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12th General Elections

Political manifestos are empty promises devoid of a realistic execution strategy

Revival of Economy

New government will have to go for another IMF program for three years

Genocide of Palestinians

Observers estimated that more than 26,000 have been killed in the process

Pakistan to Vote on 8th February



Politics

Decoding The Vision: Manifestos from Pakistan's Leading Political Parties for the 2024 Elections by Nimra Atiq – Page 04

Election manifesto PML-N's cautious optimism on economy by Shahbaz Rana – Page 07



A New Era in Democracy: Unpacking the Transformative Changes of the February 8th Elections in Pakistan by Kanwal Munir – Page 09

Pakistan's 2024 Elections: A Comprehensive Overview of Political Campaigns and Dynamics by Daniyal Wali – Page 11

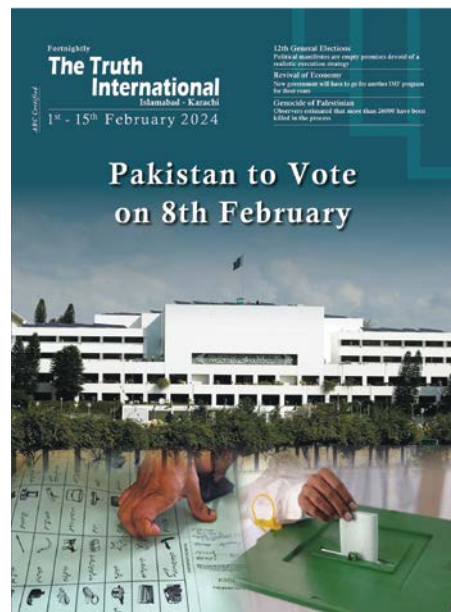
The Misfortune of Religious Parties by Haniya Ali – Page 14

'Trial in haste': Legal experts, political analysts react to Toshakhana verdict - TTI Report – Page 16



Legal experts cite: Article 10A concerns over cipher verdict by Zebunnisa Burki – Page 17

Poor reality, poor image by Husain Haqqani – Page 19



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Economy

New Govt to face an uphill task of reviving the battered economy and shattered trust of people by Javed Mahmood – Page 21



IMF lowers Pakistan's growth forecast to 2pc by Khaleeq Kiani – Page 23

What should the tax policy be in 2024? By Dr Abid Qaiyum Suleri – Page 24

How to achieve economic prosperity by Abdul Sattar – Page 26



A long and graceful life by Ashraf Jehangir Qazi – Page 28

Foreign Affairs

Genocide unabated by Naqi Akbar – Page 29

Egypt-Israel ties in jeopardy over intensifying Gaza border dispute by Claire Parker – Page 34

Iran's 'shadowy' influence in Balochistan and precarious balancing act for Pakistan by Jan Achakzai – Page 36



Climate Change

Scientists say worse to come as Himalayan snow ceases by Nidhi Jamwal – Page 37

Snowless winters deprive Northern Pakistan of an Economic Lifeline by Aamir Latif/Anadolu Agency – Page 39



River Kabul; A Controversy in The Offing by Zahiruddin – Page 41

Technology

Alon Musk sees \$56bn Tesla pay deal cancelled in court by Mariko Oi – Page 43

The F-16 at 50: Why it's still in demand by Stephen Dowling – Page 44

'First of all you must be patient, then you need spatial memory': The man behind the puzzle that 99% can't solve by Myles Burke – Page 48

Health

Mental health comes first by Eman Hassan Jugg – Page 50



Sports

Babar Azam improves significantly in ICC Test rankings – Page 52

Entertainment

The highly anticipated trailer of "Nayab" movie creates a stir in showbiz circles by Muttahir A. Khan – Page 53

Decoding The Vision: Manifestos from Pakistan's Leading Political Parties for the 2024 Elections



By Nimra Atiq

As Pakistan gears up for the highly anticipated general elections in 2024, the major political parties have unveiled their manifestos and outlined their vision and promises for the nation. These manifestos serve as a roadmap for the parties' electoral campaigns and provide voters with insights into their proposed policies and plans for the country's future.

Political party manifestos in Pakistan vary in nature and content. Some manifestos are composed well and lay forth a party's vision, policy objectives, and governance goals. However, these manifestos rarely contain comprehensive ideas outlining how the party intends to handle these concerns if elected. This is why political manifestos are frequently accused of being empty promises devoid of a realistic execution strategy. Almost all political party manifestos in Pakistan lack definition, feasibility, and practicality, raising concerns about the party's intentions and capacity to deliver on its commitments.

Whether it is the Pakistan People's Party (PPP), which formed a central government in 2008, the Pakistan Muslim League Nawaz (PML-N), which formed the federal government

in 2013, or the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf, which came to power in 2018, all three made various promises in their respective manifestos before being elected, and all three failed to keep those promises.

PPP's 2024 Election Manifesto: A 10-Point Plan for Change

The Pakistan People's Party (PPP) has unveiled its much-anticipated 10-point manifesto for the upcoming 2024 general elections. The manifesto, presented by Chairman Bilawal Bhutto Zardari, outlines a comprehensive set of policy proposals aimed at fostering inclusive growth, reducing inequality, and promoting overall prosperity. The party's priorities, if implemented, are expected to address the country's challenges, including inflation, unemployment, and poverty.

PPP's 10 PLEDGES

Doubling Salaries for Wage Earners: The PPP's top priority is to double the salaries of the citizens over the next five years. The salaried class in Pakistan has long been saddled with taxes on its gross earnings. Increase the minimum

wage in real terms by 8% per year until it reaches a living wage.

Also, reforms and investments in agriculture and small businesses will lead to increased income and employment for the poorest.

Nationwide Free Healthcare System: The PPP plans to establish a nationwide free healthcare system. They aim to provide free treatment for chronic diseases (heart, liver, and kidney) through the public sector.

Free Electricity: The party aims to provide free electricity for up to 300, through solar generation, and this will be funded with Carbon credit.

Education for All: Ensuring access to education for every child is a fundamental goal. PPP will implement Article 25-A of the Constitution in letter and spirit and guarantee education for all girls and boys of school-going age.

Housing for the Underprivileged: Building at least three million homes for the impoverished and those affected by floods.

Benazir Income Support Program: The PPP intends to enhance the Benazir



Income Support Program for poverty alleviation.

Support for Farmers (KHUSHHAAL KISAA): The party plans to introduce a card for farmers, similar to the Benazir Income Support Program.

Maazdoor Ko Mehnat Ka Sila: The PPP aims to make use of the Benazir Mazdoor Card to provide laborers with more support.

Financial Assistance for Youth: The party plans to provide financial assistance to the youth through a 'Youth Card.'

Hunger Eradication Program: The PPP intends to initiate the 'Bhook Mitao Program' to address hunger and food insecurity.

A Look Back: PPP's 2018 Manifesto

In the 2018 general elections, the PPP presented a manifesto that included policies on anti-corruption, economics, education, energy, health, local government, youth, digital, policy for persons with disabilities, and textiles.

The 2024 manifesto places a stronger emphasis on welfare measures, poverty alleviation, healthcare, and education, while the 2018 manifesto prioritized economic restructuring, trade policies, and energy sector reforms.

Although the election manifesto's goals and promises are similar to those of the 2008 and 2013 elections, it is still unclear if the PPP will be able to successfully turn these audacious pledges into concrete economic realities this time around given that Pakistan's economy is still dependent on both bilateral and multilateral donors.

PML-N's 2024 Election Manifesto: Pakistan Ko Nawaz Do

To find a middle ground between the high expectations of the general population and the harsh realities of the nation's severe financial circumstances, the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz came up with a cautiously optimistic economic platform that sets generally attainable targets without

jeopardizing the stability of the economy.

The manifesto addresses every facet of Pakistan, including commerce, the economy, foreign policy, security, and youth IT sector projects in addition to giving attention to the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC).

The manifesto includes the following key points:

Foreign Policy Emphasis:

The manifesto emphasizes strengthening ties with China, the United Kingdom, and other countries, as well as promoting regional peace and security.



It promises to strengthen relations with the Muslim Ummah, particularly the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries, Iran, Turkey, and the Central Asian Republics.

Economic Goals:

PML-N has set ambitious targets for economic growth, job creation, and combating climate change. It aims to secure a water future, add life to the economy, and cater to overseas Pakistanis by rebuilding Pakistan together.

Social Reforms:

The manifesto includes plans for constitutional, legal, judicial, and administrative reforms, as well as a family planning

program, education reforms, and digital development.

Education:

Increase in budget for higher education by 0.5 percent. They target to increase access to higher education from 13% to 30% and make five major cities of the country IT cities.

Along with "250 stadiums and academies" and "youth skills development," the manifesto calls for the creation of "Pakistan's first sports university" and the start of a scholarship endowment fund.

The PML-N manifesto for the 2024 general elections promises to bring down inflation to 4-6%. The PML-N has set an ambitious

target of achieving a per capita income of \$2,000 by the end of 2029.

A Look Back: PML-N's 2018 Manifesto:

PML-N's 2018 and 2024 election manifestos share some common themes such as foreign policy priorities and social development, the 2024 manifesto introduces new focus areas such as climate change, a message of peace to India, and specific economic targets and policies.

The PML-N's election manifesto reflects its policy priorities and vision for the future, addressing a range of domestic and international issues.



PTI's 2024 Election Manifesto: Shandaar Pakistan, Shandaar Mustaqbil aur Kharaab Maazi sey chutkara

Imran Khan, the former prime minister, promised a "new social order" in the politically and economically unstable South Asian nation in the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) party manifesto.

On February 8, Pakistan, a nation of over 241 million people, will hold general elections. Approximately 17,800 candidates are vying for 266 seats in the General Assembly and 593 seats in provincial assemblies. There will be 128.5 million voters participating in the elections and using their right to vote.

The manifesto, titled "Shandaar Pakistan, Shandaar Mustaqbil," was presented by PTI leader Gohar Khan in Islamabad. The party's priorities, if implemented, are expected to bring constitutional and social reforms, promote economic growth, and improve the well-being of the citizens.

Key Points of the Manifesto

Constitutional and Social Reforms: The PTI's manifesto promises constitutional and social reforms, including the establishment of a truth and reconciliation commission, reforming the Code of Criminal Procedure, and reducing the tenure of the National Assembly from five years to four years.

Economic Growth: The party's manifesto pledges to reform the tax scheme, increase the tax net, and promote solar energy projects. It also vows to provide a subsidy specifically for farmers and launch an aggressive energy exploration program for the energy-starved nation.

Social Welfare: The PTI aims to introduce universal health care, bring educational reforms, and provide social security for all people.

Foreign Policy: The party's foreign policy priorities include promoting peace and stability in the region, strengthening diplomatic relations, and safeguarding national interests.

Looking back at PTI's 2018 Manifesto:

The PTI's 2018 manifesto, titled "The Road to Naya Pakistan," emphasized the vision of a just and equitable society. The 2024 manifesto appears to build upon the 2018 manifesto, with a continued emphasis on governance, social welfare, and foreign relations. However, the 2024 manifesto introduces new priorities, such as the establishment of a truth and reconciliation commission and a focus on a "new social order." This suggests an evolution in the party's policy focus, possibly in response to the changing needs and challenges facing Pakistan.

PTI's 2024 manifesto seems to reflect an updated set of priorities and a continued commitment to the party's vision of a reformed and prosperous Pakistan.

Istehkam-e-Pakistan Party (IPP) Elections 2024 Manifesto:

With the goal of guiding the nation out of the current economic crisis, the recently established Istehkam-e-Pakistan Party (IPP) made grandiose promises to the average citizen in its manifesto. The party's manifesto, titled "Empowering the People," focuses on strengthening institutions, reviving the country's economic recovery, and implementing an independent foreign policy.

Key Features of the IPP's manifesto:

Empowering the People:

The IPP's manifesto emphasizes empowering the people as central to the party's vision. The party aims to strengthen institutions, revive the country's economic recovery, and implement an independent foreign policy. The IPP wants to alleviate poverty in Pakistan by elevating the middle class and lower classes, with a focus on women's empowerment and healthcare.

Defending Minority Rights:

The manifesto also emphasizes the significance of defending minority rights, advancing local tourism and sports, and preserving the assets and rights of Pakistanis living abroad.

Minimum Monthly Wage and Free Electricity:

The IPP has promised a minimum monthly wage of Rs. 50,000 for laborers with compulsory insurance, and free electricity up to 300 units for all citizens.

Islamic Society:

The manifesto has also been given a religious flavor since it promises to construct Islamic society and uphold the holiness of Hazrat Mohammad (PBUH) at all costs.

The IPP manifesto promises to provide petrol to motorcyclists at half price and air-conditioned transport for women and students free of cost. The party also promises to give interest-free loans and jobs to youth and women and introduce reforms in police, judiciary, and tax departments.

Although the IPP manifesto may sound appealing and exciting to voters, fulfilling its promises could be challenging given the current economic conditions, which are likely to persist for some time. The IPP has recognized that people are seeking solutions to their problems, and has taken advantage of this expectation by making promises that appear to address their concerns.

Less than 150 political parties registered for the election, but only a few have published comprehensive manifestos. The apparent disinterest of Pakistani political parties in releasing their manifestos raises concerns about the value they place on these documents. It suggests that some political groups see manifestos as mere obligations, rather than influential instruments that can secure election victories and persuade voters to support them.

Technical flaws that have a significant impact on the nation's economic growth include the superficiality of Pakistani political parties' manifestos, especially the part that focuses on the economy. A concerning lack of technical rigor is indicated by the lack of measurable targets, flimsy policy ideas, and disregard for trade and investment strategies, human capital, and innovation, in addition to structural reforms. To effectively address Pakistan's complex policy issues and promote sustainable economic growth, a more evidence-based, quantitative, and technically sophisticated approach is required.



Election manifesto

PML-N's cautious optimism on economy

Aims to strike balance between high hopes of people and harsh ground realities



By Shahbaz Rana

The Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz has unveiled a cautiously optimistic economic manifesto in a bid to strike a balance between high hopes of the people and harsh ground realities with regard to the country's dire financial straits, setting mostly achievable goals without unravelling the economic stability.

Some of the goals are largely in line with the five-year projections given by the International Monetary Fund in its staff report released this month. But the manifesto is silent on the questions of the new IMF bailout package and the treatment of a mounting public debt.

The budget and the current account deficit goals suggest that the PML-N, if voted to power, might be thinking of going into an IMF programme.

The party also reneged on its promise to give free electricity to those consumers who are consuming 200 units monthly – a back-paddling that suggests sanity started to prevail in the core leadership's thinking finally.

The PML-N has not aimed at making Pakistan an Asian Tiger and seems content with adopting a conservative approach towards gradual uptick in income levels. It has announced per capita income at \$2,000 by 2029, showing a gradual increase in this direction.

Last year, India's per capita income was \$2,850 while Bangladesh had also attained \$2,657 per person income.

The party, which is among the frontrunners for the Feb 8 general elections, promised to bring inflation down to a single digit by fiscal year 2025 with the aim to further slowdown the pace in the affordable range of 4% to 6% by 2029. It should be noted that inflation was 29.7% in December.

The PML-N has promised to create a 'new ministry of economy by merging four divisions – commerce, industries, Board of Investment and Pakistan Customs.' By merging Pakistan Customs with the ministry of economy means that the customs would no longer be part of the Federal Board of Revenue.

Most importantly, the party has promised that tax policy to be announced in the PML-N government's first budget would not be altered for the next five years – a promise if implemented can address one of the root causes of low foreign investment in the country.

Moreover, the PML-N also promised to clear Rs5.725 trillion circular debt in the power and gas sectors.

In a policy shift, the party vows that gas tariff would be fixed by taking into account the prices of local and imported gas.

The PML-N promised to reduce poverty from nearly 40% to less than 25% in five years, meaning lifting nearly 40 million people out of the poverty net.

It plans to achieve the goal through an annual GDP growth of 6% and a single-digit inflation rate.

The PML-N has promised that it would increase economic growth rate by 1% every year during its first three years in power – eyeing 4% GDP growth in its first year, 5%



in the second, 6% in the third year and then attaining this level for the next two years.

However, the IMF forecasts 5% economic growth rate in the third year.

A gradual increase in the economic growth rate suggests that the PML-N would not risk an external sector crisis to achieve a sudden spurt in growth.

The agriculture sector growth of 5% will be achieved by the end of 2029 based on climate-resilient cropping techniques and the government's facilitation to farmers, according to the manifesto.

The industrial sector growth of more than 7% is targeted.

Fiscal deficit

The PML-N has also not set aggressive targets to increase Pakistan's extremely low tax-to-GDP ratio.

It has promised to increase the ratio from 10.4% to 13.5% by the end of 2029 — a meagre 0.7% annual increase.

This may create problems for achieving another manifesto goal of lowering the budget deficit to 3.5% of GDP by the fourth year of its government.

The IMF has projected the budget deficit at 4.7% of the GDP in the fourth year of the next government.

The manifesto states that frugal spending along with the privatisation of loss-making state-owned enterprises (SOEs) will help contain the fiscal deficit.

It added that a sharp decline in inflation will cut the cost of debt servicing due to consequential expected reduction in the SBP's policy rate.

The party has promised to maintain a low current account deficit of 1.5% of the GDP for the next five years driven by conducive monetary and fiscal policies, and industry and trade facilitation.

The IMF has also projected 1.5% of the GDP current account deficit for the next five years.

A buoyant economy with a higher GDP growth will help absorb new entrants into the workforce creating over 10 million jobs in next five years, according to the manifesto.

The target is to reduce unemployment to below 5% by the end of year 2029, it added.

The PML-N has also announced linking the annual increase in salaries with the inflation rate — a promise if fulfilled, would end uncertainty on this front.

The party has promised a gradual increase in the investment-to-GDP ratio from 15% to 18% in five years, suggesting that it would not opt for large and unsustainable public sector development programmes.

It has also vowed to raise private sector investment from 10% to over 12% of the GDP.

The national savings rate is projected to increase to 17% of the GDP by the end of 2029.

Power sector

The PML-N has promised to continue subsidies for farmers and the economically disadvantaged people in the power sector — a promise that is not in line with the IMF requirements and a decision made by the Special Investment Facilitation Council.

It said that electricity bills would be reduced by 20% to 30% but did not give many details about the promise.

The PML-N has promised to deliver on a \$10 billion oil refinery deal with Saudi Arabia, although lately the kingdom seems not interested in the project any more. It has also promised to build a multibillion-dollar Main Line-I project of Pakistan Railways under CPEC.

The party has promised it would rationalise Open Skies Policy in the best national interest but did not clarify whether it would give more international routes to foreign airlines or take back those that were already outsourced.

The manifesto is silent on PIA's privatisation, though the party has promised to privatise loss-making power distribution companies.

The manifesto says that workers' remittances will be increased to more than \$40 billion annually as compared to the current level of \$27.3 billion, driven by increase in manpower exports and other inflows channelised through formal channels.

It has also promised to increase the exports of goods and services to \$60 billion by 2029.



A New Era in Democracy: Unpacking the Transformative Changes of the February 8th Elections in Pakistan



By Kanwal Munir

The fabric of democracy is intricately woven with pivotal events like elections, which not only shape governance but also mirror societal transformations. In Pakistan, the February 8th elections stood as a watershed moment, diverging significantly from previous electoral practices. This detailed analysis aims to explore the multifaceted differences that set these elections apart, focusing on advancements in electoral processes, transformations in voter engagement, shifts in campaign strategies, and the evolving political and global contexts.

Evolving Electoral Processes

Enhanced Security and Transparency

A hallmark of these elections was the advancement in security and transparency measures. The introduction of biometric verification systems for voter identification marked a significant leap from traditional ID-based methods. This evolution played a pivotal role in reinforcing the integrity and transparency of the electoral process, ensuring that the vote of every citizen was accurately recorded and counted.

The adoption of these measures was a response to growing concerns about electoral fraud and malpractice in previous elections. By implementing biometric verification, the electoral commission aimed to build trust in the electoral system. This technology also streamlined the voting process, making it more efficient and user-friendly for voters.

Transformations in Voter Engagement

Surge in Youth Participation

One of the defining features of the February 8th elections was the unprecedented increase in youth engagement. In contrast to earlier elections, where the voter demographic skewed towards older age groups, this election saw a significant rise in participation from the 18-25 age group. This shift was largely attributed to innovative outreach strategies adopted by political parties and civil society organizations. These strategies included targeted social media campaigns, interactive educational initiatives, and youth-centric political rallies, all designed to resonate with the younger electorate.

The importance of this shift cannot be overstated. Young voters represent not only a substantial portion of Pakistan's population but also a demographic that is typically less engaged in traditional political processes. Their increased participation in these elections indicated a growing awareness and interest in national politics, potentially shaping the future political landscape of the country.

Expanding Voter Outreach Through Digital Means

Another transformative aspect of the February 8th elections was how political parties reimagined their voter outreach methods. Recognizing the growing digital literacy among the populace, parties incorporated digital campaigns to complement traditional campaigning techniques. This multifaceted approach expanded their reach, allowing them to connect with voters in urban and rural areas alike.

The use of digital tools for voter outreach was not just about broadening reach; it also allowed for more nuanced and targeted engagement strategies. Political parties used data analytics to understand voter preferences and tailor their messages



accordingly. This data-driven approach enabled them to engage with voters on issues that were most relevant to their lives, fostering a more informed and engaged electorate.

Shifts in Campaign Strategies

The Predominance of Digital Campaigning

The February 8th elections were notable for the strategic shift towards digital campaigning. Recognizing the pervasive influence of the internet on public opinion and voter behavior, political parties and candidates increasingly relied on social media platforms, leveraging tools like search engine optimization and digital advertising. This transition reflects a broader global trend towards digitalization and highlights the importance of digital literacy in modern political campaigns.

The digital campaigning strategies employed in these elections were diverse and sophisticated. Parties and candidates used social media platforms not just to disseminate information but also to engage with voters directly, answering questions, addressing concerns, and even soliciting feedback on policy proposals. This interactive approach helped build a more personal connection between candidates and voters, breaking down traditional barriers in political communication.

Emphasis on Policy Over Populism

In a significant departure from previous elections, the February 8th polls saw a notable shift from populist rhetoric to policy-centric campaigning. Candidates and parties focused more on presenting concrete policy proposals and discussing their implications. This shift was indicative of a maturing electorate that showed an increased interest in substantive policy matters over charismatic leadership or populist promises.

The focus on policy over populism was evident in the debates and speeches throughout the campaign period. Candidates were pressed to offer detailed plans on a range of issues, from economic development to social welfare, education reform to environmental policy. This change reflected a growing desire among voters for practi-

cal solutions to the challenges facing Pakistan, rather than the emotive rhetoric that had characterized much of the country's political discourse in the past.

The Broader Political and Global Context

Impact of Global Dynamics

The geopolitical landscape played a significant role in shaping the discourse and outcomes of the February 8th elections. International relations and foreign policy issues, particularly Pakistan's relations with neighbouring countries and its role in regional stability, moved to the forefront of electoral debates. This focus reflected the increasingly interconnected nature of global politics and its impact on domestic policies and priorities.

engagement. These elections were a testament to a maturing democracy, adapting to both technological advancements and changing societal dynamics. The implementation of enhanced security measures, particularly biometric verification, marked a pivotal step towards ensuring electoral integrity and building public trust in the democratic process.

Equally noteworthy was the surge in youth participation, signaling a shift towards a more inclusive and representative political landscape. The engagement of younger voters not only diversified the electorate but also infused the democratic process with fresh perspectives and renewed energy. The incorporation of digital tools in voter outreach and campaigning mirrored a global trend towards a tech-savvy electorate, highlighting the importance of



Candidates and parties were compelled to articulate clear positions on foreign policy, trade relations, and international cooperation. This was especially relevant in the context of Pakistan's strategic position in South Asia and its relationships with key global players. Voters showed a keen interest in how these international dynamics would influence Pakistan's economic prospects and security situation.

Conclusion

The February 8th elections in Pakistan heralded a new chapter in the country's democratic journey, showcasing significant strides in electoral processes and voter

digital literacy in contemporary politics.

The shift from populist rhetoric to policy-focused campaigning indicated a more discerning electorate, keen on substantive policy discussions over superficial promises. This shift towards issue-based politics is crucial for the development of a robust and responsive democratic system. In sum, the February 8th elections in Pakistan were not just about electing new leaders but reflected deeper societal and political evolutions. These changes bode well for the future of Pakistan's democracy, emphasizing the need for ongoing innovation and adaptation in an ever-evolving global landscape.



Pakistan's 2024 Elections: A Comprehensive Overview of Political Campaigns and Dynamics



By Daniyal Wali

In the lead-up to the highly anticipated 2024 elections in Pakistan, the political landscape is ablaze with activity as parties intensify their campaigns to sway public opinion and secure a foothold in the nation's governance. The stakes are undeniably high, with the outcome of this electoral contest holding the key to Pakistan's future trajectory. The Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PMLN) has taken center stage, orchestrating massive election gatherings that echo through the streets of diverse cities, utilizing these events as platforms to connect with the people and communicate their vision for the nation. Simultaneously, the Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) has been drawing substantial audiences from various regions, leveraging leadership and a comprehensive electoral agenda to mobilize support.

However, the electoral battleground is not without its fair share of drama, as traditional rivals PPP and PMLN engage in a war of words that escalates with each passing day. Adding an intriguing dimension to the

political narrative, Bilawal Bhutto has thrown down the gauntlet to Nawaz Sharif, challenging him to an open debate as a unique component of the election campaign. This bold move has injected an additional layer of tension and excitement into an already charged political atmosphere.

Meanwhile, Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) finds itself navigating a complex landscape. Reports circulating suggest that the PTI is facing attempts at sidelining, manifested through incidents of violence and disruptions in internet connectivity. Such alleged tactics raise concerns about the fairness and integrity of the electoral process, as the PTI endeavors to maintain its standing in the face of adversity.

As the countdown to the 2024 elections continues, Pakistan stands at a crucial crossroads. Beyond being a political contest, these elections are shaping up to be a defining moment that will influence the nation's course for the foreseeable future. The anticipation is palpable as citizens

eagerly await the unfolding of events, with the political drama set to determine the destiny of the nation and leave an indelible mark on its political landscape. At this moment, it is vital to analyze the election campaign of major political parties in the country to access their strategies for the future.

PPP's Vision for 2024 Elections

As the 2024 general elections approach, the PPP has embarked on an energetic and spirited campaign, holding massive gatherings across various provinces to present its visionary manifesto. PPP Chairman Bilawal Bhutto Zardari, displaying a palpable sense of determination and urgency, has emerged as a dynamic and aggressive leader ready to take on the challenges of the impending electoral battle. Addressing a substantial public gathering in Chiniot, Bilawal made a significant pledge, promising an end to the era of "political revenge" and advocating for a politics devoid of



hatred and division. His assertive stance reflects the PPP's commitment to steering away from traditional and old-fashioned politics, especially in a time when Pakistan grapples with a prolonged economic crisis, unprecedented poverty, and soaring unemployment rates.

During these gatherings, Bilawal Bhutto reiterated that the future of the nation cannot be entrusted to "traditional and old" politicians. Instead, he emphasized the need for a new and innovative approach to address the pressing issues facing the country. The PPP chairman's call for a departure from the politics of vengeance struck a chord with the audience, as he articulated a vision that values political differences without fostering enmity. In his address, Bilawal alluded to the legacy of his mother, Benazir Bhutto, highlighting the PPP's historical commitment to fulfilling promises to the people and steering clear of retaliatory politics. Drawing inspiration from Benazir Bhutto's famous saying, "democracy is the best revenge," Bilawal Bhutto affirmed his dedication to democratic values and principles.

Moreover, Bilawal Bhutto outlined key elements of the PPP's comprehensive manifesto, promising ambitious reforms. This includes a commitment to doubling people's incomes in five years, constructing 3 million houses nationwide with a focus on women's ownership, and providing free electricity up to 300 units for the disadvantaged masses. The PPP's campaign has not only been characterized by its substantive policy proposals but also by the Chairman's assertive and proactive approach, setting the stage for a highly competitive and engaging electoral process. As Bilawal seeks support from diverse segments of the population, including PTI workers, his assurance to bury the politics of revenge reflects a genuine commitment to fostering a more cooperative and inclusive political landscape. The PPP's campaign, marked by these impressive gatherings and Bilawal Bhutto's vigorous leadership, signals a formidable presence as they gear up for the electoral challenges ahead.

PML-N's Electoral Drive

On the other hand, PML-N has surged into full-fledged election mode as the general elections draw near. PML-N leaders,

including Nehal Hashmi and Qadir Bakhsh Kalmati, have been actively engaging with party workers and addressing the public in Karachi. Nehal Hashmi's statement about Bilawal Bhutto-Zardari's potential candidacy for prime ministership within the next 15 years adds an interesting dynamic to the political discourse, showcasing the competitive spirit of the upcoming elections.

PML-N President Shehbaz Sharif, in his recent address, underscored the significance of the masses' role in shaping the future by exercising their right to vote on February 8. Acknowledging the challenges faced by the country on social, economic, and political fronts, Shehbaz Sharif called

significant increase in electricity production, and a commitment to solar energy. Additionally, the party aims to empower the youth through increased representation in politics, restoration of student unions, and initiatives for youth entrepreneurship. The manifesto also outlines plans for a sports university, infrastructure development, a Scholarship Endowment Fund, and measures to combat climate change and terrorism.

In response to criticism from political rivals, especially the PPP, for not disclosing its agenda earlier, PML-N leaders defended the timing of the manifesto release. The party's senior leaders, including Shehbaz



upon voters to carefully consider the track record of the political parties they support. He emphasized the need for effective leadership and pledged that a vote for PML-N would contribute to pulling the country out of its current challenges.

Former Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif, unveiling the party's manifesto in Lahore, positioned the economy as the centerpiece of the document. Despite political hurdles and personal challenges, Nawaz Sharif expressed optimism, focusing on the party's commitment to implementing the manifesto's provisions if voted into power. The manifesto addresses a wide array of issues, including economic development, energy, youth representation, foreign policy, climate change, and counterterrorism measures. The PML-N's promises in the manifesto include a substantial reduction in power bills, a

Sharif and Maryam Nawaz, highlighted the manifesto's comprehensive nature, designed to address the challenges faced by the masses.

Maryam Nawaz, PML-N Senior Vice President, reiterated the party's commitment to implementing the outlined agenda if entrusted with power. Emphasizing Nawaz Sharif's track record of fulfilling promises, Maryam Nawaz spoke about the transformative impact the PML-N aims to have on the youth, ensuring electricity provision in remote areas and generating employment opportunities. As the PML-N intensifies its election campaign, the party's manifesto, leadership statements, and the focus on key issues showcase a comprehensive approach to governance and development, setting the stage for a competitive electoral contest.



PTI's Resilient Campaign Amidst Challenges

As the political landscape heats up in the lead-up to the February 8 polls, the PTI has intensified its election campaign despite facing various challenges. Notably, PTI staged countrywide rallies on a Sunday following the call of Imran Khan, the party's founder. Despite hurdles imposed by law enforcement agencies to curb movement, PTI supporters demonstrated unwavering support, turning out in large numbers to back the party against all odds. In a unique turn of events, even virtual campaigns faced disruptions, with PTI claiming that its website has been deliberately stopped from working, citing heavy hindrances. The party alleges internet disruptions, adding another layer of complexity to the already dynamic and competitive electoral environment.

During a press conference in Islamabad, PTI leader Barrister Gohar Ali Khan, presented a summarized version of the party's election manifesto. The manifesto envisions a prosperous future for the country, echoing the party's motto for the 2024 elections: "Great Pakistan, great future, and freedom from bad past." Despite facing legal challenges, symbol irregularities, and political setbacks, PTI is pushing forward to salvage its election campaign. The party's senior leadership,

including Imran Khan and Shah Mahmood Qureshi, facing legal issues, adds a layer of complexity to PTI's electoral strategy. The recent relief granted by the Supreme Court to certain PTI leaders to contest the upcoming elections might reshape the party's narrative.

Barrister Gohar lamented the hindrances faced by PTI in running its election campaign, emphasizing that the party is not being allowed a level playing field. Calling on the ECP to address these issues, he stressed the need for equal opportunities for all political parties to present themselves before the masses. The evolving dynamics and challenges set the stage for a fiercely contested election, where each party strives to articulate its vision for the future of Pakistan.

In the run-up to the highly anticipated elections in Pakistan, several political parties, including Istehkam Pakistani Party (IPP), Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam Fazl (JUI-F), Jamaat-e-Islami (JUI), Muttahida Qaumi Movement Pakistan (MQM-P), and others, are actively engaged in fervent political campaigns to resonate with the masses and secure their votes. These parties are diligently presenting their respective manifestos, articulating their visions for the country's future. However, the political landscape is not without challenges, as some parties have faced security threats in the form of attacks by terrorist elements.

Despite these adversities, the parties remain steadfast in their commitment to democratic principles and are striving to connect with the electorate, navigating the complex dynamics of Pakistani politics. The presence of multiple parties and their efforts underscore the diversity of political discourse in Pakistan, adding complexity to the electoral landscape.

To conclude, the lead-up to the 2024 elections in Pakistan has brought forth a dynamic and charged political atmosphere, with major parties such as the PML-N, PPP, and PTI actively engaging in robust campaigns to articulate their visions for the nation. Each party has orchestrated massive gatherings, unveiled comprehensive manifestos, and navigated the intricacies of a competitive electoral landscape. The electoral battleground is not without its share of drama, with political rivals engaging in verbal sparring and unique challenges faced by parties like PTI, including alleged attempts at sidelining and disruptions in internet connectivity. As the countdown to the elections continues, Pakistan stands at a crucial juncture, with citizens eagerly awaiting the unfolding political drama that will shape the nation's trajectory. The diversity of political discourse, the challenges faced by parties, and the anticipation surrounding the elections all contribute to the significance of this electoral moment, which promises to leave an indelible mark on Pakistan's political landscape.





The Misfortune of Religious Parties



By Haniya Ali

Historically, Pakistan's democratic environment has been characterized by political instability due to the long-run power struggle between civilian and military leaders. From 1947 till 1972, religious parties only operated outside of the parliament, hence having no say in the policy-making process of Pakistan. The political mosaic changed after Gen Zia's Era when he formed separate electorates and in the 2002 general elections. The religious parties and the Provincial assemblies of KPK and Baluchistan made significant gains in the National Assembly. An alliance of six religious parties – Mutahhida Majlis-e- Am emerged as a strong opponent of PPP and PML-N. According to the data of the Election Commission of Pakistan, there are 1egistered parties, among which 23 are religious parties. Except for Maulana Fazlur Rehman's JUI-F, Islamic political parties are struggling generally. JUI-F was not inherently religious as it largely emerged as a right-wing Pakhtun nationalist party, filling the vacuum created after the National Awami Party was banned in the 1970s.

Before independence in 1947, the ideology behind the creation of Pakistan was that the

sovereignty solely belongs to Allah Almighty and Muslims will live their lives according to the principles of the Quran and Sunnah. The slogan "Pakistan ka matlab kia, La Illaha Illallah" became the reason that Pakistan is the only nation-state created in the name of religion. However, due to its own undesirable social, economic, and religious situations, it couldn't become the actual Islamic state, which failed religious parties to take the leadership of the country.

In the past, religious parties have done better when forming electoral alliances with major parties, especially Jamat-e-Islami and Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam (JUI). Twelve religious-political parties ran in the 2018 general election and received 5.2 million of the 54.3 million votes cast in the country. With 2.5 million votes, the JUI and JI-led Muttahida Majlis-e-Amal coalition won 12 seats in the National Assembly. In contrast to past elections, religious parties are not forming electoral alliances for the upcoming elections, even though they continue to enjoy substantial support in some areas. JUI and JI are attempting to win over the religious vote base in the next election by settling seat swaps with other political parties.

In the elections of 2018, the political campaigns of religious parties were centered around the issue of the Finality of the Prophet (P.B.U.H) with their customary slogans and perceived capitalization of religious sentiments. It was assumed that one of the religious parties would win the ground, but unfortunately, these parties couldn't get even 10% of the total seats. These results might alleviate the concerns about religious extremism and claim that Pakistanis are moderate people, but it's essential to scrutinize the reality concealed behind the numbers. Mainstream political parties also use religion but do this by blurring the slogans between the lines. The electoral system in Pakistan, known as first-past-the-post (FPTP), which determines the winner based on the number of votes in a constituency, is biased against religious parties with a small but substantial following. For example, the Tehreek-e-Labaik Pakistan (TLP) could not convert votes into seats in this election since they received over 2.2 million votes nationwide. TLP could have won over ten seats in the National Assembly under a proportional representation system. However, the TLP's performance in some Punjab and Karachi urban areas suggests that a significant



portion of the populace resonates with their message. Religious parties in Pakistan shape the political narrative more than their electoral strength would imply, even though they have won fewer seats.

There are several factors that contribute to the limited electoral success of religious parties; one of them is the lack of electoral alliance and military support. History has proved that religious parties only perform better when they form an alliance with major political parties and when they have military backing, which has happened in the case of the Pakistan Democratic Movement in 2022 and Mutahidda Majilis e Amal in 2002. The success of Mullahs in 2002 was due to the pre-roll strategic scheming and restrictions imposed by General Pervaiz Musharraf to highlight the threat posed by Islamic extremism to the West and to demonstrate to the US that the mullahs' rule was the only option available to them in place of military rule. The second reason for the failure is the power-sharing arrangements of the country; political parties often engage in vying for access to resources. In accordance with the PIDE data, prominent families and business tycoons control about 64 percent of the 44 selected companies. The 22 families control Pakistan's politics and stock market. The Sharif family owns Ittefaq Foundry, a major supplier of capital

goods to the sugar industry. Panama papers disclosed the links between the Sharif family and offshore companies. Additionally, the PPP wins due to the "Bhutto effect" and feudal control over the major areas of Sindh and Baluchistan. Lastly, these parties continue to have militant wings, have connections to radical Islamist organizations, and participate in violent politics on college campuses via their associated student organizations. In the post-Zia Era, the madras promoted by these religious parties became the hub of the militant groups, which resulted in fear among people of radicalization. Now, the country is heading towards the General elections, which are held on 8th February to elect the 16th National Assembly. The religious parties are also preparing for the forthcoming elections and are actively participating in the campaign trail.

In the last days before voting, these parties are trying to engage voters and win their support. They employ highly conservative and politically advantageous language to convince people of their goals. While JI is promising its supporters that it will secure Palestine and Kashmir's independence if it wins the next general elections, the TLP's leadership network is using the blasphemy debate to rally supporters. In the meantime, the JUI-F, led by Maulana Fazlur Rehman, is using the tried-and-true strategy

of fabricating threats to Pakistan from opponents of Islam to win over voters. The political organization is also trying to take over Baluchistan and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa from the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) party, which former prime minister Imran Khan founded.

The challenge facing religious-Islamist parties in the general elections of 2024 is undoubtedly tricky, given the volatile political environment in Pakistan. Years of struggles between political elites and institutions have left the nation's voters reeling from record-high inflation and increasingly enraged at those in positions of authority. Even though the Islamist parties have had electoral success in the past, like in 2002, it is doubtful that they will be able to match or even approach that degree of success in the next elections. Voters' sentiment does not support any Islamist organization to the degree that would lead to an overwhelming victory in the polls. These religious parties can only emerge in power if they follow the manifesto of MMA. They need to work on the sectarian conflicts, adopting digitization as it will also improve accessibility, efficiency, and transparency, allowing parties to communicate more effectively and reach a larger audience by targeting the needs of youth.





'Trial in haste': Legal experts, political analysts react to Toshakhana verdict

"A lot of questions are being raised on trial in haste," says senior journalist Mazhar Abbas

TTI Report

An accountability court in Islamabad Wednesday sentenced Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) founder Imran Khan and his wife Bushra Bibi to 14-year jail time with rigorous punishment in the Tohsakhana reference filed by the National Accountability Bureau (NAB).

The court has also imposed a fine of Rs1.5 billion on the couple and disqualified the former premier from holding public office for 10 years.

Reacting to the sentence handed over to the former prime minister and the first lady, Hamid Khan, a senior lawyer and PTI leader, said that the party will appeal against both convictions and pursue legal recourse in line with the Constitution.

Responding to a question about Imran refusing to accept the decision as it was issued in haste, Hamid said: "There have been all kinds of legal violations [in the case]. For instance, his lawyers were separated from him since Monday. They closed the evidence and didn't allow counsels to make arguments."

The senior lawyer added that the court, on its own, appointed two defence counsels from the prosecution and quickly made them conduct cross-examination in the case. "It cannot even be termed cross-examination. They only filled the file. The trial was not conducted accordingly to the law."

He said that the case was only rushed by the judges — who seem under compulsion — to be wrapped up quickly before the elections. "The evidences were recorded even after court hours ended, even though it usually gets adjourned to the next working hours."

He added that the court was apparently "under pressure", as it neither cared about court hours nor its procedures nor the constitutional rights of the accused to provide them with a fair trial and due process.



'Questions will be raised'

Commenting on Khan and Bushra Bibi's sentence, senior journalist Mazhar Abbas said that questions will be raised on the timing of the sentence. "A lot of questions are being raised on trial in haste."

He added that Khan received a 10-year sentence in a different case and this 14-year sentence in another and what kind of reaction would PTI supporters show in such a situation.

"It was expected [for Khan] to receive sentences in both cases. But would these cases be politically accepted among Khan's supporters and independent people," he questioned.

Abbas maintained that politics in our part of the world is polarised, as positions are taken in politics. "Because of which I don't think that the workers and supporters will have any particular reaction to the case. They will look at it from the legal aspect."

The party will consider legal recourse and look towards the high courts and Supreme Court in this regards, he said.

Highlighting the recent removal of PTI

leader Latif Khosa from Khan's legal team by the PTI founder, Abbas said: "The non-seriousness from PTI lawyers is also a reason for concern. Even today, when the verdict was expected, PTI lawyers were not present."

Right to pursue other courts

Sharing his viewpoint on the verdict, legal expert Mustafa Ramdey said the accused reserved the right to pursue legal options against the decision.

"The accused have the right to approach the high court against the sentence."

'Khan ineligible for any position'

Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) leader Faisal Karim Kundi, when reacting to the verdict, said PTI founder is not eligible for any position, highlighting his insignificant position in the upcoming general elections which will be held on February 8.

"The founder of PTI is not in the electoral field at the moment."

He predicted that most of the independent candidates, competing on PTI's behalf will join other parties in the general polls.



Legal experts cite: Article 10A concerns over cipher verdict

Zafar said that PTI's lawyers will file an appeal in the Islamabad High Court



By Zebunnisa Burki

Legal experts believe that Tuesday's verdict in the cipher case by a special court is eminently appealable based on what they say are strong grounds questioning whether Article 10A was upheld during the trial process.

Calling the cipher case trial a "mistrial", PTI leader and lawyer Barrister Ali Zafar told Geo News shortly after the verdict was announced that: "this was not a trial but a fraud with the justice system. The lawyers for Imran Khan and Shah Mehmood Qureshi were asked to step aside and told they couldn't represent them. And state lawyers were appointed without permission."

Confirming that the PTI lawyers would be filing an appeal with the Islamabad High Court, Zafar said that they were convinced that the way "justice has not only not been done but has been damaged, this appeal will be successful so in a way this verdict is a blessing in disguise."

Also speaking with Geo News on Tuesday,

former attorney general Ashtar Ausaf Ali said that, while there is a right to appeal, "until the punishment is overturned, the ten-year sentence stands." When asked about the court-appointed defence lawyers, Ashtar Ausaf said that this was not an unprecedented measure, justifying it thus: "When your defence counsel is trying to delay things on your instructions or you yourself make things such that the trial is hindered then state lawyers can be asked to step in."

For him, the case of Nixon was a good example of how "whenever there is a question of a country's security or if official secrets laws are violated you will see that even a powerful president like Nixon had to resign. And if the president after Nixon had not pardoned him, Nixon would have been sentenced too."

The News reached out to lawyers on how they see the special court's verdict. To Supreme Court advocate Basil Nabi Malik, "the decision is unlikely to hold muster." He explains: "Trials are a matter of fairness

and ample opportunities to prove the merits of your prosecution or your innocence, as the case may be. However, wherever the trial court is faced with serious challenges or questions regarding the openness or transparency of the trial, such as in the case of a jail trial, or where there is uneasiness and a sense of injustice about the appointment of state counsels to defend an accused already aggrieved by state actions and conduct, there are bound to be major discrepancies which cannot simply be rationalized away or wished away. All of the above is already quite distressing, but when coupled with the speed with which it has occurred and the coincidence of it happening right before elections, it becomes all the more problematic."

He is not alone in this assessment. Barrister Rida Hosain also brings up the right to fair trial per Article 10A of the constitution: "The right to a fair trial includes the right to be represented by a counsel of one's choice." She says that the decision to deprive Imran Khan and Shah Mahmood



Qureshi of a counsel of their choice “compromises the entire trial process”.

The ten-year sentence has led to a mixed bag of reactions, some calling it a surprisingly ‘lenient’ sentence, given the political context surrounding the trial. Barrister Rida has a different opinion. Deconstructing the sentence, she says that even on merit “a sentence of ten years could only be imposed in three situations: (1) if it was shown that an accused acted in the interest or benefit of a foreign power; (2) disclosed information relating to defence installations; or (3) disclosed a secret official code. When the Supreme Court granted Imran Khan and Shah Mahmood Qureshi bail, on a tentative view, it said that there was no ‘sufficient incriminating material’ at that stage which showed that any of the three situations identified above engage. The fulfillment of any of the three conditions in any case requires a high threshold to be met.”

“We have been treated to a punchline”, says lawyer Abdul Moiz Jaferii, adding: “There are three parts to a joke. The first is the setup, then the build, and last comes the punchline...I cannot wait for the setup and build to be revealed to us through detailed reasoning.” His reading of the verdict? “Great because of how ridiculous it is. I would like to see how it is reasoned, and even more so how it will stand before a high court.”

Jaferii, who has previously also written on the cipher case, says that even if there were a case to be made against Imran for having

misplaced the cipher or having been negligent, that would come under Section 5 of the Official Secrets Act, which he says carries a two-year punishment. He says that even that section “requires that the document that you mishandled was a map or something that contained a coded missive or something that if it had gotten to the enemy would have led to them creating a situation of compromise.”

That did not happen in this case, per Jaferii who says that “Imran Khan received a deciphered version of the cipher. He never saw the code.” Even if he had, Section 5 prescribes a two-year punishment. Jaferii explains that the 10 or 14-year punishment or death is given in Section 3 of the Official Secrets Act, which requires “wilful collusion with the enemy to cause knowing detriment to the state. This is what Imran Khan and Shah Mahmood Qureshi have been sentenced with.”

Is there a chance for the trial to be done all over again? Basil Nabi Malik says that, while the PTI will hope for the “decision to be set aside on appeal, it would not be surprising if the matter is then remanded back for a fresh decision upon fulfilment of all procedural and substantive requirements. Although the decision itself appears to be faulty, if overturned, the court will in all probability remand the matter back to the trial court to decide it afresh upon fulfilling all requisite procedural and substantive requirements of the law.”

On whether this verdict may be a “blessing in disguise” as declared by Barrister Ali

Zafar, Malik feels that while “this decision may be helpful to [PTI lawyers] politically. on the legal front, it’ll simply result in another round of decisions and challenges.”

Barrister Ali Tahir, however, says that the verdict is a “golden handout for Imran Khan and Qureshi’s lawyers”, adding that “in my study and practice of law I have never heard of a case where state defence counsels were appointed only because the prosecution alleged delaying tactics by defence lawyers. The right to an advocate of choice is a fundamental right. In the same way, barring cross-examination and recording the 342 statement overnight has tainted the entire proceedings of any legitimacy.”

Essentially, lawyers are questioning both the haste in trial and judgment. Constitutional lawyer Usama Khawa says that in his legal opinion, “the rushed manner in which the jail trial was conducted, as indicated by the quick announcement of the verdict, raises serious concerns about the potential violation of fundamental principles of justice and the constitutional right to a fair trial.”

He also feels that “from a legal standpoint, Imran Khan and Shah Mahmood Qureshi seem to have strong prospects of prevailing in the appeal, particularly given the concerns about the rushed trial and potential violations of due process” but cautions that the case may not see a quick resolution “reflecting the standard pace of criminal appeals.”





Poor reality, poor image

Bad image of Pakistan must solely be function of malice of international powers or malfeasance of Pakistani leaders they dislike



By Husain Haqqani

Every Pakistani has, at some point or another, expressed his or her frustration with the country's poor image. Millions of Pakistanis work all over the world and have built a reputation for hard work and efficiency.

Overseas Pakistanis are particularly sensitive to adverse comments about anything to do with Pakistan and get upset when their country is portrayed as 'dangerous', 'dysfunctional', or 'unstable' in the international media.

Their reasoning often is that because they and their friends and family are all decent people, the bad image of Pakistan must solely be the function of the malice of international powers or the malfeasance of Pakistani leaders they dislike. But Pakistan's problem is not just one of image. It is also one of harsh realities.

How can we expect the world to ignore distressing events that characterize the country's history or the present? After all, historical accounts and media reports are rarely mainly about the niceness, hospitality, or piety of individuals from a

country. It is about social and economic indicators, the exercise of power within and outside the country by its rulers and matters of war and peace. Dismissing unflattering analysis as 'anti-state' or 'foreign-inspired' shuts the door for course correction.

Doctors, engineers, and bankers, as well as cab drivers and industrial workers who live and work abroad, have been fed a narrative for years about how their contribution to Pakistan's greatness is squandered by the mistakes of one or another politician. As a result, few have been able to understand that Pakistan's problems and poor image are the product of collective mistakes over a large time span. It is not because of politician A or B but about not having a functioning political system, the absence of a culture of tolerance, and an inability to prioritize economic progress over conflict with others.

Partisan politics blinds people to difficulties with deep roots. Overseas Pakistanis applauded, based on their party sympathies, when Mohtarma Benazir Bhutto, Asif Ali Zardari, Yusuf Raza Gilani, and

Nawaz Sharif were convicted by Pakistan's courts. Those currently supporting the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) are unhappy that cricket hero Imran Khan has now been convicted and sentenced ahead of a general election. The sad truth is that prime ministers and foreign ministers of countries are their public face to the rest of the world. When they face criminal charges, the country looks bad, and it does not matter to which party they belong.

It is sometimes difficult to get people to think about issues and their solutions instead of focusing on personalities and which ones among them are to blame. Prosecution, conviction, and sentencing of national leaders should be rare. If almost everyone who rises to high office goes through that process year after year, then there is something wrong with the process and national discourse should focus on that rather than just being restricted to the victimization of X or Y.

Pakistan's political system lacks the crucial elements of compromise and adherence to rule of law that are essential for a workable



political system. Constant political conflict, and its repercussions, are a major factor in Pakistan's poor international image, along with the presence of Jihadi militants. Other reasons for Pakistan not being portrayed positively lie in our socio-economic circumstances.

Pakistan has come a long way since its creation in 1947 but it lags behind its peers in many ways. This is a harsh reality that needs to be overcome, not just a matter of image. For instance, the literacy rate in Pakistan rose from 11 per cent in 1947 to 58 per cent by 2023. But India's literacy rate rose from 12 per cent to 76.3 per cent over the same period and for a much larger population. Bangladesh took its literacy rate from 17 per cent in 1971 to 74.6 per cent last year.

Pakistan's comparatively poorer performance in promoting literacy is not a party-political matter nor can it be blamed solely on the alleged corruption of a set of politicians one dislikes. National pride should not deter Pakistanis from confronting the fact that education has not been their national priority the same way as, say, acquiring nuclear weapons. Pakistan's problem in education is about bad policy priorities, budgetary allocation, and what Pakistanis choose to teach and learn.

Pakistan is the fifth largest nation in the world by population, and has the seventh largest army, but is only 24th by size of



GDP on PPP basis and 46th in terms of nominal GDP.

For almost fifteen years after independence, Pakistan made no allocation for literacy in its national budget. Between 1947 and 1957, Pakistan's literacy rate actually remained unchanged or declined, albeit marginally. The failure was attributed in official reports to 'unstable administrative and organizational arrangements.' Even now, there are only fifteen countries in the world with a lower literacy rate than Pakistan. The low literacy rate and inadequate investment in education have led to a decline in Pakistan's technological base, which in turn hampers economic modernization.

Pakistan's lack of progress in literacy is not because of poverty; Rather, the country's poor economic performance is a result of a lack of higher literacy rates. There are forty-three countries in the world that are poorer than Pakistan on a per capita GDP basis but twenty-four of them send more children to primary school than Pakistan does. But as Pakistan heads into its twelfth general election, these and similar harsh realities are hardly discussed in the media or by politicians. Pakistanis are too busy, worrying about the image of the country and hoping that their preferred leader will fix it all.

Courtesy The News



New Govt to face an uphill task of reviving the battered economy and shattered trust of people

By Javed Mahmood

The upcoming government in the wake of the February 8 general elections will face an uphill task of reviving the battered economy and shattered trust of consumers and businesspersons as well. The foremost task for the new government would be to deal with the International Monetary Fund and line up external financing to cope with around 70 billion dollars in foreign loans and markup repayment in the next three years.

The ongoing IMF arrangement will expire in March 2024 and according to economic pundits, the new government will have to strike another deal with the IMF to secure a new bailout program at least for the next three years. It means whoever forms the next government will have to deal with the IMF in a manner that the new program neither affects economic growth nor penalizes the consumers in the shape of further hikes in the gas and electricity tariffs.

The ongoing IMF program has made miserable the lifestyle of millions of people who are facing an unprecedented increase in gas, and electricity tariffs and imposition of unprecedented taxation along with the hike in the rates of taxes in a bid to extort maximum revenues from the consumers and the businesspersons. The current IMF arrangement has annoyed the people to such an extent that the masses dislike the PDM leaders who endorsed the crushing deal with the fund. If the new government, whether the PML-N or PPP comes to power, and once again accepts every harsh condition of the IMF, it will further ignite the miseries of the people and it may cause chaos in the country.

New Govt and New Deal with IMF

On February 8, Pakistanis are set to participate in crucial elections to choose a new government for the next five years, testing the resilience of the country's democracy and its capacity to

address impending economic challenges. A smooth transfer of power to an elected government is essential as it would alleviate concerns among lenders, including the International Monetary Fund (IMF). This is particularly significant as Pakistan is grappling with a substantial external debt repayment challenge. The IMF's new Stand-by Agreement (SBA) could play a pivotal role in stabilizing the economy in Pakistan.

The importance of how the incoming government will address economic challenges, particularly in negotiations with the IMF for a long-term program is crucial for the country and the people. Given past experiences, investors are keenly observing the composition of the new government's finance team. The new government, along with its finance minister, could play a vital role in negotiating with friendly nations for debt rollover or re-profiling and finalizing a new IMF program, which would necessitate substantial reforms. Major political parties in Pakistan appeared to be sidestepping key economic challenges, focusing more on populist measures to gain public support amidst soaring inflation rates.

IMF's tranche boosts SBP's foreign exchange reserves

The State Bank of Pakistan (SBP) has reported a surge in its foreign exchange reserves, recording an increase of \$243 million within a week. As per the data released by the central bank, the SBP's reserves as of January 19 increased to \$8.27 billion, up from \$8.027 billion on January 12. This notable increase is primarily attributed to the reception of the second tranche amounting to \$705 million from the International Monetary Fund (IMF). This transaction is part of a comprehensive \$3 billion Stand-By Arrangement (SBA) between Pakistan and the IMF. Furthermore,



the central bank has adeptly managed the government's external debt repayments during this period. In a broader context, Pakistan's total liquid foreign currency reserves, encompassing reserves held by banks other than the SBP, reached \$13.341 billion. This figure reflects a growth of \$196 million compared to the preceding week. It is noteworthy, however, that there is a decline in the net reserves held by other banks, decreasing by \$47 million to a total of \$5.071 billion. The recent developments in Pakistan's foreign exchange reserves underscore the country's effective financial management and its active collaboration with international financial entities such as the IMF.

Dollar-PKR fluctuations in Pakistan

The Pakistani rupee (PKR) continued its upward trajectory this week, registering a marginal gain of 30 paise to settle at PKR 279.59, compared to the previous week's closing rate of PKR 279.9 per USD. In last Friday's trading session, the local currency saw an increase of 7.5 paise, reaching an intraday high (bid) of 280.25 and a low of 279.75. In the open market, exchange companies quoted the buying rate for the dollar at 279.07 and the selling rate at 281.17. A notable development occurred as the country received the second installment of SDR 528 million, equivalent to \$705.6

million, from the International Monetary Fund (IMF) last week.

The first review report under the Standby Arrangement emphasized the importance of allowing the exchange rate to be determined by the market. It stressed the gradual deepening of the foreign exchange (FX) market, with an emphasis on encouraging banks to manage FX flows through the interbank market. The IMF highlighted the need for the exchange rate to act as a shock absorber, urging the government to refrain from imposing formal or informal restrictions. The agreement between the IMF Staff and the authorities specified that SBP's interventions in the FX market should focus on building FX buffers, with sales limited to addressing disorderly market conditions, not preventing fundamental-driven depreciation of the rupee.

The government pledged to eliminate existing exchange restrictions and multiple currency practices in early 2024. Planned reforms in the Exchange Companies (EC) sector by the SBP aim to enhance oversight, governance, and transparency. Additionally, efforts to monitor pricing in informal exchange rate markets are underway to identify periods of market dysfunction. The government affirmed its commitment to the FX market by preparing to transition to a new trading platform for spot transactions, scheduled to go live by the end of January 2024. A feasibility study for conducting FX purchases and sales via auctions, along with the publication of auction results, is set to be undertaken by the end of March 2024. In line with its mandate to implement an exchange rate policy, the SBP is developing a framework to monitor pricing and developments in informal markets, with a report expected to be published by the end of March 2024. Despite challenges posed by limited reserve buffers, SBP's interventions in the FX market will continue to prioritize building FX buffers, with sales reserved for episodes of disorderly market conditions and not aimed at preventing a fundamental-driven depreciation trend of the rupee.

Remittances and Challenges ahead

The trajectory of remittance inflows to Pakistan has been less than satisfactory since January 2022. Monthly remittance

inflows for the first three quarters of 2023 were lower than both the previous year and 2021. From January to November 2023, remittances amounted to \$23.96 billion, marking a decrease of \$3.83 billion compared to the corresponding period in 2022 and \$4.6 billion compared to 2021. The World Bank, in its report titled "Leveraging Diaspora Finances for Private Capital Mobilization," has forecasted a 10 percent decrease in remittance flows to Pakistan for the current fiscal year. This revelation is concerning as remittances hold paramount significance for Pakistan and play a crucial role in shaping the country's economic landscape. Globally, Pakistan ranks sixth among the top countries receiving remittances, with the remittances-to-GDP ratio exceeding 7 percent.

The decline in remittances raises concerns about its potential impact on the economy. The significant drop in remittances from foreign workers signals a further challenge to the economy, particularly in terms of external financing. For example, Pakistan's external funding needs for the current fiscal year are estimated at \$28.7 billion, covering \$24.6 billion for debt repayments and \$4 billion for financing the current account deficit. The rising cost of living in Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates poses a potential obstacle to sending additional foreign exchange back home. The decline in remittances not only widens the current account deficit but also exerts pressure on the foreign exchange reserves held by the State Bank of Pakistan (SBP). As of December 22, 2023, the SBP's liquid foreign exchange reserves stand at \$7.8 billion, significantly lower than the \$20 billion held by Bangladesh. The foreign exchange reserves held by the SBP are approximately equivalent to one month's worth of import bills.

Notably, the forex reserves, falling below the three-month imports threshold, indicate a currency under pressure. The consistent strain on forex reserves inevitably puts pressure on the forex market, leading to inherent instability in exchange rates. For Pakistan, 2023 has been dubbed the "year of financial mismanagement" due to a 20 percent decline in the rupee against the US dollar. This decline surpasses the average fall of 13 percent per year over the last five years and the average of 8 percent per year over the past 10 years. The consequences of

declining remittances are evident, affecting not only the real sector but also disrupting the country's financial position. The downward trajectory raises questions about the underlying factors contributing to this worrisome trend, which can be attributed to a range of factors.

Current account deficit

After experiencing deficits for four consecutive months, Pakistan's current account recorded a surplus of \$9 million in November 2023, as per data released by the State Bank of Pakistan (SBP) on Monday. This marks a significant turnaround from the \$157 million deficit recorded in the same month the previous year. Although it is the first surplus since June 2023, the current surplus is substantially lower compared to the \$520 million surplus at that time. Experts attribute the surplus to a notable increase in the country's exports and remittances, coupled with a slight decline in imports. In October 2023, Pakistan had posted a current account deficit of \$184 million.

According to SBP data, the country's exports (goods and services) rose to \$3.364 billion in November 2023, up from \$2.999 billion in November 2022, reflecting a growth of over 12%. Concurrently, remittances reached \$2.25 billion in November 2023, a marginal increase from \$2.17 billion in the same month the previous year. In contrast, total imports decreased by nearly 6%, amounting to \$5.29 billion in November 2023 compared to \$5.01 billion in the corresponding period last year. The SBP reported a current account deficit of \$1.16 billion in July-November of FY24, a substantial improvement from the \$3.3 billion deficit during the same period in the last fiscal year (FY23). This represents a significant decline of over \$2 billion or 64%.

During its latest Monetary Policy Committee (MPC) meeting on December 12, the SBP highlighted a notable improvement in the current account balance, with the deficit narrowing by 65.9% year-on-year to \$1.1 billion during Jul-Oct FY24. The current account holds critical importance for Pakistan, which heavily relies on imports to sustain its economy. A widening deficit can exert pressure on the exchange rate and deplete official foreign exchange reserves, which stood at slightly over \$7 billion, according to the latest data.

IMF lowers Pakistan's growth forecast to 2pc

By Khaleeq Kiani

- Also revises next fiscal year's projection downward to 3.5pc
- Lifts global growth forecast to 3.1pc citing unexpected 'resilience'
- Indian economy expected to grow at a faster 6.5pc

Des-pite an improved global outlook, the Interna-tional Monetary Fund (IMF) on Tuesday lowered Pakis-tan's economic growth forecast to two per cent for the current fiscal year, down 0.5 percentage points from its October estimate of 2.5pc.

In its latest World Eco-nomic Outlook (WEO) rep-ort released on Tue-sday, the Washington-based global lender also slightly revised downward (by 0.1pc) the next fiscal year's growth forecast to 3.5pc.

The revised growth estimates are based on the Fund's recent deta-iled quarterly review of Pakistan's macroeconomic position as part of the ongoing \$3bn Standby Arrangement (SBA), which is set to expire in March.

The IMF's growth forecast is significantly lower than the govern-ment's 3.5pc GDP growth target for the current year but generally in line with the State Bank of Pakistan's expectation of 2pc to 3pc announced a day earlier as part of the monetary policy statement.

In the WEO report, the IMF also raised the global growth rate for 2024 to 3.1pc, 0.2pc higher than its October forecast of 2.9pc, citing greater than expected resilience in both the United States and China, besides many other large emerging market and developing economies.

"Global growth is projected at 3.1 per cent in 2024 and 3.2 per cent in 2025, with the 2024 forecast 0.2 percentage point higher than that in the October 2023 WEO on account of greater-than-expected resilience in the United States and several large emerging market and developing economies, as well as fiscal support in China," it said.

But despite a slightly better outlook, the IMF noted the growth forecast for both years (2024 and 2025) was below the historical (2000-19) average of 3.8pc, with elevated central bank policy rates to fight inflation, a withdrawal of fiscal support amid high debt weighing on economic activity, and low underlying productivity growth.

Inflation is falling faster than expected in most regions in the midst of unwinding supply-side issues and restrictive monetary policy. "Global headline inflation is expected to fall to 5.8pc in 2024 and to 4.4pc in 2025, with the 2025 forecast revised down," it said.

The global lender also noted that with disinflation and steady growth, the likelihood of a hard landing had receded, and risks to global growth were broadly balanced. On the upside, faster disinflation could lead to further easing of financial conditions.

Looser fiscal policy than necessary and than assumed in the projec-tions could imply temporarily higher growth but at the risk of a



more costly adjustment later on. Stronger structural reform momentum could bolster productivity with positive cross-border spillovers.

On the downside, new commodity price spikes from geopolitical shocks — including continued attacks in the Red Sea — and supply disruptions or more persistent underlying inflation could prolong tight monetary conditions. Deepening property sector woes in China or, elsewhere, a disruptive turn to tax hikes and spending cuts could also cause growth disappointments.

As such, the WEO Update raised the US growth rate by 0.6pc to 2.1pc for 2024 and downgraded by 0.1pc for 2025 to 1.7pc. On the other hand, it improved its growth forecast for China by 0.4 percentage points to 4.6pc for 2024 and kept unchanged at 4.1pc for 2025. India is anticipated to grow 0.2pc faster to 6.5pc than the previous forecast in both the 2024 and 2025 fiscal years.

Overall, the advanced economies are expected to see growth decline slightly from 1.6pc in 2023 to 1.5pc in 2024 before rising to 1.8pc in 2025, with a recovery in the Euro area from low growth in 2023 and a moderation of growth in the United States. Emerging markets and developing economies are expected to experience stable growth through 2024 and 2025, with regional differences.

World trade growth is projected at 3.3pc in 2024 and 3.6pc in 2025, below its historical average growth rate of 4.9pc. Rising trade distortions and geo-economic fragmentation are expected to continue to weigh on the level of global trade.

The IMF said its forecasts were based on assumptions that fuel and non-fuel commodity prices will decline in 2024 and 2025 and that interest rates will decline in major economies. Annual average oil prices are projected to fall by about 2.3pc in 2024, whereas non-fuel commodity prices are expected to fall by 0.9pc.

Also, the projections are for policy rates to remain at current levels for the US Federal Reserve, the European Central Bank, and the Bank of England until the second half of 2024, before gradually declining as inflation moves closer to targets. The Bank of Japan is projected to maintain an overall accommodative stance.

Idea gained traction during New Deal post-World War II, with US President Roosevelt advocating for it to fund war

There is an ongoing debate regarding the preferable size of government – big or small? ‘Big government’ is a political concept where the government plays a predominant role in social sector development, economic activities, market functioning, etc.

Meanwhile, in most developing countries, including Pakistan, the concept of an expansive and engaging government (big government) prevailed despite some successful examples of privatization of nationalized industries/organizations. The reasons are obvious: the governments want to increase their influence and footprint,

Since 2020, amid the Triple C crisis – Covid-19, conflicts, and climate change – the notion of big government has resurfaced even in advanced economies. For developing countries, this translated into increased government responsibilities and delivering on many more fronts. However, doing more means higher public expenditures that are being met through debt, taxes, or both.

One can argue that all of the above is doable with the help of smart data gathered through systems like point-of-sale (POS),

Furthermore, the government must consider that transitioning to green energy may not only imply additional spending but also potential reductions in levies, duties, and surcharges collected from conventional fossil fuels. Likewise, increased penetration of AI will cull jobs (it is one of the four priority topics at the World Economic Forum this year). The future of jobs will also affect the income tax collection across the world. These developments underscore the need for an innovative rethink of taxation policies and their implementation.

In this context, the proposal from the Ministry of Finance to pursue reforms in the Federal Board of Revenue (FBR) is a commendable step. While Pakistan has attempted revenue collection reforms in the past, the timing of the current proposal holds greater significance for the country's fiscal and economic stability. The fiscal and economic stability of the country is linked with a transparent and accountable revenue collection system, which can finance public

expenditures and at the same time have minimal impact on economic activity.

Assessing the proposed reforms (which have been approved by the apex committee of the Special Investment Facilitation Council or SIFC) involves questioning whether they can reduce anomalies in the taxation system, enhance transparency and accountability, curb smuggling (especially related to the misuse of the Afghan Transit Trade Agreement), improve tax collection efficiencies, and shift taxation into a data-led system minimizing rent-seeking opportunities.

While the current proposal seems to possess the necessary elements, its success depends on effective implementation in both letter and spirit. The hope is that the next government (which will follow the concept of 'big government' due to the electoral promises made by political parties aspiring to come into power) will have the appetite to increase revenue to finance its increased public spending. Additionally, the support of the SIFC for the current round of reforms and the likely inclusion of these reforms as a structural benchmark in the next IMF programme enhances the chances of its successful implementation.

Zooming in, the proposed creation of distinct inland revenue and customs (if implemented in a manner that does not create insecurities and turf-war within tax administration) will allow inland revenue to grow its own systems and focus on federal taxes, broadening the tax base and lowering tax rates. At the same time, customs will focus on anti-smuggling and trade facilitation, in line with international norms, working to help traders, importers, and exporters to fully interact with international markets.

Likewise, the proposed operational (budgetary and human resources) autonomy of tax administration and tenured positions of the senior officers (against medium-term objectives of collection and system development) of inland revenue services and customs will reduce the scope of political interference and politically negotiated postings and transfers. Removing fear of political pressures will allow them to lead their administrations professionally.

One can tweak the composition of the proposed independent oversight boards for both services. However, the mechanisms will potentially help protect tax administration autonomy from bureaucratic and political interference and buffer against interference in day-to-day tax collection and administration.

The boards are proposed to be responsible for effective policy and governance of the customs and inland revenue organizations. They are expected to set key performance indicators (KPI) and monitor the performance of the tax administration



against them. This reform will improve organizational transparency and accountability. However, one needs to be mindful of the fact that such boards are as effective and independent as their members are. If the proposal is accepted, the government will have to use its best judgment while appointing its members.

There have been earlier attempts to separate tax policy from administration, and this is once again part of the current proposal. This initiative is necessary for transparency and minimizing SRO-based, at times ad hoc and variously inequitable, tax policy decisions affecting tax administration.

It can be argued that intertwined tax policy and tax administration opens the doors to political interference in tax administration, promotes rent-seeking, and favours short-term revenue measures over stable tax collection. Therefore, it has been globally abandoned, and countries have unburdened tax administrations from political decisions on tax levels, tax rates, and tax burdens. Hope this can happen in Pakistan as well.

Along with tax administration reforms, there is a proposal to restructure the Pakistan Revenue Automation Limited (PRAL, the public-sector company that provides IT services to the FBR), enhance collaboration with NADRA, digitize withholding tax collection, and introduce simple schemes for taxing traders, retailers, and specified persons. These allied reforms will help strengthen and modernize the tax administration, enabling it to face the challenges of revenue mobilization in rapidly changing economies.

As previously discussed, the upcoming

government faces the imperative task of augmenting revenues to accommodate increased spending. It will also have to negotiate a new programme with the IMF to support Pakistan's macroeconomic stability. The formulation of a viable plan to finance the expanding public expenditure will be a major agenda point during talks with the IMF. That is where the next government will find the current reform plan handy. It can always refine this plan and present it as a comprehensive home-grown reform agenda.

Crucially, all stakeholders, including the outgoing and incoming governments and the IMF, must be cognizant of the far-reaching impact of the tax policy. It not only influences the economy and markets but also impacts people and the environment. Striking a balance between the imperative of a big government and prudent fiscal policy responses is essential to ensure sustainable and inclusive development.

Courtesy The News

How to achieve economic prosperity

This prompts many to assert that Pakistan can also be an economic power if it wants



By Abdul Sattar

India, Bangladesh, Vietnam and some other emerging markets have made tremendous strides in the economic and financial sectors. This prompts many to assert that Pakistan can also be an economic power if it wants. But they usually ignore the multiple factors that contributed to the economic prosperity of those countries.

Experts say that factors like the movement of capital, the size and population of a country, a country's natural resources, developmental infrastructure and business policies, and the overall international and regional political environment and political stability of a state contribute to the economic growth of a country.

Let's suppose a country has all these prerequisites for industrial and business growth, will it still attract investment? If all states are equipped with the above-mentioned golden principles of business, will they also attain the height of economic prosperity? The answer is 'no' because capitalism is not meant to empower all.

Capitalism triggers uneven development. Despite its claims of bringing prosperity to all corners of the world, the reality is different. It brings wealth and opulence to only a

few states. It is perhaps because of this that we still have groups like G7.

History tells us that the prosperity of one region or country used to be at the expense of another country or region. For instance, when Spain and Portugal emerged as prosperous nations after 1492, it was at the expense of African, Asian and South and Central American regions. The two European powers ruthlessly plundered these regions, reducing indigenous people to slaves. Merciless massacres, genocides and subjugation of local people should also be kept in view when praising the innovations of these early explorers who are considered the godfather of the new world.

Similarly, the prosperity of the Netherlands in the late 16th and early 17th centuries could be attributed to plunderers who would bring ships from South and Central America brimming with silver and gold. The emergence of the UK and France as economic powers in the 18th and 19th centuries could also be linked to this naked exploitation of various parts of the world. In the case of France, it can be said that the country not only subjugated the people of distant regions and continents but also

employed sledgehammer tactics against Europeans.

GDP and other economic indicators were introduced much later. So, it is difficult to gauge the level of economic development of the countries that were involved in subjugating other areas to enrich their territories. But a country's preparedness for wars and conflicts used to tell how wealthy a nation was. For instance, France, under Napoleon, launched attacks across Europe which definitely required immense resources. Perhaps it was the resources that France accumulated at the expense of other European countries that helped France meet the funds required for wars and military expeditions.

Such military engagements also helped other sectors of the French economy thrive. For instance, France, which lagged behind the UK in textile, started to catch up. It is claimed that it was these military expeditions which especially helped the French state to support science and innovation that turned out to be instrumental in boosting the French economy.

Napoleon or other French ruling elite members who were considered usurpers in

other parts and regions of the world oversaw the economic prosperity of their society. According to a history website 'Erenow', the silk industry in Lyons, which in 1800 had 3,500 looms, used 10,720 looms in 1808, and in 1810 one textile entrepreneur employed 11,000 workers in his mills. Meanwhile French chemists continued to meet the British exclusion of sugar, cotton, and indigo by making sugar from beetroot, dyes from wood, and linens superior to cotton. They also turned potatoes into brandy.

The economic rise of the British could not have been possible without the destruction of the Indian and Chinese economies. When the British arrived in India, the country used to contribute over 20 per cent to the global GDP, and when it left, this contribution was reduced to less than 5.0 per cent.

China used to contribute over 22 per cent to the global GDP when it was before Western powers. The Chinese were forced to open their markets for British goods. Other European powers and Japan also became partners in this plundering. At one stage, over 40 per cent of British trade consisted of opium that destroyed China but helped the UK, France, Netherland, the US and Japan thrive.

The scramble for Africa was also instrumental in boosting European economies.

The ruling elite of Belgium immensely enriched themselves at the expense of Belgium Congo's people that saw the killing of millions of its inhabitants. The ruthless plundering of raw materials from that region greatly bolstered European economies.

So, if we analyze the economic situation on a regional basis, we can describe continental Europe as one of the centres of economic prosperity. It grew immensely rich between 1492 and 1945. Before the Industrial Revolution, 35 per cent of the world was already under the rule of Western colonial powers which rose to 85 per cent by 1945.

This colonial plundering provided cheap raw materials, free or indentured labour and guaranteed markets to Western colonial and economic powers. Almost all G7 countries have been direct or indirect colonial masters throughout history. The UK, France, Germany, Italy and Japan physically occupied other countries, the US established its sphere of influence over the Western hemisphere, which is a euphemism for a less visible colonial control. Since more than 150 states of the world could not colonize other states, they could not attain this level of economic progress.

The movement of capital is another factor that cannot guarantee universal prosperity.

For instance, capital found lucrative profit in China during the 1980s and India in the 1990s, so it concentrated there. Now it is moving towards countries like Bangladesh and Vietnam where it can find a better profit margin. Since not all states can offer lucrative profit owing to multiple factors, they cannot attract the attention of investors.

The anarchy of production in capitalism is another reason why all countries cannot be industrialized. With only 22 per cent of the global labour in manufacturing, one cannot name even a single sector of the economy that is not running in over production. Global capitalism designed the economy in a way that some countries will remain producers and others consumers. It is perhaps because of this that while we find heavy state subsidies in the West for farmers, manufacturers and bankers, most financial institutions want the abolition of all subsidies in the Global South.

Consequently, meagre industrialization that some poor states had achieved during the 1960s and 1970s is declining. The reason is simple: if all states manufacture their own goods, why should they buy from a few highly industrialized countries? Therefore, universal industrialization cannot be achievable.

Courtesy The News



A long and graceful life

He was indeed a polymath, a person whose excellence spans a whole spectrum of fields

By Ashraf Jehangir Qazi

These were originally remarks at a recent memorial meeting: a galaxy of Pakistani luminaries have paid truly exceptional tributes to the late Sartaj Aziz Sahib (former finance and foreign minister of Pakistan) which he thoroughly deserves.

To quote some of them without naming them, Quaid-e-Azam's Pakistan "finally died with the late Sartaj Aziz Sahib." Although Quaid's Pakistan died in Dhaka more than 50 years ago, Sartaj Sahib was "one of the last surviving soldiers of the Pakistan Movement who dedicated 70 years of his life to nationally and internationally serving Pakistan."

During this extended period, Sartaj Sahib distinguished himself as "a civil servant par excellence, an international diplomat who commanded huge international respect and influence, a politician of unimpeachable integrity" which we all know is a rare commodity in our beloved country. He was also "a respected academic and educationist, and an economic expert" who played a key role in devising the current international architecture for food and agricultural expertise, advice and development.

He was indeed a polymath, a person whose excellence spans a whole spectrum of fields.

At home, Sartaj Sahib served as finance minister, foreign minister, and adviser on foreign policy to the prime minister. He headed a whole range of national commissions to make critically important recommendations on the apportionment of the Indus Basin waters, food security, Fata reforms including its integration into Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, reforms in Gilgit-Baltistan, and the National Water Policy for the management of water resources, etc.

Unfortunately, his recommendations were by and large ignored by the political and power decision-making elites of Pakistan as a result of which instead of being a stable and rapidly growing democracy the country is where it is today. While the elites respected Sartaj Sahib's abilities and sincerity, they

saw their anti-national self-interests in side-stepping his recommendations.

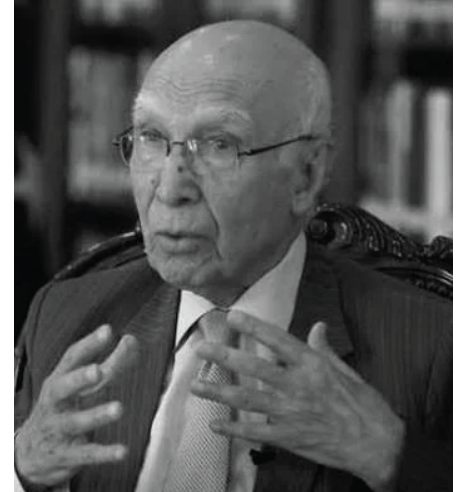
I came to know Sartaj Sahib through diplomatic colleagues who were close relatives of his and later when he was foreign minister and adviser on foreign policy. During the run up to the nuclear tests of 1998, Sartaj Sahib – while completely supportive of developing a nuclear deterrent – warned the government of the consequences of the step for the extremely vulnerable economy of the country.

The US and India were already well aware of Pakistan's nuclear capability. Reportedly, the then US president Bill Clinton offered a \$5 billion low interest loan (essentially a grant) if Pakistan refrained from testing. Accordingly, Sartaj Aziz advised deliberation and patience which insecure political leaders ignored. The economic consequences of leaders prioritizing their survival in office over the national interest are still with us.

After the Kargil conflict began, I visited Islamabad from Delhi, where I was serving as high commissioner, and Sartaj Sahib insisted I accompany him to a meeting at the GHQ where he encouraged me to give a very frank briefing on what I thought would be the final outcome of the conflict – which I did.

He then visited New Delhi where Jaswant Singh, the Indian foreign minister, received him at the airport out of personal high regard despite his government's reluctance to receive him at all because the two countries were practically at war so soon after PM Vajpayee's historic visit to Lahore.

Sartaj Sahib sought to negotiate a way out of the crisis that had negated the achievements of Vajpayee's visit. The Foreign Office was once again cleaning up the mess after the political and power leadership had made one miscalculation after another. India, however, insisted on prior withdrawal from Kargil for any negotiations to be possible. (Subsequently, the prime minister



of Pakistan who had just played host to Vajpayee had to visit Washington to ask for US intervention to facilitate a withdrawal.)

Despite disappointments, Sartaj Sahib's smiling countenance, his realistic optimism, his kindness, his acute intelligence combined with his disarming modesty, and his generosity of spirit towards younger colleagues left an indelible impression on all of us.

While unfailingly loyal to his political party superiors, he never flinched from frankly telling them about the likely harsh consequences of unwise policies – a quality which probably denied him the honour of serving Pakistan as its president, which was Pakistan's misfortune.

Sartaj Sahib was indeed a "living legend" as one prominent think tank of Islamabad named him. His unwavering belief in the universality of Islamic principles, democratic good governance, strong and accountable institutions operating within the limits of the constitution, and the broadening of the concept of the nation to accommodate the diversity of its peoples guided him throughout his life. This shall be an inspiration for generations to come who will, InshaAllah, realize the Pakistan of his dreams which he sought so diligently to build throughout his long and graceful life.

Courtesy The News

Genocide unabated

ICJ meekly looks the other way



By Naqi Akbar

Much fanfare was witnessed in the international media when the South African government took on the Zionist state over what it called the genocidal campaign unleashed by the Israeli Defence Forces in occupied Gaza Strip since October 7, 2023. With almost three months of relentless air campaign and limited ground incursions by the IDF, independent observers have estimated that more than 26000 have been killed in the process.

In the backdrop of these developments; given the fact that the Arab world in particular and the Muslim countries in general gave a cold shoulder to the Palestinian state and the people; with resistance subletting much to the splinter groups to symbolically retaliate; the South African initiative was thought to be ground breaking development.

It was initially thought that if the ICJ gives a hard-hitting judgement; it can ask the Israeli government to cease hostilities, call for a ceasefire, and also indict the Israeli government and the IDF over what can be safely concluded as 'war crimes'. The judgement which

was released by the media wing of the ICJ was declared as a press note and not an official document carrying any legal value for implementation for the concerned state.

As things stand, the world has over and above surrendered to what has been the intent of the Zionist state with complete backing of the west led by the United States. The reasons for that thought process emanate from the observations as well as behavioral patterns of the surrounding nation states, the resistance as well as its supported groups.

To begin with the leading Muslim states already sold over the guiding principles of the "Abraham Accords", a tactic recognition of the Zionist state were taken by surprise when Hamas launched its offensive into the Israeli territory. They were at loss of words, whether to condemn Hamas or Israel for its continued occupation of the Palestinian lands. It was only after the Israeli Air Force genocidal campaign that the otherwise unconcerned; these nation states recollected their senses to condemn Israel.

For the resistance led by Iran; it was a calculation that things will be manageable for the Hamas as well as regional players in the resistance with Israel soon on its knees and then on the negotiating table. They calculated their assessments on the basis that West and United States will not jump into the conflict in a big way and the show will be manageable.

What happened in the post October 7 developments was that, while the West unveiled its unconditional support for the Israeli government, with the United States sending its aircraft carriers to the conflict zone, the resistance was 'happy' with controlling the street or firing few rockets from south Lebanon. The firing from south Lebanon was more like an attendance than having any tangible impact on the Israeli genocidal campaign.

The resistance though trying to portray that it was the only power out to challenge was soon to retreat its aggressive steps as the war escalated. Iran in its initial response made a meticulous distancing from Hamas as part of its tactical deception. However later it could be easily concluded that Iran was

acting more like a nation state playing safe with what it used to call the global arrogance means United States than actually taking a plunge into direct conflict with the Zionist state.

Similar trends were followed by Hezbollah, which kept the Zionists guessing; though it actually maintained a minimum deterrence, suggesting that it was too not interested in any direct conflict with Israel.

That retreat of resistance, was witnessed in the form of frequently bombed out Damascus and Aleppo being not defended properly, literally making Syria a killing field for many senior IRGC leaders or “Sardars” affectionately called in the resistance circles. During the first two weeks of the new year 2024, the IRGC lost many of its commanders who made a name for themselves during the Syrian civil war, defending the pro resistance Baathist regime of Assad clan. Yet despite that much of loss, many of them old comrades of Qasem Soleimani, Iran did not react for revenge as has been the practice with Iran as well as Hezbollah as a matter of fact.

The odd man out in the whole jigsaw the Houthis surprised everyone, friends and foes alike with their strike capability. It seemed that they would turn the table, yet what has been observed is that they are fighting it out alone and they might have

muted too; under some advisory from Tehran.

Given the fact that the resistance nation states did not deploy their long-range missiles or even air force in the aid of Palestinians, it was a foregone signal for the aggressor government of Israel that it was a free for all theatre for them. Without mincing words, the resistance signaled its conceptual defeat, despite it claims that Israel will not last in next 25 years. The resistance failure to do any substantial damage to the Israeli war machine squarely suggests that the genocidal campaign was not effectively blocked; giving the Zionist state and the west a field day.

In the backdrop of these developments, the South African initiative in ICJ was taken as a serious step when many in the world, the free world or the resistance were not able to turn the tide. There have been examples in the case of Bosnian genocide when the western powers honored the United Nation controlled ICJ judgements regards Serbian genocidal campaign against the Bosnian Muslims.

However, what has been witnessed is that the ICJ meekly took a middle road. While not overtly condoning what the West and Israel were doing in Gaza, it did not declare their genocide as evidence of “war crime”. Likewise, Israel was ‘asked’ to do certain

things; but was not asked to enforce a ceasefire, which could have been construed as a serious snub to the Israelis. That did not happen, regretfully.

With Iran divided within, picking up fights with neighbors over trivial reasons and thinking thrice over opening front or an effective front with Israel, even with the proxies, whatever was being done by the Iran led resistance it was little more than the diplomatic consumption or domestic consumption.

With the ICJ judgement a closed chapter, likely to be confined in the chronicles of current history, the future of Palestinian plight sits squarely on how soon the otherwise internal strife ridden Israeli nation state collapses from within. Given the fact that the incumbent Prime Minister is on the edge of his political credibility, an angry electorate over the government vs the Israeli judiciary standoff; external factors do not seem to matter much.

Any out of blue military development; like the killing of US servicemen along the Iraq and Jordan border as the result of Pro Iran Iraqi resistance groups suicide drones might escalate the situation; which might force the Iranians to jump into the war mode. Sans such eventuality; the status quo does not seems to change for good; for now.





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Press Release

Unofficial

No. 2024/6
26 January 2024

Application of the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide in the Gaza Strip (South Africa v. Israel)

The Court indicates provisional measures

THE HAGUE, 26 January 2024. The International Court of Justice today delivered its Order on the [Request for the indication of provisional measures](#) submitted by South Africa in the case concerning *Application of the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide in the Gaza Strip (South Africa v. Israel)*.

It is recalled that, on 29 December 2023, South Africa filed an [Application instituting proceedings](#) against Israel concerning alleged violations by Israel of its obligations under the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide (the “Genocide Convention”) in relation to Palestinians in the Gaza Strip. In its Application, South Africa also requested the Court to indicate provisional measures in order to “protect against further, severe and irreparable harm to the rights of the Palestinian people under the Genocide Convention” and “to ensure Israel’s compliance with its obligations under the Genocide Convention not to engage in genocide, and to prevent and to punish genocide” (see press release No. [2023/77](#)).

Public hearings on South Africa’s request for provisional measures were held on Thursday 11 and Friday 12 January 2024.

In its [Order](#), which has binding effect, the Court indicates the following provisional measures:

“(1) By fifteen votes to two,

The State of Israel shall, in accordance with its obligations under the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide, in relation to Palestinians in Gaza, take all measures within its power to prevent the commission of all acts within the scope of Article II of this Convention, in particular:

- (a) killing members of the group;
- (b) causing serious bodily or mental harm to members of the group;
- (c) deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part; and

- 2 -

(d) imposing measures intended to prevent births within the group;

IN FAVOUR: *President* Donoghue; *Vice-President* Gevorgian; *Judges* Tomka, Abraham, Bennouna, Yusuf, Xue, Bhandari, Robinson, Salam, Iwasawa, Nolte, Charlesworth, Brant; *Judge ad hoc* Moseneke;

AGAINST: *Judge* Sebutinde; *Judge ad hoc* Barak;

(2) By fifteen votes to two,

The State of Israel shall ensure with immediate effect that its military does not commit any acts described in point 1 above;

IN FAVOUR: *President* Donoghue; *Vice-President* Gevorgian; *Judges* Tomka, Abraham, Bennouna, Yusuf, Xue, Bhandari, Robinson, Salam, Iwasawa, Nolte, Charlesworth, Brant; *Judge ad hoc* Moseneke;

AGAINST: *Judge* Sebutinde; *Judge ad hoc* Barak;

(3) By sixteen votes to one,

The State of Israel shall take all measures within its power to prevent and punish the direct and public incitement to commit genocide in relation to members of the Palestinian group in the Gaza Strip;

IN FAVOUR: *President* Donoghue; *Vice-President* Gevorgian; *Judges* Tomka, Abraham, Bennouna, Yusuf, Xue, Bhandari, Robinson, Salam, Iwasawa, Nolte, Charlesworth, Brant; *Judges ad hoc* Barak, Moseneke;

AGAINST: *Judge* Sebutinde;

(4) By sixteen votes to one,

The State of Israel shall take immediate and effective measures to enable the provision of urgently needed basic services and humanitarian assistance to address the adverse conditions of life faced by Palestinians in the Gaza Strip;

IN FAVOUR: *President* Donoghue; *Vice-President* Gevorgian; *Judges* Tomka, Abraham, Bennouna, Yusuf, Xue, Bhandari, Robinson, Salam, Iwasawa, Nolte, Charlesworth, Brant; *Judges ad hoc* Barak, Moseneke;

AGAINST: *Judge* Sebutinde;

(5) By fifteen votes to two,

The State of Israel shall take effective measures to prevent the destruction and ensure the preservation of evidence related to allegations of acts within the scope of Article II and Article III of the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide against members of the Palestinian group in the Gaza Strip;

IN FAVOUR: *President* Donoghue; *Vice-President* Gevorgian; *Judges* Tomka, Abraham, Bennouna, Yusuf, Xue, Bhandari, Robinson, Salam, Iwasawa, Nolte, Charlesworth, Brant; *Judge ad hoc* Moseneke;

AGAINST: *Judge* Sebutinde; *Judge ad hoc* Barak;

- 3 -

(6) By fifteen votes to two,

The State of Israel shall submit a report to the Court on all measures taken to give effect to this Order within one month as from the date of this Order.

IN FAVOUR: *President* Donoghue; *Vice-President* Gevorgian; Judges Tomka, Abraham, Bennouna, Yusuf, Xue, Bhandari, Robinson, Salam, Iwasawa, Nolte, Charlesworth, Brant; *Judge ad hoc* Moseneke;

AGAINST: *Judge* Sebutinde; *Judge ad hoc* Barak.”

*

Judge XUE appends a declaration to the Order of the Court; Judge SEBUTINDE appends a dissenting opinion to the Order of the Court; Judges BHANDARI and NOLTE append declarations to the Order of the Court; Judge *ad hoc* BARAK appends a separate opinion to the Order of the Court.

A summary of the Order appears in the document entitled “[Summary 2024/1](#)”, to which summaries of the declarations and opinions are annexed. This summary and the full text of the Order are available on the [case page](#) on the Court’s website.

Earlier [press releases](#) relating to this case are available on the Court’s website.

Note: The Court’s press releases are prepared by its Registry for information purposes only and do not constitute official documents.

The International Court of Justice (ICJ) is the principal judicial organ of the United Nations. It was established by the United Nations Charter in June 1945 and began its activities in April 1946. The Court is composed of 15 judges elected for a nine-year term by the General Assembly and the Security Council of the United Nations. The seat of the Court is at the Peace Palace in The Hague (Netherlands). The Court has a twofold role: first, to settle, in accordance with international law, legal disputes submitted to it by States; and, second, to give advisory opinions on legal questions referred to it by duly authorized United Nations organs and agencies of the system.

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Egypt-Israel ties in jeopardy over intensifying Gaza border dispute

By Claire Parker

As Israeli troops push farther south in Gaza, officials in Jerusalem are signaling what could be a central, and politically perilous, aim of the war's next phase: taking control of the border crossing with Egypt.

Since December, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has repeatedly asserted that Israel cannot eliminate Hamas without exercising authority over Gaza's southern border region, including Egypt's Rafah crossing, which has served as a vital transit point for people and humanitarian aid into the besieged enclave.

"The Philadelphi Corridor — or, to put it more correctly, the southern stoppage point [of Gaza] — must be in our hands. It must be shut," Netanyahu said in late December, referring to a buffer road along the border. "It is clear that any other arrangement would not ensure the demilitarization that we seek."

Before Oct. 7, Egyptian and Hamas border authorities each managed their respective sides of the Rafah crossing, which sits along the Philadelphi Corridor, a no man's land approximately nine miles long and several hundred yards wide that stretches from the southernmost tip of Gaza to the Mediterranean Sea. Israel hasn't had boots on the ground along the border since 2005, when the country withdrew its forces from the Gaza Strip.

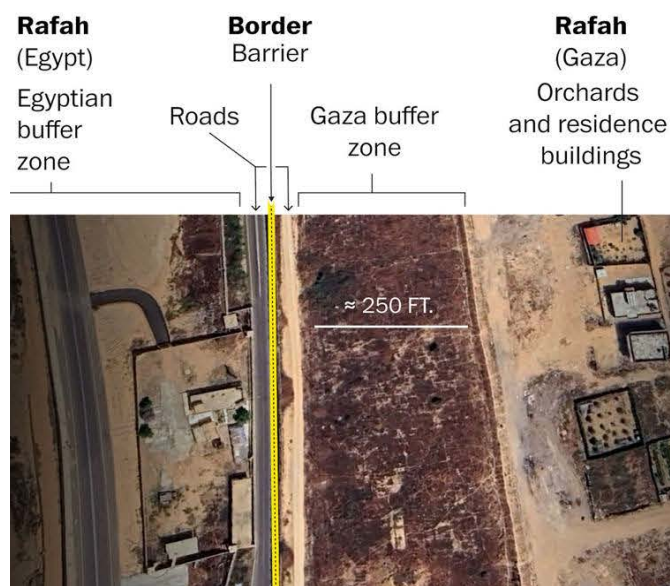
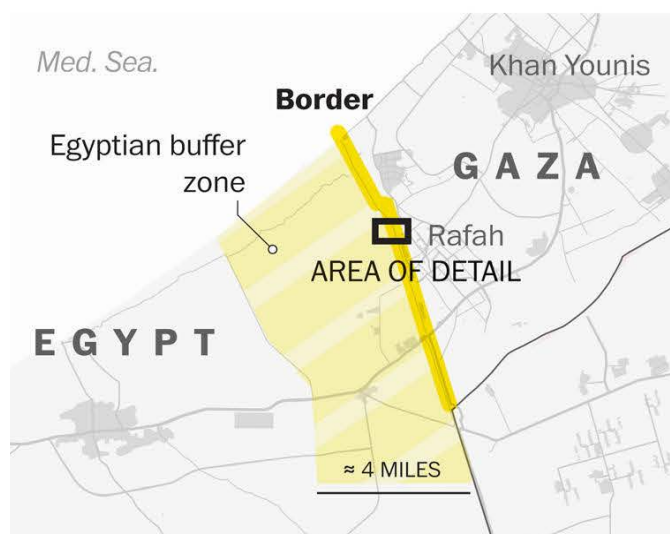
Reestablishing Israeli control over the area will be crucial to creating "a new strategic situation in Gaza" in which Hamas is unable to attack Israel again, according to Michael Milshtein, a senior fellow at Reichman University and a former head of Palestinian affairs for Israeli military intelligence.

"It must be strictly emphasized that any Israeli move in this direction will lead to a serious threat to Egyptian-Israeli relations," Daa Rashwan, head of the State Information Service, said in a statement last week.

Egyptian and Israeli officials and commentators have traded accusations this month over who is to blame for the smuggling of weapons to Hamas in Gaza, revealing growing fissures in a relationship that has been a bedrock of stability in a volatile region.

"There is lack of trust or lack of understanding from both sides, which we are not used to," said a former member of Egypt's parliament, Mohamed Anwar Sadat, the nephew of Anwar Sadat, the Egyptian president who signed the 1979 treaty and was later assassinated. "Honestly, we believe we are back to square one when it comes to our relationship with Israel — back to the '70s."

Egypt has long advocated for Palestinian self-determination while serving as a key interlocutor between Israel and Palestinian authorities. Relations between Israel and Egypt were never warm, but the two countries had developed a close security partnership in recent years and were pursuing deeper economic and energy ties.



Since President Abdel Fatah El-Sisi took power after a military coup in 2013, Egypt has destroyed hundreds of tunnels used to smuggle weapons and goods to and from Gaza. The government also displaced tens of thousands of northern Sinai residents and razed buildings near the border to create a militarized buffer zone about three miles deep.

Israel, meanwhile, let Egypt send military forces to Sinai to fight an Islamist insurgency, beyond what the 1979 treaty allowed.

Security cooperation "was excellent — until the 7th of October," said Samir Farag, a former Egyptian general and defense official.

The suggestion from Israel that Egypt has failed to adequately crack down on smuggling has touched a nerve among Egyptian officials, for whom security is paramount. From Cairo's perspective, Sisi has already taken on significant political risk by shoring up Israel's blockade of Gaza, even as more than a million displaced Palestinians seek safety in Rafah.

"Egypt is fully controlling its borders," Foreign Ministry spokesman Ahmed Abu Zeid said on a recent talk show.

Rashwan, the state information head, laid out a lengthy defense of Egypt's efforts to crack down on smuggling — pointing, among other measures, to a 20-foot-deep concrete wall Egypt constructed along the border in recent years. And he lashed out at suggestions from Israel that militants are co-opting humanitarian deliveries for their own purposes.

"Any claim that smuggling operations are carried out through trucks carrying aid and goods to Gaza from the Egyptian side of the Rafah crossing is an empty and ridiculous statement," he said.

Egypt under growing pressure as displaced Gazans crowd the border

Tensions between the countries were already high after calls by right-wing Israeli lawmakers for the displacement of Gazans into Sinai, a nightmare scenario for Egypt. The war in Gaza has also dealt another blow to Egypt's struggling economy: Tourism revenue is down, and income from shipping through the Suez Canal dropped after Houthi militants in Yemen began attacking merchant vessels in the Red Sea to protest the war.

"The strain being imposed on Egypt right now is just extraordinary," said Mirette Mabrouk, director of the Egypt studies program at the Washington-based Middle East Institute. "The security of Egypt is tantamount to the security of Israel, so when you continue to attempt to destabilize Egypt, or if you proceed in a manner that is very likely to destabilize Egypt, it is not in your interest."

Farag, the former general, said Egypt was considering a range of options to respond if Israeli forces seize the border area, but declined to elaborate.

Netanyahu said in a news conference Saturday that relations with Egypt were "ongoing and normal" after reports that Cairo had considered recalling its ambassador from Tel Aviv.

Israel's military would only undertake a ground operation along the Philadelphi Corridor with the consent of Egyptian officials, the Israeli newspaper Yedioth Ahronoth reported this week.

Preserving its relationship with Cairo is "a very, very important consideration from the Israeli point of view," Milshtein said.

Israeli troops along the border would be likely to become targets for Hamas or allied militants, bringing the violence right to Egypt's doorstep and standing in the way of a durable peace, said a former Arab diplomat familiar with Cairo's concerns, speaking on the condition of anonymity to discuss the sensitive issue.

Israel's seizure of the border crossing would also sever Egypt's geographic link to Gaza, potentially undercutting Egypt's leverage

with Hamas and weakening its role as a mediator between Israeli and Palestinian authorities, the diplomat added. Egypt, along with Qatar and the United States, continues to play a key role in negotiations between Israel and Hamas over a potential cease-fire and the release of Israeli hostages.

The "very presence" of the Israeli military in Gaza "is likely to remain a source of ongoing violence," said Khaled Elgindy, a senior fellow at the Middle East Institute. "If Israel says, 'We're never leaving Gaza,' then we can look forward to a perpetual insurgency."



Sources: Maxar and Airbus via Google Earth

Iran's 'shadowy' influence in Balochistan and precarious balancing act for Pakistan

By Jan Achakzai

To contain further fears of instability in the region, Pakistan and Iran have agreed to “de-escalate” tensions after an exchange of missile and drone attacks last week, Islamabad said.

Pakistan's Foreign Minister Jalil Abbas Jilani and the foreign minister of Iran, Hossein Amir-Abdollahian, spoke via phone last Friday, Pakistan's foreign ministry said in a statement.

Nestled along Iran's southern border, Balochistan sits at the center of a complex geopolitical game. Pakistan has an approximately 900 km border with Iran through Balochistan. While official pronouncements always painted a picture of cordial relations between Islamabad and Tehran till the recent attack and counterattack, a more nuanced narrative unfolds beneath the surface. This analysis delves into the multifaceted web of Iran's influence in Balochistan, highlighting the challenges it poses for Pakistan and exploring potential avenues for navigating this delicate landscape.

Tehran's approach in Balochistan is a study in contradictions. On one hand, it cracks down on its own Baloch separatists within the Sistan-Balochistan province but allegedly provides safe haven and financial backing to Pakistani Baloch militant outfits. Recent attacks in Ketch, Noshki, and Panjgur bear the fingerprints of this clandestine support, casting a shadow over the facade of official cooperation.

Figures like Dr. Allah Nazar, a prominent militant ethnic Baloch leader, are believed to find refuge and resources in Iran. The porous border facilitates the movement of militants, creating a vicious cycle of violence that spills over into Pakistani territory. Groups like Al Zainaboon and the Qasim Force, allegedly trained and equipped by Iran, further exacerbate the security situation. Recently a group belonging to the same outfits was busted in Karachi.

The development of Gwadar port, a



linchpin in the CPEC, has emerged as a major bone of contention. Tehran views Gwadar as a direct threat to its own Chabahar port, fueling its efforts to undermine Gwadar's progress and maintain its economic dominance in the region. This economic contest adds another layer of complexity to the already intricate geopolitical tapestry.

The situation is further complicated by the volatile dynamics surrounding Balochistan. Afghanistan's porous borders serve as entry points for militant groups like ISIS/TTP, while the presence of Indian intelligence networks like RAW in Chabahar port injects another layer of tension. Kulbuhoshan Jadav was heading this network from Chabahar. This intricate web of alliances and rivalries underscores the delicate balancing act required to navigate the region's complexities.

Pakistan faces a daunting challenge in countering Iran's influence. Openly antagonizing a neighboring state is untenable, yet Iranian meddling poses a clear threat to Pakistan's national security. The key lies in crafting a nuanced response that effectively neutralizes Iran's proxy wars and soft power tactics without escalating tensions into open conflict.

Several avenues offer promise in containing Iran's influence. Firstly, Pakistan needs to bolster its own strategic presence in Balochistan. Improved governance, addressing local governance challenges through development initiatives and reforms, and

fostering closer ties with the populace are crucial steps in countering Iranian narratives. Secondly, diplomatic channels must remain open, even as Pakistan firmly addresses its concerns regarding Iranian interference.

Thirdly, tackling the rampant smuggling across the Iran-Pakistan border is essential. Clamping down on illegal border crossings disrupts the flow of militants and weapons, weakening Iran's ability to support proxies. Finally, fostering regional cooperation, particularly with other regional countries is crucial in stemming the tide of militant threats emanating from porous borders.

Balochistan stands at a crossroads, caught in the crossfire of regional power plays. Recognizing the multifaceted nature of Iran's influence and adopting a comprehensive approach that blends strategic assertiveness, diplomatic engagement, and internal development initiatives are crucial for Pakistan to safeguard its national security and ensure stability in the region. Only through such a nuanced and multifaceted strategy can Pakistan navigate the delicate dance of countering Iranian influence without jeopardizing regional stability.

The path forward requires not just strategic calculations but also a commitment to fostering regional understanding and addressing the root causes of Iranian footprints in Balochistan. Remember, the situation in Balochistan is far more intricate than mere headlines can capture.

Courtesy The News

Scientists say worse to come as Himalayan snow ceases

Himalayan ecologies and economies are heavily reliant on winter snowfall, but the necessary weather patterns – western disturbances in particular – are decreasing in frequency and intensity

By Nidhi Jamwal

Vikram Katoch is visibly worried: the vast valley of Lahaul-Spiti in the northern Indian state of Himachal Pradesh is almost snowless this January. “By now we should have had at least four to five feet of snow, but right now we have nothing,” he says. “It is a matter of grave concern because snowfall ensures our water security and provides water for irrigation and farming to local villagers.”

Katoch is vice president of the Save Lahaul Spiti Society, a non-profit organisation trying to protect this ecologically fragile valley from environmental degradation and the impacts of climate change.

Over 500km north, the situation is no different in the skiing destination of Gulmarg, Kashmir. Despite the ongoing Chillai Kalan (Kashmir’s harshest, 40-day winter period) snow is missing from Gulmarg’s slopes.

Via social media on 9 January, Omar Abdullah, the vice president of the Jammu Kashmir National Conference party, said: “I’ve never seen Gulmarg so dry in the winter ... If we don’t get snow soon the summer is going to be miserable.”

On 10 January, the India Meteorological Department (IMD) meteorologist Sonam Lotus confirmed large winter snowfall deficits across the northern regions of Ladakh, Jammu & Kashmir, Himachal Pradesh and Uttarakhand. He added there is no likelihood of snow until 25 January.

Where is the western disturbance?

A western disturbance (WD) is an extratropical storm that originates in the Mediterranean region. An area of reduced air pressure, this disturbance carries moisture from the Mediterranean and Caspian seas east, via the subtropical westerly jet stream. This



brings rain and snow to Pakistan and northern India, which replenishes glaciers. These disturbances are therefore crucial for the region’s water security, farming and tourism.

According to Madhavan Rajeevan, a former secretary of India’s earth sciences ministry, both the intensity and frequency of western disturbances are decreasing: “The recent studies very clearly suggest that there is a decreasing trend in winter snow or winter precipitation over the region. This is related to the less-frequent passage of western disturbances.

“The most important worry should be the future projections of WDs. Climate models suggest a further decrease of about 10-15% in the frequency of WDs by 2050 or so. It should really worry us.”

The July 2023 study, “The decline in western disturbance activity over northern India in recent decades”, assessed 39 WD seasons between 1980 and 2019. It reported a declining trend in the frequency of these storms.

According to the report: “The combined mean frequency of strong and extreme WDs declined by as much as ~ 43%, contrary to the mean occurrences of feeble and moderate WDs,

which rose by ~ 11% ... The sharpest decline (~ 49%) was observed for the most intense WDs (strong and extreme), primarily explaining the decreasing WD precipitation intensity across the core WD zone.”

Similarly, a 2019 WD study published by the American Meteorological Society concluded that: “The decline in WD frequency and intensity will cause a decrease in mean winter rainfall over Pakistan and northern India amounting to about 15% of the mean.”

“WDs are associated with the mid-latitude jet stream – strong westerly winds at around 12-15km,” says Rajeevan. “Observations show this jet stream has moved north during the recent winters. It could be related to global warming (which shows everything moving poleward, including monsoons, tropical cyclones) and also Arctic Sea ice melting.”

Lower winter precipitation, higher summer rainfall

Another disturbing trend linked to WDs is their rising frequency during the months of May, June and July. This trend is noted in the August 2023 preprint of a WD analysis by Kieran

Hunt, a meteorology research fellow at the UK's University of Reading.

According to Hunt's analysis: "WDs have been twice as common in June in the last 20 years than during the previous 50. This is attributed to delayed northward retreat of the subtropical jet, which historically has occurred before the onset of the summer monsoon."

The preprint says its most important finding is the significant increase in monsoonal WDs, which means "catastrophic events like the 2013 Uttarakhand floods and the 2023 north India floods are becoming much more frequent."

Snowless winters

Lotus is based in Leh, Ladakh, where snowless winters are becoming a huge concern. "It is mid-January, which is the peak winter season," he says. "But it is unusually warm. This winter is the warmest winter in Leh in the past decade."

According to IMD data, December 2023 was an almost snowless month for most of northern India. Precipitation in both Jammu & Kashmir and Ladakh was -79% of those levels typical in December. In the state of Himachal Pradesh it was -85% and in Uttarakhand it was -75%.

January has so far been worse, with Uttarakhand receiving -99% of the typical precipitation during the first two weeks of this month. Meanwhile, Himachal Pradesh, Jammu & Kashmir, and Ladakh have not received any precipitation.

Lotus says this is not the region's first dry spell: "Analysis of the past 43 years of data shows that there have been years when snowfall has been lower than what has been received this winter." For example, in 2016 and 2018 Leh did not receive snow during November and December. Gulmarg was similarly dry in 2016: snowfall during November and December amounted to 7.6cms, compared to 23cms in 2023.

Lotus is reluctant to make a direct connection between climate change and this year's unusual snowfall in the Himalayas. What he deems indisputable, however, is that rising temperatures are making things worse. In 2023, the lowest minimum temperature recorded in Leh was -12.2C,

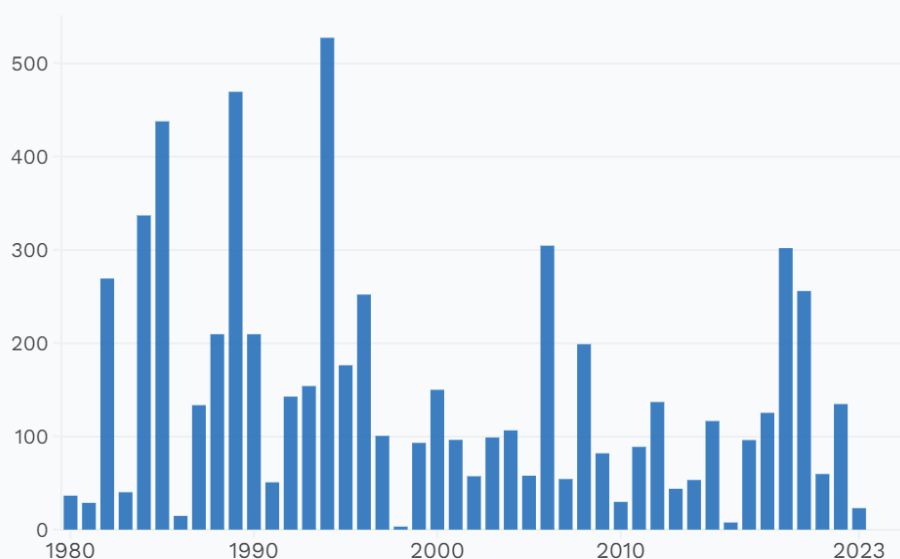
which is significantly warmer than previous years. Lotus says this combination of low snowfall and high temperatures will accelerate Himalayan glacial melt.

Impact on glaciers

The Third Pole speaks to Irfan Rashid, an assistant geoinformatics professor at the University of Kashmir who specialises in Kashmir's cryosphere. Rashid agrees with Lotus: "In the past two decades, we have had at least four snowless Chillai Kalans. Snowfall during the winter period is crucial as it feeds the glaciers which, during the summer months, slowly release water that rejuvenates springs, feeds the rivers and also provides water for irrigation."

Kashmir's snowless winter

Total November-December snowfall (cm) in Gulmarg, Jammu & Kashmir



A threat to water security

Rajeevan agrees that the water security of the region could be affected if western disturbances and their associated snowfall decrease: "Water flowing into these rivers [the five rivers of the Indus Basin] due to the melting of snow is very important for water management over this area, for agriculture, power generation."

He adds that the Indus Water Treaty, which manages river water sharing between India and Pakistan, could also be impacted; Rashid agrees that the lack of winter snowfall and receding glaciers could have a transboundary impact: "We need

basin-wide, detailed studies for the same."

Rashid says these changes also threaten more disasters in the region, such as the Chamoli disaster in February 2021, or the more recent South Lhonak Lake disaster in Sikkim.

"The Himalayan region – not just in India, but the entire Hindu Kush and Karakoram – has steep slopes that host snow or permafrost," explains Rashid. "These are vulnerable slopes and as heat rises and there is a lack of sufficient snowfall, these areas are likely to become hotspots for disasters such as GLOFs."

Some of these disasters are already evident. Uttarakhand has seen an enormous

increase in forest fires, from 922 in 2002, to 41,600 in 2019. Climate change, which increases the chances of low rainfall in this region, is a critical driving factor. Uttarakhand's forest fires usually happen between April and June, but this year they are already igniting.

Given the scope of these emerging challenges, Rashid believes the Indian government needs to urgently set up a national programme to establish what is happening to western disturbances. He says if they are armed with credible scientific data, institutions can devise plans to handle this looming threat.

Courtesy www.thethirdpole.net

Snowless winters deprive Northern Pakistan of an Economic Lifeline



By Aamir Latif/Anadolu Agency

KALAM, Pakistan: Hotels and streets are usually packed with tourists who throng to the picturesque Kalam Valley from across Pakistan to enjoy the snowfall at this time of winter. Usually surrounded by snow-capped mountains in winter, the popular tourist destination, located some 326 kilometers (202 miles) from the capital city of Islamabad, is currently sporting a brown and barren look, as the country's northern and northwestern parts are yet to receive the first snowfall of this season.

Northwestern Pakistan normally receives moderate to heavy snowfall between the middle of December and the end of January, which attracts hundreds of thousands of tourists from every corner of the South Asian country.

The Kalam and Malam Jabba valleys of scenic Swat, often referred to as the "Switzerland of Pakistan," are the most popular tourist destinations, apart from the Kaghan and Naran valleys in northwestern Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province and Murree, a hill station in the northeastern Punjab province.

"There is a 60% to 70% decline in the number of tourists this winter, and the

reason is obvious: no snowfall," Mohammad Riaz, a local hotel owner, told Anadolu.

"Last year, it was a packed season. We had to arrange extra rooms to cope with the number of tourists. But today, 70% of our rooms are vacant despite a concession in rates."

The situation in adjoining Malam Jabba, home to the country's biggest ski resort and the core of winter sports festivals, is no different. Most of the hotels lay vacant, while shopkeepers and transporters kill their time with idle chitchat.

"We are praying for snowfall. That would mean a lot to us. Snowfall is a lifeline for our economy," Mohammad Adil, who runs a hotel in the main Malam Jabba bazaar, told Anadolu.

'Snow runs our entire economy'

The northern Gilgit-Baltistan region, which borders neighboring China, however, has a longer snowfall season, stretching from November to March. A few parts of the region, located at the confluence of the world's greatest mountain ranges – the

Karakoram, the Himalayas, the Hindu Kush, and the Pamir Mountains – and home to five of the 14 peaks above 8,000 meters (26,246 feet), received light snowfall in November last year, but the peak season is still snowless. Iqbal Hussain, director of Gilgit-Baltistan's Tourism Department, foresees a "deep" impact from the snowless winter on the region's economy, which "directly and indirectly" banks on snowfall.

"Snow runs our entire economy, in terms of tourism, fishing, agriculture, and hydro-electricity. No, or less snowfall means less water, and subsequently, less fishing and less farming, aside from power shortages," Hussain told Anadolu.

No, or less snowfall would mean early spring water would be a big problem for local farmers and those associated with the fishing sector, aside from causing a further decrease in underground water levels, he explained. He said although the region does not primarily attract regular snow-loving tourists, it has traditional winter activities that are likely to be affected by the lack of snow this year. The situation has forced his department to shift the venue for this year's "winter feast," a traditional winter

recreational festival, from Hunza Valley to Ghizer district.

According to Fazl-e-Khaliq, a Swat-based journalist who focuses on environmental issues, the valley has seen a gradual increase in temperatures over the past few decades, causing significant damage to local agriculture and infrastructure. Speaking to Anadolu, he said the rising temperatures regularly lead to small and big glacier outbursts across the valley, washing away farmlands and infrastructure, aside from reducing underground water levels.

“Until a decade ago, even the lower parts of Swat, including the capital Mingora, used to receive snowfall. But nowadays, you can’t even think about that,” he said.

Climate change is here

The disappointment was writ large on Mahmood Hussain’s face as he had traveled from the southern port city of Karachi to Kalam, hoping for snowfall.

“There’s nothing here except for dry cold,” Hussain told Anadolu.

“Lakes, springs, and greenery are what you enjoy in the summers. But in the winters, it’s only snowfall that brings you here,” he added.

Pakistan is among the top 10 countries



vulnerable to the challenges related to climate change and global warming, although its share in the release of planet-warming gases is less than 1%. Environmentalists reckon that climate change has gradually turned the region’s weather patterns “erratic” and “extreme” in recent years, which has resulted in unpredictable rains, snowfall, and long drought spells.

“Although we cannot associate one particular phenomenon as a whole result of climate change, it’s true that weather patterns have become erratic and unpredictable because of that over the years,” Sardar Sarfraz, a director at the Pakistan Meteorological Department, told Anadolu. Northern and northwestern areas

of Pakistan, including Pakistan-administered Kashmir, have been receiving lower-than-average snowfall over the past three years.

“Pakistan has so far received 92% and 80% less rains in December and January compared to this period last year,” Sarfraz said. The lack of rains and snowfall is because the “westerly waves” system that brings these to the region has not properly developed so far, he explained.

However, he said Pakistan’s northern and northwestern regions are likely to receive “good rains” by the end of this month, though they would still be less compared to last January.



River Kabul; A Controversy in The Offing



By Zahiruddin

We are ready to provide financial assistance for the construction of a dam on the Kunar River. There are women who are even ready to sell their jewelry to raise funds for the construction of the dam on the Kunar River”, says Dr. Hasina Karokhail, the founder of Hasina Karokhail Charity Foundation, a Kabul-based organization. Such sentiments on the part of Afghan people against Pakistan have increased in the aftermath of the stepping up efforts of Pakistani authorities to send back the unregistered and illegally staying Afghans back to Afghanistan, the Taliban-led administration in Kabul has started multifarious issues for Pakistan and the new controversy on Kabul River is one of them. It is not merely a matter of dam for irrigation and hydro power generation, but its tacit target is Pakistan and construction of dams on Kabul River is the intimidate it.

Treading the toe of Dr. Hasina Karokhail, several Afghan experts have come up with their plans sharing it with the leadership of the Taliban government regarding the construction of a dam on the Kunar River. They have submitted the plan to the Minis-

try of Economics for cooperation in controlling the Kunar River’s water and building a dam there. The plan suggests that the ministry should seek public funding for this historic project and activate funding mechanisms. The plan includes, ‘Collecting a fee of \$100 from each Afghan returning through Kabul Airport and \$10 from each passenger on domestic flights, and the total amount of these contributions should be shared live through a TV screen. According to our calculations, just the Kabul Airport has the capacity to generate between 30,000 to 40,000 dollars a day.’

Another part of the plan mentions, ‘Creating toll points along major roads and collecting 200 Afghans from each heavy vehicle and 50 Afghans from each fast-moving vehicle.’ In December last, the Afghanistan Ministry of Water and Energy, announced to proceed on its plan to construct a multi-purpose dam on Kabul River at Kunar province to generate 45-megawatt electricity and irrigate 34 thousand hectares of land. It is said that an Indian construction firm is being engaged for the construction of the dam which has

always created concern for the authorities and the people here due to its proximity. The issue on Kabul River has been raised by different Afghan governments sporadically in the past and subsided with the passage of time but this time, it is going to spark a full-blown controversy.

Kabul River has its origin in the extreme north of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province of Pakistan located in Broghil valley bordering the Wakhan corridors of Afghanistan which is the home of scores of glaciers out of which Chiantar Glacier is widely known for its enormity. Covering a distance of about 400 kilometers across the valley of Chitral with the name of Chitral River, it enters the Kunar province of Afghanistan in its border village of Arandu in the extreme south to re-enter KP province of Pakistan in Mohmand district and eventually merges with Indus River near Attock. As per information gathered from the Irrigation Department of KP, 17 percent of irrigation water is derived from Kabul River which amounts to 13-million-acre feet (MAF) annually. The recent developments about Kabul River in Afghanistan should

naturally trigger concerns and apprehensions here in Pakistan in the highly charged atmosphere prevailing here after the TTP men have upgraded their activities in the southern districts of KP on approximately daily basis with their bastions inside Afghan soil.

Several citizens have shared their plans with the Taliban administration regarding the construction of a dam on the Kunar River and have even shown readiness to provide financial assistance for the construction of this dam. After Pakistan began forcibly deporting Afghan refugees, Afghans desired the construction of a dam on the Kunar River. They are ready for all kinds of cooperation in this regard.

This comes at a time when, some time ago, the Deputy Minister of Water and Energy of the Taliban, Mujib Rahman Akhundzada, announced plans to build a hydroelectric dam on the Kunar River. He said the dam has been surveyed, but due to its high cost, the plan could not be implemented immediately. He added that the construction of this dam would irrigate one and a half lakh acres of agricultural land and produce 45 megawatts of electricity. The official also mentioned plans to build other dams along the length of the Kunar River.

The treaty of 1921 regarding water governance of Kabul River is the only one which was signed between Afghanistan and the Great Britain which envisaged the withdrawal of water for Torkham (then part of Afghanistan) and the rights of navigation and irrigation in the plains here. A number of efforts and initiatives launched by the World Bank for concluding a treaty between Pakistan and Afghanistan, the two co-riparian of Kabul River on the pattern of Indus River Treaty but all it ended in failure. In 2014, the government of Nawaz Sharif took up the matter in its full earnestness and proposed a host of measures leading to agreement on treaty and here too, Afghan government did not reciprocate accordingly, and it was consigned to the cold storage. Both the sides do aspire for a treaty, and they know that it will remain a pipe dream due to three reasons; lack of stable government in Kabul after the Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan, political differences between the two countries leading to create an atmosphere of mistrust and lack of data on Kabul River. All the three are potential factors to foil any attempt to reach at a treaty between the two neighbors of which political instability in Afghanistan is the potent one. Peace and stability have always eluded the land of

Afghanistan since 1970s when Soviet Union started to meddle in its internal affairs while a thick layer of mistrust and wariness between the two neighbors prevails since 1947 as Afghanistan did never accept Durand Line as permanent line of division.

Pakistan had seriously started planning for constructing diversion structure in Chitral at Kessu village near Drosh in early 1980s when Soviet Union was present in Afghanistan and initial works on the plan of Kessu Barrage had started to divert the Chitral River, the major tributary of Kabul River to Panjkora River flowing across Dir valley. The plan was later on, discontinued with the withdrawal of Soviet Union from Afghanistan.

As per international law, a state cannot alter the natural flow of the river which may be advantageous to other riparian states. In utter violation of this law, Afghanistan has tried time and again to divert the water of Kabul River in its land by construction of multi-purpose dams including the proposed Shatoot Dam in Kunar province with the financial assistance of India amounting to 236 million US Dollars in 2018 which was dropped later on due to the strong protest from Pakistan.



Alon Musk sees \$56bn Tesla pay deal cancelled in court

By Mariko Oi

A judge in the US state of Delaware has annulled a \$55.8bn (£44bn) pay deal awarded to Elon Musk in 2018 by the electric car company Tesla.

The lawsuit was filed by a shareholder who argued that it was an overpayment.

Judge Kathaleen McCormick called the compensation "an unfathomable sum" that was not fair to shareholders and said the process leading to the package being approved was "deeply flawed".

She ruled the contract should be cancelled.

The pay deal, decided back in 2018, was the biggest ever in US corporate history, helping to make Mr Musk the richest person in the world. Bloomberg and Forbes estimated his net worth to be between \$198bn (£162bn) and \$220bn (£180bn), in November 2023.

Tesla's package tied Mr Musk's compensation to performance targets, such as Tesla's share price and profitability. He does not receive a salary.

But Tesla shareholder Richard Tornetta launched legal action calling for the award to be rescinded, arguing the tycoon had been overpaid.

Following years of legal argument, a week-long trial commenced in November 2022 where Tesla directors argued the huge pay award was designed to ensure that Mr Musk, one of the world's most dynamic entrepreneurs continued to dedicate his attention to the company.

But in her 201-page ruling released on Tuesday, Judge McCormick said that Tesla directors had been "swept up by the rhetoric" surrounding Mr Musk's "superstar appeal".

Moreover, Mr Musk had "extensive ties" with the Tesla officials tasked with negotiating the pay award. She cited his 15-year relationship with the compensation committee chair, Ira Ehrenpreis.



Mr Musk also had business relations with another compensation committee member Antonio Gracia dating back more than 20 years, the judge said.

Following the release of the ruling, Greg Varallo, an attorney for the Tesla shareholder Mr Tornetta, said it was a "good day for the good guys," in an email reported by the Reuters news agency.

In a post on X, formerly known as Twitter, Mr Musk said: "Never incorporate your company in the state of Delaware".

"I recommend incorporating in Nevada or Texas if you prefer shareholders to decide matters", he added. He then posted a poll asking his followers whether or not Tesla should "change its state of incorporation to Texas, home of its physical headquarters".

The judge's ruling can be appealed to the Delaware Supreme Court.

Shares in Tesla were down by around 2.5% in extended New York trade. They have lost more than 20% of their value so far this year.

As well as being the chief executive and a major shareholder of Tesla, Mr Musk also owns several other companies including the social media platform X, the rocket company SpaceX, and the brain chip firm Neuralink.

After selling a large chunk of his stake in Tesla to buy X, Mr Musk currently

owns about 13% of the electric carmaker but has recently said he wants a bigger stake in the firm.

When Tesla put forward Mr Musk's original 10-year pay package in 2018, it attracted widespread public attention. Several shareholder advisory groups recommended voting against the plan, saying it was overly generous.

The package was six times bigger than the salaries of America's top 200 chief executives combined in 2021, according to research firm Equilar.

Brian Quinn, a professor at Boston College Law School, told the BBC it was "hard to justify a transaction like this", given Mr Musk's influence over the board.

"He treats Tesla like his own but even if he calls himself the 'Techno-king of Tesla', he is not the majority owner," Prof Quinn added.

Mr Musk has also said he is concerned about Tesla's investments in artificial intelligence (AI) technology.

"I am uncomfortable growing Tesla to be a leader in AI and robotics without having 25% voting control," he said in a social media post.

He said the current shareholder structure makes Tesla vulnerable to a "takeover by dubious interests" and he wants more control over its direction.

"Unless that is the case, I would prefer to build products outside of Tesla," Mr Musk added.

Courtesy BBC

The F-16 at 50: Why it's still in demand

The F-16 jet fighter took its first ever flight in 1974, but it is still as important an aircraft now as it was then



By Stephen Dowling

Were it not for one test pilot's quick thinking 50 years ago, the entire F-16 programme might never have made it past its first fateful flight.

When pilot Phil Oestricher climbed into the cockpit of the General Dynamics YF-16 prototype at Edwards Air Force Base in California on 20 January 1974, his mission was a relatively straightforward one – a high-speed taxi test where the aircraft would travel on the ground under the power of its own engine.

The YF-16 had only been unveiled to the public just over a month earlier. The first flight was not scheduled to take place until early February.

But the futuristic-looking jet had other ideas.

As Oestricher raised the aircraft's nose slightly, the YF-16 started rolling – so sharply that the aircraft's left wing and right tailplane hit the tarmac. "As Oestricher desperately fought to maintain control of

his wild steed, the situation became increasingly dire as the YF-16 began to veer to the left," wrote the Seattle Post Intelligencer, reporting on the almost disastrous first flight. Oestricher realised he would have to depart from the planned test and get the aircraft airborne – and very quickly – before it crashed.

After some heart-stopping moments – at one point the aircraft dropped back down onto the runway – Oestricher managed to pick up enough speed for the prototype to take into the air and complete a dramatically unexpected six-minute-long flight before landing back at the base.

By virtue of his skillful flying, Oestricher had prevented disaster – and helped bring to life an aircraft that has become one of the most successful in living memory. Fifty years later, more than 4,600 F-16s have rolled off the factory lines, and production shows no sign of stopping.

If Oestricher hadn't managed to save the

YF-16 from crashing on its first taxi test, there would be a sizeable F-16-shaped gap in many of the world's air forces. The aircraft's design has also had a lasting impact on civil aviation today too, providing the first use of technologies that are now commonplace in passenger airlines, for example.

At any moment of the day – or night – there's a good chance an F-16 is in the air, somewhere in the world. Since coming into service with US Air Force (USAF) in 1978, the F-16 has been flown by 25 other air forces, from Norway to Chile, Morocco to Singapore. In 2023, 45 years after it entered service, more than 800 remained flying with the USAF.

Designed as a small, light and ultra-nimble dogfighter, the F-16 has taken on more and more roles, from ground attack to anti-shiping to photo reconnaissance to hunting surface-to-air missile launchers. Since 2015, it's been the most numerous military fixed-wing aircraft in the world; more than

2,000 are thought to still be in active use globally today.

Ukraine's plea to the West for modern weapons to resist Russia's 2022 invasion has included calls for F-16s for its air force. Ukrainian pilots are currently training on F-16s in Denmark, and deliveries are due to start in the summer. In early January, Slovakia became the latest country to take delivery of its first F-16s, 50 years almost to the day since the aircraft first took to the air.

Keeping a frontline combat aircraft in service – let alone production – for five decades is no mean feat. The reasons why air forces still want F-16s is due to some truly innovative aspects of its design, and some hard lessons learned from air combat in the Vietnam War.

During the 1960s, the US had embraced the new technology of air-to-air missile as the best weapon to shoot down enemy aircraft. When the Vietnam War began in 1965, some of its frontline fighter aircraft, such as the F-4 Phantom II, did not have guns; US military planners believed the plane's missiles would be enough.

The missile-armed American fighters, however, came up against small and agile Soviet-made MiG fighters as the war in Vietnam developed. Some of North Vietnam's MiGs were virtually identical to Soviet fighters that had fought over the Korean peninsula in the early 1950s, and were now considered almost laughingly obsolete in the West. In close-quarters combat, however, where American fighters couldn't bring their missiles to bear, they could be formidable opponents.

Between 1965 and 1968, America's fighters still shot down more North Vietnamese fighters than they were losing, but the gap dramatically narrowed. The big, twin-engined American fighters were easier to spot from a distance; the small, single-engined MiGs were not.

What was also needed was a small, agile aircraft that could shoot down enemy planes with heatseeking missiles and a gun.

One solution was to set up training schools like the US Navy's "Top Gun", which taught US aviators the lost art of dogfighting; this came into operation before the end of the Vietnam War, and vastly improved

the American kill-to-loss ratio. Dogfighting had started in World War One, in small aircraft barely faster than a family car. Similar combat in jets capable of flying at several hundred miles an hour is a completely different experience – the high speed means you are subjected to the higher gravitational forces, or G-force, in a tight turn for longer.

But another was a more ambitious programme designed to counter increasingly improved Soviet aircraft. US defence chiefs had already been alarmed, at the end of the 1960s, by the emergence of the Soviet MiG-25, a giant fighter aircraft which could fly at three times the speed of sound. (See BBC Future's article: *The pilot who stole a secret Soviet jet.*)



The Pentagon's call for a powerful interceptor to counter the MiG-25 led to the McDonnell-Douglas F-15 Eagle, a large and fast interceptor designed to shoot down enemy aircraft at high altitude with radar-guided missiles. But the Soviet Union and its Warsaw Pact allies like Poland and East Germany fielded thousands more combat aircraft that would fly and fight at lower level.

What was also needed was a small, agile aircraft that could shoot down enemy planes with heatseeking missiles and a gun – a direct learning from the hard lessons of the Vietnam war.

The USAF would need many hundreds of such fighters, and there was the strong possibility that Nato countries and other US allies around the globe would then follow suit. Five designs ended up in

contention for this lucrative project, with two quickly emerging as the frontrunners – the YF-16 from General Dynamics (now part of Lockheed-Martin) and the YF-17 from rival Northrop.

The YF-16 was built to dogfight first and foremost, and that directly influenced aspects of its design, including its cockpit canopy. The pilot would sit in a raised cockpit with a huge canopy that offered almost unrivalled view – similar to early jet fighters that had been replaced by missile-armed fighters. "At least part of the 'fighter mafia' that were pushing it were looking back to Korea and the F-86 Sabre," says Tim Robinson, a military aviation specialist at the Royal Aeronautical Society in the UK. "They were looking at

something that was really manoeuvrable and had really great vision for the pilot with a bubble canopy."

One idea that was proposed, Robinson continues, was to do away with a radar completely. "The idea would be to have two infrared-seeking missiles and a gun. And they would have to churn these things out. They were looking at the numbers of Soviet aircraft and were thinking: 'Gosh, we're going to need lots of these, we have to build lots and lots of them'."

More than any other fighter I've flown in, by far, it is a glove, it is literally like putting on a leather driving glove – Jeff Bolton.

The new jet wouldn't need the long range of the F-15, so could be a lot smaller and lighter and would only need one engine to the F-15's two. That combination of low weight and a powerful engine creates a high

"thrust-to-weight ratio", which not only enabled high speed but the ability to turn sharply – perfect for dogfighting.

The F-16 was designed to withstand up to 9G in a dogfight (which means anything that would weigh 1kg on the ground suddenly weighs 9kg). Flying at high-G generates enormous stress on both the airframe and the pilot. The F-4 by comparison, could pull 7G, but not for long as its heavier airframe bled speed and height much more quickly.



In order to help the pilot keep conscious in high-G turns, the cockpit seat in the F16 is reclined, which helps dampen some of the effects on the pilot. Jeff Bolton is an aviation journalist and broadcaster who has twice flown in a two-seat version of the F-16, used for both pilot training and specialised missions. "More than any other fighter I've flown in, by far, it is a glove, it is literally like putting on a leather driving glove when you get in it," he says. "I'm almost 6ft 4in (1.9m), so it's a tight, tight fit for me, but I could still lower my seat all the way, and I could get my hand in between my helmet and the canopy. And there's, I guess, a recognition from your body that you're 'wearing' the aeroplane."

The F-16's cockpit design went far further than just a reclined seat and a good view. The plane's designers did away with one of the most central features of fighter planes since World War One – a control stick between the pilot's legs. Instead, the F-16 had a joystick-style controller on the right side of the cockpit, much like one you'd use on a computer game flight simulator.

This controller – at least in the first examples of the F-16 – didn't move as the pilot applied force to it. This was because the F-16 was partly being flown by a flight computer making constant small adjustments to the aircraft's control surfaces – a system we now know as "fly-by-wire". It was the first aircraft in the world to use it. It is now found in most modern airliners, such as the Boeing 777 and Airbus A320.

"We now take fly-by-wire for granted," says Robinson. "Now you see fly-by-wire

everywhere. A small consumer drone that's got fly-by-wire, people fly on fly-by-wire airliners. 'Electric Jet' was one of the one of the nicknames [of the F-16] and yeah, I think there was probably some resistance in some quarters taking the pilot out of the equation."

It still looks like it belongs in the future – Tim Robinson.

The F-16 was originally built to complement the F-15 at lower altitudes, but it was soon found that – much like the World War Two Supermarine Spitfire – the F-16's airframe allowed it to carry heavier loads, more fuel and a bigger radar. "The F-16 is almost an utterly perfect Swiss Army knife," says Bolton.

The F-16 has, in the 21st Century, become equally important as a ground attack aircraft – not something its designers had on their drawing boards in the early 1970s. That adaptability allowed it to carry out more and more roles, which made it increasingly attractive to air forces. "Where there's a conflict, there's probably an F-16 involved somewhere," says Robinson.

The original nickname for the F-16 was the "Fighting Falcon", but the name never stuck, says Robinson. "Nobody ever uses it. They call it the Viper, the reason being it came out in the late 70s the same time as [TV series] *Battlestar Galactica*. It looks like a Colonial Viper," Robinson says, referring to the spaceships featured in the show. "It still looks like it belongs in the future."

Parked on the ground, the F-16 looked futuristic. But in the air, it could be a revelation, even for pilots with plenty of fast-jet experience. "There were instances where pilots were 'G-locking' [blacking out in high-G situations]," says Robinson. "It was an aircraft that could push pilots beyond their physiological limits not only because it was 9G but also how fast that would come on."

Bolton has experienced just that in one of his flights in an F-16. Only a small amount of force is needed on the F-16's controller for it to respond. "Its tiny little control inputs, little, little inputs, but the next thing you know, you've got 9G on your chest. So if you're 220lb (100kg) like I am, times that by nine. The whole world at that point is laying on top of you."

The F-16 is often described by pilots as very easy to fly, partly thanks to the fly-by-wire system, and partly because of its strong airframe, with big lift-generating wings.

"When I flew it the first time, [the pilot] said to me, 'Hey, all right, your jet'," says Bolton, meaning the pilot had given him control of the aircraft. The pilot gave Bolton some advice. "It's very sensitive. So just keep that in mind." Bolton says he started with an aileron roll, where the aircraft rolls 360 degrees without losing altitude, careful not to exert too much force on the F-16's control stick.

"So I executed that. And he looks up at me and he goes, 'Dude, that was great.'" The instructor said that student pilots would at first put too much force onto the F-16's controller. The plane is so responsive "it slams the instructors head off the sides of the canopy", says Bolton.

There's a lot of sensory overload... the heat, the jet noise – John Waters

Bolton has flown in earlier US military jets,

such as the Northrop F-5, which for a long time was used to play the role of Soviet jets in Top Gun exercises. "Talk about old school, you know that thing is great, a little like an MG sports car with a Corvette motor in it." But the F-5, which used to fill similar roles to the F-16 in many air forces, is a more "analogue airplane". Its small cockpit doesn't offer anything like the F-16's visibility. "You're out over the [front landing] gear so you can see over the nose as the ground falls away from you as you take off," says Bolton of the F-16's cockpit."

John Waters is someone who knows that view very well. Now a Boeing 777 pilot and podcaster who runs the Afterburn aviation podcast, he started flying F-16s for the USAF in 2013. He flew ground attack missions in Syria against Isis and trained for particularly dangerous missions called SEAD (Suppression of Enemy Air Defence), hunting for ground-based missile sites, which pilots nicknamed "Wild Weasel". These F-16s would be able to launch a radar-guided missile at an enemy fighter far beyond visual range, drop a guided bomb at a target on the ground and fire a radiation-seeking missile to home in on an enemy radar site – all at the same time. Waters did all three in training. "If you had all three of those in the air at one time, you were doing the 'Wild Weasel' deal to its fullest," he says.

Towards the end of his F-16 flying career,

however, Waters was flying demonstration flights and aerobatic routines at air shows. (You can see one of his air show displays in 2018 here, captured on a camera in the cockpit.)

He can still remember the first time he strapped into the F-16's cockpit. "It was July in Phoenix, and it was 119F (48C)," he tells the BBC. "There's a lot of sensory overload... the heat, the jet noise... you're jumping into a plane that you've only been in the simulator for a few times, in a controlled comfortable environment." Waters says that about 5,000ft (1.5km) up he dropped his mask and that he was drenched with sweat, both from the heat and the excitement flying the F-16 for the first time. "I just took a minute to enjoy the moment. It's a pretty incredible sensation, pushing that power up. And at that time, the absolute most powerful thing I'd flown."

It's like you're on the end of a telephone pole with a rocket motor strapped to your back – John Waters

Waters' YouTube channel is full of Go-Pro footage of him taking his F-16 off a runway into finely planned airshow routines. He would don wearable tech which monitored his heart rate. "In a 15-minute profile, I would burn anywhere from 300 to 600 calories all the way up until the end, but if it was hot outside? The F-16 has a decent environmental cooling system (ECS), but it

is really there to cool the radar and the avionics and it doesn't work great until you get up at altitude."

The only tricky part of flying the F-16, Waters says, is landing it. "Landing it well, it's not always an easy thing, because it wants to keep flying. You see F-16's do what we call a 'bubble' or a 'bounce'. You can't stall it traditionally, the fly-by-wire does not want you to do that, it wants to keep it flying."

Waters stopped flying the F-16 in 2019. "I still miss it. Nothing beats strapping on the F-16. It's like you're on the end of a telephone pole with a rocket motor strapped to your back."

The F-16 is in the process of being replaced in the US and some Nato air forces by another Lockheed-made fighter, the F-35. Each F-35 costs more than \$100m (£81m) and is designed to destroy enemy planes with long-range missiles, long before the F-35 is ever picked up on their radars. An F-16 without add-ons might only cost a third of that price.

It will be 2056 before the F-35 will mark 50 years since it first flew. There's a good chance that even then, somewhere in the world F-16s will still be flying.

Courtesy BBC



'First of all you must be patient, then you need spatial memory': The man behind the puzzle that 99% can't solve



By Myles Burke

In 1975, the Hungarian academic Ernő Rubik applied for a patent on his invention. Little did he know that his ingenious teaching tool, created behind the Iron Curtain, would become an iconic global phenomenon.

With its bright iconic design, plus the fact that it transcends languages, ages and backgrounds, and doesn't even require instructions, it is perhaps not surprising the Rubik's Cube became a best-selling global phenomenon. Not to mention that it is portable, and can be solved in countless ways.

But initially, Ernő Rubik did not realise quite what he had on his hands when he invented his ingenious, confounding colour-matching puzzle.

He did not even think about whether the cube – that would ultimately make his name famous the world over – would be successful, he told the BBC's Terry Wogan in 1986.

"I was not worried because I never decided to do that, that was nothing that I was running for," he said. He had originally not

devised his cube as a toy, but as a teaching tool for his students.

In 1974, he was working as a professor of architecture at the Budapest College of Applied Arts. Believing that the best way to teach his students was to show them, he wanted to create something they could play with to get them thinking creatively about geometric forms and spatial relationships.

His aim was to make something tactile and mobile, that was simple enough for his students to understand but contained some kind of problem to be solved. And also, importantly, it would challenge them to persevere when faced with a complex, frustrating puzzle.

"First of all you must be patient, it's very useful to solve a problem, then you need some spatial memory, three-dimensional memory," he said on the talk show, Wogan. "To memorise which congregation you are and where the pieces are and so on... If we close our eyes, we know, we remember, and not for a picture only but the meaning of the picture."

It is estimated that by 1982, more than 100

million Rubik's Cubes had been sold.

His prototype was a wooden six-sided cube composed of smaller cubes. He initially tried to drill holes in the cubes to link them together with rubber bands but it continually fell apart. So, he designed a hidden mechanism that held the cube in place, while allowing its individual smaller cubes to twist and turn. He added a solid colour to each side of the cube to make the movement visible.

Then he twisted it, jumbling the colours and tried to restore the cube to its original state, where each face displayed a single colour.

The first time it took the best part of a month for him to do it. Making him the first person to solve the Rubik's Cube. It is estimated only 1% of people can solve the puzzle without any help.

He conceded to Wogan that he was not as fast as he once was.

"I'm not very fast, if I am in practice I can do one minute or something like that, but I am not practising on it right now, years

before I was much more faster. I'm not in condition."

Therein lies the appeal of his cube. It is deceptively simple, incredibly addictive but also maddeningly frustrating to actually do.

He tried his prototype on his students, allowing them to work out their own solutions, and they loved it. On the back of its popularity among them, he decided in January 1975 to apply for a Hungarian patent for his "Magic Cube".

Due to manufacturing restrictions in the planned economy of communist Hungary at the time, for the first few years the puzzle's main enthusiasts were designers, architects and mathematicians within the country.

It was when it debuted at the Nuremberg Toy Fair in 1979, and was picked up by the Ideal Toy Corporation, that it really took off.

In 1980, the renamed "Rubik's Cube" began to be sold internationally, and it took the toy market by storm, captivating people of all ages.

Global challenge

Word about it quickly spread, with millions of people worldwide taking up the challenge, which in turn prompted a flood of books telling people how they could

actually solve it. It began cropping up everywhere, and international competitions were held, sparking a craze for competitive "speedcubing", which continues to this day.

It is estimated that by 1982, more than 100 million Rubik's Cubes had been sold, with countless other counterfeit versions also being flogged to meet the public's demand for the toy.

During the height of its popularity in the early 1980s, nowhere seemed free of the Rubik's Cube craze. They adorned t-shirts and posters, featured in songs, and the cube even had its own TV cartoon adventure series, Rubik, the Amazing Cube, featuring a flying, talking version of the puzzle.

In 1982 the noun Rubik's Cube entered the Oxford English Dictionary and the cube earned a place as a permanent exhibit in New York's Museum of Modern Art.

The famous brain teaser is no longer the global craze it once was, yet its enduring appeal and its impact on popular culture linger on.

It continues to crop up in art and sculpture, and can be seen in films like Being John Malkovich, WALL-E and Spider-Man: Into the Spider-Verse. It was featured as a Google Doodle and in the Spice Girls' Viva Forever music video. It is name-checked in TV shows from Family Guy to Law and Order and The Big Bang Theory. There is

even a Netflix documentary, The Speed Cubers, about the friendship between two of the stars in the world of competitive cubing.

Rubik's Cubes are still being sold, with committed fans setting new records all the time, solving the cube blindfolded, underwater, while skydiving or even while juggling.

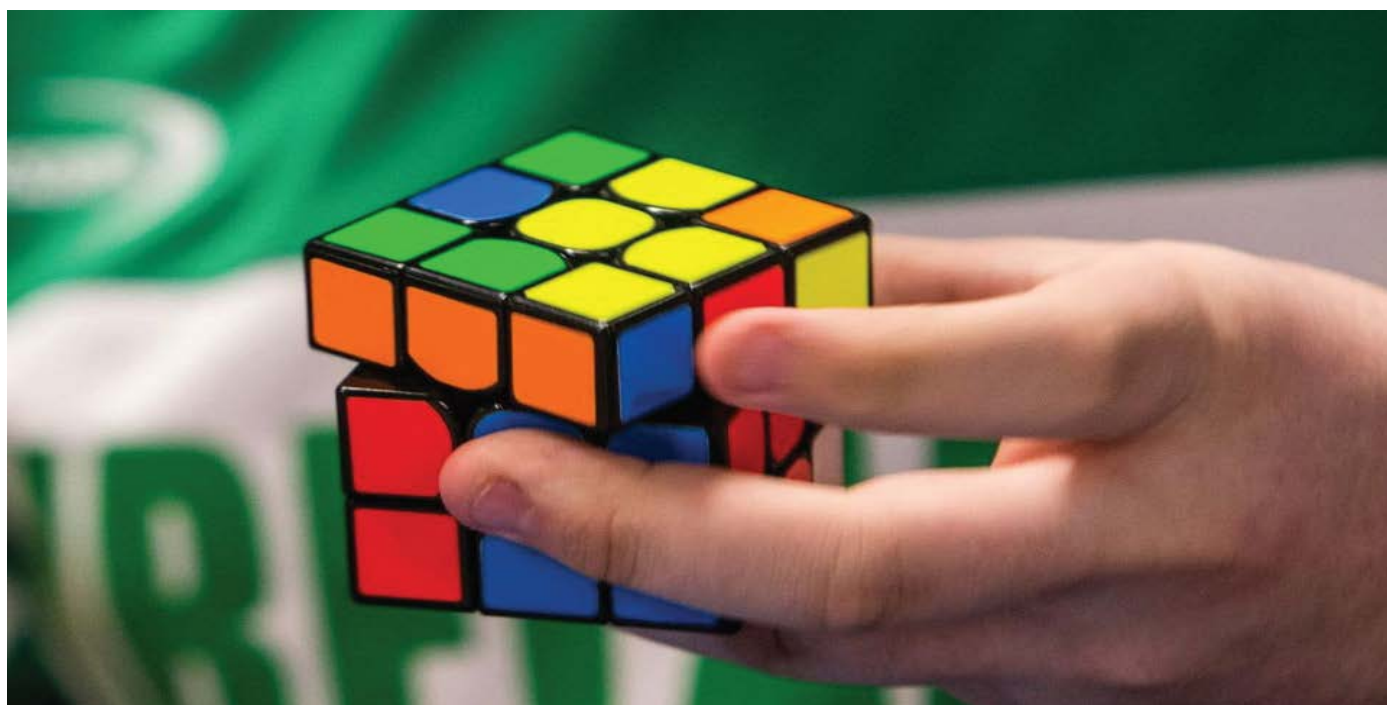
Due to the number of knock-off versions over the years, it is difficult to know the precise figures Rubik's Cubes sold, but estimates put it at more than 400 million to date. Ernő himself went on to set up a foundation to support promising young inventors in Hungary, and established his own studio designing furniture and games, such as the Rubik's Snake. But nothing else he created was the phenomenon that the cube was.

For him it wasn't about that, though. He told Wogan that he was still driven by the same impulse that made him come up with his best-selling cube.

"I like to do my best all the time as a designer and solving design problems is the best thing. So, it does not depend on how successful it will be."

In History is a series which uses the BBC's unique audio and video archive to explore historical events that still resonate today.

Courtesy BBC



Mental health comes first

Over three-quarters, 77% of global suicides in 2019 occurred in low- and middle-income countries according to a WHO report published in 2021



By Eman Hassan Jugg

According to a WHO study, at last one per cent of the total world's population dies by suicide every 40 seconds across the world. It further states that 5.0 per cent of people in the world try to kill themselves at least once during their lifetime.

Over three-quarters (77 per cent) of global suicides in 2019 occurred in low- and middle-income countries, according to a WHO report published in 2021. There is no significant change in this trend and a high suicide rate continues to be a serious and pressing concern in Pakistan as well.

Every other day, there are posts on social media describing a suicide case where someone has either died by suicide or attempted to take their lives. Pakistan has had a consistent suicide rate – 8.9 suicides per 100,000 people – since 2000. This is a deeply concerning social issue that holds significant legal implications as well.

Till December 2022, suicide was classified as a criminal act in Pakistan under Section 325 of the Pakistan Penal Code which imposed a punishment of

one-year imprisonment along with a fine for those convicted of attempted suicide.

The government recognized that the purpose of the law should be to deter people from committing this act and identify key contributing factors that urge people to end their lives. The existing legal framework was not fulfilling this purpose which was evident from the persistent high suicide rates throughout the years.

This section was ultimately repealed by the government in 2022. However, merely repealing the criminalization of suicide does not present a solution to this deeply entrenched suicidal problem. The suicide issue in Pakistan necessitates a comprehensive methodology that can address the root causes and challenges faced by those who may experience a deep sense of hopelessness and despair leading to suicidal thoughts.

The causes of suicides in Pakistan are multifaceted, rooted in a complex interplay of social, economic, cultural, and individual factors. Socioeconomic

challenges, such as poverty and unemployment, have a significant contribution towards this, given the economic crisis in the country with high inflation rates and political instability. Gender disparities, prevalent in aspects like workplace harassment of women, rape cases, and instances of domestic violence, also play a role in elevating suicide risks.

Cultural pressures and societal expectations, including the pressure to conform to traditional norms and meet familial expectations also drive a sense of isolation. All of these issues ultimately cause severe mental health problems. In the majority of cases, no medical assistance is sought due to a lack of awareness, social stigma attached to it and limited opportunities created by the government to address this cause. As a result, people often see suicide as the only option.

The government can play a pivotal role in fighting this issue and adopting strategies to deal with it. A high suicide rate in the country reflects the government's failure to take measures to

develop a strong and effective mental health policy. Initiatives that prioritize mental health funding, training healthcare professionals, and establishing mental health facilities can be supported through legislative measures.

Follow-up care by health workers for people who have attempted suicide is critical since they are at great risk of trying again. Social support within communities can help protect people who are vulnerable to suicide by building their coping skills. Communities must provide nurturing environments to those who are vulnerable, and governments can set a good example to enable them to do so.

A major aspect of this is awareness among people regarding the sensitivity of this issue and the ways to deal with it. Responsible media reporting has also been shown to decrease suicide rates. This includes educating people about suicide, risk factors and where to seek help, and avoiding the detailed descriptions of suicidal acts.

Governments can help the media with these efforts by releasing public service announcements that raise awareness, identifying and treating mental disorders as early as possible, and ensuring that those vulnerable to suicide receive the care they need before it is too late. Mental health policies should be integrated into overall

healthcare services, and governments should ensure sufficient funding to improve these services.

The existing major legislative framework governing mental health is the Mental Health Ordinance of 2001 under which each province has adopted its own legislation. However, the missing factor is that none of these frameworks lay out a detailed scheme or plan to handle issues which are the major factor of high suicide rates in Pakistan.

It is crucial to adopt a holistic approach that encompasses mental health awareness, socioeconomic development, legal reform, and cultural shifts towards fostering a more supportive and understanding society. By integrating legal measures with broader societal initiatives, Pakistan can work towards creating an environment that prioritizes mental wellbeing and provides support for those in need.

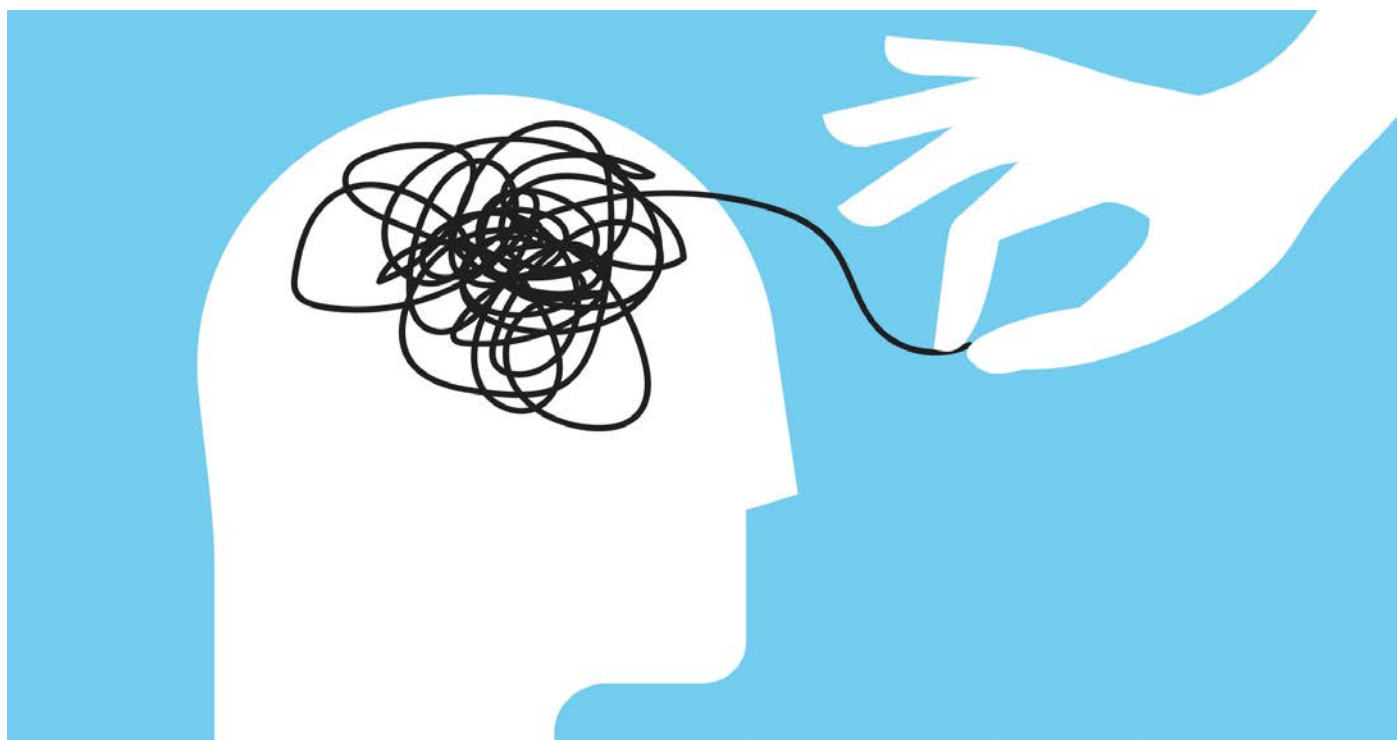
One of the initiatives undertaken by the Pakistan government is the launch of a mental health app called 'Humraaz' in March 2023. This app aims to give access to and help anyone with suicidal thoughts or any form of a mental health emergency, providing treatment to patients under complete confidentiality. This app allows arranging appointments with psychiatrists and psychologists, and the government has

pledged to work towards hiring and training professionals to combat the epidemic of mental health illness.

However, this also has certain limitations. It is not equally accessible for all since a majority of Pakistan's population is based in rural areas with limited insight into the technological world. Thousands of people are not even aware of this app, and there are a lot of those who might not be able to make use of it even if they are informed of this app as either they do not possess the skills, or they are still living in that circle where seeking mental assistance is not perceived as something normal. What is needed is a grassroots campaign that targets those living on the edge of poverty and illiteracy.

Improved surveillance and monitoring of suicide attempts is required for effective suicide prevention strategies. This includes registration of suicide cases, hospital-based registries of suicide attempts and nationally representative surveys collecting information about self-reported suicide attempts. All these measures collectively can have an impact on improving the living standard in Pakistan and fighting mental health issues over time to develop a flourishing society that provides a safe breathing space to all.

Courtesy The News



Babar Azam improves significantly in ICC Test rankings

Former skipper jumps five places following his performance in recently concluded Test series



Former Pakistan skipper Babar Azam's position in the International Cricket Council (ICC) Test Rankings for batters improved significantly as he secured the fifth spot in the updated list.

The 29-year-old previously stood at 10th but jumped five spots up following his performance in the recently concluded Test series. Failure of Indian and Australian batters to perform well in their respective Test matches also played a role for the Pakistani to improve.

Meanwhile, England batter Ollie Pope has been rewarded for his heroics during the first Test against India by reaching a new career-high rating. He rose a mammoth 20 places to 15th.

New Zealand veteran Kane Williamson remains out in front as the No 1 ranked Test batter in the world. Australia opener Usman Khawaja gains two places to eighth following a half-century in the opening innings of the second Test against the Caribbean side at the Gabba. India's star Virat Kohli, who will also miss the second Test against England, is now at sixth.

India veteran Ravichandran Ashwin maintains his

place at the head of the Test rankings for bowlers following his six wickets against England, with teammate Jasprit Bumrah closing in on top position as he gains a spot and jumps to fourth following six scalps of his own in Hyderabad. South Africa's Kagiso Rabada is ranked second while Australia's captain Pat Cummins is now positioned at third.

On the other hand, India's Ravindra Jadeja enjoys a healthy buffer at the head of the Test all-rounder rankings, but he may have a new challenger soon if England veteran Joe Root can continue his recent decent performances with the ball.

While Root is more renowned for his efforts with the willow, the 33-year-old collected five wickets against India with his more than handy spin - and even opened the bowling for England during the second innings.

This effort has seen Root rise to a new career-high rating on the list for Test all-rounder and seen the evergreen England star jump one place to fourth behind Jadeja on the updated rankings.

Courtesy The News

The highly anticipated trailer of “Nayab” movie creates a stir in showbiz circles

By Muttahir A. Khan

The trailer for the highly anticipated film “Nayab” has been released, creating quite a buzz in film circles. The movie has garnered positive chatter, with audiences eagerly awaiting its release.

Yumna Zaidi is transitioning her talents from TV screens to the silver screen, initiating her silver screen journey with “Nayab.” Her skills have sparked enthusiasm among fans and the entertainment community, generating excitement about her role. In a star-studded ensemble, Yumna Zaidi is joined by esteemed figures from the Pakistani film industry, including Javed Sheikh, Napa’s Fahad Khan, Huma Nawab, Noreen Gulwani, Ehteshamuddin, and Adnan Siddiqui.

Adding to the anticipation, Usama Khan stands poised to grace the screen alongside Yumna Zaidi, amplifying the intrigue surrounding the film’s ensemble cast.

“Nayab” is a multi-dimensional story that encapsulates a family’s tale, a city’s essence, and the narrative of a sport. The film provides an intimate portrayal of life in Karachi, almost presenting the city itself as a character. Cricket plays a pivotal role in the storyline, beautifully reflecting the issues women face in sports in Pakistan.

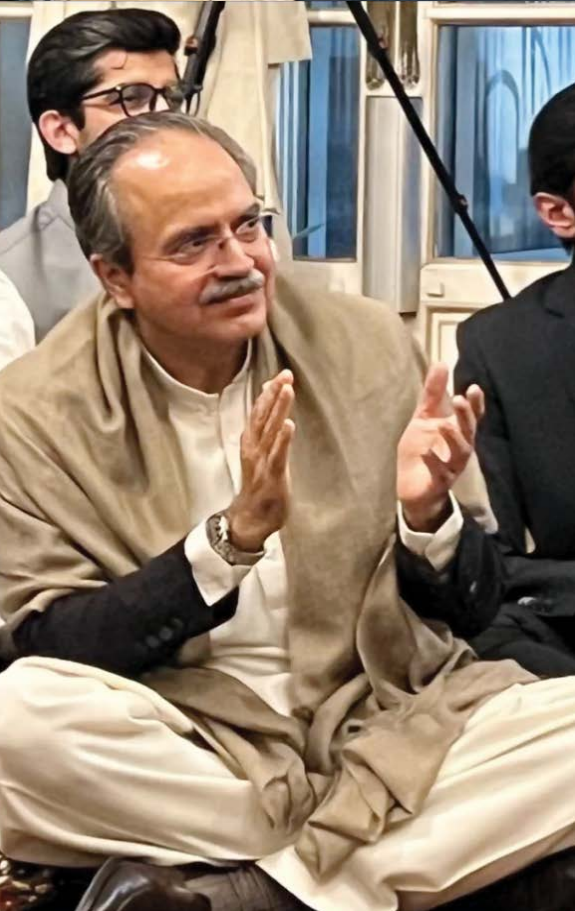
The film aspires to set itself apart by intertwining domestic conflicts, societal issues, and the barriers encountered in the realm of sports, aiming for a distinctive narrative. Director Umair Nasir Ali expressed, “I believe audiences resonate with stories that echo their own experiences to some extent.

Each character in ‘Nayab’ has worked tirelessly to make their role relatable to the public, ensuring that viewers feel a sense of familiarity while witnessing these characters. The true success of ‘Nayab’ lies in carving a place in people’s hearts.”

The glimpses shown in the trailer serve as compelling evidence of the technical craftsmanship across all facets of the film. The breathtaking cinematography and unique treatment set it apart from other upcoming movies. Alongside captivating visuals, the film’s music promises to be a defining feature.



Qawwali evening at Pakistan's France embassy mesmerises audience







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