

Fortnightly

The Truth International

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ABC Certified

Politics and Economy

On innovative thinking, no economic program, and no sanity

Inflation Touching Peaks

Unabated political and economic crisis grapple country

Sudan Civil War

War for supremacy made life unlivable in Sudan

Pakistan Heading to Nowhere



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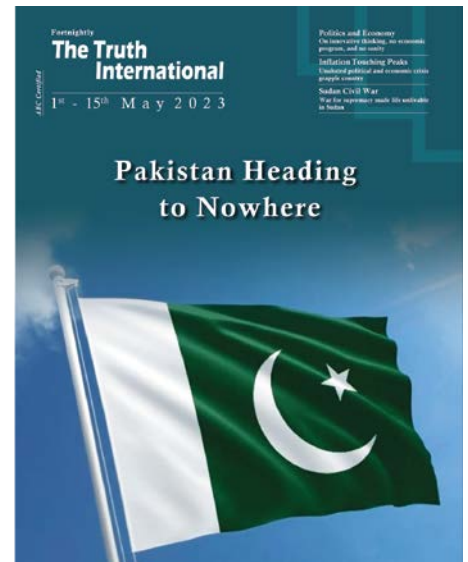


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Talking to the enemies

By Hammad Ghaznavi



Finally, the PDM government-PTI talks have begun, a development everyone has been suggesting for some time to bring the country out of prevailing constitutional, political and economic crisis. It is the first PTI-PDM formal meeting around the negotiating table in front of the cameras which is considered a major change in PTI chief Imran Khan's stance who hitherto refused to talk to the "thieves". It will be naïve, however, to pin huge hopes on the talks but the route selected is prudent as it will bring the political temperature down to some extent at least.

The timing of the Punjab elections and general elections forms the center of the negotiations, though there are reportedly other crucial matters involved including the fate of the pending cases against former Prime Minister Imran Khan and PTI legislators' return to the National Assembly. Apparently, deciding the election date, giving or taking a couple of months, doesn't seem impossible, especially considering PTI's fears that the government wants to push the elections to 2024. In this situation, the election date even in October should be acceptable to PTI. Insiders insist, the PTI wants one simple guarantee in the talks – Imran Khan will not be disqualified for the upcoming polls. This is the key question.

As for the election timing, PTI is comfortable to enter the electoral arena latest by September. Interestingly, PTI wants the elections during the tenures of

President Arif Alvi and Chief Justice Umer Ata Bandial, both due to retire by mid-September. Under the present setup, Imran Khan is convinced, if disqualified, he will get timely relief from the superior judiciary. The government on the other hand considers the present apex court blatantly tilted in favour of Imran Khan, and is desirous of pushing the elections after the CJ leaves office.

The ongoing parliament-Bandial tiff says a lot about the crumbling state structure, with both sides using all weapons available to them to conquer the 'enemy'. CJ Bandial and two other respected judges have given at least two election dates so far, the latest being May 14th. The government riding on the wings of parliament has passed at least two resolutions refusing to kowtow to the CJ. In such previous combats, the courts have been bulldozing the parliaments and the prime ministers but this time, with the Establishment not backing the Supreme Court, the CJ is cautious. Actually, both sides have shown some restraint; no attempt so far has been made by parliament or the CJ to decimate the opponent, as once the Pandora's Box is opened, things don't necessarily go as planned.

Meanwhile, a couple of extremely damaging audios have been released by the 'hacker', allegedly questioning the impartiality of the judiciary. In one audio, former CJ Saqib Nisar is advising a senior, pro-PTI lawyer Khwaja Tariq Rahim how to implicate 'someone' in a

contempt of court case. The 'someone', many agree, is none other than Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif. The audio goes to show, the PDM believes, the architects of the hybrid system, especially from the judiciary, are still active to regain the 'paradise lost'. In another audio, the mother in law of the incumbent CJ is seething with anger against the present government and is praying for the Martial Law as a better option than the present setup. In yet another audio leak, Saqib Nisar's son seems to be selling PTI party tickets with a price tag of Rs 12 million. All three audios sound harming to the Bandial clan, further questioning the motives of the CJ and co. And when all audio leaks are targeting the same bunch, it's not difficult to conclude who is releasing these. Such are the disadvantages of parting ways with the spying agencies.

"Come what may, we will contain the CJ till his retirement. This time we will not go into elections without Nawaz Sharif, period. And it's not possible under a partisan judge," says a PML-N bigwig considered close to the three times PM. On the other hand, some apolitical elements do not want the PDM-PTI talks to meaningfully progress, hence, the raid on PTI president Pervaiz Elahi's home. What a pleasant surprise it will be, if, against all odds, the government-opposition talks succeed, at least partially, to bring back a semblance of stability to a rather wonky political situation.

Making the mare go

The Supreme Court is going into uncharted seas



By M A Niazi

The Supreme Court is used to having its orders obeyed. Lower courts are also used to this but can be reversed by a higher court. There is no higher court than the Supreme Court. Therefore, if a high court refuses bail to a criminal accused, the Supreme Court may grant him bail, and whereas the high court had adjudged that he stay in jail, he would walk out of court a free man. However, if the Supreme Court refuses him bail, no one can, except perhaps the President. That is why when the Supreme Court has confirmed a death sentence, a mercy petition by the convict is routinely made to the President, and is routinely refused.

Therefore, in the midst of the current battle, one sidelight must be the unease of their lordships at being defied. This may have meant that their lordships may have attempted something not been attempted, passing an order which cannot be implemented.

The three-member bench which heard the case of the KP and Punjab Assembly dissolution had refused to accept the ECP claim that it lacked the Rs 20 billion it had asked the Finance Ministry for, or the approximately 300,000 security personnel it needed. While

addressing the issue of funds, it came up with a solution that was potentially dangerous. It ordered the State Bank of Pakistan to take the money from the Federal Consolidated Fund and credit it to the ECP, under intimation to the Finance Ministry.

The State Bank is the government's bank, just as any commercial bank may be an individual's. Will the Supreme Court intervene in a bank's operations and order it to transfer funds from one person's account to another's? A harsh word to use for that would be theft, a milder expropriation.

The other alternative would have been for the Supreme Court to order State Bank to print the money. Then it might have had to supervise the necessary open market operation, or OMO, needed for the notes to be brought in circulation, again under intimation to the Finance Ministry. Again, the State Bank's client, the government, would have been a silent spectator to a transaction carried out in its name.

The government is not giving the ECP the money because it claims it agreed to the budget with the IMF and reappropriation that big needed parliamentary

passage. As a matter of fact, since the amount was not passed in the last Budget, the normal procedure would be for the Finance Ministry to instruct the State Bank appropriately, and to get the change passed as a grant in the supplementary budget, which is passed before the budget itself.

It should be noted that the supplementary budget does not involve raising new funds. That is done by Finance Bills after the Budget. It does involve raising the spending limit approved earlier. Where has the money come from? Maybe some other department has surrendered money, or maybe that department has foregone some expenditure that was approved. The Finance Ministry must approve that reappropriation.

The Supreme Court should pause and realize that power belongs to the people. True, half the National Assembly is empty, but that is because members resigned voluntarily. What remains of the National Assembly must be considered the repository of sovereignty. After all, the judiciary only exists because its members are recruited by a process that involves a Judicial Commission involving Parliament.

If, for example, a department decides to forbid the purchase of one newspaper, it would save a certain amount from the grant passed by the National Assembly for newspapers and periodicals. It might order another newspaper instead, so long as it remained within the budget. Similarly, it might choose not to replace a certain number of retiring officials because it wanted a new car for the Secretary. It could do so, but only after approval by the Finance Ministry. Here, a supplementary grant would have to be approved, because the money approved for someone's salary was being spent on a car.

The reappropriation ordered by the Supreme Court was to be approved as a supplementary grant. The issue is not just the money, but parliamentary approval. Once the money has been made available and spent, can Parliament disapprove? If it can't because there is a Supreme Court order, will such approval have any meaning? It has so disapproved, and the State Bank, breathing a sigh of relief, is out of it. It has made it clear that while it can sequester the funds, it can only transfer them if so instructed by the Finance Ministry.

The State Bank has complied with the Supreme Court's order but this does not mean elections will be held. It merely means that that excuse has been disposed of, though Parliament's rejection of the demand for a grant stops that. The money can still be surrendered if not spent. It now remains to be seen how the Court ensures security. The briefing by the DGs of ISI and MI has not solved the problem. It may have

complicated it, because of the unfortunate optics of meeting them in a chamber rather than in open court.

The Supreme Court is not just attacking Parliament's financial powers, it is also attacking its legislative power by making the Supreme Court (Procedures and Practices) Bill inoperative even before it receives or is deemed to receive presidential assent.

The division of powers is understood to mean that Parliament makes laws, and the Supreme Court and the High Court interpret them. Actually, the first interpretation is made by some faceless bureaucrat, and that is taken to a competent court by an aggrieved citizen. A petitioner thus has to show that he is aggrieved, and not wasting the court's time, by showing his locus standi. The right to a free judiciary is one shared by all citizens, the locus standi of the petitioners cannot be denied, but whether this extends to a bill that has not received assent, is another matter.

Admittedly, it has been noted that if the bill was to become law, then it would place restrictions on the Court. This shows an understanding that the restrictions on the Chief Justice are restrictions on the Court as a whole. This view has been agreed to by the CJP and seven of the judges of the Court. It is relevant that the eight-member bench constituted, included only one of the next three judges with legitimate expectancy of becoming chief justice. Whereas Mr Justice Faez Isa is the senior most puisne judge, and thus has the legitimate expectan-

cy of becoming Chief Justice, he will retire in October 2024, and Mr Justice Ejazul Ahsan will then become CJP. He will retire in August 2025, upon which Mr Justice Mansoor Ali Shah should succeed. Mr Justice Isa and Mr Justice Shah were not on the bench. If they were excluded as parties with an interest, then perhaps Chief Justice Bandial should not have been on the bench, nor anyone who might serve on the committee constituted by the Bill.

Paradoxically, this piece of legislation asks their lordships to be 'judges in their own cause', almost the way contempt petitions do. As the final interpreters, any grievances arising out of it would have to be settled by it. If some case sees all judges recusing themselves, is there a procedure whereby the Supreme Court can remand such a case to a high court? The fact that the question arises means it will be ground for appeal or review.

The Supreme Court should pause and realize that power belongs to the people. True, half the National Assembly is empty, but that is because members resigned voluntarily. What remains of the National Assembly must be considered the repository of sovereignty. After all, the judiciary only exists because its members are recruited by a process that involves a Judicial Commission involving Parliament.

It must also be remembered that the Supreme Court is a collection of men (and one woman) in late middle age. While they must expound the law and constitution, they must not pass orders with no hope of being obeyed.



Financial viability to define Pak strategic, FP options

Modern wars not fought on borrowed oil; Pakistan to repay \$77.5b from April 2023 till June 2026; India oriented adventurist security policy warrants an end

By Umer Farooq

The crisis the Pakistani state is facing could be described as an existential crisis, crisis of viability. The question now is whether under the existing political and economic structures, the Pakistani state is financially viable or not? Linked with the question of financial viability are the issues related to our strategic and foreign policy options that are available to the Pakistani state in the years ahead.

The world around us is changing fast. It, rather, would not be an exaggeration to suggest the world around us has already changed dramatically. In our neighbors two economic giants—China and India—have already emerged on the global scene.

Despite recent military tensions between these two giants, the massive scale of bilateral trade that defines China-India relations, we could ignore only at our own peril. India has become a major consumer of Saudi oil as its expanding industrial base and requirements of greatly expanding urban life makes it an energy thirsty nation.

The ability of our nation to produce military manpower and military know-how has been the defining feature of our strategic vision and our foreign policy. Modern military machines cannot be sustained by an economy, which doesn't have the capacity to make the state financially fully viable.

Our manufacturing capacity, our productivity and our level of technological advancement, all cast a doubt on our ability to sustain a modern military machine.

We import a major portion of oil consumed in our society from the Gulf and that too sometimes on deferred payment facilities offered by our friends in the Arab world. Let there be no doubt that modern wars are not fought on borrowed oil.



There is always an organic link between the level of technological advancement of the society and a modern military machine that a society can host and sustain. Our military almost completely depends on foreign technology to meet its technological needs and requirements.

The meagre amounts of weapons systems that we produce indigenously doesn't meet the requirements to sustain a modern military machine that could match the Indian military, which again is totally dependent on western military technology. It appears that recent military tensions in China-India relations have made Chinese leadership transfer state of the art weapon systems to Pakistan military during the last two years. But this could hardly provide a solid and permanent base for a robust foreign policy.

Our financial viability will define our strategic and foreign policy options in the months and years ahead. The Pakistani state's financial viability under existing economic structures will be severely tested in the next three years.

According to a recent report, Pakistan will have to repay \$77.5 billion from April 2023 till June 2026. With our

economic base hardly producing anything of tangible value for the international market, there is a strong possibility that the present financial crisis faced by the Pakistani government will not be the last one in the next three years.

With productivity at its lowest, exports negligible, ever dwindling foreign remittances and an ever-narrowing tax base, it appears impossible for the Pakistani state to manage its finances on its own in the next three years. The fear of default will hang like a sword of Damocles over our heads. According to the report mentioned above in the year 2024-25, Pakistan's debt servicing is likely to be around \$24.6 billion. In 2025-26, the debt servicing burden is likely to be at least \$23 billion.

Neither of Pakistan's major political parties have demonstrated any signs of innovative thinking, and there seems to be economic program on the horizon that could lead us out of this financial quagmire. In such a situation, we will be ever dependent on our friends and on their financial generosity to keep the Pakistani state afloat in these difficult times.

Pakistan doesn't have the required level of financial wherewithal to repay all the



loans that will mature in the next three years, “Over the last three years, Pakistan’s export earnings and remittances were a total of \$164 billion, compared to \$170 billion worth of imports of goods.

Over the next three years as well, imports are likely to be higher than the total dollar amount of exports and remittances, which will lead to a current account deficit requiring external financing. On the export side, the IMF had projected nearly \$36 billion exports for 2022-23. That has now been

the Pakistani military and security establishment could address at the moment, is the rise of new threats in Afghanistan that could potentially destabilize the whole region.

The ISIS is one such threat and there are many radical groups within the Taliban’s ranks that could part company with the parent organization to join hands with another franchise of international terror that projects itself as dealing in more radical terror ideologies. In a situation where the

In a situation where Pakistan’s economy will be under producing and will not be exporting any valuable amounts of products to the international market that could foot our import bills, our only option would be to sell to the international community the commodity that we are good at producing – an organized military force and organized military manpower.

Remember that the situation in Afghanistan presents a scenario where the international community—both the west, the Middle East and China, Russia and Iran—would be in need of a player that could act as a bulwark against rising tide of Sunni militancy in Afghanistan.

In such a situation, Prime Minister Shahbaz Sharif’s comment that the “new army chief’s” hectic diplomacy in Arab sheikhdoms ensured provision of much needed funds that are required to ward off a default against our international financial commitments, could only be described as cryptic.

This means Pakistani military leaders still have the leverage with the Arab sheikhdoms that could convince oil rich Arab countries to provide us with required funds. As they say in the economics discipline, “there are no free lunches,” the same applies in international politics and in the world of international security.

This would mean two things, that the Pakistani security establishment has either been showcasing its capability to generate military manpower and its military expertise to friendly countries, or there is a willingness among the Arab sheikhdoms to employ Pakistan military manpower in whatever form for internal security duties.

Two possible forms witnessed in recent years include Pakistani servicemen performing security duties in Qatar during the FIFA Football World Cup and second form is the way in which retired army personnel were hired by Bahrain government for internal security duties to ward off a Shia revolt in their tiny state.

The deployment of Pakistani units in Saudi Arabia was another form. Yet another form of this extra-territorial role for Pakistani troops or security agencies is the way countries like Russia, Iran and China are



revised with a new estimate of \$28-29 billion, partly due to the rising cost of business and economic dislocation resulting from the uncertainty in the country” reads a report of USIP.

Pakistani state would be completely dependent on friendly countries and international financial institutions for the repayment of loans in the years ahead. What exactly could the Pakistani state offer to its friends in return for earning their financial generosity? One thing is for sure, that the persistent financial crisis that the Pakistani state will face in the next three years has the potential to change the strategic shape of the Pakistani state.

How would we manage our anti-India streak in our strategic thinking, when even the closest of our allies have in the recent past publicly advised Pakistan to desist from any kind of adventurism in South Asia? But that doesn’t mean that Pakistan’s military will lose attraction for our foreign friends.

One immediate international concern that

redefinition of our strategic and military roles could become a necessity in the times of financial crunch, the reorientation of the military’s self-defined strategic and military roles is a real possibility.

Normally, in the times of such financial crises, apprehensions about Pakistan’s strategic weapons program start to manifest themselves in media reporting and political commentaries. A particular group of people start to express apprehensions, that in return for providing financial assistance, the Pakistani state would be forced to abandon the strategic weapons program. This is a very crude way of presenting the implications of our financial woes for our strategic situation in stark terms.

Even more crude will be the argument that nuclear weapons and ballistic missiles of a financially unviable state could pose a threat to the state itself and could hardly be considered a functional deterrence in the face of chaos and anarchy gripping society. My argument is a little subtler than these propagandist themes that have been forced upon this unfortunate nation over the years.



consulting with Pakistani military leaders on the issues relating to the rising tide of terrorism in Afghanistan.

There exists a formal arrangement for the Pakistani security apparatus to assist Afghan Taliban in their fight against ISIS-Khorasan with the assistance of regional intelligence agencies. However, nothing of this arrangement has been made public, except the fact that regional intelligence chiefs have met in recent months to coordinate their efforts in this regard. This is not a role that is being forced on the Pakistani state. These are roles that are coming Pakistan's way after Pakistani military leaders showcased their capability before the world.

We will have to rethink the way we have been handling our security and the issues relating to regional security. The luxury of having a primarily India oriented, adventurist security policy will have to be abandoned.

At the same time, the Pakistani military seemed to be getting ready for a more strategic role at the regional level in collaboration with the Chinese People's Liberation Army. Recent reports by a Washington based think-tank indicate that Chinese and Pakistani military are working towards a

framework where they could have joint military planning for regional security.

The United States Institute of Peace's report describes Pak-China military cooperation as a quasi-military alliance, with the Chinese intending to use the Pakistani coast as a toehold for their presence in the greater Indian Ocean. This, however, is a tricky business—the fact that this arrangement would not make Americans very happy is a foregone conclusion. This arrangement will also result in heightened military tensions in South Asia. This would also mean that the Pakistani state would be ready to put all its eggs in the Chinese basket.

If the present financial crisis and the way Pakistani financial wizards are trying to avert a default are any guide, the Chinese government is only footing part of the bill to meet our financial requirements. In case we put all our eggs in the Chinese basket, will China meet all our financial requirements? Interestingly, the major chunk of the loans which we have to pay back in the next three years come from Chinese financial institutions. But remember, there are no free lunches in international politics.

This financial crisis carries a potential to dramatically change the strategic shape of our state. What exactly is the Pakistani

state's initiative to reconnect with Washington's security establishment in such a situation, is not very difficult to judge. Perhaps they think that in this way they can engage in a delicate balancing act between two superpowers. Not at all an easy task, though.

Two implications of this financial crisis are crystal clear. First, we will have to rethink the way we have been handling our security and the issues relating to regional security. The luxury of having a primarily India oriented, adventurist security policy will have to be abandoned. We will have to rework our security thinking in the light of the whims and security perceptions of our financial saviors. Secondly, it will again be the military leaders who will give shape to this new security architecture.

They will be in the driving seat, while the political leadership keep themselves busy with trivial things in the circus of parliamentary politics such as elections, bench formations, evading arrests and filing bail applications in courts. History is witness to the tragedies that have been wrought on the Pakistani people when Pakistan's security leadership has been the only force giving direction to our strategic priorities. It seems that this history might repeat itself. What a pity.





Threat to constitution by democratic institutions

Everything obscure behind smokescreen; powers that be seem disinterested in handling threats to state fabric; defiance of court orders speaks volumes of govt intentions

By Tahir Niaz

We are currently facing a crisis of democracy in the country, and this is beyond any doubt and dispute. What is more concerning, however, is that at present the constitution is under threat not by anyone else but the democratic institutions.

The Supreme Court is 'persuading' the Pakistan Democratic Movement (PDM) government to hold general elections in Punjab and Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa after dissolution of the Provincial Assemblies; the 90-day deadline has already passed because "the government has no funds, no security, holding elections on different dates will have additional financial effects and that elections without the presence of security forces will become a risky affair".

Using a carrot and stick policy, the top court had asked all political parties to evolve a consensus on the date for holding simultaneous general elections of the National as well as four Provincial Assemblies on the same day, otherwise, the court noted, its order regarding the Punjab Assembly elections on May 14 would come into force. In the meantime, the Supreme Court also sought a progress report from the Election Commission of Pakistan regarding release of funds by the federal government for holding elections in the two provinces.

After having backtracked, initially from negotiations with PTI and even criticizing the apex court for asking politicians to sit together, the government has once again decided to sit with PTI on the poll-date issue. PTI on the other hand, believes the PML-N was busy creating smokescreen over talks. Addressing a press conference few days back, PTI leadership accused the ruling PML-N of creating a smokescreen about offering talks on elections in Punjab and Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa, saying the government's attitude was non-serious.

Chairman Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf Imran Khan nominated PTI Vice Chairman Shah



Mahmood Qureshi and Senior Vice President Fawad Chaudhry for holding talks with the government, so that political parties could find a way out of the political impasse.

There is still "zero progress" in connection with the government-PTI talks initiative, and the latter believes that no serious efforts have so far been made by the government to advance negotiations.

PTI also believes that PML-N was continuously making attempts to pressure the apex court as it pleads the Constitution was very clear that elections would be held within 90 days after dissolution of an Assembly. PTI also alleges that an 'assurance' was given to former premier and head of PML-N Nawaz Sharif in London that PTI would be 'crushed' before elections in the country.

At present, everything is obscure behind smokescreen; even the country's politics and subsequently its future. Let it be the country's politics, definition of democracy, cohesion among the state institutions, or the direction the country should move towards--nothing is clear and one cannot say anything on it in definite terms.

Political impasse on polls had started soon after the PTI government was ousted through a vote of no confidence in April 2022 but it intensified after Khan's party dissolved Punjab and Khyber-Pakh

tunkhwa Assemblies in an attempt to pave the way for snap elections. Until April last year, Pakistan was facing political and economic challenges, thanks to the PDM government that plunged the country into constitutional morass by refusing to hold the constitutionally-required polls.

Elections, as per the PDM leaders, used to be an accountability mechanism exercised by the masses at polling stations. These politicians used to hide behind the 'polls accountability' whenever a state accountability institution laid siege around them. It had been a common rhetoric that politicians' accountability lies with the masses. But at present, these very politicians have proved that neither public nor the state institutions have a mandate to hold them accountable, politically.

There is a growing consensus among Pakistanis that the main threat to democracy in the country may not come from 'outside' but from the very democratic institutions themselves. Pakistan is standing at a crossroads after 75 years of its distraught life when it has to make a very important decision: either to implement rule of law or promote the rule of 'might is right'. The powers that be also seem disinterested in handling the threats to the state fabric amid high tensions between the institutions and the political leadership. It seems that PDM government wants to keep



sticking to power under one excuse or the other.

One doesn't have to be an aerospace engineer to know what has been going on for the last three months. When the PDM constituent parties reached at peak of their defiance, some politicians demonstrated they could go even further by attacking the state institutions. Resolutions after resolutions with a clear agenda of sabotaging Supreme Court decision on polls and open defiance of the court orders speak volumes of the government's intentions.

From the outset, it was quite clear that PDM didn't want elections. But with the judicial machinery in motion, it was being hoped that the exercise at the top court forum would not let the country deviate from the constitution.

For now, politically, Pakistan is stuck in a Bermuda Triangle. Pakistan had been familiar with crisis but the present crisis is unprecedented. Even by the standards of Pakistan's perpetually unstable politics, the last three to four months in the country have been exceptionally stormy. Over the past few months, the country has experienced increasing political uncertainty. It seems as if the political leadership from both sides was readying to fight the last war with nothing on the dining table for the poor.

The tussle between the Shehbaz Sharif-led government and the PTI seems to be escalating further, and has doubled with the worst constitutional crisis in decades. Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf Chairman Imran



Khan fights dozens of legal cases after his ouster from the PM office. The government has undoubtedly attempted to browbeat him with registration of a plethora of cases against him. Khan is nominated in dozens of criminal cases at the moment.

The stalemate over early elections still continues. Under the constitution, elections for the two Provincial Assemblies are to be held within 90 days of their dissolution. But the Election Commission of Pakistan refused to accommodate this deadline after the government said it has no funds and the military said they were unable to provide security for polls in Punjab.

With an ugly infighting within and among the state institutions, the society has also become deeply divided. If bad things continue unfolding the same way in future, clashes between the state institutions will escalate.

Pakistan is in a whirlpool of mess with no good in sight. Political catastrophe led to economic instability. Politicians seem ignorant of the fact that the only way forward is free and fair elections in the country. On the other hand, the Supreme Court wants to restore constitutional order and is facing resistance from the ruling alliance. The crisis has left people scrambling to secure basic food items with the value of the rupee plunging continuously.

Meanwhile, a common Pakistani is dealing with spinbreaking inflation, 46% on an annual level. The only way out is elections, which are to be held sometime later this year and these elections must be free, fair and transparent. And one thing is quite clear that until the smokescreen dissolves to show the real forces behind the mess, good cannot be hoped.





Till the rising of the court!

PTI foresee Shahbaz packing, PDM playing smart; Saqib Nisar audio leak suggests PTI contempt of court case planning against PM

By Sarfraz Raja

Both sides are expressing their commitment to upholding Constitution. It's the government vs the Supreme Court, parliament vs judiciary; and constitutional tug of war continues between two major pillars of the state for the last several weeks. The apex court had shown its commitment to implement its order of general elections in Punjab on the 14th of May while the government through parliament had rejected the order of the three-member bench, pleading for elections throughout the country on the same date. It's a standoff between the apex court and the top legislative body of the country. The question of what could be the drop scene warrants some serious concerns and speculations.

Election controversy

Politicians are often blamed for taking their troubles to court, but this time it was the court that indulged in this controversial political issue. After the dissolution of Punjab and Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa Assemblies in mid-January this year, elections for these Assemblies were to be held within 90 days, that is before mid-April.

As per law, governors of relevant provinces give a date for elections in their respective provinces while the Election Commission of Pakistan issues a mandatory schedule for these elections accordingly. Both the Provincial Assemblies were dissolved within a few days but situations in both provinces were different. Punjab Governor Balighur Rehman of PML-N had refused to sign the summary of the dissolution of the Provincial Assembly sent to him through the chief minister's office.

The governor's take was that dissolution is an undemocratic process so he doesn't want to be its part and he also denied announcing any date for elections contending 'he was not part of this process in any way.'

On the other hand, Governor KPK Ghulam Ali Khan immediately after



receiving the dissolution summary signed it, but he also didn't announce a date for elections pleading the security situation in the province was not appropriate for elections.

During that time a Supreme Court bench that was hearing a case of transfer of the Lahore police chief suddenly sent a request to the chief justice of Pakistan to take suo moto against delay in elections in these provinces, and the CJP constituted a nine members' bench to hear the case. This was the case that opened up a clear divide among judges of the apex court.

Two judges recused after objections from the government lawyers while the remaining seven members' decision is still a controversy-- whether it is a 3/2 decision or 4/3. But in its verdict, the SC directed ECP to announce the schedule for elections after getting a date from the president for Punjab and KP governor for his province.

Initially, a schedule was announced for polling day on April 30 in Punjab but later the Election Commission postponed the elections till Oct 8 after consultation and feedback from the relevant government ministries.

The Supreme Court again got involved and directed ECP to implement its order with a new date of 14th May as the polling date. The SC also directed the State Bank to issue grants of Rs 21 billion to the ECP for elections expenses. This decision again turned the already tense environment more

heated and brought the two institutions to face to face.

Political, constitutional & legal battle

The Constitution of Pakistan describes the timeframe for elections in case of dissolution of the Assembly which is 90 days, but there is silence in case one Assembly is dissolved while others stand intact.

Supreme Court issued its orders based on the constitutional requirement of elections within 90 days but the government and all other political parties think in case of early elections in any of the provinces, the results of other elections would become controversial and the government in that specific province could influence elections for National Assembly besides doubling financial burden.

Imran Khan and his PTI is the only major political party which is supporting early elections while all other parties are advocating elections on one date and day. After the Supreme Court's orders to implement its decision and provide funds to the ECP, the government took the matter to Parliament for approval to release funds. Parliament after deliberations in the committee, rejected the bill and finances couldn't be released for elections in Punjab.

On the other hand, security agencies through the Ministry of Defense also presented their stance on the security



situation in the country in an in-camera briefing to the three-member bench in CJP's chamber, but SC still upheld its order asking all political parties if they could agree on the same-day election, the court could withdraw its decision, otherwise, all will remain as it is.

Though there wasn't a hint of formal negotiations between PDM and PTI earlier after the SC directions, some willingness was expressed from both sides. PDM apparently was divided on the subject as PPP favored dialogue and JUI opposed it strongly.

Jamat-e-Islami tried to play a mediator to facilitate talks. Ameer Jamat Sirajul Haq held separate meetings with the PM and Imran Khan. Although the JI chief is hopeful about dialogue it seems there is some serious trust deficit between PTI and PDM, as both sides are not ready to step back from their stances and are not ready to trust each other. PTI leaders call it a 'delaying tactic' on the part of the PDM government.

Noncompliance with SC order

PTI hopes if the government doesn't implement the SC order, the prime minister could be disqualified in a contempt of court case. On the other hand, the government while accessing any such possibility, is playing smart.

Until now, the government took every step regarding the SC verdict with the approval of the cabinet and parliament. After a three-member bench decision to hold elections on the 14th of May in Punjab, the National Assembly in a resolution rejected this verdict calling it a minority decision and asking the prime minister not to implement it.

After the disqualification of its prime minister in AJK in a contempt of court case last month, PTI is eyeing such a top-level dismissal in Islamabad as well. In a purported audio leak containing a conversation between former chief justice Saqib Nisaar and one of PTI's top lawyers Khawaja Tariq Rahim, it seems PTI is also planning to pursue a contempt case against Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif.

Disqualification of a head of government through courts is not a new phenomenon in Pakistan. None of Pakistan's premiers was able to complete its five-year term. In the last two decades, the country has seen 12 prime ministers including three caretakers and two of the nine elected prime ministers, sent packing by the apex court.

Yousaf Raza Gillani was the longest-serving prime minister of the country in a single tenure with 4 years and about three months in office. He was trailed for not writing a letter to the Swiss government in a case against the then president and PP Parliamentarians head, Asif Ali Zardari.



In contempt of court, Yousaf Raza Gillani was given a sentence 'till the rising of the court'; and this less than one-minute sentence put him not only out of Prime Minister House but also from politics for the next five years.

The three-time prime minister of the country, Nawaz Sharif was the second head of the government ousted by the court but that was a different case than that of Gillani. Nawaz Sharif, who was trailed in the famous 'Panama Leaks' case and disqualified for a lifetime under Article 63 of the Constitution for not declaring his assets submitted to the ECP as he didn't mention details of his payable salary from his son's company in UAE.

PTI anticipates the disqualification of Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif if the Supreme Court's decision about elections in Punjab is not implemented in letter and spirit like in the case against Yousaf Raza

Gillani. On the other hand, parties in the government firmly stand behind PM Shehbaz in this scenario.

Government spokesmen say the incumbent prime minister has the backing of the cabinet and parliament vis-à-vis his decisions; and if there is any element of contempt in the court's view, it would be against the entire cabinet and parliament.

On other hand, parliament also debated the issue in a heated discourse, and on the recommendation of MPs, the NA speaker wrote a letter to the CJP and other judges of the SC, not to interfere in parliament's jurisdiction.

Independent political commentators opine it wouldn't be easy this time. Any contempt proceedings against the prime minister would be challenging as all political parties except PTI stand behind the PM. It would be clearly a 'parliament vs Supreme Court' scenario.

In addition, due to open division among judges, the apex court would be in a weaker position to go with an aggressive decision against the head of government. And despite all that if PDM premier is disqualified by the court, the ruling alliance, especially PML-N would be its beneficiary.

PML-N would exploit the situation to its advantage and would have an opportunity to get back part of its popularity lost during the last 12 months. Securing public sentiments by being a political martyr also tempts PML-N to play on the front foot in this crisis situation.



Are we heading towards civil war?

Parliament-judiciary collision to leave us nowhere; country faced with trust deficit between masses, establishment

By S Zeeshan A Shah

Pakistan, for the last many years, has witnessed turbulent times; embroiled with challenges like accountability, corruption overpopulation, pollution, inflation, nepotism etc. But such challenges equally existed across the globe too. What distinguishes Pakistan right now is the dire threat to the Pakistani nation, in view of the worsening constitutional crisis, leading the nation to a kind of civil war, economic collapse and social unrest.

The situation today is quite fluid as collision between the country's parliament, executive and the judiciary is escalating with former two uniting against the latter.

It all started a year ago. This time last year, the country was moving forward on a progressive trajectory at 6 % GDP growth, despite COVID-19 where the nation attained significant credibility as one of the best resilient nations during the pandemic. The country gained significant traction with the West including excellent diplomatic ties, as well as with the eastern countries.

As things were progressing in very pertinent direction, a big political setback hit Pakistan terribly, when an elected government was overturned by a hostile takeover, resulting in political instability and uprising across the country, that continues to this day.

Such a political quagmire was in fact a major blow to the Pakistani masses and the establishment. People of Pakistan lost credible leadership, resulting in economic and social crisis within the country, while the establishment lost its moral and ethical writ over the masses, causing a major trust deficit hardly seen in recent history.

Parallel to economic and political mess, another perilous and ugly clash is taking place between judiciary and parliament.

As Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) strives for free and fair elections in Punjab and Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa, the ruling alliance is bent upon delaying them at any cost. The country's battered economy combined with record-high inflation has led to further pressure on the currency, affecting our capacity to salvage the country out of this crisis.

Furthermore, last year's flood and epidemic caused a climate-induced health emergency across the country, resulting in severe public outcry against coalition government. Article 19 of the Constitution specifies that the right to freedom of expression and free speech is a right given to every citizen of the state. But situation suggests brutal curtailment of this right.

There is a kind of clandestine civil disobedience movement in the country being showcased by the media. Prices of goods and services have skyrocketed in recent months, ordinary man is being hard pressed by unprecedented poverty and stress. In addition to that, food insecurity and water scarcity have become yet another grave challenge.



Signs of civil unrest could be traced back to PTI rule, when it failed to honour lots of its commitments made to the public. Following the suit, the PDM government also failed to fulfil its promise to make lives of commoners better. Though PTI govt had succeeded in implementing economic and public policy reforms but failed to replicate those policy measures across the country. On the other hand, whatever it had achieved has been ruined by the present government.

The biggest setback for the country has been witnessed in parliament, that passed multiple resolutions against the Supreme Court verdict regarding date for the election slated for May 14. This has created a bigger rift between the parliament and judiciary, while the executive suffered from indecision.

In order to solidify the nation, the executive needs to feel the pulse of the nation in order to realize what the people want. Failure to realise public sentiments today may lead to bigger chaos tomorrow, as masses of Pakistan want elections to be held as per scheduled.

Justice may have had been delayed in this country in past but justice denied to the masses today will be catastrophic for the government. Politics of hate takes away credibility and logic and leaves us unstable--struggling to survive. No one would gain anything by jeopardising the system; the government needs to work towards stability by enabling a system of transparency where all political parties can run for elections. Playing Russian roulette with the judiciary would yield horrific results.

A foreseeable massive civil unrest in the country could weaken all state institutions.

It is now up to the establishment to take stock of the situation and play its role in national interest; and should mediate between the judiciary and the parliament. Going to polls is the need of the hour; power must be handed over to the people of Pakistan. Any untoward situation and civil war would only benefit the enemy.



Pakistan's political turmoil reaches dead end: Senator Mushahid

In an exclusive interview with TTI, Senator Mushahid Hussain Syed says parliament lacks vital discourse, MPs resorting to abusive language, mudslinging

By Ashraf Malkham

The current state of Pakistan's politics has reached a dead end, critical issues of national significance ie terrorism, economic crisis, conflicts among institutions and absence of constructive dialogue are left behind, says Mushahid Hussain Syed, a renowned analyst and chairman Senate standing committee on defence, in an exclusive interview with The Truth International.

Asked if parliament was effectively contributing towards 'calming' the present disorderly political situation, Mushahid said the legislative body was not playing any effective role; there is lack of discussion in parliament and instead, lawmakers were resorting to using abusive language, mudslinging and accusing each other.

The senator showed a sense of disappointment and fear that is pervasive among Pakistanis about what the future holds. "All three entities of the state, namely the judiciary, politicians and establishment were responsible for the crises being faced by the country."

To a question that some people were drawing a comparison between the current situation and that of 1970 when there was a similar rhetoric about peace but the ground reality was far from it, Mushahid said that the circumstances today were worse than those of the 1970s. "In 1971, there was clear interference by India, and the election results were not accepted, which resulted in a clear and visible situation. However, the current situation is more dangerous because there is a clash between political powers and institutions, coupled with economic crisis and terrorism. These crises have never occurred simultaneously before."

"The way to get out of the current chaotic situation is shunning the impression that one party was strong enough to defeat the other. Instead, acknowledging that various groups possess different types of strength, such as political, military, legal, governmental, and popular support," Mushahid responded when asked what were the probable venues to get out of the present political fiasco.

Referring to the ongoing political tug of war, Senator Mushahid Hussain said that the first step towards addressing the situation is for the president of Pakistan, who is also a member of parliament, to initiate talks between the government and opposition. "Secondly, seeking help from influential world Muslim figures such as Saudi Crown Prince Muhammad bin Salman and Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan could be useful, as their authority and influence may hold sway over the situation, because people believe in the authority and influence of these individuals, which could help in resolving the situation."

Asked if by doing so, will we not be inviting them to meddle in our internal affairs and admitting that we have failed to find a solution

to our own crisis, Senator Mushahid emphasized the importance of finding a solution to the problem, 'even if it means seeking assistance from external sources.'

To a query about Chinese perspective on the current situation in Pakistan, Mushahid contended that China is Pakistan's strategic partner, best friend and stands in solidarity with the country.

Replying to a question about recent developments in the international arena, particularly the reconciliation between Saudi Arabia and Iran that took place in Beijing without the involvement of the United States, Mushahid responded by sharing his recent visit to China during which he heard the Chinese president remark on significant changes occurring in the world, unlike any witnessed in the past century. "While China is rising, the West is experiencing a decline," the senator said and added Saudi Arabia has distanced itself from America and aligned with China and Russia. "Reconciliation between Saudi Arabia and Iran was seen as a dream and a hope, but it has now materialized, with indications of investment and even an invitation extended to the Iranian president to visit Saudi Arabia. The news of Saudi Arabia's reconciliation with Iran and Russia has caused a stir in America."

Regarding competition between China and Russia despite sharing a similar ideology, Mushahid maintained that China was now aligned with Russia and Pakistan stands to benefit from this development as China is a close ally of Pakistan.

To another query pertaining to Afghanistan and spillover effects of the Afghan situation on Pakistan, Senator Mushahid opined that it seems the international community has abandoned Afghanistan to its fate, as they have been facing numerous restrictions. "The United States has frozen their (Afghanistan's) accounts and seized their money."

Asked what could be the solution to the current Afghan situation and what role Russia and China could play, and what message Pakistan could draw from this situation, Senator Mushahid said that China, Russia, Iran, Saudi Arabia and Pakistan must collaborate in their efforts to bring about peace in Afghanistan.

Referring to the formation of new international alliances, Pakistan's strategic location and its role, Mushahid Hussain replied that Pakistan benefits from its neighboring countries and it is important that it does not participate in any wars, maintaining good relations with the United States is crucial and Pakistan should not sever its ties with America.



Elections within 90 days

By Parvez Hassan

There is a real lack of focus and clarity in our national purpose today. The unique consensus on the constitutional requirement of elections within 90 days has, instead, been digressed to a debate on the suo motu jurisdiction of the Supreme Court under Article 184(3) of the Constitution, on the discretionary powers of the chief justice of Pakistan, on the appointment of benches by him, and whether the SC decision dated March 1, 2023, in *Suo Motu Case No. 1 of 2023* ('Suo motu regarding holding of general elections to the provincial assemblies of Punjab and KP') should be considered as a 3-2 or a 4-3 decision.

The original nine-member bench in this case was reduced by two recusals in the beginning and by further purported recusals and separate opinions of members of the bench. Each of these debatable areas has been a part of the national dialogue for some time but it is unacceptable that they hold hostage, today, the unequivocal requirement of holding elections in 90 days. There is a frenzy in the nation as seen in the media, seminars and op-eds each highlighting the disharmony based on legal hair-splitting. But while each is counting the trees, few see the forest.

The Constitution in its Article 224(2) provides: "When the National Assembly or a Provincial Assembly is dissolved, a general election to the Assembly shall be held within a period of ninety days after the dissolution, and the results of the election shall be declared not later than fourteen days after the conclusion of the polls."

The period of 90 days for holding elections of a dissolved assembly, on the dissolution by a governor, is reinforced by Article 105(3): "Where the Governor dissolves the Provincial Assembly ... he shall: (a) appoint a date, not later than ninety days from the date of dissolution, for the holding of a general election to the Assembly."

It is an accepted given that, in the trichotomy of separations of powers, the Constitution is interpreted by Pakistan's superior courts. It is the most fundamental principle of interpretation that the words in the



Constitution should be given their plain, natural or ordinary meaning. The judiciary has responded to this mandate by affirming, without exception, that the elections are required to be held within 90 days.

The Lahore High Court, through its judgment dated Feb 10, 2023, in '*Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf vs. Governor of Punjab*', was the first with this determination and ordered appropriate actions toward the required elections. This matter went in appeal before a division bench of the LHC when the SC took suo motu action to reaffirm this constitutional obligation. The detailed separate notes of four judges (Justices Yahya Afridi, Athar Minallah, Syed Mansoor Ali Shah and Jamal Khan Mandokhail), however, raised issues about the appropriateness of exercising suo motu jurisdiction, about the discretionary powers of the CJP in the governance of the SC, and about the number of judges that supported the final SC judgement of March 1, 2023.

Each SC judge, without exception, supported, expressly or tacitly, the 90 days' requirement.

Inaugurating the Conference on the Constitution of Pakistan at 50 at the Shaikh Ahmad Hassan School of Law, Lums, on March 17, 2023, in fact, a few days before the separate detailed opinions of Justices Shah and Mandokhail were released on

March 27, 2023, I had raised the issue of a more democratic and rule-based governance of the SC, but it remains mysteriously incomprehensible how the overarching provisions of the 90 days' election can be linked to the need for judicial reforms.

It is important that none of the judges disputed the obligation to hold elections within 90 days; in fact, each SC judge, without exception, supported, expressly or tacitly, the 90 days' requirement. Justice Athar Minallah is, in fact, compelling: "It is not disputed that the Lahore High Court has already allowed the petitions and rendered an authoritative judgement and its competence to have it implemented cannot be doubted ... The ... proceedings before this Court ... [is] likely to delay the enforcement of the judgement of the Lahore High Court, leading to an infringement of the Constitution."

It is also significant that none of the other judges made any adverse remarks about the LHC judgement which clearly directed the ECP "to ensure that the elections are held not later than ninety days as per the mandate of the Constitution".

Based on a contextual examination of the SC judgement and all the opinions of the judges related to it, it can be concluded that the court has unanimously interpreted



Article 224(2) to require elections within 90 days. But the government is openly defying the SC orders on elections on the grounds of the extraneous matters raised in the separate notes of some judges.

Another important aspect is being ignored. It is the duty of all citizens to obey and support all the constitutional provisions. It is nowhere required in the Constitution that its implementation is conditional on the SC's orders, or for that matter by any order of any court of Pakistan. The Constitution should best be considered as a "self-executing" document and all individuals, governments, agencies and institutions are expected to follow its provisions with automaticity and without recourse to any person or institution including the judiciary.

Of course, the judiciary steps in to interpret, when asked, but to conditionalise the implementation of each provision of the Constitution to an order of a court is to read into the Constitution what is not there.

From this understanding, it follows that the government's obligation to hold elections within 90 days is intrinsically embedded in the Constitution and the government is inappropriately seeking to avoid this obligation by reference to issues raised in the separate notes of the judges, however weighty, but not affecting or relevant to the



requirement of the elections within 90 days. The requirement of elections within 90 days would, undoubtedly, also effectively promote the well-recognised maxim, *salus populi est suprema lex* (welfare of the people is the supreme law).

The government's defiance is untenable, mala fide and mischievous. It is an imper-

missible attempt at self-perpetuation. The 'qabza group' is a familiar phrase used in matters dealing with real estate and the ruling alliance may have extended that to itself as becoming the qabza group in Pakistan's politics.

Courtesy Dawn

The Truth International

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Pak economy sinking amid unending crisis

Despite loans from China SBP foreign exchange reserves contract to \$4.2b; SBP reserves hardly enough for one month's essential imports; decline in exports causes loss of \$2.35b

By Javed Mahmood

The economy of Pakistan has been sinking gradually but steadily because of unending political, economic, and governance crises in the country. Pakistan's exports, foreign investment, remittances, imports and value of the rupee etc. are constantly declining with no signs of recovery in sight because of deepening crisis with the passage of time that has triggered uncertainty in the country.

For example, in the first nine months of the ongoing fiscal year, national exports have plummeted by 10 percent. According to the latest data from Pakistan Bureau of Statistics, exports dropped to \$21 billion from July 2022 to March 2023 as against \$23.35 billion in exports in the corresponding period of the last fiscal year. In simple words, the country that is begging foreign exchange from donors, friendly nations, and \$1 billion from the IMF, has lost \$2.35 billion just because of a significant decline in exports in this fiscal year.

Country's imports also fell 25 percent--\$44 billion from July 2022 to March 2023. In the corresponding period of the last fiscal year, imports stood at \$58.86 billion. Thus, imports fell by \$15 billion which landed the entire industry and the trading cycle in serious trouble this year. The decline in imports has improved the current account deficit position, but it caused a blow to the manufacturing and export-oriented industries. In the first three quarters of this fiscal year, trade deficit dropped to \$23 billion, from \$35.50 billion a year ago, during the same period.

On the intervention of the IMF, the government lifted the import ban and eased issuance of letters of credit (LC) for import payments. Importantly, in the month of March 2023, imports have plummeted by 40 percent, to \$3.83 billion as against \$6.41 billion in the comparative period of the last financial year.



Notably, textile exports witnessed a major decline of 21 percent in March this year. Exports of this sector amounted to \$1.29 billion in March 2023 as compared to \$1.63 billion in the same month last year. Data showed the country's textile exports in the first nine months of FY23 decreased by 12% to \$12.5 billion, declining from \$14.23 billion a year earlier. The decline in key textile exports is concerning for the South Asian economy, which is dealing with low foreign exchange reserves.

Also, the leading car manufacturing companies, Atlas Honda, Pak-Suzuki, Indus Motors (Toyota), and others have frequently shut down their manufacturing plants frequently in the past year because of the crisis, restrictions on imports and depreciation of the rupee value.

Low reserves, decline in large-scale manufacturing

Despite release of loans by China, foreign exchange reserves of the State Bank of Pakistan have contracted to \$4.2 billion in April 2023, from \$10 billion in April 2022. The reserves are hardly enough for one month's essential imports.

Moreover, according to Pakistan Bureau of Statistics, from July 2022 to January 2023, production of 20 major industries in the country has fallen. The overall production of major industries recorded a decrease of 4.40 percent during this period. The industrial activities slowed down in the country which triggered a decline in manufacturing of the large-scale industries in Pakistan.

In the month of January 2023, industrial production fell by 7.90 percent as compared to January 2022. The output of the textile sector declined by 13.21 percent during this period. According to PBS, production of vehicles declined by 35 percent, machinery 52 percent, pharmaceuticals by 22 percent and tobacco products by 21 percent. Production of wooden products had declined by 68 percent, petroleum production by 10 percent, beverages by 7 percent, rubber products by 7.68 percent and fertilizer production by 5.31 percent.

Range-bound stock market

For the last year, Pakistan Stock Exchange has been fluctuating around 41K points with frequent upward and downward movements in the absence

of good news from the IMF and an unabated crisis that has grappled the country from the day the regime change took place in Pakistan in April last year.

With the change of government from PTI to the coalition government led by the PML-N, everyone was expecting improvement in the economy and the value of the rupee. However, things moved in the wrong direction which gradually deepened the political and economic crises in the country. On April 27, 2023, the benchmark index of the PSX-KSE-100 slightly edged up by 171 points, clocking to 41,270 points as investors cautiously awaited the Supreme Court of Pakistan's decision about elections.

Huge decline in foreign investment

The State Bank of Pakistan has reported a massive 112 percent decline in the inflows of foreign investment in eight months of the fiscal year, July 2022 to February 2023. The country recorded a net outflow of \$235 million during this period as compared to an inflow of \$1.91 billion in the corresponding months of 2021-22.

Foreign private investment in Pakistan witnessed a decline of 22.5 percent and it amounted to \$776 million from July 2022 to Feb 2023, in comparison with \$1 billion private investment in the comparative period of 2021-22. The SBP has reported \$784 million in foreign direct investment during the period under review while in the same period last year, the country received \$1.32 billion in FDI.

Portfolio investment also recorded a massive decrease in this fiscal year. The outflow from the capital market was \$8.4 million from July 2022 to Feb 2023 as against an outflow of \$315 million in a similar period of the last financial year.

Dollar 3b decline expected in textile exports

All Pakistan Textile Mills Association (APTMA) has forewarned the government of a \$3 billion decline in textile exports in this fiscal year. The decline in textile exports has been accelerated and it will

further trigger if the government did not take the preemptive measures.

Gohar Ejaz, patron in chief of APTMA said in a letter to Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif that progressive decline in exports is an outcome of the moratorium on the imports of raw materials and essential spare parts, non-availability of energy at competitive prices and delay in timely sales tax refunds. He pointed out that all these factors have caused a blow to textile exports, leading to the closure of 50 percent of the textile mills in the country.



Causes of economic crisis in Pakistan

There have been several economic crises in Pakistan over the years, each with its own unique set of causes. Here are some of the main reasons that have contributed to economic crises in Pakistan.

Political instability: Political instability in Pakistan has been a major contributor to economic crises. Frequent changes in government and political unrest can create an environment of uncertainty, which can discourage foreign investment and lead to economic instability.

Fiscal mismanagement: mismanagement of government finances has been a major problem in Pakistan. This includes overspending, inefficient tax collection, and corruption, which have led to large budget

deficits and unsustainable levels of debt.

Balance of payments crisis: Pakistan has often struggled with a balance of payments crisis, where the country is unable to pay for its imports. This is often due to a trade deficit, where the country imports more than it exports.

Energy crisis: Pakistan has faced a severe energy crisis in recent years, with frequent power outages and load shedding. This has negatively impacted the economy, as industries are unable to function properly without a stable supply of electricity.

Lack of foreign investment: Pakistan has not been able to attract as much foreign investment as other developing countries. This is due to a variety of factors, including political instability, security concerns, and a difficult business environment.

Poor infrastructure: Pakistan's infrastructure, including roads, railways, and ports, is inadequate and in need of significant investment. This lack of infrastructure can make it difficult for businesses to operate efficiently and for goods to be transported easily.

These are just some of the reasons that have contributed to economic crises in Pakistan. Addressing these issues will require a coordinated effort from the government, private sector, and civil society to create a more stable and sustainable economic environment.

Privatize DISCOs - but carefully

By Sardar Ahmad Nawaz Sukhera

Recent statements coming out of the federal government on its stated intention to shift the federally owned electricity distribution companies (DISCOs) to the provinces have generated a lot of interest in the media. This article will attempt to touch upon certain issues that have not been mentioned in most of the articles; these issues will impact any successful attempt to change the ownership structure of these companies as well as development of the power sector itself.

Shifting the DISCOs from the federal government would not be an advisable policy decision. It would just mean shifting a critical problem from one level of the government to another – albeit one with lesser institutional and financial resources to handle the issues involved. If anything, it is feared that it may further aggravate the problems facing these companies as well as the power sector. This is why the CCI had already rejected this idea earlier.

Converting public monopolies into private monopolies is not always desirable. If it has to be done, it has to be done very carefully in terms of the prerequisites and subsequent implementation scenarios. It is proposed to consider the following steps before finally privatizing them.

To begin with, as regulator Nepra needs to play its role better. While tariff setting remains its primary role, the equally important role of setting KPIs and monitoring and implementing DISCOs' investment and development plans often gets neglected. As DISCOs are government entities, the regulator is usually shy of disciplining them through punitive actions. The result is that consumers pay the cost of these inefficiencies. The job of the regulator is to ensure sectoral development by balancing the interests of the government, the investors, and the consumers. When the government is the policymaker as well as the investor, as in this case, the regulator finds it hard to always protect the consumer's interest. This needs to change.

The following two aspects pertaining to Nepra are worth a brief discussion. First,

the chairman is a power sector expert hired through a competitive process, at a salary prescribed by the MP (market pay)-1 scale, which is about Rs700,000. It's anyone's guess whether a top industry leader of a multi-billion dollar sector would be attracted by this salary structure. The result is that the best are not interested in the job.



Second, the provinces nominate the four members of Nepra, who also head the various important wings of the authority. More often than not, they are neither power sector experts nor have any requisite experience of the sector or of regulatory work. One can recall a particular example of a civil engineer working as a member even though the Nepra Act clearly stipulates that only an electrical engineer can be placed at this position. This leaves the Nepra chairman often at odds with those primarily doing provincial bidding, rather than all of them performing the mandated regulatory roles. The OGRA Act certainly has a much better provision for hiring specific sector experts in the fields of oil and gas; perhaps, Nepra would also be better off if it has members who are specialists in the different fields of electricity generation, transmission, distribution, etc.

There is a major energy crisis in the country every few years. One of the reasons for it is the unsynchronized working of the two energy sector regulators – Nepra and Ogra. Although the energy ministry has two independent divisions – power and petroleum – each with its own regulator, the functions of both are intertwined. It is

opined that there should be one regulator for the energy sector: oil and gas as well as electricity. This would be helpful in achieving energy security for the country and development of a robust energy sector.

In a previous article, I had written that the government has no business to do business in any sector for which a competitive market exists. The power sector in Pakistan does not have a competitive market; therefore, it is important to create it before the DISCOs are privatized. Three steps are suggested in this regard.

First, even if the DISCOs are not broken into smaller, more manageable sized companies, privatizing them in their present form must begin by segregating their functions – distribution business and supply business – and then privatizing the

distribution business, through one or more private companies. This is where competition will help improve bill recovery, reduction in cost as well as improvement in the quality of service, and improved customer service.

Second, a uniform power tariff policy across the country is untenable. Why should consumers of a more efficient DISCO cross-subsidize those of an inefficient one? If for socio-economic reasons, or even for the sake of political expediency, the government wants to shelter consumers where the cost of electricity provision is higher or the bill recovery is low, the government should pick up the tab, rather than penalizing those who pay their bills.

Third, it is imperative to develop a truly competitive energy market. The present policy allows bulk consumers to buy electricity from any power company, through wheeling, or to make it themselves. In a competitive market, all bulk consumers in any DISCO's territorial jurisdiction should be allowed to procure electricity from any other DISCO offering it cheaper and with better service. For example, if a consumer within the jurisdiction of LESCO can get cheaper power from MEPCO, it should be allowed. This incentivizes competition between DISCOs, with the consumer and the economy served better. This arrangement would lead towards development of a competitive power

market and this needs to be promoted.

A very important factor to be decided before privatization is to determine the extent of market share that a company is to be allowed to own. In order to avoid the complications that monopolies create, it would also be advisable to set this limit not above 20 per cent of the market in terms of consumers. One can imagine the political power a private company can wield by checking how many National Assembly constituencies fall within the territorial jurisdiction of any DISCO. Since electricity is the most basic of required services, any power company can influence the political outcomes by supporting or opposing political players within its territorial jurisdiction through their service delivery to their constituents. Hence, no single business house or holding company should be allowed to have more market share than what is technically required.

For a successful privatization of DISCOs, it is imperative that the future investment and development plans are prepared meticulously for each DISCO, as the one size fits all approach will not succeed here. These KPIs and the yearly monitoring and evaluation system, along with a strong but transparent punitive system need to be determined, and put into the tender documents before bidding. Lessons must be learnt from the privatization of KESC, where a high level Implementation Committee was formed to check implemen-

tation of the agreed investment and development plans, but, unfortunately, it never even met once to keep a check on what was subsequently happening. This has to be done by creating a strong institutional arrangement for the purpose.

Finally, a myth needs to be broken that only one country is interested in partnering with us. During my time at the Privatisation Division (2014-17), all DISCOs were put up for privatization. Road shows were held for marketing the privatization of FESCO in China, Middle East, and Turkey. A power sector investors' conference was also held in Washington, DC, which was attended by all the major US companies. There was serious interest from all over the world. Unfortunately, despite completion of the due diligence exercise by financial advisors as well as successful roadshows, the entire process was brought to a halt due to national political compulsions.

One final word. The financial advisers, who structure these transactions, as well as the potential investors, are serious entities. It is difficult to attract the best of them if they don't view your intent as serious. DISCOs have been on the privatization programme since 1992, and we have been going on in circles. The cost of this lack of political will to go through with it for 30 years is now visible in the shape of the power sector circular debt and its threat to take down the economy. How long can this indecisiveness be allowed to continue?



'Pakistan's state-run firms worst in Asia'

By Khaleeq Kiani

Pakistan's state-owned entities (SOEs) are the worst in South Asia and their combined losses growing faster than assets, resulting in a significant annual drain on scarce public resources and posing a substantial risk to the sovereign.

from commercial banks. Federal government exposure to SOEs, defined as the outstanding stock of guarantees and government loans to SOEs, has been rapidly increasing and stood at 9.7pc of GDP in FY21.

constituted the bulk of fiscal exposure, at 44.4pc of total exposure in FY21, while Cash Development Loans and foreign loans accounted for 36pc and 19.6pc of exposure, respectively.

The stock of outstanding government guarantees to SOEs has more than doubled since FY16. Over 75pc of the stock of guarantees is against the power sector for financing the circular debt. The stock of outstanding guarantees from the Federal Government to federal commercial SOEs has increased from 2.2pc of GDP in FY16 to 4.5pc of GDP in FY22.

The report said that individual SOE performance was largely dictated by sectoral performance. Although the primary reasons for SOE losses differ, they are typically related to unresolved corporate governance issues, sector regulations, an underestimation of the cost of the provision in complete restructuring and insufficient current subsidies.

An SOE portfolio analysis showed that individual SOE performance was influenced by sectoral policies and the level of operational autonomy by the Board of Directors and senior management. SOE losses are concentrated in the power, infrastructure, and transport sectors, and in the aggregate, outweigh profits from profitable SOEs. Although a sizable number of commercial SOEs generated profits in FY20, they were concentrated in the oil and gas sector.

On an annual basis, they together swallow more than Rs458bn in public funds to stay afloat as their combined loans and guarantees surged to almost 10pc of GDP (Rs5.4tr) in FY21 from 3.1pc of GDP or Rs1.05tr in 2016, according to the World Bank that advised a deep-rooted reform programme to reverse the trend.

They "impose a significant fiscal drain and pose a substantial financial risk on the federal government", said the World Bank, adding that these entities had been incurring losses since FY16, with annual losses averaging at 0.5pc of GDP over FY16–20. "Pakistan's federal SOEs have been found to be the least profitable in the South Asia region", said the Public Expenditure Review 2023, adding that with the persistent losses, the accumulated SOE losses had become substantial, amounting to 3.1pc of GDP in FY20.

To cover the losses, the federal government has been providing direct fiscal support to the SOEs, in the form of subsidies, loans and equity injections, which totalled 1.4pc of GDP in FY21. In addition to direct support, the government has been also issuing guarantees for SOEs to secure loans

The report noted that combined fiscal exposure against domestic and foreign loans and guarantees had been increasing rapidly with annual growth averaging 42.9pc over FY2016–2021. But this required a detailed risk assessment on account of contingent exposure that may arise from guarantees. In FY 2021, 32pc of the outstanding guarantees, given through the Pakistan Atomic Energy Commission (PAEC), were against project financing of the K-3 and K-4 nuclear power plants. The available data show that guarantees



Economic Cost of Political Uncertainty in Pakistan



By Dr. Abid Qaiyum Suleri

With the mainstream political parties vying for power at any cost, Political intolerance and uncertainty continue to plague Pakistan's already tumultuous economic landscape. According to experts, many countries are facing multidecade high inflation and economic meltdown amidst global poly-crisis (covid, climate change, and conflict). However, Pakistan is one of the rare examples where political uncertainty has fuelled the current economic meltdown. It can be argued that implementing the current IMF program, a must for Pakistan's short-term macroeconomic stability, is the first victim of ongoing political turmoil.

Resorting to popular measures in contravention of what we had committed to the IMF and a "one-step forward, two steps back" attitude to complete the IMF program have had a heavy toll both on our global creditworthiness and the value of the rupee against the dollar. Taking the delayed difficult economic decisions in one go led to multidecade high depreciation of the value of the rupee against the dollar, which aggravated the impact of multidecade high inflation by eroding the purchasing power of the consumers.

To counter depleting foreign exchange reserves, the government is restricting the

opening of "letters of credit" (LCs) for imports, adversely affecting the supplies and business activities. This is leading to unemployment at a time when the country has entered stagflation (very high inflation, very low economic growth).

Despite, taking most of the bitter pills, the government is still not able to get the staff-level agreement (SLA) signed with the IMF for the ninth review of the program (a must to get the next tranche of loan approved by the IMF board, and to get a "letter of comfort" which would enable us to access other multilateral funding). The reason is political uncertainty. Wonder why? Let me explain!

Pakistan has committed to the IMF to maintain foreign exchange reserves that require rollovers and financial assurances from its bilateral creditors, especially China, Saudi Arabia, and the UAE. These friendly states have no preference for any political party in Pakistan and have always maintained good relations with every government in Pakistan. However, since February 2022, they have been in a wait-and-see mode, awaiting the result of the ongoing political tug-of-war.

They are finally rolling over their commercial deposits on the assurance and guaran-

tee from non-political quarters. However, the four months delay in concluding the ninth review (which was to be concluded in December 2022) means that Pakistan needs to mobilize additional foreign exchange reserves from friendly countries.

The forex reserve targets for June 2023 are considerably higher than those of December 2022. An unnecessary delay in concluding the SLA due to ongoing political uncertainty means that the amount Pakistan needs to borrow from Saudi Arabia, China, and UAE to conclude the IMF deal has significantly increased.

Even successfully concluding the current IMF review will not completely remove Pakistan from economic thick. It has not defaulted on any of its sovereign debts, and the next payment of the commercial bond is not due before April 2024, so technically speaking, it has averted a default on sovereign debts. However, debt servicing on its bilateral debts is a regular feature. It has to make debt repayments to its bilateral creditors and then get the same amount rolled over. Walking on this tightrope depends on Pakistan's foreign policy choices, whose consistency can only be assured through political stability.

Beyond 2023, depending upon its current



account deficit, it will have to arrange 25 to 35 billion dollars of external assistance each year for the next four years. It needs to repay a whopping USD 77.5 billion in external debt from April 2023 to June 2026. This includes repayments to Chinese financial institutions, private creditors, and Saudi Arabia.

In this situation, to avert a default, Pakistan requires a new bailout package from the IMF. It may be an extension of the current one. However, the IMF cannot negotiate a new deal until the political turmoil stabilizes. This delay will worsen Pakistan's economic situation. Moreover, the IMF will demand policy and structural reforms as preconditions for any next bailout, preferably getting reflected in the next federal budget.

These reforms are likely unpopular, and no government would want to present them in a budget before the general elections. This would further postpone the negotiations with the IMF and increase Pakistan's economic vulnerabilities.

Obviously, there would be no honeymoon period for the next government. Without any cushion to delay securing the next IMF bailout, all political parties, aspiring to form the federal government after the next elections would have to take their voters into confidence about the non-popular economic decisions they would have to make after coming into power.

Formal negotiations between the PDM government and PTI to address the deadlock on constitutional interpretation for holding the provincial and next general elections is a positive development. Besides settling the timeframe and rules of the game for these elections, our political leadership must also discuss the possible way forward for coming out of the current economic mess.

They have tried to address Pakistan's economic issues while in power and have opposed the same corrective measures when in opposition. The lose-lose approach

will hurt them in the future and the people of Pakistan consistently.

I have proposed it earlier and will repeat again that like the National Security Council, a statutory body to ensure economic security – comprising the prime minister, the leaders of the House in the Senate, Leaders of Opposition in the Senate and national assembly, ministers looking after economic and energy ministries, chief ministers of all provinces, and representatives of the defence forces leadership—should be constituted (or the existing membership of National Security Council be amended to discuss economic agenda).

The council should deliberate upon economic challenges and take collective ownership of the much-needed short-term, medium-term, and long-term policy and structural reforms – with or without an IMF programme. Besides debt sustainability and containing energy circular debt, it should also forge a consensus on possible relief measures to insulate the people of Pakistan from the effects of such reforms and suggest measures to strengthen the existing social safety nets.

Such a forum or any other forum representative of all stakeholders would provide much-needed certainty to Pakistan's development partners, friendly states, and people amidst the ongoing political uncertainty, which, in turn, has led to economic uncertainties. It is time to think beyond partisan interests.



WEF report predicts 23% job shifts in Pakistan by 2027

Report says cognitive skills to be most important for workers in 2023, next five years, highlights Pak strengths, areas for improvement; evaluates Pak performance, how job market will unfold in next 5-7 years

TTI Report

The World Economic Forum in its Future of Jobs Report 2023, has predicted that in Pakistan 23% of jobs are expected to change by 2027, with 69 million new jobs created, 83 million eliminated, the green transition and localization of supply chains will lead to net job growth.

The WEF Future of Jobs Report 2023: Unveiling Pakistan's Dynamic Job Landscape, highlights include a strong working-age population, focus on core skills, and a commitment to reskilling and upskilling. The Report predicts that 23% of jobs in Pakistan are expected to change by 2027, with 69 million new jobs created and 83 million will be eliminated.

The report estimates that cognitive skills such as analytical and creative thinking will be the most important for workers in 2023 and the next five years, and companies' skills strategies will focus on AI (artificial intelligence) and big data specifically. The report also suggests that while reskilling and upskilling towards green skills is growing, it is not keeping pace with climate targets.

The report delves into key aspects, such as global trends and technologies, role outlooks, core skills, and workforce strategies, to provide a holistic view of the job market landscape in the country. The findings highlight Pakistan's strengths and areas for improvement as it navigates the rapidly changing global job market.

The working-age population in Pakistan is a notable 85.78 million, which signifies a vast pool of potential talent. The country's labor force participation rate stands at 57%, with 55% of the workforce in vulnerable employment. However, the unemployment rate remains relatively low at 5%.

The report identifies several global trends and technologies that impact Pakistan's job market, such as digital platforms and apps, big-data analytics, and education and



workforce development technologies. These trends and technologies play a crucial role in driving industry transformation and creating new employment opportunities.

According to the WEF report, Amir Jahangir, chief executive officer of Mishal Pakistan, shared his thoughts on how Pakistan can plug its human capital into the global job market. "Pakistan has immense potential to contribute to the global workforce. By focusing on strengthening our education system, investing in vocational and technical training, and nurturing a culture of innovation, we can better equip our population to excel in the global job market. We also need to concentrate on upskilling and reskilling our workforce in high-demand areas, such as AI, big data, and green technologies, to enhance our competitive advantage," he maintained.

With regard to core skills, the report emphasizes the importance of cognitive skills, engagement skills, management skills, and technology skills in Pakistan's job market. It says the businesses in the

country are focusing on reskilling and upskilling their workforce, with creative thinking, AI and big data, and leadership and social influence identified as the most prioritized skills for the next five years.

The report referred to Muhammad Ali, chairman of MAGM Ventures, as saying: "I see a shift in the Pakistani job market from jobs rewarding generalists to those rewarding specialists. This is expected to lead to a mindset shift among youth, the private sector as well as government policy from social sciences to STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics) and to skill-based vocational training."

The WEF report suggests while there is a 41% expectation of talent availability improvement when hiring, there is also a 24% expectation of worsening talent retention for the existing workforce. The report suggests that businesses in the country must adopt improved people-and-culture metrics, reporting, and diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) policies to enhance talent availability.

The DEI programs in Pakistan, report says, emphasize offering greater flexibility in

education requirements, degree requirements for roles, and setting up Employee Representation Groups. 'Currently, 45% of the surveyed organizations have DEI programs in place, compared to the global average of 67%.'

certificates significantly higher than in countries like the Republic of Korea and Switzerland, with 41% of Pakistani businesses considering them, more than twice the global average of 19%. This highlights the need for Pakistan to focus on

and economic shifts, and the rapid advancement of AI and other technologies now risks adding more uncertainty."

Mishal Pakistan, the Country Partner Institute of the Center for New Economy and Societies Platform, World Economic Forum, also announced plans to develop a comprehensive report on the Future of Jobs for Pakistan in the third quarter of 2023. This groundbreaking report will provide an in-depth analysis of the nation's evolving job landscape, addressing the challenges and opportunities in various sectors. By leveraging data and insights, the report aims to equip policymakers, industry leaders, and job seekers with valuable information to navigate and adapt to the rapidly changing job market, fostering a resilient and thriving economy for Pakistan.

Since its first edition in 2016, the World Economic Forum's bi-annual Future of Jobs Report has tracked the labor-market impact of the Fourth Industrial Revolution, identifying the potential scale of occupational disruption and growth alongside strategies for empowering job transitions from declining to emerging roles.

The Future of Jobs 2023 report serves as a valuable resource for businesses, policymakers, and individuals globally and in Pakistan to better understand the current and future landscape of the job market. With this knowledge, the countries can develop strategic plans to harness their potential, improve workforce development, and ensure long-term economic growth.



In Pakistan, according to the report, there is a more negative outlook on talent development compared to the global average, with only 45% of respondents expressing a positive outlook for the next five years. This is consistent with Pakistan's lower skills stability of 44% compared to the global average of 56%.

Moreover, Pakistani businesses value the completion of short courses and online

workforce skill development and upskilling to improve talent development and stay competitive in the global market, the report suggests.

The report quoted Saadia Zahidi, Managing Director, World Economic Forum, as saying "for people around the world, the past three years have been filled with upheaval and uncertainty for their lives and livelihoods, with COVID-19, geopolitical



Sudan unrest: Two generals battling for supremacy

Tensions between Gen Abdel Fattah, Gen Hamdan Dagalo intensify for control of Sudan; Sudanese army, RSF fighting despite new ceasefire



By Anum Akram

The latest round of civil unrest in Sudan is the result of disagreements over the idea of "one nation, one army." At a time when the country is attempting to transition to democratic governance, there is a conflict between two generals battling for supremacy.

The two most prominent generals in Sudan have been at odds for weeks. They collaborated on a military coup just 18 months ago to thwart the country's democratic transition. These tensions between the commander of the armed forces, Gen Abdel Fattah Burhan, and the leader of the paramilitary Rapid Support Forces (RSF), Gen Mohammed Hamdan Dagalo, erupted over the weekend into an extraordinary conflict for control of the resource-rich country of more than 46 million people.

Despite increasing international diplomatic pressure, both men vowed not to talk or call a ceasefire, each of whom had tens of thousands of troops stationed merely in Khartoum. It is a fatal loss for a nation at the meeting point of the Arab and African

continents, which four years ago overthrew a long-standing dictator's power in part through largely peaceful public uprisings.

A restoration to the democratic transition that had been blocked by the October 2021 coup had been the subject of negotiations in recent months in Sudan. The armed forces and the RSF reached a tentative agreement with pro-democracy and civilian groups in December as a result of intensifying international and regional pressure. However, the internationally mediated accord merely offered general guidelines, leaving the most difficult political concerns unresolved.

Gen Dagalo and the RSF

Mohamed Hamdan Dagalo is one of Sudan's most prominent and wealthy persons after climbing the ranks. The RSF's commander, General Mohamed Hamdan Dagalo, sometimes known as "Hemedti" or "Little Mohamed," is mostly responsible for the organiza-

tion's impact. Gen Dagalo, a close ally of Russia with strong ties to a number of regional powerhouses, has recently positioned himself as an advocate of democratic governance while portraying his competitors in the military as a power-hungry group clinging to power.

He rose to fame as the second-in-command of a transitional council established in 2019, following the ousting of the previous autocrat Omar al-Bashir. Dagalo quickly progressed through the ranks, caught the attention of President al-Bashir, who was looking to enlist Janjaweed to battle non-Arab people who had started to rebel against his control in Darfur in 2003, and eventually rose to the position of commander.

Year 2013 saw the establishment of the RSF under Dagalo's direction. Under the direction of al-Bashir and his National Intelligence and Security Services, it integrated Janjaweed components into a new army.

Dagalo has developed strong connections both domestically and abroad

Continued on page 30



Ace Writer Fatima Bhutto Got Married

Fatima Bhutto, a renowned writer and granddaughter of Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto, recently got married to Graham (Gibran) in a small family gathering at their home in Clifton. Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto, Fatima's brother, disclosed the news of her marriage on his Twitter account.

According to Fatima's brother's tweet, the wedding ceremony was held in their grandfather's library, which holds significant importance for Fatima. The event was attended by Fatima's close family members and friends as they collectively decided against an extravagant celebration due to the challenging circumstances faced by their fellow countrymen and women. He also requested people to pray for the newlyweds, Fatima and Graham (Gibran).

In the past year, Fatima and Zulfiqar arranged an auction of experiences to raise funds for flood victims.

Zulfiqar and Fatima actively advocated for assistance to the flood-affected individuals and were vocal about their concerns. Zulfiqar gained recognition for his anti-feudalism stance after delivering a speech at the Sindh Moorat March.





throughout the years. He allied with Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates and dispatched RSF troops to Yemen to combat Houthi rebels who are supported by Iran. At least 100 people were killed and several sexual assaults against protestors were well-documented during the violent break-up of a sit-in protest outside the military headquarters in June 2019, which was largely believed to have been led by RSF members.

Why is there strife in Sudan?

Army Chief and military ruler Gen Abdel Fattah al Burhan and commander of the powerful paramilitary RSF Gen Mohamed Hamdan Dagalo have been loosely allied since 2019. Omar al Bashir was overthrown from power in 2019 by the army and the RSF in a nationwide revolt against the dictator's 29-year rule. Gen. Dagalo has held the position of vice chairman of the Sovereign Council since the coup, which is headed by Gen al Burhan, the head of the military. In 2021, they banded together once more and overthrew a civilian-led administration.

This undid Sudan's democratic transition and threw the 44 million-person Afro-Arab country into political and economic crisis. The RSF's complete integration into the armed forces, which Gen al Burhan has started to insist on as a requirement for striking a deal to end Sudan's political crisis, is at the center of their current disagreements.

Although Gen Dagalo has expressed his support for the idea of "one army," he has never made it apparent that he would be willing to let his heavily equipped and combat-proven paramilitary to be integrated into the armed forces. The two generals have been rejecting rumors about their differences for months, claiming that certain groups are attempting to develop a rift between them that could ultimately lead to the collapse of Sudan. When Gen Dagalo claimed that the October 2021 coup had been a mistake that had opened the door for al Bashir supporters to make a political comeback, it became apparent that the two men were at war with one another late last year.

In a short denial of the accusation, Gen al Burhan told a TV journalist that Gen Dagalo was free to hold his viewpoint. However, the extent of their disagreements became more apparent when Gen Dagalo accused Gen al Burhan and others of holding onto power last month. In a statement last week, the military warned that recent RSF mobilization posed a security danger and might result in conflicts with the army. Two days later, violence broke out between the two factions in Khartoum and a number of other Sudanese cities. Tanks, rocket launchers, artillery, and fighter jets from the army are all being used against them.

Fighting is taking place against the backdrop of long term, internationally supported efforts to resolve Sudan's political dilemma. The deal's blueprint calls for the RSF to be incorporated into the

armed forces, the military to leave politics, and a civilian prime minister to lead the nation for two years until elections are held. Dagalo asserted that RSF "had to keep fighting to defend ourselves" and accused the military of beginning the conflict.

The Sudanese army and RSF are still engaged in a combat despite a new ceasefire, and residents of Khartoum are worried about running out of food supplies and a breakdown in medical facilities. Residents of one of Africa's major cities are suffering from power outages and concerned about how long food supplies would survive while holed up in their houses.

Sudan's capital, Khartoum, was the scene of a full-scale war for power that left the airport in ruins, a bridge over the Nile River in fire, and many inhabitants fled inside their homes as fighter jets circled overhead. Control of the bridges over the Nile, which divides the capital, was one of the main areas of conflict.

On the north side of the city, close to Kober Prison, where former dictator Omar Hassan al-Bashir is being held, a significant skirmish broke out. On April 17, there were numerous street fights in a number of Khartoum areas, and two significant explosions were heard in the Kafouri neighborhood to the north of the city, according to locals. If there were injuries as a result of those explosions, it was unclear right away. There were numerous gunfights, shelling, and other conflicts. The power is out. More than hundred people killed and left many wounded.



Leaks Investigation

It's typical for a national guardsman with Teixeira's job to have top-secret clearance

By Helene Cooper

The charging documents against Jack Teixeira, 21-year-old airman first class who is accused of leaking classified documents, indicate that he was granted a top-secret security clearance in 2021, which was required for his job as a computer network technician in the Massachusetts Air National Guard.

While that may sound like an exceptional degree of access for such a junior-ranking service member, having top secret clearance in that job is perfunctory. The affidavit states that he was granted access to what is called sensitive compartmented information, or SCI, which typically tells a user how the intelligence was derived — such as the use of human spies or signals intercepts. Military and civilian users of SCI must sign nondisclosure agreements at the beginning and end-points of their service that involves access to such information.

The classification markings seen on the top secret-level documents Airman Teixeira is accused of leaking usually have such markings, which is standard practice. According to an Air Force career website, all “cyber transport system” airmen must pass the kind of background investigation required for that high-level clearance, which essentially allows them to work on computer networks carrying top-secret data. The most common of those is the Joint Worldwide Intelligence Communications System, or JWICS — pronounced like “Jay-wicks.”

Much of the material in the leaked files appears to be information that would be readily available to anyone with access to a JWICS computer terminal, through which users can visit “portals” — essentially websites — for the various agencies of the intelligence community as well as many individual military units.

The C.I.A. and Defense Intelligence Agency's own secret-level and top-secret-level portals typically contain short vignettes on world events on their homepages, divvied up by geographic region and topic area — which can be seen in some of the files that Airman Teixeira is accused of taking. Outputting those files is as easy as hitting “print” on a JWICS terminal that is connected to a printer.

The charging documents say that Mr. Teixeira also used his government computer to search classified intelligence for the word “leak.” There is reason to believe, the complaint says, that he was searching for classified reporting regarding the investigation into the leak.

An Air Force spokeswoman confirmed that Airman Teixeira is assigned to the 102nd Intelligence Support Squadron at Otis Air National Guard Base in Cape Cod, Mass. Airman Teixeira's stepfather, Master Sgt. Thomas P. Dufault, retired from the same wing in 2019 after 34 years of service, according to a military news release. That unit is part of the 102nd Intelligence, Surveillance and Reconnaissance Group, which supports surveillance drone missions around the world.

Such missions produce large streams of classified data, and airmen like Mr. Teixeira would likely be needed to maintain the networks that allow video and text information to flow from the drones to other users.



Airman Teixeira's arrest lays bare the sheer volume of people who have clearance to view a swath of national security documents that the government categorizes as top secret.

From National Guard members on bases in Massachusetts to generals at NATO headquarters in Brussels to American bureaucrats all over the world, the “top secret” level of clearance gives bearers an extraordinary level of access. With it, they can see secure Pentagon and other intelligence sites, daily intelligence briefings, situation maps and detailed analyses of the state of the world as seen through the eyes of the American intelligence community.

American service members with top-secret clearance include nearly all of the more than 600 or so generals in the various services. But that level of clearance also extends to some of their military aides, many colonels who work in the Pentagon, captains of Navy ships, a wide array of junior officers, and even, in the apparent case of Airman Teixeira, enlisted service members working in intelligence units.

Pentagon officials say the number of people with such access is in the thousands, if not tens of thousands. And just below them, those with “secret” clearance include nearly everyone else who works for the Pentagon or other national security agencies. There are military contractors and even analysts at think tanks who have some level of security clearance.

The Pentagon will likely be dealing with the fallout from the leaking of scores of pages of sensitive material for months as, in the immediate term, Russian military planners pore over the leaked files for clues to their own compromised agencies. But the case raises broader questions about whether the term “top secret” is actually even secret, and whether national security agencies have allowed their sensitive material to drift too far afield.

“Clearly, too many people have access to too much top secret information” that they have no need to know, said Evelyn Farkas, the top Defense Department official for Russia and Ukraine during the Obama administration.

Joe Biden fires the starting gun on the presidential race

America's future, and the West's cohesion, rest on octogenarian shoulders



TTI Report

US President Joe Biden reacts as he delivers a speech at the Windsor Bar in Dundalk, on April 12, 2023, as part of a four days trip to Northern Ireland and Ireland for the 25th anniversary commemorations of the "Good Friday Agreement". - President Joe Biden announced on April 25, 2023 he is running for re-election in 2024, plunging at the record age of 80 into a ferocious new White House campaign "to finish the job."

The American presidential election of 2024 will feature Joe Biden against the Republican nominee. The polls suggest that person will be Donald Trump. Mr Biden announced his re-election bid on April 25th, the four-year anniversary of the start of his previous presidential campaign. Though in fact this will be the fourth time Mr Biden has run for president: his first attempt came before the fall of the Soviet Union or, for those who think in terms of Michael Jackson's discography, between "Bad" and "Dangerous". Were he to win and complete a second term, he would be 86 when he left office. America's popula-

tion is much younger than that of other Western democracies, its economy more vibrant. Its politics, however, are gerontocratic.

Those two facts—Mr Biden's familiarity and his age—help explain why 70% of Americans do not want him to run again, a number that includes 50% of Democrats. Were he an inspiring campaigner, the span between his first presidential bid and his first successful one might not have been 32 years. In 2020 Mr Biden's candidacy was the answer to a problem the Democratic Party had created for itself. The front-runner in the primaries, Bernie Sanders, would have been a huge risk for the party to take, given his hard-left policies and the substantial risk that he would have lost to President Trump. Who among the field had the greatest chance of holding off Mr Sanders and then beating Mr Trump? It was the guy who had always been there, the man whose appeal was that, in a time of too much political excitement, he was a bit dull.

Four years on, the Democratic Party is stuck with a similar dilemma. Incumbent presidents always run again if they think they will win their primary. The Democratic Party has plenty of talent: Gretchen Whitmer, the governor of Michigan, Raphael Warnock, a senator from Georgia, Andy Beshear, the governor of Kentucky, to name a few, have all shown the ability to win in places where Republicans are competitive. But Democrats are a more orderly bunch than Republicans these days. No serious candidates wish to destabilise a sitting president's campaign. And so Mr Biden's only primary challengers so far are a former spiritual adviser to Oprah Winfrey and an anti-vaccine campaigner. If the field stays like that, there may be no Democratic primary debates next year at all.

And yet this is not as sorry a position as it might seem. Yes, most Americans do not want Mr Biden to run again. But reluctant Democrats will line up behind their nominee. And, more importantly, an even higher number do not want another four

years of Mr Trump. Among voters in general, Mr Biden's numbers (minus ten points if you subtract those who feel negatively about him from those who feel positive) beat Mr Trump's (minus 19). Nor is Mr Biden's approval rating as bad as it seems if the point of comparison is not just past American presidents but the current presidents and prime ministers of other rich countries. Western voters are hard to lead in the 2020s: Justin Trudeau in Canada, Rishi Sunak in Britain and Emmanuel Macron in France all have even lower approval ratings than Mr Biden (see chart).

In theory, sitting presidents run on their records. Were that the case, Mr Biden could feel more confident ahead of next year's vote. He has done more than almost anyone to prevent Russia from taking over Ukraine, without deploying any American troops. At home his big idea has been to pursue an industrial policy aimed at increasing the domestic manufacture of semiconductor chips, thereby easing American dependence on Taiwan, and to hand out subsidies aimed at speeding up the decarbonisation of America's economy. This may be unwelcome to free-traders (and to some allies), but it goes with the mood of a country that has profited richly from globalisation while remaining convinced that it is under threat from foreign trade. As president, Mr Biden's boast that he could make deals with the Senate that others could not—because he had spent 36 years working there—turned out to be true.



In practice, though, elections are not just referendums on the achievements of the incumbent. Campaigning matters. And Mr Biden is not very good at it. The video announcing his 2024 run was an admission of that: the president is better when chopped into small clips, set against a stirring soundtrack with images of happy Americans, than he is giving a speech in front of a crowd. His vice-president, whose autocue sometimes seems to be controlled by Armando Iannucci, is not much help either. Voters seem uncomfortably aware that, should Mr Biden die in office, the burden of command will pass to someone who seems unprepared for it.

In 2020 Mr Biden hardly had to campaign because big gatherings of people were prevented by the spread of covid-19. That

served him, as did the economic slowdown brought about by the pandemic. What will matter even more in 2024 is the performance of the economy. Incumbent presidents running with a strong economy almost always win. Which is another way of saying that a Biden-Trump rematch would be much more uncertain than it should be, relying on factors beyond Mr Biden's control. If Mr Trump is indeed the nominee, he promises a revenge presidency ("I am your retribution," he declared to fans at a recent conservative conference); and his second White House will be staffed with true believers. The task of preventing that would once again fall on Mr Biden's octogenarian shoulders. Every stumble he makes over the next year and a half will be a reminder of that burden.

Courtesy Economist



The Taliban's Relentless Assault on Afghan Women Continues

By Dr. Moonis Ahmar

Cruel and repressive measures against women and girls by the second Taliban regime compelled the UN to consider closing their operations in Afghanistan. The imposition of a ban on Afghan women working for the United Nations was defended by the Taliban government spokesman Zabihullah Mujahid on April 12, who termed it as an internal issue of Afghanistan, which should be respected by all international actors.

Earlier, the Taliban regime banned women from going to the gym and parks, and disallowed them from travelling without a male companion and full veil. Banning female education was one of the first actions which were taken by the Taliban regime when it came to power following the withdrawal of American and NATO forces in August 2021. Prohibiting university and high school education for Afghan girls and women, and disallowing them from working in offices was highly resented when widespread demonstrations and protest marches in Kabul and elsewhere against the Taliban regime took place. Depriving almost 50% of the population to live a normal life will have serious ramifications in Afghanistan, as the Taliban regime violates the Doha Accords of 2020 which ensured protecting women and human rights.

Where is Afghanistan heading now that the political volatility has degenerated into a severe deterioration of human security, particularly gender equality in the last two years? How did more than \$2 trillion of American spending since 9/11 fail to transform Afghanistan into a modern, democratic and an enlightened state? What is the future of the 40 million people of Afghanistan, particularly its women? For around 20 years, Afghanistan, under the regimes of Hamid Karzai and Ashraf Ghani, was a different country where curbs on the rights of women and their education were minimal, but things changed when the Taliban took over in August 2021 and reverted to the medieval era type order which they refer to as adherence to Sharia.



In November 2022, a panel of UN human rights experts presented a report which dubbed the treatment of Afghan women and girls as a crime against humanity. Eleven UN appointed independent human rights experts blamed the Taliban regime of committing flagrant violation of human rights of Afghan women and girls. The report lamented that “confining women to their homes is tantamount to imprisonment and is likely leading to increased level of domestic violence and mental challenges. All 11 observers of human rights called upon the Taliban regime to conform to human rights standards, particularly respecting rights of all girls and women to education, employment, and participation in public and cultural life of their country. But the Taliban regime is adamant and refuses to cede to international criticism against banning high school, university education, working in offices, gyms and parks for Afghan women and girls.

The confidence of the current Taliban regime vis-à-vis its anti-women policies are akin to what the first Taliban regime from 1996 to 2001 was pursuing in the name of religion. But this time, the situation is different. The previous Taliban regime

controlled 90% of Afghan territory, but this time it governs 100% of Afghanistan and has claimed to have provided good governance, rule of law and accountability to an ordinary Afghan. It is also claimed that corruption in the form of bribery has been eliminated and people are safe to travel to any part of the country.

So far, no member of the UN has granted diplomatic recognition to the Taliban regime but interestingly countries like India, Iran, China, Russia, Pakistan and Turkey are conducting semi-normal ties with Kabul. It means, like the first Taliban regime which was largely isolated, this time it has been able to make diplomatic inroads because of economic and trade reasons. Enormous mineral and natural resources of Afghanistan provide ample justification and incentives to disregard human rights violations, particularly issues related to gender discrimination and conduct normal relations with the Taliban regime. However, in a regional summit held in Samarkand, Uzbekistan on April 14, the Chinese Foreign Minister Qin Gang expressed his concern over Taliban government's decision to ban Afghan women from working for the UN programs. It is yet

to be seen, to what extent the Taliban regime will take note of Chinese concern over restrictions imposed on Afghan women.

The relentless assault on Afghan women in Afghanistan today needs to be analyzed from three angles. First, Afghanistan is 200 years older than Pakistan, but it has not been able to settle down as a nation state. Amin Saikal, in his well-researched book *Modern Afghanistan: A History of Struggle and Survival* examines in detail how the Afghan society emerged in 1747 under the leadership of Ahmed Shah Abdali, who tried to unite various tribes but to a large extent the Afghan mindset remained highly tribal and conservative. It is religion, combined with Pashtun nationalism which shaped the Afghan mindset in which development, education, enlightenment, tolerance and rights of women failed to have any role in shaping the dynamics of Afghan society. Curbs on women and relegating their role in society, confining them to domestic affairs possesses a legitimate hold, particularly among Afghan males.

When society is retrogressive, ultra-conservative and devoid of reasoning, the outcome is social backwardness. Afghanistan is a classic example of internal resistance against social change and development. Equating modernization with westernization is common in many Muslim countries including Afghanistan. As a result, education, research, science and technology, which are essential for the modernization of any society, failed to take roots in Afghanistan and in many Muslim societies which reflected resistance against change and social development. When the regime of the People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan (PDPA) came into power as a result of the Saur Revolution in April 1978, and tried to change Afghanistan by introducing land, educational and social reforms, it faced tough resistance from the ultra-conservative segments of society to reverse the process of change. Jihad was launched against that regime, with claims that it was led by infidels and communists.

The complicated nature of Afghanistan is evident from the fact that there is no other country in the world which has experienced attack and occupation from three major

powers: the British, Soviets and Americans. If Afghanistan is back to square one despite the investment of billions of dollars for modernization through social transformation, it means that the ultra-conservative roots of the country cannot be eradicated. Corruption and nepotism, along with a culture of warlordism also contributed to the failure of the process to transform Afghanistan into a modern country. Second, without social transformation and emancipation of women, Afghanistan will not be a normal state. If the Taliban, with their retrogressive and tunnel vision mindset are in control of Afghanistan for the second time in the last 27 years, it



means there is something wrong with Afghan society which grants acceptance to groups who have seized power through occupation and for them democracy, human rights, enlightenment, development, social change and development hold no value. For them, modern education, research, innovation, science and technology means westernization.

When the mindset of a large segment of Afghan population conforms to ultra-conservatism and religious nationalism, denying women their productive role in human resource, management and development, the outcome is stagnation. By keeping almost half of population from getting education, employment and pursuing healthy activities like sports, travel, music and songs, the

Taliban regime wants to sustain male chauvinism in Afghan society. Third, muted voices against gender discrimination in Afghanistan are unable to deter the Taliban regime from converting their country into a big prison where dissent, political pluralism, democracy and tolerance cannot be allowed. As a result, by suppressing half of their population by force, the Taliban regime will soon face a backlash because 20 years following 9/11 and the overthrow of Taliban regime by the US, the generation which grew up during those days cannot accept a medieval order which suppresses dissent, innovation, creativity, education, research and critical

thinking. In the absence of women's emancipation and the ruling of the country by force, without giving people a choice who should govern them, the Taliban regime will destabilize not only Afghanistan but also neighboring states.

The retrogression of the Taliban should be a lesson for Pakistan, when multiple quarters within our country appreciated the August 2021 takeover of Kabul. Already, the implications of anti-women measures in Afghanistan can be seen in Pakistan where suffocation, stagnation and male domination is projected in the name of religion. After all, the Taliban's return to power was a source of jubilation for their counterparts in Pakistan who want to impose the same brand of shariah which prevails in Afghanistan today.

The world in 2023: Five Issues that will shape the International Agenda



By Tayyaba Razzaq

The world in 2023 is likely to look quite different from the one we know today. Many of the challenges that will shape the international agenda in the coming years are already emerging, including de-dollarization, the water crisis, climate change, international security, and technological advancements.

De-dollarization is the process of replacing the US dollar with another currency as a global reserve currency. This is being driven by growing concerns about the US dollar's strength and its ability to remain the global reserve currency. The shift away from the US dollar has already begun and is likely to accelerate as countries seek to reduce their reliance on the dollar.

Water crises are a growing concern, with scarcity becoming a major issue in many parts of the world. The world's population is expected to reach 8.5 billion by 2030, and this will put further strain on water resources.

Climate change is also likely to exacerbate the water crisis, with rising temperatures leading to more unpredictable weather patterns and increased droughts. Climate change is also likely to be a major issue in 2023. The severe impacts of climate change are already being felt around the world, with tremendous weather events becoming increasingly common and sea levels rising. Countries will need to work together to develop and implement effective strategies to mitigate and adapt to climate change.

International security is another major issue that will shape the international agenda in 2023. The interconnected globalized world and proliferation of technology have increased the threats of cyber-

attacks and other forms of violence, which is a major concern. Therefore, countries will need to work together to ensure that the world is a safe place for all.

Finally, technological advancements are likely to have a huge impact on the world in 2023. We are already seeing the emergence of new technologies such as artificial intelligence (AI), robotics, and many other advancements that are transforming the way we live and work. These technologies will continue to shape the world in the years to come and have the potential to revolutionize many aspects of our lives.

The world will move toward de-dollarization

The world is moving towards a new era of de-dollarization. The US dollar has long been the primary currency of choice for international trade and finance, but the trend is now changing. As the US continues to print more money and the dollar's purchasing power weakens, other countries are looking for alternatives. The US dollar is no longer the world's reserve currency, and this shift is likely to continue in 2023.

In 2023, de-dollarization will be driven by various factors. First, the US dollar's purchasing power has been weakened by the US government's aggressive money-printing policies. As the US continues to print money to prop up the economy, the dollar's value has decreased, making it less attractive for international trade and finance.

Second, nations are looking for alternatives to the US dollar. Global competitors such as China and Russia have begun to use their own currencies for international trade and finance. This trend is increasingly being adopted by other countries as well. For example, Japan also announced that it is exploring ways to reduce its reliance on the dollar for international transactions.

The role of BRICS in the de-dollarization of the global economy is becoming increasingly important. As the US dollar continues to be a dominant currency in global trade and finance, the BRICS countries are looking to develop alternative solutions that reduce their dependence on the dollar and promote greater economic stability. BRICS countries have already started to take steps to reduce the dollar's dominance in their respective economies. China has recently announced plans to phase out the dollar from its foreign exchange reserves, while Russia has been pushing for the creation of an alternative payment system that would reduce its reliance on the US dollar.

In addition, BRICS countries are also working together on the New Development Bank (NDB), which aims to fund infrastructure projects throughout the emerging world. The NDB provides financing for long-term investments in the BRICS countries, which could help reduce the reliance on the US dollar for global trade and finance.



Moreover, BRICS countries are also looking to promote the use of their own currencies for international investments. By using their own currencies, countries such as China and Russia are hoping to create more stability in the global economy and reduce their reliance on the US dollar. Hence, the role of BRICS in the de-dollarization of the global economy is becoming increasingly important. The BRICS countries are taking steps to reduce their reliance on the US dollar and create more stability in the global economy. By promoting the use of their own currencies, developing alternative payment systems, and creating a new development bank, the BRICS countries are leading the way in the push for a more balanced and stable global economy.

Third, some countries are looking to cryptocurrencies as a potential alternative to the US dollar. Cryptocurrencies such as Bitcoin and Litecoin have been gaining popularity and are becoming increasingly accepted as currencies in finance.

These trends are likely to continue in 2023 as countries continue to look for alternatives to the US dollar. As more countries abandon

the dollar, the world will slowly move towards a state of de-dollarization. This will reduce the US's economic influence and increase the power of other currencies.

Ultimately, de-dollarization is a long-term process that will take time to unfold. In the short term, considering the Russia-Ukraine crisis, it is likely that the US dollar will remain the dominant currency for international trade, but not for a longer time. Therefore, the trend towards de-dollarization is likely to continue. As more countries look for alternatives to the US dollar this year, the world will slowly move away from its reliance on the US dollar and towards a more diverse and global financial system.

International Security

International security will be a challenge in 2023 due to a variety of factors. The world is becoming increasingly interconnected, with globalization and the proliferation of technology contributing to this trend. As a result, cybercrime and other security issues will continue to be major challenges.

The increased complexity of the global economy and the emergence of new power structures will also continue to create security issues. The effects of globalization on international security are an area of concern, as it has the potential to amplify existing threats. With the emergence of global networks, there is a risk that terrorist networks, organized crime, and cyber-attacks can be spread across the world.

In addition, the increasing prevalence of cyberattacks and the lack of effective cybersecurity measures will further heighten the risk of international security threats. The increasing prevalence of artificial intelligence (AI) and robotics will present new threats to international security. AI and robotics will be used to develop new weapons, surveillance systems, and other security measures that could be used to undermine existing security structures.

Similarly, the use of AI and robotics could be used to facilitate espionage, terrorist activities, and other malicious activities. The increasing prevalence of natural disasters due to climate change will also present a major challenge to international security in 2023 because of the extreme weather events, such as floods, hurricanes, and droughts, that have caused significant disruption to global infrastructure, which has led to economic instability and increased security risks. In addition, the displacement of people due to climate change this year will lead to increased levels of migration and refugee crises, which could further increase the threat of international security issues.

Water Crisis

In recent years, the world has been facing a growing water crisis, and this crisis is expected to worsen by 2023 if the current trajectory of water usage continues. According to the United Nations, by 2025, 1.8 billion people will be living in countries or regions with absolute water scarcity, and two-thirds of the world's population could be living in water-stressed conditions. This water crisis will have severe implications for global economic growth, health, and food security, as well as the environment.

The water crisis can be understood by considering a significant number of factors, which include population growth, climate change, and the lack of access to clean water. As the population of the world increases day by day, the necessity for fresh water will also increase, while the amount of available water resources will remain relatively constant. This situation has been further worsened by the impacts of global climate change, which are causing droughts and melting glaciers, which are reducing the amount of available water. In many regions of the world, access to clean water is limited, resulting in people using contaminated water not only for drinking but also for other purposes.

Water scarcity should be considered a global problem that requires a global solution. International agreements, such as the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals, have been established to address the water crisis. These goals include providing universal access to clean water and sanitation, promoting the efficient use of water resources, and protecting water-related ecosystems. However, these goals have not been adequately implemented, and progress towards achieving them has been slow.

In addition to international agreements, national governments must take action to address the water crisis. This includes investing in water infrastructure, such as dams, irrigation systems, and wastewater treatment plants. Governments must also promote sustainable water management practices, such as water conservation, rainwater harvesting, and the reuse of wastewater.

Furthermore, governments should promote awareness and education around water issues so that people understand the importance of using water resources responsibly. If the current trends in water usage continue and the world fails to take meaningful action to address the water crisis, the situation will only worsen by 2023. The impacts of the water crisis will be felt in all areas of society, and they will have severe implications for global economic growth, health, and food security.

In order to avoid this grim future, governments must take action now to address the water crisis. This includes implementing effective international agreements, investing in water infrastructure, and promoting sustainable water management practices. If we are to succeed in averting a global water crisis in 2023, states must act now.

Technological Advancements

Technology has always been a part of our lives, and it is constantly changing and evolving. We now live in a world where technology is advancing faster than ever before, and it is having a huge impact on our lives. The most obvious example of how technology is changing the world this year is in the development of artificial intelligence (AI).

AI is already being used in a wide variety of applications, from smart home devices to autonomous vehicles. AI is also being used in healthcare, finance, and education, as well as many other areas.

In 2023, AI is expected to become even more advanced and sophisticated, with researchers predicting that it will be able to perform tasks that were previously impossible. AI is also being used to develop new technologies and systems that can help us solve world issues like poverty and climate change.

ChatGpt

ChatGPT came out just last year, but it is already changing many different industries. Google's management team has called a "code red" because of its release. The AI-powered chatbot comes up with answers based on what the user says. Users have used ChatGPT for everything from writing poems to getting help with their homework. When it comes to research, these chatbots that are run by AI will be very helpful. Instead of sorting through search engines, you can just type in a few words to find what you're looking for. You can use the chatbot to make certain tasks easier and faster. In the near future, people might not need help from other people to do research and sort through articles.

It seems like people will now ask the chatbot for help instead of searching through Google's websites. Anyone who has ever used Google knows that you have to look through a lot of websites to find what you need.



On the other hand, ChatGPT tries to answer specific problems quickly and directly, even if the questions are hard. Therefore, Google Bard is a new chatbot tool that was made in response to AI tools like ChatGPT that compete with it. It's meant to make you feel like you're talking to a real person, and it uses both natural language processing and machine learning to answer your questions in a way that seems natural and helpful. Such tools could be especially useful for smaller companies that want to offer natural language support to their customers without hiring large teams of support staff or adding to Google's own search tools.

However, much like the calculator didn't replace the need to take math or for people to work the till or be accountants, people will find ways of using AI-mediated communication as a tool. The more we think of it as an assistant or a tool that is incredibly powerful, the more we can envision how it will be useful. It will be a new normal.

Internet of Things (IoT)

Another big change that technology is bringing to the world this year is the rise of the Internet of Things (IoT). The Internet of Things is a type of technology that creates a network of connected devices that are capable of communicating with each other. This means that devices like a phone, TV, and refrigerator can communicate with each other and even with the home's central computer.

This technology is already being used in smart homes, but it is also being used in a variety of other areas, such as factories, hospitals, and even public transportation.

Virtual reality (VR) is also becoming increasingly popular this year. VR allows people to experience environments in a completely immersive way. This technology is being used in the gaming industry, but it is also being used in education and other areas. VR is allowing people to experience places and things that were previously inaccessible or too expensive to explore. Finally, blockchain technology is beginning to revolutionize the way people do business. Blockchain technology is a secure and decentralized ledger system that allows for the transfer of data between two parties without the need for a third party. It is used in different places, like industries, including finance and government services.

Technology is changing the world in 2023 in a variety of ways. This is in stark contrast to the way it was used in the past, when technology was mainly used to improve the efficiency of existing processes. Now, technology is being used to create entirely new ways of doing things and to solve some of the world's major issues.

Climate Catastrophe

Climate catastrophe has been an increasing concern in recent years, with weather-related disasters such as floods, hurricanes, and heat waves becoming more frequent and more intense. In 2023, if nothing is done to address this growing threat, a climate catastrophe will indeed have a devastating impact all over the world.

The effects of global climate change will be felt in multiple ways, including the disruption of ecosystems, changes to the global economy, and the displacement of millions of people. The Paris Agreement was a landmark agreement in 2015, in which countries agreed to take action not only to reduce their emissions but also to keep global temperature rise at least below 2 degrees Celsius.

However, since then, it has been observed that the progress of the states is slow, and in 2017, the United States withdrew from the agreement, a major setback for efforts to tackle climate change. At the COP27 in 2022, the issue of "Loss and Damage" was discussed, with a fund being created to provide financial compensation to countries that have suffered the most from climate-related disasters. This is an important step, but it is not enough to prevent the devastation caused by climate catastrophes in 2023.

The world is running out of time to take action to mitigate the effects of climate change. If nothing is done, the impacts of a climate catastrophe in 2023 will be catastrophic. Extreme weather events will increase in number and intensity, causing economic losses, displacement of people, and disruption of ecosystems. Heat waves will become longer and more intense, leading to droughts, crop failures, and increased water scarcity.

In order to prevent the worst from happening, countries must eliminate or at least minimize the use of fossil fuels. This requires a global effort, as well as government policies and incentives to encourage businesses and individuals to switch to clean energy.

Additionally, there needs to be investment in climate adaptation strategies such as improved infrastructure, water management

systems, and early warning systems. It is clear that a climate catastrophe in 2023 will be a reality unless drastic action is taken now. To prevent the worst from happening, governments must work together to implement policies to reduce emissions and invest in climate adaptation strategies. It is essential that the world take action now, as 2023 could be our last chance to control climate disasters.



Conclusion

In conclusion, if we see the world in 2023 with a different lens, considering these five issues that will shape the international agenda, we will understand that it is a complex and multifaceted topic that cannot be ignored.

In the future, the five issues of de-dollarization, water crises, climate change, international security, and technological advancements will be of particular importance when it comes to shaping the global agenda. De-dollarization has already begun and is likely to continue, leading to a more diversified international economic system. At the same time, it is likely to reduce the influence of the US in global economic affairs. The water crisis is an urgent issue that has been exacerbated by climate change and population growth. Water scarcity will continue to be a serious issue in many regions of the world in 2023, and it is likely to be an important factor in global geopolitics.

Countries will need to cooperate to address water scarcity, improve access to clean water, and mitigate the effects of climate disasters on the availability of water. This global issue of climate change will require concerted international efforts and the development of more sustainable energy sources. Additionally, for international security, the states will need to work together to address these threats and develop effective strategies for maintaining global security. Technological advancements are also likely to have a significant impact on the global agenda in 2023. AI and automation will continue to transform many sectors, while new technologies such as blockchain will also have important implications.

Therefore, the world in 2023 is likely to be a very different place from today. It is essential that countries work together not only to address such issues but also to make sure that the world is a safe place for all.

Flood funds and telethons

By Dr Sania Nishtar

The 2022 monsoon season “on steroids” left in its wake widespread destruction, submerging one third of the country under water, with over half of Pakistan’s districts declared as “calamity hit”.

Around 33 million people were affected, with nearly eight million displaced from their homes, of which nearly 4.5 million people remained exposed to or living close to flooded areas in early 2023. Public and private stakeholders mobilized a response to assist. Amongst these was former prime minister Imran Khan’s notable initiative to raise funds for flood victims through a series of telethons.

This comment outlines details about the handling and disbursement of funds raised through these telethons and follows several social media posts over the last six months detailing modalities about fund disbursement and the policy guiding that.

In terms of fund collection, three live fundraisers were held between August and September 2022. All donations from the telethon were received in official accounts of the chief ministers of Punjab, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Gilgit-Baltistan. The provincial governments’ own flood relief funds were also routed to these same accounts. A total of Rs15 billion was pledged in donations. Of this, Rs4.63 billion was received in dedicated accounts as of January 1, 2023.

There are three reasons for the gap between ‘amount pledged’ and ‘amount received’ in the accounts. First, was the high failure rate of international credit card transactions, worth nearly Rs4.345 billion since many payments were blocked and flagged as potential high-risk payments. According to the State Bank of Pakistan, 58 per cent of this amount could not be received as the owner of the scheme (eg Mastercard/Visa) did not authorize transactions; in 15 per cent authentication failed; in 21 per cent the issuer bank declined the transaction; in two per cent there were



technical errors in the payment and in four per cent the payment was associated with the “risk blocked bin”.

Second, Rs2 billion committed by donors during the telethons was meant to be executed by the donors themselves and was not intended to flow into the chief ministers’ accounts. And, third, some US-based donors wanted a 501 C-3 instrument so that they could get a tax exemption benefit on their donations, and donation into a government account did not provide them the tax relief. A workaround was developed for this, which will take time to materialize.

Of the Rs4.63 billion received in the accounts, 83 per cent was from domestic donors, and the remaining from international donors. The average size of donations was Rs31,310 and Rs77,107 for domestic and international donors, respectively. Further details are given on the URL: <https://www.insaf.pk/notification/telethon-flood-donations-utilization-status>

To guide utilization, special purpose committees were constituted both in Punjab and KP with the mandate to devise and oversee the mechanism for efficient management and utilization of flood relief funds from the telethon and the chief minister’s fund. Each committee was chaired by the respective chief

minister, and I was tasked to lead the initiative for both committees.

Given the large number of people who had been displaced, the committees decided to prioritize rebuilding of damaged houses, except in Balochistan, where in kind assistance was given as per the request of the government of Balochistan. We were clear in our vision of instituting a rule-based and data-driven method for selecting beneficiaries, prioritizing beneficiary experience and dignity, ensuring transparency, and eliminating leakages. A four-step process was adopted in this regard.

The first step involved an end-to-end digital field survey of every damaged house. The digital survey was conducted by the Urban Unit in Punjab and the KP IT board in KP with the respective PDMA’s. The survey app had the functionality to geotag each survey house and upload photos as proof, to ensure that the team was physically present. Once fed into the system, the data could not be altered without the consent of the district disaster management units.

Survey teams had to brave rough terrain and flooded areas to reach all damaged houses and conduct the full survey within six weeks. A control room was set up, where internal

detailed dashboards were deployed, providing all details of damaged houses. This made decision-making data-driven and transparent.

The second step introduced further rigour to the flood damage assessment process by superimposing pre-and-post flood satellite imagery maps on geotagged damaged houses. This helped pinpoint areas on the map that had been flooded. If a geotagged house happened to be in these areas, it was confirmed that there was indeed a high likelihood of it having sustained damage.

The third step involved the decision to disburse the funds through bank branches, under CCTV monitoring and with biometric signature, to minimize cases of fraud which was reported to be pervasive in past disaster payments. In KP, full bank accounts were opened for beneficiaries in a single visit. In Punjab virtual profiles were created for each beneficiary, and their compensation amount was credited to that profile, to be withdrawn at bank branches within minutes. This was an unprecedented exercise in providing financial inclusion to some of the lowest income households.

The fourth step involved the use of publicly accessible dashboards since transparency was a cornerstone of the flood fund disbursement policy. Survey and disbursement summary statistics were publicly accessible in real time in Punjab (<https://www.bop.com.pk/pdmadp/dashboard>) and KP (<https://rc.kpitb.gov.pk/landing-dash>



board) and those with damaged houses could track the status of their case by punching in their CNIC.

On January 1, 2023 of the Rs4.63 billion received in our accounts, Rs3.63 billion had been disbursed with full details on the dashboards. The remaining Rs1 billion of the telethon funds was allocated towards flood compensation in Sindh, as per the Committee's decision, and for that Sindh Survey data was needed from the NDMA.

However, despite multiple requests, NDMA and the Sindh government did not provide data; the latter conveyed that the money be given to MPAs to distribute. We did not agree to this since this disbursement method went against the principle of

transparent and rule-based payments. The Rs1 billion earmarked for Sindh is therefore kept in the Chief Minister of Punjab Flood Relief Fund 2022 at the Bank of Punjab and field data is still awaited.

The telethon flood payment disbursement process in KP and Punjab served as a precedent for future disaster response. The technology, including survey apps, triangulation data and dashboards designed for these payments, provided real-time feedback and assessment. Efforts should be made to replicate this mechanism across all provinces and to streamline the government response to large-scale adverse events.

Courtesy The News



Slave Boy Who Became Ruler of Mamluks: Kazakhstan Celebrates 800 Years of Sultan Beibars



By Aibarshyn Akhmetkali

From humble beginnings as a slave boy to becoming one of the most eminent Mamluk sultans, the extraordinary story of Sultan Beibars is celebrated in Kazakhstan 800 years after his birth as an example of how one man can turn a region filled with ongoing political rivalry and warfare into a prosperous place.

The man who would become the ruler of the Mamluks in Egypt and Syria was born in 1223. His rise was an extraordinary feat for a man who began his life as a slave boy of Kipchak origin, born in what was known as Desht-i-Kipchak located in the modern territory of Kazakhstan between the Yedil (Volga) and Zhaiyk (Ural) rivers.

In 1242, Mongols invaded the territories of Desht-i-Kipchak, and Beibars was taken as a slave for further training in the service of the Egyptian emir Aidakin al-Bundukdar. He was a sturdy and strong young man. Representatives of the Egyptian nobility usually ransomed such slaves.

Soon Aidakin al-Bundukdar fell out of favor with Sultan As-Salih II, who

confiscated all his slaves. A skillful and courageous trainee, Beibars very soon caught the attention of Sultan Al-Salih, who consequently appointed him as the commander of his bodyguards.

A hardy warrior

Beibars built his military career through a series of successful battles under Turan Shah. One of his major military victories was at the city of Al-Mansurah in 1250 against the crusaders' army led by Louis IX of France.

Bronze bust of Sultan Beibars in Cairo, at the National Military Museum. Photo credit: Ahmed Y.Elmalouk/wikipedia.org

According to historical records, in the aftermath of the battle, King Louis IX, both of his brothers, many aristocrats, and nobles were taken prisoner, many fled, and the rest had no choice but to surrender. The Mamluks sank around 4,000 crusader ships on the Nile River. Later, King Louis IX was ransomed for a large sum of money.

With the death of Turan Shah in 1250,

a shuffle of rulers began that lasted until Sultan Qutuz came to the throne in 1259. During this period, Beibars, along with other Mamluks, fled to Syria for the safety of their lives. As Sultan Qutuz ascended the throne, he gave security guarantees to Mamluks to return to Egypt.

Under Qutuz's rule, Beibars defeated the Mongols and captured the city of Kit Buga in 1260. For his remarkable victory, Beibars expected to be rewarded by Qutuz. However, the sultan was hesitant, fearing Beibars's ambitions. An enraged Beibars killed Qutuz on his way back to Cairo and seized power to become the new ruler of the Mamluks.

A powerful ruler

In the 17 years of his reign, from 1260 until 1277, Beibars aspired to build a civilizational model in his country and was largely untroubled by outside threats.

Beibars had fought dozens of battles: some against the Mongol empire, others against the crusaders. Having led the armed resistance against the

invaders, Beibars united Muslim Syria and Egypt into a single state.

The Mamluks defeated the crusaders at the disaster of Mari in 1266. Photo credit: "Le Livre des Merveilles", early 15th century. From "Le Royaume Armenien de Cilicie", Claude Mutaftian/wikimedia.org.

In an interview with Newtimes news agency, Kazakh historian Nikolay Lapin said during the rule of Sultan Beibars, the Middle East was shielded against threats from rival civilizations of Mongols and crusaders.

"Let me remind you that Sultan Beibars also became famous for his military actions against numerous crusader attacks in the Middle East. He is one of those who, in fact, stopped the very active Mongol claims to the territory of Egypt. Sultan Beibars carried out reforms within the state and managed to create one of the medieval empires of the time," said Lapin.

The Mamluks under Beibars (yellow) fought off the Franks and the Mongols during the Ninth Crusade. Photo credit: wikiwand.com.

Continuing on why Sultan Beibars's legacy remained in the historical memory of the Middle East, Egypt, Syria, Iran, and some European states, Lapin said it was due to his "very powerful activity as he held the throne of the ruler of Egypt."



"This was the 13th century, a time of great tension and activity throughout the Old World, which was also connected with the Mongol conquests, the birth of the Mongol empire, the waning but still active crusades, and so on," he added.

In 17 years, Sultan Beibars conquered the towns of Atlit, Haifa, Safed, and Jaffa, conducted almost yearly raids against the crusaders, and engaged in nine battles against the Mongols of Persia.

A man who built prosperous cities

Sultan Beibars remains a noble figure and a

source of inspiration for both Kazakhs and Egyptians for his contribution to making the region a wealthy and infrastructurally advanced place. Along with bringing political union to the region, he was credited with creating the most vibrant area of human development back then.

Mausoleum chamber of Sultan Beibars in Al-Zahiriyyah Library in Damascus. Photo credit: Francesco Bandarin/wikipedia.org

During his reign, new canals were built and the harbors improved. He established a regular and fast postal service between Cairo and Damascus. In Cairo, a large mosque was built based on his drawings, and a madrasa (school) bore his name. The region became a prosperous place to live.

He is reputed to be a guardian of widows, orphans, the elderly, the destitute, dervishes, and ascetics. Children of people in need studied in his madrasas for free, and orphans were provided with everything they needed at the state's expense. Locals also studied geography, history, math, astronomy, and other disciplines besides Shariah law.

Beibars died in Damascus, Syria, in 1277. He did not survive the poisoning that is said to have been intended for someone else. He was buried under the dome of the present Madrasa Al-Zahiriyyah, which he established under his reign.

Courtesy Astanatimes



Like Father, Like Son: Murat Auezov Was a Steward of His Father, Kazakh Classic Writer Mukhtar Auezov's Literary Legacy



Last year was the 125th anniversary of writer Mukhtar Auezov, one of Kazakhstan's greatest literary figures, followed by another anniversary this year – the 80 year celebration of his son, Murat Auezov, on Jan. 1, which gave Kazakh society another opportunity to explore the creativity of the former from his son's perspective.

No one could reasonably claim that Murat Auezov lived under the shadow of his famous father, on the contrary, he had a rich life and career of his own, and was, at the same time, fiercely protective of his father's legacy. He took pride in promoting what was still unsaid about Mukhtar Auezov and his legacy. Much of his vivid and powerful memoir explores the historic and social context under which Mukhtar Auezov created his works.

In an interview with the *Vecernii Almaty* (Evening Almaty) newspaper in 2022, Murat Auezov goes on to say that one cannot fully understand Mukhtar Auezov's works, including the renowned "The Path of Abai" without understanding the context of his father's work, namely by deepening their knowledge of the history of the nomads and the steppe.

"The greatest tragedy for the Kazakhs in the 20th century was famine, collectivization, and the death of more than a third of the population in peacetime. The nomadic world collapsed and with it, hundreds of thousands of people, our culture, and language went into oblivion. All this was also accompanied by repression. And what is nomadism in the life of the Kazakh people and what is nomadism in general? It is a stunning vision of the history of world civilization," said Murat Auezov.

According to him, the fall of nomadic civilization fundamentally influenced the works of local poets and writers, including his father.

Mukhtar Auezov with his sons Murat (L) and Yernar (R). Photo credit: adyrna.kz

"This phenomenon should not be dismissed by any means. Our poets and writers could not help but reflect on this tragic demise of the nomadic civilization," he said.

"What is Mukhtar Auezov? How can one comprehend his novel "The Path of Abai" and its strongest chapter "Jut" (massive loss of livestock from famine), where the very image of hunger is presented, without understanding the demise of such a mighty element as the nomadic civilization? ... We cannot talk about Auezov without having in mind Alashorda (early 20th century provisional Kazakh government), Abai, the Middle Ages, the poets who foreshadowed Zar Zaman – tragic, apocalyptic literature," said Murat Auezov.

He was born in 1943 in the Zhambyl Region in southern Kazakhstan. His personality was formed under the powerful influence of a family of outstanding people – his father Mukhtar Auezov and the boundless love of his mother, Fatima Gabitova.

In his memoir, Murat Auezov recalled the importance his father placed on preserving the language and Kazakh identity in his upbringing. "In 1949, when I went to school here in Almaty, there were two Kazakh-language schools – one for the girls and one for the boys. Under those conditions, Mukhtar Auezov took me, a six-year-old boy, to a Kazakh school. Since then, Kazakh for me is

my father's imperative and I have followed the logic of this imperative all my life," said Murat Auezov.

In 1959, Murat Auezov entered the Institute of Oriental Languages at Lomonosov Moscow State University. As a student in Moscow, he organized the Zhas Tulpar (Young Stallion) movement that intended to oppose the colonial policy of the Soviet Union and contribute to the formation of national consciousness.



The Zhas Tulpar movement was an informal association of Kazakh youth who studied at universities in Moscow and Lenin-grad (current St. Petersburg) in the 1960s and positioned themselves as a cultural and educational community. Some of the political views of the Zhas Tulpar movement members contradicted the canons of Soviet ideology.

"The ideas of the Alashordinians nourished the activities of the society," told Murat Auezov the Adyrna news agency in a 2021 interview. "Zhas Tulpar was an anti-colonial struggle, spiritual decolonization, and support for the Kazakh language and culture. Those ideas were picked up by a whole generation of poets, writers, artists, and musicians."

To mark the 120th anniversary of his father in 2017, Murat Auezov presented two of his own books "The thread of time" and "Dilim" at Pavlodar State University. Photo credit: tou.edu.kz

Members of the Zhas Tulpar movement were at the forefront of progressive social movements in later years, such as the Nevada-Semipalatinsk International Anti-Nuclear Movement.

When Kazakhstan declared its independence, Murat Auezov took an active part in the country's transformation. He served as the Parliament deputy, conducted research in literature, and became the first ambassador of Kazakhstan to China. As an ambassador, he did tremendous work in popularizing the spiritual heritage of the Kazakh people, particularly the works of his father and of the poet Abai. In those years, two versions of "The Path of Abai" were translated into Chinese.

In 2017, the year of the 120th anniversary of Mukhtar Auezov's birth, the younger Auezov published two of his own books "The thread of time" and "Dilim," ("My Credo") which became the embodiment of the events he experienced, the sum of his life.

The second book is notable for the fact that it was Murat Auezov's first book written in the Kazakh language. In an epigraph to the book, the author wrote: "There were times when we almost lost our language and religion and came back again. And what about Dilim?! It is absolutely impossible to lose it. We have survived as individuals, as an independent nation, an independent state only through the health of the dil (mind/credo), the purity of the dil, the strength of the dil."

Among the details on the elder Auezov's contribution to literature, Murat Auezov particularly highlights his efforts in saving the Kyrgyz Manas epic, which were accused of embodying anti-humanist, feudal ideas.

In 1952, Mukhtar Auezov made the remarkable decision to go to Bishkek to make a speech in defense of the Manas epic and he won his case.

"This is a famous story," said Murat Auezov in an interview with Forbes Kazakhstan. "He went with the risk to his life and spoke at a conference when they [the commission] had already arrived from Moscow with the verdict that it was an anti-people work and that it should be destroyed. Then, in a letter to Valentina Nikolaevna (Mukhtar Auezov's third wife), he wrote: 'I am aware of the danger this poses to me, yet I cannot remain silent,'" said Murat Auezov.



His father's current recognition in the region also comes from his efforts to develop a better understanding of the literary works of Turkic-speaking countries that consequently led to closer ties among people in those countries.

"When I was 12 or 13 years old, during a trip to Issyk-Kul (lake in Kyrgyzstan), we visited the aul (village) of Sayakbay Karalayev, the great manaschi (Manas narrator). At that time, my father coached my little brother Yernar and me to know and feel the whole essence of the Turkic-speaking world. We knew that Sayakbay would like it if we knew the Kyrgyz spirit, the Kyrgyz worldview just as much as we knew the Kazakh one. That is why for me Manas became a very close work," said Murat Auezov.

Courtesy Astanatimes

Saga of former state of Dir!

Restrictions were imposed on education, wearing white clothes; masses faced poverty while Nawab enjoyed countless pleasures

By Mahmood Jan Babar

Mohammad Ali Jauhar, also known as Babu Khan, is one of the elderly residents of the former state of Dir who remembers what the conditions were like before it became a part of Pakistan. He says that although he was very young at that time, he still remembers there were no schools or madrasas for children in this entire state, which covered an area of three thousand square miles. There was no permission to build hospitals for treatment and the only option for a patient to survive besides dying was to eat some herbal medicine prepared by local doctors. "We remember that while facilities for treating animals, especially pet dogs and horses of the ruling family, were available, there was no permission to build any medical center for humans, who were only allowed to take medicine from local doctors," he recounts.

This is the saga of children who hailed from the former state of Dir in Pakistan. Parents of these children would rather send them to other cities outside the state for education through smuggling. This 'smuggled' generation is now in its 70s, having their children and grandchildren and are counted as revered folks.

Residents of Dir would covertly dispatch their youth to study in Peshawar, Swat, and India. Curbs were not only confined to obtaining worldly education, but if someone sent their child to study in a nearby area (police station, Swat, Malakand or Peshawar), the family would face difficulties, if its story went public. Complete searches were conducted on state borders, and if someone was caught bringing chicken, eggs, sweets, rice, or anything else for their child, they would be punished severely.

One day, Babu Khan says, he tried to take a small amount of rice out of the state from his village Doriyal (a village of Akozai valley in today's Upper Dir), when he was caught by the Nawab's (ruler) forces at Chakdara.



"I remember one day I was crossing the state border at the location of Chakdara with rice from my village Doriyal when the guards took me into custody and brought me to the government checkpoint, where I saw the first and last Nawab of Dir, Shah Jahan Khan whom my father Malik Amirullah Khan had served as governor.

Doriyal is also a village situated between the town of Katlang and Takht Bhai, in the second-largest district of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, where most of the people are former residents of Doriyal village in the present-day Upper Dir district. So, when they settled in this area, the place was also named Doriyal.

According to an elderly resident of the village named Saifullah, due to a lack of education in the Dir state, the culture of weaponry was prevalent, and worldly education was considered a sin. Therefore, most people moved their children out of the state in search of a better future and education. According to him, sixty to seventy households from all over Dir had left and settled in this Doriyal village.

According to Saifullah, before the inclusion of Dir state into Pakistan, it had its own laws. People used to take their children to other areas for education, and those who studied secretly during the Nawab period, continued to study outside the state. After the end of Dir state and its inclusion in Pakistan,

the first school within the state's boundaries was established in Doriyal. Those who were already studying elsewhere, also announced they were educated; otherwise, people preferred to remain silent for fear of being punished for not being educated.

Did former Dir state comprise remote regions?

At present, this region which includes Upper Dir and Lower Dir, was called the State of Dir and its ruler was called the Nawab, although some time ago, instead of the Nawab, it was governed by 'Khanism.'

The state bordered Chitral on one side, Afghanistan on the other, Swat on one side, and Malakand on the other. According to historians, the current district of Bajaur was also under the jurisdiction of this state.

Later, after the end of the Nawabi era, due to abundance of forests in the area, the timber business became the largest source of income for the area, while agriculture also took place in some places due to predominantly mountainous terrain, and those who raised livestock also did good business.

According to local people, before the end of the state system and Dir becoming a part of Pakistan, there was no business, and people had a lot of

difficulty meeting their economic needs, and the state also had only one desire, which was to acquire as much produce as possible from its citizens.

How rule of last Dir Nawab ended?

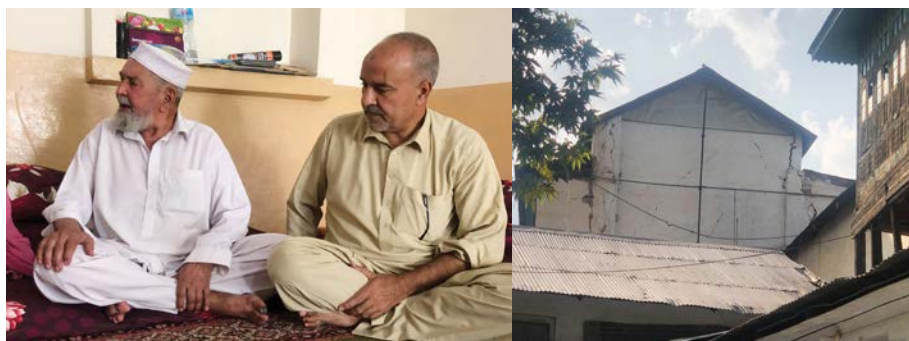
After the creation of Pakistan, Nawab Shah Jahan announced his affiliation with Pakistan to secure his borders after which there was no threat of any external aggression to his state.

Historian Khan Roshan Khan, who is an encyclopedia on Pakhtun history, in his famous book "The History of Yusufzai Nation" and other historians and writers have also expressed the same views on the issue of education, health and employment in the former state of Dir.

All of them contend that the Nawabs could have made their subjects progress and prosper, had they wanted, but they kept them away from education. Besides lack of education and health, condition of trade and agriculture was also stark. The Nawab himself had countless pleasures in his palace, kept hundreds of different dogs and had a large number of servants.

After the inception of Pakistan and during the days of the accession of the state to the government of Pakistan, some responsible officers, even the governor general, saw such poor condition of Dir masses with their own eyes, but no one did anything to help them.

Roshan Khan writes that after Dir's accession to Pakistan, the Nawab started conniving with the anti-Pakistan forces of Afghanistan. To this, Field Marshal Ayub Khan, ordered the arrest of



Nawab Shah Jahan, who was detained on October 7, 1960 and later kept in a Lahore prison for the next seven years. According to historians, in former Dir state, the state of health was such that TB, asthma, cancer, appendicitis, smallpox was common among the people; tooth extraction was done by blacksmiths, children were born in the hands of old women, circumcision was a village practice and barber used to do bone grafting in case of broken bones.

Tin roofs, cemented houses were not allowed in Nawab era

Saeed Zahir Jan, the president of journalists union of the area, says that while education and healthcare were not available, people were not allowed to build proper houses, and putting a tent on the roofs was only the right of the rulers; it was one of the darkest eras, and people were helpless. Zahir says the end of the Nawab Shah Jahan era was mainly due to policies of his own son, Shah Khusro, who was very unhappy with his father's policies of keeping his subjects subjugated. Therefore, on his complaint, the government of Pakistan arrested his father and imprisoned him in Lahore.

According to Zahir Jan, residents of the area claim that despite all this, there was

peace and tranquility during the Nawabi era. There were no thefts, robberies, or killings. The walls of people's houses used to be very low, and everyone used to sleep on the roofs in summer. The doors of the houses used to be left open at night, but no one had the courage to steal anything. Anyone who committed murder was immediately caught and was punished. Though positive things were few, but even today, people remember some good things from that time, such as exemplary peace, speedy resolution of disputes, a system of limits and retribution, a written code of conduct, strict implementation of it, control of market prices and prevention of profiteering.

To know the position of Nawab Shah Jahan's family on these matters, last year in September this representative visited the building that was being used as the Nawab's secretariat, palace and residence. However, the people inside the building refused to discuss any matter. Many people around the building and in the nearby market were asked for any information about members of Nawab's family, but no one helped in this regard.

However, according to some of the information shared by a few people, the rivals of Nawab and some ethnic groups have one stance, while the people or descendants of Syeds and Khanan Sahibzadagan have a different stance.

According to them, Nawab did not want modern education for the common people or even for his own children, but there was no restriction on traditional education, while the state's own revenue was not affected due to the lack of roads, health, and other facilities. Similarly, the British and later the Pakistani government used to give Nawab a personal allowance but did nothing for the people, even though from 1962 to 1970, the institutions established during this time were supported by the people themselves by more than 80 percent.



Chai is tea, tea is chai: India's favourite hot drink

Indians took the tea the British were marketing to them, added spices, milk and sugar, and transformed it forever

By Nupur Roopa

I remember jumping up to sit on the kitchen counter one afternoon. My five-year-old self wants to watch my mother making chai. She pushes me away from the gas stove but I am indignant and refuse to hop down, although I do move away a bit.

The water bubbles. She adds sugar, then takes a flat steel grater, balances it on the edge of the pot and grates in adrak (ginger).

"Why do we add this?" I ask, watching the shreds fall into the bubbling water.

"Child, I have to hurry I don't have time for your questions," she says. I sulk but I know that, being a doctor, she has to get to the hospital on time. I will ask grandma, I tell myself.

The ginger threads dance in the water. Then she adds the tea leaves, turning the contents of the pot brown. Stirring, she adds milk and lets it simmer over a low flame, still stirring. After a few minutes, she removes it from the heat and covers it. I hop down to watch the next step. She strains it in cups, puts them on a tray, and carries it to the dining table.

I run out. I have no interest in tasting it but am proud, boasting to my friends: "I know how to make chai." By the end of the day, I have memorised the process forever.

I don't want to ask to taste it because I know if I do, she will dilute it with more milk. "Children should not drink tea," she would say. I hated that pale milky liquid.

The first time I tasted real chai, I was in grade three. I had scored good marks on a maths test and ran home that August afternoon to share the news with my mother and grandparents as they were having their chai. Basking in the appreciation and pats on my back, I asked if I could have chai. Mother refused, but grandfather smiled and poured some into a cup. I took it and breathed the aroma in deeply. I took one sip, then the second. The creamy, rich beverage warmed my heart and spirit and at that precise moment, I became a chai lover.

I yearned to make chai but wasn't allowed. "What if you spill the boiling water and get burned," my grandmother would fret. Finally, when I was in grade five, she reluctantly allowed me to make it under her supervision and soon I was making it alone.

I felt so accomplished, measuring water, grating ginger, and scooping sugar and tea leaves to add to the boiling water. Watching the tea leaves spinning with the ginger. Then adding the milk and watching it lighten the chai and simmer, steeping the flavours. "A good cup of chai needs a slow fire," I was told, something I follow to this day.



Fast forward a few years, and I am on my way home on a bitterly cold January evening in Indore. The sun is on leave and the wind drills into my bones. I enter a silent, cold apartment – my mother isn't back from the hospital yet and my grandmother has moved to live with my uncle since my grandfather passed away.

I need chai. Soon, I'm sitting with a hot, steaming cup, sipping it slowly. I close my eyes, savouring the sweet milk, sharp ginger and cinnamon. By then, I was experimenting with spices and adding what felt right at the moment – cinnamon, fennel, green cardamom and more. I would add lemongrass, holy basil and peppercorns if I had a cold or sore throat.

Chai is tea, tea is chai

Chai in India is a drink for no reason and for every reason, morning, afternoon, evening and night. It lifts your spirits while studying for the maths paper or learning chemistry formulas. It spices college gossip and fans rumours. A welcoming or parting drink, to convince friends and family to stay longer to share more stories.

It brings everyone together. It is served in homes, board meetings, college canteens, cafes and at weddings. "Chalo chai ho jaye," (Let's have tea) is heard every day.

Tea is chai in India. When, where, and how the first cup of chai was brewed is still up for debate, but the stories from our elders give us an idea about the evolution of this delicious, addictive beverage.

Purna Kumar, founder of ChaiVeda and purveyor of medicinal blends, says: "The early reference to tea is found in the Buddhist texts where the monks drank some kind of tea while fasting and meditating.

"They made tea from foraged tea leaves and perhaps added

certain flowers to the decoction to help them feel calmer.”

But how did tea become chai and give birth to chaiwallahs (chai sellers) and chai drinkers?

I remember sitting with my grandfather and a history book in grade 10. He could make history dance in front of your eyes but I wasn't enthusiastic about that day's lesson. It wasn't about kings or queens or battles, but the dull history of the everyday drink. How interesting could it be?

Grandfather pushes the book away and tells me to just listen.

“Tea,” he began, “comes from China.”

With that, he launched a history lesson replete with scenes of Britishers drinking tea, tea traders at seaports and expansive green tea plantations in Assam.

The English were introduced to tea when the Dutch East India Company began to import it into Europe in the 17th century, and its popularity gradually grew. By the 18th century, the English East India Company was importing enough tea from China that it was considered one of the company's main assets. But there was worry over China refusing to renew the English trade monopoly and a search for alternatives began.

English botanist Sir Joseph Banks suggested that the English in Assam grow tea there in 1778 after it was discovered that the Singpho tribe in Assam and Arunachal Pradesh drank a wild tea plant. But there was little interest until China broke the monopoly in 1833; two years later, tea growing in Assam began, food historian Mohsina Mukadam from Mumbai elaborates.

The Assam Tea Company was formed in 1839 and started marketing in Europe. Tea wasn't a widely known beverage in India and it wasn't until the start of the Great Depression in 1929 that the company looked at the Indian market to move its perishable stock, Mukadam added.

They started mandatory tea breaks in factories; tea-making demonstrations in markets and in homes where women could watch from the purdah (a screened enclosure); film screenings in villages to dole out free tea samples. Free tea on the purchase of saris. Tea sold at railway stations. But tea still wasn't becoming as popular as hoped.

“The British were overconfident about changing our food habits,” grandfather smiled. Indians were wary of this new beverage. “We took it, added spices, milk, and sugar, transforming tea-making forever.”

Now I'm completely fascinated with the tea lesson.

Author and chef Sadaf Hussain, a lover of food history and stories, tells me later: “Britishers gave us the habit of tea but ... we Indianised the recipe to suit our taste.

“We were used to drinking ‘kadha’ [herbal decoctions] for ages and we innovated tea into something similar by using spices, milk, and sugar. The addition of milk was ... to increase the quantity as tea leaves were expensive and, India being an agricultural country, milk was easily available.”

Today, India is the largest consumer of tea in the world, the second-largest producer and the fourth-largest exporter. According to Tea Board India, the country produced 1.34 million tonnes of tea in 2021, about 80 percent of it for domestic consumption.

Masala chai

Basic masala chai is tea boiled in a mixture of milk, water, sugar, and any or all spices, like cardamom, cinnamon, clove, ginger or black pepper.

Every family has a special chai recipe. “Some like a mild version, others enjoy it strong,” chai-making is personal, Sadaf says. Some like ginger or cardamom, or both or neither, he explains.

“There are around 20,000 ingredients that have been added to tea around the world,” shares Prerna. “It is mind-boggling ... Anything that can be added to food can be added to tea.”



Masala chai can include herbs, spices and flowers – black pepper, cardamom, cinnamon, cloves, fennel, ginger, holy basil, liquorice, nutmeg, rose petals and more. The best chai is inspired by the masala dabba (box of spices), a quintessential presence in Indian kitchens. Ginger and black pepper are good for digestion and warming. Cloves, with their antiseptic properties, are good for sore throats and cardamom can elevate your mood.

I will never forget my Mumbai neighbour Sumathy Aunty's masala chai. A new bride, I had reached Mumbai early that morning and was taking my stuff upstairs when the apartment next door opened and a lady draped in a sari dashed out, smiling over her shoulder in the way people in Mumbai do when they need to get somewhere. I was new to Mumbai and wasn't aware of what a feat it was to catch the trains crisscrossing the city. Every second counted and could delay you. That evening around seven, Sumathy Aunty knocked and asked me over for tea. What blossomed thereafter was a unique friendship between me, recently married and in my early twenties, and Sumathy Aunty, who was in her late fifties.

We would sip chai with farsan or chivda (fried lentil and flat rice spiced snacks) and sometimes, on rainy days, I would make mango-dis (spiced lentil fritters), a speciality of central India, where I'm from. We exchanged recipes and cooking tips from our home states and she shared life skills to survive in Mumbai, a city that, for a small-town girl like me, was quite stressful.

Her chai was a caramel brew that always made me crave more. It

had ginger, fennel seeds, cardamom and lemongrass, but there was more to it. When asked how she got it to taste this way, she attributed it to a mantra she chanted.

No two chais are the same, even the process and the mindset of the person making chai play a huge role, according to Prerna. “My husband is able to discern a difference if I am unhappy with him for some reason while making tea,” she laughs.

Making chai

Here’s an easy, basic chai recipe.

Bring a cup and a half of water to a boil in a stainless steel pot, then turn the heat down so the water just simmers. Add in about an inch of ginger, grated, and a teaspoon of chopped lemongrass, a pinch of cinnamon and two teaspoons of sugar. If you have any other spices you want to put in the water as it boils, go ahead, variety is definitely welcome, as the chai map of India shows.



Let the mixture simmer away for a few minutes then drop in two teaspoons of black tea leaves.

Once the water darkens, add a cup of whole milk slowly, stirring the whole time until it starts bubbling again. To aerate your chai, take ladlefuls of the mixture and, lifting your hand about a foot above the pot, pour it back in. After a few minutes of aerating, turn off the heat and cover the pot to let the chai rest a bit. Then strain it into teacups and enjoy.

‘If you’re Indian, you must like tea’

South India has been a coffee stronghold for many years but things are starting to change as the humble chai made its way into people’s hearts and chai shops serving a variety ranging from ginger to masala and lemon hold pride of place along with “Kumbakonam coffee” houses, writer Chandrika R Krishnan shares.

“Recently, a newly opened tea shop in the suburbs of Chennai sported a sign: ‘Tea is liquid wisdom,’” she says, “and why not, looking at the steady footfall it experienced,” she adds.

Moving north, “In Old Delhi, Bhopal [central India] and Lucknow [northern India], no one asks if you will have tea, but just offer it. If you are an Indian, you must like tea and cricket,” laughs Sadaf.

Sadaf conducts food walks in Delhi that start from a tea shop near the Jama Masjid in Old Delhi that serves a unique chai. Here the milk is boiled separately from the tea and water, simmered until it

thickens and sweetens to a point where sugar becomes optional.

To serve, the tea is poured first into a kullad (a special clay cup for tea) and then topped with thickened milk. Now, connoisseurs will tell you that chai in a kullad is something to live for, that tea and cup meet as long-lost friends. The kullad absorbs the tea and the taste of the clay mingles with the hot chai, imparting an earthy, smoky flavour.

In Bhopal, a famous golden chai is served, made with only milk. Here too, full-fat milk is boiled until it reduces to less than half, then cardamom and tea leaves are added to it. No sugar is added to this chai as the creamy milk releases its natural sugars, adding layers of flavour.

In Lucknow, there’s a famous chai shop called Sharmaji Chai Wale that always has long queues in front of it and is known to keep going till the wee hours, so you can always get a chai and bun maska pao (buttered buns). “It has become a norm now, many shops in Lucknow are selling bun chai, a good, quick meal,” Sadaf says.

Lucknow has also embraced noon (salt) chai, a beloved chai from Kashmir made with green tea leaves, salt and baking soda, which turns the drink pink, especially when milk is added. Brought to the city with Kashmiris who moved there, noon chai initially had a rough time because Lucknowites didn’t like its salty flavour. But soon new Lucknow-Kashmiri chai recipes developed that omitted the salt and kept the baking soda, dubbed gulabi (pink) chai.

Regular gulabi chai is kept hot in a samovar (a traditional copper double-decker teapot used to brew, boil and serve noon chai) and served in a kullad.

Then there’s the biscuit option. In this overly-sweet version, a puff pastry biscuit is placed at the bottom of the cup and hot tea is poured over it, making the biscuit mushy. You get a spoon to stir the mushy biscuit around and eat it like breakfast cereal.

Gujarat in the west is pretty famous for its chai as well, according to Prerna who describes an extra-milky, extra-sweet chai – but not pink – made with dried ginger and cinnamon that pairs perfectly with spicy fried snacks.

Even northwesterly Punjab – a state famous for milk and lassi (a churned yoghurt drink) – has a 24-hour tea shop at The Golden Temple in Amritsar.

In Bihar in the northeast, chai is served in a small conical cup that can only hold two mouthfuls called a kapti, which Sadaf says comes from two words – cup and tea.

Chai on the road and rails

Why is the chai sold in tapri (roadside chai stalls) more delicious than the chai prepared at home? Possibly because of the experience that accompanies it.

There’s “500-meel (500-mile) chai”, a roadside favourite I encountered a few years back on my way from Meerut to New Delhi with a group of college classmates. We stopped at a roadside dhaba for dinner that late December night, the cold wind cutting through to

our bones, so we sat savouring chai while waiting for our food. A truck stopped and two drivers jumped out and ordered a 500-meel chai. Intrigued, I asked the dhaba owner what that was.

He told me it is a strong, sweet brew that helps late-night truck drivers go “for another 500 miles”, so we decide to try it. It is indeed sweet and strong, with its blend of spices, and it kept us wide awake for the rest of the journey.

There’s also the memory of relishing hot creamy chai one January afternoon while shopping in a Delhi flea market. It had been a busy day visiting historical monuments as a part of our college education as history students.

Tired, cold and hungry we gathered near the chai stall and waited longingly for the hot brew. The vendor stirred the chai, laden with sugar, tea leaves and spices as it bubbled and foamed. Then, holding his hand up high, he dexterously poured it into kullad.

Someone bought ram laddus from another stall – mung lentil fritters served with grated radish, green chillies and chutney, a popular Delhi street food. I took a bite. The crunchy exterior gave way to the soft mung bean heart as chillies and garlic tantalised my taste buds. I ate, craved and ate again. In between, I sipped tea and my fatigue disappeared in the dull, cold afternoon.

Perna says there are two other reasons for the superiority of roadside chai, “the high heat on which the chai is made and constant stirring of chai with a ladle, a scientific process called heat-aerating”.

The constant stirring adds air to the mix, encouraging the spices and tea to mix and frothing the milk as the chaiwallah lifts steaming ladlefuls of it and pours them back into the pot, she explains.

Chaiwallahs and train travel are inseparable. I can never forget my “dark night of the soul” years ago, a sad journey when I had to travel by train alone, lonely, lost and scared, fighting tears because I couldn’t cry in public. Then I heard the hawkers’ chant of “Chai garam!” as the train slowly chugged into a station.

It was past midnight, but I decided to get some chai in a traditional kullad. That night, that hot chai with ginger and a trace of cardamom, laced with thickened milk and sugar, consoled me. It became my friend forever, the light at the end of the proverbial tunnel. Today, chai is my comfort drink at any time, season and for any mood.

Chai as celebration, chai as medicine

Centuries ago, Indians had two meals a day: one in the morning or at midday, depending on the person’s occupation and requirements, and early dinner, shares Perna. That changed with time, and when campaigns to introduce tea into the Indian market started, so did the push to make breakfast into a bigger meal with chai which, of course, was encouraged as an accompaniment to an afternoon snack.

Chai can be enjoyed alone, but it excels in company. Small, sweet plain biscuits are a must with chai and have been a hot favourite for generations. Other options include cookies, toast and spicy fried

snacks.

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Hot chai with samosas and pakoras (vegetable fritters) are the nation’s way to welcome the rains. Digging into crispy snacks and drinking hot tea is a celebration of the senses. Nothing can compete with a samosa and chai combination to make Indians happy.

Food habits in India have also been strongly dictated by Ayurveda, the ancient science of life. It is so deeply ingrained in the culture that everyday recipes and even the assortment of vegetarian dishes – without onions and garlic – prepared for religious festivals and ceremonies are based on Ayurveda.

“Tea, according to Ayurveda, is more of a medicine”, Dr Rekha Radhamony, a fourth-generation Ayurvedic doctor from Kerala, tells me.

“Tea is best taken with mishri (unrefined rock sugar),” the ideal sweetener for tea with milk, she says.

If tea is sweetened with jaggery – also an unrefined sugar that contains more molasses than mishri – milk shouldn’t be added as combining jaggery and milk is contraindicated in Ayurveda, she explains. She recommends adding cardamom to all kinds of tea, which reduces the sharpness of tea and makes it digestible

You can have tea with breakfast but don’t have it on an empty stomach as it might interfere with digestion. The ideal tea time is before 4pm. Any later and it could disturb sleep, Rekha elaborates.

Every day is Chai Day

May 21 was declared International Tea Day in 2019 by the United Nations, but every day is Chai Day in India.

Chai is chai because of its stories and infinite recipes. It is a witness to conversations from the mundane to the life-changing. People bond over a cup of chai, even strangers in trains and food stalls on highways.

You hear interesting snippets about politics and parliament, news, great places to enjoy local food, flea markets for bargain buys and even suggestions for financial investments and tax planning.

In a country where the food preparations change every “kos” (about three km), chai-making varies drastically between homes and even within families. Chai recipes with stories from neighbourhoods, villages, cities and towns are an inseparable part of the Indian identity.

It is heart-warming to hold a cup of hot chai on a rainy evening and let the steam envelop your face. The aromatic liquid is a glimmer of hope in trying times and adds joy to happier times.

Simply put, a cup of chai and a plate of samosas can lift your spirits.

SOURCE: AL JAZEERA

Higher education, its mythical path out of poverty

Higher education alone not a relevant solution to poverty alleviation; government must commit to providing better policies to help those in poverty

By Sara Danial

Pakistan has developed a conspicuous economic divide between workers with college degrees and workers without them, especially after the inception of higher education institutes. Our social policy, if at all in existence, is cemented on the idea that people from disadvantaged backgrounds can cross that divide by graduating college with a degree. Though this once seemed possible, for many it now feels more like a myth.

Earning a handsome salary and climbing the corporate ladders of economic mobility with the help of a college degree or even a post-graduate degree for that matter, is not as easy as it once was. Rather than pulling out of financial stress and assuaging inequality, higher education deepens the crack. One must admit that higher education, standing alone, is not an adequate, or relevant, solution to poverty alleviation.

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

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

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

And so what followed was an incessant lust for the crème de la crème of institutes. Subsequently, a large part of the middle class' efforts turned to maintaining college affordability, with the cost of living increasing in parallel to this. As if inflationary pressure wasn't enough, the mental stress caused by the clear class divides was no mean feat to ignore. This disproportionately benefited families with the highest incomes.

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

Meanwhile, wealthier students who graduate with better means feel more comfortable attending well-resourced institutions. And those who complete degrees realize income gains. Although this was the basic premise we grew up with, the digital age has changed it all – for good. Many don't even earn a degree, but the right skillset made them a good earning member of the family. Those with degrees do not necessarily reach the pinnacle. Sounds particularly discouraging when one considers the weight our society extends to education as a panacea for social and economic ills.

My qualm is not about the tug of war between the privileged and humble backgrounds. My qualm is still not about elite educational institutions. My qualm is not about income perpetuity that comes with a degree, or the lack thereof for those without a degree.

The larger, and more important, issue at hand is that, while we are dripping with social and financial descent, our culture is laden with fairy tale accounts of the against-all-odds success student, who was fueled by good words, devoted teachers, and ample scholarships.

These success stories often forget secondary schooling and broader family dynamics. Low-income students who manage through elite institutions can indeed earn almost as much after graduation as wealthy students, but very few low-income students attend elite institutions. It is important to recognize how complex economic challenges are masked for the current generation of young people when considering higher education.

By admitting that the current system of education does not function as a solution to poverty, we could begin to call for more direct and effective anti-poverty policies. Our rescue plan must entail policies that should quickly and substantially do more to fix inequities that stem from citizens' attempts to get higher education.

There is an immediate need to make higher education more accessible to all. And the government must recognize that the higher education system now is not a cure-all for inequality. It must commit to providing better policies to help those in poverty in parallel to offering more solutions to making college affordable. Only then will those in poverty have the assistance they need to find their way out.

Arsenal vs Manchester City

Manchester City's blow to Arsenal in English Premier League title battle

By Ali Abdullah

After defeating Arsenal 4-1, the current league leader, Manchester City dealt a significant blow to Arsenal in the English Premier League title battle. The contest captured the contrasts between the two groups and revealed where each is at in its development. A superb strike from Kevin De Bruyne from outside the box gave the home team the lead after just seven minutes as they assumed control of the game. Before John Stones headed in a De Bruyne freekick just before halftime, Manchester City had squandered many good chances to double its lead. In the second half, De Bruyne added a third goal, and even though Rob Holding cut the margin in half, Erling Haaland's 33rd Premier League goal sealed City's convincing victory.

De Bruyne didn't say whether City was now on track to win a third straight Premier League championship, though. "There are still seven games, that's a lot of points and I know we have two games in hand but we're still behind them. People will say that we will win the title now, but I know this team and we will not give in until it mathematically can be done."

City has won its last seven Premier League games and Guardiola touched on the mindset his side have had throughout their dominant run.

"We are back-to-back Premier League winners so in September, October, November, when you lose a game, I said: 'We have time, we have time,' and Arsenal in the beginning was completely the opposite so every game is like a final,"

Arsenal still leads, but their advantage over City, who has two games remaining, has shrunk to two points. In order to win the Premier League for the fifth time in six years, City can now afford to lose one of their next seven games and still claim the championship, even if Arsenal prevails.

The likelihood of a historic treble-winning season for the blue half of Manchester is growing, and with games against Real Madrid in the Champions League semifinal and the FA Cup final still to come, both matches will be against Manchester United.

The mood is considerably different for Mikel Arteta's team, who have only picked up three points in their last four games while the defending champions have stumbled at a key moment in the season. In addition, Arteta has now dropped each of his seven matches versus City since taking over as Arsenal's manager and leaving his position as Guardiola's assistant.

One of the major concerns going into the game was how backup Holding would handle the record-breaking Haaland since William Saliba was once again absent from the core of Arsenal's defense.

Within the first ten minutes, that query received a resounding



response. To control a long ball forward and send it off into De Bruyne's path, Haaland easily outlasted Holding. The Belgian kept pushing forward and finished with a low shot that Ramsdale might have been able to save.

The pattern persisted for the duration of the first half, and the only puzzle was why City did not score more goals to reflect their dominance. Ben White stopped another attempt by De Bruyne, while Ramsdale made two good stops on efforts from Haaland while another of his went narrowly wide of the goal.

Arsenal was just about to believe they would just trail 1-0 at the interval when City finally increased their lead.

Stones was initially given an offside warning as he headed in De Bruyne's precise pass to the far post while Stones was back in the center of a more conventional four-man defense with Kyle Walker filling in for the injured Nathan Ake. However, a VAR review revealed the England international was unmistakably played onside, upholding the goal.

The hosts continued to exert pressure at the beginning of the second half.

Ramsdale once more blocked an attempt from Haaland, but De Bruyne was in better overall shape while the Norwegian striker was playing an exceptionally wasteful game in front of goal. After an Arsenal turnover, Haaland again set up City's top scorer, who then guided a low shot through Holding's legs to fool Ramsdale and put an end to the game, if there ever was one.

Guardiola felt secure enough to rest De Bruyne with 10 minutes remaining. With four minutes left, Holding's well-placed shot past Ederson was the last hiccup before Haaland put the finishing touches on City's victory.

Actor Zhalay Sarhadi opens up about how she dealt with ‘three bad miscarriages’ and a hypothyroid diagnosis

The actor spoke about how insensitive society can be in a recent interview with Mathira



Actor Zhalay Sarhadi opened up about her physical health and how society constantly criticises women for various aspects in a recent interview with Mathira. The actor said that people often ask intrusive and unnecessary questions. “When I tell people that I have a daughter, they ask me why did I not have more children. How am I supposed to explain to them that I’ve had three really bad miscarriages in my life, due to which I have hypothyroid and they were not because I diet or exercise, they just happened to me,” she said.

“While shooting for Jalaibee, I got to know that I was pregnant and later I had a miscarriage. I started gaining a lot of weight after that so I got it checked and found out that I have hypothyroid.”

The Chalay Thay Saath actor spoke about how a miscarriage affects a female body both mentally and physically, and people have an odd perception that women are only supposed to get married and produce children. She added that women are criticised over anything and everything, be it gaining or losing weight, skin colour or their features.

Kudos to both the actor and the host for speaking about such an important topic — it’s extremely important for artists to talk about issues everyone goes through but aren’t discussed enough.

Talking about how society makes everything a taboo, Sarhadi said, “When you stop and think everything is taboo, we aren’t able to find solutions.

“Going to a psychologist or psychiatrist is a taboo. Your mental health is as important as your physical health and for your physical health you need a doctor, similarly, for your mental health you have other specialists like psychologists and psychiatrists that you need to go to. I have been to a psychiatrist.”



We hope to see more artists talk about mental health issues and other health issues as it can help create more awareness in our society.

Courtesy Images.dawn

Labour Day: a reminder of struggle, sacrifice

May Day acquires increased significance in recent years



Many nations around the world observe May 1 as Labour Day. It is a day to honour the contributions and accomplishments of employees as well as to promote improved working conditions and workers' rights. It is also known as International Employees' Day or May Day.

The Industrial Revolution was in full flow in the late 19th century, which is when Labour Day got its start. Long hours, low pay, and hazardous working conditions were commonplace for employees in factories, mines, and other sectors of the economy. Children as young as six or seven were frequently engaged in these fields. Trade unions were established to protect the interests of workers when they started to organize and demand better working conditions and greater earnings.

May Day has acquired increased significance in recent years in light of the global rise in economic inequality and political upheaval. Workers have united for a \$15 minimum wage and better working conditions, for instance, in the United States. They have demonstrated against government policies in other nations that have resulted in job losses and austerity measures.

In Chicago, Illinois, the USA, on May 1, 1886, the first Labour Day was observed. Numerous rallies and protests were held across the nation as thousands of workers went on strike to press for an eight-hour workday. A bomb detonated at a protest in

Haymarket Square on May 4th, killing a number of people and injuring a large number more. Several labour leaders were apprehended and found guilty as a result of what became known as the Haymarket Massacre. In honour of the Haymarket Martyrs, the International Socialist Conference proclaimed May 1 as International Workers' Day in 1889.

The commemoration of Labour Day serves as a reminder of the struggles and sacrifices made by workers throughout history to protect their rights and to ensure better working conditions. It is also a day to consider the difficulties that today's employees face and to stand up for their rights and welfare. Low pay, job insecurity, hazardous working conditions, and restricted access to social security and healthcare are just a few of the problems that today's workers must deal with.

The chance to honour the accomplishments of employees and their services to society is provided by Labour Day. Workers are essential to the economy and to our daily lives, contributing to the construction of infrastructure, the production of goods, the provision of services, and the care of others.

While Labour Day is observed in various ways around the world, some common themes include parades, rallies, speeches, and cultural activities. It is a national holiday in many nations, so employees receive the day off to take part in the celebrations.

Labour Day is observed in the US on the first Monday in September. Since it's a national holiday, many people will be off work. The day is observed as the unofficial conclusion of summer and is honoured with parades, picnics, and barbecues.

In Canada, Labour Day is also observed on the first Monday in September. As it is a federal holiday, no work is allowed on this day. Speeches and other activities are held by labour unions and organisations to commemorate the day.

In China, Labour Day is observed as a public holiday, giving employees a three-day weekend. During this time, a lot of people travel, and the government also sponsors cultural events and activities.

Labour Day is often referred to as May Day in India. Since it is a holiday, all employees are off. Trade unions and other labour organisations hold rallies and speeches to commemorate the day.

Workers in Mexico are given the day off on Labour Day, which is a national holiday. Parades, speeches, and cultural activities sponsored by the government and other organisations honour the occasion.

On Labour Day, we recognize the contributions and accomplishments of employees and promote better working conditions and workers' rights. It serves as a reminder of the difficulties and giving up created by labour.

By Ali Abdullah

عوام الناس توجه فرمائیں



وزیر اعظم پاکستان محمد شہباز شریف

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