

Fortnightly

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Islamabad - Karachi

15th - 31st March 2024

New Government in office
Allies have to prove legitimacy, secure
IMF programme and give relief to public

Economy is Priority
Pakistan have to introduce new technology
in Agri sector and LSM

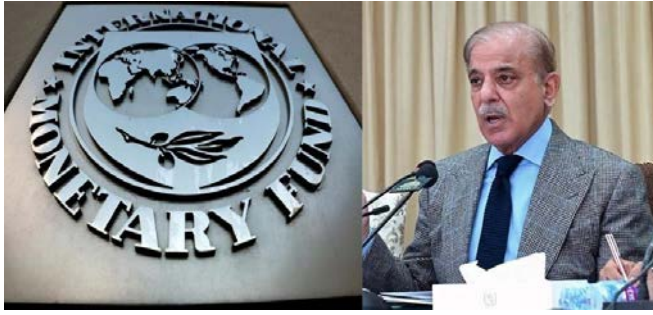
Coming US Elections
Donald Trump will be strong candidate
in race for White House

Controversial But Strong Government to Face Huge Challenges



Politics

New IMF program _ Another Test case for the Shehbaz Sharif-led PDM-2 Govt By Javed Mahmood – Page 4



Fresh Faces Join Seasoned Veterans in Federal Cabinet: Examining Their Portfolios and Challenges Ahead By Nimra Atiq – Page 7

The Relationship Between Khan's PTI and Current Government Parties in Pakistan: A Critical Analysis of the Future - TTI Report – Page 10



Navigating Challenges and Expectations: The Road Ahead for Pakistan's New Government By Daniyal Wali – Page 12



PDM 2.0: Dilemma for the IMF By Dr Sajjad Akhtar – Page 14

The meaning of democracy By Kamila Hyat – Page 16

Economy

Pakistan to seek 'long, large IMF programme' By Mehtab Haider – Page 18



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New Government in office
Offered here to provide testimony, review
IMF programme and provide feedback
Economy in Priority
Pakistan has to introduce new technology
in Agriculture and L&M
Continuing US Dependence
Tehreek-e-Insaf will be strong candidate
to enter the White House

**Controversial
But Strong Government
to Face Huge Challenges**

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Lessons from Egypt's IMF deal By Dr Abid Qaiyum Suleri – Page 20

National

PM Shehbaz reinvents wheel to save Rs1tr By Ansar Abbasi – Page 22

The price of extremism By Husain Haqqani – Page 24



Virtues of One Era Become the Vices in the New By Amir Jahangir – Page 26

Foreign Affairs

Donald Trump's Georgia judge dismisses some criminal charges By Max Matza – Page 29

Foreign policy under Trump 2.0 By Maleeha Lodhi – Page 30



Caught in the Crossfire: The Ongoing Israel-Gaza Conflict By Romana Afsheen – Page 32

The battle between farmers in West Bank pitting Israel against the US By Lucy Williamson – Page 34

Putin says Russia is ready to use nuclear weapons if its sovereignty is threatened – Page 36

Does The Legacy of The Cold War Still Haunt Europe? By Dr Moonis Ahmar – Page 37

Technology

US House passes bill that could ban TikTok nationwide By Bernd Debusmann – Page 39



Paul Alexander: 'Man in the iron lung' dies at the age of 78 By Ido Vock and Cat Snowden – Page 41

The rise of nanomaterials By Atta-ur-Rahman – Page 42

Climate Change

Shahpurkandi Dam: India-Pakistan experts advocate cooperation for water security – Page 44

Sports

Pakistan Super League (PSL) 2024: A Spectacular Cricketing Extravaganza By Kanwal Munir – Page 46



'Better together:' How friendship and faith helped guide these two US marathon runners to Paris 2024 By Ben Church – Page 48

Entertainment

What are the legal rights of reality TV stars, really? By Louisa Ballhaus – Page 50

Bodyshaming and getting wed By M A Niazi – Page 53

New IMF program _ Another Test case for the Shehbaz Sharif-led PDM-2 Govt

Notably, the cost of electricity produced from nuclear plants is around 3 rupees per unit while power companies and the government are extorting consumers by charging Rs 47 per unit (for those using less than 300 units) and Rs 65 to 75/per unit from those who are utilizing more than 400 units in a month.



By Javed Mahmood

Pakistan and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) have started negotiations for the final economic review of Pakistan's Standby Arrangement Loan Program, signifying a crucial milestone in the country's economic trajectory. Pakistan, having fulfilled all IMF targets outlined within the loan program, is now positioned to engage in discussions aimed at concluding its existing arrangement. The current visit by an IMF mission to Pakistan underscored the significance of prioritizing the completion of the country's current loan program, slated for finalization in April 2024, and negotiating another bailout deal with the Fund.

The talks appear another test case for the Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif-led government. How the new government safeguards the interest of the masses in the country in the new IMF loan? Whether or not the government would accept, once again, the biting conditions of the IMF. Will the new IMF program rid the country of economic crisis? This scenario will be clear once the government signs the deal with the Fund and unveils its conditions to inform the public and their elected

representatives in the Senate and National and Provincial Assemblies.

Scheduled from March 14 to 18, this week's negotiations will scrutinize Pakistan's standby arrangement of three billion dollars, to achieve consensus on pertinent economic matters. In a recent statement issued by the Ministry of Finance, a steadfast commitment to advancing negotiations was affirmed, acknowledging the pivotal role these deliberations play in shaping Pakistan's economic trajectory. Successful completion of the final economic assessment could yield an additional \$1.10 billion for Pakistan.

It is noteworthy that Pakistan initiated a \$3 billion loan program with the IMF in July 2023, with a substantial portion of the funds already disbursed, amounting to \$1.90 billion. As negotiations unfold, stakeholders maintain an optimistic outlook regarding Pakistan's prospects for economic stability and growth.

Earlier, Federal Finance Minister Muhammad Aurangzeb articulated Pakistan's ambition to secure the largest and most enduring program from the International Monetary Fund

(IMF) in the nation's history. Highlighting Pakistan's intent to pursue a comprehensive program aligned with its quota, Aurangzeb underscored the commitment to economic discipline within the IMF framework.

Finance Minister Muhammad Aurangzeb, nonetheless, did not bother to mention in his media talk the public interest involved in the IMF deal. The current IMF program has already cost dearly to masses in the country in the shape of hefty and unbearable utility bills and unprecedented taxation. How much the power companies are robbing the consumers in the country, can be imagined well just from one example of consumers of electricity. Even those consuming less than 300 units paid around Rs 22 per unit taxes and surcharges in their February bills, paid in March 2024. For instance, a consumer used 250 units in February and he got a Rs 12,000 electricity bill. The average cost of the unit was Rs 47 _ Rs 25 cost of electricity and Rs 22 as multiple taxes and surcharges. It is understood that electricity consumers using more than 300, 400, and 500 units a month would be paying too much. Notably, the cost of electricity produced from nuclear plants is around



3 rupees per unit while power companies and the government are extorting consumers by charging Rs 47 per unit (for those using less than 300 units) and Rs 65 to 75/per unit from those who are utilizing more than 400 units in a month. The saga of robbing the consumers does not end here as people are paying heavily inflated gas bills though natural gas is available only three times a day (cooking hours). Hydel power, coal, and gas power generation costs vary from Rs 5 a unit to 8-9 rupees per unit, but the power companies and government are charging multiple times more than their cost of production, showing no relief of mercy for the consumers.

Surprisingly, almost every month, the power companies approach NEPRA to obtain an increase in the power tariff and NEPRA does not disappoint them because the overall aim is to extort as much revenue from the consumers as is possible. The same is the case with the LPG users and vehicle owners. Importantly, natural gas is available to around 20 percent of consumers that too with gas outages daily while the masses are paying a very high price to buy LPG to keep their kitchens and their tummies warm. This is one of the major factors that eroded the popularity of the previous PDM government led by Shehbaz Sharif and the masses demonstrated their wrath in the recent elections by giving majority votes to the PTI-led independent candidates. If the PMD-2 government committed the same follies once again by accepting every bitter condition of the IMF, it would prove the last nail in the coffin of the PML-N and its allies in the government.

Meanwhile, the Finance Minister recently told the media, "The overarching goal of our government is the enhancement of the economy, surpassing even the objectives of the IMF." He further elucidated Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif's steadfast vision for economic improvement, emphasizing the premier's directive to uphold economic discipline rigorously. Assuring the absence of obstacles in securing the final installment of the current loan program from the IMF, Aurangzeb mentioned the impending release of \$1.1 billion in the last installment.

"Prioritizing the initial framework of the new IMF loan program is imperative," Aurangzeb stressed, highlighting the shared

goal of economic stability between the IMF and the Pakistani government.

Aurangzeb expressed Pakistan's eagerness to secure a substantial International Monetary Fund (IMF) program highlighting the imperative of addressing the challenges of sluggish economic growth and high inflation through stabilization measures. Aurangzeb stressed that Pakistan must move away from relying on cash deposits and debt rollovers from friendly nations and shift towards tackling underlying economic issues.



In his inaugural engagement with journalists since assuming office, Aurangzeb affirmed the coalition government's commitment to economic stabilization and willingness to adhere to IMF prescriptions once again. He underscored the necessity of a sizable and long-term IMF program for sustaining macroeconomic stability, although specific details regarding the program's duration and loan amount were not provided.

The minister's statement coincided with the arrival of an IMF team for policy discussions regarding the final installment of a \$1.1 billion loan. These talks are set to conclude by March 18th. Aurangzeb expressed keenness to initiate discussions on the Extended Fund Facility (EFF) during the forthcoming visit, with detailed negotiations slated for the spring meetings in Washington next month. He conveyed confidence in Pakistan's ability to fulfill IMF stipulations for the second review, hinting at potential assistance for the budget.

However, the minister's remarks suggested that the upcoming IMF visit might only result in a staff-level agreement, with the

formalization of a new program anticipated in Washington. Finance Secretary Imdadullah Bosal affirmed Pakistan's intention to pursue a substantial loan program, with consideration given to an IMF environment facility.

Aurangzeb stressed the need to move beyond short-term fixes, emphasizing the importance of macroeconomic stability in addressing inflation and paving the way for interest rate reductions. He highlighted the role of the Special Investment Facilitation Council (SIFC) in attracting foreign

investment, noting a shift towards equity investments over traditional deposits.

The minister expressed hope for foreign commercial loans post-finalization of the new program but remained cautious about tapping international capital markets. Aurangzeb emphasized the government's commitment to implementing tax reforms, particularly through end-to-end digitization of the Federal Board of Revenue (FBR) to enhance transparency and curb leakages. He underscored the need to tax untapped sectors like wholesale, retail, and agriculture while addressing the issue of talent drain among the salaried class.

How the new coalition government will perform this time, will be seen in the coming few months.

Remittances surge in February ahead of the beginning of Ramazan

In February 2024, the influx of workers' remittances surged by 18% compared to the same period last year, totaling \$2.25 billion as Pakistan braces for the onset of the fasting month of Ramazan next week. Data



from the State Bank of Pakistan (SBP) indicates that remittances stood at \$1.90 billion in February of the preceding year. These increased inflows are expected to contribute towards financing the trade deficit and maintaining the current account balance at a breakeven level. Furthermore, they may bolster the Pakistani rupee, enabling it to maintain stronger positions relative to the US dollar and other trading partner currencies.

Non-resident Pakistanis typically send additional funds to their families and acquaintances back home preceding and during Ramazan and Eid festivities, aiding them in coping with inflationary pressures and meeting heightened expenses. However, on a month-on-month basis, remittances experienced a 6% decline in February, amounting to \$2.25 billion compared to

year, surpassing the \$27 billion recorded in FY23. Anticipating sustained growth in the second half of the fiscal year, Ahmad cited factors such as stable rupee-dollar parity and the onset of Ramazan and Eid festivities, which are expected to encourage expatriates to send higher amounts to their families in Pakistan.

SBP's reserves decline

The foreign exchange reserves held by the State Bank of Pakistan (SBP) witnessed a weekly decline of \$54 million, reaching \$7.9 billion as of March 1. The total liquid foreign reserves of the country amounted to \$13.02 billion, while commercial banks held net foreign reserves of \$5.12 billion. The reduction in foreign currency reserves was attributed to debt repayments, as stated by the central bank.



\$2.39 billion in the previous month. Experts attributed this decline to fewer working days in February relative to January, as a considerable number of non-resident Pakistanis send remittances on a weekly or fortnightly basis.

In February, overseas Pakistanis sent an average of \$77.57 per day, marginally higher than January's average of \$77.35 per day, indicating relatively stronger inflows during February. During the first eight months (July-February) of the current fiscal year, expatriate Pakistanis remitted \$18.08 billion, marking a nominal 1.25% decrease compared to \$18.31 billion during the same period in the previous fiscal year, as per data from the central bank. SBP Governor Jameel Ahmad forecasted in late January 2024 that workers' remittances would increase to \$28 billion in the current fiscal

"In the week ending March 1, 2024, SBP's reserves decreased by US\$ 54 million to US\$ 7,895.7 million due to debt repayments," the central bank mentioned in a statement. This decline follows a decrease of \$63 million in Pakistan's central bank reserves reported last week.

Dollar-rupee exchange rate remains stable

It is the talk of the town that the new IMF bailout package would keep stable the dollar-rupee exchange rate. Currently, the dollar-rupee parity is fluctuating around Rs 279 in the inter-bank and Rs 282 in the open market. However, if the IMF desired further devaluation of the rupee, it would open a new Pandora's Box for Pakistan and its consumers. There are some reports that the US dollar is rarely available in the open

market because of the shortage of the green-back and its hoarding by investors who are anticipating a further decline in the value of PKR in the coming weeks.

Inflation falls to 23% in February

In February, Pakistan's headline inflation registered at 23.1% year-on-year, as per Pakistan Bureau of Statistics (PBS) data released on Friday, marking a notable decrease from January's 28.3%. There was no change in the month-on-month reading. Arif Habib Limited (AHL) noted, "This marks the lowest inflation reading since June 2022." The average inflation for July-February settled at 27.96%, compared to 26.19% in the same period last year. The inflation figure falls below the government's expectations, fueling anticipation that the State Bank of Pakistan (SBP) may initiate monetary easing in upcoming meetings, with the next Monetary Policy Committee session scheduled for March 18.

According to the Ministry of Finance's 'Monthly Economic Update and Outlook' report on Thursday, CPI-based inflation in Pakistan was projected to range between 24.5-25.5% in February 2024, with an expected further easing to 23.5-24.5% in March 2024. The report cited improved crop yields and steady commodity supply as factors contributing to the anticipated downward trend in inflation. AHL had previously forecasted a decline in inflation to around 23.5% in February. Looking ahead, the brokerage house expects headline inflation to decrease primarily due to a significant base effect.

Urban and rural inflation

Urban CPI inflation decreased to 24.9% year-on-year in February 2024, compared to 30.2% in the previous month and 28.8% in February 2023. On a month-on-month basis, urban inflation rose by 0.2% in February 2024, compared to 1.8% in the previous month and 4.5% in February 2023. Rural CPI inflation stood at 20.5% year-on-year in February 2024, down from 25.7% in the previous month and 35.6% in February 2023. On a month-on-month basis, rural inflation decreased by 0.3% in February 2024, compared to 1.9% in the previous month and 4.0% in February 2023.



Fresh Faces Join Seasoned Veterans in Federal Cabinet: Examining Their Portfolios and Challenges Ahead



By Nimra Atiq

As the dawn of a new political era breaks upon the nation, a 9-member cabinet under the leadership of Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif was sworn-in federal cabinet of 2024 stands poised to confront a myriad of challenges while charting a course for progress and development. The ceremony, administered by President Asif Ali Zardari, comprises a diverse mix of seasoned veterans and fresh faces, each member brings their unique background, expertise, and vision to the table, promising to usher in a new chapter in the country's governance.

Ministry of Foreign Affairs

Minister: Ishaq Dar

Ishaq Dar, a prominent figure in Pakistan's political landscape is known for his expertise in finance and his extensive political career. Hailing from Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif's Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) party, Dar has been a steadfast ally and close relative of PML-N chief Nawaz Sharif, under whose leadership he has served in various capacities.

Ishaq Dar has had a notable political career, serving as the finance minister four times and playing a significant role in shaping the economy of the country. He has been appointed as the new Foreign Minister, with the responsibility of representing Pakistan's interests on the global platform, negotiating diplomatic agreements, and managing foreign relations.

Despite his illustrious political career, Dar's tenure as finance minister in the previous coalition government faced criticism from political allies for his handling of the economy. During his

16-month stint, Pakistan witnessed soaring inflation rates and skyrocketing interest rates, largely attributed to the IMF's policy requirements.

Challenges Ahead for Foreign Ministry:

The Foreign Ministry faces the daunting task of navigating diplomatic waters in a rapidly changing global landscape. From strengthening bilateral ties to addressing regional conflicts, the ministry must adeptly maneuver through complex geopolitical dynamics to safeguard the nation's interests.

In his new capacity, Ishaq Dar confronts a myriad of diplomatic challenges, including delicate relationships with China, Gulf countries, and the United States. These nations serve as pivotal sources of financing for Pakistan, necessitating deft negotiation and strategic diplomacy. Moreover, Dar must navigate complex regional dynamics, including relations with India and Taliban-led Afghanistan. Tensions with India, compounded by impending elections, and accusations of militant harboring from Afghanistan, pose significant diplomatic hurdles.

Operating within a minority government reliant on support from various parties, Dar faces the arduous task of navigating political alliances to enact critical legislation. The Pakistan Peoples Party's commitment to support the government on an issue-to-issue basis adds another layer of complexity to Dar's political calculus. Additionally, Dar must navigate the intricate relationship with the powerful military, which wields substantial influence over Pakistan's foreign policy.



Ministry Of Finance (Finance and Revenue):

Minister: Muhammad Aurangzeb

As the new finance minister of Pakistan, Muhammad Aurangzeb, a former CEO of Habib Bank Limited (HBL) with vast financial industry experience, is in charge. With complex problems like unemployment, inflation, and substantial current account and budget deficits, he inherits a difficult economic environment.

To be eligible to serve in public office in Pakistan, Aurangzeb, a dual national, had to renounce his Dutch nationality. Even though he is not yet a member of the parliament, he has six months to become an in maintaining his position as a federal minister under national legislation.

The transition from banking to politics is not for the faint-hearted, especially when one's mandate involves navigating a country through economic tumult. Such is the challenge confronting Muhammad Aurangzeb, a seasoned banker turned Finance Minister tasked with the Herculean responsibility of steering Pakistan's economy out of its persistent crisis.



Challenges Ahead for Finance Ministry:

The Finance Ministry grapples with a host of Foremost among Aurangzeb's priorities is the urgent renegotiation of a new loan program with the International Monetary Fund (IMF) following the expiry of the existing \$3 billion agreement in April. With Pakistan burdened by over \$130 billion in external debts, equivalent to a third of its gross domestic product (GDP), securing IMF assistance is imperative to mitigate the looming financial crisis. Pakistan's precarious financial situation is underscored by its dwindling foreign currency reserves, currently standing at a meager \$7.8 billion, a stark reminder of the nation's vulnerability to external shocks.

The depreciation of the Pakistani rupee by over 50 percent in the past two years, coupled with soaring inflation exceeding 23 percent, underscores the urgent need for decisive fiscal measures to stabilize the economy. economic challenges, including inflation, unemployment, and a burgeoning debt burden.

Ministry Of Interior:

Minister: Mohsin Naqvi

Mohsin Naqvi, one of Pakistan's most prominent media moguls and the proprietor of the esteemed City Media Group, has been appointed as the Interior Minister in Mian Shehbaz Sharif's government.

With the support of influential people, Mohsin Naqvi became well-known when he took on the position of Caretaker Chief Minister of Punjab. His management approach, which was titled "Mohsin Speed" informally, attracted notice across the country. Last month, Naqvi won the race to become the chairman of the Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) for a three-year term, following the decision of his opponent, Mustafa Ramday, to resign from the position.



Challenges Ahead for Interior Ministry:

The main challenge for Mohsin Naqvi as an interior minister is addressing internal security challenges, maintaining law and order, and promoting social cohesion within the country.

Security concerns remain a major challenge for the Interior Ministry, with rising militant attacks over the past 18 months, particularly by groups like the Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) reorganizing in Afghanistan and using advanced weaponry left behind by NATO-led forces. The resurgence of militancy, including an ethno-nationalist Baloch insurgency in the southwest, strains Pakistan's limited fiscal space and requires effective strategies to address these security threats.

Maintaining stability is crucial for the Interior Ministry in Pakistan to navigate political dynamics effectively. Pakistan shares its borders with several countries, including Afghanistan, Iran, and India, which makes it a hot zone for geopolitical tensions. The new government will need to handle these relationships with utmost care, particularly in the context of TTP attacks, the expulsion of Afghan refugees, and strained relations with India.

Ministry Of Defense:

Minister: Khawaja Asif

Khawaja Asif is a prominent political leader in Pakistan's Political arena. He is appointed Minister of the Defense Ministry of Pakistan



by the new Prime Minister of Pakistan. Previously, he served simultaneously as both Minister for Defense and Minister for Water and Power, having been appointed to the positions in 2013 during the Nawaz Sharif administration.

Tasked with safeguarding the nation's sovereignty, protecting its borders, and ensuring the safety of its citizens, Asif must navigate through a complex geopolitical landscape and address pressing security concerns.



Challenges Ahead for Ministry of Defense:

As the Defense Minister of Pakistan, Khawaja Asif encountered a plethora of challenges that tested his leadership and strategic acumen. These challenges spanned across economic, political, and security domains, requiring deft navigation and decisive action to safeguard the nation's interests.

Political tensions are also high because of disturbances related to the election and the need to strike a careful balance with the military, which is heavily involved in security and economic decisions in Pakistan.

In addition, there is a significant threat from growing militancy due to a rise in militant attacks and cross-border hostilities with Iran and Afghanistan. The security situation in areas like Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Balochistan also needed to be addressed by the new government, necessitating strong coordination between civilian and military leadership.

Ministry of Information and Broadcasting:

Minister: Attaullah Tarrar

Attaullah Tarar, a prominent Pakistani politician known for his debating skills, has been appointed as the new information minister of Pakistan. Prior to this role, he served as the Special Assistant to Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif with the status of a Federal Minister. He was also appointed by Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif as his special assistant for interior and legal affairs.

As the Information Minister of Pakistan, Attaullah Tarar may face specific challenges related to political tensions and accusations within the government.

Additional notable appointments include Azam Nazir Tarar leading the Ministry of Law, Justice, and Human Rights, Ahsan Iqbal bringing his expertise to the Ministry of Planning and Development, and Qaiser Sheikh assuming control of the Ministry of Maritime Affairs, while Rana Tanveer Hussain will guide the Ministry of Industries and Production.

Abdul Aleem Khan has been tasked with leading the Privatization and Investment Board. Owais Leghari will oversee the Railway portfolio, and Riyaz Pirzada has been named Federal Minister of Housing.

Amir Maqam now serves as the Minister of State for Border Affairs and National Heritage. Chaudhry Salik Hussain has been designated as the Minister of Immigration and Human Resources.

Rana Tanveer Hussain will also serve as the Federal Minister for Industries and Production, contributing to the growth of Pakistan's industrial sector. Ahmad Cheema has been entrusted with the Ministry of Economic Affairs, and Mohsin Naqvi assumes the pivotal role of Federal Interior Minister, responsible for maintaining law and order.



The new Cabinet will face several challenges, including managing political tensions, balancing military influence, addressing rising militancy, navigating complex relationships with neighboring countries, negotiating a deal with the International Monetary Fund (IMF), and preserving stability within the coalition government.

The new government's capacity to successfully address these complex issues will be essential to guiding Pakistan out of its economic crisis and ensuring stability.

The biggest challenge for the government lies in the political arena. After the February 8 elections, independent candidates supported by the imprisoned former Prime Minister Imran Khan won the highest number of seats, 93 in total. However, due to widespread protests against manipulation in national and provincial polls, the PML-N, led by the Sharif family, and the PPP, led by the Zardari-Bhutto dynasty, agreed to form a coalition government. It will be important for the new government to reduce political tensions as Imran Khan continues to enjoy popular support and promises to continue protesting against alleged tampering with election results. Last weekend, protests led to the arrest of over a hundred PTI politicians and supporters in Punjab province.



The Relationship Between Khan's PTI and Current Government Parties in Pakistan: A Critical Analysis of the Future



TTI Report

The political landscape of Pakistan has been dominated by the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) party led by Imran Khan, who became the Prime Minister of Pakistan in 2018. However, the current government is a coalition of several parties, including the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) and the Pakistan People's Party (PPP). The relationship between these parties has been tumultuous, to say the least, with frequent power struggles and political maneuvering. In this article, it will analyze the current relationship between Khan's PTI and the current government parties in Pakistan and provide a critical analysis of the future of this relationship.

Current Relationship

The current relationship between Khan's Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) and other government parties in Pakistan is symbolic of a perpetual power struggle marked by accusations of authoritarianism, political manipulation, and selective persecution. As the largest party in the government, the PTI often wields its majority to advance its agenda, leading to accusations of sidelining the concerns of its coalition partners,

namely the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) and the Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP).

Central to the strain in this relationship is the ongoing legal battles involving prominent leaders of the PML-N and PPP, notably Nawaz Sharif and Asif Ali Zardari. These legal cases, perceived by many as politically motivated, serve as flashpoints exacerbating existing tensions. The PTI stands accused of leveraging these legal proceedings to weaken its political adversaries, consolidating its power through what opponents decry as tactics of political persecution. In response, the PML-N and PPP portray themselves as victims of PTI's authoritarian tendencies, leveraging international scrutiny to challenge the legitimacy of legal proceedings and rally public support against perceived injustices.

This backdrop of legal strife and accusations of authoritarianism underscores the fragile relationship between the PTI and other government parties. As each party maneuvers to assert its influence and safeguard its interests, the political landscape remains rife with distrust and contention. The PTI's efforts to consolidate

power clash with the PML-N and PPP's attempts to resist perceived encroachments on their political autonomy, perpetuating a cycle of confrontation and discord.

In essence, the relationship between Khan's PTI and other government parties in Pakistan is defined by a precarious balance of power, punctuated by allegations of abuse of authority and political vendettas. As Pakistan navigates its democratic evolution, resolving these tensions will be pivotal in determining the future trajectory of its governance and political stability.

Future Relationship

The future trajectory of the relationship between Khan's Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) and other political parties in Pakistan, notably the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) and the Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP), is fraught with uncertainty and complexity. As the PTI maintains its majority in the government, albeit amid growing challenges to its dominance, the dynamics between these parties will likely shape Pakistan's political landscape in significant ways. One of the critical dynamics influencing this relation-



ship is the ongoing legal battles faced by leaders of the PML-N and PPP. Often perceived as politically motivated, these legal cases serve as a contentious point of friction between the PTI and its opponents. The PTI, leveraging its position, continues to employ these cases to undermine its political rivals.

The influence of ongoing legal battles on the relationship dynamics between political parties in Pakistan is the recent deal struck between the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) and the Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) to form a coalition government. This agreement highlights how these parties, despite past differences, have come together strategically, possibly in response to their individual legal and political challenges. The history of collaboration between PML-N and PPP, as seen in previous coalition governments in 2008 and 2022, further underscores how legal issues and political motivations can shape alliances and rivalries in Pakistani politics. Conversely, the PML-N and PPP portray themselves as victims of political persecution, leveraging public sympathy and international attention to challenge the legitimacy of the PTI's rule. Consequently, the adversarial legal environment exacerbates tensions and hampers efforts at constructive dialogue between the parties.

Economic conditions in Pakistan contribute significantly to the strained relationship between the PTI and its opponents. The

country grapples with a severe economic crisis, soaring inflation rates, and a substantial trade deficit. Critics have accused the PTI government of mismanaging the economy, pointing to its failure to address fundamental issues such as unemployment and poverty alleviation. Pakistan's Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) government has faced challenges in addressing fundamental economic issues, contributing to the country's economic crisis. One major issue is the high inflation rate, with the rupee's value depreciating and foreign reserves dropping to a critically low level of \$4.3 billion, only enough to cover one month's worth of imports. The PTI government's austerity measures and limited welfare initiatives have resulted in significant inflation, unemployment, and a contraction in economic growth by 3% of the GDP. These economic struggles have heightened public discontent and intensified political rivalries as opposition parties like the PML-N and PPP leverage these issues to strengthen their political standing.

In response, the PML-N and PPP have capitalized on public discontent, leveraging economic grievances to bolster their political standing. This economic backdrop fuels public dissatisfaction and intensifies political rivalry as each party seeks to position itself as the savior of Pakistan's economic woes. The PPP, for example, has been criticized for its alleged role in the collapse of the former PML-N government in Balochistan. It has faced pressure to

safeguard its government in Karachi while also projecting itself as a significant opposition party. The PML-N, on the other hand, has been aggrieved towards the PPP for its alleged role in the collapse of the former government in Balochistan.

The intersection of legal battles and economic challenges amplifies the political polarization gripping Pakistan's political landscape. While the PTI seeks to consolidate its power by leveraging legal mechanisms and nationalist rhetoric, its opponents, particularly the PML-N and PPP, strive to form alliances and mobilize public opinion against what they perceive as authoritarian tendencies. As a result, the relationship between the PTI and other parties remains marked by distrust, anger, and a pervasive sense of political instability.

Conclusion

The relationship between Khan's PTI and the current government parties in Pakistan is characterized by a constant power struggle and political maneuvering. The future of this relationship is uncertain, with the PTI expected to continue its majority in the government, but the other parties are expected to challenge its dominance. The ongoing legal cases against the leaders of the PML-N and PPP are also likely to continue to strain the relationship. The economic situation in Pakistan is also expected to play a role in the relationship between the parties.





Navigating Challenges and Expectations: The Road Ahead for Pakistan's New Government

By Daniyal Wali

In recent months, Pakistan's political landscape has undergone seismic shifts, reshaping the nation's governance and raising pertinent questions about the integrity of its democratic processes. The culmination of these changes saw the re-election of Shehbaz Sharif, a prominent figure in Pakistani politics, to the esteemed position of Prime Minister for a second term, amidst a backdrop marred by controversy and allegations of electoral malpractice. The elections, held on February 8, were fraught with challenges, ranging from accusations of widespread rigging to delayed results, casting a shadow over the legitimacy of the outcomes.

In a display of electoral dominance, Shehbaz Sharif secured a commanding victory, amassing 201 votes in the 336-member National Assembly, thus surpassing his closest rival, Omar Ayub Khan, by a significant margin. However, the path to this victory was rife with political intricacies and strategic maneuvers, as the Pakistan Tahreek Insaf (PTI) party, Shehbaz's main contender, forged an unexpected alliance with the Sunni Ittehad Council (SIC). Compounded by electoral constraints that forced the PTI to field its candidates as independents, the political landscape became increasingly complex, reflecting the multifaceted nature of Pakistan's democratic arena.

Adding further layers to this evolving narrative, on March 10, 2024, Mr. Asif Ali Zardari assumed the presidency, marking the completion of the electoral process across Pakistan's four provinces. The coalition government, led by two major political parties, now faces a myriad of challenges as it grapples with the daunting task of ensuring both political stability and economic revitalization in a nation plagued by a fragmented mandate and a lack of clear majority support for any single party. Moreover, as the federal cabinet took oath from its ministers, observers noted with interest that many familiar faces from previous administrations have returned to power, raising questions about the potential for



meaningful change and reform within the government. Additionally, the presence of the PTI government in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KPK) province adds another layer of complexity to the already challenging task of governing, as differing political ideologies and regional dynamics come into play, further testing the cohesion and effectiveness of the new coalition regime.

As Pakistan navigates through these intricate and turbulent waters, the coalition government shoulders significant responsibilities and obligations in charting the nation's course forward, striving to address the diverse needs and aspirations of its populace while confronting the myriad challenges that lie ahead.

Fostering Political Stability and Coalition Cohesion

The foremost challenge for the coalition government lies in fostering sincerity and commitment among its partners towards the common goal of political stability and economic uplift. With a split mandate and no clear majority, coalition partners must demonstrate a collective commitment to the betterment of Pakistan and its people. Inclusivity should be prioritized to create a national consensus government, representing diverse political forces and ensuring broad-based governance.

Expanding on this, recent political history in Pakistan highlights the volatility of coalition governments, often marred by infighting and instability. The new government must learn from past mistakes and prioritize consensus-building and compromise to ensure the smooth functioning of the coalition. Additionally, efforts should be made to engage with opposition parties and civil society to garner broader support for the government's agenda. Furthermore, the new government should focus on institutional reforms to strengthen democratic institutions and decentralize power to local governments. Empowering local bodies can enhance governance effectiveness, promote grassroots development, and address regional disparities.

Upholding Good Governance and Accountability

The specter of bad governance looms large over Pakistan, contributing to political instability, economic destitution, and social unrest. The new government must prioritize good governance, characterized by selfless dedication, meritocracy, and transparency. Curbing excessive perks and privileges of the ruling elite, alongside stringent accountability measures, is imperative to win public trust and curb bureaucratic excesses.

To illustrate, Pakistan has consistently



ranked low on global indices measuring corruption and governance quality. According to Transparency International's Corruption Perceptions Index 2021, Pakistan ranked 124th out of 180 countries, indicating widespread corruption and governance deficits. Addressing these issues requires not only political will but also institutional reforms to strengthen oversight mechanisms and promote transparency in decision-making processes. Moreover, the government should prioritize the digitalization of public services to enhance transparency, reduce corruption, and improve service delivery. Leveraging technology can streamline administrative processes, facilitate citizen engagement, and foster accountability.

including debt restructuring and revenue enhancement measures, to alleviate the burden on future generations. In addition to debt management, the government should focus on promoting inclusive economic growth and addressing structural impediments to development. This includes investing in human capital development, promoting entrepreneurship and innovation, and improving the business environment to attract foreign investment.

Managing Political Temperatures and Military Relations

Navigating political tensions and managing relations with the military poses another

military, political parties, and civil society. This includes strengthening civilian institutions, promoting transparency in defense spending, and fostering a culture of accountability within the armed forces.

Addressing Rising Militancy and Security Threats

The resurgence of militant groups, notably the Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP), coupled with ethno-nationalist insurgencies, poses a grave security challenge. The government must confront militancy decisively while addressing underlying grievances through inclusive dialogue and socio-economic development initiatives. Furthermore, managing volatile borders with Afghanistan, Iran, and India requires proactive diplomacy and regional cooperation.

Pakistan's security landscape is marked by complex internal and external threats, ranging from terrorism to border tensions and transnational crime. The government's ability to effectively counter these threats hinges on robust intelligence-gathering capabilities, enhanced border management, and coordination with regional partners. Moreover, addressing root causes of militancy, including poverty, unemployment, and marginalization, is crucial to long-term peace and stability.

As Pakistan's new government embarks on its journey, it faces a formidable array of challenges ranging from economic instability to security threats and political tensions. However, amidst these challenges lie opportunities for meaningful reform, consensus-building, and national revitalization. By prioritizing good governance, fostering inclusive dialogue, and pursuing pragmatic policies, the government can navigate the complexities of governance and fulfill the aspirations of the Pakistani people for a prosperous and stable future. The new government's success hinges on its ability to navigate these challenges with foresight, resilience, and a commitment to serving the interests of the Pakistani people. As the country stands at a critical juncture, it is imperative for all stakeholders to work together towards a common vision of a prosperous, peaceful, and inclusive Pakistan.



Economic Revival and Debt Management

Pakistan's economic woes are compounded by a looming debt crisis and the need for sustainable economic revival. Negotiating with international financial institutions, notably the IMF, to secure extended support programs is critical to avoid sovereign default. However, adherence to stringent reform measures may limit the government's policy options, necessitating a delicate balance between fiscal discipline and meeting the populace's pressing needs.

Delving deeper, Pakistan's debt-to-GDP ratio stood at approximately 87% in 2021, well above the sustainable threshold, according to the World Bank. Moreover, the country's external debt servicing obligations continue to strain its fiscal resources, limiting the government's capacity to invest in infrastructure and social development programs. Therefore, the new government must prioritize debt management strategies,

significant challenge for the new government. The incarceration of former Prime Minister Imran Khan and his subsequent trials risk exacerbating political divisions and unrest. Balancing civilian authority with the military's pervasive influence, especially in economic decision-making, demands adept diplomacy and strategic policymaking.

In Pakistan, the military has historically played a dominant role in politics, often intervening to safeguard its institutional interests. Recent years have witnessed an increased formalization of the military's role in economic governance, raising concerns about civil-military relations and democratic norms. Therefore, the new government must tread carefully, ensuring civilian oversight while leveraging the military's expertise in national security matters. To mitigate tensions and promote democratic consolidation, the government should prioritize dialogue and engagement with all stakeholders, including the



PDM 2.0: Dilemma for the IMF



By Dr Sajjad Akhtar

With the green signal given by the incoming PDM 2.0 to the Ministry of Finance to initiate ground work for another (International Monetary Fund) IMF programme, IMF's willingness to work with the new government and US coaxing Pakistan to undertake structural reforms, the country is all set to embark on its 24th experiment with the IMF.

Nationally, the economic gurus and experts may be preparing their own version of IMF programme.

Hopefully, in the months ahead, the MoF (ministry of finance) and the 'home grown' IMF programme documents will morph into a single document to be negotiated with the IMF.

Designing a solid home-grown document that portrays disciplined fiscal and monetary self-restraint, contains realistic inter-temporal fiscal, monetary policy numbers and growth targets, will be a challenge and novel for GOP. So far it is familiar with presenting an offer list of assets to sovereign and private foreign investors to attract more USD.

Not undermining the above national challenge, the purpose of this article is to peep at the other side of the fence and stylize what kind of dilemma the IMF faces once Pakistan approaches it for the 24th time.

Let's begin with the trust environment facing the lender to support the expected programme. Unfortunately, IMF's trust of elected politicians, specifically since 2008 eroded gradually and is now less than of caretaker governments' ownership to carry out 'structural reforms' simply because of lack of political will, frequent use of waivers and geo-political, geo-strategic, geo-economic and geo-climatic trump cards and last minute implementation of a prior conditions.

Fortunately, this time around, except for the geo-climate 'trump card' all the others cards have lost their shine. Moreover, the performance of the latest caretaker government has shown that the risk of 'death trap' is enough to enforce short-term non-political will at least for the 'stabilization' reforms.

The feelers thrown from the incoming PDM 2.0, if translated into actual reforms, will be a litmus test for the political ownership of the new programme.

A crucial dilemma for IMF is how a hung parliament or a coalition government hanging by a thread will be able to undertake painful 'structural' reforms that require political, legal, inter-provincial and administrative buy-in. Even IMF has observed, "Adjustment episodes launched in countries where governments enjoy a parliamentary majority and do not face imminent elections, are found to be more successful."

During the last 23 programmes, IMF dealt with various types of governments in Pakistan, including hybrid, single political party in power, political coalitions, caretakers and interim setup. However from 2024 onwards IMF will witness a unique political setup, where the executive and legislative powers are distributed party-wise in the coalition.

Thus reforms requiring legislative consensus or time-bound implementation momen-



tum at the national and provincial level can be killed, held in abeyance or implemented with weak political will fueled by different ideological positions or public narratives of the partners. However, there is a silver lining in the cloud.

The economic challenges facing the nation and their stylistic solutions may have been discussed threadbare at the 6-day coalition formation stage with implicit understanding to take common position on the economic challenges confronting the nation.

In absence of such an understanding and given the controversial election results of 2024, the economic stability and re-start of consensus-driven reform process that IMF considers essential for political ownership will be elusive.

While the wish list of GOP programme's version may contain back loaded conditionalities, it is a foregone conclusion that it will be a front-loaded programme, with apriori actions. Emboldened by IMF's largesse to Egypt, in a similar economic crisis, the GOP programme wish list may also request a larger lending size with a longer timeline to implement so called tough re-packaged reforms left untouched since last 30 years.

Though it may take longer than before to negotiate a larger size lending programme, for GOP this would be a bonanza as it indicates a revival of IMF's trust and open the gateway for more debt accumulation

from friendly countries to continue in its old ways.

Given the past 30-year experience with Pakistan, IMF is also faced with the following additional set of dilemmas. Should it increase the size of the lending programme and the timeline of its implementation? Given the larger size, should it also add a list of new deeper and tougher organisational reforms along with the list of backlogs.

Another combination could be an increase in lending size, re-package leftover reforms but no extension beyond 3 years.

Yet another option could be no increase in size beyond USD 3-5 billion and no increase in conventional 3-year timeline just to implement the backlogs. A more strict option is to have a series of one-year renewable SBAs for stabilization plus implementation of one or two deep 'structural' reforms per each SBA.

From the prospective of IMF, each of the above dilemmas is not without implications at the negotiating table. If the IMF goes for a 5-year programme with a larger size, disruption cannot be ruled out due to a climate and supply-side shocks and the resultant list of waivers.

Political costs may also be high if GOP is confronted with a new list of deeper reforms in addition to the left-overs. It may end up even with fewer 'structural' reforms from the new enlarged list than the list of

left-overs. With a 3-year programme, although attractive for the political party in power as it can go on a spending spree in the remaining two years of its life without the oversight of IMF.

However, it should then expect a request for the 25th programme from the new government. The unique political set-up and uncertainties surrounding it, two one-year SBAs give an opportunity to IMF to test the political ownership of the coalition government, thereby narrowing the trust deficit, test the performance and caliber of the new economic team by adhering to strict and short timelines, keep an eye on stabilization targets, less leeway on a borrowing spree from the friendly countries and give an opportunity to home grown gurus and economic experts to undertake real 'structural' reforms.

After two years, IMF with better understanding of the political and economic dynamics/landscape can further fine-tune the stabilization component and enter into a 3-year deep-rooted 'structural' programme.

The above attempt at stylized analysis offers a glimpse of what can be opened at the negotiating table between the IMF and GOP and an opportunity to align internally designed IMF programme with the presumed thinking of the IMF.

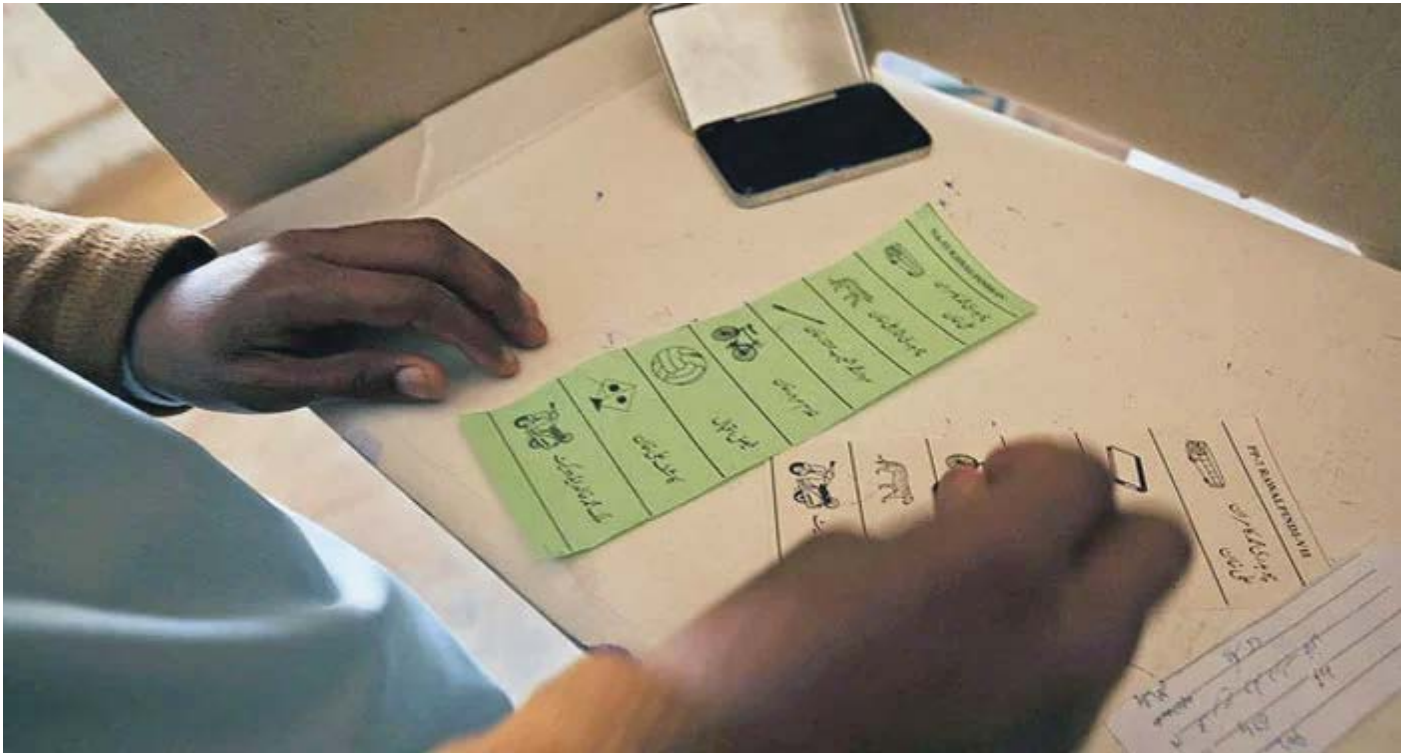
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The meaning of democracy

There are many perceived problems with the most recent exercise in polling carried out in Pakistan



By Kamila Hyat

Democracy is the system of government that most analysts in the country and beyond it believe may be the best for our future. The question however is how it is put in place. There are many perceived problems with the most recent exercise in polling carried out in Pakistan which have left many disillusioned with the system and unwilling to accept its outcome.

This is hardly surprising given the reports we are seeing of valid return forms which seem to have been quite clumsily tampered with and results would seem on the surface at least extremely strange given that initial readings from various polling stations within a constituency did not match the outcome. The same errors made in previous polls when the number of ballots cast for national and provincial assembly elections carried out on the same day did not match are also beginning to emerge. We do not know what will happen as election tribunals consider the various pleas placed before them but we do know that this would be a long process that may not yield results for many weeks, many months, or even longer.

Chief Election Commissioner Sikandar Sultan Raja had promised in past interviews before the polls that he would step down if there was any doubt about the transparency and fairness of the 2024 elections. Like others before him, he has reneged on these pledges.

The result is that there is now little faith left in the Election Commission of Pakistan as a body, and people are even less willing than before to trust the voting process and the question of what happens to the votes they cast. If these have no meaning, then our democracy itself has very little value in the eyes of people. It can in other words be said to have left behind a nation whose distrust in democracy grows by the day. In time, this will mean even lower turnouts and even less interest in polls since people know how they can be managed.

The new leaders who have come to power, including Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif, need to be questioned about why he suggested unelected institutions be granted a supervisory role in the polling process

rather than leaving the conduct and counting of ballots up to the government officials appointed for this purpose.

In India, the democratic process itself has only rarely come under any kind of question or any shadow. We need to try and understand why this is the case. Of course, the fact that the Indian armed forces have never taken hold of the country or attempted to do so by force is one reason for this. There also are other reasons entrenched in a more stable and more practiced process of democracy.

If doubts continue to pour in, as is happening in the present time, questions will arise over whether these elections can stand and hold their rest of time. If they cannot, we have to ask what happens next and what this would mean for the country already badly injured by a history of unfair play and problems at polling stations during past elections. We have to find a way to end this lack of transparency and the many doubts that seem to come with each election, as has been the case since the initial exercise of



democracy carried out in 1970. The lack of fair play can only injure all the political parties and, unfortunately, they lack the ability to step forward, talk and sort things out amongst themselves.

The issue is not only to amend the system but also to build people's faith in democracy. This cannot happen if there is so much doubt about how the outcome was reached and by whom. The polling process itself needs to be far more open to scrutiny and far more transparent in the manner in which it is conducted. This is being said not only of the 2024 results but also of that in 2018 and the balloting for nationwide elections carried out in the years before this.

In 2018 we are told that from the room where the final result was compiled, the agents of political parties were not allowed entry as should be the case under the law and instead locked out by giant doors on which bolts and locks had been placed. This is extremely unfortunate and the manner of tampering has become more and more evident to people over the past few years as they have become better educated in the methods and nuances of democracy.

We need to iron out the sheet and make sure a clean one is laid out. It is probably not possible to do this immediately. But the question raised at the 2024 poll and the debate in which the media was allowed to look and question many aspects of it holds



out some hope for the future. Of course, not all was as transparent and as visible as it should be. But we can only hope that by moving forward, people will become better versed in what to look for and how to judge if a fair verdict has been reached. If the outcome of the election is not fair, a question arises on why this expensive exercise should be conducted at all and what purpose it then serves.

These are key questions in any system where polling by the people stands as a key part of bringing a new government to power. The questions being raised over the allocation of reserved seats add to the whole equation. We need to put in place a body that can correctly oversee elections

and their outcome as is the case for the most part in neighbouring countries. We also need to understand why some countries succeed in holding polls that are perceived as fair and others do not. Very grave questions over the polling process have been raised even in the US. We need to move beyond these issues and tell people quite what happened and why.

The reports now coming forward from organizations such as Pildat, Fafen and HRCP, raise some of the blinds. But still more transparency is needed if we need people to have faith in the process itself and if they are to be expected to cast their votes for candidates who they believe can lead the country out of its current crisis.



Pakistan to seek ‘long, large IMF programme’

By Mehtab Haider

Federal Minister for Finance and Revenues Muhammad Aurangzeb said on Tuesday that Pakistan would seek a “large and long programme” from the IMF under the Extended Fund Facility (EFF).

The blueprint of the EFF programme and the possibility of augmentation will also be explored during the upcoming talks with the IMF. The minister conceded that price hike was the biggest issue and that macroeconomic stability would help reduce it gradually. He termed it a positive development that the CPI-based inflation had started witnessing receding trends. He also said the Monetary Policy Committee (MPC) is the domain of the State Bank of Pakistan (SBP), which currently enjoys autonomy but hoped that after inflation recedes, interest rates would also come down in future.

In the post-EFF agreement with the IMF, he said that Pakistan would fetch foreign inflows through commercial financing and launching international bonds.

“The Special Investment Facilitation is an important platform to bring equity and investment from abroad,” the minister said while talking to a select group of reporters here at the Q Block on Tuesday. The minister added that the era of securing deposits and rollover from friendly and bilateral partners is over, so viable and bankable projects will have to be put on the table.

All options, including augmentation of the IMF programme through climate financing and jacking up the size of allocated quota under the EFF programme, will be explored during the upcoming negotiations with the IMF review mission scheduled to be commenced soon, Muhammad Aurangzeb said.

He conceded that there was a trust deficit owing to which the IMF always proposed front-loaded programmes as they knew that after passing through the first or two reviews and getting money, we would run away from implementing the remaining programme. He said that Pakistan requested the IMF to conduct the second review under the SBA programme and release the last tranche. “I am quite confident that we will be able to agree to IMF’s stipulations,” he added.

This aside, he said he would also request to kickstart parleys for striking a new EFF programme in the upcoming talks.

The minister said that there was no luxury of wasting any more time so the country will have to go into “execution mode” to fix the structural bottlenecks. The plugging of leakages, bringing end-to-end digitization in FBR and fixing cash bleeding State Owned Enterprises (SOEs) are the top priorities agenda. He said that wholesalers, retailers, real estate and agriculture income would be brought into the tax net.

The IMF review mission is scheduled to visit Islamabad from March 14 to 18, 2024 to accomplish the second review and release of the last tranche of \$1.1 billion under the Standby Arrangement (SBA) programme.



The minister categorically said that Islamabad will request the IMF for at least kick-starting parleys on a fresh bailout package under the EFF and will deliberate with the higher management of the Fund in April on the occasion of upcoming spring meetings of IMF/World Bank. He made it clear there was no magic wand available to fix the economic ills. There is no dearth of policy prescriptions but the government has decided to enter into the implementation phase instead of relying on studying issues. The macroeconomic stability will help reduce price hikes and slash down the policy rate.

Accompanied by Federal Secretary Finance Imdad Bosal and DG Media Finance Ministry, the minister for finance stated that he would hold both the portfolios of finance and revenues as earlier in the notification it was written that he would hold the portfolio of finance and would additionally look after revenues. The minister said that there was confusion after the notification, which was now settled.

Aurangzeb said that the structural benchmarks of the last four to five IMF programmes were similar. Instead of converting to “Debating Club”, the reform plan was Pakistan’s programme. He warned that if it was not done, Pakistan would continue doing the “patchwork” like earlier but could not steer the economy from the mess. He said the growth path achieved in the past resulted in the running away of foreign exchange reserves. Pakistan could not run with the tax-to-GDP ratio standing at 9 or 10 percent as there was an urgent need to turn it into double digits.

He said that the privatisation agenda would be pursued as the government should not be running the business rather its role should be restricted to providing a level playing field to private sector. Let the private sector assume the leading role, he added.

The finance minister said the Public Sector Development Programme would have to involve public-private partnership (PPP) and mentioned that Sindh had executed this model in Thar and asked why the federal government could not follow this path.

Courtesy The News

Road to SIFC

By Farhan Bokhari

As Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif's government takes charge amid the worst economic downturn in Pakistan's history, the future of an investment-starved country remains the biggest challenge for the foreseeable future.

For all practical purposes, Pakistan's economy remains at a standstill, driven by lacklustre growth and easily overwhelmed by a host of challenges. In brief, the economy remains simply flat.

In this lacklustre environment, Pakistanis have for months debated the utility or not of pursuing investments led by the Special Investment Facilitation Council (SIFC). The council has been the proverbial talk of the town, formally bringing together Pakistan's top civil and military leaders on a common platform.

And its principal focus remains embedded in providing agricultural land in central and southern Pakistan to prospective investors from the oil-rich Middle East. For the moment across Pakistan, a host of players have questioned the SIFC as a game changer to lift future prospects.

But few have stepped ahead to welcome the SIFC as an alternative to steer the country out of its immediate economic crisis.

As this debate continues, Pakistan is urgently in need of a long-term plan to carry the country away from recurring economic crises.

Given Pakistan's history, meeting the challenge will come about not just through the creation of another platform as in the SIFC. On the contrary, the eventual outcome on this front must emerge from carving out a road map through a series of reforms aimed at transforming Pakistan.

For Pakistan, there are indeed valuable lessons to be learnt from the country's prior experience with the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor or CPEC. For instance, raising expectations at the outset with an estimated inflow of more than \$60 billion in Chinese investments was indeed a blunder.

The Pakistani public's hopes of witnessing

such a staggering investment figure quickly led to unbridled pessimism. The lesson, if one was to be learnt from that exercise, was vitally just one – that talking up an initiative through a vast dollar sum runs the risk of having to deliver it quickly. In Pakistan's case, seeking up to \$50 billion or more under the SIFC, as spelt out by the caretaker government was indeed a colossal blunder.

As for the future of projects under the SIFC, two interrelated initiatives will be vital for its success.

First, Pakistan must strive to open the doors for domestic investors in the agriculture sector as it lays the ground for the inclusion of foreign investors. This is an area that has remained neglected for long. Domestic investors armed with funds to bankroll investments in this area including the introduction of newer technologies will help finance a key gap surrounding Pakistan's farm sector.

Eventually, there is a chance for Pakistan to make investments more popular in agriculture, which remains central to the country's economic health. There is also a chance of the benefits including a rise in the production of food commodities domestically, helping to reduce dependence on food imports.

On the other hand, opening up parts of the agriculture sector to landless peasants will inspire fresh popular confidence in the future of Pakistan. This too has been a much neglected area. The choice of arming landless peasants with land potentially could mark the first step towards battling afresh the largely neglected incidence of rural poverty.

Together, these two steps as a precursor to the SIFC could lift popular confidence in SIFC and strengthen the argument for foreign investors to take stakes in Pakistan.

Going forward, the new government needs to squarely re-consider its economic priorities. Amid the recent and much-heated election campaign, promises of large spending on future infrastructure projects, notably from leaders of the PML-N,



seemed only hollow in the face of the prevailing challenges.

At a time when Pakistan faces an unprecedented crisis surrounding its food security, building expensive new train lines or highways or other elements of infrastructure must remain on hold.

In Punjab, newly appointed Chief Minister Maryam Nawaz's promise of building five new IT cities or delivering an air ambulance service were examples that were devoid of deep thinking over Pakistan's prevailing economic challenges. Punjab remains Pakistan's bread basket, though its ability to deliver on the country's food needs remains behind its potential. Rather than new infrastructure projects, the province needs to focus on revitalizing its agricultural resources in support of Pakistan's overall well-being. This must be done through initiatives such as reviving the provincial agricultural extension services, revitalizing the irrigation network and ensuring the delivery of quality seeds and fertilizers to farmers.

Ultimately, Pakistan with a population of more than 240 million people – a country surrounded with major economic risks – needs to move rapidly to secure its future. That requires a rethinking of economic priorities that have run the country almost aground. Breathing life into the SIFC must be preceded by a refocus on food security, long neglected in Pakistan.

Courtesy The News

Lessons from Egypt's IMF deal



By Dr Abid Qaiyum Suleri

Like many nations burdened by debt, Egypt once again found itself navigating a storm of economic challenges, a scenario all too familiar to Pakistan.

With an external debt-to-GDP ratio breaching the 42 per cent mark as of September 2023 and short-term liabilities teetering close to \$40 billion against a backdrop of dwindling foreign reserves pegged at \$35 billion, the macroeconomic quandary was palpable, and the inflation last August had crossed 40 per cent.

External shocks – notably, the unfortunate situation in the Middle East and the Red Sea's vicissitudes – further muddled the waters, jeopardizing critical foreign exchange lifelines such as tourism and Suez Canal revenues. In 2022-23, against the odds, the tourism sector did not do that badly, with earnings clocking in at a commendable \$13.6 billion. Nonetheless, the looming spectre of inflation was rekindled by the Red Sea tumult and a stark nosedive in Suez Canal receipts, which halved in January 2024 compared to the year prior, heralding potential trade disruptions and shortages.

In a bid to staunch the economic haemorrhage, Egypt, the second largest debtor of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) after Argentina, once again courted the IMF for succour, culminating in a strategic entente last week. This pact, a lifeline intended to shore up Egypt's faltering economy, was predicated on ensuring debt sustainability, recalibrating price stability, and spurring private sector-led growth through a gamut of structural reforms.

The key terms and conditions agreed between the IMF and Egypt include shifting to a flexible exchange rate system; monetary and fiscal policy tightening, including containing off-budget capital expenditure and recalibration of infrastructure expenditures; targeted budget support for vulnerable households through an expansion in coverage of the Takaful and Karama cash transfer programmes; and balancing public and private sector roles through reducing the state footprint and strengthening the ability of the private sector to better contribute to economic growth.

Building upon a previous \$3 billion Extend-

ed Fund Facility (EFF) from December 2022, this accord burgeoned into an \$8 billion lifeline, including a \$1.2 billion tranche earmarked for environmental sustainability endeavours. It's important to note that under the prior arrangement, Egypt struggled with implementing a market-based exchange rate, divesting state assets, and curtailing the military's economic footprint, leading to a delay in the first review of the 2022 EFF initially slated for March 2023.

Parallel to this IMF pact, Egypt clinched a land agreement with the UAE sovereign fund ADQ, a move criticized by the opposition, but it did channel critical liquidity into the domestic economy. The \$35 billion pact, inked on February 23 for the Ras al-Hikma coastal development, not only encompassed a \$24 billion land acquisition but also the strategic reallocation of \$11 billion from the UAE's pre-existing Central Bank deposits in Egypt. This monumental investment is poised to catalyze an additional \$150 billion in investments, envisaging Ras al-Hikma's metamorphosis into a vibrant economic nexus, thereby

bolstering employment and propelling growth, with Egypt maintaining a 35 per cent stake in the venture.

The currency flotation that ensued saw the Egyptian pound depreciate to 50 per dollar from a previous rate of 30, marking the fifth devaluation since April 2022; the black-market rate ominously surged to 70. The Central Bank of Egypt also increased its overnight lending rate by 600 points to 28.25 per cent.

This financial recalibration and the UAE's capital injection have kindled a spectrum of reactions within Egypt. While the government heralds these developments as a panacea for the prevailing macroeconomic malaise, dissent brews among civil society, underscored by vociferous opposition from social movements, NGOs, and legal circles, criticizing President Sisi for selling off Egypt's pristine beaches and apprehensive of the austerity's bite and its ramifications on the vulnerable.

Despite the criticism, the initial tranche of the Emirati investment pegged at \$10 billion and expected to be completed within the next two months, is anticipated to mitigate the adverse impacts of the devaluation, thereby alleviating banking constraints and easing the remittance flows.

The economic sagas of Egypt and Pakistan, particularly their frequent engagement with the IMF (Pakistan is the fourth largest borrower of the IMF), mirror each other's struggles with the cyclical nature of the crisis, intervention, and temporary reprieve. This pattern highlights a critical challenge: the difficulty of sustaining reform momentum post-IMF intervention, a challenge compounded by a lack of political ownership and a tendency to revert to short-term political expediencies at the expense of long-term economic stability.

Both nations also grapple with the ramifications of external shocks, such as global commodity price fluctuations or geopolitical tensions, which can derail economic progress and magnify existing vulnerabilities. Both have also struggled with structural issues, including governance challenges and the need for deeper institutional reforms, which can impede the long-term success of IMF-supported programmes.

Egypt's case, particularly its recent IMF

deal and the consequential sale of a significant stake in Ras al Hikma, exemplifies the high stakes and complex decisions countries face in the throes of economic distress. For Pakistan, Egypt's experience is not merely a distant tale but a mirror that reflects on its economic challenges and the potential strategies for recovery.

Two crucial lessons emerge from Egypt's experience. First, the international community's willingness to assist is often tinged with geopolitical considerations. The IMF, which had suspended its 2022 program with Egypt due to a lack of progress, willingly increased the loan amount by nearly three times in 2024, thanks to its strategic importance. It is obvious that



Egypt's potential role as an interlocutor between Hamas and Israel amidst the Gaza conflict catalysed a more favourable engagement from the IMF and international stakeholders.

This highlights the geopolitical dimension of economic bailouts, an aspect where Pakistan's situation diverges following the Nato withdrawal from Afghanistan, diminishing its leverage in international negotiations.

Second, the concept of economic sovereignty and the inherent costs of financial rescues become starkly apparent. Egypt's concession of Ras al Hikma underscores a stark reality: financial aid, especially from fraternal nations, often carries hidden costs, potentially demanding painful sacrifices of national assets. Pakistan's reliance on financial rollovers from allies like China,

Saudi Arabia, and the UAE, while currently beneficial, might similarly necessitate unwelcome compromises in the future.

As Pakistan steers through these turbulent economic waters, the importance of comprehensive and sustainable reform becomes increasingly evident. The path forward entails a rigorous commitment to structural adjustments that transcend the immediacies of fiscal balancing acts. This encompasses a broad spectrum of reforms aimed at enlarging the tax base, enhancing revenue and improving its quality (more reliance on direct taxes), rationalizing public expenditures, and addressing the perennial challenges in the energy sector and state-owned enterprises.

The essence of this reformative journey lies in fortifying governance and institutional integrity, which are essential bedrock for fostering economic resilience and growth in the absence of geopolitical leverage.

With its blend of geopolitical manoeuvring and hard economic choices, Egypt's story offers Pakistan a valuable perspective on the complex interplay of international finance and national policymaking. As Pakistan forges its path toward economic recovery, the insights gleaned from Egypt's engagements with the IMF and its broader economic strategy highlight the critical need for a nuanced, multifaceted approach that balances immediate economic exigencies with long-term structural reforms.

Courtesy The News

PM Shehbaz reinvents wheel to save Rs1tr



By Ansar Abbasi

A high-level committee set up by Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif during his last tenure as PM had recommended a comprehensive set of austerity measures to save up to Rs1 trillion per year in the medium term but most of its recommendations were ignored.

The committee, which was headed by a reputed retired bureaucrat Nasir Mahmood Khosa, had 15 members. The prime minister on Wednesday constituted a seven-member committee to present a practical plan for reduction in government expenditures. Interestingly, most of the seven-member committee members were part of the austerity committee whose most recommendations were ignored earlier.

The newly constituted committee, headed by deputy chairman Planning, includes secretary finance, secretary Cabinet Division, secretary Industries and Production Rashid Mahmood Langrial, Kaiser Bengali, Dr Farrukh Saleem and Muhammad Naveed Iftikhar.

The previous committee, which had presented its report in early 2023 to the then Shehbaz-led PDM government, not only included secretary finance, secretary cabinet, Dr Kaiser Bengali, Dr Farrukh Saleem and Muhammad Naveed Iftikhar but was also far more powerful. This was because besides others, it also included the then minister of state for finance, SAPM on finance, SAPM on government effectiveness, Adviser to PM on establishment and all chief secretaries.

The 2023 committee had recommended comprehensive austerity measures, which as per the committee's recommendations, if implemented, were to affect the savings of Rs200 billion in subsidies, Rs200 billion from development side, Rs55 billion from running of civil government, Rs60-70 billion via Single Treasury Account, Rs100 billion from conservation measures, Rs174 billion from divestment of non-strategic SOEs and saving from 15% cut of non-combat defence expenditure.

"The committee aims to effect savings of up to Rs1 trillion per year in the medium term," read the report, which was presented to the prime minister, who implemented it only partially and ignored most of its recommendations. In its conclusion, the committee had noted, "The Committee is of the view that implementation of the recommendations would be a tough task. However, given the fiscal conditions of the country it is imperative that all segments of the society, particularly those paid out of public funds, should contribute to the austerity effort. Many of the recommendations of the Committee can be implemented immediately while others would need to be applied over the medium term."

The following are the highlights of the last austerity committee's recommendations:

The Cabinet should consist of maximum thirty (30) members; 15% cut in salary and allowances of legislators (MNAs, Senators & MPAs); 15% cut be applied in current expenditure of

all Ministries/Divisions/Attached Departments/Subordinate Offices/Autonomous Bodies/Provincial Government Departments; recurrent budgets be frozen; ban on purchase of new vehicles of all types; reduction in all allowance(s) specific/admissible for a post/organization/cadre by 25%; complete ban on creation of new administrative units (divisions, districts, sub divisions, tehsils) for two years; security protocol of all government functionaries be reviewed and scaled down drastically; complete ban on new recruitments; discretionary grants/secret service fund (admissible to ISI & IB) be frozen; all entitlements regarding foreign travel, postings and visits be reviewed by Finance Division and Cabinet Division in consultation with Foreign Affairs Division; pension reforms being considered by Finance Division be finalized by 30th June 2023; maximum pension (including those of judges of SC and HCs) should be capped at Rs500,000/- per month in all cases; all posts lying vacant for 3 years be abolished; budget allocated to embassies be reduced by 15%; there should be complete ban on import of luxury vehicles, if no ban, it should be subjected to heavy taxation and subsequent wealth tax; no use of SUVs by government officials; all perks of retired civil servants, judicial

officers of superior courts and of uniformed services viz vehicles, security, support staff and utilities may be withdrawn; Cabinet Division to identify the agencies/govt. entities performing overlapping functions; Establishment Division, Finance Division and Cabinet Division to rationalize/reduce the number of Ministries/Divisions/Attached departments/Subordinate offices/Autonomous bodies/Authorities in accordance with constitutional mandate; drastic reduction in entertainment budget across the board; foreign travel on obligatory visits only; all subsidies should be targeted only and the focus should only be on the poorest of the poor; provinces should contribute to the subsidies and grants aimed at their residents; in case of BISP and subsidies on electricity for tube wells, fertilizer, etc., major chunk of beneficiaries is from provinces, therefore, contributory/sharing mechanism may be evolved on a gradual basis between federal and provincial governments; wheat subsidy should be targeted, with greater role of private sector; pre-paid metering for electricity and gas be introduced; no new greenfield project should be included in PSDP except for those related to water, energy, climate change and pro poor projects; ongoing/approved development projects may be

reviewed and only most important and unavoidable/feasible projects may be processed further for completion; federal government should fund only those development projects which come under its constitutional jurisdiction; the existing system of identification of development projects through public representatives (MNAs, MPAs and Senators) in place since 1985 be done away with; SOEs carrying out commercial activities may be shifted to other arrangements; discontinue subsidies to SOEs which do not provide any public good; non-combat defence budget be cut down by 15%; Single treasury account, on which work has been initiated by Finance Division, be implemented immediately; special accounts be reviewed thoroughly; one day work from home, with only essential staff present in offices, be introduced; day-light saving should be introduced; closure of markets at 8pm across the country; energy efficient electric appliances be used. Only one plot be allowed for civil servants/government servants, judicial officers and uniformed services. More than one plot already allotted as well as additional land allotments be cancelled and put to open auction; progressive property tax be introduced in provinces; units of free electricity allowed to employees of power distribution companies be monetized, etc.



The price of extremism



By Husain Haqqani

After a flurry of praise for the police officer who saved her life, most Pakistanis seem to have forgotten the incident in Lahore involving the woman who was accused of blasphemy for wearing a dress with Arabic calligraphy. That a woman was almost lynched for wearing clothes that an illiterate crowd mistook for religious text highlights Pakistan's extremism problem.

Dismissing events like this incident as outliers or choosing to ignore them will not prevent them from occurring again. In December 2021, the Sri Lankan manager of a factory in Sialkot was beaten to death and set ablaze by a mob over allegations of blasphemy that turned out to be spurious. The woman in Lahore with the dress bearing Arabic language words was lucky that she escaped a similar fate.

The dress worn by the woman in question bore the word 'Halwa' in Arabic script. The word means beautiful in Arabic, and it is not uncommon in the Muslim world for Arabic calligraphy to be used to adorn dresses, buildings, and much more. But the irrational environment in Pakistan over

religious matters, especially allegations of blasphemy, put the woman's life at risk. The international publicity over the incident ensured that everyone around the world who might be thinking of doing business with Pakistan had to think about facing similar risks.

Nations pay a hefty price when the rest of the world sees them as irrational or extreme. Racist violence, for example, acts as a disincentive for business travelers belonging to different races from traveling to countries where race is an issue. In the case of Pakistan, religious extremism and vigilantism have become a factor in the decisions of potential investors and merchants.

Two days after the Lahore incident, an Arab businessman remarked to me that he immediately thought of his wife and daughters. "They wear Arabic calligraphy designs as part of their dress," he said, adding, "I was thinking of expanding my business to Pakistan, but do I want to walk through Lahore or Karachi with my wife or daughters, risking such attacks?"

Pakistan already has the world's toughest blasphemy laws and blasphemy is punishable by death after a trial. But some groups do not wait for the law to take its course and want to act as judge, jury, and executioner. Several people have been lynched before their cases go to trial and those acquitted due to lack of evidence are also attacked as if the allegation of blasphemy requires no proof other than the allegation itself.

Judges, too, have to fear the backlash of those who pretend to be all-knowing while hearing such cases. Instead of making Pakistani society more religious or pious, the practice of whipping up a crowd in a religious frenzy has created situations in which mobs lose all fear of God. Even in the recent case of the woman wearing the Arabic calligraphy dress, the crowd had to be pacified with an apology from the woman though she had done nothing wrong. As Maulana Tahir Ashrafi pointed out, the men in the crowd, rather than the woman, should have been the ones to apologize.

Government after government in Pakistan has appeased groups that use religious

slogans to divide and scare Pakistanis. Some have even seen the extremists as guarantors of Pakistan's security or as instruments of Pakistani influence across the border in Afghanistan or Kashmir. But the net impact of nurturing a religious outrage industry has only been to undermine Pakistan's external relations and weaken its economy. Official data suggests that between 2001 and 2018 "the direct and indirect cost incurred by Pakistan due to incidents of terrorism" amounted to \$123.13 billion.

Add to it the cost of fostering a society driven by anger and unable to figure out its real place in the modern world. Since falling under Western colonial rule, the Muslim world has developed a narrative of grievance and Pakistan is no exception. Like all national and community narratives, it has some true elements. But the current weakness of the Muslim world or of Pakistan is not entirely the fault of Western colonialism or postcolonial machinations.

Pakistanis must understand the consequences of low literacy rates, poor quality of higher education, and low female participation in the workforce. Instead, they are fed narratives of conspiracy theories and hate against more powerful nations and a steady diet of religious-sounding rhetoric that is more political than religious.



On March 6, 1948, Pakistan's first opposition leader, Huseyn Shaheed Suhrawardy (who later became prime minister for a short time) warned the country's earliest leaders against building "a state which would be founded upon caucuses and coteries, a state which will be founded on sentiments, namely that of Islam in danger or of Pakistan in danger."

According to Suhrawardy, "a state which will be held together by raising the bogey of attacks and which you keep together by keeping up a constant friction between yourself and your sister Dominion [India], that state will be full of alarms and excursions. You think that you will get away with it but in that state there will be no

commerce, no business and no trade."

Cautioning against attacks on non-Muslims in the immediate aftermath of partition, Suhrawardy said that such a course will only erode rule of law. "There will be lawlessness and those lawless elements that may be turned today against non-Muslims will be turned later on, once those fratricidal tendencies have been aroused, against the Muslim gentry and I want you to be warned in time," he observed.

Today, those words seem prescient. Even now, a comprehensive strategy of pushing back extremism is the only way forward for a country that faces a multitude of challenges.

Courtesy The News



Virtues of One Era Become the Vices in the New

The Changing Perspectives of the Pakistani Society of Today



By Amir Jahangir

"Virtues of One Era Become the Vices in the New Era" captures the dynamic nature of values and virtues throughout history, suggesting that what may be considered virtuous or admirable in one period can become viewed as negative or problematic in another. This concept is pervasive in various historical analyses, including the work of renowned historian Will Durant, particularly in his book "The Lessons of History." Durant's comprehensive approach to history, alongside his examination of broader patterns and themes, highlights the evolving nature of societal values and virtues.

In "The Lessons of History," Durant and his wife Ariel Durant delve into recurring patterns and lessons gleaned from historical study, exploring how civilizations rise and fall, cultures evolve, and values and virtues shift over time. The notion that virtues of one era can morph into vices in another underscores the changing social, cultural, and economic contexts that shape human societies. For example, virtues like obedience and conformity may have been highly prized in historical periods but may be viewed as stifling or oppressive in more individualistic and democratic societies.

The International Women's Day, observed on March 8th every year, the concept of "Virtues of One Era Becomes the Vices in the New Era" takes on added significance as the world reflects on the evolving nature of women's empowerment. This day serves as a reminder of the progress made toward gender equality and the challenges that persist in achieving full empowerment for women worldwide. In the context of this day, the concept underscores the shifting societal values and norms surrounding women's roles and responsibilities.

Historically and culturally, women were often confined to traditional roles dictated by patriarchal societies, where virtues like obedience and self-sacrifice were upheld as ideal qualities. However, as societies progress and attitudes toward gender equality evolve, these virtues are reexamined in the new era. Today, International Women's Day celebrates virtues associated with women's empowerment, such as independence, assertiveness, and leadership, recognized as essential for women's full participation in society.

The intersectionality of women's empowerment with other social and economic dynamics is also emphasized on International Women's Day. Efforts to advance women's rights require a comprehensive approach, addressing issues like gender-based violence and the gender pay gap. By embracing new ideals of gender equality and empowerment, societies can create more inclusive and equitable environments where women can thrive.

In a different context, of Pakistani politics and patriotism, the idea that "virtues of one era become vices in the new era" can be interpreted in various ways, especially considering the changing demographic landscape and evolving demands of the young population. As Pakistan navigates these changes, policymakers and leaders must listen to the voices of the youth and adapt to meet their evolving needs and aspirations. This adaptation is crucial in ensuring a more inclusive and equitable future for all citizens.

The impact of changing societal values, demographics, and political demands on family-run political dynasties in Pakistan is multifaceted and significant. With the rise of youth activism and demands for

more inclusive governance, these dynasties are facing challenges to their legitimacy. The younger generation questions the authority of politicians who inherit power based solely on familial ties rather than merit or popular support, eroding trust and weakening the foundation of dynastic politics. Moreover, there is a growing call for meritocracy within political parties as young people advocate for transparent and fair selection processes.

This pressure for change can create internal tensions within parties with dynastic structures and may lead to factionalism and power struggles. Additionally, the emergence of alternative voices and movements challenges the dominance of family-run political parties, forcing them to adapt or risk losing relevance. Some parties may attempt to rebrand and promote younger leaders or progressive agendas to appeal to the changing demographic landscape. Still, genuine reform may be slow and face resistance from entrenched interests.

The evolving political landscape in Pakistan is reshaping the dynamics of family-run political dynasties, necessitating adaptation to meet the demands of a more engaged and diverse electorate. This dynastic politics will have to meet a higher benchmark for governance and might be subject to more criticism, especially in the Punjab and at the Center.

In a distinct context, the same concept of "Virtues of One Era Become the Vices in the New Era" holds profound implications for the social and economic fabric of modern-day Pakistan. In a society undergoing rapid transformation, this notion underscores the fluid nature of values and virtues over time. Pakistan's evolving social dynamics reflect a shift from traditional to more progressive ideals, challenging longstanding norms and customs. For instance, patriarchal structures, once revered for upholding family honor and authority, are now being scrutinized as women assert their rights and demand gender equality. This transition highlights a clash between traditional values and modern principles of inclusivity and social justice, reshaping the societal landscape.

Economically, Pakistan grapples with the transition from agrarian to industrial and knowledge-based economies, a shift echoed globally. In this context, traditional virtues like hard work and loyalty to employers may no longer guarantee economic security in an increasingly competitive and dynamic job market. Instead, the emphasis has shifted towards skills such as adaptability, creativity, and technological proficiency, aligning with the demands of a rapidly evolving global economy. Educational reforms reflect this change, with a growing emphasis on critical thinking and problem-solving over rote memorization, acknowledging the need for a workforce equipped with 21st-century skills.

Moreover, the concept of changing virtues and vices carries significant political implications in Pakistan. As societal values evolve, there is an evolving demand for transparent and accountable governance. Traditional power structures, often characterized by patronage, and nepotism, face scrutiny in the face of a populace that values integrity, loyalty, fairness, and inclusivity. This shift has catalyzed global calls for electoral reforms, anti-corruption measures, and greater citizen participation in decision-making processes, reflecting a broader desire for political change and reform, Pakistan is no exception to this.

In navigating these transitions, Pakistan faces the challenge of balancing tradition with progress, adapting its social, economic, educational, and political systems to meet the demands of a rapidly changing world. Embracing this concept requires a nuanced understanding of the evolving needs and aspirations of its people, as well as a willingness to challenge entrenched norms and embrace innovation. Ultimately, the journey towards a more prosperous and equitable future for Pakistan hinges on its ability to navigate the tensions between past virtues and present realities, forging a path that honors tradition while embracing progress.

Additionally, the intersection of "Virtues of One Era Become the Vices in the New Era" with Pakistan's socio-economic landscape presents further complexities. The country grapples with deep-rooted challenges such as poverty, inequality, and access to basic services. In this context, traditional virtues may hinder progress if they perpetuate social disparities or impede efforts toward inclusive development. For example, while virtues like frugality and resilience may have been revered in times of economic hardship, they may now be seen as obstacles to social mobility if they prevent individuals from investing in education or accessing opportunities for economic advancement.



Moreover, the concept has implications for Pakistan's cultural and religious identity. As societal values evolve, there may be tensions between traditional cultural norms and modern interpretations of identity and belonging. Virtues associated with cultural preservation and religious piety may clash with the desire for individual expression and cultural diversity. Navigating these tensions requires a delicate balance between honoring heritage and embracing progress, fostering a society where diverse identities are celebrated and respected. The recent Ichara incident in Lahore should be an eye-opener for individual liberty versus societal obligations and collective consciousness. This is also a point to ponder how the rights of the society (no matter how illiterate and irrelevant, they may be) can create a clash with the rights of the individuality of the citizens. This conflict in approach is not theoretical but stems from the individual's understanding of the belief and how a thought process is conceived, evolved, and expressed. If not addressed incidents like this could result more often in the shapes and shades of religion, culture, ethnicities, language, and other definitions of societal communions.

Furthermore, the concept of "Virtues of One Era Become the Vices in the New Era" underscores the importance of adaptive governance and policy-making. Pakistani policymakers must recognize

the dynamic nature of societal values and anticipate shifting demands from the population. Embracing policies that promote inclusivity, social justice, and sustainable development can help address emerging challenges while harnessing opportunities for progress. This requires a proactive approach to governance that is responsive to the evolving needs and aspirations of Pakistani society.

The transformation of values across different eras, along with examples of how virtues in one era can become vices in the next can be seen and felt in the table below:

Eras	Values	Virtues	Vices
Hunting/Gathering	Survival, Cooperation, Aggression	Adaptability, Resourcefulness, Aggressiveness	Conformity, Tribalism, Shy
Agrarian	Stability, Tradition, Patriotism	Hard work, Loyalty to community, commitment to land	Resistance to change, Feudalism, Aggression towards community.
Industrial/Knowledge	Progress, Efficiency	Innovation, Education	Exploitation, Inequality, Fixation with Geographical locality
Creativity and Automation	Sustainability, Human-centeredness	Environmental consciousness, Technological integration, Adaptive	Overreliance on technology, Loss of human connection, Self interest

Explanation:

1. **Hunting/Gathering Era:** In this era, survival and cooperation were paramount for the community's well-being. Virtues such as adaptability and resourcefulness ensured survival in challenging environments. However, these virtues could transform into vices when individuals excessively conform to group norms or engage in tribalistic behaviors, hindering societal progress and cohesion.
2. **Agrarian Era:** Stability and tradition were valued during this period, with hard work and loyalty to the community considered virtuous qualities. However, as societies became more entrenched in tradition, virtues like resistance to change and adherence to feudalistic structures could impede societal advancement and social mobility.
3. **Industrial/Knowledge Economy Era:** Progress and efficiency became central to societal development during this era, with virtues such as innovation and education driving economic growth and technological advancement. However, these virtues could lead to vices such as exploitation and inequality, as the pursuit of progress sometimes comes at the expense of environmental sustainability and social equity.
4. **Creativity and Automated Societies:** Sustainability and human-centeredness emerge as key values in this era, emphasizing the importance of environmental consciousness and technological integration for the well-being of both people and the planet. However, there is a risk that overreliance on technology and the loss of human connection could undermine these virtues, leading to unintended consequences and societal challenges.

In each era, the virtues that were once essential for societal progress and survival can become vices when taken to extremes or when societal values and priorities shift. This highlights the dynamic

nature of values and virtues throughout history and underscores the importance of adaptability and balance in navigating societal change.

The concept suggested by Will and Aerial Durant about "Virtues of One Era Become the Vices in the New Era" offers valuable insights into Pakistan's socio-economic, cultural, and political landscape. Embracing change, challenging outdated norms, and fostering inclusive development are essential for navigating the complexities of the modern era. By recognizing the dynamic nature of values and virtues, Pakistan can forge a path toward a more prosperous, equitable, and resilient future for all its citizens.

The current challenge of understanding between the governing and the governed stems from the shifting perspectives on virtues and vices within distinct time frames of the society. With each generation comes a unique set of challenges, values, and social contracts between citizens and the state. Loyalty and patriotism, once fundamental to societal cohesion, now take on new dimensions as perspectives evolve.



One of the key shifts lies in the changing perception of values such as money, wealth, and ownership. While these were traditionally seen as markers of success and stability, there is a growing recognition of their limitations in addressing broader societal issues. Conversely, virtues like compassion, empathy, and trust are gaining prominence as essential ingredients for building cohesive and resilient communities.

However, these changes in perspective are not uniform across society. Some embrace the future, eagerly adapting to new realities and embracing progressive ideals. Others, however, cling to the past, reluctant to let go of entrenched beliefs and practices. This divergence in outlook creates tension and complexity in governance, as policymakers navigate competing interests and priorities.

Addressing this challenge requires a nuanced approach that acknowledges the diversity of perspectives within society. Effective governance must recognize and respect the values and aspirations of all citizens, fostering dialogue and collaboration across generations.

The evolving nature of societal values and perspectives presents both opportunities and challenges for governance. Embracing change, fostering dialogue, and promoting inclusivity is essential for navigating this dynamic landscape and building a more equitable and resilient society for all.

Donald Trump's Georgia judge dismisses some criminal charges

By Max Matza

The judge overseeing an election interference case against Donald Trump in Georgia has thrown out some criminal charges, but left most in place.

Judge Scott McAfee found six counts in the 41-count indictment against Mr Trump and some of his co-defendants, including Rudy Giuliani, lacked detail.

But he said the charges can be refiled at a later date.

Mr Trump was among 19 people charged with a conspiracy to overturn the state's 2020 election results.

"The lack of detail concerning an essential legal element is, in the undersigned's opinion, fatal," Judge McAfee wrote in his order on Wednesday.

He said the charges do not provide the accused with enough information to prepare their legal defences "intelligently", adding that "this does not mean the entire indictment is dismissed".

Mr McAfee was randomly assigned the Trump case in 2023, just six months after being appointed as a judge by Georgia Governor Brian Kemp, a Republican.

He previously worked as a prosecutor, including for the Fulton County District Attorney Fani Willis, a Democrat who led the investigation into the former president.

Mr McAfee's ruling affects three of the 13 charges against Mr Trump.

They relate to a call Mr Trump made to Georgia Secretary of State Brad Raffensperger in which he told him: "All I want to do is this. I just want to find 11,780 votes, which is one more than we have."

One of the charges accused the former president of soliciting public officials to break the law by violating their oath of office.

But Mr McAfee said the indictment



was not specific enough about exactly what Mr Trump wanted the officials to do.

The other dismissed charges apply to some of his most prominent co-defendants: Rudy Giuliani, John Eastman and Mark Meadows.

In his order, Judge McAfee said the charges "contain all the essential elements of the crimes but fail to allege sufficient detail regarding the nature of their commission, i.e., the underlying felony solicited".

It comes as a win for Mr Trump and his co-defendants, who had filed to dismiss the charge. Prosecutors could now choose to refile the charges with more information in their allegation, or let the ruling stand and focus on the other charges.

The group had initially faced 41 total charges. The former president is facing up to 20 years in prison in Georgia if convicted of the most severe charge of racketeering.

In a statement, Mr Trump's lawyer in the Georgia case, Steve Sadow, called the ruling "a correct application of the law, as the prosecution failed to make specific allegations of any alleged wrongdoing on those counts".

"The entire prosecution of President Trump is political, constitutes election interference, and should be dismissed."

Mr Trump, who is running for president against Joe Biden in November, has slammed the case as politically motivated.

The Georgia ruling does not address the defence's effort to dismiss Fulton County District Attorney Fani Willis over ethics claims that she had an improper relationship with a lawyer she hired to work on the case.

Mr McAfee is expected to rule on the the ethics complaint soon. If he finds that his former boss should be removed from the case, a trial could be delayed for months. Mr Trump is the defendant in four criminal cases as well as several civil lawsuits.

On Tuesday, the judge in his defamation lawsuit brought by writer E Jean Carroll accepted a \$92m (£72m) bond from Mr Trump while the former president appeals against the verdict. A jury in January found Mr Trump owed the former columnist millions of dollars for defamation when he denied he sexually assaulted her. If he loses his appeal, the bond ensures Ms Carroll will be paid.

He has also been ordered to pay over \$450m to the state of New York after he was found to have committed fraud by lying to banks about the value of his properties.

Courtesy BBC

Foreign policy under Trump 2.0



By Maleeha Lodhi

What will US foreign policy look like under Donald Trump 2.0? Governments and people across the world have already started assessing this as the former president appears increasingly likely to return to power even though the election is far too early to call. But irrespective of who wins the presidential race, there is a general perception of the US among the international community that is informing assessments about Washington's future engagement with the world.

This concerns the intensely polarised state of the country, which frequently gridlocks the political system, threatens government shutdowns and paralyzes Congress. So much so that agreement on the budget proves elusive, and even aid to America's closest ally (Israel) fails to pass Congress. Institutional dysfunction and other challenges to its democracy compels administrations to be much more preoccupied with domestic challenges and troubles.

This in turn means Washington's international engagement is neither seen as sustained nor consistent and US reliability

also comes into question. This at a time when the US is no longer the sole dominant power in a growing multipolar world, which imposes limits on its power.

The prospect of another Trump presidency only reinforces this perception given both his unpredictability and 'America First' unilateralist approach, which produced so much disruption and discontinuity in foreign policy in his first term and eroded America's international standing. His isolationist approach also made the country retrench from its global role.

As he is now a known quantity, will it be easier for the world to deal with him? Not necessarily. His mercurial and whimsical personality makes it uncertain whether his second term will just mimic the first and offer more of the same in foreign policy. His impulsiveness makes it difficult to gauge his future policies with certainty especially as he is capable of suddenly changing course.

When Joe Biden became president, his defining phrase of how his administration

would depart from Trump was 'America is back'. It meant more expansive and energetic US engagement with the world in line with traditional US policy and global role. But in several core areas his approach was not different from that of his predecessor.

In others, his administration's declaratory policy was not matched by operational reality, as for example the aim to 'restore America's global leadership'. On China, his policy differed little from Trump's, except perhaps in tone. On trade their approach was identical. Trump-era tariffs not only remained intact but were supplemented by tech restrictions unleashing an intense tech war.

Biden's aggressive stance towards Beijing and policy to contain China of course reflected the political consensus in the US for a tougher posture towards Beijing. For their part, Chinese officials saw little to distinguish between Trump and Biden's policies. This prompted Chinese leaders to repeatedly warn Washington against engaging in a Cold War and describe the

Biden administration's strategy as one of 'confrontational competition'.

The former president will be transactional in his dealings but also unpredictable.

In many respects, Biden's worldview seemed stuck in the past and not in sync with a vastly transformed world. For example, his effort to cast the world into a defining battle between democracy and authoritarian rule was a throwback to a Cold War paradigm and rhetoric. The idea never took off, not least because American democracy itself had regressed.

His chaotic management of the US military withdrawal from Afghanistan was a major blow to US image and credibility. He failed to mediate peace to bring the costly Ukraine war to an end. His policy on Israel's war in Gaza isolated the US from the international community, which wanted the conflict to end, but instead, witnessed repeated American vetoes of ceasefire resolutions in the UN Security Council. This and Washington's arming of Israel also eroded support for Biden from within his own party, especially among young and liberal Democrats.

Not that Trump will be any different on this issue given his staunch pro-Israel stance, which also appeals to his supporters among

evangelical Christians. He said last week that Israel should continue its military offensive until "complete victory" and "finish the problem". His other utterances during the campaign have a familiar ring. He has repeated the America First rhetoric, talked of imposing new trade restrictions/tariffs on China and ending its most favoured nation trading status.

He also chastised Nato allies for not sharing the defence burden. He said in his second term, America would fundamentally rethink "Nato's purpose and its mission" and ask European nations to reimburse the US billions of dollars for military supplies it sent to Ukraine. He even said he would encourage Russia to attack 'delinquent' Nato countries who don't spend what they should on defence.

Much of this is campaign rhetoric. But there is little question that a man who brings business instincts to politics has a strong aversion to supporting wars or getting America embroiled in other people's wars. Which is why European countries should worry most about his return and about the US security guarantee for Europe. Trump will likely force Ukraine into negotiations with Russia to seek a peace deal to end the war and would be unconcerned if the outcome favoured Moscow.

He has often bragged he can end the war in 24 hours. There is also strong opposition among Republicans and party supporters to aid for Ukraine. Trump's stance on Ukraine has implications for the Taiwan issue, which he has seldom referred to. Trump has also never said America would intervene militarily if China 'invaded' Taiwan, as Biden once declared.

Because Trump has a transactional view of foreign relations that would make his policies unpredictable but also open to pragmatic possibilities. His administration would prefer to strike deals with competitors and rivals rather than try to subdue them, especially given his admiration for strongmen at the helm in some of these countries. His resistance to detail in his foreign policy pronouncements gives him room to manoeuvre and adapt.

Trump's more ambitious, if not sweeping, plans are on the domestic front, which aim to downsize the 'administrative state' and revamp the deep state but will also be driven by revenge. That means the American people will have more to fear from Trump's return than the international community.

Courtesy Dawn



Caught in the Crossfire: The Ongoing Israel-Gaza Conflict

By Romana Afsheen

The Israel-Gaza conflict, a longstanding and deeply entrenched struggle, once again grips the attention of the world as violence escalates, claiming lives and perpetuating a cycle of suffering for civilians on both sides. Rooted in decades of historical, political, and religious complexities, this conflict defies easy solutions and continues to elude lasting peace. As tensions flare and the toll of human suffering mounts, it becomes increasingly urgent to delve into the background of this conflict, understanding its origins, dynamics, and the myriad factors that contribute to its persistence.

In the ongoing Israel-Gaza conflict, the toll of human life has been devastating, with a significant number of casualties reported on both sides. The conflict has resulted in a tragic loss of lives, including civilians, children, and combatants, highlighting the profound human cost of the violence. The escalating death toll underscores the urgent need for a cessation of hostilities and a concerted international effort to bring about a peaceful resolution to the conflict.

Recently in northern Gaza City, at least 20 Palestinians were killed and over 150 injured when Israel targeted a crowd awaiting humanitarian aid, a move condemned by Gaza's Health Ministry as a premeditated massacre.

The United Kingdom Maritime Trade Operations (UKMTO) organization reported that a merchant vessel in the Red Sea sustained missile damage approximately 76 nautical miles (140km) west of Hodeidah, Yemen. The crew is safe and proceeding to their next port of call.

The United States has finalized its draft resolution for the UN Security Council regarding a truce agreement between Israel and Hamas. The resolution aims to establish an immediate and sustained ceasefire to alleviate humanitarian suffering, but the timing of the vote remains unclear.

The US Air Force, along with other



countries like the UAE, Egypt, Jordan, France, and Belgium, has been conducting humanitarian aid drops into Gaza to address acute starvation in the besieged enclave's north. However, humanitarian groups warn that airdrops may not fully address the blockade's impact and pose risks to civilians.

The Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) has urged the UN Human Rights Council and the international community to prioritize the protection of children in Gaza, citing significant violations and a high number of child casualties in the conflict.

Australia has announced the resumption of funding to the UN agency for Palestinian refugees (UNRWA). Foreign Minister Penny Wong stated that existing safeguards sufficiently protect Australian taxpayer funding, following unsubstantiated allegations by Israel against UNRWA staff.

The UK government has redefined extremism and will block certain groups from receiving government funding, citing an increase in anti-Semitic and Islamophobic hate crimes since the conflict between Israel and Gaza began.

The US military Central Command (CENTCOM) announced that the

Yemen-based Houthis launched two antiship ballistic missiles toward the Gulf of Aden and two more into the Red Sea on Thursday.

No injuries or vessel damage were reported.

CENTCOM also stated that the US military destroyed nine antiship missiles and two unmanned aerial vehicles in strikes on Houthi-controlled areas of Yemen.

The Houthis have been targeting ships in the Red Sea and Gulf of Aden in response to Israel's conflict with Gaza since November. The Iran-backed group has vowed to escalate its military actions during Ramadan.

Israeli forces conducted raids and made arrests across the occupied West Bank. In Tulkarem, three Palestinians were arrested, and raids were conducted in the nearby town of Bal'a. Additionally, a Palestinian man was arrested during a raid in Arraba, south of Jenin.

Similar Israeli raids were reported in other parts of the occupied West Bank, including al-Ram, north of occupied East Jerusalem, and the city of Yatta, south of Hebron.

The UN Security Council convened to discuss the situation in Yemen, focusing on

continued attacks on commercial ships in the Red Sea. UN Special Envoy to Yemen, Hans Grundberg, emphasized that prolonged Houthi attacks in the Red Sea would complicate peace talks in the country.

US House Speaker Mike Johnson mentioned considering introducing a standalone aid bill for Israel, prompted by Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer's recent remarks. Schumer criticized Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu and called for new elections. Johnson's proposal aims to pressure Schumer and Democrats to support Israel. Democrats have urged Johnson to back the Senate's \$95bn foreign aid package, which includes funds for Ukraine, Taiwan, and Israel.

Israel's military strategy involves relocating approximately 1.4 million Palestinian civilians from the besieged southern city of Rafah to designated "humanitarian islands" within Gaza prior to launching a ground invasion. However, US Secretary of State Antony Blinken has stated that the US government has not yet received a comprehensive Israeli proposal outlining plans to ensure the safety and well-being of civilians in Rafah, including provisions for shelter, food, and medicine.

In a distressing development, an Israeli airstrike has struck a UN aid distribution center in Rafah, resulting in the tragic death of at least one UNRWA staff member and injuring 22 others.

The ongoing conflict has exacted a heavy toll on both sides, with staggering casualties reported. Since October 7, Israeli attacks on Gaza have claimed the lives of at least 31,272 Palestinians, with an additional 73,024 sustaining injuries. In retaliation, Hamas's October 7 attack on Israel has resulted in the deaths of 1,139 Israelis, while many others remain held captive. The situation remains dire, with the cycle of violence showing no signs of abating.

An Israeli airstrike struck a UN aid distribution center in Rafah, resulting in the death of at least one UNRWA staff member and causing injuries to more than 20 others. Israeli army spokesperson Daniel Hagari has announced plans to relocate a substantial number of the over one million displaced Palestinians in Rafah to

designated "humanitarian islands" located in the central area of the Gaza Strip. This move is intended to precede Israel's anticipated offensive in the city.

Lebanon's Hezbollah has reported the deaths of two of its fighters in the Bekaa Valley following consecutive days of Israeli airstrikes in the region. Additionally, Israel targeted a vehicle in Tyre, the largest city in south Lebanon, resulting in the killing of a Hamas member.

An unpublished UNRWA report has surfaced, detailing allegations of widespread torture against Palestinians detained by the Israeli military in Gaza. The report implicates 21 agency staff members and 15 relatives of UNRWA staff among the victims. Israel has denied these accusations.

Israeli security forces shot a Palestinian individual who allegedly carried out a stabbing attack against two Israelis at a checkpoint near Jerusalem.

According to a report from the US news site Politico, senior US officials have informed their Israeli counterparts that the Biden administration will back efforts to target "high-value Hamas targets" both within and beneath Rafah. The report, which cites four unnamed US officials, highlights that the US is urging Israel to avoid a large-scale invasion of the southern Gaza City, where approximately 1.5 million displaced Palestinians have sought shelter following Israeli airstrikes in other parts of the Strip.

In private discussions, top officials from the Biden administration have indicated to Israel that they would support a strategy more aligned with counterterrorism operations rather than a full-scale war. This approach, the officials argue, would help minimize civilian casualties, weaken Hamas's leadership, and prevent incidents that could further damage public perception of Israel's campaign and President Biden's handling of the conflict.

The US has consistently emphasized the need for a plan to safeguard civilians in Rafah before endorsing Israel's proposed invasion of the area. Speaking to reporters today, Secretary of State Antony Blinken reiterated that the US has yet to receive such a plan from Israel.

Palestinians in Jericho have dedicated a street to Aaron Bushnell, the US airman who tragically passed away after self-immolating in protest against Israel's conflict with Gaza.

Janti Soeripto, president of Save the Children US, highlights the unpredictable nature of aid deliveries into Gaza. She describes witnessing instances where trucks carrying essential items were rejected at the Rafah crossing. For example, a wooden toy box containing games for children was turned away because it wasn't packed in carton boxes, and hygiene kits including soap, blankets, and sanitary pads for women were rejected due to the presence of a nail clipper. Soeripto emphasizes the challenges of distributing aid within Gaza amidst the ongoing conflict, citing the significant rubble and destruction that hinder access to the final delivery points.

The Israeli military stated that their airstrike on a UN food distribution center in southern Gaza resulted in the death of a Hamas commander, Mohammad Abu Hasna. According to the military, Abu Hasna was involved in providing intelligence on Israeli troop positions and in controlling humanitarian aid, which they claim was distributed to Hamas militants. In response, Hamas denounced Abu Hasna's killing as a "cowardly assassination" aimed at disrupting aid distribution. Hamas also identified another individual killed in the strike as Nidal al-Sheikh Eid, the head of an emergency committee for Rafah.

Amidst escalating violence and humanitarian crises, the situation in Gaza and its surrounding areas remains deeply concerning. The cycle of attacks and retaliations continues unabated, exacting a heavy toll on both civilian populations and combatants alike. Efforts to address the conflict must be intensified, with a focus on prioritizing civilian protection, ensuring access to vital humanitarian aid, and seeking diplomatic avenues for de-escalation. International involvement, particularly from key stakeholders such as the United Nations and regional powers, is imperative in facilitating dialogue and advancing towards a sustainable ceasefire.

The battle between farmers in West Bank pitting Israel against the US



By Lucy Williamson

The US has announced sanctions against three more Israeli settlers and - for the first time - two farming outposts, as part of new measures by Washington and London to stop the violent displacement of Palestinians in the occupied West Bank.

Fares Samamreh may not carry a gun, but he now has a global superpower defending him. He's still losing the fight.

A Palestinian sheep farmer on the sun-tinged slopes of the South Hebron Hills in the occupied West Bank, his battle with his neighbour, an Israeli settler called Yinon Levy, has drawn both the US and the UK into the dispute.

"Yinon Levy came here three years ago and started bothering me," Fares said, his head wrapped in a piece of white cotton, his eyes narrowed in a permanent squint against the sun.

"Before the war [in Gaza] it was the usual thing; they would come with drones. But a few days after 7 October, it became serious. They all had guns. They started coming to us day and night. I have little kids - some of them are four and five years old."

Fares said Yinon was one of a group of local Israeli settlers who would regularly come to harass his sheep with their dogs and weapons, and even, he says, to assault his family.

"They destroyed water tanks, closed down roads, they fire at the sheep," he said. "He told my wife if we didn't leave here, we'd all be killed."

He said when his wife then swore at him, Yinon Levy hit her with the butt of his gun.

Soon afterwards, Fares and his family left their village of Zanuta. Activists say it's one of four communities around the settler's farm that have been abandoned by their residents.

Yinon has denied acting violently towards Palestinians in the area - and said he didn't own a gun until very recently.

But he's now the subject of sanctions from both the US and the UK.

The road to Yinon's farm is straight out of a children's picture-book; a narrow path that winds back and forth up a steep hill, slopes

and valleys dropping away to the horizon on either side.

At the top, a spacious bungalow stands next to a large shed, full of bleating sheep smothering the strains of pop music from a radio.

"We're safeguarding these lands to ensure they remain under Jewish ownership," Yinon said. "When there is a Jewish presence, then there is no Arab presence. We keep a watchful eye on the land, ensuring that no unauthorised construction takes place."

Most countries deem the settlements, which are built on land captured by Israel in 1967 in the Middle East War, to be illegal under international law, although Israel disagrees. The settler outposts are also illegal under Israeli law.

The UK said that Yinon and another man had "used physical aggression, threatened families at gunpoint, and destroyed property as part of a targeted and calculated effort to displace Palestinian communities".

Yinon denied the allegations, and said that the Israeli government was on his side.

"I'm not worried," he told the BBC. "This is not against me personally - it's against those who obstruct the creation of a Palestinian state. There's no legal process against me [in Israel]. Here, everything is fine."

Both the UK and the US say there is a threshold of evidence that must be met - but neither have made that evidence public and declined to share it with the BBC.

We sent Yinon a video appearing to show him on Palestinian land, approaching activists with a snarling dog. He said it was misleading, and that he was defending his flock.

We sent him another video apparently showing him entering another Palestinian village with a gun last October. He declined to comment.

The sanctions came after a surge in violence in the West Bank, following the 7 October Hamas attacks and Israel's war in Gaza.

The UN says violence by Israeli settlers included physical attacks and death threats, and that the number of Palestinians displaced from their homes last year doubled to 1,539 - with more than 80% of them leaving after 7 October.

The UK has said Israel is failing to act, and has described "an environment of near total impunity for settler extremists in the West Bank".

Yinon said that he had received support from Israeli politicians.

"Many called and encouraged us," he said. "Everyone said that when the bad people are against you, you must be doing something right."

One of the politicians who publicly backed Yinon in the wake of the sanctions was Zvi Sukkot of the ultranationalist Religious Zionism party - a settler himself.

He said that settler violence was a "marginal phenomenon" and that those like Levy were the victims of conspiracies.

"When we have a functioning judicial system in Israel, we don't want our allies to say, 'we'll do the job for you,'" he said.

"If there was evidence against Yinon Levy, he would be in Israeli prison. Who is Britain to come and say, 'we are smarter

than Israeli intelligence'?"

The Israeli police commander responsible for investigating complaints in the West Bank told Mr Sukkot's parliamentary committee this week that half the complaints filed about settler violence there were false, and that they originated from "radical left-wing organisations in Tel Aviv".

Against this backdrop, sanctions on a handful of individual settlers have not shifted Israeli policies in the West Bank, but they are having a financial impact.

Yinon's Israeli bank account was frozen last month.



Some of those currently under US and UK sanctions have used crowdfunding to finance projects for their area - including one for a synagogue and educational centre at another hilltop outpost called Moshe's Farm.

Its owner, Moshe Sharvit, was sanctioned along with Yinon Levy last month.

But on Thursday the US expanded sanctions to cover several new targets, including the farm itself - putting this kind of funding at risk.

These sanctions may be more symbolic than substantial, but they signal American displeasure - both to Israel's leaders, and to the parts of President Biden's Democratic base who have been dismayed by images of the war in Gaza, in an election year.

The chairman of the local Yesha (settlers)

Council, Shlomo Ne'eman, called it "a disgusting phenomenon" and said the West Bank was being used as a scapegoat.

"I think more than anything, what drives the response of the UK [and] the US is the fear of one settler attack that goes 'out of control'," said Yehuda Shaul, founder of the Ofek Centre, a think tank which campaigns to end Israel's occupation.

"The West Bank [then] erupts like a volcano. And we have another front, as if Gaza is not enough, and the road to regional war is almost unstoppable then."

Two sheep farmers in the occupied West Bank - one backed by a superpower, the

other by the Israeli state. If the lifestyle here is simple, the politics are complicated.

From Yinon's hilltop farm, you can clearly see the ruins of Zanuta perched on the next hill, with the home Fares Samamreh left months ago.

Many of the houses are ravaged - roofs and furniture taken by their owners into exile; walls smashed by settlers to prevent them returning, activists say.

The deserted village is slowly being taken over by vast banks of wild mallow.

On a post near the entrance, a large Star of David has been scrawled in blue paint.

Settlers here point to attacks by Palestinians, and say they are scared.

But it's Palestinians who are leaving.

Putin says Russia is ready to use nuclear weapons if its sovereignty is threatened

President Vladimir Putin said that Russia is ready to use nuclear weapons if there is a threat to its statehood, sovereignty or independence, voicing hope that the US would refrain from actions that could trigger a nuclear conflict.

Putin's statement was another blunt warning to the West ahead of a presidential vote this week in which he's all but certain to win another six-year term.

In an interview with Russian state television released early Wednesday, Putin described US President Joe Biden as a veteran politician who fully understands possible dangers of escalation, and said that he doesn't think that the world is heading to a nuclear war.

At the same time, he emphasised that Russia's nuclear forces are in full readiness and "from the military-technical viewpoint, we're prepared."

Putin said that in line with the country's security doctrine, Moscow is ready to use nuclear weapons in case of a threat to "the existence of the Russian state, our sovereignty and independence."

The Russian leader has repeatedly talked about his readiness to use nuclear weapons since launching the invasion of Ukraine in February 2022. The most recent such threat came in his state-of-the-nation address last month, when he warned the West that deepening its involvement in the fighting in Ukraine would risk a nuclear war.

Asked in the interview if he has ever considered using battlefield nuclear weapons in Ukraine, Putin responded that there has been no need for that.

He also voiced confidence that Moscow will achieve its goals in Ukraine and issued a blunt warning to Western allies, declaring that "the nations that say they have no red lines regarding Russia should realise that Russia won't have any red lines regarding them either."

He held the door open for talks, but emphasised that Russia will hold onto its gains



and would seek firm guarantees from the West.

"It shouldn't be a break for the enemy to rearm but a serious talk involving the guarantees of security for the Russian Federation," he said.

Putin said that a recent spike in Ukrainian drone attacks deep inside Russia is part of efforts to derail the country's three-day presidential election, which starts Friday and which he is set to win by a landslide, relying on the tight control over Russia's political scene he has established during his 24-year rule.

Russian authorities reported another major attack by Ukrainian drones early Wednesday. The Defence Ministry said air defences downed 58 drones over six regions. One of the drones hit an oil refinery in the Ryazan region, injuring at least two people and sparking a fire. Another drone was downed as it was approaching a refinery near St. Petersburg.

Ukraine, meanwhile, reported more Russian attacks early Wednesday.

A Russian strike killed two people and injured another five in the town of

Myrnohrad in the eastern region of Donetsk, about 30 kilometres from the front line, according to Gov. Vadym Filashkin. Local rescuers managed to pull a 13-year-old girl out of the rubble of an apartment building that was hit by a Russian missile.

A five-storey building in the northern city of Sumy was struck by a drone launched from Russia overnight and 10 people were rescued from the rubble, including eight who sustained injuries, according to the regional administration.

Meanwhile, in President Volodymyr Zelenskyy's hometown in the central Dnipropetrovsk region, the death toll from a Russian missile attack the previous night rose to four.

Governor Serhii Lysak said that 43 people were wounded in Kryvyi Rih, including 12 children, the youngest of them two years and eleven months old.

"Every day our cities and villages suffer similar attacks. Every day Ukraine loses people because of Russian evil," Zelenskyy said.

Courtesy Euronews

Does The Legacy of The Cold War Still Haunt Europe?

NATO's expansion following the end of the Cold War has been misplaced, based off the perception of a threat that does not exist. The war in Ukraine is a crisis of the West's making, and one that is set to exacerbate with the membership of Finland and Sweden.



By Dr Moonis Ahmar

"This is a historic day. Sweden will now take its rightful place at NATO's table, with an equal say in shaping NATO policies and decisions. After over 200 years of non-alignment, Sweden now enjoys the protection granted under Article 5, the ultimate guarantee of allies' freedom and security," said NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg in a statement on Sweden's entry into NATO.

Recently, Swedish Prime Minister Ulf Kristersson visited Washington on the occasion of his country becoming the 32nd member of the Atlantic Alliance and held a press conference with the US Secretary of State Antony Blinken in which he justified his country joining NATO following Russia's attack over Ukraine in February 2022. Both Finland and Sweden have maintained neutrality since the outbreak of the Cold War in 1945, till the time they had second thoughts and applied for membership in the US led Atlantic Alliance in 2022. Sweden remained neutral since the end of the Napoleonic war in 1815, and was not involved in either the first or the second World War. Along with Finland, it decided not to be part of a Cold War and

proclaimed neutrality till the time the two Nordic countries applied to join NATO in 2022.

Does it mean that the legacy of the Cold War still haunts Europe? Does the inclusion of Sweden and Finland in NATO mean that the demise of the Soviet Union failed to mitigate the security threats that prompted the formation of NATO on April 4, 1949?

Many rightfully claim that the replacement of the Soviet threat with the Russian peril was one way that the West was able to sustain the threat perception in order to justify the continued militarization of Europe.

The justification for NATO in the post-Cold War era grew muted with the collapse of the Warsaw Pact, which was formed as a reaction to the Atlantic Alliance in 1955 under Soviet leadership.

Out of 32 members of NATO, two are from North America - Canada and the United States, and the remaining 30 are from Europe, which means that the Atlantic Alliance has expanded enormously since it

was formed in April 1949. Ironically, the Cold War ended with the collapse of the Berlin Wall in November 1989 and the collapse of the Soviet bloc in 1991, but NATO, which was a reflection of the antagonism between the Soviet and Western blocs, continued to strengthen with each passing year.

The justification for NATO in the post-Cold War era grew muted with the collapse of the Warsaw Pact, which was formed as a reaction to the Atlantic Alliance in 1955 under Soviet leadership. It was argued by critics that when Warsaw Pact ceased to exist, what was the justification for NATO's existence and its expansion? With the joining of Sweden and Finland in NATO's fold, there are only two neutral states left in Europe - Austria and Switzerland. The surge of NATO from 12 members on April 4, 1949 to 32 in 2024 reflects how cognizant Europe is about 'threat perception.' First, in the form of communist Soviet Union, and after the end of the Cold War, terrorism and then later the resurgence of Russian military adventurism, which got an impetus with Moscow's annexation of Crimea, and

Putin's endeavors to strengthen security ties with former Soviet republics like Belarus, Moldova and the Central Asian states. The way in which Russia reemerged as a threat to the West under the leadership of President Vladimir Putin prompted the expansion of NATO.

The Russian president Vladimir Putin expressed that Russia's red line was further expansion of NATO, with an emphasis on the announcement that the inclusion of former members of the Warsaw Pact would be massively counterproductive. Ukraine, from where the state of Russia emerged in the 10th century, seeking to join the Atlantic Alliance was shocking for Moscow. The Russian occupation of Crimea on February 27, 2014 led to a sharp reaction by the United States and its NATO allies, which prompted the exclusion of Russia from the G8 and the imposition of sanctions against Moscow.

Many rightfully claim that the replacement of the Soviet threat with the Russian peril was one way that the West was able to sustain the threat perception in order to justify the continued militarization of Europe.

When it became evident for Russia that Ukrainian president Volodymyr Zelenskyy was planning to join NATO, Moscow's patience ran out, and it attacked Ukraine on February 24, 2022. That war is still ongoing, having caused hundreds and thousands of deaths on both sides of the conflict. Russia has thus far only managed to separate a part of Russian speaking eastern Ukraine from Kiev. Fears of NATO's encirclement of Russia deepened when Ukraine established security and strategic ties with the West, and got billions of dollars of military assistance to combat the Russian invasion. The joining of Finland and Sweden, the two traditionally neutral states of Europe, confirmed Moscow's fear that NATO wants to encircle Russia even further.

Security polarization in Europe will intensify with NATO's expansion, with shrinking space for neutrality in the NATO-Russian security conflict. It would have been better for Sweden and Finland not to abandon their neutrality by not becoming a part of the growing NATO-Russia schism. There was no strategic need on the part of Finland

and Sweden to join the transatlantic alliance, because Russia's focus was to prevent Ukraine and the other former Soviet republics from joining NATO. Moscow had no aggressive designs against Finland and Sweden.

According to Jonathan Masters, writing for Council of Foreign Relations in June 2022: "Finnish and Swedish membership is expected to bolster the alliance's eastern flank and its collective defenses in northern Europe. Perhaps the most significant impact would be the stretching of NATO's border with Russia. Bringing in Finland would more than double the length, adding roughly 800 miles of frontier. And Finland and Sweden together would vastly expand the alliance's presence in the Baltic Sea and the Arctic Circle." For centuries, Europe and Japan pursued a policy to contain Russia in the Pacific, Black and Baltic Seas. Now, with Finland and Sweden joining NATO, the encirclement of Russia along the Baltic Sea and the Arctic circle will have been fully realized.

Against one country - Russia - there is an alliance of 32 countries which is both ironic and surprising in today's world.

After Finland and Sweden abandoned their neutrality, the two remaining neutral states of Europe, Austria and Switzerland will be approached by the US to follow the example of the two Nordic countries and join NATO. It is beyond one's imagination why, even after the end of the Cold War, the United States wants to sustain an environment of 'threat perception' in Europe, particularly when there is no counter alliance to NATO, like the Warsaw Pact which ceased to exist in 1991. The West and NATO grossly overestimated Putin's ambitions, akin to the former Soviet Union, when the threat of Communism in Europe loomed large. Presently, there is no such threat and the very rationale of enlarging and expanding NATO, with a view to balancing against Russia, does not make sense. Sweden and Finland certainly overestimated the implications of the Russian invasion of Ukraine as a justification for their membership.

The politics of alliances which has been the cornerstone of American foreign policy since the days of Secretary of State John Foster Dulles seems to have become an

integral part of the Western mindset, and NATO has emerged primarily as an anti-Russian alliance. Against one country - Russia - there is an alliance of 32 countries which is both ironic and surprising in today's world.

Finland and Sweden's membership in NATO has given a new shape to the phenomenon of deterrence, which means that it will now extend to the Arctic circle and to the Baltic region against Russia. The revival of the alliance system during the Cold War led to the formation of the Baghdad Pact, later renamed as the Central Treaty Organization, covering West Asia, and the South East Asian Treaty Organization against Communist Soviet Union and Communist China. Such a system may be revived, not on ideological grounds, but inspired by real politik concerns, with a focus on containing Russia and China. By augmenting the threat perception that is exclusively focused on Russia and China, the West will open a Pandora's box and plunge the world into a new Cold War.

Following the inclusion of Finland and Sweden in NATO, one can expect the expansion of security alliances in the Asia-Pacific region by including India, some of the ASEAN member countries, and the likes of Taiwan, South Korea, Japan, Australia and New Zealand, in a new security architecture led by the United States.

Plunging the world into a new Cold War seems to be the West's strategic mindset at the moment, so as to justify colossal military expenditures and an arms race. While the world has not fully expunged the legacy of Cold War, plunging it into another rivalry will only serve to further destabilize the global order.

It is yet to be seen how Russia and China will ultimately react to the expansion of NATO with the inclusion of Finland and Sweden in the Atlantic Alliance. But one thing is certain, by augmenting the threat perception that is exclusively focused on Russia and China, the West will open a Pandora's box and plunge the world into a new Cold War. When the world is still grappling with the legacy of the original Cold War, it cannot afford to be gripped by another global great power rivalry.

Courtesy www.thefridaytimes.com

US House passes bill that could ban TikTok nationwide



By Bernd Debusmann

The US House of Representatives has passed a landmark bill that could see TikTok banned in America.

It would give the social media giant's Chinese parent company, ByteDance, six months to sell its controlling stake or the app would be blocked in the US.

While the bill passed overwhelmingly in a bipartisan vote, it still needs to clear the Senate and be signed by the president to become law.

Lawmakers have long held concerns about China's influence over TikTok.

TikTok is owned by Chinese company ByteDance, founded in 2012.

The Beijing-based firm is registered in the Cayman Islands, and has offices across Europe and the US.

If the bill does manage to secure approval in the Senate, President Joe Biden has promised to sign it as soon as it lands on his desk, which could prompt a diplomatic spat with China.

ByteDance would have to seek approval from Chinese officials to complete a forced divestiture, which Beijing has vowed to oppose. Foreign ministry spokesperson Wang Wenbin said the

move would "come back to bite the US".

Mike Gallagher, a Wisconsin Republican who co-authored the bill, said the US could not "take the risk of having a dominant news platform in America controlled or owned by a company that is beholden to the Chinese Communist Party".

Chinese companies are subject to a national security law requiring them to share data with the government on request.

TikTok has tried to reassure regulators that it has taken steps to ensure the data of its 150 million users in the US has been walled off from ByteDance employees in China.

TikTok chief executive Shou Zi Chew said the company was committed to keeping its data secure and the platform "free from outside manipulation".

He warned the bill, if passed, would mean a ban on the app in the US, giving "more power to a handful of other social media companies" and putting thousands of American jobs at risk.

However, an investigation by the Wall Street Journal in January found the system was still "porous", with data being unofficially shared between TikTok in the US and ByteDance in China. High-profile cases, including one incident where ByteDance employees in China accessed a journalist's data to track down their sources, have stoked concerns.

Speaking ahead of the vote, Hakeem Jeffries - the top Democrat in the House - welcomed the bill, saying it would decrease "the likelihood that TikTok user data is exploited and privacy undermined by a hostile foreign adversary".

Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer said the chamber would now review the legislation. Its prospects in the upper chamber of Congress are unclear in the wake of Republican White House candidate Donald Trump speaking out against the bill.

The former president, who tried to ban the app during his term in office, changed his position after a recent meeting with Republican donor Jeff Yass, who reportedly owns a minor stake in ByteDance.

Mr Trump's opposition was echoed by some House members on Wednesday. Marjorie Taylor Greene, a Georgia Republican, wrote on social media that the bill could allow Congress to force the sale of other corporations by claiming to be protecting US data from foreign adversaries.

Some Democrats are also opposed to a ban, fearing it could alienate the app's youthful userbase as the party struggles to retain its hold over younger voters.

But the leaders of the Senate intelligence committee welcomed the House vote. Mark Warner, a Democrat, and Marco Rubio, a Republican, said they were determined to shepherd the bill through the chamber.

"We are united in our concern about the national security threat posed by TikTok - a platform with enormous power to influence and divide Americans whose parent company ByteDance remains legally required to do the bidding of the Chinese Communist Party," they said in a statement.

After the vote, TikTok appeared to renew its push to have users lobby Congress, sending another notification urging them to contact their representatives. A similar move last week saw congressional offices bombarded with calls, a move that some staffers told the BBC had hardened opposition to the company.

Outside the White House on Wednesday a handful of supporters gathered to protest against the bill. Tiffany Yu, a young disability advocate from Los Angeles, told the

BBC the platform was vital to her work.

"Fifteen years ago I only dreamed of reaching 30 to 40 people," she says. Now, she has millions. Another demonstrator, Ophelia Nichols, highlighted the bill's negative impact on US businesses.

"Shame on them, at the House," she said.

Content creator Mona Swain, 23, said her earnings from the app were paying her mother's mortgage and for her siblings' college educations.

"To be put out of work at such a crazy time in my life and just in a lot of other creators' lives, it's really, really scary right now," Ms Swain told Reuters news agency.

The Chinese foreign ministry's spokesperson said: "Although the United States has never found evidence that TikTok threatens US national security, it has not stopped suppressing TikTok.

"This kind of bullying behaviour that cannot win in fair competition disrupts companies' normal business activity, damages the confidence of international investors in the investment environment, and damages the normal international economic and trade order."

But White House Spokesperson Karine Jean Pierre insisted that the bill merely sought to ensure that ownership of major technology platforms operating in the US "wouldn't be in the hands of those who can exploit them".

Even if ByteDance does secure approval to

sell its stake in TikTok, it is unclear whether any of its competitors have the funding to launch a bid for the platform. The company has previously valued the app at around \$268bn. The price tag could scare off some investors.

But analysts told the BBC there would be plenty of potential buyers in the US. What deal might ultimately succeed is another question, given the cost and anti-monopoly concerns weighing on the tech sector.

"All the big social media companies would be interested but I think they would face a lot of anti-trust hurdles... There are other firms in the social media space that are smaller like Snapchat that would be interested but wouldn't be able to afford it," Emarketer analyst Jasmine Enberg told the BBC.

When the Trump administration ordered a sale in 2020, some of the biggest firms in the US emerged to explore bids, which then reportedly valued the firm at about \$50bn.

Microsoft ultimately lost out to a team that included Walmart and software giant Oracle, led by Larry Ellison and Safra Catz, who had ties with the Trump administration. The deal fell apart amid legal challenges and the change-over to a new administration.

Today, TikTok's reach and advertising revenue have increased significantly. Research firm Emarketer estimates TikTok will bring in about \$8.66bn in ad revenue from the US this year, compared with less than \$1bn in 2020.

Courtesy BBC



Paul Alexander: 'Man in the iron lung' dies at the age of 78



By Ido Vock and Cat Snowden

The polio survivor known as "the man in the iron lung" has died at the age of 78.

Paul Alexander contracted polio in 1952 when he was six, leaving him paralysed from the neck down.

The disease left him unable to breathe independently, leading doctors to place him in the metal cylinder, where he would spend the rest of his life.

He would go on to earn a law degree - and practise law - as well as publish a memoir.

"Paul Alexander, 'The Man in the Iron Lung', passed away yesterday," a post on a fundraising website said.

"In this time Paul went to college, became a lawyer, and a published author.

"Paul was an incredible role model."

His brother, Philip Alexander, remembered him as a "welcoming, warm person", with a "big smile" that instantly put people at ease.

"He was just a normal brother to me. We fought, we played, we loved, we partied, we went to concerts together - he was just a normal brother, I never thought about it," he told the BBC.

Philip said he admired how self-sufficient his brother was, even as he dealt with an

illness that stopped him performing daily tasks such as feeding himself.

"He was the master of his domain, helping people to help him," Philip added.

Paul's health deteriorated in recent weeks and the brothers spent his final days together, sharing pints of ice cream.

"It was an honour to be with him in his last moments," said Philip.

In 1952, when he became ill, doctors in his hometown of Dallas operated on him, saving his life. But polio meant his body was no longer able to breathe on his own.

The answer was to place him in a so-called iron lung - a metal cylinder enclosing his body up to his neck.

The lung, which he called his "old iron horse", allowed him to breathe. Bellows sucked air out of the cylinder, forcing his lungs to expand and take in air. When the air was let back in, the same process in reverse made his lungs deflate.

After years, Alexander eventually learned to breathe by himself so that he was able to leave the lung for short periods of time.

Like most polio survivors placed in iron lungs, he was not expected to survive long. But he lived for decades, long after the

invention of the polio vaccine in the 1950s all but eradicated the disease in the Western world.

He graduated from high school, then attended the Southern Methodist University. In 1984, he gained a law degree from the University of Texas at Austin. Admitted to the bar two years later, he practiced as a lawyer for decades.

"I knew if I was going to do anything with my life, it was going to have to be a mental thing," he told the Guardian in 2020.

That year, he published a memoir which reportedly took him eight years to write using a plastic stick to type on a keyboard and dictating to a friend.

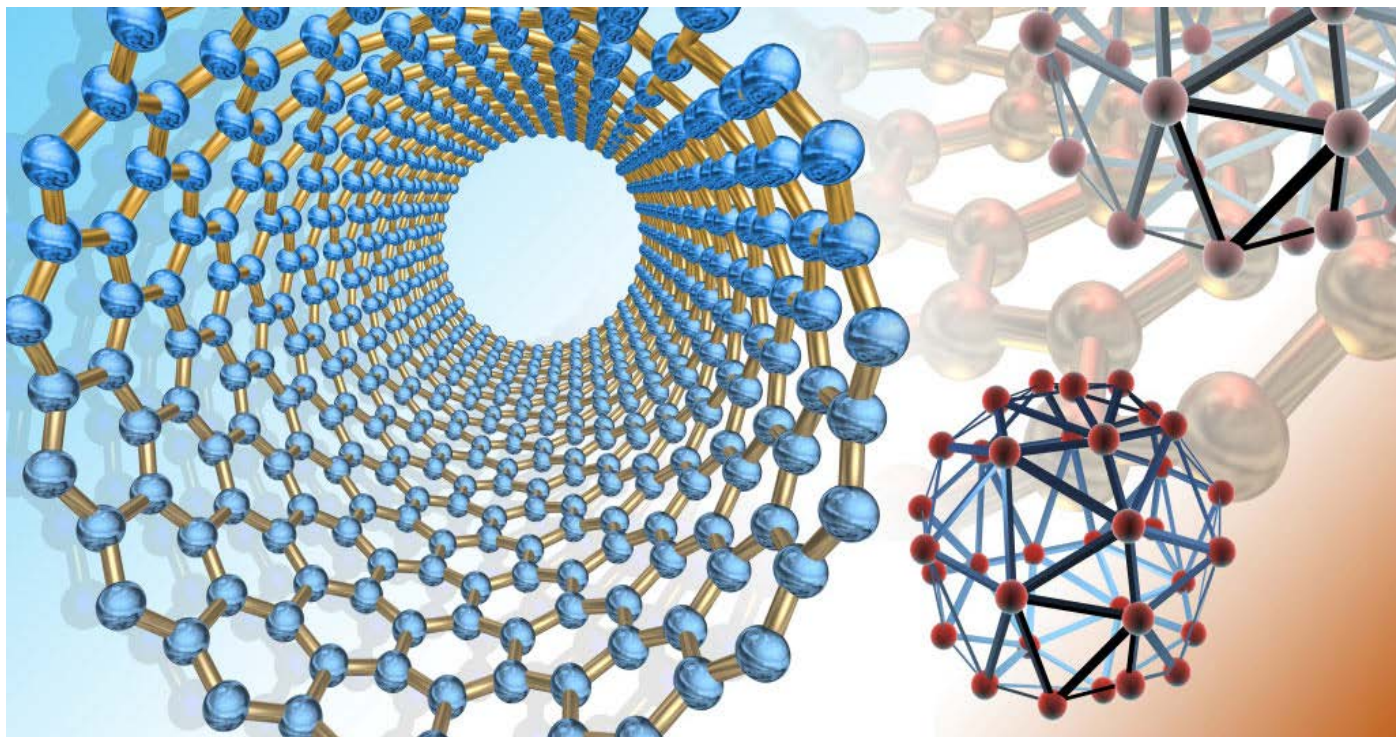
Paul's brother Philip said it was following its publication that he realised how much of an inspiration his brother was to people across the world.

Advances in medicine made iron lungs obsolete by the 1960s, replaced by ventilators. But Alexander kept living in the cylinder because, he said, he was used to it.

He was recognised by Guinness World Records as the person who lived the longest in an iron lung.

Courtesy BBC

The rise of nanomaterials



By Atta-ur-Rahman

Nanomaterials represent a rapidly emerging industry that is impacting a large number of products ranging from electronics and agriculture to medicine and the defence industry.

Nanotechnology depends on the discovery that when materials are reduced to the size of 1 to 100 nanometres (several thousand times less than the width of a human hair), they start exhibiting strange and unique properties.

As the size of a material decreases, the proportion of atoms located at the surface increases significantly, resulting in enhanced surface reactivity and interactions. This property is exploited in various applications, such as catalysis, sensing, and drug delivery. This was discovered about five decades ago, and the field has evolved in a dramatic way since then.

In Pakistan, the foundations of nanotechnology were laid by me when I was the federal minister of science and technology in 2002 and later as the chairperson of the HEC. I realized the huge potential of this field and established the National Commission on Nano Science and Technology (NCNST).

Prof NM Butt, a scientist of international eminence and former director general of PINSTECH, was appointed to head the commission and develop the trained workforce needed by academia and industry. With the efforts of the NCNST, the Pakistan government, through the Ministry of Science and Technology and the HEC, funded nanotechnology research projects at three universities and two research centres to the tune of about Rs800 million from 2003-2008. This was an exciting and important beginning of this field in Pakistan.

More recently I highlighted the importance of this field to the attention of Mr Latif Ebrahim Jamal, and as a result the Latif Ebrahim Jamal Nanotechnology Center was built from a magnificent grant by the Husein Ebrahim Jamal Foundation at the International Center for Chemical and Biological Sciences located in the University of Karachi.

It has state-of-the-art facilities, and it is carrying out cutting-edge research in various frontier areas of nanopharmaceuticals and other nanomaterials in this rapidly growing field.

Nanotechnology covers almost every sphere of human endeavour today. In agriculture, nanotechnology offers innovative solutions to enhance crop productivity, mitigate environmental impacts, and improve food security. Nanomaterials such as nanoparticles and nano fertilizers can be tailored to release nutrients gradually, thereby improving nutrient uptake efficiency and reducing fertilizer runoff.

Nanofiltration devices can provide pure water instantly. Nanosensors enable real-time monitoring of soil conditions, pest infestations, and plant health, facilitating precise management practices. Nanotechnology also contributes to the development of nanopesticides with enhanced efficacy and reduced environmental toxicity, promising sustainable pest management strategies.

Turning to the electronics industry, we find that it has been revolutionized by nanotechnology, leading to the miniaturization of electronic components and the development of novel materials with enhanced properties. Nanoscale transistors, such as carbon nanotubes and graphene, offer superior conductivity and thermal stability,

enabling faster and more energy-efficient electronic devices.

Nanolithography techniques allow for the precise patterning of nanoscale features, paving the way for advanced integrated circuits and high-density storage devices. Furthermore, quantum dots and nanowires exhibit unique optoelectronic properties, enabling the fabrication of next-generation displays, sensors and photovoltaic devices.

Nanotechnology has implications for engineering too, enabling the design and fabrication of materials with tailored properties and functionalities. Nanocomposites, composed of nanoscale reinforcements embedded in a matrix, exhibit superior mechanical, thermal, and electrical properties compared to conventional materials. These advanced materials find applications in aerospace, automotive and construction industries, where lightweight, durable, and high-performance materials are essential.

Nanotechnology also enables the development of nanomachines and nanorobots capable of performing precise tasks at the molecular level, opening new avenues for nanomanufacturing, nanoelectromechanical systems (NEMS), and nanomedicine.

In medicine, nanotechnology holds tremendous promise for revolutionizing diagnosis, treatment and drug delivery. Nanoparticles and nanocarriers can be engineered to target specific cells or tissues, enhancing the efficacy and reducing the side effects of therapeutic agents. Nanomedicine approaches, such as nanoparticle-based imaging contrast agents and targeted drug delivery systems, enable early detection and personalized treatment of diseases, including cancer, cardiovascular disorders, and neurological conditions. Nanoscale biosensors and diagnostic devices offer rapid and sensitive detection of biomarkers, pathogens, and toxins, advancing disease monitoring and healthcare management.

Nanotechnology finds applications across many other diverse fields, including energy, environment, textiles and cosmetics. In the energy sector, nanomaterials contribute to the development of high-performance batteries and fuel and solar cells, enabling efficient energy storage and conversion technologies.

Nanotechnology also plays a crucial role in environmental remediation, wastewater treatment, and pollution control, offering sustainable solutions to mitigate environmental degradation. Moreover, nanofabrication techniques enable the production of functional textiles with enhanced properties, such as stain resistance, UV protection, and antimicrobial properties.

In the cosmetics industry, nanoparticles are utilized in sunscreens, skincare products and hair care formulations, offering improved performance and aesthetics.



The convergence of nanotechnology and military science has led to groundbreaking innovations that are reshaping the landscape of modern warfare. Nanotechnology offers unique capabilities to enhance military systems, ranging from improving soldier performance to developing advanced weaponry and surveillance technologies. Nanotechnology enables the development of lightweight, flexible, and highly durable body armour by incorporating nanomaterials such as carbon nanotubes and graphene.

These materials offer superior strength-to-weight ratios and enhanced ballistic protection, ensuring better survivability for soldiers on the battlefield. Flying nanorobots can recognize enemy faces in a crowd of thousands and fire bullets accurately, killing them without collateral damage.

Nonenergetic materials, such as nano-thermite, offer enhanced performance, stability, and controllability compared to traditional propellants and explosives, enabling the development of safer and more powerful

munitions for defence purposes. Nanorobots or nanomachines can perform various tasks autonomously or under remote control, including reconnaissance, surveillance, repair, and maintenance of military infrastructure, enhancing operational capabilities and reducing human risk.

Nanophotonic devices, such as photonic crystals and plasmonic structures, enable the development of advanced optical technologies for imaging, communications, and sensing applications in military reconnaissance and surveillance. Nanotechnolo

gy enables the development of lightweight and high-performance materials, propulsion systems, and sensors for space exploration, satellite deployment, and space-based surveillance in support of military missions and national security objectives.

The government needs to utilize the applications of this important field for the manufacturing and export of high-tech products. The Pakistan-Austria Fachhochschule, a new university of applied science and engineering built under my supervision, is already involved in teaching and research in this field with its focus on the commercialization of nano products such as nanocoatings of surgical goods and nanosensors.

If it wants to stay on the path to progress, Pakistan must invest in such emerging fields as nanotechnology, artificial intelligence, quantum computing, and industrial biotechnology as these represent the value-added industry that will help us to transition to a strong knowledge economy.

Courtesy The News

Shahpurkandi Dam: India-Pakistan experts advocate cooperation for water security

Erum Sattar from Pakistan and Uttam Kumar Sinha from India discuss the Shahpurkandi dam's implications, stressing the importance of collaboration under the Indus Waters Treaty



As the Shahpurkandi barrage on the river Ravi in the Indian state of Punjab nears completion, there are fears in downstream Pakistan. The dam, proposed three decades ago, has the potential to irrigate 5,000 hectares of agricultural land in Punjab and over 32,000 hectares in Jammu and Kashmir on the Indian side. But the dam will stop any flow of river water to downstream Pakistan, with newspaper headlines being largely dominated by accusations of ‘water war-mongering’.

The Ravi is part of the six rivers of the Indus basin that are governed by the Indus Waters Treaty (IWT). Signed in 1960 between the two countries, the IWT is one of only two major transboundary water treaties in South Asia (the other being the 1996 Ganges treaty), considered one of the great successes of water diplomacy.

The Third Pole invited two experts – Erum Sattar of Pakistan and Uttam Kumar Sinha from India – to weigh in on what the development means for the

IWT as well as the long-term impacts on the Indus basin in ecological terms.

Erum Sattar, Water law expert with a doctorate from Harvard Law School

The latest controversy over the Shahpurkandi Dam and its completion by India is akin to a ‘nothing burger’ — a controversy that rages for some time mainly on social media and a lot of talk about nothing. Reasonable people should meet it by responding with the request to ‘move along, please’, as there is nothing to see here. With that overall perspective laid out, it is important to dive briefly into the details of what the IWT does and does not allow.

The IWT remains to date the only treaty in the world that diverts and divides actual rivers and not their flows or specific amounts of water. It assigned the three western rivers of the Indus basin to Pakistan whereas the three eastern rivers were allocated to

India. The main thing to know about this division is that it was meant to create certainty, so that after the conclusion of the treaty, both countries would become entitled to construct the infrastructure needed to undertake full utilisation of the waters of the rivers allocated to them.

Because water flows downstream, any flow that India did not previously utilise upstream within its territory would naturally flow down to Pakistan. In the case of the present dam and controversy, this is precisely what was happening with the flows of the Ravi that were not, until now, diverted upstream within India.

But just because the treaty allows maximum utilisation by the two countries of ‘their’ respective rivers does not mean that the countries should not reach agreement and make provisions for environmental flows – even if that means making addendums to the IWT.

As environmentalists have long pointed out, by not creating provisions for environmental flows, the hydrology and ecology of the three downstream eastern rivers is irreparably harmed. Moreover, the growing complexity and changing patterns of precipitation and river flow, as a result of accelerated glacial melt and climate change, make water management much more complex than was understood at the time the treaty was negotiated.

Rather than focusing on India's creation of projects within its territory, Pakistan should take the opportunity to have a holistic conversation about what good neighbourly conduct entails given the realities of climate change. Pakistan should put together a proposal under Article 7 of the treaty that creates the basis for future cooperation along the Indus River system. It should share its best-use ideas with India and the world immediately. Given its dependence on judicious and forward-thinking management of the rivers of the Indus, this is the need of the hour. Anything else is a distraction.

For the purposes of gaining a clearer understanding of the present controversy, it is not important to dive into the intricacies of international water law and the competing concepts of no appreciable harm and equitable utilisation. Nor to directly address whether and to the extent there are specific and general reservations on Pakistan's end as there have been through the long history of Indus negotiations about being the lower riparian to a large upstream neighbour on both the western and eastern rivers.

Every 'crisis' can be an opportunity. And right now, Pakistan as a vital custodian of the Indus should adopt a visionary, expansionist and positive approach. It should propose a plan focused on expanding cooperation across the Indus River Basin for long-term sustainability amid extreme climate change. This approach should encompass all human users and non-human species and ecology across Pakistan, India, Afghanistan and China. This way, Pakistan can be on the right side of history even before international water law and perhaps other co-riparians agree to manage the basin for present and future vitality. Being right and visionary is important, while actively working towards the realisation of hope for the virtuous alignment of

geopolitics and national interests.

Uttam Kumar Sinha, senior expert on transboundary rivers, author of Indus Basin Uninterrupted: A History of Territory and Politics from Alexander to Nehru

Any impression that the Shahpurkundi project is designed to deliberately prevent water flowing into Pakistan is misinformed. That said, due to the poor understanding of the IWT, there is a perceived notion that India is using the waters of the rivers as a tool to punish Pakistan.

During the long years of negotiations, Indian negotiators were conscious of water requirements for India's development plans, irrigation facilities and power. It was crucial, therefore, to get the waters of the eastern rivers for the proposed Rajasthan canal (now called the Indira Gandhi canal) and the Bhakra Dam on the Sutlej River. Without these waters both the Indian states of Punjab and Rajasthan would be left dry, severely hampering India's food production.

While it was important to protect India's interest on the eastern rivers this was not done at the cost of reduced water supplies to Pakistan. It is useful, therefore, to read the provisions on the eastern rivers in the IWT, which stipulates India's unrestricted use of the waters of the eastern rivers and, in particular Article II, which explicitly states that India has full rights over the use of Ravi waters before they cross into Pakistani territory.

The debates on the IWT within India largely fall into three categories. First, is about the need to replace the IWT with another improved one – an Indus Water Treaty-II. The second argument is to abrogate it and utilise the provisions of the treaty to inflict pain on Pakistan as a countermeasure.

Those advocating revision argue that the treaty is outdated in the sense that it does not take into account new realities and grounds for cooperation such as the proper survey of the basins for better exploitation of water resources; reconsideration of the interests of Kashmiris whose interests were

overlooked; and new technologies being used for dam-making, de-siltation and ecological issues, among others.

The advocates of abrogation, however, argue that the treaty has unjustly signed away more waters to Pakistan than it rightfully deserved and has not ensured friendly behaviour from Pakistan.

But there is a third perspective that centres around the optimal use of treaty provisions. Those advocating this hold that India has been lackadaisical by not using the provisions of the treaty to good effect. India has not built the infrastructure for the full use of the waters of the eastern rivers like the Ravi, or the "permissible storage capacity" it is granted on the western rivers by the IWT. This is especially important as India faces water scarcity.

The key water projects prioritised since 2014 on the Indus rivers by India all focused on the optimal use of water as under the IWT. These include the Shahpurkandi Da, the Ujh project in Jammu & Kashmir, and the 2nd Ravi Vyas Link Project in Punjab on the eastern rivers. On the western rivers, the Bursar Multipurpose Project in Jammu and Kashmir, and a second multi-purpose project being planned is the Gyspa on Bhaga River (Chenab Main) in Lahul & Spiti district of Himachal Pradesh. There is also a strong opinion that the Tulbul Navigation Project, to which Pakistan objected and which remains stalled, must now be completed.

While it is important to seriously look at what can be done within the framework of the IWT to foster cooperation given the changing Indus basin dynamics; there are two important caveats from the Indian perspective. Firstly, the idea that India is striving to acquire capacity to manipulate or withhold the flow of water from Pakistan must be set aside. It is untenable under the provisions of the IWT and it would be easy to monitor such actions. Secondly, India feels that a section of Pakistan's leadership is raising issues to distract from its own internal water management failures and a bid to gain international attention, yet again, to Kashmir. These hamper any realistic chances of cooperation.

Courtesy www.thethirdpole.net

Pakistan Super League (PSL) 2024: A Spectacular Cricketing Extravaganza



By Kanwal Munir

The Pakistan Super League (PSL) stands as a beacon of excitement and anticipation in the cricketing world, captivating fans with its blend of talent, drama, and sheer sporting brilliance. As PSL-9 unfolds from February 17th to March 18th, cricket enthusiasts worldwide are treated to a spectacle of thrilling matches and extraordinary performances.

Established as one of the premier T20 leagues, PSL continues to elevate the standard of cricket, showcasing the prowess of local and international players. With six dynamic teams vying for supremacy, PSL-9 promises an exhilarating journey filled with nail-biting encounters and unforgettable moments.

Teams:

Karachi Kings
Lahore Qalandars
Islamabad United
Multan Sultans
Peshawar Zalmi
Quetta Gladiators

Qualifying Teams for Playoff Matches:

As the league stage draws to a close, four teams have emerged as the top contenders, qualifying for the playoff matches:

Peshawar Zalmi
Multan Sultans
Islamabad United
Quetta Gladiators

First Playoff Match Summary: Multan Sultans Clinch Victory

In a highly anticipated match, Multan Sultans displayed their dominance by clinching a decisive victory against Peshawar Zalmi in the HBL PSL 9. Despite facing a challenging target of 146 runs set by Peshawar Zalmi, Multan Sultans showcased their batting prowess and chased down the total with remarkable efficiency, achieving the target in just 18.3 overs while losing only three wickets. Their clinical performance highlighted the

team's depth and resilience, underscoring their status as formidable contenders for the championship title.

Led by their skilled players, Multan Sultans exhibited a perfect blend of aggression and composure, ultimately securing a convincing win by seven wickets. This victory not only propels Multan Sultans into the final of PSL 9 but also solidifies their position as a team to watch out for in the quest for cricketing glory.

Second Playoff Match Preview: Islamabad United vs. Quetta Gladiators

As the second playoff match approaches, anticipation reaches a crescendo among cricket enthusiasts eagerly awaiting the clash between Islamabad United and Quetta Gladiators. With both teams harbouring aspirations of securing a coveted spot in the final of PSL 9, the upcoming encounter is poised to be an intense battle characterized by skill, strategy, and sheer

determination. Islamabad United, known for their disciplined approach and formidable lineup, will be looking to assert their dominance on the field.

Meanwhile, Quetta Gladiators, fuelled by their fighting spirit and never-say-die attitude, are determined to overcome the odds, and emerge victorious. As the stage is set for a thrilling showdown, fans brace themselves for a spectacle of cricketing excellence, where every run, wicket, and moment of brilliance will play a crucial role in determining the fate of these two powerhouse teams.

The Final Showdown: Multan Sultans vs. Qualifying Team

With the final match of PSL-9 slated for March 18th, anticipation skyrockets as Multan Sultans eagerly await their opponent. The path to the final pits the winner of the clash between Islamabad United and Quetta Gladiators against Peshawar Zalmi in the semifinal. The victor of this encounter will then secure a coveted spot in the final showdown against Multan Sultans. As the tension mounts and the stakes soar, the stage is set for an epic battle of cricketing prowess.

The top teams of PSL-9 will lock horns, each vying for supremacy and the ultimate



prize of hoisting the championship trophy. With the eyes of the cricketing world fixed firmly on the grand finale, fans brace themselves for a spectacle of thrilling cricketing action, where every moment will be laden with significance in the quest for PSL glory.

Conclusion:

As the curtains draw on PSL-9, the exhilarating journey it has offered comes to a thrilling conclusion. Throughout the tournament, the electrifying matches, stellar performances, and breathtaking moments have enthralled cricket enthusiasts worldwide. PSL-9 has epitomized the essence of cricketing excellence, showcasing the immense talent and passion that pervades the sport.

With each team's unwavering commitment and determination, PSL-9 has not only entertained but also inspired. From the league stage battles to the nail-biting playoffs, the journey has been a testament to the indomitable spirit of cricket. As the final showdown approaches, the anticipation and excitement reach unprecedented heights. Multan Sultans stand on the brink of glory, awaiting their challenger in the ultimate test of cricketing prowess. Beyond the boundaries of the cricket field, PSL-9 has cemented its position as one of the premier T20 leagues, capturing the hearts of millions and leaving an indelible mark on the cricketing landscape. As we bid farewell to another exhilarating season, the legacy of PSL-9 will endure, serving as a beacon of inspiration for generations of cricket lovers to come.



‘Better together:’ How friendship and faith helped guide these two US marathon runners to Paris 2024



By Ben Church

In many ways, Conner Mantz and Clayton Young are typical friends.

They have known each other for years, live just a short drive from each other in Utah and spend a lot of time together. Mantz and his wife have occasionally stepped in for baby-sitting duties and Young once helped paint his friend's house.

But this friendship has an added level of complexity – Mantz and Young are two of the best marathon runners in the US and race against one another.

After meeting at college in 2017, the duo have been on a near-seven-year mission to represent their country at the Olympic Games.

During an emotional Olympic trials race in February, they worked together to make that ambition a reality.

The pair finished first and second at the Florida event to stamp their tickets to Paris 2024. Young, who had looked the fresher of

the two on the final stretch, seemingly gave up his lead to Mantz as the pair were separated by just one second, both achieving a life-long dream in the process.

“Not a day goes by when I’m not having this conversation about the Olympics and the Olympic trials,” Young, 30, tells CNN Sport in a joint-interview with Mantz.

“There’s this wave of emotion that comes over you and you’re like, ‘Oh yeah, that’s right. I did make the Olympic team. I’m an Olympian.’”

Mantz says the achievement has taken a while to settle in but has slowly become more “normal” now that the training partners have started their preparations for Paris 2024.

“It’s kind of unbelievable because you never know who’s going to be good,” the 27-year-old Mantz, who is three years younger than his friend, tells CNN Sport when reflecting on what they achieved at the Olympic trials.

“Yes, we were the number one and number two seeds heading into the [race], but in athletics, everything is a lot more complicated than that. You can be the number one seed and you not make the final [selection].

“So it was just special that it happened together. We’ve trained together for almost seven years and we’ve actually had our goals and dreams accomplished.”

Sharing a journey

The pair estimate they’ve run well over 10,000 miles together over the years, since meeting at Brigham Young University (BYU) in 2017.

Both agree that experiencing that same journey has offered each of them a deeper level of support, be it on a physical or mental level.

“We’re able to learn from one another when we’re not running, and then when we are running, we’re able to push each other,” says Mantz, whose personal best for the

marathon is two hours, seven minutes and 47 seconds.

Young agrees, adding: “I think about standing on the starting line in Paris. I’m going to be standing next to [Mantz] again and just having the confidence that I’ve trained with one of the best athletes in the world, will give me a lot of confidence knowing that I belong.

“If I can stick with him in practice, I can stick with him, hopefully, in Paris. That gives me a lot of confidence.”

Make no mistake, though, both these men are fiercely competitive and are aware there might come a time where they have to put their friendship aside in order to claim personal glory – and for their country.

If they have managed to maintain a healthy working relationship over almost seven years of training together, the two friends are honest enough to admit the occasional tension during workouts.

“It’s definitely a dance that we have to play, and we just have to keep reminding ourselves that we’re better together,” says Young, who boasts a marathon personal best of two hours and eight minutes.

“We are very competitive and we want to beat each other at the end of the day. But, ultimately, I have decided to fully embrace this relationship and I know that I will just be better because of it.”

Importance of faith

As well as a love for running, both men also share a joint faith, which they credit for helping them achieve so much in track and field. Both are members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints – the largest Mormon denomination – and each served missions before meeting at college.

Mantz served a mission in Ghana, while Young spent two years on a mission in North Carolina. The latter says his faith has helped ease the “daunting” pressures of racing on a global stage.

“If my only identity is as a runner or making this Olympic team, it can be very debilitating,” he says, with Mantz nodding along in agreement.

“Through our canonized faith, we’ve realized that we’re more than just a couple of runners, we’re more than just professional athletes. We’re husbands, I’m a father, and we’re ultimately sons of God.

“It definitely has contributed to our running because that eternal perspective is really what grounds us. Racing is important and making an Olympic team is obviously a once in a lifetime thing, but there is more to this life than running.”

With Paris 2024 fast approaching, both men are building up their preparations ahead of this year’s Olympics.

Young is excited to compete at the upcoming NYC Half on March 17, a half-marathon event organized by New York Road Runners.

More than 25,000 runners participate in the event, which goes from Brooklyn to Manhattan and ends in Central Park, with the race the only time other than New Year’s Eve that Times Square is closed to traffic. It will be another opportunity for Young to compete with other elite athletes before he races for medals at the Olympic Games. Mantz, meanwhile, has picked up a minor injury in recent days and had to drop out of the half-marathon race. The setback is not expected to impact his participation at Paris 2024 though.

Neither is afraid to admit that a podium place in Paris is the goal, but both are acutely aware of how unpredictable an Olympic marathon can be.

“I’d be lying if I said that [Young] and I don’t have it in the back of our minds that we’re wanting to go and get a medal. Whether that’s public or not, it shouldn’t matter,” Mantz says. Young agrees, saying: “I’m going to put myself in the best position possible and see what happens.”

The 2024 Paris Summer Olympic Games are set to begin on July 26, with the men’s marathon scheduled for August 10.

Courtesy CNN



What are the legal rights of reality TV stars, really?



By Louisa Ballhaus

New Bravo lawsuits from Leah McSweeney, Caroline Manzo and Rachel Levis are forcing a look at the legal rights of reality TV stars.

When reality TV stars file legal complaints about their treatment, there's one kind of backlash viewers can depend on: eye-rolling fans flooding the comments to say that these cast members knew what they were getting into. "You've seen the show – what did you expect?" is a common refrain. So are accusations that these stars are "biting the hand that feeds them" – enjoying the spoils of reality TV fame and then turning on their employers when they're unhappy with how they're portrayed. But a recent flood of allegations from reality stars describe issues that go far beyond public perception – and raise serious questions about the legal protections they're afforded.

Last summer, *Housewives* alum Bethenny Frankel kicked off the conversation about reality stars' rights by petitioning fellow stars to join the SAG-AFTRA strike and calling for a reality TV union. "Networks and streamers have been exploiting people for too long," she said, citing the cast members' rights to residuals, among other issues. The following month, entertainment lawyers Bryan Freedman and Mark Geragos sent a letter to NBCUniversal's general counsel alleging "grotesque and depraved mistreatment" and warning that "a day of reckoning" was coming for its reality TV productions. Their accusations included "deliberate attempts to manufacture mental instability by plying cast members with alcohol while depriving them of food and sleep" and "covering up acts of sexual violence".

A spokesperson responded at the time that "NBCUniversal

is committed to maintaining a safe and respectful workplace for cast and crew on our reality shows" and that, "if complaints are brought to our attention, we work with our production partners to ensure that timely, appropriate action is or has been taken." Later that month, Freedman told *Variety* that he has spoken with "roughly 50 reality show cast members" about similar mistreatment.

Since that letter, there's been a steady stream of legal complaints from current and former reality TV stars – many of them containing complaints of discrimination, retaliation and sexual harassment. Caroline Manzo, a former *Real Housewives of New Jersey* star, filed a lawsuit in January against employers including Bravo and NBCUniversal with allegations including sexual harassment and sexual battery. *Real Housewives of Beverly Hills* alum Brandi Glanville sent her own legal letter in February accusing Bravo host Andy Cohen of sexual harassment (Cohen has since apologised for the incident in question on Twitter). Former Bravo cast members Leah McSweeney (*Real Housewives of New York*) and Rachel Levis (*Vanderpump Rules*) each filed their own lawsuits in March: McSweeney's is against employers including Andy Cohen and Bravo and alleges both sexual harassment and discrimination related to her alcoholism and mental health disabilities; Levis's is against fellow cast members Ariana Madix and Tom Sandoval and alleges revenge porn, among other charges.

While Levis does not directly name Bravo as a defendant, the lawsuit does accuse the production of revoking access to a mental health professional during filming and encouraging her to drink "much more heavily" in the belief that it

would "make for better television." A representative for Cohen told BBC Culture that McSweeney's allegations against him are "completely false". NBCUniversal, Bravo and Shed Media have not responded to BBC's numerous requests for comment.



The Real Housewives and alcohol

The allegations concerning alcohol are among the least surprising for longtime reality TV fans – The Real Housewives of New York, Leah McSweeney's former show, has become especially well-known in recent years for its depictions of intoxication and outrageous behavior. There have been growing concerns that production is either deliberately encouraging this kind of behaviour or refusing to step in when things get out of hand. These concerns were crystallised in an October investigation from Vanity Fair that detailed months of conversations with current and former Housewives, one of them Leah McSweeney, about the off-camera details of the binge-drinking seen by fans. Numerous Housewives confirmed a pervasive sense that their work environment depended on alcohol consumption and cited instances of producers declining to intervene when things got out of control. McSweeney's recollections from her time filming include waking up "in her own urine", "still drunk from the night before" – and that when she had to have her car pull over to throw up, production rushed over "not to help, but to document it."

"People saying that [Leah McSweeney] signed up for this – they're saying that it's okay that Bravo does this to these women," McSweeney's lawyer, Gary Adelman, told BBC Culture. "That it's okay to violate these women's rights, it's okay to do things that don't ordinarily happen on other film or TV sets. And I don't believe it is."



McSweeney's lawsuit concerns her time both on Real Housewives of New York and Real Housewives: Ultimate Girls Trip. Prior to her appearances on these shows, McSweeney says she had been

sober for nearly nine years, breaking her sobriety roughly five months before filming began. She also says that production was aware of her alcohol use disorder but that she was nonetheless subjected to a "workplace culture that uniquely depended on pressuring its employees to consume alcohol".

Her lawsuit accuses production of failing to provide reasonable accommodations to allow her to attend AA meetings, discriminating against her on the basis of her alcohol use disorder and mental health disabilities and retaliating against her both for attempts to stay sober and for raising concerns about her treatment. The lawsuit also characterises the actions of the defendants (Shed Media, NBCUniversal Media and Bravo, among others) as those of a "covert, illegal enterprise" operating in violation of the Racketeer Influenced and Corrupt Organizations (RICO) Act, accusing the defendants of having "conspired" and "jointly agreed" to violate various laws for the purposes of creating "dramatic pseudo-reality television." Shed Media, NBCUniversal and Bravo have not responded to the BBC's requests for comment on these specific allegations.

Those who suggest that reality stars are simply reaping what they've sown tend to operate with the assumption that reality TV sets should, by nature, be permitted to operate with different guidelines than other work environments – that things such as pressure to drink and keeping the cameras rolling in increasingly dire situations are okay by virtue of tradition, an established norm within the world of reality TV production. But that's exactly what lawsuits like McSweeney's are now trying to dispel.

"[Leah] should be entitled to the same protections as anyone else who's walking into a law firm, or a restaurant or anyplace else for employment," Adelman says. "The law is set up to protect employees, and there should not be an expectation that they're allowed to violate those employment laws simply because it's a reality show."

Alleged sexual assaults on reality TV sets

While Bravo shows have been the subject of the most legal attention in recent months, they aren't the only network whose reality contestants have started fighting back about alleged treatment during filming. Three former contestants from Netflix's Love Is Blind – Jeremy Hartwell, Tran Dang and Renee Poche – have all filed lawsuits over the past two years targeting both the network itself and production companies Delirium TV and Kinetic Content, with allegations of inhumane working conditions, false imprisonment, intentional infliction of emotional distress, gross negligence and more. Dang's case contains a particularly troubling allegation of sexual assault occurring during filming, claiming that producers knew about the alleged assault but did not act to prevent it. A joint statement issued by Kinetic Content and Delirium TV denied Dang's allegations and claimed that she "never informed the producers of any alleged wrongdoing of any kind."

Allegations of sexual assault or misconduct occurring on-camera or during production are a pervasive theme in the reality TV landscape, with highly publicised incidents occurring on Below Deck Down Under, Gran Hermano (Spain's version of Big Broth-

er), *The Challenge*, *Bachelor in Paradise* and, in an ongoing set of cases, *So You Think You Can Dance*. *Real Housewives* star Caroline Manzo's lawsuit also concerns allegations of sexual assault and harassment, describing an incident during *Real Housewives: Ultimate Girls Trip* filming in which she alleges fellow cast member Brandi Glanville "forcibly squeezed Manzo's cheeks together and thrust her tongue in Manzo's mouth", then "groped, grabbed, and forcibly fondled Manzo's vagina and breasts" while Manzo cried for help. The lawsuit claims that Glanville's actions were "caused by and allowed to happen by Defendants": despite producers allegedly "listening to the interaction on audio", Manzo says no one "took any other action to intervene and stop the sexual assault".

"I get it," Manzo's lawyer Derek Smith told BBC Culture. "Shocking reality television brings the ratings. However, human decency requires that we put limits on that shocking behavior. We all have the right to work in an environment that is free of sexual harassment. People like Ms. Manzo should never be sexually harassed in order to get a 'good' shot. A production company's creative rights should never trump a cast member's safety."

As in McSweeney's lawsuit, alcohol plays a front-and-center role in Manzo's claims, with claims that production intentionally plied Glanville with alcohol knowing her history of sexual harassment and that another incident was "likely" to occur. The lawsuit notes that, during filming, production was "constantly supplying the castmates with alcohol": "if one wanted alcohol at 9 am at breakfast, they could have as much alcohol as they wanted... the more drunk the 'housewives' were, the more outrageous the behaviour and the higher the ratings."



The path forward

While there are still many reality TV programmes on which alcohol plays a central role, others have been quietly adjusting their alcohol policies for years, often in response to issues of legal liability. *Bachelor in Paradise* and *The Challenge* instituted new alcohol limits after allegations of sexual assault during production: The entire *Bachelor* franchise now operates by a two-drink per hour limit, while *The Challenge* has producers on hand to cut cast members off if they at any point appear over-served. Contestants from Netflix's *Too Hot to Handle*, BBC's *The Traitors*, and ITV's *Love Island* have all reported strict "one to two drink" limits during filming, and series such as *Love Island* and *The Challenge* have also launched more stringent mental health protocols. *Love Island's*

was implemented in the wake of the deaths by suicide of two former cast members and former host Caroline Flack between 2018 and 2020. *Love Is Blind* has never shared an official alcohol policy, despite alcohol-related allegations from former contestants.

In September, NBCU entertainment chairman Frances Berwick sent a message to production partners indicating a growing awareness of alcohol-related concerns on reality TV sets. The message, as reported by *Vanity Fair*, introduced a new requirement to "deliver an expanded alcohol-related training to the cast, crew, and production team". It also mentioned "enhanced mental health support, including on-set psychological support during and after filming and at reunions, as well as care after filming."

Smith agrees with McSweeney's lawyer Adelman: What these lawsuits are getting at are a very basic enforcement of employment laws regulating the workplace. Though some Bravo stars' lawsuits do include complaints of emotional manipulation or dissatisfaction with storylines that have played out from the show – complaints that fans are most likely to dismiss as occupational hazards – lawsuits like McSweeney's and Manzo's are addressing issues of protection during filming itself.

"We would like [reality TV productions] to abide by these simple rules," Smith says. "Don't get the cast members drunk. Don't encourage cast members to sexually harass others. Don't continue to hire people with a history of sexual harassment. Don't put ratings and profit over people's safety."

This is the underlying fear of many who criticise current legal actions – that "good" reality TV (and the ratings and profit that come with it) can't exist without the drunken antics and shocking moments the genre has become known for. But this fear neither negates reality stars' rights to a legally compliant workplace nor has much grounding in what fans actually tend to appreciate seeing on reality TV.

Vanderpump Rules's "Scandoval", perhaps the biggest reality TV sensation of the last decade, involved the real-time reveal of a longstanding affair between two cast members and saw the show reach its highest-ever ratings, no alcohol-fueled blowouts required. *Love Island* and *The Bachelor* have enjoyed intense fan fervour even after they imposed alcohol limits. And an August episode of *Below Deck Down Under* in which producers stepped in on-camera to remove a highly inebriated Luke Jones from a sleeping cast member's bed suggested that, even in scenarios where things may get out of control, fans would vastly prefer seeing producers step into a scene that makes them question why they didn't.

Regardless of anyone's personal preference for a certain brand of drama, reality TV productions may soon find that certain established practices are not worth the legal liabilities they create. "There are more lawsuits coming and there are more people who are going to speak out," Adelman says. "It doesn't matter what people say or think – that Andy's a good guy, or that you should expect to drink, or that you should expect this behavior. What's going to matter is what the law thinks of it. And we believe the law thinks this is wrong."

Courtesy BBC

Bodyshaming and getting wed

By M A Niazi

We should avoid bodyshaming the way rich people should avoid wealthshaming. So nobody should call Anant Ambani 'fat'. Yeah, he might weigh more than average, and that is the result of a chronic disease that made him heavier than average. The result is that he has become the low-hanging fruit of fatshaming.

But the response of the family has been to give him the most expensive wedding the world has ever seen. It cost Rs 10 billion. That's Indian rupees, and it's an obscene amount. True, Anant is the son of Mukesh Ambani, one of the world's richest men, but he still reminds one of 'Fat Man', the US nuclear bomb that was dropped on Nagasaki to end World War II. It just goes to show that no matter how rich your daddy is, if you're going to be fat, you're going to be fat.

And it's not as if Anant has got other redeeming qualities. He's not good at cricket, like Azam Khan, who's got to be one of the weightiest men ever to keep wickets for Pakistan. Or any other sport for that matter, even though throwing the hammer and shotput are usually best done by hefty guys.

Or the tug'o'war, where the anchor of the team is usually picked for his sheer weight.

Young Anant is not exceptionally bright, for he dropped out of Brown University without taking a degree. He's not jawdroppingly dumb either, for he got into Brown, which is Ivy League. Whatever the reason, he got married to a childhood sweetheart, a daughter of family friends, Radhika Merchant. As they were both from Gujarati bania families, I'm sure she faced family pressure to stick by him when he suddenly got fat, after their engagement.

The wedding was starstudded. Both Mike Zuckerberg and Ashton Kuchner performed, while Rihanna attended. Or was it Rihanna who performed?

Anyway, Jeff Bezos wasn't there, nor was Donald Trump. His daughter Ivanka was, though.



No guest was murdered. Normally, that would be a given, but after Balaj Truckan wala, you can't be sure it's over until it's over.

The PIA stewardess who slipped in Toronto stayed there, and didn't go to India for the wedding. Apparently, PIA air hostesses slip quite frequently in Toronto. This airhostess was not even the first this year, but the second. And last year there were seven. And apparently, so many have slipped, that those who have are now advising those who want to slip, how to. One of the essential steps is to burn one's passport, apparently. And once you get in, make sure you don't report for the return flight.

I wonder whether the impending privatization of the national airline has any relation to this desire to settle abroad, specifically in Canada? Anyhow, the privatization is going full speed ahead, and Shiehbaz Sharif is doing what Umar Ayub presumably wouldn't have done, which is rushing through the privatization.

Elsewhere, I see that Gazans aren't getting much luck. Israel is not just continuing its attacks, but is doing its damndest to make sure that no aid gets through. However, Sweden's and Canada's decision to resume aid to UNRWA, the UN Relief and Works Agency, which was founded specifically, in 1949, to provide relief and help to Palestinian refugees.

Some aid is being airdropped, but that does not seem viable, what with five people killed when a pallet of food aid fell on them after its parachute failed. Israelis called for this to stop, as it was only encouraging the Palestinian resistance. They shouldn't object, for the crowds of Palestinians getting into the dropzone provided convenient targets.

Does anyone remember how many Jews were killed when manna fell from the sky in the Sinai? The Israelis want the Gazans thrown into the Sinai it seems. And they begrudge them even what falls from the sky.

Gaza was in bad shape before the present invasion, which is now in its sixth month. It had not recovered from previous invasions, or the covid-19 epidemic, and could have tipped into starvation anyhow. But this is too much. But for whom?

What really shook me was the appeal by a Palestinian on social media in the name of Islam. It's not just the governments and the militaries that will have to answer, but all of us who call ourselves Muslims, on the Day of Judgement. It's a scary thought to go into this Ramazan, because the Almighty might be infinitely Merciful, but He is also Just. And if Palestinians don't forgive us, I don't know if He will.

Courtesy www.pakistantoday.com.pk







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