

Fortnightly

The Truth International

Islamabad - Karachi

15th - 29th February 2024

Another Coalition Government

New government to face toughest challenges on Foreign and Economic Front

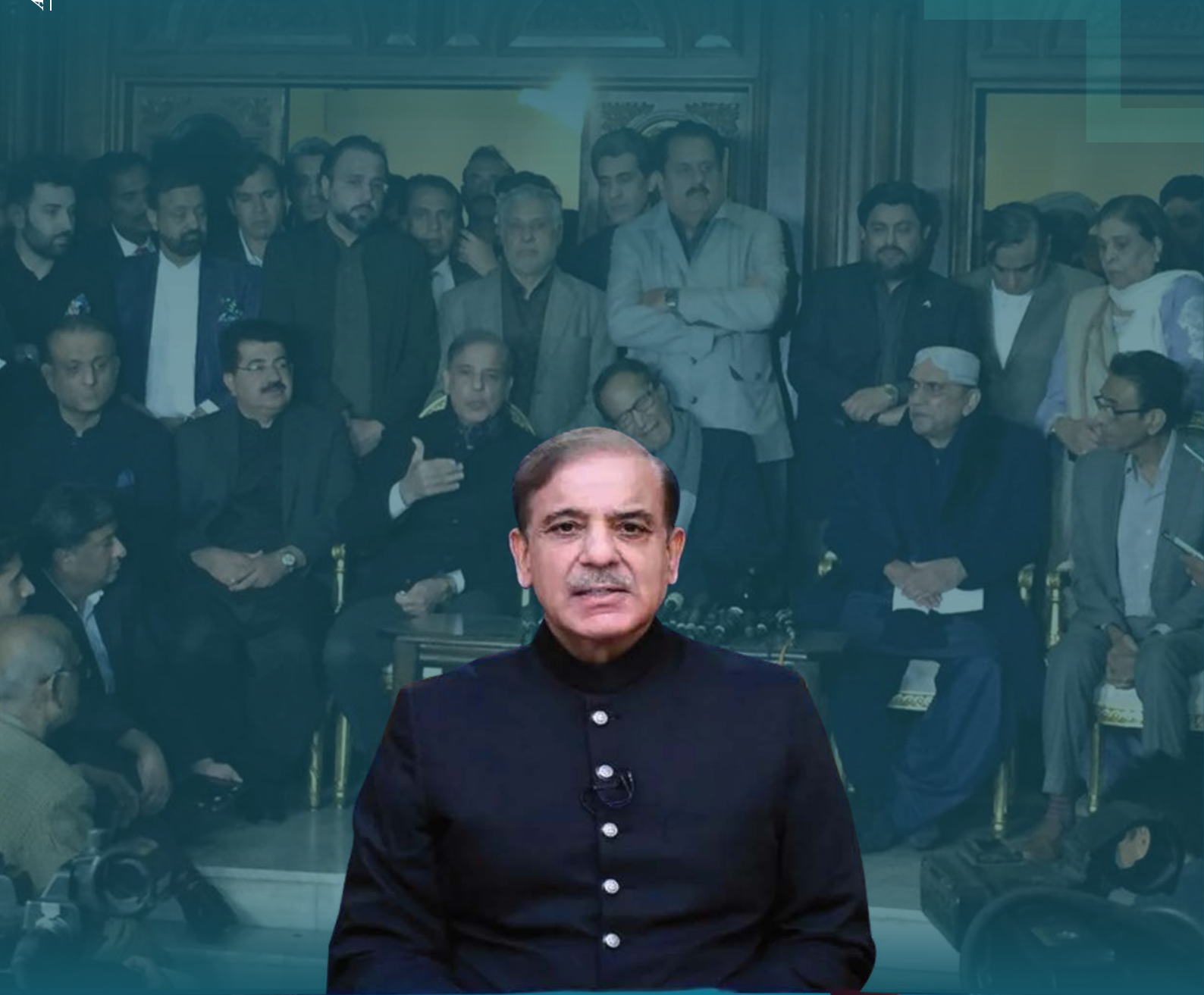
Gaza Situation

International Community criminal silence encouraging Israeli to carry on brutalities

New Government and Economy

New government has to approach IMF for next Programme

ABC Certified



Shahbaz Sharif Ready to be PM Again

Politics

Tough challenges awaiting Shehbaz Sharif-led coalition government By Javed Mahmood – **Page 04**



Democratic Evolution: Comparing Pakistan's 1970s Elections with the 2024 Political Upheaval By Hussnain Ahmad – **Page 07**

Allies set to form Govt By Asim Yasin & Ali Raza – **Page 09**



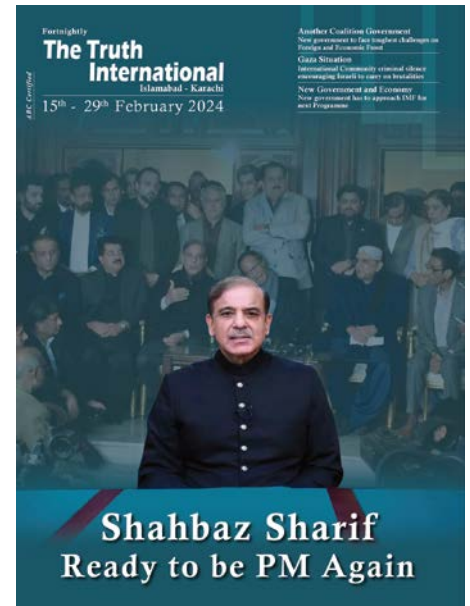
Pakistan's Political Turmoil: Challenges, Alliances, and the Quest for Stability By Daniyal Wali – **Page 13**

Evolving Democracy: A Comparative Analysis of Election Petitions in Pakistan (2018 vs. 2024) By Kanwal Munir – **Page 15**

Political Titans Tumble: High-Profile Leaders Lose Seats in Pakistan's 2024 Election Drama By Nimra Atiq – **Page 17**



Global Response to Feb 08 Elections: UK, USA, EU Reactions, and International Media Coverage By Romana Afsheen – **Page 19**



Editor:

Zaheer ud Din Babar Thaheem

Advisor to Editor:

Ashraf Malkham

Circulation & Marketing / Advertisement:

Aghzaz Ullah Raj

Contact: 0340-9850810

Email: admin@tti.org.pk

Letter to Editor:

Feel free to mail us at: editor@tti.org.pk

Postal Address:

Fortnightly "The Truth International"

Head Office:

205-D, 2nd Floor, Evacuee Trust Complex, Agha Khan Road, F-5/1, Islamabad, Pakistan.

Contact: +92 51 2820180-1

Karachi Office:

Shop No. 08, Mezzanine Salalah Apartments, Dawood Pota Road, Karachi Cantt.

Contact: +92 21 35221000-1

Email: info@tti.org.pk

Web: www.thetruthinternational.com

Price: Rs. 435

Publisher:

Muhammad Fahad Thaheem

Printer:

Masha Allah Printers

Basement # 9, Ratta Mansion, Fazal e Haq Road, Blue Area, Islamabad.

Design & Layout:

Abdul Qadir

DISCLAIMER: The articles published in this magazine collected from various writers, and sources are disseminated for information only. Therefore, the publisher shall not be responsible for any mistake/error.

Zardari tipped to become president as PPP, PML-N enter into alliance By Farooq Aqdas – **Page 23**



PTI's bet on MWM may not help secure its reserved seats in assemblies By Ansar Abbasi – **Page 24**

Imran names Gandapur for KP CM By Mushtaq Yusufzai & Arshad Aziz Malik – **Page 25**

Smaller parties take center stage as Pakistan waits for next government By Aamir Latif – **Page 26**

A crossroad for Pakistan; Elections 2024 By Naqi Akbar – **Page 27**

Moving forward after the election By Husain Haqqani – **Page 29**

Why Nawaz Sharif failed to win Pakistan election despite tacit army support By Abid Hussain – **Page 31**

Of the people By Arifa Noor – **Page 33**

Imran picks Omar Ayub as PTI's candidate for prime minister TTI Report – **Page 35**



The connection of Norwegian Pakistanis to Pakistani politics - the love of dual identities By Amna – **Page 36**

Foreign Affairs

The aftermath of Israeli strikes on Rafah – **Page 37**

In Gaza, hope is a fantasy By Andrew Mitrovica – **Page 38**

Economy

Economist Atif Mian urges next government to outline priorities By Anwar Iqbal – **Page 40**



High profits expected for banking sector on back of interest rate – **Page 41**

Climate Change

Analysis: How green are Pakistan's political manifestoes? By P M Baigal – **Page 42**

Sports

All You Need to Know About PSL 9 By Muhammad Abbas Azad – **Page 44**



Six Nations 2024: Is Ireland's James Lowe the best winger in the tournament? By Andy Gray – **Page 50**

How Torvill and Dean chose heart over head and changed a sport By Mike Henson – **Page 52**

Entertainment

Katy Perry exits 'American Idol' after seven seasons to focus on music By Nola Miller – **Page 55**

Tough challenges awaiting Shehbaz Sharif-led coalition government

By Javed Mahmood

Finally, the Pakistan Muslim League-N and Pakistan People's Party have decided to form a coalition government along with a few other political parties. On Feb 13, PPP chairman Bilawal Bhutto-Zardari announced his party's support for PML-N's candidate for the Prime Minister in the National Assembly. Bilawal, nevertheless, stated that his party would not be a part of the federal cabinet. He, however, said that Asif Zardari should be the President of Pakistan while the Chairman Senate and Speaker of the National Assembly will be from his party.

As the PML-N and PPP have decided to form a coalition government, now people are talking about the challenges ahead for the new government. The Shehbaz Sharif-led government would have to confront multiple challenges in the country and at the international level.

In Pakistan, the government would have to come up with prudent strategies to deal with the growing terrorism threat, unending price-hikes and cost of utilities, shattered confidence of people due to serious rigging allegations in the elections, and keeping Pakistan Tehrik-e-Insaf out of power in the center and Punjab though the PTI-supported candidates bagged the highest number of seats of the National Assembly, around 92 as compared to 79 of PML-N and 54 of PPP. Another daunting task for the new government would be to deal with the International Monetary Fund (IMF) in securing another bailout package, at least for three years.

This time, if the coalition government once again bows to the IMF's harsh terms and conditions, it will open a new Pandora's Box for the masses in the form of further devaluation of the rupee, increase in inflation, taxes, cost of doing business, a further hike in the utility bills. At this stage, a vast majority of the people are unhappy with the outcome of the elections and if the new government signed another anti-con-



sumers deal with the IMF, it would affect the survival of the masses, posing risks to political and economic stability in the country as long as the coalition government rules Pakistan.

For instance, when the PDM government came to power after the dismissal of Imran Khan through a midnight no-confidence, the dollar-rupee exchange rate stood around 175 rupees. However, it widened to 330 rupees in the open market trading and 305 in the inter-bank trading, when the PDM handed over the government to the caretakers in April last year.

Similarly, the PDM government levied massive taxes and the caretakers also followed the same strategy mainly because of the IMF-dictated policies. Additionally, the consumers are also paying hefty electricity and gas bills every month and cursing those who signed the deal with the IMF.

Notably, the PDM parties have faced the wrath of the people in the elections mainly because of price hikes and an anti-consumer deal with the IMF that is evident from the defeat of many political leaders who were part and parcel of the previous Shehbaz-led PDM government. If the coalition government repeated the past follies,

the masses may not tolerate their further exploitation by the new government.

Meanwhile, experts emphasized that the incoming government won't enjoy a grace period and must hit the ground running due to the multitude of challenges awaiting. Pakistan presently grapples with a \$3 billion short-term IMF program, with negotiations looming for a longer-term stabilization facility post the current program's conclusion next month. They are highlighting two immediate critical issues demanding attention: negotiating a more substantial IMF program for the balance of payment stabilization and bolstering the central bank's foreign exchange reserves. Additionally, the formulation of the FY25 budget stands as a pivotal milestone.

Experts have estimated a \$74 billion repayment of foreign loans over the next three years, alongside the burgeoning local debt stock, which stood at Rs 64 trillion as of December 2023. Additionally, there are three major challenges for the incoming government: devising a comprehensive strategy for debt management, enhancing energy sector efficiency, and reducing the tax burden, gradual reductions in corporate tax rates,



elimination of the super tax, and a decrease in turnover taxes to alleviate the burden on businesses.

The impending government's task of grappling with mounting circular debt and addressing social inequalities, particularly in education, health, and poverty alleviation, are crucial growth factors for the country. Beyond these challenges, financial experts highlighted the need to manage energy tariffs, curb inflation, stabilize interest rates and the rupee, and engage in negotiations with various international stakeholders such as the World Bank, Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, China, and the United States, along with other donor countries. These negotiations will remain key challenges for both the country and the incoming government.

Meanwhile, on the diplomatic level, the government would revive all-time low ties with Iran, and Afghanistan, and a further improvement in bilateral relationships with China, Saudi Arabia, UAE, and other friendly nations.

Debt and Liabilities

In the first half of fiscal year 2024 (1HFY24), Pakistan witnessed a substantial surge in its total debt and liabilities, reaching Rs81.194 trillion, marking a notable increase of 27.2% year-on-year (YoY) from Rs63.834 trillion recorded in 1HFY23, as per the data released by the State Bank of Pakistan (SBP) on Monday. Breaking down this figure, the total debt amounted to Rs77.90 trillion, while liabilities stood at Rs4.62 trillion during this period. Within the spectrum of total debt, external debt, encompassing borrowings from entities like the IMF, intercompany external debt from foreign direct investors, as well as government and non-governmental external borrowings, surged by 26.17% YoY to Rs33.61 trillion, compared to Rs26.63 trillion in 1HFY23.

Notably, Pakistan's debt from the IMF stood at Rs2.14 trillion, registering a significant YoY increase of 24.17% in 1HFY24. The data provided by the central bank also indicates that total liabilities, inclusive of both external and domestic, rose to Rs4.623 trillion, expanding by 27.51% YoY from Rs3.62 trillion in 1HFY23. Additionally, a

consolidated adjustment amounting to Rs1.33 trillion was noted in 1HFY24.

Servicing the total debt and liabilities surged to Rs5.702 trillion in 1HFY24, reflecting a notable increase of 28.82% YoY compared to Rs4.42 trillion in the corresponding period last year. Of this total servicing amount, a significant portion of Rs4.39 trillion comprised interest payments on external debt, indicating a substantial YoY increase of 64.67%. Further, the breakdown reveals that the remaining sum includes Rs1.23 trillion allocated for principal payments of external finances and Rs83.1 billion for interest payments on liabilities.



Combating terrorism

The incoming government following the February 8, 2024, general election faces an immediate challenge as it grapples with the urgent need to craft a comprehensive counterterrorism strategy. Despite ongoing efforts, acts of terrorism persist, with recent incidents such as the assault on the Chaudhwan police station in KP's D.I. Khan and two bomb blasts in political gatherings in Balochistan a day ahead of general elections underscoring the relentless threat.

Last December's brazen assault on a military check post in Daraban, claiming over 20 lives, stands as a grim reminder of the persistent danger posed by militant groups. Notably, this onslaught was attributed to Tehreek-i-Jihad Pakistan, a guise adopted by the proscribed TTP,

which reared its head anew last year. Throughout 2023, regions like KP, Balochistan, and Punjab grappled with recurring terrorist violence, resulting in a staggering toll of over 1,500 lives lost. Halting this bloodshed must be a top priority for the new administration. The challenge ahead is multifaceted: ensuring national security, preventing terrorist organizations from finding sanctuary within Pakistan's borders, and thwarting their efforts to establish bases across the border in Afghanistan.

Collaboration between the new government, security agencies, and provincial authorities is paramount to devising a robust and proactive security plan, especially

for the vulnerable areas of KP and Balochistan. The existing framework of the National Action Plan provides a foundation, but it must be updated and rigorously implemented to address current threats effectively. Streamlining efforts against militancy under the leadership of NACTA, with input from all stakeholders, is crucial for cohesive action.

Addressing the issue of terrorist sanctuaries in Afghanistan is equally pressing. The UN's acknowledgment of Pakistan's concerns regarding Al Qaeda and TTP training camps on Afghan soil underscores the urgency for action. The Afghan Taliban must either dismantle these facilities or face strained bilateral relations. They must halt attacks or relocate militants away from Pakistan's borders to prevent further bloodshed on Pakistani soil. It will



Pak-Iran tension

Diplomatic tensions between Pakistan and Iran have escalated following an Iranian missile strike on Pakistani soil that tragically resulted in the loss of two children's lives and left three others injured. In response, Pakistan carried out seven airstrikes in the Sistan-Balochestan province of Iran and killed the anti-Pakistan terrorists belonging to the banned outfit, the Baloch Liberation Front. Pakistan also recalled its ambassador from Tehran and prevented Iran's envoy to Islamabad, currently abroad, from returning.



Accusations fly as Islamabad asserts that Iran breached Pakistani airspace, targeting bases of the Jaish al-Adl armed group, while Tehran maintains its actions were defensive. Despite this recent incident sparking crisis talks, the two nations have a history of managing tensions along their lengthy and volatile 900km border. Iran's decision to close its borders with Afghanistan and Pakistan further underscores regional security concerns, prompted by a twin bombing in Kerman that claimed 89 lives on January 3. The attack coincided with ceremonies marking the fourth anniversary of the assassination of General Qasem Soleimani, attributed to the Islamic State (IS) extremist group, which claimed responsibility for the blasts. Iranian Interior Minister Ahmad Vahidi emphasized border security as a priority, particularly along the lengthy frontiers shared with Afghanistan and Pakistan. Though Pakistan and Iran have revived their diplomatic ties as their

ambassadors have resumed duties, both countries still lack a direction to strengthen their bilateral ties.

Despite condemnations from the Taliban-led government in Afghanistan and Pakistan's Ministry of Foreign Affairs, accusations persist that both countries inadvertently harbor elements destabilizing Iran's security. This has strained relations, with Iran insinuating Afghan complicity in terrorist activities, prompting calls for joint efforts to combat border threats. In Afghanistan, the Taliban's ongoing battle against the Islamic State-Khorasan (IS-K)

underscores the complex security landscape. Despite Taliban efforts to curb IS-K influence, porous mountainous borders pose ongoing challenges, with regional stakeholders recognizing the IS threat as a significant security concern.

Pak-Afghan critical ties

On November 8, Pakistan's interim Prime Minister Anwar ul-Haq Kakar delivered a scathing rebuke of the Taliban regime in neighboring Afghanistan. He boldly asserted that the Taliban leadership actively backs the Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP), fueling an insurgency that has resulted in a significant surge in violence within Pakistan. Since the Taliban assumed power in Afghanistan in August 2021, Pakistan has witnessed 2,867 fatalities attributable to this increased violence.

Despite mounting evidence of Taliban support for the TTP over the past two years,

the Pakistani government has been cautious in its characterization of the relationship. However, Kakar departed from this diplomatic restraint, citing "clear evidence" of the Taliban facilitating terrorism by the TTP. Shortly after Kakar's remarks, Pakistan's special envoy for Afghanistan, Asif Durrani, echoed his sentiments, highlighting that peace in Afghanistan has become a grave concern for Pakistan.

Kakar, serving as Pakistan's caretaker prime minister until the upcoming elections (now slated for early next year), is believed to have close ties to the military establishment. His statement coincides with Pakistan's contentious decision to expel 1.7 million undocumented Afghan refugees, with over 327,000 already repatriated to Afghanistan. This decision follows significant TTP-led attacks, including an audacious attempt to seize control of a border district in northern Pakistan. Kakar's statement, therefore, signifies not only his stance as the interim leader but also reflects Pakistan's strategic shift, signaling intolerance toward Taliban support for the TTP.

Under this new approach, Pakistan has launched a comprehensive pressure campaign aimed at compelling the Taliban to reconsider its support for the TTP. Given its extensive border with Afghanistan and its historical support for the Taliban, Pakistan wields considerable influence over Afghan politics. Central to this campaign is the expulsion of refugees, acknowledged by Kakar as a means to exert pressure on the Taliban. Additionally, Pakistan is scaling back economic and trade ties to inflict financial strain on the Taliban. Moreover, Pakistan has declared it will refrain from advocating for the Taliban-led government at the international level, indicating a downgrade in engagement since August 2021. The Taliban's continued backing of the TTP and Pakistan's escalating pressure campaign suggest a trajectory of prolonged deterioration in their relationship.

Improving ties with China, Saudi Arabia, UAE, the United States, and the United Kingdom should also be the priority of the new government.



Democratic Evolution: Comparing Pakistan's 1970s Elections with the 2024 Political Upheaval

By Hussnain Ahmad

The recent general elections in Pakistan, held in February 2024, have sparked significant political discussions and debates reminiscent of the country's historic elections in the 1970s. These elections, separated by decades, showcase the evolving dynamics of Pakistani democracy and the enduring quest for representative governance. By juxtaposing the outcomes and consequences of the 1970s elections with those of 2024, we gain insights into the shifting political landscape and the aspirations of the Pakistani people.

Analyzing the Consequences: A Comparative Perspective

In the annals of Pakistan's political history, the consequences of electoral outcomes have shaped the nation's trajectory, reflecting the intricate interplay of socio-political forces and historical dynamics. As we juxtapose the repercussions of the 1970s elections with the evolving landscape following the 2024 elections, a nuanced understanding of Pakistan's democratic evolution emerges.

Consequences of the 1970s Elections

The consequences of the 1970s elections were profound and far-reaching, ultimately leading to the disintegration of Pakistan and the birth of Bangladesh. The victory of the Awami League in East Pakistan, led by Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, underscored the deep-seated regional disparities and linguistic divisions within the country. However, the refusal of the military establishment and the ruling elite's refusal to recognize the Awami League's electoral mandate fueled tensions. They triggered a brutal crackdown, resulting in widespread violence and human rights abuses.

The consequences of the military's intervention and the subsequent civil war were catastrophic, with millions of people displaced and hundreds of thousands killed. Pakistan's disintegration not only altered South Asia's geopolitical landscape but also raised fundamental questions about identity, nationhood, and governance. The emergence of Bangladesh as an independent nation underscored the failure of Pakistan's political leadership to address the aspirations of its diverse population and uphold the principles of democracy and inclusivity.

Consequences of the 2024 Elections

In contrast, the consequences of the 2024 elections in Pakistan are still unfolding, with the nation grappling with the aftermath of a fragmented electoral landscape and allegations of irregularities. The unexpected success of independent candidates aligned with Imran Khan's Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) reflects a seismic shift in Pakistan's political paradigm, signaling a growing disillusionment with traditional political elites and a demand for change and accountability.



However, alongside celebrating the unexpected victory of independent candidates, questions have emerged regarding the integrity of the electoral process, casting doubt on the credibility of the results and the autonomy of democratic institutions. The military establishment's role in shaping the outcome of the 2024 elections remains a subject of intense debate, with speculations about its influence fueling tensions and mistrust among the populace. Imran Khan's strained relationship with the military and allegations of interference have further complicated the political landscape, highlighting the delicate balance between civilian authority and military influence in Pakistan's democratic experiment.

Moreover, the socioeconomic challenges confronting Pakistan continue to loom, contributing to the electorate's discontent with the status quo. While the success of PTI-aligned candidates may suggest widespread endorsement of Imran Khan's leadership, it also reflects broader disillusionment with entrenched political elites and a desire for change. The electorate's demand for tangible improvements in their quality of life underscores the pressing need for the incoming government to address socioeconomic disparities, revitalize the economy, ensure security, and uphold principles of social justice.

In analyzing the electorate's motivations, it becomes evident that the vote in the 2024 elections is not solely a show of support for Imran Khan or his party but also an expression of discontent and a desire for accountability from the establishment. The electorate's rejection of traditional power structures and dynastic politics underscores a yearning for inclusive governance and a departure from entrenched interests.

As Pakistan navigates the complexities of the post-election landscape, it must confront these challenges head-on and prioritize the needs and aspirations of its citizens. The success of Pakistan's democratic experiment hinges on its ability to address pressing socioeconomic issues, foster transparency and accountability, and navigate the delicate balance between civilian governance and military influence. Only through concerted efforts to address these challenges can Pakistan realize its potential as a vibrant and inclusive democracy, serving the interests of all its citizens.



Navigating the Aftermath: Lessons Learned and Paths Forward

As Pakistan confronts the aftermath of the 2024 elections, it stands at a critical juncture in its democratic journey. It is poised to draw lessons from past experiences and chart a path prioritizing national unity, socioeconomic development, and democratic consolidation. The success of Pakistan's democratic experiment hinges on its ability to address the grievances of its diverse population and uphold the principles of democracy, the rule of law, and human rights.

To begin with, Pakistan must reflect on the lessons learned from its tumultuous history of electoral politics, including the country's disintegration in the 1970s and subsequent challenges to democratic governance. The nation must recognize the importance of inclusive governance that respects the rights and aspirations of all its citizens, irrespective of ethnicity, religion, or socioeconomic status. By acknowledging past mistakes and embracing a commitment to inclusivity and pluralism, Pakistan can foster a sense of national unity and solidarity that transcends regional and ideological divides.

Moreover, the imperative of socioeconomic development looms large on Pakistan's political agenda, with the electorate expressing discontent with the prevailing status quo. The incoming government must prioritize policies and initiatives to revitalize the economy, create employment opportunities, and address socioeconomic disparities. By investing in education, healthcare, infrastructure, and social welfare programs, Pakistan can empower its citizens and lay the foundation for long-term prosperity and stability.

Democratic consolidation also requires a steadfast commitment to upholding the rule of law, promoting transparency, and safeguarding human rights. Pakistan must strengthen its democratic institutions, including the judiciary, legislature, and electoral commission, to ensure their independence, impartiality, and accountability. By fostering a culture of responsibility and accountability, Pakistan can bolster public trust in its democratic processes and institutions, thereby enhancing the resilience of its democracy against internal and external threats.

Imperatives for the Future: Inclusive Governance and Democratic Consolidation

The consequences of the 1970s and 2024 elections underscore the complexities inherent in Pakistan's democratic evolution. Inclusive governance, transparency, and accountability must form the bedrock of Pakistan's political landscape, fostering trust between the government and the governed. As the nation confronts the challenges and opportunities of the present moment, it must remain steadfast in its commitment to democratic values and collective progress.

The 1970s elections left an indelible mark on Pakistan's political history, culminating in the disintegration of the country and the birth of Bangladesh. The failure to address regional disparities and linguistic divisions underscored the fragility of Pakistan's national

unity and the imperative of inclusive governance. Similarly, the 2024 elections reflect a seismic shift in Pakistan's political paradigm, with independent candidates aligned with Imran Khan's PTI securing unexpected victories. This outcome signals a growing disillusionment with traditional political elites and a demand for change and accountability.

However, with the celebration of electoral victories, concerns have arisen regarding the integrity of the electoral process and the military establishment's role. Allegations of irregularities and interference have cast a shadow over the credibility of the results, highlighting the need for transparent and impartial electoral mechanisms. Moreover, the socioeconomic challenges facing Pakistan, including unemployment, inflation, and social inequality, underscore the urgency of addressing the needs and aspirations of its diverse population.



As Pakistan navigates the complexities of the post-election landscape, it must remain committed to democratic values and principles. Inclusive governance, represented by diverse voices and perspectives, fosters national unity and social cohesion. Transparency and accountability in decision-making are crucial for building public trust and confidence in democratic institutions.

Pakistan must prioritize socioeconomic development initiatives to improve its citizens' quality of life. By investing in education, healthcare, infrastructure, and social welfare programs, Pakistan can empower its citizens and pave the way for long-term prosperity and stability. The rule of law and safeguarding human rights are also imperative for protecting the rights and freedoms of all individuals, regardless of ethnicity, religion, or socioeconomic status.

Conclusion

As Pakistan navigates the aftermath of the 2024 elections, it is imperative to reflect on the lessons learned from past electoral experiences and chart a path toward inclusive and participatory democracy. The resilience of the Pakistani people in exercising their democratic rights amidst challenges and uncertainties underscores their unwavering commitment to shaping the nation's destiny. Moving forward, Pakistan must prioritize transparency, accountability, and inclusivity in its electoral processes to strengthen democratic institutions and uphold the principles of democratic governance. Only through collective efforts and genuine dialogue can Pakistan realize its full potential as a vibrant and thriving democracy in the global community.



Allies set to form Govt



By Asim Yasin & Ali Raza

In a major political development a six parties' alliance — PMLN, PPP, MQMP, PMLQ, IPP and BAP—on Tuesday announced to form government in the Centre on the pattern of last government of Pakistan Democratic Movement (PDM).

Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PMLN) Information Secretary Marriyum Aurangzeb announce on social media platform X that PMLN supremo Nawaz Sharif nominated party President Shehbaz Sharif for the post of prime minister and Maryam Nawaz for the Punjab chief minister.

Announcing the six-party alliance for next coalition government in a press conference, after the party heads met at the residence of PMLQ President Chaudhry Shujaat Hussain, PPP Co-Chairman Asif Ali Zardari said that it was decided to form the government together.

The party heads included Shujaat Hussain, Shehbaz, Asif Zardari, Khalid Maqbool Siddiqui, Aleem Khan, Chairman and BAP representative Sadiq Sanjrani.

Shehbaz, while offering the 'Charter of Economy' and 'Charter of Democracy' to political parties, said "I agree with the "forgive and forget' policy to move ahead and accept the split mandate and grateful to all parties who supported the PMLN."

Shehbaz said that the phase of talking against each other in the election was over, now the Parliament is about to come into existence, we have to end our differences and take the nation forward. "The economy has to be strengthened and stabilised," he said.

He said that the IMF agreement gave economic stability to Pakistan, the inflation in Pakistan has to be reduced, the debts of Pakistan have to be reduced, and that the mandate that has come in the elections is recognised by all.

He said the PPP has decided to give the PMLN co-vote we are thankful for this. "Thanks to Asif Zardari, Khalid Maqbool Siddiqui, Shujaat Hussain, Aleem Khan, the parties that have gathered here today have a two-thirds majority. Let's move

forward, move the economy forward, end mutual differences," he said.

In a reply to a question, the former prime minister said that PDM government saved Pakistan from bankruptcy.

To a question about the PMLN prime minister, he said, "I will request Nawaz Sharif to accept the post of prime minister."

Asked about the absence of Maulana Fazlur Rehman from the meeting and asked whether he was not part of the alliance, Shehbaz Sharif said he had contacted Maulana Fazl but he had a meeting of his party's Shura and they would meet soon.

When a journalist asked whether Asif Zardari be the next president, Shehbaz restricted himself replying in a light mood, "We will not disappoint you."

Zardari said, "We wanted that the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf should also have been included in the reconciliation process as we want that not only the PTI to be part of this process of reconciliation but every political



power to be part of the process of reconciliation.

“We want to go together with economic, defence agenda and other similar things and make Mian Sahib and other friends successful so that we can make Pakistan and its people successful,” he added.

Zardari also raised the slogan of “Pakistan Khappay”.

Shujaat said a sustainable agenda should be everyone’s priority. “Everyone should strive for the betterment of the country,” he said.

MQMP Convener Khalid Maqbool Siddiqui said, “We may have differences but Pakistan is the priority. We have supported Shehbaz Sharif before and will continue to do so. If you take steps to save Pakistan, you will lead the country towards a better situation.”

Sanjrani said, “We were all together before, and once again we should strengthen Pakistan’s democracy.”

IPP President Aleem Khan said, “Pakistan is currently going through a very difficult period, the conditions of the poor are very bad due to inflation, and there is a need to take decisions to improve the economy.”

Earlier, PPP Chairman Bilawal Bhutto Zardari announced to support the PMLN in government formation without being part of the federal cabinet.

Addressing a press conference on the conclusion of two-day Central Executive Committee of the PPP, Bilawal said the PPP would be willing to support on an issue-to-issue basis and in the case of important votes for the candidate of the Prime Minister of Pakistan, to ensure that a government is formed and political stability is restored.

“The PPP has decided that while we are not in a position to join the federal government ourselves, nor will we be interested in taking ministries in such a set-up, we also do not want to see political chaos in the country. We do not want to see perpetual crisis in the country,” he said.

The PPP chairman said the principled stance is that party wanted help the country

emerge from the plethora of crises it is faced with, and the time has come yet again for the party to raise the slogan of ‘Pakistan Khappay’. “The reality is that the PPP does not have a mandate to form the federal government and this is why, I will not be putting myself forward for the candidacy of the Prime Minister of Pakistan”, Bilawal said.

He said there are two other groups that have more numbers in the National Assembly, the independent group and the PMLN, while the PTI has announced that they will not engage in a dialogue with the PPP and that rules out the possibility of an independent and PPP-led government. “That leaves us with PMLN which is the only political party in the National Assembly who have reached out to the PPP and invited us to join their government,” he said.

“If the PTI does not want our votes and the PMLN does not form a majority, and this House fails to elect a PM and form the government, then we will have to go back for re-elections and this will lead to another perpetuation of this political crisis and political stability will not return, rather political instability will increase. The consequences of this will be faced by the people of Pakistan, who at this moment, are facing not only a political crisis but also an economic one, the very real threat of terrorism and climate change,” he said.

Bilawal said the PPP will make a committee to engage with counterparts based on its views. “We will make efforts to push the country in a direction which is the right of the Pakistani people... who do not wish for further chaos. They are looking at their politicians to help them emerge from further turmoil.”

He said the CEC members raised objections over the PMLN and PPP’s experience with them for 18 months. He said confidence-building hence is vital, which is why we will not only discuss government formation in the meetings with other parties, but also demand of them to address the PPP’s grievances.

Talking about the 2024 general elections, Bilawal said that unfortunately, as was the case in 2013 and 2018, this election too suffered from similar objections.

He said the members of the PPP’s CEC too expressed their views regarding the level playing field, rigging and irregularities and it was decided that the CEC will collect all such complaints regarding elections. Moreover, he said despite objections the party will accept the results in larger interest of the people and country. “We would simultaneously want to address these issues so that the upcoming elections are not questioned. We will also use forums such as the Election Commission of Pakistan, the Parliament etc,” he said.

Responding to questions, Bilawal said that a clear mandate was not achieved. “Neither the independent candidates supported by the PTI, nor the PMLN or the PPP are in the position to form their own respective governments,” he said.

Unfortunately, he said, the PTI today is taking decisions that are not in the interest of the people.

The PPP chairman further said that he does not believe that he would be the opposition leader.

In a reply to another question, Bilawal said that the PPP would effort to form governments in Sindh and Balochistan.

To a question regarding the PPP on constitutional posts of National Assembly Speaker, Senate Chairman and President, the PPP chairman said the party would decide its nominees for these posts but it was his personal desire that Asif Ali Zardari is the PPP’s candidate for the post of the president, because the country is burning and if anyone has the capacity to help put the fire out, it is Asif Ali Zardari.

He said it is imperative for the country that President Zardari assumes this responsibility for the sake of the country yet again.

Answering a question, Bilawal said that the PPP’s stance has always been in support of the Parliament and the PMs completing their terms but if the PMLN’s candidate engages in the traditional politics of hatred and division, then it will be very difficult for the federation and democracy to operate. “Not only the PMLN, but all political parties, including the PTI, should not think for themselves, but for the country,” he said.



“Political forces need to realise that it takes two to tango.”

Bilawal said that the PPP could have taken advantage of this political situation, and blackmailed the PTI and PMLN. “This is not the politics of reconciliation, but our love for the people of Pakistan that is compelling us to make this decision,” he said.

As far as the party’s position in Punjab is concerned, he said the conspiracy against the PPP is a continuation of a pattern in the past. It has been conveyed to Asif Zardari to address these concerns.

The PPP chairman said that the party expressed its concerns over the elections before the media and also wrote to the ECP. “We are relaying our concerns regarding the level playing field to President Zardari to be resolved since he had assured the CEC of it,” he said, adding that this can be addressed by the political parties of the country conducting electoral reforms in a manner that leaves no room for objections in the next elections.

He said that the PTI has made it a habit to cry wolf in every single election despite the fact that it is a historical fact and reality that in the majority of those elections, the odds were not against them. “We all remember the 35 punctures and how the country was destabilised and our fragile democracy was harmed through the protests and sit-ins,” he said.

Bilawal said the PTI themselves have said that they are not willing to talk to any political party. From this statement, it is obvious that they are not interested in forming the government and creating an environment of political stability. “They would like to continue their extreme, populist politics where they wish to delegitimise as many democratic processes as possible,” he said adding that they believe it is to their political benefit to spread chaos in the country.

He said the challenge of this sort of populism is not unique to Pakistan. “We have now come to a point where even the democratic system of America is being challenged along the same playbook whether you are with or without facts on your side; you accuse and repeat the message of

rigging to delegitimise the democratic process and institutions,” he said.

“This is a challenge all over the world. Pakistan’s fragile democracy, where 50 percent of its rule has been under direct dictatorships, it is very difficult to cope with this populist challenge,” he said.

He said the consequences of this approach will be borne by the people of Pakistan, especially in the wake of the economic and security crises. “We have a host of challenges to solve,” he said.

He said it will be our constant effort to convince all sides that politics should remain within the democratic space. “We should consult ourselves in a manner that strengthens democratic and civilian institutions, not for our shortsighted political gains,” he said.



Responding to another question, Bilawal said the MQMP adopted a violent approach. It is also a concern that militant elements of the party were freed in the elections, he alleged.

He said our candidates were subjected to violence, their offices and cars were burned. “Despite all this, we will not compromise on the peace and progress of the city of Karachi. Our message to them too is not to engage in the politics of hatred and refrain from dividing the city based on linguistic politics,” he said.

Separately, addressing a press conference, Shehbaz Sharif invited the PTI-backed independent candidates to show majority in

the lower house of parliament and form their government.

Ishaq Dar, Marriyum Aurangzeb, Azma Bukhari, Atta Tarar, Malik Ahmed Khan and others were also present on the occasion.

The ex-premier said if the PTI-backed independents failed to form their government, then his party will make its government with the help of allies.

He said the PMLN had emerged as the largest party in Feb 8 elections winning 80 National Assembly seats so far.

He also invited the independent candidates to join the PMLN, as it involved no legal or constitutional bar on them. He said many PTI-backed independent candidates had already announced to join the PMLN.

“We will sit on the opposition benches if the PTI-backed candidates prove their majority in the House, but if they failed, we will use our constitutional and legal right to form government with the help of our allies,” he said.

Answering a question about government formation in the Punjab, Shehbaz said the PMLN had more than 150 seats in the provincial assembly.

He said the PMLN had invited all the parties to form a coalition government in the Centre.

“We have to move forward together in the country’s larger interest,” he maintained.



He strongly rejected the impression that the polls had been manipulated.

“Had the polls been manipulated for us, the independents won’t have won on the ground,” he said, adding that several party stalwarts including Rana Sanaullah, Khwaja Saad Rafique, Khurram Dastagir and others had lost the elections.

Answering yet another question about the future relations with the IMF, he said it was loud and clear that the country needed an immediate relief package.

He said Pakistan faced the biggest financial challenges in its history needing sacrifices.

He said there were various doubts and suspicions about the holding of elections but that phase was over now.

He also thanked the Chief Justice of Pakistan and Election Commission of Pakistan for completing the election process peacefully.

He reminded that the PTI alleged rigging in 2013 and used the term of 35 punctures but later President Arif Alvi regretted the allegation on his handle on erstwhile Twitter.

The ex-premier said the election results were disabled in 2018 and they started coming after 66 hours. He said the results of

rural constituencies preceded the urban areas’ results, adding that recounting in Khawaja Saad Rafiq’s constituency was stopped in 2018 and the results of his own election from Karachi were changed.

“After about 10 to 12 percent results, a party started announcing its win. It’s illogical and inappropriate to build an opinion on just 10-12 percent results.”

He said the court had also rejected the complaints of PMLN candidates against rigging.

“From 2018 till 2022, the prime minister used to enter the assembly through a secret passage only to avoid handshake with the members,” he alleged, saying the PTI founder had even refused to sit with the other political parties in tough situations like the Covid-19 pandemic and the Indian fighter jets’ intrusion into Pakistan’s airspace.

“At that time, the entire opposition was present. The Army Chief also came but the prime minister didn’t,” he recalled.

He also said the PMLN got the FATF bill approved and took decisions beyond personal likes and dislikes.

Earlier, successful independent candidate from PP-49 Sialkot Rana Fayaz announced his joining the PMLN and expressed full

confidence in the leadership of Nawaz Sharif.

MNA-elect Waseem Qadir also met with the PMLN president at his residence. He has already joined the PMLN. Shehbaz thanked both Rana Fayaz and Waseem Qadir for joining the PMLN.

Meanwhile, Shehbaz Sharif met Maulana Fazalur Rehman at his residence and invited the JUIF to become part of upcoming coalition government in the Centre. Shehbaz Sharif reached Fazl’s residence soon after attending six parties meeting.

The JUIF sources said that Maulana Fazl conveyed his reservations to the PMLN president saying that his party’s mandate had been stolen in February 08 elections. He said that he was planning to sit on opposition benches.

Fazl said that he would respond to the offer of joining coalition government after consulting his party central working committee on Wednesday (today)

The PMLN leaders Ishaq Dar, Sardar Ayaz Sadiq and Malik Ahmad and JUIF leaders Maulana Abdul Ghafoor Haideri, Maulana Rashid Soomro and Engineer Ziaur Rehman were also present. Later, Sadiq Sanjrani also met Maulana Fazl at his residence.

Courtesy The News





Pakistan's Political Turmoil: Challenges, Alliances, and the Quest for Stability

By Daniyal Wali

In the midst of political upheaval, Pakistan finds itself at a pivotal juncture, contending with the aftermath of a highly contentious election on February 8. The absence of a decisive majority has cast the nation into uncertainty, with allegations of vote tampering adding an additional layer of complexity to the situation. The controversy surrounding the elections has been exacerbated by the sluggish processing of results by the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP). The delayed release of outcomes has fueled tensions and suspicions, both within political circles and among the general public, eroding confidence in the democratic process.

As the country grapples with these challenges, the formation of alliances remains uncertain, adding to the overall sense of political instability. Frustration among the populace is palpable, reflecting a yearning for clarity and a swift resolution to the uncertainties surrounding the election results. Internationally, condemnation of the allegations and concerns about the fairness of the electoral process are growing, placing external pressure on Pakistan to address the issues at hand and ensure a credible and transparent resolution.

In this volatile atmosphere, the imperative need to unravel the complexities surrounding the election results becomes increasingly apparent. A prompt and impartial investigation into the allegations of rigging is crucial for restoring faith in the democratic process and for charting a way forward that reflects the will of the people. The eyes of both the nation and the world are keenly watching as Pakistan navigates this challenging political landscape.

Party Positions

In the aftermath of the recent electoral contest in Pakistan, Imran Khan's Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) has emerged with a noteworthy lead through its alliance with affiliated independent candidates, securing a total of 92 seats. Nevertheless, the



political landscape remains intricate and uncertain, marked by various challenges. The resurgence of the Muttahida Qaumi Movement (MQM) from Karachi, obtaining 17 seats, and the involvement of smaller parties further complicate the prospects for forming a stable government. The Pakistan Muslim League (PMLN), led by Imran Khan's political rival Nawaz Sharif, closely follows with 76 seats. Additionally, the Pakistan People's Party (PPP) securing 54 seats positions itself as a potential kingmaker in the evolving political scenario. This distribution of seats highlights a fragmented political landscape where no single party commands a majority, introducing complexity to the ongoing coalition-building efforts.

A noteworthy development is the unexpected success of PTI's affiliated independent candidates, who have maintained their lead despite the party being divested of its iconic bat symbol. This success underscores the resilience and enduring appeal of PTI's political agenda even amidst challenges. However, the optimism surrounding PTI's lead is tempered by the party's allegations of widespread rigging, asserting that it has incurred losses in several seats. These claims have heightened tensions and added a layer of complexity to an already contentious political atmosphere. PTI's position on the perceived electoral irregularities

introduces uncertainty to the post-election scenario, prompting questions about the legitimacy and fairness of the electoral process.

As Pakistan navigates through this intricate political landscape, attention turns to the delicate process of coalition-building and negotiations. The success of any prospective government hinges on the ability of political parties to transcend differences, address concerns of rigging, and form alliances reflective of the diverse political composition of the country. In the upcoming days, one can anticipate intense deliberations and negotiations as the nation awaits the formation of a government capable of providing stability and effectively addressing the myriad challenges confronting the country.

Potential Alliances and Scenarios

In the aftermath of the recent elections in Pakistan, political analysts are closely examining potential scenarios that may unfold in the formation of the new government. The more probable scenario envisions the creation of a coalition government involving major political parties, excluding Imran Khan's PTI. This coalition may comprise the Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP), Pakistan Muslim League (PMLN),



Muttahida Qaumi Movement (MQM), Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam, and other influential players. However, the second, less likely scenario suggests a collaboration between PPP and PTI to establish a government. The intricacies of negotiations and the looming possibility of protests underscore the uncertainties surrounding the formation of the new government.

The PPP leadership has taken a crucial step in this direction by presenting the offer from PML-N before the Central Executive Committee (CEC). This decision comes after a meeting between PML-N President Shehbaz Sharif and PPP leaders Asif Zardari and Bilawal Bhutto. The outcome of this meeting, characterized by positive indications, sets the stage for further deliberations.

A joint statement issued after a subsequent meeting at Bilawal House in Lahore between PML-N and PPP leaders reveals an agreement "in principle" on political cooperation. The parties discussed the overall situation of the country and expressed a commitment to cooperate for political stability. The PPP pledged to present PML-N's proposals before its Central Executive Committee, highlighting the collaborative efforts to form a government that aligns with the mandate given by the majority.

Meanwhile, a separate meeting between PML-N and Muttahida Qaumi Movement-Pakistan (MQM-P) took place, adding another layer to the evolving political landscape. The discussions focused on forming the next government, and a joint statement indicated a "principle agreement" on working together in the interest of the country and the public.

As these political developments unfold, the statements from both PPP and PML-N emphasize the need for cooperation, stability, and a consensus on the future economic agenda. The complex post-election scenario necessitates strategic alliances and compromises, with an understanding that no single party possesses the mandate to independently form a government. While the nation awaits the outcome of these deliberations, it is evident that the political dynamics are in flux, and the formation of a coalition government is likely to be shaped

by intricate negotiations and a delicate balance of interests among the key players.

Future Prospects and Challenges

Amidst ongoing negotiations and legal disputes over alleged irregularities, the formation of the next government in Pakistan confronts inevitable delays. The potential for widespread protests and the influential role of the military introduces additional layers of uncertainty into the already complex political landscape. As political parties navigate through this intricate web of alliances and power

effective economic policies and navigate external pressures will be crucial for steering the country towards sustainable development.

In this multifaceted landscape, the call for an inclusive and holistic approach becomes paramount. The government must strive to represent the diverse interests of the population and actively engage with various stakeholders to ensure comprehensive solutions to the multifaceted challenges facing the nation. By fostering inclusivity, the government can work towards rebuilding trust, addressing grievances, and promoting a more stable and harmonious political environment.



dynamics, the trajectory of Pakistan's political future hangs in the balance, offering the possibility of significant shifts in governance and policy direction.

A major challenge awaiting the incoming government is the imperative task of uniting the country amidst the chaos and uncertainties. The polarized political environment, coupled with allegations of irregularities, poses a formidable hurdle to fostering national cohesion. The government must address these divisions with a strategic and inclusive approach to bridge gaps and build consensus. Furthermore, the economic challenges facing Pakistan add to the complexity of the situation. The new government will need to grapple with a tough economic phase, necessitating critical reforms to stimulate growth, reduce unemployment, and stabilize the financial landscape. The ability to implement

To conclude, in the wake of Pakistan's recent elections, the nation stands at a crossroads, grappling with a myriad of challenges and uncertainties. The emergence of PTI as a leading force, coupled with intensified allegations of electoral irregularities and controversies surrounding the slow processing of results, has set the stage for intricate negotiations and potential unrest. The role of the military, international reactions, and public sentiment will play pivotal roles in determining the trajectory of Pakistan's political landscape in the weeks and months to come. As the nation navigates this critical juncture, the formation of a stable and representative government remains the ultimate goal for a country seeking direction and change.



Evolving Democracy: A Comparative Analysis of Election Petitions in Pakistan (2018 vs. 2024)

By Kanwal Munir

Election petitions serve as a critical feedback mechanism in any democratic system, offering insights into the perceived fairness and integrity of the electoral process. In Pakistan, the volume and nature of these petitions filed with the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) post-election provide a window into the evolving political and electoral dynamics within the country.

The Statistical Landscape of Election Petitions

2018 General Elections: A Snapshot

Following the 2018 general elections, the ECP recorded a total of 299 election petitions. These petitions were distributed among various political parties and independent candidates, reflecting a wide range of grievances and allegations ranging from vote rigging to procedural breaches. The breakdown was as follows:

Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI):
120 petitions

Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N): 90 petitions

Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP):
50 petitions

Other parties and independent candidates: 39 petitions

Out of these, 200 petitions were resolved within the stipulated time frame, demonstrating the ECP's commitment to addressing electoral disputes. However, the resolution of these petitions also highlighted areas in need of significant electoral reforms.

2024 General Elections: An Updated Perspective

The 2024 general elections witnessed a different scenario. Preliminary data from



the ECP indicates a total of 350 election petitions, marking an increase from the 2018 elections. The distribution of these petitions is as follows:

Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI):
130 petitions

Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N): 110 petitions

Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP):
60 petitions

Other parties and independent candidates: 50 petitions

This increase in election petitions suggests a heightened awareness and willingness among political parties and candidates to challenge electoral outcomes, possibly reflecting persisting concerns over electoral integrity.

Analyzing the Trends and Implications

The increase in the number of election petitions from 2018 to 2024 raises several questions about the effectiveness of electoral reforms and the trust of political entities in the electoral process. A closer look at the

data suggests a few key trends and areas of concern:

Increased Political Engagement: The rise in petitions could indicate a more politically engaged and aware electorate and candidate pool, willing to use legal channels to contest electoral discrepancies.

Electoral Reforms: Despite efforts at electoral reforms between the two elections, the increase in petitions suggests that either these reforms have not fully addressed the concerns of political parties and candidates or that more time is needed for their effects to be realized.

Trust in the ECP: The willingness to file petitions also reflects a trust in the ECP's process to some extent, as parties and candidates see value in officially recording their grievances. However, the effectiveness of the ECP in resolving these disputes quickly and transparently remains a critical factor for enhancing this trust.

Contextualizing Election Petitions in Democratic Governance

Election petitions are not merely adminis-



trative hurdles; they are vital indicators of the health of a democracy. In countries like Pakistan, where democratic institutions are continuously evolving, the nature, frequency, and resolution of these petitions provide insights into the democratic process's maturity. The increase from 299 petitions in 2018 to 350 in 2024 suggests a dynamic political environment where stakeholders are increasingly assertive in seeking redress for electoral grievances.



The Role of the Judiciary in Electoral Disputes

The judiciary plays a crucial role in resolving election petitions, acting as the ultimate arbiter of electoral disputes. The effectiveness, impartiality, and efficiency of the judiciary in dealing with these petitions are paramount for upholding electoral integrity and public trust in the democratic process. An analysis of the judiciary's handling of petitions from both election years can offer insights into the legal framework's robustness and the need for judicial reforms to ensure faster and fairer resolutions.

Electoral Integrity and Public Perception

Public perception of electoral integrity is significantly influenced by the handling of election petitions. A transparent, efficient, and fair process can enhance public confidence in the electoral system, while delays, perceived biases, or inefficiencies can erode trust. The increase in petitions over the years also reflects a more engaged electorate, which is increasingly aware of its rights and the mechanisms available for contesting electoral irregularities.

International Comparisons and Lessons Learned

Comparing Pakistan's experience with election petitions to other countries can provide valuable lessons and benchmarks. For instance, mature democracies with lower rates of election petitions often have robust electoral systems, comprehensive voter education programs, and effective dispute-resolution mechanisms.

Examining these systems can offer practical insights for enhancing electoral integrity in Pakistan.

The Impact of Technology on Electoral Transparency

The role of technology in elections has been a double-edged sword. On one hand, it offers opportunities for enhancing transparency and efficiency; on the other, it introduces new challenges and complexities, including cybersecurity threats and misinformation. The ECP's efforts to incorporate technology into the electoral process must be accompanied by measures to ensure technological solutions' security, transparency, and reliability.

The Role of Civil Society and Media

Civil society organizations and the media play a critical role in monitoring elections and advocating for electoral reforms. Their independent observations and reporting can complement official channels for dispute resolution, providing an additional layer of oversight and accountability.

Strengthening the capacity of these actors to monitor elections and report irregularities is essential for a transparent electoral process.

The Path Forward: Recommendations for Strengthening Electoral Integrity

Based on the analysis of election petitions filed in 2018 and 2024, several recommendations emerge for strengthening electoral integrity in Pakistan:

Continued Electoral Reforms: There is a clear need for ongoing electoral reforms, particularly focusing on areas that have generated significant grievances, such as vote counting, transparency of the electoral process, and the role of election officials.

Enhancing ECP's Capacity: Strengthening the ECP's capacity to handle and resolve election petitions efficiently is crucial. This could involve training for officials, better resources for investigation, and more transparent processes for petition resolution.

Public Awareness Campaigns: Increasing public awareness about the electoral process, the importance of fair elections, and how individuals can lawfully contest irregularities is essential for a healthy democracy.

Conclusion

The evolution of election petitions from 2018 to the 2024 general elections in Pakistan highlights both challenges and opportunities for enhancing electoral integrity and democracy. The increase in petitions reflects a more engaged and assertive political community, underscoring the importance of addressing electoral grievances comprehensively. By drawing lessons from these experiences and implementing targeted reforms, Pakistan can continue to strengthen its democratic institutions and processes, ensuring that each election brings the country closer to the ideals of transparency, fairness, and inclusivity that are the hallmarks of a healthy democracy.



Political Titans Tumble: High-Profile Leaders Lose Seats in Pakistan's 2024 Election Drama

By Nimra Atiq

On February 8, millions of Pakistanis participated in the election, which was disrupted by violence and the suspension of mobile phone services. Amidst this chaos, the democratic process was overshadowed by allegations of rigging and manipulation of results, casting a shadow over the legitimacy of the electoral outcome. The 2024 general elections in Pakistan have been clouded by serious allegations of rigging and manipulation of results. Multiple political parties have raised concerns about the integrity of the electoral process, accusing their opponents of engaging in fraudulent practices to gain an unfair advantage. Such allegations have ignited tensions and eroded public trust in the democratic system.

The three-time Prime Minister's party, led by Nawaz Sharif, was unable to secure a majority in the election. Imran Khan's candidates, representing the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) party, emerged as the winners. This outcome marks a significant shift in the political landscape of Pakistan, with Imran Khan's party gaining momentum and support among the electorate despite legal restrictions and political crack-downs.

The 2024 general elections in Pakistan have witnessed unprecedented twists and turns, as several high-profile politicians, once considered stalwarts of their respective parties, faced unexpected defeats, reshaping the political landscape of the country.

NA-44 (D.I. Khan-I)

PTI-supported candidate Ali Amin Gandapur caused a surprise by defeating two prominent figures, Maulana Fazlur Rehman of the JUI-F and former NA deputy speaker Faisal Karim Kundi. Gandapur secured 93,443 votes compared to Fazl's 59,922, while Kundi only received 35,567 votes. This outcome is noteworthy as Mr. Gandapur had been in hiding due to his involvement in cases related to the May 9 violence, leading to speculation about



whether he would emerge to take oath as a member of the National Assembly.

NA-6 (Lower Dir I)

The leader of Jamaat-i-Islami, Siraj ul Haq suffered a significant defeat in NA-6, Lower Dir I, receiving 56,538 votes compared to the 81,060 votes secured by PTI-backed Muhammad Bashir Khan, who won the seat. Siraj ul Haq, the leader of JI, along with independent candidate Muhammad Bashir Khan supported by PTI, Rooh Ullah Khan from PML-N, Muhammad Hanif Khan from PPP, Bahadar Khan from ANP, and Muhammad Sher Khan from JUI competed for the NA-6 constituency.

NA-122 (Lahore-VI)

Sardar Latif Khosa, the lawyer of Imran Khan, who had previously not experienced significant electoral victories with the PPP, succeeded in defeating PML-N stalwart Khawaja Saad Rafique. Khosa secured 117,109 votes compared to Rafique's 77,709.

NA-149 (Multan-II) and NA-155 (Lodhran-II):

The ex-financier of PTI and the originator of the Istehkam-i-Pakistan party, Jahangir

Tareen performed poorly in the elections, losing two NA seats to his opponents. Even though he had a seat arrangement with PML-N in Multan, he was defeated by PTI-backed Amir Dogar, and PML-N's Siddique Baloch triumphed over the IPP leader in his hometown of Lodhran.

Tareen, in a sincere statement on X (previously known as Twitter), revealed his choice to step down from his role as chairman of IPP and withdraw from political involvement entirely. "I am thankful to all IPP members for their support."

This ruling signifies the conclusion of a significant period for IPP, causing speculation about the party's future in the absence of its original leader.

NA-100 (Faisalabad-VI)

In the recent election, Rana Sanaullah, who previously served as the interior minister and was responsible for managing the PML-N electoral campaign, faced a defeat in retaining his seat. He lost to PTI-backed Dr. Nisar Jutt, who secured 131,996 votes. Rana Sanaullah could only manage to attain 112,403 votes. This outcome indicates a significant shift in the political landscape, with Dr. Nisar Jutt emerging as the victor in this particular electoral contest.



NA-130 (Lahore) and NA-15 (Mansehra)

The Election Commission of Pakistan declared Nawaz Sharif of PML-N as the winner of the contest. His opponent, former Punjab health minister Yasmin Rashid, was leading overnight in unofficial results. However, she is currently in prison and facing charges over the riots that took place on May 9th last year.



and the Sindh High Court. Independent candidates supported by the PTI have secured 102 seats in the National Assembly, while the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz has 74 seats, the Pakistan People's Party has 54 seats, the MuttahidaQaumi Movement has 17 seats and other smaller parties have won 12 seats. The Election Commission has released results for 259 out of 265 seats, with the outcome for NA-88 being held back due to allegations of fraud. The



An unexpected outcome as Nawaz Sharif, the prime ministerial candidate and leader of the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N), suffered a major loss to independent candidate Shahzada Gastasap in NA-15 Mansehra. The surprising result signifies a significant change in the electoral environment, prompting inquiries into the current political situation in Mansehra. Even though he lost in NA-15, Nawaz Sharif is still running as a candidate in the NA-130 constituency in Lahore.

Many prominent politicians, such as former Punjab chief minister Parvez Elahi and his wife Qaisera, former Khyber Pakhtunkhwa finance minister Taimoor Jhagra, ex-KP speaker Mahmood Jan, former Punjab health minister Dr. Yasmin Rashid, and Rehana Dar, the mother of Usman Dar, have submitted legal challenges against the election victories of their opponents.

The Lahore High Court has received the majority of these petitions, with a few also being filed in the Islamabad High Court

announcement of this result will be made after addressing the complaints.

The number of rejected ballots was higher than the margin of victory in at least 24 National Assembly constituencies which is quite surprising.

Free and Fair Election Network (FAFEN) Reports

On February 8, 2024, around 60 million voters in Pakistan participated in the election of their representatives in 265 National Assembly and 590 Provincial Assembly constituencies, making it one of the most fiercely contested political competitions in the country. In the face of numerous claims from various political parties about unfair treatment and an increase in militant violence in certain regions, none of the political parties withdrew from the election competition.

The turnout for Pakistan's Feb. 8 general

elections was reported to be around 48%, with 60 million out of nearly 129 million registered voters casting their ballots, according to the Free and Fair Election Network (FAFEN). The official voting percentage is yet to be released.

Mossarat Qadeem, the chairperson of FAFEN, noted that while transparency was observed at polling stations, there were concerns about compromised polls at the office of the returning officer. This indicates potential issues with the electoral process beyond the actual voting process.

The rise in the number of registered female voters in the deeply conservative nation did not increase voter participation. The report discovered that the combined work of the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) and other parties resulted in a decrease in the gender disparity in voter registration.

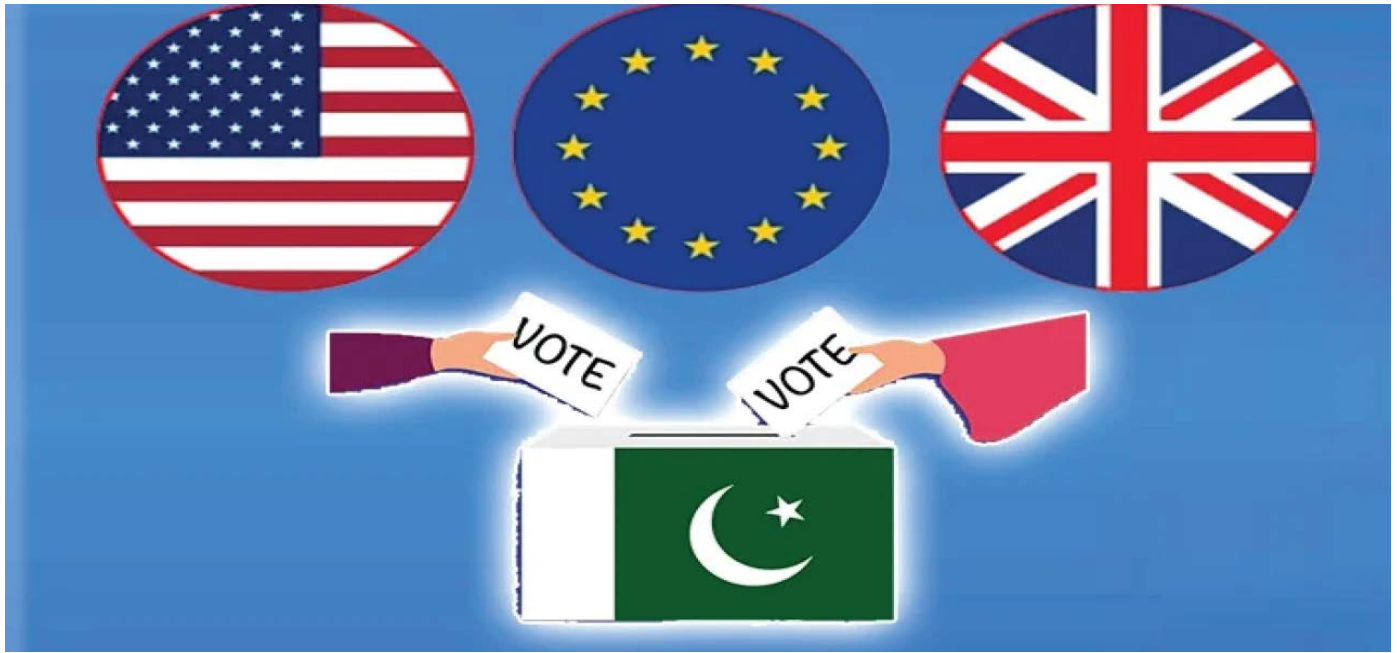
Specific efforts helped to decrease the overall gender gap in voter registration from 12.4 million in 2018 to 9.9 million in 2024. Despite this improvement, the voter turnout for women remained low at 43 percent, compared to 52 percent for men.

Furthermore, FAFEN reported that 49% of polling stations did not provide observers with Form-46 (Ballot Paper Account), possibly due to a shortage of forms, which is a violation of legal provisions. Additionally, Form-45 was not displayed at a visible location outside nearly one-third (29.4%) of the observed polling stations, which is an essential step to guarantee electoral transparency during the initial stage of the result management process.

Rights organizations were quick to condemn the ruling, as it put at risk the opportunity for a political party to secure its portion of reserved seats for women and non-Muslims. Despite this, the candidates supported by the party were able to secure the highest number of seats. In the future, the Parliament may need to review and remove restrictive regulations on political parties, while also enhancing their role within the country's electoral system. Regardless of the legal justification, taking action against political parties and their members during elections can damage the credibility of the electoral process.



Global Response to Feb 08 Elections: UK, USA, EU Reactions, and International Media Coverage



By Romana Afsheen

The elections saw a competitive environment with several major political parties, including the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N), the Pakistan People's Party (PPP) and Several Independent Candidates representing Pakistan Tehreek-e- Insaf (PTI). Like in many elections, there were allegations of irregularities and claims of rigging, leading to some controversy. The electoral process in Pakistan typically involves intense campaigning, political rallies, and a diverse range of issues being debated. However, specific details about the election dynamics and outcomes can vary from one election to another.

The United States has called for Pakistan to conduct an impartial investigation into allegations of irregularities and manipulation during the general elections on February 8, using its legal system.

The final results of the February 8 elections faced significant delays, raising concerns about electoral transparency.

Various political parties, including Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI), Jamaat-e-Islami (JI), and Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam (JUI-F), have

asserted that there were irregularities and rigging during the election.

Other parties such as PPP, PML-N, and MQM-P are in discussions to form a coalition government since no single party secured a simple majority in the polls.

Independent candidates backed by PTI secured the most seats, followed by PML-N and PPP.

During a regular press briefing, State Department Spokesperson Matthew Miller stated, "Currently, we believe it is a matter of letting the legal system in Pakistan play itself out; that is the appropriate first step, and we believe it should be taken."

Regarding US congressmen urging the Biden administration to advocate for an independent inquiry into alleged election fraud, he said, "I'm uncertain about the body they are proposing for an independent investigation."

"If there are additional steps that need consideration, we are open to exploring that," he added.

In response to another question, he reiterated-

ed, "We have observed allegations of meddling and fraud, and we want to ensure they are thoroughly investigated by Pakistan's judicial system. We will continue to monitor this in the coming days."

While emphasizing the need for a comprehensive investigation into alleged election irregularities, the spokesperson noted that it was a contested election where people were allowed to express their choice. He emphasized, "Ultimately, we respect the democratic process and are prepared to work with the government once it is formed."

The spokesperson mentioned that the US had expressed concerns both publicly and privately, along with the EU, the UK, and other nations, regarding "some irregularities that we saw in the process. We stressed the importance of the Pakistani government respecting the will of the election."

Foreign Secretary Lord Cameron stated:

"The UK and Pakistan enjoy a close and long-standing relationship, underpinned by strong links between our people. Following yesterday's elections, we commend all those who voted."



"We recognise, however, serious concerns raised about the fairness and lack of inclusivity of the elections. We regret that not all parties were formally permitted to contest the elections and that legal processes were used to prevent some political leaders from participation, and to prevent the use of recognisable party symbols. We also note the restrictions imposed on internet access on polling day, significant delays to the reporting of results and claims of irregularities in the counting process."



"The UK urges authorities in Pakistan to uphold fundamental human rights including free access to information, and the rule of law. This includes the right to a fair trial, through adherence to due process and an independent and transparent judicial system, free from interference."

"The election of a civilian government with the mandate to deliver crucial reforms is essential for Pakistan to flourish. The new government must be accountable to the people it serves, and work to represent the interests of all Pakistan's citizens and communities with equity and justice. We look forward to working with Pakistan's next government to achieve this, and across the range of our shared interests."

The United States, Britain, and the European Union individually expressed apprehensions regarding the electoral process in Pakistan following February 08 vote, urging an investigation into reported irregularities. The primary contest involved former Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif's party and candidates supported by ex-Prime Minister Imran Khan, both of

whom claimed victory separately. The elections encompassed 265 seats in the national assembly, with a simple majority requiring 133 seats.

Both the U.S. and the EU highlighted allegations of interference, including activist arrests, emphasizing the need for a comprehensive investigation into claims of irregularities, interference, and fraud. Imran Khan, currently in jail with his Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) party barred from the polls, saw independents, mainly

supported by Khan, securing the majority of seats—98 out of the 245 counted by 18:30 GMT—while Nawaz Sharif's Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) party secured 69 seats.

Khan asserts that the influential military is orchestrating a crackdown to eliminate his party, while opponents argue that the generals are supporting Sharif. The EU statement pointed out a "lack of a level playing field," attributing it to the "inability of some political actors to contest the elections" and restrictions on freedom of assembly, expression, and internet access. The U.S. State Department noted "undue restrictions" on freedoms of expression and assembly, alongside violence and attacks on media workers.

Concerns were echoed by U.S. lawmakers, including Democratic Representatives Ro Khanna and Ilhan Omar, who raised alarms about military interference and urged the State Department not to recognize a winner until misconduct allegations were thoroughly investigated. Michael Kugelman of the Wilson Center think tank

considered the EU and U.S. statements relatively mild given the scale of alleged rigging.

Earlier in the week, the U.N. human rights office decried violence against political parties and candidates in Pakistan, expressing worry about the "pattern of harassment, arrests, and prolonged detentions" of Khan's party leaders and supporters. Despite multiple legal cases against Khan, disqualifying him as a candidate and sentencing him to long prison terms, he denies any wrongdoing. Khan was ousted in 2022 after a falling out with the military, which denies meddling in politics. The EU, U.S., and Britain declared their intention to work with the next government and refrained from congratulating any candidate or party. British Foreign Minister David Cameron's statement highlighted "serious concerns" about the fairness and inclusivity of the elections.

International media said a lot about the elections and depicted them as highly unpredictable, with outcomes that defied expectations.

"You might be wondering why it has taken us a couple of days to talk about Pakistan politics and Pakistani elections, one of our favourite subjects; that's because one, the situation has been fast-moving and second, the situation has been much too cluttered also for me to hold forth on it..."

The editor-in-chief of The Print, Shekhar Gupta, commenced his 48-hour post-general election Cut The Clutter episode by describing the aftermath as undeniably cluttered.

After a tumultuous year in Pakistan's political landscape, the international media's scrutiny of the country's elections, which were controversial even before the announcement of the date, has been intense, to say the least. From the pre-election phase to irregularities on election day to the post-election counting process, the blatant efforts to undermine the PTI have been widely observed. It is also noteworthy that despite these challenges, PTI-backed candidates secured the majority of National Assembly seats.

Some of the reporting and analyses from



around the world regarding the elections that, in contrast to the pre-poll predictions, proved to be anything but predictable, were examined.

The Guardian — The Observer view on Pakistan voters' rejection of military rule: a victory for democracy

"Attempts to ignore Khan and his supporters may trigger further unrest and instability. That is the opposite of what the country needs. At a time in history when the integrity of democracy in India and Bangladesh also faces serious questions, Pakistanis should take a moment to celebrate the voter revolt of 2024."

Bloomberg — Imran Khan's candidates defy odds to thrive in Pakistan election

"The independents' strong performance points to Khan's enduring popularity among the nation's 129 million registered voters, many of whom are struggling to make ends meet amid the fastest inflation in Asia. It also highlights public disillusionment with the status quo of Pakistani politics, represented by the parties of the Sharif and Bhutto clans."

The New York Times — Shocking opposition victory throws Pakistan into chaos

"The success of Mr Khan's party upended the decades-old political playbook governing Pakistan, a nuclear-armed nation of 240 million. Throughout those years, the military has wielded ultimate authority, guiding its politics behind a veil of secrecy, and civilian leaders have typically risen to power only with its support — or been driven from office by its heavy hand."

The Independent — Pakistan election credibility already marred by internet blackout and slow count amid anxious wait for results

"But whoever ends up winning the election, the way it was conducted will guarantee recriminations over the validity of the result, and serves as a bleak reminder of the power still held by the country's military establishment to try and interfere with its democratic processes."

Sky News — Pakistan is in political limbo after election upset - so what's next?

"To me, the PPP's Bilawal Bhutto Zardari could well be the kingmaker. His centrist party will need to decide if it's the status quo of Sharif they want to get behind or the more radical agenda of the independents. What is clear is the military has taken a hit this election. For the first time ever, they appeared to back a candidate at odds with the political winds of the rest of the country."

Time Magazine — Pakistan's military used every trick to sideline Imran Khan—and failed. Now what?

"[...] the question remains how PTI supporters will react to their disenfranchisement, not least given the grim state of the economy. On May 9, PTI supporters ransacked military premises in response to an earlier, fleeting arrest of Khan. He may remain behind bars, but Thursday's election shows the sporting icon is far from done as a political force."

France 24 — The 'generals' elections' in Pakistan that turned against the military

"The country's real power-wielder, however, was not on the ballot paper, and Pakistanis were never given a symbol or say on the issue. The 2024 general election was dubbed the most rigged in Pakistan's history, with wags on social media calling it the 'generals' election', referring to the all-powerful military in the nuclear-armed South Asian nation."

India Today — Jailed Imran Khan steals the show, time for Army to introspect?

"While hobnobbing and cobbling up an alliance to suit the establishment must already be underway, any government by 'selection' is not acceptable anymore to the people of Pakistan. Should the government formation look different from the mandate of the people, expect chaos in the streets of Pakistan."

CNBC — Pakistan's ex-PM Nawaz Sharif declares victory in fraught election as opponents claim vote-rigging

"The election, voting for which began the morning of Feb 8, comes at an especially turbulent time for the country of 240 million. Known for its decades of volatile politics involving assassinations, imprisonments and military coups, Pakistan is now in the throes of an economic crisis and its largest party has been banned from running in the election."

Financial Times — Imran Khan loyalists win shock victory in Pakistan election

"Many voters, particularly young people swept up by Khan's promises for a 'new Pakistan', were dismayed by the thought of another term under the Sharif dynasty — Nawaz's brother Shehbaz served as prime minister last year."

CBC News — Imran Khan's party defied the odds in Pakistan election with strong showing

"A stock response after an election, according to Hasan Askari Rizvi, a Lahore-based military analyst who wrote a book about the army's role in Pakistani politics. He said the open question is whether the country's military, used to being the ultimate authority in Pakistan, is willing to accept the message that was sent from the electorate, who came out in large numbers to cast their ballots for Khan."

The outcome of Pakistan's recent election has left many foreign partners and rivals disappointed, offering little cause for optimism about the potential government that may emerge. According to foreign policy analysts, the country's two major political parties, Nawaz Sharif's Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) and Bilawal Bhutto Zardari's Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP), are grappling for the prime ministerial position after an inconclusive vote prompted them to form a coalition in a parliament largely dominated by independent candidates.

Both PML-N and PPP failed to secure enough seats individually to form a government, leading to a collaboration effort.



Surprisingly, independent candidates supported by former Prime Minister Imran Khan have emerged as the largest group, securing 93 out of the 264 declared parliamentary seats. This has defied expectations, considering an intense crackdown on Khan and his party, although Khan himself is ineligible for the prime ministerial role due to his imprisonment, and his group cannot officially stand as they ran as independents after their party was barred.

Some analysts speculate that the election results may reflect public discontent with perceived military involvement in politics, although the military vehemently denies such interference. The historic influence of the military in the nation's security and foreign affairs further contributes to concerns about political instability.

government also raises doubts about Pakistan's ability to implement necessary reforms to secure a crucial new International Monetary Fund program later this year. Last week, the United States, Britain, and the European Union expressed concerns about Pakistan's electoral process and called for an investigation into reported irregularities, a move rejected by Pakistan's caretaker prime minister.

Some comfort may be taken by certain Middle Eastern countries from the outcome. "Imran Khan did not have a great relationship with many of Pakistan's traditional Gulf partners," noted Joshua White, a former White House adviser at Johns Hopkins University. "I think the Saudis and the Emiratis are likely to be relatively comforted by the fact that he is

Jinping's Belt and Road infrastructure initiative. Elizabeth Threlkeld from the Stimson Center think tank emphasized that negotiating a new IMF deal is a top priority for a new government. "Any prolonged political uncertainty would complicate that process at a time when Pakistan can ill-afford delays."

Former Indian diplomats highlighted the challenges the muddled poll results pose for India's relationship with its nuclear-armed rival, suggesting that Delhi is likely to adopt a "wait-and-watch" approach. Sharat Sabharwal, India's high commissioner to Pakistan from 2009-2013, stated that it would also be difficult for a new Pakistani government to advance relations with India without political consensus.

Khan, a popular figure, has accused the U.S. of being part of a conspiracy to topple his government, allegations denied by Washington. He has been convicted over allegations of leaking diplomatic correspondence between Islamabad and Washington, which he denies. "After two years of turmoil, the international community simply wants a functioning government with some legitimacy in Pakistan," said Husain Haqqani, Pakistan's former ambassador to Washington and a senior fellow at the Hudson Center. "They want to be able to deal with Pakistan without fear of normal diplomatic interaction being turned into a conspiracy theory."

In conclusion, Pakistan's recent election has left the nation at a crossroads, with a fragmented political landscape and concerns about stability, economic reforms, and international relations. The contestation surrounding the electoral process, allegations of irregularities, and the subsequent coalition-building efforts underscore the challenges ahead. As the country navigates through this period of uncertainty, both domestic and international stakeholders will closely monitor developments, hoping for a resolution that ensures a functional government capable of addressing the pressing issues facing Pakistan. The road ahead demands careful diplomacy, political consensus, and a commitment to democratic principles to pave the way for a more stable and prosperous future.

"Pakistan has been experiencing a gradual decline for a while, though initially mild. The slope has now become more challenging," stated Frederic Grare, a South Asia expert at the Australian National University's National Security College. "The military is likely to manage the situation for a while, but the political stability is expected to decrease."

The situation is unwanted by key players like China, Pakistan's primary foreign supporter, India, its nuclear-armed neighbor and longstanding rival, and the United States, which has a diminished stake in Pakistan post its withdrawal from Afghanistan in 2021. However, there are concerns about Islamist militancy causing broader instability in the region and beyond, as analysts have noted.

The potential for a weak and divided

locked away, and his party probably will not form the government in Pakistan."

Rather than resolving the political crisis that has plagued Pakistan since Khan's ousting in 2022, the election has, according to Tamanna Salikuddin, South Asia director at Washington's United States Institute of Peace think tank, "created more confusion and uncertainty." She added, "This election not only reveals the lack of trust that Pakistanis have in their leaders, but also it is evidence that no institution or leader has a plan to fix the economy, nor do they have the political capital to make any of the very difficult and painful reforms to turn around this failing economy."

Concerns extend to Pakistan's debt owed to China, a major stakeholder through the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), a key part of Chinese President Xi





Zardari tipped to become president as PPP, PML-N enter into alliance

PPP agrees to support PML-N in Centre to form govt but without joining cabinet



By Farooq Aqdas

Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) top leader Asif Ali Zardari is expected to become the country's president for a second term after his party agreed to ally with Pakistan Muslim League Nawaz (PML-N) to form a government at the Centre, sources said on Wednesday

In a major political development a six-parties alliance — PML-N, PPP, MQM-P, PML-Q, IPP and BAP — on Tuesday announced to form a government in the Centre on the pattern of the last government of the Pakistan Democratic Movement (PDM).

Announcing the six-party alliance for the next coalition government in a press conference, after the party heads met at the residence of PML-Q President Chaudhry Shujaat Hussain, former president Zardari said that it was decided to form the government together.

Before the top leaders' presser, PPP chief Bilawal Bhutto Zardari had said that his party would support the PML-N to elect its prime minister without becoming part of the federal government.

However, to a question regarding the constitutional posts of National Assembly speaker, Senate chairman and president, the PPP chairman said the party would decide its nominees for these posts but he wanted Asif Ali Zardari to become president "because the country is burning and if anyone can help put the fire out, it is Asif Ali Zardari".

Besides the presidency, according to the sources, PPP is also eyeing the post of Balochistan chief minister and party leader Sarfraz Bugti briefed his party on the province's political situation, as per sources.

The sources have revealed that the leader-

ship of PML-N has agreed to support Zardari for the post of president in return for PPP's support to Shehbaz for the PM's post.

If the situation remains unchanged, the country will see the PML-N's prime minister and the PPP's president.

Meanwhile, PML-N senior leader Rana Sanaullah said PPP did not demand the top constitutional post of president.

In a statement, Sanaullah said that Shehbaz had experience of working with allies, while Asif Ali Zardari has the political acumen to take prudent decisions.

He said that neither the PPP demanded the position of the president nor did they make any commitment. "We hope that [JUI-F chief] Fazlur Rehman will become part of the government," he added.

Courtesy The News



PTI's bet on MWM may not help secure its reserved seats in assemblies

The ECP set December 22 as the deadline for the submission of these nomination papers to returning officers

By Ansar Abbasi

The PTI may not get reserved seats for women and minorities in the national and provincial assemblies despite allowing its independent returned candidates to join smaller political parties like the MWM.

The Election Act, 2017 makes only those women and minority nominees eligible to be considered for reserved seats whose names are submitted to the Election Commission of Pakistan within a specified period by each political party. After the lapse of the specified period, no name can be added.

This means that PTI-backed independents joining political parties like the Majlis-e-Wahdat-Muslimeen (MWM) or any other party will not pave the way for the election of the PTI's women and minority nominees against the reserved seats in the national and provincial assemblies. PTI independents joining the MWM can only benefit the nominees for the reserved seats of these parties and not those of the PTI.

On December 18 last year, the ECP instructed candidates competing for reserved seats designated for women and minorities to acquire nomination papers from the relevant returning officers and district election commissioners. The ECP set December 22 as the deadline for the submission of these nomination papers to returning officers.

When contacted, former secretary of the Election Commission of Pakistan Kanwar Dilshad said that the Election Act bars the PTI from securing its reserved seats by joining any party.

However, when asked about this Election Act clause, PTI Chairman Barrister Gohar Ali Khan said that the PTI apprehends that the ECP may misinterpret the Election Act to deprive the PTI of its reserved seats. He, however, insisted that the PTI's legal minds are sure that the party's legal position is clear and that clause 4 of Section 104 of the Election Act secures the PTI's move to get its reserved seats by joining the MWM.

What does Section 104 of the Election Act, 2017 say? The said clause deals with the subject of election to reserved seats in an assembly. According to Section 104 (1), "For the purpose of election to seats reserved for women and non-Muslims in an Assembly, the political parties contesting election for such seats shall, within the period fixed by the Commission for submission of nomination papers, file separate lists of their candidates in order of priority for seats reserved for women and non-Muslims with the Commission or, as it may direct, with the Provincial Election Commissioner or other authorized officer of the Commission, who shall forthwith cause such lists to be published for information of the public: Provided that the list submitted by a political party shall not be subject to change or alteration either in the order of priority



or through addition of new names in the list or omission of any name after expiry of the date of submission of nomination papers."

The section further says that the parties lists "may contain as many names of additional candidates as a political party may deem necessary for contesting seats reserved for women and non-Muslims, to provide for any disqualification of candidates during scrutiny of nomination papers or for filling of any vacant seats during the term of an Assembly."

The section further goes on to say that: "(3) A candidate to a seat reserved for women or non-Muslims shall file the nomination papers on the Form on or before the last date fixed for filing of nomination papers for the election and the nomination papers shall, as nearly as possible, be scrutinized in the same manner as nomination papers of candidates on general seats are scrutinized under section 62.

"(4) If, at any time, the party list is exhausted, the political party may submit a name for any vacancy which may occur thereafter and the provisions of sub-sections (1), (2) and (3) shall, as nearly as possible, apply to fill such vacancy. (5) Where a seat reserved for women or non-Muslims in an Assembly falls vacant as a result of death, resignation or disqualification of a Member, it shall be filled in by the next person in order of precedence from the party's list of candidates submitted to the Commission under sub-section (1). (6) Before notifying the name of the next person in order of priority from the party list, such person shall submit a declaration on oath that since the filing of his nomination paper, he has not become subject to any disqualification contained in Article 63. (7) A candidate contesting election on a seat reserved for women or non-Muslims shall, along with the nomination papers and its annexures, submit to the Returning Officer appointed by the Commission in this behalf— (a) a copy of the party list of the candidate's political party for such seats; (b) declarations and statements in support of the nomination; and (c) proof of deposit of the fee required for filing nomination papers. (8) Where there is equality of share on a reserved seat between two or more political parties."



Imran names Gandapur for KP CM

By Mushtaq Yusufzai & Arshad Aziz Malik

Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) founding chairman Imran Khan has nominated the party provincial president Ali Amin Gandapur for the position of chief minister of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.

Ali Amin Gandapur is a former provincial and federal minister and is considered loyal to Imran Khan.

Barrister Mohammad Ali Saif, a senior PTI leader and the party spokesman, when reached, confirmed Gandapur's nomination for the highest slot of the province.

"We all were present at the hearing of Khan Sahib (Imran Khan) in the court on Tuesday when he announced Ali Amin Gandapur's nomination as chief minister in the presence of journalists," he said.

Ali Amin had first won election for the provincial assembly from his native Dera Ismail Khan district in the 2013 elections and was inducted in the cabinet.

He was made minister of revenue in the Pervez Khattak cabinet.

He had close ties with Imran and was considered one of the few influential cabinet members at that time.

In the 2018 elections, Gandapur defeated Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam-F chief Maulana Fazlur Rehman and became Member of the National Assembly.

He was made federal minister for Kashmir Affairs and Gilgit-Baltistan.

The PTI has secured 84 seats in the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Assembly and doesn't need support of any other political party in formation of the government.

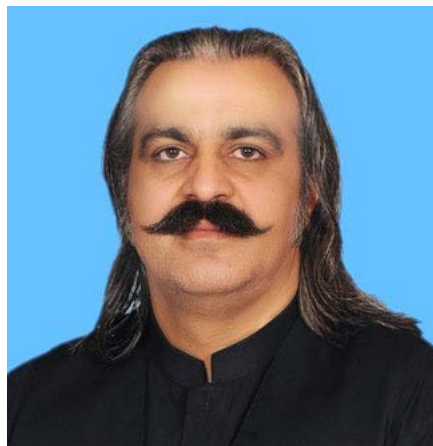
Imran Khan appointed him PTI president for KP when Pervez Khattak resigned and formed his own faction within the party following the May 9 violence.

There were rumours that some of the PTI newly-elected members may not feel comfortable with Gandapur and some of them were likely to form a forward bloc

against him, but two senior PTI leaders in Peshawar dispelled the impression.

"Look Gandapur is the choice of Imran Khan and if someone is opposing him, it means they are disagreeing with Khan sahib. There will be some good face in the government to facilitate Gandapur," one of the PTI leaders opined.

Now when the party leader has nominated leader of the house, the PTI would still continue to face some challenges.



It has to join a political party in the assembly if it wants to have reserved seats.

PTI leader Barrister Saif said they were working on multiple options.

"The option we have on mind for KP is to talk to Jamaat-e-Islami as it had three seats in the assembly, though we learnt they lost their seats. If that didn't happen, then we will form our own government," he argued.

Barrister Saif said they didn't initiate any negotiations with the JI but that's their only option saying they would not talk to other political parties including JUJIF, PMLN, ANP and PPP.

In the Centre, he said they have planned to talk to Majlis Wahdatul Muslimeem (MWM) and join them in the National Assembly.

"But as I stated, these are only the available options as we didn't talk to any one of them about our future plans," said Barrister Saif.

He said legally they can join a political party that at least has a membership in the assembly. Second, legal obligation is if that political party has applied to the Election Commission for the reserved seats before the election.

"We can join a party that fulfills these two legal obligations," said Barrister Saif.

Arshad Aziz Malik adds: Gandapur's nomination indicates continuation of the aggressive policy of Imran. He is known for tough stance against opposition political parties.

Around 19 cases have been registered against him across the country, in which he was also declared absconder, but according to sources, he obtained protective bail on Sunday so that he could attend his father's funeral.

Former provincial minister Taimur Saleem Jhagra, while talking to The News, said that Gandapur is the best choice and he would focus on governance in the province and fulfill the party's manifesto.

Earlier, various PTI groups were lobbying to make their own CM but Imran named Gandapur.

Ali Amin belongs to a politically active Gandapur tribe of Pashtuns. His father Major (retd) Aminullah Gandapur served as a caretaker cabinet member under Pervez Musharraf and died of a heart attack on February 11, 2024.

Ali Amin's brother Faisal Amin was also elected as MPA from D I Khan in the 2018 general elections.

Ali Amin completed his early education at Saint Helens High School, D I Khan. Due to his keen interest in sports, as he was a player of squash, he shifted to Peshawar and did his matriculation from the Police Model School. He later did his BA (honor) from the Gomal University.

Courtesy The News



Smaller parties take center stage as Pakistan waits for next government

By Aamir Latif

As Pakistan's three mainstream political forces rush to stitch together coalitions after the Feb. 8 general elections, smaller parties find themselves playing an unexpected make-or-break role in the formation of the next government. Several regional and religiopolitical parties with a few seats between them will be crucial in determining who gets to head the central and provincial governments. These include the Muttahida Qaumi Movement – Pakistan (MQM-P), Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam (JUI), and the Pakistan Muslim League – Quaid (PML-Q).

In the overall results, independent candidates, mostly backed by jailed former Prime Minister Imran Khan's Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) party, won the majority of seats – 101 – in the National Assembly, the lower house of Parliament. However, they do not have the required numbers to form a government on their own. The two other main parties, ex-Premier Nawaz Sharif's Pakistan Muslim League–Nawaz (PML-N) and Bilawal Bhutto Zardari's Pakistan People's Party (PPP) have started talks for a possible coalition government. They won 75 and 54 out of the 266 direct National Assembly seats, respectively.



The National Assembly has a total of 336 seats, with 60 reserved for women and 10 for religious minorities. These are proportionately distributed among parties according to their election performance. Any party that wants its leader as prime minister will need 169 votes in the House. A party requires 169 seats to form the government with a simple majority, which is currently impossible for any of the mainstream parties without the support of smaller groups.

To form the central government, the PML-N is trying to woo the MQM-P, a regional party mainly based in the country's commercial capital Karachi, which has 17 lawmakers in the new parliament. JUI, a mainstream religiopolitical party, and PML-Q, a splinter faction of PML-N, have won only four and three seats in the National Assembly, respectively, but their votes will still be decisive for the formation of governments, mainly in southwestern Balochistan and Pakistan's largest Punjab province. In Balochistan particularly, a coalition government is usually formed with the help of multiple smaller parties.

However, in southern Sindh and northwestern Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP) provinces, the PPP and the PTI-backed independents are in a comfortable position to form the provincial governments for a fourth and third consecutive term, respectively. In KP, PTI affiliates have won a two-thirds majority, but need to join a party to form the government. For that, their only choice seems to be Jamaat-e-Islami (JI), another religiopolitical party, which has won only two seats in the KP assembly.

The PTI and JI remained coalition partners in KP from 2013 to 2018

The PTI remains adamant that the candidates it supports will remain loyal and not join other parties. However, other political forces are courting these individuals, confident that they can make them switch their allegiance. In reality, independents can either join a party favored by Khan or choose to support his opponents. This would also increase the number of reserved seats for the respective parties.

In any case, the independents can be counted as game-changers, especially the "Chheena Group," a conglomerate of so-called "electables," who always contest independently from different constituencies in Punjab and later join the central and provincial governments. This time too, these electables have managed to clinch eight National Assembly and over two dozen provincial assembly seats.

Six independent National Assembly members, including one PTI-backed individual, and several newly elected Punjab Assembly lawmakers have already joined the PML-N, boosting its position in the two houses.

'A message of national unity'

Abdul Khalique Ali, a Karachi-based political analyst, believes this politicking and the increased prominence of smaller and regional forces is good for Pakistan's democracy. "Pakistan is a multiethnic country, where each region has its own peculiar political and social dynamics. In several regions, local people do not feel comfortable with the mainstream political parties, instead, they go with local groups or parties," Ali explained to Anadolu. These regional groups, he said, are more connected with the locals, compared to the mainstream political parties that are always more focused on larger national issues.

"This is the reason these smaller parties and groups are still relevant in politics, and their inclusion in federal and provincial governments sends a message of national unity," he asserted.



A crossroad for Pakistan; Elections 2024

A make or break for polity and the state



By Naqi Akbar

As expected, the much-awaited general elections in February 2024 proved to be a photo finish, for negative reasons. If that sort of electoral exercise had taken place in any other nation state, the super state would have taken two steps back, allowed the winning party the room to tread its political path and readjusted itself. The world has been witness to the 2002 Turkish landslide for Islamists led by Erdogan, when the winning leader was allowed the space to tread its path. The first ever expression was Turkey reluctance to be the part of anti-Iraq coalition despite being a staunch NATO member. Later decade proved that the same party helped the transformation of the Turkish nation state from Staunch Kemalist to modern Islamist one.

Here the readers may take note that just six years before the Erdogan landslide, an Islamist Prime Minister Nejam Erbakan was shown the door in a putsch similar to the one witnessed in Pakistan on April 2022. Yet despite planning two attempts; Sledgehammer and the 2016 coup, the deep state in Turkish nation state resigned to the reality of the polity and the electorate.

In Iran, the reformist current in 1997

despite its friction with the Iranian deep state has made its impact in the Iranian society and polity. That could not have been possible if the deep state has not readjusted itself to the glaring reality. In Iran; given the radical posture of the IRGC and its political support, any negotiations with the West and the United States would have been regarded as a red line. However, the JCPOA negotiated by a reformist government in Tehran was a reality and it benefited the Iranian economy and people.

The level of free reign can be gauged from a series of interviews given by the outgoing reformist administration foreign minister Javad Zarif in 2021 to a foreign policy beat correspondent Sara Massoumi. In the interview, Zarif told the correspondent that during the discussions the supreme leader, despite having the deciding powers in the domain of foreign policy, used to request the foreign minister to explain 'in confidence' the intricacies of the negotiations. It was demonstrative of the fact that the state was allowing the space to the mandate of the people. At the time of leaving the post, the reformist administration was also supposed to share with the newly elected conservative administration

in the form of long play recordings; from where they need to proceed further. It was demonstrative of the fact that the state was all inclusive, irrespective of the political shade of the administrations.

It would not be out of context to point out that despite a near battlefield scenario painted about that country in battles between the conservative and reform camp, the expediency council has all the human resource ingredients from the conservative as well as reformist camp.

In sharp contrast, the electoral exercise, just witnessed in Pakistan looks more 'subjective' than 'objective'. True that such subjective treatment was meted out many times during the 1988-1999 decade, the mutual respect and the basic decency of the democratic traditions was still maintained in one way or another. The reality of the ballot was still used to be tolerated as per the basic tenets of democracy and the constitution. True that the term pre-election rigging has its roots in that period of history; but never ever the whole political exercise looked so ridiculous to invite criticism from the media, foreign entities as well as the civil society.



To begin with the framing of superior courts judgements or election laws squarely showed that as if invisible hands or forces were trying to mechanically oust a particular political trend out of the race. In south Asian societies with limited literacy ratios, a particular color, symbol are the basics of any result-oriented communication; whether it is a product advertising or the political communication aimed at motivating the electorate. Again, referring to the outside world, the 2009 elections in Iran revolved around the Green color bands. Likewise, the world over symbols of political movements is honored; sans for Pakistan.

Given the fact that a particular political movement had a loyal electorate at hand in the constituencies where it was fielding, the results proved that this vote bank was still intact; and might even have helped the swinging section of the electorate to vote for that particular movement.

Moving a step further, the polling booth documents called Form 45 are treated like the First Information Report (FIR) any weighing the credibility of any electoral exercise. The confusion witnessed in the media ever since the morning after of the February 8, 2024 general elections about the afore mentioned forms points out to the fact that the concerned authorities linked

with the authenticity of the documents were at loss to minimize confusion. Rather what has been witnessed and felt across the social media has been a big question mark over, what actually happened during the wee hours of February 9, 2024.

Of particular interest is the result involving the former Prime Minister of the country hailing from old districts of Lahore. The mathematics was mind boggling as the sum total of the all-pollled votes was 293693 while total valid votes polled were 294043, not to talk of 650 votes rejected off the count. If the Form 45 be believed, it meant that total votes polled irrespective of reject count were 294693, means 1000 votes still unaccounted for. Any other calculation angle might also throw up ever more confusing scenarios. That is the story of one constituency, which was a high profile one. One cannot be sure if similar 'mental mathematics' exercises have not been done elsewhere. That brings to mind the tale of 1990 October elections when similar results were generated with the complete backing of the establishment. In 1990, votes polled in one such high profile constituency crossed even the total registered voter's count.

However, the scenarios are different; on the count that 1990 was the era of PTV and

print media. Social media had not stepped in. We are living in an era, where coups are televised as well as neutralized in Realtime. As things stand at the time of writing, a war of nerves seems to be on between the powers and the power of the ballot or public will. The emerging scenario dangerously suggests that the regimented system is not budging in to the public will. In a nation state where memories of 1971 political chaos are still fresh even after five decades; an absence of impartial judiciary, deep state and other powers which matter is a dangerous development.

It is high time that the local and international stakeholders take note of the creeping polarization, which can damage the polity irreparably. That damage will have deep scar on the economic growth and peace in the society. True Muhammad Raza of Iran, the Kemalist generals of Ankara all did service to the west; but times came when the west made way for the public will to triumph. Pakistan might not have many similarities with the afore mentioned societies in totality; yet states cannot work efficiently if forced upon the throats to exist. Invariably; Hazrat Ali saying holds true; "a polytheist system can survive, but oppression cannot survive for long"; for the people who matter to take note.





Moving forward after the election

PTI deserves credit for pushing back against restrictions and intimidation to mobilize its support base



By Husain Haqqani

The unexpected results of Pakistan's twelfth general election, held on February 8, have created both a threat and an opportunity for the country. The threat is one of political deadlock and confrontation; the opportunity is for defining a political way forward that is different from Pakistan's turbulent past.

Most observers agree that voters expressed their disdain for establishment meddling in politics and showed disapproval for high-handedness and repression by voting for Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) affiliated independents. The PTI deserves credit for pushing back against restrictions and intimidation to mobilize its support base -- young Pakistanis angry with the status quo and lack of opportunities, unimpressed by corruption and dynastic politics, and looking upon Imran Khan as the country's saviour.

Imran Khan, once the establishment's choice, has benefited from the narrative built over three decades to describe traditional politicians (and others question-

ing the establishment's policy prescriptions) as 'crooks or traitors.' The establishment may have realized in 2022 that polarizing the nation is not a recipe for national success, but its traditional constituencies have not. Imran Khan has used the establishment's decision to stop supporting his polarizing rhetoric to turn establishment-supporting voters against the establishment.

Now Imran Khan rails not just against the civilian 'crooks and traitors' but also denigrates Pakistan's institution of last resort and the 'outside powers that back it', Imprisonment has not forced him to change his stance and only adds to his popularity. Current events, and promises of future greatness, make people forget the past rather quickly. That is often the reason for the success of populists across the world.

The former cricket celebrity is now the anti-establishment icon even though he and many of his supporters endorsed General Musharraf's military coup, supported establishment-backed ousting of past prime

ministers, and proudly proclaimed that they were 'on one page' with the establishment until Imran Khan's ouster from the office of prime minister through a parliamentary vote of no-confidence.

Abusing and ridiculing opponents and blaming the establishment for the frustrations and suffering of the people offers an outlet for those who otherwise see no way out. Defiance against the established order and pinning hopes on a saviour has led to the electoral gains for populists, from the Philippines and Hungary to the United States.

But the purpose of elections is to choose a government, not just vent frustration and rage. Even if a party sweeps an election, it needs to be mindful of the voters who did not support it and of constitutional and legal niceties that distinguish parliamentary democracy from other political systems. It is in providing a broad-based, functioning government that populists often fail and, even after its impressive showing in the February 8 election, the PTI is no exception.



There is no doubt that the PTI was denied a level playing field in the elections, as has been the case with any party disfavoured by the establishment in past Pakistani elections as well. But past victims of the establishment negotiated with other political parties, bargained with the establishment and found a way forward.

Allegations of poll rigging are unlikely to change the fact that the PTI will not be able to form a government either at the centre or in Punjab. The PTI has refused to talk to other major parties and its numbers alone are not enough to constitute a parliamentary majority. Petitions for recounts or repolling in individual seats could take a long time to wend their way through the legal system. Every Pakistani election has been followed by one or another party complaining about its mandate being stolen, sometimes with good reason. But eventually, elected assemblies are convened, governments are formed, and life goes on.

Although Pakistan's politics can take unexpected turns at any time, the chances that social media activism and a vocal younger generation's frustrations will lead to a revolutionary overthrow of the existing order appear slim at the moment. It is true that the PTI is facing the brunt of state

repression and is, therefore, gaining sympathy. But the legacy political parties that have been targets of similar repression in the past are far from decimated.

The formation of government by parties other than the largest group is not unknown in parliamentary democracies after an inconclusive election. Pakistan needs a government to deal with critical issues such as negotiations with the IMF and other creditors over a new economic bailout. Both the PML and PPP realize that taking the helm of Pakistan at this moment amounts to wearing a crown of thorns. The PML seems willing to do it while others have their eye on the next election. Not having a functioning government would be worse than having a weak government.

Instead of letting uncertainty and instability persist, Pakistan's politicians could take a path they have never taken before. They could forsake personal conflicts, and extreme narratives portraying each other as irreconcilable enemies engaged in battle, to form a government of national unity. The PTI could join it, state repression could end, and genuine national reconciliation could begin. The country could focus on setting right its economy and foreign relations.

The PTI's direction, however, is set by one man, Imran Khan, and he is not someone amenable to compromise. Research on his political career reveals two consistent themes. One is his admiration for right-wing Islamist ideology and the other is disdain for all Pakistani politicians, except himself. His decisions after the latest national election also confirm those constants. Imran Khan has refused to negotiate with the two large mainstream parties and has opted to align with the religious parties, Jamaat-e-Islami and Majlis Wahdat ul Muslimeen (MWM).

These decisions might render the PTI even less effective as the party of governance if the party were indeed to form a government now or in the future. Imran Khan successfully built a conspiracy theory about regime change by using a message from Pakistan's ambassador to the US about a frank conversation with an American diplomat. That has made most international interlocutors wary of Imran Khan's populism and conspiracy theories. The irony is that the rhetoric that makes Imran Khan popular at home makes it difficult for Pakistan to build relationships abroad that could help Pakistan deal with its economic crises.

Courtesy The News





Why Nawaz Sharif failed to win Pakistan election despite tacit army support

The three-time PM's party fell short in the election, as Imran Khan's candidates emerged on top. Now Sharif faces tough choices as he tries to form a government without a popular mandate.

By Abid Hussain

When Nawaz Sharif, the three-time former prime minister, emerged on the balcony of his party's headquarters in Lahore on Friday night, fireworks went off as he was given a rousing welcome by the crowd of nearly 1,500 people.

Sharif started out with what has now become the staple of his public addresses, asking the crowd of his Pakistan Muslim League Nawaz (PMLN) supporters, "Do you love me?". The response, "We love you!", echoed among his adoring audience.

Yet, more than three days after Pakistan voted in general elections, there is little evidence that the sentiment of Sharif's core supporters is shared by the wider public in the nation of 241 million people that stunned analysts in their voting patterns on February 8.

For weeks before the elections, the PMLN was viewed by experts as the favourite to secure a clear victory that would give the 74-year-old political veteran another chance to rule Pakistan. Once targeted by Pakistan's military establishment, Sharif appeared to have won the favour of the generals for the 2024 vote.

So confident were Sharif and the PMLN of their win that they had scheduled a victory speech from their leader for Thursday night, barely hours after polls closed. Then, the results started coming in, and the bubble was burst.

"As the voting patterns emerged, it shocked and surprised the party, forcing a rethink which is why they were in complete silent mode for nearly 12 hours," said Majid Nizami, a political analyst, and a specialist on elections.

When Sharif finally addressed supporters on Friday, he claimed victory, but acknowledged that his party had failed to secure a simple majority and so would need coalition partners to form a government.



"This was not the result the party was expecting. They thought they would achieve more than 85 percent of seats from Punjab province, but initial trends showed they were barely getting 50 percent of seats," Lahore-based Nizami told Al Jazeera.

Almost all of the remaining seats in Punjab, the bastion of Sharif's PMLN, went to candidates backed by former PM Imran Khan's Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) — a party that experts believed had been decimated by targeted political and legal attacks in recent months.

What went wrong?

As the dust settles on the election results, the PMLN has emerged with 75 seats in the national assembly, trailing PTI-backed independent candidates by 20 seats.

The PTI alleges widespread manipulation and tampering, insisting that it has been denied a far larger majority and that their mandate has been "stolen" to benefit Sharif and his PMLN.

So, what happened to the PMLN, a party that, as late as early 2022, was leading opinion polls in popularity over PTI and was considered the strongest party in

Punjab, Pakistan's most populous and electorally important province?

For Lahore-based political analyst and editor Badar Alam, the roots of PMLN's disappointing performance in the polls can be traced back to April 2022 when Imran Khan, the PTI chief, and then-prime minister were ousted through a parliamentary vote of no-confidence.

At the time, Sharif was in self-imposed exile in the United Kingdom, after a series of corruption-related convictions. His party allied with the country's other traditional political force, the Pakistan People's Party (PPP) and others under what was called the Pakistan Democratic Movement (PDM), to topple Khan's government.

They succeeded. But, said Alam, "once Shehbaz Sharif, Nawaz's younger brother, took over as prime minister, his attention went towards removing all the cases and convictions against his elder brother."

These are cases that have haunted the Sharif brothers for three decades. The elder Sharif, who ruled the country twice in the 1990s, has been dogged by corruption allegations since then. In 1999, he was ousted in a military coup. His third term in power, after the PMLN won the 2013



elections, was marked by intensifying rivalry with Khan, who eventually won the 2018 election, backed at the time by Pakistan's powerful military establishment that has ruled the country directly for more than three decades and has influenced politics from behind the scenes for much of the rest of the country's existence.

Yet, since relations between Khan and the military soured, and he was ousted in 2022 — with the military now seemingly backing the PDM government — Pakistan has been through torrid political, economic and security crises.

Salman Ghani, a political analyst who has been covering the PMLN for a long time, said that as the leading party of the PDM, the decisions of that government hung heavy around the Sharif brothers' necks.

"The 16-month rule of PDM caused almost irreversible damage to the PMLN. The tenure saw massive inflation, hitting the public everywhere, including their own vote bank," Ghani told Al Jazeera. "Theirs is a party of development and the economy; people support them for delivery, not for ideology. That perception was destroyed in that time."

Pakistan was on the verge of defaulting on loans last year, with its foreign reserves depleting to less than \$4 billion dollars, and its rupee depreciating rapidly against the US dollar. A \$3 billion loan from the International Monetary Fund helped stave off a default temporarily.

Sharif returned home from his exile three months before the elections. Many analysts believe that Sharif's return and the subsequent change in his legal fortunes — with convictions against him dropped and restrictions against contesting elections removed — were made possible only because the military had decided to back him in the 2024 vote.

Meanwhile, Khan has been charged in more than 100 cases; was jailed in August and barred from contesting in the elections; and was sentenced in three separate cases just the week before the February 8 polls.

His party faced a crackdown — senior party officials were arrested, many were apparently coerced to leave his movement,

and the PTI was barred from even using its election symbol, the cricket bat, in the elections. Its candidates were forced to contest as independents.

But the PTI wasn't the only party that suffered. The PMLN and the military, seen by many ordinary Pakistanis as being behind the crackdown, made the mistake of underestimate popular support for Khan, said Ghani.

"When a person is oppressed, their support increases massively. We saw that in the case of Nawaz Sharif himself. Those who are pushed against the wall, they are the ones to retaliate the most. PMLN did not understand this," he added.

Alam, the Lahore-based analyst agreed.



"Not even once did they [the PMLN] condemn the violence and persecution of the PTI; in fact, they played their part in fully subjugating them. This made PMLN a victimiser, resulting in public anger against them," he said.

A party leader acknowledged that the PMLN had been blindsided by the recent election results.

"PMLN is on the defensive; Nawaz Sharif is on the defensive," he told Al Jazeera on condition of anonymity.

The insider also blamed "sycophants" within the party, whom he accused on focusing on their own interests, for the PMLN's failure to adapt its messaging as public opinion started to swing against it.

"Nawaz Sharif used to be very adept at handling media himself, but now that isn't the case," he said.

While the PMLN supremo, in his speech

on Friday, did name other parties the PMLN might seek alliances with to form a government, he did not mention the PTI.

Alam said that PMLN and Nawaz Sharif must show some "grace".

"PMLN came in as a party that was a government-in-waiting. PTI and Khan were in survival mode, but they upset the predictions. The country is in crisis, and it is imperative for Sharif, if he thinks he is a statesman, to concede and ask PTI to form a government," Alam said.

Lahore-based Ghani said that the election risked compounding the country's political, economic, and security challenges.

"Countries, when they hold elections, their

objective is to bring stability. Democracy functions when it holds elections, and a mandate is earned. In our country, the election result is causing further instability," he added.

Ghani said that Sharif, in his Friday speech, ought to have acknowledged the support of voters for Khan and the PTI, and indicated a willingness to "reach out to them".

But what about the party's own support base and future? It's not looking very good for the PMLN, said Nizami, the analyst.

"Their strength and hegemony were in central Punjab area, from where they used to sweep the number of seats. It was unthinkable for them to lose votes. Yet, they have been losing ground to PTI and are unable to stop the rot," he said.

"They have much to ponder now."

Courtesy www.aljazeera.com



Of the people



By Arifa Noor

The people of Pakistan waited long enough for this election, part of which should have happened early last year — in KP and Punjab — and part of it late last year.

As I say this, it's important to point out that PTI had resigned from the National Assembly in April 2022, and, other than blaming the PTI for this, no one stood up for the rights of the people who were left unrepresented for two years.

However, such delays are not new; previously, too, Pakistanis waited for years sometimes to exercise their right to vote. This time around, the wait wasn't as long in comparison, which in itself is evidence of the weakening of the powers that be.

But even when the election date was announced, circumstances remained extraordinary. No stone was left unturned to discourage the voters. One party was consistently targeted, its top tier ruthlessly purged and the ones who finally made it to the election line not allowed to campaign. Most of the campaign time was spent underground, evading arrests and even watching their livelihoods destroyed.

If this was on the ground, in Islamabad, the mainstream media ran the most (in)effective disinformation campaign ever: the PTI would boycott the election; the party had disintegrated after May 9 and it had also lost support; it had no electables left; these nobodies and the lawyers who finally got the ticket had no idea how elections worked; they wouldn't even have enough polling agents for the day.

And once the Supreme Court jumped in, the unkindest cut of all: everyone was convinced the voter would never be able to find his or her candidate or find their symbol. And so the conclusion was that the PTI was toast!

It didn't stop here. The broadcasts repeated ad nauseam, in confidence or in disgust, that there was a government in waiting and it had been anointed. The point was to tell the people that the decision had been made and they had no choice in the matter.

But as usual, the politicians, the courts, the string pullers and the media underestimated the people, who have many a time waited to get their right to choose — they waited 11 years to vote for the PPP in 1988; eight

for the PML-N in 2008, when they brought it to power in Punjab; and a year this time around. It was evident each time that it was not just a vote for a party, it was also a message to those who robbed them of their choice. And this was also true for this election.

The vote is not just for a party but also a message to those who robbed the voters of their choice.

In Punjab and KP, the people came out not for the PTI as much as they came out to vote against those who delayed these elections and then created an environment of fear. Feb 8 was a day people acted on Bilawal Bhutto-Zardari's words: democracy is the best revenge. Perhaps the disappointed PML-N voter was angry about the inflation but for the rest, far more than inflation was motivating them.

But the second point here is that this intention generally was not made too public after May 9. The crackdown and oppression didn't break the people's will (it never does, even if they do retreat tactically). And so quiet did these people stay that few realised how many would turn out. Politi-



cians on the ground concede they had no idea of the extent of the support for the PTI on election day, even though they were aware of the mood.

Even personally, as a journalist who has covered elections since 1997, this was the first time I came across so many Pakistanis who were wary to talk about the elections or their choice; 2023 and/or May 9 had made them cagey but not unaware of their power. This was true for many of those who came out to vote not for PTI but anyone they preferred, just because they wanted to make a point. It has to be said that the state's contention about May 9 didn't convince the people so much; in fact, the arrests, raids and harsh treatment meted out turned the mood in Punjab hostile.

Third, more than the PDM parties, this was a vote against the interference of the establishment, as has been the mood generally for quite a few years.

The conversation is about the instability, the constant interference and a political system which is paralysed because of which the economy is not working. All of this is interlinked, and the voters realise this. The average voter doesn't believe that the system set up to guide the economy is going to deliver.

More than the political parties, the establishment should be concerned — and



ask whether it wants to continue on a path where it is losing public support. And to what extent it can afford this, especially as the state's policies have already lost Pakistan the hearts and minds of Balochistan. Instead of working on plans to reverse this, it seems as if the people of the other provinces are being pushed away too.

There has to be some introspection everywhere this week. Within the PML-N, on why it didn't do well; in the PPP, on why it failed to make an impact in Punjab; in the PTI, on how it plans to build on this victory and ensure relief for those who are imprisoned.

But more importantly, there has to be some

introspection elsewhere too, as to why things have come to a pass where this election is being seen as a message to them from the people.

Postscript: In the 1970s, we lost half the country when our powers weren't willing to pay attention to the mood of the people, and in the noughties, it cost us the life of Benazir Bhutto among many Pakistanis killed in terrorist attacks before those at the helm changed course. Is it possible to hope we can do some course correction without a tragedy, or are we bent upon proving that we have learnt nothing from history?

Courtesy Dawn





Imran picks Omar Ayub as PTI's candidate for prime minister



TTI Report

Former National Assembly speaker Asad Qaiser on Thursday said PTI founder Imran Khan had nominated Omar Ayub as the candidate for prime minister and called for engagement with other political parties — including the Jamiat-i-Ulema Islam-Fazl (JUI-F) — protesting the Feb 8 election results.

The announcement came after Qaiser held a meeting with the imprisoned party chief at Adiala Jail. A day earlier, the PTI leader had petitioned the Islamabad High Court seeking a meeting with Imran to discuss the current political scenario.

With post-election deal-making in high gear, the PTI — like all other political parties — is weighing its options. Earlier this week, the Imran-led party, whose independent candidates clinched a lion's share in the polls, said it would ally with the Majlis Wahdat-i-Muslimeen in the Centre and Punjab.

The party had said it would form a coalition government with the Jamaat-i-Islami in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. However, JI's Liaquat Baloch later said that his party was not interested in working with the PTI in the province.

In a media talk outside Adiala Jail today, Qaiser said Imran had nominated PTI central general secretary Omar Ayub Khan — who is in hiding after facing over 20

criminal charges following the May 9 riots — as the candidate for prime minister.

“Secondly, every child knows about the rigging that took place in the elections and how our mandate was stolen [...] regarding this, Khan sahib will give a date for nationwide protests by evening,” Qaiser said.

He further stated that Imran had given him an “assignment” to engage with all political parties protesting the election results, specifically mentioning Maulana Fazlur Rehman's JUI-F, the Awami National Party and Qaumi Wattan Party.

“We want to form a strategy together because these were the worst elections in the history of Pakistan,” the PTI leader said, alleging that the Feb 8 polls had no credibility both locally and internationally.

“Therefore, we have decided that we will protest against this [elections] across the country and I will myself reach out to political parties for this purpose,” Qaiser added.

In response to a question, he stated that PTI-backed candidates who had won the polls would not resign in any condition and would sit in the assemblies. The PTI leader further added that the party would call its parliamentary session “a day or two”.

Meanwhile, former senator Barrister

Mohammad Ali Saif said Imran had picked Qaiser's brother Aqibullah Khan as the speaker of the KP Assembly.

He said Imran had conveyed a special message regarding the statement issued by the US on the general elections.

“We believe that the US has in every period either supported dictators or brought forward the most corrupt leaders [...] and democracy was ridiculed by bringing such people,” Barrister Saif said.

“Imran Khan sahib has sent a message that the US has a chance to clean its past by keeping an eye on rigging in Pakistan's elections,” he stated, reiterating that the Feb 8 polls were the “worst and most rigging elections in the country's history”.

On being questioned about Imran changing his stance on the US, Barrister Saif clarified that the PTI founder's statement was in response to the State Department's recent press briefing in which it had called for the investigation of claims of interference and fraud in the elections.

“This is our response that the US should pressurise those involved in rigging instead of issuing such cosmetic statements,” he added.



The connection of Norwegian Pakistanis to Pakistani politics - the love of dual identities

By Amna

In the current buzz and intensity of the ongoing election in Pakistan, it is clear that overseas Pakistanis, especially those approximately over 40,000 residing in Norway are following this election closely. One may wonder why anyone born in a Western country, or someone who is brought up there cares about the political tension in South Asia.

Well, the answer lies in the enduring legacy that is passed down from their parents or grandparents, who have been following the Pakistani political developments since the era of partition in 1947, and who had to part ways with Pakistan during some political changes in the mid-1960s and early years of 1970s.

In the middle of Norway's multicultural fabric, there exists a tapestry woven with threads of Pakistani heritage, vibrant and intricate. Here, amidst fjords and forests, a community of Norwegian Pakistanis finds itself rooted to the political pulse of a land distant yet intimately familiar, Pakistan. Their connection to Pakistani politics is not merely a matter of geography, but rather a connection of identities, memories and aspirations that transcend borders and generations.

Picture this: the echoes of migration, whispers carried on the winds of history. In the mid-1960s and early 1970s, Pakistanis embarked on a journey of hope, seeking fortunes in a distant Nordic land. They brought with them dreams, stories etched in sepia tones, tales of resilience and adaptation. These narratives passed down through the ages, form the backbone of the Norwegian Pakistani identity, anchoring them to a homeland they have mainly only known through the stories of their elderly family members.

And so, amidst the snow-capped peaks and fjord-filled valleys, Norwegian Pakistanis find themselves drawn to the tumultuous seas of Pakistani politics. For them, the political landscape is not a distant mirage but a living, breathing entity, pulsating with the hopes and dreams of a nation. Through the lens of social media and the magic of technology, they watch as the drama unfolds, each twist and turn resonating deep within their souls.

But it's not just about observation; it is in fact about participation, about being a part of something greater than oneself.

When elections loom on the horizon or major decisions hang in the balance, Norwegian Pakistanis roll up their sleeves and dive headfirst into the fray. They take to the virtual streets, raising their voices in solidarity, rallying support, and lending their voices to causes close to their hearts. In the middle of living rooms while being served chai and being entertained by Geo News or ARY, community centres across Norway, and even mosques where they can connect debates rage and opinions clash, as the diaspora finds itself united in a common cause. For the younger generations of Pakistanis in Norway, the technological influence has been quite



essential. By sharing photos of trips from their homeland, stories, memories, or even active participation through social media they do this to keep themselves connected and informed, but most importantly to contribute to wider awareness of the ongoing political atmosphere of the country.

Yet, beyond the realm of words and digital activism lies a deeper truth – the desire to make a significant difference, to leave an indelible mark on the fabric of Pakistani society. Through acts of education and advocacy, Norwegian Pakistanis channel their passion into action, transforming their love for their homeland into a force for positive change. They build bridges where others see chasms, reaching across oceans and continents to build a better future for generations to come.

But alongside the political discourse lies a quieter struggle – the balancing act of dual identities. For Norwegian Pakistanis, navigating the waters of cultural belonging can be a delicate dance or a challenging hike between two worlds. In Norway, they are Norwegians first and foremost, with rights, responsibilities, and dreams of their own. Yet, in the depths of their hearts beats the rhythm of Pakistan, a melody that refuses to be silenced.

And so, they find themselves caught between two worlds, two sets of expectations, two versions of themselves. It's a journey fraught with challenges, with moments of doubt and uncertainty. But it's also a journey filled with beauty, with moments of connection and understanding that transcend language and culture.

In the end, the story of Norwegian Pakistanis and their connection to Pakistani politics is a tale of resilience and hope, of love and longing that knows no bounds. It's a reminder that identity is not a static concept but a living, breathing thing, shaped by the ebb and flow of history and memory. As they continue to navigate the complexities of their dual identities, Norwegian Pakistanis serve as beacons of light, illuminating the path towards a more inclusive and understanding world.

The aftermath of Israeli strikes on Rafah



At least 67 Palestinians killed in Israeli attacks on Gaza's southern city of Rafah as strikes hit houses and mosques

At least 67 people were killed in air raids on the overcrowded city of Rafah, according to a statement from the Hamas-run territory's Ministry of Health.

The predawn strikes on Monday hit 14 houses and three mosques in different parts of the city in the south of the enclave, the Hamas government reported.

The Israeli military said it "conducted a series of strikes on terror targets in the area of Shaboura in the southern Gaza Strip".

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu told US broadcaster ABC News that the Rafah operation would continue until Hamas was eliminated, adding he would provide "safe passage" to civilians wishing to leave.

When pressed to specify where they might go, Netanyahu said: "You know, the areas that we've cleared north of Rafah, plenty of areas there. But, we are working out a detailed plan."



The Israeli military announced early on Monday that two people had been rescued in Rafah after nearly 130 days in captivity.

In a statement, the army identified the two as Fernando Simon Marman and Louis Har, saying they "were kidnapped by the Hamas terrorist organization on October 7th from Kibbutz Nir Yitzhak". Both were in "good medical condition", it added.

About 1.4 million Palestinians have

crowded into Rafah, with many living in tents, while food, water and medicine are becoming increasingly scarce.

The precarious humanitarian situation in Rafah has prompted aid groups and foreign governments, including Israel's key ally the United States, to express deep concern over the potentially disastrous consequences of expanding operations there.

Courtesy www.aljazeera.com

In Gaza, hope is a fantasy

Biden et al may claim, at least publicly, to ask Israel to stop the looming carnage. Netanyahu will not be deterred by their empty 'warnings'.



By Andrew Mitrovica

I wanted to be wrong, but it turns out that I was right.

Since early October, I have been sure that Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has had one aim all along: to erase Gaza.

Spurred on by a rabid cabinet that believes that Palestinians are worthless “vermin”, Netanyahu has done what I suspect he has always wanted to do: dispense with the incremental destruction of a people and a strip of land and, instead, engineer a genocide in Gaza with ruthless and oh so satisfying efficiency.

By now, this fact should be clear. That is the “victory” Netanyahu has and will continue to pursue until he has achieved it – to turn Gaza into dust and memory permanently.

There will be no “pause in fighting”, no “lasting” ceasefire, no truce, no end to the genocide because Netanyahu has no reason or incentive to stop.

And Netanyahu knows that no one inside or outside Israel is prepared, willing or able to stop him.

Hope has been extinguished.

Every day, Palestinians hope, in vain, that the horrors and outrages will end. Every day, we hope, in vain, for a faint sign that the murderous madness will end, that reason and diplomacy will prevail, that the captives – on both sides – will be reunited with their aching families.

Hope is a fantasy, snuffed out by men and forces who thrive on causing chaos and despair in their “killing rage”.

Netanyahu may be unpopular. Still, what he is doing and how he is going about doing it in defiance of proportionate scale, decency, and international law has the overwhelming support of Israelis who, apparently, would also be content to see Gaza reduced to dust and memory – permanently.

Polls show that most Israelis want Netanyahu to use more force, more “firepower” in Gaza and beyond. Damn decency, international law, and the mushrooming number of casualties day after dreadful day.

The pain and suffering of Palestinians is irrelevant. The right and duty of Israel to defend itself is the only thing that counts.

It’s hardly surprising then that polls show, as well, that despite the rampant hunger, disease, and desperate need, most Israelis want fellow Israelis to continue blocking trucks carrying food, water, and medicine from reaching Gaza until the Hamas-held captives are released.

Palestinians are expendable. Israelis are not.

As for the “future” of Gaza, 93 percent of Israelis reportedly agree with Netanyahu: the two-state “solution” is dead on arrival since all of the land between the Mediterranean Sea and the Jordan River belongs to them. The intent is to have Israeli settlers take the place of Palestinians in Gaza. Another Nakba is already afoot – literally.

I am convinced most of Israel’s confederates abroad – whether they admit it publicly or not – also embrace these egregious beliefs and subscribe, wholeheartedly, to Netanyahu’s modus operandi and definition of “victory”.

So, far from being “damaged” or “weakened”, Netanyahu has been emboldened as a “wartime” prime minister and by an “international community” that has

encouraged him to do what he has done in Gaza and the occupied West Bank without remorse or restraint.

Netanyahu will survive as prime minister for as long as Israel goes about doing what it is doing in Gaza and perhaps longer. Ever the calculating Machiavellian, he has rebuffed predictions of his imminent political demise or forced exit by wishful-thinking columnists, “experts”, and former presidential candidates.

Again and again, the “international community” has said it is “concerned” by what their man in Tel Aviv is doing in Gaza and the occupied West Bank. Again and again, these expressions of “concern” have proven to be hollow bits of performative nonsense.

On reliable cue, US President Joe Biden described what Israel is doing in Gaza as being “over the top”.

“I’ve been pushing really hard, really hard, to get humanitarian assistance into Gaza. There are a lot of innocent people who are starving, a lot of innocent people who are in trouble and dying, and it’s gotta stop. Number one,” Biden told reporters earlier this week.

It won’t stop. How can it stop when Biden and his complicit allies in London, Paris, Berlin, and Ottawa keep arming Israel to the brim and refusing – even in the blatant face of Israel’s “over the top” onslaught and the deepening humanitarian catastrophe in

Gaza – to demand an immediate ceasefire?

The calamitous course was set when Biden and the other presidents, chancellors, and prime ministers rushed to Tel Aviv in “solidarity” pilgrimages to “stand firmly” by Netanyahu’s side.

It’s too late to apply the stock, talking-point-ephemeral brake since Netanyahu isn’t listening.

He isn’t abiding by the International Court of Justice’s damning ruling which called on the Israeli government to stop what it is doing in Gaza after South African lawyers and diplomats made a persuasive and “plausible” case that Palestinians are victims of genocide and Israel is the perpetrator.

Rafah is in Netanyahu’s crosshairs. The so-called “safe haven” and the more than a million Palestinians who have taken refuge there in tents and makeshift “homes” will endure the inevitable lethal consequences of the major Western powers’ unconditional backing of Israel.

Exhausted and petrified Palestinians, including mothers, wives, and their sons and daughters, will not be spared Israel’s wrath. Their already precarious lives hang on the precipice of Netanyahu’s – for the moment and only for the moment – delayed designs.

Biden et al may claim, at least publicly, to ask Israel to stop the looming carnage.

Netanyahu will not be deterred by their empty, delivered-behind-a-lectern “warnings”. He is calling the geopolitical shots, not Biden et al.

While America was preoccupied with a football game on Sunday night, Netanyahu gave Palestinians in Rafah a taste of the terror to come – firing a shower of shells that killed and dismembered dozens of sleeping children, women and men.

Finally, a cocksure Netanyahu understands the value of patience. Biden looks and sounds like an old man who is poised to become yesterday’s man – gone, inconsequential and forgotten.

The November presidential election approaches just on the horizon. Another doddering old man, Donald Trump, has a better than even chance of returning to the Oval Office.

If that happens, Trump will enshrine Israel’s licence to commit genocide without his predecessor’s meaningless rhetorical “reservations”.

Either way, America has morphed, in effect, into Israel’s proxy. The dynamic has shifted.

Israel will decide what will happen in Gaza today and tomorrow and America will salute in approval and help pay for the pleasure of doing its captain’s bidding – happily, willingly, and enthusiastically.

Courtesy www.aljazeera.com



Economist Atif Mian urges next government to outline priorities



By Anwar Iqbal

Atif Mian, a prominent Pakistani-American economist and Princeton University professor, has urged the nation's future leaders to brace themselves for a challenging economic journey and to outline priorities for recovery.

Mian emphasised the country's consistent global economic decline, highlighting last year's contraction and alarming macroeconomic indicators such as inflation, stunted growth, escalating debt, and diminishing investment.

"The federal government has reached a critical point where it lacks the financial means to sustain basic operations, unable to pay the salaries of even low-ranking employees without resorting to borrowing," Mian remarked.

He pointed out that the entire tax revenue is exhausted after disbursing shares to provinces, settling pensions for retirees, and servicing the burgeoning debt, leaving the government running on a perpetual deficit. He asserted that the dire economic situation exacerbates inflation, making it uncontrollable within a deficit-driven governance structure.

Mian also argued that growth becomes an unattainable goal when the govern-

ment is unable to invest in the future due to financial constraints. "The country is bankrupt, sinking deeper every year. I have never seen such despondency. So many wanting to leave, established firms no longer comfortable investing," said Mian, emphasising the gravity of the situation.

Addressing the Feb 8 elections, Mian highlighted the people's frustration, stating, "People are mad — and they have every right to be."

He underscored the staggering human cost of poverty, citing the alarming statistic of 442,353 children dying in Pakistan last year due to impoverished conditions. Mian criticised the establishment for playing "usual games," manipulating the political landscape without addressing the pressing economic challenges.

In the aftermath of the elections, Mian observed a widening gap between the ruling elite and the general populace, emphasising the potential dangers associated with such a disconnect. He noted the establishment's attempts to form a compromised government but questioned its effectiveness, stating, "No one has a plan to fix the economy, but even if they magically did somehow, they cannot do anything

because they have lost all trust with their people. They are foreigners in their own land."

On Monday, the Atlantic Council convened a virtual conversation in Washington where experts delved into the intricate implications of Pakistan's political economy in the aftermath of the Feb 8 elections.

Safiya Ghorri-Ahmad from McLarty Associates underlined Pakistan's concern about being recognised as credible by the US.

"Pakistan does not want to be a part of the countries not recognised as credible by the US," she said. She was also critical of another government initiative, the Special Investment Facilitation Council (SIFC), as it was still not clear how that would work.

She highlighted the significance of the next few weeks in observing the country's transformation, particularly in its relations with the IMF and efforts to address inflation.

Ammar H. Khan, a nonresident senior fellow at the Council's South Asia Centre, outlined the top priority for the next 100 days — addressing the energy crisis.

Courtesy Dawn

High profits expected for banking sector on back of interest rate

By Saneela Jawad

With the interest rate still at a record high and no break in sight, commercial banks in the country are continuing to make bank off the back of government-backed securities.

Take Bank Alfalah as an example. In their recently released financial results for the year 2023, Bank Alfalah revealed that they had achieved growth in the bottom line of more than 96%. Based on the results, it can be seen that the bank has been able to increase its earnings per share from Rs 10.38 at the end of 2022 to Rs 23.15 in 2023.

The results showed that in 2022, the bank saw a net markup return of 36% which fell to 30% in 2023. This meant that even though markup income almost doubled, the interest expense for the company was much higher leading to a fall in the ratio.

And it isn't just Bank Alfalah. Most commercial banks in the country can expect rich returns this year. That is because despite a myriad of economic challenges facing the country, the banking sector has thrived amidst challenging economic conditions, with remarkable earnings over the past two years, especially in the current financial year.

Pakistan has seen interest rates at record-high levels since the end of June 2023. The country has been fighting a losing battle with inflation, leading to the State Bank of Pakistan maintaining interest rates at unsustainable levels. One of the conditions set by the IMF also revolves around the fact that as net interest rates are negative, no cut can be expected unless inflation falls below the prevailing rates.

As a result, banks have been investing in government-backed securities which are secure and generate a high rate of return. By lending with minimal risk and earning a favorable spread between borrowing and deposit rates, banks have achieved impressive profits, as reflected in their year-end accounts. If this pattern of high interest rates continues in the upcoming year, banks may further enhance their financial performance, contingent upon the duration of rate stability.

While the results from other banks are imminent, Alfalah seems to have done quite well for itself. The company saw an increase in its fees and commission income, share of profit from associates and gain from derivatives which showed that total income jumped from Rs 100 billion to Rs 156 billion in 2023.

In terms of expenses, the bank was able to limit its operations which saw expenses increase by 30% overall. Due to the increase in income and decrease in expenses, the bank was able to earn a profit before tax which more than doubled from last year. In 2022, the company saw profit before taxation of Rs 37 billion and increased to Rs 79 billion in 2023.

But that isn't all. The government will have something to be happy about in all of this. Due to higher profitability and taxes levied on the company, its tax bill is expected to be much higher this year.

Regardless of that, the company still saw its profit after taxation more than double this year.

Due to the performance this year, the company announced a dividend of Rs 5 per share which was in addition to the Rs 3 which has already been given in the shape of interim dividend. This is the highest dividend that the bank has given out in its history and it can be expected that, unless rates are revised downward, these results will be replicated or even increase.

The trajectory of the results could be seen long in the past when the company was able to earn Rs 12 per share in just 6 months this year where it had only been able to earn Rs 10.38 for the whole year before that.

	FY 2023	FY 2022	% Change
Mark-up/return/interest earned	412,005,030	214,106,020	92%
Mark-up/return/interest expensed	286,053,140	136,933,108	109%
Net mark-up/interest income	125,951,890	77,172,912	63%
Non-mark-up/interest income			
Fee and commission income	15,428,789	11,231,877	37%
Dividend income	1,022,878	1,091,320	-6%
Foreign exchange income	9,554,818	9,218,628	4%
Gain/(loss) from derivatives	1,760,669	331,578	431%
Gain/(loss) on sale of securities	295,743	-65,024	—
Share of profit from associates	1,690,573	669,831	152%
Other income	333,846	325,971	2%
Total non-mark-up/interest income	30,087,316	22,804,181	32%
Total income	156,039,206	99,977,093	56%
Non mark-up/interest expenses			
Operating expenses	64,982,495	49,897,939	30%
Workers welfare fund	1,714,807	907,442	89%
Other charges	279,412	27,178	928%
Total non-mark-up/interest expenses	66,976,715	50,832,559	32%
Profit before provisions	89,062,492	49,144,534	81%
Provisions and write-offs – net	10,324,754	12,467,133	-17%
Extraordinary/unusual items	—	—	—
Profit before taxation	78,737,738	36,677,401	115%
Taxation	42,651,377	18,279,937	133%
Profit after taxation	36,086,361	18,397,464	96%
Earnings per share – basic	23.15	10.38	123%

Analysis: How green are Pakistan's political manifestoes?

The Third Pole looks at the manifestoes of Pakistan's main political parties of Pakistan and what they promise on green growth, renewables, climate adaptation and mitigation

By P M Baigal

Manifestoes by the major parties were only released at the end of January. The Third Pole looks at how the major parties are – or are not – prioritising climate change in their manifestoes.

The front runner PML-N's ambitious manifesto

Pakistan Muslim League Nawaz (PML-N) is going to form the next government. With Shahbaz Sharif, a three-time Chief Minister Punjab (the largest province of Pakistan) and second time prime minister, at its helm, the party unveiled its manifesto on January 27. Comprising 33 sections, the manifesto highlights past accomplishments – during Sharif's premiership from 2013-18, and 2022-23, when the PML-N was part of the coalition government under prime minister Shahbaz Sharif, – and underlines commitments for 2024-29. One section is titled Sustainable Development and Climate Change and focuses on "Building a climate resilient Pakistan".

Fighting smog is a major focal point. Described as an "air quality emergency", it likely reflects the party's recognition of the significance of urban economy and business, which constitute its primary support base. This has the most detailed planning, including implementing higher vehicular emissions standards, technological upgrade of brick kilns, urban planning and transboundary cooperation with India, using the ASEAN Haze Convention as a template.

The aftermath of the 2022 floods echoes in the manifesto's second most detailed pledge, the Climate-Resilient, Recovery, Rehabilitation and Reconstruction Framework (4RF). This ambitious framework pledges to



"restore livelihoods and economic opportunities whilst ensuring social inclusion and participation." Additionally, there is a commitment to enhance the capacity of the Meteorological Department and early warning systems, alongside prioritising ecosystem-based adaptation and nature-based solutions through initiatives like the Recharge Pakistan Programme and the Living Indus Programme, launched in 2022-23.

PML-N pledges to expand solar capacity to 10% of the country's energy mix.

Addressing the illegal wildlife trade emerges as another significant pledge, with a proposal to establish a national wildlife crime enforcement agency. Crucially, proposed legislation includes bans on using animals in public events such as political rallies and on keeping wild animals as pets. At a PML-N rally in January, a live tiger and lion were brought and reportedly returned – presumably to a zoo – after Nawaz Sharif's intervention. The

manifesto also vows to grant autonomy to all Wildlife Management Boards, currently under government control, a move aimed at enhancing wildlife protection efforts.

Among other notable commitments are the activation of the Loss & Damage Fund established at COP27 and advocating for provincial consensus across Pakistan to declare the Indus River a "Living Being." The Indus also flows through China, India and Afghanistan, but the transboundary impacts of such a decision, or the need for transboundary cooperation, are not mentioned. While climate and environmental pledges feature prominently throughout the manifesto, they are conspicuously absent in sections concerning poverty reduction and employment and agriculture.

The economy section, largely devoted to oil and gas, looks to establishing low carbon Euro II emissions standards and the conversion of a heavy oil plant into a solar one at Saindak Cooper-Gold Project. Regarding trade, industry and natural resources the

manifesto promises to establish a green financing pool, although it is aimed at mining. The water management and water, food & security sections underscore the importance of adapting to climate change by emphasising the need for a robust knowledge base on one of the world's largest water systems.

The most interesting pledge, however, is in the energy section. The PML-N pledges to expand solar capacity to 10% of the country's energy mix, with an installed capacity of 10,000 MW, connect renewable energy zones to grids, lower vehicular emissions by promoting fuel standards and electric vehicles, encourage rooftop solar, establish solar mini-grids and create a fund to support clean energy initiatives. The fly in the mix is the promotion of Thar coal, along with solar, wind and nuclear energy. While solar and wind energy represent cleaner options, dependence on Thar coal contradicts this objective.

The PPP's promise of a Green New Deal

The Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP), formerly part of the 2022-23 governing coalition with the PML-N and now supporter of new government, unveiled its election manifesto on Jan 27.

In a January 25 interview with AP, Bhutto expressed regret over the insufficient emphasis on climate change in public and political discourse. The PPP's Sherry Rehman served as environment minister under the last government.

The PPP promises a Green New Deal, focusing on climate change investments in the public sector, public-private partnerships and encouraging foreign direct investments. It asserts that "investment in Pakistan's public sector infrastructure including roads, communication, health, irrigation, agriculture will all be made with a focus on climate resilience," and that indigenous and green energy will be the focus in providing electricity. There is also a pledge to create solar parks through public-private partnerships nationwide, offering free electricity access for up to 300 units to the most economically disadvantaged households.

In its health section, the PPP stresses the

importance of establishing "climate-resilient health facilities linked to the national disaster management system". Climate-related challenges are underscored as critical issues affecting women, acknowledged within the poverty and rights sections. The PPP pledges to confront climate change as a human rights concern. Additionally, the manifesto dedicates a section to water security, emphasising the necessity of climate-resilient infrastructure.

The Green New deal section presents a compelling and urgent narrative: "From melting glaciers in the north triggering Glacial Lake Outburst Floods (GLOFs) to record-breaking heat waves, droughts, and forest fires in various regions, there is no longer any doubt that climate change represents an existential threat to Pakistan." It has detailed sections on policy measures, and separate sections for adaptation and mitigation measures. Interestingly it also has a section on international climate justice and finance, which highlights the Loss & Damage Fund, international partnerships and global initiatives against climate risks.

PTI - Holding on to a green past, hoping for a greener future

The last of the three largest parties, the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI), or Pakistan's people's movement for justice, released its manifesto on January 28. The PTI has struggled to make progress since its government was ousted by a no-confidence vote in 2022, and on January 31, 2024 its founding chairman, Imran Khan was convicted of a three different cases. During its tenure (2018-22), the PTI had highlighted specific environmental policies, particularly a reforestation programme called the Ten Billion Tree Tsunami.

Despite its political challenges, the manifesto released by PTI's new chairman, Goher Ali Khan, is lengthy, though short on specifics. It mentions the Ten Billion Tree Tsunami and the launch of climate bonds as key steps during its tenure and says the party is "committed to prioritising 'green' sources of economic growth and making the economy climate-proof, with particular attention to the agriculture sector".

The PTI manifesto ends with a section titled "Climate Change – A silent Killer", outlining plans for a renewable energy transition, adoption of low-emission technologies, carbon pricing and government incentives to promote renewable energy sources. It also promotes energy efficiency in carbon-intensive industries such as cement and steel. It then ticks off a series of implementation plans across all economic sectors, as well as incentives. Although lacking detail, the scale of proposed interventions, ranging from awards for reducing emissions to generating 1GW of power through renewables by 2028, underscores the party's ambitious climate agenda.

Muttahida Qaumi Movement Pakistan - Promising a better Karachi

The Muttahida Qaumi Movement (Pakistan) (MQM-P) going to be part of next government, released its manifesto on January 5, ahead of the national parties. Given its stronghold in Karachi, Pakistan's most populous city with approximately 20 million residents, MQM-P's agenda influences the national discourse. The manifesto outlines ambitious objectives, including achieving 100% electrification of Karachi through solar and wind power, increasing renewable energy to at least 35% of the country's installed supply by 2035 and doubling forest cover in Karachi from 4% to 8% within five years.

The manifesto also devotes a significant section to the Indus River, advocating for its recognition as a living entity and its right to flow freely along its entire length. Much of this is related to the impact on Karachi's coastline, with MQM-P's manifesto focusing extensively on restoring and preserving the coast.

Speaking to The Third Pole, Mustafa Kamal, MQM-P's senior leader and former Mayor of Karachi, said the manifesto highlights a need for action: "Climate change is an emerging phenomenon and it needs continued and consistent efforts to tackle these challenges through an integrated approach."

All You Need to Know About PSL 9



By Muhammad Abbas Azad

As the countdown to Pakistan's most exciting cricketing event, Pakistan Super League (PSL) Season 9, the anticipation and excitement among Pakistan cricket fans are reaching new heights. The league has consistently introduced many talented local players since its inception, featuring international star players who showcased their skills. This time, it promises to be an equally exciting event.

Adding to the excitement, the schedule for the 9th season of the Pakistan Super League (PSL) has been announced, including the venues. Fans can find all the details here and learn how to book tickets for the matches. Additionally, information on live streaming is available for fans who cannot attend the stadium, allowing them to watch their favorite teams in action.

Moreover, this season features squads from all six franchises, including some new and exciting players. Here's everything you need to know about PSL 9.

Venues of PSL 9

PSL 9 will captivate fans across four iconic cities of Pakistan, just like the previous two seasons, including Karachi, Lahore, Multan, and Rawalpindi, which will host 34 exhilarating matches.

1. National Bank Stadium, Karachi

The National Bank Stadium will host most of the matches of PSL 9, including 11 matches, the qualifier, two eliminators, and the most important mega-final of the league.



This stadium has a history of hosting thrilling and exciting matches of the PSL in past seasons. For instance, Islamabad

United lifted the title for the second time in the 2018 season of the PSL, and South African batter Cameron Delport smashed a fast hundred in 2019 while playing for Islamabad United against Lahore Qalandars. Now, it promises to see another thrilling match and more firepower in the stadium in the upcoming season.

2. Gaddafi Stadium, Lahore

One of Pakistan's most beautiful cricket stadiums, Gaddafi Stadium, will host 9 matches of PSL 9, including the opening match of the league, and the home team, Lahore Qalandars, will kick off the tournament in the opening match at this iconic stadium.



The stadium witnessed the best experience for fans during the 2020 season of the Pakistan Super League (PSL). Ben Dunk from Australia, who played for the Lahore Qalandars, hit 12 sixes and smashed 99 runs, single-handedly winning the game for the team against Karachi Kings. Additionally, Lahore Qalandars clinched the PSL title consecutively in the last two seasons, both times on their home ground. Once again, the Qalandars will kick off their campaign as the defending champions.

3. Pindi Cricket Stadium, Rawalpindi

In addition to Lahore, the Pindi Stadium will also host nine matches during the upcoming ninth edition of the PSL. The two-time champions, Islamabad United, will play five games at their home ground.

The Pindi Stadium is renowned for its electrifying boundaries, with many sixes hit out of the park in past

seasons. It also has a history of high-scoring matches, and the highest total in PSL history was achieved here last season by the Multan Sultans when they scored 262 runs against Quetta Gladiators.



Additionally, the spotlight on that innings was Sultan's batter Usman Khan, who also smashed the fastest century in PSL history in just 36 balls. It is expected that fans will witness even more explosive performances in the upcoming season.

4. Multan Cricket Stadium, Multan

Just like the previous season of the PSL, Multan Stadium will again host only five matches of this year's PSL, and the home side Multan Sultans, will play all five matches on their home ground.



This iconic stadium has hosted many thrilling matches of the PSL in past seasons. One of the best moments was when South African star batter Rile Rossouw played for Multan Sultans and smashed the fastest 100 in just 43 balls during the 5th edition of the PSL against Quetta Gladiators.

Full Schedule

The opening match of PSL is scheduled to start on February 17th, featuring the defending champions, Lahore Qalandars, and the former two-time champions, Islamabad United, in Lahore.

The most exciting clash of PSL between Lahore Qalandars and Karachi Kings is scheduled for 24 February and 9 March. The game on 24 February will be held at Gaddafi Stadium, and the match on 9 March will take place at National Bank Stadium.

Date	Match	Teams	Venue
Saturday, February 17, 2024	Match 1	Lahore Qalandars Vs. Islamabad United	Lahore
Sunday, February 18, 2024	Match 2	Quetta Gladiators Vs. Peshawar Zalmi	Lahore
Sunday, February 18, 2024	Match 3	Multan Sultans Vs. Karachi Kings	Multan
Monday, February 19, 2024	Match 4	Lahore Qalandars Vs. Quetta Gladiators	Lahore
Tuesday, February 20, 2024	Match 5	Multan Sultans Vs. Islamabad United	Multan
Wednesday, February 21, 2024	Match 6	Peshawar Zalmi Vs. Karachi Kings	Lahore
Wednesday, February 21, 2024	Match 7	Multan Sultans Vs. Lahore Qalandars	Multan
Thursday, February 22, 2024	Match 8	Quetta Gladiators Vs. Islamabad United	Lahore
Friday, February 23, 2024	Match 9	Multan Sultans Vs. Peshawar Zalmi	Multan
Saturday, February 24, 2024	Match 10	Lahore Qalandars Vs. Karachi Kings	Lahore
Sunday, February 25, 2024	Match 11	Multan Sultans Vs. Quetta Gladiators	Multan
Sunday, February 25, 2024	Match 12	Lahore Qalandars Vs. Peshawar Zalmi	Lahore
Monday, February 26, 2024	Match 13	Peshawar Zalmi Vs. Islamabad United	Lahore
Tuesday, February 27, 2024	Match 14	Lahore Qalandars Vs. Multan Sultans	Lahore
Wednesday, February 28, 2024	Match 15	Karachi Kings Vs. Islamabad United	Karachi
Thursday, February 29, 2024	Match 16	Karachi Kings Vs. Quetta Gladiators	Karachi
Saturday, March 02, 2024	Match 17	Peshawar Zalmi Vs. Lahore Qalandars	Rawalpindi

Date	Match	Teams	Venue
Saturday, March 02, 2024	Match 18	Islamabad United Vs. Quetta Gladiators	Rawalpindi
Sunday, March 03, 2024	Match 19	Karachi Kings Vs. Multan Sultans	Karachi
Monday, March 04, 2024	Match 20	Islamabad United Vs. Peshawar Zalmi	Rawalpindi
Tuesday, March 05, 2024	Match 21	Peshawar Zalmi Vs. Multan Sultans	Rawalpindi
Wednesday, March 06, 2024	Match 22	Quetta Gladiators Vs. Karachi Kings	Rawalpindi
Wednesday, March 06, 2024	Match 23	Islamabad United Vs. Lahore Qalandars	Rawalpindi
Thursday, March 07, 2024	Match 24	Islamabad United Vs. Karachi Kings	Rawalpindi
Friday, March 08, 2024	Match 25	Peshawar Zalmi Vs. Quetta Gladiators	Rawalpindi
Saturday, March 09, 2024	Match 26	Karachi Kings Vs. Lahore Qalandars	Karachi
Sunday, March 10, 2024	Match 27	Islamabad United Vs. Multan Sultans	Rawalpindi
Sunday, March 10, 2024	Match 28	Quetta Gladiators Vs. Lahore Qalandars	Karachi
Monday, March 11, 2024	Match 29	Karachi Kings Vs. Peshawar Zalmi	Karachi
Tuesday, March 12, 2024	Match 30	Quetta Gladiators Vs. Multan Sultans	Karachi
Thursday, March 14, 2024	Qualifier	Team 1 v Team 2	Karachi
Friday, March 15, 2024	Eliminator 1	Team 3 v Team 4	Karachi
Saturday, March 16, 2024	Eliminator 2	Eliminator Winner v Qualifier Runner-up	Karachi
Monday, March 18, 2024	Match 34	Final	Karachi

Full Squad of all Six Franchises

1. Lahore Qalandars

Lahore Qalandars, who have won two PSL titles in a row, are ready for PSL 9. Even though their top spinner Rashid Khan won't

play the whole season due to injury, they've built a strong team for the upcoming season.

Here's Lahore Qalandars' complete squad:

layer Name	Category
Shaheen Afridi	Platinum
Fakhar Zaman	Platinum
Rassie van der Dussen	Platinum
Haris Rauf (BA)	Diamond
David Wiese	Diamond
Sahibzada Farhan	Diamond
Sikandar Raza	Gold
Abdullah Shafique	Gold
Zaman Khan	Gold
Mirza Tahir Baig (demotion)	Silver
Dan Lawrence	Silver (partial)
Syed Faridoun Mehmood	Emerging
Jahandad Khan	Emerging
Shai Hope	Supplementary 1
Kamran Ghulam	Supplementary 2
Bhanuka Rajapaksa	Supplementary 3
Tayyab Abbas	Supplementary 4

2. Islamabad United

Islamabad United has a great team led by their captain, Shadab Khan. They've added some awesome new players like Naseem Shah, who bowls fast, Jordan Cox, a skilled English batsman and wicket-keeper, and Imad Wasim, who joined the squad through a trade. With these additions, Islamabad United's team is strong and well-rounded.

Player Name	Category
Shadab Khan	Platinum
Naseem Shah	Platinum
Jordan Cox	Platinum
Imad Wasim (Mentor)	Diamond
Azam Khan	Diamond

Player Name	Category
Tymal Mills	Diamond
Alex Hales	Gold
Faheem Ashraf	Gold
Colin Munro	Gold
Rumman Raees	Silver
Shahab Khan	Silver
Matthew Forde	Silver
Salman Ali Agha	Silver
Qasim Akram	Silver
Hunain Shah	Emerging
Ubaid Shah	Emerging
Shamyl Hussain	Supplementary 1
Obed McCoy	Supplementary 2
Haider Ali	Supplementary 3
Muhammad Waseem	Supplementary 4

3. Quetta Gladiators

Quetta Gladiators have built a strong team for PSL 9 by combining international stars. They have got Wanindu Hasaranga, a talented spinner from Sri Lanka, in the top Diamond Category. In the Platinum Category, they've secured Rilee Rossouw, a powerful batter from South Africa, along with Sherfane Rutherford, known for his explosive batting, and Mohammad Amir, a seasoned player.

Player Name	Category
Rilee Rossouw	Platinum
Sherfane Rutherford	Platinum
Mohammad Amir	Platinum
Jason Roy	Diamond
Wanindu Hasaranga	Diamond (partial)
Mohammad Wasim Jr.	Diamond
Mohammad Hasnain	Gold
Abrar Ahmed	Gold

Player Name	Category
Sarfraz Ahmed (BA)	Gold
Will Smeed	Silver
Usman Qadir	Silver
Sajjad Ali Jnr	Silver
Saud Shakeel	Silver
Umair bin Yousuf	Silver
Khawaja Nafay	Emerging
Adil Naz	Emerging
Akeal Hussain	Supplementary 1
Sohail Khan	Supplementary 2
Laurie Evans	Supplementary 3
Bismillah Khan	Supplementary 4 (partial)

4. Multan Sultans

The Multan Sultans, led by Captain Mohammad Rizwan and supported by all-rounders Iftikhar Ahmed and David Willey, aim to win the PSL 9 title after being runners-up in the last two seasons, boasting a balanced team in the upcoming season.

Player Name	Category
Mohammad Rizwan	Platinum
Iftikhar Ahmed	Platinum
David Willey	Platinum
Khushdil Shah	Diamond
Usama Mir	Diamond
Dawid Malan	Diamond
Abbas Afridi	Gold
Reeza Hendricks	Gold
Reece Topley	Gold
Ihsanullah (BA)	Silver
Usman Khan	Silver
Tayyab Tahir	Silver

Player Name	Category
Shahnawaz Dahani	Silver
Mohammad Ali	Silver
Faisal Akram	Emerging
Yasir Khan	Emerging
Chris Jordan	Supplementary 1
Aftab Ibrahim	Supplementary 2
Johnson Charles	Supplementary 3
Mohammad Shahzad	Supplementary 4

5. Peshawar Zalmi

Under Babar Azam's leadership, Peshawar Zalmi has built a strong team for the next Pakistan Super League season. Babar, a skilled captain, leads the team with Rovman Powell from the West Indies. The team includes young opener Saim Ayub, the energetic Tom Kohler-Cadmore, and powerful hitter Asif Ali, creating a blend of new talent and seasoned players.

Player Name	Category
Babar Azam	Platinum
Rovman Powell	Platinum
Gus Atkinson/Shamar Joseph	Platinum (Partial)
Saim Ayub	Diamond
Tom Kohler-Cadmore	Diamond
Asif Ali	Diamond
Mohammad Haris (BA)	Gold
Aamer Jamal	Gold
Naveen-ul-Haq	Gold (Partial)
Arshad Iqbal/Khurram Shehzad	Silver (Partial)
Daniel Mousley	Silver
Umair Afridi	Silver
Arif Yaqoob	Silver
Salman Irshad (Retained using Right-to-Match card)	Silver
Haseebullah Khan	Emerging

Player Name	Category
Mohammad Zeeshan	Emerging
Waqar Salmakheil	Supplementary 1
Mehran Mumtaz	Supplementary 2
Luke Wood	Supplementary 3
Sufyan Muqem	Supplementary 4

6. Karachi Kings

Under the new leadership of Shan Masood, Karachi Kings have refreshed their team for PSL 9, blending seasoned players with new talent for a fresh start. Key players include the powerful West Indian batsman Kieron Pollard, Australian all-rounder Daniel Sams, and the adaptable Mohammad Nawaz.

Player Name	Category
Kieron Pollard	Platinum (Partial)
Daniel Sams	Platinum
Mohammad Nawaz	Platinum
James Vince	Diamond
Hasan Ali	Diamond
Tim Siefert	Diamond
Shan Masood (BA)	Gold
Shoaib Malik (Mentor)	Gold
Tabraiz Shamsi	Gold
Mir Hamza (demotion)	Silver
Mohammad Akhlaq	Silver
Arafat Minhas	Silver
Anwar Ali	Silver
Mohammad Amir Khan	Silver
Irfan Khan Niazi	Emerging
Sirajuddin	Emerging
Saad Baig	Supplementary 1
Jamie Overton	Supplementary 2
Lues Du Plooy	Supplementary 3
Mohammad Rohid	Supplementary 4

Live Streaming

'Tamasha', Pakistan's premier homegrown OTT video streaming and entertainment platform, is set to offer HD live streaming of PSL 9 matches to cricket fans across the nation. Once again, fans can anticipate the excitement of every game in stunning high definition on the Tamasha mobile app. Tapmad is another live-streaming platform where fans can enjoy live matches of PSL 9.

On the other side, ProSports will also provide full coverage of all matches of PSL 9 with the latest updates on matches and scores. Fans can stay in touch through the website.

Ticket Prices

Fans can pre-book their tickets online through TCS, starting from 1700 rupees. Physical tickets are a must for all PSL 9 matches; e-tickets won't get you in. You can buy physical tickets at TCS express centers from February 12, 2024. If you book online, you can pick them up at TCS centers or get them delivered to your home.

Here are the ticket prices: VIP – 6,000 rupees, Premium – 3,000 rupees, First Class – 2,000 rupees, and General – 1,000 rupees.

For the final match on March 18 at the National Bank Stadium in Karachi, prices are: VIP – 8,000 rupees, Premium – 4,000 rupees, First Class – 2,500 rupees, and General – 1,000 rupees.

For the qualifier, prices are VIP – 5,000 rupees, Premium – 2,500 rupees, First Class – 1500 rupees, and General – 750 rupees. And for the two eliminators, prices are VIP – 5,000 rupees, Premium – 3,000 rupees, First Class – 1500 rupees, and General – 750 rupees.

Fans will finally get to see the much-awaited Season 9 of PSL kick-off. The tournament is expected to begin with an opening ceremony on February 17th, followed by the start of the campaign on the same day.

Courtesy propakistani.pk



Six Nations 2024: Is Ireland's James Lowe the best winger in the tournament?



By Andy Gray

Which BBC Sport pundit said James Lowe was "too heavy, too big and too slow"?

It's safe to say that former England winger Chris Ashton, who made the comments after England beat Ireland in 2020 - and has since apologised - has changed his opinion now.

"I did it for this effect," Ashton said with a smile when asked about his comments on Six Nations Rugby Special. "He's got a lot to thank me for, actually."

With sights firmly set on back-to-back Grand Slams, Lowe was player of the match as the Ireland juggernaut steamrolled Italy in Dublin.

He contributed the fifth of Ireland's six tries with a superb solo score as he collected a pass outside the 22 and showed tremendous power and poise to drag three Italian shirts over the line with him as he touched down.

At the other end, the 31-year-old's left boot, which he admits "is a bit of a ticket" in modern rugby, helped Ireland gain useful territory and only three players have kicked more after two rounds of fixtures.

Lowe has also made the most line breaks and made the most ground, with 157m gained so far, and his defensive decision-making has been spot-on in the opening two rounds.

"He's just a powerful winger with that all-round game," Ashton added.

"I think with his skills, there is no winger right now in the Six Nations who has that. There's finishing, the French wingers [Damian] Penaud and [Louis] Bielle-Biarrey will have something to say about that.

"But in terms of what he is doing for Ireland and the effect he has, whether that is exit, defensively or finishing, I don't think there is anyone better."

High praise indeed. So is Lowe the best all-round winger in the tournament? If not him, then who takes the crown?

Damian Penaud (France)

Age: 27 Caps: 49 Tries: 36

If this question was about the best finisher, then Damian Penaud may already have this one sewn up. His strike rate of 36 tries in 49 caps - including six at the World Cup - is absolutely frightening and he was a rare ray of light in France's opening-day defeat by the Irish.

The Bordeaux Begles man has had limited chances so far in this Six Nations but his time to shine will surely come.

Louis Bielle-Biarrey (France)

Age: 20 Caps: 10 Tries: Six

While we have known about Penaud's quality for a while, his partner-in-crime Louis Bielle-Biarrey has burst on to the scene.

The 20-year-old was described as "the young genius on the wing" after his stunning solo try against Scotland - which ultimately secured the win.

It might be too early in his career to properly judge his all-round game, but Bielle-Biarrey definitely has star quality.

Duhan van der Merwe (Scotland)

Age: 28 Caps: 36 Tries: 23

Fast, dynamic and freakishly strong, Duhan van der Merwe is one of the hardest players to stop in full flight. We all know about his try-scoring capabilities, such as his Twickenham stunner in 2023 and another solo effort against Wales on the opening weekend.

The 28-year-old's (just about legal) tackle on Gael Fickou denied the French centre a try-scoring opportunity on Saturday. When Van der Merwe plays well, so do Scotland.

Rio Dyer (Wales)

Age: 24 Caps: 16 Tries: Five

The wizard on the wing, Rio Dyer is a crucial part of Warren Gatland's Wales rebuild.

He's the only other player to make as many line breaks as Lowe in the championship so far, and he's doing it in a team struggling for confidence and form.

He also gets an extra mark for his chargedown on George Ford's 'conversion' attempt.



Elliot Daly (England)

Age: 31 Caps: 64 Tries: 18

While 18 tries from 64 Tests isn't exactly prolific, we're looking at the full skillset and that is where Elliot Daly shines. His versatility

means he can play wing, centre or even slot in at full-back.

He's industrious rather than spectacular, but that is no slight on the Saracens man's ability, and he was an unsung hero of England's three Six Nations titles since he made his debut in 2016.

With a thumping left boot, he's also a very handy option from the kicking tee.

The other contenders

Italy's Monty Ioane was impressive against England but barely had a sniff against Ireland, while Wales' Josh Adams has failed to hit the heights of previous campaigns.

Calvin Nash has had an assured start to his Six Nations career on the opposite wing to Lowe as he steps in for the injured Mack Hansen, but he probably lacks the X-factor of his Ireland team-mate, and Tommy Freeman has looked promising in the white of England.



The missing men

While Lowe has been making headlines, his Ireland team-mate Mack Hansen would be in with a shout if he had not been ruled out of the tournament through injury.

The absent Darcy Graham also falls into this category after some impressive performances for Scotland, while Wales' Louis Rees-Zammit has swapped rugby for American football.

Henry Arundell and Anthony Watson are unavailable for England, while Jonny May has hung up his international boots.

Courtesy BBC

How Torvill and Dean chose heart over head and changed a sport



By Mike Henson

Stepping off the early-morning train from West Germany, Christopher Dean and Jayne Torvill were unlikely-looking revolutionaries.

Dean, 25, wore a stiff shirt, cravat, argyle jumper and pinstripe team blazer. Next to him, Torvill, 26, sported a fur-trimmed coat, matching hat, silk scarf and a shy smile. Not on display, but somewhere back in Nottingham, were their recently-awarded MBEs.

In front of them, as they posed obligingly on the platform of Sarajevo station, stood a clutch of photographers snapping away.

Nine days hence lay a risky, risqué gamble: a shot at Olympic ice dance gold which depended on a routine that bent the rules and challenged convention - a free dance number that could burn up like chiffon to a spark.

Torvill and Dean could easily have played it safe.

Instead they played with fire.

"We felt strongly about what we were doing," says Dean, 40 years on. "It was only other people who felt it was a gamble."

"We always had to be one step ahead with where our ideas were creatively," adds Torvill. "We tried to tell a story - so it had a meaning."

But 1984 was a time when narratives competed to crush one another.

Cold War nerves were frayed thin with American and Soviet warheads bristling in silos, amid false alarms and dangerously realistic military exercises.

At home, there was also conflict.

A few weeks after Torvill and Dean's arrival in Sarajevo, the miners' strike - a year-long dispute that divided families, communities and their home county - began.

On the rink, there was no escape from politics either; a schism ran through the ice.

There were the traditionalists, who believed in respecting ice dancing's ballroom roots.

They prioritised a mix of decorum and control - a chilled accuracy, efficiency and propriety in the skaters' movements.

A new wave was breaking ground though - a looser, dramatic, romantic style was emerging, one that thrilled crowds, even if it put off old-school judges.

The two approaches were different. And in a subjectively-scored sport, where medals were decided by the numbers dished out by judges, being too different made you vulnerable.

Initially Torvill and Dean had leaned towards a conservative approach.

They were coming into the Olympics on the back of a hat-trick of world title wins. There was little to prove, and so much to risk.

This, as far as they knew, would be their final shot on the greatest stage, as they were bound for the professional circuit, barring them from future Olympics under the rules of the time.

A throw-back 1930s razzmatazz showtune

from the musical 42nd Street was planned. It would show off their skills, and satisfy both judges who preferred a classical routine and those who favoured the more colourful.

But would it satisfy Torvill and Dean themselves?

Over a west London dinner party, after rifling through cassette tapes in search of a tune and a theme, they decided ultimately it wouldn't.

An altogether more daring crescendo to their Olympic careers was called for.

In the basement of their hosts' flat, pleated silk outfits were dip-dyed purple. An arranger was recruited to cut 15 minutes of music by two-thirds, while preserving its shimmering heart. And Torvill and Dean retreated to Oberstdorf in the Bavarian Alps to work on something new away from prying eyes.

"These days, with camera phones and social media, it is very hard to keep things under wraps, but nobody really knew what we were doing," says Dean. "We believed in what we were doing, as opposed to listening to those saying that it wasn't right for Olympic year, that we should do something safer."

"We wanted to do something that we had never done and that had never been seen before," adds Torvill.

Certainly nothing like Bolero had been done before. Arguably nothing has matched it since.

Torvill and Dean's free-dance routine in Sarajevo on 14 February 1984 started with them kneeling on the ice facing each other.

They had no other option. Bolero, which builds from snake-charmer stealth to raging storm, couldn't quite be compressed into the allocated four minute 10 seconds allowed for a musical accompaniment.

But the pair spotted a loophole. The clock doesn't officially start until the first blade touches ice.

By kneeling, circling and swooping around each other for 18 excess seconds at the start, before standing and skating, their routine would still be legal.

Dean, during warm-up, would subtly rough up the ice in the required spot to avoid their knees, which gave far less traction than a sharpened blade, from sliding away under them.

Their routine ended with both back on the ice, lying prostrate, chests heaving.

In the minutes in between, they had transported the Sarajevo crowd, and a UK television audience of 23 million to new heights.

Flowers rained down on the ice. A full house of perfect artistic impression marks lit up the scoreboard.



"Tonight we reached the pinnacle. I don't remember the performance at all. It just happened," Dean said at the time.

Any fears over their music, staging or steps had vaporised. An unnamed rival coach had a theory.

They told the New York Times that only Torvill and Dean's magic was powerful enough to close the sport's rifts.

"Perhaps," they said, "the judges have to accept Torvill and Dean because they are so darn good."

"But they don't want ice dancing to change radically, so they are ready to punish anyone else who tries to be different."

Everything had changed for Torvill and Dean themselves, though.

Princess Anne toasted them with champagne in the stands. Her mother - Queen

Elizabeth II - sent a signed telegram offering her congratulations on a performance that she "watched with great pleasure".

When they arrived back home, Torvill and Dean greeted fans from the back of an open-top truck, with a police escort. Later that year, Elton John would present them with the BBC Sports Personality of the Year award.

Wherever they went, there was a question they were asked again and again: whether such romance on the ice could stop when they stepped off it? Whether, having suspended their disbelief, their fans really

had to re-engage with a more mundane reality?

At one press conference, a journalist asked if they were to marry.

"Well, not this week," smiled Dean.

Torvill, reacting to the observation that the pair seemed more closely attached than other pairs, simply replied with a look across at her partner and an enigmatic "yes".

"We didn't consciously try and maintain an aura about it, but we didn't get into the conversation about it either," says Dean reflecting back on the speculation.

"We would keep it at arm's length, so I imagine people would speculate about it. People buy into what you are doing on the ice."

"If we are portraying two people in love and

people believe that, then we are doing our job right," adds Torvill.

To make that romance touch millions is one thing. To make the illusion last over a decade is another.

By 1994, rules had changed.

A relaxation of regulations meant Torvill and Dean, aged 36 and 35 respectively now, were free to return to attempt an extraordinary repeat.

Circumstances had changed too, however.



Torvill and Dean were now married - but, to the disappointment of many fans, to different people. They were also no longer the sport's golden couple, primed to take medals of a matching colour.

"I think some people felt we were coming back for the glory," says Dean.

"But we were really coming back to test ourselves for the challenge of it. It was a measure for us.

"Obviously there were countries and skaters who had been competing, poised for a medal, climbing up that tree who would feel put out."

The backstory was different. The context had changed. The tactics had to switch too.

After a raft of poor imitations in the wake of Torvill and Dean's Bolero routine, the skating authorities had become stricter about music choices and banned pairs from starting routines kneeling or lying on the ice.

"Because we had this reputation of bending the rules, so to speak, and we were coming

back after 10 years as professionals, we wanted to really conform and not arrive in Lillehammer saying 'we can do this and get away with it'," adds Torvill.

They didn't dare try to replicate the audacity and authenticity of Bolero. Instead they opted for a routine to Let's Face the Music and Dance.

It was a gleeful, glitzy, intricate finale to their programme, full of showbiz sparkle and polish. It was different to Bolero - less raw, more cute - but, as the couple folded

into each other's arms and the music gave way to cheers, it seemed it may well deliver the same result.

Flowers fell, the audience stood, the dream was alive, the fairytale went on.

Until it didn't. The technical merit marks arrived to shrieks of disgust from the crowd. Where, for Bolero, they had collected nine perfect sixes for artistic impression, they managed just one in Lillehammer.

The lead the British pair held going into the final round had been whipped from under them. Torvill, arms still cradling a clutch of bouquets, trudged backstage crestfallen. They would end with only bronze.

"We were a little surprised with the marks," said Dean at the time, leaving a pause before correcting himself.

"A lot surprised."

The papers back home were less restrained.

"Gold robbery" read one headline. The judges were accused of being either "biased" or "barmy" in one tabloid. A

broadsheet said the credibility of ice dancing as a sport had been "destroyed", external

The legality of a final lift was ultimately deemed the weak point in their routine.

With the benefit of another 30 years, Dean is more philosophical.

"We were taking advice," he says of the selection of their final free dance number. "It wasn't bad advice, but I don't know it was the right advice.

"As performers and artists, the passion and going with your heart is a really important thing."

Those following Torvill and Dean into the sport now are not short of direction.

The free dance comes with a weighty list of content that must be included in every performance. Each individual element is weighed, measured and assessed against a gold standard. Risk is mitigated. Surprises are minimised.

The standardisation leaves less room for the confusion and controversy of 1994, but also less room for something as compellingly original as 1984.

"You know you are getting this type of lift, that they have to do that spin and that footwork," explains Dean of the modern-day ice dance scene.

"It is about both the quantity and quality you put into it - but a lot of it is quantity.

"The sport has moved forward in its athleticism, the standard of the skating is amazing, but it does mean there is a bit of a sameness."

Torvill and Dean's own last dance is almost here. Tickets have gone on sale for a 28-date farewell tour, which will culminate in Glasgow on 11 May 2025.

It will be the end of their 50-year skating partnership and Bolero, and a chance to suspend disbelief once again will surely be the centrepiece.

Squeezed out of sport it may have been, but their romance is still squeezing spectators into seats.

Courtesy BBC

Katy Perry exits 'American Idol' after seven seasons to focus on music

Katy Perry says farewell to 'American Idol' seeking her own 'pulse'



By Nola Miller

After gracing the American Idol stage for seven seasons, judge and pop icon Katy Perry has announced her departure from the popular singing competition show.

The news, shared through social media and later confirmed by ABC, marks the end of Perry's tenure as a mentor and guide to aspiring singers.

When Perry made an appearance on Monday night's episode of Jimmy Kimmel Live!, host Jimmy Kimmel asked her directly how long she planned to stay on Idol. Perry has been a judge on the show with Luke Bryan and Lionel Richie since ABC relaunched it in 2018.

"Well, you know, this fall, this September, I'm going to be doing this huge music festival in Brazil called Rock in Rio. It's really exciting. It's a big deal for people all over the world, especially my Brazilian fans," Perry said in response to Kimmel's question, before adding, "So I think this will probably be my last season for Idol."

Perry, who has served as a judge on the popular show for seven seasons, said, "I love Idol so much. It's connected me with the heart of America. But I need to feel that pulse of my own beat," Perry continued, obliquely implying that she would be releasing new songs soon in addition to possibly going on a global tour.

When Kimmel questioned Perry about her choice to leave the show, she said, "Well, they'll find out tonight!" to the question from her fellow Idol judges.

Perry later announced on Instagram that the upcoming season of Idol will be her final one. She captioned "Let's play two truths and a lie: 1. I beat @usher at Monopoly Deal. 2. I'm headlining Rock in Rio this September. 3. This is my last season on @americanidol."

Perry's exit comes amidst rumours of potential changes to the show's format, further fueling speculation about the reasons behind her departure.

However, sources close to the singer maintain that her decision is driven by a desire to focus on her music career, which has seen a recent lull compared to her earlier pop dominance.

ABC has yet to announce a replacement for Perry, but several names are already swirling in the rumour mill. With the show's 21st season approaching, speculation is high about who will join returning judges Lionel Richie and Luke Bryan.

Courtesy The News



الخدمت فاؤنڈیشن پاکستان
ALKHIDMAT FOUNDATION PAKISTAN

PALESTINE

EMERGENCY APPEAL

SEND AID TO GAZA &
SAVE LIVES TODAY



Medical Aid



Shelter



Food Packs

Donate Now

alkhidmat.org/donate

MEEZAN BANK: 0214-0100861151

IBAN: PK35MEZN0002140100861151 Swift code: MEZNPCCA

 **0800 44 448**