

Fortnightly

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Role of Establishment

Voters and political parties believe elections cannot be won without establishment support

Pakistan and IMF

IMF Decisions are more political than economic

Turkey's Presidential Elections

Erdogan's 11th straight victory keeps Turkey more relevant internationally

Democratic Collapse



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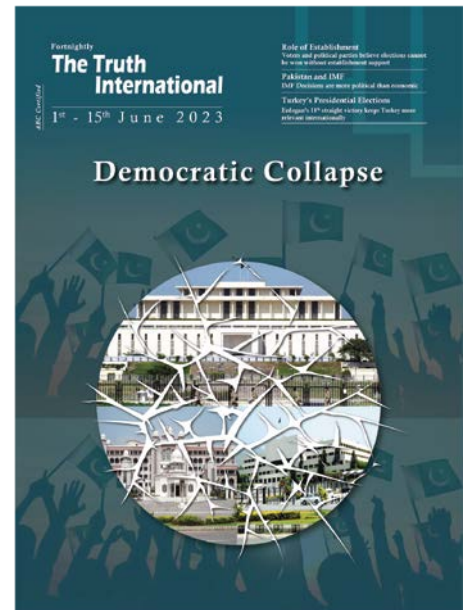


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It's a vicious cycle

By Hammad Ghaznavi



Like all of his predecessors who have fallen out with the Establishment, former Prime Minister Imran Khan is facing the wrath and the might of the state. It's the Operation-Cut-to-Size against Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaaf, perhaps the largest political party in the country. Earlier, Pakistan People's Party and Pakistan Muslim League (N) have experienced the same fate; or perhaps worse. What is the future of PTI? With PTI leaders leaving the party in flocks in the aftermath of 9th May tragedy, it seems the party is withering away. The decision makers are toying with the idea of banning the PTI or at least that's what the federal ministers have been threatening. Imran Khan's politics seems to have entered an uncertain alley.

Ever since Imran Khan was voted out of power, his frustration kept multiplying by the day. He made a string of rash decisions. To start with, he along with his party, resigned from the national assembly and took to the streets. His campaign against former COAS Qamar Bajwa was direct and belligerent – from 'janwar' to 'traitor', Imran used all kinds of insulting titles for the former COAS. PTI trolls on social media were running a systematic campaign against the army though Imran Khan tried to portray it as a war against 'one man' and not the institution. Imran Khan made another fatal mistake by interfering in the appointment of the new army chief. To build pressure and impede General Asim Munir's appointment, Imran continuously made an effort,

sharing with a bunch of journalists his serious reservations on Asim Munir's eligibility to be the COAS. During the run up to the big appointment, Imran Khan kept threatening with his long march to the GHQ Rawalpindi. Obviously, against this backdrop, the relation between Imran Khan and the new chief from day one was far from 'normal'. And then a day came when Imran Khan named the army chief as his chief foe.

Imran Khan's failure to get the Punjab Election on time irritated him no end. On the other hand, the courts' romance with Imran Khan was a little too obvious to ignore, with blanket bails granted and investigations stopped in almost all cases against him. The powers that be too got frustrated. When Imran Khan was arrested by the Rangers in an unpleasant fashion, PTI declared it as the crossing of the infamous Red Line. Hence, the 9th May. There was reasonable evidence, the decision makers thought, the PTI attack on the government and military buildings was a planned, tit-for-tat move. The burning buildings and desecration of martyrs' monuments were disturbing visuals for Pakistanis at large. Even the traditionally anti-establishment elements in society couldn't swallow the sinister assault. That was it! The axe fell.

The powers that be unsheathed the sword. Hundreds of PTI workers involved in the 9th May events were nabbed throughout the country including a granddaughter of former COAS Asif Nawaz Janjua. The

message was simple – no one will be spared. Dozens of PTI leaders were arrested and rearrested if need arose. Then there was a flurry of press conferences by PTI leaders, including key party-office-holders, former MNAs and MPAs announcing parting of ways with Imran Khan. The military courts got active and the trials of the first batch of those involved in the Corps Commander House ransack has been initiated. In a word, PTI is being cut to size. This phenomenon sounds familiar. Popular politicians and parties have undergone this treatment in the past. In fact, much worse was experienced by PPP and PML-N and their leaders. Will Imran Khan be disqualified from contesting the next election? Will IK be jailed? Things seem to be heading in that direction unless at least one of the stakeholders takes a U-turn.

True, political leaders cannot be removed from the political stage through the use of force. But it is also true that once a political party is crushed by the boots, it takes time to recover. And, history testifies, it is never the same party again. PPP could never regain Punjab after 1977 and Nawaz Sharif is still in exile. Once this operation cut to size is complete, there will be elections. We have seen it all before. This is a meaningless cycle that comes full circle every few years. The only way to break this cycle is a fresh agreement between political forces on the pattern of Charter of Democracy. Otherwise, political parties will continue to be used against each other.

Press conferences galore

By M A Niazi



You know, I've decided to join the PTI. Not because I believe in its ideology, which has been that accusation is proof, or because I'm dedicated to the idea that Imran Khan has a God-given right to rule, as because I think that is the easiest way to prove that I'm against the incidents of May 9, when the Corps Commander's house was burnt down, when MM Alam's plane at China Chowk was destroyed, and other military installations were attacked.

You see, looking at the stream of those leaving the PTI, I've realized that the easiest way of showing my disdain for what happened would be to hold a press conference and announce that, while condemning the May 9 incidents, I was leaving the party.

I wonder why Imran himself hasn't executed one of his famous U-turns and left the PTI himself. As far as I can see, the only people still in the PTI are Mrs. Imran, Shah Mehmood Qureshi, and Ali Amin Gandapur.

I've noticed that no one left the party at once, immediately after May 9. One of the first big names in the party to leave, former Human Rights Minister Shireen Mazari, only left after being first arrested under MPO Section 3, being bailed, and then re-arrested. Imran's media team has also left him, whether it is Fawad Chaudhry or Firdous Ashiq Awan, or Fayyazul Hassan Chauhan. You might guess things are serious when the secretary general of a party resigns, as Asad Umar has done.

You know, it does seem as if those from military backgrounds have decided to part ways. Asad Umar is a case in point. He is the son of the late Maj-Gen (Retd) Ghulam Umar, who was part of Yahya Khan's inner team in 1971. Then there is Fawad Chaudhry. His grandfather, Ch. Shehbaz Hussain, founded the family fortunes, one son becoming Punjab Governor, another Chief Justice of the Lahore High Court. Ch Shehbaz had been a subedar in the old British Indian Army. Actually, the subedar's sons didn't do too badly: one, the son of a rissaldar (the equivalent cavalry rank), became a field marshal and the first military ruler of Pakistan. The rissaldar's great-grandson, Umar Ayub Khan, also served in Imran's cabinet.

His father, Gohar Ayub Khan, was briefly in the Army and went into his father's old unit, 4 Punjab, and his schoolmate and PMA course-mate, Asif Nawaz, also did. Now Asif Nawaz's granddaughter, Khadija Shah, was finally arrested for having led the crowd which torched the house of the Corps Commander Lahore. Her sacrifices for the party have been heartrending; not only does her cell lack an AC, but she is not being given mineral water.

In fact, Ali Amin Gandapur is the only Army brat I know still in the PTI (his father retired as a major). He has been detained but has yet to hold a press conference.

Me, I would join the PTI only to hold a press conference announcing my departure. I would be the first ordinary member to hold such a press conference, for so far we've either been having national or provincial leaders or office-bearers. Further, I would be the first person to condemn the May 9 incidents without having been arrested.

It's interesting that the PM should have called for the Corps Commander's House arsonists to be given the same treatment as the Capitol Hill attackers (when in 2021 protesters tried to prevent Congress from declaring Biden elected), on the same day as the first attackers were being sentenced after being found guilty. One of the attackers, who had come all the way from Florida, was given 20 years.

Well, I've been hearing that there's talk of death sentences over here. Just goes to show, I suppose. In the USA, if you attack the legislature, you get 20 years. Over here, if your followers hang their laundry on the railings outside Parliament, you get made Prime Minister. But if your supporters burn down a corps commander's house, well, let's see what happens to Imran's followers.

Footnote to these notes: Ashraf Mumtaz has passed away. I was his colleague for only a few years, but before that, we had been in the field as reporters for our respective papers. A thorough gentleman, whom I at least will miss.

Our political system: how long will it work?

May 9 events call for realising dynamics, social, political and psychological causes behind decision-making process of PTI leaders; PTI planned, executed attacks on basis of heightened levels of anti-military sentiment



By Umer Farooq

A variety of grievances are at the heart of political crisis, Pakistan is facing at the moment. The groups out of power, have grievances against the military establishment, intelligence services, law enforcement agencies and the government itself. The groups in power, have grievances against the chief justice and the Supreme Court.

The groups in power also have grievances against military establishment and intelligence services, which they are not expressing at the moment and which they, nevertheless, have not forgotten. Even the military establishment has grievances against political groups which attacked its installations.

Therefore, the groups which are on the 'right side' of the state are full of complaints against each other. It doesn't matter that these groups are the prime beneficiaries of the state's generosity and largesse. The ruling PML-N more than once came to power with the assistance of the military establishment. Hardly, anyone will disagree that Imran Khan had zero chance of coming to power in 2018 if he had not been supported by the then military establishment.

PML-N is now complaining against the Supreme Court without taking any pause to recall that it was the same Supreme Court which restored its government in 1993 when the then president dissolved the National Assembly under corruption charges. Yet both these parties are full of complaints and grievances. It would not be an exaggeration if one says that our ruling classes have cultivated a culture of complaints and grievances against the state and its institutions.

Geographical expanse of all this activity is central Punjab and urban areas of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. The fact that all this activity revolves around Punjabi and Pushtun middle and upper middle classes could not hide the reality that those provinces and ethnic groups which have genuine political and economic grievances against the state are simply excluded from this game.

Any analysis of the country's political situation on the basis of grievances of Punjab-centric political groups will obscure the fact that Balochis, who are deprived of basic economic and political rights, are also part of this nation. A little comparison of Imran Khan's anti-mili-

tary establishment campaign and Gwadar's "Haq Do" (give rights) movement led by a religious leader, Maulana Hidayatur Rahman will be appropriate to prove the point.

IK's anti-establishment campaign

According to reports from the Punjab government, on May 9, 2023 some 3400 citizens of Lahore attacked what is considered a symbol of military power in central Punjab, the corps commander's residence located in the secure environment of Lahore Cantt.

Similarly, attacks on military cantonments took place in other cities including Mianwali, Rawalpindi and Sargodha – the three cities which can be described as the heartland of the Pakistan military's recruitment drives. GHQ was attacked, PAF bases were stormed and some other installations of the military came under attack in what is central, northern and western Punjab.

The first impression one gets after watching video clips on social media was that the PTI local leadership was successful in turning the popular



reaction against Imran Khan's arrest into a chain of violent protests against the military establishment.

Protesters destroying the military's emblem at the gates of GHQ and an angry mob entering the corps commander's residence confirmed that impression. Later, the Punjab government officials told media that it was a protest in which only workers of one party participated and there was no popular presence in any of these protests.

For the military, it was clearly an "act of war"—where purely military assets came under attack. Under standard operating procedures, the military was supposed to react with force in the case of attacks on military assets and installations, whether the attack came from outside the borders or from within the country's borders is immaterial.

Remember that this is a military which is fighting two insurgencies within the country's territory, and in one of these insurgencies, the insurgents have demonstrated their capability right into the center of gravity of military power in the country.

If the Punjab government's figures are correct, then 3400 protestors forcibly entering the corps commander's residence in Lahore was a sizable number. We don't know yet how many protestors attacked the main gate of GHQ.

Remember that these are not ordinary protestors – they were from Lahore and Rawalpindi. I am 56 years old – I was born and brought up in this land, and in my 32-year long career in journalism, I have always been based in the vicinity of these two cities.

My early years were spent in the streets and bazaars of these cities. The people of these cities have what can be described as almost a romantic relationship with the military. Since the 1990s, when the military's involvement in politics became overt, there grew a sizable segment of society in these cities which was opposed to the military's involvement in politics.

But even this segment didn't stop romanticizing and mythologizing the military and the men who don its uniform. Lahoris are famous for their romantic attitude towards the military.

I have seen Lahoris from the 'walled city' standing on their rooftops and raising slogans in support of Pakistan Air Force pilots who flew over their localities during the 2002 and 2008 military tensions with India. During 1965, war groups of Lahoris armed with batons and Enfield rifles turned up at the border to support their troops. In Rawalpindi, every other family has a member or a relative serving in the military.



It is truly astonishing that a political party, who rose to power with the help and assistance of the military and its intelligence agencies – a fact that is now well-documented – succeeded in gathering such a large mob of supporters from these cities to attack military installations.

I think this is not a moment to prosecute the attackers or to avenge the attack; this is a moment to ponder. How did a political party, whose support base is Punjab's urban classes, succeed in gathering a large number of people with their anger directed towards the military's installations.

At present, military leaders appear to be creating a deterrent against any future possibility of similar attacks. Police and the coercive machinery of the state are meticulously rounding up and preparing foolproof legal cases against those involved in attacking and planning the attacks.

The military leadership, through carefully crafted statements, is conveying its resolve not to allow any such attack in the future. There must be a practical need for creating

this deterrence in the face of growing political unrest in the country, especially when the military leadership considers these attacks as an act of war.

More than meeting immediate practical needs, these events call for understanding the dynamics, social, political and psychological causes behind the decision-making process of PTI leaders, who according to

the military's official position, planned and executed the attacks.

It is clear that the PTI leadership didn't decide to carry out these attacks in isolation – they were deeply cognizant of the prevailing political conditions and public opinion in central Punjab and urban areas of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa; the PTI planned and carried out these attacks on the basis of extremely heightened levels of anti-military sentiment that had been stoked in these areas prior to these attacks. They were expecting that this kind of reaction to Imran Khan's arrest would be acceptable to the general public in the kind of mood that was prevailing in this region.

Haq Do Tehreek in Gwadar

The workers of Haq Do Tehreek led by Jamaat-i-Islami's Maulana Hidayatur Rahman started their protest in the port city four months ago, mirroring last year's massive demonstrations. The situation turned ugly following a strike call as police



and protesters clashed.

The HDT started protests for a number of demands, including banning of illegal trawlers in Balochistan's waters, reduction of security checkpoints, as well as liberalisation of trade with neighbouring Iran. The violence erupted after negotiations between officials and HDT representatives broke down.

In the early morning of Dec. 26, 2022, police raided the protest camp. Internet services were suspended in the town. The government imposed, section 144 of the Criminal Procedure Code disallowing any kind of political activity. Police have reportedly arrested over 100 supporters of the movement.

The sit-in began in late October near the main entrance of the Chinese-built and operated port. The movement escalated its confrontation with the government in the third week of December, when Rehman warned the Chinese to leave. "The government started crackdown on protesters after China expressed its displeasure on the situation in Gwadar," said Rasheed Baloch, a political analyst based in Quetta, Balochistan's capital.

No military picket was attacked in Gwadar, no military residence was raided and no military installation came under attack by the protestors. And yet it took three months for the Supreme Court to grant bail to the leader of the protest, Maulana Hidayatur Rehman. Compare this with the swiftness the Supreme Court showed in granting bail to Imran Khan—leader of a Punjab-centric party.

The way whole state machinery has been catering to the demands of Punjab-centric parties makes it clear that the whole political system is Punjab-centric and other ethnic groups and provinces are of secondary importance.

My point is that the media, the state machinery and the whole political system is unevenly titled in favor of Punjab-centric groups and political parties. In this system grievances of other provinces and other ethnic groups are not given importance at all, creating a situation where smaller provinces and groups are completely alienated from the group.

Even our diplomacy is focused on the

activities of Punjab-centric groups. Take for instance the example of how US lawmakers are feeling pain for the maltreatment meted out to PTI supporters in Pakistan after their attack on military installations.

Our diplomacy, Punjab-centric nature of political system

The mood in Washington is taking shape with the massive amount of lobbying that PTI's supporters among the Pakistani-American community have undertaken in recent months.

The targets of this lobbying effort are US lawmakers and senior officials of the US State Department and the Biden administration. It is unlikely that Imran Khan or PTI as a political party could attain a major spotlight in Washington, primarily because of their crooked behavior vis-à-vis Washington's perceived role in recent political developments in the country.

So far, the assertions of US lawmakers indicate a general interest towards developing political situation in Pakistan, which, according to them, is heading towards large-scale political violence. The assertions are dotted with US diplomatic clichés like an emphasis on the rule of law, political process and need for electoral politics. It is not surprising that PTI and Imran Khan have failed to attract the attention of US lawmakers and officials as only a few months back its leaders were advocating that Pakistan should side with Russia in the war against Ukraine and were mobilizing anti-American sentiments in Washington.

Nevertheless, any perceived Chinese role in political developments in Pakistan could possibly provoke US diplomatic interests and intervention in the situation.

Two possible indications include the activist role former US diplomat Zalmay Khalilzad is playing in Washington with regards to Pakistan's political situation. Secondly, there are a couple of dozen US lawmakers who are actively taking an interest in Pakistan's political situation, which according to them is dangerously precarious.

There are no signs that any quarter in the US officialdom has made any adverse comment against Pakistan in this regard. It appears that the US administration is overly restrained for two reasons.

The US administration hardly enjoys any financial leverage against the Pakistani government at the moment, and Pak-US relations are already too cold for reasons which have nothing to do with the prevailing political situation in Pakistan.

Any adverse comment on the political situation coming from Washington would further vitiate relations and could possibly divert US attention away from security concerns that are in American focus as far as Pakistan is concerned.

How far Washington would go in this regard will largely depend on Pakistan's domestic political situation. PTI is raising hue and cry about the crackdown that is underway in Pakistan after attacks on military installations in several cities on May 9, 2023.

There are strong lobbies in Washington which always push the US administration to intervene diplomatically if there is a state directed crackdown against civil society in any country. Besides, PTI supporters are actively pursuing US lawmakers and State Department officials to intervene diplomatically.

Any major US intervention in the Pakistan situation would likely engender political complications for Washington. The political conflict that the US administration is observing in Pakistan may appear to be a simple two-party conflict revolving around political matters.

On closer inspection, the US administration will find out that different segments of the Pakistani state machinery – the military, intelligence services and judiciary – are deeply enmeshed in this conflict. Especially after PTI's attacks on military installations there is no doubt who is whose favorite in the conflict. Any move on the part of any quarter of the US administration to openly voice support for Imran Khan or PTI would attract a reaction from known segments of the state machinery, which, clearly, are under no obligation to listen to what Washington has to say.



Minus Imran or minus PTI?

ZAB first victim of the minus-one formula; Musharraf tried to minus political rivals; the new PTI a probability

By Sarfraz Raja

Minus is a mathematical term but in Pakistan, it has become a political expression since last many years. Everyone in the country is now quite aware of what is meant by the 'minus-one' formula in the political arena; and if someone still doesn't know, it refers to eliminating the topmost leader of any given political party. It has happened with almost all major political parties and top political leaders in the country's political history. Besides that, party breakups are also unfortunate in the history of this country where some major politicians and electables change their loyalties at highly crucial times. Again, it seems history is going to repeat itself in view of post 9th May scenario.

The minus, plus history

Pakistan's politics is relying on personalities; leaders remain dominant in political decision-making and governance affairs, and that's why opponents always target the top leadership. Founder chairman of the Pakistan People's Party Zulfikar Ali Bhutto was the first victim of the minus-one formula of our political history. He was eliminated forever in an unfortunate and controversial decision of judicial history through the death penalty in a murder case of his political rival.

Former military dictator Gen Pervez Musharraf after taking over the government through his military coup, had tried to 'minus' his political rivals: heads of two major political parties, Nawaz Sharif and Benazir Bhutto, from the country's political horizon. And during the 2002 elections under Pervez Musharraf, both these parties contested without their top leadership. Besides that, Musharraf also smashed his opponent parties to establish the government of his king's party, the PML-Q which comprised turncoats of PML-N and PPP. In those elections, Pakistan People's Party even couldn't take part, and a new faction with the name of Pakistan People's Party Parliamentarians was established which is still part of parliamentary politics under Asif Ali Zardari.



Later, Benazir Bhutto was assassinated in a suicide blast in Rawalpindi which was another unfortunate 'minus' in political and country's history after her father Zulfikar Ali Bhutto's death sentence.

Another and one of the most surprising and unexpected 'minus' of the politics is Altaf Hussain, founder head of Muttahida Qaumi Movement who had ruled the largest city of the country for decades and had remained a part of almost every government in the center. But Altaf Hussain himself was responsible for this minus as it was, he who on August 22, 2016, uttered anti-Pakistan slogans in his telephonic speech to his workers in Karachi from London.

Immediately after his speech, the government launched a crackdown against his party and there was no option left for his party leaders to disassociate themselves from Altaf Hussain, and the faction left was named MQM Pakistan which is now headed by Khalid Maqbool Siddiqui. A few years and months prior to this incident, nobody could even think and talk about the political quashing of Altaf Hussain.

Last but definitely not least minus was Nawaz Sharif, three times elected prime

minister and the only one who took the two-thirds majority in parliament in the country's history in the 1996 elections. Nawaz Sharif was in the fourth year of his tenure as third-time premier after the Panama Leaks scandal, where the names of his sons were highlighted as owners of offshore companies in Panama. Nawaz Sharif was trailed and disqualified for life from politics, party leadership, and any public office; and was sentenced to 10 years imprisonment, which later was suspended in order to send him abroad for medical treatment.

Imran Khan's politics

A former cricket superstar of the country, Imran Khan joined politics in 1996, four years after his retirement from sports. Khan in his inaugural speech to launch his political party, called it a movement for justice in the country. He didn't enjoy any major success for many years but suddenly after an unexpectedly successful public gathering at Minar-e-Pakistan ground in Lahore in October 2011, his party emerged as the 'third political force' in the country after the then-ruling Pakistan People's Party and opposition PML-N.

Imran was always aggressive against his



opponents but after his party's emergence as a political force, his stance against rivals got harsher. PTI couldn't get success in the 2013 elections but Khan continued his aggressive politics. He turned up as a pro-establishment politician and his more than three months-long sit-in in Islamabad was also allegedly backed by the establishment. His win in the 2018 elections was also called a 'military establishment facilitated success' by his rivals and many independent political commentators also believe so.

As prime minister, Imran Khan always took pride in the 'same page' phenomenon, where according to him military leadership was backing all the decisions and initiatives of his government. He would often use to praise military leadership under the then military chief Gen Qamar Javed Bajwa, calling him the most pro-democracy army chief. But soon after IK was removed from the PM office through a no-confidence motion, he started targeting military leadership for not supporting him. After Bajwa's retirement, Khan began targeting him openly, calling him the person behind the regime change. He also named senior serving military officers, holding them responsible for an alleged assassination attempt against him during his long march in Wazirabad last year where he got some leg injuries.

The May 9 tragedy

PTI chief's arrest was on the cards as he was booked in many cases. In fact, after the issuance of non-bailable arrest warrants by the court, police tried to arrest him but workers who were called outside his residence to protect him from any arrest, showed resistance; even police officials couldn't reach him for implementation of the court's warrants.

On May 9th when Khan was in Islamabad High Court to appear before the court for his bail, he was arrested. News of this arrest sparked countrywide protests and his workers who were allegedly brainwashed by Khan, attacked selected military installations, stormed and burnt historic Jinnah House in Lahore which was the residence of corps commander Lahore, and attacked GHQ Rawalpindi and other military and government assets. All these

acts were intolerable and the state responded accordingly.

Military leadership decided to pursue these cases in military courts and the federal cabinet backed the decision. Consequently, a crackdown was launched against all PTI leaders and almost everyone was put behind bars. After the crackdown, PTI leaders started to disassociate themselves from the party and many even announced to quit politics including some longtime friends of Imran like Amir Kayani and others.



Future of Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf

No doubt PTI is in hot waters right now and its key leaders are parting ways with Imran Khan, there are questions about how could the party survive and what would be its future. Eliminating the leadership and breakdown of parties is not a new phenomenon in this country but the case with PTI is different. Independent political experts compare this situation with that of MQM. PTI could be another MQM, the time will tell, but there are some serious issues the party has to face.

Imran Khan is on the verge of disqualification according to legal experts as he is facing cases like Toshakhana where he has been indicted already, and the 9th May incident added insult to injury.

Khan is losing his close party companions

day by day. Minister for Defense Khawaja Asif in a media interaction revealed that a ban on PTI was under consideration but it would depend on unanimity among all parties in the ruling alliance; besides how the court would respond, because to ban a political party is a complicated bid which requires approval of the top court too.

History shows that parties could be cut to size, and their leadership could be banned or eliminated but if they have popular and genuine public support they couldn't be removed from the political scene.

On the other hand, some leaders like in the case of the MQM, buried their politics themselves with their unwise or immature acts. The 9th May was also a test for PTI: how it reacted to the arrest of its leader, but they crossed all the red lines and then couldn't bear the brunt of the state's reaction. Now could PTI recover from this? Immediately, it looks difficult but it all depends on how they change their narrative, their strategy; and how they regain public support. But for that, they have to change their politics of isolation with sensible and responsible decision-making. PTI has to accept political realities and the existence of other political forces to move forward. In any case, the past ten years of PTI politics should be a pertinent learning not only for PTI but for other parties as well. Whether it would be minus Imran or minus PTI development, the probability is a new PTI in the future.



Where Imran went wrong



By Abdul Sattar

After holding a mammoth gathering in Lahore in 2011, former prime minister Imran Khan had created an impression that his party believed in a revolutionary political ideology that would transform not only the political structure of the country but that of society as well. His followers considered him a messiah who could rid the country of the crises it was facing.

It was also claimed that workers and parliamentarians of the PTI would demonstrate unflinching loyalty to Imran Khan in times of crisis. People were told that the party had a strong organization capable of facing all challenges. But the recent defections from within the party indicate that all these claims were apocryphal and the party is no different from any other traditional political party of Pakistan that heavily relies on electables and individuals with deep pockets.

During the decade of the 1990s, late Mairaj Mohammad Khan, the former secretary general of the party, had tried to form an organizational structure but Imran Khan's attitude forced him to abandon the party. Mairaj had an excellent team that could

have been instrumental in shaping the structure of the party. His comrades were ideologically motivated – people who had faced imprisonment, trials and concocted cases in the past but did not leave their parties for the sake of petty interests or monetary considerations. But the PTI chief soon realised these revolutionaries could not serve as his stooges.

It was wrong to assume the Kaptan wanted any genuine change in society. He rather had a deep interest in coming into power by any means, and was just waiting for an opportunity – which arose after the PPP and PML-N agreed to the Charter of Democracy that united political forces. The country witnessed the first transition of power from a civilian dispensation to another political government. This is when the idea of a political alternative was conceived, after which powerful stakeholders put their energies into Project Imran.

The great champion of morality put aside all ethical considerations while welcoming political turncoats and opportunists into his ranks. His shop was open for all types of people – from the religious right to feudals

to land grabbers, he greeted every man who knew nothing about political morality. In addition to that, he also stuffed his party positions with the newly-rich who had amassed unimaginable wealth during the time of Gen Musharraf.

Some might be surprised at the defections in Khan's party but those who have a deeper insight into Pakistani politics knew then that this was a party of ideological charlatans whose shallow slogans of radical change were nothing but a mirage. It was clear that Khan could not make any positive impact on Pakistani politics. What progressive mission could he have accomplished with retrogressive elements part of his party. What change could he have brought by siding with and being patronized by the biggest symbol of the status quo in Pakistan.

A political party is supposed to have a proper organizational structure with a central committee or any other policymaking body. A party of change tends to even do better than this by inducting diehard supporters and committed workers into its rank and file. Such a party does not have



only a single headquarters in one city; its roots go all the way up to the union council level. Its office bearers – from the UC in charge to the post of secretary general – are elected in fair and transparent elections. But in the case of the PTI, Justice Wajih Uddin Ahmed, who complained about the use of money and influence during the party's internal polls, was thrown out. Individuals with deep pockets surrounded Imran Khan from all corners and party positions and tickets were awarded on the basis of wealth and social status.

Those who believe the PTI was/is a party should let people know how many offices it had at the UC, town, tehsil and district levels? How many party bodies were elected in a fair and transparent manner? How much donation was collected by party workers? Would every worker pay some monthly donation or would local MNAs, MPAs and electables invest money into party programmes and events?

Khan's critics believe that instead of forming a political party he first created a fan club that was soon converted into a cult

with brigades of sycophants heaping eulogies on the Kaptaan. When he came to power, he also made efforts to create a pliant media by defanging it but sections of it fiercely resisted preferring to go to jail and facing incarceration instead of bowing to the Great Champion of Change.

It was because of this that leader after leader is deserting the PTI because instead of depending on mature political workers he depended on electables, who are now ready to fly to another destination. Even today, he is not making efforts to unite political forces but rather only wants the same special treatment that was accorded to him before the elections of 2018.

An historian once remarked, "History has a lesson for those who want to learn but not for those who want to remain adamant." It is time Imran Khan reflected upon his unleashing a storm of political revenge, his curbs on the media, his ignoring of human rights violations and his catastrophic plan to bring back the Pakistani Taliban. He needs to give up the narrative that all politicians believe in sleaze because it is a

propaganda by forces that want to control all politicians including the Kaptaan. Therefore, his interest lies in allying with political forces, sorting out differences through dialogues and talks. If he can appoint Shaikh Rasheed as interior minister, whom he claimed to previously deeply despise, if he can welcome Ghulam Sarwar and other electables then what is the harm in contacting PPP and N League leaders?

The salvation of the country lies in uniting the political forces that gifted the country with the first constitution, healed the wounds of Pakistanis in the aftermath of the country's dismemberment, enacted the 18th Amendment and defeated the menace of terrorism between 2008 and 2018. No one is perfect, neither are our politicians. But being a politician, Imran Khan must pin hopes on his fellow political leaders instead of looking elsewhere for relief and salvation. The PDM coalition should also rethink the mass arrest and detention crackdown if it is really interested in uniting political forces.

Courtesy The News





Banning PTI



The idea would be unthinkable in any self-respecting democracy, yet here we are again. The government is considering banning the PTI over the events of May 9 and 10, according to Defence Minister Khawaja Asif.

Though Mr Asif has said whatever decision is taken will be referred to parliament, can we expect restraint after both the government and legislature, despite repeated warnings from concerned observers, endorsed the army's proposal to try ordinary citizens under military laws?

Clearly, this is the season for bad ideas, and the government appears to be tempted to test another one out. It ought to remember, though, that banning parties cannot win it votes. If anything, the move would likely further antagonise a large section of voters and weaken the legitimacy of whatever government takes the reins from the current one.

Mr Asif's remarks may have been aimed at projecting that his government has great

control, but they also ended up underlining how bereft of ideas the PDM has been in mounting a political offensive.

Indeed, the government seems to realise its vulnerable position, which is why free rein is being given to the shadow state to deal with the challenge posed by the PTI. These elements have gone about this task with signature, ham-fisted violence.

The practice of labelling and treating entire social/cultural groups as 'traitors' is as old as our country: one has only to ask anyone living in the peripheries of what they have been made to suffer on this count. Nonetheless, it is unsettling to see the state displaying its deplorable aspects in the heartlands.

It is true that PTI's senior leadership has displayed a remarkable lack of spine by preferring to leave the party or relinquish their post within it — unlike so many politicians of other parties who have, at one time or another, fearlessly faced the establishment's wrath. Yet, the state's tactics have been criticised by even those

without sympathy for PTI and Imran Khan.

Insisting on severely punishing the PTI for its mistakes is no answer. Banning the PTI tells its support base that there is no space for them in the Pakistani political system.

If these people are not to be allowed to express themselves through the ballot box, which forum will they turn to? The PML-N exalted democracy when it was down and out.

The 'vote ko izzat do' slogan that kept it alive after 2018 resonated with the public because it called for respecting the vox populi. Its leaders should now not appear so willing to sacrifice their principles at the altar of political expediency.

The government has been repeatedly warned that it may be going too far — to its own detriment. It should heed those warnings and reconsider the path it plans to take.

Courtesy Dawn



Pakistan's moment of peril

By Maleeha Lodhi

Never before in its turbulent history has Pakistan witnessed what came to pass in recent weeks. Violence and wanton destruction of government buildings and military property by PTI followers after their leader's (temporary) arrest.

An angry protest demonstration by ruling coalition parties outside the Supreme Court, which called on the chief justice (CJ) to resign for 'favouring Imran Khan'; some leaders even threatening "dire consequences" from any court action against Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif.

The overarching political reality today is resistance by political parties to play by the rules. For months the government-opposition confrontation has been so fierce and unrestrained that no longer are any rules respected by the warring sides. Meanwhile, the military, furious at allegations by opposition leader Imran Khan and vandalism of army installations, lashed out at "politically motivated" attacks and pledged to bring the perpetrators of violence to justice under army laws.

For his part, Khan alleged a 'planned conspiracy' to defame his party and create the justification to ban PTI. When a crack-down was launched against his party cadres and several members began to quit PTI, his tone softened but he still claimed he was being targeted to prevent his return to power. In another twist in the crisis, the Lahore High Court struck down decisions of the Election Commission and National Assembly Speaker on the resignations of 72 PTI lawmakers, who Khan then asked to return to parliament to protest there.

The raging political crisis has dragged all state institutions into the eye of a perfect storm. Polarisation has reached an unprecedented level, with any middle ground in politics eliminated as a consequence.

Even a semblance of national unity lies shattered. With neither side willing to back down, the political system is broken and democracy imperilled by the no-holds-barred power tussle. Endless political turmoil has pushed the country to the edge of the abyss.



The authority of state institutions is being eroded in a no-holds-barred political battle.

All state institutions have come under assault. The ruling coalition defied the Supreme Court order on holding Punjab elections and made the chief justice the target of virulent attack to force him to step down. To pre-empt any contempt action by the court it is also planning a 'reference' for 'misconduct' against the CJ, as indicated by a resolution adopted by the National Assembly last week.

The government has also declared it won't accept any verdict by the apex court, accusing it of being partisan. In its confrontation with the SC, it has wrapped itself in the principle of parliamentary supremacy, throwing the very notion of separation of powers out of the window. It also adopted legislation to curb the CJ's powers.

For its part, the PTI leadership has questioned the military's role with Khan hurling one allegation after another at the army leadership, including the accusation that it seeks to disqualify and eliminate him from politics. Such attacks prompted a predictably strong response from the military's public relations wing.

The ongoing political crisis has also entailed unseemly clashes between institutions — the executive and parliament with the higher judiciary, the government with

the presidency and the Election Commission with the Supreme Court. In each instance one institution has accused the other of overstepping its constitutional authority.

When the pillars of state clash or come under attack by political leaders, then whatever the aim, the consequence is to bring their credibility into question and reputation into disrepute. This can involve lasting institutional damage which, as history has shown, takes a long time to undo.

By undermining public trust in institutions, political actors ignore its deleterious consequences. The authority of these institutions rests principally on their legitimacy. When this is undermined, whether intended or unintended, the state's authority is eroded. And when brinkmanship rather than restraint is on display the entire edifice of governance is exposed to the risk of paralysis and breakdown.

This has important implications for economic governance, which is the core task of the state. The economy cannot be effectively managed in an environment where there is erosion of institutional authority and nonstop political turmoil.

The implementation of economic decisions, especially the tough decisions needed today, rests on public compliance



and acceptance of the legitimacy of government actions in this regard. But in an atmosphere where all state authority is being challenged, economic decisions too come into public question. This can lead to weak compliance or non-compliance with policy decisions, which in turn can jeopardise economic recovery.

At a time when the worst economic crisis in Pakistan's history needs to be seriously confronted the country can least afford the erosion of state authority. Already the political battle has proved to be a fatal distraction for the government, preventing it from taking timely and prudent decisions to avert an economic breakdown.

Heightened political instability is exacting a heavy toll on the economy. The country remains on the verge of default while a cost-of-living crisis is creating conditions for possible public unrest down the road.

In this complex situation, questions are being raised by some quarters whether general elections, due in October, can be held in such a toxic and fraught atmosphere. There is certainly a need to bring down the political temperature and establish a modicum of calm for the peaceful conduct of elections.



But any move to postpone elections beyond the constitutionally stipulated timeframe will be a recipe for disaster and cause more, not less, political turmoil. In fact, announcing a date for elections is still the only way the country can extricate itself from the escalating political crisis, which is endangering both the economy and national unity.

Ideally, a political ceasefire and minimum consensus is needed between rival parties and leaders on an agreed path to elections and rules for its conduct. But the failure of

talks between the government and opposition have put paid to such an outcome. The widening crackdown against the opposition has now made any resumption of dialogue impossible.

Even so, the only way out of the present political quagmire is for the government to put the country's interests before its own and fix a date for elections, to enable people to decide who should govern them. In the absence of this, the country's very future will be at stake.

Courtesy Dawn





Exercising Army Act 1952 to draw public outcry or applause

Accused May 9 roisters to have right of appeal in higher courts; civilians accused of sharing the state's official secrets with enemy may also be tried in a military court

By Zargoon Shah

Furious and uncontrolled Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf mobs burnt and vandalized military installations throughout the country on May 9. Outraged PTI youth stormed and ransacked preselected Pakistan Army and Pakistan Air Force buildings in different cities, in addition to shamelessly disrespecting mementos that reminded the nation of the bravery, courage and resolve of our war heroes. Prior to 9 May, no one else has had attacked the country's armed forces and their installations, except terrorists, particularly the Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan or the TTP.

Pakistani media including social media platforms continuously showed, and are still showing, ugly scenes of May 9 rampage and desecrations. And while the entire nation feels disgruntled and dismayed, the government and the ISPR (inter service public relations) have reacted with a firm resolve to nab the culprits, bring them to the court of law and make them a horrific example. In its post-9 May strongly worded statement, the ISPR categorically said those involved in storming and ransacking military installations would be dealt with stringent law including Army Act and Official Secrets Act. Army Chief General Asim Munir during his visit to the ravaged Jinnah House in Lahore said that legal process of trial against planners, instigators, abettors and perpetrators involved in the May 9 tragedy has commenced under Pakistan Army Act and Official Secret Act as per existing and established legal procedures derived from the Constitution of Pakistan.

"The army draws its strength from people and any effort to create a wedge between the army and the people of Pakistan is an act against the state which is neither tolerable nor condonable under any circumstances," the army chief said while addressing the garrison officers and soldiers at Corps



Headquarters during his visit to Lahore on May 20. On its part, the government via the National Security Council endorsed the establishment of military courts decision to try and prosecute the 9 May rioting protesters under the law that was enacted in 1952.

Promulgated in 1952, the Pakistan Army Act is applicable in order to put military personnel's trial under the military's own legal code; and in some cases, this law is also applied against the civilians. An amendment was made to the act in the Gen Ayub Khan era according to which the civilians accused of triggering mutiny within the ranks and files of the armed forces through written and verbal content, could be tried under this law.

Also in 1915 in the wake of APS Peshawar massacre, an amendment was made vide bill passed in the National Assembly to further amend the Pakistan Army Act, 1952. This was done in order to address the extraordinary situation and circumstances which demanded special measures for speedy trial of 'certain offences relating to terrorism, waging of war or insurrection against Pakistan and prevention of acts

threatening the security of Pakistan by any terrorist group, armed group, wing and militia or their members using name of religion or a sect. It extends to whole of Pakistan.'

Under the Army Act, those civilians who are accused of 'sharing the state's official secrets with the enemy' may also be tried in a military court; as well as the civilians allegedly involved in targeting and attacking military buildings and installations. The military court that hears the cases brought under the Army Act is called the Field General Court Martial (FGCM). This military court functions under the supervision of military's legal directorate, known as Judge Advocate General (JAG) branch. President of this court is a serving military officer and the prosecution counsel is also a military officer.

Military officers holding legal degrees in the Adjutant General Branch (AGB) are part of these judicial proceedings. Here the accused are given the right to have a lawyer and if an accused cannot afford a private lawyer, military officers act as their advocates, they are called 'friends of the



accused.' If convicted, defendants have the right to file an appeal within 40 days to an army court of appeal. And if the defendants believe that after going before the army court of appeal, they have not received a fair trial or they express dissatisfaction with the proceedings, they can subsequently go to higher courts. The punishments, depending on the severity of the offence, can vary from two years to a life sentence, and even capital punishment.

In case of taking legal action pertaining to military cantonment, cantonment area or any part of the country, if the accused is a soldier then action is taken against him under the Pakistan Army Act, 1952. And if army itself wants to give police the authority to take action or investigate against a military person, it is possible, but this action is usually done by the army via court martial. If a civilian is found guilty of any crime in the cantonment area, an FIR against him is registered under the Pakistan Penal Code in the cantonment police station and he is also detained by the police. According to legal experts, in case of damage to 'operational military installations', the army itself can use the power of action in the military court under Army Act, including anti-terrorism laws. Espionage, provoking mutiny in the army and assaulting an army officer and some other such serious crimes are punishable under military laws. Legal experts contend that civil crimes do not fall into this category. For instance, attacking, stealing or setting fire to the residence of the crop commander in the cantonment area is a civil offense because it is a government building and residence but 'not the office of a military officer.' But if the same crime has been committed in his office or any other military installation, the case and proceedings against such an accused will be under the Pakistan Army Act and the person will be 'field general court martialled.' The GHQ, according to legal experts, is also included in the 'operational military installations,' therefore any attack on this building will be seen in the context of the Pakistan Army Act and against the civilians involved in the attack, action will be taken under the FGCM.

Established under the Cantonment Act, 1924, military cantonments in the country are federal territories. Any area under this

Act may be used for training or defense purposes of the armed forces and may be declared a 'military cantonment.' Cantonment area or the cantt includes military barracks, training grounds and installations, administrative buildings, hospitals, schools and other buildings and installations. Similarly, 'military property' includes all goods, installations, areas used or owned by the armed forces or within the limits of a military cantonment. In Pakistan armed forces (arm, navy, air force) installations, discipline or any offense against personnel of the forces is dealt with under the Pakistan Army, Naval and Air Force Act. However, even in the case of a civilian, sometimes action can be taken under the military law.



Initially, according to media reports, military is considering to establish three courts under the Pakistan Army Act and the Official Secret Act-- to try civilians involved in rampaging the Jinnah House, the GHQ, other military installations and disgracing the mementos. On the other hand, human rights organisations i.e. Human Rights Commission of Pakistan and Amnesty International, have categorically rejected the establishment of military courts. The HRC in its official tweet stated: "HRC strongly opposes the use of the Pakistan Army Act 1952 and Official Secrets Act 1923 to try civilians. While those responsible for arson and damaging public and private property during the recent protests should be held to account, they remain entitled to due process." The

Amnesty International in its reaction said that "using military courts to try civilians is a clear violation of international law; there are several provisions under ordinary criminal laws that can be used to prosecute vandalism and destruction of public property." It added, "the right to a fair trial, guaranteed by Pakistan's Constitution, is severely undermined by this move and cannot be justified. It must be struck down immediately."

Pakistan's history espouses evidences where cases were sent to military courts. Most recently during Imran Khan's tenure as prime minister between August 2018 and April 2022, more than 20 civilians were tried under the law.

One of the convictions was that of human rights activist Idris Khattak, who was sentenced to 14 years in 2021 on charges of espionage. Khattak was convicted of providing sensitive information to a "foreign intelligence agency." In 2020, the Peshawar High Court rejected the convictions of nearly 200 people and ordered their release if they were not found guilty of any other crime. The individuals were allegedly members of banned groups and were accused of attacking civilians and the military. The convicts were sentenced to either capital punishment or various prison terms. It remains to be seen, if military courts and trials under them draw public outcry or applause.



Will it be 1977 or 1999?



By Abbas Nasir

What a dramatic few day these have been, even by Pakistani standards — triggered by the arrest of PTI leader Imran Khan on Tuesday in Islamabad and his triumphant return to Lahore late Friday, after being freed by the courts and given blanket immunity from arrest.

Mr Khan's accusation that a serving major-general in the ISI was responsible for the attempt on his life and was still plotting to eliminate him, was seen by analysts as the catalyst for his arrest. After getting blanket immunity from the courts, he pointed the finger of blame directly at the army chief.

Imran Khan, who is reported to have opposed the appointment of the current army chief with all his might, said the latter feared that on coming to power "I will de-notify him when I have no such plans", insinuating that the general wanted him out of the game.

Wednesday's mayhem saw organised Tiger Force cadres and PTI supporters from among the general public ransacking, setting ablaze key government and military installations — not even sparing the Lahore Corps Commander's official residence — and it led to the most obvious question.

It was becoming clear that the PTI leader had sufficient backers not only in terms of street power but in key institutions too who would fight his corner.

"1977 or 1999?" one friend asked me, elaborating that, in his view, the former situation seemed more likely after Imran Khan's pointed accusations because it was becoming clear that such a spiral would only leave one of the two men standing at the end of the fight. They couldn't co-exist.

As the weekend approached, it was becoming clear that the PTI leader had sufficient backers not only in terms of street power,

but in key institutions too who would fight his corner. As the courts were giving him relief in older cases and protecting him in newer ones, the state paralysis was indicative of divisions elsewhere.

This was evident in the YouTube live videos by retired army captains and majors (based in the UK and Canada) where they were naming names and directing 'protesters' to the homes of senior army and intelligence officers, even furnishing street addresses. This obviously pointed to inside information and support.

It is to Imran Khan's credit, or discredit — depending on how you see things — that he has polarised and divided not just the people at large, but also families and institutions to such an extent that supporting him is a 'do or die' choice.

Whereas his populist politics may have initially ridden the wave of the massive



'information' campaign by his promoters in the so-called establishment, which tarnished his political opponents as 'chor-daku' and presented him as Mr Clean and a saviour, he has expanded his support base substantially; it is now embedded in large swathes of the country.

Such a powerful civilian politician on the one hand, and the erstwhile powerful and potent military seeing its influence apparently diminishing on the other, would usually augur well for the country and society and generate hope of a better, brighter future.

But the situation may need to be examined in the context of some other factors too. First and foremost, to what extent have the 'divisions' within eroded the military's influence and authority? Equally, if these divisions run vertically in the organisation, how severely can they potentially handicap the chief?

The answer will become clear in the coming days/weeks rather than months, as the chief will now be focusing on forming his key team. He did move around a few officers on assuming office, but largely left in place the team he had inherited.

As a courtesy to Gen Qamar Javed Bajwa, the then retiring army chief Gen Raheel Sharif left all promotions due to three stars — eight, if I recall correctly — to his succes-

sor, so he could form his own team. On assuming office, that is exactly what Gen Bajwa did.

For his part, Gen Bajwa promoted some 12 major-generals to three stars (a few more than there were vacancies, in fact) in the final weeks of his extended tenure. This may/may not have restricted the leeway the incumbent enjoyed, but there is no bar on him to form his own team now. Once he does that, any analysis can be based more on fact than desire or speculation that speaks of his isolation.

The other significant factor is whether a powerful politician such as Imran Khan, with unprecedented popular and institutional support, can resist becoming an authoritarian leader if he returns to government.

When smoke was billowing from the Lahore Corps Commander's residence and images of burning buses and bus stations were coming in from Karachi, and flames were rising from the Radio Pakistan building in Peshawar, one Ivy League-educated lawyer admonished those expressing concern by saying: "This is how revolutions happen."

That may indeed be true. But one was also rem-i--nded of the mayhem unleashed after the burning of the Reichstag in Berlin in 1933. Those flames be---came the pretext

for the worst atrocities of the last century, and millions of people perished in them.

Diehard support and pressure tactics by party cadres is one thing, but attacking installations can very easily slide into anarchy, even fascism. Pakistan has suffered greatly at the hands of the military's meddling in politics and all its political engineering projects.

When civilian leaders with a large support base feel reluctant to rein in trained cadres and other supporters and refuse to condemn violence and arson, they are letting down democracy and the democratic norms and conduct they derive their legitimacy from.

Having failed to revive the economy and feeling cornered by one unfavourable court ruling after another, the governing alliance too has indicated it will seek to assert its own power as much in parliament as in the streets with its sit-in before the Supreme Court on Monday.

What such a continuing spiral can lead to is anybody's guess. If things spin out of control, the blame would squarely be as much on each of our civilian politicians as it will be on the military's political engineering over the years.

Courtesy Dawn



No option sans seeking IMF extension beyond June

Absence of IMF program to cause Pak reliance on China manifold

By Mehtab Haider

All hopes for revival of long-awaited IMF-sponsored program have been diminishing due to inability of both sides for striking a staff level agreement (SLA) during the last seven months. Now the IMF's program known as extended fund facility (EFF) is to expire on June 30, 2023; so, there is no other option but to request the IMF and its executive board to grant an extension in the timeframe of the EFF beyond June 2023; else, the IMF program would fail.

At the moment, Pakistan has conveyed to the Fund staff to accomplish the ninth review as a first step otherwise budgetary framework for 2023-24 would not be shared.

There is a need to ascertain reasons behind the lingering deadlock between IMF and Pakistan, as Islamabad claimed that confirmation of \$4 billion financing was shared with the IMF even with the break-up but the Fund was not moving towards SLA. On the other hand, IMF took the stance that there was a financing gap of \$6 billion till the end of June 2023, so the required financing could not be materialized as yet.

Patience of Pakistani high-ups is running out and they argue before the Fund that Islamabad should be 'treated as a member of the IMF, not as a beggar.'

Pakistani authorities alleged that IMF was playing politics with Pakistan, contending that the current account deficit (CAD) was projected at \$8 billion for the current fiscal year during talks held from January 31 to Feb 9, 2023; so the financing gap was worked out at \$7 billion for the current financial year ending June 30, 2023.

However, Pakistani authorities took the stance that CAD would be brought down within a range of \$4 to \$5 billion so that the financing gap is also minimized. Then two-month long talks occurred, and IMF brought down the financing gap up to \$6 billion, keeping in view the declining CAD levels. Now the CAD turned into a surplus of \$640 million for March 2023, and overall, it stood at a deficit of \$3.4 billion for the first nine months of the current fiscal year.

The financing gap of \$4 billion was fulfilled via confirmation as Saudi Arabia conveyed to the Fund it was ready to provide additional \$2 billion deposits and UAE \$1 billion. The World Bank is committed to providing \$450 million RISE-II after fulfillment of four prior conditions and \$250 million by AIIB. Pakistan also received firm commitments for getting \$350 million out of total Geneva pledges for flood-affected areas. The only remaining \$1 billion in financing is from commercial banks and they are waiting for a striking SLA. External financing is fulfilled so there is no justification for using delaying tactics to avoid signing of SLA. With diminishing options left for Pakistan, last-ditch efforts are underway to achieve a breakthrough ahead of the upcoming budget. But if the deadlock persists over the next few days, hopes would be over for reviving the IMF program.



Few options are left to move forward: first of all, signing the SLA on urgent basis and forwarding Pakistan's request before the IMF's executive board for approving the next tranche of \$1 billion; and then securing an extension in the EFF program by a period of few months in order to accomplish the 10th and 11th reviews. Pakistan's options are limited and without an IMF program, Pakistan's default risk would stay elevated and the reserves weak.

Options for reaching an SLA in the next few days or combining the 9th and 10th review then asking for an extension of the program beyond June are there, but it seems difficult; so, life without IMF means additional financing from friendly countries, rollovers and commercial financing at higher costs. In the absence of IMF program, Pakistan's reliance on China will increase manifold. The policy makers will be left with no other options but to explore all other avenues to avert the balance of payment (BoP) crisis.

Pakistan had adopted the policy of import restrictions to manage its economy in order to avert default but it resulted in choking of the economy as the growth contracted to just 0.29 percent for the outgoing financial year. Keeping in view all these developments, independent economists are now suggesting the government make last-ditch efforts to revive the IMF program or clearly look towards China to bail out the dwindling economy.

China does not have any institutional arrangement for taking care of providing financial support to those countries who are facing the BoP crisis. First of all, whether they are ready to support Islamabad keeping in view its massive requirement of \$25 billion for repayments of debt-servicing on external loans in the coming financial year. If China gets ready to grant rollover of its deposits, and re-financing of commercial loans, even then Pakistan will have to request to restructure the outstanding loan repayments and then provide additional loans for averting default on external loan repayments and other obligations.

There will be no magical quick fix for resolving the looming crisis as the whole nation will have to stand up to bring changes in their lifestyle because the patchwork would not resolve our lingering difficulties.

Global debt at a near-record \$305 trillion in March 2023: IIF Report

Pakistan's large external debt comes with considerable repayment pressure; from April 2023 to June 2026 country needs to repay \$77.5 billion in external debt; a hefty burden for \$350 billion economy

By Javed Mahmood

As central banks respond to fragile market sentiment by slowing the pace of rate hikes, the global debt burden surged by over \$8.3 trillion in 2023. This marked a second consecutive quarterly increase, following two-quarters of a sharp decline during last year's rapid monetary policy tightening. The rebound was primarily driven by non-financial corporates and the government sector.

At close to \$305 trillion, global debt is now \$45 trillion higher than its pre-pandemic level and is expected to continue increasing rapidly. Despite concerns about a potential credit crunch following the recent turmoil in the banking sectors of the US and Switzerland, government borrowing needs remain elevated.

A combination of factors including aging populations, rising healthcare costs, and substantial climate finance gaps, continue to put pressure on government balance sheets. Heightened geopolitical tensions are also expected to drive further increases in national defense spending over the medium term, potentially impacting the credit profile of both sovereign and corporate borrowers. If this trend continues, it will have significant implications for international debt markets, particularly if interest rates remain higher for longer.

Emerging market debt now over \$100 trillion: while global debt/GDP has stabilized near 335% of GDP, nearly 75% of our EM universe experienced a rise in debt levels (in USD terms) during the first quarter of 2023. The increase was sharper in mature markets, driven by Japan, the US, France, and the UK. Among emerging markets, the biggest increases were seen in China, Mexico, Brazil, India and Türkiye, propelling total EM debt to an all-time high of over \$100 trillion – up from around \$75 trillion in 2019.

“Crisis of adaptation” to a new monetary regime: with last year's rapid monetary



tightening creating liquidity mismatches on the balance sheets of some weaker financial institutions, the recent banking turmoil has underscored the importance of maintaining public confidence to ensure financial stability. Although recent bank failures appear more idiosyncratic than systemic—and US financial institutions carry much less debt (78% of GDP) than in the run-up to the 2007/8 crisis (110% in 2006)—fear of contagion has prompted significant deposit withdrawals from US regional banks.

Given the central role of regional banks in credit intermediation in the US, worries about their liquidity positions could result in a sharp contraction in lending to some segments, including underbanked households and businesses. With US banks increasingly reporting tighter lending standards, such a contraction, could hit small businesses particularly hard while resulting in higher default rates and more zombie firms across the board. We estimate that around 14% of US companies can be considered zombies, with a substantial portion of these in the healthcare and information technology sectors.

Less appetite for EM local currency debt: several major EMs have benefited from the recent weakening of the USD and the slowdown in interest rate hikes in mature markets. This has been evident in positive

portfolio debt flows into these larger EMs since the beginning of the year. However, in stark contrast, many smaller high-yield sovereigns continue to have limited access to Eurobond markets due to higher borrowing costs.

More broadly, with the interest rate differential between EMs and mature markets diminishing EM local currency debt is less appealing to foreign investors. This could hinder the capacity and ability of some countries to effectively respond to exogenous shocks, including challenges related to climate change.

Rise of private debt markets: non-bank financial institutions (NBFIs) continue to gain prominence in global credit intermediation. The so-called “shadow banks” now account for more than 14% of financial markets, with the majority of growth stemming from a rapid expansion of US investment funds and private debt markets. Although higher interest rates have slowed activity in riskier segments of the shadow banking system, we expect that ongoing pressures on US regional banks will facilitate continued expansion of private debt markets (an alternative funding source for mid-sized firms) where investor redemption risks appear low compared to certain open-ended investment funds.

Pakistan's existential economic crisis

Pakistan's large external debt comes with considerable repayment pressure. From April 2023 to June 2026, Pakistan needs to repay \$77.5 billion in external debt. For a \$350 billion economy, this is a hefty burden. The major repayments in the next three years are to Chinese financial institutions, private creditors and Saudi Arabia. The United States Institute of Peace has published this report about Pakistan recently.

Pakistan faces near-term debt repayment pressure. From April to June 2023, the external debt servicing burden is \$4.5 billion. The major repayments are due in June when a \$1 billion Chinese SAFE deposit and a roughly \$1.4 billion Chinese commercial loan would mature. Pakistani authorities hope to convince the Chinese to refinance and roll over both debts, something the Chinese government and commercial banks have done in the past.

Even if Pakistan manages to meet these obligations, the next fiscal year will be more challenging, as the debt servicing will rise to nearly \$25 billion. This includes \$15 billion of short-term loans and \$7 billion in long-term debt, including a vital \$1 billion repayment on a Eurobond in the fourth quarter. The short-term debt repayments include \$4 billion in Chinese SAFE deposits, \$3 billion in Saudi deposits and \$2 billion in UAE deposits; the Pakistani government assumes they will be rolled over by the creditors each year. Separately, Pakistan will need to repay another \$1.1 billion of long-term commercial loans to Chinese banks.

In 2024-25, Pakistan's debt servicing is likely to be around \$24.6 billion, which includes \$8.2 billion in long-term debt repayments and another \$14.5 billion in short-term debt repayments; this includes major repayments to Chinese lenders of \$3.8 billion. In 2025-26, the debt servicing burden is likely to be at least \$23 billion; that year Pakistan is to pay back \$8 billion in long-term debt, including repaying \$1.8 billion for a Eurobond and \$1.9 billion to Chinese commercial lender.

Exports, investments, remittances and Pak repayment calculus

In order to repay its debt and avoid a sovereign default, Pakistan's earnings from exports, foreign direct investment and remittance inflows from foreign workers are vital. However, all three inflows are projected to not keep pace with the import bill as well as the mounting debt repayment pressure.

For example, 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 in exports for 2022-23. That has now been 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.

Foreign direct investment is projected to remain subdued as well. In recent years, investment has averaged a dismal \$2 billion annually due to the challenging business environment and frequent policy changes; similar levels of investment are the best case for the next few years. Investor sentiment has also been impacted by the government's recent restrictions on the movement of capital outside the country.

Options to manage external debt

Pakistan's economic managers have only two options for addressing its external debt burden. The first is to take fresh loans and seek rollovers of debt. However, due to downgrades by international credit rating agencies, Pakistan's ability to access the sovereign financing market is limited. So Pakistani leadership will depend on Middle Eastern partners and China, not just for existing rollover but also fresh loans if it seeks to avoid a default. The specific amount Pakistan may seek will depend on negotiations with the IMF.

If the derailed IMF program is revived, the

amount will be smaller than the one it would seek if the program collapses. And in case the currently derailed IMF program is revived and completed over the summer, Pakistan will need a new IMF program, in addition to new loans and rollovers from its Middle Eastern and Chinese partners, due to its external debt burden over the new three years.

Another possibility is that Pakistan seeks pre-emptive restructuring of debt. Doing so will reduce the repayment pressure and spare scarce dollars in the economy to finance the country's current account deficit. The Pakistani government has met with investment banks and advisors to explore restructuring options. However, for now, officials are reluctant as a restructuring process will be both painful and long, and also because of the political backlash of associated austerity measures.

What does it mean for Pak stability?

There is a real danger that nuclear-armed Pakistan with a population of nearly 230 million people may be unable to meet its external debt obligations — which will trigger a sovereign default. To avert this scenario, Pakistan needs IMF's continued support as well as help from Chinese and Middle Eastern partners.

Pakistani leadership has been asking the United States to intercede with the IMF, but that effort hasn't borne fruit in the way they hoped for. Pakistani leadership is also making frantic efforts for bailouts from foreign partners, but it is unclear if they will make the difficult reform choices necessary to win the trust of the IMF. If Pakistan ultimately defaults, there will be a cascade of disruptive effects.

Crucially, Pakistan's imports could be disrupted, which could lead to a shortage of essential goods and commodities. In Sri Lanka, the disruption of oil imports stoked public discontent, protests and a change in government. Pakistan, which is already seeing intense political conflict between Sharif's government and opposition leader Khan, may also see the economic crisis creating more political turmoil. And given Pakistan's demographic profile and surging terrorism threats, the resulting crisis could go in unexpected directions.

Economics of a national security state

In Pak case national security aspect hijacked state for all times to come; country continues to be low in HDI index, torn between erstwhile Western patrons, regional realities; national security state doctrines pathetic nonstarters

By Naqi Akbar

As the title of the article suggests, Pakistan has remained the captioned state for much of the time of its existence. Such a state by definition needs an international stakeholder; who has very good communication linkages with the internal stakeholders. In the case of Pakistan, the external stakeholder has been the capitalist world led by the United States. Pentagon formalizes the relationship at the American end. At the internal stakeholder end, sans for the first few years of the independent nation-state called Pakistan, it has been the Pakistani military establishment, which has managed the affairs.

Pushing the argument further, the external stakeholders' stakes in the dominant role of the internal stakeholder automatically decide the direction of the client state; in that case Pakistan. Right from the days of the Cold War to the Afghan Jihad, to the 'war on terror' and its fallout, the dominant role has helped define the hard truth. Pakistan, even though the circumstances of its formation were democratic; federating units decided in the 1940 Resolution of Lahore; 1946 elections were very much the forerunner for the first administrator legislature in post-independence Pakistan. The nation-state, which was formulated out of the process, has attained the role of the 'national security state' and not a welfare state.

It is ironic to note that the United States while dictating militaries of other states to maintain a dominating role in their respective nation-states, has maintained, the dominance of civilian rule or the rule of the law; until 9/11, when the homeland security setups justified abuse of the human rights. The militaries inclusive of Pakistan automatically played the tune of national security imperatives as the cornerstone of the nation-state. The military being the organized unit of the administration was able to market its importance, and influence, and justify its share in the natural resources.



The resultant configuration of a national security state is geared towards threat perception and the welfare aspect of the state takes a second seat. Here it is pertinent to note that each state, whether a national security state or the welfare state ought to have some threat perceptions stemming out of historical context, a geographical position as well as a host in internal and external factors. These perceptions are acceptable; until they do not knock at the welfare aspect of the state, which is equally important in the 20th-century configurations of welfare-based nation-states.

In Pakistan's case, the contradiction stemmed from the fact that the welfare aspect of the state was completely done away with. The national security aspect practically hijacked the state for all times to come; though the civilian side undertook the initial surrender. Here we may recall the fact that Pakistan's participation in the US defense programs had started before the formal takeover by Ayub Khan in 1957/58. The takeover and US support for the same under the name of Soviet/Communist threat only formalized the recognition of the new role of the Pakistani nation-state, a national security state.

That national security state prioritized a huge chunk of the budget for the military under the pretext of those very threat perceptions cultivated; sometimes under the communist threat, al-Qaeda threat, or any threat perceived as influencing the unity of the federation. As a resultant position, Pakistan has continued to be low in the human development indicators (HDI) index. The spending on education and health is minimal. The state seems to have surrendered the education sector to the private sector unscrupulous businesses. The health sector is taken care of by the philanthropists.

That dismal state of the HDI has been responsible for an ever-increasing army of poor. These poor are good cannon fodder for the exploitative industry, equally merciless agriculture sector, and the urban political elite. The last name formalized in the form of political parties has been merciless in exposing the army of the poor to adventures; which they would not delve into. The recent incidents where the above-mentioned elite disowned the political movement, while the poor were exposed to even extra-judicial killing by trigger-happy LEA, have further exposed the class-based fault lines.



Coming back to the national security state set up in Pakistan, the other aspect that seems to influence the economic and political roadmap of the state, has been the non-development of a knowledge-based economic infrastructure in the country. Pakistan does not figure prominently in innovative export avenues like the jewelry sector or the IT sector.

If there are strides in them, they are erratic in nature and do not yield enough revenue to help populate the country's foreign exchange reserves. Instead, right from the cold war until the Ukrainian conflict, Pakistan has relied upon international geo-political linkages for keeping the Dollar stable. Readings on Ayub Khan's economic strategy, Zia-ul-Haq years, and Musharraf's so-called Paris Club breathing spaces all revolved around the 'jobs did' nature of the Pakistani economic dividends. Whatever economic planning was in place was accidental in nature; not driven out of a genuine will to do so.

That aspect of national security weighed against economic linkages can be best gauged by how the country remained without connectivity for e-commerce, bills payment, or POS payments, just because of the ill-advised step by the interior minister in the backdrop of May 9, 2023, events that the unrestrained connectivity compromised security.

The country's top decision-makers could fathom the scenario of being cut off from digital payments coming into the country's

banking system for work done like content formulation on websites like Fiverr etc. The embarrassing scenario was illustrative of the fact that the state was more interested in getting the tranche of IMF based on 'jobs did' than anything to do with actually encouraging economic activity in the society. It was not before that a saner voice from the establishment itself and the political front men i.e. PPP and PML-N raised concern that the internet was back for e-commerce.

As things stand, the IMF program is a non-starter. The international geo-political linkages are not ready to feed Pakistan for

long unless Pakistan can come up with some big assurances in a fast-developing international fault line. Pakistan is torn between its erstwhile Western patrons and its regional realities. Even to formalize smuggling along Pakistan and Iran border, the border markets were set up. It took less than 48 hours when a non-state actor was put into action to kill five IRGC guards along the border to act as a dampener to legitimate trade, where the governments concerned also earn revenue and supplies are assured. Given the national security state character of the Pakistani nation-state, it is not much hard to identify, who are the stakeholders against these trade opportunities.

Conclusively, in the fast-changing world, the national security state doctrines, whether they stem from war colleges brainstorming sessions or hybrid political setups; are pathetic nonstarters. The current political crisis and the unguarded perceptions it has created among a large cross-section of the public above the political grouping basis can be the positive aspect for a greater public rule in steering the economic and geo-political destiny of the nation; than a selected few. The economics of the national security state had to give way to a greater role to an intellectual elite that can think beyond 'threat perceptions'; towards a knowledge-based growth strategy; nurtured through a better HDI index.



GDP estimates: fudging under way?



By Ali Khizar

The economic recession in Pakistan is getting worse. GDP contraction is happening at a much faster pace than was expected. The numbers are shaping up uglier than what many analysts had predicted earlier. With every passing month, the picture is getting bleaker.

The size of the economy in FY23 may contract by 1 percent or even more. However, at the same time, the Dar School of Fin-count-economics (half-baked finance, accounting, and economics) is in play to juggle the numbers.

This is evident by the delay in the meeting of the National Accounts Committee (NAC) which was supposed to happen last week.

There are two problems for finance minister Ishaq Dar. One is that last year's (FY22) GDP growth numbers are being revised upward, and that is making growth even lower this year due to a high base effect. And the second and scary explanation is that economic numbers in the last few months have shown falling output across several industries and sectors of the broader economy.

Reportedly, the GDP numbers for the last year (FY22) are being revised upward to 6.5

percent from provisional 5.97 percent. Such a revision is a regular feature, as the provisional numbers are based on nine months (or so) data which are extrapolated for the full year. Then the high-powered numbers in the last few months are massively down due to import restriction and demand destruction.

The provisional number for this year (FY23) is estimated in a range of negative 0.8 to 1.0 percent, based on the available data so far. And perhaps, the number could go down to 2 percent.

Now, with delay in NAC meeting some fear that the finance minister may attempt to influence the authorities to juggle the numbers to show lower growth last year (FY22) and better than actual numbers for this year (FY23).

The fear is not misplaced, as in the last regime of Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N), such practice did happen, when the whole team was locked in a room till it was ensured that growth assessment was made to look rosier.

And even SBP (State Bank of Pakistan) is shying away from giving any number. In its recently published half year report, SBP has indicated that FY23 GDP growth may be

significantly lower than its projections of 2 percent. It is obvious that once again SBP is behind the curve.

This fiscal year started on a bad note. First, import restrictions were imposed on the engineering sector from the first month (July 22) and have continued to date. As weeks and months passed by, the list of restricted imports only became longer in tandem with the severe decline in foreign exchange reserves. Moreover, inflation – due to revision in energy prices, currency depreciation and shortages— dented demand of other items too.

Then smack in the middle of the Q1-FY23, the agricultural value chain was devastated by floods which led to a significant loss of livestock and crops such as cotton and rice.

The overall numbers are shaping badly. Large-scale manufacturing (LSM) is down by 25 percent in March 2023 – which is the steepest monthly decline ever, excluding the last quarter of FY20 (also known as Covid quarter).

In 9MFY23, LSM is down by 8.1 percent with three straight quarters in red. Barring beverages, export quantities of garments, football, and all other industries are in the negative. And we are yet to reach the



bottom, since the fourth quarter will surely be deep in the red.

Although LSM's direct share in GDP is less than 10 percent, its decline has an overall impact on the economic value chain. A significant decline in LSM activity leaves a massive dent on the small-scale manufacturers from the SME segment, which supplies raw materials and parts to large corporates.

And the other impact is in the distribution and retail segment; for example, car and white goods dealers, who are feeling the heat too.

Energy consumption is another important indicator of overall economic growth. Here the situation is bad. Electricity generation is down by 23 percent in April 2023. It is

down by 10 percent in 10MFY23. Petrol sales are down by 25 percent in April 2023; whereas the dip is at 17 percent for 10MFY23 on cumulative basis.

The story of diesel is even dismal. Its sales have declined by half in the last two months and 10 months sales have declined by 28 percent. The sales' dip indicates fewer goods being transported from ports and factories to wholesalers to retailers. Thus, there is a dip in overall economic growth.

There is no good story to tell in construction. Cement sales are down by 18 percent in 9MFY23 and now they're at 2019 levels. The story of steel is perhaps even more dismal. And real estate as a sector is down as well.

The bottom line is that there is a severe

decline in manufacturing and a significant fall in agriculture (due to floods). And services sector, which has a lion's share in GDP, is linked to these two. Thus, wholesale and retail along with other sectors may contract in a big way. The GDP is likely to take a big hit.

The question is how bad the numbers could get. This writer's estimates are that GDP may be down by 1.5-2 percent, at least. This hit is not coming without a record high inflation. The latest recording of headline is 36 percent and FY23 average inflation is likely to be around 30 percent. And sensitive price index's recent recordings are fast approaching 50 percent.

The negative growth and high inflation constitute a double whammy at a scale never witnessed before in the country's history. People are feeling the heat; but still there is some hangover of stellar growth of last two years, i.e., one year of negative growth and record high inflation may be absorbed by segments as economy is contracting from two consecutive years of 6 percent or more growth (last such period of very high consumption led growth was witnessed during 2004-07).

However, the patience of both masses and businesses may turn into agony, if low growth and inflation continue into the next fiscal year. Unfortunately, none of the signs till date shows that things might get better.

Courtesy Brecorder

Minimum wage

By Parvez Rahim

At present, there are three laws providing for the regulation of the wages of workers employed in certain industries. The oldest one is the Payment of Wages Act, 1936, which defines the components of workers' wages and payments made or expenses incurred on them which are not considered wages. Besides, the Act lists 11 types of deductions in a worker's wages.

The minimum wage rate of hundreds of jobs is fixed under the Minimum Wages Ordinance, 1961. The minimum rate for unskilled workers employed in commercial and industrial establishments is fixed under the Minimum Wages for Unskilled Workers Ordinance, 1969.

The three laws have been adopted by the provinces following the devolution of labour laws after the 18th Amendment in 2010.

The minimum wage for unskilled workers is the most contentious because it is the base line for wages in other jobs and also because it determines the national wage level of workers in industrial and commercial enterprises. Therefore, the 1969 ordinance gains significance as it deals with minimum wages for only unskilled workers.

Sadly, the paying capacity of employers is being eroded.

The minimum wage of Rs140 per month fixed in 1969 remained unchanged until 1993, when it was retroactively raised to Rs1500 effective from July 1992. This was the only increase in the minimum wage of unskilled workers in 31 years, till 2000. It also implies that the increase in living costs during this period was not significant. Besides, labour unions and federations were active then, but did not compel governments to make such increments.

Nevertheless, in these 31 years, raises known as COLA in the salaries of low-paid employees, would be made from time to time through the Employees' Cost of Living (Relief) Act, 1973, and the Employees' Special Allowance Acts of the provinces. The last COLA, of Rs100 per month, was made effective from December 2000. The



law of special allowances became redundant in the early 1990s, after allowing nominal pay rise twice.

Progressive employers following the labour laws in letter and spirit allowed Collective Bargaining Agent (CBA) unions in their enterprises and reached an agreement with them periodically. Such agreements would be instrumental in allowing increases in salaries and benefits to unionised staff.

From 2001 to 2022, minimum wages for unskilled workers have been increased 14 times — from 14pc to 67pc. The last increase was from Rs19,000 to Rs25,000 effective from July 2022. Over the last few years, the meteoric rise in the cost of living has been a key factor in determining the new rate.

The revisions in the provinces' minimum wage are proposed by the respective provincial governments in their annual budgets. These are then reviewed by the minimum wage boards of the provinces, which have been constituted under the law and also have representation from the employers. It is unfortunate that the paying capacity of employers is being eroded due to the enormous increase in their fixed costs of utilities and security. If entrepreneurs received some government relief on these counts, they would be in a far more comfortable position to disburse even living wages to their workers.

In view of unprecedented inflation in the country, labour unions and civil society groups, among others, which took out rallies in Hyderabad on Labour Day,

demanding that the minimum wage be fixed at Rs50,000 per month and pension sums be doubled. These demands are not unrealistic; but at the same time, amenities available to employees previously should also be restored.

Another factor responsible for the rapid and unnecessary increase in employers' fixed costs are the massive amounts of monthly contributions payable by them on behalf of their employees to the Employees' Old-age Benefits Institution (EOBI) and the Social Security Institutions. The benefits currently disbursed among eligible employees by these institutions are not commensurate with the huge contributions received by them from the employers.

Under the ordinances, the present rate of contribution is 6pc of the prevalent minimum wage, which is Rs25,000 per month. If the minimum wage of unskilled workers is increased by the government to, say, Rs35,000 per month in the next fiscal budget, it will constitute a 40pc increase in employers' contribution. On the other hand, EOBI has not increased the amount of pension from Rs8,500 per month since January 2020. Dispensaries and hospitals run by the Social Security Institution lack proper facilities and capable paramedical staff; they can't cater to seriously ill patients, who are then shifted to private hospitals.

In view of all this, the governments should immediately delink the amount of contribution from the minimum wage and revive the previous system of making contribution payments against reasonable fixed amounts.

IN PICTURES

The 2023 Cannes Film Festival





Towards industrial policy 2.0 -Part - II



By Ishrat Husain

The foreign exchange earnings from jute exports which originated from former East Pakistan were pre-empted for allocation to industrialists in what was then West Pakistan.

A number of observers have commented that this growing regional economic disparity where per capita income of West Pakistan overtook that of the eastern province by 1970 was one of the main reasons that led to the separation of the two wings in 1971. The slogan of 22 families controlling 66 per cent of industry and 87 per cent of the banking and insurance sector of the country strengthened the movement against the then president Ayub Khan. His authoritarian regime was without popular representation from the majority province. Civil-military officers mainly from West Pakistan controlled most of the levers of decision-making, adding further to the resentment against the Ayub regime.

The separation of East Pakistan on the grounds of the deprivation of their economic rights validated the main plank of the charismatic Z A Bhutto's political party – the Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) – which won the 1970 elections on the platform of

Islamic socialism. It was also the time that the Soviet Union under a socialist economic system started to draw a lot of attention from policymakers and academics. They believed that control of the commanding heights of the economy with state-led industrialization would lead to a fair and just economic system.

The PPP got an ideological boost from the Soviet model and when it assumed power it gave an abrupt death knell to the industrialization strategy of the 1960s. All major industries, banks, insurance companies and educational institutions were nationalized without adequate thinking or preparation or planning. The private sector was not allowed to invest in these industries and sectors and bureaucrats were appointed to head the nationalized entities that were christened as state-owned enterprises.

With no prior training, lack of professional experience in running business enterprises, risk-aversion, and penchant for control rather than delegating powers for decision-making at the appropriate level, bureaucrats committed resources to ventures and activities that were neither economically feasible nor commercially

viable. In the name of redistribution to the poor, economic growth and industrial development were sacrificed – making the poor worse-off.

The large-scale manufacturing sector recorded a growth rate of 3.0 per cent per annum compared to 9.0 per cent in the previous two decades. The balance of payments difficulties got exacerbated as imports increased four-fold and the wide gap between imports and exports was filled by external loans. The external debt problem grew rapidly in magnitude during the decade of the 1970s.

After this episodic stock of large nationalization of assets – both economic as well as human – and the experience of several other developing countries following the same route, a number of international studies empirically evaluated the Import Substitution Industrialization strategy and found it to be responsible for stifling growth impulses, worsening the balance of payments with the increase in machinery and raw material imports outweighing export performance. This regime, by turning the terms of trade in favour of domestic industry,

had in-built long-term bias against manufactured exports.

In the 1990s, several important developments brought about changes in thinking about development policy. The winds of globalization that liberalized international trade, opened up financial flows, eased up transfer of technology and gradually removed barriers to international migration began to positively affect growth prospects and poverty reduction in developing countries.

The World Bank carried out a seminal study, 'The East Asian Miracle', documenting the factors responsible for the spectacular economic success of the countries in the East Asia region. China, which was a closed economy following the conventional socialist model, made a drastic departure and began integrating itself into the international economy and opening up the domestic markets to competitive forces. By liberalizing trade flows, attracting foreign direct investment, reducing the relative weight of state-owned enterprises (SOEs) and promoting the private sector, adopting the latest technology in production and processing, incentivizing rural households to grow agriculture commodities without government direction and empowering local governments, China was able to make unprecedented progress by raising the standard of living of their population and lifting 700 million people out of poverty.

The Washington Consensus adopted by the World Bank and IMF had interpreted the East Asian and Chinese experiences as validation of market-friendly economic policies. Other independent economists were of the view that state's direction and guidance to the private sector in the form of an industrial policy were responsible for the desirable outcomes.

While this debate remained unsettled, the impulses of globalization over the next two decades gave impetus to the proponents of the Washington Consensus, putting the advocates of industrial policy on a back foot. The global economic conditions proved to be extremely favourable for developing and emerging economies which were able to make great economic strides fortifying the views of those advocating liberalization, privatization and deregulation and shunning protection to domestic

industries – a key element of the industrial policy.

During 1990-2010, the number of persons living below the poverty line fell dramatically from two billion to 897 million, bringing down the share of poor people from 37 to 13 per cent. Real GDP of emerging and developing economies (EDEs) grew by 4.7 per cent annually on average and per capita income increased by over 70 per cent. On a population weighted basis, excluding China, the increase has been about 90 per cent. China's per capita income multiplied 54 times since 1980 and its GDP stands next to the US today. Consequently, the relative share of EDEs in the global GDP (measured at purchasing power parity) increased to 57 per cent by 2014.



India, which was a closed economy with excessive controls of bureaucracy in the form of licences, permits, prices etc., faced a serious balance of payments crisis in 1991. As part of comprehensive and deep-rooted reforms, the government decided to open up the economy, dismantled the controls and licence raj, incentivized the private sector, and attracted foreign direct investment and technology. The results have been spectacular – India has achieved a growth rate of 6-7 per cent per annum over the last 15 years, and foreign exchange reserves have accumulated to \$600 billion with a smooth transition of people from the poor to the middle class.

However, some events and factors sparked a debate over the need to resuscitate the industrial policy. These events included the Global Financial crisis of 2008 to 2009 and the financial instability widening wealth and income inequalities even in fast-growing countries such as China and India, the geopolitical tension arising from the ascendancy of China and its challenge to the United States, the pandemic of 2019 and the resulting supply chain disruption, the impending climate change risks, commodity price-escalation, the Ukraine-Russian war, transition to renewable energy, emergence of global value chains instead of vertical integration where dependence on other countries supplies is heavy, and control on key technologies by competing countries against established ones, and anti-immigration sentiments.

The evidence for the post-2010 period is overwhelming. World trade fell by 5.0 percentage points in 2016-19 relative to GDP. Global flows of long-term investment fell by half and FDI from a peak of 5.3 per cent of Global GDP in 2007 to 2.3 per cent in 2021. In 2018-19, the net addition of immigrants was 200,000 – a decline of 70 per cent from the previous year. In 2016, the incomes of the highest one per cent of US earners were 225 per cent higher in real terms than they had been in 1979. For the middle class, the growth was 41 per cent.

To be continued

Courtesy The News

Exploring Pak potential as emerging market

Power supply, transit systems and clean water big infrastructure hurdles

By Nimra Durrani

Pakistan, is being known as a promising potential rising market. Pakistan offers a variety of chances for both investors and enterprises due to its young population, expanding middle class, and advantageous geographic allocation. However, there are certain difficulties involved in realising this promise. We will examine the elements that make Pakistan a desirable rising market, consider the difficulties it faces and talk about the potential that lies ahead in this opinion piece. The three main factors that have been contributing towards the rising of the market include the young population, growing middle class and strategic geographical location.

Young population

One of Pakistan's greatest strengths is its young population. The nation has a sizable workforce that supports economy's expansion and innovation, with a median age of about 23. A wide variety of consumer markets and a pool of skilled labor are provided by the demographic split. The young and hardworking population has been pursuing their full potential through entrepreneurship, educational advancement, and skill development in order to support market expansion. A professional freelance workforce has been developed, thanks to government investments in expanding and improving opportunities and 4G access has been provided to the freelancers to make it easier for them to access their foreign clients and jobs.

Growing middle class

The middle class in Pakistan is growing quickly, which boosts domestic consumption and generates a need for products and services. The demand for consumer goods, housing, healthcare, education and entertainment increases as income levels grow. Businesses now have the chance to meet the demands and aspirations of this expanding middle class-- thanks to this increasing trend. In the four years between 2015 and 2016, Pakistan had a dramatic increase in private automobile ownership.



In 2018, 9% or more of households had an automobile, up from 6% in 2015. According to Federal Bureau of Statistics (FBS) data recently released, the percentage of households owning motorcycles increased from 41% in 2015 to 53% in 2018. According to the 2017 census, there are 32.2 million households in Pakistan. Retail sales growth, e-commerce, advertising revenue, mass media growth, sports and entertainment and the negative effects of the consumer boom are all on the rise.

Strategic geographic location

Pakistan is geographically positioned strategically in the nexus of South Asia, Central Asia, and the Middle East. It is a convenient entry point to important regional markets, making it a desirable location for trade and investment. By connecting it to China's Belt and Road Initiative and giving it access to a sizable consumer market, the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) strengthens its position even more.

Pakistan has been a valuable ally of the US in its fight against terrorism due to its

geographic location. However, the ongoing power struggle and China's emergence as a major economic force have transformed the unipolar world into a bipolar one. China became the top export market for a variety of goods in 2015 after surpassing the US in terms of crude oil imports.

There are a few setbacks and challenges that are faced by Pakistan while developing and enhancing its market. Some highlighted challenges include:

Infrastructure development

Pakistan has great potential, but infrastructure issues are preventing it from developing into a major market. The main infrastructure limitations are a lack of reliable power supply, poor transit systems, and restricted access to clean water. To resolve these problems, substantial funding from the government and infrastructure improvements in the areas of energy production, logistics, and connection are needed. According to the World Bank, Pakistan has the worst rate of infrastructure growth in the area. This year, the government will invest \$2.4 billion in highways,

power, and transportation. Investment comes on top of the billions of dollars already invested in projects by the World Bank, Asian Development Bank (ADB), Gulf Council nations, JICA, and the \$56 billion China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), which has drawn criticism for the heavy debt load it will impose.

Political, security concerns

Pakistan's commercial environment has been impacted by political and security issues. Regional conflicts, corruption, and other problems with government have occasionally made it difficult to make investment decisions. To allay these worries, the government has implemented initiatives to boost security, attract foreign investment, and improve governance.

Regulatory framework

To create an atmosphere that is favorable for the business sector, the regulatory structure must be simplified. To draw and keep investors, it is essential to streamline procedures, improve transparency, and promote ease of doing business. Pakistan can establish an environment that promotes both domestic and foreign investment by enacting business-friendly policies and reforms.



The opportunities created for the growth in the market sector of Pakistan include:

Agriculture and agribusiness

The agricultural sector in Pakistan offers numerous chances for expansion. The nation has the ability to dominate agriculture and agribusiness due to its fertile landmass and varied climate. The use of contemporary farming methods, value-added processing, and agricultural infrastructure can increase productivity, support food security, and generate income from exports.

Information technology, innovation

Information technology industry in Pakistan has grown significantly in recent years. A competent pool of IT workers and a thriving startup environment exist in the nation. The development of the IT sector can be sped up by stimulating entrepreneurship, promoting technological innovation, and investing in digital infrastructure. This will open up new job opportunities and draw in outside capital.

Energy, infrastructure projects

The infrastructure and energy sectors of Pakistan present promising investment opportunities. The landscape is changing as a result of initiatives like the CPEC, which are opening up new channels for connectivity and trade. Opportunities in transportation, urban planning, and renewable energy may boost economic growth, produce jobs, and enhance general quality of life.

Pakistan's young population, expanding middle class, and advantageous geographic location all contribute to the country's obvious potential as an emerging market. While difficulties including regulatory, political, and infrastructure development constraints result in setbacks. Pakistan may be able to achieve its highest level of economic growth if it continues to give the development of the market system more attention while utilizing all of its resources.



Erdogan secures his 11th straight win

Turkish president has pledged to soon repair 650,000 quake-hit homes



By Anum Akram

Turkey's incumbent President Recep Tayyip Erdogan has won Turkey's presidential election, defeating his rival Kemal Kilicdaroglu in run-off vote, securing his rule until 2028. Erdogan, by securing 58 percent votes, will remain as Turkey's president for another five-year term; this marks his 11th consecutive election victory.

Turkey held its presidential elections despite worsening economic crisis, mounting resentment towards millions of refugees unable to return to a Syria torn by civil conflict, and growing disenchantment among Turkish youth with the ruling elite.

On May 28, a second round of voting held in Turkey for the very first time, because neither President Recep Tayyip Erdogan nor his primary rival, opposition leader Kemal Kilicdaroglu, were able to get majority vote, necessary to win the election outright in the first round on May 14, 2023.

This election event was hotly contested and eagerly awaited, not only in Turkey but across the world. This run-off event was a turning point for the country as Turkish voters used their voting power to make their voices heard. Turkey's presidential election drew world attention due to its long history of 'democratic values' and its diversified political environment.

Of the 64 million people who have registered to vote in the Turkish elections, 3.4 million Turks living abroad are entitled to do so. Turkey is the country with largest Turkish diaspora, and 1.5 million of them are registered voters.

According to Turkish embassy in Berlin, voters from Berlin and Brandenburg who are dual citizens of Turkey and Germany cast their votes as long as they are registered to vote in the first round.

On May 14, in the first round, Erdogan

gained 49.5% vote versus Kilicdaroglu's 44.9%. He almost missed the required 50% to avoid a run-off in a contest that would have had a significant impact on both Turkish geopolitics and international politics.

The election occurred as Turkey struggles to recover from devastating earthquakes that hit in February as well as battling a protracted economic crisis. Turkish media reports suggest that 88.84 percent of Turkey's 64 million eligible voters participated in the first round of the election.

The run-off strengthened Erdogan's legacy as he continues his 20-year dominance. He had already surpassed Mustafa Kemal Ataturk, who established the Republic of Turkey, who served as president for 15 years. Crowds flocked to the presidential palace in Ankara as Erdogan's victory appeared to be complete in anticipation of his victory address.

Erdogan had previously performed a song in front of his Uskudar home in Istanbul before thanking the cheering crowd. Erdogan declared, "we have successfully completed the second round of the presidential elections with the support of our people. God willing, like we have been for the past 21 years, we will continue to be deserving your trust. The 85 million people in the nation were the "victors" of the two voting rounds on May 14 and May 28."

The president also noted that the Republican People's Party (CHP), the biggest opposition party, will hold candidate Kilicdaroglu accountable for his poor showing, noting that the CHP's representation in the parliament has fallen since the 2017 elections.

Due to the backing provided by the biggest pro-Kurdish party, Erdogan frequently referred to his opponent as being supported by "terrorists," while Kilicdaroglu concluded the campaign by branding Erdogan a "coward."

The opposition in particular pledged to compel Syrians and other refugee communities to leave, giving the campaign an increasingly nationalist tenor. Since the introduction of direct presidential elections in 2014, the vote had never advanced to a second round before Sunday's run-off. Even though voters were asked to cast ballots once more two weeks after the first election on May 14, the turnout stayed around 85%.

Tayyip Erdogan 69, represents People's Alliance, Adalet ve Kalkinma Partisi (Justice and Development Party, often known as AK Party) from 2003 to 2014. He held office for 20 years, served nine years as president and eleven years as prime minister.

Erdogan served as Istanbul's mayor from 1994 until 1998. He is now elected as a third consecutive president. With the economy struggling and earthquake devastation, this election was his most difficult to win.

Erdogan's plans

Over the next five years of his presidency, the Turkish president will encounter several difficulties. Country's economy is in disarray, and there are apparently significant policy differences within his AK party. Addressing the skyrocketing inflation will be more urgent than a priority.

According to the Turkish Statistical Institute, annual inflation was 43.68% in April. According to a poll conducted by the Yöneylem Social Research Centre in August, the cost of living problem has severely impacted households, with more than two-thirds of Turks unable to pay their rent and buy food.

With at least 50,000 fatalities and more than three million displaced, the 7.8-magnitude earthquake struck southeastern Turkey on February 6 and completely destroyed the entire region. Erdogan has pledged to soon repair 650,000 homes in the damaged provinces.



The NATO allies of Turkey are anticipating Ankara lift its veto on Sweden's admission to the US-led alliance, which has been in place since May 2022. Erdogan has dug in his heels, demanding the extradition of Kurds he calls "terrorists" and political opponents who have criticized him in the past, while Stockholm has increased goodwill gestures.

Despite Russian intervention, Tayyip Erdogan has worked in recent months to improve relations with his neighbor, Syrian President Bashar al-Assad. Assad wants Ankara to stop supporting rebel organizations that are hostile to Damascus and to evacuate Turkish military stationed in northern Syria.

The 3.4 million Syrian refugees who fled the fighting now reside in Turkey. Erdogan stated in May that 200,000 homes would be built in northern Syria to enable refugees to "voluntarily" return home.

The Turkish president has been greeted by the emir of Qatar before the official results were announced. "My dear brother Recep Tayyip Erdogan congratulations on your victory," the emir wrote. "I wish you success in your new term." Turkey and Qatar enjoy close ties. Doha stated its support for Turkey in 2015 after the Arab League condemned Ankara's airstrikes on Kurdish insurgents in northern Iraq.

Prime Minister Shahbaz Sharif also greeted Erdogan, calling him "a pillar of strength for the oppressed Muslims and a fervent voice for their inalienable rights. President Erdogan's victory and that of the AKP in parliamentary elections is significant in so many ways, reflecting the trust and confidence of the Turkish people in his dynamic leadership, Shahbaz Sharif said.

PM Shahbaz Sharif contended that the "trajectory of the bilateral ties between Pakistan and Turkey will remain positive working with President Erdogan will further develop our strategic alliance in keeping with the good brotherhood shared by our two peoples is something I eagerly anticipate."

Kashmir to remain India's bleeding wound

New Delhi's G-20 gimmicky in held Kashmir awfully fails; India tried to cheat world in guise of promoting tourism



By Dr Syed Rifaat Hussain

Taking full advantage of the rotating presidency of G-20 countries, India hosted a meeting of the organization's Working Group on Tourism in Srinagar from May 22 to May 24, 2023. This was the first ever such meeting to be held in the disputed territory of Jammu and Kashmir.

It was obvious that under the garb of promoting tourism, the real purpose of this gathering was to attain 'approval' of India's August 5, 2019 unilateral act of illegally and unlawfully annexing the State of Jammu and Kashmir-- a pseudo show case to the world that an atmosphere of peace and tranquility prevailed in the war-torn state. But this Indian gimmick fell flat as China along with Saudi Arabia, Turkey, Indonesia and Egypt decided to stay away from this meeting.

Ever since the illegal annexation of Jammu and Kashmir in August 2019, New Delhi has been claiming that by virtue of this unlawful act, the state of Jammu and Kashmir has ceased to exist as a disputed territory. In 2019, the Bharatiya Janata Party-led federal government had divided the Muslim-majority state of Jammu and Kashmir to create two federally adminis-

trated territories - Jammu and Kashmir, and Ladakh. Ladakh is a disputed frontier region along the Line of Actual Control (LAC) between India and China, and both countries claim parts of it. India now falsely claims that Jammu and Kashmir is its internal matter.

As follow up to this false claim, New Delhi has launched "a geostrategic move" that aims at portraying Kashmir as a stable destination for investments. This would work two ways- training the local youth in professions enabling them to compete internationally, and the global talent reaching them.

There is a "hidden urge" to present Srinagar, a place as high and vibrant as Shanghai and Dubai, which stand on their own due to their economy and investment destinations. The problem with this so called "strategic move" is that it ignores the fact that Srinagar and Kashmir as a whole is being subjected to worst kind of state terrorism and oppression.

As noted by renowned US intellectual Noam Chomsky: "Kashmir is the most highly militarized region on earth, with a

population subjected to imprisonment, torture, disappearances deprived of even the most elementary rights in a criminal occupation. It is unfathomable that G-20 hold any kind of a meeting let alone a tourism meeting in the capital of occupied and brutalized Kashmir."

Besides this, tourism is only 7% of the economy and the mainstay of Kashmir is its agriculture, fruits and saffron. It is heartening to note that the suffocating footprint of India's occupation, and the blood of countless Kashmiris spilled by Indian forces, means all conscientious nations stay away from what is internationally recognized as a disputed territory. According to Mehbooba Mufti, former chief minister of J&K, India has unleashed "unprecedented ... arrests, raids, surveillance and persecution" ahead of the G20 moot."

As the UN special rapporteur on minority rights recently noted that by organizing the meeting in Srinagar, India sought to normalize "brutal and repressive denial" of rights of Kashmiri Muslims, while adding that the G20 was "unwittingly providing a veneer of support" to India's violations of human rights in the disputed region.

Beijing deserves credit for taking the lead in boycotting G-20 meeting in the occupied region as its foreign ministry spokesperson said that his country “is firmly opposed to holding ... meetings in disputed territory.”

Media reports confirm that Jammu Kashmir turned into a military fortress due to intensified restrictions marked by disgrace, humiliation and insult to its people at the hands of Indian brutal forces. On the eve of G-20 meeting “the Kashmir valley wore a look of a military garrison with Indian spy agencies along with army and paramilitary forces massively increasing raids on the houses of Hurriyat leaders and activists, social media users and civil society members in the territory. “Special police nakas were set up in all major cities and towns. Life of civilians living along the Line of Control particularly was made a hell in the name of security.”

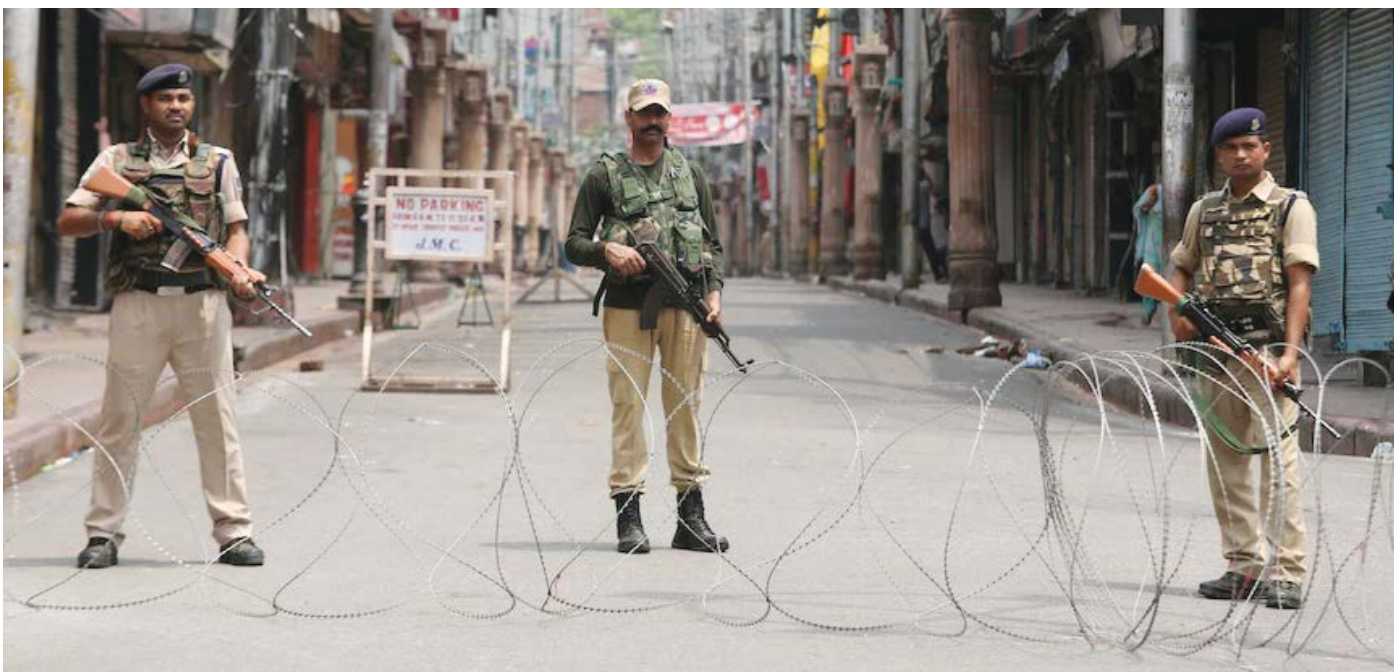
In his address to the AJK Legislative Assembly on May 22, 2023, Foreign Minister Bilawal Bhutto bashed India for its display of arrogance. “India’s continued denial of rights to Kashmiris is an unjustified and illegal act,” he said. Stressing that “no amount of diplomatic duplicity or Indian state-sponsored terror can change this fact,” Bilawal lamented that occupied Kashmir had become an open prison where Muslims were being forced to breathe fear. “This mayhem continues under draconian laws allowing continuity to the Indian occupying forces.”



Bilawal highlighted that New Delhi’s wretched, systematic and perpetual barbarism not just violate international law but it makes a mockery of the fundamental human rights. “How can the world be a bystander when a large country usurps the rights guaranteed by the UN Security Council,” the foreign minister asked.

He reiterated that holding the G-20 moot in held Kashmir was yet another show of arrogance on India’s part. “How can India possibly claim that normalcy has returned to occupied Kashmir? “I wish to remind the Indian leaders that unilateral steps in held Kashmir will neither accord democracy to their occupation nor suppress the true occupation of the Kashmiri people,” he asserted. “If India wants to be a superpower, it needs to act like a superpower,” Bilawal said.

Independent observers also raised questions over the choice of location. “Does the Modi government think that tourism can be promoted in closed conference halls next to a scenic lake being patrolled by marine commandos, with surveillance drones overhead,” columnist Bharat Bhushan wrote in the Deccan Herald newspaper. “Hundreds have been detained in police stations and thousands, including shopkeepers, have received calls from officials warning against any “signs of protest or trouble,” a senior official told media on condition of anonymity. Against this backdrop of state-sponsored repression unleashed against unarmed Kashmiri civilians by 90,000 Indian security forces, no amount of “soft power” can lead to enduring and viable peace in Jammu and Kashmir.



India & Kashmir: two views



By Ashraf Jehangir Qazi

Old 'principled' view

India is priority for Pakistan's foreign policy. It is the principal adversary and only country with which we have gone to war. It has brutally repressed the people of Kashmir and illegally annexed the disputed territory of IHK, thereby terminating comprehensive structured dialogue with Pakistan.

India calls the Kashmiri freedom struggle 'terrorism' although armed struggle is an inalienable right of people under forcible occupation. Musharraf's four-point proposal had promised a principled compromise settlement.

Pakistan's irresponsible and unforgivably corrupt governance, and the opportunism of the international community allow India to escape censure. While the international human rights community condemns India's crimes in Kashmir, the big powers prioritise state interests over law and morality. Pakistan's pathetic image, moreover, negates the cogency of its arguments.

Pakistan is a party to the Kashmir dispute. It regards the Kashmir Valley as its 'jugular vein' as its people would have opted to join Pakistan were they able to exercise their right to self-determination.

Pakistan fought three wars with India over Kashmir, which failed to produce the desired results. Tashkent brought no relief and hastened the end of Ayub Khan. Shimla extricated Pakistani prisoners of war but at the cost of effectively 'bilateralising' the dispute

Is the 'old principled' or the 'new pragmatic' view more realistic?

Subsequently, the Kargil conflict, instigated by the usual suspects after Vajpayee's historic visit to Lahore, compelled a nonplussed Nawaz Sharif to rush to the US to beg for the safe withdrawal of Pakistan's forces from an impossible situation. This transformed the LoC into a de facto border. Pakistan paid a huge price in blood, treasure, diplomatic isolation, and the perception of a failing state.

More recently, Pakistan downgraded relations with India after it annexed IHK on Aug 5, 2019, unilaterally changing its status in violation of UN Security Council resolutions and the Shimla Agreement. This rendered the LoC moot as it issued from the agreement.

By claiming to have resolved the Kashmir

dispute forever, India destroyed the basis for dialogue with Pakistan. This was a demand for a Pakistan surrender even more ignominious than in Dhaka in 1971. India, moreover, arrested the entire Muslim leadership of the Valley and intensified its repression to the extent that Genocide Watch issued two 'genocide alerts'.

While a misgoverned and isolated Pakistan was no longer able to counter India's unilateralism and repression there was never any reason to meekly accept its fait accompli. The right to self-determination is not a gift from Pakistan to Kashmir. It is the inalienable right of the Kashmiri people.

UN resolutions affirm the disputed status of Kashmir, and Pakistan as a party to the dispute. Accordingly, it has an absolute obligation to uphold and support the rights of the Kashmiri people in every legitimate way.

Despite its rhetorical declarations of support, Pakistan has, in fact, de-prioritised support for the Kashmiri freedom struggle. As a result, the Kashmiri people on both sides of the LoC today probably prefer independence to a failing Pakistan. Kashmiri independence, however, is opposed by both India and Pakistan.

It was, however, dangled before the Kashmiris by a former Pakistan prime minister. That risked complicating relations with China, which is Pakistan's most effective counter to India.

Can forsaking principled positions stem the tide of failure engulfing Pakistan? Can acting as a defeated state stabilise Pakistan? Can such a Pakistan elicit or manage \$17 billion for a 'Living Indus Initiative'?

Given that confrontation and conflict with India are no longer options, is unprincipled surrender the only alternative? Has Modi shown any inclination to consider resolving the respective 'core issues' of Kashmir and 'terrorism' through dialogue and compromise, which could usher in a mutually beneficial relationship?

Overcoming existential challenges that threaten Pakistan requires people's movements and nation-building, not the betrayal of principled commitments. Do Pakistan's ruling elites have the character, foresight, or common decency to provide minimally responsible leadership? Our present situation provides a very clear answer.

India's contempt for Pakistan and its refusal to concede anything will not be mitigated by fawning submission. However, should we recover from our moribund

condition — and this will require deliverance from the political and power elites — we may explore possibilities for improved relations with a currently pathologically anti-Pakistan India.

New 'pragmatic' view

UN resolutions on Kashmir are history. The world does not support Pakistan. Nor does it condemn India with regard to these resolutions. The Kashmiris know Pakistan is helpless and cannot afford conflict with India or alter the territorial status quo in Kashmir.

The best they can hope for is a recovered and renewed Pakistan able and willing to resuscitate the dormant four-point proposal. This would require a fundamentally improved India-Pakistan relationship so that win-win approaches become feasible.

The quicker Pakistan reconciles itself to prevailing realities, however unjust, the quicker the sufferings of the people of IHK can be alleviated. Accordingly, Kashmiris want Pakistan to restore normal relations and fully engage with India so that it can bat on their behalf.

Moreover, the potential benefits of bilateral trade, investment, tourism, cultural and media exchanges etc., can help accelerate growth, and

reduce inflation and poverty, mutual ignorance, mistrust and hostile narratives.

Powerful quarters in both countries, however, have entrenched interests in mutual hostility. While India may lose valuable opportunities, Pakistan could pay an existential price because of its parlous condition. We need not fear Chinese misgivings as they have no interest in India-Pakistan hostility.

Conclusion: Is the 'old principled' or the 'new pragmatic' view more realistic? Are they mutually exclusive? Can a combination of them comprise a feasible longer-term strategy? Discussions should ensue on this and other national survival issues.

Meanwhile, a government-led parliamentary assault on the judiciary! Rs300 going on to 500 to the dollar! Can't have an agreed census! Digital revolution and an on-off internet! 'Leaders' thousands of times richer than their vote banks sinking below the poverty line! Constitutionally superior bodies subordinate to a constitutionally subordinate body! The Army Act versus the Rule of Law! US 'non-interference' on daily display!

We have become a global joke.

Courtesy Dawn



Shift in ME: Syria returns to AL after 11 years

Bashar al-Assad visits Saudi Arabia; Saudi-Iran ties to benefit China; hinder Israel's anti-Iran ambitions

In order to consider possibility of repairing relations with Syria and its admission back into the Arab League, delegates from nine Arab countries convened in Saudi Arabia. On May 19, at Saudi Arabia's request, ministers and senior officials from six Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) nations Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates met with those from Egypt, Iraq, and Jordan.

Bashar al-Assad attend the Arab League summit after Syria was reinstated into the regional organization this month, more than 11 years after its suspension. It reveals a significant shift in how regional actors, who disagree with the West, see the reality of al-Assad's government's existence.

More than 11 years after Syria was expelled from the Pan-Arab organization as a result of its brutal suppression of anti-government protesters and the subsequent civil war, an emerging consensus in Arab capitals is that Damascus must be involved in solving Syria's problems, whether this is correct or incorrect.

Arab governments are committed to seek measures for overcoming the destabilizing effects of this conflict on the region because they recognize Syria's dilemma as an Arab problem.

Analysts claim that by reducing the fighting, they want to start reversing the drug trafficking networks, refugee problems, decreased border security, and increased involvement of Iranian military and militias backed by Tehran in Syria. Aron Lund, a fellow at Century International and a Middle East analyst, sees Syria's government's restoration of full membership in the Arab League as a significant victory.

"Being allowed back shows that Syria is being reintegrated into the region, and that other Arab leaders are confident that Assad is here to stay. So, it is a political victory for the Damascus government," Lund told a news channel. "It brings very little concrete change. Syria desperately needs aid and



investments. The Arab League can't deliver any of that, but there are Gulf Arab states that can." Experts concur that it will be challenging to foresee Damascus separating itself from Iran without the ability of Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) members to invest in Syria.

Iran Saudi relations, expectations

Historical geopolitical conflicts, religious ideologies (Sunni against Shia Islam), and rivalry for regional hegemony are only a few reasons why relations between Saudi Arabia and Iran have often been tense. The Middle East as a whole is more unstable as a result of these tensions, which have taken the form of proxy wars in places like Yemen and Syria.

As part of a Chinese-sponsored move that appears to be aimed at easing tensions in the Middle East, Saudi Arabia and Iran decided to reestablish diplomatic ties on March 10. A few months ago, more than 900 detainees in Yemen were freed as support for a resolution to the country's nine-year conflict grows. The fact that the governments of Saudi Arabia and Iran are once again in communication has

something to do with this. Seven years ago, the two powers severed ties, which affected regional politics and conflicts.

Consequently, with the reestablishment of diplomatic relations, in March, the two longtime adversaries promised to mend their fences. If they do, the detente may have a significant effect on Middle Eastern politics. The relationship between Saudi Arabia and Iran is now beginning a new chapter. Both have valid justifications for doing so. They injure themselves more than their adversary by attacking one another, both politically and economically.

Furthermore, no side has been able to truly dominate the other. This understanding is not new. Sebastian Sons, a senior researcher and Saudi Arabia expert at the Center for Applied Research in Partnership with the Orient (CARPO), a German think tank, recalled that two years' prior, representatives from Saudi Arabia and Iran were already in secret talks. However, it is still true that Saudi Arabia doesn't trust Iran, he said. "But that is exactly why the Saudi leadership is being forced to come to an arrangement with Iran; an agreement is of the highest priority for the (Saudi) kingdom."

Reprimanding them would have significant benefit of reducing their heavy reliance on major and superpowers for security over time. Above all, give them more flexibility to influence the future of their countries in the best interests of their citizens rather than as tools or vehicles for influencing major powers.

They should be in a better position to focus more on the true welfare of their people and the core interests of the country and should be able to wield greater leverage, commensurate with their national authority, when dealing with external powers. The minority, Shia and Sunni, may anticipate fairer treatment and their allegiances won't be called into question as a result of the accord, provided it is executed in letter and spirit.

Once the UN sanctions are withdrawn, it is hoped that trade and commercial activities between Saudi Arabia and Iran would rise. However, there are a number of products that are exempt from restrictions and could be traded. They have a significant edge in influencing the global energy market because they are the main producers of oil. The agreement would be a blessing for Iran as it comes at a time when it is facing the harshest sanctions, which have caused its people great suffering and hardship.

Although Saudi Arabia and other countries must interact with Iran within the confines of its sanctioned system, there is still a lot of room for cooperation, as the most recent deal between Saudi Arabia and Iran shows. This deal is all because of China's effort, China has a self-interest in pushing the Saudi-Iran agreement since it will benefit its economy as oil prices fall and eventually stabilize. As a result, it would be able to keep up its competitive edge in a market that is open to all.

How Israel see these changes?

All of Israel's political leaders view Iran's nuclear program in particular as the greatest strategic threat to the Jewish state; and they have worked to resist it through diplomatic isolation, international sanctions, and credible military threats. Israel presents a willingness to act alone if necessary, but it also favors cooperation with the West and Gulf Arab states in this regard.

Overall, Israelis are concerned about the pact. Israeli officials are concerned that the Saudi-Iran agreement will hinder Israel's ambitions to forge a regional anti-Iran alliance, which was a driving force behind the Abraham Accords, as well as its resolve to include Saudi Arabia among the nations with which it normalizes relations.

They are particularly concerned about the likelihood of a drastically diminished US engagement in the region because China, which has provided Tehran with a diplomatic and economic lifeline in recent years, may fill the gap. Israel's concern is only increased by Saudi Arabia's recent decision to host a Hamas delegation, following years of hostility.

However, Israel would find it more difficult to justify unilateral Israeli strikes given the prospect of at least temporary regional peace brought on by a Saudi-Iran détente.

But even if relations between Saudi Arabia and Iran warm up, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu would still prioritize normalizing relations with the monarchy as a key objective of his foreign policy. It is not a zero-sum game for Israel. Even while such a scenario now seems far off, Israel and the US have both stated that they do not consider the Iranian-Saudi détente as a barrier to strengthening Israeli-Saudi relations.

The Saudis' expectations of the United



Both actions, along with the kingdom's recent decision to become a "dialogue partner" of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, in which Iran has observer status, are likely to increase Israel's worries. Following rocket attacks on Israel from Gaza, Lebanon, and Syria that were apparently coordinated by Iran, Israel expressed concern that the Beijing agreement had emboldened Iran and its non-state allies. This anxiety led to the Saudi-Iran pact.

Israel's response remains unknown. Israeli officials may escalate their threats to take action against Iran's nuclear program as a result of their growing sense of isolation.

States in exchange for normalizing relations with Israel and the far-right Israeli government's anti-Palestinian acts and rhetoric are the real barriers to that road, not Iran. Security guarantees and assistance from Washington in creating a civilian nuclear program are part of Riyadh's price for normalization, but the political cost of normalization for Saudi leaders is increased by Israel's treatment of Palestinians, particularly incidents like the recent attacks on Muslim worshipers in the al-Asqa Mosque by Israeli security forces.

By Anum Akram

Kazakhstan--a bridge between East, West

Despite proximity with Russia, Kazakhstan stood for international law on Ukraine issue

TTI Report

As the spectre of international polarization comes to the fore, and countries seek security in the familiarity of alliances and blocs, the foundations of the international order are being eroded before our very eyes. This unsettling reality, reminiscent of the Cold War era, is now imbued with unprecedented complexity as a plethora of actors, each endowed with ample resources, vie for strategic advantage.

For Central Asian countries, like Kazakhstan, caught in the middle of these contests, the balancing act, many countries are now belatedly learning to embrace, has been their *modus operandi* since independence. Neighboured by two significant world powers, Russia and China, Kazakhstan's unique experience offer invaluable insights into the practice and principle of multi-vector foreign policy for other middle powers attempting to navigate today's precarious global landscape.

Since the days of the ancient Silk Road, Kazakhstan has been a bridge between East and West – a role that has recently seen it gain greater international prominence since the conflict in Ukraine. Despite Kazakhstan's significant economic and cultural connections with Russia, it has expressed concern over the conflict in Ukraine, affirming its commitment to uphold international law. Concurrently, Kazakhstan has continued to respect the international sanctions imposed on Russia as a result of the war, ensuring that its territory is not used as a platform for circumvention.

The country has repeatedly called for a peaceful resolution to the conflict while offering to mediate between both sides. Navigating the geopolitical complexities of the current international landscape through its progressive foreign policy, Kazakhstan has maintained positive relations with all countries, securing its own position in a multipolar world, and creating a fertile ground for closer political and economic cooperation with its partners near and far.

It is no coincidence that the focus of many

has shifted to Kazakhstan in recent months, with countries seeking to 'win it over'. As part of its vision to expand its relationships around the world, and in its role as a global middle power, Kazakhstan is launching the first edition of the Astana International Forum in June. The Forum is envisioned as a global platform that will help amplify the voices of countries seeking a less polarised international order and greater collaboration in addressing humanity's greatest challenges. Aiming to further establish itself as a regional leader, whilst balancing between East and West, Kazakhstan will use the forum to advance multilateralism, international cooperation and dialogue.

Kazakhstan is uniquely positioned to capitalize given its geographic position and credibility as a bridge builder on the international stage. Whether through the promotion of international cooperation, mediation of international disputes, or provision of humanitarian relief, Kazakhstan has consistently walked the talk in this regard. Just this year, the country provided 5,403 tonnes of humanitarian aid to the people of Afghanistan, while in March 2022, it was one of the first countries to provide humanitarian aid to victims of the war in Ukraine, sending 28 tonnes of medical and food supplies to the country.

Similarly, Kazakhstan's role as a mediator is well regarded. It introduced the Astana Process in 2017 to facilitate talks between parties to the conflict in Syria, convening dialogue between representatives from Syria, Russia, Turkey, Iran, the UN, US, and Jordan. It also regularly hosts the Congress of Leaders of World and Traditional Religions, an interfaith dialogue platform convening international religious leaders, which most recently saw the attendance of Pope Francis, to discuss the constructive role faith leaders can play in the international system.

Kazakhstan's active role in international affairs culminated in the country being elected as a non-permanent member of the UN Security Council in 2017-2018. As

Kazakhstan increasingly positions itself as a diplomatic hub, it is also charting out its vision to be a transcontinental transport hub, connecting markets in the West with those in the East. This ambition is embodied in plans to establish a 'Middle Corridor', linking China and the EU via rail, sea, and road.

The visionary Trans-Caspian International Transport Route is a critical new trade artery traversing Central Asia, Eastern Europe, and Turkey, spanning the Caspian and Black Seas. This streamlined route has attracted the attention of European shipping companies, for example, Austria's Rail Cargo Group, Denmark's Maersk, Finland's Nurminen Logistics, and the Netherlands' Rail Bridge Cargo. If the potential of the Middle Corridor is realized, this could unleash a new wave of investment into Central Asia, uniting trade partners at a time when alternative routes for goods and services are desperately needed.

Despite its status as an oil-producing nation, Kazakhstan remains committed to the fight against climate change, with an increasing focus on developing its rare earth sector to support the global transition towards green energy and tech. Aiming to reach carbon neutrality by 2060, Kazakhstan is seeking infrastructural support and investment to facilitate its own green economic transition. Through a combination of tax breaks and competitive incentives, the country is attracting investors excited by the limitless opportunities available to businesses located at the intersection of the world's key markets.

As the international community grows increasingly polarized and fragmented, with major geopolitical players pressuring nations to take sides, dialogue, and cooperation have never been more crucial. Kazakhstan's multi-vector foreign policy approach – honed over three decades – offers a viable model for the rest of the world at a time of rising uncertainty and tension.

CICA environmental dimension developing its capabilities

Afghanistan most environmentally vulnerable among CICA countries

TTI Report



Asia, undoubtedly, is on its way to becoming the fastest developing continent in the world: projected new trade routes, efforts to develop sustainable system and significance of green transformation in the face of rising energy, food and security demands. All of these are issues that deeply concern member states of the Conference on Interaction and Confidence Building Measures in Asia (CICA), from North Asia to Indian Ocean and from East Asia to the Aegean Sea. How realistic are the ambitious carbon-neutral plans, the countries aim at, in line with their green transformation goals?

The CICA offers confidence building measures, dialogue, connectivity, synergy and best practices for its member states to achieve their goals. At the sixth CICA summit, among common issues highlighted by the heads of states, the governments and envoys were combating the climate change and urging significance of CICA's environmental dimension for future cooperation. Why is the environmental dimension so significant for the future of the CICA region?

The CICA environmental dimension has three priority areas: sustainable development, environment protection and natural disaster management. Each priority area has its coordinator and co-coordinator. For instance, Thailand is the coordinator for sustainable development, Mongolia for environment protection; while Bangladesh and China are co-coordinators. Iran is coordinator for natural disaster management and Bangladesh is the co-coordinator.

According to CICA catalogue of confidence building measures (CBMs), member states have specified priorities for cooperation in environmental areas for the implementation of the CICA CBMs such as sharing information on best practices concerning national policies on environmental protection and sustainable development, exchanging information on natural and industrial disasters in the countries which, in their view, may affect their neighbors.

In addition, seminars, workshops, conferences and training are held within the priority areas of the CICA

environmental dimension. In general, the topics the coordinating and co-coordinating countries cover, are green transformation, sustainable development, low-carbon developments, waste management, carbon markets, natural disasters and circular economy.

The CICA member states were affected by harsh weather conditions, drought and floods in 2022, as well as earthquakes in early 2023. For example, Pakistan has had a challenging year because of floods. According to the World Bank, at least 7 million people were displaced and over 1,700 people died as a result of this disaster. Economic losses caused by floods in Pakistan were around \$30 billion. World Health Organization reports that over 7.1 million Bangladeshis were displaced by climate change in 2022. China, India, Thailand and the Middle East also had difficulties due to climate change last year.

Recently, the world has experienced a devastating sequence of earthquakes in Türkiye. After the economic impact of the Covid-19 pandemic, economic

damage caused by climate crisis and natural disasters has been taken into account; and the question of how fragile countries are for the future has come to the fore.

Major environmental problems in Asia include desertification, climate change, lack of water resources, deforestation, earthquakes and forest fires. Indeed, there are environmentally vulnerable CICA countries. Among the most vulnerable member states, according to the University of Notre Dame's Vulnerability Index score of the Notre Dame Global Adaptation Initiative (ND-GAIN), are Afghanistan in the 168th and Bangladesh in the 154th place. Pakistan ranks 147th, Cambodia is in 133rd place, and India ranks 132nd. The index evaluates a nation's vulnerability, sensitivity and capacity for climate change adaptation.

There are 177 nations on the scale, and those with high rankings, close to zero, have great climate change resilience. Highest-ranking CICA member states include Israel in the 14th place, Kyrgyzstan, Russia and Türkiye sharing the 28th place followed by Kazakhstan in the 33rd place, the UAE in the 40th and Qatar in the 44th. Negative economic impact of the Covid-19 pandemic has brought countries closer to producing new solutions.

Although developed and developing countries have different agendas, governments are shifting their economic targets to efficient systems aligned with sustainable

development goals. Green transformation is one of the most prominent examples of this. Countries that aim at decarbonizing their economies are investing more in green technology, fields such as carbon capture, mitigation and adaptation, circular economy and water management.

Diversifying energy sources is one of the essential steps in energy security. United Nations climate change conferences are significant to raise awareness and act together against extreme environmental events the world has been facing in recent years. For example, Egypt, a CICA member state, hosted COP27 in 2022. Among the results drawn here was that nations decided for the first time to set up funds to pay developing countries for "loss and damage" caused by climate-related disasters. Moreover, it was important that China and US, the countries with the highest carbon emissions, decided to engage in climate diplomacy at COP27.

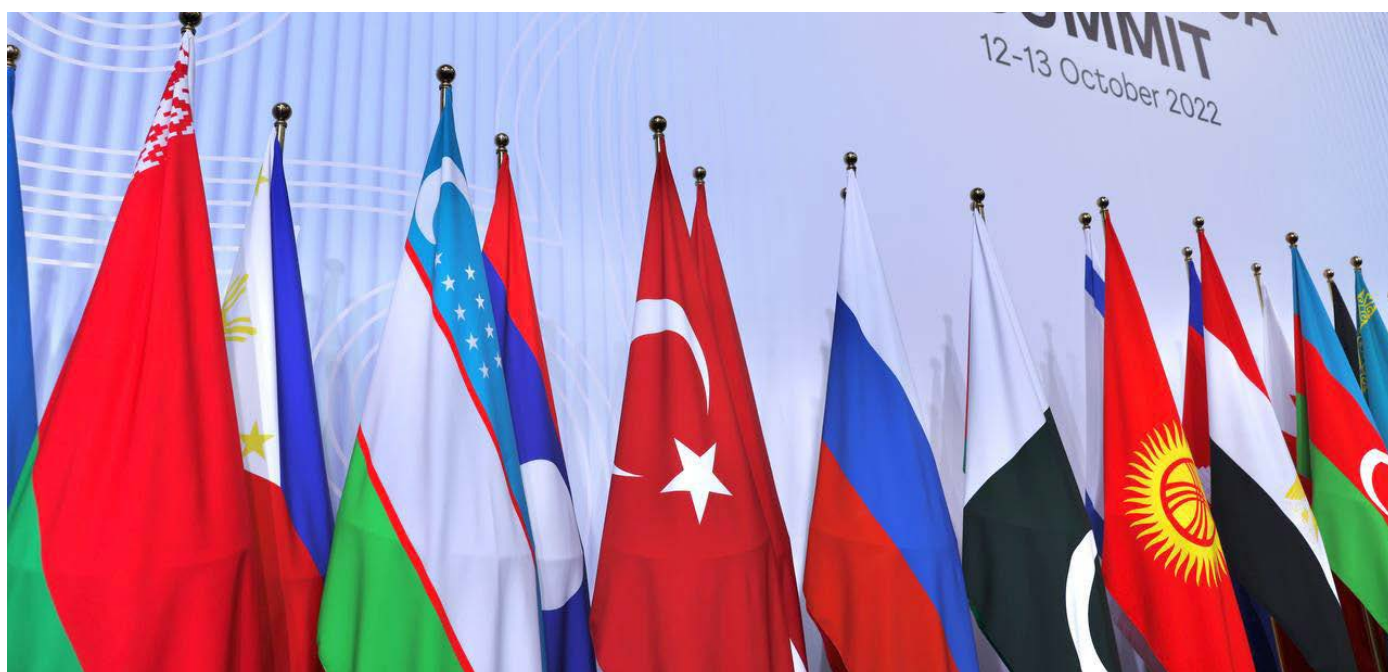
Furthermore, COP28 will take place in the United Arab Emirates, another CICA member state. From this point of view, it is a fact that environmental theme becomes increasingly relevant in Asia. The initiative of Kazakhstan's President Kassym-Jomart Tokayev to hold a high level conference in 2024 in Astana to identify environmental challenges among CICA members, was one of major outcomes of the sixth CICA summit.

The CICA region and the entire world will

benefit from the potential establishment of the CICA Council for Environmental Cooperation. Indeed, it will be in the interest of the CICA members to hold the 2024 high level environmental conference, where best practices can be shared among CICA countries and a sustainable mutual dialogue is likely to be ensured. As a result, the CICA environmental dimension is expected to progress rapidly among other CBMs.

The 2024 high level environmental conference is at the forefront of priority initiatives for the CICA Kazakh chair. Kazakhstan's goal of being carbon neutral by 2060 sets an example for other countries in the region. As part of preparations for the conference, CICA Secretary General Ambassador Kairat Sarybay met with Minister of Ecology and Natural Resources of Kazakhstan Zulfya Suleimenova.

The secretary general stated that CICA member states were extensively introducing green technologies, pursuing the ambitious goal of achieving carbon neutrality. In addition, within the scope of preparations for the conference on environment, all sides agreed to arrange a series of expert meetings of the CICA states to develop goals and objectives for the conference. With the dialogue and support of CICA members, interest in environmental topics is increasing gradually in line with the region's sustainable development goals.



Impacts of digital govt in Pakistan

Digital govt to cause digital economy; recent internet blackout affected students, freelancers, online firms

TTI Report

Possibility of digital governments has become a universal discourse in the wake of rapid technological advancements. Digital platforms and technologies are being used to improve government operations, service delivery and public participation.

Pakistan, a country faced with population explosion and countless economic, social and political problems, has a lot to gain from embracing 'digital revolution.'

This essay examines the potential effects of a digital government in Pakistan, besides reviewing recent internet blockade and emphasising significance of open and accessible digital infrastructure.

Pakistan can surely benefit from a digital government since it could be more effective and transparent. Such a government could empower its citizens while also focusing on economic progress.

Purported digital revolution will open up new opportunities and help close the digital divide. In order to create a digital Pakistan that is open, transparent and responsive to the needs of its citizens, it is essential for the government, commercial sector and civil society to work together.

A pertinent digital approach is poised to change the system of governance in the country significantly. Such a priority will first improve public service delivery efficiency and openness; repetitive jobs could go on automation, paperwork minimised and bureaucratic functioning improved, via application of digital technologies. Thus will not only save time and money but also reduce chance of corruption and increase accountability.

Secondly, a digital government empowers its citizens to access a variety of services, such as applying for identity cards, passports, licences, paying taxes and registering property-- all from comfort of homes, thanks to online portals and mobile applications.



The elderly and disabled folk's or those who live in remote areas, now have easier access to government services as it saves time and lessens the requirement for face-to-face interactions. Digital platforms can also encourage citizens' interaction and participation in the formulation of policy. Online platforms can be used for surveys, feedback mechanisms and public consultations to make sure that voices of people are heard and their demands met. A digital government can increase trust and foster a sense of ownership among the masses, incorporating citizens in decision-making.

Economic growth and creativity can also be triggered by a strong digital infrastructure and a supportive digital ecosystem. Adopting a digital government in Pakistan can open the door for a flourishing digital economy. The government can unleash the potential of Pakistan's youthful and tech-savvy population by encouraging entrepreneurship, offering training in digital skills and supporting companies.

By encouraging a conducive business climate, digitalization can help draw foreign direct investment. Pakistan can promote itself as a desirable investment destination by facilitating e-commerce, streamlining online registration proce

dures and developing effective digital payment systems. Building the investor trust, assuring ease of doing business and encouraging innovation and entrepreneurship are all important goals that the digital government can help achieve.

Despite enormous potential for a digital government in Pakistan, recent events have brought to light the difficulties that still need to be overcome. Widespread internet outages in Pakistan in May, 2023, caused worries about how these setbacks might affect the country's government, economy and civil liberties.

Due to security concerns, the authorities shut down internet in an effort to prevent dissemination of false and fake information and preserve peace and order in the midst of public turmoil. Internet closure may have had good intentions, but it served to highlight the need for a balanced strategy that protects both security and fundamental freedom of citizens to access information and engage in digital life.

Several important services were interrupted while internet was down. Freelancers were unable to work, online firms lost money and students encountered difficulties accessing educational resources. The incident



also brought Pakistan's digital divide into focus because it disproportionately affected underserved communities with poor internet connectivity.

Pakistan must give the creation of a robust and inclusive digital government top priority. This includes boosting cybersecurity safeguards to protect citizens' rights, enhancing broadband infrastructure to

close the digital divide and promoting digital literacy to help people navigate the digital world.

The government may increase efficiency, curtail corruption and improve service delivery by embracing e-governance. This encompasses programmes like internet portals, smartphone apps and electronic payment systems that enable frictionless

communication between citizens and public institutions.

To establish trust and confidence in the digital government, a strong legal framework for data security and privacy is essential. Specific legislation that safeguards citizens' personal data and ensures ethical data handling procedures by both public and commercial organisations, is the need of the hour.

A digital government's success depends upon cooperation between public, business and civil society organisations. Partnerships between public and commercial sectors may make the most of the knowledge, resources and inventiveness of both industries to create and execute sustainable digital solutions. Initiatives like tech incubators, innovation centres and capacity building programmes fall under this category.

Recent internet blackout was a wake-up call for Pakistan to prioritise the creation of a robust and inclusive digital government. It urges the need for a strategy that guarantees security without compromising citizens' fundamental rights. Internet connectivity, cybersecurity, development of digital skills and privacy issues warrant urgent attention vis-à-vis digital government. In today's linked world, embracing digital revolution is not simply a choice, it is a must.



Your DNA can now be pulled from Thin Air. Privacy Experts are Worried.

Environmental DNA research has aided conservation, but scientists say its ability to glean information about human populations and individuals poses dangers

By Elizabeth Anne Brown

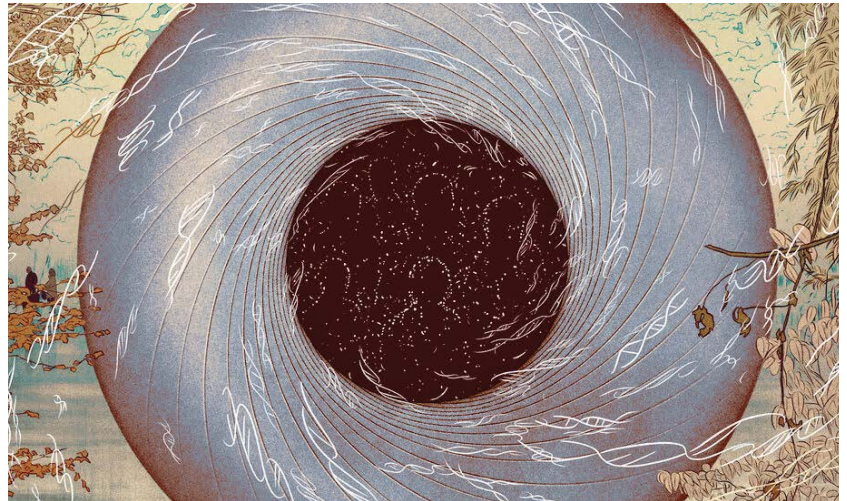
David Duffy, a wildlife geneticist at the University of Florida, just wanted a better way to track disease in sea turtles. Then he started finding human DNA everywhere he looked.

Over the last decade, wildlife researchers have refined techniques for recovering environmental DNA, or eDNA — trace amounts of genetic material that all living things leave behind. A powerful and inexpensive tool for ecologists, eDNA is all over — floating in the air, or lingering in water, snow, honey and even your cup of tea. Researchers have used the method to detect invasive species before they take over, to track vulnerable or secretive wildlife populations and even to rediscover species thought to be extinct. The eDNA technology is also used in wastewater surveillance systems to monitor Covid and other pathogens.

But all along, scientists using eDNA were quietly recovering gobs and gobs of human DNA. To them, it's pollution, a sort of human genomic bycatch muddying their data. But what if someone set out to collect human eDNA on purpose?

New DNA collecting techniques are “like catnip” for law enforcement officials, says Erin Murphy, a law professor at the New York University School of Law who specializes in the use of new technologies in the criminal legal system. The police have been quick to embrace unproven tools, like using DNA to create probability-based sketches of a suspect.

That could pose dilemmas for the preservation of privacy and civil liberties, especially as technological advancement allows more information to be gathered from ever smaller eDNA samples. Dr. Duffy and his colleagues used a readily available and affordable technology to see how much information they could glean from human



DNA gathered from the environment in a variety of circumstances, such as from outdoor waterways and the air inside a building.

The results of their research, published Monday in the journal *Nature Ecology & Evolution*, demonstrate that scientists can recover medical and ancestry information from minute fragments of human DNA lingering in the environment.

Forensic ethicists and legal scholars say the Florida team's findings increase the urgency for comprehensive genetic privacy regulations. For researchers, it also highlights an imbalance in rules around such techniques in the United States — that it's easier for law enforcement officials to deploy a half-baked new technology than it is for scientific researchers to get approval for studies to confirm that the system even works.

Genetic trash to genetic treasure

It has been clear for decades that fragments of our DNA cover the planet like litter. It just didn't seem to matter. Scientists believed DNA in the environment was too small and too degraded to be meaningfully recovered, much less

used to identify an individual human being, unless it came from distinct samples like a bloodstain or an object someone had touched.

Wildlife researchers embraced environmental DNA anyway because they're only looking for very small segments of DNA — scanning for what they call bar codes that will identify the creatures in a sample to a species level. But after finding “surprising” levels of human eDNA in their samples while monitoring disease in Florida sea turtles, Dr. Duffy and his team set out to get a more accurate picture of the condition of human DNA in the environment, and to see how much information it could reveal about people in an area.

As a proof of concept in one of their experiments, the researchers scooped up a soda-can-size sample of water from a creek in St. Augustine, Fla. They then fed the genetic material from the sample through a nanopore sequencer, which allows researchers to read longer stretches of DNA. The one they used cost about \$1000, is the size of a cigarette lighter and plugs into a laptop like a flash drive.

From the samples, the team recovered much more legible human DNA than they had anticipated. And as knowl-

edge expands about human genetics, analysis of even limited samples can reveal a wealth of information.

The researchers recovered enough mitochondrial DNA — passed directly from mother to child for thousands of generations — to generate a snapshot of the genetic ancestry of the population around the creek, which roughly aligns with the racial makeup reported in the latest census data for the area (although the researchers note that racial identity is a poor proxy for genetic ancestry). One mitochondrial sample was even complete enough to meet the requirements for the federal missing persons database.



They also found key mutations shown to carry a higher risk of diabetes, cardiac issues or several eye diseases. According to their data, someone whose genetic material turned up in the sample had a mutation that could lead to a rare disease that causes progressive neurological impairment and is often fatal. The illness is hereditary and may not emerge until a patient's 40s. Dr. Duffy couldn't help but wonder — does that person know? Does the person's family? Does the person's insurance company?

Surveillance and forensics

Anna Lewis, a Harvard researcher who studies the ethical, legal and social implications of genetics research, said that environmental DNA hadn't been widely discussed by experts in bioethics. But after the

findings from Dr. Duffy and his colleagues, it will be.

Technology focused on eDNA, she said, could be used for surveillance of certain kinds of people — for example, people with a specific ancestral background or with particular medical conditions or disabilities.

The implications of such uses, researchers agree, depend on who is using the technology and why. While pooled eDNA samples could help public health researchers determine the incidence of a mutation that causes a disease in a community, that same eDNA sample could equally be used to find and persecute ethnic minorities.

"This gives a powerful new tool to authorities," Dr. Lewis said. "There's internationally plenty of reason, I think, to be concerned." Countries like China already conduct extensive and explicit genetic tracking of minority populations, including Tibetans and Uighurs. Tools like eDNA analysis could make it that much easier, she said.

How much of an ethical minefield eDNA research will be also depends on the extent to which it's possible to identify an individual. In some situations, it's already achievable.

The kind of genetic data Dr. Duffy recovered from public places wouldn't work with the methods law enforcement personnel in the United States currently use to identify individuals, said Robert O'Brien, a forensic biologist at Florida International University

and a former crime laboratory DNA analyst.

When law enforcement DNA analysts compare a crime scene sample to a suspect, they're looking at 20 markers spread across the human genome that are tracked by the F.B.I.'s Combined DNA Index System, or CODIS, Mr. O'Brien said. Those markers are only useful if there's certainty that several of them come from the same person, and because the eDNA fragments Dr. Duffy studied can't capture more than one marker at a time, a public place like the Florida stream becomes a nightmarish jigsaw puzzle.

However, forensic researchers suggest that individual identification from eDNA could already be possible in enclosed spaces where fewer people have been. Last October, a team from the Oslo University Hospital's forensic research center piloted a new technique to recover human DNA from air samples and was able to construct full CODIS profiles from airborne DNA inside an office.

That highlights the possibility that law enforcement officials could use eDNA collected at crime scenes to incriminate people, even though wildlife ecologists who developed the techniques say the science isn't mature enough for such purposes. Scientists have yet to pin down the fundamentals of eDNA, like how it travels through air or water or how it degrades over time. And nanopore sequencing — the technology that allowed Dr. Duffy's team to find longer and more informative DNA fragments — still has a much higher error rate than older technologies, meaning an unusual genetic signature that seems like a promising lead could be a red herring.

Who gets access when DNA is free for the taking?

In the United States, rules vary widely for who is allowed to capture and analyze DNA.

University scientists hoping to learn more about human eDNA must justify the scope and privacy concerns of their studies in an imperfect process involving ethics boards at their institutions that can limit or reject experiments. But there are no such guardrails for law enforcement officials trying out

a new technology.

“There’s an imbalance in almost all systems of the world between what law enforcement is allowed to do, versus publicly funded research, versus private companies,” said Barbara Prainsack, a professor at the University of Vienna who studies the regulation of DNA technology in medicine and forensics.

While some countries, like Germany, have an approved green list of technologies and forms of evidence that law enforcement agencies can use, it’s exactly the reverse in the United States.

“It’s a total wild west, a free for all,” said Ms. Murphy, the N.Y.U. law professor. “The understanding is police can sort of do whatever they want unless it’s explicitly prohibited.”

Often, the public and other branches of government learn that law enforcement officials have adopted a new technique only at a news conference announcing an arrest, Ms. Murphy said. She pointed specifically to the arrest of Joseph James DeAngelo, the Golden State Killer, which the police credited to the use of genetic genealogy — entering crime scene DNA into family history databases and triangulating a criminal’s identity based on distant cousins. In those high-profile cases, she said, law enforcement personnel rely “on the good will they engender when they do use the technology for really positive uses.” Other uses might not be disclosed.

Safeguards against misusing a new technology like eDNA rely on the courts, where experts say the track record is poor.

To keep immature or bunk science out of legal deliberations, trial judges are supposed to determine whether an expert’s scientific testimony “rests on a reliable foundation.” Ms. Murphy said it was unreasonable to expect every trial judge to keep abreast of the latest scientific advancements. The rules of evidence, she added, “favor the admission of evidence and expect the jury to sort out what to believe and what not to believe.”

For decades, organizations like the Innocence Project have worked to weed pseudoscience out of courts — microscopic hair analysis, blood spatter analysis and bite

mark evidence have all been used to wrongly convict defendants. Even in the face of overwhelming evidence that those technologies aren’t reliable, “courts are still reluctant not to allow it or to overturn a case” based on such lines of evidence because of the long precedent of their use, said Aliza Kaplan, a professor at Lewis & Clark Law School in Portland, Ore., and counsel to the Forensic Justice Project.



The Fourth Amendment’s prohibition of “unreasonable search and seizure” without probable cause is also supposed to prevent the erosion of privacy by a powerful new technology. However, since the early 2000s, many prosecutors and courts have taken the stance that any DNA not still attached to a person has been abandoned, meaning that the police don’t need a warrant to collect it.

But it may be almost impossible to avoid leaving DNA in public. Dr. Duffy and his colleagues found that they could successfully collect airborne human DNA even from people wearing gloves and surgical masks and gowns.

“That really belies the idea that we are in any way voluntarily shedding our genetic material,” said Vera Eidelman, a staff attorney at the American Civil Liberties Union who focuses on constitutional claims regarding genetic privacy and who was not involved in the Florida team’s study.

Consent and genetic exceptionalism

It’s possible to compare human eDNA

sampling to other surveillance technologies members of the public don’t individually consent to, like facial recognition cameras. But experts say there’s an important distinction.

When it comes to collecting DNA, individuals aren’t the only ones affected. It also implicates “family members and, in some contexts, communities,” said Sandra

Soo-Jin Lee, a biomedical ethicist at Columbia University.

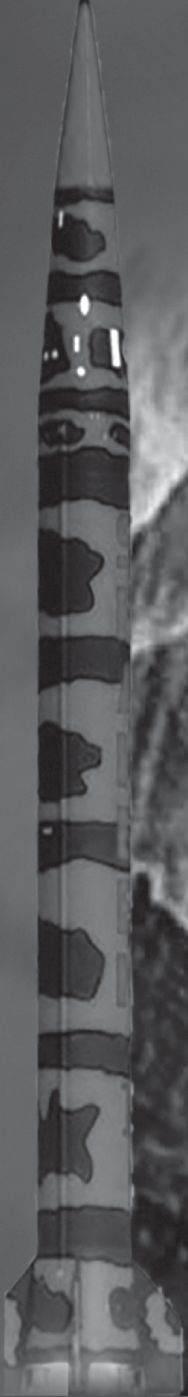
“DNA tracks to your extended relatives, tracks forward in time to your children, tracks backward in time to your ancestors,” Ms. Murphy added. “In the future, who knows what DNA will tell us about people or how it might be used?”

There’s a wide market for genetic information — from pharmaceutical companies developing therapeutics, to insurance actuaries, to public health researchers. But protections for the public are stymied by the lack of workable legal definitions of what DNA actually is. Is it personal property, Ms. Murphy asks? Is it data? Is it always medical information? Who owns it once it has been collected?

Bioethicists and civil liberties experts say that Dr. Duffy’s warning provides decision makers a rare chance to discuss the ethics and the legality of a new genetic technique before it enters widespread use. Usually, they’re playing catch-up — but thanks to wildlife ecologists, now they have a modest head start.

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City may finally deliver trophy

Inter Milan stands in City's way in final

By Ali Abdullah

City took control of the match against the 14-time defending European champions thanks to a pair of goals scored by Bernardo Silva in the first half. An own goal scored by Eder Militao after the break and a late goal scored by Julian Alvarez clinched the deal for Pep Guardiola's side, who avenged their heartbreaking semi-final loss from the previous season.

City will now be huge favorites to finally deliver the trophy Abu Dhabi's Sheikh Mansour has wanted since buying the club in 2008, having lost to Chelsea in the final two years ago. Inter Milan stands in City's way in the final.

After Portuguese midfielder Silva curled a shot past Thibaut Courtois in the 23rd minute and then headed his side's second in the 37th minute, City's home undefeated streak in the tournament was never in danger. City have now gone unbeaten in their last 26 home matches in the competition.

Holders Real, who were looking to win the trophy for the sixth time in 10 seasons, were outplayed in the second half by a relentless City team that was closing in on a treble. The second half was practically a formality for Real.

When Kevin De Bruyne's free kick was deflected by Militao in the 76th minute, there was little chance for Carlo Ancelotti's squad to come back from their deficit.

After going on as a late substitute for Erling Haaland, Alvarez capped off a spectacular night for City with a clinical finish to score the game-winning goal shortly after entering the match.

There was an aura of anticipation and suspense before kickoff inside City's fortress, which was made even more so by the fact that the encounter was promoted as a de-facto final with Inter awaiting the winners, despite Inter playing in their first final in 13 years despite having a dismal season in Serie A.



The starting lineups were almost identical to the ones that were used in the thrilling 1-1 draw that took place at the Bernabeu the previous week. The only alteration that was made was in Real's back line, where Militao replaced Antonio Rudiger.

The same as in the Spanish capital, City took an early stranglehold on the game, making it difficult for Real to connect together even two passes and making it nearly impossible for them to break out of their own half.

Thibaut Courtois, the goalkeeper for Real, made two incredible stops from point-blank headers by Haaland in the first twenty minutes of the game. The first save was a little fortunate, and the second save was unbelievable.

However, City's pressure was unrelenting, and the breakthrough did not take long to arrive. Silva sent a left-footed shot past Courtois from the right edge of the penalty area. This was City's eighth attempt at a goal in the first 23 minutes of the game.

It took Real a half an hour to even make an attack, and even then, it was City's Kyle Walker who won a sprint race with Vinicius Jr. to put an end to the threat.

Then, Toni Kroos fired a dipping right-foot drive that City keeper Ederson, who had been a spectator, pushed against the crossbar. Kroos is one of five current Real players who have won the title five times with the Spanish club.

Silva made sure City reached halftime with one foot in the final by being the quickest to react and looping a header into the net after Ilkay Gundogan's attempt was saved. Having a one-goal edge was always going to be perilous against Real's serial winners, but Silva made sure City reached break with one foot in the final.

The remainder of the first half was dominated by City's dominance against the 14-time defending champions, during which time they had multiple opportunities to extend their lead.

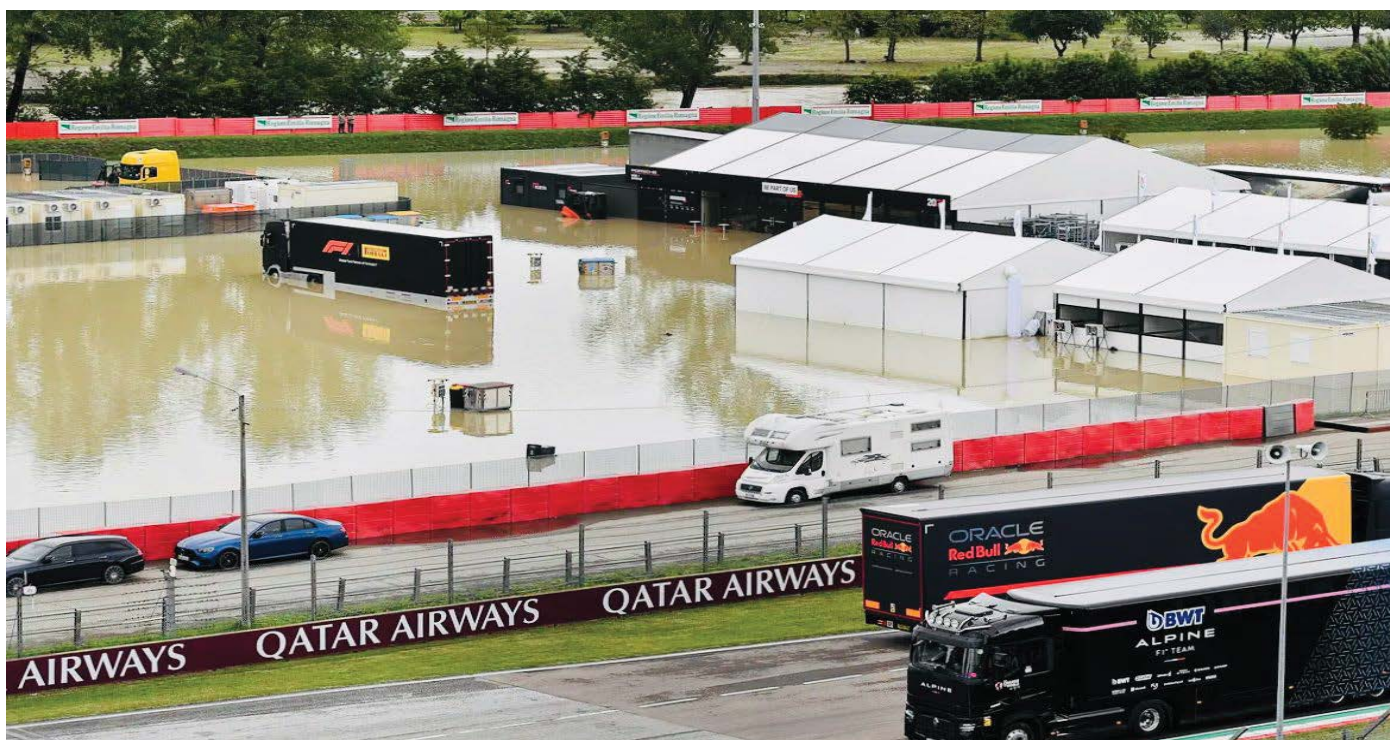
Real needed some magic to give themselves any chance, and it almost came six minutes after halftime when David Alaba's diving free kick was stopped acrobatically by Ederson. Real needed some magic to give themselves any hope.

Courtois made another stop from Haaland, denying the Norwegian player his 53rd goal of an unbelievable season, which allowed Ancelotti's team to remain in the match. Courtois did his best to keep Ancelotti's team in the match.

De Bruyne's exquisite free-kick then glanced off Militao and into the net, putting an end to any hopes of a repetition of Real's stunning comeback from the previous year, in which they won 6-5 on aggregate.

After that, Alvarez made a first-time shot that went into the bottom corner with stoppage time remaining.

Italy flooding: Imola Grand Prix cancelled Imola racetrack bisected by river



At least nine persons have been found dead in the Italian province of Emilia Romagna as a result of the severe rainfall that led to widespread flooding and prompted the evacuation of thousands of people from their homes.

Nearly twenty-dozen of the region's rivers overflowed their banks, resulting in the flooding of residential areas and agricultural land. On Monday, the Civil Protection Agency of the region issued a red weather advisory for the region, and the Italian Minister of Transport, Matteo Salvini, recommended that the Imola Grand Prix, which was due to take place the next weekend, be postponed. In the end, Formula One and the local organizers decided to cancel the event, citing the necessity to ensure everyone's safety in light of the scenario that has been occurring throughout the region.

The Imola racetrack is bisected by a river, and while the paddock did not experience any flooding as a result of the river's presence, the water levels were rising, and the areas surrounding the paddock, such as the parking lots and portions of the access roads, were flooded.

The decision to postpone this year's event comes despite a calendar already disrupted by COVID-19 and limited to 22 races after China was cancelled in January. The Emilia Romagna Grand Prix drew a crowd of 129,000 people the year before, and the decision to cancel this year's event comes in the same circumstances. Following the lead of other teams, Ferrari voiced their support for the decision to postpone the race, citing the fact that the primary concern at this time is ensuring the well-being of those who live and work in the impacted areas. Lewis Hamilton, who drives for Mercedes, is another person who has voiced their support, saying that this is "definitely the right decision."

The event was supposed to be the opening leg of the season's first triple-header, with Monaco and Spain to follow on the back-to-back weekends after this one.

The devastation is widespread across the region as a result of the fact that in certain parts about 50 centimeters of rain fell during a span of 36 hours. This amount is equivalent to approximately half of the typical annual rainfall. Agriculture Minister Francesco Lollobrigida stated that the

extent of the damage would need to be evaluated once the water level had decreased. As a result, thousands of farms have been impacted. Rescue workers, members of the military forces, and more than a thousand volunteers have been called into action to aid with evacuating people and saving people's lives.

The flooding has resulted in mudslides and has made it difficult or impossible to travel on numerous roads as a result of the damage they have sustained. The scenario at Forlì, which is located southeast of Bologna, the capital of the area, has been described as "the end of the world" by the town's mayor, Gian Luca Zattini.

The area had already been pounded by heavy rain two weeks prior, which caused floods that were responsible for the deaths of two people. The rains have caused considerably more substantial damage this time, and as a result, over 20 million euros in emergency funds have been unlocked for the region. This is in addition to the 10 million euros that were given after the previous disaster.

By Ali Abdullah

Don't drop it: World's most expensive ice cream costs \$6,400



By Chris Lau

Kee your hands steady: a scoop of this exquisite delight is probably going to cost more than all the ice cream you will have throughout multiple summers.

The frozen dessert, called byakuya – “white night” in Japanese – is currently fetching 880,000 yen (\$6,380) for a serving, officially making it the most expensive ice cream in the world, according to Guinness World Records.

Japanese ice cream brand Cellato calls white night a gelato on its website, and the name is a hint to its Italian origins.

Sourced exclusively from Alba – home to what many consider the best white truffles in Italy – that ingredient alone could rake in as much as two million yen (\$14,500) per kilogram, said an article published on the Guinness World Records website last week.

The ice cream is topped off by an edible gold leaf, two types of cheese and “Sakekasu,” a paste-like ingredient derived from the process of sake-making.

“It took us over 1.5 years to develop, with a lot of trials and errors to get the taste right,” a representative from the company told Guinness World Records earlier.

The company said its mission isn’t just about making mouthwateringly expensive desserts but to create a culinary adventure that merges European ingredients and traditional Japanese foods.

For that, it brought in Tadayoshi Yamada, the head chef at RiVi, an Osaka-based restaurant known for its French-Japanese fusion cuisine, to steer the project, according to Guinness World Records.

The desert is available for sale in Japan and is shipped directly to consumers, according to Cellato’s website.

New record set for world's biggest pizza

Sampling the treat comes with almost equal precision, as Cellato sets out meticulous steps to govern the way it

should be consumed once it arrives.

Patrons are instructed to pour in the white truffle at the right texture just as the ice cream softens up, before mixing it with a handcrafted metal spoon given to them.

They are advised to let the ice cream defrost at room temperature or microwave it at 500 watts for 10 to 20 seconds, if the texture is too hard.

While the Guinness World Records team has not had a chance to sample the dessert, Cellato earlier offered a tasting session for its staff, who described the treat to the record-keeping body as “rich in taste and texture.”

In addition, they recommended pairing the tasting with sake or a French white wine.

Cellato, which also has a black truffle-based offering on its menu, said it plans to diversify its eye-wateringly expensive product line to include Champagne and caviar in the future.

Courtesy CNN

Book Review: Manzil-e-Ishq Pakistan

The book is about author Dr Mohammad Rafiq's family who rendered unmatched services and sacrifices for the emergence of Pakistan on the globe; it's the saga of sacrifices of a family, who lived in Bijapur, Ludhiana, in Indian East Punjab. In 1947, this family migrated to Pakistan after the martyrdom of the near and dear ones

By Dr Maqsood Jafri

The title of the book is self-evident and signifies immense contribution of the folks of Dr Rafiq's Kalar Jatt family, who rendered unprecedented services and sacrifices for the creation of Pakistan. Besides minute details of his clan and their short life history, the book reflects spirit of Islam's sanctity, besides indomitable and unconditional love and dedication to Pakistan.

The author pays tributes to esteemed lady Fatima who got married with a Sikh named Ghandeela Singh who embraced Islam before marrying her. The author refers to and applauds his grandfather Chaudhary Atta Muhammad who was a big landlord at Bijapur, Ludhiana. This venerable personality was very influential in the area and was the center of admiration and esteem for both Muslims and Sikhs.

Chaudhary Atta was a dedicated pioneer and harbinger of Pakistan's ideology. He worked day and night raising the Pakistan slogan. Once, in Simla, Chaudhary Atta Muhammad addressed a public meeting which was presided over by Quaid-E-Azam. He kissed the brow and hand of Quaid-E-Azam and said: "Mr Jinnah, may you succeed by the grace of Allah in your noble mission of making Pakistan, which will be for the betterment of Muslims; who knows whether, I could step on that holy land or not; but every drop of my blood is for that promised sacred land--Pakistan."

These passionate words turned true when Chaudhary Atta was martyred on the border of Pakistan and India by some Sikhs who accompanied him in order to escort him up to the Pakistan border.

Chaudhary Atta crossed the border and entered into Pakistani territory. He and his friend Alim Deen prostrated on the Pakistani soil, kissed it with tearful eyes. They said their prayers of Maghreb and Isha on the land of



Pakistan. On the request of the Muslims and Sikhs, he stayed there that night, as they all respected and loved him and sincerely desired to spend some more moments with him.

Unfortunately, four Sikhs changed their loyalty and murdered both of them when they were offering Fajar prayer. The incident enraged other loyal Sikhs, who on their return to Bijapur fought with the killer gang. The fight left 27 Sikhs dead.

Chaudhary Atta Muhammad's grave indeed deserves to be converted into a tomb, with gravestone inscribed "tomb of the martyr of Pakistan." He was the man who in the presence of Mr Jinnah, in his speech at Simla announced to donate fifty tola gold in Muslim League's fund. Quaid was very inspired by his sincerity to the cause of Pakistan and said: "thank you Chaudhary Sahib."

After migration from India to Pakistan, the way Chaudhary Atta's family suffered and withstood the brunt of mayhem, is terrible and distressing. Father of the author, Ch Jamal-ud-Din Kalar, encountered immense heart braking tragedies. On his way to Pakistan, he along with his family was attacked by a band of Sikhs. He was critically wounded but salvaged by some Sikhs of another invading group who recognized him as the son of

Chaudhary Atta Muhammad. Jamal's wife was in another migrating party. Both reached Pakistan but did not know about their whereabouts, deeming all were murdered during migration. After nine months, they found each other. Similarly, so many families kept on searching each other for years. Some could find their loved ones and others could not till their last breath. Pakistan emerged on the world globe with the blood of martyrs.

The author expresses deep concern and grief over Pakistan's condition, saying we have not yet achieved our cherished goals for which Pakistan was created after countless sacrifices. Our forefathers had visioned a Pakistan in which we will establish an Islamic welfare state; supremacy of law and Justice will be maintained; racial discrimination and religious extremism will be uprooted. But our dreams have been shattered; we need to make a Pakistan as envisaged by our great leader Quaid-E-Azam.

Every Pakistani should read this book and know the history of the sacrifices of those people who were brutally murdered, their ladies were gang raped and their kids were beheaded and chopped into pieces in front of their parents. We must not forget their sacrifices. Long live Pakistan. Our destiny and our destination are Pakistan.

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