

Fortnightly

The Truth International

Islamabad

15th - 31st January 2023

ABC Certified

Political Uncertainty Deepens More

IK played cards successfully. Largest province will go for elections before 14th April

Eclipsed Economy

Uncertainty exists despite the international community's generous pledges for post-flood rehabilitation

Pak-US Relations

American Generosity Proved to be Life Line of Pakistani Elite

Political Uncertainty and Floods ruined Pakistan Economy



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TRANSLATING VISION INTO REALITY

OIL & GAS SELF-SUFFICIENCY THROUGH EXPLORATION & PRODUCTION REVITALIZATION

Our Recent Performance

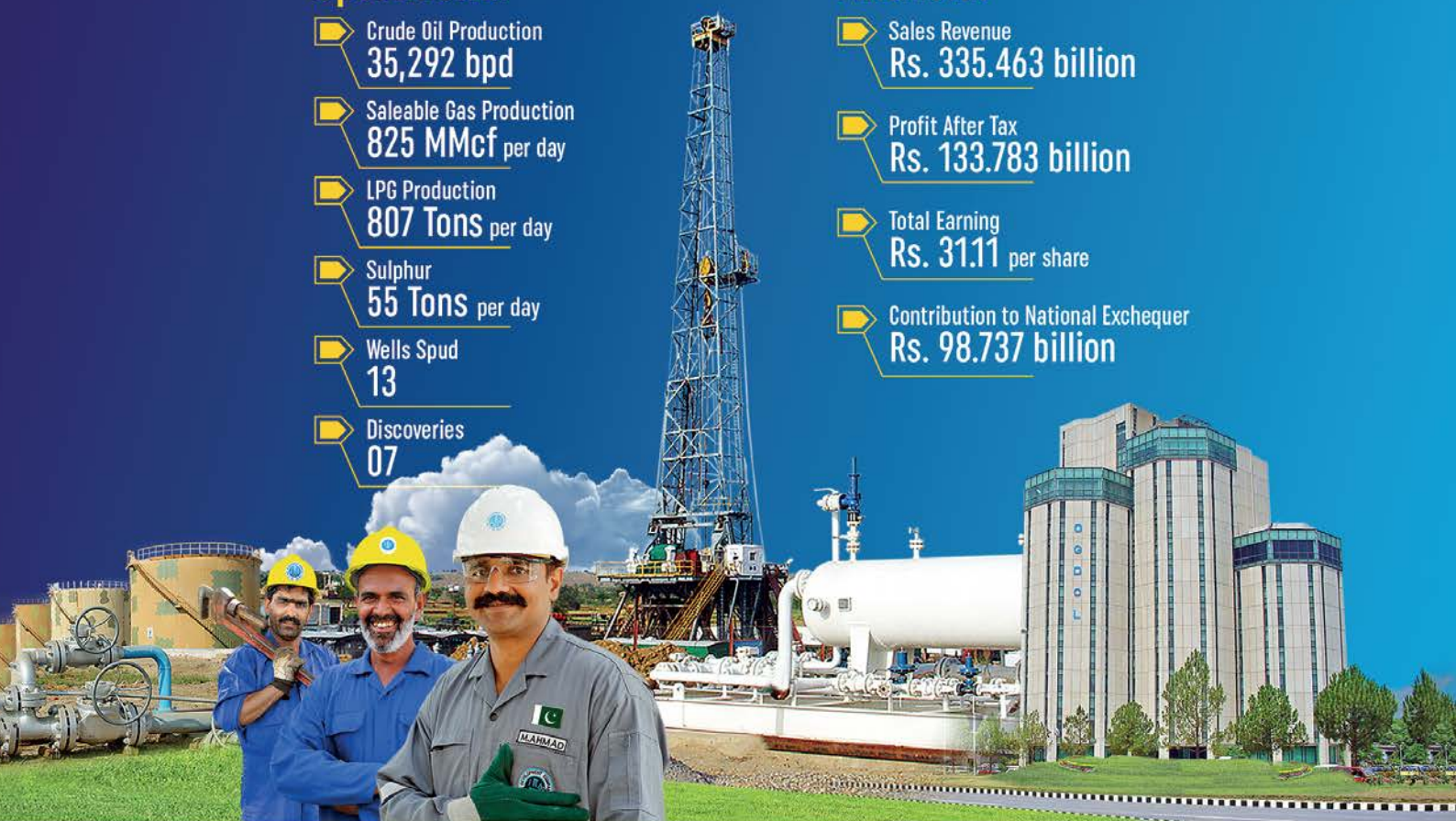
Fiscal Year Ended
30 June 2022

Operational

- Crude Oil Production
35,292 bpd
- Saleable Gas Production
825 MMcf per day
- LPG Production
807 Tons per day
- Sulphur
55 Tons per day
- Wells Spud
13
- Discoveries
07

Financial

- Sales Revenue
Rs. 335.463 billion
- Profit After Tax
Rs. 133.783 billion
- Total Earning
Rs. 31.11 per share
- Contribution to National Exchequer
Rs. 98.737 billion



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OGDCL CSR COMMITS
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for 2021-22



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Health



Water Supply



Infrastructure



Sports



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►► Energising Pakistan

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Editor:

Zaheer ud Din Babar Thaheem

Advisor to Editor:

Ashraf Malkham

Marketing / Advertisement:

Zamir A. Naushahi

Contact: 0321-4006247

Email: seniormanagermarketing@tti.org.pk

Circulation:

Irfan Ali

Contact: 0345-9908108

Email: irfanawku@gmail.com

Letter to Editor:

Feel free to mail us at: editor@tti.org.pk

Postal Address:

Fortnightly "The Truth International"
205-D, 2nd Floor, Evacuee Trust Complex,
Agha Khan Road, F-5/1, Islamabad, Pakistan.

Contact: +92 51 2820180-1

Email: info@tti.org.pk

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Government vs Inflation

By Hammad Ghaznavi



Former Prime Minister Imran Khan has tried his best to get snap polls, without success. From the long march to the threat of dissolving the KPA and Punjab assemblies, all his ploys have come a cropper. He is expected to create an opportunity soon to bounce back, if his track record is anything to go by. But at least for the time being, he seems to have run out of options. It is a rare sight to see Imran Khan on the back foot in the political arena. The cases in the courts against him are moving ahead at a frantic pace. IK faces serious threats of disqualification, the former PM himself admitted. Ik has so far not succeeded in mending fences with the Establishment, a factor whose significance cannot be emphasized enough. "The Bajwa doctrine continues," Ik has recently said, criticizing the new army leadership. To say the least, IK has a bad hand at the moment.

Interestingly, the government doesn't look any better either. The political challenge looks less daunting but it appears to be the government vs economy. The shortage of dollars is such that banks are refusing Letters of Credit, impeding crucial imports, that is hurting the industry real hard. Despite \$11 billion raised at Geneva conference, and a few more billions promised by friends, including Saudi Arabia, the situation in the street looks ugly. It's the inflation slaughtering the common man. Lots of water will pass under the bridge by the time the dollar begins to land in the country. Meanwhile,

there is a continuous loss of political capital as for the PDM parties especially the PML-N. With all the tricks the PML-N is expected to employ before the polls, recovering the lost ground will be a gigantic feat. The worst part – the avalanche continues. The prices of food items and utility bills are increasing by the day. The scent of optimism is missing in the air. The wheat shortage and the multiplying flour price is a special killer, affecting a huge chunk of population. Last week, a man, Hoor Singh Kohli, desperate to grab a subsidized bag of wheat died in a stampede in Mir Pur Khas, Sindh, epitomizing the gravity of the food crisis the common man is faced with. The wheat situation is no different in other provinces. True, it's a provincial matter but the federal government, rightly or wrongly, is being seen in bad hues. With the Punjab, the main wheat producer, and the center at loggerheads, there is no coordinated effort to grapple with the crisis.

The media, however, is focused elsewhere. It's the juicy stories of the audio leaks or the allegations of 'big betrayals' being hurled at each other by the signatories of the late 'same page'. If analyzed deeply, at the bottom of these crispy stories, lies the root cause of all the ills that today plague the country. For one, when former COAS Gen (Retd) Qamar Bajwa was accused by Imran Khan of supporting the no confidence move against him, he started feeding to

the media his side of the story. In brief, Bajwa, refuting the charges, said that it was exactly the other way round as he managed the courts for IK, threw Nawaz Sharif out of the political amphitheater, orchestrated the elections to ensure IK's victory, and then braced up the IK government for a couple of years, till the Institution decided to go neutral. In other words, he confessed that he had been violating his oath and constitution, fully confident that he would not be punished for the highest crime in the land according to the constitution.

An ISI officer deputed in the PM House was arrested for taping the calls of the Prime Minister. It was found out that he was tasked with the taping job by the then DGISI Faiz Hameed. IK and FH were as thick as thieves, reportedly, having plans to rule the country together for at least a decade. But Faiz Hameed was taping the IK calls to harness him if need be. No doubt, the hybrid regime members betrayed each other. It was an unholy alliance to start with that came into being at the debris of the constitution.

Against this backdrop, it is easier to understand the political and economic plunge that the country is witnessing. The fact is that it's not the doing of one or two governments. It's the decades of violation of the constitution that has brought the country to this sordid state. We better learn our lesson Now!

Public consequences of private deeds



By M A Niazi

Not only has PTI chief Imran Khan not gotten over the alleged audio clips leaked almost a fortnight ago, in which he allegedly engaged in explicit talk with a woman, but there is talk of two video clips having been given a limited release, which are not just explicit but perverted. While the audios barely passed muster for general circulation on social media platforms, the videos would not.

Imran has said the audio clips were a violation of Quranic injunctions to place a curtain over the sins of others. Opponents promptly pounced upon him not denying them.

He has already girded himself up for battle by declaring that videos would be used against him, which would be the result of 'deep fake' technology. However, now he seems to be maintaining a silence on the issue. He may be relying on a remark attributed to former US President Donald Trump, himself mired in scandals, who once claimed that he could commit a murder in public and get away with it.

However, his latest appeal to religion deserves closer attention. While Pakistan itself was created on a religious basis, religion has not figured all that much in its politics.

It is just possible to discern a sort of evolution of Islamic, or rather Islamist, politics in Pakistan, which corresponds to the change of attitudes among Muslims. Initially, the colonial experience brought Muslims to the examination of what had happened. They had been deposed, after all.

One solution was to return to the past. That was on offer by the JUI and the JUP, which were sectarian parties, headed by Ulema, which looked the most towards a glorious (and perhaps mythical) past.

However, there was some movement forward, as it could be seen that the Ulema had cooperated with the Raj. There was some resistance, no doubt, but there was a great deal of cooperation. There were some reformist movements, ranging from the Khaksar Tehrik of Allama Mashriqi, to the Jamaat Islami. The Jamaat was very influential, and it should come as no surprise that the Indian and Bangladeshi branches still exist.

If he had not been such a vocal proponent of the Riasat-i-Madina, he might have got away with it. Take the example of Zulfikar Ali Bhutto. He has been accused of much, but none of it stuck. Even before his 1979 hanging, his

opponents held as an article of faith his indulgence in every evil (except using drugs, probably because no one thought of it), his supporters either denied it stoutly or said it was OK. Bhutto's PPP was not particularly religious, and was even secular. Bhutto's morals did not lose him support, because voters likely to be swayed by such considerations stayed away from his party anyway.

However, another party, the Ikhwanul Muslimeen (Muslim Brotherhood) with a similar ideology arose in the Arab world, and has given rise to several parties with a greater record of success. It has had a better record of electoral success than the Jamaat, as its Egyptian branch achieved the Presidency of Egypt, and the Ennahda Party in Tunisia and Hamas in the Gaza Strip, won elections. The latter two are Brotherhood foundations, but are not affiliated to the main party in Egypt.

After Partition, neither the Jamaat nor the Jamiat did well enough in elections to achieve power. However, they did develop a nexus with the military. The Al-Badar and Al-Shams organizations which fought to keep Pakistan united were Jamaat organizations. The Jamaat Islami Bangladesh leaders tried and executed for war crimes over four

decades later were members of these bodies.

It is not that other parties did not make gestures. The Muslim League included the religion in its name, The PPP proclaimed as one of its slogans "Islam hamara deen hai" (Islam is our religion). However, neither party has deviated from the Objectives Resolution of 1949, which formed the preamble to the 1973 Constitution, and was later included in the Constitution itself by Zia ul Haq: that no laws were to be made in contradiction to the Quran and Sunnah, and that sovereignty belonged to Allah Almighty, to be exercised by the chosen representatives of the people.

However, these parties made sure these remained gestures. While governing or legislating, neither paid much attention to the latter of Islamic law, but propounded the Constitution as supreme law. The religious parties did not object, rather joined them. However, this dilution does not seem to have worked, and these parties have done badly at the hustings. Only twice has the JUI been able to head a coalition in one province. The second time, it was the MMA coalition under the Musharraf martial law.

The Jamaat route, of closeness to the military, involved taking part in the Kashmir jihad. This was an area where the Jamaat got involved, after its participation in the Afghan Jihad. The Army did not use it for the next two experiments in political Islam, the Pakistan Awami Tehrik or the Pakistan Tehrik Insaf. Neither had any cadres involved in the Kashmir freedom struggle.

Both were more broadly based than the Jamaat. The Jamaat, which was something of a reformist party, had more in common with the Deobandi School or the Ahle Hadith sect. PAT was an explicitly Brelvi platform, while the PTI did not claim any affiliation, though its leader, Imran Khan, was clearly a Brelvi.

Someone somewhere had decided that the majority of Pakistanis were Brelvis. That may or may not be true, but no one seems to have won any seats on a Brelvi platform, except in Karachi. There is the one time that Maulana Abdus Sattar Niazi won in Mianwali, though he had to take a PML

(N) ticket in 1990, when he won from the constituency Imran Khan sits for.

The Tehrik Labaik Pakistan has also got some traction as a Brelvi party, and has got some votes, but no seats except in Karachi.

The PTI thus seems to be second phase of political Islam. Its target was the Riasat-i-Madina, and the example Imran liked to quote most was of the second Caliph, Umar ibn al-Khattab. Therefore, to have to face a charge of moral corruption is all the more painful. It should be noted that there has not been a leader about whom there have not been rumors in Pakistan.



Those who have been proper while in office have had rumours about prior behaviour, some of it before their ascent to power. However, no one has had any clips, video or audio, leaked.

It is also to be noted that there have been no rumours or accusations of other Islamist leaders. The existence of rumours about one (the gentleman now being deceased) is perhaps evidence that others were not just more discreet, but free from guilt. Imran on the other hand has questions to answer. Unfortunately for him, even if the smears are false, they will stick. The question is, what will be their political effect?

If he had not been such a vocal proponent of the Riasat-i-Madina, he might have got away with it. Take the example of Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto. He has been accused of much, but none of it stuck. Even before his 1979

hanging, his opponents held as an article of faith his indulgence in every evil (except using drugs, probably because no one thought of it), his supporters either denied it stoutly or said it was OK. Bhutto's PPP was not particularly religious, and was even secular. Bhutto's morals did not lose him support, because voters likely to be swayed by such considerations stayed away from his party anyway.

It is almost as if the people might now be ready for a new experiment in Islam. Imran was a departure from the ulema, and provided a sort of ulema-free Islam, which took account of the diaspora experience,

but which allowed people to duck obeying any actual injunctions of Islam. Now it might be that the people are getting ready for an Islamic solution free of the military. That would mean turning to a party like the Hizbul Tahrir, which is active in all Muslim countries, not as separate parties, like the Jamaat or the Brotherhood, but as a single Ummah-wide party, it has been banned throughout most of the Arab world, as well as Pakistan, but it may just represent an idea whose time has come. The advantage of the Hizb is that no single military controls it. It's unpopular everywhere.

It is possible that only a party like the Hizbul Tahrir could navigate the new political reality. Politicians in other parties have long been used to maintaining a double standard, and the public might need someone it can trust. That would have to be an outsider, not someone tainted by the system.

Time for decisive action

By Humayun Akhtar Khan

Never before in recent decades has Pakistan been in such a state of crisis. Our economy, politics and society are in disarray.

About the economy, the question being asked is: 'will we soon default?' The combination of external debt, imports, and forex exchange reserves leave many wondering. Understandably, the focus at present is on survival.

But even when policymakers take a longer view of the economy, soundbites about GDP growth and IMF programmes replace vision and strategy. There is no deeper inquiry about what is best for the country. Whether GDP growth results from increase in manufactured goods or from one-time spending of borrowing does not figure in our discussion.

Nor do we discuss how to use the IMF programme to strengthen the country's economic fundamentals and avoid future crises. Both agriculture and manufacturing are in decline, consequently plunging exports. Slow accumulation of capital and slow productivity growth have reduced the economy's potential for growth.

For years, the apparent object of our economic policy has been to survive the current economic crisis by piling debt on debt, until the next one comes along. We continued to take on more debt from wherever it came, including at very high rates from the bond market. No one gave any thought to how it would be repaid. Since 2008, Pakistan's total stock of debt and liabilities has grown by \$85 billion. We have paid about \$114 billion since 2008, yet the debt stock has still grown by \$85 billion. A more flawed economic policy is hard to find.

Until a few years ago, the debate in Pakistan about economic growth centred on whether we are a security or a development state. That line of thought suggested that we may be spending too much on defence at the expense of the economy. The debate is redundant now. So much of government spending goes to paying interest on loans that all expenses,



including defence, have taken a back seat. In fiscal 22, the federal government spent almost 85 per cent of its net receipts on interest. Most other expenses are met from borrowing.

Our troubles are not for want of capital. They result from unimaginative policies. Post 9/11, the country was awash in foreign exchange. By 2008, we had spent it all and were back with the IMF with a sudden 40 per cent devaluation. There was nothing to show for the money spent.

Much of the debt went into meeting imports and debt servicing needs. Two-thirds of our external debt has been spent on the budget and BoP, and only one-third on development. Apart from CPEC investment, the debt amount was not invested. Even the CPEC projects selected by Pakistan have not so far increased our ability to repay. There was no 'game changer'.

Economic partners no longer take us at our word. In over a year, endless discussions with the IMF have borne little fruit. All commitments to the IMF are now 'prior action' because we have lost their trust. Even traditional partners, China and Saudi Arabia, are reluctant to help. They know that this patient is addicted to life support.

The key question that needs to be asked by economic planners is where we want the

economy to go from here. What kind of an economy Pakistan aims to have in five, ten or even fifty years. Specious talk about wanting to be a knowledge economy or a producer of high-tech goods does not cut it if we do not put in the needed hard work and investment into these ideas.

Political capacity too is fragile. With elections in a few months and the people dizzied by prices and taxes, the back and forth in the commitments made to the IMF shows the government's quandary. This is the cumulative effect of the inability of successive governments to offer a serious vision for the economy. Expediency and special interests are no substitute for strategy.

It is time to get serious. Bluster can no longer work as policy, nor as negotiating strategy. We must have a plan not just to exit the present crisis, but also to put the economy on a surer footing for the future. While taking the difficult measures to restore the IMF programme, the government must look at the future. The restored IMF programme will only see us through another year or two. And it will further increase our debt. What happens next?

We may like to weigh the pros and cons of seeking external debt relief. Both the IMF and G20 have established mechanisms for doing so. Decision-makers must decide on which is best. I do not recommend debt

rescheduling, as that merely postpones servicing while increasing liability.

The money saved must go to paying back the remaining debt at a faster rate and investing to increase the productivity of the private sector. Gradually, new debt should be for projects only, such that the economy essentially needs for growth and exports.

We have not seen prolonged periods of growth. The economy will not grow by targeting just a few firms or sectors. Overall demand must increase. For that, the income and purchasing power of the majority of our people must increase.

Even within the present constraints, we must find ways to increase private investment. They do not have to be in large industries alone. Entrepreneurship at all levels must grow, especially small and micro industries. The latter's need for capital, technology or energy is not high and suits the economy's present circumstances.

Small firms bring a lot of value. They are presently operating in an unhelpful governance climate. To facilitate their growth, they must have government support. An economy prospers when consumption and production increase. With proper help these small firms will boost production and increase purchasing power. They could sow the seeds of future large firms. Increasing income at the micro level would help growth in demand for the large industries.

The government's incentives for investment are skewed. Incentives must go to



encourage manufacturing, especially for exports, imports substitution and to sectors where the private sector reinvests its profits. Incentives for private power or auto production come at a very high cost to the economy, are import dependent and have not created many backward linkages to stimulate upstream manufacturing. There has been no fixed rate project financing available in Pakistan since the nineties after the closing of DFIs. Pakistan must have DFIs for private project finance.

The government must also review public expenditure. In FY22, the federal government's second highest expense after interest was Rs2.8 trillion spent on subsidies and grants. This amount is twice that of defence. Much of the subsidy went to private power producers as tariff differential. PSEs also received large sums to meet their losses. Improved policy and

governance in the power sector and PSEs would reduce the budget deficit. Thus, the government will incur less debt. While subsidy expenditure has climbed to 2.3 per cent of GDP, public investment has fallen.

Public investment too is an enabler of private investment as it provides the public goods, physical infrastructure and better human resources to raise private sector productivity. Investment in PSDP should focus on water, logistics, power transmission, technical skills development and R&D. It is crucial for Pakistan to understand that our goal is not just to survive the present crisis, but to stay out of trouble forever – and for the economy to grow.

The writer is chair and CEO Institute for Policy Reforms. He was federal commerce minister in 2002-2007.

Courtesy The News



National security and policy implementation challenges

The national security of a country cannot be salvaged unless it is politically stable and economically vibrant

By Dr Moonis Ahmar



The National Security Committee (NSC) meeting of January 2 resolved to take appropriate measures to curb cross-border attacks from Afghanistan and demanded that Kabul eradicate TTP safe havens from the Afghan soil. Throughout 2022, Pakistan faced attacks launched by TTP with the connivance of Afghan Taliban; and the situation may not be different in 2023 if the Kabul regime fails to rein in forces involved in unprovoked infiltration from across the border.

National security of a country cannot be salvaged unless it is politically stable and economically vibrant. Growing vulnerability of Pakistan in 2022 in political and economic arena opened floodgates of foreign interference particularly from the Afghan side with the sole purpose of destabilising the country. Rather than India, it was the Afghan syndrome which continued to threaten Pakistan in 2022 in the form of TTP-led attacks.

Will the NSC resolve this time make any difference as far as Pakistan's terrorism dilemma is concerned or it will fade away like similar pledges in the past? What are

the issues which undermine the credibility of National Security Policy reiterated several times since the APC attack on December 16, 2014? Why is the lack of political will and a professional even-handed approach to deal with the menace of terrorism responsible for augmenting security predicament of Pakistan?

It is not only the TTP threat emanating from Afghanistan that is a great menace for Pakistan but widespread smuggling of wheat as well as dollars is a major reason behind the prevailing economic crisis in the country. When it is known to everyone that Afghan mafias, along with their local counterparts, are responsible for smuggling, drug trafficking, sectarian violence, etc, why is the state of Pakistan unable to take effective measures to eradicate such heinous acts which undermine the country's security? Several NSC meetings have been held in recent times, resolving to deal with Afghanistan-specific issues, but there is no respite. The failure of security agencies and other state actors to prevent TTP from carrying out attacks on Pakistan is a stark reality which cannot be condoned.

The weaknesses of the state apparatus in dealing with the growing incidents of terrorism as well as smuggling indicates the presence of powerful elements in our midst who resist pursuing a zero-tolerance policy against the elements that are using the Afghan soil to destabilise Pakistan.

One can figure out three major reasons which will continue to preclude the implementation of National Security Policy vis-à-vis Afghanistan, TTP and terrorism.

First of all, it is the vacuum existing in policy implementation to deal with the mentioned issues. A policy of appeasement vis-à-vis TTP on the part of state actors is a major cause of this policy vacuum. A policy to hold dialogue with the banned TTP that is involved in heinous acts of terrorism in Pakistan reflects contradiction in policy and action. Even when the TTP takes responsibility of a terrorist attack inside Pakistan, there are elements that call for following a soft approach with that bunch of criminals responsible for shedding the blood of the people of Pakistan. Policy vacuum in dealing with religious and ethnic terrorism is obvious: while the state tends to be soft on dealing with the TTP, it is using absolute force against Baloch and Pashtun nationalist groups. Unless this contradiction is undone, there will remain a question mark as far as national security is concerned.

Second, unabated political crisis and economic meltdown also provide space for extremism, militancy, violence and terrorism in the country. There are external forces that are bent upon exploiting political and economic vulnerabilities for accomplishment of their vested interests, by using TTP, Baloch and other terrorist and nationalist groups. Vacuum in national security apparatus gets deepened amid political and economic crises. The NSC meeting of January 2 also took note of economic and political predicament of Pakistan, but it is essential to link it with growing extremism and terrorism in the

country. It is true that if a country is politically stable, economically vibrant and socially cohesive, prospects of effectively dealing with terrorism and extremism brighten. Is the state and society of Pakistan capable of focusing to deal with political fragmentation and economic meltdown so as to effectively deal with terrorism? When the TTP has made it clear that it wants to impose its own version of sharia and doesn't recognise the constitution of Pakistan, why elements having a soft corner for that terrorist organisation are allowed to function? Pakistan's image as a normal state is questioned because of its policy of appeasing and providing space to groups who reject the very existence of the country.

Third, challenges in policy implementation on Afghanistan and national security cannot be met if there continues to non-seriousness, non-professionalism and ad hocism in dealing with issues which augment political instability, economic crisis and security predicament of Pakistan. Only by holding meetings, threats from TTP cannot be neutralised nor can there be normalcy in political and economic realms. Furthermore, it is not just the matter of dealing with terrorism, but the entire gamut of national security lacks clarity, coherence and consistency on the part of those who are the custodians of this country and are contended with calling and attending meetings from time to time. No focus on human security issues — ranging from



severe poverty; growing unemployment; lack of proper educational and health facilities; unmet housing needs; unavailability of clean drinking water, etc — has been seen among those who are part of the NSC meeting. Unless people at the grassroots level, who form the bulk of the population, are better off, one cannot expect the country to feel secure.

Those confined within their comfort zones and claiming to be custodians of national

security cannot move in public without proper security whereas the general public is at the mercy of criminals, terrorists and thugs who are above the law. Unless, such issues are effectively managed, NSC meetings will not have any plausible impact on dealing with TTP, Afghan Taliban and Baloch nationalist groups as well as economic and political crises.

Courtesy The Express Tribune

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Alliance for change

By Dr Niaz Murtaza

We face many paths to doom today — both economic and security-related — but only a few paths to avoid it. But the state doesn't adopt these paths as they undermine the interests of strong civilian and military elites who control policy.

While egalitarian ideas drove Indian, Bangladeshi and Sri Lankan freedom aims, ours mainly reflected the fears of Muslim elites about their interests under Hindu rule and had few pro-poor ideas. Since '47, the Pakistani state has lived up very well to the objectives of its creation by ably guarding elite interests and ignoring those of the masses, so much so that it now faces doom. In fact, the Pakistani state may be in South Asia the one least focused on the people.

The limits of this elitism are vividly illustrated by the current perma-polycrisis. A crisis is bad enough, a polycrisis (one encompassing multiple domains such as economic, political, natural, social, etc) worse and a perma-polycrisis (a polycrisis that shows no signs of ending) more so. This crisis started as an economic one under the PTI and was exacerbated by the political standoff between Pindi, PDM and PTI; the global economic crisis; and finally the floods. No end is in sight to most of its immediate causes or the elitism in which it is rooted.

The history of successful states shows that social movements play a critical role in improving the quality of governance and making it more people-centred. Thus, it is critical for Pakistani society to organise itself better and form an alliance or coalition for change to force elites to adopt egalitarian policies that help avoid disaster. A coalition is a group of persons and/or entities that have common aims and who agree to work together towards achieving them. Coalition work includes three ingredients: agenda, partners, and strategies.

Our society needs coalitions to stand up to elites.

It is easy to list an agenda to avert doom. Economically, we must increase taxes and export revenues to reduce our fiscal and external deficits that often lead to crises; reform state enterprise (including milbus), power and water sectors; and increase investment and productivity to achieve sustainable growth. It means adopting poor-led progress strategies that make increasing the incomes of the poor as the main engine of national progress, by providing them with organisations, market power, protection, assets, skills and social services. Politically, it means civilian sway over Pindi and its spy agencies staying totally out of politics; devolution; police, judicial and bureaucratic reforms; peace with Baloch rebels and end of TTP terrorism. Externally, it means peace with India and good, balanced ties with all key allies like the West, Gulf states and China. Socially, it means ending extremism and full rights for women, minorities and other weak groups.

Progressive, grassroots, pro-poor groups are obvious partners for leading the coalition for this pro-poor agenda. But Pakistan's situation is so precarious, especially economically even in the short term, that most components of this agenda would appeal to a much



broader alliance, which is also necessary given the enormity of the task involved in swaying strong elite interests.

Thus, a broader coalition is needed, that includes pro-poor advocacy groups, farmer and labour entities as leaders, but also professional bodies of lawyers, doctors, teachers, engineers and others, including media groups, business groups, academia and expatriate groups. This practically means all organised society willing to support such an agenda outside the narrow range of elite interests that currently control state policy or extremist and criminal groups. The starting step could be for progressive grassroots groups to come together and then gradually expand the coalition by inviting other societal groups to join it.

Finally, coalitions need effective strategies. Coalitions may be loose, when members work together for a limited time until they achieve or abandon a specific aim. They may also become permanent, with governing bodies, funding, and organisational structures. It will be naïve to expect such a diverse coalition to achieve any permanence. However, even so, a three- to five-year period may still be needed to influence state policy sustainably. The main strategy would be two-fold. First, it would involve influencing policymakers through direct meetings with them, media work, public meetings and protests. Second, it would involve educating the larger public about the issues and remedies to garner greater support for the cause.

The only feasible path forward for us now is for society to stand up to elites through coalitions. Even this doesn't guarantee success, given the low odds of, first, putting such an alliance together and, second, it actually succeeding. But the chances of any other path succeeding are even lower. This sadly reflects our poor odds going forward.

The writer is a political economist with a PhD from the University of California, Berkeley.

Courtesy DAWN.

End of musical chair, beginning of new round!

Pervaiz to resist PA dissolution, avail time to boost political standing; PTI divided over dissolution plan



By Sarfraz Raja

Both sides although seemed 'confident' but they required numbers in hand to prove this 'confidence' in the House; and that was the actual reluctance among their ranks. Politics in Pakistan kept revolving around the 'vote of confidence' and 'no confidence' in the largest province of the country. This political turmoil has put the entire scenario in the shadow of uncertainties for weeks.

How it starts and where it goes

In November last year in the winding up address at the conclusion of a month-long long march from Lahore to Rawalpindi, PTI chief Imran Khan came hard with an unexpected announcement of dissolution of those Provincial Assemblies where his party was in power. It was surely a surprise for his opponents and his own party as no one was expecting such decision which was not even under consideration at that time.

Imran Khan's actual demand was early elections and for that he was holding protests gatherings, long march and threatening a sit-in in the capital city Islamabad as he had in 2014. Although Imran announced the dissolution of Provincial Assemblies of Punjab and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, he also called to

initiate a consultation process for implementation of the dissolution plan and its timings.

The PTI in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa has its sole majority government but in Punjab it has a coalition setup, sharing power with PMLQ. Despite being the largest party in the House with 180 seats in the 371 members Provincial Assembly, PTI had to support Ch Pervaiz Elahi for the office of chief minister, whose party, PMLQ, has a total strength of 10 seats.

After the announcement of the dissolution of two Provincial Assemblies on 23rd December, opposition parties alliance PDM also played their cards. First the provincial governor asked the CM to get a vote of confidence and on same day, opposition also submitted a motion for vote of no confidence against Leader of the House Chaudhry Pervaiz Elahi.

The no confidence motion has taken away the right to dissolve Punjab Assembly from the CM till completion of voting on the motion. After not obtaining vote of confidence on governor's advice within specific time, Pervaiz Elahi was denotified as chief minister.

As expected, the ruling party in Punjab took the matter to the court and challenged both the governor's advice

for a vote of confidence and denotification in the Lahore High Court which after hearing reinstated Pervaiz Elahi as the Punjab Chief Minister, after an undertaking from him assuring he would not dissolve the Assembly till the next hearing date. The court in its ruling also restored the provincial cabinet. The court adjourned its hearing till 11th of January but put no bar on taking a vote of confidence by the CM from his Assembly.

The Pervaiz Elahi factor

PMLQ leader Ch Pervaiz Elahi with just 10 seats in the largest Assembly of the country enjoyed power of the speaker and suddenly after an in-house change in the centre in April last year, cashed his party's 10 seats importance as a favourite candidate acceptable to all for the chief ministership--thanks to a close number game in the Provincial Assembly.

For Ch Pervaiz Elahi's ten decisive seats, both major parties PTI and PMLN, were ready to support him as their candidate for the CM office. Initially PMLQ under Ch Shujaat Hussain, brother of Ch Pervaiz Elahi shook hand with PDM and Pervaiz Elahi also spoke hard against Imran Khan in a television interview but later suddenly and surprisingly he jumped



into the 'Banigala' camp and became PTI candidate for CM slot after a meeting with Imran Khan.

Pervaiz Elahi's surprising move divided his party and created a rift within the family too as his brother and veteran politician Ch Shujaat Hussain who is also party president, joined hands with PDM in the centre and in the elections for chief minister in the Punjab Assembly, along with his sons and party Secretary General Tariq Bashir Cheema.

Ch Shujaat through a letter asked his party members to support PDM candidate Hamza Shehbaz for CM office and not his brother Pervaiz Elahi. This letter was later turned down by the court which helped Pervaiz Elahi to become chief minister of the province.

Although Pervaiz Elahi and his son Moonis Elahi who is a Member National Assembly but remain active in Punjab politics along-with his father, repeatedly call themselves as 'trustworthy' ally of PTI; and assure to follow what Imran would suggest but on other hand they kept convincing Imran not to dissolve Assemblies. Pervaiz Elahi in an interview even before announcement of date of dissolution of Assemblies that was 23rd of December, categorically stated that their would be no change in the system at least till March 2023.

Sources say that Pervaiz Elahi and Moonis kept convincing Imran to hold his card of Assembly dissolution which is actually not an easy task. Both the father and son in their series of meetings with Khan have been asking him that they would lose everything if they gave up power they enjoyed in

the province; and that the federal government would get a free hand to do whatever it wanted even in an unclear early elections situation or during polls held against the dissolved Assemblies.

It is asserted in political circles that Ch Pervaiz Elahi would flatly resist dissolution of the Provincial Assembly as he has become Chief Minister most probably for the last time in his political career; that he might not be able to get such an opportunity again in the near future. So being an experienced political player Pervaiz Elahi would avail this period of time to strengthen his political positioning and his party for future and for that he has to remain in power as long as he can.

Divided opinion within PTI

Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaaf also has a divided opinion over dissolution of Assemblies. Sources privy to PTI meetings say that some of party leaders are considering the move to dissolve Assemblies as 'self-destructive' for the party politics as it would be like handing over powers to their opponents. While Imran Khan is insisting to go with his decision.

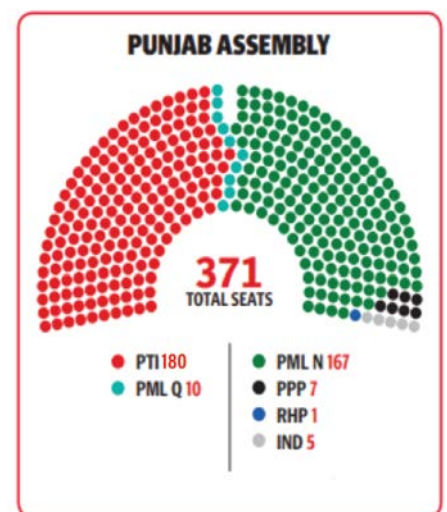
How could vote of confidence impact

To show the required strength, especially where numbers are highly close, is a tricky affair. In the 371 Members Punjab Assembly PTI has 180 seats and PMLQ has 10, while the magical number is 186 to ensure majority and secure the CM seat.

On the other hand, opposition PML-N has 167, Pakistan Peoples Party has 7 and 4 independents are also on opposition benches. So absence of few Members at the time of voting could make the difference. To ensure availability of all their Members in the House would be a huge task for both sides. To get vote of confidence as advised by the governor, Pervaiz Elahi has to show the required strength and in case of voting on motion of no confidence, opposition has to prove their majority. So both sides find it hard to demonstrate majority. Initially it was stated by some PTI leaders that CM is going to get vote of confidence in the session summoned for 10th of January but later Pervaiz Elahi came up with a view that if they go to get vote of confidence it would mean accepting the governor's advice which they don't. The PMLN dubbed this view of the CM as reflecting lack of majority in the Provincial Assembly.

On other hand, some PTI leaders raised their reservations that Pervaiz Elahi wants to continue and he was not willing to dissolve the Provincial Assembly. Imran Khan has asked his lawmakers to convince the CM to follow decisions made by PTI, else his party would quit Punjab Assembly but still senior party leaders don't suggest resignations as a wise solution.

It seem that not only opposition but many in the government and PTI don't want dissolution of Assembly and the situation in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa is not much different. But question is for how long this matter could be delayed and for how long this musical chair of confidence and no confidence could continue.





Number-game filthy sport, fuss in Punjab Assembly

PTI-PML(Q) relations might sour again; new phase of alliance to be decisive; Imran feels being pushed to wall

By Ahmad Waleed

Ever since Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaaf (PTI) and Pakistan Muslim League (Q) contracted the political marriage of convenience, both the allies in the Punjab government have been treating each other in an uncanny and suspicious way. Nevertheless, the alliance went on despite ups and downs until the Punjab governor directed Chief Minister Pervaiz Elahi to take the vote of confidence to prove majority in the House. The Punjab Assembly is in the limelight once again and the government allies are striving to get along against all odds.

From the very beginning Chaudhry Pervaiz Elahi wanted to side with PTI as long as Usman Buzdar would stay as the chief minister. Elahi had been out- rightly saying he was not going to accept any other chief minister except Usman Buzdar, if PTI dared to install someone one else. A weak Usman Buzdar suited PML (Q) very well. Elahi either wanted to become chief minister himself or else, he wanted Usman Buzdar to continue.

And during all this time Pervaiz Elahi would enjoy the coveted position of Punjab Assembly speaker; he would have the uplift funds approved for his party lawmakers and for those belonging to PTI as well. The PTI lawmakers knew Usman Buzdar couldn't say 'no' to Chaudhry Pervaiz Elahi. And this kind of a 'working relationship' continued for over-three years, until the historic no-confidence motion against Imran Khan in March 2022 that ousted him from PM House. Given the post-Imran ouster scenario, Pervaiz Elahi swiftly jumped to accept the CM Punjab office, he had been longing for.

As Elahi tried to stabilize his dwindling government right after Usman Buzdar's resignation, he was caught between a rock and a hard place. Punjab's political situation has again become intriguing in the wake of Imran Khan's pressure on



Chaudhry Pervaiz Elahi to dissolve the Provincial Assembly-- last resort to force the centre to announce snap polls across the country. However, it didn't go well: Pervaiz Elahi, who ditched PDM offer for the chief minister slot but grabbed it from Imran Khan, found himself in an awkward situation, being intimidated by PTI leaders to dissolve the Provincial Assembly or part ways with PTI.

Though Pervaiz Elahi assured Imran Khan he would not 'waste a minute to dissolve the Provincial Assembly on the latter's call,' at the same time he terms this option as "ill-advised" and "detrimental" to the future politics of both the parties, as they have to complete uplift projects in Punjab by the end of the financial year. His aim appears benefitting his party's MPs and a few other electables who could be exploited in a given political situation in future.

The number game in the Punjab Assembly is very complex. Both the PML (Q) and PTI leaders see the writing on the wall: that they don't have the numbers to either secure vote of confidence or defeat no-confidence motion. Even opposition has failed to exhibit it can garner enough support from the government MPs, contrary to their earlier claims. The PML(Q) is clear about

its relations with the establishment. Pervaiz Elahi has already stated the establishment does not want dissolution of the Punjab and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Assemblies, while some PTI leaders including Fawad Chaudhry believe the latter was pressuring PML (Q) leaders.

Relations between both the allies have gone sour once again. Pervaiz Elahi's son, Moonis Elahi, has jumped in and tried to handle the situation. PTI lawmakers believe Pervaiz Elahi will try his level best to delay the dissolution of the Punjab Assembly through legal means. The new phase of PTI- PML(Q) alliance appears 'decisive' as it is going to draw the 'lines clear.' At the same time, new alignments are being devised -- political leaders joining other parties in Balochistan and efforts made to bring old mates closer vis-à-vis Karachi politics. Such developments have added to PTI worries. Despite enjoying phenomenal popularity, Imran Khan now feels he is being alienated and pushed to the wall by the powers that matter. And given one more chance, Khan is apparently willing to mend his differences with such powers. Chaudhry Fawad Hussain has recently expressed similar views that his party should develop good relations with the establishment.



PML-N throne heir contest in the offing?

Hamza's chances to lead party diminish; party stalwarts pin hopes on Nawaz, Maryam narrative

By Tahir Niaz



Maryam Nawaz Sharif has got a new role in the party -- she would now be organizing the PML-N as senior vice president. Political observers believe Maryam's elevation to the position is not without a purpose; she is now qualified to become party president. Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif on January 2, appointed Maryam Nawaz as the senior vice-president of the PML-N, authorising her to "reorganise" the party "at all functional levels".

Information Minister Marriyum Aurangzeb shared the notification issued by PM Shehbaz, the party president. "Pursuant to the powers conferred under the constitution of the PML-N, the undersigned is pleased to appoint Maryam Nawaz Sharif as senior vice president with immediate effect," the notification said. It added that Maryam was "authorised to re-organise the party at all functional tiers/levels as chief organiser." Maryam was appointed one of the 16 vice presidents of the party on May 3, 2019.

In a tweet, the prime minister said that Maryam possessed the drive, determination and experience to lead the party's

organisational matters. "I have no doubts that she will very effectively galvanise our party's ranks and files with the vision of our Quaid Nawaz Sharif."

The development took place amid strong speculations that there was a continuing tug-of-war within the Sharif family over the issue of succession. Who will lead the party from next generation--Maryam Nawaz or Hamza Shehbaz? The two brilliant scions of the Sharif family are the daughter of PML-N Quaid Nawaz Sharif and son of the party president Shehbaz Sharif respectively.

They are equally capable of running the party and are considered strong contenders for the position. According to sources, the two had been striving to keep the party along their respective bloodlines, for some time. Whether the issue has been settled with the appointment of Maryam Nawaz as the party's senior vice president, would be too early to say as the tug-of-war is likely to continue for succession amid conjectures about who will be the heir to the Sharifs' political dynasty.

With the appointment of Maryam Nawaz as senior vice president of the party, howev-

er, the situation seems to have changed a bit in favour of Maryam Nawaz. According to party sources, the party president and Prime Minister, Shehbaz Sharif nominated Maryam Nawaz as senior vice president on the wish and will of party Quaid Mian Nawaz Sharif.

As per party constitution, a senior vice president can also be appointed as the acting president of the party. The sources further said that Nawaz Sharif has directed the concerned to hold intra-party elections at the earliest. Sources claim Nawaz Sharif could be elected lifetime Quaid of the party.

So with Maryam Nawaz elevated to the position of party's senior vice president and Nawaz Sharif all set to become lifetime party Quaid, prospects of Hamza Shehbaz leading the party in future seem to have diminished. Maryam Nawaz's elevation as senior vice president by none other than his uncle and party president Shehbaz Sharif has paved the way for her top role in the party in the near future. The question arises where would Hamza Shehbaz stand and will he be able to find a place in the party's new setup?

Amid this tug-of-war within the Sharif family, Maryam Nawaz has almost taken over the party and Hamza Shehbaz looks nowhere in the political scene when it comes to the PML-N affairs and the party's re-organisation. It merits a mention that these cousins were not on good terms with each other in the recent past due to this contest, according to media reports.

After ZA Bhutto's death, the party's driving seat was grabbed by his daughter late Benazir Bhutto with the 'real' Bhuttos no more visible on political landscape. Same appears to be an immediate possibility in the PML-N case after party chief, Mian Nawaz Sharif's younger brother, Shehbaz Sharif nominated his niece for the position of party's senior vice-president.

Unnerved by the recent losses on electoral front in Punjab, party stalwarts believe that



PML-N's only hope to move forward and regain the lost 'Punjab fort,' lies in the narrative of Nawaz and Maryam.

Shehbaz and Hamza on the other hand, seem totally helpless in the current political scenario. If PML-N wants to survive the tough times ahead vis-à-vis electoral politics, party stalwarts believe Maryam needs to come forward to steer the, sinking ship, of the PML-N before it's too late.

A gigantic task is waiting for Maryam at home as she spends time in the United Kingdom with her father and the PML-N supremo, Nawaz Sharif. The question whether Maryam Nawaz is capable enough to counter 'PTI storm' in Punjab: so far, she has miserably failed to regain the lost ground. Results of the by-elections and for selective National Assembly seats suggest that nothing in the PML-N arsenal seems to be working against the PTI at the moment. The PTI is the most popular political party in the country at present, according to the surveys.

PML-N lost Punjab in the 2018 general elections and to-date, they have been unable to make a comeback except for a few weeks when Hamza Shehbaz was elected chief minister of the province in 2022. Maryam Nawaz led the campaign in the Punjab by-elections but failed to win hearts and minds of the people. For the National Assembly by-elections later, she didn't even come out in the field for the election campaign --a surprise for many in the party.

It can be said without any doubt that the Nawaz-led party is running away from the



elections. Passing a bill to increase the number of union councils in the federal capital suggests that the government employed delaying tactics so that it could delay the local government polls in the capital. Same is the case in Karachi where Jamaat-e-Islami and Muttahida Qaumi Movement Pakistan are urging local government elections at the earliest. The ruling alliance is also resisting general elections in the country and wants more time to put things in the right direction before going for elections. Constitutionally speaking, the next elections are not far more than a one-year time. The ruling alliance, in the meantime, is striving to boost its image as a sole saviour.

However, they are yet to find a panacea to woo the masses; an issue they want to overcome before announcing the date for general elections. Efforts are on to discredit the PTI leadership. Audio tapes involving

the PTI leaders are hitting the social media platforms frequently but the mindset behind all this has so far been unable to achieve the desired results.

The nation will soon be entering the election mode. The ruling alliance of the PDM is doing all that it could while eyeing the next elections. Things seem to be moving in an 'organized and systematic way' on the political front amid allegations by PTI chief Imran Khan that the political engineering was still going on. Punjab, as always has been, remains the main battleground. It would be interesting to see if the PDM alliance remains intact in the general elections or the component parties prefer to part ways for their advantages. Nonetheless, a more interesting query would be if Maryam Nawaz's elevation as senior vice president of the party would make some impact on the political spectrum or it would simply prove an elevation for the sake of elevation.



Bajwa and others conspired to overthrow the PTI government, Fawad claims

Fawad asserted that the PTI chief was responsible for providing Pakistan with "one of the cleanest governments in 75 years."

By Arsim Tariq

In an interview with the BBC, Fawad Chaudhry, the leader of the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI), stated that "the establishment actually played a very active role" in the removal of Imran Khan as prime minister.

The former information minister expressed his disagreement with the remark made by the host of the BBC show HardTalk, Stephen Sackur, that the military played a role in the PTI's rise to power. The interview took place on the show HardTalk.

"I don't think any military or any institution can sustain you for that long," he continued, referring to the length of time it took the PTI to ascend to power, which was 22 years.

Fawad said, "We came into power, but yes, we were ousted by a conspiracy in which some of the army generals were involved, and the establishment actually played a very active role in the ouster of Imran Khan."

After that, Sackur questioned him over a statement made by Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) Director General Lt. Gen. Nadeem Anjum during a press conference. During the vote of no confidence that was cast against him, Gen. Nadeem stated that the head of the PTI had requested that the military carry out an action that was in violation of the constitution.

In response to this, Fawad stated that the viewpoint held by the party over this matter was "completely different."

"We in no way implied that." He asserted that all that his group had requested was that a stable administration not be allowed to fall apart in such a manner.

After that, he made an additional accusation, saying that "the prior army chief was also actively involved in sending our government home, and sadly, this is what the fact is."



"The current [army] leadership has just assumed the office, and we are hoping there will be a change in the policy, but yes, the previous army chief was not telling the truth when he said we asked [for their] help," the spokesperson said. "The current [army] leadership has just recently taken over the office." Fawad stated that all they had asked for was for them to remain impartial within the army.

The political system of Pakistan is thrown into disarray.

Fawad responded to Sackur's question by stating that the party was ready to put aside its partisan interests and differences in order to work together for the benefit of their nation. Sackur had asked if the former interior minister and his party were prepared to put aside their differences and put aside their partisan interests.

In addition, he stated that democratic parties in Pakistan "do have their own programmes," despite the fact that Pakistan is a democratic nation.

In addition, he stated that the nation

was thrown into "political instability" as a direct result of Imran Khan being "unconstitutionally removed from power."

According to a former interior minister, "Now people are standing on one side and the present ruling class, which we call the imported government, is standing on the other side, and that is the major problem in Pakistan."

The host inquired to Fawad regarding whether or not it was responsible on the part of PTI to call for major street rallies, taking into consideration the current state of the economy.

The head of the PTI provided a response, stating that the current economic crisis the country is experiencing is the result of political unpredictability and that the "imported government has dismally failed to provide assurance about their policies."

"They do not have a plan; they do not have a plan for the economy; they do not have a plan for administration." The state of the economy is deteriorating. He stated, "Terrorism is making a comeback in Pakistan."

Before Fawad was questioned

regarding the "economic difficulties" that the PTI government allegedly left behind, he responded by claiming that the statement was "not correct" and added that Pakistan was in "shambles" when the PTI took power in 2018.

"When we took over, Pakistan was in shambles, and when we left, according to the economic survey of Pakistan released by this government... our economy was growing at the rate of 6%," he added. "Pakistan was in shambles when we took over, and when we left, according to the economic survey of Pakistan released by this government..."

In addition, he stated that the BBC and all other independent publications have commended the manner in which the PTI government battled COVID-19. Fawad further stated that the economy was "doing incredibly well" under the leadership of the PTI government, but that "the current upheaval has thrown everything out the window."

"The most ethical administration in seventy-five years"

Fawad asserted that the PTI chief was responsible for providing Pakistan with "one of the cleanest governments in 75 years."

"Not a single corruption scandal can be ascribed to the Cabinet or to Imran Khan," he stated emphatically after the question was asked.



He claimed that the improvement in Pakistan's rating on the corruption index was due in part to the judiciary, which is the branch of government responsible for upholding the rule of law.

He stated that the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) is being investigated for "false charges," adding that the evidence is "fabricated" and that the investigations are "funny."

Having respect for established institutions

Fawad remarked that the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) has not turned against "anyone," and he added that the party respects the institutions of the nation.

"In Pakistan, the unelected institutions like the judiciary and the military utilised their powers beyond the Constitution, which is known by everyone," he continued. "This is something that everyone is aware of."

Cypher

When asked by Sackur about the failure of the PTI chief to present evidence regarding his claims of a "foreign conspiracy," the leader of the PTI responded by saying that the PTI had presented the evidence, and that the party had also written to the president of Pakistan to request a judicial investigation into the alleged conspiracy.

However, our suggestion in that regard was never taken into consideration, he stated.

He went on to assert that the PTI had never had "war with the United States" as one of its goals.

It is not possible for the administration to organise elections at this time.

The head of the PTI stated that the existing government is not prepared to hold elections in their current capacity.

He made the following statement: "We can wait for elections; we have no problem. However, this government is not prepared to hold polls, even local body elections in a city like Islamabad."

According to what he had to say, "Elections are not the requirement of the PTI but rather the necessity of Pakistan right now."



Pakistan received 17 Billion in loans in FY22 and paid back \$12.4 billion: MEA Report

As of 30th June 2022, the total external debt of the government was USD 88,836 million. Around 70% of the total external public debt was obtained from multilateral and bilateral sources having concessional terms and longer maturity



By Javed Mahmood

ISLAMABAD: In the financial year 2021-22, Pakistan received about \$17 billion in foreign loans while the country returned \$12.4 billion in external loans during the last fiscal year.

From July 2021 to June 2022, disbursements of USD 16,974 million were mainly under the project and program loans/grants with ADB, World Bank, and IsDB being the largest contributors among multilateral development partners. In bilateral, China was the largest contributor to total disbursements in the specified time. The Ministry of Economic Affairs has reported this in its annual report on Foreign Economic Assistance for July 2021 to June 2022, released on Jan 10, 2023.

The energy & power sector received the largest share of disbursements, i.e. 26% of the total. External financing is an important source for developing countries including Pakistan as it can be productive for the economic growth of such countries. External debt is the total external debt owed by the country, whereas, external public debt is the total external debt owed by the government.

According to the report, as of 30th June 2022, Pakistan's total external public debt amounted to USD 88.84 billion. The Government paid USD 12,378 million during the FY 2021-22 on account of debt servicing of external public loans. Of this, principal repayments were USD 10,355 million and interest payments were USD 2,023 million. Furthermore, the net transfers of the Government's external public debt were USD 6,380 million.

Foreign Economic Assistance (FEA), the report said, is the aid that promotes the economic development and welfare of developing countries, provided bilaterally or through multilateral agencies. The main purpose of FEA is to provide relief and assistance to developing economies in minimizing fiscal imbalances and promoting growth and development. The purpose of this report is to highlight the FEA received by the Government of Pakistan from bilateral and multilateral development partners from July 2021 to June 2022, both loans and grants.

In terms of new commitments, the Government of Pakistan signed new agreements worth USD 15,722 million

in the FY 2021-22. These commitments were composed of Eurobonds, Time deposits from Saudi Arabia, and multilateral & bilateral development partners. Out of these commitments, 62% was committed by international financial investors under bonds, commercial banks, and time deposits to provide support to the budget, strengthen the foreign exchange reserves and stabilize the exchange rate, 16% as project financing, 14% as commodity financing, and 8% as program financing. In FY 2021-22, financing for the procurement of the Covid-19 vaccine was the key priority of the Government.

Out of the total commitments agreed during Jul - Jun of FY 2021-22, USD 9,763 million (62% of total commitments) was committed by international financial investors under bonds, commercial banks and safe deposits to strengthen the foreign exchange reserves and stabilize the exchange rate. While 16% of the commitments were earmarked for project financing followed by commodity financing with USD 2,133 million (14% of total), an amount of USD 1,278 million was committed for program financing



through ADB to broaden and deepen the financial system, improve fiscal management and to bring financing sustainability in the energy sector to foster growth in Pakistan.

During the period under review, the Government committed USD 2,547 million as project financing for the procurement of Covid-19 vaccines, Energy/Power, Education and Training, Social Welfare, Water, and Health & Nutrition Sectors of the economy. The sectoral composition of the new commitments reflects the priority development objectives of the Government and it illustrates that financing for the procurement of the Covid-19 vaccine was the key priority of the Government during the FY 2021-22 committing USD 573 million. Similarly, USD 447 million has been committed to Energy/Power Sector followed by water USD 183 million, Education & Training Sector USD 149 million, Social Welfare USD 149 million, and Health & Nutrition USD 25.26 million. An amount of USD 1,012 million has been committed by China.

Disbursements of USD 16,974 million during July 2021 – June 2022 were mainly under the projects and programs loans/grants from multilateral, bilateral development partners and financial institutions. Details show that around USD 4,828 million (28% worth of disbursement) came

from multilateral development partners. Amongst multilateral development partners, ADB, World Bank, and IsDB were the largest development partners with disbursements of USD 1,626 million, USD 1,586 million, and USD 1,406 million (10%, 9%, and 8% of total disbursements) respectively. On the bilateral side, China disbursed the largest amount of USD 1,685 million followed by Saudi Arabia with USD 401 million.

The FEA is mainly received in the shape of

program financing, budgetary support, project financing, and commodity financing. During the period under review, 59% of the total disbursements were obtained for Balance of Payments/ Budgetary support which comprises bonds worth USD 2,000 million, commercial financing of USD 4,873 million, and time deposits of USD 3,000 million, which have been arranged to strengthen foreign exchange reserves and stabilize the exchange rate. In the same way, 21% of the disbursements were obtained under project financing followed by program financing of USD 1,765 million and commodity financing of 1,727 million.

The sectoral composition of project assistance is summarized as follows: During FY2021-22, the largest share of disbursements i.e. 26% of the total amount was received in the Energy & Power sector (USD 931 million), followed by Transport & Communication (7%), Agriculture (5%), Governance, Research & Statistics (4%), and Education & Training (3%) in the total project assistance; On the other hand, 16% of the total project assistance was received for Covid-19 financing needs, amounting to USD 559 million.

As of 30th June 2022, the total external debt of the government was USD 88,836 million. Around 70% of the total external public debt was obtained from multilateral and bilateral sources having concessional terms and longer maturity.



Short-term Govt's Go-Slow Policy igniting economic crisis

ISLAMABAD: The go-slow policy of the short-term coalition government has further deepened the economic crisis in Pakistan. Almost every week, negative developments are surfacing in the country, a factor that is rapidly eroding the economic foundations of Pakistan. In April last year, the coalition government came to power and its short-term will expire by August this year. Since April 2022, the coalition government has been taking important decisions slowly, delaying the release of the next IMF tranche, and disbursements of further cash assistance by Saudi Arabia, China, and UAE are badly damaging the economy of Pakistan. Critical issues such as shortage of gas, and electricity, and record high inflation are also adding fuel to fire, creating more troubles for the consumers and the government as well.

For the past three months, the government and the IMF have locked horns over the completion of the ninth review. The IMF has been demanding the government to further enhance electricity, and fuel prices, and take more measures to cover the gap in tax collection targets for the ongoing fiscal year. From July-Dec 2022, the Federal Board of Revenue has reported around 265 billion rupees shortfall in the collection of tax revenues. The officials of the IMF want the coalition government to generate more tax revenue, and enhance the costs of utilities to qualify for the release of the next \$1.1 billion tranche. The government, nonetheless, has been showing reluctance to further burden the people with more taxes and price-hikes, fearing a backlash from the public. This scenario has been giving a serious blow to key economic indicators such as foreign exchange reserves, inflows of remittances, and foreign investments, triggering economic uncertainty in the country.

By the first week of Jan 2023, the foreign exchange reserves with the State Bank of Pakistan have fallen to a record low since 2014 _ \$4.5 billion. Total national reserves are around \$10.3 billion as the commercial banks are holding more or less 5.8 billion dollars reserves. When the coalition



government came to power, the SBP was holding \$10 billion in foreign exchange reserves while the national reserves stood at \$16 billion at that time.

Despite the release of an IMF loan of \$1.1 billion in Sept last year and disbursement of Chinese commercial banks' loans, AIIB, the World Bank, and ADB assistance, and the rollover of Saudi deposits for one more year, the foreign exchange reserves of the SBP never hit the \$10 billion level again since April 2022. And the economic uncertainty has deepened to such an extent that the central bank's reserves have plummeted to just \$4.5 billion by the first week of January 2023_ less than the monthly imports of Pakistan.

Moreover, the value of the rupee is depreciating every day in the open market and the black market. These days, the US dollar is being sold above 265 rupees in the open market as against the 227 rupees rate in the inter-bank. It reflects the shortage of foreign exchange to meet import requirements and other purposes. The low-level reserves of the SBP have left the government with no other choice but to restrict the opening of L/Cs for non-essential imports. Consequently, we are experiencing a shortage of many essential consumer items, including medicines along with a record increase in their prices.

Similarly, the inflows of remittances are declining with the passage of time as a wide gap between the dollar-rupee exchange rate in the inter-bank and open market is influencing people to send money through the hundi/hawala channels. For example, monthly inflows of remittances have declined to \$2.2 billion, from a record-high level of \$2.8 billion in 2022. Also, there is a no different situation on the front of foreign investment.

Threat of Default

Finance Minister Senator Muhammad Ishaq Dar has repeatedly stated that Pakistan will never default. He also said that the government would repay its payable foreign loans _ except rescheduling of \$27 billion loans in the wake of catastrophic floods in Pakistan in recent months. Dar has also been claiming that in the next few weeks, Saudi Arabia, China, UAE, and IMF will beef up the foreign exchange reserves of Pakistan. Nevertheless, the situation on the ground is entirely critical as the SBP's reserves have depleted to \$4.5 billion, and except government's statements, the people are still eagerly waiting for good news on the economic front. Bloomberg also reported on Jan 9, 2023, that Pakistan is unlikely to face default in 2023 because of expected inflows from the Geneva conference donors and approval of the IMF's next tranche.

Panicked by the record-low SBP's reserves, Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif made a telephone call to the managing director of the IMF Kristalina Georgieva before leaving for the Geneva conference. Premier requested the IMF chief to relax the fund's conditions pertaining to further hikes in utility rates, and the imposition of more taxes because the country has been going through a very difficult phase after recent devastating floods. Finance Minister Senator Muhammad Ishaq Dar, who is accompanying PM Shehbaz at the Geneva conference today, will hold a crucial meeting with the IMF team in Geneva to seek their support for the early completion of the ninth review of the economy that will lead to the release of \$1.1 billion next tranche.

IMF programme and cash assistance from Saudi Arabia, China, and UAE

In his recent press conference in Islamabad, finance minister Ishaq Dar told the media that friendly countries like Saudi Arabia, China, and the United Arab Emirates are ready to provide more financial support to Pakistan but with the condition that Pakistan will have to follow the IMF programme to avoid the risk of default. In other words, the friendly countries have made it clear to the government that without going with the ongoing IMF programme, Pakistan will not be able to

mop up the required amount of foreign exchange in 2023. Some media reports indicate that the government will have to arrange more than \$25 billion in 2023 to return foreign loans and cover the current account deficit. Thus, the government seemed to have no other choice but to pursue the IMF conditions and further delay in the release of the fund's tranche mean more economic uncertainty in the country with an increase in default risk.

In this prevailing scenario, the coalition government must give up its go-slow policy and take measures that boost business confidence, attract foreign investments, and ensure the release of more funds by multi-lateral creditors and friendly countries. At present, the key focus of the coalition government is to line up foreign loans slowly to meet the external repayments and keep the foreign exchange reserves at a low level so that the government could not face the pressure of holding early elections in the country.

Foreign Investment in Pakistan

In 2021-22, Saudi Arabia, UAE, and China announced billions of dollars in foreign investment projects for Pakistan. Saudi Arabia indicated a \$15 billion investment in Gwadar to develop an oil city there while UAE announced \$10 billion investments in different projects in the country. And China

also indicated multi-billion dollar new investments in the CPEC projects. Unfortunately, none of the mega-investment projects materialized in 2022 because after the regime change as the economic uncertainty deepened to such an extent that default became the talk of the town in Pakistan and abroad.

With the change of regime in April last year, all and sundry in the country were anticipating an improvement in the national economy, but things further moved in the wrong direction. Go-slow and short-term approaches of the coalition government pertaining to economic stability in the country will do more harm to Pakistan and the national economy in the days ahead.

Geneva Conference and \$10 billion pledges

More than 25 countries and multi-lateral donor agencies have announced about \$10 billion in financial assistance for Pakistan for flood relief and rehabilitation at the Geneva conference on Monday (Jan 9). Pakistan had sought \$8 billion in aid from the donors at the conference, but the response exceeded the government's expectations as donors pledged more than \$10 billion in aid for Pakistan. Islamic Development Bank has announced the highest assistance _ \$4.2 billion to be provided to Pakistan in three years while the World Bank has announced \$2 billion for Pakistan.





Likewise, Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank has promised to lend \$1 billion while Asian Development Bank will provide \$500 million to the Pakistan government for different flood rehabilitation programmes. Meanwhile, the friendly countries of Pakistan also announced financial aid for Pakistan at the Geneva conference on Jan 9, 2023. Below is the country-wise break-up of assistance in alphabetic order.

- Azerbaijan: \$2 million
- Canada: \$18.6 million
- China: \$100 million
- Denmark: \$3.8 million for UNICEF's work in Pakistan
- European Union: €87 million
- France: \$10 million
- Germany: €84 million
- Italy: €23 million
- Japan: \$77 million
- Netherlands: €3.5 million
- Norway: \$6.5 million
- Qatar: \$25 million
- Saudi Arabia: \$1 billion investments
- Sweden: \$7.5 million (humanitarian assistance)
- United Kingdom: £36 million
- United States: \$100 million

Pakistan and the United Nations Secretary-General Antonio Guterres jointly organized the climate change conference in Geneva to mobilize the global community's support for Pakistan to pace up the rehabilitation of flood-ravaged people and areas. Pakistan sought \$8 billion in aid, nonetheless, the donor's commitments exceeded the expectations of Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif, Information minister Marriyum Aurangzeb said. The recent floods wreaked havoc in the country, killing at least 1,700 people and causing \$16 billion worth of losses to the infrastructure and agriculture sector. Information Minister said that the Islamic Development Bank has pledged the highest amount of aid _ \$4.2 billion in three years, followed by \$2 billion by the World Bank.



The European Commission committed 500 million euros in assistance for flood rehabilitation in Pakistan. Earlier, Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif informed the donors that Pakistan was looking for aid from the donors for the next three years to rehabilitate flood-affected people and areas.

Meanwhile, Saudi Press Agency reported on Jan 10 that Saudi Crown Prince Muhammad Bin Salman has directed the Saudi Development Fund to study an increase in Saudi cash deposits to \$5 billion with the State Bank of Pakistan _ from the existing \$3 billion to \$5 billion. The Crown Prince also ordered the SDF to evaluate \$10 billion investments in Pakistan that were discussed in 2022. In this situation, the coalition government must make coordinated efforts to materialize the financial assistance pledged at the Geneva conference and Saudi investments in Pakistan.

Important Questions about Geneva conference pledges

The multi-lateral credit agencies have announced \$7.2 billion in loans for Pakistan. Most multilateral loans take a minimum of four months' time for approval and disbursement that too against reasonably robust indicators of performance against which the loans are being provided.

Moreover, proper details are not available about the \$7.2 billion loans such as:

1. How much amount of the loans will be disbursed in how much time?
2. How much of this \$7.2 billion loans portfolio is re-programming of existing IsDB, ADB, and WB loans which are already in the pipelines?
3. What is the disbursement schedule for this \$7.2 billion loan?

BOTTOM LINE

The pledges made at the Geneva Conference will have Zero impact on the immediate fiscal and current account positions in Pakistan.

By Javed Mahmood

Financing of \$9.7b not alternate to IMF program

Additional deposits from Saudi Arabia to provide breathing space to Pakistan; urgent extra dollar inflows from KSA, China only option left

By Mehtab Haider

Pakistan has received pledges worth \$9.7 billion from multilateral and bilateral creditors during the Donors Conference in Geneva for reconstruction in the flood-hit areas. In another important development, Saudi Arabia announced it was studying to make an investment worth \$10 billion and jacking up deposits to \$5 billion from the existing level of \$3 billion to assist the cash-starved and struggling economy of Pakistan.

These additional deposits from KSA will provide a breathing space to Pakistan for a couple of months and will provide an opportunity for taking measures to revive the stalled IMF program. However, the projected financing of \$9.7 billion from multilateral and bilateral creditors cannot be considered as an alternate to the IMF program, but will help Islamabad narrow down its overall financing requirements over the next three years on account of the external front.

The IMF has estimated that Pakistan will have an external financing requirement of over \$78 billion; and if this pledged financing of \$9.7 billion is materialized over the next three years, the financing requirement will be reduced proportionally.

Minister for Finance Ishaq Dar along with his team held a meeting with the IMF mission chief and termed it as an effort to narrow down on the Fund's demands related to erasing the monster of circular debt in the gas and electricity sector, as well as taking additional measures. He made it clear the government would not burden common citizen but those areas identified where there would be an additional burden on the masses.

Dar said the 'special tax' of 10% was stuck up in court in the guise of the stay order and the government team considered it would be collected in a staggered manner. However, for other subsidies and revenue shortfalls faced by FBR in December 2022, the government could take additional taxation measures without further burdening the masses.



Now Pakistan and the IMF will have to decide whether the pending 9th and 10th reviews should be clubbed or the 9th review be accomplished standalone.

Although, Minister for Finance Ishaq Dar had expressed willingness to club both reviews as the timeframe for the 10th review under the Extended Fund Facility (EFF) had also become due, many insiders believed that both reviews should be done separately, because clubbing might cause further delay in revival of stalled program in the wake of non-availability of the whole data for end-December 2022, till the third week of January 2023.

For the time being, when the foreign exchange reserves held by the State Bank of Pakistan (SBP) were depleting fast, Pakistan has been left with no other option but to ensure additional dollar inflows from KSA and China on an immediate basis.

In the aftermath of the recent visit of Army Chief General Syed Asim Munir to KSA, Pakistani authorities are expecting Saudi Arabia would provide additional deposits soon to salvage Islamabad from the outburst of the full-fledged balance of payment crisis.

Although, friendly countries attached their financial support with the revival of the IMF program, Pakistan's high-ups made

last ditch effort to convince KSA to provide much-needed assistance to avert eruption of a crisis-like situation.

The FBR had done its internal workings and had assessed that the tax collection target of Rs 7470 billion would be missed with a margin of Rs 170 billion. So, the annual tax collection will fetch Rs 7300 billion into the national kitty.

The FBR's Inland Revenue (IR) has estimated that it will be able to materialize the assigned tax collection target in the second half (Jan-June) period of the current fiscal year, so the Income Tax, Sales Tax and Federal Excise Duty (FED) related targets would remain intact.

The FBR envisaged the Income Tax collection target of Rs 3024 billion, Sales Tax, Rs 3076 billion and FED, Rs 402 billion. The customs duty collection target was envisaged at Rs 953 billion.

According to sources the customs duty collection target, through internal arrangement, was jacked up and set at Rs 1150 billion.

Now in the first six months (July-Dec) period, the FBR has collected Rs 470 billion through customs duty collection and witnessed possible shortfall of Rs 90 billion so far.



The imports' compression resulted in reduction of \$9 billion as it stood at \$31 billion in the first six months of the current fiscal year against \$40 billion in the same period of the last financial year. So the contribution of tax collection at the import stage reduced from 52 percent in the last entire financial year to around 43 percent in the first half of ongoing fiscal.

In order to keep the budget deficit within the desired limit agreed upon with the IMF, the government has finalized imposition of

flood levy through Presidential Ordinance within a range of 1 to 3 percent for discouraging imports. Regarding proposal for slapping 'windfall profit tax,' the government has changed its mind and was now considering imposing it in shape of levy.

These two measures in shape of levy will fetch revenues to the tune of Rs 94 billion in the second half of the current fiscal year. The flood levy in the range of 1 to 3 percent on imports will bring revenues of Rs 70

billion and levy in shape of 'windfall profit' from banking sector is expected to fetch Rs 30 billion.

However, the government decided to keep revenue estimates from mini budget on the lower and conservative side. It is quite hard to predict the imports' compression in the remaining period of the current fiscal year.

The FBR has assumed that the import compression will not further aggravate in the coming months and with the approach of status quo the revenue collection will face a Rs 170 billion dip in achieving the annual tax collection target.

Even with the revival of the IMF program, there is growing realization among policy makers that Pakistan is left with no other option but to undertake much-needed structural reforms on short, medium to long term basis to generate non-debt-creating dollar inflows.

With the approach of status quo and perpetual elite capture, the dream of bringing desired changes will never materialize. For boosting non-debt-creating inflows, the country will have to focus on boosting Pak-made exports and luring remittances from Pakistanis living abroad. For boosting the dwindling exports, the government will have to do spadework for the provision of energy at affordable rates for producing exportable surplus at competitive rates otherwise the dream of increasing exports will remain just a day dreaming.



Another energy-tough year in the wings

By Khaleeq Kiani

Concluding a tough year (2022) in terms of record energy prices, the people of Pakistan are unlikely to see any noticeable relief over the next 12 months, except maybe some election-related tinkering with pricing that would, at best, be short-lived.

Unfortunately, the fundamentals for affordable energy on a sustainable basis are not yet right.

The gas regulator — Oil & Gas Regulatory Authority (Ogra)— increased the prescribed price of natural gas by 45 per cent for two gas utilities — Sui Southern Gas Company Limited and Sui Northern Gas Pipelines Limited (SNGPL) — in the first week of June. The resultant increase in consumer-end prices has still not been issued despite a mandatory 40-day deadline. This was on top of a price freeze maintained by the former PTI government.

The double-dose backlog had to come back with a vengeance. Five months later, the two gas utilities demanded up to 237pc increase in natural gas rates to generate about Rs660 billion in additional funds in 2022-23.

To be precise, the Lahore-based SNGPL has sought an increase of Rs1,294 per million British thermal units (mmBtu) or 237pc while Karachi-based SSGCL has demanded an increase of Rs668 per unit or 96pc to meet their revenue requirements for 2022-23. On top of that, SNGPL has also sought another Rs1,016 per unit as cost of services for RLNG, including Rs762 per mmBtu on account of the differential impact of diversion of RLNG to the residential consumers at cheap rates in winters.

Both companies have claimed that the major reason for the higher revenue requirement was linked to the international price of crude oil and furnace oil in line with agreements signed by the government with gas producers. The regulator has already conducted public hearings on the subject and is yet to come up with its determination. There can be a delay but no escape.



The gas circular debt is already hovering higher than Rs1.5 trillion and needs to be settled. SNGPL alone has to clear almost Rs300bn by March 2023 to Pakistan State Oil (PSO) on account of LNG payables. PSO's total receivables including those from other entities, including the power sector, are now close to Rs650bn. The situation is such that PSO is pushing to take over SNGPL's share on prevailing subdued share prices in the stock market. Ironically, despite this unprecedented price in international oil and gas prices and the resultant increase in the import bill of two essential commodities, the two gas utilities have failed to control their unsustainable system losses against regulatory targets approved by the government.

Over the last three years (2019-22), both the gas utilities have not been able to achieve loss — commonly described as unaccounted for gas (UFG) — reduction targets set by the Ogra and approved by the federal cabinet, according to a 3-year performance report released by the petroleum division.

Simply put, the two companies' UFG account for almost 600-650 million acre feet per day (mmcfd) that could easily produce more than 1,200MW of cheap electricity at Rs8-9 per unit and is more than half of the total LNG imports of about 800-900mmcfd and account for almost one-third of the total domestic gas production.

Paradoxically, the cheaper LNG options are not available to Pakistan, at least not during the current calendar year, except for those already contracted from Qatar. Therefore, a substantial chunk of power supplies would be dependent on furnace oil and coal — both local and imported.

The induction of about 2,600MW of Thar coal-based power generation is a valuable contribution but net addition during the current year would be about 1,300MW in addition to another mega 1,200MW plus LNG-based 4th project at Trimmu for which LNG availability would remain a challenge. The existing three such projects — contracted as must-run — are hardly functioning at full capacity due to fuel challenges.

Likewise, there will be an almost negligible additional contribution from fresh renewable energy (RE) plants. Their contribution to a reduction in electricity prices will be minimal given the continuously rising impact of capacity payments that, on average, cost about Rs10 per unit (ranging between Rs6 to Rs20 per unit for various plants).

Most power purchase agreements with base load thermal power plants are capacity based under 'Take or Pay' contracts. Capacity payments must be paid against available generation capacity irrespective of whether it is utilised or not.

Continued on a page 30

Winter Sports: Tourists Favourite Game

Last year was the beginning of winter sports in North Pakistan. Today this event is being liked by Pakistani as well as the diplomatic corp in Pakistan.

This year season started with a range of skiing and snowboarding competitions in different areas of Gilgit-Baltistan and KP.

The first Event of the winter Snow Sports Festival was held in Chitral, which was well attended by the public. The main thing was that the event attracted from all over the world and it proved a miracle for the tourism industry.

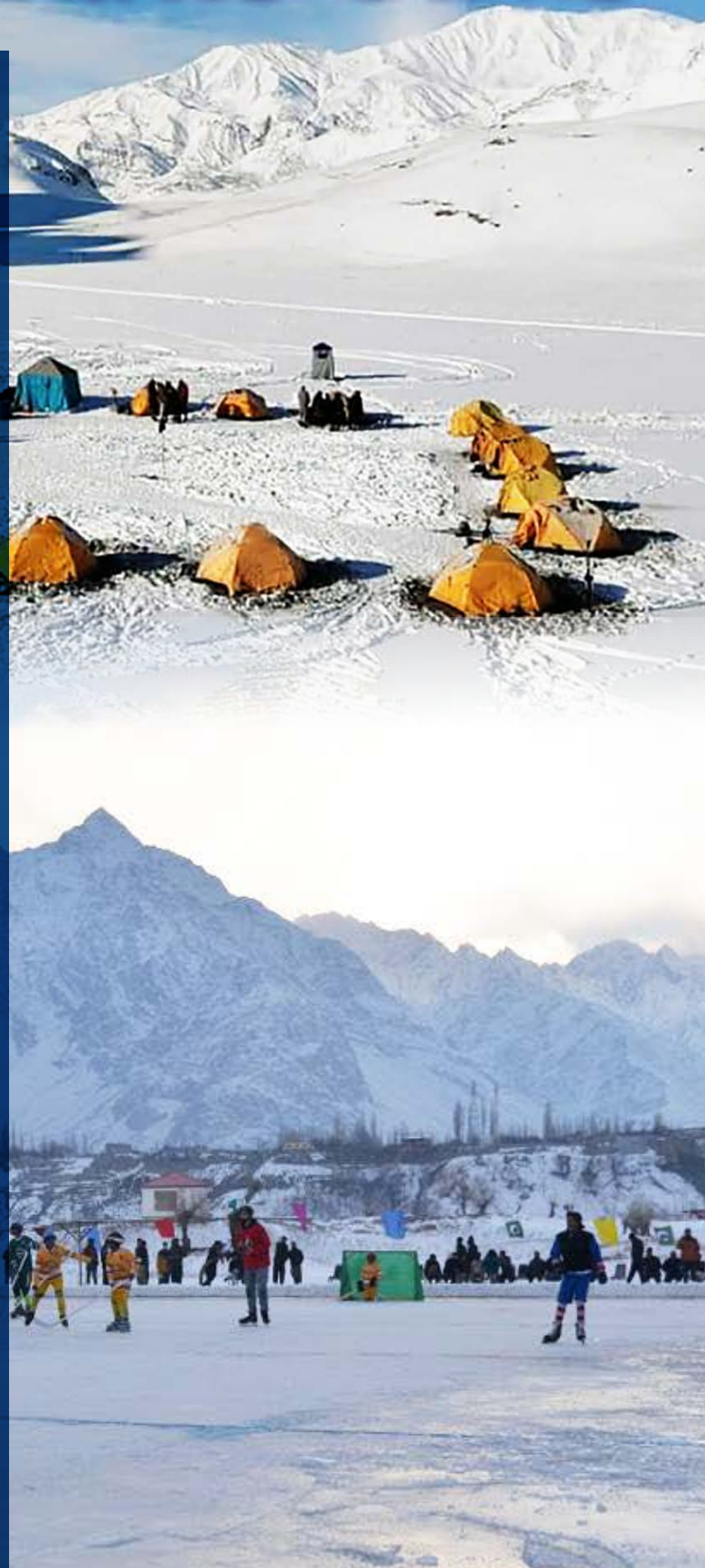
For Pakistan, things are slowly built up for winter sports. Previously there was only one destination, Naltar Valley, Now, snow festivals/ tournaments are held at Malam Jabba, Kalam, Madak Lasht, Qaq Lasht and Parvak in KP. Then Altit in Hunza, Ghulkin in Gojal, Khalti Lake in Ghizer, Naltar in Gilgit, Hussain Abad in Skardu, and many cities recognized as winter sports stations in Gilgit Baltistan.

There are 8-10 winter sports clubs in Gilgit-Baltistan that allow people to get plenty of opportunities to participate in winter sports activities. One can confidently say there's a lot more to look forward to in the future.

Ice Hockey, Curling, figure skating, Skiing, Kopolu, and winter action-adventure sports. People now have more options. Additionally, it is becoming easier for people to enjoy these sports with much fewer spendings since all one needs is to rent kits.

In winter, with lakes freezing over, open-air ice rinks are affordable to make because of the temperature. However, the plan is to make such things accessible all year round.

Pakistan has some of the biggest glaciers outside the polar region and some of the highest mountains but there were no activities in these areas especially Northern areas of Pakistan as far as the winter season is concerned.







The financial impact of capacity payments increased from about Rs600bn in 2020-21 to more than Rs720bn. It will gain pace as new China-Pakistan Economic Corridor based plants come into the system. Tar coal-based plants are no exception, although their fuel cost would be significantly lower.

As a pointer towards how the electricity prices will behave during 2023, it will suffice to recall that the finance and power divisions came up with recommendations in December 2022. These were to impose a special surcharge on consumers ranging between Rs12 to 40 per unit to cover a Rs706-800bn gap arising out of unbudgeted subsidies, system losses of around 17-18pc and 10-17pc less recoveries against billing. The financial gap will only keep growing unless drastic governance steps are

introduced — an unlikely event, at least during the year ahead. The US Energy Information Administration (EIA), Goldman Sachs and JP Morgan have forecast international crude prices between \$90 to 110 per barrel in most of the first half of the year, almost 8-9pc higher than less than \$80 per barrel at present.

Yet there are many uncertainties about the global oil and LNG prices, including those related to Russian supplies and US-EU sanctions against Russia. That means oil-importing countries like Pakistan are unlikely to get any major relief from abroad.

Islamabad's efforts to arrange energy imports from Moscow also remain uncertain. The two sides have re-engaged for energy cooperation, and a Russian delega-

tion led by the energy minister is expected to be in Islamabad by the third week of January for cheaper oil supplies to Pakistan.

How quickly negotiations progress towards reality will have to be seen, more importantly in the context of the latest ban imposed by President Putin on oil supplies to countries and entities that abide by the 30pc lower price cap imposed by US-EU allies on Russian supplies. While President Putin can exempt such bans under special cases — as maybe the case of Pakistan — the end situation is still very murky.

But that is not all. Irrespective of the international price trend, Pakistanis still have to brave additional taxes on petroleum products under the International Monetary Fund programme that has to expire in the third quarter of the year. While about a Rs20 per litre increase in petroleum development levy on high-speed diesel before March is a foregone conclusion, the introduction of GST on all major oil products will soon be another bitter reality.

The sad part is that political leadership in the government and the opposition appears poles apart on addressing governance challenges in the energy sector and, by extension, towards reform that help contain energy costs and improve the energy mix.

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2022 — a dismal year for Pakistani startups

It was the changing global macros more than anything that spoiled the party

By Mutaheer Khan

By every measure, 2022 has been a pretty tumultuous year for Pakistan. On the political front, it saw the first vote of no confidence being passed in parliament, removing former prime minister Imran Khan's government. The massive protests that followed seem to have put an irreparable dent in the establishment's role and status.

However, all those developments pale in comparison to the economic crisis the country has been reeling through over the last year. Peak inflation in almost two generations and the sharp monetary contraction managed to put a major dent in customers' and businesses' pockets. All of this was only made worse by the dilly-dallying resumption of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) programme and the constant talk of default.

For tech startups though, it was the changing global macros more than anything that spoiled the party. After a solid 2021 on the back of a capital frenzy that swept away markets the world over, and record investment of \$366 million in Pakistan, there was naturally a lot of optimism for the ecosystem in 2022. And it started on a high note too: local startups raised over \$174m in the first quarter. But the US Federal Reserve's contractionary policy amid high inflation soon caught up and slowed down the venture capital activity.

The cracks first began to appear in the second quarter of 2022, when startups started scaling back their operations and laying off people. That included Airlift, which pulled out of all cities other than Karachi, Lahore and Islamabad and let go of 31 per cent of the workforce. Soon after, Swvl, Retailo and Truck It In followed suit. However, the fundraising held up to \$104m, still higher compared to the same period last year.

Come the third quarter and it was almost carnage. Investment plunged 47pc QoQ and 68pc YoY to \$55.4m — the lowest since Q1-2021. More than that, the period saw the biggest casualty of the new fundraising environment: Airlift, the most funded Pakistani startup, announced it was shutting all operations after its investors backed out. This was the same company that had first unlocked meaningful capital for the country.

In 2019, it announced a \$12m Series A, with participation from First Round, one of the backers of Uber. Then in 2021, it bagged Series B of \$85m — an eye-popping amount by local standards.

The post-mortem in the press and social media didn't give a comforting picture. And to make things far worse, around a similar time, news reports of TAG — a regulated fintech with \$17.5m in funding — forging its documents appeared. It raised serious question marks over both the underlying governance at startups and investors' due diligence process. More importantly, it certainly didn't induce confidence among foreigners who had very recently started exploring Pakistan as an investment destination.



Whether it was for these high-profile shutdowns, the global macros or our own weakening fundamentals, the pullback was hard to miss. The number of unique investors participating in Pakistani startup deals fell to just 52, the lowest since Q1-2021. And while the current quarter is yet to complete, it makes up for a dismal picture.

Only seven investments (excluding M&A) worth \$13.9m have been disclosed so far. If it continues this way, it would be the worst quarter in terms of amount since Q1-2022 and joint lowest by deal count since Q2-2020.

Doomsday?

Based on all this information, it might seem like doomsday for the startup scene.

But there's hope.

A number of positives have come out for the ecosystem towards the tail end of the year. For example, JS Group announced a partnership with 500 Startups, one of the biggest investors globally — thus unlocking a mix of local and foreign capital. Similarly, Duraid Qureshi of Hum Network and Naveed Sherwani of US-based RapidSilicon launched a \$50m Pakistan-focused Katalytic Fund. Moreover, at least three local VCs are in the process of raising their second investment vehicle. All of it should bring in some much-needed liquidity to the market.

That said, most of Pakistan's inherent issues remain and have raised the country's risk premium, which is well beyond the control of any founder. The perennial external account troubles are hitting the fan as forex reserves are now not even enough to cover a month of imports. In this uncertain environment, even the more established businesses are struggling to keep afloat and continue daily operations, let alone early-stage startups.

Courtesy DAWN

Hurdles bar solar, wind assets from reaching national grid

Around 8.4 GW of Pak solar, wind capacity await clearance; installing FPVs on hydropower reservoirs offers huge benefits; solar induction to enhance generation capacity of hydropower plants

By Azeem Waqas

The cost competitiveness of utility-scale wind and solar assets in Pakistan is a known fact. However, regulatory hurdles and policy inconsistency have prevented their widespread penetration into Pakistan's national grid.

At present, only 1200 MW of wind and 430 MW of solar-powered capacity have been added to the system, while almost 8.4 GW of solar and wind capacity remains in the pipeline, waiting for regulatory hurdles to be removed or competitive bidding to occur.

The government also recently announced its intention to launch solar power projects worth 14 GW to rid the country of its dependence on imported fuels by the next year. Of this planned capacity, 9 GW will be kicked-off on priority basis, which could include 6 GW of large scale projects, 2 GW of residential solar on 11 KV feeders and 1 GW of solar projects for conversion of government buildings and diesel tubewells to the solar power. For residential consumers, the initiative would include setting up of 1-3 KW solar PV systems in residential feeders through a model where installation costs would be recovered from the consumers through monthly power bills. Government buildings, along with seven existing thermal power generation sites, would also be converted to solar power in a separate phase.

The Institute for Energy Economics and Financial Analysis (IEEFF) in its recent report suggested that "the addition of floating solar photovoltaic (FPV) to hydropower assets can open up new opportunities for scaling up solar power, especially in countries like Pakistan with high population densities and competitive usages for available land."

Installing FPVs on existing



hydropower reservoirs could offer benefits such as the ability to utilize existing transmission networks, a close proximity to load centers, as well as improved energy yields due to the cooling effect produced by the presence of solar PV on reservoirs.

Suitable areas for installation of solar PVs on hydropower projects can be along river banks, access roads and floating surfaces behind weir tunnels and other suitable project infrastructure.

The FPV addition to large hydropower capacity can be of particular interest in Pakistan owing to the ability of hydropower sites to be operated flexibly.

The solar capacity can even help manage periods of low water availability by allowing these assets to operate in 'peaking' mode during start of summer months, before monsoons arrive.

In return, hydropower can smooth the variability of solar output by operating in a 'load-following' mode during the day. FPV can also be installed on run-of-the-river hydropower projects or the vast canal network that supplies irrigation water across the country.

World Bank has already been pushing for such projects and recently negotiated a loan of \$341.5 million with WAPDA for the installation of a 300 MW floating solar PV setup on the Tarbela-Gazi Barotha complex. The WB also intends to support FPV on smaller hydropower projects through Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Hydropower and Renewable Energy Development Programme for which the Bank is providing a USD 450 million loan.

The Bank has set aside US \$12 million for the installation of about 10-15 MW of solar PV on smaller hydropower assets being developed by the Pakhtunkhwa Energy Development Organization (PEDO).

The Bank asserts that generation capacity of hydropower plants can be enhanced by 5-10% with the induction of solar. The FPV on hydropower assets can also enhance economic performance of such plants; for instance the addition of a 5 MW FPV set up on the 88 MW Gabral Kalam Hydropower Project can enhance its returns by up to 19%.

Enhancing the distributed solar generation capacity through the addition of

more rooftop solar systems across residential, industrial or commercial sector might be another way of adding more flexible generation capacity to the grid within a short period of time. However, the government's approach to amplify rooftop solar generation capacity through feed-in tariff and net-metering has had limited success so far, due to lack of affordable and accessible capital.

This is certainly a step in the right direction and, if pursued with determination, could yield intended results in a short period of time. The proposed model of incentivizing rooftop-installations in residential sector through provision of capital, however, could be a risky move given the low recovery rates of some of the power distribution companies.

The government of Pakistan seems to be leaning towards bilateral financing from friendly countries for the installation of a major chunk of this capacity while providing lucrative incentives such as payment guarantees, tax breaks, off-take guarantees and attractive tariffs.

In Pakistan, the governments and power planning agencies' focus has mainly been on adding generation capacity to the grid to meet future demand but very little thought seems to have been given to the transmission and distribution aspect of these schemes.

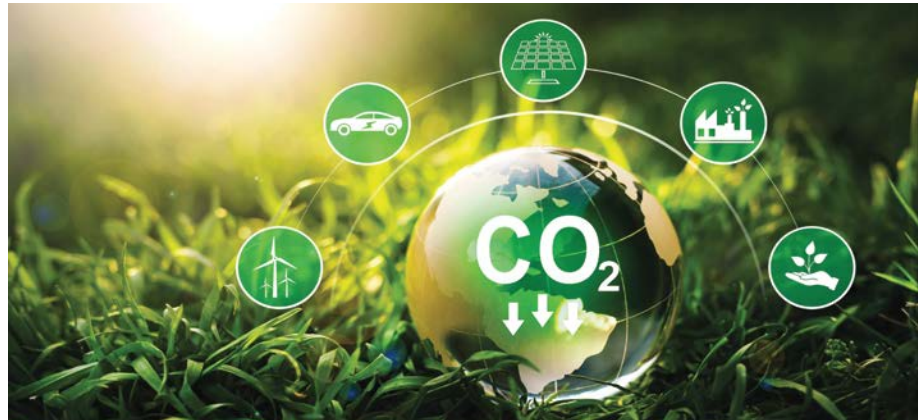
For instance, despite being a must-run technology, wind power plants in the Jhimpir corridor have faced regular curtailment due to inadequate transmission capacity. The national grid will require significant strengthening and modernization for

the widespread addition of variable renewable energy, be it utility scale solar and wind, or distributed generation in the form of rooftop/floating solar PV.

This would include the introduction of flexibility into the grid through smart grid technologies which could include two-way metering systems, allowing electricity to flow from center to consumers and back to the grid, intelligent and responsive demand management systems, monitoring demand

packaged into planned projects themselves by adding a transmission component, as has been the practice with some MDB-aided projects. Diverting public funds from projects that are at high risk of not being realized such as mega dams and large hydropower towards investments in the grid, could also ensure some financial stability for transmission projects.

The IEEFA instead recommends mobilization of private capital for this purpose,



in real time and reducing peak-load by managing variability across the grid, improving grid connections in regions where there is high concentration of renewable energy and complementing high share of variable renewable energy with energy storage capabilities.

The Institute for Energy Economics and Financial Analysis (IEEFF) has pointed out that due to "'low-return' nature of these investments, we have seen very little interest in grid enabling technologies, other than from the government itself or multi-lateral banks." While that may not change, these grid upgrades can be

given the sector's higher propensity for risk and availability of capital. The private sector would also be more amenable towards competitive bidding leading to true price discovery and cheaper electricity production.

Pakistan's focus instead should be building agile and modular sources of power generation, such as solar and wind power, or even small hydro. They require only quick construction, provide distributed generation to wide portions of demand and add flexibility to the grid, according to the IEEFA.



Report on the Telecom Sector of Pakistan

In FY 2021–2022, the telecom industry brought in a record-breaking Rs 694 billion, according to the annual report of the Pakistan Telecommunication Authority (PTA)



By Mahnur Mehfuz

One of the areas of the Pakistani economy with the greatest growth is the telecom sector, which is a major engine of expansion. There are more than 100 million cell phone users, and the industry employs about 1.36 million people directly or indirectly.

The developments in the telecom sector include the establishment of the Pakistan Telecommunication Authority (PTA) to oversee the telecom industry and the establishment of the Frequency Allocation Board (FAB) to assign frequency spectrum to the Pakistani government (GOP), telecom systems and service providers, broadcasting companies, and private wireless system users. The FAB replaced the Pakistan Wireless Board created under the Wireless Telegraphy Act of 1933; established the National Telecommunication Corporation to provide telecom services (on a nonexclusive basis) to the armed forces, defence projects, the GOP, provincial governments, and other governmental institutions as the GOP may determine; transferred telecommunication services to the private sector; and gave the GOP the authority to give the PTA policy directives.

The PTA is the main regulatory body for the telecom industry in Pakistan and is in charge of: granting, renewing, modifying, transferring, monitoring, and enforcing licenses for operating telecommunications systems and networks; regulating tariffs; regulating the establishment, operation, and maintenance of telecommunication systems; and the provision of telecommunication services.

In FY 2021–2022, the telecom industry brought in a record-breaking Rs 694 billion, according to the annual report of the Pakistan Telecommunication Authority (PTA).

The telecom industry continued to have the stellar fiscal year 2021–2022 thanks to its Rs694 billion in revenue. A \$2,073 million investment was made in the sector. The sector gave the national exchequer Rs 325.2 billion. The next-generation mobile services auction brought in Rs 222.102 billion for Pakistan's telecom industry.

Pakistan has more than 197 million telecom (fixed and mobile) subscribers, with a teledensity of 90%. Additionally, there are now 194 million biometrically

validated SIMs or customers, compared to 124 million with a 56% penetration rate for broadband subscriptions and 8,970 petabytes (6.8 GB per user, per month) of mobile data usage, which represents an increase of 31% annually. Short-Range Devices (SRDs) and the IoT Framework, under which licenses for the delivery of IoT (Low Power Wide Area Network—LPWAN) services have been given, were also launched by PTA in FY 2021–2022.

For the first time in Pakistan's history, the number of mobile phone imports went down because local products met a lot of local demand. This is a big change in how people buy things.

Pakistan has been classified as an "emerging" telecom market by the Global System for Mobile Communications Association (GSMA), a designation resulting from numerous actions. According to the report, PTA was able to draw in investments of \$120 million, which will result in the production of 10.1 million smartphones in 2021 and the creation of 2000 jobs nationwide.



According to SI Global CEO Noman Ahmed, the increased use of telecom services in Pakistan has resulted in revenue numbers that have increased significantly. He also said that setting long-term goals can help attract more FDI in the years to come.

According to an expert, the sector's income climbed by 9% in Pakistani rupee terms and by 7% in dollar terms from the previous year. However, revenue is still down more than \$1 billion from 2017–18. In Pakistan, teledensity has reached 87% and cellular service penetration is 86%, he continued. ICT and telecom services are available to 89% of the population nationwide. This increase can be attributed to Pakistan's growing 3G, 4G, and 5G service markets. Roast's 15 million registered P2P (person-to-person) users completed 7.9 million transactions totaling Rs 102.1 billion. Also mentioned in the research is that, in FY22, 8.4 million and 12.3 million mobile banking customers, respectively, used internet banking. During the year, mobile banking transactions increased by 100.4% to 387.5 million, and internet banking transactions increased by 51.7% to 141.7 million.

Internet banking transactions climbed 81.1% to Rs 10.2 trillion in 2021–2022 in terms of dollar value. E-commerce purchases showed comparable trends as well. At 45.5 million, the volume increased by 107.4%, and the value increased by 74.9% to Rs 106 billion.

A total of 32,958 Point of Sale (POS) units were added in FY22, increasing the network's size by 45.8% to 104,865. During this time, there were 4,887 e-commerce merchants registered with banks, up from 3,003 at the beginning. In 2017, the number of automatic teller machines (ATMs) in the nation increased by 4.8%, totaling 17,133 ATMs. In 2023, these numbers are expected to go up even more, both for ATMs and for mobile banking.

However, before we can make any meaningful comparisons, we must wait until the real performance figures are released. In Pakistan, the Pakistan Telecommunication Authority (PTA) has carried out impartial quality of service surveys in nine cities in Sindh and Punjab as well as on 13 highways. In eight Gilgit Baltistan cities, a survey was also conducted in conjunction with cellular mobile operators (CMOs). These studies were conducted to evaluate the effectiveness of TA field personnel keeping an eye on the level of service and pressuring operators to offer improved mobile services. Additionally, they encourage healthy rivalry among business owners and the calibre of CMOs' customer service. In terms of data speeds, CMOs were largely found to be compliant. Network latency and page load times, however, were both below the cutoff. Voice KPIs were also discovered in some regions to be below the licence requirement. Operators have received the appropriate guidance to implement corrective measures to raise service quality and satisfy KPIs. An automated QoS Monitoring and Benchmarking tool was used to verify Next Generation Mobile Service (NGMS), licensing, cellular mobile networks, QoS Regulations 2021, the coverage of mobile networks, and QoS KPIs for voice, SMS, and mobile broadband.



Washington revisits old geo-political thinking

US experts deem China new world industrial core, eying New Delhi as counterweight to Beijing; American grand strategy focused on global supremacy; war on terror once again addicted Pakistan to US dollars

By Umer Farooq

Ever since Afghanistan became a modern state, there always had been a question mark on its economic, financial and strategic viability. It has never been able to muster enough resources to meet all its expenses that the newly formed state machinery incurred since the start of the 20th century. But its strategic importance for the erstwhile Soviet Union and its rival power, the United States of America, was beyond any reasonable doubt. There are still some historians and commentators who claim that Soviet leadership decided to intervene militarily in Afghanistan in December 1979 after they received reports that some factions of the Afghan Communist Party, the notorious PDPA, was hobnobbing with American CIA and this situation could lead to Americans making inroads into Afghanistan.

This would, Russian feared, lead to unraveling of communist revolution in Afghanistan. So, better hurry up to take control of Afghanistan and prevent the country from landing into the arms of the American CIA. On this calculation Soviet Russia invaded Afghanistan and spent ten years in an attempt to bolster communist revolution. They miserably failed, leaving behind Afghanistan in the grip of anarchy. This was followed by 12 years of civil war and during this period international terror organizations entrenched themselves in Afghanistan. After the Bush Administration became convinced that it was in Afghanistan that the conspiracy to launch 9/11 attacks was hatched, they sent in the troops. American spent 20 years in Afghanistan trying to fulfill the promise to build viable governance structures. They also failed miserably and when they quit Afghanistan they left behind a country as much in the grip of anarchy as it was when they entered Afghanistan.

For Russians in 1979, Afghanistan was important, strategically, because it was a gateway to the Muslim world. A



stepping stone to get access to the 'warm waters' of the Arabian Sea, through coastal areas of Pakistan's Baluchistan. For Americans in 2001, Afghanistan was important strategically because trouble in this land could destabilize Pakistan—a nuclear armed nation bordering Afghanistan. In American calculation Pakistan's destabilization could potentially destabilize the whole South Asian region. Plus, Afghanistan could prove to be a hub of international terrorism and Islamic militancy that could potentially threaten mainland America with terror attacks.

What exactly has changed in the region that Americans have decided to lay Afghanistan off its policy concerns? According to Pakistani officials, Americans are not ready to cooperate with the Taliban regime despite repeated entreaties by the Pakistani diplomats that instability in Afghanistan could be destabilizing for the entire region. Russians have long ago completely written off Afghanistan as an area of any strategic importance. They see Afghanistan from the prism of Central Asian security and have reportedly offered countries like Tajikistan military assistance if Afghan Taliban or any other terror group based in Afghanistan pose any threat to the

Central Asian States. True, Russians have been hobnobbing with Taliban when the American forces were present in Afghanistan. They still fear the rise of ISIS in Afghanistan's northern and eastern parts. But all this they see as a minor military problem for which they are not ready to allocate any strategic resources.

Complete withdrawal of American forces from Afghanistan in August 2021 clearly indicated that the strategic value of this region in Washington's perception was dwindling. The US never saw the region in which Pakistan and Afghanistan are located as of critical strategic importance. American grand strategy has always remained focused on regions that form the industrial cores of the world. Since Pakistan's independence, ours and Afghanistan's importance was determined by our geographical location close to Soviet Central Asia. Americans could use Pakistani territory as a base to bomb and eavesdrop on the Soviet Union's military installations and industrial capacity. In the post-Cold War era the world witnessed the rise of Islamic militancy and terror groups as a prime threat to American interests as perceived by American military and strategic experts.

Afghanistan was the hub of these terror groups, who fled towards Pakistani territory after US invaded Afghanistan. For invasion, the US military and security establishment needed the assistance of our military and intelligence and they also needed our territory as a base in the fight inside Afghanistan. Both Pakistan and Afghanistan became overly important in US strategic calculations. This continued through the Cold War and in the post-Cold War era. This, however, suddenly changed in August 2021 when the last American soldiers left Afghanistan.

The US withdrawal from Afghanistan meant that this was the first time in more than two decades that the US would not have any kind of military presence in the region, starting from the shores of the Indian Ocean and up to the steppes of Central Asia. Pakistan reportedly denied bases to the US military in the wake of their withdrawal from Afghanistan. China and Russia are opposing tooth-and-nail the re-establishment of US bases in Central Asia.

The Trump Administration which initiated talks with Afghan Taliban with the ultimate objective of withdrawal of US forces from Afghanistan also issued two national security documents — “National Security Strategy” and “National Defense Strategy” in which China and Russia were identified as strategic rivals and sources of military and strategic competition.

Prior to that Obama Administration had already made known change of its policy with the new phrase, “Pivot to Asia”, the American military and diplomatic “pivot”, or “rebalance”, towards Asia became a popular buzzword after Hillary Clinton authored “America’s Pacific Century,” in Foreign Policy magazine in year 2011. So, not suddenly but gradually the focus of American foreign policy started to gradually shift away from South Asia—a region which assumed exponentially increased strategic importance in American grand strategy in the wake of the 9/11 attacks on American cities. The result was a strong American military and intelligence presence in the region.

Historically, American grand strategy has always been to avert the emergence of any land power which is powerful enough to

dominate the industrial cores of Eurasian Landmass—which prior to Second World War and post-World War periods, included Western Europe industrial nations and Japan. The regions which now form industrial cores include Western Europe and mostly Eastern Asia including China. This grand strategy compelled Americans to use their military might in the protection of Western Europe and Japan during the Cold War.

The domination of any of these industrial core regions during the Cold War could have disturbed the balance of world power and could have posed a security threat to the mainland US territory. This led to formulation of US ‘containment strategy’ against Soviet Union and Warsaw Block countries. US military and strategic experts now believe that China is the new industrial core of the world and along with Russia, it is in a position to dominate the Eurasian Landmass.

Hence the revival of old geo-political thinking is taking place in Washington, where any industrial-military power which is in a position to dominate the Eurasian Landmass could pose a military and security threat for the American mainland. Strictly militarily speaking, this should have raised the strategic importance of Pakistan as the country closest to China. But it didn’t on account of Pakistan’s close strategic and military relations with China, its importance for Washington was converted into nil. Instead, Washington’s strategists started to eye India after 2006, it was the year after which successive US administrations started emitting signals to build India as a counterweight to China.

India, however, has a very strong tradition of running an independent foreign policy, which they used to call Non-Alignment during the Cold War and which they now label as “Strategic Autonomy”. Example: despite a lot of American cajoling, New Delhi refused to condemn Moscow for its invasion of Ukraine. During 15 years, the overly pro-Americans position of New Delhi is something that is a product of the Hindutva lobby. Will India’s more independent foreign policy stage a comeback under a more secular government in New Delhi in future? Only time will tell.

What are the options for Pakistan?

Since the beginning of this year, former COAS Qamar Javed Bajwa made some attempts to introduce some warmth in Pak-US relations by cozying up with top US diplomats and by describing Washington as a strategic partner in his public assertions. The initiative, however, cannot change the reality that Pakistan and Afghanistan have lost much of their strategic value for Washington. Securing America’s mainland from terror attacks is still important for Washington, but US military planners have learned the hard way that sending their military to a ‘God forsaken’ land which hardly has any military or industrial target is not a very good strategy to deal with ragtag militias and terror groups.

In the months immediately preceding US withdrawal, senior US officials have been pointing out that the groups based in Afghanistan don’t possess any capability to strike mainland America. And most importantly, American grand strategy is now more focused on issues related to contest over global supremacy with Russia-China combine and both Islamic militancy and Afghanistan and Pakistan are peripheral to this contest. Hence growing anti-American feelings in Pakistan society—as a result of former prime minister Imran Khan’s political campaign-- didn’t cause the American radar screen to blip for even for a moment.

Our ruling elites have been too dependent on American generosity for the past 70 years—our military buildup plans, industrialization and development goals remained totally dependent on American largesse during the Cold War. War-on-terror once again addicted us to American dollars. This American generosity, historically, has proved to be the only lifeline of our ruling elite in the face one after another of economic downturns of our history. The intra-elites conflict that is prevailing in our society since 2014, may simply be a reflection of ruling elite unease over the lack of resources that is the present-day reality of our political life.

Regional, global factors drawing US, Pakistan closer

Afghan situation, Taliban conduct, TTP prompting US to back Islamabad; US deems Pakistan an important war against terror ally; insecure Pakistan not in US global interest; world scenario seeks Pakistan balancing ties with US, China



By Dr Raza Khan

The United States and Pakistan appears to be in the process of recalibrating their mutual relationship against the backdrop of briskly transforming contours of great powers struggle, strong return of terrorist groups in Pakistan, ever-deteriorating situation in Afghanistan under the Taliban regime as well as deeply divisive domestic political atmosphere in Pakistan. Relations between the US and Pakistan have not been good or cordial since the Afghan Taliban recapturing of power in Kabul in August 2021 and simultaneous withdrawal of all American troops from Afghanistan, vacating all their military bases after 20 years of presence in the war-ravaged country. In particular, the statements and afterwards unsubstantiated claims by the former Pakistan prime minister, Imran Khan strained Washington-Islamabad ties. President Joe Biden administration complete cold-shouldered treatment of Pakistan since occupying the Oval Office has also been a key factor in cold relations between Pakistan and the US.

In August 2021 as Afghan Taliban recaptured power in Kabul amid US forces withdrawal, Khan while showering accolades on the militant group had said Taliban had broken the “shackles of slavery.” This choice of words was indeed diplomatically poor and definitely annoyed a superpower like America. Then when Khan was ousted from power through a controversial vote of no-confidence by the then 13 parties opposition groups turned currently ruling alliance in April last year, he squarely blamed the US for ‘ordering’ his ouster.

According to Imran Khan, it was the then US Assistant Secretary of State for South and Central Asian Affairs, Donald Lu who in a meeting with Pakistan Ambassador Asad Majeed in March 2022, asked the latter to dislodge the IK government if Pakistan ‘state institutions’ wanted to improve relations with Washington. The US has been denying demanding of the Pakistan’s state institutions to oust Imran

Khan from the government.

However, Khan has now largely retracted his stance and has put entire blame of dislodging his government on his former army chief, General Qamar Javed Bajwa: claiming that the latter in fact was feeding Washington for taking an anti-Khan government stance. Recanting of this stance by Khan is aimed at improving his relationship with the US in the light of realization on his part that Washington had not much to do with his ouster and the local players were solely responsible for bringing down his government.

Whether backtracking from his earlier stance of squarely blaming Washington for his ouster would improve relations between President Joe Biden administration and Imran Khan and his party, Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) that is presently riding a wave of popularity in Pakistan, remains to be seen. However, this would definitely improve relations between the US and Pakistan as the most popular

political leader of Pakistan is no more blaming Washington for meddling into Pakistan's internal affairs. In fact, the reason Khan has been giving for the Biden administration going against his government, was his visit to Russia amid Moscow's attack on US and the West backed Ukraine. This reason from Khan was at best flimsy and thus unbelievable, because Pakistan being a country deeply immersed in a quagmire of political and economic crisis, could not be of any great value to ally with Moscow against Washington and the West. In particular when US and the West have been long-term benefactors of Pakistan, Islamabad cannot be expected to jeopardize its relations with both.

Moreover, both US and the West knew profoundly the nature of ties between Islamabad and Moscow--so to consider Pakistan's prime minister visit to Moscow be of any great threat to their core interest, seems to be a very wrong assessment. Yes any 'misperception' in Washington's policy circles that Khan getting closer to Moscow was part of a kind of a plan to form Beijing-Islamabad-Moscow and others including Afghan Taliban and Iran unannounced alliance to be used by both China and Russia for their mutually-reinforcing anti US-West policies, may have played its part in Washington's looking at Khan's government with askance. However, concluding that it led to US decision to effect a regime-change in Pakistan and that too through a bizarre diplomatic communication is intellectually indigestible.

Arguably the most important factor for both Washington and Islamabad to recalibrate and reassess their relations is the increasing anti-American, anti-Pakistan and anti-human rights agenda of Afghan Taliban regime. Moreover, Afghan Taliban have also unequivocally dismissed any demand from the West to have a broad-based inclusive government in Afghanistan and have also backed out from their promises made to the West for the return of all US-NATO forces from Afghanistan. The Taliban pledge to adhere to these promises culminated in the shape of February 2021 accord between the two sides paving the way for return of all foreign troops from Afghanistan and return to power of the Taliban.

Taliban have declared that the militia has the exclusive right to rule and therefore, it would not talk to any other Afghan group for power sharing. The militia's regime has also imposed complete ban on work for women in Afghanistan as well as shutting the doors of higher education on the female Afghan students. Ironically, the Taliban themselves have not been able to control the increasing deteriorating security situation in Afghanistan with Islamic State-Khorasan (IS-K) also known by its local acronym as Daesh-e-Khorasan, militant-terrorist group increasing attacks in the country resulting in widespread bloodshed.



On their part, Afghan Taliban have taken successive measures that have gone completely against the interest of Pakistan. These include: freeing thousands of TTP militants from Afghan jails captured by the Ashraf Ghani government soon after coming into power in August 2021; declaring that Taliban did not recognize international border between Pakistan and Afghanistan; nurturing TTP militants to carry out terrorist attacks inside Pakistan; and most importantly, pressurizing Islamabad to hold 'peace talks' with the TTP -- fearing the latter may join hands with IS-K in order to have a platform to regroup and resurge. On several occasions, Taliban soldiers themselves uprooted border-fencing on several locations which Pakistan has had erected through great ordeal on its 2640 kilometers long and porous border with Afghanistan.

Taliban's modus operandi could best be described as stringent, dictatorial and explicit. Using religion as a tool for executing such strategies would further deteriorate the situation in Afghanistan while global, regional and national terrorist networks and groups would find reasonable conditions under the Taliban. Afghan Taliban unofficially are said to have strong links with global and regional groups like Al Qaeda main, Al Qaeda in Indian Subcontinent (AQIS), Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU) and Chinese separatist Islamic group, East Turkistan Islamic Movement (ETIM) and Pakistani TTP.

While links with global, regional terrorist and militant networks are supposedly meant to 'highlight' Afghan Taliban, an Islamist personality support to TTP is aimed at presenting the group's Pashtun nationalist credentials and equally aimed at creating problems for Pakistan—in order to capitalize upon anti-Pakistan sentiments already very strong in Afghanistan. Consequently, the Afghan Taliban regime is directly posing a threat to the interest of US and Pakistan.

Faced with tough challenge of eradicating TTP militancy, terrorism and bringing the group to the national mainstream, Pakistan has no other option but to improve its relations with the US. For Washington, Islamabad is still the most important ally in the global war against terrorism, which is still very much there. And despite pledges

not to allow Afghan soil to be used against any other country, Afghan Taliban have neither shown the intention, nor exhibited the capacity to do so. More importantly Afghans deem Islamabad and Washington responsible for their sufferings, causing anti-Pakistan and anti-American sentiments across Afghanistan.

Ironically, the US and Pakistan have had deep differences over their respective Afghan policies during the last two decades. Washington has been accusing Pakistan of supporting the Taliban, while Islamabad has been charging US for putting the blame for its failed strategy resulting in Taliban victories against NATO and US-developed Afghan National forces, on Pakistan.

Pakistan had expected once Afghan Taliban recaptured Kabul, Islamabad would use its influence over the group's would-be regime to dissuade TTP from attacking Pakistan and give up militancy and terrorism. Washington also brokered a deal with Afghan Taliban in a hope that the latter would behave more like a responsible political actor. However, these American hopes dashed to the ground.

This situation has brought both Washington and Islamabad close to each other. Understanding Pakistani concerns regarding the TTP, Washington has recently offered Pakistan all out support to fight the terror group. Soon after the December seizure of Bannu Counter Terrorism Centre and holding several security personnel hostage by TTP militants, the US State Department Spokesperson Ned Price had offered Washington's unconditional

support to fight TTP and other terrorist groups.

Strategists in Washington are also watching closely the worst economic crisis in Pakistan as the country is facing near-imminent default. Profound political crisis in Pakistan, separately, and as a source of economic crisis are of keen interest to Washington. Against popular narrative in Pakistan, the US would not like Pakistan political crisis to get further aggravated. Because an insecure Pakistan would be more problematic in the US national security calculus as global and regional terrorist groups would take advantage of the political vacuum in Pakistan. However, economic crisis in Pakistan would make it more dependent on Washington, especially with the latter's considerable influence on the IMF, particularly its strong voting rights in the international body.

The timely release of an agreed upon tranche of loan by the IMF is indispensable for Islamabad to avoid economic default. Obviously, the US would like to extend Pakistan an economic bailout but it is going to have a price tag; like asking Pakistan to distance somewhat if not fully from China. Practically, this could be achieved by demanding more vociferously from Pakistan as US has already conveyed to Islamabad to renegotiate the terms of CPEC loans. From Pakistan standpoint, the terms of these loans have largely been against Pakistan interest. Noticeably, China has not come forward to help Pakistan negotiate and overcome its worst economic crisis while the US is ready to help.

This unfolding scenario would definitely compel Pakistan to rethink its strategy of balancing its relations with both the US and China with it tilt towards Washington while also not annoying China. Pakistan has somehow to get closer towards the US. In fact Pakistan's national interest, if looked through the lens of immediate economic and security needs of most of its citizens, so demands. In order to curtail Pakistan's over-dependence on China in the wake of US sporadic neglect, Washington apparently wants to make amends through making adjustments in its Pakistan policy.

Importantly, China cannot help Pakistan in the manner US could do, to fight challenge like the TTP--because Beijing traditionally has had avoided meddling into other countries internal security issues. Despite Pakistan's economic and political problems, it is a very important country in international politics and the US would like Pakistan to be at least neutral, if not on its side, in its struggle for global dominance with China. Thus there are several developments including worst deteriorating situation in Afghanistan, Pakistan's political and economic crisis, Washington's global power struggle with China that are influencing both Washington and Islamabad to recalibrate their foreign policy towards each other in terms of objectives they want to attain.

(The writer is an analyst in the areas of security, politics, public policy and governance having a doctoral degree and two decades long work experience with national and international organizations and diplomatic missions.)



Afghanistan's gender apartheid

It is basically a policy of consigning the female population to isolation and suppression, as was practised by the Taliban regime, which ruled the country from 1996 to 2001

By Zahiruddin

The Taliban administration in Kabul is essentially treading on the toes of the racist South African government, which orchestrated apartheid against the non-white majority from 1935 to 1995, shocking the world. This time, it is gender apartheid instead of racial apartheid that is taking on a new dimension with the passage of time, starting in August 2021, when the Taliban seized power in Kabul in the aftermath of the withdrawal of US forces from Afghanistan.

The Taliban leadership, known for their misogynist approaches of the worst kind, is making life harsher and harder for the weaker sexes across Afghanistan with each passing day. The war-ravaged soil is becoming unbearable for women as a result of the Taliban's policies, which are essentially a policy of segregation of women at all levels and in all walks of life.

It is basically a policy of consigning the female population to isolation and suppression, as was practised by the Taliban regime, which ruled the country from 1996 to 2001.

In the early days of their assuming power, the representatives of the Taliban government did their level best to assure the world of their departure from the earlier Taliban regime (1996–2001) regarding gender policy. The world at large, including the U.S., pinned hopes on the Taliban to show positive behaviour and an approach towards women, especially their education. But it didn't take long for the Taliban to revert to their previous status of obscurantism and fall into the same position as the previous Taliban.

After a year's time, in August last year, they had already banned the education of teenage girls in secondary schools, as had been done in the 1990s. Working for women in industries other than health and education had been completely prohibited, leaving hundreds of thousands of women unemployed after being fired. A new dress code had earlier been put in place in July



2022, when Mullah Haibatullah categorically announced that no woman will step out of her home without a veil from top to bottom, and no woman will travel a distance of 70 kilometres alone; it was made binding on her to travel with a mahram (father, brother, or husband), and those defying this decree were flogged in public.

The expected soft image of the Taliban regime started to tarnish, pushing them towards isolation in the community of nations while making their recognition by the world's states a distant dream.

The regime of the Taliban in Afghanistan came to the limelight once more and attracted worldwide criticism and flak in the third week of December last year when they imposed an indefinite ban on the entry of girls and women into the universities. The disgusting decision came at a time when thousands of girls had appeared in entrance tests across the country for admission to universities, both in the public and private sectors.

The ministry of higher education circulated a letter to all government and private universities about the decision, which created unrest in the international arena struggling for gender equality, and this

decision was no less than a "bombshell" for them. "You are all informed to implement the mentioned order of suspending female education until further notice," Enda Muhammad Nadeem, the minister of higher education, wrote in a letter.

A small group of female students from different universities dared to stage a protest against the decision in Kabul, and many of them were arrested. The Taliban leadership is being criticised more harshly than ever before because all of the universities were following their orders to follow the Islamic dress code, have separate classrooms and entrances, and have professors who are over 80 years old, whether they are male or female.

The international community described the move as "obnoxious and loathsome" and rushed to condemn it. UN spokesman Stephane Dujarric described the move as "troubling." "It's clearly another broken promise from the Taliban," Dujarric said. "We have seen since their takeover a lessening of space for women, not only in education but in access to public areas," he said. "It's another very troubling move, and it's difficult to imagine how a country can develop and can deal with all of the challenges that it has without the active participation of women and their education."

The explanation given by Taliban leaders to defend the decision is too feeble to hold water. They (the Taliban) have defended their decision, claiming that such restrictions are in place to protect "national interest" and women's "honor."

A few days after the banning of university education for women, the decision of Taliban leaders to order the NGOs to fire the women employees from the service came as another blow to women's rights in Afghanistan. The ministry threatened to suspend the operating licences of aid organisations that failed to stop women from working. It said it had received "serious complaints" that women working in NGOs were not observing a proper Islamic dress code, a charge also used by authorities to justify banning university education.

This decision will prove disastrous as the charity organisations are planning to leave the country. These organisations were making fabulous contributions to the betterment of the famine-stricken people, leading to their socio-economic development on the one hand and the rehabilitation of infrastructure on the other. The people will suffer heavily as the chilly winter season is approaching fast, and their miseries will be compounded once the NGOs make their exit from the country. Meanwhile, three foreign aid organisations announced that they were suspending operations in Afghanistan in response to the country's Taliban rulers. Their announcement



prompted warnings from a top UN official in Afghanistan and from NGOs that humanitarian aid would be hard hit.

"We cannot effectively reach children, women, and men in desperate need in Afghanistan without our female staff," Save the Children, the Norwegian Refugee Council, and CARE said in a joint statement. "While we await clarification on this announcement, we are suspending our programmers and demanding that men and women continue to provide lifesaving

assistance in Afghanistan on an equal footing."

The Taliban regime's harshest measures against women, segregating them into dire straits, are tantamount to gender apartheid, and the world is deeply concerned about this development. This gender apartheid will create hardships and hurdles for the Taliban government while it is already facing serious issues, including that of recognition by the international community, including the U.S.



History of Kashmir: Part 2

By Azmat M Saqib

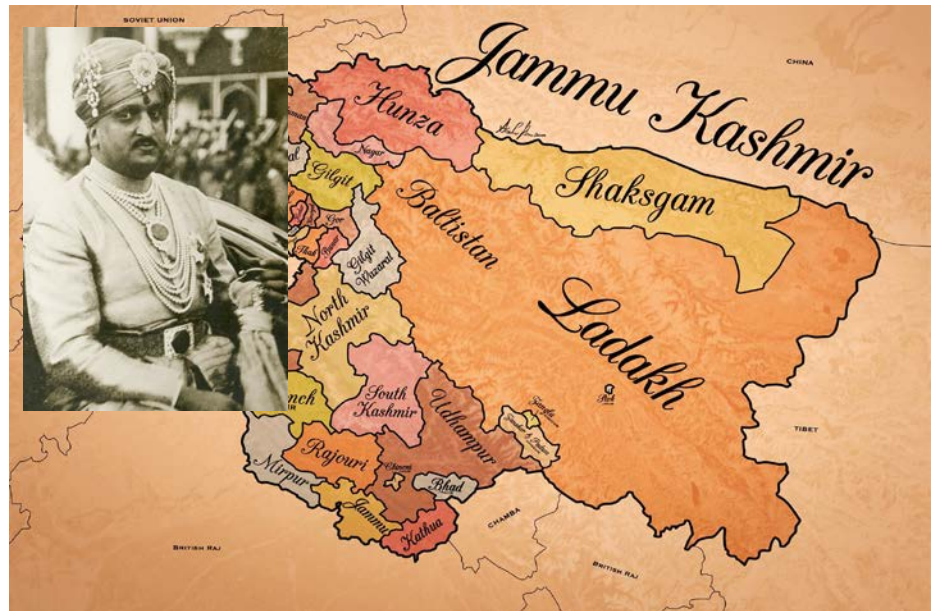
It is extremely difficult to summarise Kashmir's history since 1932. Jammu and Srinagar, the primary and summer capitals, respectively, witnessed the political struggles of pro-Pakistan Chaudhry Ghulam Abbas and secular-cum-socialist Shaikh Abdullah learning towards Nehru's secular India. Both the Muslim Conference and the National Conference were active under their respective heads. Kashmir's struggle for independence against Dogra rule was growing against the backdrop of Jinnah's Pakistan movement and Nehru's struggle for Indian independence.

While Jammu and the Kashmir Valley were witnessing urban political struggle, western Kashmir bordering Pakistan faced the armed Poonch Rebellion, and Gilgit, Baltistan, and Ladakh regions were embroiled in a war of independence against Dogra rule. From November 1947 onward, Indian and Pakistani forces also engaged in a war for control of Kashmir. To complicate matters further, Indian and Pakistani military chiefs and their overall commander in chief were all serving as Royal British Army generals. Many British officers were stationed on the ground in different parts of Kashmir.

After the 1931 protests in Kashmir, Maharaja Hari Singh's Commission recommended the establishment of a Legislative Assembly. Maharaja delayed, but protests in 1934 resulted in elections for the Assembly. The AJK Muslim Conference won 14 of the 21 Muslim reserve seats.

Shaikh Abdullah was closer to Nehru and the Congress Party since he too favoured secular and socialist views regarding state affairs and renamed the Muslim Conference the All Jammu and Kashmir National Conference in 1939. Party Secretary General Chaudhry Ghulam Abbas and Agha Shaukat Ali distanced themselves from Shaikh Abdullah and re-established the All Jammu and Kashmir Muslim Conference.

In 1940, the All India Muslim League, in its large gathering at Lahore, passed the Lahore Resolution, demanding a separate



homeland for Muslims in India. The AJK Muslim Conference fully supported this demand and became an advocate for accession to Pakistan.

In 1944, when M.A. Jinnah visited Kashmir, Sheikh Abdullah kept his distance, but the Muslim Conference and Chaudhry Ghulam Abbas welcomed and introduced him in Srinagar with great fervor, favouring Pakistan's accession. Sheikh Abdullah tabled a demand for a constitutional monarchy in Kashmir. The same year, as President of the 5th National Conference, Shaikh Abdullah adopted an elaborate socialist political and economic document known as "Naya Kashmir," authored by the Sheikh's friend B.P.L. Bedi with the assistance of Faiz Ahmed Faiz.

The document was divided into two main parts: (1) the constitutional structure, which laid down details of the fundamental rights of citizens, irrespective of religion, color, caste, or sex, in all spheres of life. It also proposed a democratic government with an independent judiciary and (2) a national economic plan that promised abolition of landlordism, assignment of land to the tillers, the right to work for wages, and freedom from debt. This manifesto appealed to the deprived Kashmiri Muslim masses.

Like Gandhi's Quit India movement of 1942 against the British, Sheikh Abdullah launched a Quit Kashmir movement on May 15, 1946, against Dogra Maharaja Hari Singh. He was arrested and detained in Badami Bagh Cantonment on the day of his fiery speech, where, as usual, many people died and many more were arrested. On the advice of M.A. Jinnah, Muslim Conference leaders stayed away from the movement.

Sheikh Abdullah was arraigned for treason and sedition. Despite Maharaja's ban, Nehru entered Kashmir in support of Sheikh Abdullah. He was arrested, which evoked demonstrations in Delhi against the Maharaja. Despite his refusal, Nehru was brought back by plane under the persuasion of Maulana Azad. Before leaving, Nehru met with the imprisoned leader, who was moved and won over by Nehru's goodwill gestures in his hour of need.

After the trial, Sheikh Abdullah was sentenced to three years' imprisonment, but his smuggled-out letter conveyed an appeal to his people to fight to the finish. The freedom movement in India was also at its climax.

An agreement was reached on June 3, 1947, in which Viceroy of India Lord Mountbatten finally announced the plan to

partition the Indian Subcontinent into two dominions, India and Pakistan. Princely states, including Kashmir, were to choose accession to one of the dominions.

The Quit Kashmir movement was at its peak, and the Maharaja was in a dilemma as to what to do in the given situation. He personally disliked both nationalist movements and wanted an independent Jammu and Kashmir state. Prior to the Cripps Boundary Commission award, all supply routes to Kashmir passed through Muslim-majority areas adjacent to Pakistan. A Kashmiri Muslim population of 77 percent was another impediment.

In any case, Nehru wanted Kashmir to be part of India. He sent the Congress President to Kashmir in May 1947, who failed to convince the Maharaja to accept India's accession. On June 19, 1947, Viceroy Mountbatten visited Kashmir and persuaded the Maharaja not to make any declaration of independence but to opt for either Pakistan or India by August 14, 1947. The Maharaja insisted on independence. At the request of Nehru, Gandhi arrived in Kashmir on August 1, 1947. He assured the Maharaja that his interests as head of state would be protected if he acceded to India.

Gandhi also advised the Maharaja to release Sheikh Abdullah and remove his prime minister, who was opposed to India's accession. Gandhi visited Begum Abdullah and assured her that her husband would be released soon.

Nehru was overjoyed when a new pro-Congress prime minister was appointed on August 11, but Maharaja was concerned about India's accession. He feared Nehru would give power to Abdullah, who was his confirmed enemy. The accession with India would also mean Pakistan would block all the supplies, and the state would be in deep trouble. In this context, Maharaja announced his intention to sign the Standstill Agreement with both Pakistan and India on August 12, 1947. A standstill agreement is a contract that contains provisions on how two parties, in this case, India and Pakistan, can offer deals that are in the best interest of Jammu and Kashmir and the Maharaja.

It can also effectively stall and stop a hostile takeover if the parties cannot negotiate a

friendly deal. This was the Maharaja's plan to buy time. Telegrams were sent to India and Pakistan by the Prime Minister of Kashmir. Pakistan accepted the agreement by reply telegram, whereas India refused to enter into any such agreement with the Maharaja.

On the intervention of the Government of India, Sheikh Abdullah was released on September 29, 1947, and met Hari Singh. Addressing a crowd of 100,000 at Hazuri Bagh, the sheikh declared that before the accession decision, Hari Singh should transfer power to the people of Kashmir. He threatened a revolt if 4 million Kashmiris were bypassed in the decision. He wanted a confederate Jammu and Kashmir, either with India or Pakistan, with complete internal autonomy, limiting the accession to three things: defence, foreign affairs, and communications. As a prerequisite, he desired a constitutional guarantee to that effect. These, along with the "Naya Kashmir" implementation plan, were presented to the Pakistani delegation led by Dr. Taseer as preconditions.

Nehru adopted the appeasement policy, invited Sheikh Abdullah to Delhi, and accepted all conditions. Dr. Taseer, along with Kashmiri leaders Sadiq, Bakshi Ghulam Muhammad, and Maulana Masoodi, met with Liaqat Ali Khan and were informed that Quaid-e-Azam was not willing to negotiate and wanted Kashmir to accede to Pakistan unconditionally. Sadiq insisted on meeting M.A. Jinnah, but when news arrived about the tribal invasion of Kashmir, he decided that a further stay in Pakistan looked futile and left for Kashmir.

Sheikh Abdullah was already apprehensive about Pakistan's feudal landlords, and he was sure that they would create hurdles to implementing his "Naya Kashmir" manifesto. This development led him to throw his weight behind India. Previously, India was unfairly awarded the Redcliffe Award for Gurdaspur, a Muslim majority area in India. Thus, the only link from Delhi to Kashmir was secured for India and Hari Singh's Kashmir. It is said that Nehru's close friendship with Lady Mountbatten played a role in making history.

To make the deal click in favour of India, stressful circumstances were created for the Maharaja, and a tribal raid was engineered.

Surprisingly, both India's and Pakistan's army chiefs were British officers. According to Devi Dass' book "Kashmir in Search of the Future," the Indian Army chief was aware of a tribal raid three days in advance. A clandestine plot was hatched in Pakistan's border province, which was still under the British governor, who was apparently unaware of the plan and immediately informed Liaqat Ali Khan, who was taken aback and stated that Pakistan had no intention of embarking on such an adventure. This is one version written by an Indian Kashmiri.

Tribal forces of 2000–3000 men entered Kashmir on October 22. On October 26, they captured Baramulla, and the Dogra Army could not resist them. The Maharaja dispatched his PM to Delhi to seek military assistance. Governor General Lord Mountbatten opposed sending Indian troops to a neutral state, as did General Messervy, the first Pakistani Army Chief (who also defied Jinnah's orders to send army troops to Kashmir).

Nehru sent a three-member delegation to Srinagar to assess the ground situation. Nehru was informed of the Maharaja's fear of capture by VP Menon, a member from Srinagar. On his instructions, Maharaja was assured of military support and a safe transfer to Jammu on the condition that he sign the accession document. On October 26, 1947, the document was signed, and the delegation brought it back to a jubilant Nehru. Lord Mountbatten wrote a letter to the Maharaja, offering military help on the condition that the state of accession was provisional and would be finally settled by reference to the people. Nehru was very shrewd. To keep the good will of Sheikh Abdullah, the instrument of accession was drafted with care so as to respect Sheikh Abdullah's dream of autonomy.

On October 27, a Sikh regiment was airlifted to Srinagar. Just before the arrival of the Indian Army, the Maharaja and Maharani Tara Devi fled to Jammu. On reaching Udhampur, she dishevelled her hair and instigated the worst type of communal riots. This led to the killing of about 2.5 million Muslims at the hands of RSS workers in Jammu and 500,000 people being displaced in acts of ethnic cleansing and genocide, permanently reducing the Muslim population of Jammu.

Pakistan International Maritime Expo and Conference (PIMEC-23)

Throughout human history, oceans have always been a significant aspect of state power



By Anoshka Johum

Oceans around the world belong to the global commons and are the collective heritage of mankind. Throughout human history, oceans have always been a significant aspect of state power.

Previously being used for connectivity across unattached landmasses only, the relevance and importance of oceans to mankind have risen exponentially in the last few centuries. With the boom of globalisation and hydrocarbons becoming the backbone of economies, over 90% of the world's trade is seaborne. The need for sustainable development amidst an ever-expanding global population and diminishing resources on land has engendered a worldwide shift from the green/brown economy to the blue economy.

Despite being blessed with a coastline extending up to more than 1000 km, Pakistan has not been able to fully capitalise on its maritime potential and use the sea and its resources to their full extent. However, the general lack of awareness regarding the potential of the blue economy and maritime sector in Pakistan is the greatest peril the country is facing at the moment.

The Pakistan Navy, as a major

stakeholder in creating awareness and avenues for future development and investments for the exploitation of the untapped potential of our blue economy, is making untiring efforts.

In this regard, the Pakistan Navy is going to organise its very first "Pakistan International Maritime Expo and Conference" (PIMEC) from February 10–12, 2023, at the Karachi Expo Centre. The launching ceremony of this flagship event of the Pakistan Navy, held under the patronage of the Ministry of Maritime Affairs (MoMA), was held in July this year. PIMEC will be held biennially, coinciding with the Pakistan Navy's AMAN Exercise, to demonstrate the most advanced technology in the national and international maritime industries.

Being the 5th most populous economy globally with a population growth rate of nearly 2 percent, Pakistan might face acute food security challenges in the future. The extreme vulnerability to climate change needs new forms of decision-making, such as investing more in the blue economy because Pakistan might face food security problems related to its limited land and water resources. The recent floods in Pakistan and the acute shortage of food

in the flood-affected areas are proof that if other avenues for food security and sufficiency are not explored, there will be much more at stake in the coming future.

The blue economy is a promising concept of economic progress and development. It offers multifaceted avenues for maritime industrial development such as fisheries, coastal tourism, maritime transport, oil and gas, salt manufacturing, chemicals, electric power, shipbuilding, marine engineering, aquaculture, marine biotechnology and biomedicine, scientific research, deep sea-bed mining, resource extraction, oceanic renewable energy, and maritime tourism. It has the potential to create job opportunities for the people of Pakistan.

Oceans contribute nearly US\$1.5 trillion annually to the world's economy. According to an estimate, the blue economy has the potential to contribute approximately \$24 trillion to the world's economy, but it is only contributing \$500-600 billion each year. Around 350 million people across the globe are dependent upon the oceans to earn their livelihoods through fisheries and other jobs. It is predicted that by



2025, the oceans will produce 34% of the world's crude oil.

Pakistan has an Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) and continental shelf of around 290,000 sq km. Despite having a potential of more than 100 billion dollars, the blue economy of Pakistan is currently limited to generating an annual revenue of just \$450 million. Pakistan's seafood industry is worth more than \$1 billion. Fishing in Pakistan accounts for around 1% of the GDP, but it still plays a crucial role in developing the economy by providing employment opportunities to a significant number of people. Moreover, it can be a profitable profession and a promising means to earn precious foreign exchange for the country.

Currently, the fish and seafood exports of Pakistan are limited. According to the statistics released by the Pakistan Bureau of Statistics, Pakistan's seafood exports from July to December 2021 were around \$201.581 million (Rs34.593 billion). However, the sector has the potential to contribute up to \$2–2.5 billion to the national GDP if it has a proper deep-sea fishing policy. In terms of revenue, in the year 2018, Pakistan National Shipping Corporation generated about 10,070 million rupees.

Pakistan has immense maritime tourism potential with a coastline that is blessed with diversified natural, religious, and cultural tourism resources. This sector is vital for economic growth, employment generation, and food supply. Tourism

generates around 5% of the national GDP. There are many beautiful places in Pakistan that have vast biodiversity and attractive beaches that can attract tourists from around the world. If these spots are developed properly, they can generate revenues of more than \$4 billion. Economic experts believe that if used properly, the blue resources can help create more than one million jobs in Pakistan. In addition, Pakistan can also reap great benefits from its mangrove forests, which are spread over more than 160,000 hectares.

To optimally benefit from this natural endowment, the foremost thing to do is to create and increase awareness and knowledge among the decision-makers as well as the general public regarding Pakistan's maritime potential. The Pakistan Navy has been making its utmost efforts to create public awareness and highlight the importance of the blue economy for Pakistan. Being a major stakeholder in the political and strategic environment of the Indian

Ocean Region, PN has maintained a firm stance to promote Pakistan's maritime potential. The Pakistan Navy is playing a vital role in the exploration of marine resources and creating avenues for foreign direct investment.

PIMEC will provide ample opportunities for private-public partnerships and will explore new avenues of cooperation and investment for Pakistan with the international maritime industry. Stakeholders from hydrocarbon industries, coastal development, shipping, port infrastructure, fisheries, marine tourism, offshore renewable energy, aquaculture, seabed mining, and marine services will exhibit their potential under one roof. This three-day event will provide a perfect platform for B2B interaction, joint ventures, and cooperation amongst the participants, both from home and abroad.

The exhibition will serve as one of the international gatherings of entrepreneurs, R&D specialists, financial experts, and top-level policymakers to boost cooperation, share knowledge, and support ventures in the maritime field. It is hoped that PIMEC will become a successful model for Pakistan's maritime exposure and potential. It will enhance our national economy and help raise our international stature as a progressive country that is willing and determined to do its part for the growth and development of the maritime sector.

PIMEC will serve as a platform for the exploration of joint ventures and investment opportunities for Pakistan and will help policymakers and stakeholders reach a workable solution to achieve maximum benefits.



AMAN 23: Expanding Naval Cooperation

Maritime security is not only important for Pakistan but also for all other countries whose prosperity and progress are strongly bonded with the seas

By Ali Basit

Like any maritime nation, Pakistan has substantial stakes in the maritime domain. Our interest in safer and crime-free seas is rooted in three conspicuous realities: our extraordinary dependence on the seas for trade, the operationalization of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor project, and our strategic location astride the global energy highway.

Together, these realities make maritime stability an important part of our national security agenda. Maritime security is not only important for Pakistan but also for all other countries whose prosperity and progress are strongly bonded with the seas. While operating together, we must be mindful that the contemporary global maritime environment remains fraught with traditional and non-traditional challenges that require a collaborative response by friendly navies. No country can single-handedly tackle the diverse threats that exist in the seas.

In order to improve maritime interoperability and global efforts, the Pakistan Navy launched the multinational naval exercise "AMAN" in the North Arabian Sea in 2007. The Pakistan Navy referred to this as "blue diplomacy," as it brought maritime nations together in the Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA) and called for increased efforts to maintain strong correlations at sea. The exercise has been aptly named "AMAN," which is the Urdu term for "peace." It signifies Pakistan's endeavour for peace while remaining fully prepared to ensure peace in the region. The Pakistan Navy has conducted seven AMAN exercises to date. The next exercise will be the eighth in a series that has taken place biennially since 2007. All previous naval exercises of the AMAN series have been highly successful and have not only been participated in wholeheartedly by navies of friendly countries, ushering in goodwill to Pakistan, but have also resulted in all participants, including the host Pakistan Navy, gaining tremendous professional experience.

The main objective of the AMAN series of multinational exercises is to promote regional cooperation and stability, greater interoperability, and a united resolve against terrorism and crimes in the maritime domain, including piracy. Whereas in the sea phase, the participating navies attend the military drills with their surface and air assets, special operation forces, and maritime teams.

They are involved in various activities, including maneuvers, weapon firing drills, maritime interdiction operations, flying operations, search and rescue exercises, and international fleet reviews. All of this improves the Pakistan Navy's capability to combat nontraditional threats and improves the country's soft image in the international community.

The exercise has been designed in such a way that it is divided into two phases: harbour and sea. In the harbour phase, activities such as friendly sports matches and international cultural displays are being conducted. During the sea phase, the International Fleet Review is conducted alongside other exercises to practise responding to maritime security threats in a multinational environment. Moreover, Special Forces teams of the participating nations take part in the counter-piracy operations in order to develop tactics, techniques, and procedures (TTPs) for combined action against asymmetric threats at sea.

This time, alongside AMAN-23, an important maritime conference is going to be held for the first time at the Karachi Expo Center. The Pakistan International Maritime Expo and Conference (PIMEC) is an initiative of the Pakistan Navy that is being organised under the patronage of the Ministry of Maritime Affairs in order to jump-start the development of the maritime sector in Pakistan and spur the blue economy.

PIMEC is scheduled from February 10 to 12, 2023, and the exhibition will bring together stakeholders and companies from

diverse maritime fields to exploit and explore the potential of the blue economy. It is actually a new chapter where we explore the true potential of much more that is to follow. It will not only provide employment and vitality to our economy, but it will also help mitigate the effects of climate change.

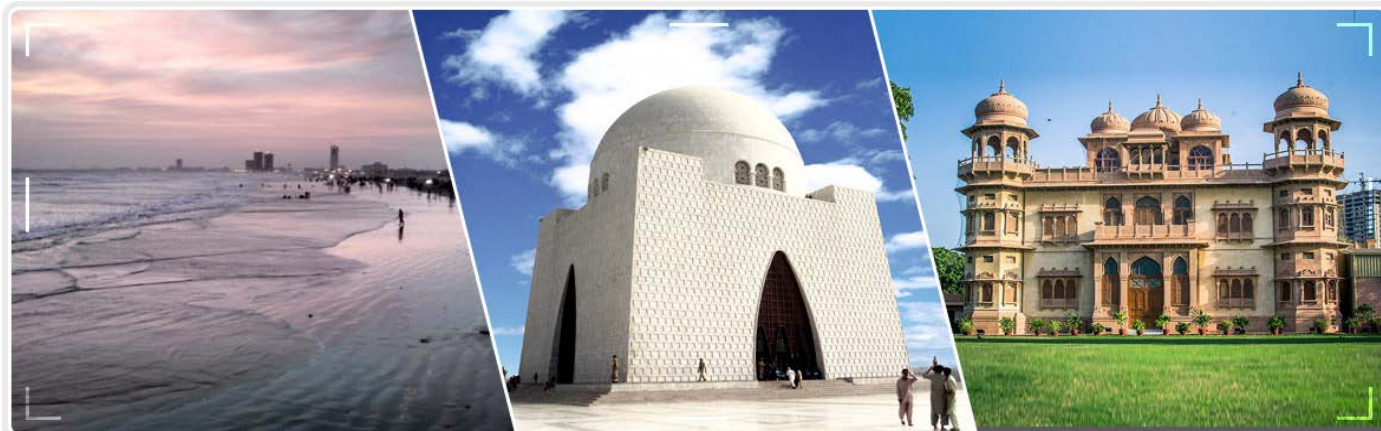
The AMAN-2023 is focused with an aim to collectively work against human trafficking, smuggling of narcotics and weapons, and terrorism in the region; to intensify operational manoeuvres against sea pirates; to improve upon joint operations at sea through effective intelligence sharing mechanisms; to enhance operational skills through contemporary experiences with a view to ensure interoperability in a diverse threat environment; to address the issue of climate change; and to highlight the significance of CPEC and Gwadar port among the delegates of the participating countries.

Soft diplomacy, or soft power, appears to have grown in importance over the last two decades. This implies persuasion and attractiveness rather than the use of coercion to change the behaviour of the state. Moving ahead with this notion, the Pakistan Navy has always contributed towards peace and stability in the region. Pakistan's commitment to the principle of "peaceful coexistence" and desire for greater regional harmony and cooperation is also reflected through Pakistan's armed forces' participation in UN peacekeeping missions, UN-mandated Combined Maritime Task Forces 150 and 151, as well as various bilateral and multilateral exercises.

The Pakistan Navy is wisely practising the idea propagated by Albert Einstein, which says, "Peace cannot be kept by force; it can only be achieved by understanding." As a result, AMAN exercises are critical in combating regional and extra-regional threats confronting participating countries and the region as a whole. The shared knowledge and skills enhance interoperability between participants, which will help increase cooperation among all stakeholders.

Mera Karachi

The journey is neither easy nor short



By Sara Danial

"Kolachi," "Kurachee," and "Karachi" are the three names that this city has relished. More than the change in name, the city now symbolises its evolution from a fishermen's village to a colonial mainstay to a commercial metropolis.

When confronted by the theme of "personal myths," the much-quoted Chinese curse "may you live in interesting times" came to mind. These are unarguably thought-provoking times, not only for Karachi but also for the world around us. Because it not only surrounds us, but Karachi is a part of us; it is in our bloodline, in our DNA, and it is personal. We often hear that, as youth and as citizens, it is our duty to question the times we live in. Born and raised in Karachi, I have survived this city enduringly, especially having been reared for a fleeting number of years in the dunes of Dubai. I say survive because one seldom enjoys the privileges of living in this city. The privileges of living in Karachi are a myth.

Karachi bore witness to the carnage of the partition of the subcontinent. The 'Batwara' (partition) symbolised the disintegration of families, people, communities, and memories, and it is deeply felt in both states. The resulting modern nation-states of India and Pakistan had Hindus and Sikhs on one side and Muslims on the other, the same communities that had coexisted for almost a millennium across the Indian subcontinent. Despite continuing episodes of turmoil, the city resiliently grows and thrives. The harsh

experience gives me immense insight into all that has gone as planned and all that has derailed due to the very fact that it became the burgeoning resource for an unchecked, ever-growing population in a country that was already riddled with its fair share of challenges.

Outbursts, protests, and disturbances when confronted with a breakdown, whether civil, structural, social, or political, are prominent and dominant forces in the way of life. The disorders and dysfunctions spark off the toughest of arguments against it, for they directly determine the health and wellbeing of each Karachi citizen belonging to the industrial, educational, residential, or commercial hub. The complexities of Karachi give me the right to state my perspective on a soft, literary platform.

Karachi was the first capital of Pakistan and continued to be so until 1967. The financial capital, as a major seaport and primary industrial hub, attracted the greatest number of refugees in 1947. Since then, the migratory identities may have altered, but the burden on the city hasn't. It hosts an escalating number of employment and opportunity seekers from across the country while providing sea and road links to the entire region. With the massive migration, a city that capsulated coconut oil in its lamps and was washed daily for cleanliness and hygiene went into growth throes with few blueprints, resulting in haphazard, unchecked planning and development that often covered sewerage and water channels, clogging and encroaching, desperately

pushing its way forward like the crooked house on a giant's back. Once well-planned areas are now surrounded by doom and gloom to accommodate the escalating population and commercial interests. As they say, whatever could go wrong, did.

Karachi sprawled into suburbs to the extent that the suburbs became the city itself. The impediments to its planning became all the more apparent during the rain spells, as deep, stagnating water covered the main arteries, holding traffic and creating delays. Meanwhile, public transport, on the other hand, deteriorated to become the adopted mode of travel for the greater population, pushing the genteel towards taxis, rickshaws, and eventually private cars. The cacophony of the engine and loud horns became the sirens of the city.

With ever-expanding borders and insufficient budgets dedicated to expansion, there was a massive web-like labyrinth replacing what used to be the road network. This sprawling, disruptive metropolis became shifting sand for many. The lack of awareness, economic struggles, crime, illiteracy, illegal connections, theft, and sheer ignorance wrought a cycle of challenges for Karachiites on a daily basis.

Karachi is Pakistan's sustenance. Karachi is Pakistan's lifeline. Keeping the industrial zone going at full throttle, against all shortfalls, is a massive undertaking. The city cannot afford to compromise on anything.

For ever and a day, the people of Karachi have always had to cope and survive. Due to negligence, they have to brave a failure, a collapse, or a rupture, whether civil, social, cultural, structural, or political. So, we are more accustomed to firefighting in the absence of precautionary measures. Without fail, we struggle: to be punctual to school or the workplace; to navigate in the wrong lanes; to drive in the face of blinding beamers from oncoming vehicles—all in an attempt to save a couple of minutes and avoid traffic and high life stress. We go through many or all of these every single day as we turn a blind eye to the repercussions of our actions. Perhaps we tend to conveniently extricate ourselves from how it affects others.

A lot of these instances are an unfiltered way of trying to disconnect ourselves from the massive issues at hand. Every year, we put up with the inconvenience and damage that the summers bring, the winters bring, and the monsoons bring, without any groundwork. Impromptu. Extempore. The decision was made on the spur of the moment. Holding out hope, we survive. Against all odds, when the entire city comes to an absolute halt, we survive. Drenched in knee-deep water, we survive. Sitting in pitch darkness, we survive. Despite the total structural collapse, we survived. Each day, we cope. Each day, we survive. That's the spirit of Karachi and its people. Come rain or shine, we must survive.

Being a mindful Pakistani civilian, I wonder if rupture and ruin are the destiny of my beloved Karachi. As I write this piece, the heavy downpour outside will lead to another indefinite blackout. Will survival mode remain Karachi's autopilot mode? I wonder. I wonder what evolution feels like. What is progress? Can people thrive despite all the misgivings? What does it mean to grow? Is the blossoming phenomenon real?

Maybe it does—for some. Money speaks. You face crime issues; build strong forts. If you feel afraid, hire security guards. If you are unable to drive, hire a driver. You have road rage; rent a car. If you face electricity failure, buy a generator. There is a water crisis; call a tanker. You aspire to quality education; send your kids abroad. So, again. We cope. We don't address the issue. We rescue. We attempt to escape. In

the torrential monsoon rains, Pakistan's financial capital was swamped with filth and misfortune, anxiety and angst because, while everyone assumes that money speaks, when one is brought crashing down to earth, it doesn't, and you have to be rescued in Noah's ark—boats and dinghies that have become a merry sight to watch, cruising through the smooth, seamless roads of elite Karachi. The forts and walls may be impressive, but they serve no purpose. The four cars belonging to a single household are a hassle to park. The generators cannot be refueled. The tankers refuse to arrive. What is wealth in the face of devastation if it fails to find solace, comfort, and peace in life? Is that the undaunted destiny of my treasured Karachiites? Do we deserve this paralysis of the entire country, with day-to-day activities coming to an utter halt in the face of failure?

The measure of these issues varies from the neighbourhood level to a large-scale disaster in the very fabric of the state, resulting in inundations in social, cultural, educational, political, and economic abysses. They have gradually become a consistent phenomenon in most of the fast-developing cities, especially Karachi. Moral deterioration and ethical corrosion contribute to the further descent of the city of lights, which was ironically once famous for its arts, architecture, history, culture, preservation, conservation, literature, and social curation. It seems as though crumbled edifices are the fate of Karachi, replacing what used to be anything but a muddle of rupture and ruin. Many people question the curators and watchdogs of culture after every massacre: target killings, ethnic clashes, sectarian riots, blasts on Ashura processions, massacres of Hazara communities, burning alive of Christian families, burying alive of girls in the name of honor, and murders of young couples who elope to find safety in this city. So, it is a small wonder that, through its survival mode and coping strategy, Karachi depicts a city of distinctions and anonymities, an assortment, an eccentric spirit, and a splendid, outrageous creature that enjoys a synergetic relationship with its populace.

The political, almost theatrical, fiasco snowballed into a crippling chain reaction. With most of the masses comprising teens and youth, Karachi strives to spark poten-

tial for creative solutions and help young people, who have grown up in a fractured city, narrow rifts and rally for change. The city that was carelessly dismissed as "the financial capital of Pakistan" or "the mainstream business hub" suffered devastation on the one hand and enjoyed an invigorating art and culture explosion on the other, which was a baby step towards connecting with the citizens from a spectrum of neighbourhoods and communities in a land where the followers of over six religions live in close proximity.

As a writer, it has been important for me to acquaint myself with a robust discourse and dialogue in the field of cultural and literary knowledge, where an open exchange on contemporary concerns about Karachi and its woes can persist and evolve, and where voices from disparate backgrounds and ages can converge, sometimes even amalgamate. The journey is neither easy nor short. It will take its time, but an organised and aware community may be the best asset for expediency. The interface created by various publishing houses springing up in the recent past kindled the beginning of a new relationship between culture and the public audience as a quantum of books, fiction and nonfiction, and performative works entered our cultural imagination.

The city of lights, drenched in sorrow, needs its citizens now more than ever. The hope is to create and raise awareness that Karachi belongs to all people and not just the elite, who, like me, call this maddening, inspiring city home. Coming from the perspective of a writer, I am wary of the tremendous power and responsibility that the tag bestows. As a witness to the trauma of violence and the challenges presented by urban decay, the beleaguered intellectual space, barriers, migration, change, territory, gender and sexuality, capitalism, global commerce, and the legacies of colonialism and class divides, we must have an internal dialogue with ourselves and the city to ponder not only our times but also the narratives tied to them. Karachi does not constitute a uniform ensemble or an inert backdrop. Rather, it offers a dynamic, polymorphous entity in a constant state of change. This enables each of us to exploit the city's diversity, utilise its remarkable potential, and lose ourselves in the tangle of its neighbourhoods.

Paris Agreement on Climate Change: implication on Thar Coal exploitation

As signatory to accord Pakistan may not utilize coal deposits after 2030; out of 14 Thar Coal blocks only two being exploited; Pakistan plans to cut emissions to 50% by 2030

By Abrar Ahmad & Dr Muhammad Nawaz Chaudhry

According to the Ministry of Planning Development and Special Initiative Report of October 2021, Pakistan's total primary commercial energy supply is around 80.62 million tons of oil equivalent (Mtoe), which includes indigenous resources (46.56 Mtoe, 57.8%) and net imported energy resources (34.06 Mtoe, 42.2%). Due to an unceasing increase in energy demand and depletion of indigenous oil and gas reserves, our dependency on imported energy resources is growing.

Pakistan's 2020-21 import bill of crude oil was around US\$ 20 billion and consequently the trade deficit surged to USD 48 billion during 2021-22. It created an extra demand of dollars and contributed in, along with other factors, a free fall of Pak rupee value. In this scenario, it is essential to increase our share of indigenous energy resources, which means development of coal, oil & gas, water and other renewable resources.

Pakistan owns 186 billion tons of coal reserves which is equal to 50 billion Toe. Thar Coal Field alone has 175 billion tons of lignite B to sub-bituminous A, coal and its heating value ranges from 6244 to 11045 Btu/lb (1). So far Thar Coal Field, covering an area of fourteen blocks, is thoroughly investigated and exploration in rest of the areas has been stopped due lack of funds. Out of these 14 blocks, only two are being exploited -- Block One by Sindh Engro Coal Mining Company (SECMC) and Block Two by Shanghai Electric Company (SEC). The SECMC has started producing electricity in 2019 while SEC is at the final coal mining stage. Total reserves of these two blocks are 5.14 billion tons which is about 3% of total Thar Coal reserves, rest of the coal field is not being exploited.

Pakistan as a signatory to the Paris Agreement on Climate Change may not be able to exploit and utilize its huge coal resources after 2030 due to over ambitious government plans to fulfill conditionality of this agreement. The Paris Agreement is a legally binding international treaty on climate change. It was adopted by 196 parties/ countries in Paris on 12 December 2015 and its goal is to limit global warming to well below 2 degree Celsius, preferably to 1.5 degrees Celsius, compared to pre-industrial levels.

In order to achieve these objectives parties/countries aim to reach global peaking of greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions as soon as possible; recognizing that peaking will take longer for developing countries/parties and to undertake rapid reductions thereafter in accordance with best available science, so as to achieve a balance between anthropogenic emissions by sources and removals by sinks of greenhouse gases in the second half of this century. Each party /country shall prepare, communicate and maintain successive nationally determined contributions (NDC) which it intends to achieve.

Pakistan has submitted an over ambitious NDCs plan 2021; and to set a cumulative conditional target of overall 50% reduction of its projected emissions by 2030. Out of this, 15% will be completed by own resources and 35% by international grant (USD 101 billion). Regarding utilization of coal, it is stated that from 2020 onwards, new coal power plants are banned and no generation of power through imported coal shall be allowed -- shelving plans for two new coal fired power plants in favor of hydroelectric power and focusing on coal gasification (conversion of coal into syngas) and liquefaction (process of generation liquid hydrocarbons from coal).

The question arises why the government of Pakistan has voluntarily imposed ban on the utilization of coal for power generation when our share of global carbon emission is only 0.9%. Pakistan's per capita carbon emission according to Worldometer report of 2016, stands at 0.87 tons as compare to neighboring Iran (8.08 tons), India (1.8 tons) and China (7.38 tons); and the world average is 4.79 tons.

Coal gasification and liquefaction is a good idea along with innovative techniques for the use of coal, but not at the cost of coal fire power plants -- because of availability of technical expertise locally and due to urgency of our energy requirements. Coal gasification and liquefaction are viable projects but require new technologies and only few countries have experienced it.

We have already experienced a failure in underground coal gasification (UCG) project due to wrong decision in selection of site in the middle of Thar Coal Field. Coal share of Pakistan, India and China in electricity generation is 18.2%, 75% and 61% respectively. It is not understandable, why we are reluctant in utilizing our local resources for power generation; and there exists no logic for replacing coal fire power projects with hydro power projects, in the context of this agreement where every country has the luxury of increasing its GHG emissions.

Rise in oil and gas prices in the wake of Russia-Ukraine war has forced environmentally-sensitive European countries like Germany, Austria, France and the Netherlands to adopt plans of coal power generation. It is, therefore, rational to initiate coal-fired power plant on urgency bases and revise our NDCs. Further, it is recommended to promote smokeless coal briquettes manufacturing and its utilization as heating fuel within industry and houses as well to reduce our dependency on imported LNG and wood to save our forests. As of today we are exploiting only 3% of Thar Coal reserves for power generation. It is feared that we will not be able to use this huge indigenous energy resource due wrong decisions, unrealistic planning and unnecessary international commitments.

New COVID-19 variants traced in Pakistan

Omicron sub variant XBB more contagious but less effective; overall coronavirus situation under control; positivity ratio of virus remains below one percent

By Anum Akram

Humanity has come across words like "virus" and "variants" around the globe during the last two-to-three years, often with scary sensation. Resurgence of newest COVID-19 viruses may not let the catastrophe come to an end. The Omicron sub variant, XBB virus, is a glaring example to this fact.

Though new Omicron virus is more contagious than prior variants, but those who contracted it, are less severely affected. Prime Minister Shahbaz Sharif has also termed the coronavirus situation in the country as "under control."

New COVID-19 variants are sparking fresh health concerns; omicron relatives XBB and XBB.1.5, have seen a surge across the world. Omicron sub variants, thought to be one of three strains responsible for current spike in COVID cases in China and other nations, have been found in Pakistan. In October 2022, the World Health Organization suggested that XBB has a higher reinfection risk as compared to other circulating omicron.

The National Command and Operation Center (NCOC) and National Institute of Health (NIH) also refuted the news of any new sub variant, saying there was no risk of a new strain of COVID-19. But then the National Institute of Health and Agha Khan University verified discovery of the XBB strain to media.

They said the XBB omicron sub variant was already a dominant variant in Pakistan for the past three months. The first female patient was diagnosed with omicron last December. Punjab Health Department confirmed presence of omicron variant in the province during the last week of December.

But the NCOC has yet not issued new guidelines for the citizens. Local medical experts believe that people in Pakistan have high immunity towards COVID-19 variants. But precautions are necessary to stay safe.

The overall coronavirus situation is under control; positivity ratio of the virus has remained below one percent since last July; credit to this goes to vaccination campaigns--over 90% of the population got the jab.

The National Institute of Health reported only 33 positive cases of the coronavirus in the first week of January, at a positivity ratio of 0.50 percent and one death reported on 9th of January. Number of cases could increase in coming days.

The NCOC officials maintained the patients affected by new COVID-19 variants may experience pain in their upper respiratory system, it won't be too tough to manage. Officials were ordered by the authority to significantly enhance hospital resources for COVID patients.

The National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA) was

also directed to ensure supply of ventilators, oxygen supplies, and antiviral medications were available in the medical facilities.

Prime Minister Shahbaz Sharif while chairing a recent meeting, gave instructions to enhancing screening at borders and airports. The premier also asked relevant authorities to ensure that children between ages of 5 and 12 receive vaccinations immediately. "It is encouraging that no COVID related death has been reported from across the country in the last 15 weeks. The decline in the COVID infection ratio is also pleasing but "we have to be alerted all the time," the prime minister has had said.

According to Federal Minister for National Health Services and Regulations Abdul Qadir Patel "Pakistan is fully prepared to meet possible outbreaks of any variants of the pandemic". The surveillance, he said, was activated at the airports to check and prevent entry of COVID affected people in the country.

Pakistan is among one of the few countries of the world, who has vaccinated around 90 percent of its population. With the increase in the number of COVID-19 cases and the detection of new variants, the government and other health policy-makers are vigilant in order to avoid disaster in the upcoming days. Some major airports in the country also began screening international travelers since the emergence of a new omicron sub variant in China known as BF.7.

Use of personal protective equipment (PPES) by healthcare workers as well as disinfection and fumigation of passenger arrival areas, have been advised to all concerned; and infection prevention control (IPC) protocols ordered at all entry and exit points of the country.

According to Dr Shahzad Ali Khan, a member of NCOC, it was uncertain how the new variants would behave in Pakistan because "viruses behave differently in different environments." Moreover he said the immunity level of Pakistanis is better because of vaccination. "New variants may disturb those who are not inoculated, so I would urge people to get vaccinated and get booster shot".

South Asian countries are still safe from deadly variant BF.5. The new variant has also been detected in Germany, Belgium, France, Denmark and the United States. China is facing around nine thousand deaths a day after abruptly ending its strict isolation rules and travel without any restrictions.

Senior medical professionals in Pakistan disagree with the existence of the subtype with some arguing that in addition to the highly contagious XBB variety, the highly contagious BF.7 form might possibly exist and spread in the country because there were no travel restrictions to stop COVID-19 from moving.

Pakistan versus New Zealand Series

Former skipper Sarfaraz Ahmed made a triumphant return to the Test side

By Ali Abdullah

The First Test between New Zealand and Pakistan ended in a draw at the National Bank Cricket Arena. The Test was indeed a high-scoring one, and it got exciting when Babar Azam decided to declare with a lead of just 138; however, bad light played its part, and the game ended as a draw.

The Pakistani team still received a lot of criticism due to their poor bowling in this test. However, there were still some positives for Pakistan in this Test, with both bat and ball.

Former skipper Sarfaraz Ahmed made a triumphant return to the Test side. He smashed two half-centuries in two innings to announce his comeback. Sarfaraz Ahmed finished his Test career with 20 half-centuries, becoming the first Pakistan wicketkeeper batter to do so. Moreover, he also became the Pakistani wicketkeeper with the most runs in Test cricket. Sarfaraz currently has 2796 runs in his 50-match Test career.

With the ball, Abrar Ahmed was the star for Pakistan. He registered another firearm at a young age in his testing career. He now has 23 wickets in his Test career, which is the most by a Pakistani bowler after the first three Test matches of his career. After the first three matches, this is the second-most wickets taken by a bowler in Test Cricket history. At first, it is Prabath Jayasuriya who has 29 wickets.

Pakistan had a lot to think about after this test, as it was their seventh test loss at home this year. They got whitewashed by England recently in the Test Series at home, and now the first Test has also ended in a draw. The second test between the two teams will be held at the same location from January 2 to 6, 2023.



Although the test series between Pakistan and New Zealand ended in a draw, there was still a huge positive for Pakistan in this series. Their middle-order issues were resolved by Sarfaraz Ahmed, a name that many people thought would never be seen or heard again in Test cricket. Sarfaraz Ahmed returned to the Pakistan side after almost 4 years, and his return was impactful.

In four innings, he scored three half-centuries and a century. Unreal consistency, class, temperament, and nerves of steel were on display by Sarfaraz Ahmed. When many believed that he was finished or would never be seen again in the starting lineup, he proved everyone wrong. Even the former PCB Chairman stated that Sarfaraz's red ball career was over, but he worked extremely hard, returned to the team, and demonstrated that he is still passionate and hungry for runs.

With his high scores in this series, Sarfaraz Ahmed became the Pakistani wicketkeeper with the most runs in Test cricket. Sarfaraz also holds the record for the second-most century by a Pakistani wicketkeeper-batsman. Moreover, he came on to bat in tough circumstances in every inning, stayed calm, and rescued Pakistan. The Pakistan team has always received criticism for being too defensive, but Sarfaraz had a strike rate of 55 or higher in all of his 4 innings. He was named Man of the Match in the final Test as well as Man of the Series in this series.

Although his wicketkeeping was questionable, and he himself admitted that in media interactions, we still cannot overlook his great batting contributions. Only if he resolves his wicket-keeping issues can Sarfaraz once again be a vital asset for Pakistan.

Search for new cricket coach

Justin Langer, Ian Pont and Simon Katich all big names; PCB unlikely to renew Saqlain Mushtaq's contract as head coach



Former captain Pakistan Cricket Team Ramiz Raja was appointed as chairman Pakistan Cricket Board by former prime minister Imran Khan; whose removal from office through vote of no confidence triggered doubts among Pakistani masses that Raja will also be shown the door. A few months later it really happened--Ramiz Raja and his entire management squad was sacked by the incumbent government that brought back Najam Sethi as PCB head.

Pakistan played one Asia Cup and two T20 World Cups under Ramiz Raja's chairmanship and qualified for two finals and one semi-final out of these significant events.

New PCB Chairman Najam Sethi, while speaking to media regarding Babar Azam, right after assuming his office, said that Babar Azam was indeed star of Pakistan cricket. "No one can take Babar's place. He is the star of Pakistan cricket. I do not take any decisions related to cricket, I always have the view that I will appoint directors and selectors, and then they can do whatever they want," Sethi maintained.

Najam Sethi said he could take decisions at his own but he preferred to seek advice from selectors and others concerned. He also had faith in the team to do well in the two test match series against New Zealand. According to him, there is nothing about splitting the captaincy in red ball cricket and white ball cricket.

Speaking about hosting Asia Cup 2023 and related issues, Sethi said that his team is not willing to take decisions that could isolate Pakistan from rest of the cricket; and that he will take instructions from the government, will also talk to the Asian Cricket Council (ACC) regarding hosting of the Asia Cup 2023.

Earlier, India refused to come to Pakistan for Asia Cup 2023. The ACC had given Pakistan rights to host Asia Cup and former chairman Ramiz Raja had stated that if India was reluctant to come to Pakistan for Asia Cup, then Pakistan can also boycott the 2023's fifty-over world cup scheduled to be held in India.

Sethi's views are in contrast to that of Raja as he opined that he will consult other participating cricket boards regarding the issue of hosting Asia Cup 2023.

Najam Sethi also revealed that he has contacted former head coach Mickey Arthur regarding his availability to resume the head coach role, as well as seeking suggestions from other coaches who can serve Pakistan cricket better. Sethi is a big fan of Mickey Arthur as a coach. Under Mickey's coaching, Pakistan won the Champions Trophy 2017. Hence, despite Mickey rejecting the offer, Najam Sethi is taking advices from him on who should be the next head coach.

A few names which are circulating in the media are Justin Langer, Ian Pont and Simon Katich. All three of them are qualified and experienced coaches. Langer was recently the head coach of Australian Cricket Team. Katich has been a T20 league specialist coach. He has been in the coaching staff of various IPL teams and he is currently serving as the head coach of MI Cape Town in SA20 League. Ian Pont, the Englishman, has expertise as a bowling coach. Pont is a former twice BPL winning coach, and has also worked with Quetta Gladiators as the assistant/bowling coach.

All three names under consideration are indeed great choices. However, there is no confirmation on who is the most favorite, except one surety that there will be a foreign coach as the current PCB management committee is not satisfied with the progress of Saqlain Mushtaq and company.

Saqlain Mushtaq is the current Head Coach of Pakistan Cricket Team. However, his contract is set to expire and the PCB is not likely to renew it. Saqlain had his success in white-ball cricket with Pakistan Team as Pakistan played a semi-final and final of World T20 under his coaching. Moreover, Pakistan has also won nine back to back matches in ODI under Saqlain's coaching. Saqlain's approach and strategies become questionable at times. His responses in press-conferences also bring him under huge criticism.

The Top Ten Pakistani Films of 2022

By Khalid Farshori

Everyone must be curious about the top ten Pakistani movies that dominated the box office in 2022. A total of 30 Pakistani Urdu and Punjabi films have graced the box office in the year 2022. Apart from these, one Balochi film, seven Pashto films, and four B-grade Punjabi films were released on a limited basis. Foreign Punjabi films were also released this year, totaling eight, while a Nepali movie, Prem Geet 3, was also released.

So, let's take a look on the top ten Pakistani movies of 2022.



The number one slot goes to none other than "The Legend of Mola Jutt." According to director Bilal Lashari, the Punjabi film The Legend of Maula Jat is the most expensive film in Pakistani cinema history, with a budget of Rs 35 crore and only Rs 25 crore spent on worldwide marketing. The business of the film, which was released on October 13, also set new records, as did the cost.

The Legend of Mola Jutt has so far collected Rs 95 crore in Pakistan alone and will soon cross the Rs 100 crore mark to become the first Pakistani film to cross Rs 100 crore in the domestic circuit alone. The film's total gross business to date, including worldwide collections, has been Rs. 225 crores. Thus, The Legend of Mola Jutt was able to claim the title of the highest-grossing movie of 2022. Film critics from all over the world praised the film highly. Even Indian film critics and industry people have called The Legend of Moolah Jat a landmark for Pakistani cinema.

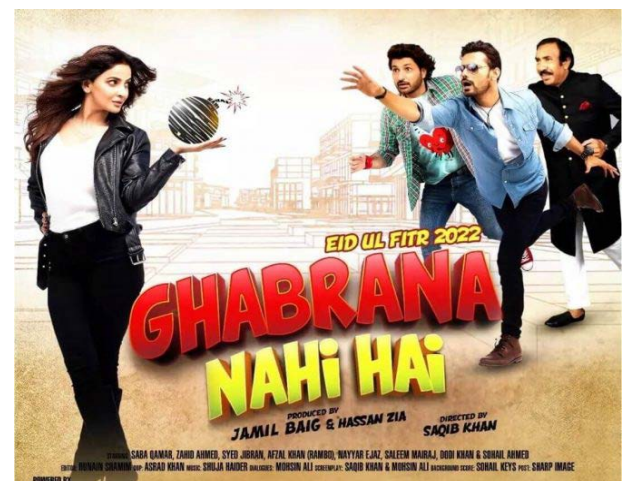


The film "Mai London Nahi Jaonga" is ranked second. The cost of the Pakistani film "London Nahi Jaonga" which came in second, was reported to be Rs 10 crore, while this film made a gross business of Rs 30 crore in the domestic circuit and a total of Rs 44 crore through worldwide

collections. The director of London Nahi Jaon Ga is Nadeem Baig. The film received a mixed response from critics. Overall, London Nahi Jaon Ga was considered to be less intense than Nadeem Baig's previous films.



The third film is Quaid-e-Azam Zindabad. Like Nadeem Baig, Nabeel Qureshi is said to be the pulse of Pakistani movie buffs and makes films that appeal to the audience, but Quaid-e-Azam Zindabad is considered less powerful than all his previous films. This film, which required a large capital investment of Rs. 10 crores, barely covered the production and promotion costs. The domestic box office of the film is Rs 27 crore, while the total gross of overseas collections is Rs 38 crore. The film was panned by critics, but the fan following of Fahad Mustafa and Mahira Khan called the film entertaining.



The fourth position is for the comedy film "Ghabrana Nahi Hai," which has a huge cast, including Zahid Ahmed and Saba Qamar. This film was released on Eid ul-Fitr and proved to be the most successful film of this Eid. TV director Saqib Khan and actor Zahid Ahmed made their feature film debuts with this film. The estimated cost of this film was Rs 8 crore, while the total box office collection of the film was Rs 16 crore and 50 lakhs. By selling TV and digital rights, the film barely covered its cost. However, the film's producers are happy that there is no need to panic; at least it has not proved to be a losing proposition for them.



At number 5, there is a film named Dum Mustam. Producers Adnan Siddiqui and Akhtar Hasnain's musical-drama movie "Dum Mastam" had high expectations, but the film was disappointed at the box office. Released on Eid ul-Fitr, the budget of this film was said to be 12 crore rupees, but Dum Mastam was limited to a box office business of 8 crores and 15 lakh rupees even after combining overseas collections. Even the hype of TV actor Imran Ashraf's debut movie and a strong banner like Hum Films could not make Dum Mastam a big hit.

What stands at number 6 is the film, Kamli. Director Sarmad Sultan Khost has always experimented with unconventional subjects, and Kamli is one such offbeat subject. The film got the tag "success beyond expectations," while trade pundits did not expect this much business from the film. The film, which was completed on a limited budget of Rs. 3 crores, grossed Rs. 580 lakhs at the box office. The filmmaker also got a good amount of income from digital and other rights, while Kamli also received extraordinary recognition at international film festivals. Thus, in terms of overall figures, this film is in the sixth position.



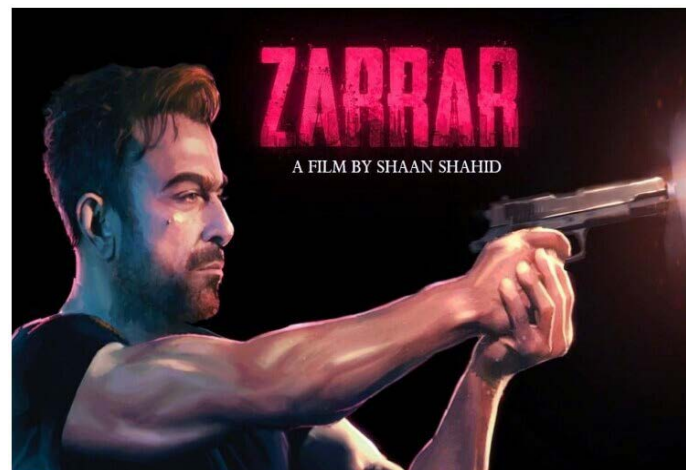
At number 7, Director Wajahat Rauf's "Parday Mai Rahnay Do" turned out to be a good, entertaining low-budget movie. The estimated cost of the film was Rs 1.5 crore, while the box office take was Rs 455 lakh. The producers also got a good income from the digital and other rights to the film. Thus, this film was counted among the few profitable films of the year. Although the film's one-and-a-half hours were considered an issue, the experiment was somewhat successful.

Chukkar was ranked eighth. Yasir Nawaz gained box office confidence with comedies such as "Wrong Number," "Mehru

Nasawi Lub U," and "Wrong Number 2," but his film "Chakkar," which was released on Eid ul-Fitr this year, brought him back to zero. Even Ahsan Khan and Neelam Munir, the hot couple, couldn't save this Rs 4 crore crime thriller. The total box office of the film was 3 crore 20 lakh rupees, while the overseas release of this film was not possible. Although Chakkar ranked eighth in terms of box office figures, overall it turned out to be a losing business for the producers.



The fifth button is positioned in the ninth position. Even a big banner like ARY FILMS and big stars like Feroze Khan, Sonia, Urwa, Iman, and Farhan Saeed could not save the mega-budget movie Tich Button from failure. This film, which was completed with a huge budget of 12 crore rupees, was also deprived of a good opening. Tich Button, although still showing in a few cinemas on the domestic circuit, has been wiped out from the overseas circuit. This film's total revenue is estimated to be around 3 crore rupees.

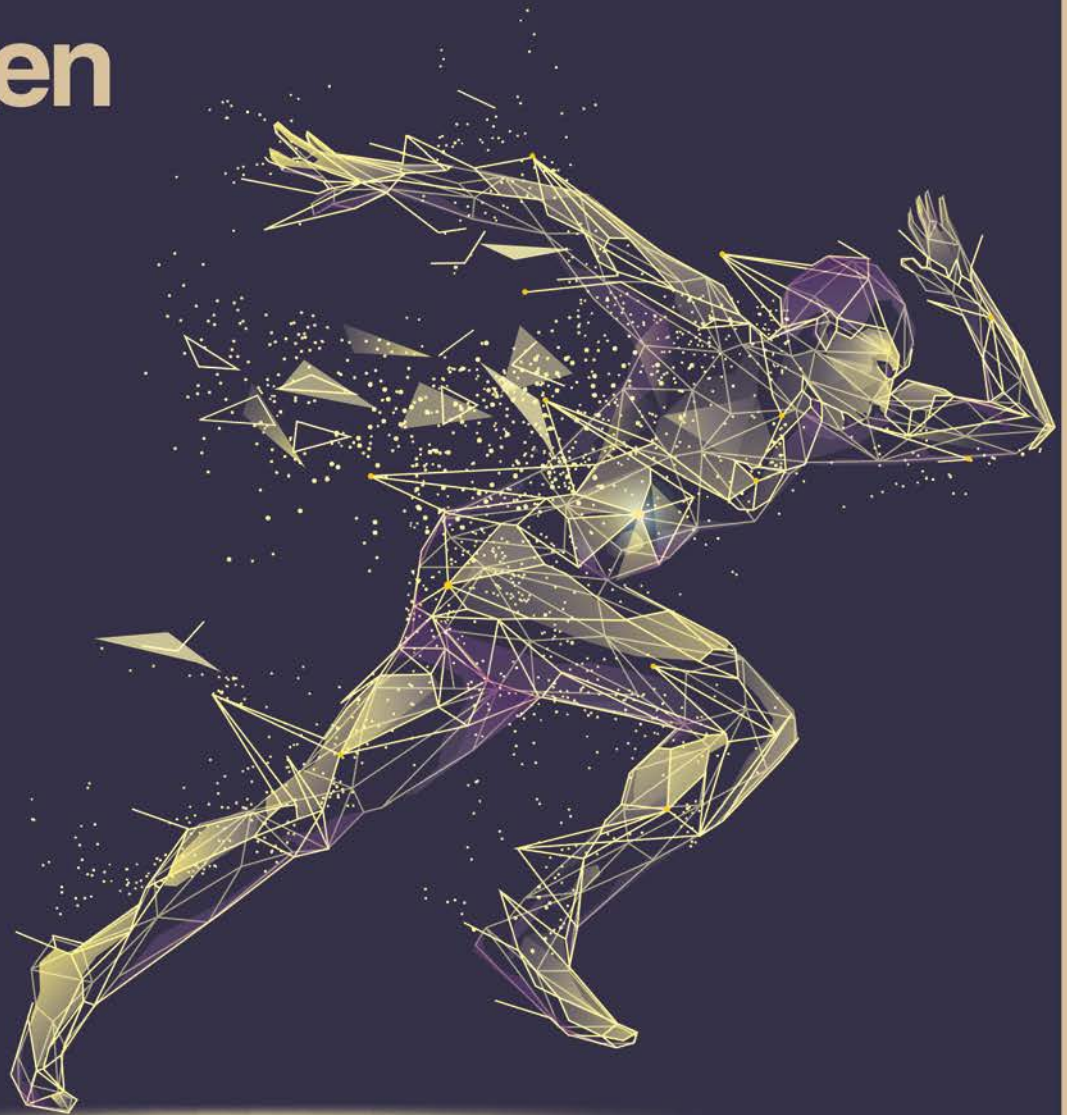


And finally, at number 10: Zarrar. Shaan Shahid's Zarrar was considered a sci-fi movie in terms of production, but this Rs 12 crore film managed barely Rs 2 crore at the box office. The overseas release of this film was not managed well. But even in the countries where this film was released, it did not get enough responses. The film did not open as expected in the domestic market, even with Shaan's fan following. The main reason was that 60 percent of the dialogue in the film is in English. It was hoped that the film would do well in single-screen cinemas due to its glory, but the magic did not work in multiplexes or single-screen cinemas anywhere.

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