

Fortnightly

The Truth International

Islamabad

15th - 31st December 2022

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PDM-PTI Back Door Contacts

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Pakistan-IMF Talks

No breakthrough in sight. Pakistan needs \$110 billion in the next four years

Sino-KSA Relations

USA is mindful of influence, China is trying to have around the world

Govt-PTI Talks Unlikely to be Fruitful



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Beyond Politics

By Hammad Ghaznavi



By our standards, politics looks relatively sluggish these days, at least apparently. Former Prime Minister Imran Khan during the last eight months was on a continuous offensive. His Long March ended without achieving the avowed goal, that is, snap polls. His desire to have a say in the appointment of the new COAS remained unfulfilled; actually, his least favourite received the baton of command. He was no more belligerent toward the Establishment or any personnel thereof. Even Senator Azam Swati's physical remand in one province after the other couldn't evoke much of a response from IK. Imran Khan's focus at the moment is on mending fences with the Establishment. Hence, the restraint. Imran Khan's threat to dissolve the KP and Punjab assemblies, perhaps the last arrow in his arsenal, has missed the bullseye. This is the background of the apparent lull in politics.

Underneath, however, the pot is boiling. The government-opposition back channel talks have yet not seen a major breakthrough; still the two sides are talking. President Arif Alvi and Ishaq Dar have reportedly met six times so far to discuss the way forward. In brief, PTI wants an election date. The government, in return, wants PTI to return to Parliament as there are many issues that can be sorted out only in the House, including the electoral laws and caretaker setup. As for the timing of the general elections, the government's stated position is that it will complete the full assembly term till August 2023, while PTI demands polls as early as maybe, say March next year. Both sides have indicated

flexibility and a give and take solution looks likely. General Elections in June-July 2023 will not surprise many, as both sides can parade the date as their achievement.

Imran Khan knows that he is riding a wave of popularity at present and he will be the biggest beneficiary of an early election. For the same reason, the PDM wants to buy some time to regain at least some of the political capital it has lost due to inflation. Imran Khan also fears more scandals and cases against him in the coming weeks. The government wants to tarnish IK's image further to dent his votebank, and IK seems to understand the strategy, therefore, he insists on snap polls. Another indicator of the elections timing can be PML-N supremo Nawaz Sharif's return to Pakistan. After the acquittal of Maryam Nawaz in the Avenfield reference case, Nawaz Sharif's conviction is also likely to be overturned. And after the Supreme Court's decision in the Faisal Vowda case, Sharif can rightly expect that his life-time disqualification by the court will also be lifted. In other words, he can return to Pakistan whenever he wants, to lead his party and contest elections himself. He would need around five months before the polls to be through the legal tangles, and to reorganize his party structure. Sharif would like to enter polls, with his voters charged at the prospect of their leader becoming PM for the fourth time.

At present, the major challenge facing the PDM government is economy: can it manage some sort of relief for the masses crushed under the price-hike. Though

default doesn't look on the cards, Pakistan's economic woes are multiplying by the day. The next tranche of IMF programme is still elusive, and as long as the Fund doesn't release the amount, the other international donor agencies, like the World Bank and ADB, will remain reluctant to transfer the committed dollars. The country's foreign reserves have touched a worrying \$ 6.7 billion – barely one month of import cover. The decline is on account of the payment of \$1 billion against maturing Sukuk and some other external debt repayments. Finance Minister Ishaq Dar's earlier claim to bring the dollar down to Rs 200 has disappeared into thin air. The dollar actually is continuously gaining against the rupee. The disparity between the dollar bank rate and that of the open market has caused a significant drop in the foreign remittances, as more and more senders are resorting to hundi. The imports have been curbed but there is a drop in the exports as well. All in all, it's far from a happy economic picture. At least temporarily, can Darnomics rescue the economy? That is the question.

Reportedly, IK has been conveyed the Establishment's concern over the murky economic situation, and is advised to refrain from destabilizing the country, politically and economically. If IK doesn't listen to this sane piece of advice, he may face the music in the coming weeks. The government and the opposition immediately need to agree on some basics and the best forum to create a consensus is parliament – the earlier this route is taken, the better.

Testing the limits of seniority



By M A Niazi

One of the effects of the recent promotion of the Chief of Army Staff and the Chairman Joint Chiefs of Staff Committee has been the fulsome praise of the seniority principle. However, that principle was only observed if it is assumed that the COAS job is senior to that of the Chairman. It is not a matter of reality, it is a matter of which officer is senior to the other.

According to the Higher Defence Organisation concept, according to which the office of CJSC was created back in 1972, the occupant of this post would also act as a Principal Staff Officer to the Commander-in-Chief (the PM) in the time of war. The services were sold the idea because of failures of communication during the 1965 and 1971 Wars. In both wars, the two smaller services said they had no idea of what the Army was up to. This was particularly serious for the PAF, which was supposed to provide air support for the Army's operations.

Part of the decision was to shift all three service headquarters to Islamabad. The Navy, which had to make the biggest shift, moved from Karachi, then the PAF moved from Peshawar, and the Army has not just failed to make the move from Rawalpindi to Islamabad, but divided the sector it was allocated, E7, into plots for senior officers, and now the biggest obstacle to its shifting is its lack of land in Islamabad. Meanwhile, E8 and E9 have been developed as Naval Headquarters and Air Headquarters respectively.

It must be remembered that the Higher Defence Organization was developed in the wake of the 1971 debacle, and was borrowed from the US Joint Chiefs of Staff Committee system. However, the US Committee, though it started in World War II, developed as a commanding authority for

nuclear power. The Chairman is PSO to the President in wartime. He is not the Commander-in-chief but is pretty close to that position.

One hidden purpose of the HDO in Pakistan was to prevent a future martial law That it signally failed to do. One reason was a compromise and a deviation from the original concept.

As conceived, the CJSC slot was supposed to have rotated among the three services. Only President Ghulam Ishaq Khan, while President, tried to resume the original concept. (He had been Defence Secretary when it was being formulated, and had discretionary powers of appointment.) The result was that Adm Iftikhar Sirohey and ACM Farooq Feroze Khan became Chairman. They also provide the only examples of a service chief becoming CJSC. Neither was promoted, already having a four-star rank.

That was the deviation, but the compromise was more serious. When moving over to a Joint Chiefs system, the service chiefs are supposed to stop being commanders of their forces, and serving purely as chiefs of staff. The forces are to be placed under tri-service commands.

For example, the USA's CENTCOM (Central Command) is generally headed by a Marine four-star officer, who has under him a three-star Army officer who is the commanding general of all CENTCOM troops, a three-star admiral who commands all of CENTCOM's ships, and a three-star USAF officer commanding all its planes. These officers, and the forces under their command, are not operationally under their service chiefs' command; the service HQs will instruct them on training doctrine, equipment and even uniforms, but orders to deploy, and shoot, come from the Commander

CENTCOM or the President. They cannot come from the CJSC, though he will be in the room if the President is giving the orders.

In Pakistan, however, the three services insisted on their respective chiefs retaining the command of their respective forces. That has made it impossible to form tri-service commands. It also meant that the Army's ability to implode Martial Law remained as before. It must also be noted that only the Army can impose military rule because neither of the other services has any troops.

However, in the Musharraf years, Pakistan had to adjust to its nuclear status, and also allay foreign concerns about the safety of nuclear weapons, which led to the formation of the Nuclear Command Authority, and the Strategic Plans Division. The SPD is part of the Joint Services Headquarters and can be headed by a three-star officer from any service, but so far the Army has maintained a stranglehold on the post. With a major general

lieutenant-general, the naval and air force commanders reported to him for operational purposes, not their service headquarters. As the name reveals, it was an Army preserve. Having a three-star officer from either of the two smaller services would have meant having a three-star officer in addition to the service chief.

Whether or not the present COAS looks at it as a priority to get the Army out of politics, the country's reputation is one with the military playing a major role. A quote from *The Concepts and Theories of Modern Democracy* is typical: "There were examples of rule by the military, and Pakistan has been a modern example for much of the period since 1947. These were all self-serving ruling groups who adjusted their policies to pressures from the wider society they governed only when prudence dictated it." The book is an academic study. Pakistan cannot be proud of its reputation.

An apparent innovation has been that the apparent extension of the



commanding the SPDF, the Army controls the nuclear arsenal; and provides the world community that Pakistan is a responsible nuclear power.

India's also taking that path, and the creation of the position of Chief of Defence Staff is necessitated only because of the need for a higher organization to handle nuclear issues. Russia and China have placed their armed forces under military commissions, and in China, the Secretary General of the Party is the Chairman of the Commission.

The Zia years saw the rotation principle jettisoned, and the post became a sort of consolation prize for one lieutenant-general who didn't make COAS. The Army opposes rotation because it has more three-star officers than the other services. Before the HDO, the Navy and Air Force Commanders were designated Deputy Commanders-in-Chief, the head of the Army being the Commander-in-Chief, and three-star officers.

At this time, there was one tri-service command, General-Officer-Commanding-in-Chief East Pakistan. An Army

concept of supersession. Lt Gens Azhar Abbas and Faiz Hameed have opted for early retirement. They are junior to General Asim but stand no chance of succeeding him, as they were to retire before his tenure ended. Previously, officers retired only when a junior is promoted and they are not. However, under the up-or-out policy of the USA which has been introduced in the Pakistani armed forces, if one misses a promotion, one is retired. In short, if you don't move up, you move out. Normally, this has not applied to lieutenant-generals, but the retiring officers seem to have applied it to themselves.

One of the dangers of the seniority principle is the tendency for it to degenerate into Buggins' Turn (Buggins being someone of the right seniority, but wildly unsuitable). True, by the time an officer reaches three-star rank, he has been through reviews at each rank, and anyone is probably suitable for the job, but the system depends on rigorous selection at each rank from major upwards. Seniority is already a consideration, and if it creeps in much further, the process could result in Buggins' Turn prevailing. After all, one of the causes of the 1857 Indian Mutiny was a senile officer corps, in which promotion went too much by seniority.

Ruling coalition flashing mixed signals on next general elections

Centre-PTI vague approach confusing masses; Imran Khan's political 'stunts' have failed to convince Shabaz government; Political issue has developed into a matter of sheer ego for both PDM and PTI

By Tahir Niaz

Backdoor talks are important components of politics but sometimes it becomes difficult to apprehend what the other side is trying to say or convey especially if it is sending mixed signals. This has been the case vis-à-vis Shehbaz-led government and Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) on the issue of early elections.

In such a confused scenario, a party seems interested in talks and at the same it expresses lack of interest -- causing political chaos. And this is how things have been moving during post-Imran era. One may not be able to guess what a political party actually wants when it speaks with many voices and its bottom line is unclear. Whether mixed signals are measured or unintentional also remains a puzzle for the political observers to solve.

Recent statements by the leaders of both the government, and the opposition suggest a deadlock in back channel PDM-PTI parleys. The PTI has been demanding of the government to announce fresh elections since Imran Khan was voted out of power in April this year. Imran Khan has so far used different political 'stunts' to bring the government to his terms but badly failed.

Khan quit the National Assembly, announced long march, held rallies, press conferences, hurled political threats, and rants to pressurize centre to announce snap polls. At the peak of his political popularity, Imran Khan did what he could amid reports of backdoor contacts with the government but still it seems a long way to go for the PTI chief.

A careful analysis of the statements from both the rival parties as well as the present political situation suggests that with the passage of time, a purely political issue has developed into a



matter of sheer ego of the big guns from both sides. It appears as the national leadership is preoccupied by the notion that retreat from respective political stances will be deemed as a big setback.

The ruling alliance feels that announcing early elections would bring them nothing but humiliation and defeat. With that in mind, they are running the government under an alarm of unpopularity. On the other hand, PTI finds it equally difficult to step back from its stated position, especially the demand for snap polls.

According to credible reports, the ruling alliance was almost willing to dissolve the National Assembly soon after assuming power in April this year, but later they backtracked from their understanding with the PTI. Deepening economic crisis underlined the need for the government to review its options on the future course of action -- whether to quit or continue in power. But so far, the government seems determined to complete its term thus causing a deadlock.

According to former foreign minister and vice chairman PTI, Shah Mahmood Qureshi, President Arif Alvi who is part of the PTI, tried to play his role as mediator between the government and the opposition on the issue of

fresh polls, but those efforts could not bear fruits.

According to insiders, President Alvi and Finance Minister Ishaq Dar met frequently during recent weeks in order to find a way out of the current political quagmire. Dar has so far met President Alvi six times since his return to Pakistan from Britain, but the deadlock stands still.

Despite having developed contact at the highest level, both the sides are uttering contradictory statements about next general elections and backdoor talks, as well. Such a PDM-PTI demeanor is difficult to be apprehended and explained even by sound political observers. The government has so far been able to maintain a smokescreen to disguise its real intentions regarding next elections. The center's intent about arresting or putting Khan behind bars or otherwise is also unclear and ambiguous.

Both the sides, despite having issued bitter statements against each other, have admitted publicly that 'they are in touch with each other' on political issues. At the same time, some of the leaders from both PTI and PML-N denied any back-channel contacts, causing further confusion.



Political observers believe meetings between the finance minister and the president were held to discuss future course of action in the wake of PTI's demand for fresh elections. These meetings were part of efforts to bring the government and PTI to the table and water down political flames via dialogue. There was no immediate word on the outcome of these endeavors, but one thing was clear – the government was willing to sit with main opposition party.

Ishaq Dar who is believed to have Nawaz Sharif's backing, is under spotlight in the ensuing political crisis. Few days back, President Alvi said in an interview with a private TV channel that he suggested formal talks between the government and the PTI during his meeting with the finance minister. The president confirmed early elections were also discussed the meetings. According to sources, Dar will get back to the president after consulting his party leadership.

Backdoor contacts between the government and PTI are continuing amid reports of PTI's back-channel talks with the establishment too. However, days after Imran Khan confirmed that dialogue was underway with the military to find a solution to ongoing political crisis, Secretary General PTI Asad Umar denied his party had any

such contacts. "I can tell you straight, no backdoor talks were, or are being, held with the establishment," Asad told reporters.

Another PTI leader, Fawad Chaudhry, however, said that PTI was seeking "improvement" in ties with the armed forces and judiciary; not "deterioration" of their relationship. "We don't want our differences with the army or judiciary to increase. We are continuously trying to

mend our differences with the institutions."

Political temperature increased when PTI threatened to dissolve Provincial Assemblies of the Punjab, and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa provinces if centre failed to budge. Imran Khan said his party would have no option but to dissolve provincial assemblies to pressurize the Shahbaz government. However, PTI is purportedly facing resistance from Punjab Chief Minister Pervaiz Elahi on the dissolution of the assemblies -- a development tagged as negative for PTI cause. So, until now nothing is clear in definite terms in this regard.

The country has been passing through a tense political situation in which dialogue seems the only way to ease tension. The success of the dialogue depends on the attitude of the political parties. Evolving public opinion suggests that civilian leadership is unable to sort out political issues, especially when military announced to distance itself from politics.

It is no more a secret that the government and the PTI are in contact with each other on national issues. The two parties have been talking to each other since months. It is certainly a good omen but it might be too early to expect any breakthrough given the nature of the crisis.





Nawaz Sharif's possible return, early elections on cards?

Nawaz Sharif becomes most important factor in Pak politics, a final authority in all decisions; political circle including PTI terming Nawaz's return an indication of fresh elections

By Sarfraz Raja

The year 2023 is for sure going to be the defining year that would certainly decide the future of politics in Pakistan. Other than being election year, these twelve months could unfold some new ventures and resumptions for some important political figures in political and national affairs. Besides this, coming days, weeks, and months would carry on with some expected uncertainties as well.

Early or timely elections -- a billion dollars question certainly and no one could have the right answer. It remains a demand of the parties who are in power today, and now it's the urge of those who were in power before. Pakistan Democratic Movement (PDM) came into power after removing Imran Khan from prime minister's office earlier this year, through an in-house change first time in parliamentary history of the country.

Immediately after his removal, Imran Khan and his party started demanding immediate elections in the country, calling it the 'only solution' to get rid of persisting economic and political crisis. PTI ran a country-wide protest campaign for their demand and two long marches toward capital.

PTI's only demand was to get a date for fresh elections. Initially they were demanding immediate elections, then early elections. On other hand, PDM was not considering PTI demand at any level, showing its commitment for holding elections on due date e.g. October 2023.

In end of October, Imran Khan finally kick-started his much-awaited long march from Lahore which in phases reached Rawalpindi on November 26. Khan's optional planes were to entre in the capital which was sealed by the local administration; or a sit in on entry point of Islamabad. But at the end of his address to the gathering, Imran Khan came-up with a surprise announcement.



The PTI chief announced to dissolve Provincial Assemblies of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Punjab province where his party enjoys power. But actually this call was without much consultation as Imran Khan also announced to start consultative process with party leaders within next few days.

This was a surprise move not only for parties in power but also for his party leadership and fellows. Government parties also started their deliberations to tackle this move as dissolution of two assemblies including that of the largest province of Punjab can create chaos and political crisis in the country.

On other hand, a number of PTI MPAs also showed their reservations about this sudden dissolution strategy. MPAs were of the view that they have to complete their development projects in their respective constituencies and other areas.

Chief Minister Punjab Chaudhry Pervez Elahi who is a PTI ally, although reaffirmed his support to Khan's decision

saying that whenever Imran asked, he would dissolve the assembly forthwith. But in his meetings with Khan he also expressed doubts following consequences of assembly's dissolution.

There were also some reservations within the PTI ranks suggesting that it is not necessary the government would announce or hold general elections throughout the country as PDM ministers were categorically saying that only by-election would be held in case of resignations or dissolution of assemblies.

Some senior politician within PTI asked Khan to use this option carefully as this would be last on their cards and wouldn't have any other option to pressurize the center. But it's a fact that announcement of dissolution of assemblies created or in-fact enhanced already existing uncertainty, especially about new elections.

Nawaz Sharif factor: Nawaz Sharif is among or probably the only most senior political leader in the country. In fact he is



the most successful one being elected as head of the government for three times. And this is also a fact that Nawaz played his cards more aggressively while sitting abroad.

Nawaz Sharif was ousted from power after Panama leaks and lifetime disqualification by the apex court in July 2017, when he was prime minister of the country. A year later, he was sentenced seven years imprisonment in two NAB cases against. Nawaz Sharif and his daughter Maryam Nawaz were convicted in absentia when both of them were in London with Kulsoom Nawaz, wife of the former premier who was hospitalized there. On 13th of July, both of them were arrested on their arrival back to the country.

Later in November 2019 after a severe immune system disorder, Nawaz was sent to UK in line with special permission by the PTI government on the orders of Lahore High Court. Since then Nawaz is in London, supervising party affairs especially after change of the government in Islamabad. And as Nawaz's party took charge of government affairs, he was accused of interfering in official matters by the PTI. In reality, Nawaz Sharif has become most important factor in politics of Pakistan as he is the one who actually is the final authority in all important decisions his party and government are going through.

Elections and possible return of Nawaz Sharif: It remains one of the most asked questions for the last three years, specially the last few months, but now things are moving in a direction where signs of his return are becoming visible. And this is seen as a near-future possibility, given

suspension of Maryam's sentence, who was co-accused and was sentenced in same case. In addition, the return of Nawaz's close aide and financial brain of his party Ishaq Dar is deemed a signal in that direction.

All the PMLN senior leaders are committed for Nawaz Sharif's return before general elections to lead his party campaign. Now some of senior leaders who are close to Nawaz like former speaker National Assembly and current Federal Minister Ayaz Sadiq are confirming his return in start of the new year, probably in January.

Political circle including PTI are terming Nawaz Sharif's possible return as an indication of new elections. On the other hand, Nawaz Sharif also asked his party to start preparation for upcoming elections. The PMLN also started working on finalizing their candidates especially in Punjab.

Whether this shows some possibility of early elections, some senior PMLN leaders believe it doesn't mean the ruling parties were ready to accept demand for early elections. They say that now less than a year is left in general elections so they have to start this practice in any case.

On the other hand, about finalizing candidates in Punjab, PMLN sources say the dissolution of Provincial Assembly is on cards after Imran Khan's announcement. Although they are considering some other options to block this move but it's politically correct and wise tactics to complete their homework as early as possible so in case of elections in Punjab, their candidates could start campaign and they could get maximum time for that.

Options and backdoor negotiations: In case of dissolution of the Punjab and KPK Assemblies, election would be held in both these provinces within 90 days and a caretaker set-up would be constituted in consultation between chief minister and opposition leader in the province. PTI in case of dissolution would be out of the power while PDM would remain in power in the center and Sindh.

Some PTI members also raise a point that elections in these provinces could be postponed for some specific period of time as constitution allows in case of any national emergency. PTI members have shown their fears that issue of economic crisis could be used for few months delay. So in case of dissolution of assemblies, PTI would be left with no other option while PDM will have their options which they could use in their favor.

If PTI could play its cards with full strength, dissolving provincial assemblies and resignations from all other assemblies, it would vacate almost half of the seats in all assemblies and by elections on these seats would be a hectic practice causing a huge financial burden.

That's way some backdoor efforts are underway to settle things on table and Finance Minister Ishaq Dar had a number of sittings with President Dr Arif Alvi. Sources claim the government wants to bring back PTI to the parliament before starting any formal negotiations on elections date but any progress in dialogue depends upon flexibility in stance from both sides and bitterness of past which still exists are a hurdle to bring parties on one table.



Army Chief General Syed Asim Munir faces many challenges

Keeping army apolitical; restoring public confidence a major challenge for new COAS; IK finally realized importance of good terms with establishment; establishment's neutrality may allow democracy to flourish

By Noor Aftab

As the 17th Army Chief, General Syed Asim Munir is facing numerous challenges in ensuring political stability and improving public perception of the Pakistan Army, especially in the context of political scenario in the wake of former prime minister Imran Khan's ouster from power via no-confidence vote in April this year.

Gen. Asim has inherited a lot of 'political and economic mess.' His foremost task now, will be to restore image of the establishment, resolve internal differences and generate confidence by displaying neutrality. Gen. Asim served as director general Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) for a brief period of time: appointed in October 2018, and removed only after eight months -- on the insistence of the then prime minister Imran Khan.

Gen. Syed Asim Munir, being a former intelligence chief, has a reputation of an 'upright soldier'. He was serving as Quarter Master General at the army headquarters before his new appointment as Chief of Army Staff. A major challenge for him is to keep military out of political fray and restore public confidence in the security forces.

After his exit from PM House, Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) chairman Imran Khan frequently and continuously criticised military leadership for its 'neutrality.' According to Khan, military should be on his side rather than sitting on the fence.

Traditionally, the establishment had been playing major role in the past-politics; and calling the shots vis-à-vis domestic and international security and political affairs. Political circles publicly blamed the establishment for carrying out 'political engineering' in order to install and impose Imran Khan-led 'hybrid regime' in 2018.

On the other side, Khan's political narratives always aligned with that of the



establishment. He often found mentors in spy chiefs -- from Hameed Gul to Shuja Pasha and Zaheer-ul-Islam to Faiz Hameed.

Yet, Imran Khan's attempt to delay and withhold Faiz Hameed's transfer from the premier intelligence agency was unprecedented and it considerably irked the entire establishment. At this point, the establishment's neutrality purportedly allowed collapse of the coalitions and brought overnight changes in loyalties; with PTI seeing many of its lawmakers defect ahead of the no-confidence vote.

Infuriated by the passage of the no-trust motion, Imran Khan launched a vigorous

campaign against the Shehbaz-led coalition government and the establishment as well. He indirectly accused the establishment of dislodging the PTI government, attempting to assassinate him and being involved in mysterious killing of the pro-PTI journalist, Arshad Sharif in Kenya.

Imran Khan, it is believed, extended former army chief Gen. Bajwa's tenure in 2019, while he was prime minister, only to exploit the military man during the time when he was being ousted from power by the parliament. And now Khan's anti-establishment rhetoric is melting down as he has finally realized if a civilian politician wants to become prime minister, he must on good terms with the establishment.



The establishment chose neutrality when it felt the Khan regime stood squarely unsustainable in the face of a serious economic crisis and an aggressive opposition. In other words, it distanced itself from a regime that had rather pushed the country to the brink of bankruptcy. On the other side, the establishment also shielded itself against anymore criticism from the masses.

It is an established fact that Imran Khan used to be a staunch supporter of former ISI chief Gen. Faiz Hameed, who was also a candidate for the coveted army chief post. Khan tried to assert it would not be fair to appoint a new army chief prior to new elections. Generally, appointment of new army chief used to be a non-political process, but PTI chief politicised it beyond imagination and to an unparalleled level.

In his last speech as army chief, Gen. Qamar Javed Bajwa said the country's most powerful institution has decided to stay away from politics. He admitted the military had unlawfully been meddling in politics for decades but would not do so in future. Gen. Bajwa also defended army against Imran Khan's diatribes.

PML-Q stalwart and Punjab chief minister's son Chaudhry Moonis Ellahi recently revealed Gen Bajwa had asked his party to support Imran Khan during the no-confidence motion. His claim was also endorsed by his father. This disclosure has triggered new debate whether establishment stood neutral since April or else.

This development on one hand, negated Imran Khan's claim that the establishment played a role in his ouster as country's

prime minister; and on the other, it raised questions about authenticity of the 'neutrality claims.'

Amid this controversy, a prominent journalist on his YouTube channel claimed Gen. Bajwa provided him his side of the story through his close aide. According to journalist, Chaudhry Pervaiz Ellahi made two phone calls to Gen Bajwa to get his 'opinion' about the no-confidence motion against Khan.

In first phone call, Gen. Bajwa told him that establishment was staying neutral, so he could make his own decision. Chaudhry Pervaiz Ellahi during his second phone call, told Gen. Bajwa that Moonis Ellahi wanted to support Imran Khan. Bajwa again told him they could do whatever they wanted to. So whatever is the reality, the issue of neutrality of the establishment has become talk of the town.



Political unrest doesn't stop here. Imran Khan's bid to block army chief's appointment failed; and now he is threatening dissolution of the Punjab and Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa assemblies. In addition to controlling two provinces, PTI also holds Azad Kashmir and Gilgit-Baltistan. President Arif Alvi apparently always looks towards him to get 'guidance' in important official affairs.

Time has come for all the stakeholders to put aside their egos, work in tandem and learn to accept their victories and defeats, keeping in view the country's critical economic situation. According to some political pundits, neutrality is an imaginary story, believers of which are naive political leaders, unfamiliar with how their interests have been exploited by the establishment.

None of Pakistan's prime ministers have completed their five-year terms. It is rare for any premier to remain in office for more than three years: only three of 22 have managed to cross the four-year mark in the last 74 years. Newfound establishment's neutrality could be a significant development that is likely to yield opportunities for democracy to flourish in Pakistan. However, prospects of civilian supremacy are not too bright.

Establishment's 'neutrality' never amounts to a paradigm shift in the political landscape of the country. Political mayhem has left many wondering if the establishment will play a role in defusing the current crisis. And if it happens, it will again draw criticism for the establishment.



PTI-PML (Q) Endgame

Trust deficit widening PTI-PML (Q) divide; Chaudhrys uncomfortable with IK style of politics, PTI doubts PML (Q) credibility; PTI fears its popularity graph may fall if early election date is not given



By Ahmad Waleed

Nine months ago, Chaudhry Pervaiz Elahi and Moonis Elahi rushed to meet PTI Chairman Imran Khan to strike a historic deal that saved PTI's Punjab government. Imran Khan offered Chaudhry Pervaiz Elahi the most coveted slot of the chief minister willy-nilly. The Chaudhry of Gujrat got the chance to become Punjab CM for the second time to strengthen his party position for the next general elections.

However, he had never thought that Imran Khan would one day ask him to dissolve the assembly to pressure the PDM government to announce election date. Imran Khan resorted to reaching this extreme step after failing to force the PDM regime to announce the election date through his massive public rallies and long march for over nine months.

The PML-Q had never favoured the PTI move of resigning from the National Assembly en masse neither it is interested in dissolving the provincial assemblies now although it has assured Imran Khan that Chaudhry Pervaiz Elahi will take one minute to execute the 'orders' of PTI chairman. In separate interviews father and

son (Moonis Elahi) have clearly hinted that they do not like the idea of ending their own government immediately.

The PTI leadership is worried these days if Chaudhry Pervaiz Elahi will stand on their side or climb the PDM bandwagon. PPP co-chairperson Asif Ali Zardari has advised Pervaiz Elahi not to take this extreme step offering him the CM slot from PDM which has sent shockwaves among the PTI ranks. With every passing day the PTI-PML-Q alliance is hit by disagreements and contradictions.

One day the father and son assure PTI chief of full support for his political decisions while the other morning they negate his assertions. It has been the part of Khan's narrative that former army chief General Qamar Bajwa was instrumental in his ouster from power as he became neutral and withdrew his support. Imran Khan used this point to build his narrative when he started his massive anti-establishment campaign.

His supporters were all out to hit the former army chief through vile trends on the social media. On the other hand, Moonis Elahi

tells a broadcaster that it was none other than Gen Bajwa who wooed him to join hands with PTI to form the government in Punjab instead of going to the PDM. "How can Gen Bajwa play double game if he wanted PML-Q to join PTI in Punjab?," he raises this pertinent question in an interview. His father Pervaiz Elahi eulogized the services of Gen Bajwa as one of the best army chiefs in the history of Pakistan the day he retired from the service.

The PTI supporters, especially those who are blind followers of Imran Khan, unleashed smear campaigns against Chaudhrys for negating the stance of their leader. Imran Khan had to intervene asking the supporters not to criticize the allies on their point of view regarding the establishment. But, the PTI supporters are not ready to follow the instructions of the leader as they have continued their campaign against Chaudhry Pervaiz Elahi on the social media.

There is a deficit of trust between PTI and PML-Q on almost all major issues; be it the narrative of PTI against the establishment or the 'fair' distribution of funds for the development projects in the PTI



constituencies. The CM has been criticized for allocating more funds for his hometown Gujrat and the surrounding districts. The trust gap between PTI and PML-Q is widening as the election year is about to start.

Chaudhry Fawad Hussain has recently clarified that it is up to the PML-Q if they want to contest the next general election with PTI. "They (PML-Q) are free to decide as they are an independent party. But, they will have to dissolve the assembly when asked by Imran Khan if they want to keep this alliance intact." Getting along with the PTI is getting difficult for the PML-Q as they have differences on every other issue.

A similar situation surfaced when Imran Khan was attacked during the Long March in Wazirabad. Imran Khan blamed one of the military officials in ISI among the three masterminds behind the assassination attempt on him including Prime Minister Shahbaz Sharif and Interior Minister Rana Sanaullah. Imran Khan wanted the Punjab government to include these three names in the first information report to be registered with the police.

Chaudhry Pervaiz Elahi landed in trouble as he tried to convince that Imran Khan should exclude the name of military official. Punjab CM had to have several rounds of negotiations with Imran Khan on the matter. However, Khan was adamant to



nominate the PM, Rana Sanaullah and the military official in the FIR. After three days stalemate the Supreme Court had to intervene in the matter and ordered the Punjab police to register FIR immediately. Only the gunman arrested from the spot was nominated in the FIR.

It is becoming evident that PML-Q leadership is not comfortable with the style of Imran Khan's politics while the PTI leadership have serious doubts on the credibility of Chaudhrys as they may part

ways after getting a more lucrative offer from the PDM. The divide is widening on a host of issues. PML-Q wants to maintain a separate identity to enter the next general elections with an aim to increase the number of seats for future political adjustments.

Meanwhile, PTI seems over confident after touching the historic peak of popularity graph that has been achieved through the narrative it took against the foreign powers and the establishment holding them responsible for his ouster from power. Khan's narrative earned him bigger fame as politician than ever. Now PTI wants to cash in on the political temperature it has worked hard to build all though the nine months of its campaign.

The only fear is the popularity graph may start to fall in the months to come if they don't get an early date of elections. For this PTI will have to keep the momentum going. The threat of dissolving the provincial assemblies of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Punjab without giving the final date is an attempt to remain relevant after trying public rallies and long march which have not yielded the desired goals except the highest graph of popularity among the masses. However, political pundits believe that popularity alone may not help Imran Khan return to power again in a vulnerable political setup in the country.





TTP's end of ceasefire announcement on different grounds

KPK govt. not interested in dealing with rising militancy; incompetent to talk to TTP; mega corruption scandals have left province in financial quagmire

By Syed Fakhar KaKaKhel

Terror attacks have resumed in the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province with the termination of the ceasefire announcement by the Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP). During the first week of December alone, sixteen terror attacks were carried out against security forces and police. Though reason behind cessation of the ceasefire was attributed to the operations by the security forces, actually the deadlock in negotiations between the state of Pakistan and the TTP via Afghan Taliban, led to the end of the ceasefire. This standoff, however, has different grounds.

The Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan chief, Mufti Noor Wali, alleged the US drone attack on Al-Qaeda chief Dr. Ayman al-Zawahiri in Kabul was behind the deadlock. Our sources believe this was one factor. Since Afghan Interior Minister Sirajuddin Haqqani was tasked a reconciliation between Pakistan and the TTP and since he became too busy after the Kabul drone attack, the TTP-Pakistan talks stalled. Haqqani was facing severe criticism from Afghan Taliban for not protecting the guest, Dr. Ayman Al Zawahiri.

Another reason for the stalemate was the death of the head of the Taliban negotiation team and the founder of TTP, Abdul Wali alias Omar Khalid Khorasani. After three of his colleagues were killed in a mysterious attack, his colleagues pressured TTP central leadership to investigate the incident. His colleagues suspected that some elements in Afghanistan had carried out this operation of targeted killings. Therefore, it is the responsibility of the Afghan Taliban to track down the killers and take action against perpetrators. This seems to be a solid reason for the deadlock and the end of the ceasefire.

On the other hand, as a result of initial negotiations, dozens of Taliban entered Pakistan and were seen in Swat. This led to



various misconceptions. All these activities of reconciliation with the TTP were headed by former DGISI General Faiz Hameed. After Faiz's departure, the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa government was not competent enough to deal with such a sensitive issue. And that is why things got messed up. The TTP viewed the KPK government as non-serious vis-à-vis negotiations or playing a double game. After that TTP formally announced end of ceasefire, and resumption of attacks.

Even to the extent of statements, the present provincial government does not have any clear policy. They put all the blame on the Afghan Taliban. On the contrary, the Pakistani Taliban seem clear in their goals. They have targeted police and security forces and are continuously attacking them. This does not necessarily mean the security forces were not achieving success. Militants are suffering heavy losses due to joint operation of the army and police; and successful intelligence-based operations as well. Until now, many important militant commanders have been

killed in North and South Waziristan, Tank, DI Khan, Bannu, Lakki Marwat, Peshawar, Mardan and adjoining areas.

But all these operations have not yet received political and public support they need. The behavior of the provincial government suggests it has nothing to do with the law and order or emerging militancy threats. Not a single PTI member uttered a word in public gatherings against militancy to-date. In fact, in past, Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf has been supporting the Taliban and they do not want to challenge them. Apparently, PTI has kept quiet by keeping army and police on the front.

On the political front, the Pakhtunkhwa government faced serious problems when PTI chief Imran Khan announced to quit the provincial government. In a video that went viral, the provincial education minister, Shahram Khan Tarkai, while sitting on the stage expressed surprise during 'quit-assemblies' announcement. Quitting provincial assembly bothered PTI provincial government more than tackling the militancy issue.



After this announcement, the Pakhtunkhwa government had to confront two types of losses. First, uncertainty arose within the KPK bureaucracy. Provincial bureaucracy, and government officials began to believe if PTI quits the government, 'records' will be sought and account of approvals and summaries will be demanded. Therefore, why become a victim of the outgoing government's misdeeds or mistakes; and why to indulge in matters which might warrant answers in the next couple of months. On the other hand, the PTI's Pakhtunkhwa government, which has been in the corridor of powers for the first time in history, is completing ten years and was thinking of strengthening its constituencies in this election year.



Being in the center for three-and-a half years, 'project Imran' has entered its last year in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. The provincial government is facing severe financial crisis. Most of the provincial departments do not even have money in order to pay salaries to their employees. And they are blaming the federal government for not paying provincial dues. But unparallel to KPK, there is no financial problem in Punjab, which is also an opponent to the center.

The problem seems 'priorities' of the PTI government in KPK. These priorities have been popular but not realistic. Projects worth billions of rupees were launched

without a second thought. A pertinent venture among these was the BRT, which later proved to be a mega corruption scandal. Release of funds for the billion-trees-tsunami, health card, and allotment of funds for social media campaign has left the province in dire financial straits. One after the other, corruption scandals are coming to light. The present provincial government believed the elections would be held on time and the entire country would be engaged in general elections under the caretaker government, thus corruption stories would be sidelined due to mass-scale political activity under a neutral government. And after the elections, they will again try to take their share in the upcoming new government.

But now if this government goes, there will be no time and resources for their public relations campaign for the general elections, besides internal differences among PTI's district bodies, development projects and vice versa. That is why the provincial government seems to be suffering from severe depression at the moment. The way the government machinery was 'misused' by the government officials for the PTI chief in the recent by-elections would not have been possible in a caretaker government.

During the 2013, and 2018 elections, the establishment openly and vehemently supported Imran Khan, but now that

facility is gone. Provincial leadership of PTI also knows that party chief Imran Khan is not going to contest elections on all seats in the current parliamentary system. Recently, the main reason for nomination of Imran Khan for all seats was that there was a problem within party candidates in the province. Even now, if elections are held, more than two PTI candidates from each constituency will contest either on party ticket or as independent. This will seriously damage the party vote. PTI believed that in this final year, by using the government machinery and funds, they would resolve differences at the district level, but if the government ends, the challenge for them will be no less than a storm.

Even now, the situation is that on the one hand, Provincial Finance Minister Taimur Jhagra says the province does not have funds, on the other hand the chief minister Mahmood Khan has laid foundation stone of development projects worth more than seven billion across the province. Political analysts are terming it as an election stunt. They believe that by putting up foundation stone, they do not get real votes. If employment and law and order issues are not addressed, PTI will lose terribly in the upcoming elections.

Sources claim, records of almost all the assembly members and the PTI cabinet are being collected. So far, institutions have received concrete evidence of alleged corruption of billions of rupees. Not only this, but the central leadership of PTI also resorted to corruption in Pakhtunkhwa. And this is the reason why KP chief minister and several other members of the assembly welcomed the decision of the party chief. But at the same IK also been told the 'end of the Pakhtunkhwa government will make him weak.'

It is also said that with the end of the government, a campaign based on KP corruption scandals will be launched, damaging the party image and Imran Khan himself in the province. For the first time in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, a party has established a record of two consecutive governments. But the price of such a long rule will also be very high which Tehreek-e-Insaf will have to pay in the coming days.



The New Chief

The first challenge facing Munir is the chaos in Afghanistan following the Taliban takeover in August 2021

TTI Report



For most of Pakistan's history, the Army Chief has held the most important role in the country. So, the appointment of a new chief has always been a significant moment, which remains in the media before and after the decision. After much anticipation, and media hype, General Asim Munir has been posted as Commander of the Armed Forces. He has to face a dizzying range of internal and external challenges. The Truth International has discussed these issues in length.

Pakistan's Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif has chosen Lieutenant-General Asim Munir to be the next Chief of Army Staff, her 7th appointment by the N League leadership during her political life. Shahbaz Sharif has agonised for weeks over this choice and even flew to London in early November to consult his brother, Nawaz, the former prime minister. Both Nawaz and Shehbaz are still haunted by their near-fatal errors in choosing Pervez Musharraf in 1998 and the late Asif Nawaz in 1991. General Musharraf only wanted the apparently mild-mannered general to mount a coup the following year and appoint himself president for the next eight years. Nawaz's long periods of exile and imprisonment serve as constant reminders of the perils of this decision.

However, the choice seems to be a good one. Munir was the highest-ranking general on the list, with the most seniority in service. He has commanded a brigade on operations in the northwest and an army corps near the Indian border. He has run Military Intelligence (MI), the body that monitors the security of the army itself, and Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI), the powerful espionage and security agency that looks at external and internal threats to the state. The latter two appointments demonstrate that he has the total confidence of the outgoing chief, General Qamar Bajwa.

Before giving his consent for this appointment, President Arif Alvi travelled to Lahore to consult with Imran Khan on the appointment. Imran Khan, known as IK, the leader of the opposition Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) party, is recovering from a recent assassination attempt and gave his assent. Any surprise is because Khan, when he was prime minister, had insisted on the removal of General Munir from his ISI role after only eight months and had installed Faez Hameed in his place. Indeed, PTI supporters suspect that Shehbaz made the appointment on the assumption that Munir still harbours some bitterness towards Khan for his treatment. However, Khan knows that he has to rebuild relations with the army,

which reached a breaking point in the lead-up to his resignation as prime minister in April. So, he decided to accept the appointment rather than be accused of meddling with a promotion system in which he has no formal locus.

Now General Munir, who got his early education in the small city of Toba Tek Singh, will have to show diplomatic finesse in restoring some balance between the Pakistan army's Chinese and US relationships, which seems to be the biggest challenge for Pakistan at the international level.

The army, too, seems broadly content. There was reportedly irritation at Corps Commander level when, in 2019, Qamar Bajwa extended his term for an additional three years (ruining the career prospects of several generals) and also at the promotions of members of Bajwa's own Baloch Regiment. By contrast, Munir is from the more mainstream Frontier Force, but the Baloch Regiment and Frontier Force have provided the last four Chiefs, and the Punjab Regiment, which sees itself as the core of the Pakistan army, will undoubtedly feel bruised. Nonetheless, Munir is here to stay for the next three and possibly six years.

The first challenge facing Munir is the chaos in Afghanistan following the Taliban takeover in August 2021. The Pakistani army kept the Taliban alive during the 20 years they were out of power. Instead of helping the army, the Taliban have been almost spiteful, refusing to hand over terrorists from the Tehrik-e Taliban Pakistan (the TTP, or Pakistani Taliban), arguing with Pakistan over the de facto border (the Durand Line), and even threatening to talk to India about the controversial topic of military training.

In parallel, Munir needs to provide some tangible reassurance to the Chinese. Beijing is privately infuriated by the failure of Pakistan's Afghan policy. In spite of China's suggestions of incorporating Afghanistan into its Belt and Road



Initiative (BRI), the Taliban are refusing to crack down on the several thousand Uighur militants in Afghanistan who have made common cause with the TTP and the Baloch Liberation Army, which targets Chinese infrastructure projects in Balochistan. These are core elements of the BRI, known locally as CPEC (the China–Pakistan Economic Corridor). The failure of CPEC would raise more international questions about the success of the BRI. So, for the Chinese, the stakes are higher than they might seem to outsiders.

Furthermore, Munir will have to show diplomatic finesse in restoring some balance between the Pakistan army's Chinese and US relationships. General Bajwa has spent a lot of time courting the US government, which had resented Pakistan's opaque role during the latter years of NATO's Afghan presence. Bajwa made it clear that the Pakistan army wanted close relations with both Beijing and Washington. This has annoyed Beijing, which finds it hard to understand why Pakistan still clings to its US alliance in spite of the Pakistan army's own narrative of Washington's multiple betrayals. The answer is simple. Pakistan values the technical superiority of US weapons, and Pakistani officers want to train at the US War College and send their children to US, not Chinese, universities.

Munir is not going to find it easy to handle a popular and populist prime minister at a time when the army has been coming in for domestic criticism for its involvement in politics.

In recent months, Pakistan appears to have been providing Ukraine with tank and artillery ammunition, in a move likely to help restore the country's strained relations with the West and to atone for Khan's inept visit to Moscow on the very day of Putin's invasion of Ukraine. However, the big US requirement is to fly drones from Pakistan to monitor and strike terrorist targets in Afghanistan. Khan has always been hostile to US drone activity, but it may also be the only way for Pakistan to counter its own threat from the TTP.

This brings us to Munir's biggest challenge: how to manage the man who is almost certain to become prime minister again in 2023 on the crest of a large populist wave. General Bajwa has assured Pakistanis that

the army has backed out of politics since February 2021. But the reality is not so simple. The army controls policy towards India and Afghanistan. It sees itself as the guardian of the country's unity and security, and it also has a large stake in the economy. Hitherto, every civilian government has had to accept the army's political role. Khan baulked at the limitations on his freedom of action, especially over foreign policy, and took the almost unprecedented step of criticising the army's interference in public. At about the same time, he invented a story that the US had been conspiring to overthrow his government. This brand of anti-Western populism has served Khan well electorally for over a decade, but it causes Pakistan considerable problems of governance, particularly for an economy that frequently teeters on the edge of disaster.

General Munir is not going to find it easy to handle a popular and populist prime minister at a time when the army has been coming in for domestic criticism for its involvement in politics. Khan will want to repair his reputation with the military and have good relations with his army chief, but a time will come when he wishes to assert his own political primacy, whether in relations with Washington, Beijing, and New Delhi or over policy towards the BRI, Afghanistan, and Kashmir. This is when tensions with the army are likely to re-emerge and when we will discover the true qualities of General Munir.



Super power rivalries, military hardware and Pakistan's foreign policy

CPEC and Pakistan's embrace with China might be reasons behind new western attitude; Pakistan set to become center-piece in emerging US-China Cold War; Beijing and Moscow on one hand, Washington on the other, ready to make moves to capture Pakistan's defense market



By Umer Farooq

Sometimes at the end of former COAS, General Qamar Javed Bajwa's first tenure in office, the Pakistani government and GHQ started receiving information that three western countries—United States, Britain and France—which were suppliers of military hardware to Pakistan, had started canceling major defense deals with the Pakistani military.

This was the time when Pakistan was in full gear to implement CPEC projects in the regions across Pakistan. Even before this development the Pakistani military had started diversifying its sources of military hardware. The Russian Federation became Pakistan's major suppliers of military hardware around 2018. China had been a major supplier for a long time. Pakistani officials don't comment on why the western countries cancelled defense deals. But it is likely that CPEC and Pakistan's deep embrace with China both in the field of security and economic cooperation were the reasons behind this new western attitude.

Quite coincidentally this was also the time when the former army chief

started giving out policy statements on foreign affairs. In an uncharacteristic overture on April 14 2018, the then chief of army staff General Qamar Javed Bajwa laid the offer of peace talks with India. "It is our sincere belief that the route to peaceful resolution of Pak-India disputes – including the core issue of Kashmir – runs through comprehensive and meaningful dialogue," he said while addressing the passing out parade ceremony of Pakistan Military Academy (PMA) cadets in Kakul.

Gen. Bajwa's speech came as a bit of a surprise for political observers in Islamabad. Given the fact that it was a full-fledged policy statement meant to offer peace talks to archrival India, it should have come from a civil government. But very few people were aware that Gen. Bajwa was to embark on a visit to Moscow within two weeks. Even fewer knew that Pakistan was in talks with the Russian Federation for the purchase of state-of-the-art battle tanks, T-90, along with other modern Russian weapons.

Gen. Bajwa's predecessor had signed an agreement with the Russian Federa-

tion in October 2015 which allowed arms trade between the two countries and cooperation in weapon development. During his visit to Moscow, Gen. Bajwa held talks with his Russian counterparts over political issues related to the purchase of Russian military hardware. Pakistan was facing problems in convincing the Russian military-industrial complex for the sale of military hardware, especially in the face of intense Indian lobbying in the power corridors of Moscow against Pakistan.

Gen. Bajwa's speech in Abbottabad was meant to convey to his Russian interlocutors – before he embarked on a visit to Moscow – that Pakistan was ready to reduce political and military tensions with India and would still be needing military hardware to deal with the difficult task of stabilizing its western border in the face of religious extremism and militancy. It is no secret that Pakistani diplomats who regularly interact with Russian government officials were facing entreaties about normalizing relations with India before relations between Pakistan and Russia could further improve.

Gen. Bajwa's speech, though, was not an example of a simple one-way message. It contained all elements of Pakistani diplomatic jargon aimed at convincing the world and the domestic audience that the Pakistani state believes in peace, "while at the same time it remained adamantly committed to its claimed status of equality with India". He talked about peace dialogue "with sovereign equality, dignity and honour", adding Kashmir as a pre-condition for a comprehensive dialogue process.



By the time Gen. Bajwa was scheduled to retire from service, Pakistan Armed Forces were putting an end to their reliance on Western sources for military hardware. Now our military services were completely relying on Chinese weapons systems. In the popular imagination ending the reliance on western sources was something to be celebrated. But the Americans are not ready to be outsmarted this easily. In the event news came that Pakistan government would get the financial concessions from US Administration in the purchase of F-16's spares after US State Department's latest approval of the sales worth \$450 million for Pakistan Air Force (PAF).

The proposed sale, however, does not include any new capabilities, weapons, or munitions. In recent years, relations have turned cold and military and diplomatic experts point out that the approval of the latest sales package for Pakistan by the US

Congress and State Department primarily is an attempt to mend relations. Pakistani experts believe the sales package doesn't offer much in terms of military capabilities. "This appears to be a lifespan sustainment package, extending the life of the airframes beyond 2030. F-16s are the only remaining dependency Pakistan has over the US supply chain. The USG would like to maintain the dependency of the Pakistani military on the American military-industrial complex" said Shahid Raza an independent defense expert.

It seems Pakistan is once again all set to become a center-piece in the new emerging Cold War between the United States and China. At the moment, Pakistan is an economic disaster story. Yet its strategic location, its once strategic relations with Washington and ongoing strategic cooperation with Beijing will compel it into a situation where it cannot afford to remain aloof from rising competition and expected military tensions between two superpowers.

US President Joe Biden attracted the applause of peace nicks around the world when he said—on the eve of the US-China Summit in Indonesia—that he would not allow competition with China to turn into a conflict. But Washington is very good at using high-sounding positive adjectives to camouflage its strategic fears of "enemies" with diplomatic niceties. The strategic debate in Washington tells a very different

story about how US strategic elites view the rise of China as an economic power and its corresponding rise as a military giant.

Two recent documents issued by the US administration — "National Security Strategy" and "National Defense Strategy" identify China and Russia as strategic rivals and sources of military and strategic competition. A 2018 Report by the Rand Corporation, an independent Washington based think-tank, claimed that "US officials and experts have significant degrees of uncertainty about Russian and especially Chinese intentions.

Combined with some degree of aggressive behavior, the uncertainty is producing intensifying fears about Russian and Chinese intentions and growing urgency about the US response." This quotation is directly taken from the report, which points towards a strong possibility of direct international competition between US and China on the one hand and US and Russia on the other hand. The report in fact points out a strong possibility of the emergence of a new Cold War: this time between China and the United States.

US experts, however, reject the possibility of US-China rivalry leading to division of the world into two rival geographical blocs like the ones which the world experienced in the post-Second World War till the collapse of Soviet Union in 1991. There are multiple poles of political and military power in different regions of the world and these countries or poles are unlikely to merge their political interests and identities in the larger blocs led by China and the United States, if at all it comes to that.

American experts and think-tanks, however, have produced many reports during the past five years in which they have pointed out close cooperation between the Chinese People's Liberation Army (PLA) and Pakistani military forces in the situation of military tensions between Washington and Beijing.

It appears that this perception of the Pakistan Army as siding with Beijing in any future military conflict, is a product of the days when the Pakistani state was in full gear to incorporate the CPEC project into its economy and Gwadar port was recently handed over to a Chinese company. Since

then, Pakistan seems to have slowed down on CPEC and not without reason: Pakistani military leaders purposely and publicly expressed their inclination towards close relations with Washington during the past two years. This, indeed, dispelled the impression that Islamabad was about to put all its eggs in a Chinese basket.

The new Cold War, this time, according to American experts, will be different in its strategic nature and geographical expanse. In the Cold War between the erstwhile Soviet Union and the United States, the two superpowers posed an existential threat to each other. It would be a different ball game this time, we are told. Just like our political institutions, our military structures and military and strategic thought is a product of Cold War compulsions.

Our military structures started taking shape during the Cold War—it was American weapons systems, training, strategic advice and financial assistance that manufactured our military conceptions, strategic thought and military structures. Initial land forces formations of the Pakistan Army emerged as a final product in the late 1950s after massive financial assistance from American. Our formations were equipped with American weapons systems.

Pakistani Armed Forces are no longer in a formative phase as they have quite developed military structures and institutions. Their strategic thought exists in quite developed form. But the inductions of new Chinese weapon systems will, however, crucially and critically introduce new strategic ideas and concepts in our strategic thinking.

The induction of Type-54AP Frigates into Pakistan Navy's inventory is primarily aimed at enhancing the interoperability between Pakistan Navy and Chinese People's Liberation Army-Navy (PLAN). The practical manifestation of this enhanced inter-operability is the eight Pak-China joint and multinational counter terrorism Naval exercises in Arabian Sea.

On the other hand, Pakistan Air force (PAF) has been evaluating the purchase of state of the art J-10 fighters into its inventory. According to experts J-10 is ideally suited for a maritime role, especially in the light of new thinking in the Pakistani Navy

to venture deep into Arabian Sea. No existing aircraft in Pakistan's inventory has the ideal capacity to carry out the maritime role. PAF wants to replace its Mirage fleet and J-10, according to experts, is ideally suited to replace the Mirage fleet. It can carry heavy payloads and could therefore become a carrier of strategic weapons. One expert said that the JF-17 doesn't have the capacity to carry heavy payloads.

The F-16 and other western technology-based aircraft in Pakistan's inventory don't come without technical restrictions, especially when it comes to strategic weapons. JF-17 is a joint production of China and Pakistan and it doesn't carry technical restrictions. However, it is a light aircraft and could not carry heavy payloads. J-10 could carry Pakistan's strategic weapons

ocean—a strategic development that would be in line with Chinese ambitions to increase its footprints in the Indian Ocean.

First difference between American military assistance to Pakistan Armed Forces during the Cold War and Chinese military assistance in the present day is that the former's strategic objectives were directly in conflict with the defense strategy of Pakistan, whereas the latter's strategic objectives are completely in line with Pakistan's defense requirements.

It seems Pakistani territory and its armed forces are about to become another playground for big power rivalry. The big powers or the new cold war rivals are not ready to concede ground on the meager number of financial resources associated



and penetrate deep into Indian territory. Officials said that the government of Pakistan was in the final stage of negotiations with the Chinese government when the plan to purchase 150 J-10 aircraft was shelved, "The reason was the financial and economic crunch of those days" he said. The J-10 is mainly designed for air-to-air combat, but can also perform strike missions.

The induction of these two weapon systems into the inventory of Pakistani Armed forces will ensure the deep-sea role of Pakistan Navy. Pakistani experts say that Pakistan Navy is in the process of developing new strategic concepts and ideas according to which it would be able to play a deep-sea role in Arabian Sea and Indian

with Pakistani small quantities of weapon purchases. Both Beijing and Moscow on the one hand and Washington on the other hand are ready to make moves to capture Pakistan's defense market. More than business interests, the two sides in the new Cold War are desperate to influence the decision-making processes of the most influential military in the region—Pakistan Armed Forces. Gen. Bajwa devoted a large amount of his time doing the balancing act between Washington and Beijing. He even once expressed his displeasure over the possibility of new cold war rivalries playing out in the region. The new military leaders will be facing the same pressures from the two sides of the new cold war. Let's see how the new military leadership tackles this problem.

International lenders deny funding for mega energy projects

Pakistan's poor economic performance can be attributed to global uncertainty; internal political turmoil major reason behind country's external vulnerability risk; Pakistan desperately needed forex to stabilize economy

By Azeem Waqas

International lenders have denied funding mega energy projects of Pakistan due to weakening economy, low foreign reserves and risky balance of payment scenario. International development partners and financial institutions have already shown a lukewarm response to fund big energy projects like CASA-1000 and TAPI gas pipeline project, according to a highly placed official in the energy ministry.

Institute for Energy Economics and Financial Analysis has said that Pakistan's ability to raise capital from external sources took a massive blow earlier this year as the country was downgraded by all three prominent credit rating agencies including Moody's, Fitch and Standard and Poor's (S&P).

Moody's was the first one to act, downgrading the country's outlook from stable to negative (B3) citing Pakistan's "heightened external vulnerability risk and uncertainty around its ability to secure additional external financing to meet its needs" in June. Pakistan's poor economic performance can be attributed to global uncertainty after the COVID-19 pandemic and the impact of Russia's invasion of Ukraine on the price of imported commodities and fuel.

Internal political turmoil and conflict amongst the country's own political parties has also been a major reason behind its external vulnerability risk. The Pakistani rupee has lost 30% of its value so far in 2022 alone and the country's foreign exchange reserve dipped dangerously below \$10 billion, enough to cover only two months of imports.

According to Moody's, the country's weak institutions and poor governance adds uncertainty around the future direction of Macroeconomic policy, including whether the country will complete the current International Monetary fund (IMF)



program; a \$6 billion bailout package that has been hanging in the balance for months now.

Shortly after the Government of Pakistan's downgrade, the government's hydropower development wing, Water and Power Development Authority (WAPDA), was also downgraded by Moody's owing to the agency's close linkages with the government. WAPDA was assigned a B3 corporate family rating (CFR) and a B3 Baseline Credit Assessment (BCA).

Due to these close ties, WAPDA is more than likely to receive support from the government in its time of need, however this support is offset by the risks arising from the Pakistani government's low policy predictability and consistency. WAPDA's financial performance stemming from the organization's inability to collect revenue itself along with the sizable hydropower capacity expansion plan.

The long receivables cycle and delayed tariff decisions were also listed as a reason for concern by the credit rating agency. While the company's weak financial performance is driven primarily by the Central Power Purchasing Authority's (CPPA) ability to pay back the hydropower producer due to the significant cash shortfall it experiences in the form of circular debt, tariff delays and the long receivables cycles are due to bureaucratic hurdles and the

regulatory structure of power purchase agreements in Pakistan.

Moody's also predicted WAPDA's 'funds from operations (FFO)' to debt ratio to remain weak over the next two years due to the company's plans to spend sizable capital in order to expand its hydropower production capacity coupled with the continued inability to collect revenue in time. Liquidity will also be an issue as Moody's considers the company's cash balance of PKR 158 billion as of 31 December, 2021, insufficient to cover its capital spending and maturing debt in 2022.

From the ESG (environmental, social and governance) perspective, Moody's considers WAPDA exposed to increasing climate risks in the form of extreme weather patterns. WAPDA's inability to get its tariffs adjusted timely as well as the high cost of power generation from costly hydropower plants could also trigger affordability concerns from a social angle. Following Moody's Fitch's and S&P also downgraded Pakistan's credit outlook from stable to negative in July, listing the same concerns as Moody's. These credit downgrades could highly impact the government's ability to provide financing for the considerable hydropower capacity it intends to fund.

Projects supported by the government are financed through the Public Sector Devel-

opment Programme fund or through commercial financing raised through local or foreign banks. WAPDA mainly acts as the conduit for channeling these funds towards the projects, but is known to provide financing itself to some projects too. For instance, in the case of the Mohmand and the Diamer Bhasha Dam, WAPDA issued its first Eurobond to secure USD 500 million for the construction of these projects. The company had plans to raise additional funds through subsequent green bonds issuances, but this may not be practical given the firm's negative credit rating will force it to pay a higher interest rate on the bond principal, raising the costs of these hydropower projects further.

Pakistan's dollar denominated bonds currently show a mixed performance already, with those due in 2030 quoted below 60 cents on the dollar. IEEFA predicts that demand from investors for Pakistani bonds is likely to stay weak amidst the bleaker outlook on upcoming bond financing. WAPDA's credit downgrade to negative could deter bond subscription or future financing. If the country is unable to raise sufficient debt in time to fund these projects, the 6.6 GW of capacity that is yet to achieve financial closure may face significant financing hurdles leading to even more cost overruns and implementation delays. In instances where the government is supposed to match MDB funding, this could even lead to the MDB's withdrawing from the project.



The 1450 MW Ghazi Barotha Hydropower project was stalled in 1997, due to the government's inability to match funding by the donor agencies. The government had been undertaking some deficit cutting measures prompted by the IMF due to which it could not support the hydropower project in time. As a result, many of the planned infrastructure for the hydropower project [including bridges and culverts] could not materialize.

As credit downgrades emerged one after the other for both Pakistan and WAPDA, there was high speculation in the market that the country would default. Pakistan desperately needed forex reserves to

provide stability to its economy in the immediate term as a mitigating factor. Fortunately, almost \$5 billion in deposits or loans rolled over by friendly countries: a \$2.3 billion loan rollover by the Chinese⁵⁰ and a \$3 billion deposit rollover by Saudi Arabia, which stabilized the country's rapidly depleting foreign exchange reserves to a degree.

The IMF programme was also revived and a \$1.1 billion tranche was received by the State Bank of Pakistan at the end of August that comes with a heavy tag of increased taxation and energy prices. These achievements worked in favor of the country's economy but only temporarily. The rupee now continues to depreciate against the dollar, as the greenback strengthens globally⁵² and inflation continues to rise due to elevated energy prices. The IMF predicts that Pakistan's inflation would be sustained at 20% in the near future, while its GDP growth would decline to 3.5% in FY 23.

Spillovers from the Russia-Ukraine war would continue to exert an upward pressure on food and fuel prices, while political uncertainty and policy reversals undermine the country's external stability. It would thus be crucial for Pakistan to curb spending, in order to maintain liquidity which could very well mean a lack of financing for the 14 GW hydropower pipeline the country hopes to build by 2030.



Arshad Sharif murder case: FFT report adds to complications

FFT report terms Kenyan police version full of contradictions; finds no bullet-penetration mark on Arshad's seat, discrepancies in Salman Iqbal's timeline

By Asadullah Malik

The fact finding report on journalist Arshad Sharif's murder, compiled after a 40-day arduous work of two senior police officers working in the Federal Investigation Agency (FIA) and Intelligence Bureau (IB), however, further complicated the case as it termed the incident "a planned targeted assassination, and not a case of mistaken identity."

Following Arshad's death on October 23, 2022, the Kenyan police said the journalist was 'fatally shot in the head' by cops after allegedly violating a roadblock established to keep an eye on motor vehicles using the route.

Kenyan media quoted local police officials as saying that they were directed to intercept a car involved in carjacking in Nairobi in which a child was taken hostage, which was similar to the one Arshad Sharif and his driver were driving.

The federal government initially constituted two-member team comprising Deputy Director General (IB) Omar Shahid Hamid and Director FIA Dr Mohammad Athar Waheed, who submitted a 562-page report to the government for onward submission before the five member bench of the Supreme Court of Pakistan headed by Chief Justice Umar Ata Bandial. Chief Justice Bandial appeared contended with the findings as he applauded the investigation team.

The investigators observed the case was not confined to Pakistan or Kenya. The report stated that "transnational roles of characters in Kenya, Dubai and Pakistan in this assassination cannot be ruled out."

Mother of the slain journalist also filed an application before the apex court nominating senior military leadership, officials of spy agency and public relations wing of the armed forces as accused.

CJP Bandial after perusal of the application



observed "it could be a version of the complainant" and advised her to record her statement before the eight member Special Joint Investigation Team (SJIT) comprising five police officials and representatives of Inter Services Intelligence (ISI), Federal Investigation Agency and the Intelligence Bureau.

The Fact Finding Team (FFT) could not succeed in getting answers to key questions linked to mysterious and horrendous murder. According to the FFT report, Arshad was shot dead after he was coming back to attend a dinner "in the honor of American instructors", who were working in the training center of his Pakistani-origin Kenyan host Waqar Ahmed. "US State Department used to conduct military-style training for the security forces in this facility," the FFT report adds.

The FFT wondered "for what reason did he (Waqar) not only provided lodging but also bore almost all expenses of Arshad Sharif, despite admitting that he did not know Arshad?" Another question was his relations with Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of private television, ARY, Salman

Iqbal and his friend Tariq Wasi who played a key role in bringing the journalist to Kenya. But this query also remained unanswered.

"What was the nature of the so-called military-style training that goes on at Kwenia Farm; and to which organization did the trainees and trainers belong," was another FFT question, Waqar failed to respond.

The report noted a number of discrepancies in the events connected to the death of Arshad Sharif and held that "the version of the Kenya police to portray the incident as a case of 'mistaken identity' is full of contradictions."

It said that Arshad Sharif was leaving from a barbecue party at Kwenia Farm and was shot dead while returning to his residence. Waqar Ahmed had established the Ammodump shooting range and training site at the farm.

The report says that officials of Kenyan General Services Unit (GSU) fired nine bullets on Arshad Sharif's Land Cruiser



from AK-47 and local Gilboa Rifle, which were in possession of the officials.

"There is only one fire whose trajectory doesn't fit with the firing pattern; there is no penetration mark of a bullet on Arshad Sharif's seat but he was hit from the back and bullet exited from right side of his chest. This does not match with his sitting position, position of gunners as well as the line of fire," report adds. The report termed it a "closed range fire." The FFT also observed some discrepancies in the timeline given by Salman Iqbal of the ARY.

Investigators were surprised to note that the "driver's side door and window were intact while driver's seat had no blood stains. And this is quite intriguing as one of Arshad's wounds was in the head suggesting his skull shattered; his hair, blood and bone pieces scattered on passenger seat, and on passenger-side roof of the vehicle--even on the rear passenger seat."

The FFT pointed out reasons that forced Arshad Sharif to leave Pakistan including registration of about a dozen FIRs. It also expressed the possibility Arshad was compelled to leave Dubai.

The FFT noted that Arshad's host Waqar, a contractor of the US Embassy in Nairobi, was connected with Kenyan National Intelligence Service (NIS) and international intelligence agencies and police.

The investigation team probed the setting

up of an army-style training center and employing a US national as trainer there. It said that Waqar was also known to Pakistani politicians and a senior ISI official in Islamabad; and when he was asked for CCTV footage of Arshad's residence, he made it conditional with the nod of the official of the spy agency.

The report said that "the fact that he handed over personal cell phone and iPad of Arshad Sharif to an NIS officer rather than police, establishes his links with the NIS. His linkage with national and

international agencies provides a scope of possibility of transnational characters in this case."

Likewise, it also raised doubts on the conduct of Waqar's brother Khurram who was driving the ill-fated Land Cruiser. The report said that "narration presented by Khurram, who was driving the vehicle on the sequence of crime scenes, is contrary to logic and facts."

"Waqar claims that he called Tariq Wasi, who facilitated Arshad Sharif's arrival in Kenya, to inform him about the journalist's death while he was driving from Ammodump camp to Oletepesi farm, essentially within the first thirty minutes of the incident. And it was during this time when Salman Iqbal called Waqar to get confirmation of Arshad Sharif's death. However, Salman Iqbal claims he did not speak to Waqar till three to four hours after the incident. Whereas the team has come to know that Salman Iqbal had contacted senior army leadership to apprise them of the fact that Arshad Sharif has been killed within an hour of the incident. It is not immediately clear why Salman Iqbal created this discrepancy over timeline," the report said.

The FFT recommended registration of the case with the Counter Terrorism Wing of the FIA under sections of the Pakistan Penal Code and the Anti Terrorism Act.



Pakistan-IMF talks in limbo

PDL a major bone of contention; Pak foreign currency reserves declining; country needs \$110 billion in next four years; PDM, PTI need to ink Charter of Economy



By Mehtab Haider

Pakistan and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) talks were literally in limbo as both sides so far remained unable to strike a broader agreement on a revised macroeconomic/fiscal framework for the current financial year 2022-23.

It resulted in a lingering stalemate for signing staff level agreement---a pre-requisite for moving requests from the Staff before the IMF's Executive Board, for considering approval of the 9th review and release of \$1 billion tranche under the \$7 billion Extended Fund Facility (EFF).

The first and foremost critical question arises why the staff-level agreement could not be signed between the two sides despite hectic efforts. There is a need to ascertain reasons as it would be required to rectify for moving towards resolution of existing limbo.

In the post-flood scenario, the government revised macroeconomic targets as the real Gross Domestic Product (GDP) was adjusted downward from 5 percent to 2 percent while CPI-based inflation was jacked up from 12 percent

to 23 to 25 percent on average for the current fiscal year. So, in totality, the nominal growth went up to 25 to 27 percent thus all subsequent targets, especially the fiscal framework needs to be revised. Now with nominal growth of 25 percent, the tax-to-GDP ratio was bound to decline if the FBR achieves its annual tax collection target of Rs 7.47 trillion targets.

The Federal Board of Revenue (FBR) has fetched Rs 2.688 trillion in revenue collection during the first five months (July-November) period of the current fiscal year 2022-23. The FBR will have to collect Rs 965 billion during the current month (December 2022) for materializing its monthly target. It will be really challenging for the FBR to achieve the first half (July-Dec) target in the wake of compressed imports.

On the fiscal front, differences persisted on achieving the non-tax revenue collection target for the current fiscal year. The Petroleum Development Levy is among the major bones of contention. With decreased POL prices in the international market, the government will be able to slap maximum Rs.

50 per liter levy on diesel as it had already imposed a maximum PDL on MS petrol.

On the external front, Pakistan required \$33 billion, of which \$23 billion was debt repayment and \$10 billion was the Current Account Deficit (CAD) for the current fiscal year.

Out of outstanding \$23 billion debt repayments, \$6 billion has been paid and \$4 billion bilateral debt has been rolled over, leaving \$13 billion still to take care of.

Of this, \$8.3 billion are the government or government-related commercial loans that the government expects to roll over, \$3.5 billion are multilateral loans and \$1.1 billion are commercial foreign bank loans.

According to the SBP's forecast, the requirement hovers around \$34-38 billion in inflows at the start of FY2023. In the first 5 months of FY2023, only \$4 billion could be materialized.

Pakistan's foreign currency reserves are declining. On the back of receiving \$1.5

billion from the ADB and \$500 million from AIIB, the foreign currency reserves held by SBP were \$7.9 billion last week. After paying the \$1.1 billion Sukuk installment and some other loans, the country ended the week on 2nd Dec 2022 at \$6.7 billion, good for 4.5 weeks of imports.

Commercial bank reserves are \$5.9 billion. The SBP hopes to re-lent \$1.2 billion that it has recently repaid foreign banks. It hopes to get a \$3 billion fresh cash injection from Saudi Arabia. Forecasting FX reserves on hopes reflects the nation's economic fragility.

Pakistani authorities claimed that they achieved agreed targets by the end of September 2022, so the IMF should move ahead with the completion of the pending 9th review. However, the IMF argues that a key purpose of program reviews in Pakistan, as in all program countries, is to evaluate both program performance to date, as well as, forward-looking, whether the program is on track or policy measures are needed to meet program targets, advance reform objectives, and maintain macroeconomic stability going forward.

Discussions with the authorities in these areas are ongoing, especially as not all end-September quantitative targets have been met, and added that "significant new developments have taken place since the last program review including the extraordinary floods and a number of new measures and developments, which affect this year's economic outlook.

The IMF made it crystal clear it required not only fulfillment of end-quarter performance criteria and quotative targets but both sides would require broader agreement on forward-looking data on basis of which the performance targets and indicative targets for the remaining program period till June 2023.

In the meanwhile, there were rampant rumors spreading through social media platforms about the imposition of a financial emergency in Pakistan.

The Ministry of Finance ruled out any such emergency, saying creation and spreading of such false messages were against the national interest in these times of economic hardship.

A mere reading of the nine points mentioned in the message indicates how far-fetched those suggestions are. It is also quite inappropriate to equate Pakistan with Sri Lanka, given the inherent strength and diversity in Pakistan's economy.

Pakistan did not have any other option but to convince the IMF to revive the EFF program because without the IMF fold, Islamabad could not secure its required external inflows of \$33 billion from all multilateral and bilateral partners.

On a short-term basis, Pakistan's economic managers have requested the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia to provide a \$3 billion additional deposit and \$1.2 billion for the procurement of oil and urea.



The KSA had already extended \$4.2 billion out of which a \$3 billion deposit was rolled over in early December 2022, probably for one year. The existing oil facility of \$1.2 billion has been underutilization by \$100 million on monthly basis. With the additional facility of \$4.2 billion, the total package will be increased to \$8.4 billion" said one top official.

Pakistani authorities were confident the financial package from the friendly country would be materialized; and that the minister for finance will engage IMF from a position of strength instead of concluding the 9th review from a position of weakness.

The total liquid foreign reserves held by the country stood at \$ 12.58 billion as of 2 Dec 2022. The break-up of the foreign reserves position shows that the foreign reserves held by the State Bank of Pakistan stood at

\$6.7 billion and net foreign reserves held by commercial banks hovered at \$5.86 billion.

During the week ended on 2-Dec-2022, SBP reserves decreased by US\$ 784 million to \$ 6.7 billion. This decline is on account of the payment of \$ 1 billion against maturing Pakistan International Sukuk and some other external debt repayments.

Some of the debt repayments were offset by inflows, mainly \$ 500 million received from Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB).

Pakistan requires \$110 billion within four years period including FY23, FY24, FY25, and FY26. Now at a time when the ruling Pakistan Democratic Movement (PDM)

and the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) should sit together for finalizing the dissolution of National and Provincial Assemblies and holding of next general elections, there is a dire need to sign the Charter of Economy for steering the economy out of crisis mode.

Whoever wins the next general elections, the incoming ruling party will have to strive hard to devise a roadmap for generating non-debt-creating dollar inflows as much as possible by boosting exports and remittances.

However, Pakistan will have to seek another IMF program as well because generating such a mammoth dollar inflow will be simply impossible without the backing and support of the IMF through another program after the expiry of the existing one in June 2023.

YouTube Announces Top 10 Creators of 2022 in Pakistan

The Top 10 Pakistani Creators of 2022 have been revealed by YouTube. YouTube is showcasing the biggest creators from around the world as 2022 draws to a close. Along with sharing global statistics, they also listed the most prolific creators in each continent and nation.

The year 2022 was a huge success for Pakistan, particularly for the fortunate ten creators who worked hard and achieved their goals.

The top creators stand out among the lists that YouTube has shared, despite the fact that it has also shared lists of the top music videos, trending videos, breakout creators, and top shorts in the nation.

Pakistani YouTubers have recently become more well-known.

From creating unique and interesting YouTube videos to vlogging to promote educational content. Vloggers from Pakistan attracted a sizable following.

The use of digital platforms in our daily lives is influenced by all of these Pakistani influencers. Pakistani YouTubers have recently become more well-known.

Many people in Pakistan launch a YouTube channel. On this platform, however, the leaders are those who show perseverance and passion by being consistent and persistent.

For the year 2022, YouTube has released lists of the most popular trending videos, music videos, creators, breakout creators, and shorts in Pakistan. It is safe to say that a variety of content kept Pakistani audiences engaged throughout the entire year.

Here is the list of Top 10 Content Creators of 2022 in Pakistan:

1. Maaz Safder World
2. Ducky Bhai
3. Ijaz Ansari Food Secrets
4. Salman Noman
5. BaBa Food RRC
6. Shaz Safder World
7. Sistrology
8. Zulqarnain Sikander
9. Mr HOW
10. Naya Pakistan





YouTube



Pakistan flirts with the default-like situation

With the current size of \$6.71 billion reserves with the SBP, barely equal to five weeks of imports, Pakistan is unable to allow a free hand to market forces to play with the foreign exchange sale and purchase. This is also evident from the current dollar-rupee exchange rate of 224 rupees in inter-bank trading which has been fluctuating around this level for the past four weeks.

By Javed Mahmood

The financial condition of Pakistan is deteriorating while symptoms of default are deepening day by day. The foremost sign of default is that the State Bank of Pakistan and domestic commercial banks are not opening Letters of Credit (LCs) to import raw materials that are used in manufacturing medicines. Despite repeated requests from pharma companies, neither the banks nor the government has any decision to allow the import of medicines and raw materials. Resultantly, pharma companies are forewarning the general public about the shortage of medicines in Pakistan soon.

Another major sign of default is that the government was supposed to pay back about 30 billion dollars worth of foreign loans. As Pakistan has no foreign exchange, there is no possibility of repayment of 30 billion dollars in external loans. Thus, taking advantage of the United Nations' recommendation, Pakistan is seeking to reschedule a 27 billion dollar loan in the backdrop of devastating floods. For Pakistan, the catastrophic rains and floods have proved a blessing in disguise as the country has been allowed to reschedule foreign loans without going through much hassle.

Similarly, different curbs and limitations are being imposed on the foreign exchange companies to regulate the purchase of US dollars and other foreign currencies in the wake of four-year low foreign exchange reserves of the central bank _ at \$6.71 billion by Dec 2, 2022, barely equal to five weeks of imports. The central bank's reserves have fallen from \$8 billion to this level after the repayment of Sukuk bonds and other foreign loans. In the open market, the SBP has linked the purchase of two dollars with the opening of a foreign currency bank account _ a regulatory measure that is being seen as a tactic to discourage easy availability of the forex in this critical time.



With the current size of \$6.71 billion reserves with the SBP, Pakistan is unable to allow a free hand to market forces to play with the foreign exchange sale and purchase. This is also evident from the current dollar-rupee exchange rate of 224 rupees in inter-bank trading which has been fluctuating around this level for the past four weeks. It indicates an undeclared understanding between the SBP/government and the banks to maintain this exchange rate to avoid a further hike in the value of the dollar. When Senator Ishaq Dar announced that he would bring the value of the dollar to below 200 rupees, the bankers, exporters, and other key stakeholders opposed this idea saying that it was not possible in the prevailing situation.

For instance, domestic commercial banks hold around 5.8 billion dollars worth of foreign exchange and if the value of the dollar is thrown below 200 rupees, from the existing 224 rupees in the inter-bank, the banks will out-rightly lose around 139 billion rupees in the shape of decline in dollar-rupee parity. Exporters too raised a hue and cry and they said that amid the record inflation, they would suffer losses and would not be in a position to compete in the international market. Thus, it appears that the government and the banks have

determined to keep the dollar-rupee exchange rate around 224 rupees. When Ishaq Dar returned to Pakistan, at that time in the interbank the exchange rate of the dollar to a rupee was fluctuating around 240 rupees while in the open market, the US dollar was trading at 250 rupees.

Meanwhile, many containers loaded with essential consumer items such as onions, tomatoes, soybean, etc., are stuck up at the Karachi port just because the banks are not providing dollars to the importers. Though the amount of foreign exchange required for the clearance of these containers is not too high, the government is trying to save foreign exchange with meager SBP reserves of \$6.71 billion dollars.

Also, the State Bank of Pakistan did not release the \$226 million payable amount of different airlines causing a stir at the domestic and international levels. Non-payment of the overdue amount of airlines is a clear signal that the Pakistan government is running out of dollars and essential payments, including airlines, are being delayed. Another important issue is that the government is unable to buy oil and gas in adequate quantities to avoid load shedding in this winter season. Pakistan's government is negotiating with Russia to buy oil

and gas at a lower than markets rate, but two to three months' time is still needed as both sides neither could decide the price of crude oil, petrol, diesel, and gas not signed any deal which could lead to the immediate supply of fuel.

Energy Sector Circular Debt

Again the issue of circular debt is resurfacing as the key oil and gas stakeholders are talking about the increase in the quantum of circular debt to around one trillion rupees, including 610 billion rupees of Pakistan State Oil (PSO) alone. The power generation companies and distribution entities are also experiencing a circular debt of half a trillion rupees. If this growing energy sector's vicious cycle of debt is not controlled, all the key stakeholders, including consumers will be facing an unprecedented load-shedding, and possible shortage of oil and gas, leading to chaos in the country.

Rumours of Default

From the day the PTI government has been ousted through a no-confidence move, PTI leaders, including Imran Khan are raising a hue and cry claiming that Pakistan has gone defaulted. Before the start of Dec 2022, the opponents of the coalition government further intensified their campaign over the default of Pakistan in repayment of foreign loans especially Sukuk Bonds, which created a panic in the



economic circle, and soon the default became a talk of the town. The government, nonetheless, paid back the Sukuk bonds worth \$1 billion on Dec 2, three days ahead of its maturity date of Dec 5, to give a shut-up call to those who were either talking about default or wanted Pakistan to default in its external repayments. Additionally, the government had also paid back the due commercial loans by the first week of Dec – resultantly, the foreign exchange reserves of the State Bank of Pakistan have fallen to \$6.71 billion from \$7.8 billion a month ago. Now the government is trying to arrange more than four billion dollars from Saudi Arabia, China, and other friendly countries with the aim to meet its obligation of foreign loans repayment on time.

\$4 billion urgent Saudi Assistance

As the International Monetary Fund appears in no hurry to release one billion dollars under the ninth review, the government has made an urgent appeal to the Saudi government to release \$3 billion in cash, a supply of oil, and fertilizers worth about one billion dollars. This option is being tried to avoid any delay in repayment of foreign loans, to improve foreign exchange reserves as IMF is using delaying tactics to disburse the next tranche, and to put an end to default speculations in the country and abroad.

A few days ago, the finance minister has openly criticized the IMF for delaying the disbursement of about one billion dollars in spite of the fact that Pakistan has fulfilled most of the IMF requirements for the ninth review despite devastating floods. Ishaq Dar said that the IMF must have considered the impact of catastrophic floods and released the funds in Oct/Nov, but this did not happen and the Fund's people are looking for details of the programme. IMF officials believe that the government had not completed the targets included in the programme to qualify for the release of the next tranche.

To sum up, getting loans from Saudi Arabia, China, UAE, and other friendly countries is temporary troubleshooting to fulfill financial obligations, including repayment of foreign loans. The coalition government must pursue a long-term strategy to put an end risk of default and ensure the financial survival of Pakistan for a long time.



Russian Crude Price Cap & Pakistan's Anticipated Discount Deal

Western allies don't want Russia to stop selling oil, its main export

By Zahra Sikandar

The month of December began with apparently good news for Pakistan, as Russia agreed to supply 100,000 barrels of oil per day. The procurement rate and related modalities, especially in light of a \$60 per barrel price cap on Russian crude and a EU ban on its seaborne supplies effective since December 2005, remain to be finalized by the two governments until next month.

Aside from the implications for Russia and the global oil market, Pakistan is concerned about the economic feasibility and political implications of this agreement, given the country's shrinking gas reserves, dwindling foreign exchange reserves, and an energy mix that is supported by imported oil and gas to the tune of 48 percent. Any international event that causes an interruption in oil supply is bound to raise the already high domestic fuel price.

While the Minister for Petroleum, Musadik Malik, remarked that his talks were "more productive than expected," Moscow is gripped by intensifying global export curbs over its invasion of Ukraine. In the aftermath of the price cap and ban, the Russian president considers reducing Moscow's share of oil production on the global market, asserting that the country will not sell oil to any country that imposes a price cap on its oil exports.

Price implications for Russia

Russia is one of the world's most significant oil exporting nations, representing up to 15 percent of global production. The ban covers more than two-thirds of Russian oil imports coming into the EU, according to European Council President Charles Michel. While the EU's oil embargo also applies to EU operators that insure and finance ships carrying Russian crude oil around the world, it does not apply to Russian oil imports coming into the bloc through pipelines.



This means Western allies don't want Russia to stop selling oil, its main export, as doing so would put a big dent in the global supply and drive prices up at a time of already soaring global inflation. It would also affect countries such as China, India, and Turkey, the key buyers of Russian crude. Instead, the United States and its allies have negotiated a plan aimed at reducing the revenue that Russia earns from each barrel that it ships.

In this way, the price cap is more of a restriction on shipping and insurance companies. The U.S. Treasury secretary, Janet L. Yellen, has described the plan as a price cap, but it's nearly impossible to manipulate the price of a global commodity such as oil. Instead, the plan relies heavily on European dominance of the maritime insurance industry, a web of companies that provide coverage for ships and their cargo, liability for potential spills, and reinsurance, a form of secondary insurance used to defray the risk of losses. Most of the major shipping companies and insurers are based in one of these seven countries. The plan prohibits those companies from handling Russian crude unless the shipment has been sold at or below the

price set by the Group of 7. If it is not, they will be held liable for violating sanctions.

Moreover, the price set at \$60 per barrel is higher than some of Ukraine's closest allies had wanted, such as pro-Ukraine Poland, which wanted to see the Kremlin lose much more revenue from its oil sales. With Russia's oil production costs estimated at \$20 per barrel and the benchmark for the price of Russian oil having traded at between \$60 and \$100 per barrel in the past three years, the agreed-upon price still allows Moscow to reap substantial profits.

The price at which Russian crude will be feasible for Pakistan

Oil and energy make up the largest portion of Pakistan's import bill. While many experts believe it would be difficult for Pakistan to make payments for the oil, given global restrictions, The key concern with the procurement of Russian crude is the freight costs. According to the Oil and Gas Regulatory Authority, Pakistan's annual oil consumption is 19.92 million metric tons. And currently, the country

mainly imports crude oil from the UAE (56%), Saudi Arabia (34%), and Kuwait (4%), according to the Trade Development Authority of Pakistan. Getting a shipment from Russia involves much longer distances compared to the United Arab Emirates (UAE) or Saudi Arabia.

As per letters written by Pakistan Refinery Limited (PRL) in June, for crude oil imported from the Middle East, shipping prices range from \$1 to \$1.50 per barrel, whereas freight prices from Russia's Kozmino port to Karachi are \$8.00 per barrel. According to a Pakistani government official familiar with the negotiations, who spoke on the condition of anonymity, Pakistan can purchase up to 4.3 million metric tons of oil from Russia at discounted rates beginning next year. Given the government's gas shortage, the petroleum minister stated that supplies would have to increase by 8% to 10% per year in order to maintain a 5% to 6% GDP growth rate.

As the South Asian economy is facing a balance of payment crisis with foreign reserves as low as \$7.5 billion and a widening current account deficit as of the end of November, James M. Dorsey, a senior fellow at the S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies in Singapore, said that in the absence of a pipeline connecting Pakistan with Russia, the oil will have to be sent by ship, which consequently will entail higher logistical and insurance costs. However, an anonymous Pakistani official, conceding to the argument that shipping costs for oil imported from Russia will be

high, claimed that the discounts will easily cover the expense.

Apart from shipping costs, experts also had reservations about the quality of Russian crude and the resources required to refine it, stating that certain varieties of Russian oil would lead to faster degradation of machinery in oil refineries. The government official pushed back on this too, saying that "most of the oil Pakistan plans to import from Russia will already be refined." When Pakistan, like other Asian countries, started considering importing discounted oil from Russia, it requested information from local refineries on whether it would be technically and financially feasible. In a June letter written by the Ministry of Energy, the managing directors of four refineries were asked to conduct a detailed analysis and submit recommendations based on their analysis around the parameters of technical suitability, quantity and grade, transport, payment methodology, and existing agreements for oil. The short answer, based on the responses from the refineries, is that although some blends of Russian oil can be processed, it would lead to higher degradation of machinery.

The energy experts in the oil industry categorize oil based on three major factors: viscosity, volatility, and toxicity. Viscosity describes how easily oil flows. Higher-viscosity oils require more power and effort to pump from the ground since they do not flow as readily. Volatility indicates how rapidly and easily oil evaporates. In order to prevent oil loss during extraction,

higher-volatility oils require additional operations to regulate their surroundings. Toxicity refers to how dangerous and poisonous the oil is to the environment as it is being extracted and refined.

In this way, each type of oil provides a particular set of advantages and disadvantages, based on which the private and public sectors establish their refineries. Russia has a long list of blends ranging from heavy to light. Most domestic refineries are configured for the off-take of lighter Arabian oil blends, and therefore lighter Russian crudes would be most suitable.

Political Implications of the Russian Crude Purchase

Earlier, before the Minister for Petroleum's visit to Moscow, Finance Minister Ishaq Dar, in his address to the party workers in Dubai last month, had indicated that Pakistan overcame the United States' opposition to the purchase of Russian oil on the pretext that India was doing the same and stressed that Islamabad intended to enter into the fuel import deal with Moscow on terms similar to those agreed by New Delhi. To dispel any notion of possible sanctions, Dar quoted US officials as saying that "they are forming a G-7 platform that will determine the price of buying oil from Russia and that no one should buy oil from Russia at a higher price."

It's important to consider that the global oil market is dominated by the decisions of oil giants, and any regulations could make bargains for oil-dependent third world developing countries less favourable, but with Pakistan having financial dealings with Saudi Arabia, China, and the United Arab Emirates and being a recipient of IMF loans and structural adjustment programs, a single factor may not provide a sufficient rubric for the speculation of sanctions against Pakistan. Besides, the resurgence of militancy in Afghanistan retains Pakistan as a strong contender for any strategic and political move that may take shape in the region.

The foremost priority for the government vis-à-vis any oil deal, however, should be about providing relief to the people with the availability of clean and affordable energy.



What we need to grow

The first challenge facing Munir is the chaos in Afghanistan following the Taliban takeover in August 2021

By Miftah Ismail

In recent columns, I have written about the control of elites over Pakistan's polity, the ineffectiveness of our governments and our pursuing the wrong model of import substitution, which results in boom-and-bust cycles.

Since our elite already control most of our resources, they aren't interested in economic growth or increasing the size of the pie. Their preoccupation is with maintaining their lion's share of the pie.

Our governments' ineffectiveness serves our elite well as it stops any social mobility, and preserves the status quo. Finally, the import substitution policy ensures that monopoly profits flow to the already well-off.

The only way to escape this poverty trap is to come up with a new 'elite bargain' that sues for growth and development. How can such a compact for prosperity be achieved is an important question that I leave aside for now. Today, I want to briefly describe what I consider to be six essential pillars for a development compact.

If our government were to carry out just one task, I'd want it to be population control, my first pillar for development. No amount of resources we put in education or health will ever be enough unless we control our runaway population growth.

Our population is growing at more than twice the rates of India and Bangladesh and three times the rate of Sri Lanka. Pakistan will forever be mired in poverty and illiteracy unless we bring down our population growth.

The only way to escape the poverty trap is to come up with a new 'elite bargain'.

In the 1950s, an American economist Charles Tiebout came up with the concept of citizens 'voting with their feet', and moving away from jurisdictions that do not provide services well or tax too much. He argued that because of this competition, cities and states would provide better services to citizens.



In America, states are sometimes referred to as 'laboratories of democracy' that experiment with different ideas until the successful ones are adopted widely. In America, power and responsibilities are not just devolved to its 50 states but to counties (loosely, what we call divisions — they typically provide many services) and cities (which are typically much smaller, and have many devolved responsibilities).

States and cities also must raise most of their own revenues. This way, the US has implemented the most effective federalism, where spending and taxation decisions are made by the same jurisdiction. This federalism is partially responsible for America's incredible economic success.

When Deng Xiaoping liberalised China's economy, he didn't just use the central bureaucracy in Beijing but also asked local government officials in four regions to establish Special Economic Zones.

One of the four zones, at Shenzhen, was very successful and within five years, inspired by Shenzhen, there were 35 zones across China, which went on to become the engines of Chinese exports, and growth. Even today, it is the best-performing regional officials who are promoted to be the highest Chinese Communist Party and government officials.

The Chinese economic miracle is in no small part due to the drive and zeal of the local officials who are competing against each other.

Our four large provinces do not provide any competition but if we had our nation's 38 divisions and more than 100 districts also competing with each other, we would definitely get better, more responsive governments.

Even while keeping provincial boundaries intact, we just need to ensure that each division has an elected commissioner and each district has an elected mayor and they are entrusted with significant devolved powers and responsibilities.

Moreover, of the divisible pool money that is given to sub-national governments, 60 per cent should go to districts and 20pc each to divisions and provinces, thus making districts the hub of metropolitan services.

Empowered local governments with responsibilities for health, education, policing, zoning, etc and raising revenues is my second pillar for growth. We should have many competing jurisdictions that make governments responsive and effective.

My third pillar is to live within our means and reduce the fiscal deficit to less than our growth rate.

The most efficient way to reduce the deficit is to restrict public sector development projects to major interprovincial projects, restrict the growth of current expenditures, including defence, to less than inflation, and most importantly, reduce payments to sub-national jurisdictions from the current 57.5pc to about 40pc of the divisible pool over five years. Of course, sub-national jurisdictions should be allowed to raise their own revenues to make up for the loss of federal transfers.

Financing of our fiscal deficits leads to crowding out of private investments and borrowing from foreigners. The former is obviously not desirable and the latter results in current account deficits, which, as we are finding out, are not sustainable.

We must therefore opt for fiscal and exchange rate policies that lead to a balanced current account.

My fourth pillar is an adaptation of policies for export promotion as opposed to import substitution. Our exports are low because of three main reasons: one, we don't provide continuous energy at reasonable rates; two, our country is not perceived as safe to visit by foreign buyers; and three, our companies prefer selling to a protected domestic market.

The solutions for the first two reasons are obvious for at least 20 years but are still awaiting implementation. A solution for



the third reason is to impose additional tax on companies that don't export even a small fraction of their sales and reduce custom duties that protect domestic manufacturers. These steps, plus export-processing zones set up by competing divisions, will give a fillip to exports.

My fifth pillar is improving agricultural productivity and yields. We call ourselves an agricultural country and yet most years we import wheat, cotton, edible oil, lentils, chickpeas, garlic, ginger, and many other farm products totalling \$8 billion. Our farm yields for most crops are considerably lower

not just compared to China but also India, which has similar conditions.

Since our population is increasing by more than five million people annually, our shortage of food will only increase unless we enhance our farm yields. This will also raise farm income and alleviate rural poverty.

My sixth pillar is education, which deserves a column on its own.

The writer is a former finance minister.

Courtesy Dawn




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China-Pakistan Relations: Unfolding Domestic and International Dynamics

Pakistan's ephemeral political dynamics will also play an important role in relations between the two countries over the next five years

By Dr. Raza Khan

The relations between China and Pakistan have always been described as taller than the mighty Himalayas, deeper than the Indian Ocean, and even sweeter than those between brothers. Leaders of both China and Pakistan have also described the ties between the two countries as "all-weather friendships." These are quite substantial claims. However, relations between and among states are determined in the final analysis by respective national interests, or, in other words, by rationality rather than emotion. So, any analysis of China-Pakistan relations must be done in terms of what is best for each country.

The seeds of brilliant relations between China and Pakistan were sown when Pakistan promptly extended diplomatic recognition to the People's Republic of China (PRC) in 1949, when the latter came into existence, and that at a time when most other regional countries and great powers bluntly refused to recognize the communist regime. Formal diplomatic relations between the two states were established in 1951. In the following decades, Islamabad served as a bridge between Maoist China and the capitalist United States in the 1960s and 1970s. A new era of extensive economic cooperation between Beijing and Islamabad commenced in 2013 with the commencement of the multi-billion-dollar China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC). Nonetheless, there were cracks in China-Pakistan relations when now-deposed Prime Minister Imran Khan (18 August 2018–09 April 2022) began revisiting contracts for CPEC with Chinese companies signed by his predecessor Nawaz Sharif and his Pakistan Muslim League government (May 2013–May 2018) shortly after taking office. According to the PM Khan administration, CPEC contracts awarded to Chinese firms harmed Pakistan's interests. As a result,



during PM Khan's tenure, government work on \$62 billion CPEC projects slowed, much to the chagrin of China and her companies. However, when Prime Minister Khan visited China in February last year, there was some mending of relations, particularly in the aftermath of the Afghan Taliban's return to power in Afghanistan, which was preceded by the complete withdrawal of US forces after 20 years in Afghanistan.

Significant changes are currently taking place on both the international and domestic fronts in both China and Pakistan, which are having and will continue to have a profound impact on bilateral relations between Beijing and Islamabad over the next five years. The important international developments include increasing economic and strategic rivalry between the United States and China, Russia's battering in its war with West-supported Ukraine, the withdrawal of US forces from Afghanistan, and the slowing down of global economic activity. The key changes in the domestic arena include dwindling GDP growth in China with President Xi getting another term as the country's

head, unprecedented inflation and stagflation in Pakistan, and a profound political crisis in the latter. In the context of these developments, a two-part article series is being published in which China-Pakistan ties are forecasted over the next five to 15 years. This is the first article in the series.

The current China-Pakistan relations have improved from what they were during the rule of Prime Minister Imran Khan, or say, a couple of years ago. Diplomatic sources, journalists covering diplomatic affairs in Islamabad, and senior Pakistan officials are mostly of the view that relations between the two sides at the moment could best be described as "cold." This is despite the fact that the PML-N presently heads the ruling coalition in Pakistan, and Shahbaz Sharif is the prime minister, who, as a long-time chief minister of the Punjab province, which is also a PML-N political forte, has cultivated deep ties with China. So, it's safe to say that Pakistan's relationship with China is "cold," or at least "relatively cold." The main reason for this is that Pakistan's 13-party ruling

coalition is very weak, with only a one-vote majority in the National Assembly, and that ousted PM Khan, riding a wave of popularity that has never been seen before, has been going after the government and demanding new elections right away.

Importantly, China's relations with Pakistan have become chilly because of Chinese companies' complaints about non-payment of their dues and their threats to stop work on their CPEC-related projects. These businesses are involved in power projects as well as highway and highway construction. However, Pakistani officials have their own complaints regarding some Chinese companies. Attacks on Chinese officials and workers in Pakistan are also a key concern for China in its relations with Pakistan. Nevertheless, there are so many compatibilities of interests between China and Pakistan that they cannot afford to keep their relations even relatively cold. Several factors will play a role and interact to shape China-Pakistan relations over the next five years. These factors include CPEC, Afghanistan, and bilateral trade, among others.

According to reports, the CPEC would be the focal point of bilateral relations at least until the route by which China wishes to connect its western part, including the restive Xinjiang region, to the Indian Ocean via a rail and road network crisscrossing Pakistan and stretching over 2000 kilometers is completed, which includes ten power projects totaling more than 5000 megawatts and a \$9.6 billion high-voltage direct current (HVDC) transmission line. On the other hand, a total of 31 projects worth around \$9.3 billion were in progress. More noticeably, 36 projects worth \$28.4 billion were in the planning stages.

China considers Pakistan's support against India crucial. Despite claims to the contrary, Beijing does have strategic motivations regarding Gwadar Port, whose development and operations have been leased out to Beijing for 40 years. The seaport sits in a very strategic location between the Arabian Sea and the Indian Ocean. In the long run, China would like to have a strategic presence in Gwadar. This would not only ensure uninterrupted oil supplies to China from the Middle East markets through the CPEC route in Pakistan but could also be used to place a

blockade with the Pakistan Navy on Indian oil supplies from the Middle East. Pakistan's military-strategic support from China is critical in containing archrival India. The rivalry between China and India is important in Pakistan's strategic calculations for maintaining a power balance in South Asia.

Prima facie, China and India could not improve their relations due to longstanding territorial disputes, particularly in the Tibet region, and because of India's increasingly close defense relations with Beijing's strategic competitor, the United States. However, for Pakistani strategists, who have a deep-rooted belief that China may never abandon Pakistan, there are important



reasons for Beijing and New Delhi to improve their bilateral relations while putting their territorial disputes on the backburner. Firstly, China and India have a huge bilateral trade of around \$US 103, forcing them not to let their ties be held hostage by their longstanding territorial issues. Secondly, for India, relations with the U.S. may be important, but India is such a big power that Washington may not compel it to become a pawn for checkmating China. It is also important to understand that, apart from economic interest in putting their strategic and territorial disputes on the back burner, China and India also have a common threat in the region to fight, and that is Muslim extremist groups. While India has been faced with a longstanding separatist insurgency from

Kashmiri Mujhideen groups in its only Muslim-dominated region, Kashmir, China has also been facing a separatist insurgency in its own only Muslim-dominated region, Xinjiang. Although India has verbally condemned Chinese "atrocities" against its Uyghur Muslim population in Xinjiang, it has refrained from enabling international bodies to take action or debate the issue. For instance, in October last year, India abstained from voting on the Western countries' sponsored motion at the United Nations Human Rights Council (UNHRC) to hold a debate on the human rights situation in Xinjiang. Importantly, it was India's abstention and Pakistan's vote in favor of China in the UNHRC's 48-member council that enabled Beijing to escape a

possibly critical debate, as the vote came with 17 countries in favor, 19 against, and 11 abstentions.

Because Pakistan wielded enormous power over the Afghan Taliban, Islamabad, at the request of China, persuaded the Taliban to protect key Chinese interests in Afghanistan. These Chinese interests include denying Chinese Islamist separatist groups like ETIM safe havens, which the Taliban did provide during their first tenure in power (1996–2001); and obtaining contracts for lucrative construction and mineral extraction deals for Chinese firms and companies. As Pakistan arguably has lost a big deal of its influence on the Taliban and the latter have expressed their willingness to treat Pakistan's archrival India at par with Islamabad and China, Beijing and



Islamabad may come up with a new strategy to outmaneuver each other. In this regard, the extension of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) to Afghanistan, which both Beijing and Islamabad have offered to the Afghan government of Ashraf Ghani, who refused to allow it due to U.S. and Indian influence and is still desirous of extending it to Afghanistan, would be an important move. Importantly, the Afghan Taliban have also welcomed the extension of CPEC to Afghanistan. Thus, the extension of CPEC to Afghanistan would be a key factor in future China-Pakistan relations.

In the short run, the most important factor that would determine the direction of relations between China and Pakistan is the huge Chinese debt that Pakistan has

contracted in the last decade and its repayment. Pakistan owes China nearly \$30 billion, or 23 percent of its total external debt of \$131 billion. For all practical reasons, there is no way to write off or curtail the outstanding debt amount. The only option for Pakistan is to request a rollover or rescheduling of the debt installment payment. After the early November visit of PM Shahbaz, Pakistan Finance Minister Ishaq Dar said that during the prime minister's visit, China promised to roll over \$4 billion in sovereign loans, refinance \$3.3 billion in commercial bank loans, and increase currency swaps by about \$1.45 billion. The total worked out at \$8.75 billion. Pakistan is seeking a fresh Chinese loan so as to make the repayment of the bilateral debt that is coming up during the fiscal years 2022–23. This

situation has pushed Pakistan into a perfect debt trap. The repayment of existing debts and the contracting of new Chinese loans will be critical factors in Beijing-Islamabad relations over the next five years.

The growing trade between China and Pakistan has been an important element of their bilateral relations. Noticeably, during the 2020–2021 fiscal year, bilateral trade remained around US \$17 billion. The point of concern for Pakistan is that her exports made up a mere \$2.3 billion of the bilateral trade, leaving it with a very unfavorable balance of trade with China. Pakistani economists and business leaders have been critical of this situation. So this situation cannot last for long, keeping in mind Pakistan's worst economic situation.

Defense cooperation is another very vital area of cooperation in China-Pakistan relations. It is one area where Pakistan has become increasingly dependent on Beijing. This can be gauged from the fact that, from 2010 and 2019, China remained the main supplier of defense equipment to Pakistan. Reportedly, in this period China supplied 70 percent of Pakistan's arms imports, worth more than \$5 billion. Reportedly, between 2017 and 2021, a whopping 47 percent of China's total global arms exports went to Pakistan.

Pakistan's ephemeral political dynamics will also play an important role in relations between the two countries over the next five years.



Pakistan Assured of \$13b support from China and Saudi Arabia

In 2019, the Khan-led PTI government reached an agreement with the IMF on the bailout package



By Mubeen Ashraf

The public discourse about Pakistan's fledgling economy is dominated by protests against hyperinflation and speculations about sovereign default. Rentier tendencies, ever-expanding import bills, meagre exports, endemic corruption, and the high informality of the economy have pushed the country to the verge of default. Successive governments have relied on makeshift arrangements to address the structural problems of the economy, including trade imbalances, mounting debts, and a low tax-net base, subsequently leading to the Balance of Payments (BOP) crisis.

In 2019, the Khan-led PTI government reached an agreement with the IMF on the bailout package. As per the agreement, the IMF pledged \$6 billion in financial assistance over a period of three years. The infamous macroeconomic stabilization program emphasized fiscal discipline, import bill reductions, a market-determined currency exchange rate, and the privatization of aging and less profitable State-Owned Enterprises (SOPs).

Since the ouster of Imran Khan, Pakistan Democratic Alliance's (PDM) economic czar, Miftah Ismail, has taken hard, although corrective measures, to secure the impending IMF tranche worth \$1.1 billion. It was the fruit of the concerted efforts of all key stakeholders that the IMF agreed to

extend the bailout program for another year. The earlier lender withheld the financial assistance, citing the non-compliance of the PTI government with the agreed framework.

Amid the devastation caused by the floods and brewing financial troubles, uninterrupted dollar inflows from creditors are the only way to mitigate the fears of a sovereign default. Because geopolitics and geoeconomics are inextricably linked, an attempt has been made here to unearth the political and economic imperatives that influenced Pakistan's choice of foreign creditors. Knowing that the United States is one of the largest cumulative contributors to the IMF, Pakistan relied heavily on China, Saudi Arabia, and Qatar for financial inflows but not the US.

There are various reasons for that, but mainly it is because Pakistan and Saudi Arabia have always enjoyed warmer relations and a strategic partnership that is manifested by multi-fold diplomatic engagement in the social, political, economic, and military realms. Moreover, religious affinity is a positive driving force for the ascending trajectory of engagement. However, at times, interesting events tested the endurance of fraternal relations between the two countries.

Pakistan was heavily cash-starved when

Khan was sworn in as Prime Minister. Therefore, Pakistan tapped into the investment opportunities outlined in Vision 2030 as Saudi Arabia was diversifying its economic opportunities. The lender agreed to deposit \$3 billion for a period of one year as balance of payment support and a one-year deferred payment facility for the import of oil, up to \$3 billion.

Following India's unilateral revocation of Articles 370 and 35-A in order to deprive Kashmir of its special status, Pakistan put pressure on Saudi Arabia to convene an Organization of Islamic Countries (OIC) session on the issue. However, the kingdom denounced such calls, rather demanding the repayment of a \$1 billion loan. The bilateral trade volume between Saudi Arabia and India during the fiscal year 2019–20 stood at \$14.06 billion. Voluminous trade compelled the kingdom to act differently, thus raising concerns about the future of Pak-Saudi relations. Afterward, defense cooperation and military diplomacy cleared the air, and bilateral relations took a fresh start.

During the ongoing economic crisis, plenty of guesswork projected that Pakistan would not be able to repay its \$1 billion in bonds, taking into account the scarcity of its foreign exchange reserves. However, due to the confidence based on Saudi's financial commitments worth \$4.2 billion, Pakistan



averted the near-term default and made the repayments.

Pakistan and China enjoy an all-weather strategic partnership with a focus on regional connectivity. Pivoting its case on the dictums of geo-economics, Pakistan was the first country to join the Chinese flagship project, the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). The China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), which is a part of BRI, has entered its second phase, with a focus on creating special economic zones and revamping the agricultural sector. Since the signing of the bilateral free trade agreement (FTA), there has been an upsurge in Pakistani exports.

China has remained steadfast in assisting Pakistan economically when the latter was facing strong headwinds. To forestall the looming threat of a sovereign default, China recently promised to roll over \$4 billion in sovereign loans, refinance \$3.3 billion in commercial bank loans, and increase currency swaps by about \$1.45 billion.

Pakistan has unpaid dues worth \$10.7 billion pertaining to Paris Club countries. As per estimates of the International Monetary Fund (IMF), Pakistan's total non-Paris Club bilateral debt currently stands at about USD 27 billion, of which Chinese debt is about \$23 billion. Ballooning Chinese debt and skyrocketing projections of credit default swaps (CDS) have alarmed Chinese lenders. Furthermore, US-China rivalry and terrorist attacks on Chinese officials have complicated the conduct of Sino-Pak

bilateral relations. Accounting for the aforementioned reasons, Chinese lenders are getting more apprehensive day by day.

In the Pak-US loan case, it is evident that bilateral relations have remained transactional and security-centric with a focus on Afghanistan. The United States had relied on the notion of political expediency and pressed Pakistan to do more. Therefore, there is a dire need to redefine bilateral relations in an all-encompassing and holistic fashion with a focus on trade, commerce, and cultural exchanges.

Also, financial inflows from the US largely came under the heading of the Coalition Support Fund, which was a reimbursement to Pakistan for expenses already incurred in

the War on Terror. A quasi-US-Indian strategic partnership to keep a check on the Chinese rise, blaming Pakistan for the defeat in Afghanistan, and the recent episode of the diplomatic cable have inculcated distrust in the US-Pak relationship.

There is no doubt that the recent floods have wreaked havoc on Pakistan's mainland, causing colossal economic and social losses. On humanitarian and moral grounds, the US must have upscaled the financial assistance; however, the US pledged only \$97 million to Pakistan, while recovery estimates stand at \$40 billion.

Pakistan has remained dependent on China and Saudi Arabia as its principal creditors because of geographical proximity, alignment of national interests, and religious affinity. On the contrary, US-Pak relations have experienced a bumpy ride, with frequent highs and lows. The unsteady nature of relations and incoherent regional outlooks have compelled the US to curtail its role as a potential creditor to Pakistan.

As per the realist school of thought in international politics, states always act in pursuit of their national interests. So, Pakistan must remain wary of the ongoing shifts and power transitions in global politics and refrain from putting all its eggs in one basket. Pakistan must project its soft power to build confidence vis-à-vis creditors and diversify its economic base, with a focus on establishing manufacturing units of high-value goods.



New Heights of Sino-Saudi Relations; Sleepless America

Beijing's foreign ministry has described Xi's trip as the "largest-scale diplomatic activity between China and the Arab world" since the People's Republic of China was founded.

By Zahiruddin

The warm reception and standing ovation accorded to Chinese President Xi Jinping in Riyadh during his visit to the oil-rich country Saudi Arabia must have sent an embarrassing and appalling message to the United States, making it uneasy beyond description. Muhammad Bin Salman, the Crown Prince, termed the visit of Xi's a "pioneering trip" and expressed high sentiments about the relations between the two countries, which registered new heights in the history of the two countries since the establishment of diplomatic relations between them in 1990.

Beijing's foreign ministry has described Xi's trip as the "largest-scale diplomatic activity between China and the Arab world" since the People's Republic of China was founded. It was really a big activity for Xi to attend the summits of the six-member Gulf Cooperation Council and a broader China-Arab leaders' meeting. Xi expressed his resolve to import large quantities of oil from Gulf Arab countries and expand imports of liquefied natural gas. The assertion of the Chinese President to make full use of the Shanghai Petroleum and National Gas Exchange as a platform to carry out Yuan settlement of oil and gas trade as a part of Beijing's effort to use its yuan currency in trade instead of the U.S. dollar is of seismic importance for Washington. During the visit, Xi made it abundantly clear without any fear that he wanted the yuan to be a working currency in the Gulf market and smash the hegemony of the dollar.

Top oil exporter Saudi Arabia and economic giant China both sent strong messages during Xi's visit on "non-interference" at a time when Riyadh's relationship with Washington has been tested over human rights, energy policy, and Russia. China's growing influence in the Gulf has unnerved

the United States. Deepening economic ties were touted during Xi's visit, where he was greeted with pomp and ceremony and on Friday met with Gulf states and attended a wider summit with leaders of Arab League countries. At the start of talks, Prince Mohammed heralded a "historic new phase of relations with China," a sharp contrast with the awkward US-Saudi meetings five months ago when President Joe Biden attended a smaller Arab summit in Riyadh, which remained a low-key affair. The international media is presenting a "compare and contrast" of the US president's visits to Riyadh and Xi's recent visit. The media has opined that Beijing just rushed to exploit the strained relations between Riyadh and Washington, and Xi realized it successfully. The media has also juxtaposed the visits of the heads of the two arch rival parties to Saudi Arabia and elaborated on the "cold shoulder" given to Joe Biden in Riyadh as he was received by the Governor of Makkah. In stark contrast, Xi was lavishly welcomed at Al Yamama Palace and met the ailing King Salman, demonstrating the high regard in which he was held by his royal hosts.

After the establishment of diplomatic relations in 1990, the two countries went on coming closer to each other, which took a great leap during the 2000s. In January 2006, King Abdullah visited China and concluded five major agreements with China, cementing relations in the coming days. Three months later that year, in April, Hu Jintao reciprocated the visit of the Saudi King by visiting his country, where he was accorded a warm welcome, and it was a rare occasion that he addressed the local council. In recent years, relations have risen to a new high following Saudi Crown Prince Muhammad bin Salman's visit to China in 2019, during which the two countries agreed to support their respective

strategic plans: China's One Belt, One Road (OBOR) and Saudi Arabia's Vision 2030.

In fact, the young Crown Prince is making all-out efforts to diversify the economy of his kingdom by making it less dependent on oil, which is one of the three cornerstones of his "Vision 2030," and he finds China an ideal market to achieve this ambitious pursuit. During the visit, agreements worth about \$30 billion were signed, which is really a big boost in the economic relations of the two countries, although it promised much more than that in the times to come. The energy minister of the kingdom, Prince Abdul Aziz bin Salman, said that Riyadh would remain a trusted energy partner for Beijing.

The White House was quick to rebuke the development in Riyadh, which hastened to comment that Beijing's objectives were not conducive to preserving the international rules-based order. It also warned of the influence that China is trying to spread around the world.

"It's certainly not a surprise that President Xi is traveling around," John Kirby, spokesperson for the White House National Security Council, told reporters at the end of Xi's visit. "We are mindful of the influence that China is trying to grow around the world."

The State Department, however, was more elaborate. "We are not asking countries to choose between the United States and the People's Republic of China," said the department's spokesperson, Ned Price, when asked to comment on the visit.

Perhaps the "China Card" will be used as a lever in the politics of the U.S. during the coming elections due to its growing influence in the oil-rich Arab world to the exclusion of America.

China's Military and Security Development 2022

China developing strong nuclear strike options to deter a 'strong enemy'; PLA enhancing its capacity to carryout military operations deep into Indo-Pacific region; Beijing might keep developing tools to hit satellites in orbit

By Mahnur Mehfuz

The People's Republic of China supports peaceful development of cross-strait ties and projects its own rise as a peaceful nation, pushes for the country's peaceful reunification and upholds ideals of 'one country, two systems.' To put itself in a 'leading position' vis-à-vis long-lasting competition between systems, Beijing's strategy entails deliberate and steadfast efforts to gather, enhance and harness the internal and external elements of national power.

China used a variety of diplomatic techniques in 2021 to try and weaken the influence of the United States and its allies, including prompting U.S. withdrawal from Afghanistan and criticizing U.S.-backed security alliances like Quad (Australia, India, Japan and the United States) and the Australia-UK-US partnership. By enabling higher defense budgets, China's economic growth aids in modernizing its armed forces. Additionally, China gains systemic military advantages from its expanding national industrial and technological base as well as party-led programs like Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and Made in China 2025.

China started prioritizing public health, digital infrastructure and green energy endeavors in 2021, and significantly increased its engagement with nations in Africa, Latin America and the Middle East. China's MCF (Military-Civil Fusion) development strategy entails six interconnected initiatives: 1) combining China's defense industrial base with its civilian technology and industrial base; 2) integrating and leveraging science and technology innovations across military and civilian sectors; 3) developing talent and fusing military and civilian expertise and knowledge; 4) incorporating military requirements into civilian infrastructure and using civilian construction for military purposes and 5) fostering innovation in both the military and civilian sectors.

To operate as a joint force that is capable of



conducting all types of land, air and maritime operations as well as nuclear, space, counter-space, electronic warfare (EW) and cyberspace operations, the People's Liberation Army seeks to modernize its capabilities and improve its proficiencies across all warfare domains. China's ability to 'fight-and-win wars' against a 'powerful enemy' (likely to be the United States), thwart a third party's intervention in a conflict on China's perimeter and projecting power globally, continues to be improved by the PLA's expanding concepts and capabilities.

The COVID-19 epidemic remained another impetus for China's foreign policy initiatives in 2021. Beijing seized the chance to use COVID-19 as a propaganda weapon against the West starting in 2020 and continuing through 2021. It also sought to disassociate itself from the global pandemic causes and tried to yield profit from its domestic success in containing the virus and offering healthcare equipment (vaccines and masks). Despite an impressive performance of the Asian democracies, particularly Taiwan, Chinese officials continue to claim that China's political model is superior and has enabled the country to successfully combat the virus. Chinese officials continued to implement their Zero-COVID strategy in 2021, which aims to completely eradicate the virus through closed borders and strict domestic regulations.

With a battle force of some 340 ships and submarines, including roughly 125 main surface combatants, the Chinese navy is numerically the largest in the world. Majority of the People's Liberation Army Navy's fleet as of 2021 consists of contemporary multi-mission ships and submarines. China's strategic land-based nuclear and conventional missile units, accompanying support troops and missile bases are organized, manned, trained and outfitted by the People's Liberation Army Rocket Force. To improve its capacity for strategic deterrence, the PLARF is moving forward with its long-term modernization plans. To centralize the PLA's strategic space, cyberspace, electronic, information, communications and psychological warfare tasks and capabilities, the SSF (Strategic Support Force) was founded as a theatre command-level organization.

The Network Systems Department of the SSF is in-charge of information warfare, which encompasses electronic warfare, psychological warfare, technical reconnaissance and cyberspace warfare. The PLA is actively developing these capabilities to give China options to discourage, deter or, if required, defeat 'external intervention' in the Indo-Pacific region, given the current tensions in the region. Additionally, the PLA is enhancing its capacity to carryout military operations deep into the Indo-Pacific region--in some cases the entire world. The PLA is expanding its space surveil-

lance capabilities which can track objects in space within their field of view and enable counter-space actions as well as acquiring and developing a variety of counter-space capabilities and related technologies, such as kinetic-kill missiles, ground-based lasers and orbiting space robots.

China, the second-largest military spender in the world, announced in 2021 that its annual military budget would rise by 6.8 percent, continuing more than 20 years of annual increases in defense spending. China's actual spending on military-related items is almost certainly much higher than what is stated in its published military budget, as it leaves out several significant

term. Beijing has committed significant financial and technological resources to develop all facets of the country's space enterprise, from military to civil space applications like profit-generating launches, human spaceflight, scientific endeavors, as well as lunar and Martian exploration missions.

The PLA anticipates that space will play a significant role in upcoming conflicts by enabling long-range precision strikes and by preventing other militaries from using the overhead command, control, communications, computers, intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance (C4ISR) systems. Space has been recognized as a separate

active-duty forces for national defense, with additional duties including preserving social order or providing assistance in case of a national emergency. China will increase and diversify its nuclear capabilities over the ensuing ten years. The country is probably planning to create new nuclear warheads and delivery systems that at very least match the potency, dependability, and/or durability of some of the systems now being created by the US, and/or Russia.

The PLA aims to have a diverse nuclear force made up of ICBMs with multi-megaton yields as well as lower-yield precision strike missiles. China is likely developing strong nuclear strike options to provide deterrence primarily against a 'strong enemy,' as well as to ensure Beijing can inflict unacceptable damage with both proportionate and overwhelming retaliatory capabilities, denying an adversary victory if the war escalates to the nuclear domain.

China contributed personnel to the UN peacekeeping operations in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, South Sudan and Mali in 2021. The PLA probably participates in peacekeeping operations in Africa to develop operational expertise and demonstrate political commitment to the region. China has strengthened ties with long-standing allies like Russia and Pakistan over the past five years, while also stepping up its engagement with the U.S. allies and partners like the Philippines, Djibouti and Thailand. The PLA has access to foreign military tactics, operational doctrine and training techniques as a result of these bilateral defense engagements, which also give the PLA the chance to acquire cutting-edge weapon systems and technologies. China's defense outreach offers potential allies alternatives to American assistance.

China's diplomatic activities extend isolated regimes i.e., Iran, Syria, North Korea, Venezuela, and the Democratic Republic of the Congo alternative sources of legitimacy and support, which reduces the effectiveness of international sanctions, allows these regimes to evade U.S. efforts, and erodes commitment to U.S. goals among U.S. allies like the United Arab Emirates and Tunisia.



categories of costs. The majority of China's missile systems, including its ballistic and cruise missile systems are at par with systems made by other top-tier international manufacturers in terms of quality. Building on earlier advancements in the development of hypersonic weapons, China tested a new hypersonic weapon system in 2021. Strengthening the strategic deterrence capabilities of the PLA is another aspect of China's strategy. China defines this concept broadly, encompassing counter-space, cyber, electronic warfare and other capabilities.

Beijing views the international environment as undergoing 'profound changes unseen in a century.' The Chinese Communist Party concludes that "international strategic competition is on the rise" and expresses deep concerns at what it sees as growing sources of instability in the near

domain of warfare at least since 2015. To hinder and disable enemy space capabilities, China might keep developing tools that can be used against satellites in orbit. About 510,000 people make up the PLA Reserve Force, which is subject to Army Reserve, Navy Reserve, Air Force Reserve and Rocket Force Reserve. Official Chinese media and academic articles claim that a small number of active-duty cadres operate as the Reserve Force's permanent backbone, allowing the infusion of reserve commanders and soldiers as needed.

The establishment of the reserve force is a crucial component of national defense construction and is the fundamental and strategic project to solidify the national defense, according to the 2020 Science of Military Strategy issued by the PLA's National Defense University. The reserves' principal responsibility is to supplement

The Long-term Effects of Floods

The government's commitment to dealing with incoming challenges seems to be jeopardized by the country's political environment

By Hamza Qureshi

The effects of recent floods can be classified into three broader categories. The human and economic losses are dominant due to the scale of the catastrophe. We can see a post-flood medical emergency due to the deaths caused by diseases such as malaria and diarrhea. Another challenge that is being predicted by experts is a food shortage. The anticipated food crisis can cause a drought-like situation in Sindh and Baluchistan. Meanwhile, the government's commitment to dealing with incoming challenges seems to be jeopardized by the country's political environment.

The United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) has published its report on the post-flood situation in Pakistan. The report, issued on December 6, includes United Nations Satellite Center (UNOSAT) imagery, which shows that water still recedes in 11 districts in Sindh and 2 districts in Baluchistan.

According to the Provincial Disaster Management Authority of Sindh, over 240,000 people remain displaced in the province as of December 3, the report quotes. The number has significantly decreased from 6.5 million in early September. However, these figures don't portray the on-ground situation.

We visited different areas of the Jamshoro and Dadu districts in the first week of this month. It was evident that the government is doing little for the rehabilitation of flood victims. The majority of flood relief centers and camp cities have been wound up. Life is not back to normal for those who have returned to their areas. The living conditions get worse each day as the winter arrives and families are forced to live without any proper shelter.

A major issue that people are facing is the unavailability of health facilities. Cases of malaria, cholera, acute watery



diarrheal diseases, and dengue fever are widespread.

District Dadu is one of the 11 districts that have been badly affected by the recent floods. Kachu is a barani, or rain-fed, area of Dadu with a topographical mix of hills and desert landscapes.

Wahi Paandi is one such town in Kachu, known for its green chili crops. A senior government doctor is running his private clinic in the town. His official assignment is at Taluka's hospital, Johi. The government hospital in Johor, on the other hand, is now managed by an NGO. Locals are not satisfied with the services provided at the government facility.

The private clinic is a source of some relief for the patients. Villagers told TTI that it is no good to transport the patients to nearby governmental health centers as there are even no basic facilities available. The other option is to carry the patient to Hyderabad, but the rates are much higher. A taxi charges about fifteen thousand rupees for a one-way trip. Poor people can't afford this "luxury."

Goth Bhakkar Jamali is a remote

village in the area, located 60 kilometers from Johi. Diseases of mysterious kinds were prevalent. We saw patients of all ages and genders lying on the ground in the streets and on the verandas of wrecked houses.

A local journalist, Asif Jamali, told us that 33 deaths have occurred in the last two months due to the mysterious disease, which is endemic in the vicinity. There is no permanent governmental health facility available for the four thousand people living in this village. The government's mobile health teams visit the area to distribute medicines. These teams consist of mere health workers and are not accompanied by a medical doctor. High fever, coughing, anemia (blood shortage), and breathing problems are some common medical symptoms, as Abdul Waheed Somro, a local health worker, describes them.

With the increase in deaths being reported by the media, governmental and welfare organizations set up their camps in Wahi Paandi and adjoining villages. Dr. Abdur Rehman Siyal is a professor at Liaquat University of Medical and Health Sciences. His team has set up a small medical camp. He shared that one cannot be sure about

the kind of disease until proper laboratory tests are performed and a definitive diagnosis is made. The locally produced malaria and dengue test results are not to be relied upon. He also demanded that the authorities provide mosquito nets and conduct insecticide spraying.

Interestingly, the incumbent Sindh Government's DG Health, Dr. Jumman Bahutu, belongs to the Kachu area in Dadu District. He verified 25 deaths due to malaria. However, he tried to dilute the sensitivity by mentioning that these deaths occurred between September and November. He saw insufficient basic infrastructure as a barrier to establishing a regular health facility or organizing emergency medical camps. The unavailability of clean water, gas, and electricity are the core issues that he sees as major obstacles in building and maintaining permanent medical centers.

The local journalist community emphasizes the need for establishing field hospitals and health centers in such remote areas. The field hospitals could play an important role in mobilizing governmental and non-governmental resources to help flood-trodden areas. With the establishment of field laboratories, medical diagnosis will also become easier and more accurate.

Asif Jamali shared that hundreds of people had died during the floods in Dadu District. The situation is still calamitous, as post-flood diseases and problems are exacerbating, contrary to government claims. We met a local named Mushkil-Kusha, who had recently lost both his son and his wife. He was now left with a 2-year-old toddler who often questions his father about his mom's whereabouts. Father can

only respond with silence and tears.

Thousands of people from Jacobabad took refuge in areas of Rohri during the floods. Despite three months passing, they continue to remain stranded. Women and children are forced to live under the stars as camps are not sufficient for all students. Men are working for daily wages as low as 200 rupees. The flood victims shared that they haven't received any aid from government agencies. Welfare organizations and donors helped them during the floods, but now there is no relief operation continuing.

The OCHA report highlighted that more than 600,000 children in Pakistan have not received a single polio vaccine because of a lack of access to areas devastated by the floods. Pakistan and Afghanistan are the only two countries in the world where the polio virus persists because of a lack of access to areas devastated by the floods. Pakistan and Afghanistan are the only two countries in the world where the polio virus persists. The flood means

GDP growth in agriculture may get negative!

District Shikarpur's union council, Jahanwah, is also facing a similar situation to that of Dadu. Babil Chandio is a local laborer whose house got demolished due to stormwater. His family has lost five children as a result of flood-related diseases. As flood water remains on his lands, he cannot sow wheat crops this season. The locals strongly demanded that steps be taken on an immediate basis to draw stormwater out of agricultural land and farms.

Given the circumstances, economic experts have been warning that the agriculture sector's share in the country's GDP growth can get negative this fiscal year.

Destruction of the road network: yet to be repaired!

The provincial government has done little to restore road networks and communication in flood-affected areas. Last month, about 20 people died in an accident near Sehwan city when a bus plunged into a large open pit. The pit was a result of cuts made at the Indus Highway to drain floodwater. The road cavities have not been properly filled so far, even after three months. We saw during our visit that the incident site was filled with stones, but no metallic road has been laid.

Despite the loss of human lives, the frivolous attitude of authorities remains unaccounted for. Restoration of road networks and communications is the least that the government could do in these areas. In several areas, people are trying to self-settle, but they are impeded by the issues caused by broken roads. It is difficult to transport construction materials on such roads. Qalandar Baloch is a local businessman in Wahi Paandi. He told The Truth International that trucks carry half of their designated loads. The floods have also greatly impacted the economies of scale. Underloaded trucks mean a significant loss to farmers and transporters.

Natural disasters wreaked havoc in Pakistan, and governments did everything they could to exacerbate disasters.



Flooding punishes everyone except women mercilessly

Floods ruined everything and forced thousands of people to abandon their houses and flee to makeshift camps

By Anum Akram

The recent floods affected around 33 million people, more than 1700 of whom lost their lives, and submerged one third of the country. They are particularly impacting the poorest and most vulnerable districts. The floods have affected the south-eastern province of Sindh and neighboring Balochistan the most. Natural calamities like floods increase already existing gender disparities by adding to the suffering of the millions of women and young girls who are battling for equality every day. Women suffer most during natural calamities.

Women and children are 14 times more likely than men to be affected. When it comes to rehabilitation or relief camps, women would not be shifted because of cultural norms and the so-called "preservation of honor," which is associated with their gender; they are given the least priority, or they are directly responsible for taking care of their family. Therefore, they are the most exposed to devastation. Women who belong to backward areas are at risk because of a lack of education, poverty, and limited access to technology like mobile phones, which makes them more vulnerable.

Floods ruined everything and forced thousands of people to abandon their houses and flee to makeshift camps. The roads were the most important structures damaged by the floods. Women frequently use these roads for work, such as home-based businesses, subsistence agriculture, street vendors, and family care. So, without any transportation, they were forced to live without medical services, markets, and other facilities. Most of the women were involved in home-based small businesses such as sewing and embroidery, but they lost everything like machinery, a workplace, and other materials.

People who live in rural areas mostly depend on agriculture. Female agricultural workers are more negatively affected than male workers. Climate change has had a negative impact on agriculture, with this



year's crops being burned by high temperatures, followed by heavy monsoon rains that damaged a third of the country. Ladies generally raise animals; however, many have lost a lot of them to the floods, and what remains is frequently taken by lotteries. Ladies likewise ordinarily collect the cotton, yet the floods hit right when the yield was prepared for picking, denying a significant amount of income their families had depended on until the end of the year.

Flooding causes a variety of issues for women's reproductive health. Because the floods destroyed homes and health care facilities, pregnant women have nowhere to give birth. Their daily routines and the existence of their infants are in danger as they can't get proper maternal medical services. There are about 610,000 pregnant women among the groups most severely affected by the negative impact of climate change. Most of them were expected to deliver their babies in the next 2 or 3 months.

Mother and newborn baby both struggle to stay alive without proper care, testing

facilities, and basic nutrition. Many of them experienced severe pregnancy complications due to a lack of basic care. In this situation, malnutrition tends to rise. Floods complicate their lives by submerging their homes, and the rate of home births rises. Due to a shattered transportation system, these women were unable to get to a medical care center, resulting in miscarriages and the deaths of both mother and child. Women and girls seeking access to contraception and other reproductive health treatments are also affected by these hurdles, in addition to those giving birth to babies. If, fortunately, a child and mother survived, then they came under the spell of waterborne diseases due to their weak immune systems.

Women and girls face rising rates of gender-based violence. Women who go to collect firewood, fetch water, and collect food supplies, and those who go too far away from their camp to use the washroom, increase their exposure to violence. Because men and women often share the same bathrooms. When food and other life essentials are insecure in such a

disaster, young girls in particular are more vulnerable to violence, including sexual exploitation and forced marriages in exchange for money to buy food for the rest of the family.

Women who live in flood-prone areas have a difficult time managing their periods. In the state of homelessness, their shelter homes are mostly unhygienic and do not have proper washrooms or clean water, so they are unable to handle their periods. This cycle did not stop with the flood. Their menstrual problems were neglected due to a lack of education and social stigma. Most people associate menstruation with shame. In floods, women often stayed underwater during their periods, and they continued to wear wet clothes. Due to the lack of sanitary supplies, they often use leaves and cloth pads to manage their periods. Because of a lack of supplies, they often share this cloth. Due to their negligence, this could lead to a higher incidence of reproductive, vaginosis, and urinary tract infections.

The impact of the flood has been devastating and has left many women in the country unheard. All these disasters cause mental

health issues such as depression, anxiety, and post-traumatic stress disorder. The mental health of women has also been negatively affected by the social and cultural norms of our society. In women, the rate of post-traumatic stress disorder (PSTD) is higher because they experience so many forms of trauma, such as gender-based violence, climate disasters, harassment, and unemployment.

Floods are today's most devastating and naturally occurring natural phenomena. It affects both men and women, but women are more vulnerable to all disasters, from their physical health to their mental health and violence. The impact of natural disasters is more devastating for those living in poverty and without access to basic resources. Laws are made by men to favor men. Women suffer this discrimination in silence. Women cannot solve their problems themselves because they are weak, and we have drilled the concept of weakness into their minds since infancy. Men should understand women and keep them in important decision-making conversations.

The government should provide

gender-specific programs and funds to help them and enhance the legal status of women in agriculture for gender equality, so they can continue to support their livelihoods and educate them to fight against natural disaster.

To control cases of violence and harassment, reporting departments should be established in affected areas. Separate toilets and sanitary supplies should be provided. Given the mental health struggles of the women in the wake of the floods, it is important to support their recovery and improve their mental health. There are a variety of strategies that can help achieve this goal. Some of these strategies include providing women with access to mental health resources and educating them about mental health issues. Providing women with access to mental health resources. Many women do not know where to turn for support and may not have access to the resources they need.

It is important that we support their recovery to ensure that they have access to the resources they need to recover from their mental health struggles.



Google team visits Pakistan to open office and explore investment avenues

ISLAMABAD: Google – the world’s largest search engine and video-sharing platform, is launching its operations in Pakistan. Google has registered as a company with Pakistan’s Securities and Exchange Commission (SECP) to begin its operations in the country. The SECP has issued Google a certificate of registration under Section 435 of the Companies Act 2017.

Google Asia Pacific Pte. Ltd. has been registered under the Companies Act 2017 for opening a liaison office in Pakistan, according to documents. The global giant has already registered itself as a company in Pakistan, IT and Telecom Minister Syed Aminul Haque said.

On Dec 11, a delegation of Google reached Pakistan and held talks with the Minister for I.T and Telecom, Ameenul Haque and others. The delegation will also hold meetings with the Federal Law minister and the Chairman of Pakistan Telecommunication Authority (PTA) in connection with the beginning its operations in Pakistan. Federal Information Technology & Telecom Minister Aminul Haque said they will facilitate Google to open office in Pakistan and operate in a friendly environment. He observed that Google, Facebook, and other social media platforms are earning huge revenue from Pakistan every year and the opening of their offices in the country will definitely help them in understanding Pakistan’s culture and religious beliefs. It may be noted that Google has recently registered itself as a company in Pakistan. Earlier in September this year, Google launched Career Certificates to offer flexible learning paths for all Pakistanis.

Meanwhile, PML-N Senator Afnan Ullah said that the platform will also provide 15,000 scholarships to Pakistani citizens after starting operations in Pakistan. Senator Afnan further said the government will extend the scope of Google services in Pakistan which will as a result lead to increased job opportunities for the Pakistani youth. Also, in a bid to Unlock Pakistan’s Digital Potential, Google has launched several initiatives in Pakistan. Earlier in September, Google launched Career Certificates to offer flexible learning paths for all Pakistanis to enable learners to develop their knowledge and acquire digital skills for in-demand jobs. In June this year, Google also launched a suicide hotline for Pakistan. In a bid to tackle the rising number of suicidal cases as well as mental health issues, Google in collaboration with ‘Umang Pakistan’ launched the hotline which enabled users to get quick help at the top of the search result page as they browse anything related to suicide. Umang Pakistan Founder thanked Google for the timely partnership which reach the maximum number of people in dire need of mental health support and break the taboo around it nationwide.

Moreover, there are countless digital business opportunities for Google in Pakistan. In April, a Google delegation visited the office of the Special Technology Zones Authority – STZA in Islamabad along with leaders of Tech Valley Pakistan. The visiting delegates were briefed about Special Technology Zones



being developed by STZA across Pakistan and the special fiscal and monetary incentives, including but not limited to 10-year tax and duty holidays, and support being offered to domestic and foreign tech companies in the Special Tech Zone.

Google’s donation for flood relief

Google has donated \$500,000 for flood relief efforts in Pakistan. Google Southeast Asia Vice President Stephanie Davis posted on LinkedIn that the tech giant would donate the amount, which is equal to around Rs110 million, to the Centre for Disaster Philanthropy through Google.org “Pakistan is Google’s next big market in the region,” Google’s head of Emerging Market Development, Southeast Asia, Jana Levene told a gathering of IT experts, bloggers, businessmen and selected journalists at Pearl Continental hotel in Karachi. The gathering comes after Google’s executive chairman Eric Schmidt visited Pakistan in June to meet with the country’s politicians and businessmen. “It was just a regular visit. He wanted to find out how important the use of technology for the country’s leadership and businessmen is,” said Badar Khushnood, Google’s consultant in Pakistan.

Moreover, Google has intensified its operations by getting involved in a lot of projects – especially with the Punjab government – in the country recently. “Innovation Punjab” is one example where Google has partnered with Punjab Information Technology Board. It has launched a social innovation fund – in collaboration with Pakistan Software Houses association, also their partner for the event – to support young entrepreneurs struggling to get their ideas public. Google’s increased interest in the country, Schmidt’s visit of Pakistan and now this event sends very strong signals to the country – the giant may consider opening an office in Pakistan. Google’s representatives attributed Pakistan’s growing importance to multiple factors.

“To enter a market, the first thing we look at is its demographics – number of internet users in that country,” Jana Levene said, explaining why Google is interested in Pakistan. “Twenty-two million internet users is a huge number. It’s more than Australia’s whole population. That’s why we are here,” she said. The second thing Google is interested in, Levene said, is the size of the market. “Pakistan is a \$400 to \$500 million market for Google,” she said. – TTI Desk Report/Javed Mahmood.

کرپشن کے خلاف آواز اٹھائیں اپنا قومی فرض نبھائیں



اینٹی
کرپشن ڈے
9 دسمبر

کرپشن ملک و قوم کیلئے ایک زہر کی طرح ہے جس کا خاتمہ ہماری، اخلاقی اور قومی ذمہ داری ہے، حکومت بلوچستان ملک سے کرپشن کو مٹانے کیلئے پرعزم ہے آئیں مل کر کرپشن کے خلاف آواز اٹھائیں، اس ناسور کو پھیلنے سے روکیں تاکہ پاکستان خوب ترقی کرے۔

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FIFA 2022: It has got more and more interesting

Qatar is the first Arab country to host a FIFA World Cup



By Ali Abdullah

The first FIFA World Cup for men's national football teams was held in 1930. It lasted from July 13 to July 30, 1930, in Uruguay.

Thirteen teams competed in the tournament. Only a few European teams chose to participate due to the difficulty of traveling to South America in the context of the Great Depression. Four groups were made; the table toppers were to qualify for the semi-finals. Argentina, Uruguay, the United States, and Yugoslavia won their respective groups to qualify for the semi-finals. In the final, hosts and pre-tournament favorites Uruguay defeated Argentina 4-2 in front of 68,346 people to become the first nation to win the World Cup.

Fast forward to 2022, when the FIFA World Cup is happening in Qatar. Qatar is the first Arab country to host a FIFA World Cup. The tournament is in its final stages now.

The Netherlands became the first team to qualify for the quarterfinal stage courtesy of a 3-1 win against the USA at the Khalifa International Stadium. Next up for the Dutch were the favorites, Argentina, who saw off Australia 2-1 after Lionel Messi sparkled on his 1000th career appearance.

The Netherlands had met Argentina nine times, winning four, losing one, and drawing four. Five of those happened in the World Cup: a 4-0 win for the Dutch at the second group stage in 1974 was followed by a 3-1 win for the Argentine's in 1978 final. The Dutch won 2-1 in the 1998 quarter-finals prior to two goalless draws in the 2006 group stage and in their most recent encounter in the 2014 semi-finals, only for the Argentines to win 4-3 on penalties this time.

Nahuel Molina scored for Argentina after 35 minutes, and Lionel Messi doubled the lead via a penalty in the 73rd minute. Substitute Wout Weghorst then scored two goals before the end of the second half, forcing the match to enter extra time and ultimately a penalty shoot-out.

The match had a total of 18 yellow cards, breaking the record of 16 that was set in another Dutch knockout defeat in the 2006 round of 16 against Portugal. The decisions by the referee Antonio Mateu Lahoz received criticism, as fans and media considered a yellow card to be too lenient for some incidents, while a potential handball by Messi was overlooked. Mateu Lahoz's use of yellow cards has also been criticized.

The match was also marred by the death of American sports-writer Grant Wahl, who collapsed near the end of the match while watching in the press box.

France beat Poland 3-1 to seal their spot in the quarterfinals, and then later on the same day England put three past Senegal to set up a showdown with the defending world champions. England had met France 31 times, winning 17, drawing 5, and losing 9. Two of these took place during the World Cup, with England winning both times: 2-0 in the 1966 group stage and 3-1 during the 1982 first group stage. They most recently met in a friendly in June 2017, with France winning 3-2.

Aurélien Tchouaméni opened the scoring with a shot from outside the penalty area in the first half. Early in the second half, Tchouaméni fouled Bukayo Saka in the penalty box. Harry Kane converted the penalty against his club teammate

Hugo Lloris, who earned his 143rd cap this evening. It brought Kane even with Wayne Rooney as England's all-time top scorer with 53 goals. Olivier Giroud, who entered the match as France's all-time top scorer, scored his 53rd international goal as well 12 minutes from time. Six minutes later, Kane had the chance to become the outright top scorer for England with another penalty but missed it. France's passage to the semi-finals, along with Croatia's, whom they defeated in the 2018 final, marked the first time that both teams from the most recent World Cup final qualified to the last four of the subsequent tournament since Argentina and West Germany in 1990. France also became the first reigning world champions to reach the World Cup semi-finals since Brazil in 1998, whom they would beat in the final.

In the first of the games on Monday, Croatia won a dramatic penalty shoot-out against Japan. They faced pre-tournament favorites Brazil after they hammered South Korea 4-1 on Monday evening. Croatia had met Brazil four times, losing three and drawing one. Two of these took place in the World Cup group stages, with Brazil winning both times, 1-0 in 2006 and 3-1 in 2014.

Neymar opened the scoring just before halftime of extra time, but a defensive lapse cost Brazil their lead as Bruno Petkovi equalized three minutes from the final whistle with Croatia's only shot on target of the game. In the shoot-out, Croatia scored all four of its penalties, while Brazil's first kicker, Rodrygo, had his saved by Dominik Livakovi, and Marquinhos' miss sealed their elimination. Croatia are into their second successive World Cup semi-finals and the third time ever, while Brazil exited the tournament at the hands of European teams for the fifth consecutive time after their 2002 World Cup final triumph against Germany.

Morocco became the seventh team to qualify for the quarterfinals when they sensationally beat Spain on penalties in the early match on Tuesday. They faced Portugal, which thrashed Switzerland 6-1 in the final last-16 match of the knockout stages. Morocco had met Portugal twice, having won and lost once each. Both took place in the World Cup group stages, with Morocco winning 3-1 in 1986 and Portugal prevailing 1-0 in 2018.

Youssef En-Nesyri put Morocco in the lead, prompting Portugal to sub on Cristiano Ronaldo, thus equaling the record for most international caps set by Bader Al-Mutawa. However, Morocco clung on, becoming the first African and first Arab country to reach the World Cup semi-finals.



Cricket at Home

The pitch curators were heavily criticized because fans could not see any competition between bat and ball

The historic series between England and Pakistan kicked off at Rawalpindi. Right from day 1, this test was quite weird. Over 1200 runs were scored collectively in the first innings. The pitch curators were heavily criticized because fans could not see any competition between bat and ball.

After England smashed 657 in the first innings, Pakistan replied with 579. The track at Rawalpindi was a heaven for the batsmen. We saw seven individual hundreds during the first innings for both sides. It was the first time in Test cricket history that both teams had a 200-plus opening stand in the first innings.

England also set the record for scoring the most runs on the first day of a test match. These records proved that the track at Rawalpindi Cricket Ground was quite awkward and perhaps not good for the game at all.

When everyone thought that this game was not result-oriented, England decided to prove everyone wrong. After dismissing Pakistan for 579, they batted with a run rate of 7.37 in the second innings, scoring 264 runs in just 35.5 overs. England made a brave decision to declare the innings, knowing that Pakistan had nearly four sessions to chase 344, which is quite doable in modern cricket.

England made it clear that they were not afraid of defeat; they just wanted a result out of this game. Pakistan began the chase with positive intent. At one stage, they were 176/4 and well in control of the chase. After the dismissal of Mohammad Rizwan in the second innings, Pakistan lost the plot of this chase.

In the final session of Day 5, Ollie Robinson got rid of Agha Salman and Azhar Ali to end Pakistan's hopes of winning this test. In the final session, Pakistan needed 86 runs to win, but the reverse swing of Ollie Robinson was too much to handle for Pakistan.

Naseem Shah and Zahid Mehmood tried to survive and perhaps save Pakistan from the defeat. James Anderson ended the 21-ball stay of Zahid Mehmood and took England even closer to victory. Soon after, the ninth wicket also fell. Naseem and Ali's last wicket partnership was 50+ deliveries, which frustrated England. Bad light was soon coming into play, but Jack Leach trapped Naseem Shah LBW, and England were the deserving winners of the first test at Rawalpindi.

It was indeed the brave decision of Ben Stokes and the England team to declare in the second inning and go toward a result. Pakistan could have chased this, but England showed their bravery, and fortune indeed favored the brave. This Test began as a boring one, as there was not much competition between bat and ball, but England's new approach to red-ball cricket once again brought life to this Test, and this will indeed be remembered as a monumental performance by England at Rawalpindi.

The second test started on December 9 in Multan. England had the upper hand as they won the last test match on a dead pitch. Changes were expected in the game from both sides. Abrar Ahmed was



one of the changes expected as Haris Rauf was ruled out of the series because of an injury. He earned his place in the team after performing well in the domestic season.

Abrar Ahmed has previously been with the T20 squad. He was picked for the seven-match series against England. However, he did not get a chance to play in the playing XI in any of the 7 games.

Abrar's chances are quite bright now as Pakistan have axed Yasir Shah from the squad due to his poor performance lately in red-ball cricket, so there was a chance that Abrar would play in this series. England batters have trouble when good spinners come at them, and Abrar has the ability to make things hard for the English batters.

As expected, Abrar Ahmed did not disappoint the selectors and fans. His debut was no less than a dream debut. England batted first after winning the toss. They started the innings confidently, but then Abrar came into attack and crushed England's hopes of getting a big total in the first innings. Abrar showcased his talent with the ball and took 7 wickets. The wicket was a spinning one. England was all out on 281. Abrar took seven wickets, with Zahid Mehmood taking three. Unfortunately, Pakistan's batting line-up flopped except for skipper Babar Azam. He scored 75 runs. They could only make 202 runs.

In the second innings, England scored 275 runs and gave up a target of 355. Abrar took four wickets in the second innings. He took a total of 11 wickets in the match. Pakistan had a decent start, but after the first wicket of Muhammad Rizwan, Pakistani batters could not save their wickets and lost the Multan test as well. After 22 years, England won the test series against Pakistan in Pakistan. Before this series, England had just won two test matches.

Now there is no chance for Pakistan to qualify for the final of the World Test Championship. This is the second series Pakistan has lost at home in 2022.

By Ali Abdullah

A Conversation with Sarah Khan

By Kaukab Jahan

Sarah Khan needs no introduction when it comes to Pakistani television drama. She has quickly established herself as one of Pakistan's top slot actors. Sarah began her career with the drama serial Badi Aapa ten years ago and is now the preferred choice of every producer and director in the entertainment industry. Her current play Wabaal on Hum TV is capturing the audience's attention due to its unique theme.

The Truth International Khan talked in detail about many aspects of her professional and personal life as an actor.

You portray an adverse kind of character in your recent drama serial, Wabaal. What enticed you to take on this role?

I had two choices after my last serial, Laapata. I chose Wabaal because it was a different script from what I have done before. It is the story of a greedy yet irresponsible girl, which I found very interesting. As Anum is a materialistic and emotional girl, these kinds of people often, with their lack of understanding of things, act in a way that makes people think negatively or that they are evil. I think there would be mixed reviews; some would suggest her as a villain, while others might find her an immature girl.

Many of your roles fall into the gray category, which seems at odds with your actual personality. Is it just a coincidence, or do you opt for them purposely?

I think an actor should choose roles that are in contrast with his or her actual self. When I do the roles that are more suited to my personality, though they are much easier for me to perform, it doesn't give me inner satisfaction. Like in Wabaal, my role as a girl who, to fulfill her greed, can go to any length, was a challenge for me.

Your style and appearance in Wabaal are quite different from your previous ones. Was it specifically for the serial?



Yes! It was deliberately done to make Anum like what was explained in the script. Anum, who actually belongs to a lower income class, is ready to do whatever she thinks will make her look like her friends from the upper class. I have observed that short hair is very popular among girls of the lower middle class to look fashionable, so I also cut my hair for the character. I also took care about the dressing of Anum, which must be according to the character.

Many drama critics observe that there is a lot of violence against women being shown in Pakistani dramas. Do you agree?

I am against showing violence. Irrespective of gender, violence in any form should not be promoted. On the other hand, in a drama or film, things are presented in exaggerated ways. Yes, we need to change our stories, which should not show women being beaten or kept in suppression, divorce, polygamy, or even item numbers just for the sake of it. There must be logic to these things in a story.

What about working on a feature film?

Why not? I think every actor wants to do a film and appear on the big screen. I am waiting for an offer that really appeals to me. Furthermore, there are some boundaries that I cannot cross. This is also a reason why I have not done any films yet, but when I find a film in which I can work within my boundaries, I will definitely go for it.

Do you have a specific story or character in mind for the big screen?

I am looking forward to working on an intense love story in which the hero and heroine meet, fall in love, part ways, and then meet again. It would be a very typical film story.

Any actor you want to collaborate with?

There is nothing specific. Actually, I enjoy working with new talent, for which I am often criticized, but I think newcomers are very enthusiastic and work really hard, while actors like us who have been in the field for the last 10 years or more are very used to their routine work. Newcomers are very passionate about everything, which drives energy in others on the set as well.

Women in our society (particularly those in the entertainment industry) are frequently trolled on social media. How do you cope with it?

I think it happens everywhere in the world where the showbiz industry exists. Even women who do not work in the entertainment industry are chastised for their attire and demeanor, but actors, who are constantly in the public eye, are openly trolling. It's part of the job these days, but sometimes people react so harshly that it hits you personally. But at the same time, I realize that if I post something on my social media, then I will have to accept that people are free to comment on it.

After 'Pawri Hori Hai', another Pakistani trend "Mera dil yeh Pukare aja" enters India

There are people who go viral for a reason, and then there are people who go viral for no reason at all

By Pavan Manzoor

Ayesha, aka Manoo, went viral on social media earlier this month after one of her dance videos from a friend's wedding went viral. TikTok, a young model, was praised for her moves on the late Lata Mangeshkar's classic, "Mera Dil Ye Pukare Aja." Ayesha rose to fame overnight after her performance of "Mera Dil Ye Pukare Aja" went viral online.

Early in 2021, Dananeer Mobeen started the "Pawri Hori Hai" trend (meme), which caught the attention of a number of international celebrities. Similar to this, Pakistani TikTok Ayesha's dance video has been trending on social media for a while.

Ayesha revealed that the decision to perform the particular song was made at the last minute and was inspired by her best friend's wedding. She explained to the host, "I was supposed to dance to another song, but my friend the bride asked me to perform on this song instead." Although she had heard the song before, the girl also admitted that it was an impromptu performance. "It was my best friend's wedding, so I had to perform, and since the song was her wish and there was no one else to join me, I just went ahead alone and did whatever I could on the spot," she said.

In addition to receiving praise on social media, the dancer also received praise for her elegant attire and fluid dance moves from the show's celebrity guests.

Ayesha, who claimed to be a model and frequently took part in photo shoots, also revealed that since the dance clip went viral, her Instagram and TikTok followers have been increasing at a rapid rate.

Numerous local celebrities soon jumped on board, including the well-known Pakistani actor Humaima Malick, and shared their opinions of the craze. India is now experiencing the trend as well.

The trend was joined by a large number of Indian social media influencers and celebri-

ties, including Madhuri Dixit, Katrina Kaif, Rubina Dilaik, and others.

The internet has been swept up by Pakistani TikTok's performance of "Mera Dil Ye Pukare Aja," which has gone viral. In fact, a Tanzanian duo has revived the trend, in addition to Pakistanis and Indians.

After a Pakistani TikTok named Ayesha's rendition of the song went viral on social media, the remix of the late Lata Mangeshkar song became an internet hit.

Internet users were enamoured with the Tanzanian influencers' performances to the point where they thought it was better than Ayesha's.

Nida Yasir is accused of spreading obscenity on her show.

Pakistan has gone through a period of "morning shows" and the controversies that have followed them over the past ten or so years.

The same wedding news and beauty tips were recycled on every major television network's morning show.

The trend has been changing, though, as many of these programs have been cancelled.

The majority of the current crop of morning shows are conversational and concentrate on the news. But one morning program that has persisted is Nida Yasir's Good Morning Pakistan on ARY Digital. People still like to watch her show, and they think it's very timely.

Why is the hashtag "Nida Stop Obscenity" trending on Twitter? Nida Yasir, a Pakistani host, is currently trending across all of Twitter in that country. Some fans may be perplexed to see the hashtag here, but there's a good reason for it. Let's investigate this further, then!

Nida Yasir is one of Pakistan's best-known



hosts. It is difficult to maintain any position for an extended period of time in a career.

Nida Yasir has encountered challenges on numerous occasions as a result of criticism she received for a variety of interviews and statements. With the hashtag #NidaStopObscenity, Nida Yasir is currently trending on Twitter once more.

Ayesha Mano recently gained popularity after her dance on the song Dil Ye Pukare Aja went viral. She was invited to appear on Nida Yasir's show, which had a wedding preparation theme. Her appearance on the show received a lot of flak after her viral video.

The hashtag #NidaStopObscenity is currently trending on Twitter as a result of internet users' outrage over Nida's decision to mention her on her show.

While completely ignoring the true talent in the country, people are criticizing the practice of relying on viral sensations.

Imran Aslam: in memoriam

By Ghazi Salahuddin

Every time you go away from Pakistan, there is this opportunity to take pause and leave the sorrows of your country behind. This was present to both of our daughters when we, my wife and I, were retrieved for a European tour of nearly three weeks. The idea was to cheer us up and get our nuclear family together one more time in these twilight days of their parents.

A grand plan, in fact, was hatched by our elder daughter Sheherbano who lives in southern California and her husband when they suddenly realized that they had not taken their parents to the magical realms of Andalusia, the south of Spain. This was where we spent a memorable week, with the base camp set in our younger daughter's home in northern Italy.

And just when we were feeling energized by our happy travels and getting ready to fly back to Pakistan, there was this news that left me in a state of shock and disbelief. Early on Friday morning, four hours behind Pakistan in time, our daughter Aliya woke me up to break the news that Imran Aslam had passed away.

It took some time for me to begin to sort out my feelings – and memories – about an exceptional human being with whom I had shared a very crucial period in my career and life. Imran Aslam, to be sure, was a man of many talents and there are bound to be so many exclusive appraisals of the contributions he made to journalism and performing arts and, in a broad context, the cultivation of civilized values.

However, as I said, I wish to largely invoke the truly revolutionary experience of launching a national English newspaper thirty long years ago. Yes, it is this newspaper – The News – that I am talking about, and I find it a bit strange that I am writing about Imran Aslam in a newspaper that we both had worked together in conceiving, designing and launching – a newspaper that marked, at that time, a remarkable technological advance in Pakistan's journalism.

The first issue of The News was published, from Karachi, Lahore and Islamabad simultaneously, on February 11, 1991. But the days that are etched in my memory are the ones when we were putting together a dream

team of mostly bright, young journalists. Imran Aslam, as the news editor, was the chief architect of that operation. He always had a way of inspiring young people and exploring their true potential.

As the editor of the Karachi edition, I had selected Fareshteh, who was then a sports reporter, as the first person to be taken on board. I had asked her: "Fareshteh, are you lucky?". This was my way of jokingly praying for an auspicious beginning. I believe Fareshteh was also lucky because she and Imran Aslam found each other in the offices of The News. Now it is a tough task for us to condole with her.



In the weeks before the actual launch of The News there was a buzz around about the grandeur of our offices, with every workstation equipped with an Apple desktop, state-of-the-art at that time. They had not seen anything like it. This was a tribute to Mir Shakil-ur-Rahman's vision – something that later bloomed in the launching of Geo television, of which Imran Aslam was president.

Among the distinguished visitors to the offices of The News was Benazir Bhutto, whom Imran Aslam and I had known from before. I have many photographs of that day, reflecting the excitement her presence had generated. Altaf Hussain, before he ran away from Pakistan, arrived rather surreptitiously late one night and I was called from home to receive him. There were so many more I would not name.

I honestly believe that a proper study is required of how the dream team that launched The News was built. One

measure of it would be to list the top media professionals who are respected for their credibility and professionalism and see how many of them had begun their career with The News. I am not naming names because there are so many, and I may not remember all of them.

This is a somewhat personal remembrance of a person who excelled in different fields. I am also not attempting a biographical sketch. There is bound to be an extensive coverage of the death of a media practitioner who stood out for his intellectual and humane qualities. The media scene has changed, is changing, but we do not find any Imran Aslams rising out of this assorted gang of loudmouths. The few who are worthy of some respect do not reach that level of erudition and maturity.

I have an abiding interest in books and am pleased to report that Imran Aslam was an avid reader and would quickly pick up any new and important arrivals in mainly the non-fiction category. I was usually surprised to find him so well-informed.

I have many stories of how both of us came under extreme pressure in the early months of this newspaper's publication. There were times when we were followed by suspicious people, activists of a political group, when we returned home late at night. My car was snatched at gunpoint.

But we were also proud of some stories we did in defiance of the 'establishment' and civilian rulers. We would fondly recall those times in our infrequent meetings. I also had some encounters with Imran Aslam in the early years of Geo when I was able to host some programmes. One that I thought was unfairly sacrificed on the altar of commercialism was 'Geo Kitab'.

On Friday morning when Aliya brought the news, we sat down and remembered Imran Aslam. She had worked for Geo in important positions, having made a splash by producing 'George ka Pakistan' and then doing the reality show from London titled 'Aliya ney Pakistan chor diya?'.

We both agreed that when people like Imran Aslam go, they leave no replacements.

Courtesy THENEWS

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