

Fortnightly

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1st - 15th September 2023

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More Dirty Politics

Criminal case against PTI Chairman and Vice Chairman under new law speaks a lot about future politics

Pakistan and IMF

Expected hike in energy tariffs and mass protest against unbearable utility bills

Pak-Afghan Relations

Pakistan expects the Taliban Govt to take action against the hideouts of TTP

Crises After Crises



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Nawaz Sharif under new law against a fair election
Pakistan and IMF
Exposed how to control capital and money printed
against the interests of the people
Fahd Algham Khatib
Pakistan's economy is falling short to take action
against the interests of TTP

Crises After Crises

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General Elections is the only way out

By Dr Syed Riffat Hussain



Despite its claims that it is in power only to ensure “independent, fair and free” elections, doubts persist how long would it remain in power as an interim set up to deliver on its promise.

The interim Prime Minister Mr. Anwar ul Haq has repeatedly said that the interim set up is there only to help the Election Commission to do its job by holding next general elections.

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

Why is this confusion about the date of general elections? One reason has to do with the role of the Election Commission (EC). The EC officials have been making

contradictory statements about their role in general elections. Not too long ago, it categorically stated that it couldn’t hold elections within the stipulated time of 90 days because the delimitation exercise would not be completed by January 2024. Now the EC has initiated a process of consultation with all the political parties to get a sense of their views about the exact dates for holding the general elections.

These ongoing consultations give a clear sense of the likely dates that would be acceptable to all the political parties including the PTI, MQM, JI, and Jul (F). If one goes by this then the likely dates for general elections would fall somewhere around November or December 2023. JI has moved the Supreme Court to get a clear commitment from the EC about the likely date of the general elections.

The EC has come under pressure from many sources to announce the schedule of elections. It would be interesting whether the Superior.

The judiciary can force the EC to cave into this mounting pressure. Earlier EC totally disregarded the Presidential Advice in this regard claiming that holding elections was its sole constitutional obligation and it was not bound by advice given by the President.

This attitude of defiance on the part of EC does suggest that it would not be amenable to any external influence.

The EC has defended its decision to delay the election by invoking section 17(2) of the Elections Act, which says, “The commission shall delimit constituencies after every census is officially published.” It claimed that redrawing electoral boundaries was a constitutional requirement to hold polls, and that without fresh delimitation and updating of electoral rolls; voters will not have “true representation in parliament and provincial assemblies.” It also argued that different provisions of the Constitution have to be read together, reconciled and harmo-

nized to give a 'meaningful interpretation' of the Constitution.

The other factor impinging on the date of elections is the uncertain future of PTI as the principal actor in the electoral game.

Despite having faced "State Repression" there is little doubt PTI remains a very potent force. The temporary relief given by Islamabad High Court to PTI Chairman by suspending his three-year sentence means that PTI Chairman can expect future relief from the superior judiciary.

How would this actually pan out remains to be seen because of his involvement in much more serious cases including Cypher and the May 9 incidents. The outbreak of country-wide protests over inflated electricity bills have only added to the popularity of PTI narrative as a

credible alternative to the fraying political order.

All PDM parties including PML (N) have to do lot of answering for the pillage and mis- misgovernance of the last 16 months. Their strategy to shift the blame of all of their sins of omission and commission onto the interim government is simply not going to work. People are much too smart to be swayed by this blatantly false propaganda.

PTI has more than a good chance to win a majority of votes in next round of general elections if it plays smart. That essentially means opening its doors to dialogue with all the political parties and shedding its animus against state institutions. Will PTI do it?

It should be offered a fair chance to prove its credentials. Critics would

say we have tried this before with disastrous results. Why should we make this mistake again?

If one can use the old Marxist phrase that there is a "new correlation of forces" that demands revising our old assumptions. The focal point of our collective efforts should be the revival of our economy which is in a free fall. Unless we can arrest this trend all will be lost. As a country of 250 million mostly young people we have too much at stake. We cannot afford a collapse. Having a constructive dialogue at all levels is what we need. Our appalling economic situation tells us that we need to muster the power of imagination to transcend the status quo and renew our commitment to the people of Pakistan. Timely, fair and free elections are the only rational course left open to us.



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The power of the pen



By M A Niazi

The most important question, it seemed, was whether the children occupying the cable car in Alai, a tehsil of Battagram, which is one of the more mountainous districts of KP, would be rescued. I wonder if that dramatic event was the inspiration for the reports of the rescue of Imran Khan from Attock Jail, by a team of commandos who came by helicopter. They did something they don't even do in the movies: knocked out all opposition, but left them all alive.

There were two other reports of interest. One was that Imran Khan had not gone to jail. A homunculus or simulacrum had been built before his arrest, and that had gone to jail. Imran had been smuggled out to Scotland, or somewhere with equally remote wild and uninhabited places. The other, the one I prefer the most, is that Mrs. Imran got one of her genies to replace him. Again, he is a free bird, but in a remote place.

Unfortunately, it seems he's still in the same place. Unlike the President, he's not in a gilded cage. The incumbent is in really bad shape, after accusing his staff of not obeying his orders. He's tried to transfer the Secretary to the President, but he stays untransferred. Their meetings must be awkward, to say the least. The President probably relies more on his Military Secretary these days.

I wonder if there's any truth in the rumor that Ms. Humaira Ahmad refused to take the job because there was no proof that the President had asked for her. When it was pointed out that he had signed the letter, she said the signature might be forged. When it was suggested to her that she talked on the phone with him, she asked for proof that it was not a homunculus or genie speaking, like the one imitating Imran. That was when the attempt was given up, and Dr. Alvi left to his own devices.

Now that the dust has settled somewhat, it seems the bills are still lying unsigned on the President's desk. The statutory period he could delay the bills being over, the government

notified the acts. If the President had really wanted to make things sticky, he could have scribbled an objection or two and sent it to the National Assembly Secretariat. Then the bills could only have been passed by a joint session of Parliament. A joint session needs elections.

So the changes, which apparently are bad for Imran, (or rather the simulacrum who'll actually be tried) would not affect him (or rather the genie).

I wonder why we don't have more simulacra or genies wandering around. I mean, they're awfully convenient. The cable car occupants were rescued, without any claims of genies being rescued. Luckily, there were no small children, or else some kids would have tried a jump. True, it's only by such experiments that we got out of caves, but small children do need the attention of the Almighty, otherwise Mankind wouldn't be around today.

I wonder if someone will offer the explanation that the Indian moon landing was faked. Well, there is an active domestic industry in the USA that claims that the moon landings were faked. Well, we've had an arms race that has not only left both India and Pakistan nuclear powers but has given a lot of people ideas. I wonder how a space race would end.

Instead of celebrating a win in the space race, we are busy protesting power bills. And nothing shows more that the caretakers intend to stay than their reaction, which is the time-tested way of making sure that the problem is not solved, but on the way to oblivion. They're holding a meeting. Now the only surer solution to the problem is the right noting on the file. Imagine someone in a mob, suddenly to be faced with an earnest-looking clerk with an open file in hand, pointing to the note that Sahib has scribbled on it.

Well, that protester would probably refuse to look at it, asking how was he to know the signature was not as forged as any President's signature assenting to a bill.

Politics getting even messier in the run-up to general elections



By Tahir Niaz

Politics has never been a sober profession in Pakistan. It has always been a murky game plagued with political setbacks and misfortunes.

The recent saga involving the two bills; the amendment of the Official Secrets Act and the Pakistan Army Act. Adds another chapter of disgrace to the already checkered political history of the country. President Alvi is denying having assented to the two bills yet they became laws. His clarification on the subject was doubted, rather used as an opportunity to tarnish his image and ultimately demand resignation.

The motive behind declaring the two unsigned bills as valid pieces of law is quite clear; to implicate top leadership of the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf in criminal cases, as calls for holding general elections within the stipulated period of 90 days gather steam.

The way in which the two bills were unilaterally declared laws and subsequently booked the chairman and vice chairman of the PTI in criminal cases speaks a lot about the future political scenario. Interestingly, soon after the President's tweet, some started demanding apology, resignation and even action against the President for

stating that he never signed the amended Official Secrets Act and the Pakistan Army Act as debate continued on the legal status of the bills. Some law experts, however, called for action against President Arif Alvi's staff.

The two bills, which were passed by the Senate and National Assembly (NA) during the tenure of Shehbaz Sharif's government amid opposition from both sides of the aisle in the Parliament, were sent to the president a few weeks ago but their current legal status has become unclear in light of the President's remarks.

Following his statement, legal experts questioned the validity of the legislation as lawyers were of the view that Alvi should initiate action against the President House staff involved in the matter.

Some suggested the president immediately sack all those involved and also rebuked the PML-N and the PPP for their part in introducing these bills in the national assembly and the Senate in the first place. They believed that these two parties would be remembered as collaborators of the establishment who for the sake of seeking relief for their leaders conceded unprecedented space to the establishment.

According to lawyer Basil Nabi Malik, the situation was "troubling to say the least". "Without his consent as president, it cannot be said that the bills in question have passed into law," he observed.

Legal position

Under Article 75, the president can within 10 days either assent to a bill or return it to parliament with a message that the bill be reconsidered. If the president decides to return the bill, there are two stages: the first stage is returning the bill to parliament for reconsideration under Article 75(1)(b). The second stage is a joint sitting of parliament actually reconsidering the bill and (with or without amendment) passing it again under Article 75(2).

The legal experts believe that the deemed provision only kicks in once the bill has been reconsidered and passed by parliament in a joint sitting under Article 75(2). There is no automatic deemed assent attached to an unsigned bill, they are of the view.

The president claims he has not signed and assented to the Official Secrets Act and the Army Act amendments. Neither of these two bills were ever



reconsidered and passed by Parliament in a joint sitting. There can be no deemed assent in this case and if the President's claims are true, neither of these laws are valid pieces of legislation as within the scheme of Article 75.

Barrister Ali Zafar is of the view that if the president had not signed the two bills, they had not become laws. "Deemed assent only applies after the joint Parliament sends bills back," he highlighted in a post on X.

Still, a case was registered under the Official Secrets Act and PTI's Vice-chairman Shah Mahmood Qureshi was arrested. Imran Khan is already languishing in the Attack jail in Toshakhana case in a decision deemed full of flaws even by the Supreme Court. The irony of the fact is that despite viewing the sentence to PTI chairman Imran Khan as unfair, many started repeating the narrative that the PTI chief has facilitators in the judiciary.

Legality of the two bills, the controversy between the President and the ECP over fixing the election date, the constitutional quagmire the country is in these days, and ultimately a delay in the general elections, all these factors are contributing to the complexity of the situation.

The last-minute approval of the census by

the Council of Common Interests and the subsequent initiation of the delimitation process by the Election Commission of Pakistan without announcing the polling date has raised fears that there may be no elections in the near future. We may recall the days of Gen Ziaul Haq, who promised elections in 90 days, which ultimately turned out to be 11 long years.

A large segment of society in the country believes that the census results might be exploited to delay elections. The PPP after endorsing the census is now demanding elections at the earliest, a move seen by many as a public gesture to be tagged a custodian of the constitution.

The electoral watchdog has proposed a schedule that appears exceeding the stipulated 90-day period after the dissolution of the assembly, thereby raising concerns of constitutional non-compliance. According to the ECP's projected timeline, elections could potentially be held at least three months later than constitutionally required.

The outgoing PDM-led ruling coalition is accused of taking steps to subsequently prolong the election timeline beyond the mandated 90 days. The delay in convening the CCI meeting to approve census results seemed to be a calculated effort to slow

down the electoral process.

The caretaker set-up also seems to be moving with the same mindset of delaying the polls to the maximum. The impending controversy over the timing of the elections is being anticipated to become a point of contention for the judiciary.

The political and constitutional experts are seeing the ECP or the president knocking the door of the top court in the coming days with the question of who has the mandate to announce the election date.

Majority of the Pakistanis believe that the elections would be held as and when the establishment wanted. There is a saying that, "In skating over thin ice, our safety is in our speed". Ralph Waldo Emerson (1803-1882) Metaphorically speaking, it is best to get off the "thin ice" as quickly as possible.

With the passage of time, the problems only multiply. Street protests against the inflated electricity bills are just the tip of the iceberg of how the situation may unfold in the coming days. The decision-makers might be thinking of doing magic to pull the country out of the ever-deepening crisis but actually are walking on thin ice by holding the electoral process in abeyance. Better they realize the gravity of the situation and avert the imminent disaster.





Delayed General Elections Amidst Controversial Census Results: Implications and Challenges

By Noor Aftab

The top electoral body has announced that general elections would not be held on time, effectively delaying until next year, following the approval of the controversial results of a new nationwide census. The Council of Common Interests (CCI) unanimously approved the returns of the population census 2023.

The recent amendments in the election laws have empowered the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) to announce dates for general elections and conduct elections in a free, fair and transparent manner.

While the ECP is obligated to ensure fair elections, it also has the power to halt the polls or declare them void within 60 days of the results under certain circumstances, such as severe illegalities or violations of the Election Act.

The amendments to the Elections Act coupled with the need for new delimitations give a collective impression that the caretaker set-up may have to look after the country's reigns for a bit longer than they are technically supposed to. However, an act of Parliament could not override the mandate of the Constitution of Pakistan, and therefore, no legislation to extend the caretaker government's tenure could take precedence over the Constitution.

Muhammad Sarwar Gondal, spokesperson and member of the Pakistan Bureau of Statistics (PBS), the department responsible for the census, said Pakistan's Constitution states that once the latest census count is completed, the polls body is bound to conduct new delimitations.

At the same time, the Constitution is very clear that once the census result is approved, new delimitation has to take place, similar to what happened during the last census in 2017, according to which 2018 polls were held. As per ECP laws, they require at least four months to implement new delimitations.

Firstly, the delimitation committees are



established for all provinces including Islamabad. The National Assembly has 266 constituencies while the provincial assemblies have 593 constituencies. Once the electoral body announces the schedule for the delimitations of the constituencies, no new administrative units can be formed. Following the announcement of the schedule, the administrative arrangements are completed within 15 days and the relevant revenue department is requested to provide essential data and maps of the tehsils and districts.

Data including the district census report and the block size is provided to the data committee and the constituency committee is trained within five days. During this time, the committees receive the district quota of provincial and national assembly seats.

The delimitation committees then complete the initial work within 30 days after which the initial report of the delimitations is published in four days.

After that, the objections regarding the initial delimitations are submitted to the ECP for 30 days, after which the ECP takes 30 days to hear the complaints and make a decision.

Once the ECP deals with the complaints, the final report on the delimitations is published in the next three to four days. The delimitation process takes roughly four months after the announcement of the schedule. The country is divided into constituencies on the basis of population and geography for the delimitation process and the population difference in any constituency should not be more than 10%.

The ECP has announced delimitation of the constituencies would be held across the country from September 8 to October 7 and the proposals regarding constituencies would be submitted from October 10 to November 8. The quota of constituencies of the national and provincial assemblies would be allocated from September 5 to September 7.

The Commission further maintained that the administrative matters related to the constituencies would be completed by August 31 while constituency committees of four provinces including Islamabad would be established by August 21.

The electoral body said it would decide on the objections to the constituencies from November 10 to December 9, adding that



the final publication of the digital census has been completed.

As per the Election Act, the ECP is bound to draw new boundaries for hundreds of provincial and national assembly constituencies across the country.

Earlier this month, the CCI meeting chaired by the then Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif approved the final results of the 7th Population and Housing Census 2023, reporting the country's population at 241.49 million with a growth rate of 2.55%.

Additionally, the Supreme Court Bar Association (SCBA) has filed a petition in the Supreme Court seeking its orders for the ECP to announce a date for polls to the national and provincial assemblies as per Article 224(2) of the Constitution. In its petition, the top lawyers' body pleaded with the apex court to suspend the August 5 decision of the CCI. Raising questions over the decision made in the August 5, meeting of the CCI and SCBA said that the interim chief ministers were not eligible to sit in the meeting.

1988. Despite that, the elections were held on November 16, 1988, marking a delay of 81 days. In the second instance, when Pervez Musharraf announced general elections in the country on July 11, 2002, the elections were to be held on or before October 9, 2002, but the elections were held on October 10, 2002, marking a delay of one day. In the third instance, general elections were called in the country on January 8, 2008. However, former Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto's assassination on Dec 27, 2007, led to a delay in the elections. The elections were held on February 18, 2008, after 40 days of delay.

Articles 222 to 226 of the Constitution of Pakistan deal with the process of election and appointment of a caretaker government. Article 218 of the Constitution casts upon the ECP to hold free, fair, and transparent elections, and that during the election exercise, all state institutions shall provide support for a free, fair, and transparent electoral process in the country.

According to Article 222 of the Constitution, the election for National Assembly and Provincial Assemblies would take place within 60 days at the time of expiry of their term but if assemblies are dissolved before their constitutional term by the Prime Minister and respective Chief Ministers, the election would be held within 90 days. Legal experts have said that the ECP was legally bound to conduct a free, fair and transparent election within 90 days after the dissolution of the assemblies while the caretaker government was responsible for providing all-out assistance to the electoral body for smooth conduct of polls in all federating units and Islamabad.

In the face of delayed general elections, sparked by contentious census results and constitutional mandates, Pakistan stands at a crossroads. The convergence of legal stipulations, institutional responsibilities, and political dynamics presents both challenges and opportunities. As the nation navigates this critical juncture, it is essential for stakeholders to uphold the principles of transparency, fairness, and stability. Only through collaborative efforts and a commitment to democratic values can Pakistan ensure a smooth electoral process and pave the way for a brighter future.



The CCI approval made it constitutionally mandatory for the ECP to hold elections following fresh delimitations in the light of the results of the 7th census.

According to Article 51 (5) of the Constitution, the seats of the National Assembly to each province and the Federal Capital shall be allocated on the basis of population in accordance with the last preceding census officially published. After the delimitation process, the ECP completes the voter lists and seals them. Following this, the schedule for the elections is announced.

The latest digital census conducted in 2023 shows that Pakistan's population has surged to 241.49 million with a growth rate of 2.55%.

"The meeting of the Respondent No. 2 [CCI] took place on 05.08.2023, in the presence of the prime minister, the chief ministers of Sindh and Balochistan, the caretaker chief ministers of the Respondents No. 3 (Punjab) and 4 [KP] and other federal ministers," read the petition.

Even though, there had been circumstances when elections could not be held within 90 days in the country, as per the mandate, like in 1988, 2002, and 2008. Regardless, the election schedule was still announced - a scenario that seems unlikely in the contemporary situation.

When the National Assembly was dissolved on May 29, 1988, it was the government's responsibility at that time to hold elections on or before August 27,



In, out game and a complicated political picture

By Sarfraz Raja

The political landscape of Pakistan is as uncertain as the dates for the next general elections. As there are questions about the election date, the future of stalwarts of politics also hangs in the balance. There remains massive unclarity as to who will be amongst the top political players, keeping the whole future politics in the country under a dark shadow of doubt.

In 2018, former Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif found himself incarcerated, effectively sidelining him from electoral politics. Interestingly, the tables have turned with another former Prime Minister, Imran Khan. Imran Khan, along with his party, faces uncertainty due to his involvement in various cases, including the Toshakhana incident, which led to his imprisonment. Similarly, the prospects of the return of PML-N's leader, Nawaz Sharif, also remain uncertain. The political landscape is currently marked by numerous uncertainties and unresolved issues. Many factors, still in the process of settling, will shape the political scenario in the upcoming weeks and months.

Fate of PTI and Imran Khan

Imran Khan is synonymous with PTI, and this belief is held staunchly by his followers, which holds true. Therefore, the destiny and prospects of Imran Khan are inextricably linked to those of Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI). There's no denying that PTI was the most prominent political entity in the nation just a few months ago. However, everything changed after April 2022, when Imran Khan was ousted from power through a historic no-confidence motion in the national assembly—marking the first instance of such an event in the country's history. This incident caused his popularity to soar, eclipsing all his political opponents. His anti-US and anti-establishment narratives struck a chord, while the rival PDM suffered significant damage to their political standing and voter base due to the repercussions of unpopular decisions they had to make, contributing to soaring inflation. Imran Khan and his party



emerged as the primary beneficiaries of the economic conditions that unfolded over the past year.

The trajectory of PTI's politics can be bifurcated into two distinct periods: pre and post-May 9. In fact, May 9, 2023, served as a pivotal moment that reshaped the entire political landscape of the country. The pursuit of securing a two-thirds majority evolved into a fight for survival for PTI. A number of second-tier leaders departed from the party and withdrew from politics altogether in response to this transformation.

Imran Khan found himself sentenced to imprisonment in the Toshakhana case, which revolved around the sale of foreign gifts acquired during official trips. These gifts' monetary value had not been disclosed in the annual asset declaration submitted to the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP). However, Imran Khan's legal entanglements go beyond this case and delve into more grave matters. He is presently under investigation for violating the Official Secrets Act due to the public disclosure of official details from the diplomatic cypher. Moreover, he's also enmeshed in a case concerning 190 million pounds under the jurisdiction of the National Accountability Bureau (NAB). In this case, an illicit sum from a business magnate, seized by the UK's National Crime Agency, was transferred to the

account of Pakistan's Supreme Court. This transfer occurred as part of a penalty imposed by the court on the said business tycoon, and it was executed with the approval of Imran Khan's cabinet.

Legal experts categorize both of these cases as significantly weighty, with potentially serious implications for Imran Khan. The charges under these cases could render him ineligible to participate in future elections.

Imran Khan finds himself grappling with these challenges. Yet, all is not smooth sailing for his political party either. Beyond enduring significant rifts, PTI faces looming clouds of electoral ineligibility. The elusive election symbol still remains beyond PTI's grasp, contingent on the completion of their intra-party elections.

The Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) has made it clear to PTI that their internal party elections were slated for June this year, a deadline that has come and gone without fruition. The Election Act explicitly mandates that every political party must conduct these internal elections in accordance with their constitution and submit the resultant report to the electoral body. Failure to do so results in the denial of an election symbol for participation in elections.

PTI confronts a multifaceted quandary. Their foremost leader and party chairman were pronounced ineligible by the ECP due



to a jail sentence, barring him from holding any party position. Sources within PTI reveal a deep-seated trust deficit within the party itself. Imran Khan's confidence appears to be reserved solely for himself as the party chairman. On the other hand, a substantial portion of the party leadership has gone underground to evade arrest in the aftermath of the May 9th events. These intricacies constitute significant impediments to promptly convening intra-party elections, a necessary step to meet legal obligations.

At present, PTI lacks eligibility to wield the "Bat" symbol for electoral participation. Hence, surmounting these legal hurdles stands as an imperative for PTI's quest to secure eligibility and partake in upcoming elections.

Some complicated decisions for PMLN

The Pakistan Muslim League Nawaz (PMLN), while not grappling with challenges as significant as those faced in 2018 or akin to the present issues confronting PTI and Imran Khan, is encountering its own distinctive set of complexities. In contrast to PTI, PMLN retains the ability to claim its election symbol and actively engage in electoral processes. Nonetheless, they confront the formidable task of persuading their constituents to once again cast their votes in their favour, particularly after experiencing the substantial inflation that characterized the tenure of the PMLN-led government. To tackle this hurdle, the party is pinning its hopes on the return of its leader, Nawaz Sharif, who is anticipated to spearhead the party's election campaign.

After protracted deliberations held in London, the precise date of Nawaz Sharif's return has been unveiled: a mid-October homecoming. However, this return comes with a legal dimension, as Nawaz Sharif is required to present himself before the courts. His departure to London had been granted on medical grounds, following the suspension of his imprisonment sentence. His future trajectory will be determined by the courts. PMLN is meticulously orchestrating a grand reception event for Nawaz's arrival, aiming for an impressive attendance of one million individuals at the

airport. As for the city of this significant event, a decision is still pending.

Undoubtedly, the performance of the PMLN pivots significantly upon the degree of Nawaz Sharif's involvement in the forthcoming election campaign.

Potential Candidates for next Prime minister

Should a state of equilibrium prevail and a level field be established for all, the stage would inevitably be set for a showdown between Nawaz Sharif and Imran Khan for the prime ministerial position. Nevertheless, considering the exhaustive issues discussed above, such an outcome appears exceedingly implausible.



Imran Khan finds himself embroiled in turbulent waters, given the multitude of legal cases against him. In light of these circumstances, the prospect of Imran's active participation in elections is greatly diminished. Indeed, it might even be fortunate for him if his party can engage in the electoral process with its full remaining vigour. In such an eventuality, the question arises: Who shall stand as their candidate for prime minister? A core committee insider reveals that this matter hasn't yet been formally deliberated upon. The prospect of anyone other than Imran Khan being considered for the position of prime minister is beyond PTI's contemplation. Thus, if Imran Khan remains disengaged from the electoral arena, it will ultimately be his prerogative to designate the prime ministerial nominee.

On the opposite side, PMLN has made an unequivocal declaration that Nawaz Sharif will be their premier candidate. The election slogan of "Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif" resonates with this commitment. However, the outcome hinges on the judicial proceedings: Can Nawaz garner relief from the courts and be deemed eligible to partake in the electoral process? And should circumstances not align with their anticipations, what contingency plan exists? PMLN sources suggest that Shehbaz Sharif would step into the role of their prime ministerial candidate for these elections. Yet, should Nawaz become eligible, the party will orchestrate his parliamentary entry, marking his fourth ascension to the prime ministerial seat.

Outside the realm of PMLN, PPP is treading more cautiously in relation to the prime ministership. Ground realities dictate that their party's prominence in Punjab isn't commensurate with what's necessary to secure a substantial parliamentary mandate. As such, their efforts are concentrated on maximizing their influence in the country's largest province. A senior party figure conveyed that Bilawal Bhutto would be their contender if the elections yielded a favourable outcome for their party. Conversely, if circumstances dictate otherwise, PPP is inclined to lend its support to PMLN, should it emerge as the preeminent parliamentary force. Naturally, these dynamics pivot on the intricate post-election landscape that will unfold.



Nawaz Sharif's return to mainstream politics

By Ahmad Waleed

Ever since the PDM gained power, the talk about Nawaz Sharif's return to Pakistan has been making rounds. He left the country in 2019, after getting bail for medical reasons following his arrest in a property corruption case. But now since his arch-rival Imran Khan is in jail and Khan's party, PTI is deteriorating, and Sharif has been ruled innocent of any corruption charges, it is the perfect opportunity and time to make for Sharif's comeback in national politics.

Various reasons have been cited for the delay in Sharif's return since he left the country for his treatment in the UK. The main objective of the party was to keep the hopes of his supporters alive for political gains. Every occasion was used by the party to announce his possible return. One PML-N leader was of the view that Nawaz Sharif would only return after the tenure of the current Chief Justice Pakistan ends in September as the party does not want to take a risk and put his life in danger. "He is 74 and is diabetic and has two heart surgeries with multiple ailments," he was quoted as saying. Earlier, Nawaz Sharif had told a senior journalist that he would not be able to return to Pakistan until his treatment was completed.

There is another view in the party about his return. The party wants the announcement of the general election schedule and the elimination of cases against him to pave the way for his comeback. They don't want to see him in jail again. Nawaz Sharif was declared absconder by the high court and he will have to surrender to the court and be sent to jail until the court decides to consider the other option of keeping him under house arrest.

He traveled to UAE a few months ago to have meetings with his party leaders besides other PDM stalwarts to discuss the political landscape of the country. The party leaders started claiming that Nawaz Sharif may take a flight to Pakistan at any time as a surprise to his supporters and political opponents. Rana Sanaullah had sent a letter to the divisional and district-level leaders, MNAs, and MPAs to prepare for his return. They were instructed to welcome the PML-N supremo in a grand way whenever he lands in Pakistan. But, it never happened and he returned to the UK instead.

Drastic changes have been witnessed on the political horizon of the country in his absence though his approval was sought in all the decisions his party has taken during all through these years. An entirely new political landscape awaits his return, if he returns in October this year. According to the party leaders, the PML-N can only be rejuvenated when Nawaz Sharif is among his supporters again as has been the case in the past when he would come out and address the crowds with his hard hitting speeches to mobilise the party vote bank.

The senior leadership and legal consultants in the party have been discussing for the past many days the timing of Nawaz's return and the cases launched against him in Pakistan. Shahbaz Sharif told reporters outside the London residence that everybody knows that Nawaz Sharif's name was not there in Panama Papers and he was

included in the investigation through a conspiracy in Panama Papers. "Nawaz Sharif will come to Pakistan and face the law, there no other opinions on it," Shehbaz said. He added that after detailed consultations the party has decided that Nawaz Sharif would 'come back in October to lead the election campaign'.

Shehbaz, however, said the court's ruling will not affect the plans of Nawaz Sharif's return to Pakistan as Nawaz Sharif has completed his disqualification term of five years. Shehbaz Sharif said that the law is in the field right now and it states that the maximum period for disqualification is five years and the SC verdict will not be an 'obstruction' in his return. He, however, regretted the SC decision which came after the dissolution of assemblies after completing the five-year term. "I wish the verdict had come during the parliament's life then we would have debated this law on the floor or the house or made amendments with the parliament's collective wisdom," he said during the interview.

The signing of the bill has benefited Nawaz Sharif and Jahangir Tareen of the Istehkam-e-Pakistan Party who was also disqualified for life by the Supreme Court.

Political analysts, nevertheless, raise questions if Nawaz Sharif's return will help revive the declining popularity of his party before the elections. Will his medical condition allow him to take part in active politics and address rallies ahead of elections? Most of them agree. The PDM regime was no different from the hybrid regime except for a few tough economic decisions it took to invite the ire of the masses who faced unprecedented prices of daily-use items. It broke all records of inflation. In these circumstances, Nawaz Sharif's return will be of little help and the PML-N leadership from top to bottom know it well. This may be among the reasons that Nawaz Sharif is reluctant to come home or maybe because of the conditions better known to the quarters at the helm of affairs that allowed him to proceed to the UK.

Above all, the current scenario suggests little worthiness of our political elite who have willingly offered space to the apolitical forces to avenge the 'injuries' inflicted by their arch-rival Imran Khan who had colluded with the then power brokers. Now these politicians including Nawaz Sharif want Imran Khan's politics to be buried into the pages of history. At the same time, his critics also believe that even if Nawaz Sharif returns to his homeland in October this year, he will not be able to participate in Pakistan's politics as per the deal between him and the powers. Consequently, they think his chances of coming back to power as prime minister of Pakistan for the fourth time are very bleak.

On the other hand, the PML-N leaders are more than confident that the return of their leader will definitely help boost the party which faced so many challenges after it decided to go for a historic no-confidence motion against the former prime minister through which Imran Khan was ousted on April 9, 2022. "We will come out of the crisis as soon as Nawaz Sharif lands in Pakistan," one of the PML-N leaders has recently vowed.



Role of Women in Politics

By Zahra Khurram

No nation can rise to the height of glory unless your women are side by side with you. The complete and active participation of women in legislative bodies on an equal basis with men is not only an objective in its own right, but it is also imperative for the formation and sustainability of democratic systems. Ensuring gender parity in parliamentary representation, as well as promoting women's leadership and incorporating their perspectives, is of utmost importance in guaranteeing enhanced responsiveness to the concerns of citizens. The presence of women in positions of political leadership has been empirically demonstrated to yield positive outcomes for society in several dimensions. These benefits encompass a reduction in societal inequality, enhanced collaboration across party affiliations and ethnic boundaries, as well as a heightened emphasis on addressing social issues such as education, healthcare, parental leave, and retirement provisions.

The Pakistan movement was spearheaded by women. Women actively participated alongside men in the endeavor to form an independent nation specifically for adherents of the Islamic faith. By 1947, Muslim women had demonstrated their political skills and activity on the battlefield. They had raised finances for the Pakistan Movement, mobilized women, campaigned on the streets against injustice, and addressed women's issues including education. Under the leadership of Fatima Jinnah, women were effectively mobilized and made significant contributions to the Pakistani cause. Their involvement primarily entailed active participation in the All India Muslim League rallies and processions, which served as crucial catalysts in the attainment of the nation's independence. Nevertheless, there existed a prolonged period during which political fervor failed to translate into efficacious political engagement. Pakistan's inaugural constituent legislature, which operated from 1947 until 1954, comprised a mere two female members, namely Begum Shaista Suhrawardy Ikramullah and Begum Jahanara Shahnawaz. Moreover, it



is noteworthy that the 1956 indirect election did not result in the election of any female candidates to the legislative assembly. In addition to the provision of reserved seats, the 1956 constitution also included the concept of women's suffrage.

The election held in 1956 did not witness a substantial increase in the representation of women in political seats. However, the decision made by Fatima Jinnah to contest the presidency against Ayub Khan emerged as a highly crucial and transformative moment in shaping the involvement of women in the realm of politics. Fatima Ali Jinnah, hailed as the 'Mother of the Nation', exemplified qualities of fearlessness, progressiveness, and a strong commitment to professionalism and social responsibility. She established herself as an exceptional social worker in the aftermath of the divide, and her contributions to the field of social development are particularly notable. In the year 1938, the Muslim League established a sub-committee with the specific objective of addressing the well-being and advancement of Muslim women which under Fatima Jinnah's guidance remained actively involved until the establishment of Pakistan. In March 1940, she actively

engaged in the Lahore resolution of the Muslim League, a significant event that exerted considerable influence on the political terrain.

Begum Ra'ana Liaquat Ali Khan, a prominent female figure, played a significant role in the Pakistan movement, actively participating in the establishment of Pakistan and providing support to the nascent nation. In May 1933, her presence alongside her husband, Liaquat Ali Khan, during their visit to London marked a significant milestone in the history of Pakistan. The individuals convened with Jinnah at his residence in Hamstead Heath, where they effectively convinced him to reengage with the British Indian Empire and reassume his role as a leader. Shortly following the establishment of Pakistan, the Pakistan Women's Voluntary Service was created with the purpose of coordinating and supervising various initiatives pertaining to women's engagement. During that particular historical period, a considerable number of Muslim women, who had hitherto remained confined within their households, actively participated in humanitarian efforts at hospitals, transit camps, and along public thoroughfares.



Significant advancements were achieved by women during the tenure of the Z.A. Bhutto administration, spanning from 1971 to 1977. The Pakistan People's Party (PPP) under Bhutto's leadership significantly engaged women in political activities. Begum Nasim Jahan, a prominent member involved in the establishment of the Pakistan People's Party (PPP), orchestrated the mobilization of educated women with the objective of disseminating the party's ideology across various neighborhoods in Lahore. The establishment of a Women's Wing by the PPP, with provincial affiliations, served to enhance women's political consciousness. In 1972, women were granted access to all government posts and services, leading to their appointment to significant positions such as Provincial Governor, University Vice Chancellor, and Deputy Speaker of the National Assembly.

"The carefree girl who initially left home in 1969 to study at Harvard had now changed into a lady with an iron will, to fight the struggle left unfinished by her father." At 35, Benazir Bhutto was one of the youngest CEOs in the world and became the first female Islamic prime minister in 1988. This occurrence garnered national notice at the time. She was seen as Pakistan's engaging and sophisticated representation in the West, a pioneering campaigner for gender equality and the first female Muslim leader in history, despite corruption claims. However, many Pakistanis saw her as a major figure who championed their needs and goals. Pakistan's democratic transition

gave many people hope after eleven years of dictatorial rule. The election of a representative of liberty and fairness gave marginalized citizens hope. Benazir Bhutto launched various programs to help women find work, especially in conservative regions.

The standing of women in politics has undergone a significant transformation. Despite the relatively low development rankings of the country, the government has undertaken significant efforts to enhance the status of women and mitigate poverty. This has been achieved through the implementation of several pro-women legislations by many political parties. Moreover, it is noteworthy to highlight the notable accomplishments of women in reclaiming public spaces. Pakistan, for instance, has witnessed important milestones, such as the appointment of its inaugural female United Nations envoy, as well as the first female Foreign Minister, Prime Minister, and Speaker of the National Assembly. This particular framework has facilitated an increased representation of women in legislative bodies and their active involvement in legislative processes.

Advocacy for enhanced awareness and the elimination of impediments to women's engagement has been championed by activists and organizations dedicated to advancing women's rights. The active participation of women in leadership positions played a crucial role in the implementation and enforcement of legislation

pertaining to their rights, both within the political realm and in various aspects of societal existence. The legislative measures encompassed the 'Prevention of Anti-Women Practices Act (2011)', 'The Acid Control and Acid Crime Prevention Act (2011)', 'Punjab Fair Representation of Women Act (2014)', 'Criminal Law (Amendment) (Offence of Rape) Act (2016)', and 'Punjab Enforcement of Women Property Right Act (2021)'. These legislative measures facilitated the advancement of women in social, economic, and political spheres by addressing issues related to gender-based violence and harassment.

The task of integrating into the political mainstream has historically posed significant challenges for women in Pakistan. The presence of socio-cultural obstacles, such as the prevailing patriarchal framework within society, discriminatory practices and traditions, and the overt manipulation of religion for the purpose of establishing authority, along with the reluctance of those in positions of power to undertake substantial efforts to promote women's empowerment and guarantee their complete involvement, further intensify the predicament. However, it is noteworthy that female leaders of great importance have played a crucial role in bringing about substantial and far-reaching changes, as seen by the increasing participation of women in initiatives aimed at promoting and advancing their rights.





PTI Chairman to remain in jail for an indefinite period

By Danish Javed

Former prime minister and PTI chairman is set to remain in jail for an indefinite period as the Islamabad High Court ordered his release in the Toshakhana case by suspending his sentence. However, the authorities rearrested the PTI chief in the Cipher case and did not release him. It makes clear that the former PM and PTI chairman will not be released from jail till the time he succumbs to the demands of the establishment.

On Tuesday (August 29), everyone was anticipating the release of the PTI chief after the IHC suspended his sentence awarded by the trial court judge Humayun Dilawar Khan. However, the lawyer of PTI chairman and a senior PPP leader Sardar Latif Khosa told the media (well before the announcement of the IHC verdict) that the former premier would be arrested in the cipher case. And it proved true on Tuesday afternoon when the FIA announced the arrest of the PTI chairman in the cipher case.

Later on, it was also announced that the hearing of the cipher case against the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) chairman will be conducted in the Attock Jail due to security reasons. Resultantly, the Judge of the Special Court Abul Hasnaat went to Attock Jail on Wednesday morning and conducted the hearing of the case.

The law ministry issued a notification granting permission for the cipher case hearing against the former prime minister to take place in Attock jail. Earlier, a special court in Islamabad instructed Attock Jail authorities, where the former premier is detained, to keep the PTI chairman in judicial lockup due to the cipher case. The decision was made shortly after the Islamabad High Court (IHC) suspended the three-year sentence of PTI Chairman in the Toshakhana case.

Addressed to the superintendent of Attock jail, the special court's letter directed the



authorities to produce the PTI chief on August 30 for his involvement in the cipher case. The letter stated, "Accused residing in Zaman Park, Lahore, is hereby ordered for judicial remand in the case mentioned above, as he is already detained in district jail, Attock."

Notably, Azam Khan, former principal secretary to the PTI chairman and ex-prime minister made startling revelations by claiming that the former PM utilized a US cipher for "political gains" and to prevent a no-confidence motion against him. Azam Khan, previously missing for months, resurfaced and made these revelations regarding the US cipher while providing his statement under Cr PC 164 before a magistrate.

IHC suspends the sentence of Imran Khan

The Islamabad High Court suspended the sentence of PTI chairman in the Toshakhana case on Tuesday (August 29). The trial court judge Humayun Dilawar had awarded three years imprisonment to the PTI chief in this case in the first week of August. The court ordered the immediate release of

Imran Khan from Attock Jail. The IHC bench announced the verdict through its short order. A two-member bench of the IHC led by Chief Justice Aamir Farooq announced the reserved verdict on Tuesday.

Earlier, before the announcement of the IHC decision, PTI chief's lawyer and PPP leader Latif Khosa said that the court would suspend the sentence of Imran Khan. He, nonetheless, claimed that the former prime minister could be arrested in the Cipher Case.

Meanwhile, on Monday (August 28), the IHC said that it is announcing its reserved verdict on August 29 in the Toshakhana case sentence for PTI chief. The IHC also told the PTI and ECP lawyers that it is announcing the decision on Tuesday morning. Earlier, the two-member bench of the IHC reserved its verdict in this case. In this case, the PTI chairman challenged the sentence given by the trial court judge Humayun Dilawar.

The IHC bench led by Chief Justice Aamir Farooq heard the case on Monday. After hearing arguments, the bench reserved the



verdict and announced it on the following day. The Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) lawyer Amjad Parvez completed his arguments in this case.

During the last hearing, PTI lawyer Latif Khosa completed his arguments. In the first week of August, a trial court sentenced the PTI chief to three years in prison and imposed a fine of Rs 100,000. PTI chief challenged the verdict in the IHC for his release and the suspension of the conviction.

Suspension of sentence and Imran Khan's disqualification

Legal experts emphasized that the suspension of the former prime minister's sentence in the Toshakhana case by the Islamabad High Court (IHC) does not reverse his disqualification and conviction. These rulings will continue to be in effect until the court reaches a decision on the primary appeal that challenges the verdict.

Earlier this month, a district and sessions court in the federal capital had sentenced the PTI chief to three years in prison and a fine of Rs 100,000 due to his involvement in corrupt practices linked to the state gift repository. This conviction led to his ineligibility to participate in upcoming

elections. On Tuesday, the IHC suspended the former PM's sentence in the Toshakhana case and directed authorities to grant him bail.

However, the court announced that it would release a comprehensive verdict later, outlining the reasons behind the suspension of the trial court's three-year prison sentence.

Advocate Hafiz Ahsan Ahmed provided insight into the IHC's abbreviated ruling, stating that the suspension was not unexpected, given the three-year sentence. Nonetheless, Ahmed clarified that the PTI chief's conviction and disqualification would persist. He explained, "The decision to suspend a sentence is never based on the merits of the case. One of the grounds for suspension could be the delay in scheduling the main appeal's hearing in the high court. Another reason is the punishment being under five years, as it was in this case—three years."

Lawyer Raja Khalid remarked that the IHC's verdict was conventional. He clarified that short sentences, like the three-year punishment in this case, often result in petitions filed under Section 426 of the Code of Criminal Procedure, seeking suspension of the sentence for the time

being. He underlined that suspension of sentence was a common occurrence for three-year punishments. He also suggested that the backlog of cases might cause delays in the court's decision on the main appeal, potentially taking more than six months. However, he reiterated that the conviction and disqualification would persist.

In response to the IHC's short verdict, Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) leaders Atta Tarar and Azam Nazir Tarar weighed in. Former law minister Tarar pointed out that only the sentence had been suspended, while the conviction remained intact. He cautioned the PTI against premature celebrations and criticized the transformation of Toshakhana gifts into a profitable business.

Meanwhile, Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) Barrister Ali Zafar expressed contentment with the high court's decision to suspend Khan's sentence. Zafar remarked that the case should not be assigned to the same judge, and he anticipated the subsequent stages of the legal process, involving the main appeal.

"In stage two, the matter will either be settled or sent back for a mistrial," Zafar explained, highlighting Khan's role as the chairman of the party.



Inflated Power Bills Land Caretaker Govt in Trouble: Nationwide Protests Continue

By Javed Mahmood

The caretaker government officials have been holding meetings for the past three consecutive days to find a solution to inflated bills and subsequent nationwide protests. However, till Wednesday (Aug 30), the government could not do anything except send a request to the International Monetary Fund, seeking permission to reduce the electricity bills of consumers.

Amid ongoing countrywide protests against inflated electricity bills, the federal cabinet held another important meeting on Tuesday (August 29), but it could announce relief for the masses affected by inflation. Instead, it decided to seek approval from the International Monetary Fund (IMF) before moving forward with any proposal. Caretaker Prime Minister Anwaar-ul-Haq Kakar presided over the cabinet meeting, during which proposals to provide relief to consumers using up to 400 units per month for August and September were discussed.

After attending the cabinet meeting, Caretaker Information Minister Murtaza Solangi stated that the government would announce its decision within the next few hours, after involving the IMF in the process. A statement released by his office on Tuesday night mentioned that Caretaker Finance Minister Dr. Shamshad Akhtar was in contact with IMF officials regarding this matter, referring to his conversation with a private television channel.

The minister highlighted that various proposals were discussed in the cabinet meeting, and some of them received approval. Solangi emphasized that involving the IMF was essential for certain decisions. Solangi pointed out that the caretaker cabinet had decided to take measures to provide relief to power consumers without negatively impacting the primary surplus and circular debt.



The federal cabinet meeting lasted approximately two hours and approved some of the proposals presented by the Power Division. As per the decision made by the federal cabinet, power tariffs would not be reduced. However, consumers using up to 400 units per month for August and September would receive relief through adjustments over the next six months. The cabinet expressed significant concern over the nationwide demonstrations against electricity bills. Simultaneously, it acknowledged that the government's actions were constrained due to the IMF agreement.

The Power Division also briefed the federal cabinet about the provision of free electricity to VVIPs, VIPs, and employees of power distribution companies. The cabinet decided to thoroughly examine this matter, ensuring careful decision-making and accurate communication with the public. It's worth noting that the caretaker prime minister had given a 48-hour deadline to relevant authorities to propose relief measures for power consumers. Demonstrations

continued across the country for the fifth consecutive day on Tuesday, with protesters publicly burning bills and refusing to pay them.

The decision was prompted by a challenging fiscal situation, driven by the need to achieve the primary deficit and circular debt targets agreed upon with the lender. To collect dues from consumers using up to 400 units in August and September, the government would need IMF staff endorsement. Additionally, the government would need to implement Quarterly Tariff Adjustments (QTAs) ranging from Rs4 to 6 per unit over four to six months. These proposals require cabinet approval before being presented to the IMF.

The drastic depreciation of the rupee against the dollar led to increased capacity payments, now totaling Rs2.2 trillion. Coupled with higher policy rates, borrowing costs for local power producers surged. As a result, the government chose to stagger the electricity bill increase for consumers using up to 400 units, with no relief for those exceeding this limit. Due to the

lowest domestic savings rate in South Asia, Pakistan relied on foreign savings, particularly from independent power producers (IPPs), to invest in the power sector. Unsustainable methods initially stabilized the exchange rate, but the scarcity of dollars exposed exchange rate vulnerability. The rupee-dollar rate crossed Rs300 in the interbank market, with even higher rates in the open market.

The official highlighted that even if other power factors remained constant, the exchange rate devaluation alone would have led to a two-thirds increase in electricity prices. Limited fiscal space prevented the country from constructing domestic power plants with domestic resources. Now, under the IMF program, the government's options to provide fiscal incentives to the power sector are to increase the primary deficit or allow an increase in circular debt. These approved proposals will be presented to the IMF for endorsement, and upon approval, the government will announce its relief package for power consumers.

Traders and Jamaat-e-Islami announce strike

On September 1, the business community of Karachi will actively participate in a shutter-down strike to protest against the inflated electricity bills and the escalating inflation. Sharjeel Goplani, President of the All-City Traders Association, stated that all markets in Karachi will close on Friday as a sign of protest against the inflated electricity bills and the increasing inflation. This decision has gained support from various other trade unions, all of which have confirmed that all markets in Karachi will effectively shut down on September 1.

Additionally, Rizwan Irfan, President of the Karachi Electronics Dealers Association, has issued a warning that a strike will be initiated if Sharjeel Goplani's pre-arrest bail expires. Furthermore, the All Pakistan Trade Association has declared a nationwide shutter-down strike for August 31 (Thursday) as a response to the inflated bills. The association has urged the government to develop policies that prioritize the welfare of the people. They emphasized

that authorities should discontinue the provision of free electricity units for government officials.

Simultaneously, the issue of inflated power bills has sparked protests across the country, from Karachi to Khyber. In certain areas, these protests have turned violent. The protesting masses are demanding an end to the provision of free electricity to privileged individuals and are seeking relief, as the received bills surpass their salaries. Protest demonstrations took place in various parts of Karachi, with people carrying banners and placards, accompanied by their children, expressing their frustration towards the government's impact on their lives.



Jamaat-e-Islami calls nationwide Strike on Sept 2

In protest against the surge in electricity prices, the Jamaat-e-Islami (JI) has declared its intention to stage a nationwide strike on September 2nd. The decision emerged from a JI meeting led by the party's chief, Sirajul Haq, in Lahore. JI spokesperson Qaiser Shareef affirmed that they have established committees to coordinate the strike.

As outlined by the spokesperson, Sirajul Haq is scheduled to meet with trade organizations tomorrow. The spokesperson also indicated that people from all walks of

life are gearing up to participate in the upcoming nationwide strike. Notably, the spokesperson acknowledged the substantial support from industrialists and traders for the strike initiative. Emphasizing a commitment to peaceful protests against inflation, the spokesperson outlined a plan to sustain these demonstrations for the next five days. This strategy underscores the JI's concerted endeavor to articulate concerns about the escalating prices and their repercussions on the public.

The wave of protests against inflated power bills has reverberated throughout the country, with some protests taking a violent turn in certain areas. In Karachi, citizens raised their voices against the high

bills issued by K-Electric, citing bill amounts that exceeded their earnings. In Peshawar, citizens expressed their dissatisfaction, while in Rawalpindi, protesters set bills ablaze and demanded the elimination of imposed electricity taxes. Similar demonstrations unfolded in various other cities, including Gujranwala, Narowal, Attock, Sargodha, Haripur, and numerous others. The widespread public outcry underscores the mounting frustration triggered by the amplified financial burden arising from elevated electricity tariffs. This sentiment has ignited widespread protests and fervent appeals for relief from the escalating costs.

Balancing Act: Navigating Energy Tariffs, Subsidies, and IMF Obligations in Pakistan



By Mehtab Haider

Amid increasing reliance on the continuation of the IMF-sponsored program, the caretaker government has been facing immense pressures to hike electricity and gas tariffs in order to keep the Fund program afloat while on the other hand, the inflation-stricken masses came out on roads to protest for paying unbearable utility bills.

The IMF is expected to hold the parleys for the first review on the basis of the macro-economic for the first quarter (July-September) by the end of October or early November 2023 in order to qualify for staff-level agreement and then for making a request to approve the second instalment of \$700 million under \$3 billion Standby Arrangement (SBA) program.

The Fund has put in place the cash-bleeding energy sector position in the proper context by arguing in its review report that the energy sector's long precarious situation has become acute, with severe liquidity pressures now adding to the continued over-accumulation of unsustainable payment arrears in the shape of Circular Debt (CD).

This situation has built up over the past decade on the back of "slow reform" to address deep-seated deficiencies that create operational losses and raise generation costs, aggravated by political reluctance to pass through international commodity prices, currency depreciation, and financial and other costs to tariffs, and repeatedly granting new unbudgeted, untargeted subsidies.

This was demonstrated again by the further deterioration in the power sector in FY23, with substantial unexpected additional budgetary subsidy needs amid a higher-than-expected arrears accumulation, binding liquidity constraints, and increased recourse to supply shortages with regular widespread power outages (load shedding).

The circular debt continued mounting up and touched new heights of Rs 2.5 trillion in March 2023 or 3 percent of GDP mainly on account of CD flow overruns of Rs 387 billion (0.5 percent of GDP) relative to the Circular Debt Management Plan (CDMP) from early-FY23.

Key drivers were policy slippages (mostly

from new unbudgeted, untargeted energy subsidies for exporters and agriculture, and some deferred tariff adjustments for certain residential consumers) and slow progress with structural cost-side reforms.

Amid mounting liquidity pressures for fuel inputs, debt payments, and capacity charges to independent power producers (IPPs), the authorities took a set of corrective socially-balanced measures from March 2023 to contain both the FY23 budget subsidy (to 1.1 percent of GDP) and CD flow (to 0.4 percent of GDP).

Also enshrined in their cabinet-adopted FY23 CDMP update in February 2023, these measures (worth 0.2 percent of GDP in FY23 alone) not only helped catch up with the deferred tariff adjustments, but also permanently (i) expand the base and level of the debt service surcharge; and (ii) remove all new unbudgeted subsidies.

The PDM-led regime cabinet adopted an updated FY24 Circular Debt Management Plan (CDMP) in July 2023 with measures to help contain the budgeted FY24 power subsidy to Rs 976 billion (0.9 percent of

GDP). The FY24 power subsidy also allowed CD stock payments of Rs 392 billion (0.4 percent of GDP) to compensate for the projected FY24 CD flow of PRs 392 billion and stabilise the FY24 CD stock at desired levels.

“Timely alignment of power tariffs with cost recovery levels along the established tariff structure that protects the poor through lifeline and protected tariffs. The IMF Staff stressed that regular tariff adjustments—in line with established formulas for the one Annual Rebasing (AR), four quarterly tariff adjustments (QTAs), and twelve monthly fuel price adjustments (FPAs) per FY—are critical to implement the CDMP, halt CD accumulation, limit fiscal pressures, lend credibility to the National Electric Power Regulatory Authority (NEPRA), lower load shedding, and restore the viability of generators and ensure their ability to operate” the IMF staff added.

Pakistani authorities concur with the IMF that subsidy reform needs to continue to effectively protect the vulnerable, introduce more fairness, and reduce fiscal costs. Staff commended the authorities for committing to: (i) entering the third stage of their multi-year subsidy reform plan, supported by the World Bank, and submitting to cabinet a subsidy rationalisation reform plan for tube wells for large agricultural users by end-2023; and (ii) persevering with

regular tariff adjustments while sparing the lifeline and protected slabs, which will increase the progressivity of the tariff structure for residential consumers and improve fairness.

The authorities’ efforts remain geared toward reducing commercial losses, technical losses, and generation costs; improving governance and Purchasing Power Agreements (PPA) terms; increasing competition; and greening the energy mix. Staff therefore called on the authorities to speed up work, mainly supported by the World Bank and ADB, to: (i) improve price signals for inputs (including gas, to help channel the most expensive inputs to the most efficient power generators in line with the merit order principle); (ii) renegotiate remaining PPA in return for clearing unguaranteed CPPA arrears; (iii) convert publicly-guaranteed PHPL debt into cheaper public debt (along the 10-year repayment plan); (iv) expand renewable energy capacity; and (v) improve distribution efficiencies.

On the gas sector, the IMF assessed that partially available data suggests uncovered subsidies (especially for export and zero-rated industries). To avoid burdening the budget with additional subsidies, the authorities implemented a gas price hike in mid-February 2023: (i) of, on average, 75 percent as determined by the Oil and Gas Regulatory Authority (OGRA) in January

2023; and (ii) along an updated tariff slab system, which, developed with the support of the World Bank, ensures full cost recovery, affordability, and efficiency.

The IMF Staff reiterated the importance of persevering with regular biannual end-user gas price adjustments (as per established formulas and timelines), whilst sparing the protected slabs which protect the most vulnerable consumers. Besides, Staff encouraged the authorities to work with the World Bank on: (i) preparing guidelines for OGRA to implement the Weighted-Average Cost of Gas pricing (WACOG) law adopted in March 2022 for the next regular OGRA determination; (ii) creating reliable CD data, management, and projection capacity; and (iii) implementing cost-reducing reforms (notably to reduce UFG losses, including through infrastructure improvements, network rehabilitation, and theft control).

However, the government has not notified the tariff determined by OGRA so it might become a thorny issue in the upcoming review talks with the IMF.

In the wake of rising inflationary pressures, the government will have to work hard to continue the completion of the IMF program along with protecting the lower-income as well as middle-income earners to avoid falling below the poverty line during the Fund program period.



The Economy of Pakistan again appears in reverse gear

The business community, exporters, industrialists, and consumers are bemoaning the IMF-driven frequent increase in power, gas tariffs, and hikes in domestic petroleum prices. This situation is again dragging the country towards an economic mess day by day.



By J. Choudhry

After the approval of the IMF loan, everyone in the country and abroad was anticipating economic revival and stability in Pakistan. However, things have gone the wrong way and the economy of Pakistan has, once again, landed into reverse gear especially after the caretaker government came to power. The foreign exchange reserves, stock market, remittances, exports, and value of rupee are steadily declining with the passage of time.

Additionally, the business community, exporters, industrialists, and consumers are bemoaning the IMF-driven frequent increase in power, gas tariffs, and hikes in domestic petroleum prices. This situation is dragging the country towards an economic mess day by day. It appears that in the next three to four months, once again Pakistan will be struggling with the default-like situation. The ongoing IMF program is expiring by March 2024, but before that, the economy of the country and the consumers, including business persons, will be in serious trouble just because of the rapid deterioration in the key economic indica-

tors especially the regular devaluation of the rupee.

On August 25, 2023, the dollar-rupee exchange rate widened to 316 rupees in the open market trading. It shows an increase of 25 rupees since August 9, 2023, when the previous government dissolved the National Assembly. At that time, the dollar-rupee exchange rate was fluctuating around 291 rupees. However, in the inter-bank trading, the exchange rate of the dollar to a PKR increased by 13 rupees during this period as it increased to a record high mark of 301 rupees on August 25, from 287 rupees on August 9, when the Shehbaz Sharif-led government hand over power to the caretakers.

Notably, when the IMF released \$1.2 billion for Pakistan on July 13, a day after its board approved a stand-by arrangement for Pakistan, at that time the dollar-rupee value was hovering around 278 rupees in the inter-bank and 282 in the open market trading. Nevertheless, as the IMF has linked its bailout program with the free float

of the dollar and curb-free imports, the value of the dollar has surged to a record high level these days.

Surprisingly, after the approval of the IMF loan for Sri Lanka, the value of the Sri Lankan has improved to 320 rupees to a dollar. However, in the case of Pakistan, the situation has moved in the wrong direction after the release of the IMF loan. It is a fact that some of the IMF's conditions are constantly derailing the economy of Pakistan and making life miserable for consumers and business persons across the country. As much value, as the US dollar gains, so much pain will be passed on to the consumers. And it is the law and dictation of the IMF.

Current Account Deficit Widens in July 2023

The current account figures for July 2023 indicate that the policymakers might be haunted by the state of the current account balance. After maintaining a positive trajectory for four consecutive months and

achieving a surplus of \$334 million in June, which contributed to a cumulative surplus of \$1.4 billion from March to June 2023, the trend has now reversed. In July 2023, the current account deficit reached \$809 million, marking the highest deficit since FY23 and raising concerns about the already fragile economy.

In comparison to the substantial current account deficit of \$17.5 billion in FY22, the deficit in FY23 has shrunk by 85.14% to settle at \$2.6 billion, primarily due to import restrictions implemented as a policy measure by the PML-N-led coalition government. Amidst low reserves and stalled talks with the IMF, the government pursued import restrictions, leading to a 43% reduction in the trade deficit to \$27.55 billion, down from \$48.35 billion in the same period the previous year.

Exports, Imports, and Remittances

Imports also plummeted by 31%, settling at \$55.29 billion compared to \$80.13 billion in FY22. Conversely, export earnings failed to show a significant increase, reaching \$27.74 billion, a decrease from \$31.78 billion in FY22. Remittances also slowed down, falling to \$27 billion from \$31.3 billion during the same period last year. This strategy aimed to align import expenses within the range of export and remittance earnings.

Given the growing deficit in July 2023 and the anticipated challenges ahead, it's clear that the current account deficit isn't unprecedented. One of the conditions set by the IMF was the removal of import restrictions, a move that was expected to impact the country's external account position and lead to mounting deficits. As the import backlog is cleared, this is likely to exacerbate the external account position at a time when exports are stagnant and remittances are subdued, partly due to the preference for informal banking channels by overseas residents.

While imports for July 2023 stood at \$4.2 billion, the simultaneous decline of 12.7% in exports and 7.3% in remittances contributed to the current account deficit. Considering the current scenario, the country's external account position is expected to worsen. The situation is further

complicated by the rising prices of crude oil in the international market. With OPEC+ crude protection at its lowest point since August 2021 and the potential for higher prices due to the economic rebound in China, the pressure on import costs, particularly in the petroleum group, could strain the economy.

This pressure on the external account position is likely to lead to currency depreciation, as evidenced by the Pakistani Rupee crossing the 300/\$ threshold. This situation will also test the stability of the country's reserves, which are heavily reliant on funding from various sources including the IMF. If imports were to increase to a monthly average of \$6 billion while exports and remittances remained unchanged, the situation could become even more challenging.



In the realm of Pakistan-IMF negotiations on circular debt reduction, the government engaged in a virtual meeting with the IMF to discuss energy sector losses and strategies to tackle circular debt during the current fiscal year. The aim was to find solutions to eliminate accumulating circular debt.

Circular Debt Crisis

To address circular debt, the Pakistani government made adjustments to fuel prices and introduced quarterly tariff revisions. They also shared a new Circular Debt Management Plan (CDMP) with the IMF. However, concerns were raised about the CDMP's sustainability due to declining recoveries, prompting the need for an effective strategy. Despite agreements with the IMF, the stability of the Pakistani rupee remains a challenge. The rupee's depreciation against the US Dollar has led to

increased demand for imported items and a rush to purchase dollars. This trend has been further fueled by a surge in imports, contributing to the currency's decline. The gap between interbank and open market rates has exceeded the recommended threshold set by the IMF. The decline in the local currency has implications for various sectors, including fuel, electricity, transport, and other goods prices. Despite the challenges, officials emphasize the potential for improvement as import payments decrease and regulatory authorities monitor unnecessary dollar purchases.

Declining Foreign Exchange Reserves

Moreover, the country's total liquid foreign exchange reserves decreased by \$131 million due to external debt servicing. The

State Bank of Pakistan's (SBP) weekly report indicated that total liquid foreign reserves stood at \$13.24 billion as of August 18, 2023, compared to \$13.38 billion on August 11, 2023. SBP's reserves decreased by \$125 million, while net foreign reserves held by commercial banks slightly declined by \$6 million.

\$601 billion Reserves of India

At present, the foreign exchange reserves of India have ballooned to \$601 billion in August 2023, showing a significant increase in comparison with \$578 billion reserves in March this year. The economy of India has been growing consistently, but the economy of Pakistan has been sinking steadily. Instead of repeating past mistakes, our "rulers" must learn something from India as both countries got independence simultaneously.

New Wave of Inflation and its Impact on Consumers



By Daniyal Wali

In the heart of South Asia, Pakistan is currently grappling with an economic conundrum of monumental proportions. The nation's economic landscape has been shaken by an unprecedented wave of inflation, sending shockwaves through its socioeconomic fabric. As the inflation rate surged to an alarming 38% in May 2023, the highest recorded since 1957, a grim reality has emerged: the common consumer is now at the forefront of this economic storm, facing a multitude of challenges that threaten their well-being and way of life. However, amidst the gloomy clouds of economic distress, a glimmer of hope emerged in June 2023. For the first time in seven months, the yearly inflation rate saw a decline, settling at 29.4%. This trend continued into July, further alleviating concerns as the rate dropped to 28.3%. Yet, these momentary respites offer only partial relief, as the intricate web of economic challenges suggests that the battle against inflation is far from won.

The hopes of the nation for relief were resting on the shoulders of the caretaker setup. However, soon after gaining power, the interim government increased the cost of petrol to 290 rupees after a substantial 17.50

rupee hike, while diesel reached 293 rupees following an even steeper increase of 20 rupees. Consequently, basic commodities have also experienced a steady ascent, placing strain on households already grappling with economic uncertainty. The rising tide extends to the energy sector, where electricity bills have surged, prompting widespread protests across the nation. Recently, people from Peshawar to Karachi, from Azad Jammu and Kashmir to other regions, came out in huge numbers and burned the electricity bills to stage a protest.

The human toll of this economic turmoil is perhaps the most distressing facet of Pakistan's predicament. Heart-wrenching stories of individuals resorting to extreme measures to cope with the escalating cost of living underscore the gravity of the situation. Tragically, suicides have become an alarming consequence of the burden of inflation. Beyond this, a surge in criminal activities, such as thefts, mirrors the palpable tension permeating society. In the tumultuous journey of Pakistan's economic odyssey, the consumer's experience serves as an emotional barometer of the nation's economic health. The inflationary spiral has infiltrated every aspect of daily life,

from purchasing groceries to paying utility bills. The consumer's struggle is multifaceted, encompassing not only the burden of increased costs but also the erosion of purchasing power, psychological stress, and a shifting socioeconomic landscape.

At the forefront of this new wave of inflation is the startling increase in the cost of basic commodities. The prices of essential food items, a cornerstone of any household budget, have risen precipitously. Families are forced to grapple with the harsh reality of spending more to put food on the table, stretching budgets that were already strained. What were once routine grocery purchases have now become fraught decisions, as consumers are forced to prioritize necessities amidst escalating costs. The rising tide of inflation extends its grip beyond the grocery store. The energy sector, a linchpin of modern life, has not been spared. As electricity bills surge in tandem with inflation, consumers find themselves trapped in a cycle of financial strain. The increase in utility bills presents a double-edged sword: not only does it deplete disposable income, but it also restricts the ability to maintain a comfortable standard of living. Basic amenities that

were once taken for granted now come with a hefty price tag, adding to the woes of the common consumer.

As prices rise, the consumer's purchasing power wanes, leading to a cascade of lifestyle adjustments. Non-essential expenditures are often the first to be sacrificed, as the focus shifts from discretionary spending to securing the essentials. Leisure activities, dining out, and entertainment become luxuries that many can ill-afford. The ripples of this consumer belt-tightening extend beyond personal pleasure, affecting industries that rely on discretionary spending for their livelihood.

Psychologically, the impact of this new wave of inflation cannot be underestimated. Consumers face not only the tangible struggle of making ends meet but also the intangible weight of financial stress. The constant juggling of bills, the worry about meeting obligations, and the uncertainty of the future cast a pall over daily life. This psychological toll has far-reaching consequences, affecting mental health, family dynamics, and the overall quality of life. The most heart-wrenching aspect of this crisis is the human toll it exacts. Reports of individuals resorting to extreme measures, including suicides, to cope with the financial strain paint a grim picture of the desperation that has taken root. Families torn apart, dreams deferred, and aspirations dashed—the human cost of inflation is immeasurable. Beyond the immediate

impact on individuals, the societal fabric itself bears scars as crime rates rise and tensions simmer.

In response to this economic upheaval, the interim government has a Herculean task at hand. Balancing the need for fiscal stability with the imperative to provide relief to the common consumer is a complex puzzle. Subsidies and support mechanisms may provide temporary respite, but a comprehensive, long-term strategy is needed to address the root causes of inflation and create sustainable economic conditions. The inflationary surge has generated a sense of unease and unpredictability that reverberates throughout Pakistan's economic landscape. Uncertainty tends to breed caution, prompting consumers to reconsider major financial decisions. This phenomenon ripples across various sectors—investment, real estate, and business expansion—where hesitancy to commit resources becomes the order of the day. Entrepreneurs and investors, unsure about the stability of prices and the future purchasing power of the population, may adopt a wait-and-watch approach, stalling economic growth and innovation.

In this landscape of uncertainty, planning for the future becomes an intricate puzzle. Families are forced to rethink their long-term financial goals and retirement plans as the stability of prices erodes. Businesses grapple with the challenge of forecasting costs and revenues, hindered by

the volatile economic environment. The uncertainty permeates the education sector as well, with families apprehensive about committing to the rising costs of higher education, leading to potential shifts in career choices and academic pursuits.

As Pakistan grapples with these challenges, it is imperative that a holistic approach be adopted—one that not only addresses the immediate concerns of inflation but also lays the groundwork for a resilient, inclusive economy. The common consumer, the lifeblood of any economy, deserves relief from the burden they bear. The way forward is arduous, but through effective policies, transparency, and the collective determination of the nation, the echoes of this new wave of inflation can be transformed into a clarion call for positive change.

To conclude, the ripple effects of Pakistan's soaring inflation extend beyond the immediate economic challenges to encompass a pervasive sense of uncertainty about the future. As consumers, businesses, and investors grapple with the unknown, the need for thoughtful and decisive action becomes paramount. By addressing the root causes of inflation, implementing effective central bank strategies, and fostering an environment of transparency, Pakistan can pave the way for a more stable and certain economic future—one where the echoes of uncertainty are replaced by the promise of resilience and prosperity.



Can Pakistan Become a Market of Tomorrow?



By Amir Jahangir

Pakistan's journey to becoming a 'Market of Tomorrow' has been hindered by various challenges in creating a cohesive economic narrative. Fragmented vision and political instability have led to inconsistent policies that have left investors uncertain about the country's economic prospects. Furthermore, negative perceptions, ineffective communication and recently, a significant emphasis on security concerns have overshadowed Pakistan's potential. To overcome these hurdles, a proactive and strategic approach is essential. Pakistan must develop a coherent economic strategy with long-term goals, continuity and stability.

The concept of competitiveness has evolved and is no longer defined merely by GDP figures. Instead, the emphasis is on delivering 'beyond-GDP goals'. Pakistan holds several competitive advantages, including a young, tech-savvy population and emerging sectors, such as the 'Orange Economy,' centred on knowledge and information generation.

Pakistan holds the potential to become the trade and transit hub, positioning itself as a strategic pivot for global commerce. By leveraging its geographical location and enhancing trade, Pakistan can foster region-

al connectivity and facilitate the seamless movement of goods and services. Special Economic Zones (SEZs) and export-oriented industries will further boost its trade capabilities, while digital infrastructure and a skilled workforce will drive innovation and efficiency in trade practices.

Pakistan has recently unveiled the 'Economic Revival Plan', a strategic blueprint that aims to harness the country's potential and elevate its global competitiveness. At the core of this ambitious endeavour lies a strategic focus on key sectors that can attract investments and drive growth. One such pillar is agriculture technologies (agri-tech), which holds the potential to revolutionise the agrarian landscape through modernisation and innovation. By adopting precision agriculture and sustainable practices, Pakistan can ensure food security, boost exports and enhance agricultural productivity.

However, challenges persist in the agricultural sector, with notable gaps between Pakistan's crop yields and international standards for major crops like wheat, rice, sugarcane, maize, gram and cotton. Inefficient irrigation practices, limited use of agri-tech tools, such as fertilisers, pesticides, and advanced seeds, reliance on

outdated crop varieties and limited access to credit are some of the factors hindering productivity. The 'Green Pakistan Initiative' aims to transform barren land into fertile ground, fostering increased productivity and revenues. Encouragingly, many Gulf countries have expressed interest in investing, leading the country to aspire for a transformative \$30-50 billion investment boost in the agriculture sector.

Pakistan also holds a unique geo-economic advantage, being in proximity to the world's two most populous countries, China and India. This favourable position opens up opportunities for Pakistan to become the breadbasket of the region. Southern Asia and China combined are home to over 3.5 billion people, constituting nearly 43% of the world's population. The vast potential market size presents a compelling incentive for Pakistan to harness its agricultural capabilities and cater to the growing food demand.

Pakistan embraces the concept of large-scale corporate farming, which offers the prospect of enhanced efficiencies and cost reductions in the long run; there is also growing emphasis on expanding cultivation to address food security challenges. The approach extends beyond simply improv-

ing yield benchmarks per hectare and aims to ensure a sustainable supply of food to meet the needs of the population.

On the energy front, Pakistan can take centre stage by harnessing its abundant natural resources. Embracing renewable energy sources like solar, wind and hydro-electric power not only guarantees energy security but also positions the country as a vanguard of sustainable development. Moreover, Pakistan's strategic positioning in the regional energy corridors, with gas and oil supplies from Kazakhstan, Iran, Russia and other Central Asian countries, bolsters its potential to emerge as a net energy exporter to Europe, China and Africa.

Venturing into the digital realm, Pakistan's vibrant tech-savvy population can fuel the rise of digital trade and e-commerce. With a large market eager to embrace digital solutions, the potential for growth in e-commerce platforms and digital trade is immense. By capitalising on this, Pakistan can tap into both domestic and international markets. Young Pakistanis are already making attractive incomes through opportunities on Amazon, Alibaba, Fiver, Upwork and other digital platforms.

Pakistan's youthful population requires accessible and quality education. EdTech initiatives have the potential to democratise education, offering e-learning platforms and skill development programmes. The shift from long-duration degree-based education is transitioning into a more skilled-centric ecosystem. Transformative and generative AI is creating opportunities for people to learn irrespective of the lines of divisions between literacy and illiteracy, language barriers and digital divides. With a population of 240 million plus, it has the potential to create a life-smart, jugar-centric (innovation-based) and solution-oriented population.

Pakistan's freelancing market has experienced remarkable growth, with an impressive 78% annual growth rate, making it the fourth fastest-growing country in the world. The Ministry of IT and Telecom has reported that the freelancing market has generated over \$500 million in the last year alone. The country currently boasts an estimated three million freelancers, with graphic

designing and web development emerging as the most sought-after skills. Pakistani freelancers are also making their mark in the international arena, earning an average hourly rate of \$20. The majority of these freelancers are under the age of 30, showcasing the potential of Pakistan's youth in driving growth in this sector. The country is also number one on multiple freelancing platforms, such as Upwork, Freelancer, Fiverr – a further testament to how the young generation can be part of the global value and supply chain of technology and of creative responsibilities. This potential is something that governments and the private sector should explore in the Orange Economy.



In fact, Pakistan holds immense potential for the Orange Economy, also known as the 'Creative Economy'. This sector encompasses creative industries, such as arts, culture, media, architecture, design, technology and video games. As creators, Pakistan's talented young can play a pivotal role in driving the growth and innovation of this sector on the global stage. In fact, the Orange Economy's role in income generation and job creation can contribute about 30 million jobs globally.

In Pakistan, nearly one-third of creative occupations are filled by people under 24, showcasing their significant participation in this sector. With a more strategic focus on local creativity and skills, the creative industries can contribute substantially to GDP and foster sustainable economic growth. However, to unlock this potential, it is essential to expand access to affordable and high-speed internet services, while the local creative industries must focus on

producing culturally relevant and diverse content that resonates with the Pakistani audience, while also creating native platforms and indigenous products to benefit local creators. Leveraging digital platforms and social media will empower creators to reach millions of users and foster engaged communities around their content.

Nurturing a supportive ecosystem for start-ups and creative entrepreneurs is equally critical. Initiatives like incubators, accelerators, and co-working spaces will cultivate creativity and innovation, offering access to funding, mentorship and networking opportunities that encourage individuals to turn their creative ideas into sustainable businesses.

To achieve excellence, Pakistan must undertake certain fundamental steps. Firstly, by enhancing accountability to ensure transparency in financial and performance aspects as well as by promoting transparency through open government mechanisms and data-driven policies. Embracing data for policy designs and implementations is crucial. Secondly, by establishing a "Prosperity Council" (promoting reforms and optimising strategic plans for economic resurgence and inclusive growth) with a team of apolitical experts focused on implementing reforms based on professional expertise and knowledge. This approach will foster transparency, efficiency and effectiveness in addressing critical issues.

With innovative thinking and a commitment to growth, Pakistan can become a beacon of opportunity, attracting investments and shaping a vibrant and diverse economy on the global stage.

Ayeza Khan Dazzles in Emerald Green Saree

The gorgeous actress once again makes a strong fashion statement

By Sher Alam

The always stunning, Ayeza Khan captured the hearts of fans once again with her impeccable style and grace.

The Mein star looked absolutely stunning in an emerald green saree adorned with intricate embroidery.

Ayeza shared glimpses of her latest photo-shoot with fans, showcasing her ethereal beauty in an elegant ensemble from the collection of renowned fashion designer Nomi Ansari.

Ayeza Khan's choice of attire perfectly complemented her demeanor, highlighting her sophisticated taste in fashion. The saree featured exquisite embroidery that added a touch of traditional elegance to the modern design, making her look effortlessly chic.

Not only did the actress's attire stand out, but her makeup was also flawlessly done, enhancing her features and adding a touch of glamour to the overall look. Ayeza's choice of statement earrings added a touch of sparkle, completing the ensemble with a touch of sophistication.

Ayeza Khan is one of the most famous Pakistani actresses of her generation. She is a household name and a mainstay in showbiz with her amazing acting skills in hit shows such as Laapata, Chupke Chupke, and Mere Pass Tum Ho to name a few.

Known for her versatility and acting prowess, Ayeza Khan's fashion choices also consistently make headlines. Whether it's on-screen performances or off-screen appearances, she manages to captivate her audience with her timeless beauty and impeccable sense of style.

With each appearance, Ayeza Khan continues to set new fashion trends and inspire her fans to experiment with their own style choices.

Courtesy propakistani.pk





Automobile financing showed a 21% decline, falling to Rs 285 billion

By Kanwal Munir

In July 2023, the central bank's data revealed that automobile financing in Pakistan dropped to Rs285.19 billion. This represents a 20.90% year-on-year (YoY) decrease and a 2.91% month-on-month (MoM) decrease compared to Rs360.55 billion in July 2022 and Rs293.73 billion in June 2023, respectively.

The decline can primarily be attributed to higher interest rates, rising car prices, regulatory restrictions on loan acquisition, and increased taxes on automobile imports and parts. According to the State Bank of Pakistan (SBP) data, consumer financing for house construction reached Rs211.11 billion by the end of July 2023, marking a 4.82% YoY increase, primarily due to SBP's efforts to promote housing and construction in the country.

However, on a monthly basis, house construction financing remained nearly unchanged, with a 0.57% decline. Meanwhile, personal use financing amounted to Rs250.24 billion, reflecting a 0.09% YoY decrease. Similarly, on a monthly basis, financing for this category decreased by 0.95%. As a result, the total credit disbursed to consumers increased to Rs851.22 billion during the review month, showing a 4.70% YoY decrease and a 0.99% MoM decrease. Outstanding credit to the private sector decreased by 0.06% YoY and 1.12% MoM, reaching Rs8.19 trillion in July 2023. Loans to the manufacturing sector increased by 1.12% YoY, totaling Rs4.48 trillion in the review period. However, on a monthly basis, loans to this sector decreased by 1.44% MoM.

Borrowing from the construction sector amounted to Rs190.23 billion in July 2023, reflecting a 1.89% YoY increase and a slight 0.01% MoM decrease. Simultaneously, loans to the agriculture, forestry, and fishing sectors rose to Rs346.17 billion in the month under review, representing a 6.23% YoY increase. On a sequential basis, loans to this sector recorded a 0.53% MoM increase. Thus there seems a decrease in automobile financing.



Automobile sales dropped 56% in FY2023

According to the Pakistan Automotive Manufacturers Association (PAMA), the fiscal year 2022-23 witnessed a significant blow to the Pakistani automobile industry as car sales plummeted by 56% to a mere 126,879 units. This considerable decline can be primarily attributed to several factors, including the unavailability of completely knocked-down kits (CKDs), elevated car prices, a surge in auto financing, and the limited purchasing power of consumers.

In June 2023, monthly car sales experienced a staggering year-on-year drop of 79%, with only 6,034 units sold. However, it's worth noting that these sales marked a 10% improvement compared to May. Auto sales declined due to government-imposed restrictions on LCs for completely knocked-down (CKD) kits, along with persistent increases in car prices and ongoing interest rate hikes. Honda Atlas Car saw the most substantial month-on-month increase of 253%, reaching 307 units in June. This was largely due to a lower base from the previous month and the availability of parts.

Pak Suzuki experienced a modest 2% month-on-month growth, reaching 3,009

units in June, driven by a 67% surge in Bolan sales. However, the company's bookings plunged by 57%, totaling 65,364 units in the fiscal year 2022-23. Indus Motor Company, responsible for assembling Toyota cars, witnessed a 7% growth in monthly bookings, totaling 1,846 units in June. However, the company's total car sales for the fiscal year 2022-23 dropped by 58% year-on-year to 31,104 units. Hyundai Nishat Motor observed an 11% month-on-month sales increase, with Tucson sales rising by 61% to 313 units and Elantra sales increasing by 28% to 88 units in June. In the tractor segment, Millat Tractors (MTL) experienced a 42% month-on-month increase in bookings, reaching 2,136 units in June. Meanwhile, Al Ghazi Tractors (AGTL) reported sales of 854 units, down by 57%.

Overall, total tractor industry sales for the fiscal year 2022-23 reached 30,942 units, reflecting a 48% decrease due to factors like floods, plant shutdowns, reduced consumer buying power, and elevated prices. The high-interest rates and substantial increases in auto prices due to the rupee's depreciation against the dollar would continue to negatively impact auto sales in the fiscal year 2024. Also, restrictions on LCs for CKD imports by auto assemblers could lead to reduced plant capacity utilization and, in extreme cases, plant shutdowns.

Challenges and Complexities: Unraveling Security Dynamics in Afghanistan-Pakistan Border Region

By Syed Fakhar KaKaKheh

After the attack on the security forces in South Waziristan, the Army Chief gave a clear message on the occasion of his visit to Peshawar and said that operations against the militants would continue until they surrender.

“The surge in terrorism in recent past is a futile effort on the part of terrorists to get the talks re-initiated, however, there is no option for these terrorists except to submit to the writ of state of Pakistan before they are decimated, if they persist on their wrong path,” COAS General Asim Munir was quoted by the military’s media wing, ISPR. The army chief reiterated the resolve of the Pakistan Army, Frontier Corps (FC) and other law enforcement agencies in their fight against terrorism. “He [Gen Munir] showed resolve to finish peril of Narco which is becoming a lifeline for these TTP Khawarij,” the ISPR said.

General Asim Munir also stated that “propaganda by inimical forces” against the armed forces will be dealt with as per the law.

On the other hand, attacks on police and security forces are continuing in the southern districts of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. After Pakistan’s objection that Afghanistan’s land is being used against Pakistan, Afghan Interior Minister Sirajuddin Haqqani stated to the media that after his arrival on August 15, 2021, he tried to talk to the Pakistani Taliban and the Pakistani government at the negotiating table. However, after the change of government in Pakistan, that process got stuck. The Afghan Minister maintained that peace and harmony are internal problems of Pakistan.

Pakistan believes that the top leaders of Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan are sitting in Afghanistan and targeting Pakistan, and expects the Afghan Taliban to take action against them. Meanwhile, a section in Pakistan also believes that



Pakistan itself should take action against the hideouts of Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan near the border.

All these advancements are responses to specific events. However, when we examine the current realities on the ground, they often diverge significantly from these reactions.

Until the present day, a portion of Pakistan has maintained the belief that a distinction exists between the Afghan Taliban and the Pakistani Taliban, viewing them as separate entities. This perception was even shared by the former ISI Chief, the late General Hameed Gul. However, the reality is that both historically and presently, Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan operates under the authority of the Afghan Taliban’s leader. During earlier times, they recognized Mullah Muhammad Umar as Ameerul Momineen (Commander of the Faithful), and today they acknowledge Mullah Haibatullah Akhund, the leader of the Afghan Taliban, as their Ameer. This information is documented. Should either the Pakistani or Afghan Taliban refute this

reality, it would be regarded as a straightforward falsehood.

It was taken as a surprise when the British High Commissioner asked the Afghan Taliban to take action against the Haqqani network. Reportedly, British High Commissioner in Pakistan Jane Marriot said the Afghan Taliban must control the Haqqani Network and other terror organisations, adding that the terrorists were a threat to not only Pakistan but also the entire world if they were not stopped. The reality is somehow different as these are the Haqqanis which rule Kabul, capital of Afghanistan. Sirajuddin Haqqani, leader of the Haqqani Network, is the Interior Minister in the current interim Afghan setup.

A senior member of the Afghan Taliban Anas Haqqani, in reaction to comments of the UK High Commissioner to Pakistan Jane Marriott, said online that “Marriott is still not able to see the facts beyond the thick curtain of propaganda.”

“A cruel war, started under the pretext

of terrorism ended with the defeat of invaders. Those who were blacklisted by countries/entities are now rulers of this land, widely popular amongst their people. There is no such thing as a 'network'; it's one country, system and leadership", he added.

previous regime, a large number of militants and their facilitators are present inside Pakistan. The new situation in Afghanistan has not only affected Pakistan but also another neighbouring country to Afghanistan, Iran is no longer safe. In recent days, there have been several attacks

gatherings, Barrister Mohammad Ali Saif, the spokesperson for the former provincial government, repeatedly expressed the idea that if these elements were resettled in the former Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA), issues would be averted. This stance and perspective fostered a sense of distrust within the state and the Pashtun Tahafuz Movement (PTM), ultimately leading to PTM's demonstrations. Even in the present day, the PTM remains convinced that the government aims to plunge the former FATA region back into turmoil and lawlessness.

However, in a clear address to the Tribal Jirga in Peshawar, Army Chief General Asim Munir categorically stated that negotiations with armed groups would not be pursued. The current military leadership, as with other issues, finds itself dealing with the consequences of past leadership's errors.

The assertion made by the Army Chief that negotiations will henceforth be conducted with the Afghan Interim Government presents a lasting solution to the predicament. Pakistan possesses substantial evidence that can be presented and deliberated upon with the Afghan Taliban. To initiate this process, Pakistan's Special Envoy to Afghanistan, Asif Durrani, could visit Kabul to establish an environment and mechanism that will pave Pakistan's path forward. Subsequently, a comprehensive and sovereign Jirga could be convened, featuring representatives from both sides of the border and special delegates from neighbouring nations. In the ensuing phase, the Pakistani state would furnish evidence to this Jirga and empower it to arrive at a decision. This approach would compel the Afghan Taliban to respect the Jirga's verdict. Similarly, neighbouring countries could adopt this same mechanism to ameliorate their security-related concerns and enhance their relations with Afghanistan.

Regarding Afghanistan, a recent United Nations report has raised apprehensions about the worsening security conditions. However, this report's findings have been refuted by Zabihullah Mujahid, the spokesperson for the Afghan Taliban. He went so far as to assert that the presence of the Pakistani Taliban, Al-Qaeda, and Daesh (ISIS) is nonexistent within Afghanistan.



Coming to the role of Afghan Interior Minister Sirajuddin Haqqani, it seems that he is avoiding taking action against the Pakistani Taliban. While looking at the ground realities one can find that the fighters of Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan are the assets of the Haqqani network. The strength and influence of the Haqqani network extends to Paktia, Paktika, Khost and Nangarhar in Afghanistan, while the Pakistani regions of North Waziristan, South Waziristan, Bannu and Kurram have the highest concentration of their fighters. Now these are the Pakistani areas where Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan meant the Haqqani network. These people have resisted military operations, countered drones and laid down their lives for the Haqqani network. In such a situation, it is naive to expect that the Afghan Interior Minister will take action against his fighters.

As far as militancy-based activities are concerned in Pakistan, it is also a fact that apart from the militants released by the

in Iran that involved militants from Afghanistan.

Concerning the negotiations, the most significant hurdle emerged from within the ranks of Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan itself. Certain hard-line factions within the organization held the view that just as they collaborated with the Afghan Taliban to topple the government of former President Dr. Ashraf Ghani and compel the withdrawal of the American coalition forces from Afghanistan, a similar approach should be replicated within Pakistan. These factions advocate for a global caliphate.

During the previous negotiation attempts, Pakistan demonstrated a vulnerability by unconditionally releasing imprisoned TTP fighters without stipulating any conditions. Witnessing the government's willingness to exhibit flexibility, the leaders of Tehreek-e-Taliban insisted on carving out a distinct region for themselves. In discreet

BRICS plus six

By Maheen Shafeeq

In 2001, Goldman Sachs chief economist Jim O'Neill coined the acronym BRIC in a research paper, predicting a potential club of emerging economies. From there, BRIC grew and had its first summit in 2009. South Africa was accepted as a full member in 2010, and the group was renamed BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa).

Last week, BRICS held its 15th summit in Johannesburg, South Africa from August 22 to August 24 where the prominent agendas of the debate were the further expansion of BRICS and de-dollarization.

On the subject of expansion, South African officials have reported that more than 40 countries have expressed interest in joining BRICS, while about 20 applications for membership were received. Among the applicants, divergences in political systems, economies, cultures, and even diplomatic positions remained obvious.

However, the prominent commonality across the application remained hailing from the Global South. Many analysts have assumed the group to be a counter to the Global North's G7. However, G7 is an exclusive group which does not accept more members. In contrast, BRICS has expansion plans.

China views expansion as the most critical factor of BRICS. Many Western analysts argue that BRICS offers China a forum to expand its influence and cast itself as a champion of the developing world and the Global South. India, in strategic rivalry with China, has been competing for the status of the leader of the Global South. However, when it came to the expansion of BRICS membership to countries in the Global South, India proposed stringent criteria.

India's proposal requires that members have a certain GDP and should not be the target of international sanctions. This is strange since Russia, India's historical strategic partner and also a member of BRICS, is under international sanctions. This shows the complexities that India has put itself in.



Brazil, regardless of having a similar non-alignment foreign policy as India, believes adding its regional neighbours, buried under inflation, will relieve them from the Western financial system. Russia, at war with the West, has also shown enthusiasm towards ending the West's neocolonialism by adding new members to its alternative system.

It was highly anticipated that the recently held BRICS summit would add new members. As per reports from Johannesburg, BRICS has decided to invite six new members – Argentina, Egypt, Iran, Ethiopia, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates. This shows that expansion is underway, and it yet remains to be seen how the new enlarged group will be able to forge convergences.

The matter of de-dollarization is highly polarized. While some believe that it is inevitable, others believe in the irreversible supremacy of the US dollar. It is undeniable that efforts towards de-dollarization are gaining some momentum through BRICS.

The New Development Bank (NDB) was established by BRICS members in 2015 with its headquarters in Shanghai, China, which is argued as an alternative option to the IMF and the World Bank. The NDB lends loans in Chinese renminbi and is expected to start lending and trading in South African, Brazilian and Indian currencies soon.

The NDB ceased structuring loans in US dollars and euros in 2021, which shows measures towards reducing the use of Western currencies and the expected use of currencies of BRICS nations. So far this is the only platform of such a kind. Although nations have started using other currencies for trading, such as Pakistan and India paid for Russian oil in the Chinese currency recently, these are sporadic incidents.

The invitation to oil-exporting countries such as Saudi Arabia, Iran, and the United Arab Emirates, shows that there is a great enthusiasm towards ditching the petrodollar. So far, further acceptance into BRICS has remained unclear; however, oil-exporting countries stand a high chance of acceptance into the BRICS to end the dollar fanfare.

Some analysts have argued that the choice of trading currency depends on the oil-importing country, and as the Western countries, especially the US is one of the major oil-import, the dominance of the petrodollar will prevail. However, at the BRICS summit, the countries expressed strong interest in using currencies other than the US dollar while trading among themselves.

As the group expands and offers national currencies of members, there could be a possibility of not preferring dollars. While countries might opt to use other currencies for trade with non-Western states, they

cannot completely rule out the use of the dollar. At the government level, most central banks, even BRICS nations, hold reserves and most business transactions take place in dollars. Likewise, individuals too are not yet ready to convert their dollar savings to yuan or any other currency.

Pakistan has not made any formal requests to join BRICS. It appears that Pakistan is still deciding on whether to be part of the group since Islamabad is watching the group closely. It is also mindful of becoming part of bloc politics as the group is being led by the Sino-Russia alliance. Additional-

ly, India's presence in BRICS and its attached tantrum come as irritants to Pakistan.

Last year, India blocked Pakistan's participation in the BRICS summit in China. However, this year, for the first time Pakistan received an invite by China to attend the summit. Many in New Delhi are against Pakistan's acceptance into the group. But regardless of India's efforts, Pakistan should not delay the request for membership.

BRICS should also be mindful of India and its tactics of sabotaging every multilateral

forum. India hosted the SCO, which could not be productive for regional cooperation, while its G20 presidency was marred with controversy. This shows that India's self-serving agendas and its rivalry with China and Pakistan could be a bane for BRICS and its potential.

India has failed to work for the global good and should do a reevaluation of its failures at multilateral forums. BRICS presents an insight into the future of global geopolitics; however, its effectiveness as a stable and preferred alternative system is yet to be seen.

G20: Putin tells India PM Modi he will not attend Delhi summit

Russian President Vladimir Putin has told Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi over a phone call that he will not attend the G20 Summit.

India is hosting this year's summit, which will be held in capital Delhi from 9-10 September.

Mr Putin told Mr Modi that Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov would attend the summit on his behalf.

The two leaders also discussed several "regional and global issues of mutual concern", India said in a statement.

A Russian government spokesperson had said last week that Mr Putin would not attend the summit as he had a "busy schedule".

The G20 includes the world's 19 wealthiest countries plus the European Union. India currently holds the G20 presidency, which rotates annually between members.

Russia's invasion of Ukraine is expected to be a talking point at the summit in Delhi, where world leaders including US President Joe Biden and UK Prime Minister Rishi Sunak will be present.

Last week, Mr Putin attended the Brics summit - Brics is an acronym for Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa - held in Johannesburg by video link to avoid the risk of possible arrest by the International



Criminal Court (ICC). The ICC has issued a warrant against Mr Putin, accusing him of war crimes in Ukraine.

In its statement on Monday, India said that Mr Modi expressed "an understanding for Russia's decision" and thanked Mr Putin for supporting Delhi's initiatives while it held the G20 presidency.

Russia's statement did not mention Mr Putin's absence at the G20 summit but said

that the two countries had agreed to "closely collaborate in the context of Russia's BRICS chairmanship", which starts on 1 January next year.

"The discussion also touched on current issues of Russian-Indian relations, which are developing progressively in the spirit of a specially privileged strategic partnership," it added.

Courtesy www.bbc.com

Recession in the European Economy

By Romana Afsheen

A recession in Europe's economy refers to a period of economic downturn characterized by a significant decline in economic activity, usually measured by indicators such as gross domestic product (GDP), employment rates, consumer spending, and industrial production. During a recession, key economic indicators contract, leading to negative economic growth. This contraction can result in reduced business activities, higher unemployment rates, lower consumer demand, and decreased investment.

Recessions can be triggered by various factors, such as financial crises, external shocks, changes in global trade dynamics, geopolitical tensions, or internal economic imbalances. These events can disrupt economic stability and lead to decreased confidence among consumers, businesses, and investors, causing a slowdown in economic activity.

In response to a recession, governments and central banks often implement various measures to stimulate economic growth, such as lowering interest rates, increasing government spending, implementing tax cuts, and introducing stimulus packages. These measures are aimed at boosting consumer spending, encouraging investment, and revitalizing economic activity.

Recessions are a normal part of the economic cycle, and their impact can vary in severity and duration. Recovering from a recession requires effective economic policies, resilience, and adaptability to address the underlying causes and restore growth.

Europe's Historical Recessions and Economic Challenges

Over time, Europe has encountered its share of recessions and economic challenges, reflective of the intricate nature of global economics. These periods of economic contraction, commonly known as recessions, are characterized by decreased economic activity, rising unemployment,



and dwindling consumer spending. Europe's history has seen notable recessions, with varying triggers such as financial crises, geopolitical tensions, and external shocks.

The 2008 financial crisis showcased Europe's vulnerability to global economic turmoil. The subsequent Eurozone crisis highlighted the challenges of maintaining a common currency while dealing with varying economic strengths among member nations. The austerity measures implemented to counter these crises sparked debates on balancing fiscal responsibility with the need for growth and employment.

Europe's economies have also navigated through challenges like high inflation, soaring debt levels, and sluggish economic growth. These hurdles have spurred policy responses ranging from monetary stimulus to structural reforms aimed at boosting competitiveness and productivity.

The continent's economic history reveals resilience and adaptation. Periods of adversity have led to a renewed focus on economic integration, cooperation, and the development of mechanisms to mitigate future crises. Europe's economic journey underscores the complex interplay of domestic policies, global forces, and the delicate balance between fiscal discipline and stimulus in fostering sustained growth and stability.

Euro Zone's Declining Business Activity (August)

Against this backdrop, recent economic indicators in the Eurozone highlight ongoing challenges. In August, the European business landscape witnessed a concerning contraction, marking the lowest activity level since November 2020. This downturn was indicated by the flash composite Purchasing Managers' Index (PMI) for the euro zone, which plummeted to 47.0 from July's 48.6, falling short of the anticipated 48.8 projected by economists. This index, where a figure below 50 signifies contraction, pointed to a significant drop in economic momentum. Notably, if we exclude the months affected by the COVID-19 pandemic, this recorded value is the weakest since April 2013.

Euro Zone Economic Growth (Q2)

Dissecting the numbers, the service sector's PMI declined to 48.3, while the manufacturing PMI saw a minor improvement from 42.7 in July to 43.7 in August. This dichotomy between services and manufacturing highlighted a broader economic trend. Economists expressed concerns over these numbers, suggesting that the euro zone might contract by as

much as 0.2% in the third quarter. The situation was particularly severe in Germany, the region's economic powerhouse, which reported the most pronounced contraction in business activity.

post-COVID recovery wave, experienced an abrupt slowdown in economic growth in 2023. The growth rate plummeted to 0.7% for the year, and projections for 2024 indicated a marginal improvement to 1.4%. This stark contrast comes on the heels of

A contributing factor to this decline was attributed to the European Central Bank's continued campaign of interest rate hikes, which began to exert pressure on consumers and negatively impact the services sector. The delicate balance between combating record inflation and avoiding excessive economic damage remained a challenge for policymakers.



European Central Bank's Dilemma

Amid these economic challenges, the European Central Bank (ECB) found itself grappling with a crucial decision. Following their July meeting, ECB President Christine Lagarde indicated the possibility of either raising interest rates or halting the ongoing rate hike trajectory. The final decision was to hinge on the evolving economic data. However, opinions within the financial sphere remained divided. Some advocated for a pause in rate hikes, given the stagnating employment rates and decreasing production. Others, however, believed that the economic circumstances, including subdued growth and inflationary pressures, might warrant further rate increases.

Dutch Economy's Slowdown (2023)

In the context of this dilemma, recent economic events in the Netherlands highlight further challenges. The Netherlands, which had been riding a robust

the remarkable nearly 5% annual growth witnessed in both 2021 and 2022. The Dutch economy grappled with a mild recession during the first half of 2023, as reflected by a contraction of 0.3% in the second quarter, following a 0.4% contraction in the initial three months. Despite the relatively mild nature of this recession, inflation remained a concern, potentially leading to an increase in the number of households living in poverty.

Worsening Euro Zone Business Downturn (July)

In the broader context of the Eurozone's economic landscape, another significant challenge emerged. The trajectory of business activity in the eurozone took a concerning turn in July, with both the services and manufacturing sectors experiencing substantial contractions. Notably, the economies of Germany and France, the two largest contributors to the region's GDP, found themselves in contractionary territory. These developments stoked fears of a potential recession for the entire bloc.

ECB Interest Rates and Economic Outlook (July)

The subsequent developments in July added further complexity to the Eurozone's economic narrative. As revealed by the Composite PMI for the euro area, July witnessed a further decline in economic health, with the index dropping to 48.9 from June's 49.9. Both the manufacturing and services sectors felt the impact, with manufacturing recording particularly bleak figures. Germany's economic struggles were highlighted as its economy contracted during July, raising concerns about the potential for a recession in the latter half of the year. The situation was mirrored in France, where both the services and manufacturing sectors underperformed. These developments had ripple effects in the financial markets, leading to a slide in the euro's value and a decrease in government bond yields. In a broader context, the private sector in Britain faced its own set of challenges, including sluggish growth, rising interest rates, and persistent inflation. While manufacturers benefited from reduced input costs, the overall output still registered a decline.

The interplay of historical context and contemporary economic realities highlights the ongoing need for adaptable strategies and collaborative efforts to navigate Europe's economic landscape effectively.

In conclusion, Europe's economic history is marked by cycles of growth and challenges, including recessions triggered by various factors. Recent instances highlight the interconnectedness of economies, policy dilemmas faced by central banks, and the need for adaptability. Such experiences emphasize the importance of proactive policy responses, structural reforms, and collaboration to navigate economic uncertainties and foster long-term stability.

Will Jaranawala violence prove to be the last straw?



By Umer Farooq

Pakistan's political, cultural, and religious diversity make it a beautiful society. It also makes it a dangerous one—a society that is prone to social, political, and religious conflicts. Pakistan is a highly fractured society as well—a society that is divided along ethnic, religious, cultural, and sectarian lines. These divisions create the possibility of endless social, political, sectarian, and religious conflicts. We as a nation are familiar with the forms these conflicts can assume—for instance in the 1990s, we witnessed ethnic conflict in urban areas of Sindh which pitted Sindhi speaking population of rural Sindh against the Urdu-speaking population of Karachi and Hyderabad.

Then we witnessed in the late 1990s, the intensification of the Shia-Sunni conflict in Urban areas of Punjab. Since the 1990s also saw the intensification of intra-Afghan military conflict in neighboring Afghanistan, the porous Pak-Afghan border failed to prevent the movement of weapons and trained fighters from Afghan society into Pakistani society. It was for this reason that the conflict involving Shia and Sunni extremist groups in Punjab was

extremely violent in nature. Similarly, Karachi was the city in Southern Pakistan where displaced Afghanistan loved to reside in the 1990s and they carried with them the drug and Kalashnikov culture into the peaceful city of Karachi. Therefore, the MQM and the PPP violence in the 1990s was extremely dreadful.

Societies that cannot control political and religious polarization in their midst and societies that cannot control the flow of weapons and military cadres into the territory under their control are bound to witness such violence. In the 1990s we failed to direct our political discourse away from getting infiltrated by messages of ethnic and sectarian hatred and we paid the price. We are again making the same twin mistakes. Religious groups in our midst are spreading and preaching the messages of inter-communal hatred and weapons and trained cadres of these religious groups are freely moving across the international border between Pakistan and Afghanistan.

Ethnic, religious, and sectarian violence and conflict have always

generated groups that construct their own set of grievances against the state and society. The 1990s was the time when MQM started sending their cadre members to India for military training because they constructed the narrative of grievances against the state and political society as a whole. Pakistani Shia groups developed international connections with Shia militant groups in Iran and other Middle Eastern countries following the violence perpetrated against the Shia population by Sunni militant groups primarily because they first constructed a narrative of grievances against the state and society as a whole. Pakistan's Christian community is among the peaceful communities in Pakistani society. They have never engaged in any kind of organized violence. But they have grievances and they have international connections too. During the past ten years, Pakistani Christians have experienced organized violence perpetrated against them and their holy places repeatedly. Given the peaceful nature of the Christian community, I don't think we should expect or fear that they will turn towards violence. But grievances filtered through the international political environment can

take other sinister forms. And Jaranawala violence might prove to be the proverbial last straw.

Till the 1970s Christians in our neighborhoods were treated as “our own people” primarily because they speak the same language—Punjabi. There are now well-documented histories of Christian communities in Pakistan that trace their origins to the original inhabitants of the land. These histories convincingly argue that Pakistani Christians are the original sons of the soil. Treating them as outsiders or linking them with European or American Christianity is an invention of a distorted fundamentalist mentality that has already caused a lot of destruction in society. However, in this time of deep anguish, one cannot expect Pakistani Christians to completely de-link their community from Western Christianity—which, in these testing times, serves as their own source of solace. The Pakistani state has failed our Christian community. But the irony is that even Pakistani society doesn’t have anything to offer to Christians of Pakistan. It will take years if not decades to heal the wounds caused by the Faisalabad Tragedy. The tragedy that we witnessed in Faisalabad is enough to completely alienate the Christians of Pakistan. In this way the idea based on the historical fact that the Christian community of Pakistan are the original inhabitants of this land rather than the original sons of the soil will be lost forever as we might witness more and more Chris-

tians turn to their modern links with western Christianity.

I think an urgent task for the Pakistani state and civil society is to initiate programs for the revival of the indigenous nature of the Pakistani Christian community. Most of our intercommunal problems emanate from the political fact that we have turned Pakistani state and state machinery into a patrimony of majority religion. The impartiality of state machinery we cannot imagine now even in dreams. The state is partial and state machinery is the patrimony of those who claim to speak for the majority religion. This is no fault of any religion in itself. Islamic history is full of examples of states acting impartially in the medieval period between religions of different religions, much before the secular political and legal tradition was invented in the West. This is a fault of the state machinery, which has a long-established tradition of becoming a party in political, social, and religious conflicts. The state might play a role in resolving inter-communal conflicts. But protecting every religious community from physical harm is the prime responsibility of the state before it can even qualify as an actor that can resolve conflicts. So, by reviving the concept of Christians as sons of the soil, civil society and the state can rejuvenate the idea of Christianity as a community that shares in the patrimony of the state and social and political resources. This idea could be extended to every religious minority in Pakistan. Since even

Hindus, Sikhs, and Ahmedis are sons of the soil. This idea can help us eradicate the sense of alienation of these communities that has taken root because of the oppression these communities have faced at the hands of the general public or the fundamentalist groups.

Of all the religious minorities, Christians have particularly proved that they are the sons of the soil. They have contributed greatly in the education and health sector. They have been very effective as military men in our armed forces. The name of Cecil Chaudhry, an Air Force pilot who is considered a war hero comes to mind. Unfortunately, according to reports reaching me, our war hero didn’t die a satisfied man, especially when it comes to the condition of his co-religionists in Pakistan.

In the wake of the Faisalabad Tragedy, a Christian friend posted an appeal on Facebook asking everybody to pray for Christians of Pakistan. “May God Protect every Christian in Pakistan” was my response. I am personally indebted to the Christian community of Pakistan because of the role my Christian teachers played in making me the person that I am. But alas, I could not do much. I believe there should have been powerful voices from within our society to appeal for the protection of Christian holy places. Those who were instrumental in this vandalism should realize that they were doing great harm to Pakistan and its social fabric.



Jaranwala Incident—Inquiry report

By Anum Akram

August 16, 2023, was an unfortunate and unforgettable day for the Pakistani Christian community. Some Muslim mobs attacked the churches and the residences of members of the Christian community, after claiming that some of its members had desecrated the Holy Quran. According to Muslim men, they found some burnt pages of the Holy Quran near a Christian colony and also they used insulting words against Islam and the Holy Prophet. This kind of incident has arisen frequently since the mid-2000s.

On the morning of August 16, Muslim men gathered with sticks, rods, and petrol bottles near the Christian community after the announcement was made through a mosque that revenge would not only be taken from the two accused brothers but from the entire community. This news spread like wildfire in the city. People were filled with anger and hatred. They not only set their churches on fire but also burnt their houses. 19 churches have been destroyed and more than 85 houses burnt. Many people vandalized the Assistant Commissioner's office as well because the commissioner is a Christian. Fortunately there were no casualties.

No inquiry report was submitted in this case because there was no any clear evidence so, the hearing of the case was postponed. Samuel Maksan, the chairman of the Implementation Minority Rights Forum Lahore, had submitted a petition, which was to be heard by a three-judge panel of the Supreme Court, led by Chief Justice Umer Ata Bandial and including Justices Athar Minallah and Shahid Waheed.

There is Only 3 percent population of the country is Christian so; they are frequently the target of fictitious and unsupported blasphemy accusations. It is not wrong to say that; Pakistan's blasphemy laws have frequently been employed for private gain. The FIR was registered against two Christian brothers according to the blasphemy law under sections 295B and 295c. The crime of these two brothers has not been proven yet. According to a report of the Human Rights Focus Pakistan (HRFP) that now the minority community facing a

traumatic experience. They are still afraid to return home after a week has passed and some of them will never want to return home ever.

Surprisingly when Muslims found the torn pages of the Holy Quran in their colonies, the writer mentioned the name, address, and CNIC on the top of the papers. This case revealed unexpected truth when the CCTV footage was obtained. Police revealed that they saw Robert Charles before and after this tragedy on the scene. Robert Charles is the chairman of a foreign NGO. He is responsible for creating this mishap. Actually, Robert Charles had a fight with Raja Amir family a few months ago. So he did this trick to trap them and wrote their name on the paper, Raja Amir and Rocky Saleem. He used blasphemy as a means of settling personal scores. He knew very well that the Muslims would either kill them or put them behind bars for a long time. After this police arrested Robert Charles. Now he is in police custody.

Police registered twenty-one cases against more than 600 people after this incident raid on different locations, and arrested more than 200 hundred people. Moreover, police also arrested a pastor on the base of the suspect from Peshawar named Amjad Alam, he also recorded a video message shortly before the police arrested him. He said that he was in Peshawar on the 16th of August and he had nothing to do with this event. The Punjab government formed a 10 joint investigation team to investigate the riots in Jaranwala and bring the evidence on this event and analyze it. This joint investigation team contains a counter-terrorist department (CTD), a crime investigation agency (CIA), and a police investigation.

The Jaranwala event is just one in a long line of incidents. Earlier this year on August 7th, 2023 a teacher who was accused of blasphemy in Turbat was shot and killed. A vigilante mob in Nankana took a guy out of a police station in February 2023 and beat him to death after accusing him of desecrating the Holy Quran. Priyantha Kumara, a manager from Sri Lanka, was brutally killed in Sialkot in December 2021. His



body was then burned after being dragged along the road. In 2014 Kot Radha Kishan Kasur a couple was burnt alive. On the rumor that the Holy Quran had been desecrated, dozens of enraged people surrounded Joseph Colony in the Badami Bagh neighborhood of Lahore in March 2013. Houses, churches, and businesses were destroyed in the Warispura Faisalabad attack in 2010. Numerous shops, three churches, and hundreds of homes were all set on fire and in this case accused were released after some time due to the lack of evidence. Six persons, including four women, one male, and two children, were burned alive in Gojra in August 2009. But no one was held accountable for this act. In the past more than 80 people have been killed on the allegation of blasphemy. There is a long list of events that will never end. This was not the last event. It will continue forever.

In 1947 we got a separate country to live our lives according to religious principles but the question is whether we are really free, the minorities free? As a Muslim nation according to the founder of Pakistan, "this country is for all segments of religions and everyone is free to go to his worship place whether it is temple, mosque or church". Minorities in our country are really the ones who suffer the most. Even after so many days, no serious action was taken against Muslim mobs who burnt houses and churches. We as a nation failed to protect minorities in the country and failed to provide them justice. Like earlier cases, this case will also forgotten without taking any action. The Jaranwala incident is one of many violent crimes against minorities committed in the name of religion.

Pakistan Navy Celebrating Seven Decades of Independence



By Ubaid ur Rehman

Pakistan surfaced on the global map during the time of the Cold War between the USA and the USSR. Due to its strategic geographical location and its relevance to the main power objective of the USSR, Pakistan was thrust into a pivotal position of choosing a geopolitical block. As a newly formed nation, making choices on international and regional issues proved challenging since the goals and interests were specified but it was not viable for Pakistan to strategically align with existing powers as a newly established state. Right after obtaining independence, Pakistan faced this challenge and thus opted for military alliances and agreements to protect its national interests. Consequently, its reliance on military cooperation and construction of foreign policy portrayed Pakistan as a 'Security State', underlining the significance of the armed forces.

Being a state having multi-dimensional security threats, the Pakistan Armed Forces bore the enormous responsibility of protect-

ing Pakistan's national interests. Pakistan Armed Forces have always shown their professionalism from land to air to sea. As a result of increased maritime diplomacy and the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), the role of the Pakistan Navy has arguably expanded in recent years. In this context, the Pakistan Navy's vision of securing territorial waters and coastline, playing a constructive role in maritime security measures, combating the darkness of the sea, and exploring special economic zones is truly commendable.

At the time of independence, the Pakistan Navy received a share of 4 frigates, 4 naval minesweepers, 8 motor minesweepers, and a harbor defense vessel. Initially, there was no established naval infrastructure and the naval headquarters was a one-room office in Karachi, which was later moved to the West Wharf Building and later to Napier Barracks (Liaquat Barracks). Although, it was a navy with extremely less resources, the story of success started from there. With

the resolution, commitment and tireless efforts of Pakistan Navy Officials, the Pakistan Navy is now a commendable force possessing advanced minesweepers, Submarines, gunboats, fast patrol crafts, floating dock, rotary wing aircraft, submarine chasers, fast attack crafts, survey vessels, advanced missile systems, and exclusive training ships, etc. In addition, the Pakistan Naval Shipyard provides domestic maintenance services and indigenizes through contracts and technology transfer from friendly countries. The maritime cooperation with the Chinese Navy in the West and the recent naval agreement with Turkey are some examples in this regard.

Besides, the Pakistan Navy is effectively engaged in 'Naval Diplomacy' to further our bilateral relations with the world. In this regard, bilateral Naval Exercises with several world navies are conducted at regular intervals to increase interoperability and promote bilateral relations. Increasing

the naval strength and self-reliance is highly mandated by the PN to maintain an effective operational presence in the Indian Ocean Region. The recently inducted type 054A Frigates, PNS TIPPU SULTAN and PNS SHAHJAHAN marked the completion of a project of four Chinese-built Tughril Class Frigates followed by the launching of PNS Tariq at Karachi Shipyard indicates the momentous steps taken towards more powerful maritime defence. Similarly, Pakistan is also attaining the capability of submarine construction with two Hangor Class Submarines under construction at KSEW with the help of China.

At the coastal borders of Pakistan, the Navy has come a long way to help nation-building through development of the educational institutions, coastal community-building projects, relief operations during previous years' floods, and rescue & relief operations during recent tropical Cyclone Biparjoy in the form of evacuation of affectees along the creeks area.

Above all, Cognizant of the international obligations and changing international scenario, the Pakistan Navy redefined itself and has played a vital role in securing international waters and ensuring regional peace. The general area of this operation is the North Arabian Sea, including parts of the Persian Gulf and the Gulf of Oman. Pakistan is part of international task forces (CTF-150 and CTF-151) and has done an excellent job in international campaign against piracy, drug and human trafficking. Pakistan in conjunction with other coalition partners has carried out various



successful operations and seized many ships. Pakistan Navy also joined the US led coalition, called Coalition Maritime Campaign Plan (CMCP) in the year 2004. The campaign, which is maritime component of 'Operation Enduring Freedom' (OEF), designed to keep a check on sea-borne terrorist elements.

With the declaration of the regional fate changer project CPEC, the responsibility of Pakistan Navy has increased drastically to ensure the security of multi-billion project. To respond call of duty, Pakistan Navy raised a specialized Task Force to provide security to Gwadar Port and the projects under CPEC. Henceforth, undoubtedly Pakistan Navy is now an important component of the economic security of Pakistan.

In a nutshell, the Pakistan Navy started its journey with limited resources, but with the vision, resolution, commitment, and tireless efforts of countries' leadership and sacrifices of the Navy personnel, the Pakistan Navy is now a committed and professional sea arm that has proved its professionalism internationally. Moreover, from the security of coastal borders to the nation-building efforts, the Pakistan Navy has always come up to the expectations of the nation in these seventy years. With the current vision to address sea blindness, explore natural resources in special economic zones, and secure gigantic economic opportunities, CPEC, the Pakistan Navy is emerging as a significant economic component of the country.





SERVING THE NATION WITH PRIDE

Celebrating Independence Day,
Pakistan Navy congratulates the
nation while remaining committed
to defend the sovereignty of its
maritime frontiers and help the
nation in the wake of
disasters & challenges



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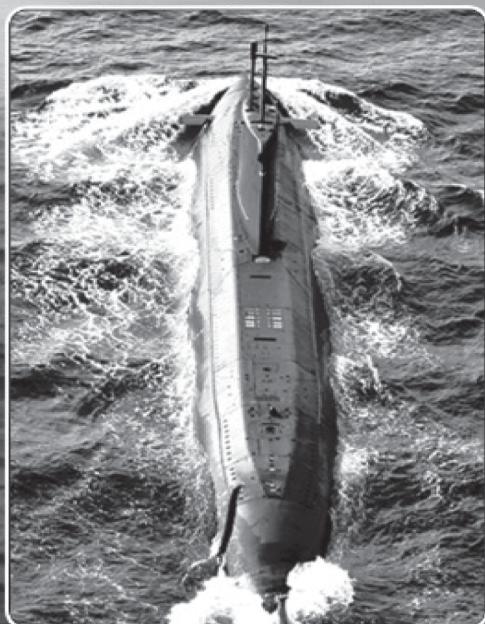
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Defenders of Maritime Fr



14th August
Independence Day



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Surface



Sub-Surface



Air Arm



SOF & Marines

Education or Business?

By Sara Danial

Dwindling education quality in Pakistan has become a concerning and persistent issue that poses a significant challenge to the country's development. Despite efforts to enhance the education system, several factors have contributed to the decline in education quality. One key factor is the inadequate allocation of resources towards education by the government, resulting in underfunded schools, outdated teaching materials, and poorly trained teachers. This scarcity of resources has particularly affected rural areas, where access to quality education is already limited. As a consequence, students are often left with subpar learning environments that fail to nurture their intellectual growth and critical thinking skills.

Extrapolating in the same vein, Pakistan faces a lack of educational infrastructure and facilities. Many schools in Pakistan lack basic amenities such as clean drinking water, proper sanitation facilities, and safe classrooms. The absence of a conducive learning environment not only hampers students' ability to concentrate but also jeopardizes their health and well-being. Moreover, the dearth of modern teaching methods and technology integration in classrooms leaves students disconnected from the rapidly evolving world and the skills needed to thrive in it.

Additionally, socio-cultural norms and economic disparities further contribute to the decline in Pakistan's education system. Gender disparities, for instance, remain prevalent, with girls often facing more barriers to education than boys. This not only perpetuates gender inequality but also deprives the nation of the potential contributions of nearly half of its population. Furthermore, the lack of teacher training and professional development opportunities leads to a deficiency in pedagogical skills and innovative teaching techniques. As a result, students are left with a rote-learning approach that stifles their creativity and critical thinking abilities,



hindering their capacity to tackle real-world challenges.

Let's move on to the metropolis' education system, where the elite have access to some of the most privileged schools and universities. This brings us to another question: Does education aim to educate children or perpetuate business and protect commercial interests?

The debate between prioritizing education or generating business out of education is a complex and nuanced one. It's important to recognize that these two aspects are not necessarily mutually exclusive. Rather, they are interdependent, with a symbiotic relationship that can lead to holistic development.

However, the rising cost of education in Pakistan has been ridiculous, knowing the quality the schools are providing. This can be attributed to a combination of factors that have contributed to the overall increase in expenses associated with obtaining a quality education. Some key factors contributing to the high cost of education in Pakistan include:

Lack of Public Investment: Historically, the Pakistani government has allocated a relatively low percentage of its budget to education. This underin

vestment has led to a shortage of quality public educational institutions and resources, forcing many students to turn to private institutions that often charge higher fees.

Inflation and Economic Challenges: Rapid inflation and economic instability in Pakistan have had a direct impact on the cost of education. As the cost of living rises, educational institutions are also affected by increased operating expenses, which are often passed on to students in the form of higher tuition fees.

Private Sector Dominance: The lack of sufficient quality public educational institutions has given rise to a booming private education sector. These private institutions often provide better facilities and resources, but they come with a hefty price tag. The demand for private education has allowed these institutions to charge premium fees.

Dependency on External Examinations: Many educational institutions in Pakistan prepare students for external examinations, such as Cambridge International Examinations or International Baccalaureate. These exams often come with high registration fees and additional expenses for preparation materials, which add to the overall cost of education.

Lack of Financial Aid: Scholarships and financial aid opportunities are limited in Pakistan, especially for higher education. This leaves many students and their families struggling to cover the costs of tuition fees, books, and other expenses.

Quality Concerns: The perception that private institutions offer better quality education than public ones has led many families to opt for private schools and universities. Of course, this perceived quality often comes with a higher price.

Foreign Qualifications: Pursuing foreign degrees or qualifications is a trend in Pakistan, but these international education opportunities often come at a premium. Exchange rates, visa expenses, and tuition fees for foreign institutions can significantly increase the overall cost of education.

Tuition Arms Race: In the absence of strong regulatory mechanisms, there can be a competitive drive among private institutions to offer more amenities and facilities, which in turn increases tuition fees.

The race of tuition and tutors in Pakistan has become a pervasive and somewhat concerning phenomenon within the country's education landscape. This trend refers to the widespread reliance on private tutoring and coaching outside of regular school hours, often in an attempt to supplement or even replace classroom learning.

Let's compare the same with the other countries in the Global South. India's education system is vast and diverse due to its large population. While it boasts a higher number of educational institutions and a broader range of subjects and disciplines, there remain significant quality disparities as well. However, it is important to note that the country has made considerable efforts to enhance its higher education institutions and research facilities, which has led to the rise of globally recognized universities. Institutions like the Indian Institutes of Technology (IITs) and Indian Institutes of Management (IIMs) have gained international recognition.

Bangladesh, on the other hand, has made remarkable progress in improving its education system, particularly at the primary and secondary levels. The country has seen a substantial increase in primary school

enrollment and literacy rates, attributed in part to its focus on community-based learning programs and female education initiatives.

The education system in Pakistan places significant emphasis on high-stakes standardized examinations that are believed to determine a student's academic and professional future. As a result, students and their families often feel immense pressure to perform well in these exams, especially the O' Level and A' Level students, leading them to seek additional help in the form of private tutors to maximize their chances of success, that has become a business in and of itself.



Education in Pakistan has become increasingly market-oriented, with schools and institutions operating in a competitive environment. As education is perceived as a pathway to better opportunities and career prospects, there is a demand for prestigious institutions. This demand has created a market where schools and universities can charge higher fees, leading to a focus on profit rather than purely educational objectives.

In the same vein, parents often seek the best possible education for their children, which can lead to a willingness to pay high fees for perceived quality education. This demand fuels the growth of private institutions and tuition centers that promise better results, further promoting the commercialization of education. Additionally, to improve rankings, institutions may focus on marketing efforts and investment in infrastructure

rather than focusing on improving pedagogy and learning outcomes.

Addressing the issue of expensive education in Pakistan requires a multi-pronged approach that includes increased public investment in education, efforts to improve the quality of public institutions, expansion of scholarship opportunities, and implementation of effective regulations to ensure that quality education remains accessible to all segments of society.

It is a small wonder that deteriorating education is a multi-faceted issue driven by various factors such as inadequate resources, insufficient infrastructure,

sociocultural barriers, and the absence of effective teaching methods. Addressing these challenges requires a comprehensive and collaborative effort from the government, educational institutions, communities, and international partners. By prioritizing education, allocating sufficient resources, improving teacher training, and promoting inclusive policies, Pakistan can begin to reverse the trend of dwindling education quality and pave the way for a more prosperous and knowledgeable society.

Moreover, it's essential to strike a balance between the commercial aspects of education and the preservation of educational quality. Effective regulatory mechanisms, transparent quality standards, and a broader understanding of education's role in societal development are necessary to ensure that education remains a means of empowerment rather than just a business venture.

Pakistan's political crisis distracts from urgent climate challenges

A bruising political fight in Pakistan is confounding efforts to adequately support a population facing severe environmental threats

By Nazish Qureshi



The ongoing political turmoil in Pakistan is distracting its government and the public from the critical challenge of climate adaptation. One of the key challenges being neglected is the aftermath of last year's August floods, which displaced nearly eight million people in Pakistan. The Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre named the floods the world's largest disaster displacement event in 10 years.

But ever since April 2022, when the former Pakistani prime minister Imran Khan lost a no-confidence motion, the country has seen violent face-offs and heavy-handed state action. The shift in attention has been most evident in how official periodic updates on the state of flood-affected people stopped in November 2022, resulting in a lack of transparency regarding rehabilitation efforts.

Flood-affected population neglected

As part of its Floods Response Plan, Pakistan declared a need for USD 816

million to help recover from these floods. However, as of July 2023, only 67.7% of this plan has been funded. Without the required funding, the government struggles to deliver the needs of all identified sectors. This has resulted in severe consequences, including an "alarming surge" in food insecurity among those in flood-affected areas. In a joint 2023 outlook report, the Food and Agriculture Organization and the World Food Programme designated Pakistan as "very high concern" for food insecurity, noting the country has a "high number of people facing critical, acute food insecurity." Millions of children living near stagnant water in flood-affected areas are at risk of dying from water-borne diseases. Many are suffering from acute malnutrition.

Extreme heat and other climate-induced threats are on the horizon. But instead of ringing alarm bells and immediate action, military authoritarianism is clamping down on all forms of dissent, peaceful protest and freedom of speech. Pakistan's power struggle is disrupting governance amidst a

misplacement of priorities.

Khan's previous government made climate action one of its key messages, with initiatives such as a massive tree-planting programme, pioneered in Khan's home province of Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa and extended to the country. The current government is much more focused on infrastructural development, but neither issue is seeing much action in the current situation.

Bad news in the budget

The new government's 2023-2024 fiscal budget features a 16% hike in military spending. Meanwhile, the climate change division's budget has been slashed by more than half with a reduction of 58% from last year. Last

year, special flood-response funding was put in place for the country's National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA). During this fiscal round, that was removed.

Additionally, there has been no

budgetary increase in the NDMA's annual funding, despite a number of critical limitations it has identified since 2022's floods. Such limitations include a lack of comprehensive flood telemetry systems, weather stations, disaster-management personnel, risk and hazard assessments and heavy-duty earthmovers. Each of these is crucial to monitoring the early signs of natural disasters and implementing a swift response, so Pakistan's vulnerability persists.

The budget cuts come in tandem with the discontinuation of some nature-based climate solutions that were spearheaded by the previous government. For example, the 10 Billion Tree Tsunami afforestation program ended on 30 June this year, without rolling over to the new fiscal year. Elsewhere, the scaling-up of the Glacial Lake Outburst Flood project in northern Pakistan (a flood risk reduction programme run in partnership with the UN Development Programme) is set to expire at the end of this year, with no indication of renewal.

Some hope, but limited time to act

Not all the news is negative. The chapter on climate change in Pakistan's Economic Survey 2022-2023, shows a growing



allocation and – crucially – utilisation of funds from 2018 onwards for areas like water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH). The Climate Adaptation Plan that was underway when the survey was released received cabinet approval on 26 July. Pakistan's flagship Living Indus Initiative, which caters to the most important river basin in the country, is likely to benefit from a Memorandum of Understanding signed with China in June on water conservation, drought relief and other sustainable development matters.

For Pakistan to fully benefit from such initiatives, however, political parties must

find a way to cooperate on national priorities. There is less than half a year until COP28. Before this, it is imperative that Pakistani leadership – across political parties – demonstrates how it is protecting those frontline communities impacted disproportionately by the climate crisis, including flood-affected displaced people. Only then, when political opponents learn to deal with domestic issues in a peaceful and stable manner, can Pakistan rightfully demand climate reparations from those rich countries that pursued a polluting pathway to development.

Courtesy thethirdpole.net



The emerging need of cybersecurity in Pakistan



By Hamza Qureshi

A recent article published by Haaretz on August 3rd, 2023 presents a damning critique of Pakistan's use of hacking tools from Israeli companies over the past decade. While Pakistan officially does not have diplomatic relations with Israel, the article reveals that Pakistani law enforcement agencies have been utilizing Cellebrite's phone hacking and digital forensics technologies since 2012, likely without the knowledge of Israeli authorities.

The article serves as a strong charge sheet against Pakistan, expressing anger over the hypocrisy of Pakistanis for covertly acquiring and using Israeli cyber products despite having no formal ties. However, the article notes that Cellebrite sold its tools to intermediaries based in Singapore, who then sold them to Pakistani companies, enabling Pakistan to acquire the technology without bringing it into the company's immediate knowledge.

The article ignited vigorous debate within Pakistan's cybersecurity circuit about the wisdom of procuring IT tools from hostile nations like Israel and India. A majority argued on ethical and legal grounds that Pakistan cannot

recognize Israel nor have formal ties, given the ongoing oppression of Palestinians. Though no law expressly prohibits Israeli products, related import/export and customs regulations make such transactions legally dubious. Pakistan supports causes like the Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions (BDS) movement that economically pressure Israel over human rights violations.

The discourse featured diverse perspectives, including some former and serving government officers advocating a pragmatic approach to procuring tools, regardless of country, in an interconnected world. They argued, "What the big deal?" that Cellebrite and similar tools are state-of-the-art, efficiently getting the job done. It would be unwise, they claimed, to avoid technology merely because an adversary produces it.

Cybersecurity experts emphasized that for Pakistan, data and cybersecurity are existential issues, the digital battlefield's most vital weapons. At minimum, sensitive data must be shielded, even from allies. Hence the armed forces restrict social media and smartphones on premises, aware that a

lapse in cyber defenses could prove catastrophic.

They argued against brushing this off as "no big deal," stressing that such nonchalance jeopardizes national security in the digital age. Pakistan cannot afford to hand over its sensitive data and access to untrustworthy technology providers, no matter how convenient their tools may seem.

They cited other nations taking proactive measures to secure their digital realms, like America banning Chinese and Russian apps, Russia curtailing internet access, and China's Great Firewall. While extreme, these examples highlight that connectivity has limits, and security must come first.

Revisiting the conversation, it becomes evident that at the state level, considerations of law and moral concepts come later in the decision-making process. The crucial question arises: why does Pakistan rely on importing or acquiring sensitive tools, which are then used by our law enforcement and intelligence agencies? Instead, why haven't we nurtured a culture of developing indigenous tools and software?

Recent revelations underscore why Pakistan must be wary of foreign cyber tools, even from ostensibly friendly nations. Trend Micro discovered Chinese backdoor malware in software from Pakistan's National IT Board. This alarming breach involving a close ally highlights that today, trust ends where national security begins.

History further proves this lesson. For decades, the CIA secretly controlled the Swiss encryption firm Crypto AG, rigging devices so America could decrypt allies' communications. The customers of the machine included the Pakistani government, which deployed it in embassies worldwide and other sensitive inland locations. While extreme, this deception exemplifies how even partners spy in the cyber domain.

It is important that Pakistan must heed these warnings. Over-reliance on foreign technology, however convenient or sophisticated, imperils national security and sovereignty. Pakistan must invest vigorously in indigenous capabilities, applying its IT talent to build secure systems worthy of sensitive data. This path is challenging but essential.

But then there are also several barriers to progress in this direction which include bureaucratic red tape and leadership lacking technical vision. Our people in private and public organizations often procured imported tools, mostly in emergency situations, when there is less



time to ponder about the origins of these tools. They often ignore the fact that imported software poses an intrinsic threat, as backdoors are common in such products. Implementing a zero-trust environment within organizations becomes challenging when proprietary tools inherently contain backdoors and spyware.

Although the idea of building software and hardware indigenously faced setbacks (by SOEs, ministries, and large banks) during Musharraf's time, we cannot afford to overlook the importance of such efforts. Our nation has already suffered significant setbacks in emerging fields like cybersecurity, data science, blockchain etc. We today have turned into mere consumers due to this import-centric mentality.

This Independence Day, as we celebrate 76 years of freedom, a new frontier has emerged to test Pakistan's sovereignty - cyberspace. This boundless virtual domain offers immense opportunities, but also enormous risks unlike any we've faced before. Our cyber landscape will only be as secure as we make it. Just as our ancestors refused to depend on foreign rulers and charted their own destinies, we must now harness our IT talent to build robust, indigenous defenses to protect Pakistan's digital future.

The time has come to empower our brilliant minds to develop cutting-edge cyber capabilities on par with the best in the world. We must invest vigorously in homegrown solutions rooted in national values, not outsource the protection of our cyber sovereignty to vendors with divided loyalties. There will be some serious challenges ahead in this journey but they are dealable.

The virtual realm is a new phenomenon. Our forefathers won us the physical homeland; it is now up to us to secure the virtual one. Pakistan's cyber sovereignty rests in our own hands. This Independence Day, let us resolve to fortify our virtual borders as securely as we have fortified our territorial ones. A new frontier has emerged to test the spirit of self-reliance passed down by our ancestors - and nothing less than Pakistan's survival as a free nation in the coming cyber age is at stake.



2023 Asia Cup: Cricket's Historic Co-Hosted Unity



By Ali Abdullah

In the scorching days of August and the mellow breezes of September 2023, cricket enthusiasts around Asia and beyond eagerly await the 16th Asia Cup, a pinnacle of One Day International (ODI) cricket. This year's tournament promises an enthralling fusion of skills, strategies, and rivalries, with a remarkable twist – Pakistan and Sri Lanka will join hands to co-host the event, a first in the history of the Asia Cup. The stage is set for six formidable teams to battle it out, as the cricketing world turns its gaze toward this captivating tournament.

Co-hosting is no small feat, and the 2023 Asia Cup marks a momentous occasion with Pakistan and Sri Lanka sharing the honour. Four matches are scheduled to unfold on Pakistani soil, while the remaining nine will grace Sri Lanka's cricket grounds. This dual-nation hosting exemplifies the spirit of collaboration, fostering the growth and camaraderie that cricket embodies. The anticipation is palpable, as fans wonder how the unique blend of subcontinental conditions will influence the game.



Intriguingly, this edition of the Asia Cup features Afghanistan, Bangladesh, India,

Pakistan, and Sri Lanka – the renowned full members of the Asian Cricket Council (ACC). However, a new entrant arrives on the scene, marking a historic milestone. Nepal, emerging victorious in the 2023 ACC Men's Premier Cup, secures their maiden participation in the Asia Cup. The roar of the Nepali fans and the fervour of their players will

undoubtedly add a novel dimension to the tournament. As the

ACC's visionary calendar for 2023 and 2024 unfolded in January 2023, confirming the competition's dates and format, it became clear that cricket's pulse continues to beat strong across the continent.

The journey to the 2023 edition has not been without its challenges. The tournament's origins trace back to 2021, with grand plans, hopes, and expectation.

Formation of Cricket Technical Committee

The first Member and the Head of the PCB Cricket Technical Committee is Misbah-ul-Haq, the former Pakistani Captain, who has also served as the head coach and chief selector of the Pakistan Men's Team. Mohammad Hafeez and Inzamam-ul-Haq have also been named in the committee. Inzamam has previously served as a Chief Selector, while Hafeez has earned a major position for the very first time in PCB after his retirement.

The Task of the PCB Cricket Technical Committee (CTC) is to provide recommendations on cricketing affairs. These affairs include; scheduling, playing conditions, the appointment of coaches, central contract-related matters, the appointment of the selection committee, and development of referees and umpires. It is safe to say that the new CTC has a wide range of powers. The members of the CTC will report to Misbah-ul-Haq on a regular basis.

It will be interesting to see how the new PCB Cricket Technical Committee works. Their first and most important task is to appoint a new selection committee as soon as possible. With the 2023 Men's Asia Cup around the corner, the Pakistan Team quickly needs a new selection committee to finalize the squad for the event.

Previously, the Chairman of the PCB management committee clarified in an interview that they have not decided about the coaches at all. Zaka Ashraf said that he doesn't really care whether the coaches are local or foreign. He further stated that they have not taken any decision on what to do with the coaching panel. The Head of the newly formed CTC, Misbah-ul-Haq in the past has given statements against the appointment of Mickey Arthur. It was rumored that if Misbah gets powers in PCB, he might look to remove Mickey Arthur or the entire coaching panel altogether. However, with the recent results of the Pakistan Team, the CTC might not change the coaching panel.

These were the headlines a couple of weeks ago but now things are taking a turn. Pakistan Cricket Board relies highly on Pakistan's politics.



The never-ending drama of a permanent PCB chairman has continued once again. It all started when Former Prime Minister Imran Khan was thrown out of power and Ramiz Raja was removed by the new Patron in Chief of PCB (PM Shehbaz Sharif). After Ramiz was removed, PCB had Najam Sethi as its new head. However, Najam Sethi could not survive for long and months later we saw Zaka Ashraf getting into power.

After Zaka Ashraf's appointment, it was thought that finally, PCB will have some stability with a head, who can stay for a longer period of time. However, as soon as Zaka Ashraf rose to power, cases were filed and his appointment was challenged by the members of the previous PCB management committee. A senior sports journalist, Abdul Majid Bhatti revealed on X (Formerly Twitter) that a summary has been sent to the principal secretary of Caretaking Prime Minister of Pakistan to either terminate or take any other decision on all the political appointments of service heads. The summary/guideline was sent by the Ministry of Inter-Provincial Coordination of the Government of Pakistan.

There are two cases of such political appointments, and one of them is the appointment of Mr. Zaka Ashraf. The Previous IPC minister had stated on live TV that Zaka Ashraf's appointment was based on the PPP's interest (A ruling coalition party at that time).

Now, the situation is that Zaka Ashraf's appointment can be terminated and we can see another PCB Chairman. Many believed that former PCB Chairman, Najam Sethi might return. Some more sources claimed that we can even see a new name, which only time will tell.

Meanwhile, senior sports journalist, Asif Khan provided more clarification on what is the role of ICC in this. Since PCB has had a rapid change of PCB chairmen and all are based on political interferences, it is a violation of ICC's code of conduct. Asif Khan revealed that ICC will only take action if Zaka Ashraf himself complains to ICC that he has been removed due to political interferences, or anyone from Zaka's management committee lodges a complaint to ICC.

By Ali Abdullah

PCB unveils 'Star Nation Jersey' for World Cup 2023

"We have kept Pakistan's star and flag on the chest which represents our identity," says Zaka Ashraf



The national cricket team's official kit — Star Nation Jersey — for the highly anticipated upcoming ICC Cricket World Cup 2023 was unveiled by the Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) on Monday.

The Jersey, which has a star and Pakistan flag on the chest side, was unveiled during a ceremony held at the Gaddafi Stadium in Lahore.

Speaking on the occasion, PCB Management Committee chairman Zaka Ashraf said this jersey represents Pakistan's spirit and determination as they are already sitting on the number one position in the ODI format.

"We have kept Pakistan's star and flag on the chest which represents our identity. I am hopeful that our team, who is already number one in ODIs, will win the World Cup in India," he said.

Pakistan will start their World Cup

campaign against the Netherlands on October 6 in Hyderabad. They will play against their arch-rivals India in a much-awaited contest on October 14 in Ahmedabad.

Here is Pakistan's schedule for the ICC World Cup 2023:

October 6 - vs Netherlands in Hyderabad

October 10 - vs Sri Lanka in Hyderabad

October 14 - vs India in Ahmedabad

October 20 - vs Australia in Bengaluru

October 23 - vs Afghanistan in Chennai

October 27 - vs South Africa in Chennai

October 31 - vs Bangladesh in Kolkata

November 4 - vs New Zealand Bengaluru (Day match)

November 11 - vs England in Kolkata

The day matches will start at 10:00am Pakistan Standard Time (PST) while all other matches will be day-night fixtures starting at 01:30pm (PST).

If Pakistan qualify for the semi-finals, they will play in Kolkata.

If India qualifies for the semi-finals, they will play in Mumbai unless playing against Pakistan, in which case they will play in Kolkata.

The Cricket World Cup will be played in a round-robin format with all teams playing against each other for a total of 45 league matches.

The top four teams will qualify for the semifinals, which will be held in Mumbai on November 15 and in Kolkata on November 16. The semi-finals and the final will have reserve days.

Courtesy The News

Why is Rocky Aur Rani Ki Prem Kahani's treatment of women so much better than Babylicious'?

They're both essentially romcoms, but the lessons they teach audiences are so wildly different



By Aarfeen Afzal

This summer, we've seen the releases of several blockbusters from Bollywood, and Lollywood and we all know that messages delivered by these film industries travel far beyond the walls of movie theatres, and many of them tend to spotlight societal issues. The way they treat these issues, however, is incredibly different. Some of the most recent big-name films produced by Pakistan and India follow plot lines that are wildly different in their portrayal of women.

Babylicious was released on June 27, a Pakistani romantic comedy directed by Essa Khan. This star-studded film was overly hyped due to the stars of them film, Shahroz Sabzwari and Syra Yousuf, and their offscreen relationship, or lack thereof. How and why the divorced couple managed to set aside their differences to act with, appear in interviews together, and create other promotional content for a film like this is beyond understanding.

Hindi cinema delivered Rocky Aur Rani Ki Prem Kahani (RRKPK) — directed by Karan Johar — on July 28

with two of their most successful stars as the leads, Ranveer Singh and Alia Bhatt. While this film is categorised under the genre of "Drama/Family", like most Dharma Productions, it is essentially a romantic comedy.

Since most Lollywood movies are meant to be family-friendly and eschew inappropriate or lewd remarks, you would think that Khan's film, which was released around Eid, would also be suitable to watch for all ages. At the cinema, many children were accompanied by their older relatives to watch this new release, and I've got to believe that every viewer, like myself, felt second-hand embarrassment watching from the kids' eyes.

Before diving into the plot line, it should be known that this was not a matter of wanting a conservative movie, it was a matter of feeling ashamed at the twisted storyline and the obscene mindset with which the script was written. Each laugh heard at the crude jokes sounded like an alarm blaring that this kind of talk and sexist humour is normalised in our country.

Spoilers ahead

The film begins with a "hopeless romantic" named Omar, who desperately wants his ex-girlfriend Sabiha, whom he inexplicably refers to as "Babylicious" back. While her family arranges for her marriage with another man, named Nabeel, Omar believes she will fight for their love. However, after he sends a mutual friend to change her mind, the plan backfires as Sabiha says that marrying Nabeel would be more practical. At one point, their friend says, "Omar calls you Babylicious, he buys you Subway cookies, he does your homework", and she replies with, "can Omar drive me around in a BMW? Can he take me shopping in Dubai? Can he take me shopping in Dubai? Can he buy me a house in Canada?"

After this scene, which portrays Sabiha as a materialistic woman who finds more meaning in goods than love, Omar seeks comfort from his sleazy friends, who take him to see a prostitute. I'll never forget the insurmountable cringe I felt when I overheard a child in the cinema ask "Mama, what's happening

right now?" This was the part when the boys met the prostitute who was shown to be filthy and itchy, and all of them felt scared to touch her. Another scene, towards the end, reveals Nabeel to the viewers, who shows up in his foreign car to a party, and Sabiha can be seen running towards him.

One of the more disturbing parts of this film was the discrimination. In a scene where Omar is crying at a bar, he meets a seemingly white-washed girl who cannot speak Urdu properly. She tells him of her boyfriend who went to jail when she was in college. When Omar curiously asks, "jail?", she swiftly responds, "it was only because he was black". Afterward, another guy beside them uses a racial slur in Urdu to refer to the boyfriend.

Johar's film, on the other hand, follows the lives of Rocky Randhawa, the heir to a successful sweets business, and Rani Chatterjee, a famous news anchor. While Rocky is from a Punjabi family and is lighthearted, funny, and romantic, Rani has a more English-influenced upbringing and is more guarded, feminist, and headstrong. Despite their differences, the two fall in love, but they need to make their families accept each other before they can get married. This leads to the two switching places at each other's houses so each can connect with the other's family.

While at the Randhawa household, Rani

teaches the women of the family to cease their subservience and chase after their dreams. She helps them regain their respect when she observes how Rocky's mother, Punam Randhawa, is treated like a staff member rather than a wife and how Rocky's sister, Gayatri, is constantly fat-shamed and introduced to several rishtas who ridicule her. Rani realises that both mother and daughter have talents they are suppressing and encourages them to pursue those aspirations.

At the Chatterjee's home, Rocky is initially shamed for not being as intellectual and artistic as Rani's family. He follows desi myths such as "drinking tea makes one darker" and is rebuked for his racist beliefs, despite not having any exposure in his upbringing to make him aware it was wrong. His macho exterior prevents him from feeling comfortable in what he believes are "feminine" activities, such as dancing, even though he is great at it. After witnessing a Kathak performance by Rani's father, Chandon Chatterjee, for which he is mocked, Rocky begins to understand the importance of embracing oneself.

He corrects his own way of thinking and delivers an emotionally powerful speech on how people should learn from one another rather than being quick to cancel and shun each other for their mistakes. In another jaw-dropping scene, Rocky and Mr Chatterjee both perform Kathak at the

Durga Puja celebration with the Randhawa family in the audience, showcasing his talent instead of avoiding the "feminine" label society slapped on it.

When compared to Babylicious and its prehistoric ideas regarding women and society, RRRPK is a breath of fresh air. Many people may argue that Johar too has released several films in the past that come across as sexist, and the female characters in these Dharma Productions films are portrayed to be subservient to the men around them. This argument is valid, but what matters more is the message the director is trying to deliver today through his films; he is making an effort to teach important lessons to create a more tolerant world.

RRRPK viewers got to see the blending of families without having to witness the compromises and sacrifices of women's desires yet again. Babylicious on the other hand is a step in the wrong direction — it only feeds into toxic masculinity and inappropriate behaviour, even if it is a "comedy". While some may believe Hindi films are inappropriate due to their kissing scenes and so on, I would argue that in this case, Babylicious and its unfair portrayal of women, vulgar dialogue, and discriminatory nature is more inappropriate than RRRPK with its message of love, learning, and acceptance.

Courtesy images.dawn.com



Resham is making her movie return with Shoaib Sultan's newest project, Gunjal, alongside Ahmed Ali Akbar

Though she feels like she never left at all

By Irfan Ul Haq

Resham is returning to the big screen in a lead role for Shoaib Sultan's new project, Gunjal, alongside Ahmed Ali Akbar.

The star shared the news on Facebook and said she is both scared and excited. "People say it's my grand return to the cinema, but I say I was never separated from cinema," she wrote. Her most recent film appearance was a cameo role in The Legend of Maula Jatt as Fawad Khan's mother. Before that, she starred in 2015's Swaarangi.

"Director Shoaib Sultan's Gunjal is a very special film for me — it is cinema without a reason, which I always wanted to do but unfortunately never got a chance to do. But ages later, when I was told Gunjal's story, I immediately expressed my interest because the time has come for us to talk about these important issues," she said.

Resham called her journey a memorable yet difficult one. She said they took great pains to ensure an accurate depiction of the film's period and she believes Sultan was successful in doing so. "This is a film that will always be close to my heart," she said.

The actor told Images that this is a film of an "international level." Though she wasn't able to reveal much, she did share the names of her costars — Butt, Amna Ilyas and Ahmad Ali Butt among others.

Ever since I saw Parizaad, I wanted to share a screen with Ahmed Ali Butt and look, I got my wish, she said.



Resham described the story as a "true" one, saying that people now want to see out of the box content, like Kamli.

She said a lot of hard work went into the film, which she described as "not commercial". After a release in Pakistan, she expects that it will go on to tour film festivals abroad. "It's very technically strong," she said.

Courtesy images.dawn.com

Netflix's first Pakistan-themed original to star Fawad Khan, Sanam Saeed, Mahira Khan and Ahad Raza Mir

There are a host of other top stars in the upcoming show Jo Bachay Hain Sang Samait Lo

After months of speculation, the news is finally out — Pakistan is getting its first Netflix Original in Jo Bachay Hain Sang Samait Lo.

According to a Variety exclusive, the series stars the biggest stars in Pakistan. Fawad Khan, Mahira Khan, Sanam Saeed and Ahad Raza Mir are reported to be the lead cast with Hamza Ali Abbasi, Bilal Ashraf, Maya Ali, Iqra Aziz, Hania Aamir, Khushaal Khan, Nadia Jamil, Omair Rana and Samina Ahmed as supporting characters.

The show is being produced by Momina Duraid Films. According to the publication, it has been commissioned by the Netflix Middle East and North Africa team. Jo Bachay Hain Sang Samait Lo is an adaptation of Farhat Ishtiaq's novel of the same name. It centres around a Harvard law student named Sikandar who experiences a life-changing incident and Liza, a talented artist with a troubled past. The pair meet in Italy and their story begins.

The show is currently being shot in Italy, the UK and Pakistan and there's no word on the release date yet.

Courtesy images.dawn.com



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