

Fortnightly

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PDM and Politics

Worsening political culture speaks
incompetence of leadership

Rupee Devaluation Impact

Open market trading, Pakistani currency
has fallen close to the level that Sri Lanka

Sino-Russian Relations

Moscow and Beijing to increase mutual
trust between their armed forces

Political and Constitutional crises Deepen



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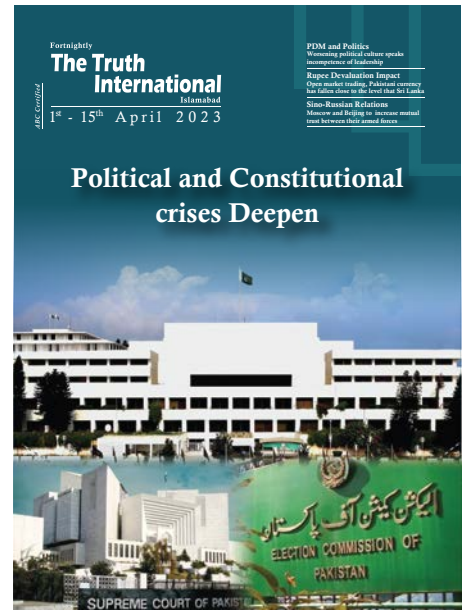


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The War of the Wigs

By Hammad Ghaznavi



The Supreme Court of Pakistan is now visibly fractured, with a group of judges openly challenging the authority of Chief Justice, who still has five months in office. It is not merely difference of opinion; it's bad blood. Wishes apart, the Judges are not likely to amicably sort out their differences as the Rubicon seems to have been crossed. A showdown is on the cards, with the government and the opposition supporting their favourites. According to World Justice Project Report, Pakistan's judiciary ranked one of the lowest in the world. The optimists suggest, the present crisis may prove a blessing in disguise as there's not much room for deterioration.

Because of its chequered past, the Judiciary doesn't command much respect in the country. The Supreme Court of Pakistan, without exception, has condoned all subversions of the constitution by the self-proclaimed military messiahs since 1958. It has, in brief, blatantly sided with the dictator, obstructing and distorting democracy throughout its existence. The genesis of the present crisis in the superior courts roughly started with Saqib Nisar assuming the office of Chief Justice in December 2016. With the advantage of hindsight, it could be said that a "hybrid" system of governance had been conceived by the Establishment wherein senior politicians deserved no place. The spying agencies, NAB and the Judiciary, all were on the same page. Deriving strength not from their institution but the Establishment, former CJs Saqib Nisar and Asif Saeed Khosa dictatorially ruled the SC. All those judges who refused to sign the 'same

page' were considered suspicious, and impediments in the implementation of the Grand Design. Shaukat Siddiqui of Islamabad High Court refused to join the squad, and was made a horrible example. The entire hybrid system tried to throw Qazi Faiz Eesa out of the SC through a presidential reference. The brother judges, so to speak, stabbed Qazi in the back. Qazi was extremely lucky to survive the onslaught. The grouping in the court further cemented. During these five years or so, there was a group of 3-4 judges who sat on every bench hearing political cases, and without fail deciding in favour of the then blue eyed boy of the army, Imran Khan. The same judges formed the bench when constitutional matters were heard by the court, many times as a result of suo moto notice.

It was after the fall of the hybrid system that 'The War of the Wigs' surprisingly has gotten more ferocious. The incumbent CJ, without the backing of the Establishment, has remained autocratic in making benches, issuing cause lists, and taking suo moto notices. Still the same 2-3 judges form the bench on every political and constitutional case, and without exception the decisions remain predictable. The senior most judges, Qazi Faiz and Sardar Tariq Masood, are completely ignored in the formation of benches. A constitutional matter has never been referred to a full court, an idea endorsed by every professional jurist. The starting point of the present episode can be found in the interpretation of the article 63-A of the constitution wherein, according to two members of the bench, the constitution was rewritten and the votes of the defec-

tors were not counted. It was this decision that led to the formation of Pervez Elahi government in Punjab, and then the dissolution of the assembly. A couple of weeks ago, the SC took another suo moto notice, to determine the schedule of Punjab and KP elections. This suo moto proved the proverbial last straw in the camel's back. It is for the very first time in the history of SC that the judges on the bench are arguing among themselves if the verdict was 4-3 or 3-2, the bench comprised seven members or five? "Stop the one man show" read a senior judge's note on the bench, referring to the autocratic powers of the CJ in taking suo moto and forming the bench.

It was against this backdrop that parliament decided to legislate to spread the powers of CJ among the senior judges of SC. It's a good piece of legislation, however, it would have been better if the SC had initiated the change itself. The court watchers insist that the CJ and co will not take it lying down. It's after a long time in our history that there is a split in the judiciary-army alliance. There are serious cracks within the Supreme Court, leaving the CJ dented. Will the CJ's orders be implemented by the executive? The chaos is multiplying. The only way out is a Grand Dialogue among all the stakeholders, politicians and institutions. This is actually the Last Bus!

Supreme court serving dictators, new low after Saqib, ever since, Bundial, present crisis roots 63A, dogar case, 4-3 or 3-2? Future course, parliament vs Bundial, Bundial will retaliate, will lose in the end.

Who beats who to the draw?



By M A Niazi

Imran Khan seems bent on showing the world that he shouldn't be heading a political party, but should be leading the revival of Pakistani cinema as its leading scriptwriter. Witness his claim of why he did not get out of his vehicle during his appearance at the Islamabad Judicial Complex: 'they' were going to kill him in fulfillment of the 'London Plan'. That mention of the London Plan made me regret the death of Adib, the great character actor, who had a yellow wig that allowed him to essay all those foreigners roles. Another great one for Englishman's roles was the late great Agha Taalish, who relied not on a wig, but a vaguely military uniform and fierce mustachios.

Or maybe Imran has been watching *Ertugrul*, the Turkish television series about the founder of the Ottoman dynasty. One of the noticeable conventions of Turkish teleplays, especially about Ottoman sultans, is that a character isn't dead just because they've been killed. If the plot needs them, they will come back to life, and the play will explain how the person's life was saved.

Is that what Imran imagines will happen? That everyone will think he's dead, only for him to come back, alive, after a while, to the discomfiture of Mian Shehbaz Sharif and Rana Sanaullah.

I wonder if there's anyone in his party who can tell him it doesn't work that way. In real life, if you get killed, you're dead. You stay dead, and the play goes in without you.

Of course, what the script has still not got is some way of bringing in horses. Viewers of *Ertugrul* might have noted that there are a lot of horses involved, and there are long scenes consisting of just some Turks riding horses. It's the Turkish equivalent of the old-time Westerns, which I'm sure Imran was brought up on.

Maybe one way of writing horses in, would be to have mounted police for crowd control, and have them respond to trying to ride down Imran. Of course, in addition to writing the script, Imran will be the hero of the film, will wrestle down one of the cops, and will take over his horse. He will somehow get a gandasa (probably thrown to him by Ali Amin Gandapur, who cannot be left out of the situation), and then ride hard against Shehbaz who will suddenly appear on the scene on a black horse, sporting a Stetson and a buckskin vest. Imran should lose, because you never bring a gandasa to a gunfight, but Imran not only stars and writes the script, but he also directs the film and composes the music. (Ali Amin wrote the songs, though.)

Then there is the scene where Imran, wearing a white hat, confronts the Chief Election Commissioner, in a black one, in his office, and forces him to hold an election. I suspect that Imran imagines an election to be something like the shootout between the hero and the villain. Or maybe he thinks it is something like the earthquake that shook the country. It was 7.8 on the Richter scale, which is about the same as the one that recently hit Turkey and Syria. That caused more than 50,000 deaths all told, the majority in Turkey. That was like the earthquake that hit Kashmir and KP in 2005. So that either means we had a close shave or were blessed.

I suppose the later blessing should count, which saw us start Ramazan with Afghanistan and the Arab world. The moonsighting is now happening on the same day as the Arabs because now we know that the moon has been sighted there. I still don't understand why the evidence of someone in Kabul is unacceptable, but that of someone in Peshawar is. Does the Almighty ask for one's passport? Well, let's see if we have Eid on the same day.

But seriously, maybe the statement by Zalmay Khalilzad shows how deeply Imran has divided the US establishment. It's another victory for the Kuptaan, isn't it?

Situationer: Reform package of dreams tainted by ‘bad timing’

By Syed Irfan Raza & Malik Asad

The bill aimed at curtailing the powers of the chief justice of Pakistan (CJP) may have sailed through the National Assembly, but it has generated a new controversy as timing of this legislation is being called into question; despite the fact that such reforms in the Supreme Court’s rules have been a dream of nearly all mainstream political parties in the country.

Not only the parties in the ruling alliance such as the PPP and PML-N, but even the PTI had plans to undertake comprehensive judicial reforms to address key issues, such as the appointment of judges, powers of suo motu, formation of benches. However, they were either reluctant or unable to do so in the past, when they held power.

Now, all eyes are on the Supreme Court, waiting to see how it will take the new legislation pertaining to its own domain — will it be acceptable to the court or will it adopt a more or less similar course of action through subordinate rules to put its own house in order.

The legal fraternity, however, seems divided on the proposed legislation.

Under the bill, the CJP has been deprived of his power to take suo motu action in an individual capacity, as well as his discretion over the formation of benches. The bill has proposed a committee consisting of three senior judges, including the CJP, to decide both matters.

One of the most significant aspects of the bill is that it has given, for the first time, a right of appeal to parties involved in suo motu cases.

But while the bill tabled by Minister for Law and Justice Azam Nazeer Tarar was welcomed by the ruling alliance, it was strongly rejected by the main opposition PTI, mainly because of its timing.

PPP Chairman Bilawal Bhutto-Zardari, speaking on the floor of the National Assembly on Wednesday, said that clipping the CJP’s powers on suo motu was a part of the Charter of Democracy, inked by the



PPP and the PML-N in 2006, in addition to being suggested in 18th amendment.

Every party’s dream

Another PPP leader, Farhatullah Babar, told Dawn that although both parties had agreed upon judicial reforms in the CoD, at that time PML-N supremo Nawaz Sharif was reluctant to implement them as he was of the view that it could be considered later in parliament.

He said the PPP had demanded more, saying that there must be a constitutional court in the SC which would only deal with cases of a constitutional nature.

Referring to Article 191 of the Constitution, Mr Babar said if the apex court did not make the much needed changes, the government could make the laws on its own.

Also speaking on the floor of the house on Wednesday, Defence Minister Khawaja Asif said that during the movement of the “restoration of judiciary” — when the PPP was in power — his party wanted to table a bill regarding judicial reforms, but the judiciary at that time was not ready for it.

PTI leader Fawad Chaudhry said that transparency in appointment of judges, use of suo motu powers and formation of

benches was also addressed in his party’s proposed judicial reforms. “The main objection [we have now] is that the timing of the legislation only suits the rulers and does not serve the purpose of reforms,” he added.

“The present National Assembly, with an opposition leader like Raja Riaz, is illegitimate and thus has no moral authority to pass such legislation. The judicial reforms we have proposed should be discussed in the next parliament,” he added.

Mr Chaudhry said the right to appeal provided in the law would only benefit Nawaz Sharif — who was disqualified in the Panama Papers case, initiated under Article 184(3) of the Constitution.

Under normal circumstances, suo motu jurisdiction is invoked by the CJP alone and not by any other judge. However, the stance of some apex court judges including Justice Qazi Faez Isa, Justice Yahya Afridi, Justice Syed Mansoor Ali Shah and Justice Athar Minallah remained different, as they think that it should be a collective decision.

No need for an amendment?

Sources in the judicial bureaucracy said there was no need to amend the Constitu-



tion through a two-thirds majority, as the current legislation was aimed at amending the rules of the apex court and not Article 184(3) of the Constitution, from which the court derives its power of suo motu.

The rules are subservient to the Constitution; the government approves the rules of procedures of constitutional bodies and it is settled law that the authority that passed an order can undo it. The Supreme Court in a number of judgements has endorsed this dictum, sources said.

They said that judicial scrutiny of the law was always a possibility and the Supreme Court or even the high courts of the country had previously set aside a number of acts of parliament.

For example, the Islamabad High Court (IHC) partially struck down Section 20 of Prevention of Electronic Crimes Act (Peca), and last year it also set aside a presidential ordinance on local governments.

The apex court had also entertained petitions against the 18th Amendment when parliament changed Article 175 of the Constitution that deals with the appointment of judges in the superior courts and gave equal share to the Parliament in judicial appointments.

The government at the time, in order to save the legislation, introduced the 19th Amendment.

But former IHCBA president Shoaib Shaheen, who petitioned the Supreme Court to hold elections in Punjab and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa — a petition that was later merged into the suo motu

proceedings — thinks otherwise.

Granting the right to appeal and streamlining suo motu proceedings would require a constitutional amendment, he said, adding that the government had introduced the “so-called reforms with mala fide intentions”.

Giving retrospective effect to the legislation shows that it has been designed to benefit certain politicians, he said, adding that these grounds were sufficient for the apex court of taking cognizance of the matter and strike it down, as was done with the Hasba bill in the past.

View of the judicial community

However, the Pakistan Bar Council (PBC), the apex legal regulatory body in the country, has an altogether different stance.

PBC Vice Chairman Haroon Rashid told Dawn that lawyers’ bodies from across the country were demanding streamlining of the discretionary powers of the CJP.

He said that while the Constitution was silent on this matter (Article 184 (3) vests the powers in the Supreme Court), the chief justice of Pakistan traditionally assumed this power, without proper regulations.

It is worth noting that former chief justice of Pakistan Asif Saeed Khan Khosa, in his full court reference on December 20, 2019, had said that “a working paper containing some proposed amendments to the Supreme Court Rules, 1980 so as to regulate suo motu exercise of this Court’s jurisdiction under Article 184(3) of the Constitution

and to provide for an Intra-Court Appeal in that respect has been presented before the Full Court and the same is under active consideration.”

However, the full court of the apex court has yet to adopt these amendments.

According to Mr Rashid, the court can only set aside any legislation if it is deemed ultra vires to the Constitution or contradictory to the law.

In his opinion, the proposed legislation appears to be legal and in accordance with constitutional provisions.

Former Islamabad High Court Bar Association president Raja Inam Ameen Minhas also said that the act did not curtail any judicial power of the CJP, rather it has broadened the scope of suo motu proceedings.

He said the apex court was being criticised over excessive exercise of its suo motu jurisdiction as in the past, successive CJPs took notices on issues such as posting/transfers, sugar prices, construction and other peripheral issues.

He noted that certain segments of society, including the lawyers themselves, were not happy with the excessive suo motu notices, but now a voice for introspection was coming from within the Supreme Court, he added.

Mr Minhas was of the view that in case any petitioner challenged the law, the apex court could take up the petition in accordance with the new legislation.

Courtesy the Dawn

Stop blaming the IMF!

It has been forty days since the IMF's (International Monetary Fund's) technical talks concluded, but there have been no signs of the pending Staff Level Agreement (SLA) taking place

By Ali Khizar

It has been forty days since the IMF's (International Monetary Fund's) technical talks concluded, but there have been no signs of the pending Staff Level Agreement (SLA) taking place.

At this point, IMF agreement seems unlikely. It appears that the government itself is pushing the country to the brink and hoping to make the IMF a scapegoat for its failures. The government's intentions are no longer so sanguine, as evidenced by the recent announcement of untargeted and price-distorting subsidies.

One after the other, authorities have tried to pass the buck of its lapses onto the Fund. It started with the Supreme Court taking suo motu action on the apparent delay in elections or two provincial assemblies. Soon after, the Prime Minister himself announced that the IMF deal may not happen in ten days, despite the fact that he and the finance minister previously claiming that the IMF deal would happen in 2-3 days.

Meanwhile, Islamabad was rife with whispers that the IMF is forcing Pakistan to compromise its nuclear assets. On probing, it appears that such talks were initiated by the finance ministry, and these reports were then covered (without attribution to source) by business journalists. The rumor spread, and one coalition partner senator publicly demanded clarity on threats to strategic nuclear assets. Intentionally, it seems a conspiracy theory was fueled, and later the Fund had to issue a clarification.

In another case, the Election Commission's explanation for the delay of elections referred to finance secretary indicating that funds to hold elections were unavailable due to financial restrictions imposed under the IMF program. Again, the Fund's country representative had to clear the air by issuing a statement, denying all such claims.

The government should stop selling these fantasies. The PDM (Pakistan Democratic Movement) government, especially the finance ministry under Ishaq Dar, must bear the blame for failing to resume the

IMF program despite passing the inflationary burden on to the masses. Almost all conditions have now been met; energy prices have been revised upward, GST has been raised, new taxes have been imposed, currency has been adjusted, and interest rates have increased. Yet program resumption eludes us.

The government has failed to bridge the financing gap, which was assured in the last review when Miftah Ismail was the finance minister. At that time, Saudi and other GCC partners offered verbal assurances in the IMF's board meeting that they would inject the pledged deposits or provide funds in some other form.



However, between September 2022 and March 2023, there has been a change of heart. They are not offering any commitments on shoring up SBP's (State Bank of Pakistan's) foreign exchange reserves before the IMF's board meeting, and without that, the IMF SLA will not happen. In fact, one partner has outrightly denied any new loan issuance.

The writing is on the wall. The government has lost the IMF's and GCC partners' trust due to its mishandling of the economy over the last few months. It is crystal clear that the government's top priority is to neutralize Imran and his party, PTI (Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf).

This may well be Pakistan's internal conflict which has nothing to do with lenders but being at loggerheads with the country's most popular leader (approval rating of 61 percent in a recent survey) cannot help restore macroeconomic and political stability.

Without those, there is no guarantee that the government will follow the economic stabilization path agreed with the IMF.

Perhaps seeing this, the GCC countries are shying away from injecting money into Pakistan's economy. This is in line with the Saudi finance minister's statement at Davos a few months ago, where he clearly said that the kingdom is changing the way it provides aid, moving away from direct grants and deposits provided unconditionally in the past. Thus, Pakistan must sell its case through prudent economic management and find a way to meet or placate Saudi's foreign policy demands.

Against the backdrop of the government's increasing non-seriousness towards the IMF, last week saw the announcement of a few new subsidies. None of them are direct, and their motives are purely political, with the potential to create price distortions.

For example, provincial governments provide cheap Atta (flour) to the public, but this can lead to leakages and corruption during disbursement. Furthermore, people have been forming long queues to receive free wheat flour, with some even dying in their quest for free essential item.

Another scheme involves cross-subsidies on fuel. This planned programme has been disapproved by the IMF due to the distortions they would cause. In fact, the Fund's representative has recommended giving direct cash to subsidy recipients instead.

Overall, the government's economic management is failing to show a clear pathway forward, which is essential for securing the IMF's support. According to the writings of some former Saudi and American diplomats, the only way to achieve political stability is through fresh elections.

However, the PDM government may not support this approach and may try to avoid elections at all costs. This poses a growing risk of a disorderly default and painful debt restructuring.

From 'democracy is best revenge' to 'revenge is best democracy'

IK implicated in 40 FIRs, petitioner in 19 cases; 15 FIRs registered against Khan in one day; PTI chief's appearance in courts beyond human capacity

By Tahir Niaz

Former slain prime minister of Pakistan Benazir Bhutto frequently used to say that 'democracy is the best revenge.' After her tragic death, Pakistan Peoples' Party, the purported torch bearer of democratic norms, continued with Benazir's ideology until becoming an ally of the present ruling set-up at the centre in April last year. Since PPP became an ally of the PDM, politics in Pakistan started setting bad examples vis-à-vis tolerance, democratic norms, confronting contrary views and extending space to political adversaries.

Political tolerance and forbearance is diminishing and so is the space for political opponents. The beleaguered former prime minister and Chairman Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf, Imran Khan has been bombarded with registration of criminal cases including sedition, terrorism, riots, vandalism and blasphemy in less than one year since he was ousted from power via vote of no-confidence.

People as well as the country's courts have been left guessing as to how many cases have so far been registered against the 69-year old politician. At par with this, concerned authorities appear reluctant to share complete details of these cases. According to party sources, Khan has been implicated in around 40 FIRs (first information report) lodged at different police stations across the country. These are the FIRs in which Imran Khan is directly named, while the number of cases registered against party leaders is more than double the number.

According to a report submitted by the state counsel in the Islamabad High Court on March 28, PTI Chairman Imran Khan is facing 28 criminal cases at Islamabad police stations besides the one at FIA (Federal Investigation Agency). Of these 28 cases, 15 were registered against him in a single day,



May 26, 2022, at different police stations of the city.

During the hearing, the state counsel told the court that seven cases were in the investigation process in Islamabad, 20 in trial courts while one case is continuing in the banking court.

For Imran Khan, every dawn heralds a new case in a new court for him; and he is the person who has been at the receiving end of the ire of Shehbaz government since many months.

Sedition case against Khan's nephew

Members of the embattled Pakistan Tehreek-i-Insaf are also facing series of criminal cases. Latest in sequence is the sedition case filed in Karachi against Khan's nephew and focal person for political affairs, Hassan Khan Niazi. From Islamabad to Quetta and from Quetta to Lahore and then in the latest of his 'jaunts', Hassan landed in Karachi on March 28 to face a case registered at city's Jamshed Quarters police station. A resident of the Lasbela area of Karachi has filed the FIR against Hassaan Niazi for 'inciting' people against the former and current army chiefs. The Jamshed Quarters

police registered the case against Niazi under sections 121, 124-A, 153-A and 505/34 of the Pakistan Penal Code, it emerged on March 27.

Section 121 refers to waging or attempting to wage war against Pakistan; 124-A a colonial-era sedition law suggests up to three-year imprisonment for whoever incites people against federal or provincial government; 153-A entails imprisonment for upto five years for promoting hatred among various sections of the society; 505 carries a maximum punishment of seven years jail term for promoting racial or religious hatred, and section 34 is for abetment and common intention. The police said that the head Moharar of the Jamshed Quarters police station received an application addressed to the Jamshed Quarter SHO.

The applicant, Mohammad Iqbal, a resident of Muhammadi Colony, Lasbela, stated on March 26, he was at home using social media on his mobile phone when he saw a person giving an interview on various social media platforms including WhatsApp and TikTok, saying that 'if Imran Khan is arrested, neither Haji, nor Hafiz will be spared and there will be a civil war in the country.'



Imran Khan and other party leaders are also facing similar types of charges in multiple cases and still counting. Blockades, tear gas shelling, lathi charge, FIRs, crackdown, multiple FIRs against one incident, late-night arrests and even alleged enforced disappearances: this is what the political canvas of the country is depicting these days.

Imposition of Section 144

On the night of March 26, the Islamabad administration also imposed Section 144 (ban on public gatherings) in the federal capital, warning arrests in case of violation of its order.



Ban by PEMRA

Pakistan Electronic Media Regulatory Authority (PEMRA), on March 27 banned live and even recorded coverage of rallies and public gatherings across federal capital, hours before Imran Khan was to appear before the Islamabad High Court. According to a statement, PEMRA referred to a letter sent to it by the law-enforcement agencies regarding security situation in Islamabad. It observed that satellite television channels run live footages/images of violent mobs, attacking police and law-enforcement agencies. "Such footage or images were seen on TV without any editorial oversight during the recent stand-off between political party workers and law-enforcement agencies in Lahore and Islamabad wherein, the violent mob used petrol bombs, injuring armless policemen and blazing police vehicles." It added that the live telecast of such footage on different satellite TV channels "created chaos and panic" among viewers and the police. PEMRA said airing such content would be in violation of several Supreme Court judgments.

A similar ban had been imposed by the Authority on March 18 as well, when the PTI chairman appeared in the Federal Judicial Complex for a hearing in the Toshakhana Reference.

Having faced receding political space, PTI has sprung into action. It wrote letters to British, US and EU lawmakers as well as international human rights bodies to apprise them of unrelenting crackdowns against its leaders, workers and activists, citing HR violations at the hands of the PDM government. PTI also decided to reach out to foreign diplomats, who are already aware of Pakistan's political situation.

The ex-speaker National Assembly, Asad Qaiser wrote a letter to the International Parliamentary Union, which has 179 members. Qaiser criticised the PDM government as being 'fascist' and accused it of unlawful policies and grave human rights violations. Large PTI protests were held in London outside UK Parliament and 10 Downing Street, as well as a sizeable demonstration in Brussels outside the European Parliament.

A white paper issued by the PTI has summarized "all human rights violations against PTI from May 25 till now". It said the government in Pakistan was involved in "crimes and custodial torture for political reasons."

On the other hand, Imran Khan himself is a petitioner in 19 cases filed against the government departments and individuals,

as per the litigation status report of PTI chief provided by senior party leader Fawad Chaudhry. The party claimed there are a total of over 70 cases in which Imran Khan is directly named.

The PTI sources also confirmed that a total of 15 FIRs were registered against the former prime minister in a single day on May 26 last year. Three more were registered on August 8 last year. These cases are not included in the list of recent cases filed against Imran Khan. Out of the total litigation cases, five are ongoing in the Supreme Court of Pakistan after being filed by Khan against the Federation of Pakistan. He has filed two cases against the Election Commission of Pakistan while two are registered against him in the Islamabad High Court.

In the Lahore High Court, a total of six cases were filed by Khan, four against the Federation of Pakistan and two against the Election Commission. However, only two cases are ongoing against Imran in the LHC. A total of three cases are continuing in the Peshawar High Court involving Imran Khan in which he is a petitioner in one case.

In the Islamabad district court, there are three cases against the former Pakistani premier. The ECP is pursuing five cases against Khan, which include foreign funding, using KP government helicopter, removal from chairmanship and the contempt case for using inappropriate language against the EC and its chairman.

The Federal Investigation Agency has also registered two cases against Imran Khan. Both of them are related to cipher. Further, in Anti Terrorism Courts, Imran is facing three cases, while one case has been filed against Khan by the FIA Banking Crime Court, Islamabad.

Two weeks ago, the PTI chief had claimed on Twitter that 76 cases have been registered against him. "My 76 cases that are increasing rapidly include terrorism, blasphemy and sedition. In the sedition case, neither the officer is named nor institution identified."

Appearance in concerned courts in connection with immense number of cases against Imran Khan is almost beyond human



capacity. The Lahore High Court on March 17 granted PTI chairman protective bail in 9 cases registered against him in Lahore and Islamabad, eight of which were registered under terrorism charge.

Out of eight terrorism cases, five were registered in Islamabad including two for vandalism at the Islamabad Judicial Complex and High Court and three in Lahore including two for violence on March 8 and obstructing police from arresting PTI chief in the Zaman Park, Lahore, operation.

The accused were ordered to appear before investigators at the earliest, otherwise, legal action will be taken against them, the call-up notice read.

On March 26, an Anti Terrorism Court in Lahore granted Imran Khan protective bail in three cases following last week's clashes between police and PTI workers outside Zaman Park. Several cases have been registered against the PTI chairman under different sections including attacking police in Zaman Park.

Leaked audio tapes case

On October 2, the government decided to file a case against Khan over leaked audio tapes in which the later could purportedly be heard having discussion with his party leaders on how to paint his ouster from office under a US-led conspiracy. At least two audio tapes have been circulating on social media, in which Khan can be allegedly heard giving directions to his then principal secretary Azam Khan, party stalwarts and workers on how to pin the blame on the US and achieve political ends.

Hooliganism, sloganeering charges

In August, police booked Imran Khan in connection with a sloganeering incident against Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif at Saudi Arabia's Masjid-e-Nabawi. The FIR stated that 150 supporters of Khan had been sent from Pakistan to Saudi Arabia to heckle Sharif and his delegation, on the direction of the PTI top command. A purported video of the incident showed some people screaming "chor" (thief) and "ghaddar" (traitor) after seeing the delegation making its way into the mosque. Several former ministers and allies of Khan were also booked in connection with this case, including Fawad Chaudhry and Sheikh Rasheed, and ex-deputy speaker of the National Assembly Qasim Suri.

Azadi March riots

In May last year, police booked Imran Khan and several others over the riots that took place during IK's Azadi March, which was undertaken to protest against the Sharif administration. Two separate FIRs were filed in the case, which mentioned the burning of metro bus stations, and damaging government vehicles.

According to political and legal experts, such 'fabricated' cases are unlikely to cause serious problems for the PTI leadership. However, people of Pakistan are worried about where the country's politics is really heading and whether keeping aside elections for two Provincial Assemblies, general elections in the country could be a prediction.



Separately, a single LHC bench granted PTI chief protective bail till March 27 in a case registered at the Sarwar Road police station following the death of PTI zealot Ali Bilal alias Zille Shah. The authorities were neither informing the PTI chief nor the courts about details of the cases registered against him.

Case registered at CTD Islamabad

Imran Khan was also among 17 PTI leaders summoned by the CTD (counter terrorism department) on March 27, in connection with a case lodged at Golra police station of the capital. PTI leaders summoned for interrogation include Murad Saeed, Aamer Mehmood Kiani, Amjad Niazi, Raja Khuram Nawaz, Ali Amin Gandapur, Shibli Faraz, Asad Umar, Dr Shahzad Waseem, Farrukh Habib, Omar Ayub Khan, Hammad Azhar, Asad Qaiser, Hassaan Khan Niazi, Jamshed Mughal and Imran Khan's Chief Staff Officer (CSO) Col retired Asim.

Threatening Judge Zeba Chaudhry case

In October, an Islamabad magistrate had issued IK's arrest warrants for allegedly threatening a female Additional District and Sessions Judge Zeba Chaudhry. During a rally, Khan had threatened to lodge cases against his political opponents, top police officers and the Election Commission over the treatment meted out to his aide, Shahbaz Gill, who was nabbed on the charges of sedition. Hours after his speech, Khan was booked under the Anti Terrorism Act. However, the terrorism charges against were dropped after intervention by the Islamabad High Court and the case was transferred from ATC to a sessions court.

In August 2022, Imran Khan was also charged with violating section 144 by organising a rally in Islamabad, once again to portray his solidarity with Gill, who also served as his chief of staff.



Relentless political, constitutional crisis

PDM-IK war of nerves goes nonstop; Punjab, KP polls to make entire election process controversial; PTI clashes with police a question mark on state writ

By Sarfraz Raja

Though 2023 is the election year in Pakistan, holding elections this year in the country remains a million-dollar question. Parallel to a grave economic crisis, Pakistan faces an unprecedented political and constitutional crisis.

The scenario containing a plethora of FIRs against PTI chief Imran Khan abruptly developed after clashes between PTI supporters and police in Islamabad and Lahore. Dealing with this kind of chaotic political situation is a daunting challenge for the ruling political coalition, which took the matter to the joint sitting of parliament to secure firm backing and support.

Election in two provinces

It's been a year now that the country is in a state of political turmoil. Since April last year after being ousted from the prime minister's office, Imran Khan is demanding immediate and early elections.

For that Khan continued his trademark aggressive politics comprising protests, and long marches but couldn't get his demand fulfilled. Finally when all plans flopped he dissolved the Punjab and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Provincial Assemblies where his party was in power. This actually made things more complicated politically.

Article 224 of the Constitution of Pakistan clarifies that on expiry of the Assembly term, elections would be held within 60 days; while in case of dissolution of any Assembly, the time period is 90 days, 30 extra days to complete urgent election preparations.

Both Punjab and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Assemblies were dissolved in mid-January; so as per the constitution, elections in both provinces should be held before mid-April. But instead, controversy erupted when governors of these provinces failed to extend election dates to the Election Commission of Pakistan.



Consequently, the apex court had to intervene through a *sou moto*, asking the president and governor KP to give dates for the Punjab and KP elections. After consultations, April 30 for Punjab and April 28 for KP, were fixed as dates for elections.

The election schedule for Punjab was also issued which was later suspended by the ECP and elections were delayed for about five months.

Reservations of political parties

Political parties in PDM, especially PML-N, never feel comfortable with early elections in the two provinces, specifically Punjab. Their reservations are based on some solid grounds which if not addressed could cause a long-term political stalemate.

Constitution of Pakistan bounds that elections would be held under caretaker setups appointed via mutual consultation between the prime minister and opposition leader for the center; and chief minister and opposition leader for provinces to ensure transparency and neutrality.

Both in Punjab and KPK, caretaker setups have been installed but they could only continue until the formation of the newly elected government in the respective provinces.

Elections in two other provinces, Sindh and Balochistan, and for the National Assembly will be due before mid-October.

By that time elected governments, not caretakers would be ruling Punjab and KPK. These elected provincial governments could doctor elections in favor of their respective parties. Such a situation will make the entire election process controversial, as well as give birth to its future continuation as elections in these provinces will keep coming in advance.

Punjab is the largest province of the country with 148 National Assembly general seats out of a total of 272, while KP has 35 NA general seats. Combined, they have almost two-thirds of the total number of NA seats.

Due to the largest number of seats, the party that wins Punjab gets the majority in the center and forms the government. PDM believes these two provinces, especially Punjab, would continue impacting general elections in the future, rendering the election process controversial and unacceptable, to those who would lose.

Another issue is the fresh census and delimitations. Census in the country is underway and, on its completion, new delimitation of constituencies will be done by the ECP. But this exercise is not a possibility vis-à-vis elections in Punjab and KP. On completion



of the new census, delimitation would also be done in these provinces but the question remains what would happen when any seat becomes vacant in these Assemblies, how and on which seat by-elections could be held?

Postponement of schedule by ECP

After announcing the elections schedule, the electoral body of the country huddled to seek appropriate security arrangements and financial requirements. But after detailed deliberations, it canceled the schedule issued for elections in the two provinces.

Relevant government institutions—the ministry of finance, interior and defense—raised issues of financial constraints and unavailability of security personnel due to current law and order situations in the country.

In a unanimous decision by all five members of the ECP, the electoral body said that “after the briefing and material bought before it, it has concluded that it is impossible to hold and organize elections scheduled on April 30th honestly, justly, fairly in a peaceful manner in accordance with the Constitution and law; and a fresh schedule will be issued in due course of time with the election date on October 8th.”

All other three, Sindh, Balochistan, and National Assemblies, will complete their tenure in the middle of August. Election for them would be held within 60 days, which is before mid-October. So in other words, the ECP actually announced the date for



general elections in the country in its decision.

Immediately after the ECP decision, PTI came up with a strong reaction, calling the electoral body verdict a 'violation of the constitution' and the decision of the Supreme Court. It also announced to take this matter to the apex court and as a result constitutional institutions could come face to face in the coming days on this issue.

A wave of political violence

Another menace Pakistan is facing for the last several weeks is the emerging element of violence in politics. Although it was looming for months, it sparked and spread when Islamabad police with their Lahore counterparts tried to reach Imran Khan's residence in Zaman Park Lahore to comply

with the court's nonbailable arrest warrants.

At Zaman Park, clashes erupted between police and PTI, followed by a showdown in Islamabad where Imran Khan had to appear before the district court's judgment in the Toshakhana case. In IK's absence, Lahore police raided his Zaman Park residence, nabbing dozens of PTI workers. All these happenings, besides incurring the heavy cost and financial loss to the national exchequer, pose serious questions on the writ of the government.

Matter in parliament

Ruling parties who were facing the challenge of dealing with Imran Khan and possible elections in a month's time in Punjab decided to take the matter to parliament. A joint session was called on March 22 and before that, an important meeting of coalition parties was held. The coalition resolved not to compromise on the writ of the government at any cost. The PML-N also suggested to the House that elections for all Assemblies be held simultaneously.

No doubt a war of nerves is continuing between the ruling parties and Imran Khan for the last many months. It seems that Khan has pushed his rivals on the back foot through his aggressive political strategy and he is the one who has benefited from the situation more than his adversaries. Keeping in view the current boiling political temperature, actions, and reactions from both sides, there are no signs of an immediate or early end to this political and constitutional tug-of-war.





Dynamics of Imran Khan's stardom

IK riding wave of new middle class sympathy, discontent in central Punjab; PDM not blessed with star figure to match PTI chief; Khan successfully retains macho, invincibility image

By Umer Farooq

Imran Khan's biggest political capital is his star value. His star value is at the base of his political capital. Of-course he has constructed an elaborate structure of political popularity on the foundation of his value as a star. But without his star value this elaborate political structure would be good for nothing. As many social and political commentaries have noted, Imran Khan is riding a wave of new rising middle-class sympathy in the urban areas of Pakistan.

This new middle class has been variably described as a product of General Musharraf era's attempt to liberalize the economy and to connect it to the wave of globalization that was taking hold of Asian economies at the start of 21st century.

American financial aid in dollars along with Pakistanis and Muslims in general bringing their liquid capital into Pakistani banks in the wake of 911 enhanced the liquidity of Pakistani banks during the initial years of Musharraf era. This was coupled with the advent of telecom and software industry in Pakistani society that created jobs in bulk in Pakistani urban centers. General Musharraf often boasted about the increase in the number of households purchasing Air conditioners, refrigerators, small cars and motorcycles on bank loans during his years in power as an indication of economic growth witnessed during his tenure. This was the new middle class that now provides the backbone of rise in the popularity of PTI chairman, Imran Khan.

Sociologists pin point one particular feature of this new middle class—a group of people with a handset in each person's hands. This mobile handset mania is the vehicle through which Imran Khan's craze and Imran Khan's political propaganda finds its most potent manifestation—a cult of personality that has overwhelmed traditional political parties in Pakistan's political arena. This middle class is mostly of youth, who mention Imran Khan's boldness,



aggressive style and his audacity in speaking truth (or whatever you may call it, depending on your political inclinations) as their reasons for supporting him. In this middle-class Imran Khan has found his consolidated political support base.

Compare this with the political force that is opposing Imran Khan—the ruling Pakistan Democratic Movement (PDM). There is no comparable single political personality that could match Imran Khan in the popularity contest. Nawaz Sharif and his party are paying the price of his prolonged absence from the political scene. Now public opinion polls are showing Nawaz Sharif as a political leader that is receiving negative ratings in the popularity race in the political contest. Shahbaz Sharif, Maulana Fazl-ur-Rehman and Asif Ali Zardari were never part of the race to win hearts and minds of the masses. Maryam Nawaz Sharif may be counted as a favorite of PML-N hardcore supporters, but she is also included in Gallup surveys polls list of politicians who were attracting negative publicity.

A vast majority of Pakistanis blame PDM leadership responsible for the economic downturn that Pakistan has witnessed since Imran Khan was ousted from power, according to the Gallup survey. Price hike and inflation are two features of the

economic situation that directly affect the masses and the Gallup survey shows people holding the PDM government responsible for these two economic troubles they are facing at present.

The PDM is at the same time not blessed with any star figure that could put up a contest with Imran Khan's rising popularity levels. Its leading faces never claim themselves to be star figures. The only person that could have matched Imran Khan in star values, Nawaz Sharif appears reluctant to join in the contest. Perhaps his advisors seem to have impressed upon him the fact that mere star value would not serve him well in the contest that is awaiting him in Pakistan. His party, PML-N, which is the lead party in the ruling coalition cannot offer any economic relief to the masses in the present circumstances, where the IMF has imposed strict conditions on the government of Pakistan not to squander away financial resources on least productive subsidies.

The part of the middle class that has always supported Nawaz Sharif in the period between 1993 and 2013 is highly dependent on state subsidies for sustaining their middle class lifestyle and is now facing a government completely impotent in the face of increasingly strict conditions imposed by its financial donors.



Ukraine conflict—a war in the far-off land has affected Pakistan's economy and political situation in myriad of ways. Oil price increases in the international market have eaten away our foreign exchange reserves, which touched precariously low limits last month. We don't produce anything and we don't export much. Our foreign exchange reserves are dependent on external loans from international financial institutions or bailout packages from our political and ideological friends. In such a situation, subsidies on oil appear just beyond our capacity.

In layman's language, subsidies will amount to a scheme where we take loans from our friends and international financial institutions and squander them away in the form of subsidies to our industry—which are still not internationally competitive and grants to our middle classes and rich whose extravagance is exemplary.

The most ironic reality of our political and national security discourses is that our political class jumps to grab every opportunity that discontent among the masses generates without realizing how poorly we manage threats to our national security and our national survival.

Here, all of this translates into a political problem for our major political parties, who are in a contest for power to control Islamabad. The Pakistani masses don't seem to care much about details and mechanics of IMF programs, and why it is interested in forcing the government of Pakistan to withdraw subsidies for oil and electricity. They seem to be in a mood to punish everyone who is ostensibly responsible for withdrawing the subsidies.

These middle classes are the most vocal and most visible presence in the political discourse going on in the country. These middle classes are also addicted to state sponsored subsidies for their middle class lifestyle. An oil price rise in the international market and subsequent rise of oil prices in the domestic market, followed by withdrawal of subsidies by the Sharif government have generated massive amounts of discontent.

If public opinion polls are to be believed, this discontent is forcing middle classes in central Punjab to part ways with their

“beloved leader”, Nawaz Sharif. Remember that the Punjabi middle classes in central Punjab have always voted for Nawaz Sharif in the period from 1993 to 2013. For the first time, Gallup's polling, which is generally considered pro-Nawaz Sharif, in its latest survey showed Nawaz Sharif among the figures who are on the receiving end of negative sentiment among the urban population of the country. Ironically, Imran Khan is riding the wave of this popular discontent.



Little do the masses in our country realize that this was the man they would have been cursing if the no confidence motion against him would not have been successful. If Imran Khan had still been in power, he would have been forced to take the same decision Prime Minister Shahbaz Sharif has taken under IMF pressure. If not, he would have taken the country on the path of default and bankruptcy. Cashing in on the discontent that the withdrawal of subsidies has generated, itself is a kind of moral bankruptcy. Your political capital is based on a reality that is fast changing and could be equated with the reality of shifting sands. How long will it last? It will last as long as Imran Khan stays out of power and as long as another international crisis hits the world politics.

There were, however, clear local manifestations of political conflict that has heated up because of conflict in the far-off land. There were two dramas simultaneously staged by two political players in the events surrounding the Zaman Park operation by the Punjab police. Imran Khan was seemingly afraid of arrest, as per his claims that he

would surely be tortured after arrest or may be killed or taken to Balochistan. So he assembled the most militant of his supporters, most likely unemployed youth, around his residence in Zaman Park and pushed them into hand-to-hand combat with the Lahore police.

In the background, Imran Khan's statements that he was ready for any sacrifice and would go to any extent to serve his cause provided the backdrop of

this drama. Imran Khan was addressing a larger audience: at stake was his image as a winner, an invincible larger than life persona, a political macho who, as far as his cause is concerned, is not ready to bow his head even before the most mighty, and the most powerful.

The imaginary constructed around his persona is aimed at portraying him as the most mighty, and the most powerful. Therefore, in such a situation, his charged core supporters found it acceptable, rather heroic, to use petrol bombs, slingshots and stones as projectiles to attack police which had come to arrest him.

Imran Khan was not only harassing the police with his newly acquired street power, he, in fact, apparently made an attempt to bully part of the judiciary while using the space provided to him by another part of the judiciary. If media reports are to be believed, his militant supporters who accompanied him to the gates of Judicial Complex where the district and session judge of Islamabad was holding his court, heralded Imran Khan's arrival by pelting stones on the heavily guarded premises. So,



all in all, Imran Khan was successful in retaining his macho and image of invincibility as the drama around Zaman Park concluded.

There was another drama that was being staged around Zaman Park, the objective of which was to portray Imran Khan as a violator of law and judicial institutions. The alternate objective of this drama was to break Imran Khan's image as a winner, macho or invincible personality of Pakistani politics. Part of this objective was the subsidiary aim—in case the judiciary intervenes, as most often it does when it comes to the executive organ treating Imran Khan badly—to portray Imran Khan as the darling of a segment of the judiciary. This was in continuation of Imran Khan's image as the darling of the military and its intelligence agencies.

Imran Khan himself destroyed this image of his when he launched a frontal attack on the military and its affiliated institutions during the last year. There is no clarity as to who is the author of the script of this drama.

A heavy contingent of Lahore police was assembled at Zaman Park ostensibly to implement the arrest warrants issued by Islamabad court. Punjab is being presided over by a caretaker government, which is supposed to be neutral. Its Chief Minister Mohsin Naqvi reportedly has connections with the incumbent Chief of the Army Staff General Asim Munir. Imran Khan, during

the Zaman Park episode himself named General Asim Munir as the person behind all this drama. Imran Khan changed his position and tone as to the identity of the author of the Zaman Park drama after his non-bailable warrants were cancelled by a district judge.

He started accusing Maryam Nawaz Sharif as a conspirator without taking the effort to name her specifically. In the imagination of PTI supporters, this operation was the handiwork of Interior Minister Rana Sanaullah. This became clear when PTI leaders started vowing that they would not 'hand over Imran Khan to Rana Sanaullah,' while the Punjab police was making the effort.

Can Mohsin Naqvi on his own launch such a ruthless operation? I doubt it. I even doubt that even Rana Sanaullah has the guts to carry out such an operation without receiving a go-ahead from someone entrenched more permanently into the system. Perhaps, Imran Khan was aware of who that 'someone' was when in the initial hours of the operation, he launched an accusation that 'a single man' was responsible for what was happening around Zaman Park.

People from Pakistan's political class are too alienated from the state to use its machinery against their respective opponents in a ruthless manner. So, whenever the state machinery displays ruthlessness there could be two possibilities, it is

either a blunder of someone who is in charge on the spot, or violence is being orchestrated on the orders of someone more permanently entrenched into the system.

There are clear indications that Imran Khan cannot make any independent political move without support from the judiciary. In other words, he is over reliant on the superior judiciary in whatever he is doing. Despite the fact that Pakistani history has a horrible track record of support to democracy and constitutional order in society, there have been judges in our history who protected the constitutional rights of those who fought against military governments in the past. Military governments' high-handed approach to crushing political dissent found strong opposition from judges like Dorab Patel and Fukhar-e-Din G Ibrahim.

But the way Imran Khan has been treated by our judiciary cannot be described as the tradition of Justice Patel and Justice Ibrahim. Imran Khan is clearly bullying judges into granting him the space that should not be available to someone who defies the law, judicial and constitutional order. So, the PML-N, no matter whether it is the author of the drama that has unfolded or not, has succeeded in pushing the narrative on a national scale that Imran Khan is someone who thinks he is above the law, and is emerging as a darling of the judiciary.





The youth and its role in shaping current political parties

The youth have its own voice

By Zainab Umer

Why is the youth suddenly the centre of attention when it comes to the implementation of strategies amongst the political parties of Pakistan? Years ago, when the lines of what we today know as Pakistan were drawn, political leaders and their defining qualities were entirely different from what we see now. Infamous party leaders like Imran Khan (PTI) and Bilawal Bhutto (PPP) seem to be supporting political personas that the youth of Pakistan find rather appealing. "A charismatic man with the ability to challenge wrongdoers in public is something a strong leader should have," spoke a university student from Lahore when asked what he wanted the Prime Minister of Pakistan to look like. According to an article by The Express Tribune, Imran Khan received a positive rating from 61% of the Pakistani population, making him the most popular political leader in Pakistan. The question that remains is why a man with a cricket background and little knowledge of politics was trusted the most with the responsibility to cure Pakistan of all of its ailments.

Imran Khan, since the start of his political career in the mid-1990s, has been quite the heartthrob in Pakistan. When a good-looking cricketer brings home the first World Cup and steals the hearts of every Pakistani sitting in front of a television screen, it is safe to say he will be followed even if he plans to jump off a cliff. "Great leaders must have two things: a vision of the world that does not yet exist and the ability to communicate that vision clearly," said American author Simon Sinek. Something that benefited Imran Khan's success was the fact that he was present at all times, whether it was for interviews, addressing people in the street, or even visiting universities and engaging with students. It is no secret that the people would like to be aware of what the leaders are all about. Knowing Khan's struggles and hearing him publicly speak about his personal experience with bullying during



his early cricketing career, the transformations he had to make in his lifestyle to become the champion, how the sad demise of his mother triggered the idea behind a free cancer hospital, what influence Allama Iqbal's poetry had on him, the political struggles, the sacrificed marriage life, and the painful dissociation from his children made him transparent to the masses. The youth faced no difficulty seeing the vulnerability of a man and perceiving him as the saviour this country had been waiting for. The emotional factor Khan played in his interviews and on national television earned him a permanent place in the hearts of Pakistani youth. The simple truth was that Khan's persona was something youngsters could relate to; after all, an Oxford graduate who openly speaks of the times he feels depressed is not something 18-year-olds can get over. A discussion with some university students from Lahore concluded that, despite the emotionality factor presenting itself as a great advantage, it was Khan's valour, courage, and boldness that brought upon such popularity amongst the youngsters. A man who explicitly exposes the acts of opposition leaders might not be the best political strategy, but when Khan comes on stage and aggressively challenges every party, his courage and upfront persona are

all teenagers can focus on. The rush of adrenaline and the idea of 'doing' politics rather than just understanding it sound a lot more exciting. "Young people tend to engage with non-institutionalized political groups and activism, such as supporting charities or attending protests; it is argued that youngsters are attracted to such alternative forms of political activism because they are more interested in doing politics." Khan's repetitive speeches where he blatantly accused other parties of being corrupt were perceived as a just and selfless act by the younger generation and served as a main component in getting Imran Khan such a huge fan following.

Contrary to common belief, Imran Khan's surface-level religiosity has been quite beneficial for his increasing fame. Even though the youth of Pakistan are relatively less inclined towards religion, they do notice Khan's journey from a severely western lifestyle towards a moderately religious one, and the fact that he wears it on his sleeve serves as a reminder that Khan does not follow any trend but in fact sets his own.

"What I have learned is that Imran Khan is an intelligent speaker. He can connect with and engage people from all walks of life, young or old, male or female. This is a



remarkable skill, something that one desires from its leader. Another distinct quality of Imran Khan is empathy. He often tries to transport the audience towards self-realization and contemplation. One can sense from the way he speaks about the pain he feels for the people of Pakistan. And he wants us to ponder about it too." wrote Owais Fazal in his blog.

For political systems to be representative, all parts of society must be included. When young people are ousted or disengaged from political processes, a significant portion of the population has little or no voice or part in decisions that affect group members' lives. A key consequence is the undermining of political systems' representativeness.

A change in a country like Pakistan could only be brought about if young people were engaged in formal political processes and had a say in formulating today's and tomorrow's politics. "Inclusive political participation is not only a fundamental political and democratic right but also crucial to building stable and peaceful societies and developing policies that respond to the specific needs of younger generations." In order for young people to be properly represented in political institutions, processes, and decision-making, and in particular in elections, they must know their rights and be given the necessary knowledge and capacity to participate in a meaningful way at all levels. They must know what the foundations of a political system entail so they can make informed decisions when it is time to pick a political leader.



"When there are obstacles to participating in formal, institutionalised political processes, young people can rapidly feel disempowered. Many tend to believe that their voices are not going to be heard or that they will not be taken seriously even if they are. The problem becomes circular as politicians may lose interest in responding to the aspirations of young people if they cannot win their votes. This in turn leads to young people being increasingly excluded from taking part in decision-making or in debates about key socio-economic and political issues, despite their sensitivity to the demands for social equity and justice, environmental protection, and cultural diversity," wrote ACE in a paper.

Imran Khan's approach towards the public never faltered in expressing his need for the youth's support for his party. During a youth convention in Lahore, Khan went on to say, I only need the youth of Pakistan to

bring change, not big names or big politicians," and "A coward can never be a leader," he said, adding that the reason to admire Prophet Muhammad (pbuh), Muhammad Ali Jinnah, and Nelson Mandela is that they all worked towards a bigger goal rather than their personal gains. The call for support and a speech acknowledging the importance of the younger generations when it comes to the political decisions of the country may have touched the Pakistani youth in ways neither the PML-N nor the PPP could achieve in their very long tenures. Khan condemned the PML-N's act of buying the youth vote by distributing laptops.

Moreover, a majority of Khan's support comes from the youth, the most active generation on social media. Despite Khan's inability to gather a jaw-dropping street presence, he did manage to gather a very strong online presence. A student at Beaconhouse National University who was a PTI supporter claimed that his initial support started due to the immense support for Khan on social media and believed that such numbers do make you think that the said political leader must be right. "At times I can say that my supporting Imran Khan might have a bandwagon effect, but I still believe he's fighting for the betterment of this country."

It may be that the youth is the future of this country or that it makes up a huge chunk of the population, but over the years our political leaders have built personas that help keep the youth on their side, and they indeed bear the fruit of including the younger generation.



Unabated Bleeding of Rupee _ Its impact on consumers and economy

Total public debt by June 2022 was Rs 51.1 trillion. Out of Rs 9.4 trillion net increase in public debt, Rs 3.8 trillion was the outcome of our currency devaluation. The rupee depreciated by around 30% against the US Dollar during the year

By Javed Mahmood

Pakistani Rupee (PKR) has become unstable and vulnerable during the past year. Even the unending ongoing government-IMF talks over the resumption of the stalled loan could not lend support to the falling rupee value. During the last year, (April 2022 to March 27, 2023, after the regime change), the Pakistani rupee lost a massive and heart-breaking value against the US dollar and other major currencies. The coalition government inherited the dollar-rupee exchange rate at Rs 175 in April 2022. These days, this exchange rate is hovering around 285 rupees in the inter-bank and over and above 290 in open market trading. Thus, it shows more or less 110 rupees massive depreciation in the value and worth of PKR versus the US dollar.

The political and economic uncertainty that gripped the country after the regime change left the rupee orphan and the US dollar kept on butchering its value day by day. Some PML-N leaders _ a main political party in the coalition government with its prime minister Shehbaz Sharif started targeting then-finance minister Miftah Ismail, saying he was responsible for the economic meltdown though Miftah successfully secured the IMF bailout package in August last year. According to the London Plan, Miftah Ismail was removed as the finance minister in an unceremonious way, which Miftah himself termed insulting to him and the party policy. Then the PML-N's 'most talented man'_ Ishaq Dar was inducted into the federal cabinet.

Before taking oath as the finance minister, Dar vowed to push back the value of the greenback to around 200 rupees. At that time, the dollar-rupee parity was around 226 rupees in the inter-bank and 234 in the open market trading. From April 2022 to Sept 2022, the dollar has gained more or less 50



rupees in the inter-bank and 55 rupees in the open market trading. However, a short-lived miracle occurred when Ishaq Dar became finance minister and the exchange rate of the dollar to a rupee fell below 216 rupees in the inter-bank. As mentioned earlier that it was a short-lived miracle, the exchange rate took a forward gear at a full speed and these days the value of the dollar has ballooned to 285 in the inter-bank and over 290 in the open market trading.

In the grey market, known as the black market, the dollar is being sold above 300 rupees and the exact price of the greenback is determined according to the capacity and influence of the buyers. Thus, just one condition of the IMF _ free float of dollar_ has ruined everything in Pakistan. For example, the dollar was available in the range of 220 to 222 before the implementation of the IMF-dictated free float regime, and these days, the dollar is close to hitting 300 rupees as IMF people are sticking to the completion of their upfront measures, causing an unexpected delay in the resumption of loan.

Impact of Rupee depreciation & Inflation

A simple method to evaluate the impact of rupee depreciation on consumers is an increase in imports. For example, in Feb this year, the imports of Pakistan closed at \$4 billion and the importers paid Rs 440 billion additional amount just because of the depreciation of the rupee value. And who will be the victim of the rupee-slaughtering _ obviously the consumers? This additional financial burden on importers/consumers is for the month of Feb-2023. And if you calculate the total impact of rupee depreciation on imports/consumers _ it will be greater than Rs 3000 billion in the last year. And this does not include the impact of the increase in prices of essential consumer items _ petrol, electricity, gas, cooking oil/ghee, sugar, flour, fruits, vegetables, and many more. The 46 percent short inflation, on a week-on-week basis and 32 percent on a year-on-year basis reflect the holocaust of just

rupee-slaughtering and bad governance. Moreover, billions of rupees increase in the dollar-denominated foreign loans is another horrible aspect of the deepening economic crisis. Financial analysts believe that the rupee devaluation has added 3.8 trillion rupees to the national debt.

Interestingly, when Miftah Ismail was the finance minister, the International Monetary Fund did everything in a hurry to bail out a package and released the tranche in August last year. However, as the PML-N's powerful economic wizard has replaced Miftah Ismail, the IMF staff is giving a very tough time to the Dar-led economic

tive board of the IMF approved a \$3 billion bailout package for the default-hit country. The IMF board approved the loan for Sri Lanka on March 20, and the first tranche of the loan will be released in a day or two. On Friday, the dollar-Sri Lankan rupee exchange rate reversed to 322 rupees as the country is set to receive a much-needed bailout package from the IMF.

In April last year, Sri Lankan government announced default saying it was not in a position to pay back \$51 billion in foreign loans. Before default, the value of the dollar to a Sri Lankan rupee was around 280 rupees. However, the exchange rate

the forex reserves standing at \$16 billion.

However, the things worsened in the following weeks and months and now the dollar-rupee exchange rate has surged to 284 rupees in the inter-bank, 290 rupees in open market and above 300 rupees in the black-market trading.

Hence, without declaring/facing default, in the open market trading, Pakistani currency has fallen close to the level that Sri Lanka experienced after default. The foreign exchange reserves of Pakistan have fallen to below \$10 billion _ from \$16 billion in April-2022 when the regime change plan materialized.

Current account deficit dips to \$74 million in Feb-2023

The current account deficit of Pakistan has dipped to the bottom _ of \$74 million only in the month of Feb 2023. In the month of February 2023, CAD narrowed by 86% YoY and 67.8% MoM, to \$74 million compared to \$519mn in February 2022 and \$230mn in January 2023. Pakistan posted a current account deficit (CAD) of \$3.8 billion in 8MFY23, improving by 68.03% YoY as compared to the same period last year.

The State Bank of Pakistan reported this in its latest balance of payment position. The trade deficit in goods narrowed by around 19.4% YoY and 1.34% MoM to \$1.73bn in February 2023 as the import of goods declined by 22% YoY while on monthly basis, the import bill remained relatively flat at \$3.93bn. The trade balance in services also remained negative, down by 90% YoY to clock in at \$39mn. To note, in January 2023, the trade balance in services witnessed a surplus of \$18mn. The worker's remittances fell by 9.47% YoY while on monthly basis, the remittances increased by 4.96% MoM to \$1.988bn. On a cumulative basis during 8MFY23, remittances by overseas Pakistanis moved down by 12.17% YoY to \$20.18bn from \$17.99bn recorded in 8MFY22.

Pak forex reserves again above \$10 billion

The foreign exchange reserves held by the



team, government, and consumers as well. Importantly, the government has fulfilled all the upfront conditions, including the harshest ones pertaining to a massive increase in the cost of utilities and rupee-slaughtering, still, the IMF wizards are showing no leniency and asking for more. The last thing the IMF has been demanding these days is written guarantees from the friendly countries of Pakistan _ Saudi Arabia, China, and the United Arab Emirates, about their foreign financing to Pakistan this year. It is because the IMF has estimated a \$6 billion gap in the financing and expenditures of Pakistan by June 2023.

Sri Lankan Rupee recovers sharply after IMF okays \$3 billion bailout package

In recent days, the value of the Sri Lankan rupee has recovered sharply after the execu-

widened to a record high of 365 rupees in February this year. Nonetheless, it started descending when the Sri Lankan government started negotiations with the IMF, seeking a bailout package. As the IMF is in the process to release its first tranche for Sri Lanka, the country is moving towards economic revival.

The case of Pakistan

Pakistan is also in the limelight because of its critical financial position and more than expected delay in the revival of the IMF loan programme. The speculations and media reports about a possible default by Pakistan started surfacing after the regime change in April last year.

On April 9, the coalition parties in the PDM formed the government after removing PM Imran Khan through a no-trust vote. At that time, the dollar-rupee exchange rate was around 175 rupees with

State Bank of Pakistan (SBP) increased by \$280 million or 6.74% WoW to \$4.6 billion during the week ended on March 17, 2023, marking the fifth consecutive increase on a weekly basis as SBP received \$500 million in terms of government's commercial loan disbursement, according to the data released by the central bank on Friday.

Similarly, the country's total reserves rose by \$292.4mn or 2.96% WoW to \$10.13bn. The reserves held by commercial banks also moved up by \$12.8mn or 0.23% WoW to \$5.54bn. On March 19, 2023, the central bank received \$500mn from the Industrial and Commercial Bank of China (ICBC) as Pakistan completed the necessary documentation for disbursement.

Pakistan had earlier received \$500mn from ICBC as the first of three disbursements approved for rollover, and the completion of documentation for the second disbursement of \$500mn. The Chinese bank had approved a rollover facility of \$1.3bn, which Pakistan had repaid in recent months. The country is also expecting another \$800mn from ICBC after renewing its \$1.3bn facility, which it had repaid earlier. However, the IMF tranche is still pending, and due to longer-than-expected delays, economic uncertainty is increasing.

Pakistan's debt in from 2021 to 2022

Pakistan's national debt has surged to Rs38.70 trillion by June 2021. In just one year, 2020-21, the national debt has expanded by 3.59 trillion rupees and mounted to 38.7 trillion in June 2021, from Rs35.10 trillion in June 2020. The debt owed by the federal government has increased by 10 percent (Rs 3.59 trillion) in a year and it mounted to Rs38.7 trillion in June 2021.

According to the State Bank of Pakistan, 68% of the loans were acquired from domestic sources while 32 percent was foreign debt. The total debt of the Central Government during FY21 surged by Rs3.59 trillion reaching Rs38.7 trillion when compared to Rs35.106 trillion in FY20. In FY19, federal government debt stood at Rs31.78 trillion.

According to the latest data, Pakistan's public debt remained Rs 10.4 trillion higher

than the permissible limit allowed in the fiscal responsibility law. Rupee depreciation played a key role in debt expansion this year. Total public debt by June 2022 was Rs51.1 trillion. Of the Rs9.4 trillion net increases in public debt, Rs3.8 trillion was the outcome of our currency devaluation. The rupee depreciated by around 30% against the US Dollar during the year which led to an increase in external public debt when reported in Pakistani rupee (PKR) terms.



Foreign financing must for economic stability, says IMF

Pakistan's economy faces multiple challenges including slowing growth, high inflation, and large financing needs. This all is coming on the back of devastating floods. Discussions are ongoing between IMF staff and the Pakistani authorities toward a Staff Level Agreement on policies to complete the ninth review of Pakistan's extended Fund Facility. The IMF said this in a statement issued in Washington on March 24. The authorities are committed to implementing the necessary reforms. They've started to implement decisive actions to stabilize the economy and restore confidence.

While providing space to accommodate the needs related to the floods, including through an increase in social assistance through the Benazir Income Support Program, timely financial assistance from external partners will be critical to support the authorities' policy efforts and ensure the successful completion of the review.

Pakistan-IMF Staff Level Agreement

A Staff Level Agreement will follow once the few remaining points are closed, including the financing assurances, what we're looking for here is a standard feature of all IMF programs. Aside from support provided by the IMF, Pakistan's, EFF supported program receives financing from other multilateral institutions, including the World Bank, the ADB, and the AIIB, and

bilateral partners, notably China, Saudi Arabia, and the UAE. So, we do need to ensure that we have those financing assurances in place in order for us to be able to take the next step with Pakistan.

IMF has nothing to do with elections in Pakistan

Earlier, the IMF resident representative in Islamabad Esther Ruiz said that the decisions regarding the constitutionality, feasibility, and timing of the provincial and general elections rest solely with Pakistan's institutions. There is no requirement under Pakistan's EFF-supported program that could interfere with Pakistan's ability to undertake constitutional activities, IMF Resident Representative Esther Ruiz said in a short message sent to media persons.

Targets under IMF-supported programs are set at the aggregate general government level (aggregating across federal and provincial government) and within these, there is fiscal space to allocate or reprioritize spending and/or raise additional revenues to ensure constitutional activities can take place as required.

IMF program struck in mess

Fund's fresh program inevitable for Pak ailing economy; fuel subsidy announced without IMF consent; free Atta scheme to cause Rs 74b subsidy



By Mehtab Haider

The revival of the IMF program has become a pie dream which proved hard to materialise mainly because of different political and economic reasons. Frustration of Pakistani authorities has been growing coupled with complaints that IMF provided bailout packages to Sri Lanka and Bangladesh but their treatment of Pakistan was quite harsh.

But there are some bitter realities as the Pakistani authorities unveiled ill-timed cross-subsidy for fuel without taking the IMF staff into confidence at a time when the staff level agreement was around the corner, giving another excuse to the IMF for delaying signing of the agreement on purported grounds of 'seeking details regarding modalities of proposed scheme.'

The Ministry of Finance was not on-board for announcing this scheme but the PM office preferred to go ahead with a cross-fuel subsidy as well as free-of-cost flour bags for Punjab and KP residents. This free Atta scheme is going to cause a Rs 74 billion subsidy.

In such a scenario, the IMF made crystal clear that without securing external financing from multilateral as well as bilateral creditors the staff level agreement would not be struck with Pakistan.

Now all efforts of the Pakistani authorities proved futile for placing Islamabad's request before the IMF's Executive Board on April 10, 2023 meeting after signing the staff level agreement.

The IMF Director of Communication, Julie Kozack, when asked in Washington DC what were the major outstanding issues and what more the Fund would like to see from Pakistan's creditors, replied that discussions were ongoing between the IMF and Pakistani authorities for a staff level agreement on policies to complete the ninth review and the authorities were committed to implementing necessary reforms. "They've started implementing decisive actions to stabilize the economy and restore confidence while providing space to accommodate the needs related to floods, including an increase in social assistance through Benazir Income Support Programme, which is aimed at the most vulnerable," she added.

"Timely financial assistance from external partners will be critical to support the authorities' policy efforts and ensure successful completion of the review," she said. Kozack said at this point ensuring that there was sufficient financing to support the authorities was of the paramount priority.

"A staff level agreement will follow once the few remaining points are closed. I can also say that financing assurances, right, what we're looking for here are a standard feature of all IMF programs," she said and added, "aside from the support provided by the IMF, Pakistan's EFF-supported program receives financing from other multilateral institutions, including the World Bank, the ADB, AIIB and bilateral partners, notably China, Saudi Arabia, and the UAE. So, we do need to ensure that we have those financing assurances in place in order for us to be able to take the next step with Pakistan."

Now it's a very complex situation whereby IMF was throwing the ball into the court of friendly countries and asking Pakistan to get confirmation from them while having a mandate of lender of last resort the responsibility also lies on the shoulders of the IMF for arranging external financing for Pakistan. But the IMF high-ups argued in background discussions that the Pakistani side presented its external financing plan and friendly countries' representatives in the executive board meeting on the occasion of granting approval of the 7th and 8th reviews in August 2022, made their commitment to providing financial assistance in the shape of deposits and

investments but it could not be materialized after passing almost seven months. Now the IMF's credibility would be at stake if Pakistan faced the risk of default in case of non-materialization of the external financing commitment so the IMF was insisting to save its own credibility.

When contacted, Dr Khaqan Najeeb, former advisor to Ministry of Finance, said the delay in the completion of the 9th review with IMF has hurt in terms of the erosion of SBP FX reserves and the severity of external sector challenge. Many industrial sectors have slowed as raw material import is constrained due to the dollar liquidity crunch.

He asserted Pakistan and IMF have a trust deficit due to back-and-forth on set of reforms agreed in the last few reviews. The Pakistan government more recently did make the needed steep adjustments, to complete prior actions in the hope of reaching a staff level agreement with the IMF. It is not heartening to see that a key prior action has been an increase in indirect taxes, with little action on taxing property, agriculture, and the retail sector.

He stated that now a credible plan by authorities of external financing appears to remain a bone of contention for the completion of the review. It is probably important for the fund to also play its part in taking on-board the multilateral including World Bank, ADB and AIIB and



bilateral partners to push project and program financing to stabilize Pakistan's balance of payment position. With growth plummeting, poverty increasing and inflation running at 31% it is time to unclog the economy, he concluded.

However, amid increasing trust deficits, some statements from Ministry of Finance high-ups also widened the gap between the two sides. When Senator Raza Rabbani inquired about the delay in signing of IMF agreement during the parliamentary session, Minister for Finance Ishaq Dar replied that Pakistan would not accept any dictations on its nuclear program or what kind of long-range missile the country should have. However, later he explained

in a statement that the IMF did not discuss anything on nuclear or missile programs.

The IMF's sponsored program has struck into a messy situation as the ninth review should have been accomplished on December 3, 2022. The 10th review should have a timeline of February 3, 2023, which was already missed out. Now the timeline of the 11th review scheduled to be undertaken in the first week of May 2023 would become due after one month. There is easy solutions lying ahead for fixing the ailing economy of Pakistan because there will be no solution but to seek a fresh IMF program after the expiry of the existing one in June 2023.




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The elites must change

Dr. Ashfaq Hassan Khan argues that the elites must change amidst the crippling economy

By Dr. Ashfaq Hassan Khan

Dr. Ashfaq Hassan Khan, a renowned Pakistani economist and former civil servant, has recently criticized the International Monetary Fund (IMF) for its policies regarding Pakistan. In a statement, Dr. Khan expressed his disappointment with the IMF's "impractical and suffocating policies" that have been causing economic distress for Pakistan.

Dr. Khan, who has served as the Economic Adviser to the Ministry of Finance in Pakistan, believes that the IMF is a professional institution, but its heads are not as smart as they should be when it comes to policies regarding Pakistan. He emphasized that Pakistan's economic and social conditions are different from other countries, and hence, the IMF's "one size fits all" approach is not appropriate.

One of the major concerns that Dr. Khan raised was the IMF's policies on currency devaluation. He argued that the IMF's insistence on devaluing the Pakistani rupee has not resulted in any positive outcomes. Instead, it has led to inflation, increased the cost of imports, and adversely affected the country's balance of payments.

Dr. Khan believes that the IMF needs to adopt a more realistic approach that takes into account the ground realities of Pakistan's economy. He emphasized that not everything is a market phenomenon, and the IMF needs to consider the socio-economic conditions of the country before recommending policies.

Furthermore, Dr. Khan urged the IMF to consider alternative policies that could help Pakistan achieve sustainable economic growth. He suggested that the IMF should focus on encouraging foreign direct investment, promoting exports, and improving the country's tax system.

He argued that the IMF's approach to Pakistan's economic challenges is often based on western economic models that do not account for the country's unique economic and social conditions.

Dr. Khan has argued that the IMF's approach to Pakistan is often based on the assumption that the country is similar to western economies, which he claims is far from the truth. According to him, Pakistan's economic challenges are rooted in a complex set of socio-economic issues that cannot be solved by western economic models alone.

Dr. Khan has expressed his concerns that the IMF's policies, which are often based on the western economic approach of liberalization, privatization, and deregulation, may not be appropriate for Pakistan. He believes that these policies may only benefit a select few, while causing harm to the majority of the population.

One of the main areas of concern for Dr. Khan is the IMF's insistence on currency devaluation, which he believes is a western approach to dealing with economic problems. Dr. Khan has argued that devaluing the Pakistani rupee, as suggested by the IMF, will only lead to inflation, increased cost of imports, and a decline in the purchasing power of the people. According to him, the IMF needs to take into account the unique conditions of Pakistan's economy, such as its heavy reliance on imports, before recommending such policies.

Dr. Khan has also pointed out that the IMF's approach to Pakistan's energy crisis is not suitable. He claims that the IMF's solution of increasing energy prices to reduce subsidies is not practical in a country where a large part of the population lives below the poverty line. He believes that the solution lies in investing in renewable energy sources and adopting more efficient energy policies.

Dr. Ashfaq Hassan Khan's criticism of the IMF's view of Pakistan's economic problems through a western lens highlights the need for a more nuanced approach that takes into account the country's unique economic and social conditions.

In the face of a crippling economy and



widespread poverty, Dr. Khan has been vocal in urging the elites of Pakistan to change themselves and take responsibility for the country's progress. He has stressed that the current economic crisis is not only due to external factors but also a result of the failure of the country's ruling class to implement effective policies and address the root causes of poverty. According to Dr. Khan, the elites must play their part in promoting a culture of accountability, transparency, and good governance. He has also called for measures to promote investment and entrepreneurship to create job opportunities and reduce poverty. Dr. Khan's efforts to bring about change in the country's economic landscape have earned him widespread recognition and respect, and he continues to inspire others to work towards a more prosperous Pakistan.

In conclusion, Dr. Ashfaq Hassan Khan's criticism of the IMF's policies regarding Pakistan highlights the need for a more nuanced approach that takes into account the country's unique economic and social conditions. He emphasized that the IMF needs to be more realistic and considerate of the ground realities of Pakistan's economy. Dr. Khan's insights and recommendations should be carefully considered by the IMF, as they could help Pakistan achieve sustainable economic growth and development.

IMF to seek details of fuel relief package

IMF expects ban on subsidies; govt to supply 461m litres of cheap petrol on monthly basis; delay in completion of ninth review hurting economy

By Noor Aftab

Pakistan remains the only South Asian country that has failed to secure a bailout package from the International Monetary Fund (IMF), while Sri Lanka has secured financing and Bangladesh striving to implement the Fund's mandated reforms.

Affected first by the COVID-19 pandemic, followed by inflation and then in 2022, by devastating floods, Pakistan has been facing series of grave economic, political and security challenges.

At this time the Shehbaz-led government has announced a subsidy (the government officials term it as only relief) to provide petrol to those belonging to lower strata of life at low rates.

Questions are raised by the financial experts as how the government plans funding subsidy by balancing the gap via higher fuel charges from those who own cars bigger than 800cc? Whether this scheme will work or not will have to be seen later, but more pressing and urgent is securing IMF loan.

The government, according to officials, would make petrol cheaper for poor and expensive for the rich. Plan suggests those who afford expensive cars would pay extra for fuel, and that extra amount would be used to pay for poor's fuel costs.

Motorcycle owners will get 100 percent relief. Under the cheap petrol relief package, the monthly limit for motorcycles and small cars will be 21 and 30 liters, respectively.

Some 50 percent of poor folks will benefit from the relief package, as owners of more than 2.6 million motorcycles, 1.6 million registered rickshaws and small cars will get low-priced petrol.

The daily fuel limit for motorcycles and small cars will be two and five litres respectively. A total of 461 million litres of petrol will be given monthly to car and motorbike owners under the petroleum relief package



while the auditor general or a third party will conduct audit of fuel distribution.

Three options are currently under consideration with regard to petrol relief. These include payment through password, card or Benazir Income Support. However, a one-time password (OTP) is reportedly being preferred. A foolproof gateway for consumers will be set up to ensure no one could steal or sell the subsidized petrol in black.

The low-income individuals will receive a petrol subsidy of up to Rs 50 per litre. With that in view, subsidy will be given to the vehicle owner on fixed fuel amount in a month.

The beneficiaries' data will be collected from provincial vehicles registration authorities. Then a message (OPT) will be sent to their phone numbers and 12,000 outlets of OMCs will be facilitated through scanners.

The relief package has also been viewed from legal point of view. Apparently, no legal hurdles are blocking its way, and no ministry has raised any objection because the government will not take money from anyone.

An escrow account will be established in the National Bank into which extra money extracted from the rich will be deposited,

and the account will be regularly audited.

The government believes that when individuals with big cars will pay more than those with smaller cars, they will ultimately incline towards more fuel-efficient cars.

The plan involves a difference of around 100 rupees a litre between the prices paid by the rich and poor. The scheme apparently will not cost the government anything extra. The low-income citizens will buy one litre petrol that will be Rs 100 cheaper than market rate. Depending on the international fuel market, the government will decide whether relief package should continue or it should end.

On the other hand, with 4.6 billion dollar in foreign exchange reserves held by the central bank in the week ending March 17, enough to cover only about four weeks of necessary imports, Pakistan is desperate for the IMF agreement to release a 1.1 billion dollar tranche from a 6.5 billion dollar bailout package in 2019.

The government did not consult the Fund about its fuel relief package, however a staff-level agreement with IMF will be signed once few remaining points, including the fuel scheme, is settled in the coming days.

The IMF will ask the government for more details, including how the plan will be



implemented and what protections will be put in place to prevent abuse. It will seek further details in terms of the plan's operation, cost, targets, protections against fraud and abuse. IMF will carefully discuss these elements with the Pakistani authorities.

Pakistan has made substantial progress towards meeting policy commitments needed to unlock the critical IMF funding. However, the country is required to meet few more conditions before it can secure the loan and circumvent the looming threat of default.

The IMF expects Pakistan to fulfil conditions, one of which is ban on subsidies. Therefore, concerns regarding losing the IMF loan is surfacing after the new scheme was announced.

Pakistan and the IMF have been negotiating since early February on an agreement for release of 1.1 billion dollar to the cash-strapped country. Reports suggests that Saudi Arabia was no longer willing to bailout its ally and has refused to provide easy money to Pakistan, demanding economic reforms in advance. Looking at the current economic difficulties of Pakistan, the country is in dire need of sustained dollar inflows to avoid defaulting on nearly 80 billion dollar of international loan repayments over the next three and a half years.

Saudi Arabia's decision not to provide any further bailouts or interest-free loans to Pakistan, has left the government in shock and has prompted the finance minister to assert that even friendly countries were not

keen on helping Pakistan out of its economic fiasco.

Analysts say the financial crisis, coupled with political instability and mounting terrorist threats, are creating the sort of conditions that have repeatedly led in the past to untoward political events.

Pakistan has limited the foreign exchange reserves, but owes more than 9 billion dollar in principal and interest payments in the coming months. Inflation has exceeded 25% in recent months and Pak rupee has plummeted to historic low in value. The staggering debt in the energy sector is another contentious issue in talks with the IMF.

Miftah Ismael, the former finance minister, stated "if Pakistan is able to get IMF tranches and some loans from the World Bank and the Asian Development Bank ... and some deposits from Saudi Arabia and UAE and perhaps some money from China as well, then I think we should be able to at least avert the default."

In 2019, Pakistan and the IMF agreed to a 6 billion dollar bailout but differences over monetary policy hindered the release of more than one billion dollar. Meanwhile, donors and lenders demanded structural reforms before giving more funds to Pakistan.

Pakistan was able to secure the previous tranche of 1.17 billion dollar in August last year after IMF approved the seventh and eighth review of the package, with the central bank possessing at the time more than 8 billion dollar in foreign reserves.

The delay in completing the ninth review, however, has sent the economy spiraling down further—foreign reserves have dwindled, covering less than just four weeks of imports.

Amid fast changing political and economic situation, the government has shown confidence it would be able to address all concerns of IMF regarding scheme to provide petrol on low rates to the poor.



Economy: myths and failures (Part-I)



By Amar Zafar Khan

This piece, the first of two parts, is not about the current economic crisis the country faces. Opinions about that are legion and are being expressed everywhere. And as is quite clear, whatever immediate palliatives are sought for today's crisis will only lead to another and then another and still another.

The prime task of our national leadership is to recognize the realities that have sucked the country into this recurrent spiral and take the long path of extricating ourselves from it. The challenges facing any Pakistani leadership are enormous. We have many under-tapped opportunities, and resources, but any leadership taking on the necessary restructuring of the economic engine has a formidable task.

This is a country with chronic trade and fiscal deficits, weighed down by enormous debt, an exploding population to feed and employ, misconceived religious interference, self-seeking short-term attitudes, and a hungry and disenfranchised people. Our various leaderships have to date lacked the confidence, courage, or honesty, to explain the truth or have the patience to cope with the necessary, interim hardships. But the arduous journey to recovery must begin or Pakistan will continue down the abyss of a failing state.

The points I wish to make here may not be comfortable and may even cut against the commonly held wisdom nor am I seeking to commend or indict any particular government. There are certain fundamental flaws in our thinking that I wish to highlight. No doubt many innovative strategies will surface. The aim of highlighting eight erroneous beliefs is the recognition of boundaries which should be used to screen out those initiatives which breach the framework defined by these boundaries.

The first of these flaws I wish to highlight is this current trope: 'If IMF fails, money won't come in and Pakistan is doomed'. This is false. The money that 'comes in' from the IMF and friendly nations if and when an IMF agreement is reached is not income. These are loans, the servicing of which cannibalizes the nation's future. It is logically obvious that if our export revenues are not adequate to meet our current imports and existing debt servicing needs, new loans will only cause the country's future debt to spiral, and erode further our consumption space. Until such time as our exports increase, we should cut our coat according to our cloth by curbing imports rather than seeking more loans.

Another long-standing trope has been: 'Import substitution is the solution as it

reduces our need for foreign exchange and creates local employment. This too is false. This is the belief that has driven the structure of our industrialization for the past 70 years. And what do we see? Shoddy product quality that fails to match international standards, on the one hand, and on the other, a growing foreign currency debt mountain. Clearly, this belief has not served us well. After all, most items we produce also have imported content, be it plant and machinery or raw material or royalty payments etc. The mushrooming population and consequent demand for imported substitution products has caused imports of these components to outstrip the foreign exchange saved by not importing the finished product.

Given that competitive advantage means that we cannot will ourselves out of import dependency, the way forward is to ensure that: first, manufacturing units are of a scale that matches international scale and consequent economies of scale. Second, that all manufacture meets international quality standards; and, third, that a significant part of the output is earmarked as a priority for international exports to at least offset the foreign currency needs and only the remaining production should be available for domestic consumption

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The third belief that bears questioning is: 'The government is to blame, as the business community holds, for foreign currency insufficiency for their import substitution needs.' This too is false. Business owners have traditionally measured their competence in terms of successfully selling their products to domestic consumers and the resulting profits they make. They thus have the local currency capacity to pay for their inputs, whether domestic or imported. They do not see it as their own responsibility to generate the foreign income to fund their own import needs. They simply assume to be available on the market or from the government.

But the government is not an exporter and not a recipient of foreign incomes. Like an indulgent parent, it resorts to borrowing from external sources to supply the importer with foreign currency. The result is the outcome we see: a growing foreign debt burden. It is high time the government came out transparently to state that it cannot afford to remain a provider of last resort of the foreign currency. The business community must recognize its own responsibility to earn or arrange the foreign currency for its own import needs.

Particularly prevalent is this fourth belief: 'We must seek to indiscriminately attract Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) as this will revitalize the economy and cushion the foreign currency deficit. It is also beneficial to sell loss-making state-owned enterprises



to foreign investors'. False. Foreign investors rightfully expect to repatriate their earnings in foreign currency and their rate of return expectation is far higher (above 20 per cent per annum) than interest rates payable to foreign lenders (say, 5.0 per cent per annum). If the underlying project largely serves the domestic market, its earnings will be in Pakistani rupees. The more successful the project, the greater the rupee profit, and the greater the size of profit repatriation in foreign currency. The same is the consequence of privatizing state-owned enterprises to foreign owners.

FDI, unless predominantly channeled into export-oriented businesses is costly and destructive. Only a very small share of

equity should be permitted to foreigners in the case of SOEs and import substitution businesses and that too if the foreign investor brings a unique contribution in terms of technology or access to export markets.

The four points made above relate primarily to transforming Pakistan's economy, from being import-based, debt-accumulating, and perpetually crisis-ridden, to an export-driven, solvent, and growing economy. There are four further points, relating primarily to government actions, that I will discuss in the second of these two articles.

To be continued...

Courtesy The News



Scrambling for cash

The surveying teams also manipulated the data such that it rendered undeserved households deserved and vice versa

By Zahiruddin

I paused to see the stampede-like situation in one of the busy markets of the federal capital Islamabad, where women were thrusting forward to a kiosk, during which I saw a number of old and feeble women stumbling to the ground. The kiosk owner was the franchisee of the Benazir Income Support Program (BISP) for the disbursement of the stipends of the program. The rush was gaining momentum as more and more women were rushing from different sides while a smart squad of police reached there to make queues and wait for their turn.

It is not difficult to imagine the state of affairs at the collection points for the stipend in the far-flung areas of the country if juxtaposed to the federal capital. Since the inception of the unconditional cash transfer (UCT) by BISP in 2008, a number of mechanisms for disbursement of cash have been devised, including the present one, but none of them have worked well.

The largest ever social network in the country, benefiting the maximum number of women in all parts of the country living below the poverty line, the flawed and imperfect disbursement mechanism put in place is like 'a fly in the ointment'.

The UCT for the women suffering from extreme poverty is in vogue in many countries in the world, and lessons can be drawn from the successful models of mechanism of disbursement as well as identification of beneficiary. A large scam has been reported in the media from time to time when the names of the wives of affluent people, traders, and government officers in grade 20 were found on the list of beneficiaries. No earnest effort has ever been made to remove the inherent faults in the identification of beneficiaries.

The first phase, which kicked off in July 2008, was known as the "Parliamentary Phase," as the members of Parliament were authorized to forward the application forms for the stipends from their respective constituencies. The applications were

scrutinized through the NADRA database, and 2.2 million forms were accepted out of 4.2 million, but it came to light later that the forms were distributed on a political basis, excluding the deserving and the destitute. Two years later, the Poverty Score Card system was launched to search for the poorest of the poor, and a poverty census was held for this purpose with the help of the World Bank.

Each household was to be given a score from 1 to 100, and the households with scores less than 32 were declared entitled to the stipend. This identification mechanism proved to be more flawed than the previous one because the enumeration and survey processes were outsourced to private firms and the questionnaire for assessment did not reflect the true financial status or poverty of the households surveyed due to redundant and extraneous questions.

It is also alleged that the surveying teams also manipulated the data such that it rendered undeserved households deserved and vice versa. The existing list of active beneficiaries (at 5.7 million) of the UCT has been compiled on the basis of that faulty and rigged survey, raising a volley of questions about it.

Money orders through Pakistan Post were introduced in 2008 with their nationwide rollout for the purpose of disbursing stipends. As of December 2016, Pakistan Post had disbursed a huge amount of Rs. 64562.98 million to the beneficiaries. Some cases of mismanagement were reported from different parts of the country within the first two years, and an alternate mechanism named the Smart Card Payment System was introduced in four districts, including Multan, Mian Wali, Sanghar, and Mirpurkhas.

In this mechanism, smart cards were issued to the beneficiaries, who withdrew the stipend from different franchises. This mechanism, put into place on an experimental basis, did not work well and was disbanded in 2012, when another



mechanism called "Mobile Banking Payment" was introduced in four districts of the country. In this system, the beneficiaries were provided with a mobile telephone set and a SIM card. A PIN code was sent to the payee to give to the designated franchisee to receive her cash. Yet this system failed as well due to a number of recurring technical faults.

Another mechanism named the Benazir Debit Card was launched in February 2012, which allowed the beneficiary to withdraw the stipend amount from the ATM of any bank. This tool was also discontinued after four years and was replaced by the current mechanism of the Biometric Verification System (BVS) in February 2020. The beneficiary goes to the BISP franchise and receives her payment after biometric verification.

The system is plagued by the shortcomings of a smaller number of franchise shops, repeated failures of connection with the NADRA database for biometric verification, and the absence of an internet system in the far-flung villages. The rush and stampede of beneficiaries in the franchise shops can be drastically reduced if the number of franchise outlets is increased to a comfortable number throughout the length and breadth of the country. In remote areas with no internet access, the only solution is to make payments using Pakistan Post's money order system.

Fix the system again!

One wonders if it was Trump-induced regulations, banks' risk mismanagement, an interest rate hike, or a well-aligned combination of all three

By Sara Danial

Time indeed flies. I remember studying economics and management during my student life. It only seems like yesterday when our professors explained the capitalistic nature of the market economy. Fast forward to my professional life, and I witness the breaking down of American capitalism right before my eyes. After the nightmarish 2008–2009 global financial crisis, one would've thought that we had learned our lesson. Clearly, banks still possess the unending power to leave us with a heart-stopping scare.

One wonders if it was Trump-induced regulations, banks' risk mismanagement, an interest rate hike, or a well-aligned combination of all three.

To devise a rescue, the US government made an intervention to prevent a major banking, and financial crisis yet again, owing to which the mid-sized lending saviour of the tech startups, Silicon Valley Bank, crashed, sending shockwaves through the entire financial system. The bank was troubled when the interest rates increased, the treasury yields tumbled, and the value of its bond holdings plunged. Under the crunch, the nervous depositors pulled out their money. In a failed effort to plug a shortfall in finances, the share price dropped. On March 13th, HSBC purchased SVB's British assets for £1, but America's regulators have struggled to find a buyer for the rest of the bank.

Fourteen years since the global financial crisis, it doesn't take an economic scientist to realise that the experience should have made us wiser. Yet, here we are again, with frantic regulators and frightened investors. Questions are again swirling about how brittle banks are and whether regulators have been caught out. The fiasco clearly reflects how the banking sector stands as a major ward of the state. Nothing short of an accounting fiction, I'd say.

If that wasn't enough, Credit Suisse's share price plunged by a quarter to its lowest-ever level, and other European banks took a



knock as well. Reports swirled that financial institutions were examining their exposure to the bank. By the end of the day, Swiss regulators released a statement saying that Credit Suisse met the capital and liquidity requirements applicable to big banks but that they would offer the bank support if needed. The embattled lender announced it intends to borrow up to SFr50 billion from Switzerland's central bank to bolster its liquidity and buy back SFr3 billion of its distressed debt. In the febrile atmosphere of the market meltdown, the bank's largest investor, Saudi National Bank, decided not to increase its stake in the business.

Coincidence? Hardly. To state the obvious, both crises are clearly linked. Only revealing long-overdue hidden stress.

The high-speed collapse and the size of the failures disrupted the markets, wiping billions off bank stocks. The collapse continues to reverberate, bloating the political blame game.

In a coordinated feat, the Treasury, the Federal Reserve, and the Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation intervened to protect depositors. They set up a facility that allows banks to tap emergency funds.

The Fed may be right in proving the necessary rescue against good collateral to stop runs. But, easy terms carry a cost. Creating an expectation that the Fed will assume interest rate risks in a crisis only enables and encourages the banks to behave recklessly.

Not only does it complicate the Fed's road to further monetary tightening, but it also has to weigh up stability in the financial system and inflationary pressures. While the annual inflation reduced to 6%, the core annual rate (stripping out food and energy prices, which economic scientists fret about) remained nearly unaffected at 5.5%. The labour market is a mess in and of itself.

It is important to focus on fixing the system. Because while the emergency programme will be a helping hand for a year, it won't be long before banks begin to take excessive risks in pursuit of high returns. The system must be safer.

One actionable deliverable can be to remove various odd exemptions that apply to mid-sized banks, many of which were the result of post-crisis rules being rolled back amid much lobbying in 2018 and 2019.

The rescue action plan for SVB drives home the point that policymakers think such

banks pose systemic risks. If so, they should face the same accounting and liquidity rules as the megabanks—as they do in Europe—and be required to submit plans for their orderly resolution in case of failure. Effectively, this will force them to increase their safety buffers.

The Capital Cushion

Industry experts and policymakers should build a regime that recognises the risks of an interest rate hike. It is a small wonder that a bank with unrealized losses is more vulnerable to failure during a crisis than one without them. My question remains: why is this disparity not reflected in capital requirements?

Perhaps a stress test: what will happen to the bank's safety cushion if its bond portfolios are marked to market and if rates keep increasing?

It is then for the policymakers to decide whether the system has sufficient capital.

The central bankers must tighten monetary policy until something breaks. For much of the past year, this cliché has been easy to dismiss. Even as markets plunged, the world's financial system stayed wreck-age-free. The most notable collapse of FTX—a disgraced former crypto exchange—was well outside the mainstream and, regulators say, caused by fraud rather than the Fed.



Bankers, of course, won't be the most amused about this. They will loathe the idea of more capital buffers and rulemaking.

But it is better to be safe than sorry. The gains from safety are massive. Depositors and taxpayers ranging from Silicon Valley to Switzerland are rattled by a mighty scare. They do not deserve to live with constant anxiety and fright, which they thought had been historically put to rest.

The Way Forward

One feature of this painful new phase is that markets are suddenly working with the Fed rather than against it. For more than a year,

the central bank's officials have been repeating the same message: that inflation is proving more stubborn than expected, meaning interest rates will need to rise higher than previously predicted. That does not mean investors have given up fighting the Fed. They are still betting it will soon start cutting rates, even though officials have given no such indication. The battleground has nonetheless shifted. Taken in conjunction with the reaction in other markets, this suggests a degree of cognitive dissonance.

Speaking of the currency, the dollar, which tends to strengthen in crises as investors flock to safety, weakened a little. On the one hand, investors think the Fed should fear bank failures enough to start cutting rates. On the other hand, they do not themselves fear the fallout of such a failure enough to reflect it in prices.

Behind this contradiction is the supposed tension between the Fed's inflation target and its duty to protect financial stability. Since even the fight against inflation pales in importance next to the stability of the banking system, goes the argument, the Fed cannot afford to raise rates any higher. This lowers the risk of recession, gives a boost to stocks, and reduces the need for haven assets like the dollar.

To squeeze inflation out of the economy, the Fed needs to make lenders nervous, loans expensive, and businesses risk-averse. Allowing reckless banks such as SVB to fail is not a tragic accident. It is part of the Fed's job.



Inflation hits Pakistan hard

With the Pakistani economy in free fall and subsequent high inflation, a large portion of the Pakistani population is suffering greatly



By Azeem Waqas

"I have been waiting since yesterday for free flour; I came in the morning and started a queue at the grocery store; after three hours, the grocery store employee told me that supply of free wheat flour is late due to untold reasons, and it is expected that truck will reach around 2:00 pm," 55-year-old Maryam told The Truth International, at the sale point of Sitara Market, Islamabad.

Maryam said that wheat flour prices are increasing with every passing day; it has become difficult for her to provide food three times a day to the family. "Only flour costs us Rs. 600–700 per day. I have three daughters, a boy, and a husband. My husband works at a store, and he earns Rs. 35, 000 per month.

Getting free wheat flour is costing the lives of poor Pakistanis. Poor men, women, and senior citizens have lost their lives in a struggle to get a 10-kg bag at the sale points in Punjab, and KPK.

In the open market, wheat flour prices have reached Rs. 170 per kg, while a roti is being sold for Rs. 20–25.

Since the pandemic, Pakistan has been battered by calamities that have pushed up the price of food and fuel: Russia's invasion of Ukraine and two events made more extreme by climate change: a spring heatwave that shrivelled harvests and then summer floods that drowned them. Now there's an economic crisis so dire that the country risks default.

In February 2023, inflation reached nearly 31%, but the figure conceals dramatic variations. In poorer rural areas, the price of food rose even higher.

During Ramadan, Maryam and many others are among the millions of Pakistanis toiling to put food on the table amid a deepening cost of living crisis that has hit the country of 220 million people.

Food inflation is at an all-time high in Pakistan. Long lines at flour distribution points were a horrific indicator of the severe food crisis in the country, and women are the first to feel the punch of the economic crisis.

Now, the World Food Programme

expects that 5.1 million people are likely to be a step away from famine levels of hunger by the end of March—an increase of 1.1 million people from the previous quarter.

Inflation is expected to reach a staggering 33% soon, while the currency has lost 65% of its value in the last year. The country is in dire straits.

Muhammed Aamir, a 35-year-old security guard, said last year a businessman had bought him groceries for the whole month of Ramadan. This year, however, Aamir does not know what he will do for his family of six.

Food prices have continued to rise since February 2022 for the 11th consecutive month (except for a 0.1% decline in December 2022). National and international drivers (fuel price hikes, energy costs, devaluation of the rupee against the dollar, increasing prices of food and non-food imported items, the Russia-Ukraine war, etc.) suggest that prices will remain high for the coming months.

A comparison of pre-flood (June 2022) and post-flood (January 2023) indicat-

ed a huge increase in prices for some food commodities; for instance, the price of onions increased by up to 220%, wheat flour by 74%, rice Irri by 68%, pulse moong by 65%, rice Basmati by 45%, and milk by 39%.

The World Food Program's (WFP) flood situation report for Pakistan said that high food prices and a heavy reliance on imports are threatening Pakistan's food and nutrition security as the country reels from the effects of devastating floods that washed away large swathes of agricultural land last year.

"Meanwhile, the 2022-2023 Rabi, combined with the unstable availability of wheat flour, has resulted in significant price fluctuations and uncertainty affecting the prices of other essential goods."

According to the report, 14.6 million people required emergency food assistance in Pakistan, seven million children were in need of nutrition services, four million kids lacked access to health services, and 5.5 million people no longer had access to safe drinking water.

Citing WFP's monitoring data, the report said the floods had caused a 53 percent increase in new malnutrition cases across Pakistan from July 2022 to January 2023 among children enrolled in 50 pilot facilitation centres of the Benazir Nashonuma Programme, a national social protection scheme aimed at improving health and nutrition.



"Additional funding is urgently required to treat moderate and acute malnutrition (MAM)," the report said, "to prevent the progression to severe acute malnutrition."

As of February 24, 2023, WFP has supported 3.4 million flood-affected people with 77,745 metric tonnes of relief food and nutrition assistance and over US\$19.6 million in cash-based transfers (CBT). Starting mid-February 2023, WFP has been compelled to scale down its assistance due to resource constraints at a time when significant humanitarian needs persist.

Economist Najam Ali says that "due to the overall macro inflation impact on the

economy, as always, the most vulnerable segments of society will be hit the hardest." The government must focus on reducing price volatility as well as ensuring robust social safety nets for the vulnerable.

Economist Sajid Amin said that "political instability is one major driver of inflation in Pakistan. Ongoing political chaos has almost eliminated the government's ability to design and implement policies to control inflation. Food inflation, a particularly sensitive price index, is very likely to touch 50%".

Analysts say that "a stable government with a clear mandate to put the economy on the right track is a must." "The country has no choice but to implement tough economic reforms, good governance, and focus on promoting tourism and hospitality and reviving foreign direct investment as early as possible."

With the Pakistani economy in free fall and subsequent high inflation, a large portion of the Pakistani population is suffering greatly. Inflation and price increases affect Pakistan's politics as well as its economy. The opposition parties are using the government's inability to control the price increase as a major issue to attack it and win over the public. If the government is unable to control the price increase, it may trigger more political unrest, demonstrations, and even violence.



The Blossoming of Sino-Russian Alignment

By Dr. Syed Rifaat Hussain

Sino-Russian ties received a huge boost following President Xi Jinping's three-day visit to Moscow from March 21 to March 23, 2023.

The visit not only resulted in a plethora of agreements between the two countries in the fields of trade, technology, infrastructure, energy and space but also allowed their leadership to display unity of purpose and mutual resolve in the face of Western opposition to them. In this context President Xi made the most remarkable statement when he told President Putin "change is coming that has not happened in 100 years. And we are driving this change together." President Xi parting statement underscores the complete convergence of Sino-Russian interests in opposition to American agenda.

The International Criminal Court has issued arrest warrants for Mr. Putin accusing him of war crimes. The ICC has accused the Russian leader of bearing personal responsibility for the abductions of children from Ukraine during Russia's full-scale invasion of its neighbor that started almost 13 months ago.

Mr. Putin has signaled his openness to President Xi's 12-point peace plan floated during the Munich security conference last February to solve the war in Ukraine. Mr. Putin said: "We're always open for a negotiation process." Touching on the prospects for peace in Ukraine Mr. Putin stated that:

"This is an example of how world powers, who are permanent members of the UN Security Council and have a special responsibility for maintaining stability and security on the planet, should interact." He went on to say the Russian and Chinese people have a "common soul" and can overcome any obstacle with their joint strength. Putin further observed that relations between China and Russia were "at their highest point in history" and that trade and economic cooperation were the priority of both governments.

China's trade with Russia hit a record



high in 2022, growing by 30% as the West tried to embargo Moscow. Bilateral trade is on pace to hit over \$200 billion this year – though two thirds of it have been denominated in yuans and rubles, as both countries move away from the dollar.

Putin has also endorsed the use of yuan in trade settlements with other countries in Asia, Africa and Latin America.

Presidents Xi and Putin also discussed increasing the scale of trade, further developing logistics and cross-border infrastructure, expanding agricultural cooperation to ensure food security for both countries, and improving cooperation in the exchange of energy, minerals, metals and chemical products. China and Russia pledged to expand cooperation in the fields of technology, information technology and AI.

"By joining our rich scientific potentials and production capabilities, Russia and China can become world leaders in the fields of information technology, network security, and artificial intelligence," Putin told reporters after first day of high-level talks in Kremlin.

Putin described relations between Russia and China as different from the military-political alliances that developed during the Cold War, saying they are "superior to that form of interstate cooperation, and are not of a confrontational nature."

Moscow and Beijing agreed to "regularly conduct joint maritime and air patrols and joint exercises," develop military exchange and cooperation using all available bilateral mechanisms, and increase mutual trust between their armed forces.

Fostering relations with Russia is "a strategic choice China has made on the basis of its own fundamental interests and the prevailing trends of the world," Xi said after the first round of meetings on Monday, explaining that the two nations shared a commitment to building a multipolar world.

In the post-cold war period, relations between China and Russia have gradually moved towards a rapprochement especially after China's peaceful rise in the first decade of the twenty first century. Both countries settled their territorial differences along their long border and have committed themselves to pursuing cooperative security.

Both countries have shown their willingness to work together to promote a "multipolar" world order based on multilateralism and collective security. Both have espoused the promotion of the principles of non-interference, respect for territorial integrity and opposition to hegemonic behavior.

Russia's invasion of Ukraine is simultaneously a challenge and an opportunity for China. Challenges include a potential blow to China's credibility as a

champion of sovereignty, territorial integrity, noninterference, and the possibility Russia's poor performance will leave it unable to act as a pole in the emerging multipolar order.

China views the strategic stalemate created by Ukraine war as an opportunity to reorient pressure on itself by providing relief to developing countries impacted by the economic sanctions leveled by America and its allies. Furthermore, Russia's isolation due to sanctions provides China with greater leverage in its bilateral relations.

Indeed, the response by the United States and its NATO partners to Russia's aggression has buttressed the Sino-Russian partnership on this issue.

In Chinese view, a multipolar order would result in a dominant position for China in the East Asia region and a key global role in which Beijing has greater capacity to shape international rules and norms. Both sides have expressed support for a multilateral order and criticism of the United States and its partners during the war.

China, however, has routinely called for an end to the war without directly criticizing Russia and has avoided direct support for Russia's invasion of Ukraine. To move toward significant commitment, Russia or China would incur significant security costs and risks for the other. Currently, they avoid the commitment problem and its side effects.

While it is true that Beijing has not condemned Moscow's brazen naked aggression against Ukraine nor has it condoned imposition of a plethora of sanctions against Moscow, Beijing has confined itself to lending political and diplomatic support to Russia.

These dynamics are particularly important given the joint statement released on February 4, 2022, at the start of the Beijing Winter Olympics, declaring the friendship between the two states has "no limits," which implies this alignment has been solidified.

It can be argued that Beijing was surprised by the scale and scope of Moscow's aggression against Ukraine. In other words, it is less about China taking sides than it is

about China navigating the geopolitical effects of the conflict in ways that secure its interests.

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

Mr. Putin has signaled his openness to Xi's 12-point plan to solve the war in Ukraine, "We're always open for a negotiation process."



U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken warned that Xi's proposal—which calls for the respect of sovereignty and territorial integrity but does not condemn the invasion or call for Russian withdrawal from occupied territories—could be a "stalling tactic."

"The world should not be fooled by any tactical move by Russia, supported by China or any other country, to freeze the war on its own terms," he said, adding, "Calling for a cease-fire that does not include the removal of Russian forces from Ukrainian territory would effectively be supporting the ratification of Russian conquest."

In Moscow, Putin thanked Xi for "observing principles of justice," while Xi said, "Under your strong leadership, Russia has made great strides in its prosperous development. I am confident that the Russian people will continue to give you

their firm support."

On the issue of ICC's decision to issue warrants for Putin's arrest, Serbian President made the profound observation that this issue will have bad political consequences, "because it demonstrates that the West is 'reluctant to talk about 'peace and about truce in Ukraine,'" He posed the question: "

"Do you really think that it is possible to defeat Russia in a month, three months or a year?" he asked, adding: "There is no doubt that the goal of those who did this is to make it difficult for Putin to communicate, so that everyone who talks to him is aware that he is accused of war crimes."

Asked if Putin would be arrested if he comes to Serbia, the Serbian President Vucic responded it is "a pointless question, because it is clear that as long as the conflict (in Ukraine) continues, Putin has nowhere to go."

Moscow doesn't recognize the court's jurisdiction and has disdainfully dismissed the move as "legally null and void".

After the talks, Putin and Xi issued joint declarations pledging to further bolster their "strategic cooperation," develop cooperation in energy, high-tech industries and other spheres and expand the use of their currencies in mutual trade to reduce dependence on the West.

They said they would develop military cooperation and conduct more joint sea and air patrols, but there was no mention of any prospective Chinese weapons supplies to Russia that the U.S. and other Western allies feared. Putin has hailed China's proposals for a political settlement and a cease-fire in Ukraine, saying that it could serve as a basis for a peaceful settlement "once the West and Kyiv are ready for it." The U.S. has criticized Beijing's plan as a move intended to allow Russia to shore up its gains.

By lending its diplomatic and moral support to President Putin during the Ukraine war, President Xi has proven to the United States and its NATO allies that their ongoing efforts to marginalize Russia in the great power competition will not bear fruit and a negotiated settlement of the war in Ukraine is the only way out.

Geoeconomics to decide fate of Saudi-Iran entente

Accord boosts Chinese role in ME; Beijing bid to replace Washington as key global player in region achieve milestone

By Dr Raza Khan

Brokered by China, the recent agreement between Saudi Arabia and Iran to normalize their rocky relations would be vital for peace and stability in the Middle East. This development would have important extra-regional consequences for South Asia, specifically for Pakistan.

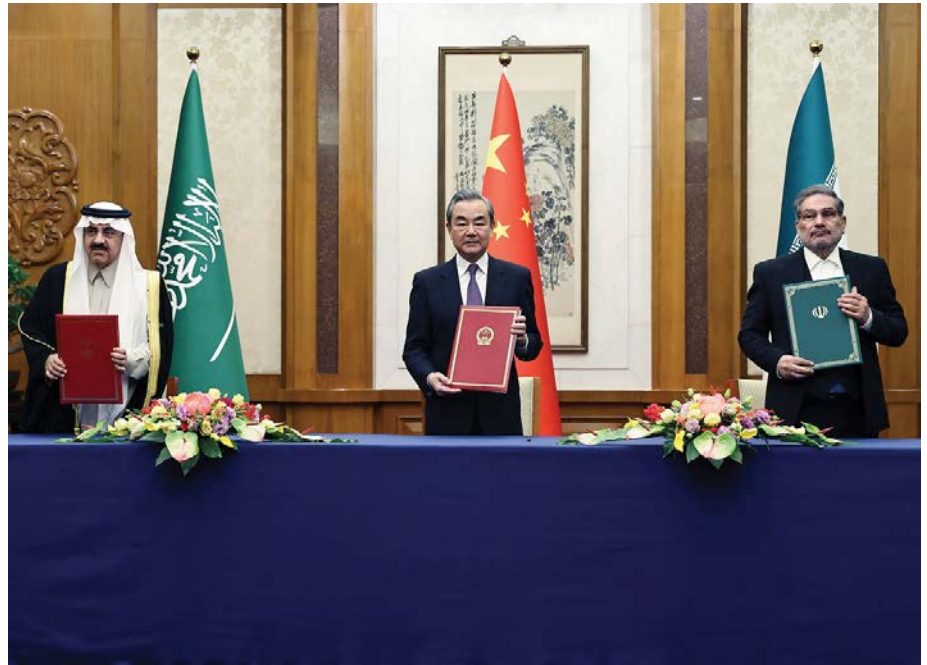
Normalization of relations between Saudi Arabia and Iran is a good news for the Middle Eastern region and more than that, for the Muslim world. However, the biggest worry regarding success of normalization bids are the issues between Saudis and Iranians--too complex having deep roots in history.

Both these states represent two key Muslim sects, Sunni Wahabis led by Saudi Arabia and Shias led by Iran. Against this historical backdrop, success of normalization of bilateral relations between the two would depend upon the extent of priority given to geo-economics over geopolitics.

With regard to Saudi Arabia, Riyadh is far more economically stable than Tehran. Thus, it can afford, at least economically, bumpy relations with Iran. But in order to sustain its economic growth, Saudi Arabia nonetheless has to normalize its relations with Iran. Backed by Iran, Saudi Arabia has been confronting rocket and missile attacks from Yemen-based Houthi rebels during the last few years, affecting the country's economy. This situation is considerably realized by the Saudi de-facto ruler, Crown Prince Muhammad bin Salman, who has consented to normalization of ties with Iran.

Saudi Arabia's alacrity to normalize relations with Iran can be gauged from the fact that within few days of the agreement to have rapprochement, Saudi King Salman reportedly invited Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi to visit the kingdom. This is indeed a significant development, deemed by many as a good gesture on the part of Saudi Arabia.

On Iran's part, the need for normalization of relations with Riyadh is vital for Tehran economically and politically.



Economically, Iran has been reeling through protracted sanctions imposed by the United States and its Western allies to compel Iran give up its 'suspicious' nuclear program.

These economic sanctions coupled with social checks imposed by Iranian self-declared puritanical regime on the Iranian masses particularly female population, have been the cause of massive social chaos and political instability in the country in recent times. Iran, therefore, has eagerly desired normalization of relations with Saudi Arabia. Substantial reports suggest, it was Iran who perused China to mediate between Tehran and Riyadh.

On the other hand, Tehran's urge to normalize ties with Saudi Arabia may also result in instability in Iran, given the anti-Saudi feelings in the country particularly within some powerful institutions that appear stronger than the state. In this context, it remains to be seen whether such institutions were taken into confidence before taking normalization steps with Saudi Arabia, by the Iranian government.

Hopefully, both Saudi Arabia and Iran would not use normalization of relations to

seek nuclear weapons that would further destabilize the Middle East. For decades Iran has been struggling to develop nuclear weapons and, on several occasions, it came quite close to acquire them. Whereas, Saudi Arabia has not publicly expressed its desire to obtain nuclear weapons but has been deeply desiring civil nuclear technology from the US.

Washington has been hesitant to provide civil nuclear technology to Riyadh due to opposition from Israel. As the US has been vehemently against Iran's acquisition of nuclear arms, there are fears both Iran and Saudi Arabia may use their stable relations to seek nuclear weapons. So in this case, both countries have a commonality of interests.

A very significant aspect of the agreement between Saudi Arabia and Iran is that it has catapulted China on the political scene of the Middle East. It is now obvious that Beijing's efforts to replace Washington as key global player in the region have achieved a significant milestone. China not only has kept close relations with Iran but also with Saudi Arabia, a long-standing partner of America, as well as with Israel. Since the 1979 revolution led by Ayatollah

Khomeini in Iran, and the deposition of US-backed King Reza Shah Pahlavi, Washington's relations with Iran have been strained. At the same time, China has had kept close relations with both Saudi Arabia and Israel.

China has proactively engaged itself in mediating between and among regional countries vis-à-vis longstanding disputes, as compared to US who has even estranged its old ally Saudi Arabia. Moreover, China by bringing Riyadh and Tehran closer, has given a strong message to Washington, its Western allies and the World at large that it could match the US-led normalization of relations between Israel and its Arab rivals via arrangements known as Abraham Accord.

So there is considerable rationale in Chinese mediation between Saudi Arab and Iran, suggesting if US could broker Abraham Accord between Jewish state of Israel and Muslim states of United Arab Emirates (UAE), Morocco and Bahrain, why an entente could not be secured between two Muslim states, albeit representing two different Muslims sects.

Succeeded, the rapprochement bids between Iran and Saudi Arabia would have to be seen in terms of Riyadh and Tehran giving up support to non-state actors and ensuring respect for each others' sovereignty as well as boosting economic engagement via trade and investment.

Another yardstick about success of these efforts would be the US reaction. White House Spokesperson John Kirby, while reacting to the Chinese brokered agreement, said the (President Joe) Biden administration "welcomed" it, but indicated some suspicion about its durability. "If it can be sustained, regardless of what the impetus was or who sat down at the table ... we welcome that," Kirby reportedly said.

The American ambivalence of welcome and suspicion is realistic and understandable. Hopefully, if US will not support this endeavour, it would at least not take steps to jeopardise it.

US may have close relations with Israel but the Biden administration must equally be cognizant of the fact that US-Israel ties

have always been at the cost of Arab and Muslim world. Hence, if peace and stability in Middle East has to be achieved then parallel to normalization of relations between Israel and Arab/Muslim countries, normalisation of Saudi-Iran relations along with their respective regional allies is a sine-qua-non.

If peace and stability in the Greater Middle East is not the real objective of the US foreign policy, its another thing; but peace and stability definitely has been a key objective of the US foreign policy in the present geopolitical environment of the world.

Russia-Ukraine war has immensely destabilized the world including Middle East. On the other hand, China's increasing engagement to address conflicts and crisis in the world particularly Middle East is clandestinely reducing Washington's worth for regional countries.

In such a situation, US would seek a stable Middle East as it would give Washington more leverage to play conspicuous role in the region. China has its own objectives in the region by mediating regional conflicts. These objectives are economic in nature, and are aimed at creating conducive environment for Chinese President Xi Jinping's Belt & Road Initiative in the area.

Once Middle East gets stable, the United States could capitalize on this situation by attracting Middle Eastern countries and societies to achieve the second stage of development: modernization and democratization. Obviously, it is the US and the West, not China, which could lead this process of development.

Implications for Pakistan

Foremost importance of the Saudi-Iran accord is that it has been brokered by Pakistan's closest ally, China. Thus China's influence and acceptability in such a scenario is a win-win situation for Pakistan. If China is able to operationalize its BRI in the Middle East, the region's economic integration would be of great benefit to Pakistan.

Pakistan during the Imran Khan government had invited Saudi Arabia to become

the 'third partner' in CPEC, a flagship project of BRI in 2018 and Saudi Arabia had accepted the offer. On his occasion, a high-level coordination committee proposed by Saudi King Salman bin Abdul Aziz, was formed to work out details.

Making Saudi Arabia a partner in CPEC would facilitate Saudi oil to China. After Saudi-Iran agreement, an overland oil pipeline from Saudi Arabia to Iran, onwards to Pakistan and China could be a possibility.

There is no denying the fact that basic issue between Saudi Arabia and Iran is the sectarian one. And Pakistan has been affected by sectarian proxy wars on its territory. Due to normalization of relations between Riyadh and Tehran sectarian violence in Pakistan is expected to reduce to a large extent.

A pertinent outcome of normal Riyadh-Tehran ties would be reduction in sectarian violence and conflicts in the Middle East that would have positive impacts on Pakistan too. Sectarian issues between predominantly Sunni population and minority Shia community of Pakistan and occasional violence have been a source of deep chasms in the Pakistani society.

Due to rapprochement between Saudi Arabia and Iran, former's pressure on Pakistan to be on its side against Tehran and on the Yemen conflict, would also drop considerably.

It may be recalled that when Houthi rebellion started in Yemen, Saudi Arabia had asked Pakistan to extend weapons and troops to fight Houthis and to stem influence of Shi'ite Iran in what appeared to be proxy war between the Gulf's two dominant powers.

In response Pakistan's parliament had voted in April 2015, not to join the Saudi-led military intervention in Yemen, dashing Riyadh's hopes for powerful support from outside the region in its fight to halt Iranian-allied Houthi rebels.

Pakistan is going to gain a lot from normalization of relations between Saudi Arabia and Iran provided our foreign policy makers make right choices at the right time.

US raises concern over human rights violations in Pakistan

Human Rights Watch has stated that the Indian government's policies and actions target Muslims

By Anum Akram

The report covers 198 countries and territories, presenting accurate, unbiased information based on reliable accounts of the events that took place in 2022. This report was meticulously compiled by the US Department of State. When detailing the report of practices in 2022, each country's report, according to international law and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, speaks for itself. Record violations and abuses that are horrifying in their scope and severity are highlighted in several of the reports.

In this report, they describe several significant human rights issues, including credible reports of: unlawful or arbitrary killings, including extrajudicial killings by the government or its agents; forced disappearances by the government or its agents; torture; and cases of cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment. The topic also highlighted Pakistan's restrictions on media and freedom of speech, as well as the torturing of journalists.

While according to the law of Pakistan, the right to freedom of speech is expressly guaranteed to Pakistani citizens by the 1973 Constitution, Every citizen is entitled to freedom of speech and the press, according to Article 19, "subject to any reasonable restrictions imposed by law in the interest of the glory of Islam, the integrity, security, or defense of Pakistan or any part of it, friendly relations with foreign states, public order, decency, or morality, or in relation to contempt of court, committing, or inciting an offense."

Although the constitution guarantees freedom of expression, especially for journalists, there are constitutional limitations, the report said, adding that self-censorship is common among journalists and editors as a result of threats, harassment, kidnappings, violence, and murders. Restrictions on the right to freedom of assembly and association were put into place as a result of the government's refusal to look into and prosecute attacks on



human rights advocates and nonviolent demonstrators. The section on violations of freedom of expression indicated that journalists experienced high levels of violence from both state and non-state actors, including political parties. In the section on violence and harassment, they also highlight the topic of Arshad Sharif, who fled the country after he was charged with several violations of the law for anti-military comments, he made on his television show. On October 23, he was found dead in Kenya.

Moreover, according to the State Department's assessment, physical violence, cruel treatment, and illegal violations of people's privacy were reported in Pakistan in 2022. "There was a lack of government accountability, and abuses, including corruption and misconduct by security services, often went unpunished, fostering a culture of impunity among perpetrators. Authorities seldom investigate or punish government officials for reported human rights abuses or acts of corruption". The US described this in its executive summary on Pakistan.

According to a US State Department report, the Pakistani government is attempting to control the media. In general, media organizations practiced self-censorship, particularly when reporting on stories involving the military, religious extremism,

and the blasphemy laws. According to journalists, there is pressure for them to stick to the pre-set narrative and PEMRA's editorial guidelines for media outlets. Journalists accused the existing and former governments of harassing and threatening journalists for producing critical analyses. On May 22, the media reported charges were filed against journalists Imran Riaz, Sabir Shakir, and Arshad Sharif for alleged criticism of state institutions and "abetting mutiny."

The comprehensive report on Pakistan is broken down into seven sections: respect for one's personal integrity, civil liberties respect, freedom to participate in politics, corruption and lack of government transparency, government response to international and non-governmental investigations of alleged human rights violations, discrimination and societal abuses, and workers' rights.

Report also sheds light on the events of corruption and a lack of transparency in government. Officials who participate in corrupt behavior at any level are subject to criminal penalties under the law, although the government generally does not successfully enforce it. Politics and government were rife with corruption, and a number of politicians and public officials were accused of engaging in bribery,

extortion, cronyism, nepotism, favoritism, graft, and embezzlement.

The report also pointed out the security situation in Pakistan, where for the majority of the nation, police are primarily in charge of internal security. Provincial governments have authority over local police. Under the direction of the Ministry of Interior, paramilitary groups such as the Frontier Administered Tribal Areas and the Rangers, which operate in Sindh and Punjab, offer security services.

Countless cases of discrimination against women, children, and workers in Pakistan have been pointed out in the report as well. Moreover, the report stated that "the Lahore Gender-Based Violence Court receives the most serious cases in the district, such as aggravated rape, and offers enhanced protections to women and girls". In the first eight months of the year, Lahore reported 176 cases of domestic violence against women, 337 cases of rape of women, 1,782 cases of kidnapping of women, three cases of so-called honor killings of women (the killing of a relative who is perceived to have brought dishonor on the family), and 746 cases of violence against women.

In accordance with the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaaf (PTI) government being overthrown legally and a coalition government being created under Shehbaz Sharif's leadership, stated in the summary of the US administration's annual report on international human rights Recall that on April 10 of last year, the National Assembly defeated a motion of no confidence in Imran



Khan's administration by 174 votes, which led to the overthrow of Imran Khan's administration. Following the overthrow of Imran Khan's government, Shehbaz Sharif was chosen as prime minister by a large margin by the Pakistan Democratic Movement (PDM) and Pakistan People's Party. However, Imran Khan initially laid the blame for the overthrow on the United States and later claimed that former army chief General (retired) Qamar Javed Bajwa had a significant hand in the overthrow.

On India

The report also discussed human rights abuses in India, emphasizing how the abuses persisted in 2022 and how the Modi administration continues to impose limitations on journalism and speech freedom. Significant human rights issues in India have included credible reports of the government or its agents conducting extrajudicial killings; torturing or cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment or

punishment by police and prison officials; political prisoners or detainees; and unjustified arrests or prosecutions of journalists, the US report added.

"Terrorists in Jammu and Kashmir, north-eastern states, and Maoist terrorism-affected areas committed serious abuses, including killings and torture of armed forces personnel, police, government officials, and civilians; kidnapping; and the recruitment and use of child soldiers". Stated in the executive summary of the report.

Human Rights Watch has stated that the Indian government's policies and actions target Muslims, and opponents of Modi claim that since his Hindu nationalist ruling party came to power in 2014, it has encouraged religious polarization.

On Israel

The yearly study criticized Israel's adherence to civil liberties, limitations on Palestinians, and examinations of security force abuses, saying that there have been "many claims that the government or its agents conducted arbitrary or unlawful executions." The report notably includes allegations related to the 2022 killing of the Palestinian-American Al Jazeera journalist Shireen Abu Akleh.

Israel is mentioned in the study as a country that has significant restrictions on the right to peaceful assembly and association and "generally respected these rights except for Palestinian residents of Jerusalem, for whom the government limited and restricted freedoms of peaceful assembly and association," citing complaints of excessive use of force by the police throughout different protests, funerals, and demonstrations throughout the year.



How the London Police Department is homophobic, racist, and misogynistic

The investigation discovered that the management of the force, not its size, is what is at the root of all of this



By Mahnur Mehruz

After the conclusion of an independent investigation that revealed the capital's police force is rife with racism, misogyny, and homophobia, human rights organisations in the United Kingdom are calling for change.

Louise Casey, a social welfare official for the British government, conducted the 363-page review after serving police officer Wayne Couzens kidnapped, raped, and killed Sarah Everard in 2021. The report released on Tuesday warned that the Metropolitan Police Service, which has more than 34,000 officers and is the largest police force in Britain, must "transform itself" or risk dissolution.

"It is not the responsibility of the general populace to protect itself against the police. Louise Casey, a specialist in victim's rights and social welfare who oversaw the evaluation, stated that it is the responsibility of the police to keep the general public safe. To achieve that, "far too many Londoners have now lost faith in the police."

Following a string of scandals regarding the Metropolitan Police's treatment of women

and minorities, the findings increase calls for a significant overhaul of the agency. The assessment discovered that the department has a culture of denial, with executives adopting a "we know best" mentality that causes them to ignore outside critics. Budget reductions and the choice to shut down neighbourhood police stations—effectively ending community policing—also play a role in the predicament.

The investigation discovered that the management of the force, not its size, is what is at the root of all of this.

According to the research, "The Met is operated as a collection of disjointed and conflicting movable elements, lacking clear methods, goals, or strategies." It is supported by a number of haphazard and transient activities that are active but ineffective. A serving officer sexually assaulted and killed Sarah Everard, a young marketing executive, as she walked home from a friend's house in March 2021, sparking a national outcry as women shared their experiences of being threatened or attacked when walking alone. This led to the Casey review, which was ordered as a result.

Police dispersed the crowd of hundreds who had assembled at Clapham Common in south London to call attention to the violence that women endure on a daily basis, claiming that their presence violated the COVID-19 lockdown regulations. To the gasps and protests of bystanders, a video that was shared on social media showed male officers catching hold of several women and dragging them away in handcuffs. In December 2021, two officers who had been sent to guard the scene where two black women had been killed were imprisoned for photographing and sharing images of the women's bodies. After admitting guilt to 48 rapes and several other heinous crimes perpetrated over a 17-year period, another officer was eventually given a life sentence.

In addition, the Met was charged with homophobia for failing to apprehend serial killer Stephen Port, who killed four young males over the course of 15 months between 2014 and 2015. According to a damning independent study of Britain's largest force revealed on Tuesday, London's Metropolitan Police is still likely

to be hiring rapists and murderers and has a history of institutionalised racism, sexism, and homophobia.

The bodies of the victims, all gay men in their 20s whose homes were discovered nearby in east London, were not first connected by detectives. The report was ordered after Sarah Everard, a London lady, was abducted, raped, and killed by serving Metropolitan Police officer Wayne Couzens two years ago. Louise Casey, a government official, wrote the report. The horrifying acts, according to Casey, were committed in a setting marked by "deep-seated homophobia" and predatory behaviour, where female employees and officers "routinely experience sexism and misogyny." She claimed that although violence against women and girls has not been taken seriously enough by the predominantly white and male police, officers from minority groups experience pervasive bullying.

A Sikh said a coworker "thought it was hilarious" to trim his beard; a Muslim cop found bacon left in boots inside a locker; and sex objects were put in coffee mugs as practical jokes. In the foreword of her damning 363-page study, Casey declared, "I make a finding of institutional racism, sexism, and homophobia in the Met," adding that the organisation "needs to alter itself."

"The police's responsibility is to keep the general public secure. To achieve that, she wrote, "far too many Londoners have since lost faith in law enforcement, she wrote. Over 25 years have passed since the Macpherson Report's findings that the



Metropolitan Police Department was institutionally racist and made a number of reform recommendations after looking at shortcomings following the murder of black teenager Stephen Lawrence in 1993.

She later learned that institutional prejudice is "tolerated," with complaints "likely to be directed against black, Asian, and ethnic minority officers" after a quarter century.

There needs to be a change in culture and leadership, according to Prime Minister Rishi Sunak, who described what has been happening inside the Met as "just terrible and intolerable."

In the foreword of her damning 363-page study, Casey declared, "I make a finding of institutional racism, sexism, and homophobia in the Met," adding that the organisation "needs to alter itself." Furthermore, female police officers and workers frequently experience

discrimination and misogyny. The Met has not shielded its female workers or members of the public from police who abuse their positions for sex or who commit domestic violence.

"Even though the Met claims that violence against women and girls is a priority, it is not given the same attention as serious violence. This has resulted in it not being treated as seriously in terms of resources and prioritisation in practise.

According to the research, the Met has "systemic and basic issues in how it is administered," and its size is not the issue; rather, it is "inadequate management."

Since then, several other Met scandals have surfaced, and another officer, David Carrick, has also been sentenced to life in prison for numerous rapes and sexual assaults that occurred over a 20-year period.



From Pakistan to Pinnacle: Exploring the Journey of Scotland's Trailblazing Leader, Humza Yousaf

Hamza Yousaf may serve as the bridge between Pakistan and Scotland

By Arsim Tariq

Humza Yousaf, a Scottish politician of Pakistani origin, has been named as the next leader of the Scottish National Party (SNP). Yousaf narrowly won the leadership race over Kate Forbes and Ash Regan and will replace Nicola Sturgeon as the first minister of Scotland. Yousaf's rise to prominence marks a significant milestone in the UK's political landscape, showcasing its growing diversity and inclusivity.

Born in Glasgow in 1985, Yousaf is the son of Pakistani immigrants who settled in Scotland in the 1960s. He attended the University of Glasgow, where he studied politics and graduated with honours. Yousaf's political career began in 2011 when he was elected as a member of the Scottish Parliament (MSP) for Glasgow at the age of 25, making him the youngest MSP at the time.

Throughout his political career, Yousaf has been a strong advocate for social justice, equality, and human rights. He championed numerous progressive policies and initiatives, such as increasing funding for mental health services, promoting renewable energy and public transportation, and supporting refugees and asylum seekers. In 2012, he played a critical role in the successful passage of the Marriage and Civil Partnership (Scotland) Act, which legalised same-sex marriage in Scotland.

As a British Pakistani, Yousaf's rise in the SNP is not only a testament to his political acumen but also an example of the UK's growing diversity and inclusivity. Yousaf's success serves as an inspiration to other minority communities in the UK.

Yousaf's grandfather, Abdul Ghani, was a prominent freedom fighter during the Pakistan Movement, which ultimately led to the creation of Pakistan as an independent nation in 1947. Yousaf's political inclinations could be traced back to his grandfather's commitment to social justice and equality. Yousaf fluent in Urdu, the



national language of Pakistan, regularly used the language to engage with the Pakistani community in Scotland, fostering a sense of unity and belonging.

Yousaf consistently advocated for strong ties between Scotland and Pakistan, both economically and culturally. Under his leadership, Scotland and Pakistan signed a memorandum of understanding to boost collaboration in the fields of education, health, and renewable energy. Yousaf had also been an advocate for the rights of the Pakistani diaspora in the UK, fighting against discrimination and prejudice faced by minority communities.

Yousaf's potential leadership could signal a new era of inclusivity and diversity within the SNP and the broader UK political landscape. His potential leadership could also lead to stronger ties with ethnic minority communities and further promote social justice and equality.

As a British Pakistani, Yousaf might bring a

unique perspective and understanding of the region, which could result in a more collaborative and nuanced approach to foreign relations. Yousaf was an avid cricket fan and a keen supporter of the Pakistani cricket team. He often shared his enthusiasm for the sport on social media and attended cricket matches between Pakistan and other countries, showcasing his love for the game and his ancestral homeland.

Yousaf's succession of Nicola Sturgeon as the leader of the SNP could signal a new era of inclusivity and diversity within the party and the broader UK political landscape.

Yousaf's potential leadership could also lead to stronger ties with ethnic minority communities and further promote social justice and equality. Yousaf's potential leadership could also impact the UK's foreign policy, especially regarding relations with Pakistan and other South Asian countries.

Travel agents scamming students with fake visa documents: a growing problem

By Pavan Manzoor

Many students find travelling abroad to study an exciting opportunity. However, the rising number of students choosing to study overseas has also increased the demand for visa documents. Regrettably, this has resulted in a surge of fraudulent travel agents scamming students by providing them with forged visa documents. This growing problem has been highlighted by recent reports, which indicate that fake visa documents have led to over 700 students being at risk of deportation from Canada.

Why do students fall victim to these scams?

Fraudulent travel agents often entice students with the promise of a hassle-free visa process at a lower cost. As students are already burdened with academic and financial obligations, they often succumb to the temptation of these deceitful agents. Since they are unable to verify the authenticity of the documents provided by the agents, they unknowingly end up submitting fake documents to immigration authorities.

What are the consequences of submitting fake documents?

Submitting fake documents is a grave offence, and it can lead to severe consequences. Students who submit fraudulent documents may be subjected to deportation, fines, and even a permanent ban on entering the country. Such outcomes can have a significant impact on their academic and professional aspirations.

How can students protect themselves?

To safeguard themselves, the initial step for students is to conduct thorough research on travel agents or agencies. Before entrusting them with the visa process, it's crucial to authenticate their credentials and reputation. Students should be cautious of agents who pledge to obtain visas at a lower cost or shorter processing time than the standard. It's always preferable to choose authorized and reputable travel agents with a good track record.

Another crucial step is to verify the genuineness of the documents provided by the agent. Students can do this by cross-checking the details with the immigration authorities or embassy. Any uncertainties or discrepancies should be cleared up before submitting the documents.

Over alleged fake visa papers, 700 Indian students face deportation from Canada

Canadian authorities have uncovered that more than 700 Indian students are at risk of deportation as their "admission offer letters" to educational institutions were discovered to be



fake. The Canadian Border Security Agency (CBSA) recently issued deportation letters to these students.

Reports suggest that Brijesh Mishra, who is based in Jalandhar, headed Education Migration Services, through which these students had applied for study visas.

Mishra allegedly charged each student over Rs 16 lakh to cover all expenses, including admission fees to premier institute Humber College but excluding air tickets and security deposits.

These students travelled to Canada for study purposes between 2018 and 2019. The fraud was exposed when these students applied for permanent residency in Canada, and immigration officials scrutinized their admission offer letters. The Canadian Border Services Agency (CBSA) examined the documents that were used to issue visas and uncovered that the admission offer letters were falsified.

A consultant based in Jalandhar has been sending students to Canada for the past 10 years. The consultant explained that individuals involved in such fraudulent cases obtain forged offer letters from colleges and provide fake fee payment receipts to students who are seeking visas. Visas can only be issued after the student's fees have been deposited with the colleges. Additionally, the consultant stated that, in this particular case, colleges offered most of the student's admission letters to institutions they did not end up attending after they arrived in Canada.

The colleges either transferred the students to other institutions or requested that they defer their enrollment until a later semester, which differed from the one indicated in their visa application documents. Another consultant from Kapurthala confirmed this and added that there is a huge rush of Indian students to Canada, and some fraudulent agents are capitalizing on their desperation by conniving with Canada-based private colleges.

In conclusion, the increasing number of students falling victim to fraudulent travel agents is a concerning trend. Students need to be aware of the risks involved and take the necessary precautions to avoid such scams. It is always better to invest time and effort in finding a trustworthy and authorised travel agent rather than risking one's academic and professional aspirations by submitting fake documents.

Digital Divide and Infrastructure Gaps in India

The increasing digital divide between the Indian rural and urban population coupled with the lack of infrastructure poses serious challenges to its economic potential. With disruptive economic structures, India's economic struggle can have a ripple effect on the global economy.

By Amir Jahangir

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

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

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



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

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

India faces the greatest threat and risk on digital inequalities and lack of access to digital services to its society and citizens' classifications, with a fractured and unequal access to digital networks and technologies stemming from under investments, low digital skills, insufficient purchasing power, or government restrictions on technologies.

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

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

The digital divide in the access and

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

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

S&P Global has identified that infrastructure may be India's stumbling block, or if not done right, it could be the key to the country's failure for economic potential, making it difficult to sustain the largest population in the world by 2050, creating a global depression that can engulf major Indian allies on economic and political fronts.

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

The other destabilizing factor India faces is

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

India's ability to deal with its debt crisis can be a mammoth task in the coming years. Collapse or lack of social services and public infrastructure can create serious constraints. The recent COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the fault lines in India's health and social infrastructure, in a situation where transportation infrastructure capacity constraints continue to limit corporate performance and investments.



S&P Global has identified that infrastructure may be India's stumbling block, or if not done right, it could be the key to the country's failure for economic potential, making it difficult to sustain the largest population in the world by 2050, creating a global depression that can engulf major Indian allies on economic and political fronts.

The prolonged economic stagnation in India can also limit its public policy options. The increasing poverty challenge is creating social divide among the Hindu majority and others, including the

Muslims, Christians, and the Dalits, a silent minority that is increasingly capturing the socioeconomic space in the society, creating further rifts between the extremist Hindu intelligentsia and the growing Indian professionals.

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

Geopolitical contestation of resources both at regional and global levels is also an identified risk. Deployment of economic levers by global and regional powers to

decouple economic interactions can be a challenge between nations, restricting goods, knowledge, services, or technology with the intent of gaining geopolitical advantage and consolidating spheres of influence. India is thus on a confrontation path with China, Brazil and Russia in terms of competition in textile and information communications technologies, along with a race to dominate the Indian Ocean and the South China Sea region, which may have destabilizing consequences for the region.

Courtesy Hilal



23rd M

"Organise the people economically and politically, and I am sure they will be accepted."

Quaid e Azam

**GOVERNMENT
OF PAKISTAN**

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...nically, socially, educationally,
...e that you will be a power that
...ed by everybody. "

, 23rd March, 1940



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The History of Thatta: Exploring the Cultural and Heritage Hub of Sindh



Thatta, a city situated in the southern province of Sindh in Pakistan, holds a rich history that dates back to the ancient Indus Valley Civilization. The city was an important hub of Islamic art and architecture, as well as a bustling trading centre. Tourists from all over the world visit the city today to explore its cultural and historical significance. In this article, we will explore the fascinating history of Thatta, its culture, heritage, tourism, and food.

Ancient History

According to popular belief, Thatta Khan, a legendary figure, founded Thatta in the 14th century. Nonetheless, the city's history dates back even earlier to the ancient Indus Valley Civilization, which prospered in the region from 2600 BCE to 1900 BCE. Thatta was a significant trade and commerce centre during this period, and evidence of its commercial activities can still be found in the form of ancient coins and seals discovered in the area.

Islamic Art and Architecture

Thatta reached its cultural zenith during the 16th and 17th centuries when it was ruled by the Mughal Empire. During this period, the city became an important centre of Islamic art and architecture, with many magnificent structures being built. The most famous of these structures is the Shah Jahan Mosque, which was built in the 17th century during the reign of Emperor Shah Jahan. The mosque is known for its exquisite tilework and is considered to be one of the finest examples of Mughal architecture.

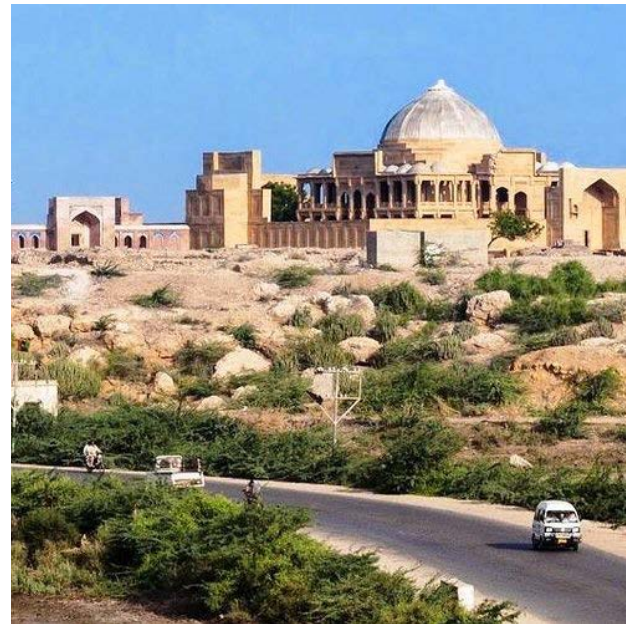
Culture and Heritage

Thatta is a city rich in culture and heritage, and this is reflected in its many festivals and traditions. One of the most famous festivals celebrated in the city is the Urs of Shah

Abdul Latif Bhittai, a Sufi poet and saint who lived in the 17th century. The Urs is a four-day festival that attracts thousands of devotees from all over the world. Other festivals celebrated in the city include the Makli Festival, which is held every year to celebrate the heritage of the Makli Necropolis, a UNESCO World Heritage site.

Tourism

Thatta is a popular tourist destination and attracts visitors from all over the world. The city is home to many historical sites, including the Shah Jahan Mosque, the Makli Necropolis, and the Keenjhar Lake, which is the largest freshwater lake in Pakistan. The city's rich cultural heritage is also reflected in its many museums and art galleries, which showcase the works of local artists and artisans.



Food

Thatta is known for its delicious food, which is a blend of the local Sindhi cuisine and the Mughlai cuisine. Some of the popular dishes include biryani, haleem, and kebabs. The city is also famous for its sweets, including laddus and barfi.

Conclusion

Thatta is a city steeped in history and culture, and its many monuments and festivals are a testament to its rich heritage. The city's Islamic art and architecture, along with its many museums and galleries, make it a popular destination for tourists. Whether you're interested in history, culture, or food, Thatta has something for everyone.

By Pavan Manzoor

The Qalandar Champion

Lahore Qalandar became the first team to win the trophy twice in a row



By Ali Abdullah

Multan Sultan, known as the team of oldies, qualified for their third straight final. Ever since Muhammad Rizwan took charge, his team has never failed to qualify for the finals.

The first playoff-stage match of Pakistan Super League Season 8 was played between Lahore Qalandars, and Multan Sultans. Multan Sultan won the toss and elected to bat first. While batting, Kieron Pollard scored the most for the Multan Sultans, and that is 57 runs on just 34 balls. The batting of Kieron Pollard included six sixes and a four, while he scored at a strike rate of 168. Kieron Pollard, for his same outstanding performance with the bat, won the 'energetic player of the match' as well as the 'player of the match' awards.

The captain, Muhammad Rizwan, contributed 33 runs on 29 balls; Usman Khan scored 29; and Tim David scored 22, and he remained not out. Overall, the Multan Sultans were able to score 160 runs for the loss of just five wickets in their innings.

For Lahore Qalandars, Haris Rauf took three wickets, while Zaman Khan and Rashid Khan took one wicket each. Shaheen Shah Afridi and David Wiese also bowled four overs, but they did not have any luck taking wickets.

As the Lahore Qalandars came to bat, it seemed the target of 161 would be very easy for them to chase. As previously, they had been on top of the points table in the previous stage of PSL 8. However, the whole team of Lahore Qalandars got out after scoring just 76 runs, which is not even half of the given target. No player from the Lahore Qalandars even

scored 20 runs. Sam Billings was the best scorer; he scored 19 runs on 27 balls. Haris Rauf scored 15, David Wiese scored 12, and eight other batters were not able to even enter double figures.

For Multan Sultans, Sheldon Cottrell took three wickets and Usama Mir took two. While Anwar Ali, Abbas Afridi, Ihsanullah, and Kieron Pollard took one wicket each. Hassan Talat was run out by Usman Khan.

On the other hand, Peshawar Zalmi was waiting for Lahore Qalandars in the second eliminator after they beat the mighty Islamabad United in the first eliminator. On March 17th, 2023, the second and last eliminator match of PSL 8 was played between the Lahore Qalandars and the Peshawar Zalmi. In this match, Lahore Qalandars eliminated Peshawar Zalmi from PSL 8 and moved on to the finals, where Multan Sultans were waiting for them for the final showdown. Peshawar Zalmi won the toss, and they elected to bat first today. While batting first from Peshawar Zalmi's side, Muhammad Haris scored 85 runs on 54 balls with the help of 11 fours and two sixes. It was a fantastic knock and the highest individual score of not just Peshawar Zalmi's innings, but both of them. Babar Azam also contributed 42 runs on 36 balls with the help of 7 boundaries. After him, Bhanuka Rajapaksa also scored 25 runs; other than that, no one else was able to enter double-digit scores. Overall, Peshawar Zalmi scored 171 runs for the loss of five wickets in their 20 overs.

While bowling from the Lahore Qalandars side, Zaman Khan and Rashid Khan took two wickets each. Shaheen



Shah Afridi also took one wicket. David Wiese, Harif Rauf, and Ahsan Hafeez were not able to take any wickets.

Lahore Qalandar's opener Mirza Baig scored the most, 54 runs on 42 balls, with the help of seven fours and two sixes. After him, the best score was from Sam Billings, who scored 28 runs on 21 balls with the help of three fours. He supported the run chase when the team desperately needed it. Sikandar Raza scored 23 valuable runs and remained unbeaten. Ahsan Raza scored 15 while Shaheen Shah Afridi scored 12 and remained not out.

Lahore Qalandars was able to chase the given target of 172 runs with 7 balls of the innings still remaining. So they won the match by four wickets. Mirza Baig was the man of the match for his 54-run contribution, which made the overall run chase possible for the Lahore Qalandars.



The Lahore Qalandars won the toss and elected to bat first. While batting first, they scored 200 runs, which was a great total on this Lahore pitch. As chasing the set target will be a record on this pitch, from Lahore Qalandars batting side, Abdullah Shafique scored 65 on 40 balls with eight fours and two sixes. Shaheen Shah Afridi scored 44 on just 15 deliveries with the help of 2 fours and 5 sixes.

Fakhar Zaman scored 39 on 34 balls with the help of four fours and a six. Mirza Baig scored 30 on 18 balls with the help of five fours and a six. Overall, Lahore Qalandars set the target of 201 runs while losing six wickets. A pretty difficult target for any team playing second on this pitch.

Coming to bat in the second innings, the pressure was already on the Multan Sultans. Lahore's bowling a huge target on board was never a combination any opponent team wanted. Rilee Rossouw scored 52 runs on 32 balls. Muhammad Rizwan scored 34 runs on 23 balls. Tim David scored 20 runs. Kieron Pollard is gone after scoring just 19 runs on 16 balls. Usman Khan, the opener, contributed 18 runs.



Near the end of the inning, Khushdil Shah contributed 25 runs on just 12 pitches, while Abbas Afridi scored 17 on just 6 pitches. The Multan Sultans almost levelled the score. On the last ball of the match, while running the third run to level the score, Khushdil Shah got out, so the Multan Sultans got one run short. The Lahore Qalandars won the final match by just one run.

From Lahore, Qalandars bowler Shaheen Shah Afridi took four wickets. Rashid Khan took two wickets while David Weise took one wicket.

With this victory, Lahore was crowned champions for the second time. Lahore Qalandar became the first team to win the trophy twice in a row.



Pakistan versus Afghanistan

The Men in Green dropped wickets at regular intervals after the opening one, giving Afghanistan momentum

After Australia cancelled their series against Afghanistan, the Afghanistan Cricket Board reached out to the Pakistan Cricket Board and requested a 3-match series against Pakistan in Sharjah. PCB agreed and planned a series right after PSL in March.

The team was announced a few days before the series. Many experienced and main players like skipper Babar Azam, Muhammad Rizwan, Haris Rauf, Shaheen Shah Afridi, and Fakhar Zaman were given rest. PCB Chairman Najam Sethi said, "The Afghanistan series is the training ground to test our youngsters. I am not worried about winning or losing to Afghanistan—if we find a few talented youngsters, it will serve the purpose. The series is largely about bleeding our new talent and developing them." Quite a few players made their debuts, and a couple made comebacks after their brilliant performances in the HBL Pakistan Super League. Saim Ayub, Zaman Khan, Ihsanullah, and Tayyab Tahir made their debuts, while Imad Wasim, Faheem Ashraf, and Abdullah Shafiq found themselves back in the team.

In the first T20I encounter of the three-match series, Afghanistan made history by defeating Pakistan for the first time ever. Pakistan scored 92 runs while batting first, and the hosts won the match by a score of six wickets in the 18th over. Mohammad Nabi's undefeated 38-run knock earned him the title of player of the game. When Pakistan's new, young team limped to 92/9 in 20 overs, they experienced a spectacular collapse. The visitors, who chose to bat first, lost their first wicket in the third over when Saim Ayub was bowled out for 17.

The Men in Green dropped wickets at regular intervals after the opening one, giving Afghanistan momentum. The best bowler for the hosts was Mujeeb Ur Rahman, whose 4-over stretch of 2/9 destroyed Pakistan's batting backbone. The best players available had been chosen, according to Naseeb Khan, chief executive of the Afghanistan Cricket Board (ACB).



The team also includes former captain Mohammad Nabi, who resigned following the Twenty20 World Cup in November.

In the second T20I, the Pakistan Cricket Team chose to bat first after winning the toss. Pakistan's team struggled to get going when it came to batting first. Saim Ayub, the opener, faced two balls before leaving the pavilion without settling the score. Following this, Mohammad Haris was easily removed despite having scored 15 runs off of nine balls. Abdullah Shafiq also left without scoring and went back to the pavilion. Tayyab Tahir scored 12 runs in 23 balls after this. On the team, Imad Wasim scored the most runs. He faced 57 balls for an undefeated 64 that included three fours and two sixes. Shadab Khan added 32 runs to his total. On the other hand, Farooqi took 2 wickets from the Afghanistan team, while Naveen-ul-Haq, Rashid Khan, and Karim Janat took 1 wicket each.

The 131-run mark was chased down by the Afghanistan Cricket Team with tremendous success. Rahmanullah Gurbaz and Usman Ghani, the team's openers, had a 30-run partnership for the first wicket. After scoring seven runs in only nine balls, Ghani was struck out. After that, the team's innings were managed by Gurbaj and Ibrahim Zadran.

Although Zadran was removed for 38,

Gurbaj scored 44 from 49 balls. Najibullah Zadran also contributed at the same time, with an unbeaten 23 from 12 balls. Mohammad Nabi, who scored flawless 14 off nine balls, assisted him. With this win, Rashid Khan became the first Afghan captain to win a series against Pakistan.

In the final and third T20 international, Afghanistan won the toss and elected to bowl first. Afghanistan had already won the series, but for Pakistan, it was their last chance to not get whitewashed. After another early wicket of Muhammad Haris, it seemed as if Pakistan was going to lose this one too. Fortunately for Pakistan, Saim Ayub, Shadab Khan, and Iftikhar Ahmed stabilised the team and put a good total of 180+ on the board.

In the second innings, Afghanistan looked strong in the beginning, but after their first wicket, they couldn't really find gaps to score runs. Ihsanullah, Wasim, and skipper Shadab Khan bowled brilliantly in the game.

The run rate started to increase after every ball, which created extra pressure on the Afghan side. In the end, Afghanistan were bowled out for 116. With this, Pakistan won by 66 runs, but Afghanistan won the series 2-1.

By Ali Abdullah

My Role is very different in Money Back Guarantee: Kiran Malik

Malik is a well-known fashion model who has modelled for A-list Pakistani and international brands

By **Kaukab Jahan**

Kiran Malik is a wonderful addition to our film industry. Her first venture, *Pinky Memsaab*, got high critical acclaim, while her role in *Zarrar* opposite superstar Shaan Shahid also gained the attention of viewers. She is back in films with *Money Back Guarantee* releasing this Eid ul Fitr. Kiran has also entered television dramas, as she loves to extend her acting skills to every medium. Besides acting, Malik is a well-known fashion model who has modelled for A-list Pakistani and international brands. Residing in Dubai, Kiran Malik is always ready to come to Pakistan for the sake of her passion. The Truth International talked to this beautiful lady about her current and future endeavours.

What is your role in the money-back guarantee?

I can't reveal much about her role in the film. It is a male-centric film, as the major characters of the film are mostly male. Viewers will see my role among them. So yes, I take my lead from there. As far as my role is concerned, I am representing a province. It is actually a very intelligently written character. The film is running on a very twisted angle, so if I tell you more, it will reveal the story and spoil the interest of viewers. So for now, that is all I can tell you.

Representing a province sounds like the job of a character actor. So where did you take your inspiration from?

Yes, it is. Actually, Faisal Qureshi was kind enough in all this. After casting me for that character, he also sat with me in script reading sessions. I am a Punjabi, so I needed more explanation for that particular character. Faisal even guided me all the way on sets. All the other cast members, including Mikhaal Zulfiqar and Gohar Rasheed, helped me a lot on shoots. I would like to especially mention Marhoom Ahmad Bilal in this regard. He is like a brother to me. So with the help of all of them, I reached somewhere. Let's see how people take it.

This is your third film after *Pinky Memsaab* and *Zarrar*. What are your hopes for MBG?

Both of my previous films were different from each other. MBG also has a different angle. I have never done a comedy role before. My friends even didn't correlate comedy with me. I am a very social person, but at the same time, I am a bit reserved as well. That is why I am so happy that I have done a comedy film. I believe we need a comedy film so badly in the current situation. In the scenario that Pakistan is going through presently, we must go and watch a soft comedy in the cinemas. And that is what MBG is bringing in.

You have only acted in films so far. So what about working on television dramas in the future?

I am already doing a drama serial under the production banner of Six Sigma Films. Saba Hameed is directing the play. My co-stars are Mikhaal Zulfiqar, Durr-e-Fishan Saleem,



and Javed Shaikh. We started shooting the serial in Karachi last October. So you will also see me on TV screens in the near future. Yes, this will be my first television project.

What is your character in the *Six Sigma* serial?

I am playing the sister of Mikhaal Zulfiqar. This character is very close to my heart. She is a very independent woman who runs the whole house and takes care of everything with her hands. The play would show the layers in the life of that character and the struggles she has gone through to reach that status. She is a depiction of all women who are continuously working hard to have their fair share in society.

So now you have explored both dramas and films. With whom do you connect more?

Film. The atmosphere and pace of the film are totally different, whether it is a big-budget or small indie project. I enjoy drama as well. This medium is more intimate and gets you closer to your character. So I would say film and drama are two entirely different ballgames. Here I would quote Shaan Shahid, who firmly believes that film stars should limit themselves to cinema screens and drama artists should not act continuously in films. Now I understand his point.

What would you opt for in the future? More films?

Definitely films, but if I am offered a good drama script, then I would do that as well.

Besides acting, you are also considered a style icon. So where does all this flair come from?

I am fond of styling myself, so I wear whatever I want. One of the reasons might be my habit of keeping an eye on fashion all over the world through magazines and other means. Another reason was my father, who was a very well-dressed man. He used to say that we clothe ourselves for others. It doesn't mean you have to wear expensive clothes all the time, but dress up correctly. As I saw it all in my house from the beginning, I guess I got most of my inspiration from my father.

Sar e Rah brings new stories

Media plays a key role in bringing positive change to society, says USAID Mission Director Reed Aeschliman

TTI Report

We attempted to bring the stories of society's unsung heroes to people through 'Sar e Rah (on the roadside)', Shehla Rizwan from USAID Outreach and Communication said.

A formal closing ceremony was held to mark the grand success of the recently televised project with the support of the United States Agency for International Development (USAID). A serial aired in collaboration between USAID and a private broadcaster in which the idealistic goals of development initiatives such as gender equality and women empowerment in Pakistan were beautifully presented.

"Media acts as an effective catalyst for social change," USAID/Pakistan Mission Director Reed Aeschliman said. "In all societies, media plays a vital role in building perceptions. It serves as a platform to educate, guide, and build better understanding."

Speaking at the closing ceremony, Shehla Rizwan, the executive producer of the serial, said, "The majority of the characters in this project are based on real people." Through this drama, the unsung heroes who have not only made their lives better with the support of USAID but also played their role to create a positive impact on society have been brought to the fore. The concept of this play is also given by Shehla Rizwan, USAID Outreach and Communication Head.

The objective of this drama is to produce an entertainment-focused series with strong intertwined messages from a behavior change communication aspect. It weaves the theme of gender equality and social inclusion through multiple sub-stories, representing different individuals, social classes, and demographics. Each story unwinds the struggles women and men face through their journeys of empowerment amid societal challenges.





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