

Fortnightly

The Truth International

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ABC Certified

IMF Programme only Hope
Pakistan has to accept IMF conditions to
avoid default

Pakistan's Political Problem
Mysterious forces are no more mysterious now

PDM and Fresh Wave of Terrorism
Consensus at national level is key to
defeat terrorism

IMF Dictated Mini Budget





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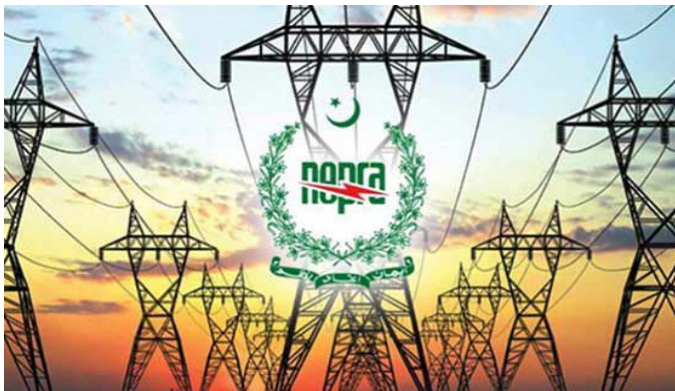
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Economy Blues

By Hammad Ghaznavi

'Pakistan is passing through a critical juncture', has been an oft used statement all along, the butt of countless jokes. This time, however, it is different. The country is faced with a list of crises, all ferociously multiplying. Basically, it's the economy that has reached the nadir; political instability is touching the zenith; terrorism is back, leaving 100 dead in an attack last week; the government seems paralyzed – all these challenges against the backdrop of huge floods last year that caused damages worth \$30 billion. Pakistan, truly, is at the brink, and this time nothing cosmetic can bring it back.

Pakistan's foreign exchange reserves have plummeted to under \$3 billion, good for three weeks' of imports. The dicey cash situation is such that buying petrol for power plants has gone jerky, causing increased power outages of late. The Rupee is witnessing a free fall against the dollar as the government, in order to meet the IMF conditionality, has reversed its policy of artificially supporting the currency. Inflation is killing the common man, as the fuel and electricity prices have gone up manifold, impacting the cost and availability of food items and medicine. Meanwhile, the IMF is insistent upon certain conditionality before unbolting the support package. Finance Minister Ishaq Dar has announced that according to the deal with the IMF new taxes worth Rs 170 billion will be imposed through a mini budget. Certainly, tougher days are ahead for the common man.

It's a fact that Pakistan has been mismanaging its resources over the years, burdening the common man whenever there emerges a need. The state has been spending more than it affords on defense. The \$17 billion subsidies to the ruling elite are indefensible. The Austerity Committee headed by Nasir Khosa has proposed massive cuts in the perks and privileges enjoyed by the ruling elite comprising politicians, generals, judges and bureaucrats. The proposal includes a substantial cut in the cabinet size, no pension beyond Rs 500,000 per month from the taxpayer's money, no SUVs for government functionaries, withdrawal of all perks of retired judges, army officers and bureaucrats. It is also proposed that only one plot can be allotted to government servants and those who have been allotted more need to return the land to the state. The committee also suggested a 15 percent cut in the legislators' salaries and allowances, and a 15 percent cut in all the ministries' budget.

The question is: can these proposals be implemented? Will the powerful stakeholders voluntarily give up the luxuries they enjoy on the public money? The shortsightedness of the ruling elite has brought Pakistan to the precipice of disaster. The rulers milked the national resources as long as they could, but now the coffers have gone empty. It is time to make major decisions. IMF has made it clear to Pakistani authorities that the financial support will not be forthcoming until the lavish ways of ruling elite are not mended.



While Pakistan wallows in decades of mismanagement, the world anxiously watches the unspooling nuclear state, particularly USA and China with whom Pakistan has had long term strategic partnerships in the region. Will Pakistan be allowed to follow in Sri Lanka's footsteps? Who will benefit from Pakistan's default? Pakistan watchers insist, Pakistan's default is in no one's interest, especially China and USA. China is surrounded by 'bad neighbours' except Pakistan; and China has invested billions of dollars in CPEC, eyeing its long term interests in the region with Pakistan as a significant partner. As for the USA, an unstable Pakistan is a bad news for the entire region's future. The world knows, Pakistan is no Sri Lanka – it has a nuclear arsenal, a million-man army, a population ten times that of Sri Lanka, and hoards of Islamic militants ready to export terrorism. Saving Pakistan from default is in the interest of many. There seems, however, to be a consensus among donor countries and multilateral agencies that Pakistan will be rescued only if it commits to 'mend its ways'.

Pakistan, as a state, has witnessed decades-long mismanagement. The ruling elite's greed is solely responsible for pushing the country to this point. The masses seem to have lost faith in the ruling clique. It all needs to change – as it is already too late.

Two journeys, destinations unknown

Just coincidence or a deeper link?



By M A Niazi

PTI leader Fawad Chaudhry's arrest was not a precondition of PML(N) Senior Vice-President Maryam Nawaz, but one does not have to seek too far to see the link. Dissolving the Punjab Assembly has put a caretaker Chief Minister in place, Mohsin Naqvi, and has removed from office PTI ally Ch Pervez Elahi. Not only did Chaudhry no longer have the protection of the Punjab police, but Maryam had no fear of returning to Lahore.

At the same time, as the province prepares for elections, Chaudhry and Maryam are both symbolic of further changes that might take place for their leaders. Indeed, they are consciously precursors. If Chaudhry can be arrested, so can party chief Imran Khan himself. It is to be noted that Chaudhry was arrested for something he had said about the Election Commission of Pakistan. Now Imran has been speaking freely in public against various institutions, and certain individuals.

Chaudhry, in Ch Pervez's tenure, could have followed his leader safely in the knowledge that he would not be touched. If he was arrested by the Punjab Police and taken by it to Islamabad that is worse than merely accompanying the Islamabad police party, but it should not disguise the fact that if the

Punjab police had chosen to be uncooperative, the Islamabad policemen could have done nothing about it. The call given by Imran for protests did not yield much of a result. Obviously, Fawad Chaudhry was not a cause for which PTI supporters were prepared to render more sacrifices. However, the Punjab government has to consider whether those supporters are sufficiently invested in preventing Imran's arrest.

Maryam's return was also a sign of the times. She had obtained bail while Ch Pervez was in office, and had got her name removed from the Exit Control List before going off to see her father. However, it cannot be ignored that her stay in the UK lasted almost four months, and ended only when Ch Pervez was out.

At the same time, she faces no cases, nor arrest for any offence. Her arrest would have required the registration of a fresh case. Naqvi could be expected not to do any such thing, but Ch Pervez could not, not after his wife and daughters-in-law had been summoned by the FIA. The rule on not involving women could no longer apply.

However, neither Fawad Chaudhry's arrest nor Maryam Nawaz's return should be seen as straws in the wind,

strongly tempted as observers might feel that they are. Both are cataclysmic, in their way, but neither brings to an end the political instability bedeviling the country

She announced the return of Mian Nawaz soon but did not give a date. Her credibility on this point was not very great, because the word out on the street is that he will not return. It should be noted that Maryam's getting bail means that Mian Nawaz should get bail in the Avenfield case, but provides him no help in his conviction, which is for possessing an iqama, and for concealing this from the Election Commission. He must be waiting anxiously for the outcome of the case against Imran for not informing the ECP of the existence of a daughter, Tyrian White. If Imran gets relief in that case, Mian Nawaz will be able to claim that relief for himself.

It should be remembered that Nawaz is in a little deeper than Maryam, or the other returnees from London, Ishaq Dar, and Salman Shehbaz. Whereas Mariam, was a free woman, and the other two were wanted by a court, which could grant them bail, Mian Nawaz skipped bail from jail. If he surrenders before the jail authorities, they cannot give him bail. He can get transit bail from the airport to jail, but

the caretakers will not stick their necks out for him.

Mohsin Naqvi is married to one of Ch Shujaat Hussain's nieces and has cordial relations with PPP Co-Chairman Asif Zardari, but while his relations with the Sharif family are supposed to be cordial, they are not deep enough for the PTI to accuse him of being bent on favouring him in any unusual fashion. At most, Mian Nawaz can hope to be allowed access to some of the creature comforts Imran was bent on depriving him of, like an air-conditioner (which is not needed for months, anyway).

However, as Maryam has said, he is to return. From one point of view, his return is essential. From that same point of view, that return to jail would not merely be unproductive, but potentially counter-productive, for his being in jail would force the entire party to act (perhaps futilely) for his release, at a time when it should concentrate on the election campaign in its backyard. At such a time, for the party's chief to be immured in prison, would be bad for morale.

At the same time, Mian Nawaz has got to campaign if Punjab is to be won back. The PTI won it in 2018 when both Mian Nawaz and Maryam were in jail. He is considered essential to a winning campaign. Candidates on marginal seats will be the ones pressing hardest for his return, and free return, so that he can campaign in their constituencies.

However, it could be argued that Maryam is able to lead the campaign alone. It might be a hard task, but if she is to lead the party, a baptism of fire may be optimal. After all, her father is a septuagenarian, and will not be around forever. She herself is a



grandmother and is 49. At this age, her father had been Prime Minister and was Opposition Leader. She is being tipped as Chief Minister if the PML(N) wins, and it has been assumed that Mian Hamza Shehbaz has been found wanting. At any rate, he has not developed as a campaigner, and in his only outing as CM, only managed to get ousted. He also did not provide the requisite leadership for the vote of confidence that followed, with the result that the Punjab Assembly was dissolved.

Another problem that Maryam and the PML(N) the face is whether provincial polls will be held at all. There are two issues here. One is the census, which is to be held at the beginning of March. If the election is held around April's beginning, the results will have come in. While it is legal to hold an election under the present demarcations, demarcation according to the new results, which must take place before the next election, would become obvious. It is not so much the shifts of seats between provinces, as the reallocation of seats between districts will matter. Also important are the five new districts created by the Pervez government, where seat boundaries will have to be adjusted to the districts.

Then there is the issue of the National Assembly if its life is prolonged by the declaration of an economic emergency. There seems no provision in the Constitution for a postponement of provincial polls even then, but one never knows what arguments might arise if lawyers get to work. It should be taken as given that Mian Nawaz will not be coming home if there is a postponement. Only when there is a confirmed date for the poll will he return.

In this context, the likelihood of the coming by-elections, slotted for March 16, becomes doubtful.

However, if they take place, they will be a national challenge for Maryam. It might be a strange campaign, what with Imran standing for all the vacated seats. The provincial elections can take place about a month after that, and Imran cannot even theoretically stand on all seats (he can only do for the province where his vote is inscribed, Punjab). Mian Nawaz will be strongly tempted to return, and will be called by the party's leaders, the legal path of his return is not all that clear, and its murkiness is increased by the current caretakers. What would happen in the event of Imran's disqualification, imprisonment or both is another matter. Mian Nawaz will lower the bar then for his return, being tempted by a reversal of the 2018 position.

However, neither Fawad Chaudhry's arrest nor Maryam Nawaz's return should be seen as straws in the wind, strongly tempted as observers might feel that they are. Both are cataclysmic, in their way, but neither brings to an end the political instability bedeviling the country.



Divided in Crisis

By Maleeha Lodhi

While the economy teeters on the brink and a new surge of militant violence threatens the country's security, the political situation descends into more chaos.

The country's intensifying challenges prompted Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif to call an all-parties conference but this did nothing to lower the political temperature. Indeed, there is no indication that political leaders are willing to pause their political war to find solutions to Pakistan's multiple crises. Instead, recent developments have plunged politics into a more volatile and confused state. Uncertainty rules as politics gets messier.

The dissolution of the Punjab and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa assemblies opened another chapter in the fierce political confrontation between the government and opposition. While opposition leader Imran Khan hoped this would force the PDM government to call early general elections, the ruling alliance stuck to its guns and insisted that national polls would only be held once parliament completes its full term in August. But it left the PML-N-led government having to deal with the constitutional obligation of holding elections to provincial assemblies in the stipulated 90-day period. Its governor in Punjab is however demurring over fixing a date. This despite the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) writing to him and proposing dates between April 9 and 13 and reminding him of his



constitutional duty to announce elections within 90 days from the date of dissolution of the assembly. ECP has also suggested between April 15 and 17 for the KP election.

The delay reflects PML-N's reluctance to press ahead on this count. This was laid bare in a recent meeting of PDM heads. News reports indicated that a case was made by some in the party to delay provincial elections on the grounds that these should follow a digital census due to get underway in March. This, it was argued, would be consistent with an earlier decision of the Council of Common Interests that the next elections should be held according to a new census. This argument ignores the fact that such decisions cannot override constitutional stipulations. Some in the

ruling party have apparently invoked the financial cost of holding multiple elections as an argument for delay, pointing out that holding two provincial and national elections at a different time would be unprecedented in the country's history.

PML-N's assessment seems to be that provincial elections within 90 days would advantage Khan. If PTI does exceptionally well that would set the template for national polls later. Given the political cost the ruling alliance is incurring due to the tough economic measures it is taking to resume the IMF loan programme and the worsening energy crisis, it needs time for a course correction to improve its position before going to the polls. Party leaders also think more time would enable them to end internal discord and divisions in what is their rudderless Punjab organisation today.

The country's multiple crises have not persuaded political leaders to pause the political war.

Whether or not this political calculation is well grounded, any effort to delay provincial elections will further complicate the situation, even spark a constitutional crisis. The matter will again be left to the courts to decide. Already the governor's prevarication over fixing an election date is in court. More litigation can be expected with the Supreme Court likely to be involved if provincial polls are postponed beyond April. This would mean asking the courts to suspend the 90-day constitutional require-



ment, which will take some doing. It will certainly reinforce the growing impression that PDM is running scared of elections.

For his part, KP Governor Ghulam Ali has said that the law and order situation in his province was not suitable to hold elections. After the terrorist attack on a mosque in Peshawar, which claimed over 100 lives, he wrote a letter to the ECP. In this he asked it to consult all relevant stakeholders including political parties and law-enforcement agencies before fixing a date for the polls in view of the “alarming” security situation in the province. Later, the Punjab governor wrote a similar letter to ECP citing the country’s security as well as economic situation. While the timing of provincial elections is still up in the air, if they are held on schedule, it will mean there will be elected, and not neutral caretaker governments in place when general elections are held. This will create its own complications and hand the losing party an excuse to explain its defeat and more consequentially to reject the outcome — a catch-22 situation.

Adding to the current political confusion are by-elections announced to 33 National Assembly seats for March 16. ECP has fixed March 19 for another 31 seats. These became vacant after the resignations of PTI MNAs were hurriedly accepted by the National Assembly speaker. So, a major electoral exercise will get underway in March whose outcome may shape political dynamics for general elections but in which



winning candidates from PTI will not even join the current NA. In any case, whoever wins will only serve for four months as a member before the Assembly is dissolved. The PPP has decided to contest the by-elections but PML-N is still undecided — indecision increasingly becoming the hallmark of the party leadership.

There are two important conclusions to draw from all of this. One, that political turmoil, ceaseless power struggles and frequent appeals to courts to settle political disputes are all taking place at a time when the country is faced with serious challenges to its financial solvency and security. This shows a disconnect from reality by the warring parties. It also suggests a lack of concern for issues that will actually

determine the fate and fortunes of the country. Two, the searing political divide and polarisation portends a troubled outlook for what might happen before, during and after general elections, whenever they are called. With political parties constantly on a collision course, unable to agree on anything and confronting each other on everything, there is little chance of any consensus on the rules of the road leading to national polls and, more importantly, on accepting its outcome. This suggests political stability might remain elusive in a country that needs it more desperately now than ever.

The writer is a former ambassador to the US, UK & UN.

A photograph showing a person's hands typing on a laptop keyboard. A black smartphone is on the desk next to the laptop, and a hand is holding a pen over an open notebook. The image is part of a promotional banner for The Truth International.

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Lingering Pak-IMF trust deficit, credibility gap

Govt to swallow bitter pills in guise of mini budget; PTI, PDM brazenly breached agreement with Fund; Presidential Ordinance poised to fetch additional Rs 170b tax revenues; coalition govt to impose taxes worth Rs 453b

By Mehtab Haider

The credibility gap between Pakistan and the IMF has marred the efforts for striking a staff-level agreement in order to revive the stalled Fund program of \$6.5 billion under the Extended Fund Facility (EFF).

This lingering trust deficit and credibility gap resulted in forcing the IMF mission to call for undertaking timely and decisive implementation of much-needed policies along with resolute financial support from official partners as critical for Pakistan to successfully regain macroeconomic stability and advance its sustainable development. It clearly shows that without timely and decisive implementation, the IMF support will remain a far cry.

In order to restore the lingering trust deficit, now the IMF has given its prescriptions and the government will have to swallow all bitter pills in form of unveiling a mini budget through presidential ordinance, hiking electricity and gas tariffs as well as securing confirmation from multilateral and bilateral creditors for fulfilling dollar injection requirement till the end of the ongoing financial year.

Why this credibility gap and trust deficit occurred? There is a need for soul-searching and in-depth analysis to ascertain facts and then take into account the stance taken by the IMF. If we try to get into the shoes of the IMF, it is argued that Pakistani authorities always made commitments and then breached them half way. It resulted in creating a trust deficit.

In the political arena, the political parties blamed each other by holding others responsible but as a matter of fact, the recent two episodes were showing glaring examples whereby the incumbent PDM-led regime, as well as PTI, committed the same blunders as first, they signed an agreement with the IMF and then violated it blatantly.



Under the PTI-led regime, Pakistan and the IMF signed an agreement and the Fund provided a loan tranche in December 2021 but the PTI government breached the agreement in February 2022 by reducing the POL prices by Rs 10 per liter and electricity prices by Rs 5 per unit and also announced to freeze it. Then the Imran Khan-led PTI was ousted from power through a vote of no confidence.

The PDM-led regime led by Shehbaz Sharif took over the reins of power. After passing through stiff resistance and undertaking tough measures, the IMF program got restored in August/September 2022. Soon after the restoration of the IMF program, former finance minister Miftah Ismail was shown the door and Ishaq Dar took charge as minister for finance. Under the IMF program, the pending 9th review became due from first week of November 2022.

Dar reversed the policy of market-based exchange rate and made efforts to manage it artificially for almost three months. During this period the POL prices did not increase despite the fact that the petroleum levy was jacked up to Rs 50 per liter only on MS petrol.

Finally, the flood gate broke the doors by end of January 2023 as rupee

witnessed a slide massively against US dollar and POL price surged by Rs 35 per liter in one go.

These two decisive measures helped dispatching the IMF field mission to visit Islamabad from January 31 to February 9, 2023.

After hectic engagement of ten days, the IMF left Islamabad without signing the much-awaited Staff Level Agreement. Although, IMF shared the draft of Memorandum of Economic and Financial Policies (MEFP) with Pakistani authorities by giving its menu list and both sides would have to bridge the differences to reach a stage for signing the staff level agreement.

Now both sides are all set to kick-start deliberations for finalizing the agreement as the IMF placed prior actions including the unveiling of a mini-budget for taking additional taxation measures of Rs 170 billion. A Presidential Ordinance is under consideration to fetch additional tax revenues of Rs 170 billion in the remaining four and half month period till June 30, 2023.

The IMF shared its menu through the draft MEFP and now both sides would deliberate upon different measures to convince the Fund staff for signing the Staff Level Agreement (SLA). Although, IMF opposed all one off

measures such as flood levy but Pakistani authorities are still insisting for avoiding regressive taxations.

The hiking of the GST rate by one percent will fetch Rs 50-55 billion in the remaining period of the current fiscal year. Other taxation measures include hiking tax rates on cigarettes, beverages, real estate transactions and expensive vehicles etc.

The IMF asks for implementing the revised Circular Debt Management Plan (CDMP) by hiking the electricity tariff in the range of Rs 8 to 11 per unit, removing un-targeted subsidies for Zero Rating Industries (ZRI), doing away with Kissan Package, increasing gas tariff up to 25-30 percent on average and securing confirmation from bilateral, multilateral and other avenues to generate dollar inflows in the range of \$12 to \$13 billion.

According to the IMF's statement, its mission led by Nathan Porter visited Islamabad during January 31–February 9 to hold discussions under the ninth review of the authorities' program supported by the IMF Extended Fund Facility (EFF) arrangement.

Porter stated that "the IMF team welcomes the prime minister's commitment to implement policies needed to safeguard macro-economic stability and thanks the authorities for the constructive discussions. "Considerable progress was made during the mission on policy measures to address domestic and external imbalances."

Key priorities include strengthening the fiscal position with permanent revenue measures and reduction in untargeted



subsidies, while scaling up social protection to help the most vulnerable and those affected by the floods; allowing the exchange rate to be market determined to gradually eliminate the foreign exchange shortage; and enhancing energy provision by preventing further accumulation of circular debt and ensuring the viability of the energy sector.

IMF made it clear that "the timely and decisive implementation of these policies along with resolute financial support from official partners are critical for Pakistan to successfully regain macroeconomic stability and advance its sustainable development".

"Virtual discussions will continue in the coming days to finalize the implementation details of these policies," the IMF statement concluded.

The government made commitment with the IMF to slash down expenditures and undertaking additional revenue measures to bring down the primary deficit at desired levels. For collection of Rs 170 billion in remaining period of the current fiscal year, the government will have to impose taxes of Rs 453 billion having annual impact for making collection of the desired amount. The FBR's tax collection will be jacked up proportionally so the annual tax collection target will go up to Rs 7640 billion.

The government also made a request for granting adjuster of Rs 472 billion waiver in flood related expenditures. The Public Sector Development Program (PSDP) was further slashed down while the allocation for BISP was jacked up to Rs 400 billion from earlier allocation of Rs 360 billion for the current fiscal year.

The last but not the least, the IMF wants confirmation for securing dollar inflows from multilateral and bilateral creditors during the remaining period of the current fiscal year. There is no easy solution available so the next few days and weeks are important to ward off the possibility of hovering danger of default on the economic horizon of the country. But in the medium term, the country will have to seek another IMF program once the existing one under the EFF will expire in coming June 2023 mainly because of external debt servicing requirements over the next three to four years period.



Pakistan to face Super Inflation in the wake of Govt-IMF deal



By Javed Mahmood

Pakistan and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) are close to accomplishing the ninth review of the economy. It will lead to the disbursement of the stalled \$1.1 billion tranche from the IMF. Both sides started discussions on Jan 31, 2023, to finalize the ninth review with the target to conclude talks by Feb 9, leading to the signing of the Memorandum of Economic Framework Policy (MEFP). Once the MEFP is signed, the next stage will be the disbursement of the next tranche soon after the approval of the board of directors of the Fund.

Pakistan is desperately seeking loans from the IMF with the aim to avoid default as the reserves of the central bank have fallen to a terribly low level, at \$3 billion. Also, the donors have linked the disbursement of grants and loans with the continuation of the IMF programme in Pakistan. The international creditors and donors believe that in the prevailing economic crisis in Pakistan, the financial survival of the country is not possible with the continuation of the IMF programme. In other words, the IMF programme will be taken as

a guarantee that Pakistan will not default as long as the country is pursuing the Fund's programme.

However, there are some dark sides to the IMF programme and the number one is inflation. In January this year, the headline inflation soared to a record high of 27.6 per cent while food inflation expanded to 45 per cent. One of the main reasons behind this inflation is the government's decisions to enhance oil, gas, and electricity costs to fulfil the IMF's requirements. Additionally, the Pakistani rupee has also been left to the market forces which will determine the dollar-rupee on a daily basis as the government has ended the cap on the exchange rate.

In just a few days, the dollar has edged up to over 270 rupees in the inter-bank trading and around 280 rupees in the open market from its earlier rate of 227 rupees (in the inter-bank) and 235 rupees in the open market when the dollar-rupee value was under the government's control. Hence, the US dollar has gained further value of 43 to 45 rupees in the inter-bank and open market

trading just because of one condition of the IMF – lifting of the price cap. Depreciation of the rupee means an immediate increase in the cost of doing business and hikes in prices of essential items such as oil, gas, cooking oil/ghee and imported fruit and vegetables.

Moreover, the banks have started charging the open market rate from their customers for international payments. Interestingly, the banks will make payments to their customers receiving foreign currency according to the inter-bank rate, but charge them an open market rate for international payments. Thus, this exploitative policy would not only cause an extra financial burden on the banks' customers but will make imported items dearer.

IMF requirements and the fear of Super Inflation

The experts, analysts, and people are anticipating super inflation in the country soon after the implementation of the IMF

agenda. Experts believe that Pakistan will see another 10 to 12 points increase in inflation just because of the conditions of the IMF. For example, in January 2023, the headline inflation surged to 27.6 per cent record high since 1977 while food inflation inflated to 45 per cent. The inflation would further trigger to an alarming level as the government is putting in place each and every condition of the IMF just to get loans.

For instance, on the demand of the IMF, the government has increased petroleum product rates by 35 rupees per litre. Also, the LPG rate per kg has been jacked up by 60 rupees. The tariff on natural gas is also being increased by 70 per cent with effect from July 2023. We can also see a further increase in petroleum products because the IMF wants the government to generate more revenues to cover the gap in the tax collection target. Elimination of subsidies on electricity tariffs is also on the card. And the IMF agenda does not end here as the fund wants the government to broaden the tax base, and increase rates of taxes especially GST _ from 17 per cent to 18 per cent. Meanwhile, the tax rate on the import of non-essential consumer items is expected to be raised to mop up more revenues in the fiscal year 2022-23.

All the fiscal and tax measures would, no doubt, ignite inflation in Pakistan and in the next couple of months, we can experience super inflation _ general inflation around 38-40 per cent and 60-70 per cent food inflation, against the prevailing 45 per cent food inflation reported in Jan-2023. This terrible level of inflation would, indeed, throw millions of people into poverty in 2023 in Pakistan.

Human Rights Watch and IMF agenda

Human Rights Watch (HRW) has noted that the conditions of the IMF attached to the resumption of the bailout package for Pakistan will be harmful to the people in the country. The human rights watchdog, therefore, urged the IMF to work with Pakistan's economic team to strengthen social protection and mitigate harm to the vulnerable segments of society. The Human Rights Watch said (Feb 8) that with growing poverty, inflation, and joblessness, Pakistan is facing the worst economic

crises. The prevailing situation is jeopardizing millions of people's rights to health, food, and an adequate standard of living.

Pakistan and IMF will continue negotiations till Feb 9 to clear the IMF's 9th review of its Extended Fund Facility. It will lead to the release of a \$1.1bn tranche. It may be noted here that during policy-level discussions, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) has asked Pakistan to enhance its foreign exchange reserves to \$16 billion by June 30, 2023. The Fund also demanded the removal of import restrictions forthwith. On Feb 9, 2023, the government decided to put in place the demands of the IMF to pave the way for the release of the next tranche.



FM Bilawal Bhutto asks IMF to soften conditions

Foreign Minister Bilawal Bhutto Zardari also urged the International Monetary Fund to keep in mind the miseries of the flood-ravaged millions of Pakistanis and soften the harsh conditions to minimize their miseries. Speaking at the 'Resilient Sindh: From Pledges to Reconstruction' conference in Karachi on Feb 8, Bilawal said that the people had suffered a lot because of the devastating floods and tormenting rains.

"Our people have already been drowned in floods and heavy rains and they cannot be drowned again in the flood of price hikes," Bilawal said.

Bilawal Bhutto is also the chairman of the Pakistan Peoples Party _ one of the three mainstream political parties in the country.

Bilawal said, "Their [flood victims] standing crops have been washed away and despite tiresome efforts, they have not been able to prepare their lands for the Rabi [October-March] crop and may not be able to make their flooded lands fit for the upcoming Kharif [April-September] crops."

He pointed out that in such a situation, the people could not be further pushed into the spiral of price hikes. Therefore, Bilawal Bhutto requested the IMF to offer soft conditions to Pakistan which it offered to other nations during the Covid-19 pandemic.

Important to note is that the prices of essential consumer items have declined in

the international market, but we (the Pakistanis) would not be able to get that relief just because of the government-IMF deal amid the fast-depleting foreign exchange reserves of the central bank. For our leaders, going to the IMF is a quick and easy way to get loans and complete their terms and it is difficult to run the country without burdening the country with new loans. This is not the first time that Pakistan is facing a bankruptcy-like situation and in the past, the previous rulers obtained 22 times bailout loans from the IMF since 1958. In Dec 1958, for the first time, the Pakistan government obtained a 25 million loan SDR (Special Drawing Rights/IMF currency) from the International Monetary Fund. Neither our rulers nor the IMF people have changed the fate of Pakistan and the country has been sinking deeper into the debt trap with the passage of time.

Worsening Economic Crisis

Dr. Ashfaq Hasan Khan asserts that IMF is to blame for the current economic crisis

By Dr. Ashfaq Hasan Khan

A well-known economist, Ashfaq Hasan Khan, has put forward the hypothesis that the policies of the International Monetary Fund are to blame for the country's deteriorating employment, poverty, and inflation conditions. He asserts that hardly a single nation has ever improved after participating in the IMF's programme.

During an interview with the host of ARY News, Ghulam Sarwar, Dr. Ashfaq stated, "I have always claimed that the economic status of any country that has gone to the IMF has never gotten better." Dr. Ashfaq's comments were made in the context of the conversation.

"Unemployment, poverty, and inflation have all worsened in all of the nations that opted for the IMF programme," he added. "This is the case in every single one of these countries." You will never be able to make any headway using the programme that the IMF has provided.

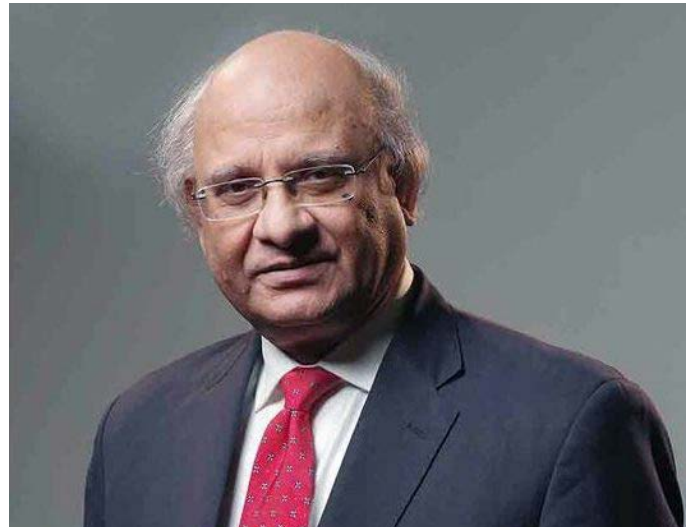
The economist made the remark in response to rumours that the government was considering renegotiating its agreement with the IMF. He asserts that in order for the government to fulfil the needs of the lender in the coming months, the government would be forced to raise taxes as well as the price of power, which will make life even more challenging for the typical citizen.

Dr. Ashfaq is concerned that the government is overburdening the people by imposing extra taxes in the forthcoming budget as a response to pressure from the International Monetary Fund (IMF). Unemployment is on the rise, and people's purchasing power is eroding as a result of surging inflation. He was talking about the potential for new taxes to be levied.

Dr. Ashfaq is disappointed that the administration is praising a growth rate of 2% when it is possible that the economy could have advanced at a rate of between 7% and 8%.

One of the hosts referred to the World Bank as an example to demonstrate how seriously the COVID-19 outbreak is impacting Pakistan's labour force. It is anticipated that between April and July of 2020, 37%, or 20.7 million people, will have lost their jobs, and another 6.7 million workers, or 12% of the total, will have seen a loss in income from the labour that they perform.

When asked if it wasn't a failure of the IMF programme and the current government that the country is living off of bailout packages despite bringing the economy to a standstill, he said that the government was forced to go to the IMF because it remained unsuccessful in getting economic support from friendly countries at the time. He said that the government was forced to go to the IMF because it remained unsuccessful in getting economic support from friendly countries. He continued by stating that the current administration as well as the programme that was being implemented by the IMF were both to blame for the catastrophe.



Dr. Ashfaq is of the opinion that it was inappropriate for Pakistan to approach China for support despite the country's participation in the IMF plan. China has been assisting Pakistan in its efforts to become self-sufficient. China has been providing assistance to Pakistan in an effort to assist the country in becoming self-sufficient; however, the leadership of Pakistan has not been able to make the necessary developments as of yet.

The host stated that despite the fact that Pakistan is participating in a programme designed by the IMF to put the country on a path to sustainable prosperity, the government of Pakistan instead relies on allies such as China, from which it receives annual financial support of 11 billion dollars. The host stated that this is despite the fact that Pakistan is participating in the programme.

As an answer to a query regarding the projects that make up the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor, he stated that a straightforward litmus test can demonstrate how serious the federal government is about implementing the multibillion-dollar roads and rail project (CPEC).

When you read about the Prime Minister's trip to Gwadar in 2017, you may have noticed that he spent a lot of time discussing the current status of the CPEC Authority and the work that it is carrying out.

According to Dr. Ashfaq, not one of the special economic zones (SEZs) that are being built as part of the CPEC plan is finished or completely operating at this point in time. He emphasised how important it was for the prime minister to put together an experienced economic team that is capable of analysing and resolving the issues that the country is facing economically.

Since it has no human face and ignores the facts on the ground in Pakistan, most notably the terrible flood, this IMF programme is the harshest and most merciless the IMF has ever delivered to any

government. It is also the harshest and most cruel programme the IMF has ever provided to any country. The decision made by the International Monetary Fund (IMF) to delay its 7th and 8th reviews had a severe impact on Pakistan's economy.

He said that at a time when GDP is expected to be between 2% and 2.5% and inflation is very high, the Fund has now imposed the condition of watching the monthly revenue target, and that in the case of a shortfall, the government will be compelled to implement additional taxation measures. This condition comes as a result of the fact that the fund has now imposed a condition of watching the

monthly revenue target. In addition to that, he said that this requirement had been imposed by the Fund.

He asserted that the present state of affairs prevents the government from introducing any new revenue measures and that the fact that this is the case demonstrates that the programme was not thoroughly negotiated. He said this showed that the negotiations were inadequate.

According to Hassan Khan, the objectives that were laid forth for the fiscal year 2022–2023 are now irrelevant.

Financial Times report on Pakistan

Pakistan is facing its worst set of challenges in its modern history. Riven with political incompetence, an economy that is on the brink and devastation wrought by climate change, the country last week suffered a terrorist attack that left 100 dead. A stark set of choices faces Pakistan, and its creditors in the west and in China, none of whom are served by further instability in a nuclear-armed power on a geopolitical faultline. The country's political and military elites have presided over decades of dysfunction, corruption and woeful governance. While the main political parties interminably slug it out there is little to differentiate them on policy. Elections this year will probably be exploited as an opportunity for a fresh round of toxic squabbling, rather than substantive efforts to improve Pakistan's fate. If they travelled outside the bubble of Islamabad they would find people with little faith that the ruling class will do anything effective to alleviate their misery. Politicians need to start putting the people, not their parties, first. As it is, Pakistan risks following Sri Lanka into default, where food and medicine have been in short supply. But with a population ten times that of Sri Lanka, a nuclear arsenal, a military with a history of meddling, and extremist Islamists who are displaying their bloodthirsty fanaticism once more, default is a situation international creditors and multilateral institutions must help Pakistan avoid.

The figures are stark: the country's foreign exchange reserves dwindled to just \$3.7bn late last month, equivalent to just three weeks' of imports. That compares to total public debt of \$270bn, around 79 per cent of GDP. Just keeping the lights on is seemingly tough: the country has faced



blackouts. On top of this, Pakistan suffered flooding last year that caused \$30bn of damage and affected tens of millions of people. International lenders agreed a support package of \$9bn last month but there is little clarity as to how and when it will reach the people who need it. That needs to be determined, urgently. Inflation, the impact of Russia's war in Ukraine on food and energy prices, and of course, mismanagement, have all played their part to get to this point. An IMF mission is currently in Pakistan to try to unlock a \$7bn support package first agreed in 2019. The rupee fell to record lows recently after the authorities, in a bid to meet IMF conditions, abandoned exchange controls that were artificially supporting the currency. But even if another \$1bn or so is unfrozen, this is a sticking plaster. Unpalatable as it is, what is needed is magnitudes higher if Pakistan is to avoid default. But it is not just up to the IMF to provide this. Pakistan's biggest bilateral creditor is China, which holds about \$30bn

of its total debt, not including the \$1.1bn owed to independent Chinese power producers for electricity purchases. Beijing rejects any suggestion that its lending creates a "debt trap" for emerging markets. In which case, China should have no problem with abiding by a broad principle of parity with other international creditors, agreeing to loan repayments on close to equal terms with multilateral institutions and taking similar haircuts on repayments.

China, the IMF and the Paris Club of creditor nations need to bring Pakistan into debt-restructuring negotiations, and quickly; not present it with a fait accompli struck behind closed doors after drawn-out negotiations, similar terms to which it must try also to strike with commercial creditors. Pakistan's plight, as Sri Lanka's and Zambia's before it, shows the whole rickety architecture of sovereign debt restructuring needs an urgent redesign. It should not have to take another default to make that happen.

Courtesy Financial Times

Tale of three crises and Pakistan's stability

Pakistan's 'military myth' known to everyone; intra-elite conflict to determine country's future direction; IK ouster from power completed alienation of Punjab-centric political parties from military establishment

By Umer Farooq

Pakistan at present is beset with multiple crises—the crises which can put the country on the path of chaos or anarchy. Intra-elite conflict that has dominated the country's political scene since 2014 is the least dangerous of these crises, yet they are dominating the political and media scene of the country.

As part of this intra-elite conflict two major political parties including PML-N and PTI are at loggerheads and besides these two political parties, one after the other, have launched public campaigns against military leadership. Yet this is the least of the dangerous crises faced by the country.

Other two crises faced by the country could endanger its survival or threaten the stability of the country for a longer period of time: first crisis is the economic and financial viability of the state which now largely depends on the IMF program which is under negotiations. Second is the rising threat of terrorism and violence in the northwest and southwest of the country.

But it is the first crisis which will determine the outcome of the second and third crises. It is ironic that the political conflict between major power wielders in Islamabad has diverted the focus and attention away from any determined efforts to tackle revival of TTP in the northwestern part of the country.

Now even the IMF is calling upon the government to develop some kind of consensus between major political parties regarding agreement with the Fund so that any future government should not do away with the agreement. The crisis of intra-elite conflict is an overarching crisis, which will determine what direction the Pakistani state will take.

Ever since I started reporting politics for local newspapers, I have always come across multiple dimensions and shades of a myth of military's



hegemony in a country's politics. Military and its role in politics has been all pervasive during the past 33 years that I have been reporting. Often people just don't mention military or generals by name, they just refer to them in third person, "they (which means military) are angry with so and so", "he is their (military's) man", "they (military) will never allow this to happen".

This mysterious third person is never mentioned by name in the political discourse in the country's political and media circles. The fact that they could be angry, happy or may have come all out to support or oppose a political development or a personality could have decisive influence on the events or direction of argument in drawing room debate.

Some of the basic feature of military's myth in Pakistani politics are as follows: In the last days of General Musharraf's rule, cracks started to appear in military's myth of all-power image, when two insurgencies—one in the North west, led by religious extremists and Pashtun tribal fighter and the other in South West, led by more secular minded Baloch rebels—started to shatter the omnipotence of military's role in Pakistani society.

The year between 2007 and 2014 was a period of mass scale violence against the military itself and against urban targets in Pakistan. Public opinion

about the effectiveness of the military and its leaders took a nosedive in these years. However, by 2017-2018 the military prevailed over these militants' groups primarily because of its superior firepower and organizational strength.

This perhaps, led to over confidence among the military leaders who intervened in the country's political arena in August 2014—the same year the military launched a full-scale operation in tribal areas—in order to install their favorites in power corridors. This led to a deep division in political society in areas and regions that provided the recruiting ground for the military's officers' corps.

With the ouster of Imran Khan from power the alienation of Punjab-centric political parties from military establishment was complete. Now it was time for the military leadership to pay the price of its high visibility in the media and in political circles. There was a palpable anti-military reaction among the hitherto pro-military middle classes in central Punjab and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. Some observers say that the reaction was so intense that the military's myth of political dominance itself took a hit from the rise of anti-military reaction in the public opinion in Pakistan's heartland.

Military or more precisely its intelligence arms are omnipresent and omnipotent. This could mean they can



always decisively influence the political outcome if they really want. What has fueled this myth are a series of events in the post-Zia period. For instance, there was a general impression that the then military command wanted Benazir Bhutto out after she picked a fight with the military establishment in 1989.

So, when the then COAS, General Aslam Beg-sponsored no confidence move failed, the military had its way by pressurizing the then president Ghulam Ishaq Khan to dissolve the National Assembly and Benazir Bhutto's cabinet. Nawaz Sharif became prime minister in the wake of the 1990 dissolution and he also fell out with the president. Everybody remembers the constitutional deadlock between prime minister and president and everybody in Islamabad was made to hear the news about how the then COAS, General Abdul Waheed Kakar used his swagger stick to impose resignation on prime minister Nawaz Sharif in 1993.

The then president Farooq Laghari succeeded in ousting Benazir Bhutto again after securing the backing of the military establishment in 1996. 1999 was the year of military takeover after which the military imposed its will directly on the country and major political parties were ousted.

Military knows all and everything about everyone who matters in the country. This myth is fueled by powerful political players like former prime minister, Imran Khan, when he repeatedly refers to ISI as an intelligence agency, which knows everything about the corruption of Pakistani political leaders.

This myth is reinforced even by the judiciary in rare incidents when representatives of two military intelligence agencies, Military Intelligence (MI) and Inter Services Intelligence (ISI) were included in the JIT formed to probe the corruption charges against former prime minister Nawaz Sharif. Remember this is a highly painstakingly constructed myth of Islamabad's political culture.

The stories and gossip doing the rounds during every period in the post-Zia era are carefully crafted and spread to create an image of military-led intelligence agencies

as all-knowing. Tales of behind-the-scene meetings, gossips related to melodramatic dialogues between key political players who spend most of their life behind seven curtains are made available to those who work for constructing this myth.

Military's international connections: the professional soldiers are always reluctant—when you talk to them—to admit that they have any connection with the outside world outside the official framework established by the government of Pakistan. But side by side there are intellectuals in our political and media circles who put too much emphasis on the military's international legitimacy. Officially, the military officials say that any incumbent COAS's interaction with the foreign dignitaries is strictly within the



framework established by the government of Pakistan. But consider this: the late General Musharraf has narrated in his autobiography how he first informed CENTCOM Chief, General Anthony Zinni that he had staged a coup on the night of 12 October 1999. Whatever may be the official status of the military's interaction with the outside world, these interactions reinforce the myth that it has international connections. And this coupled with the all-pervasive myth that foreign powers control the mechanics of a country's politics fuel the rumor-mill that the military and its leaders are the real power wielders in the country.

Two factors will determine the true impact of this changing public opinion on the strength of the military's myth: a) whether the change of hearts among Punjabi middle classes is permanent? All will depend on how elastic public opinion in central Punjab

proves itself to be. Will it resume its original pro-military form after Imran Khan and Nawaz Sharif stretched it towards anti-military reaction as part of their political campaign in the wake of their respective ouster from power? Remember the military's myth is a myth because Punjabi middle classes, intellectuals and journalists perceive it in a certain way.

If these classes and groups start thinking and perceiving military's role in a bad light, that is likely to become the political reality of Pakistan. B) secondly, in the post-Zia period the craftsmen who created the military's myth of dominance were constructing this myth in the background of massive flow of aid—both military and economic—to the military government of General Pervez Musharraf. So, this myth was constructed while everything was hunky and dory from an economic point of view.

The problem of terror, extremism and militancy contributed in no small part in bestowing external legitimacy to the military leaders in post-9/11 situations. With Americans gone, countries like Russia, China and Arab sheikhdoms are still interested in controlling what is happening inside Afghanistan. But whether these new partners in counter terrorism and counter militancy would be as generous as Americans were, is a debatable question.

The aspect of this situation which worries me the most is the question, what will replace this myth as a stabilizing factor for the Pakistani political system, in case major political parties' political campaigns really shatter this overarching myth? Whatever semblance of stability we have enjoyed in the post-Zia period, could be credited partially to this overarching myth is beyond doubt.

The weak political institutions and inept political leaders in post Musharraf period have almost completely relinquished any role they might have had in the past, in stabilizing the country from the perspective of internal security. They don't have any wherewithal either. We should collectively start pondering over this question: whether our political institutions have the required strength or will we land into complete anarchy.



U-turns record, unease eclipse PTI's *jail bharo* tehreek

History shows failures of fill-prison drives; PTI leaders suspect latest party chief announcement; some cases could lead to IK arrest;

By Sarfraz Raja

News channels were simultaneously airing two important events live: in one window of the screen ex-prime minister Imran Khan was leaving for his official visit abroad, in the other the then opposition leader Shehbaz Sharif was appearing before the court in one of the cases against him. A year later, same channels were covering such live happenings but this time sequence was the other way round: one window showed PM Shehbaz Sharif being received on his official foreign visit, in the other PTI Chief Imran Khan appearing in court. This is a pertinent depiction of politics in Pakistan nowadays--those who are not in power face arrests and court cases.

During three and half years of Imran Khan government, all mainstream leaders of the PML-N stood behind bars for months and years and during ten months of the PDM coalition rule, many PTI stalwarts are given the dose of the same medicine.

During this term of Shehbaz Sharif led government, PTI leaders Senator Azam Khan Swati, former prime minister's special assistant Shehbaz Gill, former federal ministers Fawad Chaudhary and Sheikh Rasheed Ahmed are among those who were arrested in different cases and remained under custody of police and Federal Investigating Agency (FIA). PTI calls these arrests as revenge, but PML-N is reminding PTI the days when the latter was in power, striking a comparison with arrest of PML-N leaders, number of days spent behind bars and their miseries. But PTI contends it 'suffered more.'

Could Imran Khan also be arrested?

Imran Khan's arrest remained a question from the day he left the Prime Minister House. There are some cases that could lead to this high profile arrest but there is an element of reluctance within the



government ranks. Some sources in government reveal that Interior Minister Rana Sana Ullah is in favor of Khan's arrest but he wants backing of the cabinet; while Asif Ali Zardari suggests averting such move as it could benefit IK cause and draw more sympathies for him.

On the other hand, PTI leaders are asking their workers to get ready all the time for a strong countrywide reaction against any anti-IK move. Government sources say they would rely on court orders before any such action so it couldn't backfire.

After recent successive arrests, PTI Chief Imran Khan announced to start *jail bharo* (fill prisons) movement, linking it with possible delay in Punjab and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Assemblies' elections due before mid-April.

What is *jail bharo* movement?

A *jail bharo* movement involves a large number of political workers or activists approaching the police or other law enforcing agencies to present themselves for

arrest, or by doing something to court arrest, such as chanting some really nasty slogans against the regime or some other act of violence to create a reason to put them behind the bars.

Jail bharo tehreek, has a history in the Subcontinent; it was a form of protest widely used by politicians during the British rule before partition. Gandhi was the most prominent leader to adopt this method with the aim to choke the government functions. Jails have limited capacity to hold prisoners. Locking up a large number of people in prisons creates difficulties for any administration.

In recent history, Indian social activist Anna Hazare used *jail bharo* movement threat successfully and brought the then government of India to its knees in 2011.

Anna Hazare was supported by millions of Indians who signed an online petition and staged protests that grabbed media attention for many days. The then-Indian government did everything to neutralize Hazare's *jail bharo* protest, but nothing worked. In Mumbai, police decided to declare a ground as a jail and detained everyone present.



In March 2015, Anna Hazare again called for another *jail bharo* movement but ended his protest only two days later. Reason was at that time around, India was being ruled by the Narendra Modi-led BJP, and Hazare could not muster the Hindu nationalist support he had won against the Congress government earlier in 2011.

Earlier Gandhi's *jail bharo* drive against the British Raj following the Cripps Mission also met with failure. During that movement over 60 thousand people were detained and many of them spent years in jail. The actual objective was to force the British Raj to withdraw from India, which remained unfulfilled.

History of *jail bharo* movement in Pakistan

Pakistan has seen only one *jail bharo* protest in the country's history and that too many decades ago. The Movement for Restoration of Democracy (MRD) against the Zia regime announced a *jail bharo* tehrick in early 80s. Thousands of people were arrested during the MRD agitation in Punjab, but in Sindh, it took a violent turn and there were clashes between protesters and security forces, eventually the movement was crushed. After that some political leaders like JUI Chief Molana Fazalur Rehman used the *jail bharo* slogan as a threat but didn't execute at any point of time.

Jail bharo movement a risky affair?

Keeping in view the history, *jail bharo* movement could be used as a threat but it always is a risky affair to execute as there are strong chances it could be crushed by the regime. A call for *jail bharo* movement offers no guaranteed results and a lot depends on the potential government response. The police will not detain someone until he or she commits a crime and if done, there is a risk of conviction, which may damage someone's professional career with a disqualification for all public sector jobs. Secondly, the government can develop the capacity to hold a large number of prisoners at least temporarily, by declaring any large place as a jail or sub-jail. It could be any house, stadium or any other place; and seeing the history *jail bharo*

movements have no good memories but unpleasant experiences for those who announced and exercised it.

A desperate move by IK

After removal from premiership Imran Khan seemed desperate as he used his cards one after another. His first move was resignations from National Assembly seats. But it bounced back as later IK decided to return to parliament but government made

Khan now feels his political moves were not getting the desired results; so now he has announced his latest move--the *jail bharo* movement which again was a surprise decision. Again, some of his party leaders are not convinced with this announcement as it's a difficult choice with very little expected success chances.

Political circles also consider this act as a desperate one on IK's part which lacked comprehensive consultation in advance;



it too late for him by accepting PTI resignations and diminishing it's number to grab the all-important seat of opposition leader. Consequently, IK had to approach courts for some remedy. Khan's second move was long march, he tagged as Azadi March on 25th of May last year, which proved another failure and another long march of October November also was a drawback. At the end of his second long march in Rawalpindi in the last week of November 2022, IK announced the dissolution of two Provincial Assemblies, Punjab and Khyber Pakhtunkwa, where his party was in power. This decision was certainly not a unanimous like many of his earlier moves. In fact majority of his party was against these dissolutions but he stuck to his decision; and now as predicted earlier by some of his party seniors and ex-chief minister Punjab Pervaiz Elahi, it seems government is avoiding early elections.

and there are strong chances Khan might take a U-turn against this decision. Same is the assessment of government circles, which appear not much worried about the tentative *jail bharo* announcement. The government spokesman call it an immature move which if executed, will not create any threat, even PML-N leaders are challenging Imran Khan to initiate this movement and present himself for an arrest to start with.

Even few days after this fresh announcement, the PTI core group meeting decided that those who are contesting bye elections on National Assembly seats vacated by their resignations, would not be part of the arrest movement. These include all mainstream leaders and it is considered as a step towards another U-turn on this decision-- asking workers to go to jails while all the entire leadership staying out. Many PTI central leaders are not fully sure if the *jail bharo* tehrick could materialize.



Imran Khan factor flusters PML-N

Poor economy, price-hike, party-rifts and IK popularity big challenges for Maryam; IMF hard conditions to benefit PTI; many key PML-N leaders not happy with allocation of party offices within family

By Ahmad Waleed

Pakistan Muslim League (Nawaz) has been in a fix how to counter massive popularity graph of their arch rival Imran Khan, who after his ouster from power through a no-confidence motion managed to gain a huge response from public through the narrative he built. Party's 'big minds' held marathon meetings in London and back home to hammer out some brilliant idea that would knock down Imran Khan's narrative.

Maryam Nawaz was the only name that struck the party and family heads who can revive the PML-N in its own stronghold – Punjab; and take on Imran Khan who has special focus on Punjab while sitting at his family home in Zaman Park, Lahore. It was also decided to appoint Maryam as senior vice president and chief organizer of the party with a task to re-organise the party and lead the campaign to target PTI. A key decision was also made to expose all names behind the hybrid regime who have been extending support to Imran Khan.

After getting major tasks from her father Nawaz Sharif in London, Maryam landed in Lahore where a huge number of party stalwarts and supporters had gathered outside the Lahore Airport to welcome her. She hit out at Imran Khan in her very first speech at the airport.

Maryam has started her campaign from south Punjab where she is holding meetings with top-to-lower tier leaders to listen to their grievances against the party leadership besides addressing public gatherings to respond to the plethora of hard-hitting statements of Imran Khan who addresses public on almost daily basis through his vibrant social media.

She has four major challenges that her party faces since it became major partner of the PDM government with the most coveted slot of prime minister. These four challenges include economy, unprecedented price-hike, rifts within the party and Imran Khan's rising popularity in Punjab.

Despite all the efforts and tall claims of Finance Minister Ishaq Dar, the economy remained the toughest challenge for Dar who was desperate to replace Miftah Ismail and do the 'magic' to pull the country out of economic quagmire. He rushed back to Pakistan and took the seat of finance minister and found out that the economic mess is much deeper than he thought. He became the target of criticism from all quarters. His party members started raising fingers at him.

However, Maryam tried to extend her support to her 'uncle' saying, "have faith in Ishaq Dar [and] God. We'll take the economy out of this [quagmire]." However, the IMF's toughest ever conditions and the rising inflation will not be going in favour of PML-N government after it directly put the burden on the masses by agreeing to all hard conditions.

This is definitely going to benefit Imran Khan in the next elections. He is confident enough that under the current economic condition



of the country the PDM government cannot win public support at all. And under these circumstances, Maryam is unlikely to meet the goals she has been tasked by his father.

Many key PML-N leaders are not happy with the awarding of top party positions within the 'family.' There was an open criticism when Hamza Shahbaz was made the chief minister of Punjab, ignoring several seasoned leaders of the party.

"We have struggled for the party, but our leadership does not think beyond the family. It's all in the family. Father is prime minister while his son is made the chief minister of the largest province of the country," one of the party leaders grumbled at that time.

Now, people within the party have started showing discontent at Maryam and Ishaq Dar (who is the father-in-law of Nawaz Sharif's daughter) for extending important party positions to those within the family.

While former prime minister Shahid Khaqan Abbasi relinquished his party position being senior vice president in protest, former chief minister KP Sardar Mehtab Ahmad Khan flayed the party leadership for toeing the 'line of the establishment.'

The Imran Khan factor is the biggest challenge for Maryam Nawaz and the whole PML-N. He is sitting in Zaman Park, Lahore, to hit out his rivals in Punjab. He is in a hurry to capture the PML-N stronghold after dissolving the Punjab Assembly.

Khan wants to cash in on his popularity by winning the elections to maintain power in the province for another five years. The PML-N, however, does not want elections to the Provincial Assemblies as per the PTI demands, fearing an imminent defeat.

It seems the PDM government has hidden support of the 'powers that be' for assuming power at the critical juncture and taking the toughest and the most unpopular decisions that ruined their politics. With a massive public support Imran Khan still looks perturbed and is looking for a small window of reconciliation.



Govt lacks pledge to deal with terrorism

Inclusive counter terrorism policy long overdue; APC called at peak of political acrimony; political differences turning into personal enmities; PDM bent upon delaying election at any cost

By Tahir Niaz

The nation has been facing a new surge in terrorism in the country. Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) has claimed responsibility for most of the attacks, the deadliest of which was the Peshawar incident that claimed more than 100 precious lives. The recent incidents have reminded the nation of the post-US invasion era when it saw deadly attacks on almost a daily basis. Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa and the erstwhile FATA remained the worst-hit areas in the TTP onslaught.

The armed forces of the country fought the menace bravely and rooted out terrorism by launching operations like Zarb-e-Azab. The nation was united in its stance against terrorists despite division on the political lines. The nation, with the support of the armed forces, emerged victorious and faced no threats of such intensity until the recent incidents.

The Peshawar bloodbath pushed the PDM government to call an all-parties conference purportedly to discuss security challenges being faced by the nation in the wake of the fresh wave of terrorism. The whole of the world was grieved over the appalling massacre but it was not enough to bridge the continuing political divide.

Still, there is no clear national narrative on how to deal with the perpetrators of this heinous act with the political leadership in the country not even willing to sit together. They had not been able so far to develop a concrete line of action and a collective response to such a situation and one can hardly find any change in this regard as of today. The acrimony-driven political moves are still dominating the national interest as the nation moves forward.

Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif called the all-parties conference to discuss the current situation in the face of terrorism and find ways to tackle it effectively. The main opposition party, Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf, was also invited for the huddle. The APC, following the recent wave of terrorism in



the country, was first scheduled on February 7, but Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif postponed it. However, the meeting was rescheduled for February 9 but postponed again following the PM's planned visit to quake-hit Turkiye and Syria. The PM, nonetheless, didn't embark on the visit and a new date of the conference is yet to be announced by the government.

An inclusive counter-terrorism policy is long overdue but it has yet to take shape. The conference has been called at a time when political acrimony is touching its heights and to the volumes the nation had never seen before. As a result of the 'political victimization', political differences have been turning into personal enmities.

PTI's Fawad Cahudhry, Shehbaz Gill, Shereen Mazari, Azam Swati, Shandana Gulzar faced sedition, terrorism and other charges of grave nature as they criticized the government for bad governance and corruption, and demanded elections. Even the members from the PTI ally parties; Ch. Pervez Elahi and Sheikh Rashid Ahmed tasted what they believed was the worst kind of suppression and political victimization at the hands of the government. The PTI leadership is fearing further victimization at the hands of the caretaker governments in Punjab and Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa.

As the new date for the conference is yet to be announced, the question is whether the government will be able to achieve the desired results by the APC amid the atmosphere of heightened polarization. The answer to this question lies in the initial response the PTI has given to the invitation. The government is inviting 'terrorists' to address the issue of terrorism in the country, said PTI Secretary General Asad Umar when he was asked if the party would attend the government-hosted APC.

On the other hand, Jamaat-e-Islami is of the opinion that the terrorists are taking advantage of the animosity and tussle between the political forces. The JI Amir on February 7 said that the terrorists were getting emboldened by the weaker political situation in the country.

It seems that the government is weakening its case against terrorism by not trying to build a cordial political environment before inviting the stakeholders. Fighting terrorism is a continuous job. Guard cannot be lowered at any time as the terrorists remain in search of an opportunity to sabotage peace in the country. But here one can hardly find any seriousness on part of the government in this regard.

The government itself doesn't seem too keen to get the PTI on board. It is politics



that matters more for the country's political leadership than national interests. Unfortunately, the growing threat to our national security by the militants has not eased the ongoing political confrontation.

The political gestures suggest that the government lacks seriousness to deal with the menace of terrorism as it first 'forcibly' ousted PTI from the parliament — the most reasonable forum to discuss such issues — and now inviting it to the APC. Why not the National Assembly and the Senate jointly making the parliament? One would easily find the answer to this simple question.

Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf Vice Chairman Shah Mahmood Qureshi on February 8 slammed the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz government for its 'non-seriousness' over the all-parties conference in the wake of terrorism, following repeated postponements. Talking to the media, Qureshi said that the government is not serious about holding the APC, as the meeting was being postponed again and again. The lawmakers did not oblige to their commitments and words, he added as he noted that PTI had been criticized even before it was sent an invitation.

With little to no likelihood of the main opposition party, the PTI, attending, the proposed all-parties conference seems to be a non-starter. The whole exercise would be of no use if all the stakeholders don't agree to sit together to discuss the issue.

The main reason for the heightened acrimony is the PTI demand for fresh elections. The government, on the other hand, seems hell bent on not announcing date for new elections. The government functionaries, the governors of Punjab and Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa and the Election Commission of Pakistan are passing the buck when it comes to fixing date for elections of the two Provincial Assemblies.

It appears that the PDM government is trying to delay elections for the Punjab and Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa Assemblies at any cost. PML-N leaders Khawaja Saad Rafique, Malik Ahmad Khan and Attaullah Tarar have made very similar assertions

on the postponement of the elections. It would be extremely unfortunate if the ECP joins the chorus. The law is quite clear that elections must be held within 90 days in case of the early dissolution of the National or Provincial Assemblies, and those in power should stop finding lame excuses to put it off until the situation favours them.

The democratic process cannot be suspended. It is up to the political leadership to come up with a way out of the political crisis so that attention could be given to the menace of terrorism. The PDM must stop trying to set bad precedents that the coming governments may also use to unlawfully extend their rule.

Amid the political confrontation, there is no clear national narrative on how to deal with those responsible for terrorism. Such a gathering as the APC can only be useful in developing a national consensus when all the stakeholders shun their differences and come up with a concrete plan of action. The government must desist from their narrative to tag the political opponents as terrorists before inviting them for consultations.

The Peshawar tragedy could certainly become a turning point in the country's struggle against militancy but the political forces must have to show seriousness. More importantly, the civil and military leadership must have to come on the same page then only the nation could hope that the menace could be overcome.





Recalling Gen (Retd) Musharraf era!

Late Gen (Retd) Pervez Musharraf wrangled with judiciary, parliament; faced post 9/11 US pressure; lived in self-exile in UAE



By Noor Aftab

Though a number of enthusiasts tag former president Gen (Retd) Pervez Musharraf as daring, outspoken and brave who championed 'Pakistan first' slogan, his opponents call him a law-breaking controversial military dictator who bulldozed Constitution and hurt Pakistan politically and morally.

Musharraf, who had been living in self-exile in Dubai since 2016, has left behind an empty farmhouse in Islamabad and few apartments in Middle East and London.

The second of the three brothers, Pervez Musharraf moved with his family from New Delhi to Karachi in 1947. As a son of a career diplomat, he lived in Turkey during 1949–56. Musharraf could speak Turkish language fluently due to his early schooling in Ankara. He joined Pakistan Army in 1964 and held positions in artillery, infantry and commando units.

Former prime minister Nawaz Sharif appointed Musharraf as his army chief in October 1998—a gamble to exert 'control' over military, as Sharif chose Musharraf

over other more senior generals. When the 1999 Kargil War bounced back and Pakistan started facing problems, Nawaz Sharif ordered troops to pull back, a move that 'offended' the army. The Kargil War took place months after former prime minister Nawaz Sharif had signed a peace accord with his Indian counterpart Atal Bihari Vajpayee in Lahore on Feb 21, 1999.

On October 12, 1999, while Musharraf was out of the country, Sharif dismissed him and tried to disallow the plane carrying Musharraf from landing at Karachi Airport.

The army officials, however, took control of the airport and other government installations and deposed Sharif, paving the way for Musharraf to become head of a military government. After ousting Sharif from power, Musharraf declared himself as 'chief executive' until 2002, till he forced the then-president Rafiq Tarar to resign and declared himself president. Musharraf served as president of Pakistan from 2001 to 2008.

During Musharraf's rule, Nawaz Sharif was convicted of terrorism and hijacking in 2000 and sentenced to life imprisonment. In 2009, the Supreme Court quashed Sharif's conviction and cleared the way for his return to the parliamentary politics.

Subsequent to three years of Musharraf rule, Pakistan once again headed towards democracy on October 10, 2002, when more than 70 parties contested the 8th General Elections. Convicts were barred from taking part in election while several other politicians were unable to contest for lack bachelor degree, a mandatory prerequisite. And with no party emerging with a simple majority, the country faced a hung parliament. Mir Zafarullah Khan Jamali became the prime minister of a coalition government. Like many other political parties formed during military regimes, Pakistan Muslim League-Quaid (PML-Q) enjoyed unprecedented sway in the power corridors during the Musharraf era.

Things were moving ahead amicably for Pervez Musharraf in Pakistan when al-Qaeda chief Osama bin Laden, sheltered



by Afghan Taliban, launched the Sept 11, 2001, terror attacks on the US. The then-US secretary of state Colin Powell told Musharraf that Pakistan would either be 'with us or against us.' Musharraf even revealed later that the American official threatened to send Pakistan 'back to the stone age' if it chose the latter.

Musharraf's decision to side with president Bush's 'war on terror' in 2001 following the September 11 attacks, inevitably meant he would end up clashing with militants whose sympathies were with Taliban and al-Qaeda. He was walking a tightrope as he sought to balance pressure from the US to crackdown on extremism in Pakistan and the demands from an increasingly anti-American mentality.

Musharraf survived a number of assassination attempts; he reinstated the Constitution in 2002, though it was heavily amended with the legal framework order (LFO)—a provision of which extended his term as president for another five years. Parliamentary elections were held in October 2002. In April 2002, Musharraf held and won a so-called referendum granting him an additional five years as president.

Musharraf's time in power was also marked by his struggles with judiciary, including disputes over his desire to remain head of the army and president as well; he introduced his 'enlightened moderation' philosophy, inaugurated the first National Academy of Performing Arts in 2005. He

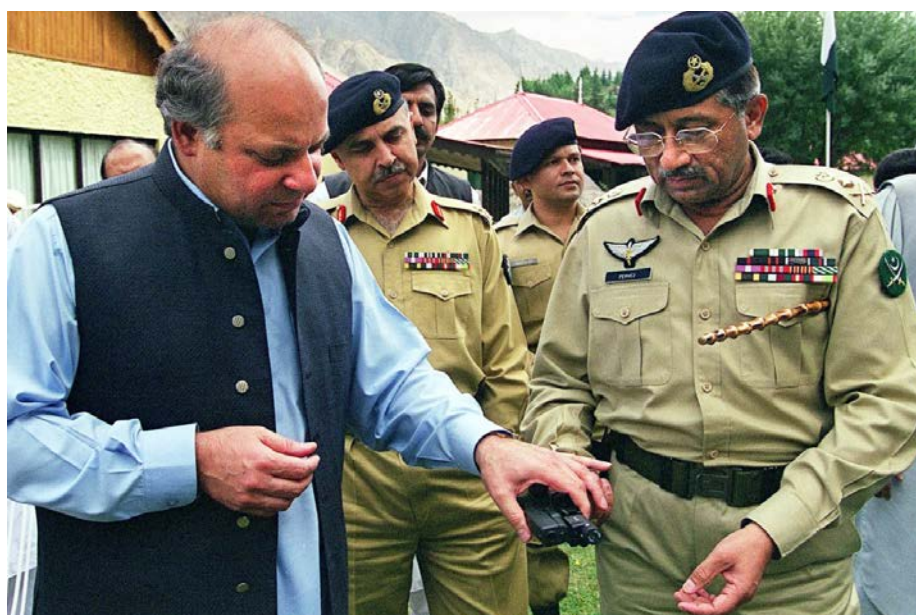


introduced some key reforms, including reserved seats for women and minorities, the local bodies system and allowed private television channels to operate.

Musharraf's downfall began when he ousted the then chief justice of Pakistan, Justice Iftikhar Muhammad Chaudhry, triggering a popular lawyers' movement. That decision backfired in July that year when a 13-member bench of the Supreme Court reinstated Chaudhry. In response, Musharraf arranged to be elected as president by parliament in October but it backfired with almost all opposition members either abstaining or resigning from parliament to protest Musharraf's rule. He later suspended the Constitution,

declaring a state of emergency. Months later he ordered a bloody raid at Lal Masjid, resulting in the deaths of more than 100 people.

In 2007, Musharraf made a deal with the former prime minister Benazir Bhutto: the National Reconciliation Ordinance (NRO) that paved the way for many politicians and bureaucrats to get amnesty for cases between Jan 1st, 1986, and Oct 12, 1999, involving everything from murder to corruption. Benazir Bhutto returned to Pakistan and got assassinated in a gun-and-bomb attack in Rawalpindi. Musharraf faced strong criticism for not making enough arrangements for security of Benazir Bhutto who had earlier alleged that some people wanted to kill her.



The outcome of the 2008 elections was seen as a rejection of Musharraf and his rule; PML-Q finished a distant third behind Pakistan People's Party. Musharraf later resigned to avoid impeachment and then left the country. In March 2013, he dramatically returned to Pakistan to compete in elections but it ended in humiliation and arrest. He was barred from standing and his All Pakistan Muslim League (APML) performed as badly as many had predicted. In 2016, after a travel ban was lifted for medical reasons, Musharraf again left the country and had been living in exile in Dubai ever since.

Musharraf was suffering from amyloidosis, a rare disease that causes organ damage—and was unlikely to recover.

An unstable Afghanistan in our backyard

Afghanistan returns to post-Soviet withdraw era; suicide attack on KP police headquarters beginning of a new war; TTP divided over Peshawar police mosque attack

By Syed Fakhar KaKaKhel

Pakistan is once again facing a fresh wave of terrorism. This time the battle tactics and goals are different. On the one hand, militants have obtained modern weapons, on the other, they are targeting police and security personnel at the beginning of this new phase. But one thing that seems to be common is that this time too the reason is an unstable Afghanistan in our backyard.

On the arrival of Afghan Taliban in Kabul, victory was celebrated along with claims that peace will be established in the region after the withdrawal of the United States and allied forces. Majority of analysts were unable to understand who defeated Western forces in the graveyard of empires; who was replacing them and who will run Afghanistan in our neighborhood after the US and allied forces leave?

Afghanistan has once again returned to the times it was in after the withdrawal of Russian forces. Much to Islamabad's worry, the Pakistani Taliban have emerged in the last twenty years, who were not present at the time of Russian withdrawal. That is why after the withdrawal of coalition forces from Afghanistan, this time apart from Afghanistan, Pakistan will also face chaos. It has already begun: the suicide attack on the headquarters of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa police is the beginning of new war. This was a message to our forces that this time, war will not be as easy as we thought it was in the last forty years.

How did this wave of violence resurge in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa; and what will be its future? To find an answer, we would have to go back to August 2021. When Taliban captured Kabul and Americans left Afghanistan along with their Afghan rulers, there were jubiliations in Pakistan as if the Taliban victory was a victory for Pakistan too.

However, even at that time serious and sensible circles of the society were worried while thinking where would



the forces that defeated US and its allies, would take Afghanistan once in power. Most of our analysts believed that while in power, Afghan Taliban would pressurize Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) to lay down arms before the State of Pakistan--as one section believed TTP was taking up arms at the behest of India and that it was an Indian proxy.

Reporters who have been covering this Afghan war for twenty years knew that Afghan Taliban will die but will not let TTP lose even a drop of its blood. Afghan Taliban believe that when former president General Pervez Musharraf was selling them to US; when they were being attacked by drones; when they were being put in Pakistani and when special teams raided their homes in Pakistan, it were the Pakistani Taliban who embraced them, protected them and fought for them against their own state; that the Pakistani Taliban were targeted and killed along with the Afghan Taliban in drone strikes for supporting the latter.

Afghan Taliban have a kind of special relationship with Pakistani Taliban, especially the Taliban of the tribal belt living in different parts of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. To the contrary, Balochistan Taliban were not so dependent on TTP because the Tehreek-e-Taliban's roots were not so strong there. The leadership of the Tehreek-e-Taliban and majority of Taliban fighters were based

in the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. That's why the Afghan Taliban of Kandahar proposed to the Pakistani Taliban either obtain Afghan refugee cards, halt attacks on Pakistan and live comfortably in Afghanistan or go back to your country. It was for this reason that Sirajuddin Haqqani, the Afghan Taliban interior minister who wields influence on Pakistani Taliban, suggested to the government of Pakistan the issue should be resolved through dialogue; and that is why negotiations with TTP were started.

Since at that time affairs were in the hands of former DGISI General Faiz and former prime minister Imran Khan, Pakistan was starting to talk from a very weak position. Despite soft corners for the Taliban by these two, key elements of the establishment believed the Pakistani Taliban would be persuaded to surrender through ANP-PPP-style talks in Swat first. A peace treaty will be inked and then a full Malakand-style operation will be conducted against those elements who will take up arms. In this way, the state will also get the support of Afghan Taliban, Pakistani religious circles and people.

But the government assigned the negotiation process to the then spokesperson for Khyber Pakhtunkhwa government, Barrister Muhammad Ali Saif. Barrister Saif claims he has done jihad and that Taliban Interior Minister Sirajuddin Haqqani knew him person-

ally. It is obvious that with the jihadi past and jihadi mindset, how he had to represent the State of Pakistan with the militants? Nobody probably thought of it within the establishment. Therefore, his sympathies for being an Afghan jihad veteran were with the Pakistani militants for obvious reasons.

One of the conditions Imran and his team were accepting was that the decision to merge the former Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) be withdrawn and that Pakistani Taliban should be settled in these areas. This condition was strongly opposed by PPP and ANP. On its part, the establishment was not comfortable with it too. For many critics, this was tantamount

like Awami National Party and People's Party were opposing this process. These political parties contended that any decision outside parliament will not be approved by them and the decision to reverse the status of the merged district must be taken by the parliament as it was the parliament that decided the merger.

Taking advantage of Pakistan's leniency some Taliban entered Bajaur, Dir and Swat in August 2022. Exactly one year after the Afghan Taliban captured Kabul, Pakistani Taliban believed they too would enter these areas as conquerors. On August 7, 2022, Khorasani was killed. Earlier, al-Qaeda leader Dr Ayman al-Zawahiri was killed in

crisis in the country diverted attention from the issue of peace and harmony.

On the other hand taking advantage of the situation, TTP reorganized its entire structure. In the past, such reformulation was subject to the tribal structure. This means all tribes have their TTP chapters headed and run by fighters from the same tribe. Under the new structure, commanders from different tribes were deployed outside their tribes. For instance, Sarbakaf Mohmand from District Mohmand in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa was appointed head of TTP in Zhob, Blochistan.

So far TTP was trying to attack police and security forces and did not deliberately target public places. But this time in view of public reaction after the attack on police mosque in Peshawar, the central Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan did not take responsibility. TTP central Shura rather clarified that they do not attack mosques. However, the TTP commander in Zhob Sarbakaf Mohmand claimed responsibility for this attack, saying it was part of a series of revenge against the killing of Omar Khalid Khorasani. However, there is a division within the outfit over the incident. There are instances where Tehreek-e-Taliban commanders continued to accept responsibility for the incidents and the central leadership avoided taking responsibility for these incidents.

At this time, some Taliban commanders believe that the path of jihad should be adopted for the establishment of Shariah and caliphate in the entire region, and some believe that efforts should be made to implement Shariat considering the local atmosphere and social structure.

Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif also reviewed this situation in the Apex Committee meeting soon after the mosque attack. Now, what will happen next? Commanders and fighters who believe in jihad for the implementation of Sharia and caliphate in the region will continue this war. While some leaders, commanders and fighters could be persuaded toward peace through dialogue. But to prevent and control the violent incidents in the coming days, the recovery of the economy and the end of the political chaos in the country are the first requirements that are not visible at the moment.



to Pakistan's surrender-- accepting terms of resettlement and protection of all militants in the merged districts of Pakhtunkhwa. So instead of Malakand style negotiations, it turned out to be the Doha style US-Afghan Taliban accord.

The negotiating team of the Tehreek-e-Taliban was headed by TTP founder member Abdul Wali alias Omar Khalid Khorasani. General Faiz and the PTI government released dozens of Pakistani Taliban commanders from prisons as a goodwill gesture as done by the Afghan government under US pressure during Doha negotiations. When Khorasani observed Pakistan was playing on a weak wicket, he demanded restoration of FATA and its handover to Taliban so that they could establish their Sharia-based government there.

In the entire dialogue process, Khorasani was seen as a tough negotiator. The PTI government left the issue squarely with Gen Faiz. On the other hand, political parties

a drone strike in Kabul. The situation became very difficult for both TTP and Afghan Taliban. Afghan Taliban accused Interior Minister Siraj Haqqani of negligence. On the other hand, TTP fighters demanded the killers of Omar Khalid Khorasani be tracked down and killed. However, even in this situation, the head of Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan, Mufti Noor Wali Mehsud, continued to say that a ceasefire was imposed for an indefinite period on his behalf so that the negotiations would be successful. However, on the other hand, the Pakistani Taliban resumed operations in Pakistan against the government to avenge the killing of Omar Khalid Khorasani. The Pakistani Taliban said they were carrying defensive attacks. During this time, the PTI rule ended and negotiations stalled.

Under the pressure of fighters from Mohmand and Bajaur, Tehreek-e-Taliban ended ceasefire and resumed attacks. During this time, the political turmoil and economic

Pakistan strengthens ties with Russia

By Dr. Raza Khan

When, at the tail end of its tenure, former Prime Minister Imran Khan visited Russia in February 2022, on the eve of Moscow's military invasion of neighbouring Ukraine, to initiate a new era of relations, mainly economic ties, between Russia and Pakistan, many eyebrows were raised in western capitals. Although Mr. Imran Khan has time and again clarified that he visited Moscow only to request and secure cheap oil and liquefied petroleum gas (LPG) supplies from Russia to ease a burgeoning energy crisis back home, most western countries considered the visit as having strategic motives. Mr. Khan was ousted from power through a no-confidence vote in the National Assembly by opposition parties after securing support from Mr. Khan's party, Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI), dissidents, and small coalition partners. After being shown the door, the former prime minister accused Washington of dislodging his government because of his visit to Moscow.

The crux of Mr. Khan's argument while accusing the US of ousting him from power was that, as Washington had always considered Pakistan a pawn on the regional political chessboard, his display of pursuing an independent foreign policy was not liked by the US decision-makers. Although Mr. Khan has since retracted his earlier claim that the US was behind his ouster for the Russian visit, his visit to Moscow laid the groundwork for a new era of relations between the two countries, particularly in economic cooperation and, in particular, Russian energy supplies. The immediate reason for the new period of good relations between Islamabad and Moscow could be the critical need of Pakistan for energy from Russia; however, there are a lot of things that both countries could gain from having extensive relations in the economic, political, diplomatic, and defence arenas.

Significance of Russia-Pakistan Friendly Ties

Thinking about friendly relations between Russia and Pakistan is not only important but also historically interesting. It was the



Russian-dominated Soviet Union that played a vital role in the breakup of Pakistan in 1971 and turning then-East Pakistan into an independent state of Bangladesh. The former Soviet Union signed a friendship treaty with India shortly before the 1971 East Pakistan separatist uprising, which resulted in Indian military intervention and, ultimately, Pakistan's disintegration. Under the terms of this Indo-Soviet treaty, if either of the countries were to be in a state of war with any third country, the other would come to its support.

As a result, the Soviet Union enthusiastically supported India's dismemberment of Pakistan. While the Soviet Union continued to be a grave threat to the survival and territorial integrity of the rest of Pakistan, Islamabad got the God-sent opportunity to play a role in the break-up of the Soviet Union in the shape of the latter's occupation of Afghanistan. As Afghanistan is the next-door neighbour of Pakistan, then military ruler General Zia ul-Haq conveyed to the US and allies that he was ready to organise anti-Soviet Afghan resistance on its soil to impose a crushing defeat on its occupying forces in Afghanistan. Gen. Zia, while placing Pakistan on the chopping block for the Soviets and braving continual airstrikes and airspace violations from Afghanistan-based Soviet air forces on its soil, went all-out to organise and execute anti-Soviet Afghan resistance, giving it the colour of an Islamic Jihad by inviting

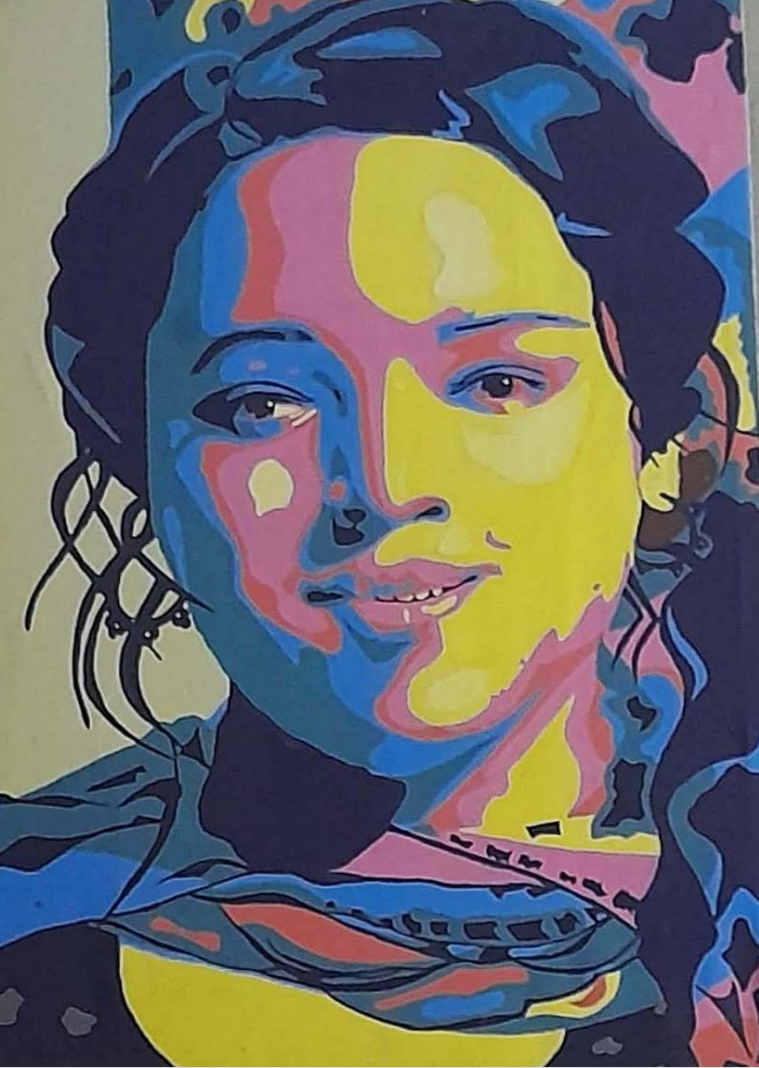
Muslim young men from across the world to fight Soviets occupying a Muslim country. With sophisticated American weaponry, particularly surface-to-air shoulder-fire Stringer Missiles, the Pakistan-trained Afghan Mujahideen wreaked havoc on Soviet forces in Afghanistan and forced them to go on the defensive and withdraw from Afghanistan. But the wounds that Pakistan inflicted on the Soviets during the course of the Afghan war precipitated the collapse of the communist Soviet Union or Empire.

The main reasons for the Soviet Union's disintegration were over-centralized economic policy and communist ideology, but military reverses in Afghanistan acted as a trigger or catalyst in the disintegration of the Soviet Union. Thus, both the Soviet Union (Russia) and Pakistan have played significant roles in each other's dismemberment. Now that both of these countries have come to the conclusion that they want to live as friends and also cooperate, they mean business.

Russia-Pakistan Energy Cooperation

The most important reason for Pakistan's extensive economic relations with Russia is the latter's vast oil and gas reserves. Potentially, Russia could supply large volumes of oil and gas to Pakistan, and that too at discounted prices, which could be instrumental in not only overcoming the chronic

Continued at page 30



Maha Rehan

A Young Pakistani Miniature Artist

Maha Rehan is a young Pakistani Miniature artist. She has participated in Gachrang art exhibition for newly graduated in the year 2022. Along with that she participated in National Painting exhibition, PNCA, Islamabad-2019.



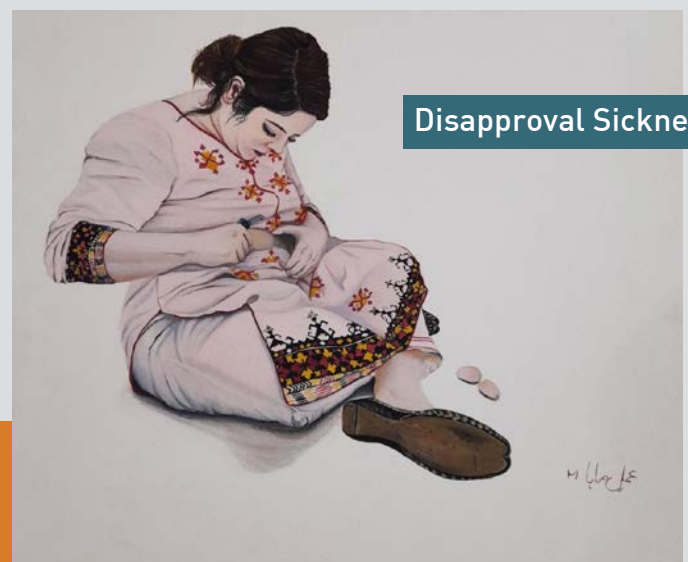
Persian Miniature



Fantasy Idealization



Mughal Miniature



Disapproval Sickness



Expectations



Presence



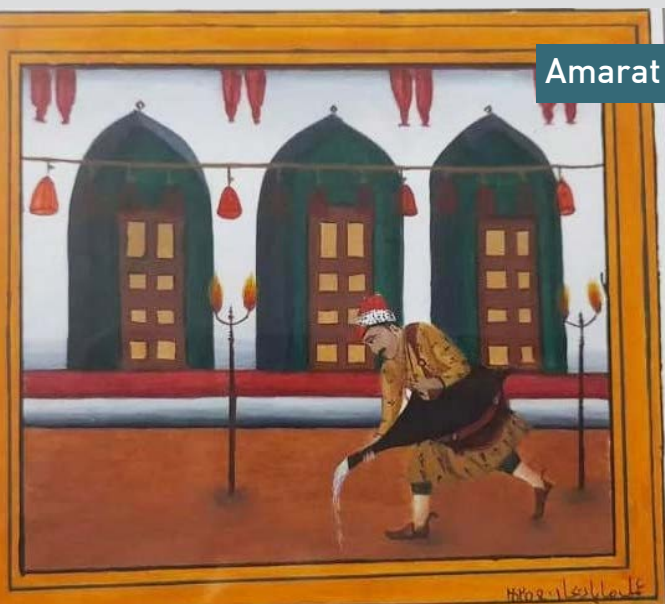
Frustration



Personality Choice



Weight Hate



Amarat



Agaz e Saffar

Artist Statement "Maha Rehan"

Every person has (his/her) own unique identity with different personality traits. The miniature theme is titled as

"Rejection of marriage proposals on the basis of appearance."

The perception behind this artwork is to make people aware that we should not judge humans, according to their physical appearances. Wanted to enlighten the sensitive issues related to matrimonial proposals in our society. I want to present the experiences, feelings and sufferings of a person (especially girl); who is rejected for marriage due to her appearance by her family and society.

energy deficiency in the country but also significantly reducing the oil import bill of Islamabad. Equally important, Russian crude oil and gas supplies to Pakistan could reduce Pakistan's reliance on Middle Eastern oil and gas supplies, particularly Saudi Arabia, Qatar, and the UAE.

Although Russia may not gain economically from providing crude oil and LPG at reduced rates to Pakistan, it could be of great diplomatic and political advantage to Russia. Such supplies would make Pakistan increasingly dependent upon Russia, and this may off-set some of the influence, if not all, of Washington and its Western allies, particularly North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) members, on Pakistan. Russia still considers Cold War-era NATO

On its part, Russia is also not that upbeat about supplying crude oil and LNG to Pakistan in a few months. Pakistan does not have the dollars to pay for these imports, and Moscow is not interested in providing oil and gas to Pakistan on deferred payment terms like Saudi Arabia and the UAE have done so. However, Russia has informed Pakistan that it may pay in the currencies of "friendly" countries, possibly the Chinese yuan.

Crude oil supply agreement

When Russian Energy Minister Shulginov visited Pakistan, both countries announced that they had reached an agreement to supply crude oil to Pakistan. The Russian

ov's statement is significant because it is the first time that both countries have gone to that extent in terms of energy cooperation, as previous talks in this regard could only go so far.

Spanner in use

It is proverbially said that there are many slips between the tongue and the lips, meaning there is still much to do before final achievement and agreement. Given the US and India's understandable opposition to Russian-Pakistani energy cooperation, as well as ambiguity and a lack of vision on the part of our strategists, including the political leadership in Moscow and Islamabad, a final agreement for the supply of Russian crude oil at discounted rates to Pakistan may fall through. Significantly, when Musadik Malik announced after his Moscow visit that Russia would soon supply Pakistan with crude oil, it was just a week after Foreign Minister Bilawal Bhutto Zardari, during his visit to the United States in mid-December 2022, took a completely different line.

During his visit to the US, while talking to the media, Mr. Bilawal surprised everyone by saying Pakistan was neither "pursuing" nor "receiving any discounted energy [from Russia]," adding that Pakistan was exploring various possible options to meet its energy demands. Bhutto also said that Russian supplies could not materialise immediately, as energy ties with Moscow, he said, "will take a long time for us to develop." This dichotomy in the policy statements of two ministers is very noticeable.

Again, surprisingly, when Bilawal Bhutto visited Moscow on January 29 and 30, no agreement was signed between the two sides regarding the supply of crude Russian oil to Pakistan.

The official statement on this occasion only read that Pakistan and Russia had agreed to further enhance mutually beneficial cooperation in areas of trade, energy, education, culture, security, and counter-terrorism. Perhaps Russia invited Bhutto to Moscow despite its preoccupation with war with Ukraine just a week after the Russian Energy Minister's visit to Islamabad to gauge the level of seriousness within Pakistan's ruling alliance for establishing



to be its strategic nemesis, and its occupation and annexation of parts of Ukraine have been justified by Moscow as a means of preventing NATO from absorbing Ukraine and other Russian neighbouring countries. This eastward expansion of NATO has been considered by Russia to be a US-orchestrated plan to circumvent Russia in its backwaters.

So having energy cooperation with each other is in the national interest of both Russia and Pakistan. However, the US-West fear of economic retaliation has kept Islamabad from moving forward with the idea of formally asking Moscow for discounted oil and LNG prices. This is despite the Russian Energy Minister Nikolay Shulginov's visit to Pakistan in January and an earlier visit by Pakistan's junior petroleum minister, Musadik Malik, to Moscow in December last year.

authorities, on the other hand, told Pakistan that their country will not be able to supply cheap LNG in the coming months and that Pakistan should speak with Russian energy companies such as Gazprom about this.

However, both countries have announced that they have agreed in principle in this regard. While specific details of the agreed-upon deal are not available, probably because it is not completely finalised and both sides have to have another round of talks in March this year, "we have already decided to draught an agreement to sort out all the issues that we have with regard to transportation, insurance, payments, and volumes."

"These issues are in the final stage of the agreement," Shulginov said. Although no final agreement has been signed, Shulgin-

wider energy cooperation. Unfortunately, the level of seriousness is quite lacking on Pakistan's side, which does not augur well for the country.

Perhaps some of Pakistan's ruling politicians, while giving the impression that their country has nothing to do with Russia, particularly in the US and Western countries, are trying to improve their prospects of US backing to manoeuvre them to power in the next election or without elections. Again, the victim of such thinking is Pakistan's interest rather than the public's, which definitely needs the supply of cheap Russian oil.

Afghanistan and Defense Cooperation

So if there is such opposition to Russia-Pakistan economic cooperation internationally and in Pakistan, then what would be the scale of antagonism if both countries started real cooperation in the field of defence and security? However, cooperation between these two states in the realms of defence and security is critical, particularly for Pakistan, at a time when the US and West are not looking favourably on Islamabad. However, any analysis of defence cooperation at this point in time would be difficult and besides the point. Nevertheless, the situation in Afghanistan, which has developed since the Taliban took over the country in August 2021, and the entire world's hesitance to extend diplomatic recognition to the Taliban regime, including Russia and Pakistan, is a key matter of mutual interest between Moscow and Islamabad.

It is good that both Russia and Pakistan are coordinating their strategies regarding the Afghan Taliban regime. Significantly, just as the Afghan Taliban cannot be trusted to keep their promises to the international community, Russia cannot expect the Taliban to keep any promises about anti-Russian elements being barred from entering Afghan territory. Pakistan has already been left in the lurch by the Afghan Taliban for nurturing Pakistan's largest terrorist network, Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan, on its soil. So both Russia and Pakistan need to coordinate their strategies in Afghanistan, and this is very important for regional peace and economic integration in South and Central Asia.

The silver lining of CPEC

The China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), being a flagship programme of the Beijing Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) under President Xi Jinping, is potentially of great interest to Moscow. While China has its own cooperative agreements with Russia, Pakistan, by providing landlocked Western China the shortest possible access route to the sea through its Gwadar Seaport, could also be instrumental in helping Moscow reach the warm waters of the Arabian Sea and Indian Ocean for economic purposes.



Arguably, Russia would be ready to join the CPEC, provided Pakistan and, more importantly, China let it join. The key reason why Moscow would love to become even an auxiliary part of CPEC is that it has been the long-cherished desire of Russian rulers to have access to the warm waters of the Arabian Sea, Persian Gulf, and Indian Ocean. Since the times of the Russian czar Peter the Great to the present-day Russian leader, Vladimir Putin, all have wanted to somehow provide Russia access to the warm waters of Asia, because most of the other seas surrounding Russia have not been navigable.

During the Cold War, Soviet Russia could not match the military prowess of the US because, inter alia, of the strategic advantage that the latter had because of its geography. The US is surrounded by the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans, most of which are open for all navigational purposes.

Therefore, access to the warm waters of Persia and South Asia has always been extremely important for the economic and military strength of Russia. Regardless of Putin's agenda, times have changed. Today, Russia may not get any real military

advantage from having access to the warm waters, but it obviously would have a large-scale positive impact on its economy. Beijing and Islamabad may not want Russia to gain any military advantage by joining, but they would not mind Moscow getting a proportionate economic advantage.

Noticeably, Russia could only be part of CPEC if the Central Asian Republics are also linked to the project. Most of these states have shown their desire to join CPEC. Through its One Belt, One Road initiative, China has massive plans for reviving the

ancient Silk Route. Beijing would be more than willing to economically link Central and South Asia with Russia because, in the final analysis, it would be China that would gain the most from these links.

Pakistani strategists, in order to take military and strategic advantage by having closer ties with Moscow so as to neutralise India's growing relations with Washington, may want to rope Russia into CPEC.

Keeping in mind the geostrategic location of Russia and Pakistan, the vast natural resource base of Russia, the great economic needs of Pakistan, the much-needed stability in the South Asian and Central Asian regions, as well as their economic integration, there is stupendous room for mutual cooperation between Moscow and Islamabad.

It is a good omen that both states have put history behind them and have no negative strategic objectives towards each other. This is the real platform for a golden era of bilateral cooperation, which only needs vision in the leadership of both sides, particularly Pakistan, to take maximum advantage of this prospective situation.

Pak-India talks held hostage!

India's Aug 2019 act, revoking of Kashmir special status eclipse chance of dialogue, economic ties between arch rivals

The August 2019 move of Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi government repealing special constitutional status of the state of Indian-held Kashmir--continues to overshadow political, economic and cultural relations between Pakistan and India, while keeping the South Asian region unstable with the possibility of conventional war escalating into nuclear conflict. Consequently, nearly one-and-a-half billion population of the two countries with majority facing extreme poverty, hunger and effects of climatic changes, cannot enjoy desired opportunities to prosper.

It was in 2019 when Modi's BJP (Bharatiya Janta Party) government revoked Article 370 and with it 35-A of the Constitution of India, under which former Princely State of Jammu and Kashmir enjoyed special autonomous status in the Indian Union or federation. The State of Jammu and Kashmir including Indian-held territory of Ladakh has been a disputed region between arch rivals Pakistan and India. In fact, Kashmir issue has been a key factor in appalling rivalry between the two South Asian neighbors.

Kashmir's merger with India in 1947 by its Hindu ruler Maharaja Hari Singh against the wishes of Kashmiris, has since remained the core issue between Pakistan and India. Both the countries fought three wars--1948, 1965 and 1998 (Kargil)-- over Kashmir; and the issue has kept bilateral relations hostage for over-70 years.

Hindu extremist, BJP and its leader Narendra Modi during his election campaign in 2019, had promised Indian Hindus an end to Kashmir's special status and its merger into Indian Union. Since 1954, Indian Constitution gave special status to Jammu and Kashmir in view of its Muslim-majority. Not only Kashmiri Muslims but Buddhists too have never reconciled with the inclusion of their territory into India. This is evident from the 1989 uprising in held Kashmiri that continues until now. However, successive Indian governments including that of BJP in the 1990s led by

late premier Atal Bihari Vajpayee, kept intact the special autonomous status of Kashmir, in order to keep Muslims satisfied. One key aspect of Kashmir's special status was that non-Kashmiris were not allowed to own or purchase land in the state. This provision was aimed at preserving demographic balance of the region where Muslims have been in majority for centuries.



However, the BJP in line with its Hindu nationalist and extremist ideology, abolished Kashmir's special status in order to what it perceived 'put an end to Pakistan's claim on occupied Kashmir.' And parallel to it, BJP conceived notorious plan to bring massive demographic changes to the state population—by allowing settlement of millions of non-Kashmiris, particularly Hindus from across India, in held Kashmir. This was unacceptable to Pakistan and was also against the spirit of the Shimla Agreement of 1972, as well as UN resolutions on Kashmir.

Pak-India dialogue: since revoking of Kashmir's special status by the Modi government in August 2019, no talks between Pakistan and India could be held. Even prior to that New Delhi had often

showed reluctance to hold dialogue with Pakistan, blaming Islamabad for supporting 'terror groups' in held Kashmir. Modi government's rhetoric regarding its escape from talks had been that 'terror and talks cannot go together,' which Pakistan flatly rejected.

On its part, Pakistan maintains that durable peace and stability in South Asia depends

on resolution of all outstanding issues, including Kashmir, between Pakistan and India. But despite Pakistan's diplomatic endeavors, Indian diplomacy seems prevailing. And this is not because of Pakistan's 'poor performance,' but because of India's enormous political and economic standing on international horizon. More importantly, the United States being the only superpower has been supporting India to counter China. Pakistan's close friendship with China, has also been a key factor for the world to buy India's stance on Kashmir. Even friendly Arab countries have not backed Pakistan on its stance; and revocation of Kashmir's special constitutional status as they have strong economic ties with India. In such a situation, Pakistan could not expect meaningful dialogue with India. It's important to understand that India, particularly BJP

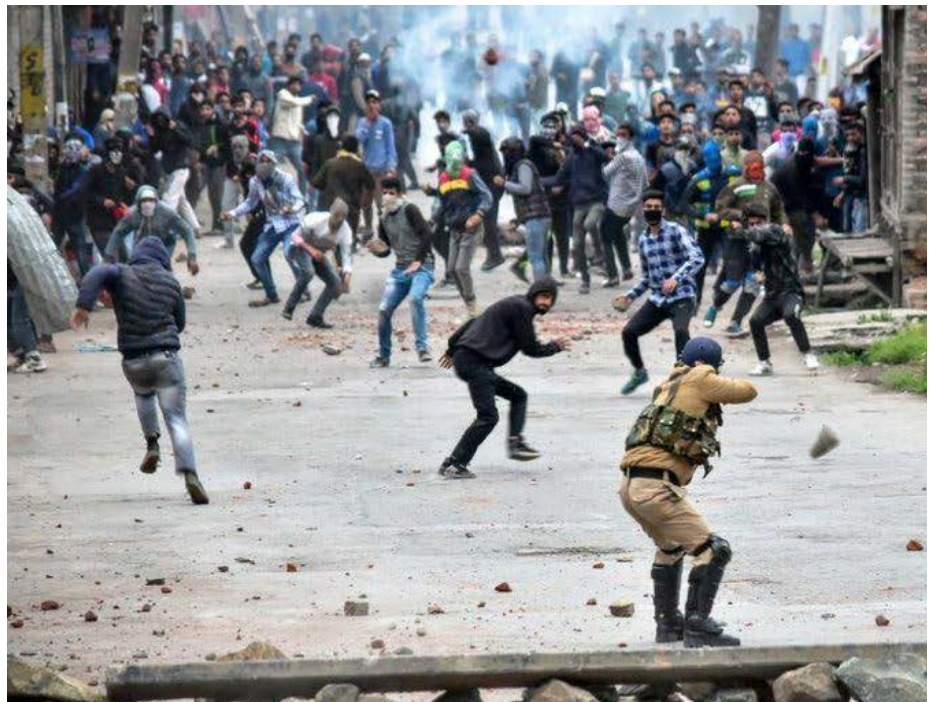
government by consistently refusing to hold talks with Pakistan, has been preparing ground to annex held Kashmir--the BJP did it in August 2019.

India has also been using termination of Kashmir's special status as a benchmark to assess Pakistan's response. The previous Imran Khan government rejected annexation of Kashmir by New Delhi and raised the issue at United Nations, Organization of Islamic Conference and other relevant forums. However, more than that Pakistan could not do much as it would mean a war with India.

The Modi government has been orchestrating a plan to start talks with Pakistan, once the 'annexation of Kashmir dust' is settled. However, without resolution of Kashmir such an initiative would be of no use; and this is evident from the February 2021 bilateral gestures to engage but without any progress. In February 2021, the director general military operations (DGMOs) of both the countries issued a joint statement 'to re-commit themselves to the 2003 cease-fire accord.' Only days before the joint statement, the then army chief Gen (Retd) Qamar Javed Bajwa hinted: 'it is time to extend hand of peace in all directions.' This gesture of peace was perceived as Pakistan's willingness to re-engage with India. But situation suggested that negotiations with India in the post-Kashmir annexation situation, was very difficult, if not impossible.

Nuclear flashpoint: if the world believes that after India's annexation of held Kashmir, Pakistan could not do anything save diplomatic clamoring; and that this would ultimately lead to negotiations between the two, it would probably not happen. A prime reason could be that both countries are nuclear powers and nuclear-armed and Kashmir remains a core issue between them. Thus Kashmir stands as a nuclear flashpoint-- perhaps the only nuclear flashpoints in the world. Contrary to some Western scholars' misperception that Pakistan's claim on Indian-held Kashmir has been a bone of contention between the two nations, the fundamental cause of their rivalry is India's extremist Hindu ideology that never accepted creation of Pakistan. Hindu extremist outfits i.e. Hindu Mahasabha, Rashtarya Swayam Sangh and leaders of BJP never accepted Pakistan

and wanted to undo it. Thus Kashmir is a territorial issue while rivalry between Pakistan and India is basically that of ideology. Pakistan strived to obtain nuclear technology to become a nuclear weapon state in order to deter India from attacking it and not attaining the status of some big power as India did in 1974 by conducting nuclear tests. So even after annexation held Kashmir by India, and bleak chances of future bilateral negotiations, nuclear war between the two adversaries could not be predicted. The only way the threat of nuclear war between the two could be avoided, is world community's intervention urging both the countries to resolve Kashmir and limit their nuclear options.



Pak-India bilateral trade: the threat of a limited, fullfledged or an atomic war between Pakistan and India could be averted provided both the countries establish extensive economic and trade relations. According to the theory of liberal internationalism, large-scale trading between and among states prevent them from war despite having historical rivalries.

This theory considerably applies on Pak-India relations. Before Kashmir's annexation by India, possibility of large-scale bilateral trade existed that could have benefitted both the nations and the region as well. But reversal of J&K special status, has jeopardized such a possibility. Pakistan, soon after the August 2019 unilateral act by

India, suspended its trade with New Delhi. In April 2021, the Economic Coordination Council (ECC) in an effort to suffice domestic demands, endorsed import of cotton and sugar from India, which would have ended nearly two years of trade suspension between the two countries. However, the very next day, Imran Khan cabinet withheld the ECC decision, linking it to reversal of India's Aug 2019 act. Incumbent Prime Minister Shahbaz Sharif has also vowed that trade with India would remain suspended until the latter restores special status of Jammu & Kashmir. And given inflexible posture of PM Modi and his party on the issue of revocation of Kashmir's special status and 2024 being the

election year in India, New Delhi could not be expected to revisit its J&K annexation decision. While this is not something to happen in the foreseeable future, bilateral trade cannot be expected to revive and expand. However, given Pakistan's economic discomfort, such a scenario will not augur well for Islamabad. Moreover, such economic policy towards India does not reinforce Pakistan's position on Kashmir.

While Delhi is not going to reverse its unilateral act on Kashmir, the South Asian region will continue to face the threat of a nuclear war.

By Dr Raza Khan

5 فروری
یوم یکجہتی کشمیر

February 5, 2023 Kashmir Solidarity Day



#KashmirSolidarityDay
#PakistanStandswithKashmir



Dr Arif Alvi

President, Islamic Republic of Pakistan



Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif

Prime Minister, Islamic Republic of Pakistan



Bilawal Bhutto Zardari

Foreign Minister, Islamic Republic of Pakistan



Qamar Zaman Kaira

Adviser to the Prime Minister on Kashmir Affairs and Gilgit Baltistan

Today, we observe Kashmir Solidarity Day to express Pakistan's unflinching support for the legitimate and just struggle of the Kashmiri people for the realization of their inalienable right to self-determination. On this occasion, we pay rich tribute to the selfless sacrifices made by our Kashmiri brothers and sisters during their decades-old resistance to the Indian occupation. We observe this day to draw the attention of the international community towards the relevant UN Security Council Resolutions which provide that the final disposition of the Jammu and Kashmir Dispute would be made in accordance with the will of the people, expressed through the democratic method of a free and impartial plebiscite conducted under the auspices of the United Nations. Over the last 75 years, the Indian occupation forces have unleashed a reign of terror and carried out a relentless campaign to intimidate and suppress the people of Indian Illegally Occupied Jammu and Kashmir (IIOJK). The presence of more than 900,000 Indian armed personnel has turned the region into an open prison. India's illegal and unilateral actions of 5 August 2019 in IIOJK were a blatant violation of international laws, including the UN Charter, the 4th Geneva Convention, and the relevant UN Security Council resolutions. India has been consistently engaged in efforts to further entrench these illegal measures through artificial demographic changes, political engineering, economic marginalization of the local people and an assault on Kashmiri identity and culture. It is alarming that India is undertaking demographic changes in IIOJK by bringing non-Kashmiris to settle in the valley. India's heavy-handed approach frequently manifests itself in extrajudicial killings, arbitrary detentions, custodial torture, enforced disappearances and the use of pellet guns in IIOJK. India has muzzled the media and incarcerated the Kashmiri leadership and defenders of human rights. These excesses and brutalities have been well-documented by several human rights organizations and international media outlets. Today, Pakistan calls upon India to allow unfettered access to the UN and OIC observers, international media and human rights organizations to IIOJK to obtain first-hand information about the situation there, and investigate and report the human rights violations. Pakistan also urges the international community and organizations to take practical steps to hold India accountable for its gross and widespread human rights violations in IIOJK. Pakistan has consistently maintained that a lasting solution to the Jammu and Kashmir Dispute is possible only in accordance with the relevant UN Security Council Resolutions and wishes of the Kashmiri people. Pakistan will continue to extend its unstinted moral, diplomatic and political support for this just cause.

Every year, on the fifth of February, the people of Pakistan reaffirm their solidarity with their Kashmiri brothers and sisters. On this Kashmir Solidarity Day, we renew our commitment of our unflinching support to them in their just struggle for inalienable right to self-determination.

The Jammu and Kashmir dispute is one of the oldest, unresolved items on the agenda of the United Nations. Over the last seventy-five years, India has continued its illegal occupation of Jammu and Kashmir and suppressed its people. Thousands of Kashmiris have sacrificed their lives and suffered countless atrocities at the hands of the Indian Occupation Forces. The already bad situation took a turn for the worst following India's illegal and unilateral actions of 5 August 2019. These illegal and unilateral steps have been rejected by Pakistan and the Kashmiris.

The human rights situation in Indian Illegally Occupied Jammu & Kashmir (IIOJK) remains a source of grave concern to Pakistan and the rest of the world. India has brazenly targeted Kashmiri men, women and children through curfews, blackouts, arbitrary detention, imprisonment, and denial of basic rights. The popular Kashmiri political leadership has been illegally detained or deliberately victimized through fictitious cases. The media has been silenced through coercion and religious scholars have been arrested. Draconian laws have been enacted that deny the fundamental freedoms of the Kashmiri people.

India has also intensified its campaign to bring about demographic changes in IIOJK, so as to convert the Kashmiris into a minority in their own land. These actions are in violation of UNSC resolutions and international law, including the 4th Geneva Convention. India is mistaken if it believes it can crush the iron will of the Kashmiri people. No amount of state terrorism, unleashed by Indian Occupation Forces, can break the will of the Kashmiris or undermine their legitimate struggle.

We urge India to honour its commitments made to Pakistan, the UN and, above all, to the Kashmiri people.

On behalf of the entire Pakistani nation, I want to assure our Kashmiri brothers and sisters that we stand shoulder to shoulder with them. We will continue to lend moral, diplomatic and political support to their just cause, until they attain freedom from Indian oppression. Pakistan will also continue to raise its voice at all international platforms and highlight India's barbaric actions in IIOJK.

As we observe the Kashmir Solidarity Day, the people of Pakistan salute the sacrifices of our Kashmiri brothers and sisters who have suffered for more than seventy-five years under brutal Indian oppression.

For over seven decades, Indian Occupation Forces have brutalized the Kashmiris and denied them their rights. Today, Indian Illegally Occupied Jammu and Kashmir (IIOJK) is one of the most-militarized zones of the world, with the presence of over 900,000 occupation forces.

With its illegal and unilateral actions of 5 August 2019, India has opened a new chapter in suppressing the people of IIOJK. With fresh delimitation of electoral constituencies, issuance of millions of domicile certificates to non-Kashmiris, and addition of hundreds of thousands of non-Kashmiris in the voters lists, India's ruling dispensation aims to transform Kashmiris into a disempowered minority in their own land. Kashmiris are living in a constant state of fear as Indian forces engage in indiscriminate use of force and extra-judicial killings in staged "cordon-and-search" operations. Political activists and human rights defenders face arbitrary detention, torture and confiscation of properties.

India must end its gross human rights violations in IIOJK; reverse its unilateral and illegal actions of 5 August 2019 including demographic changes; repeal draconian laws; allow UN-mandated investigations into cases of extrajudicial killings and; implement relevant UN Security Council resolutions on Jammu and Kashmir.

I want to remind our Kashmiri brothers and sisters that Pakistan will never sit back and watch silently while Kashmiris continue to suffer Indian atrocities. Jammu and Kashmir dispute will remain a key pillar of Pakistan's foreign policy. We will continue to lend unstinted moral, diplomatic and political support to the Kashmiri people until the realization of their right to self-determination in accordance with the UN Security Council resolutions.

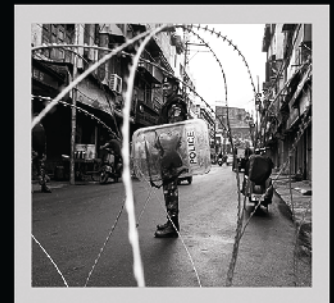
On this Solidarity Day, we stand united with our Kashmiri brethren in their valiant struggle to achieve the long overdue legitimate right to self-determination. The unflinching support of government of Pakistan and its people to the people of Indian Illegally Occupied Jammu and Kashmir for realization of their inalienable right to self-determination has remained unshaken throughout last seven decades. We salute and pay tribute to our Kashmiri brothers and sisters for resisting all tools of Indian state terrorism and sacrificing their lives for their birthright of self-determination. Indian tools of state terrorism like extrajudicial killings, arbitrary detentions, torture, forced disappearances, collective punishments and incarceration of Kashmiri leaders have miserably failed to subdue the will of Kashmiri people. The indigenous and untiring struggle of Kashmiri people has proved that no level of suppression can break their will for their just demand of right to self-determination. In desperation, India took illegal and unilateral actions on August 05, 2019 and revoked the special status of Indian Illegally Occupied Jammu and Kashmir IIOJK in order to implement its sinister design to change the demography of IIOJK. Since then, more than four million domiciles have been issued to non-Kashmiris. New property laws have been promulgated to usurp the land of Kashmiris. India is also manipulating the local elections by redrawing the electoral constituencies for allocating higher number of seats for Hindu majority areas. All of these Indian obnoxious steps are blatant violation of United Nations Security Council resolutions, international laws and 4th Geneva Convention. Pakistan, Kashmiris and the world community have widely rejected these illegal engagements and deceptions of India. These steps are glaring manifestation of the RSS inspired Hindutva mindset of Indian government which marginalizes minorities. Today India stands exposed before the world as an aggressor and oppressor. Its so-called secular and democratic credentials stand fully discredited. India must realize that Kashmiris have a glorious history of standing up against all tools of suppression and any misadventure of Indian authorities will further strengthen the Kashmiris resolve for freedom from Indian occupation. Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif and Foreign Minister Bilawal Bhutto Zardari have undertaken enormous efforts in highlighting the Kashmir issue on all international forums. As a result, we have seen increased awareness in the world community of this festering dispute. International human rights organizations like Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch, United Nations Office of Higher Commissioner for Human Rights and Independent Permanent Human Rights Commission of OIC have well documented and highlighted the human rights violations in IIOJK. Today India's mantra of Kashmir being "internal" matter of India rings hollow. The world community must recognize its collective obligation towards Kashmiris. The continued apathy towards suffering of Kashmiri people will have disastrous consequences for the region and beyond. Pakistan has consistently maintained that durable peace and security in the region is contingent upon peaceful resolution of the core issue of Jammu and Kashmir. We once again reiterate our resolve that Pakistan will continue to provide all possible political, diplomatic and moral support to the Kashmiris in their just struggle for right to self-determination as enshrined in UNSC resolutions and as per wishes of the Kashmiri people.

کس منہ سے کہا تم نے
کشمیر تمہارا ہے

حنا موش گواہوں کو
معلوم تو سارا ہے

پھولوں کو بھی روندنا ہے
بچوں کو بھی مارا ہے

کشمیر کی وادی میں
کیا ظلم اتارا ہے



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KASHMIR SOLIDARITY DAY



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Social and Political Faultlines in Indian Society Can Lead to Economic Stagnation and Governance Failure; Impacting Global Prosperity and Growth

By Amir Jahangir

The Global Risk Report 2023 issued by the World Economic Forum just prior to the annual meeting in Davos this year has characterized some critical factors that identifies India's hidden weaknesses and vulnerabilities. Making India as one of the most serious threats to future global economic stability.

The 2010s saw global military expenditure growing in line with GDP and government budgets (5% of expenditure, down from 12% in the early 1990s). However, today, global military expenditure as proportion of GDP is rising, driven predominantly by higher spending by the United States of America, the Islamic Republic of Iran, Russia, India, China, and Saudi Arabia. India has shown an increase in allocations for the Ministry of Defence (MoD) by 9.8 percent to INR 5.25 trillion (approx. USD 70.6 billion). This does not, however, cover MoD's two main items of expenditures. Those items are separately accounted for under the Defence Pensions and MoD (Civil) heads.

As per the data shared by the Observer Research Foundation, the Indian Ministry of Defence's entire allocations, whether gross or net, do not reflect India's true defence spending. Some large expenses, especially those related to the four border guarding forces (BGFs) and India's defence-related nuclear, space and cyberspace activities conducted outside the MoD-controlled entities – are incurred by some other ministries or departments. India's actual defence spending is thus much greater than what is reflected in the MoD's allocations. Table 1 shows the net budget of the MoD and those of the four BGFs which are part of the Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA). As can be seen, of India's larger defence budget of INR 5.7 trillion, nearly 8 percent is spent through the MHA for the defence of the country's external borders. The Defence budget breakup is as follows:

India's Defense Budget 2022-23 Breakup

Ministry	Component	INR Billion	% of Total	% of CGE	% GDP
Ministry of Defence (MoD)	Defence Services Estimates (DSE)	3853.70	68	9.77	1.49
	Defence Pensions	1196.96	21	3.03	0.46
	MoD (Civil)	201.00	3.5	0.51	0.08
MoD Total		5251.66	92	13.31	2.04
Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA)	Border Security Force (BSF)	227.18	4.0	0.58	0.09
	Indo-Tibetan Border Police (ITBP)	74.61	1.3	0.19	0.03
	Assam Rifles (AR)	66.58	1.2	0.17	0.03
	Shastra Seema Bal (SSB)	76.54	1.3	0.19	0.03
	MHA Total	444.92	8	1.13	0.17
Grand Total Defence Budget		5696.58	100	14.44	2.21

Source: Observer Research Foundation



The Indian Army had revealed that 68% of army's equipment is in the 'vintage category', 24% in the current and 8% in the state-of-art grouping, and consequently, insufficient funds are certainly not going to remedy this worrying state of affairs. This indicates India's defence budget will increase on an average 8%-10% per annum just to replace the equipment over the next 8-10 years timeframe. A substantial undertaking that India needs to take over its undernourished population.

However, In the face of spreading humanitarian crises and state instability, water infrastructure continues to be used both as a weapon and target, mirroring past water conflicts and terrorism in India, Pakistan, and Afghanistan.

Over 12,000 global business experts, when the World Economic Forum asked the question: "Which five risks are the most likely to pose the biggest threat to your country in the next two years?" and were asked to select these from a list of 35 risks, India's top risks were identified from digital inequality to erosion of social cohesion to climate change as the greatest risks that have global implications.

India faces the greatest threat and risk on digital inequalities and lack of access to digital services to its society and citizens' classifications. With a Fractured and unequal access to digital networks and technologies stemming from under investments, low digital skills, insufficient purchasing power, or government restrictions on technologies. The rural-urban digital divide in India can create the multiple India's with significant socio-economic and political implication divides. Despite registering a significant (digital) growth rate of 13 percent in 2021-22, only 31 percent of the rural population in India uses the Internet compared to 67 percent of the urban population.

The digital divide in the access and usage of ICTs and the internet has also led to an exclusionary consequence in three sectors of

utmost significance: education, health, and finance. In a country plagued by high socioeconomic inequality, the digitalisation process cannot be posited as the panacea for the inherent challenges of the physical world. It becomes particularly problematic when half of the population neither has access to gadgets and the internet or the technological know-how to move to a digital environment. In such circumstances, the digitalization process becomes unequal, favouring the digitally connected while excluding the rest, and in certain cases, exacerbating the already existing inequalities.

The data on India shows that, there is evidence of a palpable digital divide between the rich and the poor, the urban areas and rural areas, men, and women and among different caste and religious groups. This divide mirrors the existing socioeconomic inequalities—it means that often the most marginalized groups have been the least digitalized whereas the privileged groups reap the benefits of digitalization. The digital divide is also prominent between rural and urban India.



The recent Oxfam Report “Indian Inequality 2022” accounts that, the government of India has been promoting its flagship programme, Digital India, with a vision to transform India into a digitally empowered society and knowledge economy. In the process, the government has been deploying emerging technologies to enhance the delivery of its services to the citizens. As per UN’s e-participation index (2022) which is a composite measure of three important dimensions of e-government, namely provision of online services, telecommunication connectivity and human capacity, India ranks 105 out of 193 nations. The report says that India is at a high level in terms of human capital development and online services provision, courtesy of Digital India, but is held back by relatively lower levels of infrastructure development. It has the scope to benefit people who have the technological know-how and access to ICTs but has the risk of being exclusionary to the digitally disconnected population. Furthering the digital divide and exclusion among the populations, creating the social divide on the lines of economic, religious, communal, social strata and education attainment and opportunities.

Geopolitical contestation of resources both at regional and global levels is also a risk that India needs to mitigate. Deployment of economic levers by global and regional powers to decouple

economic interactions can be a challenge between nations, restricting goods, knowledge, services, or technology with the intent of gaining geopolitical advantage and consolidate spheres of influence. These are some key issues that the Indian leadership needs to concentrate on. This includes, but is not limited to currency measures, investments and providing human capital access and natural resources management for a global market. This has especially put India in a confrontation path with China, Brazil and Russia in terms of competitions in textile and information communications technologies, along with a race to dominate the Indian Ocean and the South China Sea region to ensure sea trade and balance of power.

More than 270 million households in India are facing economic stress. Broad sections of populations have shown inability to maintain their current lifestyle due to increases in the cost of essential goods which are not matched with a rise in real household income. The 2019-2021 data shows that about 16.4 per cent of India’s population live in poverty, with an average intensity of 42 per cent. About 4.2 per cent of the population live in severe poverty. About 60% of India’s more than 1.4 billion people live on less than \$3.10 a day, the World Bank’s median poverty line. And 21%, or more than 250 million people, survive on less than \$2 a day.

The other challenge India faces is the growing median age population (28.4 years in 2023). The median age for India would be crossing 38.1 years by 2050. Making India the most populous country in the world with a population of more than 1.64 billion people. The challenge India has today is that its 65% population still lives in the Rural India, where connectivity, education and poverty are moving towards deteriorating social cohesion.

India’s ability to deal with its debt crisis can be a challenging task for the future governments. Collapse or lack of social services and public infrastructure can create serious constraints on progress and development. The recent Covid19 has shown the fault lines in India’s health and social infrastructures.



Infrastructure development is critical for improving India’s manufacturing competitiveness and achieving sustained growth. Although India has focused its efforts to improve Power generation and transmission, but transportation infrastructure capacity constraints continue to limit corporate performance and investments.

Despite India's significant infrastructure investments (about 35% of GDP), according to the government estimates, it still requires an additional US\$1.5 trillion in infrastructure investments over the next decade. But even this would likely only help bridge the infrastructure deficit rather than create room for future growth.

S&P Global estimates that, poor infrastructure is among the biggest hurdles in crystalizing the Indian program and dream of, called "Make in India," which aims to improve the nation's manufacturing capabilities and support higher growth for generating employment. The corporate growth and investments can be hampered if the government fails to close the infrastructure deficit, which some experts estimate costs about 4%-5% of GDP due to inefficiencies. Lack of attention to infrastructure development can not only amplify inefficiencies contributing to economic restraints but can also slowdown long-term growth.

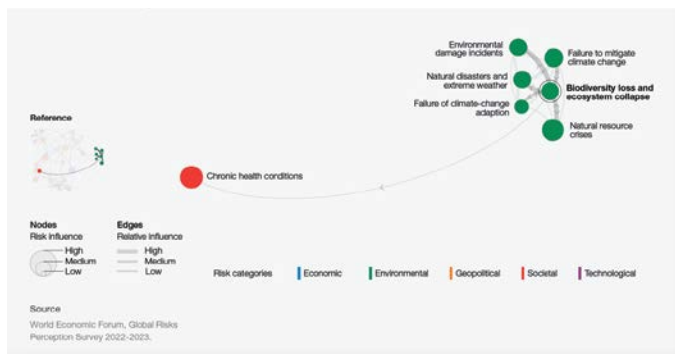
Sustained policy improvements, which the Modi government has been trying to deliver, can be tumbled with electoral choices. Confidence in sustainability of economic growth, and infrastructure development will be essential to attract otherwise muted private sector investments in India. S&P Global has identified that Infrastructure may be India's stumbling block, or if not done right,

it could be the key to country's failure for economic potential, making it difficult to sustain the largest population in the world by 2050, creating a global depression that can engulf major Indian allies on economic and political fronts.

Climate change is a reality that the South Asian region is facing, neighbouring Pakistan has faced the devastating floods in 2022. Over 800,000 hectares of farmland has been wiped out by 2022 floods in Pakistan – this has resulted in increasing commodity prices significantly in a country that is already grappling with record 27% inflation. Similar natural disasters and extreme weathers can impact India's environmental challenges. Failure to mitigate climate change in India, along with environmental damage incidents and government's poor climate related public policy choices can result into serious biodiversity loss and ecosystem collapse, this can lead to a possible natural resource crises for India in the next 5-8 years. The extreme caution is to be observed as the natural resource crises can spill over into the neighbouring nations and regional blocks in the form of chronic health catastrophes.

The prolonged economic stagnation in India can also limit its public policy options, the increasing poverty challenge is creating the social divide among the Hindu majority and "others", including the Muslims, Christians, and the Dalits. A silent minority that is increasingly capturing the socio-economic space in the society, creating further rifts between the extremist Hindu intelligentsia and the growing Indian professionals.

The coming years will present tough trade-offs for the future Indian governments facing competing concerns for society, the environment and security. As the secular India's Tiranga is losing its colors into the shades of saffron extremism, India has its own set of complexities that can impact the global prosperity and balance at risk.



Turkey Earthquake: Being buried alive with my newborn son

By Alice Cuddy



It has been a week since a deadly earthquake struck Turkey and Syria, killing thousands. But amid the despair, there have been stories of "miracles". This is one of them.

When Necla Camuz gave birth to her second son on 27 January, she named him Yagiz, meaning "brave one".

Just 10 days later, at 04:17 local time, Necla was awake feeding her son at their home in southern Turkey's Hatay province. Moments later, they were buried under mounds of rubble.

Necla and her family lived on the second floor of a modern five-storey building in the town of Samandag. It was a "nice building", she says, and she had felt safe there.

She did not know that morning that the area would be torn apart by the earthquake, with buildings damaged and destroyed at every turn.

"When the earthquake started, I wanted to go to my husband who was in the other room, and he wanted to do the same thing," she says.

"But as he tried to come to me with our other son, the wardrobe fell onto them and it was impossible for them to move.

"As the earthquake got bigger, the wall fell, the room was shaking, and the building was

changing position. When it stopped, I didn't realise that I had fallen one floor down. I shouted their names but there was no answer."

The 33-year-old found herself lying down with her baby on her chest, still held in her arms. A fallen wardrobe next to her saved their lives by preventing a large slab of concrete from crushing them.

The pair would remain in this position for almost four days.

Day one

Lying in her pyjamas beneath the rubble, Necla could see nothing but "pitch black". She had to rely on her other senses to work out what was going on.

To her relief, she could tell immediately that Yagiz was still breathing.

Because of the dust, she struggled at first to breathe, but said it soon settled. She was warm in the rubble.

She felt as though there were children's toys beneath her but could not manoeuvre herself to check, or to make herself more comfortable.

Other than the wardrobe, the soft skin of her newborn son, and the clothes they wore, she could feel nothing but concrete and debris.

In the distance, she could hear voices. She tried to shout for help and bang on the wardrobe.

"Is there anyone there? Can anyone hear me?" she called.

When that didn't work, she picked up the small bits of rubble that had fallen next to her. She banged them against the wardrobe, hoping it would be louder. She was scared to hit the surface above her in case it collapsed.

Still, no one replied.

Necla realised there was a possibility nobody would come.

"I was terrified," she says.

Life underground

In the darkness beneath the rubble, Necla lost all sense of time.

This wasn't what life was supposed to be like.

"You plan lots of things when you have a new baby, and then... all of a sudden you're under rubble," she says.

Still, she knew she had to look after Yagiz, and was able to breastfeed him in the confined space.

There was no source of water or food that she could access for herself. In desperation, she tried unsuccessfully to drink her own breast milk.

Necla could feel the rumble of drills overhead and hear footsteps and voices, but the muffled sounds felt far away.

She decided to save her energy and remain quiet unless the noises from outside came closer.

She thought constantly of her family - the baby on her chest, and the husband and son lost somewhere in the debris.

She also worried about how other loved ones had fared in the earthquake.



Necla did not think she would make it out of the rubble, but Yagiz's presence gave her a reason to remain hopeful.

He slept much of the time, and when he woke crying, she would silently feed him until he settled down.

The rescue

After more than 90 hours underground, Necla heard the sound of dogs barking. She wondered if she was dreaming.

The barks were followed by the sound of voices.

"Are you OK? Knock once for yes," one called into the rubble. "What apartment do you live in?"

She had been found.

Rescuers carefully dug into the ground to locate her, as she held Yagiz.

The darkness was broken by a torch light shining into her eyes.

When the rescue team from the Istanbul Municipality Fire Department asked how old Yagiz was, Necla couldn't be sure. She only knew that he was 10 days old when the earthquake struck.

After handing Yagiz to the rescuers, Necla was then carried away on a stretcher in front of what seemed to be a large crowd. She couldn't recognise any faces.

As she was moved to an ambulance, she sought confirmation that her other son had also been saved.

After the rubble

When she got to hospital, Necla was greeted by family members who told her that her husband of six years, Irfan, and her three-year-old son, Yigit Kerim, had been rescued from the rubble.

But they had been transferred hours away to a hospital in Adana province, having sustained serious injuries to their legs and feet.

Remarkably, Necla and Yagiz had suffered no serious physical injuries. They were kept

in hospital for 24 hours for observation before being discharged.

Necla had no home to return to, but a family member brought her back to a makeshift blue tent crafted from wood and tarpaulin. There are 13 of them there in total - all have lost their homes.

In the tent, the family support each other, making pots of coffee over a small stove, playing chess and sharing stories.

Necla is "trying" to come to terms with what happened to her. She says she owes Yagiz for saving her life.

"I think if my baby hadn't been strong enough to handle this, I wouldn't have been either," she explains.

Her only dream for her son is that he never experiences anything like this again.

"I'm very happy he's a newborn baby and won't remember anything," she says.

As a call comes in Necla grins. From a hospital bed Irfan and Yigit Kerim smile and wave.

"Hi warrior, how are you my son?" Irfan asks his baby through the screen.

Courtesy BBC News



Flaws in reducing energy prices

The Alliance for Climate Justice and Clean Energy (ACJCE) has pointed out that the IGCEP fails to undertake an unconstrained, evidence-based, and independent assessment of least-cost options, resulting in a suboptimal outcome

By Azeem Waqas

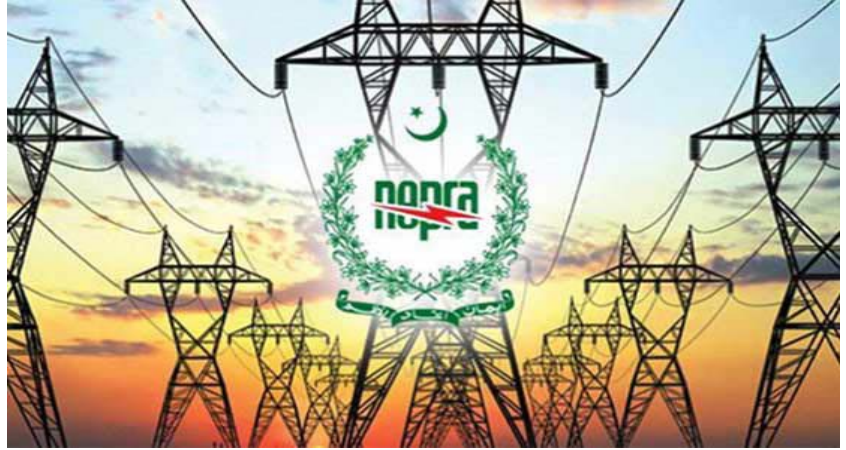
Dollar-crunched Pakistan recently approved a long-term plan to reduce electricity prices by changing the country's energy mix. The National Electric Power Regulatory Authority (NEPRA) has changed the criteria for adding alternate energy projects to the Indicative Generation Capacity Expansion Plan 2022–31 (IGCEP-2022), which is a basic flaw to provide cheaper electricity to the masses at large.

The Alliance for Climate Justice and Clean Energy (ACJCE) has pointed out that the IGCEP fails to undertake an unconstrained, evidence-based, and independent assessment of least-cost options, resulting in a suboptimal outcome.

The National Electric Power Regulatory Authority (NEPRA) has approved the Indicative Generation Capacity Expansion Plan 2022–31 (IGCEP-2022), submitted by NTDC in keeping with the relevant provisions of the Grid Code 2005.

The IGCEP-2022 builds on the plans laid down by the preceding iteration and proposes a gradual shift from an energy mix heavily dominated by imported fossils like coal, furnace oil, and RLNG towards one pillared by indigenous sources of energy, including Hydel, Thar coal, wind, and solar. Furnace oil is expected to be phased out by 2031. Similarly, electricity generation from RLNG and imported coal will drop to 2% and 8%, respectively, in 2031. At the same time, there will be a substantial increase in the electricity generated by hydroelectric, wind, and solar PV. The contributions of hydel, wind, and solar PV, which currently stand at 28%, 4%, and 1%, respectively, will be increased to 39%, 10%, and 10%, respectively, thereby increasing the total share of green electricity to around 59%.

The IGCEP is subject to a number of internal contradictions, and the



proposed energy mix and a road map for capacity additions are often inconsistent with the principles of sustainable development.

The ACJCE said that, as pointed out by multiple stakeholders in the last year's IGCEP hearing, NTDC's failure to conduct an unconstrained analysis of the energy options violated the basic purpose of a least-cost modelling exercise. The current IGCEP 2031 fails to address this fundamental flaw.

There are various facets to this planning failure, each of which requires correction if the document is to achieve its true goal of developing an evidence-based and analytically sound roadmap for a sustainable, and cheap energy mix, says ACJCE.

IGCEP presents a 10-year roadmap for expanding Pakistan's power generation with the aim of meeting the future energy needs of the country.

Zain Moulvi from Alternative Law Collective says that IGCEP 2022 ignores surplus capacity and ignores renewables' potential. It prioritises expensive projects to run ACs for a few. While attempting to reduce the contribution of thermal plants to Pakistan's energy mix, the IGCEP (2022–2031) envisions increased use of indigenous coal and massive additions of large hydropower.

ACJCE is of the view that problems in the Definition of Committed Projects: The manner in which the category of "committed projects" has been defined means the planning process is rigged from the start, rendering the entire exercise of least-cost modelling futile. This error can be traced to IGCEP 2030, which introduced an arbitrary, unreasonable, and highly objectionable change in the then existing criteria for classifying a project as "committed." Prior to last year's IGCEP, a project used to be classified as "committed" only if it fulfilled one of the following prerequisites: "it is already under construction; has achieved financial close; has strategic importance, i.e., the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) project; or is a G2G project."

In the IGCEP 2030, however, this criterion was changed, and a project was considered "committed" if it fulfilled the following criteria:

- It has obtained LOS as of December 2020 for private sector projects. For federal government public-sector projects, the PC-I has been approved and funding secured (as of March 2021). However, M/S Jamshoro Unit-2 and M/S Chashma-5 nuclear power projects shall be modelled as candidate projects to be evaluated under the least-cost principle.

- G2G project: power generation projects that are listed under the Federal Government's international (bilateral or multilateral) commitments if project or financing agreements are signed. where timelines for completion of a project under G2G are not firmed up yet. The tool shall determine the timeline by which such a project must come online based on its tariff optimization with respect to other available options.



- RE plants (wind, solar, and bagasse) are listed in Categories I and II of the CCoE's April 4, 2019 decision.
- RE on-grid power projects in balance target block share as stipulated in the ARE Policy 2019, i.e., 20% by the year 2025 and 30% by the year 2030 (including
- On the basis of the least-cost principle, a candidate block will be considered for respective wind, solar, and hybrid technologies beginning in 2023–2024.

The ACJCE further explained that no rationale for this change in criteria was provided, particularly for the easing of the criteria from "under-construction or financial closure" to merely obtaining a "LOS" for private projects and "the approval of a PC-1" for public sector projects. Industry best practises the world over aim to limit accommodation of such "committed" projects very strictly to those cases where significant investments in project development and construction have already been undertaken and financial and contractual obligations have been firmed up such that shelving the project at such a stage would result in more losses to the market

and the public overall. In general, this only applies to situations where the power purchase agreements have already been signed for projects that have proven their least-cost credentials previously.

The underlying rationale for such pre-selection is to avoid expensive and inequitable outcomes where project developers who have already incurred significant expenses and placed reliance on contractual agreements end up getting

penalised because of ex-post facto changes in market optimality outlooks.

The present criteria, on the other hand, is entirely arbitrary and pre-selects projects so early in the project development cycle as to effectively guarantee a seat for mere abstract proposals with no real developments on the ground, allowing them to bypass the least cost optimization process.

Last year, more than 80% of the capacity additions were pre-selected on grounds other than their least-cost credentials due to this arbitrary criterion. This year's plan has fared no better, with committed projects taking up well over half the share of the energy mix on average. Through this backdoor mechanism, the IGCEP has added a significant number of fossil-fuel-based and large hydroelectric projects that have been exempted from least-cost testing against RE technologies to determine their competitiveness. This includes 4,203 MW in coal and gas-based energy and a whopping 7,111 MW of (mostly large) hydropower projects. The share of committed solar and wind energy is negligible by comparison.

Given that wind and solar are vastly more

competitive even on purely economic grounds alone, this methodology sets up an uneven playing field. Relative to coal, gas, and hydro, cheaper and cleaner RE projects have therefore been placed on an unequal footing without fair competition.

It is important to point out that this outcome has nothing to do with "technical considerations" related to grid limitations or issues of intermittency and the base load reliability needs of the system—it is purely the result of an unjustified and unreasonable intrusion of political bias in the planning process. The same has been forcefully noted in a World Bank report on RE integration in Pakistan, which observes that "some committed plants are only drawn because of their status but not because they make economic sense or are needed for supply."

The resulting mix is therefore patently sub-optimal in terms of both economic costs and environmental sustainability. This outcome results not only in substantial economic losses to the public but also frustrates NEPRA's statutory goal of developing competitive markets. This criterion, therefore, amounts to a circumvention of the market and regulatory processes through the preselection of preferred projects, which is simply a poorly concealed form of market nepotism.

This plan will considerably hurt investor and consumer confidence in the possibility of a free market for electricity, particularly for the renewables industry, which is a present priority of NEPRA, especially with the CTBCM reforms and the shift to competitive bidding for renewables enacted this year, says ACJCE.

According to the Power Division, this is the first time that the Indicative Generation Capacity Expansion Plan (IGCEP) has been finalised and approved. that: digitalization of metering through AMI from power generators to end consumers; B-to-B wheeling allowed with bilateral contracting; CTBCM implementation with more stakeholders in distribution; cheaper and renewable generation addition through 10 GW of solar; further operational autonomy given to DISCOs; NPCC will be fully ISO; and CPPA would be a full market operator.

The flood crisis has turned into a food crisis

TTI Report



The devastating floods in Pakistan have brought the nation to its breaking point. Following the COVID-19 epidemic, soaring inflation, the nation's worst heatwave in more than 60 years, and these floods, have occurred. Russia's invasion of Ukraine worsens the situation. Russia's invasion of Ukraine has caused food prices to rise, which has led to increased food shortages, and food insecurity in Pakistan. However, the terrible truth is that this is only the beginning. Pakistan is currently dealing with a serious food crisis that was caused by the floods, and is pushing the people into poverty. Given that crops, cattle, and agricultural land have been damaged or destroyed, Pakistan finds it challenging to feed both itself and the countries that depend on its food exports.

Unpredictable and aberrant climate change that has caused catastrophe and devastated tracts of agriculture nationwide are factors contributing to the impending food crisis in Pakistan. The worst flood Pakistan has ever experienced occurred in 2022. The nation is still recovering from the summer's devastating floods, which government officials estimate destroyed more than 80% of the country's crops. It is also coping with economic uncertainty, which has caused food and medicine to sit in ports. According

to the State Bank of Pakistan, the country's foreign exchange reserves have fallen, which is not enough for imports in the future.

The greatest threat to the standard of living in developing nations is the rising price of essential food items. This poses a formidable challenge to livelihoods in a country like Pakistan, where 50–80% of income is spent on food, and adds to the extreme economic inflation Pakistan is currently experiencing. Despite efforts by the government and other countries to stabilise commodity prices, the cost of wheat flour, the nation's main source of food, continues to soar.

One half of the population dies from floods, while the other half dies from the unavailability of food. Pakistan faces a variety of food crises as a result of the floods. It is anticipated that flooded agricultural land will have long-term humanitarian and economic impacts. Billions of dollars' worth of wheat, sugar, and rice have been wasted. Flooding has caused significant damage to agricultural land in numerous areas of Pakistan's Punjab, Baluchistan, Sindh, and KPK provinces.

Pakistan's total land area of 45% was damaged by floods. Crop devastation

because of floods plays a big part in Pakistan's current food crisis. Food production is reduced when crops and agricultural fields are damaged by floods or any other natural catastrophes. Food shortages, increased prices, and decreased food availability may result from this, creating a food crisis. Food security in the affected areas is directly impacted by crop destruction. Food shortages results from a significant number of crops being damaged, making it difficult for people to get enough food. Additionally, because of the rise in food prices, many individuals, especially those who are poor, are not able to buy it.

Crop damage has a long-term effect. A food shortage resulted from the failure to recover thousands of acres of agricultural land. Because so much of Pakistan's cattle and farms have been lost, there are severe food famines. Over 4 million acres of agricultural land, 900,000 animals, and 80 to 90 percent of the crops have been destroyed by the flood. According to preliminary estimates, 3 million animals have died, and the floods have destroyed 65% of Pakistan's primary food crops, including 70% of its rice. So, crop loss is a significant factor in Pakistan's food crisis and can have substantial repercussions for the crisis in the affected areas. Pakistan also exports a wide range



of non-food crops, most notably cotton. Pakistan is the 5th largest cotton producer, accounting for 5% of global output; this damage shrinks the world cotton supply. Flood damage has an impact on Pakistan's capacity to export agricultural products, which is a vital source of income.

In Pakistan, more than 60% of the population lives in rural areas, and they rely on livestock for their livelihood. The loss of livestock had a negative impact on their lives. They face financial losses that make it difficult for them to access food. Price increases may result from a reduction in the supply of meat and dairy products.

Flood-related infrastructural damage has a substantial impact on Pakistan's food issues. Roads, bridges, and other transportation networks, which are essential for the distribution of food, are damaged by floods. Food shortages occur in some locations because the transportation systems are disrupted, making it harder to provide food to those in need.

Furthermore, the damage to infrastructure disrupts the food supply chain, making it challenging to carry food from one location to another. People find it difficult to get food areas, especially in remote or isolated places where there may

be an imbalance in the supply of food.

Floods are not the only cause of the food crisis in Pakistan, but the recent war that has begun between Russia and Ukraine has caused a food crisis and spiked the prices of crops, especially wheat. According to Uzair Younus, Director of the Pakistan Initiative at the Atlantic Council, Pakistan is experiencing a dual economic crisis. Food inflation was already high before last year's rains, especially in rural areas, and many people found it difficult to keep up with the increase in costs. Blue-collar employees in Pakistan have lost over 30% of their purchasing power over the past four years.

Imports are being delayed at the ports in an effort to stretch dollars, which has an impact on everything from food to medication. Onion prices are currently skyrocketing because containers of onions are detained at the port as a result of the bank's failure to approve payments. "Shortages are bound to occur across the supply chain, notably for imported food and medication, in a country of 230 million on the brink of default."

It has been six months since the extreme flooding submerged one-third of the country. Millions of people relocate to flood-prone areas. These people are experiencing an extreme level of food crisis. These six months changed the course of Pakistan's future.



Rape crime on rise despite national rage

Reported cases of rape suggest every two hours a woman is raped in Pakistan; fewer than 4 percent of sexual assault or rape cases in country result in a conviction; certainty of punishment, not severity deters rape crimes

By Zahra Sikandar

Rape is a pervasive problem that affects individuals and communities around the world. Despite efforts of many organizations and governments to prevent it, the incidence of rape continues to be a significant issue in many countries. While there is no country in the world that is completely free of rape, it is also important to note that it is not inevitable. And that there are many countries that have made significant progress in reducing incidences of rape and improving responses to sexual violence.

To achieve order in society through law, it is to be understood that crimes are not natural or normal. Rather those are human actions that violate laws and are not considered a natural or normal part of human behavior. Although crime has been a part of human society throughout history, crimes are also not inevitable.

This brings into perspective the nature of this vile crime in Pakistan that outrightly leaves the nation enraged and the victim baffled. But despite the national rage the thoughtless discussions that recur among the wide segment of society make rape incidents more eerie.

As they say the patient gets half better by the doctor's attitude, the vigilante nature of the recent F-9 Park rape incident clearly suggests there are many takers of this victim-blaming attitude in society that the perpetrators were emboldened enough to act by the self-assumed notions of having an ownership over women, or assume moral authority to fix women behavior. And that if this crime is to be eradicated change in this attitude will need to be induced at individual, social and structural levels.

While causes of crime are complex and can be influenced by a range of factors, including social, economic, and psychological factors, there are many effective strategies for preventing and reducing crime. By addressing the root causes of crime and working to create safe and equitable communities, the incidence of rape crime can be effectively reduced and create a safer world for everyone.



Factors that contribute to rape

The underlying factors that contribute to the crime of rape can vary between cultures, plethora of evidence underline some common factors such as gender inequality and sexual entitlement and lack of bystander intervention as some of the common factors across cultures, contributing to rape crime. Rape is often committed with the implicit or explicit support of others who do not intervene to stop the violence.

It's important to note that these factors do not cause rape, but rather create an environment in which rape is more likely to occur. Similarly, the ways in which these factors manifest and the extent to which they contribute to rape can vary depending on cultural and societal norms and attitudes.

Therefore preventing rape requires addressing these underlying factors and changing the social norms and attitudes that contribute to its perpetration. It's also worth noting that the ways in which sexual violence is reported, investigated, and prosecuted can vary between cultures. In some cultures, there may be significant barriers to reporting sexual violence, such as stigma, lack of trust in the justice system, or fear of retaliation.

How safe is Pakistan for women?

According to the Ministry of Human Rights most recently available data, although a downward trend in the rape incidents against women is observed across the country between 2018 to 2021, as many as 14,456 reported cases of rape of women suggest that every two hours a woman is raped in Pakistan. While the reported cases indicate highest incident in Punjab, ironically the sexual violence against women increased in Islamabad between this period.

Out of 4,326 reported rape cases in 2018, 3,883 were from Punjab, 249 from Sindh, the 203 from KPK, 13 Balochistan and 26 in Islamabad Capital Territory (ICT). And in 2019, out of 4,276 reported rape cases in 2018, the 3,314 were from Punjab, 277 from Sindh, 233 from KPK, 21 Balochistan, 40 Islamabad Capital Territory (ICT) and one each from GB and AJK. In 2021, 15,84 rape cases reported in Punjab, 153 in Sindh, 92 in KPK, and one in AJK. The reported data also indicate 908 cases of gang rape in four years.

Besides, these figures are exclusive of the incidents of rape of minors, sexual harassment, gender-based violence, domestic

violence and routine incidents of cat-calling, molestation, non-consensual touch and staring. Moreover, the pervasive social attitude of victim blaming, rape culture, burden of honor, burden of proof prevent many victims reporting any of these crimes at all.

What can government do?

In 2021, the House approved an The Anti-Rape (Investigation and Trial) Act, 2021, to ensure speedy trial of rape cases through the establishment of special courts mandated with the objective of wrapping up the cases within four months, besides directing the establishment of a country-wide registry of sexual offender with the help of the NADRA.

This is certainly a milestone towards hoping a speedy dispensation of justice, however reports indicate fewer than 4 percent of sexual assault or rape cases in the country result in a conviction. The greater gaps therefore lay in the social attitudes and elements in legal proceedings that limit the scope of prosecution. For example, in 2020, the UNDP ranked Pakistan on top among the 75 countries with an anti-women bias in courts.

Government initiatives like Zainab Alert app or the Anti-Rape Act of 2021 came in to force in the aftermath of gruesome assault of a minor child Zainab and motorway gang-rape incident that had caused an outpouring of anger across the country, calling for stringency of the measures. However, plethora of evidence suggests that it is indeed the certainty of punishment, rather than its severity that deters crimes such as rape.

Under the most recent Anti-rape 2021 Act, in addition to capital punishment and life imprisonment, chemical castration was sanctioned for the repeated offenders. But the latter was revoked, for not only CII termed the castration cruel and inhumane and therefore un-Islamic, the Amnesty International also called upon the authorities to address the deep-seated problems in the criminal justice system that invariably deny justice to victims than ratcheting up punishments. The human rights group said, that "chemical castrations will not solve a deficient police force or inadequately trained investigators."

Therefore, the gaps that often result in fewer convictions should be focused with a multiprong approach. First the gaps in the legal process need to be identified to ensure perpetrators aren't spared. Second, but most importantly the gaps need to be identified in the individual socialization at early stages of life as well as at the level of adults. This approach needs to aim at broadening the horizons of mind and developing a conducive society that ensure individual freedoms.

Japan and Singapore, are among the countries with least number of rape incidents. The former is famed for its ethics while latter for its numerous laws and strict regulation via enforcement of the law.



Gaps in justice system

Some of the gaps in the justice dispensation stem from lack of evidence. Rape is often a crime that takes place in seclusion and without witnesses, which makes it difficult to gather strong evidence that can be used to secure a conviction.

Similarly, there is often a significant amount of bias and prejudice against rape victims, which can make it difficult for prosecutors to secure a conviction. Some people may believe that the victim was somehow responsible for the crime, or that they were not actually raped. The unsympathetic judicial system can significantly decrease the likelihood of a conviction.

Criminalizing victim-shaming may help rape victims report the crime to the authorities without the fear of stigmatization,

shame or distrust of the justice system. Not being able to report a crime due to these factors only let the criminals roam free and repeat the crime.

However, to facilitate the reporting of this crime the police departments and prosecutors' offices need to have resources and training to overcome cultural attitudes and biases to effectively investigate and prosecute rape cases. Lack of sensitization can lead to cases being dropped and therefore resulting in fewer convictions.

Socialization gaps

The socialization gaps pervade in areas of education, media, work-place and social space sharing. Overcoming socialization gaps can play a significant role in preventing rape crime. Socialization refers to the process by which individuals learn the values, beliefs, norms, and behaviors of their society. These socialization experiences can have a lasting impact on a person's behavior and attitudes towards rape.

The culture of victim-blaming, gender stereotypes perpetuate the rape culture and often result in gender-based violence. The toxic masculinity norms that glorify violence and domination and rape as a form of punishment consider it a "natural and normal" outcome. Similarly, many people are not socialized to understand consent, healthy relationships, and gender equality, which can contribute to a lack of understanding about the serious nature of rape crime.

While education is an important tool for preventing rape and changing social attitudes towards the crime. It is also equally important to reach out to the left out segments of society and provide them meaningful, self-esteem developing opportunities. This can not only promote meaningfulness of life but could help respect themselves enough to respect their fellow beings.

Addressing these socialization gaps is crucial in preventing rape and creating a culture where consent and respect are valued. This should involve education, awareness-raising efforts and media literacy initiatives as well as creating, inclusive, safe and healthy entertainment activities and creative pass-times.

History of the Capital



By Pavan Manzoor

Islamabad is Pakistan's capital city. It is the tenth most populous city in Pakistan, with over 1.2 million citizens, and is federally managed by the Pakistani government as part of the Islamabad Capital Territory. After being built as a planned city, it surpassed Rawalpindi as Pakistan's capital in the 1960s. Islamabad, in comparison to other cities in the country, is a clean, large, and tranquil metropolis with plenty of greenery. The city is well-known for its high living standards, security, and cleanliness.

Heritage

Islamabad, Pakistan's capital, is situated on the Pothohar Plateau inside the Islamabad Capital Territory, one of Asia's earliest known places of human habitation. Islamabad, Pakistan's capital city, is situated on the Pothohar Plateau in the country's northwest. As a junction between Rawalpindi and the North West Frontier Province, this location has historical significance.

Islamabad is the capital of Pakistan's Islamic Republic. Between 1960 and 1970, the city was established to replace Karachi as the capital. President Ayub Khan conceived of Islamabad as the national capital (1907–1974).

Karachi had been the capital since it was Pakistan's commercial core, but it was not deemed an acceptable administrative centre owing to a variety of reasons, so a planned city became necessary, and Islamabad was created.

Islamabad has a contemporary culture that is in tune with other internationalised cities. It has a recent past, having been built as a planned city only 50 years ago. Islamabad has a reputation for being a flourishing, business-minded capital in the heart of Pakistan's rapidly urbanising landscape. The white marble Faisal Mosque, an iconic symbol of the city and one of the world's largest mosques, is a popular tourist destination, as is the lively Jinnah Market.

In 2015-16, the Federal Department of Archaeology and Museums, with the assistance of the National Fund for Cultural Heritage, conducted preliminary archaeological excavations that unearthed the remains of a Buddhist stupa at Ban Faqiran, near the Shah Allah Ditta caves, dating from the 2nd to the 5th century CE.

The Islamabad Museum displays various antiques and artefacts from the region's Gandhara era, a fascinating mix of Buddhist and Graeco-Roman traditions.

The Lok Virsa Museum and the Institute of Folk and Traditional Heritage in Shakarparian Park are the greatest places to learn about Islamabad and Pakistan's live culture.

Construction and development

Islamabad was developed in the 1960s as a forward capital for a variety of reasons. Furthermore, Karachi's location at the country's southernmost point left it vulnerable to assaults from the Arabian Sea. Pakistan needed a capital that was easily accessible from wherever it was in the country.

The interference of commercial interests in government problems made Karachi, a corporate centre, unpalatable as well. Islamabad was picked as the site lately because it was closer to both the army's headquarters in Rawalpindi and the disputed territory of Kashmir in the north.

The master plan for the city was prepared by a Greek architectural firm led by Konstantinos Apostolos Doxiadis, who used a triangular grid with its apex facing the Margalla Hills. The capital was not immediately shifted from Karachi to Islamabad; rather, it was temporarily relocated to Rawalpindi in the early 1960s and then to Islamabad in 1966 once critical building work was completed.

In 1981, Islamabad and Punjab province were separated to form the Capital Territory. The city's growth has been aided by prominent designers such as Gio Ponti and Edward Durell Stone.

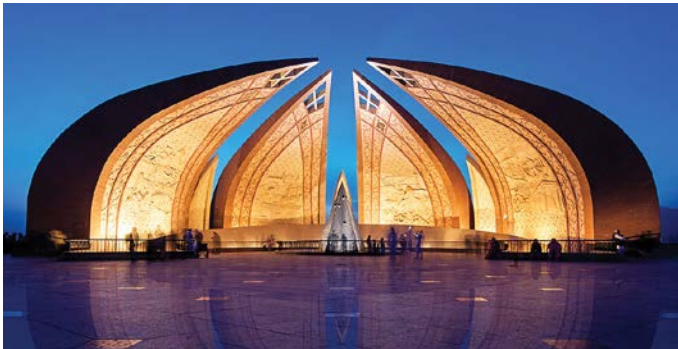
Architecture

Islamabad's architecture mixes modern design with centuries-old Islamic and local customs. The Saudi-Pak Tower is an example of how traditional and modern architectural styles may coexist. The beige edifice, one of Islamabad's tallest skyscrapers, is highlighted with blue tile works in line with Islamic tradition.

Another example of Islamic and modern architecture

coexisting is the Pakistan Monument and Faisal Mosque. Other notable structures include the Edward Durell Stone-designed National Assembly, the Gio Ponti-designed Secretariat Complex, and the Mughal-inspired Prime Minister's Secretariat.

The murals that cover the interior of the Pakistan Monument's gigantic petals are inspired by Islamic architecture. The Shah Faisal Mosque, designed by Turkish architect Vedat Dalokay and funded by Saudi King Faisal, mixes modern style with a more traditional, massive triangular prayer hall and four minarets.



The absence of a dome structure distinguishes the architecture of the Faisal Mosque. Its architecture incorporates Mughal, Turkish, and Arabic elements. The Centaurus is an example of modern architecture being erected in Islamabad. The seven-star hotel was designed by WS Atkins PLC. The Islamabad Stock Exchange Towers are another recent example of contemporary architecture in the city.

Language

According to the 2017 census, 52% of the population speaks Punjabi as their first language; Pothohari is a major dialect; 19% speak Pashto; 12% speak Urdu, the country's official language; and 17% speak other languages.

Similarly, according to the 1998 census, the city has 1 million migrants, the majority of whom (691,977) come from Punjab. The majority of the migrants, 210,614 people, came from Sindh, with the remaining from Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Azad Kashmir. Balochistan and Gilgit-Baltistan saw lower migration rates.

Literacy

The majority, or those aged 15 to 64, account for around 59.38% of the population. Only 2.73% of the population is above the age of 65, while 37.90% is under the age of 15. Islamabad has the highest literacy rate in Pakistan, at 88%.

9.8% of the population has completed some type of secondary education (equivalent to grades 11 and 12). A bachelor's degree or similar is held by 10.26% of the population, while a master's degree or equivalent is held by 5.2%. Islamabad employs 185,213 people and has a 15.70% unemployment rate.

Climate

Islamabad's humid subtropical climate has five seasons: winter (November to February), spring (March and April), summer (May

and June), the rainy monsoon (July and August), and fall (September to November) (September and October). June is the hottest month, with average highs sometimes topping 38 °C (100.4 °F). July is the wettest month, with frequent afternoon thunderstorms, heavy rain, and the possibility of cloudbursts and flooding. January is the coldest month.

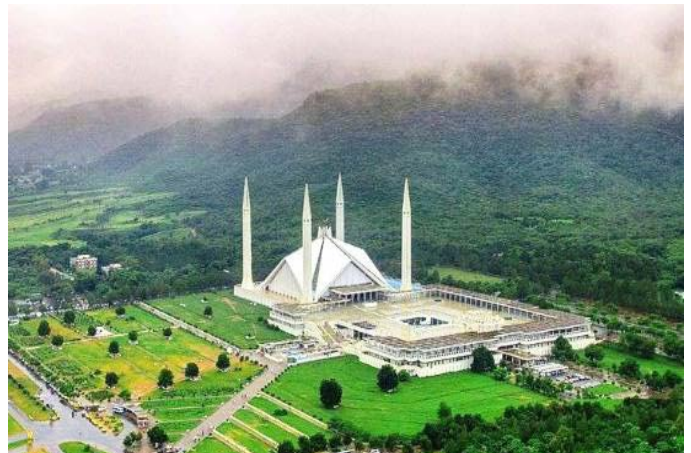
Tourism

The Faisal Mosque is a cultural icon of the city that attracts many people every day. The Faisal Mosque, erected in 1986, is named after Saudi Arabia's King Faisal bin Abdul Aziz. The Faisal Mosque, created by Turks and funded by the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, features Quranic texts calligraphed on its walls.

One of Islamabad's highlights is the Pakistan Monument, which was completed in 2007. This tourist attraction represents Pakistani nationalism and sovereignty.

The building is in the shape of a dome, and its walls are in the shape of petals. On these walls are carvings of other popular tourist spots in Pakistan, like the Badshahi Mosque, Minar-e-Pakistan, and Lahore Fort.

Islamabad's key attractions include the Pakistan Monument, Lok Virsa Museum, the Institute of Folk and Traditional Heritage, Shakarparian Park, and prominent galleries like the National Art Gallery and Gallery 6.



Islamabad was built on civilizations and architectural styles dating back to the 10th century. Islamabad is located on the Potohar Plateau, where remnants of prehistoric civilizations such as the Acheulian and Soanian traditions can still be seen and are popular tourist destinations. Islamabad has a number of historical sites that represent Hindu culture dating back to the 16th century, such as Saidpur. Saidpur, an Islamabad neighbourhood, grew from a hamlet to a sacred location with temples where Hindu Mughal commanders worshipped.

The Margalla Hills National Park is located on Islamabad's northern outskirts, close to the Himalayas. The magnificent hills and valleys of the National Park are home to a variety of wildlife, including leopards, barking deer, and Himalayan goral. Margalla Hills National Park offers guests housing and camping places, and it is surrounded by fauna and flora.

Pakistan: Grumblings about Climate Change in Davos

If we continue business as usual, we are hurtling towards a 3.0C world, which will be a race against time for many of us

By Zahiruddin

The Pakistani delegates at the World Economic Forum's annual meeting in Davos, Switzerland, did everything they could to educate the participants from 193 nations about the country's vulnerability to climate change and the fragility of its position in the face of it. The theme of the meeting for the year was "cooperation in a fragmented world," which gave Pakistan a lavish chance to propel its agenda of soliciting the world's attention and a fine understanding of the chronic and perpetual issue. More than 3000 political leaders, investors, economists, business leaders, scientists, journalists, and celebrities were in attendance at the 4-day meeting starting on January 16. The mission of the world body is to improve the states of the world by engaging business, political, academic, and other leaders of society to shape global, regional, and industry agendas, and this mission best suited the plea of Pakistan, which is within the core ambit of its task.

The Pakistani Foreign Minister Bilawal Bhutto Zardari, Minister of State Hina Rabbani Khar, and Federal Minister of Climate Change Senator Sherry Rehman's discussions in different sessions on different topics and subjects ranging from energy to trade and investment, aside from regional cooperation and conflicts, kept revolving around the core issue of climate change. They had meaningful informal discussions with political leaders, corporate executives, international organizations, climate action practitioners, the media, and plenary forums on climate, environmental, economic, and social issues.

All efforts were focused on getting assurance and a pledge from the world community at large to address the core issues, including greenhouse gas emissions and carbon control, as well as other factors that affected the globe on a comprehensive, long-term basis. Bilawal told the forum that the devastation caused by the "catastrophic climate event" last year—he was referring to the deadly floods that claimed hundreds of lives and caused widespread losses estimated by the government to be around \$30 billion—was a disaster on a scale never before seen in Pakistan's history.

Bilawal adopted a soft and complimentary tone for the world community at large in its earlier call for help in recovering from the climate catastrophe of last year. He said that the world has stood in solidarity with Pakistan in this difficult time, and this is an important message on climate change. It also gives us a confidence boost as far as our economy is concerned. He described the International Conference on Climate Resilient Pakistan, which was held in Geneva earlier this month with the specific aim of helping our country's ongoing recovery efforts. "Pakistan went in seeking \$8 billion, but the pledges exceeded more than \$9 billion, and that too at a time when every country in the world is facing



its own domestic economic problems," he went on, praising the world community and seeking its continuation in the same tone and tenor.

The Federal Minister for Climate Change, Senator Sherry Rehman, made abundantly clear the standpoint of the country while speaking at a panel discussion titled "Bending the Emissions Curve," where she was joined by the Chairman of the Board, Mitsubishi Heavy Industries, Shunichi Miyanaga; Chief Executive Officer, Heineken, Dolf van den Brink; and Chairman, President, and Chief Executive Officer, Baker Hughes, Lorenzo Simonelli. The panel was moderated by CNBC's journalist and anchor, Steve Sedgwick. She reiterated that the historic emitters responsible for the majority of global GHG emissions need to move resources to allow developing and emerging economies to make the energy transition to renewables without compromising development. Minister Rehman was her name.

She said that the commitment to reach net zero by 2050 loses its meaning if the 1.5 °C target is no longer achievable. "We are on an ambitious track to net zero, but all of that takes a huge pause if the 1.5C target set under the Paris Agreement is under threat, as we are struggling to keep it alive."

If we continue business as usual, we are hurtling towards a 3.0C world, which will be a race against time for many of us. We experience the burn much faster and harder than anybody else, and on a scale that nobody has seen before. "We are in geographies of extreme vulnerability, and our experience of climate change and global warming is very nonlinear," she stated.

She went on to plead the case of the third world countries given their vulnerabilities to the consequences of climate change and remarked that, at the moment, there was no standardisation of the best practises for regulatory frameworks that could be shared across the board through global governance frameworks and multilateralism. She contended that the moral imperative alone is not enough and that there is a need for a system with clear incentives and penalties because the current system is not working.

Higher education and its mythical path out of poverty

One must admit that higher education, standing alone, is not an adequate or relevant solution to poverty alleviation

By Sara Danial

Pakistan has developed a conspicuous economic divide between workers with college degrees and those without them, especially after the inception of higher education institutes. Our social policy, if it exists at all, is based on the idea that people from disadvantaged backgrounds can bridge the gap by graduating from college with a degree. Though it once seemed possible, many now believe it is a myth.

Earning a handsome salary and climbing the corporate ladders of economic mobility with the help of a college degree or even a post-graduate degree, for that matter, is not as easy as it once was.

Rather than pulling out of financial stress and assuaging inequality, higher education deepens the crack. One must admit that higher education, standing alone, is not an adequate or relevant solution to poverty alleviation.

In the recent past, the last two decades or so, my batch was in the process of working tirelessly to get the best grades and aim for the best higher education institute, in the hope of landing the best-paying job—the corporate giants of marketing, financial power, and top-notch communications firms. We were deceived into believing that Pakistan must rely on higher education as an engine of opportunity, and it has been an important driver of social progress and wealth creation.

While equal results are never guaranteed, equal opportunity has been critical in determining the Pakistani dream. Our policies have diverged from these aims. The institutes relentlessly press disadvantaged families in financial terms, highlighting the socioeconomic divide. A worrying move in Pakistan is that none of it is getting better. On the contrary, it is worsening. Various institutions have been known to broaden educational aid specifically for the purposes of national competitiveness, and we see many individuals emerging from the likes of TCF and making it to the top.

With the advent of increased competition, new attention was paid to equity concerns around dedicating financial aid, supporting the ones with humble backgrounds, and providing equal opportunity in higher education, culminating in a level playing field, the purpose of which is to alleviate the need to borrow among poor students so as not to discourage them from investing in a college education.

And so what followed was an incessant lust for the crème de la crème of institutes. Subsequently, a large part of the middle class' efforts turned to maintaining college affordability, with the cost of living increasing in parallel to this. As if inflationary pressures weren't enough, the mental stress caused by visible class divides was difficult to ignore. This disproportionately benefited families with the highest incomes.

What eventually burst the bubble was when, 10 years later, beginning with the expensive O and A levels, the postgraduate degrees' promised ladder of economic mobility became a downward slide for most without wealth. Now, as it becomes even more unaffordable and unattainable, it has strengthened class divisions and reinforced existing inequality trends.

Meanwhile, wealthier students who graduate with better means feel more comfortable attending well-resourced institutions. And those who complete degrees realise income gains. Although this was the basic premise we grew up with, the digital age has changed it all—for good. Many do not even have a degree, but the right set of skills allows them to contribute to the family's income. Those with degrees do not necessarily reach the pinnacle. It sounds particularly discouraging when one considers the weight our society extends to education as a panacea for social and economic ills.

My qualm is not about the tug of war between privileged and humble backgrounds. My concern is still not about elite educational institutions. My concern is not about the income security that comes with a degree or the lack thereof for those who do not have one.

The larger, and more pressing, issue is that, while we are dripping with social and financial disadvantage, our culture is rife with fairy tale accounts of the against-all-odds success student, fueled by good words, dedicated teachers, and ample scholarships. These success stories often forget secondary schooling and broader family dynamics. Low-income students who manage to attend elite institutions can indeed earn almost as much after graduation as wealthy students, but very few low-income students attend elite institutions. It is important to recognise how complex economic challenges are masked for the current generation of young people when considering higher education.

By admitting that the current system of education does not function as a solution to poverty, we could begin to call for more direct and effective anti-poverty policies. Our rescue plan must entail policies that should quickly and substantially do more to fix inequities that stem from citizens' attempts to get higher education. There is an immediate need to make higher education more accessible to all. And the government must recognise that the current higher education system is not a cure-all for inequality. It must commit to providing better policies to help those in poverty while also offering more solutions to make college affordable. Only then will those in poverty have the assistance they need to find their way out.

Pakistan Super League 2023

By Ali Abdullah

The Pakistan Super League has been one of the most exciting times for cricket fans worldwide, but especially for Pakistani fans. This is the time when friends turn into enemies. The whole country is supporting their favourite city and player. Families sit together and enjoy the league, using it as a time to unwind as our players compete against one another; regardless of the outcome, Pakistan wins.

Recently, the Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) announced the schedule for the Pakistan Super League (PSL) for the year 2023. PSL 2023, which is also referred to as PSL 8, will start on February 13th, 2023, with a match between Multan Sultans and Lahore Qalandars. PSL 2023 or PSL 8 will end with the final match, which will be played on March 19, 2023. The PSL for 2023 will consist of 37 matches, including three exhibition matches for women.

The PSL 8 will be played between six teams: Islamabad United, Karachi Kings, Lahore Qalandars, Multan Sultans, Peshawar Zalmi, and Quetta Gladiators. Also for this year's PSL, four venues have been finalised: Karachi, Lahore, Multan, and Rawalpindi.

In Karachi, PSL 8 matches will be played at National Stadium Karachi; in Lahore, they will be played in Gaddafi Stadium; in Multan, the chosen venue is Multan Cricket Stadium; and in Rawalpindi, the matches will be played at Rawalpindi Cricket Stadium.

As far as match timings are concerned, the opening match will start at 8:00 p.m.; other than that, all night matches will start at 7:30 p.m., while the day matches will start at 3:30 p.m.

All teams will first play each other twice in the tournament, and then the four teams with the most points will reach the play-offs. As far as the playoffs are concerned, there will be a qualifier between team 1 and team 2, and then the first eliminator between team 3 and team 4. The second eliminator will be between Eliminator



1's winner and the qualifier runner-up. So the final will be played between the qualifier winner and the Eliminator 2 winner.

The tournament is officially known as the HBL PSL because HBL has always been the tournament's main sponsor. The PSL has become a very popular tournament that takes place in the country on an annual basis. The PSL matches feature not only local players but also players from various foreign teams. When the tournament first started, due to security risks in Pakistan, all the PSL matches were held in the United Arab Emirates (UAE). But, over time, things have normalised here, and for the past few years, all PSL matches have been held in Pakistan without incident. Also, top-notch security is provided to teams, players, and venues as a precaution.

Different players were invited to the new PCB podcast. They were asked about their preparations and goals for the HBL PSL 8.

Babar Azam, the fan favourite and Pakistan Super League's highest run scorer across all seasons, revealed that a century is something he is aiming for in this season's Pakistan Super League. Babar has represented Karachi Kings and Islamabad United in the past, but during PSL 8, he will be in action for Peshawar Zalmi. Babar has been named Zalmi's captain for the league's eighth season.

Babar Azam revealed in the PCB podcast that he is always excited for every edition of the Pakistan Super League as it promises new challenges. Moreover, he said that he wants to begin a good journey with this new franchise (Peshawar Zalmi).

Talking about a PSL century, Babar Azam said that it is his dream to reach the 3-figure scoring mark in the Pakistan Super League. "I have scored two T20I hundreds and several T20 hundreds in other leagues. "I am positive about getting 100 in the PSL now," Babar added.

Despite playing 68 matches, Babar Azam has never scored a century in the PSL. He has 23 half-centuries to his name. Moreover, his highest score is 90*, which he achieved in PSL 7 against Peshawar Zalmi, and now he will be a part of Peshawar Zalmi itself.

The last season was quite an unfortunate one for Babar Azam, as he suffered nine defeats out of 10 games with Karachi Kings, and he was captaining Karachi in that season. However, he is optimistic that things will work this time. Peshawar Zalmi will kick off their PSL 8 campaign on February 14 against the Karachi Kings at the National Bank Cricket Arena in Karachi. It will be quite interesting to see how Babar plays against his former side in their opening clash.

Wasim Akram: Acting career is a full-time job



By Kaukab Jahan

When one talks about the biggest real-time star of Pakistan, the name that comes to mind is Wasim Akram. After reigning over the cricket world for 20 years, his charisma could not be diminished as the star continued his career as a commentator and television host. But now, the legend has entered the field of acting by playing a pivotal role in the comedy feature film Money Back Guarantee, releasing on Eid. He is very excited about the film and wishes it much success. The Truth International talked in detail to the cricketer/actor about his role and overall experience in the film.

How did you decide to do a film?

I have worked with Faisal Qureshi for quite some time. We did many funny television commercials for a mobile service operator. Those ads were massive hits. I really like Faisal's out-of-the-box ideas and his style of humor, which is subtle yet funny.

One day, Faisal called me and said that he had found a role for me, and when he read my part in the film, I liked that a lot. It is a very different kind of comedy role. Actually, I also wanted to try my hand as an actor. I think that whenever Faisal asks me to do anything, I am supposed to be ready most of the time. MBG was a great experience.

How difficult was acting for you?

Oh, it is really very difficult. The commercials used to be just two minutes long and finished in a couple of days with very short lines. So, it was quite easy. But I didn't know that one had to learn by heart everything that would be on screen, and if it is a longer scene with a paragraph of dialogue, you have to memorise it word for word with all the action and expression. It was not that easy for a newcomer like me.

Tell us a little about your role in the film.

I am the president of a bank in an imaginary country in the film. The bank receives hordes of money from corrupt politicians, so a heist is about to happen there.

Did you take tips on acting from anyone?

Not really. As I had done commercials before, it gave me an idea of the camera and placement. Yes, I found it quite tough on a nine-day shoot. But as my company was good and I already knew most of them, it became fun for me and a bit easier as well. I had a great time on sets and off the field.

Your wife, Shaniera, is also in MBG with you. So are you both romancing in the film as well?

Laughs! I don't think the film has a lot of romance in it, but yes, it is full of comedy, in the typical Faisal Qureshi style. Although most of the actors believe that their new film will be different, I suppose that MBG is really a different thing.

There is an on-screen tussle between you and Fawad Khan in MBG. Is it true?

Yes. In the film, Fawad Khan is the manager and my second-in-command in the bank. Actually, he wants to take over my place, and I don't want to leave my chair for anyone at any cost. It is a typical part of the world's story, all shown in a funny way.

How was the overall experience of making a film?

Oh, it was great. The sets are amazing. I must give credit to Faisal Qureshi.

You are an icon of the cricket world, while Fawad Khan is

the most celebrated actor in Pakistan. So what happened when these two stars collided?

I have known Fawad for the last many years, and we both have great respect for each other. We enjoy good humour as well, and I must say that Fawad has a great sense of humor. Like I said, all the cast, including Fawad, and the production team made me feel comfortable on sets, and I really enjoyed that shoot.

What are your hopes for the box office success of "MBG"?

I have great hopes for the box office success of "MBG." All have worked very hard. Unfortunately, COVID-19 delayed its release. So we all have our fingers crossed for its release on Eid. The film is very different. It is full of comedy, heists, and action. I hope people will enjoy it.

Do you have any pressure at the box office?

Yes, if I were a professional actor, I would be. I have a live experience of this public pressure when stadiums are packed with 10 to 20 million people and we get down to the ground for a match. So I am more anxious about my film than under pressure. I am hopeful for my fellow actors, especially the director, Faisal Qureshi. This is his first film. So yes, I feel pressure on me in that way.

We saw you on the television show "Aik Khiladi Aik Haseena" doing some dancing. Have you shaken the leg on MBG as well?

Of course. I have danced a lot in MBG and enjoyed it a lot. He just let go of the reins and allowed us to do what we wanted. As a result, I was able to move and desired to do so.

Would you continue to act in the future?

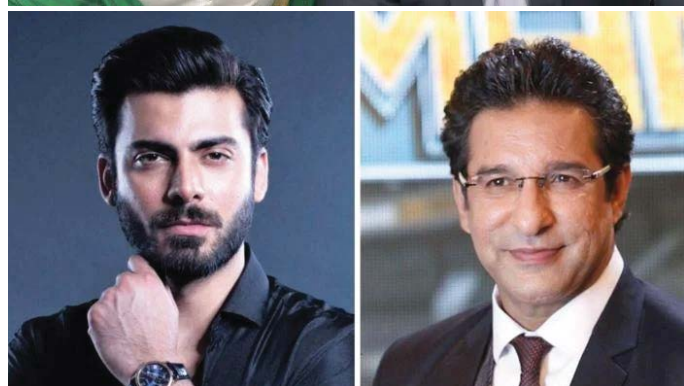
I found acting quite difficult. It is hard work and a really full-time job that needs a lot of talent and, of course, a very strong physical and mental state. I must commend all actors around the world, particularly Pakistan. Another reason for not continuing is my limited capacity, patience, and attention span to read the entire script, so I don't think I can continue acting in the future. If I get a role of 4 to 5 minutes, I will probably think about it, but not the entire movie.

Do you think there should be a movie about your life?

Yes. I think yes. My book is already out. It will soon be launched in Pakistan as well. It is a very easy and interesting book. I feel we have problems with the scarcity of funds in our country. If anyone wants to make a documentary or a biopic on my life, it will need a heavy budget. This will show me everything: my childhood, my area, my ups and downs in life, my triumphs and tragedies in career, and everything else.

Which actor do you think would be suitable for the role of Wasim Akram?

I think it is a very difficult question to answer. We have so many good actors out there. Anyone can play me. Obviously, being 6'3" can only be done by an actor with the same height.



Valentine's Day: A Celebrated Event of Love

Valentine's Day is associated with a number of martyrdom tales, including one about Saint Valentine of Rome

By Mahnur Mehfuz

Every year on February 14, Valentine's Day, also known as Saint Valentine's Day or the Feast of Saint Valentine, is observed. It began as a Christian feast day dedicated to one or more martyred early Christians by the name of Saint Valentine. Through later folk customs, it has developed into a huge cultural, religious, and economic celebration of romance and love in many parts of the world.

Valentine's Day is associated with a number of martyrdom tales, including one about Saint Valentine of Rome, who was imprisoned for helping Christians who were being persecuted by the Roman Empire in the third century. Early legend has it that Saint Valentine healed the blind daughter of his jailer. Numerous later additions to the legend have improved its connection to the theme of love. For example, an 18th-century embellishment to the legend asserts that he wrote the jailer's daughter a letter addressed to "Your Valentine" before his execution.

Another tradition holds that Saint Valentine officiated at weddings for Christian soldiers who were not allowed to get married. The event, which marked the arrival of spring, featured fertility rituals and the random matching of women and men. Pope Gelasius I forbade the observance of Lupercalia around the end of the fifth century and is frequently credited with replacing it with St. Valentine's Day, though the holiday's exact ancestry is at best hazy. Up until the 14th century, Valentine's Day was not recognised as a day of passion. The priest is said to have written a letter to his jailer's daughter, whom he had befriended and, by some accounts, healed from blindness, signing it "from your Valentine."

Despite the fact that the two saints were almost certainly the same person, some legends claim that the holiday was named after the bishop St. Valentine of Terni. Another popular myth is that Saint Valentine disobeyed the emperor's orders and secretly wed couples in order to protect the husbands from going to battle. This



explains why his feast day is connected to love. Valentines, or formal notes, first appeared in the 1500s. By the late 1700s, commercially printed cards had become commonplace. Midway through the 1800s, the first commercially produced Valentines were printed in the United States. Valentines frequently feature hearts, the traditional repository of emotion, as well as Cupid, the Roman deity of love. Birds also became a symbol of the day because it was believed that the avian mating season starts in the middle of February.

Candies and flowers, especially red roses, a representation of beauty and love, are common gifts. There are several Valentine's Day traditions that are shared by many different cultures. Valentine's Day is observed in Argentina on February 14th, followed by a full week of festivities. Brazil's version of Valentine's Day, Dia dos Namorados, is observed on June 12 instead of February 14. (February is when Carnival is observed.) Similar to Valentine's Day celebrations around the world, theirs feature presents, romance, parties, and decorations.

The Danes actually play around with Valentine's Day! They send their fans

gaekkebrev, or "jerst letters." The recipient signs the message using dots rather than their name and writes a rhyme or poem on paper that has been cut into the shape of a snowdrop or spring flower.

Approximately 28 countries celebrate Valentine's Day. Valentine's Day is a fairly mature event in Germany; there is no card-exchanging in schools. After World War II, the holiday was first observed here. The pig is a distinctive emblem of German Valentine's Day.

In Germany, pigs are a sign of luck and lust, and you can find them among chocolates, flowers, and hearts. You can find pigs with chocolates, flowers, and hearts in Germany, where pigs are symbols of luck and lust. Because Valentine's Day is seen as a Christian celebration in Saudi Arabia, religious police there in 2002 and 2008 forbade the sale of all Valentine's Day merchandise and instructed shop employees to remove all red goods. A black market for roses and wrapping paper has emerged as a result of this ban.

More than 140 Muslims were detained by the religious police in 2012 for celebrating the festival, and all red roses from flower

shops were seized. Muslims are not permitted to observe the festival, and non-Muslims are only permitted to do so in private.

Additionally, it has been noted that Valentine's Day is not supported by Hindu, Muslim, or Christian populations in India.

Modern-day purists of Hinduism and Islam view the holiday as a product of India's globalisation and a cultural invasion from the West. Due to them being "foreign to Indian culture," the Shiv Sena and the Sangh Parivar have urged their supporters to avoid the festival and the "public admission of love."

Although political elites are behind these demonstrations, the demonstrators are middle-class Hindu men who are worried that globalisation would undermine their society's traditions, such as arranged marriages, Hindu joint families, full-time mothers, etc. In spite of these challenges, Valentine's Day is growing in popularity in India. Some Muslims, depending on the act, believe that it is forbidden to celebrate holidays like Christmas or New Year's because they go against their religious principles. Since the genesis of Valentine promoted adultery and promiscuous relationships, Muslims consequently view the celebration of Valentine's Day as haram and believe that Muslims should abstain from it since it contradicts Islamic principles.

Additionally, the customary Valentine's Day celebrations are not the world's most religious events. Traditional Valentine's

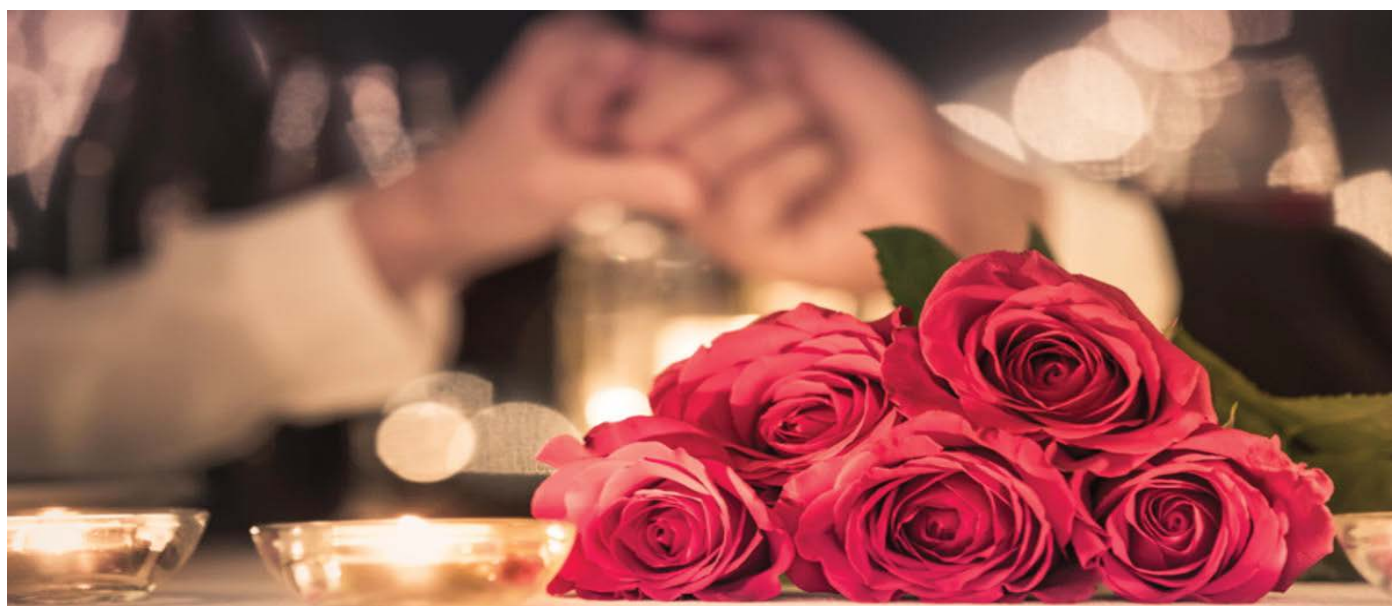


Day customs include singing, musical adultery, and drinking, all of which are prohibited in Islam. Because it is a clear law that Muslims are not allowed to celebrate or observe religious holidays that are not mentioned in the Quran, doing so is prohibited and is classified as haram. Similar to the Islamic ban on bankers and the restriction on music in mosques, it can still be controversial for certain individuals.

We are not permitted to celebrate Valentine's Day for any reason. In Islam, it is not acceptable. The spirit of Valentine's Day is in opposition to Islamic teaching. Valentine's Day has changed from the real event that took place in previous years to a romantic occasion. The couple at the time was encouraged to commemorate their romantic love today. The incident changed

the topic from pure love to lust and involved relationships between women and men as well as boyfriends and girlfriends. You might also be interested in reading about Islamic tort law. It's only a matter of time before someone who is focused on Valentine's Day bliss becomes sidetracked by it. Events, rituals, purchases, or even extra cash for a gift are things people can easily forget.

The worst thing is that if they allowed one of the other religions or cultures to become a part of them, it might cause someone to adopt a different culture or tradition. Humans are social creatures that are actually susceptible to manipulation or being led astray by a trigger. You might also wish to study up on the Islamic law of gravity.





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