

Fortnightly

The Truth International

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Elections can end crises in Pakistan

Toshakhana Record
Many leaders stand exposed

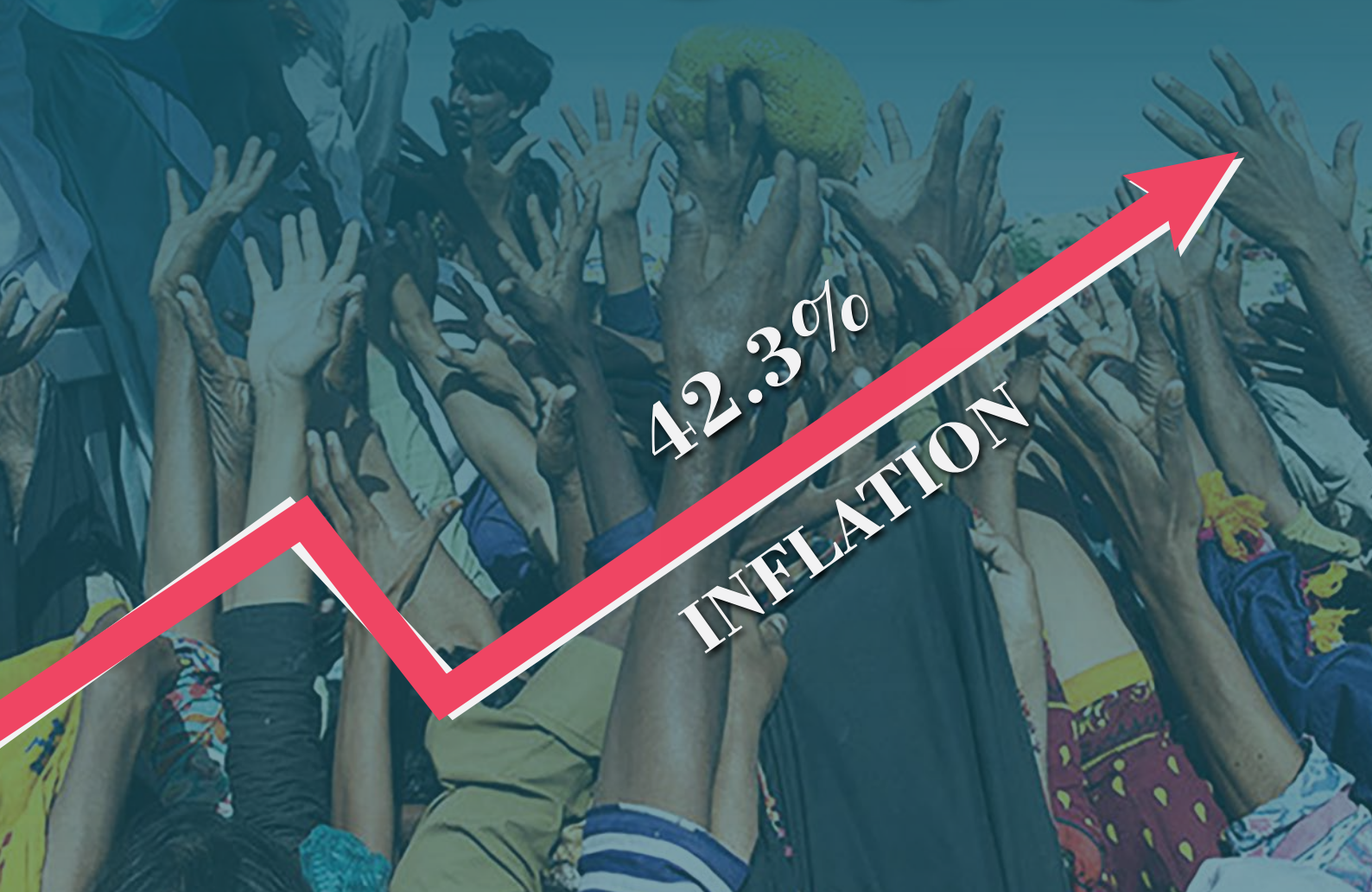
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CONTENTS

Editorial

The party getting out of hand by Hammad Ghaznavi – **Page 05**

Opinion

Napoleon's disease and a collegemate by M A Niazi – **Page 06**

The State of Pakistan by Ashraf Jehangir Qazi – **Page 07**

The only way out? By Maleeha Lodhi – **Page 09**

Politics

Will Imran Khan survive attempts to remove him from political scene? By Umer Farooq – **Page 10**



Ruling alliance achieving goals before heading to polls? By Tahir Niazi – **Page 12**

Imran Khan's possible arrest, disqualification, and aftermath by Sarfraz Raja – **Page 14**

IK narrative attains strength in current economic plight of masses by Ahmad Waleed – **Page 16**

The politics in Sindh by Azfar Ashfaq – **Page 17**

Many exposed as Toshakhana details surface by Syed Irfan Raza – **Page 18**

Economy

The Heartless IMF people and Pakistan's 'Bailout programme' by Javed Mahmood – **Page 20**



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12 banks report Rs. 585 billion record pre-tax profit in 2022 by Javed Mahmood – **Page 22**

Inflation could average 42.3% in first half of current year by Anum Akram – **Page 23**



With depleting gas production, the country's reliance on imported LNG will increase manifold by Syed Khalid Mustafa – **Page 25**

Saudi oil giant, Aramco earned a record-breaking profit of \$161 billion (£134bn) in 2022 mainly because of humper increase in oil prices by Javed Mahmood – **Page 27**

Investigation

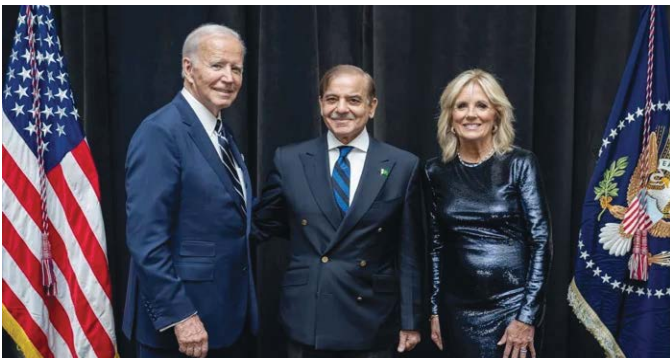
Debt Re-profiling by Azeem Waqas – **Page 30**

Foreign Affairs

TTP presence in Afghanistan being realized globally by Syed Fakhar KaKaKhel – **Page 32**

Ukraine war hits strategic stalemate by Dr Syed Rifaat Hussain – **Page 34**

US new Central Asian strategy: Implications for Pakistan by Dr Raza Khan – **Page 36**



Archrivals Iran and Saudi Arabia agree to end years of hostilities in deal mediated by China by Mostafa Salem, Adam Pourahmadi and Nadeen Ebrahim – **Page 38**

POWERCHINA's 10th CPEC Anniversary: Green, Sustainable Development for Pakistan by Zubeda Anjum Niazi – **Page 40**

National

This Ramzan to begin on same day across Pakistan? By Mahnur Mehruz – **Page 41**

The wrecked traffic situation by Hamza Qureshi – **Page 42**

Rupee plunge awfully affect Hajj package by Noor Aftab – **Page 43**



Education

University of Essex, UK, creating job-ready graduates, says VC by Zarghon Shah – **Page 45**

Health

Gynaecologist Dr Tahira Kazmi shares three practices women should adopt if they want to stay alive by Wara Irfan – **Page 48**

History

The History of Bahawalpur: A Journey Through Time by Pavan Manzoor – **Page 49**

Technology

Elon Musk Aims to Bring Starlink to Pakistan, Awaits Approval from Government Regulator by Pavan Manzoor – **Page 51**

Sports

The last ride by Ali Abdullah – **Page 52**

Qalandars saving the day by Ali Abdullah – **Page 53**



Entertainment

In the future, I hope to take on more significant roles. Shaniera Akram by Kaukab Jahan – **Page 54**

Obituary

Qavi Khan — the last of the legends by Muhammad Suhayb – **Page 55**

The party getting out of hand

By Hammad Ghaznavi

Despite the announcement by the Election Commission of Pakistan of polling schedule in the Punjab and KP, uncertainty persists. The scheduled date – 30th April – is approaching but election preparations seem much behind the clock. So far, the ECP has been refused assistance by the federal government and other institutions concerned. The slogans of pehlay ehtasab phir intikhab (accountability first, elections later) are also in the air. Why the confusion, despite vivid orders of the Supreme Court to hold elections in the two provinces within 90 days of the dissolution of the assemblies as necessitated by the constitution?

It seems no political party in the country, other than PTI, is keen on going into provincial and general elections separately. The PML-N, one of the two biggest political parties in the country, is insistent on a 'level playing field' for the elections. Maryam Nawaz, PML-N's chief organizer, explains this point of view: "Elections within 90 days is a constitutional requirement. However, free and fair election is also a constitutional requirement. How can elections be free and fair if one of the key politicians Nawaz Sharif is kept out of the electoral arena? Particularly, now that everyone knows of the judicial victimization that he has suffered at the hands of dodgy judges." She is also tough on the judiciary, alleging that the courts are lenient with PTI chief Imran Khan who should have been behind bars in various 'open and shut' cases like Tosha Khana, Foreign Funding, Tyrian White, etc.

On the other hand, the biggest conundrum the ECP is faced with is the absence of assistance of the institutions concerned. For one, the army, considering the rising terrorism, seems reluctant to spare its 350,000 personnel for the election security duties as demanded by the ECP. The government has also not responded positively to the ECP's request of Rs 20 billion for the election arrangements.

There are constitutional puzzles to be resolved as well. The constitution clearly states that the General Election will be held under a caretaker setup, both at center and in provinces. If the Punjab and KP elections are held separately, there will be political governments in two provinces when the general election approaches. Will the constitution be followed then? The political governments will be replaced with a caretaker arrangement for the elections? It would have been in the fitness of things if the court had also decided about it in its judgment regarding the 'election within 90 days'. This is certainly a confusing situation.

Unfortunately, all the possible scenarios look chaotic. If Imran Khan is disqualified or jailed, will the PTI participate in the elections? There is a big question mark. If the PTI loses, the provincial elections, will Imran Khan accept the results? Not at all. He has already shown distrust in the 'biased' caretaker setup in the Punjab. Imran Khan, to put it mildly, is not a huge fan of Chief Election Commissioner



Sikander Sultan Raja either. If PTI wins the provincial election, it will lead to a fierce battle between the federal and Punjab governments. These are all chaotic scenarios without much hope of getting out of the current political and economic turmoil.

There is no 'neutral' forum available in the system that can mediate between warring political parties. At times, the army has been playing the guarantor in agreements between the political parties in the past. With Imran Khan openly accusing the military high command, that route perhaps is not available. The judiciary also has serious issues of credibility, especially for the PDM parties. In the absence of PTI, the crippled parliament is also in no position to resolve a political controversy. How to get out of this political, economic and constitutional crisis?

Political dialogue seems the only solution of the multiplying chaos. Political leadership has to realize it as soon as maybe, since time is running out. The luxury of not talking to each other is no more available to the political lot. Timing of the next election can be mutually agreed on. A free, fair and transparent election and smooth transition of power is something that's much more important than anything else. It is time to show responsibility and political maturity before the deepening constitutional and political crisis gets out of everyone's hand.

Napoleon's disease and a collegemate



By M A Niazi

It seems that the Jail Bharo Tehrik was not as serious as the 2014 dharna. That ended with the APS Peshawar massacre, and the Jail Bharo Tehrik ended after the Supreme Court verdict stating the obvious: when an assembly is dissolved, elections must follow in 90 days.

It is true that the dharna had run out of steam when it was called off, and Imran Khan was casting excuses to bring it to an end. But it had not become a joke, which the Jail Bharo Tehrik had been, from the get-go. Once again, Imran proved right. I mean, he didn't present himself for arrest, and there were some mean-spirited people who wanted to know why he was so anxious to get people arrested when he was not willing to get arrested himself.

I wonder now how those arrested on the first day are doing. In particular, I wonder how Makhdoom Shah Mahmud Qureshi is holding up. It took the Jail Bharo Tehrik for it to be disclosed in court that he suffers from piles.

That put me in mind of a nickname that was inflicted on a fellow who was a year senior to me in college, Maulvi Bawaseer. He was thus ennobled because a) he had a beard and b) because he had once in an unguarded moment admitted to some classmates that he was a martyr to them. What is

one supposed to call, Qureshi, Makhdoom Bawaseer? I don't quite see why, but I was irresistibly reminded of the advertisements that were daubed on so many walls, all over the city, and on roads outside it, for a remedy for 'Khooni Bawaseer'. The remedy was not mentioned in words as prominently as the disease. I presume Makhdoom Sahib has avoided that particular complication.

However, he should not be ashamed of the disease, for one of his fellow sufferers was Napoleon. He wasn't a very healthy man, for he also had a bad gastric ulcer. Do you remember his most famous pose? With one hand in his coat? Well, that was because he used to get some relief by pressing on the painful spot. Ask a doctor, and he will tell you that you have to be pretty bad for pressing it to give your relief. Well, at least no one has claimed an ulcer as grounds for bail.

Perhaps the PTI should revise its attitudes towards bail. For a start, no one dresses for the part. No yellow kameezes with blue polka dots, no colorful dhotis, no pumps without the benefit of socks, no fright wigs, no warts on the cheek. How do they expect to get bail if they don't look the part?

Of course, it's all political persecution. Like is happening in India, where the

Delhi Deputy CM, a stalwart of the Aam Admi Party, has been nabbed for corruption. Even though the AAP, like the PTI, had campaigned to get rid of corruption. The BJP is bent on making up charges, just like the ones bout the Toshakhana watches.

The government is focusing on non-issues, instead of dealing with real issues, like the Barkhan IED blast, which probably got something to do with the private prison of Abdur Rehman Khetran. Though I would be very surprised if the struggle for the Sardar-ship of the tribe, did not figure, if only as a motive for the last murder which was revealed through autopsy, where the body was not that of Khan Muhammad Marri's wife, but of a young woman criminally assaulted, who was shot dead, and over whose face acid was poured. Sounds like someone didn't want to get caught.

Sounds like the same motive was at work in the butchering of Kong Kong socialite Abby Choi, whose body parts were found in a fridge, and whose head, torso, and hands are still missing. Among the suspects is her former father-in-law, an ex-cop. I think that makes sense because an ex-cop would want the corpse dismembered and never found. You get off when the prosecution can't prove.

The State of Pakistan

By Ashraf Jehangir Qazi

The reality of Pakistan, shaped by its wayward masters and bureaucrats, manifests itself each day. Not even December 1971 compares with the listless gloom that engulfs the country today. Ever since the loss of our eastern wing and the judicial murder of our first elected prime minister, our story has degenerated from the tragic to the pathetic to the absurd.

Ways out of this desolation exist. But they are barred by the corruption and cynicism of predatory 'leaders' and 'defenders' who accumulate vast fortunes through the criminal abuse of public trust; by the resignation of their prey who are preoccupied with getting through the day; and by the confusion of our intelligentsia and the irresponsibility of our intellectuals.

Every major institution and influential group of people has failed the country: the government; the army and intelligence apparatus; the judiciary; parliament; political leaders and parties; the media; the educational and health systems; the civil services; the landed, business and religious elites; etc. Together they have ensured a failed state. The primary culprits are known. They couldn't care less.

The Quaid, the Pakistan Movement and the people of Pakistan are incessantly mocked. In his last days, the Quaid told the Raja of Mehmdabad "I am surrounded by traitors". Today, the country is besieged by them. No enemy of Pakistan matches the enmity of its own rulers. They laugh all the way to their foreign banks and talk of national security and economic stability while the ruled sink below the poverty line to wither and die.

The time for questions has gone. Only answers matter, which only actions and organised movements can supply. There are social and rights activists, entrepreneurs and professionals who make a difference.

They need to coalesce and reinforce each other to generate transforming momentum. The people need servants. A populist panders to a vote bank and sees citizens as subjects. A leader serves citizens.



What can be done? Plenty. First, ask yourself what you can do. Then get in touch with someone, anyone, share your thoughts, expand your circle, give your time, discuss, differ, agree, do, and review. Repeat a thousand times all over the country and see Pakistan change, grow, and succeed. Enemies will begin to melt away.

The constitutional/electoral crisis is important but secondary. The primary crisis is domestic governance by malfeasance exacerbated by the threat of climate catastrophe which will mount year by year. Without decent governance, elections will only mimic and insult democracy and existential threats will end our existence.

Governance is a function and process of commitment, competence, priorities, reform, resources, feedback, information, devolution — and ownership. Pakistan has all in actual and potential abundance. They have to be mobilised in the face of systemic and treacherous power elite betrayal. They will be mobilised to save our children and grandchildren, and theirs.

Pakistan's foreign policy has to contribute to the saving of Pakistan. Principled and realistic policies will contribute to national survival, regeneration and prosperity. Peace is a prerequisite. While Kashmir is a matter of principle, it is also a human rights challenge.

Pakistan has a responsibility to seek a rapprochement with a very difficult India in order to increase the prospects for justice in Kashmir and to render multifaceted cooperation with India politically feasible.

Principled compromise approaches can increase the probability of reciprocity, transform zero-sum confrontation into positive sum cooperation, reduce security expenditures, and with greater interactions allow less mutually hostile narratives to emerge.

There is no reason today why Pakistan should not be willing to negotiate a no-war agreement with India. Reaching a principled understanding on Kashmir could greatly help such an endeavour. Accordingly, playing to the gallery on Kashmir in these circumstances is of no help to the Kashmiris.

Afghanistan is another case where the hijacking of foreign policy has led to policy disaster. Pakistan's Afghanistan policy has been a gift to India. Respecting Afghanistan's independence and gaining its confidence is the way towards developing the closest of ties with it and accessing the massive potential for regional cooperation with Central Asia and Iran.

Opportunistic policies towards the Taliban do not help. Nor do policies that vary from



furtive support to public hostility. What we want for the people of Pakistan must be what we wish and support for the people of Afghanistan. Within this framework all the issues with Afghanistan can be handled in a mutually satisfactory manner.

Pakistan must act with the generosity of a larger neighbour. It is not enough for Pakistan to claim it is following such a

policy. Afghanistan should feel this is indeed so.

The US has reversed the course of globalisation in its effort to pre-empt the emergence of China as a global rival. Within a de-globalising world Pakistan must prioritise its relations within its region which is Asia. China is in Asia. It is a proven friend of Pakistan. But a failing

Pakistan will not be able to realise the potential of the relationship.

The ups and downs of CPEC testify to this. In contrast, the US policy towards Pakistan is implicitly premised on Pakistan being a failing state without options, which is just fine for the social and power structure in Pakistan. The importance of the US for Pakistan cannot be gainsaid. But Pakistan needs to change the premise of the relationship.

A word about the economy. The Americans, the IMF and sometimes the Chinese are blamed for Pakistan's economic woes. The IMF may be part of the Washington Consensus. But it does not impose itself on Pakistan. Pakistan goes cap in hand to the IMF. It has its conditions. Pakistan can take them or leave them.

However, Pakistan's rulers want IMF cover for not doing the reforms they don't want to do, and for imposing the costs of their dereliction on the people of Pakistan. Those reforms can be implemented independently, which would enable Pakistan to deal with the IMF on better terms. Similarly, the Chinese cannot be blamed or expected to compensate for Pakistan's irresponsible economic governance.

Courtesy Dawn.

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The only way out?

By Maleeha Lodhi

Another phase in the country's turbulent politics opened with the Supreme Court ruling that elections to the Punjab and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa assemblies should be held within the constitutionally stipulated 90-day period. The assemblies were dissolved in January but the PDM government, which installed caretaker administrations in the two provinces, prevented their governors from fixing a poll date.

In the face of this reluctance, consultations by the Election Commission of Pakistan went nowhere. When President Arif Alvi announced an election date the government condemned this action while the ECP held back from doing anything.

Against the backdrop of this confusion and uncertainty, the SC was obliged to step in and take suo motu notice of a matter which was of constitutional importance and had a time-bound nature. In a 3-2 verdict, the apex court directed the president to suggest a date for the Punjab poll and Governor Ghulam Ali a date for elections in KP after consultation with the ECP. If elections could not be held within 90 days, the ruling said, then ECP should propose a date that "deviates to the barest minimum" from that deadline. No sooner had the SC decision been announced when spokespersons of the ruling coalition began to question the judgement and deploy various arguments against it.

The most curious and legally bizarre interpretation came from the attorney general. He argued that the petition had actually been dismissed 4-3, as two judges had dissented from the verdict, while another two judges had earlier recused themselves from the hearing; that meant the 'majority decision' was not in support of the SC ruling and was, instead, in the government's favour.

The federal law minister echoed this line in TV interviews claiming he was speaking in his personal capacity. Meanwhile, Interior Minister Rana Sanaullah claimed, equally disingenuously, that "The petition of PTI stands rejected and suo motu proceedings stand dropped in the light of the decision."

The government only signalled its weakness by these interpretations as well as

place itself in a potentially disadvantaged position if not on a collision course with the senior judiciary in the days to come. The debate and controversy it aimed to rake up did little to obscure the fact that the verdict was a setback for the ruling coalition, which just doesn't want to go to the polls.

Last month, when the Lahore High Court ordered the ECP to consult the PDM-appointed governor, Baligh ur Rahman on the poll date, he challenged this and went into an intra-court appeal. Subsequently, ECP too filed a similar appeal.

Fresh elections are the only means to escape from the political quagmire.

The ruling coalition now has little choice but to implement the SC judgement, which is legally and constitutionally binding. ECP moved to comply with the order by writing to President Alvi proposing Punjab polls can be held between April 30 and May 7.

Alvi has approved April 30 as the election date. If the government refuses to comply with the SC ruling it will be defiance of the apex court, which will lay it open to contempt proceedings.

The ruling coalition can now either comply reluctantly or in a way that shows leadership and responsibility. Although it is loath to engage with opposition leader Imran Khan, who also refuses to talk to the government, it should make an effort to reach out to him and see if a mutually acceptable date for general elections can be agreed.

If the effort succeeds, for which Khan would also have to show uncharacteristic flexibility, national and provincial elections can be held simultaneously, on the same day, the way they always have in the past.

The SC even offered this opportunity when during the proceedings it asked the legal counsel of both political parties to consult with their leadership on a consensus date. But this opportunity was not seized by political leaders. Although time is short, if agreement on simultaneous elections can still be reached by the warring sides the SC can be approached and conveyed the commonly agreed date. The court will likely sanction such an outcome.

On the other hand, in the absence of an accord, an anomalous situation would be created if provincial elections in Punjab and KP are held in April and national polls in, say, October/November, after the National Assembly completes full term in August.

That would mean that there will be elected and not neutral caretaker governments in place when general elections take place. The spirit behind Article 224 1-A of the Constitution would be defeated. This enjoins the government and opposition to agree on installing caretaker governments to oversee elections. More legal challenges can then be expected on this issue before general elections are anywhere near.

There are other more consequential political implications of holding provincial and general elections on different dates. The PDM government, seeking to delay national polls, seems to overlook the fact that if PTI was to do exceptionally well in the provincial elections, this would set the template for general elections. Khan would have the political momentum with him to take his party more easily past the winning post later.

If PDM parties feel they need to buy time to improve their electoral prospects, it defies logic as to how their position will change in any appreciable way in a few months. If anything, the government is losing political ground in the face of soaring inflation, sky rocketing energy and fuel prices and a worsening economy.

Indeed, if 'salvaging the economy' was one of the key justifications for the PDM government to hang on to power, it is now wearing thin. The economy is in meltdown mode, the IMF deal remains elusive, the rupee is in freefall and market/business confidence is hitting an all-time low. International rating agencies have again begun to warn that Pakistan might default on its sovereign debt.

The finance minister's typically angry response does nothing to calm markets. With the political and economic crisis posing a mounting challenge to the country's stability, elections and a fresh mandate may be the only way out of the present quagmire.

Courtesy Dawn.

Will Imran Khan survive attempts to remove him from political scene?

IK faces threat of disqualification, physical elimination; Pak state machinery develops sophistication in political engineering projects; coercive state machinery against Imran Khan can smash his image of invincibility

By Umer Farooq

Pakistani state machinery has an age-old tradition of removing popular political leaders from the scene—political leaders who refuse to fall in line. This could mean physically eliminating a political leader as had happened with former prime minister Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, who was hanged through a dubious judicial process. It could mean disqualifying a political leader from holding public office or barring him from participating in country's politics as has happened with former prime minister Nawaz Sharif, who was first disqualified from holding public office and later barred from participating in country's politics when he was removed from the office, being president of his party through a judicial order.

There have been other examples of removing popular political leaders from the scene, but in those cases the involvement of the country's state machinery is less obvious or less clear. For instance, on December 27, 2007, former prime minister Benazir Bhutto was assassinated in Rawalpindi. Her party and her family accused former military ruler late General Pervez Musharraf for being responsible for the assassination. Till today there is no clear evidence to decisively conclude who was responsible for her assassination, but nonetheless Benazir Bhutto, one of the most popular political leaders' Pakistani societies has ever produced, was physically eliminated from the political scene.

Elder Bhutto's judicial murder was a great tragedy, it created permanent divisions in our society, which, over the years, have mutated into different forms, but nevertheless these forms have persisted in our political life till this day. Benazir Bhutto's assassination created a civil-war like situation in the province of Sindh.

Nawaz Sharif's disqualification is one of the factors that contributed in



creating deep polarization that exists in our society in the present times. I think, if Pakistan has ever to become a law-oriented society, its political and cultural history will repent and renounce the way how we have treated our popular political leaders. How they have been sent to gallows, how they have been humiliated in dubious cases and how they have been physically eliminated.

Ironically, we as a polity have not learned any lessons from our history. The shocks and crises the removal of popular leaders from political scenes have generated in our society, were not enough lessons to prevent them from undertaking future such endeavors. Imran Khan has clearly emerged as the most popular political leader in the Pakistani society, if public opinion polls are to be believed.

Not at all surprisingly, he, according to many media commentaries and analyses, is facing both the threat of disqualification from holding public office, and allegedly a threat of physical elimination through assassination. Imran Khan at present is facing several legal cases in which he could be sentenced to jail and as a consequence could face disqualification from holding public office. Few months back there was a serious attempt on his life when, according to his own version of the

events, several gunmen simultaneously fired bullets with automatic weapons aimed at him during a political procession at GT Road close to Lahore. Imran Khan has repeatedly claimed that another conspiracy to physically eliminate him has been hatched by those in power.

Now two things about Pakistani politics are becoming clearer with each passing day: first, that elections, both provincial and parliamentary, are just round the corner. Second, Imran Khan has clearly emerged as the most popular leader in Pakistani society. How successful he will be in translating his popularity into a comfortable majority will depend on two factors, a) Imran Khan's relations with the military establishment, as the establishment not only controls the coercive machinery of the state, it also exerts considerable influence on popular public opinion and as a consequence electoral politics of the society. b) how successfully his party cadre and leaders manage electoral politics. Whether he will be able to secure the support of Punjab's electorate? Whether his party cadres can manage the inter-party tussles around which electoral politics revolves in the big cities and urban centers of Punjab.

The patterns of Pakistani political history make it clear that the most



popular political leaders do lose elections if they find themselves on the wrong side of the military establishment. As recently as 2018 public opinion polls showed Nawaz Sharif to be the most popular leader but his party still lost parliamentary elections in that year because he was clearly on the wrong side of the then military establishment. It is not necessary that the military establishment physically intervene in electoral politics to defeat someone who they oppose. In 2018 the tactful use of coercive machinery against Nawaz Sharif and his family were clearly instrumental in creating an image of Sharifs as losers.

Imran Khan, who, according to many commentators, is facing the threat of disqualification and even jail sentence, must be watchful about any “tactful” use of coercive machinery against him. But maybe it is already too late for Imran Khan: his rhetoric and political narrative has already inflicted irreparable damage to the image of the military establishment and has already made everyone in power corridors to be deeply insecure.

How it will reflect on Imran Khan’s political future is not very difficult to judge. Second factor will be influenced by the fact as to how well organized his party cadre is. There is no doubt that PTI would be facing a very tough opponent in the shape of PML-N which is not only well organized, it is also well funded and it has a well-trained cadre in electoral politics of urban Punjab, where the main battles would be fought.

Imran Khan has two advantages as far as the politics of electables in Punjab is concerned. Recently he has been joined by Chaudhry Pervaiz Ellahi, master of politics of electables in Punjab. Secondly, Imran Khan, according to public opinion polls, is the most popular politician—a patently attractive factor for electables of Punjab.

Pakistani state machinery has now developed a lot of sophistication in its political engineering projects. For instance, they have learnt that physically eliminating popular leaders doesn’t remove them from the hearts and minds of the masses. This was amply demonstrated by the case of Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto—Bhutto’s judicial murder took place in 1979 and even after the passage of more than 40 years Bhutto’s influence as a

factor in the country’s electoral politics is still alive. Pakistan’s powers are not naïve not to comprehend this reality.

Second lesson is that legally removing political leaders from the political scene through judicial process will not work either. Nawaz Sharif still exists as a mightily potent factor in the country’s electoral process as a reality despite the fact that the military establishment tactfully used coercive machinery of the state to remove him from the political scene in 2017.

Although state machinery has learnt these lessons from their past experience, the need and requirement for the establishment to get rid of popular leaders has not gone away. So, what is the solution? The peculiar circumstances and results of Nawaz Sharif’s case, perhaps, provides an answer to the establishment’s predicament.



The state machinery and establishment did nothing to permanently remove Nawaz Sharif as a factor in electoral politics of the country. They didn’t touch his electoral strength nor made any serious attempt to divide his party. What they did, served their purpose well. They removed Nawaz Sharif from the political scene at the nick of time, a few weeks before July 2018 parliamentary elections by sending him to jail, creating an image of him as a loser in an electoral contest.

In Pakistani politics, electoral victory is not simply a function of leaders’ popularity. The leader has to be well connected within the state machinery and must be on the right side of the military establishment. And the leader must exude an aura of invincibility or at least display an image of winners in the forthcoming parliamentary elections.

A serious and ruthless use of coercive machinery against Imran Khan can simply devastate his image of invincibility, which he has so far successfully retained. Imran Khan’s rhetoric and political narrative based on his unaccommodating attitude towards his opponents whom he accused of rampant financial corruption, will be one of the questions the so-called guarantors of this political system would be pondering on these days.

Will a clear majority for Imran Khan bring stability to the political system, especially if Imran Khan implements his rhetoric and starts prosecuting his opponents on corruption charges? Will Imran Khan’s opponents, most of whom have a constituency of their own, accept him as legitimate ruler? Some indications of how the things will evolve has started to surface with Maryam Nawaz Sharif stating clearly that in order to hold fair elections it is necessary

that “unjust” and “unfair” verdicts against Nawaz Sharif should be reversed.

The kind of attitudes and behavior our political class is demonstrating could prove to be a kiss of death for our political system. The political confrontation and tensions we see in our society can potentially become a cause of concern for our national security managers. The society is deeply divided and they are at each other’s throats. Political opponents have turned into blood thirsty enemies. Time to ponder for those who thought political confrontation between major political parties will create favorable circumstances for their institutional interests. Time to shame those who laid the foundation of this confrontation with their 2014 soft intervention.



Ruling alliance achieving goals before heading to polls?

PTI says Khan implicated in over 75 cases; for third time in seven months PEMRA bans IK speech telecast; with elections around targeting major political leader to spark instability

By Tahir Niaz

Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) and the federal government appear 'determined' not to violate Supreme Court's order to hold general elections for the Punjab and Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa Provincial Assemblies within the constitutional time-frame. Every move on the part of the federal government and the ECP indicates they are gradually moving towards the elections. The ECP is meeting on regular basis, discussing preparations for conducting elections amid reluctance from the governor Pakhtunkhwa in announcing the election date.

ECP has announced schedule for the Punjab Assembly elections to be held on April 30 (Sunday). Parties within the ruling alliance seem disinterested in launching their respective election campaigns; and on the other hand they are not allowing their common rival, PTI to start its election campaign. Events of the past few weeks suggest the government has planned a clamp down on Imran Khan. According to PTI, Imran Khan has been implicated in over 75 cases as he can be found encamped in Lahore after the attempt on his life in Wazirabad a few months back.

Police teams from different cities and provinces have been dashing to Lahore to arrest the PTI chief from his Zaman Park residence in connection with the criminal cases registered against him since he was thrown out of power via a no-confidence move, less than a year ago. In the latest government attempts, a Quetta police team reached Lahore on March 10 to arrest the former prime minister of the country. However, Balochistan High Court salvaged Imran Khan and suspended his arrest warrants issued by a local court, for 15 days.

Meanwhile, a large number of charged PTI supporters have been camping around their leader's house in Lahore and frequently



face off with the arresting police parties. Nobody knows what turn the next stand-off between Imran's loyalists and the police takes. The government is of the view that Imran Khan must appear in courts as well if he is fit enough to lead a party rally as the latter uses 'security threats' as repeated excuses to evade court appearances. According to Maryam Nawaz, the PML-N stalwart, Imran Khan is 'ill for courts but fit for rallies.'

Imran Khan was being tagged as coward for not leaving his 'bunker' in Lahore's Zaman Park. And when he decided to lead a public rally to express solidarity with the judiciary on March 8, the interim Punjab government imposed section 144 of the PPC in the city, apparently just to block his movement along with his supporters. So what optics the government was creating by resorting to tear-gassing and lathi-charging the PTI supporters when they were assembling at Zaman Park?

As tensions over efforts to arrest Imran Khan were still fresh, PEMRA, the digital media regulatory body, took the opportunity to ban Khan's speeches from being aired on TV channels--a move often dubbed as political censorship. For the third time in

around seven months, PEMRA banned Khan's speeches and press talks from being aired on Pakistani TV channels. However, Lahore High Court suspended the fresh Pemra ban until further orders.

A similar restriction had previously been trashed by the Islamabad High Court on September 6 last year, for violating fundamental rights. Another was, however, quickly withdrawn by the PDM government in November last year for 'being against democratic norms'.

PEMRA has a tarnished history of silencing political leaders. Similar bans were imposed on Nawaz Sharif and Altaf Hussain after they were declared persona-non-grata by the power that matters. It seems that plans are now on the anvil to push Khan away from the public eye using similar tactics.

Starting with registration of criminal cases against PTI top leadership under various changes including sedition, terrorism and murder-attempt, to the bid for Imran Khan's disqualification from electoral politics, strive for his arrest; and from efforts to push him out of public eye by disallowing telecast of his speech to



suspending licences of the TV channels which spare time for the PTI, the government is apparently maneuvering a walkover in the electoral arena.

Stop Imran Khan from moving in public; if he shows up, don't let him speak and if he speaks, ban its telecast; and if TV channels telecast his speech, suspend their licences -- this is what the government has been ostensibly pursuing before heading to polls.

The meeting between ECP representatives and the KP governor on March 8 remained an exercise in futility as the latter didn't give a date for the Provincial Assembly elections. Response from ministries of interior and finance to the ECP request for security and funds respectively for provincial elections itself speaks of the ruling alliance's intentions about general elections. Security agencies also presented a bleak picture of the law and order situation, advising ECP not to hold provincial elections at this stage: a version almost similar to position they took before the Supreme Court suo-moto.

PTI is squarely under pressure at the moment. The government is doing its utmost to delay elections and at the same time, pushing to crush the Imran-led party. Death of the PTI activist Ali Bilal in Lahore is the latest of a series of incidents which suggest that the former ruling party is facing worst kind of suppression at the moment.

Given the purportedly scripted correspondence, meetings and maneuvers among state institutions which have a role to play in holding the elections, it appears that elections in the two provinces are still 'so near yet so far' despite announcement of the election schedule.

Meanwhile, the ruling alliance is exploring each and every avenue which might possibly offer an opportunity to escape elections. Reluctance on the part of ruling alliance to contest elections is quite understandable as it has almost lost even before start of the political match due to bad governance, rising inflation, skyrocketing energy and fuel prices, lack of an appealing narrative and courage to face the situation. The ruling alliance needs to buy time to improve its election prospects. The question is how their position will change remarkably in a few months time.

The ruling alliance tried its level best to stop dissolution of the two Provincial Assemblies through whatever means. For that part of the story, the alliance was 'just' in its lawful, constitutional, political and democratic struggle. But once the situation demanded fresh elections, it appeared 'undemocratic' on its part to run for elections; and instead use coercive means to suppress a common opposition. On the other hand, it is quite baffling why state institutions were moving back-and-forth when it comes to holding the elections.



No one among the PDM parties seems bothered about any possible violation of the constitution. Pakistan People's Party has, however, started preparations for the elections in Punjab with Rana Farooq, the president of PPP's central Punjab wing instructing all the interested candidates from the province to submit their nomination papers from March 12 to 14. The PML-N has also invited applications for party tickets but it seems they are not mentally prepared for the elections yet.

The main party in the PDM ruling alliance, Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz still wavers in ambiguity despite the announcement of the election schedule. It is still busy advocating the advantages of holding elections in the entire country at the same time. Excuses that are being offered by the party, range from financial constraints to security concerns, holy month of Ramadan, fresh digital census and the need for holding elections in the entire country at the same time.

It seems PML-N is still double-minded. The

PML-N's newly-appointed chief organizer, Maryam Nawaz, is currently on a division-wise tour of Punjab to revive party ranks. But the party is showing continuous hesitation in calling it an election campaign, apparently fearing a loss to the party's narrative against the impending elections.

The most comic and legally bizarre interpretation of the Supreme Court decision on the Provincial Assembly elections was offered by the attorney general and the federal minister for law.

They had argued the petition had actually been dismissed 4-3, as two judges dissented from the verdict, while another two judges had earlier recused themselves from the hearing; meaning thereby that the 'majority decision' was not in support of the SC ruling and was, instead, in the government's favour. Interior Minister Rana Sanaullah claimed equally dishonestly that "the petition of PTI stands rejected and suo-moto proceedings stand dropped in the light of the decision."

Registration of cases against Imran Khan on regular basis suggests the ruling alliance does not know how to 'deal' with Imran Khan sans resorting to undemocratic tactics. With elections around the corner, targeting a major political leader will only spark more instability and friction within the masses, something the country can ill afford at this juncture. The ruling coalition now has little choice but to implement the SC judgement as fresh elections are the only means to escape from the continuing political quagmire.



Imran Khan's possible arrest, disqualification, and aftermath

Toshakhana worries IK most; PTI legal team seeks delays in cases; govt may arrest Khan at any stage

By Sarfraz Raja

Action and thrill continue in Pakistani politics with FIRs, warrants, arrests, prisons, courts, and bails as news stories splashing around, either on social media or mainstream news channels.

With the government not coming slowly, the Tehreek-e-Insaf finds itself at the receiving end, this time. Many PTI leaders have been jailed including some volunteers in the jail bharo (fill the prison) movement but the expected or anticipated arrest of party chief Imran Khan still remains the talk of the town, making the political scenario more uncertain and keeping PTI leaders and workers on their toes. In the present political scenario questions that arise are: whether Imran Khan will be arrested; will Khan be disqualified and if so, how PTI would react?

Charges and cases against Imran Khan

Not just one, two, or few cases but Imran Khan is booked in more than seventy cases on different charges all over the country, as claimed by PTI spokesmen. The number of cases could be an exaggeration but it's a fact that cases against IK are in several dozens with different kinds of charges.

Corruption charge

Very few were familiar with Toshakhana a few years back but now there are few who might not know it. It was an Islamabad-based journalist who took the matter to the court after refusal by the government to provide him details of gifts presented to the then prime minister Imran Khan during his official foreign visits. Consequently, some revelations surfaced about the sale and purchase of Toshakhana gifts by Imran Khan hitting the media headlines and creating a storm in the political arena.

Now Toshakhana is actually the main case against Khan which was filed by a member of the ruling Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz, contending the former prime minister had bought gifts given by foreign dignitaries from the state gift repository but failed to disclose them in his assets in declarations submitted to the Election Commission of Pakistan. The PTI chief has denied these accusations saying he bought the gifts according to official rules and guidelines and declared them in his tax returns too.

In October last year, the ECP after hearing the arguments, suspended Khan from membership of the National Assembly, accusing him of corrupt practices and ordering relevant institutions to initiate proceedings against him.

This is the case that indeed worries Imran Khan the most as a decision against him, which is very much on cards, could eliminate him from politics at least for a term of five years. In this case, Khan has been trailed under article 167 of the Elections Act which describes false declaration; and article 174 which provides a penalty for this offense. It says that 'any person guilty of the offence of



corrupt practice shall be punished with imprisonment for a term which may extend to three years or with fine which may extend to one hundred thousand rupees or with both.'

Any of these punishments could disqualify Imran Khan to contest any election for any seat of any house of parliament for the next five years. After the ECP decision against Khan, the PTI chief's position is considered fairly weak in this case, and that's why IK's legal team is following a strategy of delaying the courts' proceedings until now.

Terrorism charges

In another high-profile case in August last year, Imran Khan was charged with terrorism for remarks made at a public rally in Islamabad against police officials and a female judge who had ordered the police remand of one of his close aides and his former chief of staff Shahbaz Gill, who accused police authorities of torture in custody.

In his speech, Imran Khan had allegedly threatened action by taking legal courses against top Islamabad police officials-- inspector general and deputy inspector general of police--and the female judge, Zeba Chaudhry. The Islamabad High Court dismissed the charges against Khan in September, saying his comments did not rise to the level of terrorism and later after his apology, IHC dismissed a case of contempt of court as well, warning him to be careful in the future. But the case of violation of section 144 by Khan and other PTI leaders is still pending in court.

Illegal funding

The foreign, illegal or PTI funding case was first highlighted in 2014 when Imran Khan was on protest against Nawaz Sharif's government in the capital and it was his own former close aide and party's founder member Akbar S Babar who came up with allegations of illegal party funding with some documented proofs.

From the very first day, independent political commentators dubbed them as serious allegations but PTI took it lightly and blamed the PML-N government for backing their former party spokesman. Although PTI called these allegations baseless it never found itself comfortable, defending them in courts and before the ECP. PTI's



major defense was a plea to investigate the funding of other parties as well including their rivals PML-N and PPP. In August last year, the Election Commission finally announced its verdict.

In this case, which dragged on for eight years, PTI was accused of receiving funds from abroad, which is illegal in Pakistan. The PTI has denied the allegations saying all those who gave money were Pakistani citizens. Legal experts contend if the decision of the ECP is perused properly and effectively in courts, it could result in the former premier and his PTI being banned from politics.

Tyrian White case

Another case about Khan's alleged daughter Tyrian White is also in the Islamabad High Court. Actually, this is the case that too often chased Khan throughout his political career, and his political rivals used it to hurt his reputation. A three-member larger bench under the chief Justice of Islamabad High Court is hearing this case but it's also in the early stages. Legal experts consider it as another case that could end in the disqualification of the PTI chief for providing a wrong declaration by hiding details regarding his family members in his nomination papers.

Cases that can cause IK arrest

Despite "clouds of arrest" hovering around Khan for weeks, the PTI chief couldn't be arrested amid the issuance of some bailable and non-bailable arrest warrants by courts due to his nonappearance in different cases.

A major case against him right now is the Toshakhana which is in the indictment stage. This case is also about irregularities in the purchase of gifts from the state treasure house. National Accountability Bureau (NAB) has already started investigating this case and has summoned the former prime minister and his wife former first lady Bushra Bibi too. NAB has the legal authority to arrest the PTI chief and his wife in case they find them non-cooperative in the investigation.

The party funding case is also under investigation by Federal Investigating Agency (FIA) in line with the directions of the Election Commission. Although this case is in its initial stages Imran Khan has not appeared before FIA. On the other hand, he already got bail-before-arrest by the banking court judge so there is no chance of his arrest in this case until his bail is valid. In the same case, ECP has initiated proceedings to confiscate illegal funding received by PTI.

Imran Khan as party chief had submitted annual asset details of his party accounts. Legal experts believe that Khan could be trailed under article 62/63 of the Constitution of Pakistan for submitting a false declaration with ECP but there is no chance of his arrest in this case at any stage.

Another case the ECP is hearing is the contempt of the Election Commission. In this case, IK in some of his speeches had used 'derogatory' remarks for members and the chief of the commission. Due to his non-appearance in case, the ECP has issued his bailable warrants.

This case is again in the indictment stage but for that Imran Khan has to appear before ECP. In case of a decision against him, Imran

could be disqualified from being a member of the parliament for a period of five years, like in the contempt case against another former prime minister, Yousuf Raza Gillani. PTI sources view Toshakhana as the case that is threatening the political future of Imran Khan, while all other cases are of no worry for them.

Govt reluctance to arrest Khan

The arrest of Imran Khan was on cards since he was ousted from power in April last year. Even IK and his party were also anticipating such an arrest. There were some occasions when Khan could have been arrested but it was not done. Sources within the government alliance say that the majority in PML-N is in favor of Khan's arrest including Interior Minister Rana Sanaullah. But some of their allies were opposing the move and were of the view that it could benefit Khan politically and his popularity may further rise.

On other hand, whenever there were indications of Imran's arrest, his party workers were called to his residence either at Banni Gala in Islamabad or Zaman Park in Lahore. In case of any arrest attempt, the situation could go worse.

The government accuses Khan of hiding behind human shields to avoid arrest. Some in the ruling parties suggest that government shouldn't arrest Imran Khan and instead leave the matter to the courts. They feel there is a strong chance that courts could order IK's arrest or any sentence of imprisonment; so in such cases, the government wouldn't be blamed for any political victimization and they would act on court orders.

Recently to comply with the non-bailable arrest warrants by the court, Islamabad police reached Khan's residence in Lahore where he was "unavailable" according to his chief of staff. Following some recent happenings and statements it appears the government has made up its mind to arrest Imran Khan at any stage regardless of the consequences.

Implications of IK arrest, likely reaction

Imran Khan is our "red line" that's how PTI reacts to rumors of Khan's arrest. Party leaders threaten countrywide protests in case of such acts but how strong and effective these protests could be.

Government spokesmen believe they would handle any situation if Khan is arrested. In recent weeks and months, many PTI leaders were imprisoned including some of the volunteer arrests during the jail bharo movement including party Vice Chairman Shah Mehmood Qureshi, Secretary General Asad Umar, and Vice President Fawad Chaudhary.

But how the party would react to the possible arrest of its chief? Sources say a protest strategy is under consideration with sit-ins, road blocks led by local leadership, in case of any possible arrest of Khan. In case of IK disqualification by the court, Imran Khan wouldn't be eligible to continue as party chairman. In such a situation, Khan would be designated 'supreme head' of the party and his Vice Chairman Shah Mehmood Qureshi as acting chairman; but there are certain things to be settled before that. PTI is following a wait-and-see policy.



IK narrative attains strength in current economic plight of masses

Maryam's Imran-thrashing pacifies PML-N supporters to some extent; PDM's no election hurry rational troubles IK most

By Ahmad Waleed

Maryam Nawaz did well to reenergize her party that was facing the worst times since its inception. She has been primarily given the job of countering party's major rival Imran Khan who has captured the PML-N stronghold, Punjab. In every speech she makes, Maryam lambasts Imran Khan with the strongest possible rants.

Besides, she hits out at her assigned targets-- the characters in the establishment and judiciary who the PML-N supremo, Nawaz Sharif, believes were behind his disqualification and ouster from power to bring Imran Khan. She has succeeded in her task to some extent. But, is it enough?

Senior PML-N leadership still thinks otherwise if they stand strong enough to the onslaught launched by its arch rival, Imran Khan. "We know the reality. Imran Khan's Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) is going to outsmart PML-N and other parties of the country in the upcoming elections. Once Imran Khan returns to power, we will find ourselves behind bars once again as he is going to be tougher on his rival politicians this time," says a senior Lahore-based PML-N leader, requesting not to be named.

Although Imran Khan has been engaged in tackling dozens of cases registered against him and he has restricted himself to his Zaman Park Lahore residence, his narrative is gaining strength with each passing day specifically in the wake of tough economic decisions being taken by the PDM government and miseries of common masses who are facing worst ever inflation in the history of Pakistan.

A recent Gallop Pakistan survey suggested over 60% Pakistanis held PDM responsible for current price-hike and inflation in the country. In such a situation, PTI Chief Imran Khan has nothing to worry about despite multiple and sequential odds.

Although Imran Khan is pressuring the government to announce the date for Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Assembly election following the announcement for the Punjab Assembly election date, his distrust is getting stronger that the government seems in no mood to hold election. "They have plans to orchestrate yet another attack on my life to delay the elections," Khan expressed his paranoia recently.

From economic mismanagement to Khan's personal life so far, Maryam Nawaz has gone to every extent possible to smear Imran Khan. However, Khan seems undeterred by all these tactics.

The PDM government has succeeded in merely creating an impression that they are not in a hurry to hold elections. Only this PDM rational really offends Imran Khan. Maryam Nawaz repeats it in her speech everyday saying, "first, balance the scale (of justice) then hold the election next morning. I will have no objection."



She wants the same treatment for Imran Khan that was meted out to her father Nawaz Sharif. She wants to see IK disqualification before the next elections or her father's disqualification be declared null and void besides clearing all cases against him.

Maryam's Imran-thrashings have pacified the PML-N supporters to some extent as before her return from the UK, Imran Khan had an open space to malign the Sharifs since there was no other leader including her uncle Shahbaz Sharif who could respond to Imran Khan with this much force and loudness.

Even after all this somewhat 'successful' campaign by Maryam, the politics of Punjab has taken a new turn. The Sharif family's claim on Punjab has suffered a setback after it decided to join hands with PDM when the country was in an economic turmoil, in order to have its own Prime Minister Shahbaz Sharif, who was more than eager to grab the most coveted seat of the chief executive of the country.

This only benefitted Imran Khan. Most of the PML-N leaders now believe it was the biggest mistake which has damaged their politics in the province. Now, they want the establishment to help them in return for kicking Imran Khan out of power corridors in guise of a no confidence move. Although the PDM enjoys all the support from the establishment, its fears are growing about the popularity of Imran Khan.

PML-N believes Nawaz Sharif should return just ahead of general elections – if being held anytime soon – to help restore image of the party which has been ruined by the phenomenally unpopular economic decisions as it is in no position to provide any relief to the masses under the current circumstances.

Some of the party leaders suggest the PDM government should go for general elections without any fear that Imran Khan will return to power. "We should wait for another five years as Imran Khan has no planning or vision and is incapable of running the government and he will repeat the same mistakes which will help us in the long run," one of the leaders opined.



The politics in Sindh

PPP wants the next general election to be held on the basis of the results of the 2017 census

By Azfar Ashfaq

While the seventh population census is underway across the country in a smooth manner, almost every party in Sindh as well as the provincial government has cast doubt on the mega exercise, fearing its results will again be manipulated. The gravity of the situation can be gauged from the fact that the Pakistan Peoples Party, which is a major coalition partner of the PDM government, has threatened to quit ministries if Sindh's grievances on the headcount are not addressed.

The sixth national population and housing census was held in Pakistan in 2017, and only the province of Sindh (and its many parties) refused to accept its provisional as well as final results. In 2021, the Council of Common Interests approved the census of 2017 with a majority vote (Punjab, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, and Balochistan approved it), but decided to start the process for a fresh census immediately so that general elections would be held in 2023 on the basis of its results. The Muttahida Qaumi Movement-Pakistan, which was the coalition partner of the then Pakistan Tehreek-i-Insaf government at the center, and the opposition by the PPP's Sindh government, had forced the federal government to hold the census in five years instead of the usual 10-year interval.

The Seventh Population and Housing Census, which has formally begun on March 1, is the first-ever exercise in which enumerators are collecting data digitally using tablets, while people can also give their details electronically on a self-enumeration portal, which was open from February 20 until March 10. Unlike past censuses, this time the condition of counting an individual on the basis of his or her national identity card is waived off. Also, an individual who has been living in any part of the country for the past six months is being counted as a resident of that particular city instead of counting him or her as a resident of his or her permanent address.

The census has always been a tricky subject in Sindh due to its complex demographic situation. During the 1970s, the province

was practically divided into Sindh-rural and Sindh-urban by the then government of Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, and a 60:40 job quota was reserved in all government departments on the basis of rural and urban population. However, the unofficial population of Karachi alone is said to have surpassed 90 percent of the population of rural parts of Sindh, but it has been intentionally kept lower to maintain the status quo in terms of representation and the number of constituencies in the National Assembly and the Sindh Assembly.



However, the undercounting of Karachi's population is eventually a loss for a province whose true population has never come to light. Demographer Dr. Mehtab Karim of Cornell University recently told a seminar that estimates provided by other sources had suggested that Karachi's population had exceeded 21 million by 2017, but it was reported as a mere 16 million in 2017.

Against this backdrop, when the census process began, the MQM-P was the first party to allege a conspiracy was being hatched to show a lower population in Karachi. Party's senior leader, Dr Farooq Sattar, went to the extent of saying his party will not accept any census that shows Karachi's population is less than 40 million.

Sindhi nationalist parties also joined the chorus. Qaumi Awami Tehreek leader Ayaz Latif Palijo, Sindh Taraqqi-pasand Party's Dr Qadir Magsi, Sindh United

Party's Zain Shah, different factions of Jeay Sindh Qaumi Mahaz, and even Sindhi intellectuals raised their voices against the digital census and demanded that the exercise be postponed till the rehabilitation of flood-affected people. They all choose to ignore the fact that it was Sindh that rejected the results of the sixth population census, and the seventh one is being held on its demand.

The PPP, which has been ruling Sindh for the past 15 years, however, had adopted a different strategy. First, it objected to certain shortcomings and demanded that the computerized national identity cards be made mandatory for the census and that there should be a separate column in the census form for illegal immigrants. Then PPP chairman and Foreign Minister Bilawal Bhutto-Zardari and former president Asif Zardari came forward with Sindh's reservations over the digital census. And on March 10, in what appears to be a policy statement, Sindh Information Minister Sharjeel Inam Memon made it clear that the province would not accept the results of the census if its grievances were not addressed.

"We have conveyed our reservations to the federal government, and their response is awaited." "The Sindh government and all political parties and civil society want to have full confidence in the digital census and that each and every person residing in the province should be counted," he said while speaking at a press conference.

"Actually, PPP wants the next general election to be held on the basis of the results of the 2017 census because elections are going to be held in Punjab and KP before the announcement of the results of the seventh census," said a Sindh government official, requesting anonymity.

Regardless of the exact motives and genuine concerns, the process has already been put under a question mark, and it seems the results of the census will cause another controversy as far as Sindh is concerned.



Many exposed as Toshakhana details surface

- Zardari, Nawaz retained bulletproof vehicles; Imran took multiple watches
- Most of the gifts acquired free of cost; millions of rupees spent on gifts given to foreign delegate

By Syed Irfan Raza



The government on Sunday made public the details of foreign gifts retained by public office holders — presidents, prime ministers, federal cabinet members, politicians, bureaucrats, retired generals, judges and journalists from 2002 to 2022.

The details of Toshakhana were updated on the website of the Cabinet Division. Prominent personalities who benefited from the Toshakhana gifts included President Dr Arif Alvi, Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif, former prime minister Imran Khan, ex-prime minister Nawaz Sharif, ex-president Asif Ali Zardari, late military dictator Pervez Musharraf, former premier Shaukat Aziz, ex-PM Yousuf Raza Gilani, ex-PM Shahid Khaqan Abbasi, ex-PM Raja Pervaiz Ashraf, ex-PM Zafarullah Khan Jamali, Senate Chairman Sadiq Sanjrani, Finance Minister Ishaq Dar, Foreign Minister Bilawal Bhutto-Zardari, Sheikh Rashid Ahmed, Khursheed Kasuri, Abdul Hafeez Shaikh, Jehangir Tarin, Shah Mehmood Qureshi, and Dr Attaur Rehman among others.

As per the documents, most of the gifts were retained by the office holders free of cost except for a few ones. Mr Zardari and Nawaz Sharif received one bulletproof vehicle each during their visits and retained these vehicles after paying some money to the Toshakhana.

Pakistan Tehreek-i-Insaf (PTI) Chairman Imran Khan and his wife received five precious wristwatches, ornaments and other items. Pervez Musharraf and Shaukat Aziz retained hundreds of foreign gifts without paying a penny.

In return for the gifts received from foreign dignitaries, these public office holders, especially the rulers, gave away gifts worth millions of rupees to the foreign delegates.

Asif Ali Zardari

The details revealed that Mr Zardari retained one BMW 760 Li white (security version) on Jan 26, 2009. The value of the car was fixed at Rs27.3 million while the former president retained it after paying a little more than Rs4m.



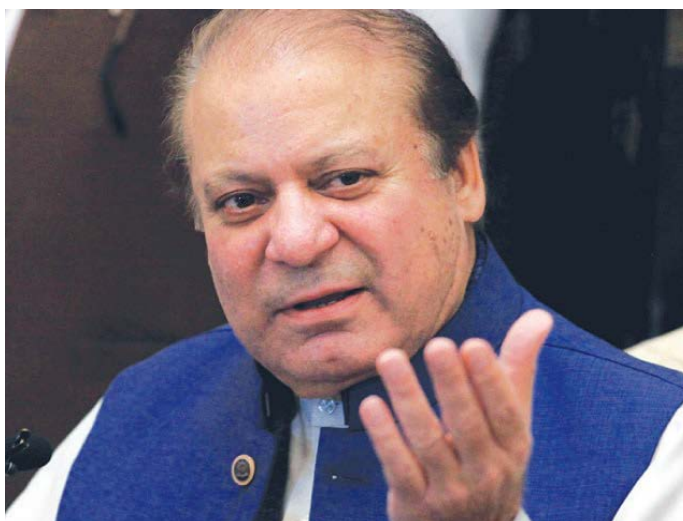


In March 2011, he retained a wristwatch worth Rs1m after paying Rs158,250 for the watch and some other items. In June 2011, he retained a wristwatch worth Rs1.25m after paying a sum of Rs189,219 for the watch and some other items. In Oct 2011, the PPP leader retained a Cartier wristwatch worth Rs1m after making a payment of Rs321,000 for the watch and a gun.

Nawaz Sharif

The PML-N supreme leader was gifted a Mercedes Benz car on April 20, 2008 which was worth Rs4.25m.

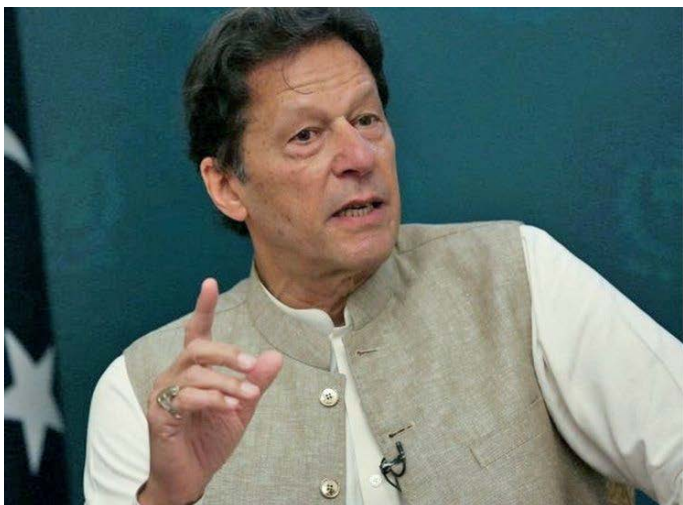
The former PM retained it after paying Rs0.636m, as per the document. The document did not mention in what capacity Mr Sharif received the vehicle.



Imran Khan

Mr Khan received five precious wristwatches, including a Graff watch, worth Rs3.8 million. He retained these gifts in Oct 2018 after paying a sum of Rs0.754m.

In September 2018, he retained a Graff wristwatch worth Rs85m, a pair of cufflinks worth Rs5.6m, a pen worth Rs1.5m, and a ring worth Rs8.75m after paying Rs20m for these items.



Another Rolex watch worth Rs1.5m soon followed and the former prime minister retained it after paying Rs294,000 for the precious item.

In November 2018, Imran Khan retained another Rolex wristwatch worth Rs900,000 after paying a sum of Rs338,600 for the watch and some other items.

In October 2019, he retained a boxed watch, assessed at Rs1.9m, after paying a sum of Rs935,000. In September 2020, Imran Khan retained another Rolex watch, assessed at Rs4.4m, after paying Rs2.4m for the watch and a number of other gifts.

In the same month, his wife Bushra Bibi kept a necklace worth Rs10m, a bracelet worth Rs2.4m, a ring worth Rs2.8m, and a pair of earrings worth Rs1.85m after paying a sum of Rs9m for these gifts.

Arif Alvi

President Dr Arif Alvi's wife, Samina Alvi, retained a necklace worth Rs1.19m in October 2019 after paying Rs865,000 for it and other items in the jewellery box.

The president himself retained a Rolex wristwatch worth Rs2.5m in February 2022 after paying Rs1.2m.



Sheikh Rashid retained dozens of gifts, including two gold coins, on Feb 3, 2003, after paying a mere Rs3,420.

Khurshid M Qasuri received several gifts in 2005 and retained these items free of cost.

Raja Pervaiz Ashraf retained a Graff wristwatch assessed at Rs890,000 in November 2012 after paying a sum of Rs218,000 for it and other items.

Courtesy Dawn.

The Heartless IMF people and Pakistan's 'Bailout programme'

IMF is not a professional multilateral lender at all, it is a remote-control minion of the United States. Though China is also a leading funding country of the IMF, the mission of the heartless people's life is to please their real masters sitting in Washington

By Javed Mahmood

ISLAMABAD: During the past two to three months, International Monetary Fund (IMF) officials are using different tactics to delay the resumption of the loan programme for Pakistan. The economic team of Pakistan and IMF officials are holding talks, directly and virtually, since January 2023, but the IMF people are showing the least interest in giving timely further loans to Pakistan. Even by the first week of March 2023, the coalition government completed all the upfront requirements, including some harshest conditions with the aim to unlock a \$1.1 billion IMF loan. The harshest conditions are making life miserable for the masses in Pakistan, but for the heartless people, this is not an issue at all.

So far, despite all efforts of the government, the IMF did not show any interest in quickly releasing the next tranche though the economic crisis in the country is deepening day by day. Pakistan is urgently seeking an IMF loan _ to bolster economic activities, enhance foreign exchange reserves, support the flood-hit people, and move forward. But the heartless IMF people are completely indifferent to the woes of millions of Pakistanis, especially those who have suffered a lot because of the catastrophic floods and tormenting rains in October last year. And since then they are waiting for help from the government and the international community.

Why is Pakistan desperately seeking an IMF loan?

Why is the IMF delaying the resumption of the loan programme despite the fact that Pakistan has fulfilled all the upfront conditions of the multilateral creditor?



Many people in Pakistan and outside the country are once again talking about the political motives of the IMF. Some are saying that the remote-controlled stooges of the IMF are punishing Pakistan through the harshest conditions just because Pakistan is an ally of China and implementing the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC). The CPEC is being termed a game-changer multi-billion dollars project. Nonetheless, the CPEC is an eye-sour for the remote-controlled puppets in the IMF, whose motto of life and profession is to please their Masters, especially the United States of America. IMF people claim to be champions of tackling economic crises by supporting countries with problems, but on top of their agenda will always be the tacit motives of their Masters.

A few days ago, China has publicly exposed the United States, saying "the radical fiscal policy of a developed country" is one of the major reasons for the economic crisis in Pakistan and other developing countries. Chinese spokesperson did not name the United States directly, but the words she used made it clear who is influencing the IMF and how they manipulate things to create problems for those who are not fully onboard with the USA and are close allies of China.

Woes of Millions of Flood-Hit Pakistanis

In 2022, Pakistan has faced massive climatic destruction because of floods and tormenting rains. Millions of people became homeless, countless suffered unprecedented losses to their homes, businesses, livestock, farmlands, and standing crops. Pakistan has estimated more or less \$40 billion worth of total losses. The secretary general of the United Nations Antonio Guterres himself spent a week in Pakistan with marooned people in the flood-hit areas. On his appeal, the international community donated around \$10 billion for relief and rehabilitation works at an international conference in Geneva.

Unfortunately, donations, grants, and loans meant for flood rehabilitation have also stuck up just because of the heartless people (IMF officials), who are delaying the resumption of the loans programme. It is because the donors want Pakistan to revive the IMF loan first to obtain \$10 billion for flood relief and rehabilitation activities. Just imagine that millions of hapless Pakistanis devastated by floods in October last year are still looking towards the Pakistan government and

the international community for help to lead a better life _ understandably not the one the heartless people are leading in the world. The heartless people can drain billions of dollars in the Ukraine war, but supporting the flood-affected people is not their priority.

Seeing the large-scale devastation caused by floods and heavy rains, the IMF and the international donors must have set aside their 'intriguing demands' and supported millions of Pakistanis in need without wasting time. Alas, their 'terms and conditions' are more essential than the needs of millions of hapless people in Pakistan. The more the IMF people delay the resumption of loans to Pakistan, the more time will be wasted in reaching out to deserving people.

IMF and its Harsh Conditions

Also, the harsh conditions of the IMF pertaining to frequent increases in taxes, electricity, gas tariffs, devaluation of the rupee, free-float of the dollar, and a cut in development spending, are some of the bitterest conditions of the International Monetary Fund which have started biting the masses through unending waves of price-hikes. Analysts believe that the annual inflation which is around 31 percent at this time, will shoot up to around 60 percent. In other words, inflation will take away 60 percent of the incomes of the masses, leaving them with 40 percent to survive.



Senator Raza Rabbani Questions the IMF package

Former chairman of the Senate and incumbent PPP Senator Mian Raza Rabbani issued a press statement on March 6, 2023. In his statement, Mian Raza Rabbani said, "The dragging of the feet by the IMF on signing the agreement and reluctance of friendly countries _ except China, to help sans the IMF, Parliament must be taken into confidence."

He said that it appears that Pakistan is being softened up to play a role that is against its national and strategic interests.

PPP Senator also said that the people have a right to know if, our nuclear assets are under pressure or if our strategic

relationship with China is under threat, or if we are being called up to play role in the region which will facilitate the military presence of an Imperialist power.

These and other questions require a policy statement by the Prime Minister on the floor of a Joint Sitting, he added. Senator also said that the question of the TTP and the increase in terrorism has also found no discussion or briefing from the government. It seems that be it the PTI or present governments want 'azadi' (liberty) from Parliament and the Constitution, 1973.

The IMF programme will expire in June 2023

Another matter of concern for Pakistanis is that the current IMF programme will expire in June 2023. After June, once again the people and the government will be in trouble in managing things in an organized manner. Why is the IMF giving tough times to Pakistan and its people just for a few months? Why did IMF not extend the current programme to 2025 and beyond to ensure economic stability in Pakistan? This is a very intriguing aspect and it shows the 'political ambitions' of the IMF. The coalition government tried to convince the IMF to extend the ongoing programme to June 2024, but the stooges in the IMF did not consider it because of their political ambitions.

To sum up, the IMF is not a professional multilateral lender at all, it is a remote-control minion of the United States. Though China is also a leading funding country of the IMF, the mission of the heartless people's life is to please their real masters sitting in Washington.

12 banks report Rs. 585 billion record pre-tax profit in 2022

The banks reported their annual profits to the Pakistan Stock Exchange (PSX), the State Bank of Pakistan (SBP), and the Securities and Exchanges Commission of Pakistan (SECP). It is mandatory for the banks to report profit, taxation, and dividends to PSX, SECP, and their shareholders

In sharp contrast to the ongoing economic crisis in Pakistan, 12 banks operating in Pakistan reported a record profit of 585 billion rupees in the calendar year 2022. It is the pre-tax profit the banks reported to the State Bank of Pakistan and the Pakistan Stock Exchange.

This time and for the first time, Meezan Bank has taken the lead over all other leading banks in earning profit in 2022. Meezan Bank earned Rs 88 before tax profit for the year 2022.

The second highest profit-making bank in Pakistan was Habib Bank Limited. It reported 77.02 billion rupees in profit before paying taxes to the government. MCB Bank closely followed the HBL with 75.34 billion rupees in profit in the calendar year 2022.

United Bank Limited is the fourth largest bank in terms of profit-taking. It reported 68.43 billion rupees pre-tax profit last year. The state-run largest commercial bank in size _ the National Bank of Pakistan earned 63.60 billion in profit before tax.

In profit-making, Allied Bank Limited and Bank Al-Falah Limited remained far behind their competitors. Allied Bank reported 46.78 billion rupees profit while BAFL earned 36.67 billion profit before taxation.

Similarly, Bank Al-Habib emerged as the seventh largest bank in the country and it earned 33.05 billion pre-tax profit in 2022.

Askari Commercial Bank reported a 27.47 billion rupees profit while Habib Metropolitan Bank earned 28.46 billion rupees pre-tax profit last year, followed by Faysal Bank with a 22.39 billion profit. Bank of Punjab also earned 18.37 billion in profit before tax for the year 2022.

All these banks have reported their annual profits to the Pakistan Stock Exchange, the



State Bank of Pakistan, and the Securities and Exchanges Commission of Pakistan. It is mandatory for the banks to report profit, taxation, and dividends to PSX, SECP, and their shareholders.

Pakistan has been facing a serious crisis since the beginning of the year 2022. The crisis was magnified further with the change of regime _ the ouster of Imran Khan and the arrival of the coalition government led by Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif.

Ishaq Dar keeps mum on eight banks' exchange-rate scam

Finance Minister Senator Muhammad Ishaq Dar is keeping mum on eight banks' involvement in the exchange-rate scam. In a recent press conference, Dar told the media that the inquiry report was ready against the bank. He promised to share details of the report with the media along with action against banks.

In the first week of October 2022, Governor State Bank of Pakistan Jameel Ahmad briefed the National Assembly's Standing

Committee on Finance and Revenue. He said that investigations had been launched against the banks' role in the manipulation of the exchange rate. He said that Standard Chartered Bank, United Bank, Habib Bank, National Bank, Meezan Bank, and Allied Bank are being investigated in this scam.

Governor SBP also pointed out that show-cause notices have been issued to NBP, ABL, and Standard Chartered. SBP Governor Jameel said that the remaining banks would be investigated in the next phase.

Chairman of the committee, MNA Qaiser Sheikh, directed the central bank to take appropriate action against all the banks, found guilty of exchange-rate scams.

"The committee noted that during volatility in the exchange rate, the banks earned exorbitant profits."

Minister of State for Finance, Secretary Finance, SBP Governor Jameel Ahmed, Chairman FBR, and other senior officials of the departments attended the meeting.

By Javed Mahmood

Inflation could average 42.3% in first half of current year

Rising inflation threatens macroeconomic stability; Feb spike in consumer price inflation highest since 1974; increasing prices to choke life of common masses

By Anum Akram

Being a fundamental measure of a nation's health, inflation sheds light on the state of the economy and good macroeconomic principles guiding it. A stable inflation rate not only fosters economic progress but also helps the most vulnerable members of society, the impoverished and those on fixed incomes. With a few notable exceptions over the previous ten years, inflation had increased globally.

Like every other nation, Pakistan has its share of difficulties. External factors like economic pressures, geopolitical tensions, and natural catastrophes are to blame for some of these issues. However, a large portion of Pakistan's issues are actually of its own making and are the product of a variety of internal factors and choices that its leaders and citizens have made. The International Monetary Fund bailout alone is getting the economy back on track, but some economists fear that IMF rescue alone isn't going to be enough to bring the economy back on track. Inflation in Pakistan could average 42.3% percent in the first half of 2023 before moving lower. Economic management that is tenacious and sound is what the economy actually needs.

Following a significant devaluation in the currency and as the government proposed an increase in energy prices and taxes to comply with the International Monetary Fund's loan conditions, Pakistan's consumer price inflation spiked to 31.5% in February 2023, the highest rate since June 1974.

Due to mismanagement, corruption, and a dearth of funding for vital infrastructure and social welfare initiatives, Pakistan's economy has also struggled. A small elite now enjoys disproportionate wealth and power while the majority of the population continues to live in poverty, creating a sizable wealth disparity. Due to their disproportionate exposure to non-discre



tionary purchases, low income households continue to be under a great deal of pressure as a result of rising inflation. The economist predict that as a result of the high cost of food, which people are unable to avoid, poverty rates will rise in coming months. Food prices are expected to go even higher as we approach Ramadan. Surging prices over the past few months hit many people's lifestyle. These increasing prices might not affect the rich but will choke the life out of the common people.

The poorest sections of society have been impacted the hardest by the economic crisis, as they struggle to make ends meet and see the cost of necessities rise faster than their income. They gripe about high utility bills despite seldom use, exorbitant costs for necessities, lack of social safety nets, and their struggle to make ends meet. People from diverse middle class socio-economic levels expressed similar worries because the economic crisis has made it very challenging for them to maintain their standard of living. This is especially valid for people who rent their homes. This group hardly has any savings left due to rising rents and high electricity costs. Instead, a lot of people have been taking on debt to continue living their regular lifestyles. Office workers have become more vocal about the growing gap between their pay and spending, particularly during

the past year. Similar to this, business owners of medium-sized companies complain about governmental rules when their profits decline.

For a number of reasons, the recent spike in inflation causes significant concern. If we look at the history, the inflation throughout the 1960s averaged 2.6 percent as indicated by a rise in the wholesale price index (WPI). The WPI's constituents, including food, raw materials, manufactured goods, and gasoline, likewise had average annual growth rates ranging from 2.0 to 3.4 percent in the 1960s. During the 1970s, inflation surpassed the single-digit mark. The annual average rate of growth for the WPI and its components was between 12 and 18 percent. Due to two significant oil shocks, a significant devaluation of the currency, and disastrous floods that ruined agricultural supplies, there was double-digit inflation in the 1970s. In the 1980s, Pakistan once again saw single-digit inflation. With the exception of 1990–1991 when the Gulf War caused the rate of inflation to rise to 11.7 percent, it stayed below 10 percent during the first three years of the 1990s. Only now, in the current fiscal year, is the growing inflation posing a significant danger to macroeconomic stability.

Main reason for inflation were the devolution of rupee. When Musharraf tried to



control the price of dollar by artificial ways and now Dar did the same thing and Pakistani rupee became the Asian's worst currency within few months. The government imposed tax of 170 billion rupees in February to revive a six-billion-dollar bailout which led to hike taxes on natural gas for domestic and industrial consumers from 16 percent to 112 percent. Both national and international factors play a major role in inflation.

We have everything, rich in natural resources. But we can't utilize them because of illiteracy of people and none of the leader were interested in the state's betterment. Everyone was busy saving politics rather than nation and its people. The IMF, Palestinians, and Chinese are once again the focus of the country's pleading gaze. We have visited the IMF with a begging bowl about 22 times since gaining

our freedom. The total amount of interest payments due on the government's debt obligations and pension payments were more than the federal government's net income, Atif Mian wrote in The New York Times. The troops and the rest of the government apparatus are funded by borrowed funds.

The complex interplay of historical, political, economic, and social factors in Pakistan is primarily to blame for the country's problems. Over the past forty years, project loans from the World Bank, the Asian Development Bank, and other institutions have helped finance the building of Pakistan's most important physical infrastructure, including the Tarbela and Mangla dams, the nation's railway network, its irrigation system, and other crucial projects. The result follows naturally. The World Bank and IMF both

have agendas. The IMF's programmed design is flawed in that it sets up negative feedback loops that worsen rather than solve the underlying structural issues by creating perverse incentives and unintended repercussions in revenue collection and the energy sector.

According to Dr Hafiz Pasha, economist and former finance minister, The IMF program will be terminated if the government does not carry out the agreed-upon changes, which will result in a virtual dry up of capital and a lack of foreign exchange reserves to fulfil the external debt repayment commitments. Under this scenario, the country would experience severe shortages and a breakdown in economic activity, and the inflation rate may reach 70%. The famous financial expert noted that the government's artificial exchange rate and the overvalued rupee are bad for the economy since they have a negative impact on both exports and remittances (the true exchange rate of the local currency is Rs295 to the dollar). Economic problems have grown as a result of Covid-19, Russian Ukraine war and last year's terrible storms. All these factors reduce GDP and inflation. All components' prices continued to rise. Some economists contend that it is due to global consequences and political instability in the country.



With depleting gas production, the country's reliance on imported LNG will increase manifold

Pakistan has consumed 985 million barrels of its 1,234 million barrels of oil reserves, accounting for 79.8% of the total

By Syed Khalid Mustafa



With local gas reserves depleting by 9–10 percent per year, an increase in demand of 5 percent annually, and no reasonable source of oil or gas, the country's oil and gas landscape seems bleak in the years to come. And the reliance on the import of LNG will increase manifold. According to the latest report of the Petroleum Division, domestic production is currently at 1.263 trillion cubic feet per annum, compared to the demand for about 1.770 tcf, which shows a deficit of 0.507 tcf. And to bridge the shortfall, 0.382 tcf (8.1 million t) of LNG is imported per year. Over time, the share of LNG in the natural gas supply has risen to 29%. At present, a net shortfall of 0.125 tcf is dealt with through the curtailment of gas supply, or load management, to different sectors of the economy.

According to the data, Pakistan has consumed 985 million barrels of its 1,234 million barrels of oil reserves, accounting for 79.8% of the total. Now, around 249 million barrels of reserves are left. Balochistan had recoverable oil reserves of 1.84 million barrels, of which 0.24 million barrels had been used, leaving 1.60 million barrels. Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa (KPK) had

recoverable reserves of 264.83 million barrels, and out of these, 170.59 million barrels have been consumed. Now, only 94.24 million barrels are left. Punjab had recoverable reserves of 457.43 million barrels, of which 383.20 million barrels have been consumed while 74.23 million barrels are yet to be utilised. Sindh had estimated recoverable reserves of 509.58 million barrels, and out of these, the province has consumed 430.60 million barrels, leaving 78.98 million barrels.



Pakistan's oil production stood at 27 million barrels in the financial year 2020–21, compared to its target of 30 million barrels, showing 90% achievement of the goal. In comparison to oil, Pakistan has been a major gas producer to meet domestic needs. The country had been self-sufficient in the past, but due to the launch of gas supply schemes and political considerations, it has become an importer of liquefied natural gas (LNG) since 2015. Pakistan has so far consumed 66.6% of the total gas reserves, leaving 33.4% of the reserves untouched. Exploration and production (E&P) companies have not been able to ramp up gas production since 2000 and have also failed to make major discoveries. The country had over 63 trillion cubic feet (tcf) of natural gas reserves, out of which around 42 tcf has been consumed.

According to the Planning Commission, gas production stood at 1.27 tcf per year, against the target of 1.43 tcf. Province-wise data showed that Balochistan had total recoverable reserves of 20.637 tcf, of which 15.182 tcf had been consumed, leaving a balance of 5.455 tcf (26%). K-P had total recoverable reserves of 2.932 tcf, and out of these, 1.746 tcf have been consumed, while 1.186 tcf (40%) are left. Punjab had total

recoverable reserves of 3.977 tcf. Out of these, 2.379 tcf have been utilised, leaving a balance of 1.598 tcf (40%). Sindh has 35.5% of its recoverable reserves left. It had total reserves of 35.765 tcf, of which 23.053 tcf had been consumed while 12.712 tcf had yet to be utilised. Natural gas forms one of the major components of Pakistan's energy mix, with 33% coming from domestically produced gas, 10% from LNG, and 1% from liquefied petroleum gas (LPG). An annual increase of 5% in natural gas demand has been eating into the limited domestic reserves for the past many years.

According to energy experts, ineffective monitoring of production and sale, partial or non-implementation of petroleum policies, PCAs, rules, and guidelines, and field development plans of E&P companies can be cited as reasons for the non-allocation of crude oil and gas to refineries and service companies, respectively, and the non-finalization of gas sale and purchase agreements. The E&P sector is confronted with multiple challenges, which include slow exploration and production of hydrocarbons. Adverse security conditions in the exploration areas cause extra cost, damage to assets, and disruption to E&P activities. Variable E&P costs from low and depleting reserves could not be rationalised over the years.



Unconventional sources of energy, such as shale gas, tight gas, and oil, have not been tapped due to extraordinarily high costs and the unavailability of service providers and technologies. Multiple projects by E&P companies were either delayed or could not achieve the set production targets. In some cases, production was stopped due to the unsynchronized installation of storage facilities.

Furthermore, unnecessary or unjustified procurements caused a blockade of funds, which ultimately led to wasteful expenses. Some experts say that the reliance on the import of gas will increase, but the country lacks the required infrastructure to ensure more imports of LNG. In the last 6 years, there has been no advancement in installing more LNG terminals in the country, and no additional gas pipeline has been laid from Karachi to Lahore for the transportation of more LNG. Currently, Pakistan imports the maximum amount of LNG—1.2 bcf—and is unable to import more because authorities have failed to augment LNG infrastructure during the last six years. Pakistan has failed to initiate the North-South gas pipeline line, which has been renamed the Pakistan Stream Gas Pipeline.

This project has witnessed many ups and downs, and yet it is not finalised. The Russian delegation is to arrive on January 17, and talks on the shareholding agreement for the gas pipeline project will advance. The private sector wants to build more LNG terminals in a private business mode without a government take-off guarantee, but red tape has emerged as the biggest hurdle to ensuring the ongoing protection cover for inefficient gas companies—Sui Northern and Sui Southern.



Saudi oil giant, Aramco earned a record-breaking profit of \$161 billion (£134bn) in 2022 mainly because of humper increase in oil prices

The profit of Aramco demonstrates a 46.5% growth on YoY basis when matched with oil conglomerate's profit in 2021



Saudi Aramco today said that record high international oil prices and increase in demand in the wake of sanctions on Russia boosted its profit in 2022.

Aramco's impressive performance reflects a wider trend of energy firms benefiting from higher energy prices following Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022.

In comparison with American ExxonMobil and British Shell company, Saudi Aramco earned much more profit than the combined profit of rival oil giants.

America's ExxonMobil reported \$55.7bn in profit in 2022, while Britain's Shell earned \$39.9bn profit last year.

Also, the Saudi oil giant declared a \$19.5bn dividend for the October to December quarter of 2022. The dividend will be paid in the first quarter of 2023.

Analysts said that Saudi Aramco's big success reflects the ongoing importance of the energy industry to global economies.

The oil industry is expected to continue to

face scrutiny as pressure grows to transition toward cleaner, more sustainable energy sources.

Meanwhile, Aramco's astounding performance indicates a wider trend of energy firms benefiting from soaring energy prices following Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022.

Aramco Mission Statements

We are one of the world's largest integrated energy and chemicals companies, creating value across the hydrocarbon chain, and delivering societal and economic benefits to people and communities around the globe who rely on the vital energy we supply.

We are committed to playing a leading role in the energy transition. We have a responsibility to help the world achieve a net-zero economy, and our people are working hard to help solve the world's sustainability challenges. For our customers, we are a supplier of choice. For our shareholders, we provide long-term value creation. For communities around the world, our

ambition is to provide reliable, affordable, and more sustainable energy.

We believe in the power of energy to transform lives, enhance communities, advance human progress, and sustain our planet.

With the global population forecast to increase by two billion over the next 25 years, even more, energy will be required to meet rising demand. It will take all available sources of energy to fill this need — both legacy and alternative sources. And while alternative energy sources are steadily making advances, they will not be capable of meeting future demand alone. Even as we transition to a low-emissions future, hydrocarbon-based energy sources will be counted on to meet the bulk of the world's energy demand well into the future.

We're committed to driving energy efficiency and addressing the global emissions challenge. And as the world's largest integrated oil and gas company, we believe we are uniquely qualified to make effective contributions to the overall solution.

By Javed Mahmood

AURAT MARCH 2023



The women of Pakistan have been using the Aurat March as a platform to come together and advocate for their rights and equality. The march has gained momentum in recent years, with women from all walks of life coming together to raise their voices against injustices faced by women in Pakistan. However, some women have been using the Aurat March as a platform to display indecent and un-Islamic banners, which has led to a negative impact on society. Such banners not only undermine the message of the march but also give a negative impression of women and their struggle for rights.

It is crucial for the Aurat March to portray a positive message to society. Women should use this platform to raise awareness about the issues they face and advocate for their rights in a way that does not go against the values of Islam. The Aurat March should promote unity, equality, and respect for all individuals, regardless of their gender. Women in Pakistan must use this opportunity to create a positive impact on society and work towards creating a more inclusive and equitable society for all.

The Aurat March in Pakistan has been a platform for women to come together and advocate for their rights in a positive manner. Women should avoid using indecent and un-Islamic banners as it only serves to undermine the message of the march and give a negative impression of women. By promoting unity, equality, and respect for all individuals, women in Pakistan can create a positive impact on society and work towards creating a more inclusive and equitable society for all.

**PROMOTING POSITIVE CHANGE: THE IMPORTANCE OF
A POSITIVE MESSAGE IN THE AURAT MARCH IN PAKISTAN**

INDECENT, UN-ISLAMIC AND ANNOYING BANNERS

During Aurat March, the women participants have displayed some disgusting, indecent, un-Islamic, and annoying banners.

After seeing the placards and indecent banners, one cannot believe that Pakistan is an Islamic Republic.

Expression of freedom is the right of every citizen, but using shameful, disgusting and annoying words and language, we don't use at homes, in offices and public place, is very disturbing.



Debt Re-profiling

One of the key challenges facing Pakistan's economy is its high level of debt

By Azeem Waqas



Pakistan has denied reprofiling its mounting external debt, as the government is trying to meet all of its international commitments on time and keep the IMF program on track.

"We think it is not the appropriate time to go for re-profiling of external debt; debt restructuring is even more disastrous -- we want to keep the IMF program on track and pay external debt on time," a key official of the Ministry of Finance explained, on condition of anonymity.

One of the key challenges facing Pakistan's economy is its high level of debt. Pakistan's external debt has increased from around \$38 billion in 2008 to over \$130 billion in 2023. This debt burden has put enormous pressure on the country's finances.

Experts believe that, caught between China and the USA's economic war, Pakistan is unable to reprofile its external debt in the near future.

China has rolled over \$1.3 billion to help out Pakistan, in a development that will intensify concern among western countries about cash-strapped Islamabad's debt burden to Beijing.

The Chinese loan comes on top of \$30 billion that Pakistan already owes China and Chinese commercial banks. Securing the financing will help unlock bailout cash from the International Monetary Fund (IMF).

A senior investment banker, while talking with The Truth International (TTI), said that Pakistan's external debt situation is unsustainable over the immediate-to-medium term. Therefore, it is very important that Pakistan reprofile its debt in an orderly and timely manner. The approach to its lenders should be preemptive rather than reactive.

He said that "there are no pre-conditions as such for the replevin of debt." When a sovereign is unable to meet its short-term repayments, that is the trigger for repricing.

About the re-profiling of debt, Arif Habib Experts issued a report that alluded to the fact that Pakistan had no option but to stay engaged with the IMF for the long term to be able to manage its medium- to long-term external debt obligations. We believe reclassifying USD 13 billion of short-term bilateral and commercial

debt from friendly countries is a less disruptive option to effectively create some breathing space to put our financial house in order.

The report said such a transaction shall only be possible once Pakistan signs up to a new long-term agreement like the SBA (Standby Agreement), likely post-general elections (due in October). The report states that Pakistan's bilateral creditors have made it abundantly clear that Pakistan needs to remain under IMF watch before they are willing to commit additional funding and/or external support.

The Pakistan Business Council (PBC) has also proposed to the government that it buy time for fundamental reforms by re-profiling debt with assistance from sovereign debt advisors. However, there has been no clarification until now.

Investment bankers said that Pakistan's external debt is approximately \$120 billion at the moment. Its external debt to GDP ratio of 40% is fairly high, and its external debt to exports ratio of 4.0x is also very high when compared to other peer group

countries. Most importantly, Pakistan's USD cash-flow generating capacity is very low when compared to its external debt servicing requirements and its current account financing needs. Therefore, the repayment of debt becomes a necessity.

He is of the view that potentially the entire stock of Pakistan's sovereign external debt can be reprofiled, and this would include multilateral and bilateral (78% of external debt) and commercial debt (22% of external debt). However, reprofiling commercial debt will represent an event of default, which, if managed correctly, can lead to a desirable outcome. However, any debt restructuring exercise must be accompanied by domestic economic reforms, which would include widening the tax base, reducing government expenditure, and boosting USD inflows through the current account.

He further said that having an operational IMF program in place (with the next tranche released) will be very helpful in Pakistan's negotiations for refinancing its debt, as China has already indicated its willingness to help countries like Pakistan reduce their external debt servicing burden.



Chair of Economic Security at the Islamabad Policy Research Institute (IPRI), Dr Aneel Salman, has said that "it's difficult for Pakistan to reprofile its external debt in the near future, but, in the longer term, Pakistan can approach the Paris and Non-Paris Clubs for a reprofile of its loan." Immediately, Pakistan can get support from China and Saudi Arabia to reschedule its debt, which will ease Pakistan's economy.

Dr. Aneel is of the view that Pakistan should also reschedule its internal debt

along with its external debt. It is a doable thing, but at an individual level, we need experts in our Finance Ministry. Debt swap preparation takes almost one to two years because you have to map out its feasibility.

Financial expert Abdul Rehman Najam said that local debt haircuts can create a massive banking crisis. However, foreign lenders will be unwilling to sacrifice without local lenders also sharing the burden.

China has agreed to support Sri Lanka's debt restructuring, a crucial step towards securing a \$2.9 billion IMF rescue package and pulling the country out of an economic crisis. Sri Lanka owes about \$40 billion in public debt to creditors, including China, India, and Japan, as well as private bondholders.

The available solutions to the crises that Pakistan faces raise suspicions domestically and internationally. While the IMF worries that bailouts will pass directly to Pakistan's elites, the US worries that any debt haircuts it accepts will only furnish repayments to Pakistan's Chinese creditors.

The G20 leader is putting more pressure on China to take haircuts on distressed debt. But with China continuing to call for multilateral lenders to take losses in the restructuring,

On a visit to Islamabad last week, Derek Chollet of the US State Department said: "We have been very clear about our concerns about Chinese debt, or debt owed to China, not just here in Pakistan but elsewhere all around the world."



TTP presence in Afghanistan being realized globally

Terror outfit sitting in Afghanistan and planning attacks on Pakistan; Afghan Taliban border guards lack professional training

By Syed Fakhar KaKaKhel

Pakistanis who celebrated the victory of Aghan Taliban on August 15, 2021, are now worried about what to do with the Taliban in their backyard knocking at their door. Pakistan is faced with internal political turmoil in the form of Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) challenging the state and a chaotic neighbor in the form of Taliban-led Afghanistan.

In the jargon of good and bad Taliban, these people forgot that they are militants first. The matter of their being good or bad is of a specific time. After the arrival of the Taliban, Pakistan is facing problems with each passing day on the entire Pak-Afghan border in general and the Torkham, and Chaman border crossings in particular. It is not only the issue with Pakistan but things are tense on Afghanistan's border with Iran.

A couple of weeks ago, Afghan Taliban abducted an Iranian security official from the border with the Afghan province of Nimroz, kept him in their custody and later returned to the Iranian authorities.

The neighboring countries including Pakistan are unable to realize the fact that these fighters are Taliban guerrillas and not professional army or trained border guards of a country who are posted on the border per international laws.

These Taliban guerrillas do not have any idea of a professional soldier both mentally and physically, and that's why there are problems on the Pak-Afghan border regularly. Recently, the Afghan Taliban fired directly at the security posts on the Pakistani border posts at Torkham.

However, since there is a professional security force on this side of the border that has an understanding of border management and countermeasures,



they preferred to resolve the issue through diplomacy after closing the border.

At present, Pakistan only expects Afghanistan to stop using Afghan soil against Pakistan. Pakistan should also have at least this expectation because of the Doha agreement, under which Afghan Taliban had convinced the world that their territory would not be used against any country.

Afghan Taliban found themselves in an awkward situation on global front when al-Qaeda chief Dr Ayman al-Zawahiri was killed by a drone strike in Kabul right under their nose. Al-Qaeda chief's presence in Afghanistan under the Taliban was a clear violation of the Doha agreement.

It reminds the world of the previous Taliban regime in Afghanistan when Mullah Mohammad Omar was their supreme leader. Even on 9/11, he supported al-Qaeda leader Osama bin Laden and demanded bin Laden had nothing to do with this incident; and that if there was any, evidence should be provided to him. Exactly one year later, Osama bin Laden not only accepted responsibility for the 9/11 attacks but also paid homage to all the attackers.

The presence of Pakistani Taliban in Afghanistan is being recognized globally and it has been proven many times that Pakistani Taliban are sitting in Afghanistan and planning attacks on Pakistan. However, the Afghan Taliban rejects all these facts.

Above all, the official evidence is that the leadership of the Pakistani Taliban met the Pakistani elders in Kabul during the negotiations. The former head of Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan and facilitator of the attack on the Army Public School, Mullah Fazlullah was killed in a US drone strike in Afghanistan's Kunar province. Abdul Wali alias Umar Khalid Khorasani, the head of the Pakistani Taliban negotiating team and a founding member of the TTP, was killed in August 2022 in the Afghan region of Birmal.

The world is aware of historical relationship between Afghan Interior Minister Siraj Haqqani and Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan. In such a situation, when after the deadlock in the negotiations, as the attacks in Pakistan were resumed and Pakistan sent a message to the Afghan Taliban, they clearly said that the territory of Afghanistan was not used against

Pakistan and that the Pakistani Taliban were an internal issue of Pakistan.

Amid such acceptance and denials, misunderstandings are starting to arise between the fighters of Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan in Afghanistan itself. Many of their fighters have been killed in Afghanistan.

After the killing of the founding leader of Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan, Abdul Wali alias Umar Khalid Khorasani in Afghanistan, there were reports of differences within the organization, which the organization denied later.

However, after the explosion in Peshawar Police Lines, the commander of the banned organization named Sarbakaf Mohmand accepted the responsibility, and then the central organization itself expressed ignorance about that suicide attack. It seems that there is either a lack of communication or discord somewhere within the organization. Its effects are also visible in Pakistan.

Recently, a new militant outfit Tehreek Jihad Pakistan first claimed responsibility for the suicide attack in the Bolan area of Balochistan and identified the attacker as a Baloch youth. But shortly after, there was a statement from the Islamic State that the attack was carried out by them and Abdul Rahman carried the suicide attack in which nine officials were killed. Earlier, Tehreek Jihad Pakistan had also claimed responsibility for an attack on the Pak-Afghan Chaman border in Balochistan.

Militants associated with various extremist organizations are carrying out attacks and there is no specific mechanism to claim responsibility. In the past, we had witnessed that the Tehreek-e-Taliban either took responsibility for an incident and then feigned ignorance or first denied it and then took responsibility.

The dangerous situation for Balochistan is also because Baloch youth who used to be associated with various Baloch resistance militant movements, are now tilting towards various Jihadi outfits. Especially their involvement with ISIS is a cause for concern.

Apart from this, another factor that is being observed in these areas is the attacks on the local Levies force. Earlier, only FC or

regular troops were targeted in Baloch areas. Since Levies are part of the local force, Baloch tried not to clash with them too much, but now the Levies are being targeted in Bolan and many other places.

As far as Khyber Pakhtunkhwa is concerned, after the Peshawar Police Lines attack, there has been an increase in the number of militant attacks due to large-scale changes in the police force and the operations of the security forces, but not as much as we have seen in the past.



To tackle this situation created due to the Afghan spillover effects, Defense Minister Khawaja Asif and DGISI General Nadeem Anjum arrived in Kabul on a short visit. There, they informed the Taliban government about the hideouts of Pakistani militants in the Afghan provinces of Kunar and Nangarhar and presented solid evidence. Pakistan demanded of the Afghan Taliban to take action against these hideouts. The Taliban government has assured Pakistan, but it seems that the Afghan Taliban are under pressure from their inner circles in this regard.

Afghan Taliban demanded lenience for the Afghan citizens on the Pakistan-Afghan border. Pakistan also explained that if incidents like Torkham and Chaman continue to happen on behalf of the Afghan Taliban, then it will be difficult for Pakistan to maintain the border normally. Some sections of the Afghan Taliban also believe that the issues between Pakistan and Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan should be resolved through dialogue. There are no

immediate signs of this process resuming right now. On the other hand, security personnel are being continuously targeted in the southern districts and Peshawar valley.

Despite announcing the date of the elections in Punjab, the governor of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa believes that the economic condition of the province and the deterioration of law and order are the factors that led to reconsidering the courts' order. The governor finds it difficult to hold elections.

Governor Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Haji Ghulam Ali says that there is a big difference between conditions of Punjab and Pakhtunkhwa. We have fewer resources and too many problems to take care of.

Despite the apex committee meeting in Peshawar, it seems that the PDM government has no plan to tackle the emerging law and order situation in the country. At the national level, political chaos and issues related to Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf have overshadowed the rest of the issues so far.

The domestic scenario has been reduced to the extent of statements against each other. A severe economic downturn and a lack of discussion on security issues can only push the country to a complete standstill. Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf wants elections and the people need a solution to their economic problems while the state is facing security threats. In such a situation, PDM does not seem to be successful on any front and stands nowhere.

Ukraine war hits strategic stalemate

Conflict leads to break down of East, West Cooperative ties; Putin's brazen use of force fosters unparalleled EU unity; Germany reverses policy of Ostpolitik; Western liberal order faced with problems

By Dr Syed Rifaat Hussain

Last February marked the first anniversary of Russian invasion (Moscow calls it “special operations”) of neighboring Ukraine. Contrary to Moscow's expectations of “an easy military victory” against a weaker and smaller country, Ukrainian forces led by President Zelensky have offered dogged resistance. Prior to invasion, Zelensky had been informed by his intelligence sources including American intelligence that the forces sent by Russian President Putin were going to liquidate him. He went into hiding and decided to offer a strong resistance to invading Russian forces. As a result, he stood out as a symbol of Ukrainian nationalism, national independence and unity.

Geography plays a critical role in defining the role of Ukraine as a country. Ukraine is a large country in the middle of Eastern Europe, neighboring Poland, Hungary, Slovakia, Romania, Moldova and Belarus, as well as Russia. With a population of some 45 million, the territory comprising modern Ukraine has long been contested, and its history is one of regular fragmentation and unsettled borders, with the western and eastern parts often separated. The area north of Black Sea, sometimes known as “Novorossiya,” with Odessa to the south, Kharkiv to the north, and Donetsk to the east, was taken from the Ottoman Empire in the 18th Century.

During the 19th Century a Ukrainian nationalist movement took root. As a result of the short lived Brest-Litovsk Treaty of 1918 between Russia and Germany, Ukraine gained independence. Its borders were then contested after the end of the First World War. After 1919, Western Ukraine, which had not been part of the Russian Empire, was divided among a number of countries, although most of it was incorporated into Poland. It was then joined with the rest of Ukraine following the Soviet Union's invasion in 1939— and then again after the German forces that had invaded in 1941 were driven out in 1945.



As one of the largest republics and with its leadership fully Sovietized after purges, Ukraine was integrated into the Soviet Union. It was the location for vital defense industries and military facilities.

Many Ukrainians held important positions, yet a distinctive Ukraine national identity developed over time, with its own political culture and was recognized by Ukrainian communists. As soon as it became clear that the Soviet Union was headed for dissolution, Ukraine asserted its sovereignty. On December 1st, 1991, three weeks before the demise of the Soviet Union, the Ukrainian people supported independence in a referendum (by 90 percent) and elected the chairman of parliament, Leonid Kravchuk, as the first president.

Roots of the ongoing Ukrainian war that has caused death, destruction and displacement, can be traced to 2014, when Moscow occupied Crimea and Black Sea ports as its vital supply lines to carry Russian gas and grain to the outside world. There was virtually no protest against this Russian annexation of Crimea.

That served as an incentive for Moscow to further consolidate its influence over the truncated Ukraine. The Western support has played a pivotal role in sustaining Ukrainian resistance. Provision of lethal military equipment including “leopard” tanks, missiles, armored personal carries, anti-missile defenses and related equipment has enabled Ukrainian resistance to blunt Russian military advances.

According to media reports, US has extended 40 billion dollars to Ukraine since Feb 2022 while EU has promised 30 billion dollars in military aid and arms supplies to Ukraine. Today Russia controls 20 per cent of Ukrainian territory, most in Eastern part of the country. The war has reached a strategic stalemate.

Impact of Ukrainian war on international relations: first, the break down of cooperative relations between East and West. This is evident from a sharp deterioration in the relations between Moscow and Washington. Putin has publicly talked about letting Moscow's nuclear capability coming into play if Russia is faced with “strategic defeat.”

Washington has characterized Moscow's invasion of Ukraine as an act of "naked aggression" and totally "unprovoked" which is reflective of Putin's long-standing desire to impose its imperial will on its European neighbors.

Joe Biden administration has imposed a plethora of economic and military sanctions on Moscow to force Putin come to an agreement to withdraw its military forces from Ukraine. United States has urged its EU partners to defend the rights of countries like Ukraine to maintain their independence, sovereignty, and territorial integrity. The unprecedented unity shown by EU countries is symptomatic of the sense of outrage ignited by Putin's brazen use of force against Ukraine.

Germany under its new Chancellor, Olaf Scholz, has become a very vocal critic of Putin's aggressive behavior and is leading the European opposition to the ongoing Ukrainian conflict. In addition to making German army as a tool for NATO's plans to combat Russian aggression against Ukraine, Germany has begun to supply arms to Ukrainian resistance. As a result, the decade old German policy of Ostpolitik has been reversed and has been replaced by a new cold war mentality.

There are credible media reports including a claim by reputed journalist Seymour Hersh that the Biden administration was behind the terrorist bombing of the Nord Stream gas pipelines last September. This

act of sabotage was evidently carried out with the full knowledge of the German leadership.

Apart from marking the return of East-West Cold war, the war in Ukraine has created a huge problem for the Western liberal order led by the United States and NATO countries. For instance, Turkey has been instrumental in blocking the entry of Finland and Sweden to NATO because of Ankara's concerns relating to the activities of terrorist groups operating out of these countries. Without accession of Finland and Sweden to NATO, the ability of NATO countries to fully encircle Russia would remain somewhat limited.

Russia's aggression in Ukraine exposes the inherent tension between China's strategic partnership with Russia, which it sees as necessary in a multipolar international order, and its image as a protector of sovereignty, territorial integrity, and non-interference in the face of American hegemony.

Beijing cannot overtly support Russia without undercutting China's reputation as champion of sovereignty and risking secondary sanctions from the United States. Simultaneously, Beijing cannot pressure Moscow and undermine its strategic partnership.

In a speech on 22 February 2023, President Putin made a "legal case" against Western countries led by United State for "attacking" Russia. These included: the expansion of NATO to Russia's borders, support of

terrorists in Russia, economic war, terrorist sabotage of the Nord Stream Pipeline, financing of the coup and war in Ukraine, directly assisting Ukraine to attack targets in Russia including Russia's nuclear bombers, and plotting to destroy and partition Russia into pieces"..... "This means they plan to finish us once and for all. In other words, they plan to grow a local conflict into a global confrontation. This is how we understand it and we will respond accordingly, because this represents an existential threat to our country."

These steps according to Western military analysts "signaled aggression to Russia, in effect kicking them when they were down. NATO expanded to include former members of the Soviet Union in 1999: the Czech Republic, Hungary and Poland. NATO enlarged even further in 2004 to include the Baltic States bordering Russia, Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania; and also Romania, Slovakia and Slovenia." Such moves only alarmed Russia but also aggravated their feelings of insecurity.

In 2004, the EU enlarged its membership for the fifth time, incorporating a traditionally Russian sphere of influence and former Soviet Union satellites: Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, and Slovakia. In 2007, Bulgaria and Romania joined as well." John Mearns has summarized the adversarial strategic consequences of these Western military moves on Russia's military outlook



US new Central Asian strategy: Implications for Pakistan

US strategy in CARs aimed at countering Russian, China; Washington wants to curtail CARs dependence on Moscow; encirclement of China poised to increase importance of Gwadar

By Dr Raza Khan

Due to rapid changes on the international political and security horizon, the United States has come up with a new strategy in the Central Asian region. From public assertion to media reporting, Washington's new game plan in Central Asia is aimed at strengthening regional economies, specifically that of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan, in addition to helping them in nation-building.

Known as Central Asian Republics or CARs, these countries have a common diplomatic forum tagged as C5+1 with the US that was formed in 2016. However, despite such proclamations, the new US strategy in Central Asia is much more than what is visible; it is aimed not only at countering Russian traditional influence in its backyard but also preventing China from increasing its sphere in the region.

The US foreign policy deals with Central Asia and South Asia through a single office of the Bureau of South and Central Asian Affairs, presently headed by Assistant Secretary Donald Lu. That means both the regions are intertwined according to the Washington policy circles; thus the new US strategy in Central Asia would have significant implications for Pakistan. And it would depend on Islamabad how it deals with the opportunities and challenges arising out of the new scenario.

US Secretary of State Antony Blinken's recent visit to Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan where he met foreign ministers of all five regional countries, was primarily aimed at countering growing Chinese influence in the region. As reported, other issues i.e. Russia-Ukraine war and human rights in Afghanistan were not discussed during this visit—contrary to last two-decade long US policy, entirely focusing on its war in Afghanistan.

Russia's attack on Ukraine and continuation of war between the two has prompted a

new scenario in the adjacent Central Asian region. First, Moscow's military presence in the region has considerably diminished, causing concerns in CARs capitals that have traditionally relied on Russian security guarantees and assistance. However, this is also a pertinent opportunity for these states to decisively come out of Russian sphere of influence.



Secondly, economic sanctions on Russia have threatened regional trade and export, which is highly centred on transit through Russia, and also threaten livelihood of millions of Central Asian migrant workers who send billions of dollars in remittances back home every year from Russia.

The US is meticulously trying to materialize this opportunity. Washington has conveyed to CARs it would press hard to reduce the impact of sanctions against Russia, on the Central Asian states.

By economically backing CARs in this situation, the US wants to curtail CARs dependence on Moscow and instead wants them to look towards Washington.

In recent months, the US has also stepped up efforts to 'strategically' encircle China. From the Philippines to Australia to Japan – and a new US Marines base in Guam – more American troops and military assets are headed for Asia. This US bid is known as 'encirclement of China' in Asia that is poised to increase importance and significance of Gwadar seaport.

Gwadar could be in the limelight given

India's presence in Andaman and Nicobar Islands at the face of Strait of Malacca where it could impose naval blockade against China.

In case US persuades CARs and increases its military presence there, parallel to boosting Taiwanese forces and enhancing its own military prowess in South China Sea, the military encirclement of China could be a possibility.

An envisaged military encirclement of China by the US would accompany

economic blockade of Beijing. That means jeopardising Chinese President Xi Jinping's Belt & Road Initiative (BRI) vision worth nearly one trillion US dollars.

The BRI aims at economically integrating around 60 countries of Asia, Europe and Africa. It would be instrumental in economically integrating Central and South Asia, regional and non-regional countries with China. The US-India venture could affect significance of China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), which is one of BRI's flagship projects.

Grave hurdles could be created in the completion of CPEC which Beijing deems as link between its landlocked western China region and Pakistan's strategic Gwadar deep seaport in the Arabian Sea.

China and Pakistan deny any military usage of Gwadar being a major seaport in the region, saying Gwadar is meant to facilitate western China vis-à-vis international trade and commerce, integrate South Asia and Central Asia as well. However, contrary to that view, Gwadar does have a huge strategic military worth and both Pakistan and China would like to capitalize on that.

Faced with a probable military encirclement from US, China would seek maximum strategic exploitation of Gwadar, especially to match India. But Pakistan may not be able to afford allowing some other country take strategic benefit of its deep seaport. Islamabad, specifically, cannot offend Washington by doing so for the fear of security, political, diplomatic and economic consequences.

Parallel to US, India has also begun desperately engaging with CARs. In line with this endeavour, New Delhi has formed its own C5+1. Besides economic objectives, India's forming of this group is to reinforce US presence in the region and this in turn is aimed at countering Chinese presence and influence in the area, if not that of Russia with which India has strong bilateral relations. In other words, India's increasing engagement with CARs is focused on preventing these states from becoming allies of China and posing strategic threats to India.

As mentioned earlier, the Central Asian region has become highly important for the

US in the backdrop of Russia's war with Ukraine. It is the region where the US economic and military assistance could check any support for Russia and resist Chinese influence. The US modus operandi is to distract Russian focus from Ukraine.

In response, there are strong prospects that China and Russia may devise a joint new strategy. China may seek an oust-US alliance with Russia. Given the contiguity of CARs with both Russia and China, the latter has a strong base to keep Washington at bay from the region.



But in spite of this, Russia economically is not in a position to resist US assistance to CARs while Beijing may not be willing to match US financial support to these states. The only way China could give economic benefits to CARs is through increasing the number of BRI projects in the region along with jacked up investments.

In this scenario where US and India are trying to join hands in Central Asia to confront Russia and China and a counterbalancing act by Moscow and Beijing, options for Pakistan are limited.

In view of its strategic location, Pakistan stands at the cross roads of Central and South Asia, thus it has considerable importance for CARs. Though Pakistan does not share border with any of the CARs, it is separated via a 16km wide Wakhan

corridor from Tajikistan. For Pakistan the best response to rising great and regional powers conflict in Central Asia, is to tacitly side with China.

However, Pakistan should not let itself to be used anyway by Beijing to promote its agenda of countering US presence in the region. Though China has been a long standing partner of Pakistan, the latter could not afford to lose US support, in particular when Afghan Taliban are resorting to a strong anti-Pakistan stance and backing off from their promises to form

broad-based Afghan government, ensure civil liberties and protect human rights.

Washington has also conveyed its strong willingness to renew its decades' long support to Pakistan to counter terrorism in the region specifically the Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP), which has regrouped in Afghanistan with the support of Afghan Taliban.

Thus the US increasing engagement, presence and influence in CARs is not against the very national interest of Pakistan. More importantly, Washington may also not like to oppose CPEC as long it is confined to Pakistan. To US it is quite clear that Chinese influence in Pakistan cannot be reduced by any means. So, in such a scenario, Pakistan could greatly serve its national interest by asking China to increase pace of CPEC projects.

Archrivals Iran and Saudi Arabia agree to end years of hostilities in deal mediated by China

By Mostafa Salem, Adam Pourahmadi and Nadeen Ebrahim

Abu Dhabi, UAE CNN — Saudi Arabia and Iran announced on Friday that they agreed to reestablish diplomatic ties after seven years of hostility, in a deal between the regional archrivals that could have wide-ranging implications for the Middle East.

Riyadh and Tehran plan to reopen their embassies within two months in an agreement mediated by China, Saudi Arabia, and Iran said in a joint statement after talks in Beijing on Friday.

They also plan to reimplement a security pact signed 22 years ago under which both parties agreed to cooperate on terrorism, drug-smuggling, and money-laundering, as well as reviving a trade and technology deal from 1998.

Friday's announcement is also a diplomatic victory for China in a Gulf region that has long been considered part of the US' domain of influence. It comes as the Biden administration tries to notch its own win in the Middle East by trying to broker a normalization pact between Israel, and Saudi Arabia.

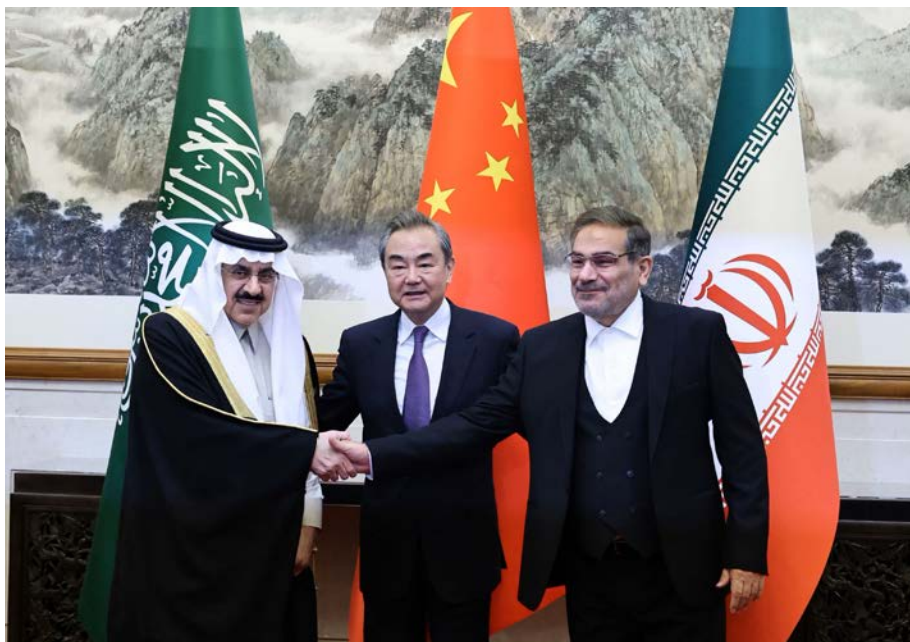
Talks had been ongoing since March 6 in Beijing between Iranian national security chief Ali Shamkhani, Saudi national security council adviser Mosaed Bin Mohammad Al-Aiban and China's top diplomat Wang Yi, according to Iranian state media.

Video of the signing ceremony aired by Iranian media showed officials seated around tables on opposite sides with the Saudi Arabian, Iranian and Chinese flags around them.

The animated simulation shows a fleet of drones approaching an oil facility belonging to Saudi Aramco, the kingdom's oil company. (@sepah_pasdaran/Telegram)

Cartoons and Quranic verses form the latest Saudi-Iran battleground

"We will continue to play a constructive role in properly handling hotspot issues in today's world in accordance with the



wishes of all countries and demonstrate our responsibility as a major country," Wang said, adding that Chinese President Xi Jinping supported it since the beginning.

In an apparent push back to American influence, Wang said that "the world is not limited to the Ukraine issue" while emphasizing that the fate of the Middle East should be determined by the people of the Middle East.

"The foreign ministers of the two countries will meet each other to implement this decision and make necessary arrangements for the exchange of ambassadors," the joint statement said. "The two sides agree to respect the sovereignty and non-interference in each other's internal affairs."

Saudi Arabia and Iran had previously held talks aimed at reconciliation in Oman and Iraq.

Riyadh severed ties with Tehran in 2016 after Iranian protesters stormed the Saudi embassy in the Iranian capital following the execution of a Shi'ite cleric in Saudi Arabia. Since then, they have fought a proxy war that has embroiled a number of neighboring countries, bringing the region ever closer to war.

In Yemen, the two countries have supported opposite sides of a civil war that has been described by the United Nations as one of the world's worst humanitarian crises. From there, the Houthi rebels have fired missiles at both Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates, targeting oil infrastructure that is vital to their economies.

Saudi Arabia has however been engaged in direct talks with the Houthis, and an unofficial ceasefire appears to be holding.

In a speech prior to the signing of the agreement with his Iranian counterpart, Saudi Arabia's Al-Aiban called for non-interference in the sovereignty of states to be a "fundamental pillar for the development of relations."

"We value what we have reached and we hope that we will continue the constructive dialogue, in accordance with the pillars and foundations included in the agreement," he said.

Iranian Foreign Minister Hossein Amir-Abdollahian hailed the deal and said Tehran would step up its diplomatic efforts in the region.

"Iran and Saudi Arabia relations returning

to normal makes the two countries, the region and the Muslim world stronger,” Amir-Abdollahian tweeted on Friday.

Tehran finds itself increasingly isolated on the global stage. Talks to revive Iran’s 2015 nuclear pact with world powers are frozen and relations with Western states have faced further strains due to the Islamic Republic’s brutal crackdown on protests that started in September.

Iran’s main international ally Russia is preoccupied with the war in Ukraine, while China, its other ally, has lately been courting Tehran’s archrival Saudi Arabia.

A police motorcycle burns during a protest over the death of Mahsa Amini, a woman who died after being arrested by the Islamic republic’s “morality police”, in Tehran, Iran September 19, 2022.

London-based TV channel sparks Iranian leaders’ ire amid protests

“For Saudi Arabia, rapprochement with Iran is a key part of a major diplomatic offensive on all fronts,” said Hussein Ibish, a senior resident scholar at the Arab Gulf States Institute in Washington. “Just as Saudi Arabia normalizes relations with Iran it produces a potential framework for eventually, perhaps, normalizing with Israel as well.”



“The fact that it has been agreed to in Beijing is very significant for China and its rise as a diplomatic and strategic player in the Gulf region,” said Ibish. “This does seem to recognize China’s unique role in being able to broker relations between Tehran and Riyadh, stepping into a position that had previously been occupied

by European countries, if not the United States, and this will not be particularly pleasing to Washington.”

The reconciliation comes as China expands its diplomatic outreach in the Arab world. In December, Chinese President Xi Jinping was welcomed in Riyadh in an extravagant ceremony as part of a visit that brought together 14 Arab heads of state. That was just months after a relatively low-key meeting with US President Joe Biden, whose relationship with Saudi Arabia has been frosty.

“China’s role as a broker is striking, and could foreshadow a bolder diplomatic position,” said Sanam Vakil, a senior research fellow for the Middle East and North Africa program at Chatham House think-tank in London.

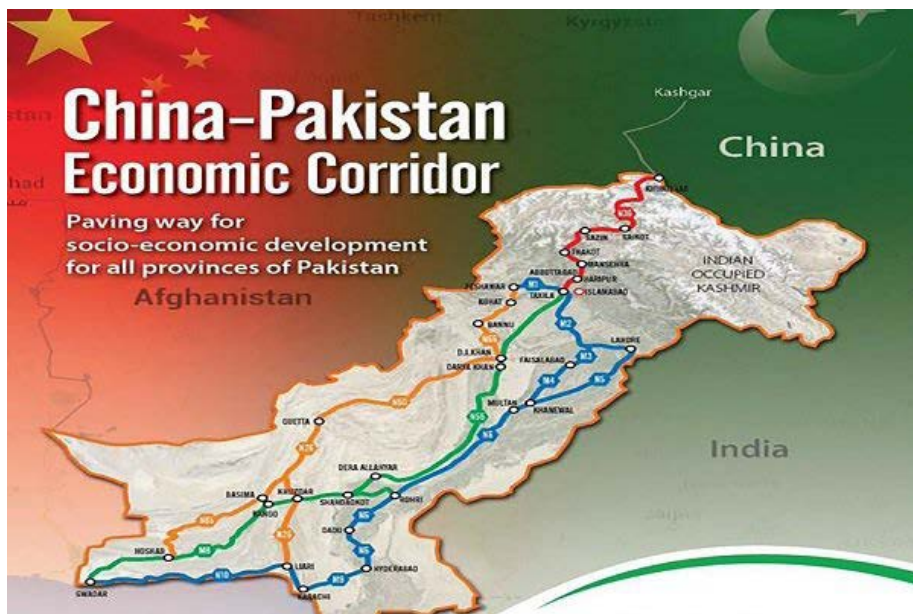
“But we should be cautious in overstating Beijing’s intentions. This is more about China’s interests in the region. China has brought together two key actors – regional and economic actors – for the purpose of reducing regional tensions and facilitating greater economic engagement with both.”

Courtesy CNN



POWERCHINA's 10th CPEC Anniversary: Green, Sustainable Development for Pakistan

By Zubeda Anjum Niazi



The Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), which is being proposed by China, will celebrate its tenth anniversary this year, as will the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC).

Since it first entered the Pakistani market in 1987, POWERCHINA, one of the major companies involved in the building of the CPEC, has been active in a number of sectors including energy, electricity, water management, and infrastructure investment.

Over the past 36 years, POWERCHINA has finished 103 projects in Pakistan, including the largest wind farm, the Tricon Boston 150 MW Wind Power Project.

The Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) will celebrate its tenth anniversary this year, as will the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC).

Other projects include the largest installed hydropower station, the Tarbela 4th and 5th Extension Hydropower Project, and the first roller-compacted concrete (RCC) dam in Pakistan, the Gomal Zam Dam Multi-purpose Project.

POWERCHINA has taken part in the investment and development of 11 of the

first 20 energy and infrastructure projects of the CPEC during the past ten years.

It has consolidated the conventional power industry while continuing to advance other industries and innovative energy research.

The Diamer Basha Dam Project, Pakistan's largest hydropower hub project now being built by POWERCHINA, will grow to be the tallest and largest RCC dam in the world and supply Pakistan with 18.1 billion KWh of clean electricity annually.

Nadeem Ilyas, a Pakistani Project Engineer, believes that one of the project's many beneficial outcomes will be the creation of more than 20,000 new job possibilities as it moves forward.

POWERCHINA, one of the top businesses in China, has built and operated renewable energy projects of the highest caliber in compliance with international standards and is dedicated to enhancing Pakistan's infrastructure and reducing local power shortages.

It has made significant contributions to Pakistan's sustainable development in addition to being instrumental in the creation of CPEC.

Courtesy The Diplomatic Insight



This Ramzan to begin on same day across Pakistan?

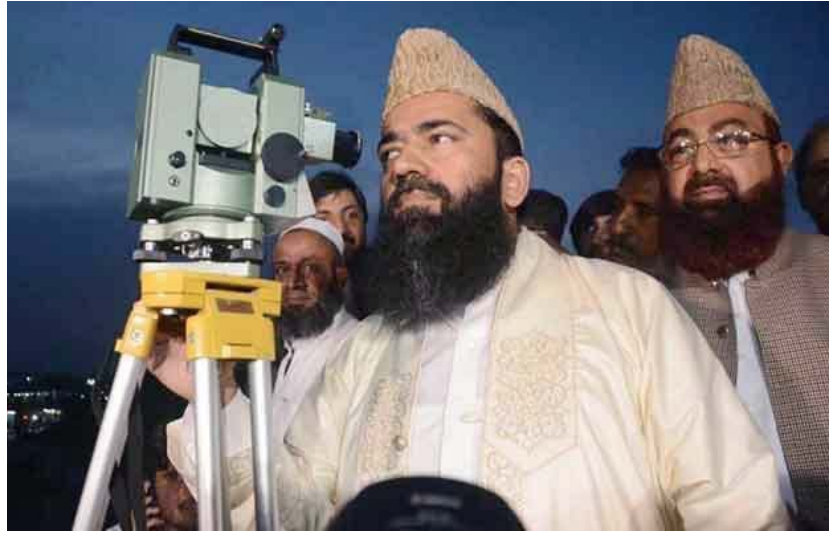
By Mahnur Mehfuz

Ramadan is the ninth month of Islamic calendar during which Muslims around the world fast from sunrise to sunset. Fasting is one of the five pillars of Islam, and it is required of all able-bodied Muslims who have reached the age of puberty. During Ramadan, Muslims refrain from eating, drinking, smoking, and engaging in sexual activity from dawn until sunset.

And during the last ten nights of the month, entire Quran is recited in mosques, specifically on Laylat al-Qadr or the night of value. Allah in Holy Quran says that praying on Laylat al-Qadr is better than a thousand months of worshipping. On this sacred night, the first verses of the Quran were revealed to Prophet Muhammad (PBUH).

Ramadan is the month that is commemorated in Pakistan with the greatest amount of reverence, seriousness, and submission. Fasting is viewed as a time to purify one's mind, spirit, and body rather than as a punishment.

Sighting of the Ramazan moon in Pakistan marks the beginning of this holiest month in the Muslim calendar and the cleric-led Ruet-e-Hilal committee specifies when fasting should begin.



Ramadan moon sighting is primarily announced by the Ruet-e-Hilal Committee. This body convenes to confirm various moon sighting evidences from across the country.

Ramadan is of great importance to Muslims for several reasons. First and foremost, it is a time for spiritual reflection and renewal. By abstaining from food and drink, Muslims are reminded of the suffering of those who are less advantaged and are encouraged to be charitable and compassionate towards others. Ramadan is also a time for Muslims to strengthen their relationship with Allah and to seek forgiveness for their sins.

Fasting during Ramadan is an act of worship and a spiritual discipline. It is a way for Muslims to demonstrate their devotion to Allah and to discipline their bodies and minds. There are some exceptions to fasting during Ramadan. Those who are sick, pregnant, breast-feeding, traveling, or experiencing menstruation are exempt from fasting.

However, they are required to make up the missed days at a later time. In addition to fasting, Muslims also perform Taraweeh prayers during Ramadan. These prayers are optional that are performed after the Isha prayer.

Shopping in markets and bazaars increases after mid-Ramadan as people get ready for 'Eid al-Fitr, which is the most enthusiastically observed holiday in Pakistan. The end of Ramadan is celebrated with a festival called Eid al-Fitr, which means "festival of breaking the fast." This is a time for Muslims to come together with family and friends to celebrate the end of Ramadan.

The day begins with a special Eid prayer, followed by a sermon. Muslims then exchange greetings and spend the day with loved ones. A certain amount of money called Fitrana is given to poor before the Eid prayers.



The wrecked traffic situation

It is important to note that displaying unauthorized number plates is a violation of traffic laws

By Hamza Qureshi

Pakistan has been facing various issues related to traffic management and vehicle registration for a long time. A new phenomenon finally came into the limelight, highlighting the incompetence and corruption in the concerned government departments.

Significant delays in obtaining number plates were observed for motor vehicle owners in Punjab and Sindh. Despite collecting billions of rupees in vehicle registration fees from the owners, the provincial excise departments in these provinces have not been able to provide number plates to about 2 million vehicle owners in Sindh and 2.2 million in Punjab.

Several car owners in Pakistan display fancy number plates on their vehicles to show off their status and wealth or to simply make their vehicles easily recognizable. However, it is important to note that displaying unauthorized number plates is a violation of traffic laws.

Recently, the Sindh traffic police launched a campaign against the fancy number plates to enforce the law, causing an increase in the demand for official number plates of vehicles. On the other hand, the campaign has become a disaster for the public as the supply of official number plates is disrupted to the core. The public is already under pressure due to the economic crisis, and the delay in providing official number plates is adding to their troubles.

Reportedly, the supply of hundreds of thousands of motor number plates has been affected due to the contractor's inefficiency. It may be noted that the Excise, Taxation, and Narcotics Control Department (ETND) of Punjab had awarded a contract for the supply and provisioning of ISO 7591-certified license number plates to NRTC on October 29, 2020. The Sindh government also awarded the contract for making computerized number plates in 2020 to NRTC.

NRTC further outsourced the contract to

private companies, which were unable to provide number plates in time. "Brimming dissensions between the Excise Authorities of the Provinces and the National Radio Telecommunication Corporation (NRTC) caused the delay," sources said.

NRTC outsourced the project to two companies, InfoComm and IT Communications. These companies were responsible for the procurement of number plates. An investigation by this scribe revealed that the contractors of the NRTC were found involved in unlawful activities, including tax evasion.

An internal source reported that a few months back, the private companies responsible for the preparation of license plates were found to be involved in tax evasion. However, no action was taken against them. According to documents available with the National Accountability Bureau (NAB), the owner of a private company, IT Communications, Faisal Rao, who had been awarded the contract for supplying number plates in Punjab, struck a PKR 62,500,000 plea bargain deal with the NAB in 2018. Rao is documented as being associated with the Lahore Parking Company.

While the contractor on a similar scope for Sindh is Info Comm, led by Saad Arshad, who is also a relative of Faisal Rao, Reportedly, both companies are being managed by a single person, i.e., Faisal Rao, with different names due to unknown reasons. Sources further shared that IT Communications was found guilty of tax evasion worth \$56 million in 2021. Despite all this, the NRTC hasn't blacklisted these contractors. Scribe contacted Syed Amer Javed, the marketing manager at the NRTC, to clarify the reason to award the contracts to one family, but he wasn't available for a response.

According to the Customs Court's decision, which was ordered in December 2021, IT Communications was found responsible for under-invoicing and tax theft worth hundreds of millions. The court imposed a

fine of about Rs. 26 crore as a penalty.

The issue is not just about the incompetence of contractors. In fact, it is more about the government's inability to ensure transparency and accountability. The government should take strict action against contractors who fail to deliver on their commitments, and the procurement process must be transparent to ensure that only competent and trustworthy companies are awarded contracts.

An official handout dated March 7 was released by the Punjab Government's PRO office. It stated that Punjab Ombudsman Azam Khan took notice of the delay in procurement and supply of numbers. He ordered NRTC and ETND Punjab to submit monthly updates on the project until the issue is fully resolved, but Sindh's provincial government has yet to take any notice. It is allegedly said that the brother of a provincial minister is involved in these bogus contracts. Thus, the provincial excise ministry is not actively pursuing the matter.

The government should also devise a plan to reduce the burden on the public, particularly for those who have already paid the registration fees but have not received their official number plates. One solution could be to issue temporary number plates to vehicle owners until the official ones become available. This will allow them to use their cars without fear of being penalized by the traffic police.

Furthermore, the government should ensure that the supply of license plates is not interrupted in the future. This can be achieved by improving communication and coordination between the federal and provincial agencies involved in the process. It must be ensured that the public is not at the mercy of a single contractor.

An efficient and transparent traffic management system will not only benefit the people but will also contribute significantly to the country's overall development.

Rupee plunge awfully affect Hajj package

Hajj expenses increase by Rs 350,000; national flag carrier to charge fares in US dollars; sponsorship scheme only for overseas Pakistanis, relatives

By Noor Aftab

Given the worsening economic situation fast gripping the country, the government has decided to give half of Hajj quota of its citizens to Pakistanis living abroad under its new Hajj Policy-2023 that is aimed at saving the outflow of around 400 million dollar.

Overseas Pakistanis can themselves perform Hajj or finance the expenses of someone living in Pakistan by availing of the quota, which the government is going to offer due to foreign currency shortage.

'Hajj sponsorship scheme' is only for overseas Pakistanis or their relatives. Pakistanis remitting foreign exchange from abroad to designated accounts will be able to benefit from this scheme.

Depositing dollars from Pakistan will not be allowed and foreign exchange earned from sponsorship scheme will be used to pay Hajj related obligations in Saudi Arabia. The fall in the value of Pakistani rupee has a significant impact on the Hajj package.

Moreover, Pakistani passport will be required to join the sponsorship scheme. Overseas Pakistanis will not be dipping into Pakistan's meagre foreign currency reserves to pay for flights, lodging and other expenses associated with the pilgrimage. In fact, it is actually a net gain of foreign currency for the government, since overseas Pakistanis will pay the costs in dollars.

Total expenditure on the Hajj scheme in 2023 is about 2 billion dollar. Foreign exchange reserves are hovering between 3 billion and 4 billion dollar, which is barely a month of export payments. So this new scheme will help the government to deal with the situation that could otherwise take a nasty turn.

This year, Saudi Arabia has given a Hajj quota of 179,210 pilgrims to Pakistan but due to severe economic constraints, the government could not afford to allow a massive capital flight. Still, the government



needs money to facilitate pilgrimage for the remaining half, so it has to arrange 284 million dollar for this purpose.

Hajj quota allocated to Pakistan for 2022 was 81,132. It was distributed between government and private Hajj schemes at a ratio of 40: 60 i.e. 32,453 and 48,679, respectively. Under the government scheme, the designated expenditure per pilgrim will cost Rs1.1 million to Rs1.2 million as per the current exchange rate. It will fluctuate with changes in the exchange rates. The Saudi government is also increasing tax rate on Hajj, which may also raise the cost for pilgrims.

Hajj expenses have increased by almost Rs350,000 due to the depreciation of the rupee against the dollar. The estimated expenditure of pilgrims in the northern part of Pakistan--Lahore, Islamabad, Peshawar, Multan and other cities--will be Rs1.175 million while pilgrims in the southern part--Karachi, Quetta, Sukkur and Hyderabad--will be charged Rs1.165 million.

PIA will initiate Hajj flight operations from May 21 to August 12. Saudi airlines along with two private airlines in Pakistan will also operate from the rest of Pakistan in Hajj operations. Road to Makkah project facility will continue at Islamabad Airport,

which is likely to be extended to Lahore and Karachi. The Pakistani pilgrims were not able to get train facilities last year but this time they can avail the train facility in Mina, Muzdalifah and Arafat.

The national flag carrier has decided to charge fares in the US dollars for the second year in a row and fixed the fares for pilgrims going to Saudi Arabia under the private Hajj scheme from 870 to 1180 dollar for the southern region. On the other hand, the airfares for the pilgrims from the northern region are in the range of 910 to 1,220 dollar.

In case of savings from the Hajj package, it would be refunded to the pilgrims through the bank accounts provided by them. Those applicants of the 'sponsorship Hajj scheme' who have no bank account, would be provided money in cash.

The Hajj applications can be submitted from March 16 to March 31, 2023, through 14 designated banks across the country. In the regular Hajj scheme, those who have performed Hajj in the last 5 years will not be allowed to apply and the age limit for Hajj has been abolished from this year. The names of the pilgrims going to Hajj this year will be announced in the first week of April.

The government has claimed that Hajj cost for Pakistan is below India, Bangladesh and Afghanistan. On its request, the government of Saudi Arabia has also reduced the cost of Hajj for Pakistan.

Pilgrims seeking to perform Hajj must be fully vaccinated against COVID-19 with the complete doses of the following vaccines to be able to enter the Kingdom including Pfizer/BioNTech, Oxford/Astra-Zeneca, Janssen, Moderna, Sinopharm, Sinovac, Covaxin, Sputnik V, Nuvaxovid, and Covovax.

Other salient features of Hajj Policy 2023 include: regular Hajj scheme applicants must have a single or joint bank account. All banks will assist in opening such accounts; a mahram must accompany female pilgrims but women over 45 years of age can go without mahram; mahram of women going to Hajj for the first time will be exempt from the five-year condition; selection of people in regular scheme will be done through computerized balloting, the results of which will appear on ministry's website; waiting list of pilgrims will also be created in which only 0.5 percent of official Hajj quota will be kept; three percent (2,688) of the total seats under the government Hajj scheme will be reserved for



hardship cases like newborns or broken families.

Applicants who fail in regular Hajj scheme will be able to receive their money within seven days in the bank account provided or in the form of cash from the relevant bank; three hundred seats (for labor quota) will be

reserved for low paid employees of companies registered with the Employees Old Age Benefits Institution (EOBI), and Workers Welfare Fund. List of authorized quota holders Hajj Group Organizers (HGOs) will be released later through the ministry's website for admission to the private Hajj scheme.



University of Essex, UK, creating job-ready graduates, says VC

In exclusive interview with TTI Prof Anthony William Forster says Essex facilitates two-year post graduation work visa for foreign students



By Zarghon Shah

TTI: Thank you Professor Anthony Forster for visiting Pakistan. First of all, tell us about what is the exact purpose of your visit?

Prof Anthony Forster: This is a really important visit for the University of Essex. This is one of my first team visits since the lifting of the COVID restrictions and I was very very keen to come to Pakistan. We've got four objectives; the first is to speak to the people in the ministry of education and in the government to understand how education is being used as a source for good in Pakistan and how we might be able to help. We're very very keen to build on relationships that we've with universities in Pakistan. As you may know, Essex recruits very well from Pakistan. We've fantastic students who come to the university in top four in the United Kingdom, a number of students come from Pakistan. But we want to build on that by creating some long-term partnerships with universities; and so a second purpose of the work is to meet universities to explore the different strengths that we have and see where we can build some research as well as education partnerships.

Thirdly, we've been very keen to reach out to our alumni community to talk to them, to see how we can support them further in country. And then finally, the capstone of the visit is the graduation ceremony for over two hundred supporters and alumni of the university. A way for us giving back to wonderful Pakistani graduates at the university of Essex.

TTI: Why did you decide to hold a graduation ceremony, particularly in Pakistan?

Prof Anthony Forster: We have fabulous students who come to university. We recruited our first University students in the early 1970s. And we wanted to take a moment to come to Pakistan and celebrate their achievements in country. And, it's not only an opportunity to celebrate with our graduates who'll be bringing their families and friends and it would be a much cheaper way of being able to celebrate here in country rather than holding the graduation ceremony in Colchester. But, we also wanted to use the opportunity to offer a 'vice chancellor's award' to two of our most immi-

nent graduates at the university of Essex. Firstly, Nazeera Habib, who runs the Society for Education, which is a wonderful charity, doing some really important work around women and children's education and using healthy food in a way that promotes well being. And then secondly, Nasar-ud-Din Mirza, who has done some extraordinary things in Pakistan. We particularly want to celebrate the way in which he has been protecting and championing the cultural heritage of Pakistan. These are two wonderful examples of the way in which our graduates are going out into the world and making a difference and we wanted to celebrate that, here in Pakistan. "

TTI: In Pakistan, as you said, you'll be interacting with some of the universities. Will you mention them?

Prof Anthony Forster: We've been to Bahria and the Air University, and also to the NUST. Just a few examples of the universities that we have been visiting. They've got a number of different strengths in research areas that we are particularly interested in

having conversations about and matching our own peaks of research excellence to see how we can build research partnerships particularly in artificial intelligence, business analytics but also in international human rights and in some other important areas as well.

United Kingdom on two year post study work visa and taking up employment and from the first day, that any student arrives at Essex, we are really conscious that we are preparing our students to be job-ready and to stand out from the crowd. And we've seen particular interest in a number

based on that campus and an innovation centre that is there to help students with start-up ideas and for the university to be able to invest in them. And we are really committed to thinking about placement opportunities, so that we can give work experience while students are at the University of Essex. So, we do that with businesses that we are partners of but also the university itself, has a lot of different sections in our professional services; in marketing, in finance, in student support, in communication, external relations and we have been very keen to make sure that we are giving our work experience to Essex graduates through the university's ability to create job opportunities."

TTI: For the information of our intending students, elaborate a little bit about the admission process of the university of Essex.

Prof Anthony Forster: There are a number of different ways in which students can engage with the university if they have got an interest. The most obvious way is to go to our website which has a really straight forward, step by step process for getting in contact with us, for having a conversation with advisors to provide advice on the best courses to take but we are really proud that we are really proud that we have in country experts; University of Essex staff who are based in Pakistan, in Lahore, in Karachi and they are on the ground and are able to provide very direct personal advice and experience of the University of Essex. So those are the routes that I would very very strongly recommend."

TTI: How important is the international education today?

Prof Anthony Forster: "Well, look! I think it's really important to say that in the twenty first century, international education is really important. It's important for intercultural understanding. We think it's some of the very best education that anybody can have if you're studying with other people from other countries from around the world and the United Kingdom offers a fantastic opportunity for that international education. We have a two year post study work visa where if somebody studies, graduates in the United Kingdom, they can stay on to undertake two years of work after they have graduat-



TTI: What do you think which universities in Pakistan stand in world ranking?

Prof Anthony Forster: Pakistan is rapidly rising up the international world rankings and we are really delighted to see that. I mean, notwithstanding the position they have in the world ranking, what we would say and what are own experience is that there are some really important centres of excellence within many, many universities that we have been talking to and we have been keen to see where we can partner in those peaks of excellence with our own expertise to see how we can be stronger together and to build relationships that last over five, ten or perhaps twenty years in really trying to push the frontiers of science and knowledge.

TTI: If we talk about Pakistani students' interests in studying abroad, particularly in UK, what is of particular interest for the Pakistani students to study in Essex?

Prof Anthony Forster: Well, the first thing to say and quite rightly, almost all of our students are interested in being job-ready, in coming back to Pakistan or staying in

of areas, I've mentioned some of those; computer science, electronic engineering, artificial intelligence, analytics and data science, business management with a particular focus on business analytics but we are also seeing very strong interest, for example, in international law and in also, many of the social sciences. One of the exciting things for us is that there are really strong breadths of interests that we are seeing from Pakistan in terms of the courses that we run.

TTI: Pakistani students want to develop skills and get work experience for their future career. How can the University of Essex really help them?

Prof Anthony Forster: Well I've mentioned the very strong focus that we have on creating graduates that are work-ready, that stand out from the crowd. And in the University of Essex, we have businesses that sit on the advisory boards of all of our degree programmes to make sure that we understand what business needs. We've created a business park, that's an intergroup part of the University of Essex, Colchester campus where we have businesses that are

ed. And if you're thinking of the United Kingdom, think of the University of Essex. We have a very strong Pakistani community of over seven hundred students at the University of Essex. We are a university that really cares about our students. We know they are traveling from all over the world and our own intercultural understanding matters enormously in making sure that people feel welcomed, supported and that can get the very best out of the Essex education."

TTI: Professor Anthony, please tell us a little bit about to what extent is the expenditure affordable for Pakistani students at University of Essex?

Prof Anthony Forster: That's a really important issue to make sure that we are really good value, that we are pocket friendly. So we have a number of scholarships that we offer but we also recognise that's only part of the story. We have got really good subsidized accommodation at the university for our international students. They can stay in university accommodation for the duration of their studies that guarantees them a price for their accommodation. And in terms of day to day expenses, we recognise the cost of living challenges is really significant, for example, I've created this year, a hope meal for two pounds, for anybody who would like that. We are

trying to reduce all of the charges that we have for sports, music, volunteering in the arts because we know it's important to create low barriers to engagement in as many activities as possible. Because, in Essex, what goes on in the classroom is important but so too is the extracurricular activities; music, sports, volunteering in the arts. That's a crucial part of the Essex experience. So, we hope in that way that we are being very sensitive to value for money and the cost of an Essex education. "

TTI: Please tell us from your experience as a vice chancellor or an academician, how do you compare the Pakistani students with the rest of the world especially our neighbours?

Prof Anthony Forster: I would say our students from Pakistan are some of the very best that we have at the University of the Essex. One of the reasons that I am here is that we have been so hugely impressed by the quality of students from Pakistan across a full range of disciplines in science and health, in arts and humanities and in social sciences. We know the British education and education at the University of Essex is really focused around offering research led teaching of the very best researchers that we have, teaching our undergraduate and postgraduate students. We know that's different, that sometimes that can bring

particular challenges and we want to make sure that we are offering as much support as we can through the lecturers but also through our personal tutor system to make sure that as I said we are offering the very best support and students can get the very best out of their learning but I have to say that our students from Pakistan are amazing and that's one of the reasons I am here.

TTI: Also please throw some light on the extracurricular activities of your university

Prof Anthony Forster: Extracurricular activities really matter to us at Essex as I say what happens outside of a classroom is as important as what goes on in the laboratory, the lecture room, the seminar room. We invest really significantly, we are absolutely one of the top universities in the United Kingdom for the amount of resource we are investing in the student experience in our student unions, in sport clubs, societies, in arts, in music and in our departmental academic student societies. We see that as really important because at Essex, it's not just about getting an Essex degree, that's important, it's also about getting a transformational education for life and making friends for life and so for us at Essex, the extracurricular activities are absolutely central to the type of experience we offer.



Gynaecologist Dr Tahira Kazmi shares three practices women should adopt if they want to stay alive

By Wara Irfan

In Pakistan, women's reproductive health is shrouded in stigma and taboo. Dr Tahira Kazmi, a gynaecologist with more than 18 years of experience, unpacked some of the issues and stigma around reproductive health as part of a series Gynae Feminism: Conversations of Women's Health and Self-Care in a podcast with Uks founder and Director Tasneem Akhtar.

Gynae feminism is an ideology that gynaecological health is a basic human right. The aim of this series is to not only spread awareness regarding reproductive health but also inculcate vocabulary that women in our country lack to describe their bodily ills and pains.

Speaking about the beginning of her journey as a gynae feminist, Dr Kazmi narrated an incident. She used to write blogs on various topics until one day, a family member mentioned they are experiencing "painful periods." "Why shouldn't I write on periods?" she wondered and wrote her next blog on irregularities of periods.

"The first blog on it got so much reaction...I have a problem, if someone will try to stop me by force, I get encouraged to do it more," she added. She continued writing on reproductive health despite the backlash, often in the shape of character assassination and slander.



Periods are not only a topic of her blogs. According to Dr Kazmi, the most common problem that women come to her with is menstruation. "In any gynaecologist's clinic, 80 per cent of the issues are related to periods," she explained. This is because girls from a very young age experience menstruation that continues for a major part of their lives, till they get to menopause.

"A young girl from interior Punjab came to my house and she used leaves [in place of sanitary napkins]," she explained, drawing from her own experiences and events she witnessed.

Akhtar asked the gynaecologist for advice regarding cervical, breast and uterus cancers, illnesses majority of the

population shy away from talking about. "There are three things women should religiously adopt in their lives if they want to stay alive — regularly get pap smears, mammographies and transvaginal scans," she stressed.

Knowing one's own body is paramount. "Every time your period is irregular, your body is telling you there's an issue inside," the doctor said. She emphasised the need for women, especially educated ones, to learn about their conditions and symptoms before going to the doctor. "They should cross-question the doctor...they must have basic information," she stressed.

When asked about the prejudice and sexism present in family planning policies, where it's mostly women who bear the burden of birth control, she responded by saying that in all her 18-year-long career, she has "never seen a man go towards getting a vasectomy."

According to her, men have misconceptions about vasectomy that their sexual activity will be affected or they will become impotent as a result of the medical procedure. However, none of these are true. "The policy-makers are men," she said, concluding that this is a "global issue".

Courtesy Dawn



The History of Bahawalpur: A Journey Through Time

Bahawalpur has several tourist attractions that are worth visiting



By Pavan Manzoor

Bahawalpur, a city in the Punjab province of Pakistan, has a rich history dating back several centuries. From its early days as a small principality to its rise as a powerful state, Bahawalpur has played an important role in the region's political and cultural landscape. In this article, we will take a journey through time to explore the history of Bahawalpur and the events that shaped it.

The Early Days of Bahawalpur

Bahawalpur was founded in the late 18th century by Nawab Mohammad Bahawal Khan Abbasi, who was a descendant of the Abbasi family that ruled over the region of Sindh in the 17th century. The principality started off as a small settlement and gradually expanded over the years.

The Rise of Bahawalpur State

In 1802, Nawab Mohammad Bahawal Khan Abbasi was granted the title of Amir by the Mughal emperor, which elevated his status and gave him the authority to rule over a larger territory. Over the next few decades, the state of Bahawalpur grew in power and influence. Its strategic location on the trade routes between India and Central Asia made it an important hub for commerce and diplomacy.

Bahawalpur under British Rule

In 1849, the British East India Company annexed the Punjab region, including Bahawalpur. However, the British recognized the Abbasi family's authority over the region and allowed them to continue ruling as a princely state. Bahawalpur remained a loyal ally of the British throughout their rule in India and played an important role in the region's politics.

Modern-Day Bahawalpur

In 1947, Pakistan gained independence from British rule, and Bahawalpur became a part of the new country. However, in 1955, the Pakistani government abolished the princely states and merged Bahawalpur into the Punjab province.

Despite this, Bahawalpur has maintained its unique identity and cultural heritage. The city is known for its beautiful architecture, including the stunning Noor Mahal palace, which was built in the 19th century. Bahawalpur is also famous for its handicrafts, particularly the intricate embroidery work done by local artisans.

In recent years, Bahawalpur has undergone significant development, with new infrastructure projects and industrial zones being established in the city. The city is now a major hub for agriculture, textiles, and oil refining.

Culture, Heritage, and Tourism Places in Bahawalpur: A Tourist's Guide

Bahawalpur, a city in the Punjab province of Pakistan, is known for its rich cultural heritage and historic landmarks. From stunning palaces to ancient shrines, the city has something for everyone. In this article, we will explore the culture, heritage, and tourism places in Bahawalpur that every tourist should visit.

Culture in Bahawalpur

Bahawalpur is home to a unique blend of cultures, with influences from Central Asia, India, and the Middle East.

The city's rich cultural heritage can be seen in its architecture, art, and music. Traditional dances like the Jhumar and Luddi are popular in the region, and local artisans produce intricate handicrafts like embroidery, pottery, and woodwork.



Heritage Sites in Bahawalpur

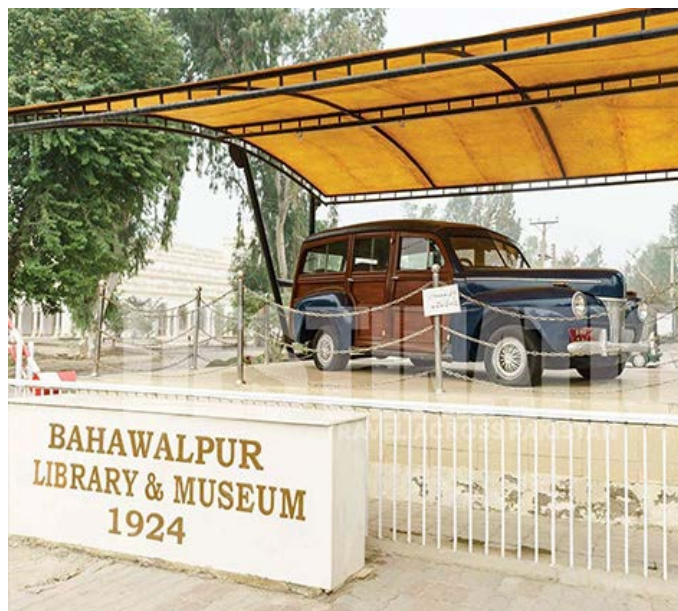
Bahawalpur is known for its historic landmarks, many of which date back several centuries. Here are some of the top heritage sites in the city:

Noor Mahal: Built in the late 19th century, Noor Mahal is a stunning palace that blends Islamic and European architectural styles. The palace was designed for the Nawab of Bahawalpur and is now open to the public as a museum.

Darbar Mahal: This 18th-century palace was once the residence of the ruling family of Bahawalpur. The palace is now a museum and houses a collection of historic artifacts and artwork.

Sadiq Garh Palace: This sprawling palace was built in the early 20th century and features a blend of Mughal and European architectural styles. The palace is now a luxury hotel and is open to guests.

Derawar Fort: Located in the Cholistan Desert, Derawar Fort is a massive fortress that dates back to the 9th century. The fort was built by the Bhati Rajputs and is now a popular tourist destination.



Tourism Places in Bahawalpur

In addition to its heritage sites, Bahawalpur has several tourist attractions that are worth visiting. Here are some of the top spots:

Lal Suhanra National Park: This wildlife sanctuary covers over 1500 acres and is home to a variety of animals, including deer, jackals, and wild boar. The park is also home to several rare bird species.



Abbasi Mosque: This mosque is one of the oldest in Bahawalpur and is known for its stunning architecture. The mosque features intricate tilework and a large central dome.

Uch Sharif: This historic town is located near Bahawalpur and is home to several ancient shrines and tombs. The town dates back to the 13th century and is known for its rich history and cultural heritage.

Cholistan Desert: This vast desert spans over 16,000 square miles and is known for its stunning landscapes and unique culture. Visitors can take camel rides and explore the traditional desert.



Conclusion

The history of Bahawalpur is a fascinating journey through time, marked by the rise and fall of empires, the struggles of independence, and the challenges of modernization. Despite these challenges, Bahawalpur has emerged as a vibrant city with a rich cultural heritage and a promising future. Bahawalpur is a city that is steeped in culture, heritage, and history. From stunning palaces to ancient shrines, the city has something for everyone. Whether you're interested in exploring the city's rich cultural heritage or taking in the natural beauty of the surrounding desert, Bahawalpur has plenty to offer tourists. So pack your bags and get ready to explore this vibrant and historic city.

Elon Musk Aims to Bring Starlink to Pakistan, Awaits Approval from Government Regulator

The launch of Starlink in the country could be a game-changer for the tech industry and the country's economy as a whole

Elon Musk, the visionary entrepreneur and CEO of SpaceX, has set his sights on launching Starlink, his company's satellite-based internet service, in Pakistan. While Musk has expressed his enthusiasm for expanding Starlink to the South Asian country, the decision to grant permission for the service to operate in Pakistan is currently pending with the Pakistan Telecommunication Authority (PTA).

Starlink

Starlink is a global satellite-based internet service that aims to provide high-speed, low-latency internet access to people in remote areas or regions with limited connectivity. The service consists of a network of thousands of small, low-Earth orbit satellites that communicate with ground stations and user terminals to provide internet access.

Starlink, which provides internet connectivity through satellite in numerous countries, submitted a technical and commercial plan with the PTA for operations in Pakistan, with plans to utilize satellite-to-satellite laser technology.

PTA's Pending Decision: Will Pakistan Allow Elon Musk's Starlink To Operate In The Country?

Musk has been vocal about his ambition to bring Starlink to Pakistan, citing the country's large population and potential for growth in the tech sector as reasons why it would be a good fit for the service. In a tweet in October 2021, Musk said, "Starlink will go anywhere in the world where there is a need for affordable, high-speed broadband. Pakistan is a country with tremendous potential, and we would be honored to serve the people there."

However, the decision to grant permission for Starlink to operate in Pakistan is not entirely up to Musk or SpaceX. The PTA, the government body responsible for regulating telecommunications in Pakistan, has yet to approve the service for operation in the country.

The Pakistan Telecommunication Authority (PTA) is yet to grant a license to the satellite-based internet service provider, Starlink, due to various concerns. PTA officials have discussed the matter with stakeholders and found that the security of data is not the only concern regarding Starlink's operations in Pakistan.

The telecom regulator is also examining the company's business model and technological setup, which have not been fully addressed.

The PTA is currently engaging with American-based satellite service providers to ensure that satellite-based services

comply with the applicable licensing regime. This will ensure quality services for users and protect the rights of already licensed operators in Pakistan.

Sources from PTA have reported that the expected price of the device to access the Starlink network in Pakistan is around \$700, with a monthly subscription of \$100 for a 100 Mbps internet connection package. As a result, the device cost and the first-month subscription income will be around Rs. 200,000, with a subsequent monthly package of Rs. 28,000, making it the highest in comparison to any optical fiber or fixed-line operator in Pakistan.

Furthermore, the payment procedure for Starlink is currently only available through credit cards, which could be an issue for Pakistani users living in remote areas with limited access to credit cards and financial services.

The telecom regulator is also analyzing the regulations of other regional countries that have not awarded licenses to Starlink due to similar concerns.

Efforts are underway to ensure that the company complies with all requirements for the license grant in a transparent manner, including with regard to data hosting inside Pakistan and satellite-to-satellite communication that bypasses terrestrial gateways.

The company is having ongoing discussions with the company with the aim of achieving this goal. PTA officials are consulting with all relevant stakeholders, including the Ministry of Information Technology, to analyze the impact of using spectrum in low-Earth orbit (LEO).

Before issuing the license, the PTA requested the business to halt the collection of credit card orders for devices from Pakistani clients.

The launch of Starlink in Pakistan would not only provide much-needed internet access to people in remote areas, but it could also spur economic growth and innovation in the country. As such, many are hopeful that the PTA will grant permission for the service to operate in Pakistan soon.

In conclusion, Elon Musk's plans to launch Starlink in Pakistan have generated a lot of excitement among the country's tech enthusiasts and those seeking better connectivity in remote areas. However, the decision to grant permission for the service to operate in Pakistan is still pending with the PTA. With its potential to bring high-speed, low-latency internet access to millions of people in Pakistan, the launch of Starlink in the country could be a game-changer for the tech industry and the country's economy as a whole.

By Pavan Manzoor

The last ride

Experts are predicting a final between Islamabad United and Lahore Qalandars

By Ali Abdullah

The Pakistan Super League is in its second half, and this is the time when things gets fired up. Some teams qualify for the next round, and some get eliminated. Karachi Kings are the first team to get eliminated. Their last two seasons weren't up to par, even though they were the defending champions in 2021. One positive from Karachi King is Imad Wasim. Imad Wasim is in the form of life with both bat and bowl. It was a good sign as Muhamad Nawaz is the only off-spin all-rounder travelling with the team. Imad's inclusion in the Pakistan team will be crucial as he can bowl with the new ball and score important runs in the last few overs.

Lahore Qalandars faced Multan Sultans in match number 20 of PSL 8. The Lahore Qalandars won the toss and elected to bat first. While batting for the Lahore Qalandars, Sam Billings scored 54 runs on just 35 balls with the help of six fours and two sixes. The second-best score was by Abdullah Shafique, who scored 48 runs on 35 balls with the help of six fours and a six.

Other than these two, everyone else scored fewer than 20 runs. However, as Lahore Qalandars lost too many wickets, all players got a chance to bat, so overall, Lahore Qalandars were able to score 180 runs today for the loss of nine wickets.

For Multan Sultans, Anwar Ali, Ihsanullah, Abbas Afridi, and Kieron Pollard all took two wickets each. While Sameen Gul took one wicket in his three overs, which he bowled. Multan Sultans bowlers restricted the Lahore Qalandars well on 180.

In the Multan Sultans batting order, there were no big scores but many small performances that brought the Multan Sultans near the given target of 181 runs. However, in the end, the Multan Sultans were not able to finish it off with a victory. In the designated 20 overs, they were able to score only 159 runs for the loss of seven wickets.

From the Multan Sultans, Kieron Pollard scored 39 runs on 28 balls with the help of two fours and three sixes. Muhammad Rizwan, the team captain for the Multan Sultans, was able to score 30 runs on 27 balls. Shan Masood scored 19 runs, Usama Mir scored just 17, and everyone else scored lower than that.

Lahore Qalandars' bowlers contained the batters of the Multan Sultans very well. Rashid Khan, in his designated four overs, only gave away 15 runs and took three very valuable wickets from the Multan Sultans. He was the star of the night. He was also given the Player of the Match title and the trophy. Zaman Khan, Haris Rauf, Sikandar Raza, and Hussain Talat also took one wicket each. Shaheen Shah Afridi bowled four overs while David Weise bowled three; these two were not able to take any wickets. With this win, the Lahore Qalandars' secured their spot in the next round



and became the first team to qualify. Lahore picked up their form from last year, and it seems like they won't be an easy opponent to play with in the playoffs.

The second team to qualify for the playoffs was Islamabad United. Islamabad played against the Quetta Gladiators in match 21. As soon as the Quetta Gladiators started batting, they lost four early wickets. They were just 17 for the loss of four wickets. At this point, it seemed like Quetta Gladiators would not be able to even reach the hundred-run mark. The batters who got out were Yasir Khan, Will Smeed, Sarfaraz Ahmed, and Iftikhar Ahmed. All of these got out on single-digit scores. However, later on, the two batters on the crease, Muhammad Nawaz and Najibullah Zardan, played very well. Both of them scored their fifties and saved the Quetta Gladiators batting lineup from ultimate humiliation.

Najibullah Zardan scored 59 runs on 34 balls with the help of 5 fours and 3 sixes, while Muhammad Nawaz scored 52 on 44 balls with the help of 6 fours. Umar Akmal also contributed 43 runs on 14 balls while not being out. Overall, Quetta Gladiators scored a total of 179 runs in their innings while setting the target of 180 for Islamabad United to win the match.

While batting for Islamabad United, Colin Munro scored an epic 63 runs on just 29 balls with the help of five fours and four sixes. Faheem Ashraf scored 39 on 31 balls with the help of six boundaries, and he remained not out. Azam Khan also scored 35 on 25 balls. Overall, Islamabad United was able to chase the target of 180 with three balls of the inning still remaining.

While bowling for Quetta Gladiators, Umaid Asif took three wickets and Muhammad Nawaz took two. While Naseem Shah, Naveen-ul-Haq, and Iftikhar Ahmed took one wicket each, Odean Smith was not able to take any wickets in the 2.3 overs that he bowled and gave away 40 runs to the opposition.

Islamabad United won the match by two wickets with three balls remaining. Fazalhaq Farooqi was awarded the man of the match title and the trophy, as he gave away just 25 runs and took three wickets in his four overs.

Qalandars saving the day

Lahore Qalandars have done a lot for cricket in Pakistan after the Pakistan Super League



Cricket is a sport played in almost every house, from father to child, though that does not mean it has a secure future in Pakistan. Cricket has never lost its value in this country. The team has been unpredictable since the beginning, though it has always stayed in the top ten in the world.

Pakistan has always had superstars in cricket. Pakistan has won all the major ICC tournaments once. Batting has always been a weak point, but their bowling attack has been one of the best. Cricket runs in the nation's blood.

Talking about the national sport of hockey, Pakistan used to be one of the greatest teams in the world. Pakistan is the most successful hockey team to date. The team has four World Cup trophies under its belt. Winning their first world cup in 1971 and their last in 1994. The Olympics have been a successful event for the team as well. 8 medals in the Olympics, 8 of which are in hockey.

Few international hockey teams have a history as storied as the Pakistan men's side. Four World Cup titles, the most by any nation in the history of the sport. Three Olympic gold medals, including the first to break the six consecutive golds, won by neighbors and archrivals India. For anyone growing up watching hockey, as recently as

during the 1990s, few teams personified big match temperament and swagger like the Pakistanis.

Sadly, the national sport is nowhere to be found in the country anymore. Hockey declined after 1994 in Pakistan. Being the national sport of Pakistan and not seeing them qualify for the Olympics after 2012, it's heartbreaking to see a world-class team suffer like this.

Lahore Qalandars have done a lot for cricket in Pakistan after the Pakistan Super League. Not just for their franchise, but they have produced players for the national sides through their trials. They have made a system like none other. A couple of weeks ago, Lahore Qalandar and its management made it public that they have been in touch with the Pakistan Hockey Federation (PHF) and Sindh Sports Board for the last two years. They want to revive the hockey culture in Pakistan and make Pakistan one of the top teams in the world.

Their high-performance program is famous for producing players for their franchise and national team. Shaheen Afridi, Haris Rauf, and even Fakhar Zaman are products of this program. While talking to the media, Atif Rana said that the hockey players would also undergo this program. Twenty-two players will be selected from each city through open trials, which will be

held in all major cities of Pakistan. Shaheen Shah Afridi was named the brand ambassador for Lahore, and Haris Rauf for Karachi. Management Lahore Qalandar also assured that all facilities will be provided by them and players will be sent abroad for training and matches.

Introducing two teams does not mean that only players from these cities can participate. Lahore and Karachi have been introduced because they have a rivalry of their own; hence, this will bring interest. Players from all over Pakistan will be allowed to play, as there is no domicile restriction.

As there is not much hockey happening in the country, the grounds need to be renovated as well. Synthetic turf has been laid on 10 different grounds in Sindh. The Sindh government assured that a specific sum would be set aside annually from the province's budget. A total of \$400 million has been allocated for Abdul Sattar Edhi Stadium's renovation.

This is a very brave step taken by Lahore Qalandars management. Reviving a dead sport in the country is not everyone's cup of tea. Hopefully, provincial governments will play their role and help Atif Rana and co. in their mission.

By Ali Abdullah

In the future, I hope to take on more significant roles. Shaniera Akram

The Truth International reached Shaniera Akram and talked about her acting endeavors

By Kaukab Jahan

Shaniera Akram has gained fame in Pakistan not only because of her much-celebrated cricketer husband Wasim Akram but also because of her amicable personality and her ability to integrate herself so well into Pakistani society. Besides her role as an active social media activist highlighting the issues Pakistani society is facing, she has also come up with another passion of hers: acting. She is debuting as an actor in a feature film called Money Back Guarantee (MBG), which releases on this Eid-ul-Fitr.

The Truth International reached Shaniera Akram and talked about her acting endeavors, her experience of doing a film, and her activism on social media platforms.

How did you decide to go into acting?

It was Faisal who asked Wasim and me if we would like to be in his film. We asked for the script, and when we read it, it was very funny and humorous. We really liked it, so we said yes.

Tell us a little about your role in the film?

I am not allowed to talk too much about my role. I can tell that I am playing an American who comes to visit Pakistan with a couple of other Americans (who are of Pakistani origin). I don't know how much I have been able to bring to the table, but it was so much fun doing that. My shoot was finished in 11 days, and I have heard the whole team has done an amazing job finishing the rest of the movie. I haven't seen the film yet, so I'm waiting to see it when it is released.

Would you like to continue acting in the future?

I would definitely continue acting, as I enjoyed it a lot and realized that I love to be in front of the camera. I think I should do something more challenging next time—a character that I



completely threw myself into. It can be a role that demands speaking Urdu too. I have a pretty good memory, so I guess I would be able to memorize lines in Urdu for the specific role. Yes, it would definitely be with the help of coaching from an expert in the language. To be honest, I am not sure if the Pakistani audience wants to see me on television and in cinema. Let's see how it goes after MBG.

Do you have any specific kind of script or role for yourself in mind?

Actually, I would love to write a few stories. I have a couple of ideas for Pakistani cinema. One can be an observer through the eyes of a foreigner like me who comes to Pakistan. It would actually be based on my experiences, including what I saw and did when I first came to Pakistan. I would love to play the role of that newcomer. I think that would be quite an interesting character. It may even be the mother or sister of a child who comes to Pakistan after a long time.

Who would you like to have opposite you in your next projects?

Oh. That's Wasim Akram. Actually, it was fun to act with him. Moreover, he has a very strong presence on screen. We might play mother and father in our next film. Besides joking, I believe there are a lot of brilliant actors in the

industry, although whenever I watch a Pakistani drama or film, I try to translate them from Urdu to English to understand their roles. I have realized that they are super talented.

You have been very active on social media. How do you think we can use social media to bring about a positive change in society?

I think social media has done an incredible job. It is doing well right now, as before this, like five to six years ago, we were not doing anything substantial with social media. It was just selfies and photos here and there, but now people are trying to do positive things through it. Moreover, we are able to comment on things that we used to brush under the carpet before. Now, people are videotaping what they feel is wrong and posting it on social media platforms. We saw that there were some girls bullying and berating others at their university. Now if we didn't have that filmed, it would keep going. Now bullying at educational institutes has become an issue. Let's talk about it. Bullying happens everywhere. It happens in schools. It happened at my school. Now every parent can talk to their children about that bullying. Think: if we didn't have social media, that video could not be up, and we would not be able to talk about the issue. So I think it is a great tool, and we should use it more.

Qavi Khan — the last of the legends

They say never meet your heroes in person — I met Qavi Khan and can report that he was as much a gentleman off screen as he was on screen

By Muhammad Suhayb

Writing about an actor who enthralled generations with his work is quite a daunting task. Usually, actors you admired in your childhood turn out to be anything but nice when you meet them in person. Muhammad Qavi Khan was a true gentleman. He not only inspired many with his on-screen performances, but was equally charming off-screen.

Born on November 13, 1942 in the Peshawar of undivided India, Muhammad Qavi Khan had been around for ages. He began his career as a child artist from Radio Pakistan Peshawar in 1952, but destiny brought him to Lahore, where he got a chance to work as the lead in PTV's first-ever play Nazrana (1964). For the next couple of years, Khan shuttled between his job at a multi-national bank, and TV/films. He later quit his job for a full-time acting career. He was a regular in theatre as well and had been performing since 1961. I was fortunate enough to watch him play Nawab Sahab in a play at Karachi's Arts Council in 2008.

From being PTV's first lead to the lead actor's grandfather in films — his last film was Tich Button in 2022 — Khan had the habit of getting into the skin of all the characters he portrayed. His short but powerful performance as the helpless father of Faisal Rehman in Nahin Abhi Nahin (1980) was quite touching.

In 1972/73, he played the role of Waheed Murad's father in Mulaqat while just a year earlier, he played his character's colleague in Naag Mani. In 1978, he returned to play his father's role in Parakh, where he was first seen in the role of a police officer. The age difference between Waheed Murad and Qavi Khan was just four years yet it never felt so on screen. Khan credited Murad's charisma for such remarkable performances — "Waheed ko acting karta dekh ke main apni lines bhool jata tha [I would forget my lines after watching Waheed act]," was the reply from someone who had played all the male-oriented roles available in a motion picture.

He even ventured into film production but by 1980 had more flops than hits to his



credit. His production Dhamki was eventually released as Paasban. It was General Zia ul Haq's reign as president and Pakistan was involved in fighting America's war with the USSR in Afghanistan. Even the title text of Paasban, appearing in bright red, was not spared, as red was linked with the left.

Fed up with films, Khan returned to TV to resume his second innings. Exposure to the world benefited him and the 80s brought more successes than his first few years. Knowing his days as a lead were over, Khan experimented with different roles. He was one of the four brothers in PTV's long play Mirza and Sons (1983), where his character Rahat wanted to emulate actor Qavi Khan. The dialogues, expressions and body language of the wanna be actor are still a treat to watch. Andhera Ujala was born after the success of TV play Rago me Andhera (1983) urged producers to turn it into a serial.

With Rahat Kazmi's refusal to continue, producers turned to Qavi Khan, whose performances as DSP Tahir Ali, immortalised the character. It influenced many like me so much that whenever we had to address any colleague named Jaffar, the words that came out would be, "Jaffar Hussain, yeh sab kya ho raha hai?"

When Nadeem-Shabnam starrer Pehchan (1975) was aired on TV in 1987, I was

shocked to see Khan in an altogether different avatar — that of a smuggler. Upon learning of the family he abandoned as a kid, Khan not only fights his boss — the typical bishum bishum — but also sets out to meet his mother. Still recovering from the aftershocks of the 'criminal' activities of Khan's character Rashid, I broke down at the eventual meet-up. Mehdi Hassan's tera pyar mere jeevan ke sang rahega still resonates in my ears.

Even as someone who grew up during Sultan Rahi's rule as a top box office draw, it was Khan who recommended that I start watching Punjabi films. He explained that there was not much difference in understanding the language and after some time, it would seem like an Urdu film. With his suggestion, I discovered Sultan Rahi-less Punjabi cinema with Khan's Manjhi Kithe Dhawan (1974) becoming my personal favourite. During my next meeting with him, I asked about the inspiration behind the climax of his film and his reply was more of a performance.

Like an experienced theatre actor, he leaned to one side, transported himself to the year 1964 and uttered: "Aurat ho tu tumharay jaisi, dost ho tu tumharay jaisa aur bewaqoof ho tu meray jaisa [A woman should be like you, a friend should be like you, and a fool like me]," the climax of his very first film Rivaaj, directed by Diljeet Mirza and written by the maverick Riaz Shahid.



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