

Fortnightly

The Truth International

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1st - 15th March 2023

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How to Achieve Political Stability
Democracy demands opponents' existence
accepted and respected

Pakistan and IMF
Lack of trust forced Pakistan to have
toughest negotiations with IMF mission

Pak-Afghan Border
Pakistan needs national policy to
counter terrorism



At the Brink of Constitutional Collapse





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The Collapsing Constitution

By Hammad Ghaznavi



With all the major institutions in the country at each other's throat, the constitutional arrangement seems unspooling. The institutions that would play the arbitrator in the past appear to have lost the required strength and acceptability among the stakeholders. As a state, we have failed to honour the document – the constitution – that gave birth to all our institutions. Those who abused the constitution were given a state funeral; Pervez Musharraf was a recent example. Those who tried to protect the constitution were treated like enemies; Justice Seth Waqar was a case in point. Finally, the edifice of legal structure seems to be collapsing, with the judiciary, parliament and executive fighting a fierce battle for power.

First, let's have a backgrounder. According to the constitution, if an assembly is dissolved, the elections are to be held within 90 days – by 14th April in this case. When the Election Commission (ECP) and the Governors failed to come up with a date for the Punjab and KP elections, the President, citing Section 57 (1) of the Election Act, announced April 9, as the election date for the two provincial Assemblies. Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif called the move unconstitutional and illegal, as the said Act bounds the President to consult the ECP before announcing the election date. The ECP chief called it a transgression on the President's part as it was not his constitutional power to announce the date for a provincial election. "Arif Alvi has acted like a king and a PTI worker," said PDM

chief Maulana Fazalur Rehman. While the debate over presidential powers in this regard was raging, the Supreme Court intervened and took a suo moto notice of the issue. But the move proved controversial from the word go as instead of a full court, a 9-member bench was formed whose composition was objected to by various bar councils, including a judge on the said bench because of the exclusion of the two senior most judges and inclusion of two 'controversial' judges. The divide in the Supreme Court has been a known fact, but the bench formed on the issue has brought it to the limelight. Political parties hate each other's guts, and likewise, so it seems, the brother judges in the courts. The full court will display it all.

Meanwhile, on the political front, PML-N's Chief Organizer Maryam Nawaz belligerently attacked certain judges on the 9-member bench, smelling bias and ill-will in the suo moto. In a public rally, she displayed on screen the pictures of the judges who she thought were compromised. These judges have a long history of anti-PML-N verdicts, including the disqualification of party supremo Nawaz Sharif, she argued. She also referred to an audio leak of Justice Mazahar Ali Naqvi, wherein he sounded thick with the newly appointed PTI President Ch Pervez Elahi. While PTI chief Imran Khan came out in support of the bench, crystalizing the political divide in the Court.

In this situation, obviously, the court's decision will remain a controversial one.

But that is how it has always been when the courts take up political cases. This time, however, there is a major difference. Historically, the Supreme Court, in cahoots with the army, has been playing the role of facilitating dictators and clipping the wings of popular political leaders. But this time round, insiders agree, the army is not pulling the strings, strictly maintaining its 'Neutrality'. And on the issue of election timings, there seems to be a difference of opinion between the army and the judiciary. The scenario definitely looks confused. It seems the powers that be will not be able to stay 'neutral' on the issue, as sooner or later the ball will end up in their court.

It's after a long time that there is a visible split in the Establishment's ranks. Last time it was in the early 90s when Justice Naseem Hussain Shah restored Nawaz Sharif's assembly that had been dissolved by the then President Ishaq Khan, a protégé of the Establishment. Despite the restoration of the assembly by the court, the government couldn't last long. In other words, the powerful prevailed. Will it be different this time?

An interpretation of the constitution by the Supreme Court that many described as the rewriting of the constitution, led to the ouster of Hamza Shehbaz from Punjab that eventually resulted in the dissolution of the Punjab Assembly. There laid the genesis of the present crisis, many argue. Will the Court's decision put the genie back in the bottle? Indicators are not encouraging!

Raising a stink by going to jail



By M A Niazi

After Pervez Musharraf and Amjad Islam Amjad, it was the turn of Zia Mohyuddin. Of the latter two, I don't know who will be the most regretted. Now I do not doubt that General Musharraf will be regretted, especially by his family circle, but I don't think the regrets of his death are going to be far beyond that circle.

Perhaps, the only person to regret his passing more than the literary figures will be Imran Khan. Rumors of his being illiterate are not true. Credible sources say that he writes with his hand (as opposed to Usman Buzdar, who single-handedly revived the lost art of writing with his feet). However, read he does not. He doesn't watch Urdu dramas much, so he must have missed much of Amjad Islam Amjad's dramatic oeuvre. And perish the thought that he ever read his poetic oeuvre. Zia Mohyuddin was more to do with the performing arts, but one doesn't associate his sort of work, which was serious, with Imran's inclinations, which seem to incline more towards melodrama and slapstick.

Imran and Musharraf had this much in common, that neither had the reputation of being an intellectual. However, military men who have gone through the staff college and the armed forces war course are surprisingly well-read. Imran did go to Oxford, but that doesn't necessarily mean much.

He went ahead and announced that the 'Jail Bharo Tehrik' would start on Wednesday. I wouldn't like to comment on whether it will succeed or not, but I would certainly like to know when the next step will take place, the return of all titles granted by the Government.

I suppose those titles would cover Nawab Bahadur and Khan Bahadur, but would they cover Khan Sahib? So what do you call Imran then? And what about any Nawabzadas? Most are not the descendants of rulers of princely states (who prefer the title Sahibzada), but of people who had received the title of Nawab Bahadur. Where do they stand? Can they surrender the title?

I wonder if Shaukat Tarin will star in the Jail Bharo Tehrik. His must rank as the noisiest arrest not to have taken place. The news of the FIA being allowed to arrest him was given more play than most arrests are given. If I was him, I would get out of the country. Not legally, you see. Perhaps in the back of a truck carrying dollars to Afghanistan.

Imran might have heard of 'Jail Bharo Tehrik' from before Partition and might imagine that they're all fun and games. I've heard that when visiting hours were over, some visitors might choose to stay in prison overnight. Jail discipline had broken

down so much that it was possible. Sometimes prisoners would leave with their friends at night, and not come back till the next day when they would sneak in with the visitors. I've also heard of the 1942 Quit India movement, but that was spearheaded by Congress, not the Muslim League. So I don't suppose any party wanting to be on the same page use it as an example.

One person who will not help fill the jails is Ali Wazir, the PTM MNA who was jailed for anti-Army remarks. He is acknowledged as a spiritual leader by some, not because of his incarceration, but his hairstyle. Well, now that he is free, hopefully, he will get a haircut.

I would imagine that the IMF would stop him. After all, they raised gas prices so much that people are going to cut back on bathing, and so one will have to walk the streets holding one's nose. The IMF is not really anti-health, because they've had us impose a really massive tax on cigarettes, which should make some people at least stop smoking. Or at least cut it down.

Now that would really make the 'Jail Bharo Tehrik' a success. Imagine all those unwashed PTI supporters in jail. In a trice, the atmosphere would be too nauseous even for the most hardened jail staff.

No chance a political plan could last, endure for long

Absence of rules of game in political arena major cause of country's crisis; violations of specific constitutional provisions a norm during last five years; attitude of Pak political elite to constitution not different from Taliban

By Umer Farooq

Without agreed upon norms and constitutional traditions, there is no chance that a political arrangement could last or endure for long. Rival groups or opposing political parties have to bow their heads before political norms or rules of the game in order to maintain order in a political society and to keep it from sliding headlong into anarchy and chaos.

Most of the time, these rules of the game attain a written form in the shape of a constitutional document. There are several examples in the modern history of the world where arch rivals in political society coexisted and operated within the ambit of constitutional norms, tradition, written in a constitutional document or enshrined in unwritten rules of the game. Rivals in a political society might be the worst enemies of each other. They could be using or threatening to use violence against each other, they could be conspiring against each other behind closed doors, they could be making plans to dislodge each other from top political positions. But when it comes to observing the norms or law or rules of the game, they just stick to the book.

The major cause of Pakistan's persistent and incessant crisis during the last two decades is the absence of any rules of the game in the political arena to which all the political parties adhere to. Political parties don't agree on any rules of the game in this country. Violations of specific constitutional provisions by major political players instead have become a norm during the last five years. Ironically some instances of violation of constitutional provisions have become points of celebration among the leaders and cadres of major political parties. Former deputy speaker National Assembly Qasim Suri is now celebrated as a hero within PTI for a ruling which could easily be described as a subversion of the Constitution. On Sunday April 3, 2022, something happened in Islamabad that heralded a major distortion in the parliamentary democracy, and that could only be described as another incarnation of the specter of Ziaul Haq that is still haunting our democracy. Events happened in quick succession — former deputy speaker of the National Assembly, Qasim Suri, rejected the no-confidence motion against the then premier Imran Khan on the pretext of foreign conspiracy, and within a few minutes Khan appeared on national television to announce he had dissolved the National Assembly. President Arif Alvi signed the dissolution order.

April 3rd was the day of voting on the motion, and the opposition had mustered the support of 197 parliamentarians, whereas only 172 votes were required to dislodge the prime minister. While addressing his party leaders in the afternoon, the ex-PM said, "when the highest national security body has



declared that there was a foreign conspiracy and then the numbers in the parliament become irrelevant". Imran Khan's message was clear: the National Security Committee is a super body and the parliament doesn't matter. He thinks the parliament is subservient to the National Security Committee — because its members include the military chiefs and military spymasters.

Zia didn't succeed in establishing a supra decision-making body like the National Security Council. He came under tremendous pressure from the parliament and withdrew the proposal to set up the National Security Council. But his incarnations have succeeded: late General (Retd) Pervez Musharraf created such a supra body and presided over its proceedings in his nine-year rule as a constitutionally powerful president. Imran Khan is no anomaly — he served as the prime minister because the numbers game in the parliament was in his favour three years back. Yet he remained true to his political ancestry by declaring that the decision of a supra decision-making body can overrule the numbers in the parliament.

We have played a role in making a mockery of law and constitution. A former prime minister and a convict of the court of law was allowed to go abroad for treatment. Pakistan's leading political figures and law-abiding citizens justify the escape of their leader. Pakistan's intelligence services indulged in spy games to prevent a former military dictator from appearing before the court where he had to be indicted. And these spy games ensured that he is never indicted for high treasons under Article 6. Later many journalists wrote in their reports that the then army chief didn't like the idea of a former COAS indicted for high treason.

These are only two crude examples, where our leaders and power wielders have made a mockery of law. Such instances



are gaining normality. Violations of law and constitution have stopped stirring the society into action. I don't dislike Pakistani Taliban and other insurgent groups because of their inclination to extreme forms of religion because that is a lifestyle of a large segment of our society. I dislike them because they don't accept Pakistani laws and the constitution. The attitude of Pakistan's political elite to the constitution is not any different than that of the Taliban.



The same president who had no qualms about signing of dissolution of National Assembly in April 2022 after a fraudulent rejection of no confidence motion in the National Assembly, took extra pain to emphasize that a specific constitutional provision has been violated because Election Commission of Pakistan didn't announce elections for Punjab and KP Assemblies within 90 days of dissolution of Provincial Assemblies. True, it is clearly a violation on the part of ECP. But can President Arif Alvi explain why he signed the dissolution after fraud was committed by his party in the parliament in April 2022? But now it was the turn of the other side to insist that their blocking of announcement of election was a routine matter and didn't amount to violation of the constitution. The present ruling party PML-N and its crony bureaucrats are trying their best to present their move as routine affairs while it was not a routine affair.

There are no serious attempts at consensus building to run the governance process. What we see is a continuous strife and struggle, in an effort on part of political groups, to eliminate and undermine each other. In parliamentary democracy, you routinely make compromises, engage with, and enter into give and take arrangements with your opponents. In tribal warfare, the goal is to eliminate your foe.

These two opposing attitudes and trajectories spawn two different kinds of political climate—engaging your opponent in parliamentary democracy could result in smooth functioning of the government on the basis of mutual toleration.

When you try to eliminate your opponent like Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto was eliminated through manipulation of the judicial process, you hammer a nail in the coffin of your political system. Ironically, our political history is littered with events which have, in the past, transformed our political environment from the one which was conducive for parliamentary democracy to the one in which only tribal animosity could work.

The elder Bhutto's hanging was one such event. Most of the time, violence which in the past had reverted Pakistani politics back to the environment of tribal warfare, originated from the state. You subject an individual to third degree torture, this will compel the individual to think in terms of seeking revenge. You use the state machinery's capability for violence to eliminate a group or its members, this will revert the politics back to tribal culture. We have cases in which the state's military force was used against lightly armed civilians. We have cases in which military force was used against civilians holed up in a mosque. We have cases in which the state's machinery was used against unarmed protestors. All this is a recipe for introducing the tribal style of politics in society. Then there is the incidence of ethnic violence in cities like Karachi, which has the potential to convert warring factions into groupings as rigid as tribes and clans. Sectarian violence also does the same.

We have adopted parliamentary democracy as a legal and constitutional reality in our society and yet have never bothered to wholeheartedly embrace the norms and values of that system.

Consequently, what we describe as politics in our society, is not smooth and calm functioning of parliamentary institutions, traditions and norms. We don't see opposing political groups engaging in policy debates or engaging in a give and take process to arrive at a compromise. There are no serious attempts at consensus building to run the governance process. What we see is a continuous strife and struggle, in an effort on the part of political groups, to eliminate and undermine each other. Parliamentary norms like acceptance of your opponents and their interests as legitimate are simply missing from our political culture.

Take the example of rival political groups in present-day Pakistan: while Imran Khan is hell-bent upon destroying and eliminating the PML-N leadership from the political scene by dubbing them as the most corrupt in the history of the country, the PML-N is equally adamant in eliminating Imran Khan by describing him as someone who is hell-bent on introducing anarchy, chaos and fascism into society. The point is not whether either of them is correct in adopting an intransigent position towards the other, the point is that their intransigence has the potential to destroy the already ailing system of parliamentary democracy that was only restored 14 years ago. I believe all politicians need to consult Khursheed Shah on this matter, and listen carefully to what he has to say.

Democracy is a system where the first thing you need to do is to accept the legitimacy of your opponents' existence and their interests. We have adopted parliamentary democracy as a legal and constitutional reality in our society and yet have never bothered to wholeheartedly embrace the norms and values of that system.



General elections so near yet so far

Securing election date a halfway to IK destination; PDM hoping Khan's political demise; all govt anti-PTI moves backfire

By Tahir Niaz

The government spent over one month playing ping-pong as regards to announcing the date for the elections of the Provincial Assemblies of Punjab and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. The Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) and both the governors moved rapidly back and forth but didn't announce the election date, compelling Supreme Court to intervene.

Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) remained key to how the country's politics got here. It was March 8, 2022, when the joint opposition including Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N), Pakistan Peoples' Party (PPP), Maulana Fazlur Rehman's Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam and other smaller parties submitted a no-trust motion against the then prime minister in the National Assembly. Initially it lacked sufficient votes, 172 in the 342-member House, to de-seat the prime minister who was already three and a half years into his five-year term of office.

Khan was vulnerable on two fronts, of which the joint opposition parties took advantage and expedited their move against the PTI government. First, the cracks within the ruling PTI had started appearing quite visible as a sizable number of its parliamentarians intended to defect to the opposition, though the PTI blames some external forces for the same.

As the PTI led the coalition government with a razor-thin majority in the centre, it needed to keep key partners including the Karachi-based Muttahida Qaumi Movement-Pakistan (MQM-P) and the Balochistan-based Balochistan Awami Party (BAP). But PTI could not manage any of them. However, the Punjab-based Pakistan Muslim League-Quaid-e-Azam stood with the PTI to the last.

PTI's other weakness was rising inflation. As Imran Khan was fast losing popularity among the masses due to rising inflation, the PTI government was apparently reluctant in holding fresh elections despite



opposition's repeated calls. After having lost to the opposition on the vote of no-confidence, Imran Khan unwillingly sent the summary for dissolution of the National Assembly to the president so that the then opposition parties could not come into power at least before the next general elections. However, his move was frustrated by the Supreme Court.

Actually, the former prime minister had two bigger challenges: one inside and the other outside the parliament. Inside parliament, Khan had lost the support of coalition allies, denying him majority in the House he needed to defeat the vote of no-confidence. Outside parliament, Khan appeared to have lost the support of the establishment over senior military appointments and policy decisions.

The then opposition alliance took the situation as an opportunity to form its government at the centre and since then Imran Khan has been struggling for fresh elections and power, rather for his political life.

Almost one year has passed and in the meanwhile, Imran Khan took so many political decisions — many of them were criticised even by the PTI sympathizers and what to talk about his political opponents.

With the ECP, the governors, federal government and the interim governments in Punjab and Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa working in apparent agreement to delay the polls until the National Assembly expires on 13 August this year, the political situation has become quite serious and very much comic given the logic being presented to delay the elections for the two Provincial Assemblies.

By making the controversy land in Supreme Court and getting a date for the election of the Provincial Assemblies, Imran Khan has reached just halfway mark of his journey. During his expedition from April last year when he was thrown out of the power corridors, to approaching the Supreme Court and getting a date for the elections, Imran Khan explored multiple political avenues to achieve his objective of fresh elections.

At the outset of the high political drama continuing since last year, Imran Khan decided to dissolve the National Assembly after the then deputy speaker Qasim Khan Suri binned the no-confidence motion against Imran Khan for being backed by the external powers. However, his scheme was frustrated by the Supreme Court.

Khan then got the two Provincial Assem-



blies dissolved. Simultaneously, he decided to return to the National Assembly. PTI lawmakers withdrew their resignations in a bid to grab the seat of leader of the opposition in the House. And the latest of his political moves is the 'jail bharo tehreek'.

One can differ with the political strategy Imran Khan has been adopting since his ouster from power, however, it has benefited the PTI to the extent that it remained popular among the masses, grabbed time on the media and still an attraction for the media attention. Khan is blamed for harming democracy which he hardly sees in the country at present. He was held responsible for the economic and political crisis. He was even blamed for rising animosity among the political leadership of the country.

As the joint ruling alliance frustrated each and every effort made by Imran Khan so far to get the fresh elections, his political decisions remained under tight political scrutiny. Some believe that Khan's decision to quit the National Assembly was a blunder as he could have stopped PDM parties from making amendments to the NAB laws, and could show his strength in the parliament instead of coming to streets. In a democratic set up, numbers count and it was unlikely that PTI could halt passage of the NAB amendments even if they didn't quit the House.

Then the PTI decided to return to the National Assembly to grab the position of

leader of the opposition. PTI leadership is on record that the decision to return to the National Assembly was not aimed at to be part of the House proceedings rather to de-seat Raja Riaz as leader of the opposition.

The Lahore High Court has suspended the ECP and speaker National Assembly's notifications to terminate membership of the PTI lawmakers. The ball is now in the court of the speaker National Assembly as to when and how he welcomes the PTI's lawmakers in the House and dispose of their application to allocate the leader of the opposition slot to the party. The leader of the opposition has a key role to play in the coming days when it comes to the selection of caretaker set up before the general elections and in a possible vote of confidence requested to the prime minister by the president.

Dissolution of the two Provincial Assemblies remained the biggest and a decision of vital importance among Imran Khan's political maneuvers in the last 10 months. Quitting power in the two provinces certainly provided PTI's political opponents an opportunity through the respective interim governments, to implicate Imran Khan's sympathizers in sedition and treason cases.

Nonetheless, the decision to leave the governments in two provinces has pushed the PTI closer to its objective of getting new elections. The constitution is clear like a

crystal on the elections after a Provincial Assembly is dissolved but what if someone flatly refuses to follow it. And it would not be Imran Khan to be blamed if he could not get the fresh elections at least in the two provinces but those who don't want elections at present and offering so many excuses to build their case.

As the PDM parties aided by some state institutions are striving hard to delay the elections and in the meantime hoping for the political demise of Imran Khan, the situation hardly seems to be changing.

The strategy is to get sufficient time to discredit Imran Khan and then go to elections. The authorities can put Imran Khan in jail, disqualify him for electoral politics and launch an aggressive campaign to make the people believe that Imran Khan and the PTI has no future.

Every such move would have its own repercussions. Until now, every government move in the previous ten months has backfired. From audio tapes to the Tosha Khana scandal and from Tyrian White to corruption charges, everything has been tested but Imran Khan is still as popular as he was on the night of April 10. The question is can Imran Khan maintain popularity in the coming weeks. In fact, Pakistan's future politics revolves around this one question. And as far as general elections are concerned, they seem so near yet so far.





Political disputes unlikely to resolve politically

Rivals resort to courts, establishment to further their political imbibitions; opposition-less NA marginalised; 9-member SC bench hears PAs' election date case

By Noor Aftab

It's over a month since the Punjab and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Assemblies were dissolved but governors of both the provinces have yet not announced dates for by-elections. The Lahore High Court has ordered the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) to hold elections in Punjab within 90 days, while plea seeking election date in KP is being heard by Peshawar High Court (PHC). Initially, speakers of Punjab and KP Assemblies filed petition in the Supreme Court seeking election dates in both the provinces. The Supreme Court was approached to pass orders for the announcement of election date as the two governors were not announcing the same in line with constitutional requirements.

A 9-member larger bench of the Supreme Court has now started hearing the suo-moto case regarding elections for the Punjab and KP Assemblies. The SC has remarked that violation of the Constitution would not be tolerated, saying elections in Punjab and KP should be held on time.

President Dr Arif Alvi has also unilaterally announced April 9 as the date for holding general elections for the Punjab and KP Assemblies. He made the decision under Section 57(1) (notification of election programme) of the Elections Act, 2017 and asked the Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) to issue the election programme under Section 57(2) of the same Act.

Legal fraternity is split regarding issue of announcing dates for elections. Some call the presidential act as unconstitutional, others think the president has legal authority to take such step.

Legal experts who are supporting the viewpoint of the ruling coalition, argue that the real authority for announcing a date for the polls is the concerned governor under Article 105. According to them "in the event he (the governor) chooses not to dissolve the Provincial Assembly, the ECP in consultation with the governor (should



announce the election date) as recently affirmed by the Lahore High Court judgment by Justice Jawad Hassan. The court has directed ECP to announce a date after consultation; it did not mention the president."

"The Election Act of 2017 is superseded by the Constitution, and was last applied when president was announcing a date for general elections at national level. In any case, the president would still require consultation with the ECP before announcing a date of any kind," these experts believe.

They also refer to a specific clause of the Constitution stating "the president shall announce the date or dates for general elections after consultation with the ECP; and within seven days of the announcement, the ECP shall call upon voters of the notified constituencies to elect their representatives in accordance with an election programme." But they also maintain that Section 57 of the Election Act 2017 is all about elections of the National Assembly and it has nothing to do with elections for the Provincial Assemblies.

The government officials articulate the president crossed his constitutional limits and what he has done is against the law and Constitution. President can announce the date for the election of the National

Assembly but not the provincial ones after their dissolution; and that president has no constitutional jurisdiction to announce the date for the elections of Punjab and KP Assemblies.

Government officials also think the president talked about upholding the Constitution but he himself violated it in the past. The National Assembly was dissolved within three minutes by the president after the ruling of the former deputy speaker, which was later set aside by the apex court. President even refused to administer oath to Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif.

The ECP consulted the attorney general of Pakistan and legal experts on the matter and announced it would continue to take decisions as per the Constitution and without any pressure. The president sent a letter to Chief Election Commissioner Sultan Sikandar Raja, asking him to participate in a meeting to discuss the election in two provinces. But the latter refused, resulting in announcement of the election date by the president himself.

The CEC has already contended how could free and fair elections be held at the time when army has refused to provide security during polls and the judiciary has denied providing staff while the government is not giving funds.



The ECP is also making arrangements to hold by-polls for 33 vacant NA seats on March 16 and later on March 19 for other 31 seats. These seats fell vacant after over-100 MPs of the former ruling party resigned en-masse in April last year from their seats in line with Imran Khan's direction—in a bid to build pressure on Pakistan Democratic Movement (PDM) that has now announced it would not contest the upcoming National Assembly by-elections. The move came after key PDM allies, Muttahida Qaumi Movement-Pakistan (MQM-P) and Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam (F) also decided to abstain from by-elections.

According to legal experts any difference of opinion between president and the ECP will ultimately result in a legal court battle. PTI is likely to plead its case in court in a bid to seek a suitable verdict.

On the other hand, ECP is responsible for holding elections. It also enjoys absolute powers to take decisions to accomplish this task. Other constitutional institutions cannot dictate or influence ECP when it comes to issues related to holding free and fair elections, experts maintain.

PTI is also mounting pressure on the government and has formally initiated jail bharo tehrak (fill the jail movement) with a message that it would counter the "attack on constitutionally-guaranteed fundamental rights and economic meltdown" by the incumbent government. PTI Chief Imran Khan, in the wake of sedition cases filed against his party leaders including Fawad Chaudhry, Azam Swati and Shahbaz Gill, announced the movement on February 4.

The Punjab government has decided that criminal history, tax and bank records of people arrested under PTI's jail bharo drive would be thoroughly probed-- and anyone found involved in corruption or criminal cases, would face legal action.

Political pundits are of the view that Imran Khan's announcement in December to dissolve the Punjab and KP Assemblies added to political and economic agony of the country and hurt the image of an already poor economy.

Political parties have resorted to a filthy blame game, hurling corruption allegations against each other, while economy continues to cascading down. Instead of taking economically rational and tough decisions for structural reforms, political leaders are looking up for help from development partners.

While economy is on the edge, the

International Monetary Fund (IMF) has not yet released the next tranche of the Extended Fund Facility. At the same time, Pakistan's traditional partners such as Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates (UAE) and China appear unlikely to shore up country's foreign reserves unlike the past.

Pakistan has occasionally fulfilled IMF conditions but since last 22 occasions since 1959, the Fund is less willing to make concessions. IMF is also reluctant to release the next tranche unless the government keeps up its promises. The loan from Saudi Arabia and China is yet to be materialized; even if it does it will only add to the country's 130 billion dollar debt.

Amid heightening tensions, political disputes are no longer to be resolved politically. Political rivals have either resorted to courts or turned to the establishment to further their political imbibitions. An opposition-less National Assembly has been marginalised and political system has come under increasing stress. The state institutions are facing growing pressure and superior courts are expected by both sides to not just adjudicate legal and constitutional issues but also decide political matters. The struggle for power is likely to continue in the coming months. While the incumbent government has not ceded to Khan's demand for early elections, countrywide elections are constitutionally mandated to be held by October this year. It benefits the government politically to withhold them as long it could in order to steer the country out of present economic quagmire.





New wave of terror and political divide

NAP execution a complex process; APC becomes political issue

By Sarfraz Raja



Besides economic crisis and political instability, Pakistan is combating another wave of terrorism. Country is under attack and terrorists are targeting major cities like Peshawar and Karachi--the largest city and business hub of Pakistan.

Though it's not something new for the people and security institutions of the country, the situation is seriously alarming. A different kind of threat, especially after strategic changes in the region and neighboring Afghanistan with the fall of Kabul and takeover by the Afghan Taliban.

Terrorism has a long and complex history in Pakistan, which can be traced back to various political, social and economic factors as well. The country has been grappling with terrorism for several decades, various terrorist groups have carried out attacks in the country including the Pakistani Taliban (TTP), al-Qaeda, and ISIS.

Following the September 11, 2001 attacks in the United States, Pakistan became a frontline ally in war-on-terror in the region. This led to significant increase in terrorist attacks across the country. Militant groups targeted Pakistani military, other security forces and civilian targets in retaliation for supporting the United States.

TTP and other terrorist groups have targeted both civilians and government institutions including schools, mosques, and military installations, resulting in thousands of deaths.

Pakistan has taken pertinent measures to combat terrorism including military operations against terrorist groups, focusing mainly on tribal and north-western parts of the country alongside Afghanistan, establishing specialized counter-terrorism forces and implementing harsh laws to prosecute terrorists. However, the issue of terrorism remains a major challenge for Pakistan, especially in the post 9/11 era.

National Action Plan and its execution

One of the deadliest terrorist attacks in Pakistan's history was the attack on Army Public School in provincial capital Peshawar in December 2014, in which 141 people, including 132 children, were killed.

This attack was carried out by the banned Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP). This was the time when country was highly polarized politically with Imran Khan's PTI resorting to a sit-in inside Islamabad's Red Zone and grabbing entire media and public attention.

PTI was in power in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa where the bloodiest terror attack on APS took place. The then prime minister Nawaz Sharif immediately summoned an all parties conference in Peshawar; PTI called off its three-month long Islamabad protest and Imran Khan joined the government-led APC. On the recommendations of APC and with consultation of civil and military leadership, a comprehensive plan of action was drafted.

The National Action Plan (NAP) comprised 20 points, including measures such as the establishment of military courts to expedite terrorism cases, repatriation of Afghan refugees, monitoring of religious seminaries and crackdown on financing of terrorist groups. The plan also included efforts to improve intelligence gathering, coordination between security agencies and border management.

While some progress was made in implementing the NAP, there have been criticism that the plan was not fully implemented. Concerns were also raised about lack of transparency and accountability in the execution of the plan.

In recent years, the government has made efforts to revamp NAP and make it more effective. In 2019, the government launched the National Action Plan Two

which aims at addressing some of the shortcomings of the original plan and include new measures such as regulation of social media and strengthening of the criminal justice system.

Overall, implementation of NAP in Pakistan remains a complex and continuing process. There is still a long way to go in terms of effectively addressing the threat of terrorism and extremism in the country.

Fresh wave of terrorism and concerns

The year 2023 until now has proved to be quiet alarming. New wave of terrorism has



started hitting the country; in the end-January terrorists again targeted Peshawar where a suicide blast in Police Lines mosque claimed nearly a hundred innocent lives, mostly police personnel.

At the same time, the country became a political battlefield with PTI and Imran Khan dissolving the Punjab and KPK Assemblies in a push for fresh elections demand; and after dissolution a caretaker set up looking after the government affairs in both the provinces.

At this point of time again, the government decided to engage with different political parties and stakeholders in order to address the issue of new threat of terrorism. The government again called an 'all party conference' to draw new strategies. It also extended an invitation to PTI who was in ifs-and-buts vis-à-vis joining the APC but after the devastating earthquake in Turkey and Syria this meet was postponed as PM Shahbaz Sharif planned a visit to Turkey which later was delayed as well, but APC couldn't be rescheduled.

Where has APC gone?

The announcement to call an APC in the wake of Peshawar attack was widely welcomed by all, as it sought to end political divide and unite the nation against emerging terror threat. Although initially APC was postponed due to proposed PM visit to Turkey but later no alternate date was given for this important political meet.

Terrorism is a shared problem that needs joint strategy with consultation, consensus and unanimity and for that all stakeholders have to sit together while the incumbent government has the responsibility for making such gathering possible -- similar to one organized in 2014 after the APS attack.

Following the Police Lines mosque suicide blast in Peshawar, Karachi Police Office was attacked by terrorists. Though this attack was repulsed by Karachi police and Rangers who killed three attackers, the situation warns of the presence of terrorists in major cities and their ability to attack important places. But even after this second

major terrorist attack there are no signs of APC anywhere around.

On the other hand, an unfortunate political blame game was witnessed after these sequential terrorist attacks. Politicians pointing out each other's policies as the cause behind such incidents; and it seems that APC is also becoming a political matter with no specific reasons for its postponement. It could be called nothing else but a brazen negligence on the part of the coalition government.

Successive governments in the country have had also been criticized for not doing enough to address root causes of terrorism such as poverty, lack of education, and political and social marginalization and have also been accused of not doing enough to counter extremist ideologies and groups that promote violence and terrorism.

The issue of terrorism is a complex and multifaceted one that requires a comprehensive and coordinated strategy involving all stakeholders, including political parties, civil society, and the general public.

Government's failure to summon APC to form a strategy on terrorism is dubbed as a significant hurdle in developing a coherent and effective policy on the subject. It is the sole responsibility of the government to take proactive steps to address root causes of terrorism, extremist ideologies and ensure the spirit of National Action Plan.



Terror attack on KPO: Nexus between TTP, BLA being traced

RDX used in suicide vests hints RAW involvement; vehicle used in attack sold four times without name-transfer; attack suggests terrorism alive across country

By Azfar Ashfaq

The deadly attack on Karachi police headquarters —Karachi Police Office or KPO — by three Taliban militants has proved that the network of outlawed Tehreek-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) is not only active in the provincial metropolis but it is also capable of launching attacks in the heart of the fortified security places in the so-called 'red zones.'

While the stand-off between militants and law-enforcers did not last long, the attack exposed intelligence and security lapses, forcing none other than Sindh Chief Minister Syed Murad Ali Shah to point an accusing finger towards the security apparatus for failing to stop the attackers from penetrating the heavily guarded KPO without being detected.

On February 17, three attackers—two of them later identified as residents of Lakki Marwat in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa—managed to enter the four-storey building of the KPO after cutting through the barbed wire fence at the back of the police headquarters. Armed with AK-47 rifles, hand grenades and wearing suicide vests, the militants challenged the law enforcers and engaged in a fierce gun battle that lasted for hours. By the time guns fell silent, three policemen, a Rangers official and a sanitation worker were killed and 17 individuals, mostly law enforcement personnel, were wounded. Two of the militants were killed, while their third accomplice had detonated himself on the fourth floor of the building. The outlawed TTP claimed responsibility of the attack.

A police report submitted before the administrative judge of the antiterrorism courts in Karachi, states that the three attackers who arrived at the KPO in a Toyota Corolla car, were aided by two facilitators. It says they were followed by two motorcyclists and when the three exited their car, the motorcyclists pointed the attackers



towards the KPO, hugged them and then left. The militants then proceeded to enter the KPO.

The incident, which is being described as the year's first act of terrorism in Karachi and the second major one in the country after Jan 30 Peshawar Police Lines suicide bombing, has raised grave concerns about the security situation in Sindh and the capacity of law enforcement agencies to prevent such attacks.

The authorities are currently investigating the attack and focusing on the intelligence and security lapses that enabled the militants to carry out the assault. As the provincial government has pledged to improve security by carrying out a comprehensive security audit of vital installations, senior law enforcement officials fear more such attacks across the country.

The fears based on the TTP open threat issued in the form of a statement in which it warned police to stop killing what it called innocent prisoners in the name of so-called encounters or be ready to face its wrath.

The investigation into the KPO attack reveals that the three militants were ideologically motivated but not fully trained. Knowledgeable sources say they brought with them three

sub-machine guns with only six loaded magazines and they went out of bullets as soon as the stand-off began. Five of their over a dozen hand grenades proved dud and two of the three militants did not have the courage to detonate their suicide vests, they add.

A citywide hunt that had been launched as soon as the investigators saw two helmet-wearing men seeing off the three militants in the CCTV footage of outside KPO has failed to yield any results. The investigators carried out geo-fencing of the area surrounding KPO and managed to detect some suspicious cell phone numbers.

While the TTP has already claimed responsibility of the brazen assault, police and intelligence officials are exploring the possibility of a nexus between the Taliban and Baloch/Sindhi separatist outfits.

They say three bombings had occurred in Karachi during the first half of 2022 including a suicide attack by a woman inside Karachi University in which she targeted Chinese teachers of the Confucius Institute. The other two IED blasts had targeted Pakistan Coast Guards and police vehicles in the metropolis. The proscribed Balochistan Liberation Army (BLA) had claimed responsibility for the university blast,

while the Sindhudesh Revolutionary Army (SRA) claimed the attack targeting Coast Guards.

The officials say a preliminary forensic analysis of the two unexploded suicide vests suggested these were prepared on the same pattern of the one used by the woman suicide bomber for carrying out Karachi University attack. Besides, the explosives used in these vests appeared to be RDX and it strengthened their doubts about involvement of Indian intelligence agency RAW.

However, many believe the brazen attack was a total security failure, but the Sindh government has so far not taken any action against responsible officials since it may lower the morale of the force.

“The headquarters of Karachi police is not at all an easy target to choose. The attack shows careful planning by the masterminds who apparently wanted to send a message that we can strike wherever we want” said a senior Counter-Terrorism Department official, asking not to be named. “It’s a serious security lapse and very soon you will see heads will roll.”

In a recent session of the Sindh Assembly, Sindh CM Murad Ali Shah asked as to how armed militants from KP travelled to Karachi and attacked KPO despite the fact that a threat alert was already in place. “It was security laxity and weakness of our intelligence work that could not collect information,” he had told the house. He was of the view that the militants could have been neutralised outside the KPO building.



In the same session, the CM had announced several measures to be taken to enhance security in the city. “I have been conducting a security audit of strategic installations and will do it once again to further improve security measures,” he said.

The militants had used a Toyota Corolla car that was sold by its original owner in 2014 and since then it changed hand four times but none of the owner got the vehicle transferred in his name. The Sindh government takes strong exception to this and decides all those vehicles being plied in the city on “open letter” will be impounded from March 1. The Sindh excise department will conduct random checks to ensure motorists would make compliance of this decision.

The government is also in the process of finalising standard operating procedures for civilians, welfare organisations as well as

broadcast media in the event of any major attack to ensure a prompt response from law enforcement agencies.

For Karachiites, who have already been suffering from a worst wave of street crime, the audacious attack on KPO came as a stark reminder that the threat of terrorism is very much alive. It also exposes the tall claims about preparedness of the intelligence and law enforcement agencies to crush militants. In the first week of January, a meeting of the Sindh Apex Committee had discussed terrorist as a secondary threat as participants considered street crime in Karachi and dacoit rule in riverine area as the primary threat to peace. Since the menace of terrorist has already reared its ugly head, the government and security agencies should review their strategies and to take measures that can improve the sense of security among the already suffering common man.



Wrong foundations of Pak-TTP negotiations

IK assertion to bring back 40,000 TTP militants inapt, disastrous; Kandahar Shura asks Kabul to resolve Pak-TTP issue; release of TTP men damages Pak position



By Syed Fakhar KaKaKhel

A wave of shock spread among the Pakhtunkhwa police as more than 80 people mostly policemen were killed in the suicide attack on Peshawar Police Lines mosque. And for the first time in the recent history, police officers staged protests in various cities of the KPK. Earlier, in the seventies, the police took to streets demanding increase in salaries. The CCTV footage suggested the Police Lines blast was due to negligence on the part of police itself.

This incident was so horrifying that it baffled the Pakistani Taliban circles themselves. After the incident, the commander of Tehreek-e-Taliban Zhob Balochistan, Sarbakaf Mohmand, accepted responsibility for the attack, saying it was a 'revenge' for the killing of Omar Khalid Khorasani, a founding member of the Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP). Abdul Wali alias Omar Khalid Khorasani was one of the founding members of the TTP, but later formed his own group of Mohmand Taliban named Jamaat-ul-Ahrar, due to differences within the TTP.

When Mufti Noor Wali Mehsud from Waziristan became TTP chief, Khorasani rejoined the outfit. After exit of US forces from Afghanistan and initiation of talks

between TTP and the Pakistani government, Omar Khalid Khorasani led the TTP side in Kabul. The TTP announced a ceasefire but Khorasani was then mysteriously killed in a blast along with three associates while traveling in Bermal region of Afghanistan, during a deadlock in talks. After this, TTP resumed attacks by ending the ceasefire.

TTP commander Sarbakaf Mohmand, being a close associate of Omar Khalid Khorasani since 2007, took the responsibility for Peshawar Police Lines attack. Contrary to him, the central TTP leadership did not take any responsibility for this incident. Sarbakaf contacted central TTP leadership several times urging them to accept responsibility for the suicide attack. However, a few hours after the terror attack, central TTP leadership stated it had nothing to do with the attack and that the TTP does not target innocent Muslims in mosques.

After this statement, an impression of conflict emerged within the TTP. Most of TTP fighters from Mohmand and Bajaur were not willing to negotiate with Islamabad, demanding an Afghanistan-style government in Pakistan. On the other

hand, the TTP leadership from Waziristan believed that after Taliban's control in Afghanistan, the issues should be resolved through negotiations not a war. Things went worst when three fighters of the Mohmand Taliban were killed in Afghanistan's Kunar province. There were reports that there was a clash between the central TTP leadership and the Mohmand Taliban. This was dubbed as rumor and propaganda by the Pakistani Taliban.

The next day, a statement was issued by Jamaat-ul-Ahrar in which associates of the TTP Chief Mufti Noor Wali Mehsud were accused of killing Omar Khalid Khorasani. The statement contended Khorasani was invited for negotiations and then killed in line with a plan. How much truth is in this allegation? It would be premature to say anything for the moment. But it can be confirmed there are differences within the organization; even when Omar Khalid Khorasani was leading the talks on behalf of TTP. Such differences are not new to TTP -- from the organization's founding leader Baitullah Mehsud to the leadership of Mullah Fazlullah, TTP has been at odds over various issues at various times.

Sources say that this time too internal

differences have emerged due to 'misconceptions' and these differences will soon be resolved. A majority of the Afghan Taliban believe that negotiations are the only way to reduce intensity of war and attacks. It can be argued that the foundation of Pak-TTP parleys was wrongly laid. Chief of Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf Imran Khan's statement that he wanted to bring 40,000 Pakistani fighters back to Pakhtunkhwa and settle them was inappropriate. Acknowledging the presence of 40,000 armed Pakistanis in Afghanistan is disastrous for the future of Pakistan itself. Also, the admission that former DGISI Gen (Retd) Faiz was overseeing the entire negotiation process, further weakens Pakistan's role in the unrest in Afghanistan.

Earlier, Pakistan kept calling the presence of these elements in Afghanistan as 'Indian proxy.' At this time, when the so-called pro-Pakistan Taliban rule Afghanistan, what name could be given to the presence of the TTP now? On the other hand, the Afghan Taliban have clearly said neither TTP existed in Afghanistan nor Afghan soil was being used against Pakistan. It seems the Afghan Taliban have started repeating the same position regarding Pakistan that Pakistan adopted in the past regarding Afghanistan.

After the Peshawar terror attack, Afghan Interior Minister Siraj Haqqani once again contacted the TTP and tried to persuade them to negotiate. Sources in Kabul believe the Kandahar Shura has instructed the Afghan Ministry of Interior to resolve the TTP-Pakistan issue as soon as possible because it was affecting Afghan internal issues and creating border issues with Pakistan. It is worth mentioning here that despite all sanctions and law and order problems, Afghanistan economically seems stable.



The main reason for this is humanitarian aid from the West, while China, Russia and Iran are also providing financial support to the Taliban in various forms. Since Pakistan itself is caught in an economic quagmire, its relations with the current Afghan Taliban government are not what they used to be. We must remember that the Afghan Taliban have changed significantly in terms of international relations during the last 20 years. They have gained considerable experience in independent diplomacy by striking deals with US allies in Doha and having advanced relations with Moscow, Beijing, and Tehran.

Pakistan's Foreign Minister Bilawal Bhutto Zardari has suspected the presence of TTP in Afghanistan as well as Afghan Taliban's leniency towards them but Afghan Taliban circles claim the other way round. They assert the TTP is a Pakistan's issue and they have already done what they could; and that it was Pakistan which started negotiations with TTP. Pakistani delegation's meeting with TTP leaders and the release of TTP leaders from Pakistani jails, have already damaged Pakistan's position.

Afghan circles believe the advent of Taliban in Kabul and fencing of Pak-Afghan border was all done by Pakistan and if militants are entering Pakistan from Afghanistan, what are Pakistani forces of doing on the border? And those attackers can't enter Pakistan easily and frequently without a considerable facilitation and support from within Pakistan. The question arises what actions Pakistan was taking against such terrorists on its soil. In such a background, when a former Pakistani prime minister was bent upon bringing terror elements to Pakistan and now if they have come, the Pakistani authorities are to be blamed rather than the Afghan Taliban.

The Afghan Taliban articulate that Pakistan should keep its own house in order. Even after the Peshawar incident, the TTP continued issuing statements it would expedite attacks – triggering a security beef-up across Pakistan. But despite this, three militants attacked the Karachi Police Headquarters. These militants were from the North Waziristan and Lakki Marwat districts of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. As the Karachi police were cautioned and were prepared for the attack, the militants failed to inflict maximum damage. After attacks in Peshawar and Karachi, security was also increased in Balochistan and Punjab. But to what extent this security will be successful, nothing could be said with certainty at present. A major internal problem of the country is political chaos; and that former rulers have brought the country down the political path, resulting in instable political environment. This uncertainty is impacting country's economy, hurting national unity. Experts fear a surge in militant activities in the days ahead, particularly in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.



2013-2023: Timeline of terrorist attacks on high-security sites in Pakistan in the past decade

After the banned militant group TTP called off its ceasefire on November 28, Pakistan has been hit by a fresh wave of terrorism

After a brief period of relative peace, Pakistan has seen a resurgence of terrorist attacks in the country.

After the banned militant group Tehreek-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) called off its ceasefire on November 28, 2022, Pakistan has been hit by a wave of terrorism, mostly in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, and areas bordering Afghanistan, though recent events suggest the terrorists' tendrils could reach further into the Pakistani heartland.

A suicide attacker detonated himself on the outskirts of Islamabad in January, while just two days ago, an audacious attack on the high-security Karachi Police Office (KPO) in Karachi has raised questions on the state of security in the country.

On the same day, the Punjab Counter-Terrorism Department (CTD) in Mianwali's Kalabagh also came under attack from a group of armed militants. The TTP claimed responsibility for both attacks.

To look back at Pakistan's experience with major terrorist incidents in the past decade, Dawn.com presents a timeline of major militant attacks on high-security sites in Pakistan since 2013.

February 2013

On Feb 14, 21 people, including security personnel, and militants were killed and several others injured in suicide attacks on police posts in southern KP districts, and roadside explosions in Orakzai Agency.

Eleven people, including three Frontier Constabulary (FC) personnel, two policemen, and one Levies man were killed as a suicide bomber rammed his explosive-laden vehicle into a security post in the volatile Hangu district.

Meanwhile, five suicide bombers and a non-combatant were killed in a pre-dawn attack on a police station in Bannu while a police post was partially damaged when police repulsed a militant attack in Karak district.



July 2013

Dozens of heavily-armed Pakistani Taliban insurgents freed nearly 175 inmates, including 35 'high-profile militants', during a brazen overnight attack on July 30 on the central jail in Dera Ismail Khan.

At least nine people, including four policemen and five militants, were killed in the attack and the following shootout. This was the second largest successful attempt at a jailbreak following the TTP's Bannu jailbreak in 2012 which freed nearly 400 prisoners.

October 2013

On Oct 8, a hand-grenade attack at Quetta's New Sariab police station, on the outskirts of Quetta wounded 11 people, including policemen.

Two days later, a powerful bomb exploded near City Police Station in Quetta, located in Liaquat Bazaar, a busy city centre. Eight people, including a policeman and child, were killed while over 60 were injured. The United Baloch Army (UBA) claimed responsibility for the blast.

June 2014

On June 8, gunmen disguised as police guards stormed through Karachi's Jinnah International Airport, opening fire with machine guns and a rocket launcher.

The attack lasted five hours and left 28 people dead. Rizwan Akhter, the then-chief of paramilitary Rangers, had said that all 10 terrorists were killed. A TTP spokesperson took responsibility of the attack, claiming that it was carried out to avenge the killing of Hakimullah Mehsud in a US drone strike.

November 2014

At least 60 people were killed in a blast near the Wagah border on Nov 2, the responsibility of which was claimed by both the outlawed Jundullah and TTP-affiliated Jamaat-ul-Ahrar outfits.

The victims included 10 women and seven children, while more than 110 people were injured.

January 2015

On Jan 12, at least seven Frontier Corps

personnel and two others were killed in a militant attack on a security check post in Mekhtar area of Balochistan's Loralai district. Security sources had told Dawn that around 40 militants had attacked the checkpoint with rockets and gunfire.

September 2015

On Sept 18, at least 42 people, including 13 terrorists and an army captain, were killed as TTP militants attacked a Pakistan Air Force base in Badhabar area on the outskirts of Peshawar. Ten soldiers were injured in the following exchange of fire.

October 2016

In what was called the "deadliest attack on a security installation in the country's history", heavily-armed militants wearing suicide vests stormed a police academy in Quetta, killing at least 61 people and wounding at least 117 on Oct 23.

Communication intercepts showed the attack was carried out by the Al-Alimi faction of the Lashkar-i-Jhangvi (LJ) militant group, officials had said.

February 2017

On Feb 13, a blast outside the provincial assembly in Lahore killed 13 people, including SSP Operations Zahid Gondal and DIG Traffic Lahore Capt (ret'd) Ahmad Mobin, along with four other police officials.

Seventy people were injured in the attack, for which the Jamaat-ul-Ahrar yet again claimed responsibility.

February 2018

On Feb 3, the TTP claimed responsibility for a suicide attack near a military camp in KP which left 11 soldiers, including a captain, dead.

The blast took place in the evening near the Pakistan Army's sports unit situated at Sharifabad area of Swat's Kabal tehsil while the soldiers played volleyball.

January 2019

On Jan 29, at least nine people — five civilian employees, three policemen, and a candidate — were killed and 21 others

injured in a terrorist attack on the office of the Deputy Inspector General of Police, Zhob Range, in Loralai.

February 2019

On Feb 17, another attack took place on security personnel in which four Frontier Corps members were killed in the Gardab area of Panjgur District.

Official sources said unidentified armed men opened fire on the personnel during the change of shifts at two check-posts located in the mountainous area on the outskirts of Panjgur town.



September 2020

On Sept 5, a terrorist on a bomb-clad motorcycle targeted a Frontier Corps convoy on Mastung Road, Quetta, killing four personnel and injuring 20 others. TTP claimed responsibility for the incident.

January 2022

On Jan 25, militants stormed an army security post in a remote area of Dasht, Kech District, Balochistan, killing at least 10 security personnel and injuring three others. The clash lasted for a few hours in which militants were also killed. Additionally, the militants seized weapons that were present in the security post.

December 2022

On Dec 18, the TTP carried out an attack

on a counterterrorism centre in KP's Bannu District. They took the officers hostage until Dec 20, when Pakistan's security forces lay siege to the centre, releasing all the hostages and killing 25 militants inside. Three officers were killed during the siege.

January 2023

On Jan 14, the Sarband police station in Peshawar was attacked, killing a DSP and two constables. TTP claimed responsibility for the attack.

Two weeks later, one of the biggest blasts since relative peacetime exploded in

Peshawar on Jan 30 at a mosque in Peshawar Police Lines. Over 80 people were martyred, many of whom were police officials. TTP once again claimed responsibility for the attack.

A day later on Jan 31, a police station in Mianwali, Punjab, came under a gun attack by a group of TTP militants. However, the attack was repulsed.

February 2023

The Karachi Police Office building in Karachi came under attack on Feb 17. Sindh Chief Minister Murad Ali Shah declared that three terrorists had been killed. Four people were killed and 19 were injured in the incident.

Courtesy DAWN

Senate's Business Advisory Committee Proposes Ban on Parliamentarians' Foreign Trips

By Javed Mahmood

ISLAMABAD: The Senate's Business Advisory Committee proposed a ban on Parliamentarians' foreign trips due to the prevailing economic challenges.

The committee held a special meeting in Islamabad to discuss preparations for the celebration of the Golden Jubilee of the Senate. The committee also prepared recommendations for promoting austerity by reducing expenditures.

Chairman Senate Sadiq Sanjrani chaired the meeting of the Senate's Business Advisory Committee. Finance Minister Senator Ishaq Dar and other Senators – Shahadat Awan, Mushtaq Ahmed, Maulana Abdul Ghafoor Haideri, and Syed Yousuf Raza Gillani participated in the meeting.

In the meeting, Chairman Senate and Senators proposed a three-month ban on foreign visits of the Parliamentarians. They were of the opinion that foreign tours should be allowed only in unavoidable circumstances.

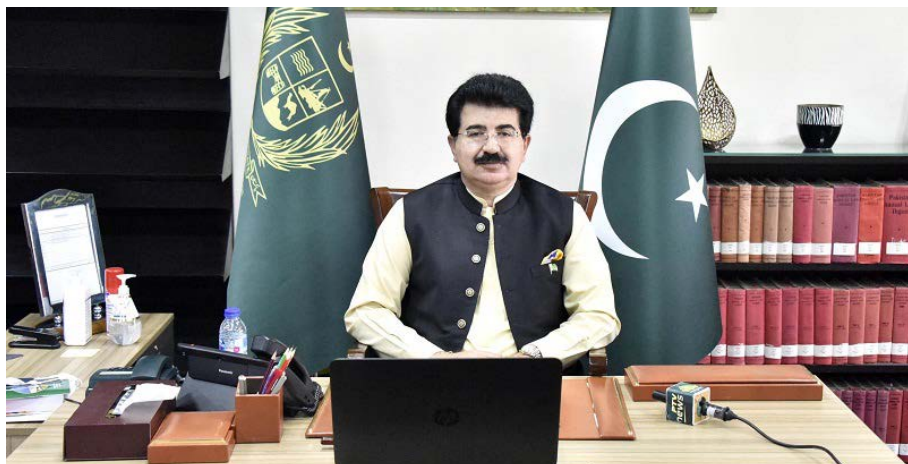
Austerity and Golden Jubilee of Senate

The participants of the Business Advisory Committee gave their suggestions to minimize expenditures and celebrate Golden Jubilee with simplicity.

Addressing the members of the committee, Chairman Senate Sadiq Sanjrani said that tough decisions will be taken to overcome economic challenges. He said that a 3-day special session of the Senate will begin from March 15-17.

In the upcoming session, all Senators will get a chance to share their points of view about austerity measures. Mr Sanjrani said that keeping in view the challenging economic situation in the country, the ceremony will be organized in a simple but prestigious manner.

He made it clear that the Golden Jubilee celebrations will be confined strictly to Senate. He said that the earlier decision to invite foreign dignitaries to the Golden



Jubilee celebration is being changed unanimously with the aim to put the minimum burden on the state exchequer.

The committee also recommended a cut in the fuel allowance of the chairmen of the standing committees of the Senate.

Ishaq Dar rejects default news

Finance Minister Senator Ishaq Dar outrightly rejected the news and speculations of default. He said that the country is experiencing some financial difficulties, but he ruled out the possibility of default.

He said that with effective policies, the government will overcome the economic crisis. He also said that the nation should adopt austerity to avoid unnecessary expenditures.

Chairman Senate Sadiq Sanjrani endorsed the viewpoint of the finance minister Ishaq Dar and said, "We will have to work day and night to get out of the current economic challenges."

Senate Chairman also expressed satisfaction over the measures Ishaq Dar has taken to improve the economic situation.

Meanwhile, the Chairman Senate and members of the Senate's Business Advisory Committee appreciated the efforts of Ishaq Dar to steer the country out of the crisis.

The Opposition Leader in the Senate Dr. Wasim Shehzad also endorsed the

viewpoint of the Chairman Senate. Also, Senator Saleem Mandviwala fully supported the recommendations of the Chairman Senate.

Moreover, PPP's Senator Yousaf Raza Gillani suggested that the Golden Jubilee of the Senate should be celebrated with simplicity. Law Minister said that the attendance of all the Senators in the Golden Jubilee celebrations must be ensured.

Jamaat-e-Islami's Senator Mushtaq Ahmed said in the meeting that the government should take effective measures to control the prices of essential food items.

Meanwhile, Senator Abdul Ghafoor Haideri appreciated the federal cabinet's decision to give up pay and perks, reduce cars and pay their utility bills from their own resources. He said that it was a good decision to reduce the salaries of parliamentarians.

And the parliamentarians would surrender their luxury vehicles to the government. Moulana Haideri also said that the government should announce similar measures for the civil bureaucracy to reduce expenditures.

All the members of the Business Advisory Committee of the Senate gave their suggestions to promote austerity and keep the expenditures minimum in the prevailing circumstances.

Dar says government allocates Rs 118.4 billion for Road Safety

According to Muhammad Ishaq Dar, the Federal Minister of Finance and Revenue, the government has allocated a total of Rs 118.4 billion under the Public Sector Development Program (PSDP) for FY2023, which would be used to improve the nation's road infrastructure

By Sarah Tayab



118.4 billion For Road Safety

The finance minister stated that the government has included 50 projects in the National Highway Authority (NHA) portfolio in the PSDP for CFY2023 with a total allocation of Rs 118.4 billion. This allocation is to provide the country with a safe, modern, and efficient transportation infrastructure.

He made this statement during the 'International Road Safety Conference for Parliamentarians' closing ceremony. The ceremony took place in the Serena hotel, Islamabad.

According to Ishaq Dar, the number of vehicles on the road was anticipated to be 34.2 million up until FY2022. And this number is rising quickly as the middle class expands across the nation.

He stated that Pakistan's present road infrastructure covered 500,750 km. This network includes 428 km of motorway, 32097 km of highway, and 373525 km of local roads. Moreover, 146 km of metro roads, 2816 km of motorways, and 92153 km of primary and secondary roads, respectively.

Significant infrastructure development projects

He stated that the previous PML (N) governments focused on significant infrastructure development projects. These projects include M2 Lahore-Islamabad Motorway, which was launched in the early 1990s by the PML(N) government. Since then, this project has extended spectacularly throughout the country. Later, included in the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC).

It has improved the length and quality of highways while also providing much-needed comfort for motorists, which has significantly increased road safety.

He claimed that in order to speed up the nation's economic development, the current PDM coalition government, which includes the PML-N, is again working on improving the quantity and quality of the nation's roadways.

Furthermore, the government is actively seeking effective implementation of road safety legislation in order to maintain accident-free traffic flow.

The minister stated that it is our responsibility

as lawmakers to identify effective solutions to enhance road safety. At both the local and global levels, he continued, we must act right away and quickly.

Goals of the United Nations Global Action Plan

According to the minister, we must implement road safety measures. The intention should be to reduce traffic fatalities and serious injuries by 50% by 2030. These are the goals set by the United Nations Global Action Plan on Road Safety. He is confident that the insightful talks will be beneficial in guiding the future of road safety programs in our countries. The conference has been a fantastic chance for lawmakers to exchange their experiences, knowledge, and best practices, he said.

Meanwhile, he emphasized the need for ongoing efforts to increase traffic safety. He said that the world must now put greater emphasis on legislating thorough traffic regulations and strictly enforcing their application. In addition, he thanked the organizing committee members and the presidents of the International Parliamentarians Congress (IPC) on Road Safety and the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU), as well as the deputy secretary of the Parliamentary Assembly of Turkic States (TURKPA).

According to him, the pressure on road infrastructure is rising as a result of alternative forms of transportation being comparatively ineffective at ensuring the implementation of appropriate road safety measures, which are crucial for socioeconomic growth.

Ishaq Dar stated that the discussions with the IMF have reached their last phase. The final round of IMF negotiations is taking place today, and both sides are making significant progress, he continued. He expressed optimism about the direction of the IMF negotiations.



Aman, PIMEC reflective of Pak Navy's capabilities

Drill joined by China, Turkey, US and Saudi Arabia; senior observers from 50 countries witness big naval exercise

By Hamza Qureshi

Pakistan Navy has started the year 2023 on a high note by successfully organizing two major events in February. The first was the international military exercise named "Aman" or peace which brought together naval forces from around the world to participate in joint maneuvers, and training exercises. The other event was the Pakistan International Maritime Expo & Conference (PIMEC), which provided a platform for Pakistan's naval industry to showcase its latest technologies and capabilities to a global audience.

These events not only demonstrate Pakistan's commitment to promoting regional peace, and stability, but also highlight the country's strategic importance in the Arabian Sea region. With its long coastline and strategic location, Pakistan plays a crucial role in maintaining maritime security and ensuring free flow of trade in the region. Pakistan Navy's initiatives like Aman and PIMEC reflect its efforts to enhance its capabilities and play a more proactive role in securing the region's waters.

Conducted from 10 to 14 February, Aman witnessed participation of naval hardware, observers, and senior officers from 50 countries, reflecting the event's significance and broad-based global appeal. States such as China, Turkey, the United States, and Saudi Arabia took part in the event with ships, aircraft, special operations forces, marine teams, and observers.

In his inaugural message, the naval chief highlighted the changing nature of maritime security such as the non-traditional threats, and climate change. During the ceremony, Vice Admiral Ovais Bilgrami, commander Pakistan fleet shared his views about securing sea lanes for trade, Gwadar Port, and the CPEC. He also underlined the significance of the geoeconomics of the region.

Pakistan Navy is not only part of the United Nations' efforts to maintain peace and counter-terrorism in the Indian Ocean and adjacent seas, but it has also commanded



both task force 150 and 151 on multiple occasions. The main objective of these exercises is to improve technical capabilities such as vigilant monitoring of the seas and coastal areas to prevent any disturbance of peace caused by anti-state or non-state actors.

Pakistan Navy's Special Service Group conducted a counter-terrorism exercise as part of Aman in Manora, Karachi. The exercise showcased navy's proficiency in defeating the enemy through the use of frogman operations. Additionally, the commandos conducted a robust action against terrorists to recover hostages.

National and foreign naval warships and aircraft conducted maneuvers in the open sea, showcasing a range of capabilities such as refueling at sea, rocket and heavy gunfire, and fly-pasts. Prime Minister, Shehbaz Sharif and other officials praised the successful completion of the exercises, which demonstrated PN readiness and capabilities in defending the country's maritime borders.

Pakistan International Maritime Conference (PIMEC) was organized by Pakistan Navy in Karachi Expo Center from 12 to 14 February. It brought together maritime experts, policymakers, and industry leaders

to discuss challenges and opportunities related to the maritime sector. The aim of the event was to promote greater cooperation and understanding among stakeholders and to highlight the importance of the blue economy for Pakistan's economic uplift.

Pakistan Navy's Commander Karachi, Rear Admiral M Zubair Shafique shared that the purpose of the expo is to showcase the potential of the blue economy, maritime resources, and coastal economic opportunities to attract investment. The goal is to promote investment and boost economic growth by leveraging Pakistan's unique coastal advantages. Out of the 142 participating institutions, 32 were international exhibitors. National and international companies, as well as private institutions and educational organizations, all had stalls that attracted visitors' attention.

At PIMEC, American companies showcased modern maritime intelligence systems that can track and navigate ships, cargo carriers, tankers, and underwater pipelines. Various national and international organizations signed numerous memorandums of understanding at the Pakistan Maritime Exhibition and Conference.

PAKISTAN NAVY IS HOSTING

A MULTI-NATIONAL EXERCISE



AMAN 2023



**TOGETHER
— FOR — PEACE**

Pak-IMF poised to ink staff level accord

Cash-bleeding power sector still blocking SLA; circular debt, losses in power sector to badly hit Pak economy

By Mehtab Haider

Pakistan and the IMF high-ups are inching closer to striking a staff level agreement in order to accomplish the much-awaited ninth review and release of \$1 billion tranche under the \$6.5 billion extended fund facility.

However, three issues remain unresolved. Among them the most important one is securing confirmation from bilateral and multilateral creditors for obtaining much-needed dollar inflows in guise of loans and deposits.

Although, this process has kick-started as China Development Bank (CDB) provided a refinancing of \$700 million.

Three outstanding issues between the IMF and Pakistan included imposition of a power surcharge of over Rs 3 per unit in order to recover losses being experienced by the cash-bleeding power sector, securing confirmation from multilateral and bilateral creditors for dollar inflows and hiking policy rate.

The imposition of a fresh surcharge has been placed on the menu list despite the fact that the government also approved a revised circular debt management plan (CDMP) including raising tariffs in the range of Rs 7 per unit till August 2023.

The government withdrew subsidies in electricity tariffs for the export-oriented sector and Kissan package.

Under various heads including quarterly tariff adjustments, deferred fuel price adjustment and imposition of a surcharge of Rs 1 per unit, the government hiked around Rs 7 per unit till August 2023.

However, the revised CDMP did not talk about any surge in the base tariff of electricity or any surcharge of over Rs 3 per unit as demanded by the IMF in order to reduce the requirement of an additional subsidy of Rs 335 billion.

Under the directives of the IMF, the additional requirement of subsidy was



slashed from Rs 675 billion to Rs 335 billion and the government indicated to make it part of the stocks of the monster of circular debt.

The government withdrew power sector subsidy for export-oriented sectors with effect from March 1, 2023, in order to save Rs 51 billion. The government also withdrew the Kissan package to save Rs 14 billion with effect from March 1, 2023.

With a base case scenario to add Rs 952 billion in the circular debt in FY2023 and for bringing it down to Rs 336 billion, the government approved a plan under which the quarterly tariff adjustment (QTA)-Q-1 from Feb 23 to March 23 at Rs 3.21 per unit will be hiked so the government will recover Rs 40 billion, QTA-Q-2 from March 2023 to May 2023 at rate of Rs 0.69 per unit, the government will recover Rs 17 billion, QTA-3 from June 23 to August 2023 at rate of Rs 1.64 per unit, the government will recover Rs 16 billion. The improvement in DISCOs losses by keeping it at 16.27 percent on average will recover Rs 12 billion.

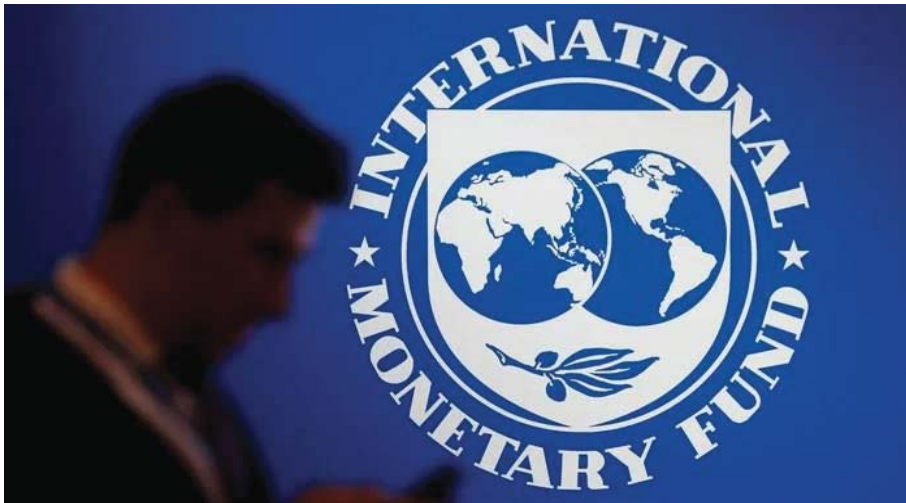
The FCA (fuel cost adjustment) recovery till June 30, 2023 will help recover Rs 31 billion, PHL (power holding limited) mark-up recovery through imposition of surcharge will recover Rs 68 billion, discontinuation of package

of 'zero rating regime' will save Rs 51 billion, discontinuation of Kissan package with effect from March 1 will recover Rs 14 billion, GST and other taxes on collection basis will recover Rs 14 billion and reimbursement from FBR will recover Rs 5 billion. The CDMP envisages the government will provide additional subsidy of Rs 335 billion. The projected flow of circular debt will be standing at Rs 336 billion. The circular debt stock will be standing at Rs 2374 billion till end of FY2023 if the revised CDMP was implemented fully and without delay.

However, the CDMP was envisaged to keep the exchange on average at Rs 234 against a dollar, Karachi inter-bank offered rates (KIBOR) at 16.84 percent, LIBOR at 4.73 percent, RFO (USD/MT) \$610, RLNG \$14.30 per MMBTU, imported coal \$236 per MT, local gas at rate of Rs 857 per MMBTU and demand 134 Bkwh.

On the issue of refinancing of commercial loans from Chinese banks, Pakistani high-ups were pinning hopes that all Chinese matured loans would be refinanced soon.

Two more commercial loans were expected to be refinanced including \$500 million and \$800 million. In total Pakistan expects refinancing of Chinese loans up to \$2 billion by end of



February or the first week of March 2023.

But the cash-bleeding power sector still remained a hard nut to crack. So far it has become one of the major stumbling blocs in the way to signing SLA (staff level agreement) with the IMF.

The government will have to make up its mind about slapping another surcharge on the power sector for moving towards striking a much-awaited SLA.

The government paid out total accumulated losses of Rs 1600 billion during the last financial year 2021-22, which was even higher than the defense spending shown in the budget documents. This monster of circular debt and losses accumulated in power sector will terribly hit Pakistan's economy.

There is still confusion within the government about resolving this lingering issue. Some government circles believe efforts

should be made through improved revenues or expenditures cut instead of raising tariff by imposing another power surcharge. But there is another view within the ranks of the government that there is need for revival of the IMF program on urgent basis so the power surcharge should be imposed without wasting more time.

In the absence of the SLA, Pakistan's difficulties on the economic and financial front might multiply and the country could not afford such a laxity.

With the fast approaching holy month of Ramadan from March 23, Pakistan cannot afford food shortages especially cooking oil and pulses as most common items of use during this month; so it requires dollar injection without waste of time.



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BAFTAS

2023 Ceremony



IN PICTURES

The British Academy Film Awards, more commonly known as the BAFTA Film Awards is a highly prestigious annual award show hosted by the British Academy of Film and Television Arts to honour the best British and international contributions to film.



The more things change

Challenges facing the economy and their proposed solutions are persistent

By Dr Abid Qaiyum Suleri

Ever wonder what is common among the governments of Gen Ayub Khan, Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, Gen Zia-ul Haq, Benazir Bhutto, Nawaz Sharif, Gen Pervez Musharraf, Shaukat Aziz, Asif Zardari, Imran Khan, and Shahbaz Sharif? They may have difference of opinion with their predecessors or successors but they all agreed to borrow from the International Monetary Fund. Since 1958, Pakistan has borrowed 23 times from the IMF, and this is undoubtedly not its last programme.

Pakistan's first loan from the IMF was meant to provide economic stability to the country after the military coup of 1958. The second one was to stabilise the economy after the 1965 war with India. The third one aimed to support Pakistan's efforts to achieve economic development and reduce poverty. And then came a salvo of loans mainly in the name of economic reforms, structural adjustments, fiscal and monetary policy reforms, privatisation, trade liberalisation and to avert a balance of payment crisis.

In IMF language, a letter of intent (LOI) is a formal missive that a government dispatches to the Fund to provide a comprehensive assessment of the economic challenges that the nation is facing and the policies that it intends to implement to redress those issues through an IMF loan. Typically, this letter is written jointly by the country's finance minister and the central bank governor. It is accompanied by two other documents, namely (a prior agreed) Memorandum of Economic and Financial Policies (MEFP), and the Technical Memorandum of Understanding. The supplementary documents furnish intricate details about the government's policies and reform agenda. Once in a loan programme, a commitment to keep on delivering on an ongoing programme is revived at the time of each review for releasing a loan tranche.

To ensure transparency, the IMF requires that governments authorise publication of these documents on its website. The LOIs submitted by successive governments of Pakistan proffer significant insights into the



state of economy and the terms and conditions agreed upon to access respective IMF loan programmes. These undertakings provide a more profound understanding of the pitfalls of previous efforts. Recalling them may help bring some sanity to an otherwise politically heated debate around the IMF and its loans.

What can one learn from the LOIs? Pakistan has been borrowing from the IMF owing to a lack of fiscal prudence, lack of ability for revenue mobilisation, doling out non-targeted subsidies and tax exemptions to please the constituencies and interest groups, blackholes in economy in the form of ailing state-owned enterprises and intercorporate circular debts, chronic trade imbalance, and current account deficit leading to a balance of payments crisis. The challenges facing Pakistan's economy and their proposed solutions are so persistent that in some cases all one needs is to change the date and year on an LOI written by the previous government.

An Argentinian joke goes: "if you leave Argentina for twenty days, everything changes; come back in 20 years, and everything seems the same". This also holds true for Pakistan's volatile political situation and deeply entrenched economic problems.

Let me explain through the recent LOIs submitted by the PTI, PML-N and PPP governments.

In 2008, after the restoration of democracy, the PPP, and PML-N found Pakistan's economy mired by the politically popular decisions of Shaukat Aziz. A consumption spree supported by an accommodative monetary policy (low-interest rate) had led to a current account deficit while massively subsidising energy (in the run-up to elections) was the beginning of the accumulation of energy circular debt. A judicial stay order to privatise the Pakistan Steel Mills had tainted the privatisation process in Pakistan.

The PPP government in November 2008, through its LOI, promised fiscal consolidation, tightening of monetary policy, reduction of fiscal deficit to 4.2 percent of the GDP from 7.4 percent, reduction of current account deficit, elimination of intercorporate circular debt, pursuing a flexible exchange rate, increasing GST to 16 percent, eliminating electricity tariff differential subsidies, adjustment of fuel prices to pass through the international prices, eliminating financing of the budget through State Bank of Pakistan, putting in place a social safety net for the protection of vulnerable segments of society (BISP), increasing tax revenue and full implementation of value added tax.

The then opposition parties criticised the government for its 'anti-public' economic policies and vowed to break the shackles of IMF once they came into power. Amidst

criticism, the PPP government implemented the IMF programme piecemeal. In 2010, Pakistan had a super flood and it was no longer possible for the government to fulfil its commitments to the IMF; resultantly the programme was suspended. The fiscal deficit in the run-up to general elections, current account deficit, and energy circular debt rapidly mounted in the absence of an IMF discipline forcing the PML-N to seek a fresh bail-out from the IMF after coming into power in 2013.

“Poor economic management during the previous government and unaddressed long-standing structural problems have led to falling capital inflow and [a] large reduction in international reserves” is the opening sentence of the LOI submitted by the PML-N government to the IMF in 2013. Pakistan again committed to “strengthen macroeconomic and structural policies to shore up confidence and to reduce economic imbalances” through an IMF programme.

The PML-N government adopted some of the promised fiscal adjustment measures through the 2013-14 budget. A certain amount of US dollars was purchased from the spot market to build up State Bank’s foreign exchange reserves. A three-year plan to phase out the energy circular debt through an increase in tariff and reduction of subsidies was shared with the Fund. The government also committed itself to improving tax revenue mobilisation and addressing the issue of the SOEs. Its political opponents criticised the PML-N for ‘toeing’ IMF’s policies. It missed certain commitments and had to seek 16 waivers from the IMF board for not being able to achieve its benchmarks and targets. The 2013-2016 programme was the first IMF programme completed by Pakistan. Once Pakistan came out of the IMF programme, the PML-N government went on a spending spree. This caused a fiscal deficit. On the other hand, consumption-led growth led to a massive current account deficit.

After the 2018 elections, the PTI government found itself in an economic situation similar to 2013. For one year, the PTI government resisted pressure to seek IMF help. However, realising that bilateral funds cannot substitute for the IMF assistance, it had to go for an IMF loan in 2019. Collate the LOIs of the PPP and the PML-N, and you will get the PTI LOI.

The PTI government diagnosed a lack of attention to the implementation of much-needed structural reforms. It proposed an expansion of avenues for domestic revenue mobilisation and resolution of the inefficiencies and losses in SOEs.

To overcome the current account and fiscal deficit, the PTI government also planned to implement stabilisation policies, enduring structural reforms (for strengthening institutions), and expand social safety nets to cushion the impact of the needed stabilisation policies on the poor.

Like PML-N, PTI’s prior actions to show seriousness about reforms included the adoption of the FY 2020 budget consistent with (IMF) programme targets to kick-start fiscal consolidation (read: tax measures and withdrawal of exemptions); adoption of a flexible market-determined exchange rate as a buffer against external shocks; and a tighter monetary policy to shore up confidence and control inflation. It also increased gas and power tariffs to stop the growth of quasi-fiscal deficits (to address the energy circular debt); and expanded social support. The PTI, too, had to swallow the same pill it used to give to the then government when it was in opposition, i.e., staunch criticism from the opposition parties for “pledging national sovereignty” to “anti-poor” IMF.

Facing a no-confidence vote, the PTI government abandoned its commitment to pass on international energy prices to consumers. After some initial reluctance, the PDM government resumed the IMF programme. However, after receiving the last tranche, it resorted to populist measures and is now compelled to take all the actions it should have taken over the previous five months to revive the programme once again.

The letters of intent submitted by successive governments of Pakistan for IMF programmes reveal that all of them were very clear on what was wrong with the economy and how to cure it. The cure lies in non-populist reforms that many politicians dare not enact under normal circumstances. Such reforms are only feasible when the government is “coerced” by the IMF. However, succumbing to opposition pressure, the governments (except PML-N 2013-2016) violated their

commitments after receiving the early loan tranches resulting in a suspension of the programme.

All governments profligate before elections, leading to rupee (fiscal) and dollar (current account) deficits. Their successors then have no choice but to approach the IMF with a loan request. All of them blame their predecessors for lack of timely action. None of them assumes total ownership of the IMF programmes.

The three major parties, when in opposition, have all criticised the government for making life challenging for the people of Pakistan under the IMF diktat. The commitments unfulfilled in one programme become “prior actions” for releasing a loan tranche under the following programme. The mandatory prior actions make the IMF programme painful for the people and the government.

The silver lining in the current cloud is that this time the programme will be resumed on the assurance of a continuity of policy and structural reforms. If that happens and we can cure our self-inflicted economic woes, the next programme may be our last IMF programme. For that to happen, our political parties have to show rare maturity.

This week, for the News, I compared the “letters of intents” (LOIs) written by PPP, PMLN, and PTI governments to avail the last three IMF programs. They reveal that all of them were very clear on what was wrong with the economy and how to cure it.

From General Ayub Khan to Shahbaz Sharif, Pakistan has been borrowing from the IMF due to (pretty much) similar reasons; lack of fiscal prudence, lack of ability for revenue mobilisation, doling out non-targeted subsidies, and tax exemptions to please the constituencies and interest groups, blackholes in economy in the form of ailing state-owned enterprises and intercorporate circular debts, chronic trade imbalance, and current account deficit leading to a balance of payments crisis. The challenges facing Pakistan’s economy and their proposed solutions are so persistent that in some cases all one needs is to change the date and year on an Letter of Intent (LOIs) written to IMF for the previous program and it remains valid.

Mini-Budget is set to open a new Pandora's Box for the masses

Instead of taking cosmetic measures, the coalition government must come up with measures that ensure the long-term economic sustainability of Pakistan

ISLAMABAD: President of Pakistan Dr. Arif Alvi signed the Finance (Supplementary) Bill 2023, known as the mini-budget on Feb 23. With this development, the mini-budget will be effective from the day the President signed the Bill. Enforcement of the mini-budget was one of the major conditions of the International Monetary Fund. Now Pakistan and IMF are set to sign a staff-level agreement that will lead to the disbursement of \$1.1 billion next tranche from the IMF. The implementation of the IMF-dictated program is creating frustration amongst the masses who are anticipating more inflation in the country along with a massive increase in the cost of utility services. Almost all the international think tanks and analysts have forewarned Pakistan of superinflation in the wake of the IMF programme. A few days ago, Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif himself has admitted that inflation will further trigger in the days ahead.

For example, in this mini-budget, the government wants to raise Rs170 billion in tax revenues by June 2023 to fill the gap between the tax collection target and the actual target of over seven trillion rupees. And this target will be achieved at a time when the country is going through the most difficult phase amid deepening economic and political crises, a few months after the history's catastrophic floods which caused more than \$35 billion in damage to the economy and the infrastructure.

Nonetheless, with the enforcement of the mini-budget, the government has increased the rate of GST from 17 percent to 18 percent for most consumer items. The consumer items falling in the category of luxury items will be charged with a 25 percent General Sales Tax. Additionally, the government has enhanced central excise duty on cigarettes.

Apart from additional taxation measures, on the demand of the IMF, the government has decided to enhance gas and electricity



tariffs. The purpose of this strategy is to cover up losses, eliminate subsidies and enhance revenues to overcome the energy sector's circular debt. To fulfill the IMF demands, the government is ready to jack up gas and electricity tariffs. Nevertheless, it is not yet clear how much increase will be passed on to the consumers in the first stage. One thing is clear, the government is ready to accept each and every condition of the IMF to revive the stalled IMF loan programme as the reserves with the State Bank of Pakistan are hovering at a critically low level, \$3.2 billion by mid-Feb 2023, from \$10 billion when the coalition government replaced PTI government in April last year. At that time, the national reserves stood at \$16 billion.

Dollar-Rupee free float regime

On the demand of the IMF, the government has allowed the free-float of the dollar in the inter-bank and the opening market trading from January 25, 2023. At that time, the dollar-rupee exchange rate in the inter-bank was fluctuating around 227 rupees and 235 to 238 rupees in the open market. However,

as the government artificial cap on the dollar-rupee parity, the value of the dollar surged to 270 rupees in the inter-bank, before falling to 260 rupees on Feb 24, 2023. Also, in the opening market, the exchange rate of the dollar surged to 275 to 278 rupees, before descending to 269 rupees on Feb 24, amid reports of a \$700 million loan disbursement by the China Development Bank and enforcement of the mini-budget. With more or less Rs34 depreciation of the value of the rupee versus the US dollar, the consumers are feeling the pain of a hike in all the imported items, including fuel and edible oil/ghee, which are the most essential consumer items in the country. All over the world, energy prices are declining as Brent crude and OPEC oil have fallen to \$81 per barrel, from \$120/barrel in 2022, when the prices were at their peak, while in Pakistan, the prices of essential items are going up because of devaluation of the rupee, elimination of subsidies, and increase in the tariffs of gas, electricity and petrol prices as well because of the IMF-dictated policies of the coalition government.

IMF Managing Director's Tough Advice to Pakistan

A few days ago, the managing director of the IMF said that Pakistan should tax the rich people and give relief to the poor/needy. She said that the companies and individuals, who are earning more in Pakistan, must contribute to the national economy while the vulnerable should be protected from inflation. In other words, the IMF chief made it clear that instead of throwing the burden of price hikes on the common people, the Pakistan government should tax the super-rich in the country. Perhaps this is the reason the government has enhanced GST to 25 percent, from the standard 17 percent to tax more those who consume luxury items, including cosmetics and imported food items which fall in the category of luxury items.

Austerity Measures

Responding to criticism against the government for record price-hikes and inflation, Prime Minister Nawaz has announced austerity measures wherein the members of the federal cabinet _ PM, federal ministers, ministers of state, advisors, and special assistants to the Prime Minister will work without pay and perks. This strategy will also silence the IMF and donors who want an end to the lavish lifestyle of the ruling elite in Pakistan and social protection of the vulnerable people. However, some analysts doubt the implementation of the austerity measures in their true shape for the cabinet members.

A few days ago, Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif announced 20-point austerity measures to save Rs 200 billion and minimize the government's expenditures at a time when Pakistan is facing an economic crisis and record high inflation. PM Shehbaz stated that all the cabinet members will work without pay and perks, their luxury cars will be auctioned, and they will pay their utility bills from their own pockets. Following are the important austerity measures PM Shehbaz Sharif announced today:

The Austerity Measures

All federal ministers, state ministers, advisers, and special assistants voluntarily

decided to work without pay and perks; All ministers will pay their utility bills _ power, telephone, water, and gas bills from their own resources; All luxury cars given to cabinet members will be auctioned; When necessary, ministers will be provided one vehicle for security; Government officials will travel in economy class and their assistants will not go with them on official tours; During foreign tours, the cabinet members will not stay in five-star hotels; All ministries, divisions, departments, sub-departments, and independent organizations' current expenditures will see a cut of 15%;



Principal accounting officers of ministries, divisions, departments, sub-departments, and independent organizations will adjust their expenses accordingly; Government officials will not buy luxury cars till June 2024; Government officials will only hold official foreign tours if obligatory; Car allowances for government officers who already have official vehicles will be discontinued; Cars provided to government officers for security will be taken back; The Interior Ministry will decide which government officer needs security vehicles; Zoom conferences will be preferred instead of visiting foreign countries; To save electricity & gas, offices will open at 7:30 am while less power consuming appliances will be used; Government officers will not be given more than one plot; Only one dish will be served at government meetings, tea and biscuit will be served at other meetings; Prohibition of food will not be applicable to

foreign dignitaries; Centre, provinces to cut power supply of malls and markets if they don't shut down by 8:30 pm; Townhouses will be constructed for ministers and government officers; Single treasury account will be established; and Toshakhana gifts' details will now be available online.

Conclusion

Pakistan is getting the IMF loan facility for almost the 23rd time in the last four decades. Each time, the rulers got a loan from the IMF, completed their term, and

left the government for the successors with a deep economic mess. Every time, the rulers shifted the burden of price hikes on the masses after getting IMF loans and did not change the rotten culture of lavish expenditures by the ruling elites. Thus, every government kept on piling up the debt burden on the country. Today, Pakistan is not in a position to sustain itself financially without getting financial support from the IMF. Even friendly countries are not willing to extend financial support to Pakistan till the time the government revives the IMF programme. Instead of taking cosmetic measures, the coalition government must come up with measures that ensure the long-term economic sustainability of Pakistan.

By Javed Mahmood

What is the unstable economic condition of Pakistan and how did it get here?



By Anum Akram

The Pakistani rupee has continued to struggle against the US dollar (USD) so far this year. The Pakistani rupee has devalued by 34 rupees in the past month. Recently, the rupee touched 265 against the U.S. dollar. Pakistan's stock exchange had gone from being Asia's best-performing market to the world's worst. Pakistan only has enough foreign currency reserves to pay for roughly three weeks of imports. Ordinary people are suffering from rising food and gasoline costs, and the damage caused by the floods has only made the country's economic problems worse.

The government owes another trillion rupees in circular debt. Pakistan is currently dealing with a political deadlock, a faltering economy, rising inflation, increasing terror threats, and the potential for a global economic downturn. As Pakistan's foreign reserves decrease, the value of the rupee declines, and inflation continues at levels not seen in decades, worries about the country's economic situation are intensifying. The opposition, which is bitter, is continuing to use its rhetoric of fire and brimstone. Both the government and opposition are unaware of their ultimate objective.

Country's current situation

The government escaped a default last month, but as of this moment, its foreign exchange reserves are at their lowest level since 2014, at \$4.3 billion. Despite acknowledging that the economy is in "a difficult condition," Pakistan's finance minister dismisses worries about a default and labels them as "propaganda" from the opposition. In reality, the country is still a whisker away from this bleak scenario. Since former Prime Minister Imran Khan was ousted in April 2022 by a legislative vote on a no-confidence resolution, Pakistan is reportedly experiencing its worst period of political and economic upheaval.

Meanwhile, people are suffering. Rice, cotton, dates, sugar, and other crops destroyed by flooding are still in need of assistance. Without "decisive relief and rehabilitation initiatives to support the poor," the World Bank warned in October that up to nine million Pakistanis might be driven into poverty. For families who are already trying to make ends meet, high

inflation just makes things worse. According to figures released this year, food costs in January increased 43% over the previous year.

Prior to an agreement with the International Monetary Fund (IMF) on a lifeline rescue, the government-imposed import restrictions on everything but vital food and medicine due to severely low US dollar reserves. Industries including steel, textiles, and pharmaceuticals are barely operating, which has led to the closure of thousands of firms and increased unemployment. "The shortage of scrap metal, which is needed to make steel bars by melting down scrap metal, has prompted the steel industry to issue a serious supply-chain warning." The price of the bars has risen dramatically in recent weeks. "The construction sector, which is connected to 45 downstream sectors, receives materials directly from us," said Wajid Bukhari, president of Pakistan's Large Scale Steel Producers Association. "This entire cycle will become clogged."

The Pakistani rupee has, in recent months, caused gasoline prices to reach a record high of 273 rupees on February 16, 2023. Price hikes that have an impact on

Pakistan's economy are also caused by political instability.

How did Pakistan get here?

The economic climate in Pakistan has been shaky for a while. Their main causes are excessive levels of debt, a corrupt government, bad governance, and reliance on foreign help. Due to Pakistan's slow economic growth and ineffective tax collection system, the country has recently incurred a sizable amount of debt from foreign lenders. This debt has grown increasingly challenging to service. Due to the country's inability to pay for its imports, this has resulted in a balance of payments crisis, which has decreased the value of the Pakistani rupee.

The Pakistani rupee devalued when Finance Minister Ishaq Dar tried to control the dollar by artificial means. But this has not started with Dar; it started with Shaukat Aziz. Throughout Musharraf's tenure, Shaukat Aziz managed to keep the dollar exchange rate at 60 by dumping the dollar into the local market. This process of getting expensive loans and dumping money in the local market This process is repeated by successive governments, resulting in massive national debt. When the government artificially holds the value of the dollar to present a false picture of a thriving economy, it eventually falls, as we are seeing now.

ECONOMIC CRISIS IN PAKISTAN



Some people claim that the problem currently facing the country was long in coming and extends much beyond electoral politics. The economic state of the nation is a clear illustration of the decades-long misallocation of national priorities. It is ridiculous to expect the world to save us when Pakistan's credibility is at its lowest and the ruling class shows no sign of wanting to modify their way of life. Although difficult, Pakistan's economic problems have long-standing answers that are well-known to all. Unfortunately, no government has ever had the political will to address them, which is strange.

Pakistan is ranked 34th out of 39 countries in the Asia-Pacific region on the yearly index produced by the Heritage

Foundation, a preeminent think tank focused on the influence of public policy in Washington, D.C. Pakistan's overall score is lower than the average for the region and the entire world. Pakistan's economy is ranked 153rd in terms of economic freedom in the 2022 index, with a score of 48.8. According to experts, the current administration, which was elected on the promise of reducing inflation, has failed to give people any relief. They also think there is a connection between political and economic difficulties.

Due to the significant disconnect between professed economic and social objectives and their actual implementation, Pakistan has greatly suffered. Not so much the substance as the formulation, execution, and review processes, the absence of clearly defined responsibilities and accountabilities, and cursory consultation with stakeholders are to blame for the problem. As a result, decisions are frequently reversed, altered unfairly, or abandoned too soon. A current illustration of this phenomenon is tax policy. Every new administration begins formulating policies without taking a close look at the past. The same errors are made repeatedly, and by the time its term is up, no real progress has been made. This forces its successor to declare the policy a failure and start over. Top-down-driven, irrational, and ad hoc policies have significantly hurt the economy relative to other causes. The nation's influential voices have not yet been heard. A completely different future might develop if Pakistan's working class followed Sri Lanka's lead and rose up.



IMF programme too expensive for Pakistan

By Dr Ashfaq Hasan Khan

Pakistan has suffered a loss of \$ 101 billion loss owing to two policies Pakistan pursued under IMF program in last four years, says Dr Ashfaq Hassan Khan, Former Economic Advisor to Finance Ministry.

Pakistan started following IMF program in July 2018, and the losses are counted till December 2022. Dollar devaluation cost \$ 75 billion and interest rate hike costed \$ 26 billion which combines up to \$ 101 billion, explains Dr Ashfaq Hassan.

Talking to Private Tv Channel, Dr Khan said, this is the worst ever economic conditions of Pakistan after 1971. On one hand, Pakistan is asked to devalue the currency by IMF which is inflationary. Due to inflation policy rate is enhanced then for solution it is asked to raise prices of electricity and gas, which is again inflationary. Then it is passed on and it becomes inflationary.

So, on the other hand, the policy is creating a problem and then on solution is aggravating the situation further. Rather than solving an issue, it is rather creating further issues from the solution of a problem.

Governor State Bank should know that high markup rate solution is actually creating further problems than solving it, said Dr Khan.

One percent of increase in interest rate increases the Rs 250 billion interest payments. So, by increasing mark up in one jerk 2%, the addition in interest payments is Rs 500 billion, which is impossible to absorb at this stage.

He said, cost of the Current IMF program, from July 2019 when the program started but on prior action we had started working in July 2018, from that date till December 2022, that is around 4 years period, on only two points total loss is calculated. Its almost 4 and half years' duration.

Dollar value was Rs 121 per one dollar in July 2018, Rs 262-63, and discount rate was 6%. Is now at 17% and is almost going at 19%. These two policies have how much damaged economy of Pakistan in these four and half years. From July 2018 to



December 2022, with only devaluation the cost of damage is Rs 12511 billion (Rs 12.5 trillion) debt is added on Pakistan. This loss is \$ 75 billion in the value of average exchange rate during this duration.

Then the loss from mark up, by hiking the rate, the interest payment increase is Rs 4275 billion (Rs 4.27 trillion). That is by dividing the average exchange rate of this duration comes equal to \$ 26 billion.

However, combining these two comes to \$ 101 billion loss for the \$ 6.5 billion IMF program, (plus other donors program combines equal to \$ 15 billion roughly). This is almost \$ 25 billion loss every year, which means equal to entire remittances annually.

On the other hand, there is an argument that we have no choice other than IMF program, which is a huge lame excuse made by many organization and individuals. These huge deficit natures are running us down and creating more and more vicious circle of problems.

From April 2022 to December 2002, during this duration, \$ 33 billion was added on extra interest payments and addition in public debt was caused from both interest payments and dollar valuation increase. During the current fiscal year.

IMF believes that everything is a monetary phenomenon, every problem is rooted in the monetary issues. While, in Pakistan the issues of inflation appear not from demand side but due to supply side shocks, Its by

increasing the hike in prices of electricity and other input prices of supply side.

Empirical analyses say that when State Bank increases mark up by 1% the CPI inflation increases by 1.3% rather than falling. This was State Bank's own study, which they have hidden it now, as analysts and I am (Dr Ashfaq Hassan Khan) speaking about it, they have hidden it. This is their working paper number 34 or 35 of 2010, titled as, "A Small Open Economy Model of Pakistan" as I had seen it. As they had taken the data of 1990s and the coefficient they used reflects now that it is equal to 1.3% when they increase mark up by 1%.

IMF follows Chicago School of thought that is monetary approach for every problem economy is facing.

Now from various sides various voices will start rising that there is no choice except to take additional loan from IFM, and Pakistan needs another IMF program after June 2023. As Martaza Sayyed former Deputy Governor State Bank has said in his two days back interview. There is a huge lot of people coming from donors which support his comment. They are retired from donors' institutions and they support this concern.

The overheating of economy's point of view is also spread from the donors supported point of view. How come 6% growth can be overheated. It is just a propaganda spread from donors' point of view.

For import substitution, selective and yet aggressive policy should be followed.

Strong lobby denying self-sufficiency in cooking oil

Pak agri sector capable of producing cooking oil; palm fruit weighs 18 grams in Malaysia, 45 grams in Pakistan; Pak palm oil matching world quality standards, yield percentage more than Malaysia's

Pakistan's annual import of cooking oil has lately come under scrutiny as the country spends around \$4.5 billion to purchase the commodity from abroad. Interestingly, Pakistan's agricultural sector has the potential to produce its own cooking oil, but the strong influence of a powerful lobby has prevented the country from achieving self-sufficiency in this regard. As a result, the issue has been lingering for years without any sustainable solution in sight.

Despite being an agricultural country, Pakistan's domestic production of edible oil falls significantly short of its local consumption needs, accounting for less than 10% of the total demand. This has led to the country's heavy reliance on imported cooking oil, with billions of dollars spent annually on this essential commodity. Addressing this issue is crucial to improve Pakistan's food security and reduce its dependence on foreign imports.

Pakistan procures a significant quantity of palm oil from Malaysia and Indonesia to cater to its cooking needs. In 1996, the government of Benazir Bhutto experimented with planting palm oil trees obtained from Malaysia in Thatta, Sindh. The project was initiated under the banner of Sindh Coastal Development Authority (SCDA), but was later abandoned. However, in 2016, the project was revisited, and the outcomes of the local palm trees were highly promising. Experts claim that the bunch obtained from Malaysian palm oil trees weighs approximately 30 kilograms but can go up to 50 kilograms in Pakistan.

Zameer Hussain, Deputy Director SCDA told this correspondent that a normal palm fruit weighs around 18 grams in Malaysia. While in Pakistan, the fruit weighs an astonishing 45 grams. Palm is grown on experimental grounds as a regular crop in Pakistan and receives systematic watering and organic fertilizers, which enhance its yield. Currently, natural fertilizers are utilized to provide nutrients to plants. In contrast, the palm tree is a naturally occurring plant in Malaysia spread all along the coast. In 2008, the federal government of Pakistan initiated

a tender for a machine for palm oil extraction on large scale. Unfortunately, the process came to a standstill in 2009, resulting in a significant setback for the industry. In 2020, SCDA managed to import a small machine from China to extract palm oil. As a result, for 20 years, the fruits on a 30-acre farm were left to waste. This highlights the bureaucratic red tape and negligence of public departments that have stunted the growth of Pakistan's indigenous palm oil industry.



Palm oil agriculture in Pakistan faces several challenges, including the need for quality seeds, and efficient plantation processes. Currently, palm seeds need to be imported from Malaysia and must be planted within three days of arrival to ensure optimal growth. To address these challenges, the Sindh Coastal Development Authority (SCDA) requested Sindh government to allocate a suitable area for the purpose. In 2020, the provincial government announced 3000 acres of forest land for the development of a palm tree nursery but the land is yet to be notified. The SCDA plans to utilize the land for developing tissue culture to produce new seedlings, which would save time and resources while enabling more efficient tree planting. This development could have significant implications for the growth and sustainability of the palm oil industry in Pakistan.

In contrast, the palm tree project was launched in India in 2000 and has now expanded to cover 800,000 acres of land. The oil extracted from Pakistani palm trees has undergone testing at national laboratories such as PCSIR as well as labs in China and Malaysia. Zameer Hussain shared that

lab results confirmed Pakistani palm oil meeting international quality standards. The yield percentage of oil from local Pakistani fruits is 52%, which is interestingly a bit higher than Malaysia's yield of around 50%. Experts believe that had Pakistan taken the palm oil project seriously since 1996, the country could have become an exporter of palm oil instead of being reliant on imports. Presently, Pakistan imports edible oil worth \$4.5 billion.

According to sources, a small group of influential importers and multinational corporations have been reportedly creating hurdles in the palm oil production process in Pakistan. This has resulted in difficulties for local farmers and even governmental authorities to plant and grow woody edible oil trees. Currently, Pakistan imports more than 90% of its edible oil consumption, with the trade quantity increasing by 7% every year. The monopolistic control of a few large companies over the import of cooking and other edible oils has limited the growth of local palm oil production.

It takes approximately three years for a palm plant to bear fruit and seven years to reach its full potential. These trees usually live up to 40 years. The fruit yield is usually higher between March and October, and the crop can be harvested every four months. However, the yield and harvest time of palm plants may vary depending on various factors such as climate, soil quality, and cultivation practices. It is pertinent to note that Pakistan's vast coastal area spanning hundreds of miles is highly suitable for growing palm plants.

In addition to boosting domestic production, there is also a need to promote the efficient use of edible oil in the country. This includes encouraging healthy eating habits and reducing food waste, which can have a significant impact on improving food security and overall health outcomes in the country. Overall, the production of edible oil within the country can play a crucial role in strengthening Pakistan's food security, reducing import bills, and promoting sustainable economic growth.

By Hamza Qureshi

Industrial Closure

During recent months, besides Jovi, Careem, Uber, and Swvl, CarFirst and Airlift in the transport sector have closed their operations in Pakistan

By Azeem Waqas

Muhammad Asif, 35, was sitting in an office in Blue Area, Islamabad, waiting for his turn in the interview. He was hoping to get a new job after six months of unemployment in the Federal Capital.

"I was working in Jovi, a company that operated as an online food and other stuff delivery service in major cities in Pakistan; the company was closed and we were sacked, that's all, and now I'm looking for a new job," Asif explained to The Truth International (TTI).

During recent months, besides Jovi, and Swvl, CarFirst and Airlift in the transport sector have closed their operations in Pakistan. Swvl was very popular among working women because it had reasonable charges and was convenient to use. Airlift had also been working well in food and grocery delivery, but due to unviable business, they are all closed.

Pakistan has experienced several industry shutdowns, causing widespread economic and social disruption. The shutdown of industries, particularly in the textile and manufacturing sectors, has had significant negative impacts on the country's GDP, employment rates, and overall economic growth.

During the last six months, more than 30 major industries have decided to shut down their operations or are running at 50% capacity.



Nishat Chunian, Suraj Textile Mills Ltd., Kohinoor Spinning Mills Ltd., Moon Textile, and Diamond Industries announced production cuts, partly because of high operational costs and low demand. Industries also blamed current economic conditions and the lack of availability of imported materials for the suspension.

Under these conditions, the All Pakistan Textile Mills Association (APTMA) fears that, in addition to the jobs lost in recent months, there will be further major layoffs, resulting in significant unemployment for more than 10 million workers in Punjab.



One of the primary reasons for industry shutdowns in Pakistan is the country's unreliable and inadequate energy supply. Many businesses, particularly those in the textile sector, rely heavily on energy to power their operations. However, frequent power outages and load shedding have forced these businesses to shut down, leading to job losses and decreased productivity.

A Karachi-based industrialist and former President of the Karachi Chamber of Commerce, Ibrahim Kasombi, has said that it is difficult to run an industry in Pakistan; we are barely paying wages to thousands of workers. The cost of production, especially electricity and gas, has gone up. After the recent supplementary budget taxes were increased, local and international suppliers were not willing to do business with us.

Ibrahim said that business confidence has been broken and that the "situation will get worse after 2-3 months when more industries will shut down and there will be more unemployment in the country since industries have no raw material supplies in the coming days."

In Pakistan, the unemployment index has gone so high that almost 50% of industry has shut down in the last 6 months. Pakistan is seriously facing a food, energy, economic, and security crisis. Many industrial sectors, including textiles, are facing a huge decline in international orders, resulting in local industrial shutdowns and unemployment.

Millat Tractors Limited, Bolan Castings, Indus Motor Company, Pak Suzuki Motor Company, and Baluchistan Wheels were temporary closed due to continuing reduced demand and cash flow constraints.



The steel industry of Pakistan is also working at 40% capacity. Abbas Akbar Ali, Head of Amrili Steels, has said that the government should start rationing Letters of Credit and that SBP should reprioritize the import LCs by taking urgent steps to save the industry from complete closure.



Abbas Akbar also conceded that more industries will be halted in the coming months, and it will be difficult to revive them in the near future.

Ibrahim Kasombi is of the view that due to the policies of the current government; industries are shutting down their operations and it will take two to three years to revive industries in Pakistan.

Currently, Pakistan is facing decades-high inflation and low forex reserves due to huge debt repayments. This leaves the country with the question of what the next step is to keep the economy afloat.



Fahad Rouf, Head of Research at Ismail Iqbal Securities, has said that industrial closure will impact Pakistan's economic growth and will further increase unemployment in the country.

He said that due to the slowdown in the economy, there is low demand in the international market, which is hampering our exports. Pakistan has banned imports to save their reserve, which is causing pain in industry.

Fahad is of the view that, although the real problem started in Finance Minister Shaukat Tareen's tenure when an expansionary budget was presented in FY 2022–23, After the budget was passed, imports increased and our reserves began to dwindle; however, "Finance Minister" Ishaq Dar's policies have harmed the economy more than anyone else. He tried to control the rupee, which reduced remittances and exports. Fahad Rouf stated.

A Karachi-based industrialist said that in Shaukat Tareen days, the economy was performing well. USD was at 178 PKR; he could not be blamed for the country's economic crisis. He is of the view that Pakistan has changed its international position now that Russia and China are not supporting Pakistan, which is more concerning.

Shahbaz Sharif's government has put more burden on people, and it is expected that inflation will rise in the coming days. Pakistan's people are the ones suffering the most as the prices of essential items are surging. For example, packed milk now costs Rs 250/litre, chicken prices have risen to Rs 780/kg, and wheat flour costs Rs.170/kg.



Fahad Rouf also foresees more industry closures in the coming months as they run out of raw materials. "The IMF loan programme is the only hope for the revival of the economy in the short term. After the IMF program, the country's reserves will start picking up gradually and imports will open, but again, it's a time-consuming process."

State Minister for Finance Dr. Ayesha Ghous Pasha has said that "Pakistan is under a perfect economic storm; the country has never witnessed such a crisis in its history." "I do not want to hide the truth from you. When we came into power, we were in the middle of this storm, but we came to bring the country out of this crisis."

These are stressful conditions. "We took difficult measures, which will cost us politically, but knowing that we will take more actions, industry is reacting to these measures, and we hope that these are temporary shutdowns and that they will reverse in the coming days," she said.



How many Pakistanis will lose jobs as the economy shrinks, and how many will starve as real incomes fall?

By Pavan Manzoor

Pakistan is a country with a population of over 200 million people, and joblessness is a growing concern for many of them. With the ongoing economic crisis, unemployment has become a widespread issue, with many individuals struggling to find work and make ends meet.

The economic crisis in Pakistan is multifaceted and complex, with several factors contributing to the rising unemployment rate. One major issue is the lack of foreign investment in the country. Despite the government's efforts to attract foreign investment, many international businesses remain hesitant to invest in Pakistan due to its unstable political climate, high levels of corruption, and poor infrastructure.

Another factor contributing to joblessness in Pakistan is the country's struggling manufacturing industry. The manufacturing sector in Pakistan has been in decline for several years, with many factories shutting down due to the high cost of production and lack of government support. This has left many workers without jobs, and there are few opportunities for them to find employment elsewhere.

Furthermore, the educational system in Pakistan is not equipping graduates with the skills necessary to succeed in the job market. Many graduates lack the practical skills and experience that employers are looking for, and this has led to a mismatch between the skills of the workforce and the demands of the job market.

The impact of joblessness on the economy is significant. Without jobs, individuals are unable to contribute to the economy through spending and taxation, and this can lead to a decrease in economic growth. Additionally, the lack of employment opportunities can lead to an increase in poverty, crime, and social unrest.

Joblessness Amid Rising Prices

Due to a recent surge in fuel, oil, and gas prices, Pakistan's majority population of



225 million is likely to face significant hardships, i.e., losing jobs. The economy is already struggling, and the additional burden of rising electricity rates, a 1% hike in the general sales tax, and an already high consumer inflation rate of 27.5% may exacerbate the situation further.

The government's latest forecast suggests that Pakistan's GDP growth for the fiscal year ending in June may not exceed 1.5%. According to the people's perspective, the real question is: how many Pakistanis will lose jobs as the economy shrinks, and how many will starve as real incomes fall?

There is growing concern among politicians and the establishment about the widespread impact of unemployment, increasing poverty, and rising hunger in Pakistan. The severity of these issues has raised the question of whether the current political and administrative discontent could potentially escalate into a broad public upheaval.

If such an upheaval were to occur, it is essential to consider alternative measures to address the situation successfully. In order to mitigate the negative impact of the ongoing balance-of-payments issue and the resulting decline in large-scale manufacturing (LSM) output, a national consensus must be reached as soon as possible. It is hoped that all parties involved will work towards a quick consensus and develop a strategy to prevent the economy from collapsing and alleviate the resulting human suffering as much as possible.

As a result of the decline in LSM output, which has been ongoing since July through December 2022, the labor-intensive textile industry, the automobile industry, and the pharmaceutical sector, among others, have experienced double-digit yearly output decreases.

This situation has led to an increase in unemployment. Labor-intensive businesses in the service sector, such as transportation, retail, and wholesale, are facing significant challenges due to the severe oil and currency crises.

This has resulted in major employment losses, with businesses reducing their output, temporarily suspending their operations, or even shutting down altogether. The situation is likely to deteriorate further as inflation increases, driven by rising fuel oil costs, a higher GST, and the Rs170 billion mini-budget.

As a result, workers may face permanent or temporary layoffs, and many may be compelled to accept reduced compensation in exchange for short-term job security.

Even before the current anti-inflationary policies were implemented, the World Bank predicted that 6.205 million Pakistanis, or 8.5% of the total workforce of 73 million, would be unemployed during the current fiscal year.

However, business leaders and analysts believe that the jobless rate will surpass 10%

of the workforce soon, causing as many as 7.3 million people to become unemployed.

While the State Bank of Pakistan (SBP) believes that higher interest rates should be used only in exceptional circumstances, many individuals are reporting even higher figures for the number of unemployed people, indicating a concerning situation.

The International Monetary Fund shares a similar viewpoint in reality. However, increasing the policy rate, which is already at a high of 17%, by 2% or more may not yield the necessary outcomes and could be a risky approach. Presently, Pakistan's inflation is primarily cost-driven rather than demand-driven. Therefore, a significant increase in interest rates could worsen the already-existing stagflation.

Instead, a more sensible approach would be to devise strategies for minimising the growth of food prices, which is a task that falls under the responsibility of the federal and provincial governments, including the two caretaker governments in Punjab and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.

The prices of milk and curd in Karachi have reached Rs 190–Rs 210 per liter. Furthermore, chicken meat is currently priced at Rs 700 per kg. The recent mini-budget has resulted in the escalation of prices for all food items, including rice, pulses, cooking oil, ghee, jam, jelly, and bread.

To provide relief to consumers, provincial governments can enforce stricter implementation of price controls and take measures to curb unfair business practices. According



to news reports, the Sindh government is planning to crack down on profiteers and hoarders to ensure that food items are available at reasonable prices. Hopefully, this planned action will achieve its stated objective.

In Asia, the issue of food scarcity has emerged as a significant economic challenge. The ongoing conflict between Russia and Ukraine has exacerbated global food shortages, and the World Food Programme reports that severe food insecurity now affects 349 million people in 79 countries. The severe flooding that occurred in Pakistan in 2022 has also had an impact on the food supply chain.

The production of vital food items like rice, wheat, and maize has not met the expected levels, leading to a severe shortage of pulses and vegetables such as onions. The

inflation of food prices in the country is primarily driven by a reduction in domestic food supplies and an increase in import costs due to the devaluation of the rupee.

The Pakistan Bureau of Statistics reports that the prices of essential food items have surged from 50% (mash pulse) to 500% annually (onions). Additionally, the cost of chicken and eggs has risen by 93% and 79%, respectively.

Tea prices have risen by 64%, while the prices of Basmati and non-Basmati rice have surged by 69% and 68%, respectively. In Pakistan, the average monthly food inflation rate in January was 39% in urban areas and 45% in rural areas. Although administrative price controls are crucial, they alone are not adequate to curb the current high levels of food inflation. There are still several aspects that require attention, particularly the cultivation of both major and minor food crops.

To meet domestic demand, the overall output of these crops must be increased, which necessitates the use of technology and improved seeds. Reducing pre- and post-harvest losses and enhancing the productivity of agricultural labourers are critical.

A recent study by the World Bank indicates that, unlike the South Asian average, which is four times higher, Pakistan's agricultural output per worker has risen by less than 0.7 percent annually over the previous three decades. This highlights the urgent need to increase the efficiency and productivity of the agriculture sector.



IS-K becoming more focused on Pakistan?

IS-K network has grown in Afghanistan even after Afghan Taliban takeover of Kabul; outfit dubs Afghan Taliban as stooges of Pakistan; most of IS-K founding commanders from TTP

By Dr Raza Khan

As attacks from largest militant-terrorist network of the country, the Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP), have once again spiked and become ferocious, another regional terrorist outfit, Islamic State-Khurasan (IS-K), is also trying to replenish its ranks inside Pakistan posing serious security threat to the society and its people.

Although the IS-K, which is also known by its local acronym, Daesh-e-Khurasan (DeK) in the Afghan-Pakistan region, at the moment does not have an elaborate network inside Pakistan. However, the group has been trying its utmost for the last several years to establish an extensive web in the country as the latter is of extreme significance from the viewpoint of the group.

As for the strength of IS-K network in Pakistan is concerned, it is not that extensive as compared to TTP. For instance, according to Pakistani authorities' estimates, total strength of different wings of the TTP as the umbrella organization, is around 30,000 to 40, 000 including family members. Whereas there is no exact estimates regarding the number of IS-K fighters in Pakistan but they could be around 1500.

However, the IS-K considers itself a regional entity. In IS-K's view Khurasan is a region comprising Afghanistan, Pakistan, Iran, India and parts of Central Asia. Consequently, the biggest presence of IS-K in the region is in the war-ravaged Afghanistan.

Importantly the IS-K network has grown in Afghanistan instead of shrinking even after Afghan Taliban's takeover of Kabul in August 2021. The IS-K and the Afghan Taliban have had deep ideological and operational differences. There have been dozens of deadly clashes between the two since 2014 after sudden emergence of IS-K in Afghanistan and rest of the region.



The IS-K considers Afghan Taliban an Afghan nationalist movement that only uses the name of Islam to gain power. And that this has been the main driving spirit behind Afghan Taliban insurgency against the United States and NATO forces in Afghanistan. When in February 2019, the Taliban inked a peace agreement with the US to pave way for withdrawal of all foreign forces from Afghanistan with the good offices of Pakistan, the IS-K severely criticized the deal.

The IS-K has also been dubbing Afghan Taliban as stooges of Pakistan; it has accused Afghan Taliban regime of "working hard to implement the Pakistani version of Islam designed by ISI and CIA in US intelligence headquarters of Qatar."

Through this kind of propaganda the IS-K has been trying not only to make suspicious the credentials of Afghan Taliban but also trying to malign Pakistan in the eyes of Pakistani Muslims. The aim is very clear: the group wants to convey to the Muslims that Afghan Taliban in Kabul and constitutionally Islamic system in Pakistan are just a façade, which needs to be removed. For this the Muslims of both Pakistan and Afghanistan have to support IS-K, which 'is the true torch-bearer of Islam.'

It is interesting to note that the Afghan Taliban regime's growing animosity towards Pakistan since its assuming of

power in Afghanistan, is aimed at dispelling the impression of the group being a 'Pakistan stooge.' In fact, the near three decades of Afghan Taliban existence and the events since then strongly suggest the Afghan Taliban have only been using Pakistan as their tactical retreat and support while giving the impression to Islamabad and its strategists that they have been the great benefactors of Pakistan. However, while in power in 1996-2001 and then since August 2021, most of the Afghan Taliban's actions have been against the very interests of Pakistan. For instance, the current support which the Afghan Taliban have been extending to the TTP is a case in point.

The IS-K argument that the Afghan Taliban are primarily a nationalist movement who were only using the name of Islam, then it seems they are right. In fact, the Afghan Taliban on several occasions have been calling themselves as an Afghan nationalist movement with no interests outside Afghanistan. On the contrary, the IS-K is a regional movement for which national boundaries are of no value as Islam does not believe in such divisions of Muslims. So it has the basic purpose to wage Jihad in the region. Therefore, while based in Afghanistan IS-K has a special interest in Pakistan.

On its part the IS-K has not only been unleashing propaganda against Pakistan but also attacking Pakistani

interests in Afghanistan. In this connection the last December 2 incident, whose responsibility was taken by the IS-K, when several gunmen attacked Pakistani Chargé d' Affaires, Ubaid-ur-Rehman Nizamani in Kabul is a instance. Nizamani was walking inside the embassy compound when militants from a neighbouring building fired at him.

The assassination attempt ultimately failed due to valiant effort by a Pakistan security guard who covered Nizamani with his body and received gun shot in his chest and both legs. In a post attack message, the IS-K tagged the Pakistan envoy and his guard in Kabul as 'apostates.'

The attack was a clear message to Pakistan by the IS-K that it would now physically attack Pakistani interest in Afghanistan. In the IS-K calculation if Pakistani personnel and buildings are targeted in Afghanistan then the Afghan Taliban may not provide security which would create a gulf between the two sides and without Pakistan support, Afghan Taliban regime may not be able to sustain. This would be the situation from which the IS-K would take maximum advantage.

The IS-K and TTP

Here it is important to note that while the IS-K has been dubbing Afghan Taliban an un-Islamic movement, at the same time the group has been favorably inclined towards the TTP. Surprisingly, this is despite the fact that the TTP has always considered Afghan Taliban as guiding spirit for the group and founder of the later, Mullah Omar as their beacon of light. Whereas, the IS-K has been consistently, describing the Afghan Taliban as an Afghan nationalist force only seeking state power with nothing to do with Islam while making mockery of Mullah Omar's Islamic credentials.

There are key reasons for the IS-K tilt towards the TTP. The foremost is that most of the IS-K founding commanders come from the TTP like Hafiz Saeed Khan from Orakzai tribal district of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province. These former TTP commanders founded the IS-K in Afghanistan to be used as a launching pad for its attacks and operations against Pakistan.

The fundamental reasons for these commanders joining the IS-K was personal

agenda. The ISIS had made a sudden and phenomenal appearance in its heartland Iraq and Syria in 2013 and within no time it took control of large swathes of territories in both the countries--the same could be repeated in Afghanistan and then in Pakistan. In case it happened then those TTP commanders who joined the IS-K would have been in the limelight. The TTP is the group which also shares the non-state ideology of the IS-K or in other words they think they are working for establishing a regional and global Khilafah. So in IS-K's calculation the TTP is a potential ally. Moreover, in case the TTP as a group does not forge an alliance with the IS-K the latter could attract large number of fighters and several commanders from the TTP, mainly based in Afghanistan.



In IS-K's hypothesis, when Pakistan would pressure Afghan Taliban to handle TTP inside Afghanistan, many TTP fighters would switch sides and join IS-K ranks. There is strong possibility of such

happening. Once it happens, it would be disastrous for both Pakistan and Afghanistan. Here it is important to recall that when last year Pakistan started talking to TTP, it was on insisting of Afghan Taliban. Pakistani military top brass then told the parliamentary committee in an in-camera briefing that the Afghan Taliban feared that if Pakistan would not talk to the TTP, the group would most probably join IS-K.

The IS-K Afghanistan-based leadership which mostly hails from Pakistan and Afghanistan has especially targeted Pakistan because in this way anti-Pakistan

sentiments among Afghans and some pockets in Pakistan could be exploited

which would attract hundreds of young men to join the IS-K in Afghanistan--making it a formidable outfit and a grave challenge to the Afghan Taliban, thus it could potentially get hold of some territory to establish a caliphate at least a symbolic one.

The IS-K's growing focus on Pakistan and threat to the country can be gauged from the group's recent media production. In one such video released by the IS-K media wing Al-Azaim Foundation in December 2022, only a few days after the attack on Pakistan Embassy in Kabul the group vehemently criticized and threatened Pakistan of dire consequences.

This is a rare IS-K's fully Pakistan-focused

media release. The 18-minute video, titled: "to the Muslims in the land of Muhammad bin Qasim," is in English in which an IS-K commander speaks. The video eulogized what it termed, "valuable contributions of IS-K's Pakistani contingent and the movement's supporters." The video considerably suggests IS-K wants to curry favor with the TTP. In the video the commander of IS-K accuses Pakistani state of ignoring miseries of Kashmiri Muslims and criticized it for working against the interest of Islam and instead embracing "nationalism, patriotism, and secularism."

Highlighting the 'Xinjiang Muslim's oppression at the hands of Chinese authorities' and blaming Pakistan for not doing anything to stop these atrocities and also taking to task the China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC). This argument of the IS-K is probably aimed at winning Baloch militant-terrorist groups to its folds.

What has Joe Biden said about Vladimir Putin and how often have they met?

US president has accused Russian counterpart of having 'no soul' and being a 'killer'

By Joe Sommerlad

During Joe Biden's surprise visit to Ukraine on Monday, a hugely significant gesture of solidarity with Kyiv ahead of the first anniversary of the Russian invasion, the American president could not resist taunting his Kremlin counterpart.

"When Vladimir Putin launched his invasion nearly one year ago, he thought Ukraine was weak, and the West was divided. He thought he could outlast us. But he was dead wrong," Mr Biden told the world during a bilateral appearance alongside Volodymyr Zelensky.

The Democrat may divide opinion at home but he was warmly welcomed in the Ukrainian capital, where the locals expressed appreciation for his unwavering support for their cause.

His track record of hostility towards Mr Putin, a fellow veteran Cold Warrior, also deserves to be remembered.

Commenting on Russia's brutal war in Chechnya in February 2000, Mr Biden said of the country's then acting-president that "the jury is still out on Mr Putin and his commitment to democratic rule or to nonproliferation... It is in our interest to remain closely engaged with Moscow, but if Mr Putin's government strays too far from the democratic road, or purposely helps other countries to develop weapons of mass destruction, we must be prepared to re-evaluate our relationship".

When George W Bush unwisely pronounced the Russian leader "very straightforward and trustworthy" after meeting him at a summit in Slovenia in June 2001, even claiming he had got "a sense of his soul", it was the experienced senator for Delaware who again took a more sceptical line.

"I don't trust Putin," Mr Biden said in the meeting's aftermath. "Hopefully, the president was being stylistic rather than substantive."

He continued: "The president's first meeting with Vladimir Putin appeared to be positive and constructive and a start for a new chapter in Russian-American relations. But I'd caution the administration against being excessively optimistic about Mr Putin and his intentions. Russia has exhibited a troubling pattern of less than democratic behaviour since Putin took office."



In an interview with Chris Wallace on Fox News Sunday in December 2006, he again sounded the alarm over creeping authoritarianism in Eastern Europe, declaring: "Russia is moving more and more toward an oligarchy here. Putin is consolidating power. He's been doing it for the last six years. I think that Russia is sliding further away from genuine democracy and a free-market system and more toward a command economy and the control of a single man."

While that warning has been more than borne out by the events of the last decade, Mr Biden's ascent to the White House as Barack Obama's vice president meant the official US foreign policy line on Moscow was that it was time to start over.

"It's time to press the reset button and to revisit the many areas where we can and

should be working together with Russia," Mr Biden said in February 2009, hoping to bring Mr Putin in from the cold for the sake of European unity six months on from the Russo-Georgian War over the sovereignty of South Ossetia and Abkhazia.

So far as that went, Mr Biden visited the Kremlin in 2011, and encountered Mr Putin in person.

Mr Biden remembered the encounter in conversation with The New Yorker in 2014 and said: "I had an interpreter, and when he was showing me his office I said, 'It's amazing what capitalism will do, won't it? A magnificent office!' And he laughed. As I turned, I was this close to him... I said, 'Mr Prime Minister, I'm looking into your eyes, and I don't think you have a soul.'"

Asked whether he had really said that, invoking President Bush's naive remark, Mr Biden answered: "Absolutely, positively. And he looked back at me, and he smiled, and he said, 'We understand one another.' This is who this guy is!"

In the same interview, he reflected: "We no longer think in Cold War terms, for several reasons. One, no one is our equal. No one is close. Other than being crazy enough to press a button, there is nothing that Putin



can do militarily to fundamentally alter American interests.”

Frostier relations with Russia returned over its annexation of the Crimea in 2014, and Mr Putin’s implausible denials that the “Little Green Men” fighting for Donetsk and Luhansk were Russia-backed.

Donald Trump’s tenure in the White House was of course dominated by suspicion of Russian election hacking and the possibility of Trumpworld collusion, the subject of FBI special counsel Robert Mueller’s investigations.

Mr Putin certainly enjoyed Mr Trump’s assertion at the Helsinki summit of July 2018 that he believed Russia’s denials over the expert opinion of his own intelligence services, and even more, the president’s blundering threat to withhold Congressionally-approved military funding for Mr Zelensky unless he launched a politically-charged investigation into Mr Biden’s son’s role on the board of Ukrainian gas company Burisma, events that led to his first impeachment.

Having entered the Oval Office himself on the other side of Covid-19, and the Capitol riot, Mr Biden told ABC’s George Stephanopoulos in March 2021 that he had spoken to Mr Putin himself about the election hacking question and told him: “I know you and you know me. If I establish this occurred, then be prepared.”

The president agreed that he considered the Russian “a killer” and said he would pay “a price” for his actions, if they could be definitely substantiated.

Such talk did not stop the men meeting in person again in Geneva, Switzerland, the following June for what the American described as “constructive” talks on cyber-crime, human rights and Ukraine.

“The bottom line is, I told President Putin that we need to have some basic rules of the road that we can all abide by,” Mr Biden said afterwards.

For his part, the Russian said: “He’s a balanced and professional man, and it’s clear that he’s very experienced. It seems to me that we did speak the same language.”

Matters were less cordial when the two spoke by Zoom in December 2021 as Mr Biden demanded answers as to why Russian forces were amassing on the country’s western border with Ukraine, with the prospect of a large-scale invasion widely feared.

Mr Biden’s top national security adviser, Jake Sullivan, said after the call that his

boss had “told President Putin directly that if Russia further invades Ukraine, the United States, and our European allies would respond with strong economic measures”.

The meeting was “useful” and the discussion “direct and straightforward,” according to Mr Sullivan, who added that there was “a lot of give and take” but “no finger wagging”.

Prior to the invasion actually happening, Western leaders like Emmanuel Macron and Olaf Scholz, and US secretary of state Antony Blinken visited Moscow in the hope of dissuading Mr Putin from proceeding, their case made ultimately in vain.

Mr Biden had agreed “in principle” to make his own personal appeal but the trip never took place and the two have not met since, although they might have run into each other at the G20 summit in Indonesia last November had the Russian not pulled out and sent his foreign minister Sergey Lavrov instead.

The US and its Nato allies have meanwhile made good on their threats to impose biting economic sanctions on Russia, while supporting Ukraine with humanitarian and military aid, leaving the Kremlin to regard their war in Ukraine as a savage fight with the West by proxy.

Relations between Washington and Moscow have not been so low since the Soviet Union was in its pomp, a period of tense nuclear standoff both Mr Biden and Mr Putin recall all too well.

Courtesy INDEPENDENT



Emergence of New Power Centers: Impact on US Led World Order

By Moonis Ahmar

In his State of Union address delivered before American Congress on February 7 this year, the US President Joseph Biden primarily focused on domestic issues, but also touched upon foreign policy challenges, challenges particularly from the People's Republic of China. While reiterating that America will continue to play a leadership role in world affairs, he cautioned Congress members against rising threats to global order.

With defense expenditures of \$850 billion, debt of \$32 trillion, and GDP of \$24 trillion, the United States is passing through a critical phase because its defense expenditures are going up along with debt, but the economy is declining. Consequently, the leadership role of America to sustain West's tutelage is under challenge from China and Russia.

The US President Joseph Biden is in a denial mode asserting that his country is not declining in terms of economy, global security, poor infrastructure and growing racial divide capable of causing enormous damage to America's credibility and capacity to protect its national interests.

Is there US a declining power and if yes, then why its leadership is unable to reverse the process of a steady waning of its superpower status? How will the vacuum created as a result of American decline will have its ramifications in global order? To what extent the West will accept the US leadership and how rupture in the Atlantic alliance will further jeopardize American influence in global affairs? These are the questions which are raised in the backdrop of the Russian-Ukrainian war and the growing Sino-Russian nexus to cut the US down to its size.

Historically, no power on earth can sustain its influence and hold forever. Huge empires having their tutelage for centuries diminished and gave rise to new centers of power. But, the example of the United States is different because since it got independence from Britain in 1776 till



today, it massively expanded its power. In 2026, the US will celebrate its 250th independence anniversary and from 13 states on July 5, 1776 it expanded to 50 states with enormous economic, technological and military progress surpassing European imperial powers and assuming number one position in global affairs as a superpower following the end of the Second World War.

United States is a classic example to understand how a weak state passed through the process of achieving, strengthening and demonstrating power. There is no other country in the history of the last 300 years which can match with America's steady success in emerging as a global power. One needs to examine and analyze with critical thinking the projected decline of America from three angles. First, called as the land of opportunities, America regardless of apartheid system, excluding non-whites from basic rights including the right to vote till 1965, was called as the 'land of opportunities' and attracted talent from all over the world. Composed of migrants, excluding native Americans who were liquidated since the white European settlements from 16th century onwards, those who assumed leadership role after seeking independence from Britain worked hard to build their country brick by brick and made full use of enormous resources available to their country.

The turning point in the US leadership role in global affairs was after it had won the Second World War and assumed the responsibility to protect western interests after the decline of European imperial powers.

Taking advantage of their ideal geographical location, American leaders pursued a gradualist approach in seeking a global power status. From a policy of isolation enshrined in Monroe doctrine of December 23, 1823 to winning the civil war of 1860s and the American-Spanish war of 1898, the US abandoned its policy of isolation by joining the First and the Second World War. The turning point in the US leadership role in global affairs was after it had won the Second World War and assumed the responsibility to protect western interests after the decline of European imperial powers. Paradoxically, the United States, which was the richest country of the world after World War Second and financed the historic Marshal Plan for reconstruction of war, devastated Europe in 1948 became the poorest country because of its surging debt of \$32 trillion. Even then, at the non-state level, America is the richest country because of the accumulation of enormous wealth in the hands of several hundred billionaires; companies having assets of trillions of dollars and dollar as number one international currency.

The generation which planned and rendered sacrifices for transforming the United States from a weak state in 1776 to a major global power in 1945 is now replaced by a generation which lacks ownership and commitment to their country. As a result, Pax Americana, which replaced Pax Britannica during the 20th century, is no more a reality because 21st century is predicted to be Pax Asiana. Second, realistically speaking, despite the downhill trend of the US economy and it is declining leadership role in global affairs, it is argued that America will continue to influence the world in partnership with the West because of its technological superiority. Unlike the pre-Second World War situation when wars within the West led to the two world wars, after the Second World War, the West has not fought any war with each other. Resolution and management of conflicts, particularly between France and Germany in Europe and the role of the US under the auspices of NATO, tends to ensure Western supremacy in global affairs. Furthermore, Japan, despite being geographically located in Asia, is termed as a first world country having strong ties with the United States. In its essence, it is by default that America is playing a leadership role in global order by representing West and its allies in the developing world.

Following terrorist attacks in New York and Washington DC on September 11, 2001, which killed around 3,000 Americans, the US has managed to prevent a major terrorist attack on its soil. But, the price which it had to pay to counter terrorism is in the form of curtailing human rights and the vicious role of homeland security in apprehending those suspected to be involved in terrorism. Acts of harassment of the Muslim community and the detention of hundreds of Muslims in the notorious Guantanamo Bay prison badly eroded America's image of the world. Even President Barack Obama during his eight years as American president failed to completely shut-down that prison because under the so-called counter terrorism strategy it was defended by the ultra-conservatives.

Perhaps, the worst phase in the recent American history shattering its image as a democracy got tarnished during the

four-years term of former President Donald Trump. His tilt towards white supremacists and measures against Muslim immigrants badly damaged America's image in global affairs. It was during the Trump era when serious efforts were made to cut America down to its size by offering an alternate world order under the leadership of Russia and China. The two giants of Asia made it clear that they would not allow American tutelage in global order any more. Even European allies of the US were antagonized because of Trump's policies, which called for lowering the US financial contribution to NATO. The culture of populism, which is perceived to be anti-Muslim and anti-immigrant, further fragmented and polarized American society. Countless acts of lynching of Afro-Americans by the white American police galvanized hatred against the white dominated Trump administration, which significantly contributed to the defeat of Trump led Republican party in November 2020 elections.

Finally, how a country like Pakistan, which despite being the fifth most populated country in the world, will be impacted if the US led world order declines and new centers of power emerge in the coming years? The position taken by the then Prime Minister of Pakistan when Russia attacked Ukraine on February 24 antagonized the United States. America wanted Pakistan to condemn Russian attack and wanted its Prime Minister not to visit Moscow the day when Ukraine was attacked. Unfortunately, the failure of Pakistan to focus on its economy and seek political stability augmented its vulnerability because with a weak economy it had to make compromises on its sovereignty. Reaching out to International Monetary Fund (IMF) for a 23rd time in the last 75 years of its history meant acquiescing to American pressure. It also means compromising on its sovereignty by agreeing to harsh conditions of Washington based IMF without realizing the fact that instead of seeking foreign aid, it should have focused on enhancing exports and pursuing a policy of self-reliance. Those at the helm of affairs plunged their country into deep economic crisis.

It would have been better for Pakistan to follow success stories of South Korea,

Singapore, Malaysia, China, India and the UAE in terms of their economic vibrancy. But, with tunnel vision and meager skills to pull Pakistan from deep economic and political crisis, they further deepened their country's dependence on IMF, China and the West. In this scenario, alarmists argue that those having an age-old dream to neutralize Pakistan's nuclear arsenal will take advantage of its economic fiasco and impose conditions which will compel Islamabad to slash its defense expenditures and allow International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) to monitor and control Pakistan's nuclear arsenal.

Given Pakistan's pressing economic and political condition, its role in global affairs and to deal with the transformation of world order is questionable. Huge power asymmetry between Pakistan and other players in global order, including India, is a major reality. Yet, if governing elites take cognizance of the situation and be mindful of their country's fragile and failing status, one can expect some better role of Pakistan in the prevailing world order.

Certainly, history teaches us the lesson that no power can sustain its hold over power for long, but in case of the United States it is a different story because it is not just America but the West whose survival is stake because of Sino-Russian nexus and the possible cleavage in the Atlantic Alliance.

To sum up, one can argue that the year 2023 is critical both for Pakistan and the world order. During this year, Pakistan can further sink in the vicious cycle of economic, and political crisis or a miracle can happen and pull the country from an impending disaster. It is yet to be seen if miracles take place in today's world. As far as the world order is concerned, certainly history teaches us the lesson that no power can sustain its hold over power for long but in case of the United States it is a different story because it is not just America, but the West whose survival is stake because of Sino-Russian nexus and the possible cleavage in the Atlantic Alliance. Certainly, there is no surety that the world will be better off if the world order transforms as a result of American decline or a multipolar world with responsible global actors will ensure peace and stability.

Are online jobs the future of the world?

Who would have imagined that in the future, government employees will be able to work from home?



By Mahnur Mehfuz

Work from home is a new trend in the workplace nowadays. "Work from home" refers to the requirement that employees perform their duties from their residences. Employees benefit because they can stick to their scheduled work hours. According to a recent study on remote work, it is advantageous for employees to work from home because it will boost production. The company benefits as well because it allows them to save a lot of money. In 2020, the COVID-19 outbreak affected labour markets all around the world. Millions of individuals were furloughed or lost their jobs, and others quickly adapted to working from home when workplaces closed. The short-term effects were abrupt and frequently severe. Many additional employees were judged necessary and continued to work in hospitals, supermarkets, garbage trucks, and warehouses while adhering to new protocols designed to stop the spread of the unique coronavirus.

Global labour markets were affected by the COVID-19 epidemic in 2020. The immediate effects were abrupt and frequently severe: millions of people were laid off or lost their jobs, and others quickly adapted to working from home as offices closed. In order to stop the unique coronavirus from spreading, many additional people

were judged vital and continued to work in hospitals, supermarkets, garbage trucks, and warehouses while adhering to strict rules. Jobs that were permanent and pensionable are no longer available. Companies are reducing labour expenses by taking advantage of developments in digital technologies. More profits for shareholders and employers result from lower costs. It presents a grim, brutally honest assessment of the state of the labour market.

Flexible work schedules have become more widely used this year, making the phrase "working from home" a cliché. Who would have imagined that in the future, government employees will be able to work from home?

The pattern began long before the existing coronavirus pandemic, and it is expected to persist as firms change their operational procedures to reflect the new situation. For young people who have spent nearly 20 years in various stages of study and are eager to become financially independent, the drop in permanent jobs is bad news. To reduce their labour costs, governments are likewise moving away from permanent positions. The government is already taking steps that could eventually result in teachers, health care workers, and other government

personnel being hired on a contract basis rather than on a permanent basis. The good news is that there are a tonne of options for generating money through online freelancing because digital technologies are rendering traditional occupations obsolete.

The "gig economy" refers to a global movement that includes freelancing. An individual gets hired for a specified assignment with a deadline as part of a gig, which is essentially freelancing work. The remuneration is not fixed; it changes according to the task's urgency or the number of other people available to complete it. Internet jobs provide flexible working hours, where the amount of time spent on tasks is entirely up to the individual, but speedy completion is rewarded. A person could work for multiple different digital platforms. Taxi drivers enrolling themselves on various taxi-hailing apps to attract more clients is a good example.

The government's recognition of online work as the future of youth employment is excellent news. The AjiraDigital Initiative, launched by the Ministry of Information and Communication Technology in 2016, intends to give Kenyans the resources, instruction, and mentorship they need to take

advantage of online employment opportunities. Online labour is "a revolution whose time has come," according to the ministry's Cabinet Secretary, Joe Mucheru, who was speaking about Ajira.

Working as a freelancer can be unfair to those without smartphones and computers. Internet employment requires a sizable number of data bundles, and those who cannot afford them are left behind, escalating the gap between the wealthy and the poor in society. There are worries that online platforms for freelancing are gathering excessive amounts of personal information that could fall into the wrong hands. Patricia Walowe, a student, claims, "I joined an online working platform, but they were asking for too many personal details." She found it awkward to be asked for images of herself, copies of her national identification card, her tax certificate, and permission to turn on location services on her phone. She claimed that it appeared that they were more focused on gathering personal information than on carrying out the assigned job. Worldwide, the gathering and sale of personal data has become a lucrative industry.

The government's Ajira Program issues warnings against dubious websites that advertise online employment. They advise individuals to perform background checks prior to accepting assignments. Looking up user reviews is a useful technique to evaluate the legitimacy of a site. Ajira claims that genuine online employment boards are



open to everyone and cost nothing to join. Don't turn in assignments if you don't know how much you should be paid and how you'll obtain it. You might find yourself doing tasks for free. The collection and sale of personal data is now a thriving industry on a global scale.

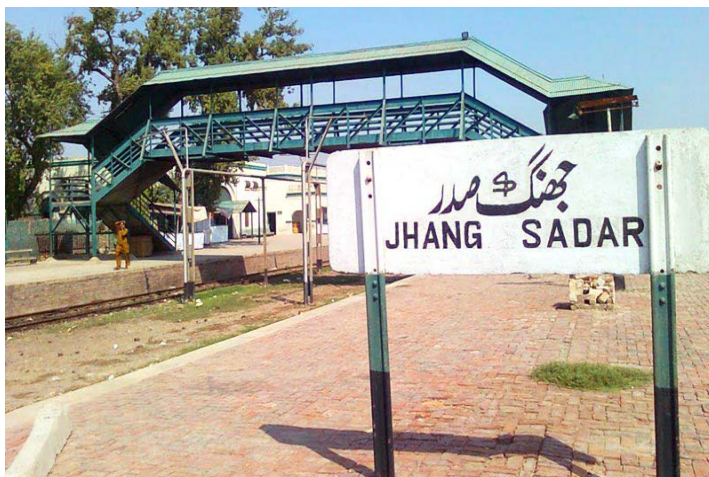
The Ajira Program of the government offers alerts on questionable websites that promote online jobs. They recommend that people run background checks before accepting tasks. Finding user reviews is a helpful way to assess a website's credibility. According to Ajira, legitimate internet job forums are free to join and open to everyone. If you don't know how much you should be paid and how you'll get it, don't send in assignments. You can find yourself

doing things for free. Around two-thirds (74%) of respondents to a recent Gartner CFO survey said they intended to permanently switch personnel to remote work after the COVID-19 situation is resolved. Big IT firms are leading the way, as expected. San Francisco-based Twitter informed staff members that they might work remotely at any time in May.

About the same time, Square, another company run by Twitter's Jack Dorsey, also established a similar policy that permits staff to continue working from home. Mark Zuckerberg, the CEO of Facebook, informed his workforce that many of them would work remotely indefinitely and that he planned to keep people working remotely into 2020.



The Historic Jhang



Jhang is a city located in the province of Punjab, Pakistan. It is an ancient city with a rich history dating back several thousand years. The region around Jhang has been inhabited since prehistoric times and has been the site of many different civilizations.

The earliest known settlement in the Jhang region was the Indus Valley Civilization, which existed between 2600 BCE and 1900 BCE. The ruins of the Indus Valley Civilization have been found near the town of Harappa, located near the border of Jhang district.

During the Vedic period, which lasted from 1500 BCE to 500 BCE, the region around Jhang was inhabited by the Aryan people. The Aryans were a group of Indo-European migrants who migrated from Central Asia and settled in the region.

In the 5th century BCE, the region came under the rule of the Mauryan Empire, which was one of the largest empires in ancient India. The Mauryan Empire was founded by Chandragupta Maurya and was known for its efficient administrative system and its promotion of Buddhism.

In the 2nd century BCE, the region came under the rule of the Kushan Empire, which was a powerful empire that controlled much of Central Asia and northern India. The Kushan Empire was known for its artistic achievements and its promotion of Buddhism.

In the 7th century CE, the region came under the rule of the Arab Empire, which was a powerful empire that controlled much of the Middle East and North Africa. The Arab Empire was known for its achievements in science, mathematics, and literature.

During the medieval period, the region around Jhang was ruled by various Muslim dynasties, including the Ghaznavids, the Ghurids, and the Mughals. The Mughal Empire was one of the most powerful empires in the world during the 16th and 17th centuries and was known for its architectural achievements, including the Taj Mahal.

During the British colonial period, Jhang became an important centre of commerce and trade. The city was connected to other parts of India through a network of railways, which allowed for the transportation of goods and people. The British also established schools and colleges in Jhang, which helped promote education and literacy in the region.

After the partition of India in 1947, Jhang became part of Pakistan. Since then, the city has continued to grow and develop. Today, Jhang is a bustling city with a population of over one million people. It is an important centre of trade and commerce, and it is known for its cotton and textile industries.

Jhang, situated in the central region of Punjab province in Pakistan, is a place known for its cultural significance and natural beauty. Its history dates back to

the Indus Valley Civilization, and it boasts lush green landscapes along the banks of the Chenab River.

The city attracts tourists and spiritual seekers who come to visit its famous Sufi shrines and tombs, with the shrine of Pir Mahal being a popular pilgrimage site. Visitors can also witness traditional crafts such as pottery, weaving, and wood carving and enjoy the delectable cuisine that includes specialties like "Sohan Halwa" and "Dahi Baray."

In recent years, Jhang has become a hub of business and commerce, attracting entrepreneurs and investors from across Pakistan. Despite the rapid development, the city has managed to preserve its cultural heritage, creating a unique blend of modernity and tradition.

Whether you are seeking spiritual enlightenment, a taste of traditional culture, or business opportunities, Jhang is a must-visit destination in Pakistan. Plan your trip today and explore the fascinating history and beauty of this city!

In conclusion, Jhang has a rich and diverse history that spans several thousand years. The city has been home to many different civilizations and has been influenced by a wide range of cultures and religions. Today, Jhang is a vibrant and thriving city that is an important part of Pakistan's economy and culture.

By Pavan Manzoor

The PSL is here again!

The PSL is once again going on with full force; fans are excited

By Ali Abdullah

It's that time of the year again when friends turn into rivals and wars between cities start. The eighth season of the HBL Pakistan Super League has begun. Matches are held in different cities in Pakistan. The first leg was played in Multan and Karachi, whereas the second leg will be played in Lahore and Rawalpindi. So far, we have seen some nail-biting matches. The first match was played in Multan after an astonishing opening ceremony. Last year's finalists played the opening match.

The Multan Sultans won the toss and elected to field first. While batting first, the Lahore Qalandars set the Multan Sultans a target of 176 runs to win the match. Fakhar Zaman was the biggest contributor to the total with his 66 runs, which he scored on 42 balls at a very good strike rate of 157. After him, Mirza Baig scored 32 runs on 26 balls. All other players scored 20 runs or less.

Hussain Talat scored 20, Shai Hope scored 19, and Sikandar Raza scored 19 while he remained not out. David Weise got out on 5 runs while Kamran Ghulam got out on 3 runs. Lahore Qalandars lost six wickets while scoring 175 runs.

As far as the bowling from the Multan Sultans is concerned, Ihsanullah and Usama Mir took two wickets, while Akeal Hosein and Shah Nawaz Dahani took one wicket each. Sameen Gul scored 41 runs in four overs while not taking a wicket.

Muhammad Rizwan scored the most runs for Multan Sultan, with 75. It was the highest score of the match, but not quite enough to get the Multan Sultans over the line. Shan Masood scored 35 runs. David Millar scored 25 runs, while Kieron Pollard scored 20. Khushdil Shah scored 12.

Multan Sultan scored 174 runs while losing four wickets. They were just one run away from levelling the score and two from winning the match. However, they just lost the match by one run.



From Lahore Qalandars' bowling side, Shaheen Shah Afridi, Haris Rauf, Zaman Khan, and Hussain Talat all took one wicket each. Sikandar Raza, Liam Dawson, and David Wiese had no luck with the bats.

While the match between the Lahore Qalandars and the Multan Sultans was really close, it was the Lahore Qalandars who took away the victory in the tournament's opening match.

In the second match of the league, the Karachi Kings were beaten by Peshawar Zalmi by just two runs. The Karachi Kings won the toss and elected to field first.

While batting for the Peshawar-Zalmi side, Tom Kohler-Cadmore scored the most runs, 92, on just 50 balls. Second to him was Babar Azam, who scored 68 runs on just 46 balls. After scoring 16, James Neesham remained not out, while Muhammad Haris scored only 10 runs. No one else entered double figures.

Overall, while batting, Peshawar Zalmi scored 199 runs and gave Karachi Kings the target of 200 runs to win the match. This total was very impressive, and everyone thought it would be a walk in the park for Peshawar Zalmi from that point; however, Karachi Kings did make things difficult for Peshawar Zalmi while batting, but more on that later.

While bowling for the Karachi Kings Mir Hamza, Andrew Tye, Imran Tahir, and Ben Cutting took one wicket each. Other than that, Muhammad Amir and Imad Wasim were not able to take any wickets. Imad Wasim of the Karachi Kings was the most expensive bowler, conceding 42 runs in three overs.

In terms of batting, the captain, Imad Wasim, scored the most: 80 runs off 47 bowls. After him, Shoaib Malik scored 52 on just 34 balls. This great strike from Shoaib Malik brought the Karachi Kings back into the match at a difficult time. And at that time, it looked like the Karachi Kings would win the match; however, the turn of events after Shoaib Malik got out resulted in a different result. After Shoaib's 52, the highest score was from Matthew Wade; he scored 23 runs, and Haider Ali scored 12.

Overall, Karachi Kings scored 197 runs while attempting to chase 200 runs in response to Peshawar Zalmi's 199 runs. This way, Peshawar Zalmi won by just two runs. Tom Kohler-Cadmore was chosen as the player of the match for his 92 runs on 50 balls, which helped Peshawar Zalmi win the match.

If we talk of the bowling of Peshawar Zalmi, Wahab Riaz and James Neesham took two wickets each, while Salman Irshad took one wicket.

The PSL in full swing

Mohsin Naqvi, Chief Minister of Punjab, demanded an additional 450 million rupees from the Pakistan Cricket Board in order for the province to host more matches



HBL Pakistan Super League Season 8 started, and fans were excited because the matches were to be played in four different cities. Four different venues were introduced in 2021, but due to COVID-19, only Karachi and Lahore hosted the league in 2022. The first leg of the Pakistan Super League has finished, and now teams are travelling to Lahore and Rawalpindi for the second leg. The final was scheduled for Lahore on March 19th.

Due to uncertain political circumstances in the country, Punjab is under a caretaker government. Mohsin Naqvi, Chief Minister of Punjab, demanded an additional 450 million rupees from the Pakistan Cricket Board to host more matches. A total of 800 million rupees was demanded by the Punjab government. This huge amount was not even paid when the league used to be in the United Arab Emirates.

The Pakistan Cricket Board cannot afford such a large sum because they have yet to recover from a 1 billion rupee loss caused by the Ramiz Raja regime's Pakistan Junior League (PJL). The Pakistan Cricket Board and the franchise owners decided in a meeting on February 25, 2023, that only two matches will be played in Lahore, whereas no matches will be played in Rawalpindi. All the matches will be shifted to Karachi. Fans from Lahore and Rawalpindi were disappointed, as they had already bought tickets for the matches.

This was the latest update, but this decision took a U-turn in favour of HBL PSL and the fans on February 26, 2023. After many negotiations, the Punjab government offered to split the massive amount that had been requested earlier. The Pakistan Cricket Board and its chief, Najam Sethi, did not accept the offer, as it was still a huge sum and the PCB could not afford it. In the end, Chairman PCB Najam Sethi contacted Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif, who gave his full support to hosting the matches in Punjab. Now, PCB will give 10 million rupees to Mohsin Naqvi's government.

The last two matches of the first leg were played in Karachi and Multan, respectively. Peshawar vs. Islamabad was a one-sided match that Islamabad won, but the one played in Multan was a nail-biter.

The match took place in Multan and was a very interesting competition—an absolute thriller. Even on the last ball of the game, it was not clear who would be the winner of the game. At many stages of the match, the odds of both teams winning increased and decreased as compared to the other team. So it's a very interesting game. The Karachi Kings won the toss and elected to field first. While batting, the Multan Sultans only lost two wickets until the end. The top scorer was the captain and keeper of the team, Muhammad Rizwan, who scored 110 runs on 64 balls with the help of 10 fours and four sixes, and he also remained not out. Shan Masood scored 51 runs on 33 balls; he achieved this total with the help of six fours and one six. Rilee Rossouw scored 29 on 21 balls, while Kieron Pollard scored 2 on the 2 balls that he faced. He also was not out while the innings of the Multan Sultans ended. Karachi Kings have set Multan Sultans a target of 197 runs to win the match. The target was not an easy one to chase down.

From the Karachi Kings bowling side, Muhammad Umar and Shoaib Malik took one wicket each. Other than that, no one was able to take a wicket, as in total, six bowlers tried their luck, including Imad Wasim, the captain, and two wicket-takers.

From the Karachi Kings' batting side, one of the openers, James Vince, scored very well, scoring 75 runs in total. Karachi King would never lose if he kept up his current pace. However, in an unfortunate misunderstanding between Haider Ali and James Vince, Vince got out. According to the experts, this was the event that resulted in the defeat of the Karachi Kings. Even without Vince, the team did well, as he had built a solid foundation, but Karachi Kings failed to get over the line and fell just short. James Vince had scored 75 runs on just 34 balls with the help of six sixes and seven fours. He was not out by the end of the inning for the Karachi Kings.

Imad Wasim, the captain himself, scored 46 on 26 balls with the help of five sixes; in fact, all of his boundaries were sixes. Matthew Wade scored 20 runs, and everyone else involved scored less than that. Until the end of 20 overs, the Karachi Kings were able to score just 193 runs for the loss of 5 wickets. In the end, Karachi lost the match by just 3 runs. From Multan Sultans' bowling side, Abbas Afridi took two wickets while Usama Mir and Khushdil Shah took one wicket each. Muhammad Ilyas, Carlos Brathwaite, and Ihsanullah were not able to take any wickets.

While Multan Sultans won the match by 3 runs, Muhammad Rizwan was awarded the player of the match title and trophy for his tremendous 110 runs on just 64 balls.

Matches began on February 26 in Lahore, with the Rawalpindi leg beginning on March 1, 2023. The league will again return to Lahore for the playoffs and the final.

By Ali Abdullah

Money-Back Guarantee: This Eid's Attractions in Cinemas

Money Back Guarantee (MBG) is written by actor and comedian Faisal Qureshi and also marks Qureshi's cinematic directorial debut



By **Kaukab Jahan**

The wait is over. After having had the most successful Pakistani film to date, *The Legend of Maula Jatt*, to his credit, Fawad Khan is back with another film, the action-comedy *Money Back Guarantee (MBG)*, which will be released on Eid. This time, the star is an icon of the cricket world, Wasim Akram, who is making his acting debut in the film. The world-famous cricketer has already shown his talent for showbiz performances in television hosting and commercials. Another attraction of MBG is the entry of Akram's wife, social worker and activist Shaniera Akram, in a pivotal role.

Money Back Guarantee (MBG) is written by actor and comedian Faisal Qureshi and also marks Qureshi's cinematic directorial debut. The film is produced by Shayan Khan under the banner of his company, ZASHKO Films, and distributed by IMGC Global in Pakistan and ZASHAKO Films worldwide.

The Urdu-language film stars a plethora of other entertainment bigwigs and celebrities, including veteran star Javed Sheikh, Hina Dilpazir, Ali Safina,

Shayan Khan, Mikaal Zulfiqar, Mirza Gohar Rasheed, Hajra Yamin, Ayesha Omar, Faisal Qureshi, and Jan Rambo.

The film also features Kiran Malik, Aqdas Waseem, Mani, Shafaat Ali, Marhoom Ahmad Bilal, Adnan Jaffar, and Ataullah Khan in supporting and cameo roles.

The theatrical trailer and official poster of the film have also recently been released and gaining appreciation from the public.

Shot in Karachi and Thailand, MBG revolves around a heist supposedly happening in a bank. The bank's president is played by Wasim Akram, while Fawad Khan is in the role of the bank's manager. Besides the major theme of heist, there is a continuous tussle between the characters of Akram and Khan throughout the film, creating multiple folds in the story.

Director and writer of MBG, Faisal Qureshi, while expressing the motive behind the story, said, "I have tried to address multiple problems that I observe in our society in *Money Back Guarantee*, but the main theme of the film is unity."

Explaining the name of the film, the playwright said that as the film is a story of a heist, this robbery in the bank is the "Money Back Guarantee" for the characters planning it.

The producer, Shayan Khan, said the money-back guarantee was a great experience for him. The team worked very hard to make the film. Khan was hopeful about the box office of MBG and said he wished his film could also break records like *The Legend of Maula Jatt*.

The actor-producer also showed his trust in his director, Faisal Qureshi, and said they were done with all the homework before going on the sets of *Money Back Guarantee*.

After the international appreciation and success of "The Legend of Maula Jatt," viewers and producers are expected to maintain that standard. The *Money Back Guarantee*, in addition to a stellar cast, appears promising in the trailer's story and direction sections. What this attractive package actually has for the audience will finally be revealed on Eid ul-Fitr in the last week of April 2023.

"Queen of Memes": Nida Yasir Blunders



Nida Yasir is a well-known television personality in Pakistan who has been hosting morning shows for over a decade. Over the years, she has made a number of blunders on air that have sparked controversy and criticism from viewers.

One of the most notable incidents occurred in 2016 when Nida Yasir invited a rape victim on her show and proceeded to ask her a series of insensitive and inappropriate questions. The victim, who had been raped at gunpoint, was asked if she had enjoyed the experience and whether she had put up a fight. This line of questioning was widely criticized, and Nida Yasir was accused of victim-blaming and insensitivity towards the trauma of sexual assault survivors.

In another incident, Nida Yasir faced backlash for an episode in which she invited a couple to her show who had lost their child in a tragic accident. During the segment, Nida Yasir asked the couple to reenact the accident for the cameras, which many viewers felt was exploitative and insensitive to the couple's grief.

More recently, in 2020, Nida Yasir was criticised for a segment in which she invited a family on her show who had tested positive for COVID-19. During the segment, Nida Yasir was seen hugging and touching the family members, despite the fact that they were supposed to be in quarantine. This behaviour was widely condemned as it went against the guidelines for social distancing and could have put the health of Nida Yasir and her crew at risk.

Nida found herself at the centre of a controversy after inviting Ayesha, a young girl who gained fame on social media for her unique style and pronunciation, to her morning show.

She invited Ayesha to her show to talk about her newfound fame and to showcase her talents. However, the invitation backfired, and the show received widespread criticism from the public for making fun of Ayesha and her unique way of speaking.

Many people on social media accused Nida Yasir of exploiting Ayesha for the sake of ratings and views. They argued that the show was not only disrespectful to Ayesha but also showed a lack of empathy towards people who are different from the mainstream.

The criticism was not limited to social media. Prominent figures from the entertainment industry also condemned Nida Yasir's actions, with some calling for a boycott of her show.

Nida recently made a blunder while discussing a cricket match on a show with former cricketer Shoaib Akhtar. Shoaib Akhtar is seen in a video questioning Nida when Pakistan won the 1992 Cricket World Cup. Nida Yasir is unable to respond and seeks help from Shahista Lodhi. When Akhtar asked when Pakistan won the 2009 T20 World Cup, Nida answered in 1992.

These incidents are just a few examples of the blunders and controversies that Nida Yasir has been involved in over the years. While some viewers have criticized her for being insensitive and exploitative, others have defended her, arguing that she is simply trying to create engaging and entertaining content for her audience.



Regardless of one's perspective, it is clear that Nida Yasir's blunders on air have had an impact on the way she is perceived by the public. As a public figure, she has a responsibility to be mindful of the impact of her words and actions, particularly when dealing with sensitive topics such as trauma and illness. Only time will tell whether Nida Yasir will be able to address these issues and regain the trust of her audience.

By Pavan Manzoor



Zia Mohyeddin, as I remember him

People have said that Urdu lost its voice with his death, but I say that I lost someone quite close, whose lovable smile will always remain etched in my memory

By Muhammad Suhayb

"It's Suhayb, (as in rehab, tab) not Sohaib (as in babe, rabe)," corrected Zia Mohyeddin sahab when I asked him to autograph his memoirs *A Carrot is a Carrot* and *The God of My Idolatry* for me. After several meetings with him at NAPA — the National Academy of Performing Arts — sometime around the beginning of 2021, I gathered the courage to ask him to sign my books. For someone who has been saying his own name incorrectly for over four decades, it was a wake-up call with the stroke of a pen.

For a generation like mine, who had the misfortune of growing up in the days of the tyrannical Zia-ul-Haq, Zia Mohyeddin was a nobody, although we listened to his recitations on audio cassettes. My elders were diehard fans of his as they grew up watching *The Zia Mohyeddin Show* on PTV in the 70s. *Shakira ki maa kia boli* and *lagay theka* — something he said to the musicians to start the *thaika* — were unknown to us. The closest we could get was the iconic parody by Moin Akhtar in 1986 at the sixth PTV Awards. "Yeh PTV award hai, design iska odd hai [this is the PTV award, its design is odd]" was rendered the same way Zia Sahab would have read it.

A trendsetter as far as talkshows were concerned, *The Zia Mohyeddin Show* was quite popular in its days. With most of the recording tapes lost in the PTV archives, I asked Zia Sahab about the following he amassed around that time, and why he stopped the show after just two spells? "Well, after the success of the first spell from Karachi in 1971, I did the second and eventually the last spell from Lahore in 1973. After the airing of the episodes, it was getting difficult for me to move around. People would circle my car, feel proud for touching my shirt and tried to get closer to me, whenever I went out. Autographs were the selfies back then and as I was not used to such adulation, I decided to give it a break," recalled Zia Sahab at one of the sittings.

The show also saw the debut of comedians Moin Akhtar, Ismail Tara and Khalid Abbas Dar, not to forget the famed

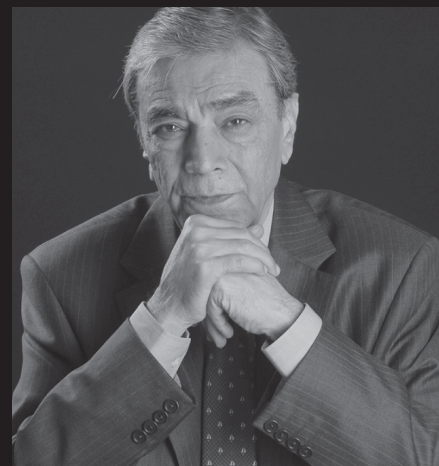
compere Khushbakht Shujaat. The latter, who was a student back then, became an overnight star after engaging in a candid discussion with filmstar Muhammad Ali. Zia Sahab laughed when I mentioned watching that particular clip. "Khushbakht Aalia, as she was called back then, was hilarious, but Muhammad Ali Sahab mujhsay kuch naraaz hogaye thay uss qist ke baad [was a bit upset with me after that episode]."

Not many people know that Zia Mohyeddin was an inspiration to many, including chocolate hero Waheed Murad. Murad was introduced on stage for the first time in 1957 by the big man, who directed *Romeo and Juliet* at Karachi's Theosophical Hall. He was given the role of Benvolio and Zia Sahab remembered working on his voice throw before selecting him for the part.

With changes coming in the political setup in Pakistan, Zia Sahab left for the UK by the mid-70s and continued working in Hollywood films and British TV. He came back in the mid-90s and relaunched the iconic show, but found his audience occupied elsewhere. An *Evening with Zia Mohyeddin* remained an annual fixture in Lahore for over 35 years where the thespian would read Urdu prose and poems. A disciple of the Western genre of "reading", he introduced the youth to legends like Ghalib, Faiz, Noon Meem Rashid, Shaukat Thanvi, Ibn e Insha and Patras Bokhari.

The first formal introduction with Zia Sahab and my generation happened during the airing of Shoaib Mansoor's *Dhun hamari tumhare naam hui* in the late 90s. He presented filmy songs that have been copied on both sides of the border over the years.

Zia Sahab was quite particular about many things — the spelling of "Mohyeddin" topping the list. He referred to his birth city as Lyallpur instead of Faisalabad till his last day. The other grey area was the topic of *Mujrim Kaun*, the only Urdu film in which he starred. Directed by Aslam Dar, the film had Zia Sahab pitted against stalwarts like Allauddin, Rehan, Rangeela and a budding Sultan Rahi. The mystery thriller failed, despite its excellent music.



I had the honour of trespassing the topic and coming out clean from the discussion, that too during my very first encounter with the great man. Arriving two minutes early, I was asked to wait. I was earlier cautioned by Arshad Mehmood, the actor and music director about Zia Sahab's peculiarity. Being programme director of NAPA, Mehmood was in Lahore that day and told me that Zia Sahab has never entertained anyone for more than five minutes, be it a fellow like you or a head of the state. Once he reportedly even refused to meet Hollywood star Angelina Jolie when she arrived at NAPA unannounced.

When I came out of the room after 15 minutes, I got a call from Mehmood who said, "Tum le aaye hogay Mujrim Kaun ko beech me [You must have brought up *Mujrim Kaun*], otherwise there was no chance that you could have survived that long."

Zia Sahab was a loving figure. The audio cassettes of his recitations were part of my grandfather's collection. Whenever I met him at NAPA or the Arts Council, he displayed such affection that reminded me of my deceased grandfather. I mentioned it to him once and he simply patted me. People have said that Urdu lost its voice with his death, but I would say that I lost someone quite close, whose lovable smile will always remain etched in my memory.

Zia Sahab began his journey from Radio Pakistan in 1949. After 74 years mesmerising the world with his acting, recitation, *Marsiya Goi*, and hosting, his demise on World Radio Day is in itself a tribute to his work.



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