

Fortnightly

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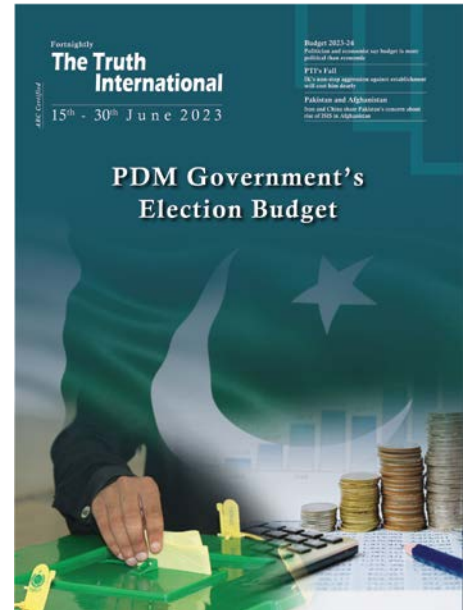


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# The Sinking City

By Hammad Ghaznavi



No one learns from their past mistakes in the land of the pure. Is Pakistan suffering from some kind of bulimia, bingeing and purging, bingeing and purging incessantly. Are we suicidal? Desire to self-harm is a psychotic condition and we as a state seem to have reached its last stage. On political and economic fronts, we are repeating our follies with pride on end.

The interference of the-powers-that-be in politics is an ugly phenomenon that has been in currency, despite its monstrous outcomes, almost ever since the inception of the country. The last high tide of this kind of meddling is called the Imran Khan Project. It was an institutional decision to demolish the two biggest political parties in the country, PML-N and PPP, and replace these 'thugs' with Khan, the 'sadiq and Ameen'. The courts and media were managed to achieve the desired results. There are reasons why popular leaders have not been acceptable to the Powerful and the trend goes back to the early days of Pakistan – from Hussain Shaheed Suhrawardy and Fatima Jinnah to Mujeeb-ur Rehman and Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, all were dubbed corrupt or traitor, and crushed. The same mistake of disregarding the peoples' will was repeated again and again. Former Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif was no exception: he was ousted, jailed, exiled, and his party stalwarts were put behind bars. PML-N was crushed, and its return to power was impeded with the might of the state. Constitution, law and human rights were abused with impunity.

Fast forward to today, and you see exactly the same treatment being meted out to Imran Khan and his party. With military courts getting super-active, human rights are being violated and the PTI stalwarts are being forced to quit the party. IK is the latest addition to the list of traitors. Once again, the 'neutrals' are neck-deep in political swamp. It's a vicious cycle. Of course, IK cannot be absolved from the political and economic mess we are in today. His fascistic style of politics took the entire system back to the 90s, the pre-Charter of Democracy days when PPP and PML-N shook hands with the military whenever an opportunity arose to crush each other. The two parties learnt their lessons from their past mistakes and signed the COD, ensuring that political victimization and the Establishment sponsored political instability will be unacceptable under any circumstances. When the two old parties understood the khaki game, the Powerful created another front man, the Captain. Ironically, the yesterday's champions of constitution and human rights PML-N and PPP are watching these violations from the sidelines, in fact, enjoying the plight of IK. It's a vicious cycle.

Economic disaster is knocking on our door but we are busy elsewhere. Amidst this unprecedented political and economic instability, Finance minister Ishaq Dar has presented the annual budget 2023-24. It's a ritualistic budget, masquerading as 'business as usual.' The entire edifice of the budget hinges on donors' benevolence

– loans and loans from left right and center. There is nothing long-term here, no serious issues addressed, no new beginnings. It's an ad-hoc document and what else could have been expected from a government on its way out in a few weeks. A touch of populism (30-35 % increase in the employees' salaries) in the budget is understandable; however, there is no glaring irresponsibility in the budget, the way PTI government reduced the petrol prices before its ouster in violation of its agreement with the IMF. In a word, Pakistan is a classic case of a debt-trapped state, plunging deeper and deeper into the quagmire. The budget once again proves our unwillingness to mend our ways as the document refuses to even mention the chief issue of Pakistan – around \$13 billion subsidies enjoyed by the civil and military elite of the country.

Can Pakistan recover from this unparalleled political and economic instability? Are the stakeholders cognizant of the gravity of the crisis? It is difficult to answer these questions in the affirmative. We are running on a treadmill, moving constantly and going nowhere. Petty interests of individuals and institutions have overshadowed the national interest. The upcoming elections provide perhaps the last opportunity to get our house in order. The question, however, remains – are we going to have a free and fair elections...on time?



## A New party, but is it political?



By M A Niazi

The Istehkam-i-Pakistan Party is probably the only party to have Pakistan somewhere in the middle. Parties usually have Pakistan in the beginning. The Pakistan Awami Tehrik, the Pakistan Muslim League, and the Pakistan Peoples' Party are all examples that put Pakistan first. The Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam doesn't have it in its name, perhaps because the Jamiat Ulema-e-Pakistan won the race. It was a Bareilvi party, but it does seem, Bareilvis are not doctrinaire about names. The Pakistan Awami Tehrik went with prefixing, but the Tehreek Labbaik Pakistan (TLP) went with the suffix.

Does anyone remember the Tehrik Takmil Pakistan, which had been founded by Mehmod Ali, who was one of those East Pakistanis who came over to the West after Bangladesh was created in 1971? It had the same initials as the Tehrik Taliban Pakistan, though of course, he could claim that the TTP stole from him. He was a mild-mannered gentleman of the old school and certainly did not believe in violence. When virtually all West Pakistanis had accepted the reality of the creation of Bangladesh, he was one East Pakistani who refused to accept it. But he never advocated violence, and his TTP was meant to convince public opinion by rational argument, not force. I'm sure he wouldn't have approved of the TTP, because of the damage it was causing to what was left of the country he remained loyal to.

The Istehkam Pakistan Party has not just found a unique solution to the prefixing and suffixing dilemma by putting Pakistan into the middle, but it has the same initials as the Independent Power Producers, the IPPs. It's unfortunate, for it links the party to load shedding, which is a place it doesn't really want to go. It's as unfortunate as the nickname Raja Pervez Ashraf gained as Minister for Water and Power, Raja Rental, after the Rental Power Plants, because of the kickbacks he is alleged to have got. Now the new party had better be very careful about any donation it gets because if it gets anything from an IPP, it will have a lot of explaining to do. On the other hand, maybe that is the path to getting party

funds. Maybe the IPPs would be attracted by a party with the same initials.

I know there's a ban on companies donating to parties, but if the company pays an individual a lot of money for PR or some purpose as would be accepted by an auditor, and then the person then makes a donation to the target party, who can object?

One of the interesting things about the IPP is the presence of Fawad Chaudhry. Well, actually the whole of the PTI government's information apparatus, because Dr. Firdous Ashiq Awan was there, as was Fayyazul Hassan Chauhan. I'm surprised that Lt Gen (retd) Asim Saleem Bajwa was missing. Actually, the reason why Fawad Chaudhry was a bit of a surprise was that when he condemned the May 9 attacks, he also announced that he was taking a break from politics. Well, it was a pretty short break, it seems.

On the other hand, maybe Fawad Chaudhry is making a profound statement about the IPP, that it isn't really a political party. That means his joining it would not constitute political activity. Is it media activity then? Or legal activity? Ch Fawad has dabbled in the media and is also a lawyer by profession. During his break from politics, I would expect him to concentrate on either of these pursuits. As he was not covering the IPP's formation for a news organization, I can only assume he was being held in reserve for tendering legal advice.

Better legal advice than economic advice. That is something the government badly needed as it presented a budget that attempted to square the circle by preparing for election later this year while keeping on the right side of the IMF. Well, the budget proved that it can't be done, and all the government has achieved is that it has upset the IMF even further while failing to do anything enough to avoid a thorough rebuff at the hustings.

# Budget outlay reflective of polls this year

*Rs 236b PSDP suggests needs of politicians not fiscal prudence; budgetary allocations aimed at young voters ahead of next elections; govt announced incentives without securing IMF bailout package*

By Tahir Niaz

Even though Federal Finance Minister Ishaq Dar has said that Friday's budget was a "responsible budget" instead of an "election budget," the political observers seem not ready to believe him.

Speaking in the National Assembly while presenting a Rs 14.46 trillion budget for 2023-24 with no new taxes, the ruling coalition has tried to win back public favour before the upcoming polls. The budget documents speak a lot about what the government wants to get out of it.

Massive upto 35 percent increase in the federal govt salaries and pensions; 33 percent increase in development expenditures; tax incentives for agriculture, information technology; construction and industry and much more—all reflects the government has entered into the election mode.

With the looming elections in mind, the coalition government didn't even bother about fiscal challenges. It increased development funds for the parliamentarians by almost 30 percent from budgetary allocations to Rs 90 billion; and is likely to disburse about Rs 8.4 billion to farmers through a database of the Sindh government. According to economic experts, the government's income would be insufficient to cover debt servicing expenses after paying share of the provinces.

Furthermore, the government announced a Rs 236 billion PSDP (public sector development programme) for the next fiscal year which mostly reflects needs of politicians instead of fiscal prudence and discipline. The government made significant changes in the PSDP even after the National Economic Council approved it on June 6. These changes were made in the light of demands by the government allies, mainly the smaller political parties.

The PSDP book revealed that the government at the eleventh hour,



further increased allocation for certain ministries compared to the document approved by the NEC. Out of the proposed allocation of Rs 950 billion, nearly half has been given to the newly-included over 300 development schemes, indicating the government's election priorities. The economists believe that this is one of the highest ratios that will put the country's development spending on a wrong track.

The government has proposed Rs 80 billion worth of various Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif's initiatives. These include Prime Minister's Laptop Scheme, Prime Minister's Youth Programme for Small Loans, Prime Minister's Initiatives for Solar Tube Wells, Pakistan Endowment Fund for Education, Prime Minister's Initiatives for Women Empowerment, Prime Minister's Initiatives for Support of IT Start-ups & Venture Capital, Prime Minister's Green Revolution, Prime Minister's Youth Skill Development and Prime Minister's Institute of Sports. All these initiatives clearly indicate that the budgetary allocations were election-driven and appear to be aimed at the youth voters ahead of the next general elections.

The government employees have had not received such an increase, at least in the last decade; and even at a time when economy was in a much better shape than today. All such steps,

according to political observers, suggest that the coalition government has perhaps made up its mind to go into the elections after the present National Assembly completes its term in August this year, hoping the Imran-led Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf would have also been 'fixed' by that time.

The government announced all incentives without even getting a bailout package from the International Monetary Fund, suggesting that it was a budget keeping in mind the polls in the next four-five months. The government has probably surrendered to the political pressure as it didn't take any "tough decisions" expected in the absence of the IMF package. Given the budgetary stats, it can safely be said that the 'looming electoral exercise heavily influenced the next year's fiscal plan. Some of the significant changes in taxes/duties introduced by the government in budget 2023-24 include:

## Vehicle imports

The budget proposes withdrawing the capping of fixed duties and taxes on the import of old and used vehicles of Asian makes above 1300cc, which means they can become more expensive now.

## Dining out made cheaper

The government announced that in a



bid to promote digital payments — through debit/credit cards, mobile wallets or QR scanning — at restaurants, it has reduced the tax rate from 15pc to 5pc. That means dining out has been made cheaper if one opts for electronic payment methods.

## Solarisation initiative

In line with the government's initiative, the budget announced an exemption on customs duty on raw material used in production of solar energy products. The exemption encompasses essential components such as inverters, solar panels and batteries.

## IT sector

In a bid to boost information technology (IT) exports, a 0.25pc concessional rate of income tax will be intact until June 30, 2026. Moreover, freelancers earning up to \$24,000 per year will also be exempted from sales tax registration and filing tax returns while a single-page income tax return will be introduced for them.

The budget also proposed exemption of customs duties on raw materials of diapers and sanitary napkins, exemption of customs duties on import of shrimps/prawns/juveniles for breeding in commercial fish farms and hatcheries, removal of regulatory duty on second hand clothing, grant of exemption of sales tax on contraceptives and accessories; and waiver of 2pc final withholding tax on purchase of immovable property for nonresident individual National Identity Card for Overseas Pakistanis/Pakistan Origin Card holder where immovable property is acquired through foreign remittances remitted from abroad.

## Notable levies

Conversely, the budget has some moves which are likely to hurt the common man's pocket. That includes withdrawal of exemption of sales tax on edible products sold in bulk under brand names or trademarks, enhancement in reduced rate of sales tax from 12pc to 15pc on supplies made by points of sale retailers dealing in leather and textile products and electric power transmission services proposed to be taxed at 15pc.

As per the budget documents, the size of the

Annual Development Program is fixed at Rs 1150 billion. Rs 950 billion have been earmarked for PSDP, Rs 170 billion for special initiatives of the prime minister and development schemes of the lawmakers, Rs 80 billion for nine special projects of prime minister, Rs 30 billion for programme to convert agricultural tubewells to solar power and Rs 10 billion for the Prime Minister's Laptop Scheme.

The Dasu Hydropower Project has been allocated the maximum of Rs 58.59 billion. Rs 17 billion have been allocated for the Karachi Greater Water Supply Scheme. Rs 17.63 billion will be spent on the purchase of 820 railway freight wagons and 230 passenger bogies. Rs 14.86 billion have been allocated for the Karachi Coastal



Power Project. Rs 26 billion have been set aside for the merged districts of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. For the 10-year development plan of the former tribal areas, Rs 31 billion are likely to be spent, suggest the budget documents.

An allocation of Rs 10.5 billion has been made for the Mohmand Dam Hydropower Project. For the Jamshoro Coal Power Project, Rs 12 billion have been earmarked. Rs16 billion will be spent on the Pakistan-Tajikistan transmission line. For the rehabilitation of flood-affected areas, Rs 6 billion have been earmarked.

Rs 5.70 billion have been allocated for the Hyderabad-Sukkur Motorway project; Rs 05 billion have been allocated to New Gwadar International Airport, while the project will cost Rs 51 billion in all. Rs 05 billion have been earmarked for the Lahore-Sialkot Motorway from Narang Mandi to Narowal.

According to PML-N Senator Mushahid Hussain Syed, the government had shown great generosity by announcing relief measures for the masses. He termed it a "populist budget" in which lower sections of the society and those facing financial hardships had been provided "relief" to a great extent. He, however, saw no long-term measures in the budget to bring back the economy on track.

Qaiser Ahmed Sheikh, another PML-N parliamentarian and also the chairman National Assembly standing committee on finance which refused to sanction funds to the Elections Commission of Pakistan for elections in Punjab and Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa on the orders of the Supreme Court, termed it a realistic budget

adding the PML-N was fully prepared for the elections.

Interestingly, despite all visible intentions of the coalition government to hold polls, the general public is still wary of the electoral exercise in the current year. They see PTI's rising popularity, even amid a wide crackdown, standing in the way of holding timely general elections in the country though the incumbent government has already violated an earlier Supreme Court order to hold elections in Punjab and Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa mainly due to the same reasons.

People still have in their minds the abrupt announcement by the Election Commission of Pakistan to postpone polls in the two provinces till October 8. Efforts on part of all the government institutions seem directed towards the PTI and it looks that as long as the PTI is 'alive', there are lesser chances of the elections in the country.

# New Budget, SBP's Discount Rate, and Challenge of Taming Inflation

By Javed Mahmood

Finance Minister Senator Muhammad Ishaq Dar presented the new budget for the fiscal year 2023-24 in the National Assembly on June 9 with an outlay of Rs 14.46 trillion. The budget envisaged 3.5 percent GDP growth in the next financial year vis-à-vis 0.29 percent GDP growth in 2022-23.

In the new budget, the government proposed a Rs 9.2 trillion target for tax revenue collection in 2023-24 as against Rs 7.2 trillion for the outgoing financial year (2022-23). In other words, the government and tax authorities will have to mop up 2 trillion rupees of extra revenue in 2023-24 in a bid to meet the annual target.

However, in the prevailing circumstances achieving the tax collection target seems to be a daunting task at a time when various industries are shutting down frequently amid a shortage of raw materials, lack of opening of L/Cs to import required materials, high cost of inputs \_ electricity, gas, fuel, and other essential items. For example, many a time, car manufacturing companies announced temporary shutdowns in 2022-23. In this scenario, the government will resort to frequent hikes in gas, petrol, and electricity prices and try to increase taxes on imports to achieve the tax target \_ a strategy which will further ignite the inflation in 2023-24.

Meanwhile, in the new budget, the government has levied a super tax on pharmaceutical companies and super-rich individuals. It means that they will also pass on the impact of the super-tax to the consumers. For instance, in 2022-23, the government imposed a 10 percent super tax on mega-companies for the first time and they quickly shifted the burden of this tax onto their customers by enhancing the cost of their services and products.

If we look at the new budget, we do not see any solid policy of the government to tackle the monster of inflation. On the one hand, the government announces a little relief for the consumers while on the other, it was taken back. For instance, during May-June,



the government reduced the domestic petroleum prices. But at the same time, the tariff of electricity and gas was increased that offset the relief. Also, from July 2023, the government notified a 50 percent increase in the tariff of natural gas.

## Headline Inflation inflates to 37.97% in May

The headline inflation in Pakistan inflated to 37.97 percent in May, setting a national record for the second month in a row. According to the Pakistan Bureau of Statistics, in April this year, Pakistan's consumer price index (CPI) was at 36.5 percent. Hence, it was already the highest in the country as well as the South Asian region. For example, Sri Lanka, which is slowly recovering from a two-year economic crisis, posted annual inflation of 25.2 percent in May. The month-on-month rise in inflation in May further surged 1.58 percent with further increases in prices of vegetables, pulses, wheat flour, rice, eggs, and chicken.

## Inflation is a Governance Problem

As the prices of major commodities have fallen internationally such as cooking oil, ghee, and crude oil significantly. For

instance, in recent weeks international crude oil prices have slumped to \$75 per barrel. Unfortunately, people in Pakistan could not get any benefits from this situation mainly because of the depreciation of the rupee value against the US dollar and the lack of the government's interest to ensure a trickle-down effect. For example, the government has reduced domestic petroleum and LPG prices recently, but shopkeepers denied relief to consumers citing different excuses.

Interestingly, the retail prices of rice, sugar, chicken, and flour have increased substantially without any solid reasons, but no one bothered to look into this aspect. Every shopkeeper has set the price according to his own choice knowing that no one will question him. The way the retailers are overcharging, it appears that a race has started to extort as much profit from the consumers as possible in the absence of a check and balance mechanism of the government.

## Record high discount rate and SBP's new Monetary Policy Statement

In April this year, the central bank jacked up further the discount rate to 21 percent by incorporating 100 basis points increase.



This record-high markup rate \_ on the one hand is bound to increase the cost of doing business while on the other hand, it will discourage credit supply. Hence, the SBP's discount rate will keep many borrowers away and put extraordinary financial burdens on those who get bank loans for business.

At its meeting today, the Monetary Policy Committee (MPC) decided to keep the policy rate unchanged at 21 percent. The MPC noted that higher inflation outturns for April and May were broadly as anticipated. The Committee also noted sequential ease in inflation expectations of both consumers and businesses from their recent peaks. Further, the Committee expects domestic demand to remain subdued amid tight monetary stances, domestic uncertainty, and continuing stress on external accounts. Against this backdrop, and given the declining m/m trend, the MPC views inflation to have peaked at 38 percent in May 2023, and barring any unforeseen developments, expects it to start falling from June onwards.

2. The Committee noted multiple important developments since the last meeting. First, the provisional National Accounts estimates show real GDP growth to have decelerated considerably during FY23. Second, the current account balance recorded back-to-back surpluses in March and April 2023, which reduced some pressures on foreign exchange reserves. Third, the government unveiled the budget for FY24 on June 9, which envisages a slightly contractionary fiscal stance against the revised estimates for FY23. Fourth, global commodity prices and financial conditions have eased recently and are expected to persist in the near term.

3. The MPC also took stock of the cumulative impact of the substantial monetary tightening undertaken so far, which is still unfolding. On balance, the MPC views the current monetary policy stance, with positive real interest rates on a forward-looking basis, as appropriate to anchor inflation expectations and to bring down inflation towards the medium-term target - barring any unexpected domestic and external shocks. However, the MPC emphasized that this outlook is also

contingent on effectively addressing the prevailing domestic uncertainty and external vulnerabilities.

## Real sector

4. The provisional National Accounts estimates show that real GDP grew by 0.3 percent in FY23, from the revised FY22 growth of 6.1 percent. The major drag came from a significant contraction in value addition of industry due to several adverse domestic and external factors; while the services sector grew at the slowest pace since the COVID-impacted FY20. The agriculture sector growth was lower than last year but better than post-flood expectations, as bumper sugarcane and wheat crops and robust growth in the livestock sector largely offset the flood-related damages to cotton and rice crops. The MPC also noted that the slowdown in economic activity was in line with the trends in high-frequency indicators, especially double-digit declines in volumes of auto, POL, and domestic cement sales, and contraction in large-scale manufacturing during the course of this fiscal year. These trends are expected to continue in the near term due to the accumulated impact of tight policies. On the other hand, in the absence of any unfavorable turn in weather conditions, the agriculture sector is expected to post an improved performance relative to the outgoing fiscal year.

## External sector

5. The current account continues to respond to the demand-compression policies and regulatory mix, with the deficit during Jul-Apr FY23 dropping to \$3.3 billion, less than one-fourth of last year's deficit. The policy-induced contraction in imports more than offset the drop in exports and remittances. The Committee noted that the narrowing of the current account deficit has somewhat contained pressures on the foreign exchange reserves and the interbank exchange rate, which has broadly remained stable since the last MPC meeting. However, debt repayments amid lower fresh disbursements and weak investment inflows continue to exert pressure on the FX reserves. Going forward, under the baseline assumptions of a relatively favorable outlook for commodity prices and moderate

domestic economic recovery next year, the MPC views that the current account deficit will broadly remain in check.

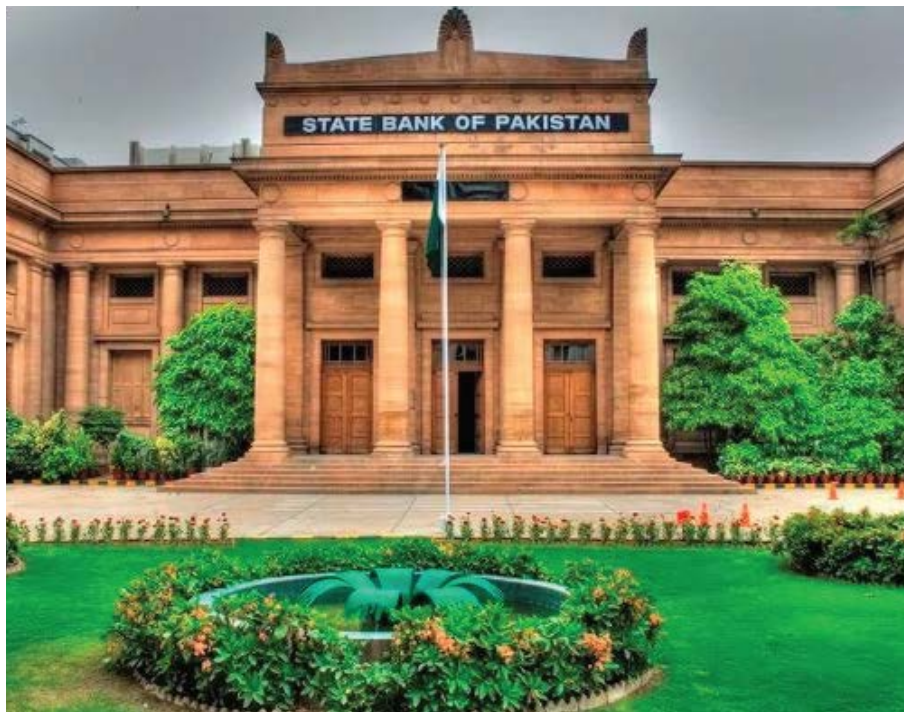
## Fiscal sector

6. The fiscal position has improved in cumulative terms during Jul-Mar FY23, as the fiscal deficit reduced slightly to 3.6 percent of GDP from 3.9 percent last year, while the primary balance posted a surplus of 0.6 percent of GDP this year against a deficit last year. Notwithstanding this cumulative improvement, there has been some deterioration in fiscal indicators in Q3, largely reflecting an increase in non-interest current expenditures, mainly subsidies, and a significant deceleration in the pace of overall tax revenue. The usual end-year increase in developmental spending and further slowdown in revenue collection amidst a substantial slowdown in domestic economic activity and contraction in imports points to a further increase in the fiscal deficit in Q4. The revised estimates show a fiscal deficit of 7.0 percent and a primary deficit of 0.5 percent of GDP for FY23. The FY24 budget envisages a fiscal deficit of 6.5 percent and a primary surplus of 0.4 percent of GDP. The MPC noted that while the target for the overall fiscal deficit is not significantly different from the revised estimate for FY23, strictly adhering to it is imperative to contain inflationary and external account pressures.

## Monetary and inflation outlook

7. The broad money (M2) growth decelerated in May 2023 compared to last year, largely due to a substantial fall in private sector credit (PSC) and a contraction in net foreign assets of the banking system. The y/y growth in PSC decelerated to 7.1 percent in April 2023, substantially lower than 22.3 percent in April 2022. Sequentially, PSC saw net retirement for the fourth consecutive month in April, mainly because of a substantial reduction in demand for working capital and consumer loans in the wake of subdued economic activity and high borrowing costs. While there was an uptick in credit for fixed investment in April, it was significantly lower in cumulative terms during Jul-Apr FY23 compared to the same period last year.

On June 12, 2023, the State Bank of Pakistan maintained the Discount Rate at 21 percent. In this situation, the State Bank of Pakistan should review its monetary policy and reduce the discount rate to motivate private borrowers to get bank loans to promote business and eliminate the chances of shortage of essential commodities amid their falling prices in the international markets. Capital market analysts believe that if the IMF is not reviving the loan program, the SBP should reduce the discount rate to promote lending and economic activities.



8. The national CPI inflation rose to 38 percent in May 2023, pushing the average inflation to 29.2 percent during July-May FY23, compared to 11.3 percent in the same period last year. Inflation remained broad-based, with food continuing to contribute more than half to the overall inflation in May. Importantly, core inflation maintained its upward trajectory, albeit at a slower pace, mainly indicating the second-round impact of higher food and energy prices and exchange rate depreciation amid still elevated inflation expectations. Within food, prices of few essential non-perishable items rose quite significantly in May, mainly due to domestic supply chain issues. The MPC expects that reduced demand-side pressures and ease in inflation expectations, along with moderating global commodity prices

and high base effect, would help bring inflation down from June 2023 onwards. In this context, the MPC views that maintaining the current policy stance is necessary to bring inflation down to the medium-term target range of 5 – 7 percent by the end of FY25.

## New Tax Measures and Inflation

In the 2023-24 budget, the federal government has proposed some new tax measures to generate additional tax

revenue. The government has announced 223 billion rupees in new tax measures for 2023-24. Moreover, in Feb 2023, the government imposed 170 billion rupees in taxes through the mini-budget and in the 2023-24 budget, the impact of the mini-budget will generate around Rs 660 billion in 2023-24. Therefore, the overall tax revenue impact of measures including the mini-budget would be more or less Rs900 billion in 2023-24. Hence, the additional tax revenue collection will, indeed, keep the headline inflation in a very high zone in the next financial year. The new tax measures include the imposition of the super tax on the superrich individuals with more than 150 million rupees per annum income. Also, non-filers will pay a 0.6 percent withholding tax on the withdrawal of cash from banks.

Meanwhile, in the new budget, the government has reimposed a 10 percent withholding tax on bonus shares and supplies to be provided by contractors.

Moreover, under the Finance Bill 2023, the government has imposed additional tax at the rate not exceeding fifty percent on income of profit and gains of a person or class of persons on account of extraordinary gains due to exogenous factors. When the federal cabinet approved the budget on June 9, FBR Chairman Asim Ahmed told the media that 28 percent growth is required in tax collection to meet the target of Rs 9.2 trillion in 2023-24. This required growth shows a mismatch with a 3.5 percent growth in the GDP. FBR chairman pointed out that the revenue impact of (additional tax on certain income, profits, and gains) cannot be considered a new tax, but an enabling provision introduced in the law.

He said that the sales tax measures involved Rs22 billion collection while the customs duty measures will generate Rs13 billion extra revenue. However, 12 billion rupees relief in customs duty and taxes will create a net impact of one billion rupees. FBR chairman also said that the government has increased the monetary limit of foreign remittances to USD100,000 for the purpose of section 111(4). The tax officials will not seek sources of unexplained income/assets for transactions.

Meanwhile, he explained that the super tax under section 4C will apply to all super-rich persons with income above Rs150 million a year. There will be three new income thresholds for 2023-24 + Rs350m to Rs400m, Rs400m to Rs500m, and above Rs500m. And individuals falling in these income thresholds will have to pay six to 10 percent supertax.

Moreover, the government has increased to six percent withholding tax for commercial importers, from the existing 0.5 percent rate. Also, five percent WHT will be charged to non-resident Pakistanis using debit/credit or prepaid cards abroad. A two percent final withholding tax on immovable property purchases by non-resident POC/NICOP holders will be waived if purchased with foreign remittances.



# What's in Budget 2023-24?



By Dr Abid Qaiyum Suleri

The editorial published in this paper yesterday ('Budget 2023-24: nobody's budget', June 9) correctly pointed out that the finance minister's attempt to please everyone while preparing the federal budget for 2023-24 ended up displeasing everyone.

Let us see why. First and foremost, the objectives of this budget. Here I am setting aside political economy considerations for a while. The documented guiding principles for the budget are aimed at achieving several goals. These include encouraging industrialization and investment, incentivizing the agriculture sector, promoting energy efficiency and conservation, and advancing digital services.

The industrial sector has been grappling with challenges such as import restrictions and uncertainty surrounding foreign currency exchange rates. While the budget proposes some adjustments to regulatory and customs duties, it falls short of addressing the significant hurdles Pakistan's industrial sector faces today.

To encourage the adoption of renewable (solar) energy, boost IT exports, and strengthen the agriculture sector, the budget suggests implementing measures such as duty-free import of machinery, equipment,

and inputs for solar energy, as well as selected IT-enabled services. Additionally, there are proposals to relax customs and sales taxes on agricultural inputs like seeds, fertilizers, and certain machinery. The budget also proposes extending concessionary loans, particularly in the agriculture sector, which may have positive implications for achieving food self-sufficiency, reducing imports, and fostering rural development.

While the guiding principles outlined in the budgetary papers hold theoretical promise, there is a significant challenge to address. After allocating the provincial share from the federal divisible pool, the federal government is left with a projected net revenue of Rs6,887 billion. However, the projected federal expenditures amount to Rs14,460 billion, resulting in a deficit of Rs7,573 billion.

The government hopes that the provinces will leave some unspent deposits with the State Bank of Pakistan (provincial surplus), which it has budgeted at Rs650 billion. Factoring in this surplus, the government projects a deficit of Rs6,923 billion or an overall fiscal deficit of 6.54 per cent of GDP. Nevertheless, historical trends

indicate that provinces rarely leave any surplus, implying that the actual deficit will likely be higher than the projected figures.

Like its predecessors, the current government plans to bridge the fiscal deficit by borrowing from external and domestic sources. These sources include project and programme loans from multilateral and bilateral development partners, such as the World Bank, the Asian Development Bank and China; the Saudi Arabian oil facility, which provides deferred payment for oil imports; Euro Bond and Sukuk bonds, which are issued in international capital markets; and deposits in the state bank from friendly countries such as China and Qatar.

However, many of the funding sources for Pakistan are contingent on the country's adherence to the IMF programme which demands fiscal consolidation, structural reforms, exchange rate flexibility, and ironically financial assurances from the same friendly nations that require a letter of comfort from the IMF to extend their support to Pakistan.

Simply put, the federal government spends more than twice as much as it earns. To cover this gap, the government needs to borrow money, but it can only do so if it

follows the IMF's rules. Otherwise, it risks losing access to these sources of financing and the crisis worsens.

One way to improve this situation would be to increase revenue, which usually means imposing new taxes. However, since the next general elections are approaching, the government has avoided proposing any new taxes in this budget. Moreover, the government has not announced any plans to tax the 'known' tax-evading sectors, such as agriculture, real estate, and wholesale trade; or to privatize the 212 public-sector enterprises that are running at a loss, such as Pakistan International Airlines, Pakistan Steel Mills, Pakistan Railways, and energy distribution companies etc. For comparison, the expected revenue from privatization is only Rs15 billion, which is less than 0.2 per cent of the total budget.

Let us examine this budget from another perspective. Remember, the federal government's expected income: Rs6,887. Its major expenditures can be categorized into 'Four-Ds'. The first is debt service and foreign loan repayment, which amounts to Rs7,303 billion. The second is defence affairs and services, which costs Rs1,804 billion. The third is the day-to-day running of civil government, including pay and pensions, which requires Rs1,475 billion; the federal pensions are Rs761 billion, and salaries Rs714 billion. My fourth 'D' is development, which includes grants, transfers, subsidies, and the federal public sector development programme (PSDP). All these expenses total Rs2,024 billion.

This means that for the first time in Pakistan's history, its federal revenue is not enough even to pay its debt obligations. Assuming that the exchange rate (Rs290 per dollar) used to prepare this budget and the interest rate remain constant, we would have to borrow an additional Rs416 billion (Rs16 billion more than the budgeted amount for the Benazir Income Support Programme, which provides cash transfers to poor households) just to service our debt or the first 'D' on my list.

After borrowing to pay for debts, the government will have to borrow even more to take care of defence, civil administration, and development. This will result in more debt and more debt servicing in next year's budget.

But it is important to note that no government can compromise on debt repayment/-servicing, defence needs, and the functioning of the government. The only discretionary expenditure is the fourth 'D' – development. Therefore, development is always the first to be cut when governments have to reduce their fiscal deficit.

I am thrilled to see the budgeted numbers for the federal PSDP. The federal PSDP includes spending on infrastructure, social sectors, regional development, and other public goods. The PSDP has mainly been aligned with the government's development framework of five 'Es' – exports,

Compared to the revised costs of ADPs in Punjab and KP, Rs702 billion and Rs340 billion respectively in the current fiscal year, their caretaker governments have proposed ADPs worth Rs426 billion and Rs268 billion respectively for the first four months of the next fiscal year. If we extrapolate these numbers for the whole fiscal year, the ADP cost for Punjab (Rs1,278 billion) will exceed the total federal PSDP.

I understand the importance of Punjab in the current political landscape. However, spending money lavishly when the country is facing one of the worst fiscal deficits in its economic history would only create



equity, empowerment, environment, and energy, as well as reconstruction and rehabilitation of flood-affected areas to regain economic growth momentum. It is higher than the revised PSDP for the current fiscal year 2022-23, which was Rs900 billion. However, I am also mindful that most of it will remain in the budget books, as whatever we borrow will be spent on meeting the first three 'Ds'.

Some of the schemes in the PSDP must remain unspent. For instance, discretionary development funds to parliamentarians through the 'Pakistan Sustainable Development Goals and Community Development Program'. It has been criticized for being opaque, discretionary, patronage-based, and misaligned with Pakistan's SDGs priorities. Despite these criticisms, this scheme is to continue. Moreover, the federal government has also approved the visibly 'pre-election' annual development provincial plans (ADPs) of Punjab and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.

another kind of deficit: a trust deficit between the external partners and the government. Almost all of our lenders have emphasized that we have to put our house in order to avoid a fifth 'D': disappointment and despondency when they refuse to bail us out.

However, let me conclude by appreciating that, despite some appetite for lavish spending, the current budget is not as bad and expansionary as the pre-election 2018 budget of the PML-N. When there is no money in any case, there is little the finance minister can offer. Moreover, one should not take the budget very seriously as I see it getting revised at least twice (immediately after the elections, and possibly before June 30 to address the IMF's objections on its calculations). One hopes that after revisions, it will come close to our economic realities.



# The ticking time bomb of economic adversity

*Pakistan is now even behind Bangladesh in terms of per capita income, foreign exchange reserves and exports*



By Dr. Moonis Ahmar

How Pakistan's economy has dwindled over the past three decades is not difficult to gauge. At a time when IMF has literally refused to bail out Pakistan's economy and the annual budget is likely to be announced on June 9, one can expect drain of resources either to pay interest on loans or to meet defence expenditures. After covering these two heads with around 7 trillion rupees of tax resources, there will be no money left to run the government and the development programme.

A staff level agreement with IMF which was to be reached in February this year for the release of the remaining \$1.2 billion out of \$7 billion of bailout package still hangs in the balance. In the financial year 2023-24, Pakistan needs around \$35 billion to make external payments which reflects a doomsday scenario. Even if Saudi Arabia, the UAE and China agree to provide a couple of billion dollars to help Pakistan pull its economy from dire straits, it will not be possible for Islamabad to avoid a default on its foreign obligations. Delaying default by cosmetic measures would further compound the economic predicament of Pakistan and augment miseries for its 240 million people.

Is there a way out of the economy crisis that

is ticking like a time bomb? Why are those at the helm of affairs unable to read the writing on the wall? What will be the implications if the economic time bomb explodes? When all the noticeable economic indicators in 2023 are adverse for Pakistan, can a nuclear state facing two-pronged security challenge from India and Afghanistan possess the capability and capacity to deal with the prevailing dangerous situation?

At a time when remittances and exports are down, inflation has reached 45%, foreign exchange reserves have dipped to a meager \$4.5 billion, tax to GDP ratio is hardly 9.2% and the rupee value versus the US dollar and other major currencies of the world has hit its lowest ebb, how will the annual budget 2023-24 deal with such critical issues? When India can have foreign exchange reserves of \$650 billion, exports of \$660 billion and remittances of \$100 billion, why is Pakistan, which was economically better than India four decades ago, suffering from a serious economic decline? Pakistan is now even behind Bangladesh in terms of per capita income, foreign exchange reserves and exports.

Moving away from fiscal statistics which tend to project a dismal picture of

Pakistan's economy, there are some hard realities which one cannot escape while analysing why the country has decayed in terms of governance, rule of law, accountability, per capita income, GDP and so forth. When national and provincial budgets are to be presented in coming weeks, will people get some relief from an unprecedented inflation and back-breaking price hike? When the rate of the rupee versus the dollar is going down on a daily basis and a staff level agreement with IMF has not been reached, how will Pakistan's economic managers deal with the gap in income and expenditures? If the dollar continues to go up and crosses 325 per rupee, how will it impact the country's import bill? From where will the resources for debt servicing, defence expenditures, running federal and provincial governments and development projects be arranged?

The economic crisis can only be dealt with by considering three measures, as follows:

First, the inept handling of economic matters by the coalition government can only be rectified by immediately announcing elections. Since April last year, the prices of essential commodities have been doubled; the rupee has suffered a steep fall



against major international currencies; and there has been a decline in exports, remittances and per capita income, etc. When the country is in a deep political crisis, it is bound to have a negative impact on the economy. As the country's survival is at stake, it means that those wielding power have failed, and there is need to install a neutral caretaker setup to hold free and fair elections. Efforts by the incumbents to prolong their stay in power by imposing a financial emergency and extending their term for another year or so would be disastrous and threaten further chaos. Due to the gap in official and open market rates of the dollar versus the rupee, the overseas Pakistanis, who play a leading role in running the economy by sending around \$30 billion annually, are likely to resort to non-official channels, aggravating the balance of payments crisis.

Second, civilian leadership with a professional background coming through a genuine electoral process will re-set economic parameters of Pakistan. After all, Pakistan's economy has declined because of corrupt and incompetent leadership which remained at the helm of affairs for around four decades. Bold, courageous and visionary decisions to eradicate corruption and nepotism and increase exports, foreign exchange reserves, per capita income and remittances in the coming 10 years is only possible if the elected government is



allowed to function without pressures from non-political forces, adhering to strict work ethics. If successful economic models — like China, India, South Korea, Singapore, Taiwan, Turkey and the UAE — can leave their mark on the global order, why can't Pakistan, which had an impressive economic and planning track record five decades ago, do it? It all goes down to the leadership which can either make or break a country. Unfortunately, Pakistan is still a feudal and tribal society where religious intolerance leads to violence and terrorism. Unless Pakistan is cleansed of corruption, nepotism, extremism and mafias, there is

no way the country can defuse the ticking time bomb of the economic meltdown.

Third, without doers in the leadership who can ensure austerity in using public money, a 30% cut in non-developmental expenditures and eradication of VVIP culture, Pakistan's cannot be pulled from economic coma. The recent statement by the Finance Minister that Pakistan will not default because it has \$1 trillion worth of assets doesn't make sense because the entire infrastructure, crops and other assets of the country have been mortgaged in order to secure loans.





# Approve 2023-24 in Line with Fund Requirement and Meet External Financing—IMF



By Mehtab Haider

The IMF's Managing Director has replied back to Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif before the announcement of the budget for 2023-24 and conveyed to Islamabad clearly the fulfilment of three conditions for striking staff-level agreement.

These three conditions from the IMF included meeting external financing requirements in line with the Fund assessment, presenting and approving the budget for 2023-24 aligned with the IMF requirements, and introducing market-based exchange rate for moving towards staff-level agreement.

Although, Pakistani authorities claimed that they did not receive any response from the IMF after the announcement of the budget, however, both sides preferred to keep mum about the response of the IMF's Managing Director to the Prime Minister of Pakistan which was conveyed before the announcement of the budget for 2023-24.

The sources claimed that the IMF's MD responded to Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif's telephone conversation with clarity and conveyed that the staff-level agreement

would only be done after fulfilment of the given guidelines of the IMF staff.

This correspondent sent out questions to both the IMF in Washington DC and the Islamabad office as well as the Ministry of Finance but got no official response from any side till the filing of this report.

On the other hand, Pakistan's Minister for Finance Ishaq Dar is still hopeful about the revival of the IMF and went on to say that there were no reasons for any delay in the staff-level agreement. While addressing the ICAP post-budget seminar here in Islamabad on Monday evening, Mr Dar said that the government fulfilled all tough measures including imposing Rs170 billion taxation measures in last February 2023 and other steps as well for reviving the IMF programme.

On the external financing gap, the minister said that the IMF assessed an external financing gap of \$7 billion on account of the increased current account deficit but it decreased to just \$3.3 billion in the first ten months of the current fiscal year against \$13.7 billion in the same period of the last financial year. Now the current account deficit was projected at \$4 billion for the

ongoing financial year ending on June 30, 2023. The financing gap on external accounts, he said, should have been reduced but the IMF was still stuck to its old number.

"I am still hopeful for striking Staff Level Agreement (SLA)" he said and added that some internal and external forces were looking for becoming Sri Lanka but it did not happen and would never happen in the case of Pakistan.

He said that the government opted for the strategy to slash the current account deficit and did it rightly so in order to avert a crisis. "We have reversed downward trends of the economy and now the path of stabilisation and growth will commence," he said.

He was of the view that there was a need to give hope to the businessmen as he held meetings with Chambers in the last several weeks and every apprised him that after meeting you the confidence was restored. As a professional, he urged the Chartered Accountants to play their role and help businessmen to restore their confidence that the ongoing unusual and difficult phase could be overcome by joining hands.

# No use of WB \$188m speaks volumes of our incompetence

*IK-led govt could have utilised WB concessionary loan in 2018; out of \$15b committed by international donors only \$1b released*

By Imran Bajwa

The former Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf government, like its predecessors, lost a pertinent opportunity to curtail colossal damages caused by the last year's floods, due to sheer "incompetence."

The Imran Khan-led administration could have significantly reduced the losses, had it prudently used 'concessionary loan' of \$188 million approved by the World Bank in 2018 under Pakistan Hydro- Meteorological and Climate Services Project, when PTI took the charge.

The omission appears criminal in the backdrop of Pakistan being the '6th most vulnerable country in the world effected by climate change' especially after the previous devastating floods of 2003 and 2010.

During the last year's floods, over 1700 human lives could have been easily saved besides over 1,200,000 livestock which perished due to lack of timely preparedness--the blue print and planning of this WB project was with Federal Ministry of Environment since at least 2018.

A total of 33 million Pakistanis were directly affected by these floods out of which over nine million were pushed below poverty line and over 9.4 million acres of crop lands were inundated. Over 2.2 million homes were damaged or destroyed and total financial losses were estimated at over 30 billion dollars by the government and the World Bank.

World Bank's concessional loan of \$188 million for execution period of five years till 2023, to forewarn about climate risks of floods and droughts by empowering local institution-building and provision of hitech early warning systems, remained unutilised due to regrettable negligence. The World Bank's arm, IDA (international development association), which extends almost interest-free project loans, had reportedly warned cancelling this critical concessionary loan for lack of implementation.



Precisely, only \$5,635,749 have been drawn from this allocation during the last four years against availability of \$188 million ie only about 2% of the total approvals until the floods and subsequent devastations in Aug 2022.

This WB lending, originally meant for early warning and flood mitigation purposes, had finally been diverted to the affectees of the last year floods under BISP (Benazir income support programme) in September last year--for short term relief of one-month ration to the same affectees who were supposed to be salvaged through this loan earlier. This cost Pakistan \$30 billion plus in material losses besides irrecoverable human suffering of 33 million Pakistani citizens for months.

The World Bank approved this substantial loan for mitigating major climate change risks in Pakistan under these heads: one, capacity building and implementation support to Pakistan Metrological Department (PMD), two, technical provision of weather observation stations, data management and numerical timely weather prediction system and improvement of hydrological forecasting process and three, modernisation of seismic monitoring and tsunami warning system besides oceanographic monitoring apparatus.

This was basically designed to substantially enhance the technical and human capacities of meteorological department to provide accurate, timely and user-friendly weather forecasts to decision makers in different sectors.

This matter was so urgent that UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres had committed to raise over-three billion dollars in next three years for the same telemetry base stations for early warning systems in last COP27 congress for countries affected by climate change.

The chairman National Disaster Management Authority warned this month at a hearing in Public Accounts Committee of the National Assembly that there are 72% chances that devastating floods at a scale of last year will hit Pakistan in the coming monsoon beginning June this year, a claim denied by MET department later.

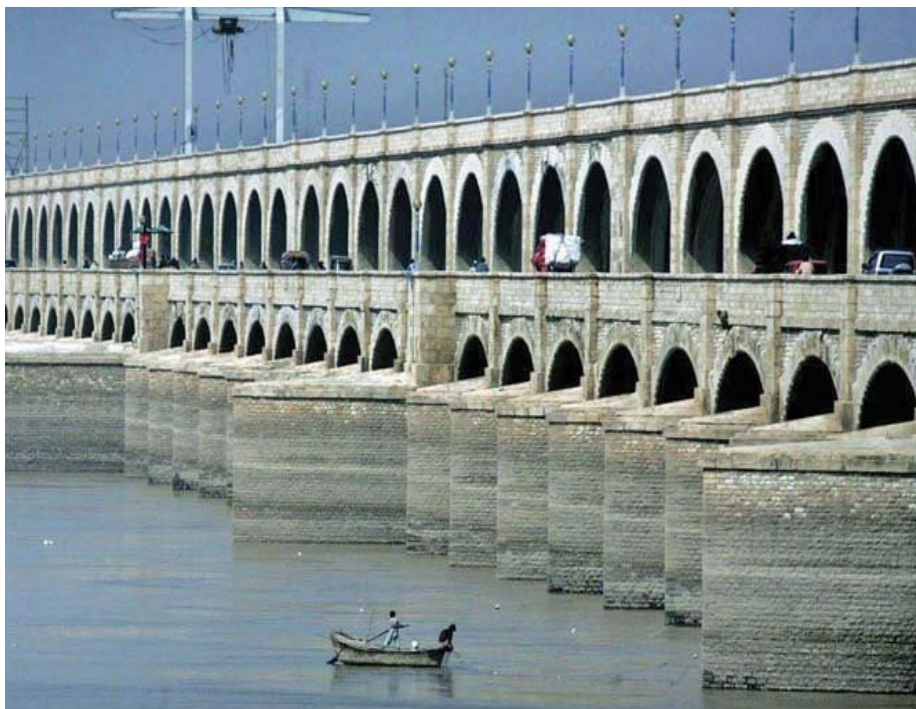
Meanwhile, situation is not very clear as to what preparations have the sitting coalition government done during their one year in power on this front. Chairman PDMA claimed that they are in the process of installing 36 early warning stations for flood mitigation but no firm timelines have been provided yet as to when those will be operational.



The original World Bank project was planned for 90 such early warning stations along the waterways and rivers by 2022. But out of \$15 billion plus committed by international donors for rehabilitation and reconstructions, only around one billion dollars ( just 8% ) have actually been released during the last 10 months, according to data from multiple donors and the Pakistan government. This means that over 80% of direct losses had been borne by flood affectees directly, ten months down the last floods.

Just imagine Pakistan, the world's fourth largest cotton producer historically, lost more than 4.5 million bales of cotton valuing around \$2 billion in international markets during the last floods. Rice, sugarcane and other standing crop losses are much more, but has anyone compensated for that yet or after the last devastating floods in 2010?

As reported, the closing slate of 2010 floods, out of total estimated loss of around 10 billion, only 1.3 billion dollars (just 13%) were actually released by the international donors as reported by Britannica.com. It appears that any natural calamity mainly due to climate change, results in 80% human and economic losses endured by Pakistani citizens and 20% or less by the



Pakistan government and international donors combined.

So do we have a choice in not investing half a percentage of that loss through gainfully investing \$188 million of the WB funding and others such donors' loans in calamity mitigation to save remaining nearly 100% losses perpetually.

The CP27 could only achieve contributions worth \$104 million against a claim of \$525 billion global losses during last 20 years due to climate change. That's a joke and not a 'down payment' as claimed by Sherry Rahman, the minister for environment. "It's not even worth a token, in view of challenges ahead."





# Towards Industrial Policy 2.0: Part - III & IV

By Ishrat Husain

Instead of choosing the winners and losers which was the case with the industrial policy 1.0, the thrust of the new policy that is still evolving is to align the pattern of production to meet the future requirement of the economy, integrate in the global value chains, invest in research and development of technologies that give an edge and spurt to the economy, and invest in human capital formation throughout the lifecycle right from early childhood development to social protection.

Academic literature and experience of successful countries in East Asia, China and Vietnam no longer consider the state and market as a binary but as self-reinforcing and complementing each other. A capable and effective government with competitive and well-functioning markets will produce optimum results. Governments should invest in research and development, a skilled and trained labour force, and develop symbiotic public private collaboration, digital infrastructure and core data capabilities.

The private sector should be engaged in production, distribution and exchange of goods and services, pay their due taxes and curb anti-competitive practices such as collusion, cartelization and contrivance. The 2019 pandemic showed that business and government can't be really disentangled; they rely on each other more than the partisans care to acknowledge. The Pfizer vaccine is based on insights into chemistry and molecular biology developed in government and university labs over a long period of time. State-funded basic research enforced patents and safety regulations, and industries turned raw ideas into a marketable product.

In recent years, a perceptible change in attitudes has been observed. The forceful advocates of globalization – the US and other Western powers – who used to preach quite forcefully to developing countries to open up their economies have gone into retreat. The main champion of globalization at the World Economic Forum a few years ago was none other than President Xi Jinping whose country has tasted the elixir



of globalization. US President Trump was conspicuous by his absence at the forum that year.

The US has assumed the leadership role in steering a new type of industrial policy. President Trump's campaign was based on the premise that as a result of globalization, American people had become sharply divided into two distinct groups – the well-off highly educated people living in thriving places and the less educated who lived in places that were left behind.

Trump concluded that liberal trade and free flow of capital and technology, outsourcing of manufacturing facilities and tradable services to other countries, and absorption of a large number of migrants had made the lives of this latter group miserable. They lost their jobs but were not trained to take up alternate occupations. He therefore introduced tariff and non-tariff barriers to thwart the inroads of Chinese goods and services in the US. His migration policy was quite tough and technology transfer from and to the US was firmly controlled.

US President Biden has gone even further and given more impetus to the industrial policy for the US. The CHIPS and Science Act 2022 gives the government a primary role in deciding which chip makers will benefit from the funding of \$52 billion worth of subsidies and tax credits for manufacturing firms setting up new or expanding existing operations in the US. The Act has also allocated \$200 billion towards scientific research in AI, robotics and quantum computing.

The infrastructure bill has tougher 'Buy American' rules, provision for reindustrialization, big innovations in technologies competing with China. The Foreign Direct Product Rule has also tightened export controls on technology transfer to China. Russia was cut off from the US technology supply chain globally.

Under the Inflation Reduction Act, an amount of \$400 billion would be allocated as subsidies to adopt green technologies, to boost clean energy and reduce dependence on China for batteries for electric vehicles.

Sixty-three per cent of investment flows in the US are subject to the screening regime – up from 52 per cent in 2020. Sixty per cent of the value of stock markets fall under the potential review of the Committee on Foreign Investment in the US (CFIUS). US capital is not allowed to enhance the technological capabilities of the competitors.

The European Union (EU) is far ahead of other countries in pursuing an active industrial policy. Germany plans to subsidize power to industries up to 80 per cent. EU farm subsidies amount to \$65 billion annually in addition to hefty budgetary grants to backward regions in the member countries. Governments help companies invest in green technologies and cut reliance on dominant suppliers and boost industry. They have also signed on to long-term contracts with the firms within the EU for supply of crucial raw materials such as lithium, rare earths and also fixed targets for domestic industries for domestic production of strategic technologies.



According to policymakers, climate change, disruptions during Covid-19, Russia's invasion of Ukraine underline the need for a more interventionist state. Subsidies among the G7 countries have risen sharply from 0.6 per cent of GDP in 2016 to 2.0 per cent in 2020. Some proponents of the new industrial policy have justified the competition between the US and the EU as a valid tool for combating the risks of climate change which is an existential threat.

These subsidies and interventions are, unlike the past, not aimed at accelerating economic growth but protecting the future generations from calamities, disasters and disappearance. However, export controls, screening of foreign investment, ban on transfer of technology to competing nations and relocation of some industries within national jurisdictions in the name of avoiding supply disruptions do smack of old protectionist tendencies.

According to the UN, more than 100 countries accounting for over 90 per cent of the world's GDP have adopted formal industrial strategies. Around \$371 billion has been earmarked by seven countries for the semiconductor industry. Clean energy and batteries would cost 3.2-4.8 per cent of global GDP.

India is offering \$26 billion of production-linked incentives for promoting electronics, semiconductors, electric vehicles, and mobile phone manufacturing over the next five years.

An IMF paper in 2022 justified the industrial policy by the presence of sector-specific externalities where the benefits of addressing them outweigh the costs and risks of the proposed intervention. Coordination failures and learning externalities imply that firms do not fully internalize the gain from potential activities. The emergence of new modern sectors hinges on the presence of effective government institutions, a favourable business environment and investment climate, and credible macroeconomic policies. Policy failures may include a burdensome regulatory framework, high tariffs on critical inputs, an overvalued exchange rate, inadequate infrastructure or an insufficiently skilled workforce.

Whether Pakistan should pursue an indus-

trial policy or not is a question that has not yet been debated seriously. There are clear ideological divisions between those who believe that the state should have a better control over the generation and allocation of resources and others who are of the view that the state should set the direction and incentives structure and let households, private firms, businesses and farmers make the choices.

The important questions that need to be addressed are: (a) what is the end goal of such a policy; (b) what would be the nature of policy interventions by the state; and (c) what would be the main ingredients of the policy which should be used to achieve the end goal?

The end purpose of an industrial policy for Pakistan should be to achieve competitiveness through higher productivity which brings greater profits for entrepreneurs, higher wages and better working conditions for workers, and more tax revenues for the government.

Such a policy may also result in stable prices for consumers and saving in foreign exchange as exports become competitive and production of import substitutes efficient. The following quotation by former prime minister of India VP Singh aptly captures this end goal: "What we need is growth that falls like rain on the mountain and flows down in stream to the valleys and plains below, not growth that is like snow, which sticks to the mountain tops."

Empirical research has provided evidence that most of the factors hindering GDP growth in Pakistan particularly in commodity producing sectors – agriculture and industry – are institutional or policy based requiring reforms instead of additional financial injections.

Focusing more specifically on industry, it was found that the failure to take off or stunted industrialization was due to dysfunctional markets and the excessive participation of government in productive activities. A recent PIDE study concluded that the government had a footprint of 67 per cent of the GDP. The declining growth in value added has been accompanied by falling productivity. The prerequisites for a workable industrial policy are political

stability, sound macroeconomic policies and economic governance. Fiscal dominance which is crowding out private-sector credit for fixed investment and working capital has to be minimized. The growing informalization of the economy in production and trade is a manifestation of the weakness of state capacity to enforce the laws and rules and exercise its coercive power.

Therefore, a strong state apparatus is necessary under the industrial policy 2.0 to play an entirely different role i.e. to correct market failures, remove constraints from the way of a competitive market structure and improve allocative efficiency, eliminate policy-induced distortions and perverse incentives instead of picking winners through an elaborate system of protection and subsidies. Highly protected domestic markets not only reduce the incentive to export but also penalize the economy by allowing inefficient producers to extract policy-induced rents from domestic consumers. Enforcement of contracts and protection of private property rights necessitate a well-functioning judicial system that adjudicates and resolves disputes expeditiously and at affordable costs for small and medium businesses.

The nature of government interventions under the industrial policy 2.0 would, therefore, be to unshackle the entrepreneurial energies of the private sector (by providing a level playing field), and to shift from resource-based to technology-intensive products whose demand is growing at a rapid pace in both domestic and international markets. The basic thrust of the policy would be for the state to eliminate unnecessary and costly regulations and an extortive taxation system, promote research and development in productive sectors, provide skilled and trained manpower and infrastructure, and avoid distorting markets through administered prices of inputs and output.

Market structures characterized by oligopoly, monopoly, collusive practices, cartelization and other defective practices have to be cleaned up. Entry barriers for newcomers as well as for scaling up the size of the operations have to be dismantled.

Industries that can export or save foreign exchange, attract foreign direct investment,

generate employment, and have strong backward and forward linkages are most likely to emerge under such a policy. A lot of risks are too big to insure against privately. The state should step in such cases through public-private partnerships where the rewards to society at large are enormous. The main ingredients of a forward looking industrial policy for Pakistan ought to be: Innovation: Rapid technical change is at the heart of the new competitive scene and innovation and productivity growth are interrelated. R&D expenditure in Pakistan was already paltry, but it has declined from 0.32 per cent of the GDP to 0.28 per cent in the last decade.

Institutions: Strengthening institutions of economic governance by devolving powers, delegating decision-making and decentralizing fiscal resources, and giving them autonomy while holding them accountable for results is essential. The state should withdraw from running businesses and allow the private sector to compete on a level playing field. The role of the state should be that of a facilitator, enabler and promoter but also that of delivering basic public goods and services in a cost effective and efficient manner. Technology parks, incubation centres, special economic zones can create clusters for exchange of knowledge, skills and provision of common

for compliance by the federal, provincial and local governments – some overlapping – have stifled the entry of newcomers by increasing the cost of doing business and thus retarded the forces of competition. For example, the minimum tax based on turnover acts as a barrier to new entrants.

As a result Pakistan has gone through deindustrialization and the share of manufacturing in GDP has remained stagnant. Easing the regulatory burden and lowering the tax incidence on manufacturing industries (by bringing in other sectors and firms into the tax net) would allow the existing firms to expand their scale of operations and new companies to invest in activities that would become profitable.



Support for scientific research and development in both private and public sectors to alter the production structure and processes in response to changing demand patterns, preferences and technology has to be given the highest attention and resources. Institutional specialization, complementarity between university and industry, patents acquisition, and stakeholder involvement would generate beneficial results. Transition to green technology and clean energy, adaptation and mitigation of climate change risks and emerging technologies such as AI, robotics, data analytics, etc. have to be the major components of an R&D programme. Financial incentives should be given to firms for in-house R&D activities that enhance their technological capabilities and enable them to implement new innovative techniques and processes. An innovation development challenge fund can be a useful instrument for this purpose.

services resulting in agglomeration economies. Narrower forms of specialization in fragmented production that now dominate global value chains have changed the dynamics of industrial and export activity.

Pakistan has to find niche products in the chain where it can compete. These clusters would also house quality testing labs, standards metrics compliance and extension services to SME suppliers and vendors. These clusters along with joint ventures between Pakistani and foreign firms can further reinforce the process of upgrading technologies, building new capabilities and finding new markets and market niches. Deregulation and taxation: The formal industrial sector is overregulated and heavily taxed. About two-thirds of taxes are collected from the manufacturing sector which accounts for only 13 per cent of the GDP. The plethora of laws, rules, regulations and no objection certificates required

Large-scale firms tend to be more productive reflecting economies of scale. Export subsidy schemes have to be rationalized to incentivize new products, sub sectors and for penetration in new markets. One way to promote consolidation, capital formation, scaling up and expansion of the manufacturing sector is to remove tax on inter corporate dividends. Human capital formation and skilled labour force: Despite loud claims that Pakistan has a large pool of talent, the fact is that we rank below our peers in the human capital index. Factors like one-third of children out of school, alarming learning poverty, a rising number of unemployed graduates, low female labour force participation rates, malnutrition and stunting and an acute shortage of skilled workers demanded by industries pose serious constraint to productivity growth.

Science and mathematics should be introduced early in the school curriculum and made mandatory for all middle and secondary school students. Technical and vocational training institutes should be expanded and operated by the private sector. Universities should produce more STEM graduates of employable skills. Manufacturing's growing parts in value addition are research, design, engineering, marketing and networking. Digital economy would require a large workforce of ICT professionals.

To be continued

Courtesy The News



# Is the game over for Imran Khan?

*Post May 9 scenario a question out of syllabus for IK; PTI defectors eyeing IK vote bank; Khan's near future to decide PTI's ultimate future*

By Sarfraz Raja

A modest start, then a noisy and aggressive middle inning, and then a sudden lifting of 'the umpire's finger' to give an out. No one could believe what has happened within a few weeks. A person who was everywhere is nowhere now. Is the game over for Imran Khan? The number of positive responses is increasing with every new day. Even if the former cricket star has nodded to losing his wicket but there is a chance to review the decision; and if Khan has a chance, could he be given a 'not out' in review? It's hard to predict as Pakistan's politics is ripe with uncertainties and surprises. Reality suggests that Khan who wanted the 'umpire to raise his finger against his opponents,' now finds that 'finger' raised against him.

## Is there some politics left for Imran?

Imran's politics, after his departure from power corridors in April 2022, could easily be divided into pre-and-post 9th May scenarios. The former and ousted prime minister was enjoying an undoubted majority; his party ticket was considered a hot cake for those eyeing the elections; and the aspirants were ready to pay tens of millions in cash to 'party funds' to secure an election ticket. It was really becoming harder for other parties to get suitable candidates against Khan's ticket holders. In view of such a promising political scenario, Imran Khan was rightly and squarely dreaming of a second-two-third majority government in the history of the country.

But then rises the sun of 9th May which literally set along with Imran Khan's politics, to a very large and visible extent.

Imran Khan was facing some solid and serious cases earlier as well. Although dozens of cases were registered against him during PTI's protests on different counts including the anti-terrorism act



but the Toshakhana, foreign funding, and the Al-Qadir trust cases, have some solid grounds to render Khan inside bars and outside politics. But, as history suggests, decisions in such political cases could result in convicts' (in this case IK) favor; and he could seize the opportunity to enrich his popularity.

Imran Khan was also making grounds among his party men that he could be disqualified in these 'fabricated' cases as the ruling alliance couldn't compete with him in the elections; he would maintain that PDM was trying to put him out of the way via disqualification in such cases. But what happened in the aftermath of 9th May was actually a 'question out of syllabus' for Imran Khan and his party.

Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf was ready for its May 9 action but certainly not for the 'reaction.' Military leadership took the 9th May attacks on its assets more seriously than Khan's imagination and categorically declared it a 9/11 for the country and the army. A decision to try the culprits under Army Act was an utter surprise and a shock for the Insafians, who realized too late 'what they had done.'

So for damage control and rectification, several PTI leaders and

parliamentarians began to disassociate themselves from the party, many even announced to quit politics. All these developments were a great shock for the 'all-important resident' of Zaman Park, Lahore, who in a video address declared himself to be 'alone' with no party leader remaining in his contact anymore. This was certainly a disastrous situation for PTI who a few weeks back claimed to be the 'single largest and most popular' party in the country. According to some prominent federal ministers, the IK case was terribly serious in the wake of a probe proving his involvement in the May 9 vandalism and as the mastermind of the entire mayhem. Khan could be tried in military courts, which would overshadow his electoral politics, at least for the coming elections, and that would be a great setback to the former ruling party of the country.

## Where would Imran's vote bank go?

Imran Khan, no doubt, still has a vote bank. What number can be discussed, given the post-9th May scenario? Where it could go is also unclear, however, calculations are on. Imran Khan is not disqualified yet and can contest elections but still, there is a few months' time left in general elections



and a lot can happen prior to that. Expecting Khan's possible disqualification to contest polls and lead the party, the deserting PTI leaders are eying for his vote bank to turn in their favor.

Jahangir Khan Tareen, former secretary general and one of the closest aides of Imran Khan, has suddenly become active in politics. Tareen, after a long and meaningful absence and several days of political consultations, has announced his Istehkam-e-Pakistan Party.

Jahangir Khan Tareen, an experienced billionaire politician from southern Punjab, has close relations with many important electable politicians in Punjab, some parts of KP and Sindh. He was actually the person mainly responsible for establishing the PTI government, especially in Punjab where after the general election in 2018, PTI was the 'number two' party in strength after the PML-N. Tareen directly approached all the independents and got their support to enhance PTI numbers over PML-N and establish a government in the largest province of the country.

Tareen's new party is actually a group of electables, who have their own constituency vote bank and also those who were previously part of PTI. So besides electable, Tareen is also seeking a PTI vote bank by including its faces in the party. On the other hand, some of the former important Punjab ministers like education minister Murad Ras and interior minister Hashim Doggar

initially had also announced to establish a political group with the name of 'democrats' to go for the upcoming elections and targeting the PTI vote bank but later Murad Ras met Tareen and joined his party while Hashmi Doggar announced to dismantle the 'democrats.'

Fawad Chaudhary, a vocal spokesperson for Imran before 9th May, after spending a few days in jail, announced to quit not only the party but politics too, but a few days later he reinitiated his political activities. Fawad claimed to establish contacts with some other former party colleagues and leaders like Shah Mehmood Qureshi, and Asad Qaiser but his claim was rejected by other sides and later Fawad joined JKT's Istehkam-e-Pakistan Party.

Smelling about his possible arrest and disqualification, Imran Khan has nominated party Vice Chairman Shah Mehmood Qureshi as his successor; but the Zaman Park meeting between the PTI chief and his deputy after Qureshi's release was not 'pleasant'. Sources claim that Khan was furious with Qureshi's advice to 'keep calm for some time and do not make any public statement, or go abroad.' It is anticipated that PTI couldn't get heavy-weight candidates this time and, it has to rely on new faces.

The 9th of May was a breakup day for PTI, which hit its voters and supporters as most of them were left with no other option except parting their ways with the party. It

is still believed that Imran Khan has his fan-following and voters' support base, but where these voters could go on the poll day: well most likely, the hardcore PTI voters would definitely go with the candidate contesting with the PTI symbol or they could abstain from elections as most of PTI voters are basically part of Imran's fan club, and if Khan would not be in the field they would find no interest remaining in elections.

Other than these two options, Tareen's party could get some of the PTI votes as JKT was the face of PTI for many years. He supported Khan in thick and thin and left him when he was enjoying good times in power and many PTI longtime supporters have regard for his efforts. On the other hand, Tareen is enjoying good relations with top PML-N leadership; and a seat adjustment is expected at least at the level of Punjab between these two parties which can benefit the former.

With all these happenings, PTI rivals are comfortable, specifically PML-N who with minus-Imran-PTI, has again become the favorite to lead the election race, especially in Punjab where it has had hurt its popularity due to a huge rise in inflation in its tenure of more than a year. Now if the National Assembly completes its term, elections are to be held before mid-October and there are still around four months to go. Still, lots of important developments have to take place. But for sure Khan's near future will decide PTI's ultimate future.







## Justice Munib casts aside '4:3 controversy'



By Nasir Iqbal

Casting the controversy of minority decision aside, Justice Munib Akhtar in a much-awaited judgement on the Punjab and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP) elections on Monday, threw his weight behind both nine-member and five-member benches constituted and reconstituted by Chief Justice of Pakistan Umar Ata Bandial — one as master of the roster and the other in response to a 'judicial order'.

In his 43-page judgement, Justice Akhtar dec-l-a-red that the Feb 27 order by the nine-member bench for reconstitution of the bench was a 'judicial order' and not an 'administrative order', marking a barrier between the two validly constituted benches.

He highlighted that Justice Yahya Afridi and Justice Athar Minallah, who dismissed these matters on the very first day, as well as Justice Mansoor Ali Shah and Justice Jamal Khan Mandokhel, who were part of the five-member bench, were also signatories as members of the nine-member bench to the judicial order.

Through its Feb 27 order, CJP Bandial after deliberations that lasted 90 minutes in an adjacent ante room had split the nine-judge bench into five-member bench to continue hearing the suo motu proceeding regarding delay in the election dates for the two provincial assemblies.

Signed by nine judges, the Feb 27 order stated that the matter was referred back to the CJP keeping in view the Feb 23 order and additional notes attached by Justice Shah, Justice Afridi, Justice Mandokhel and Justice Minallah, as well as discussion/deliberations made in the ante-room of the top court.

Later on March 27, Justice Shah and Justice Mandokhel in their detailed reasoning explained that the SC by a majority of four to three and not three to two had dismissed on March 1 the suo motu hearing on polls delay in Punjab and KP and therefore the same should be considered as the "Order of the Court".

Both judges had also questioned CJP's

'discretion' in regulating constitution of the benches and highlighted the need of revisiting the power of 'one-man show' enjoyed by the CJP office to ensure public trust and confidence in the judiciary.

### Judicial vs administrative order

In the judgement released on Monday, Justice Akhtar elaborated that the initial nine-member bench was constituted by CJP Bandial as master of the roster since the matters were placed before that bench on Feb 23 and 24.

It is apparent that the minority opinion does not dispute this, and also accepts that two members of that bench (Justice Yahya Afridi and Justice Athar Minallah) dismissed these matters on the very first day, he noted. Thereafter, the nine members of the bench unanimously made an "order" by referring the matter to CJP "for reconstitution of the bench".

This Feb 27 order was not and could not be



an administrative order, rather a judicial order made by the nine-member bench, Justice Akhtar noted, explaining that the reconstitution of the bench by the CJP to the present five-member bench was in response to that judicial order.

The judicial order constituted a decisive break — indeed, a barrier — between the two validly constituted benches, Justice Akhtar observed, rejecting the claim that the matters stood dismissed in the ‘self-computed’ ratio of four to three as ‘erroneous’.

It is noteworthy, he said, that both Justice Afridi and Justice Minallah were signatories as members of the nine-member bench to the Feb 27 judicial order. Indeed, he added, two other colleagues Justice Mansoor Ali Shah and Justice Jamal Khan Mandokhel — now in minority in the five-judge bench — were also signatories in same manner. “The failure of the minority opinion to notice and take it into account is therefore, and with great respect, implausible,” the judgement stated.

## Fresh start

It was neither a matter of administrative convenience nor facilitation of the “remaining five members of the bench”, Justice Akhtar noted. There was no such “further” hearing, nor any “remaining five members”, because the earlier constituted nine-judge bench had ceased to exist, Justice Akhtar observed.

Insofar as Justice Afridi and Justice Minallah were concerned, the unanimous request made for the reconstitution of the bench was in line with their orders of dismissal on Feb 23, the judgement explained. It said they had themselves accepted that their continued “retention” on the “present bench” may be of no avail, and had left the matter to the CJP. The judges believed they had, on account of their orders of dismissal, nothing more to contribute to the bench of which they were actually members. How then could anything said or done by them in such capacity be “counted” or “reckoned” when determining the proceedings before the

reconstituted bench of which they were not members? This, with great respect, is the central conundrum that lies at the heart of the reasoning adopted in the minority opinion, Justice Akhtar reasoned.

## Numbers game

“Where did the ratio 4:3 claimed in the minority opinion come from?” he wondered and then went on to explain that it could only have come about by taking two judges from the initial, validly constituted nine-member bench and all other judges of the subsequent, validly constituted five-member bench, and melding this number into a seven-member “bench”.

“This seven-member bench was never constituted, and which never existed in law or in fact.”

“Since there was never ever any such bench, there could not, ipso facto, be any decision in the ratio 4:3,” Justice Akhtar emphasised.

Thus by focussing on the number of judges and not the constitution of the benches, the minority opinion sought to breach the “barrier” posed by the unanimous judicial order of Feb 27 in which the matter was referred back to CJP Bandial for the reconstitution of the bench.

Courtesy Dawn







## The fall of the pied piper?



By Kamila Hyat

Let us be clear about one thing: Imran Khan as a sportsman and cricket captain for Pakistan was a formidable figure and quite naturally a hero for millions. These fans existed in Pakistan and abroad. His leadership style — a mix of aggression and clever strategies in some places — inspired others and turned him into a major hero in the country. It was this identification as a winner — and as a leader — which helped Imran begin his political success. Of course, there were many other factors behind the events which brought him to power in 2018, and he himself has accepted his links with state institutions this time. Unfortunately for Pakistan — indeed tragically for the country — Imran's style of leadership did not work in politics. His aggression turned into something so volatile that was rarely seen before.

From politicians we need diplomacy, patience, and an ability to think beyond the single idea of corruption in a corrupt opposition. It appears that Imran and his team did not have these skills. He was essentially a cult leader. We have historically seen many a cult figures in other parts of the world. We had the Moonies cult in Korea, Reverend Jim Jones — who led his

hundreds of followers to Guyana and ordered them to drink 'Kool-Aid' laced with poisonous substance which killed 900 or so including 300 children — and other well-known cult leaders like Charles Manson and his 'family' which engaged in murder and other heinous events in the late 1960s.

Pakistan has over the years had great politicians — it would be a disservice to compare Imran to any of them. They include brave figures such as Khan Abdul Ghaffar Khan who spent 37 years of his life in jail but remained firm on his ideology. His son Wali Khan followed essentially in the same tradition spending a long period of time in jail. In Balochistan, Abdul Samad Khan spent the entire period of the Ayub Khan regime in jail because he refused to change his views or ideology. There are other figures such as GM Syed from Sindh who also spent over 30 years in jail not because of any political activity but because authorities did not like their stance and found it best to incarcerate them instead of allowing a democracy with true differences of opinion within it to grow and develop.

There are a few questions now: what will

become of the cult Imran led? The fate of Imran himself will be determined by the courts, and by time. He could be disqualified or jailed, or he could be left to continue whatever remains of his career. But the way May 9 was orchestrated — presumably by the party — leading people to attack state buildings and installations on May 9 put at risk the lives of both young and older people, from lower-income and middle-income families in Lahore, Rawalpindi and other places.

Some of these people — in fact many of them — remain behind bars for stealing all kinds of objects, including a peacock. Their families have nowhere to go and nothing to show for what they engage in or what they did. Certainly, no ideological belief or any kind of principle was involved. They simply thought they were following a man who acted as a cult leader, and found themselves in an extremely difficult position: children and young men who knew no better and had never been taught history or politics or creative thinking at schools.

In the future, these people will most likely think a little harder. We already have some thinking taking place even now.





There are those who ask whether the May 9 events can be justified. Even some who had a role to play in them or who knew people who participated, have condemned the assault on public buildings, the burning of an ambulance and the other violent events which took place. They see the attack on sensitive buildings as dangerous. In Punjab, a majority of people have high respect for the armed forces and recognize it as a major defence force. The men in uniform stand tall in their eyes. We wonder how Imran stands now that he has been defeated and left to pick up the pieces of his shattered political career.

The events of the coming days will be interesting. We will closely analyze how the groups already breaking away from the PTI will take a shape of their own. One of them will, of course, become the new 'King's Party'. We do not know if the Elahi family or Tareen or someone else will become the chosen leader of this group. But it is likely that the group will do well and just as Imran was pushed into power, they will receive the same boost and similar assistance in their effort to acquire power. For Pakistan, the real question is what they will do with it and how they will handle things.

There are other questions as well. It is quite obvious that separation of powers needs to be practised in the country. This is extremely difficult and has not happened throughout Pakistan's history of over seven



decades, with hybrid regimes being the order of the day — year after year and decade after decade. There is still too much movement of various players on the chessboard to determine precisely what has to happen next and how. But we know that Imran is unlikely to play a major role in Pakistan's politics again. Already, people are criticizing how he put the lives of other people at risk while protecting himself.

How he asked his supporters to protect him in Zaman Park, allowing them to face the police while he remained within his home protected by his supporters who had come out on May 9 in hundreds. These 'hundreds of people' will not be enough to bring Khan to power. The fact that more people did not

come out shows that people know right from wrong and know that what happened on that day is wrong and should not have taken place. This is something from which all political parties can learn and gain wisdom.

The wisdom perhaps should match that of men from outside Punjab such as Baba Jan from Gilgit-Baltistan, who has protested for the rights of people in the region despite a long term in jail. These are real heroes. We need to recognize them and put them aside from mere cult figures such as Imran and others like him who we have seen throughout our political history.

Courtesy The News







# Destination unknown

By Arifa Noor

The PTI juggernaut may have been brought to a stop but politics in Punjab hasn't. It goes on at full throttle, with Asif Ali Zardari busy meeting electables in the province who are heading for the PPP after a long time. The PML-Q is also welcoming a few into its fold. But the biggest news of the week was the launch of yet another new party full of old, familiar faces, who had once walked the halls of Banigala. From those who had left earlier, such as Jahangir Khan Tareen (JKT) and Aleem Khan, to those who retired recently from politics, they were all there.

The launch was grand and was covered extensively but the reaction was, if we allow for a little bit of slang ... meh.

This perhaps was less due to the politicians collected there than our collective experience, lived and remembered. As many people keep pointing out, the script is now so old that everyone knows how it turns out — it's the butler, who did it. And everyone and their khala knows it.

Having seen it happen with the Jatoli-led National People's Party and the Chaudhry-led PML-Q and even the PPP-Patriots, who does not know that these 'marriages' of convenience work only for a short while? Eventually though, politicians have to return to the political parties once their non-political friends step back, for some reason or the other. In the meantime, there may have been cabinet posts and protocol but the years in the wilderness can be longer and the future uncertain for long. (Ask the Chaudhries.) Going back is never easy; not only is the leadership wary, so is the general public, and the media is harsh.

The unhappiness was hard to miss on the day of the launch of the new party.

In addition, there is politics. The party vote is the consolidating factor. But there are fewer and fewer electables who can win on their own steam. The best ones need a party ticket to make it across the finish line, preferably coming from a party that has a sizeable following. The PTI, for the moment, is popular in Punjab and has this vote bank but it comes with the leader and his endorsement; it is not there for those who have moved on.

These are the reasons why it wasn't easy to take the PTI apart until it became obvious how final the decision was. The politicians had known how close electoral victory was with the party ticket. Even then it took pressure. Perhaps this is why the unhappiness was hard to miss on the day of the launch of the new party: those leaving the PTI are doing so for the wilderness; there is no 'king' around who is going to ensure their victory. For, the king needs to be there, to be seen, and to rule, with his band of merry men. Invisible men don't really cut it, unless of course there is a plan to throw off the invisibility cloak which we are yet to be told about.

But moving on to the larger picture, what does this new party tell us

about the days to come? One, that unlike the past three elections, it is still not clear who is the lucky man about to be crowned. In 2008, 2013 and 2018, we all knew on whose head the hum was about to land. This time, we don't even know if the bird is circling above or not. JKT and his non-electables are best placed to strike a psychological blow or may just play spoiler. The PPP is said to be the blue-eyed party this time but its chances in Punjab still look dicey; it will probably need just a little less help than the Istehkam-i-Pakistan Party (IPP).

But more interesting was the reaction of the PML-N. Khawaja Asif and others were quick to say that the PML-N shared a good relationship with JKT and the two parties could carry out some seat adjustment. The last time the PML-N went in for such an arrangement was in 2008. Is this an admission that the party is already prepared for a similar outcome, i.e. a hung parliament this time and is looking around for allies?

It has long been said that those on whose behalf the IPP, the PPP, and even the PML-Q, are suddenly active don't want PTI to win but they also don't want the PML-N to win too big, which it might if PTI is forcibly removed from the electoral arena. After all, 1997 is not that long ago. The PML-N is aware of this; in fact, there are many who are wondering why the party is not worried. Khawaja Asif's statement shows the party is perhaps trying to conserve some political space by offering seat adjustments to the JKT group before others do.

But even then, the alliance will not be easy to pull off. Consider that Lodhran, where JKT contests from, is the stronghold of a PML-N cabinet minister and his group. The adjustments might not be all that easy to make.

All this points towards another, previously highlighted, possibility: the aim to create a hung parliament, and a coalition government to take things forward. But some are cautious and say this will happen only if the results from successful manipulation are evident in the crystal ball. If not, then there are no guarantees this season will give way to a new one.

Sounds like a plan. But — and there's always a 'but' — this plan doesn't really account for what will happen to the economy if there is no election. (Not that an election and a hung parliament bring much assurance regarding the economy.) However, the uncertainty around the political set-up will further delay everything on the economic front; even if people are certain the entire edifice can be held up — without or without a legal cover — there are chances this support will be there for a year or so. Either way, the roller coaster ride of Pakistani politics is set to continue and the only istehkam (stability) to be seen is in the name of the newly launched party.

Courtesy Dawn



# Babusar Top The Beautiful

**T**his will not be incorrect if, Babusar Pass (mostly known as Babasaur Top is called one of the beautiful passes of world. The pass is known for beauty in summer and its connection with northern areas of Pakistan.

IF we look into history of the Babusar It was previously known as Babur Top because the famous Mughal Emperor Babur used the same route at the beginning of the 16th century, which is one of the reasons for its success as a tourist attraction. With the passage of time Babur Top got famous as Babusar Pass, holding the title of the highest peak in the Naran Valley which is elevated at a height of 13,691 ft.

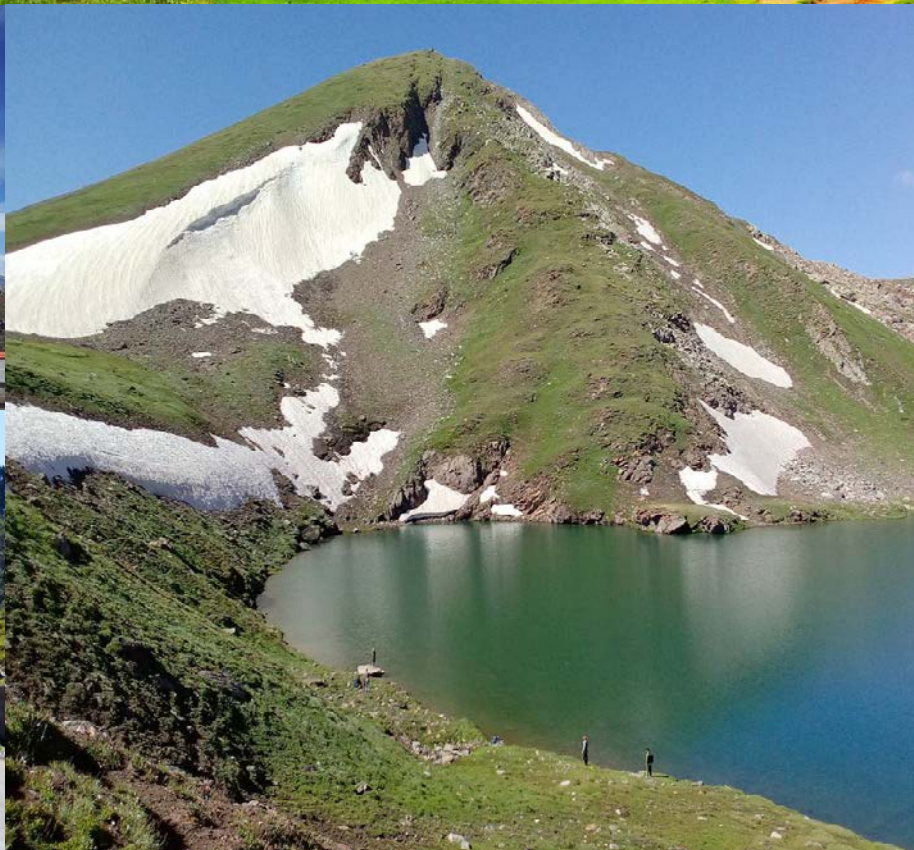
Babusar connects mountains that links up Kaghan with Gilgit-Baltistan via Chillas district. Babusar Top is known to provide easy access to its visitors via regular four-wheeled cars. On the contrary, Babusar Top is considered to be one of the most dangerous mountain slopes. It is therefore required to ensure every safety measure for this adventurous ride.

The movement towards Babusar Top is limited for the monsoon and winter periods. However, it is completely accessible and convenient to visit between May and September. Temperature, during May, ranges in between 11°C (highest) to 1°C (lowest). There are no hotels at the top of Babusar. Therefore, it will not be wrong to say that Babusar Top is a best place to visit but not to stay.

Malika e Parbat is the highest peak of the Babusar region that can only be witnessed from the Babusar Top. Other exquisitely spread plateaus, lush green meadows, fast-flowing streams, and snow-covered peaks of Kashmir across this region work as a bounty to the visitors' eye from the top view of Babusar. Moreover, sharp and steep turns of curvy roads with marvelous landscapes on both sides turn every trip into a lifetime experience.

Babusar Top is a place for nature lovers as it offers a wide variety of plants and animal species. One can find snow pigeons, owls, snow cocks, and hawks across the beautiful pine and oak forests nearby. Sheep and wild goats are excessively found in this area but cultivation is a challenge here because of harsh weather conditions and high altitude.







# Charter of economy and security nightmare

*Pak economic problems could not be separated from security issues; with military rule gone in 2008, the military continued to dominate decision-making; security threat from Taliban and Baloch separatists to determine our economic future; TTP currently has the largest component of 3,000 to 4,000 foreign fighters in Afghanistan*



By Umer Farooq

In the second week of June, officials from the Foreign Ministries of Pakistan, China and Iran met in Beijing to discuss the establishment of a formal joint counter-terrorism mechanism between the three countries. Mumtaz Zahra Baloch, the spokeswoman for the Pakistani Ministry of Foreign Affairs, stated in a recent weekly press briefing that the tripartite meeting was attended by the Director General of External Security in the Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Bai Tian, Director General for Counter Terrorism issues in the Pakistan Foreign Ministry Abdul Hamid Khan and Seyed, the director general of South Asian affairs at the Iranian Foreign Ministry.

Pakistan, China and Iran have been coordinating their efforts in counter-terrorism for the last several years. Intelligence chiefs of these countries also met last year to discuss joint counter-terrorism efforts against the rise of ISIS-Khorasan in Afghanistan.

This meeting aimed at developing a regional response to the rise of Sunni militant groups in Afghanistan and what Pakistan considers to be a threat of the rise of Baloch separatist groups, which are now operating from Iranian soil after their eviction from Afghan territory by Afghan Taliban.

The joint mechanism, according to experts, could be described as a

functional response to the threats to CPEC posed by Baloch separatist groups and the rise of ISIS-Khorasan in Afghanistan.

Both Iranians and Chinese share Pakistan's concern about the rise of ISIS in Afghanistan and reported links between Pakistani Taliban and Baloch separatists on the one hand and Pakistani Taliban and ISIS-Khorasan on the other hand. Ironically, there are very few voices examining the possible impact the rising wave of terrorists and militant violence will have on our economic conditions.

Normally, when we talk about political instability causing deterioration in our economic condition, we usually talk in terms of PML-N, PTI rivalry and PTI-military establishment confrontation. Our public discourse simply ignores the fact that the rising way of violence in our North West and South West will more dramatically impact our economy. Perhaps we are more ardently focused on our news channel screens to be able to contemplate otherwise how our security environment had impacted our economic capacity and how it would impact our economic conditions in future.

Not surprisingly, our political leaders are talking in terms of reaching a consensus between political parties for delinking economics and politics. Both

Prime Minister Shahbaz Sharif and former president Asif Ali Zardari recently talked about avoiding short-term decisions based on political expediency and focusing on making decisions about the economy on purely economic criteria. This thinking stems from the experience of past governments and the incumbent government in dealing with the bad decisions of their predecessors, which were taken based on political expediency.

Economic experts describe the "current crisis in Pakistan's economy can be attributed in part to the irresponsible fiscal behaviour of successive governments. Each administration has prioritized short-term political gains over long-term economic sustainability, leading to the current state of affairs. The problems began to emerge during the last year of the PTI government's tenure, with inflation rising and the fiscal deficit increasing. The government sought assistance from the IMF through a bailout package, but as Imran Khan's ouster became inevitable, the PTI administration torpedoed the deal by announcing an unfunded energy subsidy, leaving incoming officeholders to face the consequences," reads an analysis of economic conditions by a young expert.

"However, the situation was similar when the PTI took office in 2018. They



inherited a massive fiscal deficit of approximately \$20 billion and a currency crisis from the previous PML-N government. Despite the current finance minister's promises, the incumbent government seems clueless about managing the economy, and the situation has only worsened due to their pseudo-economics."

The problem is that even if all political forces in the society reach an understanding called the "charter of the economy" as it is dubbed by ruling coalition leaders, it will partially resolve our problems. We can say that after everybody signs such a charter, we can expect that political governments of the future will stop making intentional mistakes that could cause problems for their successors. However, with this thinking, we cannot wish away our security nightmares that stem from the revival of militant activity in our neighbourhood.

Pakistani Taliban are now again in a position to pose a substantial terror threat to Pakistani security forces and urban centres after they were allowed to regroup in Taliban's Afghanistan in August 2021. Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) or Pakistani Taliban have the largest component of foreign fighters presently stationed in Afghanistan after the Taliban takeover of Kabul, according to the United Nations monitoring committee report published last year. United Nations Security Council's ISIL and al-Qaeda sanctions monitoring committee's 30th report on the presence and capability of various terror groups based in Afghanistan shows that the TTP currently has the "largest component" of 3,000 to 4,000 foreign fighters in Afghanistan.

This number is larger than any other group of foreign fighters stationed in Afghanistan. TTP's central leader, Noor Wali Mehsud started efforts to reorganize the militant group sometime in 2020, when clear signs emerged about American withdrawal from Afghanistan. According to experts al-Qaeda leadership based in Afghanistan played a crucial role in assisting the re-organization of TTP in Afghanistan. According to the UNSC report, Noor Wali Mehsud's success in reuniting various TTP factions has made the group "more cohesive, presenting a greater threat in the region."

As the report mentions further, the "TTP is

working in alliance with other transnational jihadi networks, such as the East Turkestan Islamic Movement (ETIM), based in Afghanistan. The group is also tied to al-Qaeda, as the February 2021 report of the UNSC showed that the anti-Pakistan group's merger was facilitated by al-Qaeda." In the period between 2007 and 2014, Pakistani society witnessed a horrible wave of violence in which hundreds of security forces personnel and ordinary citizens laid down their lives.



The Pakistani government had in the past entered into peace deals with the Taliban only to be shocked later by a fresh wave of violence from the Taliban's side. In May 2004, Pakistan signed an agreement with the then-leader of the Pakistani Taliban, Nek Mohammad of South Waziristan. The agreement called for a ceasefire. The Taliban were allowed to retain their weapons. This agreement lasted only 50 days. In 2006, another agreement was signed, which the then-governor of KP, hailed as "unprecedented in tribal history." This, too, failed to bring peace. Another agreement was signed in 2008, which also failed to end terrorism.

The Pakistani government is facing a severe cash crunch and the country's economy is in no position to sustain a prolonged military campaign in the erstwhile tribal areas. The Pakistani military is engaged in a low-key counter-insurgency campaign in Pak-Afghan border areas against TTP. Making the situation worse is the recent unearthing of the evidence that the religious-minded TTP has started to collaborate with secular-minded Baloch separatists in their terror attacks in Pakistani urban centres.

There are other signs which point out that the TTP has found a strategist in their new leader, Noor Wali Mehsud, who is trying to withdraw TTP from any commitment to the world of international terrorism. Media reports suggest that experts concur that Noor Wali wants to focus his attention on the anti-Pakistani government and military campaign and wants to extract his organization from any situation where he has to face an American CIA-led drone campaign in tribal areas. In the past drone campaigns

had cost TTP heavily and now Noor Wali Mehsud doesn't want to rub the US administration on the wrong side.

Pakistani independent economic experts opine that Pakistan's economic problems could not be separated from its security problems. And more than the inter-party, political tensions and PTI vs military establishment tensions, the security threat emanating from Taliban and Baloch separatists will determine our economic future.

There are, however, strong apprehensions that mismanagement of domestic political situations could add to our political and security instability. Two factors should be taken note of in the analysis of Pakistan's path towards repressive and authoritarian tendencies in dealing with political freedom. First, the military establishment has never withdrawn from the decision-making process in the wake of Musharraf's removal from office. They continued to control the use of coercive machinery of the state as they were doing while the military was still in power.

The civil governments which came to power in the wake of Musharraf's exit

facilitated the military's control of the coercive machinery. They were inexperienced and afraid to deal with the militant threats directly and therefore delegated all powers to the military. This arrangement is continuing to date. Second, the military is for the first time facing a situation where Punjab-centric popular parties are raising their voice against the military's continued dominance of the political system. The military which appears to be in love with its image cannot afford this kind of political activity on its home turf.



The result is before our eyes. There is potential for violence in this situation. Punjabi middle classes have been facing economic hardships since the time this whole drama started to unfold. Devaluing currency, unemployment and price hikes are causing the shrinking of the Punjabi middle class, which has been deeply addicted to state subsidies since the time of the US-backed military government of General Zia-ul-Haq. More than state oppression, the economic conditions of these middle-class multitudes will determine the fate of Pakistan's political system. Oppression could prove to be a catalyst in the process of emerging street violence as a political norm.

Ironically, no deep thought is given to how and why authoritarian tendencies started to creep into our system the moment parliamentary democracy was restored in the wake of General Musharraf's resignation in 2008. We became a full-fledged parliamentary democracy in the wake of the 2008 parliamentary elections after the PPP-led parliament repealed the contaminations introduced by the outgoing military government. The civil governments of Asif Ali Zardari inherited two insurgencies—one in

erstwhile tribal areas and another in Balochistan—from the military government of Pervaiz Musharraf. Therefore, the situation of political freedoms in these two regions remained bleak from the commencement of parliamentary democracy in the country. Enforced disappearances were rampant in these two regions and remained rampant after democracy was restored in the country.

The island of freedom in the country that includes areas of Punjab, Islamabad and

Karachi was increasingly coming under the sway of authoritarian ways of handling political freedom and civil liberties. During the military rule of General Musharraf, Punjab saw a large number of cases of enforced disappearances. The military government, however, countered allegations of unfreedom by pointing out that they allowed media houses to open electronic channels, which was generally seen as a step towards unprecedented media freedom in the country. The military government then thought it appropriate to promote a Punjab-centric political culture and a media scene, which was also centred around Punjab, Islamabad and Karachi. If Balochistan and erstwhile tribal areas ever figured in the news coverage of Pakistani media it was to the activities of the Pakistani military—what was unpalatable about situations in these regions was seldom shown on Pakistani screens.

By the end of the first decade of restoration of parliamentary democracy in Pakistan, the honky dorky picture of Punjab, Islamabad and Karachi started to give way to an anti-military establishment atmosphere, where anti-military sloganeering became

common in political campaigns of Punjab-centric political parties. After the 2017 removal of a democratically elected Prime Minister, Nawaz Sharif from office as a result of a dubious judicial process, it became a no holds barred situation and the military establishment started to face scathing criticism from Punjab-centric political leaders and parties.

The absence from our political discourse of the discussion about structural reasons for the continued and increasing role of the military in managing the political mechanics in our society is the basic reason behind our blinkered view about the rise of authoritarian tendencies in our society. Political and media circles usually blame political leaders they oppose as the reason behind repressive and authoritarian tendencies prevailing in our political system.

The military as an institution assumed a commanding position as far as the decision-making process related to the use of force in the society was concerned during Musharraf's military government. PPP government conferred the power to apply force in dealing with the militant groups on the then COAS in 2009. This meant not only the power to exercise executive authority in the use of tools of coercive machinery of the state but the dominance of the intellectual tools to decide as to which forces are enemies of the state and which forces would be acceptable as legitimate players in the democratic process.

It is no surprise that the year 2014 when the military started to make the decisive push against militants in erstwhile tribal areas, was also the time when part of the military establishment started the campaign to get rid of Nawaz Sharif. In the wake of the 2007 rise of TTP and the military's successive campaigns to flush out the border region from these militants, the military started to dominate political and decision-making processes in the country. So, the military government might have gone in 2008, but the military continued to dominate the decision-making especially when it came to the use of coercive machinery of the state. Initially, it was militants who were at the receiving end, later this coercive machinery was used against political forces opposed to the military at the political level.



# Iran's embassy opens in KSA day before Blinken visit

*New international environment presents opportunities, challenges*

By Anum Akram

Saudi Arabia's embassy in Iran remained shut for quite a long. In 2016, Iranian demonstrators stormed it and forced its closure, causing an abrupt stoop in Saudi-Iran bilateral ties. Attack on Saudi embassy in Tehran was triggered by the death penalty awarded to a top Saudi Shia cleric Sheikh Nimr al-Nimr, in January 2016.

Hostilities furthered when Saudi Arabia was joined by the United Arab Emirates in its Yemen war, where the pro-Iran Houthi rebellion overthrew the Saudi-backed regime and took control of capital Sanaa.

Saudi Arabia and Iran finally announced in Beijing this March to reopen their embassies, ending seven years of hostilities and hatred. Brokered by China, the peace deal has made both the nations endeavor for reviving direct flights, boosting trade and rebuilding business connections. Iran has reopened its embassy in Riyadh, while Saudi Arabia has yet to reciprocate. Iran's move would make it easier for citizens of both the countries to travel in and out. Iranian pilgrims will now find it pretty easy and short to apply for Saudi visas for Hajj and Umra.

The Saudi-Iran rapprochement is considerably aimed at securing peace, stability and prosperity in a region affected by wars in Yemen, Syria and Lebanon. The Beijing peace accord also highlighted China's own expanding sway in the Middle East.

Tehran named Alireza Enayati as its envoy to Saudi Arabia last month. Many diplomats and government representatives attended a ceremony held inside the Iran embassy to celebrate diplomatic mission's first reopening in seven years. "We consider today as an important day in vis-à-vis relations between Islamic Republic of Iran and Saudi Arabia," Iran's Deputy Foreign Minister for Consular Affairs Alireza Bikdeli said.

The UAE was one of the first nations to applaud Saudi Arabia's decision to normalize diplomatic ties with Iran. In a phone call with his Saudi counterpart Prince



Faisal bin Farhan bin Abdullah, the UAE Foreign Minister Sheikh Abdullah bin Zayed al Nahyan conveyed his greetings.

Finally, the two years of backchannel negotiations between Saudi Arabia and Iran proved fruitful. The new international environment presents opportunities and challenges of its own, therefore regional states must simultaneously deal with it.

There are many other constructive exchanges happening in the area. In order to foster economic relationships, the Iranian Minister of Roads and Urban Development, Mehrdad Bazrpash, traveled to the United Arab Emirates in the first week of May.

This included establishing a direct container line between Jebel Ali and Bushehr as well as strengthening commercial and civil aviation ties. Separately, the UAE announced on May 31 that it had withdrawn two months earlier from a US-led naval coalition entrusted with safeguarding sensitive Gulf waterways that are essential to the world's oil traffic.

According to a statement from the foreign ministry, the UAE "withdrew its participation" in the 38-nation Combined Maritime Forces two months ago without citing any justifications.

The day before US Secretary of State Antony Blinken was due to land in Saudi Arabia, where he has vowed to press for rapprochement with Israel, Iran's embassy reopened. Blinken stated that while the Biden administration believes in negotiation, "all options will be on the table" to prevent Iran from gaining a nuclear weapon during a meeting of the American, Israel Public Affairs Committee on June 5 in Washington.

Blinken also said that Iran posed a serious threat to Israel. Both Iran's nuclear program and the range of its drones and missiles, which the United States claimed were responsible for a significant strike on Saudi oil installations in 2019, continue to cause Saudi Arabia great concern.

The Emirati decision to leave, according to The Wall Street Journal, was motivated by irritation over what they believed was the US's lack of action in the face of Iranian threats. After these recent instances, the US daily said that the UAE was dissatisfied and had urged that the US take more action to dissuade Iran, citing US and Gulf officials.

The UAE declared its dedication to diplomatic engagement and conversation to promote regional peace and stability as well as guarantee international law-abiding

navigation safety near its coasts. The choice alters the dynamics of global collaboration in maritime security at a critical juncture in the geopolitical history of the area.

The United Arab Emirates attempted to interact with Tehran in 2019 by strengthening diplomatic ties in August, motivated by economic interests that depend on its reputation as a secure corporate haven. For the first time since 2016, Iran has appointed an ambassador to the United Arab Emirates.

On the other side, the normalization agreement between Saudi Arabia and Iran may create a strong basis for the long-desired stability and spark increased intra-regional cooperation and economic growth. The region's nations increasingly agree that economic cooperation will spur regional rapprochement, as the Baghdad Conference on Cooperation and Partnership's most recent session made clear.

By investing in infrastructure projects, supporting energy transition initiatives, and assisting reconstruction efforts around the region, the UAE will profit from this laid-back culture and may contribute to the good momentum.

The UAE was informed of the former minister of defense and armed forces logistics of Iran, Ali Shamkhani's trip to Abu Dhabi and Dubai shortly after the Saudi-Iranian accord that the two nations' relations are unaffected by Iran's agreement with Riyadh. Tehran continues to give importance to Emirati apprehensions and sees Abu Dhabi as a significant partner in



geopolitical conflicts that are important to its interests.

The UAE's usefulness to the Iranians is best demonstrated by the Syrian situation. For Iran to maintain its ability to project influence across the Levant and conduct strategic calculations, the survival of the Bashar al-Assad regime in Syria was essential.

The UAE is the only member of the GCC to have actively supported Arab nations' efforts to normalize relations with Damascus during the past few years.

The UAE asserts that its outreach to Syria principally tries to distance Damascus from Iran, while also providing a vital diplomatic lifeline to the Assad regime, which is currently under international sanctions, and legitimizing the Syrian regime, which coincides with Iran's long-term strategic objectives. Therefore, despite their

divergent objectives, Iran will benefit from having open lines of communication with Abu Dhabi as long as the UAE actively contributes to preserving the Assad government in power.

Regardless of whether the agreement on Saudi-Iran reconciliation holds up, the UAE will keep using its special geopolitical position to defend its agency. It can optimize its strategic interests by deftly weaving its diplomatic position between competing factions in the Gulf.

The UAE would refrain from publicly condemning Riyadh with regards to possible tensions with Saudi Arabia, instead opting to defuse tensions as they develop. The UAE's national security depends on sustaining its long-standing cooperation with Saudi Arabia, but maintaining flexibility and the capacity to pursue an independent foreign policy comes first.





# The ‘aubash’ hand in India’s pain

By Jawed Naqvi

‘AUBASH’ is a Persian word whose meaning, if grasped correctly, could help explain the runaway success of Hindutva as an Indian phenomenon. Japanese scholar Hiroshi Kan Kagaya’s insightful work on the role of the aubash in the Iranian revolution and two earlier political turbulences in the country makes one ponder its relevance also for South Asian politics, and beyond.

For Indians struggling with Persianised Urdu, the word occurs memorably in a cult movie from the 1960s in which Mughal Emperor Akbar chides his wayward teenager son imperiously. “I wouldn’t ever want to see the day when our beloved Hindustan becomes a plaything for an aubash prince.” Akbar was fuming at finding the boy prince wading into early signs of what he saw as a drunk hoodlum.

The word finds a wider currency in Kagaya’s exposition of aubash in the Iranian context. Marxist intellectuals would readily equate it with their preferred pejorative, the lumpen proletariat, though they do not always accept the part that class has played in their own rise and fall. In India, we saw the class switching loyalties en masse from the left to rival groups, chiefly the current populist ruling dispensation in West Bengal. Another tranche broke off from the left to back the rise of Hindutva forces in the former leftist bastion.

In modern Iran, aubash have embraced various functions — social, religious, economic and political, says Kagaya. The structures appear to have been cannily replicated by Indian groups, say, the Shiv Sena or the Bajrang Dal. Some Pakistani and Sri Lankan vigilante groups are similarly structured. The aubash flaunt a close tie with their own ‘mohalle’ (ward), which they protect, control and identify themselves with. Along with it, they belong to a traditional varzishgah (sport centre), or zurkhane (wrestling club) as a centre of physical and spiritual activities. A boss of aubash is usually supposed to be a master wrestler who sometimes embodies the civic virtues of javanmardi, depicting machismo or chivalry.

Take the police away from the grasp of the chief minister of Uttar Pradesh, and he would have to auction away his bulldozers at a steep discount.

The promise of gallantry need not always work for women. Difficult to miss the role of the aubash — in cahoots with the police, inevitably — in the custodial death of the Iranian woman detained over charges of not observing hijab. “Educate the daughter. Protect the daughter.” The official slogan is embossed on India’s public transport vehicles. The message quickly mutates, however, into a patriarchal state’s mealy-mouthed promise when the ruling class goes out of its way to protect a loyalist accused of molesting women wrestlers. The release of around a dozen convicts jailed for rape and murder in the Gujarat pogroms of 2002 reflected another example of the truer face of javanmardi at work.

Economically, the aubash have control over the underworld. The Shiv Sena comes into the frame readily. A similarity can be found also with the Japanese yakuza. Often enough they promise and

supervise low-level jobs. They gather unskilled workers, mostly slum dwellers and urban migrants from rural areas, seeking employment even in unlawful work. Prime Minister Modi’s advice to them to “fry pakoras” was an honest option by comparison. “In short, underemployed or unemployed slum dwellers need aubash for their daily earnings ... Relations between yakuza and temporary workers in Japan bear a similarity.”

In politics, the aubash are allies of any established regime, says Kagaya. They are heads of mob demonstrations to be hired easily, primarily by security organisations, or by anyone who can foot the bill and sustain them durably. “The fact suggests that they have been a reservoir of violent reactionaries in modern Iran, while this could be somewhat remodelled after examining their function in the Islamic Revolution.” The Sanjay Gandhi phenomenon rode a steady supply of the aubash. Their post-emergency migration to rival parties was characteristic: seeking the more powerful patron.

Prof Christophe Jaffrelot has prompted the question whether India’s deep state had become vested in Hindutva. The scholar of South Asian politics posited in a recent analysis in the Indian Express that Hindu nationalism’s organisational linkages may have added an extra layer to the Indian deep state by extending its social reach to district and neighbourhood levels. Jaffrelot implies a lack of malleability in India’s deep state, which is assumed to be, like its cousins elsewhere, a security-driven state within a state.

Let me propose an alternative view, one proffered by Dr Mubashir Hasan, the late Pakistani public intellectual. Dr Hasan scoured Indian politics with an eagle eye. He told me during a visit to Delhi after a tour of West Bengal and some BJP-ruled states that political parties in our patch, once they take power, sustain it with an alliance between the cadre and the police. Hindutva is no different. Take away the police support needed by the cadre to inflict pain and exploitation on whoever they choose to target at any given time, and chances are their rippling sinews would go into an abrupt recess. The change of guard in Karnataka, evicting Hindutva rule, offers a good example to illustrate Dr Hasan’s view. As for the deep state, it’s possibly too stymied by its upper caste limitations to have much of a say in managing the political choices the country can summon.

Take the police away from the grasp of the chief minister of Uttar Pradesh, and he would have to auction away his bulldozers at a steep discount. Remember the time when an opposition party was in power in the state? Yogi Adityanath, MP, was bawling in the Lok Sabha. Without the communist Speaker Somnath Chatterjee’s assurances of safety, the saffron-clad politician wouldn’t stop crying. Gujarat 2002, Delhi 1984, marking widespread violence against Muslims, or inflicting a pogrom against Sikhs, would not be possible without the alliance of the police and India’s aubash. Both change their tune with the change in the political winds.

Courtesy Dawn

# Pakistanis have a bias against women

## TTI Report

The United Nations claimed that 99.89 percent of Pakistanis have a bias against women. The UN made this startling disclosure in its report.

According to the UN report, 99.89% of Pakistanis had at least one gender bias during 2017-22. The percentage was 98.52 of those with at least two biases against women. The share of people with no bias at all was just 0.11%, according to the report.

The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) reported this in its updated Gender Social Norms Index (GSNI). The GSNI takes into account political, economic, educational, and physical integrity metrics – using data from the World Values Survey. It is an international project that examines how values and beliefs are changing globally.

By gender, 100% of women and 99.79% of men have at least one bias. Also, the share of women with no gender bias is 0% among women and 0.21% among men from 2017-21.

The prejudices “are widespread among men and women, indicating that these biases are deeply embedded and influence both men and women to similar degrees”, the UN report adds.

The index shows “no improvement in biases against women in a decade,” the UNDP said, “despite powerful global and local campaigns for women’s rights” such as MeToo.

For instance, globally 69% of the world’s population believes that men are better political leaders than women. Nonetheless, only 27% believe that women must have the same rights as men.

## Man can beat his wife

One-fourth of the population also considers it justifiable for a man to beat his wife. Prejudices create “hurdles” for women and are “manifested in a dismantling of women’s rights in many parts of the world,” the report said.

“Without tackling biased gender social



norms, we will not achieve gender equality or the Sustainable Development Goals,” it said.

Despite a surge in women’s rights groups and social movements like Time’s Up and MeToo in the United States, biased social norms and a broader human-development crisis heightened by COVID-19, when many women lost their income, have stalled progress on inequality.

In the report, the UNDP tracked the issue through its Gender Social Norms Index, which uses data from the international research program World Values Survey (WVS). The survey draws from data sets spanning 2010-14 and 2017-22 using data from 80 countries and territories, covering 85 percent of the global population.

## Biases

The analysis showed that almost nine out of 10 men and women hold fundamental biases against women and that the share of people with at least one bias has barely changed over the decade.

In 38 of the surveyed countries, the share of people with at least one bias decreased to just 84.6 percent from 86.9 percent. For example, 69 percent of the respondents still

believe that men make better political leaders than women, and only 27 percent believe that it is essential for democracy that women have the same rights as men.

Nearly half – 46 percent – believe that men have more right to a job, and 43 percent that men make better business leaders. A quarter of them also think it justifiable for a man to beat his wife, and 28 percent believe that university is more important for men.

Though education has always been hailed as key for improving economic outcomes for women, the survey revealed the broken link between the education gap and income, with the average income gap at 39 percent even in the 57 countries where adult women are more educated than men.

The degree of improvement over time has been “disappointing”, said Heriberto Tapia, research and strategic partnership adviser at UNDP and co-author of the report. Prejudices create “hurdles” for women and are “manifested in a dismantling of women’s rights in many parts of the world”, the report said.

“Without tackling biased gender social norms, we will not achieve gender equality or the Sustainable Development Goals,” it added.



# The Women Fighting Japan's sexual violence stigma

*Rina Gonoï was sexually assaulted by fellow soldiers during her time in Japan's army*

By Shaimaa Khalil

**R**ina Gonoï had two dreams. To be a soldier, and to compete in the Olympics as a judo player.

She started judo when she was four years old, trained by her brother, and was 11 when she first saw soldiers in action.

The armed forces, known in Japan as the Self-Defence Forces (SDF), had helped Ms. Gonoï and her family in an evacuation center after the 2011 earthquake and tsunami disaster. The 23-year-old is from Higashi-Matsushima in Miyagi Prefecture - the area worst hit by that catastrophe.

Female soldiers were part of the aid effort. "They gave us food and ran a soup kitchen," Ms Gonoï says.

"They were back and forth bringing hot water for us so we could have a bath. I looked at them and thought 'What a wonderful job.' I thought I would like to work for society - for the people."

Both her dreams were within reach when she joined Japan's army, the Ground Self-Defence Force (GSDF).

Both were shattered by sexual harassment which she experienced "on a daily basis" when she joined her unit after training.

"My body parts were rubbed. I was kissed on the cheek, groped, or grabbed from behind in the hallway - colleagues or superiors would rub themselves against me with people watching," she said.

"Often, I was told things very objectional.

Colleagues made remarks about her body.

August 2021 was a dark turning point.

During a training exercise in the mountains, three of Ms Gonoï's male colleagues called her into a tent, where they'd been drinking.

"They were talking about a martial arts technique that involved choking someone and putting them to the ground. They said,



'Gonoï try it' - they pinned me to the bed and choked me."

Around a dozen colleagues were around she said, adding that no one stopped the three men: "Many were laughing."

"I was filled with despair. I thought, 'How could I live after my body and soul have been tainted?'"

She reported the incident to her superiors but was unable to obtain any witness testimony, and her complaint was dismissed.

Later, the three men were referred to prosecutors on suspicion of indecent assault by the GSDF police unit, but the case was dropped for lack of evidence.

In the end, Ms Gonoï felt she had no choice but to quit and go back home.

"I was exhausted mentally and physically and isolated myself in my house," she said.

When she decided to go public with her story, Ms Gonoï's family and those around her were against it.

In Japan's male-dominated society, most sexual violence victims are shamed into silence. And those who speak out face a fierce backlash.

A recent survey showed that more than 70% of sexual assaults in Japan go unreported.

When Ms Gonoï decided to speak out, she knew it wasn't going to be easy. She was taking on a Japanese military institution.

She shared what happened to her on YouTube. Her story was a rare case that captured the nation's and the media's attention.

Ms Gonoï says that other women and men shared their stories of sexual violence with her, both in the military and elsewhere. She also collected more than 100,000 signatures for a petition calling on the defense ministry to investigate her case.

But she also faced a backlash.

"Some would say 'You are ugly' - others would comment on my cauliflower ears because I'd been doing Judo. Some would say 'Are you actually a man?'" she said.

"When I was collecting signatures for the petition, I got a threatening email saying, 'I'll kill you if you go any further.'"

The last case that garnered this much attention was in 2019, when Japanese journalist Shiori Ito filed and won her civil

lawsuit seeking damages from a prominent reporter who she said had raped her.

It was also the same year that the Flower Demo movement started. On the 11th day of every month since April 2019, groups of sexual violence victims and their supporters have gathered throughout Japan in public spaces to protest unjust acquittals of sexual crimes and call for changes to the country's sexual violence law.

Problems with the existing law were highlighted by not-guilty verdicts in four cases in 2019. In one of the trials, a father accused of raping his 19-year-old daughter was acquitted even though the court acknowledged that he had had sex with her against her will. The prosecution's case, that the man took advantage of the daughter's inability to resist the sexual attack, was rejected.



"I started the Flower Demo because I was angry," Minori Kitahara told the BBC after one of the gatherings in Tokyo. "I also felt many other women's anger. But there's no place to speak out."

The gathering in central Tokyo was small but significant, and quite moving. Some people were carrying placards: one said "Sexual abuse is unforgivable" in Japanese, while another written in English said, "Consent is everything".

The Flower Demos have become a symbol of defiance against silence.

A woman held a microphone and, through her scarf and mask, you could still see how

emotional she was as she told the crowd how her father had sexually abused her as a teenager. Men and women were in tears, including Ms Kitahara.

In February, the Japanese government approved a bill to raise the age of sexual consent from 13 to 16, as part of reforms to the country's sexual violence penal code.

Under the current law, a victim bears the onus of proving not only that there was no consent, but also that there was "assault or intimidation" or other factors that made it impossible for them to put up resistance.

"I think the law is very discriminatory... Compared to other countries, it still disadvantages female victims. When I think about all those victims who could not speak out, I cannot help but think the law itself was a crime against victims," Ms Kitahara said.

"I know [the age of consent] is about to change to 16 but... the fact it stayed at 13 for this long is a big problem."

Ms Kitahara thinks that because the Japanese government is made up mostly of "old men" it makes it very difficult for them to understand what women go through.

The public attention that Rina Gono's case garnered pushed the military to conduct an internal probe. Last December, five servicemen were fired, and the unit commander was suspended for six months. The rare investigation across the defense ministry found more than 100 other complaints of harassment, according to officials.

The ministry also issued an apology to Ms Gono.

She said that she wants to prevent this from happening again to anyone and that the government was also responsible "for neglecting the case."

"I want each [SDF] member to be protected," she said.

Earlier this year, Ms Gono filed a civil lawsuit against the five perpetrators and the Japanese government, seeking 5.5 million yen (\$40,000; £32,000) in damages from the men for causing her mental distress, and an additional 2 million yen from the state for its failure to prevent abuse.

I asked her why, having experienced so many attacks since she went public, she was pursuing this lawsuit.

She hesitates. You can tell none of this is easy.

"I love the SDF so much," she said. "They helped us during the [2011] disaster. This was the last thing I wanted to do."

"I just think this is not right. I still get flashbacks of what happened. It's cost me so much."

In March, Fukushima prosecutors indicted three former members of Japan's GSDF on suspicion of indecent assault in relation to Ms Gono's case.

Tweeting after the indictment, Ms Gono said she felt her "work had not been in vain" and that she hopes the three "reflect in full and atone for their crimes".

"I've spent a long time feeling totally unable to accept why none of them were being prosecuted. Every day has been a struggle," she wrote.

Ms Gono says she wants to travel and move on with her life.

"I'm a fun-loving person. I like to make people laugh and I like to smile. I want to show people that I can still live positively and enjoy my life. I want to live as I am - I want to be myself."

Courtesy BBC



# Longing to live life in West

*Thousands of talented Pakistanis leave country for greener pastures; sense of social safety, economic stability drawing youth abroad; emerging Gen-Zs eager to migrate for mental peace, freedom to live freely*

By Sara Danial

How genuine is the problem of brain drain in Pakistan? The other day, as I was going through the morning newspaper, something caught my attention. It didn't startle me to read the headline stating Canada's intended plan for its immigrants by 2025.

Its federal government announced an aggressive plan to take in 500,000 immigrants a year by 2025, with almost 1.5 million new immigrants coming to the country over the next three years. Today, at 7.6 million, there's a reason why the Pakistani diaspora is one of the largest in the world, with an estimated 4 million Pakistanis in the Persian Gulf region.

**Non-resident Pakistanis are rapidly becoming not-returning Pakistanis. Why so?**

Let's begin with a familiar story. All of us have that uncle or aunt who lives in the US, UK or Canada. This is not a story of the recent past. This longing to live life in the West is not a concept of the bygone era. Since many years, thousands of talented Pakistanis from various disciplines have left the country in search of greener pastures.

For many years, the badge of migration was a sign of honor. Because you made it to the cut; you survived and you made a life for the next generation. You were 'successful'. You have been able to realize the most singularly pursued dream. And this was mainly because Pakistan is unable to offer the same prospects to its citizens as its western counterparts. So is our brain drain problem getting worse? For a very long time, foreign degrees have been a favorite amongst Pakistani students, and South Asians in general. Every year, more than 50,000 Pakistani students go abroad for pursuing higher studies. The popular destinations for pursuing education are the United Kingdom, the United States, Canada, China and Europe. The top rankers amongst these are just a fraction of the student migration.

While the running theme for this concept is the lack of well-recognized educational facilities and lack of recognition of talent, there is also an unsettling sense of dissatisfaction among the students - that the prevailing Pakistani educational system is inept and inadequate at preparing them for the challenges of the increasingly globalized world. The absence of innovative courses is drawing numerous students to leave local shores for better education overseas.

One of the primary reasons why Pakistan's young, skilled labour force leaves is in pursuit of better recompenses for their effort and talent. However, better compensation is not the only driving force for migrated students, and skilled professionals. It is the general sense of social safety net, and economic stability that are few of the main reasons for families to relocate. Although the vast majority of overseas Pakistanis reside in the Middle East, the US continues to be the favorite destination, with Canada quickly catching up, mainly because the ME bubble bloated soon.



The notion of a welfare state that cares for the family's basic needs of education and health are available at quite an affordable price. It is, of course, too good an offer to be blatantly refused, especially by a Pakistani who has to struggle for the very basic roti, roads, and raahat.

Speaking of brain drain, the not-so-startling fact is that it is not only pertinent to students or young skilled professionals. The emerging Gen-Zs are eager to go abroad with equal measure. Settling abroad is, for them, the trend – not merely for a sustainable future and better prospects, but for mental peace and the freedom to live the way they want, without having to conform to ridiculous societal disorders that the Pakistanis thrust down our throats.

I admit things have changed for good but its pace is excruciatingly sluggish. While globally, the pace seems far more rapid. Of course, for a few recent years, one did witness a slump in people leaving Arabian shores for abroad. This is attributable to the digital boom in the country with virtual alternatives available at the click of a finger and blink of an eye; along with a cohort of entrepreneurial ventures flooding the corporate landscape. But since then, there's again been a rise in the number of people leaving the country.

Various solutions can be adopted by the Pakistani government to plug the brain drain, such as prioritizing skill development with a mission to train a certain number of people across the country by 2030. However, this alone will not curtail the problem. It would be folly to look at brain drain through a narrow sensibility. We need to address the urgent need to first understand what is compelling them to leave the country. Several questions need to be asked.

An internal reflection is imperative – as a country, as a nation. The questions about quality of life, mental and physical peace, employment opportunities, social structure, health facilities, financial and social security, human development, gender equity, religious freedom. Do we have 'em all? Because if one goes amiss, the longing to pursue it in a different country will keep compelling Pakistanis to leave the country.

# How to curb Islamophobia in Western countries?



By J. Choudhry

**I**slamophobia is a form of prejudice or discrimination against Islam or Muslims. It can be expressed in a number of ways, including verbal abuse, physical assault, and discrimination in employment or housing. Islamophobia can have a devastating impact on the lives of Muslims, leading to fear, isolation, and even violence.

There are a number of things that can be done to overcome Islamophobia in the West. These include:

- **Education:** One of the best ways to combat Islamophobia is to educate people about Islam and Muslims. This can be done through school programs, community events, and online resources. By learning about Islam, people can come to understand that it is a peaceful religion that teaches tolerance and compassion.
- **Interfaith dialogue:** Another important way to overcome Islamophobia is to foster interfaith dialogue. This involves building relationships and understanding between people of

different faiths. When people get to know each other, they are less likely to fear or discriminate against each other.

- **Challenging stereotypes:** It is also important to challenge stereotypes about Islam and Muslims. These stereotypes are often based on misinformation and prejudice. By challenging stereotypes, we can help to create a more accurate and positive image of Islam and Muslims.
- **Standing up against discrimination:** When we see Islamophobia, it is important to speak up and stand up against it. This can be done by challenging discriminatory comments and actions, and by supporting organizations that are working to combat Islamophobia.

Overcoming Islamophobia is a complex challenge, but it is one that is worth fighting for. By working together, we can create a more inclusive and tolerant society where everyone feels safe and respected, regardless of their religion or beliefs.

Human trafficking is a complex issue with no easy solutions. However, there are a number of things that can be done to overcome it in the future. These include:

- **Raising awareness:** One of the most important things that can be done to combat human trafficking is to raise awareness of the issue. People need to know what human trafficking is, how it works, and who is at risk. This can be done through education, public awareness campaigns, and media coverage.
- **Strengthening laws and enforcement:** Strong laws and effective enforcement are essential to combating human trafficking. Governments need to enact laws that criminalize human trafficking and provide for the protection of victims. They also need to invest in law enforcement agencies so that they have the resources to investigate and prosecute trafficking cases.
- **Supporting victims:** Victims of human trafficking need access to support services, such as housing, food, medical



care, and counseling. These services can help victims recover from their experiences and rebuild their lives.

- **Addressing the root causes:** Human trafficking is often rooted in poverty, inequality, and lack of opportunity. Addressing these root causes can help to prevent trafficking from happening in the first place.

By working together, we can overcome human trafficking and create a world where everyone is free from exploitation.

Here are some specific actions that you can take to help overcome human trafficking:

- **Learn about human trafficking:** The more you know about the issue, the better equipped you will be to help. There are many resources available online and in libraries.
- **Talk to your friends and family about human trafficking:** The more people who are aware of the issue, the more likely we are to be able to prevent it.
- **Support organizations that are working to combat human trafficking:** There are many organizations working to end human trafficking. You can donate your time, money, or skills to help them in their work.
- **Report suspected cases of human trafficking:** If you suspect that someone is being trafficked, report it to the authorities. You can also call the National Human Trafficking Hotline at 1-888-373-7888.

By taking these actions, we can make a difference in the fight against human trafficking.

Causes of Islamophobia in western countries

Islamophobia, or the fear, prejudice, or discrimination against Islam and Muslims, is a complex issue with multiple causes in Western countries. While it's important to recognize that Islamophobia is not universally present, the following factors contribute to its existence:

**Misinformation and Stereotyping:** Lack of accurate knowledge about Islam and Muslims often leads to misconceptions,

stereotypes, and generalizations. Media portrayal, biased reporting, and limited personal interactions can reinforce negative stereotypes, portraying Islam and Muslims as inherently violent, oppressive, or incompatible with Western values.

**Extremist Acts and Terrorism:** Acts of terrorism carried out by individuals or groups who claim to be motivated by Islam have contributed to the negative perception of Islam and Muslims. These acts receive significant media attention, which can reinforce existing biases and create a link between Islam and violence in the public consciousness.



**Political Factors:** Political events, such as conflicts involving Muslim-majority countries, wars, and geopolitical tensions, can fuel Islamophobia. Public discourse, political rhetoric, and policies targeting Muslims or communities perceived as Muslim can contribute to a climate of fear and hostility.

**Cultural Differences and Integration Challenges:** Cultural differences between Muslim communities and the majority culture can sometimes create tensions. Issues related to dress, religious practices, language, and social norms can be perceived as threats to national identity or values. Difficulties in the integration process can exacerbate these tensions.

**Economic Insecurity and Social Factors:** Economic anxieties and social insecurities can contribute to the scapegoating of

minority groups, including Muslims. Muslims, particularly those of immigrant backgrounds, may face discrimination in employment, housing, and education, leading to marginalization and a sense of alienation.

**Lack of Interfaith Dialogue and Understanding:** Limited opportunities for meaningful interfaith dialogue and understanding can perpetuate stereotypes and divisions. Increased interaction, education, and exposure to diverse perspectives can foster greater empathy and reduce prejudice.

**Islamophobic Discourse:** Certain individuals, media outlets, and extremist groups propagate Islamophobic narratives, contributing to the spread of fear, hostility, and discrimination. This can be done through hate speech, online platforms, or extremist ideologies. In recent years, there have been instances of hate crimes, vandalism of religious institutions, verbal abuse, and discrimination targeting religious minorities. These incidents are not limited to a single religion but affect various communities, including Muslims, Jews, Sikhs, and others.

It's crucial to address these causes through education, interfaith dialogue, media literacy, policy interventions, and community engagement to promote tolerance, understanding, and acceptance of diversity.

# Career counselling: questions and answers

By Syed Azhar Husnain Abidi

**Q1:** Dear Mr Abidi, I regularly read your columns. I have two children who are studying in a local English medium school. However, I'm confused which study system would be the best in future for my kids, either Cambridge/O levels or Matric? Some of my relatives and friends are suggesting that my children get an English medium/Cambridge education, as it would be better for higher studies. Although my kids are very young, I think this is the right time for making decisions about their education/ system. I look forward to your advice. (Rebecca Khokhar, Lahore)

**Ans:** Dear Ms Khokhar, let me advise you that our national curriculum which we normally refer to as Matric/FA/FSc (10+2) is a well structured system and believe me there is nothing to worry about that. On the other hand, CIE which is normally referred to as O/A levels is fit for those students who plan to get foreign education/undergraduate degree for which they go abroad after passing A levels. Therefore, if you think you can easily afford the British education system and you are serious about sending them to a foreign country for further studies then the CIE system should be your choice. However, intermediate students who do FA/FSc also go to foreign countries for studying bachelors and further education and I can assure you that they have a double edge of passing national entry tests which give them more success as compared to O & Level students. I hope the above information would be of great help and clarifies the situation.

**Q2:** Dear sir, I passed my high school (Intermediate) from Canada. Due to some certain reasons, I couldn't continue and never studied further. Now I'm about 35 years of age and live in Karachi. Do you think I can start my studies at this age if I want to? Can you please advise what should I study? (Allah Bux Dino, Karachi)

**Ans:** Dear Mr Dino, you can start over again and resume your education any time when you wish as the education is not conditional to age or time. While I am not sure if the education you refer to as high school is equivalent to intermediate? However, I recommend you to consult your



current qualification with IBCC whether it is an Intermediate (12 years of education)? If this is so, then you may start your education on the basis of the equivalence provided. You can find the IBCC details on the internet.

**Q3:** Dear sir, my youngest brother passed matric with A+ grade and started ICS but he failed in two major subjects. Personally, he was not happy in ICS. Afterwards he started FA, and he is now 2nd part of FA. Please guide me about his best feature. (Zanjabeel Hussain, Multan)

**Ans:** Dear Zanjabeel, thank you for your inquiry. However, I can only advise you to let your brother focus on his studies and try to get good marks in his FA. However, you didn't mention which subjects your brother is now studying in his FA. Once he successfully passes his FA then he should think and choose one of the streamlines in which he has more interest and got a good grip to take up in his future career.

**Q4:** Dear Mr Abidi, I have recently passed my Mechanical Engineering, a 4-year

degree. Now I'm thinking of doing a degree which gives me a good combination of engineering and management. I want to study for such a degree so that I have more career prospects and options when I go for a job in the industry. Do you think I should do a Masters in Business Administration or an MSc? (Sher Aly Fatyana, Toba Tek Singh)

**Ans:** Dear Sher Aly, after going through your background details, I suggest you should gain some relevant work experience for two or three years then only you should think over which area of management you should study to add value to your degree. You should try Masters in Technology Management (MSc) or Project Management. I would advise you to gain practical experience after your current degree even if you get an internship without a salary. This will give you a chance in developing contacts and gaining a professional edge over newcomers who look for a job without any experience.

Courtesy The News



# Human rights costs of climate crisis

*Floods of 2022 exposed human crisis already existing in system; being on top of climate risk index  
Pakistan was cooking up potential climate crisis many years back*



By S Zeeshan A Shah

Pakistan was hit by the 'storm of the century'. What occurred as a climate-change-related event became an imminent climate disaster.

The nightmare began last year in 2022 during the spring season. According to NDMA (National Disaster Management Authority), Pakistan floods claimed over 1800 lives, injuring over 13000 people, destroying over 1.7 million houses, and impacting over 33 million in the biggest GLOF event in history.

The havoc that raged in the Indus River and its tributaries due to heavy torrential rains and flash floods left one-third of the country submerged under water, unleashing a massive energy crisis, food insecurity, and a major health emergency in the country that continues today. GLOF (Glacier Lake outburst floods) is a calamity event and a nature crisis is a climate crisis that always leads to human rights being violated.

In April 2022, the South Asian Monsoon Forecasting Forum predicted the climate crisis, after the GLOF event shook the country in the Gilgit Baltistan Province. GLOF is a climate emergency event where melting glaciers release millions of cubic meters of water and debris, from the mountain

down to the land, leading to the loss of property, homes, shelter routes, and human lives in the impoverished remote of the KP Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Province, Sindh, and Baluchistan where subsequent flooding lead to 40% of the population below the poverty line and under the blade.

On July 22, the shift in monsoons resulted in two separate weather systems- the monsoon rains from Eastern and Southeastern regions during the summer and the changing weather pattern in the Mediterranean Sea during the winter over the non-monsoon mountain regions of Baluchistan province mountain regions. This resulted resulting in a catastrophic climate crisis.

In short, the GLOF event laced with multiple tracks of monsoon depression, hitting Sindh and Baluchistan province on August 22, battered over 94 districts of the country, blowing away houses, roads, bridges, dams, rivers, schools, hospitals, and fields displacing millions of people. All previous Pakistan MET department records were broken as the aftermath of this natural disaster event.

Overall, Pakistan witnessed an intense 'heat wave', skipping spring after winter in the vents that followed on mid-June 22. In September 2022, United Nations

took notice of the event, after discovering the horrific extent and scale of the disaster. The UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres visited the country the same month. He defined the event as a 'Monsoon on Steroids'. It is important to note that Pakistan being on top of the climate-risk index, was cooking up a potential climate crisis many years back.

Rapid industrialization without protocols in place, reckless energy use, poor agricultural practices, increasing deforestation, bad consumer practices, weak implementation of protection laws, inefficient transportation, higher fuel and diesel prices, and heavy land and sea pollution had already resulted in rising temperatures, higher sea levels, increase in extreme weather conditions, combined with high land degradation, loss of wildlife and declining bio-diversity. The flash floods were bound to hit Pakistan.

When did it all become a 'Human Right Cost 'to the nation? A climate event in itself is a major cost to human beings living in that province, where an environmental crisis is bound to result in a major health crisis. The floods of 2022 merely exposed the brewing human crisis already existing in the system, thereby compromising people's 'basic rights to life'.

The geography of the region that is Pakistan today, exacerbated the situation as water of the increased flash floods added rain to the already existing water system accumulated in the deep pockets of the province of Sindh, leading people into heavy chest-deep water with no high ground to move to from low lying areas, with major routes cut off, further decreasing 'access to shelter-zones'.

Post-UN Intervention, it was identified that the initial rescue response by the government of Pakistan was slow. The UN cluster along with UNFPA (United Nations Population Fund), the World Food Program (WFP), the International Organization of Migration (IOM), and UNICEF, moved into action to provide oversight thereafter. According to a study by World Weather Attribution, Pakistan National Disaster Management Commission did not lay out effective preparedness and delivery system protocols, as NDMA (National Disaster Management Association) – the executive arm of the commission was not prepared to handle the scale of damage that hit the country.

"Pakistan's disaster risk paradigm is deeply centralized with limited avenues for hazard or vulnerability mapping at the local provincial level": was the assessment. When the damage became apparently out of control, the government called for support from other nations, donors, and relief agencies.

A national emergency was eventually declared by the government on August 22.

Hereon, it became apparent that this climate event had actually resulted in one of the biggest 'human rights costs' in recorded history. The Rights to Health were compromised. Accumulated flood water resulted in an outbreak of various illnesses. With high temperatures, lack of hygiene, and rotting corpses of dead livestock, the flood victims faced a terrifying ordeal. A lot of people contracted various skin diseases from constantly swimming and wading underwater and also due to close proximity to each other while seeking shelter. This increased the risk of communicable diseases.

Stagnant water week on week further leads to the spread of Malaria and Dengue. Primary and tertiary care health infrastruc-

ture was damaged beyond limits. The death tolls began to rise. Waterborne diseases began to threaten the flood victims, due to water filled with contaminants such as animal and human excreta. In the absence of adequate water purification tablets or filters or any means to boil water, gastro-enteritis hit the people on a major scale in some heavily populated water pockets with cases of cholera also reported in many provinces.

Another major threat identified was the 'limited access to reproductive health'.

Out of 33 million people, over 1.6 million women of reproductive age were impacted. An estimated 128,000 of these women, aged 15-50 were pregnant with 42,000 births expected in the next three months (July to Sep 22).

Despite emergency clinical arrangements made by government with the support of relief agencies, many women were deprived of access to basic emergency care, feeling an acute sense of loss of dignity, given the unavoidable proximity to strangers, when needing to access reproductive healthcare.

A disproportionate impact on the health of the women was witnessed during this event, due to 'period poverty' and lack of access to menstrual hygiene products. Shockingly, female hygiene products were not made a part of the relief packages, offered to flood victims. This was a major finding, with a resistance to inclusion of hygiene kits in relief kits and packages sent by civil society members.

In the overall analysis of the event, the major setback faced by the population was the 'mental and emotional health' of the flood victims. It was 'the trauma'- seeing their homes destroyed, their animals and livestock dying and their life savings washed away'. The social networks of all these people were destroyed, due to their loved ones migrating from their home-towns.

Combined with the inability to process their shock and grief, many aid workers further reported a sense of 'fear' in the women and children over the constant gush of water and living out in the open in tents and sometimes without any means of shelter over their heads, under the open sky.

The Rights to Food were also compromised. According to WFP's October 2022 report, the number of flood victims facing an expected food emergency would reach 14.6 million from December 2022 to March 2023.

The Right to livelihood was deeply impacted as well due to breakdown and law and order, raising fears of 'asset security': with assets, fixtures, livestock and cash being reported stolen after the damage to houses. This was another reason for the rising death toll as lot of people stayed behind in their crumbling homes, for fear of losing their assets if they left. Many victims were unable to be rescued.

Being an 'agricultural economy', a huge chunk of the standing agro-crop was wiped away by 'Hydro-Floods'. Earlier severe shift in weather patterns had already compromised the yield and quality of wheat, with the country then facing a major wheat shortfall due to shortfall or inequalities in water distribution to various districts.

Water from the dams was apparently not allowed to flow in the Southern part of the province in April 22, when the wheat cycle was completed and land was being prepared for the next crop. The fact that there was an ideal opportunity for these dams to be filled by the forecasted glacial melt (GLOF) and increase amount of rainfall, was overlooked.

Farmers suffered losses that further increased fears of food and economic insecurity. In Sindh province, over 3 major districts suffered a massive emergency with over 40% of the province under water. Receding flood waters revealed a massive emergency, as most farmers were not offered adequate loans to replenish their losses. Others feared a massive debt-trap, with relief packages receiving criticism from agriculture community regarding disparity in terms of loan facilities being offered at the time.

The Rights to Education were massively compromised. Over 27000 schools were damaged permanently affecting the already disrupted educational infrastructure. Schools left standing were converted to shelter homes, which prevented children from resuming their education, after the waters receded. Poor alternative learning



facilities were put in place in campsite areas, there was no long-term solution as displaced people having migrated their children to safer grounds, had no way to seek admissions to schools there, failing to submit proper registration documents, that were all lost in the floods and during the migrations. Sports and recreational facilities for the youth and children were also destroyed, along with access to formal education. Due to safety at risk, the children became the most vulnerable and ignored segment of the population affected by the floods.

Finally, the Rights to Housing were severely compromised as well. Restoration of damaged infrastructure is always the most difficult of all tasks when it comes to rehabilitation. There were over 780,000 houses destroyed and 1.27 million houses partially damaged, with Sind province being the worst affected with over 83% of total housing damages.

Overall, the country faced PKR 1200 billion in damages to houses and PKR 137 billion in house losses- the biggest loss in recent decades. This was where the impacts were 'climate risk' were visibly seen. Loss of access to water and sanitation, health hazards, and the wipeout of pure drinking water due to heavy contamination was the actual impact of the flood of 2022.

As we have seen in disaster management worldwide, the re-construction phase comes much later down in the list of priorities, same was the case in Pakistan. Grappling from 'donor fatigue', the assessment and damage control estimates targeted were not fully attained. Even after six months of the floods in July 22, there were millions of people left under the skies, without any of their food and shelter needs met. Winter brought other challenges, such as severe needs to seek shelter from the cold, with no heating and electricity arrangements in place for the majority of the flood victims.

Post 2022, high profile meetings took place with policy makers, disaster management authorities, climate activists, environmental experts, public health authorities and civil society organizations on 'climate induced disasters, to formulate a 'climate mitigation strategy' that could result in 'effective climate justice' before the next monsoon arrives in July 2023.

Summing up, the agenda was finalized over the following key points on the 'way forward plan' on attaining 'climate justice'. 1) Effective Evacuation and Rescue Plan to be in place during climate disasters, ensuring safety, privacy and dignity of the people. 2) Equitable provision of emergency relief and medical aid for affected flood victims, especially pregnant women and children. 3) Mitigating dangers to public health and food and water scarcity arising from climate emergencies such as flash floods, smog and droughts. 4) Development of climate friendly policy to ensure control on carbon emissions and focusing to 'Go Green' and protection of blue-carbon habitats and such mangroves and other natural eco-systems.



What was lost in the past must be regained in the near future.

As we enter yet another dangerous monsoon-phase this July, lessons must be learnt fast and policies must be adopted for implemented sooner than later. The institutions put in place after the 2005 earthquake of 2005, and the 2010 floods, must be made functional immediately without delay, accordingly to the purpose for which they were formed in the first place. Here, local disaster management bodies like PDMA-Provincial Disaster Management Association- the provincial executive arm of NDMA must be given resources and decision-making power to independently work without political intervention, with budgets allocated to them in advance. More focus needs to be done on 'Disaster Risk Reduction-DRR', by seeking pro-active solutions to prevent mass migrations, that we saw in the past.

The readiness response now needs to be in line with the level of potential climate threat assessed. Mapping of vulnerability zones, with implementation and monitoring. Geologists with professional expertise need to be recruited by Ministry of Climate Change and NDMA to increase the preparedness of the government, to be seen as taking this matter seriously.

Pakistan has one of the highest 'tele-density' rates in the world, with millions of people having access to radio coverage and mobile access. Media must be engaged now to come up with informative documentaries and programs using mainstream and social media to further reach millions of people in language-friendly transmissions, by launching a 'massive awareness drive' on climate risk,

climate resilience for eventual 'climate justice' to be seen all across the country.

The next monsoon is upon us. In the face of in-coming danger, resilient nations survive and Pakistan is a survivor nation. It is up to our policy makers now to take this agenda on priority, to avoid further 'human costs' to the nation.

Rights to life cannot be compromised anymore.

We pray for God Al-Mighty to save our people from the onset of GLOF- flash flood events in the coming year. With economic activity at its lowest ebb with less than 1% GDP growth and billions of dollars of debt repayment, we need to engage the global community to secure climate funding beforehand, otherwise we will be facing the biggest storm of the century and irreversible damage to our human populations leading to an all-time 'Human Rights Costs' to Pakistan.

# He ran out of countries to visit, so he created his own

By Richard Collett

"I like to put it simply," says Randy "R Dub!" Williams, a late-night "slow jams" DJ from San Diego who's also known as "the Sultan of Slowjamastan." "I ran out of countries, so I created my own."

A broadcaster by night, Williams has spent his life attempting to visit every country in the world. With just one UN-recognized nation left to visit, he decided to buy an 11.07-acre plot of empty arid land in the California desert to build a new "country" named after his radio show.

Wearing his best suit and sunglasses, the sultan of Slowjamastan officially declared independence from the United States of America at 12:26 p.m. on December 1, 2021 as he broadcast the secession live from his open-air government "office" in Dublândia, the capital of the Republic of Slowjamastan.

Two years on, and while the Sultan of Slowjamastan has instigated more than a few bizarre laws (he's outlawed the wearing of Crocs, for example), the Republic also has all the trappings of a fledgling nation-state. It issues its own passports, flies its own flag, prints its own currency ("the duble"), and has a national anthem that's played on state occasions.

The Republic of Slowjamastan even claims over 500 registered citizens, while 4,500 more are said to have been conditionally approved or are waiting in line for citizenship. Now that Williams is set to complete his lifetime goal of visiting every country in the world, he's inviting tourists to visit the Republic of Slowjamastan as he plans to create the world's foremost "micronation."

## The Sultan of Slowjamastan

"When I'm not on the radio, I'm probably traveling to a country most haven't heard of," Williams told CNN



not long before heading on a trip to Turkmenistan, the final country on his list of 193 UN-recognized nations. "One of the reasons I created Slowjamastan was because, after 193 countries, I wanted a 194th!"

Officially named The United Territories of The Sovereign Nation of The People's Republic of Slowjamastan, Williams' self-declared "country" is located off California State Route 78, a two-and-a-half-hour drive northwest of San Diego. The small plot of land isn't much more than desert, but Williams has erected an enormous "Welcome to Slowjamastan" sign by the highway, he's built a border control post and flies the colorful Slowjamastan flag above his ministerial office, which is currently open to the elements.

Williams was inspired to create his own country after visiting various "micronations" – self-declared territories often run by eccentric leaders – on his world travels.

In August 2021, Williams visited the Republic of Molossia, an 11.3-acre micronation in Nevada that declared independence from the United States of America in 1998, where he was given a personal tour by "His Excellency President Kevin Baugh." He learned about the Republic of Molossia's

ongoing "war" with now-defunct East Germany, how the local currency (the "valora") is backed by chocolate chip cookie dough instead of gold, and had his passport stamped and his photo taken on the "border" with the United States.

When he returned home to San Diego, Williams immediately began drawing up grand plans for his own micronation. In October 2021, he purchased a plot of land for \$19,000 and by December had declared Slowjamastan's independence.

## A dictatorship in the desert

"We're a dictatorship most of the time," Williams says, as he explains his Republic's system of "government." "On occasion, we'll hold special voting ceremonies and referendums. Recently, I allowed citizens to vote on what should be our national fruit, sport, and even what our national animal should be named."

It might seem quite paradoxical for a "republic" to have a dictatorial sultan as its head of state, but that's the point. Williams' travels have taken him to some of the world's most curious destinations, and he's seen firsthand the bizarre cults of personality and



contradictions that exist in places like The Democratic People's Republic of North Korea.

Williams likes to pose for photographs and make public addresses wearing his bright green sultan's uniform, complete with faux military awards, golden epaulets and tinted sunglasses. He hires "border guards" and surrounds himself with "security" when he hosts events in the Republic of Slowjamastan and enforces a list of prohibitions that all citizens and visitors have to follow in order to avoid "banishment." Currently, these prohibitions include "Crocs," "mumble rap" and "people who put their feet on the dashboard."

The Sultan of Slowjamastan's character and dress is Williams' way of highlighting the absurdities found in politics and dictatorships, and there's a long line of people ready to share in his micronational experiment. People can apply for citizenship and cabinet positions via the Slowjamastan website, and it's proven exceptionally popular, with a backlog of applications numbering into the thousands.

He's now opened the border to tourists, too, and he tells CNN Travel how the most popular activities include taking selfies in front of the Slowjamastan sign, visiting Independence Square and searching for the elusive Slowjamastan raccoon, the national animal.



His next grand plan is to raise enough funds to build "a lazy river, an armadillo farm, an all-you-can-eat Mongolian BBQ establishment and, of course, a giant statue/monument of The Great Leader (me)." "We also host a handful of activities throughout the year," Williams adds, "including opportunities to have your Slowjamastani passport stamped, join in on the commemoration of new states, and even meet the sultan."

## In search of diplomatic recognition

Williams says he's working on diplomatic ties with other countries.

Williams says he's working on diplomatic ties with other countries.

## Republic of Slowjamastan Ministry of Communications

Williams says he is working on creating diplomatic ties with other countries, and he's had his Slowjamastan passport stamped by 16 different countries on his recent travels, including South Africa, New Zealand, Vanuatu, and the United States.

He makes it clear that Slowjamastan technically meets the criteria for a sovereign nation-state as defined by the 1933 Montevideo Convention, which is typically cited as the best definition of a country.

The Montevideo Convention requires a country to have a permanent population, a defined territory, a government and the capacity to enter into diplomatic relations with other states, all prerequisites which Williams claims the Republic of Slowjamastan has met.

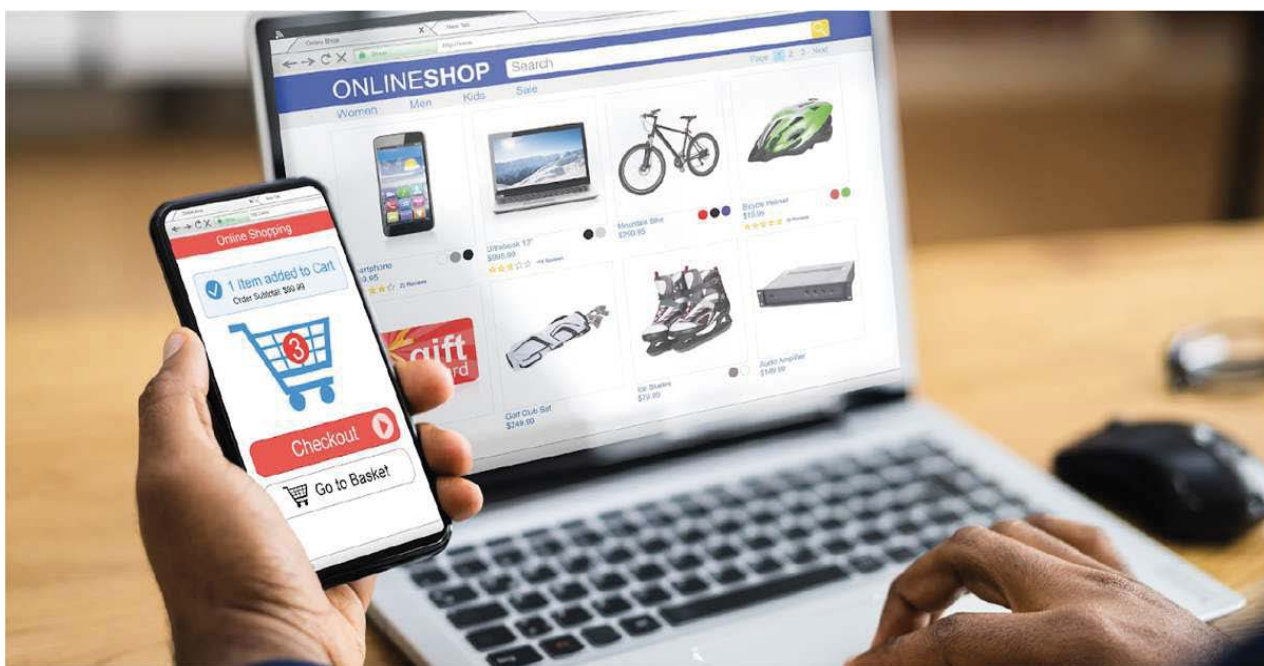
The next stage is for the sultan to gain recognition of his micronation's secession from the United States, although that might be a little far-fetched even for Williams.

"I'm a little frustrated to admit that, despite emails and DMs to President Biden on Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and MySpace, our messages have all been left unread," explains Williams. "Perhaps they are stuck in his spam folder. We're going with that."

Courtesy CNN



# Tech startups can potentially rewrite the fate of Pakistan's poor – but many pages can they?



By Momina Ashraf

Sabir Quraishi, a second-generation Afghan refugee would step outside his small two-bedroom rented house in Peshawar with nothing but hope to find work. He would wait on the greenbelt in drizzling rain and scorching heat, to secure some work in construction or plumbing but most other times nowhere. Going back to his aged parents, and a disabled older brother with a hardly Rs 150 in hand was Sabir's everyday reality.

In Pakistan, the minimum wage is Rs 25,000 and millions are pushed even below this. With added barriers, such as gender, caste, and ethnicity the opportunities to work and progress narrow even more. However, Sabir changed his destiny by utilizing his smartphone and access to the internet. In November 2022, he took a leap of faith and borrowed Rs 2500 from his friend to enter the e-commerce industry as a supplier. "I really wanted to try my luck with e-commerce so I promised my friend to return his money in just a few weeks. I didn't know how but I deep down knew this would work out for me.

And so it did. His first supplies of fourteen facewashes were sold out in a day and he earned a profit of Rs 1680.

Sabir did not stop there. He ventured to cutlery, cosmetics and clothes. Different products sell differently at different times. By understanding the market trends he is now able to earn at least Rs 40,000 with each batch of supplies. On average, Sabir earns Rs 120,000 every month, an income higher than the starting years of a white-collar job.

With internet penetration at 36.5%, the lifestyles of the masses of Pakistan are on the brink of change. Markaz understands this evolution and establishes itself among the pioneers of social e-commerce in the country. E-commerce in Pakistan is still in its nascent stages, but it is growing rapidly. According to the State Bank of Pakistan, the number of registered e-commerce merchants increased from 571 in 2015 to 1,516 in 2019. Similarly, the number of e-commerce transactions increased from 3.4 million in 2015 to 29.7 million in 2019. A report by eMarketer shows that e-commerce sales are projected to go up to \$2.1 billion in 2023.

In an already promising industry, Markaz sets itself apart with its reselling feature. This means the users can resell listed products among their social circle by charging profit of up to 100% of the

listed price. The packaging, delivery and all other logistics are taken care of Markaz, and the reseller can essentially create a passive income by zero investment.

Therefore, the kind of users Markaz targets are the ones who otherwise have no means of financial independence. 48% of the users on the app are female who mostly don't have formal education or work experience. One simple conversation with them quickly reveals their culture and social norms at home. "A lot of the women thank us for providing them an opportunity to work while maintaining their purdah (religious veil). Most of our women are not highly educated. They are housewives who never had any exposure outside of domestic chores. But seeing them earn money, and collect funds for major life events like children's wedding assures us that we are doing something right," recalled a customer service associate at Markaz.

Ecommerce startups are not alone. The technological boom in Pakistan is being utilised to address the crippling development problems of Pakistan. A Chitral-based startup, AIVestify, is working to eradicate poverty in the valley with the use of artificial intelligence.



“By leveraging AI technology, we can identify areas where poverty is widespread, assess the impact of our intervention and allocate resources more efficiently,” said Khairuddin Shaidani, CEO of AIVestify in a presser conference in February. The startup aims to create a trillion-dollar fund by 2030, and empower the Chitrali community by offering free courses on online earning and AI technology. It is targeted at the poor and uneducated youth, who otherwise do not have the means to enter the formal economy. “After losing Rs. 2.5 million and four years, I have created this program specifically for fresh or jobless youth and working professionals who are eager to learn online business and enter the exciting world of trading,” writes Shaidani while announcing a course on his LinkedIn.

## The roadblocks

Pakistan is largely a cash-based economy, with access to digital banking to only 21% of the population. With situation as such, it becomes difficult to pertain transparency in online businesses. It is not uncommon here for customers to not receive an online order to avoid paying when the time comes. “I placed 15 orders, and all of them were returned,” said Shazia Khan, a reseller in a Facebook group. It is impacting the whole ecosystem. “A lot of the orders were returned because they couldn’t be delivered” on time. People ordered clothes for Eid and they were delivered after Eid so a lot of them refused to receive them”, she added.

“Digital payments and logistics are the main pillars for e-commerce,” said Shoaib Khan, CEO of Markaz. “There is demand from the hills to the deserts, but not many delivery services are available only in big cities,” he added. Similar is the case with online payments. When there is a lack of trust in delivering the right products at the right time, a lot of the customers will not be comfortable making advanced payments.

Despite an impressive rate of digital penetration, e-commerce platforms haven’t gained a great deal of traction in Pakistan because most transactions are cash-based. Studies estimate that nearly 95 percent of companies in Pakistan receive payments for their online orders via cash-on-delivery—and a large unbanked population makes the transition to digital payments only more difficult. “Currently the system of non-bank digital payments is extremely tedious which demotivates the mobile wallet users from making a purchase,” suggests Khan. “This is something we have always prioritised. To capture the demand of the masses, we offer imbedded finance experience, such as Easypaisa and Jazz cash, which they use more than formal banks,” he added.

With many heights yet to be achieved the tech industry faces abysmal challenges from the state. It’s no news that due to political instability, Pakistan remains vulnerable to power and internet blockade. Although its monetary effect is usually recovered there’s a heavier price that becomes difficult to

pay: the image problem. Tech startups, built on the fundamental model to attract FDI, often face reluctance from foreign investors due to precarious market conditions. “Every year, Amazon Web Services (AWS) studies Pakistan as a separate case study from clustered regions. The company is deeply interested to expand in Pakistan. There is massive potential due to a large population and availability of tech talent, but the company still isn’t here. Why so?” remarked Fawad Hussain, a former employee at AWS. “There are things outside the IT industry’s control such as stringent policy about data, energy and telecommunication limitation, security challenges which restricts an international company like AWS from expanding in our country,” he sighed.

In a country where universally popular platforms such as Wikipedia and TikTok have to constantly fight their case, there is a long path to tread to create a conducive investment environment. Last month, the internet shutdown following former Prime Minister’s arrest, led to an estimated loss of \$3 million, according to P@SHA, an association for IT companies in Pakistan. But what followed was even more astounding. VPN usage closed at 1,329 percent more than on the previous 28-day average, noted Simon Migiliano, CEO of Top10VPN. Such a situation paints a clear picture, Pakistanis are tired, and thanks to technological advancement they are also very much well-prepared to write their own narratives.



# Asia Cup Fiasco: Pak unwilling to concede entire competition

*ICC urges Pakistan, India to resolve issue amicably, to give decision soon*



By Ali Abdullah

The location of the event has been the subject of numerous discussions, arguments, and considerations in the run-up to the 2023 Asia Cup. There has been much back and forth on where and how the competition should be held as a result of India not receiving government approval to visit Pakistan, the host country.

Najam Sethi, the chairman of the Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB), has suggested a hybrid system in which some games would take place in Pakistan while others would be played at a neutral site.

The latest rumours on the arrangement show Sri Lanka as the front-runner to host the tournament, adding to the suspense surrounding it. Pakistan, on the other hand, is still holding firm to their position and is unwilling to concede the entire competition.

Since the cricket board would be forced to go to India for the 50-over World Cup later this year, they are likely to use the competition as a justification for taking that severe stance.

As a result, several alternative venues have been suggested for the tournament, including Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, Oman, and even the UAE as a sole host. The final decision on the

venue is yet to be made, and it remains to be seen whether all participating teams will be willing to travel to the venue that is ultimately chosen.

The Asia Cup is a prestigious cricket tournament featuring teams from across Asia, including India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, and Afghanistan. The tournament is typically held every two years, with India being the defending champions from the 2018 edition.

The uncertainty surrounding the venue for the 2023 edition of the tournament is a source of concern for cricket fans and stakeholders alike. However, efforts are being made to ensure that the tournament goes ahead as planned, with the safety and security of all participants being given top priority.

The International Cricket Council (ICC) has been closely monitoring the situation and has urged both Pakistan and India to resolve the issue amicably. The ICC has stated that it is important for the game of cricket that the tournament takes place in a peaceful and secure environment.

Meanwhile, other cricketing nations are also closely watching the developments, especially those who are scheduled to participate in the tournament. If the tournament is not held, it will have

a significant impact on the financial and cricketing landscape of the region.

The Indian cricket board has stated that it is willing to host the tournament, but only if the Pakistan team agrees to travel to India. However, Pakistan has maintained that it will not participate in the tournament if it is hosted in India. The situation remains fluid, and it remains to be seen how the issue will be resolved. The ICC is expected to make a final decision on the venue for the tournament soon.

If the tournament is not hosted by Pakistan there are a lot of chances that Pakistan will pull out of the 50 over world cup happening in India later this year. Financial cost and viewership will decrease as Pakistan is a cricket loving nation and their team not participating in the tournament will leave no interest. Other than this, players and team ranking will be effected by not participating the tournament. Pakistan is currently 2nd in the one day international rankings meanwhile we have three batsmen in top 5 rankings where Babar Azam is on number 1 since 2021. Pakistan might lose all these rankings if they pull out of the tournament. In the end the decision is in PCB and ICC's hands. The fans are just waiting for some good news soon.



# Messi's transfer to Inter Miami

*Messi, once pride of European football, has practically been released for free by two big clubs in past two years*

Lionel Messi announced his decision to sign with Major League Soccer Franchise Inter Miami as a free agent after leaving French champions Paris St. Germain and declining a hefty contract offer in Saudi Arabia.

After playing his farewell games for PSG over the weekend, Messi was rumoured to be considering a move back to Barcelona, but the Spanish club's choices were constrained by LaLiga's financial fair play rules.

"I still haven't closed it 100%. I'm still missing a few things, but we decided to go ahead. If Barcelona didn't work out, I wanted to leave Europe, get out of the spotlight and think more about my family."

Messi won the Ligue 1 championship in his two seasons at PSG as well as the French Super Cup in 2022. Messi, who led Argentina to World Cup victory in Qatar in December and holds a record seven Ballon d'Or honors, also won the French Super Cup in 2022.

"After winning the World Cup and not being able to go to Barca, it was time to go to the US league to experience football in a different way and enjoy the day-to-day," Messi said. "Obviously with the same responsibility and desire to want to win and to always do things well. But with more peace of mind."

The move is also a big win for MLS, which welcomed Messi while adding that work remained to finalise the details of the formal agreement.

"The (goat) is coming," MLS tweeted, with a goat animal emoji standing in for the phrase "greatest of all time".

"Millions of MLS fans all over the world welcome you, Leo."

According to a person with knowledge of the negotiations, Messi had intended to join a team where he might potentially have an ownership stake. His contract is expected to make it possible for him to do so once he retires.

Additionally, he will be able to make the most of his current endorsement agreement with Adidas and receive a portion of the money from the MLS Season Pass on Apple TV, which broadcasts league games.

MLS receives a set price from Apple of about \$250 million annually up until it hits a predetermined number of subscriptions, at which point it will receive a portion of the money generated by those subscriptions.

Given that Messi is the most well-known soccer player in the world, his move to the MLS is predicted to increase interest in the Apple TV streaming service.

After receiving an official offer, the forwards was also mentioned in connection with a transfer to Al-Hilal of Saudi Arabia.

In an effort to attract the game's top players to its league, the Gulf nation was successful in persuading Portuguese forwards Cristiano



Ronaldo to join Al Nassr shortly after the World Cup. Karim Benzema, a French striker, has signed with Al Ittihad.

"If it had been a question of money, I would have gone to Arabia or elsewhere where they offered me a lot of money," Messi said.

Former England captain David Beckham, one of the first well-known European players to relocate to the United States and compete in the Major League Soccer (MLS), co-owns Inter Miami. Beckham won the MLS Cup twice with the Los Angeles Galaxy.

Messi will have his hands full in Miami, though, as the team is in last place in the Eastern Conference standings and is only six points from ninth place, which would put them in with a chance of making the playoffs.

After a terrible stretch of 10 losses and five victories this season—a dramatic contrast to their sixth-place finish and automatic qualification for the MLS Cup playoffs the previous year—the team fired coach Phil Neville last week. Messi, who was once the pride of European football, has practically been released for free by two big clubs in the past two years.

Messi has a number of records for Barcelona, the team he never wanted to leave and the city he has called home since he was a teenager. But because Barcelona failed to make it financially feasible for him to stay, Messi had no choice but to leave the club in 2021.

He voluntarily left PSG because he thought the French team required a long-term strategy, and fan discontent sped up his exit. The highs he experienced after winning Argentina's first World Cup in 36 years were quickly eclipsed by the lows he experienced in Paris.

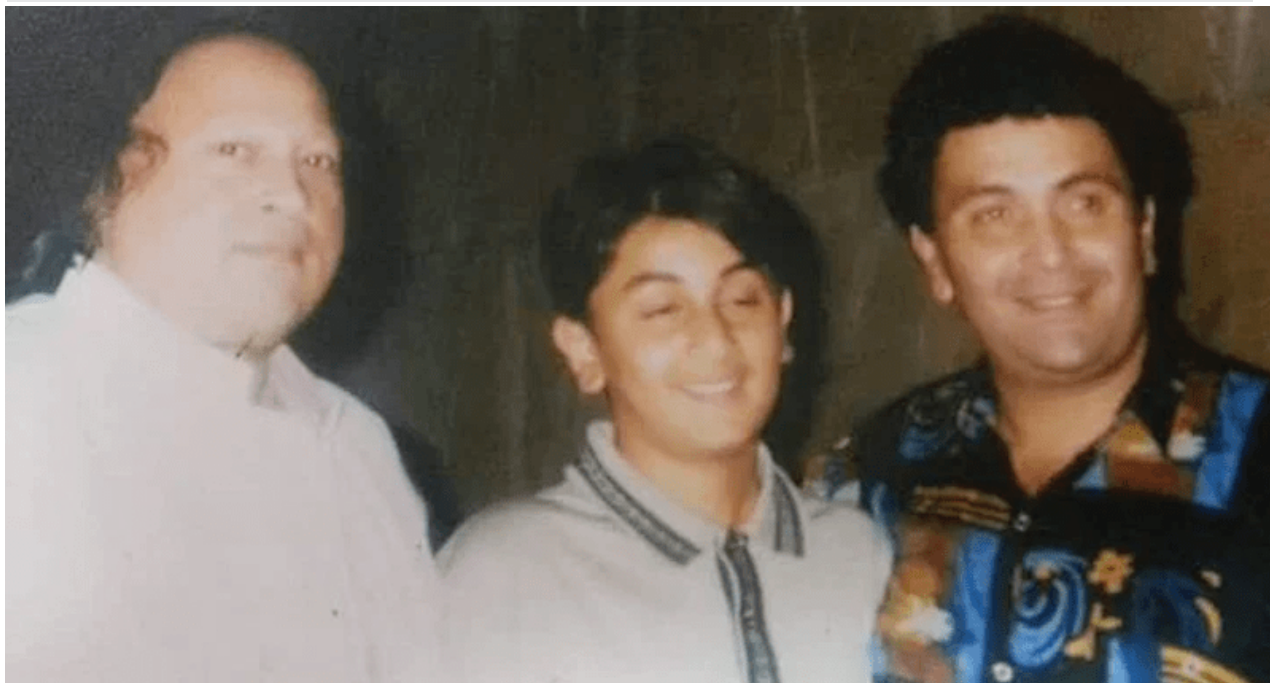
Before he could celebrate his World Cup victory, he was pushed into the spotlight when, for the first time in his distinguished career, PSG supporters turned against him because of the team's poor performance.

PSG fans have grown accustomed to their team winning domestic championships over the past ten years. Qatar Sports Investments owns and supports PSG. They achieved their ninth championship in 11 seasons last month. But despite yet another mild elimination in the round of 16, the Champions League remains elusive.

By Ali Abdullah

# Raj Kapoor and his connection to Pakistan

*On the filmmaker and actor's 35th death anniversary, we look back at his ties to Pakistan and its stars*



By Muhammad Suhayb

Some time in the beginning of 1989, upcoming Pakistani actor Zeba Bakhtiar was ready to meet Mrs Krishna Raj Kapoor at Deonar Cottage in Chembur for the first time. Chembur was a large upmarket suburb in Central Mumbai, (Bombay back then) where the family of Raj Kapoor, India's finest showman, resided for years.

Bakhtiar, who had worked in PTV's Anarkali, had been finalised for the titular role of Henna, an Indo-Pak love story where an Indian boy drifts into Pakistan and falls in love with a local girl. Raj's death on June 2, 1988 halted production of the movie, though the story was there. He died days after finalising Bakhtiar for the role and never met her in person.

His son Randhir, being aware of the entire story, called Bakhtiar over to India for an audition and that is when she met Krishna Kapoor. Bakhtiar told Images that after glancing at her, Krishna's response was — "I could see Raj ji's dream in flesh and blood".

The Kapoor family has been around since India's first talkie film — Alam Ara — was released in 1931. Raj's father Prithvi Raj played a substantial role in that movie and is considered

among the pioneers of Bollywood. Prithvi immortalised Emperor Akbar with his role in Mughal-e-Azam in 1960 and his sons gradually found their way to the top as well.

Raj, the actor, producer and director, was much more than just being the "Charlie Chaplin of India". Known to be the most influential filmmaker from the country, he was once the youngest director/producer in Bollywood. He conceived the idea of blockbuster Barsaat (1948) at the ripe age of 24. He established RK Studios soon after and made classic films like Awaara, Shri 420, Sangam, Bobby and the cult classic Mera Naam Joker. He was also the first producer to shoot a film outside of India — a tradition that continues till today.

By the 1970s, his sons Rishi and Randhir were carrying the legacy forward and today, it's on the shoulders of Randhir's daughter Kareena Kapoor Khan Rishi's son Ranbir Kapoor.

## A Peshawar boy

Raj Kapoor was born Ranbir Raj Kapoor in Peshawar on December 14, 1924. He moved to Calcutta where his younger brother Shamsheer Raj aka

Shammi Kapoor was born in 1931. When he was 14 years old, his family welcomed the arrival of his youngest brother Balbir Raj aka Shashi Kapoor.

Raj loved his family and missed Peshawar. He would get emotional while recalling his childhood, and family members who had never been to Peshawar could feel it. It was that love that made him look affectionately towards anything that belonged to the region. He wanted to visit Peshawar once more but was unable to.

He had great love for Pakistan, where his films were distributed, until Dev Anand's Jaal (1954) faced resistance from the local film fraternity. Old timers recall watching Aan, Awara, Aag and Barsaat in cinema houses in Pakistan as late as 1965.

## Art has no borders

Raj was a lover of art and recognised its true worth. He had no qualms in appreciating talent that wasn't from India, as he believed that art had no boundaries. When ad film maker Javed Jabbar went to India for the screening of Beyond the Last Mountain — which was the first Pakistani film to be made in the English language — Raj Kapoor appreciated it,



terming it an intelligent film of contemporary cinema. “Raj Kapoor was most gracious. He welcomed Shabnam and me very warmly during his grand reception/dinner for delegates at the first Bombay International Festival in January 1976. He then came with eight senior members of his production team to view *Beyond the Last Mountain* at a special screening. His hospitality and attitude were most endearing,” recalled the advertising guru, who later served as a minister and senator.

By the 1980s, Pakistan was being ruled by General Ziaul Haq who, with all his might, tried to quash the entertainment industry. As luck would have it, Raj decided to unintentionally help budding talent from Pakistan, who later proved their worth to the world.

## Helping Pakistani stars shine

It came as a surprise to many when actor Rishi Kapoor requested famous singer Rahat Fateh Ali Khan to render a particular song Nusrat Fateh Ali Khan had sung at his wedding reception during a TV show a couple of years back. Many people were shocked to know that it was Raj Kapoor who introduced the budding qawwal from Pakistan to the world.

Raj had asked Rahat and his uncle to come over to India and perform at his residence in January 1980. It was the celebration of Rishi and Neetu Singh's wedding and the entire film fraternity was there. Despite the presence of renowned music directors and singers, Nusrat was under no pressure. He started singing at 10pm and continued till 7 in the morning, rendering ‘Halka Halka Suroor’ for two and a half hours at a stretch.

The emergence of Salma Agha, the orotund singer who became an actor, has a lot to do with her relationship with Raj Kapoor. Related through her step-grandfather — Agha's step-grandfather Jugal Kishore Mehta happened to be Raj's maternal uncle — she came into the picture when Raj was thinking of *Henna* and the noted filmmaker BR Chopra was preparing for *Nikaah*. Raj abandoned his plans for *Henna* — it had been in the pre-production stage since the early 70s — and started off with *Prem Rog*, with a young Padmini Kolhapuri in the lead while Agha got the role of Nilofer, the

heroine in BR Chopra's classic.

She also did playback for her songs, to much appreciation. *Prem Rog* and *Nikaah* were hits — *Prem Rog* received 12 while *Nikaah* got 11 Filmfare nominations. Kolhapuri received the Best Actress award while Agha got the Best Female Singer. She also received two more nominations for the same category, with Nazia Hassan's ‘*Boom Boom*’ nominated as well.

Nazia, the Queen of Pop, captivated generations with her singing and youthful appearance. She received the Best Singer Female trophy for ‘*Aap Jaisa Koi*’ from Feroz Khan's *Qurbani* just two years prior. No points for guessing who presented the award to the Pakistani singer.

Raj Kapoor's daughter Reema became fast friends with Nazia, who was busy with her singing assignments in Pakistan and India. It was through her that Raj offered Nazia the title role of *Henna*, which she eventually turned down. Nazia wanted to focus on social work, singing and her studies and had no time for acting.

Around the same time, Haseena Moin's smash hit serial *Tanhayian* was aired on PTV. By late 1986, it was available in India on VHS cassettes and its following grew to match the one in Pakistan. Shehnaz Sheikh and Marina Khan, the *Zara* and *Saniya* of the show, caught Raj's eye and he met them in the UAE during a cricket tournament in Sharjah in December 1986. He wanted Moin to write the dialogues of *Henna* and needed to finalise one of the girls for the titular role. Sheikh got close to playing the role, but eventually declined.

Moin wrote the dialogues for *Henna*, which had cross-border relations as the theme. Krishna once complained that whatever Moin had provided in the tape was played on loop on Raj's Walkman. In those days, Raj was seldom found without his headphones on, as he was mesmerised by the lines written by Moin.

She also arranged for a Pakistani actor whom she believed was the answer to Raj's quest, she told this author in 2018. She asked him to watch clips of a young lady who was playing the lead in *Anarkali*, a play produced by PTV. She seemed the right choice for Raj, who had the VHS cassette of *Anarkali* (aired in May 1988)

arranged as soon as he could get his hands on it. He managed to watch the tape and shortly after giving his nod of approval, he passed away on June 2, 1988, almost as if he was waiting for the right choice.

“I was roped in months after Raj Kapoor's death. Haseena Moin met my father, Attorney General of Pakistan at the time Yahya Bakhtiar, at our home in Karachi and asked for his permission. Had Haseena Moin not been involved, my father would never have allowed me to go to India,” Bakhtiar told Images. She ultimately became the last heroine to star in a project started by Raj Kapoor.

When asked why Raj insisted on a Pakistani girl to play the role of *Henna*, Bakhtiar replied, “Raj Kapoor always wanted to be true to his story and the character. He could have had any of the top Indian actresses, but it would lack authenticity. To make the story real and believable, Raj Kapoor opted for a girl from Pakistan.” That authenticity went on to bag Bakhtiar the Best Debut award.

Raj was planning to direct *Henna* himself but his deteriorating health did not allow him to. He received the Dadasaheb Phalke Award a month prior to his death, where the president of India broke protocol and came with the award to his seat because Raj was unable to walk up on the stage to receive it.

Raj had two dreams to fulfil before he died. One was the completion of *Henna* and the other was a farewell visit to Peshawar. *Henna* was later directed by his eldest son Randhir and released in 1991. When Rishi and Randhir came to Pakistan to shoot some scenes for the film, they managed to visit their ancestral home and live the moment. *Henna* was a commercial and critical success and was India's nomination for the Best Foreign Film Category at the 1992 Academy Awards.

Raj once mentioned that “mitti from Peshawar” must be placed on his forehead before he was cremated. The soil was arranged and he went peacefully. The mere mention of such acts bring a tear or two to one's eyes, as people from that generation lived and died in a world that was altogether different.

Courtesy images.dawn.com

# The Pindi Boyz are back with a new song with the OG Pindi Boy — Sheikh Rasheed

*Three years after blowing up with 'Pindi Aye', the Boyz are back with 'Pindi Aye 2.0', a more energetic, colourful song about their favourite city*

By Siham Basir

Have you heard of the Pindi Boyz? Three years after their super hit single 'Pindi Aye,' the seven-member group is back with a new single and a new music video featuring the Pindi Boy — Sheikh Rasheed.

The Pindi Boyz — emphasis on the z — consist of seven members: Hashim Nawaz, Zeeru, Hamzee, Shuja Shah, Usman Ghauri, OCL and Khawar Malik.

Three years ago, eight solo artists collaborated on the much-loved 'Pindi Aye,' which blew up online and racked up 22 million views.

"It was about a month before Covid hit and we received so much love on that song. It has 22 million views on YouTube," Osama Karamat, also known as OCL, told Images. "We didn't expect it at all!"

After the success of the song, everyone went their own ways but no one found the success 'Pindi Aye' achieved. "I called up Hashim and told him to get everyone together," Karamat said. They recently released 'Pindi Aye 2.0,' which has hit two million views.

The Pindi Boyz are obviously all from Pindi and all of them are currently based there too — except for their producer, Ghauri, who works with them remotely from Bahrain. He was born and bred in Pindi though, I was assured.

It was only right to title their new song 'Pindi Aye 2.0,' Karamat says, as a homage of sorts to their initial claim to fame. There are seven of them now but they're still the same Pindi Boyz — albeit with a z.

The name might be amusing to some — the term is not a complimentary one — but they're well aware of it. "There's a comedic image or 'ganda' stigma attached to the phrase," Karamat explained. "Through the first project, we wanted to make it cool to be a Pindi boy."



Pindi boys — without the z — are often typecast as stereotypically sleazy and show offs. But with the arrival of 'Pindi Aye,' even Islamabadi — often the biggest detractors of Pindi boys — were sharing their song. "It's only fair to call the group Pindi Boyz," he explained. "None of us look like 'typical Pindi boys,' so it was a no brainer," said Karamat.

## The OG Pindi boy

But perhaps the biggest surprise of 'Pindi Aye 2.0' was the inclusion of Sheikh Rasheed — the OG Pindi boy. "We wanted him on the first track but we weren't able to get access," Karamat said. But their perseverance paid off and three years later, they were finally able to have him featured in their music video.

It took a two-month "wild goose chase" but he made an appearance as a cross between a mafioso and Nick Fury in the music video. The Boyz went over to meet him on the third day of Eid with the intro in mind.

In the music video, he sits in typical Sheikh Rasheed fashion and lazily smokes a cigar as he hands them a black dossier. The Boyz stand before him in all black, looking serious as if they are being handed a secret mission — to unite the Pindi Boyz.

The politician agreed to the video but initially didn't understand what the Pindi

Boyz wanted to do. "He was like, 'Pindi Aye 2.0'? So they want to make a new Pindi?" Karamat laughed. They ended up showing him the first video — which he loved — and getting some pointers from him. He wanted them to promote the city even more.

"For the video, we told him to just 'be you'," said Karamat. Rasheed, known for his eccentric ways and man-of-the-people vibe — who can forget him arriving at the PTI-AML protest at Pindi's Committee Chowk on the back of a motorbike and then hot-footing it towards the police — was perfect for the role. "Political stuff aside, he looked like Nick Fury while handing us the dossier," Karamat chuckled.

The Pindi Boyz spent about two and a half hours with him and he was "really cool". That he was so laidback came as a slight surprise to them, given that everyone had set him up to be an intimidating man. "It was very chill, very laidback. He was like one of us," Karamat said.

## Round 2

The first song was an amalgamation of several independent artists "winging it". This time around, it was tougher to get everyone on the same page but the Pindi Boyz knew the formula for success — don't try too hard. "People connected with the song then and they connected with it now again," explained Karamat.



The colours have been changed up and the music is more energetic, but it's still the Pindi Boyz, talking about their favourite city. If 'Pindi Aye' was "gangster", 'Pindi Aye 2.0' is more hiphop, according to the rapper.

"This song is more mainstream. We're capturing Pindi again and [this time it's] colourful, vibrant and fun." Sheikh Rasheed was, of course, the cherry on top, but he wasn't the only part of Pindi that was captured in the music video.

A behind the scenes video from the music video shoot on their YouTube page reveals just how many people came out to celebrate the Pindi Boyz. We had to let go of a lot of footage, Karamat said.

They filmed in some of Pindi's most iconic spots — Fawara Chowk in Raja Bazaar — and as they marched in, 300 to 350 people gathered. When they filmed in the Metro they got permission to do so through the proper channels, but everything public was done "Pindi Boyz style".

"Pindi is different, a lot more loving. Mobs do form but no one interrupts. It would have been different [had we filmed] in Karachi, Lahore or Islamabad," he said, adding that each city has its own vibe. "We received nothing but love."

## Organic > bought

From the start, when we spoke about the 22 million views on 'Pindi Aye' — and the two million on 'Pindi Aye 2.0' — Karamat used the word "organic". Reaching these numbers organically is something he's very passionate about. Only Young Stunners have done it, he explained. "They're destroying the number game organically," he emphasised.

What's the alternative, you may wonder. People buy views, likes and follows, Karamat said, explaining that you can tell the difference in real versus purchased likes and follows from engagement. This isn't a new claim — many people have called out social media influencers and the like for buying fake followers and artists for manipulating music video views using bots and other mechanisms to send numbers soaring.

"We put out stories before the shoot and

said we're going to be in Saddar, food street, at this time on this date and that's it." That was enough for a crowd of 400 people to show up, no questions asked. "If our fame hadn't come organically, no one would have turned up," the rapper said.

That is when they realised what they had created.

Before the government suspended mobile data and several social media sites early May, they were looking at 200,000 to 250,000 views a day on their video. They hit one million views in four days. "It was tough because it was a new channel, but people showed up," said Karamat.

## The boys are back in town

'Pindi Aye' has a cult fanbase. The goal was to get those fans on the Pindi Boyz side.

The three-year gap didn't really divide the fans, according to Karamat. And it's not like none of the Boyz collaborated as individual artists. The only difference was that they didn't have everyone back to create music together.

We at Images heard of 'Pindi Aye 2.0' via TikTok. Not from the song being used in the background of a video, but a take on a particular TikTok trend featuring the Pindi Boyz and Sheikh Rasheed.

"I'm always thinking [about these things]," Karamat said. They hadn't really planned anything when going to meet the politician other than the main video. But when inspiration struck, "it was game over".

"We had finished our shoot and while talking, I was brought it up. I told Zeeru my idea and said it's cringey but this is a mafia vibe, so it only made sense," said the rapper.

## Going solo

At the time of 'Pindi Aye', they were all solo artists. The one thing they can all agree on for the Pindi Boyz is the genre — hiphop.

Five of them are already knee-deep in the genre, except for Khawar who's a singer.

But being solo artists was "very, very

tough". "With TikTok, attention spans have gone to sh\*t. It's really killed audiences unless there's a cult fanbase involved," explained Karamat. "You could be putting out the best of the best but someone does a dance and they're a viral superstar."

They found that working together helped them get the traction that they were otherwise missing in their solo projects. "I was doing English music until 'Pindi Aye' and it was decent. It was tough overall, it was tough for everyone," he explained. "No one was getting the traction that 'Pindi Aye' got."

To their minds, hiphop had peaked in Pakistan when Young Stunners were announced as the PSL anthem artists and Ranveer Singh's Gully Boy was released. "It was after Gully Boy that Pakistani brands started paying attention to our own rappers. It took India [making a movie] for them to realise [their importance]," he lamented.

But hiphop is here to stay, it seems. The Pindi Boyz have already made a bunch of music together. "We've knocked out a bunch of music — the next five singles and we're shooting music videos for the second and third songs. We also have a cool collab on the fourth song with a badass Pakistani artist," he said.

They have seven songs planned out so far with five completed and two in progress.

The Pindi Boyz are working on the Wu Tang Klan model. "There are seven of them too. The main guy, RZA, has this vision where they all work under the umbrella of the Wu Tang Klan and focus on the group and then solo projects and then the group again," Karamat explained.

They want to follow the Wu Tang Klan blueprint, with all of them working under the Pindi Boyz banner.

So far, the plan is working. They're still riding the wave of the first song and its momentum has launched them to stardom. They make money from YouTube and Spotify and, with the recent uptick in music festivals and concerts in the country, things are looking good for the Pindi Boyz.

Courtesy images.dawn.com

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