

Fortnightly

# The Truth International

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## Caretaker Regime to Begin

PM will dissolve NA two Days before completion of tenure

## Pakistan and IMF

After completion of SBA Pakistan have to go for another programme with tougher conditions

## China-India Tension

US is Arming India to the teeth to counter China Militarily

# Caretakers are Coming



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# The shape of current political chaos

By Dr Syed Riffat Hussain

**I**t is a measure of extraordinary challenges facing Pakistan that a routine matter like setting up a caretaker government at the centre has generated so much political controversy.

On the one hand, we have a thirteen-member coalition known as PDM with a “friendly opposition”, and on the other we have the popular PTI that was ousted from power in April 2022 through a no-confidence move.

Since then both sides have exchanged a litany of accusations against each other. PTI has called them a government of “corrupt” politicians that have pillaged the country for the last two decades driving it to the brink of economic collapse.

The PDM led by PML (N) and PPP has returned the “compliment” by publicly calling PTI an artificial entity that was brought to power as a “third force” by the powerful military establishment which wanted to break the monopoly of the two mainstream parties. This confrontation has deeply polarized the polity and aggravated the economic malaise leading to the immiseration of the vast majority of 230 million people.

In this polarized environment, PDM has made it abundantly clear that the caretaker set-up will be of its choice. PML (N) and PPP have reportedly floated two names each as a result of mutual consultations between the two. The names are: Ishaq Dar, the current finance minister, and Senator Reza Rabbani. In response, the PTI has termed this as an attempt at “pre-poll” rigging and suggested that any such set-up can hardly be trusted to hold fair and free elections, which are the mandate of the caretaker set-up.

## PTI and Imran Khan's absence

Following the May 9 incidents of violence against military installations and symbols by PTI supporters there is an expectation that cases of “sedition” will be pursued against PTI leadership including its Chairman under the military courts.

PTI has alleged that thousands of its supporters have been incarcerated and desertions have been engineered to make it

pay for its mutiny against the state. The military has already sacked one serving Lt. General, three major Generals and half a dozen Brigadiers from service for their links to May 9 violence.

The PTI chairman, Imran Khan, is engulfed by over one hundred legal cases including Toshakhana, Al-Qadir Trust, and Cypher leaks. It is hoped by PDM that in one of these cases, Khan would get disqualified and pave the way for an easy victory for PDM in forthcoming elections.

## Will IMF be affected?

Another important concern affecting the composition of the caretaker set-up is the likely impact it would have on staff-level agreement with IMF particularly the implementation of its strict conditions over the next nine months. As observed by one informed analyst, “In a nine-month IMF programme, there is zero time to waste”. The programme is to be implemented by three separate governments — the present one, an interim one, and then the newly elected one.

IMF has warned the present government that failure to implement the programme could imperil the arrangement and would result in a situation where Pakistan would be forced to seek restructuring of its mounting external debt of 30 billion dollars.

The Fund has sought assurances from PML (N), PPP and PTI that elections would be held on time and there would be no deviation from this. This means that the interim government will have to focus its mind on ensuring end-September targets contained in the programme are adhered to since the release of the next tranche will depend on this. That partly explains why the caretaker set-up is to be chosen very carefully because it would be so pivotal to the success of the IMF deal.

The ruling PDM has clearly stated that it would like the next caretaker PM to be a politician and has ruled out picking someone from bureaucracy, judges and retired generals. Consultations are underway between the top leadership of PML (N) and PPP to come up with agreed names that would be

acceptable to their smaller allies of the governing coalition. One has to wait for the official disclosure of these names closer to the election date.

Linked to the composition of the caretaker set-up is the thorny issue of the return of ex-PM Mian Mohammed Nawaz Sharif from his current abode in London. The former Prime Minister faces a tough legal battle including the prospect of being sent to jail for having violated the terms of the agreement under which he left the country on emergency medical grounds nearly three years ago.

It is worth mentioning here that his younger brother, Shahbaz Sharif, the current Prime Minister, signed his affidavit that he would return to the country after receiving medical treatment. The PML (N) strongly feels that as long as the current Chief Justice of the Supreme Court remains in power, Mian Mohammed Nawaz Sharif cannot risk his return and he has to wait out his retirement on September 16. Asked when Nawaz would return, Mohammed Zubair, party spokesperson, categorically stated that the party supremo would return after Sept 16, alluding to Chief Justice Bandial's retirement. There is a widely shared belief among PML (N) leadership that Nawaz should delay his return to Pakistan if he wants to have smooth sailing and avoid legal battles awaiting him. Justice Bandial can muddy the water for him as long as he heads the Supreme Court. PML (N) has justified this delay in the name of creating a “level-playing field”. A highly placed source has revealed that after the Supreme Court Review Act matter is resolved the PML (N) could file an appeal to review the Panama case decision of disqualification including exercising the option of filing a protective bail.

The PDM government has pushed a plethora of pieces of legislation through the Parliament recently. The basic purpose of these legislation bills is to send a message to the international community especially the donor countries, that after it steps down, it would be leaving a legislative legacy that offers a credible policy framework for future government and ensure implementation of commitments given to IMF.



# Clashing with the judiciary in Israel

By M A Niazi



Some of the mystery of Israel's fascination with human rights in Pakistan, expressed in its expression of concern about the violation of PTI supporters' human rights in their trials by military courts, by the recent passage of a judicial reforms package. Israel does not have a constitution, and judicial reforms can be carried out by a simple parliamentary majority.

One thing the Israeli government is worried about is making sure that the judiciary is not supreme over Parliament.

If Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu is accused of corruption, and if the law is changed to save him, then the Supreme Court must respect the will of the people. One wonders why Netanyahu is so concerned about the PTI, because its chief is so much against corruption. Admittedly, Netanyahu has sold no watches, nor received any land for a university, but he has favoured a media mogul over his rivals.

There is a military component as well, as one of the means of protest has been the refusal to answer call-ups. Remember, the Israeli armed forces consist of conscripts, and could soon be dysfunctional if conscripts don't show up. It's a bit like the May 9 attacks. So we've got a government engaged in a clash with

the judiciary, and an opposition which is going head-to-head with the military too. The big difference is that everybody knows the name of the COAS over here, but no one knows the name of the Israeli Chief of General Staff and Commander-in-Chief of the Israeli Defence Forces, who is a lieutenant-general, not a full general. I just hope he knows what name he has.

Now, if the Supreme Court strikes down a law, if the Knesset repasses it, it can't be struck down. I'm sure our Parliament would like to have this tool of parliamentary supremacy. Of course, we are stuck with a Constitution, which Israel doesn't have.

That wasn't the only change in the world. Twitter removed the familiar bird logo and replaced it with an X. Now that was a jarring change, and more noticeable than the declining support in Sweden for a ban on Quran burning. It seems the Swedes want to make a fight of it. I mean, they've abandoned neutrality and applied to join NATO. To abandon freedom of speech and the consequent right to burn any book they please, seems a bit much.

Another thing that appeared much as the proposal to make Ishaq Dar caretaker PM. That would compromise the neutrality of the election, and would

make people wonder why Hamza or Maryam couldn't be caretaker CM (the one who would be dropped after the election). Well, the requirement for an economic wizard has led to suggestions like Hafeez Pasha or former SBP chief Raza Baqir. I've got a better suggestion, someone whose economic credentials made him come within a whisker of getting the Nobel Prize for Economics. Yes, I mean Gen (retd) Qamar Javed Bajwa.

I'm not entirely sure how Imran would react. He has got a lot of legal troubles, but he has also noted the treason by Sri Lanka, whose batsmen betrayed him by throwing their wickets away to Shaheen Shah Afridi, so that at some future date he might find himself on the same page, just as Imran was. Pakistan managed to win both Tests though, though the second Test came under threat from rain. That is a time-honoured way of escaping defeat, though Sri Lanka didn't make it, West Indies did against India in their test, and either Australia or England did in their Test.

Time was, and not so long ago, when the only Tests in July would be in England. It seems the schedule is now so crowded that everyone is extending their season. So cricket has got its own type of climate change.

# Caretakers or chair takers?

By Sarfraz Raja

The final countdown has commenced, signalling the end of Shehbaz Sharif's coalition government's 16-month rule. As the 12th of August approaches, it marks the cutoff date for the current assembly to complete its constitutional five-year term. The focus now shifts to the electoral process and the formation of a caretaker government.

Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif put an end to speculations about extending the term of the present assemblies, making it clear that his government would not continue beyond the 12th of August. This raises the question of whether the assemblies will be dissolved before that date or if they will be allowed to complete their terms. If the assembly completes its tenure, elections must be held within 60 days, but if dissolved earlier, elections will take place within 90 days.

Some parties, including the People's Party, proposed dissolving the assemblies on the 8th of August. According to the constitution, the Prime Minister (or Chief Minister for provincial assemblies) sends a dissolution summary to the President (or Governor for provincial assemblies). The President or Governor must sign the dissolution summary within 48 hours; otherwise, the relevant assembly stands dissolved after that period.

The suggested 8th of August date is strategic because if the President doesn't sign the dissolution summary, the assembly would be dissolved by the 11th of August, one day before the actual dissolution date. Consequently, the election date could be extended until the first week of November, giving the ruling parties an extra month for their election campaign. The next critical aspect is the formation of the caretaker setup. The question arises as to who will be appointed as the caretaker Prime Minister and the ministers in the interim government. There are concerns about the ruling parties' intentions to potentially appoint a politician as a caretaker PM and enhance the interim setup's powers through legislation.



## Defining the Constitution's Scope

Pakistan stands out as one of the countries that have established a caretaker setup to oversee new elections, a system not commonly seen in other nations, including neighbouring India. In most countries, including India, the incumbent government remains in power until the new government takes charge, albeit with limited powers to manage day-to-day affairs. However, in Pakistan, before the 18th amendment, the president held the authority to nominate a caretaker prime minister. Subsequently, under the unanimous amendment to the constitution in 2010 during the PPP government, a more transparent and non-controversial process was adopted to define the establishment of the caretaker setup, explicitly outlined in the constitution and the law.

When the term of the National Assembly or a provincial assembly is about to expire, the Prime Minister or Chief Minister, as applicable, holds consultations with the Leader of the Opposition in the National Assembly or Provincial Assembly. Together, they submit three names for the appointment of the caretaker Prime Minister or Chief Minister to a parliamentary committee. This committee comprises eight members, equally divided between the treasury and opposition

benches, nominated by their respective parliamentary leaders.

In the event that the parliamentary committee fails to reach a consensus on any one name within three days of its first meeting, the matter is then referred to the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) for a final decision within two days. This entire process, from consultations to nomination, may take five to seven days. During this period, the outgoing Prime Minister is allowed to continue, but his cabinet is not permitted to function.

## Potential Members of the Caretaker Setup

Following the 18th amendment, the appointment of the first caretaker prime minister before the 2013 elections was made by the ECP, as the Prime Minister and opposition leader were unable to reach a unanimous decision on any candidate. However, the current situation differs significantly, as the opposition leader in the National Assembly is perceived to be aligned with the government, having publicly declared intentions to contest the next election on a PMLN ticket. This scenario potentially paves the way for a consensual appointment, a first in this context. The question arises: Who will lead the new caretaker government?

Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif has





taken proactive measures by initiating consultations weeks before the government's term completes. He has formed a high-powered committee consisting of his party leaders to engage with other political parties in this consultative process. Additionally, key leaders from both PMLN and PPP, namely Nawaz Sharif and Asif Zardari, have reportedly held a series of meetings in Dubai, with the caretaker setup being a prominent topic of discussion.

With these developments, there is a prospect that a consensus may be achieved for the appointment of the new caretaker government, marking a significant departure from past experiences where unanimity was hard to come by.

## Contemplating a Politician as a Caretaker Prime Minister

The appointment of a caretaker prime minister has historically favoured non-controversial figures, with retired judges having served in this capacity in the past. However, the current situation has sparked a debate among political parties, questioning why a politician couldn't head the caretaker setup. Some argue that individuals with a background in technology, other professions, or journalism, lacking experience in managing a union council, might not be better equipped to govern than a seasoned politician. The crux of the argument lies in the possibility of politicians being non-controversial. This ongoing debate has presented compelling arguments both in favour and against.

Meanwhile, sources within government parties have expressed concerns about the extension of the caretaker setup in Punjab and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa beyond the standard three months. This has raised doubts about whether the caretaker setup at the federal level could also be extended. Consequently, an atmosphere of uncertainty looms over the political landscape. To address such concerns, political parties may find comfort in having a political figure leading the caretaker government.

Furthermore, the country's economic situation plays a crucial role in the decision-making process. The government is particularly mindful of its agreement with

the IMF, which was achieved after months of strenuous negotiations and efforts. In light of these circumstances, there is a growing belief that the caretaker prime minister should possess a political background and a thorough understanding of economic sensitivities.

In short, the debate surrounding the appointment of a caretaker prime minister encompasses considerations of political experience, economic expertise, and the desire for a non-controversial leader to navigate the country through this critical transitional period.



## Significance of Caretakers Under the New Laws

There have been recent amendments to the electoral laws in Pakistan, altering the process of announcing the date of general elections. Previously, the President of Pakistan would announce the election date, and the ECP would then declare the election schedule within the constitutionally specified timeframe. However, with the new amendment, the responsibility of announcing both the election date and the respective schedule now falls solely on the ECP.

The caretaker government's role has traditionally been to manage official matters and oversee the day-to-day affairs of the government during the pre-election period. Most of the powers were vested in the ECP, which closely monitored all

election-related activities, including transfers and postings, after the announcement of the election schedule. Consequently, the electoral body held significant authority in shaping the election process.

Recently, the government made a decision to strengthen the caretaker government's role by amending the Elections Act 2017. This empowerment enables the caretaker setup to function akin to an elected government, particularly in matters concerning international affairs. It grants them the ability to act in a sovereign manner and make important decisions accordingly. The

amendment bill was passed in a joint sitting of the Senate and National Assembly.

Given these developments in the political landscape, the caretaker setup has gained increased importance. With the participation of all other parties and a friendly opposition, there is a possibility of witnessing an unprecedented unanimous caretaker prime minister, deviating from the usual choices of retired judges, bureaucrats, or journalists. Instead, a political figure endowed with additional powers and appointed by the ruling parties could effectively serve as an extension of the present political setup.

In conclusion, the recent amendments to the electoral laws and the empowerment of the caretaker government have introduced significant changes in the political landscape, potentially reshaping the dynamics of the upcoming elections.



# Political Polarization and Uncertainty: A Call for Transparent Elections in Pakistan

By Tahir Niaz

As the National Assembly approaches the end of its constitutional 5-year term, scepticism grows in Pakistan regarding the possibility of holding elections within the timeframe mandated by the constitution once the assembly is dissolved or reaches the end of its tenure. With only 12 days remaining, many doubt that the elections will take place as scheduled.

In April of last year, the Pakistan Democratic Movement (PDM) assumed control of the country by ousting Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) chairman Imran Khan from power through a parliamentary vote. Since then, the ruling alliance appears to be focusing on two primary objectives: resolving their legal cases and diminishing the former ruling party's influence to ensure a smoother path towards regaining power.

According to the court records, the cases against the leadership of the two major political parties, Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) and Pakistan Peoples' Party (PPP), have been dismissed as unproven, except for PML-N supremo Mian Muhammad Nawaz Sharif. The delay in his case can be attributed to his failure to gather the courage to return to Pakistan and present his plea of innocence before the appropriate forums.

The PTI accuses the ruling PDM of colluding with the establishment to act against them, an allegation that the alliance frequently denies. However, a brief analysis of the political developments over the past year indicates that the government made extensive efforts to dismantle the PTI. Imran Khan himself is facing approximately 200 criminal cases, and the entire top-tier leadership has either gone into hiding or been incarcerated. Hundreds of PTI workers remain imprisoned, and even displaying a PTI flag is prohibited, let alone engaging in assembly or other political activities. These events can be deemed unprecedented in nature, raising concerns about the state of political affairs during this period.

The government, in an apparent escalation of political vendetta and revenge, denied PTI stalwart Shaheryar Afridi's release on two separate occasions to attend the funeral prayers of his brother and a sister, both of whom passed away while he was in custody.

As per the most recent reports, a PTI leader experienced a heart stroke while in jail and was subsequently taken to a medical facility for treatment. However, contrary to medical advice, he was soon returned to jail instead of receiving further medical attention.

Despite all the political actions taken, both political observers and members of the ruling alliance remain uncertain about the possibility of upcoming elections in the near future. In particular, two key allies within the ruling coalition express concerns that the general elections could be delayed. The PPP is worried that disputes over the digital census and delimitation might cause a postponement. Additionally, JUI-F chief Maulana Fazlur Rehman is sceptical that the polls will be



held on time, even if the PDM-led coalition hands over power to a caretaker set-up, as it is expected to do in the coming days.

During a press conference held on July 22, PPP leader Faisal Karim Kundi emphasized that his party firmly believes that timely elections are the only viable solution to address the current political and economic challenges. The contentious issue of the census arose after federal ministers categorically stated that the elections, scheduled for either October or November, would not be based on the digital census conducted earlier this year.

Kundi asserted that timely polls are the key to navigating the political quagmire. In contrast, Fazlur Rehman suggested that the responsibility of determining the "right time" for elections lies with the caretaker government. Amidst these statements and apprehensions, MQM-P, another ally in the ruling coalition, has demanded elections based on the latest census data.

Kundi also warned that raising the issue of the census at this stage could lead to a delay in elections. Instead, he proposed conducting elections based on the previous census data. The PPP's clear stance is that the assemblies should complete their tenure, and the caretaker government and Election Commission of Pakistan should hold elections within 60 days.

As per the constitution, when assemblies complete their full term of five years and are dissolved, polls are held after 60 days. However, if assemblies are dissolved prematurely, even by a day, a caretaker setup is installed for a duration of 90 days.

The recent remarks made by the PDM chief indicate that his party may not be keen on holding elections on schedule. During a visit to the residence of GDA chief Syed Sadruddin Shah on July 22, the PDM chief appeared hesitant to affirm that elections would take place as planned, shifting the responsibility onto the incoming





caretaker government. He emphasized that it would be the interim setup's decision to determine the appropriate timing for the electoral process and whether it requires additional time or not.

When asked about the political future of PTI chief Imran Khan, he referred to him as a "relic of the past" and suggested that he should not be involved in significant discussions anymore.

The PDM leadership's uncertainty about Imran Khan's political standing raises questions about their reluctance towards holding elections. Their hesitancy appears to stem from a genuine fear that they may not be widely accepted by the masses despite their efforts to discredit the PTI. This uncertainty is evident in their recent amendment to election laws, granting the ECP the authority to announce the election date. This suggests they are avoiding the mistake of openly opposing the elections, opting instead for the electoral watchdog, which has been controversial due to past actions, to act on their behalf.

Furthermore, the newly passed legislation empowering the interim government to make significant decisions regarding the country's economy indicates that the interim setup may exceed its constitutional term of three months. This suggests that the PDM's statements about the PTI may be more of a public posture than a genuine conviction.

Pakistan has frequently been in the spotlight for peculiar incidents unfolding on its soil. One such incident occurred in April 2022, when the Supreme Court and Islamabad High Court held sessions at midnight on the eve of a no-confidence vote, sparking controversy and criticism from both the PTI and the ruling alliance.

Another midnight political event took place when the acting president and chairman of the Senate, acting on advice from the federal government, issued an ordinance to amend the accountability law. The amendment granted the National Accountability Bureau (NAB) the authority to detain suspects based on 'non-cooperation' and extended the physical remand period from 14 to 30 days. It is noteworthy that the same government had previously reduced the physical remand limit from 90 days to 14 days. Furthermore, the amendment empowered NAB to arrest a suspect during

the inquiry stage. These decisions have been viewed by political observers as overt measures of witch-hunting and are perceived to be part of a broader process of political engineering.

So far, the ruling alliance has failed to neutralize support for the PTI among the masses. Rather, it has strengthened the former ruling party through its actions and deeds. It, intentionally or unintentionally, provided new leadership to the PTI by putting the workers in jails. One goes, and many others are in queue to replace him. It won't be a surprise for the political observers if PML-N Chief Organizer Maryam Nawaz finds any one of Sanam Javed, Khadija Shah or Aliya Hamza contesting her in the next general elections. Similarly, PTI may decide to field Aitzaz Ahsan and Latif Khosa against some PML-N stalwarts. And let's not talk about Imran Khan filing his nomination papers against Nawaz Sharif.

It seems the PDM leadership never thought about why it reached the situation it is in at present. Time has changed, people have started thinking differently and it is now almost impossible to arrest an ideology.

Imran Khan finds himself in the eye of the storm due to his challenging of the perceived political role of the military establishment. He is also a critic of what he sees as the above-the-law intelligence apparatus of the state. His arrest from within the Islamabad High Court by an army-led civil armed force was termed illegal by the apex court. A district and sessions court in Islamabad termed absurd the possibility that Imran Khan instigated his party workers for violence on May 9.

In recent years, and particularly in the outgoing year, the nation has witnessed increasing political polarization. Political opponents are now regarded as adversaries, enemies, traitors, or even terrorists, creating a toxic environment within the political arena. The lack of mutual respect is concerning, and it is crucial for the nation to engage in retrospection and awaken to these divisions. In this critical time, it is essential for political entities to pledge to avoid infighting and point-scoring. It is never too late to change course and work towards fostering unity and understanding. The ultimate solution lies in conducting free, fair, and transparent elections, which can pave the way towards a more cohesive and harmonious society.







# The Changing Political Landscape of Pakistan: Challenges and Opportunities ahead

By Ahmad Waleed

May 9, a date etched in Pakistan's history, has been likened to Nine Eleven in terms of its significance. The events of that day sent a clear message to the top leadership of Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) that the incident would not be forgotten, and those responsible would not be spared. As a consequence, thousands of PTI workers and leaders were arrested, while some mysteriously disappeared or were taken to unknown locations. This tumultuous event led to a mass exodus of PTI members, with many distancing themselves from Imran Khan's leadership or temporarily abandoning politics altogether.

In the aftermath of these developments, estranged close associates of PTI Chairman Imran Khan, namely Jahangir Tareen and Aleem Khan, leveraged their influence to garner support from numerous PTI defectors and formed the Istehkam Pakistan Party (IPP) with a primary focus on Punjab. Similarly, in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP), Pervaiz Khattak established his own faction of Pakistan Tehree-i-Insaaf Parliamentarians.

## The Impact of Splinter Groups on PTI's Vote Bank

The central question at hand is whether these splinter groups have the capacity to erode PTI's vote bank. Imran Khan remains confident that these factions lack public support and are destined to fail—a sentiment shared by many PTI leaders. However, some political analysts argue that the defectors, particularly the electables, may still wield significant influence in their respective constituencies and could potentially damage PTI's vote bank.

The upcoming elections, if held on time, will be crucial in determining the fate of all political parties. The challenging economic decisions made by the Pakistan Democratic Movement (PDM) government to secure an agreement with the International Monetary Fund have had significant political



ramifications, while PTI would have been the primary beneficiary if not for the events of May 9.

## Imran Khan's Leadership and the Challenges Ahead

Despite the "huge popularity" gained by Imran Khan following his ousting through a historic no-confidence motion, it remains to be seen how this popularity will materialize. Imran Khan's unrelenting criticism of his rivals and the establishment has politically cornered him, leaving little room for negotiation with any group.

The newly-formed political groups will encounter several challenges ahead. In Punjab, Jahangir Tareen's IPP will have to ensure that its candidates perform well enough to retain their vote bank, considering the presence of PTI candidates and a resurgent Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N). Seat adjustments with PML-N to defeat PTI candidates may also pose another challenge.

In KP, Pervaiz Khattak's faction may only be able to help other political parties win a couple of seats by dividing PTI's vote bank. However, PTI remains a dominant force in

the province since 2013, making it difficult for Khattak alone to dent its support.

## The PDM's Woes and PML-N's Struggle

PML-N, one of the major political parties in Pakistan, has faced considerable setbacks in Punjab as a result of the government's unpopular decisions. These decisions have contributed to an unprecedented rise in the cost of living, causing economic hardships for the common people. Such circumstances can have a detrimental effect on PML-N's electoral prospects in the upcoming elections, potentially benefiting PTI, its arch-rival in the province.

In light of the challenges it faces, PML-N seems hesitant to hold elections soon and is instead focusing on "damage repair" to rebuild its image and regain public trust. The party believes that it requires time to address the grievances of the electorate and address the adverse effects of the government's decisions on people's lives.

Furthermore, PML-N is demanding a level playing field in the electoral process. It wants cases against its leader, Nawaz Sharif, to be removed to enable his participation in the elections. Nawaz Sharif's disqualification





from holding public office has been a contentious issue, and his party maintains that he should be allowed to contest elections as a prominent political figure.

However, the establishment is grappling with a legal quandary concerning the potential banning of PTI. Such an action could have far-reaching consequences and could significantly impact the political landscape of the country. The establishment must carefully weigh the implications of any decision taken regarding PTI, as banning the ruling party could lead to political instability and potential backlash from its supporters.

Amid these dynamics, the future course of action remains uncertain. Both PML-N and PTI find themselves facing challenges unique to their respective positions. PML-N's struggle to mitigate the impact of unpopular decisions while demanding a fair electoral playing field for its leader puts it in a delicate position. On the other hand, PTI must navigate the aftermath of the May 9 events and the emergence of splinter groups while striving to maintain its position as the ruling party.

As the nation moves closer to the upcoming elections, the political landscape will continue to evolve, and the choices made by the electorate will shape the future direction of Pakistan's governance. Economic stability, effective governance, and addressing the pressing issues faced by the people will be critical factors in determining the success of any political party. The road ahead is rife with challenges, and both PML-N and PTI must carefully strategize their moves to secure the support of the electorate and shape the nation's political destiny.

## PPP's Aspirations and Challenges

PPP, apart from the other parties within the Pakistan Democratic Movement (PDM), is enthusiastic about participating in the election race after the assemblies complete their term. The party's primary goal is to retain power in the province of Sindh, where it proudly boasts of initiating and executing several significant development projects. With a recent victory in electing the first mayor of Karachi, PPP's optimism for gaining more seats in the province has soared. The historic success in the mayoral election has bolstered their confidence in

securing more support from the electorate in the upcoming elections. As one of the prominent political forces in the region, PPP aims to showcase its commitment to furthering the prosperity and well-being of the people of Sindh, as it aspires to emerge as a dominant force in the province once again.

## The Role of the Establishment

The all-powerful establishment seemingly opposes Imran Khan's re-emergence as a powerful political force and appears aligned to delay the next general elections. The fear instilled among potential PTI candidates is advantageous to the PTI's rivals, who hope this uncertainty and fear will work in their favour.



## The Impact of Political and Economic Instability

The ever-changing political landscape of Pakistan presents numerous challenges and opportunities for the major political parties. The fallout from the events of May 9 continues to reverberate, affecting PTI, its splinter groups, and the broader political spectrum. As the nation approaches the upcoming elections, the choices made by the electorate will have a profound impact on the country's political future.

The growing intervention of anti-democracy forces in Pakistan's democratic process raises serious concerns among many political parties. The common man, particularly the younger generation, continues to suffer amid political and economic instability. A record number of talented young people have already left the country in search of better opportunities abroad, while thousands of businessmen

have shifted their businesses to other countries due to economic uncertainties.

## Conclusion

In conclusion, the changing political landscape of Pakistan presents both challenges and opportunities for major political parties. The aftermath of the May 9 events continues to have far-reaching implications for PTI and the emergence of splinter groups. As the nation gears up for the upcoming elections, it is crucial for political parties to address the concerns of the electorate and work towards building a stable and prosperous Pakistan.

Imran Khan's leadership, while maintaining popularity, faces challenges

due to his confrontational approach towards political rivals and the establishment. The newly-formed political groups, Jahangir Tareen's IPP and Pervaiz Khattak's faction, will need to navigate various hurdles to gain electoral success. The PDM's struggles and PML-N's attempts at "damage repair" also underscore the complexity of the political landscape.

The role of the establishment, whether its actions facilitate or impede democratic processes, is under scrutiny. Economic instability and the exodus of talented youth and businesses add further complexity to the political situation. In the end, the choices made by the electorate will shape Pakistan's political trajectory in the days to come. A stable, prosperous, and democratic Pakistan requires pragmatic leadership, inclusive governance, and a commitment to address the pressing issues faced by its people.



# Do We Need Caretaker Governments?



By Wajih Safarish Khan

As the tenures of the National Assembly, Sindh Assembly, and Balochistan Assembly come to an end in the second week of August, caretaker governments will assume control of federal affairs and these provinces. Punjab and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa have already had caretaker governments in place since January of this year. However, despite the constitutionally mandated period of 90 days having passed, elections in these provinces were not conducted, disregarding clear orders from the Supreme Court to do so.

As per the constitution, when a new assembly needs to be formed, it must hold elections within sixty days if it dissolves after completing its term, or within 90 days if the assembly is dissolved at the advice of the Prime Minister or the Chief Minister before its tenure ends.

The process of swearing in a new government typically takes at least three weeks from the day of polling. Previously, before the 18th amendment, the President had the discretion to decide when to convene a new assembly and allow it to form the govern-

ment. This led to instances of different Presidents abusing this power. However, under the current arrangement, the assembly automatically convenes on the 21st day after the polling date if the President does not call it into session before that. The election and swearing-in of the Prime Minister take an additional three days, resulting in the country being without a permanent government accountable to the parliament and the people for approximately 84 or 114 days, depending on the specific circumstances.

This practice of establishing a government with individuals who do not have a long-term stake in politics and governance can have detrimental effects on governance, especially the country's economy, during such a prolonged period. Few countries in the world adopt such a system of handing over power to a caretaker government on the eve of elections. Bangladesh experimented with this idea in the 1990s but discontinued it in 2013 when the caretaker government, established in 2006, continued beyond the stipulated period and attempted political engineering. Similarly, the consti-

tution of Greece also includes provisions for utilizing such a system in special circumstances.

Among the approximately one hundred members of the United Nations, only these two countries have adopted such a system. In most countries, all types of elections take place during the tenure of the incumbent government. Established democracies have robust election authorities, electoral laws, and procedures, along with a general state of rule of law and equality, which prevent the incumbent government from using its position to gain undue advantage.

Contrastingly, across our eastern border, polling is a lengthy process spread over several phases and months, with significant gaps between the first and last phases. Despite this, the Indian election process has been largely free from major issues of rigging. This is largely attributed to the independence and strength of the Indian Election Commission and its associated institutions. There is no reason why Pakistan cannot achieve a similar level of success.





In recent years, numerous legislative and administrative measures have been taken in Pakistan to empower and strengthen the Election Commission of Pakistan, making it more independent and influential. Initiatives such as the computerization of National Identity Cards and aligning voter lists with them have eradicated fake and double voting. The inclusion of voters' pictures in voting registers has minimized the possibility of proxy voting. Additionally, the incorporation of modern technologies, including those introduced through amendments in the Elections Act 2017, has made it challenging to tamper with election results.

Overall, Pakistan has made significant progress in fortifying its election process and ensuring a fair and transparent electoral system, drawing lessons from established democracies and leveraging technological advancements to uphold the integrity of elections.

The Election Act and constitutional amendments have significantly bolstered the authority of the election commission, even surpassing the powers of its Indian counterpart, according to some observers well-versed in both countries' election commission systems.

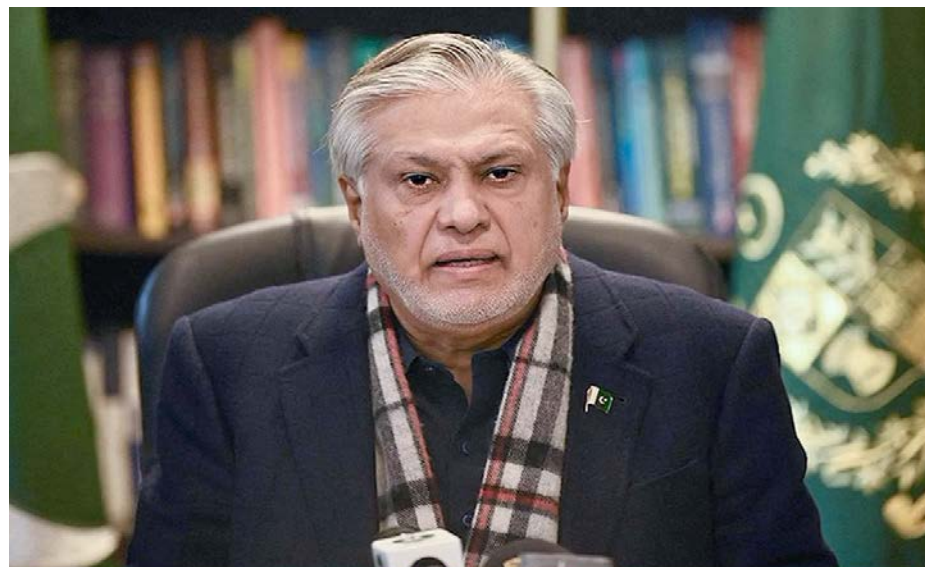
Now, the onus falls on the Election Commission to effectively exercise its newfound powers and assert itself to ensure elections that are free, fair, transparent, and independent, fostering public trust. However, certain decisions and the absence of action by the Supreme Court and certain High Courts, particularly in Lahore, have eroded the election commission's authority, emboldening government officials to defy its orders.

A missed opportunity to punish those responsible for blatant rigging attempts during the 2021 by-election for the National Assembly seat from Deska has set a concerning precedent, signalling that such acts may go unpunished in the future. This lack of accountability may embolden others to engage in similar actions without fear of consequences.

Although the constitution grants members of the Election Commission of Pakistan a status equal to Supreme Court judges, in recent years, their autonomy has been compromised due to unwarranted court

interventions and interference. Different parties have utilized High Courts to hinder the Election Commission from fulfilling its responsibilities under the election act and other relevant laws, resulting in a diminishing perception of the commission's stature in the eyes of the public.

Article 224 of the 1973 constitution of Pakistan initially stipulated that elections for the National Assembly or provincial assemblies must occur within 60 days before the incumbent Assembly's term expires. Moreover, a Prime Minister or Chief Minister possesses the authority to dissolve the assembly and call for a new election whenever deemed necessary.



General Zia ul Haq made an amendment to Article 224, replacing the word 'preceding' with 'following,' which allowed for the establishment of a caretaker administration to oversee elections. However, it is not necessary to delve into Zia's stance on democracy and free and fair elections, as his actions spoke for themselves. The subsequent administrations, controlled by Zia's clique after his death, showed no pretence of neutrality during the elections in 1988 and 1990. Blatant abuse of state resources to defeat the PPP was brought to light in the Asghar Khan case, as acknowledged by the Supreme Court.

Between Zia and Musharraf's reigns, only the 1993 elections had some semblance of neutrality, thanks to the Nawaz-Kakar-Ishaq Khan agreement rather than any constitutional provision. However, the scenarios in 1997 were no different from those in

1988 and 1990. In 2002 and 2008, elections held under Musharraf lacked any façade of neutrality. Despite elaborate provisions for a neutral caretaker government introduced in the 18th amendment, the 2018 general elections witnessed the worst political engineering in the country's history.

The reality is that caretaker or interim governments established to oversee elections cannot ensure a truly free, fair, and transparent electoral process, and they are often prone to misuse of state resources for political purposes. Instead of promoting and protecting democracy, this period of 'non-political' administration brings uncertainty and compounds the country's

economic challenges. The looming fear of an extended undemocratic interlude hangs like a Damocles sword during such periods.

The upcoming Parliament, elected after the forthcoming elections, should seriously consider reevaluating and abolishing the provisions in the constitution related to interim or caretaker governments, dating back to July 1977. It is imperative for politicians, parliamentarians, and political parties to collaborate and devise alternative methods to prevent individuals from exploiting their positions to engineer political setups according to their preferences. The existence of caretaker/interim governments only serves to empower and embolden such individuals, making it essential to find more effective and democratic solutions to ensure fair and impartial elections.



# Election Uncertaintiest

By Maleeha Lodhi

Pakistan's ruling coalition has indicated its intention to hold general elections when Parliament's term ends in mid-August. Although a date for the polls has not yet been announced, uncertainty about whether elections would be held on time should now come to an end. Political parties represented in the coalition government are at present focused on who should be in the caretaker government, which has to be installed when Parliament is dissolved, as this is a constitutional requirement. The interim government is expected to be neutral but it is to be seen whether it meets this test, deemed necessary for it to supervise elections in a fair and non-partisan manner.

Meanwhile speculation grows about whether opposition leader Imran Khan will be barred from contesting, following his possible conviction in any one of the multiple legal cases against him. Already his party, the Pakistan Tehreek-i-Insaf has seen an exodus of leaders and former legislators, which has reduced it to a shadow of its former self. Khan has sought to signal that he is unfazed by this and that his party will still be able to garner more votes than any other party. But the loss of many so-called electables from his disintegrating party puts it at an electoral disadvantage.

Many defectors from PTI have joined the new party launched by Jahangir Khan Tareen. But it is uncertain whether Istehkam-e-Pakistan will emerge as an important political force. In past elections, including by-elections, voters have punished those seen as turncoats or deserters who switch from one party to another. For example, in the by-elections held last year almost all the PTI lawmakers in Punjab who had crossed party lines failed to get re-elected. True, some political figures enjoy individual or personal support in a constituency but whether they can withstand competition from party-backed candidates is yet to be seen.

There are other uncertainties that have been injected into electoral politics. How will PML-N fare given the fraught economic situation and cost-of-living-crisis that will likely weigh negatively on the incumbent? Its share of the vote in its stronghold, Punjab, has been eroding over the years. From a high of 57 percent of the popular vote polled in Punjab in 1997 (in the national assembly election), the party got 47 percent in the 2013 election and 35 percent in 2018, although it still secured a large number of seats in the last election. So, the question is whether PML-N can regain its former electoral strength in the battleground province which determines the outcome of general elections. Will Mian Nawaz Sharif's return to the country, expected in coming months, be able to galvanize the party's former vote bank?

Pakistan's political stability depends on whether the election is seen as free and fair by the people.

The Pakistan People's Party is now a regional party. Perhaps one of the certainties of the election is that it will comfortably hold on to its stronghold of Sindh as there are no serious challengers there. But despite its party leader's efforts to win over some PTI defectors from south Punjab, the PPP is unlikely to make appreciable gains in



the province. In the 2018 election it could win only 6 NA seats from Punjab which has a total of 148 directly elected seats. This underlined its lack of support in the province, which it has also paid little attention to in recent years.

Another question relates to new voters. 20 million new voters have been added to the electoral rolls in the past five years since 2018. That's a significant 16 percent of the electorate. Which party will be able to appeal to them and garner their support? The bulk of new voters are of course young people. In fact, the youth vote can be consequential to the election outcome. Of the current size of the electorate of about 126 million, over 56 million are between the ages of 18 and 35 – which is around 45 percent of the electorate. The youth vote can therefore be a game changer provided the young turn up to cast the ballot. In the past their turnout has been significantly lower than the average voter turnout. Although PTI has an advantage over other parties in its appeal to youth, whether this translates into young voters showing up at the ballot box, especially if Khan is disqualified, is an indeterminate factor.

Political parties have not started gearing up for the election. Therefore, electioneering has yet to get into swing. What voters will expect to see is the various contenders outlining their position on key challenges and issues facing the country. No political leader has thus far offered any policy vision for the future; nor how their party would address the country's imposing challenges. They have remained preoccupied in the political war against their opponents and discrediting one another. This has made their public messaging vague or even muddled on policy issues. How much this will change as elections near would be important to watch.

Perhaps the most important question about the upcoming election will be about its fairness and credibility. It is disconcerting that in a recent Gallup-Pakistan opinion survey, only a quarter of Pakistanis expressed confidence in the fairness of the coming elections. Pakistan's political stability depends on whether the election is seen as free and fair by the people. If the election is perceived to lack credibility it will plunge the country into even greater turmoil than it has witnessed in the past year or so.

Courtesy [www.arabnews.pk](http://www.arabnews.pk)





# Vitals of a level playing field

By Abbas Nasir

Perhaps, the PML-N knows something we don't but its confidence does not seem to be ebbing; with two weeks to go before the National Assembly is dissolved, its government is paving the way for a 'neutral' caretaker administration tasked with presiding over free and fair elections.

Just look at the government's approval of long term projects such as the trillion-rupee nuclear power plant at Chashma and the raft of legislation being stamped by parliament without even a perfunctory examination.

Some pieces of legislation thus approved have drawn the ire of rights activists and the odd parliamentarian still hanging on desperately to a vision; the reality is no more than a tattered fabric of a democratic order. But the government seems not to care, such is the level of its self-belief.

Given the state of the economy and record inflation, and in the absence of credible and recent opinion polls conveying the mood of the masses, the PML-N's confidence can't be rooted, to any significant extent, in its perception of popular support. There have to be other factors.

The PML-N's confidence can't be rooted in its perception of popular support.

Since his removal from office in 2017, Nawaz Sharif, ousted as prime minister via a judicial order on pretty tenuous grounds by the Supreme Court and then wrongfully imprisoned — if the sentencing judge's video admission is correct — has called for a 'level playing field' for democracy to function and for the country to be steered out of the crisis it is in today.

Mr Sharif has repeatedly called on those responsible for paving the path to power for Imran Khan to 'undo the damage they have caused' and make sure they redeem themselves by undoing the injustice done to him and his party. He did not shy away from naming key figures he held responsible.

Even though Nawaz Sharif was allowed out of prison on medical grounds and permitted to travel to the UK in November 2019 for treatment, his calls for a 'level

playing field' fell on deaf ears for nearly two years. All that was to change in October 2021.

This was when the first signs of differences emerged between the then prime minister and the army chief who was seen by many as his benefactor.

The famed 'same page', the term used by Imran Khan himself to describe the harmony that existed between the two, was torn apart.

And, like Humpty Dumpty after his great fall, could not be put together again.

On the face of things, the cause of the falling out was the civilian prime minister's 'interference' in the military's transfers and posting system, which it guards against zealously, when he tried to retain his ISI chief who the army chief wanted to rotate out to a corps command.

Imran Khan was to justify his reluctance to agree to this change by citing the ISI chief's Afghanistan expertise. He said that with the exodus of the US-led forces from the Western neighbour, the collapse of the pro-West regime and the rout of its forces in the face of the Taliban march on Kabul, his intel team's expertise was badly needed.

The reality was a little different, and it started to trickle out in the dozens of interviews he gave to the media during his tense stand-off with the then army chief and after his ouster from office in a parliamentary vote of no-confidence (VoNC), ordered by the Supreme Court after he tried unconstitutional means of averting it.

Mr Khan openly admitted that the intelligence agency, under Lt Gen Faiz Hameed, did sterling work in wielding the whip that held his weak coalition together and that he couldn't even have mustered the numbers needed to pass the budget without the agency's help. He also wanted the intel team more deeply involved in the persecution of his political opponents cloaked in an anti-corruption role.

Although he denied he had any such intentions, his harmonious relations with

the intel chief that straddled work-related areas as well the spiritual sphere (with both reportedly looking to similar sources for guidance and inspiration) suggested that the officer would be his first choice when the chief Gen Qamar Bajwa retired after completing his extended, second tenure in November 2022.

The chief was shrewd enough to know what was happening and though the prime minister relented and a new intel head was brought in to replace the latter's favourite, it did not stop the chief from quietly supporting the VoNC though the establishment said it would be 'neutral'.

It is clear he was playing both sides in order to possibly secure yet another extension. He is understood to have pressured the Shehbaz Sharif government no end for this. But despite a tense few weeks, when speculation abounded about the fate of the PML-N-led coalition, Nawaz Sharif is said to have held his ground and told his younger brother to steady his nerves and name the senior most three-star as the chief.

Loss of power and receding hopes of a return angered Imran Khan no end. He also received poor counsel from some people around him and a bunch of YouTubers abroad, among them some ex-army captains/majors, with little handle on reality and no inside knowledge.

They made him believe he enjoyed such support within that he was untouchable and any tough sanction against him like his arrest and/ conviction would trigger an uprising within. He only needed to provide leadership to the 'revolution'.

He believed them. What followed in recent weeks each of us is familiar with.

The fallout made the task easy for anyone inclined to ensuring a 'level playing field' for the next election, ie, in the golfer's lexicon providing the same handicap to the PML-N as PTI had for the 2018 elections. Little wonder the party appears confident and so many of us are filled with a sense of déjà vu.

Courtesy Dawn

# What does the IMF's Standby Arrangement mean?



By Mehtab Haider

Pakistan's economy was on the brink of collapse but finally, Islamabad managed to secure a fresh bailout package of \$3 billion under the Standby Arrangement (SBA) program which is going to expire in March 2024.

This SBA program has only averted the risk of default for a short-term period of nine months provided Islamabad implements it fully and avoids deviations from the agreed structural benchmark and performance criteria under the IMF program. There should be no iota of doubt in anyone's mind that Pakistan would have to go for another IMF program for the medium-term program after completion of the existing SBA by the end of March 2024.

There are different risks attached to the SBA program but the first and foremost one would be in the context of political transition over the next nine months as three different governments would have to rule over the next months in case of a smooth transition. The PDM-led government signed the IMF deal and obtained \$1.2 billion. Now the first review of the IMF program would be undertaken when there would be a caretaker setup in the country by the end of October or early November this

year. Then the second review of the SBA program would be conducted by the IMF in mid of February 2024 so the Fund program would be completed by March 2024.

The IMF declared that risks remain exceptionally high and tilted to the downside on both domestic and external fronts for implementing the SBA program of Pakistan. External headwinds remain strong with tight global financial conditions and still elevated food and fuel prices due to the war in Ukraine.

The difficult sociopolitical climate, including persistent political volatility, remains a key risk to policy implementation, which could undermine Pakistan's adjustment path and growth potential. Advanced economic financial tightening, geopolitical tensions, and wavering reform efforts could affect the availability of external financing. The materialization of such downside risks could tip Pakistan toward an unsustainable debt situation. Close program monitoring, supportive TA, and financing assurances from key lenders mitigate those risks to some extent.

Pakistan's economic challenges are

complex and multifaceted, and risks are exceptionally high. Addressing them requires steadfast implementation of agreed policies, as well as continued financial support from external partners. Consistent and decisive implementation of program agreements will be essential to reduce risks and maintain macroeconomic stability.

The International Monetary Fund (IMF) had given full prescriptions of Islamabad's economy. To put the record straight, the IMF declared that macroeconomic conditions deteriorated considerably in FY23, halting the post-pandemic recovery.

The economy took a tumble in FY23 amid worsening domestic and external conditions, stringent import payment restrictions, and the impact of the floods (especially in the cotton and rice sector). Provisional estimates for FY23 released by the Pakistan Bureau of Statistics (PBS) in May put real GDP growth at +0.3 percent, however, data outturns in recent months have disappointed and staff assesses that real GDP could decline by 0.5 percent in FY23.

External pressures escalated in



FY23H1 as foreign inflows came to a standstill and scheduled debt service drained reserves to critically low levels. Without the ability to formally intervene in the FX market, informal efforts began in the Fall, including moral suasion on banks, to nudge the exchange rate to appreciate. When this did not succeed, import-payment restrictions and a crawl-like behavior from October 2022 through end-January 2023 fueled pressures in the FX interbank market, exacerbated the scarcity of dollars, allowed the FX black market to grow (with a rising informal premium), and caused disruptions in the timely import of key inputs for domestic production and exports.

In the last six months, inflation has continued to rise, in part due to rising food prices and the passthrough from the depreciation, but also as the shortages placed upward pressure on prices.

Price dynamics became increasingly broad-based with core inflation reaching 22.8% on a year-on-year basis and headline inflation reaching a record high of 38% in May 2023. Despite the mounting pressures, actions by the State Bank of Pakistan (SBP) lacked clarity, as it kept its policy rate unchanged in Monetary Policy Committee meetings in August, October, and early June, expecting that the price rises had peaked and would subside, but hiked rates in November, March, April, and late June. The last hike brought policy rates to 22

percent (cumulatively, an 825 bps (basis points) increase since the beginning of FY23).

## Fiscal

Deteriorating revenue—particularly the petroleum development levy (PDL) and general sales tax (GST) levied on imported goods—and unbudgeted expenditure, including for energy subsidies and immediate relief to those affected by the devastating post-monsoon floods, placed significant additional pressures on the budget. The primary surplus<sup>3</sup> reached only PRs 586 billion in FY23H1, thus falling short of the budget target by 0.4 percent of GDP, and the fiscal shortfall deepened in FY23H2 despite the authorities' efforts with the adoption of a supplementary finance bill in February.

The incomplete and uneven policy implementation under the 2019–23 EFF was a missed opportunity to set the economy on a sounder footing and help Pakistan avoid the costs of yet another economic crisis. The EFF aimed to provide a comprehensive framework to strengthen fiscal and external sustainability and advance structural and institutional reforms to foster stronger and more balanced growth.

The new SBA aims to rebuild confidence and entrench stability. To reduce near-term uncertainty and risks, the new program focuses on containing the budget and external deficits, bringing inflation under control,

restoring the proper functioning of the exchange market, rebuilding reserve buffers, and advancing some critical reform efforts.

While the authorities have taken actions in these areas, these need to be sustained in the program period if Pakistan is to regain stability and remain sustainable. Success will hinge on strong and sustained ownership, firm implementation, and significant external financial support, and be underpinned by program monitoring. Policies and monitoring should thus support external financing, with restored FX market functioning and stronger policies supporting a recovery in remittances in FY24 and other inflows (including FDI) thereafter. 33. The fiscal effort in the FY24 budget is an important step to protect fiscal sustainability but needs to be followed by further reforms. The consolidation envisaged in the FY24 budget is appropriate and supported by measures to boost revenue mobilization and restrain non-priority spending, whilst protecting social assistance.

Strict budget execution will be needed to reduce the sizable risks surrounding macroeconomic stability and fiscal sustainability, with current expenditure restraint and strong efforts to mobilize revenue through better tax administration.

Beyond FY24, efforts need to continue to build a more progressive, simple, efficient, and fair tax system that should generate adequate space for critical development and social spending.



# The Fiscal Year 2022-23

## A Disastrous Year for Pakistan

*The cost of essential consumer items \_ electricity, gas, petrol, cooking oil/ghee, flour, sugar, and meat surged to a record high level in the last fiscal year. To some extent, the year 2022-23 was a year of disaster for the economy*



By Javed Mahmood

The fiscal year 2022-23 seems to be the worst year for the economy of Pakistan. In this financial year, Pakistan witnessed a steep decline in exports, imports, inflows of remittances, and foreign investment. Also, the GDP growth forecast has been further downgraded to 0.5 percent against the previous estimate of 3-4 percent growth. The value of the rupee sharply plunged against the US dollar and other major currencies because of the IMF's dictation and the disappointing economic performance of the coalition government. The coalition government inherited the dollar-rupee parity of around 175 rupees when Imran Khan was ousted as prime minister through a no-trust vote on the night of April 9. Today, the dollar-rupee exchange rate has inflated to 289 rupees in the inter-bank and 293 rupees in the open market.

The cost of essential consumer items \_ electricity, gas, petrol, cooking oil/ghee, flour, sugar, and meat also surged to a

record high level in the last fiscal year. To some extent, the year 2022-23 was a year of disaster for the economy and the consumers in Pakistan.

### The decline in Exports and Imports

In the recently ended FY23, the imports fell to 52 billion dollars, from 71.54 billion dollars in FY22. In monetary terms, the decline in imports stood at 19.54 billion dollars. This is one of the major reasons for a substantial decline in the current account deficit. The trade deficit also fell to 24.80 billion dollars in 2022-23, from 44.90 billion dollars in 2021-22. It led to a relief of 20.10 billion dollars to Pakistan in the last fiscal year.

Meanwhile, Pakistan's overall exports in 2022-23 totaled \$27.7 billion against \$31.7 billion during the corresponding period of 2021-22. Thus, the Pakistan Bureau of Statistics reported a decrease of 12.73

percent in exports in a year. In monetary terms, Pakistan lost a huge foreign exchange of \$4 billion due to a decline in exports in the last fiscal year. The textile exports of Pakistan fell 14.6 percent during the fiscal year 2022-23. In FY-23, textile exports dropped to \$16.50 billion as compared to \$19.32 billion during the fiscal year 2021-22. The textile sector is the backbone of Pakistan's exports and large-scale manufacturing sectors in the country along with the provision of millions of jobs to skilled and non-skilled people.

### Big Decline in Remittances

The State Bank of Pakistan reported a huge decline of 4.25 billion dollars in the inflows of remittances in the fiscal year 2022-23. In percentage, the overseas Pakistanis remittances fell 13.6% YoY in FY2022-23 \_ to 27.02 billion, from \$31.27bn in FY21-22. The State Bank of Pakistan mentioned this decline in its



latest data released in July 2023. In the month of June alone, workers' remittances registered an inflow of \$2.2 billion, compared to \$2.1 billion in May 2023, and \$2.7 billion in June 2022. The inflows mainly came from Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, the United Kingdom, and the United States of America, with Saudi Arabia being the largest contributor at \$515.1 million. The central bank, however, mentioned no reasons for this huge decline in the inflows of remittances in the last fiscal year.

## Headline inflation surged to 29.2% in 2022-23

The average inflation for FY23 stood at 29.2 percent, which is the second-highest ever in the history of Pakistan, surpassing the 30.0 percent recorded in FY74, and significantly higher than the 12.2 percent in FY22. Notably, FY23 differentiates from the previous high inflation periods of FY74 and FY75 due to the negative GDP growth. While FY73 and FY74 had a positive average GDP growth of 5.5 percent, FY23 experienced negative growth, making the impact of stagflation much deeper.

The last year was likely the worst in the country's history in terms of a fall in real income. Food inflation in FY23 reached 39 percent, surpassing the previous record of 34.8 percent in FY74.

To put food inflation into perspective, prices doubled in the last thirty-eight months. The decline in June 2023 inflation is not solely due to the base effect; it also resulted from a decline in the index. On a monthly basis, inflation recorded a negative value, dropping by 0.3 percent. This is the first negative recording since September 2022 and the fourth negative recording in the last thirty-six months.

The impact is more significant on the rural community compared to the urban population. Rural inflation in FY23 recorded a rate of 32.6 percent, while the urban rate stood at 26.9 percent. Additionally, both the Wholesale Price Index (WPI) and the Sensitive Price Index (SPI) recorded higher rates than the CPI, standing at 32.8 percent and 33 percent, respectively.

## A Major Relief in the Current Account Deficit

Though the country and the people suffered a lot in the last financial year, a huge decline of \$19.5 billion has been reported by the State Bank and the Pakistan Bureau of Statistics in imports. It gave substantial relief to the government in trimming the trade and the current account deficit in 2022-23. The State Bank of Pakistan reported a massive decline in the current account deficit in the fiscal year 2022-23. In the fiscal year 2022-23, the current account deficit fell to 2.91 billion dollars, from 17.82 billion dollars in the preceding financial year. It is an outcome of a huge decline in imports due to curbs and a shortage of foreign exchange. Meanwhile, in the month of June, the State Bank reported 315 million dollars surplus current account.



## The free market policy of IMF hits the rupee value

Moreover, the IMF's demand for an intervention-free foreign exchange market in Pakistan has led to a significant increase in the value of the US dollar even after the disbursement of the IMF loan. As the IMF handed over 1.2 billion dollars to Pakistan under the Stand-By Arrangement on July 13, the value of the rupee improved. However, it proved a temporary relief, and the US dollar, once again, hit the 293 rupees level in the open market trading by July 26. In inter-bank trading, the dollar-rupee exchange rate surged to 289 rupees on July 26. The dollar-rupee exchange rate is set to hit the 300 rupees level once again.

## IMF Loan and Hopes for Economic Revival

On June 14, 2023, Pakistan received \$1.2 billion from the International Monetary Fund under the Stand-by Arrangement. The IMF board has approved the SBA only for nine months, starting from July 2023. The SBA will complete in April 2024. The resumption of the IMF loan has revived the hopes of an economic turnaround in Pakistan. For instance, the KSE-100 benchmark index of the Pakistan Stock Exchange has gained more than 4,000 points after the approval of the IMF loan. The index crossed 46,600 points by July 26, from below 42K in the first week of June. As the resumption of the IMF loan has ended default risk, after the stock exchange, real estate, large-scale manufacturing, and other sectors are set to demonstrate gradual recovery.

Meanwhile, the outsourcing of the airports, seaports, and privatization would indeed fetch foreign exchange along with the trust of international investors.

Unfortunately, some of the harsh conditions of the IMF such as a massive increase in the tariff of electricity, and gas, an increase in the petroleum development levy, and massive taxation in 2023-24 pose a risk to economic recovery. The business community had already warned the government of the consequences of a massive hike in the cost of utilities, nonetheless, the government appears indifferent to it because for the rulers, the IMF conditions are more important than anything else in the country.

# Global economic growth to fall to 3% in 2023 and 2024

*IMF's World Economic Outlook Update Highlights Near-Term Resilience and Persistent Challenges*

The global recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic and Russia's invasion of Ukraine is slowing amid widening

divergences among economic sectors and regions. The World Health Organization (WHO) announced in May that it no longer considers COVID-19 to be a "global health emergency." Supply chains have largely recovered, and shipping costs and suppliers' delivery times are back to pre-pandemic levels. But forces that hindered growth in 2022 persist. Inflation remains high and continues to erode household purchasing power.

Policy tightening by central banks in response to inflation has raised the cost of borrowing, constraining economic activity. Immediate concerns about the health of the banking sector have subsided, but high-interest rates are filtering through the financial system, and banks in advanced economies have significantly tightened lending standards, curtailing the supply of credit. The impact of higher interest rates extend to public finances, especially in poorer countries grappling with elevated debt costs, constraining room for priority investments. The International Monetary Fund mentioned these developments in its latest Global Economic Outlook Update released on July 26.

As a result, output losses compared with pre-pandemic forecasts remain large, especially for the world's poorest nations. Despite these headwinds, global economic activity was resilient in the first quarter of 2023, with that resilience driven mainly by the services sector. The post-pandemic rotation of consumption back toward services is approaching completion in advanced economies (including in tourism-dependent economies of southern Europe), and it accelerated in a number of emerging markets and developing economies in the first quarter.

However, as mobility returns to pre-pandemic levels, the scope for further acceleration appears more limited. At the same



time, nonservices sectors, including manufacturing, have shown weakness, and high-frequency indicators for the second quarter point to a broader slowdown in activity. Amid softening consumption of goods, heightened uncertainties regarding the future geo-economic landscape, weak productivity growth, and a more challenging financial environment, firms have scaled back investment in productive capacity. Gross fixed capital formation and industrial production have slowed sharply or contracted in major advanced economies, dragging international trade and manufacturing in emerging markets with them.

International trade and indicators of demand and production in manufacturing all point to further weakness. Excess savings built up during the pandemic are declining in advanced economies, especially in the United States, implying a slimmer buffer to protect against shocks, including those to the cost of living and those from more restricted credit availability. The fight against inflation continues. Inflation is easing in most countries but remains high, with divergences across economies and inflation measures. Following the buildup of gas inventories in Europe and weaker-than-expected demand in China, energy and food prices have dropped substantially from their 2022 peaks, although food prices remain elevated.

Together with the normalization of supply chains, these developments have contributed to a rapid decline in headline inflation in most countries. Core inflation, however, has on average declined more gradually and remains well above most central banks' targets. Its persistence reflects, depending on the particular economy considered, the pass-through of past shocks to headline inflation into core inflation, particular economy considered, pass-through of past shocks to headline inflation core inflation, corporate profits remaining high, and tight labor markets with strong wage growth, especially in the context of weak productivity growth that lifts unit labor costs. However, to date, wage-price spirals—wherein prices and wages accelerate together for a sustained period—do not appear to have taken hold in the average advanced economy, and longer-term inflation expectations remain anchored. In response to the persistence of core inflation, major central banks have communicated that they will need to tighten monetary policy further. The Federal Reserve paused rate hikes at its June meeting but signaled further ones ahead, and the Reserve Bank of Australia, Bank of Canada, Bank of England, and European Central Bank have continued to raise rates.

At the same time, in some other economies, particularly in East Asia, where mobility curbs during the pandemic restricted



demand for services longer than elsewhere, core inflation has remained low. In China, where inflation is well below target, the central bank recently cut policy interest rates. The Bank of Japan has kept interest rates near zero under the quantitative and qualitative monetary easing with a yield curve control policy. The corporate profits remain high, and tight labor markets with strong wage growth, especially in the context of weak productivity growth that lifts unit labor costs.

However, to date, wage-price spirals—wherein prices and wages accelerate together for a sustained period—do not appear to have taken hold in the average advanced economy, and longer-term inflation expectations remain anchored. In response to the persistence of core inflation, major central banks have communicated that they will need to tighten monetary policy further. The Federal Reserve paused rate hikes at its June meeting but signaled further ones ahead, and the Reserve Bank of Australia, Bank of Canada, Bank of England, and European Central Bank have continued to raise rates. At the same time, in some other economies, particularly in East Asia, where mobility curbs during the pandemic restricted demand for services longer than elsewhere, core inflation has remained low. In China, where inflation is well below target, the central bank recently cut policy interest rates. The Bank of Japan has kept interest rates near zero under the quantitative and qualitative monetary easing with a yield curve control policy.

Thanks to the authorities' swift reaction, the March 2023 banking scare remained contained and limited to problematic regional banks in the United States and Credit Suisse in Switzerland. Accordingly, since the April 2023 WEO, global financial conditions have eased (Box 1), a sign that financial markets may have become less concerned about risks to financial stability coming from the banking sector. But tight monetary policy continues to put some banks under pressure, both directly (through higher costs of funding) and indirectly (by increasing credit risk).

Bank lending surveys in the United States and Europe suggest that banks restricted access to credit considerably in the first quarter of 2023, and they are expected to

continue to do so in the coming months. Corporate loans have been declining lately, as has commercial real estate lending. Following a reopening boost, China's recovery is losing steam. Manufacturing activity and consumption of services in China rebounded at the beginning of the year when Chinese authorities abandoned their strict lockdown policies; net exports contributed strongly to sequential growth in February and March as supply chains normalized and firms swiftly put backlogs of orders into production. Nonetheless, continued weakness in the real estate sector is weighing on investment, foreign demand remains weak, and rising and elevated youth unemployment (at 20.8 percent in May 2023) indicates labor market weakness. High-frequency data through June confirm a softening in momentum into the second quarter of 2023.



Growth Slowing, with Shifting Composition Global growth, is projected to fall from 3.5 percent in 2022 to 3.0 percent in both 2023 and 2024 on an annual average basis (Table 1). Compared with projections in the April 2023 WEO, growth has been upgraded by 0.2 percentage points for 2023, with no change for 2024. The forecast for 2023–24 remains well below the historical (2000–19) annual average of 3.8 percent. It is also below the historical average across broad income groups, in overall GDP as well as per capita GDP terms.

Advanced economies continue to drive the decline in growth from 2022 to 2023, with weaker manufacturing, as well as idiosyncratic factors, offsetting stronger services

activity. In emerging markets and developing economies, the growth outlook is broadly stable for 2023 and 2024, although with notable shifts across regions. On a year-over-year basis, global growth bottomed out in the fourth quarter of 2022. However, in some major economies, it is not expected to bottom out before the second half of 2023. World trade growth is expected to decline from 5.2 percent in 2022 to 2.0 percent in 2023, before rising to 3.7 percent in 2024, well below the 2000–19 average of 4.9 percent.

The decline in 2023 reflects not only the path of global demand but also shifts in its composition toward domestic services, lagged effects of US dollar appreciation—which slows trade owing to the widespread invoicing of products in US dollars—and rising trade barriers. These forecasts are based on a number of

assumptions, including those regarding fuel and nonfuel commodity prices and interest rates. Oil prices rose by 39 percent in 2022 and are projected to fall by about 21 percent in 2023, reflecting the slowdown in global economic activity.

Assumptions regarding global interest rates have been revised upward, reflecting actual and signaled policy tightening by major central banks since April. The Federal Reserve and Bank of England are now expected to raise rates by more than assumed in the April 2023 WEO—to a peak of about 5.6 percent in the case of the Federal Reserve—before reducing them in 2024. The European Central Bank is assumed to raise its policy rate to a peak of 3¾ percent in 2023 and to ease gradually in



2024. Moreover, with near-term inflation expectations falling, real interest rates are likely to stay up even after nominal rates start to fall.

For advanced economies, the growth slowdown projected for 2023 remains significant: from 2.7 percent in 2022 to 1.5 percent in 2023, with a 0.2 percentage point upward revision from the April 2023 WEO. About 93 percent of advanced economies are projected to have lower growth in 2023, and growth in 2024 among this group of economies is projected to remain at 1.4 percent.

In the United States, growth is projected to slow from 2.1 percent in 2022 to 1.8 percent in 2023, then slow further to 1.0 percent in 2024. For 2023, the forecast has

been revised upward by 0.2 percentage points, on account of resilient consumption growth in the first quarter, a reflection of a still-tight labor market that has supported gains in real income and a rebound in vehicle purchases. However, this consumption growth momentum is not expected to last: Consumers have largely depleted excess savings accumulated during the pandemic, and the Federal Reserve is expected to raise rates further.

Growth in the euro area is projected to fall from 3.5 percent in 2022 to 0.9 percent in 2023, before rising to 1.5 percent in 2024. The forecast is broadly unchanged but with a change in composition for 2023. Given stronger services and tourism, growth has been revised upward by 0.4 percentage points for Italy and by 1.0 percentage points

for Spain. However, for Germany, weakness in manufacturing output and economic contraction in the first quarter of 2023 means that growth has been revised downward by 0.2 percentage points, to -0.3 percent. • Growth in the United Kingdom is projected to decline from 4.1 percent in 2022 to 0.4 percent in 2023, then to rise to 1.0 percent in 2024. This is an upward revision of 0.7 percentage points for 2023, reflecting stronger-than-expected consumption and investment from the confidence effects of falling energy prices, lower post-Brexit uncertainty (following the Windsor Framework agreement), and a resilient financial sector as the March global banking stress dissipates. • Growth in Japan is projected to rise from 1.0 percent in 2022 to 1.4 percent in 2023, reflecting a modest upward revision, buoyed by pent-up demand and accommodative policies, then slow to 1.0 percent in 2024, as the effects of past stimuli dissipate. For emerging markets and developing economies, growth is projected to be broadly stable at 4.0 percent in 2023 and 4.1 percent in 2024, with modest revisions of 0.1 percentage point for 2023 and -0.1 percentage point for 2024. However, this stable average masks divergences, with about 61 percent of the economies in this group growing faster in 2023 and the rest—including low-income countries and three of the five geographic regions described in what follows—growing more slowly.

By Javed Mahmood

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# Ten years of CPEC: Growth and Possibilities

By Anum Akram

Over the last decade, the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), a pivotal project of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), has ushered Pakistan into substantial progress. China's significant direct investment of \$25.4 billion into the CPEC has played a crucial role in strengthening economic, commercial, and investment ties, as well as fostering meaningful people-to-people interactions, all while maintaining strategic and diplomatic closeness between the two nations. Completing its first phase successfully, the CPEC is now well underway in its second phase, making it one of the most significant and closely monitored components of China's ambitious global Belt and Road Initiative (BRI).

In the CPEC's second phase, China generously granted Pakistan \$1 billion for the development of its social sectors. This investment has resulted in over 30,000 Pakistani students pursuing education in Chinese institutions, while a substantial number of Chinese citizens have chosen to reside and work in Pakistan, leading to a significant rise in people-to-people engagements.

At the "Decade of CPEC - Cake Cutting Ceremony" held in Islamabad on July 5, Federal Minister Ahsan Iqbal, who oversees the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor, delivered a historic speech. In the presence of Her Excellency Pang Chun Xue, the Acting Ambassador of China, and distinguished guests, including Prime Minister Excellency Shahbaz Sharif, Minister Ahsan Iqbal expressed heartfelt gratitude for the opportunity to address this momentous occasion marking the completion of the CPEC's first decade.

He highlighted the significance of the historic memorandum of agreement signed in Beijing to initiate the CPEC, signifying hope and a vision for advancing political and economic cooperation between China and Pakistan. Minister Ahsan Iqbal underscored the deep ties between the two countries, often described as "higher than the Himalayas."



The Minister further stressed the seamless integration between President Xi's Belt and Road Initiative and former Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif's ambition to transform Pakistan into an Asian tiger by 2025. He emphasized how this synergistic vision harnesses Pakistan's strategic position as a pivotal junction connecting South Asia, Central Asia, China, and the Middle East, with the ultimate goal of shifting the nation's focus from geopolitics to geo-economics. By establishing Pakistan as a central hub for trade, commerce, manufacturing, and agriculture in the region, the CPEC aims to pave the way for sustained economic growth and prosperity.

Prime Minister Shahbaz Sharif highlighted China's unwavering support for Pakistan during its most challenging times, particularly as it negotiated the International Monetary Fund (IMF) accord. He assured that Pakistan would not resort to declaring default and emphasized the need to exert considerable efforts to revive the nation and restore its prosperity. The Prime Minister extended his congratulations to the leaders and citizens of both countries, emphasizing the strong bond between them as "iron brothers," and lauded the CPEC as a new chapter in their enduring and steadfast strategic cooperative partnership.

The CPEC initiative has led to the establishment of numerous road networks, fostering a productive synergy between

rural and urban areas. Along these interconnected roads, Special Economic Zones (SEZs) have emerged, implementing innovative strategies to attract investments, especially in the post-COVID-19 era.

According to a senior Chinese Foreign Ministry official, the CPEC has successfully created a comprehensive cooperation pattern referred to as "1+4." This pattern centres around the CPEC itself, with Gwadar Port, transportation infrastructure, energy, and industrial cooperation as the four primary areas of focus. This holistic approach has significantly contributed to job creation in Pakistan.

As part of this endeavour, the project aims to construct 510 km (316 miles) of motorways, produce 6,000 MW of electricity, and extend the country's transmission network by 886 km (550 miles). These impressive developments were confirmed by Wang Wenbin, a spokesperson for the foreign ministry, during a press briefing in Beijing.

The CPEC initiative is playing a pivotal role in fostering enhanced economic growth and cooperation, empowering Pakistan's infrastructure and energy sectors, and facilitating regional connectivity and prosperity.

Experts agree that the CPEC has brought about a revolutionary impact on Pakistan's development landscape. Over the past

decade, the nation has witnessed remarkable progress, driven by the successful completion of numerous multimillion-dollar projects. These projects encompass power plants, mass transit networks such as the Orange Line, and the expansion of road infrastructure, all contributing significantly to Pakistan's advancement.

Furthermore, the CPEC has played a pivotal role in significantly enhancing Pakistan's road communication infrastructure. Across the entire length and breadth of the nation, an impressive array of new highways and motorways has been completed or is currently under construction. Noteworthy projects include the upgraded Karakoram Highway, the Zhob-Kuchlak route, and the Eastbay Expressway, among others. The Karachi-Lahore Motorway, which links Multan, Rahim Yar Khan, Sukkur, and Hyderabad, is another key achievement.

The operational deep-sea port in Gwadar has been witnessing an increasing influx of cargo ships, while plans for a new international airport and related facilities are also in the pipeline for Gwadar. Additionally, a decision has been made to upgrade Pakistan Railway's Main Line 1, spanning from Peshawar to Karachi.

These comprehensive developments have set the stage for Pakistan's economy to propel towards industrialization and growth driven by exports. The improved infrastructure and connectivity provided by the CPEC have opened up vast opportuni-

ties, facilitating seamless trade and transport within the country and with international partners. With such a strong foundation, Pakistan is well-positioned to embrace its economic potential and embark on a trajectory of sustainable progress.

The seamless connectivity facilitated by transmission lines and the optical fibre is playing a vital role in supporting Pakistan's pursuit of self-reliant economic growth. By fostering a spirit of "seeking common ground," the CPEC projects are promoting extensive dialogue to harmonize policies and create favourable conditions for overall development.

CPEC, a remarkable commercial and infrastructure venture between China and Pakistan and a key component of China's Belt and Road Initiative, is estimated to surpass \$50 billion in investment. Notably, this initiative grants China crucial access to the Arabian Sea via the strategic Gwadar Port.

Through the development of robust communication networks and the fostering of collaborative policies, the CPEC is contributing significantly to Pakistan's progress towards self-sufficiency and sustainable economic growth. It is not only enhancing regional connectivity but also paving the way for mutual prosperity and cooperation between the two nations.

Amidst the global challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic, conflicts, climate change, unemployment, and depleting resources, the China-Pakistan Economic

Corridor (CPEC) stands as a historic achievement. It represents a shining example of regional connectivity aimed at improving the lives of people through inclusive development and fostering mutual prosperity. In the face of these obstacles, trade between China and Pakistan has thrived, with exploration of new markets leading to impressive growth in agri-based product exports. Notably, sesame seeds exports saw a 50% annual increase in 2022, seafood exports rose by 40%, and Pakistan exceeded the historic threshold of exporting one million tons of rice to China. Between 2013 and 2022, Pakistan's overall exports to China soared by over 35%.

The CPEC's significance extends beyond economic growth; it fosters the creation of new markets, expansion of supply chains, removal of bottlenecks for comprehensive development, ensuring energy security, and generating millions of job opportunities for the region's residents.

Looking ahead, Pakistan is committed to strengthening economic ties with China and views Chinese foreign direct investment (FDI) and industrial support as essential pathways to stability. The collaborative efforts between the two countries exemplify a vision for a prosperous and interconnected future, despite the complex global challenges at hand. The CPEC stands as a beacon of hope, demonstrating that with determination, cooperation, and innovative solutions, nations can overcome obstacles and forge a path towards a brighter and more prosperous future.





# 20 Reasons to Love or Hate Ishaq Dar as Finance Minister



By Amir Jahangir

**F**inance Minister Ishaq Dar, who delivered the Budget 2022-23 (July-June), has been a key figure in the economic policies and decision-making of the Coalition Government.

Looking at his tenure as finance minister in Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif's government allows us to evaluate his performance, effectiveness, aspirations, and impact on Pakistan's economic landscape.

**Economic Stewardship:** Dar's tenure as finance minister has been a tumultuous journey, marked by a blend of achievements and disappointments. Inheriting an economic quagmire riddled with governance lapses, mismanagement, and instability, Dar embarked on a mission to steer Pakistan toward stability. His measures, including stringent austerity, revenue mobilization, and securing external financing, yielded some glimmers of progress. However, the failure to conclude the IMF program earlier under his leadership cast a shadow of prolonged uncertainty over the nation. The conse-

quent desperation for economic relief towards the end of his tenure has inflicted profound anguish on the emotional, economic, and physical well-being of countless individuals connected to Pakistan. The impact has been far-reaching, leaving behind a trail of shattered hopes and shattered lives.

**Fiscal Management:** Dar's approach to fiscal management has been the subject of intense scrutiny and critique. While he placed a strong emphasis on fiscal prudence and austerity measures, doubts linger regarding their sustainability and effectiveness. The persistence of budget deficits and the increasing reliance on external borrowing throughout his tenure raise legitimate concerns about the long-term fiscal stability of the country. Furthermore, the lack of transparency and accountability in managing public finances, including the allocation and utilization of development funds, poses a significant challenge. This situation was exacerbated by the initiation of infrastructure projects during the final days of the PDM government, seemingly driven by

political motives rather than sound financial planning, with Dar and his bosses — the Sharifs at the helm.

**Structural Reforms:** One of the key areas where Dar's performance falls short is the implementation of structural reforms. Despite rhetoric on the need for reforms, there has been limited progress in critical sectors such as taxation, energy, and governance. Reforms in tax administration and the broadening of the tax base have been sluggish, and the energy sector continues to face significant challenges, including circular debt and inefficiencies. The lack of tangible progress in these areas raises concerns about the government's ability to drive sustainable economic growth.

**Public Debt and External Financing:** During Dar's tenure, Pakistan's public debt increased significantly, raising concerns about the country's debt sustainability. The reliance on external financing, including loans from international lenders, has been a cause for scrutiny. The terms and conditions of these loans, along with the burden

they place on future generations, need careful evaluation. There is a need for a comprehensive debt management strategy and effective utilization of borrowed funds to ensure they contribute to productive investments and development.

**Inclusive Growth and Social Development:** The budget speech and Dar's tenure as finance minister have been criticized for the limited focus on inclusive growth and social development. While some relief measures for the poor are mentioned in the speech, the lack of specific details and concrete initiatives raises questions about the government's commitment to addressing income inequality, poverty, and social welfare. The absence of comprehensive poverty alleviation programs and targeted measures to uplift marginalized communities reflects a missed opportunity to address pressing socio-economic challenges.

**Transparency and Accountability:** Transparency and accountability in economic governance remain major concerns during Dar's tenure. There have been allegations of corruption and lack of transparency in economic decision-making processes, including issues related to alleged financial mismanagement and misappropriation of funds. The lack of clear fiscal details, including revenue targets and expenditure allocations, raises doubts about the transparency and credibility of the government's financial planning.

**Currency Depreciation and External Sector:** One of the critical areas of concern during Dar's tenure has been the significant depreciation of the Pakistani rupee. While a certain level of depreciation can be attributed to external factors, the extent of the depreciation raises questions about the effectiveness of the government's exchange rate policies and its ability to manage external sector imbalances. The impact of currency depreciation on inflation, import costs, and external debt servicing has been a burden on the economy.

**Taxation and Business Environment:** Despite rhetoric on improving the tax system and creating a favorable business environment, the government's efforts under Dar's leadership have fallen short. Tax reforms have been slow, and the burden of taxation has largely fallen on a narrow tax base. The complex tax structure

and cumbersome tax filing processes continue to discourage investment and hinder business growth. Moreover, the lack of clarity and consistency in tax policies and frequent changes have added to the uncertainty for businesses.

**Public Sector Enterprises:** The performance of public sector enterprises (PSEs) under Dar's tenure has been a matter of concern. Many PSEs, including energy companies and national airlines, have incurred substantial losses and struggled with inefficiencies and mismanagement. The government's failure to implement comprehensive reforms and ensure transparency and accountability in PSEs has led to significant financial burdens on the national exchequer and hindered their potential to contribute positively to the economy.

financial institutions have persisted. The lack of effective mechanisms to combat corruption and enforce accountability has undermined public trust and hindered economic progress. Strengthening institutions, promoting transparency, and implementing robust anti-corruption measures are crucial to fostering a conducive environment for economic growth.

**Communication and Stakeholder Engagement:** An area where Dar's tenure has been criticized is communication and stakeholder engagement. The finance minister's ability to effectively communicate the government's economic policies engage with various stakeholders and address concerns has been a matter of contention. The lack of clear and consistent communication has contributed to a sense



**Wealth Disparity and Social Welfare:** One of the persistent challenges in Pakistan is the wide wealth disparity and inadequate social welfare measures. While the budget mentions relief measures for the poor, the overall impact of Dar's tenure on reducing income inequality and improving social welfare has been limited. The lack of targeted poverty alleviation programs, inadequate investment in education and health-care, and the absence of comprehensive social protection schemes have hindered progress in addressing these pressing socio-economic issues.

**Corruption and Governance:** Corruption and governance issues have remained significant challenges throughout Dar's tenure. Despite claims of improved governance and transparency, allegations of corruption within the government and

of uncertainty and skepticism among investors, businesses, and the public.

**Infrastructure Development:** During Dar's tenure, there have been notable infrastructure development projects, particularly in the energy and transportation sectors. The government's focus on addressing the energy crisis and improving the country's infrastructure is admirable. However, concerns remain regarding the transparency of project procurement processes, cost overruns, and potential inefficiencies in project implementation. Effective monitoring and evaluation mechanisms are essential to ensure that infrastructure projects are executed efficiently and deliver the desired outcomes.

**Job Creation and Youth Employment:** Despite the government's emphasis on job creation, the overall impact on reducing



unemployment and addressing youth employment remains limited. The budget speech does not provide a comprehensive plan or specific initiatives to tackle the high unemployment rate, particularly among the youth. Creating an enabling environment for private sector investment, promoting entrepreneurship, and investing in skill development programs are crucial steps that need to be prioritized to address the unemployment challenge effectively.

**Investment Climate:** Dar's tenure witnessed efforts to improve the investment climate in Pakistan, including the establishment of special economic zones and initiatives to attract foreign direct investment. However, challenges such as bureaucratic hurdles, lack of ease of doing business, and concerns over policy consistency and stability continue to deter domestic and foreign investment. Further reforms are needed to create a business-friendly environment, simplify regulations, and ensure a level playing field for all investors.

**External Debt and Debt Sustainability:** Another critical aspect of Dar's tenure is the substantial increase in external debt. While external borrowing is sometimes necessary to meet the country's financing requirements, the government's ability to ensure debt sustainability has been questioned. The rising debt burden and debt servicing costs pose significant challenges to the long-term economic stability of the country. Strengthening debt management strategies, improving revenue generation, and promot-

ing export-led growth is essential to mitigate the risks associated with growing debt.

**Inflation and Cost of Living:** Despite efforts to maintain price stability, inflation rates have remained relatively high during Dar's tenure. The impact of inflation on the cost of living, particularly for low-income households, has been a significant concern. The budget does not provide clear strategies to address inflation or alleviate the burden on consumers. Implementing effective monetary policies, addressing supply-side constraints, and strengthening social safety nets are necessary to mitigate the adverse effects of inflation on vulnerable segments of society.

**Economic Diversification:** The budget is also silent on providing a comprehensive roadmap for economic diversification, which is crucial for long-term sustainable growth. Overreliance on a few sectors, such as textiles and remittances, exposes the economy to external shocks. Encouraging innovation, promoting research and development, and supporting emerging industries can help diversify the economy and reduce its vulnerability to external factors.

**Creating an Economic Narrative:** Finance Minister Ishaq Dar's tenure has been marked by a lack of effective initiatives to kickstart the economy. Despite the government's focus on creating fiscal space, there has been a notable absence of policies that create a positive business environment and

attract foreign investors to consider Pakistan as an attractive investment destination. The failure to establish a clear economic narrative for the country is a collective shortcoming of successive governments, and Dar's tenure reflects an outdated approach to governance reminiscent of the 90s. Furthermore, his actions, including playing politics with the International Monetary Fund (IMF), showcase a manipulative approach rather than a sincere commitment to governing the nation. This is evident in his inability to satisfy the IMF team and the subsequent correction and denial of his illogical statements by the IMF mission in Islamabad.

**Dar in a Nutshell:** Finance Minister Ishaq Dar's tenure has been marked by both positive and negative aspects. While his efforts to stabilize the economy and restore macroeconomic stability are noteworthy, there are concerns about the sustainability of fiscal policies, limited progress in implementing structural reforms, and the lack of focus on inclusive growth and social development. Transparency and accountability remain significant challenges that need to be addressed to foster public trust and ensure effective economic governance. A comprehensive and sustainable economic vision, coupled with tangible reforms and greater emphasis on social welfare, is crucial for long-term economic prosperity in Pakistan.

Courtesy narratives.com.pk







# Pakistan Under Water









# China-India military tensions: Implications for Pakistan

By Umer Farooq

How Pakistan will respond to any rise in military tensions between its all-weather friend China and its arch enemy India, will be the key question to answer in the regional security situation. Any such tension will take place close to Pakistani territory and will have direct implications for Pakistan. Whether Pakistan can afford to remain aloof from such tensions and possible conflict? If Pakistan decides to become a party in this confrontation, it will be the first trilateral crisis involving three regional nuclear powers—All three powers have nuclear weapons and a fully functional delivery system available to them. In the fifteen years between 1986-2001, there have been three major military crises between Pakistan and India and one major war in Kargil. In all three US diplomacy paved the way for the peaceful resolution of the crisis or war and prevented the tensions from converting into a full-scale conventional war. This time the United States itself is arming India to the teeth to counter China militarily. What is our region's future in the impending scenario?

Both US and Pakistani diplomats have made statements to the effect that Pakistan won't be forced to take sides in a US-China confrontation that seems to be edging closer and closer to the inevitable. While the great power rivalry garners quite a bit of attention, it is not directly related to Pakistan's geopolitical conundrum.

We will not be put in the quandary of taking sides between Washington and Beijing. As far as we are concerned, Sino-Indian political and military tensions are more relevant to the geostrategic situation we face in the region. The central question Pakistan's foreign policy is facing is how we will respond to a situation where political and military tensions between the two Asian giants will rise to alarming levels.

China and the United States are not in geographical proximity, and any possible conflict between the two



would likely arise in East Asia—a far-off region as far as Pakistan is concerned. The conflict between India and China, on the other hand, will likely take place in the geographical proximity of Pakistan's territory. India and China are both militarizing their international borders, forcing the Indian military, according to reports in the international media and by American think tanks, to rebalance its troops away from the border with Pakistan. This could be very tempting in purely military terms.

Pakistan has close and deep political and military relations with China. Since a frigid chill has crept into Pakistan's security relations with the United States and its Western allies after the May 2011 Abbottabad raid that killed Osama Bin Laden, Pakistan has gradually turned toward China for its military hardware needs. There are clear indications that the Pakistani government and military are now strategically and militarily more closely allied with China.

Indian foreign policy, on the other hand, clearly indicates that it's moving into the Western orbit and is in the process of using its military muscle to attract the smaller nations of Southeast Asia towards some kind of military or political alliance. Experts say that India's strategic elite seems to have overcome its initial reluctance to

militarily counter Chinese influence in South East and South Asia. It is exporting its indigenously built military technology to Southeast Asian countries which see China as a threat, thus showing its readiness to play to the tune of Washington and other western capitals.

American experts have recently put forward a concept of "integrated deterrence" to rope in New Delhi to take responsibility to counter China's assertiveness in the regions in India's vicinity. The resulting military and political situation in our region could be severely destabilizing for all of South Asia, but especially so for Pakistan.

What are the options? Can Pakistan choose to remain a bystander in a possible military confrontation or conflict? Since China has been augmenting Pakistani military capabilities significantly since 2011, will a neutral Pakistan live up to its closest ally's expectations, especially in an environment in which India will be actively and militarily deterring China?

The December 2022 clash between Chinese and Indian troops along the two countries 2,100-mile-long contested border, known as the Line of Actual Control (LAC), is considered the worst during the last two years of China-India relations. The Americans assisted India with valuable intelligence information



related to Chinese military movements and offered state of art military technology to New Delhi. American strategists consider India to be a valuable partner in its super-power rivalry with China, and they have been trying to rope it into its international alliance system like the Quad. Border tensions between China and India are not settled and experts point out that the tensions could escalate into a conflict.

So far, the military confrontation between two Asian giants has not devolved into an all-out war and has remained restricted to local skirmishes. Increased military activity on Line of Actual Control has remained a constant feature of the tense relations between the two countries since. The Pakistani military has responded sensibly to rising tensions on the China-India border by not making any military maneuvers of its own.

It is evidently clear that China-US tensions or the possibility of a confrontation are not something that immediately concerns us. However, the same cannot be said about the China-India confrontation, as it will have direct security and military implications for Pakistan which it will not be able to ignore. It is clear that whether any future military crisis in the region would remain a bilateral crisis between China and India or would it become a trilateral crisis involving Pakistan will ultimately depend on how Pakistan responds to any future military tensions and how India conducts itself vis-à-vis tempting Western offers of co-optation. It will also depend on whether India will embrace the concept of “integrated deterrence.”

It goes without saying that a trilateral crisis if one were to ever arise, will make life very difficult for South Asia. Pakistan’s military planners, foreign policy establishment, and those in the business of running the day-to-day affairs of governance will have to take into account the danger of further nuclear proliferation or vertical proliferation in our region. There are reports that China is in the process of upgrading its inventory of nuclear weapons and their delivery systems in response to American upgrades.

What will happen if India responds to this by upgrading its own nuclear inventory? Or by way of buying more systems for reconnaissance, intelligence, and surveillance? Does

Pakistan have the financial wherewithal to enter into a regional trilateral arms race? There are reports that Indians are already in the process of acquiring modern systems for reconnaissance, intelligence, and surveillance. India is also in the midst of integrating advanced US weapon systems into its military. How will Pakistan intend to respond in the time of financial meltdown?

The economic impact of military tensions in a trilateral crisis should be front and center in our attention. The last major full-blown military confrontation between Pakistan-India was so expensive for Pakistan that, according to some Pakistani experts, military planners in Pakistan decided to induct tactical nukes into our warfighting plans. We should start pondering how expensive a trilateral crisis is going



to be. The Pakistani economy is passing through a severe crisis, and there is no chance that economic activity will pick up in the country anytime soon. Some people argue that the campaign in India to boycott Chinese goods will appear as an opportunity for Pakistan to increase trade volume between the two countries, which will likely have a meager impact relative to the cost of a military confrontation in the region. The Pakistani economy has taken a pretty heavy hit by the economic impact of the war in Ukraine, a far-off land. How are we going to cope with a conflict in our geographical proximity, or a trilateral crisis in the region?

Military mobilization also carries its own pains; we are still facing the threat of a prolonged battle with indigenous militant

groups in the northwest and southwest of the country. Part of our military is deployed in areas afflicted with active insurgencies. A military mobilization to counter the Indian threat will prove devastating for our economy and our political system.

The Pakistani state is too preoccupied with its political problems and the ongoing domestic economic meltdown to seriously ponder over these strategic dangers lurking just around the corner. The Pakistan military leadership has demonstrated some sensitivity towards the possibility of such danger arising in our geographical vicinity, when it tried to reach out to Washington in the midst of a deep and intense strategic embrace with China, sometime in the middle of last year. But even this will be futile.

The Americans themselves are flirting with the idea of using military tools in our region to counter an ever more assertive China. There are voices in India that are advocating saying no to a military confrontation with China – they argue that India will be left alone to feel the heat in the time of crisis as Washington is not a reliable military ally. Even banking on this strategic calculation is not a viable option for Pakistan: India’s domestic politics is in the tight grip of Hindu extremist forces who want to thrive in the impending age of confrontation, tensions, and conflict and will not hesitate in resorting to jingoism.

Diplomacy for peace will, nevertheless, serve Pakistan’s interests best.

# Cluster Munitions in Ukraine: Rising Tensions and the Threat of Nuclear Escalation

By Daniyal Wali

In an unexpected turnaround of events, the United States announced on July 6 that it plans to send cluster munitions to Ukraine in the battle against Russia. This news ignited a flurry of objections from campaign groups. Despite the assurance of rational usage from the United States, the United Nations and human rights watch groups across the world criticized the decision of supplying these indiscriminate weapons. For several months now, Ukraine has been requesting these weapons due to an ongoing ammunition shortage. While the United States' decision to provide cluster munitions to the Ukrainian forces may come as a relief to them, it has also sparked apprehension among those who comprehend the inherent dangers associated with these weapons.

The International Convention on Cluster Munitions defines cluster munition as “a conventional munition that is designed to disperse or release explosive submunitions, each weighing less than 20 kilograms.” These are controversial weapons because of high dud rates. Cluster munitions frequently fail to detonate upon landing, resulting in duds with varying rates of 2 per cent to 40 per cent, depending on the origin of the submunitions. U.S. submunitions have lower dud rates, while Russian submunitions tend to have higher ones. These unexploded duds pose a significant risk to civilians, functioning like landmines and causing injuries. To address this issue, the Convention on Cluster Munitions was established and came into effect in 2010. This international treaty, signed by 123 nations, prohibits the use, development, production, acquisition, stockpiling, and transfer of cluster munitions. Russia, Ukraine, and the United States have not signed the convention. The international community is expressing deep concern over the potential consequences of the United States transferring cluster munitions to Ukraine. Such a move could have far-reaching and unwanted implications.

## What's behind the United States' decision to supply cluster munitions to Ukraine?

The United States' commitment to aiding its allies has been a cornerstone of its foreign policy, especially during times of geopolitical tension. The cluster bombs being sent to Ukraine are neither new nor novel. The United States used them extensively during the war in Vietnam and at the start of the war in Afghanistan. Both Russia and Ukraine have reportedly used them since the beginning of the conflict in the year 2014. The decision of the United States to supply cluster munitions to Ukraine has ignited widespread concern due to their indiscriminate lethality and potential for unexploded bomblets, raising humanitarian and ethical dilemmas. Democratic Congresswoman Chrissy Houlahan, an Air Force veteran and House Armed Services Committee member expressed reservations about the decision, citing the blurring of the moral high ground. In the past, when Russia was reportedly deploying cluster bombs, the prospect was referred to as a potential war crime by President Joe Biden's spokesperson.

Pentagon's decision to provide cluster munitions to Ukraine is part of a new military aid worth up to \$800 million for the war effort against Russia. The United States believes arming the Ukrainian forces with cluster munitions would be a significant step toward breaking through the strong Russian trenches to free the territory they controlled. Given the daunting challenges of navigating through over 30 kilometres of complex, unmarked minefields, overcoming tank obstacles, and breaching extensive trench lines all while facing relentless threats from Russian UAVs, artillery, and helicopters, the use of cluster munitions is deemed necessary to create a viable path and ensure a safer advancement for the Armed Forces of Ukraine (AFU). Providing Ukraine with cluster bombs, each barrel having a life of around 1,800 rounds, allows for reduced ammunition usage while maintaining a strong and sustained battlefield effect, prolonging their fighting capability significantly. According to experts, the use of cluster munitions contrasts Russia's efforts to prolong the conflict to exhaust the Western powers' capacity to supply the AFU with the needed munitions. Hence, in response to Russia's large-scale mobilization, the United States has made the decisive choice to equip Ukraine with cluster munitions.



## Russia's Response to the Development

The decision by the United States to provide cluster munitions to Ukraine has ignited a significant international discourse, with concerns being raised over the potential escalation of the conflict to undesirable levels. As anticipated, Kremlin has reacted to the move in quite an aggressive way by further boosting its offensive efforts in the east industrial zone of Ukraine. In a recently published interview, Russian President Vladimir Putin asserted that Moscow possesses an ample supply of cluster munitions and emphasized that Russia retains the prerogative to respond in kind if Ukraine chooses to employ these contentious weapons.



Russian President Vladimir Putin conveyed on state television that Moscow would respond in a reciprocal manner if deemed necessary.

"I want to note that in the Russian Federation, there is a sufficient stockpile of different kinds of cluster bombs. We have not used them yet. But of course, if they are used against us, we reserve the right to take reciprocal action." Putin referred to the use of cluster munitions as a crime and reasserted that Russia had not used them so far despite having faced a shortage of munitions in the past.

The upcoming few months seem to be important since the use of cluster munitions may shift the way war in one way or the other. Despite the claims of Ukraine to not use them against forces in the Russian territory, it is expected that the counter may be much more powerful and intense.

## Will the war escalate to the nuclear realm?

The past few months have been quite hectic for the leaders in the Kremlin. Russia's so-called "special military operation" has been prolonged for an unexpected duration magnifying their military loopholes. With events such as rebellion from the Wagner Group, drone attacks on Moscow and shelling of areas inside Russia, some headliners are of the view that Russia's loss is near or at least it is not getting the promised victory. With the United States handing over cluster munitions to Ukraine, some even believe that it may pave the way for the use of nuclear weapons from Russia.

Undoubtedly, up until this point, Russia's actions may have been perceived as rational. However, there has been a resurgence of calls within Russia for the demonstrative use of a nuclear weapon to compel the West to cut off arms supplies to Ukraine. These views came to light during a high-level meeting of officials and think tankers based in Moscow. State Duma deputy Konstantin Zatulin, a prominent nationalist figure, revealed that one of the participants in the meeting proposed the employment of a nuclear bomb on Rzeszów, a crucial transport hub located in south-eastern Poland that facilitates a significant portion of weapons flow into Ukraine.

Sergei Karaganov, the head of the Council, reportedly supported this idea and even published an article titled "A Difficult but Necessary Decision: The Use of Nuclear Weapons Can Save Humanity from a Global Catastrophe," advocating for the demonstrative use of a nuclear weapon to force the West to capitulate. Karaganov argued that even if Russia achieved victory on the battlefield, facing an insurgency in occupied parts of Ukraine would require halting Western support to effectively crush the resistance.

These developments underscore the growing tensions and risks in the region. The suggestion of using nuclear weapons as a strategic tool to achieve political goals is highly contentious and raises alarm among the international community. Such propositions warrant careful attention and a concerted effort to pursue diplomatic solutions to de-escalate the situation and avoid the potentially catastrophic consequences of nuclear conflict.

While his views cannot be considered a representation of the official Russian stance, such views have some support in the

Russian public. A recent survey by the New Voice revealed that around 20 per cent of respondents believe Russia's use of nuclear weapons would be justified. More importantly, Russian leaders have regularly warned NATO that the country would be willing to be the first to use nuclear weapons in case of any "existential threat". Russia recently moved the first batch of tactical nuclear weapons to Belarus to strengthen its 'deterrence'. According to the Federation of American Scientists, Russia possesses approximately 4,477 deployed and reserve nuclear warheads, which also include an estimated 1,900 tactical nuclear weapons. Putin's nuclear brinkmanship is indeed a fear factor for Washington as President Joe Biden said last October, "for the first time since the Cuban Missile Crisis, we have a direct threat to the use of nuclear weapons".



The future remains uncertain, and it is early to predict the repercussions of Ukraine being armed with cluster munitions. However, the fog of war may lead the world to witness another nuclear catastrophe. The Russian frustration over the lack of gains when multiplied by an increased counteroffensive of the Ukrainian forces may force the Russian elite to go nuclear. It is not to be forgotten that even a single tactical nuclear weapon can have strategic consequences. A possible nuclear war between the two countries having the largest stockpiles of nuclear weapons, the United States and Russia will turn the world into ashes. Even a minor error on such a global scale can lead to sheer devastation. Therefore, both sides should take rational and well-calculated actions in such a chaotic environment.

To conclude, the United States arming Ukraine with cluster munitions is a major development in the Russia-Ukraine war. Unfortunately, no single munition or weapon can lead to victory, but their indiscriminate use may unveil destructive destinations. Given the warmongering from belligerents, the addition of cluster munitions may multiply the suffering. It is time to understand that victory in war is a result of cumulative military efforts and effective strategies. Both Russia and Ukraine must act rationally and prioritize the larger global implications instead of seeking minor benefits, as the fate of the world hinges on their actions.

# Strategic Stability and Nuclear Deterrence in South Asia

*Strategic stability and effective nuclear deterrence relies on effective communication and credible commitments. The breakdown of confidence in the India and Pakistan relationship has constrained both, and has subsequently weakened the effective of nuclear deterrence in the region.*

By Dr. Moonis Ahmar



The asymmetrical nature of deterrence in Indo-Pak relations is reflected in New Delhi's edge in conventional weapons and large-scale modernization of India's nuclear arsenal. Is nuclear deterrence in South Asia durable enough to be able to prevent another war in the region? Or will an arms race, whether conventional or nuclear, continue to drain the resources of both India and Pakistan?

According to Key Concepts in International Relations by Martin Griffiths and Terry O'Callaghan, in its simplest form, deterrence consists of the following threat, intended to dissuade a state from aggression: 'Do not attack me because if you do, something unacceptably horrible will happen to you.'

Based on the above subject, one can argue that the concept of deterrence is as old as the existence of this world, with periodic transformations which took place in its application from time to time. Weapons form the core of deterrence, which was

demonstrated when nuclear weapons began to shape state policy with the purpose of deterring the other side and signaling refrain from aggression. For deterrence to work reliably, the three 'Cs' are critical: capability, credibility and communication. If any of the Cs is missing, deterrence will not work.

The history of nuclear deterrence goes back to the post-1945 era, when the nuclear arms race between the United States and the Soviet Union acted as a useful way to prevent the outbreak of another global war. Nuclear weapons are supposedly supposed to deter the other side and are not to be used, because they conclusively create a 'zero sum game,' in which there are no winners and losers. Talks for nuclear arms control yielded muted results, because the nuclear stockpile held by the five de jure and four de facto nuclear states are capable of destroying the world several times over. De jure nuclear powers are the permanent members of the UN Security Council and

the de facto nuclear states are Israel, India, Pakistan and North Korea.

Coming back to the nuclearization of South Asia, with the testing of nuclear devices by India on May 11, 1998 and Pakistan on May 28, 1998, the two countries ended a policy of nuclear 'opacity' and embarked on manufacturing nuclear weapons and missiles. That caused enormous fear and concern in the influential capitals of the world, that both countries, in view of their unresolved issues, may be tempted to use their nuclear weapons against each other. Yet, in order to ensure the world over responsible handling of their nuclear arsenal, India and Pakistan established nuclear control and command authority, and took measures to ensure nuclear safeguards and nuclear restraint, along with pursuing a policy of minimum nuclear deterrence. While the Indian nuclear program is two pronged i.e. directed against China and Pakistan, Islamabad's nuclear program is India specific.



In December 1985, after attending the first SAARC summit in Dhaka, the President of Pakistan General Zia-ul-Haq made a stopover in Delhi where after meeting the Indian Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi, the two countries agreed to exchange information about each other's nuclear installations, an arrangement which was given practical shape when in December 1988, on the sidelines of SAARC summit held in Islamabad, India and Pakistan signed an agreement in which the two countries agreed to exchange a list of their nuclear installations every year by December 31.

Twenty-five years after the nuclearization of South Asia, the region is grappling with the prospect of a nuclear arms race, with India taking the lead in land, sea and air based nuclear weaponry, by expanding the range of its nuclear missiles with an ambition to deter China and Pakistan in the Indian Ocean region. It means nuclear weapons have come to stay in South Asia, and continue to act as a credible means to avoid an all-out war.

In order to project their nuclear weapon's program as credible and safe, India and Pakistan came up with their respective nuclear doctrines and also signed agreements for ensuring safety of their nuclear arsenal. In December 1985, after attending the first SAARC summit in Dhaka, the President of Pakistan General Zia-ul-Haq made a stopover in Delhi where after meeting the Indian Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi, the two countries agreed to exchange information about each other's nuclear installations, an arrangement which was given practical shape when in December 1988, on the sidelines of SAARC summit held in Islamabad, India and Pakistan signed an agreement in which the two countries agreed to exchange a list of their nuclear installations every year by December 31. Called nuclear confidence-building measures, the idea was to induct trust, responsibility and professionalism by India and Pakistan about their respective nuclear programs.

Likewise, in 1991, India and Pakistan signed an agreement not to attack each other's nuclear installations. Prior to that in 1990, India and Pakistan agreed to establish a hot line between Director General Military Operations (DGMOs) to manage military crises situations. In 2005, New

Delhi and Islamabad signed an agreement for giving advance notice of ballistic missile tests.

While nuclear confidence-building measures formed the core of nuclear deterrence, India and Pakistan are unable to bridge their trust deficit and eradicate a mindset based on paranoia and hostility, which is responsible for putting a question mark over their professional approach to dealing with threats of nuclear escalation.



One needs to analyze the phenomenon of nuclear deterrence in South Asia in three ways. First, both sides claim that a level of maturity and prudence is reflected in their nuclear programs after a quarter century of their overt nuclearization. The standoff in Indo-Pakistan relations, and stalled comprehensive dialogue since the Mumbai attacks of November 2008 tends to deepen the vacuum in stabilizing a credible nuclear restraint regime. When there is the absence of Track-1 diplomacy under comprehensive dialog, which has a specific component dealing with the nuclear issue, the two sides are unable to engage in dialog on ensuring confidence, trust and transparency in their nuclear programs.

Literature on the nuclearization of New Delhi and Islamabad spells out that "Pakistan is pursuing a policy of "full spectrum deterrence (FSD)" designed to prevent conventional conflict at any level by the threat of nuclear first use in response to aggression. Pakistan's first response may, and probably would, be conventional. It would resort to nuclear use in response to a 'large-scale attack.' The full spectrum

covers both short-range, low-yield weapons and long-range weapons to cover the most distant targets in India, which is identified as the sole adversary. While the capability to inflict unacceptable damage is inherent in the full-spectrum approach, the threat of the use of short-range weapons is meant to deny India the space for limited conventional war. India follows a policy of No First Use (NFU) against all nuclear-armed states, but with a commitment to retaliate in the case of any use of nuclear, or large-scale

chemical or biological, weapons against its territory or its armed forces anywhere."

In a useful and an informative monograph entitled, "Nuclear Deterrence and Stability in South Asia: Perceptions and Realities" published by Antoine Levesques, IISS Research Fellow for South Asia with Desmond Bowen, IISS Associate Fellow for South Asia, in May 2021, the authors argued that the "failure of deterrence leading to a confrontation between India and Pakistan could result in the first offensive use of a nuclear weapon since 1945 and potentially escalate into a broader nuclear exchange. Neither side would truly win such a war, the consequences of which, including the breakdown of the nuclear taboo that has held for more than 70 years, would extend far beyond the region. Unless national survival were truly at stake, it is hard to see what security gains would warrant nuclear use. India and Pakistan became nuclear-armed states when they both tested weapons in 1998."

Fingers were pointed against Pakistan from several sides about the unreliability of its

nuclear weapons program, because of the unstable character of the state and the growing influence of Jihadi forces. It is a nightmare and a doomsday scenario according to the West if the Pakistani state is seized by Jihadi elements and they also manage to seize control of the country's nuclear installations and weapons. In order to dispel such fears and conspiracy theories, from time to time, Islamabad has reminded the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) about the safety of its nuclear arsenal.

Second, nuclear deterrence in the context of India and Pakistan has been tested numerous times in the last several decades. In 1990, when the two countries had not overtly gone nuclear, crisis escalation in Indo-Pakistan relations took place over Kashmir, which reportedly forced Pakistan to activate its nuclear weapons. The so-called mission of Robert Gates, the then CIA Chief to both India and Pakistan to manage the nuclear crisis in 1990 is often quoted as a major challenge to the very concept of nuclear deterrence.

International players like United States, Russia, China and Saudi Arabia reportedly played a crucial role in defusing the 2019 crisis, which had the potential to escalate in the wake of Pulwama and the Balakot incident, leading to the shootdown of two Indian aircraft by the Pakistan Air Force.

Apart from other crises in Indo-Pak relations since 1990, the February 2019

crisis in Indian occupied Kashmir triggered a crisis which threatened a nuclear showdown in South Asia. According to Antoine Levesques and Desmond Bowen in their IISS monograph: "On 14 February 2019, a suicide bomb attack – for which the Pakistan-based Jaysh-e-Mohammad (JeM) terrorist group claimed responsibility – killed 40 Indian paramilitary personnel in Pulwama in the Indian state of Jammu and Kashmir. In retaliation, India carried out an airstrike targeting what the Indian government described as a major JeM training camp in Balakot, a town in the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province of mainland Pakistan. Pakistan's counter-retaliation resulted in the loss of an Indian aircraft and the capture of its pilot. (He was later released.) There are reports that India threatened to use, and possibly prepared, a small number of conventionally armed ballistic missiles against Pakistan. During the crisis, both sides engaged in deterrence signaling that alternated between provocation, and which was evidently clouded by misperceptions that could have led to miscalculation and unintended escalation. This episode, in which chance played an ameliorative role, challenged both countries' long-standing claims of being able to contain a crisis well ahead of any resort to nuclear weapons. Such claims have been, at best, soliloquies, rather than resulting from dialogue between the two."

International players like United States, Russia, China and Saudi Arabia reportedly played a crucial role in defusing the 2019

crisis, which had the potential to escalate in the wake of Pulwama and the Balakot incident, leading to the shootdown of two Indian aircraft by the Pakistan Air Force. American President Donald Trump, who was visiting Vietnam at that time, had to intervene and persuade the Modi regime to refrain from retaliating following the shooting of Indian fighter aircraft by the PAF.

Lately, the fragility of the Pakistani state because of a severe economic crisis and seemingly perpetual political instability tends to question the capability of Islamabad to secure its nuclear arsenal from a possible seizure by Jihadi groups. When the economy of Pakistan has narrowly escaped default and the country is under heavy burden of debt, will international lenders take advantage of the situation and pressurize Pakistan to put the country's nuclear installations under the control of the IAEA? This may verge on the conspiratorial, but when a country is facing breakdown both economically and politically, how can it be expected to protect its nuclear arsenal from possible seizure?

The stability of nuclear deterrence in South Asia will continue to have a question mark if both India and Pakistan are unable to make significant progress in their nuclear confidence building measures, or if Islamabad continues the slide downhill, exacerbating the fragility of the Pakistani state.

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# Unpacking implications of Pemra act amendments

*One significant amendment to Section 5 involves guaranteeing timely salary payments to employees in the electronic media sector*

In the heart of Islamabad, the National Assembly's Standing Committee on Information and Broadcasting convened in the Radio Pakistan office, where the Pakistan Electronic Media Regulatory Authority (PEMRA) (Amendment) Bill, 2023 was put forth.

The Minister for Information, Marriyum Aurangzeb, clarified the necessity for this amendment, remarking that the media landscape had experienced a drastic change since the original Pemra Ordinance was introduced in 2002. This amendment is historic, not only because it is the first time the Ordinance has been modified in this context, but it brings significant reforms intended to protect journalists and hold media organisations accountable. The nine clauses of the Ordinance are amended, five new clauses are added, and journalists are given the right to file complaints in the Council of Complaints for the first time.

The modifications reflect a shift in power dynamics. Previously, the authority to close down a channel lay solely with the Pemra Chairman. The amended law has delegated this authority to a three-member committee. According to Marriyum, the incumbent government engaged in extensive consultations with various stakeholders, including media workers' organisations and media house owners, to reach this revised bill over a span of 13 months.

A salient feature of the new bill is to address information disorder, putting more responsibility on content creation and ownership, by inclusion of definitions for fake news, disinformation, and misinformation. Notably, the penalty for deliberately spreading false news or creating information disorder has increased from Rs1 million to Rs10 million. This steep hike is an attempt to ensure that media houses share in the accountability for the news they disseminate. However, the proposed law is still silenced on the definitions,



types, and categories of information disorders, leaving loopholes to be exploited later.

The amendments in the Pemra law have sparked intense debates across the country's media and political landscape. The amendments, presented by Ms Aurangzeb, were devised after extensive consultations over a year and aim to ensure journalist welfare, fostering a free and accountable media environment in the country.

Key modifications involve changes in Sections 2, 6, 8, 11, 13, 24, 26, 27 and 29 of the Pemra law. In addition, five new sections, including Sections 20, 20-A, 29-A, 30-B, and 39-A, have been incorporated. These changes intend to widen the news coverage scope, allowing the inclusion of verified news, tolerance, economic progress, and child-related content in electronic media publications.

One significant amendment to Section 5 involves guaranteeing timely salary payments to employees in the electronic media sector, which mandates electronic media employers to make required payments within two months. This change under Section 20-A and 20-B aims to protect employees from non-payment by any broadcast media outlet. As a result, electronic media employees can now legally challenge the non-payment of their dues or salaries.

Despite the intended benefits, these amendments have faced staunch criticism from the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI), who reject the bill, citing concerns over curtailed freedom of expression and media freedom. PTI spokesperson criticised the government's attempt to control media and free speech as unacceptable, arguing it to be the worst exploitative and anti-constitutional government in the country's history.

Yet, the National Assembly's Standing Committee on Information and Broadcasting unanimously approved the Pemra (Amendment) Bill, 2023, considering it an extraordinary initiative for journalist welfare.

While certain aspects of the revised Pemra law have been lauded, the amendments have also been slammed for their potential to restrict broadcast media or distribution service operations. Advocates for media freedom argue that while Pemra should ensure channels adhere to the law and refrain from hate speech, it should not act as a censor enforcing an official line for all programming. The ultimate goal should be to establish an independent body like a thinking and research-based regulator, which, despite state approval, can operate independently.

Changes in the amended law focus on the well-being of media workers. The bill states, "Timely payment refers to

payments made to electronic media employees within two months." Should media houses fail to comply, they would not receive government advertisements at both federal and provincial levels.

Supporters of the bill emphasise that it brings much-needed reform to the industry. By defining between disinformation and misinformation, the new law aims to reduce the spread of fake news. Additionally, it seeks to ensure fair remuneration for media professionals, even though there are debates about the specified two-month payment window.

Furthermore, the bill introduces a sense of democratisation to the Pemra board by giving representation to the Pakistan Federal Union of Journalists (PFUJ) and Pakistan Broadcasters Association (PBA). However, as these positions are 'honorary' and non-voting, their influence on decision-making remains to be seen.

The bill reflects an attempt to balance media freedom with increased responsibility and accountability in the evolving landscape of Pakistan's media industry. However, the full impact of these changes will only become apparent once the bill is implemented and tested in real-world scenarios.

Countries that media freedom challenges on both sides of the fence, as the regulator and the media entities both play in a gray world of rules and legal stays, it is important that an independent neutral body make decisions regarding the impact of news or programming has had on society, this could be a hybrid of members from academia, professionals, and/or legal fraternity.

This is why the independence of the electronic media regulator is so important. Institutions like the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) in the United States of America or the News Broadcasting Standards Authority in India are both state-approved regulators but completely independent. These would be good examples to follow.

The information minister has said that the Media Joint Action Committee was consulted regarding these amendments, which took 11 months to be finalised. The Pakistan Broadcasters Association (PBA) on its part has endorsed the bill. But it may

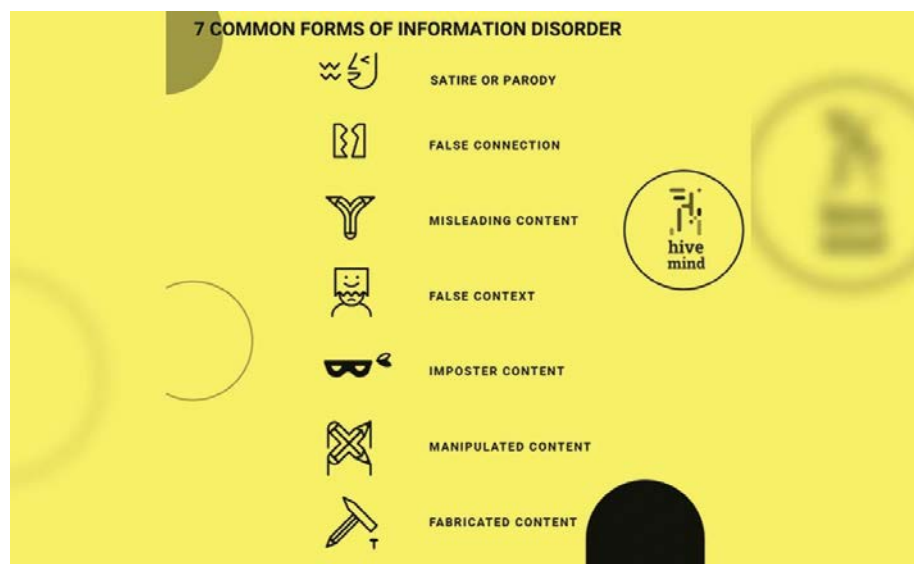
be best to also try and reach out to those media professionals that have reservations regarding these amendments before the bill is passed by parliament.

There is a thinking that Pemra should not be regulating the media entities, however, self-regulation is not an answer for the industry, as regulation gives protection to the licensee in addition to safeguarding the general public's right to truth and entertainment. That said, there is a need for responsible action by regulators. That means taking to task those who do not follow the basic tenets of journalism without punishing journalism that lives up to its mission of speaking truth to power.

terms of what can and cannot be shown on TV.

It is suggested that an independent body, equipped with the knowledge of "media effect" can be gauged. The science of sociology and psychology are to be included in such a sensitive decision-making process. This is important to ensure the freedom and independence of the media and its positive impact on society.

The provisions aimed at guaranteeing timely salary payments to media workers could significantly affect the media sector's overall structure. Such regulations may prompt industry players to prioritise the



The new amendments introduced measures to protect the rights of media workers. For instance, the new bill gives media workers the right to file complaints in the Council of Complaints and requires media organisations to pay their employees' salaries, no later than two months, or else face a ban on government advertisements. The journalists could go to CoC earlier, too, but were barred from lodging complaints against their own organisation which this bill has now allowed.

However, this raises concerns about the amendments. While acknowledging the good intentions behind the bill — such as the attempt to tackle disinformation and fake news, and ensure timely payment of salaries to media workers — we should also consider the ambiguities and potential risks. The media controlling mindset of the regulator and the government, their desire to determine the sanctity of the content, in

commercial viability of their content, potentially resulting in increased commercialism and a dilution of content integrity, specifically in news and current affairs discourse. This could be a very important and effective tool in the coming days of the General and Provincial Elections in the country.

The shift could inadvertently favor businesses that have established media outlets primarily as a form of influential leverage to bolster their commercial interests, coming from non-journalistic backgrounds, they also bring their parent industries' set of rules and approaches.

Over time, this trend could potentially erode the core journalistic spirit of the media industry. It's crucial to carefully balance economic considerations with maintaining the integrity and independence of journalistic content, in order to prevent a



total eclipse of journalistic values by commercial interests and non-professionalism.

As the debate around the amendments to the Pemra Ordinance continues, it remains to be seen how these changes will ultimately impact media freedom in Pakistan. Both the government and media outlets will need to strike a balance between regulating content to prevent disinformation and maintaining the independence and freedom of the press — a task that will undoubtedly prove to be challenging.

The perceived state of governance within the Pemra is a matter of concern and seeks serious attention, with the Pemra website exposing a potentially alarming situation. The regulatory body, overseen by Chairman Saleem Baig, a seasoned bureaucrat with an impeccable reputation, seems to exhibit signs of lax governance and borderline disregard for various governance commitments. However, the primary responsibility lies with the board members of the authority to ensure compliance by the management. The secretary to the board should also be questioned for his negligence in compliance.

Historical policy decisions have also played a significant role in the current state of affairs. During former prime minister Yousaf Raza Gillani's tenure, two actions notably compromised the independence of the regulatory bodies: placing the National Accountability Bureau (NAB) under the law ministry and moving Pemra under the information and broadcasting ministry. These moves allowed the government to use the regulators to its own advantage, often targeting opposition parties and dissenting voices.

The Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) government, in a highly controversial move, had conceived the Pakistan Media Development Authority (PDMA) under the guise of controlling and developing the nation's media industry. Despite its purported innovative approach, the PDMA had been a glaring testament to failure and mismanagement. The authority was rudderless, bereft of clear direction, devoid of a meaningful mandate, and structurally disorganised. There had been a conspicuous lack of institutional trust, with its credibility constantly under fire from media profes-

sionals, civil society, and the public at large.

In what appeared to be a blatant disregard for transparency and democratic governance, the PDMA had instead morphed into a disappointing piped dream. The plight of the PDMA underscored the PTI government's inability to effectively administer such critical institutions, reminding us of the indispensable need for comprehensive planning, stakeholder engagement, and an unwavering commitment to the principles of free speech and transparency.

Regrettably, these measures were largely unchallenged, reflecting both a deficiency in civil society's awareness and empowerment and a silence from industry dissenters. With the rise of the PTI government under PM Imran Khan, intense discussions emerged around advertisement revenues and their public sector allocation for media entities. However, the crucial role of the Securities and Exchange Commission of Pakistan (SECP), the primary regulator, to determine the health and governance of the business entity was largely ignored during these conversations.

The SECP steadfastly stands as the premier supervisory authority for corporate governance, spanning all sectors and industries, including media. Let us imagine a parallel scenario wherein gross mismanagement within corporations arises, compelling corresponding regulators from various sectors — energy, oil and gas, telecom, banking, and so forth — to step in. Legal consequences would naturally ensue unless these issues were swiftly and effectively resolved.

Therefore, we must underscore the pivotal role of regulatory bodies such as the SECP and Pemra in safeguarding the integrity of industries. Their tasks aren't merely administrative; they are the bastions ensuring ethical business conduct, fair practices, and the enforcement of statutory regulations. Their presence underscores the need for constant vigilance in the corporate world and is a reminder of the importance of good governance to the economic health of the nation.

A key area of contention is the functionality of the Council of Complaints (CoC), a crucial mechanism for managing grievances and ensuring transparency and accountability. The new amendments put a lot of

responsibilities and influence on the Council of Complaints and its members.

The complaints received by Pemra's state-of-the-art, call center are compiled and displayed on the official website for public information at the end of each month. In theory, these complaints are presented in the CoC meetings and actions are determined accordingly.

However, the most recent complaint log available on the Pemra website dates back to November 2022, raising questions about the effectiveness and transparency of this system. Furthermore, an in-depth look into the CoC's composition reveals that only the Balochistan Council is currently functional, while the remaining provinces and the federal are redundant or non-functional. This lack of information about the Council's members and their functionality on the website exposes a notable gap in the governance delivery.

Adding to the concerns, the annual report, a statutory requirement for all regulatory bodies, is also not a regular publication. The latest annual report published by Pemra is the one for the year 2019-2020. The report is typically utilised as a reference for industry stakeholders and potential investors, providing vital insights into the media sector's dynamics. Information such as the number of investors, user habits, new technologies or opportunities to be explored, and other crucial research findings are typically included, aiding those interested in exploring media space for possible investment opportunities and job creation.

The conspicuous absence of updated reports from Pemra is troubling, given that clause 17 of the Pemra Ordinance 2002 (amended 2007) mandates annual reporting of its operations and accounts, along with making it public knowledge through reports available to all.

The Board of Pemra appears negligent in ensuring compliance and sharing its operations and financial activities with the public. If left unchecked, such oversight constitutes a breach of trust and should be handled firmly. It is the Board's responsibility to maintain compliance and oversee regulatory obligations, and failure to do so is a matter of public concern and should be subject to parliamentary scrutiny.

Moreover, the website discloses that the last board meeting was held on 17th February 2022, and the subsequent silence and lack of published decisions stand as a stark testament to Pakistan's deteriorating state of media and governance.

Highlighting with pride, the 2019-2020 Annual Report, which is the latest report by the authority. — Screenshot by author

Pemra's state of governance appears to be in need of serious reconsideration, with the transparency, accountability, and regulatory compliance of this important regulatory body coming into question. Pemra as a media regulator has the role and responsibility of being the "Custodian of Public Trust" in society.

The lack of thinking and absence of governance is not only eroding the citizen's trust in public institutions but also damaging the sentiments of the younger generation towards the significance of the country's identity and social values.

Compliance and public disclosure are two crucial elements in the management and regulation of any industry. In essence, they create an environment of accountability, fostering trust and confidence among stakeholders and the general public.

Compliance refers to the adherence to rules, regulations, laws, and standards that govern an industry. For media regulators, this means ensuring the industry follows the laws and regulations on content creation, publication, dissemination, and the ethical guidelines set out by the license agreement between the regulator and the licensee. Compliance in the media industry can also relate to the observance of laws relating to copyright, defamation, and privacy, among others.

Public disclosure, on the other hand, relates to the openness and transparency of an organisation's operations, including the regulator. For media entities, this could involve disclosing information on ownership, funding sources, and editorial policies. This openness helps in creating a more transparent media environment where audiences can understand who is behind the content they consume, which in turn aids in fostering trust and credibility.

In the context of Pakistan's media industry,

the importance of these elements is magnified due to several challenges that have stunted the industry's growth and cognitive abilities. These challenges range from political pressure and censorship to financial instability and lack of professional training. The limited vision of stakeholders and the pursuit of short-term business interests by key industry players have often overshadowed the broader societal role of the media.





# Recast Urban Planning

By Sara Danial



Urban flooding in Karachi highlights major infrastructure failures, bringing into question the entire urban planning approach. Clearly, a new approach is needed.

Extreme weather conditions and severe flooding in the financial capital over the weekend redirected the focus back to infrastructure failures in Pakistani metropolises. While the deluge of indignation reflects real pain over damaged assets and civic inconvenience, there is an almost ritual quality to the criticism over flooding, air pollution, traffic congestion, and so on.

Yes, it is not new, and this year is no exception but the flood fury being far more severe due to the climate crisis has created more perception of fear than actual fear itself. Urban areas in the country, especially cities like Karachi, Lahore, and Peshawar, have experienced severe flooding due to various factors.

Coherent urban planning has confined our focus to insistent public lament in recent years; in unpacking the nature of planning, can we resort to better ideation for new planning to address the crises major cities face?

Poor maintenance of drainage is not the only reason for this mess – the real

culprits are planned and unplanned developments that blatantly disregard the settlements' land profile.

Lately, these mushrooming developments have become more aggressive, less scientific, and quick to complete. A Shaheed-e-Millat road lined with skyscrapers, endless restaurants, and the accompanying infrastructure in the heart of Karachi is a tragic, serious case in point. Another disaster is the DHA. Yet another is Korangi. Literally meters away from homes and workplaces, severe inundation plagues the city traffic in these areas, rendering commute time to nearly two hours straight. This remains one of the most ill-informed decisions when one realizes that two of these areas were once a wetland. It is little wonder that these remain the worst-hit areas when the heavens open, only to break loose all hell.

A society obsessively infatuated with speed and real-estate investments, primarily driven by new wealth and burgeoning automotive production and housing projects is trying to validate more and more transportation and housing infrastructure, with little to no thought given to planning. No political party has the nerve to take tough decisions on logical urban planning.

Once again, as futile as this exercise may be, as a woeful citizen of the country, can we work on lessening public misery, enormous recurring economic losses, and the post-flood health issues faced by the poor and rich alike? All the while the massive housing encroachments, by both planned and unauthorized development, are increasing relentlessly in the size of Pakistan's small cities, growing taller and denser, with tunnels and flyovers being worked upon for better traffic engineering, while an orderly master plan rests unnoticed. Karachi is big, and so are the undeclared capital's egos, development brilliance, and monumentality of its infrastructure misadventures.

Perhaps it is too late to right the wrong. But if the authorities dare to take some hard-nosed decisions, there may be hope after all.

A comprehensive water management master plan, in collaboration with Disaster Management Authority is much-needed. It is a strategic imperative to revisit the calculations for water demand, to revisit infrastructural and civic needs, that are quickly hastening Karachi's projects for redevelopment, to revisit wastewater recycling and solar projects management to meet at

least 50% of Karachi's energy needs and a blanket ban on development-based invasion of Karachi's water lands. Forget for once, about signal-free corridors and vehicular speed and focus on people and their peace. As the world has moved on with technology, our planning skills have remained passive and conservative. According to the Economist Intelligence Unit (EIU), Karachi is ranked among the top five 'least livable' urban centers in the world. It stands at 169th out of a total of 173 cities, with only Lagos, Algiers, Tripoli, and Damascus ranked lower than the largest city in Pakistan.

Estimated losses from urban floods in city after city are increasingly incalculable. Official estimates fail to incorporate the massive social and health cost the people, especially the poor, pay as communities lose their entire homes and livelihoods. Can we afford to continue taking one step forward and two steps back every monsoon?

It is not important but necessary to have a national action strategy in place against floods. Owing to its geography, every city rests differently on the vast continuum of flood vulnerability and resilience. The Pakistani government and local authorities have been working to address

these issues by improving drainage systems, implementing better urban planning practices, and raising public awareness about flood preparedness and safety measures. However, challenges remain, and it requires continued efforts and

long-term planning to mitigate the impact of urban flooding in Pakistan.

Needless to say, such a strategy must encompass the melting glaciers in the northern regions as well as tropical cyclones in the coastal areas. However, those are bigger decisions by centralized bodies. Let's address one elephant at a time: preparing for urban and settlement flooding for now. The private sector has never been a closer friend to public bodies. Possibly, a thorough clarity of vision backed by gutsy decision-makers at the city level, ready to call the shots even if they are uncomfortable, should do the trick. Three solutions are essential for the resolution of the problem. First, implement proper flood plain mapping and zoning regulations to prevent construction in high-risk areas. This would help protect vulnerable regions from flooding and preserve natural waterways.

Second, urban planning and regulation are of strategic importance to strictly enforce and control haphazard development and discourage construction in flood-prone zones. It is important to encourage sustainable development practices that consider flood risk factors.

Improving waste management systems to prevent blockages in drains and waterways is essential for prevention rather than firefighting an issue that Pakistan always engages itself in. Regular cleaning and maintenance of existing drainage infrastructure to ensure its optimal functioning is necessary.

Moreover, where preventive measures are important, it is also essential to conduct public awareness campaigns to educate citizens about flood risks and safety measures. Teaching communities about preparedness, emergency response, and evacuation plans is the need of the hour. Recognize the impact of climate change on urban flooding and integrate climate change adaptation measures into flood management plans.

Regional cooperation by joining forces with neighboring regions and international partners to share knowledge, expertise, and resources in managing and preventing urban flooding can help to make a larger impact. It is important to note that our ecosystem requires immediate restoration. Protecting and reinstating our natural ecosystems, such as wetlands and floodplains, which can act as natural buffers against flooding and contribute to water retention only makes sense.

Implementing these solutions will require the collective efforts of government agencies, local authorities, urban planners, NGOs, communities, and the public. By adopting a proactive and integrated approach, Pakistan can effectively mitigate the impact of urban flooding and enhance resilience to future flood events. It is essential to recognize that addressing urban flooding is a complex and long-term process that requires collective effort. By implementing these solutions and fostering a culture of proactive flood management, reducing the impact should be a no-brainer.





# Hunting and militancy threaten wetland birds in conflict-hit northwest Pakistan

*The protectors of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa's wetlands struggle to conserve the region's biodiversity in the face of a worsening security situation, prevalent poaching and encroachment*

By Zulfiqar Ali

A deep-rooted culture of hunting, combined with decades of encroachment, have taken a heavy toll on the populations of migratory birds in the wetlands of northwest Pakistan's Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province, officials tell The Third Pole. Meanwhile, they report, the threat of conflict and militancy in the province, which borders Afghanistan, has made protecting the wildlife that remains increasingly challenging.

Covering more than 4,000 hectares along the Kurram River in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Thanedar Wala was designated a wetland of international importance under the Ramsar Convention in 1976, given the significant populations of breeding and visiting birds it supported. Thanedar Wala was also declared a protected game reserve by the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa government, with a sub-divisional officer at the provincial wildlife department responsible for its management and maintenance.

But according to Malook Khan, a divisional forest officer at the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa wildlife department with responsibilities spanning multiple districts, there has been a sharp decline in the number of migratory birds visiting Thanedar Wala in recent years. "Increasing human settlements have decreased the size of their habitat. Along with this, an increase in uncontrolled illegal hunting has also led to a sharp decrease in their numbers," he says.

Hunting has long been widely practised along the Kurram River, a tributary of the Indus. In 1990, a Ramsar monitoring visit noted that hunting pressure on migratory wetland birds, especially cranes, was "heavy". Common and demoiselle cranes migrate to Pakistan from their breeding grounds further north to spend the winter.

Trappers traditionally pitch tents along the banks of the Kurram River in winter and lie in wait for cranes and waterfowl with a variety of weapons, from double barrel



shotguns to AK-47s. But as human settlements have grown around Thanedar Wala in recent decades, so has the impact of hunting on bird populations.

"Beyond doubt, the number of cranes visiting the site has greatly reduced during the last two decades," Mir Aslam Khan, the sub-divisional forest officer for Lakki Marwat district, where Thanedar Wala is located, tells The Third Pole.

Hunters and trappers have also noticed a decline. Altaf Ali Khan, a resident of Lakki Marwat, has converted part of his house into what he calls a "sanctuary" for cranes. Some of the cranes he keeps were caught from the wild, whereas others he has raised in captivity. Khan says the number of cranes arriving at Thanedar Wala has dwindled over the past few decades.

"We don't see as many cranes coming here as I used to during my childhood, when I helped my uncle trap them," says Khan.

## Conflict makes wetland protection a dangerous business

A breakdown of administrative oversight has exacerbated the impact of hunting on

the birds of Thanedar Wala, with conflict in the region leaving authorities unable to keep up monitoring activity which is meant to discourage illegal hunting.

Pakistan's border districts have been torn by conflict for decades. Since 2007, militant group Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan has been fighting the Pakistan state in areas along the border with Afghanistan. Two of the group's main demands are withdrawal of army troops from the erstwhile Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA), and reversal of the 2018 merger of FATA with the province of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.

The security situation has become worse since the Taliban's takeover of Kabul, Afghanistan's capital, in August 2021. Lakki Marwat District, where Thanedar Wala is located, marked a resurgence in violence in recent months.

An environment official, who spoke on condition of anonymity, told The Third Pole that Thanedar Wala had lost its significance for migratory birds because of the fragile security situation. He said that security forces are conducting targeted operations against militants in the wetland and surrounding areas, as militants were attacking law enforcement personnel.

“A hostile environment and apathy on the part of the government have resulted in the desertion of wetlands,” the official said.

Now we have reduced movement and stopped night duty at the wildlife check post. Now, we are working under fear.

“Our job, primarily, is protection of the migratory birds,” says Mir Aslam. “[In the past] we maintained a presence here at all hours for monitoring – our staff would count the migratory birds and stay vigilant to detain hunters. We would have visitors from WWF and donors from abroad. Sadly, this is not the case now.”

“Now, we have reduced movement and stopped night duty at the wildlife check post,” he adds. “Now, we are working under fear.”

What little conservation infrastructure there once was at Thanedar Wala, including fencing and a feeding enclosure, was destroyed by floods in 2010, which inundated one-fifth of Pakistan. As natural disasters have coincided with conflict, the administrative machinery has struggled to keep up.

Mir Aslam says that cranes and other migratory birds have largely abandoned the Kurram River on their migration, instead flying to neighbouring Balochistan province. “Only one flock of cranes was spotted during the previous migration season that flew over the wetland at very high altitude,” he says.

Hunters, too, have apparently moved. Abdul Wahab, who heads the Crane Welfare Association, a private body of trappers and hunters in Lakki Marwat, told The Third Pole: “[Now] local hunters go to Balochistan for trapping cranes and hunting waterfowl.”

According to Malook Khan, while violence and hunting are major factors behind a decrease in populations of migratory birds at Khyber Pakhtunkhwa’s wetlands, other factors may be even more important. “Through personal experience, I can say that by far the biggest reason for this decrease is the loss of their habitat due to human settlement in the surroundings of Thanedar Wala and Tanda Dam,” says Malook Khan.

## Migratory birds face threats across Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province

Hassina Ambreen, deputy director of the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa wildlife department in Peshawar, says that migratory birds, especially cranes, are losing habitat across the province due to construction of housing colonies around the wetlands.

“The main issue is that the wildlife department neither has the infrastructure nor the resources in the erstwhile FATA [a semi-autonomous region where provincial and federal laws were extended after its merger with Khyber Pakhtunkhwa in 2018] to contain illegal hunting,” she said.



Declines in waterbirds have been noted at Tanda Dam, another Ramsar-designated site near the city of Kohat. A forestry official, speaking on condition of anonymity, said that the number of waterbirds visiting the site has declined due to hunting, unplanned construction in the surrounding area, and disturbance from commercial activities like boating and fishing.

The official is responsible for management of protected areas across four districts of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province, and says that his office does not have the necessary equipment and resources to systematically count migratory birds visiting Tanda Dam.

The Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Wildlife and Biodiversity (Protection, Preservation, Conservation and Management) Act, 2015

does not mention management and protection of wetlands. “The government does not have any relevant legal policy or strategy to ensure the protection of wetlands in the province,” said the official.

Chaudhry Muhammad Jamshid Iqbal, senior manager of research and conservation at WWF Pakistan, tells The Third Pole: “We have noted a decline in the population of the migratory birds in Pakistan. Wetlands and migratory birds are facing multiple threats such as climatic changes, shortages of food, destruction of habitats, scarcity of water, and illegal hunting and trapping of birds”.

He added that the government should enforce relevant laws, such as bans on

motorboats on protected water bodies, and work to improve awareness among local communities about the importance of wetlands.

Together with the International Union for Conservation of Nature and in response to a request from the federal government for their technical input, WWF Pakistan has drafted a Pakistan National Wetlands Policy. The draft policy states that it aims to address threats to the nation’s wetlands, from demand for water to a lack of coordination, capacity and resources among relevant authorities. It was handed to the government in 2019, but has yet to be implemented.

Courtesy [www.thethirdpole.net](http://www.thethirdpole.net)



# Pakistan's long walk to the finish line



By Ali Abdullah

In a manner that was quite unlike of Pakistan, with little fuss and drama, they found the final 83 runs in just over an hour. Even though Pakistan lost three wickets, it was clear from the first ball, which was lifted for four, that they would succeed in the end. The outcome gives Pakistan a 1-0 series lead over Sri Lanka and puts them in a great position to start this new World Test Championship (WTC) cycle. Additionally, it is their first Test victory in precisely a year.

When the winning runs were scored, a lavish loft over long-off for six, Imam-ul-Haq was unbeaten on 50 and had Agha Salman for company. Although Prabath Jayasuriya finished with a score of 4 for 56, adding to his ever-expanding list of Galle scalps, the hosts will find little solace in this.

And while Pakistanis could have had second thoughts about a possible collapse or a performance by the visitors this morning that snatched defeat from the jaws of triumph, this was a result that might prompt a reassessment.

On the surface, a four-wicket victory while chasing 131 may indicate some trepidation, but interestingly enough, this was a chase that felt in command despite those defeats.

In fact, the first delivery of the day served as a microcosm of how both of these teams handled their respective mandates throughout this Test, as the occasionally erratic Ramesh Mendis dragged one short for Babar Azam to put away quickly to the boundary behind square leg, Pakistan needed quick runs, Sri Lanka needed to keep things tight, but only one side adhered to the plan.

A second boundary was added later in the over, and 30 runs were ultimately scored off the first five overs of the day. During this time, Babar and Imam both displayed unexpected intent by utilizing their feet to attack the spinners, and the Pakistani skipper even made a rare use of the sweep.

Given their knowledge of Pakistan's history, some of those present may

have been excused for bracing for a possible panic when he collapsed with his leg trapped by Jayasuriya. After all, Pakistan had collapsed frighteningly quickly in 2009 while chasing a similarly low total on the same ground. But they are trying to play with a new style.

They promised to play attacking cricket before the day's play, and they did. Imam pumped one nicely over long-off the very next ball following Babar's wicket, and Saud Shakeel—the star of the first innings—also slashed one behind point.

And as the shortfall shrank, so did their intensity. Shakeel took Sri Lanka's top bowler for two boundaries on either side of the wicket with just over 20 runs remaining. Shakeel's average at this point had surpassed 100, but he ultimately settled for a bit less, nicking one through off Mendis before the innings was up.

With only four runs remaining to score, Sarfaraz was the last to fall, top-edging a sweep to deep square leg. However,

Agha hammered home the point by smoking one long and straight first ball to end the match.

Pakistan bowled first in Colombo and it seemed as if Sri Lanka is playing an away series. Pakistan bowled Sri Lanka out on just 166. Day 2 was almost wasted due to rain. Pakistani players batted brilliantly. Pakistan put a total of 576/5 with 1 century of Agha Salman and 1 double century of Abdullah Shafique. Pakistan declared with a lead of 397. Mohammad Rizwan also scored his 8th test half-century. He was a substitute as Sarfaraz Ahmed was retired hurt earlier.

Noman Ali's cunning, accurate left-arm spin captured seven wickets, and Naseem Shah's brilliant reverse-swing spell in the sweltering Colombo heat ended the game. This was Pakistan's most comprehensive victory on Sri Lankan soil in the previous few years.

Although Pakistan's bowling was mesmerizing, the numbers of this victory are incredible. Sri Lanka suffered its heaviest home loss ever at the hands of Pakistan, who triumphed by an innings and 222 runs.

Despite more than a day's worth of play being effectively lost to rain and poor lighting, they completed it in four days. Noman had a 7 for 70 in the second innings.

Noman was a particularly dangerous threat because of his flight, dip, and speed adjustments. The openers for Sri Lanka's second innings enjoyed a strong start, scoring 69 points jointly. However, as soon as Noman entered the attack, he struck Nishan Madushka for 33 runs with a magnificent delivery before slicing through the rest of the batting order. The bowler bowled the ball to Madushka from close to the wicket; it dipped, pitched on middle and leg, then leaped off the ground to beat the batter's outside edge and clip off stump. That occurred just before lunch, at the last interval.

Noman was unstoppable after the interval. Dimuth Karunaratne was caught by Imam-ul-Haq at the short leg. After failing to reach the pitch of the ball, Kusal Mendis attempted to hit Noman inside out but instead spooned a catch to cover. Dinesh Chandimal was dismissed for a pittance after attempting a lap sweep, and even

Dhananjaya de Silva, who had played well throughout the series, was dismissed for a pittance after holing out to long on to finish Noman's five-wicket haul.

Even Angelo Mathews, who scored an undefeated half-century as the destruction took place at the other end, struggled against Noman early in the match. Sure, he made some significant boundaries, but in between, he made nervous defensive moves. He eventually became more confident. However, none of the Sri Lankan batters felt at ease in front of Noman. He may still take all ten wickets in an innings, it was still possible. But at the other end, Naseem was casting a brave spell. It is difficult to overestimate how much he was causing the ball to swing, especially toward the right-hander. In order to hide the shining side and, hence, prevent the batter from knowing which way the ball would move, he would cover the ball as he rushed in. Additionally, he was bowling with absolute velocity, occasionally reaching the mid-140kph range. In the end, he took 3 wickets and Pakistan won by an innings and 222 runs and lifted the trophy by winning 2-0.





# "Thank you for supporting me," says a teary-eyed Djokovic to his son while lifting the trophy



When the young Spaniard overcame a shaky start to grab two sets to one lead, it appeared like he would win. However, Djokovic once again displayed his excellent resiliency. He seemed to be in control at the beginning of the fifth set, but 20-year-old Alcaraz battled back to win after four hours and 43 minutes, dealing a crucial blow to the young guns against the guy 16 years older than him.

Following Djokovic's final forehand that sailed into the net, Alcaraz sagged to the court and gave the defeated Serb a deep embrace.

Alcaraz, who has added Wimbledon to his US Open title, said: "Well it's a dream come true for me. It's great to win but even if I had lost, I would have been really proud of myself, playing a final against a legend of our sport.

"After the first set I thought 'hmmm... Carlos increased the level'. I have to congratulate Novak. I started playing tennis and watching you. When I was born you were already winning tournaments. But 36 is the new 26. It's amazing."

King Felipe of Spain was cheering on his nation's rising star from the royal box. Playing here in front of royalty is unique. I'm so glad you're here to support me. You came to see me play twice, and I won, so I hope you return again.

Djokovic dominated the opening match, winning 6-1 in only 34 minutes as he sought an eighth victory and fifth straight victory at the All England Club.

Alcaraz was unable to match Djokovic's tactical awareness as the Serb took early control of the contest with just two unforced errors. At the start of the second set, the Spaniard's jitters appeared to calm down, and he broke Djokovic's serve to take a 2-0 lead.

But Djokovic, who was playing in his record-breaking 35th Grand Slam final, broke back immediately, sending the match to a tie-break.

The 36-year-old had prevailed in his previous 14 Grand Slam tie-break victories, but Alcaraz finally ended the run by winning the tie-break 8-6 with an incredible return of serve to tie the match.

At the beginning of the third, Alcaraz broke once more as Djokovic argued with umpire Fergus Murphy after a disputed let call. Some spectators heckled the reigning champion after he engaged in a lengthy conversation with the umpire throughout the game, which resulted in a time violation in the tie-break.

After a marathon 26-minute game, Alcaraz broke once more on his sixth break point, sealing the set 6-1 as the match approached the three-hour mark.

At the time of the switch, Djokovic had a lengthy restroom break. When he returned, the audience continued to jeer him. However, it appeared to work because at 2-2 in the fourth, he created two break points and took the second when Alcaraz's drop shot found the net.

Finally gaining some momentum, Djokovic won the fourth set to force a decisive fifth-set shootout. When he slammed what appeared to be the eventual winner into the net in the fifth, he lost a break point for a score of 2-0. It turned out to be expensive, as Alcaraz forced the break in the following game, causing Djokovic to crash his racket on the wooden net post.

After Alcaraz served out for a surprising victory to become the new Wimbledon king, Djokovic's era was gone. Prior to ascending to the players' box to celebrate with his squad, the 20-year-old kicked a ball into the crowd.

Djokovic also praised the young champion Carloz Alcaraz. He mentioned how he did not deserve to win some of the finals he played but matches like these even them out. In the end, his eyes teared up when he looked at his son. While looking at him Djokovic said thank you for supporting me.

By Ali Abdullah

# Women's World Cup 2023: Tournament in Australia and New Zealand to get under way

By Neil Johnston

The waiting is almost over. The biggest Fifa Women's World Cup - featuring European champions England and debutants the Republic of Ireland - will finally get under way on Thursday.

Australia and New Zealand are co-hosting the ninth edition, which for the first time will feature 32 nations including defending world champions the United States.

It is the first Women's World Cup with two co-hosts.

New Zealand launch the tournament against Norway at Eden Park (08:00 BST kick-off) before Australia play the Republic of Ireland at Stadium Australia, Sydney, on the same day (11:00 kick-off).

But what should have been a day of celebration of women's sport was overshadowed by an early morning shooting in Auckland, which left two people plus the gunman dead, and six others injured.

Supporters getting ready to head to a fan park near the waterfront, which was close to the incident, expressed their shock and sadness at the news.

Fifa said the tournament would proceed as normal and organisers hope the opening two games will attract an aggregate crowd of 100,000 fans.

It is on course to be the most-watched Women's World Cup, with more than 1.3 million tickets bought in advance for the 64 matches at 10 venues across nine cities.

Organisers are targeting a record two billion television viewers for the 2023 edition, a figure that would double the audience that watched the 2019 World Cup in France.

"The future is women. Thanks to the fans for supporting what will be the greatest Fifa Women's World Cup ever," said Fifa president Gianni Infantino.

As well as the Republic of Ireland, seven other nations are making their debuts at this World Cup - Vietnam, Zambia, Haiti,



Morocco, Panama, the Philippines and Portugal.

While the United States - who are chasing a fifth world title - are the number one side in the world, Zambia lie 77th and are the lowest ranked team at the tournament.

The final takes place at Stadium Australia on 20 August (11:00 kick-off).

## World Cup of firsts

This Women's World Cup has been labelled the biggest women's sports event ever to be staged. One thing is certain: the tournament will be huge in terms of show-casing - and growing - women's football around the world.

For the first time, Fifa will directly pay players at the Women's World Cup. Amounts increase for the deeper that teams progress, ranging from about £24,000 per player for the group stage to just over £200,000 allotted to each champion.

These are significant sums at a time when the average salary in the women's game worldwide is £11,000, according to last year's Fifa benchmarking report. Overall prize money has increased from £23m in 2019 to £84m.

In another first, referees will announce the

reasoning for video assistant referee (VAR) decisions to fans in stadiums and television audiences via a microphone and loudspeakers.

As at the men's World Cup in Qatar last year, referees are also encouraged to stop time-wasting, so added time is likely to be lengthy while long goal celebrations will also extend stoppages.

Meanwhile, captains will be permitted to wear armbands with messages about inclusion, gender equality and peace after rainbow armbands were not allowed at the men's tournament last year.

## Who will win this Women's World Cup?

The last time the United States lost a World Cup game was in 2011 when they were defeated on penalties by Japan in the final in Frankfurt, Germany.

Since then they have won 13 out of 14 on the global stage and they head into this edition chasing a record third successive success following triumphs in 2015 and 2019.

However, boss Jill Ellis has stepped down since guiding the Stars and Stripes to World Cup glory in France in 2019, while



two-time World Cup and Olympic gold medal winner Carli Lloyd has ended her international career.

With 14 of the 23 players appearing at their first World Cup, and Megan Rapinoe - regarded as a genuine American icon - announcing this will be her fourth and final World Cup, will there be a changing of the guard at the top of women's football?

England's unforgettable Euro 2022 success has rightly placed them in conversations when it comes to predicting World Cup favourites.

However, injuries have hit hard and the Lionesses are without several key players including Beth Mead, who was named Euro 2022's best player and won the Golden Boot award given to the tournament's top scorer.

Spain have the best women's player in the world in Alexia Putellas, while two-time winners Germany have a strong and experienced squad.

France are led by experienced manager Herve Renard, while co-hosts Australia will be backed by large crowds and have Chelsea's prolific forward Sam Kerr.

## Controversial build-up

Olympic champions Canada are also hoping to go deep in the tournament, but they are one of several nations whose World Cup preparations have been disrupted by domestic issues.

Spain and France have also made headlines in recent months as rows between players and federations have escalated, although France's issues appear to have been resolved with the appointment of Renard.

Jamaica - and even Nigeria's head coach - have taken action or called out their federations over issues such as pay, resources and personnel.

England's players are frustrated with the Football Association over its stance on performance-related bonuses.

Meanwhile, the South Africa squad selected by coach Desiree Ellis did not participate in their final warm-up fixture on home soil before leaving for the World Cup, meaning a back-up team, which included a

13-year-old girl, was hastily assembled to face Botswana in order to avoid a fine.

## Six World Cups and counting

With 32 teams at this edition, - up from 24 in 2019 and 16 as recently as 2011 - there are 736 players at this World Cup.

Three of those players are appearing at the tournament for a sixth time - Marta (Brazil), Onome Ebi (Nigeria) and Christine Sinclair (Canada).

Having turned 40 in May, defender Ebi is the oldest player in Australia and New Zealand.



But she still trails Brazil's Formiga, who holds the record as the oldest player to take part in the competition at 41 years and 112 days in 2019.

Meanwhile, there are a number of players who are barely out of high school.

South Korea's Casey Phair, 16, will become the youngest ever player at a Women's World Cup if she appears in either of her country's first two group matches against Colombia or Morocco.

## A growing injury list

The United States, Netherlands, England, France and Canada are among the nations who will be without key players due to injury.

As well as captain Becky Sauerbrunn (foot), the United States' injury list includes

forward Mallory Swanson (torn patellar tendon), midfielder Sam Mewis (knee) and forward Christen Press (knee).

Vivianne Miedema, the all-time Netherlands leading scorer, is out with anterior cruciate ligament damage - the same injury that has prevented England's Leah Williamson and Mead from taking part.

Attacking midfielder Fran Kirby (knee) is also missing for the Lionesses.

France are deprived of midfielder Amandine Henry (calf), five-time Champions League winner Delphine Cascarino (ACL) and striker Marie-Antoinette Katoto (ACL).

Another player ruled out because of an ACL injury is Canada forward Janine Beckie.

## How to follow on the BBC

The BBC is your destination for coverage 24 hours a day, seven days a week. With 33 live games on BBC TV and iPlayer, alongside coverage of the key matches on BBC Radio 5 Live and BBC Sounds, football fans can enjoy the Australia and New Zealand Women's World Cup wherever they are.

With first pick of the last-16 stage, the BBC will show England's first knockout game if they make it past the group stage. The BBC is the only place you can watch both semi-finals on 15-16 August. The final, on Sunday, 20 August, will be broadcast by both the BBC and ITV. Courtesy BBC

# Top 50 Countries with the Most Beautiful Women in the World



By Afifa Mushtaque

In this article, we will look at the top 50 countries with the most beautiful women in the world. We have also discussed some interesting insights about the beauty industries and companies. If you want to skip our detailed analysis, head straight to the Top 10 Countries with the Most Beautiful Women in the World.

The dynamic and ever-evolving beauty industry plays a prominent role in shaping modern societies' perceptions of beauty and self-expression. Comprising a vast array of products, services, and trends, this multi-billion-dollar global market caters to individuals' diverse beauty needs and desires worldwide.

The global cosmetic surgery market experienced impressive growth and reached \$46.45 billion in 2023, with a CAGR of 9.2% from 2022. However, the Russia-Ukraine war disrupted the global economic recovery from COVID-19, causing inflation and supply chain disruptions. Despite these challenges, the market is expected to grow at a CAGR of 8.2% and reach \$63.66 billion by 2027.

Cosmetic surgery aims to enhance physical appearance. It addresses issues like damaged skin, wrinkles, and blemishes. Cosmetic procedures include botox, cheek lift, chemical peel, chin surgery, cosmetic dentistry, dermabrasion, brow lift, and eyelid surgery. North America led the market in 2022 and is projected to be the fastest-growing region in the forecast period.

The cosmetic surgery market is driven by increasing demand for aesthetic enhancement, technological developments, and the growing acceptance of cosmetic procedures. As a result, Asia-Pacific, Western Europe, Eastern Europe, North America, South America, the Middle East, and Africa all play significant roles in the global market. With cosmetic surgery becoming increasingly accessible and appealing to a broader demographic, the industry is expected to witness continued expansion in the coming years.

## Companies Making Waves in the Cosmetic Industry

Allergan Aesthetics, an AbbVie Inc (NYSE:ABBV) company, celebrated the accomplishments of women surgeons in cosmetic surgery through its ongoing initiative, LIMITLESS. In partnership with the American Society of Plastic Surgeons (ASPS), The Aesthetic Society, and the American Hernia Society (AHS), LIMITLESS aimed to highlight women's achievements in the field and offered several initiatives for their education, mentorship, and empowerment. The platform features a docuseries, podcast series, and the LIMITLESS Leaders Summit to provide networking and collaboration opportunities. By sharing inspiring stories of women surgeons, Allergan Aesthetics hopes to empower future generations and create a more equitable path forward in cosmetic surgery. In full-year 2022, AbbVie Inc (NYSE:ABBV) 's net revenues reached \$58.054 billion with a 3.3% rise on a reported basis and 5.1% on an operational basis. In the fourth quarter (Q4) of 2022, AbbVie Inc reported a 1.6% increase in global net revenues to \$15.121 billion.

On the other hand, Estée Lauder Companies Inc (NYSE:EL) actively engages in the beauty business by partnering with various organizations and leveraging popular events and destinations to promote its products. In China, the brand collaborated with China Duty Free Group for a summer takeover campaign in Hainan to promote its best-selling lines and travel retail-exclusive sets.

They utilized immersive animations and photo booths to create an interactive and fun experience for travelers. Moreover, Estée Lauder Companies Inc (NYSE:EL) is also making strides into sports marketing, by partnering with Manchester United to tap into their extensive fanbase in China and the Asia Pacific as they aim to expand their audience and promote skincare awareness among male consumers.



## Our methodology

The selection of the Top 50 Countries with the most beautiful women in the World was determined after reviewing numerous threads and discussions on Reddit. Thus, the most frequently appearing countries were considered. Those countries were then further studied regarding the frequency of cosmetic surgeries, facilities, and other beauty-related industries where women's participation is actively observed.

Note: For our list of countries ranked by beauty, we have exclusively focused on the prevalence of cosmetic surgeries in these countries as an indirect indicator of prettiness. Our list doesn't necessarily focus on beauty demographics.

### 50. Czech Republic

The Czech Republic is considered a pioneer in plastic surgery, with 400 surgeries per year by qualified doctors. It's a top medical tourism destination, offering modern equipment and services to patients of all ages, with 70% female and 30% male customers, mostly aged 30 to 50. The Czech Republic is one of the top countries with the most beautiful women in the world.

### 49. Hungary

Budapest offers cost-effective cosmetic surgery owing to Central Europe's lower living costs, making Hungary a leading destination for health and medical tourism. New Beauty Medical Aesthetic and Anti-aging Center is Budapest's top choice for plastic surgeries.

### 48. Poland

The aesthetic injectables market in Poland was valued at \$15.87 million in 2021 and is projected to reach \$30.65 million at an 8.3% CAGR by 2030. The increasing popularity of injectables is attributed to rising beauty standards, affordability, and advanced technologies.

More than 30,000 patients underwent cosmetic surgery in 2021, with injectable treatments dominating the surgeries, especially among younger patients. Many from Sweden travel to Poland for cosmetic procedures due to lower costs and better plastic surgeons.

### 47. Singapore

There is a rise of cheap botched aesthetic procedures performed by unlicensed operators in Singapore, which has been concerning. While aesthetic procedures are popular, the risk of infection or even death from unlicensed treatments emphasizes the importance of seeking licensed practitioners for such surgeries.

### 46. Morocco

The quest for beauty in Morocco has led to a rise in cosmetic surgeries, with popular procedures like Brazilian Butt Lift becoming common. Influencers on social media play a significant role in promoting these surgeries. Clinics are making use of the digital space while partnering with influencers to advertise their services and attract patients. Morocco is one of the top countries with the most beautiful women.

### 45. Portugal

Portugal provides top-notch, affordable cosmetic surgery. Breast augmentation costs €4,000, which is way less than the America's €10,000 average. Faccia and Luísa Magalhães Ramos in Lisbon and Clínica da Beloura by Dr. Christopher Johnsson in Sintra are the top choices for cosmetic surgeries in Portugal.

### 44. Romania

Estetis Clinic and Noel Estetique are two popular cosmetic surgery clinics in Romania. Estée Lauder Companies Inc (NYSE:EL) recently opened its Global Technology Center in Bucharest, Romania, leveraging the country's strong IT talent base to enhance consumer experiences and supply chain efficiency through AI, cloud, automation, and omnichannel solutions.

### 43. Qatar

The Qatar cosmetic products market was projected to grow at a CAGR of 5.2% during 2020-2027. The COVID-19 pandemic had a neutral impact which initially caused a decline in sales. However, the market is driven by the young working population's grooming beauty-consciousness, and increased demand for natural ingredients, and innovative packaging of cosmetics. Qatar is one of the top countries with the most beautiful women.

### 42. Chile

Chile is a popular destination for plastic surgeries due to its reputable medical facilities, skilled plastic surgeons, and lower costs than many Western countries. The country's growing medical tourism sector also attracts patients seeking high-quality cosmetic procedures.

### 41. Austria

Medical tourism in Austria is gaining popularity due to world-class healthcare facilities and skilled medical professionals. Dr Walther Jungwirth and Dr Peter Durnig are popular plastic surgeons in Austria.

### 40. Netherlands

Cosmetic surgeries in the Netherlands are increasingly popular, with various procedures offered, including facelifts, liposuction, breast augmentation, and rhinoplasty. The country's advanced medical facilities and qualified plastic surgeons attract local and international patients looking for quality aesthetic procedures.

### 39. Dominican Republic

The Dominican Republic is a renowned destination for plastic surgeries, especially for individuals seeking affordable liposuction, tummy tucks, breast augmentation, and Brazilian butt lifts. The country's skilled surgeons and medical tourism infrastructure attract many international patients. However, it's essential for potential patients to thoroughly research and choose reputable clinics with experienced professionals to ensure safety and satisfactory results.

## 38. Ukraine

In Ukraine, women are undergoing plastic surgery procedures like blepharoplasty (eyelid surgery), rhinoplasty (nose surgery), facelifts, and breast reduction surgeries despite ongoing conflicts. Ukraine is one of the top countries with the most beautiful women.

## 37. Peru

Plastic surgery in Peru is gaining popularity because of the affordable prices, high-quality facilities with modern technology, experienced and skilled surgeons, and a wide range of procedures offered. Clinic Arroyo Goldstein is a highly popular plastic surgery clinic in Peru.

## 36. Jordan

According to Jordan Times, there were 60 plastic surgeons in Jordan in 2017, and the number has been growing. The sector's competitiveness in the regional market offers relatively low prices combined with high-quality services and has attracted clients from various Arab countries, America, and Europe. Nose surgeries cost between \$2250 and \$4250, with lower prices available in government hospitals.

## 35. Kuwait

Around 60% of Kuwaiti women aged 15 to 55 invest largely in cosmetic and laser treatments, per Times Kuwait. The most sought-after procedures for men are gynecomastia and forehead wrinkle treatments. Popular cosmetic services in Kuwait include Botox, fillers, threads, rejuvenation, fat injection, rhinoplasty, and liposuction. Sleeve operations are also common for weight loss, leading to significant lifestyle changes for individuals.

## 34. Israel

In 2021, according to Jerusalem Post, around 82,000 Israelis underwent plastic surgery, with breast augmentation, liposuction, and nose surgery being the most popular procedures. Additionally, 75 surgeries were performed to correct complications from procedures done abroad. Botox was the most common aesthetic procedure, with 290,000 Israelis receiving injections for cosmetic purposes.

## 33. Sweden

Cosmetic surgeries in Sweden are common but have become more regulated, with mandatory registration and restrictions on who can administer injections limited to licensed doctors, dentists, and nurses.

## 32. Belgium

Belgium offers a well-established cosmetic surgery industry known for high-quality care. Common procedures include breast augmentation, liposuction, rhinoplasty, and blepharoplasty. Belgium is one of the top countries with the most beautiful women.

## 31. Switzerland

Switzerland is renowned for its advanced and reputable cosmetic surgery services. Common procedures include breast augmentation, facelifts, liposuction, and rhinoplasty, provided by skilled professionals in a safe medical environment.

## 30. South Africa

South Africa has a growing and reputable cosmetic surgery industry, offering various procedures such as breast augmentation, liposuction, facelifts, and rhinoplasty. Qualified surgeons operate in modern facilities across the country.

## 29. Egypt

The cosmetic and beauty industry is flourishing in Egypt, with a dominant presence of beauty salons, spas, and skincare clinics. Cosmetic procedures such as rhinoplasty, breast augmentation, and facelifts are sought-after that attract both local and international clients. Influencers on social media platforms play a key role in shaping beauty trends and promoting beauty products. Egypt is one of the countries with the most beautiful people.



## 28. Malaysia

Malaysia's medical tourism industry sees approximately 14 million people worldwide traveling yearly for medical treatment. Although the Covid-19 pandemic caused a 46.9% decline in the global medical tourism sector in 2020, it has come back to life, with international tourist arrivals almost tripling by 172% in the first seven months of 2022 according to the Malaysian Reserve. The country's cosmetic industry is recognized for its reputable aesthetic practitioners and plastic surgeons, attracting medical tourists from Southeast Asia, Australia, New Zealand, the Middle East, and Europe.

## 27. Philippines

Cosmetic surgery in the Philippines is popular due to its affordability and the variety of procedures offered. Common surgeries include rhinoplasty, breast augmentation, and liposuction, attracting local and international patients. The Philippines is one of the top countries with the most beautiful women.



## 26. Canada

With reduced stigma surrounding cosmetic procedures, cosmetic surgeries have become increasingly common in Canada, including among young people under 30. Procedures like rhinoplasty, breast augmentation, liposuction, and tummy tucks are amongst the most popular.

## 25. Australia

Cosmetic surgeries are widespread in Australia, with almost 7 million adults, or 38% of the adult population, considering a procedure in the next ten years. Women predominantly opt for body improvement surgeries, with breast and liposuction being popular - 31% and 14%, respectively. Facial surgeries like facelifts and rhinoplasty are more common for men - 36% and 29%, respectively.

## 24. United Kingdom

Although known as the country with the best education, the popularity of cosmetic procedures in the UK has surged over the years, with an estimated 900,000 injections carried out annually. Botox and dermal fillers are among the most common treatments, particularly amongst women in their 30s and 40s and even those in their 20s seeking age-preventative surgeries.

## 23. Lebanon

Plastic surgeries and cosmetic procedures are incredibly common in Lebanon, with around 1.5 million surgeries performed annually in a country with a population of six million. It is believed that one out of every three women in Lebanon has undergone some form of cosmetic surgery. Despite the challenging economic situation, plastic surgeons in Lebanon continue to flourish, and the country is known as the Botox capital of the Middle East. With the approaching Muslim holy month of Ramadan, the demand for cosmetic procedures is expected to increase, attracting new clients to the industry.

## 22. Iran

Iran is a hub for cosmetic surgery with Rhinoplasty, or nose jobs, particularly popular due to the cultural obsession with beauty inherited from the history of Persia. The industry flourished after the Iran-Iraq War, which provided skilled military surgeons who transitioned into cosmetic work. However, there are concerns about botched surgeries, lack of regulation, and deeper questions about societal standards of beauty and cultural influences.

## 21. China

China experienced a surge in plastic surgery, with over 16 million procedures performed in 2017. The country's aesthetic medicine market is projected to surpass 310 billion yuan by 2023, which is approximately \$43.5 billion. Popular procedures include double eyelid surgery, which remains the most demanded, rhinoplasty, and breast augmentation, particularly preferred by younger generations.

## 20. Saudi Arabia

Saudi Arabia has become one of the biggest markets for overseas clients seeking cosmetic surgery, and the number of plastic surgeons has risen from just three to over 300 in the last two decades. Younger patients, including those under 20 years old, are opting for treatments like rhinoplasty, breast augmentation, liposuction, fillers, and Botox. Saudi Arabia is one of the top countries with the most beautiful women.

## 19. United Arab Emirates

The UAE, particularly Dubai, has emerged as a hub for the world's leading cosmetic surgeons, that attracts patients from around the globe that are looking for high-quality procedures at competitive prices. The region's cosmetic surgery industry is booming, with an increasing number of clinics and hospitals offering various procedures to meet the rising demand for cosmetic surgeries. Two of the most popular and reputable surgeons in the UAE are Dr. Sanjay Parashar and Dr. Jamil Al-Jamali.

## 18. India

India has seen a surge in cosmetic surgeries, with hair transplants being the most popular, garnering over 30,000 searches per month. The global cosmetic surgery market was estimated at \$53.79 billion in 2021, expected to reach \$71.93 billion by 2030, with a 3.7% CAGR. On a side note, India is also one of the largest exporters in the world.

## 17. Russia

Following Russia's military intervention in Ukraine, sanctions have led to shortages of cosmetic surgery supplies like Botox and breast implants. The Russian aesthetic medicines sector was worth \$969 million in 2021. However, it faces challenges as imports are disrupted, causing concerns among patients and doctors.

## 16. Turkey

Turkey has become a popular destination for cosmetic surgeries due to its skilled medical professionals, affordable costs, and attractive tourism packages. Turkey is known as the cheapest country for cosmetic surgeries in the world.

## 15. Greece

Cosmetic surgeries in Greece are sought after for procedures like rhinoplasty, breast augmentation, liposuction, and facelifts. Dr Fotios Filippou Karantonis Plastic Surgery and Hatzipieras Plastic Surgery Clinics are two of the most popular clinics in Greece for aesthetic surgeries.

## 14. Spain

Spain is a safe and top destination for cosmetic surgery. With beautiful places like Marbella, Barcelona, and Madrid, with accredited clinics providing high-quality treatments amid the Mediterranean, it is a popular choice for both domestic and international patients.

## 13. Taiwan

Taiwan has seen a huge demand for cosmetic surgeries among women. Popular procedures include double eyelid surgery, rhinoplasty, breast augmentation, and liposuction. The country's skilled surgeons and modern facilities attract local and foreign women.

## 12. France

France offers a wide range of cosmetic surgeries for men and women, including facelifts, liposuction, rhinoplasty, and breast augmentation. The highly skilled surgeons ensure quality results. Owing to the number of aesthetic procedures done, Paris is one of the top cities with the most beautiful women.

## 11. Argentina

The average cost of plastic surgery in Argentina is about three times less than in the USA or Europe. The affordability and the prevalent popularity of cosmetic surgeries in Argentina have led it to become a global medical tourism hub.

## 10. Venezuela

Venezuela's obsession with beauty and physical perfection, influenced by beauty pageant successes, has led to a surge in cosmetic surgeries that includes breast implants, tummy tucks, nose jobs, and buttock lifts.

## 9. Italy

Italy has a high uptake of plastic surgery, with popular procedures including eyelid and breast surgery. Ten years back, there were 182,680 plastic surgery procedures, with breast enlargements being common and liposuction also popular. The industry has seen an increase in male patients, with around 70 percent of patients being female.

## 8. Thailand

Thailand has become a top medical destination that attracts over 2 million people annually for surgeries and medical procedures. It offers excellent medical services, JCI-accredited hospitals, and skilled surgeons which makes it a popular choice for cosmetic surgeries due to its quality and lower costs.

## 7. Colombia

Colombia is a leading destination for plastic, aesthetic, and reconstructive surgeries that attracts women worldwide. With a wide range of procedures, certified plastic surgeons, and a commitment to patient safety, Colombia offers top-quality services and transformations for thousands of patients annually.

## 6. Germany

Germany is known for its advanced healthcare system and expertise in cosmetic surgeries. It leads to reconstructive surgery and continuously implements cutting-edge treatments. Plastic surgery procedures in the country have an average cost of \$10,110, ranging from \$8,425 to \$11,795.

## 5. Mexico

Cosmetic surgeries in Mexico are popular as it is home to some of the most qualified plastic surgeons and accredited facilities. Lower costs for property, pharmaceutical drugs, and medical staff salaries make Mexico an attractive destination for safe and effective procedures.

## 4. Japan

In 2020, Japan ranked fourth globally for the highest number of aesthetic/cosmetic procedures performed, following the USA, Brazil, and Germany. The country accounted for 2.2% of the world's total, with 222,642 surgical procedures conducted, per the ISAPS International Survey.



## 3. United States

Miami is the leading cosmetic surgery destination in the United States and is among the top choices globally. With 18 board-certified plastic surgeons per 100,000 people, it has the highest concentration in the US and possibly the world.

Dr. Javad Sajan is the best plastic surgeon in the US based on his revolutionary surgical techniques and dedication to patients.

## 2. Brazil

Brazil is a global leader in plastic surgery, performing the second-highest number of cosmetic procedures worldwide, just after the United States. As a top destination for aesthetic treatments, the country has gained prominence in medical tourism. Brazilian women are often called plastic women for getting too many surgeries done.

## 1. South Korea

Plastic surgery is prevalent among young South Korean women, with nearly 25% of those aged 19-29 undergoing procedures. Among 30-39-year-olds, the percentage rises to 31% for women and 4% for men, earning South Korea the title of "plastic surgery capital of the world." Women in South Korea are known to have the most beautiful skin in the world. South Korea performs the highest number of plastic surgeries in the world annually.



# The Pearls of Romanticism and Pangs of Reality

“The Pearls”, the book, under appraisal, is a collection of appealingly composed novelettes by Muttahir Ahmed Khan, a well-known Essayist, Journalist, TV Anchor, and Educationist who has to his credit a number of other books including “The Lighthouse”, “The Spectrum”, “An Insight in Thought”, etc. As we unfold the above-cited literary venture and go through the introductory phase, we come across some appreciative articles and comments by highly towering and legendary figures including Amjad Islam Amjad (Late), Ayub Khawer, Mudassar Bashir and Moroccan Singer Hayat Aloui. This factor truly adds to the worth and significance of the book as well as the novelist.

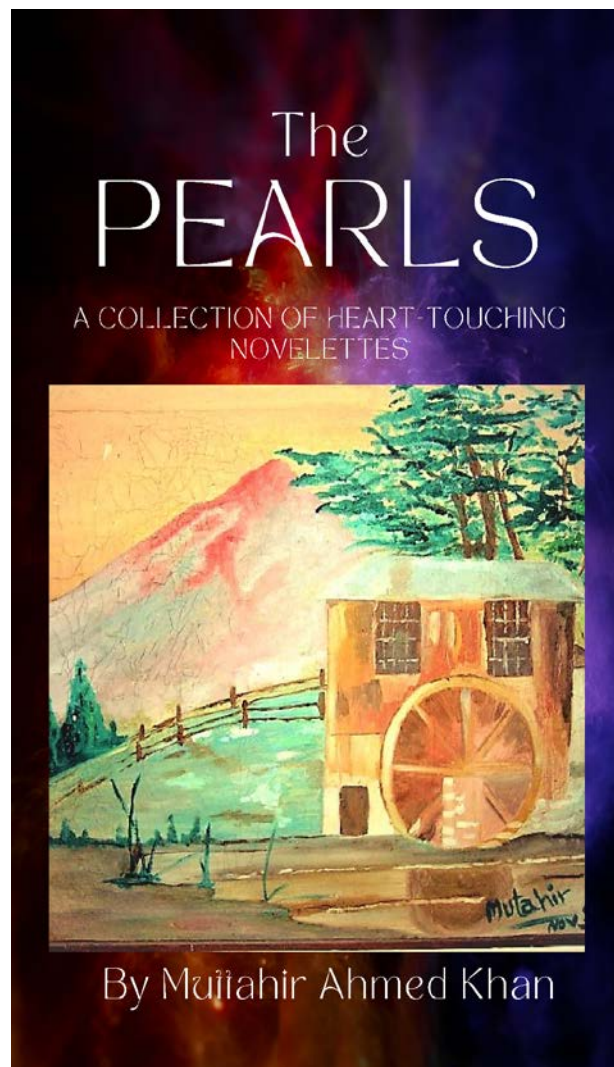
Factually speaking, there is a continuous decline in the trends of book reading and writing amongst the young generations, in our part of the world. Adding to the disappointment, when we cast a cursory glance at the number of Pakistani English Writers, the situation is more critical as you will hardly find new books approaching the bookshelves, in this regard. So, it would surely be just and appropriate to opine that this book is a feast for the literature-lovers, and Muttahir Ahmed Khan is a great asset to society as he writes meticulously and thoroughly on social evils and issues in a poignant manner through absorbing style of fiction.

Being an admired journalist and literary critic, Khan always perceives the world around him with a critical angle and expresses his viewpoints with straightforward words; so, he will definitely have a didactic approach in his art of fiction too. His words and sentences are always very touching and inspirational in regard to his endeavor to inspire his readers. His characters speak for themselves and, more than a narration, his fictions create an aura of stage presentation or visual performance of the characters on a screen.

“Neha, the Bad Girl” shakes us fully

and forces us to think on the point as to how can life be so indifferent and even cruel towards people like Neha. She was a very loving and innocent girl, but punished for the sins she never committed or even thought to commit in her whole life.

The roles of our slavish statesmen and the otherwise highly polished and trained, but slavish government officers-cum-servants have been portrayed stunningly in the heart-touching novelette titled “Identity Crisis”. Moreover, the story makes us realize that the sacrifice of humanism at the altar of so-called advancement has led us toward the height of insensitivity and bestiality. At the same time, we come across many strong characters of our soil and actual heritage and culture; for example Sheraaz in the novelette “Far across the Seven Seas” and Mrs. Nawaz and Sarfaraz in “The Identity Crisis” make us understand the dedication for family and the society of our people.



Another tantalizing and shaking novelette “The Pangs of the Shattered Dreams” takes us to an average third-world home and its very domestic issues that are, no doubt, more crucial than life and death matters. It is all about the chains of capitalism and its impact on humanity. The combination of maturity and responsibility with emotional flights and romantic touch and the pleasingly balanced ambiance prevailing in “Far across the Seven Seas” is a vivid example that Muttahir, being in his 40s, can easily switch his emotional disposition to the previous generation, his generation, and the coming generations, his students.

To drive home the point, “The Pearls” really bears the weight and worth of its title and provides a reader with thought-provoking ideas with heart-touching stories. Being associated with writing in the English language, the authors like Muttahir can present a soft, strong, and positive image of the country in the world.

By Javed Mahmood

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