

Fortnightly

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General Elections 2024

Top leadership of PTI and its allies have been
knocked out of the polls race

Israel Barbarism Continue

Finding and rescuing those trapped under the rubble
is becoming increasingly difficult in GAZA

Pakistan Economy

Consistent increases in energy tariffs have badly
undermined the business sentiment

Pakistan entering Election Mode



Politics

Embattled PTI faces 'knockout' at scrutiny stage By Iftikhar A. Khan – **Page 04**



Political Conundrum Ahead of General Polls 2024 By Zainab Imran Malik – **Page 06**

Navigating the Delay: Unraveling the Dynamics of Pakistan's Postponed Elections By Hussnain Ahmad – **Page 08**



Analysis: On the verge of political rebirth? By Malik Asad – **Page 11**

PTI staging comeback for polling day 'surprise' despite hurdles By Ansar Abbasi – **Page 12**

Political Turmoil and the 2024 Elections in Pakistan By Naqi Akbar – **Page 13**

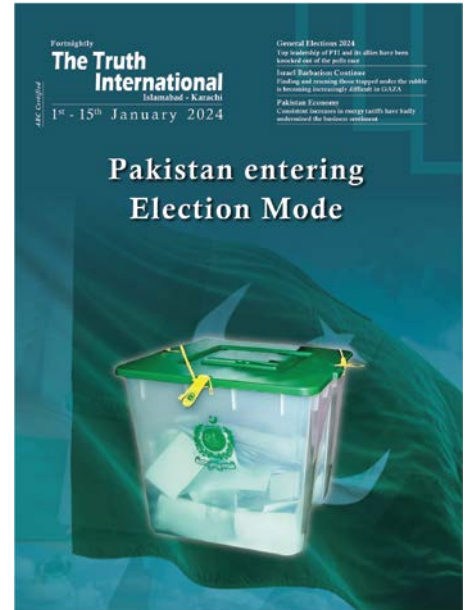
Election Year 2024: 4.2 billion voters, 83 polls, 78 countries By Khawaja Burhan Uddin – **Page 15**

Opinion

Batting without a bat By M A Niazi – **Page 17**



With fear lurking, eyes denuded of sight By Raoof Hasan – **Page 18**



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Foreign Affairs

Under the rubble: The missing in Gaza By Mohammad Abu Shahma – **Page 20**



Bombed, then stabbed: West Bank doctors recall horrors of refugee camp raid despite hurdles By Mosab Shawer – **Page 22**

Red Sea's Escalating Turmoil: The New Frontline Amidst Gaza-Israel Conflict By Nimra Atiq – **Page 23**

Cuban President Miguel Diaz-Canel Declares Israel a Terrorist State By J. Choudhry – **Page 25**

Ex-CIA Chief Analyst Paul Piller says Israel cannot defeat Hamas By M.A. Saki – **Page 27**



From Korean War to Hallyu: Lessons from South Korea's Burgeoning Economy By Amna Islam Ch – **Page 29**

Disqualification of Trump and its Impact on US Politics By Anum Akram – **Page 31**

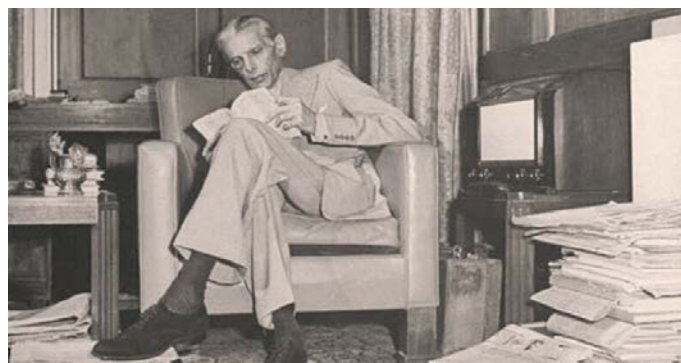


Economy

Frustration still haunts people amid 'electioneering' in Pakistan By Javed Mahmood – **Page 33**

National

Jinnah amid ideas of Pakistan By Asad Rahim Khan – **Page 35**



Christmas Festival of Kalash People: A Deep Dive into Tradition and Celebration By Zahiruddin – **Page 38**

History

Exploring Lahore's Mughal architectural splendors By Syeda Aamna Nadeem – **Page 40**

A Look into The Hindu Kush - TTI Report – **Page 42**

Environment

When breath becomes a luxury By Sara Danial – **Page 45**



Sports

Pakistan's Kishmala Talat secures 5th position in annual Asian Shooting rankings By Faizan Lakhani – **Page 48**

Hasan steps down 19 years after serving as POA president By Faizan Lakhani – **Page 49**

Entertainment

Celebrity Couples Who Met on Set By Kate Prince – **Page 50**

American Desi Family By Javed Mahmood – **Page 51**

Embattled PTI faces 'knockout' at scrutiny stage

By Iftikhar A. Khan

- Nominations of Imran, Qureshi, other bigwigs rejected; party cries foul; tribunals to decide appeals till Jan 10
- GDA leaders Zulfiqar, Fahmida Mirza; Akhtar Mengal, Sheikh Rashid, Alvi's son, Ayaz Amir face rejection
- Nawaz, Shehbaz, Bilawal, Achakzai, Maryam, Khattak, Fazl, Siddiqui, Tareen, Awan, Siraj among those cleared

In the initial phase of elections slated for Feb 8, the top leadership of the Pakistan Tehreek-i-Insaf (PTI) and its allies has been knocked out of the polls race, as almost "90 per cent of nominations from important leaders" failed to stand the scrutiny exercise ended on Saturday.

Despite their failure to clear scrutiny at the initial stage, the PTI candidates have till Jan 3 to approach an appellate tribunal against the decision of the respective returning officer. The tribunals can adjudicate on these appeals till Jan 10.

Most of the candidates whose papers were rejected belong to PTI, which has fallen out of favour and is facing the full force of law for its involvement in May 9 riots. Its former chairman Imran Khan and key aide Shah Mehmood Qureshi among others are incarcerated or have gone underground.

The PTI also lost its electoral symbol 'bat' before it was returned by the Peshawar High Court.

Punjab

PTI founder Imran Khan's nomination papers were rejected from NA-122 (Lahore) and NA-89 (Mianwali).

"Yes, Imran Khan's no-mination papers to contest elections from NA-89 (Isakhel tehsil) have been rejected due to his conviction in the Toshakhana case and some dues liable to be paid by him," Isakhel Assistant Commissioner



Gh---u-lam Murtaza told Dawn. "This has been told to me by our Additional Deputy Commissioner (Gen-eral), who is the returning officer of NA-89. I am the RO of one of the PA constituencies falling under NA-89," he added.

Imran Khan's papers were also rejected from NA-122 (Lahore-VI) on account of his conviction and disqualification.

PTI Vice Chairman Qur-eshe's nomination papers from Multan's NA-150, NA-151, and PP-218 (as well as Tharparkar's NA-214 in Sindh) were also rejected. His son Zain Qureshi and daughter Mehr Bano Qureshi also failed the scrutiny.

The nomination papers of ex-Punjab CM Parvez Elahi, his spouse Qaisara Bibi and son Moonis Elahi were rejected from constituencies in Chakwal, Tala-gang, Gujrat and Mandi Bahaud--din districts. In Chakwal, the nomination papers of columnist Ayaz Amir were also rejected.

According to reports, papers of all PTI candidates in Mianwali were rejected.

Amara Niazi, PTI women wing leader, and a candidate from NA-90, who was briefly taken into custody in front of the RO office, couldn't appear before the RO and faced rejection of her papers.

In NA-125 (Lahore), the nomination

papers of Jamshed Iqbal Cheema and his wife Mussarat Jamshed Cheema and Jameel Asghar Bhatti were rejected.

Similarly, Dr Yasmin Rashid in NA-130 and Hammad Azhar in PP-172 also faced rejection.

In Sialkot, the nomination papers of PTI leader Usman Dar's mother Rehana Imtiaz Dar and her daughter-in-law Aruba Dar were also rejected from NA-71.

Fawad Chaudhry and Hiba Fawad in NA-61 (Jhelum), Zulfi Bukhari in NA-50 (Attock), Ali Asjad Malhi in NA-73 (Daska), Rai Hasan Nawaz in NA-203 (Sahiwal), and Ijaz Chaudhry in NA-127 met the same fate.

PTI ally Sheikh Rashid and his nephew Rashid Shafiq faced rejection from NA-57 and NA-56 in Rawalpindi.

In Sargodha division, the papers of the top-tier PTI leadership were rejected.

However, some low-profile PTI leaders' papers were approved.

The nomination papers of PTI leader Dr Shabbir Ali Qureshi, former Punjab governor Ghulam Mustafa Khar, his wife Avnia Mustafa Khar, and Jamshed Dasti were rejected from various constituencies.



Papers of Maryam Nawaz were accepted and PTI's Sanam Javaid were rejected from NA-119 (Lahore).

In the same constituency, PTI candidate lawyer Azhar Siddique and PML-N leader Khawaja Saad Rafique's papers were accepted.

On the other hand, the nomination papers of PML-N Supremo Nawaz Sharif were accepted from NA-130 (Lahore), followed by his daughter Maryam Nawaz whose papers were also approved from various constituencies of Lahore and Sargodha.

PPP Co-Chairman Bilawal Bhutto-Zardari's papers were accepted for NA-127.

Javaid Hashmi, Jahangir Tareen, and Amir Dogar's nomination papers were also accepted from NA-149. PML-N chief Shehbaz Sharif's nomination papers were accepted from NA-123 (Lahore) whereas Abid Sher Ali of PML-N, a close relative of the Sharif family, also saw his papers accepted for NA-102 (Faisalabad).

Mustafa Nawaz Khokhar, Nayab Ali, Tariq Fazl Chaudhry, Anser Aziz, Babar Awan, Khawaja Khaqan, Mian Muhammad Aslam, Zeeshan Naqvi, Imran Ashraf, Anjum Aqeel were among successful candidates, whose papers were accepted by the returning officers in Islamabad.

Sindh

PTI leader Haleem Adil's papers were accepted, however.

In Sindh, the nomination papers of Dr Fahmida Mirza, her spouse Zulfiqar Mirza, President Arif Alvi's son Awab Alvi, MQM leader Arshad Vohra, and PTI's Firdous Shamim Naqvi were rejected.

The RO of NA-234 (Karachi Korangi-III) rejected the nomination papers of 27 out of total of 33 candidates, including MQM-P's Moin Amer Pirzada and Sadiq Iftikhar, PPP's Mohammad Ali Rashid, and former PTI MNA Faheem Khan. PML-N's Saleem Zia was among the six candidates cleared from the same constituency.

Dr Fahmida Mirza, Dr Zulfiqar Mirza, and

their son Hasnain Mirza's papers were rejected from two NA and three provincial assembly seats from Badin.

The nomination papers of GDA nominee Mohammed Khan Junejo, who recently joined PML-F, were turned down from NA-209 (Sanghar-I) for allegedly submitting a fake degree.

Firdous Shamim Naqvi was disallowed whereas JI leader Naeemur Rehman was allowed to contest polls from NA-248 (Karachi Central-II). The nomination papers of former PTI lawmakers Alamgir and Khurram Sherzaman were also turned down from NA-241 and 236, respectively.

MQM-P convener Dr Khalid Maqbool Siddiqui was declared eligible to contest elections from NA-248 Central-II, NA-249 Central-III, and NA-250 Central-IV). Mustafa Kamal as well as Khawaja Izharul Hasan from NA-247 (Central-I) were also cleared.

PML-N President Shehbaz Sharif is running from NA-242 (Kemari-I) against MQM leader Mustafa Kamal, and PPP's Qadir Khan Mandokhail.

Khyber Pakhtunkhwa

Shehryar Afridi, Murad Saeed, Ali Mohammad Khan, Azam Swati, Sher Ali Arbab, Shandana Gulzar, Atif Khan, Fazil Hakim, Dr Amjad, Gul Zafar Khan, Anwar Zaib, Shehraz Tarakai, Shahid Khattak, Junaid Akbar, and Taimur Saleem Jhagra were among those whose papers were rejected.

At least 29 ex-lawmakers in KP could not clear the scrutiny stage. According to the data compiled by the PTI, the returning officers rejected the nomination papers of PTI provincial president Ali Amin Gandapur, former speaker Asad Qaiser, former KP Assembly speaker Mushtaq Ahmad Ghani, and Sher Afzal Marwat.

The papers were rejected as most were placed on the Schedule-IV of the Anti-Terrorism Act 1997.

Kamran Bangash, Karim Khan, Akbar Ayub, former MNAs Noorul Haq Qadri, Iqbal Afridi, Arbab Amir Ayub and former MPAs Tufail Anjum and Muhammad Arif

Ahmadzai were among the successful candidates.

Nawaz Sharif, Fazlur Rehman, Sirajul Haq, Aimal Wali Khan, Qaumi Watan Party chief Aftab Ahmed Khan Sherpao, PTI-Parliamentarian chief Pervez Khattak and former CM Mahmood Khan's papers were also accepted.

Balochistan

The nomination papers of ex-MPA of PkMAP Nasarullah Zerey, Senator Prince Agha Omer Ahmedzai, and ex-minister Khalid Langove, Malik Naseer Ahmed Shahwani of BNP-Mengal and BAP Senator Manzoor Ahmed Kakar were also rejected.

In Balochistan, BNP-Mengal President Akhtar Mengal, PTI Balochistan President Qasim Khan Suri, ex-governor Zahoor Ahmed Agha, BNP Awami President Mir Israrullah Zehri, PkMAP leader Nawab Ayaz Khan Jogezi, Khushhal Khan Kakar of newly formed Pashtunkhwa National Awami Party, Hazara Democratic Party President Abdul Khaliq Hazara also faced rejection.

According to the Election Commission, the nomination papers of Sardar Akhtar Mengal from NA-256- (Khuzdar) NA-264 (Quetta) and PB-20 (Khuzdar) were rejected. "Mengal's nomination papers were rejected on the grounds of having Iqama of United Arab Emirates (UAE) which he did show in his nomination papers," the returning officer said.

"Mostly nomination papers of candidates were rejected due to defaulter of utility and other bills which they have not paid for a long time," sources told Dawn.

JUI-F chief Maulana Fazl, PkMAP Chairman Mehmood Achakzai, ex-CM Jam Kamal, Nawab Aslam Raisani, Dr. Abdul Malik Baloch, Sardar Muhammad Saleh Bhootani and many others were declared eligible to contest elections.

Khalid Hasnain in Lahore, Ishaq Tanoli in Karachi, Mohammad Ashfaq in Peshawar and Saleem Shahid in Quetta also contributed to this story.

Courtesy Dawn



Political Conundrum Ahead of General Polls 2024

By Zainab Imran Malik

Pakistan has a long history of controversial elections. Elections in Pakistan have never been completely free and fair, but what is being witnessed now has made a mockery of the complete democratic process. Whether local body, provincial, or general elections, results have always sparked controversies among the voters. But this time, controversies seem to have arisen before the elections. Voters are expressing complete disappointment and zero confidence in state institutions, specifically the Election Commission of Pakistan. Currently, the entire country is in a constitutional and electoral dilemma. Major political parties, except PML-N, are showing huge resentment towards state institutions and the Election Commission of Pakistan. Intra-party conflicts in political parties are further aggravating the situation. No one knows if the general elections will commence on the scheduled date, and if not, what could be the possible outcomes. Results can prove to be disastrous not just for the state but for the people as well.

Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf, one of the major key players in the current political scenario, is facing potential marginalisation from the authorities. Recent intra-party elections of PTI were declared null and void by the Election Commission of Pakistan on December 22. A five-member bench, presided over by the chief election commissioner, held a preliminary hearing on 14 applications seeking nullification of PTI's intra-party elections.

In light of the procedure described in the PTI constitution, the member of the ECP Sindh questioned Babar's attorney about whether his worries about the intra-party polling process were pertinent. Nonetheless, the lawyer clarified that the party's constitution did not call for this kind of process. "All registered members may vote," he said, "but the party's constitution does not mention how intra-party polls are to be conducted."

"If the party constitution does not specify



an election method, then the polls should be held under the Elections Act. The PTI's intra-party elections were held in violation of the act," he argued. The ECP not only declared the elections null and void but also revoked the party symbol of the PTI.

In response to this, Barrister Gohar Ali declared this decision a conspiracy of the state against PTI. On the other hand, an expert on the electoral process, Zafar Ullah Khan, expressed his analysis of this situation. He sheds light on the historical context of the intra-party elections. The provision of such elections was formulated in 2002. The case of PTI is marked as the first incident in which the intra-party elections have been rejected, adding an unprecedented chapter to Pakistan's political and constitutional history. The expert also emphasised the significance of an election symbol, stating that without a symbol, the candidate cannot convey an overall message to voters, leading to potential ambiguities and confusion in upcoming elections.

Following the ECP's decision, PTI finds itself in uncharted territory. ECP has deliberately excluded Pakistan's key political party from the list of registered political parties with the ECP. PTI is consistently calling the ECP verdict a "famous London plan" and a shameful attempt to keep PTI away from participating in the

elections. Thus, PTI challenged the "flawed ECP verdict" in Peshawar High Court, which led to a legal victory for the party. On December 22nd, the Peshawar High Court suspended the order of the ECP. Justice Kamran Hayat Miakhel announced the short order on the petition filed by Barrister Gohar Ali and six other leaders. They requested the court to declare the Dec 22nd Verdict of the Election Commission of Pakistan without any jurisdiction.

"In the meantime, the impugned order dated Dec 22, 2023, is suspended with further direction to the Election Commission to publish the certificate [of PTI's intra-party polls] on its website and restore the election symbol of PTI. This order will be operative till Jan 9, 2024," the single-judge bench ordered, while issuing notices to the respondents, including the ECP.

After Peshawar High Court, the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf on December 26th approached the Apex Court, seeking initiation of contempt of Court charges for alleged violation of its December 22nd direction by ECP and members of the administration. The petition was moved on behalf of Chairman PTI Barrister Gohar Ali through advocate Shoaib Shaheen. The petition sought direction from the Supreme Court to ensure a level playing field, by not detaining PTI workers, candidates, and leaders. Instead, all should be allowed to



freely participate in the election processes, and their families should not be harassed.

On Dec 22, the Supreme Court, in its order, had directed the ECP to attend to the party's grievances urgently and resolve these expeditiously to ensure that the electoral process remains smooth, open, transparent, free, and fair. Let this exercise be completed by ECP promptly without disturbing the timelines given in the election program because "voters must have faith in the electoral process for our democracy to succeed", the order had stated.

Along with Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf, other political stakeholders are also unhappy with the delimitation done by the Election Commission of Pakistan on different grounds. The Pakistan Election Commission (ECP) has not responded to the complaints filed by the PPP's central election cell, which has angered Senator Taj Haider. In a statement released on Wednesday, Haider, the cell's chief, claimed that this inaction not only jeopardises the basis of free and fair elections but also provides anti-democratic forces with an excuse to disregard election laws and the directives of the ECP. The senator added that there was a clear and present risk of breaking the ECP's orders in the PPP's election cell's complaint against the caretaker government of Sindh's transfer of more than a hundred assistant commissioners.

On the other hand, the Awami National Party is seen contending its grievances. As per the new electoral boundaries laid out by the Election Commission of Pakistan, K-P's merged districts, formerly known as Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA), will now have 6 fewer representatives in the NA. To illustrate further: Bajaur District which had two NA seats, NA-40 and NA-41, has seen its constituencies merged and now will have one seat, NA-8. Similarly, Khyber District's NA-43 and NA-44 seats have been merged into one seat, NA-27; and Kurram District's NA-45 and NA-46 have made way for NA-36. Sardar Hussain Babak, of the Awami National Party (ANP), has termed the delimitations as a robbery of the rights of the people of K-P.

It seems that the elections will happen on the scheduled date. But in that case, no single party is seen to be gathering majority votes and making it to the highest number of seats in the national assembly. Circumstances suggest that a coalition would take place among allied political parties to form the government. Such coalition governments, especially in Pakistan, are most prone to instability due to different ideologies and policy preferences which lead to disagreements and then breakdown. The national cause is left behind, and all ruling parties run for power and money grabbing.



For instance, during the 2022-2023 coalition government, Pakistan Democratic Movement (PDM), an alliance of 11 opposition parties, took the country to the verge of collapse. The country went into a severe economic crisis. The sudden \$3 billion bailout package by the IMF came forth as a saviour for Pakistan. The main argument here is if a coalition government is formed again, the nation should stay ready for some other economic dilemma.

The World Bank in its latest report has also warned Pakistan ahead of general polls. The country director for the World Bank in Pakistan, Najy Banhassine, said in an overview of reforms for a brighter future. He said, "Policy decisions are heavily influenced by strong vested interests, including those of military, political, and business leaders." World Bank officials are consistently warning Pakistan amidst numerous economic hardships, including inflation, severe electricity bills, climate shocks, and insufficient public resources to finance development.

In conclusion, as Pakistan faces a tumultuous lead-up to the general elections in 2024, the political landscape is marked by controversies, intra-party conflicts, and institutional challenges. The recent nullification of Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf's intra-party elections and the subsequent legal battles underscore the fragility of the democratic process and the deepening mistrust in state institutions.

The delimitation issues, discontent among various political stakeholders, and warnings from international entities like the World Bank further contribute to the

uncertainty surrounding the electoral process. The prospect of a coalition government, while a potential outcome, raises concerns about political stability, given the historical challenges of managing divergent ideologies within such alliances.

As the nation anticipates the elections, the need for transparent, fair, and timely resolution of disputes is paramount to restoring faith in the democratic process. The consequences of a fragmented political landscape extend beyond the political arena, potentially impacting the nation's economic stability and development.

Ultimately, the upcoming elections in Pakistan are not only a test of political leadership but also a crucial juncture for the resilience and credibility of the democratic institutions that underpin the country's governance. The hopes for a stable and prosperous future rest on the ability of the political actors and institutions to navigate these challenges with a commitment to upholding the principles of democracy and serving the best interests of the Pakistani people.



Navigating the Delay: Unraveling the Dynamics of Pakistan's Postponed Elections



By Hussnain Ahmad

In the ever-evolving realm of Pakistani politics, the recent postponement of elections has cast a pall over the democratic process, a fundamental pillar of governance. This article delves into the intricate dynamics surrounding the postponement, shedding light on its origins, impact on democracy, and the diverse perspectives of key stakeholders.

Pakistan, a nation entangled in the tumultuous web of its political history, has fervently endeavored to bolster its democratic foundations. A cursory glance into the annals of time exposes the paramount importance of recurrent electoral exercises in sculpting the intricate contours of the nation's political odyssey. The relentless pursuit of democratic fortification has been an enduring motif amid the undulating landscape of power struggles and governance.

Delving into the historical echelons, it becomes evident that the rhythmic cadence of regular elections serves as the pulsating heartbeat, propelling Pakistan's political trajectory. The cyclical nature of these

democratic rituals, although fraught with challenges, embodies the indispensable mechanism through which the nation articulates its collective will and navigates the labyrinth of governance.

To decipher the current impasse, an erudite comprehension of the customary election schedule, procedural intricacies, and the cast of pivotal players assumes paramount significance. The electoral edifice, replete with its nuances and orchestrated choreography, unveils the complex ballet of power dynamics that dictates the nation's destiny. Mastery of this intricate dance is imperative for those seeking insight into the present predicament, where the aspirations of a nation grapple with unforeseen disruptions in the quest for democratic consolidation.

Reasons for the Delay of Elections

The unexpected postponement of elections in Pakistan results from a convergence of intricate factors that collectively obstruct the electoral process. Foremost is the

prevailing political instability, exemplified by the schisms within major political parties such as the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) and the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N). The internal discord and power struggles within these parties have permeated the democratic framework, impeding the smooth progression of electoral proceedings.

Legal challenges, notably high-profile litigations involving parties like the Pakistan People's Party (PPP) and the Tehreek-e-Labbaik Pakistan (TLP), have emerged as significant hurdles. Court battles over electoral constituencies, allegations of electoral malpractice, and disputes over candidate eligibility have created a legal quagmire, delaying the electoral timeline and fostering an environment of uncertainty.

Administrative inefficiencies add another layer of complexity, as witnessed in the mismanagement and logistical challenges encountered during the previous elections. Ballot discrepancies, polling station irregularities, and logistical hiccups have plagued



the electoral machinery, contributing to delays in the overall process.

The specter of external influences, either overt or covert, introduces an element of vulnerability into the ostensibly sovereign electoral proceedings. Instances of alleged foreign interference, with accusations leveled at neighboring countries, have cast doubt on the autonomy and integrity of the electoral process, further complicating its timely execution.

By dissecting these factors precisely and citing specific instances involving prominent political entities, a clear understanding emerges of the formidable challenges hampering the electoral system. The deferred elections become a tangible outcome of the intricate interplay between internal party dynamics, legal contestations, administrative shortcomings, and the looming shadow of external influences, all of which collectively undermine the democratic aspirations of the nation.

Impact on Democracy

The protracted postponement of elections in Pakistan unleashes a seismic upheaval, violently shaking the bedrock of democratic governance. The jeopardisation of political stability, a fundamental prerequisite for the productive functioning of the state apparatus, now looms ominously over the nation. The intricate tapestry of democratic processes, meticulously woven over time, is unraveling, casting a foreboding shadow over the governance landscape.

This delay begets a cascading series of repercussions, akin to a political domino effect, threatening to dismantle the delicate balance of power inherent in the democratic framework. As the temporal void persists, the vacuum of legitimate political authority expands, permitting uncertainty and vulnerability to fester within the political milieu.

Citizens, the quintessential architects of democratic vitality, witness their trust eroding as the electoral machinery grinds to an unanticipated halt. The essence of participatory governance is compromised, exemplified by disillusioned voters eagerly anticipating exercising their democratic rights. The delay breeds discontent and disenchantment among the populace, with

tangible examples emerging as widespread protests and public outcry against the perceived erosion of democratic principles.

Political experts, once stalwart proponents of democratic resilience, now grapple with the disturbing reality of a democracy in suspended animation. Conferences and panel discussions, previously venues for celebrating the robustness of Pakistan's democratic experiment, are now forums fraught with concerns and debates about the erosion of political stability.



The erosion of political stability, stemming from this unprecedented delay, undermines the very essence of democratic governance—transforming it into a fragile and malleable construct susceptible to external pressures. The implications are profound, as evidenced by international criticism and concern, heralding an epoch of uncertainty where the tower of democratic norms stands perilously on the precipice of degradation.

Stakeholder Perspectives

The intricate tapestry of Pakistan's electoral conundrum weaves through the nuanced and often self-serving perspectives of its major political entities. The ruling Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI), led by Prime Minister Imran Khan, views the postponement as a strategic maneuver to recalibrate their electoral strategies, masking it as a necessary delay amid alleged concerns over electoral integrity. In contrast, the opposition, spearheaded by the Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) under Bilawal Bhutto Zardari, condemns the postponement as a blatant

subversion of democratic principles, amplifying their long standing grievances against the ruling regime.

Government officials, predominantly within the PTI, echo the narrative of prudent caution, emphasizing the need for an electoral process free from purported malfeasance. Opposition leaders, typified by the firebrand Maryam Nawaz of the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N), decry the delay as a ploy to stifle their growing influence.

Civil society, personified by vocal activists and advocacy groups, manifests various opinions. Some laud the delay as an opportunity for more thorough electoral scrutiny, while others decry it as a grave infringement upon democratic norms. Internationally, concerns voiced by entities like the United States and the European Union underscore the global ramifications of Pakistan's democratic setback, adding a layer of external pressure and scrutiny to the already convoluted domestic landscape. This melange of divergent voices and agendas contributes to the intricate fabric of the postponed elections, where self-interest, principles, and global implications collide in a complex symphony of perspectives.

Legal and Constitutional Aspects

An exhaustive examination of the legal underpinnings enveloping the postponement of elections is imperative. This facet demands an elucidation of the constitutional ramifications and concurrent discourses prevailing in both the legal and political



echelons. Noteworthy juridical figures in these deliberations include Chief Justice Saeed-uz-Zaman Siddiqui and prominent constitutional scholars such as Dr. Faizan Mustafa.

The constitutional implications unfurl a labyrinth of intricacies, with Article 224 and Article 232 at the forefront of legal contemplation. The judiciary, spearheaded by Justice Nasira Iqbal, grapples with the delicate balance between upholding the democratic ethos and addressing exigent circumstances. Simultaneously, the legal arena witnesses a clash of perspectives, exemplified by the vigorous debates between Barrister Aitzaz Ahsan and Attorney General Khalid Jawed Khan. This subtle exploration traverses the legal tapestry, delineating the nuances of the legal discourse encapsulating the postponement predicament. As legal luminaries dissect the constitutional fabric, the nation awaits a jurisprudential compass to navigate the convoluted terrain of delayed elections.

Public Reaction

The nation's pulsating sentiments manifest in the kaleidoscope of responses to the electoral deferment. Scrutinizing the societal pulse reveals a tapestry of divergent reactions across demographics and regional landscapes. Analyzing social media trends, figures like Dr. Ayesha Siddiqi and Hamid

Mir emerge as influential voices reflecting public sentiment. Their respective platforms amplify the dichotomy in opinions—ranging from vehement dissent to cautious optimism. In the urban strata, where digital discourse dominates, figures like journalist Talat Hussain and activist Jibran Nasir spearhead discussions, providing insights into the nuanced perspectives of the educated elite. Often marginalized in virtual spaces, the rural front articulates its voice through local leaders such as Malik Niaz Ahmad in Punjab and Gulzar Khan in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. This diversified panorama underscores the intricacies of public sentiment and the challenge of forging a consensus amid the din.

International Repercussions

The global stage, an unforgiving auditorium, scrutinizes Pakistan's delayed electoral narrative, invoking responses that transcend borders. Within the diplomatic matrix, figures like UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres and U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken articulate concerns that impact Pakistan's international standing. Academic and strategic thinkers like Ashley Tellis and Christine Fair lend depth to the discourse, delineating potential repercussions on regional stability and global security.

Neighboring countries, notably India, and key international players, such as China and the United Kingdom, influence the narrative. Diplomats like Ajay Bisaria and Nong Rong vocalize apprehensions, illuminating how the election delay ripples across geopolitical fault lines. The impact on foreign policy strategies and international alliances is palpable, with global stakeholders recalibrating their engagement with Pakistan in light of these unprecedented electoral developments.

Conclusion

The deferred elections in Pakistan stand as a critical juncture challenging the bedrock of its democracy. As the nation grapples with constitutional intricacies and diverse public sentiments, the global gaze intensifies, shaping international perceptions. The coming weeks are poised to sculpt the political landscape, determining the trajectory of Pakistan's democratic future. Amidst legal debates and geopolitical considerations, the imperative for a transparent and timely resolution looms large. The nation awaits a jurisprudential compass and diplomatic recalibration, aware that the resolution of this predicament will resonate far beyond its borders, defining Pakistan's place in the evolving geopolitical mosaic.





Analysis: On the verge of political rebirth?

While Nawaz basks in glory of his recent acquittals in Avenfield and Al-Azizia cases, not all legal experts agree on smooth sailing ahead of polls

By Malik Asad

Former prime minister Nawaz Sharif's acquittal in two major corruption cases — Avenfield Apartments and Al-Azizia Steel Mills — over the past month has reignited discussions about his potential comeback in politics. While the development has cleared his path to run in the upcoming elections and reclaim his role as PML-N's president, it may not be a walk in Hyde Park for Mr Sharif.

However, until things get settled for him, Mr Sharif can revel in the fact that even at this point his political future seems more secure than that of his long-time nemesis, Imran Khan. Mr Khan, serving a three-year sentence for corruption in Adiala Jail, remains disqualified from contesting elections after the Islamabad High Court (IHC) rejected his plea on Thursday to suspend the conviction.

The legal community remains split over Mr Sharif's prospects. The debate hinges on whether the legislative amendment to the Elections Act can retrospectively apply to Mr Sharif's case and whether it supersedes the constitutional provision under which the former premier was disqualified.

Although parliament has limited disqualifications to a maximum of five years, some legal experts believe that Mr Sharif might not gain an advantage from this amendment to the Elections Act. This scepticism stems from the fact that the Supreme Court's interpretation of disqualification relates to a specific article in the Constitution, and it is widely held that an Act of parliament, such as this amendment, cannot supersede a constitutional provision.

Mr Sharif's troubles began after the Panama Papers leak in April 2016, which subsequently led to his disqualification in July 2017 from holding public office. The court's decision was based on Article 62(1f) of the Constitution, which requires parliamentarians to be *sadiq* and *ameen* (honest and righteous). The SC then directed NAB to initiate three corruption references against him: the Avenfield, Flagship and Al-Azizia cases.

In July 2018, Mr Sharif was sentenced to 10 years in the Avenfield case and in December of that year, he was sentenced to a further seven years in the Al-Azizia case. He was found not guilty in the Flagship reference.

Following the two convictions, Mr Sharif was disqualified from politics, as the law bans those convicted from holding or running for public office.

Mr Sharif later filed appeals in the IHC. These appeals revived in October this year when the former prime minister returned to Pakistan, ending his four-year self-exile, ahead of the Feb 8 elections. The IHC has now overturned both the conviction and the disqualification that had been imposed on him by the accountability courts under the National Accountability Ordinance (NAO).



Arguments for and against eligibility

Barrister Zafarullah Khan, a former special assistant on law during the PML-N regime, argues that Mr Sharif can contest elections, citing an amendment to the Elections Act by the previous Pakistan Democratic Movement-led government. That amendment to Section 232 of the Elections Act caps disqualifications at five years.

Barrister Khan believes that Mr Sharif can now submit his nomination papers to the returning officer for the elections and if someone objected to his candidacy, the matter would be resolved through judicial review.

However, senior lawyer Raja Inam Ameen Minhas counters this view, emphasising that the amended law cannot benefit Mr Sharif since the legislature did not amend Section 232 retrospectively. He says that since the amendment entails penal consequences, it cannot deal with the matter in the past. According to him, the law that deals with punishment cannot be applied retrospectively unless the legislature categorically gives this effect.

Mr Minhas explains that the NAO was promulgated in 1999, but the legislature gave it a retrospective effect. Complicating matters is the Supreme Court's 2018 ruling that disqualifications under Article 62(1f) of the Constitution are lifelong. This ruling directly impacts Mr Sharif, who was disqualified under this provision.

Mr Minhas believes the SC may settle the debate once and for all. As it goes, the SC is set to examine the matter. It has issued a public notice inviting concise statements of potential candidates who may relate to the disqualification case for a hearing on Jan 2. Advocate Kashif Ali Malik supports the "lifelong" interpretation, asserting that statutory amendments — like the one to the Elections Act — cannot interpret, override or defeat constitutional provisions.

Mr Malik, however, also hopes that the outcome of the Supreme Court's hearing will provide definitive clarity on whether Nawaz Sharif can indeed make a political comeback.

Courtesy Dawn



PTI staging comeback for polling day ‘surprise’ despite hurdles

Political situation is becoming really fluid as PTI appears to be staging comeback in elections despite administrative muscle being used to suppress it



By Ansar Abbasi

With general elections less than six weeks away, the political situation is becoming really fluid as the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) appears to be staging a comeback in the election ring despite the administrative muscle being used to suppress it.

Amid reports of not being allowed to stage public meetings and political rallies, the PTI is getting some major relief from the courts. This has served as a booster for the party, which has been facing serious legal and criminal actions against its top leaders and workers following the May 9 attacks.

On the other end, the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PMLN), which is being seen by many as the ‘King’s Party’, seems to be in sleep mode — doing far less than what it was expected to do to outsmart the under-pressure PTI in Punjab. Despite the alleged administrative support available to it, the PMLN has yet to start its election campaign to mobilize people.

While the PMLN is waiting for a ‘managed miracle’ to bring it to power, the PTI

leadership and its supporters have received great encouragement from some recent court decisions. The Supreme Court’s verdict on the cipher case and the Peshawar High Court’s decision against the ECP’s order of withdrawing the PTI’s election symbol of the ‘bat’ have renewed enthusiasm among PTI leaders and workers.

On Thursday, the Islamabad High Court granted a stay order in the cipher trial till January 11 on Imran Khan’s petition against in-camera proceedings of the trial court. After the Supreme Court’s relief in the cipher case, PTI leaders were worried that Imran Khan could be convicted any time in the cipher case by the trial court. Now, following the IHC stay order, the PTI has succeeded in delaying the trial.

The PTI legal team is also keenly pursuing legal options to get Imran Khan’s conviction in the Toshakhana case reversed from the apex court, which took up the matter on Wednesday but because of the unavailability of judges the case will now be heard after judges return from vacations.

If the Supreme Court undoes Imran Khan’s conviction in the Toshakhana case, the founder-chairman of PTI will become eligible to contest the general elections.

PTI leaders claim to have the support of a vast majority among the public and if the ballot paper has the PTI election symbol on election day, the party’s voters will give a surprise.

And in case Imran Khan is allowed to contest the elections, the chances of an electoral surprise by the PTI will increase manifold.

Following the post-May 9 crackdown on the party, it was generally speculated that it would be difficult for the PTI to find candidates to contest in the general elections.

However, PTI candidates have outnumbered all other parties in filing their nomination papers. In fact, the number of PTI candidates who have filed nomination papers for national and provincial assemblies for the Feb 8, 2024 elections is higher than the number of PTI candidates in the 2018 elections.



Political Turmoil and the 2024 Elections in Pakistan



By Naqi Akbar

Pakistan is swiftly entering election mode with virtual political meetings, in-person rallies, and other activities that can be considered part of the election campaign. Despite the perceived partiality of the election commission and delays in organizing the electoral mechanics, individuals, ranging from the common man to political leaders, whether favored or in the wilderness, are actively engaging to capture the attention of a disgruntled voter base. This unprecedented radicalization surpasses historical instances witnessed during the Ayubian decade, Zia's MRD, and the lawyer's movement against Musharraf in 2007 in Karachi.

As Pakistan gears up for the upcoming general elections on February 8, 2024, the political atmosphere is charged with virtual meetings, in-person rallies, and various activities that signal the onset of the election campaign. In this complex political landscape, the role of the election commission, the behavior of political leaders, and the radicalization of the voter base are crucial aspects that demand examination. This analysis delves deeper into the historical context, the current political dynamics, and the potential implications of the forthcoming elections.

In the instances mentioned, there was still a level of restraint on the part of the political forces regarding their dealing with the establishment. Despite the fact that the coups of Ayub, Zia, and Musharraf had the backing of the Khaki establishment, upon a return to formal civilian rule, things were forgotten, and the constitution was allowed the space to accept these political experiments as unavoidable accidents with no punishment or retribution to talk off.

As things stand in Pakistan today, all political groups, those out of favor and those having the complete backing of the established order, are united on one count—an anti-establishment stance sells in the Pakistani political landscape of today. No political group can afford to be painted as the one being the 'favorite.' Regardless of which group is able to secure a number of seats to form governments at the center, the hard fact still remains that the biggest electoral promise each party can give to the compliant electorate, that the establishment will be reined in the process, is a distant reality.

Going threadbare, the established order, despite calling the shots down to a Police Station level and manhandling political

activists, cannot simply shy away from the ritual adherence to the 1973 constitution. Despite months of uncertainty about the holding of the elections and an intervention by the judiciary to hold the same, a common man knows well that global stakeholders cannot afford to be called supporters of dictatorship in societies like Pakistan, India, Turkey, Egypt, etc. Despite the fact that the United States has dangerously traded its image in supporting Israel, its peacetime image cannot be compromised for supporting a client state with a dominant military willing to do the jobs 'as directed.'

The somewhat reluctant return to democracy in Pakistan in the form of the February 8, 2024, elections needs to be taken with a pinch of salt. To elaborate further, Pakistan's economic indicators and the ongoing negotiations with the IMF need to be seen in the context of the fact that the prime guarantors of the deal might not be the political government likely to form the government, but rather the powers behind the throne—a reality witnessed by the people of Pakistan since 1988, meaning democracy has never returned in Pakistan in its true essence.



A closer look at the unfolding of the 1993 political stalemate and the crisis sheds direct light on these mechanics. On April 17, 1993, the then civilian Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif's refusal in a live broadcast not to take 'dictation' set into motion the wheels of a soft coup against his government. The only spoiler was the Supreme Court, which restored the political government in June after it was sacked on charges of corruption on April 19, 1993. The aftermath of the Supreme Court intervention was that political forces and the front actors for other forces were not ready to work with each other, forcing the actual powers to appear as power brokers and guarantors, even for the IMF.

The July 18, 1993, resignation of PM Nawaz Sharif and establishment-backed President Ghulam Ishaq Khan was preceded by behind-the-scenes negotiations, where the establishment was so much into the act that PML economists like Sartaj Aziz were asked whom to be selected as the caretaker finance minister. Similarly, the caretaker PM Moeen Qureshi was much more than a meek PM only around to hold elections; rather, he was instrumental discreetly in paving the way for the next IMF injection. As history guides us, the succeeding PPP government was shown the door again with active behind-the-scenes shadows of IMF briefcase men.

What seems to be the script for the 2024 elections can be precisely the same. Here

one needs to look at the geopolitical scenario. The 90s were much peaceful days for the world and for client states like Pakistan. Pakistan's concerns were isolated. The 9/11 incidents and unraveling of many simmering issues like Iranian nuclear enrichment, JCPOA, the igniting of the Palestinian question, besides the dominance of the establishment in the local political scene, have created an environment where the political government likely to be elected into power might not have much say in what is happening around.

A direct reference can be made to the quiet role the Pakistani Navy is playing in the aftermath of the October 7, 2023, regional developments. During December, two destroyers have been deputed to the conflict zone one by one near the Bab al Mandab area for the supposed safety of shipping lines in the Red Sea. Even a layman knows that it is only the United States' interest in involving the regional navies for the jobs, which could have been done by the United States Navy itself. Here, questions arise on how a military arm of the state can jump into a risky geopolitical scenario, while there has been no role of the Prime Minister in defining the Pakistani role or the role of the Senate or the parliament for that matter.

Given the fact that the ongoing conflict has all the ingredients of complexity as well as chances of escalating beyond safe containment levels, the role of the next political parliament or, for that matter, the

political order might not be more than a convenient rubber stamp. The Pakistani parliament in the coming months, which will emerge from the gestation of the February 2024 elections, might well resemble the Jordanian parliament of September 1970 when another massacre of Palestinians was in process—a rubber stamp one with an equally powerless Prime Minister calling the shots.

The takeaway for the Pakistani voter, a radicalized voter, is even more pathetic. Each voter might feel like changing Pakistan for good after many bouts with the establishment. The political group out in the wilderness as well as those allowed to play will try to portray that they have defeated the established order. There might be some space for starting these schemes or that schemes, which will invariably be sublet to the central bank and the banking industry. The steps will be cosmetic and not far-reaching. The hold of the invisible forces will continue to embed national life in all spheres of life, including creative arts and sports.

Conclusively, the forthcoming elections might only generate economic activity in terms of printing expenses or plates and Degrés of Biryani. No radical change like the Erdogan blitz in 2002 should be expected in Pakistan, and regrettably, given the inherent divisions in society, Pakistan is centuries apart from any experience like the 1979 Islamic Revolution in Iran.





Election Year 2024: 4.2 billion voters, 83 polls, 78 countries

By Khawaja Burhan Uddin

More than 4.2 billion people — representing more than half of the world's population — across the globe will participate in elections in 2024.

Seventy-eight countries will hold 83 national-level executive or legislative elections in the next year and we won't see that many again until 2048, according to Atlantic Council, a Washington-based think tank.

2024 is also the largest election year in terms of sheer volume in the world's history, showcasing the enduring power of democratic principles across the globe.

The polls — touching almost every continent — are scheduled to start right from the first week of January. The Asian continent will see the highest number of voters exercising their right to self-determination.

As per *The Economist*, some places, such as Brazil and Turkey, will not hold general elections but have local or municipal elections in which the whole country will participate. Similarly, the European Union's 27 member states will elect the bloc's next parliament.

2024 is a culmination of trends that are designed to erode trust in institutions and I think what's key here is to keep an eye on the smaller elections as well as the big ones. — NDI Director Kay Spencer

Many of the nations that are going to polls are part of some of the world's powerful groups like G20 and G7, which means that there may be some geopolitical impacts, and the international landscape is also likely to be affected.

Although elections in some countries will be mere formalities, offering little to no influence — such as Russia — on the existing power structures, others will be pivotal moments for shaping national policies and leadership — including the United States.

The 'big year' will start with the January



elections in Bangladesh and despite the opposition Bangladesh Nationalist Party's protests, Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina is set to complete her 15 years in power.

In February, we will see two populous Muslim nations — Pakistan and Indonesia — head into elections nearly a week apart. In Pakistan, it is unclear who might form the government, but according to American Journalist David A. Andelman, Indonesia's voters are "unlikely to loosen the grips on the power of wealthy business and military elites".

In May, Africa's most industrialised nation — South Africa — will hold elections seen as the most crucial ones since the end of apartheid in 1994. The other nations who will decide their fate include Algeria, Botswana, Chad, Comoros, Ghana, Mauritania, Mauritius, Mozambique, Namibia, Rwanda, Senegal, Somaliland, South Sudan, Tunisia and Togo.

The continent will see the highest number of elections in 2024.

In the upcoming polls, the ruling African National Congress (ANC) faces an uphill task as fears grow that it may not secure the necessary 50% of votes needed to retain power.

Since there are so many elections, there will be distractions and the kind of advocacy and activism that the global community plays won't be there. — Carr Center for Human Rights Policy fellow Phumzile Van Damme

In Europe, we might see a power struggle as political parties will seek to form coalitions as over 10 parliamentary and presidential elections are slated to take place over the next 12 months. Finland, Belarus, Portugal, Ukraine, Slovakia, Lithuania, Iceland, Belgium, European Parliament, Croatia, Austria, Georgia, Moldova and Romania will vote as Europe heads to the biggest election cycle.

The next year is considered significant in terms of the electoral changes that the world will witness, but this great march to the ballot box, according to *The Economist*, does not necessarily mean an explosion of democracy.

Jittery Pakistan elections

The general polls are scheduled to take place on February 8, 2024, across the Muslim-majority South Asian nation, with nearly 106 million people expected to



exercise their voting rights.

The polls will be held for the National Assembly and four provincial legislatures — Balochistan, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Punjab, and Sindh.

The top two issues that the incoming government will have to deal with are economic stabilisation and political uncertainty — both of which have been persistent since the ouster of Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf's government in April 2022.

It's still too early to say who might form the government in the centre, but several politicians have hinted that a coalition would rule the country as no one is currently in the position to grab a majority and elect their prime minister.

However, as Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) supremo Nawaz Sharif secures reliefs from courts and seemingly all his worries are ending ahead of the polls, PTI founder Imran Khan remains incarcerated and disqualified.

Despite his disqualification and fallout with the establishment, Khan remains a crucial reason for PTI's vote bank — as was evident when his party released an AI-generated audio of Khan to boost the supporters' morale.

But his party might face an uphill task when they head into polls as Khan has stepped down as the PTI chairman and handed over the reins to Gohar Khan, the man who has been in the party for around a year.

The Biden-Trump US battle

Get ready for a wild ride — the 2024 presidential race is shaping up to be a historical whirlwind. It is expected that Democrat President Joe Biden will go up against Republican ex-president Donald Trump in November. More than 160 million are expected to use their right to vote and change the future of America.

The foreign policy implications will be impactful as Biden will be coming in with more power than before as he would have a second consecutive term, while Trump is

prone to making rash decisions, which could have unexpected impacts.

Trump recently was disqualified from Colorado's presidential primary ballot by the state's Supreme Court, an extraordinary ruling that could be struck down by the US Supreme Court ahead of the November 2024 US election.

It is not clear how the Supreme Court would rule, but it is dominated by a conservative majority that includes three Trump appointees, some of whom are longtime skeptics of giving courts powers that are not clearly based in legislation.

Even if the ruling survives Supreme Court review, it could be inconsequential to the outcome of the November 2024 election because Trump does not need to win Colorado and is not expected to, given its strong Democratic leanings.

EU's fragmented political landscape

Twenty-seven countries in the European Union will go into elections, with hundreds of millions of people expected to vote in the nations — including France, Germany, and Sweden. The European elections will be held on 6-9 June 2024.

The Economist Intelligence expects Europe's fragmented political landscape in 2024 could lead to gridlock, slow decision-making, and challenges in addressing pressing issues. It is expected that making stable majority governments will be hard, which will ultimately lead to multiparty alliances.

The European elections are held every five years. The last European elections took place in May 2019.

India, where Modi might win a third term

India's 2024 elections carry immense weight as more than 600 million voters will decide the country's destiny in May.

Hindu nationalist Narendra Modi's Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) is still leading ahead of the Indian National Congress and its allies, local opinion polls show.

The ruling Hindu nationalist party has won three out of four key state elections, setting the momentum for the national polls.

The BJP's poised victory would mean the atrocities against Muslims will continue internally — and the relations with Pakistan might not mend due to the party's non-compromising stance on Kashmiris' rights.

Fears galore

As the stakes are higher than ever, experts fear that it will be hard for the global community to oversee the entire process — and for the platforms to guarantee that there isn't manipulation.

The elections are taking place at a time when the public discourse is increasingly taking place online, which makes the role of social media platforms far more important.

At a recent panel discussion hosted by the Atlantic Council, Technology and Human Rights Fellow at Carr Center for Human Rights Policy, Phumzile Van Damme, voiced fears that since there are so many elections, there will be distractions and the kind of advocacy and activism that the global community plays won't be there.

Brazilian journalist Patrícia Campos Mello, who is a reporter at large and columnist at Folha de São Paulo, said electoral denialism would spread around — just like it did in January 2023 in Brazil and the Capitol riots in the US in 2021.

Kay Spencer, program director of elections at the Washington-based National Democratic Institute (NDI), said the year 2024 is a big year for social media platforms and it will be important to monitor how they will manage all the elections that are coming up.

"2024 is a culmination of trends that are designed to erode trust in institutions and I think what's key here is to keep an eye on the smaller elections as well as the big ones. What we have seen in the past is that we know authoritarians use these smaller elections as a testing ground for tactics to use in bigger elections later on," she noted.

Courtesy Geo TV

Batting without a bat



By M A Niazi

Perhaps one of the saddest stories to emerge from Gaza is that of the family of British MP Layla Moran, who along with many others, is trapped inside a church in Gaza. There were quite a few Palestinian Christians displaced and massacred in 1948, the An-Nakba, and the disaster through which Zionists tried to clear Palestine of Palestinians and create Israel. The majority of Palestinians are Muslim, but there are some Christians among them too.

It should perhaps not be forgotten that France and Russia showed a great interest in the Middle East since the 19th century, because the Holy Places of Christendom were there. Also, the Holy Places of Judaism and Islam were also there, in the form of the Masjid Aqsa, which is also the site of the Temple of Solomon.

However, that led to the Crimean War of the two against the Ottoman Empire.

Now, it seems, that figleaf is not being used. It seems that all the vaunted missionary fervour of the USA and the West is running out, and they are supporting Israel, even when it attacks churches. Does anyone remember Shakespeare's Merchant of Venice, where Shylock gets it in the neck for conspiring against a Christian? Or is there an element of racism here? I mean, these are not white Christians, but Arabs. And we must remember that Israel was founded by Russian and Ukrainian Jews who had moved to the USA. I presume that's where they

imbibed racism, directed not just against blacks, but also against Arabs. The present Israeli PM is in this mould, being the child of Ukrainian Jews, and though born in Israel, brought up in the USA. He is the first Israeli PM to have been born in Israel, that is, after Independence.

Indians don't have the same racism. After all, Muslims are mostly converts, so while Hindus may be virulently anti-Muslim, their goal is 'ghar wapsi' as they now call it. Until then, Muslims are down there with the Dalits. There is no move among Israelis to reconvert Palestinians. They remain subject to being killed, as in Gaza. The Christians who had been killed in the Gaza church were not killed by a bomb or artillery, where there is an element of inadvertence, but by snipers, which implies a spine-chilling deliberation.

Meanwhile, they are petting cows in a former dairy farm in the UK, to alleviate mental problems. It doesn't seem to have been used in Czechia, where a 24-year-old student offed himself after shooting dead 13 others, and injuring 25 others, one of whom died in hospital. It was by far the worst shooting in Czech history, though it was only middling by US standards, where the school or college shooting is almost a tradition.

If the British technique was to be used in Pakistan, it would be done by petting buffaloes. If there was a crime anywhere, the patients would be arrested for stealing the buffaloes.

However, the 61 intending illegal migrants feared dead off Libya in yet another boat-sinking tragedy would not have been helped by the petting of buffaloes or cows. None of the illegals have been identified as PTI supporters, but that is perhaps the only good news the party has had.

Well, its ranks have been swelled by Latif Khosa, formerly of the PPP, which had made him both attorney-general and Punjab Governor. The PTI had also attracted former Punjab Governor Muhammad Sarwar, and made him Governor again. But he had gone from the PML(N)'s ranks. So maybe the JUI(F) should watch out for KP Governor Haji Ghulam Ali, closely related as he is to the party chief.

Meanwhile, the PCB is a victim of the audio clip craze. And instead of some former player (like Imran), the clip released was of the PCB Chairman, Zaka Ashraf, discussing the captaincy. And that's political, because the captaincy is crucial to getting on the same page.

Of course, Imran is not the best advertisement for that, not after his party was deprived of its symbol. Still, Imran showed a fine undaunted spirit by saying his party would play on. Sorry, still contest the elections. I wonder what sport of fit the umpires would throw if batsmen turned up without a bat. You could get caught off the glove, and could either be out handled the ball or obstructing the field.

With fear lurking, eyes denuded of sight



By Raoof Hasan

It was Shakespeare who said in 'The Tempest': "Those are pearls that were his eyes". So powerful was the impact of the line that T S Eliot repeated in 'The Waste Land': "I Remember/Those are pearls that were his eyes".

Eliot goes on to catch a comparable image in 'The Burial of the Dead', albeit in greater detail:

There is shadow under this red rock,
(Come in under the shadow of this red rock),
And I will show you something different from either/
Your shadow at morning striding behind you,
Or your shadow at evening rising to meet you:
I will show you fear in a handful of dust."

The eyes having been gouged from a human face and fear in a handful of dust are powerful images stalking the human mind. Suffering from such affliction may bring one to a pass where, despite possessing the relevant faculties, one may be unable to use them. The shadow of fear may be the refrain to use the power of sight to speak the truth. In essence, this is a feeling that reflects the onset, even accentuation of a virtual comatose state which numbs the human mind to varying degrees of inaction and, consequently, the mere routine of living is deprived of meaning and purposefulness.

As a nation, we have often suffered from one or the other such ailment but, more recently, this sufferance has assumed grave proportions. It appears that society is plagued with the twin scourge of blindness and fear. But it is not blindness that has made us afraid as much as fear that has driven us blind, either as a natural consequence thereof or as a contrived means to escape the unleashing of terror by the state.

With people being forcibly taken away for eliciting their confessional statements, all of society seems to have become a hostage in the grip of unseen powers that exercise control without either being visible or held to account. These forces lurk in the shadows only with their silhouettes decipherable, but the stock and substance of their beings evade human sight.

At this juncture, every institution appears to be at their disposal, obeying their orders without as much as a stir. The possibilities whether one does it after being deprived of sight, or one is forced to stay quiet out of fear, reside in the domain of conjecture. Both possibilities are cogent realities, and no matter which one is pursued, the conclusion would be the same: that life has travelled well beyond the precincts of what can be managed without the fear of reprisals.

But there are some fortunate ones who not only enjoy the liberty of handling their affairs to their absolute satisfaction; they have also been granted the freedom to hurl threats, abuse, and invective at others they consider inimical to the attainment of their goals and implementation of their agendas.

Only a few days ago when the Peshawar High Court (PHC) suspended the ECP order to withhold the allotment of an election symbol to the PTI, one heard the head of a political party threatening the chief justice to refrain from giving such judgments, or his life would be endangered, and he would be forced to leave the province. Absolutely nothing stirred to establish the writ of the court and the security of those who still dare obey the dictates of their conscience and the call of their duty.

The state, by and large, is visible only when wrapped in the apparel of violence and intolerance. Notwithstanding the constitution, rule of law, and whatever may remain of morality, those in power assert that it is their will that has to be obeyed, no questions asked, while those at the receiving end suffer the draconian consequences of such attitudes in utter silence. Even a hint of complaint can evoke grievous consequences.

Yet, there are moments symbolizing perseverance when the human spirit ascends, and fear is reduced to being a bystander. The young girls and boys and their senior mentors who have been confined behind bars for almost six months now have lit a heroic trail with their bravery and grit. Suffering the excesses of the state and unjustly deprived of their freedom, they have refused to compromise on their principles. The morning that beckons them from afar shall soon draw near when they shall bask in its glory and relive with pride their time in shackles and the justness of their cause which would drive them ashore.

With their unmatched fortitude and their faith, they have paved the way to what Pakistan should have become a long time ago: a genuinely independent and sovereign country free to make decisions that would be to its benefit and the benefit of its people who, for all the years they have lived, have survived on the fringes of existence. Deprived of even their most basic needs of life, their dignity has been routinely badgered, and their self-respect criminally brutalized. They are treated as if they neither have brains to think with, nor emotions to cry at their abominable deprivations. They are supposed to survive as slaves to cater to the lusts of their anointed masters whose egos are bloated over illicit heaps of pelf they have accumulated through their years in power.



But nature has a course of its own. Those who had felt certain that the sun would never set on their citadel of power can now see a change taking shape gradually. It may yet be far, but its sounds are audible, and its effects discernible. It is also that its traditional beneficiaries are trying to cast different spots on their beings so that they would not be recognized for their past deeds and could escape into the safety of a future.

One cannot predict one's destiny, but it is the draconian cruelty of the beneficiary elite that has spurred the advent of a new morning for the country and a new future for its people – a future that had remained a dream since that fateful day when Pakistan

emerged on the face of the world as a separate country, free from the colonial fetters. The transition proved to be temporary as, soon thereafter, the hitherto foreign imposed rule was replaced with domestic colonization by its own people at the helm.

It has taken over seven decades to jolt this hold and usher in a change that would alter the shape of the country to what it was dreamt to have become. Neither are the people afraid of the lurking fear nor are they blind to the reality that is taking shape. They are its catalysts and there is nothing that will now stop them from savouring the pride in taking Pakistan to its cherished destination.



Under the rubble: The missing in Gaza

Finding the 7,000 Palestinians believed buried under collapsed buildings is becoming increasingly difficult



By Mohammad Abu Shahma

Every morning, 51-year-old Yasser Abu Shamala goes to the place where his family's house once stood in Khan Younis in the southern Gaza Strip. He starts digging through the rubble with his bare hands, lifting pieces of concrete to try to find members of his family buried under the debris.

Abu Shamala's family house was bombed by Israeli forces on October 26, demolishing the building and killing his parents, brothers and cousins. The strike killed 22 people with many more trapped under the rubble.

Abu Shamala's family members are among the more than 7,000 people who are reported missing in Gaza, including 4,900 children and women. The missing are believed to be trapped under bombed buildings, according to Hamas officials in Gaza.

Despite multiple failed attempts, Abu Shamala refuses to quit and has pledged to continue searching for his relatives and recover their bodies from

under the ruins of the house. He hopes he can bury them in a cemetery with proper Islamic rituals.

Israel has dropped thousands of bombs on Gaza since October 7, the day the war started with Hamas attacks on southern Israel. The war is believed to be one of the most destructive and fatal in recent times, having killed nearly 21,000 people in Gaza and 1,139 in Israel, wounding nearly 55,000 Palestinians and at least 8,730 in Israel, and destroying or damaging at least 60 percent of Gaza's residential units.

As the war continues, finding and rescuing those trapped under the rubble is becoming increasingly difficult.

The Gaza Civil Defence is tasked with rescuing people every time a bomb is dropped, but its ability to mount rescues is restricted by a lack of advanced equipment.

"The equipment we use is very outdated, and the Civil Defence hasn't received any new equipment since 2006. The Civil Defence is working

with the least minimum of equipment," said Captain Raed Saqr from the Fire and Rescue Department in the Gaza Civil Defence.

Saqr showed Al Jazeera the tools his team uses for rescue missions. They included a shovel to remove debris, a sledgehammer to break pieces of concrete, a manual cutter to sever metal rods and crowbars to access confined places where hands can't reach.

"They are simple tools that could be found anywhere or at any craftsman's shop," he said.

According to Captain Anes Wafi, head of the Fire and Rescue Department in Khan Younis, the Gaza Civil Defence has a limited number of machines but is unable to use them due to a shortage of fuel.

"If we had fuel, we would have used a concrete crusher and cutting discs. We would have been more productive. They are completely out of service now because of the fuel crisis," Wafi said.

Wafi added that no aid has been provided to the Gaza Civil Defence through the Rafah border crossing with Egypt despite the agency's need for special machinery and heavy cranes to break down buildings and concrete and remove debris.

"We do not have any capabilities. We need tractors, claw machines and huge cranes to lift the rubble of the buildings."

This month, Gaza's media office said in a statement that 80 percent of rescue vehicles and equipment had been destroyed in Israeli attacks on the enclave.

No respite for rescue missions

Israel's assault on Gaza has continued for almost three months with bombs dropping nearly every day. The ongoing attacks make it difficult for rescue teams to reach the thousands of people who remain buried under the rubble, especially if those areas have been evacuated and blocked off by Israeli forces.

"Sometimes our teams were targeted while they were searching for people under the rubble, or sometimes they [Israeli forces] would fire warning missiles to force us to evacuate the area," Wafi said.

"Our teams were targeted in Gaza City and in Rafah. Our ambulance car was damaged because of a missile attack nearby. We are always expecting to be targeted in any rescue mission."

Wafi said that sometimes the team has to make the difficult decision to leave someone trapped under the rubble if they determine the rescue mission cannot continue without proper equipment or machinery.

"We had to leave them there since it would take about 10 hours of work, and we would move on to another place that would be recently targeted and needs less time to dig under the rubble."

Widespread destruction: How Gaza turned into rubble

The Israeli bombardment has levelled entire neighbourhoods in Gaza from the north to the south.

Some international officials have called the destruction more "catastrophic, apocalyptic" than that experienced by German cities during World War II while others say Gaza is "fast becoming unlivable".

According to the latest data from the United Nations Office for the Coordination

of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), the World Health Organization (WHO) and the Palestinian government, as of Sunday, Israeli attacks have resulted in:

- More than half of Gaza's homes - 313,000 residential units - destroyed or damaged
- 352 educational facilities damaged
- 26 of 35 hospitals not functioning
- 102 ambulances damaged
- 203 places of worship damaged

With nearly two million people - about 85 percent of the population - internally displaced within the tiny enclave, some Palestinians have resorted to staying in their demolished homes rather than being homeless.

No end to the war is in sight, but experts are already worried that it could take years to clear the rubble and find those trapped underneath.

The Mines Advisory Group, which works to clear landmines in conflict zones, said unexploded ammunition in Gaza will make it particularly difficult to clear the debris and would require unprecedented efforts.



Bombed, then stabbed: West Bank doctors recall horrors of refugee camp raid despite hurdles

The Israeli raids on the Nur Shams and Fawwar refugee camps followed a pattern of deadly assaults that have killed more than 300 people in the West Bank since October 7, say doctors and politicians

By Mosab Shawer

Fawwar, occupied West Bank — It was one o'clock at night when the casualties started arriving at Thabet Thabet Governmental Hospital in the city of Tulkarem.

There were six of them, all with critical wounds, said Dr Iyad al-Aqqad, the hospital's medical director. They were victims of an Israeli bombing on the Nur Shams refugee camp in Tulkarem, during a raid that started on the night of December 26 and continued into the early hours of the following day.

It was the second time in 24 hours that Israeli forces had stormed the camp, entering several homes, and dropping at least two bombs, including on an industrial facility. Israeli soldiers are often accused — both in the occupied West Bank and in the Gaza Strip — of not allowing ambulances to reach the wounded promptly. That is what happened in Nur Shams too, say witnesses and doctors — a two-hour delay during which the six men were bleeding.

By the time they were brought to al-Aqqad's hospital, it was too late to save them.

The six joined a ballooning list of Palestinians killed in the West Bank by Israeli soldiers and illegal settlers since October 7, when a Hamas attack on southern Israel sparked a deadly war of retribution focused on — though not limited to — Gaza. Since then, Israeli bombing and artillery attacks have killed more than 21,000 people in Gaza, while Israeli soldiers and settlers have killed more than 300 people in the West Bank. At least 56 people have been killed in Tulkarem governorate itself, according to the Shireen Observatory, a non-profit group that tracks killings and arrests by Israeli forces.

Tens of thousands more have been injured in Gaza and the West Bank. Soon after the



six victims of the Israeli bombing on Nur Shams arrived early on December 27, several other Palestinians with injuries from the attack were brought to Thabet Thabet Governmental Hospital. Three of them had serious injuries to their upper bodies.

And all of them had harrowing tales to relate to the doctors.

Radwan Balibla, the head of the Tulkarem Doctors' Syndicate, said a soldier had stabbed one of the victims in the neck while he was being moved to the hospital in an ambulance. Others said they had been beaten in the ambulances.

"They were told, 'We do not want you to reach the hospital and survive'," Balibla told Al Jazeera.

Just hours later, Israel launched another raid, this time in the Fawwar refugee camp near Hebron. As Israeli troops entered homes and occupied the streets for hours, they faced confrontations with locals and responded by opening fire.

Ahmed Muhammad Yaghi, 17, and

Ibrahim Majed al-Titi, 31, were killed. Ambulance crews in the camp provided first aid to them and transferred them to Yatta Governmental Hospital, but they died as a result of their critical injuries. Six other injured people were transferred to hospitals to receive treatment.

In an interview with Al Jazeera, the representative of the Fatah movement in the Fawwar camp, Muhammad Abu Esh, said Israeli forces are storming the camp on an almost daily basis. Israel's army has also closed the entrances to the camp since October 7, hampering the movement of Palestinians by preventing entry and exit. Meanwhile, amid increasingly frequent raids, the number of detainees has also grown to 100 in Fawwar.

Abu Esh said Israel had deployed snipers inside buildings and houses during the raid this week. Yet, he added, "Israel is mistaken if it thinks it is scaring the people al-Fawwar", especially its children. "No attacks ever will."

Red Sea's Escalating Turmoil: The New Frontline Amidst Gaza-Israel Conflict



By Nimra Atiq

The Red Sea has become a new focal point of escalating tensions as Yemen's Houthi rebels have intensified their attacks on ships linked to Israel, triggering widespread concerns about maritime security and sending shockwaves through global oil markets.

In a show of solidarity with the Palestinian cause, the Houthis have targeted any vessel with ties to Israel, including a recent attack on an Israel-linked vessel off the Indian coast. The Houthis, an Iran-backed rebel group, have launched a series of attacks on vessels in the Red Sea, targeting both Israel-linked ships and commercial ships. The United States has announced a new maritime protection force to counter Houthi attacks in the Red Sea. However, the Houthis have vowed not to stop their attacks until Israel's "crimes in Gaza stop and food, medicines, and fuel are allowed to reach its besieged population."

Houthi Attacks in the Red Sea

Israel's campaign to eradicate Hamas militants behind an Oct. 7 massacre has

resulted in severe devastation in the coastal enclave of Gaza. The widespread destruction has led to hunger and homelessness for many residents. According to the Palestinian enclave's Health Ministry, the conflict has resulted in the tragic loss of nearly 20,000 lives among the Gazan population. The situation in Gaza remains dire, with urgent humanitarian needs requiring immediate attention and support from the international community.

The conflict has expanded beyond Gaza and has reached the Red Sea, where Houthi forces aligned with Iran have been launching missile and drone attacks on vessels. This has led to the establishment of a multinational naval mission to safeguard trade in the region. However, the Houthis have stated their intention to continue their attacks, potentially conducting sea operations every 12 hours. The Houthi attacks began after the start of the Israel-Hamas war on October 7, and the group has declared its support for Hamas, stating that they will target any ship traveling to Israel.

In the last month, they seized control of a commercial ship, and this month, they

targeted a Norwegian vessel with a missile, causing a fire. Their actions have compelled the world's biggest shipping companies to change the routes of their ships, leading to disruptions in global trade and a rise in oil prices.

The two India-bound ships, MV Saibaba and MV Chem Pluto were targeted in drone attacks while sailing in the Red Sea and off the coast of Gujarat in the Arabian Sea. These incidents occurred during a period of heightened maritime tensions due to the ongoing Israel-Hamas war. The attacks on the ships have raised concerns about the security of maritime trade routes and the potential impact on shipping in the region.

Yemen's Houthi rebel group also claimed responsibility for launching drone attacks aimed at the Israeli port city of Eilat and a commercial vessel in the Red Sea. The Iran-backed group has escalated its attacks, stating that they are a way to pressure Israel to halt its conflict in Gaza.

Iran, a significant supporter of the Houthis, has been cautious about taking actions that might escalate the conflict in Gaza to the wider region.



The US has alleged that the recent assault on an Israel-affiliated chemical tanker off the Indian coast originated from Iran, a claim that Tehran has rejected as unfounded. Iran has refuted any involvement in the attacks carried out by the Houthis in the Red Sea.

United States and Allied Response

The US has declared the establishment of a coalition force to safeguard trade in the Red Sea following assaults by Yemen's Houthi rebels, which led to the suspension of operations for at least twelve shipping companies.

An alliance of 10 countries, led by the United States, is unlikely to effectively prevent Yemen's Houthi rebels from targeting ships in the Red Sea. However, analysts have indicated that both sides have a shared interest in avoiding a situation that could escalate and become uncontrollable.

The Houthi officials claim that their attacks on commercial and military vessels, which may have ties to Israel, are intended to pressure Israel to cease its conflict with Gaza. These attacks have gained popularity within Yemen, enabling the group to attract recruits.

Despite the establishment of this task force, the Houthis have rejected the initiative as futile, asserting that even in the event of a regional crisis, international shipping routes remain the top priority. The US-led

task force seeks to uphold a deterrent presence in the region, given the recent series of attacks in the Arabian Sea.

The Impact on Global Shipping

The Bab al-Mandeb strait is a crucial maritime route through which about 12 percent of the world's seaborne oil and eight percent of liquefied natural gas pass. These resources are primarily destined for Europe. However, the impact of attacks in this area extends beyond energy resources. Other commodities such as grain, palm oil, and manufactured goods are also affected.

The attacks on Red Sea ships have had a significant impact on global shipping, with

many of the world's largest shipping firms abandoning the route. The Indian Navy has deployed guided missile destroyers to the Arabian Sea after an attack on an Israel-linked chemical tanker off its coast. Despite the new US-led task force, there still hasn't been an increase in ships trying to pass through the Red Sea, and dozens of cargo ships remain stranded in Djibouti.

As tensions continue to escalate, concerns about the safety of ships traversing through the Red Sea have intensified. A total of 12 shipping companies, such as the Italian-Swiss powerhouse Mediterranean Shipping Company, France's CMA CGM, and Denmark's AP Moller-Maersk, have halted passage through the Red Sea citing safety worries. UK oil giant BP joined the list, declaring its decision to steer clear of the region.

Many companies are opting to bypass the Bab al-Mandeb strait and instead travel around the southern tip of Africa, adding approximately nine days to their journey and increasing costs by at least 15 percent. The Red Sea and Suez Canal account for 30 percent of the world's container ship traffic, and the fallout from these attacks has been immense for global shipping.

As the situation unfolds, the global community remains on edge, closely monitoring developments in the Red Sea region. The impact of these attacks on maritime security, coupled with the resulting surge in oil prices, underscores the pressing need for swift and effective measures to de-escalate tensions and restore stability to the area.



Cuban President Miguel Diaz-Canel Declares Israel a Terrorist State

On December 10, the IDF soldiers disregarded cries for "help" and the word "hostages" spoken in Hebrew. The investigation suggested that the soldiers perceived this as a "terrorist deception attempt" by Hamas, intending to lure them into the building in Shejaiya, Gaza

By J. Choudhry

Cuban President Miguel Diaz-Canel has characterized Israel as a “terrorist state” involved in a genocidal conflict in Gaza. This statement coincides with Israel’s sustained military campaign in the region since October 7, leading to an estimated 21,000 casualties in the besieged enclave.

Expressing his concerns on social media, Diaz-Canel underscored the severe impact of Israel’s military operations in Gaza, emphasizing the substantial loss of Palestinian civilian lives. Describing the situation as “a humiliation for humanity,” he criticized the Israeli regime for evading accountability in the face of widespread condemnation.

Diaz-Canel condemned what he referred to as “the genocide committed by the terrorist Israel in Gaza,” deeming it an affront to humanity. He questioned the continued impunity for such actions and reiterated Cuba’s steadfast support for Palestine, declaring, “Cuba, which will never stand among the indifferent, continues to raise its voice in defense of Palestine.” The conflict escalated following Hamas’ initiation of Operation Al-Aqsa Storm, a surprise attack against the Israeli regime in response to longstanding violence against Palestinians. Diaz-Canel’s remarks contribute to the global criticism directed at Israel’s actions in Gaza.

The ongoing hostilities have resulted in a staggering toll, with at least 20,915 Palestinians—predominantly women and children—reported killed in the regime’s aggressive campaign thus far. During the storming of a Gaza building where three hostages were held, Israeli soldiers reportedly ignored pleas for assistance just days before unintentionally killing them, according to a military investigation.



On December 10, the soldiers allegedly disregarded cries for "help" and the word "hostages" spoken in Hebrew. The investigation suggested that the soldiers perceived this as a "terrorist deception attempt" by Hamas, intending to lure them into the building in Shejaiya, Gaza. Fearing the structure was rigged with explosives, the soldiers exited and subsequently killed five Hamas fighters attempting to flee.

It is believed that the hostages also escaped the building. On December 15, the Israeli soldiers mistakenly identified them as a threat and shot them. Two hostages were killed instantly, while the third fled. Despite orders to withhold fire to identify the individual, two soldiers, apparently unable to hear the command due to noise from a nearby tank, shot and killed the third hostage amid cries of "help!" and "They're shooting at me."

UNICEF reports record casualties of children in Israel’s Gaza bombings

UNICEF has raised an alarm regarding the

escalating toll on children in the Israel-occupied West Bank, emphasizing that their plight amid the ongoing conflict must not be overlooked.

According to Adele Khodr, UNICEF’s Regional Director for the Middle East and North Africa, this year has seen an unprecedented level of violence affecting children in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem. She highlighted a distressing statistic, citing that within the past twelve weeks, 83 children have tragically lost their lives—a figure surpassing the total number of child casualties in all of 2022. These fatalities occurred amidst heightened military and law enforcement activities.

Khodr also pointed out that more than 576 children have suffered injuries, while others have reportedly been detained. Additionally, the region faces severe challenges due to movement restrictions and limited access.

While global attention often fixates on the situation in Gaza, Khodr emphasized that children in the West Bank grapple with their harrowing reality. Enduring constant fear and sorrow has become an unfortunate

norm for these affected children. Highlighting the imperative nature of the issue, Khodr stressed that the suffering of children in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, should not be relegated to the sidelines amidst the broader conflict—it is an integral part of the overarching crisis.

Israeli forces ignored SOS calls and killed Hostages: Report

During the storming of a Gaza building where three hostages were held, Israeli soldiers reportedly ignored pleas for assistance just days before unintentionally killing them, according to a military investigation.



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World Bodies Condemn Gaza Bombings

The air strikes on hospitals and ambulances in Gaza by Israel claimed to be carrying Hamas militants, have drawn condemnation from the United Nations Secretary-General and aid agencies operating in the region. The Israeli military alleges that the ambulance was being used by Hamas, although evidence has not been provided. The targeted strike, which reportedly hit a convoy of ambulances evacuating wounded individuals, resulted in 15 deaths and 60 injuries, primarily among people near the hospital gate rather than inside the vehicles, according to Mohammad Abu Selmeyah, the director of al-Shifa Hospital.

Israel has stated its intention to present more evidence supporting its claim that the ambulance was utilized by Hamas for transporting fighters. However, Hamas denies both accusations. UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres expressed horror at the reported attack, while the World Health Organization condemned the strike, and Medecins Sans Frontieres described it as "horrendous" and "a new low in an endless stream of unconscionable violence."

The Palestinian Red Crescent Society reported that the ambulances were attempting to transport individuals wounded by Israeli bombardment from al-Shifa Hospital to the Rafah border crossing with Egypt. The evacuation journey, obstructed by Israeli forces surrounding the northern half of the

enclave, aimed to reach the southern area, which has not yet seen ground troops but is subjected to Israeli bombardment.

The ambulance convoy, forced to turn back due to road blockages caused by shelling, was targeted as it returned through Gaza City, resulting in injuries to the crew and patients. Videos verified by Reuters showed casualties near ambulances, prompting expressions of concern from international organizations, including the International Committee of the Red Cross, which stated its heartbreak over the endangerment of medical services in Gaza. The ICRC emphasized the Palestinian Red Crescent Society's commitment to principles of neutrality and impartiality in providing life-saving services.

Over 12000 children were killed in Gaza bombings

The government media office in Gaza reported that the Palestinian death toll resulting from ongoing Israeli aggression in the Gaza Strip has surpassed 12,000. The victims, as per the statement released, encompass over 5,000 children and 3,300 women, with an additional 30,000 individuals sustaining injuries. The statement also highlighted that 3,750 people, including 1,800 children, remain unaccounted for amidst the conflict. According to the media office, the Israeli occupation is held responsible for 1,270 recorded massacres during this period.

Tragically, the assaults have claimed the lives of 200 medics, 22 civil defense personnel, and 51 journalists, the statement further revealed. The relentless Israeli aggression has resulted in the closure of 25 hospitals and 52 healthcare centers, with 55 ambulances becoming targets of Israeli forces.

Israel initiated extensive air and ground attacks on the Gaza Strip following a cross-border assault by Hamas on October 7. The widespread Israeli offensive has caused extensive damage, impacting numerous buildings, including hospitals, mosques, churches, and other structures within the region.

Ex-CIA Chief Analyst Paul Pillar says Israel cannot defeat Hamas



By M.A. Saki/Tehran Times

TEHRAN – “Obviously the unqualified Western support has been a major factor in enabling Israel to continue down the tragic path that has led to the situation we see today,” says Paul Pillar, a nonresident fellow at the Center for Security Studies at Georgetown University.

Pillar also casts serious doubts over the Netanyahu government’s declared statement to eliminate Hamas, saying Israel “really cannot” decimate Hamas in the Gaza Strip. Professor Pillar believes that the rage against the Israeli attacks on Gaza is helping Hamas recruit new forces and that the resistance may take other forms in the future.

“Even if Hamas could be ‘destroyed’—which it really cannot, given how anger over the Israeli assault is gaining Hamas recruits and support—resistance would take other forms, including groups yet to be formed and acts of resistance by angry individuals,” Pillar tells the Tehran Times in an exclusive interview. Pillar is the former chief of the CIA.

Pillar also asserts that if a solution is not found to the decades-long conflict between Palestinians and Israelis there will be no end to the violence.

“There will be unending violence without a resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict,” notes Pillar who served as a national intelligence officer for the Near East and South Asia at the CIA.

Following is the text of the interview:

Q: How do you analyze Israel’s atrocities in Gaza in response to Hamas’s October 7 attacks in terms of proportionality, international law, especially attacks on health centers, etc.?

A: The well-known facts of what has transpired in Gaza since early October speak for themselves and do not require analysis, including the fact that the casualties, destruction, and suffering of the civilian population are far out of proportion to the damage inflicted in the opposite direction. I am not an international lawyer, but clearly, there are issues regarding the

laws of war that have properly been raised regarding not only attacks on medical facilities but also the overall manner in which lethal violence has been directed at civilians. The atrocities that Hamas committed in Israel on October 7th also were violations of international law. One such violation does not justify the committing of other violations.

“When people are denied peaceful channels for pursuing grievances, some will resort to violence.”

Q: Israeli PM Netanyahu has claimed he wants to remove Hamas from Gaza. Do you think it is practically possible?

A: Even based on the Israeli government’s numbers, the Israeli assault has so far destroyed only a fraction of Hamas’s military capability. Given the current rate and methods of the Israeli military, to “remove” Hamas or even destroy its military wing would mean continuing the operation in a way that would increase civilian casualties to several times the

alarmingly high number they have already reached. Given that Hamas is much more than just the military wing and has been the civil administration of the Gaza Strip, "removal" is not something that can be accomplished anyway with just a destructive military assault.

Q: Even if Hamas is debilitated, can it be imagined that new groups would not emerge after some years or that new intifada/intifadas would not begin in the West Bank?

A: Yes, of course it can. One of the common errors in talking about Hamas is to treat it as some sort of prime mover that is uniquely destabilizing. Hamas is just one organizational manifestation of Palestinian resistance against occupation and blockade. Even if Hamas could be "destroyed"--which it really cannot, given how anger over the Israeli assault is gaining Hamas new recruits and support--resistance would take other forms, including groups yet to be formed and acts of resistance by angry individuals.

Q: Sociologically speaking, is it rational to expect around 2 million Gazans who have been put in a concentration camp not to rebel? Don't you think the way Israel is treating the Palestinians in Gaza and the occupied West Bank automatically breeds

extremism and violence?

A: The principles at play are not unique to the Middle East or the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. One principle is that when a population is mistreated and its nationalist aspirations suppressed, it will resist. Another principle is that when people are denied peaceful channels for pursuing their grievances, some will resort to violence.

"There will be unending violence without a resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict." **Q:** Do you agree with this view that the Western world is partly responsible for the current situation as it has turned Israel into a "spoiled child" through its unwavering support in a way that the Tel Aviv rulers have turned down any offer to heal this decades-long wound?

A: The unqualified Western support has been a major factor in enabling Israel to continue down the tragic path that has led to the situation we see today. One of the unfortunate things about this is that although the tragedy is first of all one for the Palestinians, it also is a tragedy for Israelis, who will never know true peace and security until and unless they recognize the aspiration for self-determination among their Palestinian neighbors. Those in the West who admire and respect Israel would be true friends of Israel only if they stop

enabling the destructive behavior. True love in this case must take the form of tough love.

Q: Despite the current calamity, Netanyahu boasts that he has stood strong against efforts to establish an independent Palestinian state. With this in mind, is it possible to imagine that a two-state solution can be found to the conflict?

A: It is difficult to imagine an Israeli government with its current extreme-right political makeup ever agreeing to an independent Palestinian state, but politics in Israel can change just as they can change in other countries. As to whether the construction of Israeli settlements in the occupied territories has gone so far as to make a two-state solution almost impossible that is a question on which objective observers can disagree.

Q: What can we learn from history in finding a durable solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict?

A: That the conflict, as long as it is not resolved with a negotiated political settlement that meets the nationalist aspirations of both Israeli Jews and Palestinian Arabs, cannot be sidelined shoved aside, or pushed out of the world's consciousness. Without such a resolution of the conflict, there will be unending violence.



From Korean War to Hallyu: Lessons from South Korea's Burgeoning Economy

By Amna Islam Ch

The success of the Korean wave can be seen, at its core, as the outcome of a historical confluence of politics, economics, and culture. In this context, three major factors are drawing attention to South Korea's soft power around the world. To begin, South Korea's thriving culture owes a great deal to the country's dynamic history, embodied by its burgeoning economy and flourishing democracy. Despite the devastation caused by the Korean War, South Korea developed into a middle power in just over 50 years. With a per capita income of about USD 30,000, it is currently ranked as the tenth-largest economy in the world. As a result of its rapid economic development, South Korea is now a leading nation in the fields of the digital economy and information and communication technology (ICT), developing well-known brands such as Samsung, Hyundai, and Kia. Similarly, taking into account the stable political and social environment of South Korea, we observe the successful democratization and peaceful transition between political parties that brought economic boom in the country. South Korea's accomplishment in gaining soft power and establishing middle-power status within the liberal international order is a source of inspiration for other countries, particularly the developing states.

Introduction

Over the ruins of the Korean War, South Korea's current economic and cultural progression recounts the tale of decades of successful strategic policies, the resilience of Korean people, and the re-affirmation of Korean identity through the phenomena of Hallyu. The pessimistic view of South Korea emerged after the havoc of the Korean War in the 1950s. It was regarded as a country with pervasive corruption, an authoritarian regime, a painfully slow development rate, political upheaval, rampant poverty, hyper-inflation, and over-dependence on aid packages. In the mid-1950s, American aid was a very significant part of South Korea's economy and



accounted for approximately 80% of all government revenues. A decade of economic stagnation mired with unsuccessful import substitution policies, South Korea underwent much-needed social change in the educational and technological sector. Consequently, South Korea wiped out the derogatory label of the "Rat Hole," notorious for gulping down foreign aid and assistance without producing sustained economic growth, and rewrote its fate as a "Middle Income Economy." South Korea has surely come a long way.

The Visionary Leadership and the Path to Success South Korea laid the foundation of success and transformation with a clear vision and well-thought-out strategic plan. Under President Park Chung-hee's leadership in the 1960s, the government enacted a number of economic measures designed to encourage industrialization and export-oriented growth. This plan, often dubbed as the "Miracle on the Han River," prioritized investments in education and technology while simultaneously supporting traditional economic pillars including the manufacturing and heavy machinery sectors. Essential to this plan was the idea of economic nationalism, which attempted to reduce dependence on foreign assistance and foster self-reliance. After 1961, large business conglomerates known as 'Chaebol' rose to

the forefront of South Korea's economy. Half of the fifty largest chaebols were founded in that decade. Chaebols, or major family-owned companies, like Samsung, LG, and Hyundai, were built up and became the backbone of South Korea's economy. These companies were instrumental in developing industries and brands with a global reputation for excellence. Moreover, South Korea's rapid economic development can also be attributed in large part to the government's commitment to improving the country's educational system and technological infrastructure. The induction of young technocrats into the government administration who pursued STEM courses abroad, especially from the US, proved fruitful for the economic development of the country.

Hallyu—The Wave of Cultural Export

The term "Hallyu," short for "Korean Wave," first appeared in the late '90s to describe the meteoric rise in popularity of South Korean pop culture exports like "K" dramas, "K" pop, and "K" movies around the world. The phrase for the global spread of Korean culture, "Hallyu," comes from China. Hallyu Wave, or the internationalization of Korean popular culture, has undergone significant change over the past

two decades, attracting the attention of scholarly communities. The export of Korean entertainment goods like TV shows, albums, and digital applications helped boost the country's economy. South Korea's success story of Hallyu as an export can be broken down into four distinct waves that spread rapidly over the years in the form of Hallyu 1.0 (K-drama), Hallyu 2.0 (K-pop music), Hallyu 3.0 (K-culture), and Hallyu 4.0 (K-style). Recent years have seen a rejuvenated international interest in South Korean culture, thanks in large part to the achievements of K-pop performers like BTS and Blackpink, as well as the success of dark-comedy films like *Parasite* in the Oscars and television shows like *Squid Game* on Netflix.



Re-Affirmation of Korean Identity through Soft Power

The Hallyu wave served as a tool for the Korean government to bolster and project its soft power by contributing to the economy and promoting a positive image of Korean culture abroad. Among the many contributing factors to the surge of the Hallyu Wave, the narrative of decolonization and its legacy stands out. The reassertion of Asian identity in response to Western cultural dominance created ideal conditions for the development and dramatic rise of the Hallyu Wave. As the Korean people started to work towards decolonization by regaining their cultural principles, the country's economy grew, giving its residents the means to celebrate the successful spread of Korean culture to nearly every corner of the globe. Hallyu rose to prominence as a potent instrument

of soft power, capturing audiences around the globe and highlighting South Korea's distinctive culture, creative thought, and artistic talent. The alluring beats of K-pop and the emotional stories of K-dramas brought people of different backgrounds together and helped to increase South Korea's global influence. Consumer trends editor at Foresight Factory Margot Peppers asserts that, "There has been a purposeful government campaign to push the Korean wave to the globe on a worldwide scale." The success of Korean culture today is a hallmark of a technologically integrated world. Similarly, the establishment of KOFICE (Korea Foundation for International Cultural Exchange) in 2003, as an offshoot of Korea's Ministry of Culture,

Sports, and Tourism, helped tremendously to foster international cultural exchange and promote Korean culture abroad. Interestingly, Korean sociologist Chang Kyung-Sup calls the rapid development of South Korea after World War II "compressed modernity." Since then, his idea of compressed modernity has been widely influential among academics in Korea and beyond. According to Chang Kyung-sup, Korea experienced the same level of socio-economic transformation as Europe and Japan combined, but in only three decades.

Cultural Diplomacy and the Idea of "Global Korea"

The Lee Myung-Bak administration in the late 2000s shifted cultural policy from an emphasis on the economy to one that emphasizes national branding and competence. To establish South Korea as "future-oriented,

multi-cultural, and visionary," the Lee administration welcomed economic, political, intellectual, and cultural endeavors under the banner of "Global Korea." According to the 2010 Diplomatic White Paper, "soft power" is "becoming increasingly important; culture has surfaced as an indispensable element of a nation's competitiveness and economic resource that produces added value." Hence, cultural diplomacy has become an integral part of Korea's foreign policy as the country adapts to a more interconnected and multicultural world. Everything from South Korean pop music to Korean barbecue has gone global, and this phenomenon has had a cascading impact on South Korea's economy and international reputation. Furthermore, the South Korean government invests in the country's soft power as an efficient means for Seoul's public diplomacy: The country was once largely known for cars and smartphones, but a global audience has become mesmerized by its entertainment, and creators say success did not happen overnight.

Conclusion

From the devastation of the Korean War, South Korea has emerged as a leading industrial nation owing to its people's determination, strategic choices, and cultural reach via Hallyu. The economic rise of the country may be traced back to its strategy for success, which centers on industrialization, export-oriented growth, and investments in education and technology. At the same time, the success of Hallyu around the world accentuated South Korea's artistic and cultural brilliance. South Korea's path, aided by technological developments, is a motivational case study of the power of the human spirit and its ability to overcome misfortune and forge a place for itself among the world's leading economic powers. Michel Foucault's infamous statement "Constructing reality through language" is quite relevant in the context of South Korea and Hallyu. The language and discourse used by the Government of South Korea have played a fundamental role in exporting the cultural narrative, shaping the global perception, and creating a distinct socio-political reality. Hence, we can say that South Korea has created an international niche for its language and culture through the projection of its soft power.

Disqualification of Trump and its Impact on US Politics



By Anum Akram

The Supreme Court of the US state of Colorado made a significant decision on the evening of December 19th, stating that former President Donald Trump should be impeached for his role in the attack on the Capitol Hill building in Washington DC on January 6 and is disqualified.

The Colorado Supreme Court applied the sedition clause to rule that ex-President Donald Trump cannot run in the state's next year's presidential election. In a historic decision, four judges opposed three, declaring Trump ineligible as a candidate. This marks the first use of Section Three of the 14th Amendment to disqualify a presidential candidate. According to the ruling, Trump is barred from appearing on the ballot for the November presidential election in Colorado next year. The judges wrote in their decision: "We do not reach these conclusions so easily. We also bear in mind the gravity and weight of the questions before us at this time." The judges further wrote: "Similarly, without fear or favor, our firm determination to enforce the law. They also keep duty in mind and take decisions according to law without being influenced by public reaction to those decisions."

President Trump's spokesperson referred to the Colorado Supreme Court's ruling as "undemocratic" and promised to file an appeal with the US Supreme Court. Notably, there are two-thirds more conservative justices on the US Supreme Court than liberal ones. Right-wing decisions have been rendered by six of the same Supreme Court justices, including the historic decision on abortion rights last year that overturned the protections of *Roe v. Wade*. Trump campaign spokesperson Steven Cheung issued a statement saying, "We will soon appeal it to the U.S. Supreme Court. The Colorado Supreme Court delivered a completely flawed decision tonight." Together, we will launch a petition to overturn this egregiously undemocratic ruling.

The 14th Amendment allusion was denounced by Trump's campaign staff as an attempt to sway millions of voters, who hold Trump in high regard. Notably, Trump is the only presidential contender in US history to be removed from office by virtue of a little-invoked clause in the US Constitution. Officials who are involved in "inciting rebellion or insurrection" are considered to be ineligible to hold public

office under this clause.

The decision may have an impact on the state's Republican primary scheduled for March 5; however, it may also have an impact on Trump's status in the general election on November 5. Colorado is seen by independent US polling companies as safe for Democrats. This implies that President Joe Biden will be successful no matter what happens to Trump. Colorado was one of Trump's losses in 2020, by 13 percentage points, and the state is not even necessary for him to regain the presidency the following year. The largest danger for the former president, however, is that additional state courts and election officials might decide to follow the Colorado decision and throw Trump out of states where he needs to win. It is worth mentioning that numerous lawsuits have been filed nationwide with the aim of disqualifying Trump based on Section Three of the 14th Amendment. Consequently, there is a possibility that he could encounter a comparable verdict in other states. Anyone who swears to "support" the constitution and subsequently "engages in sedition or insurrection" against it is prohibited by law from holding public office. Only a few



times in the decades following the American Civil War has it been employed.

The Colorado case relied on whether Section 3 barred Trump from the presidency. The article seeks to bar people who took an oath to protect the Constitution and then engaged in insurrection from holding state or federal office. Citizens for Responsibility and Ethics in Washington filed the case in Colorado state court in September on behalf of four Republican voters and two unaffiliated voters, saying that Trump's actions in connection with the Jan. 6 assault disqualified him under Section 3. Several lawsuits have been brought across the country with the same argument, but several have already been dismissed by state courts.

In November, a trial judge in Denver ruled that the events of January 6 met the criteria of insurrection and that Trump incited rebellion. Judge Sarah B. Wallace eventually decided that the language of Section 3 was ambiguous as to whether it covered the office and the past president, and she ordered Griswold to include Trump on the Republican presidential primary ballot. The Colorado Supreme Court agreed to hear arguments in the case earlier this month after agreeing to review the district court's decision. The justices deliberated on whether the events of January 6 could be deemed a "insurgency," and if so, if Trump "engaged in it." They also considered whether the president is an "officer of the United States" under Section 3 of the Constitution.

The justices rejected Trump's lawyers' claims that the Jan. 6 breach of the Capitol by his supporters was not an insurgency, instead concluding that the record in the case "amply established that the events of January 6 constituted a concerted and public use of force or threat of force by a group of people to hinder or prevent the U.S. government from taking the actions necessary to accomplish the peaceful transfer of power in this country."

America is regarded as the world's first and most developed liberal democracy, and it is expected that if this type of choice is made in America, it will have an impact on other states claiming to be liberal democratic governments around the world. According to the speaker of Trump's party, this type of judicial ruling is tantamount to tyranny being implemented. Former US President Trump has the right to challenge the Colorado Supreme Court's judgment, and it is possible that Trump will receive relief from the US Supreme Court, but the important thing to remember at this moment is that the dominant political party. In terms of the popularity graph, Joe Biden's standing among Americans has dropped below 40%, and it appears that Donald Trump has a better chance of winning the presidency despite the fact that, a former US president, is seen by many in the East as having openly supported Islamophobia and adopted anti-Islamic policies.



Frustration still haunts people amid 'electioneering' in Pakistan

By Javed Mahmood

Despite the beginning of electioneering in Pakistan, frustration is still haunting Pakistanis due to a variety of reasons. After the signing of the staff-level agreement with the IMF, the people were optimistic about a gradual economic recovery in the country and ease in their cost of living, but this appears a distant dream in the prevailing scenario.

The foremost reasons are the consistent increase in electricity, gas tariffs, and essential consumer items that have eroded the purchasing power of the people and badly undermined the business sentiment.

The recent crash of the stock market and its dramatic recovery in the following two days has unnerved people further who were anticipating a gradual improvement in the economic activities of the country. On Tuesday (Dec 26), the bears took a firmer hold on Pakistan's stock market, causing the key stock index to plummet by a record 2,534 points, marking its most significant single-day decline to date.

This downturn follows a sustained correction phase after the market reached unprecedented highs in recent weeks. The KSE100 index, considered the benchmark, experienced a drastic 4.1% crash, culminating at 59,171 points by the close of the latest session at the Pakistan Stock Exchange (PSX). Following this steep decline, the KSE100 has now descended by 11%, equivalent to 7,256 points from its pinnacle of 66,427 points recorded on December 12.

However, on Dec 27 and 28, the KSE-100 Index gained more than 2000 points to recover the earlier losses.

Financial experts have labeled the bearish trend in the market as a necessary correction phase in response to an overheated market. Simultaneously, they recognize that it faces pressure due to delays in interest rate reductions, an upsurge in political activities preceding the general elections, and foreign investors selling off their holdings.

According to experts, "The market has been in corrective mode while foreign investors' involvement remained minimal owing to New Year celebrations." They further highlighted that the ongoing rollover week and heightened political tension over the weekend were exacerbating the index's decline.

Analysts expressed investor apprehension regarding the outcome of the scheduled national polls on February 8. They emphasized the anticipation of continued caution among investors due to the ongoing political developments.

The PSX had reached an unprecedented high of 66,427 earlier in the month amid speculation about an interest rate reduction. However, the central bank maintained the 22% rate in its monetary policy due to persistent high inflation.



Exports reflect 33% growth in December 2023

Pakistan saw a remarkable surge in exports during the initial 20 days of December 2023, with an outstanding year-on-year increase of \$479 million, reflecting an impressive growth rate of 33.1%. This positive momentum was highlighted in a recent press release.

Former APTMA chairman and caretaker Minister of Commerce Gohar Ejaz emphasized that these encouraging trade figures signify Pakistan's resilience in the global market. He reiterated the commitment to support exporters and explore new markets for exports, aiming to sustain this upward trajectory.

In contrast, imports experienced a significant decline of \$405 million within the same period, marking a notable reduction of -12.8%. This resulted in an impressive improvement of \$884 million in Pakistan's trade balance for December 2023. In the fiscal year to date, spanning from July 1, 2023, to December 20, 2023, Pakistan's exports surged to \$14 billion, witnessing a substantial year-on-year increase of \$709 million, equating to a noteworthy 5.3% improvement. On the other hand, import figures dropped to \$24.3 billion from \$29.2 billion in the previous fiscal year, reflecting a substantial year-on-year decrease of \$4.9 billion and a corresponding improvement in the balance of trade by \$5.6 billion.

Remarkably, agricultural and food exports saw an extraordinary 109.2% year-on-year increase, totaling \$574.6 million in the first 20 days of December 2023. This surge was fueled by robust performances in maize, corn, ethyl, alcohol, tobacco, and rice exports. Additionally, the textile manufacturing & and engineering sectors exhibited a commendable 15% year-on-year increase in exports during the same period. Pakistan experienced significant export growth to key destinations, including Indonesia, the United Arab Emirates, Madagascar, and China, signaling promising market diversification and expansion.

Minister Dr. Gohar Ejaz expressed confidence in the continuity of this positive trend, emphasizing the Ministry's

dedication to creating an enabling environment for trade and economic prosperity. These achievements highlight Pakistan's resilience and competitiveness on the global stage.

SBP's reserves skip below \$7 billion in December

However, recent data released on Thursday showed a decrease in foreign exchange reserves held by the State Bank of Pakistan (SBP) by \$136 million every week, bringing the reserves to \$6.9 billion as of December 15. This marks a low point in over five months, largely attributed to debt repayments and a lack of fresh inflows. Despite challenges, recent agreements with international entities like the IMF aim to bolster Pakistan's financial stability and support ongoing economic efforts.

December is poised to witness a staggering surge in inflation, likely surpassing the daunting 30% threshold. This rise is primarily attributed to the recent escalation in gas prices and the lingering adverse base effect, exerting pressure on the Consumer Price Index (CPI).

Inflation in Pakistan in 2023

Projections indicate that December's headline inflation might settle around 30.11% Year-on-Year (YoY) and 1.18% Month-on-Month (MoM), contrasting with the preceding month's figures of 29.2% YoY and 2.7% MoM. However, despite this upsurge, the monthly inflation rate remains notably lower than the 12-month average of 2.17% MoM.

Consequently, the average yearly inflation for the first six months of FY24 is expected to reach 28.87% YoY, in contrast to the 25.05% YoY recorded in the equivalent period of FY23. This surge is fueled by a combination of factors, including the adverse base effect and the notable spike in gas prices, which were not fully absorbed in the previous month. The National Consumer Price Index for December 2023 is projected as follows:

Headline CPI: 30.11% YoY, 1.18% MoM; Food & Non-alcoholic Beverages: 27.76% YoY, -0.29% MoM; Alcoholic Beverages & Tobacco: 81.77% YoY, -0.07% MoM; Clothing & Footwear: 20.24% YoY, 0.18% MoM; Housing, Water, Electricity, Gas & Fuels: 41.18% YoY, 6.19% MoM; Furnishing & Household Equipment Maintenance: 31.34% YoY, 0.00% MoM; Health: 22.25% YoY, -0.20% MoM; Transport: 22.41% YoY, -4.04% MoM; Communication: 7.25% YoY, -0.08% MoM; Recreation & Culture: 38.29% YoY, -0.11% MoM; Education: 13.34% YoY, 0.07% MoM; Restaurants & Hotels: 30.42% YoY, 0.49% MoM and Miscellaneous: 30.66% YoY, 0.25% MoM.

On a different note, food inflation is predicted to witness a light decrease of 0.29% MoM, primarily driven by declines in the prices of tomatoes, potatoes, chicken, and oil. Similarly, the transport index is expected to decrease by approximately 4% MoM, attributed chiefly to relief in petrol and HSD prices.

Looking ahead, it's anticipated that inflation will begin declining at a more rapid pace post-December. Factors contributing to this decline include a favorable base effect, the delayed impact of monetary tightening measures, and administrative actions. December's

inflation surge is largely tied to the lingering repercussions of the overdue gas price hike. However, it's crucial to note that unforeseen climate events, fluctuating global commodity prices—especially oil—and external account pressures pose significant risks to the inflation outlook.

The resurgence in global oil prices, exacerbated by shipping disruptions, stands as a potential threat to the inflation trajectory. Moreover, the successful completion of the IMF review and additional loan programs holds paramount importance. Notably, the remaining \$1.8 billion under the SBA is yet to be disbursed. The high base effect is depicted in a chart showcasing various yearly inflation trajectories considering different MoM CPI scenarios. These projections indicate a gradual decline in yearly inflation towards the fiscal year-end, albeit with the real interest rate likely remaining in negative territory by then.

World Bank fears reversal of economic policies after general elections

The World Bank has raised concerns regarding potential rollbacks of vital reforms, especially in trade tariffs, following the upcoming general elections, citing vested interests as a key factor. In its assessment of the \$350 million loan sanctioned under the second Resilient Institutions for Sustainable Economy (Rise-II), the international lending agency highlighted the risk posed by strong vested interests pushing for the reversal of crucial reforms. These reforms specifically target trade tariff adjustments, property tax increases, and energy sector enhancements.

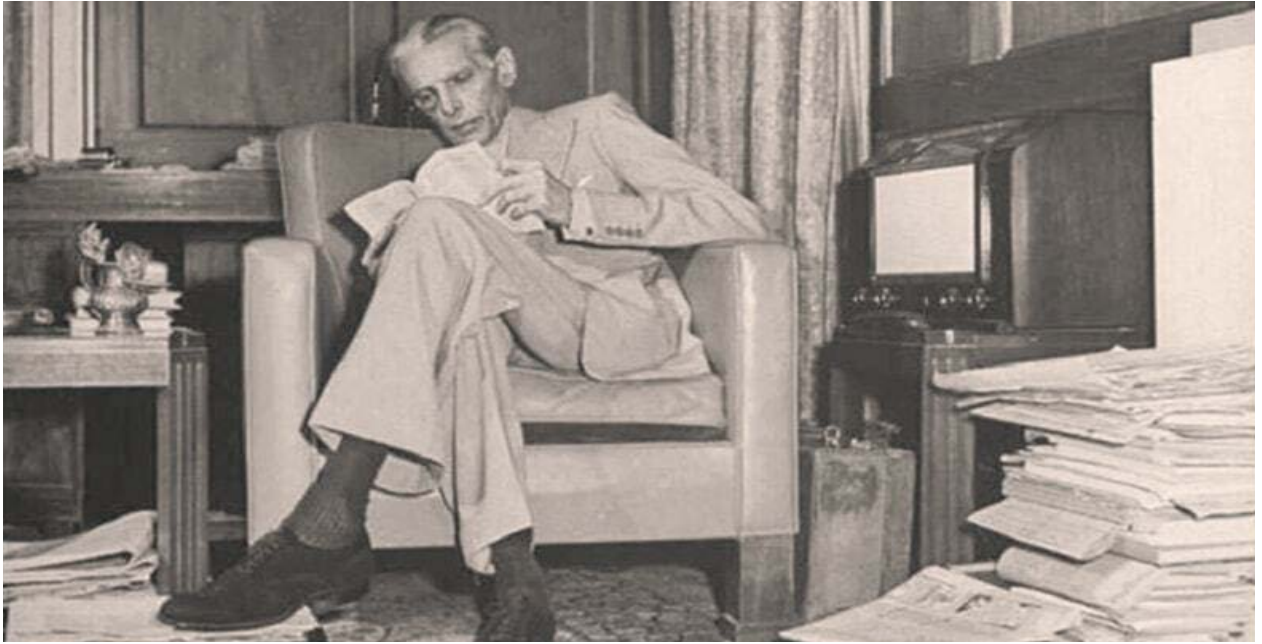
The urgency for fiscal and structural reforms aimed at sustaining macroeconomic equilibrium and fostering lasting growth was emphasized during the loan approval on December 20. With Pakistan's general elections scheduled for February 8 and an earlier staff-level agreement between the country and the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the World Bank underscored the risks associated with political pressures potentially swaying decisions to meet the lender's requirements.

The report stressed the significance of external support post the Stand-By Arrangement (SBA) completion, highlighting macroeconomic risks and the necessity for balanced and sustainable growth. The IMF's staff agreement, focusing on macroeconomic stability and conditions for equitable growth, was a pivotal aspect of the nine-month agreement. Addressing economic concerns, the World Bank highlighted the elevated risk to sustainability due to the need for coordination between provincial and federal authorities, compounded by frequent turnover in critical government positions.

Moreover, the lender emphasized that the incoming government would need to embark on comprehensive reforms within the subsequent IMF program. Interim Finance Minister Shamshad Akhtar previously underscored the fragility of the economy, emphasizing the need to stay within the loan program.

Looking forward, the World Bank advocated for trade policy reforms, the phasing out of agricultural subsidies, and a rationalized federal government expenditure approach in devolved areas as crucial steps ahead.

Jinnah amid ideas of Pakistan



By Asad Rahim Khan

Around 1899, empire's beloved envoy, Rudyard Kipling — fresh from Lahore — wrote 'The White Man's Burden', urging the master race to serve "your new-caught, sullen peoples, half devil and half child."

Addressed to America, the poem was a hit in his home colony: at a safe remove from the world wars, the British Raj seemed set to rule forever.

But not everyone was for it: per the anti-imperialist poet Wilfred Scawen Blunt, "The White Man's Burden, Lord, is the burden of his cash." Praised by no less a fellow critic than Edward Said, Blunt was a rather unique son of Sussex. ("The British Empire is a structure that might crumble at any moment," he wrote, "the sooner the better, say I.")

He was also an early voice — per some, the first — to argue for a separation of the Hindu and Muslim parts of India, if retaining a common British defence. Writing a day short of 140 years ago, he wished "to put Northern India practically under Mohammedan [government], Southern India under Hindu government ...".

Blunt's proposal — which, per historian K.K. Aziz, was of "breathtaking novelty" for 1883 — landed at the close of a century that had seen nonstop tragedy for India's Muslims.

The most searing case had been 1857, which ended in a years-long revenge spree by the Crown: natives were fired from cannons, others driven from their homes.

"When the angry lions entered the city," Ghalib wrote of the British taking back Delhi, "they killed the helpless and burned [their] houses." Yet even after the swords were put away, the minority was still seen as the culprit: Punjab's John Lawrence, for one, felt the Muslims had "displayed a more active, vindictive, and fanatic spirit than the Hindus — but these traits are characteristic of the race."

Thus, when Lawrence's statue went up on the Mall outside the Lahore High Court, it was inscribed with a warning for the city's angry young men: "Will you be governed by the pen or the sword?" For India's foremost Muslim leader at the time, Sayyid Ahmed Khan, the answer could only be the pen.

Scarred by 1857, his lectures to fellow believers to stop spitting on the Union Jack — and learn something, get a job, and grow strong along the way — were scorned by Muslim conservatives too freshly humiliated to pull focus. Rather than see his Aligarh College as an oasis, they dismissed it as an assembly line for British flunkies.

Besides, Sayyid Ahmed was a bit of a morning star; his thinking too ahead of its time to sway the Muslim mass. To him, siding with the Crown — a temporary overlord — was a matter of tactics, and guarding against the Hindu majority — a permanent overclass — a matter of strategy. "Suppose ... the whole English army were to leave ... then who would be the rulers of India?" he asked Meerut in 1888. "Is it possible that under these circumstances two nations — the Muhammadans and the Hindus — could sit on the same throne and remain equal in power?"

Most certainly not. It is necessary that one of them should conquer the other and thrust it down. While never urging division like Blunt — and thus, per one historian, stopping in the middle of his own argument — Sayyid Ahmed nonetheless pointed to the divide at the heart of imperial India: the expression 'two nations' was his result.

"By the 1930s, Jinnah had closed out the first two phases of his public life: as an ambassador of Hindu-Muslim unity, and then as a frustrated moderate amid Gandhi fever. The third phase, as we all know, was embracing the idea of Pakistan"

The next clear plan for separation —

for which a primary source exists — would come from Hindu sectarian Lala Lajpat Rai in 1924, urging “a clear partition ... into a Muslim India and a non-Muslim India.” Appalled by the idea of separate electorates ripping through his Bharat, Rai thought it best to take a knife to the whole thing. He would be killed by lathi charge four years later.

Finally — in the last landmark before the Lahore resolution — it was fiery Cambridge student Rahmat Ali’s pamphlet in 1933 that spelled out the surest plan for partition, and also coined the new state a name: ‘Pakistan’ or land of the pure, pulled from Punjab, Afghanistan, Kashmir, Sindh, and Balochistan. (Bengal showed up in its own right, as the unfortunately named ‘Bangistan’.) During all of this — the pre-partition trinity of Blunt, Rai, and Rahmat — leading lawyer Muhammad Ali Jinnah was still miles short of calling for independence.

This also brings us to a bit of a delicate point: to say poet Iqbal dreamt up the idea around the same time, as Pak Studies types so often do, isn’t borne out by the record. His famous Allahabad address of 1930 did indeed wish for “Punjab, North-West Frontier Province, Sindh, and Balochistan” to be “amalgamated into a single state,” but “within the body-politic of India.”

After all, Iqbal meant ‘state’ in the lower-case Indian fashion, as a province (the uppercase ‘S’ is a sly revision in later texts by other writers). Son Javid Iqbal confirms in his book *Islam and Pakistan’s Identity* that this was for a “Muslim India within India, as the word ‘state’ used by Iqbal, only implied the grant of full autonomy...” The elder Iqbal clarified as much in his letter of October 12, 1931: that such “Muslim provinces ... would be the bulwark of India ... against the hungry generations of the Asiatic highlands.”

He wrote again of Hindu-Muslim ties in 1931, “... I cannot allow myself to believe ... that all human efforts directed to uniting the two communities are doomed to failure.”

To say Iqbal thereby doesn’t figure in Pakistan’s genesis, however, is unkind. While enough has been written on the hold his words had on the Muslim street, he had also endorsed the politics of partition by

1937. His letter of June 21, addressed to Jinnah, is definitive: “A separate federation of Muslim provinces ... is the only course by which we can secure a peaceful India and save Muslims from the domination of non-Muslims.

Why should not the Muslims ... be considered a nation entitled to self-determination ...? “Which brings us, at last, to creation’s key figure. By the 1930s, Jinnah had closed out the first two phases of his public life: as an ambassador of Hindu-Muslim unity, and then as a frustrated moderate amid Gandhi fever.

The third phase, as we all know, was embracing the idea of Pakistan, and creating a country less than a decade after it was proposed. “I am an Indian first and a Muslim afterwards,” Jinnah said, “but ... no Indian can serve his country if he neglects the interests of the Muslims.” Less remarked-upon is what caused that final shift.

While turning points are aplenty, perhaps the clearest came in 1928, when Gandhi’s populist magic met the cold, black-letter law of the Nehrus. Unlike his easily bored son, Motilal Nehru was a seasoned lawyer.

When he brought out the Nehru Report — the all-Indian counter to a British roadmap — Jinnah was left reeling: his constitutional safeguards had been tossed out the window.

But these had been the great work of his life, going as far back as the Lucknow pact in 1916, when Jinnah’s skill had gotten even hardliners like Tilak and Lajpat Rai to comfort an anxious minority — promising the Muslims separate electorates, as well as reserving them a third of the central legislature, greater than their numbers.

“As the Quaid nears his 150th birthday, the idea of Pakistan has been made real for a while now. Yet it remains as unfulfilled as ever”

But those handshakes had been a while ago: the Congress of the late 1920s and ’30s was a new beast altogether as the logic of brute majority started dawning on winner and loser alike. Even when Jinnah went as far as dropping separate electorates — in return for keeping a third of the assembly — it mattered nothing to the Congress bosses.

In his letter to Gandhi, Motilal jeered that

“even the most advanced Mussalmans” had given up such a demand, leaving “the Ali brothers and Jinnah to stew in their own juices.” All said, Jinnah had asked for a tiny piece of the federal pie; just not tiny enough for Motilal.

The Hindu-Muslim question would be settled, Motilal wrote to Annie Besant, “by throwing a few crumbs here and there to the small minorities.” With such indifference all around, it was becoming obvious that the Congress and the League had fundamentally different visions for India’s future.

Hence, also, Jinnah’s heartbroken farewell to the nationalist cause at 1928’s end. Up against a hostile audience at the all-parties convention at Calcutta, he pleaded for reason. One Congressite called him “a spoilt child” and “a naughty child”; the Hindu Mahasabha said he was a fringe wonder.

Jinnah didn’t take the bait. “... Here I am not speaking as a Mussalman but as an Indian,” he told them gently. “... Minorities cannot give anything to the majority.

It is, therefore, no use asking me not to press for what you call these small points. I am not asking for these modifications because I am a ‘naughty child’ ... I am asking you for this adjustment because I think it is the best and fair to the Mussalmans ... Majorities are apt to be tyrannical and oppressive and particularly towards religious minorities ... We are all sons of this land. We all have to live together.”

Otherwise, “if we cannot agree, let us at any rate agree to differ, but let us part as friends.” And part he did: when he left, Jinnah kicked away the Nehru Report as a ‘Hindu document’ — the sort of binary that would now colour his speeches and statements. Unity was over.

But Pakistan was yet to beckon. Stunned by his wife’s death and abandoned by his own cause, Jinnah spent a lonely wilderness in private practice in London.

Discussions with Liaquat and letters from Iqbal followed, as did politely brushing off Rahmat and his friends: “My dear boys, don’t be in a hurry; let the waters flow and they will find their own level.” From 1937 to 1939, Jinnah’s foes in Congress, in power at last, stirred those separatist waters

all by themselves; his tone hardened with it.

“We Muslims have made up our minds to have our fullest rights,” Jinnah told Patna, “but we shall have them as rights, not as gifts or concessions.” By 1940, the tide had come in: the idea of Pakistan captured the Muslim imagination like none before it.

But the extraordinary popularity of the Lahore Resolution meant fresh critiques aimed at the Quaid, as well as the idea he was determined to adopt and now own.

While meriting a separate essay by themselves, these can nonetheless be touched upon: that Pakistan was meant as a bargaining counter, for a better deal in undivided India. This writer has rebutted that claim in detail elsewhere, whereas Jinnah sighed almost every year since the resolution that “it is not a counter for bargaining”, and to “remove from your mind any idea of some form of such loose federation”. Amid these countless denials post-1940, not a single credible source where Jinnah says otherwise has so far been discovered.

There’s also the canard that Jinnah’s Pakistan was a British plot. But this glides over the fact that the vast majority of empire’s officials would go on record again and again to oppose Pakistan, not least for what it meant for defence: the division of the Indian army, with the Russian bear breathing down the mountains.

(The hilarious claim that the British wanted a ‘buffer zone’, defended by two small armies instead of one, is yet more magical thinking.) Even past guns and steel, the coloniser would also weep for India’s unity for emotional reasons. India had a geographic, racial, and above all ‘political unity’, wrote secretary of state Leo Amery in 1941, “... which we have confirmed in far stronger fashion than any of our predecessors ... I would say, indeed, that if some sort of Indian unity had not existed, it would have to be invented.”

This form of self-soothing was part of a broader trend — the white man’s burden in crisis. As historian Sikandar Hayat has rightly pointed out, “Neither Linlithgow, Zetland, nor Wavell, Amery, Attlee, or Mountbatten supported the [Pakistan] demand.” But for a lull during the war, when the League was preferable to a

striking Congress, the Raj sprung right back to its default contempt for Jinnah’s party as soon as the Japanese fell.

All this bad blood is only ever countered with a few random letters between Jinnah and Churchill, an opposition relic far from the levers of government, who’d never wanted to free India anyway. Taken together, London’s endlessly documented sneering at Pakistan is met with near-zero evidence to the contrary.



Most important, the minority question: if Pakistan was meant to be a land where the Muslims could breathe free, what of the millions left behind in India? For Jinnah, his answer would unvaryingly be in terms of the greatest good, as a counter-question: whether all of Muslim India “should be subjected to a Hindu-majority Raj, or whether at least six crores of Mussalmans residing in the areas where they form a majority should have their own homeland ... and shape their own future destiny ...?” More recent treatments of the idea also merit mentioning.

In *Creating a New Medina*, Venkat Dhulipala is correct to say Pakistan was no vague slogan; he isn’t as correct in the latter half of his thesis — that it was a popularly envisioned theocracy. Save a few clergymen, the religious right overwhelmingly rejected Pakistan and attacked Jinnah, from Maududi’s Jamaat to the Majlis-e-Ahrar to most of the Deoband school. The feeling was mutual: for the Muslim modernists that had founded the new nation, it certainly wasn’t “to be ruled,” per Jinnah, “by priests with a divine mission”.

To play up such a mission would be almost as wrong as its mirror image, Faisal Devji’s

Muslim Zion, linking Pakistan’s birth to Israel’s apartheid project — as two states that transcended ‘blood and soil.’ But Pakistan was “of course nothing like Israel,” historian David Gilmartin has already rebutted, “...for the areas that became Pakistan were already occupied by tens of millions of the Muslims in whose name the state was created.” Zafrulla Khan, the Quaid’s foreign minister, opposed Palestine’s partition for the same reasons at the UN.

Hence, also, Pakistan as a mass movement that became the world’s largest Muslim-majority state at birth, and not a settler militia blasting its way in. To call it a ‘Muslim Zion’, then, is, as Gilmartin says, “an act of historical erasure”.

Finally, we turn to the idea now realised, and what came of its founder’s wishes. Here, unfortunately, there can be no defence: since the creation of Pakistan, Jinnah declared parliamentary sovereignty (Constituent Assembly, August 11, 1947), civilian supremacy (Quetta Staff College, June 14, 1948), and religious pluralism throughout.

Today, the lights are out in all five assemblies, the military establishment reigns supreme, and the country’s minorities eke out their days on the margins, with civil liberties — closer to the lawyer Jinnah’s heart than anything else — long faded from view.

As the Quaid nears his 150th birthday, the idea of Pakistan has been made real for a while now. Yet it remains as unfulfilled as ever.

Courtesy Dawn

Christmas Festival of Kalash People: A Deep Dive into Tradition and Celebration

By Zahiruddin

The Christmas Festival of the Kalash people stands as a vibrant tapestry woven with rich cultural threads, ancient traditions, and communal celebrations. As a unique community residing in the southern part of Chitral, the Kalash people have garnered attention for their distinctive way of life, marked by a deep connection to nature and an unwavering commitment to their cultural heritage.

The committee overseeing the religious rites and a council of respected elders, many of whom are octogenarians, play a pivotal role in the festival's proceedings. One of the festival's highlights is the release of a tethered red fox, symbolizing freedom and renewal. The enthusiastic applause that follows its leap towards the forest is not just a spectacle but holds profound significance for the Kalash people.

The direction of the fox's first jump after its release carries a distinct connotation for the community. It serves as a means of making forecasts for the upcoming year—predicting whether the year will be marked by abundance or scarcity, the outbreak of diseases, or the likelihood of natural disasters in the valley. The fox's movement is a language understood by the Kalash, where an upward leap is interpreted as a positive sign, while a downward leap is considered a bad omen.

This unique ceremony, known as Lowe Nezik, unfolds early in the morning on the last day of the Chitirmas winter festival, spanning two weeks and marking the first day of the Kalash calendar. It encapsulates the essence of the Kalash people's connection to nature and their reliance on these age-old practices to navigate the challenges that lie ahead.

The Kalash people, with their roots embedded in the three adjacent valleys of Bumburate, Birir, and Rumbur, are recognized as one of the indigenous tribes inhabiting the foothills of the Hindukush system of mountains. Despite facing abject poverty, these pleasure-loving people



celebrate various festivals throughout the year, with Chilim Jusht or Xoshi (spring festival) and Chitirmas or Chaumus (winter festival) standing out as significant and prominent events that draw thousands of tourists to their unique cultural milieu.

Chitirmas, the winter festival, serves as a preparation for the residents of the valleys for the rough weather during the next four months, when heavy snowfall confines them to their homes. This festival, lasting fifteen days, commences in the second week of December and concludes on the 22nd of the month. The concluding day holds special significance from a religious perspective, as the Kalash people believe that on this day, the sun changes its course of movement and takes on a new orientation.

The formal initiation of the festival occurs on December 7th with the ceremonial lighting of a bonfire. Children under the age of 10 actively participate by collecting twigs and branches of pine trees, piling them up in a central place. According to their faith, the height of the flames signifies a welcome to peace, prosperity, and amity in the forthcoming winter. Accompanying this

ritual, children and girls sing songs specific to the occasion, beseeching the gods and goddesses to bestow upon them the divine bounties.

Sarazari, the second ceremony of the festival, involves dressing children under two years in new clothes and costumes. This widely attended ceremony sees villagers presenting gifts to the parents of the children, adding to the festive spirit. Kotramu, another integral component of the festival, captures the imagination with its unique expression. Women create statues of different domesticated and wild animals using dough made from wheat flour, which are then baked in fire. According to their belief, the presence of these statues and murals acts as a deterrent, preventing evil souls from entering their houses during the festivities.

The ceremony of Madaik unfolds as a culmination of preparations, where preserved fruits, including grapes, pears, apples, and walnuts, are piled up in a central place in every small village. These fruits are meticulously cleaned and washed, ready to be consumed during the festival. The festival then enters its second and

intriguing phase with the initiation of the autik ritual, where, in every village of the valleys, men and women confine themselves inside a corral (cattle-house) for the next five days.

During these five days of autik, the Kalash people completely insulate themselves from the outside world. They engage in eating the meat of slaughtered goats, drinking wine, and indulging in merry-making inside the corrals. The entry of non-Kalash people into Kalash villages is strictly prohibited during this period, and the usually hospitable Kalash people undergo a shift in their attitude towards guests. Every adult Kalash man and woman is mandated to go into seclusion during these five days, reinforcing the rigorous adherence to the festival's rituals and customs.

The rituals and customs of the final phase of the 15-day Chitirmas festival are known for their rigor and inflexibility. Any slight departure from these established practices is not allowed under any circumstances. After the commencement of the autik ritual, even a Kalash person, whether male or female, is prohibited from entering the village after sunset. This prohibition is rooted in the belief that such an act would pollute the eatables and cast bad omens upon the people.

The traditional concluding ceremony takes place in the jastakhan, the designated dancing place, in Broom village of the Bumburate valley. Kalash elites from the other two valleys of Rumbur and Birir actively participated, marking the conclusion of the festival, which had concluded two days earlier in those valleys. The concluding day kicks off with the Lowe Nezik ceremony early in the morning, bringing a sense of closure to the elaborate festivities.

Groups of men and women, who had voluntarily gone into seclusion five days before the end of the festival, emerge on this occasion. Their self-imposed seclusion in cattle houses during these five days is seen as a religious ritual aimed at pleasing their gods and goddesses. During this period, they slaughter as many goats as possible, seeking the favor of the deities.

The Kalash women and children, adorned in new traditional dresses, converge at the central dancing place (jastakhan) in Broom

village. Singing special songs of the occasion, they join the grand assembly, creating a vibrant and lively atmosphere. On the concluding day of the festival, announcements are made regarding the engagements of young boys and girls, who are set to solemnize their marriages during the upcoming spring festival, Chilim Jusht, scheduled for the month of May. While locals indicated that twelve couples made engagement announcements this year, the number remains fluid and might increase, considering the figures from the other two valleys.



The concluding ceremony witnessed a substantial turnout, with people from other villages in Chitral and tourists from different parts of the country converging to witness the spectacle. Unlike the past, a notable presence of foreign tourists, primarily from Europe, added an international flair to the festivities. Maria, a young woman from Poland, shared her enchanting experience, expressing her enjoyment over the sixteen days she spent in the valley during the entire festival. Captivated by the charms of the valley and the unique festival, she described it as a truly unique and unexpected experience, having had no prior knowledge of it before coming to Pakistan.

Dr. Amir Nawaz from Lahore, along with his fourteen friends, embarked on this journey after reading about the winter festival of the primitive Kalash people. The valley proved to be a life-long experience

for them, deeply influenced by the natural beauty of the Kalash valleys and the genuine friendliness of its people. Dr. Amir emphasized the tremendous potential for the promotion of tourism in the valley, urging authorities to fully exploit this opportunity.

Regular attendees of the festival, hailing from different cities such as Karachi, Lahore, Multan, Rawalpindi/Islamabad, and Peshawar, shared their experiences. Many of them have been making the pilgrimage to this winter festival for the last

ten to twenty years, attesting to the valley's enduring charm. They encouraged fellow travelers to explore this hidden gem, highlighting its enchanting allure, the hospitality of its people, and the whole-hearted welcome extended to guests.

In conclusion, the Christmas Festival of the Kalash people offers a profound glimpse into a world where tradition, culture, and spirituality converge in a harmonious celebration. The festival, with its elaborate rituals and communal festivities, not only showcases the Kalash people's unique way of life but also invites outsiders to partake in the richness of their cultural heritage. As the valley opens its doors to visitors, it stands as a testament to the importance of preserving and celebrating diverse cultural practices, fostering a deeper understanding and appreciation for the tapestry of human civilization.

Exploring Lahore's Mughal architectural splendors

By Syeda Aamna Nadeem

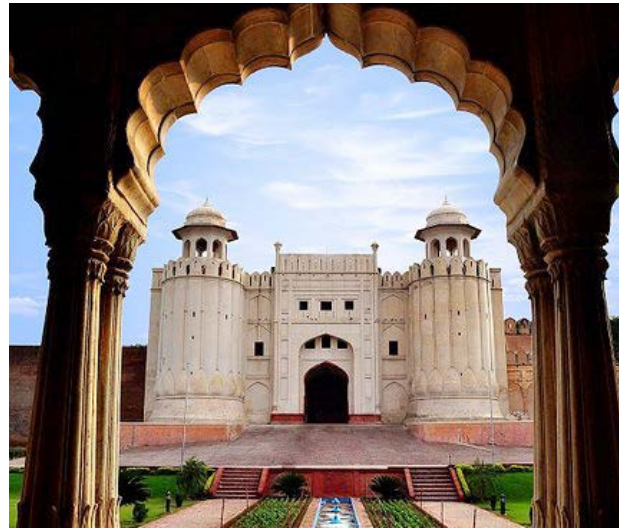
Mughal architecture, originating in the 16th to 18th centuries in the Indian subcontinent, is a unique form of Indo-Islamic architecture marked by symmetry, geometric precision, and intricate ornamentation. Featuring pointed arches, bulbous domes, grand minarets with cupolas, expansive halls, and imposing gateways, this style blends Islamic, Persian, Turkish, and Indian influences. Mughal structures encompass gates, forts, gardens, mausoleums, mosques, and public buildings, reflecting a rich fusion of cultural aesthetics. Mughal gardens, inspired by the Persian charbagh, evoke a utopian setting with divided sections connected by pathways or flowing water. Notably, Mughal buildings showcase lavish ornamentation, using materials like red sandstone and white marble with meticulous bilateral symmetry, employing baked bricks for domes and arches covered with plaster or facing stones.

In the grand legacy of the Mughals, some of the architectural marvels in Lahore, each narrating a captivating chapter in the rich history of Pakistan, are briefly described below:

Lahore Fort

The Lahore Fort, an integral part of the old city of Lahore, has a rich history dating back to pre-Mughal times. Emperor Akbar initiated its construction and expansion in 1575, transforming it into a grand complex during his reign (1586–1598) when Lahore briefly served as his capital. Originally situated overlooking the Ravi River, the river has since shifted its course, creating a distance from the fort. Successive Mughal rulers, including Jahangir, Shah Jahan, and Aurangzeb, left their imprints on the fort, introducing additions and modifications. Despite the ravages of time, many Mughal buildings within the fort endure. Notably, Akbar's contributions include the audience hall, basements, mosque, and quadrangle, while Jahangir incorporated Persian styles, and Shah Jahan brought marble and refinement to the forefront. Aurangzeb's era saw the addition of the Alamgiri gate and Badshahi mosque.

The Sikh and British colonial periods witnessed the demolition of numerous fort buildings. The fort served as the residence for Maharaja Ranjit Singh's family until 1849, with Moti Mosque converted into a Sikh temple. Sikh rule introduced structures like the Aath Dara pavilion and the Haveli of Maharani Jindan, attributed to Mai Jindan, now the Sikh Gallery Museum. The British era left its mark with the construction of the Barood Khana in 1857 to store gunpowder. The Lahore Fort complex, shaped as a parallelogram measuring 1,312x1,148 feet, once enclosed the old city within a thick brick wall with multiple gates. During the Mughal rule, safety and stability led to population growth, attracting skilled artisans, calligraphers, painters, woodcarvers, and marble craftsmen. The predominant use of red sandstone and marble in construction mirrors Mughal forts



in Delhi and Agra, contributing to the fort's rich historical tapestry shaped by diverse rulers over the centuries.

Palace of Mirrors - Sheesh Mahal

The Sheesh Mahal is an intricately adorned pavilion within the Shah Burj of the Lahore Fort Complex, commissioned by Shah Jahan in tribute to his empress. Constructed in 1631-32 A.D., it features a central facade with five cusped marble arches, coupled columns inlaid with precious stones, gilt work, pietra dura work, marble perforated screens, aiena kari (glass mosaic artistry), and monabat kari (stucco tracery). The palace's courtyard is embellished with variegated marble slabs, and a central water basin with jet fountains is connected to other structures by water channels. Mirrors on the walls symbolize stars, and the ceilings depict a star-lit panorama. The Sheesh Mahal is not only an architectural marvel but also symbolizes the love story of Shah Jahan and Mumtaz Mahal. Illuminated during night tours, it captivates visitors with its shimmering beauty, echoing the tragic yet legendary love between the emperor and his queen.

Deewar Jahangiri or Picture Wall

Emperor Jahangir initiated the construction of the Picture Wall in 1624-25, later completed by Shah Jahan in 1631-32 AD. This monumental wall at the Lahore Fort, adorned with colorful mosaic decorations, depicts scenes of Mughal emperors' recreational pursuits, including animal fights and Polo. Spanning 460 meters in length and 16 meters in height, the wall features intricate designs, cut brickwork, glazed tile mosaic work, filigree work, and painted lime plaster. As a UNESCO World Heritage Site cornerstone, it served as the entrance to the Lahore Fort alongside the Shah Burj Gate. Recently restored by the Walled City Lahore Authority and the Aga Khan Development Network, the Picture Wall stands as a preserved symbol of historical grandeur.

Badshahi Masjid

The Badshahi Masjid, constructed in the late 17th century during Aurangzeb's reign, is the final imperial Mughal monument in Lahore, located west of the Lahore Fort. Made from white marble and red sandstone, the mosque boasts intricate design, spaciousness, and proportion. The interior is adorned with frescoes, stone carvings, stone-inlay work, and pietra dura embellishments. The central structure features a commanding pishtaq with five arches on each side, crowned by a large white marble dome and surrounded by four minarets. Despite periods of neglect and misuse, including conversion into a stable by Maharaja Ranjit Singh and military use by the East India Company, extensive restoration work from 1939 to 1960 returned the mosque to its original glory. Today, the Badshahi Masjid stands as a revered symbol of Pakistan's architectural and cultural heritage.

Shalimar Bagh

Shalimar Bagh (sometimes spelled Shalamar), a magnificent Mughal garden built by Shah Jahan in 1641, stands as a testament to grandeur and architectural excellence. Originally a generous donation by the "Mian" family, it served as the Royal pleasure garden for almost three centuries. Enclosed by high brick walls, the garden features three surviving terraces, Farah Baksh (Upper Terrace), Faiz Baksh (Middle Terrace), and Hayat Baksh (Lower Terrace), each with its unique charm, following the Char Bagh concept. Spanning 80 acres, Shalimar Gardens is adorned with intricate fretwork on its boundary walls, numerous fountains, and architectural structures like the Sawan Bhadun Pavilion, Aiwan (The Grand Hall), Hammam (The Royal Bath), Naqar Khana, Aramgah (The Resting Place), Begum Sahib Khawabgah (Bedroom of the Emperor's wife), Diwan-e-Khas-o-Aam (Hall for ordinary and special visitors to the Emperor), Baradari (summer pavilions for enjoying nearby fountain coolness), two gateways, and minarets at the garden's corners. Recognized for its cultural significance, Shalimar Gardens is a UNESCO World Heritage Site but has been listed as Endangered since 2000, emphasizing the need for continued preservation efforts.

Mausoleum of Emperor Jahangir

The Mausoleum of Emperor Jahangir, constructed in the 1630s in a Lahore suburb by his son Shah Jahan, is a unique testament to Mughal architecture. Developed in collaboration with Empress Nur Jahan, the rectangular building with a flat roof departs from conventional Mughal tomb designs. Adorned with red sandstone, slender minarets, and white marble chhatris, the structure surrounds a central corridor leading to Emperor Jahangir's cenotaph, elegantly adorned with Farsi calligraphy and intricate inlay work depicting naturalistic motifs. The mausoleum, set within an expansive garden, is a splendid example of artistic and architectural excellence, commemorating the Mughal emperor.

Wazir Khan Masjid

The Mosque of Wazir Khan, a testament to Lahore's spirit and artistic excellence, was commissioned by Nawab Ilmuddin Khan in 1634 during Shah Jahan's era. This grand mosque, initially the

largest in the city, features notable elements such as leased rooms for calligraphers and scholars, a unique vestibule, and a central chowk with rented shops serving as an open market. Strategically located, the mosque's central chowk connected various parts of Lahore, offering accessibility to worshippers and visitors. Wazir Khan's choice of location was influenced by its proximity to the tomb of Sayyid Muhammad Ishaq Kazirun, a saint whose teachings were imparted in the mosque's small rooms (hujras). The tomb, situated within the mosque's courtyard, adds a historical and spiritual dimension to this architectural marvel.



Sonehri Masjid

Sonehri Mosque, named for its golden embellishments, occupies a central junction in Lahore, elevated above street level at the convergence of Rang Mahal, Kasera Bazar, Waan Market, Shah Almi, and Kashmiri Bazaar. With three gilded domes, the mosque's main prayer chamber is a jewel featuring exquisite fresco work and a remarkable ceiling. The construction, dating from 1749 to 1753 A.D., was initiated by Nawab Mir Syed Bhakari Khan despite local opposition. During Sikh rule, the mosque faced desecration, but influential Muslim families intervened, leading to its restoration by the British. The mosque stands as a testament to enduring religious significance and architectural splendor.

Wazir Khan Hammam

Wazir Khan's Hammam, located within Delhi Gate at Chowk Wazir Khan in Lahore, is a historically significant complex built by Sheikh Ilmud-din Ansari, known as Wazir Khan. Linked to the mosque that shares its name, the Hammam now serves as a children's school, dispensary, and Health Department offices. Spanning 1110 square feet, this single-storey structure is constructed with small bricks, typical of Mughal-era Lahore. The northern half of the western façade retains the original cut and dressed brick exterior, adorned with zanjira-type continuous decoration. The hammam features twelve domes, including a compound dome on the octagonal hall, showcasing Mughal architectural excellence. A testament to the city's cultural heritage, Wazir Khan's Hammam invites visitors to appreciate its unique features and timeless beauty.

A Look into The Hindu Kush

TTI Report

The Hindu Kush Stretches from central and eastern Afghanistan into northwestern Pakistan and far southeastern Tajikistan.

The eastern end of the Hindu Kush in the north merges with the Karakoram Range. Towards its southern end, it connects with the White Mountains near the Kabul River. It divides the valley of the Amu Darya (the ancient Oxus) to the north from the Indus River valley to the south. The range has numerous high snow-capped peaks, with the highest point being Tirich Mir or Terichmir at 7,708 metres (25,289 ft) in the Chitral District.

The range and communities settled in it hosted ancient monasteries, important trade networks and travelers between Central Asia and South Asia. While the vast majority of the region has been majority-Muslim for several centuries.

Etymology

Hindu Kush is generally translated as "Killer of Hindu" or "Hindu-Killer" by most writers.

Several other theories have been propounded as to the origins of the name.[43] According to Nigel Allan, the term Hindu Kush has two alternate meanings i.e. 'sparkling snows of India' and 'mountains of India', with Kush possibly being a soft variant of the Persian kuh ('mountain'). Allan states that Hindu Kush was the frontier boundary to Arab geographers.[44] Yet others suggest that the name may be derived from ancient Avestan, meaning 'water mountain'.

Other names

In Vedic Sanskrit, the range was known as upari yena, and in Avestan, as up irisa-na (from Proto-Iranian *up risaina- 'covered with juniper'). It can alternatively be interpreted as "beyond the reach of eagles".

Some 19th-century encyclopedias and gazetteers state that the term Hindu Kush originally applied only to the peak in the



area of the Kushan Pass, which had become a center of the Kushan Empire by the first century.

Geography

Noshaq is the second highest independent peak of the Hindu Kush Range after Tirich Mir. Landscape of Afghanistan with a T-62 in the foreground Aerial view of Hindu Kush mountains in northern Afghanistan Terraced fields amongst the Hindu Kush in the Swat valley, Pakistan Chitraas village, Nuristan Province in Afghanistan Hindu Kush in the background in Ishkoshim, Tajikistan

The range forms the western section of the Hindu Kush Himalayan Region (HKH)[4][5][6] and is the westernmost extension of the Pamir Mountains, the Karakoram and the Himalayas. It divides the valley of the Amu Darya (the ancient Oxus) to the north from the Indus River valley to the south. The range has numerous high snow-capped peaks, with the highest point being Tirich Mir or Terichmir at 7,708 metres (25,289 ft) in the Chitral District. Pakistan. To the north, near its northeastern end, the Hindu Kush buttresses the Pamir Mountains near the point where the borders of China, Pakistan and Afghanistan meet, after which it runs southwest through Pakistan and into Afghanistan near their border. The eastern end of the Hindu Kush in the north merges with the Karakoram Range.

Peaks

Many peaks of the range are between 4,400 and 5,200 m (14,500 and 17,000 ft), and some are much higher, with an average peak height of 4,500 meters (14,800 feet).

The range has several other passes in Afghanistan, the lowest of which is the southern Shibar pass (2,700 m or 9,000 ft) where the Hindu Kush range terminates.

Other mountain passes are at altitudes of about 3,700 m (12,000 ft) or higher,[19] including the Broghil Pass,

Geology

The Hindu Kush range remains geologically active and is still rising, it is prone to earthquakes. The Hindu Kush system stretches about 966 KMs (600 mi) laterally, and its median north-south measurement is about 240 KMs (150 mi). The mountains are orographically described in several parts. Peaks in the western Hindu Kush rise to over 5,100 m (16,700 ft) and stretch between Darra-ye Sekari and the Shibar Pass in the west and the Khawak Pass in the east. The central Hindu Kush peaks rise to over 6,800 m (22,300 ft), and this section has numerous spurs between the Khawak Pass in the east and the Dur h Pass in the west. In 2005 and 2015 there were some major earthquakes.

Land cover and land use

ICIMOD's first annual regional 30-meter resolution land cover database of HKH generated using public domain Landsat images demonstrated that grassland was the most dominant land cover, followed by barren land, which includes areas with bare areas. The cropland covered in 2000 was about 5.1% and about 5.41% in 2015. Snow and glacier areas covered about 4% of the high-elevation section in 2018, while waterbodies and riverbeds/channels together accounted for 2%.

History

Ancient mines producing lapis lazuli are found in Kowkcheh Valley, while gem-grade emeralds are found north of Kabul in the valley of the Panjshir River and some of its tributaries. According to Walter Schumann, the West Hindu Kush mountains have been the source of the finest Lapis lazuli for thousands of years.

Richard Bulliet also proposes that the area north of Hindu Kush was center of a new sect that had spread as far as Kurdistan, remaining in existence until the Abbasid times. He conquered Jayapala's dominion west of Peshawar in the 10th century.

Medieval era

Mahmud of Ghazni came to power in 998 CE, in Ghazna, Afghanistan, south of Kabul and the Hindu Kush range. He began a military campaign that rapidly brought both sides of the Hindu Kush range under his rule. From his mountainous Afghani base, he systematically raided and plundered kingdoms in north India from east of the Indus River to west of Yamuna River seventeen times between 997 and 1030.

In 1017, the Iranian Islamic historian Al-Biruni was deported after a war that Mahmud of Ghazni won, to the northwest Indian subcontinent under Mahmud's rule. Al Biruni stayed in the region for about fifteen years, learnt Sanskrit, and translated many Indian texts, and wrote about Indian society, culture, sciences, and religion in Persian and Arabic. He stayed for some time in the Hindu Kush region, particularly near Kabul. In 1019, he recorded and described a solar eclipse in what is the

modern era Laghman Province of Afghanistan through which Hindu Kush pass. Al Biruni also wrote about early history of the Hindu Kush region and Kabul kings, who ruled the region long before he arrived, but this history is inconsistent with other records available from that era. Al Biruni was supported by Sultan Mahmud.[94] Al Biruni found it difficult to get access to Indian literature locally in the Hindu Kush area, and to explain this he wrote, "Mahmud utterly ruined the prosperity of the country, and performed wonderful exploits by which the Hindus became the atoms scattered in all directions, and like a



tale of old in the mouth of the people. This is the reason, too, why Hindu sciences have retired far from those parts of the country conquered by us, and have fled to places which our hand cannot yet reach, to Kashmir, Benares and other places".

In the late 12th century, the historically influential Ghurid empire led by Mu'izz al-Din ruled the Hindu Kush region.[96] He was influential in seeding the Delhi Sultanate, shifting the base of his Sultanate from south of the Hindu Kush range and Ghazni towards the Yamuna River and Delhi. He thus helped bring Islamic rule to the northern plains of the Indian subcontinent. In the Mongol invasion of the Khwarazmian Empire, Genghis Khan invaded the region from the northeast in one of his many conquests to create the huge Mongol Empire.

Kabul in the 19th century

The Moroccan traveler Ibn Battuta arrived in the Delhi Sultanate by passing through

the Hindu Kush. The mountain passes of the Hindu Kush range were used by Timur and his army and they crossed to launch the 1398 invasion of the northern Indian subcontinent., also known as Timur or Tamerlane in Western scholarly literature, marched with his army to Delhi, plundering and killing all the way. He arrived in the capital Delhi where his army. He carried the wealth and the captured slaves, returning to his capital through the Hindu Kush.

Babur, the founder of the Mughal Empire, was a patrilineal descendant of Timur with roots in Central Asia. He first established

himself and his army in Kabul and the Hindu Kush region. In 1526, he made his move into north India, and won the Battle of Panipat, ending the last Delhi Sultanate dynasty, and starting the era of the Mughals.

Slavery

Slavery, as with all major ancient and medieval societies, has been a part of Central Asia and South Asia history. The Hindu Kush Mountain passes connected the slave markets of Central Asia with slaves seized in South Asia. The seizure and transportation of slaves from the Indian subcontinent became intense in and after the 8th century CE, with evidence suggesting that the slave transport involved "hundreds of thousands" of slaves from India in different periods of Islamic rule era. According to John Coatsworth and others, the slave trading operations during the pre-Akbar Mughal and Delhi Sultanate era "sent thousands of Hindus every year north to Central Asia to pay for horses and other goods". However, the interaction between

Central Asia and South Asia through the Hindu Kush was not limited to slavery, it included trading in food, goods, horses and weapons.

The practice of raiding tribes, hunting, and kidnapping people for slave trading continued through the 19th century, at an extensive scale, around the Hindu Kush. According to a British Anti-Slavery Society report of 1874, the governor of Faizabad, Mir Ghulam Bey, kept 8,000 horses and cavalymen who routinely captured non-Muslims as well as Shia Muslims as slaves. Others alleged to be involved in the slave trade were feudal lords such as Ameer Sheer Ali. The isolated communities in the Hindu Kush were one of the targets of these slave-hunting expeditions.



Modern era

After 1947

In the colonial era, the Hindu Kush was considered, informally, the dividing line between Russian and British areas of influence in Afghanistan. During the Cold War the Hindu Kush range became a strategic theatre, especially during the 1980s when Soviet forces and their Afghan allies fought the Afghan mujahideen channelled through Pakistan. After the Soviet withdrawal and the end of the Cold War, many mujahideen morphed into Taliban and al-Qaeda forces imposing a strict interpretation of Islamic law (Sharia), with Kabul, these mountains, and other parts of Afghanistan as their base.[118][119] Other Mujahideen joined the Northern Alliance to oppose the Taliban rule.[119]

Climate change

Observed glacier mass loss in the HKH since the 20th century. The 2019 Hindu

Kush Himalaya Assessment [67] concluded that between 1901 and 2014, the Hindu Kush Himalaya (or HKH) region had already experienced warming of 0.1 °C per decade, with the warming rate accelerating to 0.2 °C per decade over the past 50 years. Over the past 50 years, the frequency of warm days and nights had also increased by 1.2 days and 1.7 nights per decade, while the frequency of extreme warm days and nights had increased by 1.26 days and 2.54 nights per decade. There was also a corresponding decline of 0.5 cold days, 0.85 extreme cold days, 1 cold night, and 2.4 extreme cold nights per decade. The length of the growing season has increased by 4.25 days per decade.

In the future, if the Paris Agreement goal of

1.5 °C of global warming is not exceeded, warming in the HKH will be at least 0.3 °C higher, and at least 0.7 °C higher in the hotspots of northwest Himalaya and Karakoram. If the Paris Agreement goals are broken, then the region is expected to warm by 1.7–2.4 °C in the near future (2036–2065) and by 2.2–3.3 °C (2066–2095) near the end of the century under the "intermediate" Representative Concentration Pathway 4.5 (RCP4.5).

Under the high-warming RCP8.5 scenario where the annual emissions continue to increase for the rest of the century, the expected regional warming is 2.3–3.2 °C and 4.2–6.5 °C, respectively. Under all scenarios, winters will warm more than the summers, and the Tibetan Plateau, the central Himalayan Range, and the Karakoram will continue to warm more than the rest of the region. Climate change will also lead to the degradation of up to 81% of the region's permafrost by the end of the century.

Future precipitation is projected to increase as well, but CMIP5 models struggle to make specific projections due to the region's topography: the most certain finding is that the monsoon precipitation in the region will increase by 4–12% in the near future and by 4–25% in the long term. There has also been modelling of the changes in snow cover, but it is limited to the end of century under the RCP 8.5 scenario: it projects declines of 30–50% in the Indus Basin, 50–60% in the Ganges basin, and 50–70% in the Brahmaputra Basin, as the snowline elevation in these regions will rise by between 4.4 and 10.0 m/yr. There has been more extensive modelling of glacier trends: it is projected that one third of all glaciers in the extended HKH region will be lost by 2100 even if the warming is limited to 1.5 °C (with over half of that loss in the Eastern Himalaya region), while RCP 4.5 and RCP 8.5 are likely to lead to the losses of 50% and 67% of the region's glaciers over the same timeframe.

Glacier melt is projected to accelerate regional river flows until the amount of meltwater peaks around 2060, going into an irreversible decline afterwards. Since precipitation will continue to increase even as the glacier meltwater contribution declines, annual river flows are only expected to diminish in the western basins where contribution from the monsoon is low: however, irrigation and hydropower generation would still have to adjust to greater interannual variability and lower pre-monsoon flows in all of the region's rivers.

Future development and adaptation

A range of adaptation efforts are already undertaken across the HKH region: however, they suffer from underinvestment and insufficient coordination between the various state, institutional and other non-state efforts, and need to be "urgently" strengthened in order to be commensurate with the challenges ahead.

The 2019 Hindu Kush Himalaya Assessment outlined three main "storylines" for the region between now and 2080: "Muddling through", with no significant change from the current trends and development/adaptation initiatives proceeding as they do now; "downhill", where the intensity of global climate change is high, local initiatives fail and regional cooperation breaks down; and "prosperous".

When breath becomes a luxury

By Sara Danial

As smog envelops Lahore, it triggers a political blame game. Pakistan maintains a consistent presence among the world's most polluted countries, securing the third position in the latest 2022 report by IQAir.

According to the same report, Lahore emerges as the most polluted city globally. Despite toxic smog being a recurring annual occurrence for the surging population – now at 242 million people – there appears to be reluctance among stakeholders to shoulder responsibility.

When smog subsides, the political mudslinging will ensue. Persisting for over a week, pollution levels in Lahore have consistently lingered in the 'hazardous' category, as tiny particulate matter in the air reached 450, a level 30 times higher than the maximum average daily exposure recommended by the World Health Organization. The city's residents find themselves compelled to inhale air laden with pollutants surpassing healthy limits.

Various factors contribute to Lahore's annual pollution season, including cars, factories, construction, and power plants. Another major contributor is the seasonal burning of wheat stubble in the neighbouring areas of the province. Farmers set fire to their fields to clear them quickly for new crops. According to the Centre for Science and Environment, stubble burning has been responsible for up to 38 per cent of the pollution levels in Lahore over the past week.

Despite the annual arrival of the consistently murky grey skies and a recent study revealing that pollution is reducing the lifespan of the residents of Lahore by nearly seven years, there is notable absence of willingness among both state and central governments to assume responsibility.

Muhammad Salman, 31, who runs a roadside tea stall for up to 14 hours a day, told me, "Despite government assurances to improve Lahore, nothing substantial has transpired. My eyes experience a burning sensation, and my head feels dizzy. I am concerned about my future," accusing lack of action and indifference on the part of the government, transforming Lahore into a 'gas chamber'. He said that the residents of Lahore are expressing discomfort with itching and breathlessness, while children are falling ill. Instead, he pointed out that the central government was 'inactive' in addressing air pollution.

It seems as though there was significant frustration with the perception that pollution was treated merely as a localized problem shuffled here and there. It seems that more effort is directed towards avoiding responsibility instead of addressing root causes.

The government must recognize that no city can exist as an isolated haven of clean air. It is imperative that this becomes a shared political responsibility, as without collaborative efforts, a solution remains elusive.



There is a failure to recognize that pollution is not merely a temporary problem but one that demands a comprehensive, long-term overhaul of regulations, laws, and institutions at both the state and national levels.

This lack of foresight is a significant aspect of the issue. Because the problem is not confined to November or December, it persists throughout the year and requires a continuous approach. While provincial governments have neglected crucial measures, the role of the central environment ministry in this scenario is questionable.

Residents of Lahore, including those whose livelihoods compel them to endure the toxic outdoor air, are experiencing a mix of anger and resignation. They confront the daunting prospect of enduring weeks, and possibly months, of hazardous air, sparking a sense of frustration among the affected population.

Ali Raza, aged 55 and employed as a security guard at my workplace, shared his experience of persistent dizziness with me. He highlighted that the people around him, including himself, were grappling with a range of health issues such as headaches, coughs, fevers, and nausea. Expressing the tangible awareness of inhaling something highly toxic, he remarked, "We are in a city where breathing, the most fundamental human need, feels terrible. I struggle to imagine what the future will look like."

The smog problem in Lahore is not only a health hazard but also significantly impacts daily life and economic activities. Reduced visibility on roads poses risks for commuters, and the aviation sector often experiences disruptions.

The thick smog layer casts a pall over the cityscape, affecting the overall ambiance and quality of life. Efforts to mitigate this crisis require a comprehensive approach, encompassing not just curbing immediate pollution sources but also implementing long-term sustainable practices. This involves promoting cleaner industries, adopting eco-friendly agricultural practices, and encouraging public awareness to foster a collective commitment to combating the persistent smog issue in Lahore.

No map or GPS — How do migratory birds navigate thousands of miles without getting lost?

Migratory birds travelling to Pakistan being driven away amid rise in hunting, netting, and urbanization

By Husba Thanvi

When it comes to rugged shores, pristine beaches, and azure views, Pakistan's coastline bordering the Arabian Sea does not fall short. It presents a stunning blend of natural beauty and vibrant atmosphere.

While numerous striking sites across the country easily appeal to one's eyes all year long, the beauty of its landscape gets one-upped when migratory birds arrive at the coast from different parts of the world with the help of nature's version of GPS.

Migrating birds can cover thousands of miles in their annual travels, often travelling the same course year after year with little deviation.

Every year, as the season in most parts of the world transitions into winter and temperatures in the already-cold regions of the world gradually begin to drop, sheets of water turn into slabs of ice. This natural climatic change endangers not only wild mammals but birds as well.

However, the question is, how are they able to identify where to go?

Nature's GPS

Migrating birds can cover thousands of miles in their annual travels, often travelling the same course year after year with little deviation.

According to the Sindh Wildlife Department, research has shown that migratory birds learn from parents or group adults to use genetic traits and heritable traits to train and determine their route.

However, the use of geographic markers and magnetic waves is of particular importance in travel techniques, while the consequences of losing one's way can be the most dangerous.

The secrets of their amazing navigational skills aren't fully understood, partly because



birds combine several different types of senses when they navigate.

While discussing the navigation techniques used by birds, Brohi said: "The migration is initiated by adult or grown-up birds and the younger ones follow them. While travelling during the day, these birds use landmarks such as land, rivers, or mountains to determine where to go. Meanwhile, during the night, they use stars to navigate their way. Some birds even follow the Sun during the day."

The sense of smell is also believed to be a factor in the migration patterns of certain species, including homing pigeons, waterfowl, and cranes.

As bird migration sounds like a big event, let us dive into the route these extraordinary birds use to pull off such a difficult yet necessary task.

These birds are forced by the intense winter season in colder countries to set off on a quest for warmth, in search of which they end up travelling long distances from one location to another location at regular intervals — a phenomenon known as

migration. Migration also refers to the regular seasonal movement of birds between the south and north flyways' wintering and breeding sites.

Pakistan — a significant destination for migratory birds travelling from Russia, Siberia, China, and other Central Asian states — has diverse ecosystems that provide essential stopovers for birds crossing global flyways.

"Bird migration is an ecological event during which they travel to Pakistan via the Indus Flyway," Javed Mahar, a conservator at Sindh Forest and Wildlife Department told Geo.tv. "This event has been taking place for ages and this practice of the ancestors has been followed by generations of birds."

Dr Mehrban Ali Brohi, a zoologist based in Islamabad, said: "It has been observed that birds generally migrate from northern (cold) regions to southern (warm) regions because of intense snowy weather and lack of food. Therefore, to protect themselves from harsh weather conditions, these birds migrate to the south."

Birdwatchers also flock to Thatta's Keenjhar Lake and Haleji Lake where these visitors find refuge during their seasonal migration which contributes to ecological balance and provides a unique opportunity to witness nature's harmonious dance across Pakistan's skies.

Indus Flyway

Flyways are flight pathways taken by migratory birds while moving between their overwintering quarters and breeding grounds.

"There are eight flyways in the world used by migratory birds to travel," Mahar said. "Birds migrating to Pakistan use 'International Migratory Bird Route Number 4', also called the 'Green Route' and more commonly known as the Indus Flyway, which stretches from the Karakoram down to the Indus Delta in the south."

The Indus Flyway Zone is part of the Central Asian Flyway, which covers the Eurasian continental areas between the Indian Ocean and the Arctic Ocean. It provides warmer weather conditions for feeding and breeding purposes.

This flyway attracts thousands of migratory birds, including Siberian cranes, flamingos, and duck species.

Other migratory birds found in Pakistan include geese, swans, falcons, and waders, along with common species like gulls, duck-mallards, plovers, stints, snipes, cormorants, northern shoveler, common teal, and storks.

These birds, after taking off from China, Russia Siberia, and other Central Asian states, travel 4,500 kilometers north using the Indus Flyway to reach Pakistan in August and leave in February. Rawal Lake in Punjab and the Rann of Kutch Wildlife Sanctuary in Sindh are the main sites for their arrivals, Mahar told Geo.tv.

Brohi also revealed that there are some environmental factors such as harsh weather conditions, snowfall, and shortage/lack of food that force the birds to migrate.

These routes frequently connect to significant rest stops that offer food resources that are essential to the birds' survival. Smaller birds typically travel across the landscape in broad fronts. Studies by eBird — a journal

producing research on birds — mention that numerous small birds use various routes in the spring and autumn to take advantage of seasonal variations in weather and food.

Humans vs migratory birds

Events in the weather such as sudden rain or snowfall might lead people astray. These birds' migration patterns may also be considerably impacted by the consequences of climate change.

Pakistan is witnessing a significant decrease in the number of migrating bird species and according to Masood Lohar, the founder of Clifton Urban Forest, both man-made and natural factors are to blame.



Netting, habitat loss from land-use changes like converting land to cultivation, and unlawful hunting of migrating birds, among other factors, are examples of anthropogenic causes that have negatively affected the migration of these birds to Pakistan.

"Human practices, like urbanisation, increase in housing colonies and real estate have shrunk the wilderness, forests, and lakes that receive aquatic birds," Lohar said.

Migratory birds, he added, become victim to "genocidal poaching" in Pakistan where hunters previously used guns or nets to hunt these birds, but now they "play the calls of these birds on loudspeakers and as soon as the entire flock arrives, it gets trapped in a net laid out."

Lohar revealed this had been in practice for the last seven to eight years and had resulted in fewer birds returning to their nesting grounds or where they came from because they were all trapped here.

He continued: "Pakistan has been caught up in a real estate madness that has almost destroyed itself. There was a time when flamingos and Sarus cranes used to breed in Karachi, but now you will hardly find one here. It has become a strange national character of ours."

The increasing activities of illegal and unchecked hunting across habitats of migratory birds are distressing the population of migratory bird species, which is alarming.

Whilst skies grow starker, feathered hope

remains on the wing. Through mindful action, we can try to ensure these plummy friends fill the skies to their edges and swarm every inch of the lands where they choose to be. They should be free like birds.

We must be alive to the urgency of the need for a harmonious coexistence between humanity and these winged voyagers from distant parts of the planet that grace our wild blue yonder with their beautiful presence.

Let us become not the architects of their extinction by making their second homes in our country inhospitable, treacherous, and death traps, but custodians of their impossible flights for survival for generations to come.

Pakistan's Kishmala Talat secures 5th position in annual Asian Shooting rankings

Kishmala also stands as highest-ranked Pakistani shooter across all categories in the 2023 rankings



By Faizan Lakhani

In a remarkable achievement, 21-year-old Pakistani sports shooter Kishmala Talat has secured the 5th position in the annual Asian Shooting rankings released by the Asian Shooting Confederation.

The rankings, unveiled at the close of the year, are a reflection of Kishmala's skill in the women's 10-metre air pistol shooting category.

With a total of 2,505 rating points, Kishmala got herself placed among the top five shooters in the category. She also stands as the highest-ranked Pakistani shooter across all categories in the 2023 rankings, marking her significant journey from not being ranked in the previous year, 2022.

Kishmala's stellar performance includes winning a bronze medal for Pakistan in the 2023 Asian Games in the women's 10m air pistol event. Her exceptional skills were also on display during the World Champions and Asian Championship, which further solidified her as a rising star in the world of sports shooting.

Additionally, Kishmala also secured the 15th position in the women's 25m air pistol category, which confirms her proficiency across different disciplines.

The next best-ranked Pakistani athlete in the Asian Shooting rankings is GM Bashir, who was in the 8th position in the men's 25m rapid-fire pistol category.

In men's skeet, Pakistan's Usman Chand claimed the 10th position, while Gulfam Joseph secured the 14th position in the men's 10m air pistol rankings.

Courtesy The News



Hasan steps down 19 years after serving as POA president

Lieutenant General (retired) Arif Hasan was first elected as POA president in March 2004



Lieutenant General (retired) Arif Hasan has resigned as the president of Pakistan Olympic Association (POA) after remaining in the top office for over 19 years.

Hasan, who was first elected as president POA in March 2004, confirmed to Geo News from USA about authenticity of his resignation letter.

“Totally legit,” Arif said when this correspondent asked if the letter of resignation is true, which has been doing rounds on social media.

Arif is in USA for the last many days for his treatment.

He confirmed in his resignation letter addressed to members of POA’s Executive Committee that he has decided to step aside due to his health.

“I am writing to formally resign as the President of the Pakistan Olympic Association, effective January 1, 2024,” Hasan wrote in the letter, dated December 28, 2023.

“The decision to step aside is not one I have taken lightly. It is borne out of the necessity to balance my health and well-being with the demands of leading such a dynamic and impactful organisation. Hope you will understand and respect this decision of mine,” he added.

“I assure you that I earnestly desire a smooth transition to ensure the continuity of our excellent work. It is my sincere wish that

POA continues to thrive and excel, building on the solid foundation we have established together,” he noted.

Hasan, who was first named as head of organising committee of South Asian Games in 2002, was first elected to the office of POA in 2004. He was then elected for next four consecutive terms.

Hasan was usually criticised by politicians and fans for Pakistan’s medals drought in Olympics. Most recently, Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz’s (PML-N) senior leader Ahsan Iqbal posted a critical post on social media targeting Hasan.

However, the POA and Hasan had always maintained that it was Pakistan Sports Board’s job to provide infrastructure and training facilities to athletes, while the POA was only a representative organisation in IOC on behalf of Pakistani sports bodies.

Meanwhile, POA’s secretary Khalid Mehmood also confirmed to Geo News about Hasan’s resignation on medical grounds.

Following Hasan’s resignation, the POA’s Executive Committee is now likely to appoint an interim president till the next elections.

Sources believe that the next elections to elect a new POA president will held only after the Paris Olympics 2024.

By Faizan Lakhani

Courtesy The News

Celebrity Couples Who Met on Set

By Kate Prince

On-screen romances are one thing, but it's a much different, far more realistic story when actors end up falling in love on the

set. Sometimes, actors and actresses can't help but become attached to each other while working long hours during filming, and all of the movie and TV stars on this list met their partners-to-be during rigorous Hollywood workdays.

The bright lights and shouting directors on the set of big-budget productions from studios like MGM and Touchstone might not seem like the ideal places for a whirlwind romance, but, for these Hollywood couples, the sets did the trick in helping them find love.

1. Madonna and Sean Penn

Movie: *Material Girl*

Location: Hollywood, California

Year: 1985



Madonna and Sean Penn started dating in the mid-1980s after the two met on the set of Madonna's music video for her hit single, "Material Girl." The actor and the singer had both just gotten out of relationships at the time, and they weren't looking for anything serious.

They remained friends, but their friendship soon became a full-on romance. They got married four years after meeting, but the marriage didn't last. Madonna filed for divorce twice, and the second time, in 1989, the divorce stuck. The *Material Girl* cited "irreconcilable differences" between the two, putting an end to a tumultuous, tabloid-frenzied relationship.

2. Channing Tatum and Jenna Dewan-Tatum

Movie: *Step Up*

Location: Baltimore, Maryland

Year: 2006



Another famous couple that equally-as-famously met on set was Channing Tatum and Jenna Dewan-Tatum, who met on the set of *Step Up*, a dance movie. You can tell from even the audition video that the two actors had chemistry right away, though Tatum was reportedly a little hesitant to begin dating Dewan.

However, he shook off those jitters, and the two began dating shortly after the release of the Touchstone movie. They got married in 2009, and they stayed married for nine years, until the pressures of work, sadly, split them up. Still, *Step Up* lives on as one of the best romantic movies of the 2000s.

3. Brad Pitt and Juliette Lewis

Movie: *Too Young to Die*

Location: Taft, California

Year: 1989



Brad Pitt, a Hollywood icon, has revealed that one of his most significant relationships was with actress Juliette Lewis. The two met on the set of their 1990 film "Too Young to Die" when Pitt was 27 and Lewis was 17. Despite the age difference, they became a high-profile couple and dated for three years before ending their relationship in early 1993.

In an interview, Pitt expressed his continued affection for Lewis, calling it one of the greatest relationships he had ever been in. However, Lewis has mentioned that Pitt is no longer part of her universe and emphasized that their relationship is in the past.

4. Daniel Craig and Rachel Weisz

Movie: Les Grandes Horizontales

Location: London, England

Year: 1994



Daniel Craig and Rachel Weisz have been married for more than ten years, and the British couple were close friends before tying the knot back in 2011. The two met on the set of a play called *Les Grandes Horizontales*. Though they didn't begin dating immediately in 1994, they eventually found their way back to each other in December of 2010.

Though they didn't meet on some big MGM set or something flashy, *Les Grandes Horizontales* is still a solid play that has received a lot of critical acclaim. The London theater production, hosted by the National Theatre Studio, is a dark romance with an amorous plot that couldn't help but bring Weisz and Craig together.

5. Jennifer Lawrence and Nicholas Hoult

Movie: X-Men: First Class

Location: London, England

Year: 2010



Funny as always, Jennifer Lawrence described her and ex-boyfriend Nicholas Hoult as "two perverted Homer Simpsons." The superstar actors met in 2010 when they were filming the Marvel movie *X-Men: First Class*. Lawrence told *Elle Magazine* that the actor was her "best friend" because he could make the Oscar-winner "laugh harder than anybody."

They dated for a few years, but, as both are top-tier stars in Hollywood, they got too busy for a relationship. As *E! News* put it, they spent too much time apart due to work, and that put a strain on their relationship. Both actors have moved on, and Lawrence is now married.

6. Mila Kunis and Ashton Kutcher

Movie: That '70s Show

Location: Studio City, California

Year: 1998



Another favorite Hollywood couple that has lasted is Mila Kunis and Ashton Kutcher. The two stars first met on the set of their hit sitcom, *That '70s Show*, though sparks didn't fly immediately, as Kunis was fourteen and Kutcher was twenty.

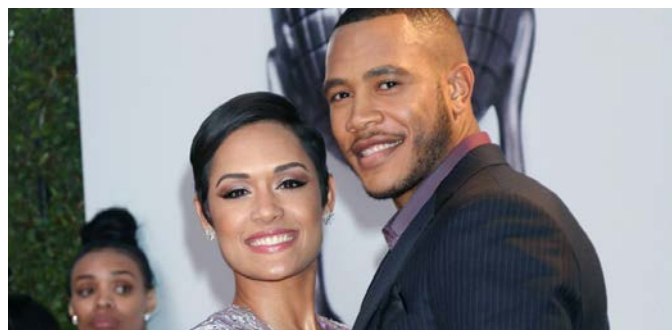
The castmates were merely working professionals until 2012 when they rekindled their relationship. Kutcher and Kunis went from co-stars on a Fox show to husband and wife, as they were married in 2015. Now, the pair have two kids together, Dimitri and Wyatt. Will we see a project co-starring the couple in the future? Who can say, but fans certainly hope so.

7. Grace and Trai Byers

Movie: Empire

Location: Chicago

Year: 2015



Some couples look so aesthetically good together that it just makes perfect sense. Grace and Trai Byers connected on the set of *Empire* in 2015, but Grace was in a committed relationship at the time. After realizing that the relationship wasn't going to work out, she ended things.

Shortly after, the pair started dating and announced their engagement, tying the knot in 2016 at Grand Cayman Island. Judging by their gushing social media posts, they're head over heels in love and that's not going to change anytime soon.

8. Gwen Stefani and Blake Shelton

Movie: The Voice

Location: Hollywood, California

Year: 2015



The Voice has quickly become one of the most popular reality shows on TV right now. The singing competition features would-be stars hoping to capture the attention of one of the celebrity judges, who will move them forward in the competition.

Two such celebrity judges were singers Gwen Stefani and Blake Shelton, who met on the set of the NBC show in 2015. The pair hit it off immediately, and they began dating. They released music together, something that delighted fans who were interested to see how well the pop star's and country star's music meshed together. In 2020, Stefani and Shelton got engaged.

9. Claire Danes and Hugh Dancy

Movie: Evening

Location: Newport, Rhode Island

Year: 2007



Claire Danes and Hugh Dancy are yet another famous couple to meet on a movie set. The pair met while filming the 2006 movie Evening, and, though Danes had, at the time, sworn off relationships after a string of bad luck, she couldn't help but give Dancy a chance.

The two didn't necessarily fall in love while acting, however. According to their co-star Mammie Gummer, the pair bonded over a love of Scrabble and Boggle. The pair would later keep their relationship both off-screen and on when they starred on the show Homeland together. For those who want more Claire Danes in their life, the actress has a new show on Apple+ called Essex Serpent.

10. Jennifer Garner and Ben Affleck

Movie: Pearl Harbor

Location: Honolulu, Hawaii

Year: 2000



Jennifer Garner and Ben Affleck were once the Hollywood "it" couple, and the pair actually met in 2000 on the set of Pearl Harbor. Though many people believe that the 2002 movie Daredevil was the site of these two star-crossed lovers' union, it was actually the gritty war drama, which was filmed two years prior.

Affleck and the Neutrogena spokeswoman didn't really strike up a relationship during Pearl Harbor. Garner was married at the time to Scott Foley, another actor, so it wasn't until Daredevil that they two were able to strike up a friendship. They were married three years later in late June of 2005, staying married for thirteen years.

11. Ariana Grande and Pete Davidson

Movie: Saturday Night Live

Location: New York City, New York

Year: 2014

Pete Davidson and Ariana Grande, for a short time, were a Hollywood "it couple." The two met when Grande hosted Saturday Night Live, and the pair quickly became close friends. They went on their first date in May of 2018, and they got engaged almost immediately after.

It was a short-lived engagement (the whole relationship was really a whirlwind), as fewer than five months later, the singer and the

comedian split. Part of the reason for their split was the death of rapper Mac Miller, Grande's ex. Davidson said that he knew the relationship was over when it happened, and he said he remained supportive from a distance after their breakup.



12. Penelope Cruz and Javier Bardem

Movie: Jamon Jamon

Location: Zaragoza, Spain

Year: 1992



When Penelope Cruz and Javier Bardem first met on the set of *Jamon Jamon*, a Spanish-language film, the actors hadn't exactly had their big breaks yet. Both were considered "rising stars" in the Hollywood world, and the success of *Jamon Jamon* definitely furthered their career, turning them into the superstars they are today.

However, the Disney star and Bardem wouldn't begin dating in the early 1990s, as Cruz was just sixteen. Instead, their love story took a little while to begin, with the two starting their relationship in 2010, officially appearing as a couple during the Goya Awards that year.

13. Natalie Portman and Benjamin Millepied

Movie: *Black Swan*

Location: New York City, New York

Year: 2009



In 2020, Natalie Portman celebrated eight years of marriage to her husband, dancer Benjamin Millepied. They met on the set of the dark, psychological thriller *Black Swan*, where Portman was the star of the movie and Millepied was the choreographer.

The intense, harrowing film, which isn't exactly as cheery as the ABC show *Dancing with the Stars*, might have been dark, but Portman's and Millepied's love story has been anything but. Portman described Millepied as her "love," and said that he gave her the "most important role" of her life: being a mother. The pair have two kids, Amalia and Aleph.

14. Brad Pitt and Gwyneth Paltrow

Movie: *Se7en*

Location: Los Angeles, California

Year: 1994



Actress and business owner Gwyneth Paltrow described her and Brad Pitt as "a very '90s couple." The two definitely looked the part, often donning near-matching 1990s fashion choices together. The actors met on set when they were filming the movie *Se7en*, a crime drama that made over \$320 million at the box office.

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After the pair met on the set of the violent, thought-provoking drama, they began dating. The Pantene spokeswoman opened up to *OprahMag.com* about how Gosling changed her life, saying she didn’t want to have kids until she met her longtime partner. The two are now parents of two daughters, Esmeralda Amada and Amada Lee.

16. Ryan Reynolds and Blake Lively

Movie: Green Lantern

Location: New Orleans, Louisiana

Year: 2010



Ryan Reynolds and Blake Lively are (almost) everyone’s favorite Hollywood “it” couple. The pair are known for their social media hijinks and flirtatious behavior, even though they’ve been married for years. They met on the scene of *Green Lantern* back in 2010, but sparks didn’t fly immediately.

As Reynolds revealed in an interview, they were both with other people at the time. The *M.C.U.* star was married to *Black Widow* actress Scarlett Johansson, while Lively was dating her *Gossip Girl* co-star. Reynolds said the two were just “buddies,” until they reconnected a few years later and began dating.

17. Kurt Russell and Goldie Hawn

Movie: The One and Only

Location: Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada

Year: 1966



As one report put it, the love story between Goldie Hawn and Kurt Russell is a four-decade tale of romance. The two met for the first time on *The One and Only*, a Disney film, in 1966. However, they didn’t fall in love right away.

They actually waited almost twenty years (and several boyfriends and girlfriends for each of them) before reconnecting. They met up again while on the set of yet another movie, *Swing Shift*, in 1984. The second time was the charm, and they went on their first date, which the couple described as “pretty crazy.” Crazy or not, they’ve been inseparable ever since.

18. Vincent Kartheiser and Alexis Bledel

Movie: Mad Men

Location: Los Angeles, California

Year: 2012



Luckily, the love story between Alexis Bledel and Vincent Kartheiser went far better than the love stories we saw on *Mad Men*, a period TV show that featured a whole lot of drama, infidelity, and sales tactics (however, everyone got to fall in love with Jon Hamm, so that made the nail-biting worth it).

Bledel had a guest appearance as Beth Dawes on *Mad Men*’s fifth season in 2012, while Kartheiser was a season regular. When they met on set, the pair quickly had a love connection, announcing that they were dating. They got married two years later.

American Desi Family

Thespianz Foundation performing this stage drama in Chicago in January 2024

In January 2024, the Thespianz Foundation is set to present the stage drama "American Desi Family" in Chicago. Scheduled for Saturday, January 27, 2024, the performance will take place at the auditorium of the South Asia Institute located at 1925 S Michigan Ave, Chicago, USA. Directed by Faisal Malik, with Sheikh Sameer Nadeem as the Associate Director and written by Injila Hamesh, the comedy Urdu Hindi Theatre play explores the dynamics of an "American Desi Family." Faisal Malik, hailing from Karachi, Pakistan, is the founder of the Thespianz Foundation and is widely recognized as an icon in the performing arts.

Thespianz Foundation, a dedicated performing arts organization, strives to broaden individual horizons through theatre and string puppetry. With a remarkable track record, the foundation has orchestrated over 194 theatrical productions, 1,129 puppet and pantomime performances, and conducted more than 775 theater workshops.

The comedy Urdu Hindi theatre play "American Desi Family" is proudly presented by the South Asia Institute in Chicago, USA.

Established in 2015, the South Asia Institute (SAI) aims to celebrate the arts and culture of South Asian Americans through thoughtfully curated exhibitions, innovative programs, and engaging educational initiatives. The institute strives to amplify the voices of South Asian Americans while exploring their intricacies, all within the context of our broader human family.

About the Play

The play delves into the complex yet closely intertwined relationships between spouses, emphasizing the importance of maintaining a strong and dedicated bond. As South Asian families migrate to developed countries like America and Canada, where lifestyles undergo significant changes, the production addresses the rising issue of



divorce rates. Through a lighthearted and entertaining narrative, the play creatively tackles this pressing social concern, proving that even critical issues can be addressed through humor and creativity. The storyline revolves around four main characters, with director Faisal Malik actively participating in the performance.

Directed by Faisal Malik

Faisal Malik, the Artistic Director and Founder of Thespianz Foundation, boasts an impressive portfolio of 109 theater performances, 71 dance performances, and 712 educational workshops. A fellow of the Arts Management Fellowship Program at the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts, he has been recognized for his contributions with a nomination for the Pride of Performance award.

Associate Director Sheikh Sameer Nadeem

As the dedicated Associate Director and string puppetry expert, Sheikh Sameer Nadeem has been an integral part of the arts scene since 2016. His exceptional commitment to the artistic aspect and leadership skills shine through, contributing signifi-

cantly to the success of various theater productions. With over 650 puppetry performances, he has served as associate director for several years.

Written By Injila Hamesh

Injila Hamesh, a versatile writer, poet, and teacher, brings her literary expertise to the play. With publications in national and international literary magazines, she has also translated plays into Hindi and English, showcasing her proficiency as a playwright and translator.

Cast of the Play

The play features a talented cast, including Faisal Malik as Atif, Mehboob Khan as Wajih, Maliha Ghouse as Naima, and Afzal Sodagar as Ashiq – Band Master.

Rehearsals

Held at Streamwood's Popular Creek Library and Pardesi Pavilion, the cast and crew immersed themselves in 90 days of intensive rehearsals, infusing the production with vibrant creative energy for the upcoming comedy Urdu Hindi theatre play "American Desi Family."

By Javed Mahmood



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