

Fortnightly

# The Truth International

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Gaza or Death Valley

Death is hovering over Palestine and the world is silent spectator

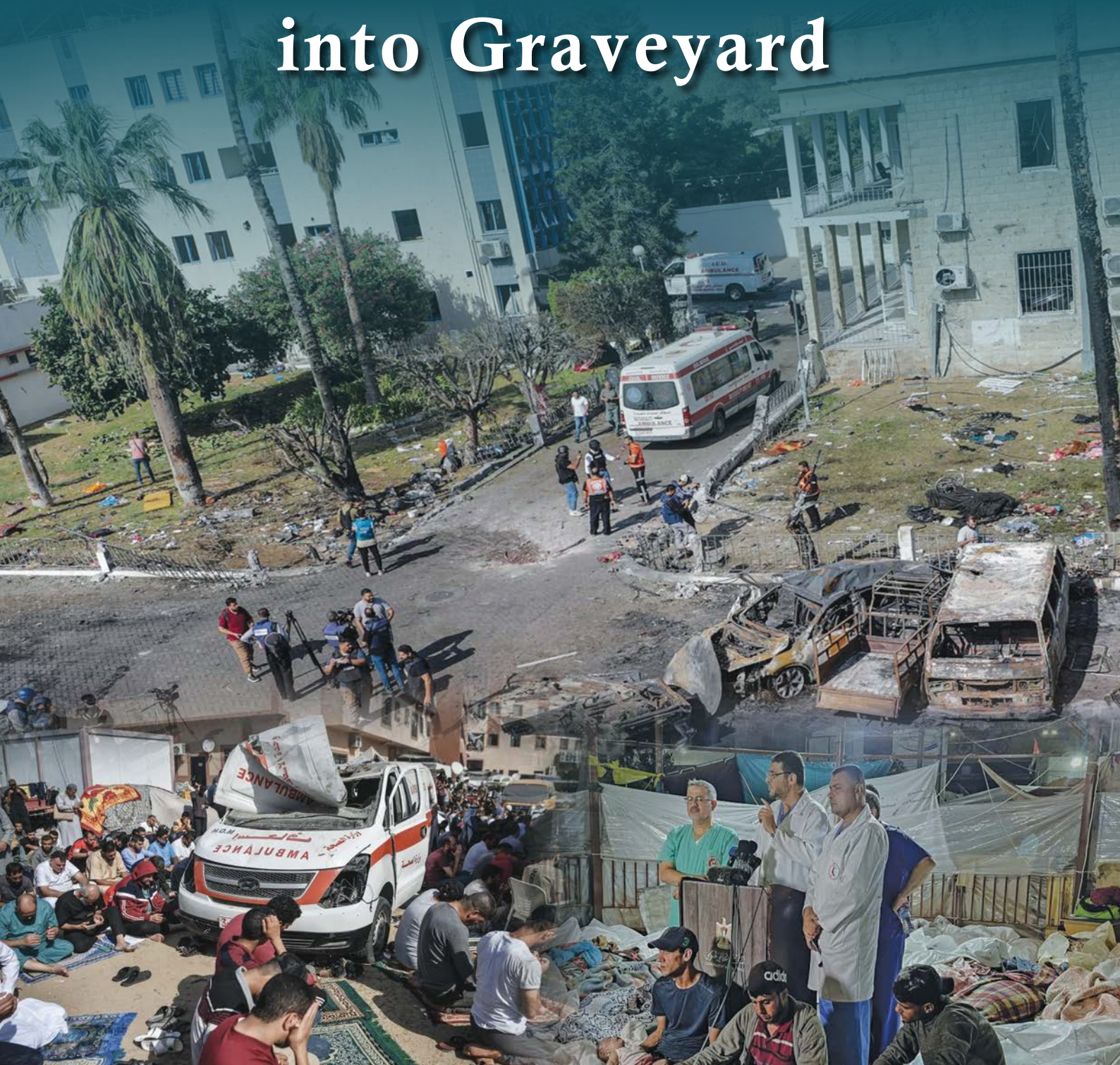
PDM Allied are Daggers Drawn

Country is witnessing strategic maneuvering of political alliances

Is Economy on Recovery Path?

PSX crossed 56K level for the first time in history

## Hospitals Turned into Graveyard





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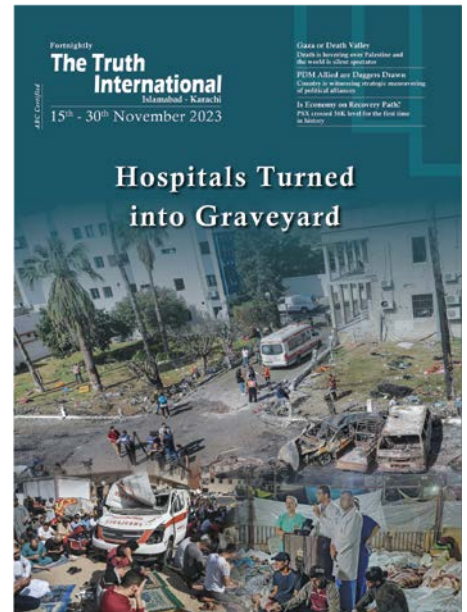
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# Take me back to my Boots and Saddle

By Hammad Ghaznavi



With the announcement of 8th February 2024 as the date for the general election, the rumours regarding the continuation of the caretaker setup for a longer period of time have ebbed away. A still more important question, however, remains unanswered – will the upcoming election be free and fair? A rigged election, history testifies, doesn't bring stability, in fact, it multiplies chaos: the general election of 2018 is a case in point. A regime that comes into power through a non-transparent electoral exercise requires highhanded methods to establish its writ – a recipe for further unrest.

A look at the previous elections reveals, there has always been a political party or two complaining of an uneven playing field. In 2002 and 2008 it was PML-N, in 2013 it was PPP and in 2018 it was PML-N again, questioning the transparency of the polls. All these elections were held under the supervision of the army but in the last elections, going an extra mile, the army personnel were appointed inside the polling booths with enhanced powers that further kicked up controversies. This time around, the powers of the army, especially on the election day, have yet not been announced by the Election Commission of Pakistan. The lesson of history is clear, and must not go heedless.

It is no different this time around, as one political party, Pakistan Tehrik e Insaf, is continually clamouring for 'Level Playing Field', a code word for fears regarding the

transparency of the entire election process. PTI's plight is no secret. The party chairman Imran Khan is behind bars, with a plethora of legal cases registered against him. It will be surprising if he is released from the jail before the election or even allowed to contest the polls. He has not been convicted in any of the cases instituted against him so far, but the election is still three months away and meanwhile the axe is likely to fall. PML-N supremo Nawaz Sharif faced a similar situation in 2018 as he was convicted and jailed just before the election. In fact, PTI is facing the same wrath of the 'state' that the PML-N faced during the 2018 elections. The leading lights of the PTI, including its President Pervez Elahi and Senior Vice Chairman Shah Mehmood Qureshi, are in jail. The cases have been registered against almost all the main leaders of the PTI, and many unable to resist the pressure, have quit the party. Including former PTI secretary General Asad Umar, some have abandoned politics altogether. Many PTI leaders have gone underground or are on the run. Against this background, the PTI is entering the election. Yet another fear haunts the potential PTI candidates in the upcoming polls – will they be allowed to contest the election on the PTI ticket? In 2018, many PML-N ticket holders were compelled to return the party tickets and go independent. Will that coercion be witnessed again? It is feared the PTI will be wrestling with various such 'state' bullying tactics in the run up to the 8th February.

On the other hand, things look hunky dory for the PML-N. Nawaz Sharif is being treated by the caretaker setup respectfully, and the PML-N patron has all the trappings of a PM in waiting. His party is going into electoral alliances with regional political parties like MQM, BAP, GDA, etc, all considered thick with the garrison. A drove of 'electables', particularly from Punjab, has joined PML-N in the recent weeks. Indicators of PML-N's good relations with the Establishment are numerous. 'Level Playing Field', it seems, will remain an elusive bird. PML-N leader Pervez Rashid, however, differs. "If you look at the narrow picture, it might appear skewed. But if you juxtapose 2018 and 2024, it's a perfect level playing field," argues Pervez.

All cases against Imran Khan apart, it's the 9th May 'failed revolution' which perhaps is the biggest obstacle in the way of Imran Khan's and his party's political fortunes. It was an attempt at an internal coup against the present military leadership and there is no pardon for the sin, Rawalpindi sources insist.

It seems there is a consensus among the Establishment and the international stakeholders that Pakistan desperately needs a period of internal stability and regional peace, particularly with India, to overcome its financial woes – and the best candidate among the present lot of Pakistani politicians to deliver on this front is none other than former Prime Minister Mian Muhammad Nawaz Sharif.

# Why the Israelis dither

*Israel's Test?*



By M A Niazi

The question that will ever remain over the present Israel-Hamas conflict is what was keeping the Israeli Defence Forces from going into the Gaza Strip. The Israeli answer, that it is awaiting the results of the US attempts at a ceasefire is not credible, for it would represent the first time Israel has paid attention to any factor short of its own desires or needs, in determining its course of action. The suspicion arises that the IDF is scared. The initial engagement, followed by withdrawal, indicates as much.

The IDF faces the problem of all conscript forces, that the troops are not of high quality. In the sort of fighting that invading infantry would face in Gaza, conscript troops would probably not do too well. The bulk of the troops would probably be reservists recalled to duty, but their primary purpose would probably be to survive, not to overcome.

The IDF might hark back to the Ramadan War of 1973 when Israeli armoured formations composed primarily of reservists defeated Egyptian armoured formations which

broke out into the occupied Sinai. However, that should take account of how bad the Egyptian armour was, as shown in the 1967 Six-Day War. More instructive is when there was more infantry-oriented fighting, around the Chinese Farm, when the Egyptians gave a good account of themselves, against reservist Israeli infantry.

In other words, the IDF cannot count on its infantry in the urban warfare that will characterize a ground invasion of Gaza. Opposing forces are not an army, so there will be gaps in training. True, just because a soldier does not know how to salute properly does not mean he cannot fire his personal weapon accurately. Another problem for attacking IDF forces is their lack of information about the Hamas tunnel network. The USA came up against the same problem in Vietnam against the Viet Cong and never came up with a solution. One method, to use its infantry to clear the tunnels was tough, for it meant high casualty rates. This increased domestic pressure against the war, as the returning body bags of conscripts created a backlash.

As a matter of fact, the Israeli comparison of the October 7 Hamas attacks to 9/11 is probably not accurate. A more valid comparison would be to the 1968 Tet Offensive, when the North Vietnamese Army and the Viet Cong jointly launched an attack during the Vietnamese New Year, Tet, to exploit the fact that many South Vietnamese military personnel were on holiday leave. Hamas used this, launching its attacks to coincide with the Yom Kippur holiday, which meant that military personnel would be on leave, and reservists would face problems in answering the inevitable call-up.

Are all the agonisings in the Muslim world over the Gazans actually just a nostalgic hankering for the Caliphate? They are inspired by a feeling for fellow Muslims, and for the land of Al-Aqsa, and the Caliphate is the mechanism for their defence. But there is presently no Caliphate, and the Gazans must shift for themselves.

Already with about 400,000 personnel in Vietnam, the US commander, Gen William C. Westmoreland, estimated that there would be another 200,000



needed to defeat the North Vietnamese. This meant that a million more personnel would have to be called up. Clearly, the USA had reached its limit. Though the Tet Offensive did not cause the general uprising it was supposed to, it did cause the USA to enter the path of peace negotiations.

Similarly, the decisive moment for Israel will be whether it can sustain the cost of continuing the War. One of the major problems it faces is that it is not fighting another state, but a guerrilla organization. It might have realized that the peace with the PLO did not give it security. The PLO was initially committed to an end to Israel, and the Palestinian people getting their homeland, but came around to a two-state solution.

Hamas is committed to a Palestinian state, with no Zionist state. If it comes to a two-state solution, what is the Israeli guarantee that no other Palestinian group will emerge, with a similarly anti-Israeli ideology? One problem is that the Zionists will not accept that they are in the wrong, that Israel is an abomination, a perversion of the concept of the nation-state. The era of a nation taking over another's land by simply walking in, and throwing out the original inhabitants, has long been over. The last memorable example was the WASP (White Anglo-Saxon Protestant)

snatching of the USA and Canada from the Native Americans.

One of Israel's problems is that Hamas is not a state. Worse for it, the Gaza Strip is occupied territory, and by Israel. It is qualitatively different from Lebanon, where it fought the Hezbollah. Though Hezbollah was not the Lebanese state, at least the state's borders were there to be observed. In Gaza, who is Israel supposed to subdue? Hamas? But they took power through an election Israel accepted as the occupying power. And the occupation has gone on since 1967. Only colonial occupations lasted longer. The Gaza Strip itself was occupied for 31 years by the British, when it was part of the Mandate of Palestine, from 1917 to 1948. It was initially occupied by Egypt, which lost it in the 1967 War. It has remained under Israeli occupation since.

Does Israel wish to have the Gaza Strip vacated? The question of where the people would go remains unanswered.

When the Ottoman Caliphate still existed, but while it was contracting, refugees would go to the capital of the Caliphate. One of the recurring problems was what to do with the refugees. Central Asians ended up in what is now Saudi Arabia; Chechens ended up in modern Jordan and also in Trebizond on the Black Sea, Greeks and East Europeans in Istanbul as well as in

Anatolia. However, today, the Palestinians of Gaza have nowhere to go.

That may provide them the edge that the Israelis lack. The worst the enemy can do is deprive them of life. That is not as severe a hardship for a Palestinian stuck in Gaza under Israeli occupation, which has to be brutal and humiliating so as to sustain itself, as for an Israeli reservist who might not have a perfect life but lives a good life.

One big advantage the Israeli forces have is that they need not worry about the resupply of arms and munitions, because the USA and other backers will make up any losses. Hamas has a limited supply of munitions, and even Iran, supposedly its main backer, cannot resupply it freely. Turkish President Tayyip Erdogan held a big rally in favour of the Palestinians in Ankara last Saturday may have said outright that Israel was an occupier, but he did not mention even a baby step to help the Palestinians. Instead, he took part in the celebrations marking the centenary of the establishment of the Turkish Republic, and thus the abolition of the Caliphate.

The rights and the wrongs of the Caliphate's abolition can be debated, but it must be noted that the Palestinians have no right to expect help from the Turkish Republic. But the Caliph was under an obligation.



# Continuous Bombing turns Gaza into Valley of Death

*The United Nations flags flew at half-mast at the UN compounds as staff observed a minute's silence in memory of 100 colleagues killed in Gaza during the Israeli strikes on the besieged enclave*



By Javed Mahmood

The United Nations has verified that a "collapse of services and communications" in hospitals in northern Gaza is significantly impeding health officials. The most recent update on casualty figures in Gaza was provided by the government media office on Sunday after a two-day gap. The death toll was raised to 11,300, including over 8,000 children and women. The official update was last issued on November 10. The Ministry of Health cited the targeting of hospitals and the prevention of body and wounded entry as reasons for the delay in accurate statistics.

The UN relief agency reported a communication breakdown hindering the receipt of new figures. Nearly 3,000 Palestinians are still missing, with the possibility of being trapped or deceased under rubble. Another 27,490 Palestinians have reportedly been injured, according to the Health Ministry on Friday.

The Health Ministry's data compilation involves recording the details of

victims arriving at government hospitals, including ID numbers and personal information, which are then entered into the hospital's computerized information system. Non-governmental hospitals use their own forms, sending them to the Health Information Centre at the Ministry of Health within 24 hours for central database entry. The daily information on killed Palestinians is transferred from decentralized hospital systems to the government registry's central database.

The al-Quds Hospital and Al-Shifa Hospital, two important hospitals in Gaza have halted operations due to a shortage of fuel amid ongoing Israeli airstrikes in the besieged enclave, according to the Palestine Red Crescent Society (PRCS). The PRCS expressed grave concerns for the safety of medical staff, patients, and displaced civilians, emphasizing that the hospitals' closure resulted from depleted fuel supplies and power outages. Despite challenging conditions marked by a lack of medical provisions, food, and water, the medical staff is striving to

deliver care, resorting to unconventional methods.

In a statement on Sunday, the PRCS held the international community and signatories of the Fourth Geneva Convention responsible for the breakdown of Gaza's healthcare system, contributing to a severe humanitarian crisis. The International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies spokesperson, Tommaso Della Longa, highlighted that al-Quds Hospital has been isolated from the outside world for the past six to seven days, facing significant challenges with no access for incoming or outgoing personnel.

Describing the situation as "no way in, no way out," the spokesperson noted that al-Quds Hospital now stands alongside al-Shifa Hospital, another major healthcare facility in northern Gaza, in closing its doors to new patients. The lack of fuel, and medication, and the impact of Israeli bombardment are placing existing patients at risk, heightening the



urgency of addressing the deteriorating healthcare conditions in the region.

Israeli forces have blockaded hospitals in the northern part of the Palestinian enclave, severely limiting their ability to provide adequate care for those within, as reported by medical staff. Despite a rising number of daily casualties, the options for the injured are dwindling. Ahmed al-Kahlout, who was following Israeli advice to move south for safety, expressed the difficulty in finding a hospital for his injured son, highlighting the widespread sense of insecurity throughout Gaza.



A plastic surgeon from al-Shifa Hospital revealed that the bombing of the facility, which housed incubators, compelled them to place premature babies on regular beds. The limited power available was redirected to adjust air conditioning to provide warmth. The spokesperson for the Gaza Health Ministry, Ashraf al-Qudra, emphasized that Israeli attacks were instilling terror among both medical officials and civilians.

The toll of Israeli assaults in Gaza has surpassed 11,000 lives over a five-week period, with a majority being women and children. The Ministry of Health in Gaza is grappling with challenges in updating casualty figures, as Israeli forces increasingly target hospitals and related services in the besieged enclave.

The ministry conducts thorough processing of data, ensuring completeness, and verifying the absence of duplicates or errors after the transfer.

The information center of the ministry

generates daily reports, which are then submitted to the government-operated Health Emergency Operations Centre for approval and dissemination.

Regarding the situation in Gaza's hospitals, Israeli air raids, particularly in areas surrounding medical facilities, have had devastating effects throughout the conflict. There are disputes over Israel's claims that Hamas operates in these areas, as no proof has been provided. In the northern Gaza ground offensive, Israeli forces have increasingly targeted hospitals. Al-Shifa Hospital, Gaza's largest facility, is

surrounded by Israeli tanks, and incidents involving snipers and drones shooting at people have been reported. A surgeon at the hospital described the challenges of treating patients amid continuous airstrikes and drones hovering in the hospital area.

The director of al-Shifa Hospital reported two premature baby deaths due to an electricity failure in the neonatal intensive care unit, with 37 more babies at risk. Al-Quds Hospital is non-operational due to a fuel shortage and power outage. The World Health Organization lost communication with contacts at the hospital, confirming reports of people killed while attempting to flee. UN shelters have also been affected, with 66 internally displaced people killed and 588 injured in UN shelters as of Friday. The UN highlighted the struggles of hundreds of thousands in the north to obtain essentials, raising concerns about dehydration and waterborne diseases. It emphasized that hospitals are entitled to specific protection under international humanitarian law.

## Israeli air attacks destroyed the Cardiac Ward of Shifa Hospital

Gaza officials report that Israeli airstrikes have killed over a dozen people and destroyed the cardiac ward of the main hospital in the besieged strip. At least 13 people were killed in an Israeli airstrike on a home in Khan Younis, while the day before, a strike at a UN compound in Gaza City resulted in several deaths and injuries. The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) condemned the ongoing tragedy of civilian casualties in the conflict.

Israel has intensified its offensive near Gaza's main hospital, al-Shifa, where thousands of medics, patients, and displaced individuals are reportedly trapped without electricity and with diminishing supplies. The director of al-Shifa Hospital, Muhammad Abu Salmiya, reported two intensive care unit patients died due to a lack of electricity and oxygen, with others at risk if the fuel shortage continues. The hospital, accused by Israeli forces of being used as a cover for a Hamas command center, has faced repeated attacks. Witnesses inside the hospital described violent fighting, and Gaza officials reported that one airstrike destroyed the cardiac ward, leading to power cuts affecting incubators and ventilators in the neonatal unit.

Doctors Without Borders surgeon Mohammed Obeid stated that two babies died in the neonatal unit due to depleted power to their incubators, and a man died when his ventilator was cut off. The Israeli military pledged to assist in evacuating babies from the hospital. Al-Shifa, one of the 16 operating hospitals left in Gaza, is now inaccessible for new casualties. Mohammad Qandil, a doctor at Nasser Hospital, revealed that al-Shifa is currently out of service, with no one allowed in or out and no evacuation for wounded individuals in the Gaza area.

## United Nations flags flew half-mast due to the killing of its 100 staff members in Gaza

The United Nations flags flew at half-mast at the UN compounds across Asia, as staff



observed a minute's silence in memory of colleagues killed in Gaza during the Israeli strikes on the besieged enclave. The blue and white UN flag was lowered at 9:30 am local time at offices in Bangkok, Tokyo, and Beijing, a day after the world body reported "a significant number of deaths and injuries" in strikes on a facility in Gaza. The UN Agency for Supporting Palestinians (UNRWA) announced that more than 100 of its employees had died in Gaza since the start of the conflict.

## Israel imposes curfew in Gaza's neighborhoods

The Israeli military has imposed a curfew on eleven neighborhoods in the Palestinian city of Hebron, as reported by the Israeli NGO, B'Tselem. This measure has resulted in the closure of stores and businesses, confining approximately 750 families, or thousands of people, to their homes. The military only allowed residents to leave their homes for one hour in the morning and one hour in the evening on Sundays, Tuesdays, and Thursdays, after a full two weeks of complete curfew, beginning on October 21, 2023.



The Old City in Hebron, under Israeli control, houses Israeli settlers, and residents attempting to leave their homes must navigate checkpoints, and interact with soldiers. B'Tselem highlights the degrading treatment, meticulous body searches, and time-consuming processes involved, which consume most of the limited window of time granted to residents. B'Tselem emphasizes that there

is no justification for subjecting hundreds of people to a comprehensive movement ban.

## Erdogan says Israel is committing war crimes and the world is watching

Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan condemned Israel for committing "war crimes" on a global scale, accusing them of targeting hospitals, schools, and places of worship, including mosques and churches, as well as ambulances, and refugee camps. Speaking on his return flight from Saudi Arabia, where he participated in the 8th Extraordinary Islamic Summit and engaged with counterparts on Israel's Gaza attacks, Erdogan underscored the urgency of addressing the ongoing humanitarian crisis.

Highlighting the prolonged struggle of Palestine under occupation, Erdogan expressed outrage at the "unspeakable cruelty" endured for the past 36 days, with innocent civilians in Gaza facing indiscriminate heavy bombardment and forced displacement. He criticized Western

countries for passively observing these atrocities and called on those with a conscience to speak out.

Erdogan outlined Turkey's efforts since October 7 to broker a humanitarian ceasefire through diplomacy and dialogue. Stressing the need for a ceasefire, an end to clashes, and unhindered humanitarian aid delivery to Gaza, he revealed that Turkey has sent ten planes carrying approximately

230 tonnes of humanitarian aid to Egypt for distribution in Gaza.

The Turkish president urged the international community to take action against the massacres, expressing disappointment in the dysfunctionality of the United Nations Security Council. He reiterated Turkey's stance on achieving lasting peace in the region through the establishment of an independent and sovereign Palestinian state based on the 1967 borders, with East Jerusalem as its capital, ensuring geographical integrity.

## US Congresswoman Ilhan Omar says Israel dropped more bombs in Gaza than the US exploded in Afghanistan

American Congresswoman Ilhan Omar said that Israel has thrown more bombs on Gaza in the last 10 days than the United States exploded in a year in Afghanistan. Speaking at an event she said, "How could you look one atrocity wrong and other is not? Where is the humanity and why we are not paying attention to the genocide of children and women in Gaza."

US Congresswoman Ilhan Omar exposed Israeli brutalities and said Israel throws more bombs on Gaza than the United States exploded in Afghanistan in a year. She said that a little attention is paid by most of the American media and political class to what humanitarian groups working on the ground in Gaza—and their international allies—have to say about ending the death spiral in the Middle East. But leaders of these groups are speaking with moral clarity about the need to take immediate steps to end the sheer horror that has cost more than 11000 Palestinian lives since the October 7 Hamas assault on Israeli kibbutzim and a music festival.

The officials with Save the Children International, Oxfam International, Handicap International/Humanity & Inclusion, Plan International, Mercy Corps, the Norwegian Refugee Council, and a number of European affiliates of Médecins du Monde (Doctors of the World) issued a joint statement urging world leaders to demand an immediate cessation of hostilities.

# Gaza: A Struggle for Survival



By Zahra Khurram

The Israel-Palestine conflict is a complex and enduring disagreement over territorial claims and the formation of national identities within the Middle Eastern region. The phenomenon in question can be traced back to the latter part of the 19th century and the early part of the 20th century, with a notable increase in intensity occurring during the mid-20th century. The formation of Israel resulted from the 1947-1949 conflict, following the ratification of a partition proposal by the United Nations. Consequently, a substantial number of Palestinian Arabs were displaced, leading to lasting grievances and contentions surrounding the concept of the "right of return."

In pursuit of subjugating Hamas, Israeli ground forces have encircled the densely populated city of Gaza, severing its access to southern Gaza. Although hundreds of thousands of Palestinians fled to the north of Gaza in preparation for the invasion, approximately 400,000 people remain stranded there. Reportedly, Hamas has established itself beneath and within civilian infrastructure, and Israeli airstrikes have inflicted significant collateral damage on civilian sites, including the Jabalia

refugee camp. Although Israel has thus far declined requests for periodic humanitarian pauses, it has consented to the daily entry of one hundred aid vehicles into the territory. Concurrently, the United States is implementing shuttle diplomacy to defuse regional tensions. Hezbollah and Israel continue projectile exchanges in Lebanon, while Israel strikes alleged Iranian targets in Syria. Dozens of attacks against U.S. military positions in Iraq and Syria have been launched by groups sponsored by Iran. Houthi rebels from Yemen have also escalated the conflict by launching missiles at Israel.

Palestinian health officials report that over 10,000 individuals have lost their lives during a continuous 31-day period of Israeli assaults on the Gaza Strip. The beleaguered enclave shows no indication of a ceasefire. The Ministry of Health in Gaza released a statement on Monday, indicating that the number of Palestinian fatalities has reached a minimum of 10,022, including 4,104 children. Numerous casualties remain trapped under debris, while an Israeli blockade has severely limited the availability of essential resources such as fuel, food, and power. The United Nations has reported

that over 1.5 million people, accounting for more than half of Gaza's population, have been displaced.

According to a spokeswoman from the Health Ministry, the number of those injured since the commencement of the bombardment on October 7 has increased to 25,408. The statement emphasised the need to prioritise the urgent requirements of hospitals while distributing relief. It called for the United Nations and the International Committee of the Red Cross to actively advocate for the timely supply of fuel and blood supplies to the enclave. The Indonesian Hospital, located in the northern region of Gaza's Beit Lahia district, was forced to close due to a lack of electricity, rendering it unable to provide essential services. The footage authenticated by Al Jazeera depicted the facility in a state of darkness. The videos depicted medical personnel at the hospital receiving patients transported by ambulance workers, utilising handheld flashlights. Subsequently, it was reported that the power supply was reinstated; however, the duration of its restoration remained uncertain.

The Palestinian health authorities have



reported that the sole hospital providing cancer treatment in the Gaza Strip has become inoperative due to a depletion of fuel, a consequence of Israel's ongoing siege of the region. During a press conference, Subhi Sukeyk, the director of the Turkish-Palestinian Friendship Hospital, stated that the hospital is currently non-operational. With the suspension of operations at the Turkish-Palestinian Friendship Hospital, the number of non-functioning hospitals in the Gaza Strip has increased to 16 out of 35, along with over 50 out of 72 primary healthcare clinics. In a statement, Palestinian Health Minister Mai al-Kaila expressed that the lives of 70 cancer patients within the hospital are under imminent threat. "The functioning of hospitals is crucial for the survival of thousands of patients in Gaza," stated Tarik Jasarevic, spokesperson for the World Health Organization, in an interview with Al Jazeera. The condition of cancer patients is inherently delicate. Without receiving the necessary treatment, their fate is essentially sealed as a lethal outcome. Pregnant women, in addition to cancer patients, are also subject to medical vulnerability during intense bombing, as they may have to give birth without access to medical assistance. In a recent statement, the organisation Human Rights Watch stated that around 50,000 pregnant women and girls in Gaza face the possibility of not receiving proper prenatal care and giving birth without access to electricity or medical supplies.



Although all conflict zones are dreadful, Gaza is an unmatched hell. A considerable portion of the enclave, home to two million people, has been transformed into a battleground, with residential and commercial areas coexisting with military infrastructure. The reality described above is nowhere more acutely experienced than in the hospitals of the territory. These facilities have evolved into both secure havens and potential targets, and daily lives are being affected by the consequences of Israel's offensive. Medical care in Gaza is experiencing a decline in conditions along the besieged 140-square-mile coastal enclave. Doctors and health organisations inform TIME that surgeons are rationing water, anaesthesia, and generator fuel, in addition to operating by torch, to power incubators, care for kidney-dialysis patients, and provide electricity. The World Health Organization reports that the approximately two dozen facilities still

operational in Gaza are accommodating the patients of the twelve that have been forced to close due to insufficient supplies and ongoing bombing. "Medical teams are on their knees," according to Hisham Mhanna, an International Committee of the Red Cross spokesperson in Gaza.

Donors and the international community should provide substantial economic assistance to address the considerable harm inflicted upon Gaza due to lengthy restrictions, closures, and repeated military operations. These factors have severely hindered the economy and caused major damage to infrastructure. While donor aid plays a crucial role in supporting the people of Gaza, it should not be considered a replacement for lifting the limitations and closures and urging Israel and all parties involved to fulfil their obligations according to international law.



# The Ongoing Struggle: A Comprehensive Timeline of the Israel-Palestine Conflict

By Kanwal Munir

The Israel-Palestine conflict remains one of the most entrenched and multifaceted disputes in the Middle East, characterised by decades of political manoeuvring, military conflicts, and sporadic attempts at peace. The roots of this enduring struggle delve into the early 20th century, with geopolitical changes, diplomatic intricacies, and a relentless quest for self-determination shaping the narrative. In recent times, a resurgence of violence has once again thrust the conflict into the global spotlight. This comprehensive timeline delves into the key events, conflicts, and developments that have defined the Israel-Palestine saga.

## World War I: Shaping the Future

The origins of the conflict can be traced back to the aftermath of World War I, when the British Mandate assumed control of the region, signalling the end of Ottoman rule. The aspirations of both Israelis and Palestinians for self-determination led to conflicting diplomatic efforts and agreements, including the Sykes-Picot Agreement and the Balfour Declaration. These early developments laid the groundwork for the challenges that would unfold in the decades to come.

## 1948: Birth of Israel and the Nakba

The pivotal year of 1948 witnessed the declaration of the State of Israel, a move that triggered the first Arab-Israeli war. In the wake of the conflict, Israel gained control of significant territories, leading to the displacement of approximately 700,000 Palestinians. This mass exodus termed the "Nakba" or catastrophe, has remained etched in the collective memory of the Palestinian people, contributing to the deep-seated animosities between the two sides.

## 1956: Suez Crisis

The Suez Crisis of 1956 unfolded when Egyptian President Gamal Abdel Nasser nationalised the Suez Canal, a crucial trade route connecting the Red Sea and the Mediterranean. In response, Israel, along with Britain and France, intervened militarily. International pressure ultimately forced a peace deal, but the canal's blockade persisted until 1957.

## 1967: Six-Day War

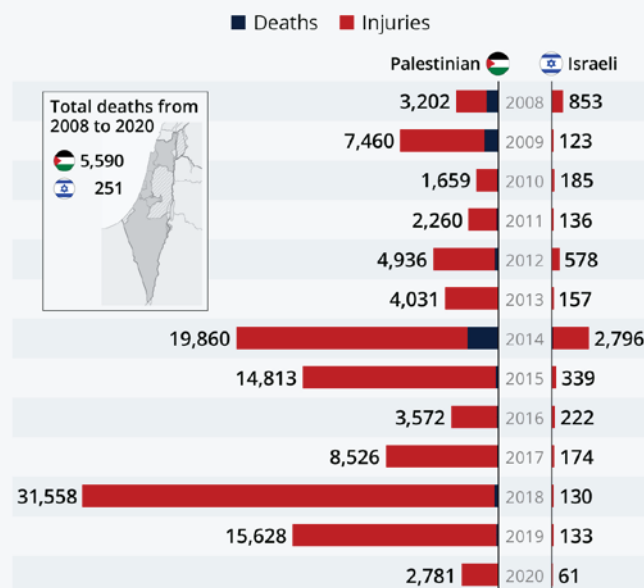
The year 1967 marked a turning point with the outbreak of the Six-Day War, a conflict that saw Israel gaining control of the Gaza Strip, Sinai Peninsula, West Bank, Golan Heights, and East Jerusalem. The geopolitical ramifications of this war continue to reverberate, influencing the contours of subsequent negotiations and conflicts.

## 1973: Yom Kippur War

In 1973, on the holiest day in Judaism, Yom Kippur, a coalition of Arab nations launched a surprise attack on Israel. The conflict, known as the Yom Kippur War, initially saw Arab forces making significant gains. However, Israel's counteroffensive, supported by the United States, resulted in heavy casualties on both sides.

## The Human Cost Of The Israeli-Palestinian Conflict

Israeli & Palestinian deaths/injuries documented by the UN



## 1978: Camp David Accords

Amidst the turbulence, the Camp David Accords of 1978 marked a rare moment of diplomatic breakthrough. Facilitated by U.S. President Jimmy Carter, the accords led to a historic peace agreement between Egypt and Israel. The subsequent Israeli withdrawal from the Sinai Peninsula laid the groundwork for future negotiations.

## 1987: First Intifada

The late 1980s witnessed the eruption of the First Intifada, a spontaneous uprising marked by widespread protests and civil disobedience against Israeli occupation. The unrest, characterised by clashes and harsh military crackdowns, continued for several years, resulting in numerous casualties on both sides.

## 1993: Oslo Accords

The Oslo Accords of 1993 represented a significant milestone, with Israel and the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) signing agreements aimed at establishing a framework for limited Palestinian self-rule. While the accords marked a step towards peace, unresolved issues, including settlements and the status of Jerusalem, persisted.



## 1995: Rabin's Assassination

Tragically, the optimism generated by the Oslo Accords was shattered in 1995 when Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin was assassinated by a right-wing extremist opposed to the peace process. The event had profound implications, further complicating the path to reconciliation.

## 2006: Hamas in Gaza

The withdrawal of Israeli troops from Gaza in 2005 paved the way for democratic elections in 2006, leading to the victory of the Palestinian militant group Hamas. Tensions between Hamas, controlling Gaza, and the more moderate Fatah party, controlling the West Bank, heightened, resulting in a 16-year blockade on Gaza by Israel. The blockade exacerbated the already dire humanitarian situation in the densely populated enclave.

## 2014: Gaza Conflict

The summer of 2014 witnessed another devastating conflict between Israel and Hamas in Gaza. The violence, characterised by intense airstrikes and rocket attacks, resulted in a staggering toll of over 2,200 Palestinian lives and 73 Israeli lives lost. The conflict underscored the cyclical nature of violence in the region and the urgent need for a sustainable resolution.

## 2017: U.S. Recognition of Jerusalem

In 2017, the Trump administration's decision to recognize Jerusalem as the capital of Israel and relocate the U.S. Embassy from Tel Aviv further inflamed tensions. Protests in Gaza escalated, leading to clashes with Israeli forces and a substantial loss of life.

## 2021: Al-Aqsa Mosque Raid

Tensions reached a boiling point in 2021 when Israeli police raided the Al-Aqsa Mosque, one of the holiest sites in Islam. The incident triggered a wave of violence, with thousands of rockets launched from Gaza and hundreds of Israeli airstrikes. The ensuing conflict claimed over 200 lives in Gaza and at least 10 in Israel.

## 2022: Escalation in Violence

The year 2022 witnessed a notable surge in violence, marked by a series of terrorist attacks in Israel and Israeli military operations. Human rights groups accused Israel of perpetuating apartheid-like conditions, further heightening international scrutiny.

## December 2022: Netanyahu's Sixth Term

In December 2022, Benjamin Netanyahu was sworn in for a sixth term as Israeli prime minister. The election results solidified a more pro-settler government, dashing hopes for a two-state solution. The increased settlement activity and settler violence further exacerbated tensions on the ground.

## January 2023: Raid on Jenin

In January 2023, Israeli forces conducted a raid on the Palestinian city of Jenin, resulting in casualties and intensifying regional unrest. The subsequent day saw a Palestinian gunman targeting an East Jerusalem synagogue, leading to further loss of life, including children.

## Summer 2023: Escalation Continues

Retaliatory attacks in the summer of 2023 escalated tensions further. Surprise airstrikes by Israel, settler violence, and the first drone strike in the West Bank since 2006 intensified the cycle of violence. In July, Israel launched a significant air and ground attack, backed by drone strikes, on a refugee camp in Jenin, resulting in multiple casualties and signalling the beginning of a prolonged counterterrorism effort.

## October 2023: Formal Declaration of War

In October 2023, the Israel-Palestine conflict reached a critical juncture with a series of events that marked a significant escalation in hostilities. The trigger for this escalation was a surprise assault by Hamas militants on October 7, timed around the 50th anniversary of the start of the 1973 Yom Kippur War. This assault, characterised by gunmen targeting Israeli civilians in their homes along border areas, claimed the lives of at least 1,400 Israelis, according to official statements from the Israeli government.

The surprising nature of the attacks and the ruthless targeting of civilians added a new layer of complexity to the already volatile situation. Israel, in response to the attacks, swiftly declared a state of emergency and formally announced a state of war against Hamas on October 8. The government asserted that the attacks were a blatant violation of international law, emphasising the need to protect its citizens. The Israeli response was swift and robust, involving major airstrikes in the Gaza Strip, which is controlled by Hamas. The Gaza Health Ministry reported that the Israeli airstrikes resulted in a devastating toll on the Palestinian population, with casualties exceeding 11,000. The scale of the offensive prompted international concern and calls for an immediate ceasefire.

The situation further intensified as both sides exchanged accusations and grievances. Israel argued that its military actions were a necessary and proportionate response to the grave threat posed by the Hamas attacks. On the other hand, Hamas, through its spokespersons, condemned what they termed as "Israeli aggression" and insisted on its right to defend the Palestinian people. The international community responded with a mix of condemnation, calls for restraint, and urgent diplomatic efforts to broker a ceasefire. The United Nations, regional powers, and various international organisations sought to mediate between the conflicting parties, emphasising the need for a peaceful resolution to avoid further humanitarian catastrophe.

## Conclusion

The Israel-Palestine conflict, with its deeply embedded historical complexities, remains a crucible of geopolitical tensions and human suffering. The ongoing cycles of violence, diplomatic endeavours, and shifting political dynamics underscore the formidable challenges of achieving a lasting resolution. The toll in terms of lives lost, injuries sustained, and the broader geopolitical consequences emphasise the urgent need for renewed international efforts to foster a just and enduring peace in the region. As the conflict continues to evolve, it stands as a testament to the complexities inherent in navigating a path toward reconciliation in one of the world's most contested regions.

# Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi's 10 urgent measures to end the Gaza war

*Raisi cautioned regional leaders about the urgency the Islamic world is facing today. "Today is the day of action," he said, adding that regional states must muster up all they have to defend the holy Al-Aqsa mosque*



By Sadeh Fereydounabadi

TEHRAN: Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi has presented a series of measures to regional countries, in an effort to address the deadly Israeli onslaughts against Palestinians in the besieged Gaza Strip.

Upon beginning his speech at the emergency meeting of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) in Riyadh, Raisi slammed Israel's brutal aggression against Gaza, saying the regime is currently committing the "most heinous crimes" in the history of humanity.

He said the OIC can act as a unifying body that helps Islamic bodies take cohesive action against Israel. "Realizing this important fact, The Islamic Republic of Iran has decided to warmly embrace Islamic nations based on a policy of good neighborliness and regional unity," the president stressed.

Raisi cautioned regional leaders about the urgency the Islamic world is facing today. "Today is the day of action," he said, adding that regional states must muster up

all they have to defend the holy Al-Aqsa mosque.

"What has happened in the past five weeks in Gaza and parts of the West Bank is a historic source of shame for ethics, law, and humanity. Gaza is oppressed but heroic; wounded but proud; for the past two decades, due to a complete naval, land, and aerial blockade, it has been known as the largest open-air prison," Raisi said noting that despite all that's happened to them, Palestinians in Gaza have managed to stand up to the oppressive Israeli regime with bare hands.

The Iranian official highlighted that Israel's ongoing bombing campaign against the strip is in violation of international law. He pointed out how the regime has been using white phosphorus bombs and other prohibited weapons, in its deliberate targeting of civilian areas.

So far, more than 11,000 Palestinians have been killed during Israeli attacks, with thousands of children among the dead. It is

estimated that some 3,000 civilians are also stuck under the rubble, with chances of rescue running thin.

"The even greater tragedy is that the number of people losing their lives due to a lack of access to medicine and the spread of diseases in the face of the Zionist regime's brutal siege is increasing," Raisi added.

The Iranian president added that the U.S. is Israel's biggest partner in crime.

"America encouraged the Zionist regime to carry out criminal operations against the defenseless people of Gaza and called it a legitimate defense; the claim of legitimate defense by the occupying forces who are always invading the rights of Palestinians is one of the bitter ironies of history which is incompatible with any of the established legal rules and international standards," he stated.

Raisi listed how the U.S. has been helping Israel in its callous war against Gaza, which includes the dispatching of troops and



military equipment to the Persian Gulf and the Mediterranean, provision of deadly weapons to the regime, and prevention of any efforts towards a ceasefire in the UN Security Council.

“The most destructive role is that of America. All evils are under the Americans' control. The slaughter of millions of people around the world, including in Afghanistan, Iraq, Syria, and other Islamic countries is under America's control. America has been igniting this conflict by disabling all international organizations in the world,” the president said.

The Iranian president also suggested that a referendum should be held in Palestine with the participation of all people residing between the river and the sea. He said every Palestinian Muslim, Jew, and Christian should be allowed to take part in the referendum, which he suggested would put a democratic end to the decades-long conflict in Palestine.

He ended his speech by proposing a set of solutions to resolve the crisis in Gaza. The proposed solutions are as follows:

- 1- Putting an end to the massacre of the people of Gaza and blind attacks on civilians
- 2- Complete lifting of the humanitarian blockade of Gaza and immediate and unconditional reopening of the Rafah border crossing with cooperation of Egypt
- 3- Immediate withdrawal of the military of the Zionist regime from Gaza
- 4- Cutting off any political and economic ties with the Zionist regime
- 5- Recognition of the military of Israel as a terrorist organization
- 6- Establishment of an international court to prosecute and punish the criminal leaders of Israel and the U.S.
- 7- Funding the reconstruction of Gaza
- 8- Sending humanitarian aid to the Palestinian people in Gaza from various Islamic countries
- 9- Naming the day of the bombing of Arab Al-Ahli Hospital as the day of genocide in member countries' official calendars

10- Arming the people of Gaza, if Israel's relentless crimes and Washington's support for the regime's conduct continue

## 'Immediate cessation of Gaza war'

Addressing leaders from the Arab League and the OIC, Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman called for the immediate end of Israel's war on the besieged Gaza Strip.

“We are certain the only cause for peace is the end of the Israeli occupation and illegal settlements, and restoration of the established rights of the Palestinian people and the establishment of the Palestinian state on 1967 borders, with East Jerusalem as its capital,” the Saudi crown prince said.

Bin Salman also pointed out the failure of the UN Security Council and other international bodies to prevent a full-scale humanitarian crisis in Gaza.



## Qatar Emir condemns international inaction

Qatar's Emir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al Thani criticized international organizations and governments around the world for sitting idly by in the face of the Palestinian people's suffering and giving Israel carte blanche to do whatever it wants.

“What is taking place in Gaza is a real threat at all levels. These are unprecedented events. How come the bombardment of hospitals becomes an ordinary attack under the false allegations that there are tunnels

and military installations underneath?” the emir asked.

He also condemned people and states worldwide for failing to comply with international law while posturing as defenders of human rights.

## 'Region could spiral into major conflict'

Jordan's King Abdullah II decided to warn the world about the prospects of a regional war in the face of unending Israeli crimes.

“We convene today for Gaza and its people as they continue to face death and destruction in an ugly war that must stop immediately, or our region will spiral into a major conflict whose price innocent people from both sides will pay, and whose repercussions will affect the whole world,” the king warned.

He also pointed out that Israel's oppression against Palestinians did not begin on

October 7, clarifying that the Israeli regime's crimes began over seven decades ago and are still ongoing.

## Assad urges halt to political process with Israel

Syrian President Bashar al-Assad told regional leaders that any political process with the Israeli regime should be halted. He stated that the Palestinian situation has become more unjust and oppressive due to the alleged peace process with the Israeli occupation. He emphasized the signifi



cance of collective action to stop the crimes committed by the Israeli occupation against the Palestinian people.

He also noted that the West's unequivocal support for Israel has enabled the regime to vastly violate international law. He urged countries participating in the summit to address Israeli crimes by working in unity.

## 'Israel acting like West's spoiled child'

Also attending the summit, the president of Turkey condemned Western governments for their unfaltering support towards Israel, saying the regime is now acting like a "spoiled child of the West". "It is a shame that Western countries, which always talk about human rights and freedom, have remained silent on the massacre in Palestine," said Recep Tayyip Erdogan. He said the world is now facing unprecedented barbarism in history, expressing shock over the bombing of hospitals, schools, and other civilian sites in Gaza.

"We believe that a fund should be established within the Organization of Islamic Cooperation to rebuild Gaza," the president proposed.

## Iraq calls for 'serious action' on Gaza war

Iraqi President Abdul Latif Rashid strongly condemned the explicit violations of international laws, especially the bombing of non-military facilities and hospitals in the course of the war on Gaza.

He called for serious action by the international community to put an end to the deadly attacks. He noted that the crimes of the Zionist regime in Gaza aim to expel Palestinians from their lands, Judaize Palestinian areas, and implement policies of racial discrimination and settlement expansion, adding that all those moves are in no way acceptable. The President of Iraq added that his country has always attached great significance to the Palestinian issue.

## 'Displacement of Gaza's residents must be prevented'

Egypt's President Abdel-Fattah El-Sisi demanded an immediate, unconditional,

and sustainable ceasefire in Gaza as well as a halt to the forced displacement of Palestinians to any location inside or outside their territory.

Israel and the U.S. have reportedly been pressuring Egypt to take in the 2.3 million population of the Gaza Strip and settle them in the Sinai Peninsula. Cairo has strongly opposed such requests. During the Arab-Islamic summit, Sisi also slammed the ongoing aggression against the Gaza Strip and the "brutal killing and besiegement of the people of Gaza and the inhumane actions suffered by them."

## Lebanon attends summit after suffering casualties

Lebanon's Caretaker Prime Minister Najib Mikati also arrived in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia on Saturday to participate in the extraordinary joint Arab-Islamic summit. The Lebanese delegation to the summit also included caretaker Minister of Foreign Affairs Abdallah Bou Habib, caretaker Minister of Agriculture Abbas Hajj Hassan, Lebanese Ambassador to the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia Fawzi Kabbara, and Lebanese Ambassador to Egypt and the League of Arab States Ali Halabi. Lebanon's Resistance movement Hezbollah has been attacking Israeli positions in the occupied territories since October 8. It has so far lost dozens of soldiers in its latest fight against the regime. Courtesy: Tehran Times





# Israel-Hamas war: List of key events, day 38

*As the conflict between Israel and Gaza enters its 38th day, these are the main developments*

## Latest on human impact and fighting

The collapse of medical centres and communication services across Gaza has left the Ministry of Health unable to update casualty figures since 2pm (12:00 GMT) on November 10. On Sunday, however, the government media office in Gaza updated the figures, raising the death toll to 11,100, including more than 8,000 children and women.

An Israeli air raid near Khan Younis in southern Gaza on Monday killed at least seven people, according to Al Jazeera Arabic.

The United States carried out two air strikes in Syria against Iran-linked facilities, US Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin said on Sunday. Six to seven pro-Iran fighters were also killed, Fox News reported quoting a Pentagon source.

Two Israeli soldiers were killed and one severely injured during clashes with Palestinian fighters in Gaza on Sunday, according to Israel's military.

Israel's military said on Sunday that its jets hit Hezbollah targets in southern Lebanon in response to antitank missiles that wounded Israelis near the border.

## Situation in Gaza's hospitals

Gaza's second largest hospital, al-Quds, ceased operations because of fuel shortage, the Palestine Red Crescent Society (PRCS) said on Sunday.

Three nurses were killed at al-Shifa Hospital, the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UNOCHA) said on Sunday. Staff at the hospital has been struggling to bury at least 100 decomposing bodies of those killed in Israeli bombardment across the enclave, Gaza's health minister told the Palestinian Wafa news agency on Monday. The hospital has also shut its doors to new patients.

The World Health Organization has managed to restore communication with staff at al-Shifa Hospital, the agency's director-general said on Sunday.

In an interview with NBC News on Sunday, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said Hamas refused an offer of fuel for al-Shifa Hospital. The Palestinian group denied the claim and any association with al-Shifa management or decision-making in a statement on Sunday.

The US is having "active consultations" with Israel's military about its concerns around "firefights in hospitals where innocent people, patients receiving medical care, are caught in the crossfire", White House NSA Jake Sullivan told CBS News's Face the Nation programme on Sunday.

European Union foreign policy chief Josep Borrell has called for "pauses" to evacuate hospital patients in Gaza who need urgent medical care.



## Diplomacy

Six UN offices across East Asia lowered their flags to half-mast on Monday in memory of colleagues killed in Gaza. Other UN headquarters around the world are expected to hold similar memorials on Monday.

US President Joe Biden held a phone call with Qatar's Emir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al Thani on Sunday. The two discussed the protection of civilians and the need for humanitarian aid in Gaza. Biden thanked the emir for Qatar's efforts to rescue captives in Gaza, according to a White House readout of the call. The emir called for an immediate ceasefire in Gaza during the call.

On Sunday, Hamas said it was suspending hostage negotiations because of how Israel handled al-Shifa Hospital, a Palestinian official told Reuters news agency.

## Attacks in West Bank

A man in al-Hawuz neighbourhood of Hebron was fatally shot in the head by Israeli forces while driving his vehicle early on Monday, according to Wafa. At least 186 Palestinians have been killed in the occupied West Bank since October 7, the Palestinian Health Ministry reported on Sunday.

Al Jazeera Arabic reported overnight clashes in Nablus and an explosion in Qalqilya on Monday.

Courtesy [www.aljazeera.com](http://www.aljazeera.com)



# Israel forces a Nakbaa again; while resistance seeks regime change

*The next few weeks crucial*



By Naqi Akbar

A classroom training attended by the author way back in the summer of 2005 in Lahore related to the trade in WTO scenario illustrated a scenario where the EU as a recipient market is supposed to create Tariff walls aimed at benefiting a particular country granted the 'Most Favored Nation' (MFN) status. The hypothetical exercise centered on the import of dates from a North African country Tunisia and from Israel. The scenario advised the analyst that in order to benefit the MFN state, a tariff wall be imposed that discourages sales of the rival. Here it may be pointed out that Tunisia has been growing the product for ages and it is counted as its 'comparative advantage' in international economics terms. Compared to that the Israeli data has been the outcome of 'noncompetitive' tools of irrigation 'i.e. drip irrigation. That hypothetical exercise observed 18 years ago, without any doubt, illustrates what is happening in the Middle East and how the developed world sees it without qualms.

In the aftermath of WW2 and the creation of the Jewish state in the heart of the

Middle East based on doubtful religious credentials, it has been the case of an unnatural state as well as an economy. Israel, claiming to house the lost tribes of Banu Israel, factually is housing a very diverse mix of population. In terms of demographic diversity, that state can be easily likened to the ever-expanding Pakistani city of Karachi; which has all the imaginable religious and ethnic entities within its fold.

The US-led push for the acceptance of the "Abraham Accord" read universal acceptance of Israel has been going on under different banners since the last 1973 war between Israel, Egypt, and Syria. Initially formalized under the banner of the Camp David Accord between Egypt and Israel, its lukewarm version in the form of the Fahd Plan was launched. It was a non-starter due to the 1982 Israeli invasion of Lebanon. The 1987 intifada was manipulated by the PLO to push forward the Oslo accord in 1993. For all practical purposes, a Palestinian diaspora spread over the Middle East, making its name in various disciplines of art, industry, and commerce was found just

enough in number for a paltry strip along the Mediterranean, and another piece of land linked to Jordan.

The Return of the Republicans to the White House under Trump gave the push another life. With Saudi Crown Prince MBS a willing partner to that, it was felt that soon the whole Muslim world would embrace Israel as their newly found cousin. However, the complete rout was still avoided, as the resistance axis was somewhat successful in communicating that there was no easy ride to the acceptance of the accords.

The resumption of the push for the Abraham Accords recently when activity was felt about eventual Saudi acceptance to normalization of ties with Israel and talks of a few Muslim states also joining in, created an impression that the rejectionist front was now effectively isolated. The Americans, Israelis, and the West could have still saved the day if the Hamas military initiative had responded proportionately. What happened seems to have proverbially 'bombed' the Accords for a considerable time to come.



The Israeli state and the military itself going through an internal fight with the judicial reforms, were certain that the Israeli response would not only be disproportionate but would also accrue liability in the coming days. Here we may need to have a look at what the Judicial reform or judicial crisis has done in Israel. For the Pakistani reader, it is a very simple proposition that after years of practicing Western democracy, the Israeli state shuns what it calls the judicial review of its actions. For the democratically minded Israeli technocrat, the government pushed reform aims at cutting the powers of the judiciary, a thing which each Pakistani political faction, often with the encouragement of the establishment wishes to enforce. Like the current state of affairs in Pakistan, the Israeli state in a peacetime mode is in the never-ending throes of redefining itself, the distribution of power, and outreach between the executive, judiciary, and the military.

A cursory look at the instances of collateral damage during the recent weeks by the Israeli Air Force reveals organizational disarray. A call by the shaky political executive to allow safe passage is soon put into doubt when the same route is bombed relentlessly. That matter is already under discussion that the amount of incendiary ordnance unloaded by the IAF F-16s surpasses similar USAF firepower deliveries during its engagements in pre-2011 Iraq of post-2014 DEASH campaigns. Domestically there might be many questions for

saner minds in Israeli society as to what is happening at the leadership level.

Looking at the matter in the context of the United States and EU support for Israel means that whatever firepower has been displayed by the IAF had the full moral support of the developed world. The intent is clearly felt that the developed world wants the Jewish state to enforce another 'Nakbaa' or forced betrayal for the Palestinian population which is still stranded and can be easily manipulated with force.

The new 'Nakbaa' in other words means that whatever was allowed for the Palestinians in 2000, as the outcome of the 1993 accord is likely done away with. The displacement is precisely the cause of disagreement with like-minded Middle Eastern States like Egypt and Jordan; none of them likes a huge influx of displaced Palestinians. The intent of the Israeli government under Benjamin Netanyahu and the West is firmly behind that project. The reasons for that are the final implementation of the Abraham Accord, which means that Israel is here to stay and the 'disruptionists' the Palestinians be subjected to yet another diaspora.

The role of the resistance is critical. The body language and reluctance of the Axis to act in a way, that really affects the Israeli campaign is not felt on the ground. Despite a threatening posture by Hezbollah, the promised escalation or push is still not felt;

to put pressure on the Zionist entity. Syria's dysfunction, Hamas bloodbath, and Hezbollah reluctance all are translating into the possibility or eventuality of another Nakbaa in store for the Palestinians, regrettably.

Nothing can be final in politics and the geo-political war of nerves; however, the reality cannot be discounted that what is needed is concrete action and support. Israel has been afforded firepower and diplomatic international support. There is a lot of support for the Palestinian cause. However, what is wanting is tangible steps the world at large, the regional powers in particular, and the Muslim world specifically.

These words may not be construed as a call for revenge or war. What is important is a strong message through an action that the field is not wide open for any one player; now pathetically supported by the developed world. The developing world needs to counterbalance that one-sided power imbalance.

Without a doubt, the danger of another Nakbaa taking root is real. The coming hours and days will be critical, not just on the Arab streets, but also beyond. The state of fear needs to be broken by the established nation-states; a total of 57 in number. Failing which, the Palestinians will be justified in not resting hopes with anyone; whoever so ever may be.



# Hamas destroyed over 160 vehicles of the Israeli army

*Abu Ubeida has said the "brave resistance fighters are targeting the mobilization of Israeli troops with mortar rounds, artillery, explosive devices that they are quickly planting, explosive drones as well as mortar shells."*



By Ali Karbalaee

The armed wing of Hamas has announced it has "completely or partially destroyed more than 160 Zionist military vehicles," including tanks and bulldozers since the regime's ground operations began in the besieged Gaza Strip. Abu Ubeida, the official spokesperson for the al-Qassam Brigades, has said that more than 25 Israeli military vehicles have been destroyed over the last 48 hours alone. The Israeli ground forces "operating in the residential buildings and areas it bombed, as well as a scorched earth, are being targeted by traps laid out by the resistance fighters."

He has strongly condemned "American-Zionist warships loaded with hundreds of thousands of tons of weapons that are indiscriminately attacking Gaza, alongside the warplanes, which are not differentiating between civilians and combatants."

Abu Ubeida has said the "brave resistance fighters are targeting the mobilization of Israeli troops with mortar rounds, artillery, explosive devices that they are quickly

planting, explosive drones as well as mortar shells."

"Our resistance fighters remain busy on the battlefield, lurking near the enemy's troops and vehicles. Every hour, they are attacking them," he added.

The military spokesperson for Hamas has also said that "Israeli tanks and infantry are facing powerful resistance and fierce clashes that have compelled the regime's ground forces to retreat from the areas it occupies and change the routes of its ground offensive."

In a warning to the Israeli regime, he has highlighted that "Gaza will be an arena where Israeli troops will meet their death. The enemy, which knows Gaza very well, will not have an hour to rest, but rather it will pay a very strong and unexpected price."

The Israeli military slowly began its ground operations in the Gaza Strip around two weeks ago and claims nearly 50 of its troops

have been killed by the Palestinian resistance since then, with scores of others injured, many in serious condition. The regime tends to downplay its military casualty figures and revise them upwards at a later stage.

The al-Qassam spokesperson has pointed out that "the confrontation is militarily unequal, yet it frightens and terrifies the most powerful force in the region."

"Al-Qassam fighters come out from under the ground, above it, and from under the rubble, and destroy the occupation's armor and tanks," he added.

Reports in Gaza indicate fierce clashes between Israeli troops and Hamas fighters all night around Gaza City. Abu Ubeida has noted that "the cruel and barbaric massacres committed by the enemy, that have targeted hospitals, schools, mosques, churches, and residential areas for five weeks in front of the world, are its only achievement in this war."



He explained that "the easiest and quickest revenge by the Zionists is by bombarding civilian sites."

Israeli warplanes have just killed around 5,000 Palestinian children. "(This) is aimed at appeasing the internal (occupation) population," he said, stressing that "the great sacrifice made by the resistance is a prelude to its victory."

Israeli warplanes have struck more than 11,000 civilian areas in the Gaza Strip, claiming they are targeting Hamas sites. During his speech on Saturday afternoon, the Secretary-General of Lebanon's Hezbollah, Sayyed Hassan Nasrallah, asked: "Does Hamas have this many military sites?"

The armed wing of Hamas is believed to have scores of military sites, at most hundreds, but certainly not tens of thousands. In a separate statement following Abu Ubeida's briefing, the al-Qassam brigades said the resistance is continuing to engage in fierce clashes, and are blowing up Israeli occupation vehicles at all the directions and points which the occupation is trying to advance toward Gaza, whilst targeting Israeli mobilization sites across the besieged Gaza Strip.

On Sunday, the al-Qassam Brigades said it targeted "a Zionist ground force with an explosive device in the Khuza'a area, east of Khan Yunis in the Southern Gaza Strip, and achieved a direct hit."



This is another indication that Israeli ground forces are operating in the southern Gaza Strip where the regime claimed it would be safe for Palestinian civilians to travel to. The Gaza health ministry has said that an Israeli airstrike on Sunday killed thirteen civilians after the regime's missile struck a residential home in Khan Younis.

This is just one of many airstrikes that have been reported by Palestinian officials and reporters in the south of the enclave. Also on Sunday, the armed wing of Hamas announced "the destruction of an Israeli enemy tank southwest of Gaza City with an Al-Yassin 105 shell."

This comes as the al-Qassam Brigades published a video documenting the resistance fighters targeting Israeli tanks

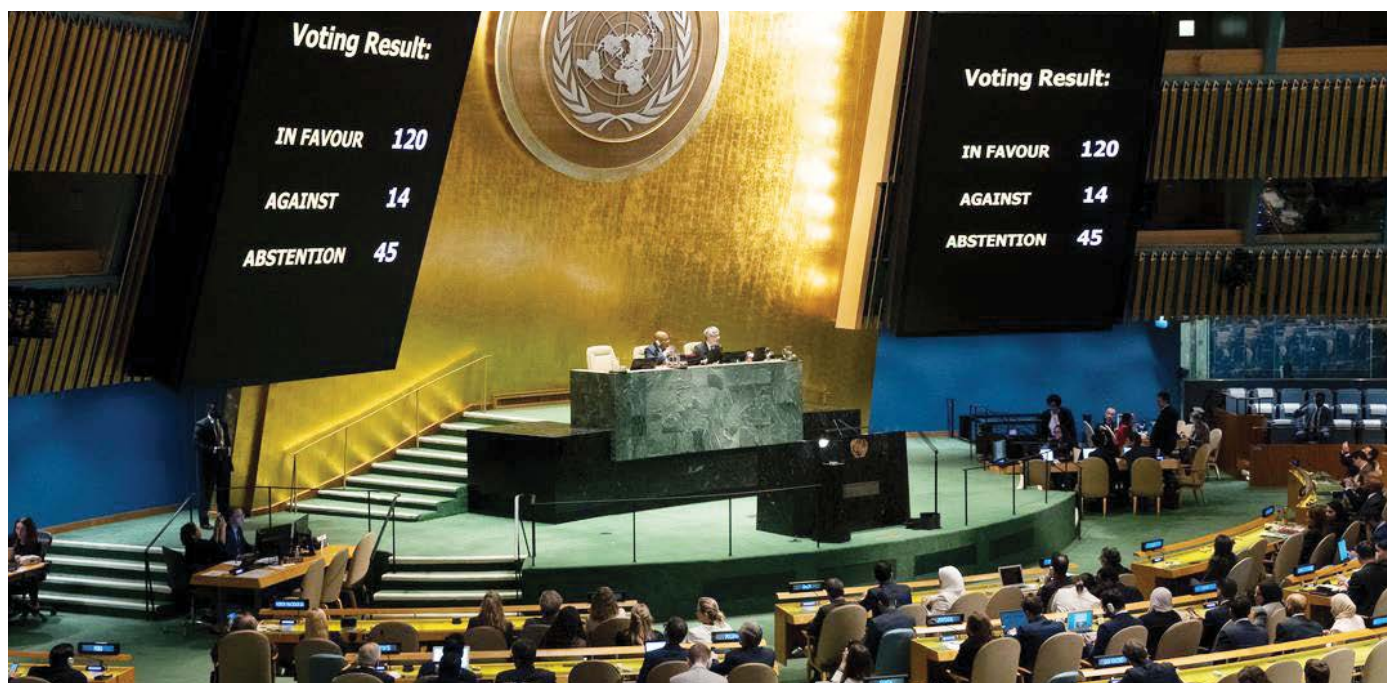
with close-range rocket fire in the al-Tawam and Beit Hanoun areas in the northern Gaza Strip. In some of the scenes, the freedom fighters carrying an anti-tank rocket-propelled grenade on their shoulders, can be heard chanting in celebration as they carefully fire and blow up Israeli tanks.

Meanwhile, sirens continue to sound in the settlements near the Gaza Strip and Tel Aviv with casualties reported by Israeli media. The settlement of Sderot is more than a kilometer away from the Gaza separation barrier. Yet the Israeli military's much boasted about iron dome system, which is designed to shoot rockets out of the sky, more than frequently doesn't have time to react. Courtesy: Tehran Times





# International Responses to the Israel-Palestine Conflict



By Anum Akram

The conflict between Israel and Palestine has once again flared up, with Israel conducting an extraordinary bombing campaign in Gaza in response to attacks from Hamas, as well as other incidents originating from Lebanon and Syria. The military strikes specifically targeted the military sites of the Syrian government and Hezbollah. This escalation has triggered concerns globally, particularly due to the sustained and intense violence in the region. Of significant worry is the toll on civilians, including thousands of children, resulting from Israeli activities in Gaza. The protracted nature of the conflict has led to severe humanitarian problems and a tragic loss of life among innocent civilians.

The prolonged conflict's impact on defenseless civilians has not only garnered international attention but has also caused great consternation among people, various groups, and governments around the world. The distressing scenes of civilian suffering have left global spectators feeling frustrated and powerless. Despite continuous diplomatic efforts, interventions, and humanitarian appeals, the conflict persists without a clear resolution in sight.

In response to Hamas' latest attack on Israel, the United States issued a vehement denouncement, expressing unwavering support for Israel and categorizing the action as terrorism. Drawing parallels between the trauma experienced by Israel and the aftermath of the 9/11 attacks, the U.S. sought to underscore the gravity of the situation. Notably, the U.S. not only expressed support for Israel but also provided military aid in the past month. President Joe Biden, while refraining from directly addressing the Israeli bombardment on hospitals and refugee camps or the targeting of civilians and children, maintained that Israel, like any other nation, has the right to defend itself.

This stance sparked large-scale protests in major U.S. cities, demanding a ceasefire in Gaza and an end to what was perceived as a humanitarian crisis and genocide. Following these protests, President Biden announced a commitment to providing aid in Gaza, marking the first time the U.S. supported a humanitarian pause in the conflict.

Israel's perception of the Arab states' inability to offer a meaningful response stems

from their perceived lack of power, insufficient unity, or apparent apathy toward the suffering endured by the Palestinians. The official Arab stance on the Palestinian struggle has gradually weakened over time, with the decline becoming apparent after Egyptian President Anwar Sadat signed a peace accord with Israel in 1979. The subsequent invasion of Lebanon by Israel further weakened the Arab world's support for the Palestinians, providing opportunities for groups like Hamas and Hezbollah to gain ground in Palestine and Lebanon, respectively.

Hamas' actions have prompted rallies across the region, with protesters in numerous cities expressing solidarity with Palestinians in Gaza and advocating for their fundamental human rights in the face of continued Israeli military attacks and dire living conditions. Notably, the peaceful nature of these protests reflects a broader shift in the region away from using violence to achieve political goals, a departure seen in the wake of the 2011 Arab Spring upheaval.

Initially, Arab officials' reaction to the conflict was secular and moderate, drawing



a distinction between Hamas' condemnable targeting of civilians and a legitimate struggle against Israeli occupation. Arab countries, influential social media accounts, media outlets, and civil society organizations quickly denounced the violence and urged the preservation of life on both sides. However, as the crisis worsened, those who ignored the attacks on Israeli civilians found their opinions marginalized. On October 26, amid increased Israeli shelling in Gaza, nine Arab foreign ministers reiterated their opposition to violence and the assassination of people. The Saudi Minister of Culture, Prince Badr bin Abdallah bin Farhan, attending the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) in Paris, strongly condemned Israel's continuous attacks in Gaza. It's worth noting that this marks the first statement from officials of Saudi Arabia on the matter.

Jordan's King Abdullah II canceled a planned meeting with President Biden due to concerns over the U.S.'s strong support for Israel's actions, reflecting leaders' anxieties about their countries' internal situations. Most Arab countries do not recognize Israel as a state and strongly condemn the airstrikes in Gaza. However, Bahrain, known for its warm relationship with Israel in recent years, did not issue any official statement in favor of Gaza.

The United Nations has expressed deep

concerns about the breaches in Gaza, with Secretary-General António Guterres raising his voice on the Gaza and Palestine conflict. He emphasized the need to understand the root causes of the violence and called for an end to offensive speech and provocative behavior. Guterres stated, "I am extremely disturbed by the surge of hatred towards Muslims and Jews. The pictures depicting the misery in the Middle East are incredibly painful and depressing." Other members of the UN also expressed their worry about the suffering of the people of Gaza.

On October 28, the United Nations demanded an immediate humanitarian cessation of hostilities between Israel and Palestine. The Gaza ceasefire resolution received support from 120 countries worldwide, while 45 countries chose to abstain, and 14 countries voted against it. The General Assembly, taking action after the UN Security Council's recent passivity, approved the resolution. However, the Israeli Foreign Minister vehemently disagreed with the UN's request for a truce, labeling it "despicable" in a message posted on social media. The minister emphasized Israel's intent to destroy Hamas, drawing comparisons to the international community's responses to threats posed by the Nazis and the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS).

According to international humanitarian law, the Israeli ambassador stated that

there is no humanitarian crisis, refuting claims based on regular monitoring of the Gaza situation. Drawing a controversial parallel, the ambassador likened believing reports from Gaza to believing reports from ISIS.

European nations have expressed varying opinions on the conflict, with some leaders asserting Israel's right to self-defense, while others criticize Israel for alleged violations of humanitarian standards and international law. Belgium's Prime Minister has stated that Israel is using excessive force in Gaza, voicing concerns over Israel's alleged disrespect for international law in the current crisis. Ursula von der Leyen, the President of the European Commission, has faced criticism from the majority of EU employees for her unwavering support of Israel, with accusations of giving the Gaza violation insufficient attention.

Despite the ongoing conflict, Israel appears to lack a clear end goal for Gaza, leading to speculations that its primary objective is to administer collective punishment on the 2.3 million Palestinians living in the besieged enclave—of which nearly half are children. This has raised alarm about the severe form of collective punishment being imposed. To prevent further casualties, it is crucial for nations to unite and communicate clear boundaries to Israel, fostering a path toward a peaceful resolution that respects the rights and lives of all those affected.



# Caught in the Crossfire: Pakistan's Expulsion of Afghan Refugees and the Unfolding Humanitarian Crisis

By Daniyal Wali

In a sweeping move, Pakistan recently initiated a massive expulsion of undocumented foreigners, a policy that includes the deportation of approximately 1.7 million Afghan refugees, marking one of the largest forced repatriations in the country's history. While Pakistani officials argue that the policy is intended to safeguard public welfare and enhance national security, a closer examination suggests that domestic politics and strained relations with the Taliban-led Afghanistan may be influencing this draconian decision. The crackdown, marked by arrests and deportations, has raised concerns and garnered criticism from various quarters, including United Nations agencies, human rights groups, and the Taliban-led administration in Afghanistan. Preempting the government's actions, thousands of refugees crammed into trucks and buses, heading towards the two key border crossings to return home and avoid arrest and forced deportation. The urgency displayed by Afghan refugees underscores the severity of the situation and the fear of consequences should they remain in Pakistan without proper documentation. Afghans have sought refuge in Pakistan for decades, with millions fleeing conflict since the 1970s, including a significant influx of 600,000 after the Taliban takeover in 2021. Despite Pakistan's historical role as a sanctuary for Afghan refugees, human rights groups have documented persistent discrimination against Afghans in various aspects of life, from work and education to encounters with landlords and law enforcement.

## Humanitarian Crisis in Afghanistan

Pakistan's decision to repatriate millions of Afghan refugees has the potential to exacerbate an already dire humanitarian crisis in Afghanistan. One of the primary challenges is the lack of adequate space and infrastructure to accommodate such a massive influx



of returnees. Afghanistan is already grappling with overcrowded urban areas and informal settlements, and the sudden return of a large number of refugees could strain these resources to the breaking point.

The housing shortage is likely to intensify, leading to makeshift settlements and increased competition for limited resources. This could further strain already fragile social structures, potentially triggering tensions and conflicts over access to basic amenities such as shelter, water, and sanitation. The risk of displacement and homelessness for many returning refugees looms large, adding another layer of vulnerability to an already distressed population. Moreover, the strained healthcare system in Afghanistan is ill-equipped to handle a sudden surge in population. Access to essential health services, including vaccinations, maternal care, and treatment for diseases, is already a significant concern. The return of refugees without adequate health infrastructure could lead to a public health catastrophe, with the potential for the spread of diseases and increased mortality rates, especially among vulnerable groups such as children and the elderly.

Education is another sector that will be profoundly affected. The existing challenges in providing quality education to Afghan

children are likely to be exacerbated by the return of large numbers of school-age children. The education system, already burdened by a lack of resources and security concerns, may struggle to accommodate the increased demand for schooling. This situation could perpetuate a cycle of poverty and hinder the long-term development prospects of the country. The economic implications of the refugee influx are significant as well. The job market, already strained due to conflict and economic instability, may be unable to absorb the returning population. This could lead to increased unemployment and underemployment, further deepening poverty levels and creating a breeding ground for social unrest.

## Challenges and Urgent Needs

Upon returning to Afghanistan from Pakistan, Afghan refugees are greeted by temporary camps established by the Taliban along the Chaman border crossing. These camps serve as vital hubs for immediate assistance, providing shelter, food, healthcare, and other essential services to the returning families. The International Rescue Committee has highlighted the immense needs at the Torkham crossing,



with hundreds of families arriving daily, expecting the influx to continue for the next six months. The humanitarian response in these areas urgently requires international funding to address the pressing needs of the new arrivals. As winter approaches, concerns rise for the survival of those sleeping in tents or under open skies, especially with dropping temperatures and anticipated heavy rains in mid-December.

Naseeb Mashal, the senior area coordinator of IRC Afghanistan, emphasized the challenges faced by the returning Afghans, many of whom include women and girls, with severe injuries from the arduous journey through the mountains. The pre-existing population of over six million internally displaced individuals within Afghanistan adds to the complexity, indicating a bleak future for those returning from Pakistan. Despite the dire situation, the Pakistani government has maintained its deportation plan for illegal residents, emphasizing the clear policy regarding individuals lacking legal documents or overstaying visas.

The Pakistani Foreign Ministry spokesperson, Mumtaz Zohra Baloch, defended the deportation plan, stating that it had been discussed with Afghan authorities. However, the Taliban has denounced the plan, and global refugee agencies have urged Islamabad to reconsider, citing the already dire humanitarian crisis in Afghanistan. While Pakistan has dismissed calls to halt the crackdown on illegal residents, it has clarified that registered refugees and those with legal status, totaling 2.28 million, are not subjects of the crackdown. The caretaker interior minister of Pakistan, Sarfaraz Bugti, attributed the deportation orders to a surge in terrorist attacks, claiming that a significant number were carried out by Afghan nationals. The Pakistani officials argue that Taliban-allied militants are plotting cross-border attacks from Afghan sanctuaries, allegations that the Taliban officials reject. The backdrop of more than four decades of hostilities in Afghanistan, combined with natural disasters, has led millions to flee to neighboring countries like Pakistan and Iran. The complex geopolitical situation, including the recent Taliban takeover and withdrawal of U.S. and NATO troops, has further complicated the fate of Afghan refugees, with many

expressing reluctances to return due to fears of retribution and abuse by the Taliban for their association with foreign troops.

## International Response

The expulsion of Afghan refugees from Pakistan has prompted a severe humanitarian crisis, catching the attention of global organizations. The UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) expressed deep concern over the dire situation faced by tens of thousands of Afghans, predominantly children, who were forcibly deported since the beginning of the month. The acting Humanitarian Coordinator, Daniel Endres, noted that around 60 percent of the 20,000-21,000 people who crossed into Afghanistan between November 1-4 were children. Many of these individuals find themselves

Furthermore, Amnesty International has strongly condemned Pakistan's actions, calling for an immediate halt to deportations, detentions, and harassment of Afghan refugees. The organization raised alarm over the lack of transparency, due process, and accountability in deportation centers, citing cases of individuals, including minors, being deported without proper documentation. The impact is disproportionately felt by vulnerable groups, including women, religious minorities, and journalists. The deportation measures not only endanger the safety of Afghan journalists in Pakistan but also create an atmosphere of constant anxiety for women in Afghan-majority settlements and religious minorities facing additional challenges amid the expulsions. The urgent need for international intervention to address this crisis is increasingly evident.



in desperate conditions, having traveled for days, unsure of where to go and stranded at the border.

The forced deportation has not gone unnoticed by the international community, with the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF) expressing concern over increased detentions and violence against Afghan refugee communities in Pakistan. Tensions between Islamabad and the Taliban have escalated, as Pakistan's acting Prime Minister, Anwar ul-Haq Kakar, justified the deportations by linking them to the Taliban-led government's alleged inability to control extremists. In response, the Taliban rejected these claims, warning Pakistan against blaming the group for its security challenges. The strained relations and criticisms further complicate the already precarious situation.

To conclude, Pakistan's decision to deport Afghan refugees is a complex and multifaceted issue, blending domestic concerns, historical discrimination, and geopolitical calculations. As the mass expulsion continues, it is essential to monitor its impact on the vulnerable Afghan population, who find themselves caught in the crossfire of broader political maneuvers. The international community's attention and engagement are crucial to address the unfolding humanitarian crisis and ensure the protection of those forcibly displaced. The plight of Afghan refugees requires a nuanced and comprehensive approach that goes beyond immediate relief efforts, focusing on long-term solutions for the displaced population and addressing the root causes of the crisis.

# UK Cabinet Reshuffle



## David Cameron made foreign secretary

David Cameron is back - or Lord Cameron as he now is - as foreign secretary. It's not unprecedented for the foreign secretary to be a member of the House of Lords - Lord Carrington was Margaret Thatcher's from 1979-1982. But the return of a former prime minister to the cabinet table has wowzers value to it, there's no doubt about that. PM Rishi Sunak will hope this is finally the thing that gets him and his government noticed and can change the political weather. He will argue, no doubt, this is a coming together of the Conservative political family, putting aside the turbulence of recent years. But remember only weeks ago Sunak was defining himself against recent former Tory leaders. Cameron himself said, for example, that scrapping the northern leg of HS2 was a mistake.

Now David Cameron former PM of UK has been appointed new foreign secretary. He replaced James Cleverly who, as reported earlier, is the new home secretary.

This reshuffle was sparked by the sacking of Suella Braverman this morning, days after

she wrote a controversial article in The Times newspaper, criticising the Met Police. It was later confirmed she had ignored advice from No 10 to make changes to the article. James Cleverly replaces Suella Braverman, who was sacked this morning.

## Schools minister Nick Gibb quits

At Lower level, Schools minister Nick Gibb said he won't stand at the next general election, and stood down as a minister. "Over the last few weeks I have been discussing taking up a diplomatic role after the general election," he said, adding that "To enable me to do so I have asked the prime minister if I can step down from the government at the reshuffle and he has agreed." He further stated "I campaigned for Rishi last summer and I remain an enthusiastic supporter of the prime minister's leadership."

I may have disagreed with Sunak but I'm here to help - Cameron

Soon after named as Foreign Secretary David Cameron posted on X, "While I have been out of front-line politics for the last

seven years, I hope that my experience - as Conservative Leader for eleven years and Prime Minister for six - will assist me in helping the prime minister,". He further added that, though I may have "disagreed with some individual decisions" made by Sunak, the PM is a "strong and capable" leader.

Theresa May has welcomed the former prime minister's return as foreign secretary. "His immense experience on the international stage will be invaluable at this time of great uncertainty in our world," she writes. "Looking forward to working together again!" May - who was home secretary in Cameron's government, before herself becoming prime minister - remains a Conservative MP.

## New home secretary lobbied against key Home Office policy

What is new Home Secretary James Cleverly going to do about a flagship Home Office policy that he is on the record as opposing?

Suella Braverman approved converting former RAF Wethersfield to accommodate



1,700 asylum seeker for possibly three years. She needed the site because her department has been struggling for years with delays and backlogs in refugee decision-taking, exacerbated by more recent arrivals over the English Channel.

Braintree District Council - the Conservative-led local authority - is now embroiled in a huge row with the Home Office at the High Court. Wethersfield is in Cleverly's Braintree constituency - and in March he confirmed to constituents that he had lobbied colleagues to stop the plan. It's not clear whether he still opposes putting migrants at the centre.

Back in July, James Cleverly said at the Aspen Security Forum in the US that he would need to be dragged out his job with "nail marks down the parquet flooring". It seemed an unusual appeal to Rishi Sunak to keep his job as foreign secretary. Now, that was in the summer when speculation was mounting he could replace Ben Wallace as defence secretary. He is now the home secretary.

It's a huge and controversial brief with difficult questions mounting over the legality of the government's plan to send some asylum seekers to Rwanda, and the policing of protests. The question is - did he want it, given his summer comments?

## Braverman sacked, but Gibb and O'Brien ask to leave

Suella Braverman has been asked to leave government - but two highly regarded ministers have themselves asked to leave. Neil O'Brien, a health minister, wants to spend more time in his constituency - with a tightly fought general election in prospect, that may be a wise move. And - as we just reported - Nick Gibb intends to stand down at the next election so has asked to leave ministerial office. This means Rishi Sunak will have to carry out a wider reshuffle that extends beyond cabinet.

## Jeremy Hunt remains chancellor

But one person who isn't moving is Jeremy Hunt - it has been confirmed that he remains as chancellor.

Keeping Braverman for this long was cowardice, say Lib Dems.

Liberal Democrat leader Ed Davey says: "Suella Braverman was never fit to be home secretary. Rishi Sunak knew this, and he still appointed her. It was the prime minister's sheer cowardice that kept her in the job even for this long. They

need to put us all out of our misery and call a general election now."

## Harder for Sunak to define himself against what came before

As I recover from the shock of David Cameron's return to government, I'm just thinking through some of the implications. His diplomatic experience could signal a desire on PM Rishi Sunak's part to focus on domestic priorities - at a time when the government is consumed by foreign crises in the Middle East and Ukraine.

There is likely to be unease, though, among some Tory China hawks given Cameron ushered in a "golden age" of UK-China relations. There is some domestic politics to this though. Cameron may still be popular with some of the southern voters the Conservatives are losing to the Liberal Democrats. Yet Sunak is trying to define himself against so much of what has come before, including previous Conservative governments. That was already a bit of a challenge when he had figures like Jeremy Hunt and Michael Gove, who have been in government for much of the past 13 years, around the cabinet table.

It'll be harder still with Cameron there.



# Insights from the President of the Rwandan Parliament: A Perspective on the Palestine-Israel Conflict and Diplomatic Visit to Pakistan

By Romana Afsheen

In the intricate web of international relations, a recent visit by the President of the Rwandan Parliament to Pakistan offers a unique perspective on pressing global issues. In an exclusive interview with The Truth International, the distinguished leader shared invaluable insights into the ongoing Palestine-Israel conflict, providing a viewpoint shaped by Rwanda's own history and commitment to diplomacy.

## François Xavier Kalinda

On January 6, President Paul Kagame appointed François Xavier Kalinda as a senator in the Rwandan Senate, succeeding the resigned Augustin Iyamuremye. Three days later, Kalinda was unanimously elected as the new Senate president with all 26 votes.

A member of the Social Democratic Party, Kalinda, aged 60, returned to Rwanda after completing two terms in the East African Legislative Assembly in December 2022. In his acceptance speech, he pledged commitment and cooperation, emphasizing collaboration with all institutions to serve the Rwandan people. Kalinda, a former Dean of the School of Law at the University of Rwanda, had served in the EALA from 2015 to 2022, holding key positions within the regional Parliament.

## Introduction

As the world watches the escalating tensions in the Middle East, the words of leaders from diverse corners of the globe carry weight. The visit to Pakistan, coupled with the President's candid reflections, not only sheds light on the geopolitical intricacies of the Palestine-Israel conflict but also unveils the broader canvas of diplomatic relations in a rapidly changing world.

This article delves into the key highlights of the interview, exploring the President's views on the current state of the conflict, his experiences during the diplomatic visit, and



the shared visions that bind nations together in pursuit of global harmony.

## President's Visit to Pakistan

The President of the Rwanda Parliament was asked about his stay in Pakistan, and he expressed positive sentiments. He mentioned it was his first visit to Pakistan and appreciated the warm welcome and hospitality extended by the people.

He acknowledged the excellent treatment received since arriving in the country and conveyed a very positive overall feeling about his experiences in Pakistan, including interactions with various individuals and the picturesque landscape of Islamabad.

## On the Palestine-Israel Conflict

When asked about the ongoing conflict between Palestine and Israel, the President emphasized Rwanda's position, aligning with the African Union's stance of recognizing two separate, independent states. He condemned all forms of violence, particularly those affecting civilian populations, without explicitly taking sides in the dispute.

## President's Views on Democracy and Governance

In response to questions about democracy and governance, the President highlighted the complexity of the concept, stating that there is no one-size-fits-all model for democracy. He noted Rwanda's democratic system, established after the genocide against the Tutsi, as a unique approach aimed at uniting the nation. The President expressed contentment with their democratic process, which involves elections. When asked about the perfection of democracy in Rwanda, he acknowledged the need for continual improvement, emphasizing that democracy is a dynamic concept that must evolve with the growing demands and development of the people.

## Post-Genocide Reconciliation and Progress

When addressing the aftermath of the 1994 genocide in Rwanda, the President discussed the challenging task of healing a divided society. Under the leadership that followed the genocide, the country focused on reunification efforts. Rwanda successful-



ly repatriated refugees who had fled both before and during the genocide. To address the deep-seated divisions, the government implemented a judicial system known as Gacaca. This system facilitated community-based reconciliation, where individuals in villages, who were familiar with each other, participated in the process. The approach involved acknowledging wrongdoings, seeking forgiveness, and reintegrating individuals back into society. Even those who had been imprisoned were given the opportunity to engage in truth-telling, receive pardon, and contribute to the nation's reconstruction. This comprehensive process extended to both perpetrators and victims of the genocide, fostering unity in a society that no longer recognizes ethnic distinctions. The President emphasized the success of these initiatives, highlighting how individuals now coexist peacefully in Rwanda, actively participating in the country's development.

## Tourism and Economic Development

In response to inquiries about Rwanda's tourism potential, the President acknowledged the country's beauty and described it as the "country of a thousand hills" with a favorable climate and welcoming people. Highlighting the importance of tourism as a significant source of income, he noted that Rwanda has been actively promoting this sector, attracting numerous visitors and

positioning tourism as a key contributor to the country's economic development.

## International Forums and Cooperation

When asked about the need for a common forum for third world countries similar to forums like G20 and SEO, the President acknowledged the existence of various forums such as the African Union. He expressed the possibility and importance of establishing a forum specifically for underdeveloped countries from different regions—Europe, Central Asia, Latin America, and Eastern Europe. The President highlighted the potential benefits of such a forum, allowing nations with similar challenges to unite, share their problems, and collectively address issues, providing a counterbalance to the influence of larger nations. He noted the historical existence of a non-aligned countries forum and emphasized the necessity of such platforms for collaboration and solidarity among underdeveloped nations.

## Cooperation Between Rwanda and Pakistan

The President highlighted several areas of potential cooperation between Rwanda and Pakistan during the visit. Trade and investment discussions were underway, with a focus on increasing tea exports from Rwanda to Pakistan. Additionally,

Rwanda expressed expertise in technology, agriculture, mining, and other sectors, aiming to attract Pakistani investors. Memoranda of understanding related to trade and investment had already been signed, indicating a commitment to collaboration. The President emphasized Rwanda's readiness to work with the Pakistani people, fostering mutual benefit.

## Areas for Investment and Student Exchange

Regarding investment, the President suggested that detailed discussions and exploration were essential to identify specific areas for Rwandan investors in Pakistan. He emphasized the need for mutual visits to uncover opportunities in various sectors. In terms of education, the President, acknowledging the advanced capabilities of Pakistan in science, technology, pharmaceuticals, and other fields, expressed interest in a student exchange program. He envisioned Pakistani universities specializing in science and technology, ICT, and medical schools coming to Rwanda to train the local youth, creating a valuable exchange of knowledge and expertise.

In conclusion, the President welcomed the prospect of cooperation, both in economic endeavors and educational initiatives, underscoring the potential for shared growth and development between Rwanda and Pakistan.



# Options for Pakistan in a chaotic world of military conflicts

By Umer Farooq

There was a time when liberal internationalists in Washington used to describe Kashmir as a flashpoint. They used to express the fear that the Kashmir situation could lead to nuclear exchange between Pakistan and India. Now Kashmir doesn't seem as dangerous a flashpoint as the Korean peninsula. The economically advanced and highly industrialized nation of South Korea, which is displaying the same signs of pacification and liberal political ideology as the West, is demanding that Washington put its nuclear assets on display in the Korean peninsula to deter the chaotic North Koreans. Close by, Japanese society is witnessing a revival of interests in geopolitics and recent trends in Japanese politics indicate signs of an aggressive foreign policy. The Japanese are afraid of Chinese assertiveness in East Asia, and have been in talks with Washington over the geopolitical issues of the region. India and China have not yet resolved military tensions that manifest themselves in occasional military clashes on the international border. And yet, US strategists have started laying out plans for incorporating the Indian military's potential into an integrated deterrence strategy that would involve the process of making India a regular member of Western military plans against China. This plan doesn't simply mean that India would counter China as a military force on its international border, primarily because US strategists have started talking about the Indian role in the overall US military strategy over possible conflict in Taiwan Strait. The Indians were initially reluctant to become part of Western military strategy against China. Limited clashes on the international border however, changed Indian attitudes. Taiwan itself is a major flashpoint for military conflict between major world powers.

In the 1990s, an Israeli military historian, Martin Van Creveld wrote a book, "The Transformation of War" in which



he predicted that direct conventional wars between nuclear armed nation-states and world powers was no more a phenomenon of the future. It seems his prediction applied only to the period between the end of the Cold War in 1991 and the Russian attack on Ukraine in March 2021. We now have a full-scale conventional war between two nation-states, one of which has the world's largest nuclear arsenal, in the form of the Russia-Ukraine war. Arms sales have increased around the world as a result. Countries like Japan are now talking about adopting aggressive foreign and security policies. India, which has resisted power politics in its foreign policy since independence, is becoming greatly involved in great power politics. Chinese geopolitical ambitions are manifesting themselves in ambitious projects such as the Belt and Road Initiative. Geopolitics is back, with a vengeance. A war that can trigger a chain of events leading to a global conflagration appears just round the corner. The flip side is that he had rightly predicted the war in Gaza.

Two types of conflicting intellectual currents have defined the academic approach towards war in the western academic world. Realism says that the international system of nation-states is inherently prone to war, since it is anarchic and there is no overarching governing body that provides security to a nation-state whose survival is threatened by another state.

Liberalism, which has come to be seen as the dominant intellectual current since the end of the Cold War, suggests that economic interdependence has increased to a level where war has ceased to be an option for world powers, and they stand to gain more from economic interdependence and the network of institutions, laws and norms that have come to define international politics. A historian or a theorist may adhere to one or the other intellectual current, but they cannot deny the fact that not even a short period of human history has passed without conflicts and wars. It is not that the time since the conclusion of the Second World War has not seen wars and conflicts; it is only that full scale conventional wars between rival nation-states have been rare since 1945. The world is changing around us. Perhaps for the first time since 1945 however, war between major world powers appears possible.

One is astonished to see the proliferation of lengthy reports by international think tanks about possible war between China and the United States on the one hand, and United States and Russia on the other hand. In October 2021, RAND Corporation, a Washington based think-tank close to the American security establishment, produced a report in which it depicted three possible scenarios of full-scale conventional war between China and the United States in the light of emerging





geopolitical trends in world politics. On the other hand, Russia-US or a world war between Russia and Europe has emerged as a real possibility in the wake of the Russian invasion of Ukraine. Russian President Putin has been speaking in an extremely threatening tone, both in terms of conventional conflict with the west and its possible escalation into a nuclear catastrophe. He has taken some practical steps to implement his nuclear threat by shifting some of Russia's tactical nukes into neighboring allied countries, which have geographical proximity to Western allied nations in Eastern Europe, and which are acting as a conduit for supply of American military hardware to Ukraine's forces. Russian defeat is no more a remote possibility. The West fears that if Russia is defeated, the chances of Putin using tactical nukes in Ukraine will increase. This is one reason why the US led Western support effort has been slow on supplying state-of-the-art military hardware to Ukraine.

The situation in Gaza and Israeli atrocities are leaving a deep-seated imprint on the psychology of Pakistan's people. In the days of fast changing media images, Gaza as an issue will vanish from the public's imagination as fast it has occupied center-stage for now. I have little doubt though that it will permanently occupy a place in the subconscious of Pakistani masses for decades to come. The lesson from Gaza reinforces the Pakistani masses already held deep seated prejudices against the western world, the United States as a superpower and the American led international order. The majority of Pakistanis have little understanding of international politics, but they universally—at the grassroot level—share that prejudice that international order and system are unjust and essentially anti-Muslim. The way the Gaza situation has unfolded and the way Washington, London and Paris have supported Israeli atrocities against the people of Gaza have largely reinforced the Pakistani public's prejudice against the international system.

Apparently, China is making inroads into the Middle East and the Saudi-Iran rapprochement is a high mark of this effort. The United States on the other hand has a heavy footprint on Middle Eastern soil as a major provider of security to the Arab states

with the US military and security establishment having intimate relations with the security establishments of Arab states. The Abraham Accords, relating to normalization of relations between Arab Sheikdoms and Israel, is the central policy tool Washington is using to push its political interests in the region. To isolate Iran and to contain its influence is the central objective of Washington's foreign policy in the region and normalization of relations between Arab states and Israel is a crucial policy tool to isolate and contain Iran.

The Chinese move to secure an agreement for resumption of diplomatic relations between Saudi Arabia and Iran might not be solely aimed at scuttling Abraham Accords, but it certainly raised China's stature in the Middle East. Experts, however, believe China still cannot match the depth of American influence in Arab



capitals and their political establishments. Washington is the main provider of security to Arab states. Whereas Chinese footprints in the region are restricted to developing economic relations with the Arab world.

The main implication of the Gaza situation is that no Arab regime can afford to normalize relations with Israel. Whereas Chinese efforts to get the rival states of Iran and Saudi Arabia to resume diplomatic relations started to bear fruits when the Saudi Crown Prince and Iranian President exchanged views about Gaza in a telephonic conversation. One of the main features of the existing international order is that it assigns management roles to superpowers. The permanent membership of five states in the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) is a reflection of this principle. Out of these five, Washington has played an overly influential role in the management of

disputes and conflicts in the international system in the post-Cold War era. The glory of the unipolar world has long passed for the United States however. But still, the Gulf War and the two wars post 9/11 in Afghanistan and Iraq largely showed that Washington is the world hegemon.

Now, the United States is adamantly supporting Israel in its atrocious military invasion of the helpless Gazan people. There are no signs that China will take this opportunity to challenge American influence in the Middle East in any decisive manner. The Chinese have shown their annoyance over the Gaza situation. But at the political and military level, it can hardly play any decisive role to prevent continuous atrocities in Gaza. Firstly, China is not a military brute and so far, we have not seen the Chinese militarily confronting Washington except in the South China Sea.

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Now, the United States is adamantly supporting Israel in its atrocious military invasion of the helpless Gazan people. There are no signs that China will take this opportunity to challenge American influence in the Middle East in any decisive manner. The Chinese have shown their annoyance over the Gaza situation. But at the political and military level, it can hardly play any decisive role to prevent continuous atrocities in Gaza. Firstly, China is not a military brute and so far, we have not seen the Chinese militarily confronting Washington except in the South China Sea. Clearly, Washington has flexed its military muscle in the Gaza situation by sending aircraft carriers to the region. China didn't do any such thing, rather it could not do any such thing as it doesn't have any military presence in the region.

China's security relations with the states of

the region are minimal. Its relations with Arab states are primarily of economic nature. Can China play any important role in relations to the Gaza situation? I think neither China nor any other extra-regional country can play a decisive role if the Arab states continue to remain silent spectators to the massacre of Palestinian in Gaza. Much will now depend on the outpouring of emotions on Arab streets. Arab public opinion could now question the overly influential management role Washington plays in the Middle East. If public opinion in Arab streets turn violent at this stage, it could overturn the apple cart of American influence in the region.

Pakistan public opinion on the other hand could potentially turn violent—this is my understanding of the situation— if they clearly see a target. The Pakistani foreign policy establishment is, however, hardly

gathering the courage to question the management role of Washington in the region. Pakistan's ruling elite's perceptions and interests are too closely associated with the edifice and network of American influence in the region. Otherwise, people here are deeply hurt by Washington's dirty role in connection with the Gaza situation.

## The anarchy in the international system

Despite the fact that we are now living in the post-Cold War world of interconnectivity and integration, the international system is anarchic, where every state has to take care of its own security. Nobody, absolutely nobody, will come to defend an attack against you, this is the main lesson of the Gaza situation. Only a strong military deterrent can prevent an aggressor from attacking a state, whether that military

deterrent is provided by an organized and conventional military or terror or militant organization will largely be an irrelevant question for the weaker parties in the international system which are closely watching the Gaza situation. The Pakistani state has believed and functioned on the assumption that nobody will come to its rescue in the face of a military attack, especially after the 1971 war.

The Pakistani military has dominated the security debate during the past fifty years and it has turned this assumption into the central principle of its security and foreign policy making processes. The Gaza situation will strengthen the belief in this principle and marginal voices, which in Pakistani society advocate for a change of heart, will completely lose the argument and debate.

What will be the practical manifestations of strengthening this belief? Only time will tell. One indication came when Pakistan flight tested the multiple warheads carrying Ababeel ballistic missile days after the Israeli claimed that their missile defense systems were more than 90 percent successful in shooting down Hamas' rocket attacks on Israeli border cities and towns.

It is pertinent to mention here that Indians have shown interest in buying an Israeli produced missile defense system named Iron Dome, and might already be in the process of integrating elements of the Israeli system into their own missile defense structures. The Indians claim to be on the path to make the Pakistani nuclear deterrent redundant with the deployment of an Israeli made missile defense system. Pakistanis, with the flight test of multiple warheads carrying Ababeel ballistic missiles, amply demonstrated that they have capacity to defeat the Indian missile defense system. A full-fledged arms race in South Asia is on. The managers of the international order, who in the past used to preach pacifist ideologies just to sell their non-proliferation messages across the world, would do a service to their cause if they just try to peep into the heads of those who are at the receiving end of Israeli atrocities. And also, into the heads of those in the region who are the potential next targets of the Israeli military. They must be dreaming about bombs - lots of them.





# PML-N and PPP Navigate Separate Paths Toward the Upcoming Elections

By Tahir Niaz

As Pakistan gears up for the upcoming elections scheduled for February 8, 2024, the political climate is marked by a noticeable absence of the traditional election fervor. With less than three months remaining, the country is witnessing a strategic maneuvering of political alliances by parties positioning themselves for the post-election scenario.

The ruling party, with three consecutive terms in power, is actively working on pre-election alliances to secure a favorable outcome. Having already engaged with MQM-P, the PML-N is expected to build a robust political bloc in the coming weeks, potentially including Balochistan parties. However, amidst this alliance-building, the question arises: what about their previous ally, the PPP?

The relationship between the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) and the Pakistan Peoples' Party (PPP) has been marked by a love-hate dynamic, not uncommon in the realm of political partnerships. Post every collaboration, the romance fades, leading to mutual accusations, particularly after the entry of Imran Khan into politics.

The once-strong alliance between PPP and PML-N under the leadership of former Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif appears to be faltering, especially since the end of Shehbaz's term. Tensions escalated over issues related to general elections, with accusations of political flip-flopping and accusations towards influential forces. Verbal clashes and accusations of backtracking on political slogans further strained their ties.

In the latest developments, PPP leaders criticized PML-N, accusing them of "hiding behind institutions." The slogan "Vote ko izzat do" (respect the vote) came under scrutiny, with PPP claiming a change in the party behind the slogan's stance. Differences intensified, especially regarding the timing of general elections, as PPP raised concerns about a scenario reminiscent of



the Islami Jamhoori Ittehad (IJI) formed in 1988.

The PML-N, on its part, declared its unwillingness to form an electoral alliance with PPP, dismissing the latter's reliance on the legacy of Zulfikar Ali Bhutto. A bitter cold war is unfolding between the two parties, and the PML-N is confident in its election prospects without aligning with PPP.

The PML-N's anti-PPP alliance in Sindh and the rejection of seat adjustments in Punjab reflect a clear departure from their previous coalition. Despite the ongoing cold war, the PML-N has not ruled out accommodating the Istehkam-i-Pakistan Party of Jehangir Khan Tareen in Punjab.

The evolving political landscape suggests a return to a three-party system, dividing the anti-Imran vote into two blocs. As PML-N supremo Nawaz Sharif directs party leaders to prepare for the elections, the party advises PPP to face the political arena without complaining about a lack of a level-playing field.

The situation is complex, with accusations of collusion with caretakers, concerns about free and fair polls, and the uncertainty surrounding the fate of Imran Khan and his party. The delay in elections is attributed to the political crisis since Khan's removal, demanding not just elections but a transparent process to navigate the country out of its political and economic challenges.

Imran Khan is acknowledged for disrupting the traditional two-party system in the country, emerging as the third major political force. However, there came a phase where the electorate was polarized into pro or anti-Imran factions. Presently, it appears that the political landscape is reverting to a three-party system, with the anti-Imran vote splitting into two blocs due to PML-N's apparent disinterest in aligning with the PPP in the lead-up to the elections.



# Pakistan's Journey to the General Elections

*The road ahead is straight, but the ride is far from simple*

By Sarfraz Raja

Finally, the nation has a date for the upcoming general elections—February 8th, a day eagerly awaited for choosing representatives for the next five years. The election date, a demand from all political stakeholders, materialized after the Supreme Court intervened, instructing the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) to consult with the president and set a date. With this announcement, political parties launched their election campaigns, unfolding strategies that are gradually painting a clearer pre- and post-election picture.

## The Emerging Political Scenario

Anticipating the political landscape six months ago was challenging, with predictions drastically different from the current outlook. The unexpected decline of PTI, especially after May 9th, shifted the narrative. While uncertainties remain about Imran Khan's participation and the strength of his party, recent events, such as the return of PML-N Quaid Nawaz Sharif, have altered predictions. Sharif's return, linked by some commentators to the election date, signifies a significant development. After four years in London, Sharif's return holds political significance, as he aims to be the next prime minister, despite facing disqualification challenges. In contrast, Imran Khan, facing incarceration, is unlikely to actively participate in the elections. As it stands, Nawaz Sharif appears to be the most prominent candidate for the prime ministership.

## Could It Be a Smooth Sail for PML-N?

PML-N faced a struggle for political survival during its coalition government due to unpopular economic decisions. The impact of May 9th, however, provided a new political life and an opportunity for PML-N to capitalize on the country's performance in 2017. After PTI's decline, PML-N's journey toward victory in the



February 8th elections seems relatively smoother. As the largest party in Punjab, PML-N has a significant advantage over its rivals. PPP may be the second rival, but it lacks an essential presence in Punjab. The newly formed Istehkam-e-Pakistan party, led by PTI dissidents, may attract some electables but is unlikely to form the government. In Sindh, PPP has a strong foothold, while PML-N is forging alliances to counter it. PML-N's relations with JUI-F suggest potential partnerships in KPK and Balochistan. The possibility of a coalition government, with PML-N as the leading party, is high.

## Hurdles in the Way

Despite the favorable outlook, hurdles remain. Nawaz Sharif's ineligibility to contest elections is a significant obstacle, and the legal challenges must be navigated swiftly. Additionally, PTI still holds a vote bank and public sympathies, posing a potential challenge. While the road appears clear for PML-N to reach the Prime Minister's house, the journey ahead will undoubtedly present its own set of challenges for the anticipated new prime minister and the ruling party.







# Justice Arshad Hussain sworn in as KP caretaker CM

*Talking to reporters later, the caretaker chief minister vowed to hold free and fair elections in the province*

By Mushtaq Yusufzai

Justice (R) Arshad Hussain Shah took oath as the caretaker chief minister of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa here on Sunday.

Governor Ghulam Ali administered the oath to the chief minister at a ceremony at the Governor's House. Talking to reporters later, the caretaker chief minister vowed to hold free and fair elections in the province. "We will ensure free and fair elections in the province," he said, adding that maintaining law and order would also be his priority.

Earlier, former chief minister Mahmood Khan and opposition leader Akram Khan Durrani nominated Justice (R) Arshad Hussain Shah for the slot of caretaker chief minister. The chief minister's slot fell vacant following the sudden demise of Mohammad Azam Khan on Saturday, who was appointed as the caretaker chief minister in January 2023, following the dissolution of the provincial assembly by the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) government.

Azam Khan, 90, was admitted to a private hospital in Peshawar for health complications where he died of heart failure. Advocate General Aamir Javed had held a meeting with Governor Ghulam Ali on Saturday night and reportedly advised him to approach the former chief minister and opposition leader to hold a meeting and nominate someone for the position.

Former chief minister Mahmood Khan and opposition leader Akram Khan Durrani held a consultative meeting at the Chief Minister's House on Sunday and it was interestingly the first time that both of them had chosen the same person for the highest administrative position of the province. Well-placed government officials told The News that both of them had come to the meeting with the same nominee.

"It seemed both Mahmood Khan and Akram Durrani had either held prior discussions about the nomination or the nominee was already recommended to them as they had come to the meeting with the same name.

They didn't waste time as they did in the past and agreed to nominate a retired judge for slot," a government official told The News on condition of anonymity. After finalising Justice Arshad's name, a summary was sent to the governor for approval. They in fact helped resolve the constitutional crisis created by the untimely death of former chief minister. Former chief minister Mahmood Khan told The News that he had proposed Justice (R) Arshad Hussain Shah for the caretaker chief minister's position.

Justice (R) Arshad Hussain belongs to Abbottabad and is the brother of Secretary Forests Nazar Hussain Shah. One of his brothers is holding a senior position in the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa police. Justice Arshad Hussain previously served as chief justice of Gilgit-Baltistan from 2019-2022. He was part of the second caretaker cabinet headed by the late Mohammad Azam Khan.



Governor Ghulam Ali administered oath to caretaker Chief Minister Arshad Hussain. Besides many other pressing challenges that Khyber Pakhtunkhwa has been facing, the biggest problem that the newly-appointed chief minister will have to deal with is financial difficulties of the province.

The government has not been able to pay salaries to doctors and other employees of the public sector hospitals. He will need to play a key role in holding negotiations with the federal government to secure the release of Rs280 billion that the Centre has to pay in terms of net hydel profit and National Finance Commission Award to KP.

Meanwhile, PTI leader Zahir Khan Toru said that the party would not accept the new chief minister whose appointment was decided by the former CM and opposition leader. Toru said that they would move the court if the new chief minister's appointment was done by Khan and Durrani. He further stressed that the matter should be solved constitutionally, saying the governor should not apply his formulas.

"The new CM chosen by Mahmood Khan, Ghulam Ali and Akram Khan Durrani will be a political one," he said, adding that a level-playing field was not expected from the chosen chief executive. Meanwhile, President of Awami National Party, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Aimal Wali Khan, said where the Pakhtun and Muslim traditions had gone as only after a few hours of KP CM's death, the JUIF governor had called a meeting to elect a new chief minister.

Aamil Wali Khan said that this meeting was not acceptable to any stakeholder and noted that there would be no level playing field in the election. "If we remain silent, no one will forget this silence." He said that as per the Pakhtun traditions, there should be mourning for three days and decision regarding the new CM should be taken by taking all the stakeholders into confidence.

He said the KP governor had no authority to write a letter to the former chief minister and former opposition leader of the assembly for the selection of a new caretaker chief minister. The governor should have written a letter to the president of Pakistan on the constitutional crisis, he said. The ANP leader said the governor had exceeded the constitutional powers, therefore, the ANP would also go to the court after consultation with the Tehreek-e-Insaf legal team.

# The stock market, and banks show stunning growth in 2023

*On Oct 13, the Pakistan Stock Exchange's KSE-100 benchmark index set a new record by exceeding the 56K level for the first time. The 100-index mounted to 56,176 points on Oct 13, 2023, at 11 am amid continued buying by investors*

The stock market and Pakistani banks have demonstrated robust growth in recent months because of different factors, including the resumption of the IMF loan and the crackdown against hoarding and smuggling.

On Oct 13, the Pakistan Stock Exchange's KSE-100 benchmark index set a new record by exceeding the 56K level for the first time. The 100-index mounted to 56,176 points on Oct 13, 2023, at 11 am amid continued buying by investors. The stock market is touching a new high level every week amid positive developments, including the ongoing talks with the International Monetary Fund. The success of the talks will lead to further disbursement of \$700 million by the IMF.

Meanwhile, in the first nine months of the current calendar year, leading Pakistani banks have collectively announced a substantial profit of 450 billion rupees. This pre-tax profit, earned from January to September 2023, translates to \$1.60 billion when considering the October 27 exchange rate of Rs 280 in the inter-bank trading. Contrary to the impressive banking sector profit, there is no apparent indication of an economic crisis in the country, although this narrative is disconnected from the actual ground realities. The increased profitability is attributed to the banks raising their various service charges.

Furthermore, the State Bank of Pakistan (SBP) has increased its discount rate to 22 percent in 2023, contributing significantly to the banks' substantial profits derived from lending to the government, private sector, and individuals. The surge in online financial transactions since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic has played a pivotal role in the remarkable growth of the banking sector's profits. Banks typically impose a two to three percent additional charge over the SBP's policy rate for private sector loans. However, for individual borrowers, the banks levy eight to 10 percent above the central bank's discount rate, citing various justifications.

During the January to September period of 2023, Meezan Bank Limited achieved a record pre-tax profit of 115.92 billion rupees, with a post-tax profit of 58.90 billion rupees. Meezan Bank Limited, as the first and largest Islamic bank in Pakistan, has demonstrated notable financial performance. The MCB ranks as the second-largest profit-oriented commercial bank in Pakistan, securing a profit of 96.90 billion rupees in the first nine months of this calendar year, with a post-tax profit of 48.34 billion rupees. Habib Bank Limited claimed the third position in profit-making for 2023, earning 83.50 billion rupees in profit before tax payments during the same period.



United Bank Limited and National Bank of Pakistan secured the fourth and fifth positions, reporting profits of 81.11 billion rupees and 72.36 billion pre-tax payment profits, respectively, from January to September 2023. Allied Bank holds the sixth position, with a profit before tax of 58.45 billion rupees and a post-tax profit of 29.03 billion during the review period. Bank Al-Habib closely follows Allied Bank, earning a profit before tax of 53.42 billion rupees and a post-tax profit of 29.28 billion rupees. Notably, Standard Chartered Bank of Pakistan and Faysal Bank reported identical profits before tax for the year. SCBP earned 24.86 billion rupees, while Faysal Bank reported 24.11 billion rupees before tax. Habib Metropolitan Bank generated a profit of 37.83 billion rupees before tax, with a net profit of 19.76 billion rupees after tax payments.

## SBP's mid-year review 2023

Earlier, the first half of CY23 witnessed further build-up in macroeconomic stress that had started to emerge in CY22. Large Scale Manufacturing (LSM) Index sharply declined and the Business Confidence Index (BCI) remained downbeat. In this backdrop, the banking sector managed to expand its asset base by 14.0 percent during the period under review which was, however, largely augmented by investments as advances recorded a muted growth. Private sector advances contracted while the public sector availed additional financing mainly for commodity finance operations.

On the funding side, deposit mobilization witnessed a revival during H1CY23, however, banks' reliance on borrowings remained noticeable due to stronger expansion in asset base. Asset quality indicators improved due to better provision coverage for loan losses as gross NPLs witnessed a contained increase during H1CY23. Profitability indicators witnessed



significant improvement mainly on the back of growth in net interest income as an increase in interest rates gradually translated into the pricing of earnings assets during the review period. The higher earnings helped to enhance loan loss provisioning and improve the Capital Adequacy Ratio (CAR) of the banking sector to 17.8 percent by the end of June 2023 (17.0 percent in Dec-2022). With further improvement in solvency indicators, the banking sector, in different scenarios of stress testing exercise, shows sufficient resilience to withstand severe shocks to key risk factors and economic conditions.

Financial markets in general showed relatively lower volatility during H1CY23, however, the FX market on average showed increased stress despite improvement in current account balances. In the face of building inflationary pressures and an increase in the policy rate, financial conditions tightened further and the equity market observed lackluster performance during the period under review. The 12th wave of the Systemic Risk Survey<sup>1</sup> conducted in July 2023 highlights that the key potential risks for the financial system as identified by independent participants include FX risk, increasing domestic inflation, and political uncertainty. The respondents, however, expressed confidence in the stability of the financial system and the ability of the regulators.

The economic and financial conditions, which began to deteriorate in CY22, became further challenging during H1CY23. In the wake of high and persistent inflation, the policy rate was increased by 600 basis points to 22.0 percent during the first half of CY23. Large Scale Manufacturing (LSM) Index continued to exhibit dismal performance and Business Confidence Index (BCI) remained below its threshold level of 50. Also, PKR depreciated by 20.8 percent against the US dollar during H1CY23. Particularly, the economic policy uncertainty index—though receded—still remained at an elevated level.

In this backdrop of a stressed macroeconomic environment, the banking sector performed reasonably well in terms of solvency, earnings, and management of underlying risks. The asset base grew by 14.0 percent during H1CY23 (16.0 percent growth in H1CY22) to reach PKR 40,796.7 billion. This growth was mainly contributed by investments which constitute 52.7 percent of asset base, while growth in advances remained subdued. On the funding side, banks' deposits increased by 14.2 percent during H1CY23 (9.3 percent in H1CY22) to PKR 26.8 trillion by the end of June 2023. The banking sector also relied significantly on borrowings in order to finance the expansion of the asset base and meet the growing budgetary needs of the government. The share of assets financed from borrowings marginally increased to 22.2 percent by the end of June 2023 from 21.9 percent at the end of December 2022. As a result of the strong inflow of deposits and weak momentum of advances, Advances to Deposits Ratio (ADR) declined to 45.0 percent from 50.4 percent in Dec-2022.

Like the overall sector, Islamic Banking Institutions (IBIs) observed a noticeable expansion of 12.3 percent in the asset base during H1CY23. This growth was mainly driven by investments followed by financing. The share of IBIs in the total assets of the banking sector slightly improved to 19.9 percent by the end of June 2023 compared to 19.5 percent in Jun 2022. The overall advances

(domestic and overseas) of the banking sector increased by 2.5 percent during H1CY23 to PKR 12,965.0 billion. Domestic advances increased by 2.3 percent while overseas advances increased by 6.3 percent to reach 5.9 percent of overall advances during H1CY23. There was a marked slowdown in domestic private sector advances (PSA) during H1CY23 which contracted by 7.0 percent against 6.8 percent growth in the corresponding period last year. It is noteworthy that after June 2022, financing continued to show weaker momentum in the wake of stressed macro-financial conditions, ebbing economic activity and production (Figure 3), low business confidence, and banks' increased risk aversion due to higher anticipated credit risk and economic policy uncertainty.

Segment-wise details of private sector advances reveal that almost all segments retired loans during H1CY23. The corporate segment – holding 75 percent of domestic private sector advances – made the highest retirement of PKR 534.6 billion. This substantial loan retirement was mainly driven by low demand for working capital loans and trade financing. Similarly, small and medium enterprises (SMEs) which hold 3.5 percent of banks' domestic loan portfolio also made a net retirement of PKR 94.3 billion during H1CY23 – mainly in working capital loans. It is noteworthy that SMEs usually retire their loans in the first half of a calendar year as the previous 5 years' average retirement turns out PKR 57.0 billion.



Nonetheless, during the reviewed period, significantly higher retirement of advances indicates that in the face of rising interest rates and a slowdown in economic activity, the supply and demand of SME credit was affected: banks adopted a risk-averse strategy whereas the SMEs reduced their reliance on bank credit. The consumer finance segment, which constitutes 6.9 percent of banks' domestic loan portfolio, posted a net retirement of PKR 47.4 billion during the period under review. Auto financing observed a retirement of PKR 44.9 billion, driven by high interest rates and the lag impact of macroprudential measures that were taken during CY21. Importantly, mortgage loans, constituting 25.2 percent of total consumer loans, also gradually lost momentum, as the concessional finance scheme for low-income groups that particularly augmented the growth of mortgage finance in recent quarters was suspended in June 2022.

By Javed Mahmood

# Poverty alleviation through targeted interventions

*The IGG has created opportunities in 17 trades, particularly in the livestock sector, the key source of the village economy*

By Mian Aamir

**S**louching against a neatly painted wall in a carpeted room, Mohammad Younas narrated his struggle to become an entrepreneur from a mere jobless person like many others in this remote village of Balochistan's Pishin district.

His story is one of good things happening in an otherwise violent and poverty-stricken mineral-rich province.

Younas, in his late 20s, is one of the thousands of beneficiaries of a flagship poverty alleviation project by the Balochistan Rural Support Program (BRSP), targeting 10 districts across the province.

Launched in 2017, the Rs 5 billion Balochistan Rural Development and Community Empowerment Program (BRACE), which aimed at alleviating poverty concluded in June 2023, benefitting – directly and indirectly – 1.9 million population in Zhob, Loralai, Duki, Pishin, Killa Abdullah, Chaman, Washuk, Khuzdar, Jhal Magsi and Kech/Turbat over the past six years.

A muddling two-hour journey, mainly on a battered stony road ended at Malakan village encircled by straggling apple and grapes orchards.

Inside a large compound located at the end of a dust-bowed street, a group of children were playing on a tuft of neatly trimmed grass. Whereas, members of the local village committee were engaged in a weekly meeting, enjoying qehwa.

“Until two years ago, I was a mere jobless person but now I own a shop, and make a good living,” Younas, who received a Rs 50,000 grant under BRSP's Income Generating Grant (IGG) program in 2021. Alleviating poverty is the key goal of the program.

He began with a small makeshift system using a few tables in an outer room of his house and gradually upgraded that into a proper shop to sell all kinds of essential stuff.

The IGG has created opportunities in 17



trades, particularly in the livestock sector, the key source of the village economy.

Younas says he earns between Rs 20,000 and Rs 25,000 per month.

The amount for a resident of Karachi, Lahore, or even Quetta may sound small, but for a dweller of this far-flung and impoverished village, it is indeed an achievement.

Sajida Tareen had another success story to share. Of course with a female member of our group because of the local culture.

Hailing from adjoining Tora Shah village and married at the age of 18, Sajida faced the daunting challenge of making ends meet while her husband struggled to provide meager daily wages. However, even in the face of adversity, she, a mother of eight children, clung to hope, believing in the promise of a better tomorrow.

In 2020, with a grant amounting to Rs 48,000, Sajida started a small grocery business in her house, laying the foundation for her enterprise.

Within three years, she expanded her business, now valued at nearly Rs. 140,000,

earning a monthly income ranging from Rs. 10,000 to Rs 12,000.

## Targeted intervention

According to Tahir Rasheed, the head of BRSP, the BRACE project is one of the “targeted interventions” launched by his organization with the help of the European Union to assist the Balochistan government in reducing the grinding impacts of poverty across the province.

This initiative has been designed to establish a conducive policy environment for and set requisite preconditions for a sector-wide approach towards community-led development. It aims to provide a platform to the provincial government and its development partners for evolving a consensual contextualized and harmonized approach to community-led development and local governance.

The six-year program of is expected to benefit 1.9 million citizens (300,000 households) in 249 Union Councils of 10 target districts.

Aside from income-generating grants and vocational training programs, BRACE also



includes a Community Investment Fund (CIF) that amounts to Rs 2 million solely handled by the local community. Under this revolving fund, the concerned village organization or local support organization provides soft loans to the villagers to buy livestock or start small businesses to make a living.

Abdul Hayee, a beneficiary of this program, had bought two goats in 2019, and gradually not only managed to buy a cow but also set up a milk-selling point at his home.

Another components of BRACE include, Community Physical Infrastructure (CPI) -under which pavement of streets, water supply and agriculture related assistance is provided-, Community Mobilization, and Adult Literacy and Numeracy Skills, which is solely for women.

Under the community mobilization program, Rasheed said, the BRSP has established an inclusive, and representative system of community mobilization through formation of 29,248 community institutions, including community organizations, village organizations, village and local support organizations to engage with local communities, and authorities.

The organization has rehabilitated, expanded and maintained 204 climate-resilient community physical infrastructure schemes mainly drinking water supply schemes,



which are prioritized and managed by community institutions themselves.

To enhance the mobility of 4,943 persons with disabilities, BRACE enabled them to play a more active and productive role in society through the provision of 5,697 assistive devices.

The recipients of its technical education and vocational training component have shown promising results, with over 70%

employed or self-employed, earning between Rs. 6,000 and Rs. 15,000 monthly.

The BRSP's poverty graduation survey indicated a 20% average income rise, transitioning 48% of poor households to a higher poverty band within the community investment fund component. In the IGG segment, 30% of poor households progressed out of poverty, achieving higher scores and a 17% income growth.



# Navigating Hardship: Pakistan's Economic Crossroads



By Sara Danial

Pakistan, a nation known for its rich cultural heritage and diverse landscapes, is currently grappling with a severe cost of living crisis, exacerbated by a dwindling economy. This multifaceted issue is affecting citizens across socio-economic strata, leading to increased poverty, unemployment, and a palpable sense of economic uncertainty. Against the backdrop of these challenges, the resilience and resourcefulness of the Pakistani people stand out as a beacon of hope. In the face of adversity, communities are coming together to navigate these turbulent times, highlighting the inherent strength within the nation. Delving into the various factors contributing to Pakistan's cost of living crisis, one finds that the state of the economy is bizarre. Let's explore the potential pathways for recovery and sustainable growth.

## Understanding the Cost-of-Living Crisis

The cost-of-living crisis in Pakistan is a complex web of interconnected issues, ranging from inflation and unemployment to an inadequate social safety net. One of the primary challenges is the persistent inflationary pressure that has been eroding

the purchasing power of the average Pakistani. Essential commodities, including food items and energy, have seen substantial price hikes, leaving citizens struggling to make ends meet.

The depreciating rupee also stands out as a critical factor. The country has been grappling with a persistently lowering rupee, significantly affecting the shortages and soaring prices of energy. The fluctuating prices, particularly in the oil and gas sector, have not only strained the government's budget but have also adversely impacted businesses and households. They contribute to elevated production expenses for industries, hindering their competitiveness in the global market. Furthermore, the unreliability of the energy supply hampers productivity, acting as a deterrent for potential investors and exacerbating the economic downturn.

The depreciation also affects the country's external debt burden, as repayments become more substantial in terms of local currency. These downward spiral places strain on the overall fiscal health of the nation, limiting the government's capacity to invest in critical sectors and address broader economic challenges. The interplay

of energy prices and currency depreciation creates a formidable economic landscape, necessitating comprehensive reforms and strategic interventions to stabilize and revive Pakistan's economy.

Additionally, the issue of unemployment looms large over the country. The youth bulge, coupled with a limited job market, has led to high rates of unemployment, particularly among the educated youth. This not only contributes to financial instability at the individual level but also hampers overall economic growth.

## Dwindling Economy

The economic challenges facing Pakistan are deeply rooted and have been exacerbated by both internal and external factors. High levels of public debt, trade imbalances, and political instability have played significant roles in the economic downturn.

**Public Debt:** Pakistan's economy has been burdened by a considerable amount of public debt, both domestic and foreign. Servicing this debt diverts a substantial portion of the government's budget, limiting its capacity to invest in social development and economic stimulus programs.



**Trade Imbalances:** Persistent trade imbalances, with imports consistently surpassing exports, have led to a drain on foreign exchange reserves. The dependence on imports for essential goods and energy resources has further strained the country's economic stability.

**Political Instability:** Periods of political instability and governance challenges have hindered the implementation of consistent and effective economic policies. This has led to a lack of investor confidence and foreign direct investment, impeding economic growth.

## The Way Forward

Addressing Pakistan's cost of living crisis and revitalizing the economy requires a comprehensive and coordinated approach. Here are key areas that need attention for a sustainable recovery:

### Economic Reforms:

**Fiscal Policy:** Implementing prudent fiscal policies that focus on reducing the fiscal deficit, rationalizing subsidies, and enhancing tax collection efficiency is crucial. This will create fiscal space for social development and poverty alleviation programs.

**Monetary Policy:** A carefully calibrated monetary policy can help control inflation and stabilize the currency. The central bank must strike a balance between supporting economic growth and ensuring price stability.

### Investment in Human Capital:

**Education and Skills Development:** Investing in education and skills development is imperative to empower the workforce and make them more competitive in the global market. A skilled and educated workforce is vital for attracting investments and fostering innovation.

**Social Safety Nets:** Strengthening social safety nets is essential to protect vulnerable segments of the population from the adverse effects of economic shocks. Targeted cash transfer programs and subsidized healthcare can mitigate the impact of rising living costs.

### Trade and Export Promotion:

**Diversification of Exports:** Encouraging the diversification of export products and markets can reduce dependency on a limited set of commodities and trading partners. This requires strategic planning and support for industries with export potential.

**Trade Facilitation:** Improving trade facilitation measures, reducing bureaucratic hurdles, and enhancing the ease of doing business can attract foreign investment and boost export-oriented industries.

### Infrastructure Development:

**Energy Sector Reforms:** Addressing the energy crisis through sustainable reforms can enhance industrial productivity and reduce production costs. Investments in renewable energy sources can contribute to long-term energy security.



**Transportation and Logistics:** Efficient transportation and logistics infrastructure are critical for the smooth flow of goods and services. Developing and modernizing transportation networks can reduce transaction costs and boost economic activity.

### Good Governance:

**Anti-corruption Measures:** Implementing effective anti-corruption measures is essential to restore public trust in institutions. Transparent and accountable governance is fundamental for attracting both domestic and foreign investments.

**Political Stability:** Fostering political stabil-

ity through effective governance and consensus-building can create an environment conducive to economic growth. Political leaders must prioritize national interests over partisan considerations.

Pakistan's cost of living crisis and economic challenges require urgent attention and a collective effort from government institutions, policymakers, and the private sector. A comprehensive strategy that addresses fiscal and monetary issues, invests in human capital, promotes trade and exports, develops infrastructure, and ensures good governance is crucial for navigating through these turbulent times.

As Pakistan endeavors to overcome its economic challenges, there is an opportunity to not only stabilize the economy but also to lay the foundation for sustainable and inclusive growth. As the country works towards revitalizing its economy and alleviating the cost-of-living burden on its

citizens, it is crucial for all stakeholders to collaborate in a unified effort. By implementing comprehensive reforms, investing in human capital, promoting trade and exports, and ensuring good governance, Pakistan can chart a course towards economic stability and prosperity. The road ahead may be challenging, but with a concerted commitment to positive change and inclusive development, Pakistan has the potential to emerge stronger and more resilient than ever before. The journey towards economic recovery is a collective endeavor, and the people of Pakistan, with their unwavering spirit, are at the heart of this transformative process.

# Is the PSX rally sustainable?

*A lot of rebuilding and work is needed in Pakistan to regain trust*

By AAH Soomro

There have been silver linings in Pakistan's economic outlook since the start of the fiscal year. The much-needed impetus started with finally sealing a Standby Agreement with the International Monetary Fund (IMF), followed by a caretaker setup. Additionally, sharp improvements in PKR and fixed-income bond yields have depicted signs of optimism. But one much-touted indicator of stock market performance has been the real talk of the town. The KSE-100 conveniently surpassed its all-time peak of ~52,000. But does that mean the boat has already sailed?

Let's understand. The KSE-100 Index level is a total return index. Therefore, any increase in the value is a function of an increase in share price and dividends announced. While dividends are immediately deducted from the share price, the index value remains elevated. Also, since the peak in 2017, many companies and industries have demonstrated much higher profitability in rupee terms, thus the current values still reflect undervalued assets.

Assuming that all the KSE-100 companies earned \$1 only, that asset was trading at \$12 in 2017, thereby having a Price to Earning (P/E) ratio of 12x. That was a sign of peak optimism and euphoria right after Pakistan joined the jinxed MSCI Emerging Market status. Beware yourself of such peak optimism. In contrast, as per various estimates, the current P/E valuation metric of the same KSE-100 is 3.7-8x, thereby implying significant catch-up returns. Pakistan only needs to catch up to the old Pakistan to deliver abnormal returns.

The recent market uptrend is a function of clarity that Pakistan isn't defaulting, is in an IMF programme, has no choice but to take structural reforms, moderate oil prices, gradual resumption of imports and dividend repayments, strict fiscal prudence, tight monetary policy, falling fixed-income yields, and clarity over election dates. Smart money is accumulating shares trading at a fraction of the replacement and asset values, with several top companies

buying back their own shares using corporate treasury. Blood was already on the streets, but someone took the bet.

## Read PSX touches new heights as rupee continues downward trend

Nevertheless, at a 21% interest rate, many conservative and risk-averse investors would shy away from equity markets that need to offer more than the risk-free 21-22% rate to compensate for higher volatility in returns. Investors who have already lost their shirts in the stock market would pray to break even or not venture until their views are substantially altered. Empirically, it takes a decade to erase the memories of such sharp 40-50% declines in equity markets from people's investment avenues.

Critical before venturing into the equity markets today is to know your own self. Whether I can endure such downside to my wealth and what time horizon can I invest for are two critical parameters. Tenets of diversification, quality companies, and avoiding unnecessary trading remain central to strong equity market returns. In the near future, interest rate cuts, a successful IMF review, acceptable elections to be followed by a medium-term IMF programme are likely re-rating events that can take the KSE-100 Index to Pakistan's long-term P/E of 5-6x, still offering a staggering upside from current levels.

It will be difficult to convince investors to enter the market today until they see people around them making money from the stock market, their bank deposits offering inflationary 14-16%, PKR remaining stable against the USD, and property market performance being much lesser than PSX broader returns. Markets are forward-looking and move on sentiments. If Pakistan continues on the path of enhancing energy security, enhancing tax revenues, privatising loss-making SOEs, and remains steadfast in reducing debt, foreigners will



eventually lead Pakistan's re-rating story provided the geopolitical environment remains conducive.

The next government needs to incentivise companies listed on PSX by offering lower tax rates and rewarding investments in documented wealth-generating sectors instead of providing cherries to people investing in real estate plots as a means to park their black money. Already, global giants such as Shell are bidding farewell to Pakistan's operations, and many are delisting – Pak Suzuki – in the absence of tangible benefits of being on PSX. While the regulator has done a commendable job to increase the level playing field for brokers, making it easy to onboard investors digitally and protect their assets, the onus, once again, is on macroeconomic managers.

In developed economies, fixed income and real estate returns are hardly nominal enough to cover long-term inflationary trends. Thus, their pension pots are invested in equity markets hiring specialised asset managers or specialised exposure through Exchange Traded Funds (ETF). A lot of rebuilding and work is needed in Pakistan to regain trust. We broke that trust with a market crash in 2008, 2018-9, and 2022-3; let's not hurt investor sentiments again – they are counting on policymakers again. The investor is duty-bound to know the company they invest in and avoid "tips" and "satta" stocks promulgated by speculators. Respect Mr Market, and he will pay you back.

Courtesy Tribune



# Pakistan suffering Rs8 trillion in tax loss each year due to illicit trade

*Pakistan Business Council says illegal trade amounts to \$68 billion or 20% of the formal economy*



Amid dire economic circumstances, Pakistan is also losing Rs8 trillion each year in tax loss due to rampant illicit trade which is further exacerbating the country's worrisome financial indicators.

Pakistan has "one of the highest" illegal trade in Asia, amounting to \$68 billion or 20% of the formal economy which also equals 85% of the tax revenue target for FY 24, the Pakistan Business Council (PBC) said in a statement.

The body has further warned that not only illicit trade is linked with crime but is in fact extensively detrimental to the country's economy.

The forum warned that the existing illegal trade also has an adverse effect on the country's economy and is also linked with criminal activities.

"Illicit trade undermines the formal sector's growth and exploits labour," the PBC said, adding that not only such activities are detrimental to the environment but also the production and trading of products that are unsafe and substandard.

Blaming high taxes and ineffective enforce-

ment as the reasons behind unrestricted illicit trade, the forum said the phenomenon is further allowed to exist due to a "poorly documented cash-based economy".

The PBC also criticised the fitful measures taken against illegal trade terming them as "unsustainable".

Calling for "enduring" fundamental reforms, the body provided a comprehensive framework to curb illicit trade and reduce its adverse impacts on the economy.

As per the PBC, the government needs to;

Develop a strong political consensus to fight informality in the economy.

Address the misuse of the Afghan transit trade.

Control and eliminate the flow of foreign currency funding smuggling and under-invoicing.

Limit the use of cash to ensure transparency in transactions.

Bring all points of sale through which illicit goods are sold into the tax base.

It is pertinent to mention that Pakistan is facing a severe financial crunch due to depleting foreign reserves and devaluing local currency.

The caretaker government had launched a nationwide crackdown to curb illegal smuggling and hoarding of dollars and other foreign currencies.

Despite, the rupee making notable gains against the greenback, the country still is not out of the deep waters as its Current Account Deficit (CAD) stands at a whopping \$6.5 billion.

After the signing of the IMF agreement under the \$3 billion Stand-by Arrangement (SBA) programme, the forex reserves saw an improvement in July 2023, but in the last two months, the pace of external loans and grants has slowed down.

Authorities expect that completion of the first review of the IMF programme would push up the dollar inflows from multilateral and bilateral creditors.

Courtesy The News International

# Markhor Population on the rise in Pakistan

By Aamir Latif/Anadolu

A sustainable trophy hunting program and greater community involvement have helped Pakistan maintain a years-long trend of an increase in the population of its national animal, the markhor, according to government and international conservation officials.

Once believed to be on the brink of extinction, markhor numbers have gradually increased, doubling in a couple of decades, with a particular jump since 2014. This is now the 10th straight year that numbers of the long-horned wild goats have grown, marking a milestone in local conservation efforts.

"The population of the markhor has been increasing with an annual ratio of 2% since 2014," Saeed Abbas, an official with the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) in Pakistan, told Anadolu. Around the world, however, their numbers are declining, mainly due to a lack of adequate conservation programs, he added. Another potential downside, he said, is that because of the continued rise in Pakistan's markhor population, the animal's global status has been downgraded from "endangered" to "near-threatened."

The IUCN classified the markhor as an endangered species in 1994 due to overhunting for its meat and horns, and its population was estimated to be less than 2,500 at that time. The number of mature markhors in Pakistan surpassed 2,500 in 2014, which prompted the conservation agency to downgrade the threat level in line with international wildlife standards, said Abbas.

Pakistan is famous for the markhor, which is distinguished by its nimble and sure-footed nature, as well as its long winter coat and massive spiral horns, which can grow to more than 1.5 meters (5 feet) in length for males. They inhabit the highest mountains and can be found in the northwestern Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP) province's Chitral, Kohistan, and Kalam regions, as well as the northern Gilgit-Baltistan region, southwestern Balochistan province and parts of Pakistan-administered Kashmir.

"An annual rise in population between 1.5% and 2% is viewed as a healthy increase in case of threatened animals like markhor," Abbas explained, adding that harsh conditions, illegal hunting, poaching, and predators altogether make it difficult for the wild goat to survive.

The markhor's current estimated population is between 3,500 and 5,000, a majority of them in KP, followed by Gilgit-Baltistan and Balochistan, he said. Locally, the goats are categorized as Astor, Kashmiri, Suleiman, and Chiltan markhors, whereas globally, Astor and Kashmiri markhors are classified as flare-horned.

Trophy hunting: Bane or boon?

The Gilgit-Baltistan government, earlier this week, granted a permit to hunt an Astor markhor for a record \$186,000, one

of the highest permits in the world to kill an animal. The previous record for a markhor hunting license in Pakistan was \$160,000 in 2021. The government uses the money to support local communities with initiatives such as building schools, mosques, health centers and even providing scholarships to students. About 80% of the amount generated through the hunting license program, launched in early 2000, is spent on local communities, while the remainder goes to the national exchequer.

The incentives encourage local communities to avoid killing markhors and instead pushes them to care for the animals, according to Syed Altaf Shah, an official of the KP Wildlife Department.

"Trophy hunting has reduced poaching and hunting of markhor to a great extent as the local communities themselves started protecting the animal after it became a source of income," Shah told Anadolu.

Hunting female or young markhor is prohibited.

According to local laws, any hunter who kills a female or a young markhor faces a six-year prison sentence, a fine of up to 150,000 Pakistani rupees (\$850), or both, said Shah.

The law, however, is rarely implemented.

Wildlife lovers view trophy hunting as a controversial practice as it involves hunting rare animals for sport and displaying parts as trophies.

Abbas, however, feels that the program has helped protect rare animals, including the markhor, from illegal hunting and poaching.

## Salary rift triggers numbers row

A salary dispute between the government and local conservators sparked a controversy over Pakistan's markhor population. In the 2021-22, locals hired as conservators to protect the wild goat claimed that the number of markhors had actually decreased despite the ban on hunting and other conservation efforts.

The claim prompted the government to involve the IUCN and other wildlife organizations to conduct a new survey to verify the assertion.

"We carried out a fresh survey to ascertain the veracity of the claim. The latest findings and headcounts, however, suggested that the population of the animal has actually increased," said Abbas, who was a member of the survey team. In 2017, according to a wildlife official who spoke on condition of anonymity, the government had stopped paying salaries to scores of members of village conservation committees.

That prompted the controversy as those people wanted to "settle the score," the official contended.



# Students' Union revival: Still a distant possibility?

By Zahiruddin

The decision to resurrect the students' union at Quaid-e-Azam University Islamabad has ignited hope among students nationwide for the resurgence of vibrant breeding grounds of democracy within universities and colleges, where democratically elected student leaders resolved issues during their early stages. During a meeting of the university's syndicate, Chief Justice of the Supreme Court of Pakistan, Justice Qazi Faiz Isa, who serves as an ex-officio member, agreed in principle to reinstate the students' union at the university. A committee was formed to determine the election procedures and other related matters. The Chief Justice of SCP fully endorsed the decision and aimed to model it after Oxford University's students' union, which produced numerous world-class leaders. A committee was established to examine past practices and procedures and to explore contemporary best practices in leading world universities concerning students' unions and their structures and functions.

The decision to reinstate the students' union in the federal capital's public sector university has been widely applauded by students and civil society, as it may pave the way for the revival of democratic institutions in all universities and colleges throughout the country. These unions were banned by a military dictator in 1984 to maintain his rule, which included suppressing democratic institutions and political parties. Although Benazir Bhutto came to power in 1988 as a champion of democracy and repealed General Zia's Martial Law Order through an Act of Parliament in 1989, the ban remained in effect. In 1993, the Supreme Court of Pakistan addressed the matter of students' unions in universities and colleges nationwide and declared them essential for resolving student issues. This decision was based on Article 16 (freedom of assembly) and Article 17 (freedom of association) of the constitution, but it remained largely ignored until 1999 when another military dictator took control. In 2017, a parliamentary body attempted to address the issue of students' unions at the national level, but despite recommendations for their modernized restoration, nothing substantial materialized. The



government of PPP's Murad Ali Shah took a significant step by passing the Sindh Students' Unions Act in 2019, requiring universities and colleges to hold union elections to create a safe and inclusive campus environment. Unfortunately, this provincial legislation suffered the same fate as previous attempts since the ban in 1984.

Another nationwide attempt was made by students and civil society in 2022 when major and smaller cities and towns echoed with demands for the revival of students' unions. It was on the 9th of February, the same day in 1984 when the military dictator, General Zia-ul-Haq, banned students' unions across the country. The resounding voice of students from Karachi to Khyber prompted the then Prime Minister Imran Khan to pledge his support for revival. However, his ousting through a vote of no confidence prevented him from fulfilling his promise or taking a U-turn.

Given the history of unsuccessful attempts to revive students' unions in the past, it is challenging to be optimistic about the recent decision of Quaid-e-Azam University's syndicate and its potential impact on the rest of the country. The lack of commitment from political parties appears to be the main obstacle, despite their full awareness of the benefits of democratically elected student unions within educational institutions. Opposition leaders from mainstream political parties have repeatedly expressed their intent to reinstate them once in power.

No political party opposes the revival of students' unions, as they recognize the gravity of the situation that emerged after the ban was imposed four decades ago. They experienced the vacuum in the country's political landscape following the eradication of student unions, as these unions had generated statesmen with the capabilities and experience to govern the state in practical life. Before 1984, incidents of sexual harassment of female students and teachers by instructors, administrators, clerical staff, and fellow students were unheard of. The elected student representatives with statutory authority acted as protectors of student rights.

The prospect of reviving students' unions in Pakistan's educational institutions is a significant step towards rekindling the spirit of democracy, fostering leadership, and ensuring the protection of student rights. The decision taken by Quaid-e-Azam University's syndicate is a beacon of hope, but history has shown that this path is fraught with challenges. To ensure the success of this endeavour, it is essential for political parties to display a genuine commitment to this cause. The legacy of vibrant students' unions, which once produced leaders of great stature, should not remain consigned to the past. As the nation watches with bated breath, the revival of these unions may well usher in a new era of empowerment, progress, and a vibrant democratic future for Pakistan's youth.

# Conceptualizing the Life of Women in Ayub Goth



By Jannat Saeed

Nestled within the bustling heart of Karachi University's expansive campus lies Ayub Goth, a small community with a rich tapestry of cultures. Home to a Christian majority, it also embraces Muslim and Hindu families, symbolizing the harmonious coexistence of diverse communities. While at a glance, Ayub Goth may seem fraught with innumerable challenges, delving deeper reveals a captivating story of resilience and a profound sense of community that has endured for generations.

Gulshan-e-Iqbal, the vast neighborhood in which Ayub Goth is located, stretches across 29 square kilometers, yet it's a patchwork of disparities when it comes to essential amenities like water, electricity, and housing. In this feature, we will embark on a journey to uncover the daily life of women in the deprived corners of Ayub Goth, illuminating the hardships they face.

The sun rises over Ayub Goth, casting its warm glow and acting as an alarm clock for the daily rituals that define the lives of the resilient women of Ayub Goth. From preparing meals for their families to attend-

ing to their work, these women wear multiple hats. Unlike some other informal settlements, Ayub Goth enjoys relatively better access to electricity, a small comfort in the midst of its daily struggles. When asked about the challenges she faces in Ayub Goth, Ruqaiya's response is simple yet profound: "There are problems and only problems in this area." Ruqaiya's work as a healthcare provider involves rigorous fieldwork. Her primary responsibility is to go door-to-door, ensuring that every child in the community is safe from polio. But her contributions don't stop there; she has also been actively involved in various health campaigns, including polio vaccination drives, flu shots, and, more recently, the COVID-19 vaccination efforts, exhibiting unwavering dedication to her work.

Yet, her path is far from easy. Ruqaiya works at a semi-government health department, a position that comes with little in the way of perks or benefits, including transportation assistance. As she recounts, "I don't have a refrigerator in my house because of the hefty amount of bills." The cost of living looms large, affecting her family's ability to store food in large quantities. To cope with

this challenge, Ruqaiya has devised a daily routine. After finishing her day's work, she picks up fresh vegetables on her way home, ensuring that her family will have a meal to look forward to.

Water is essential for life as it is integral to every aspect of our lives. For the people of Ayub Goth, clean water is a far-fetched idea. Like many parts of Karachi, this area gets heavy water that is highly unsuitable, but it is harmless if consumed in small quantities or for a short duration of time. At the same time, when heavy water is consumed for a long duration, it can lead to poisoning that further paves the way to blood pressure and dizziness. This indicates that the people living in Ayub Goth are prone to diseases that are caused by the consumption of water that is not clean or safe to use. The taps remain dry for a couple of days in Ayub Goth as the supply of water from the line stops, and there is no one to hold accountable. These people can complain to some extent but are aware that no one can hear what they want to say, and there is no platform where they can convey their message effectively.

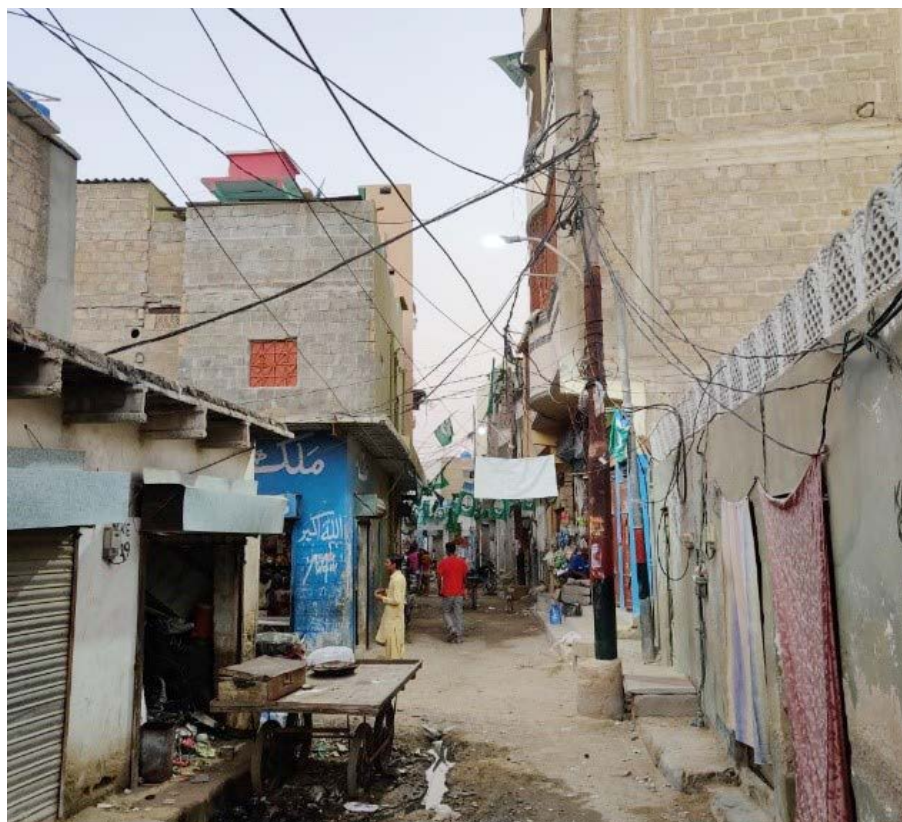


Karachi is known to be Pakistan's largest city, but thousands of people face the water shortage crisis. Some posh areas have access to clean drinking water, but with a dilapidated area like Ayub Got, the problem is it has run out of water. The scene of water flowing through the taps is a rare sight that people have stopped expecting.

"My husband takes the bottle with him and fills them from the filter of the university where he works," told Zoya, a housewife belonging to a Hindu household. Her husband leaves the house early in the morning with the bottles and brings back the filled bottles. The extra effort these people have to put in for a basic necessity is unfathomable for those who should be held accountable.

The streets of Ayub Goth are no less than a labyrinth where you completely lose your sense of direction. The narrow and broken alleys have densely populated houses, and you cannot even count the number of houses in one alley.

Janita, a Christian woman I interviewed, lived in a one-bedroom space with a Baramda attached to it. The upper portion belonged to her brother-in-law. The house was not rented, but the two brothers shared it and lived harmoniously. Most of the families in Ayub Got lived in a joint family system where one brother and his family occupied the lower portion, and the other brother and his family were settled in the upper part. The houses these women lived



in were not very spacious, and just by looking at them, one could guess that it would be difficult to manage. The houses I visited in Ayub Got were cement houses, and the walls were not painted. These houses were small, and by looking at them, it was visible that the whole area had an unplanned settlement because the houses were crammed together like a mesh.

Despite facing a myriad of challenges in the form of water scarcity, erratic electricity

supply, and overcrowded living conditions, the residents of Ayub Goth continue to persevere, generation after generation. As we explore the lives of those in Ayub Goth, we are reminded of the fundamental importance of essential services like clean water and electricity and the urgent need for sustainable solutions. In sharing their story, we honor the strength of Ayub Goth and, by extension, the countless communities around the world facing similar struggles.

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# Navigating The Digital Mind: Unraveling the Intricate Relationship Between Technology and Mental Health

In an era dominated by technological advancements, our lives are increasingly intertwined with digital devices. From the moment we wake up to the time we rest our heads at night, we are surrounded by screens, notifications, and a constant stream of information.

As technology continues to shape the way we live, work, and connect, it becomes imperative to explore its impact on an aspect of our well-being that often takes a back seat in the digital revolution: mental health.

## The Social Media Paradox

At first glance, social media platforms seem to connect us with friends, family, and the world at large. However, there's a growing body of evidence suggesting that excessive use of social media can have detrimental effects on mental health. The constant comparison to curated online lives, cyberbullying, and the pressure to maintain a flawless digital persona contribute to heightened levels of stress, anxiety, and even depression.

## Screen Time and Sleep Disruption

The ubiquity of screens also raises concerns about the quantity and quality of our sleep. Research indicates that prolonged screen time, especially before bedtime, can disrupt sleep patterns. The blue light emitted by devices can interfere with the production of melatonin, the hormone responsible for regulating sleep. As we spend more time engaging with our devices, the potential for sleep disturbances and subsequent impacts on mental health cannot be ignored.

## The Rise of Mental Health Apps

On a positive note, technology is also playing a crucial role in addressing



mental health concerns. A surge in mental health apps offers users access to therapy, meditation, and mindfulness exercises at their fingertips. These apps aim to break down barriers to mental health care, providing affordable and convenient solutions for those in need. However, questions about the effectiveness and long-term impact of these digital interventions persist.

## Virtual Reality: A New Frontier in Mental Health Treatment

Emerging technologies, such as virtual reality (VR), are opening up new possibilities in mental health treatment. VR therapy is being explored as a tool for exposure therapy, helping individuals confront and overcome phobias and post-traumatic stress disorders.

Additionally, VR environments offer a unique platform for mindfulness practices and stress reduction, showcasing the potential for technology to contribute positively to mental well-being.

## Balancing Act

As we navigate this complex relationship between technology and mental

health, finding a balance becomes crucial. It's not about demonizing technology but rather understanding how to use it mindfully. Establishing healthy digital habits, incorporating intentional screen breaks, and being aware of the impact of technology on our mental state are essential steps toward fostering a harmonious coexistence.

## Embracing a Tech-Wise Future

In steering our course through the digital landscape, it's evident that our relationship with technology is both intricate and influential. As we ponder the implications on our mental well-being, let's not view this exploration as a conclusion but as an invitation to cultivate a tech-wise approach.

The future beckons us to wield technology as a tool for empowerment, guiding us toward a harmonious coexistence where the boundless possibilities of the digital age enhance, rather than compromise, our mental equilibrium. In this ongoing journey, mindfulness becomes our compass, ensuring that the dynamic interplay between technology and mental health remains a source of enrichment rather than a challenge to be overcome.

By Romana Afsheen



# Struggling in the Shadows: Pakistan's World Cup Woes and the Path to Redemption

By Ali Abdullah

Pakistan's premature exit from the World Cup has left fans devastated. Despite high expectations fueled by recent performances (excluding the Asia Cup), the team's heavy focus on T20 Internationals left them lacking match practice for one-day matches.

Several factors contributed to this early exit, including an outdated batting strategy, subpar spinner performances, a shortage of backup options, and questionable selection decisions. Pakistan, known for its unpredictable nature, once again failed to make a mark in the World Cup.

Despite being the top-ranked ODI team before the Asia Cup, Pakistan faced serious concerns by the end of the tournament. Unfortunately, the management's decision to stick with the same group of players for the World Cup resulted in a disappointing performance.

Reflecting on the past, Pakistan made a notable appearance in the 2011 ODI World Cup semifinals but was defeated by India. The current Babar Azam-led faction missed a golden opportunity to leave a lasting impression on Indian soil.

In the World Cup opener against the Netherlands, Fakhar Zaman, who had been out of form, was benched, affecting the team's chances. Although Abdullah Shafique performed well, Imam-ul-Haq's declining performance graph harmed the team's overall performance.

Babar Azam, the captain and star batsman, also had mediocre results, falling short of the expectations set for himself. Despite four fifties in nine innings, Babar returns home uncertain about his future as a leader.

To meet the demands of the game, the top three need to adopt a more



aggressive strategy. Misbah-ul-Haq, head of the PCB technical committee, recommended adjustments to the spin department after Shadab Khan and Mohammad Nawaz's underwhelming performances in the Asia Cup.

Front-line spinners let the team down in Indian conditions, where taking wickets in the middle overs is crucial. Shadab and Nawaz managed only two wickets between them throughout the tournament. Even Usama Mir, given a chance mid-competition, couldn't perform well.

Pakistan's pace attack, once formidable with Shaheen Afridi, Naseem Shah, and Haris Rauf, faced challenges. Naseem's injury exposed weaknesses, and Rauf's T20 success didn't translate well into the 50-over format.

Hasan Ali, bowling alongside Afridi, lacked the bite needed to trouble batters consistently. Concerns about bench strength arose, especially in the absence of a top-tier pacer like Naseem, and the spin department lacked viable options.

Wasim Akram advised Rauf to undergo first-class cricket trials to become an all-format bowler. With serious concerns about bench strength, Misbah suggested practical recommendations, emphasizing the need to identify domestic talent and bridge the gap between domestic and international cricket through specialized camps.

As Pakistan prepares for a tour of Australia next month, addressing these issues becomes crucial for future success.

## 2023 Cricket World Cup: Semifinal Showdowns

After successfully navigating the initial five-week phase of the Cricket World Cup, host India, five-time champion Australia, and perennial title contenders South Africa and New Zealand have earned their spots in the semifinals.

The composition of the final four, however, defied many predictions at the tournament's commencement on October 5. The reigning champions England, holders of the World Cup in both the one-day and Twenty20 formats, found themselves in an unexpected position.

In the first match, New Zealand upset England by nine wickets, echoing the 2019 final but with a different outcome. The England team, initially struggling with six losses in their opening seven matches, rallied back with victories against Pakistan and the Netherlands, concluding with a 3-6 record and a seventh position finish, just behind Afghanistan.

Reflecting on the historical context, the narrative of Pakistan in the 1992 zone unfolded, with the team having a chance to secure a top-four finish until the very last day of the league stage but falling short in achieving the required results.

Consequently, India, riding on a nine-game winning streak, faces fourth-place New Zealand at Wankhede Stadium in Mumbai on Wednesday, maintaining their stronghold at the top of the standings. Meanwhile, Australia and South Africa, both with identical records of seven wins and two losses, will clash the next day at Kolkata's Eden Gardens. The winners from these semifinals will battle for the championship on Sunday.

India, in its pursuit of a third championship, set the standard by defeating Pakistan and Australia before dominant performances against South Africa and England. Notably, Virat Kohli's 95 in the encounter with New Zealand at Dharamsala proved crucial in overcoming a formidable threat.

Despite the setback of losing all-rounder Hardik Pandya to an ankle injury, India adapted their lineup and continued their winning streak, showcasing stellar performances with both bat and ball across nine venues.



Kohli leads the run charts with 594 runs in nine games, while captain Rohit Sharma holds the fourth spot with 503 runs, boasting the highest strike rate among openers who played in all nine league games. Four out of India's six starting batters achieved centuries throughout the tournament.

In the bowling department, Jasprit Bumrah ranks fifth with 17 wickets, while Mohammed Shami, in just five games, took 16 wickets at an impressive average of 9.56. Ravindra Jadeja, with fifteen wickets, narrowly missed the top ten.

The first playoff features the Black Caps, who face the formidable home team. Despite a run of four losses after an initial triumph over India, New Zealand secured their spot in the fifth consecutive World Cup semifinal with a victory over Sri Lanka.

Australia enters the semifinals on a seven-game winning streak, rebounding after initial defeats to South Africa and India. Spearheaded by opening batsman David Warner (499 runs in nine games) and spinner Adam Zampa (22 wickets, the most in the tournament), Australia carries strong momentum into the playoffs.

All-rounder Glenn Maxwell made a signifi-

cant impact with two remarkable innings, including the fastest World Cup century off just 40 balls in Delhi against the Netherlands and an unbeaten 201 off 128 balls against Afghanistan. This extraordinary performance provided Australia with a powerful momentum boost as they prepare for the playoffs.

South Africa, known for their high-scoring ability, holds the highest total in the competition and has achieved four of the twelve scores of 350 or higher overall. Opener Quinton de Kock stands second in the tournament scoring standings with 591 runs at a strike rate of 109.

Despite early success, South Africa faces historical challenges against Australia, having been defeated in the 2007 semifinals by seven wickets and losing to Australia in a thrilling 1999 semi final based on a higher run-rate after a tied match at Edgbaston.

Reflecting on these past encounters, batter Rassie van der Dussen expresses optimism for the current campaign, saying, "I was 10 years old in 1999, so don't remember much. In 2007, we didn't execute plans on the day. Both those years, we really had a good chance, especially in '99. I think, (in 2023) we have a good chance."

By Ali Abdullah



## World Cup: From 'ifs to 'if onlys'

Pakistan's roller-coaster campaign in the Cricket World Cup ended on a highly disappointing note on Saturday at the Eden Gardens in Kolkata where they met England in their last game. Only a highly improbable mathematical chance had kept the Pakistanis alive in the race for the semi-finals following New Zealand's comprehensive five-wicket win against Sri Lanka in Bengaluru last Thursday. That slim opportunity vanished once England won the toss and piled up 337-9 against a Pakistani attack that once again failed to live up to expectations. While Pakistan bowed out of the event, New Zealand joined hosts India, South Africa and Australia in the last-four stage of the ten-nation contest.

To be honest, and despite the hope and the last-minute near-impossible mathematical calculations, the writing was on the wall for Pakistan midway into the World Cup. There had been too many ifs and buts surrounding their title campaign following a disappointing run of four defeats in a row against old rivals India, Australia, Afghanistan and South Africa. Bouncing back with a vengeance, Pakistan did well to stay alive by beating Bangladesh and New Zealand but the two wins turned out to be a case of too little too late. From discussing the ifs and buts, Pakistan's fans were left pondering a lot of 'if onlys'. If only we had selected a better team, if only Fakhar Zaman had found his form early, if only our bowlers



had performed to their potential, if only we had not lost against Afghanistan, if only we had won the close game against South Africa, if only Friday's match between New Zealand and Sri Lanka had washed out.. The list went on. The truth of the matter is that the way Pakistan played in the tournament they didn't deserve to be in the semis. The bowling was mostly ordinary while the batting clicked in phases. Babar Azam's captaincy was below-par as were the fitness levels of most of his players. With such an equation it's unlikely for a team to win a major title like the World Cup.

With Pakistan out of the World Cup, there will be calls for a massive shakeup in the

team. The Pakistan Cricket Board will carry out a so-called 'post-mortem' of the team's dismal performance. But instead of mere cosmetic steps, the country's cricket authorities will need to take a long, hard look at what's ailing our cricket. Poor team selection, below-par coaching and distracted players, most of whom lacking the sort of fitness required in modern-day cricket, were some of the reasons behind the team's unimpressive performance in the World Cup. And for all of that the primary responsibility falls on the PCB itself. The Board failed to raise a well-oiled, well-drilled squad for the World Cup and yet again our team fell at the first hurdle.

Courtesy The News International



# Fans aren't too pleased with Ayeza Khan's 'apology' for not posting about Gaza

*Actor says her previous post about praying instead of posting was misinterpreted; fans say she's still not doing enough*

Ayeza Khan, one of the most followed Pakistani actors on Instagram, has apologised to her followers for not posting about the Gaza invasion and her previous comments about praying instead of posting. However, fans aren't too pleased with her apology because it still doesn't mention Gaza, Palestine or a condemnation of the ongoing violence.

On October 5, the actor shared a now-deleted post with an answer to why she had not been posting about the situation in Gaza. She said that while she felt the pain of the Palestinian people, she believed praying daily for them was much more effective than posting on social media.

She faced severe criticism from people who said that while praying is important, she should also use her platform to raise awareness.

Following the backlash, the Meray Paas Tum Ho actor shared a second post in which she said she would not attempt to explain or justify her previous post because her intentions were not malicious. She claimed to have failed to articulate those intentions well enough. Apologising for herself and on behalf of her team, she said that it would not happen again.

Khan said she empathises with the people's pain but feels helpless and deeply saddened. She said that her awareness may not bring an immediate resolution and asked everyone to pray alongside posting call to action efforts.

However, her statement failed to make an impact with fans — many of whom called her out for still not using her platform to raise awareness.

Many also took issue with the fact that she didn't mention Palestine or Gaza.



Her statement also had no mention of the horrific human rights violations nor the over 10,000 Palestinians who had been killed.

In this social media age, the war online is as important as anything else. With so much misinformation and hatred being spread online, the burden of sharing accurate and responsible information is often on public figures with large platforms, like Khan.

Sharing posts about Palestine is more than just a perfunctory action on social media — it's important because it helps spread the word and keep the ongoing violence in people's minds. If people with large platforms and dedicated followings post about Palestine, it helps. Prayers are important but so is using your platform to do good.

Courtesy images.dawn.com





# Olly Murs weeps on The Voice, reveals tragic loss of 'good friend'

*Olly Murs shares tears and empathy on The Voice UK amidst emotional audition*



By Charles Leroy

Olly Murs found himself overcome with emotion as one contestant's audition resonated deeply with him, during Saturday's episode of The Voice UK.

The 39-year-old singer was moved to tears when Sheridan Coldstream, 59, delivered a poignant rendition of Billie Eilish's *Listen Before I Go*, a song centered around the theme of suicide.

Unaware of the song's heavy subject matter, Olly hit his button to turn around for Sheridan, expressing his admiration for the vocal and confidence coach's performance.

It was only after his choice that Olly discovered the emotional depth of the song.

Sheridan revealed to Olly and the audience that the track was, in essence, a "suicide note."

He disclosed his prior volunteer work for a charity suicide hotline, explaining, "I got very used to working with vulnerable people so I now can't separate coaching people to sing from helping them remove their mask and be openly vulnerable."

The singer, visibly moved, shared that he hadn't heard the song

before and was caught off guard by its powerful lyrics, particularly the line "tell your friends that I love them."

Expressing his genuine emotions, Olly said, "It just hit me, and I got quite emotional actually. I just went with my feeling in my heart."

As Sheridan explained that the song was about suicide, Olly became visibly moved, stating, "And obviously, I lost er' before breaking down into tears."

Fellow judge Anne Marie rushed to comfort Olly as he tearfully revealed, "I lost a good friend to suicide a few years back."

While not explicitly naming his friend, it is widely speculated that Olly was referring to Caroline Flack, who tragically took her own life in 2020.

Expressing gratitude to Sheridan, Olly reflected on the unexpected impact of the encounter, stating, "It hit me. I think there's a lot of stuff I haven't dealt with that I need to talk about. Sheridan walked into my life, and maybe I need that."

Courtesy The News



# ROMANIAN ARMED FORCES DAY











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