

Fortnightly

# The Truth International

Islamabad - Karachi

1<sup>st</sup> - 15<sup>th</sup> March 2024

Again Coalition

First thing compromised in coalition  
government is merit

New Government and Economy

Shahbaz Sharif government have to take harsh  
decisions to keep the economy moving

Palestine Invasion

Israel proved herself an arrogant state who  
don't care for international conventions

## PDM Government Minus Maulana



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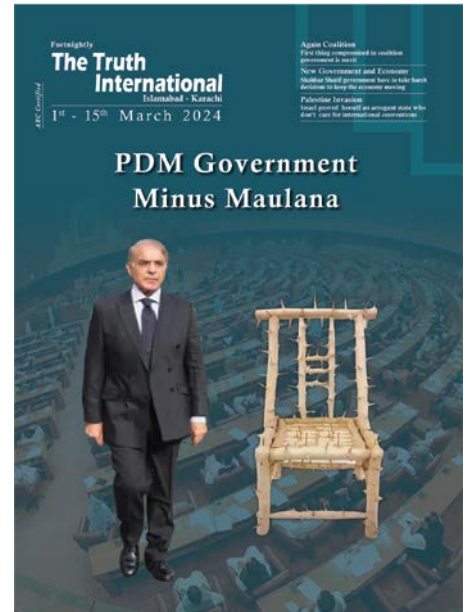
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# Pakistan's Political Tapestry: A Chronicle of Coalition Governments and Current Challenges



By Romana Afsheen

Coalition politics in Pakistan is a common phenomenon due to the multiparty system and the need to form alliances to achieve a parliamentary majority. The political landscape in the country has been dynamic, with alliances forming and dissolving based on changing political dynamics.

Pakistan's history has been marked by turbulence, including provincial conflicts, a nuclear standoff with India, and oscillations between military rule and democratically elected governments. The country struggles with defining a national identity and political system due to linguistic diversity and regional tensions. The emergence of Pakistan in 1947 led to significant demographic movements, and despite a shared religion, the country faces challenges in national integration. Wars with India, economic crises, and difficulties in resource allocation contribute to ongoing instability.

The first military regime under Ayub Khan in 1958 aimed to centralize the government, but regional disparities and discontent in East Pakistan led to the creation of Bangladesh in 1971. Subsequent democratic transitions

faced challenges of corruption, power struggles, and economic issues. The military coup in 1977, led by Zia-ul-Haq, introduced Islamization policies and received international support during the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan.

The 1988 election brought a return to civilian rule, but frequent changes in leadership, dismissals, and corruption allegations eroded public faith in the democratic system. President Zia's death in 1988, followed by non-party elections and political maneuvering, contributed to a complex political landscape. Frequent elections, dismissals, and power struggles between major parties, such as the PPP and the Muslim League, characterized the 1990s.

The military's influence persisted, and the 1999 coup by General Musharraf overthrew the civil government. Political instability continued with challenges in Kashmir, terrorism, and strained relations with India. Musharraf declared himself president, cooperating with the West in the war against terrorism.

Pakistan's political scene reflects a

struggle between civilian and military forces, with frequent changes in leadership, power struggles, and challenges in national integration. Economic issues, corruption, and regional tensions remain significant concerns. Despite these challenges, Pakistan continues to contribute culturally, religiously, and intellectually to the world. Here are some instances of coalition governments in the history of Pakistan:

## 1988-1990: First Benazir Bhutto Government:

After the end of military rule, the Pakistan People's Party (PPP) led by Benazir Bhutto formed a government in 1988. However, due to a lack of a clear majority, it was a coalition government with support from smaller parties and independent members.

The coalition government led by Benazir Bhutto from 1988 to 1990 in Pakistan presented a mixed picture of advantages and drawbacks. On the positive side, it symbolized the restoration of democratic governance after a period of military rule. The coalition structure, inherent to such





governments, facilitated an inclusive approach by incorporating representatives from various political parties, ethnic groups, and regions. This diversity often resulted in a more comprehensive decision-making process that considered a wide range of perspectives and fostered power-sharing among different political entities.

However, the drawbacks of this coalition became apparent as well. Inherent instability emerged due to conflicting interests among coalition partners, leading to internal tensions and frequent changes in the political landscape. The consensus-driven nature of decision-making in a coalition sometimes resulted in policy compromises, potentially causing delays in implementing crucial measures or leading to policy gridlock. The need to appease coalition partners could also foster corruption and nepotism, as government positions and resources were distributed based on political considerations rather than merit.

Moreover, the constant negotiation and compromise required in coalition governance often led to slow decision-making processes and ineffective governance, hindering the government's ability to address urgent issues. Partisan interference

became a risk, with coalition partners prioritizing their party interests over national concerns, potentially hampering long-term policy planning. The coalition government faced the challenge of frequent changes, as internal conflicts or disagreements among partners could lead to early dissolution or shifts in leadership, resulting in a lack of continuity in governance.

Ultimately, the success or failure of a coalition government hinges on the ability of political leaders to manage differences, foster cooperation, and prioritize national interests over partisan considerations. The experience of the 1988-1990 coalition in Pakistan reflects the dynamic nature of such governments and their impact on the country's political landscape.

## 1993-1996: Second Benazir Bhutto Government:

Benazir Bhutto returned to power in 1993 and, once again, formed a coalition government with various parties. However, her government faced challenges, leading to its dismissal in 1996.

The second term of Benazir Bhutto's government from 1993 to 1996 in Pakistan

presented a complex picture with both positive and negative aspects. On the positive side, Bhutto's return to power during this period signified the continuation of democratic governance in the country, reinforcing its commitment to a democratic political system. The government also initiated economic reforms, introducing privatization measures and market-oriented policies in an effort to address economic challenges and stimulate growth. Social welfare programs, including the Benazir Income Support Program (BISP), were implemented to provide financial assistance to low-income families. Additionally, diplomatic efforts aimed at improving relations with neighboring countries and enhancing Pakistan's international standing were notable achievements.

However, the government faced significant challenges. Allegations of corruption were directed at Benazir Bhutto's administration, raising concerns about transparency and accountability. Despite economic reforms, the country grappled with economic challenges, including high inflation and a growing fiscal deficit. Political instability marked this period, as opposition parties criticized the government for governance issues and alleged corruption, eroding confidence in its ability to address the







country's problems. Relations with the military remained strained, reflecting historical tensions between the civilian government and the military, and this strained relationship had implications for political stability and governance. Ultimately, in 1996, the government was dismissed by President Farooq Leghari, citing corruption and mismanagement as reasons, prompting questions about the strength and resilience of democratic institutions in Pakistan.

emerged. The 2002 general elections led to the formation of a coalition government, showcasing a collaborative approach to governance. The coalition, predominantly composed of the Pakistan Muslim League Quaid-e-Azam (PML-Q) and various regional and religious parties, provided an opportunity for diverse political voices to contribute to the decision-making process. This inclusivity aimed at representing different segments of the population in the political landscape.

## 2008-2013: Coalition under Asif Ali Zardari:

In the aftermath of Benazir Bhutto's assassination, the PPP, led by Asif Ali Zardari, formed a coalition government in 2008 with various parties, including the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N). The period from 2008 to 2013, marked by a coalition government under the leadership of Asif Ali Zardari, had a mix of positive and negative aspects.

During this time, there was a continuation of democratic governance, representing a shift from military rule to civilian administration, which contributed to political stability. The government took steps to devolve power to the provinces through the 18th Amendment, enhancing provincial autonomy and promoting a more inclusive governance structure. Social welfare initiatives, including the introduction of the Benazir Income Support Program (BISP), aimed to provide financial assistance to vulnerable segments of the population. Additionally, efforts were made to improve diplomatic relations with India, fostering regional stability.

However, the administration faced challenges, notably corruption allegations that raised concerns about transparency and accountability. Economic difficulties, such as inflation and a rising fiscal deficit, posed significant challenges, and the effectiveness of economic policies in addressing these issues was a point of contention. The period also witnessed security challenges, including terrorist attacks and insurgency, leading to criticism of the government's handling of security matters. Political instability surfaced, with coalition partners expressing dissatisfaction and disagreements, affecting the government's ability to maintain a cohesive governing strategy.

## 2013-2018: PML-N Government:

The Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) secured a majority in the 2013 elections and formed the government. While not a formal coalition, it had to negotiate with smaller parties to maintain stability.



## 2002-2007: Musharraf's Era and Coalition Governments:

After the 2002 general elections, a coalition government was formed between the Pakistan Muslim League Quaid-e-Azam (PML-Q) and various regional and religious parties. This coalition supported President Pervez Musharraf. Later, in 2004, the Muttahida Majlis-e-Amal (MMA), an alliance of religious parties, formed a coalition government in the province of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.

The period from 2002 to 2007, under General Pervez Musharraf's leadership, marked a distinctive phase in Pakistan's political landscape characterized by a mix of advantages and challenges.

During this era, some positive aspects

However, the period was not without its challenges. The coalition government faced criticisms for being perceived as aligned with Musharraf's military regime, raising concerns about its independence and the potential influence of the military on civilian governance. This connection sparked tensions and controversies, impacting the government's legitimacy and credibility.

Moreover, the coalition governments during this era struggled to address some of Pakistan's pressing issues effectively. Economic challenges persisted, with issues such as inflation and unemployment requiring comprehensive and sustained strategies. Additionally, the political landscape remained dynamic, and the coalition faced difficulties in maintaining stability amid shifting alliances and evolving political dynamics.



The period from 2013 to 2018, under the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) government, displayed a mix of positive and negative aspects.

During this time, the government prioritized economic growth, with a focus on infrastructure projects like motorways and energy initiatives to address power shortages. The implementation of energy projects aimed to alleviate the long-standing energy crisis and contributed to industrial development. Additionally, efforts to improve the security situation through military operations against militant groups led to a reduction in terrorism, enhancing overall security.

However, the administration faced criticism due to corruption allegations surrounding high-profile projects, raising concerns about transparency and accountability. Despite initiatives to address power shortages, challenges in the energy sector persisted during the early years of the government's tenure, impacting various economic sectors. The accumulation of significant external debt also drew criticism, with concerns about long-term economic implications and dependence on external financing.

Political controversies, including confrontations with the judiciary and military, marked this period, raising questions about the stability of democratic institutions and the rule of law. Protests and civil unrest in response to allegations of corruption and governance issues added to the political challenges, contributing to an environment of uncertainty.

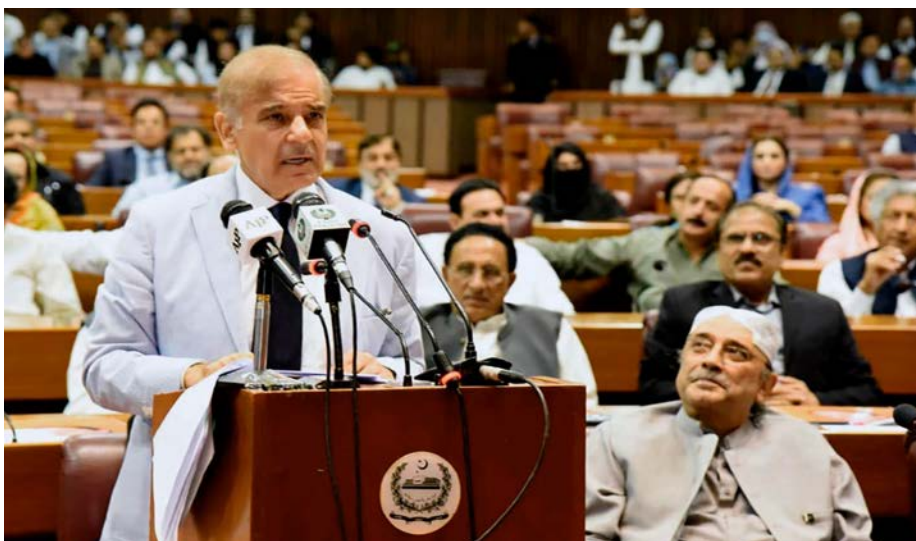
## 2018-2022: PTI-Led Coalition:

After the 2018 elections, the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI), led by Imran Khan, emerged as the largest party but had to form a coalition government with smaller parties to secure a majority.

The Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI), led by Imran Khan, emerged as the single largest party in the National Assembly but did not secure an absolute majority. Instead, the PTI formed a government with the support of independent members and smaller parties without entering into a formal

coalition arrangement.

Imran Khan's government relied on the cooperation of allied parties and independent lawmakers to maintain a majority in the National Assembly. While it wasn't a formal coalition government with a written agreement among parties, the PTI leadership worked to secure support for its policies and legislative agenda from various quarters. The absence of a formal coalition did not mean that the government was without allies; it simply operated with support from individual members and smaller parties on specific issues.



## PDM Coalition's Return: Prospects and Challenges in Pakistan

The coalition that previously governed Pakistan for 16 months after ousting former Prime Minister Imran Khan in April 2022 is poised to return to power. The February 8 general election saw no single party securing over 50 percent of parliamentary seats, leading to allegations of rigging. The same coalition, known as the People's Democratic Movement (PDM), has rallied against independent candidates supported by Khan's Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI), which won the most seats.

The PDM has re-nominated Shehbaz Sharif from the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) for the prime minister's post. Critics anticipate similarities with Shehbaz's previous term (2022-23), marked by high inflation, record

interest rates, import restrictions, subsidy removal on electricity, and internal party struggles.

However, some argue that the upcoming administration will differ from the previous PDM government due to changed circumstances since August 2023. Shehbaz is expected to be more assertive and decisive this time. Unlike the past, the PPP, led by Benazir's son Bilawal Bhutto-Zardari, has joined the coalition but refrained from accepting cabinet positions, opting for constitutional roles like president and provincial governors.

Analysts highlight key distinctions in the new government, such as the PML-N's dominant decision-making role without significant PPP influence. The coalition partners will also lead three of the four provincial governments, with the PML-N in control of Punjab, providing political strength to the federal government.

Shehbaz's previous appointment of Ishaq Dar as finance minister is deemed a major mistake, leading to exchange rate volatility. Dar is a potential contender again, but experts warn against his reappointment. The military's role is emphasized, with Shehbaz's positive relationship with military chief General Asim Munir expected to facilitate economic management.

Some liken the incoming administration to Khan's 2018 minority government formed with establishment support, though the establishment's influence is perceived as





weaker now. Pakistan is anticipated to seek a \$6 billion IMF loan to bolster its dwindling foreign exchange reserves amid external debt repayments.

Economic challenges persist, with low growth and high inflation. Cosmetic measures like the Special Investment Facilitation Council (SIFC) are criticized for not addressing long-term structural problems. The fundamental issues lie in economic and political fragility, with concerns about the administration's ability to deliver comprehensive solutions.

## Feb 08 Elections, Challenges Ahead for New Coalition Government:

The two historically dominant forces in Pakistani civilian politics have announced their intention to form a coalition government, resolving the impasse following last week's parliamentary elections where no party secured a clear majority.

The Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N), led by former Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif, disclosed its collaboration with the Pakistan People's Party (PPP) and

smaller parties, collectively having enough seats for a majority in the 265-member parliament. Shehbaz Sharif, the younger brother of Nawaz Sharif and a former Prime Minister, is the PML-N's nominee for leading the new government. This coalition mirrors the 2022 alliance that ousted then-Prime Minister Imran Khan's government, governing for 16 months before a caretaker administration took over for elections.

However, analysts express concerns about the potential weakness and instability of the new coalition, anticipating disagreements between the PML-N and PPP. The PPP's decision not to take ministerial roles raises fears of a weaker coalition compared to the previous one. With Pakistan grappling with economic challenges, including corruption, mismanagement, the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, a global energy crisis, and natural disasters, the incoming government faces significant hurdles. The economic turmoil has led to a decline in real wages, particularly affecting the poor. Pakistan secured a \$3 billion standby deal with the International Monetary Fund last year, but discussions for an extension will likely involve unpopular measures.

While some express confidence in the coalition's ability to address economic issues, others doubt its effectiveness. Critics argue that the coalition may focus on meeting IMF obligations, attracting investment, and seeking bailout funds, potentially overlooking necessary reforms. The incarceration of Imran Khan, leader of the Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) party, and allegations of vote-rigging during the elections add complexity to the political landscape. The PTI claims widespread irregularities and calls for protests, potentially leading to anti-government movements.

Beyond economic challenges, Pakistan faces security concerns, including rising militant attacks from groups like the Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan and the Islamic State. Cross-border tensions with Iran and Afghanistan add to the security challenges.

Experts emphasize the need for collaboration between the civilian government and the powerful military establishment to address security issues effectively. However, the popularity of the new government, particularly given its likely initial focus on IMF obligations, remains uncertain, potentially complicating efforts to build public support for counter-terrorism operations.







# Shehbaz Sharif: A Profile in Political Leadership



By Haniya Ali and Ayeza Areej

Shehbaz Sharif, 72, born on September 23, 1951, in Lahore, Pakistan is a prominent figure in the realm of both politics and business. He is the second son of Muhammad Sharif who migrated from Amritsar to Lahore and founded a steel factory outside of Lahore that eventually joined the well-known Ittefaq Group industrial tycoon. Shehbaz's strong sense of business acumen and leadership were ingrained in him by his upbringing in a family with substantial industrial holdings. He went to St. Anthony's High School for early education and later on completed bachelors of Arts from GCU (Government College University). He joined his family's business after graduating but due to the nationalization policy of Bhutto, Ittefaq group was disenfranchised which prompted the involvement of Sharif brothers into the politics. Later on, in 1977 during Zia's era they regained the control of Ittefaq group. In 1985, Sharif, was chosen for a one-year term as president of the Lahore Chamber of Commerce & Industry as he gained both business experience and political acumen. Being the second of three brothers to enter politics, Sharif helped establish his family's

political dynasty. His younger brother, Abbas Sharif, was a member of National Assembly for a short period of time (1993–1997) as he couldn't continue further due to his health concerns and died of cardiac arrest in 2013. His elder brother, Nawaz Sharif, was appointed as Punjab's finance minister in 1981. With his first wife, Nusrat, Shehbaz Sharif had four children. Their eldest son, Hamza Shehbaz Sharif, was elected to the National Assembly thrice between 2008 and 2018. In 2003, Shehbaz married for the second time to Tehmina Durrani. Shehbaz, from Muslim League (Nawaz) (PML-N) is once again set to take over as the Prime Minister of Pakistan, as the party has made an alliance with other parties, majorly PPP to attain the required numbers. Shehbaz has made a name for himself as Punjab's Chief Minister thrice, from 1997-1999, after which he and his family were exiled to Saudi Arabia by Pervez Musharraf; from 2008-2013; and from 2013-2018. In 1985, only limited elections were permitted so after the death of Zia-ul-Haq in 1988, Shehbaz ran for the first set of general elections. He was chosen to serve in the Punjab Provincial Assembly

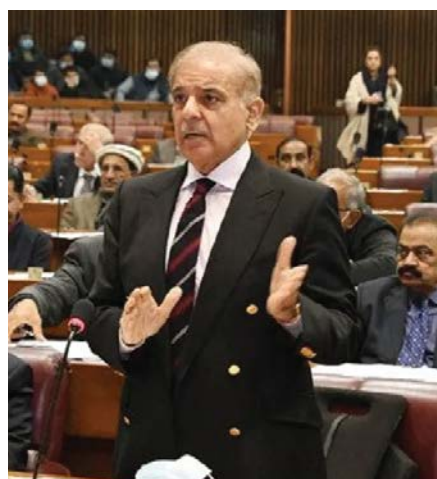
that same year, and was subsequently elected to the National Assembly in 1990. He was reelected in 1993 to the Punjab Provincial Assembly as well as the National Assembly. Instead of keeping his seat in the National Assembly, he moved to the Provincial Assembly to lead the opposition (1993–96). Following the PML-N's national sweep to power in 1997, Sharif was chosen as Punjab's Chief Minister. However, his political trajectory wasn't smooth. The decade that followed Zia-ul-Haq's reign was turbulent for Pakistan's democracy and particularly for the Sharifs. Leaders of both the parties, PML-N and PPP came alternatively to power. Although Benazir Bhutto and Nawaz Sharif engaged in acrimonious accusations of corruption, they were perpetually entangled in a struggle for dominance between the military establishment and the civilian administration. During 1988 to 1996, military authorities exerted pressure on each government to end before the completion of their tenure. After getting a two-third majority in 1997, Nawaz Sharif's government became the most powerful



democratic authority in the history of Pakistan, but due to the Kargil war and nuclear tests, government's tensions increased with the establishment which had a significant impact on Shehbaz Sharif's political journey. Shehbaz Sharif was his brother's envoy to the army and the US, and he also periodically handled crises for the administration. However, in a coup d'état in October 1999, Gen. Pervez Musharraf overthrew Nawaz Sharif as head of state by stopping his plane from touching down in Pakistan. Shehbaz went to exile for his brother's pardon. In 2007, ahead of elections, Sharif brothers returned to Pakistan, Bhutto also came back but she was assassinated as the security measures failed to prevent an attack on her motorcade. After the elections, the PML-N led by the Sharifs and PPP by Asif Ali Zardari, came together to oppose Musharraf's party and removed him from office. In this coalition, Shehbaz Sharif once again became the Chief Minister of Punjab. He presented himself as a capable administrator by taking on development projects, expanding educational opportunities, and eliminating bureaucratic corruption. In 2013, PML-N came to power and he continued his developmental projects as the CM of Punjab. One of his most prominent initiatives during this tenure was starting Lahore's Orange Line metro train system. This project was made possible through increased funding from China, whose China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) initiative had elevated Pakistan to become the strategic hub of China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). Despite his administrative expertise and dedication to public service he faced criticism and accusations of corruption. Fast forwarding to April 2022, when Shehbaz Sharif became Prime Minister the country was beset by political unrest and economic instability. Imran Khan's overthrow of the previous government due to vote of no confidence, sparked a turbulent transition that required prompt corrective action. The administration of Shehbaz quickly launched a multipronged strategy to solve the economic as well administrative issues. He remained in power till august 2023 and then the National Assembly was dissolved for the elections. Unlike as a CM Shehbaz was not

liked as a Prime Minister; despite managing to hold together a diverse coalition, his administration came under heavy fire for how it handled the economy in the face of intense IMF inspection and high inflation. It did not help his image that he had emerged as the apparent face of the military dictatorship, driving out the well-liked Imran Khan.

In 2020, the political landscape of Pakistan had undergone a significant shift with the formation of Pakistan Democratic Movement(PDM). For the first time in the history of Pakistan, a historic collaboration



in the form of PDM among the political parties emerged with the goal of overthrowing the civilian authoritarian government. The coalition tried to depose Prime Minister Imran Khan through No-Confidence Motion. The development created the opportunity for Shehbaz Sharif, who belongs to Pakistan Muslim League (N) to step into the government as a new Prime Minister of Pakistan. Pakistan Democratic Movement(PDM) was the alliance of 11 political parties, which included "Awami National Party, Awami National Party Wali, Balochistan National Party (Mengal), Jamiat Ahe Hadith, Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam, National Party-Bizenjo, Pakistan Muslim League (N), Pakistan Peoples Party, Pakhtunkhwa Milli Awami Party, Pashtun Tahafuz Movement and Qaumi Watan Party". As Shehbaz Sharif assumes the role of Pakistan's new Prime Minister, various pressing issues demanded his immediate attention.

Firstly, the major challenge that confronted

the Shehbaz Sharif government was stagnant economy. Irrespective of its importance, the issue gains traction only when Pakistan secures loans from foreign entities like China, US, Saudi Arabia, or seeks support from international financial institutions. The country was suffering from dwindling foreign reserves and slow growth rate. This financial fragility brought the country at the edge of financial collapse. "The only silver lining is that Pakistan's main creditor China, through its state media, has already hailed Shehbaz Sharif and vouched for their support towards Pakistan, stating that is not dependent on any particular person." Another challenge to Shehbaz Sharif government was to manage the coalition of the 11 political parties. It was challenging for the government to tackle these political parties with varying interests and ideologies. During Imran Khan tenure, foreign policy of Pakistan witnessed a remarkable shift considering his stance against Islamophobia and condemnation of major world leaders, though there are criticisms about the apparent neglect of specific human rights concerns. These alterations along with strained ties with traditional allies and challenges from Afghanistan presented a challenging landscape to Shehbaz Sharif. As given by the Observer Research Foundation, "Shehbaz Sharif realised that with empty coffers, he cannot be of any help to the Taliban regime. In fact, equipped with a more capable economy, India is winning hearts of people in Afghanistan through their aid programmes."

In the aftermath of the Pakistan General Elections 2024, where no single party could secure clear majority the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PMLN) and the Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) have decided to form a coalition government by nominating Shehbaz Sharif for Prime Minister and Asif Ali Zardari for next President. The decision to form a coalition government has drawn severe criticism not just from Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf which alleges that their mandate was stolen but also from the public due to the belief that it represents PDM 2.0. (new version of PDM, a coalition government which was formed after Imran Khan was ousted in 2022 following a no-confidence motion).





## Why is the Maulana so angry?

*Shunted out by the voters and out of favour with his erstwhile benefactors, JUI-F chief Maulana Fazlur Rehman is fighting for his political survival*



By Zaigham Khan

Maulana Fazlur Rehman expected the 2024 elections to significantly enhance the fortunes of his political party, the Jamiat Ulema-i-Islam-Fazl (JUI-F). With the Maulana's main rival in Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa (KP), the Pakistan Tehreek-i-Insaf (PTI), splintered into three factions, stripped of its election symbol, its influential members having defected and forced to head into the elections without a coherent campaign, the consensus among most analysts was that the Maulana would emerge as the primary beneficiary of these circumstances in the province.

However, to his great disappointment, the results showed the exact opposite. The elections turned out to be a debacle for the Maulana of Maulanas. Both he and his close relatives were defeated in their constituencies in KP, and the party could not improve on its performance in the 2018 elections, significantly diminishing JUI-F's political influence.

Adding insult to injury, his former allies from previous coalition governments, along with the establishment, sidelined him during the crucial post-election phase of the power-sharing process. As things currently stand, the JUI-F chief has rejected the election results and announced that he will sit in the opposition in the National Assembly.

Now, the frustrated Maulana has suggested that he might consider aligning with his long-standing adversary, the PTI. In a statement that supported the PTI narrative, he accused top military leaders, including former army chief Gen (ret'd) Qamar Javed Bajwa, of orchestrating the downfall of the Imran Khan-led PTI government in April 2022.

Shunted out by the voters and out of favour with his erstwhile benefactors, JUI-F chief Maulana Fazlur Rehman is fighting for his political survival. In his desperation, he is even considering an alliance with a sworn

political nemesis, who mocked and humiliated him publicly with nicknames. What is the veteran politician playing at?

This proposition is something that neither the nascent coalition government at the centre nor the establishment can afford to disregard. Despite efforts to undermine the PTI, the party has risen as the most significant political force in the elections and it is set to challenge the new government, both in the parliament and through public demonstrations.

Should Maulana Fazl forge an alliance with the PTI, it could pose a significant dilemma for the government. The Maulana's supporters are not as easily 'managed' as PTI activists. State actions against clerics, preachers and seminary students could provoke a severe backlash and the Maulana is fully aware of this dynamic.

Why is the wily Maulana so angry? What does his anger mean for Pakistan's political



landscape? How risky is his gamble to align himself with his former adversaries? And what lies ahead for him and his party?

## THE MAULANA'S STAKES

One has to assess the extent of Maulana Fazl's setbacks to understand the paradox he faces. So far, the Maulana's most notable achievement has been maintaining his party's relevance in an environment where other religious parties have seen their political and electoral influence wane.

A key to the Maulana's success is his foundation in the expansive network of Deobandi madrassas and the devout Deobandi section of Pakistan's population, who generally have less formal education compared to the followers of parties such as the Jamaat-i-Islami (JI).

While the JI support base shifted towards mainstream parties, JUI-F's supporters remained relatively resistant to their appeals until recently. Maulana's voter base is also geographically concentrated, providing him an edge in Pakistan's first-past-the-post electoral system.

Even more importantly, Maulana Fazl's approach to politics has been pragmatic. He steers his party not solely on ideological grounds but also through patronage politics, keeping close ties with the political elite.

From 2002 to 2018, Pakistan witnessed a succession of hybrid civil-military governments, including those led by the Pakistan Muslim League-Quaid (PML-Q), the Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP), and the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N). A constant presence through these shifting administrations was Maulana Fazl.

The Maulana has often been criticised for his unyielding pursuit of power and his seeming indifference to the ideological stance of whichever party happens to be in power. But it was precisely this that helped the Maulana cleverly navigate the diminishing influence of religious politics in Pakistan as a survival strategy.

The Maulana's favourable circumstances began to change with the emergence of the PTI. In 2018, after a long time, the Maulana was not part of a coalition government

— at the centre or in KP. Not only this, Imran Khan singled him out for public humiliation, calling him 'Diesel' and encouraging his supporters to mock him. In Imran Khan's eyes, the Maulana — alongside Asif Zardari and Nawaz Sharif — symbolised the decadent politics of Pakistan that needed to be replaced.

## RIDING TURBULENT WATERS

Since the 1980s, overtly religious politics in Pakistan has been on the decline. The Bareilvi Jamiat Ulema-i-Pakistan (JUP) and the pan-Islamist Jamaat-i-Islami (JI) have suffered the most. The JI saw its stronghold in Karachi taken over by the Mohajir Qaumi Movement (which would morph into the Muttahida Qaumi Movement-Pakistan), and later lost its Punjab voter base to the PML-N. The once-important JUP has virtually disappeared from the political landscape.

During the 1990s, the religious vote shifted away from religious parties towards the PML-N, boosting the latter's voter base while reducing the influence of religious groups. In 1988, the JI joined the Nawaz Sharif-led Pakistan Muslim League in an electoral alliance, facilitated by intelligence agencies, with the goal to stop a resurgent Benazir Bhutto. When JI walked out of the alliance — called the Islami Jamhoori Ittehad (IJI) — its voters decided to stay put with Nawaz Sharif.

Tahir Mehdi, an expert on elections, has made an interesting observation regarding the 1993 elections. "The six million votes that had purportedly been deposited by the 'establishment' in the IJI's account in 1988 were moved to Nawaz Sharif's account, while his politics earned him an interest of two million additional votes." The JI, however, went bankrupt.

Despite this trend, the Maulana successfully shielded his party from decline. In the past four decades, under Maulana's leadership, the JUI-F has managed to outperform other religious political parties. Differing from the JI's leadership, a youthful Maulana vigorously opposed Gen Zia's regime — an opposition that landed him in prison.

The JI's close ties with the establishment,

forged through its participation in the Afghan and Kashmir jihad, persisted into the 1990s. Throughout that decade, the JI leveraged its establishment connections and adopted populist strategies to engage voters, yet failed to translate this into electoral success.

As Zia had changed the game of politics in Pakistan through his crony politicians, mainstream parties focused on the politics of patronage. Maulana Fazl was shrewd enough to recognise that the path to maintaining relevance for his party lay in prioritising patronage over ideology, ensuring his party's continued influence and comfort by staying in power.

The era of Pervez Musharraf briefly boosted the fortunes of religious parties between 2002 and 2008. The Maulana was instrumental in forming a coalition of religious parties, which established the first government of religious parties in the erstwhile North West Frontier Province (renamed KP in 2010) under the banner of the Muttahida Majlis-i-Amal (MMA) in 2002.

After the MMA disbanded in 2008, the JI sat out the elections while the Maulana secured enough support to ally with the PPP government. By the 2013 elections, the PTI emerged as a formidable challenge to religious parties in KP, appealing to a portion of the JUI-F's base.

The 2018 elections were particularly perilous for established religious parties, facing not only the PTI's challenge, but also the rise of new religious movements, such as the Tehreek-i-Labbaik Pakistan (TLP) led by Khadim Rizvi and the Allah-o-Akbar Tehreek (AAT) led by Hafiz Saeed.

It was more out of fear than opportunity that the religious parties banded together again in 2018. Predictions foretold a significant defeat for the MMA — which indeed suffered a major loss. Adding to the blow, its leaders, including Maulana Fazl and Sirajul Haq of the JI, lost their seats.

The TLP, under Khadim Hussain Rizvi, garnered 2.2 million votes, ranking as the fifth-largest party based on vote count nationwide. Together, the TLP and the AAT secured over 2.3 million votes, a significant portion of the total 5.2 million votes earned by all religious parties.





## PRAGMATIC RELIGIOSITY

The Maulana secures his base's loyalty by showcasing a commitment to religious ideology and advocating for Sharia law through parliamentary and democratic means. For example, while steadfastly supporting democracy and allied with PPP, he also referred to Mumtaz Qadri as a shaheed [martyr] after he was hanged for murdering PPP's Punjab Governor Salman Taseer in 2011.

Earlier, in July 2005, the MMA, led by JUI-F, had passed the Hasba Bill, which aimed to create an Afghan Taliban-like department of vice and virtue, complete with an enforcement mechanism, and included measures such as the removal of mannequins from stores and the defacing of billboards featuring images of female models. However, in September of the same year, a nine-member bench of the Supreme Court struck down the bill, declaring it unconstitutional and in violation of the fundamental rights guaranteed by the Constitution.

Maulana Fazl positions himself as the heir to the pre-Partition Indian Deobandi movement in Pakistan. For instance, in 2017, JUI-F commemorated the centenary of the Jamiat Ulema-i-Hind, attracting delegations from 30 countries, underscoring the party's historic significance and international appeal. The event in Nowshera in KP was attended by high-profile religious figures, including the Imam-i-Kaaba and Saudi Arabia's religious affairs minister, highlighting the transnational recognition of the party.

On the other hand, similar to other major catch-all political parties, he has established a broad network of support, based on patronage within his constituencies and among politically active Deobandi clerics.

Since the restoration of democracy in 1988, the Maulana has consistently sought to be part of coalition governments, aiming to secure benefits and patronage for his supporters. The 2002 elections, under Gen Musharraf, marked a peak for the Maulana. As a leading figure in the MMA, an alliance of religious parties, he secured the position of chief minister for his party in

KP (then NWFP) and became the Leader of the Opposition in Pakistan's National Assembly (NA).

## CHANGE OF FORTUNES

The Maulana's favourable circumstances began to change with the emergence of the PTI. On one side, the PTI drew supporters from sub-nationalist parties like the MQM and the Awami National Party (ANP) while, on the other, it appealed to the educated demographics within the JJ and JUI-F in the KP region.



In 2013, Maulana Fazl tried to convince Nawaz Sharif to form a coalition government in KP. Nawaz Sharif, on the other hand, wanted to honour the Charter of Democracy, which promised giving a chance to a party with the largest share of votes to form a government. The PTI was given a chance to form the government in KP, even though the party was not a signatory to the charter. It was an act of graciousness the PML-N now considers a mistake, because it allowed the PTI to strengthen itself in KP.

In 2018, after a long time, the Maulana was not part of a coalition government — at the centre or in KP. Not only this, Imran Khan singled him out for public humiliation, calling him 'Diesel' and encouraging his supporters to mock him similarly, in reference to an accusation that the Maulana had allegedly benefitted financially by receiving fuel permits during the PPP government in the 1990s.

In Imran Khan's eyes, the Maulana — alongside Asif Zardari and Nawaz Sharif — symbolised the decadent politics of Pakistan that needed to be replaced.

The JUI-F as a whole also experienced a significant setback in KP at the hands of the PTI in the 2018 elections. Alongside other political parties, the Maulana cried foul over alleged rigging in elections.

In October 2019, Maulana Fazl initiated his 'Azadi [Freedom] March' to protest against electoral rigging and to pressure the

PTI out of power. At this juncture, other major political entities were subdued, their voices stifled in mainstream media, too intimidated by the establishment's influence to engage fully in protests.

The Maulana's sit-in lasted two weeks but managed to exert significant pressure on the government. It is acknowledged for its role in facilitating the departure of PML-N's ailing leader, Nawaz Sharif, from the country. Though the two major parties eschewed active involvement, their support lent credibility to the Maulana's allegations of election rigging and his calls for the government's resignation.

## TIP OF THE SPEAR

Initially, the Maulana's political collaborators needed him to be the 'bad cop', to show what 'good boys' could do but were good enough to control the temptation. The Maulana, on the other hand, used



dharnas to consolidate his position as a pre-eminent opposition politician. Thanks to his defiance, the Maulana became the undisputed leader of the resurgent opposition. He had inflicted the first cut on the government at a time when the opposition was shy of hurling a stone in the direction of Bani Gala.

This collaboration reached its peak with the formation of the Pakistan Democratic Movement (PDM) in September 2020 in Islamabad, with the Maulana elected as the leader of the alliance. The PDM issued 26 demands, which included the resignation of Prime Minister Imran Khan, the cessation of undemocratic forces interfering in politics, and the call for free and fair re-elections, after the implementation of electoral reforms.



Both the PML-N and the JUI-F wanted to resign from the assemblies, while the PPP resisted such a move. In April 2021, the PPP departed from the alliance after receiving a “show cause” notice from the PDM for its rejection of the mass resignation strategy.

Nevertheless, the PPP later re-aligned with the PDM parties to support a no-confidence motion against Imran Khan. This no-confidence motion was successfully passed in Pakistan’s parliament on April 10, 2022, marking a significant moment, as Khan became the first prime minister in Pakistan’s history to be ousted from office through such a vote.

Under the new regime, the Maulana gained significant influence over the KP government when his close relative, Haji Ghulam Ali, was appointed as the gover-

nor in November 2022. With the province under the nominal leadership of an ailing former bureaucrat as the caretaker chief minister, Haji Ghulam Ali effectively wielded authority for the duration of the caretaker government’s term. This extended period of interim governance allowed the Maulana to exert control over KP through his proxy.

Maulana Fazl seized this opportunity to intensify the distribution of patronage, utilising state resources to his advantage. Ghulam Ali, exceeding his official remit, used his position to advance projects and make appointments that benefitted the Maulana’s allies and supporters.

This strategic manoeuvring was aimed at bolstering Maulana’s position in anticipa-

tion of the KP elections, where he was expected to make significant gains and possibly lead the government. During this time, governance in the province deteriorated, accompanied by widespread allegations of corruption and appointments lacking merit.

## TRANSITIONAL PAINS

The Maulana’s defeat by the electorate in these recent elections signals a shift in the political landscape. Like other mainstream parties, Maulana has not adapted to the evolving political dynamics. The traditional politics of religious and patronage-based parties are facing challenges. Notably, many mainstream parties are experiencing dynastic transitions at a time when the youth are increasingly disenchanted with political dynasties.

The Maulana, along with his entire family, participated in the elections, with his two brothers and two sons in the running for the seats in the NA and the provincial legislature. Additionally, he nominated two women from his family for the reserved seats. Despite these efforts, none of his relatives secured a seat, although the Maulana himself managed to win a seat from Balochistan. The Awami National Party (ANP), another major party in KP undergoing a dynastic transition, has encountered a similar dilemma.

It will be unfair not to count the challenges the JUI-F faced due to attacks from terrorists. The JUI-F became a target for terrorists during the election campaign, with its rallies increasingly attacked in Pakistan in recent years. The most devastating attack occurred on July 31, 2023, killing at least 54 people. The Islamic State Khorasan Province (ISKAP) claimed responsibility for this tragic event. Some attacks were suspected to be orchestrated by the Tehreek-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP).

During a hectic period of election campaigning, the Maulana visited Afghanistan, aiming to persuade the Afghan Taliban to rein in the banned TTP and prevent its use of Afghan territory for anti-Pakistan activities. He was officially received and met the Islamic Emirate’s top leadership. On the very day the Maulana was meeting with the Afghan prime minister, Mullah Hasan Akhund, the TTP launched a deadly assault on police officers guarding polio vaccinators in Bajaur, resulting in the death of at least six police personnel.

Maulana’s initiative failed to bear fruit. While it might have appealed to the ultraconservative part of the electorate who advocate for open borders with Afghanistan, it failed to convince the mainstream voter in KP to vote for the Maulana. It also failed to impress the establishment, which has vowed to halt terrorism emanating from Afghan territory.

PPP leader Faisal Karim Kundi, who competed against the Maulana and also lost to a PTI candidate, labelled Fazl a “spent cartridge” in politics and reminded him about the times when Imran Khan





would openly criticise him. In reality, traditional parties are experiencing a downturn, and their waning influence is paving the way for new entrants.

## WHAT IS THE MAULANA'S END GAME?

Just as the PPP's decline in Punjab cleared the path for PTI's rise, the diminishing presence of mainstream religious parties has led to the emergence of extremist groups like the TLP. In Punjab, the TLP has occupied the space once held by other religious factions.

The decline in Deobandi politics is attributed to both internal and external factors. Globally, a new form of religious politics has emerged, one that leans on identity over scholarly religious arguments. Today, religious sentiment outweighs direct religious political engagement. In this context, Imran Khan has arguably outperformed traditional religious leaders.

The de-intellectualisation of the religious parties can also be counted as a leading factor. For example, since Maulana Maududi, there has been a lack of comparable intellectual leadership in the JI. This has resulted in a diminished ideological appeal to the religiously inclined middle class. The party has struggled to expand its ideological

foundations and remain politically relevant within the evolving political landscape.

The longstanding rapport between secular ruling elites and Deobandi scholars, which persisted for nearly two centuries, is now challenged by the emergence of new religious parties, introducing fresh social dynamics into politics. The TLP's appeal to the religiously inclined lower middle class, disengaged from PTI's political activism and disillusioned with conventional patronage politics, mirrors Imran Khan's mobilisation of the educated middle class by voicing their grievances.

Despite their lack of widespread popular support, the ulema [religious scholars] have established a strong alliance with the country's secular ruling elite. This partnership supports the ruling elite by validating their authority, fostering a national identity rooted in religion, and mobilising religiously motivated young men for various political and foreign policy projects. Moreover, the ruling elite indulges these religious factions, driven by fear and, in the case of politicians, the pursuit of electoral votes.

This dynamic has led to an unprecedented amalgamation of religion and the modern nation-state, a blend that has had disastrous consequences. Although the ulema aimed to dominate the state apparatus — as seen

in Iran — they have instead settled into a profitable compromise with the state, akin to the situation in Saudi Arabia.

As JUI's electoral prospects diminish, will the Maulana revert to his base and take more extremist and populist positions in future or will he keep trying his luck through mainstream politics?

The Maulana's display of anger could be a strategic manoeuvre designed to regain a prominent position on the political stage once more and claim a better share in the new set-up. Both the Maulana and the establishment need each other and the system cannot afford to alienate him altogether.

Currently, it seems likely that the Maulana will be open to genuine efforts at reconciliation from both the establishment and the new government. Though he did not get the kind of "support" he wanted during elections, and he may not get the share in government that he aspires to, he may yet be mollified if offered a share he can be content with.

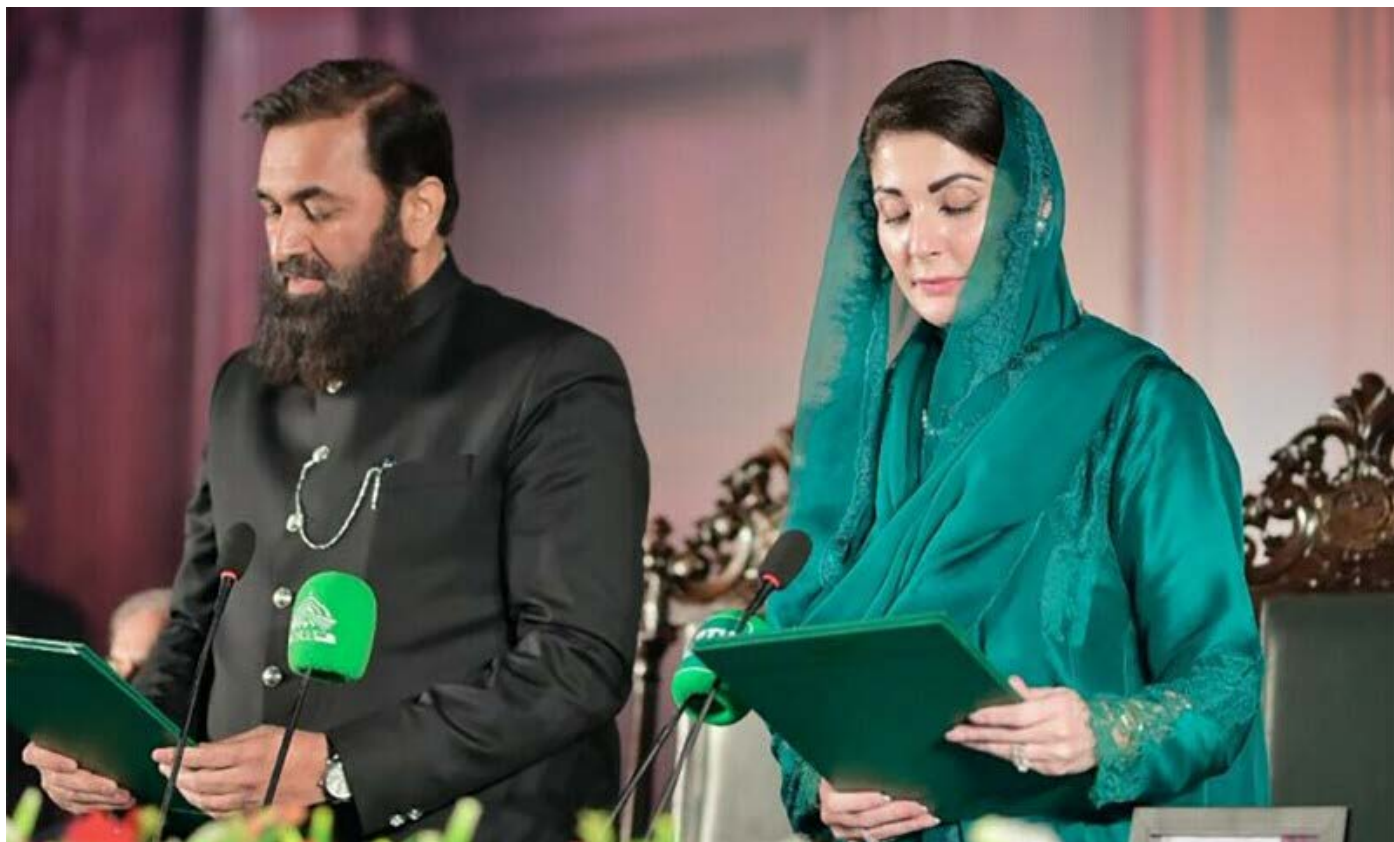
The PTI remains the Maulana's major political challenge and he cannot fight it alone.

Courtesy Dawn





# Maryam Nawaz's Leadership: A Paradigm Shift in Pakistani Politics or a Familiar Tale?



By Nimra Atiq

As Maryam Nawaz Sharif takes the oath as Chief Minister, it is essential to evaluate her strengths and weaknesses and understand her political journey to this point. We need to examine the phases of her past political and personal life, the qualities that could help her succeed, and the potential challenges that may arise.

Maryam Nawaz Sharif's nomination as the first female Chief Minister is a significant step towards gender equality in Pakistan. It is also a clear indication that the Sharif family has chosen her as their political successor. Since the passing of Mian Muhammad Sharif, Nawaz Sharif has been officially appointed as the head of the family, and the family's political decisions, social policies, and internal conflicts revolve around him. Even during disagreements, the Sharif family shows loyalty to Nawaz Sharif's decisions.

The decision to nominate Maryam Nawaz and Hamza Shahbaz as Chief Ministers was made by Nawaz Sharif, and Shahbaz Sharif and Hamza endorsed it. Hamza will now take the oath for the National Assembly instead of the Punjab Assembly and assist Shahbaz Sharif there.

Maryam Nawaz Sharif is known for her assertiveness and emotional politics. She stands by her father during the resistance against the authorities without fear of jail or NAB scrutiny. Her courage during her imprisonment surprised many, as she actively participated in political decision-making. Her active role in major decisions, be it in social media or television channels, indicates her involvement in Nawaz Sharif's vigorous defense strategy.

During the challenging times when her father was in solitary confinement,

Maryam Nawaz spent hours in his company every day. This drew criticism from opponents, including General Bajwa, who had reservations about her conversations and confrontations with Nawaz Sharif. In that period, PTI and the establishment were aligned, so Imran Khan and PTI constantly opposed Maryam, making her a target.

Meanwhile, an internal circle was formed within the Sharif family, including Kulsoom Nawaz, Maryam Nawaz, and Ishaq Dar. This inner circle played a definitive role in making political decisions during that time. Chaudhry Nisar Ali Khan had spoken against Maryam during this period, and attempts were made to implicate her in Dawn Leaks, but General Bajwa agreed to exclude her name at Chaudhry Nisar's insistence.

Maryam Nawaz was often seen as the





destined successor of the Sharif political legacy. She played a pivotal role in the media strategy for both the federal government and her party, and her opinions frequently shaped the course of governance and political decisions.

Encircled by a group of staunch supporters, many within the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz envisioned her as the future leader who would eventually steer the party. Until recently, Maryam's influence on her father was so profound that her counsel would often override the input of others, leading the senior Sharif to alter his decisions to align with his daughter's preferences.

However, the political landscape appears to have shifted. The removal of Nawaz Sharif from his official residence has been marked by a series of missteps, which have been collectively termed a 'tragedy of errors'. In this narrative, Maryam is seen as bearing part of the responsibility along with her father. Critics argue that the former prime minister's decision to empower his daughter excessively led to a growing rift with state institutions, the alienation of long-standing party members, and the disregard of their guidance, ultimately resulting in significant political costs for him.

Even during the PTI government, Maryam Nawaz organized rallies in major cities,

gaining acceptance due to her resistance style and behavior. The Sharif family initially entered politics in opposition to the Pakistan People's Party. With the support of the establishment and the right-wing, they built the "Ladkana" Punjab, focusing on development and political grooming, and retaliated against the Bhutto party.

In the Sharif family, remote control is still with Mian Nawaz Sharif due to their age-old traditions. In many ways, this can be seen as positive, but even after winning the position of Chief Minister, Shahbaz Sharif's control may still remain with his father. While seeking parental guidance is not inherently negative, it can create a conflict between power centers.

Maryam Nawaz has very little governance experience, and how she handles the millions of people of Punjab, its unruly police force, and bureaucracy with her limited experience will test her capabilities. Her dressing, fitting into the "working woman" mold, will also need to be a calculated choice considering societal expectations. Being the Chief Minister is not just about winning political debates for Maryam Nawaz, but also about demonstrating the governance style of her father and uncle. The political future of the Sharif family depends on Maryam Nawaz's performance. If she successfully navigates through the political intricacies and breaks the spell of PTI, there is a future for her and

her family. However, if she fails to deliver, the fate of the Sharif family might mirror the decline of the Pakistan People's Party in Punjab.

The current political challenge is determining the course of action for Imran Khan. The PML-N has not yet provided a definitive solution to this issue. Will Maryam follow the past pattern of suppressing PTI, initiating legal cases, and putting them in jail, or will she seek a new path through reconciliation and compromise? While Maryam Nawaz symbolizes positive progress for women in a predominantly male society, leading a cabinet, assembly, and secretaries dominated by men will be a challenge. Each person's freedom is crucial, and while women have the right to choose their attire, working women face different expectations in society. Figures like Benazir Bhutto and Fatima Jinnah strategically altered their dress to represent working women.

Maryam Nawaz's tenure as Chief Minister is not only a new political experience for her but also a test of her governance skills. Her political acumen has consistently gained high marks, but whether she can govern Punjab successfully remains to be seen. It is crucial to critically examine her strengths and weaknesses rationally and support her as she navigates the complexities of political life.





# Rana Aftab Ahmed Khan: The Political Maestro of Punjab's Political Arena

By Nimra Atiq

Hailing from the vibrant city of Faisalabad, Rana Aftab Ahmed, a prominent political figure has become a significant player in Punjab's political landscape. He has won a seat in the provincial assembly for the fourth consecutive term, making him a Member of the Provincial Assembly (MPA). What's even more remarkable is his decision to run for the position of Chief Minister, which has garnered widespread attention and support.

He is an accomplished lawyer and seasoned politician who has been an active participant in Faisalabad's political sphere since 1988. He has shown resilience and commitment throughout his political journey, from his time as a member of the Pakistan People's Party (PPP) to his recent association with the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI). Rana Aftab Ahmed Khan has an impressive political background, having served as a member of the Provincial Assembly of Punjab for five consecutive terms since 1988. He made his mark in the legal arena before venturing into politics. His consistent electoral success speaks volumes about his popularity and the trust reposed in him by the constituents of PP-108. He has faced and triumphed over formidable opponents, making him a prominent figure in Punjab's political arena.

In the 1988 Pakistani general election, Rana Aftab was elected as a Member of the Provincial Assembly of Punjab for the first time, representing Constituency PP-52 (Faisalabad) as a PPP candidate. Over the years, he contested several elections, representing different constituencies and political affiliations. Notably, he was appointed as the President of PPP Punjab by Asif Ali Zardari in 2008. Rana Aftab Ahmed has held various positions, such as Provincial Minister of Punjab for Planning and Development.

His work as a Provincial Minister of Punjab for Planning and Development demonstrated his ability to manage large projects and

implement policies that benefit the public. Additionally, he has been involved in legislative affairs, participating in international conferences, and maintaining a family history of political involvement.

Rana Aftab Ahmed's political journey took a significant turn when he joined the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) under the guidance of its founder, Imran Khan. His dedication to the party's vision and commitment to the betterment of Faisalabad earned him the trust of party leaders.

Recently, he was nominated for the prestigious position of Chief Minister of Punjab against Maryam Nawaz, making him the first MPA to vie for this role with recorded votes. This nomination came after security concerns led to the replacement of the initial nominee, Mian Aslam Iqbal. Despite being nominated, Rana Aftab faced challenges during the election process where he did not receive any votes due to PTI's boycott following the denial of his request to address the House.

Unlike many politicians who retreat from public life after an electoral setback, Rana Aftab took a different path. Rather than succumbing to political obscurity, he immediately initiated groundwork for the upcoming elections. His tireless efforts and strategic planning demonstrate a tenacious spirit determined to serve the people and contribute positively to the political landscape.

What sets Rana Aftab apart is not only his political acumen but also his accessibility and humility. Despite holding significant political stature, he remains deeply connected to the grassroots. One notable aspect of Rana Aftab Khan's approach to politics is his hands-on engagement. He managed his party office, answered phone calls from the public without the aid of a personal assistant, and even provided training sessions at his office during this period. His accessibility and direct interaction with the community have earned him a reputation for transparency and sincerity.



During the interim period after the 2018 elections, Rana Aftab Khan did not just sit idle. He actively participated in party activities, dedicating time to training sessions, especially for polling agents. Notably, he took the initiative to familiarize his team with the latest technology provided by the party, ensuring effective utilization of social media platforms.

Rana Aftab Khan's son, Barrister Rana Asad Aftab, played a significant role in mobilizing the youth and managing the campaign. The collaborative effort between the father-son duo has been instrumental in building a robust social media presence and engaging with the youth effectively. With an eye on the 2024 elections, Rana Aftab Khan has strategically planned his campaign, utilizing the lessons learned from previous electoral experiences. His proactive approach includes implementing advanced technology in polling stations and leveraging social media to connect with voters.

Beyond politics, Rana Aftab envisions a brighter future for Faisalabad, with plans to establish hospitals, and universities, and tackle issues like drug abuse and industrialist rights. His vision encompasses not just political aspirations but a genuine desire to uplift his community, standing firm alongside his party, Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI), and its legacy.





# Ali Amin Gandapur's Political Ascension Clouded by Legal Challenges



By Daniyal Wali

In the aftermath of Pakistan's 2024 elections, the reverberations continue to resonate through the intricate wall of the political landscape, casting a shadow of controversies and complexities that stubbornly refuse to dissipate. Allegations of rigging, raised by both human rights organizations and political parties, have added an additional layer of intricacy to the unfolding narrative, sparking debates and fueling a sense of unease and uncertainty among the populace.

Contrary to predictions, independent candidates aligned with former Prime Minister Imran Khan's Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) emerged as the leading force at the national level, surpassing established parties such as Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N), Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP), and Muttahida Qaumi Movement (MQM). The absence of an absolute

majority has paved the way for a potential coalition government, prompting concerns about its ability to address pressing economic and security issues. Persistent allegations of vote tampering have further clouded the electoral outcome, triggering calls for a comprehensive investigation.

In a resounding victory, the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) achieved a clean sweep in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KPK), securing an impressive 87 seats out of a total of 118. This dominance far surpassed its closest competitors, with the Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam (JUIF) and Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PMLN) both securing 9 seats each. With this commanding lead, the PTI is poised to form the government in KPK, solidifying its stronghold in the province for the third time.

However, the nomination of Ali Amin

Gandapur as the Chief Minister (CM) for candidate for Khyber Pakhtunkhwa has stirred controversy and raised reservations from opposition parties. To understand the implications of his potential leadership role in the province, it becomes vital to analyze Gandapur's profile in detail. With their recent sweeping victory, PTI has once again established its dominance in KPK, underscoring a significant and recurring electoral success.

## Ali Amin Gandapur's Profile: A Political Journey Marked by Resilience

Sardar Ali Amin Khan Gandapur, a key figure in Pakistani politics, has forged a career marked by resilience and unwavering dedication to public service. Born into



the politically influential Gandapur tribe of Pashtuns in Dera Ismail Khan, his trajectory in politics mirrors a deep commitment to his community and the nation at large.

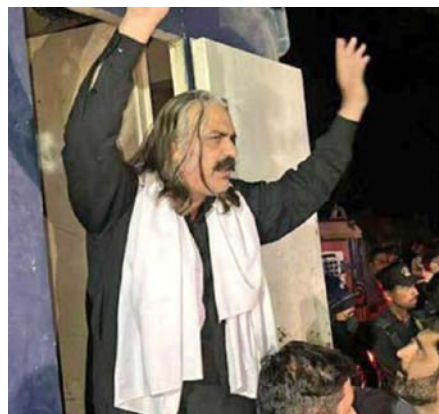
Ali Amin's early life was shaped by a family deeply immersed in politics, with his father, Major (ret'd) Aminullah Gandapur, having served as a cabinet member under Pervez Musharraf. Educationally, Ali Amin's journey began at Saint Helens High School in Dera Ismail Khan, but driven by a passion for sports, particularly squash, he moved to Peshawar and completed his matriculation at the Police Model School. Later, he pursued his BA (honors) at Gomal University in Dera Ismail Khan.

His political journey commenced in 2013, winning a seat in the Provincial Assembly of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa as a Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) candidate from PK-64 (Dera Ismail Khan-I). Following this success, he became part of the provincial cabinet under Chief Minister Pervez Khattak, holding the crucial position of Provincial Minister of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa for Revenue and Estate. In 2018, Ali Amin transitioned to national politics, securing a seat in the National Assembly from Constituency NA-38 (Dera Ismail Khan-I). His rise within PTI was further solidified when, on October 5, 2018, he was inducted into the federal cabinet by Prime Minister Imran Khan. In this role, he served as the Federal Minister for Kashmir Affairs and Gilgit-Baltistan, contributing to addressing issues in the region and shaping national policies.

Imran Khan's continued trust in Ali Amin was evident in 2024 when he nominated him as the PTI candidate for the Chief Minister of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa after the general elections. This nomination underscores Ali Amin's standing within the party and his perceived ability to lead at the provincial level. Beyond his individual achievements, the Gandapur family legacy in politics extends to his brother, Sardar Faisal Amin Khan Gandapur, who is also actively involved in the political arena. This family commitment to public service highlights the significance of civic responsibility in shaping the region's political landscape.

## Legal Challenges for Gandapur

Ali Amin Gandapur, a prominent figure in Pakistani finds himself entangled in a web of legal challenges. The Azad Jammu & Kashmir Election Commission has recently issued an arrest warrant against him, alleging contempt of court in connection with the 2021 elections. The arrest warrants stem from allegations of violating the code of conduct during the 2021 elections, with the notification issued based on an application filed by lawyer Raja Zulqarnain Abid. The Election Commission of Azad Kashmir has directed the Dera Ismail Khan deputy commissioner to apprehend Gandapur and present him before the court by February 28.



Adding complexity to the situation, it was reported earlier that the Peshawar High Court's Dera Ismail Khan Bench had granted protective bail to Gandapur in 26 cases registered against him by various police stations. These cases include charges of assault and corruption registered in cities such as Rawalpindi, Lahore, Faisalabad, and Gujranwala. The recent development of protective bail being granted by the Peshawar High Court provides Gandapur temporary relief until March 9 in certain cases. However, the broader legal landscape remains complex, with cases pending in multiple jurisdictions and accusations ranging from assault to corruption. The issuance of an arrest warrant by the Election Commission of Azad Kashmir underlines the challenges Gandapur faces in reconciling legal obligations with his political aspirations. The outcome of these

legal proceedings will not only impact his personal standing but may also have implications for the political landscape, given his prominent role within the PTI.

Gandapur's legal troubles extend beyond the recent arrest warrant, encompassing a range of cases scattered across different regions. Despite being named in multiple cases, the PTI leader has sought protection from the judiciary, approaching the Lahore High Court against his potential arrest. His legal counsel argued that the government's actions against PTI were politically motivated, contending that undisclosed cases had been registered against him in Punjab. In a strategic move, Gandapur had also requested the court to issue an injunctive order against his possible arrest in any undisclosed case. This legal maneuvering suggests a proactive stance in dealing with the legal challenges, aiming to secure protection and prevent any adverse actions against him.

As the legal drama unfolds, the focus shifts to whether Gandapur can successfully navigate through the legal complexities while simultaneously pursuing his political ambitions. The judicial decisions in the coming weeks will undoubtedly shape the trajectory of Ali Amin Gandapur's political future and contribute to the broader discourse on the intersection of law and politics in Pakistan. In a landscape where the political terrain is already marked by uncertainty and intrigue, the fate of Ali Amin Gandapur adds an extra layer of complexity. Will legal challenges hinder his ascent to the coveted position of Chief Minister, or will he emerge unscathed, proving his resilience and political acumen?

The unfolding events post-Pakistan's 2024 elections provide a gripping narrative that goes beyond the usual political analyses. It is a tale of ambition, power, and the delicate dance between legality and political maneuvering. As the nation watches, the story of Ali Amin Gandapur becomes a microcosm of the broader struggles within Pakistan's political arena, where the consequences of legal battles extend far beyond the individual, shaping the destiny of a nation at a crucial crossroads.





# Profile: Anthony Naveed, the third minority deputy speaker in Pakistan's history

*Naveed says he never even dreamt of becoming a speaker*



## TTI Report

**S**indh Assembly's newly-elected deputy speaker Anthony Naveed never even dreamt or aspired to hold the position, but now he has become the third minority member in the country to oversee the proceedings of a legislature.

His ascent is remarkable given the curtailing religious freedom in the country and probably it was the political environment that led many people to wrongly believe that he was the first non-Muslim to become a deputy speaker in Pakistan.

Between 1993 and 1996. Bashir Masih and Arjun Das Bugti served as deputy speakers in the Balochistan Assembly.

Bugti eventually migrated to India.

Naveed, who is now 53, was born to a modest Catholic family in Karachi's Akhtar Colony. His father held a private job, but is described by Naveed as a man who laboured to make ends meet for his family. He grew

up with a brother and two sisters.

After matriculating from St Patrick's School, Naveed gained an engineering diploma in garment technology from the Pakistan Swedish Institute of Technology.

He showed an interest in community activities early and went on to serve as a vice-president of Christian Boys Association and also worked with Pakistan Christian Congress.

His first foray into politics came in 2005, when the Pakistan Peoples Party gave him a ticket in Karachi's local body election. He contested as a vice-chairman from his native Akhtar Colony, in an alliance that pitched a Jamat-e-Islami candidate as chairman.

Naveed told the BBC that his victory in that election was the experiment in bringing a member of the Christian community into Pakistan's mainstream politics.

He went on to become a special assistant to Sindh's chief minister in 2016, and began to set his sights on becoming a legislator.

Although he also eyed a Senate spot, the party chose him as a reserved seat candidate in Sindh Assembly, where he served from 2018 to 2023. When elected, he was the lone Christian member in the house.

Naveed says he ran a campaign under National Lobbying Delegation for Minority Rights in Pakistan to get rights enshrined in the constitution to members of minority groups.

He told a recent interview that he had 'not even dreamt' of becoming a deputy speaker as the post left very little space for him to act as a legislator.

However, he is still hopeful that he can get work done in terms of quotas for minorities in education and employment as well as Christian personal law.



# PMLN, PPP, PTI to maintain significant presence in Senate

*Elections to fill the seats allocated to each province are held in accordance with the system of proportional representation*

## By Our Correspondent

Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PMLN), Pakistan Peoples' Party (PPP) and Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) are set to maintain their dominance in the Senate despite retirement of several of their senators on March 11.

Keeping in view their strength in the provincial legislatures, following the recent general elections, both PMLN and PPP are likely to pose a challenge to PTI, which, if crosses all legal hurdles, can emerge as the largest party in the Upper House of the Parliament.

The term-wise data of senators explains that PMLN will lose 11 out of its total 16 members, whereas PPP will fall short of 12 out of 21 members, as they complete their six-year term. However, PTI, which had made its way to the Senate for the first time in 2015, will lose only seven out of its 24 members, and hence, will still have 17 remaining in the House even prior to Senate polls. Subject to clearance from the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) regarding its intra-party polls, fixed for March 3 and other legal matters, PTI is in a position to possibly outnumber the other two major political parties because of its numerical dominance in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Assembly and significant presence in Punjab Assembly.

The term of a senator is six years, but half of them retire every three years, and elections are held for new members, as the Senate is the only legislature that remains in existence and is not subject to dissolution.

The full strength of the Senate has been 100, including 23 members each from the four federating units, and four each from erstwhile Fata and Islamabad. The 23 seats allocated to a province comprise 14 general seats, four reserved for women, four for technocrats and one for a minority member. However, now only 96 members will be part of the House, for the representation of the erstwhile tribal areas will end, following the 25th constitutional amendment, which merged them with Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP).

Accordingly, the upcoming elections to the Upper House of the Parliament will elect 48 new senators: 11 each from all the four provinces on general and technocrats seats, two from Islamabad and two minority members from Punjab and Sindh as well.

The House presently consists of 97 members, due to the death of PMLN's Rana Maqbool Ahmed and the resignation of Shaukat Tarin. Likewise, Balochistan Awami Party's Anwaarul Haq Kakar also resigned after assuming the office of the caretaker prime minister.

While PTI's 17 members will exhaust their term in 2027, the seven retiring PTI members include Leader of the Opposition in the House Dr Shahzad Waseem. Prominent among those retiring from PPP include Mian Raza Rabbani, Maula Bux Chandio and Qurat-ulain Marri.

Similarly, Leader of the House Muhammad Ishaq Dar and Mushahid Hussain Syed are among PMLN's legislators bowing out next



month. Five members, belonging to Balochistan Awami Party (BAP), are also completing their term and most prominent among them is Senate Chairman Muhammad Sadiq Sanjrani.

Two senators each from the Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam (JUIF) and the National Party (NP) whose term will end on March 11: former law minister Farogh Naseem is the only senator from the Muttahida Qaumi Movement-Pakistan (MQM-P), who will complete his term.

Likewise, Pashtunkhwa Milli Awami Party (PkMAP), PML-Functional and Jamaat-e-Islami (JI) have one senator each and all the three set to retire in March.

All six independent senators in the present House are also set to retire in March and they are Deputy Senate Chairman Mirza Muhammad Afridi, Dilawar Khan, Hidayatullah, Hilalur Rehman, Naseebullah Bazai and Shamim Afridi.

It is quite likely that quite a few of those, who are retiring, may return to the House, after the Senate elections. And, this partly depends on their respective party's priorities as well as their numerical presence in the respective legislatures.

In the backdrop of their power-sharing deal, it is obvious, PPP will most likely field its candidate for the slot of chairman Senate, who will be supported by PMLN and their other allies.

Elections to fill the seats allocated to each province are held in accordance with the system of proportional representation, by means of the single transferable vote, and members of each provincial assembly elect their respective representatives, whereas members of the National Assembly vote to elect senators from Islamabad.

Chapter VII of the Elections Act, 2017, deals with the Senate elections while Section 107 says: Notification for election.—(1) The Commission shall, by notification in the official Gazette, call upon the members of the assembly of a province or, as the case may be, the National Assembly to elect such number of members to the Senate from that province or the Islamabad Capital Territory, as the case may be, as is specified in the notification.

Courtesy The News



# Foreign Debt Repayment and a New Deal with the IMF are tough tasks for New Govt

*The United States Institute of Peace underscores Pakistan's precarious position amidst surging inflation, internal political tensions, and escalating terrorism*



By Javed Mahmood

Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif's led government faces multiple challenges. The two foremost challenges for the new government are the repayment of a huge amount of foreign loans, about 75 billion dollars in three years, and signing a new deal with the IMF for another three years. It may involve up to 8 billion dollars new bailout package, including 1.5 billion dollars in climate financing. As the ongoing IMF program is ending in March 2024, the government and IMF officials will sit again to work out another bailout loan program to sustain economic stability and growth in Pakistan. Why is the new IMF program essential for Pakistan? Analysts believe that a new deal with the IMF will empower Pakistan to repay its foreign loans conveniently, attract foreign investment of billions of dollars, and put the country back on track for growth and sustainability.

Recently, a notable US think tank has sounded the alarm, cautioning that Pakistan faces an imposing task of repaying a staggering 75 billion dollars

in external debt from April 2024 to June 2026, with potentially disruptive effects looming if it defaults. The analysis, released by the United States Institute of Peace (USIP), underscores Pakistan's precarious position amidst surging inflation, internal political tensions, and escalating terrorism. The country's extensive external debt obligations pose a significant risk of default amid its ongoing economic crisis, characterized by a weak local currency, dwindling foreign exchange reserves, and high external debt.

Describing the USD 75 billion debt burden as substantial for an economy valued at USD 350 billion, the USIP report highlights the potential ripple effects of a default. Over the next three years, Pakistan faces substantial repayments to Chinese financial institutions, private creditors, and Saudi Arabia. The report notes that in the near term, from April to June 2023, the country faces intense debt repayment pressure, with an external debt servicing burden of USD 4.5 billion.

Of particular concern are the significant repayments due in June, including a USD 1 billion Chinese SAFE deposit and roughly USD 1.4 billion from a Chinese commercial loan. Pakistani authorities are hopeful of negotiating refinancing and rollover agreements with the Chinese, as has been done in the past. Even if Pakistan manages to navigate these immediate obligations, the fiscal year ahead presents challenges, with debt servicing projected to soar to nearly USD 25 billion.

The country has received USD 1.1 billion tranche from the International Monetary Fund (IMF), in November of the previous year. These funds, part of a USD 6.5 billion bailout package approved by the IMF in 2019, are deemed vital to stave off default on external debt obligations.

Meanwhile, the State Bank of Pakistan (SBP) recently revealed that Pakistan faces a looming task of repaying \$27 billion in foreign debt by November 2024, encompassing both principal loans and interest expenses. Examining

SBP data in depth exposes that between December 2023 and November 2024, Pakistan is obligated to repay \$23.83 billion in foreign debt and an additional \$3.64 billion in interest payments. Notably, the SBP's latest update, released on Wednesday, indicates a significant payment of \$4.3 billion in debt and interest costs due in December 2023 alone.

According to the repayment schedule, Pakistan is mandated to settle \$3.47 billion in January and February, with an additional \$19.71 billion due from March to November. Economic analysts predict that

would be able "to quickly negotiate a new International Monetary Fund (IMF) program" soon after the ongoing programme expires in April. It said that Pakistan's political risks remain high, "following a highly controversial general elections held on 8 February 2024".

Moody's was of the view that although a coalition government looks set to be formed primarily by Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz Party and Pakistan People's Party, "there is high uncertainty around the newly elected government's willingness and ability to quickly negotiate a new IMF

try of Energy officials have confirmed meeting the end-December targets, which include containing the flow of circular debt below Pakistani Rs 385 billion, timely adjustments in electricity prices, and mitigating the rise in line losses.

The IMF will assess the implementation of these targets during loan negotiations under the second review of the \$3 billion bailout package. The review mission is expected to visit Islamabad either by the end of this month or early next month, contingent upon the completion of government formation at the federal and provincial levels. Despite the requirement to limit circular debt to Rs 385 billion by the end of December 2023, the increase was contained within Rs 378 billion, slightly surpassing the IMF's expectations.

In recent statements, a senior IMF official expressed readiness to collaborate with the new government in Islamabad but refrained from commenting on the incarcerated former Prime Minister Imran Khan's demand for an "audit" of the election results before approving further loans for the country. Pakistan's heavy reliance on the IMF is evident as it currently implements a short-term \$3 billion agreement. The IMF has disbursed two tranches of the loan, with the final tranche of \$1.2 billion anticipated by the end of March or early April. Analysts suggest that the incoming government will need to engage in fresh negotiations with the IMF to secure additional financial assistance. Previously, the IMF's review mission was slated to visit Pakistan in the first week of February, but the delegation postponed its trip on the eve of the general elections.

## High Inflation continues to grip Pakistan

In January 2024, Pakistan continued to grapple with high inflation, as indicated by a 28.3% year-on-year (YoY) increase and a 1.8% month-on-month (MoM) rise in the Consumer Price Index (CPI), according to the latest data released by the Pakistan Bureau of Statistics (PBS).

Though slightly lower than the 29.7% YoY and 0.8% MoM figures from December 2023, the January 2024 CPI still surpassed the rates seen in January 2023, which were 27.6% YoY and 2.9% MoM. The trend of



Pakistan will likely seek another IMF loan program to ensure the smooth repayment of its debts after the current standby arrangement concludes in March 2024. The impending payments slightly exceed the average forecast of \$20-22 billion for the next 12 months. The anticipated IMF loan program is expected to serve as a crucial safety net, bridging the projected current account deficit.

In December 2023, SBP Governor Jameel Ahmad stated that Pakistan was slated to pay off \$24.6 billion in foreign debt and servicing by the end of June 2024. This total encompasses a rollover of \$12.4 billion, with \$9.3 billion of this amount already confirmed by creditors.

## Uncertainty over new IMF deal

Meanwhile, Moody's warned that it remains highly uncertain whether the newly elected government of Pakistan

program soon after the current one expires in April."

"The coalition government's electoral mandate may not be sufficiently strong to pursue difficult reforms that will likely be required by a successor program. Until a new program is agreed to, Pakistan's ability to secure loans from other bilateral and multilateral partners will be severely constrained," it said.

## Pakistan meets IMF conditions

Meanwhile, Finance Ministry officials have reported that Pakistan has successfully met the International Monetary Fund's (IMF) benchmarks concerning the energy sector, potentially paving the way for the disbursement of the next loan tranche amounting to \$1.2 billion. This development comes ahead of the anticipated visit of the IMF's review mission to Pakistan, as the country grapples with financial constraints. Minis-



elevated inflation, surpassing 20% since July 2023, reflects persistent pressure on essential commodity prices. Breaking it down further, urban CPI inflation stood at 30.2% YoY and 1.8% MoM in January 2024, compared to 30.9% YoY and 0.7% MoM in December 2023, and 24.4% YoY and 2.4% MoM in January 2023. Similarly, rural CPI inflation was 25.7% YoY and 1.9% MoM in January 2024, compared to 27.9% YoY and 1.0% MoM in December 2023, and 32.3% YoY and 3.6% MoM in January 2023.

The primary drivers of inflation in January 2024 were food and beverages, which saw a 37.4% YoY and 3.5% MoM increase, along with housing, water, electricity, gas, and other fuels, which rose by 28.9% YoY and 3.1% MoM. Various food items such as chicken, tomatoes, onions, eggs, fresh vegetables, pulse gram, fish, tea, dry fruits, fresh fruits, pulse moong, gur, sugar, besan, and meat saw significant month-on-month increases, while items like potatoes, cooking oil, vegetable ghee, and mustard oil experienced slight decreases.

Year-on-year, the prices of tomatoes, cigarettes, fresh vegetables, condiments and spices, sugar, beans, gur, beverages, tea, eggs, pulse mash, wheat flour, potatoes, dry fruits, sweetmeat, dessert preparation, milk powder, rice, pulse masoor, pan prepared, readymade food, and wheat products showed sharp increases, while mustard oil, onions, and vegetable ghee saw marginal decreases. Non-food items also saw price hikes in January 2024, particularly in communication services, woolen ready-made garments, electricity charges, liquefied hydrocarbons, marriage hall charges, personal grooming services, solid fuel, garbage collection, furniture, and furnishing on a month-on-month basis. Conversely, motor fuel, construction input items, motor vehicles, and motor vehicle accessories experienced price decreases.

## SBP's foreign exchange reserves decline in Feb 2024

The foreign exchange reserves held by the State Bank of Pakistan (SBP) decreased by \$43.7 million or 0.54% WoW to \$8.01 billion during the week ended on February 16, 2024, according to the data released by

the central bank last week. The central bank cited debt repayments as the reason for this decline.

Similarly, the country's total reserves fell by \$51.3m or 0.39% WoW to \$13.1bn. The reserves held by commercial banks diminished by \$7.6m or 0.15% WoW to \$5.09bn. In the current fiscal year, total liquid foreign reserves have increased by \$3.94bn or 42.99%. Meanwhile, the current calendar year has seen a decrease of \$0.12bn or 0.93%.



## Remittances show a significant growth in January

In January, Pakistan experienced a significant increase in remittances, with a growth of 26% totaling \$2.4 billion every year. This surpasses even the highest figure recorded in January 2022, which stood at \$2.2 billion. The State Bank of Pakistan disclosed this important development on Monday by releasing the latest remittances data. In the first seven months, the inflows of remittances increased to \$15.8 billion. Remittances inflows in January 2024 mainly originated from Saudi Arabia, UAE, the UK, and the United States of America. The implementation of stringent monetary and fiscal policies has reduced the demand for foreign currency as a store

of value, leading to stability in the Pakistani Rupee (PKR) exchange rate, which has remained steady for almost a year (at PKR 280/USD between March 23 and February 24).

The caretaker government, in conjunction with pressure from the State Bank of Pakistan, has issued clear warnings to exchange companies, speculators, and investors. Additionally, the consolidation of exchange companies and government

incentives for increased remittances to the banking sector are contributing to the country's economic resilience. While the requirement for external debt repayments necessitates higher export growth, the extension of debt and positive net present value (NPV) of foreign investment have helped maintain balance in the currency markets.

Despite offering a risk-free return of 20%, capital has yet to shift away from the USD. Continued adherence to IMF reforms will be crucial in sustaining stability. To achieve an optimal balance of stability, growth, debt reduction, and tax expansion, it is essential to keep the Current Account near balanced or within 1-2% of GDP. Though it's a long journey, every month's progress is significant.

# Stabilizing the economy

*Mueen Afzal mentioned two economists whose writings have fundamentally influenced thinking on development economics*

*[This is based on a talk by Mueen Afzal, former secretary of general finance, a prominent philanthropist and chairman of several national institutions, at the Institute of Strategic Studies in Islamabad on February 21, 2024.]*



By Ashraf Jehangir Qazi

Recently one of Pakistan's most respected economic mandarins, Mueen Afzal, gave a talk at the Institute of Strategic Studies in Islamabad on the subject of stabilizing the Pakistan economy. A recent report says "the country is headed for inevitable default". Pakistan's external debt has rocketed to over \$124 billion and its domestic debt has exploded to over \$140 billion, making a total national debt of over \$270 billion – well over a quarter of a trillion dollars.

This comes to over \$100,000 for every man, woman and child in Pakistan. This is the odious "debt trap" or rather "death trap" in which 90 per cent of the population of Pakistan is imprisoned for life by the thriving and thieving ruling 10 per cent.

Mueen Afzal said he had been asked three questions. One, could Pakistan manage this debt? Two, was CPEC viable? And, three, are economic experts useful? Mueen sagely responded by saying debt was like an illness and its treatment depended on its severity and on the cooperation of the patient. Similarly, with regard to CPEC he noted it was viable provided the debts incurred were put to good use and repayment obligations

and capacity were borne in mind. As for experts, he observed that public finance required practical commonsense more than academic expertise although its importance was undeniable.

Accordingly, stabilizing the economy depended on the state of the macro-situation. Pakistan's imports at over \$60 billion per annum were almost twice its exports. The gap was more or less filled by remittances which was on capital account. As long as the trade gap was kept under control the rupee could be kept stable, inflation contained and growth sustained. Otherwise, a vicious circle would set in as foreign exchange reserves would rapidly diminish (sending Pakistan to the ICU of the IMF for the 25th time).

However, to sustain growth over the longer term, the social sectors including child and healthcare, education including vocational education, population growth, infrastructure development, job security, living wages, reduction in corruption, etc would require much greater attention and priority. Unfortunately, there is very little budgetary space for these priorities because of military, administration, and debt repay-

ment expenditures (which are increasingly financed by incurring further debt.) IMF programmes can at best help prepare the ground for longer-term domestic and foreign direct investment which are essential for growth rates that lift all boats. But for this political stability is a prerequisite.

Mueen Afzal mentioned two economists whose writings have fundamentally influenced thinking on development economics. One is Thomas Piketty. According to him, prior to World War I tax revenues of advanced countries like the US, the UK, France and Sweden were never more than 8-10 per cent of GDP since government expenditures were largely for the police, the courts, the judiciary, the military and some infrastructure.

The governance priorities of early industrial capitalism largely served feudal-bourgeoisie interests. It was only after World War I (and the Russian Revolution) that government policies became conscious of poverty. The shared experience of the horrors of modern war from the US civil war and the Franco-Prussian war to the first and second world wars (1870 to 1950) impacted the class basis of politics. As a result, there was



a three to four-fold rise in tax revenues to address the needs of veterans and their families who were overwhelmingly from the lower classes that had all suffered the ravages of war.

After World War II and the start of the cold war, the concept of social welfare as a major principle of governance came to the fore to challenge the appeal of Russian communism. Tax revenues in the advanced industrial countries accordingly dramatically rose to more than 50 per cent of GDP. An awareness of the need to address the consequences of egregious inequalities informed the politics of Western democracies whether ruled by progressive pro-labour or conservative pro-business parties.

Piketty, however, noted the “South Asian conundrum” according to which tax revenues in impoverished underdeveloped and densely populated countries like India and Pakistan remained at 15–20 per cent of GDP. Despite the socialist or nationalist rhetoric, politicians and bureaucrats presumably regarded poverty as so overwhelming a reality that it could only be managed not resolved (even when drawing up long-term perspective plans.)

The other economist mentioned by Mueen was Stefan Dercon who wrote *Gambling on Development*. He visited Pakistan where he observed there was no need for governmental expertise in public finance which essentially required sensible

decision-making. Mueen cited examples of procurement prices for cotton and rice that were above market prices which made no sense as they drained public resources, raised prices for consumers, and could not be sustained.

Similarly, charging below market prices for gas, petroleum and electricity had contributed to the circular debt which had become a monster. He recalled a prime minister telling him that if he did not have the money to provide certain services all he had to do was to ask for it. Apparently, the great man did not realize (or did not care) there were “twin holes” in export and tax revenues as a result of which the people of Pakistan were “paying through their noses” for these services today.

In the same way, Sui gas prices were set with the profitability of the producer in mind instead of the needs of the consumer. As a result, Quetta, which is the capital of Balochistan in which the Sui gas fields are located and is the coldest of all the provincial capitals – and the people of Balochistan are the poorest and most exploited people of Pakistan – was the last to receive Sui gas. Mueen was too polite to draw political conclusions but they were not lost upon his audience.

According to Dercon “Pakistan’s status quo is untenable and even elites are losing because of it.” Low tax collection, high subsidies, low savings and investments are

part of the “elite bargain” in Pakistan. This “regularly leads to macroeconomic and fiscal crises and the need for outside support.” He calls for “a set of incentives for the emergence of a better elite bargain for growth and development.” In other words, an economic zero-sum game between the elites and the people should be converted into a more positive-sum game in which the people can share in the benefits.

This, of course, is a liberal Tory concept of social welfare or ‘third-way’ based economic development. It claims to be realistic in that it minimizes business, conservative and reactionary opposition and settles for ‘second best’ solutions on the assumption that ‘the best should not be made an enemy of the good’. Striking a viable balance depends on detailed study of specific social, economic and political situations, and good and responsive governance. As Mueen Afzal rightly says, there are no easy or pat answers. That is why economics is a discipline not a science and economic development is a problem of political economy rather than economics.

He did not need to mention that the recent elections have brought this reality into national focus like never before as the people of Pakistan now feel their country has become one big Balochistan. Able and sincere politicians will need to learn from the wise counsel of people like Mueen Afzal in order to better serve the people.

Courtesy The News



# Building the growth castle on political instability



By Naqi Akbar

Pakistani economy has been in the tailspin since the hybrid arrangement formalized in 2018. Partly due to the fact that the prescriptions of stabilization of the exchange rate on the basis of market forces backfired and partly due to the incidence of Covid 19 Corona global pandemic. Over that the political instability self-generated by the decision-making political elite caused more pain to the economy, both at the macro and micro level.

The management of the economy during the period on 2018-2022 left much to be desired at. That time was characterized by single minded pursuit of the goal of accountability. The inhouse change of guard facilitated by various players in the visible and invisible arena did not jump started the economy. Rather what was witnessed between the period of April 2022 till January 2024 has been a continuous inflationary regime. The inflation index in double digit; if analyzed at the macro level caused a cost push inflationary impact on the economy. That impacted the cost of the food basket, fuel expenses, housing, rent and practically all aspects of life.

The same translated into the micro impact devastated the day-to-day calculations of the middle-income group as well as the lower middle and poor sections of the society. If the latter two were pushed further into the poverty, many in the middle-income category now qualified for a place below the poverty line.

Having explained the on-ground situation, a look at the thought process followed by the power players behind the scene as well as those posing as political forces suggests that the prescription of economic growth seems to be a leaf out of the tested and failed model followed by the political elite; military and civilian included which took key decisions in the aftermath of the October 1958 coup by Ayub Khan.

The growth model on the economic side rested on the two-gap theory, the saving and investment gap and the export and import gap. These two gaps advocated economic model which justified foreign assistance as well as foreign investment. The entry of IMF dates back to those times when the exchange rate was kept artificially

stable to facilitate import of capital goods as well as the availability of enough resources with the central bank as well as the banking sector to allow the businesses to follow a liberal import regime. That model was based on few pre requisites; the political stability and geo political stability. The former stability during that period meant that a country has been run like a dictatorship managed day-to-day as a police state. On the geo political side the nation state in question was to follow low key conflicts, which were not supposed to blow out of proportion.

The establishment of that time failed on the geo political count, which also brought down crashing the house of card of a stable economy. The third plan period of 1965-1970 started with a rigged election electing the president, followed soon by a silly war, which produced nothing tangible, but loss of resources. The fall out was arms embargo in a heightened state of alert. That caused the economy to slow down as not much foreign exchange was available for vital industrial imports. Much of the foreign exchange dried up with arms procurement



from France and China on hard cash.

The result was political discontent; dismemberment of the eastern arm of the nation state and ideological polarization in the western wing. Many people lament the fact that Pakistan never took off again in the economic sense. But few realize the fact that the thought process followed was bound to produce the results, once assumptions were compromised.

Bypassing the period of five decades between the above-mentioned debacle and what is now Pakistan; regretfully, not much has been learnt during the period in between as well as what is being followed at the macro and micro level.

At cursory look at the management of the economy and that of politics suggests that the deciding powers do not prioritize economy in a sincere manner. They are more interested in power grab. Economy is the second fiddle and obviously thought to kickstart with few superficial investment initiatives.

To explain the same further; to begin with the political road map followed after 2018 has created polarization and political instability to the levels where the economy cannot ignore the ill impact of the above two factors. Every modern nation state has its share of public protest, political upheavals in any federating unit, even anti insurgency operations and things related to the security aspects of the society. Many nations state had to live with separatist movements, yet keep the economic growth cycle moving to ensure that the state and the economy are self-sustaining. The self-sustaining parameters in fact decide how much foreign assistance or interference can be kept at bay.

In the case of Pakistan, a series of bad short-term decisions have transformed the economy into a high cost inefficient economy which is least fit for a free trade regime on favorable terms. The result has been that the visible and invisible players are concerned over the fact as to how to enrich the kitty to keep the expenses show going without any compromise to the goals of the state. That concern however is not addressed seriously. What these players failed to fathom was the repulsion of the investor. The investor sentiment; whether

to invest or not translates into the confidence a polity or an economy might radiate. That has been absent since 2019. The real estate sector scared away at that time, is still not ready to make an entry.

Over that, the efforts to jump start the economy suggests that the superficial goals have been visualized without any feel of the true pulse of the economy. Investments in any economy under a nation state are not triggered by Investment councils, rather they are generated when the investing parties feel that the people have purchasing power and that the investments are safe owing to political stability; means there is not hanging sword of a military coup, or quick snap elections or erratic economic decision making etc.



Regretfully, Pakistani nation state and the economy possess all the above-mentioned dangers. The last two years, including the unnaturally prolonged tenure of the caretaker government, the unexpected economic twists and the electoral process, completely managed in favor of a faction of society and geared towards the other unfavored section of the society has few takers in the international arena. The February 2024 elections have created a very bad image for the country and the economy. Despite the fact that the formation of the governments at the provincial as well as at center is being fast tracked, the hard truth remains that the donor agencies are likely not to feel comfortable with Pakistani government formed out of the process.

Further with a near North Korean or an Arab Socialist Baath dictatorship like image of a nation state which has been traditionally in the western capitalist camp, no investment is expected where e commerce can be disrupted due to political episodes or social media instruments are accessed by the general public.

Recently the feedback from Elon Musk and Twitter can be an eye opener to the fact that political liberalization is the key to economic turnaround. A turnaround which can generate enough foreign exchange as well as revenue for the state to be self-sustaining. Towards that end, it is imperative that the key decision makers and policy makers look beyond the proverbial 'polling booth capture' mentality, if the state has to be

steered out of the current economic and political quagmire.

Pakistan needs to self-correct itself. In the case, which looks more probable, political instability and economic instability might contribute to more strife and civil war. The role of the establishment, political groups, judiciary and media is of critical importance. The present structure self-correction needs to come from within. The rudderless rage of the people in the form of protests graduating into a revolutionary situation might not be a viable option in the absence of a mature leadership. Revolutions are wished for, but hard to contain and transform from a disruptive movement into a constructive...history is the witness.....

# Hamas to halal: How anti-Muslim hate speech is spreading in India

*Ahead of national elections, a new report tracks how hate speech events map geographically across India, those behind them, and the conspiracy theories used to stoke anti-Muslim hate*



By Yashraj Sharma

India averaged nearly two anti-Muslim hate speech events per day in 2023 and three in every four of those events – or 75 percent – took place in states ruled by Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi’s Bharatiya Janata Party, revealed a report released Monday.

In 2023, the hate speech events peaked between August and November, the period of political campaigning and polling in four major states, according to a report released by India Hate Lab (IHL), a Washington, DC-based research group.

As India heads for a national vote in the upcoming months, a first-of-its-kind report by the IHL maps the spread of anti-Muslim hate speech across the country. The group documented a total of 668 hate speech events.

Last month, the website of India Hate Lab was rendered inaccessible in India after the government blocked it under the controversial Information Technology (IT) Act, 2000. The government also blocked the website of Hindutva Watch, an independent hate-crime

tracker also run by the IHL’s founder.

The new report – the first time a research group has tracked hate speech events in India over a year – tracks how these events spread geographically across India, the triggers behind these events, and when they occur.

Which are India’s hate speech hotbeds?

The group documented a total of 668 hate speech events across 18 states and three federally governed territories. The top-ranking Indian states for these events were: Maharashtra in the west with 118 incidents, Uttar Pradesh in the north with 104 incidents, and Madhya Pradesh in central India with 65 incidents.

These three states are among the biggest voter bases, are currently ruled by the BJP, and collectively account for 43 percent of the total hate speech events recorded in 2023.

But relatively smaller states, like Haryana and Uttarakhand in northern India, weren’t immune either.

While Haryana witnessed 48 hate speech events, or about 7.2 percent,

events in Uttarakhand made up 6 percent – both states are among the emerging hotbeds for anti-Muslim violence as well. Seven people died and over 70 were injured in violence in the Nuh region of Haryana in August 2023; earlier this month, five Muslims were killed in Haldwani, Uttarakhand, while protesting against the demolition of a mosque and a religious school in the town.

Prem Shukla, a national spokesperson of the BJP, told Al Jazeera that the party has been opposing the “Islamic fundamentalist forces” and alleged that the IHL data represented a “biased picture of the situation”.

“The other so-called secular states are targeting the Hindu majority community by hate speeches, but no one will talk about it,” Shukla said in a phone interview. He also dismissed the IHL report, alleging that those behind it “have sworn to destroy the BJP”.

Who rules states with the most hate speech?

As per the report, 498 hate speech events, which make up 75 percent, took place in the states ruled by the BJP or in



territories that it effectively governs through the central government. Among the 10 states with the most hate speech events, six were ruled by the BJP throughout the year. The other three states, Rajasthan, Karnataka, and Chhattisgarh had legislative elections in 2023, in which power changed hands: Rajasthan and Chhattisgarh moved from the opposition Congress party to the BJP, and Karnataka from the BJP to the Congress. Bihar, the last of the 10 states with the most hate-speech events, was ruled by an opposition coalition until last month, when its chief minister switched sides to join a BJP-led alliance.

More than 77 percent of speeches that included a direct call of violence against Muslims were also delivered in states and territories governed by the BJP.

A third of all hate speech events documented by the IHL were organised by two far-right organisations, the Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP) and the Bajrang Dal, which are associated with the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), the ideological mentor of the BJP. In 2018, the United States Central Intelligence Agency tagged the VHP and Bajrang Dal as “religious militant organisations”.

“Our analysis shows that anti-Muslim hate speech has been normalised and become part of India’s socio-political sphere,” said Raqib Hameed Naik, founder of the IHL. “We foresee rampant use of anti-Muslim

hate during the upcoming general elections to polarise voters.”

What are the provocations used for hate speech events?

The report documented that 63 percent of the total 668 hate speech events referenced Islamophobic conspiracy theories.

The theories included “love jihad”, an alleged phenomenon where Muslim men lure Hindu women into marrying them and converting to Islam; “land jihad”, which alleges Muslims are occupying public lands by building religious structures or holding prayers; “halal jihad”, which views Islamic practices as the economic exclusion of non-Muslim traders; and “population jihad”, which alleges that Muslims reproduce with the intention of eventually outnumbering and dominating other populations.

All of these conspiracy theories have been debunked: The government’s own data, for instance, shows that Muslim fertility rates are dropping faster than those of any other major community in India.

Over 48 percent of the events occurred between August and November, a period that saw state elections in four major states.

Reacting to the IHL report, Amnesty International called on Indian authorities to put an end to the rise in speeches calling for violence and hatred against religious

minorities.

“[The authorities] must take concrete measures to counter stereotypes, eradicate discrimination, and foster greater equality,” Aakar Patel, chair of the board at Amnesty International India, told Al Jazeera.

What’s the latest hate weapon being used against Indian Muslims?

Since October 7, Indian far-right groups have been weaponising the Hamas attack on southern Israel, and Israel’s ongoing war on Gaza to stoke anti-Indian Muslim fears and hate. From October 7 to December 31, 2023, one in every five hate-speech events invoked Israel’s war, a phenomenon that peaked in November, according to the IHL report.

Pravin Togadia, founder and current president of the Antarrashtriya Hindu Parishad, said in an event in Haryana on November 20: “Today it is Israel’s turn. That same Palestine is rising in our villages and our streets. Saving our prosperity, our women, from them is a big challenge for us.”

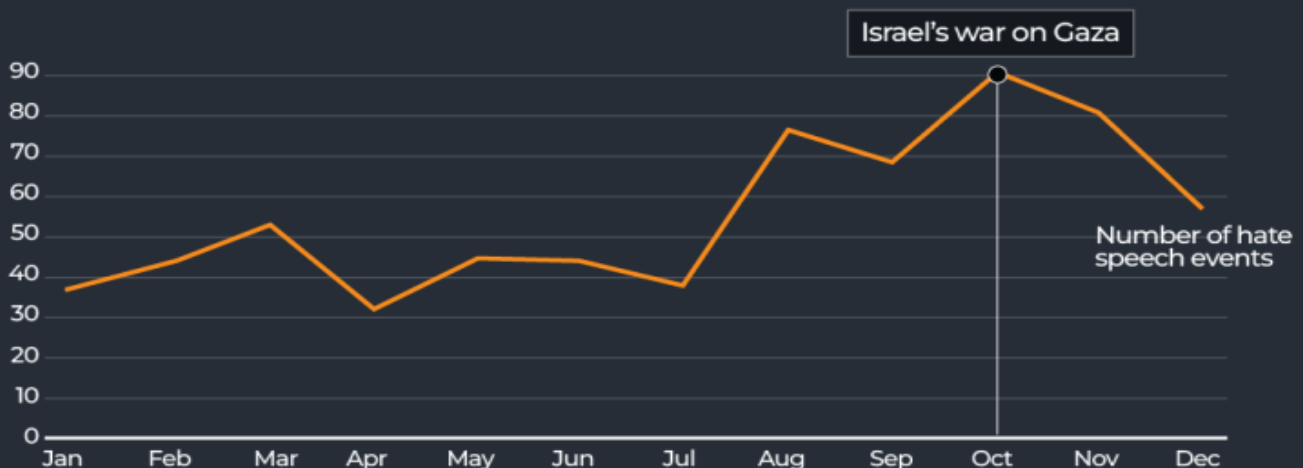
In the same month, Kapil Mishra, a BJP leader, said: “What Israel faced is what we have been facing for 1,400 years.”

Other analysts have found that India has also emerged as an epicentre of disinformation on Israel’s war on Gaza, spreading through the internet.

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

## Hate speech events in 2023

Between October 7 and December 31, 2023, one in every five hate speech events in India invoked Israel’s war on Gaza, according to India Hate Lab.



# Gaza Catastrophe: A Deep Dive into Netanyahu

*The analysis scrutinizes Benjamin Netanyahu's family history, political path, and policy impact, highlighting controversial coalition ties and far-right connections. It explores his government's focus on judicial reforms, challenges such as corruption charges, and concludes by pondering Netanyahu's legacy in the context of the Gaza tragedy, underscoring the imperative for a fair resolution*

By Amir Jahangir

Benjamin Netanyahu, born in Tel Aviv in 1949, is touted as a scion of a family supposedly profoundly rooted in the history and development of the State of Israel. His father, Benzion Netanyahu, a historian and fervent Zionist, played a role in the revisionist Zionist movement led by Ze'ev Jabotinsky, which had its share of controversies. The Netanyahu family narrative often romanticizes Yonatan Netanyahu, Benjamin's older brother, who lost his life during Operation Entebbe in 1976. While his loss is considered significant, it's presented within a narrative that conveniently brushes over any potential critique.

Benjamin Netanyahu's trajectory involves a seemingly dutiful replication of his family's chosen path. Serving in Sayeret Matkal, the elite special forces unit, is often presented as a badge of honor, but it raises questions about his political journey. The transition from military service to politics in Israel is not unique, but in Netanyahu's case, the critical examination of the consequences of this transition remains primarily overshadowed.

The ongoing events of brutality in Gaza today seem to be in line with the plans and promises that Netanyahu not only advocated but also preached and openly propagated during his election campaigns and subsequent public interactions. The unfolding situation appears to mirror the policies and strategies that Netanyahu strongly endorsed and actively disseminated, prompting scrutiny of the influence of his explicit declarations on the current human rights violations and atrocities in Gaza.

Benjamin "Bibi" Netanyahu, now in his third term and extending his record as Israel's longest-serving Prime Minister to 16 years, is forming his sixth government with a distinctly hardline composition. This coalition is shaped through alliances with far-right and ultra-Orthodox parties, highlighting Netanyahu's commitment to



establishing a legacy as a leader who leaves behind a new Israel.

The coalition agreements highlight critical priorities for the Netanyahu government. Notably, there is a focus on comprehensive judicial reform, including the passage of a High Court override law to reduce judicial checks on executive and legislative power. Additionally, the government has committed to expanding settlements, ensuring West Bank's annexation, addressing the cost of living, and centralizing ultra-Orthodox control over state Jewish services.

While addressing the Knesset plenum (central and supreme authoritative body of the Knesset, Israel's unicameral parliament) before the vote of confidence in December last year, Netanyahu outlined three top priorities: halting Iran's nuclear program, developing state infrastructure, and restoring internal security and governance.

Criticism within Netanyahu's party has surfaced, particularly regarding concessions made to allied parties, including the far-right Religious Zionist Party. This party, advocating and pressuring for settlement expansion and reforms that subordinate the judiciary, has secured significant ministerial appointments. Bezalel Smotrich, for example, is overseeing construction in the West Bank's Area C.

Another far-right ally, Otzma Yehudit, secured control over law enforcement and the border police, pushing for legislation to change soldiers' legal liability, inciting for the killing of Palestinians and labeling them as terrorists, and ban the Palestinian flag from state-funded institutions. Hussein al-Sheikh, the Secretary General of the Executive Committee of the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO), tweeted in August 2023, "We call on the international



community and international institutions to consider the party of the terrorist Itamar Ben Gvir as a terrorist party due to its personal and partisan history of inciting for the killing of Palestinians”.

Ultra-Orthodox parties, Shas and United Torah Judaism succeeded in securing promises related to welfare, religious benefits, and healthcare, further emphasizing their influence in shaping the government's agenda. Notably, the coalition intends to support Likud-led judicial reforms, signaling a broader effort to reshape the judiciary, including raising the bar for court interventions and changing the role of government legal advisers.

Leading the 37th government, Benjamin Netanyahu's immediate emphasis on hardline policies, controversial ministerial appointments, and the restructuring of key ministries raised considerable concerns among observers about the potential ramifications for Israel's domestic and foreign policies from the outset. The coalition's prioritization of comprehensive judicial reform, settlement expansion, and considerations of West Bank annexation has signaled a shift towards a more conservative and assertive stance from January 2023 onwards.

The ministerial appointments made by Netanyahu, especially his alignment with far-right parties holding controversial views, have contributed to the complexities within the government's dynamics. The restructuring of ministries and the consolidation of power within specific factions raised concerns about the efficiency and coherence of policy implementation. It's noteworthy that ministries dealing with law, order, construction, and national security are currently under the control of extreme right-wing parties.

Observers, both supporters and critics, have expected and anticipated the impact of these decisions on the nature of Israel's governance, its relationships in the region, and its global standing during his leadership of the 37th government.

The ongoing events of brutality in Gaza today seem to be in line with the plans and promises that Netanyahu not only advocated but also preached and openly propagated during his election campaigns and subse-

quent public interactions.

Currently, Netanyahu's primary audience appears to be the Zionist intelligentsia, a select group whose support is crucial in cementing his legacy as the “Father of the New and Complete Israel.” This strategic focus suggests an awareness of the importance of shaping a narrative that resonates within this specific intellectual and ideological community, perhaps as a means to secure a lasting and positive historical imprint on his leadership.

As the Netanyahu family's role in Israel's history is glorified, it's essential to peel back the layers and critically assess the nuanced impact of their legacy on their nation's ongoing journey.

An updated June 26, 2023 story by Yonette Joseph and Patrick Kingsley from The New York Times (NYT) reported that Benjamin Netanyahu was set to return as Israel's Prime Minister despite facing unresolved corruption charges. The article outlines the status of the corruption cases against Netanyahu, emphasizing the three cases (Cases 1000, 2000, and 4000) that involve allegations of bribery, fraud, and breach of trust. (Mr. Netanyahu was cleared in a fourth case, Case 3000, which concerned the government's procurement of German-made submarines.)

The investigations into Netanyahu's conduct began in 2016, with the police formally recommending prosecution in February 2018. The trial started in May 2020, and it has faced delays, including interruptions due to a central witness' “personal reasons” in 2021 and the judge testing positive for COVID-19 in February 2023.

The journalists investigated and explained in the NYT that the charges in each case involved gifts from wealthy business people, a quid pro quo arrangement with a newspaper publisher, and alleged favors from a telecom mogul. It also delves into why Netanyahu did not resign, highlighting that Israeli prime ministers can remain in office until convicted. If convicted, Netanyahu could face several years in prison. However, some of his coalition partners intend to legalize the alleged crimes or end the trial altogether.

The Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's prolonged tenure, marked by a political strategy that prioritized radicalism over diplomacy, has culminated in a devastating tragedy in Gaza. A year ago, Netanyahu confidently declared that he had “two hands firmly on the steering wheel.” Still, the resulting government turned out to be the most radical and incompetent in Israel's history.

Netanyahu's approach of ruling out any political process in Palestine and asserting an exclusive Jewish right to all parts of the land of Israel had already set the stage for inevitable bloodshed. Even during the tenure of peace-seeking leaders like Yitzhak Rabin and Ehud Barak, there was violence in Palestine. However, Netanyahu's reckless policies, which involved paying any price for coalition support, expanding illegal settlements, and sidelining moderate Palestinian leadership, created a volatile environment. The brutality displayed by Israel's hard power approach raises profound concerns about the appropriateness of their chosen path, leaving a dark stain that may endure for years.

Netanyahu's vision of “A ‘New and Complete Israel’ for Future Generations” and being remembered as the “Father of the Israeli Nation” neglects the complexity of historical grievances and geopolitics, relying on strategic posturing rather than genuine dialogue and negotiation. As his tenure concludes, the true impact of his legacy remains uncertain. There exists an open-ended question regarding how he will be remembered, with the possibility that, in the annals of history, he might be characterized by a significant portion of the global community as an exceptionally ruthless and heartless figure, perhaps even earning the label of the most sadistic.

As of January 24, 2024, Gaza's Hamas-run health ministry reports that over 25,700 Palestinians have lost their lives in the Israeli bombardment. The ongoing conflict has exacted a toll measured in countless precious lives, each loss resonating as a poignant reminder of the seemingly elusive resolution. The profound human cost serves as a compelling call for an immediate, compassionate, and just solution.

# US airman sets himself on fire outside Israel embassy to protest 'genocide'



**A**ctive duty airman reportedly said he did not want to be 'complicit in genocide' as he lit himself on fire.

An active member of the United States military has set himself on fire outside the Israeli embassy in Washington, DC, according to officials, in an apparent act of protest against Israel's devastating war on Gaza.

Aaron Bushnell, 25, was rushed to the hospital on Sunday with "critical life-threatening injuries", according to the US capital's fire department.

The agency said emergency responders rushed to the scene just before 1pm (18:00 GMT) in response to a "call for person on fire outside the Israeli embassy". They arrived to find that officers from the US Secret Service had already extinguished the fire.

The US Air Force confirmed the incident involved an active duty airman.

'Free Palestine!'

US media reports said Bushnell livestreamed himself on Twitch, wearing fatigues and declaring he would "not be complicit in genocide" before dousing himself in liquid.

He then lit himself on fire while yelling "Free Palestine!" until he fell to the ground.

The footage has since been removed from Twitch. Local police said they are investigating the incident.

The police also said an explosive ordinance disposal was requested to the scene in relation to a suspicious vehicle that may be connected to the individual. It later said that no hazardous material was found.

The Israeli embassy said all of its staff members were safe, a spokesperson told the New York Times.

Israel's embassy has been the target of continued protest against the Israeli war on

Gaza. The protests started after October 7 when Hamas, the Palestinian group that rules Gaza, killed 1,200 Israelis and seized 253 hostages in a cross-border attack.

Since then, Israeli forces have waged a military campaign against the coastal enclave, laying much of it to waste, with nearly 30,000 people dead, according to Palestinian health officials.

In December, a protester set herself on fire outside the Israeli Consulate in Atlanta. A Palestinian flag was found at the scene, and the act was believed to be one of "extreme political protest".

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





# South Carolina primary: Donald Trump easily defeats Nikki Haley in her home state



By Sam Cabral

Donald Trump is one step closer to the Republican presidential nomination after a massive win over Nikki Haley in South Carolina.

The former president won his primary opponent's home state by a 20-point margin, his fourth consecutive victory.

As he celebrated, Mr Trump made no mention of Ms Haley, who vowed to stay in the race. Instead he set his sights on the general election in November.

That will be a likely rematch with his successor in the White House.

"We're going to look Joe Biden right in the eye," he told supporters minutes after US media projected him as the winner on Saturday night.

"He's destroying our country - and we're going to say 'get out Joe, you're fired'."

Mr Trump lauded his party's "unity" after Saturday's result, saying: "There's never been a spirit like this. I have never seen the Republican Party so unified."

It marked a shift from his response to last month's primary in New Hampshire, where he raged against Ms Haley for "doing a speech like she won".

Ms Haley, who once served as a popular two-term governor of South Carolina, congratulated her opponent on his victory in her speech.

She promised not to quit, however, saying the roughly 40% of the vote she received was "not some tiny group".

"There are huge numbers of voters in our Republican primaries who are saying they want an alternative," she said, emphasising that her continued campaign was not about her own political ambitions.

"I'm not giving up this fight when a majority of Americans disapprove of both Donald Trump and Joe Biden," she added.

She has re-committed to staying in the race until at least Super Tuesday - 5 March - when voters in 16 states will cast their ballots on the same day.

"I'm a woman of my word," the former UN ambassador said. "We're headed to Michigan tomorrow, and we're headed to the Super Tuesday states throughout all of next week."

The Trump campaign dismissed Ms Haley's continued effort in a statement on Saturday, stating that her "delusion is clouding her judgement, and she is no longer living in reality".

It has predicted the former president will accumulate enough delegates to formally clinch the nomination within the next month.

Ms Haley does not have a clear path forward - her opponent has a large lead in the delegate count and is polling far ahead in all future contests.

And yet the Haley campaign is still standing, in large part due to contributions from deep-pocketed donors. That flow of cash has continued despite her facing long odds.

Ms Haley raised \$16.5m in January alone,

campaign officials said. That was her largest monthly total so far, and much more than Mr Trump's numbers.

To drive home the point that he believes the primary has now ended, Mr Trump wasted no time in making his victory speech moments after the race was called, not allowing Ms Haley to speak before him as she had done in New Hampshire.

Flanked at his podium on the Columbia state fairgrounds by nearly two dozen allies, including most of the state's political leaders, he told a raucous crowd: "This was a little sooner than we anticipated."

Mr Trump certainly has much to boast about with this win. Exit polling conducted by the BBC's US partner, CBS News, shows that the ex-president bested Ms Haley with both men and women, and among all age groups. He also drew strong support from white evangelicals and voters who identify as very conservative.

Thanking them for their support, Mr Trump, 77, reminded his audience: "We have a lot of work ahead of us."

Andre Chang, 21, told the BBC that Mr Trump is still the only candidate willing to fight the establishment, particularly the "unelected political regime" of bureaucrats

and technocrats that govern Washington DC.

"With the Democrats, it's like we're playing Russian roulette with a handgun," the University of South Carolina senior said.

"Well Trump is a revolver. And I want to spin the barrel again."

Mr Trump believes in "supporting the nation of Israel", Noel Caldwell, 85, said.

"And not only that, Trump did such a good job - we built up our military and he kept the border closed down and he kept inflation down. Now those things are no longer being taken care of by the administration," the Lake Murray resident added.

Ms Haley failed to garner traction despite her homefield advantage because voters did not like "the way she has been criticising Trump", according to Micah Rea, the national committeeman for the South Carolina Young Republicans.

He argued the writing is on the wall for her campaign and she should drop out for the good of the party.

Haley supporters, however, described their votes as taking action against "demagoguery" and the danger they believe Mr Trump poses to democracy.

"America always likes a great underdog, and I think she's got that," said Sian Owens.

"Donald Trump is mired down. How much focus can he give to our country with all these legal problems?"

The former president faces the first of four criminal trials next month.

He is also now on the hook for more than half a billion dollars, the combined total of two recent civil trial rulings against him in New York - one for sexual assault and defamation, and another for business fraud.

As Mr Biden racks up a sizeable cash advantage over him in what will likely be the most expensive presidential race in US history, Mr Trump is increasingly relying on donations to cover his soaring legal costs.

It appears the Republican Party could come to his aid. He has consolidated his hold over it by endorsing key allies to lead its national committee.

His daughter-in-law Lara Trump, his pick to take over as co-chair of the Republican Party, has pledged to "spend every penny" of party funds on his legal defence.

Courtesy BBC





# How Trump won South Carolina primary and why Nikki Haley isn't quitting yet



While the outcome puts Trump closer to clinching the Republican nomination, Haley has vowed to press on. We explore why.

Frontrunner Donald Trump has cruised to victory in South Carolina's Republican primary with the support of an almost unwavering base of loyal voters.

But rival Nikki Haley says she is not dropping out of the United States presidential race. Despite her loss in a state where she previously won two terms as governor, Haley said she will stay in the race until at least the Super Tuesday primaries on March 5.

Let's unpack the primary vote and what it means for the two candidates.

How did Trump win in South Carolina?

Trump's victory in South Carolina looked remarkably similar to his wins in the Iowa caucuses and the New Hampshire primary. It's a sign that regional differences that once existed within the GOP have been supplanted by a national movement that largely revolves around the former president.

Trump, 77, won in South Carolina with voters who are white and do not have a college degree, one of his core constituencies. About two-thirds of Trump's backers in this election fell into that group.

A majority believe Trump is a candidate who can emerge victorious in November's general election, while only about half say the same of Haley. Voters were also far more likely to view Trump than Haley as someone who would "stand up and fight for people like you" and to say he would keep the country safe. And about seven in 10 say he has the mental capability to serve effectively as president.

Trump's voters also backed his more nationalist views – they are more likely than Haley's supporters to have lukewarm views of the NATO alliance or even consider it bad for the US, to say immigrants are hurting the country and to say immigration is the top issue facing the country.

Why did Haley say she is still in the race?

Haley has become the voice of a portion of the Republican Party that feels rootless, those traditional-minded conservatives who backed presidential candidates such as

George W Bush and Mitt Romney.

Haley is the closest thing they have now to a champion and advocate – and for now, at least, she retains a public platform to air her views.

"I'm not giving up this fight when a majority of Americans disapprove of both Donald Trump and Joe Biden," she said on Saturday.

At the age of 52, Haley has bet that she can offer a generational change for the GOP. But the future she articulated has little basis in the present-day GOP. About four in 10 of South Carolina Republicans – including about six in 10 of those supporting Trump – say they have an unfavourable opinion of her.

Despite the result, Haley has pledged to continue her campaign.

"I said earlier this week that, no matter what happens in South Carolina, I would continue to run for president," Haley said in a speech to supporters in the city of Charleston after her loss. "I'm a woman of my word."

Haley insisted she would fight on at least



through “Super Tuesday” on March 5, when Republicans in 15 states and one US territory will cast ballots.

The reason why she is still in the race is money, said Al Jazeera’s Shihab Rittansi, reporting from Charleston.

“Even though she has little prospect to win any of the future races, deep pocket of donors are still prepared to bankroll her because of their antipathy to Donald Trump or to keep her in the running in case Trump’s legal troubles mean he has to drop out,” Rittansi said.

The majority of South Carolina voters consider themselves supporters of the “Make America Great Again” movement,

a Trump slogan that helped catapult him to the White House in 2016.

Haley’s voters were much more divided: About half were motivated by supporting her, but nearly as many turned out to oppose Trump.

What are Trump’s potential weaknesses?

Trump has an iron grip on the Republican base, but that might not be enough of a coalition to guarantee a win in November’s general election.

South Carolina was a chance to show that he can expand his coalition beyond voters who are white, older and without a college degree. But about nine in 10 of South

Carolina’s primary voters were white, making it hard to see if Trump has made inroads with Black voters whom he has attempted to win over.

Haley outpaced Trump among college-educated voters, a relative weakness for him that could matter in November as people with college degrees are a growing share of the overall electorate. Even though South Carolina Republican voters believe that Trump can win in November, some had worries about his viability.

About half of Republican voters in South Carolina – including about a quarter of his supporters – are concerned that Trump is too extreme to win the general election.

About three in 10 voters believe he acted illegally in at least one of the criminal cases against him, even though about seven in 10 believe the investigations are political attempts to undermine him.

Trump dominates among conservative voters. But his challenge is that those voters were just 37 percent of the electorate in the November 2020 presidential election. The other 63 percent identified as moderate or liberal, the two categories that Trump lost to Haley in South Carolina.

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





# Queen Camilla to decide Prince Harry's fate in royal family

*Prince Harry's offer to return to royal duties has been completely ruled-out*



By Wells Oster

Prince Harry and Meghan Markle's return to the royal family as part-time royals has been dubbed impossible in the wake of acrimonious relations between the two parties.

Speaking to The Sun, royal expert Valentine Low suggested that even if King Charles ends up reconciling with his youngest son, he will receive pushback from Prince William and Queen Camilla after he besmirched them on several occasions since the royal exit.

He also noted that the decision to bring back the Sussexes to the royal fold hinges on the agreement of all royal members alongside the King and palace's courtiers and advisors.

"Harry and Meghan have done and said so many things about William, about Camilla, about his own father," the expert said during the outlet's Royal Exclusive show.

"It has to be said it's pretty unlikely," Low noted, adding: "The late Queen was very clear that Harry and Meghan could not

have a hybrid role half-in, half-out as they wanted to do."

"The advisers drew up a list of alternatives but it was the Queen and the other members of the family who took the final decision."

"I think that's what will happen this time. I think it's the members of the family who will take any of these big decisions," the former Times journalist claimed.

Courtesy The News



## River Kabul; A Controversy in the offing



By Zahiruddin

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

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

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

The treaty of 1921 regarding water governance of Kabul River is the only one which was signed between Afghanistan and the Great Britain which envisaged the withdrawal of water for Torkham (then part of Afghanistan) and the rights of navigation and irrigation in the plains here. A number of efforts and initiatives launched by the World Bank for concluding a treaty between Pakistan and Afghanistan, the two co-riparian of Kabul River on the pattern of Indus River Treaty but all it ended in failure. In 2014, the government of Nawaz Sharif took up the matter in its full earnestness and proposed a host of measures leading to agreement on treaty and here too, Afghan government did not reciprocate accordingly and it was consigned to the cold storage. Both the sides do aspire for a treaty and they know that it will remain a pipe dream due to three reasons; lack of stable government in Kabul after the Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan, political differences between the two countries leading to create an atmosphere of mistrust and lack of data on Kabul River. All the three are potential factors to foil any attempt to reach at a treaty between the two neighbors of which political instability in Afghanistan is the potent one. Peace and stability has always eluded the land of Afghanistan since 1970s when Soviet

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

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

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



# ASP Shehrbano hailed as a hero after rescuing woman from charged mob in Lahore

Sajal Aly, Mira Sethi and a host of other celebrities are praising the cop's bravery for the way she handled the situation.

ASP Syeda Shehrbano Naqvi is being hailed as a hero by Pakistan's celebrities after she saved a woman from a charged mob in Lahore's Ichra Bazaar after someone accused her of committing 'blasphemy' by wearing a dress bearing Arabic calligraphy.

Naqvi's bravery is on full display in several videos that have surfaced on social media. In one clip, the police officer can be seen rescuing the woman from the bazaar while a mob hurls abuses in the background. Another sees her addressing the mob, urging them to trust the police while convincing them that no blasphemous act had been committed.

"During my service, I have handled three such incidents, and you should have trust in us [police]," she can be heard telling the mob in the clip.

Shopkeepers defended the woman and sheltered her until the police arrived. As per a Dawn report, most of the charged people in the mob were either customers, visitors or passersby and the garment traders who rescued the girl were aware of the print also being available in the market.

A video also shows the girl hiding in a shop shaking with fear of being attacked by the mob on a blasphemy charge, an allegation that has resulted in many public lynchings in the past.

## ASP Shehrbano — the real hero

Celebrities are commending Naqvi for showcasing immense courage. Sharing a picture of her on Instagram, actor Sajal Aly wrote, "We need more women in power," and we couldn't agree more.

Actor Ayesha Omar remarked, "What a hero she is. Bravo Shehrbano."



Mira Sethi wrote, "ASP Shehrbano rescuing a woman who happened to wear a print with Arabic words — and a crowd gathered accusing the woman of blasphemy. No words. We've been here before."

Filmmaker Sharmeen Obaid-Chinoy also shared the news of ASP Naqvi saving the day.

Director Sarmad Khoosat made a virtual salute to the officer to show his respect while actor Yashma Gill shared previous acts of heroism — involving animals — by the ASP to highlight the fact that her latest display of courage wasn't an isolated incident.

The Punjab police has nominated Naqvi for the Quaid-e-Azam police medal. Punjab IG Dr Usman Anwar's statement on the Punjab Police's official X (formerly Twitter) account reads, "ASP Syeda Shehrbano Naqvi, the brave SDPO of [Gulberg] Lahore, put her life in danger to rescue a woman from a violent crowd. For this heroic deed, the Punjab Police has recommended her name for the prestigious Quaid-e-Azam Police Medal (QPM), the highest gallantry award for law enforcement in Pakistan."

## Brand responds

The woman in the video was wearing clothes similar to the ones sold by Kuwait-based brand Semplicita. The brand shared a statement on Instagram to shut down speculations about its collection being linked to the Ichra case. The response seems to have been prompted by Pakistanis spamming the brand's posts with comments about its choice to print Arabic calligraphy on its clothes.

In a statement posted on its Instgaram story, the brand said, "Dear Pakistani people, we have nothing to do with the recent incident that happened to the innocent girl. We are based in Kuwait and we do NOT ship worldwide. Please stop following and messaging since it's really disturbing. We use Arabic words and letters in different fonts everywhere since it's our language!"

For the record, the words printed on the dress include 'حَيَاة' meaning 'Life' and 'جَمِيل' meaning 'Beautiful', as clarified by the brand in response to a query made by an Instagram user.



# Moonstruck Odyssey: Odysseus Makes History as First Private US Lander to Touch Lunar Soil in 50 Years!



By Romana Afsheen

The historic achievement of the US commercial spacecraft 'Odysseus,' landing on the Moon last Thursday, marks a momentous event that not only breaks a decades-long hiatus in American lunar landings but also propels the nation into a renewed era of lunar exploration. Operated by the private company Intuitive Machines, Odysseus has opened new avenues for scientific and technological advancements while contributing to NASA's broader goals for lunar missions.

The lunar landing, which occurred at 23:23:53 UTC on February 22, was confirmed through images provided by NASA's Lunar Reconnaissance Orbiter Camera team. The precision of the landing coordinates—80.13°S and 1.44°E, at an elevation of 2579 meters—demonstrates the technological prowess of both Intuitive Machines and the collaborative efforts within the space industry. This success has rekindled the United States' aspirations for lunar exploration, setting the stage for future missions and scientific discoveries.

Odysseus' landing site, known as Malapert A, holds strategic importance due to its proximity to the moon's South Pole. The region is characterized by treacherous and rocky terrain, making the successful landing a remarkable feat. Intuitive Machines, through its IM-1 Nova-C mission, has not only achieved this milestone but has done so within an impressive 1.5 km of its intended landing site.

This success, however, was not without its share of challenges. The descent of Odysseus had a tense final approach and descent due to an issue with the spacecraft's automated navigation system. This unexpected hurdle prompted ground engineers to implement an untested workaround at the last moment, showcasing quick thinking and adaptability in the face of uncertainty.

Before delving into the details of Odysseus' journey, it is crucial to appreciate the historical context of lunar landings. The United States' lunar exploration efforts trace back to the iconic Apollo missions, particularly

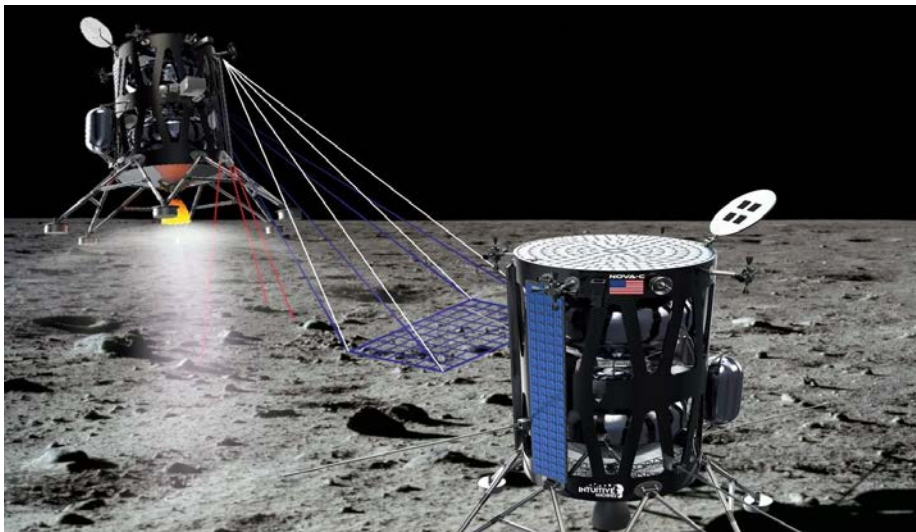
Apollo 11, which marked the first successful human landing on the Moon on July 20, 1969. Astronauts Neil Armstrong and Buzz Aldrin became the first humans to set foot on the lunar surface, achieving a feat that captured the world's imagination.

The Apollo program continued with subsequent missions, each contributing valuable scientific data and expanding our understanding of the Moon. Notably, the final crewed moon mission, Apollo 17, took place in 1972, with astronauts Gene Cernan and Harrison Schmitt exploring the Taurus-Littrow region.

After the Apollo era, lunar exploration took a backseat for several decades. Other countries, however, ventured into lunar exploration, with the former Soviet Union, China, India, and Japan achieving successful moon landings. The United States, despite being the sole nation to send humans to the Moon, saw a prolonged absence in controlled lunar descents until the recent achievement by Odysseus.

Odysseus, a six-legged robot lander, marks a significant departure from the crewed Apollo missions. Developed and operated by Intuitive Machines, a Texas-based company, Odysseus is a testament to the growing role of private entities in space exploration. The successful landing not only reestablishes the United States' capability for lunar landings but also positions private companies as key players in advancing space exploration objectives.

The significance of Odysseus' achievement extends beyond national borders. In the context of a renewed international race for lunar exploration, with China, India, and Japan achieving recent moon landings, the successful mission by Intuitive Machines contributes to the broader global efforts to unravel the mysteries of the Moon.



The unexpected twist in the narrative came a few hours before the lunar landing when Intuitive Machines disclosed an issue with Odysseus' navigation systems. The lander had to rely on experimental technology, creating a dynamic situation. The primary navigation sensors were reassigned to use NASA's Navigation Doppler Lidar (NDL), an experimental technology intended for testing during the mission.

Despite not originally designed for functional use, engineers swiftly implemented an update to bypass Odysseus' malfunctioning equipment and make use of the experimental NASA lidar. The NDL, shooting laser beams to the ground for precise speed and direction measurements during flight, proved to be a crucial element in overcoming the unexpected challenge,

showcasing the resilience and adaptability of both the spacecraft and the ground control team.

Following the successful landing, Intuitive Machines addressed concerns about Odysseus possibly tipping during the descent. The company assured in a press briefing on Friday that the lander possesses substantial operational capability, emphasizing its ability to communicate with flight controllers. The communication capability enabled Odysseus to send images from the lunar surface, showcasing its vertical descent to the Malapert A landing site.

The strategic choice of landing site, near the Moon's South Pole and the Malapert A impact crater, adds another layer of significance to the mission. This region is of

broad international interest due to its suspected stores of water ice, a valuable resource for potential future missions. The successful landing at this location not only fulfills scientific objectives but also positions Odysseus as a precursor to future missions targeting lunar resources.

Odysseus carries a suite of scientific and technological payloads from NASA and various commercial clients. These payloads, designed to operate solely on solar energy for a duration of seven days, have specific objectives focused on gathering data on the effects of the space atmosphere on the lunar surface, radio astronomy, and other aspects of the lunar environment.

The collaboration between private entities

and government space agencies, exemplified by Odysseus' mission, reflects a growing trend in space exploration. The success of this mission, conducted under NASA's Commercial Lunar Payload Services (CLPS) initiative, emphasizes the role of private companies in advancing space exploration goals. This collaborative model not only leverages the innovation and efficiency of the private sector but also contributes to the broader objectives of national and global space exploration strategies.

As Odysseus continues its mission on the lunar surface, the duration of its operations has been shortened due to the unexpected tipping during landing. Originally designed for a seven-day mission, flight controllers intend to collect data until the lander's solar panels are no longer exposed to light. The communication with Odysseus is expected to continue until Tuesday morning, providing a limited window for scientific data collection and communication with ground controllers.

The successful launch of Odysseus took place on February 15, with a SpaceX Falcon 9 rocket lifting off from NASA's Kennedy Space Center in Florida. The IM-1 mission represents Intuitive Machines' first venture under NASA's CLPS initiative, highlighting the collaborative efforts between public and private entities to foster the lunar economy and advance space exploration capabilities.

In conclusion, the successful landing of the US commercial spacecraft 'Odysseus' on the Moon stands as a historic achievement, breaking a significant hiatus in American lunar landings. Operated by Intuitive Machines, this mission not only demonstrates the capability of private entities in space exploration but also contributes to the broader goals of NASA and global efforts in lunar exploration. The unexpected challenges faced during the mission, including the last-minute reliance on experimental technology, highlight the resilience and adaptability of space exploration endeavors. As Odysseus continues its mission, it paves the way for future lunar exploration, positioning the United States and its private partners as key players in the ongoing quest to unravel the mysteries of the Moon.



# Kashmir avalanche: What is the link with climate change?

*As the latest avalanche shows, long dry spells and higher temperatures are making the Himalayan region of Kashmir far more disaster-prone*



By Auqib Javeed

At around 1:30 PM on February 22, 2024, Showkat Ahmad Rather, a ski guide in the picturesque Gulmarg resort in Kashmir received a call from the local administration that an avalanche had hit the Khilanmarg area of Gulmarg known as 'Army Ridge'.

On snowmobiles, Rather and his colleagues rushed to the spot. The avalanche had trapped a group of six Russian skiers along with their local guide. All but one were rescued safely, but one Russian skier perished.

The avalanche in Gulmarg struck during the fourth edition of the Khelo India Winter Games, where 800 participants were participating in a range of events, including snowboarding, alpine skiing and Nordic skiing. The authorities made a public statement that the avalanche happened far from the area where the winter games were taking place and all other players were safe.

A day before, the Defence Geoinformation Research Establishment (DGRE) based in Chandigarh, that operates under the Ministry of Defence, had issued an avalanche warning for many hilly areas of Jammu & Kashmir, including Gulmarg. A Gulmarg public official, speaking on the condition of anonymity, told The Third Pole that the skiers had disregarded the warnings not to go skiing in 'backcountry', far from the 'green zone' cleared for the games. One of the people investigating the incident has blamed the skiers for setting off the avalanche.

## A prolonged dry spell

This year there was limited snowfall in early winter, much to the disappointment of holidaymakers and tour operators. The Kashmir valley endured a prolonged dry spell. It was only on 28 January, 2024 that Gulmarg was

finally blanketed by its first major snowfall, breaking a two-month dry spell. January 2024 was one of the driest and warmest Januarys recorded in the past 43 years, according to the meteorological department.

Avalanches occur when a layer of snow collapses and slides downhill. Such events are more likely during periods of elevated temperatures, which hinder the accumulation of snow.

Irfan Rashid, assistant professor at the Department of Geoinformatics, at the University of Kashmir, highlights the significant "heat in the system" due to the prolonged dry spell in the valley. He notes that temperatures were above normal during these months and the accumulated heat was not able to dissipate.

"The late snowfall was watery (snow-water equivalent) and it began

melting rapidly,” he explains, adding “When the water content in the snow is high, it will resist settling down – thus increasing the risk of avalanches.”

### The climate change connection

The Third Pole has previously reported that senior Indian scientists like M Rajeevan had linked the long dry spell with climate change and its impact on the western disturbances – which carry precipitation from the Mediterranean. Sonam Lotus, the India Meteorological Department (IMD) meteorologist, had said that Kashmir had seen dry winters before, but the temperatures were far higher than earlier.

This changing pattern has significant impact for Kashmir, specifically for avalanches, according to Shakil Ahmad Romshoo, the Vice Chancellor of the Islamic University of Science and Technology in Kashmir. Speaking to The Third Pole, he explained that February and March have seen unusually warm temperatures in the region over the last decade.

Romshoo said that during these months, when snowfall occurs, the risk of avalanches increases, explaining that the high temperatures lead to “melting [which]

reduces the friction and that is why we see significant avalanches in [these] months. This is directly related to an increase in temperature which is the result of climate change.”

According to Ramshoo, snowfall during the Chillai-Kalan (the name given to Kashmir’s 40-day period of intense cold, where temperatures drop as low as -10°C) is crucial to the region. The sub-zero temperatures reduce the likelihood of avalanches, but he stresses that there is a need for a comprehensive study to better understand the behaviour of avalanches in the valley.

### Avalanches across Kashmir

The latest avalanche comes just weeks after a previous one in Gulmarg had led to the death of two Polish skiers and resulted in the rescue of 21 others on February 1, 2024. Another avalanche had struck Sonamarg, another popular tourist destination in Central Kashmir, two weeks earlier. Footage of the avalanche, which hit the vicinity of a workshop for the Zojila tunnel construction was captured on camera. Additionally, on 20 February, another minor avalanche occurred near the Hung area of Sonamarg, obstructing the Sindh stream and leading to the closure of the

Sonamarg-Ladakh road.

Avalanches are not new to Kashmir, which have historically resulted in significant casualties, particularly among Indian and Pakistani military personnel stationed in avalanche-prone areas along the borders.

In November 2019, four Indian army soldiers and two porters were killed after an avalanche struck the Siachen glacier in the Karakoram Range.

In February 2010, 17 Indian soldiers were killed and dozens injured after a massive avalanche ploughed into an Indian army training centre in Gulmarg.

The latest climate science suggests that such disasters are likely to get much worse. The Himalayan Assessment report carried out by the International Centre of Integrated Mountain Development (ICIMOD) in 2019 had warned that climate change was significantly affecting the cryosphere – or the areas of snow and ice – in the Himalayan region. Of particular concern was its impact on the Indus basin, in which the Kashmir valley lies. The report noted that the Indus basin saw the most casualties from natural disasters between 1980-2015 in the Himalayan region.

Courtesy [www.thethirdpole.net](http://www.thethirdpole.net)





# International footballers who embraced Islam

*In the past, well-known football stars from around the world converted to Islam*



By Rafique Mangat

**S**panish football star Jose Ignacio (Jota) Peletero is the latest addition to many footballers around the world who embraced Islam.

In the past, well-known football stars from around the world converted to Islam, including German defender Robert Bauer, Holland star Clarence Seedorf, Barcelona club star Eric Abidal, Ghanaian star Thomas Partey, French footballer Franck Ribery, Mali's Frederic Canute, Manchester United star Paul Pogba, French footballer Nicolas Anelka, Togo's former captain Emmanuel Adebayor, German footballer Rudy Blum, Nigeria's defender Emeka Ezego and England's Natha Ellington are included.

According to the report, Pelletrio, who plays for Spanish football club Eibar, British football club Brentford and Birmingham City, announced in the video that he has become a Muslim. The Turkish news agency quoted the Spanish media outlet Marca as saying that the 32-year-old Pelletrio converted to Islam after learning about the religion from his friend of 11 years, former Kuwaiti footballer Faisal Boresli. He said that he was very happy and empowered to be a Muslim, adding that joining the fold of Islam was the best moment of his life, and for that he

thanked Boresli. Pelletrio said that when he had dinner at Boresli's house, his mother presented him with a cake that read "Welcome to Islam."

Born in northwestern Spain, Pelletrio retired from football in 2021. In September 2023, German defender Robert Bauer of Saudi Arabia's Alrai Football Club converted to Islam. In March 2022, Clarence Seedorf, a well-known football player from the Netherlands, accepted Islam. He admitted that he was introduced to Islam by his Iranian-born wife, Sofia. Clarence Seedorf, the only footballer in the world to win the trophy with three different clubs in the history of the Champions League, announced his conversion to Islam through an Instagram post.

French footballer and Barcelona club star Eric Abidal converted to Islam in 2007. Diagnosed with liver cancer in 2011, he said that Islam helped him through difficult times. Ghanaian footballer, Arsenal star, Thomas Partey converted to Islam in 2022. He revealed that he had converted to Islam because of his Moroccan girlfriend Sara Bella. French footballer Franck Ribery converted to Islam in 2002. He had a distinguished career in Europe, being ranked the fourth best player in

the world by the Guardian in 2013. He won the UEFA Men's Player of the Year award in 2013. Ribery announced his conversion to Islam in 2002 after marrying his Algerian wife Wahiba Belhami.

Former Mali international Frederic Canute converted to Islam in 1999 while playing in France. In 2020, he raised more than a million dollars to build the first mosque in Seville in 700 years. French soccer star Paul Pogba of Manchester United converted to Islam. In 2017, he performed Hajj. French footballer Nicolas Anelka converted to Islam at the age of sixteen. He named himself Abdul Salim Bilal. Emmanuel Adebayor, former captain of Togo and playing for the Turkish club, also accepted Islam.

German footballer Danny Blum announced his conversion to Islam in January 2015. A former Nigerian football defender and midfielder who played in the 1994 World Cup, Emekaizyogo converted to Islam in February 2012. England's Nathan Ellington, a former Premier League striker, converted to Islam in 2005 after marrying his Bosnian wife Alma. In 2011, he formed the Muslim Footballers Association.

# The Thrilling Dynamics of Pakistan Super League: A Spectacle of Cricketing Excellence



By Hussnain Ahmad

In the cricket landscape of Pakistan, the Pakistan Super League (PSL) has evolved into a captivating spectacle since its inauguration in 2016. Renowned for its pulsating matches and dynamic performances, the league is a testament to the nation's unwavering passion for cricket. As the seventh season unfolds, the enthusiasm and anticipation among fans intensify, fueled by the enthralling encounters witnessed on the field.

At the forefront of the current season stands the Multan Sultans, a team that has surged ahead, seizing the pinnacle of the points table with a commanding eight points. Their remarkable journey epitomizes resilience and strategic prowess as they navigate through the double round-robin stage with finesse and determination. With an impressive net run rate of 0.781, the Sultans emerge as formidable contenders, driven by a collective zeal to clinch the coveted title.

Close on their heels, the Quetta Gladiators stand tall with six points, showcasing a brand of cricket marked by tenacity and skill. Emboldened by three victories out of four matches and a commendable net run rate of 0.345, the Gladiators embody the spirit of fierce competition, setting the stage alight with their electrifying performances.

Amid the fray, the Karachi Kings and Peshawar Zalmi are locked in a spirited battle for supremacy. While the Kings exhibit flashes of brilliance with two wins, their negative net run rate of -0.420 underscores the challenges they confront in maintaining consistency. Similarly, Peshawar Zalmi grapples with mixed results, their two wins tempered by an unfavorable net run rate of -0.456. As they strive to recalibrate their strategies, both teams remain steadfast in their pursuit of glory.

Conversely, Islamabad United and Lahore Qalandars find themselves entrenched at the bottom of the table, grappling with adversities that test their resilience. Despite flashes of brilliance,

their journey is fraught with setbacks, reflected in their negative net run rates of -0.028 and -0.533, respectively. Yet, amidst the trials and tribulations, these teams epitomize the indomitable spirit of cricket, refusing to relent in the face of adversity.

Beyond statistics and standings, the PSL is a crucible for burgeoning talent and seasoned professionals. It provides a platform where dreams take flight as young cricketers showcase their mettle on a grand stage, vying for recognition and acclaim. Moreover, the league serves as a beacon of hope for international players, allowing them to immerse themselves in the rich tapestry of Pakistani cricket, fostering camaraderie and cultural exchange.

As the league progresses, the enthusiasm and excitement among fans reach a crescendo, permeating the air with an electric energy that reverberates across stadiums and living rooms alike. Each match unfolds as a captivating narrative, weaving tales of triumph and adversity, showcasing the resilience and fortitude of the human spirit.

Looking ahead, the future of the PSL shines bright, poised to chart new horizons and captivate audiences around the globe. With each passing season, the league continues to evolve, transcending boundaries and uniting hearts in a shared celebration of the beautiful game. As the current season unfurls its drama-laden chapters, fans brace themselves for an exhilarating denouement, eager to witness the coronation of a new champion.

The Pakistan Super League is a testament to the enduring legacy of cricket and the unwavering passion and enthusiasm that defines the sport. As the seventh season unfolds, it beckons us to embark on a journey of discovery and exhilaration, where every moment is imbued with the promise of greatness. In the heart of Pakistan, amidst the roar of the crowds and the crack of the bat, the spirit of cricket finds its most authentic expression, a testament to the triumph of the human spirit.



# Navigating the Off-Field Arena: Dynamics and Strategies in the Premier League

The British Premier League stands as a cornerstone of contemporary football, embodying the essence of sporting excellence and serving as a stage for intricate off-field negotiations and strategic maneuvers. In this article, we delve into the recent events, competitive matches, and off-field dynamics that have shaped the landscape of one of the world's most celebrated football leagues.

**Competitive On-Field Encounters:** The recent fixtures in the British Premier League have showcased the intense competition and skillful displays emblematic of top-tier football. Teams such as Sheffield United, Arsenal, Manchester City, and Liverpool have left an indelible mark on the league standings with their formidable performances.

In a closely contested match, Sheffield United faced a 1-0 defeat against Wolves, with Pablo Sarabia's winning goal standing as a testament to the competitive spirit on the field. However, the match was not without its controversies, as an on-field clash between Jack Robinson and Vinícius Souza captured the attention of fans and pundits alike.

Arsenal's emphatic 4-1 victory against Newcastle United at the Emirates Stadium demonstrated the team's offensive prowess, with goals from Jakub Kiwior and an own goal by Sven Botman highlighting their dominance on the pitch.

Meanwhile, Manchester City's hard-fought 1-0 win against Bournemouth, with Phil Foden's decisive goal, underscored the team's resilience in the face of formidable opposition.

Liverpool's commanding 4-1 triumph over Luton extended their lead at the top of the table, showcasing their consistency and determination to maintain their position as frontrunners. However, Manchester City's narrow victory against Brentford narrowed the gap to just one point, setting the stage for a thrilling title race in the coming matches. **Off-Field Dynamics and Strategic Considerations:** Beyond the realm of on-field action, the Premier League operates within a complex ecosystem of off-field negotiations, financial intricacies, and strategic maneuvers that significantly influence the fate of clubs and reverberate across the broader footballing landscape.

The recent announcement of charges against Everton and Nottingham Forest by the Premier League administration underscores the league's commitment to enforcing regulatory standards and ensuring financial integrity among its member clubs. Such charges typically arise from violations of financial fair play regulations, breaches of club licensing requirements, or discrepancies in financial reporting. For Everton and Nottingham Forest, the prospect of facing penalties or sanctions poses a substantial threat to their stability and competitive standing within the league. Potential relegation looms as a palpable consequence, casting a shadow of uncertainty over the future trajectory of both clubs and amplifying the stakes of compliance with league regulations.

The exploration and implementation of fan zones by Premier



League clubs represent a strategic initiative to enrich the match-day experience, foster deeper connections with supporters, and maximize revenue generation opportunities. Fan zones serve as communal hubs where supporters converge to celebrate their shared passion for the club, partake in pre-match festivities, and engage with various entertainment offerings. From interactive experiences to merchandise stalls and culinary delights, fan zones enhance stadium precincts' overall atmosphere, contributing to the vibrancy of match-day rituals and amplifying fan engagement efforts. Moreover, the economic ripple effects of fan zones extend beyond the confines of the stadium, bolstering local businesses, hospitality establishments, and tourism infrastructure in the surrounding community. Amidst the backdrop of financial viability and regulatory compliance, the ongoing debates surrounding cost-control rules within the Premier League underscore the intricate economic dynamics that underpin modern football governance. The implementation of cost-control mechanisms aims to foster financial sustainability, promote competitive balance, and safeguard the long-term viability of clubs operating within the league framework. However, the efficacy and implications of such regulations remain subject to intense scrutiny and debate within the footballing community. Clubs grapple with the delicate balance between fiscal responsibility and competitive ambition, navigating a landscape fraught with financial constraints, revenue disparities, and regulatory imperatives. Pursuing sustainable business models and equitable resource allocation is paramount as clubs seek to reconcile commercial imperatives with the ethos of fair play and sporting integrity inherent in the Premier League ethos.

## Conclusion

The British Premier League stands as a beacon of sporting excellence and a testament to players, clubs, and fans' enduring passion and dedication. The recent developments, competitive matches, and off-field dynamics highlighted in this article underscore the multifaceted nature of the league and its profound impact on the global footballing landscape. As the season unfolds, one thing remains sure: the British Premier League will continue to captivate audiences and inspire awe with its unparalleled blend of skill, drama, and excitement.

By Hussnain Ahmad

# Japan naked festival: Women join Hadaka Matsuri for first time



By Shaimaa Khalil

The sea of chanting, nearly-naked men tussle, push and shove towards the shrine. "Washoi! Washoi!" they yell - let's go, let's go.

It is scene that has barely changed in the 1,250 years the Hadaka Matsuri, or the Naked Festival, has been taking place at the Konomiya Shrine, in central Japan.

But this year there is a change - a big one.

Away from the men's huddle, a group are about to become the first women to ever take part.

The women gathered here know they are making history. Finding room in traditionally male-dominated spaces is difficult anywhere, but in Japan - which last year ranked 125 out of 146 on the World Economic Forum's gender gap index - it is particularly hard.

Not that they weren't always there.

"In the background, women have always worked very hard to support the men in the festival," explains Atsuko Tamakoshi,

whose family has been working at the Konomiya festival for generations.

But the idea of actually taking part in the festival - which sees the men attempt to drive away evil spirits, before praying for happiness at the shrine - seems to have never come up before.

According to Naruhito Tsunoda, there has never been an actual ban. It's just that no one had ever asked.

And when they did, the answer was easy.

"I believe the most important thing is for there to be a fun festival for everyone. I think God would be happiest about that too," he told news agency Reuters.

Not everyone in the community was as accommodating though.

"There were many voices that were concerned (about us taking part) - saying, 'What are women doing in a men's festival?', 'This is a men's festival, it's serious'," Tamakoshi, a 56-year-old grandmother, explains.

"But we were all united in what we wanted to do. We believed that God would watch over us if we were sincere."

The women waiting for their turn are indeed sincere. What they are not is naked.

Instead many are wearing "happi coats" - long, purple robes - and white shorts, as opposed to the men's loincloths, while carrying their own bamboo offerings.

They won't be part of the big scramble which accompanied the men's rush to the shrine, or the clambering over one another to touch the Shin Otoko, or the 'male deity' - a man chosen by the shrine. Touching him, as the tradition goes, is meant to drive evil spirits away.

It doesn't take away the significance of this moment.

"I feel that times have finally changed," Yumiko Fujie tells the BBC. "But I also feel a sense of responsibility."

These women, however, are not just breaking gender barriers with their participation.



They are also keeping the tradition alive.

This week, another naked festival - held at Kokuseki Temple in Japan's north - said this would be the last one they would hold. There simply were not enough young people to keep the festival going.

Japan has one of the fastest ageing populations on earth. Last year, for the first time, more than one in 10 people were aged 80 or older. Meanwhile, its birth rate stands at just 1.3 per woman, with only 800,000 babies born last year.

The moment has come for the women to make their way to the shrine.

They stand in two parallel lines and carry the long bamboo sticks wrapped in intertwined red and white ribbons.

Atsuko Tamakoshi is leading the way - blowing her whistle to prompt the rhythmic chant they've heard the men say for decades.

"Washoi Washoi," the women shout.

The women focus on the movements and speed which they've practiced for weeks. They know they have to get this right.

Aware that the eyes of the media and the

spectators are on them they're also smiling a mix of nerves and excitement.

There are supportive cries from the watching crowd, some shouting "Gambatte" or 'keep going!', as they push through the freezing temperatures.

They enter the Konomiya Shinto shrine's courtyard and, like the men, they're sprayed with cold water. It seems to energise them even more.

After their offering is accepted, the women end the ceremony with the traditional salutation of two bows, two claps and one final bow.

And then, the enormity of the moment sets in. The women erupt into cheers, they jump around and hug each other crying. "Arigatogozaimasu! Arigato!" Thank you! Thank you! They say to each other and the crowd now applauding them.

"I got so teary," Michiko Ikai says. "I wasn't sure I could join, but now I feel a sense of achievement."

As they make their way out of the shrine, the women are stopped by members of the public who want to take pictures with them and media outlets who want to interview

them. They happily oblige.

"I've done it. I'm so happy," Mineko Akahori tells the BBC. "I'm really grateful that as a woman, I could participate for the first time."

Her friend and teammate Minako Ando adds that simply "becoming the first to do something like this is just great".

"Times are changing," says Hiromi Maeda. Her family has been running a local inn which has hosted some of the male festival-goers for the last 30 years.

"I think our prayers and wishes are the same. It doesn't matter if it's a man or a woman. Our passion is the same."

For Atsuko Tamakoshi, who has played such a key role in the day, there is a moment to reflect on what they have all achieved together. She's both emotional and relieved.

"My husband has always taken part in this festival," she tells the BBC. "And I was always the spectator. I'm now filled with gratitude and happiness."

Courtesy BBC



# From The Silver Screen To Your Closet: Celebrate Women's Day With Star-Studded Style

*The United States Institute of Peace underscores Pakistan's precarious position amidst surging inflation, internal political tensions, and escalating terrorism*



By Anukriti Srivastava

Women's Day celebrates the essence of womanhood. Ahead of Women's Day 2024, we have selected a few celebrity looks that can be your outfit inspiration for the day. Whether you are going for a shopping spree with your girl gang or you are planning a lavish dinner date with your colleagues, these looks will fit your program for the day. Check out the looks here for inspiration.

## Alia Bhatt's Chiffon Saree Look

Saree is one of the best outfits that accentuates a woman's features to its best. But pulling off a saree feels tedious sometimes. You can take inspiration from Alia Bhatt's saree look from the movie 'Rocky aur Rani Ki Prem Kahani' which she shared on her Instagram. You can choose a chiffon saree and style the same with a sleeveless plain blouse. You can opt for a multi-hued saree for a dazzling look.

## Kareena Kapoor's Shimmer Dress Look

Kareena Kapoor turns heads with every outfit she styles. If you are planning to style a dress then you can take inspiration from Kareena Kapoor's shimmer dress look which she pulled off with a long pendant necklace. She took to her Instagram and shared this party look with her fans.

## Kriti Sanon Bossy Look

Kriti Sanon pulls off the professional looks effortlessly. If you have a meeting on Women's Day that you can't skip, but you want to outshine then you can take outfit inspiration from Kriti Sanon. Kriti has shared her bossy look on Instagram styling a sleeveless white shirt with a slit black skirt and thin black tie. The minimal

earrings and poker hairstyle complement her look.

## Rakul Preet's Printed Blazer Look

Who said you can't pull off a printed blazer in the professional realm? Rakul Preet has styled a printed blazer look with minimal accessory and nude makeup. You can create a similar look for your office on Women's Day.

## Deepika Padukone Grandpacore Fashion Look

Deepika Padukone can pull off every fashion trend effortlessly. She took to Instagram and shared her Grandpacore fashion look which she has styled for a film promotional event. She has styled a white shirt with a loose half sweater and beige trousers. Her minimal accessories and nude makeup create a boss look.



## Bachaa Party's new festive collection ad is repping all bachaas — as it should



We want to see more diversity in our ad campaigns, whether they're for kids or adults, because everyone deserves representation.

Bachaa Party, a children's toys and clothing retailer, released their festival collection in collaboration with the Child Protection Welfare Bureau Punjab featuring children with disabilities — and we're absolutely here for it!

The adorable campaign shows a group of children, including a young boy in a wheelchair and another boy with albinism. It rightfully highlights that children with disabilities not only exist but belong with others their age. The company's approach is excellent as it doesn't appear to be forced tokenism, rather it looks like a gang of friends hanging out.

Diversity campaigns usually have negative representations or sorrowful portrayals of children with disabilities, who are often shown as people to be pitied. However, Bachaa Party's ad aims "to spread a message of love, inclusivity, and diversity" and promote "dialogues and necessary conversions to make inclusion the new normal".

The importance of inclusion cannot be understated. Hundreds of children AND parents walking into Bachaa Party stores or looking

at their campaign online will see how normal it is for all kinds of children to be together and in turn, reduce biases against children with disabilities. Furthermore, it could foster empathy and understanding through the celebration of diversity.

Campaigns like the one by Bachaa Party can also boost the self-esteem and confidence of children with disabilities by giving them prominent, visible role models and demonstrating that they too are integral members of the community.

In their Instagram post, Bachaa Party said: "This collection is a testament to our deep commitment to mobilising resources and building partnerships for the well-being of every child in Pakistan".

Our only note — it would be a great touch to include children with disabilities as models for clothing items on the website.

Challenging stereotypes and misconceptions could encourage social integration by promoting acceptance and friendship, thus breaking down barriers to inclusion.

Representation matters. Children must be able to see people like themselves in the media, as well as the normalcy of having friends and peers of all kinds.













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