The Truth <u>International</u>

15th - 30th June 2022

PTI's insistence to protest again

Failed long march damaged PTI popularity – Imran Khan still wants early election

Govt unveils Rs9.5 trillion budget for FY-23 IMF seeks changes in the new budget

Afghanistan and India on path of Cooperation First political and diplomatic relations then defense ties can be maintained – Clarify Afghan Govt

Waiting for Divine Intervention





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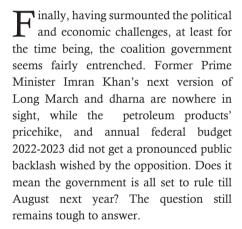
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Shehbaz Entrenched

By Hammad Ghaznavi



When the coalition government came in, it faced 2 visible threats: one, Imran Khan, breathing down its neck, holding big public rallies, whipping anti-America up sentiments, and successfully pressuring the government and other institutions that mattered. His support among the institutions, adding extra pressure on the government, was palpable. A couple of decisions by the courts were construed by political analysts as the handcuffing of the government. Then came the culmination point of this pressure campaign - the Long march and the sit-in. Despite patchy participation in the Long March, particularly from the Punjab, the government decided to quell the march with force. Still, a decent number of participants, overpowering impediments, managed to reach Islamabad, particularly from the KPK. But then came the turning point. Imran Khan called off the sit-in, almost in a mysterious fashion, with the announcement of pending the sit-in for 6 days. That deadline passed without a whimper. Ever since, Imran Khan is looking towards the courts to further his politics.

On the economic front, though the challenges the coalition government faces are far from over, the initial brunt of unpopular decisions has not proved unmanageable. The government remained under immense pressure regarding the increase in petrol prices, but finally it budged as the agreement with the IMF necessitated the increase. Finance Minister Miftah Ismail has also indicated at further increase in the prices of petrol and electricity sooner than later. The annual budget also looked like a successful camouflage of the sordid economic situation the country is in. Not many could decipher the economic burden the budget entailed for the common man, hence, it didn't elicit the anger of the masses that the opposition could exploit for its politics. Certainly, PML-N, the leading partner of the coalition, suffered some loss of political capital because of the general price-hike, but to reap its possible benefits, the opposition has to wait for the next elections. Meanwhile, after the execution of the IMF conditionalities, the other donors have also begun to sound positive. China has also announced the rollover of \$2 billion loan on lesser interest rates: while South Korea has agreed to \$1 billion fresh loan. In a couple of months, the coalition government can realistically expect a less gloomy economic picture.

As a result of tough economic and political decisions of the government, are we



witnessing Imran Khan's political upswing? No guesstimates needed. There is a bunch of by-polls just around the corner, on July 17th to be precise, on the 20 seats of Punjab assembly that fell vacant when the ECP de-seated PTI MPAs for defections. Analysts are dubbing the upcoming polls as the 'mother of all by-elections', not only because of the unprecedented numbers of seats involved, but because of the political significance these polls carried. Certainly, the by-polls will have a huge impact on the future of the Hamza government in Punjab. But beyond that, the polls' outcome will be a huge indicator of how the Punjab electorate may behave in the next general elections. Remember, all these seats are vacated by the PTI MPAs, though around half of them had been elected as Independents, and joined PTI later. Against a united opposition candidate, the PTI will be faced with one of its toughest electoral challenges in Punjab. The two sides appear fully mindful of the significance of these by-polls, with both Imran Khan and Mariam Nawaz reportedly gearing up to address public rallies in the provincial constituencies concerned. Unlike the past practice, Imran Khan is also conducting one-on-one interviews of the potential PTI candidates.

If the result of by-polls are disappointing for Imran Khan, he will have to wait for the next general elections till a time picked by the government. Imran Khan must learn to choose gears; politics is not always a 'thriller'. Parliament can be boring at times, but that seems a smart option for Imran Khan, at least for the time being.

A rare Asiatic poison once again



By M A Niazi

I've not heard Imran Khan weaving the deaths of Amir Liquat Husain or Maqsood Chaprasi into any of his speeches, which reflects the inefficiency and incompetence of his staff, which is head by the redoubtable Dr Shehbaz Gill. I mean, Dr Amir Liaquat was obviously murdered by Nawaz Sharif, who (together with Shahbaz Sharif) forced down his throat that rare Asiatic poison which would cause a heart attack and leave no trace in the body afterwards.

This rare Asiatic poison, it must be remembered, is the same as the curare used by Amazonian Indians to tip their arrows. How Asiatics got hold of it from the Amazonian Indians is a question best asked of the Brazilian President. (He's a retired captain, and recently he's been expressing doubts about the voting system, doubts being repeated by the military. Imran would have got support if he had been a retired captain of the army, not the cricket team.

One might ask why would the Sharifs want Dr Amir Liaquat dead? Did they want a by-election on his seat? Or maybe it was mere motiveless malignity. At least the death of FIA official Dr Rizwan, whose heart attack was the first time Imran tested hi are Asiatic poison tope, was the investigating officer in the money laundering case against Shahbaz Sharif.

One of the witnesses of that case, Magsood Chaprasi, whose accounts were allegedly used, and who turned out to have billions in his accounts, also suffered a heart attack. He died in Dubai, which is presently ornamented by Farhat Shahzadi 'Gogi' who is supposed to have made billions and transferred them out. I suspect her because poison is supposed to be a woman's weapon. Now she is someone whose evidence could prove damaging to the Kuptaan. So maybe she should employ a taster.

Meanwhile, Shahbaz Sharif is dealing with other problems in his own style. Remember how he made Saturdays on again in government offices after they had been abolished? The idea of government employees sluggishly staying abed on Saturday mornings was anathema to him, so he ordered them in on Saturdays, so that they would spend the sixth day of the week with their feet on the desk, the newspaper spread over their heads, catching up on their sleep.

The loadshedding crisis has intervened, and the holiday has been reintroduced. Now isn't that why the second off day was introduced? To save electricity during some previous crisis? Another bright idea has been to shut down markets at 8 pm. That would be less an electricity conservation measure than a police welfare measure. I mean, the degree of strictness with which the local police would interpret the closure deadline, and the force theory would exert to enforce it, would depend on their negotiations with the market association, which exists primarily to engage in such delicate dealings.

A more fruitful approach would be to cut off electricity to these markets at a fixed time. Not loadshedding, for both customer and shopkeeper could wait our the closure, but a 12-hour shutdown. Customers wouldn't like to make choices in the dark, and shopkeepers wouldn't like to sit in the dark and heat for hours, so the market would automatically shut early.

Another step, which would be wildly popular among the younger set, would be to extend school holidays. I know schools are already off, but by the time they will reopen, I doubt if the power crisis will be over. In fact, maybe government offices can close down or the remaining five days a week they open. See if it will make any difference.

One of the functions of government has been performed, the presentation of the Budget. Miftah Ismail presented iii, the absence of the PTI saving him from having to shout. The convention here is not that the Leader of the House, the Budget speech or the presidential address is to be heard in pindrop silence, but amid the constant jeering of the opposition. Unfortunately, the Opposition didn't do its job. The jeering has been left to thew people.

The more things change, the more they remain the same

Shahbaz Sharif having fame as good administrator could not prove his grip in federal government



By Noor Aftab

The fundamentals of the system in Pakistan, beneath the intense ongoing political tug of war, remain the same. Soaring political tension amounts to an opportunistic struggle for power. It has left the country a political tinderbox. Hardliner Imran Khan who heads Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) has changed his political strategy and postponed an anti-government long march for time being, focusing on upcoming by-elections in the Punjab province.

The government circles have termed this change in strategy as a failure of the PTI politics because, according to them, Imran Khan was not able to mobilize a large number of people in his first long march due to which he decided to return back to the Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa (KPK) because had he gone ahead with the protest sit-in, the situation might have become embarrassing for the PTI chairman.

The reports emerging from the various quarters gave the impression that the PTI leadership was using the pretext of litigation to buy time, while matters were settled elsewhere. It is well known

that the PTI has been in talks with the 'establishment' since it began the May 25 long march. The PTI circles claimed that the channel, which was initiated by the establishment using intermediaries, succeeded in persuading Imran Khan to go back without staging the sit-in on the assurance that dates for dissolution of assemblies and fresh polls would be given soon.

PTI chairman Imran Khan during a meeting of his party's core committee in Bani Gala repeated his old mantra that is quite popular among his supporters that he would not let the government of these "thieves and American slaves" stay anymore and demanded the government to dissolve the assemblies and announce fresh general elections in the country.

Imran Khan returned back to Bani Gala after staying in Peshawar for a few weeks apparently due to mounting allegations by the government officials that he was using government resources for his personal engagements.

But as a precautionary measure, he approached the Peshawar High Court

that granted Imran Khan three-week transit bail on June 2, ahead of PTI's second long march to Islamabad. Interior Minister Rana Sanaullah said that Imran Khan would be arrested by the security officials deployed outside his Bani Gala residence on the expiry of his protective bail.

PTI chairman Imran Khan is facing quite a difficult situation because, on one hand, he is determined that he would force the government through political agitation to dissolve assemblies and announce new elections. On the other hand, many PTI MNAs are not willing to vacate their seats and constantly asking their party chairman to go back to the national assembly and pursue their political goals through parliamentary politics.

A senior PTI leader during his interaction with The Truth International revealed that the establishment has asked them to leave behind the politics of long march and sit with the government to develop consensus over the date of the next general elections. He admitted that their party was not impressed with this suggestion because



the establishment was not ready to play any kind of role in convincing the government to early elections.

The political circles claimed that this proposal is still valid and some senior members of PTI have held discussions with their party chairman and tried to convince him that they should adopt parliamentary means instead of solely focusing on street agitation.

PTI is also at a crossroads as many political pundits say that at least 54 out of its 155 MNAs are contemplating ditching the party leadership by disassociating themselves from their resignations from the national assembly.

The PTI, which resigned from the national assembly after a successful no-confidence motion against former prime minister Imran Khan, hinted at a conditional return to the lower house of the Parliament.

Amid growing pressure within their ranks, PTI leader Fawad Chaudhry has said that the return of PTI to the national assembly is possible only if the election date is announced. He said that the PTI is ready to go to the House and talk about the election framework if the government announces an election date.

The political history of Pakistan reveals that no anti-government movement ever succeeded without hidden support from the 'powerful quarters.' At the moment, PTI never enjoys the luxury that was available to it during the protest sit-in in 2014, when the government was hogtied and not allowed to take any serious action against the participants of the long march.

Now, Interior Minister Rana Sanaullah is again claiming to 'crush' the long march as he had done before during Imran Khan's first long march in May after his ouster from the government.

The government has so far registered over two dozen cases against Imran Khan including rioting, sedition, chaos, and armed attacks on the federation. But his party leaders and workers are charged up and threatened the government with dire consequences if Imran Khan is arrested.

PTI MNA Attaullah in his video message asserted that "if a single hair on Imran Khan's head is harmed, then those running the country be warned: neither you nor your children will remain. I will be the first to carry out a suicide attack on you, I will not let you go. In the same way, thousands of workers are ready."

Former Interior Minister Sheikh Rashid Ahmed said that Imran Khan's arrest would lead to an 'uncontrollable chaos' in the country. Furthermore. PTI leader Usman Dar said, "Imran Khan is our red line and if any attempt is made to cross this red line then people will teach a lesson to the government."

the federal government which still apparently lacks the ability to control rising price hikes in the country. The people were expecting so much from Prime Minister Shahbaz Sharif who in his first address to the nation after assuming power last month talked mostly about the domestic problems faced by the government.

Now he is assuring that his main focus would be to give relief to the vulnerable groups and communities after the government increased the petroleum prices to get an assistance package from the International Monetary Fund (IMF).



On the political front, both PML-N and PTI are going to face another big test in by-elections on 20 seats of the Punjab Assembly that are vacant after the de-notification of 25 PTIs MPAs. These will be held on July 17 and both the parties are trying to field the winning horses in the by-elections.

Punjab chief minister Hamza Shahbaz sought PPP's support in the bye-polls and it is expected that it will neither seek any seat adjustment with the PML-N nor field its candidates against these seats to ensure that all the ex-lawmakers contesting the election on PML-N tickets return to the Punjab Assembly without any difficulty.

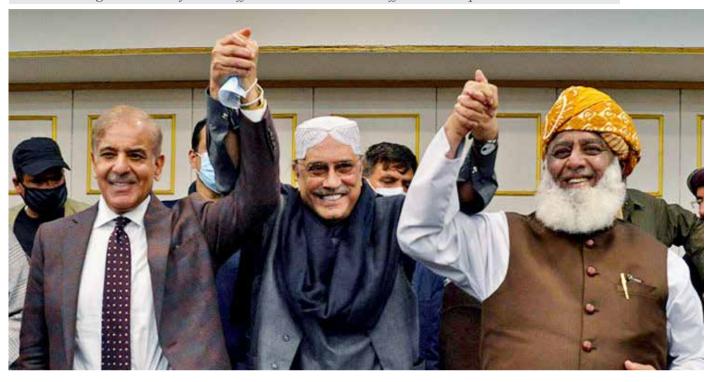
The results on these seats will also decide the fate of the Punjab government and if PML-N succeeds to win the majority of these seats then it will be able to strengthen its grip in the province that is considered the 'main hub' of politics in Pakistan.

The unprecedented rise in the diesel and petrol prices has put enormous pressure on For now, PTI chairman Imran Khan is ready to make all-out efforts to force the government to hold elections before November this year, due to an important appointment that many believe can have a long-run impact on his political career. The federal government is feeling the heat due to constant pressure from Imran Khan but with each passing day, it is becoming more confident and poised to continue to work till the completion of the constitutional term of the national assembly.

Amid heightened domestic political instability, controlling inflation in Pakistan is essential in attaining macroeconomic stabilization to eventually address the ultimate objective of eliminating poverty. And in all of it, little regard is currently being displayed on either side for the ongoing sufferings of ordinary people who continue to pay the price for the country's long history of political instability.

Test of skills for the new Premier

To lead allied govt has always been difficult. This time is too difficult due to poor economic situation



By Sarfraz Raja

t is surely not a bed of roses as it turned L out to be. The situation was not as good and even as bad as it was anticipated for the Shahbaz Sharif-led coalition when they came into power ousting Imran Khan through a vote of no confidence in April this year. The economic front was alarming; the rupee was drowning, inflation was climbing, and the stock exchange was trending downwards. Even some quarters in the new regime began considering that no confidence was a trap for them. Whatever it might be and whoever to blame but now it was all on them to tackle challenges and that too without any further waste of time

Divide and Confuse

It was time for some quick decisions but they were divided, they were confused and they accepted this reality. Some of the senior leaders among PMLN openly admitted that the situation was exceptional on the economic front; there was a strong opinion circulating that despite going for some unpopular decisions which could hit their support base, they should go for immediate elections, otherwise, they have to carry the burden of what they call incompetence and mismanagement of the previous set up which would be politically disastrous for them.

But another opinion was to take this as a challenge and make all efforts for some betterment in the remaining tenure, prove their competency to handle things, and then go to the public to ask for another term.

Ultimately, the latter prevailed but it took about a month to decide what to be done. A divide in opinion or confusion exists but it also seems like a lack of homework on part of the new government before grabbing the power seat.

Tackling the Economic **Crisis**

Earlier this year, when PMLN and PPP with other their allies in Pakistan Democratic Movement started a campaign for a no-confidence motion against Imran Khan, PTI led government had signed an agreement with the International Monetary Fund (IMF) that includes some harsh terms like an increase in petroleum prices, reducing subsidies and increase in electricity prices and cabinet ministers were preparing public minds for those hikes.

Suddenly, Prime Minister Imran Khan appears on TV and announces a 10 rupees reduction in per litre petroleum prices and Rs 5 per unit in electricity prices and that too for the next few months till June. It was a surprise for everyone including the economic brains in the government but that was proved not an economic but political move to save his government. The new government under Shahbaz Sharif called this move mines laid by Imran Khan for the new government. After the removal of Imran Khan, when the new government took charge, it was too difficult for them to proceed in a difficult economic situation. PMLN's top brains had consecutive meetings for a few days in London under their party leader, Nawaz Sharif, for determining a way forward. Analyzing the situation, they found no way to carry on without taking some unpopular steps like an increase in Petroleum prices. But as it is a multiparty government they have to convince and take into confidence their coalition partners, which they did and also



built a narrative that they have to do this unwillingly with heavy hearts and because of the unjustified and incompetent actions of the previous government on the economic front.

After a month, finally, they decided and implemented those unpopular and hard decisions with historically huge and consecutive hikes in petroleum prices which provided a way forward to the signature of their deal with IMF. According to some government spokespersons, it was the last resort for the economy to survive from a defaulter situation hoping for progress in the future.

So, it is a success on their part to take such decisions without any rift in the coalition but how they could carry forward these tough decisions and convert them into opportunities for economic stability; that's the challenge they have to prove in the coming months, especially in providing some relief to the general public before going to general elections.

Political Front

Immediately after the defeat in the no-confidence move, PTI decided to resign from the National Assembly, and consequently, 131 of their MNAs including their ally, Sheikh Rasheed Ahmed, submitted resignations; the then acting speaker of PTI, Qasim Khan Suri, accepted those resignations in bulk and sent them to Election Commission for further action.

To hold by-elections of around a hundred general seats in all provinces could be an economic, managerial, and political challenge but as the new speaker of the coalition, Raja Pervez Ashraf, took his office, he decided to go for a fresh verification of these resignations according to rules. This decision hampered PTI's move of resignation as they know many of their MNAs could miss this individual verification which could expose their move.

So, they decided not to become part of that individual verification process and the speaker got some genuine legal justification to not approve their resignations.

Outside Parliament

After losing the no-confidence motion with around three dozen country-wide successful public gatherings, Imran Khan was becoming a political threat to the new coalition government. When Imran Khan announced a long march towards Islamabad claiming to bring 2 million people with him, it was a worrying situation for parties in power as he already had hosted a house full of political shows around the country. To tackle this situation, the interior ministry under Rana Sanaullah adopted a policy to not allow them to gather anywhere.

Government ranks call it a successful policy but, either way, the long march was not a success, and with a not much impressive show, Imran Khan's political threat suddenly diminished.

government; they are here for the rest of their complete tenure till August 2023.

After the most unpopular steps, they were initially reluctant to take them but, now, everyone believes that these things are not planned for the shorter term. It was a political disaster for them to go for elections after such decisions had zero acceptance by the general public.

So, they have to sort out economic problems before entering into the election phase for that they would try to utilize the maximum of their time. On the political front, it seems that Imran khan has started accepting that things are not going in his way right now.



Government considers their tackling of this March as a success but political gurus blame Imran Khan for a discouraging end for PTI. They believe that Imran Khan played all his cards in hurry without assessing ground realities that proved workable for his campaign against the new regime. Lack of consultation and planning were also causes of this drawback.

But, the pressure of this political movement reduced drastically making the situation cooler and calmer for at least now.

Can the Government Survive?

This was an unaddressed question that no one had a defined answer to but now things are becoming clearer in minds of those in There is a strong realization among PTI core leadership that if nothing is going to happen, why they are sitting outside the parliament; should they not go back to the assembly to grab their seat as opposition leaders and give hard time to the treasury benches. If this thought prevails and they join back assembly, it would be termed as no more agitation outside.

But as it is a thin majority government with around nine parties, Shahbaz Sharif has to keep all those on board all the time as losing the support of any one of the allied parties can leave them with a minority.

Till now, he played his part very well to keep all his partners on board to continue for a longer duration, especially in the case of PTI's return to parliament which should be certainly a test of his political skills.

Dysfunctionality of the System

Martial laws and irresponsible attitude of political leadership damaged the system



By Umer Faroog

akistan's political system is in the grip of crises. It has been jumping from one crisis to another in the post-Musharraf period. Mostly the crises emanate from clashes between rival political parties, but occasionally it has happened that the ruling party's tussle with one or the other state institutions have also generated crises in Islamabad. There has never been a dull moment in Islamabad's power politics since the demise of the military government of General Pervez Musharraf. Crisis is the new normal. So much so that policy making and serious governance issues have been pushed into the background by a permanent crisis that defines Islamabad's political scene. Military's dominant political position in the power structure of the country has become a permanent feature of our political system. It's not that

this permanent feature has added any source of stability to the situation—rather the dominance of the military has added to the dysfunctional nature of the system. Pakistan is a federal parliamentary form of democracy where the Prime Minister is bestowed with the complete executive authority by the 1973 constitution. And yet there are instances where in recent times, the incumbent Prime Minister has acted as a supplicant before the military establishment. While the opposition leaders routinely ask the COAS to shun his neutrality. Other state's non representative institutions like superior judiciary have started acting like a permanent mediator in political conflicts, thanks to the political naivety and inaptitude of political leaders, most of whom are in a permanent state of conflicts with their rivals. Superior judiciary's role as a mediator in political conflicts is not a rare occurrence in the system any more. It has become a norm with judges regularly issuing verdicts on such petty administrative matters such as whether to allow the opposition to hold a protest rally in Islamabad and where such a rally should be held.

The germs of non-representative institutions becoming arbiters in political conflicts started to creep into the political practice in our society by the time of the demise of the military government of Zia-ul-Haq. Political parties were disorganized and their leaders were inept and naïve. This gave rise to a situation where more organized non representative institutions came dominate the system—non-representative institutions which possess the maximum resources of the state and society. The result

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was the gradual surrender of political initiative and political autonomy before the military top brass. In the post-Zia period political leaders like Benazir Bhutto were still retaining the political autonomy vis-à-vis the military. Likewise Nawaz Sharif started to distance himself from the military high command and by 1993 he became an independent political actor. However both these political leaders proved to be a relative failure when it came to effectively governing the country. Both of them remained restricted to politicking and failed to perform in the areas of policy making and governance, and in the process lost initiative and political autonomy at the doors of manipulative GHO.

way of admitting that PTI as a political force is impotent?

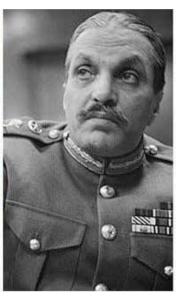
When Imran Khan left Peshawar at the start of his latest Long March, the eyewitness accounts said there were no more than a couple of thousand people behind him riding air conditioned 1600-CC luxury vehicles. This was a crowd unlikely to bring a ruthless coalition government under pressure. And Imran Khan simply had no democratic means or capacity to influence the decision-making process of a parliamentary government. He is not on talking terms with the government. This would mean PTI as a political party is impotent in the system. They cannot force the government

federal government. What does this statement signify? Is this a way of admitting that the coalition government as a political and administrative force is impotent?

Why should people vote for you if you need support from the army to perform after forming a government? What exactly is it that you lack, the army possesses and which you require? It appears that political parties are admitting their impotence and their lack of capacity and are in awe of the army. The political leaders' understanding of the army's political capacity, as reflected in their public assertions, is vague.

It appears that they think that the army could decisively play a role in making and









The succeeding generation of political leaders simply started their careers as subservient actors in the system. Consider two of the following examples: While addressing a press conference in Peshawar, Khan said that the prevailing political situation was a test for the establishment (read Army) as well, because if they remained neutral while the country was going down the drain, they would be held responsible. Everybody knows that Imran Khan has been pressuring the Army top brass to compel it to pressurize the coalition government to decide for an early election. In other words, Imran Khan wants General Bajwa to force PM Shehbaz Sharif to dissolve the assemblies and call an early election. Is it a way of admitting that the army can perform a function in the system which Imran Khan, his party and the opposition have no capacity to do so? Is it a

and they cannot influence the system democratically. You can only convince a government on a certain course of action if you are on talking terms with it. But at the moment, democratic institutions are dysfunctional. The Opposition and Government don't talk. The only option left is the army, which Khan invokes.

Now let us consider how PM Shehbaz Sharif admitted to the incapacity and impotence of his government. While addressing traders and businessmen in Karachi, he said "If we have received 30 percent support from the Establishment compared to what Imran Khan received, the country would have progressed." Again, in this statement there is a clear admission of the fact that the armed forces of the country are in possession of a unique capacity which is not available even to the

breaking the governments. For instance, Imran Khan's helplessness was clearly evident when DG ISPR told a press conference that the Army was neutral amidst a fast-eroding majority of the ruling PTI in the national assembly days before the final vote in the parliament. The lesson that Imran Khan learned was that an incumbent PM can lose their majority if the Army Chief decides to stay neutral. His later assertions confirmed that this was the lesson he learnt before losing his government.

If political leadership is so helpless in this system or if they perceive themselves to be so helpless, what are the lessons Pakistan's ruling classes and Pakistani people should learn from this situation? The army which dominates the political system is in a position to generate a crisis by simply staying aloof. And the army knows this in

advance. The political parties, which are addicted to the support of dominant forces, will be afflicted with a crisis of incapacity: whether they are in government or in opposition doesn't matter. The two major political parties are not on talking terms and therefore cannot reach any understanding through consensus building. Result could be a deadlock or a clash of two politically impotent forces. Most of the times impotent prove more lethal for the body-polite than those who have the capacity to perform some function.

incumbent COAS General Baiwa for their ouster from the power corridors. Maulana Fazal-ur-Rehman assembles his party workers in Islamabad and demands the dismissal of the Imran Khan government. In his speeches he claims he has been assured of a positive outcome of his protest by "influential circles"—a code word for the army and its top brass.

In March 2022, the then Prime Minister Imran Khan said that a foreign power — he didn't name the United States but it was

ing—in his favour—in the political crisis that led to his ouster. "After I came to know about this conspiracy, I sent my finance minister to the people who call themselves 'neutral' [a code word for the Army top brass] that our weak economic recovery will go down the drain if this conspiracy to dislodge me is not prevented." This means that Imran Khan didn't see General Bajwa's public comments as violating his political position.

It was a curious situation that a prime minister accused a foreign power of conspiring to dislodge him, while the chief of the army staff declared that foreign power as a "strategic partner." But Imran Khan didn't seem to bother about General Bajwa's speech or its content. He was only interested in forcing General Bajwa to use the immense political and coercive power at his disposal to defeat the no-confidence motion against him. He was not interested in eradicating the dysfunctionality of Pakistan's political system. He was only interested in seeing the general intervene on his behalf - and in the process making the political system more dysfunctional.

Why do the mainstream political parties make the army and its top brass the reference points of their political campaigns? One explanation could be that both Imran Khan and Nawaz Sharif wanted their ouster from power to look like a big scandal. Something bigger than what the actual situation on the ground indicated-In case of Imran Khan it was the height of ineptness where a person holding all the executive powers of the state in his hands could not keep the unity of his parliamentary party intact. And in the case of Nawaz Sharif, it was simply involvement in mega corruption scandals. But these are the explanations they tend to ignore. They or their party men rather focus on factors which point towards active involvement of the army top brass and its political arm, the intelligence services, in hobnobbing with their respective opposition parties. At least their perceptions and imaginations force them to believe that even the absence of the army's active support for their government could lead to their ouster from power in a system in which army top brass acts as a hegemon. As Imran Khan seems to believe.



Most of the situations and factors which contribute towards the dysfunctionality of the system stem from political leaders' own ineptitude and naivety. They don't have the confidence that they can act as independent and autonomous actors in the system. Their mindsets are simply too slavish to gather the courage to act independent of military high command. They have in fact surrendered to the hegemonic role of the military in the system. A very potent reflection of the army's hegemonic role in the political system is the fact that all the mainstream political parties, at present, have made the army or its role in the system as a reference point of their politics and political campaign. Nawaz Sharif was ousted from power in 2017 and his subsequent political campaign was focused on a series of his grievances against army top brass. Imran Khan lost power and he and his party workers started targeting and blaming the obvious that he was accusing Washington - threatened him with consequences for visiting Moscow. He also accused the foreign power of conspiring to dislodge him through a no-confidence motion.

Then, on 01 April 2022, the country's army chief delivered a speech at a security forum in Islamabad and dubbed the United States as a long-standing strategic partner. As noted by commentators, General Bajwa's comments were clearly the rejection of the Prime Minister's allegations against Washington. Ironically nobody in the media or political circles - not even the prime minister himself — took notice of this divergent position. In fact, in the post-ouster situation, Imran Khan's diatribes against the army top brass don't in any way relate to the principle of civilian supremacy. On the other hand, he is actually complaining against the army top brass for not interven-



Chaudharys and Sharifs: Struggle for Power

Hamza has to face more pressure in the presence of Pervaiz Elahi, who managed to defeat a no-confidence motion against him

By Ahmad Waleed

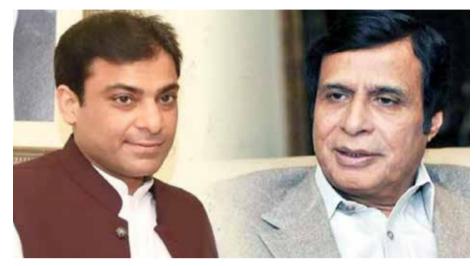
lthough the Hamza Shahbaz Agovernment in Punjab has started showing some signs of stability, the politics in the largest province of Pakistan is far from normal. The more things get closer to a resolution, the more it gets complicated with the passage of time.

The PML-N heaved a sigh of relief after the appointment of the new governor. Minutes after the oath-taking of Governor Balighur Rehman late in the night, members of the cabinet rushed to take the oath from the governor newly-appointed the Governor's House. It took President Arif Alvi 24 days to concede and submit to the mounting pressure from the PML-N, paving the way for the formation of a provincial cabinet that is pending for over a month since Hamza Shahbaz took the oath of the office as the Chief Minister of Punjab. It resulted in ending the impasse that has paralyzed the functioning of the largest province of the country besides party helping the ruling honor commitments it had made with the four independent and one Rah-i-Haq lawmakers by accepting their demands of adjusting them in the cabinet. Now they are bound not to switch sides in case of a run-off election for the chief minister.

Hamza Shahbaz is likely to face another challenge where he has to show that he enjoys the majority in the house as he lost the majority in the Punjab Assembly after the election commission's decision to de-seat 25 PTI dissident MPAs over defection. And if he is faced with a run-off election, he may struggle to meet the required strength of 174 in the assembly.

However, Hamza Shahbaz has achieved one major milestone though.

Hamza has a big challenge ahead to prove his mettle that he can run the province while his father Shahbaz Sharif took up the reins of the federal government at a time when the country is in a deep economic crisis. His father Shahbaz Sharif is credited



with handling the Punjab affairs with strong administrative abilities during his three tenures as chief minister of Punjab.

Besides these challenges, Hamza has to face a lot more pressure in the presence of the Punjab Assembly Speaker, Chaudhry Pervaiz Elahi, who has managed to defeat a no-confidence motion against him filed by the PML-N. The next task is to remove Chaudhry Pervaiz Elahi for the smooth running of the House. However, Chaudhry Pervaiz Elahi is more than confident that Hamza has lost the majority and it would be a daunting task for Hamza to prove his strength in his presence. PML-N has promised PTI dissident Saeed Akbar Nawani the seat of the speaker.

In yet another development, the politics of PML-Q has taken a new turn as the family of Chaudhrys of Guirat has started to fall apart after serious differences have erupted within the family. The elders of the family have seemingly lost control over the next generation. Some people close to the family say that the children of Shujaat Hussain and Pervaiz Elahi had not been on good terms for years.

But lately, with Pervaiz Elahi and Moonis Elahi deciding to go with PTI and Chaudhry Shujaat and Salik Hussain supporting PML-N the fissures had come out open. All the efforts to reconcile have seemingly failed.

MNA Hussain Elahi came up with an announcement that he is parting ways with

PML-Q over the support offered by the party to Shahbaz-led "imported government." He tweeted, "I've always said my country is first for me and keeping that in mind I have decided that my political journey with PML-O must come to an end." Hussain Elahi is the son of Wajahat Hussain who is the brother of Shujaat Hussain

In an interview with BBC Urdu, Pervaiz Elahi, however, maintained that no one can go against the party policy and that the elders of the party will resolve this issue. He also criticized Salik Hussain, son of Shujaat Hussain, for not paying attention to his constituency. "I helped him get elected from Chakwal seat which was vacated by me after deciding to retain the provincial seat. He (Salik) has disappeared from the constituency since then," he lamented.

The divisions within the party are crystal clear. The leadership is in a fix on how to resolve this issue as one group wants to back PML-N and the other favors PTI. The PML-Q faction was created during the Musharraf regime and it was reduced to only a few seats in the 2008 election after PPP and PML-N leadership - Nawaz Sharif and Benazir Bhutto - returned from exile. It seemed the party is on the edge of oblivion.

Marriage of Convenience: PPP, MQM, and Sindh

Political stability is one of the most important factors in the progress of the IT industry



By Azfar Ashfaq

It has become a dominant view within the circles of Muttahida Qaumi Movement-Pakistan (MQM) that the Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) had once again "used" the MQM against the Pakistan Tehreek-i-Insaf-led federal government in the name of a "Charter of Rights" that the two parties had signed before the ouster of former prime minister Imran Khan.

While the MQM-P and PPP are part of the Shahbaz Sharif-led coalition at the Centre, the two parties have not yet officially reached a power-sharing deal in Sindh, where the PPP has been running the government for the past 14 years.

The MQM-P sits on the opposition benches in Sindh along with the Pakistan Tehreek-i-Insaf (PTI), Grand Democratic Alliance (GDA), and two other parties having much smaller representation in the provincial assembly.

But, after the March 30 agreement, known as the Charter of Rights, between the PPP and MQM-P in Islamabad, it was expected that, like Islamabad, the two parties would forge a coalition in Sindh as well, but even after more than 10 weeks, nothing of this sort has happened.

Sources in both the PPP and MOM-P have confirmed that both the parties had agreed upon a power-sharing formula under which the MQM-P was to be given the post of Karachi and Hyderabad administrators as well as a couple of ministries in the Sindh government including health and information technology.

The PML-N had already given two federal ministries and the post of the Sindh governor — a summary has been sent to President Arif Alvi to appoint MQM's Nasreen Jalil as the next governor - to the MQM-P in return for its support in the no-confidence vote in the National Assembly against then prime minister Imran Khan.

With less than two weeks left in the first phase of the local government elections in four of the six divisions of Sindh, a sense of betrayal is prevailing within the MQM-P since the PPP has not fulfilled any promises.

"Have you remembered what had happened with us when we supported PPP's candidate Raza Rabbani for Senate chairman in 2015? We supported PPP over PML-N which had the government at the Centre. Nine Zero was raided and our workers were picked up but the PPP did not say a word of sympathy for us then. In 2022, it's like déjà vu," says a senior MQM-P leader.

Recently, a delegation of the MQM-P called on PPP-Parliamentarian president Asif Ali Zardari in Karachi and conveyed to him their reservations on the slow pace of progress on already agreed-upon issues. Zardari directed the Sindh Chief Minister, Murad Ali Shah, to look into the grievances of the MQM-P.

As a result, another meeting was held earlier this month in which both sides discussed the most contentious issue i.e., to bring improvement and reforms in the Sindh Local Government Act of 2013 as per the directives of the Feb 1 Supreme Court (SC) verdict that called for an empowered LG system in accordance with Article 140-A of the Constitution.



The MQM-P also sent the name of its senior leader and former MNA Abdul Wasim for the post of Karachi Administrator. The sources in both parties assert that he would be appointed if the local government elections are postponed.

"It was decided to devolve two departments - Sindh Building Control Authority and Karachi Development Authority — on a trial basis, but one week has already passed but no follow-up meeting has been called," says another MQM-P leader, who is part of a negotiation team.

Furthermore, irked by the slow progress, he feels that the PPP is wasting time intentionally and that it is not prudent in implementing the SC order. "CM Murad Ali Shah has assured us that the schemes of our MPAs will be included in the next fiscal year's annual development plan," he contends and further adds that he is not that hopeful about the provincial budget for the fiscal year 2022-23 to be presented on June 14 in the Sindh Assembly.

He says getting ministries is not his party's priority. "An impression has been created as if we left PTI-led coalition because of ministries. This is incorrect and mere propaganda," he says, evading a direct reply to a question as to whether the impasse between PPP and MQM-P is because of the latter's demand for certain important portfolios.

But his statement is corroborated by senior PPP leader and Sindh Labour Minister Saeed Ghani, who says that the MQM-P "never demanded any ministry" with the PPP. He told reporters at a recent event that the issues of the MQM-P are fake domiciles, flawed census, and other civic issues

In fact, the issues cited by Ghani are part of the 18-point Charter of Rights signed between PPP chairman, **Bilawal** Bhutto-Zardari, and MQM-P convener, Khalid Maqbool Siddiqui, in the presence of the PML-N president and incumbent PM Shahbaz Sharif, JUI-F chief Maulana Fazlur Rehman, Balochistan National Party-Mengal's, Akhtar Mengal, and Balochistan Awami Party's, Khalid Magsi.

Both parties while acknowledging each other's mandate agreed that the February 1

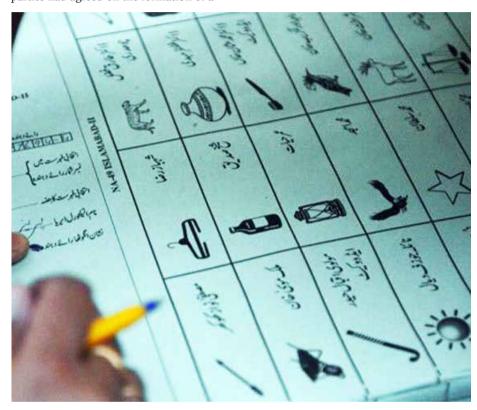
decision of the Supreme Court regarding an empowered LG system would be "implemented in letter and spirit within one month".

Issues like observance of decades-old job quota with a 60:40 rural-urban ratio and providing jobs meant for the urban population of other areas on fake domiciles were also a part of the charter, and both the parties had agreed on the formation of a

Sindh for the past decade."

The MOM-P has sought another meeting with former president Zardari and conveyed to his close aides that only he could end the deadlock between the two

Currently, both MQM-P and PPP are contesting against each other a by-election on a National Assembly seat, NA-240, in



joint commission to investigate and cancel all such domiciles in every district of Sindh. The two parties also decided to set up a 'quota observance' joint committee comprising legislators from both sides to monitor the government recruitment process.

But despite passing more than two months, neither the LG law has been reformed nor a joint commission or quota observance bodies have been formed.

"Despite all this, the situation [between the two parties] has not reached a point of no return," says the MQM-P leader who is part of the negotiating team. "We have a lot of hopes with Zardari sahib and Bilawal. We believe they sincerely want to eliminate the sense of deprivation that has been prevailing among the people of urban parts of Karachi that had fallen vacant after the demise of MOM MNA Igbal Muhammad Ali. The by-election is scheduled to be held on June 16 and according to sources in the two parties, the result will set their future course of action.

Terming the newfound relationship between PPP and MQM-P "marriage of convenience", the sources say the former has been eyeing the slot of Karachi mayor for a long time and its provincial leadership believes that it can get the required number of councilors elected in the July 24 LG election in Karachi to install its own mayor for the very first time in history given the current sentiments of urban population which are unhappy with the MQM-P for siding with the PPP. Only last week, Karachi Administrator Murtaza Wahab repeated that the next mayor of Karachi will be from the PPP.

Budget 2022-23 hints General Election is in offing

IMF-dictated budget may further trigger price-hike in Pakistan in 2022-23



By Javed Mahmood

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ISLAMABAD: The federal government has announced Rs 9.5 trillion rupees new budget for the fiscal year 2022-23, starting from 1st of July 2022. The Rs9.5 trillion size of the budget is higher by nearly Rs418 billion (4.6%) over the 2021-22 revised budget of Rs9 trillion. There was an increase of 11% in expenditure in 2021-22 when matched with the original budget of Rs8.5 trillion.

The gross revenue target of almost Rs9 trillion (tax and non-tax revenues) is higher by 23% in comparison with the 2021-22 target. The new tax target also includes Rs300 billion collection from the consumers through the petroleum levy on petrol and high speed diesel. The new budget is being termed an IMF-dictated budget, which focuses much on revenue generation, hike in utilities cost, and elimination of subsidies.

For instance, in the new budget, the government has raised the tax collection target to 7.25 trillion, about 1.2 trillion more in comparison with the 6

trillion rupees tax collection target for the outgoing financial year, 2021-22. The Federal Board of Revenue's tax target has been set at Rs7.25 trillion that is higher by 17% over the revised estimates for 2021-22. The non-tax revenue receipts are projected at Rs2 trillion, which means 52% growth and meeting this non-tax receipts target will be tough for the government.

In the new budget, the federal government has proposed Rs740 billion new taxes, including Rs440 billion tax measures recommended by the Federal Board of Revenue. These new measures are in addition to the upcoming increase of 45% in gas tariff, Rs8 per unit hike in the electricity tariff from July 1, 2022 and gradual increase in petroleum development levy (PDL) till the time it increases to Rs30 per liter. All these measures will, indeed, further boost inflation and put more financial burden on the consumers.

Also, the retailers have been taxed at the fixed rate through electricity bills while wealthiest Pakistanis holding offshore assets will pay annually 1% of the value of their foreign assets in taxes.

The tax burden on registration of luxury cars of above 1,600cc has been doubled while the rates on sales, purchase and gains made on the properties have been significantly increased.

In the new budget, the government, however, has given some relief to the salaried class whose tax burden has been significantly lessened in addition to a 15% increase in salaries. Another positive point is that the government has enhanced the taxable limit to 1.2 million rupees, from existing 0.6 million rupees.

In his budget speech, Finance Minister Miftah Ismail said that the coalition government has taken difficult decisions and the process of taking these steps has not yet been completed. He further said that the budgetary proposals are linked to the approval of the International Monetary Fund. In other words, he has hinted at some changes in the proposed budgetary

measures as per the requirement of the IMF. Worth to note is that the IMF's nod to the budget is essential for the resumption of the stalled bail-out package of \$6 billion.

The coalition government has accepted the IMF's demand to exhibit a primary budget surplus, pitching it at Rs152 billion by planning fiscal consolidation of nearly Rs1.8 trillion or 2.2% of the GDP in the next fiscal year. It is the steepest consolidation that is proposed in an election year amid heightening political uncertainty and tough IMF negotiations.

So far, the talks with the IMF are yet to conclude and the ongoing process of consultation may take some more time after the finance minister announced certain measures contrary to the desire of the global lender.

In the new budget, the government has projected inflation at 11.5%, which the tax measures in the proposed hike in the cost of utilities may inflate the inflation beyond the government's calculations in 2022-23.

It is a general perception that increase in the prices of electricity, gas and petroleum products would also jack up the cost of the military and the civilian government, which has not been truly reflected in the budget figures proposed by the finance minister.

A major challenge that the finance minister Miftah Ismail has set for himself is to announce a primary budget surplus of Rs152 billion, particularly when the provincial governments have announced big development budgets that leave little room for Rs800 billion cash surpluses of four federating units. Miftah said that the government would focus on agriculture development, productivity enhancement and exports' promotion in the next budget to stabilize the national economy.

Interestingly, a major portion of the new budget -about Rs5.45 trillion (58% of the budget) will be utilized for debt servicing and defence expenditures. There is an alarming increase of over Rs806 billion or 26% increase in debt servicing cost in just a year. In the outgoing fiscal year, the share of these two components was half of the total budget. The defence services share remained constant but the debt servicing seemed to have gone out of control in the prevailing circumstances. The domestic

debt servicing will take away about Rs3.5 trillion while another Rs511 billion will be drained on foreign debt servicing. The average interest rate in 2022-23 is being projected at 14%, which would take away whatever the government earns through additional revenues.

Also, in 2022-23, the government will have to borrow Rs4.6 trillion to run its operations, thanks to nearly Rs3.95 trillion debt servicing cost in fiscal year 2022-23, which will be the highest-ever debt servicing cost in the history of the country. The defence budget is estimated around Rs1.523 trillion -up by Rs43 billion or 3% over the revised budget of the outgoing fiscal year. The Ministry of Defence has already taken a Rs110 billion supplementary budget for the outgoing fiscal year.

year because Pakistan will have to repay \$21 billion foreign loans and another \$12 billion will be required for current account deficit financing and \$8 billion for boosting the foreign exchange reserves to \$18 billion. In the first week of June 2022, the reserves with the State Bank of Pakistan has dropped to \$9.3 billion, which is hardly equal to six weeks' import bill. At present, the average monthly import bill is around \$6 billion while exports are \$2.4 billion.

In 2022-23, the government has estimated inflows of \$16 billion in foreign loans. The petroleum levy collection target has been set at Rs750 billion on back of the Rs50 per litre levy. This is the second unrealistic target after the primary budget surplus. For the outgoing fiscal year, the previous government had set Rs610 billion levy

The International Monetary Fund (IMF) seeks changes in the new federal budget announced on June 10, 2022, for the fiscal year 2022-23.

IMF Resident Director in Pakistan Esther Perez Ruiz said, "We note the submission of the draft budget to the National Assembly last Friday. Discussions with the authorities continue to obtain more clarity on certain revenue and spending items and allow for a full assessment."

She, however, said that the IMF's preliminary estimate is that additional measures will be needed to strengthen the budget and bring it in line with key program objectives. IMF Resident Director further said that IMF staff stand ready to continue to support the authorities' efforts in this respect and, more generally, in the implementation of policies to promote macroeconomic stability.

The government has drastically cut subsidies that are estimated at Rs699 billion in the next fiscal year.

These are down by Rs815 billion or 54% over this year's revised estimates. The cost of pensions is Rs530 billion and the running of the civil government will consume only Rs550 billion. The Rs550 billion cost appears low due to increase in cost of utilities under the IMF programme.

The government proposed Rs727 billion for the Public Sector Development Programme for the next fiscal year, although Planning Minister Ahsan Iqbal unveiled the draft PSDP of Rs800 billion. The government has pitched the budget deficit target of 4.9% of the total size of the economy, or Rs3.8 trillion. But the major challenge for the finance minister will be arranging a record \$41 billion in foreign loans in next fiscal collection target but the revised collection figure is now shown at Rs135 billion.

According to budget documents, the gross revenue receipts are estimated at Rs9 trillion for next fiscal year, up by Rs1.7 trillion while the provinces will get Rs4.1 trillion as their share, leaving the federal government with Rs4.9 trillion net revenues.

In the new budget, how the federal government would reduce the current account deficit and what strategies will be adopted to boost exports, these measures are yet unclear. Therefore, the federal government must come up with a solid plan to stabilize the economy by minimizing the current account, trade deficits, reduce non-essential imports and magnify exports and remittances to raise as much foreign exchange as possible.

Mounting Cost of Undeclared Global Economic War & its Implications for Pakistan

Pakistan economy seems unable to recover due to mal administration coupled with high food and energy inflation at international level



ISLAMABAD: During the past few months, an undeclared global economic war has been launched wherein every country was trying to mint as much money as possible. This global economic war has surfaced from the outset of the year 2022, when the world got rid of the two-year long lockdowns and social distancing like restrictions in the wake of double COVID vaccination of people that is being followed by booster doses.

In December 2021, the international crude oil prices were fluctuating around \$70-72 per barrel which surged close to \$90/barrel in January 2022, when some leading countries in the world lifted COVID-related curbs and started welcoming the international tourists, students, and business persons. This sudden increase in international oil prices was the beginning of an undeclared global economic war and in the next stage, the prices of other important commodities such as gas, coal, sugar, wheat, gold, edible oil, tea, electronic devices, cars, and cellphones started edging up in a systematic manner.

The economic war got further momentum from Feb 24, 2022, when Russia invaded Ukraine. Soon after this development, every country took it as a golden opportunity and boosted the prices of commodities whichever they had. For example, within a couple of weeks of the Russian invasion of Ukraine. international crude oil prices crossed \$100 per barrel and gradually stabilized around \$120/barrel amid forecasts of further increase in oil prices to \$140/barrel in coming weeks. After a sharp increase in the value of black gold (crude oil), the world also witnessed an unprecedented growth in the prices of each and every essential and non-essential item because every country thought it fit to make money out of this panicking scenario in the world and soon the value of every item was doubled.

The way the prices of commodities were raised in the international markets, it has exposed the non-existence of an international mechanism which governs the price-control to a certain degree to protect consumers from exploitation. For instance, billions of consumers throughout the world

are facing great hardship and going through pain just because of an unprecedented hike in the value of each and every consumer item. Who will stop this exploitative culture, no one knows it as everyone is watching the situation with disappointment with no sign of immediate relief. Importantly, in this scenario, the most affected countries and people are those who are relying mostly on imported essential consumer items such as petrol, gas, edible oil, and sugar, etc.

Another bizarre aspect of the ongoing tacit global economic war is that the United States is influencing the European countries to boycott Russian oil, gas, and other essential consumer items. The United States is also motivating the OPEC nations to increase their oil output by at least 2 million barrels per day to enhance supply in the international markets in the wake of a ban on the Russian oil. Adding fuel to fire, the USA, UK, and some European imposed countries have economic sanctions on Russia which have further triggered price hikes globally. On the one

hand, the USA, UK and others are lobbying for Russian oil ban, while on the other hand, the prices of all essential commodities, including oil, gas and food-grains, have been further increased in the USA, UK, Canada and OPEC markets. It shows that the market manipulators in these countries are taking maximum monetary benefits of the economic war and amassing the wealth. The latest data shows that on June 10, 2022, the international price of Brent crude stood at \$122.6/barrel, OPEC oil was available at \$121.5/barrel, WTI crude at \$121 while Bonny Light crude oil rate increased to \$129.4, whereas natural gas price further improved to \$9.01, and heating oil was being sold at \$4.432 _ almost double than their Dec-2021 price-level.

Implications for Pakistan

The government and the consumers in Pakistan are in serious trouble because of unending shocks and aftershocks of price-hikes in the country, which are the outcome of a variety of international and home-driven factors. On the one hand, the consumers are facing the impact of hike in the cost of essential and non-essential consumer items at international level, while on the other hand, the government's deal with the IMF, depreciation of rupee to around Rs200 in the inter-bank and Rs 203-207 in the open market, and frequent upward revisions in the prices of electricity, gas, petroleum prices, edible oil, etc., are making miserable the life of common

people in the country. In Pakistan, measuring price-hike has become difficult these days because every day the retailers are raising prices of commodities on different pretexts and this process seems to be endless amid reports of further increase in petroleum prices, 45 percent increase in gas tariff and Rs8/unit hike in electricity tariff with effect from July 1, 2022. From 1st July to onward, the people will see another wave of price-hike in the country, which further erodes their buying power.

In coming few months, if the prices of essential commodities decline, Pakistanis may not be able to get that benefit because of the government's deal with the IMF to abolish subsidies, increase in value of dollar and the cost of utilities. Thus, all the factors quoted above will keep the consumers in hot waters as long as the country remains in the grip of the IMF programme with soaring cost of utilities and value of dollar, etc.

Recently, the Goldman Sachs and Citi_the international financial entities _ have hinted at further surge in the oil prices, which will, indeed, boost the value of other commodities as well. Thus, in the ongoing calendar year (2022), Pakistanis must not look towards the government for any relief in price-hike and devise their own strategies to stay safe from this undesirable situation by enhancing their income and minimizing their cost of living. The new government, led by PML(N) with a combination of nearly a dozen political parties, first vowed

to protect the consumers from the price-hike, but at a later stage the government suddenly blew up multiple price-hike bombs, citing its compulsion for the resumption of IMF loan programme because of the fast-depleting foreign exchange reserves. According to the State Bank of Pakistan, by the first week of June, the central bank's reserves have further dropped to \$9.2 billion because of repayment of foreign debt. These forex reserves are barely equal to the country's six-week imports, which is a perilous sign for the economic survival of the country. In this scenario, the new government has decided to comply with each and every requirement of the IMF irrespective of its hazardous impact on the economy and the consumers just to get more loans from the IMF and others.

In the prevailing circumstances, the government must evolve a plan for the economic survival of the country and the people of Pakistan as well. Merely cutting 40pc fuel of government servants, Prime Minister, Ministers and other elected representatives is not a way out of the present scenario and the government must abolish all allowances of senior government officials, including those in the uniform, at least for one year so that everyone shares the burden of economic crisis in the country and contributes his/her share for survival of their motherland.

By Javed Mahmood



A challenge for the vulnerable

Spending compromises on basic necessities to meet energy expenses will test many Pakistanis living in multidimensional poverty



By Dr. Abid Qaiyum Suleri

uel and food prices were already at a high in 2021 after a faster than expected recovery from Covid-19. The already high prices further shot up in the last few months due to the war in Ukraine. Global natural gas prices have almost doubled in the past five months and global oil prices have risen by about fifty percent.

Many NATO allies are resisting a complete ban on Russian energy exports. However, if Russia is put under a complete energy embargo, the oil price per barrel could reach \$150, rapidly boosting global inflation by another 2 percent (the impact would be much higher in countries like Pakistan).

If history is a guide, we should remember that fuel inflation in the past (in the 1970s, after the Arab-Israel war led to an oil embargo) has been associated with deep recessions, hurting the lowermiddle-income earners very hard. The World Bank's recently released "global

economic outlook" has also warned of a recession due to recent fuel inflation, which may persist for a few years.

While consumers worldwide are feeling the heat of costly fuel, the situation is harrowing for developing countries where the purchasing power of millions had already eroded due to the livelihood disruptions during the Covid-19 pandemic.

Governments around the world are trying to cope with fuel inflation in various ways. Some are passing on the prices to consumers, others are exploring the option of targetted subsidies, and still others are taking measures to minimise their energy imports through rationed and rational use.

Global fuel inflation will seriously affect Pakistan's economy due to its dependence on imported fuels. The current government initially showed a populist reluctance to pass on the global energy prices to domestic consumers. However, facing the challenge

of a rising current account deficit (dollar deficit) and weakening currency that required urgent support from the IMF, it eventually raised the prices of petrol, diesel oil and electricity. At the same time, an increase in gas prices is on the cards.

In turn, increased fuel prices have tidal effects on the price of electricity generation, cost of plying public and private transport, cost of agricultural production and processing, cost of manufacturing and consumer index. Resultantly, Pakistan's headline inflation quickened to 13.8 percent in May 2022, the highest level in more than two years. The food prices in Pakistan have surged 17.3 percent and transport costs surged 31.8 percent in May 2022 compared to a year earlier. The State Bank of Pakistan (SBP) has already raised policy rates by 675 basis points to check rising prices. The increase in policy rate will slow down the economy (beneficial for macro-economic stability, but bad news for the micro-economy at the household level). However, it cannot reduce the nearly inelastic demand for energy. Thus, fuel inflation will drive the cost of doing business and the cost of living in Pakistan.

While consumers worldwide are feeling the heat of costly fuel, the situation is harrowing for developing countries where the purchasing power of millions had already eroded due to the livelihood disruptions during the Covid-19 pandemic.

There is no shortcut to shield the consumers from higher energy prices. Over short time horizons, households and businesses cannot easily cut energy use in response to rising costs, leaving less to spend on other goods and services. The longer prices stay high, the more their effects evolve, especially for lower- and lower-middle-income earners who would have to compromise their spending on health and food to meet the energy expenses.

Such compromises will have a drastic effect on more than 70 million Pakistanis who are living in multidimensional poverty. According to the pre-Covid-19 statistics (National Nutrition Survey), 55 million

people lived below the national (income) poverty line in Pakistan. Almost 72 million experienced mild to severe food insecurity. Drinking water in every second and third household was contaminated with coli form and E-coli bacteria, respectively. Four out of every ten children under the age of five were stunted. A vast majority of the population is not covered under any social protection system.

Covid-19 has turned these numbers obsolete. The situation has likely deteriorated after the pandemic. Even if that were not the case, these numbers are too scary. We are talking of tens of millions of people most vulnerable to current inflation and a possible recession.

There is no denying that the government of Pakistan cannot continue "across-the-board" fuel subsidies due to the twin deficit (rupee deficit and dollar deficit). However, the most vulnerable and excluded segments of society need to be protected against inflation and a possible recession, and that too, within the framework of the IMF agreement.

The IMF advocates for agile fiscal policies

amidst the food and fuel crises. It advises that the government focus on the most urgent spending needs and raise revenue to pay for them. In IMF's words, "Government responses to the surge in international commodity prices should give priority to protecting the most vulnerable. A critical objective is to avoid a food crisis while keeping social cohesion". For countries with well-developed social safety nets, it advocates for temporary cash transfers to vulnerable groups while allowing domestic prices to adjust. For other countries, it advises "a more gradual adjustment of domestic prices (of energy) and the use of existing tools to help the most vulnerable during this crisis, while taking steps to strengthen safety nets."

During these challenging times, the government will be judged by the people of Pakistan as well as by the IMF on what it classifies as the "most urgent spending" (requires prioritisation of spending), and how seriously it focuses on "raising revenue" to pay for them (without adopting too regressive tax collection measures).

The writer heads the Sustainable Development Policy Institute.



Debt Trap to Policy Trap

Pakistan is taking new loans to pay back the interest which is in fact the real form of debt trap

By Shakeel Ahmad Ramay

ebt trap is a common word which is being used these days. There's hue and cry by the western countries to malign the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) by using the term debt trap. It has become a buzzword along with environment and self-imagined assumptions Pakistan for criticizing China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) related interventions and programs. The proponents of this term paint a scary picture and try to convince the common man that something really bad is on the horizon.

They claim that CPEC is not an economic opportunity, rather a debt trap, but the actual debt trap which was systematically introduced by other factors does not get space in the debate, especially in the liberal circles.

For many years Pakistan has been taking new loans to pay back the interest which is in fact the real form of debt trap.

Pakistan, like many other developing countries, has been in a debt trap for many years without actually declaring it a debt trap. Pakistan has started to pay the price of debt trap in the form of high inflation, free fall of rupee, shrinking production sector of Pakistan and removal of social welfare spending under the dictation of International Financial Institutions (IFIs).

Pakistan started its journey of debt in 1952. The first-ever loan agreement of USD 27.2 million was signed with World Bank in 1952. The country started its journey with International Monetary Fund (IMF) in 1958 by signing an agreement of USD 25 million, which Pakistan never withdrew. Asian Development Bank (ADB) came into the picture from 1966 and total borrowing from ADB till April 2019 was USD 32.18 billion. Pakistan also availed the opportunity from Paris Club. Bilateral loans or borrowing is yet another story; a sharp increase in bilateral borrowing has taken place during the last two years. Pakistan also borrowed from commercial banks and the journey is still going on.

There has been consistency in approaching IMF, World Bank, ADB, and bilateral



partners for getting loans. From Ayub Khan to Prime Minister Imran Khan, IMF has remained a constant player in our economic landscape which led to accumulation of debt and in 2018 it reached around USD 95.1 billion dollars at the completion of previous government. For many years Pakistan has been taking new loans to pay back the interest which is in fact the real form of debt trap.

There is no substitute of building on productive sectors. Countries can only grow by focusing on industrialization, agriculture development and keeping pace with the changing dynamics of markets. For example, Turkey also implemented the IMF program, but it kept close focus on the productive sectors. If there is no focus on productive sectors, then austerity measures cannot help the country to develop.

Right after assuming the office of Prime Minister, the present government had to arrange USD 10 billion on debt servicing to pay back the installments and interest on loan. It led to crossing the psychological barrier of 100 and now it stands at USD 105 billion. Pakistan is going through a crisis, which is the result of irresponsible policies of successive governments. Their reliance on loans and not prioritizing productive sectors has brought Pakistan to this point. Pakistan did not focus on the productive sectors except for a few years. Leading sectors of economy, i.e., agriculture and manufacturing, exhibited frequent

fluctuation in the last twenty years. The story of remaining years of history is no different.

It happened despite the fact that international partners, IFIs and the Paris Club were advising the country to reform. Among all of them, IMF has been the leading advocate of reforms in Pakistan for decades, especially after the Structural Adjustment Program of 1988, which was introduced to reform the system. It came with micro-management style. IMF started to advise government on how and where to bring reforms. The history of reforms proposed by IMF is very interesting. Many countries crumbled during the reform period of IMF. Latin American economies are the most cited example on this front but we can find new entrants like Hungary and Greece, too.

Reforms are a hectic and long-term process, and require time to mature. Reforms to break the system do not work; it can only yield results when these are designed according to the circumstances and status of the country. China is a noticeable example on this front. It started reforms in 1978 and sequenced the reforms according to the development status of the country.

These two countries are the most recent examples of IMF led reforms. Hungary started the deal with the implementation of austerity measures, reduction in pension benefits, seizing of wages and reducing the deficit. Reforms introduced by Hungary

badly struck the social welfare spending and system, which led to agitation against the government, but IMF was comfortable. When Hungary's government tried to create some space for the poor and introduced banking transaction tax, IMF reacted very strongly over it and halted the cooperation. Greece, despite all the recipes from IMF, European institutions and partners, is still unable to find a sustainable solution.

There are five lessons for Pakistan to be learnt from the episode of Latin America, Hungary and Greece. First, loans are not the solution for achieving development and commercial loans are the most unsustainable and difficult ones. Latin American countries borrowed heavily to build infrastructure and for industrialization, and when they could not secure the required amount of resources from IFIs, they started to borrow from commercial banks and sources, which was another strategical mistake. Commercial borrowing led to worsening the situation after the 1970s oil crisis. Thus Latin American countries could not complete many projects due to lack of resources. Moreover, there is a need to rationalize the need of big infrastructure projects according to the development status of a country. Blind obsession with building of infrastructure is not a wise or sustainable strategy.

Second, there is no substitute of building on productive sectors. Countries can only grow by focusing on industrialization, agriculture development and keeping pace with the changing dynamics of markets. For example, Turkey also implemented the IMF program, but it kept close focus on the productive sectors. If there is no focus on productive sectors, then austerity measures cannot help the country to develop.

Debt trap marks the beginning of a policy trap. Once a country has been captured in debt trap it will ultimately fall in a policy trap, which is more dangerous as it becomes very difficult to reverse the policy framework.

Third, IFIs' formula of overnight implementation of reforms is a faulty recipe. There is no magic wand to change the scenario in the short term. Reforms are a hectic and long-term process, and require time to mature. Reforms to break the system do not work; it can only yield results when these are designed according to the circumstances and status of the country. China is a noticeable example on this front. It started reforms in 1978 and sequenced the reforms according to the development status of the country. Once considered a closed economy, China is now the champion of globalization.

Fourth, debt trap marks the beginning of a policy trap. Once a country has been captured in debt trap it will ultimately fall in a policy trap, which is more dangerous as it becomes very difficult to reverse the policy framework.



Fifth, IMF's reform agenda under the Structural Adjustment Program is being derived from Washington Consensus, which calls for radical changes in a short span of time. It tries to blur the difference between revolution and reforms. Theory of reforms was built on the principles that it is a time taking process. It is closer to evolution than revolution. We need to understand that reform is not merely writing a policies, principles and putting deadlines. It is more about the behavioral changes and building characters of actors, while character cannot be built in the short term. It is a process of years, if not decades, as we have to deal with humans, not machines. Diversion from the principles of reform leads to chaos in the country and resultantly, people start to get agitated.

The recipe presented or implemented by IFIs, especially by the IMF, does not qualify for the principles of reform. Instead it looks like an attempt to 'trap' policy of any country. Pakistan has been going through this since 1988, and has put itself in the debt trap. However, Pakistan has the chance to avoid the policy trap. For that

purpose, Pakistan first of all needs to understand that Structural Adjustment Program cannot help until the productive sectors of the economy are revived. Fortunately, at present Pakistan is trying to introduce some measures to revive the productive sectors, and has generously allocated for agriculture. It also has developed a good framework for the next five years to help the agriculture sector and farmers.

The government is also trying to revive the economy by giving priority to manufacturing sector, especially the industry. Moreover, the government is also striving to diversify the economy, as this time around focus is not on textile alone. Pakistan needs to diversify as an international market is more inclusive for diversified economies.

Luckily, Pakistan has a window of opportunity in the form of CPEC and China. We know that the government is strengthening the social welfare program but what most people do not know is that it is happening due to the generous help from China. It has committed more than USD 1 billion to support the social welfare system of Pakistan. Additionally, it will also be contributing to the skill development programs of Pakistan in the coming years. CPEC provides us an excellent opportunity to revive our economy, while SEZs present an excellent opportunity for the growth of industrial sector in Pakistan. Cooperation in technology and modern IoT will serve as a future opportunity. However, to benefit from CPEC Pakistan needs to understand that it is an economic opportunity, not charity. Therefore, we will have to deal with it as an economic opportunity. If we fail in taking advantage of CPEC and China's help, we would have to face the reality that policy trap is waiting for us.

The impacts of policy trap would be even more dangerous as compared to debt trap. Policy trap will lead to compromise on vital national interests. More specifically, we need to understand that U.S. enjoys veto power at IMF and World Bank, and it will definitely try to extract its national interests. Therefore, it's time for us to think rationally and devise policies of self-reliance.

The writer teaches digital diplomacy, negotiation skills and conflict transformation at Foreign Services Academy. He is also the Chief Operating Officer at Zalmi Foundation.

Difficult Decisions

To please allies is vital for govt. Inflation hike is more dangerous for Shahbaz Sharif



By Sajad Jatoi

hile as a leader of the opposition, Shahbaz Sharif appeared to be observing the inflation rate in Pakistan very minutely. He was lashing out at the PTI government for a price hike of even a single digit in petroleum products and was riding on the wave of public resentment against Imran Khan. He was self-professedly moved by the suffering of the public; and because of this, he mobilized the long march with the help of other mainstream opposition parties shortly before the vote of no-confidence. The narrative for the march was to dismantle the government of Khan through a no-confidence motion so that the public can get some relief by getting rid of his elite oriented policies.

Now that he has assumed power, he seems to have lost all sense of the misery of people living below the poverty line. Within the time period of two weeks late May and early June, he has approved a 60 rupees hike in petrol and diesel prices. In addition, the cooking oil and ghee prices have been raised by over 200 rupees per litre and kg, which now cost near 600 rupees. To add fuel to the fire, his finance minister has suggested that fuel prices may be increased again in mid-June.

While it is understandable why the prices of petroleum products are being increased, however, this increase is a lot more than what the people of Pakistan can afford in an already impoverished country.

Apparently, the reason for the hike in the prices is the pressure from the International Monetary Fund, which wants Pakistan to comply with its guidelines or rather with its orders as the country wants the bailout package to continue smoothly. However, it was not just about resuming the deal with the Fund. In fact, the assistance from friendly countries such as China, Saudi Arabia and UAE, also depended on it as these nations were also directing Pakistan to get the withheld tranches of bucks from the IMF first; only after they would come to its aid.

Undoubtedly, Pakistan had little choice when it came to cutting down on the subsidies given on petroleum products because the bail-out package by the IMF and assistance from friendly countries hinged on the removal of subsidies. But the thing is that PM Shahbaz Sharif and his cronies are terming the removal of subsidies on fuel a 'difficult decision', which is illogical and erroneous, given other options that they could explore.

Removing subsidies on fuel prices is, in fact, a much easier decision in comparison with slashing the defence budget and stopping subsidies given to the elite class through the corporate sector which directly or indirectly helps the elite accumulate wealth at the expense of the general public. This is what well-known economists like Qaiser Bengali have been proposing for some time now. Increasing fuel prices is a lot easier because the government hardly takes the masses into consideration as long as they suffer peacefully. But discontinuing subsidies to the elite and slashing defence expenditure is not an easy choice because, in order to do so, the government will have to bitter opposition from powerful quarters. And the odds are that taking such decisions might send the government packing.

Leaving defence expenditures aside, the corporate sector is said to be receiving about 2660 billion rupees, which is four times the money spent on social protection programmes. This large amount of money from public resources is going to large industries, and other business firms, which

are owned by the elite class. The purpose behind this is that it would keep the corporate sector running; which, in turn, will help the country to meet its domestic needs and contribute to the exports. However, this hardly translates into reality as Pakistan remains dependent on imports to meet its domestic needs. Also, the exports are much lower when compared with imports.

Increasing the price of petroleum products is perhaps a difficult decision for Shahbaz Sharif in the sense that it would take a heavy toll on his and his party's popularity because he came to power with the narrative of controlling the rampant inflation and fixing the tattered economy. Definitely, denting his party's image is indeed a difficult decision for him because politicians care more about themselves than they do for the public. So this will not only militate against him in the next general elections but also revive the hitherto dying PTI because Imran Khan would have died a political death had he been allowed to complete his term.

Before the price hike, people were enraged at Imran Khan for not being able to contain the runaway inflation. But after this, he seems to have been vindicated of that. Also, this has given the general impression that inflation in Imran's regime had nothing to do with his competence or incompetence; rather it was a global phenomenon, which is slowly dawning on people in Pakistan.

The public anger has now shifted towards Shahbaz Sharif and his party. The people have begun questioning the sincerity of Shahbaz Sharif and other mainstream political parties for organizing a long march with the Pakistan People's Party against Imran Khan. They are asking what became of the promises made to them. They are questioning that if Shahbaz did not have a plan of his own, then why exactly did he make efforts to oust Imran Khan as he has done the same what the Khan administration was doing i.e., surrender before the IMF.

To save face, the incumbent Finance Minister, Miftah Ismail, who belongs to Shahbaz Sharif's PLM-N, had said a few days back that ex-PM Imran Khan had mortgaged Pakistan with the IMF. So, his government was under compulsion to abide by the dictates of the IMF. One can blame Imran for going to the IMF, but this does not hold true that he mortgaged Pakistan. Before Imran, Pakistan sought help from the IMF on multiple occasions. This does not exonerate the Shahbaz government from the responsibility. He had assumed power on the promise that he would try his best to provide relief. Hence, the people are looking toward him.

Lastly, it is expected that the coalition government is going to increase fuel and electricity prices once again. Undoubtedly, the public reaction to this decision can be expected in the shape of protest demonstrations and sit-ins, but Shahbaz Sharif should be careful in saying that it was a tough decision for him to take. In fact, if he is sincerely dedicated, he will have to realize that tough decisions are yet to be made. Unlike his predecessors, he has to realize that the country cannot afford to subsidise the elite any longer. He will have to seek consensus from all political parties to pull the plug on the money going to the

The writer is a freelance columnist based in



Political Stability: Gateway to Economic Stability of Pakistan

Change of Policies With regime change been mother of ills



By Muhammad Shaheer Mahmood

Pakistan's Achilles heel has been its political instability rendering social, cultural, and economic losses to the country. Pakistan's political instability has been a long-term problem for the country. The persistence and political integrity of a contemporary government regime is referred to as political stability. In the context of the said definition and historical overview of Pakistan, it can be argued that it has remained hard for a government in Pakistan to maintain its persistence and integrity. As a result, the country of about 220 million individuals suffered in all spheres but the most pressing was the economic depression.

It is well-demonstrated that any sudden change at the government level is bound to cause a shift in economic policies, something every investor or businessperson fears. Moreover, policymakers' horizons are narrowed by political instability, leading them to pursue non-optimal macroeconomic policies. It also reduces the visibility of monetary and fiscal authorities, resulting in decisions with short-term consequences. Furthermore, whenever there is political unrest, there is a drop in both domestic and foreign investment, as well as a drop in public confidence in the government. Economic growth is likewise slowed in these circumstances.

Political stability is not about having a democratic regime as the West claims instead it is about having a stable political leadership free from any sort of factors that can lead it towards instability. Political stability can be in both regimes i.e., civil or military, and democratic or authoritarianism. There have been two types of regimes since the inception of Pakistan as an independent state, namely, civil or democratic and dictatorship or authoritarianism. There are numerous distinctions between the aforementioned regimes, especially in economic affairs. Pakistan has been ruled by the military for 32 years and by civilians for 38 years, accounting for 45% and 55% of the time, respectively. During these two periods, the average GDP growth was 6.3% during military rule and 4.2% during civilian rule. The decent and constant economic growth in military regimes is credited to the political stability of their regimes.

Constant stints of political instability have rendered state institutions weak and unorganized. This has led to bad governance and maladministration and ultimately effecting the economic standing of Pakistan. Another stressing point is that weak institutions promote a culture of corruption which undermines the importance of a strong economy. Only a stable political landscape in the country can result in building competent institutions which in turn can ensure a stable financial environment in the country.

However, whole-hearted and half-hearted attempts have been made by different governments at different times to attain political stability. The most important of all was the passage of the 18th amendment. This amendment was an attempt to address the concerns of the provinces. Provinces were given some serious authority and rights so that the chances of tussle and rift

between provincial and federal governments can be avoided. But unfortunately, the 18th amendment was not implemented to its spirit. The absence of constitutionalism is another factor that has not made Pakistan able to achieve political stability.

Similarly, the recent political adventures and misadventures have acted as an impetus for clouding the political atmosphere with instability. The rising dollar against the Pakistani rupee, growing inflation, distrust among the public, and clash of institutions are among the numerous repercussions of the political instability that has grappled Pakistan. Stretching the period of political instability is not a commendable act. It has been witnessed in the recent political affairs of the state that stabling the political atmosphere was not a priority for the stakeholders of the state and it resulted in economic distress for the state and its individuals. All these events had disastrous effects on the confidence of businesspersons and investors.

Political instability causes different minds to come into power for a short period. With different minds, there are different voices and visions, and with this concoction of views comes temporal variances in policies and governance.

Moreover, political instability causes a battle of power, and state resources are used by respective stakeholders for building strongholds. If the said statement is looked through the prism of the current political scenario of Pakistan, it can be witnessed that two different ideology-oriented governments lead to strife between the economic policies of the outgoing and incoming governments.

Several studies and scholars reiterate the fact that the countries where there is political stability are more likely to ensure economic stability within their territories. If the current situation in Pakistan is viewed through this logic, one gets the idea of the real problem, the economy of Pakistan is facing.

A country, as diverse as Pakistan has many factors that can lead it to political instability. In other words, if political stability is to be ensured, the contemporary government has to mediate on different fronts i.e., religious, civil society, political, etc. Political tensions, sectarian issues, civil society's concerns, and the tussle between the three pillars of the state i.e., legislature, executive, and judiciary can independently or interdependently lead to political instability. Such a situation has arisen many a time in Pakistan hence, pushing Pakistan through political instability. This all ultimately leads to economic downfall.

Considering the fragile economic state of Pakistan, several measures are to be taken. priorities have to be shifted and above all political stability has to be attained. Political stability is a pressing concern for Pakistan because it is critical for a country's economic progress, and a stable political environment aids in the construction of a rational and continuous path to long-term

The contemporary government of Pakistan has to get into the driver's seat as it has the main role in achieving political stability. In the current political turmoil, there is a dire need to develop consensus among all the political parties. Political stability cannot be attained without engaging the political parties. Secondly, the rift between the different pillars of the state has to be reduced to the possible minimum level. Thirdly, pressure groups should not be allowed to exercise pressure on the government and its respective institutions. Pressure groups include religious parties. terrorist organizations, ethnic associations, and other extremist unions. Fourthly, the federal government must deal with the provinces with equality as per the 18th



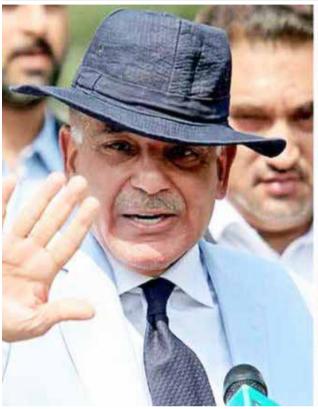
development. Furthermore, policies developed by a certain political superior regime can be advanced and made to achieve the necessary goals with political stability, whereas political instability causes friction in the implementation of laws and policies. Political stability has the added benefit of assisting the country in achieving long-term development by providing investors, taxpayers, and lenders with a predictable economic policy to follow. A powerful, secure environment, as well as a governmental authority that knows what they're doing, will eliminate future uncertainty.

amendment in the Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan, 1973. It has been unfortunate that provincial governments and federal governments, at times, are not on the same page. Lastly, constitutionalism should be promoted as the constitution is the sacred law of the land and if it is followed as per its spirit, political instability can be avoided to a certain extent. It is an unquestionable fact that only political stability can rescue the state of Pakistan from its economic depression.

The author is a final year student of law at Quaid-i-Azam University, Islamabad.

Two important characters in Sharif's Money Laundering case expire, and others at large

The investigation team detected 28 Benami accounts of the Shahbaz family through which money laundering of Rs16.3bn was committed during 2008-18





By Asadullah

At least two important figures in the money laundering case against Prime Minister Shahbaz Sharif and his son, Hamza Shahbaz, have expired after the ouster of former Prime Minister Imran Khan earlier in April this year.

Initially, the investigation officer, Dr Rizwan of the Federal Investigation Agency (FIA), died because of cardiac arrest, and recently, key suspect Malik Maqsood Ahmed alias Maqsood Chaprasi (peon) also died while he was an absconder and was in abroad.

Maqsood 'Chaprasi', a peon at the Ramzan Sugar Mills, was one of the proclaimed offenders in the case and the FIA had claimed the suspect had received an amount of Rs3 billion in his bank account.

The leadership of Pakistan Tehreek-i-Insaf (PTI) claimed both the deaths as unnatural and seek a probe.

The Supreme Court also took notice of the assumptions of pressures on the prosecution agency and had stopped posting/transfers of the prosecutors and the investigation officers associated with high-profile cases.

The federal investigation agency held Shahbaz Sharif responsible for his family-owned company embarking on an organized mega-money laundering operation.

The agency claimed that the evidence shows that Shahbaz Sharif is personally and directly responsible for assisting in this money-laundering operation. Likewise, the money trail reveals that PML-N political worker, Aurungzeb Butt, issued two cheques amounting to Rs 5million which were deposited into Benami accounts.

During the investigation, his son Aslam Zeb appeared on behalf of his father, he

said that these cheques were handed over to his father during a meeting with Shahbaz Sharif.

Furthermore, FIA claims that Hamza Shahbaz holds approximately 33pc shares of Ramzan Sugar Mills Limited (RSML) and Suleman Shahbaz about 19pc.

Being major stakeholders, they were holding decision-making powers of the company.

Hamza Shahbaz was CEO of the company from 2004-2018; in 2018, he was replaced by Suleman Shahbaz.

During the period of operating Benami accounts, Hamza Shahbaz was effectively in charge of the affairs of the company.

Hamza Shahbaz signed key documents of the company in his capacity as CEO, which include Annual Audited

Financial statements from 2019 to 2017, the Directors Report of RSML.

According to the investigation report in the money laundering case, "The investigation team has detected 28 Benami accounts of the Shahbaz family through which money laundering of Rs16.3bn was committed during 2008-18. The FIA examined the money trail of 17,000 credit transactions," according to an FIA report submitted to the court.

The amount was kept in "hidden accounts" and given to Shahbaz in a personal capacity, the report claimed.

This amount (Rs16bn) had nothing to do with the sugar business (of the Shahbaz family), FIA had alleged. The money received from the accounts of low-wage employees by Shahbaz was transferred outside Pakistan via hundi/hawala networks, ultimately destined for the beneficial use of his family members, the FIA alleged.

"Eleven low-paid employees of the Sharif group who 'held and possessed' the laundered proceeds on behalf of the principal accused, are found guilty of facilitating money laundering. The three other co-accused of the Sharif group also actively facilitated the money laundering," the agency had said.

According to the copy of the FIA's investigation, Magsood worked as a "tea boy/peon" at the Ramzan Sugar Mills, Lahore. His last drawn salary was Rs25,000 in 2017 and then "he absconded to the UAE on March 14, 2018".

The FIA, in its challan, said at least seven Benami accounts were opened in his name where an amount of Rs2966 million was transferred. "He was a resident of Lahore and it is improbable that he could operate business accounts at a geographically remote area — Chiniot".

Ironically, all three key facilitators of the money laundering case, namely Suleman Shahbaz, Syed Muhammad Tahir Naqvi, and Malik Magsood Ahmed, had "absconded" abroad and were believed to be in the United Kingdom and the UAE.

During the inquiry, the low-wage employees of Sharif group/RSML admitted that these accounts were operated for secret transactions.

Money trails of deposits into these accounts, provided by respective banks, revealed that huge deposits through cheques/instruments issued by various parties are totally unrelated to the sugar- business.

depositors include politicians. constructors and contractors, petroleum dealers, Pharma-vendors, and various traders/merchants.

The FIA questioned Sharifs about the opening of very high-turnover Benami accounts operated in the name of RSML employees, the control of these accounts, and personal enrichment from these accounts.

He also denied any contact with the RSML's employees and expressed ignorance about who was depositing funds in the Benami accounts.

His ignorance was to extent that he even showed ignorance when asked about who was depositing funds into his personal accounts

Suleman Shahbaz was served three notices at his residence in Lahore and through e-mail but he did not respond to any of these notices. The court of judicial magistrate issued warrants of his arrest and was declared proclaimed offender on April 20, 2021.



Shahbaz Sharif's legal advisor Atta-ullah Tarar appeared before FIA (ACC) Lahore on February 2, 2021, and turned in a half-page response in this response; some counter allegations were hurled at FIA, saying that FIA is building a case with mala fide intentions.

Subsequently, on being summoned, Shahbaz Sharif appeared before FIA on June 22, 2021, after getting pre-arrest bail.

The FIA alleged that Shahbaz Sharif was non-corporative to the extent that when he was asked "which of his son was controlling the Sharif group/RSML" he expressed ignorance to the question. He also said that he had no knowledge of the reasons behind his son Suleman Shahbaz's absconding to the UK.

Hamza Shahbaz also expressed ignorance about the transactions. He denied financial control over the affairs of Sharif Group/ RSML despite being CEO of the company. The FIA has so far found 28 Benami accounts operated in the name of 14 employees of Sharif Group-owned Ramzan Sugar Mills.

The FIA's scrutiny of 11 employees of the Sharif group revealed that they had no other source of income except their monthly salary as employees of RSML.

The experts said that the evidence against Sharifs is strong, however, since the key witnesses are abroad - one of them has recently expired – it will be difficult for the prosecution to prove the case.

However, it is still not easy for them to go scot-free as the Supreme Court is also watching the proceeding of the trial court and this may be the reason that Suleman Shahbaz absconded abroad and never returned despite the fact that his father has become the Chief Executive of the country and his brother is the incumbent Chief Minister of Punjab.

The State of IT Exports in Pakistan

Political stability is one of the most important factors in the progress of the IT industry



By Azeem Waqas

akistan's Information Technology and Communications (ICT) services sector is struggling hard to rise high and make its place in the world but it would not be able to achieve its set target of \$3.5 billion in exports till 30th June 2022.

Industry players have shown their reservations about the government's inconsistency in the IT policy and pointed out the vested interest of some officials.

The IT industry is facing many challenges but the lack of an international digital payment gateway is one of the biggest hurdles in promoting IT exports to Pakistan.

One of the high officials of the Ministry of IT revealed that Pakistan has \$3.5 billion in undocumented IT exports. The freelancers and IT entrepreneurs cannot bring this money into Pakistan because there is no IT policy for the private sector in Pakistan.

Former Chief Executive Officer of NITB, Syed Shabahat Ali Shah, has questioned the Ministry of IT about the fate of Pakistan's own developed international digital payment gateway. The project was

completed two years back, all data was submitted to the ministry and everything was proved about the project, but this has not been started yet. Whether it's the incompetence of the IT ministry or it involved the monetary benefit of a few individuals?

Syed Shabahat Ali Shah said that PayPal will never come to Pakistan; they have told this in 2019 that Pakistan is not on their digital route. Pakistan has to develop its own digital payment gate through which freelancers can bring dollars into Pakistan. Government has to reduce the tax rate for bringing dollars for freelancers.

The government has set a target of \$3.5 billion for IT exports but it will achieve \$2.7 billion for the current year. Pakistan Software Houses Association, the P@sha, has identified five Reasons why IT Exports in Pakistan will not meet targets in 2022.

In its report, P@sha disclosed that while the overall growth in the IT/ITeS industry is still there, a closer look at data shows that the growth rate trend has declined during this year. The only change this year from last year is the change in the tax regime, which has affected the potential growth. In 2021, there was 47% growth in the IT/ITeS industry. Continuing the same growth trend, the IT industry would have crossed USD 3.5 billion; however, there are the top 5 reasons why the planned growth was not achieved.

The report says that the sudden change in Tax Regime during the year has affected IT growth. The tax exemption was the only incentive given to the IT/ITeS industry and was committed till 2025. In 2021, it was changed to a controversial tax credit regime. This came as a surprise to the industry. Industry and relevant ministries (MoITT) were not consulted in advance before making this change last year. The current tax credit regime has not been implemented as per the planned commitment. 1% is being deducted by banks, while companies have not been awarded tax exemption certificates even after 6 months. The process includes negotiations with field officers, which leads to further delays. The current regime discourages companies to bring exports to Pakistan and also raises questions about the consistency and continuity of the policies.

It states that delayed cash reward distribution & little incentive was also a big hurdle in the promotion of the IT industry. A cash reward was announced as the first-ever monetary incentive for the IT/ITeS industry in 2021, but the distribution hasn't been done till now. In addition, the disbursement of the launched incentive scheme was on the growth rate of IT & ITeS export remittances achieved during FY2020-2021, in comparison to the previous FY2019-2020. This strategy to allocate cash reward incentives based on the growth, instead of total revenue, has discouraged a significant number of companies to apply for the scheme due to the low incentive, as evident from the applications received during this year.

The report said that Special Technology Zone (STZ) enablement is also another reason. Special Technology Zones (STZ) was approved in August 2020, and STZA was launched in January 2021. However, it's been two years that STZs has not been enabled for the existing IT/ITeS industry. With a lack of stakeholder (IT industry) representation in STZA, the focus has been diluted and not aligned with IT export growth.

Pasha said that the delay in implementation of the PM package announced in January 2022 discouraged the IT industry. In January 2022, a package was approved and announced by Prime Minister Pakistan to ensure export growth within this fiscal year. However, this has not been implemented till now.

Political instability and country perception are one of the most important factors in the promotion of IT exports. Unlike other industries (with transactional contracts), the IT industry has long-term contracts and is highly dependent on country perception and political stability, it added.

Pakistan is in serious need of dollars. The IT industry believes that the quickest way to fix most of Pakistan's economic problems is to focus aggressively on building tech unicorns. It took India a little over a decade to build 100 unicorns and their combined worth is over \$300 billion; roughly 50% of Pakistan's estimated GDP.

Zain Khan, the founder of a start-up, has said that Industrialization is over. China and a few other countries won. We need to get over it. We're never going to have a comparative advantage here. But we're pumping out thousands of software engineers every year and we have one of the biggest and most well-connected internet markets.

He said that it takes decades and a ton of resources to get the industrial policy right and we've been getting it wrong for 70 years. But it takes very little in comparison to building billion-dollar tech companies. Start-ups like Careem and Airlift are proof of this. Pakistan is blessed that it has a small army of software engineers who can build these start-ups. This is Pakistan's real comparative advantage in the global economy.

Furthermore, Zain added that instead of lending these engineers to other countries via dev shops, we should help them grow our economy by building start-ups here. It blows my mind that we're so negligent and completely blowing our lead in the one sector of our economy that can compete on the global stage. That's not to say that some sectors of government aren't taking this seriously. STZA, the State Bank, and a few other government stakeholders are doing well to move this forward. And they deserve huge credit. I'm proposing that instead of being a side quest, tech start-ups should be the centrepiece of Pakistan's economic policy for the next decade.

IT expert and founder of a start-up, Habib ul Allah Khan, said that the current IT exports number is in no way Pakistan's reflection of potential. Pakistan's economy is in a downturn, current funding scenario is weak, so there is no way but to encourage IT export.

He said that regulatory changes in the pipeline will be implemented from July 2022, and hopefully, the state bank is getting involved. We are the last un-digitized trade, Agri-tech, and payment market left in the world. Government has a very strong regulatory mandate and if it executes on this, I think the country will catch up. He further said that as regulatory changes keep happening, it will be good for the health of Pakistan's start-up ecosystem to start with the small business model.



Sons of Cow and their Friends

TTP demanded to undo merger of Ex-FATA into Pakistan is unlikely to be met



By Syed Fakhar KaKaKhel

A 50-member jirga from Pakistan has concluded three days of talks with the Pakistani Taliban in Kabul, resulting in a second ceasefire indefinitely. In the presence of the Pakistani jirga delegation, the Pakistani Taliban sent a clear message that the decision to integrate FATA should be reversed.

Apart from the release of their comrades, they also demanded the implementation of Sharia. During their first joint meeting, both parties decided to set up committees on both sides. The jirga from Pakistan agreed that one member from each district of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa would be part of the committee representing the government. A 10-member Taliban delegation led by Omar Khalid Khurasani took time to form their team for negotiations. On the first day of the jirga, Afghan Interior Minister Siraj Haqqani briefed the jirga members on the situation, their role as mediators, and future strategy.

This is an exclusive effort in a dialogue between the government and the TTP. Earlier, a delegation of local elders was usually used for talks with the TTP. In Malakand, the government held talks with the Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) through Maulana Sufi Mohammad, leader of the Tehreek-e-Nifaz

Shariat-e-Mohammadi. This time, a foreign country is engaged in the negotiations. That country is not only hosting the talks but the Afghan Interior Minister, Siraj Haqqani, will also be the guarantor of the agreement if it is reached. If either party violates the agreement, the guarantor will also be free to act against the opposing party.

Since the establishment of the Taliban government in Afghanistan on August 15, 2021, Pakistan has been demanding that action be taken against the Taliban fighters. However, Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) continued its attacks in the border areas of Pakistan.

The Afghan Taliban kept sending messages to Pakistan to give the Pakistani Taliban a chance to negotiate. The Afghan Taliban believed that the issue should be resolved politically through dialogue. The main reason is the ground-level relationship between the Afghan Taliban and the Pakistani Taliban. Because the Pakistani Taliban, despite all odds, fully supported the Afghan Taliban in their fight against the US-led coalition forces, providing them with sanctuaries in the border areas; they are avoiding operations against the Pakistani Taliban.

On the other hand, the Afghan Taliban have made it clear to the world that their territory will not be used against other countries, including Pakistan.

Therefore, when the Pakistani Taliban launched operations in Pakistan under Operation Al-Badr, the pressure on Afghanistan concerning the Pakistani Taliban increased. Pakistani military officials then provided evidence to the Afghan Taliban about how the Pakistani Taliban were sitting in Afghanistan and engaging in operations against Pakistan.

After that, the Afghan Taliban, especially the Afghan Interior Minister Siraj Haqqani, played a crucial role in bringing the Pakistani Taliban to the negotiating table. In such a situation, if the parties reach a conclusion in the presence of a guarantor, an agreement is made, it will be necessary to implement it.

On the other hand, if the TTP violates the agreement in the future, the Afghan Taliban could take full action against the Pakistani Taliban or at least support Pakistan.

At the end of the three-day jirga talks, the Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) issued a statement expressing satisfac-

tion over the talks. The Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) has also extended the ceasefire indefinitely due to these talks. No date has been set for the next round of negotiations, but talks are likely to resume in late June or early July.

But in this situation, despite the ceasefire in the border areas, the attacks on the security forces continued. Security forces also conducted operations against the militants. However, the TTP has not claimed responsibility for those attacks.

It is feared that despite progress on the agreement, some factions will not accept the talks. Dealing with them will be a challenge for the Pakistani government and the leadership of the Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan.

Perhaps this is why Islamic State in Khurasan Province (ISKP) is considered a threat to the future of Afghanistan and Pakistan. Both countries try to control the internal elements as soon as possible so that the external factors do not benefit from them.

Despite these efforts, ISKP attacks continue, especially in Afghanistan. It has been observed that the scope of ISKP activities is spreading toward Kabul and north of Afghanistan.

The Taliban administration's acting foreign minister, Mawlawi Amir Khan Muttagi, met an Indian foreign ministry delegation led by JP Singh, a secretary in the ministry.

"The meeting focused on India-Afghan diplomatic relations, bilateral trade, and humanitarian aid," Taliban foreign ministry spokesman Abdul Qahar Balkhi said on Twitter

Balkhi said the minister called the visit a "good beginning in ties between the two countries". A statement made by Afghan Defense Minister Mullah Mohammad Yagoob followed this meeting. When asked if the current regime in Afghanistan wishes to have close defense ties with India, Mullah Yaqub said first that they wanted to establish strong diplomatic relations with all countries, including India. "When we will together have cordial political and diplomatic relations, then only we would be ready for defense relations. Neither there will be any problem with it nor do we see any issue with it," he added.

In this context, it is essential to note that there is a history of military training between Afghanistan and India. This is not the first time that India has mentioned the training of Afghan forces.

But this time, the optics are strange as India not only opposed the Afghan Taliban on every platform in every era but also played a full role in resisting them by supporting a war against the Afghan Taliban.

That is the reason that the Afghan Taliban has issued a cautious statement. The Taliban made it clear that things will move forward only when India formally recognizes the Taliban government in Afghanistan and accepts the Taliban government embassies in India. Neighbouring countries like Pakistan have not yet recognized the Afghan Taliban government.

In such a scenario, it is unlikely that India will recognize the Afghan Taliban and train its forces in India in the near future. It would be quite interesting that India, which is on the path of the Hindutva Raj, would host pure Islamic jihadi troops on its soil.

Overall, India's direct contact with the Afghan Taliban has historically been minimal. However, in recent times, India has connected with the Afghan Taliban through Qatar. Thus, as in the past, India is dependent on Pakistan for ground communications. An important factor is India's relations with the Northern Alliance.

Due to its special relations with Tajikistan, India has always maintained good relations with the leadership of Northern Afghanistan. The recent visit of Afghan leader Abdullah Abdullah to India is a case in

India's influence on the Pashtun-majority Afghan Taliban is rarely seen. But, the Afghan Taliban consider their relations with India better for their diplomatic image globally and especially in South Asia.

However, a statement about future relationships with India has stirred jihadi groups. In a recent propaganda booklet by ISKP, the Taliban were criticized for the current Afghan Taliban stance towards India. The propaganda pamphlet titled "Sons of Cow and their New Friends."



There is strong moral and geopolitical case for helping Ukraine military: Polish ambassador

In an exclusive interview with Truth International, Maciej Pisarski says Russia is stealing Ukrainian wheat and selling to other countries; Poland is trying to help Ukraine excersize its right to self-defence; we are cognisant to the fact this conflict may spillover



By Zarghon Shah

Q: What in your views is the Russian mindset behind invading Ukraine

A: I think this a very important question. What is behind this war is an attempt to create a sphere of influence in a kind of new nomination of a smaller country by a bigger country. So this war is completely unprovoked and illegal, this is in breach of lot's of act's of international law including the UN Charter and also numerous agreements and treaties to which Russia has been a party; so we could see this during the UN General Assembly session where 141 countries deplored this war of aggression, so what is at stake here is of course Ukraine, independence, sovereignty, territorial integrity as well as its self-determination but also wider ramifications, as the whole international security order is at stake right now, based on international law which guarantees that the rights of smaller countries are the same as that of bigger countries and that the war cannot be a justifiable means to achieve political ends.

Q: Do you think the capture and annexation of Cremia is a factor that encouraged Russia to invade Ukraine

A: I think that one can see and look at this war as a continuation of the events of 2014 when Cremia was annexed and the war in eastern Ukraine was instigated; so, this is a continuation of the process that really was launched at that time.

Q: Don't you think the world has double standards for instance when Iraq invaded Kuwait, the world was united and Saddam had to pullout but here it's the otheway round-- the might is right

A: I think that the bigger countries especially the members of the UN Security Council, the countries with recognizable nuclear arsenal should be a pillar of peace and stability in the world and in this regard, we have seen such countries acting in a reckless and very brutal manner. There have had been military conflicts in the world during the last decades, and each of them had its own specifics; I don't want to diminish the importance of those events which should have been avoided because war is not acceptable or should not be an acceptable way of achieving political ends, I don't want to go into details, but what I am trying to say is that the responsibility of great powers or countries aspiring to be great powers or to be attributed as great powers, is much bigger than others.

Q: Poland is acting as a condute for Western humanitarian and military aid for Ukraine, this certainly draws Russian threats to attack Poland, your views!

A: We are not only facilitating, but we are part of it, and let me be very clear that the right to self-defence is a commonly recognizable right from the moral point of view and from the legal point of view; so, what we are trying to do is to help Ukraine to excersize its own right to self-defence, this is a war that has been waged in Ukraine

against Ukraine, so the Ukrainians are fighting for their freedom but they are fighting also for our freedom. We are not a party to this war, we are not a site for the conflict but we have a great interest in the outcome of this conflict as the entire international community should have because if we allow a bigger country to invade its own neighbour and to dictate how a smaller country should be governed, then the whole international community is in big trouble.

Q: Russia has bombed Ukrainian territory too close to the Polish border, so do Poles really believe the Kremlin could attack their country?

A: As I said we are not a party to the war, we are helping our Ukrainian neighbour we provide them with necessary help also humanitarian help and we are not afraid, we are very well prepared and one of the the unintended consequences, from Kremlin point of view, may be and has been that Nato really became much more stronger, united and it really took very important decision to strengthen its defence and deteranc capacity; so yes we are watching closely, we are cognisant to the fact that this conflict may spillover as any other conflict, there is always a potential; but we are really not intimidated and we are not afraid.

Q: As you referred to Nato, you think that it's in fact the Nato factor that is barring Russia from attacking Poland until today?

A: No question about it, had there not been a Nato expansion in the late 90s and early 2000, I don't know what kind of war we would be having these days; I think that Nato has proven to be relevant, to be effective and to be a factor for stability and security in Europe and in the whole world.

Q: Do you think that Ukraine could be another Afghanistan for Russia?

A: We have been witnessing the suffering of the people of Afghanistan, and we know how brutal it has had been, we are also cognisant of Pakistan's problems and ramifications, so this is beyond any question we would prefer a kind of peace and stability for our respective neighbourhoods. When it comes to Ukraine, it really depends on only one side, and this is the Russian Federation, they have started that war, this is a war of choosing of one man, unprovoked, without any reason, so only one man can decide to stop that war.

Q: And that man (Valdimir Putin) has not decided yet!

A: But he should hear from the world, not only from Western European countries but

also from across the world especially developing countries: 'Mr. President stop that war, stop it now and pullout your troops.'

Q: Are Ukrainians resisting Russian onslaught with considerable courage and resolve?

A: Yes indeed, it's been a remarkable display of steadfastness, bravery, self-sacrificing. You know President Putin wrote an article and he talked on numerous occasions about Ukraine saving that 'Ukraine was not a nation, Ukraine was not a country.' But for me if people want to die for their country that means that there is a country; if the people are ready to sacrifice their lives for the existence of their nation that means there is a nation, so what the Ukrainian people have proven is that they have every right to be considered and respected as a proud and independent

Q: How the Russian aggression against Ukraine is impacting Poland economically and politically?

A: I think we are all paying a price of Russian aggression against Ukraine, Poland is impacted for obvious reasons, we have millions of refugees, we have seen our





gas deliveries to be cutoff, we will not be importing Russian oil, there has been lot of disruption, but I think other parts of the world have been suffering a lot from economic spillovers of this war, especially the developing countries and we are cognisant about that. You know the energy and fuel prices are up, comodity prices are up, wheat supplies have been distributed, I know that Pakistan imported a lot of wheat from Ukraine before the war, and now the Ukrainian wheat field are turned into battlefields, where there were tractors, now there are tanks, so crops are not being cultivated, seaports are blocked by the Russian navy and this is another example of an aggressive stance. I mean to keep the whole world community hostage, especially when countries that relied on the Ukrainian supplies of wheat. We have been talking to our Ukrainian friends bilaterally and also with the European Union and other partners about facilitating Ukrainian's capacity to ship its wheat to the international market, but we need to be very careful not to buy any stolen grains as lot's of Ukrainian wheat has been stolen by the Russians. So, there is an economic element to this whole conflict.

Q: When you say a lot of Ukrainian wheat stocks have been stolen by Russians, are the Russian taking these stocks to Russia for onwards sale to other countries?

A: Yes, there have been lots of such news in the media, I think this is a possibility.

Q: Is Poland still receiving influx of Ukrainian refugees and how you are dealing with it?

A: yes we are receiving them although their

number is smaller than at the beginning of war, almost 4 million Ukrainians crossed Polish border; around 2 million went back and we are still hosting 2 million Ukrainian refugees. On the first it was a spontaneous act on the part of the government and the society, we have a network of assistance centres but also, we have prepared a legal framework the Ukrainian refugees; as I said they have a right to stay legally, they have a right to work, education, health and social assistance. We wish this war to end and all refugees return to their homeland.

O: Pakistan has sent few plane-loads of humanitarian assistance to Ukraine via Poland, what else we could do?

A: We have been talking to our Pakistani friends and presented our assessment of the situation, we noted with gratitude the two tranches of humanitarian aid that were delivered to Ukraine via Poland, I think there is always a room for doing more because this is an ongoing conflict. We have been working closely with Pakistani authorities about evacuation of Pakistani citizens from Ukraine, especially students and I myself greeted Pakistani students coming back from Ukraine via Poland, so I think this type of partnership is in our mutual interest.

Q: Former prime minister Imran Khan was criticised for visiting Moscow right on the moment Russia was about to attack Ukraine, your comment?

A: We have been reading the same press, the same accounts, but this is not up to me to articulate Pakistan's foreign policy, as I said we have been in close consultation with our Pakistani friends, Pakistan is a

sovereign country, it can come up with the foreign policy objectives of its own, and we respect that. I don't think the former Pakistani primr minister knew about the exact date and time of Russian invasion of Ukraine although there were lots of discussions in media and diplomatic forums about the incoming war, it came as a kind of surprise, as no one announces if its in a day or two notice. We should concentrate on the way forward, how to work together to upload the principles of international law, provided required assistance to Ukraine.

Q: Ambassador when you refer to assistance, should Pakistan assist Ukraine militarily also, like rest of the world?

A: I think that Pakistan is taking a close look on those issues and it will decide on it's own, I will not comment on that, I am here to represent Poland, this fully a prerogative of the Pakistani government.

Q: Ukraine has assisted Pakistan in the production of our main battle tank, al-Khalid, so don't you think it deserves this kind of Pakistan's assistance?

A: I think that there is a strong moral and geopolitical case for helping Ukraine also in military terms, countries need to decide, we have made this decision to support the Ukrainian resistance as it is strongly linked to the security of Poland as well, we have been working closely with our Nato allies, if this war protracts, we need to do more, we cannot abandon Ukraine now.

Can NATO deliver on Turkey's legitimate security demands?

Ankara plans for a renewed offensive in Syria and presses Finland and Sweden to come good on five concrete assurances, any positive diplomacy on lifting the embargo would need to be complimented by similar headway on other four demands



By Hannan R. Hussain

nkara continues to stick to its legitimate concerns about Swedish and Finnish support for anti-Turkey groups, having engaged in tense talks as Nordic leaderships hope for a clear path to NATO membership. But how serious is the military alliance in prioritizing Turkey's demands from Sweden and Finland, which range from an end to terror financing to a cessation of arms support to the Kurdistan Workers Party militant group (PKK)?

Washington's expression of confidence that reservations will be met swiftly is a tough sell. It is at odds with the staggering progress witnessed in recent talks, and considerable ambiguity surrounds what Sweden and Finland will agree to cede to Turkey.

Ankara has been clear from the start that any form of support from Nordic powers to the outlawed PKK will be enough to frustrate its approval of NATO's controversial enlargement. "For as long as Tayyip Erdogan is the head of the Republic of Turkey, we definitely cannot say 'yes' to countries which support terrorism entering NATO," said the Turkish leader in a press exchange last week.

The lack of specificity from the U.S. – the leading NATO voice - on how it aims to bridge Turkey's counterterrorism divide with Finland and Sweden was on the full show recently as well. The top U.S. diplomat, Antony Blinken, put little on display beyond hope, and the U.S. State Department itself shed new light on its "concerns" vis-à-vis Turkey's planned offensive against PKK fighters and partners.

Ankara is, therefore, correct to invite traction for the fact that as a NATO member state, it has suffered considerably on the back of terrorism, and is likely to expect more than just symbolic dialogue with Finland and Sweden to break ground on conditions. That includes a thorough consideration of key realities, including Turkish requests for the extradition of Kurdish militants from Sweden. The requests have seen little tangible movement since 2017, and are emblematic of the larger problem Ankara faces in getting Finland and Sweden to act swiftly and align with the NATO state on "fundamental issues."

Turkey's willingness to test if NATO can put its security concerns on top is also a test of the military bloc's "collective security" principle. For one, Finnish foreign minister, Pekka Haavisto, has made no secret of his desire to ensure Turkey's issues with his country's membership are resolved ahead of a central NATO summit next month.

It must be noted that Finland's recent narrative on reconciling differences with Turkey has been less about legitimizing Ankara's concerns on Kurdish support, and has focused more on indicating to NATO that Ankara's reservations take issue with Finnish membership prospects.

Helsinki's arguments in defense of NATO membership have also been motivated by the alliance's collective security principle and its presumed merits. But the same principle is put to test when counterterrorism cooperation between an existing member state and NATO aspirants is barely satisfactory to begin with, and NATO as a whole remains reluctant to formally resolve to fight 'all forms of terrorism' in its new strategic concept. That assurance is crucial to convince Turkey of concrete support.

The perceived terror threat to Turkey from PKK and its affiliates has shot up drastically in recent weeks, with Ankara calling upon the U.S. to step-up action against an outfit that its NATO allies also see as a terrorist organization. Identified targeting of militants and swift intelligence support from Turkey on key hideouts have largely been the result of Ankara's own national counterterrorism exigencies. The fear of a large-scale attack against the Turkish state, even one from the shadows in Northern Iraq or Syria, appears potent enough to validate Turkish offensives against PKK militants, making it critical for NATO to become aware of Ankara's sensitivities to any form of sustained militant support.

In other words, Turkey's expectation for NATO to embrace and own part of its own counterterrorism fight has been received underwhelmingly thus far, as Erdogan's patience for Turkey to be treated as a sovereign equal in the alliance is wearing thin. It is here that Sweden and Finland's continued support for an arms export embargo on Turkey since 2019, has not helped the alliance further convergence with Ankara either.

The embargo was the result of Ankara's military operation in designated territories in Syria against a PKK offshoot, and it is time that NATO begins to bite the bullet on what degree of priority it will attach to Ankara's actions against PKK, to reconciliation prospects with Sweden and Finland, and to Turkey's long-running cross-border anti-terror campaign.

Now that Ankara plans for a renewed offensive in Syria and presses Finland and Sweden to come good on five concrete assurances, any positive diplomacy on lifting the embargo would need to be complimented by similar headway on other four demands.

Recalling Turkish Foreign, Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu's, own words: that "an approach of 'we'll convince Turkey in time anyway, we are friends and allies' would not be correct." NATO has a historic tendency to veer away in that direction, acknowledging Turkish counterterrorism priorities in tone but demonstrating reluctance to put bloc support behind its sensitivities. Ankara appears to have gauged that prospect, and is unlikely to offer its undivided support for Finland and Sweden's NATO membership if credible assurances are not conveyed.

So, the ultimate question is, can Finland and Sweden come through on Turkey's specific counterterrorism demands for it to back their NATO membership bids before June-end?

Given the little progress in recent talks, the onus falls on NATO to muster more than just acceptable rhetoric on Turkish concerns to come across as a deal-maker. It must convince Ankara that the bloc's long-standing neglect of legitimate security concerns – witnessed in the lead-up to the Russian invasion of Ukraine - stands transformed in the space of just weeks.



"Drug addicts are not criminals," says Shehzad Roy at UNODC Country Programme for Pakistan 2022-2025

The Country Programme presents solutions to tackle challenges like- drug trafficking, organized crime and terrorism; and to establish accountable criminal justice systems



By Arsim Tariq

n 3rd June 2022, the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) launched the third phase of the Programme Country for 2022-2025. The new UNODC Country Programme for 2022 to 2025 will assist Pakistan in addressing these drug and crime challenges through integrated, scalable, and sustainable responses to all forms of crime, with an emphasis on gender-responsive programming, in order to achieve the rule of law and advance human rights. Ms. Ghada Fathi Waly addressed the attendees assembled to witness the launch of the new Country Programme of the UNODC Country Office Pakistan with the aforementioned expressions.

An important lesson from the event was the importance of having substantial conversations on human rights and gender issues with the General Council, while also ensuring cultural sensitivity and moving forward with an appropriate focus on human rights issues.

The third phase of the Country Programme (CP-III) was designed in close collaboration with more than 60 stakeholders from the Government of Pakistan, the United Nations, the private sector, and civil

society. The second phase of the Country Programme (CP-II) was implemented from 2016 to 2022 and resulted in numerous successes. The new Country Programme presents integrated, scalable, and sustainable solutions to confront the numerous challenges posed by illicit drug trafficking, transnational organized crime, corruption and economic crime, and terrorism; and to establish robust, accountable criminal justice systems. The Programme will work in synergy and close cooperation with other regional and global UNODC vehicles, including the Regional Programme for Afghanistan and Neighboring Countries, the Strategy Stability Grid, and a number of Global Programmes.

Julien Harneis, the UN Resident Coordinator and Humanitarian Coordinator in Pakistan, also emphasized that "the work of UNODC directly supports the efforts of Member States related to SDG 16 "Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions" and SDG 5 "Gender Equality", which is essential for promoting rule of law, gender responsiveness in combating crime, improving overall governance structures, and promoting citizen-centric policies for sustainable growth."

Sabino Sikandar, acting federal secretary of the Ministry of Narcotics Control, also spoke at the occasion. He stated, "Given the intricacy and worldwide nature of drug trafficking, no single nation can win this war." The international community may handle these concerns more effectively through concerted efforts.

The Goodwill Ambassador for UNODC Pakistan, Shehzad Roy, stated, "I had been following UNODC's work even before joining them as a Goodwill Ambassador. The Agency's work is commendable; I am a strong advocate for everything they do, and emphasize their mandate under SDG 16 peace and security - which UNODC prioritizes and is so well-known for." All of their efforts to make Pakistan a safer place are interconnected. He also thanked the Government of Pakistan and UNODC GWA for collaborating with UNODC and opening the road for UNODC's work. He thanked all of the contributors whose contributions had made it possible to bring about change and make a difference. Shehzad Roy further advocated against the stigmatization of drug addicts. If we are to start a dialogue with drug users, we have to stop making this conversation taboo in

society, and only then the addicts can open up if they need help from someone.

At the event, Ms. Ayesha Rehman and Dr. Komal Nisa from the Goodwill Kaniz Foundation, a UNODC-partnered organization, praised the disability-inclusiveness of UNODC Pakistan at all levels of its future programming and implementations. During the event, participants with disabilities interacted with donor agencies, diplomatic missions, government officials, and other UN agencies, and provided feedback on how UNODC Pakistan is working to mainstream Human Rights, Gender, and People with Disabilities at all levels.

Dr. Jeremy Milsom, UNODC Country Representative, emphasized that the new phase of the Country Programme would focus on innovation and partnerships, aiming to better integrate and synergize all thematic areas at the national, regional, and global levels: "I look forward to forging new partnerships with a broad range of partners to assist the Government of Pakistan in becoming a model in the fight against drugs and crime."

A number of initiatives and methods have contributed to the Country Programme's relevance for Government Counterparts (GC) and other stakeholders. These include a solid foundation in the work and results of the previous Country Programme, particularly lessons learned and noted good practice; the use of research and consultation with GC; the use of evaluation findings and recommendations from the previous Country Programme; a situation analysis using desk resources; and a need assessment conducted in planning by programme governance committees at the national 1eve1

The Country Programme contributes to One UN programme. This involves a clear emphasis and participation with the UNDAF and SDGs 5 and 16. Improving the overall relevance of its activities, the Programme is effectively integrated into a developing One UN organization and strategy in the country.

Furthermore, Programme design is governed by the UNDAF, and the Country Office reports to the UN Country Team (UNCT) on its actions and results within the context of the UN Development Assistance Framework (UNDAF). Prior to beginning the design of the present plan, the Country Programme aided the UNCT in completing a comprehensive human rights assessment and led the evaluation of Pakistan's human rights policy of due diligence. Operationally, the Country Programme engages and coordinates with multiple other UN agencies, including

WHO, UNAIDS, UNHCR, IOM, and UNICEF, on a regular basis.

The framework of the programme in Pakistan correlates with the structure of the Regional Program. The purpose of the Country Programme is to combat illicit trafficking, drug abuse, and crime in Pakistan while strengthening the rule of law and safe society for all. The Country Programme strives to link existing actions with regional frameworks, taking into account cross-cutting programmes with the Regional Programme and worldwide thematic areas of UNODC. UNODC's persistent and long-term advocacy for human rights and gender equality has allowed the Pakistani government to engage in discourse on these topics. Despite the political and cultural sensitivity connected with this rising priority, it is evident that the UNODC and the GC recognize the significance of gender and human rights in promoting justice in Pakistan.

In this context, the event revealed a need for discussions with the GC regarding the incorporation of human rights and gender elements in a more substantive manner, while also striking a balance between cultural sensitivity and moving forward with an appropriate emphasis on gender and human rights agendas.



Decontextualizing Palestine

Since two Decades Israel's crimes against Palestine and silence of international community is crime



By Arsim Tariq

This year was much of a muchness as L the last year for Palestine but also for mainstream Western media in reporting the obvious ethnic cleansing and apartheid project deployed by Israel against Palestinians. In May 2021, major Western media outlets continued to omit important historical and political context from their coverage of the 11-day Gaza Crisis in the occupied West Bank. Western media outlets including America's most influential newspaper of the record, the New York Times, continued to devoid Palestinians of their existence as a nation, decontextualized the Palestinian resistance, and pushed the alternative interpretations to the margins, generally, absolving Israel of responsibility. This year was similar to the last year, the year before that, and so on.

That the American media treats Israel with "kid gloves" is a continuing discourse in academic circles and alternative media, especially in the context of Palestine. For instance, some studies have taken a critical account of pro-Israel reporting, mapping, and referencing strategies being used in Western media, and it shows a consistent

pattern of selection, exclusion, and inclusion that, by and large, approves of Israeli rationales and expressions. For example, the construction of the first Palestinian intifada (1987-1991) in the US media was such that it was devoid of meaningful context integral to understanding the conflict dynamics.

Media is, therefore, the most significant marketplace of ideas and the notion of objectivity attached to it gives it the legitimacy to perpetuate ideologies and perceptions that are either deliberately or unconsciously in line with the interests of the ruling class i.e., the state. For example, the role media plays in negative portrayals of the Palestinian resistance against Israel has produced a decontextualized image of the Palestinian struggle. The ideas that the politically uninformed people are being socialized into regarding the Israel-Palestine conflict are those that benefit the political elite to maintain support for the US foreign policy on Israel.

The March of 2022 and Shireen Abu Agleh's assassination in May 2022 by the Israeli forces witnessed a similar pattern in the Western media. The language used to interpret and represent the conflict depicted a clear bias in favor of Israel. Below, I analyze three articles published in The New York Times in March 2022 that have contributed to the knowledge being disseminated across the globe in order to legitimize the Israeli apartheid and settler-colonial ambitions.

1st March 2022: Palestinians Threatened With Eviction Can Stay in Their Homes for Now by Isabel Kershner in The New York

In this report, Isabel Kershner rightfully recognizes that the Israeli legal institutions are a part of a "wider Israeli effort to displace Palestinians from East Jerusalem in order to cement Israel's claim to sovereignty there." But at the same time, the author fails to acknowledge the political and colonial dimensions of the evictions by positing that "the land has powerful attachments to Palestinians and Jews." Through this ignorance toward Israel's settler-colonial ambitions in the Sheikh Jarrah

evictions, Isabel Kershner is contributing to the knowledge designed to legitimize Israeli colonialism, thereby, proliferating epistemic violence against the Palestinians. The heedful use of language depicts violence through knowledge.

Kershner's credibility is further weakened considering that her son served in the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) and her father is a communication strategist for the Israeli regime. Apart from the fact that she never disclosed her son's service in The New York Times, she shared an article last year by her husband, Hirsh Goodman, where he debunked the Human Rights Watch's "claims" of Palestinian persecution by the IDF; he is also an ex-serviceman of IDF.

While Kershner highlighted a "legal double standard" that Palestinians have "no similar legal recourse to reclaim homes" but Israeli settlers can reclaim land, she reduced the eviction case to a "legalistic property dispute" between two parties ignoring the political and colonial contexts again. Moreover, frequent use of words like "clashes" disregards the fact that if on one side, there are unarmed civilians with tiny rocks, and on the other side, there is a heavily equipped military funded by the US, it cannot be termed as a clash between two parties. If violence against devout worshippers at Al-Aqsa Mosque during the Ramadan of 2021 and 2022 is any indication, terming it as "clashes" makes no sense; instead, it exposes her unethical bias. Furthermore, Kershner fails to problematize the notion that an occupying power must not evacuate the native population out of their land, and neither can it transfer its own population into the occupying land.

23rd March 2022: U.N. Investigator Accuses Israel of Apartheid, Citing Permanence of Occupation by Patrick Kingsley in The New York Times

This article by Patrick Kingsley, The New York Times Bureau Chief in Jerusalem, on the United Nations special rapporteur's report on Israeli apartheid in Palestine, is more like a statement brief of several Israeli officials' response to the report. After introducing the report in one sentence, Kingsley brings up the 'strong' denial by "Israel and its supporters" of the United Nations report. The author further mentions several statements from the Israeli foreign ministry and government terming the UN report as "biased and baseless." While a clear Israeli agency is referenced, there is no reference or source from the Palestinian side except "many Palestinians" that have appreciated the special rapporteur Michael Lynk's efforts.

Moreover, Kingsley ignores some of the key aspects of Lynk's advanced unedited version of the report where he explicitly lamented in the introduction that he was not granted access to the occupied territories, "nor have his requests to meet with the Permanent Representative of Israel to the United Nations been accepted." It is also

apartheid" as an "outlier" which is inaccurate as many human rights organizations, intellectuals, activists and journalists acknowledged the Amnesty

23rd March 2022: Ukraine War Ignites Israeli Debate Over Purpose of a Jewish State by Isabel Kershner in The New York

In this article, Isabel Kershner writes about Ukrainians seeking refuge in Israel and how it has stirred up a debate on whether allowing these refugees would threaten Israel's Jewish character. Throughout the



strange to note that the 18 pages report was only worth two quotes in Kingsley's article while the reactions from "Israel and its supporters" grabbed most of the article's space and attention. The erasure of Palestinian voices and frequent mentions of Israel's official rationale indicates The New York Times' media bias and deliberate strategy to serve the Zionist cause as Noam Chomsky and Edward Said argued. This analysis is further strengthened if we look at Patrick Kingsley's 27th April 2021 article in The New York Times where he used a similar strategy by referencing one of Benjamin Netanyahu's advisors, followed by the Israeli ambassador to Washington, the Israeli Foreign Ministry, the ex-head of Israel's administration in the West Bank, and the president of a right-wing Israeli think tank. All of these sources denounced the apartheid accusations against Israel. However unsurprisingly, at the end of the article, Kingsley labeled Amnesty International's report "accusing Israel of

article, Kershner sings songs about Israeli values and morals, and how Ukrainian refugees feel safe in Israel. What is striking, even for authors like Kershner, is the absolute absence of Palestinians in the article. Not even once the author mentions the Palestinians living in areas occupied by Israel. While Israel might be safe for Ukrainians as Kershner claims, around 7 million Palestinian refugees are denied returning to their homes under legal laws put forward by Israel.

The language that is used to represent the conflict shows that the consensus of media groups such as The New York Times and journalists like Isabel Kershner and Patrick Kingsley is based on denying the existence of the Palestinians as a nation, decontextualizing their resistance as terrorism, and using various media strategies to apparently 'debunk' the "accusations" of crimes committed by Israel against the native Palestinian population.

Boris Johnson Survived the No-Confidence Vote: What Now?

If all the members who have government jobs and assignments are counted, the percentage of backbenchers that opposed the PM rises to 75 percent

By Dr. Khalid Bajwa

D oris Johnson survived the Dno-confidence vote enforced by the powerful 1922 Committee Backbenches of the Conservative Party. This vote was an intra-party affair of the conservative party and was the culmination of the expression of discontent by the conservative MPs for some time.

Many MPs believe that in the light of the Sue Grey report and issuance of a fine for the breach of Covid rules as a result of the police investigation, the prime minister has lost the moral ground to rule the country. After crossing the threshold of 15 percent of the conservative MPs showing no confidence in the prime minister in writing. the 1922 committee told the prime minister to take the vote of confidence.

All 349 MPs of the conservative party took part in the vote. The prime minister and his allies were hoping that the result would be better than Thresa May when she faced such a vote in 2019 but the result was worse than expected.

148 MPs voted against the prime minister and 211 in favour. It means that 41 percent of his own party's MPs showed no confidence in the prime minister. If all the members who have government jobs and assignments are counted, the percentage of backbenchers that opposed the prime minister rises to 75 percent.

This means, in a house of 650 members, the prime minister has the confidence of only 211 members as all opposition parties along with conservative rebels called for the prime minister's resignation.

In response to the resignation call, Boris Johnson stressed to draw a line under the party gate and move on as the UK needs to tackle huge problems. The opponents of the prime minister said that the prime minister is wounded and has lost the moral authority to continue in office. The prime minister instead of taking care of the problems faced by the country will be preoccupied with appeasing his opponents, wooing them back by doling out favours, and so will be



true in regards to his supporters lest they decide to cross the line.

The UK is confronted with huge problems including Brexit, the pandemic, very high inflation in decades, plummeting business confidence, and the Ireland Protocol, which potentially, lead to the breaking of the Brexit treaty or the United Kingdom.

Cost of living crisis with plunging disposable real incomes, out-of-control energy prices possibly pushing 10 million people into fuel poverty, and putting millions of people to choose between 'eating or heating' with disastrous consequences for the poor and vulnerable sections of the society are other factors.

The opponents of the prime minister reckon that he is not in a position to concentrate on these gigantic issues and will be spending his energies to stay in power, therefore, he must do the decent thing and resign.

The prime minister is adamant to stay, come what may.

Can he survive under the circumstances and lead the conservative party to the next election? The rebels in the conservative party believe that he is not in a position to lead the party to win the next elections. Instead of being an asset, he has become a liability and all opinion polls suggest this direction. The public has also lost confidence in his leadership. Boris Johnson leading the nation is damaging to the UK's democracy too.

If we go by the history of survival of a prime minister after such a vote, it is not good news for Boris Johnson. In recent decades Margaret Thatcher, John Major, and Thresa May got mortally wounded by such a vote. Margaret Thatcher and Thresa May resigned within months of such a vote and though John Major survived, he lost the election due to internecine conflicts within the conservative party. Considering all these factors, it will be very difficult for Boris Johnson to survive.

Though under the present rules, he is safe for at least one year from such a vote again. However, rules can be changed as has happened before.

However, before any conclusion is drawn about the future of Boris Johnson, one must remember that Boris Johnson is an unconventional leader and prime minister and he has survived many situations before where any other conventional leader might have failed or resigned. Only time will decide the fate of the prime minister.

Considering the stakes piled against Boris Johnson, it seems very difficult for him to survive for long. We are talking about Boris Johnson though. He may surprise all. Moral standing may not matter after all.

The Islamic Governance and Political System (Part I)



By Azmat Mumtaz Saqib

The effectiveness of governance is demonstrated through the resilience of the governance model and the strength of personality implementing that model. However, whether the implementer and the model succeed in the test of time is another factor in gauging the effectiveness. Similar is with the Islamic model of governance. The question, then, emerges: what fruits were borne at the end of the governance era in the Islamic world striving for an ideologically spiritual state?

Caliph Umar Al Khattab (RA) qualifies at a very high pedestal on all counts. This article presents several aspects of the governance of Umar's caliphate rule.

First, the Islamic political model is discussed, based on which the Caliphs ruled the Caliphate. The nature of governance of the Caliph is presented throughout the article; governing units of the caliphate and their officers' code of conduct are also highlighted; law and order and revenue-related departments are studied as well. Furthermore, a general description of steps taken for public works and education-related activities is debated. In the end, some salient features of Umar's (RA) military affairs are mentioned in brief detail.

The difficulty of his task can only be grasped if it is realized that Caliph Umar's time in history was the era of empires on the global level and tribalism at the local level. Another challenge faced was to evolve a temporal system of governance based on spiritual principles. Muslim Caliphate was expanding into regions with different ideologies and religions. Hence, Caliph Umar had to evolve and implement his system in a multi-racial, multi-religious and multi-cultural society.

Through personal example, leading from the front he was successful in creating a welfare state, in which every individual felt empowered. He laid down his life, killed by a non-mus-

lim (Abu Lu'lu Feroze), whose rights and duties were his concern in the last encounter with that assassin.

In order to understand the governance system of Caliph Umar, it is imperative to review briefly the basis of the Islamic political model and the purpose of the Prophet of Islam, Muhammad (PBUH).

The Islamic Political Model

The domain of the Islamic System and its political model is spiritual and material, eternal and temporal, this-worldly and other-worldly, and last but not least, Godly and humanly. A society based on the Islamic system harmonized all the above-mentioned aspects in a manner that the Creator and His creation (both humans and other creatures on earth) embodied the unity of purpose (Tauhid), i.e., to accept that Allah, the Creator, only has the right to legislate, the creation can only work and legislate within the limits set by Him.

"Legislation is not but for Allah. He has commanded that you worship not but Him"

(Al Quran. Sura Yusuf, ayah 40)

"...and He shares not His legislation with anyone"

(Al Quran. Sura Kahf, ayah 26)

If a man acts as His vicegerent on earth and makes a governance system within the legislated limits, then harmony is achieved between the creator and creation.

This unity of purpose is also illustrated in the following block diagram along with the secular model that is shown for comparison.

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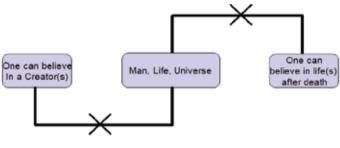


Figure 1: Secularism

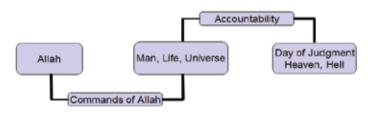


Figure 2: Islamic Agedah

To achieve this purpose, Allah (God) sent His messengers with revealed messages for mankind, Prophet Mohammad (PBUH) being the last and final one. The mission of Prophet Muhammad's (PBUH) lifelong struggle is highlighted by the verse of the Quran

"It is He who sent His Messenger with guidance and Deen of truth to manifest it over all Deens, although those who associate others with Allah dislike it."

(Al Quran. Sura Suff, ayah 9)

Guidance is the Quran (comprehensive guidance), and Deen of truth is (comprehensive governance rules) implemented through the living model of the Prophet Mohammad (PBUH), who was the leader and role model of the struggle.

Religion covers creed, modes of worship, and rituals, whereas Deen, in addition to these three, covers social, economic, and political aspects as well.

Allah highlights the Prophet's (PBUH) role as,

"There has certainly been for you in the Messenger of Allah an excellent model for anyone whose hope is in Allah and the Last Day and [who] remembers Allah often."

(Al Quran. Sura Ahzab, ayah 21)

Prophet Mohammad and his role in defining the Islamic State policy

No personality in human history exists other than the Prophet of Islam Muhammad (PBUH) who completed his mission in one lifetime, i.e., from the presentation of Ideology to the establishment of a just society governed by a state based on ideological (Islamic) political system. Allah gave witness to its completion by revealing:

"This day I have perfected for you your religion and completed My favour upon you and have approved for you Islam as religion. But whoever is forced by severe hunger with no inclination to sin – then indeed, Allah is Forgiving and Merciful."

(Al Quran. Sura Ma'eda, ayah 3)

In his struggle for creating a just society, a perfect role model in personal, social, and political domains was seen in history. While divinely guided, his struggle was totally on the human level, both means and ends were never in conflict with the divine commandments

He trained towering personalities who gave sacrifices individually and collectively in pursuit of the purpose and built a team at Mecca later strengthened by the Ansar of Medina. Like the leader, team members also followed the commandment of Allah both in means and ends.

"You see them bowing and prostrating [in prayer], seeking bounty from Allah and [His] pleasure. Their mark is on their faces from the trace of prostration. That is their description in the Torah. And their description in the Gospel is as a plant which produces its offshoots and strengthens them so they grow firm and stand upon their stalks, delighting the sowers – so that Allah enrage by them the disbelievers. Allah has promised those who believe and do righteous deeds among them forgiveness and a great reward."

(Al Quran. Sura Al Fath, ayah 29)

Twenty-three years of organized struggle led by the greatest personality on earth achieved the goal on the lands of Hijaz. Prophet Mohammad then became the true messenger of Allah and established a just society in Hijaz (region of present Saudi Arabia). An environment was created, whereby progressing in this world was in synchrony with heavenly salvation. At the societal level, Allah promised a meaningful reward.

"Allah has promised those who have believed among you and done righteous deeds that He will surely grant them succession [to authority] upon the earth just as He granted it to those before them and that He will surely establish for them [therein] their religion which He has preferred for them and that He will surely substitute for them, after their fear, security, [for] they worship Me, not associating anything with Me. But whoever disbelieves after that – then those are defiantly disobedient."

(Al Quran. Sura Nur, ayah 55)

Finally, Allah and his messenger (before departure) gave a mission to the followers of Islam to achieve after him, Allah says

"You are the best of nation produced [as an example] for mankind. You enjoin what is right and forbid what is wrong and believe in Allah. If only the People of the Scripture had believed, it would have been better for them. Among them are believers, most of them are defiantly disobedient."

(Al Quran. Sura Ale Imran, ayah 110)

At the time of the last Hajj of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH), he ordered:

"Those present should take this (message) to those who are not here."

[Al Hadith]

He further stated:

"Preach even if you (have learned) one verse from me." [Al Hadith]

Then Ouran says to prophet and his followers to preach:

"Call people to the way of your Lord with wisdom and with goodly exhortation, and argue with them in a way that is the best."

(Al Quran. Sura Al Nahl, ayah 125)

Finally, if the need arises Jihad also becomes the highest stage of the religious obligation of "Calling people to Allah". Since rulers of empires implement a system that restrains the subjects to remain under decadent godless chains and only Jihad (war) can break those chains; under Islamic just rule, nobody is forced to convert to Islam according to Quran.

"And fight with them until there is no fitnah (disbelief & polytheism) and the religion will be all for Allah alone, but if they cease then certainly, Allah is all seer of what they do."

(Al Quran. Sura al Anfaal, ayah 39)

So that Allah's word is exalted, only His order reigns supreme in the world and people act with justice and equity:

We have already sent Our messengers with clear signs and sent down with them the Scripture and the balance that the people may maintain [their affairs] in justice.

(Al Quran. Sura al Hadeed, ayah 25)

Implementation of these commandments can be noticed in the last years of the Prophet Mohammad's (PBUH) life. Individuals and groups were sent to locations where non-hostile territories were involved. Delegations were sent to rulers and kings of adjacent regions and empires. Prophet (PBUH), in response to the king of Persia's attitude, predicted the downfall of the Persian Empire. With Byzantinians, Prophet himself led the army of Jihad to Tabuk, but the Romans did not come for war. One unsuccessful battle was fought by an army of Muslims at Mau'ta, east of the Jordan River. The objective behind all this was that after the establishment and consolidation of Dar-ul-Islam, the message of truth has to spread to humanity and Godly justice has to be implemented over systems rebellious to God.

Responsibilities of Caliphs

Followers of Islam after the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) were aware of Quranic injunctions,

"Thus We have made you [true Muslims], a just nation, that you will be able to witness over mankind and the Messenger be a witness over you."

(Al Quran. Sura al Baqara, ayah 143)

And the instructions of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) at Hajjat ul Wida (the last Hajj) bearing witness to Allah that he has conveyed Allah's message in theory and practice. That it was now the duty of his followers to do the same with the rest of humanity.

Every rightly guided caliph was entrusted with the following responsibilities:

- 1. To be a humble servant of Allah and a close follower of the Prophet (PBUH) of Islam, on a personal as well as societal level.
- 2. To run the state in a manner that
 - a) Social justice is established
 - b) Political justice is established
 - c) Economic justice is established
- 3. To spread the message of Islam to humanity, at the individual as well as collective level.

The primary objective, therefore, was to present an alternative model of society to the world demonstrating a just order based on the commandments of Allah.



C L I M C H A N G

Pakistan's struggle against growing air pollution

In history of Pakistan none of the governments tried to tackle issue of pollution. Resultantly now we are among nations having Worse Air Quality



By Zeeshan Shah

KARACHI: Over the last 20 years, air in Pakistan has become polluted beyond ordinary levels as climate change becomes a deadly fact. According to a recent World Air Quality Report, Pakistan is one of the top countries with the worst air quality. Simply put: more than 9% of our population or over 100,000 people will continue to die every year due to 'toxic air', in the form of highly concentrated toxic chemicals called PM-particulate matter - a new breed of an invisible enemy.

In the last 20 years, Pakistan has witnessed over 141 extreme events with an average death toll of over 600 lives and an economic loss of over USD 3.9 million. Fueled with over population, urbanization. unemployment climate change in the aftermath of COVID-19, Pakistan is in danger of impacting many of its under-served communities with health issues, as yearly health costs rise up to USD 12-13 billion. Unlike Russia, India and China, Pakistan's contribution as a polluter is not as severe but the country is at high risk as a victim.

Air pollution in populated nations has

become a serious health hazard. South Asia is a high impact region due to weak emission control strategies by powerful economies. Few years back. there were over 870000 deaths reported due to air pollution worldwide. Trend analysis today would safely indicate double that number, in the post-pandemic era. Pakistan, a signatory of the Paris agreement, is also the 6th most vulnerable nation to climate change. Due to the green house effect leading to higher gas emissions, the earth is currently experiencing 'global warming' -a rise in average temperatures for up to 4% centigrade which impacts climate globally through severe weather patterns, causing flash flood, sea level rise or coastal flooding, melting of the ice-caps, water scarcity, desertification, excessive rains and poor crop yield to name a few. Not many are aware of the potential new threat of disease that is visibly evident in our atmosphere.

Poor air quality due to toxic air directly affects our immune system just like any other virus and this particular health problem takes off additional 2.5 years off our average life span. This clearly means higher mortality rates in adults

as well as children. Ministry of Climate Change needs to proactively engage on a province-specific climate change policy, linking the needs of each province to the national climate change policy framework for implementation in line with the goal of the federal government for inclusive growth and the green economy. Additionally, the need to embed the sustainable development goals with our economic policy must be done quickly to assist the academia and policy experts in understanding the seriousness of climate 'adaptation' goals. SDG-13 (Taking urgent action against climate change) has been proposed as a major dedicated goal through improving education, awareness-building of youth mitigation strategies like building institutional capacity, impact reduction and clarity.

This will eventually create 'adaptation' as people will save water, store food and maintain a secure living and save the crops and land through human awareness. By adaptation, I mean to suggest a set of procedures that will aim to reduce the vulnerability to human systems against actual or expected climate effects.

Pakistan Clean Air **Program**

A clear understanding is now required on what we are dealing with here. Key findings highlighted by the government in the PCAP - Pakistan Clean Air Program report include where 4 key factors identified as major killers - including natural dust, burning of solid waste, industrial emissions and smoke from vehicles. On an average, over 71,000 tons of solid waste is generated form mega-cities of Pakistan on a daily basis but we do not have a proper system of disposing off the waste. This huge debris of pollution is then burnt, causing excessive fumes to enter the atmosphere in massive quantity- which is poisonous air.

Major pollutants identified as critically risky for health include Sulfur Dioxide (SO2), Ozone (O3), Carbon Monoxide (CO), Nitrogen dioxide (NO2), Lead (PB) and particulate matter called PM. Only O3 was found to be meeting quantity guidelines while the rest were found in higher quantities. NO2 and PM.2.5 were identified as highly dangerous. It has been found that people who live in high polluted areas in mega cities have a 20% higher risk of getting lung cancer in their living years, especially people living in closed spaces in dirty slums or traffic infested areas.

Over 3 million children die every year due to such environmental factors- a shocking number by any population standard. WHO estimates that reductions in the annual average of PM-particulate matter concentrations could help reduce air pollution by 15%, where as Pakistan is currently 100% over it's the acceptable threshold levels.

If we look at bare minimum numbers, estimations indicate over 40,000 premature adult deaths and 90,000 hospital admissions, over 5-6 million cases of lower respiratory illness in children, and over 800 million cases of respiratory diseases in our entire population. This is probably the highest health impact being borne by any country in South Asia that is not impacted by commercial warfare.

It is important to note here that the above data was pre-pandemic not post-pandemic and there may be an alarming rise in casualty numbers today as compared to earlier figures of the PCAP 2020 report. We must also keep in mind that reduction in air pollution levels may have occurred the in summer months by default, due to the closure of power plants and mills and people being home as opposed to working in factories. It is not something that could be credited to the health department as lifting the quarantine may now indicate a re-emergence during winter season.

Increased air pollution is a bigger threat. We fail to see that the combined world polluted smoke and the solid waste residues burning in the air are leading to a slow depletion of the ozone layer – a natural O3 gas that exists around the earth's atmosphere at 10 kilometers above the earth's surface, protecting us from the rays of sun and the radiation waves that cause eve diseases and skin cancers. This means breathing more toxic air over time. If the ozone layer is depleted, millions of lives would be altered in a matter of days. We must also note that lung cancer cases are on the rise in most developing countries which there is no health insurance care for the majority.

On the waterfront, untreated water combined with air pollution doubles the risk of disease by crippling the remaining percentage of the population as toxic contaminated waste and untreated industrial pollution is being 'systematically' dumped in our rivers and oceans and affecting our drinking water supply. The same water precipitates into the air as water vapor that sometimes gives us acidic rain.

Green Climate Change

In 2010, the Green Climate Change Fund (GCF) was established by global



governments to support programs, policies and financial mechanisms in coordination with the UNFCCC-United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change to reduce GHG's (green house gases) by setting up country targets on national levels- indicating that nations omitting majority of GHG's will need to reduce at a greater rate.

The GCF fund was created to assist countries showing a responsive approach on climate change policy and action. According to Article 4 of the Paris Agreement, each partner country will maintain NDC's (nationally determined contributions) to pursue domestic mitigation measures on the reduction of air pollution by controlling GHG's to acceptable levels.

Pakistan also drafted the NCCP (National Climate Change Policy) in 2012. Furthermore, in line with the 'Kyoto protocol'- an international independent binding agreement for all nations governments, it was agreed to set focused targets on GHG reduction by industrialized countries. How far we are on the Kyoto Protocol is not accurately known to the public at large.

Highly affected areas and the reforms needed in Pakistan

If we study urbanization levels, the province of Sind is the most affected. Heat waves have increased as the air changes. Out of an estimated population of 48 million people in Sind, almost 49% live in urban cities, some in posh areas and others in slums. All of these people are at risk of air pollution through excessive burning of solid waste and traffic fumes, lack of green spaces and a concrete city structure that generates more heat every day.

According to ADB, rise in temperature from 0.5 to 2 degrees centigrade will reduce agricultural productivity by 8-10% by the year 2040. Warning signs are visible but the government has not been able to track down simple applicable solutions.

Karachi, the capital city of Sind is now an economic disaster with tons of toxic waste being dumped in the city and unchecked waste being thrown directly into the ocean, endangering millions of lives. In rural Sind, air pollution has a direct impact on crops with winter showing greater warming trends than summers. This has adverse affects on the rural farmers who depend on crops and yield. The change in maximum and minimum temperatures also creates the difference the quality of air we breathe everyday.

Globally, nuclear waste and weapons manufacturing has left us more toxic air, leaving us potentially at risk of dying much earlier than usual. In Pakistan, the average age of the population has decreased from 65 years in the 1980's to around 55 years in recent times-marking "Health as the single biggest risk factor to the GDP of the nation".



Air quality is decreasing and this will impact the lifestyles of over 180 million people of Pakistan. The principle sources are poisonous vehicle emissions and industrial pollution-burning and dumping of plastic becoming a potent risk. Both federal and provincial governments must identify on this issue and take it up for discussion in the parliament. Previous governments ignored environmental safety protocols through bad governance and the hope now is with the new government.

Every day, hundreds of plastic bags are seen floating in our waters with the public not being fined or reprimanded for this neglect. In Pakistan, the government is yet to announce a proper 'mask disposal strategy' as countless masks are being dumped into the oceans, adding fuel to the fire.

We are collectively liable for breach of 'human safety conduct' along with our governments. What we need today is 'safe air' for our children and elders and better capacity building on health awareness and self-care. Strict measures must be taken immediately by provinces facing extreme poverty high by launching improved pension plans and cash transfers to the poor vulnerable segments. In Sind, almost the entire province is poverty stricken and without disposable incomes.

Without government intervention, long term impacts will not be as significant. Incorporating the gender aspects of climate change impacts must be documented to protect our women and children. More clarity is also required on agriculture practices and crop yields and other knowledge facts, using media as the information leader.

All government hospitals must be engaged and all related health medicines must be subsidized for the general public with zero error policy. Audits in medical centers, clinics and major hospitals are very important right now. A number of monitoring stations need to be created with public guidelines issued before the arrival of winter.

On the educational front, the 'SNC'-Single National Curriculum must include environmental sciences as a major subject across all public and private schools to offer basic ground-level information on climate change, air pollution and self-care, for our young learners.

Current times demand urgent action with air pollution being marked as the silent killer. A jointly coordinated effort by the Health Ministry and Ministry of Climate Change (MOCC) will test the wisdom and resilience of our policy makers. We need to ensure limits on key pollutants, monitor current standards in place and redefine action plans to come up with an "emission control strategy".

Zeeshan Shah, Director at Children Nature Network Asia, writes on Global Affairs. Climate Change, Governance and Public Policy. Zeeshan is an Environmental Journalist & Change Maker, with over 20 years of expertise in Media, Education and Banking sectors.

Health of the Indus

By Zofeen T. Ebrahim

THE Indus is dying, and it is dying downstream Sukkur. was unanimous verdict of filmmaker Waiahat Malik and his five friends after traversing the once mighty river on a raft.

To get first-hand knowledge of the health of the river, the six adventurers started off on March 30 and were given a warm send-off by the locals at Hamzigond in Gilgit-Baltistan's Kharmang district. They covered an estimated 2,300 kilometres of the entire 3,180 km length of this transboundary river on a raft over 45 days. They reached Kharo Chan in the delta, where the Indus meets the Arabian Sea, turned west and ended their journey at Karachi's Marina Club.

Theirs was an odd group: three paraglider pilots, one of whom is a karate champion, two white water rafters and one ace swimmer, who could double as a rescuer in case someone fell into the sometimes raging waters — or so they thought. The team had second-hand wet suits (these barely protected them from the frigid glacial waters in the north for more than a minute if anyone fell into the river) helmets, life jackets and a sturdy raft. They could have gone with better gear, but had limited resources.

Though this was not a high-performance, data-intensive computing mission undertaken by environmental field researchers, scientists anthropologists state-of-the-art equipment, the six were nevertheless able to see a kaleidoscope of images of the ecological, environmental socioeconomic devastation of Pakistan's lifeline wrought by climate transitions, as they slowly moved south.

Whichever town they neared, they would be greeted by floating trash.

They witnessed, and were able to film, the impact of both water shortage, as well as the poor quality of what little was available, on the lives and livelihoods of people living along the river. The reckless dumping of poisonous effluent into the river by factories, hotels and restaurants were some 'disturbing' images that were etched on their minds and captured by their cameras.

Whichever town they neared, they would be



greeted by islands of floating trash. The flotsam included plastic, bottles and in particular, styrofoam. Little wonder studies say that the Indus contributes 164,332 tonnes of plastic waste (that enters the sea) annually and is the second most plastic-polluted river in the world. The first, third and fourth polluted rivers in this category are in China.

But what was most vividly witnessed was the interaction of local people with natural systems, and the resilience of both against manmade climate-induced disturbances and the realisation how critical this was to understanding the river's ailments.

Throughout their odyssey, they continued to be educated by water experts like Hassan Abbas, Danish Mustafa and Afia Salam, all of whom joined them at various legs of their journey, enriching their knowledge about how the river was being affected by climate change, the built infrastructure, loss of biodiversity, death of the delta, seawater erosion etc.

Come sunset, and they would disembark on land, and put up somewhere for the night. They often met the locals, and held long conversations about the river itself, hearing mesmerising tales, even the renditions of past mystics and poets about the revered Indus. They were able to glean information about the flora and fauna they had seen, such as the king storks, the wild geese, the fruit bats, the blind Indus dolphins and the small turtles.

But if the river was dying, Malik said, so was life in and around it. And yet, to their

surprise, they found an invasive plant species, usually found in stagnant ponds in Brazil, happily thriving and floating in the Indus. However, there were other elements that were going to be erased. For instance, the petroglyphs near the Bhasha-Diamer dam, they were told, would be lost if the dam was built. The poverty-stricken Mohanas (indigenous fisherfolk living on bo--ats) from Tau-nsa in the Punjab to Manchhar lake in Sindh had all but disappeared, the rafters observed. Without fish in the water, they were forced to give up their ancestral occupation and move to cities and work as labourers.

There were parts where they could not traverse as the river had dried up. For example, at one point they had to go up the Kabul river and re-enter the Indus at Attock. And between Attock and Kalabagh, as they came to Punjab, the river shrunk to a trickle and at Tarbela they saw with their own eyes what 'dead level' in a dam actually means. In Sindh, the Indus became wide and shallow with sand beds in the middle of the river. Instead of enjoying what could have been a three-hour boat ride, they had to trudge and push the boat as if in a desert for a good eight hours until they were able to find at least six feet of water and get into the raft and sail again. But even more than the river, it was the delta, the rafters said, that seemed to be on its deathbed.

The writer is a Karachi-based independent journalist.

Courtesy Dawn Newspaper

Shaheens versus Windies: Can Pakistan Whitewash the Black Storm?

Pakistan Proved that they are no more unpredictable squad



By Ali Abdullah

Pakistan and West Indies are ready to lock horns at the iconic Multan Cricket Stadium in three ODIs, scheduled to take place on June 8, 10, and 12. All three games are part of the ODI Super League. The ODI series that was supposed to be played in December 2021 had to be postponed due to the Covid-19 outbreak in the West Indies camp. The city of Saints does have, of course, some real scorching heat, hidden under its belt but make no mistakes, the Windies already are accustomed to such weather and temperatures.

However, Pakistan's announced squad seems very well balanced with the likes of an ace spinner, Shadab Khan, returning after recovery from an injury as well as top-order batsman, Abdullah Shafique, who impressed the crowd during this year's PSL with the maiden champions, Lahore Qalandars. Other youngsters including Shahnawaz Dahani, rising wicketkeeper-batsman, Muhammad Haris, and leg spinner, Zahid Mehmood, have been included.

If we look at the squad of Pakistan, it is having pretty decent and very balanced side whether it's the top order, middle order, or the bowling line-up. But in cricket, we can't predict the game result until the match is over. Pakistani Squad has a solid combination starting with Imam-ul-Haq and Fakhar Zaman both averaging 45 plus and then the modern-day king Babar Azam who is having a humongous average of 59 in ODIs and almost has a century in every series since WC19. Then, the middle order of Abdullah Shafique, Shadab Khan, Iftikhar Ahmad, Khushdil Shah, Muhammad Rizwan, and Muhammad is a proper middle order that has the ability to dethrone every opposition.

The all-rounders' department consists of Shadab Khan, Muhammad Nawaz, Khushdil Shah, and Iftikhar Ahmad. Whereas the fast-bowling department consists of the fast and furious Shaheen Shah and Haris Rauf followed by young sensation Shahnawaz Dahani and Waseem Junior.

Let's discuss the combination that Pakistan can use in the bowling department; although there is no proper off-spinner in the squad, Iftikhar Ahmad can be used as an off breaker as he has done some good job recently. There are two leg spinners in the squad, Shadab Khan and Zahid Mehmood and two orthodox bowlers M. Nawaz and Khushdil Shah, and all of these players have the capabilities to bat good and can be used according to the situations and matchups.

The batting combination is decent as well starting with Imam and Fakhar followed by Babar Azam. Pakistan can use Abdullah Shafique as its 2 down batter in ODI which might be a good move for M. Rizwan, Shadab Khan, Iftikhar Ahmad, and Muhammad Nawaz respectively. In case Pakistan rests M. Rizwan, Pakistan has a very decent backup wicket keeper, M. Haris who is a very clean hitter of the ball and a very good gun fielder too.

Realistically asking, what chance does Pakistan have against the Windies? Well, Pakistan currently sits at 10th in the ODI Super League having played 12 matches, winning exactly 50%, and of course, losing 50% of the matches equating to 6 each. This ODI series is the best chance Pakistan has to increase

their points tally. Babar Azam and his team will definitely need to come up with a plan that will topple the visitors.

However, the plan will need the best execution possible and that will be down to Babar's men as to how they play in the field. With recent form in mind, they'll be putting on a great show for the fans, and of course, only the best show that will send them further up the table at 3rd or 4th, the former being possible only if they can do better in their run-rate compared to Afghanistan. The Windies sit at 4th having played 18 matches, winning 8 and losing 10. Pakistan has some major strengths in the form of their eagle, Shaheen Shah Afridi, who'll definitely want to hunt with the new ball for some more scalps as he has always done. Pace gun, Haris Rauf, will continue his great form while top-order batsman, Fakhar Zaman, will indeed be also looking for chances to smash some deliveries outside the park. The youngsters will surely be given a chance to display their talent and win their team the matches they need.

Conclusively, this will definitely be an important encounter because with points and reputation both at stake, both teams

will be doing their best and both will want to emerge out on top at the end; however, the game can only be won by one. The Shaheens stand a huge chance and if they can pull off a whitewash, Pakistan will well and truly be in a great position for the World Cup when the time comes.

This series is equally important for both Pakistan and West Indies for the qualification scenarios of WC23. A win-win situation is on for both teams. West Indian squad is quite young and some of them are inexperienced. Nicholas Pooran just got the new captaincy along with the vice-captain, Shai Hope.

Shai Hope is the main hope for West Indies as he is among the sensible batters who know how to bat long; his strike rate is a bit concerning but the team who is revolving around 10 hitters is lucky to have such a batsman. Kyle Mayers and Romario Shephard are a batting all-rounder couple followed by Keach Carty who is also a batting all-rounder. An interesting thing about Keach Carty is that he is the only player from Saint Marteen Island to represent West Indies. No other player from that Island represented the national side. Nkrumah Bonner, Brandon king, and Rovman Powell are a bit experienced and will add their values to the West Indian Squad.

Now come to the bowling combination they have: Akeal Hossein is a real threat for Pakistani batters whose deliveries are a bit tricky and will become more tricky on Asian tracks followed by the pace bowler Alzari Joseph, a tall bowler who is always difficult to face.

Shamrah Brooks, Jayden sealed, Anderson Philips, and Hayden Walsh will also show their talent and add important values to their squad during the series.

If we look at both teams, the Pakistani team on paper is looking a bit stronger having home advantage but you can't decide the result before the last ball of the series is bowled especially when you are playing against the unpredictable Pakistani team.

While hoping for a good series and that there will no political interference, this series will be played smoothly in the hot weather of Multan. Pakistan has yet to lose an ODI series in Pakistan after the return of cricket.



Sarmad Khoosat's Alternative Ideas: Interview with The Truth International

Khoosat want doesn't want to be an actor anymore. After, Manto it was the end of his capacity to do the double role of director/actor



By Kaukab Jehan

Sarmad Sultan Khoosat, an actor, director, producer, and screenwriter proudly keeps all these hats and always wears one or maybe two at a time. Sarmad loves to work on offbeat ideas and considers it his responsibility to make people think about those less discussed and marginalized issues, and finally, bring a change in society's discourse.

He is best known for directing the super-hit TV dramas, Humsafar and Shehr-e-Zaat. His feature films, Manto, Zindagi Tamasha, and the recent one Kamli have got high critical acclaim here and abroad. Khoosat is one of the producers of the feature film, Joyland, which has recently been screened at the Cannes Film Festival and got the 'jury prize' in the 'Un Certain Regard' category at the exhibition.

The Truth International had an exclusive talk with this multi-talented artist.

How important is this prize to Joyland at the Cannes Film Festival?

I believe this award has importance not only to the makers and actors in the film but to the whole film industry and Pakistan at large. Yes indeed, it was a proud moment when people from all over the world came to know about our stories and the style of filmmaking. Most importantly, it is a door opened not only for the working but emerging filmmakers of Pakistan. Now, the audience and market of our films are not restricted to local cinemas but are available globally.

What do you think were the elements in Joyland that made it reach there?

I believe that a filmmaker's major work ends when his/her product is on screen, then its critique comes from the viewers.

As one of the producers, I can tell that Joyland is a story of sensitive human emotion. It was proved when the audience at its screening, who did not understand the language of the film and comprehended it just through English subtitles, was laughing and crying at the moments throughout the film. Believe me at the end of the show, besides those claps, I could see almost 70 percent of the crowd were also wiping their tears, which means we were able to get our message through, effectively.

You were there in those moments. So, what was your feeling at that time?

At first, it all seemed unbelievable and like a dream. Watching your film with the whole team in a cinema fully packed with audiences from all over the world was a very unusual experience for us. Yes, we got emotional, crying and hugging each other but somewhere it elevated our morale. It was like a tap of affirmation for the months of hard work. So, standing among those claps for almost 10 minutes was out of this world for us. It really cannot be explained in words.

Do you agree that the subjects and topics which we don't discuss generally in our stories on media get more attention in the international forums like the Cannes Film Festival?

If it is about the point that Joyland got the attention internationally just because of its subject, which was a transgender girl, I don't completely agree. We have already highlighted this topic in our television dramas and mainstream media many times but with sensation and stereotype image. Being a part of Joyland, one thing I can guarantee is that it doesn't have that sensationalism generally attached to the topic but a human voice is written with emotions that can touch one's heart.

Is your recently released feature film Kamli, a women-centric story made in the genre of art?

Yes, Kamli is an unapologetically women-centric film. As far as its genre is concerned, I don't believe much in the difference between art and commercial cinema. The film is itself a form of art.

In Kamli, I am telling a story in my own style and I believe that being an artist, I should have that liberty. But yes, it has all the ingredients of a sub-continental film-like drama, mystery, music, and scenic locations. Moreover, it is laced with powerhouse performances by Saba Qamar, Sania Saeed, Nimra Bucha, Omair Rana, and our new hero Hamza Khwaja. I hope viewers would get something with them when they get out of the theatre after watching Kamli; a message, emotions, and a thought.

Your leading ladies on Kamli were also present in your first feature film Manto. So, is there any special chemistry with this particular cast?

Laughs! Yes, it is true that you have chemistry with some actors. Some may call it favoritism but it would be so if these actors were not talented enough for the job. We assume that whatever we see on screen just happened robotically and every XYZ could do that.

No, there is a journey behind every project which is not possible without that bond within the team. If that journey can go well by taking like-minded people with you, then, I strongly recommend doing that. I feel lucky enough to have worked with them as I am not only a fan of all these three but they are also good colleagues and wonderful human beings.

We talk about the downfall and revival of Pakistani cinema. What do you think that we should do for its rebooting?

In my view, we would have to work on varied ideas in varied genres, which must be according to the pace and trends of today's world. It must be realized that today we can't work on a formula that was successful some decades ago. Moreover, it should be a collective effort to bring change. A single film or a single person can't do it alone. In the end, it is all business. People are giving their time and money to watch a film. So, filmmakers too should

comprehend the contentment of the audience. The industry would flourish with a constant flow of content; films with small, medium, and big budgets under big or small banners by casting superstars and newcomers. Some films might do well at the box office and some don't. So, in a nutshell, without variety, we can't sustain.

You have directed television plays like Humsafar and Shehr-e-Zaat. Where do you feel that the content of our drama is going?

I feel our drama has become stagnant yet boring. It is losing its grip as it is not tightly knitted. I wonder why we are stretching our stories to 40 episodes. The problem here is that there is a huge empty stomach, which needs to be filled every day, so we are doing it in an assembly line manner of a factory where a lot of the same products are finished in bulk to meet the demand. If there is one relevant scene, it is followed by three unrelated ones to increase the duration of the episode.

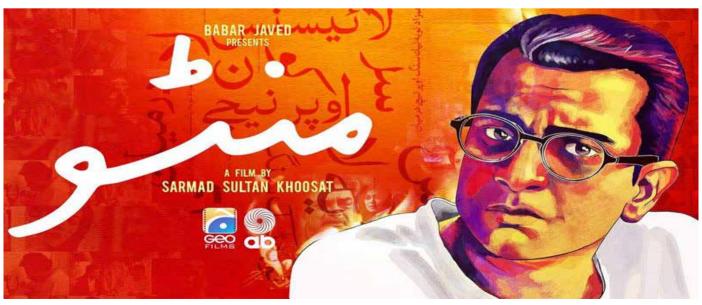
Another reason which I think of this static state is the lack of breathing time for our writers. I believe if they are given a break to refresh their minds and observe new things, they can come up with novel

Do you think we have that liberty on television to work on some offbeat ideas?

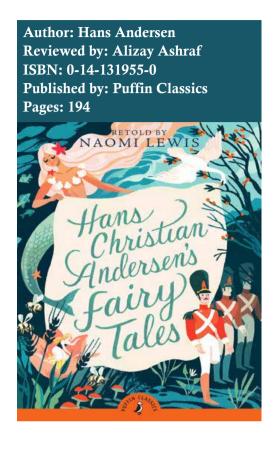
Yes. We have but again if we are working on some new concept, it should be the series or serial of a lesser time span like from 6 to 13 episodes. In this way, the audience would be more prone to accept it.

Where do you feel more expressive and satisfied; acting or direction?

It is direction. In direction, you can control more things and have more margins to express your ideas. Director is like a storyteller or an author and if one is addicted to the art of direction, its pleasure is entirely different from anything else. Yes, I enjoy acting too but I do it in a relaxed mood without any kind of stress. I don't want to direct myself as an actor anymore. I did it in Manto and thought it was the end of my capacity to do the double role of director/actor.



Hans Andersen Fairy Tales



Tans Andersen's Fairy Tales is a Lcaptivating collection, retold and put together by Naomi Lewis, and contains twelve of Hans Christian Andersen's heavenly stories including Thumbelina, a young lady something like a thumb-joint high, The Emperor's New Clothes, the story of a main man for his appearance and The Little Mermaid, who is eager to one day marry a human prince. The book also contains a behind the scenes journey after every end of a fairy tale.

I was really astonished and amazed by the literature based on these stories. Each story was really detailed and elaborate. The writer also takes inspiration from other books and novels and puts it in a very different way altogether.

Nonetheless, despite the amount of praise I have for these stories, I was not impressed by 'The Snow Queen'. I loved the general theme of good versus evil but was very eager for the story to end.

However, it would totally be understandable if others felt different about it.

Some of the fairy tales had real important lessons that could be useful in daily life. It seemed right to read them and really understand the stories. Each story has a deep and engaging plot which makes them unique and different in their own way.

The illustrations made in the book definitely made it more fun and rare. It definitely made it easier to understand what was going on. Every single one of them were aesthetically beautiful and unique. Really made each of the stories fun to read.

I would definitely read this book again as it is fun and calming to read them. Would definitely recommend this to friends and family. The book is really suitable for any age group to read as the humour in it is simple and unmatched.

A Homecoming for Kezzie

F or Kezzie, the war starts when German planes fire at her luxury ship as she gets back from Canada to Scotland with her young sister Lucy. When home, she is brought together with the granddad in Clydebank before the conflict begins. The whole family is in shock. In the first place, she needs to save an Italian family from the racial hatred they experience. She also takes care of her companion Peg after her house is demolished in an attack. Unfortunately, as the Clydebank turns into a consuming hellfire, Kezzie's granddad is killed, and the young ladies are forced to move to England to live with a family companion Lady Fitzwilliam. Here Kezzie's medical abilities are called right into it as she works in a nearby field medical clinic, and is joined with her Irish companion, Michael who shows up there with extreme wounds.

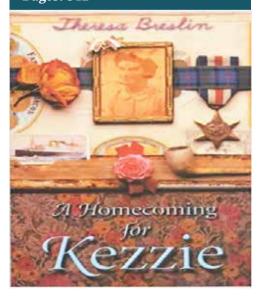
The story is a very simple story, a story of

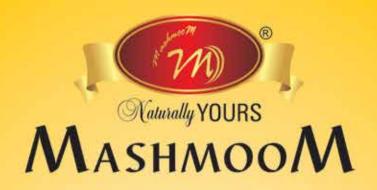
survival and keeping family together during hardships. The book itself isn't really cheerful to read. In my opinion, it would not be attractive to the young audience and might be too overbearing. But overall, the book was enjoyable and flowed very well. The characters are brilliant and fit very well.

I would recommend this to those who have a great interest in WWII. The novel shows the emotional interaction between family members who are all stuck together and cannot get out of their houses. These relationships are what kept people motivated to carry on and keep their spirits up during the most stressful experience in the country's history.

The novel is a very powerful piece of writing, and I would recommend this book to some of my friends who have a great interest in old history and wars. It is suitable for young adults to read.

Author: Theresa Breslin Reviewed by: Alizay Ashraf ISBN: 1-4052-0111-8 Publisher by: Egmont Pages: 312





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