

Fortnightly

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ABC Certified

Palestine Victim of Tyranny

Life made impossible by IDF attack from Ground, Space and Sea

Nawaz Sharif and Politics

Who is responsible for delay in elections in Punjab and KP for more than one year?

IMF Review Commission Visit

Gap on Fiscal and Monetary side may be major problem for Pakistan

GAZA BLEEDS



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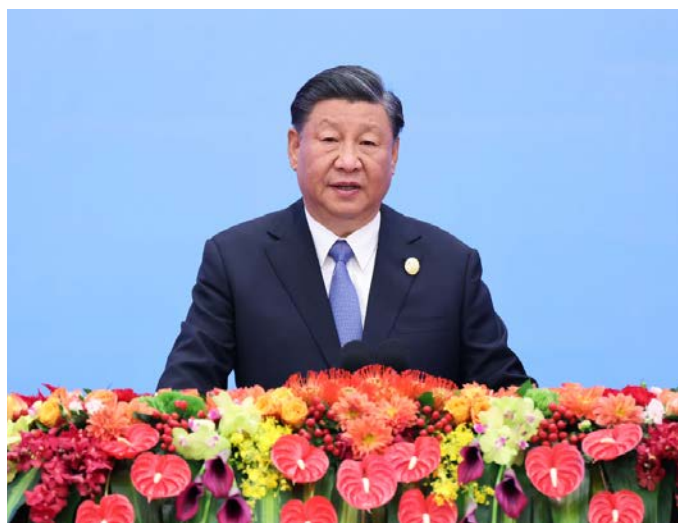
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The Return of Nawaz Sharif

By Hammad Ghaznavi



Nawaz Sharif appears vindicated and victorious. Neither the garrison nor the judiciary has tendered a formal apology for the political engineering that led to Nawaz Sharif's ouster from power in 2017, followed by jail and exile, but through their actions they seem to be confessing their sin, and compensating. "The mighty cannot eject a popular politician out of politics" seems to be the moral of the story. Obviously, the same holds true for the currently jailed former premier Imran Khan.

Upon his return, Nawaz Sharif's first speech is appreciated by many for its reconciliatory tone, inviting all stakeholders, political and apolitical, to join hands to pull Pakistan out of the present mess. The 3-time former prime minister sounded like a man ready for his fourth stint as at least parts of his address appeared coming from a post electoral victory speech.

Efforts to get rid of popular politicians have a long history in Pakistan, starting from well-nigh its very inception. From Hussain Shaheed Suhrawardi and Shiekh Mujeeb-ur-Rehman to Mohtarma Fatima Jinnah, the list is long. Apolitical forces succeeded temporarily to hold onto power through this policy but there was always a heavy cost that the country had to pay, that is, political instability leading to economic mess. While invariably, the establishment failed to get rid of a politician through disqualification, jail, or exile. Even the judicial murder of Zulfikar Ali Bhutto could not expunge him from Pakistan's politics. Imagine the futility of the policy –

having arrested the political process for 11 years, when finally the party polls were held in 1988, ZAB's daughter Benazir Bhutto beat her opponents hands down. In 1999, imposing martial law, Pervez Musharraf tried to erase Nawaz Sharif from the political landscape. Another dictator failed. Nawaz Sharif returned to power in 2013. That was not the end of this mindless khaki meddling in politics. In 2017, the garrison in cahoots with the hallowed precincts of the court, ousted Nawaz Sharif from power on rather flimsy grounds. He was later jailed and exiled. Now, on October 21st, after four years of exile, he is back again. A vicious cycle cannot be described better.

Having realized that they had been used by the Establishment against each other in the 90s, Benazir Bhutto and Nawaz Sharif signed the Charter of Democracy in 2007 that convinced the meddlers of the need of a third force. Hence, the rise of PTI and Imran Khan. Even our chequered electoral history cannot offer an example of a more dodgy election than that of 2018 that brought Imran Khan to power. In brief, Imran Khan is in jail today. And Nawaz Sharif has returned triumphant. Meanwhile, Pakistan has become a difficult country to govern. Spread over years, the political instability has begun to take its toll, impacting all spheres of governance, worst of all, the economy. Pakistan is in a state of economic meltdown is not an exaggeration. Political polarization, according to many, is an even bigger monster gnawing the fabric of our polity. No doubt, one political party

or the garrison alone cannot surmount the gigantic challenge. Nawaz Sharif is right when he says 'all' political parties and institutions need to join hands to grapple with the daunting situation. Yes, easier said than done.

Democracy derives its strength from differences of opinion. In the name of national unity, a democratic dispensation does not restrain the system with a straightjacket. We don't have to reinvent the wheel. The solution is simple – the constitution. Follow it, Period! Having tried everything under the sun, the Establishment needs to restrict itself to its constitutional rule. The impression of making yet another deal with a politician is not helping the cause of democracy. True, the revival of economy through regional trade has been Nawaz Sharif's agenda since the 90s. Today, the Establishment is also convinced that without better relations and increased trade with the neighbours, particularly India, the economy may not be fixed. For the purpose, the decision makers seem convinced, Nawaz Sharif is the man. Maybe, Nawaz is the more suitable candidate to deliver on this front but only the electorate can give the final verdict in this regard.

The country cannot move ahead without a fair and free election. Immediately, the election date needs to be announced. A controversial election, 2018 poll testifies, does not resolve any issue, but only deepens the crisis. Without a level playing field, the upcoming election would not yield the desired stability.

Israel-Hamas war and its implications

By Dr Syed Rifaat Hussain

The Hamas attack on Israel that occurred on October 7 not only disrupted the prospects for peace in the Middle East but also raised the possibility of a broader military conflict engulfing the entire region. This attack led to over a thousand casualties among the Israeli defence forces and the abduction of more than 200 foreign nationals, mostly Israelis, undermining the perception of Israeli military invincibility.

In response to this military setback, Tel Aviv initiated a full-scale war against Hamas. As part of this ongoing military campaign, Israel launched an aerial bombardment of Gaza, resulting in the loss of over 7,000 Palestinian lives, including 2,000 children and women. Human rights organizations have described this ongoing aerial bombing as "savage," with the primary aim being to impose "collective punishment" on Palestinians for Hamas's military actions in Israel.

On October 25, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu openly declared, "Gloves are off now," hinting at an impending ground offensive for which the Israeli Defense Forces (IDF) had been preparing since early October. As a prelude to this ground offensive, on October 26, IDF conducted a "limited ground offensive," involving a battalion of tanks deep inside Gaza.

Israel ordered all Palestinians residing in Gaza to evacuate the northern portion, leading to the displacement of 1.5 million people. The UN Secretary-General characterized this as a direct violation of fundamental principles of international humanitarian law, potentially constituting war crimes.

Oxfam's report accused the IDF of using "starvation" as a weapon of war by imposing a blockade on all food, fuel, and water in Gaza, creating a dire situation endangering the lives of all Palestinians in Gaza.

With overt support from the United States and other Western powers such as France, Germany, and the UK, the IDF has been enabled to conduct what some characterize as a "genocide" of unarmed Palestinians. The United States has vetoed all three resolutions calling for a cease-fire, while the IDF has expressed its intent to maintain the blockade until its goal of "eliminating" Hamas is achieved.

During a speech to the UN General Assembly's emergency session on Palestine on October 26, the Israeli Ambassador repeatedly emphasized that his country was confronting a terrorist organization and was willing to take any measures to "obliterate" it.

Israel's aggressive rhetoric and its portrayal of Hamas as "evil" in need of eradication provide a clear indication of its war objectives. However, Israel's past experiences in fighting Hamas in Gaza suggest that its chances of successfully reoccupying Gaza appear limited. An elaborate urban warfare operation, including house-to-house searches, would be necessary to eliminate Hamas. This would be a substantial



undertaking, considering Hamas's entrenched position in urban areas in Gaza. The IDF is neither trained for prolonged urban warfare nor accustomed to operating in a deeply hostile environment. These inherent challenges were among the reasons that led to the IDF's complete withdrawal from Gaza in 2015, enabling Hamas to take control.

These limitations do not mean that Tel Aviv would be averse to launching a full-scale invasion of Gaza in the future. Tel Aviv appears to be pursuing a "scorched earth" policy in Gaza and is willing to pay any price to fully subjugate Palestinians and establish direct military control over this small enclave. In this endeavour, Tel Aviv is counting on the support of Arab states, especially Egypt, which opposes Hamas due to its connections to the Muslim Brotherhood. The Arab street's sentiment, which has traditionally been pro-Palestinian and critical of Arab states' alignment with Israeli aggression, is the only variable in this asymmetric conflict. Iran, Turkey, Qatar, and Jordan currently lead the axis of resistance against Israel.

However, these countries lack the collective power to resist Israel's ability to wreak havoc on the Palestinian people. Israel is disregarding the 54 member states of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC), and they lack an effective strategy to counter Israeli aggression. There are reports in Western media of some Gulf countries cooperating with the U.S. Treasury Department to track down the "funding sources" of Hamas.

The unfortunate reality is that none of the Arab states desire a Palestinian state on their borders. A Palestinian state would not only threaten the monarchical structures in the Arab world but also become the most populous entity due to its youthful demographic and high literacy rate. While a two-state solution to the Palestinian issue is proposed on paper, in practice, none of the Arab states are actively working to bring it to fruition. After the first Gulf War, when millions of Palestinians were expelled from countries like Kuwait and scattered geographically, Palestinians have been searching in vain for their homeland. Israel's impending full-scale aggression, starting from Gaza, could potentially serve as the catalyst for a large-scale conflagration.

The line up around Gaza

Unprecedented hardline without preparation



By Naqi Akbar

As these words hit the stand, the much anticipated ground offensive might have taken place, or there are fair chances that not much has materialized yet. The response by the Israeli Defence Forces (IDF) to the Hamas surprise incursion on October 7, 2023 can be termed ruthless, reactive but seems bereft of any sound strategy. Almost into the third week, the ground offensive has been postponed, sometimes due to inclement weather or most recently due to the message from the United States political and military leadership that until they mass up enough assets in the Mediterranean and around, they would advise the IDF to initiate the offensive. Here it is also pertinent to note that the IDF itself is short of supplies, which are being refurbished by the United States led western powers.

Going by the information filtering out, the IDF seems to be at loss. Despite its success in creating a global hype in its favor, rallying the western world behind in unilateral terms, it has not been able to devise a strategy, which can help it out in the short and long term. In simple words, it is short

of strategy. That loss of strategy is further evident in the fact that whatever retaliatory campaign which is being spearheaded by the IDF is practically Air Arm; the Israeli Air Force. The IAF target selection, given the fact that the state of Israel is signatory to the Geneva Conventions, clearly suggests that all it is doing is filling up fat files for the International Court of Justice for possible trials under the head of war crimes against individual IAF pilots as well as the political leadership.

That target selection also points to yet another development; a sort of state dysfunction prevalent in the state of Israel. Already dented courtesy the political chaos there because of the government led judicial reforms, which has many similarities in the thought processes forwarded by political parties in Pakistan; containing the judiciary, a war like situation practically exposed the state to its inefficiency.

The episode preceding the first call for a ground offensive was marked by two contrasting situations. On one hand, the Israeli government pinpointed the exit

routes out of Gaza, while on the other, the same convoys of unarmed civilians were bombed by the IAF, exposing a high level of administrative chaos. Similarly, the required public relations narrative was replaced with disinformation. Instead of a rational buildup for the narrative, the Israeli government's media campaign seemed more aligned with a person consumed by revenge and vendetta. It offered no words of clarification for its air campaign and displayed utter disregard for non-military targets, among other issues.

Having discussed the chaos within the cantonment state of Israel in detail, the extent of preparations led by the United States and its Western allies implies some concerning developments. Firstly, they seem to be relying on the turmoil within the political and social structure of Israel. Secondly, the lineup not only hints at an air campaign to control the Palestinian rebellion by militants and manage the resulting refugee crisis, but it also appears to be a strategy aimed at dismantling what US analysts refer to as the "resistance axis" led by Iran and backed by Chinese and Russian support.

While the Russians are still assessing the situation, the movement of the Chinese navy in the Middle East suggests that Beijing is not willing to leave Tehran alone in the current situation. As things stand, behind-the-scenes consultations may not be ruled out. Apart from the current crisis in the Middle East, it is evident that both China and Russia are unhappy with the United States' attempt to inflame the region, which, from their perspective, could be seen as an economic opportunity. It's worth noting that a less reported development in favour of the "resistance axis" is Russian approval to use its airbase near Latakia for IRGC-related logistics, given that the Syrian air bases in Damascus and Aleppo have been regularly rendered inoperative by the IDF since the start of the current hostilities.

China's recent initiatives in brokering peace between what can be called Sunni Islam and Shia Islam leadership indicate that China is looking at the region as a place of opportunity. The United States regrettably sees the region only as a boost for its arms industry complex, with deep pockets like Saudi Arabia and Emirati monarchs ready to click on the add-to-cart list. Further, the United States sees trade in the backdrop of the Abraham Accord, which means subservience to the 'Rothschild' order courtesy wiping out of the 'resistance'.

The United States' insistence to the Jewish state that the ground offensive be delayed means that it wanted to ensure that if the

resistance axis reacted, it had enough hardware as well as the support of NATO to take on the task. Frankly, it does not only look like aiding the Jewish state in dire circumstances, rather it looks like a complete battle plan to possibly transform the configuration of the region. A development, which can safely be termed as the 3rd World War.

For the resistance axis, the stakes are high and it is literally a do-or-die situation. It is ironic that despite the fact that many Muslim hearts ache for the Palestinian plight, the hardware like the best jets are under the watchful eyes of the very tormentors indirectly. While the IDF jets miss no opportunity to pound Civilian targets in complete disregard to the Geneva Convention, the hardware in the use of Muslim air arms can only be found loitering in useless air exercises along the stretches of central Punjab plains. On the other hand, the resistance mainstay still works on obsolete hardware.

The developing scenario also indicates that the Hamas issue is just the figurehead, as has been the case in the last two great wars. The possible annexation of the new lands for Israel with the help of the coalition, the knocking down of the regime in Tehran through possible internal rebellion and external aggression will be the takeaways for the United States and its regional allies. The regional allies will be happy with such a scenario on many counts; they are part of the system; though dying and unable to

offer any free trade opportunities. Their internal incompetence is exploited by the Western powers to extract benefits from them. Therefore, it is a marriage of convenience between the incompetent establishments and the Western armament complex, which is integrated with the Western powers' leadership.

For countries like Pakistan, decision-making is becoming increasingly challenging with each passing day. With the current battle lineup so openly visible, it will be extremely difficult for foreign policy experts to continuously use vague language to manipulate international opinion. Pakistan, despite its deep-rooted tradition of Pan-Islamic sentiments, which was unquestionable even under a staunchly pro-US dictator like Ayub Khan when he dispatched pilots to Iraq and Jordan in 1967, or when, in 1973, a social democrat liberal such as the late Bhutto, who was a CENTO ally of the US, sent Pakistani pilots to Damascus. Today, Pakistan seems to be in a completely different situation.

As the Mediterranean theatre heats up, its impact on the economy and geopolitics will be felt in the coming years, long and short term. It would not be an exaggeration that if the conflict gets out of hand, we will be looking towards a changed world order. It is high time that honest analysts see through the words of the capitalist West, smell a bigger conflict, and try to contain it - before it is too late.



The human cost of phosphoric bombs

By Anum Akram

Following Hamas' attacks on Israel on October 7, Israel has launched full-blown bombardment in Gaza, dropping thousands of tons of explosives on the besieged territory. Israel has also shut off fuel, electricity, and water, which has caused a worsening of the humanitarian crisis in Gaza. Since Israel withdrew from the coastal enclave in 2005, it has been the third significant ground assault in Gaza. Israel is using advanced weapons against Palestine. The military of Israel is supported by the United States with the most advanced weapons.

Israel is one of the Middle East's best-armed countries. The estimated 2023 security budget for Israel, including US aid, is \$23.6 billion. Its air force is equipped with the cutting-edge American F-35 fighter jet, Patriot missile defense batteries, and the Iron Dome missile defense system. In order to assist any street-to-street combat, Israel is equipped with tanks, armored personnel carriers, a fleet of drones, and other modern technologies. Israel instructs its soldiers in similar methods. Besides its drones and missiles, Israel is also using white phosphorus munitions in its military operations in Gaza and Lebanon.

The West Jerusalem government has not verified nor dismissed reports that Israel has between 100 and 200 nuclear bombs. About 30 of these are gravity bombs that are delivered by airplanes. Human Rights Watch confirmed the news of the use of white phosphorus in its military operations in Gaza and Lebanon. Israeli military officials reportedly declined to comment on Human Rights Watch's claims, claiming they were not yet aware that phosphorus bombs had been used during raids on Gaza. This was reported by a British news source. The bombs which are used to attack Gaza and on the borders of Lebanon are M825 and M825A1 artillery shell, and are also labeled D528 which is the US Department of Defense Identification Code (DODIC) for white phosphorus.

Additionally, the Palestinian Ministry of Foreign Affairs earlier claimed that Israel was employing phosphorous bombs on



Gaza that are illegal. In a statement, the Palestinian Ministry of Foreign Affairs said that the occupying Israeli forces had deployed phosphorus bombs in the northern Gaza neighborhood of al-Karamah, which is against international law. Israel used this white phosphorus in Gaza which is the most populated area. Using White phosphorus directly on civilians is permitted under international law.

White phosphorous is a weapon used to mark enemy targets and create smoke to hide unit movements. It can also be employed as a firebomb against hostile positions. Dozens of states that are signatories to the Convention on Conventional Weapons (CCW) have expressed grave concerns with the use of incendiary weapons, particularly white phosphorus, over the past ten years in places like Afghanistan, Gaza, Syria, and other places. White phosphorus munitions are not completely banned, although their use is regulated under international humanitarian law. It is not considered a chemical weapon because its operational effectiveness is primarily due to heat and smoke rather than toxicity. As such, its use is governed by the Convention on Conventional Weapons (CCW), specifi

cally Protocol III, which deals with incendiary weapons. Palestine and Lebanon have acceded to Protocol III while Israel has not ratified the protocol. Protocol III first prohibits the use of ground-based incendiary weapons, where civilians are present.

In artillery shells, bombs, and rockets, white phosphorus is a chemical that ignites when it comes into contact with oxygen. 815 degrees Celsius of high heat is produced by the chemical process. When phosphorus comes into touch with people, it not only causes horrendous damage but also produces light and dense smoke that is employed for military purposes. Due to the fact that it functions primarily through heat and flame rather than toxicity, it is not regarded as a chemical weapon. White phosphorus has a characteristic "garlic" odor and can be given using felt wedges that have been soaked with phosphorus.

White phosphorus can cause severe skin burns and often burns flesh to the bone. Its burns are extremely painful, and its wound healing is difficult and susceptible to infection. White phosphorus particles that remain in the body can re-ignite if they

come into contact with air and melt the body's flesh. According to Human Rights Watch, burning 10 percent of the body with white phosphorus can be fatal. Inhalation of white phosphorus particles or fumes can cause damage to internal organs. People who survive initial injuries often experience lifelong suffering such as loss of mobility and painful, horrific scars that can damage eyes. It is a slow human killer. White phosphorus can also destroy infrastructure and property, damage crops and kill livestock, especially in high wind conditions.

It is not the first time that Israel used white phosphorus directly on civilians but it has happened before. During Operation Cast Lead from December 27, 2008, to January 18, 2009, the Israeli military launched 200 white phosphorus bombs from the ground into civilian areas of Gaza. The white phosphorus rounds also caused damage to hospitals, markets, warehouses housing humanitarian aid, schools, and other buildings used by the general public.

Irish nationalists utilized white phosphorus ammunition for the first time in the late 19th century; at that time, the composition was known as "Fennin fire." In World War I, the United States was the first nation to employ this chemical as a weapon. Additionally, British and Commonwealth forces made widespread use of the chemical in phosphorus grenades, bombs, shells, and rockets during the First World War. These



weapons have been employed in wars all over the world, from the US invasion of Iraq in 2004 to the protracted Nagorno-Karabakh conflict to the invasion of Normandy during World War II. White phosphorus bombs were allegedly used by Russia during the Russia-Ukraine war in 2022.

Thousands of innocent civilians including children were killed in Palestine. Israel cut off everything. Palestine ran out of food, electricity, and fuel and many people are

missing. There are many dead bodies lying openly on the roads, there is no place to bury them. The United States announced all the possible support for Israel, and they showed themselves as a victim. The moral support for Palestine from all Islamic countries including Pakistan is still limited to statements. Nobody knows how long it will take for Palestine to be free but the attack of Hamas on Israel is a good and solid start to end the fear of Israel from the Muslim world.



Against Gaza genocide

By Fatima Bhutto

There is no other word for the violence that Israel is raining down on Gaza except genocide. Today, in real-time, we are watching Israel starve a criminally besieged population in Gaza, denying them water — one of the most basic and fundamental rights without which no living being can survive — food, fuel, and movement. Gaza has been described as the largest open-air prison in the world, but it is increasingly more accurate to call it a concentration camp.

Doctors in Gaza are too afraid to bury their dead according to Dr Ghassan Abu Sitta, a surgeon with Doctors Without Borders. In seven days, Israel has murdered over 1,000 children in cold blood, ordered a civilian population to move from the Northern part of the Gaza enclave, a virtual concentration camp that is under naval, air, and land blockades, towards the South, and then bombed them as they evacuated.

Despite ordering more than one million Gazans to evacuate to the south, Israel ordered the Kuwaiti Specialist Hospital in Rafah, in the supposed safe zone, to empty their beds of all their patients and evacuate as well.

"The hospital is full of patients and fuel. We are not leaving and will die in the hospital. We have been given two hours to evacuate. Tell all," Dr Suhaib Alhamss, one of the hospital's surgeons, said in a voice note on Sunday morning. Dr Suhaib's home was bombed and destroyed a few hours after he sent his plea for help.

According to the UN Sexual and Reproductive Health Agency, 50,000 pregnant women in Gaza have no access to health services. Beyond this, 5,522 pregnant women are expected to give birth this month. Imagine bringing life into the nightmare that Israel has wrought: thundering bombardment the first sound that the delicate ears of a newborn baby will ever hear, provided it survives the ordeal of its first few hours on earth.

The Palestinian Ministry of Health estimated on Sunday that Israeli terror strikes kill one Palestinian every five minutes. On the



first day of Israel's ground invasion of Gaza, the health ministry announced that 45 families — all the living generations of 45 separate families — had been killed and wiped from the Gaza Civil Registry. Genocide. There is no other word.

Unicef has issued a strong statement stating that there are 'no safe spaces' in Gaza. And soon, this terror will spread beyond the besieged and battered Gaza Strip. Itamar Ben Gvir, Israel's ultra-right, racist National Security minister, announced the purchase of 10,000 rifles which are to be distributed to settlers around the country. Four thousand weapons were already handed out by Ben Gvir's ministry but those were deemed insufficient for whatever it is that Israel has planned. This weekend, there was a chilling silence from Gaza as Israel blocked its electricity and internet, effectively giving themselves the cover of darkness to commit their crimes against the Palestinian people.

It hardly comes as a surprise that Prime Minister Narendra Modi of India has

cheered Israel's psychopathic massacre in Gaza from day one. Modi's India is the number one client of Israeli weapons, and though the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh, which Modi is a devoted lifelong member of is ideologically inspired by and seeks to emulate Nazi racism and fascism, there is no doubt that a common hatred of Muslims and shared anti-democratic, authoritarian tendencies have brought the Indian Prime Minister closer to Israel than any previous other Indian leader.

I do not say with any glee but only sadness, for our Indian brothers and sisters who continue to believe in the politics of the global south, and decolonisation, and who are themselves embattled as they fight this sinister fascism at home.

What I do find surprising, however, is Pakistan's uncharacteristically limp and underwhelming response to Israeli slaughter in Gaza. In September, the Foreign Minister of Israel, Eli Cohen, announced after the UN General Assembly gathering in New York that 'six or seven' Muslim

countries were ready to normalise relations with Israel on the back of its recognition by Saudi Arabia. Cohen did not say that Pakistan was one of those countries but recent bizarre mentions of Israel by our interim Prime Minister led many to suspect Pakistan was one of those countries.

The sudden mentions of a 'two-state solution', dead in the water internationally and more importantly rejected by Palestinians, made by several Pakistani politicians in the wake of Israel's slaughter this month added more fuel to the fire. Pakistan doesn't believe in a two-state solution, nor should it. The only viable solution is one state with the right of return for all Palestinians and the immediate end to Israel's brutal apartheid and occupation.

In our complicated country, we can be certain of very few things. We are currently in the grips of a dire economic crisis, have never weathered more than a few weeks of political calm, and are caught in the crosshairs of myriad geopolitical fault lines. But we can be certain and proud that Pakistan's historic stance has always been steadfastly against the practice of apartheid — our passports refuse our citizens to travel to Israel today but until the 1990s there were two countries we could not travel to: South Africa and Israel, on the grounds that both were apartheid states. Israel's apartheid is a more ferocious beast today than the one practiced by whites in South



Africa and there is no question that Israel is committing genocide against the Palestinians in full view of the world.

I know that I am not alone amongst Pakistanis of my generation who struggle with our beautiful and fractured country. There is no doubt that as Pakistanis we have been blessed with a patrimony of riches — historical, architectural, cultural, environmental — and simultaneously betrayed by decades of violence, corruption, and political suppression.

I love my country and that is why I have often wept for it, wounded by its politics and failures of justice. But when it comes to the issue of the dispossessed Palestinian people, Pakistan has always stood on the side of the occupied, never the occupier. And this has always given me great pride. Looking at Pakistanis online, expressing courageous solidarity with an embattled people, I feel that same pride.

I was a child watching the news on television with my father, Mir Murtaza, in exile in Syria when I first saw young Palestinian boys pelting the hardened shells of Israeli tanks with the only weapons the weak have — rocks. Pray for them, my father told me, when you pray for your return to Pakistan before you go to sleep at night, pray for the Palestinian people too. Pray that they can return to their homes too.

The unfolding genocide in Gaza must not happen in our name. Pakistan must lodge the strongest diplomatic protests. Pakistan must stand on the right side of history and oppose this slaughter with all its might and for all our problems, we are a mighty country. And as we do so, we must remember our duties to occupied people everywhere who are bound by not just fidelity but consistency. Yesterday, Pakistan stood by the Palestinians in their struggle for justice. We must do the same today and tomorrow.



Western media and the war

By Zahid Hussain

The brazen one-sided account of the conflict justifying Israeli aggression against Palestinians living in the occupied Gaza Strip has exposed the mainstream Western media's claims of objectivity in reporting. Truth has been a major casualty in the ongoing war.

While disproportionately highlighting the Hamas assault, the destruction of Gaza and the killing of thousands of Palestinians, mostly children in Israeli airstrikes, has received little coverage in the US and other Western media.

Israel's war crimes are being justified on the pretext of the 'right to self-defence'. There is no word of protest on the killing of a dozen Arab journalists in the relentless bombing that has turned Gaza into rubble. The double standards of those who claim to be the champions of freedom and democracy is appalling.

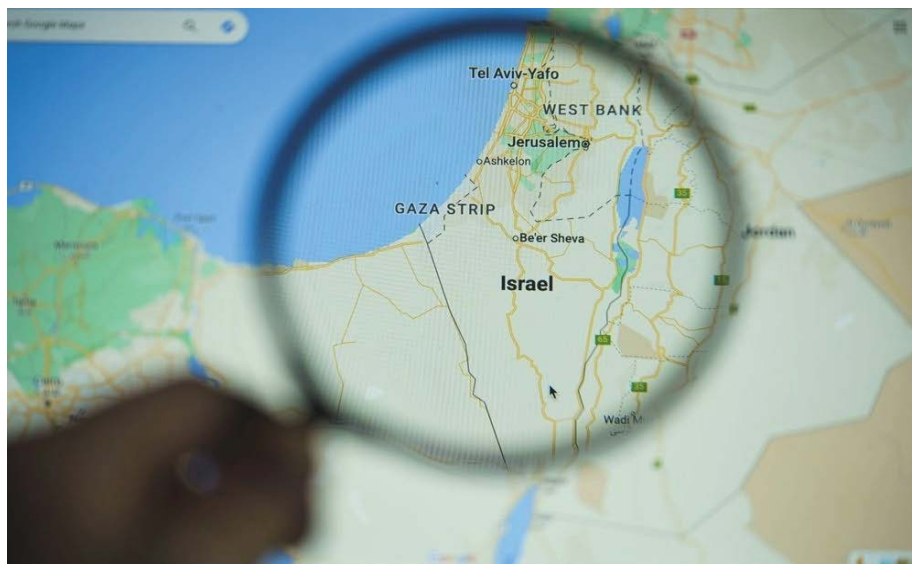
While scores of Western journalists are covering the war from Israel, there are few on the ground to report on the unfolding humanitarian catastrophe in Gaza. For them, there is only one side of the story and that's what they are projecting.

Much of their reporting of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict show a dominant pattern biased in favour of the Zionist colonisers. The events of Oct 7 are reported in isolation without going into the genesis of the Palestinian struggle for freedom.

Unconfirmed reports of the beheading of Israeli children have been used to whip up sentiments in the West and to build a narrative for the annihilation of 2.2 million people living in a narrow strip of land. Israeli leaders and some Western media commentators have compared the Hamas attack to 9/11.

The severity of the Palestinians' plight is mostly missing from Western reporting.

Indeed, the killing of women and children by any side cannot be condoned, but what is happening in Gaza is without any parallel in recent history. Nothing is worse than the genocide of a subjugated population by a colonising power.



In its recent report, Human Rights Watch has confirmed Israel's use of white phosphorus in military operations in Gaza and Lebanon, putting civilians at risk of serious and long-term injuries. "The use of white phosphorus in Gaza, one of the most densely populated areas in the world, magnifies the risk to civilians and violates the international humanitarian law prohibition on putting civilians at unnecessary risk," the report said.

Meanwhile, according to a Unicef report, hundreds of children have been killed and injured in the latest Israeli airstrikes: "The images and stories are clear: children with horrendous burns, mortar wounds, and lost limbs." The number of such cases is rising every minute, with overwhelmed hospitals unable to treat them. The dead and injured are not only numbers; each and every one is a human tragedy.

But the ongoing tragedy seems to have been ignored by the Western media that has continued to justify the Israeli military action. Such distortion of facts has virtually turned the media into a propaganda tool for warmongers. It appears that their 'objective' journalism is meant to serve their respective governments' policy of unequivocal support for Israel.

It is as if there is virtual censorship, particularly on electronic media. There is shrinking space for rational views.

For instance, it has been reported that three Muslim anchors were suspended by MSNBC, a leading American TV network, for apparently trying to present the other side of the story regarding the plight of the people in besieged Gaza. One journalist has been quoted by the Arab News as saying that "the mood is very similar to what had happened post 9/11 with the whole you are either with us or against us argument".

This mindset is very much apparent in the way some media groups have been reporting the protests against Israeli aggression and the wholesale massacre of the Palestinian population, across the Western world. A BBC TV report described massive pro-Palestinian marches across Britain as "pro-Hamas". The network later confessed to misleading the public but it stopped short of apologising.

Many European countries, including France, Germany and Italy, have banned the protest rallies, but defying the restrictions, people are coming out in large numbers to express their solidarity with the Palestinian people who have been subjected to Israeli war crimes. The worsening humanitarian situation in Gaza will only intensify the public's outrage.

While the severity of the Palestinians' plight is mostly missing from Western mainstream reporting, the destruction inflicted by the Israeli bombardment has

been widely relayed through social media and some media networks such as Al Jazeera. But there is now a move to block reports and commentaries on the Gaza massacre even on those forums.

Azmat Khan, a Pulitzer Prize-winning investigative reporter for the New York Times and a professor at Columbia University, has reported that her account was “shadowbanned” after she posted an Instagram story about the war in Gaza. “It’s an extraordinary threat to the flow of information and credible journalism about an unprecedented war,” she posted on X (formerly Twitter).

In the midst of Israel’s relentless bombing of Gaza, forcing over a million people out of their homes and turning the territory into a killing field for Palestinian children, the New York Times in its editorial declared: “What Israel is fighting to defend is a society that values human life and the rule of law.”

Nothing could be more bizarre than the defence of an apartheid regime, which has constantly been accused of committing war crimes, by the editors of a newspaper that takes pride in upholding the cause of democracy and human rights. There is no mention of Israeli colonising Palestinian land and regularly forcing the inhabitants out of their homes in the editorial.



And what rule of law is the NYT is talking about? While condemning Hamas for its Oct 7 attack and the kidnapping of Israeli women and children, the editors deliberately ignored the fact that Israel is holding some 5,000 Palestinian prisoners.

Is the use of white phosphorous on civilian populations and starving millions of people an attribute of a country that values human life? Such duplicity and support from the West have emboldened Israel and destabilised the situation further.

Courtesy Dawn



A world sacrificed at Israel's altar



By Jawed Naqvi

It isn't concealed from the keen observer of politics that the Five Eyes Anglosphere created the modern state of Israel in 1948, which in turn birthed the Hamas as a foil to the non-sectarian and avidly secular PLO. In both instances, the objective was to vacate the threat of leftist fervour striking roots around the fabled Arab oil wells.

It was not insignificant that Arthur Balfour's letter to Lord Rothschild, cited as laying the grounds for a future state of Israel, was drafted and delivered on Nov 2, 1917. In other words, the overture came as the Bolshevik Revolution set off alarm bells in European capitals.

A handy asset to this end arrived only a year before the Balfour Declaration. The secret Sykes-Picot accord of 1916 carved up former Ottoman territories in the Middle East, to become areas of influence between France and Britain. The accord enabled Lord Balfour to draft his promise to the Jewish elite as an overdue quid pro quo.

The Rothschild support for England's war efforts had climaxed with the campaign against Napoleon. From London in 1813 to 1815, Nathan Mayer Rothschild almost

single-handedly financed the British war effort, organising the shipment of bullion to the Duke of Wellington's armies across Europe.

He also arranged the payment of British financial subsidies to their continental allies. In 1815 alone, the Rothschilds are said to have provided £9.8 million (equivalent to about £1 billion today) in subsidy loans to Britain's continental allies.

Balfour's letter to Walter Rothschild, however, spoke plainly of a "national home" for Jews in Palestine, "it being clearly understood that nothing shall be done which may prejudice the civil and religious rights of existing non-Jewish communities in Palestine, or the rights and political status enjoyed by Jews in any other country". There was pointedly no mention of a theocratic state exclusively for the Jewish community, much less any expulsion of non-Jews from Palestine.

There was pointedly no mention of a theocratic state exclusively for the Jewish community, much less any expulsion of non-Jews from Palestine.

There could, in any case, not be a religious

state in the sense Benjamin Netanyahu and his right-wing cohorts would conceive Israel in their time. The idea didn't excite the Anglosphere, which initially favoured a multicultural milieu, the kind that would one day produce a Rishi Sunak or a Barack Obama in their own drawing rooms.

The religious genie was never, however, completely exorcised. The Christian trope of turning the other cheek was meant to be a challenge to the Old Testament's prescription of an eye for an eye or a tooth for a tooth. It never found traction in the real world.

European wars, colonial armadas and the West's ceaseless duels with each other reinforced the sombre truth, not to speak of the slave trade they plied to manage the conquest of other's lands. Colonial competitors built churches across the world but thumbed their noses at the injunction against stealing and killing. Rwanda massacres took place between two tribes that both went to the same church installed by their colonial masters.

Some Hindu activists in India were, however, ranged on opposite sides of the Christian-Jewish-Muslim injunctions about the

text and spirit of their faiths. Gandhi was a pacifist in the Christian mode, so much so that Martin Luther King Jr, the civil rights leader and Christian preacher, saw him as his inspiration.

On the other side stood Hindutva, which proposed as early as 1939 to do to the Muslims and Christians in India what Hitler was doing to Jews in Germany. In his admiration of Hitler, M.S. Golwalkar was as staunchly anti-communist as Narendra Modi would soon be. Anti-communism became a clear reason for Hindutva to flip its mockery of Jews subsequently to side with Israel. Intense Islamophobia only fortified the ties.

There was a seminal piece published in the Indian Express, curiously a day before the Indian parliament was attacked on Dec 16, 2001.

An erstwhile Hindutva votary and journalist-politician from A.B. Vajpayee's stable pontificated on how to deal with the collusion, which he swore he could see, between Muslim extremists and Indian Marxists, who he branded as terrorists. (There's a useful protocol followed by the BBC on why the media should not describe Hamas and other serial offenders, including Jews, Muslims, Christians, Hindus or Naxalites, as terrorists.)

The journalist-politician advocated a jaw for a tooth, unwittingly subscribing to the biblical dictum, a trope his worldview otherwise shunned. To the relief of his



critics, the journalist-politician has evolved as an opponent of Prime Minister Modi's politics.

Israel's bloodthirsty pursuit of revenge against the religiously inspired Hamas — if that ever helped the US in Afghanistan after 9/11 — is not different from the West's eye-for-an-eye atavism. It was used to destroy secular states at the altar of an entity the West created to brush off its guilt of mocking and murdering Jews for centuries.

As Noam Chomsky and others persistently remind us, the defeat of Hitler didn't find the Americans or anyone in Europe welcoming the exodus. They needed someone else somewhere else to do the job. The Holocaust was not on the historic firmament until 1967, respected Jewish scholars like Norman Finkelstein would tell you.

I had a ringside view of an event in 1982 that links up with the rise of and secret investment in Hamas by Israel until last week. Then Saudi crown prince Fahd was promoting his peace plan in Fez in Morocco to the Arab League, whereby Palestinians would get a state.

The price was recognition of Israel with security guarantees, something Iraq, Syria, Libya and South Yemen turned down. It was precisely these secular pro-USSR states that were dealt with one by one when the Cold War ended. They were systematically destroyed at the altar of Israel and as a reward for the feudal-tribal satraps installed as rulers by Britain.

They say the Hamas assault on Israel has disrupted a likely Israel-Saudi accord. The question is when was the accord not there?

Courtesy Dawn



Forging a New Dawn: U.S. and China's collaborative journey in late 2023

By Kanwal Munir

In a rapidly evolving global landscape, the willingness of the world's two largest economies, China and the United States, to collaborate and manage their differences holds paramount significance for international stability and prosperity. At an annual dinner hosted by the National Committee on United States-China Relations, Chinese President Xi Jinping expressed China's readiness to cooperate with the United States. This declaration signifies a pivotal moment in the ongoing relationship between the two nations. This article will delve into the nuances of China's stance, the dynamics of U.S.-China relations, and the potential implications for the world, while exploring the context leading up to the forthcoming visit of Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi to Washington.



Setting the Stage: U.S.-China Relations

To understand the significance of President Xi's message and the upcoming diplomatic engagement between the U.S. and China, it is crucial to grasp the evolving dynamics of their relationship. U.S.-China relations have been marked by a complex interplay of cooperation, competition, and occasional discord. This partnership, often referred to as the world's most consequential bilateral relationship, has the potential to shape the global order in the 21st century.

Xi Jinping's Message: Willingness to Collaborate

At the annual dinner, President Xi Jinping stressed China's commitment to collaboration with the United States. He emphasized the necessity of actively managing their differences, signalling a crucial step towards a more stable bilateral relationship. Xi's call resonates with the global community, as he underlined the profound significance of finding the "right" approach for interaction between these two influential nations. This commitment to responsible

diplomacy and cooperation carries far-reaching implications, impacting not only the two nations involved but also the broader international landscape.

Principles of Cooperation

President Xi's message emphasized three fundamental principles for cooperation between China and the United States. First, mutual respect signifies a commitment to recognizing each other's sovereignty and values. Second, peaceful co-existence highlights the avoidance of conflicts and disputes, promoting stability. Third, win-win cooperation underscores the pursuit of outcomes that benefit both nations, fostering a positive and equitable relationship. These principles serve as the cornerstone for building a constructive and cooperative partnership, where respect, peace, and shared prosperity are at the forefront of their collaborative efforts.

Wang Yi's Upcoming Visit

The forthcoming visit of Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi to Washington marks the highest-level in-person engagement between the two nations before the anti-

ipated meeting between U.S. President Joe Biden and President Xi Jinping at the November Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) summit in San Francisco. Wang's visit is a critical step in furthering diplomatic efforts and managing the intense competition that characterizes the U.S.-China relationship.

U.S. efforts to manage differences

The United States has adopted a proactive stance in recent months, focusing on the management of differences and the reduction of tensions within its relationship with China. This approach is driven by the imperative of preventing potential conflicts and fostering stability in a relationship that is marked by intricacies and challenges. Key U.S. officials, including Secretary of State Antony Blinken, have actively initiated dialogues with their Chinese counterparts. These discussions encompass a wide spectrum of issues, including trade and territorial disputes in the South China Sea, reflecting a commitment to diplomatic engagement as a means to address contentious matters and promote a more stable bilateral relationship.

China's Expectations

While China expresses its willingness to collaborate, it also places expectations on the United States. Beijing seeks tangible efforts from Washington to address its concerns and demonstrate sincerity in building a more stable and cooperative relationship. These expectations include respecting China's core interests, such as the issue of Taiwan, and engaging in dialogue on contentious matters.

Global Implications

The potential for enhanced U.S.-China relations carries significant global implications that extend far beyond the bilateral sphere. A more cooperative relationship between these two superpowers can exert a positive influence on a plethora of pressing global challenges, thus reshaping the dynamics of international diplomacy.

Foremost among these challenges is climate change. As the two largest greenhouse gas emitters, the collaboration of the United States and China in the fight against climate change is paramount. Their joint efforts can set the tone for global climate action, leading the way in transitioning towards cleaner, more sustainable energy sources and mitigating the adverse effects of climate change.

Moreover, the response to pandemics gains immensely from collaborative U.S.-China relations. The COVID-19 pandemic starkly illustrated the necessity of global cooperation in health crises. A more harmonious relationship between these two nations can

bolster international efforts to combat infectious diseases, develop vaccines, and improve global health infrastructure.

Economic stability is another critical area of impact. The interdependence of the U.S. and Chinese economies means that their collaborative efforts can enhance global economic resilience. By addressing trade issues, and intellectual property concerns, and fostering economic growth, the two nations can contribute to a more stable and prosperous global economy.

Furthermore, improved relations between the United States and China can serve as a model for nations with differing ideologies. By demonstrating that nations can work together despite political and ideological disparities, they can inspire diplomatic cooperation and bridge-building in regions marked by long-standing conflicts.

In summary, the positive transformation of U.S.-China relations holds the potential to address some of the world's most pressing challenges, benefiting the global community in areas such as climate change, pandemic response, economic stability, and fostering a spirit of international cooperation.

The Road Ahead

With the impending visit of Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi to Washington, there is a palpable sense of cautious optimism regarding the future of U.S.-China relations. This pivotal moment offers both nations the opportunity to recalibrate their approach, fostering increased cooperation while managing their differences constructively and responsibly. The success

of this collaborative effort is not confined to the bilateral sphere; it carries the potential to shape the trajectory of global affairs in the 21st century. As these two superpowers navigate their complex relationship, they set an example for the world, demonstrating that even amidst disparities and challenges, nations can work together for the greater good. The road ahead presents a chance to create a more stable, cooperative, and harmonious international landscape, setting the stage for a future marked by diplomacy, collaboration, and global prosperity.

Conclusion

China's willingness to collaborate, as articulated by President Xi Jinping, offers a rare opportunity to redefine the dynamics of the world's most consequential bilateral relationship. By championing principles of mutual respect and peaceful co-existence, both nations can chart a path towards enhanced stability and cooperation. The imminent visit of Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi to Washington stands as a pivotal moment in this transformative journey and symbolizes hope for the entire global community. As the U.S. and China address their differences and explore avenues for collaboration, they possess the potential to become trailblazers for international cooperation in our intricate and interdependent world. This collective effort holds the promise of fostering a more secure and prosperous global order, setting an example for nations with differing ideologies, and establishing a framework for diplomatic engagement that can address shared challenges on a global scale.



Democracy in Pakistan Faces Pressure Amid Election Dilemma

By Umer Farooq



Specific constitutional provisions related to holding elections within 90 days of the dissolution of provincial or national assemblies have already been violated. Earlier this year, the Punjab and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Assemblies were dissolved, followed by the National Assembly's dissolution in August 2023. Yet, it's clear that the provisions for holding elections for the national and provincial assemblies will not be adhered to within the stipulated 90-day period. The Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) has recently announced that elections are slated for the last week of January 2024.

This implies a substantial delay in the elections for Punjab and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa assemblies, nearly a year overdue. In contrast, elections for the national assembly and the remaining two assemblies will also face several months of delay. This leads us to question who should be held accountable for this electoral postponement.

The caretaker government has publicly stated that the Election Commission retains the prerogative to announce the election schedule, effectively absolving itself of any responsibility for the delay. In response, the Election Commission

has firmly rejected any role for the incumbent President in determining the election schedule. The ongoing dispute between the President and the Election Commission continues, with President Arif Alvi expressing skepticism about the possibility of the January 2024 elections. This doubt is not unique to the President, as many analysts and commentators fear further delays due to Pakistan's precarious economic situation and political turbulence.

Originally, elections were meant to take place within 90 days, but the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) has explained that it required more time to redraw constituencies following the latest population census. In an interview with a private news channel, when asked about his belief in the January 2024 elections, President Alvi responded, "No, I do not believe [polls would be held in the last week of January], but since the supreme judiciary has taken the matter under its notice, I think it would give a very reasonable verdict."

Pakistan's Caretaker Prime Minister Anwaar-ul-Haq Kakar has consistently reassured political stakeholders that a "level-playing field" would be provided

to all parties and their candidates in the upcoming elections. However, the differing views of the President and the Prime Minister on this matter highlight the divergence in their perspectives.

In parliamentary systems around the world, political leaders and parties often demonstrate flexibility in their attitudes and policies. They engage in negotiations, make compromises, and are willing to concede ground. This adaptability is crucial for making the system function effectively, particularly in an environment where policy-making takes precedence. Inflexibility can lead to system breakdown. Parliamentary democracies embrace diversity, where each member of the lower house has an equal vote and an equal say.

The Pakistani political class, unfortunately, lacks institutional memory and has failed to build significant political institutions over the country's 70-year history. The political processes lack the necessary rules to peacefully resolve conflicts that naturally arise in any political system. Instead of finding peaceful solutions, they often resort to non-representative institutions to arbitrate between them. What's even more striking is their short-sightedness.



When one of these non-representative institutions rules in their favour, they often believe that it secures permanent dominance, neglecting the possibility of future decisions that might not be in their favour.

There is no chance that anybody will be held accountable for violating the specific provisions of the constitution relating to holding parliamentary elections within 90 days of the dissolution of the assemblies. We have a direct confrontation between the Supreme Court and the PDM government about the delay in the holding of elections for two provincial assembly elections. It ended in a stalemate and nobody was punished. Rather we are expecting further delay in the elections—some are predicting that the election would be delayed for years. Imran Khan is persistently scoring a higher than 60 per cent rating in public opinion polls. His continuous absence from the political scene has so far failed to dampen his popularity. Nawaz Sharif is still a potent and popular political force in central Punjab, a region where a decisive electoral battle for a parliamentary majority takes place. But he is no longer a darling of the Punjabi middle class, a social class which has persistently voted for him between 1993 and 2013. In the sixteen months of coalition rule led by PML-N, this social class was pulverized with economic hardships. This is a social class which is the prime beneficiary of state-sponsored economic and financial subsidy programs. The comfortable middle-class lifestyle, which this social class has enjoyed since Zia's martial law, the Punjabi middle class has thus far attributed to the patronage-based politics of Nawaz Sharif. This middle class is no longer solidly supporting Nawaz Sharif. Although Nawaz and his party are making a last-ditch attempt to re-attract its social base with slogans such as, "Nawaz Sharif will restore economic affluence in the country." PML-N's narrative squarely blames Imran Khan and his time in power for the economic hardship people have been facing. The military will undoubtedly be taking a risk in this game. Nawaz Sharif, once in power, will surely try to act as an autonomous political actor. In his Minar-e-Pakistan speech, he did not mention normalization with India but broadly hinted at normalization with Pakistan's neighbours. The military is

rather familiar with Nawaz Sharif's old obsession with the idea of initiating a peace process with India. Autonomous political actors or those who have a pretension of autonomy don't take long to start a brawl with the military establishment. Pakistan's post-Musharraf political history is rife with examples of this sort. So someone who can kick out Imran Khan and bring in Nawaz Sharif could also kick out Nawaz Sharif and bring Imran Khan back again. Our criminal justice system has already been turned into a series of kangaroo courts.



Kicking out one popular political leader and bringing in another will never bring stability to our society. Any political system that will take birth after the political engineering of keeping Imran Khan out of electoral politics will face serious legitimacy questions. Pushing Imran Khan out of politics means disenfranchising, rather than alienating, a large segment of Pakistani society. Perhaps a large segment of Pakistani society is likely to not turn up for voting on polling day in the January 2024 parliamentary elections, thus dramatically reducing voter turnout. This will be another question mark on the legitimacy of the January parliamentary elections.

It would be a folly of the highest order to decide Imran Khan's future based on legal and jurisprudential principles. Imran Khan's fate should be decided on the basis of political principles. Keeping Nawaz

Sharif out of the electoral process was a mistake, and we paid heavily for that mistake when the political system failed to stabilize in the wake of the 2018 parliamentary elections. Nawaz Sharif possesses political wisdom in ample supply. He has seen many ups and downs throughout our nation's political history. Political popularity could never be erased by the sheer de jure power of judicial verdicts. People's verdicts endure far longer than judicial verdicts. This is a lesson from our history. Those repeating their mistakes should realize as

quickly as possible that they are standing on the wrong side of history.

It is precisely for this reason that no accountability mechanism exists in our constitution to punish those responsible for delays in elections that people are freely speculating that elections will be delayed. However, the caretaker prime minister while addressing an American audience at the Council on Foreign Relations think tank in New York expressed that his government was determined to facilitate "free, fair and transparent elections" in Pakistan, "We're committed to abiding by the principles of democracy that are enshrined in Pakistan's constitution. My government will work diligently to ensure that the people of Pakistan are fully represented in the government that would be formed," he said. Let's hope he remains true to his words.



Nawaz Sharif: The noisy return and challenges ahead

By Tahir Niaz

'Bail or Jail' was the question in the peoples' mind when Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz supremo Mian Muhammad Nawaz Sharif was preparing to end his 4-year self-exile in London.

The three-time prime minister of Pakistan returned to the country with the status of a convicted criminal as he has been sentenced in two graft cases before leaving Pakistan for abroad purely on a medical plea. He flew from Dubai to Islamabad on a chartered flight. The state opened its arms for the 'healer' as he arrived in the country.

The law fully assisted to make him another entry into the country's politics. All possible legal hurdles were removed timely from the path of who was once declared a 'proclaimed offender' by the Pakistani courts for fleeing from the law. Two days before his arrival in Pakistan, Mr Sharif secured protective bail in the Al-Azizia and Avenfield cases, in which he currently stands convicted from the Islamabad High Court. The accountability watchdog, which had once found the Sharif family fallen neck deep in corruption, suddenly offered no objections to the elder Sharif being granted bail. Otherwise, he could have to proceed directly to a jail instead of Lahore's Minar-e-Pakistan rally.

The remaining legal hurdles in the way of Nawaz Sharif to power corridors are also falling like dominoes. Punjab caretaker government, in a contested move, suspended the former prime minister's sentence in the Al-Azizia case under Section 401 of Code of Criminal Procedure; Islamabad High Court extended protective bail for the next two days; and the accountability court revoked warrants. Nawaz Sharif on October 24 secured an extension in his protective bail from the Islamabad High Court in the Al-Azizia and Avenfield Apartments cases till October 26 and the same day, the court restored his appeals against the convictions in the two references, opening a path to election. The lawyers of Nawaz Sharif may request the court to



dispose of the appeals within a shortest possible time so that it could be decided before the general elections. The accountability court judge Mohammad Bashir also revoked the perpetual arrest warrants of PML-N supremo after his surrender in the Toshakhana case and also granted him bail against surety bonds of Rs 1 million.

Nawaz Sharif smoothly proceeded from Islamabad to Lahore. Two planes showered him with rose petals. In his hometown Lahore, Mr Sharif addressed supporters at the Minar-i-Pakistan, where attendees were promised free meals, motorbikes, and even paradise tickets. A large crowd welcomed their Quaid at the rally and dispersed. This is a reflection of how the PML-N supremo was welcomed in his country of over 250 million.

When Nawaz left Pakistan in 2019, he was serving time for corruption. He was allowed to leave jail on health grounds. At that time, Imran Khan was the prime minister of the country and later he was ousted in a parliamentary vote. In a striking reversal of roles, Nawaz's rival Imran Khan is now in jail and the Pakistan army's one-time arch-rival received a rousing state welcome upon returning from self-exile.

Under the circumstances, Pakistan Peoples' Party also is not very happy with the protocol given to the PML-N Quaid. According to Faisal Karim Kundi, the journey starting with a meeting with Pakistan's envoy in London ended up with a salute in Lahore. He also termed the PML-N rally a third copy of the PTI gatherings at the same venue.

Now it appears that the powerful establishment is prepared to embrace the man it long back dislodged from power, then toppled in a coup and in the last, allegedly got disqualified for electoral politics. There would be no surprise if a thorn in the side of the establishment for so much of his over three-decade career even ends up being PM again. One could have hardly imagined such a dramatic turnaround in Pakistani politics.

The three-time prime minister seems all set for a fourth shot at power and the political observers believe that anything that could stop him now from being in the PM house is a bad luck, read prank. However, PTI supporters see the welcome and protocol offered to the three-time prime minister as a ploy to make the common people believe that the supremo will be in power again, as



they think that the PTI still enjoys support of the vast majority of Pakistanis. Here concludes the first phase of the politics attached with Nawaz Sharif's arrival in the country.

The second round starts with Nawaz Sharif attending the court proceedings to convince the judicial system of the country that he had done nothing wrong and all the cases framed against him were fabricated. The accused of the May 9 riots would also be tried in the coming weeks and in the meantime, and the nation might see some more press conferences.

Nonetheless, what next? One can hardly answer this question, not even those at the helm of affairs. It's far from certain exactly how things will play out in future.

The PML-N was of the view that it is Nawaz Sharif who could turn the table on the political opponents after landing in Pakistan. Nawaz Sharif's party is very clear that he will be their PM candidate in elections likely to be held early next year if everything goes by the ECP announcement. In a changing political era, the PML-N leadership is facing multiple political challenges. Upon his arrival in a changed Pakistan, Nawaz is facing a stubborn youth. His popularity is at stake in the face of Imran Khan's massive following and from here his real political test starts.

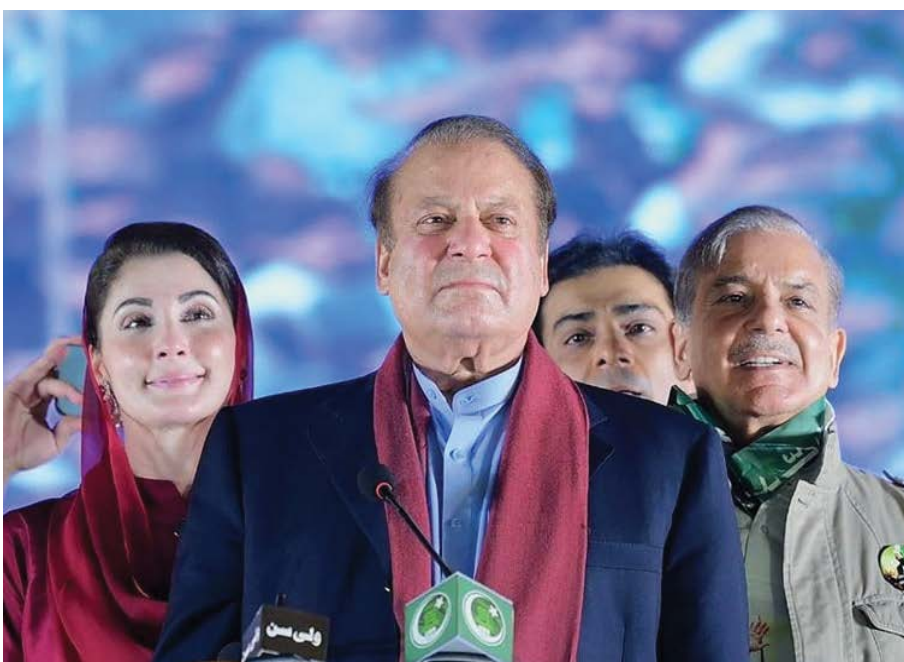


Imran Khan's supporters are largely silent at the moment but seem determined as Imran Khan is in jail and his party weakened after a crackdown following May 9 violent protests. Nawaz Sharif's party recalls similar things happening before the 2018 vote when their supremo was in jail and people were forced to part way with the PML-N. Political analysts see history repeating itself, with the PML-N instead of the PTI the beneficiary this time. Now it looks like it's Nawaz's turn.

But political observers are still unable to find the answer to 'how' given the popularity of Imran Khan even in these times. The PML-N tried to match PTI's power show at Minar-i-Pakistan. The party's nervousness was quite evident from its bizarre statements during the run-up to the rally; warnings to keep track of people through their cell phones and offers of motorbikes and even tickets for paradise.

There was nonstop coverage of the PML-N rally on almost all local television channels, but on the very next day, PTI workers were not allowed to hold a gathering in Lahore despite having permission from the district administration. Still, things are not as easy for the PML-N as the party pretends as the 16 months government under Shehbaz Sharif is simply coming as a big hurdle in their acceptance among the masses. Inflation still remains a strong challenge to the PML-N and its former allies.

A lot has changed in Pakistan over the past four years. A growing youth prominence in the electoral rolls is changing the nature of politics in critical ways. The votes cast for the PML-N have been on a consistent decline for years. The question is if Nawaz Sharif could reverse this trend in the next elections when the victim card is firmly held by Imran Khan's party. Only time will tell if Nawaz Sharif has returned to rule the country or depart again.





The race for Premiership, Is there the only horse?



By Sarfraz Raja

Elections are a mystery to many, yet everyone seems to be clued in on the outcome. This humorous observation is currently making the rounds on social media, shedding light on the state of the country's politics. It remains uncertain when Pakistan's general elections will take place, as no official date has been announced. However, there is a growing consensus on who will assume the role of the next prime minister. Nawaz Sharif, a former prime minister and the leader of the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) has returned to the country after a four-year absence, and there is a strong belief that he will be the next leader of the nation. The question is, why is he being considered as the frontrunner for this position? There are several factors contributing to this perception and belief, despite the significant decline in the PML-N's popularity during their sixteen months in power.

Is Nawaz Sharif the only option?

The concept of a level playing field, much talked about in recent times, holds the

promise that if provided, and all parties are allowed to freely participate in the electoral process, it would undoubtedly set the stage for a showdown between Nawaz Sharif and Imran Khan. However, the political landscape in the country has undergone a significant shift since May 9. Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI), which had been enjoying soaring popularity, suddenly fractured into multiple factions within a matter of days. Vocal leaders and ardent supporters of Imran Khan parted ways in quick succession, leaving the party and its leader without a solid defence. New parties emerged, aiming to replace the PTI's leadership and capture its voter base. It's now challenging to envision the PTI participating in the upcoming elections at full strength.

Party leader Imran Khan has been behind bars for several months, facing severe legal cases, including those related to the Official Secrets Act, while his vice-chairman, Shah Mehmood Qureshi, also faces arrest in the same case. It appears unlikely that they will have the opportunity to participate in the elections, making the PTI an uncertain

presence in the electoral landscape. In such a scenario, the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) remains the sole major party with the potential to secure a majority, particularly due to its deep roots and substantial voter base in the country's largest province, Punjab.

A significant concern is the performance of the PML-N-led coalition government during its sixteen-month tenure, which began in April 2022, following the ousting of Imran Khan. Unpopular economic decisions, including sharp increases in the prices of petroleum products, electricity, and gas, along with fluctuations in the exchange rate of the dollar, led to record-high inflation in the country, significantly affecting the PML-N's popularity. To address this issue, the party turned to its chief, Nawaz Sharif, who had been allowed to travel to London on medical grounds directly from Kot Lakhpat jail in Lahore after his sentence was suspended in 2019. What was initially four-week permission turned into four years.

Nawaz Sharif's return was the outcome of



numerous meetings and events that unfolded in recent months. He met not only with the top leadership of his party but also with representatives of friendly countries. The date of his return was eventually announced. With this eagerly awaited announcement, the PML-N began to cultivate the belief that Nawaz would be the next prime minister of the country, even though he still faced disqualification from contesting elections. As Nawaz Sharif arrived back in the country, the way he was treated and assisted by the institutions under the caretaker setup strengthened this perception. His biometrics for bail were recorded at the airport, and his welcome processions were facilitated. There are discussions in certain political circles about a potential deal and his path to becoming the next prime minister. While his party refutes the first part of this perception, it openly promotes the second, asserting that Nawaz is their prime ministerial candidate in a scenario without the PTI, as no other party in the country is currently in a position to win the election as the single largest party.

A preferred choice within influential circles

Nawaz Sharif has returned, and he remains the top contender for the next Prime Minister's role. However, insiders suggest that the influential establishment in the country, while not fundamentally opposed to Nawaz, has its favoured candidate for the premiership, namely Shehbaz Sharif, Nawaz's younger brother. Sources indicate that within the establishment, Shehbaz is highly regarded for his successful tenure as head of government, which lasted for 16 months. He made courageous decisions, implementing unpopular policies to avert an impending economic crisis. Additionally, he skillfully managed a multi-party coalition, a challenging feat that required keeping numerous parties aligned and addressing their concerns.

Furthermore, Shehbaz maintained a positive working relationship with the military establishment. For these reasons, he earned favour within establishment ranks. On the other hand, the top leadership of the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) unanimously believes that how Nawaz's government was removed consti-

tuted an injustice to both him and the party. This sentiment has been acknowledged by those who were involved in those events. As a result, the prevailing view among PML-N leaders is that the best way to rectify this perceived injustice is to bring Nawaz Sharif back to power.

Challenges for Nawaz Sharif and his party

With their primary rival seemingly sidelined, the PML-N faces minimal electoral competition in the upcoming elections. However, they do confront legal challenges before the elections and economic challenges after assuming power.



Initially, Nawaz Sharif, who was handed a ten-year imprisonment sentence in cases brought by the National Accountability Bureau (NAB), needs to clear his name from these charges to regain eligibility for electoral participation. This is the central focus for the legal experts within the party, who are optimistic about achieving this goal before the election process commences.

Following the resolution of legal matters, the party will shift its focus to the election campaign. Should the PML-N secure a predicted victory, Nawaz Sharif will need to address the country's economic challenges to stabilize the economy and provide relief to the public. Some within the

party suggest that the primary emphasis for the next five years, should the PML-N form a government, will be squarely on the economy.

The PML-N also seeks assurances that they will be allowed to govern without political interference, a concern they had to contend with after the 2013 elections. In tandem with his court appearances regarding his legal cases, Nawaz Sharif has also begun engaging in political activities and meetings. PML-N leaders assert that their election campaign unofficially commenced with Nawaz Sharif's return to the country, but the formal start is pending the resolution of Nawaz's legal cases and the

restoration of his eligibility for election participation.

However, assessing the events and support Nawaz Sharif has received since his return, including a successful welcome show, it is evident that he is likely to encounter no significant obstacles on his path to securing a fourth term as Prime Minister. Nonetheless, Pakistani politics can take unexpected turns in a short span of time. As of now, Nawaz Sharif's fourth premiership seems almost certain, with no other prominent opponent posing a serious threat. In any case, it's shaping up to be a showdown between Nawaz Sharif and Imran Khan, or potentially, Nawaz Sharif and no one else, with the latter option currently favoured.



Nawaz Sharif's Legal Odyssey: A Comprehensive Look at the Cases and Convictions

By Romana Afsheen

Nawaz Sharif ventured into politics during the 1980s when he joined the Pakistan Muslim League (PML) and was appointed as the Finance Minister of Punjab in 1981 by then-President Muhammad Zia-ul-Haq.

In 1985, Nawaz Sharif was elected as the Chief Minister of Punjab, Pakistan's most populous province, a stronghold where he still wields significant influence. Husain Haqqani, former Pakistan's Ambassador to the United States, noted, "He has led PML-N in winning three elections and still retains support in Punjab."

Nawaz Sharif's PML-N won the general elections in 1990, leading to his first term as Prime Minister of Pakistan. However, his first tenure was marked by allegations of corruption and a power struggle with President Ghulam Ishaq Khan, which ultimately resulted in his dismissal in 1993.

In 1997, Nawaz Sharif was re-elected as Prime Minister for his second term. During his leadership, Pakistan conducted its first successful Chagai-I nuclear tests in 1998.

In 1999, a significant turning point occurred when Nawaz Sharif's second term was abruptly ended by a military coup led by General Pervez Musharraf.

After his removal from power, Nawaz Sharif faced exile and legal challenges, primarily related to his business interests and financial dealings, including his family's ownership of the Ittefaq Group, a prominent business conglomerate co-founded by his father, Mian Muhammad Sharif. The group encompassed various businesses in sectors such as steel, sugar, textiles, and paper. Allegations revolved around his alleged use of political influence to benefit the Ittefaq Group by securing favorable contracts and loans from state-owned institutions.

Nawaz Sharif returned to Pakistan in 2007 from Saudi Arabia after spending eight years in self-imposed exile during the



military rule of Parvez Musharraf. In 2013, he and the PML-N emerged victorious in the general elections, and he assumed the role of Prime Minister for a third term.

However, the Panama Papers Scandal in 2016 revealed that Nawaz Sharif's family had acquired luxury apartments in London through offshore companies, triggering investigations and legal proceedings. In 2017, he was disqualified from office by the Supreme Court of Pakistan. Nawaz Sharif's health issues prompted his departure for London in 2019, where he received medical treatment.

Recently, Nawaz Sharif returned to Pakistan after spending four years in self-imposed exile in London. He signed applications at Islamabad International Airport to restore pending appeals against his convictions in the Avenfield Apartments and Al-Azizia corruption cases. These applications, prepared by his legal team, are set to be filed in the Islamabad High Court (IHC) division bench and are scheduled for a hearing on October 24. Additionally, a petition for protective bail and an appearance before an accountability court on the same day are part of his legal proceedings. Nawaz Sharif, the former Prime Minister of Pakistan, has faced several legal cases and legal proceedings over the years. Some of the prominent cases against him include:

Avenfield Case

The Avenfield case is related to luxury apartments in Avenfield House, Park Lane, London, which are allegedly owned by the Sharif family. The case was initiated in 2016 when the Panama Papers leak revealed that Nawaz Sharif's family had purchased these properties through offshore companies. The Panama Papers leak showed that the family could not explain the sources of funds used to purchase these apartments.

Nawaz Sharif and his family were accused of corruption and money laundering in relation to the Avenfield properties. The case led to investigations by Pakistan's National Accountability Bureau (NAB). In July 2018, Nawaz Sharif, his daughter Maryam Nawaz, and his son-in-law Captain Safdar were convicted and sentenced to prison. Nawaz Sharif received a ten-year prison sentence, Maryam Nawaz was sentenced to seven years, and Captain Safdar to one year. The verdict was later challenged in the courts.

Al-Azizia Case

The Al-Azizia Steel Mills case is another corruption case involving the Sharif family. It is named after a steel mill in Saudi Arabia, which was established by the Sharif family. The case revolves around allega-



tions that Nawaz Sharif received funds to establish the mill and did not provide a satisfactory money trail to justify the source of these funds. The National Accountability Bureau (NAB) investigated the case.

In December 2018, Nawaz Sharif was found guilty in the Al-Azizia Steel Mills case and sentenced to seven years in prison. However, he was acquitted in another case involving Flagship Investments. These verdicts also faced legal challenges and appeals.

Nawaz Sharif, the former Prime Minister of Pakistan, has faced several legal cases and legal proceedings over the years. Other prominent cases against him include:

Panama Papers Case

The Panama Papers case emerged from the Panama Papers leak in 2016, which revealed offshore companies owned by the Sharif family. The primary focus was on the ownership of luxury apartments in Avenfield House, London, which were allegedly purchased through these offshore companies.

Nawaz Sharif, along with his daughter Maryam Nawaz and son-in-law Captain Safdar, was accused of corruption and money laundering.

In July 2018, Nawaz Sharif was sentenced to ten years in prison, Maryam Nawaz to seven years, and Captain Safdar to one year. Nawaz Sharif was also fined heavily.

The case gained significant political and media attention, and it played a crucial role in the disqualification of Nawaz Sharif from holding public office.

Flagship Investments Case

This case was a part of the broader investigation into the financial dealings of the Sharif family. It revolved around allegations of corruption and the source of funds used in establishing Flagship Investments, an offshore company linked to the Sharif family. Nawaz Sharif was acquitted in this case, meaning he was not found guilty of the charges related to Flagship Investments.

Hudaibiya Paper Mills Case

This case has a history dating back to the 1990s when it was initially investigated but did not result in significant convictions. It involved allegations of money laundering and illegal financial transactions by the Sharif family through Hudaibiya Paper Mills.

The case was reopened but eventually did not lead to substantial convictions.

Raiwind Assets Case

This case concerned accusations of corruption and the alleged illegal acquisition of land in Raiwind, Punjab, by the Sharif family. Nawaz Sharif was acquitted in this case, meaning he was not found guilty of the charges related to Raiwind Assets.

Model Town Incident Case

This case is related to the killing of at least 14 people during a police operation against protesters in Lahore's Model Town in 2014. Nawaz Sharif was not directly implicated in the violence, but the case had political significance and led to controversies and protests in Pakistan.

Money Laundering and Asset Beyond Means Cases

These cases are part of the broader corruption allegations against Nawaz Sharif and involve claims that he acquired assets and wealth beyond his known means. Investigations into these matters have been ongoing.

Nawaz Sharif's convictions in the Avenfield and Al-Azizia cases played a significant role in his political career, as he was disqualified from holding public office and subsequently had to leave the country to seek medical treatment. These cases are two prominent corruption cases involving Nawaz Sharif. His convictions led to political turmoil in Pakistan, and the cases became emblematic of the ongoing struggle against corruption in the country's political landscape.

Nawaz Sharif's Return and Legal Appeals

The Islamabad High Court's recent decision granting protection from arrest until October 24 has paved the way for his return to Pakistan ahead of parliamentary elections in January. On October 24, the Islamabad High Court extended the protective bail of PML-N leader Nawaz Sharif in the Avenfield and Al-Azizia cases, in which he had been convicted, until October 26. This extension came after the National Accountability Bureau (NAB) stated that it had "no objections" to the plea filed by the deposed prime minister.

A division bench of the IHC, consisting of Chief Justice Aamer Farooq and Justice Miangul Hassan Aurangzeb, issued the order in response to Nawaz's petitions for protective bail in the cases and the restoration of his appeals against his conviction.

In July 2018, the court sentenced Nawaz, who had been ousted, to 10 years in jail in the Avenfield properties corruption reference for the ownership of assets beyond his known income and one year for not cooperating with the NAB. These sentences were to be served concurrently.

The Al-Azizia Steel Mills corruption reference led to his sentencing to seven years in jail on December 24, 2018. He was then taken to Rawalpindi's Adiala Jail, from where he was transferred to Lahore's Kot Lakhpat jail the following day. Additionally, he was fined Rs 1.5 billion and US\$25 million in this case.

In March 2019, Nawaz was released from jail, and in November 2019, he left for London after the LHC granted him permission. In December 2020, the IHC declared him a proclaimed offender in both cases.

Last week, the IHC extended Nawaz's protective bail in the cases until October 24, enabling his return home on October 21.

Today, during the proceedings, Nawaz, accompanied by his brother Shehbaz Sharif and several other party leaders, appeared before the court.



At the beginning of the hearing, Azam Nazir Tarar from PML-N informed the court that the accountability court had suspended Nawaz's warrants in the Toshakhana case and approved his bail with surety bonds.

Justice Farooq noted that two petitions related to restoring appeals against Nawaz's conviction were before the high court, and notices needed to be issued on these applications.

Justice Aurangzeb pointed out that the petitioner had to explain the reasons for his absences if he wanted to restore the appeals.



Tarar insisted on following the law, but Justice Farooq emphasized that, aside from Article 10-A (the right to a fair trial) of the Constitution, the petitioner had to prove that his absences were not deliberate and did not stem from ill intentions.

Tarar mentioned that the Lahore High Court had granted Nawaz permission to leave the country for medical reasons, but Justice Farooq questioned the legality of such a move when matters were pending in one high court. Justice Aurangzeb also questioned the proper legal procedures for petitions concerning the restoration of appeals.

The IHC Chief Justice stressed that this was not a routine matter and required a show cause, and the court would issue notices to the opposing side. He emphasized the necessity for the court to be satisfied with the reasons provided.

At one point, Tarar requested the court to extend Nawaz's protective bail for further argument preparation, and Justice Farooq asked the NAB prosecutor general for his opinion on the matter.

The NAB official stated that the bureau had reviewed the petition for the restoration of the appeal and had no objections to it, nor did they object to extending the protective bail.

Justice Aurangzeb expressed surprise at NAB's position and questioned if they wanted to maintain charges of corrupt practices while releasing the convict. He

suggested that the NAB chairman be asked why he was wasting public time.

Justice Aurangzeb also inquired why NAB didn't withdraw the case if they had no objections and instructed the bureau's prosecutor general to provide a clear position on the matter at the next hearing.

The court subsequently issued notices to NAB on Nawaz's pleas for the restoration of appeals against his conviction and bail, while also extending Nawaz's protective bail until Thursday.

When reporters asked Nawaz if he would participate in the upcoming polls, he smiled.

Nawaz Sharif's appeals for The Al-Azizia Steel Mills and Avenfield Cases against conviction have been restored by Islamabad High Court on Thursday (26th Oct, 2023).

Sharif's Toshakhana Bail Confirmation & PML-N's Positive Outlook

In a separate development, an Islamabad accountability court confirmed Nawaz Sharif's bail in the Toshakhana case on October 19. This case involves allegations that Nawaz, along with former President Asif Ali Zardari and ex-Prime Minister Yousuf Raza Gilani, received luxury vehicles and gifts from the Toshakhana.

In June 2020, non-bailable arrest warrants were issued for Nawaz, but he later withdrew his challenge to them in the Islamabad High Court. On September 10, 2020, he was declared a proclaimed offender, and the court initiated proceedings to confiscate his properties, instructing the National Accountability Bureau (NAB) to seek his arrest through Interpol.

Nawaz was provided special security by Islamabad police as he arrived at court, accompanied by PML-N leaders. At the hearing, the court confirmed his bail with surety bonds of Rs 1 million. The court also accepted his application for legal representation due to health issues and issued notices to NAB regarding the confiscation of his property, with further proceedings scheduled for November 20.

During a meeting on Thursday at Shehbaz Sharif's Model Town residence, the PML-N president stated, "The PML-N will hold power in the upcoming tenure. The return of Nawaz Sharif signifies the victory of the PML-N."

Former Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif commended Ahsan Dar, a PML-N leader from the UK, for his contributions to the party and stressed the significance of overseas party workers, saying, "The overseas PML-N workers are invaluable assets to the party, and we appreciate their dedication."

Separately, Ahsan Iqbal also mentioned the party's commitment to embark on a new journey toward the country's progress under the leadership of Nawaz Sharif, emphasizing the nation's enthusiastic welcome for his return and the hope it has rekindled among the masses.



What does Election 2024 look like?



By Bilal I Gilani

In its latest press release, the ECP has given a tentative timeline for the general elections – January 2024. The fact that the ECP has not given an exact schedule makes many believe that elections might not happen around these dates either.

Given this uncertainty, the election campaign and the overall election mood is yet to descend in the cities and villages of Pakistan. From pollsters' perspective as well, given this uncertainty, clear predictions are difficult. To use the weather analogy, given the fast-changing weather, weather predictions are at best murky. However, over the past four decades of election analysis has given us some clues about what we can expect, and this article aims to shed light on some.

First, the main power-yielders in the upcoming general elections remain political and nonpolitical forces. In a usual democracy, elections would be solely decided based on popular vote and the mechanics aligned to it – for example, political parties and their internal elections.

In Pakistani-style democracy, nonpolitical

actors are as important. Many have theorized about Pakistani democracy as a pretorian democracy, where nonpolitical actors jealously guard who gets to participate in the election but also what the outcome of the general election would be. The usual refrain is that the military is the main nonpolitical actor, but I believe over the recent decades the judiciary as well as civil bureaucracy are other important and pivotal players in this equation.

Unfortunately, the 2024 general elections will be no different from the previous 11 elections: there is a general election in which approximately 100 million voters will be allowed to vote but their choices would be restricted to what the nonpolitical actors would allow. Many therefore rightly argue the need for this contest if both the process and the outcome are mediated if not determined by nonpolitical actors. The merits or demerits of this debate aside, as we watch the unrolling of General Election 2024, we should be clear-headed about the ritual of elections and how far or close it is to what the constitution of 1973 dictated.

Second, within the political actor's space,

the main contenders remain the old faces of Pakistani politics. The front-runner remains Imran Khan, followed by Nawaz Sharif, and followed by Asif Zardari. Together these three faces and the parties they represent took 31 per cent, 25 per cent and 15 per cent of the total votes cast in 2018. In other words, 71 per cent of all the votes cast belonged to these three individuals and their parties (that they either created or inherited).

If Election 2024 were to happen free and fair, we are likely to have not much of a different outcome in terms of how heavily three personalities would dominate the politics of the world's fifth largest country. There can be changes in terms of vote proportions (for example, the PTI can win more than 31 per cent and the PML-N can win less than 25 per cent) but the stark fact would remain: that three parties represented and encapsulated by three leaders will be the choices the electorate would have.

Third, in case – and which appears to be increasingly the situation – the PTI is denied a level playing field, then Election 2024 can throw up new actors as well as



unexpected gains and losses. Again, disallowing a political party – let alone one of the largest political parties – or its leader cannot and must never be endorsed without any legal judgment and I have no intentions of doing that. However, as an analyst it's crucial to distance oneself and predict what would be the outcome if this were to happen. Within the cornering of PTI options each of the options throws up potentially different scenarios.

First, if Imran Khan is kept in jail (as was the case with Nawaz Sharif in the 2018 election) and the party is given a relatively free hand to contest election, I would this this the minus-ones scenario (a tried and tested formula from the establishment rulebook and successfully applied to the MQM and PML-N and tried multiple times on the PPP). My analysis of the previous and current public pulse suggests that this would only narrow down the gap between the PML-N and PTI, but the PTI would continue to be ahead and at best we would see a replication of the 2018 general election results.

Second, if Imran Khan is not allowed to contest and there is repression of PTI leaders and difficulty in issuing tickets, a scenario I call 'minus all', and if it is done in the same fashion as was the case in 2018 with the PML-N, this could prove to be a lethal blow to the PTI. Lastly, and I think this is less likely to happen, the option is to

remove the PTI from the electoral choices altogether, a scenario I call as 'No PTI' or 'Minus PTI'. This would be very difficult to pull off and would create an assembly that would be weak in legitimacy even after being born.

For scenarios 2 and 3, the more interesting question would be who gains with the 'forced collapse' of the PTI. One thing is quite clear: the largest casualty of scenarios 2 and 3 would be turnout and in turn the overall legitimacy of the electoral outcome. A major beneficiary of the forced exit of the PTI would be the TLP. The 2018 elections saw the rise of the TLP as a party that spoiled the votes of the PML-N. On the day of election, as many as 50 per cent of TLP voters claimed that they had voted for the PML-N in the 2018 general election. In 2024, if scenario 2 or 3 is unfolded, the TLP would now consolidate its vote and attract a major voter base from the PTI. This would be mainly in Punjab and its semi-urban towns, but it would be enough to make the TLP a major seat puller.

Unlike other analysts, even if PTI voters are forced to stay home, the likelihood of the PML-N regaining its lost position in Punjab is implausible and simply not how the voter blocs work. The vote the PML-N lost, and which went to the PTI, is now only going to go to another resistance and anti-PMLN party – the TLP.

The second group that can be minor beneficiaries of the 2nd and 3rd scenarios are the two new parties launched by Jehangir Tareen and Pervaiz Khattak respectively. There are others on the horizon like the one suggested by Miftah Ismail, Shahid Khaqan Abbasi and Mustafa Nawaz Khokhar. Together these three parties (if they can work together) can also pose a threat to not just the PTI but also the PML-N and PPP's politics in Punjab. However, these new parties fully replacing the PTI or attracting a bulk of its vote in just a few months would be difficult to imagine.

I would end on a more sober note. Election 2024 comes at one of the worst moments in national history. The economic collapse especially reflected in the hyperinflation and unemployment figures, the collapse of the legitimacy of authority as reflected by the May 9 incidents and repeated violation of the constitution as is with the case of adjournment of provincial assembly elections and now with National Assembly elections. Unfortunately, none of the political or nonpolitical actors in the runup to the 12th general election of Pakistan seem to realize the gravity of the situation and all sides seem to be replicating what they have done for the past 11 elections. Voters in this country and the conditions of the state of Pakistan require a major change which doesn't seem to be on the horizon.

Courtesy The News



Govt's Gas blast opens a new Pandora's Box for consumers

When the government reduced oil prices, everyone was saying that the rulers will take this benefit away through another decision. And this happened exactly when the ECC announced nearly 200% increase in gas tariff from November 1, 2023.

By Javed Mahmood

Last week the caretaker government opened a new Pandora's Box for the consumers. This time the government exploded the gas bomb just days ahead of the beginning of winter season. From November 1, 2023, the consumers will have to pay more than 190 percent increase in the cost of gas. And this does not include the agonizing impact of taxes on the consumption of gas. If we include taxes, the overall increase in the consumers' bill will be more than 200 percent in comparison with their current gas bills.

The Economic Coordination Committee (ECC) of the cabinet approved the decision of a cruel increase in the gas tariff because it was one of the conditions of the IMF to qualify for the disbursement of \$700 million next tranche. As the IMF team is reaching Pakistan on November 2, the government has announced a massive gas tariff hike before the arrival of the IMF officials for the evaluation of economic performance of Pakistan and implementation of the set of conditions attached to the IMF loan program.

Notably, from October 16, 2023, the government reduced the price of petrol by 40 rupees a liter. No doubt it was a good decision to give relief to the consumers badly ditched by frequent hikes in the cost of fuel (gas, electricity, and petroleum products). When the government reduced oil prices, everyone in the country was saying that the rulers will take this benefit away through another decision. And this happened exactly when the ECC meeting, chaired by finance minister Dr. Shamshad Akhtar, announced nearly 200 percent increase in gas tariff for the consumers with effect from November 1, 2023.

The caretaker government took this harsh decision setting aside the fact that a massive hike in the electricity tariff



had already bankrupted millions of families in the country. A majority of people belonging to middle and lower middle class are bemoaning unaffordable hike in the cost of electricity along with multiple taxes.

The Economic Coordination Committee (ECC) of the Cabinet, which convened in the federal capital under the leadership of Finance Minister Dr. Shamshad Akhtar, granted approval for a gas tariff increase of up to 193%, set to take effect from November 1, 2023. This decision precedes the upcoming review by the International Monetary Fund (IMF) scheduled for later this month, as part of which Pakistan was urged to address the mounting circular debt in the energy sector.

According to the approved summary, the fixed monthly charges for protected consumers were adjusted, increasing from Rs10 to Rs400, while for non-protected consumers, they rose from Rs460 to Rs1000, and for those in higher consumption brackets, up to Rs2000. The government has raised the local gas tariffs by 173% for non-protected domestic consumers, 136.4% for commercial users, 86.4% for export-oriented businesses, and 117% for non-export industries. Exporters are

set to experience an 86% increase in their tariffs, effective from November 1, 2023, securing the most significant adjustment.

According to the Economic Coordination Committee, gas tariff hike is in response to the IMF's demand for increased revenue collection from gas consumers in Pakistan. Additionally, the ECC reviewed a summary from the Ministry of Energy (Petroleum Division) concerning the revision of natural gas sale pricing for FY 2023-24. After thorough discussion, the ECC approved the summary, with the revised pricing effective from November 1, 2023.

Chaired by Dr. Shamshad Akhtar, the Federal Minister for Finance, Revenue, and Economic Affairs, the ECC meeting was attended by various government officials. These included Mr. Gohar Ijaz, Minister for Commerce, Industries, & Production; Mr. Shahid Ashraf Tarar, Minister for Communications, Railways, & Maritime Affairs; Mr. Sami Saeed, Minister of Planning, Development, and Special Initiatives; Mr. Muhammad Ali, Minister for Power & Petroleum; Dr. Umar Saif, Minister for IT & Telecom; Dr. Waqar Masood, Advisor to PM on Finance; Mr. Muhammad

Jahanzaib Khan, Deputy Chairman Planning Commission; and the Chairman of SECP, along with other senior government officials from relevant ministries.

Inflation and Economic Challenges: SBP's Annual Report

The State Bank of Pakistan unveiled its Annual Report on the State of Pakistan's Economy for the fiscal year 2022-23 a few days ago. According to the report, Pakistan's economy encountered a multitude of challenges during FY23, exacerbated by long-standing structural weaknesses that magnified the impact of consecutive domestic and global supply shocks of unprecedented magnitude. The country's macroeconomic situation had already begun to deteriorate from the second half of FY22 due to the Russia-Ukraine conflict, elevated global commodity prices, and an unplanned fiscal expansion. This situation further deteriorated during FY23 due to factors such as floods, delays in completing the 9th review of the IMF's Extended Fund Facility (EFF) program, ongoing domestic uncertainty, and tightening global financial conditions.

The devastating monsoon floods, in particular, significantly impacted economic activity, fueling inflationary pressures, increasing stress on external accounts, and widening the fiscal imbalance due to spending on relief efforts. Similarly, uncertain global economic and financial conditions, somewhat softened but still elevated global commodity prices, higher debt servicing, and reduced external inflows had ramifications for various sectors of the economy. The culmination of these developments substantially weakened Pakistan's macroeconomic landscape and performance during FY23. Real GDP growth reached its third-lowest level since FY52, while the average National CPI inflation reached a multi-decade high. While the current account deficit narrowed considerably, limited foreign inflows continued to exert pressure on the external account, leading to a decline in SBP's foreign exchange reserves.

Furthermore, reflecting the unsustainable fiscal policy stance of recent years, a sharp increase in interest payments, persistent

large energy subsidies, and lower-than-targeted tax collection all contributed to less-than-anticipated fiscal consolidation during FY23. The report underscores that Pakistan's economic performance in FY23 underscores the urgent need to address long-standing structural obstacles that pose significant risks to the country's macroeconomic stability.

Foremost among these challenges are the need for more comprehensive and swift tax policy reforms to expand the resource base, even to meet current expenditures. On the other hand, inefficiencies in public sector enterprises have been a continuous drain on fiscal resources, limiting the scope for development spending necessary to enhance the economy's productive capacity. Inadequate investment in physical and human capital, as well as research and development has hindered the development of a technology-intensive manufacturing base and the growth of value-added exports.

Additionally, stagnant crop yields and insufficient focus on developing the food supply chain and addressing market imperfections have led to sustained reliance on imported food commodities. These trends contribute to an unsustainable current account balance, increasing the country's vulnerability to global supply shocks. The report emphasizes the need for comprehensive reforms to address various sectoral imbalances, ensuring the availability of resources for economic growth and development.

Specifically, accelerating tax policy reforms and swiftly implementing governance reforms in PSEs are essential to create fiscal space for public investment in human and physical capital. Additionally, fostering an environment conducive to foreign direct investment in export-oriented sectors and promoting technology transfers is crucial. Agriculture sector reforms are also required to reduce import dependence and achieve price stability.

Best performing PKR (in Sept 2023) to remain vulnerable to external financing risks

Goldman Sachs analysts are skeptical about

the sustainability of the Pakistani rupee (PKR), despite its recent strong performance, citing financing risks and the upcoming elections. In a recent report, analysts led by Kamakshya Trivedi expressed their view, stating, "The recent appreciation of the Pakistani rupee will likely be short-lived, given soaring interest costs and only short-term arrangements with the IMF and bilateral financing to support the external balance." They went on to add, "The market will continue to demand a premium for Pakistan's rupee ahead of elections."

Last week marked the end of the Pakistani rupee's 28-day historical streak of strengthening against the US dollar, losing 1.18 rupees against the greenback. This decline was attributed to a shortage of US dollars within banks, leading to the quoting of forward rates. The PKR had previously seen significant gains due to measures like an army-backed crackdown on illegal dollar outflows and other administrative actions taken by the government.

Additionally, reforms introduced by the State Bank of Pakistan aimed at consolidating and redefining various types of exchange companies into a single category with specific mandates and higher capital requirements have contributed to increased transparency. At the time of writing, the US dollar is trading at PKR 280 in the interbank market. While it had recently declined from 303 rupees to 277 in interbank trading, the greenback has regained strength and has been gradually rising since October 20.

Pakistan set to receive \$500 million from China and SBP's reserves

Pakistan is on the verge of receiving a \$500 million financial infusion from China, with no rollover agreements involved. This development was revealed during a meeting between Pakistan's Caretaker Prime Minister Anwaarul Haq Kakar and Chinese President Xi Jinping in Beijing. The meeting occurred on the sidelines of the 3rd Belt and Road Forum. The incoming funds are expected to boost the reserves of the State Bank of Pakistan (SBP), helping them surpass the \$8 billion threshold.

It's worth noting that China previously extended the maturity of a \$2.4 billion loan to Pakistan for a two-year period, aimed at shoring up foreign reserves in light of an IMF deal that prevented a default. Currently, the total foreign exchange reserves held by the State Bank of Pakistan (SBP) increased by \$67.3 million, representing a 0.88% rise week-on-week, reaching \$7.71 billion during the week ending on October 13. Conversely, the overall reserves of the country diminished by \$117.2 million, reflecting a 0.9% decrease week-on-week, to stand at \$12.91 billion. During the meeting, both nations explored various facets of the multi-dimensional Pakistan-China relationship. They reaffirmed their enduring and unwavering friendship, their strategic cooperation, economic and trade links, and the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC).

SBP reports growth in remittances in September

The State Bank of Pakistan has reported a 5.3 percent month-on-month increase in remittance inflows for September 2023. According to data from the SBP, overseas workers' remittances reached \$2.2 billion in September 2023, showing a 5.3 percent growth compared to the previous month. In the first quarter of the current fiscal year, the SBP recorded a total of \$6.3 billion in remittance inflows. The primary sources of remittances in September 2023 were Saudi Arabia (\$538.2 million), the United Arab Emirates (\$400 million), the United Kingdom (\$311.1 million), and the United States of America (\$263.4 million).

IMF predicts 2.5% economic growth in 2024

Meanwhile, the International Monetary Fund has projected that Pakistan's economy is expected to achieve a growth rate of 2.5% in 2024, with the potential to increase to 5% by 2028. The IMF's World Economic Outlook predicts a decrease in Pakistan's inflation rate, expected to drop from 29.2% in 2023 to 23.6% in 2024.

Furthermore, the report forecasts a reduction in Pakistan's unemployment rate from

8.5% to 8% in the coming year. However, it also anticipates an increase in the current account deficit from 0.7% to 1.8% in 2024. On the global economic front, the IMF offers a cautious outlook, acknowledging a gradual recovery in the global economy. The IMF projects that global economic growth will remain at 3% for the current

year, consistent with its previous forecast from July. However, the forecast for the following year has been slightly adjusted downward to 2.9%. The IMF highlights ongoing challenges for the global economy, including high inflation, tight monetary policies, the Russia-Ukraine conflict, and extreme weather events.

Global tax on billionaires to generate \$250 billion a year: GTE Report

The EU Tax Observatory has proposed a new phase in the global fight against tax evasion, suggesting the implementation of a global minimum tax on billionaires, with the potential to generate \$250 billion annually. This proposed amount, if enforced, would constitute only 2% of the combined wealth of the world's 2,700 billionaires, which stands at nearly \$13 trillion, as per research from the organization affiliated with the Paris School of Economics.

The Tax Observatory's 2024 Global Tax Evasion Report underscores that billionaires often pay substantially lower effective personal taxes compared to individuals with more modest incomes. This inequity arises from their ability to shield their wealth within shell companies, thereby avoiding income taxes. Gabriel Zucman, the director of the observatory, expressed concerns about this practice, noting, "In our view, this is difficult to justify because it risks undermining the sustainability of tax systems and the social acceptability of taxation." The report indicates that billionaires in the United States pay an estimated personal tax rate of around 0.5%, and in certain high-tax countries like France, it may even be as low as zero.

In several nations, the growing wealth gap has spurred calls for the wealthiest individuals to contribute a greater share of the tax burden. This is especially crucial as public finances grapple with supporting aging popula-

tions, financing climate transition initiatives, and managing debts resulting from the COVID pandemic. Although U.S. President Joe Biden had included plans for a 25% minimum tax on the wealthiest 0.01% in his 2024 budget, the proposal has faced challenges in Washington due to government shutdown threats and pending funding deadlines. While a coordinated international effort to tax billionaires may take time, the EU Tax Observatory points to previous successes in ending bank secrecy and reducing profit-shifting by multinational corporations to low-tax jurisdictions as precedents.

The automatic sharing of account information initiated in 2018 significantly decreased wealth held in offshore tax havens, according to the observatory. Moreover, a 2021 agreement among 140 countries established a global minimum corporate tax rate of 15%, curbing the ability of multinational corporations to lower their tax liability by channeling profits into low-tax jurisdictions. The observatory emphasized the potential for a "coalition of willing countries" to lead the way in implementing a minimum tax on billionaires if broad international support is lacking. Despite the progress made in eliminating tax rate competition among countries, opportunities for reducing tax liabilities persist. Wealthy individuals are increasingly investing in real estate rather than offshore accounts, and companies are exploiting loopholes in the 15% corporate tax minimum. Governments are also competing for investment through subsidies, which, while less damaging to their tax bases than competing solely on low tax rates, remain a concern, as noted by the observatory.

Challenges and Prospects: Pakistan's IMF Review and Fiscal Outlook

By Mehtab Haider

Pakistan and the IMF are gearing up for discussions as part of the first review under the \$3 billion Standby Arrangement (SBA) program. If both parties can reach a staff-level agreement, Islamabad is poised to secure a \$700 million tranche, pending approval from the Fund's Executive Board by the end of December 2023.

The IMF's mission is to engage with Pakistani authorities in technical-level talks to gather data from various ministries and departments, assessing the country's economic well-being.

These upcoming discussions will unfold in two phases. Initially, both sides will collaborate to share and reconcile data, following which the IMF will prescribe necessary measures to align the economic trajectory with the IMF program's objectives. The macroeconomic framework, encompassing GDP growth and inflation, will serve as the basis for the entire macroeconomic and fiscal framework. In the case of Pakistan, these figures will shed light on the potential risks of stagflation and the impact of inflation on the nation's population.

Once the macroeconomic and fiscal framework is finalized, both sides will identify structural benchmarks, performance criteria, and indicative targets to address any emerging issues. These measures are essential components of the IMF's bailout package designed to support a country's balance of payments.

For Pakistan, the IMF mission will collaborate on data reconciliation, and both parties will work towards a consensus on the draft of the memorandum of financial and economic policies (MEFP). This document will lay out fiscal, monetary, and external financing frameworks. Under the macroeconomic and fiscal framework, the IMF and Pakistani parties will agree on the macroeconomic framework, which will then inform the fiscal framework. The IMF mission will identify gaps in fiscal and monetary aspects to finalize the MEFP.

The next step involves addressing the external financing issue after determining the currency account deficit and overall balance of payments. Finally, the IMF will propose corrective measures, encompassing actions to rectify the economic challenges evident in the draft MEFP. When both parties reach an agreement on the MEFP, they will announce a staff-level agreement.

In cases of disagreement, the IMF typically continues engaging with authorities to seek an agreement and ensure ongoing discussions to establish consensus.

Recent fiscal operations indicate that Pakistan has thus far adhered to the agreed-upon fiscal deficit limits with the IMF. Nevertheless, there are potential risks of deviations from the desired fiscal deficit, as outlined in the 2023-24 budget. The IMF may recommend reducing expenditures or generating additional revenues to bridge the gap, particularly converting the primary deficit into a primary

surplus of 0.4 percent of GDP, equivalent to Rs 452 billion for the current fiscal year.

During the first quarter of the current fiscal year (July-September), Pakistan recorded a fiscal deficit of Rs 963 billion, equivalent to 0.9 percent of GDP, accompanied by a significant statistical discrepancy of Rs 193.5 billion on the fiscal front. This fiscal framework raises three significant issues: the statistical discrepancy, reduced subsidies, curtailed development spending, and achieving the agreed growth rate for the petroleum development levy.

The ballooning statistical discrepancy reveals a challenge in reconciling fiscal accounts, with the figure significantly higher compared to the same period in the previous fiscal year.

Aligning with the IMF's requirements, the government aims to maintain a primary surplus of Rs 452 billion or 0.4 percent of GDP for the current fiscal year. To bridge the fiscal deficit, total net financing needs amount to Rs 962.8 billion, with domestic financing accounting for Rs 0.537 trillion and external net financing at Rs 0.425 trillion.

The government's debt servicing surpasses spending on defense and development, reaching Rs 1.379 trillion, while the Public Sector Development Program (PSDP) allocated a mere Rs 40 billion for development, and defense spending amounted to Rs 0.343 trillion.

Total government revenues in the first quarter stood at Rs 2.685 trillion, with the Federal Board of Revenue (FBR) collecting Rs 2.04 trillion, and non-tax revenue at Rs 0.468 trillion. Total expenditures were recorded at Rs 3.648 trillion, with current expenditures amounting to Rs 3.1 trillion.

The fiscal performance of the federal government highlights the challenge of balancing the budget. Gross revenue receipts for the central government reached Rs 2.494 trillion, with transfers to the provinces under the National Finance Commission (NFC) Award totaling Rs 1.08 trillion. The federal government's net revenue amounted to just Rs 1.4 trillion, while expenditures reached Rs 2.42 trillion, resulting in a federal budget deficit of Rs 1.041 trillion, with a statistical discrepancy of Rs 73 billion.

On the issue of subsidies, the government disbursed only Rs 2.48 billion in the first quarter, far below the projected amount of Rs 1.06 trillion. To address the circular debt in the energy sector, viable plans with clear measures and timelines must be presented to the IMF during the upcoming review talks.

The external financing gap remains a crucial element on the table and could potentially hinder the agreement. Nevertheless, Pakistani authorities remain hopeful that the first review with the IMF will proceed smoothly, paving the way for the timely release of the next tranche.

Pakistan's Economic Resurgence: A Deep Dive into the State Bank's Encouraging Report

By Rehmat Aziz Khan Chitrali

The recent release of the State Bank of Pakistan's annual report brings a glimmer of hope to the people of Pakistan who have been grappling with inflation and poverty. The report delves into Pakistan's economic performance for the financial year 2022-2023 and provides projections for the upcoming fiscal year 2023-2024, indicating a positive trajectory toward economic recovery. While challenges persist, the report outlines notable improvements that inspire optimism about Pakistan's economic future.

Understanding the context is crucial to appreciate the significance of the State Bank's report. The past financial year, 2022-23, presented numerous challenges, including devastating floods that disrupted economic activities, widening fiscal imbalances, and soaring inflation. Tax policy reforms faltered, further limiting resources for critical expenditures. Declines in cotton and rice production added to the woes.

The challenges faced during the financial year 2022-23 were multifaceted. Natural disasters, such as destructive floods, laid bare Pakistan's vulnerability to environmental catastrophes, severely disrupting infrastructure and livelihoods while dealing a significant blow to the economy. The widening fiscal imbalances placed significant strain on the nation's financial health, underscoring the urgency of adopting prudent fiscal management and enhancing revenue collection mechanisms. The surge in inflation, reaching multi-decade highs, exacerbated the cost of living, significantly impacting the purchasing power of the average citizen. Slow progress in implementing tax policy reforms limited the government's capacity to generate much-needed revenues, further constraining its ability to meet essential expenditures. Additionally, the decline in cotton and rice production posed a direct threat to the agricultural sector, affecting both livelihoods and the overall stability of the economy.

Despite these formidable challenges, the



State Bank's report offers a promising outlook for Pakistan's economy, with several key indicators pointing toward a brighter future. Firstly, in terms of GDP growth, the report anticipates an economic rebound in the fiscal year 2023-24, with a growth rate projected at 2 to 3 per cent, signifying the potential for recovery and development. Secondly, there are expectations of effectively controlling inflation, with the goal of reducing it to 20 to 22 per cent, indicating concerted efforts to mitigate the adverse effects of rising prices. Thirdly, the report hints at the anticipated recovery in the production of essential crops, notably cotton and rice, which have the potential to revitalize the agricultural sector. Fourthly, the injection of \$3 billion from the International Monetary Fund (IMF) has played a role in reducing external sector risks, thereby contributing to financial stability. Lastly, the report acknowledges a significant reduction in the current account deficit, suggesting a move toward a more balanced trade position. These positive indicators offer hope for Pakistan's more stable and prosperous economic future.

To bring these positive economic projections to fruition and ensure a brighter future for Pakistan, a series of comprehensive reforms and sustained efforts are essential to foster a resilient and thriving economy. These strategic steps encompass various

aspects, including preparedness for natural disasters through infrastructure investments, reinforcing fiscal responsibility by enhancing revenue collection and discipline, maintaining policies for effective inflation management to ensure citizens' cost of living remains manageable, expediting tax policy reforms for increased revenue generation, revitalizing the agricultural sector for enhanced productivity and food price stability, and streamlining the efficiency of public sector enterprises to reduce financial burdens and allocate more resources for crucial development projects. By diligently pursuing these steps, Pakistan can make significant progress towards economic stability and improved living standards for its citizens, requiring collaboration between the government, stakeholders, and the public to achieve these objectives.

The State Bank of Pakistan's report offers hope during challenging times. It acknowledges the hurdles faced in the past financial year while presenting a positive outlook for economic recovery in the upcoming fiscal year. To realise these projections, the government and stakeholders must collaborate to address the issues identified by the Central Bank and focus on areas requiring reform. Through these efforts, Pakistan can move closer to achieving economic stability and prosperity for its citizens.

The BRF vision

By Dr Abid Qaiyum Suleri

China's President Xi Jinping speaks during the opening ceremony of the third Belt and Road Forum for International Cooperation at the Great Hall of the People in Beijing on October 18, 2023

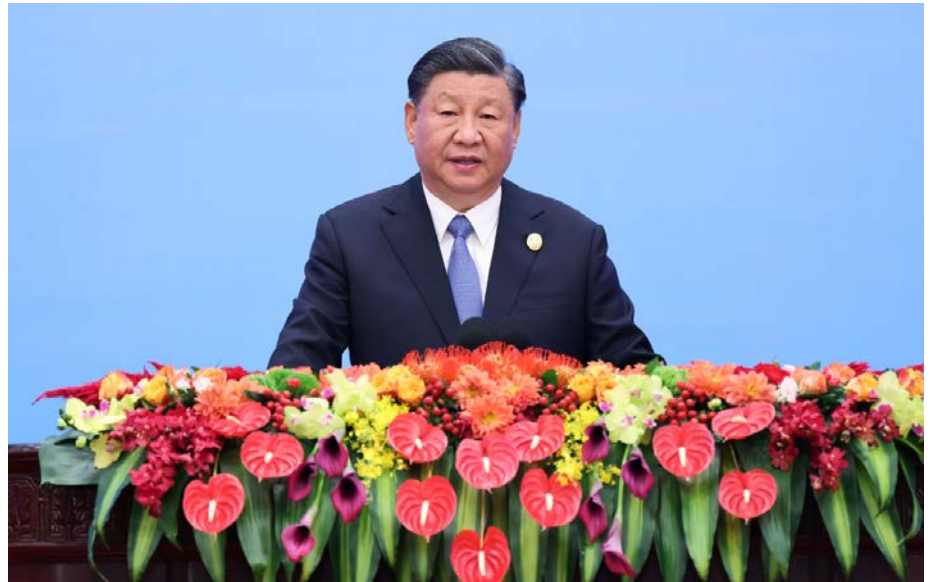
This year marks the 10th anniversary of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). Conceived initially as One Belt One Road, its subsequent expansion across diverse regions led to its rebranding as the BRI.

The third Belt and Road Forum (BRF) recently convened in Beijing, from October 17 to 18, to commemorate the initiative's first decade. This gathering saw the participation of 20 heads of state and government, international organization heads, including the United Nations secretary-general, and over 1500 high-level delegates.

So, how has the BRI performed in its first ten years?

The figures are undeniably impressive. Since its inception in 2013, over 150 countries, including 18 of the European Union's 27 member states, have joined this initiative. China, now the largest creditor in the developing world, has invested billions of dollars in roads, railways, energy, and various infrastructure projects across Eurasia, Africa, and Latin America. As per statistics disclosed during the third BRF, the BRI has generated 420,000 jobs and has lifted 40 million people out of poverty. When the Covid-19 pandemic struck, China supported BRI partner countries substantially, distributing more than 10 billion masks, 2.3 billion vaccine doses, and engaging in joint vaccine production with over 20 nations.

The Chinese leadership attributes this success to the BRI's cooperative model, centered on "planning together, building together, and benefiting together." The BRI aims to improve connectivity and integration across regions and sectors, addressing global challenges such as poverty, climate change, pandemic response, and digital transformation. The statements of world leaders who attended the third BRF underscored that the BRI respects the diversity



and sovereignty of each participating country while aiming to foster mutually beneficial outcomes.

"In a world dominated by geoeconomics, the BRI is not a geopolitical or ideological agenda, but rather a vision of openness and inclusiveness, focused on environmentally friendly and people-centric global economic development," was the message given to the BRF participants from the Chinese leadership. Chinese President Xi Jinping, in his opening address, called for the expansion and alignment of BRI cooperation with global development agendas such as the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the African Union's Agenda 2063.

He highlighted "eight key steps" for the BRI's future. These steps involve upholding the principles of consultation, contribution, and benefit-sharing; enhancing policy coordination and synergy; deepening integrity-based development cooperation across various fields, including advanced scientific and technological innovation and artificial intelligence governance; fostering multidimensional international relations; promoting green development and the transition to low-carbon economies; and increasing support for developing countries through a \$95.8 billion allocation from China Exim Bank and the New Development Bank.

Despite criticism from certain quarters that BRI countries may fall into a debt trap, the fact remains that the BRI has filled a significant void in global development financing. To elucidate, consider the words of UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres from February 2023: "Today's polycrises are compounding shocks on developing countries – largely due to an unfair global financial system that is short-term, crisis-prone, and exacerbates inequalities. We need to significantly increase affordable, long-term financing by aligning all financial flows with the SDGs and improving the terms of lending from multilateral development banks. The high cost of debt and growing risks of debt distress demand decisive action to make at least \$500 billion available annually to developing countries and convert short-term lending into long-term debt at lower interest rates."

Chinese financing is actively contributing to rebalancing the global financial system. According to a report from AidData, a US-based research lab, China provided \$462 billion in official finance to 164 countries between 2008 and 2019, surpassing the contributions of \$467 billion by the World Bank and \$89 billion by the IMF.

Addressing concerns related to the potential debt trap within the BRI (including the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor – CPEC) is pivotal and calls for a comprehen-

sive understanding of the dynamics at play. It is true that a substantial portion of the financing within BRI initiatives takes the form of debt extended to member countries for their identified projects. However, it is essential to recognize that debt in itself is neither good nor bad. It is a financial tool whose value depends on how it is employed.

The BRI and the various financial institutions operating under its umbrella serve to address the deficiencies of weakening global financial institutions, which often attach numerous conditions and requirements to their financing for developing countries. These strings attached to traditional funding sources can limit the flexibility and suitability of the financing for the unique needs of recipient countries. In this context, it's worth considering that had global financial institutions been more supportive of the developing world, alternative means of development cooperation like the BRI might not have been necessary.

Nevertheless, it is important to underscore that 'no strings attached' financing, while seemingly advantageous, can pose a risk if borrowing governments do not exercise responsibility and maturity in managing the funds. Therefore, the responsibility for prudent fiscal management and wise investment ultimately lies with the borrowing governments. They must ensure that the borrowed funds are deployed in a manner that enhances productivity and fosters inclusive growth. It is not entirely fair to attribute the blame for fiscal mismanagement solely to the BRI; it is a shared responsibility.

Transparency is another crucial aspect of responsible borrowing and implementation. It is the duty of borrowing governments to maintain transparency throughout the negotiation and execution of BRI projects. This transparency promotes a shared domestic consensus on the country's developmental needs. It is a critical step in building trust and encouraging collaboration among stakeholders.

Furthermore, borrowing governments have an obligation to be accountable to their citizens for any borrowing undertaken in the name of development. This accountability ensures that the benefits of BRI projects are shared equitably and that any

challenges that may arise are addressed with due diligence.

It's noteworthy that China has taken significant steps to address the perception of the BRI. In 2019, during the second BRF, China introduced a 'Green BRI' model. Notably, during this event, China provided leadership in advancing the Paris Declaration on climate change. This proactive stance helped fill the void left by the US's withdrawal from the 'Paris Climate Change Commitments' under the Trump administration.



Furthermore, China's decision to halt financing for coal-based power plants outside its borders demonstrates its commitment to environmental sustainability and its resolve to mitigate the ecological impact associated with BRI projects.

In addition to environmental considerations, China is also showing a keen awareness of concerns related to the potential debt trap associated with the BRI. Among the eight strategic steps outlined for the future of the BRI, the seventh step underscores the promotion of integrity-based cooperation within the Belt and Road framework.

President Xi Jinping explicitly conveyed this initiative, noting, "China will establish an integrity compliance evaluation system for companies engaged in Belt and Road

Cooperation and will provide information on the progress and prospects of integrity-building within the BRI." This commitment highlights a dedicated effort to ensure the responsible and sustainable execution of BRI projects while simultaneously addressing any apprehensions regarding debt and transparency.

In measuring the impact of an initiative, we often look to its critics as a yardstick. When critics begin to recognize and offer alternative options, it reflects the initiative's influence. To counter the socioeconomic

reach of the BRI, an India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor (IMEC) was announced at the recent G20 summit in Delhi (though IMEC remains a non-starter due to the unfortunate developments in the Middle East).

Furthermore, the US has pledged to increase its lending to developing countries through the World Bank. Such evolution within the global development landscape signifies the BRI's substantial impact and its role in shaping the future of international cooperation. Which mode of cooperation would be beneficial for a country like Pakistan does not depend on the source of funding but on our readiness and preparedness. Are we ready for next-generation international cooperation?

Courtesy Dawn

SC strikes down 'military justice' for civilians

- Unanimous decision by five-member bench orders proceedings against May 9 suspects to be shifted to criminal courts
- Four out of five judges declare multiple provisions of army act 'unconstitutional, without legal effect'; govt to file appeal soon



By Nasir Iqbal

In a judgement that was hailed widely across the political spectrum, a five-member bench of the Supreme Court on Monday declared unconstitutional by a majority of 4-1 the military trials of civilians for their alleged role in attacks on army installations.

Led by Justice Ijazul Ahsan, the bench comprising Justice Munib Akhtar, Justice Yahya Afridi, Syed Mazhar Ali Akbar Naqvi, and Justice Ayesha Malik unanimously emphasised that the cases of the accused involved in the May 9 riots will proceed before criminal courts.

"Without prejudice to the generality of the foregoing the trials of civilians and accused persons, being around 103 persons who were identified in the list provided to the apex court by the attorney general for Pakistan (AGP) and all other persons who are now or may at any time be similarly placed in relation to the events arising from and out of May 9 and 10, 2023, shall be tried by criminal courts of competent jurisdiction established under the ordinary and/or special law of the land

in relation to such offences of which they may stand accused," the order said.

The short order, the detailed reasons of which would follow soon, also declared that any action or proceedings under the Pakistan Army Act (PAA) 1952 in respect of these persons or any other persons to trial by the court martial are and would be of no legal effect.

Justice Yahya Afridi, however, reserved his ruling on a point which the majority of four judges held that Section 2(1)(d)(i) and 2(1)(d)(ii) and Section 59(4) of the PAA were ultra vires and therefore of no legal effect. Section 2(1)(d)(i) says that those persons not otherwise subject to PAA become subject to the law if they were accused of seducing or attempting to seduce any army officer from his duty or allegiance to the government.

Likewise, Section 2(1)(d)(ii) says individuals could be tried under PAA if they have committed an offence in relation to any work of defence,

arsenal, naval, military or air force establishment or station, ship or aircraft or otherwise in relation to the naval, military or air force affairs of Pakistan an offence under the Official Secrets Act 1923. Section 59(4) says that any person who becomes subject to PAA will liable to be tried under this act.

AGP Mansoor Usman Awan told Dawn that the federal government will soon move an appeal against the decision. If the appeal is filed, the same, in accordance with the Supreme Court (Practice and Procedure) Act 2023, will be taken up by a larger bench consisting of judges not part of the present five-judge bench.

'Without fear and favour'

Senior counsel Khwaja Ahmad Hosain, who represented former chief justice Jawwad S Khawaja and had challenged Section 2(1)(d)(i) and (ii) of the PAA to be inconsistent with the fundamental rights, described the judgement as "historic and bold", as

the court stood for the Constitution and the rule of law — without fear or favour.

“It should give hope to all those losing hope in difficult times,” the counsel said, adding as long as courts were independent, challenges could be faced and overcome. The nations with independent judges giving decisions in accordance with their oaths of office flourish and prosper, he emphasised and added, “Today is a good day for the Constitution and for our country.”

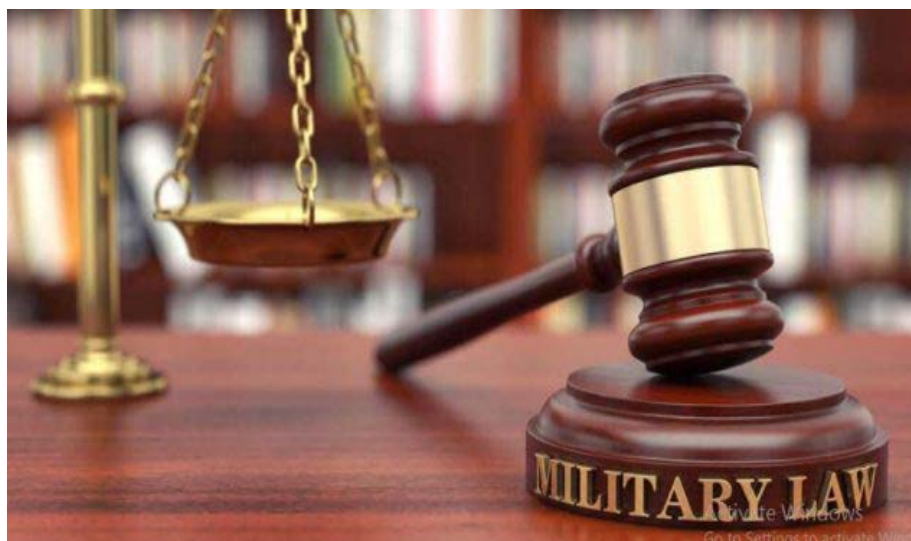
Former additional attorney general Tariq Khokhar described the judgement as a triumph for the wretched people of Pakistan, the Constitution, and the rule of law in the face of “raw power”.

“The decision also fulfils our obligations under the international law. It is the finest moment for the petitioners, their counsels and the judges who have risked so much,” he said.

Advocate Usama Khawar said the Supreme Court’s “trailblazing verdict, challenging military trials for civilians, marks an unprecedented stride”.

“It confronts military preferences at their zenith, rather than biding its time for their influence to wane,” he said, adding that the

decision “constitutes a transformative juncture in Pakistan’s legal narrative, with far-reaching implications for other laws impeding the right to a fair trial”.



In the face of Pakistan’s alleged current “hybrid” governance, the court’s audacious stance in upholding the right to a fair trial and declaring trials of civilians unconstitutional for times to come not only burnishes its own reputation but also underscores the new Chief Justice Qazi Faez Isa’s impartiality and independence.

Applications dismissed

The judgement, however, dismissed a set of nine applications moved to make the applicants facing military trials a necessary party. The applications were rejected since they were not supported by appropriate affidavits as per requirement of the Supreme Court Rules, 1980.

The applicants had requested for early conclusion of their cases by the military courts in separate applications. They had pleaded that they had complete faith and confidence in the military authorities to provide justice to them and to other accused persons.

During the hearing, Justice Ayesha A. Malik emphasised that Article 8(3) of the Constitution “places a heavy burden by specifically stating that no law could be made in derogation of the fundamental rights as guaranteed under the Constitution”. Such specific command of the Constitution cannot be left open-ended, Justice Malik emphasised.

Courtesy Dawn



TTI and Khmer Times sign MoU in Cambodia to promote bilateral cooperation



TTI Report

The Truth International, a fastest growing media entity in Pakistan, and Khmer Times, the leading news agency of Cambodia, signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) to promote their bilateral cooperation in the field of journalism.

Publisher/Managing Director of Khmer Times Mr Mohan Bandam and CEO of the TTI Mr Muhammad Fahad Thaheem signed the MoU in Phnom Penh, the capital city of Cambodia.

About Khmer Times

Khmer Times serves as a prominent international news agency providing the latest updates from Cambodia and beyond. It offers unbiased reporting through print and digital formats, covering events with a fresh perspective. Khmer Times encourages diverse opinions and publishes them daily,

fostering a neutral stance on political, business, and social issues.

Meanwhile, Khmer Times content caters to a young Cambodian audience, featuring weekly youth related sections and lifestyle news. The newspaper also excels in business reporting and utilizes a mix of local and foreign journalists to provide comprehensive, objective, and insightful news to its readers.

About TTI

The Truth International is the fastest growing media entity in Pakistan. It is regularly publishing a fortnightly magazine in English in Pakistan. The magazine carries highly authentic articles and analyses from Pakistan's renowned writers. It also covers important national and international developments. TTI is registered as a private media and research company with

the government of Pakistan. TTI gained experience in research and analysis, monitoring and evaluation, consultancy, quality and transparency reviews, and market surveys.

Therefore, both Khmer Times and TTI have agreed to strengthen their collaboration under this Memorandum of Understanding and to implement the common goals.

Khmer Times, an award-winning English newspaper in Cambodia, officially entered a partnership with The Truth International (TTI) on Friday, a Pakistan-based magazine that provides high-quality content and information. The Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) was signed on Friday afternoon at the Embassy of Pakistan in Cambodia between Mohan Bandam, the Publisher of Khmer Times, and Prince Muhammad Fahad Thaheem, CEO of The

Truth International (TTI). Under the terms of this partnership, Khmer Times and TTI commit to collaborate and work together for better and informed news publishing and other relevant services.

From this week onwards, Khmer Times and TTI can collaborate by cross-publish-

ing select articles or content from each other, expanding their readership reach. This partnership can help Khmer Times access insights on Pakistan's national and international developments and TTI to gain a fresh perspective on events in Cambodia and beyond.

Given TTI's research capabilities, both outlets can collaborate on research projects and surveys related to common regional or international issues. Sharing insights and survey data could lead to a more comprehensive understanding of various topics, benefitting both publications and their readers.



Is Content still the King?

By Sara Danial

Content is king. A statement that often prompts eye-rolling from marketers and advertisers. Famously coined by Microsoft's founder Bill Gates in the 1990s, it makes sense to say that the quote remains relevant till today. Google regards high-quality content as the foremost determinant of rankings; it enables the creation of backlinks, highlights the keywords, and plays a vital role in enhancing the website's overall engagement statistics.

In the ever-evolving realm of digital marketing and online presence, the phrase remains a rallying cry. But is it still as relevant today as it was when it first gained prominence?

The answer is a resounding yes, but with some important qualifiers. It sure is the king. Content has the ability to attract new customers into your enterprise's embrace, coaxing them to stay. It possesses the capability to nurture potential prospects, facilitate the establishment of connections, and drive sales, even when faced with the most challenging economic conditions. Quality content remains a pivotal element in the online world, and here's why:

Audience Engagement: Well-crafted content is the linchpin of audience engagement. Whether it's a blog post, a social media update, a video, or an email newsletter, content is the vehicle through which brands can connect with their target audience. Informative, entertaining, and valuable content keeps users coming back for more.

Search Engine Optimization (SEO): Search engines still favor high-quality, relevant content. Regularly updated and optimized content helps websites rank higher in search engine results, driving organic traffic. This means content is indispensable for visibility and discoverability.

Brand Credibility: Quality content establishes trust and credibility. It showcases a brand's expertise and authority in its niche, setting it apart as a reliable source of information or a provider of valuable products and services.



Storytelling: In the age of personalization, storytelling is key. Content allows brands to tell their story and connect with customers on a deeper level. A well-told narrative can create an emotional bond, which can translate into customer loyalty.

And "content" does not solely pertain to written content such as blogs or articles. Content in various forms, be it an infographic or a video, remains crucial to sustain the engagement and fascination of the audience, regardless of the audience or the device/platform they employ to discover the presence of the business.

Then who is the queen?

Many argue that it is the context - delivering the right message to the relevant person precisely when it's most fitting. On the other hand, some believe it's dissemination, the way of connecting and engaging with the audience for the content produced.

While it is an endless debate, the advertising industry strongly aligns itself with the latter perspective. The effectiveness of the content hinges on the correct dissemination techniques employed. After all, if the content isn't garnering engagement, is its existence even justified? Forrester reports that a mere 53% of B2B enterprises perceive

their utilization of content marketing as proficient in driving sales.

Dethroning Content

In the year 2013, a new era dawned in the realm of search engines with the introduction of an entirely fresh algorithm, Hummingbird, which aimed to provide users with search outcomes that were more contextually pertinent, considering an array of novel factors.

Consequently, many businesses in the digital marketing sphere heralded the "demise of SEO" and anointed content marketing as its successor. It's essential to reiterate that content remains exceptionally significant – the internet thrives on it. However, for the attainment of organic visibility, a more comprehensive strategy is required.

However, the exclusive emphasis on "content marketing only" has some notable challenges. Firstly, it establishes impractical expectations. Secondly, it contributes to the proliferation of low-quality content. Thirdly, its efficacy is limited. Is there an alternative?

What to do about it

Podcasters, bloggers, YouTubers and vloggers have spent time crafting and publishing great content, yet find themselves utterly perplexed by the absence of desired outcomes. They

embraced the notion that "content is king." So, when the numbers didn't show up, it was difficult to sustain.

This stands out as a major challenge frequently encountered when conversing with disillusioned online marketers. Many who embarked on their journey of crafting blogs and online content did so after encountering insights from accomplished online marketers, taking inspiration from the likes of Zaid Ali T, Shahveer Jaffry, and Romaisa Khan. They came across narratives suggesting that excellent content alone can secure a high ranking, and they anticipated similar outcomes. The issue at hand is contextual understanding.

Consider this scenario: There is an online marketing blog boasting 100,000 subscribers. Generating content and disseminating it within the community will yield more than just an expansion of influence. Given the time the creator has invested in cultivating the subscriber list, it can be safely said that the creations will elicit shares and foster the creation of backlinks. On the other hand, there is a blog with a subscriber base of 1000. The latter curates content that is more relatable, culturally relevant and time-sensitive – certainly enhances the value to users, yet it might not witness an immediate surge in organic growth comparable to the previous case.

These are not mere examples. These are real-life instances where content creators



had invested a ton in terms of space, equipment and people, all to no avail in terms of numbers. Evidently, the first website has amassed a substantial amount of authority. This translates to more credibility among the audience and, notably, in the eyes of Google. While the second website has the potential to achieve a similar standing, it won't be as straightforward as a mere "publish and attract" approach.

It's crucial to note that the landscape has evolved. Content is no longer just about volume; it's about relevance and value. The focus has shifted from keyword stuffing to user intent and delivering content that addresses the audience's needs. Moreover, the format of content has diversified to include video, audio, and visual content. While the digital realm has seen significant changes, content remains the driving force

behind online success. It's not just about being king; it's about being the wise and adaptable ruler that understands the ever-shifting dynamics of the digital kingdom. So, yes, content is still very much the king, but it rules with an understanding of the new-age realm it inhabits.

To satisfy both, the audience and Google's requirements, it's essential to develop content that caters to the genuine needs and intent of the end users. Dedicate effort to identifying the challenges; produce content that imparts knowledge and offers solutions to address their concerns. SEO doesn't operate in isolation, and the same holds true for content marketing. If a business has embraced the emphasis on "content is king" and witnessed minimal to no outcomes, then it is missing the point.



Building a Trustworthy Media Entity in the Age of AI & Declining Confidence

The unprecedented speed and scale at which ai can disseminate and amplify falsehoods are sending shockwaves through the media landscape



By Amir Jahangir

In a world increasingly defined by digital disruption, generative artificial intelligence (AI), and polarizing ideologies, the need for trustworthy media has never been more critical. The media landscape is evolving at an unprecedented pace, and with the proliferation of AI, the battle to rebuild trust in media and tackle disinformation has become a pressing concern. Trust in news is at an all-time low, with only 40% of the population worldwide placing faith in the information they encounter. Concerns surrounding disinformation, fake news, and the influence of AI on news consumption have intensified, painting a disconcerting picture of the media ecosystem in 2023.

The media ecosystem in 2023 is an intricate web of digital, mobile, and platform-dominated environments. The COVID-19 pandemic accelerated the shift towards this “new normal,” compelling journalists and news media to carve out their spaces to connect with an increasingly digital-savvy

public. However, this digital transformation has brought both opportunities and challenges, with an ever-growing array of platforms and channels for information dissemination.

Audience preferences are shifting as well. More and more people are getting news from social media, but this shift comes with its own set of challenges. Younger generations, in particular, exhibit a weaker connection with traditional news outlets and a stronger affinity for content shared via social networks, search engines, and aggregators. This shift in consumption patterns poses a conundrum for news organizations striving to maintain their relevance and credibility.

In this evolving landscape, the issue of trust is paramount. Trust in media is declining, and the reasons are multifaceted. The Edelman Trust Barometer 2023 reveals that fewer people, especially those with polarized mindsets, trust the media. Trust

in media is not only declining but also recognized as a driving force behind polarization. The erosion of trust in the media is both a cause and a consequence of extreme polarization, indicating a vicious cycle that media organizations must address.

These challenges are exacerbated by the growing concerns around disinformation and misinformation. Over half of survey respondents report worries about distinguishing between real and fake information on the internet, further emphasizing the necessity for media to be not only accurate but also distinguishable from disinformation.

The reward for trust has been in various forms and currencies, however, the biggest currency that governs trust in relationships both individual and/or societal level is and will remain credibility. Credibility is the ability to instill trust or belief in a person or institution, with respect to one's compe-

tence, skill, or character. It is an invaluable currency that can generate awesome results when it is built. Credibility is crucial in relationships, and it can drive whether we get the sale, the next date, or get the attention of our teenagers. Here are some ways to establish credibility in relationships:

Building trust: It is the most important factor in establishing credibility. You cannot cultivate a relationship without trust. Being honest and dependable play a role in contributing toward a high score in the credibility department.

Trustworthiness: Being trust worthy is another way to establish credibility. Your skills and expertise demonstrate your knowledge on certain matters, which helps develop credibility.

Being authentic: It means being honest, transparent, and consistent in words and actions. It also means being true to yourself, your values, and goals. People can recognize when you are genuine or not, and they will respond more positively to you if you are.

Building rapport: It helps create a connection and a sense of commonality with the other person, based on shared interests, experiences, or values. Building rapport helps you establish trust, likability, and empathy, which are essential for credibility and influence.

Being assertive: Expressing your thoughts, feelings, and needs in a clear and respectful way is a must. It also means standing up for yourself and your values, while respecting the rights and opinions of others. Being assertive helps you establish boundaries, build self-confidence, and win respect from others.

Credibility is an essential element of effective leadership and strong relationships. Building trust, being trustworthy, being authentic, building rapport, and being assertive are some ways to establish credibility in relationships.

As Pakistan undergoes the shift from traditional linear media to the dynamic realm of digital media, it encounters a landscape filled with both challenges and opportunities. In an attention-driven economy, the ever-evolving dynamics of the

media industry introduce a new form of currency — content appreciation.

Pakistan has experienced a surge in information dissemination since the deregulation of the telecommunications and media sectors in 2002 and 2004, respectively. However, the ecosystem of content and intelligence has struggled to effectively synthesize this information into knowledge for its consumers. This growing gap not only widens but also deepens societal divisions, limiting the populace's understanding of the complex socio-economic challenges that fall within the sphere of public interest.

Summarizing these into a Media Credibility Index has already been done through earlier research done by Mishal Pakistan through a research grant by the Open Society Foundation.

The research was complimented by the further research on Development Journalism and State of Ethical Standards, a Research Report on News Media in Pakistan supported by the Danish International Development Agency (DANIDA) through the International Media Support (IMS)

Over the years, news and current affairs programs have assumed a unique position as custodians of people's trust and interests. The challenges in this custodianship stem from the absence of robust knowledge management systems within Pakistan's media landscape. To address this, the Media Credibility Index adopts a qualitative, evidence-based approach to assess the credibility of media professionals across six pillars: professionalism, accuracy, balance, timeliness, ethics, and fairness. These pillars draw from an examination of more than thirty codes of conduct, including those from Pakistani institutions and international media ethics bodies.

The research on Media Credibility Index in the age of artificial intelligence can create opportunities to redefine social media interactions, by complimenting with Big-Data intelligence. This can introduce gamification in the news and current affairs realms. Bringing a whole new generation of content creators and consumers into competition with the wise, credible and the old both in terms of time, reach, influence, and credibility.

As the world braces for record-breaking US Presidential elections in 2024, concerns about the amplification of misinformation and disinformation by generative AI loom large. The unprecedented speed and scale at which AI can disseminate and amplify falsehoods are sending shockwaves through the media landscape. The transformation of the media ecosystem by AI presents challenges and opportunities that demand careful consideration and collective action.

The decline in interest in news is another alarming trend. Interest in news is dropping, with fewer people expressing a "very" or "extremely" high level of interest in news. This is a sign of changing media consumption habits and a challenge for media organizations seeking to engage and inform their audiences effectively.

Economic factors also play a role in the media landscape. High inflation has sparked a cost-of-living crisis, causing people to rethink their spending priorities. In this context, paying for news subscriptions has become a difficult decision, especially in an era where information is increasingly available for free.

Global ad revenue for print media has dropped significantly, and the rise of generative AI threatens to further disrupt traditional business models. This AI could enable search functionality that doesn't require users to click through to access content, posing risks to media business models that rely on traffic and advertising revenue.

The media industry's growth has decelerated, and the challenges it faces seem formidable. The industry must find ways to adapt and evolve to remain relevant and trustworthy in this rapidly changing environment.

Building trust in the media is a collective endeavor that requires the collaboration of journalists, media organizations, readers, and technology companies. The challenges posed by AI and the changing media landscape can be surmounted by a steadfast commitment to the principles of journalism: accuracy, fairness, transparency, and accountability.

As we navigate this transformative era in media, the focus must remain on the audience, on truth, and on the vital role that

journalism plays in upholding democracy. Rebuilding trust is a journey that begins with these strategies and continues with a dedication to serving the public with integrity and excellence. Trust in the media is not only a necessity but a cornerstone of informed, democratic societies. In a world rife with disinformation and polarization, the role of trustworthy media entities in guiding us towards a more enlightened future cannot be overstated.

Building trust is an ongoing journey that demands consistency, a commitment to ethical journalism, and a genuine dedication to serving your audience with accurate, reliable, and unbiased information. It is imperative to adapt to the ever-evolving media landscape, especially in the context of AI, while staying true to the principles of journalism that uphold truth and transparency.



The challenges faced by the media landscape in 2023 are formidable, but they also present opportunities for media entities to rethink their strategies and emerge as beacons of trust and reliability.

So, how can a new media entity navigate this challenging terrain and build trust in an age of AI and declining confidence? Here are 50 thought-provoking steps to strategies for media organizations to consider:

Transparency as the Cornerstone of Trust: It is the bedrock upon which trust is built. Media organizations must be forthright about their editorial processes, sources, and any potential conflicts of interest. By revealing how stories are researched, fact-checked, and edited, they can demonstrate their commitment to truth and credibility.

Accountability for Accuracy: Media entities should hold themselves accountable for the accuracy of their content. Timely corrections of errors and adherence to strict editorial standards are vital. Establishing clear guidelines and consequences for breaches of journalistic ethics is essential to maintaining trust.

Quality over Quantity: Prioritize quality content over quantity. Invest in journalism that upholds ethical standards and delivers well-researched, balanced, and reliable reporting. Quality content is the cornerstone of building and maintaining trust.

Diversify Sources: Avoid over-reliance on AI-generated content and single sources. Use a variety of sources to provide a balanced and accurate representation of the news. Multiple perspectives can help in presenting a more comprehensive picture of events.

Promote Media Literacy: Educate audience about media literacy. Equip them with the tools and knowledge to critically evaluate information, identify credible sources, and understand the impact of AI on news consumption. Empowering readers to make informed decisions is crucial.

Foster User Engagement: Engage with your audience through comments, social media interactions, and feedback mechanisms. Create a community where readers feel heard and valued. Encouraging reader participation can foster trust and loyalty.

Fact-Checking as a Priority: Invest in fact-checking resources and make it clear when content has been fact-checked. Demonstrating a commitment to accuracy and truthfulness is vital for rebuilding trust.

Ethical Use of AI: If AI is used in content generation or curation, ensure it adheres to ethical guidelines. Transparency about AI involvement in content creation is essential. AI should be a tool to enhance human journalism, not replace it.

Collaborative Partnerships: Collaborate with reputable organizations, fact-checkers, and experts to strengthen your content's credibility. Partnering with trusted entities can enhance your own trustworthiness.

Long-Term Vision: Building trust is a gradual process. Consistency in producing reliable content over time is essential. Be patient and persistent in your efforts to establish trust with your audience.

Ethical Advertising: Be discerning about the advertisements you accept. Avoid misleading or unethical ads that could harm your reputation and trustworthiness.

Data Protection and Privacy: If you collect user data, ensure you have robust data protection and privacy measures in place. Be transparent about your data practices and offer users control over their data.

Editorial Independence: Safeguard your editorial independence. Avoid undue influence from advertisers or external parties that could compromise the integrity of your content.

Community Guidelines: Establish clear and fair community guidelines to govern user interactions on your platform. Create a safe and respectful environment for discussions.

Continuous Improvement: Regularly assess and improve your processes and practices. Be open to feedback and adapt to changes in technology and audience needs.

Content Diversity: Ensure your content reflects diverse perspectives and voices. Represent different communities and avoid biases in your reporting.

Long-Form Investigative Journalism: In an era of clickbait and quick headlines, there is a renewed appetite for in-depth, investigative journalism. Media organizations can invest in long-form reporting that delves deep into critical issues, providing readers with comprehensive, well-researched stories that foster trust.

Audience Engagement and Listening:

Media entities can go beyond user comments and social media interactions to actively listen to their audience. Conduct surveys, host town halls, and seek direct feedback from readers to understand their needs and concerns. This not only shows a commitment to audience interests but also helps tailor content to their preferences.

Local Journalism: Local news is the lifeblood of communities. Media organizations can revitalize local journalism by investing in local reporters and covering issues that matter to people on a community level. Being a source of trusted local news can help rebuild trust from the ground up.

Innovation in Storytelling: Embrace new formats and technologies for storytelling. Podcasts, interactive graphics, virtual reality, and other innovative mediums can make news more engaging and relatable. Adapting to evolving storytelling techniques can capture and retain audience interest.

Algorithmic Transparency: If AI is used in content curation or personalization, be transparent about the algorithms at play. Explain how recommendations are made and the criteria for content selection. This transparency can mitigate concerns about AI-driven information bubbles.

Ethical Data Journalism: Data journalism is powerful but must be wielded responsibly. Use data to uncover insights and hold institutions accountable. At the same time, respect privacy and ensure data is handled ethically and securely.

Empower Journalists: Invest in the training and well-being of journalists. Provide opportunities for professional development and encourage investigative reporting. Support journalists in their efforts to uncover the truth and report it accurately.

Global Perspectives: Expand your global coverage to offer readers a broader understanding of international events and cultures. This can help counteract biases and enhance the diversity of perspectives in your reporting.

Protecting Sources: Guarantee the safety and confidentiality of sources. Journalists must be able to assure their sources that

they can come forward with critical information without fear of reprisal.

Fighting Disinformation: Dedicate resources to actively combat disinformation. Develop fact-checking teams and algorithms to identify and debunk fake news. Show your commitment to accuracy and truth.

Partnerships with Academia: Collaborate with academic institutions to conduct research on the impact of media and AI on society. Academic partnerships can provide valuable insights and solutions to the challenges faced by media entities.

Community-Based Reporting: Engage local communities in reporting and sharing news. Grassroots reporting can foster a sense of trust and belonging, especially in areas where mainstream media may have limited reach.



Reinforce Journalistic Ethics: Journalism's core principles, such as accuracy, fairness, and impartiality, must be upheld unwaveringly. Ensure that your newsroom operates with a strict adherence to these ethics, reinforcing trust in your reporting.

Social Responsibility: Acknowledge your role as a steward of democracy and society. Highlight your commitment to responsible journalism, community engagement, and promoting democratic values.

Crowdsourced Fact-Checking: Harness the collective wisdom of your audience. Implement systems for crowdsourced fact-checking where readers can report potential inaccuracies. This collaborative approach not only improves the accuracy of your content but also fosters a sense of community.

Transparent Corrections: When errors occur, handle them with transparency. Clearly communicate corrections, retractions, and updates to your readers. This demonstrates a commitment to accuracy and accountability.

Cross-Verification: Double-check facts and sources, especially in high-stakes or sensitive stories. Utilize multiple verification methods and encourage journalists to independently verify information to ensure the highest levels of accuracy.

Encourage Investigative Reporting: Invest in in-depth investigative reporting. Investigative journalism often plays a pivotal role in holding powerful entities accountable and uncovering truths that may otherwise remain hidden.

Reimagining Business Models: Explore innovative business models that can

support quality journalism. Consider alternative revenue streams beyond traditional advertising, such as reader subscriptions, donations, and partnerships.

Resilience Against Threats: Safeguard your journalists and their work against threats and harassment. Media organizations should invest in cybersecurity and provide support to journalists who may face backlash for their reporting.

Adaptive AI Integration: AI can be a valuable tool for journalists. Rather than replacing human journalists, AI can be used to assist in tasks like data analysis, trend identification, and content curation. Invest in AI that augments, rather than replaces, human work.

Story Verification Tools: Develop and

implement AI tools that help in verifying the authenticity of user-generated content. This can help in distinguishing real news from fabricated or manipulated content.

Promote Digital Literacy: Offer educational resources to help readers navigate the digital landscape. This includes teaching them how to identify credible sources, recognize misinformation, and protect their privacy online.

Media and Digital Literacy in Education: Work with educational institutions to integrate media and digital literacy into school curricula. Empowering the next generation with these skills is a long-term investment in creating discerning media consumers.

Advocate for Responsible AI: Engage in advocacy efforts to promote responsible AI development and deployment. Collaborate with AI researchers, policymakers, and industry leaders to establish ethical AI standards.

Unbiased Reporting: Commit to unbiased reporting. Avoid sensationalism, polarization, and bias in your content. Uphold journalistic principles of fairness and impartiality to earn and maintain the trust of diverse audiences.

Support Independent Journalism: Contribute to the sustainability of independent journalism. Supporting non-profit news organizations and initiatives can help bolster the media ecosystem.

Disclose Ownership: Clearly disclose

ownership structures and any potential conflicts of interest. Transparency in ownership can help mitigate concerns about media organizations being influenced by external forces.

Data Ethics: Handle data responsibly and ethically. Respect user privacy, and ensure that data collected is used solely for legitimate journalistic purposes.

AI for Media Literacy: Leverage AI to create educational tools and platforms that promote media literacy. AI-driven educational content can help users develop critical thinking skills when consuming news.

Trust Seals and Standards: Consider adopting trust seals or certifications from reputable organizations that verify your commitment to journalistic standards and ethics.

Reader Participation: Encourage readers to participate in the editorial process. Seek input on story selection, conduct reader surveys, and host town hall-style discussions to ensure the content reflects their interests and concerns.

Ethical Advertising Policies: Establish strict ethical advertising policies. Ensure that the ads you carry align with your values and do not compromise the integrity of your content.

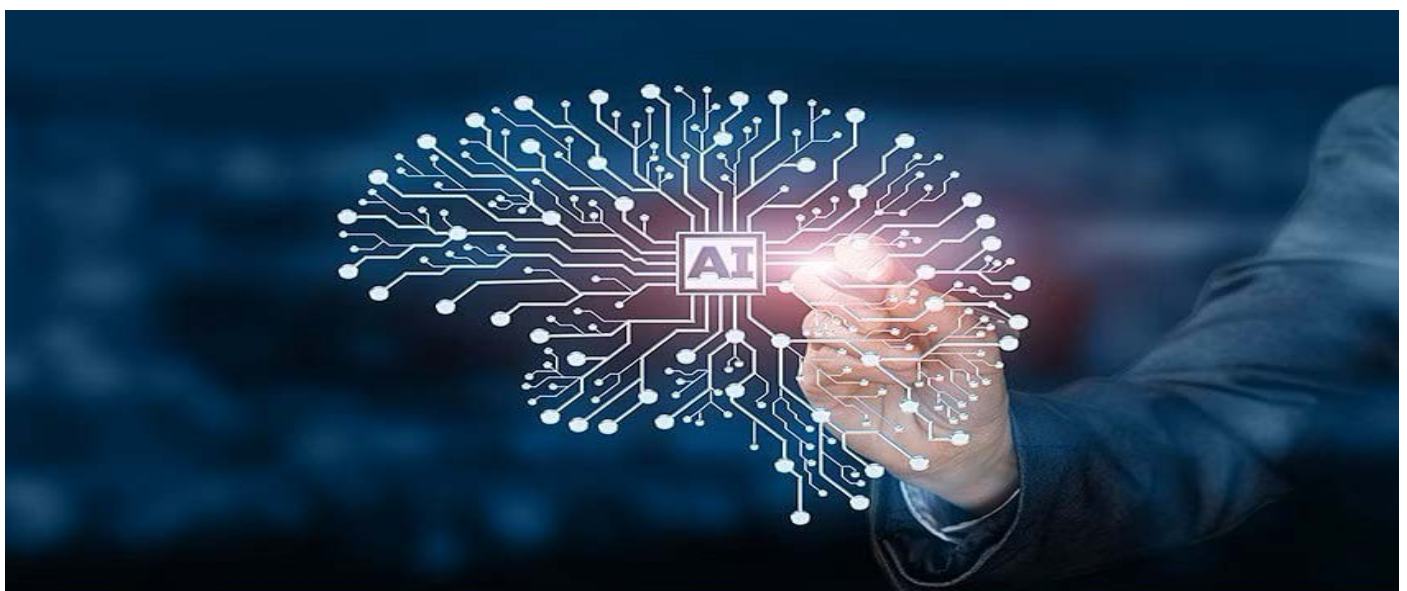
Global Collaboration: Collaborate with media organizations from around the world to address global challenges such as disinformation, AI ethics, and media

literacy. Shared expertise and resources can make a collective impact.

Rebuilding trust in the media is a multifaceted journey that demands unwavering dedication to ethical journalism, transparent practices, and a deep commitment to serving the public. The challenges presented by the changing media landscape and the influence of AI are significant, but they also offer opportunities for media entities to reinvigorate their roles as purveyors of accurate, credible, and trustworthy information.

In a world where misinformation spreads rapidly, and polarization threatens to divide societies, the role of the media as a beacon of truth and accountability cannot be overstated. Trust in the media is not merely a commodity; it is the foundation upon which informed, democratic societies are built. In this transformative era, the focus must remain on journalistic integrity, truth, and the crucial role media plays in guiding us toward a more enlightened future.

To succeed in this mission, media organizations must remain adaptable, resilient, and deeply committed to their ethical responsibilities. Rebuilding and maintaining trust in the media is not a solitary endeavor but a collective responsibility that extends from journalists and media entities to readers and technology companies. It is a commitment to the principles of journalism that underpin truth, transparency, and accountability principles that will ultimately shape the future of trustworthy media in an age of AI and evolving challenges.



Webinar

Climate Change Impacts and Adaptation in Pakistan: Environmental, Economic, and Security Considerations

TTI Report

Climate change is no longer a distant specter but a stark and undeniable reality, one that is hitting Pakistan with ever-increasing force. In a recent webinar on 11th October 2023 organized by The Truth International, a panel of experts from the governmental and educational sector illuminated the multifaceted challenges posed by climate change in Pakistan, encompassing its environmental, economic, and security dimensions. In this article, we will explore the key insights and revelations unveiled during this enlightening discussion, shedding light on the demanding issues of climate change that mandate our immediate attention.

Sherry Rehman's Insights

During the webinar, Senator Sherry Rehman, former Climate Change Minister of Pakistan, provided a comprehensive overview of Pakistan's vulnerability to climate change. She emphasized that Pakistan, despite having limited financial resources, is increasingly grappling with extreme climate events that have far-reaching consequences. From devastating floods to soaring temperatures, the nation is acutely experiencing the impacts of a changing climate.

Perhaps one of the most alarming revelations made during her presentation was the staggering temperature increase in Pakistan. The country has witnessed temperatures as high as 53.6°C, ranking it among the hottest places on Earth. This extreme heat poses significant risks to human health, agriculture, and ecosystems.

Senator Rehman also highlighted the disheartening lack of global attention focused on Pakistan's climate vulnerabilities. Despite Pakistan contributing less than one percent of global greenhouse gas emissions, the country's geographical location in a region prone



to climate catastrophes implies that the consequences of climate change do not respect national borders. The interconnected nature of climate change means that the impacts experienced in Pakistan have broader implications, and addressing these issues necessitates a global perspective and cooperation.

Senator Sherry Rehman emphasized Pakistan's susceptibility to climate change, which, despite financial constraints, is manifesting in extreme weather events and soaring temperatures. This places significant strain on the nation's resources and its ability to adapt effectively to these changing conditions. The heightened temperatures, including record-breaking heatwaves, present grave concerns for various sectors, from agriculture to public health. Furthermore, Senator Rehman underscored the need for greater international recognition of Pakistan's climate challenges, given its location in a region prone to climate-related disasters, and called for more global cooperation to address these shared issues.

Senator Semi Ezdi's Perspective

Senator Semi Ezdi's remarks centered on the catastrophic floods that struck Pakistan in the preceding year. These catastrophic events resulted in the

displacement of a staggering 33 million people and inflicted substantial damage on the nation's infrastructure. In the face of such unnerving challenges, Senator Ezdi highlighted Pakistan's significant contributions to global efforts aimed at mitigating the syndromes of climate change.

Notwithstanding Pakistan's commitment and involvement in international climate change initiatives, the financial support extended by the global community has been far from adequate to address the country's pressing climate-related needs. The divergence between Pakistan's contributions and the assistance received has raised concerns regarding fairness and equity in international climate finance mechanisms.

Senator Ezdi emphasized the urgent requirement for innovative climate change solutions to address the increasing climate-related risks facing Pakistan. Furthermore, she called for enhanced support from industrialized countries to help Pakistan cope with the growing environmental and humanitarian challenges posed by climate change. These challenges necessitate a collaborative and equitable response on the global stage, given Pakistan's commitment to tackling climate change and its vulnerable position in the face of its impacts.

Dr. Nafees on Climate Change Characteristics

Dr. Nafees, a distinguished lecturer at Peshawar University and a recognized climate change expert, contributed his valuable insights to the webinar. Drawing from his academic background and expertise, he emphasized the three fundamental characteristics of climate change: unpredictability, intensity, and irregularity, which present unique challenges in regions such as Pakistan.

Dr. Nafees brought valuable insights to the discussion by elucidating three fundamental characteristics of climate change: unpredictability, intensity, and irregularity.



These attributes, he explained, pose considerable challenges, particularly in regions such as Pakistan, where their impacts have far-reaching consequences for vulnerable communities, including laborers and the agricultural sector.

Unpredictability in climate patterns makes it difficult for communities to prepare adequately for shifting weather conditions, affecting their livelihoods and well-being. The intensity of extreme weather events, including both hot and cold extremes, adds to the complexity of adapting to a changing climate. Dr. Nafees underscored the importance of acknowledging the irregular nature of these changes, where one year may bring a devastating flood, while the next may entail drought conditions.

In response to these challenges, Dr. Nafees stressed the necessity of enhancing climate

change policies and their effective implementation. This involves adopting a proactive approach that prioritizes reforestation efforts to mitigate the impacts of climate change and water conservation measures to ensure sustainable resource management. These steps are crucial for both mitigating the effects of climate change and safeguarding the livelihoods of vulnerable communities, making them a central focus in Pakistan's climate change strategy.

Yasir Hayat Shah on Data and Finance

Yasir Hayat Shah, a program policy officer at the World Food Programme (WFP), brought a wealth of practical experience



and expertise to the webinar. With his background at the WFP, Shah emphasized the pivotal role of accurate and implementable research and data in effectively addressing climate change. He revealed the stark reality that Pakistan's climate finance needs significantly surpass its current allocation, highlighting a substantial funding gap.

Yasir Hayat Shah provided invaluable insights into the critical nexus between data and finance in addressing the challenge of climate change. He underscored the pressing need for accurate and actionable research and data to effectively combat the impact of climate change. Shah's presentation shed light on the stark reality that Pakistan's climate finance requirements far exceed its current allocation. In fact, the financing gap is substantial, as the nation's

climate finance needs are estimated to be five times greater than what is currently being allocated.

To bridge this significant financial shortfall, Shah proposed a pragmatic and collaborative solution. He advocated for the accreditation of more local organizations to participate in climate finance initiatives. By expanding the pool of accredited entities, Pakistan can potentially tap into additional resources, thereby bolstering its capacity to address the multifaceted challenges posed by climate change.

This emphasis on accurate data, adequate financing, and increased local engagement underscores the importance of a concerted and data-driven approach to confront the escalating climate crisis in Pakistan. Such measures are essential to ensure that the nation is equipped to develop and implement effective strategies for mitigating and adapting to the impacts of climate change.

Conclusion

The insights shared during the webinar have illuminated the dire need for Pakistan to confront the multifaceted challenges posed by climate change. It is evident that climate change transcends the boundaries of being solely an environmental issue; it has far-reaching implications for the nation's economic stability and security as well.

The experts' collective wisdom underscored the critical role that data collection, rigorous research, and innovative solutions play in addressing and mitigating the impacts of climate change in Pakistan. The urgency of the matter cannot be overstated. As Pakistan grapples with the relentless and escalating challenges brought on by a changing climate, both the government and civil society must join hands in a collaborative effort to secure a more sustainable and resilient future for the nation.

The webinar's revelations serve as a clarion call, emphasizing the need for immediate action, informed policymaking, and a steadfast commitment to addressing climate change. The stakes are high, and the time to act is now to safeguard Pakistan's environment, economy, and security in the face of an evolving climate landscape.

Bridging the Divide: Pakistan's dual Educational System



By Hussnain Ahmad

In the heart of South Asia, Pakistan is a nation encircled by enormous intricacies in its educational landscape – the glaring duality of its education system. This division is marked by a distinct contrast between elite institutions favored by the well-off and the struggling public schools accessible to the underprivileged masses. In this article, we delve into the profound disparities between prestigious schools and the under-resourced public education sector and examine the implications of this divide for Pakistan's future.

Within this dual educational system, a reality emerges: students from elite schools, benefiting from top-tier facilities and a rich array of educational opportunities, often graduate as the “Cream of the Crop.” However, their trajectory frequently leads them abroad, seeking better prospects, higher education, and an improved quality of life – a phenomenon called the “Brain Drain.” This raises questions about the substantial investments made in their education, which often yield returns for foreign nations rather than Pakistan.

Conversely, public schools and colleges present an utter contrast. Overcrowded classrooms, outdated textbooks, and limited resources characterize the educational experience for the majority. The privileged few revel in elite institutions, while most are left caught in the faults of the public education system. In exploring

Pakistan's dual education system, the aim is to dissect its complex syndromes, analyze the sociopolitical implications of this divide, and offer glimpses of potential solutions for a more equitable future. This exploration is an invitation for collective introspection as Pakistan endeavors to align the aspirations of its youth with the demands of its progress.

The cream of the crop

Elite educational institutions and their counterparts have come to symbolize the climax of academic excellence in Pakistan. These schools are marked by many unique attributes that set them apart, underpinned by an exceptional allocation of resources and a commitment to fostering a holistic learning environment.

Statistics reveal a stark contrast in terms of resources. According to the Annual Status of Education Report (ASER) report in 2019, Pakistan's public schools, attended by the majority, faced severe resource shortages. The report indicated that approximately 56% of public schools lacked functional toilets, and a significant proportion operated without electricity. Whilst, elite private schools often have state-of-the-art facilities, well-maintained infrastructure, libraries stocked with the latest publications, and technologically advanced classrooms. These schools boast a student-to-teacher ratio, allowing individualized attention and small

class sizes, a luxury beyond reach for most public institutions.

Beyond physical infrastructure, these elite institutions are known for their commitment to educational excellence. Private schools in Pakistan often employ better-qualified teachers, with most having at least a bachelor's degree or higher. In contrast, government schools frequently have a shortage of qualified teaching staff. This directly impacts the quality of education imparted in these institutions.

The extracurricular activities available in elite schools further distinguish them. These institutions invest heavily in sports, arts, and cultural activities, providing students with a well-rounded education. For example, with its vast network of schools across the country, the Beacon House School System strongly emphasizes co-curricular activities, nurturing talent in music, arts, sports, and more. Such opportunities enhance students' skill sets and contribute to their overall personal development.

These attributes, backed by substantial resources and unwavering commitment to educational excellence, position students graduating from these elite schools as the “Cream of the Crop.” These students emerge from their educational journey with a distinct advantage and are well-prepared to excel in competitive academic and professional spheres within

Pakistan and abroad. The access to advanced learning environments and a wealth of extracurricular activities in these institutions equips them with skills and experiences that set them apart, perpetuating the perception of excellence associated with these schools.

Brain Drain

The phenomenon of the Brain Drain in Pakistan is a complex intricacy compounded by the departure of many of its brightest minds, particularly those who graduate from elite educational institutions. These students, often called the nation's "Cream of the Crop," embark westward in pursuit of superior educational and career opportunities. In this process, not only does Pakistan lose its intellectual capital, but the substantial investments made by their families in their education often yield returns on foreign shores.

are known to make financial sacrifices to secure their children's admission into elite schools. Tuition fees, additional coaching classes, and other educational expenses can account for a significant portion of a family's income. Beyond monetary investments, parents invest their hopes, aspirations, and dreams in these students, envisioning them as harbingers of positive change for Pakistan's future.

However, when these exceptionally educated individuals opt to continue their higher education or build their careers abroad, the nation's investment often flows out of the country. The funds expended on early education, extracurricular activities, and university admissions find fruition on foreign shores. The "Brain Drain" phenomenon thus signifies a substantial loss, as Pakistan's investment in grooming its brightest minds is not retained within its borders.



According to data from the Higher Education Commission of Pakistan, 60,000 students opt to study abroad each year. Western countries like the United States, the United Kingdom, Canada, and Australia are among the preferred destinations. This departure is driven by various factors, including the attraction of internationally recognized universities, the promise of high-quality education, and the potential for better career prospects.

The investment in these students' education is substantial and multifaceted. Families from various socioeconomic backgrounds

This ongoing outflow of talent and resources to other nations can have severe implications for Pakistan. It results in a talent shortage within the country, especially in sectors that require specialized skills and knowledge. The economic impact is also profound since Pakistan loses the contributions these highly educated individuals could make to its economy and development. This phenomenon spreads a cycle of underinvestment in the country's education system, further exacerbating the existing disparities in the dual education system.

Haves and the Have-Nots

The disparities between elite private and government-run schools in Pakistan reflect a deeply cemented socio-educational divide. These disparities manifest on multiple fronts, encompassing resources, infrastructure, and, most crucially, the quality of education imparted.

In the realm of resources, elite private schools enjoy a profound advantage. The classrooms are equipped with modern technology, offering students an interactive and dynamic learning experience. In contrast, government-run schools often grapple with a severe shortage of resources. Overcrowded classrooms are a norm, where a single teacher must manage many students, impeding individualized attention and effective learning.

The most significant differentiation, however, lies in the quality of education. Elite schools have the resources to attract and retain well-qualified educators, ensuring a high standard of teaching. They implement contemporary curricula that are in line with international standards. These schools also foster extracurricular activities, which are pivotal to a student's development.

However, government-run schools grapple with a shortage of qualified teaching staff. Many educators in these institutions lack proper training, leading to a dilution in the quality of education. Outdated textbooks and curricula are often the norm, rendering students ill-equipped to compete in a rapidly evolving global landscape.

These disparities paint a bleak picture for students attending government schools, who face a formidable struggle for quality education. Overcrowded classrooms hamper the learning process, while outdated resources and underqualified teachers perpetuate a cycle of substandard education. Consequently, the disparities in the dual education system in Pakistan contribute to an entrenched cycle of inequality and hinder social mobility, cementing the divide between the haves and the have-nots. Addressing these disparities is not just a matter of educational reform but a question of social justice, equity, and the nation's future development.

The Economic and Social Impact

The dual education system in Pakistan, characterized by a stark contrast between elite private schools and government-run schools, exerts profound and enduring consequences on the nation's economy and social fabric. This system not only perpetuates inequality but also substantially impedes social mobility, thereby undermining Pakistan's long-term economic and societal prospects.

Economically, the dual education system exacerbates inequality in the country. Elite private schools produce graduates who, owing to their superior educational backgrounds, are better equipped to access higher-paying jobs and contribute more substantially to the nation's economic growth. These students, often called the "Cream of the Crop," have access to the resources and opportunities that position them for success. Consequently, they tend to secure better-paying positions, both domestically and abroad, effectively driving income inequality.

Students from government-run schools, lacking adequate resources and quality education, are frequently relegated to lower-wage employment opportunities or unemployment. The implications of this economic divide extend beyond individual livelihoods, affecting the nation's overall economic health. The limited access to quality education perpetuates a cycle of low productivity and skill mismatch, stunting economic progress and limiting the country's ability to compete on a global scale.

In the long term, these inequalities can have detrimental social consequences. A society marked by a lack of upward mobility fosters frustration and disillusion among those systematically denied access to better opportunities. It can lead to social unrest, resentment, and decreased social cohesion, undermining the nation's fabric.

To address these long-term consequences, it is of utmost need for the policymakers of Pakistan to prioritize educational reform that focuses on equalizing opportunities, enhancing the quality of public education, and mitigating the disparities between private and public educational institutions.

A more equitable education system is an ethical imperative and a key driver of economic growth and social cohesion. By bridging the gap between the haves and have-nots in the educational realm, Pakistan can work toward a more inclusive, prosperous, and harmonious future.

Possible Solutions

A multifaceted approach is essential to address pervasive educational disparities and bridge the prevailing education gap in Pakistan. First and foremost, a substantial increase in government investment in public education is imperative. This entails allocating a higher portion of the national budget to education to enhance infrastructure and resources and attract and retain qualified teaching staff.



Comprehensive reforms also aimed at improving the quality of curricula and standardized testing are vital. Public-private partnerships can be pivotal in expanding access to quality education, ensuring a broader reach, and ameliorating resource constraints.

Collaborations between government bodies and private organizations can leverage the strengths of both sectors to effect positive change. Success stories from organizations and initiatives that have made strides in underprivileged areas should serve as guiding examples.

Initiatives such as The Citizens Foundation (TCF), which focuses on creating

affordable schools in underserved regions, exemplify the transformative potential of concerted efforts to bridge the education gap. These solutions collectively present a viable pathway toward a more equitable education system, thereby fostering a brighter and more inclusive future for Pakistan.

Conclusion

The dual education system in Pakistan, epitomized by the stark divide between elite private schools and government-run institutions, underscores a critical issue that transcends the confines of classrooms and textbooks. The disparities in resources, infrastructure, and quality of education perpetuate inequality and hinder social mobility, with far-reaching consequences

for Pakistan's economic growth and societal cohesion. It is imperative to acknowledge that bridging this divide is not merely a matter of educational reform but a collective responsibility of society and government. A comprehensive commitment to increased investment in public education, substantial reforms, and meaningful public-private partnerships offers a viable roadmap toward a more equitable and inclusive educational landscape. The future of Pakistan, its unity, and its prosperity depend on ensuring that quality education is accessible to all as a fundamental human right and a cornerstone of a thriving nation.

Pakistan's World Cup 2023 Journey: A Glimpse of Hope Amid Four Consecutive Losses

By Ali Abdullah



In an unprecedented turn of events at the World Cup 2023, Pakistan faced their fourth consecutive loss, with the latest defeat in Chennai. Despite their inability to control their destiny, Pakistan still clings to hopes of securing a spot in the semi-finals.

The match in Chennai bore witness to Pakistan's desperation, drawing an audience of more than 25,000 fans who witnessed a thrilling showdown between Pakistan and South Africa. Both teams were in dire need of the two points this match offered, with South Africa looking to prove their chasing capabilities following an unexpected loss to the Netherlands in Dharamsala earlier in the tournament.

In the end, South Africa clinched victory by a narrow 1-wicket margin, primarily thanks to Keshav Maharaj's calm and collected strategy. Pakistan's pace trio, comprising Shaheen Shah Afridi, Haris Rauf, and the young Mohammad Wasim Jr., gave it their all, applying pressure to South Africa's lower order and almost compensating for their team's lacklustre batting performance. Yet, on the sporty

Chepauk pitch, a total of 270 runs proved insufficient, and it was left to left-arm spinner Mohammad Nawaz to deliver the final blow.

After Aiden Markram's dismissal at ninety-one, Pakistan released the pressure they had built, as Captain Babar Azam expressed his dissatisfaction with Nawaz's loose delivery, which Keshav Maharaj easily caught. Pakistan's loss was devastating, and Captain Babar acknowledged the sombre mood in the locker room.

The victory was essential for Pakistan to stay in the race for the semi-finals. Despite the setback, they still have a chance to make it to the top four.

With 10 points from 6 games, South Africa has now claimed the top spot in the World Cup 2023 points standings, surpassing India. India, with an edge over the teams above, is gearing up to face a struggling England.

Australia is teetering on the edge of the top 4 with 6 points, while New Zealand holds third place with 8 points. The bottom six teams still hold some realistic chances, with Sri Lanka appearing

to have the best shot at making it to the semi-finals. Afghanistan also has a remote chance, but the road ahead will be challenging.

Pakistan's fate is not entirely in their hands; they must heavily rely on other match outcomes. First and foremost, Pakistan needs to regroup and break their losing streak.

To stay ahead in the Net Run Rate competition, Pakistan must secure decisive victories in their remaining three matches. They also hope for favourable outcomes, such as Australia or New Zealand losing their upcoming games, as well as a combination of other lower-ranked teams not performing well.

If Pakistan can maintain their momentum and disrupt New Zealand's plans in their upcoming matches, they might have a shot at advancing. While it's a complex scenario, as the World Cup reaches its conclusion, fans of teams in the bottom half will be keeping their fingers crossed for favourable developments. It's a time when calculators come in handy.

Cricket World Cup 2023: Afghanistan Stuns Pakistan, Netherlands Upsets South Africa in Thrilling Matches

The T20 format of cricket has long been synonymous with unpredictability and upsets. The ongoing 2023 Cricket World Cup in India has been no exception, as teams that had to qualify through qualifiers have caused major upsets by defeating more established cricketing nations.

One of the most significant upsets in the tournament came when Afghanistan secured a convincing eight-wicket victory over Pakistan. Afghanistan's top-order batsmen all notched up half-centuries, with skipper Hashmatullah Shahidi remaining unbeaten on 48. This solid batting performance allowed Afghanistan to chase down the 283-run target with an over to spare. This victory marked the first time Afghanistan had beaten Pakistan in eight One Day International (ODI) matches and had a ripple effect, sending defending champion England to the bottom of the standings.

The Afghan team, which had earlier surprised cricket enthusiasts with a win against England, showcased their professionalism in chasing the target. When Pakistan batted first after winning the toss, Afghanistan's spin-heavy attack put them under pressure during the initial powerplay. Afghanistan had four spinners in their lineup, but it was the young spinner Noor Ahmad who made a significant impact on his World Cup debut, taking three crucial wickets. Pakistan's innings was anchored by half-centuries from Abdullah Shafique and captain Babar Azam.



However, Rahmanullah Gurbaz and Ibrahim Zadran's blazing opening stand of 130 runs provided the impetus Afghanistan needed to chase the target. Pakistan's bowlers appeared uninspired, and their fielding was sloppy. Although Shaheen Afridi dismissed Gurbaz, Rahmat Shah and Ibrahim Zadran continued the good work. Hasan Ali did manage to break Zadran's resistance, but Shah and Shahidi sealed the deal with an unbroken 96-run partnership.

The defeat left Pakistan with their semi-final hopes hanging by a thread, and Babar Azam emphasized the importance of a well-rounded performance in World Cup.

In another surprising turn of events, the Netherlands outperformed the mighty and in-form South Africa by defeating them by 38 runs in the ICC Cricket World Cup 2023 at Dharamshala. Despite setting a target of 246 runs, the Dutch showcased tight bowling and strong late-inning batting to secure the victory.

South Africa's chase began cautiously but stumbled as they lost wickets in quick succession. The Dutch team capitalized on this, with Colin Ackermann taking key wickets. The Netherlands' bowlers, led by Roelof van der Merwe and Paul van Meekeren, maintained pressure and secured vital dismissals.

Heinrich Klaasen and David Miller provided some hope for South Africa with a 45-run partnership, but Logan van Beek's bowling prowess ended their resistance. Despite a late 41-run stand between Keshav Maharaj and Lungi Ngidi, the Netherlands emerged victorious.

The Dutch team's disciplined bowling and astute fielding earned them a memorable win, while South Africa suffered a surprising defeat, highlighting the unpredictable nature of the Cricket World Cup.

By Ali Abdullah



Sajal Aly wants Lux Style Awards for more than just popular artists and we agree with her

The Kuch Ankahi actor called out the LSAs for ignoring many hard-working artists

In a fair world, everyone involved in a movie would get an award in Pakistan. But we don't live in a fair world and Sajal Aly is very aware of that.

After the 2023 Lux Style Awards, the star took to Instagram to acknowledge the many, many people who weren't awarded or even acknowledged during the show. From fellow stars such as Mehwish Hayat for London Nahi Jaunga, Zara Noor Abbas for Badshah Begum and Ushna Shah for Habs, to supporting actors and technical teams, Aly is an ally to everyone.

Here's why that's so important.

This is a perfect example of women supporting women. Aly did not talk about herself, even though she didn't win an award either — instead she gave examples of other female actors who have been doing terrific work but have not received acclaim for it. She used her platform to uplift her fellow women, and we love her for it.

She also spoke about the contributions of everyone involved in making shows and films successful and the need to have specific categories for them too.

While it's true that a lot of lead actors deserve praise for their work, is it necessary for us to make it all about them? For example, was Humsafar only about Asher and Khirad's love story? The whole storyline and supporting cast's arcs deserve our attention without reducing a show or film to just the main characters.

To be honest, reducing any show or film to just the main couple feels shallow. Art deserves to be celebrated as a whole; with all of its components equally applauded.

As part of Aly's desire for more acclaim for everyone involved in the industry, she also spoke about the importance of honouring supporting actors.



This is something that is rarely mentioned in Pakistan, when it is often the supporting actors who play the most crucial role in making a show or a film worth watching. Without good acting from the supporting roles and their input within the story, any show or film would seem incomplete.

Aly also talked about the need to appreciate those who work behind the scenes. "My second request is that LSA also needs to honour technical teams like DOPs and their very hard working teams who create magic for us, us actors and for the audiences who see us," she said.

It's important to see how other countries media praise their entertainment industries. The Oscars and the Emmys honour not only the best actors but the best supporting actors alongside the best director, best makeup and hairstyling, as well as best costume design and production design, among many other categories.

It is important that our industry credits not only its lead actors and popular shows, but all the supporting actors and production team behind it as well, because after all, what would Umeed from Fairytale be without her colourful and carefully curated clothes or Hassan from Dastan be without his signature sherwani and oiled hair? Did

music (and a very artfully styled shawl) not play a part in stirring your emotions when Murtasim appeared on screen in Tere Bin?

Without acknowledging the part played by the people who curate these things and make sure that it looks perfect each and every time, we are doing a disservice to the industry. They deserve as much — if not more — praise than the actors on screen.

In 2022, Meesha Shafi and Momina Mustehsan had called out the Lux Style Awards for excluding female nominees in the best musician category. So, criticism against the LSAs is not new. Every year, someone or the other gets snubbed and that's through no fault of their own. In the case of the best musician category, it was the lack of separate male/female categories that led to an almost complete erasure of female artists.

Without proper categories honouring ALL the actors, all the supporting staff and production team, there is simply no way that our awards could truly honour the art that is being produced. So, we need to consider what Aly has said and work towards an equitable celebration for the entire industry.

Courtesy images.dawn.com

Mahira Khan's wedding outfits ranked

There can only be one winner!

When it comes to celebrity weddings, nothing interests us more than the clothes and Mahira Khan's sudden (to us) wedding had great outfits to dissect.

Allow us to present to you our favourite outfits from her wedding, ranked in order.

If all girls in India dream of Sabyasachi, then girls in Pakistan dream of Faraz Manan.

Mahira in Faraz Manan was a dream come true. Everything about it was dreamy and perfect — from her signature simple makeup to the delicate silver embroidery to that gorgeous jewellery to the way her dupatta and lehenga fell elegantly.

We especially loved the tiny pop of colour in her jewellery.

It's no wonder then that this was our favourite look from her wedding — she looked like an actual princess.

While silver is great, we also love a good pop of colour every now and then and Mahira's indigo Menahel and Mehreen outfit was just the palate cleanser we needed.

Her mehndi outfit was simple but was complemented by gorgeous jewellery and deceptively heavy embroidery that made it difficult to tell what's embroidery and what's actual jewellery, especially around her wrists.

White may be Mahira's favourite colour to wear, but indigo is definitely her colour — especially with the tiny pops of green incorporated through her jewellery.

Third on our list is this colourful and rather casual number by Zara Shahjahan. There's something about a bride who knows when to glam it up and when to dress it down and Mahira is queen of elevating her casual looks.

The bangles and red dupatta were nice touches, as was the lipstick, which was a darker shade than what she wore on her other events. We loved how toned down the look was overall — especially compared to the usual heavy bridals we've seen over the years.

Another outfit from Mahira's wedding look-book that struck a chord with us was the traditional Hyderabad two piece she wore by Umar Sayeed. Simple, traditional and in her favourite colour (white), Mahira looked great in this outfit.

The only thing we aren't fans of are the sleeves.

Last on the list is Mahira's mayun outfit, also done by Zara Shahjahan. There isn't much to say about it — it's a rather plain yellow outfit complemented with a green border on the dupatta for a pop of colour. It's not a bad outfit, per se, but it's definitely not our favourite.





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