

Fortnightly

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Combined Edition

Finally IMF deal Done

At closure of SBA Pakistan will have to enter in
24th programme for 3 years

Elections 2023

New elections, political alliances & doubts

Understanding China's Diplomatic
Initiatives

China embarks on ambitious diplomatic ventures

Pakistan and IMF to go along



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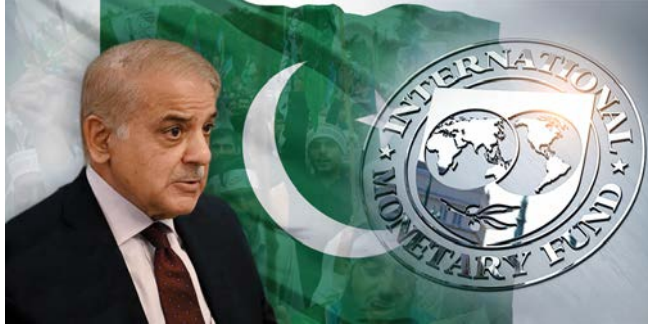
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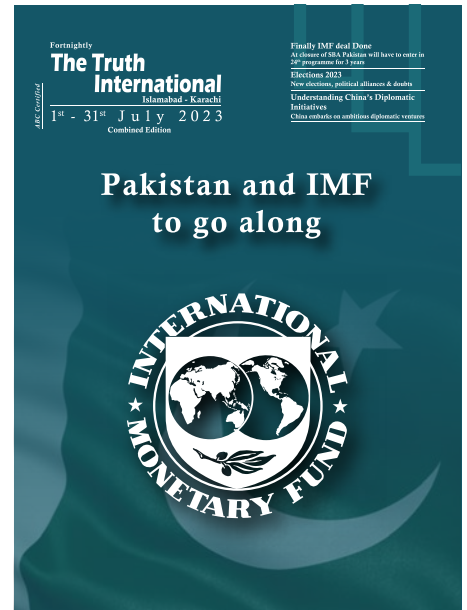


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Editor:

Zaheer ud Din Babar Thaheem

Advisor to Editor:

Ashraf Malkham

Circulation & Marketing / Advertisement:

Irfan Ali

Contact: 0345-9908108

Email: irfanawku@gmail.com

Letter to Editor:

Feel free to mail us at: editor@tti.org.pk

Postal Address:

Fortnightly "The Truth International"

Head Office:

205-D, 2nd Floor, Evacuee Trust Complex,
Agha Khan Road, F-5/1, Islamabad, Pakistan.

Contact: +92 51 2820180-1

Karachi Office:

Shop No. 08, Mezzanine Salalah Apartments,
Dawood Pota Road, Karachi Cantt.

Contact: +92 21 35221000-1

Email: info@tti.org.pk

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Dealing with the malaise

By Dr Syed Riffat Hussain

It has become a cliché to suggest that Pakistan has been faced with grave challenges. Yet, this time around both the magnitude and severity of these challenges confronting the country are truly unprecedented and if left unaddressed these will become existential threats questioning the cohesion and integrity of the state.

Foremost among these challenges is the economic one. Pakistan's economic growth is projected to be less than 2 percent and its foreign exchange reserves are less than 5 billion dollars. Adding to this grim scenario is the massive debt trap that Pakistan finds itself in. The International Monetary Fund (IMF) has projected Pakistan's gross external financing needs at a staggering \$91.536 billion over a three-year period starting from fiscal years 2023-24 to 2025-26. Pakistan has \$4 billion in foreign exchange reserves and \$4.7bn in debt service payments to make between July and December.

If we run a zero current account balance, meaning no inflows and no outflows of foreign exchange, then we hit zero foreign exchange reserves by or before December. It is in this regard that the negotiations between Islamabad and IMF for a Stand by agreement for a period of nine months starting from July 2023 to March 2024 assume a critical significance.

Pakistan is hoping that over the next nine months that includes holding of national elections and an interim set up to supervise these would offer Islamabad a "ray of hope" to iron out its economic mess.

A pivotal factor affecting this would be the shape of things to come politically, especially the ability of Election Commission of Pakistan to hold fair, free and transparent elections.

PTI has expressed its reservations about the impartiality of EC and in case of PTI being disallowed to participate in November 2023 elections on charges of "sedition", its claim of rigged elections will get further strengthened. Beside the PTI factor, the new political entity – Istehkam E-Pakistan-Party (IPP) is another imponderable. As

indications are IPP is likely to make significant headway in South Punjab where Mr. Tareen remains very popular and that could upset the applecart of political calculations of both PML (N) and PPP as strong contenders at the Centre.

The total elimination of PTI in local body elections in Balochistan does point towards the political decline of PTI as an electoral force. A lot can change between now and November because of the fluidity of the situation obtaining in the country but one thing remains certain that whichever political party or a coalition that assumes power will have to learn the art of doing more with less. The issue-based politics is likely to emerge as the key determinant of a country's politics. The forthcoming national elections will be the litmus test of different political party's ability to engage in issue-based politics and mobilize their clients on the basis of their commitment to reduce poverty, inflation and unemployment.

One can make a strong argument that the incumbent political set up can deliver on these promises but the fact remains that there cannot be an excuse of the totally lackluster performance of the PDM government. Many people are asking the legitimate question why the PDM government delayed negotiating with IMF for eight months and ultimately caved into IMF demands?

Such questions as these are going to haunt PML (N) in the next elections and may lead to a massive win by "independent candidates". This raises the fundamental question relating to the role of Parliament in future set up of Pakistani politics. There is a universal consensus among political analysts that over the past several decades especially since the early 1980s, there has been an "elite capture" of the Pakistani state. Members of the Parliament represent this elite capture as legislators they hardly engage in public interest legislation and are more interested in trying to promote their own agendas and interests. The so-called Pakistani elites have strong representation in parliament and have hence been dubbed

as 'electable', "who align with different ruling parties to continue protecting and perpetuating their vested interests."

According to the UNDP's National Human Development Report (NHDR) for Pakistan the richest 20% of Pakistanis hold around 50% of the national income.

On the other hand, the poorest 20% hold just 7% of the country's national income. Despite these glaring inequalities, the NHDR had estimated that over 37% of public expenditure benefits the richest people in the country, whereas less than 15% of public expenditure reaches people in the poorest income category. Moreover, the biggest beneficiary of varied tax breaks, subsidies and preferential access to capital and other public services in Pakistan is the corporate sector. The second and third-highest recipients of state largess are the country's 1% rich elite, who collectively own 9% of the country's overall income. While their influence has reduced over time, feudal families, which comprise just over 1% of the population, own around 22% of all arable farmland. On the other hand, "the majority of poor rural households own no land and must survive as sharecroppers, seasonal or daily waged agri-labourers."

Besides spending a significant proportion of the country's income on military spending, the government also supports the military in the form of preferential access to land, capital, infrastructure support and tax exemptions for its varied corporate interests. According to the UNDP's calculations, the total dollar amount of privileges provided to Pakistani elites (the corporate sector, feudal, powerful politicians and the military) adds up to around 6% of the country's economy.

This essentially means that if Pakistan has to come out of its multidimensional crisis, it must address the fundamental economic challenges, its dysfunctional system of governance and carry out structural reform agenda which is pro-people and not tied to the vested interests.

PM persistence paid off Stand-By Arrangement



By M A Niazi

The Shehbaz coalition must be given credit for persistence. The IMF's refusals should have made it realize that it was not going to get the last tranche of \$6 billion ESAF, but the recent mini-budget, the lifting of import restrictions, and the interest rate hike made it clear that the government was not giving up.

The PM's persistence paid off in the shape of a Stand-By Arrangement, which should see off the threat of default, and get friendly countries to lend the amounts pledged. This latest development provided another example of the IMF setting conditions in advance, and only disbursing the promised loan when the condition is fulfilled. That means that the IMF does not trust the government, as shown by its giving an SBA. That is serious. It should be pointed out that when Imran reneged on his government's deal with the IMF, it was merely something Pakistan had done before. The problem is that the IMF conditions are bound to make for government unpopularity.

The governments concerned may feel the IMF is out to 'get' them, but actually, the IMF is merely doing what any prudent banker does: ensure the client can repay. Why does a country like

Pakistan borrow from the IMF? Because it has to repay its project loans and lacks the foreign exchange to do so. Those project loans should have led to greater development, thus exporting ability, and thus foreign exchange to repay those loans. That hasn't happened, mainly because those loans were not meant so much to build export capacity, as to be embezzled by the country's ruling elite. Yet those loans still have to be repaid with interest.

Among other things, the country turns to the money markets, which basically means the international banking system. When payments fall due, again the country needs foreign exchange. The simple solution is to borrow again, a sort of rollover, in which the principal and with interest may become a new, higher, principal figure.

These were never project loans, but they are meant to repay project loans and depend on increased foreign exchange generated by projects. This is where the IMF steps in, and offers to lend the required amount. The country makes the payment and continues to make imports, and what happens is that the debt is transformed. From commercial debt to banks, it becomes a debt to the IMF.

The IMF wants to be repaid, because it is a bank, even though the word is not in its title. Instead of collateral, it wants to ensure the country can repay, so it dictates economic policy. The IMF is not in the business of development, though it is claiming to be moving in that direction, probably because it realizes developing countries cannot repay loans unless they develop.

Its conditionalities are severe. It has no problem with measures cutting back on growth, or causing suffering. It also claims it is a purely economic body, with no political agenda. This may be truer than for the World Bank, but the IMF has still been a tool of US foreign policy. It is easier for the USA to use the World Bank this way, for the Bank President is an appointee of the US President; the IMF MD is not. An appointee of the Executive Board is usually a European; the incumbent and her predecessor have also been women.

One flaw of the Charter of Democracy was that it did not include all parties or the establishment. That might also afflict a Charter of the Economy. The temptation to play politics on the economy might be too good to resist, what with a general election due this year. However, the need of all to get a

deal with the IMF may not be so easily resisted.

However, the IMF remains a Bretton Woods institution, and since the MD always belongs to a US ally, it can work as a tool of foreign policy. Of course, in such a case, the country would really have to need it, as Pakistan does. The China-Pakistan Economic Corridor started at just the time that the USA began its trade war with China, as well as its great-power rivalry. One result has been the IMF's overweening interest in Chinese loans to Pakistan, and its requirement that Pakistan not use the IMF loan to service its CPEC debt to China. The agreement with the IMF implies that, over and above the economic conditions, Pakistan has given the USA assurances about China. They remain unknown, but they are probably acceptable to China, being conveyed to it by COAS Gen Asim Munir when he visited China earlier this year.

The natural question is why the government is going through all of this trouble. Though the IMF's terms are onerous, they are still better than the terms available on the international money market if the lenders know their borrower has been turned down by the IMF. It should be remembered that lenders need their loans secured. All the recent talk of default has made lenders skittish about letting Pakistan

have any money: a country has to be in a bad way if it approaches the money markets to borrow to avoid a default. The practical result is that loans are only offered at prohibitively high interest rates; thus making the prospect of a default in the near term more likely.

In short, countries and banks both seek the IMF's 'Seal of Good Housekeeping', as it was called by Shahid Javed Burki when he was caretaker Finance Minister in the 1996-1997 caretaker Meraj Khalid government. Friendly countries have linked their loans to Pakistan being on an IMF program; in other words, they want the knowledge that Pakistan wouldn't take all their money and waste it.

The IFIs generally, and the IMF particularly, have been criticized for becoming credit rating agencies. Credit rating agencies are not obtrusive and certainly do not dictate policy. They let the entities they rate go to the devil in whatever way they want.

Whether credit rating agencies or something more, the IFIs have so far not helped any country turn around. That means that while they have identified structural reforms, they have not forced them to be carried out. It is not that they cannot. However, it almost seems that they are more inclined to retain the structural reforms as a stick to beat the government over the head with, rather than actually

implement them. Or maybe the structural reforms work?

One effect of all of these recent ups and downs has been that there has been increasing talk of a Charter of the Economy. One major reason why it makes sense is that all the parties have had to deal with the IMF. All have done (or tried to do) business with it, even the PTI took its time doing so. None can claim that it has a different economic policy from the others.

Perhaps it makes sense to take out of the economic debate those issues which need continuity. Parties cannot be left to make populist criticisms of economic policy (which means demonizing the IMF) when they have no alternative. There will be a hidden advantage to the Charter. It will also provide the IFIs with a series of red lines they cannot cross. Manifesto promises will have to be commitments to amend the Charter, which will mean taking the other parties on board.

One flaw of the Charter of Democracy was that it did not include all parties, or the establishment. That might also afflict a Charter of the Economy. The temptation to play politics on the economy might be too good to resist, what with a general election due this year. However, the need of all to get a deal with the IMF may not be so easily resisted.



What does it mean to finally lock the IMF deal?

By Mehtab Haider

After failing to accomplish the last IMF program known as the Extended Fund Facility (EFF) despite making all-out efforts since November 2022, Pakistan and the IMF struck a fresh bailout package of \$3 billion under the short-term Standby Arrangement (SBA) program.

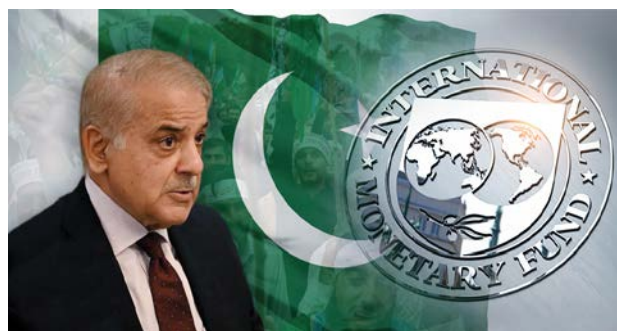
There was no other option but to opt for moving ahead with the stop gap arrangement for nine months period up to March 2024 with the clear-cut understanding that Islamabad will have to go for another new 24th program of medium-term of at least three years keeping in view massive external financing requirements. There would be the biggest challenge for Pakistan that Islamabad would have to manage external debt re-profiling from non-Paris club countries before entering into the next IMF program after March 2024. In other words, Pakistan will have to get debt re-profiling of its foreign debt from China as Islamabad owed \$30 billion foreign loan.

The IMF has estimated that the gross financing requirement of Pakistan stands at \$28 billion for the current fiscal year with external debt repayments of \$22-\$23 billion while remaining for the Current Account Deficit (CAD) needs. The IMF has assessed that there was a financing gap of \$6 billion for the current fiscal year for which the IMF's MD and Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif assured to fill this gap with joint efforts.

In order to manage the external financing gap of \$6 billion, Pakistan is eyeing to get an additional \$2 billion from the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, \$1 billion from UAE, \$1 billion from Islamic Development Bank, \$450 million from World Bank's RISE-II program loan, \$250 million from Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) and \$600 million from Geneva pledges. Pakistan must manage the remaining amount from multilateral or bilateral creditors to manage this \$6 billion gap.

There will be another challenge for the IMF-sponsored program under SBA in the next nine months as it would be implemented during the tenure of three different governments over the program period. The design of the SBA demonstrated that it was designed with a well-thought strategy as there was the stake of each government coming into power over the next nine months. The first installment of \$1.2 billion is planned to be disbursed after approval of the Fund's Executive Board under the PDM led regime. The first review of the SBA program will be undertaken on the basis of data for September 2023 which will fall under the tenure of the caretaker setup. The second review of the program is planned on the basis of December 2023 data, which will be undertaken when the new government will assume powers after the upcoming elections. But there is a big if as no one knows whether the next elections will be held on time or not.

According to the work done by the IMF and Pakistani side for striking staff level agreement under the \$3 billion SBA program, Pakistan's Gross Financing Needs (GFN) on the external front stood at \$91.5 billion over three years period starting from the fiscal year 2023-24 to 2025-26.



Islamabad will have no other option but to go back for another IMF bailout package after the expiry of the existing one under \$3 billion Standby Arrangement (SBA) in the coming March 2024.

The current account deficit has been worked out in the range of \$6 to \$7 billion over the next three years period so the overall CAD might remain within the range of \$20.6 billion over the next three years period the import compression was going to persist in coming years or it would be withdrawn in a gradual manner.

The IMF's working has projected that the imports of the country would be standing at \$64.109 billion in the fiscal year 2023-24, \$64.9 billion in 2024-25, and \$71.115 billion in the fiscal year 2025-26. The exports of the country are projected to stand at \$30.8 billion in 2023-24, \$31.14 billion in 2024-25, and \$35.8 billion in 2025-26.

According to estimates worked out by the IMF staff and Pakistani authorities under \$3 billion Standby Arrangement (SBA) program showed that the Gross Financing Needs (GFN) in totality stood at \$91.53 billion over the next three years period. The current account deficit (CAD) has been projected at \$20.618 billion over the next three years period starting from the fiscal year 2023-24 to 2025-26.

According to the agreed projections between the IMF staff and the Pakistani side showed that the Gross Financing Needs would climb to \$28.409 billion during the current financial year 2023-24. Pakistan's external debt repayments were estimated to hover around \$22-\$23 billion in the current fiscal year while the remaining \$6.4 billion would be required for fulfilling the current account deficit. The foreign exchange reserves held by the SBP will be standing at \$11.712 billion by the end of the fiscal year 2023-24.

The gross financing needs is all projected to escalate up to \$30.615 billion in the next financial year 2024-25 out of which the current account deficit is estimated at \$6.75 billion. The foreign exchange reserves held by the State Bank of Pakistan (SBP) are projected to hover around \$12.673 billion in fiscal year 2024-25.

The country's gross financing needs will further go up to \$32.514 billion in the financial year 2025-26. The foreign exchange of the SBP is projected at \$13.809 billion in the financial year 2025-26.

Moody's, Fitch warn of risks despite IMF deal



By Anwar Iqbal

Two leading global rating agencies have warned that Pakistan will require significantly more funds than what it's receiving from the International Monetary Fund (IMF) to meet its debt maturities and to finance its economic recovery, reported Bloomberg on Monday.

Moody's Investors Service and Fitch Ratings that issued the warning are two of the big three credit rating agencies, recognised by the US Securities and Exchange Commission.

The two agencies noted that Pakistan has to repay \$25 billion in the current fiscal year to meet its debt obligations. The repayments include both principal and interest, and are about seven times Pakistan's foreign exchange reserves, according to Moody's.

This is significantly more than the initial approval of a \$3bn IMF loan Pakistan secured last week. The programme is still subject to approval by the IMF Executive Board "Pakistan will require significant additional financing besides the IMF disbursements to meet its debt maturities and finance an economic recovery," said Krisjanis Krustins, director of sovereigns for Asia and the Pacific region at Fitch.

Pakistan requires to repay \$25bn in FY24

"While the IMF likely sought and received assurances for such financing, there is a risk that this could prove insufficient, particularly if current account deficits widen again."

Bloomberg, an international financial wire which reported the two quotes, also noted that the IMF programme has "sent a positive wave through the markets, with stocks surging the most in 15 years on Monday and dollar bonds extending their best run ever."

Pakistan increased taxes, hiked key interest rates to an all-time high, and cut spending to secure the initial pact with the IMF. "It is uncertain that the Pakistani government will be able to secure full \$3bn of IMF financing during the nine-month Stand-By Arrangement," Grace Lim, an analyst with Moody's in Singapore told Bloomberg.

The government's commitment to continually implement reforms will be tested as it goes into elections due by October, she said. Pakistan had previously clinched a \$1.1bn loan in August, but the lender did not release the amount as Islamabad failed to meet some conditions.

"Whether Pakistan will join another IMF programme may only become clear after elections," said Lim. "Until a new programme is agreed, Pakistan's ability to secure loans from other bilateral and multi-lateral partners on an on-going basis over the longer-term will be severely constrained."

In May, Fitch reported that Pakistan was required to pay \$700 million of maturities in May and another \$3bn in June. Fitch noted that \$2.4bn of deposits and loans from China would be rolled over to meet the obligation.

Rating agencies warned in May that Pakistan could default or do debt restructuring if it did not get IMF's support.

At the height of the financial crisis, a US-based Pakistani economist Atif Mian noted that for Pakistan "the issue is not default per se - but its terrible consequences for the people." Pakistan, he said, "has left itself almost completely at the mercy of foreign assistance — this is the real sin of its political elite."

Courtesy Dawn

Costs of Proxy Wars and Conflicts

By Javed Mahmood

Conflicts and proxy wars come with significant costs, both in human and economic terms. The most tragic and significant cost of conflicts and proxy wars is the loss of human lives. Civilians and combatants alike suffer casualties, leading to immense personal and societal grief. The physical and psychological injuries inflicted on individuals can have long-lasting consequences, affecting families, communities, and entire generations.

Conflicts and proxy wars impose a heavy economic burden on the involved parties. Resources that could have been allocated to development, education, healthcare, and infrastructure are redirected toward military expenditures. This diverts funds from vital sectors, leading to economic stagnation, poverty, and reduced living standards. Additionally, the destruction of infrastructure and disruption of economic activities further exacerbate the economic toll.

Meanwhile, conflicts and proxy wars often result in the mass displacement of populations. People flee their homes to escape violence, persecution, and instability, becoming internally displaced within their own countries or seeking refuge in neighboring nations. This situation places a strain on resources and infrastructure in host countries, while displaced individuals and families face numerous challenges, including limited access to basic necessities, healthcare, and education.

Proxy wars, in particular, can escalate regional tensions and destabilize entire regions. When external powers support different factions within a conflict, it can lead to a widening of the conflict's scope and involvement of neighboring countries. This can result in a cycle of violence and instability that hampers regional cooperation, economic development, and political stability. Conflicts and proxy wars can have global ramifications. They may contribute to the spread of extremism, terrorism, and transnational organized crime, threatening international security. These conflicts often draw in external powers, leading to geopolitical rivalries and tensions. Moreover, the presence of conflicts in key regions can disrupt global supply chains, impact energy markets, and create waves of migration that affect multiple countries.

After conflicts and proxy wars end, significant efforts are required for reconciliation, reconstruction, and nation-building. This involves addressing the underlying causes of the conflict, promoting social cohesion, and rebuilding physical infrastructure. The costs of these processes can be substantial and require sustained international support and commitment. It is important to note that the costs mentioned above are not exhaustive and can vary depending on the specific context of each conflict or proxy war.

Additionally, the long-term consequences can be felt for generations, making it crucial to prioritize peaceful resolution and prevention of conflicts whenever possible. Determining the exact global funding for proxy wars is a complex task due to the clandestine nature of many proxy war activities and the involvement of multiple actors. Proxy wars typically involve various nations providing financial, military, and logistical support to proxy forces fighting on their behalf. The funding for proxy wars can come from different sources, including governments, private entities, and illicit activities.



Here are some key points to consider:

Proxy wars often involve states supporting proxy forces in an effort to advance their own interests. This support can include financial aid, military equipment, training, and intelligence sharing. Governments provide funding through their defense budgets or covert channels.

State sponsors may provide foreign aid to their proxy forces or allied governments involved in proxy conflicts. This aid can be in the form of economic assistance, humanitarian aid, or development projects. The purpose is to strengthen the proxy's capabilities and maintain influence in the region.

Arms sales play a significant role in funding proxy wars. State sponsors or arms suppliers may sell weapons, ammunition, and military equipment to proxy forces. These transactions generate revenue for the arms industry and contribute to the financing of ongoing conflicts. Proxy wars are often driven by the desire to control or gain access to valuable resources, such as oil, minerals, or strategic locations. The revenue generated from resource exploitation can be used to fund proxy forces and sustain the conflict.

Moreover, non-state actors, such as insurgent groups or rebel factions, may also engage in proxy wars. They obtain funding through various means, including illicit activities like smuggling, extortion, kidnapping, or involvement in the drug trade. Additionally, they may receive support from sympathetic individuals, diaspora communities, or other non-state entities.

It is challenging to provide an exact figure for global funding dedicated specifically to proxy wars. The funding sources and amounts vary depending on the specific conflicts, the interests involved, and the actors participating. Furthermore, the lack of transparency and the covert nature of proxy war financing makes it difficult to obtain comprehensive data.

It is worth noting that international efforts have been made to regulate arms transfers and financial flows to mitigate the support for proxy wars. Organizations such as the United Nations and regional bodies promote arms control measures, sanctions, and peacekeeping operations to address the root causes and funding sources of proxy conflicts.

Petrol and Gas price-hikes and a gigantic tax target for 2023-24



As the International Monetary Fund has revived the stalled loan program, the federal government would have to further enhance the petroleum development levy and gas prices. This strategy is part of the IMF program to mop up additional revenues from consumers in the financial year 2023-24.

The government had already increased the petroleum development levy to 55 rupees per liter, from 50 rupees a liter to meet the IMF condition ahead of the meeting of the executive board of the IMF. The PDL on domestic petroleum prices will increase to at least 60 rupees a liter.

According to Petroleum Minister Musadik Malik, the government can enhance PDL on petroleum prices to 65 rupees a liter. Under this strategy, the government raised the diesel price by 7.50 rupees per liter with effect from July 1, 2023, the beginning of the new fiscal year. The government raised diesel prices at a time when people were anticipating some relief in petroleum prices after two consignments of Russian crude oil reached Pakistan in June. With the arrival of Russian crude oil, speculations about 50 to 100 rupees decline in domestic oil prices flooded the social media networks.

However, the government ended the rumors by slapping an increase of 7.50

rupees per liter in the price of diesel and also announced that it will raise the petroleum development levy to at least 60 rupees per liter.

Meanwhile, from July 1, 2023, the government is set to raise domestic natural gas prices by 50 percent. Again, this is an outcome of the government and the IMF deal which requires a substantial increase in the domestic natural gas prices in 2023-24. In other words, in this financial year, consumers will not be able to see any major relief in the cost of utilities even though the IMF has revived its stalled program.

Power Sector Circular Debt Hits Rs 4 Trillion

The Power Division has declared that the accumulated circular debt has exceeded Rs 4 trillion, with an additional Rs 400 billion being added during 2022-23. In a letter to the Secretary of the Power Division, the Secretary of the Ministry of Water Resources has requested the payment of Rs 250 billion in overdue amounts for hydropower projects. The Water and Power Development Authority (WAPDA) is responsible for a significant portion of the development work, necessitating an integrated framework for the construction of dams, hydro-electric plants, and power evacuation infrastructure.

The Secretary argues that a well-coordinated power evacuation plan must be put in place by the National Transmission and Dispatch Company (NTDC), aligned with the completion schedules of major projects such as the Diamer-Basha Dam (DBDP), Mohmand Dam (MHPD), and Dasu Hydropower projects. The availability of financial resources is equally crucial to ensure the successful completion of these projects without delays.

According to the Secretary of Water Resources, during a hearing in the Supreme Court of Pakistan on January 12, 2023, the Supreme Court directed the Power Division to address the issue of implementing NTDC's power-evacuation project for DBDP. The Supreme Court noted that apart from this transmission line, there are other power generation projects that need to be connected to the national grid. The court observed that the progress in the construction works of both projects is behind schedule due to various reasons, including the lack of sufficient financial resources, including WAPDA's equity. It was revealed in court that the release of WAPDA's equity was dependent on the payments of WAPDA's receivables by the CPPA-G, and the total amount due has now reached approximately Rs. 250 billion. The Secretary of the Power Division informed the court that necessary steps

were being taken to make the required payments based on the available resources.

The Legal Advisor stated that the pace of construction work on dams was affected by COVID-19 and floods. Additionally, the insufficient availability of financial resources has hindered progress at the sites. He explained that there are three sources of funding for the project: the Public Sector Development Program (PSDP), WAPDA's equity, and commercial financing. Regarding the PSDP, WAPDA required Rs. 25 billion for the Mohmand Dam in the current financial year.

In response to the court's inquiry, the Secretary of the Power Division, Rashid Mehmood, stated that the division receives money through the CPPA-G but there is an annual gap between the amount received and the amount that needs to be paid. This year, the gap has increased to Rs. 400 billion, leading to the current circular debt reaching Rs. 4.1 trillion. He emphasized that this significant gap is the primary reason for the non-payment of required funds to WAPDA.

New Tax target

The federal government has increased the tax collection to 9.45 trillion rupees for 2023-24 from an initial target of 9.2 trillion rupees. The government enhanced the new tax receipts target to meet a major demand of the IMF to ensure the revival of the IMF bailout package. The new target for tax revenue collection in this fiscal year is higher by 2.25 trillion rupees when compared with the 2022-23 target of 7.2 trillion rupees. It means the government will apply different traditional measures to mop up additional tax collection in the current financial year. The traditional measures can be the frequent increase in gas, and petroleum prices, and additional tax measures.

For example, in 2023-24 the federal government has extended the 10 percent super tax to pharmaceutical and many other companies. Hence, just like banks, pharmaceutical, and other companies will retrieve the super tax from their customers. In 2022-23, for the first time, the coalition government imposed a 10 percent super tax on the banking sector and telecom companies and both sectors quickly passed on this revenue impact to their customers.

New Budget and Impact on Exports

In the new budget, the export-oriented industries will face more pressure after an increase in the cost of utilities and a massive hike in tax targets for this fiscal year. Textile, the leading export sector in Pakistan, has already been facing difficulties and after the elimination of subsidies, this sector might face further decline in its exports.

For example, Pakistan's textile sector continues to face a prolonged period of decline in textile exports on a year-on-year basis, highlighting ongoing challenges for the industry. Although textile exports



previous month. Among the value-added products, towels, ready-made garments, and knitwear witnessed respective month-on-month increases of 10%, 8%, and 3%. However, bed-wear experienced an 8% decline. On the other hand, basic textiles saw a remarkable 31% month-on-month increase, with cotton cloth alone increasing by 19%. In terms of volume, ready-made garments, and towels increased by 8% and 5%, respectively.

However, compared to May 2022, Pakistan's textile exports witnessed a year-on-year decline of 20% (with a 17% increase in PKR terms). This decline was primarily driven by a 21% decrease in



showed a month-on-month increase of 7% in May 2023, reaching \$1.32 billion, there was a significant decline of 20% compared to the same period last year. The trend of declining textile exports on a year-on-year basis has persisted for eight months. Despite the positive momentum observed in May, the overall outlook for fiscal year 2023 remains negative. Textile exports totaled \$15 billion during the 11-month period, reflecting a year-on-year decrease of 14.7%. These figures underscore the challenges faced by the textile industry and the need for sustained efforts to revive and strengthen its performance.

Moreover, Pakistan's textile exports have experienced an eighth consecutive month of decline on a year-on-year basis. In May 2023, textile exports reached \$1.32 billion, indicating a 7% month-on-month increase. In Pakistani Rupees (PKR), the exports amounted to Rs377 billion, reflecting the same 7% month-on-month growth. Notably, value-added textile exports recorded \$889 million, showing a 3% increase from the

value-added products and a 19% decline in the basic segment. Value-added exports experienced declines in bed-wear, knitwear, ready-made garments, and towels, which decreased by 28%, 22%, 17%, and 5% respectively, on a year-on-year basis.

During the 11-month period of fiscal year 2023, Pakistan's textile exports totaled \$15.03 billion, representing a 15% year-on-year decrease (with an 18% increase in PKR terms). Basic textiles recorded a 22% decline, while value-added products declined by 13% compared to the previous year. Notably, volumetric exports of ready-made garments and knitwear increased by 46% and 9% respectively during this 11-month period. The devaluation of the Pakistani rupee is believed to have had a positive impact on these labor-intensive segments. However, it is anticipated that textile exports in 2022-23 will range between \$16-16.5 billion, indicating a decline of approximately 16% compared to the previous fiscal year.

By Javed Mahmood

Russian oil imports might overturn Pakistan's economic situation

By Mahnur Mehfuz

After the post-covid fuel price hike, it's well cemented how crucial the global energy industry is in defining economic landscapes throughout the world. It is extremely important to assess the possible influence of international energy cooperation on local fuel costs. In this piece, we look at the interesting oil and gas relationship between Russia and Azerbaijan and how it may affect Pakistani pricing.

Russia and Azerbaijan have formed an energy strategic partnership marked by significant bilateral agreements and mutual collaboration. Russia, as one of the world's largest oil and gas producers, has had a considerable impact on global energy markets. Azerbaijan, strategically placed at the crossroads of Europe and Asia, has abundant oil and gas reserves, making it an appealing partner for Russia.

Pakistan's Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif claimed on Sunday that the nation was making advances towards economic progress and prosperity, following the arrival of the country's first cargo of discounted Russian crude oil on what was hailed as a "transformative day" for the country.

Pakistan has been aggressively exploring lower-cost energy sources to alleviate its debilitating economic situation, which has seen its official FX reserves collapse to frighteningly low levels, falling below \$5 billion in recent months. To counteract the crisis, the government chose to reduce the country's imports, which slowed the economy's speed.

According to the Pakistan Bureau of Statistics, energy goods account for around 29 percent of overall imports. Acquiring Russian crude oil at a reduced price has the potential to considerably cut Pakistan's import bill and provide the government with greater fiscal freedom. "Glad to announce that the first Russian discounted crude oil cargo has arrived in Karachi and will begin oil discharge tomorrow," the prime minister said in a Twitter post.



"Today is a transformative day. We are moving one step at a time toward prosperity, economic growth, and energy security & affordability."

He also emphasized that the first oil shipment from Russia will usher in a new era in the two nations' bilateral ties.

Previously, the Karachi Port Trust issued a statement confirming the arrival of a tanker carrying 45,000 metric tonnes of Russian crude oil in Pakistan's southern port city. The shipment will also be turned over to the Pakistan Oil Refinery for processing before the country received an additional 50,000 metric tonnes of oil within a week, according to the statement.

Last month, Pakistan's State Minister for Petroleum, Musadik Malik, told the media that the government will begin importing Russian crude oil in tiny quantities in the first part of June.

While he refused to reveal the business terms of the agreement with Russia, he expressed confidence that a steady supply of inexpensive oil would benefit the national economy.

Following prolonged discussions between the two nations, Pakistan placed its first order to acquire crude oil from Russia in April. The Russian crude oil that arrived in Pakistan on Sunday evening, according to

the Petroleum Ministry, would assist down petrol and diesel costs.

According to authorities, the introduction of Russian oil will affect petrol and diesel prices beginning July 1. According to authorities from the Ministry of Petroleum, the average price will be derived by mixing local and Russian oil.

They further stated that Russian oil is 30 to 40 percent less expensive than the broader market.

"If average production of petrol and diesel is more than 50 percent, it can be reduced by Rs 40 per liter," they emphasized. Russian oil is expected to reach the Pakistani market over the next two weeks, according to sources from the Petroleum Ministry. This statement comes as Musadik Malik, Minister of State for Petroleum, emphasized the significance of the first Russian cargo, which carried 45,000 metric tonnes of discounted crude oil. In the following months, the arrival of this cargo is expected to play a critical role in regulating inflation and delivering relief to the ordinary man.

In a recent interview with a private TV channel, Minister Malik emphasized the importance of Pakistan-Russia bilateral ties. He noted that Russia is a long-standing and time-tested friend and that their alliance remains a critical pillar of

Pakistan's foreign strategy. The administration wants to build positive and constructive contacts on a global scale by cultivating solid connections with other nations such as Afghanistan, Russia, America, Europe, Azerbaijan, Tajikistan, and China.

Dr. Malik also underlined the government's desire to lead the country to prosperity, economic progress, energy security, and general stability. Recognizing the global economy's interconnectedness, Pakistan tries to harness its alliances to boost economic growth and improve living conditions for its inhabitants. Pakistan can manage risks, assure energy security, and boost economic development by diversifying its energy supplies and working with trusted friends like Russia.

The supply of Russian oil in the Pakistani market is vital. As Pakistan progresses toward prosperity, the government is committed to maintaining a stable and inexpensive energy market. Pakistan's collaboration with Russia, a major participant in the global energy market, fortifies its position and gives it a chance to acquire reliable and cost-effective energy resources.

The delivery of the first Russian shipment is only the start of what may be a productive partnership between the two countries. It paves the way for future projects such as infrastructure development and collaborative partnerships in the energy sector. Such initiatives have the potential to simplify the supply chain, improve energy transportation efficiency, and eventually contribute to price stabilization in the Pakistani market. Finally, the impending arrival of Russian oil in Pakistan represents an important advance in the country's energy industry. The discounted crude oil shipment is supposed to offer relief to the common man by assisting in the management of inflation and the stabilization of prices. The government's effort to develop good connections with a wide range of nations, including Russia, indicates its commitment to long-term prosperity, energy security, and economic stability. As Pakistan progresses toward prosperity, it will continue to rely on strategic alliances to satisfy its energy demands and pave the path for a brighter future.

Pakistan's Foreign Minister, Bilawal Bhutto-Zardari, claimed in January that the

US had been told before the government entered into petroleum and energy discussions with Russia.

The action comes as the G7 countries imposed a price restriction of \$60 per barrel for countries acquiring Russian oil as part of attempts to put pressure on Moscow during its crisis with Ukraine.

Russia and Azerbaijan's combined efforts can influence the global supply and demand dynamics for oil and gas. Increased collaboration between the two nations might increase oil and gas production, potentially increasing the total supply. Because of increasing rivalry among manufacturers, an



increase in supply frequently puts downward pressure on pricing. As a result, if Pakistan obtains a major amount of its energy needs from Russia and Azerbaijan, its energy prices may rise.

Pakistan has worked hard to diversify its energy sources to lessen dependency on a single supply and assure energy security. Collaboration with Russia and Azerbaijan allows Pakistan to tap into different energy sources. Diversification not only improves energy security but also strengthens Pakistan's bargaining leverage in pricing agreements. By lessening its reliance on conventional suppliers, Pakistan may negotiate more favorable price arrangements, perhaps saving customers money.

Geopolitical issues can have a significant impact on energy prices and market dynamics. The Russia-Azerbaijan cooperation has geopolitical consequences that may have an

indirect influence on Pakistan. Given the region's current geopolitical complications, any geopolitical developments influencing the energy industry might cause price volatility. Pakistan must actively watch these developments to limit any hazards and establish contingency measures.

Another key feature of Russian-Azerbaijani cooperation is the potential for energy infrastructure development. Pipeline developments, for example, can enhance the efficiency of energy delivery while lowering related costs. Improved infrastructure can help to simplify the supply chain, increasing energy availability and perhaps

stabilizing costs. Pakistan would gain from upgraded infrastructure as it strives to satisfy its rising energy demands.

The partnership between Russia and Azerbaijan in the oil and gas industry gives Pakistan an attractive chance to improve its energy security and perhaps affect local pricing. Pakistan may minimize its reliance on existing suppliers, negotiate favorable price terms, and establish a robust energy market by diversifying its energy sources and participating in strategic collaborations. Policymakers and business players in Pakistan must constantly watch this emerging collaboration to capitalize on the benefits it may offer. As the global energy landscape evolves, Pakistan must position itself to capitalize on the potential benefits of cooperation in the oil and gas industry, guaranteeing long-term economic growth and stability.

Is there an end to consumerism?

By Zeeshan A. Shah

In recent history, large populations have migrated from Pakistan in search of a better livelihood, bigger financial prospects, and a good living. Despite visible economic changes and inflation, it is hard for people to understand why the cost of living keeps increasing.

People never tend to stop and think about the damage to their sense of security and economics as they continue chasing other people's lifestyles. What we consume today has become expensive as compared to a few years back. A simple phenomenon that needs to be understood is called 'Consumerism' – the price we pay.

Channeling our constant 'desire' is vital today. Our 'wants' is what we desire versus 'our needs' is what we cannot do without. We are surrounded by a culture of constant consumption that leaves us feeling fascinated, but exhausted. This is the cycle that eventually leads to 'overconsumption', which we call consumerism.

We may need to re-think the ways we spend. Our behavior to overspend and overcome determines whether we are living within our means or living beyond them. 'Having more is great but wanting less is much better'. I believe: Less is More. More freedom, more peace of mind, and more mindfulness if you spend less. If we own less, it brings a sense of peace to our lives. By ensuring our lifestyle stays within our control, we start to discover wonderful new habits that emerge in our lives. The pursuit of 'greater significance' is something worth a try. Breaking free from 'excessive consumerism' is an essential step for a simplified life and a satisfied mind.

At the heart of the matter is something called 'Consumerism'. When we crave more and more in life, we forget the damage cost that we incur after recklessly spending to attain it. Opportunity loss occurs when we do not foresee the after-effects of heavy spending, accumulating short-term debt that becomes a long-term curse. For example, the pursuit of happiness today is to go eat out at fast food restaurants every second, feeding our families junk food. Here, we do not realize



the overall rise in obesity in our children, who grow up with abnormal needs to fulfill, leading complex lives and facing healthcare challenges like never imagined before.

Unhealthy food consumption has become a norm in a country like Pakistan, where we pay a general sales tax of 13% on every transaction we make in cash or by credit on food that is harmful to our lives and leaves us facing health issues. The culture of home-cooked meals is no more. The average child eats two out of three daily meals by ordering in through countless apps while defying to eat normal healthy food at home. The cost of the wallet today has tripled over the last decades, with consumers having to accumulate vast amounts of debt payments to process, much beyond what they earn and save.

Pakistan faces an immense challenge today. Our cost of living has risen substantially while our spending power has reduced due to the devaluation of the rupee against the dollar, double-digit inflation, higher consumer price index, and reduction in savings. We were never a nation that saves more than it spends. Our spending pattern is visible in our policy-making, our taxation system, and our overall attitude toward living excessive lives. Consumerism has

affected people's peace of mind and their capacity to lead healthier lives. The capacity to spend at will has been taken over by the desire to overspend, in a desperate attempt to win a rat race that has no end.

Materialism is everywhere. Look at the number of divorces taking place today over financial stress and mismanagement. Moral corruption has taken its root inside our family system, where it is all right to spend carelessly over retail buying despite the GST (general sales tax) at 13%. Before paying our bills while eating out, not many people notice that what we spend in a single day, is higher than we average family of four in Pakistan makes in weekly wages.

No one seems to look back and reflect anymore. It is the price of consumerism we pay every day without realizing how much money we are losing. Impulse buying may be the easiest relief to a person in the short run but paying credit card payments with annual percentage rates (APR) crossing over 50% per annum is the agony that hits much later. Today, Pakistan is facing a severe health emergency, a looming climate crisis, and a financial meltdown where people are unable to sustain monthly payments on food, water, electricity, and housing.

A simple guide to overcoming 'consumerism' is essential today. Here are a few guidelines:

1. **Admission:** Admit that it is possible to overcome consumerism. Adopting a minimalistic lifestyle is a great step forward. Rejecting and overcoming consumerism is essential in today's day and age and this may give you the motivation to take positive steps to improve your lifestyle. Victory begins here.
2. **Mentality:** Changing your mentality is important. When we travel, for example, we only take what we require. We feel lighter, more flexible, easygoing, and free. Hence, we enjoy it more. We carry less and travel light. Adopt a 'traveler's mindset for life'. Only buy what you need for the journey of life.
3. **Embracing the 'lighter lifestyle':** Imagine designing your home bedroom similar to a hotel bedroom- very specific and need-oriented rather than extravagantly clumsy. Consider the benefits of owning less by calculating the benefits of a 'lighter lifestyle'.
4. **Become a minimalist:** Spend less. Save more. Benefits clearly articulated are easier to adapt and quickly understood. The best way to change your life is to actually make a comparative analysis of the benefits of having less debt versus more debt. There is much peace of mind in owning less than owning more.
5. **Higher Awareness:** Read more. Be aware of the consumer-driven social media campaigns that indulge you in false dreams of grandeur. Stay real. The world makes us believe that the money you spend is your greatest contribution. Every day thousands of advertisements ask us to spend more and go buy. Hence, our average spending goes recklessly. It is important to remove your focus from such advertisements and calculate the cost of spending weekly and monthly funds on products.
6. **Compare-down:** As we look at others who have more, we start comparing our possessions to theirs and end up losing our own joy, happiness, and contentment. Here, we could break this trap when we 'compare-down'- by noticing

those who need more than us and have much fewer possessions than us. This way, we remain content and grateful.

7. **Lead by example:** Show younger generations the simple joys of life. Go walk with them when you see a par close by and save up on fuel consumption. Get a simpler sandwich at a lesser price than enter a lavish restaurant to buy the same sandwich at twice the price.
8. **Realize:** Know that your money is valuable only to the extent of how chose to spend it. Money can be used for great causes to help others in need. A lot of times you spend your money buying outfits you do not need. You can instead spend that money on getting food for street children who are hungry. It's when and how you 'Realize' and put that into practice.



9. **Dream Big:** Always have an objective to achieve in mind. If you dream big you will aspire to achieve it and maybe use your money carefully in the search for the attainment of that objective or goal. Dream bigger dreams for your money. For example, keep saving to get yourself your dream car instead of spending that money away. This way, you are bound to save that money instead of spending it away.
10. **Value for money:** Understand the full cost of your purchase. The cost of an item is beyond the rack price. Always calculate the additional cost of time, energy, and focus related to that purchase. How you see the 'usefulness' of that product would actually determine the full cost of that product and the real value for money.

11. **Watch less TV:** Television glamorizes everything to continue to exist. What is real is not shown as such. Companies spend billions on TV commercials as they 'know' you will buy whatever is shown as glamorous and glitzy. The television industry is built on assumptions and not facts. You do not have to be immune to what television wants to buy. Watch less TV to stay more stress-free and less prone to 'fake reality'. Research has indicated that people who watch less TV today are leading less stressful lives.
12. **Gratitude:** Practice being grateful as a daily habit. Focus on your blessings than your troubles.
13. **Generosity:** Be generous. Helping others makes us feel better about

ourselves and gives us more purpose in life, as some of us keep searching for the purpose that encourages, motivates, and indulges us to seek more satisfying life goals. Ambition without greed is always the best way forward.

In essence, consumerism is a daily battle we must fight. We need to renew our commitment on a daily basis. When we reject consumerism every day, we become stronger every day. Expect the battle to be there each day and get up every morning on the positive. Trust in your gut feel and expect yourself to be positively motivated to change your life. As humans, we are designed to be resilient and change our lives for the better or for the worse. Choose better.

The economic test



By Maleeha Lodhi

While the Stand-by Arrangement with the IMF helps Pakistan to avert debt default, it is a temporary reprieve that provides only limited breathing space. The short-term arrangement will momentarily restore some confidence. But a fundamental change in policy direction is needed if the country is to address its economic crisis on a sustainable basis and establish durable economic stability. Financing requirements to meet external debt obligations are an estimated \$25 billion this fiscal year. This necessitates mobilising additional funds. It means Pakistan will have to negotiate a longer-term funding deal with the IMF down the road.

In any case, an IMF programme is necessary but not sufficient for the country to achieve economic recovery and embark on a path of growth. A comprehensive set of home-grown structural reforms are needed for Pakistan to escape from the vicious cycle of high budget and balance-of-payments deficits, slow growth, low savings and investment, excessive borrowing, rising indebtedness and soaring inflation. The cost-of-living crisis fuelled by the unprecedented level of inflation has placed an onerous burden on people. The public's greatest expectation from their government

is that it competently manages the economy to alleviate their plight and provide them with a better economic future.

With the election season around the corner, what are political parties doing to show people they have a serious plan to deal with the country's economic challenges? So far, very little, if anything. Indeed, if news accounts are correct about a recent meeting of ruling coalition leaders in Dubai, their focus seemed to be more on who should be in the caretaker government and subsequent power-sharing arrangements between them than the economic problems facing the country. This suggests that the PDM parties still see governance as leveraging the spoils system rather than formulating public policy.

The real test, however, will come once elections are announced, because parties will then have to stake out their positions on economic as well as other issues. Voters will be able to determine whether in fact any party or leader has offered anything like an economic vision and has a strategy to extricate Pakistan from the economic mess it is in. But that doesn't mean voicing the usual platitudes and clichés that figure so frequently in pronouncements by political

leaders. There has been some talk about an 'economic compact' among parties, but this amounts to little more than a slogan as no one has cared to spell out what that should entail.

Only a fundamental break from the past can ensure a better economic future for Pakistan.

Some would argue that elections in the past have hardly been fought on policy issues and, instead, have been about personalities, traditional loyalties and local, constituency factors. This, of course, is true. But that view overlooks the fact that the ongoing economic crisis has affected people like never before and therefore public expectations may be very different from the past in the intensely fraught economic environment today. Not surprisingly, in successive public opinion surveys, people identify the economy as their number one concern. In a survey conducted by Ipsos in March, inflation and unemployment were the top public concerns. It would follow from this that many voters will look more closely at which political party can better handle the country's economic troubles and ease their hardship. Voters are also likely to punish incumbents for their worsening economic plight.

Apart from what political parties may have to offer on economic policy, there is also the question of whether the nature of the election outcome will help or hinder efforts at serious economic reform. Present indications are that Pakistan's era of coalition governments is not about to end. The pattern is likely to persist of a hung parliament with no party able to win an overall majority and form a government on its own. If the past is any guide, a coalition government will find it harder to secure consensus or agreement on tough economic measures, especially as the likely parties in such an arrangement (the two major parties in the present ruling coalition), are status quo parties in the first place, which have demonstrated little commitment to reform. Thus, coalition politics might inhibit the ability of the next government to take decisive actions and launch bold reforms. There are examples of coalition governments elsewhere in the developing world that managed to carry out far-reaching reforms, but it needed strong commitment by key parties to such action — a crucial element missing in our case, as none of the parties can be deemed as reformist.

There is also the strong likelihood of elections producing a regionalised outcome, with different parties forming governments in the four provinces. This reflects the reality of the country being bereft of a truly national party with roots



and support in all provinces. Regionalised results in recent general elections also indicate the growing fragmentation of politics. As this trend is also likely to continue, it will magnify the challenge for the federal government to manage such a polity and, more importantly, build inter-provincial consensus on major issues of economic policy and reform.

Of course, before the country goes to the polls, there will be a period of some months when a caretaker government will be in charge. Its main task will be to supervise and preside over the election. But at a time when an ailing economy will need to be carefully managed and delicately handled, leadership on this count will be expected

from the interim government. By prior agreement with the major parties, it can also take steps to strengthen and reinforce stabilisation measures to sustain the momentum of economic recovery.

There are many unknowns going forward. What is not in doubt is that the government that will emerge from elections, whatever its complexion, will have the responsibility to take the process of economic revival forward. Whether it can live up to that responsibility is an open question. But nothing less than a fundamental break from the past can ensure a better economic future for the country and its citizens.

Courtesy Dawn

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Textiles: A dormant giant

By Amir Jahangir

Pakistan, known as the fifth largest cotton producer worldwide and a major textile exporter, seems to be entrapped in a paradox of both potential and neglect.

While the sector contributes a staggering 57% to the country's exports and provides employment to a vast portion of the population, its steady decline over the past five years has been marked by a tangible lack of government and private sector interest.

Despite the textile sector's fundamental role in the economy, its position within the economic strategy of the country seems to be wavering. The Ministry of Textiles, the government body responsible for its administration and curating the industry, appears to have been in a virtual dormant state for the last half-decade.

This can be glaringly noticed in the outdated and obsolete data on their website, which has not been updated for years.

The ministry still prides itself on having Razzaq Dawood as its adviser, someone who has long gone from the policy arena. The last tender dates back to 2019, and the events and expos mentioned are relics of 2018-2019, casting a shadow on the department's lack of initiative.

This lethargy is not just limited to the government. The All Pakistan Textile Mills Association (APTMA), the body representing textile manufacturers in Pakistan, too, seems to be drifting, lacking vision and momentum to seize opportunities in the regional and global market space.

A visit to their website reveals that the latest industry insights are from 2021, suggesting a detachment from current global textile trends and developments.

Given the current scenario, the announcement made by Finance Minister Ishaq Dar, in his budget speech, about promoting the textile industry by abolishing the 5% regulatory duty on synthetic filament yarn, which is not produced locally, feels like a drop in the ocean.

The increase in GST on Tier-1 retailers of textiles and leather products from 12% to



15% appears more of a move to gain revenues, rather than a strategic plan to bolster the textile industry. Influencing the competitiveness of the high-end textile products being produced at home as compared to the similar products available to the consumer from the grey channels.

The Textiles and Apparel Policy 2020-25, launched by the Ministry of Commerce, promises to boost value-added exports and make Pakistan a major player in the global textile supply chain. However, the document is brimming with ambitious targets, but without a concrete action plan on how to achieve them. Telling the nation "what to do", while being muted about "how" to do it.

The statistics tell a worrying tale — the exports of textile products posted a growth of 12.8% year-on-year to \$4.4 billion in 2017-18, while the 2022-23 figures by the Economic Survey of Pakistan show a negative growth of 16.03%. This trend is a stern warning that without immediate and strategic action, the industry is at risk of further decline.

To make matters worse, the global shift from natural to man-made fibers in both consumption and production patterns is an undeniable reality that the Pakistani textile industry is yet to acknowledge and adapt to. This signals an urgent need for an instrument of research and development that can guide the industry toward an innovation-centric sustainable textile model.

It is evident that the textile industry, one of the champions of Pakistan's economy, is sadly enmeshed in neglect and apathy from the authorities that ought to be its strongest allies. Without a doubt, a rejuvenated and focused approach toward this sector is the need of the hour. The potential is immense, but the will and vision must meet the understanding of the global shift in market dynamics and the innovation that can enable the possibilities.

In the face of the increasingly fluctuating global cotton market, the Pakistani cotton industry has showcased a relatively resilient performance.

The data for 2022/2023 indicates that cotton was grown in an area of 2.065 million hectares. This represents a slight decline from the 2.110 million hectares of the previous year. Despite the decrease in cultivation area, the yield per hectare stood at 404.61 kilograms, reflecting an improved yield compared to previous seasons.

Cotton production for 2022/2023 was recorded at 0.836 million tonnes. This figure shows a decline compared to the 1.265 million tonnes produced in the 2021/2022 season. The shift in production can be attributed to a variety of factors, including climate change effects, agricultural practices, and policy regulations.

Beginning stocks for the 2022/2023 season were 0.5 million tonnes, which when coupled with imports of 1 million tonnes, provided the cotton industry with a

substantial volume for consumption and export. The total cotton consumption in Pakistan for the 2022/2023 season was high, reaching 1.9 million tonnes.

Despite the considerable consumption, Pakistan managed to export 0.009 million tonnes of cotton in the 2022/2023 season, slightly above the previous year's export volume. By the end of the 2022/2023 season, ending stocks were at 0.427 million tonnes. The stocks-to-use ratio, a key indicator of market tightness, was recorded at 0.22 for the 2022/2023 season, suggesting a balance in the supply and demand scenario for the Pakistani cotton industry.

Despite the fluctuating figures and the challenges faced by the cotton industry, Pakistan is a major player in the global cotton market. However, the global shift in standards and production techniques is changing the global landscape of textiles.

Pakistan needs to focus more on exploring new markets, increasing yield per hectare, and innovation to improve its share to be part of the global value and supply chain.

The statistics provide a comprehensive overview of the industry, but it is important to remember that the sector's performance is influenced by numerous variables, both domestic and global. The resilience and potential of Pakistan's cotton industry offer a promising future, given the right realisations, interventions, and policy support.

The establishment of a Sustainable Textile Innovation Council (STIC) in Pakistan could be the catalyst needed to drive the



industry toward a more sustainable and competitive future.

Not only would this align Pakistan's textile industry with global trends, but it would also unlock economic benefits, enhance social well-being, and safeguard the environment.

The mandate of the STIC will be different from the All-Pakistan Textile Mills Association (APTMA), the value proposition and policy focus would also differ in objectives and outcomes.

In the fast-paced world of industry moving ahead with artificial intelligence and automation, the line between success and failure can be drawn by a simple choice: to embrace innovation and change or remain stagnant in comfort zones, leading to a slow and gradual demise.

Nowhere is this decision more critical than in the dynamic textile industry, where the winds of change constantly blow. To survive and thrive, textile businesses must wholeheartedly embrace innovation, break free from their traditional boundaries, and venture into uncharted territories.

To avoid a slow and gradual demise, textile businesses must foster a culture of innovation. Encouraging creativity, empowering employees, and seeking collaborations with startups and research institutions can inject fresh perspectives and ideas. Embracing a mindset of continuous improvement, where even the smallest of changes are seen as stepping stones towards progress, can fuel the industry's journey towards a brighter future.

Courtesy www.geo.tv



COAS General Asim Munir supports the government's Economic Development plan

Enhancing Pakistan's Economic Development: Army's Commitment and Agriculture Revolution



TTI Report

Chief of Army Staff General Asim Munir addressed participants at the National Seminar on Agriculture and Food Security, held at the Jinnah Convention Centre in Islamabad on July 10.

According to the Chief of Army Staff, Pakistan has the capability to achieve great success and emerge as a leading nation. He expressed his belief that no external force can impede Pakistan's progress and development.

The Chief of Army Staff (COAS), General Asim Munir, has reaffirmed the Pakistan Army's unwavering support for the economic progress of the country, ensuring collaboration with the Pakistan Democratic Movement-led (PDM) coalition government. Speaking at the National Seminar on Agriculture and Food Security held at the Jinnah Convention Centre in Islamabad, General Munir emphasized the institution's commitment to providing every possible cooperation for the nation's economic advancement.

In his address, General Munir extended the military's full support to various initiatives

initiated under the Special Investment Facilitation Council, including the recently launched Green Pakistan Initiative. Recognizing Pakistan's abundant resources, the army chief expressed confidence in the nation's potential to rise to new heights. He called upon every individual to contribute to the country's development, assuring that Pakistan's progress and development are unstoppable by any external force.

PM Shehbaz revealed that Gulf countries are willing to invest in Pakistan's agriculture sector, providing modern machinery to enhance crop production. To attract investment, political stability is crucial, as an unstable environment dissuades potential investors. With stability and favorable conditions, Pakistan could attract \$40 to \$50 billion in investment and become a significant exporter of food products to Gulf countries, which presently import goods worth \$40 billion.

Strengthening Food and Economic Security

The Prime Minister emphasized the correlation between national security, food

security, and economic stability. By fortifying these aspects, Pakistan can secure its future and compete with the rest of the world. PM Shehbaz asserted that through relentless hard work and strategic planning, Pakistan's economy will witness a significant revival within the next two years.

"The Prime Minister's Office (PMO) announced the launch of the Land Information Management System - Centre of Excellence (LIMS - COE), followed by the implementation of the Green Pakistan initiative. This initiative aims to bolster food security in Pakistan, boost exports, and reduce the country's reliance on agricultural imports, thereby making a significant contribution to the national economy. The statement highlighted the positive response from agriculture experts and farmers who highly praised the government's groundbreaking efforts to revolutionize the agricultural sector. The collaboration between the public and private sectors, along with the focus on incorporating modern technology, is expected to bring substantial benefits to local farmers and help alleviate poverty."

Standard Chartered says Bitcoin can hit \$50,000 by end-2023



By J. Choudhry

In 2023, Bitcoin can surge to \$50,000 in 2023 while in 2024, Bitcoin's value will double, to over \$100,000.

ISLAMABAD: Standard Chartered has predicted robust growth in the value of Bitcoin in 2023 and 2024. In 2023, Bitcoin can surge to \$50,000 in 2023 while in 2024, Bitcoin's value will double, to over \$100,000.

According to Standard Chartered, Bitcoin has gained 80 percent value since the start of the calendar year 2023. In January this year, Bitcoin's value was hovering around \$23,000, and by July 10, 2023, Bitcoin surged to above \$30K amid multiple developments.

The recent surge in Bitcoin's price could encourage Bitcoin "miners" to hoard more of the supply.

Earlier, Standard Chartered published a \$100,000 end-2024 forecast for Bitcoin back

in April on the view the so-called "crypto winter" was over.

However, Geoff Kendrick, one of the bank's leading analysts, claimed there was now a 20 percent "upside" to that call.

"Increased miner profitability per BTC (bitcoin) mined means they can sell less while maintaining cash inflows. It will reduce net BTC supply pushing BTC prices higher," Kendrick said in a report.

Bitcoin's price has surged 80% since the start of 2023 but its current level of just over \$30,200 is still less than half the \$69,000 it peaked back in November 2021.

In 2022, trillions of dollars were wiped out of the crypto sector as central banks hiked rates while a string of crypto exchanges, including FTX exchange imploded. This year's collapse of several traditional-style banks though has fed the rebound.

Standard Chartered said the rationale for its prediction was that miners who mint the 900 new bitcoins produced each day across the world would soon need to sell fewer to cover their costs.

Kendrick estimated that miners have recently been selling 100% of their new coins. If the price hits \$50,000 though, they would probably only sell 20-30%.

"It is the equivalent of miners reducing the number of bitcoins they sell per day to just 180-270 from 900 currently."

"Over a year, that would reduce miner selling from 328,500 to a range of 65,700-98,550 – a reduction in net BTC supply of roughly 250,000 bitcoins a year."

Next April or May the total number of bitcoins able to be mined each day is also set to half due to an inbuilt supply and issuance mechanism that gradually limits supply to maintain its appeal.

The existing political landscape

By Umer Farooq

Pakistani society is facing multiple political crises. Apparently, society is in the grip of a power struggle. But it is a power struggle involving a confrontation between political players and state institutions at several levels.

First, the former ruling party, Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) has been engaged in a state of confrontation with the military and its affiliate intelligence services. This confrontation involves PTI mostly social media campaigns against the military leadership that culminated in May 9 attacks on military installations in Rawalpindi, Lahore and several other cities. PTI in turn is accusing the military of running a witch hunt against its leaders and workers. PTI accuses the military of making an attempt to damage it as a political party. At another level, the incumbent ruling party, PMLN is engaged in a confrontation with the Supreme Court and incumbent Chief Justice of Pakistan. The ruling party has been accusing the Chief Justice of tilting in support of PTI chief, Imran Khan and making an attempt to damage the ruling party. At the third level, the confrontation between PMLN and PTI seems likely to spill over into open violence in the streets of Pakistan. This, however, is not the end of the story. Apparently, the military and Chief Justice are seemingly supporting opposite sides in this chaotic political situation and this has the obvious impact of intensifying the political conflict. With elections only four months away this political melee is giving rise to an explosive political situation. Complete uncertainty prevails in the country.

The ruling party had only months ago prevented the holding of Punjab Assembly elections within the stipulated 90 days. We don't know whether all political parties will be provided a level playing field before the parliamentary elections. One of the contenders for power, PTI is facing the wrath of the state machinery since May 9 attacks on military installations and there are clear indications that an intense program of political engineering is afoot. The



influentials of Punjab's politics who were made to join PTI before the 2018 parliamentary elections—as PTI was the military establishment's favorite then—are being pushed to abandon PTI's ship. Jehangir Tareen, a former PTI stalwart has assembled a few hundred former lawmakers and electables of PTI is set to form his own political party, which is likely to contest elections in opposition to Imran Khan and his party. We don't know whether the military will remain neutral during the forthcoming parliamentary elections and subsequent government formation process. Immediately after Imran Khan's ouster from power, the military leadership announced to completely stay out of politics. But then the May 9 attacks happened—those responsible for the attacks were made to pay the price—former ruling party, PTI, started to fall apart with many of its stalwarts parting company with the mother party.

The big question facing the political system is whether the PTI would be allowed to contest elections under circumstances that could be described as a level playing field for all players. In a way what we are witnessing is a repeat of the 2018 parliamentary elections. Imran Khan is being treated the way Nawaz Sharif was treated before the 2018 elections. A plethora of criminal cases are being registered against Imran Khan. He is facing corruption allegations. He is facing criminal cases of different natures; the

particular aim of all of them seems to be the disqualification of Imran Khan from holding public office. Just like Nawaz Sharif was disqualified from holding public office, Imran Khan too would be disqualified. Nawaz Sharif's disqualification was followed by a process of political engineering of which Imran Khan was the prime beneficiary. His party won the parliamentary elections after Nawaz Sharif was removed from the political scene as he was sent to jail.

Imran Khan's anti-elite rhetoric endeared him to the deeply discontented middle classes and downtrodden alike. There seems to be a plan to chip away Imran Khan's vote bank by assembling electables, local politicians who are influential enough to win elections in their constituency without the support of popular political parties, associated with his party under the banner of another political party. This plan can work under a strictly controlled electoral process. This was the plan that Musharraf employed against Nawaz Sharif after the October 1999 coup that brought him to power. He assembled electables under the leadership of the Chaudhrys of Gujrat and engineered a controlled electoral process that bestowed a majority on the PML-Q in the 2002 parliamentary elections. However, the controlled electoral process left a deep-seated legitimacy question for the system General Musharraf put in place to prevent Nawaz Sharif from coming



back to power in the wake of the 1999 coup. And the Musharraf system failed to survive the electoral process when Musharraf was not in a position to dominate that process. Come to the 2008 parliamentary elections, PML-Q miserably lost.

If Imran Khan has the endurance to serve a jail sentence awarded to him by a military court, he might emerge as a folk hero. This is not an exaggeration. Look at where our society is headed. The economy is in shambles and there are zero chances that there will be a turnaround. Middle-class discontent will grow even worse. The political fortunes of PML-N, another claimant of middle-class loyalties, are in steep decline. Social and economic discontent and political instability will provide fuel to the myth that is likely to congeal around the persona of Imran Khan.

The establishment will end up creating a larger-than-life martyr figure in our midst. Worst of all, the removal of Imran Khan from the political scene will create a permanent legitimacy question for the system that the powers will establish in his wake. Remember that we as a society are still living in the aftermath of Nawaz Sharif's dubious removal from the political scene. The system Imran Khan presided over after the 2018 parliamentary elections completely lacked legitimacy, and the system that will take birth after Imran Khan's removal from the political scene will be similarly void of political legitimacy as the one he presided over.



Imran Khan's removal from the political scene will create a legitimacy question for the political system. If Imran Khan is removed from the political scene and the military establishment engineers a new political setup, this process is likely to generate a crisis of legitimacy for the system. It would not be an exaggeration to say that we are witnessing a repeat of the 2018 parliamentary elections. The removal of Nawaz Sharif from the political scene generated a political crisis for the system and we are still living in the aftermath of this crisis.

Imran Khan's campaign to make Nawaz Sharif accountable for alleged financial corruption in 2017 followed an age-old pattern in Pakistani politics where the military, intelligence services, and establishment colluded with rising and

famous leaders to put anti-military political leaders into the docks after their ouster from power. If anybody has any doubts about Imran Khan being the first to question the military's dominance, they should try to study how Benazir Bhutto reacted to her ouster in 1990 and 1996, or how Nawaz Sharif responded to his disqualification by the Supreme Court in 2017. The only thing unique about Imran Khan is his use of violence against the military as part of his anti-military campaign. Yet we see people genuinely believing that Imran Khan is engaging in some unique political crusade, primarily because our society collectively suffers from political amnesia. Similarly, political commentators are trying to present Imran Khan's possible disqualification from holding public office as something novel and unique. While Imran Khan is the darling of Pakistan's middle classes, the most endeared social group for the Pakistani state, his possible disqualification will not be a unique phenomenon – it will be an act that has been repeated umpteen times in our history.

There are two possibilities that are likely to emerge in case Imran Khan is removed from the political scene. Nawaz Sharif becomes the prime minister with the support of the military establishment. In the absence of Imran Khan, the system will face a crisis of legitimacy. The second possibility is that the military establishment constructs a third force that will be the prime beneficiary of future political engineering. The result will be a crisis of legitimacy.





Elections and new political alignments



By Sarfraz Raja

Politics is a game of chance. Bring that to Pakistan, and you get a recipe for power and disaster, which is a unique reminder of the past. Politics is alleged to be unpredictable, but how so? When the power remains among just a handful.

Here's a snapshot:

Doubts about elections

2023 is the elections year in Pakistan as the National Assembly of the country is completing its five-year term on the 13th of August. As per the constitution of Pakistan, an election has to be held within sixty days after the completion of the assembly tenure. Still, if the assembly is dissolved any time earlier even a day before the completion of its term, elections would be held within ninety days period after that. There is no ambiguity in this clause of the constitution but still, the biggest political question in the country remains throughout the year: would elections be held this year or not? There is just one condition under which the government can extend the assembly term for a few months and a maximum of a year, that is in case of some national emergency

situation like war, natural disaster, or calamity and that too has a legal process to follow otherwise there is no way to extend parliament tenure or delay elections.

Although there were few between-the-lines statements by some government members or politicians none of those ministers are considered the spokespersons of the government or even the head of government The Prime Minister never intended to delay the elections and even in a recent news conference PM Shehbaz Sharif when asked about the elections, categorically said that the term of assembly would be completed on the 13th of August. They would leave and after that, the election commission would solely decide upon the general elections. Sources of governing parties say that elections wouldn't be delayed and nothing would happen beyond the constitution but there is a suggestion that if assemblies are dissolved a day or two earlier than their actual time, elections could be held in November a month later than the actual expected time of October which would provide them some extra time to run their campaign. Rumors of a rift among ruling parties.

The set up running the government affairs in the country is a parties studded alliance, about a dozen parliamentary parties are part of that with a unique occasion in the political history of the country when almost all the parties are enjoying the government, but every party has its own identity, ideology, election symbol, and vote bank. Although it is called the PDM (Pakistan Democratic Movement) government, actually some of the major parties are not part of the PDM. The alliance was established at an all-party conference in September 2020 in Islamabad hosted by Pakistan People's Party but a few months later PPP disassociated themselves from the anti-government alliance after some differences with PMLN but they remain in support with PDM in the struggle against Imran Khan Regime. Other parties like MQM, PMLQ, and BAP are also not part of PDM and in fact, they were part of the Imran Khan government before joining the present ruling coalition. It is still unclear and undecided that PDM would be an elections alliance of not but one thing is clear that all parties in the government would go for elections with their own agenda and manifesto.



PMLN and PPP are two major parties in the ruling alliance both are setting their eyes on the elections and the top seat of premiership which is very much obvious in politics. After the federal budget was presented in parliament by the finance minister Ishaq Dar, Bilawal Bhutto came up hard for the not sparing amount for the flood victims in Sindh and threatened to leave the coalition, which sparked some controversies in mainstream and social media that there are some rifts among ruling alliance but PM Shehbaz Sharif immediately intervened and settled the issue accordingly.

What happened in the Dubai meetings?

Amid rumors of rifts, in the last week of June top leadership of PPP and PMLN sat at a table in Dubai to discuss future politics, where Nawaz Sharif arrived from London and Asif Ali Zardari, Maryam Nawaz from Pakistan. There were a series of meetings held between the top lot of Pakistani political powers and later reportedly representatives of parties like Jahangir Tareen's Istehkam e Pakistan party also joined some of the sittings. There was not anything official about these meetings but sources privy to this dialogue revealed that elections, Nawaz Sharif's return to Pakistan, and seat adjustment in some important constituencies in Punjab came under discussion. Sources

claim that there was unanimity among the participants that Nawaz Sharif should return to Pakistan as things have changed. Some new laws have been passed which could make the former three-time prime minister of the country eligible again to take part in active politics and lead his party like the pre-2017 scenario, when after he was declared disqualified for life by the apex court of the country and was thrown out of power and politics. Sources also mention that PPP wants seat adjustment in some important national assembly constituencies in Multan, Gujrat, Sargodha, Rahim Yar Khan, and Rawalpindi. On the other hand, a proposed charter of the economy also came under discussion under which a new government in consultation with all political parties and stakeholders would carry out an economic strategy and continuity of this policy would be ensured through some joint legislation too.

At the same time, the scenario emerging after the 9th May scenario and PTI vandalism, both PMLN and PPP are realigning their strategies, and trying to engage electives with them.

Emerging political scenario before elections

A few months earlier there was one

opponent of all ruling parties which was PTI but after the 9th of May sudden and unexpected downfall of Imran Khan and his party started and in days' time his party seems eliminated from the political scene of the country. Now all other parties which were past rivals and recent allies are redesigning their strategies to get the maximum share in the next parliament. There are some new alliances and adjustments on cards. PDM parties could contest elections as an alliance but with every party's own election symbol. Meanwhile, PPP could make an election alliance with its like-minded parties Awami National Party in KPK and Balochistan Awami Party in Balochistan but again these parties would go with their own election symbols. PMLN could go with some seat adjustments with Tareen's IPP and PMLQ in Punjab. Political guru believes that after a minus of PTI now elections and their results are very much predictable but still many things yet to be finalized there are still a few months left in elections and all parties would play their cards in terms of seat adjustments, alliances to gain the maximum numbers in next parliament but where PTI stands it's still before time to predicate about that what conditions emerged after possible arrest and disqualification of Imran Khan, all for them are depending on that.



Pakistan Peoples Party



Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf



Pakistan Muslim League (N)



Muttahida Qaumi Movement



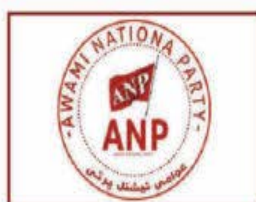
Jamaat-e-Islami Pakistan



Pakistan Quami Yakjehti Party



Pakistan Muslim League (F)



Awami National Party



Pak Sarzameen Party



Balochistan Awami Party



Amidst a dearth of economic opportunities, Pakistanis continue to embark on dangerous territories



By Tahir Niaz

Pakistan's Federal Investigation Agency (FIA) offloaded 19,000 Pakistanis suspected of illegal immigration in 2022. Europe deported 34,000 Pakistanis last year while the Agency tasked with the investigation of federal crimes including trafficking in persons and smuggling of migrants registered 3,600 First Information Reports (FIRs) against the agents in 2022. This all speaks volumes about how much the Pakistani youth is desperate to reach Europe and other destinations of their choice, no matter whether how they could potentially suffer. The main reason is only one; they don't see any future in Pakistan.

Pakistan, a nation of about 250 million, is facing the worst economic crisis in decades. Work is scarce; inflation is high; and essentials including food and fuel are increasingly costly, leading to 'tragedies in the seas'. On 14 June 2023, a fishing boat, reportedly known as the *Adriana*, smuggling migrants capsized in international waters in the Ionian Sea off the coast of Pylos, Messenia, Greece. The boat left Tobruk, Libya, on June 10 with an estimated up to 750 people on board, mostly from Pakistan, Egypt and Syria. The incident was one of the worst humanitarian disasters in the Mediterranean in recent years in which 104 people

survived and 82 bodies were recovered. According to media reports, at least 350 Pakistanis were onboard the vessel. Bandali in AJK of Pakistan with a population of 12,000 is just one of many Pakistani communities reeling from the disaster as about 22 people from this village alone remain unaccounted for, according to the residents. The Federal Investigation Agency of Pakistan said it has confirmed 92 deaths in the incident by collecting DNA samples of family members who reported their loved ones as missing. Interior Minister Rana Sanaullah, later, in a statement in the National Assembly said that there were at least 350 Pakistani victims on the overloaded boat that capsized and sank in open seas off Greece adding 82 bodies of those aboard the boat were recovered and their identification process was underway with the help of the forensic and NADRA data.

The tragedy, rightly called so, called on the authorities in Pakistan to take responsibility for its part in this disaster while also acknowledging that lack of economic opportunities available in the country compels more and more people to take their chances on such routes even knowing the risk involved. Grief shrouded Pakistan as

the nation mourned the Greece boat tragedy. An air of melancholy, especially engulfed the small village of Bandali in AJK where nearly two dozen families mourned the deaths of their near and dear ones. All these people intended to reach Europe in search of a better life but they met a tragic fate.

On the other hand, survivors blamed Greek coastguard for the tragedy. Four people who survived the disaster said the actions of the Greek coastguard caused the crowded fishing vessel to sink. Such tragedies are not new to Pakistan. The country has witnessed so many times such tragedies. The people of Gujrat, Mandi Bahaiddin, Gujranwala, Rawalpindi and AJK quite often hear such news. What makes the latest disaster different from the earlier ones is the scale of human loss. Authorities in Pakistan said they have started a crackdown on human trafficking networks in the country, arresting more than 20 human smugglers and more than five traffickers in connection with the latest episode. The country's investigation authority said special teams have been formed in the capital Islamabad, as well as the cities of Lahore, Gujrat, Gujranwala and Rawalpindi, to arrest other suspects. The Mediterranean, particularly



Greece's many southern islands, is a key route for migrants and refugees attempting to flee political discord and poverty in the Middle East, Asia and Africa. Greek authorities have faced criticism for how the disaster was handled, and uncomfortable questions were raised about European countries' attitudes toward migrants.

With work avenues drying up and sky-high inflation blowing a hole in their pocket, people are desperate to reach Europe. Pakistanis have been making these journeys in increasing numbers in recent months because of the country's economic crisis. Cash-strapped Pakistan's \$350 billion economy is in a meltdown, with inflation at a record 38%. A rapidly depreciating currency and external deficit led the government to adopt drastic measures over the past year to avoid default. But with that came a huge hit to growth and jobs.

The industrial sector, Pakistan's economic engine, provisionally contracted almost 3% in the current financial year -- troubling for a nation of 250 million with more than 2 million new entrants to the labour force annually. Official unemployment data have not been published in two years. The experts, however, put the jobless rate at a record 11-12%, conservatively.

Currently, Pakistanis are the number three nationality registered in Italy coming from Libya, after Egyptians and Bangladeshis, according to Frontex. Of the detections this



year through May, 4,971 were from Pakistan, a record for the country on the central Mediterranean route in a single year, according to Frontex data that go back to 2009.

Pakistan observed a day of mourning after the latest boat disaster. Around 350 Pakistanis were believed to be on board. Even before last week's sinking, numerous Pakistanis had perished in the Mediterranean this year. Muhammad Nadeem, 38, was aboard a boat that sank off Libya in February, killing more than 70.

Pakistan is a top exporter of labour, and remittances have helped keep the country afloat. Nearly 830,000 people registered as

overseas workers last year, the highest since 2016, official data show. But legal migration opportunities are limited, and many migrants make arrangements through agents who often present irregular migration as a quicker, cheaper, or the only way to reach Europe, according to the Migrant Resource Centre, an EU-funded organisation that provides information and counselling to migrants.

The situation requires prudent decisions on the part of the government, the countrymen and the local employers. Unless the economic situation improves, and youth is provided with job opportunities, the countryman would continue to hear such tragic stories.



Amanat Hussain: From Zero to 100

By Mishaal Ashraf



In the bustling streets of Barcelona, a name resonates with success, resilience, and philanthropy—Amanat Hussain. Born in Jehlum, Pakistan, Amanat embarked on a journey of entrepreneurship that would not only transform his life but also leave an indelible impact on the Pakistani community in Spain and his home country. Over the past 23 years, he has built an empire from scratch, becoming an icon of success in Barcelona's business landscape.

From Humble Beginnings

Amanat Hussain's story begins with humble origins. Born and raised in Pakistan, he possessed an unwavering determination to build a prosperous future for himself and his family. In 2000, he made the life-altering decision to move to Spain, where he encountered a new set of challenges.

Overcoming the initial language barriers and cultural adjustments, Amanat found employment in various odd jobs. From working as a kitchen assistant in a Spanish restaurant to being a petrol station attendant, Amanat embraced all types of work without hesitation. During the initial years, he dedicated himself to working 16 hours a day, every day of the week. He harboured a burning desire to chart his own path and achieve financial independence. Fuelled by this determination and honest intentions, Amanat's entrepreneurial journey was set in motion, propelling him from working in a small supermarket on Comte d'Urgell, which he thought was a need of the moment, to now commanding a vast network of over a hundred establishments scattered throughout the city.



The First Steps

Amanat Hussain's entrepreneurial journey truly took off when he recognized an opportunity in the supermarket industry. With his keen business sense, he identified a gap in the market and set out to establish his first supermarket in the heart of Barcelona. This venture required immense dedication, hard work, and financial discipline.

Amanat painstakingly researched the needs and preferences of the local community, striving to provide exceptional service. Over time, Amanat Hussain successfully accumulated the necessary capital to acquire renowned supermarket franchises in Spain. Starting out as an employee in a local supermarket, he gradually transitioned into becoming the proprietor of a diverse network of supermarket franchises.

Building a Fortune

Amanat's ascent to success didn't stop with his supermarket franchises. He diversified his business interests, venturing into real estate, sports management, trading, and other sectors. With a shrewd eye for lucrative opportunities, he strategically invested in prime locations, acquiring properties and expanding his wealth.

In addition to his business ventures, Amanat demonstrated a keen interest in sports management. He recognized the unifying power of sports and the potential to nurture talent. Amanat Hussain actively fostered the growth of Barcelona's sports scene by engaging in sponsorships, implementing training programs, and supporting infrastructure development. His dedication extended beyond mainstream sports, as he

also played a vital role in preserving traditional Pakistani sports such as cricket, volleyball, and kabbadi, ensuring their continuity and prominence in the community abroad. His involvement in sports not only enriched the local community but also enhanced his reputation as a multifaceted businessman.

Philanthropy and Community Empowerment

Throughout his remarkable journey, Amanat Hussain remained deeply connected to his Pakistani roots. He understood the challenges faced by his fellow countrymen in Spain and sought to empower them, especially the women. One of his significant contributions has been the creation of thousands of job opportunities for Pakistanis and various other nationalities residing in Spain. By establishing businesses, Amanat provided employment and facilitated the integration of Pakistani immigrants into Spanish society.

Moreover, Amanat's philanthropic endeavours extended beyond Spain's borders. He initiated various projects aimed at empowering individuals in his home country, Pakistan. Recognizing the importance of education, he invested in schools and scholarships, enabling underprivileged children to receive quality education. Furthermore, Amanat Hussain extended his support to healthcare initiatives by establishing a free ambulance service. He also contributed to infrastructure development efforts and actively supported charitable organisations. Through these endeavours, he made a significant and positive impact on the lives of numerous Pakistanis, enhancing their access to vital healthcare services and fostering community development. In addition to this, Amanat takes immense pleasure in personally welcoming Pakistanis visiting Spain and assisting those who need to acquire legal status overseas via official means.

Recognitions and Impact

Amanat Hussain's unwavering commitment to success and community empowerment garnered him widespread recognition. Not only popular in Pakistani circles, but Amanat also prides on having close ties with the political leadership in Spain. In Barcelona, he is considered one of the



elites, admired for his entrepreneurial spirit and dedication to community building. His success story has become an inspiration for aspiring entrepreneurs, both within the Pakistani community and beyond.

Amanat's contributions have not gone unnoticed by the government and business circles in Spain. He has been honoured with numerous awards and accolades for his outstanding achievements. His accolades include the Best Businessman Award from the Government of Catalunya in 2013. These recognitions have further solidified his reputation as a role model for aspiring entrepreneurs.



Conclusion

Amanat Hussain's incredible and humble journey from starting with nothing to becoming a prominent figure in Barcelona's business landscape showcases the power of determination, resilience, and community support. Through his relentless pursuit of success and unwavering commitment to philanthropy, Amanat has not only

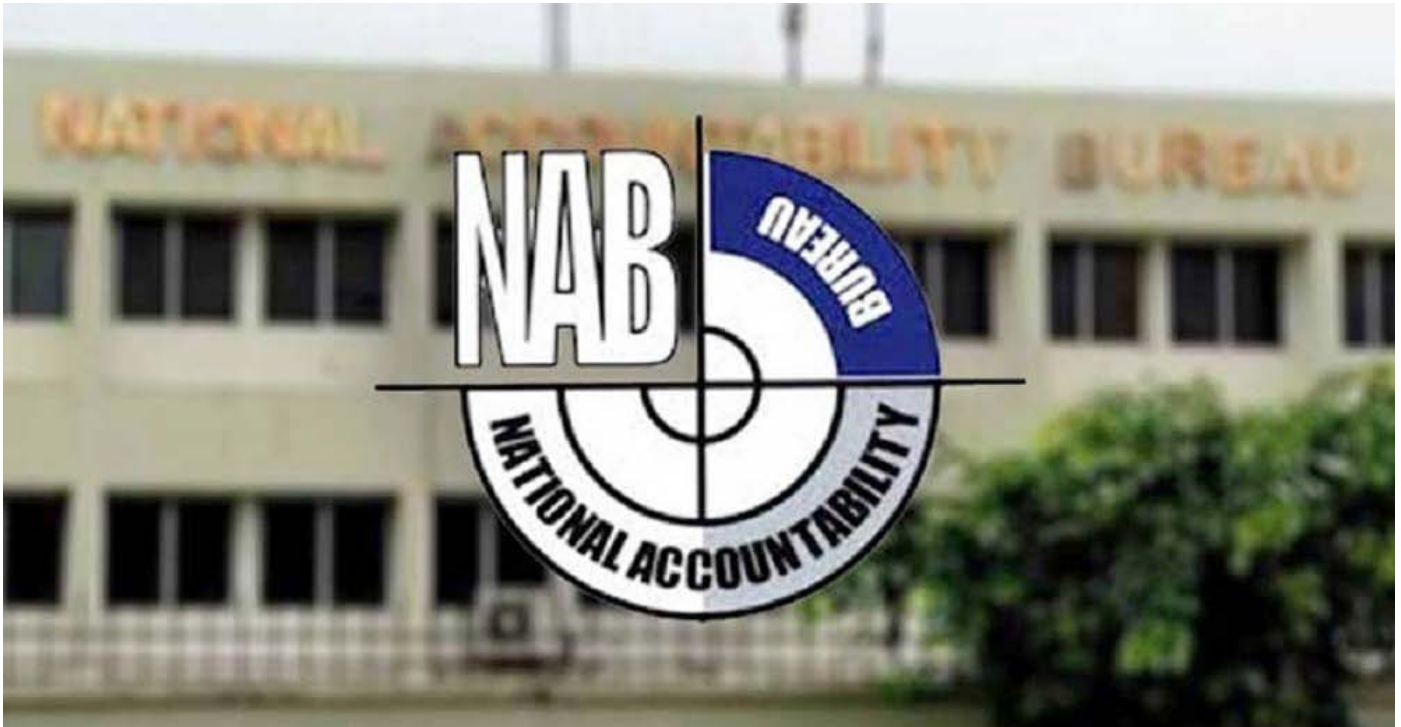
transformed his own life but also uplifted the lives of countless individuals.

His dedication to empowering the Pakistani community in Spain, along with his philanthropic efforts back home, serves as a testament to his compassion and generosity. Amanat Hussain's story stands as a shining example of how entrepreneurial success can be coupled with social impact, inspiring others to dream big and make a difference in their communities. His journey from zero to owning an empire of supermarket franchises, real estate, and involvement in sports management amongst other sectors is a true testament to the power of hard work, determination, honesty, and modesty.

In his pursuit of excellence, Amanat Hussain remains steadfast in his commitment to expanding his business empire even further. With an unwavering belief that the sky is the limit, he envisions reaching new heights of success and impact. Amanat's entrepreneurial spirit is fueled by his belief that "water takes the shape of any container," illustrating his adaptability and willingness to embrace new opportunities. With his remarkable journey as inspiration, Amanat continues to push boundaries, chart new territories, and leave an indelible mark on the business landscape. The future holds endless possibilities for this visionary businessman, whose determination knows no bounds.



Amendments to the law, and its new victims



By Asadullah

The sudden change in the accountability laws through an ordinance promulgated by the acting president may be a problem for Pakistan Tehreek-i-Insaf (PTI) but it is likely to soothe the Sharifs. It enhanced the National Accountability Bureau (NAB) powers of arm twisting and also introduced a penal clause for the political engineering done in the past.

Through the Presidential Ordinance, promulgated late at night on July 3, the government amended 6 different sections of the National Accountability Ordinance (NAO), the law that governs the NAB.

Senate Chairman Sadiq Sanjrani, who is working as acting president in the absence of President Arif Alvi, issued an ordinance to empower the NAB to arrest a suspect during inquiry period and also allow the NAB court to remand a suspect for 30 days in custody after arrest instead of earlier 15 days. It seems that the law has been drafted in a hurry as there are certain sections that have been inserted in the Ordinance without making any changes.

Interestingly, the amendments introduced through the Presidential Ordinance in

Section 14-A that is about “Presumption against accused accepting illegal gratification” is the same that was repealed through the ordinance. Likewise, Section 26 which relates to the power of the chairman NAB to “Tender of pardon” also remains the similar to the section to which it has been substituted.

However, what differentiates the ordinance from the existing law is the recurrence of those powers of the chairman NAB that was clipped through an Act of Parliament that was passed by the ruling coalition and is pending before the Supreme Court. For example, through the previous year’s amendment in Section 24 of the National Accountability Ordinance, the chairman NAB has been barred to issue arrest warrants during the inquiry stage, and also the remand period was reduced from 90 days to a fortnight.

However, the Presidential Ordinance empowered the chairman NAB to “issue warrant of arrest during the course of inquiry if the accused is not joining inquiry despite notices or willfully does not cooperate in such inquiry.”

In sub-section (d), for the word “fourteen”,

the word “thirty” shall be substituted.

It may be mentioned that as per NAB’s procedure, after verification of the complaint, an inquiry is authorized by the competent authority which took at least three months to upgrade as an investigation. This means that if an inquiry is authorized today, the chairman of NAB could not issue arrest warrants until it is converted or upgraded into an inquiry. However, the amendment has now empowered him to order the arrest of suspects at the stage of inquiry.

The NAB has repeatedly argued before the accountability court and Islamabad High Court that PTI chairman Imran Khan avoided responding to the call-up notices for one pretext or another.

Former premier Khan now faces at least two NAB cases one related to Toshakhana gifts and the other to a 190mn pounds corruption scam also known as the Al-Qadir Trust corruption case.

The Al-Qadir Trust case alleges that the PTI chief and his wife Bushra Bibi obtained billions of rupees and land from a real estate firm for legalizing 190mn Pounds that were



identified as crime proceed by the UK government and returned to the country by the National Crime Agency of the UK during the previous government led by Khan.

The amount however was transferred into the bank account of property tycoon Malik Riaz.

Mirza Shahzad Akbar, former close aide of Mr Khan obtained secret approval from the cabinet for the transfer of crime proceed into the account of Malik Riaz which the latter transferred to the Supreme Court to clear Rs460bn fine imposed on him by the apex court.

It is expected that the PTI politicians who were facing NAB inquiries and are still loyal to Mr Khan may face arrest. Khan and his spouse are on interim bail in both the NAB cases, however, they could also be arrested in case NAB would initiate a fresh inquiry against them.

Legal expert said that the Presidential Ordinance has revived the powers of NAB.

He said that this law may be use for PTI for the time-being; however, it may be used against PML-N or any political party in future.

Another amendment in a sub-section of

Section 24 increased the remand period from 14 days to 90 days.

A senior lawyer, who wishes not to be named, said that 14 days remand in white-collar crime was sufficient time and there was no need of detaining a suspect for a month. The white-collar crimes are probed to get hold of certain documents, which may be laying at some office, a bank or commercial entity, therefore, the investigation could recover the evidence in a fortnight, he said. He also added that since this provision directly relates to the liberty and freedom of a citizen therefore this should not be inserted in the law through a temporary legislation.

However, the government on the other hand is defending these amendments.

Prime Minister's Special Assistant on Legal Reforms and Accountability Irfan Qadir said that the 90 days remand was not rational, therefore, the period was reduced to 14 days.

He said that a fortnight was not enough to interrogate and gather the evidence from an accused and the investigation agency was facing some issues therefore it was slightly increased to 30 days. He however said that the prosecution is required to produce the accused before the judge to obtain remand

and it is the judge who makes the decision of handing over custody of the suspect to the investigation team for a certain period.

The Presidential Ordinance besides amending other sections also inserted a provision in Section 36. It states: "if the accused has been acquitted by the Court on the ground that the case was initiated with malafide intention based on fabricated evidence, the person found guilty of such act by the said Court shall be punished with imprisonment of either description for a term which may extend to three years and shall also be liable to fine."

The NAO provided blanket cover to the officials of the government as well as of the prosecution agency. Though the law is prospective, but the legal experts are of the view that the amendment may soothe the Sharif family as former Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif has yet to seek acquittal in Avenfield and Al-Azizia references.

In Avenfield reference, a division bench of the IHC earlier last year had already ruled that the prosecution failed to prove charges against Maryam Nawaz and Capt Safdar and there was no evidence on record to prove Nawaz purchased apartments in his daughter's name through corrupt, illegal practices.





Sources of instability

By Umair Javed

There is an enduring debate on the degree to which politics reflects a country's societal trends. Some analysts argue that politics usually reflects deep divides or cleavages found in society, such as socioeconomic class, religion, ethnicity, or gender. Others argue that political actors actively make or break identities and divisions in society, which helps them win power.

As is usually the case, the truth lies somewhere in the middle. Sometimes it takes a while for political parties to wake up to societal truths and trends. Societies undergo demographic and economic shifts and change people's requirements from politics. But parties can be slow to act.

Other times, political parties try to act contrary to society's existing divisions. They attempt to create new visions of a society, ignoring inequities, imbalances, and pre-existing fault-lines.

When there is a gap between people's expectations from politics and what political actors are usually doing, it leads to moments of crises. The crises can be violent upheavals. Or they can be episodic bursts of instability because of infighting among politicians, between politicians and groups of citizens, or between politicians and other state institutions. But all these are a sign that state and society will have to adapt for stability to re-emerge.

Pakistani politics, especially in the mainstream, demonstrates gaps with society fairly frequently. Over the last decade and a half, we can see three variants at different points in time: 1) new ways of thinking about an issue become popular in society so the state and political parties belatedly try to co-opt it; 2) the state and political parties attempt to coercively centralise authority and enforce unity despite the existence of different and competing interests in society; 3) the state and political parties ignore deep demographic and economic transformations in society and try to carry on with business as usual.

All three types of gaps have produced their own type of instability.

The first gap is most visible in the way the state deals with the politics around blasphemy. The rise of Barelvi fundamentalism and its deepening roots in both urban and rural settings have made blasphemy and the finality of prophethood a major and entrenched societal flashpoint. There is mobilisation around this theme, triggered by both global and local issues. The assassination of Salmaan Taseer and the celebration of his killer, Mumtaz Qadri, was a major inflection point after which there appears to have been no turning back.

How has the political mainstream responded to it? First, it offered open space for public protest and venting, mistakenly thinking that a single-issue politics of this type would die out in a country that is 96 per cent Muslim. When the issue refused to die out, the state decided to use this mobilisation for narrow purposes, such as destabilising an out-of-favour government and breaking away voters. Ultimately, faced with the prospect that this new way of thinking would eventually consume everything, the political mainstream has decided to embrace it fully. Changes to school curriculum and the text of a nikahnama in Punjab are recent examples of this embrace. Inches have been given, but the instability-causing crowds on the roads will frequently demand miles

The second gap was the hybrid experiment that ran from 2011 to 2022, achieving full manifestation in its last three years. This was an attempt to centralise authority through a hybrid populist alliance of the PTI and the military. The populism part mobilised public anger through Imran Khan against the rest of the political mainstream, while the military part coercively dealt with opposition parties, ethnonationalist movements, and a non-compliant civil society. The end goal of this experiment appeared to be a unified state with no space for opposition politics.

Ultimately this experiment fell prey to its own, very familiar internal contradiction: two bosses for one system. As former PM Imran Khan now admits, it was a mistake

to outsource politics to the military. When the experiment cracked, there was no safety net, no grounding in parliamentary politics that could offer a way out. Instead, we ended up with greater instability. Even today, the denial of legitimacy to political opponents is one of several reasons why instability continues.

Finally, the third and most recent gap is the attempt by the military establishment and the current coalition government to carry on with the usual politics of jor-tor and patronage, while ignoring massive demographic, economic, and political change that has taken place in society.

In a recent piece for another publication, Dr Adnan Rafiq pinpointed one major aspect of this political and demographic change, which is the rise of the urban, educated, white-collar segment (colloquially called the middle class). This is the core electorate for the PTI, and the one segment that, despite its actual numbers, has had an outsized impact on politics because of its presence in media, in the private sector, in state institutions, and in the diaspora.

This segment was fully mobilised by the PTI for the first hybrid experiment as it waged the clean vs corrupt battle. That battle played to their analysis of Pakistan being held back by conventional politics and the sclerotic practices of traditional, dynastic parties. Thus, deep-seated frustration with dysfunctional governance and a stagnant economy found its own political outlet.

The khaki patrons of that experiment pulled the plug in April 2022, and have since forged a new arrangement with traditional parties in a coalition model. Yet the anger of various segments in society cannot be undone as easily as engineering a few defections or a vote of no confidence. That anger is still palpable and will remain disruptive, even if its main outlet (PTI) is suppressed. In other words, the political mainstream has to adapt to a society that has changed considerably, otherwise instability will remain a perennial condition.

Courtesy Dwan



The Ugliness in Pakistan's Power Politics

Pakistan's power politics has taken an ugly turn. The consolidation of power has become the ultimate aim, democratic principles and fairness be damned. Such careless politicking will undoubtedly have disastrous consequences in the future.

By Dr. Moonis Ahmar

Hans J. Morgenthau, a renowned international relations theorist, wrote in his path breaking book *Politics Among Nations* that: "All politics is power politics." He was right insofar as he was representing the realist school of thought in international relations. Morgenthau's insight also fits politics in 2023, which is devoid of ethics and morality because it is used as a tool to grab power by all means.

The ugliest face of Pakistan's power politics is a sad reality, as never in the 75-year history of this country has indifference, hypocrisy and opportunism reigned supreme with only a few muted voices of dissent. The lust for power tends to permeate different segments of state and society to the extent that the line between right and wrong doesn't exist anymore.

The recent example of the ugliness in Pakistan's power politics is political engineering and manipulation in Gilgit-Baltistan (GB), where Chief Minister Khalid Khursheed of the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) had to step down because of a fake degree case. Rawalpindi and Islamabad are on one page for denying PTI any space, which led to police action in the assembly of GB by preventing PTI assembly members in electing a successor to Khursheed.

Following the footsteps of Azad Kashmir, where recently the PTI government was removed by an engineered vote of no-confidence, the situation in GB is getting serious. To break the clear majority of PTI members in GB assembly, the PDM-led coalition government and their patrons in the establishment are now deploying horse trading, harassment and other manipulation tactics to transform the PTI's majority in the GB assembly into a minority, and then install a coalition government led by the Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP), the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) and the Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam (JUI).

When one talks about the malice in Pakistan's power politics in the year 2023, coercion, repression, oppression and the use of force to suppress the voices of dissent have enabled the powers that be to silence the media and preventing the truth from reach people. The manner in which the judiciary is in a compromising position is unprecedented in 2023, because of a fear that adhering to the rule of law and accountability will damage their interests. Those who are determined to cut PTI and Imran Khan down to size believe that this task cannot be accomplished without silencing the media, judiciary, election commission and conducting a large scale crack-down.

Recently, the Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi claimed that "Pakistan is not an issue because that country will collapse under its own weight." Our country's leadership does not realize that such



bluster must be taken seriously. The current economic and political predicament that Pakistan finds itself in is not far from the trajectory that the Indian Prime Minister was predicting for our collective future.

What is appalling is the manner in which the majority of political parties have compromised on the principles of democracy, the freedom of press and the independence of the judiciary. When the suppression of dissent is done with the collusion of political parties for consolidating power, the outcome will necessarily be disastrous for the economy and politics of the country.

Why is this ugly power politics allowed to continue, and how are those who wield real power oblivious to the heavy price that Pakistan will pay if the freedom of the media and the independence of the judiciary is compromised? What will be the end result of the current state repression against a single political party and its leadership?

When the history of Pakistan will be recorded, the years 2022 and 2023 will be marked as one of the darkest episodes because the callousness with which ethics, morality and principles were sacrificed for securing power for the ruling coalition government and their principal backers. The implications of adopting such a shortsighted approach by the incumbents will surpass the tragedy of Pakistan's disintegration in 1971.

Recently, the Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi claimed that "Pakistan is not an issue because that country will collapse under its own weight." Our country's leadership does not realize that such bluster must be taken seriously. The current economic and political predicament that Pakistan finds itself in is not far from the trajectory that the Indian Prime Minister was predicting for our collective



future. When the country is facing an unprecedented crisis in its history, instead of dealing with the diplomatic sleight visited on Pakistan by India, over accusations of sponsoring cross border terrorism in a joint communiqué issued by India and the United States, following Modi's visit to America, the PDM, PPP and the military establishment failed to respond to a grave threat to the country's national security.

When political engineering led to regime change in AJK and a similar strategy is being pursued in GB, will India remain silent and not fully exploit the situation to their benefit?

The developing political situation in GB, where India is trying to annex what it calls "Pakistan Occupied Kashmir," will provide a valuable opportunity to our neighbor for their designs because of Islamabad's machinations to remove the PTI government and replace it with their own. One only needs to refer to repeated threats from the Indian Defense Minister in which he has vowed to annex GB and Azad Kashmir by taking advantage of Pakistan's economic and political crisis.

When political engineering led to regime change in AJK and a similar strategy is being pursued in GB, will India remain silent and not fully exploit the situation to their benefit? Given the sensitivity of GB, because of its strategic and security vulnerability, why has Islamabad embarked on measures to destabilize the situation in that region by attempting to remove the PTI government in Gilgit from power?

Pakistan's power politics need to be examined from three angles. First, the unholy alliance of the PDM and PPP has a single point agenda – to remove the PTI and Imran Khan from the political scene. Ironically, these political parties failed to learn lessons from history, that alliances based on opportunism cannot endure. But what is unfortunate and alarming is the total neglect of ethics, values, morality and principles by compromising on democratic norms, political tolerance and the rule of law. Using the unfortunate events of 9 May for their own power ambitions and silencing the opposition by imposing curbs on media; neutralizing judiciary and resorting to worst kind of repression will have far reaching implications.

By denying the PTI media coverage and deploying brutal repression through the state apparatus, the coalition government is unable to redeem itself of the consequences of what it is resorting to today by eliminating its political adversary. A myopic mindset on part of those who wield power is unprecedented. Without giving an opportunity to Imran Khan and PTI to defend their position over the sad events of 9 May, those who are determined and single-minded in accomplishing their objectives sooner or later will have to pay the heavy price of their short-sighted approach.

Second, instead of pursuing an inclusive approach to focus on national unity and saving the country from economic derailment, the PDM and their allies are least interested in dealing with issues which will cause unprecedented damage to the country. The ruling coalition's decisions to use the events of May 9 for their political motives will further divide and polarize Pakistan.

If the next elections are held without the PTI being able to participate meaningfully, and having been denied political space, the credibility of such polls will be doubtful and lead to large scale political conflict and perhaps even violence.

If the PDM and PPP, through denying the PTI a level playing field in the general elections, think that they will fill the gap and secure electoral gains, they are completely mistaken in their calculations. If the next elections are held without the PTI being able to participate meaningfully, and having been denied political space, the credibility of such polls will be doubtful and lead to large scale political conflict and perhaps even violence. Those who are rendering support to the coalition government because of their hatred against Imran Khan by manipulating the next general elections must think very carefully about the consequences.



Finally, the horrid nature of power politics in Pakistan will lead a descent into chaos if partisan caretaker governments are installed in the center and provinces. Already, the legality of caretaker governments in Punjab and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa is contested. Meetings in Dubai and elsewhere between the PPP and PML-N leadership over installing a favorable caretaker setup in the country will be reprehensible, with grave consequences to come.

When the PDM-led coalition government and their principal handlers are unable to neutralize the popular support of PTI among the masses, they embarked on another plan to destabilize GB via political engineering. Anti-Pakistan and anti-establishment sentiments among the local people of GB will trigger another crisis and motivate people like Rajnath and others in India who are waiting for just the right opportunity to absorb GB and AJK into the territorial fold of India.

The dirty game of power politics in Pakistan has further exposed the elites of this country as malicious rent-seeking parasites, who while disregarding the severe economic predicament of the masses, are more interested in operating from their comfort zones and seeking to maximize their privileges and perks even as the country burns. The use of manipulative methods to seek electoral legitimacy will further compound Pakistan's political and economic crisis.

Courtesy www.thefridaytimes.com

Understanding China's Diplomatic Initiatives

In 2023, China has embarked on ambitious diplomatic ventures, seeking to deploy its soft power to mediate conflicts across the world. While it's too early to label these initiatives as successful, there is no doubt that China now seeks to assert itself as a benevolent global power

In the first half of 2023, China embarked on three diplomatic and peace initiatives by offering a Ukrainian peace plan, mediating between Saudi Arabia and Iran with the aim of normalizing their diplomatic relations and offered the visiting Palestinian President Mahmud Abbas peace talks with Israel. In all three initiatives, China acted like a rising hegemon, by projecting its soft power for mending fences in three conflict zones of Middle East and Europe.

According to reports, Chinese President Xi Jinping, while welcoming the Palestinian president Mahmud Abbas in the Great Hall of Peoples in Beijing on June 14 offered reconciliation within Palestinian factions, and the promotion of peace with Israel. He also supported the full membership of the State of Palestine in the United Nations and establishing an independent Palestinian state composed of the pre-June 1967 borders with East Jerusalem as its capital. In March this year, China unveiled its peace plan to end the war in Ukraine. Also in March, China arranged Iranian-Saudi reconciliation, whereby the two rival states announced they were reestablishing diplomatic relations. All three strategic and diplomatic initiatives of Beijing in the international arena will have far reaching implications in a polarized world order.

It seems like China is entering the Middle East with big ambitions, and the scale of those ambitions was reflected in the first China-Arab summit which was held in Riyadh in December last year. In that summit, which was attended by 21 Arab states, the Chinese president Xi delivered a keynote speech entitled "Carrying Forward the Spirit of China-Arab Friendship and Jointly Building a China-Arab Community with a Shared Future in the New Era," in which he announced that China and Arab States were in agreement on deepening ties.



Xi, in his keynote speech, asserted that "China and Arab states should focus on economic development and promote win-win cooperation. The two sides should strengthen synergy between their development strategies and promote high-quality Belt and Road cooperation. They should consolidate cooperation in traditional areas including economy and trade, energy and infrastructure development. In the meantime, the two sides should strengthen new sources of growth such as green and low-carbon development, health and medical services, and investment and finance, and expand new frontiers including aviation and aerospace, digital economy and peaceful use of nuclear energy. China and Arab states should also tackle major challenges like food security and energy security. China will work with the Arab side to implement the Global Development Initiative (GDI) and drive sustainable development of South-South cooperation." It means a paradigm shift in China and Middle East, whereby the focus would be on economic cooperation, development, environmental protection and South-South cooperation.

The China-Arab summit can no doubt be termed as a landmark and game changer, because Xi called "to advance eight major cooperation initiatives in areas including development support, food security, public health, green innovation, energy security, inter-civilizational dialogue, youth development, and security and stability, and will strive for early harvest." China as a major buyer of Gulf oil and a foremost investor in Arab infrastructure under its Built and Road Initiative (BRI) will surely be at par with an age-old player in the Middle East, the United States.

It was not only the China-Arab states summit which augmented Beijing's influence in the Middle East. On June 11, the first Arab-China business conference was held in Riyadh, in which Saudi Arabia announced billions of dollars of investment deals between China and Arab countries. More than 3,500 government and business officials from China and Arab countries participated in that conference, in which a \$5.6-billion memorandum of understanding was signed between the Saudi investment ministry and Human

Horizons, a Chinese maker of electric and self-driving cars. Focusing on promoting economic and commercial ties – reflecting the reality of geoeconomics and soft power – China is reaching out to the Middle East and other parts of the world with each passing day.

The visit of Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas to Beijing and Chinese president Xi Jinping's offer for peace in the Middle East indicates how vibrant China seeks to be in the realm of mediation and diplomacy. China and Palestine signed several bilateral agreements for economic and technological cooperation, a deal on mutual visa exemption for diplomatic passports, and a friendship between the Chinese city of Wuhan and Ramallah, the capital of Palestinian authority in the occupied West Bank.

On March 13, 2023, the announcement by Beijing of having facilitated the normalization of relations between Iran and Saudi Arabia, the two rival states in the Persian Gulf, reflected how China had played a significant role in mending fences by using 'quiet' diplomacy in the region. Beijing certainly took advantage of American-Saudi cleavages and launched mediation for reconciliation between Iran and Saudi Arabia. Since the last seven years, the two countries had severed diplomatic relations when Iran protested against the hanging of a Shia cleric in Saudi Arabia. According to the AP, "an agreement between Iran and Saudi Arabia to re-establish diplomatic relations has cast China in a leading role in Middle East politics, a part previously reserved for long time global heavyweights like the US and Russia. It's another sign that China's diplomatic clout is growing to match its economic footprint."

The neutrality of China in the Iran-Saudi schism provides enough justification for Beijing's role in mending fences between the two adversaries. Certainly, Saudi-Iranian normalization is a major setback for Israel and the United States, as the two had followed a policy of projecting Iran as an enemy state, not only for Saudi Arabia but for the entire Arab world. Iran's nuclear program and the implications of Iranian revolution of February 1979 in promoting anti-monarchy sentiments in the Gulf States led to American and Israeli augmen-

tation (read manipulation) of Arab threat perception against Tehran. Now, Chinese diplomacy has created new opportunities for peace and cooperation in the Middle East. Yet, if China has succeeded in mending fences between Iran and Saudi Arabia, it will be an uphill task for Beijing to continue to play a meaningful role in the Israeli-Palestinian peace process because Tal Aviv will not take a back foot on its illegal occupation of the West Bank or agree to the full implementation of the Oslo Accords signed between Israel and the Palestinian Liberation Organization on September 13, 1993 in the lawns of the White House and mediated by the then American President Bill Clinton.

The war in Ukraine, which has negatively impacted food and fuel supply chains globally, and led to the fragility of the world order provided China a unique opportunity to step in and present its own peace plan. Regardless of China's close ties with Russia, the Chinese peace plan got a cautious response from the West and somewhat of a silent endorsement by Moscow. Since Russia's attack on Ukraine began on February 24, 2022, colossal material and physical losses suffered by both Ukraine and Russia have prompted African countries, Indonesia, Brazil, Turkey and China to present peace plans for ceasefire and to end deadly war.

The Chinese peace plan to end the war in Ukraine calls for respecting the sovereignty of all countries, abandoning the Cold War mentality and ceasing hostilities. The plan calls for a resumption in peace talks, a resolution of the humanitarian crisis, protecting civilians and prisoners of war (POWs), keeping nuclear power plants safe, reducing strategic risks and facilitating grain exports. The crux of the Chinese peace plan is not to resolve conflicts between Ukraine and Russia, but to create conditions for a ceasefire, the resumption of peace talks, to create space to deal with the humanitarian crisis and the stabilization of the food and fuel supply chains, which faced disruption because of the war. However, neither Ukraine, nor its principal backer NATO, gave a positive response to the Chinese peace plan.

Three fundamental realities have led to China seeking to play a growing role for the

sake of peace and cooperation in the world today. First, China has largely adhered to using its soft power as its preferred diplomatic tool, which has meant conducting relations on the basis of trade, aid, diplomacy and technology. Since January 1979, China has not gone to war with any country, as its military intervention in Vietnam was its last act of invasion and occupation. The focus of Chinese leadership since Deng Xiaoping's 'open door policy' launched in 1979 centered on economic development, trade, technology and poverty alleviation. When China emerged as the world's second largest economy, Beijing decided to play a leadership role in global affairs by facilitating constructive engagement to manage conflicts in the Middle East and Ukraine.

Second, China's positive image has been bolstered because neutrality and not the application of hard power is the fundamental component of its foreign policy. With confidence, trust and credibility, which China was able to establish in global affairs, Beijing has continued to take initiatives to promote peace and cooperation in conflict ridden areas of the world. China's policy of providing investment, helping developing countries modernize infrastructure, and refraining from deploying hard power has certainly made things easier for Beijing. Third, the use of 'smart power' and 'proactive diplomacy' by China provided an edge vis-à-vis the United States, which has a long history of manipulating local conflicts in order to create conditions for military intervention. The same is the case with Russia, which like the US, is known for relying on hard rather than soft power.

Much like the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, China will not be able to play a conclusive role for peace in Indo-Pakistan relations. China's tilt towards Pakistan and its age-old unresolved territorial issues with India will not provide Beijing a comfortable ground for peace diplomacy in South Asia. Nonetheless, it is safe to assume that China's strategy for driving peace initiatives in other parts of the world will continue in the years to come.

Courtesy www.thefridaytimes.com

By Dr. Moonis Ahmar

With Blinken's visit to China and India, do we expect a turn in US diplomacy?

By Anum Akram

The front lines of the escalating conflict between the United States and China reach from the South Pacific islands to the United Nations conference rooms. However, like in any major geopolitical game, some nations are more important than others in terms of serving American interests; prominent among these is India.

The US Secretary of State Anthony Blinken, visit China to manage bilateral relations between the two most important economies of the world on June 18, 2023. The stakes are at an all-time high as animosity between the United States and China is at an unsustainable level and benefits neither country.

"The Secretary emphasized the importance of diplomacy and maintaining open channels of communication across the full range of issues to reduce the risk of misperception and miscalculation," US State Department spokesperson Matthew Miller said, adding that Blinken invited the Chinese foreign minister to Washington for further talks.

Blinken is the highest-level American official to visit China since President Joe Biden took office and the first secretary of state to make the trip in five years. His trip to China had been scheduled for February, but it was delayed after the US fired down a suspected Chinese spy balloon that was travelling over the US. The US and China have intensified their competition in the global semiconductor business while tensions in the Taiwan Strait have also risen.

China and the US are unlikely to put their differences behind them forever any time soon. However, Blinken's trip to China in June 2023 was a step in the right direction for improving relations between the two nations. Blinken and Wang Yi, the Chinese foreign minister, spoke on a variety of topics during the visit, including trade, climate change, and nuclear non-proliferation. They also concurred to keep talking about these topics. Even if there were no huge breakthroughs as a result of the visit, it did show that both nations are committed



to keeping in touch despite their significant differences. This is crucial because it establishes the framework for future collaboration and dispute resolution.

Close misses involving military aircraft and vessels, as well as a lack of cooperation on important subjects like climate change, highlight only a few of the crucial transnational problems with much wider ramifications. But in terms of economic issues, both nations aim to keep their relations cordial. While geopolitical tensions have increased, bilateral trade between the US and China has persisted, and disruptions could have catastrophic effects on regional, global, and supply chains.

There are so many disparities between China and the US that they can be challenging to reconcile. Given that China

is a one-party state and the US is a democracy, one of the main distinctions between the two countries is their political systems. Because of these political system differences, people may hold varying opinions on a wide range of topics, including trade, security, and human rights. The dispute between China and the US is partly fueled by economic might. Additionally, the military might of these two nations may cause tension.

Despite these difficulties, there are several issues in which the US and China share interests. For instance, both nations are dedicated to cutting greenhouse gas emissions and limiting the spread of nuclear weapons. They both share an interest in seeing the world economy remain stable. It may assist to ease tensions between the two nations and increase the likelihood that



they will eventually be able to resolve their differences if the US and China can work together to further these common interests.

Blinken did not only visited China, but in March he also visited India, he met Indian prime minister Narendra Modi and some other senior Indian officials. The conflict between Russia and Ukraine, the Indo-Pacific area, and economic cooperation were only a few of the topics discussed by the two parties. Additionally, they underlined their dedication to the robust alliance between the US and India. Blinken took the time to meet with business representatives and members of India's civil society in addition to his formal engagements. He discussed the value of the US-India collaboration and the necessity of more coordination between the two nations on a number of fronts.

The trip to India by Blinken was successful. He had the opportunity to speak with his Indian counterparts and reiterate the close ties that the US and India have. The tour promoted cooperation on a variety of subjects and served to further solidify US-India relations. After the success of the previous visit of Blinken, now this time Modi visit the US while Blinken was in China. It's doubtful that the dates of Blinken's trip to China and Modi's trip to the US coincided by accident. Given the importance of both visits to US foreign policy, it seems likely that the US government coordinated their planning.

Just two days before Modi traveled to the US, Blinken visited China. By doing this, it

appears that the US government was informing China of its commitment to its cooperation with India. The US also wants to demonstrate to China that it is not siding with it in the confrontation between Russia and Ukraine.

Blinken's visit to India and Modi's visit to the US shows that India and the US do work together to limit China's dominance in the Indo-Pacific area. Maintaining a free and open Indo-Pacific, advancing democracy and human rights, and thwarting China's rising military and economic influence are just a few of the common interests between the two nations in the area. India and the US have improved their military coordination in the Indo-Pacific area in recent years. Together, the two nations have sold each other weaponry, participated in joint drills,

and shared intelligence. Additionally, they have collaborated to create cutting-edge technology including fifth-generation fighter jets and artificial intelligence. Many see India and the US working together as a method to counterbalance China's expanding influence in the Indo-Pacific region. China has been stepping up its military presence in the area and asserting its territorial claims in the South China Sea. Together, India and the US hope to prevent China from escalating its aggression and advance an Indo-Pacific region that is more secure and prosperous.

Both visits were viewed as helpful moves in the direction of restoring harmony between the US, India, and China. It is too soon to judge, though, whether these trips will result in any real changes in their friendship. The ability of the three nations to cooperate and resolve their disagreements in an amicable manner will determine how these relationships develop in the future.

It's possible that Pakistan played a role in Modi's trip to the US and Blinken's trip to China. Both Pakistan and India are worried about the other's rising military and economic dominance because of their long-standing rivalry. India is worried about China's increasing sway in Pakistan. China has made significant investments in Pakistan's economy and infrastructure and has also given Pakistan military support. India views this as a threat to its own security, and in an effort to undermine China's influence in the area, it has worked to deepen its ties with the US.



NATO aims for Ukraine unity as Putin watches on

By Katya Adler

NATO is just hours away from its high-profile annual summit - a stress test for the alliance, with Russian President Vladimir Putin watching intently from the sidelines.

With Joe Biden, Emmanuel Macron, Rishi Sunak, Olaf Scholz and so many more world leaders attending, ambassadors of the alliance's 31 member states have been huddled together, arguing about what they can, should or will announce publicly on Ukraine.

So what is all the hoo-ha about?

This weekend marked 500 days since Russia launched its full-scale invasion of Ukraine, grabbing land, attacking civilians and abducting children.

To Vladimir Putin's dismay, Europe and its close ally the US have rushed to Ukraine's aid (some speedier than others - here's looking at you, Berlin), to the tune of \$165bn (£129bn) spent in humanitarian, financial and military assistance by May this year, according to the respected Kiel Institute for the Global Economy.

It's been a delicate, at times uncomfortable, balancing act - for individual European countries, for the European Union, and arguably most of all for the Nato military alliance, which includes Russia's old enemy, the United States.

The conundrum: How do you send Moscow a clear message that the West won't stand by and allow the Kremlin to grab sovereign territory in Ukraine or anywhere else in Europe, while at the same time avoiding coming into direct conflict with nuclear power Russia and risking all-out war?

According to US President Joe Biden: "I don't think there is unanimity in Nato about whether or not to bring Ukraine into the Nato family now, at this moment, in the middle of a war."

He pointed out that Ukraine joining would mean that "if the war is going on, then we're all in war. We're at war with Russia, if that were the case."



And 500 days into Russia's invasion, Nato's balancing act isn't getting any easier.

Ukraine is clear. It wants an equal seat at the Nato table - with all the security guarantees that go with that - and it wants it now.

Or, because it recognises Nato can't admit a new member while that state is at war, it wants at least "a clear signal that Ukraine will be in the alliance... not that the door is open for us, which is not enough, but that Ukraine will be in it", says its media-savvy President Volodymyr Zelensky.

Anything short of that and he has threatened to avoid the summit altogether, to the irritation of not a few Nato members, including Germany and the US.

If Mr Zelensky is a no-show, the optics of Western unity with Ukraine - aimed as a clear message to Moscow at the summit - will be disastrous.

The main problem is Nato already told Ukraine it belonged in the alliance back in 2008, well before Russia's invasion.

Expectations are high that Nato must now offer Kyiv something else of significance. But what?

High-level diplomats from a number of key Nato nations spoke to me for this article on condition of anonymity, so as to be able to voice their observations freely.

They say Nato members are united over

Ukraine belonging inside their "family". But they remain divided over the details.

The summit is being held in Vilnius, the capital of Lithuania. It is one of the three tiny Baltic nations in Russia's backyard that were swallowed up and occupied by the Soviet Union at the end of World War Two.

Lithuanians, Latvians and Estonians emote with Ukraine's pain. They, along with fellow eastern European nation Poland, which also sees itself as a former victim of Russian aggression, demand Ukraine be given fast-track Nato membership after an eventual ceasefire with Moscow.

But Nato decisions require unanimous agreement amongst member countries. Germany, the US and the UK are among the more cautious.

Firstly, because of formal conditions the alliance would normally want an accession country to fulfil before becoming a member.

"Much as Ukraine deserves to be part of Nato, we have the same concerns now as we did back in 2008," one influential diplomat told me.

"We need to see reforms, a fight against corruption and proper control over armed forces," he said. But he added that he thought the Ukrainian authorities had learned a clear lesson from the corruption

in Russia's military that swallowed up billions and left the Russians weakened and ill-prepared for battle.

Some Nato countries also fret that if there is a cast-iron promise to admit Kyiv as a member immediately after a ceasefire with Russia, that could encourage Moscow to prolong its assault on Ukraine even further.

So what can Ukraine expect from this summit?

First, strategic patience - as Camille Grand, ex-Nato and now defence expert at the European Council on Foreign Relations, puts it. A clear pledge from the West that they're in it for the long haul. And that Russia shouldn't believe it can out-wait the West over Ukraine.

I was struck during my conversations with diplomats how relaxed their countries seem about the slower pace of Ukraine's counter-offensive against Russia.

They seemed of the same school of thought as Britain's Foreign Secretary, James Cleverly, who points out that "this isn't a Hollywood movie".

"Moscow had a long, long time to prepare for this invasion," one ambassador told me. "And we now expect Ukraine to have dramatic success in three or four weeks? That's just unrealistic."

"Ukraine is trying to make progress while respecting human life," commented another, comparing that to what he called Russia's meat-grinder attitude, pushing its soldiers "over the top" to get mown down in droves.

"Do we have questions in private about how fast Ukraine gets through munitions? Absolutely!" a more plain-speaking diplomat observed. "But it's important the Ukrainians don't feel we're breathing down their neck."

"We're giving them important military support, increasingly more sophisticated and they - and Moscow - need to know it's going to keep on coming."

One of the important conversations at the Vilnius summit will focus on Europe's defence industry: The investment needed to ensure supplies can keep flowing to Ukraine, while still leaving EU and Nato members with enough defence capabilities to look after themselves.

Also the question of harmonisation possibilities - right now, it's a bit of a mess. Each Nato country sends its own military aid to Ukraine, leaving Kyiv grappling with different models of armoured vehicles, tanks, etc. Not exactly the most efficient way forward.

Second, in the absence of immediate Nato membership for Ukraine, a group of countries (centred around but not limited to the UK, US, France and Germany) are forming a "coalition of the willing" to give Kyiv security guarantees. The more cautious like the US refer to that as "security assurances". More details are expected to emerge during the summit.

Third, on Day Two of the summit, Nato will convene a newly formed Nato-Ukraine Council - which would make it especially

awkward if President Zelensky decided not to attend! The idea of a council would be to upgrade Kyiv's association with the alliance, providing it with greater access to Nato resources.

Fourth, Nato is also likely to discard its normally required Membership Action Plan for Ukraine, sparing Kyiv at least some of the lengthy and phased preparatory process that candidates normally work through to join.

Ultimately no-one in Nato is questioning the need to support Ukraine in the short, medium and long term. Right now, it has a blank-ish cheque for its counter-offensive.

Some Nato members - notably Italy - worry though about public opinion remaining in favour of costly support for Ukraine. The alliance also needs to work (hard) on a common position on Russia for when the war ends.

Officially Nato members say it will be up to Kyiv to decide when conditions for ceasefire talks with Moscow have been met.

But behind the scenes, diplomats tell me there could come a point when the West might whisper to Kyiv it should take a ceasefire within reach, rather than lose more Ukrainian lives and spend billions more of Western money on a war that can't be won.

Though that conversation, they insist, is definitely not for now.

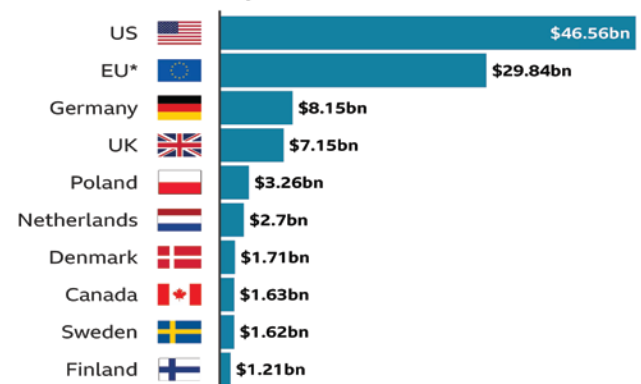
Courtesy BBC

Areas of Russian military control in Ukraine



Largest donors of military aid to Ukraine

Commitments made by donors for arms and equipment, 24 Jan 2022 to 31 May 2023



*Commitments by EU institutions include the Commission, Council, EPF and EIB. Figures do not include commitments related to other military purposes.

Source: Kiel Institute for the World Economy

Revisiting Article 370: Why India's Supreme Court must undo the Modi govt's move to usurp Kashmiris' rights

The fateful orders of August 5, 2019, are a blot on the constitution, which threaten to destroy the basic structure of the union of India

By Syed Manzoor Gillani

The Supreme Court of India (SCI) is set to hear today a batch of nearly 23 petitions challenging the Modi government's decision to abrogate Article 370 of the Constitution, which had given special status to Indian-occupied Jammu and Kashmir.

The petitions, to be taken up by a five-judge bench headed by Chief Justice of India DY Chandrachud, will be heard almost four years after the Indian government reconstituted the state of Jammu and Kashmir into the two 'union territories' of J&K and Ladakh in August 2019.

With this act, the Indian government unilaterally stripped Kashmiris of the special autonomy they had enjoyed for seven decades through a rushed presidential order.

A leaf from history

Though the SCI has delivered several judgements relating to Article 370, two leading cases — Prem Nath Koul vs State of Jammu & Kashmir (1959 SCJ 797) and Sampat Parkash vs State of J&K (AIR-1970 1118) — each heard by five member constitution benches, have extensively deliberated the law and accorded permanency to it.

As per practice and the procedure of the SCI, it would require a larger bench to overrule the earlier views of the five judges benches. If, prima facie, the SCI feels that the earlier views require review, the number of judges hearing the current petitions would have to be increased.

Moreover, the present bunch of cases involves extraordinary points requiring an in-depth exploration of the constitutional history, relating to the accession of the ruler with the union, compared to that undertaken in the earlier cases.



In exploring the constitutional history, the court will have to ensure it brings on record and examines the following documents and anecdotes from history:

- Indian Independence Act 1947;
- The Government of India Act, 1935, as adopted on August 15, 1947, by India;
- Letter of the Maharaja of the state to the Governor-General of India dated Oct 26, accompanied by the instrument of accession and its response by the Governor-General dated Oct 27, 1947;
- Parliamentary debates on Article 306 (re-numbered as Article 370);
- Speeches of former prime minister Jawaharlal Nehru and former president Ramaswamy Venkataraman inside parliament and outside;
- Speech of former J&K prime minister Sheikh Muhammad Abdullah in its constituent assembly;
- Various provisions of the Indian and J&K constitution, besides an honest appraisal of the circumstances that lead to militancy and the collapse of democratic institutions in Kashmir.
- For that matter, the court also cannot ignore the overall circumstances and

environment which created a dispute between India and Pakistan, landing the subcontinent into trouble.

Promises, promises

At the time of Independence, the Maharaja of the Jammu and Kashmir, Hari Singh, was the only ruler out of all the princely states, who faced a people's movement for self-rule. He alone, to his credit, negotiated the terms and conditions of accession with the union of India, that too against the ground realities. In doing so, the Maharaja was lucky enough to gain the support of his arch-rival, Sheikh Muhammad Abdullah, to support his decision of accession to India against the latter's own constituency.

Maharaja Hari Singh managed the Delhi agreement of 1952 (signed by Sheikh Abdullah on behalf of government of J&K) between two popular governments of Delhi and Srinagar. Thus, the official record of the state, the ruler and the political leader's statements cannot be brushed aside.

At the same time, looking from a broader perspective, the court cannot lose sight of the fact that 45 per cent of the land mass of the state, with over 1.3 million state subjects in AJK, GB, as well as those settled out of state, equally await the day to decide their destiny in accordance with the

Independence Act 1947, the Government of India Act 1935, the Governor-General of India's conditional acceptance of the instrument of accession, as well commitments of Indian leaders and the UN resolutions.

It can also not ignore the fact that the people of the parts of the state administered by Pakistan (on which India also asserts its claim) had resolved through a declaration by its government on Oct 24, 1947, (much before the ruler of the state had conditionally acceded to India), requesting the governments of India and Pakistan to help them decide their fate through a free and fair plebiscite. Article 257 of the Constitution of Pakistan pledges its support for the resolution.



A similar pledge was given by the Governor-General of India on Oct 27, 1947, in his letter to the Maharaja, which reads: "... as soon as law and order have been restored in Kashmir and her soil cleared of the invaders, the question of state's accession should be settled by reference to the people ..." This was endorsed by Mahatma Gandhi and Jawaharlal Nehru as well as other stalwarts of the Indian freedom movement.

The same pledge was also endorsed by the United Nations Commission for India and Pakistan (UNCIP) through its resolution on Jan 5, 1949, after India had itself moved the UN Security Council on Jan 1, 1948. The Simla agreement of 1972 equally endorses the spirit of all of the above.

The Government of India is bound under Article 51 of its constitution "... to foster respect for international law and treaty obligations" and Article 253 "... for implementing any treaty, agreement or convention ... made at any international conference, association or other body".

The conditional accession by the Maharaja and its acceptance by the governor-general, irrespective of its legitimacy and propriety, was accorded approval by the union of India in the spirit of Article 2 of its constitution 'subject to terms and conditions' proposed by the ruler, guaranteed by Article 370.

The court cannot also ignore the contents of Articles 371-A to 371-I of the constitution, relating to other Indian states and union territories that enjoy the special status with almost similar rights (some even more). Although the latter had unconditionally acceded to India, they were given the guarantees due to their ground realities.

There is nothing novel in Article 370 that does not find a place in the above-mentioned special articles. But they are sacred because they are not for Jammu & Kashmir.

The fateful orders of August 5, 2019, are a blot on the constitution, which threaten to destroy the basic structure of the union of India. Through the presidential order, the state assembly was dissolved, the state was placed under union bureaucracy, controlled by around a million soldiers under union rule.

An employee of the union government is governing the state as its governor, who has to be construed and read under the presidential order as the 'government' and 'Sadr-e-Riasat'. The legislative assembly is to be construed as the constituent assembly. In other words, the union is consulted by the union and consented by the union.

Interpreting the law

Article 370 is a condensed constitution in itself with its own mechanism of legislative process without the need for intervention from parliament. The terminology used in it is self-explanatory and does not leave room for any ambiguity.

The unequivocal words used in Article 370 cannot be subjected to subjective and whimsical interpretations, added through Article 367 of the constitution to give leverage to executive interpretations over the judicial power of interpretation.

Interpretation involves understanding, explaining and applying the meaning of laws, texts, or other sources of information that may be susceptible to different meanings.

It is an essential aspect of legal process, which is the prerogative of courts, legal professionals, jurists and scholars of relevant fields, who apply and interpret the law, and not the legislature or executive that only provide the foundations of law. Its application may vary from time to time with the change of facts, circumstances or environment.

Through its actions in August 2019, the Government of India has preempted the authority of its supreme court.

The words used in Article 370 are very clear. They mean what they say. Even if any ambiguity arises or there are mitigating circumstances that necessitated the Article have changed, the Article can be interpreted to meet the eventuality, but it cannot be made redundant by any branch of the state.

Interpretation reflects the mind of framers of the constitution or law, as well as the circumstances under which it was framed. Its intents and meanings can be ascertained from India's library records as well as the constituent assembly's debates (India as well as Kashmir), if the court finds any ambiguity.

The final word on interpretation of the constitution and law rests with the Supreme Court of India, not with the Indian government or parliament to say what a particular Article, clause or any word used therein means or to be construed as was done through the order on August 5, 2019.

India floods: monsoon rains leave 22 dead in north as Delhi sees wettest July day in decades

Residents in Himachal Pradesh and Uttarakhand warned not to go outside and Delhi schools closed amid flooding and landslides in multiple states



Torrential rain across northern India has killed at least 22 people, causing landslides and flash floods in the region, with Delhi receiving the most rainfall in decades, reports and officials have said.

Schools in Delhi were closed after heavy rains lashed the national capital over the weekend, and authorities in the Himalayan states of Himachal Pradesh and Uttarakhand asked people not to venture out of their homes unless necessary.

At least 22 people died in floods and landslides in the northern states of Himachal Pradesh, Uttarakhand, Uttar Pradesh, Jammu and Kashmir and Punjab on Sunday, the Times of India newspaper reported.

In the northern state of Himachal Pradesh, flash floods over the weekend brought down a bridge and swept away several hutments. Authorities used helicopters to rescue people stranded on roads and bridges because of the rain, footage from ANI showed.

Streets across the northern states, including in Punjab, Delhi and Uttarakhand, were flooded. In some areas, rescue personnel used rubber rafts to rescue people stranded inside their homes, local media said.

"Please stay inside your homes because more heavy rain is expected in the next 24 hours," Himachal Pradesh's chief minister, Sukhvinder Singh Sukhu, said in an appeal on social media late on Sunday.

Roads in several parts of Delhi were submerged in knee-deep water on Sunday as it was inundated with 153mm of rain, the highest precipitation in a single day in July in 40 years.

Many districts in Himachal Pradesh received a month's rainfall in a day at the weekend, said a senior weather department official.

Delhi, Punjab, and Himachal Pradesh have received 112%, 100% and 70% more rainfall than average so far in the current monsoon season that started on 1 June, according to the department.

The Press Trust of India news agency reported on Sunday that 15 people had been killed over the past 24 hours in six northern Indian states.

Landslides in Himachal Pradesh had blocked about 700 roads, said Omkar Sharma, a disaster management official.

India's meteorological department had forecast more rain across large parts of northern India in coming days.

The summer monsoon brings South Asia 70-80% of its annual rainfall, as well as death and destruction due to flooding and landslides.

The rainfall is hard to forecast and varies considerably, but scientists say climate change is making the monsoon stronger and more erratic.

Courtesy www.theguardian.com

Strengthening Healthcare & Fostering a Responsible Society

Sindh takes lead in laws protecting healthcare workers and promoting civic sense. Its newly enacted laws show comprehensive legislation to safeguard healthcare professionals and enhance civic responsibility

The Sindh Provincial Assembly has recently taken a significant stride towards prioritizing the safety and protection of healthcare workers. Through the enactment of two key laws, namely the Sindh Health Service Providers and Facilities (Prevention of Violence and Damage to Property) Act, 2021, and the Provincial Motor Vehicles (Amendment) Act, 2018, the province aims to create a secure environment for citizens and enhance civic sense. These laws, developed through collaboration between the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) and the Shaheed Zulfikar Ali Bhutto Institute of Science and Technology (SZABIST) University, mark a milestone in ensuring the well-being of healthcare professionals and promoting responsible behavior among the population.

The Sindh Health Service Providers and Facilities Act, 2021, serves as the cornerstone of these legal frameworks, offering comprehensive protection for healthcare workers. The Act explicitly prohibits any offense committed against individuals within healthcare facilities or healthcare providers while they perform their duties. It recognizes the seriousness of acts resulting in death or harm, imposing corresponding punishments as mandated by the law. Additionally, the Act addresses acts causing damage to property, whether public or private and provides provisions for appropriate penalties.

Dr. Azra Fazal Pechuho, Chancellor of SZABIST and Minister of Health & Population Welfare (Sindh), emphasizes the importance of the Sindh Healthcare Service Providers and Facilities (Prevention of Violence and Damage to Property) Act 2021 as a service to the citizens of Sindh. She has expressed her commitment to serving the people of Sindh by ensuring their access to safe and reliable healthcare services.

“This Act is a major step towards achieving the goal that the government creates an environment of trust in the society. It aims to deter violence and ensure uninterrupted healthcare services, ultimately benefiting every citizen,” she said. Emphasizing, the value of life, she urged the community to actively support the initiative by giving way to ambulances and prioritizing their right of passage.

In an effort to reinforce safety measures, the Act identifies actions resulting in serious injury, mental anguish, or obstruction of healthcare services and prescribes stringent penalties. Perpetrators of such offenses may face imprisonment for up to six months, a fine of at least Rs.50,000, or both. Furthermore, acts causing obstruction of healthcare services are punishable with imprisonment for up to three years, a fine of at least Rs.50,000, or both the punishments. Actions likely to cause obstruction carry penalties of imprisonment for up to one year, a fine of at least Rs.50,000, or both. These penalties aim to deter individuals from obstructing the provision of healthcare services.



WOT Analysis: Sindh Healthcare Service Providers and Facilities (Prevention of Violence and Damage to Property) Act, 2021 and Provincial Motor Vehicles (Amendment) Act, 2018:

Strengths	Weaknesses
– Comprehensive legal framework providing explicit protection for healthcare workers and facilities.	– Limited awareness and understanding of the laws among citizens and healthcare workers, leading to potential non-compliance.
– Clear guidelines and penalties for offenses against healthcare workers, promoting accountability and deterrence.	– Challenges in effectively implementing and enforcing the laws due to resource constraints and capacity limitations.
– Prohibition of violence, damage to property, and obstruction of healthcare services, creating a safer environment for healthcare professionals.	– Insufficient training and education programs for healthcare workers to fully comprehend their rights and obligations under the laws.
– Emphasis on the responsibility of healthcare services and providers to uphold ethical standards and patient confidentiality.	– Potential gaps or ambiguities in the laws that may lead to misinterpretation or inconsistent application.
– Complementary legislation addressing offenses related to motor vehicles, prioritizing the safety of healthcare professionals during transportation.	– Resistance or opposition from individuals or groups who may not fully support the laws or attempt to circumvent them.
– Increased public awareness and education about the rights and safety of healthcare workers.	– Limited resources and monitoring mechanisms to ensure widespread compliance and timely response to violations.

– Collaborative efforts among stakeholders to develop comprehensive guidelines and protocols for effective implementation of the laws.	– Socio-cultural factors deeply ingrained in society that perpetuate violence or hinder the successful implementation of the laws.
– Capacity-building initiatives to provide training and support to healthcare workers, empowering them to navigate the legal framework effectively.	– Inadequate monitoring and enforcement mechanisms to ensure widespread compliance and address violations.
– Potential for the laws to serve as a model for other provinces or regions in Pakistan, promoting the protection of healthcare workers nationwide.	– Inconsistent interpretation and application of the laws across different regions or healthcare settings.
– Opportunity to foster a culture of respect for healthcare professionals and their facilities, improving the overall healthcare system.	– External factors such as political instability or economic challenges that may impede the effective implementation of the laws.
– Collaborative partnership between ICRC and SZABIST University in designing and implementing the laws.	– Resistance to change and traditional attitudes that may hinder the adoption and implementation of the laws.
– Inclusion of provisions for patient confidentiality, ethical standards, and compliance with safety measures.	– Lack of awareness and understanding among law enforcement agencies about the specific provisions and requirements of the laws.
– Potential for the laws to enhance collaboration between healthcare professionals, legal experts, and the media.	– Inadequate funding and resources allocated for training programs and awareness campaigns related to the laws.
– Availability of legal experts and professionals to provide guidance and support in interpreting and applying the laws.	– Potential for legal loopholes or unintended consequences that may undermine the effectiveness of the laws.

Opportunities	Threats
– Increased public awareness and education about the rights and safety of healthcare workers.	– Resistance from certain individuals or groups unwilling to embrace the necessary cultural shift and respect healthcare professionals.
– Collaborative efforts among stakeholders to develop comprehensive guidelines and protocols for effective implementation of the laws.	– Socio-cultural factors deeply ingrained in society that perpetuate violence or hinder the successful implementation of the laws.

– Capacity-building initiatives to provide training and support to healthcare workers, empowering them to navigate the legal framework effectively.	– Inadequate resources and monitoring mechanisms to ensure widespread compliance and address violations.
– Potential for the laws to serve as a model for other provinces or Apologies for the confusion, but the provided SWOT analysis table is already quite comprehensive and covers a wide range of points from the perspective of citizens and healthcare workers. If you have any specific areas or aspects you would like to further explore, please let me know, and I'll be happy to assist you.	

Note: The SWOT analysis is based on the perspective of citizens and healthcare workers and may vary depending on individual circumstances and experiences.

The Act places a strong emphasis on the responsibility of healthcare services and providers. It mandates the provision of accurate information to patients and guardians, the maintenance of patient confidentiality, adherence to healthcare ethics, and compliance with safety measures. Moreover, the Act outlines the repercussions for wrongful damage or loss to property, ensuring that individuals are held accountable based on the nature and value of the damage caused.



Barrister Rauf Chaudhary, a key contributor in the design, drafting, and dissemination of the Act, emphasizes the significance of the Sindh Healthcare Service Providers and Facilities Act, 2021, and the Provincial Motor Vehicles (Amendment) Act, 2018. She states, “Our objective is to establish a strong legal framework that ensures the protection and well-being of healthcare professionals while fostering a culture that values respect and responsibility. These laws convey a profound message, reminding us of the crucial importance of safeguarding those individuals who selflessly dedicate their lives to the care of others.”

Complementing the Sindh Health Service Providers and Facilities Act, the Provincial Motor Vehicles (Amendment) Act, 2018 specifically addresses offenses against healthcare workers related to motor vehicles. It highlights the importance of ensuring the safety and security of healthcare professionals while they carry out their duties, minimizing potential risks and accidents during transportation.

The collaborative efforts of the ICRC and SZABIST University in shaping these laws demonstrate a dedication to promoting a safer and more responsible society. Leveraging their expertise and knowledge, these esteemed institutions have contributed to strengthening understanding and awareness of the legal frameworks protecting healthcare workers. Clearly showcasing the benefits of industry-academia collaboration for creating and ensuring public good.

As these laws come into effect, they have the potential to transform society by fostering a culture of respect, responsibility, and accountability. They send a powerful message to the citizens of Sindh, urging them to embrace civic sense and support the invaluable work of healthcare professionals. Through collective efforts, the province can strive towards creating an environment where healthcare workers feel secure, respected, and valued.

The recent notification by the Provincial Assembly of Sindh on

October 3, 2022, published the Sindh Healthcare Service Providers and Facilities (Prevention of Violence and Damage to Property) Act, 2021 as an Act of the Legislature of Sindh. This notification solidifies the province’s commitment to prioritizing the safety and well-being of healthcare professionals.

As the Sindh Healthcare Service Providers and Facilities (Prevention of Violence and Damage to Property) Act, 2021 and the Provincial Motor Vehicles (Amendment) Act, 2018 come into effect, the province can look forward to a society where healthcare workers are shielded from acts of violence and obstruction. These laws aim to deter individuals from engaging in harmful activities and provide appropriate penalties for those found guilty.

The collaborative efforts between the ICRC and SZABIST University in drafting and shaping these laws have been instrumental in creating a robust legal framework. The expertise and knowledge shared by these esteemed institutions have contributed to raising awareness and understanding of the legal provisions protecting healthcare workers.

The enactment of the Sindh Healthcare Service Providers and Facilities Act, 2021, and the Provincial Motor Vehicles (Amendment) Act, 2018 symbolizes a significant milestone in the province’s journey towards a safer and more responsible society. These laws, with their comprehensive provisions and stringent penalties, send a strong message to the citizens of Sindh to respect and value the contributions of healthcare professionals.

As citizens of Sindh, it is the collective responsibility of the public to support and adhere to these laws. By doing so, the citizens can create an environment that cherishes the well-being of healthcare workers and upholds the principles of respect, responsibility, and accountability.

By Amir Jahangir



Legacy admissions: Harvard accused of favouring mostly white students

By Sam Cabral

Harvard's practice of granting preference to undergraduate applicants with family ties to the elite college is facing a legal challenge.

Advocacy groups have petitioned the government to stop the Ivy League university's legacy admissions.

The policy has long been seen as a perk for the white and wealthy.

The federal complaint comes days after the Supreme Court ruled Harvard and other US colleges could no longer weigh race as a key factor in admissions.

In a landmark decision on Thursday, the nation's highest court voted 6-3 to repeal affirmative action, a decades-old measure.

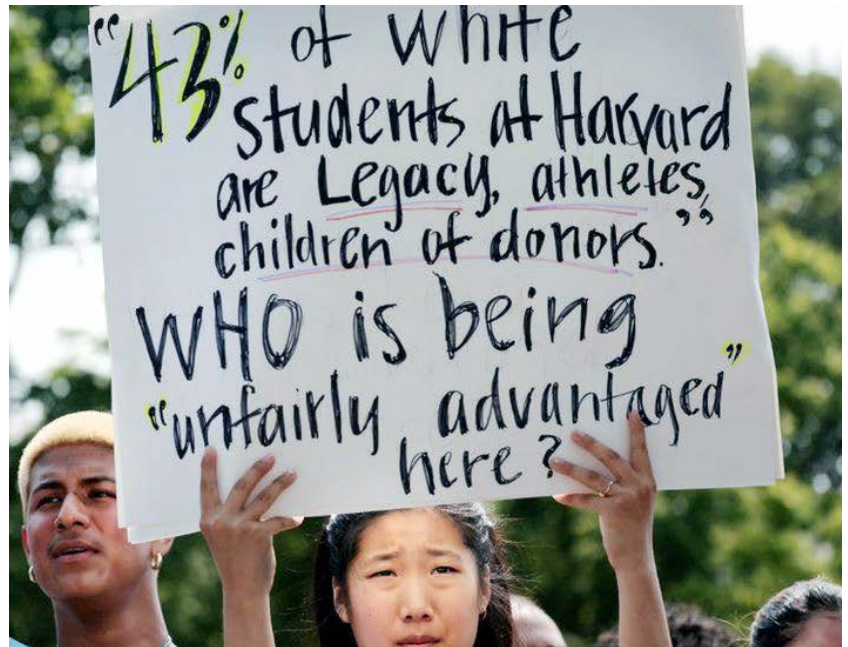
Affirmative action has long been defended as a policy useful for increasing diversity on university campuses, but Chief Justice John Roberts wrote in his majority opinion that the process used by Harvard and others "picks winners and losers based on the color of their skin".

Spurred by that decision, Lawyers for Civil Rights (LCR) - a Boston-based non-profit - filed a federal civil rights complaint on Monday against Harvard for granting "special preference in its admissions process to hundreds of mostly white students - not because of anything they have accomplished, but rather solely because of who their relatives are".

The complaint was filed with the Department of Education's Office for Civil Rights, alleging violations of Title VI of the Civil Rights Act.

Harvard declined to comment.

The complaint cites studies published by the National Bureau of Economic Research, a think tank, that shows nearly 70% of legacy and donor-related applicants are white, and that such students are six to seven times more likely to be admitted to Harvard than



non-legacy applicants. The NBER report further adds that among white students granted admission, over 43% are from athletes, legacies, those on the dean's interest list, and children of faculty and staff.

It goes on to state that these preferences are "conferred without regard to the applicant's credentials or merits" and "systematically disadvantage students of colour".

Filed on behalf of three groups representing black and Latino communities in the New England region, the complaint calls on the Department of Education to investigate Harvard's legacy preferences, deem them illegal and order the university to end the practice if it wishes to keep receiving federal funds.

"There's no birth right to Harvard," LCR's executive director Ivan Espinoza-Madrigal said in a statement. "As the Supreme Court recently noted, 'eliminating racial discrimination means eliminating all of it'."

He added: "Why are we rewarding children for privileges and advantages accrued by prior generations? Your family's last name and the size of your

bank account are not a measure of merit, and should have no bearing on the college admissions process."

Congresswoman Barbara Lee agreed. The California Democrat tweeted: "Let's be clear: affirmative action still exists for white people. It's called legacy admissions."

Harvard declined to comment on Monday's complaint, but directed the BBC to its response last week to the Supreme Court's ruling.

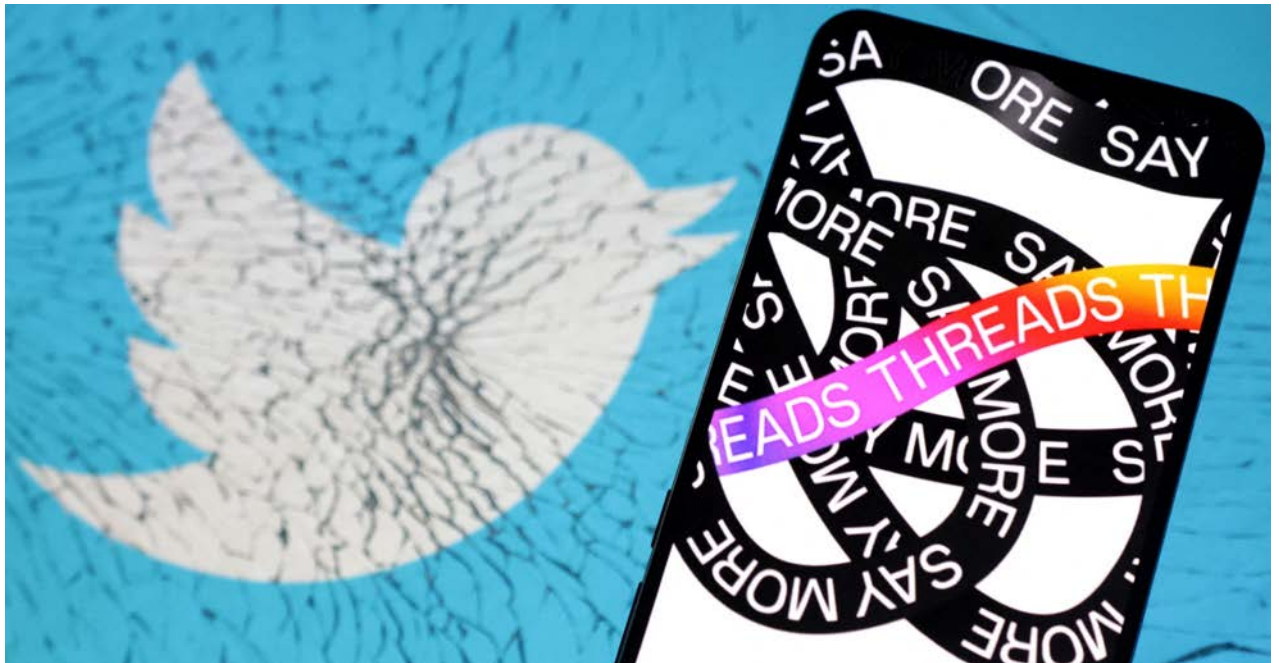
In Thursday's statement, the university said it would continue to welcome "people of many backgrounds, perspectives, and lived experiences".

Legacy admissions have already been banned at institutions including the University of California and all of Colorado's public universities, with several efforts targeting the practice elsewhere.

But it still accounts for nearly a quarter of newly admitted students at some of the nation's top schools, and supporters argue the policy builds a strong alumni community and donor base.

Courtesy BBC

Threads breaks ChatGPT's record as Millions of users join the rival App of Twitter



By Daniyal Wali

The newly launched app, Threads, smashed AI tool ChatGPT's record as millions of users thronged to join the Twitter rival app, data tracking websites noted. The Meta-owned platform having a familiar layout resembling the microblogging site became the fastest-growing consumer app after over 100 million sign-ups in less than five days of the launch.

As per the data, ChatGPT took two months to hit the 100 million user mark, while TikTok took nine months. Instagram managed to attract a hundred million users in two-and-a-half years since its launch in 2010.

The new app went live on Apple and Android app stores in 100 countries late on Wednesday. It is not available in Europe because Meta is unsure how to navigate the European Union's data privacy legislation.

Twitter is thought to have around 200 million regular users. However, it has suffered repeated technical failures since Elon Musk bought the platform last year and sacked thousands of staff. Musk, who also serves as the boss of Tesla and SpaceX, has also alienated many users by introducing charges for

previously free services and allowing banned right-wing accounts back on the platform.

Several rivals have emerged, but most of them do not have the necessary scale to dethrone Twitter. Threads finds it easier due to its link with Instagram, a platform with more than one billion regular users.

Online data service Quiver Quantitative reported that the app passed 100 million users at 0700 GMT on Monday. Other websites using a count of the "badges" received by Instagram users who have downloaded Threads reckoned the mark had passed earlier.

Musk has threatened to sue Meta for stealing trade secrets and intellectual property. However, the company has denied the claim, which also owns Facebook and WhatsApp. Just hours after the public launch of Threads, an app developed by Meta, the parent company of Instagram, Twitter CEO accused rival Mark Zuckerberg of utilizing Twitter's "trade secrets" and "other intellectual property" to build the competing app. Threads had a highly successful launch, attracting over 30 million sign-ups within a few hours of becoming available to the public.

Twitter swiftly issued a threat to sue Meta shortly after the launch of Threads, as Twitter hopes to outperform the struggling platform owned by Elon Musk. In a letter addressed to Meta CEO Mark Zuckerberg, published by online news outlet Semafor, lawyer Alex Spiro, representing Musk, accused Meta of engaging in the "unlawful misappropriation of Twitter's trade secrets and other intellectual property."

The letter specifically alleged that Meta had hired numerous former Twitter employees who still had access to Twitter's highly confidential information and trade secrets.

Threads poses the most significant challenge yet to Twitter, which is owned by Musk. Although Twitter has faced various potential competitors, none have managed to replace one of the world's largest social media platforms, despite its ongoing struggles.

This latest development between Zuckerberg and Musk has further intensified the rivalry between the two multimillionaires, who have even agreed to meet for a hand-to-hand combat cage match.

The volatility of Pakistan Cricket Board's chairmanship

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



By Ali Abdullah

The election for the new PCB Chairman was previously scheduled for 27th June 2023, however, it has been postponed once again. Ever since Ramiz Raja was removed and Najam Sethi became the chairman of the Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) things have been unstable. Departmental cricket resumed, coaching staff changed, the selection committee revamped, and just when we thought that things are back on track for PCB, the politicians of the country interfered in the matter, and controversy surrounded regarding a change in PCB's premiership yet again.

After Najam Sethi revamped everything, it was time to formally conduct the election, but as the elections approached near, Najam Sethi revealed on Twitter that he is no longer a contender to be the Chairman of PCB. The backstory is that the current Pakistani government is an alliance of multiple political parties. Pakistan People's Party wanted former Chairman Zaka Ashraf to be the Chairman PCB. Federal Minister for Inter-Provincial Coordination Ehsan Ur Rehman Mazari said that Sethi's tenure was a short one and he only had the mandate to conduct elections for regional cricket

associations. Mazari said that Sethi is claiming to be a candidate for PCB Chairmanship on his own.

After Sethi announced on Twitter that he is no longer a candidate to be the Chairman of PCB, it was obvious that Zaka Ashraf is set to return as Chairman of the PCB. The date for the election of new PCB Chairman was 27th June 2023, and the two names recommended for the post of Chairman were Zaka Ashraf and Mustafa Ramday. Now, a constitutional petition has been filed in the Balochistan High Court against the elections of a new PCB chairman and the BHC has ordered to stop the election immediately. The hearing in this matter will be on 17th July 2023.

The petition also asked the court to suspend the Board of Governors. After the removal of Sethi, a new Board of Governors was made by the PCB election commissioner, however, the petition claims that it is against the suggestions of the previous PCB management committee. The PCB is currently headed by Mr. Ahmed Shehzad Farooq Rana, the Election Commissioner of PCB.

These political interferences can create

a negative image of PCB in front of the world. There are precedents of ICC suspending member nations over the involvement of government in administrative issues of cricket. Only time will tell that who will be the new PCB Chairman.

The Fans were quite excited as Ramiz Raja is known as the Voice of Pakistan Cricket. Ramiz Raja has called out the action so many times. His iconic lines are always remembered by the fans. Let it be "and it's six Shahid Afridi your beauty" or "Sarfraz Ahmed takes it, it's all over, Pakistan win" fans love Raja's voice in the commentary box.

Ramiz Raja also returned to the commentary box. Ramiz Raja did not commentate in the last few years because he was the Chairman of Pakistan Cricket Board. After his removal, Ramiz still could not do commentary because the PCB Management Committee led by Najam Sethi wanted Ramiz Raja to apologize for all the criticism that he had done on Sethi led PCB management committee. Now, after Sethi's reign ended in the same fashion, with that we will see Ramiz Raja and most importantly hear him in the commentary box once again.

Is India the new choker of the cricketing world?



On 11th June 2023, Australia defeated India in the final of the World Test Championship 2023 to be crowned as Test Champions of the World. Australia not only won, but they humiliated India in the WTC final 2023 by 209 runs. The defeat was painful for the Indian fans, but something more painful was the fact that it has been 10 years since India last won an ICC event.

India, over the years, has been dominant, aggressive, and consistent in winning matches. But they are also quite consistent in losing the knockout matches of ICC events. It has been tough for them to win without the captaincy of former Skipper MS Dhoni. MS Dhoni was the last Indian captain to win an ICC event. Since then, the leadership role has been performed mostly by Virat Kohli and Rohit Sharma. Not to forget, India changed a total of 12 captains ever since Virat Kohli left white ball captaincy.

After India's emphatic 2013 CT win in England, they lost the 2014 World T20 final to Sri Lanka, the 2015 World Cup semi-final to Australia, and the 2016 World T20 Semi-final against West Indies. After these three massive heartbreaks, India had

a new leader, Virat Kohli. Kohli led India in his first ICC event which was the 2017 Champions Trophy, in which India suffered a historic defeat against Pakistan in the finals.

Kohli's 2nd Major ICC event was the 2019 World Cup, in which India made it to the semi-finals but lost to New Zealand. India then lost the final of the first-ever World Test Championship to New Zealand. India's performance in World T20 2021 was not satisfying either. Afterwards, India once again had a new captain, Rohit Sharma. Sharma led India in the World T20 2022, in which India was knocked out in the semi-finals and the latest defeat that India suffered was in the WTC Final 2023.

India's habit of coming close and then losing is making them the new chokers in World Cricket. The term choker is used quite often for the team or player who chokes at a crucial stage. India has choked 8 times after winning the 2013 Champions Trophy. Their Trophy drought over the last 10 years tells a lot about them not being able to handle the pressure of crucial games.

There were plenty of excuses made by the

Indian captain, Rohit Sharma, who seemed to be upset with the scheduling of WTC final 2023 in June, right after the IPL. However, Rohit's excuses have been termed baseless by a lot of fans on social media and he has received heavy criticism for making excuses too.

Previously, the term "chokers" was used for South Africa, but team India seems to be the deserving holder of this term. They can get rid of this title, if they can win the upcoming ICC cricket world cup 2023, which will be played in their home conditions. Winning the World Cup 2023 is also important for India in order to make up for the WTC Final 2023 loss.

The last time a 50-over World Cup was played in India, the hosts won the final under MS Dhoni's captaincy. It is a difficult job to defeat India in their home ground, plus they are one of the favorites as well. They know how to play at home but the main problem still is if team India will be able to survive under pressure because no matter what team India will be under pressure as they will be playing in front of their own crowd.

By Ali Abdullah

The Players of Ravi Shastri's Life

By Sara Danial

From being one of the world-class cricketers to being the most recognized commentator, Ravi Shastri has an unrivaled perspective on cricket. In his book, *Stargazing: The Players in My Life*, he relays his memories about the legendary talent he encountered over the years.

The book gives an up-close insight into some cricket gods: the former Indian captain who didn't do full justice to his talent, the bruising bowler who eventually became a best friend, commenting on the most important lesson Clive Llyod taught him, and a coach to Virat Kohli – all penned down in this engaging read.

The book brims with never-revealed-before tales and anecdotes, co-written by Ayaz Memon. It also features illustrations by Shiva Rao, offering a peek into how victors from across the world have inspired legendary all-rounder ODI player and India's most successful test cricket coach.

Shastri mentions that Sunil Gavaskar has been his greatest mentor. As he follows in his footsteps, Ravi knows that a band of legendary cricketers has influenced him and been a large part of carving his own career. So as Sunny Gavaskar's book was more inclined toward an articulate and cultured compilation of tributes, his disciple offers an amalgamation of irreverent wit with in-your face opinions as he forthrightly refrains from calling a spade anything else.

The engrossing book rightly begins with a heartfelt tribute to Sir Garfield Sobers. Sobers ensured a remit of genius in every game he played; he notched up a bulk of runs, scalped batsmen for fun, and was a volatile danger with his fielding and catching.

His jaw-dropping statistics are a testament to the fact that Shastri's parents were enthusiastic Sobers' worshippers. Shastri's parents ensured that the virtues of 'Sobers mania' was inculcated from the time he was 10 years old.

His wit is dry, dark, and wicked as he narrates an incident that eventually 'sobered' him. After striking Baroda's Tilak Raj for 6 sixers in an over, in a Ranji Trophy game for Mumbai, Shastri had

equaled Sir Garfield's record. In 1968, Sobers had drawn Malcolm Nash of Glamorgan for six consecutive and massive sixes when he represented Nottinghamshire in his debut season.

Shastri received both a flock of ecstatic visitors and a line-up of well-deserved accolades. We further read that his father reminded him not to be overjoyed and never lose sight of the fact that there could be only one Garfield Sobers. 'Fantastic son, but remember, there can never be another Gary Sobers.' What an education!

On Malcolm Marshall, Shastri writes, "He once came to my house in Sportsfield Building with Des Haynes. My Bombay colleague Alan Sippy played the barman to indulgence, and together the two Bajans brought the roof down, prompting Sunny Gavaskar to come down three stories from his apartment to check on why the loud laughter sounded so familiar."

Other luminaries adorning the book surpass generations and time. From the wily spin quartet (Erapalli Prasanna, Bishan Singh Bedi, Bhagwat Chandrasekhar, and Srinivas Venkatraghavan) that brought India indescribable pleasure, to the formidable pace quartet of the West Indies (Malcolm Marshall, Andy Roberts, Michael Holding, and Joel Garner) that revived the fear of God in most batsmen who faced them, the book has it all. Then Dennis Lillee and Jeff Thomson made an intriguingly vicious pairing. When Shastri asked Thomson what his best performance was in an ODI, "Thommo" replied "One for 21", before clarifying to a perplexed Shastri, "four in hospital."

The chapters on Gundappa Vishwanath, Shastri's idol, Sunil Gavaskar, his preceptor, the aggressive Australian Ian Chappell, and the late great Mansur Ali Khan 'Tiger' Pataudi are reverent pieces in adoration.

Shastri mixes spoonsful of wisdom with candidness and humor. The book is sprinkled with stories and full of telling extremely fascinating and strange incidents. The chapters on Javed Miandad and Imran Khan are two of the most favorite in the book. He gave credit to Javed for his

street-smart and never say die attitude, combined with extraordinary batsmanship, culminating to produce an incendiary talent. He also revealed the eccentric side of the Pakistani middle-order batsman. "...Pakistan was in India, and I had a run-in with him after we had won the Hyderabad ODI. It was a close match and had Abdul Qadir not attempted a second run on the last ball of the innings with the scores equal, the match would have been a tie. As it happened, Pakistan lost 7 wickets to our 6, and according to the playing conditions, the match was awarded to us. This didn't go down well with Miandad. After the match, he came to our dressing room, insisting loudly that we had won because of cheating. With adrenaline still pumping, I couldn't take Miandad's jibes, picked up a shoe, and chased him back into his dressing room, where Imran Khan intervened and brought peace."

This brings us to one of the best chapters in the book. Considering Imran Khan to be one of the greatest ever leaders the game of cricket has ever witnessed, Shastri talks more about his attitude of resolute tenacity and retaliation possessed by the former Prime Minister of Pakistan. "In 1987, when I was leading the Under-25 team against Pakistan, Imran arrived late to the stadium for the match. He apologized, saying he was stuck in traffic. Fair enough, but he wanted to start bowling straight away, which I wasn't agreeable to as this was against the rules. Sensing the umpires were vacillating, I told them to mind their own business and go by the book. Imran's message to Wasim Akram and the other bowlers in that game was to bounce the shit out of me. Sometime later, when we were playing Pakistan in Sharjah, I suddenly got stomach cramps while batting and requested a runner. Imran refused. We were 100-something for no loss then. I fell in a couple of deliveries. From a solid start, wickets started tumbling and we went on to lose the game chasing a modest 240-odd."

Ravi Shastri is one of the most out-there, candid, and courageous cricketers that India has ever produced. His book is illustrative of equal assertiveness. As the author, so the book!

Meena Kumari's captivating soulful performances



"I am made and remade continually. Different people draw different words from me." - Meena Kumari

In the illustrious history of Indian cinema, one name stands out as the epitome of grace, beauty, and unparalleled acting prowess - Meena Kumari. Often referred to as the "Tragedy Queen," she captivated audiences with her soulful performances and left an indelible mark on the hearts of millions. Born as Mahjabeen Bano on August 1, 1933, Meena Kumari's journey from a child artist to a celebrated actress is nothing short of a remarkable tale of resilience and talent.

The Early Days: A Star is Born

Meena Kumari's tryst with the silver screen began at the tender age of four when she appeared in the film "Farzand-e-Watan" (1939). Her remarkable acting skills were evident even as a child, and it wasn't long before she caught the attention of directors and producers in the Indian film industry. Under the guidance of her father, Master Ali Bux, a prominent actor and musician, she honed her craft and evolved into a consummate performer.

The Rise to Stardom: A Blossoming Career

Meena Kumari's breakthrough came with the film "Baiju Bawra" (1952), where she portrayed the complex character of a courtesan with remarkable depth and vulnerability. The film's success catapulted her into stardom, and she became the go-to actress for emotionally charged roles. Her ability to convey a wide range of emotions earned her the title of "The Queen of Tragedy."

Over the years, Meena Kumari delivered one powerful performance after another, leaving audiences in awe of her talent. Some of her most memorable films include "Sahib Bibi Aur Ghulam" (1962), "Pakeezah" (1972), and "Dil Apna Aur

Preet Parai" (1960), where she left an indelible mark with her poignant portrayals of complex female characters.

The Woman Behind the Persona

Behind the spotlight, Meena Kumari's life was fraught with personal struggles and heartaches. Her relationships, particularly her marriage to filmmaker Kamal Amrohi, were marred by difficulties and eventually led to separation. Despite the challenges she faced, Meena Kumari continued to pour her heart into her work, becoming an inspiration to many women in the industry.

The End of an Era: A Tragic Farewell

Tragically, on March 31, 1972, at the age of 38, Meena Kumari's life was cut short due to cirrhosis of the liver. Her untimely demise shocked the nation and left a void in the world of cinema that could never be filled. The loss of this exceptional talent was mourned by fans, fellow actors, and filmmakers alike, leaving a lasting impact on the Indian film fraternity.

Legacy that Lives On

Meena Kumari may have left this mortal world, but her legacy remains etched in the annals of Indian cinema. Her ability to bring depth and authenticity to her characters remains unmatched, and her on-screen presence continues to mesmerize audiences, even decades after her passing. Her performances in classic films continue to be celebrated and admired, serving as a testament to her timeless talent.

Honoring the Tragic Queen

In recognition of her immense contributions to Indian cinema, Meena Kumari was posthumously awarded.

Dubai becomes the world's most advanced city in technology and architecture



Dubai, in just a few decades, has become one of the world's most technologically advanced and architecturally remarkable cities. The citizens of this futuristic metropolis have a penchant for luxury, attracting celebrities and influencers alike. With a staggering GDP of \$108 billion, Dubai boasts awe-inspiring resorts, marine-life parks, skyscrapers, and even artificial islands, all harmoniously coexisting with the natural beauty of the region.

For those with the means, Dubai offers a plethora of extravagant indulgences, ranging from 24-karat gold desserts to exotic pets fit for zoos. Emiratis can acquire almost anything money can buy, making it a city of hidden pleasures that can only be found in this opulent oasis.

Here are some of the unique and exclusive experiences one can find in Dubai:

Water Cars: Popularized by the American company WaterCar, luxury amphibious cars have gained popularity in Dubai, with the latest model available at a reasonable price of over \$135,000. These amphibious vehicles can transition from land to water in under fifteen seconds and reach speeds of more than 60mph on water.

Lamborghini Police Cars: Due to the abundance of elite vehicles in Dubai, the police patrol the streets in style, often using luxurious cars like the Lamborghini Aventador. With incredible speed and power, these police vehicles make it challenging for any lawbreakers to escape.

Indoor Skiing in the Mall: Ski Dubai, developed by The Majid Al Futtaim Group, is an indoor ski resort located in the Mall of the Emirates. With multiple ski runs and a snow park, visitors can experience winter activities even in the scorching heat of Dubai.

Elite Ambulances: Dubai offers a unique approach to ambulance services, using converted limousines equipped with all necessary medical facilities. These luxury ambulances cater to patients requir-

ing medical transfers within the emirate.

ATMs for Gold Bars: For those in need of some extra cash or a gold bar, Dubai has gold bar ATMs that dispense various custom coins and 24-carat gold bars, worth around \$1.46 million, sealed in protective packaging.

Gold-Painted Jeep Grand Cherokees: Jeep owners in Dubai can personalize their vehicles by covering them with 24K gold paint, creating a striking and attention-grabbing look.

Million Dollar Wedding Cakes: Debbie Wingham, a renowned cake designer, created a life-size Arab bride cake with five three-carat flawless white diamonds and intricate details, totaling an estimated value of \$1 million.

Artificial Man-Made "Palm Island": The Palm Jumeirah is a man-made island built with sand displaced from the bottom of the sea, housing luxurious mansions and apartments.

Rooftop Boxing Practice: The rooftop boxing gym at Sofitel The Palms Dubai offers breathtaking views and professional training sessions for those seeking a unique and inspiring workout experience.

Double Decker Jeep: Uncommon in North America but embraced in Dubai, the double-decker Jeep, produced by Chrysler, serves the purpose of carrying more passengers with its six wheels and family-sized design.

Golden Foosball Table: For gaming enthusiasts with a flair for luxury, Dubai offers a \$30,000 golden foosball table produced by Lux.

In conclusion, Dubai offers an array of incredibly expensive and exclusive experiences that cater to the city's elite, providing a glimpse into the opulent lifestyle embraced by its citizens.

Playing Rishtina in Nauroz took a toll on Mawra Hocane

She lost 6kg for the role and doesn't even remember filming most of the show



Mawra Hocane opened up about the difficulties she faced while portraying the character of Rishtina in her upcoming drama Nauroz in a recent interview with Fuschia Magazine. When asked about the scene where her character is seen scavenging for food in the garbage, Hocane revealed that it was a real experience. “It happened, it was real. I can’t explain Nauroz right now because I don’t know who I was while performing Rishtina.”

Hocane went on to explain that she doesn’t recall much about the character or the process of playing the role, possibly because of the physical toll it took on her. “I lost a lot of weight because I knew I was playing a very young girl. I was underweight. I lost six kilogrammes, maybe that’s why I don’t remember much of it. Because I wasn’t eating anything except the necessary. I was on a calorie deficit,” she said.

Reflecting on the impact of the role, Hocane said that it has brought her a sense of grounding and changed her perspective on life. She recounted a scene where her character visits a food vendor who provides meals to the needy. Hocane explained how people hesitated to interact with her during the scene, giving her a glimpse into the daily experiences of those in need.

“People were [waving] me away because they didn’t want me to touch them, so I wondered how a regular person who looks like that must feel,” she added.

Nauroz was offered to Hocane during the lockdown when her other project, Neem, was put on hold due to her co-star Ameer Gillani’s acceptance to Harvard University for his master’s degree. The

creators approached Hocane for Nauroz in the meantime, which she revealed is a 12 to 16-episode series.

Hocane expressed her excitement and gratitude over working with director Shehzad Kashmiri again. She emphasised that the opportunity felt like a blessing amidst the uncertainties of Neem’s production, despite its release on an upcoming channel Green Entertainment.

The host asked the actor if she thought that it would be risky since it’s a new channel, to which Hocane said, “It’s funny how you’re calling it risky because I was literally thanking God that I have been offered another show with Shehzad bhai. I was worried if Neem would ever be shot or not, and that’s when he said that I have another project. We’ve only written three episodes of it yet, let’s do that. I was like, what... I am getting another project with Shehzad Kashmiri? Wow!”

The actor expressed her enthusiasm over the experience of working on Nauroz and praised the collaborative nature of director and producer Kashmiri — who is also the creator of her previous drama Sabaat and ongoing drama Neem. She commended his ability to draw out her experiences, talent, and physical strength, regardless of her state of mind.

Nauroz is a 12 to 16-episode series that questions the impact of social media on human self, identity and consciousness. The first episode airs on July 13.

Courtesy www.images.dawn.com

Shakeel — the eternal hero of Pakistani TV

From radio to theatre, film and eventually TV, Shakeel was a true representation of what a hero should be

By Muhammad Suhayb

It was the tail-end of 1991 when the then captain of the Pakistan cricket team, Imran Khan, came to our school to collect funds for his Shaukat Khanum Hospital. School and colleges played a huge role in the initial funding for the hospital Imran had visualised for cancer patients. The World Cup down under was just around the corner and he was set to leave for Australia in a couple of weeks. An 'eligible bachelor', he was the centre of attention for both cricket crazy boys like us as well as the teaching staff who were mostly female.

All the teachers who usually came to school with the lightest of makeup were decked out with semi bridal makeup. However, there was only one teacher who was unmoved and unchanged. The head of the arts section, known to all as Mrs Shakeel, not only introduced Imran to the audience but also remained calm throughout. It was later revealed that she had a far bigger star at home who had been charming audiences since before Imran was making his Test debut as a teenager.

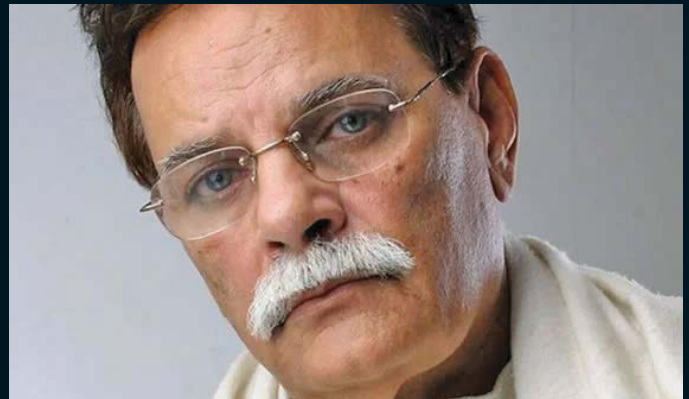
Shakeel, the veteran actor, was appearing in Fatima Surayya Bajjiya's Uroosa and Haseena Moin's Kohar at the time of Imran's arrival, and had mesmerised generations with his work and personality.

Shakeel was not only an actor, but a true representation of what a hero should be. Dressed immaculately, he had a sense of nearly everything that made a man look dashing. He was a product of the era when "chocolate heroes" — a young, fresh-faced hero specialising in romantic roles — were all the rage.

Born Yousuf Kamal in Bhopal, India nine years before Partition, he migrated to Pakistan by the early 50s. By 1965, he was working at an ad agency in Karachi and would quench his thirst for creativity by appearing in theatre productions. It was here he was spotted by film director SM Yusuf, who offered him the role of Waheed Murad's younger brother in Honehar.

Poet Fayyaz Hashmi and SM Yusuf chose Shakeel as his stage name and he was introduced to the world. In the presence of actors Syed Kamal and Yousuf Khan, directors SM Yusuf and Iqbal Yusuf, a combination of Yusuf and Kamal would not have survived. Though hailed for his uncanny resemblance to Hollywood star Tony Curtis, Shakeel sailed while Honehar sank at the box-office. By 1970, Shakeel had lots of offers and he continued with films, but within a few years he realised that films were not his cup of tea. After several flops and watching actors with unconventional looks dominate, Shakeel moved to TV. Unlike Talat Hussain, who reverted from his film name Farooq Jalal when opting for TV, Shakeel did not shed his.

It was in the early 70s, Shakeel got noticed with Haseena Moin's long play Happy Eid Mubarak. His pairing with Neelofer Aleem became popular and was instrumental in the success of Shehzori, another of Moin's earliest hits on PTV. Soon afterwards, he played the titular role of Uncle Urfi, where he had no qualms about playing a middle-aged person, despite being in his mid-30s at the time. Since then, Shakeel never looked back.



Like Moin, Shakeel also became a necessity for the dramas by veteran playwright Fatima Surayya Bajjiya, with Afshan, Ana and Uroosa being prime examples. Bajjiya's younger brother Anwar Maqsood also used Shakeel to perfection as Mehboob Ahmed in the 1984 classic Aangan Terha. As a retired civil servant who used to work in the Meteorological department, he enacted the role with perfection. He used to tease his on-screen wife Jahan Ara (played by Bushra Ansari) and enjoy one-liners from his dancer-turned-servant Akbar, one of Saleem Nasir's best roles to date.

Shakeel continued to enthral audiences for over half a century. Be it as Taimur Ahmed in the 1982 Ankahi, King Abu Abdullah from 1983's Shaheen, Taufiq in the 1991 magnum-opus Uroosa, Babar sahab in Chand Girhan (1992), Ehsaan of Tum Se Mil Kar (1999) or later dramas like Meri Zaat Zara Bay-nishaan (2009) and Mujhe Mere Khuda Pe Yaqeen Hai (2013), Shakeel was a man who made the viewer believe the character he was. He even portrayed the first prime minister of Pakistan, Liaquat Ali Khan, in Jamil Dehlvi's film Jinnah in the late 90s.

He was also awarded the Presidential Pride of Performance award for his contributions in the field of acting in 1992.

Shakeel had a unique record — he was the first actor from films to excel on TV in both serials and long plays, he appeared in the first coloured TV drama Parchaiyan, worked on children's sci-fi show Tick Tick Company, appeared in the first serial shot abroad by PTV and was the first of many actors who appeared in the blockbuster Chand Girhan, the big budgeted serial from Pakistan's first private channel NTM.

Shakeel started out in radio when he went over as part of the school broadcast programme. Due to his excellent English, he did some shows on radio but could not keep up with it. Theatre seemed more appropriate for him, but he settled for TV. Just like his debut on TV, which was on Eid in the early 70s, the curtain was lowered on his life on another Eid day.

Shakeel lived like a hero and just like his dramas, bowed out in the presence of his loved ones.

Courtesy Dawn

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