

Fortnightly

The Truth International

Islamabad - Karachi

1st - 15th May 2024

Pakistan's Internal Unity
Present situation demands reconciliation
among all stakeholders

Israel's War on Palestine
Miserable situation in Palestine has exposed
hypocrisy of civilised world

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IMF team will reach Pakistan to negotiate
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Reconciliation - The only Option



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Reconciliation - The only Option

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Well Wishers of Pakistan ready to Bring Hope



By Ashraf Malkham

Finally, a rational voice has emerged, advocating for much-needed reconciliation among the establishment, Imran Khan's PTI, and all political parties. This initiative aims to facilitate dialogue on unity and the resolution of the nation's pressing issues.

Interestingly, retired individuals, seemingly more concerned about Pakistan than active politicians and members of the establishment, have taken a proactive role. While many political leaders remain preoccupied with undermining each other or enjoying the privileges of the government, the outlook for ordinary Pakistanis appears bleak.

One member of this group, preferring to work behind the scenes, expressed concern about the unprecedented turmoil in Pakistan. Reflecting on a career spanning both public service and politics, they lamented the lack of awareness regarding the severity of the situation. Notably, the nation's eastern and western borders are under threat, diplomatic relations with Iran are strained, and even longtime ally China is discontent with Pakistan's policies. Yet, personal agendas continue to overshadow the imperative for collective action.

Despite daunting challenges, there is a glimmer of hope. A group of individuals has initiated dialogue, engaging various stakeholders to navigate the current crisis. While early progress may be modest, the crucial process of reconciliation has begun.

Senior Journalist Ansar Abbasi reported in The News that a group of "well-wishers of Pakistan" is joining hands to evolve a strategy not only to resolve the growing rift between Imran Khan and the military establishment but also make the political parties sit together for greater good of people and the country.

The group includes some senior "neutral" politicians and a retired general. One of them confided that so far at least three "well-wishers of Pakistan" are in contact with one another, some others may join, to discuss the strategy for national cohesion and political stability.

These three include two former federal ministers and a well-known retired three star general. All the three are known faces. At this stage these "well-wishers of Pakistan" are not keen to disclose their names but they are discussing how they can use their connections both within the military

and in politics to bring an end to politics of enmity and hatred. One major concern of the group is to resolve the rift between Imran Khan and the military establishment. Talking about the rifts, the source said that there is a conflict between Imran Khan and the military establishment; PTI and the ruling coalition parties also don't talk to each other whereas IHC's six judges letter also showed a divide within the judiciary. It is said that the current situation is not good for the country, which needs political stability as well as respect for all the institutions.

"Once we finalise our strategy, we may share our thoughts with the media," the source said, indicating that it may not take long.

From the views expressed in TV talk shows during recent months by these "well-wishers of Pakistan", it can be assessed that their main focus will possibly be to resolve the differences between Imran Khan/PTI and the military establishment. There has been no direct interaction between Imran Khan/PTI and the military establishment since Nov 2022. Imran Khan and other leaders of the PTI have been frustratingly seeking a direct contact with the military establishment but it did not happen as yet. There have been



some unconfirmed reports about some indirect contacts but the ground realities remain unchanged for both Imran Khan and his party.

A few weeks back former secretary defence Lt-General (R) Naeem Khalid Lodhi had claimed that the military establishment had contacted Imran Khan but there was no outcome. The retired general had said it was in his knowledge that the military establishment had indirectly contacted Imran Khan.

He said the message for Imran Khan was to admit that he had planned the May 9 attacks, apologise for the same and assure that he would never repeat any such act in future. Lodhi added that Imran Khan replied he never planned the May 9 attacks, condemned those involved in arson and hooliganism and said he would ensure those who were involved in these incidents were removed from the PTI.

Aiming for immediate political and institutional reconciliation, former defence secretary Lt-Gen (r) Naeem Lodhi has proposed an end to incendiary discourse against institutions, an end to political persecution, and allowing the present government at least two years to deliver.

The retired general said that even if the involved parties initially seem to be non-compromising, sincere groups and individuals should -- for the sake of the country and its poverty-stricken people -- not get deterred by the enormity of the seemingly impossible task.



He said that he had the support of some political figures but would disclose the names of those joining the effort once the group is complete.

Gen Lodhi, who is in touch with two former federal ministers for the reconciliation effort, is inviting more people to join the group. He demands an extraordinary meeting of the National Security Committee with a special invitation to the CJP, heads of major political parties, prominent personalities from the media and business community etc to discuss reconciliation.

His demands include a call for an immediate cessation of all kinds of rabble-rousing and aggressive stances against rival political groups and institutions; a halt and reversal to all political persecutions by the government

and others; for the judiciary and tribunals to be free to dispense speedy justice related to politically motivated trials and appeals related to election complaints.

Further demands are that the police and district administration should not be employed to harass political opponents; the present governments, federal and provincial, be given at least two trouble-free years (till the end of 2025) to deliver; those who don't accept the election results may remain peaceful and under protest accept the present governments for this stipulated interim period; their silent protests be allowed to manifest through benign non-violent acts like wearing black armbands etc; and no street protests or large-scale demonstrations for these two years except approved gatherings for organizational purposes.

Gen Lodhi said that two realities must be understood. First, no political group can change the entire state apparatus. Second, the state cannot suppress the voice and wishes of a large chunk of society.

He warned that we have no time to continue on this collision course without facing grave economic, security and political consequences. He added: "Let it be known to all, that despite the hush-hush environment, there were people from all walks of life (media, judiciary, administration, the business community, lawyers, students, veterans etc) who raised their voices pointing at the ominous gathering of the impending storm".





Was the Faizabad commission doomed from the start?

Individuals involved in the 2017 events preferred to take responsibility for how the sit-in ended but stayed mum on who was behind the sit-in in the first place

By Atika Rehman

Leaks from the Faizabad commission report have opened a can of worms about an event that gripped the nation some seven years ago, but one that can hardly be dismissed as a ‘thing of the past’ given the long shadows it cast on the delicate issues of civilian supremacy, the role of the military establishment, mass media censorship and the competence of government machinery to handle a crisis.

The purported leaks, specifically the revelation that the commission has exonerated Gen Faiz Hameed, raised eyebrows especially when viewed against the backdrop of PML-N’s stance over the past few years on the establishment’s alleged interference in civilian affairs — as well as on the across the board accountability.

Former premier and party supremo Nawaz Sharif on several occasions had dec-ried a “state above a state” and in a pre-election interview with Dawn reiterated his desire to see accountability across institutions.

Yet when individuals who played a key role in the 2017 PML-N government were given an opportunity to rec-ord statements about the est-a-blishment’s alleged role in the dharna, they preferred to take responsibility for how the sit-in ended, but sta-yed mum on who was behind the sit-in in the first place.

Incumbent Defence Minister Khawaja Asif has dismissed the commission itself as being “non-serious” and has been publicly saying the same in recent months. In a conversation with Dawn, Mr Asif said the members who spoke to him had “no depth” and were busy in “chit chat”.

Ahsan Iqbal, one of the key figures nominated by then-PM Shahid Khaqan Abbasi to negotiate with the TLP protesters at the peak of the 20-day protest said, “The report must be made public. Selective and distorted leaks are giving the wrong impressions.”

When pressed to reflect on his role during that period, and whether he is proud of the



way the government handled it, Mr Iqbal told Dawn, “There was a sequence of events during a very volatile situation, and there was a threat of sectarian violence. If it had been badly handled, God forbid, Pakistan would have become worse than Lebanon. The government had no other option, no room to manoeuvre. We had two choices: let it linger or defuse the situation.

“We had exhausted all options. They [the protesters] didn’t listen. The Islamabad administration failed to break up the sit-in. So it was an extreme measure to involve senior military officers.”

Was it impossible to find a solution without them, given that the deal struck with the TLP was far from a victory for the government as it sacked a minister and walked away from the episode utterly dejected?

“The military establishment has clout, and of course, our security institutions play a role. Sometimes their presence itself is a deterrence. Things were not working out for us, so we had to escalate things as a response,” he said.

Shahid Khaqan Abbasi, who was prime minister at the time, said the military and intelligence services were involved in the negotiation process after the Islam-abad

High Court interve-ned. Before that, his strategy, “was to wear out the protesters through attrition”.

Mr Abbasi’s responses to the commission’s questionnaire are limited, and on talk shows in recent days he has reiterated that given the sanctity of the office he occupied, he did not engage in speculation on issues he did not have evidence of.

But how much authority did he have during the sit-in, and over how the negotiations went?

“I had and exercised all the authority available to my office as PM. We had a strategy, it may not have been a strategy that was liked by everybody, but it was the strategy of my government. All actions taken by Ahsan Iqbal or the negotiation team including Gen Faiz during the negotiations are my responsibility; we had opted for attrition to avoid loss of life and negotiate with them [TLP] on our terms. But the IHC gave unrealistic directions to remove the protesters without using force.”

He added, “The Islamabad police and administration under threat of being held in contempt by the High Court, made an ill-planned hurried attempt to remove the protesters and failed. After this failure a larger meeting involving senior Punjab



government officials and army and intelligence personnel was held to devise a plan to de-escalate and resolve the situation.”

So was it ever in the back of his mind during this negotiation process, when he engaged key military and intelligence officials, that perhaps elements in the security establishment were behind the dharna in the first place? And did Mr Abbasi share this with the commission?

‘Not an isolated event’

“Of course the question of who was behind the dharna was a consideration when we managed the situation. How did the situation snowball? There were many considerations — but the office I held does not allow me to speculate about things when there is no direct evidence. However, the dharna was not an isolated event, this was the same timeframe in which the Balochistan government literally vanished, the Senate elections were manipulated, and the Senate chairman election produced an impossible result.

“I did also wonder if the petition on the dharna to the Islamabad High Court was a collusion of some sort, but again I have no evidence. But it is clear that the High Court’s decision completely negated the government strategy to effectively manage the situation. The interference in executive authority by the High Court undermined the writ of the government and necessitated the involvement of the Army and the intelli-

gence agencies at the highest level to resolve the situation.”

Mr Abbasi went on, “The army is part of the government’s executive authority; the speculation that this process was driven by Gen Bajwa is not correct. Overall, how this event ended is not a matter of pride, the negotiation process undermined the government’s authority, but we were able to resolve a situation which had great potential to escalate.”

On the question of minister Zahid Hamid’s resignation, Mr Abbasi said, “the High Court decision left us with no option but to accede to the demands of the dharna [organisers]; the state failed to maintain its authority. Whether the dharna and the consequent events were by design or default, one can only speculate.”

A commission doomed to fail?

Political analyst Zahid Hussain said it was “well known that the orchestration of events was done by the establishment” and that though the PML-N did not publicly say it, privately its members acknowledged that.

“Despite the commission set out by the SC to investigate the dharna, it seemed that nobody wanted to delve into that subject matter,” Mr Hussain said.

“The terms given to the commission by the SC were meant to determine the culprits

behind the dharna. However, it appeared that the terms of reference were limited and did not specify the individuals involved. There were doubts about the power of the commission itself, comprising former police officers and bureaucrats. Now some of those who were interviewed, such as Khawaja Asif, revealed that the people interviewed did not have specific questions asked of them. Thus, the commission’s findings lacked clarity on who was behind the events.”

He added, “Now that the PML-N is back in power, they seem hesitant to upset relations with the establishment and are not clear on their stance.

When asked what he makes of Mr Abbasi’s position, given that he is no longer a member of PML-N and is poised to launch his own political party, Mr Hussain said, “I think Abbasi has been candid, it’s quite difficult for anyone in that capacity to blame any organisation without substantial evidence.”

“The ruling of the Supreme Court, particularly by [Chief] Justice [Qazi] Faez Isa, was seen as more damning, as it named individuals. But commissions in our country are not truly independent, and they are influenced by the government in power — ironically it is the same government that suspected the establishment of wrongdoing, but prefers not to go into that now.”

Courtesy Dawn



Why war in Palestine will continue

The recent military conflict between Iran and Israel only diverts attention from the real crux of the problem

By Ejaz Haider

"Where did you come from?"

"From Poland."

"When?"

"1948."

"When exactly?"

"March 1, 1948."

A heavy silence prevailed. All of them began to look around at things they had no need to look at.

Said broke the silence, saying calmly: "Naturally we didn't come to tell you to get out of here. That would take a war..."

"I mean your presence here, in this house, our house, Safiyya's and my house, is another matter. We only came to take a look at things, our things. Maybe you can understand that."

She said quickly: "I understand, but..."

Then he lost his composure. "Yes, but! This terrible, deadly, enduring 'but'..."

Returning to Haifa by Ghassan Kanafani

"Your Majesty, the image given of me in the Arab press is that I am very hard. It's not true. I have lived my life dreaming of a nation and a state, so I can understand the Palestinians. If you are angry over what we are doing to face the Palestinian uprising, it is not that we do not understand. We understand their dreams very well, but unfortunately here we have a conflict between two dreams... we agree to the Palestinians having a dream, but they should understand that it is impossible."

Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir to the King of Morocco — quoted by Mohamed Heikal in *Illusions of Triumph: An Arab View of the Gulf War* "The obstinate fact is this: the



Israelis don't understand any language but force," he said. "This is history — without force, they will give you nothing."

Veteran PLO fighter Mahmoud Ajrami in the *Financial Times*, May 24, 2021

"Talk to whom? That's the kind of conversation between the sword and the neck."

Ghassan Kanafani responding to a question about why Palestinians don't just talk to Israelis

Now that some of the euphoria has lifted, it is possible to re-examine the Israeli-PLO agreement with the required common sense. What emerges from such scrutiny is a deal that is more flawed and, for most of the Palestinian people, more unfavourably weighted than many had first supposed. The fashion-show vulgarities of the White House ceremony...only temporarily obscure the truly astonishing proportions of the Palestinian capitulation.

Edward Said, 'The Morning After',

London Review of Books, October 21, 1993

The Proximate

The latest iteration of Palestinian

armed resistance against Israel's colonial-apartheid state began on October 7, 2023, with an attack on Israelis by Hamas and Palestine Islamic Jihad (PIJ) fighters on land occupied by Israel. The many battles, kinetic and non-kinetic, in this long war have entered the seventh month.

Israel's response has been brutal and genocidal. The Israeli targeting strategy — bombing homes, tall buildings, hospitals, bakeries, prayer places, people moving to safer zones or collecting aid packages, aid workers, civil defence personnel, paramedics, journalists — and a very high tolerance threshold for civilian casualties have already been discussed at length by several international media outlets, including Israeli publications such as +972 and Local Call. That account, in granular detail, cannot be bettered and is widely available to readers and viewers around the world.

At the time of writing this, the talks to obtain a ceasefire have stalled. There were and are many proposals on the table, but Hamas and Israel are sticking to their positions: Hamas wants a permanent ceasefire and complete Israeli withdrawal; Israel wants a temporary ceasefire, return of Israeli captives and the freedom to continue its war to "destroy" Hamas' fighting capability, a euphemism for

exterminating and expelling Gazans and occupying Gaza to make way for illegal Israeli settlements.

Then, on April 1, Israel attacked Iran's consulate building in Damascus, killing seven Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps officers, including two generals. That action, illegal under relevant provisions of international law, threw the region in a tizzy. Iran promised a response and delivered one on the night of April 13 with an unprecedented attack on Israel from Iranian soil, using direct attack munitions and land-attack cruise and ballistic missiles.

The recent military conflict between Iran and Israel only diverts attention from the real crux of the problem — the brutal Israeli occupation of Palestine and its ongoing genocidal actions in Gaza. Ejaz Haider explains why it is important to look at the wider picture of Zionism's plans in the region and the place of Palestinian resistance to it

The attack generated fears around the world about a likely Israeli response, resulting in vertical and horizontal escalation across the region. The Israeli war cabinet meetings, at the time of writing, had agreed on a response but have remained divided over when and how.

During this episode, news about ongoing violence in Gaza and the Occupied Palestinian Territories (OPTs) was pushed to the sidelines. That violence continues unabated, though with a spike in attacks on the Palestinians in the OPTs by illegal Israeli settlers, who are always protected by Israeli security forces.

But this is just the immediate or proximate, if you will. This war did not begin on October 7. It has a much longer trajectory. Consider.

The Longer Context

Look again at the quotes above. They are there for a reason. Juxtapose what Kanafani, Ajrami and Said are saying with what Shamir said to the King of Morocco: Palestinians have a dream but that dream is impossible. What dream is that, especially since Resolution 181 of the United Nations passed on November 29, 1947 and the war that followed it?

That dream, shattered multiple times through subsequent wars in 1967 and 1973, is to have a Palestinian state, where Palestinians can exercise the right to return, a state which is not just an administrative authority but a sovereign state. It is this dream that Shamir told the King is impossible.

For most of the world, Oslo I (1993) and Oslo II (1995) were to take care of this problem. The Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO) had been recognised as the sole representative of the Palestinian people, the Palestinian Authority was to govern the affairs of its people and all would be well. There would be talks about a final settlement after five years of Oslo II.

That was not to be. As Said and many others at the time — and many since — pointed out, the Oslo Agreements effectively ended Palestinians' right to resist. They also entrapped the Palestinians into perennial subjugation by a settler-colonial state.

Why and how? The agreements didn't address Israeli violence or incursions into Palestinian towns and camps, Israeli illegal settlements, Palestinian refugees' right to return and Israel's control of land, sea and air.

As Said wrote in the LRB article: "In his September 13 press conference, [Yitzhak] Rabin was straightforward about Israel's continuing control over sovereignty; in addition, he said, Israel would hold the River Jordan, the boundaries with Egypt and Jordan, the sea, the land between Gaza and Jericho, Jerusalem, the settlements and the roads. There is little in the document to suggest that Israel will give up its violence against Palestinians."

This is also clear from Rabin's speech to the Knesset on October 5, 1995, where he presented the Oslo II Agreement: "We would like this [Palestinian Municipal Authority (PA)] to be an entity which is less than a state and which will independently run the lives of the Palestinians under its authority."

He then went on to explain how the arrangement would work: "The first stage of this redeployment of [Israeli Defence Forces (IDF)] will be carried out in three areas...: Area A — or the 'brown' area...

will include the municipal areas of the six cities — Jenin, Nablus, Tulkarm, Qalqilya, Ramallah, and Bethlehem. Responsibility for civilian security in this area will be transferred to the Palestinian Authority.

"Area B — or the 'yellow' area includes almost all of the 450 towns and villages in which the Palestinians of the West Bank live. In this area, there will be a separation of responsibilities. The Palestinians will be responsible for managing their own lives, and Israel will have overall responsibility for the security of Israelis and the war against the terrorist threat. That is, IDF forces and the security services will be able to enter any place in Area B at any time.

"The third area, Area C, or the 'white' area is everywhere that is not included in the areas that have been mentioned until now. In this area are the Jewish settlements, all IDF installations, and the border areas with Jordan. This area will remain under IDF control.

"Areas A and B constitute less than 30 percent of the area of the West Bank. Area C, which is under our control, constitutes more than 70 percent of the area of the West Bank."

Thirty days after this speech, on November 4, 1995, Rabin was assassinated. He is widely known as someone who wanted peace. That might be true, but not even he believed in allowing an independent, sovereign Palestinian state. The quotes from his speech make the situation clear.

They should also make clear how and why Israel has created disjointed Palestinian towns through checkpoints and roadblocks; how Palestinian movement is entirely dependent on Israel; how and why the IDF and Israeli police can raid and enter any area, including Area A, with impunity. But most importantly, how these "interim" agreements have (a) become the status quo, (b) turned the Palestinian Authority and its security forces into Israeli collaborators, and (c) put a nail in the coffin of any final settlement.

The Israeli rightwing was opposed to the accords. After Rabin's assassination, Ariel Sharon and Benjamin Netanyahu rose to power. Neither had any intention of following up on the interim arrangements

to a final settlement. Israel continued to expand its illegal settlements, created a strong chokehold on areas under nominal PA control, and increased its military and intelligence activities in Palestinian towns.

On the Palestinian side, Hamas and the PIJ were opposed to the accords and “warned that a two-state solution would forgo the right of Palestinian refugees to return to the historic lands seized from them in 1948 when Israel was created.” Said in his LRB article called it “an instrument of Palestinian surrender, a Palestinian Versailles.”

Today's Israeli government comprises people who believe in expelling Palestinians from Eretz Yisrael [Greater Israel]. Itamar Ben-Gvir, Israel's current National Security Minister, had threatened to kill Rabin. Along with Bezalel Smotrich, the far-right current finance minister, he is also an illegal settler.

This is of course a very sketchy account. But the essential point is simple: Israel, artificially created as a Jewish state, simply cannot exist alongside a sovereign Palestinian state. This has been made clear by a number of Zionists. Their argument: “If we allow Palestinians to return, what will become of the Jewishness of the Jewish state.”

Neither one state nor two states works for Israel. As discerning observers have noted, given what happened to the Oslo Accords, the two-state solution only lives in sham bureaucratic platitudes.

There were and are many proposals on the table, but Hamas and Israel are sticking to their positions: Hamas wants a permanent ceasefire and complete Israeli withdrawal; Israel wants a temporary ceasefire, return of Israeli captives and the freedom to continue its war to “destroy” Hamas' fighting capability, a euphemism for exterminating and expelling Gazans and occupying Gaza to make way for illegal Israeli settlements.

Some history is important

The idea of political Zionism is credited to Theodor Herzl's 1896 pamphlet *The Jewish State*. But Herzl, a Jewish journalist and essayist who was born in Budapest in the Austro-Hungarian Empire, and is considered the father of Israel, was not the first

Jewish writer to have presented this idea. Zionism predated Herzl.

The idea in several forms was gestating among European Jews who were actively a part of European socio-political turmoil in the 18th and 19th centuries. As German historian Michael Brenner describes it, “Nationalism was a characteristic trait of life in 19th century Europe, and Jews were right in the middle of it.” They had “witnessed and often participated in the struggles for unity and independence of European nations, from the Polish rebellions against the Czarist Empire to the Italian Risorgimento and the struggle over German unification.”

It was “no coincidence that the most significant precursors of Zionism came from the much-contested border areas of Europe or explicitly mentioned the fight for sovereignty of European nations as an inspiration of their own (proto-)Zionist writings.”

Rabbi Yehuda Alkalai (1798–1878), born in Sarajevo, and Rabbi Zvi Hirsch Kalischer (1795–1874), born in West Prussian Thorn, were two contemporaries who believed that Jews could not passively await the arrival of the Messiah. Their approach was very different from many ultra-orthodox Jews (including rabbis) who were to later oppose Herzl's political Zionism.

Alkalai, in fact, came up with a novel interpretation and pointed to “a precedent in the traditional Jewish idea of a first, temporary, Messiah from the house of Joseph, who would lead a militant struggle to open the way for the final arrival of the real Messiah from the house of David.”

This two-stage interpretation looked at Zionism, in terms of a return to the Biblical idea of Eretz Yisrael, as the form of a collective Messiah of the house of Joseph, which would then lead to the arrival of the real Messiah. As Brenner puts it, “He thus legitimised the return of the Jews and the establishment of their state in Israel by his quite original theological interpretation.”

Kalischer, while not going for a novel exegesis, however, argued in his 1862 treatise *Seeking Zion* (German: *Drishat Tsion*) that Jews could not passively wait for the Messiah. “Instead, he called for

human intervention to hasten the coming of the Messiah. The colonisation of the Land of Israel was one measure he suggested.”

Speaking with me, American policy scholar Barnett Rubin, who is known here because of his work on Afghanistan and Central Asia, talked about false messiahs. That account is contained in a long article he wrote for the *Boston Review* titled, ‘False Messiahs: How Zionism's dreams of liberation became entangled with colonialism.’

But a little known and often forgotten fact is that Jewish political and religious Zionism came much later. It was preceded by Christian (later, Protestant) Zionism. Jordanian-Palestinian Professor Joseph Massad takes the idea back to Christian millenarianism during the crusades. British Reverend Dr Stephen Sizer argues this point in his book *Christian Zionism: Road Map to Armageddon?* and says that, “Christian Zionism is the most dominant and destructive expression of Zionism today.”

Meanwhile, Donald E Wagner, author of *Anxious for Armageddon* and who teaches at North Park University in Chicago, notes that, “Christian Zionism...views the modern state of Israel as the fulfilment of Biblical prophecy, thus deserving our unconditional economic, moral, political and theological support.”

What we are witnessing today is a coming together of Jewish Zionism, which has now transformed into Religious Jewish Zionism, and modern Protestant millenarianism that is pegged on the Second Coming of Christ.

This is where theology, politics and geopolitical interests intersect. The ‘return’, essentially the stealing of Palestinian land, not only fulfilled a promise for the Jews but also provided them the support of Christian millenarians and, presumably, secular, democratic Western governments.

Why is this important?

This sketchy background of a very complex history should give the reader some idea about why, despite the Oslo Agreements, no solution to the Palestinian colonisation is in sight; why Israel continues to insist on keeping Gaza as an open prison and the OPTs as areas that are

effectively controlled by Israeli military and intelligence services; why Israel can, at will, curtail freedom of movement, raid, arrest and kill Palestinian men, women and children; and why Israel continues to expand illegal settlements in the face of UN resolutions by destroying Palestinian properties and land. Most importantly, it explains why Israel will never agree to a sovereign Palestinian State.

The two-state solution, as noted above, is a red-herring. Take, for instance, the US position: first in 2011 and now two weeks ago, the US has killed Palestine's application in the UN Security Council for a full state status. The US insists that, until a final settlement, Palestine cannot have full status.

But while mouthing the two-state bromide, it has failed to force Israel into moving towards final settlement talks or stop it from expanding its illegal settlements. Last September, when Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu went to the UN with a map of Israel that showed Gaza, OPTs, Galilee and the Syrian Golan Heights as part of Israel, the US never objected to his brandishing of that map.

That map is Eretz Yisrael. Israel cannot openly show Jordan and parts of Syria and Lebanon in that map because of geopolitical sensitivities, but there's more to Eretz Yisrael than the 'River to the Sea' slogan. When a reporter once asked Menachem Begin about the borders of Israel, Begin responded by saying, "But they are given in the Bible."

As Rubin wrote in an article for the website Mondoweiss, titled 'Redemption through Genocide': "In the wake of the 1967 War, Rabbi Tzvi Yehuda Kook's teaching that the commandment to 'conquer and settle' the Land of Israel was equal to all the other commandments, inspired [ultranationalist Jewish settler movement] Gush Emunim. Fulfilling that commandment is the greatest tikkun [acts of repair] and will hasten the footsteps of the Messiah. 'The army of Israel,' Kook taught, 'is the army of Hashem [God].'"

Expansion, repair, the promised land, the return of the Messiah, the army of God — none of this squares with a settlement with the Palestinians.

The place of violence

This is where the Palestinian armed resistance comes in. International humanitarian law legitimises wars of national liberation. The Additional Protocol I to the Geneva Conventions of 1949 describes such resistance as a protected, universal and essential right of occupied people.

This is further corroborated by UNGA's 1974 Resolution 3314, which not only prohibits states from "any military occupation, however temporary" but also affirms the right "to self-determination, freedom and independence [...] of peoples forcibly deprived of that right, [...] particularly peoples under colonial and racist regimes or other forms of alien domination." The resolution also recognises the right of the occupied to "struggle...and to seek and receive support" in that effort. This is further corroborated by UNGA resolution, A/RES/37/43 of December 3, 1982 which "Reaffirms the legitimacy of the struggle of peoples...all available means, including armed struggle;..." (italics added)

International Law is very clear. The rest is geopolitical baloney. Hamas' October 7 attack, despite the very high cost to Gaza and Gazans, has served to sharpen focus on Israel's real objective: expel Palestinians from occupied territories and create Eretz Yisrael from the River to the Sea.

Ajrami, who trained hundreds of Hamas and PIJ fighters, advised them to be patient and bide their time: "Let the beast sleep until you are ready," he said. But when the time is ripe, "Bring the beast to me, and we will slay it together."

Hamas knew how Israel would respond: brutally and vengefully. In strategic terms, begetting the expected Israeli response was key to creating an international public relations disaster for Israel. That is precisely what has happened.

For the first time in its artificial history, Israel has lost the support of not only a number of states but people around the world. It is in the International Court of Justice dock on the charge of committing genocide and its actions have also put Germany in the dock.

The United States, its strongest ally, is in a quandary — it is stretched in geopolitical terms, from Ukraine to the South China Sea to the Middle East. The Global South, to use a loose term, no longer considers it an honest broker.

This does not mean that Israel will relent. It won't. It also retains the capabilities to put up a fight and it will. A mix of political and religious Zionism means it cannot have a single, inclusive state in Palestine; nor can it allow a sovereign Palestine as part of a two-state solution — unless, the US and its Western allies develop some basic moral compass.

In the interim, Israel will become even more brutal. It is locked in a paradox of its own creation: such are the very conditions of the problem that the solution to the problem is rendered impossible. American author Joseph Heller called it Catch 22.

Equally, as the Hamas attack and subsequent horizontal escalation have shown, the rules of engagement in the Middle East have changed. To quote the IDF spokesperson Lt-Col Peter Lerner, the Axis of Resistance has created a "ring of fire" around Israel.

Resistance groups are in this war and its many battles for the long haul. They have seen how this iteration has created second- and third-order effects for Israel and the US. With the growing commodification of weapon systems, platforms and associated technologies, capabilities are becoming diffused and spreading laterally. That fact has consequences for more iterations of this war.

There are two ways of dealing with this: either the Western world leans heavily and decisively on Israel to deliver a sovereign Palestinian state or the war will continue. Its continuation will have unintended and catastrophic consequences.

As TS Eliot said in East Coker:

"Our only health is the disease

If we obey the dying nurse

Whose constant care is not to please

But to remind of our, and Adam's curse,

And that, to be restored, our sickness

must grow worse."

Courtesy Dawn

BBC Gaza correspondent: My struggle to keep family safe while covering the war

By Adnan El-Bursh

For about three months, Adnan El-Bursh reported on the war in Gaza while living in a tent, eating one meal a day, and struggling to keep his wife and five children safe. The BBC Arabic correspondent shares the harrowing moments he faced covering a war that pushed him to his limits.

One of the worst moments of the past six months was the night we all slept on the street. I looked at the faces of my wife and children, huddled in the bitter cold in Khan Younis in southern Gaza, and felt helpless.

My 19-year-old twins, Zakia and Batoul, lay on the pavement alongside my daughter, Yumna, who is 14, my son Mohamed, who is eight and my youngest girl, Razan, aged five, with their mother, Zaynab.

As we tried to rest outside the Palestinian Red Crescent Society's headquarters, the sounds of shelling echoed through the night and drones buzzed overhead.

We had managed to find an apartment to rent, but the landlord had called earlier that day, saying the Israeli military had warned him the building would be bombed. I was working at the time, but my family grabbed their bags and fled.

We met up at the Red Crescent headquarters, which was already overflowing with displaced people.

My brother and I sat on cardboard boxes all night, discussing what we should do.

We had fled our homes in the town of Jabalia a few days earlier, on 13 October, leaving most of our possessions behind, after the Israeli military told everyone in northern Gaza to move south for safety.

And now we had just escaped being bombed in the area we had been told to move to. It was hard to think straight. I felt angry, humiliated and terrible that I could not provide any protection for my family.

Eventually, my family moved to an apartment in Nuseirat in central Gaza,



while I stayed with the BBC team in a tent at Nasser hospital in Khan Younis. I visited every few days.

Communication was difficult, with internet and phone signals sometimes cut. Once I did not hear from my family for four or five days.

In Khan Younis, the BBC team - about seven of us - lived on one meal a day. Even when there was food, sometimes we did not eat it because there was hardly anywhere to go to the toilet.

During this time my friend, Al Jazeera bureau chief Wael Al-Dahdouh, suffered a terrible loss.

The house his family had been staying in was hit in an Israeli air strike. His wife, teenage son, seven-year-old daughter and one-year-old grandson were killed.

The Israeli military says it takes "feasible precautions" to reduce civilian casualties, and in this case had "targeted Hamas terrorist infrastructure in the area".

In Gaza, Palestinian journalists document the war as they live it on a daily basis. In this BBC World Service film, we hear the story of BBC Arabic's Reporter in Gaza, Adnan El-Bursh who found himself reporting the news, as he was living through it.

I watched the footage of my friend, who I have known for 20 years, embracing his children's shroud-wrapped bodies in central

Gaza. I wished I was there with him.

The news came amid a string of reports about the deaths of other friends, relatives and neighbours. My heart ached. I have now lost about 200 people in the war.

That day I wept live on air, as I was reporting. In the night, I woke up with tears covering my cheeks. Wael's image never left my mind.

I have covered conflicts in Gaza for 15 years, but this war stands apart, from the unprecedented attack that triggered it, to the scale of the losses.

At 06:15 on 7 October I was woken by loud explosions and my children screaming. I went up to the rooftop and saw rockets being launched towards Israel from Gaza.

When we realised Hamas had breached the fence into Israel - in its assault that saw about 1,200 people killed and 250 taken hostage - we knew the response from Israel would be like nothing we had seen before.

More than 34,000 people have now been killed in Gaza, according to the Hamas-run health ministry. The risk of injury and death has been ever-present.

Two days into the war, I hurried to our local market in Jabalia, to stock up with food. It was busy with others doing the same.

But the area was bombed heavily just 10

minutes after I left. The entire place was destroyed, including the large grocery store where I had shopped moments earlier.

I knew the faces of the shop owners. Many of them were among the dead.

Amnesty International says at least 69 people were killed in the attack and that it should be investigated as a war crime.

The Israeli military has not responded to the BBC's question about this incident.

Throughout the war it has said its operation is targeting Hamas, which it says operates from civilian locations.

It also says "strikes on military targets are subject to relevant provisions of international law".

Before the war, Jabalia was a beautiful, tranquil town. I was born there and had been living a simple, contented life with my family, filled with love and plans for the future.

I had a farm east of the town, where I had planted olive, lemon, and orange trees with my own hands. It was peaceful and I loved to drink tea there after work.

The day we decided to flee northern Gaza for Khan Younis - leaving our homes and the BBC office in Gaza City behind - was a pivotal moment in my life.

With more than 10 people crammed into one car, my family and I crawled our way south, along a single road, with tens of thousands of other people, on foot and in vehicles, all loaded with belongings.

The journey was punctuated by air strikes on nearby areas on both sides of the road. Confusion, grief and uncertainty marked the faces of my family and the crowds.

The children kept asking me: "Where are we going? Will we be back tomorrow?"

I really wish I had taken our photo album, full of pictures of me as a young child, my parents, and my wife and I when we got engaged. My dad was an Arabic teacher and I also wish I had taken some of his books that I kept after he died. Later, I learned from a neighbour that my house had been completely destroyed, and my farm burned.

After that terrifying and surreal journey south, and our night outside the Red Crescent headquarters, I continued working from Khan Younis for several weeks. My family were still in Nuseirat and being separated from them took a toll emotionally.

Then, in early December, Israel began telling Gazans to leave parts of Khan Younis and move to other areas, including Rafah, further south.

The Israeli military also closed the main road leading north, which connected me and my family. I did not know how I would get to them or where we should go if I did. Rafah was already overcrowded with hundreds of thousands of people, and there was barely anywhere to stay.

For days, I grappled with swirling emotions. News circulated about Israeli forces advancing towards the main roads, apparently aiming to divide the south from the central and northern regions. I was terrified that I - or my family - would be killed and we would never see each other again.

For the first time I felt like I had lost it. I did not even know what day it was. I considered stopping work and returning to my family. If we died, we would die together.

In the end, on 11 December, I drove with a colleague along a back road to Nuseirat. When I arrived, my youngest children rushed up to hug me, with Razan reaching round my neck and holding on tight.

We managed to move the family to Rafah. The BBC team had also relocated there, continuing to report. There were some awful moments.

In late December, I reported as the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) handed about 80 bodies to the authorities in Gaza. The IDF said it had taken them from Gaza to Israel so they could be checked to see if there were any hostages among them.

A large lorry drove into the cemetery in the Rafah area. The stench was overwhelming when the container was opened. Men in aprons and masks placed the remains, wrapped in blue plastic, in a mass grave dug by an excavator in the sandy ground.

I had never seen a scene like that before. It is hard to describe how horrible it was.

Then, in January, I was reporting from a hospital in Rafah when several bodies were brought in, including another of Wael Al-Dahdouh's sons, Hamza, his eldest, who was also a journalist working for Al Jazeera.

Who would tell Wael? It just seemed impossible, after the tragedies he had already faced. I could not even listen as one of my colleagues called someone close to Wael to pass on the news.

Hamza and his colleague, freelance videographer Mustafa Thuraya, were killed in an Israeli air strike on their car, after they had reported on the aftermath of another strike in the area.

The Israeli military alleges they were "members of Gaza-based terrorist organisations". The families and Al Jazeera reject the claims as false.

The IDF says the two were operating drones "posing an imminent threat to IDF troops", but a Washington Post investigation "found no indications that either man was operating as anything other than a journalist that day".

More than 100 journalists have been killed in Gaza since 7 October, according to Reporters Without Borders - the vast majority are known to be Palestinian.

The IDF says it "has never, and will never, deliberately target journalists".

It says it "takes all operationally feasible measures to mitigate harm to civilians including journalists", but "remaining in an active combat zone has inherent risks".

Eventually, the news came that the BBC team's families had permission to leave Gaza. Four weeks later, we too finally left through the Rafah crossing, facilitated by the Egyptian authorities.

I am writing this in Qatar. But I know that in Jabalia, they have been pulling up grass and grinding animal feed to eat, while I'm here having meals in a clean hotel. I find it hard to eat - it's like eating poison.

Courtesy BBC

The US doctor who cannot forget what he saw in Gaza

By Fergal Keane

Sam Attar reckons he left part of his soul in Gaza. It was the part of him that saw suffering and could not turn away. The part which now cannot forget.

You can be on the shores of Lake Michigan on an overcast spring day, the wind whipping up waves on the green water. And at the very same time you can be back there, in the heat and the dying.

It's been three weeks since he came home to Chicago but it might as well have been yesterday. The faces of that other world are with him: Jenna, the traumatised little girl wasting away, spectral pale on a hospital bed, while her mother shows Sam a phone video of the child's last birthday. Happy days before the disaster.

Warning: This article contains details and images some readers may find disturbing.

Another mother whose 10-year-old son had just died.

"The mom just told me with just a blank numb stare on her face that he had just died five minutes prior. The staff had been trying to cover up his body with blankets but she just refused to let them. She wanted to spend more time with him. She was grieving, she was sobbing, and stayed that way for about a good 20 minutes, she just didn't want to leave his side."

Then there was the man in his 50s, forgotten in a room, having had both legs amputated.

"He had lost his kids, his grandkids, his home," Sam recalls, "and he's alone in the corner of this dark hospital, maggots going out of his wounds and he was screaming: 'The worms are eating me alive please help me.' That was just one just one out of... I don't know, I just I stopped counting. But those are the people I still think of because they're still there."

Sam is a sensitive, thoughtful man in his 40s, the son of two doctors, who was born and raised in Chicago and who works as a surgeon at Northwestern hospital in the



city. While in Gaza he kept video diaries and filmed his experiences.

For two weeks in March and April - on behalf of the NGO Palestinian American Bridge - he worked in Gaza hospitals that were desperately short of everything except badly-wounded patients. On the day he entered Gaza this time around he was immediately confronted with the hunger crisis.

"We were just swarmed by people banging on the cars, some people trying to jump on the cars. The drivers... they just got it. They don't stop because if they stopped then people jump on the cars. They're not trying to harm us. They're just begging for food. They're starving."

Sam recounts his experiences calmly, as you might expect of a man trained to put patients at ease. Every day there was the relentless pressure of carrying out triage, deciding who could be saved, who was beyond hope. Patients lying on hospital floors surrounded by blood and discarded bandages, the air filled with the cries of pain and of grieving relatives.

There is no erasing such horrors. Even if you are a highly trained doctor with past experience of war zones like Ukraine, Syria and Iraq.

"I still think of all the patients I took care of," he says, "all the doctors that are still

there. There's a little bit of guilt and shame at leaving because there's so much that needs to be done. The needs are overwhelming. And you walk away from people that are still there and still suffering."

The last trip - his third into Gaza since the war began - saw him join the first team of international medics to be embedded in a hospital in northern Gaza where malnutrition is at its most acute.

The mission was organised by the World Health Organisation (WHO) which has warned of looming famine. Some 30% of children below the age of two are reported to be acutely malnourished, and 70% of the population in northern Gaza is facing what the UN calls "catastrophic hunger."

Last month the UN Human Rights chief, Volker Turk, accused Israel of a potential war crime because of the food crisis in Gaza.

"The extent of Israel's continued restrictions on entry of aid into Gaza, together with the manner in which it continues to conduct hostilities, may amount to the use of starvation as a method of war," he said.

Israel denies this and has blamed the UN and aid agencies for any slow or inadequate delivery of aid.

The Israeli government said UN calculations on hunger were based on "multiple

factual and methodological flaws, some of them serious." The government has said that it had tracked media reports that food markets in Gaza, including the north, had plentiful supplies.

"We outright reject any allegations according to which Israel is purposefully starving the civilian population in Gaza," said a statement from COGAT - Coordinator of Government Activities in the Territories.

Sam Attar remembers the 32-year-old woman admitted suffering from severe malnutrition, with her son, and her mother and father in the room with her.

She underwent CPR - attempts to resuscitate the heart - but could not be saved.

"I had to call it," Sam says. The young mother lay on a bench, her left arm dangling towards the floor, eyes gazing upward in the moment of death. Across the room a nurse comforted her crying mother.

There was the little girl, Jenna Ayyad, aged seven, "just skeleton and bone" whose mother hoped to get to the south where better medical facilities were available.

Jenna was traumatised by the war and looked to be extremely malnourished. She suffers from cystic fibrosis, which makes digestion more difficult. Her condition has been exacerbated by the conditions of the war and she is also suffering from trauma. In footage taken by a BBC cameraman Jenna seems lost and now only speaks to her mother.

"What can I do? She can't be treated," said Nisma Ayyad. "Her mental state is very difficult. She doesn't talk at all whenever anyone talks to her. Her situation is bad, and as a mom, I can't do anything."

Dr Attar said that as his team packed up to return to southern Gaza, Jenna's mother approached him.

"Jenna's mom came to me and was saying, 'I thought we were coming with you... what's happening? Why are you going and we're staying?'"

Sam had to explain that the convoy south was only approved for the delivery of fuel and food and not for carrying patients.

But before leaving Sam and his colleagues

filled in the necessary papers to have Jenna transferred. It would take days but they would make sure the paperwork reached the right offices. When Sam went to speak with Jenna's mother, other mums noticed.

"The problem is it's open, shared rooms, [with] maybe 10 patients in one room. So when all the other moms saw me talking to her, they all swarmed me."

Jenna was transferred and is now being treated at the International Medical Corps hospital near Rafah.

According to UN estimates last month the majority of those killed in the war have been women and children: 13,000 children, 9,000 women.



The war is now in its seventh month. Negotiations for a ceasefire and the release of hostages are stalled. Every day and night the wounded and the malnourished arrive at the few functioning hospitals that are left. The WHO says that only 10 of Gaza's 36 hospitals are still functioning.

Traveling in Gaza can be very dangerous for aid workers. Witness the deaths of seven aid workers, including three Britons, when the Israeli military attacked their convoy with missile strikes on 1 April.

Sam describes queuing for hours at Israeli checkpoints. "We often wait one to four hours depending on how long it takes for the Israelis to approve the passage because they are conducting military operations."

The US doctor wants to see a concerted push to get more aid into the north.

"The north just needs more access, it needs more food, more fuel, more water, the roads need to be opened... And there are so many patients that need to be evacuated from the north to the south and the problem is the south is also busy. I mean, the hospitals here are exploding."

He will go back. Soon he hopes. There are bonds of friendship which call out to him.

The paramedic Nabil who Sam saw every day, bringing in the wounded for treatment, until he himself became a victim who had to be pulled from the rubble by his

colleagues. He is alive but will not be able to leave Gaza.

The doctor whose daughter was killed but who found the generosity to comfort a mother whose toddler son was suffering from a brain injury caused by bomb shrapnel.

And there are the patients and their families who see in the doctors, nurses and paramedics not just the possibility of practical help but the steady light of human decency in a place of terror and degradation.

These are Sam Attar's people. All of them.

Courtesy BBC

Hundreds of students arrested in US Gaza war protests, scuffles at UCLA



Police out in full force, some using chemical irritants and Tasers to disperse students, as more universities join movement.

Hundreds of students have been arrested across universities in the United States, with scuffles reported between pro-Israeli and pro-Palestinian demonstrators at UCLA, as rallies for a ceasefire in Gaza and divestment from companies linked to Israel spread across US campuses.

The pro-Palestinian encampment at the University of California at Los Angeles has expanded in recent days, but counter-protesters have also become increasingly vocal and visible.

On Sunday, the mood turned ugly when some demonstrators broke through a barrier that had been set up to separate the two factions, according to Mary Osako, UCLA's vice chancellor for strategic communications.

People from both sides then pushed and shoved each other, shouting slogans and insults and in some cases trading punches. Campus police armed with batons eventually separated the sparring groups.

Osako said the university was "heartbroken" about the violence and had introduced additional security measures.

"As an institution of higher education, we stand firmly for the idea that even when we disagree, we must still engage respectfully and recognize one another's humanity," she said in a statement. "We are dismayed that certain individuals instead chose to jeopardize the physical safety of the community."

While the Los Angeles police were not called in at UCLA and no arrests were made, officers in other parts of the country were deployed to campuses on Saturday, with some using chemical irritants and Tasers to disperse the students, as the protests spread.

In Boston, police detained about 100 people while clearing a protest camp at Northeastern University, with social media posts showing security forces in riot gear and officers loading tents onto the back of a truck.

In a statement on X, Northeastern said the area on campus where the protests were held was now "fully secured" and "all

campus operations have returned to normal".

The university said its move came after "what began as a student demonstration two days ago was infiltrated by professional organisers with no affiliation to Northeastern". It added that detained individuals who produced a valid student ID were released and will face disciplinary proceedings, not legal action.

Northeastern said that "Kill the Jews" had been heard at the protests, and that such chants "crossed the line", making it necessary to clear what it said was an "unauthorized encampment" that had been "infiltrated" by professional organisers with no affiliation to the university.

However, members of the pro-Palestinian protest movement at the university rejected those claims.

Video posted from the site appeared to show that people holding Israeli flags were the ones using the slur.

In Bloomington in the Midwest, the Indiana University Police Department arrested 23 people as they cleared a campus

protest camp, the Indiana Daily Student newspaper reported.

On the opposite side of the country, the Arizona State University Police Department arrested 69 people for trespassing after the group set up an “unauthorised encampment” on campus.

Arizona state officials said a protest group, “most of whom were not ASU students, faculty or staff”, set up a camp on Friday and ignored repeated orders to disperse.

Meanwhile, at Washington University in St Louis, at least 80 people were arrested, including US presidential candidate Jill Stein and her campaign manager.

Across the US, university leaders have tried, and largely failed, to quell the demonstrations, which have often seen the police intervening violently, with videos emerging from different states showing hundreds of students – and even faculty members – being forcefully arrested.

The protesters have demanded amnesty for students and faculty members disciplined or fired for protesting. About a week ago at Columbia University in New York, more than 100 pro-Palestinian activists were arrested.

What started at the Columbia campus has turned into a nationwide showdown between students and administrators over pro-Palestine protests and the restrictions on free speech.

In the past 10 days, hundreds of students have been arrested, suspended, put on probation and, in rare cases, expelled from colleges, including Yale University, the University of Southern California, Vanderbilt University and the University of Minnesota.

A few universities have had to cancel graduation ceremonies, while others have seen their buildings occupied by the protesters.

Students taking ‘big risks’

Al Jazeera’s John Hendren, reporting from Princeton University in New Jersey, said “the price of protests can be high” for the students occupying college campuses.

“Students are taking some big risks at these protests. If they violate university rules, they can be expelled. And here at Princeton, tuition is over \$50,000 a year,” he said. “For many of them, it’s an education they have been looking forward to all their lives.”

Princeton student Sam Bisno told Al Jazeera taking such risks showed how “passionate” students were about the issue. “People are willing to put it all on the line. But we know we have the power in numbers,” he said.

Momodou Taal was among four students whom Cornell University in New York state “temporarily suspended” on Saturday for setting up an encampment on its campus.



He told Al Jazeera the protesting students received threats and were subjected to doxxing, the posting of the personal information of an individual on the internet without their consent. He said such students received no protection from their institutions.

“We no longer have faith in the administration to be a place safe for Muslim students, for Arab students, for Palestinian students and by and large those students of colour and pro-Palestinian students,” Taal said.

Maysam Elghazali, an organiser of the protests at Emory University in Atlanta, said the demonstrating students had three demands.

“Number one, that Emory disclose all of its financial investments. Number two, that they divest from all Israeli companies, and number three, that they provide continued amnesty and protection to all the students who were unjustly arrested,” she told Al Jazeera.

Meanwhile, college protests against the “genocide” of the Palestinians in Gaza have also spread to universities in Canada, Europe and Australia.

Canada’s first campus protest camp for Gaza appeared at McGill University in Montreal on Saturday.

Broadcaster CBC reported protesters were demanding McGill and Concordia universities “divest from funds implicated in the

Zionist state as well as [cut] ties with Zionist academic institutions”. Tents were also set up on the front lawn of the University of Sydney last week. In a statement Vice Chancellor Professor Annamarie Jagose said the university, Australia’s oldest, was committed to the right of protesters to assemble peacefully and express their views.

But she said there was also “zero tolerance for any form of racism, threats to safety, hate speech, intimidation, threatening speech, bullying or unlawful harassment, including antisemitic or anti-Muslim language or behaviour.”

Courtesy www.aljazeera.com

Reluctant Neighbors

Raeesi visit bombed any meaningful reproachment

By Naqi Akbar

Ever since the Islamic Revolution in Iran, relationship between the two erstwhile neighbors Pakistan and Iran has taken many nose dives. Sometimes the nose dives were generated by statements emanating from Tehran and sometimes pure misunderstanding between the two was enough to derail any meaningful development of warm relations between the two. The recently concluded visit by the Iranian President Ibrahim Raeesi, instead of creating any opportunity for a reproachment, it squarely bombed out any positive developments for the future.

The areas constituting Pakistan before 1947 have been heavily influenced by the Persian culture, for good or for bad. Towards that end the tactical military alliance between the founder of Moghal empire Babur and the Safavi dynasty founder Shah Ismael can be termed the basis for much of the Iranian Persian influence in above mentioned areas. Babur brigades which won the vital battles in 1526 had components from the Safavi military units. Many of the combatants opted to settle in the newly conquered Indian states, thus heralding the basis of the above-mentioned cultural influence in the area.

The development of Urdu as the language of the Muslim elite as well as Darbar had an effective breast feeding from the Persian language and culture. One of the most visible impacts has been the level of sectarian tolerance witnessed in the areas constituting Muslim majority in the undivided India. The undivided India and what constituted Pakistan after 1947 has been a Sunni majority areas. However, Pakistan has for decades held a unique distinction that the martyrdom day of Ahel Bait in Karbala in 7th century has been treated as a day of mourning with minority Shia having the freedom to mourn the day as they deemed fit. Such freedom has been absent in Shia majority regions like Iraq, Bahrain and even Lebanon. In Bangladesh, where there are no credible statistics about the number of Shia in the population, the



central procession of Ashura has been the regular feature in that nation state.

With such a background, it was all a practical proposition that the two countries remain on one side of the political and cultural divide. That convergence of perception in the early years of Pakistan inception were partly guided by the cultural similarities and partly by the geo political arrangements in the post WW2 and cold war era. The political and military establishments of both Iran and Pakistan happened to be pro West and were further tied in military pacts like CENTO and SEATO. Even if there were disagreements about Iran being too close to Pakistan by the pro Saudi religious element, at the end of the day, Shia Iran, radical Sunni Saudi Arabia and the so-called neutral Pakistan all were reporting to the west led by Washington. During that period, it was not uncommon to see Shah of Iran frequenting Pakistan too often. Many intelligence chiefs of dreaded SAVAK were appointed as ambassadors to Pakistan.

However, all the positioning was disturbed when the 1979 revolution in Iran led by the Shia clergy overthrew the secular monarchy. The slogans of the revolutionary clerics were far detached from the traditional Shia circles of Sub continent. As opposed

to the lax behavior of the subcontinent towards basic rituals of Islam like Friday prayers, fasting etc. the Iranian revolutionaries resonated with Sunni radical slogans as raised by Ikhwan ul Muslimeen. God is Great was the battle cry of the new rulers in Iran as against any Shia specific battle cry. However, the reason that the country went out of the American axis, was enough to create dissensions between the new state and the fellow Muslim nation states. Towards that end the sectarian card was the best bet for the jilted West, having lost its bases in Iran.

Towards that end, unguarded statements by the revolutionary leaders about exporting the revolution created more misunderstanding. The Iranian call for exporting the revolution meant fall of pro US dictatorships and monarchies, irrespective of the sectarian orientation of the monarch or dictator in question. The Iranian leaders had a valid argument that they overthrew a Shia Shah, who was quite generous in the maintenance of the Shia Shrines in Iraq. Their disagreement was politico-religious; a type of stance taken by IM against successive Egyptian dictators.

At that point of time, Pakistan under a military dispensation was repositioning itself to be a Pro-US bases, more

effective than the now defunct CENTO or SEATO. For obvious reasons, it was not on in the corridors of power to endear the Iranians more than what was tolerated by the Americans. Towards that end, the proliferation of the outfits whose only qualification was hate speech for a particular section of society and a particular nation state was undertaken to create as much bad blood, as much they can.

Much of the hate narrative in Pakistan has its base during those years. The so-called return of the civilian rule did not end the overbearing role of the intelligence agencies in Pakistani day to day narrative. The killing of an Iranian diplomat in Lahore in December 1990 heralded a campaign when non state actors were given a deliberate free hand to take the sensitivities of foreign policy imperatives in their hand. The mysterious support for these killers from the deep state was the first red flag about what was in store for the nation states not preferred by the deep state.

In the following years, especially in 1997, the killing of Iranian cadets in Kamra, another diplomat in Multan and the killing of a police chief who went beyond the red line of investigation all made it clear about the foreign policy imperatives of the Pakistani deep state. The difference was that instead of only US pressure, the repulsion for the neighbor next door was home grown now. The deep state created an environment where Pakistan was ideally suited to be at war with literally everyone around, Iran, India and Afghanistan.

The Indian spy episode at the time of the



reformist President Rouhani visit to Pakistan in 2016 was the next most credible red flag, which showed how a political government bid to open trade with an erstwhile neighbor was dynamited by the military establishment. Despite these episodes, there has been a level of decency between the two states. However, the current visit by the Iranian president to Pakistan at most can be termed as humiliation for the foreign guest. The absence of foreign minister in the country, a lower-level minister welcoming the president, the prayer leader of Badshahi Mosque going beyond his mandate to appease the foreign dignitary, all spoke of a tacit humiliation of the Iranian delegation. The visit looked more like a forced one, than a comfortable one.

As things stand, the failed visit of Iranian president is likely to go down as the

dampener in the relationship between Pakistan and Iran. Despite efforts for damage control by the Pakistani political leadership, the damage has been effectively done. Going forward, Pakistan diplomatic isolation is likely to escalate as all the borders, especially the Iranian and Indian borders are now hostile. It is high time, if the professional minds in the foreign office look at the damage done and make concerted efforts to diffuse the pain, failing which, not much will be to look back in times of crisis as recent US sanctions on Pakistan and US objections on Human Rights all indicate that the established order might be in a quagmire as faced by the Iraqi faction of Baath; when its leadership geopolitical somersaults to rein in Iran for its support against Bush Senior lead Western alliance bore no fruits.



Cycle of retaliation



By Maleeha Lodhi

The spectre of a wider conflict still looms in the Middle East after Israel's ostensibly 'limited' attack on Iran. The escalatory cycle of retaliation pushed the region to the precipice of a regional conflagration. But both countries seemed to pull back from the brink amid global calls for de-escalation.

The latest escalation of violence was sparked by Israel's April 1 air strike on Iran's consulate in Damascus which killed seven members of the Revolutionary Guards including a top commander. This raised the stakes in a volatile situation with Iran retaliating with an unprecedented missile and drone attack targeting military installations in Israel. There were no casualties in what was a measured response. Iranian officials said it was not designed to inflict damage but send a message that Israel would have to pay for any action that breached Iran's red lines. In response, Israel launched an undeclared drone strike at a military target in Isfahan, which also caused no damage. Iranian officials played down the "failed attack", claiming three drones had been intercepted and indicating they had no intention to retaliate.

This marked the first direct military confrontation between the two adversaries who have long engaged in covert conflict. Israel has carried out assassinations of Iranian nuclear scientists, sabotage and strikes on Iranian assets in third countries while Iran-backed armed groups have been firing rockets across Israel's border, although there is little equivalence between the two. With this conflict out of the shadows, the rules of the game have changed in the Middle East.

Both countries have crossed each other's red lines. Iran's retaliatory action sought to establish a new level of deterrence aimed at preventing more Israeli attacks inside Iran and on Iranian assets elsewhere. Tehran had previously never directly responded to such attacks by striking Israel from Iranian soil. This changed equation prompted the leader of Israel's opposition to claim that his country's deterrence policy had been damaged. Israel's counterstrike on Iran, however small, sought to limit that damage and restore deterrence.

Danger of regional conflict will not recede until the war in Gaza is ended.

Condemnation of Iran's assault on Israel was fast and furious from the US and other Western countries, who did not bother to similarly denounce the first Israeli strike, which was in violation of international law and the Vienna Convention. But such censure was overshadowed by mounting international concerns that further retaliatory actions would trigger a full-blown regional war. Iran threatened to respond with "greater force" if Israel launched another attack.

All this created an explosive situation. With no country wanting a slide into dangerous escalation a flurry of public calls followed, including from Israel's closest allies, urging restraint on Tel Aviv. The most significant message came from President Joe Biden who called for restraint but also served notice to Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu that if he went ahead with military action the US would not be part of it. Anxious Arab countries signalled they would not allow US military bases on their soil to be used in any attack on Iran. American officials repeatedly declared, "We don't want to see a wider regional war." Public opinion in America is strongly averse to involvement in a faraway, foreign war. This

is also evident from the lack of public interest and waning political support for the Ukraine conflict. With a looming election, this poses obvious political risks for Biden.

Meanwhile, the UN Security Council met in emergency session on April 14 to discuss the situation. The usual divisions were evident, which meant no Council statement was issued. The envoys of Israel and Iran traded threats and heated accusations, with the US representative lashing out at Iran. But Council members were unanimous in calling for restraint. UN Secretary General António Guterres told the meeting the region was on the brink and de-escalation was necessary as there was “a real danger of a devastating full-scale conflict”.

The increasingly unpopular Netanyahu government came under domestic pressure to act, ostensibly to shore up deterrence as well as its own position, with much pressure coming from its far-right members. To discourage Netanyahu from escalatory action and prevent an expansion of the war, the US announced new sanctions against Iran’s drone manufacturers to “degrade its military capacity”. Britain followed suit while the EU is also poised to impose sanctions on Iran.

But these measures and entreaties did not dissuade the Israeli leadership from launching a military strike against Iran, although it neither confirmed nor denied it did this. US urgings may have persuaded Tel Aviv to moderate its retaliatory action. Israel



maintained deniability so as not to provoke another Iranian response. Iranian officials for their part were quoted as saying they saw no need to respond to a “non-attack”. With the score even, there is some hope that the situation will calm down now and tensions will gradually de-escalate.

But the risk of miscalculation remains high in a fraught and volatile environment. Either side can still misread the other’s intentions and the situation can spiral out of control. Speaking in the Security Council, Guterres pointed to this: “One miscalculation, one miscommunication, one mistake, could lead to the unthinkable — a full-scale regional conflict that would be devastating for all involved — and for the rest of the world.”

That danger will not recede so long as the war in Gaza continues. Israel has taken this brutal war into the seventh month, with

over 34,000 Palestinians killed and more than 76,000 injured by its relentless military onslaught, which has inflicted untold suffering on the people. It refused to comply with a UNSC resolution calling for a ceasefire during Ramazan, flouting international law. It defied all norms of humanity by blocking humanitarian assistance for desperate people facing famine. Meanwhile, talks in Cairo between Israel and Hamas for a durable ceasefire and release of hostages have ground to a halt. Qatar, which is mediating the talks along with Egypt and the US, is now signalling it may give up its mediatory role.

If the major powers don’t want the ongoing crisis to snowball into a regional conflict, they have to prevail on Israel to end its war in Gaza.

Courtesy Dawn



U.S. Stance: Support for Israel and Vetoing UN Membership Resolution for Palestine



By Romana Afsheen

The United Nations Security Council grappled with a pivotal decision regarding the admission of Palestine as a full member of the UN, which took center stage during its latest session. The draft resolution, advocating for Palestine's membership, underwent a vote with far-reaching implications for the region's geopolitics and the ongoing pursuit of peace in the Middle East.

The Security Council's deliberation unfolded against the backdrop of escalating tensions in Gaza, further intensifying the urgency of addressing the Palestinian question. Amidst these pressing circumstances, Palestine submitted a formal request for reconsideration of its 2011 application for UN membership, prompting a meticulous examination by the international community.

However, the United States, a staunch ally of Israel, has consistently opposed such efforts, viewing them as detrimental to the prospects of a negotiated two-state solution to the conflict. Despite urging from the Biden administration to refrain from

pressing for a U.N. vote, President Abbas has remained steadfast in his pursuit of international recognition for Palestine.

The draft resolution, succinct in its wording, recommended the admission of the State of Palestine to the United Nations, setting the stage for a decisive vote that carried profound implications for the Palestinian people's aspirations for statehood and self-determination.

In the Council chamber, the voting outcome revealed a complex landscape of diplomatic maneuvering and divergent perspectives. The U.S. veto of the draft resolution underscores the deep-seated divisions within the international community over the Israel-Palestine conflict. While the majority of the 15-member U.N. Security Council supported the resolution, with countries like Russia, China, France, and Japan voting in favor, the U.S. stood alone in opposition. The abstention of the U.K. and Switzerland further reflects the nuanced positions taken by some countries on this issue. Notably, the United States exercised its veto power, reflecting a

longstanding stance that underscores the complexities surrounding the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

Critics of the U.S. veto, including organizations like the Council on American-Islamic Relations (CAIR), have argued that it undermines the principles of justice and fairness in international relations. They point to what they see as the limitations of the U.N. Security Council in addressing conflicts effectively, particularly when powerful nations like the U.S. wield veto power over decisions that impact millions of people.

The structure and function of the U.N. Security Council itself have come under scrutiny in light of recent events. Established in 1945 with the mandate to maintain international peace and security, the Security Council consists of five permanent members—China, France, Russia, the U.K., and the U.S.—each with the power to veto resolutions, along with ten rotating members elected on two-year terms. While this system was designed to ensure the participation of major powers in global

governance, critics argue that it can also lead to gridlock and inaction, particularly on contentious issues like the Israel-Palestine conflict.

Russian Ambassador Vassily Nebenzia characterized the U.S.'s veto as emblematic of its perceived bias towards Israel, emphasizing the global community's growing support for Palestine's bid for UN membership. Nebenzia's remarks underscored the broader geopolitical rifts within the Security Council and the challenges of achieving consensus on such a contentious issue.

In contrast, U.S. Deputy Permanent Representative Robert Wood emphasized the need for adherence to the UN Charter's principles and criteria for membership. Wood highlighted unresolved questions regarding Palestine's statehood and governance structures, citing concerns over the influence of Hamas, a designated terrorist organization, in Gaza.

China's Ambassador Fu Cong reiterated the imperative of recognizing Palestine's right to self-determination, emphasizing the evolving realities on the ground and the urgency of addressing the Palestinian people's aspirations. Fu's remarks underscored China's steadfast support for Palestine's quest for statehood and its commitment to a two-state solution.

Riyad Mansour, Permanent Observer of the State of Palestine, reaffirmed his people's unwavering commitment to self-determination and statehood, despite the setback at

the Security Council. Mansour urged Council members to uphold justice and humanitarian principles, signaling Palestine's determination to persevere in its pursuit of UN membership.

Israeli Ambassador Gilad Erdan condemned the resolution, arguing that it disregarded the reality on the ground and would hinder future dialogue. He criticized Hamas' actions and accused the Security Council of rewarding violence.

The Security Council's deliberations underscored the deep-seated divisions and complexities surrounding the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, with divergent narratives and geopolitical interests shaping diplomatic discourse. While the vote did not yield the desired outcome for Palestine, it highlighted the enduring quest for self-determination and statehood among the Palestinian people.

Despite the failure to gain UN membership, Palestinian representatives expressed gratitude for the support received and reaffirmed their determination to pursue statehood through diplomatic channels.

This marked the second attempt by Palestinians for full UN membership, with the first in 2011 failing due to insufficient support in the Security Council. However, in 2012, the General Assembly upgraded Palestine's status to a non-member observer state, enabling its participation in various international organizations.

The U.S. and others cited unresolved issues, including the influence of Hamas in Gaza, as reasons for withholding support for Palestine's UN membership. Both sides reiterated their commitment to a two-state solution but differed on the path to achieving it.

Israeli officials criticized the resolution, arguing that it disregarded the reality on the ground and would hinder future dialogue. They condemned Hamas' actions and accused the Security Council of rewarding violence.

Despite the failure to gain UN membership, Palestinian representatives expressed gratitude for the support received and reaffirmed their determination to pursue statehood through diplomatic channels.

Looking ahead, the failure of the resolution underscores the need for renewed diplomatic efforts and a comprehensive approach to addressing the root causes of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The international community must redouble its commitment to a negotiated settlement based on the principles of mutual recognition, territorial integrity, and respect for international law.

In the face of adversity, the quest for justice and dignity for the Palestinian people remains undeterred, underscoring the imperative of sustained international engagement and solidarity in advancing the cause of peace in the Middle East.



Across the Western world, public opinion on Palestine is finally shifting

The brutality of Israel's war on Gaza has put an end to the apathy towards the suffering of the Palestinian people in the West

By Othman Moqbel

For a very long time, many in the Western world have not engaged at all with the issues stemming from the occupation of Palestine. The occupation was in the news, every year or so, for a day or two, and then it would go again. It was too “complicated”, those who knew about the context – on either side – were too passionate. So many opted to remain neutral. Many more believed the smears against the Palestinian people.

However, the scale and severity of brutality that has defined the past six months of conflict has put an end to the widespread apathy towards the suffering of the Palestinian people. The wall-to-wall media coverage, thanks to fearless reporting from organisations like Al Jazeera and Palestinian journalists on the ground, has opened people's eyes to the reality people in Gaza, and the rest of Palestine, have had to endure for generations.

At Action For Humanity, one of the leading NGOs working in Gaza and influencing policymakers in the United Kingdom, we have commissioned polling by YouGov and found that 56 percent of the UK are now in favour of halting arms exports to Israel. Only 17 percent are against and the rest are unsure. This is huge. We have been polling the public on conflicts like Syria and Yemen for years and never have the UK public not just been so aware of a conflict, but also feel so passionately about it.

Furthermore, when asked, 59 percent of the respondents said they felt Israel was committing human rights abuses in Gaza – almost three in five people and just 12 percent felt this was not the case. And it's worth noting this survey was conducted before the April 1 killing of World Central Kitchen aid workers – an atrocity which has horrified the world, even the UK and US governments. We now anticipate, due to the widespread condemnation of this event, that the number of people who realise what horrors are being committed and want no part of it, is higher.

Other polling by YouGov has shown that, the longer this war on Gaza goes on, the more people are likely to support a ceasefire (from 59 percent in November to 66 percent in February), are more likely to think the attack on Gaza is not justified (from 44 percent in November to 45 percent in February) and are more likely to want peace talks (61 percent in November to 66 percent in February). And this is a pattern we are seeing all across the Western world. In the United States, the biggest backer of Israel on the global stage, it is not just the administration in the White House that is struggling to attempt to justify the accelerating civilian death toll, the public too are showing disapproval. A CBS/YouGov poll found that in October 47 percent – almost half – of the US supported sending weapons to Israel, this month the number has plummeted to just 32 percent – less than a third, and that support for a ceasefire is growing.



We believe that this is the case across the West and now that the overwhelming majority of the Western public are becoming more and more aware of the crimes against humanity that are being committed in Gaza, the West Bank and Jerusalem, the more people are completely appalled. And even those who once felt the huge civilian death toll in Gaza were justified and realising in increasing numbers that nothing on this earth can justify what is happening.

However, sadly, the politicians of Western governments are completely out of step with their public's mood. Not only is this morally reprehensible, but it is politically shortsighted.

The year 2024 has been called “the year of elections”, with at least 49 percent of the world voting at some point this year, politicians who do not realise their publics want them to stop facilitating and supporting human rights abuses in Gaza, face electoral defeat – even if they refuse to face their conscience.

Here in the UK, the Labour Party, which many believe will form the next government, have also been behind the public's growing demand to stop arming Israel – even though our polling found that a huge 71 percent of those who intended to vote Labour at the next election believe the UK government should stop funding Israel.

For decades, Western states were able to support abuses against Palestinians with impunity due to public ignorance on the issue – due to people not paying attention to what's happening, and buying into lies. This is now over, and the horrific way Israel conducted its war on Gaza is the reason why. Humanity, in all its forms, everywhere, is fundamentally good. Most humans, at their core, believe in peace and justice. They know that murdering innocents is wrong. Now the world is paying attention to Gaza, everyone can see what an unnatural, horrendous reality Palestinians are forced to endure, and they want no more of it.

Courtesy www.aljazeera.com

The Abu Ghraib case is an important milestone for justice

Three Iraqi survivors of torture at Abu Ghraib finally get the chance to have their voices heard and seek redress



By Yumna Rizvi

I was in middle school when on April 28, 2004, CBS News first made public the haunting photos from Abu Ghraib prison in Iraq. I can't remember exactly how I felt then except that it was an incredibly dark moment that rocked everyone. That has stuck with me to this day.

Almost 20 years later, I found myself in court looking at the same shocking pictures of men whose faces are hidden beneath coarse hoods. But this time, the men tortured in these photos were not nameless and faceless. I watched one survivor of Abu Ghraib testify from Iraq via videolink, and I shook hands with another outside the court, 20 minutes away from the nation's capital where decisions were made that changed their lives.

It was two weeks before the 20th anniversary of the Abu Ghraib scandal that the civil trial of *Al Shimari v CACI* finally started. I attended as an observer from the Center for Victims of Torture, which seeks accountability for torture perpetrated by the United States.

This case, brought forth by three Iraqi men – Suhail Najim Abdullah al-Shimari, Salah Hasan Nusaif al-Ejaili and Asa'ad Hamza Hanfoosh Zuba'e – is the only one by survivors of Abu Ghraib against a military contractor that has reached trial.

The three men are suing CACI International Inc, a private military contractor, over the allegation that CACI personnel "participated in a conspiracy to commit unlawful conduct, including torture and war crimes at Abu Ghraib prison". Since 2008, the company has tried to dismiss this case more than 20 times.

The trial marks a significant moment in the legal battle for justice and redress for Abu Ghraib and, more broadly, the US torture programme. It represents a culmination of relentless efforts by the victims themselves, human rights advocates and legal experts to shed light on the dark underbelly of the US "war on terror".

At the Center for Victims of Torture, where I work, we directly interact with survivors

of torture, hear them speak about what was done to them, and how torture affected their sense of security, sense of trust, and sense of self. Torture is about intentionally breaking the human – mind, body, and spirit; it doesn't end when the acts stop. That is why telling the story matters.

In the courtroom, the plaintiffs gave harrowing accounts of their experiences at Abu Ghraib and the effects with which they live with 20 years later.

They walked the court through the kinds of torture and humiliation they were subjected to by both military personnel and private contractors. They spoke about the lasting physical pain and injury, the difficulties in interacting with family, loss of meaningful relationships and trouble sleeping due to nightmares. They related how they could not even make eye contact with each other – a simple human act to see and be seen – because of the shame they felt over what was done to them.

Al-Ejaili, a journalist who used to work

with Al Jazeera, testified how meaningful it was to him to tell his story: “Perhaps it’s like a form of treatment or a remedy.”

At court, Major-General (retired) Antonio Taguba and Major-General (retired) George Fay testified about their respective investigations into torture at Abu Ghraib. General Taguba’s 2004 inquiry was conducted before any pictures from Abu Ghraib were made public and was initiated by the military following investigations from the International Committee of the Red Cross and the Army’s Criminal Investigation Command. General Taguba found that “incidents of sadistic, blatant and wanton criminal abuses were inflicted on several detainees” and that the “systemic and illegal abuse ... was intentionally perpetrated”.

General Fay’s report, released in August 2004, found that torture techniques on the detainees included the use of dogs, nudity, humiliation and physical abuse. It described torture, including “direct physical assault, such as delivering head blows rendering detainees unconscious, to sexual posing and forced participation in group masturbation”.

Both Fay and Taguba’s investigations, and a subsequent one by the US Senate Armed Services Committee in 2008, uncovered that the atrocities at Abu Ghraib were not isolated. The horrors were part of the Bush administration’s “war on terror” torture

policy and reflected tactics authorised by senior officials, including Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld. Some of the torture practices were brought over to Abu Ghraib from Guantanamo Bay and Bagram, a military base in Afghanistan, where also detainees were tortured.

The Taguba and Fay reports implicate CACI personnel in abuses, such as tactics to “soften up” detainees prior to interrogations. One of them was Steve Stephanowicz, who, according to internal CACI emails presented at court, was a “NO-GO for filling an interrogator position”, as he was “neither trained nor qualified”. In court, General Taguba testified that Stephanowicz even tried to “intimidate” him during his investigation.

Despite this, Stephanowicz was promoted within CACI and received a 48 percent increase in salary – a trend also seen with those in the Bush administration who authorised torture.

The Fay report mentions unnamed CACI personnel who physically assaulted detainees and placed them in unauthorised stress positions. One even bragged about “shaving a detainee and forcing him to wear red women’s underwear”.

What is unique about Abu Ghraib is that, unlike Guantanamo and other CIA secret prisons, the world has seen the atrocities that took place there. And today, the world

sees again through this trial, through the stories of these survivors, what was done by the US. No senior government or military official has been held accountable for crimes perpetrated by the US. No victim has received redress relative to the harm they live with every day till they die.

But this trial offers the opportunity to obtain some level of justice. Survivors of torture have the right to redress, rehabilitation and compensation, all of which I hope these three men receive. While they will never get the full justice they deserve, a verdict in their favour could get them financial compensation as well as acknowledgement of their suffering and make public CACI’s complicity.

The fight for justice does not end with this case. There is much more still that needs to be done.

Abu Ghraib and the detention centre at Bagram were officially closed in 2014, but Guantanamo remains open, with 30 men indefinitely detained in conditions that may amount to torture, according to the United Nations. Efforts to close have stalled despite the current US administration’s stated intent to do so. Nevertheless, efforts to close the detention centre and seek justice and redress for victims of the US torture programme continue.

Courtesy www.aljazeera.com



Four hundred seats?



By Umair Javed

Analyses of the ongoing Indian election mostly focus on the scale of the BJP's expected victory rather than the identity of the winner. The ruling party is similarly confident of its return to power, with a campaign target set at 400-plus seats in a 543-seat Lok Sabha. Anything close to this number would give it the largest majority of any Indian government since Congress in 1984, in the aftermath of Indira's assassination.

That the Modi-led BJP has managed to carve out and then extend its single-party dominance is one of the most important trends of electoral politics anywhere in the world. After the rise of lower-caste and regional parties, political analysis of India from the late 1990s and early 2000s repeatedly talked about the permanence of fractured mandates and coalition politics.

The BJP's rise in the last decade or so invalidates many of these predictions. Its dominance of national politics has deepened during this time. The Hindi heartland of Gujarat, Rajasthan, Madhya, and Uttar Pradesh is practically a one-party region. There is no clear nationwide alternative, and opposition parties succeed mostly in state assembly elections in the southern states.

Explanations for the BJP's rise and the reconfiguration of Indian politics offer both cultural and economic factors. Its strategy of tactical polarisation in key constituencies, through communal rhetoric and violence, helps consolidate upper-, middle-, and lower-caste Hindu voters behind one party, whereas previously, these groups may have voted for different candidates.

Explanations for BJP's rise and the reconfiguration of Indian politics offer both cultural and economic factors.

The same strategy is at play once more, as witnessed in Modi's recent scaremongering speech about how the opposition, if voted into government, planned to use an inheritance tax to appropriate Hindu property and distribute them among Muslims.

Earlier work by sociologist Manali Desai also points out how the BJP in Gujarat used the memory of violence of the early 2000s, which was of its own making, to project itself as a protector of Hindus against the threat of Muslim resurgence. Regardless of the fact that Muslim populations remain ghettoised and entirely disempowered, this rhetoric has both shaped and taken advantage of general material and personal insecurities, especially among middle- and lower-caste

Hindus.

In more recent times, the BJP has also made inroads in places that were seen to be immune from divisive polarisation, such as Kerala. While it is still some way from winning an election there, the BJP's popularity among Dalit voters has grown considerably. The fact that a party dominated by upper-caste Hindus is getting votes from lower-caste groups deserves more explanation. Incisive analysis by Samantha Agarwal on this issue points to the tactical use of caste-centric rhetoric that portrays the BJP as a defender of lower-caste interests in a region where secularist and leftist parties have failed to improve their material conditions.

The tactical flexibility of using upper-caste imagery and religious scaremongering in Hindi-belt states and lower-caste appeals outside of it show the BJP's adeptness at using cultural factors for its advantage. But part of its success also rests on economic factors. Here, higher headline rates of GDP growth, and a state-curated perception of the country doing well globally, are also key in shaping the pre-election environment.

Political popularity attributed to GDP growth deserves further scrutiny. It is

well documented that inequality has increased in India over the last few decades. As per The World Inequality Report, the top one per cent of the population now holds about 33pc of national wealth while the bottom half of the population holds about 6pc; in 1991, these shares were 16pc and 9pc respectively.

If high rates of growth are mostly advantageous to a small set of the population, why then does the rest of the electorate vote for the ruling party on its basis? One persuasive answer is that high rates of growth, and visible prosperity for some, creates greater desire and aspiration among middle-class segments. There is a prevailing sentiment, managed and curated by the BJP, that if these select few can succeed, the economy will eventually work for us as well. In other words, trickle-down economics has been turned into a dominant idea in India.

At the same time, lower-income groups have been won over through targeted distribution of welfare schemes. The welfare provision work carried out by its Hindu fundamentalist affiliates, notably the RSS, reaps electoral dividends for the BJP. This is well documented by authors such as Tariq Thachil in his book *Elite Parties, Poor Voters*.

In more recent years, the BJP has also laid claim to reducing poverty by a significant degree. Disagreements between economists on this issue, dubbed the 'Great Indian



Poverty Debate', previously contested the extent and reasoning behind this decline, though there is now increasing consensus that poverty reduction has taken place.

In a recent piece on the same topic, economists Maitreesh Ghatak and Rishabh Kumar agree that there has been an uptick in household-level consumption among the poorest segment of the population, which can at least partially be explained by the expansion of public welfare programmes following Covid-19.

To this end, they provide the example of the "prime minister's food support plan (PMG-KAY), which built on the pre-existing National Food Security Act to provide rice

and pulses to 800 million people at zero cost. The increase in the Government of India's food subsidy bill between 2019-20 and 2020-21 was nearly fivefold and the net amount of the subsidy remained structurally higher every year since 2020".

This mix of divisive cultural politics and growth-oriented economics that feeds Hindu middle-class ambition and provides targeted welfare are key ingredients in the BJP's political trajectory. Unless a major upset happens, this agenda looks set to deliver an expanded majority for the party. And in the process, India is likely to take one more step towards a one-party form of government.

Courtesy Dawn



2024 Elections: What's at stake for India's minorities?

Could a third term under Narendra Modi see the formalising of second-class status for minorities and the destruction of the country's ancient composite culture?

By Sajjad Hassan

If the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) under Prime Minister Narendra Modi succeeds in winning a third five-year term in the ongoing Lok Sabha elections, many fear that India's religious minorities, especially Muslims, will see their second-class status formalised in law and practice.

But for Hindu supremacy to be fully realised, which is the stated aim of Hindu nationalists, they will have to expunge India of any Muslim influence, of which there is much, historically. When Indians cast their vote in the coming weeks, they would do well to be aware of the weight of their electoral choices. And the international community would do well not to drop the ball on India.

Second-class citizens

In a recent article, political scientists, Ashutosh Varshney and Connor Staggs asked the rhetorical question: "Is India under Narendra Modi ... beginning to resemble the American South under Jim Crow?" referring to state and local laws introduced in the southern United States in the late 19th and early 20th century that enforced racial segregation.

They explain that Jim Crow laws were aimed at blunting the Reconstruction Amendments that abolished slavery and gave equal rights to Blacks. They were designed to make Blacks second-class citizens. Similarly, in India, Hindu nationalists seek to diminish the constitutionally guaranteed equal citizenship of Muslims and turn them into marginalised, less than fully equal citizens.

Jim Crow laws lasted for almost a century, ending only in the 1960s. Varshney and Staggs claim that since Hindu nationalism is in its early phase, it could still be forestalled before it is institutionalised via political and legislative processes. They suggest that the ongoing national elections



present an opportunity for Indians to do that.

However, the comparison between Jim Crow and Hindu nationalism diverges in their ultimate objectives. While Jim Crow merely targeted the equal citizenship of Blacks, Hindu nationalism has a more totalitarian goal.

What does Hindutva want?

To fully grasp the end-goals of Hindu nationalism or Hindutva, it is necessary to read its foundational texts. There are none more seminal than *We or Our Nationhood Defined* (1939) by Madhav Sadashiv Golwalkar, who led the Rashtriya Swayam-sevak Sangh (RSS) from 1940 to 1973. The RSS is considered the heart and soul of the vast network of Hindu nationalist organisations, of which the BJP is the political wing. Narendra Modi, a life-time member and former official of the RSS, credited it for grooming him to political leadership.

In his text, Golwalkar writes of his wariness of "hostile elements" within the country that "act as menace to national security", singling out Muslims as the number one

threat, followed by Christians. His solution to "the danger of a cancer developing into its body politic" was offering the "foreign element" two options: "either to merge themselves in the national race and adopt its culture or to live at its mercy so long as the national race may allow it to do so, and to quit the country at the sweet will of the national race".

Another of the movement's foundational texts is *Essentials of Hindutva* (1923) by Vinayak Damodar Savarkar, who is considered by many to be the foremost Hindutva thinker. In *Essentials*, he provided Hindu nationalism with an ideology, which in a nutshell claims that India was special, as it offered something nobody else could — Hindu thought. This unique Hindu supremacy, Savarkar believed, was under threat because of the presence of non-Hindus. He called on Hindus, fragmented as they were, to unite and reclaim their supremacy. Violence against Muslims, Savarkar said, was the means to achieve that goal.

Golwalkar drew on Savarkar's thoughts. He also admired the race theories of fascist Germany and Italy and recommended that Hindustan, the land of Hindus, should profit from their lessons. In *We or Our*

Nationhood Defined, he wrote: “To keep up the purity of the race and its culture, Germany shocked the world by her purging the country of its semitic races — the Jews. Race pride at its highest has been manifested here.”

Golwalkar saw the world in apocalyptic terms. His objective was clear: “To rule over the world was the heavenly task ordained to Hindu race.” He called upon Hindus to “rally to the Hindu standard, the bhagwa dhvaj [and] set our teeth in grim determination to wipe out the opposing forces”.

Some Hindutva leaders today have explicitly articulated this vision. For instance, in March 2020, a Hindu priest named Yati Narsinghanand, who is the president of Akhil Bharatiya Sant Parishad (All India Priests Council) and someone close to the BJP, was reported to have told his followers, “Humanity can only be saved if Islam is finished off. Hindus: Read the Gita along with Mahabharat, and learn how to die fighting.”

This call was made around the time BJP leader Kapil Mishra was leading processions in Delhi calling for violence against the mainly Muslim participants in protests against the Citizenship Amendment Act, chanting the mantra: “Desh ke ghaddaron ko, goli maro saalon ko [Shoot the traitors of the country].”

In 2023, another BJP leader, an MLA from Telangana, T Raja Singh, at a rally in Mumbai, urged his audience to take to arms. “I would like to request all my Hindu brothers that the coming time is the time of struggle, it is the time of war,” he said. “Every Hindu is obliged to unite. Hindu should not become one who rings temple bells, but rather he should become a Hindu who kills landyas”, a derogatory reference to Muslims.

At a public meeting of Hindu priests in December 2021, in the holy town of Haridwar, a star speaker, Annapurna Maa, the general secretary of the Hindu Mahasabha, was heard exhorting her audience: “If you want to eliminate their population, then be ready to kill them and be ready to go to jail. If only a 100 of us become soldiers and each of us kills 20 lakhs of them, we will be victorious...”

Modi is circumspect in his speeches now, but was not always so. As chief minister of Gujarat, soon after the pogrom there in 2002 during his term that left at least 2,000 dead, mostly Muslim, he was often reported in his public speeches to evoke visions of a religious struggle of good over evil.

“This is the holy place of shakti [godly power], the power for extermination of asuras [demons],” he said in one speech. “We have resolved to destroy and stamp out all forces of evil...”

The montage that is India

Beyond the goal of cleansing the Hindu land of the “cancer” to save the nation, there is another equally compelling reason for the Hindutva project to be more than just about marginalising Muslims. That has to do with the fact that India today is, in the words of historians Catherine Asher and Cynthia Talbot, “an intricate montage assembled from assorted material”, of which the Islamic is a critical element. The desire on the part of Hindutva leaders to fully realise Hindu supremacy will also require extirpating Muslim life and Muslim imprint from today’s India.

Historians view the era between 1200 AD and 1750 AD (Medieval India in history textbooks) as the foundation for the highly diverse human landscape of modern South Asia, with its pluralistic culture that draws on both Indic and Islamic traditions. In their magisterial work, *India Before Europe* (2006), Catherine Asher and Cynthia Talbot show how the Central Asian ethnic heritage, Persian cultural orientation and Islamic religious affiliation of North India’s ruling elite class in the period after 1200 AD led to the dissemination of many innovative elements through the subcontinent.

While acknowledging that the encounter between Indic and Islamic peoples and cultures led to short-term conflicts, Asher and Talbot note the vast degree to which cultural practices inspired by Perso-Islamic traditions became integral to the subcontinent as a whole in the long run. South Asia’s art and architecture, its political rituals, its administrative and military technologies and even its popular religions were deeply inflected by the new forms.

This composite culture, the authors note, forms the basis of India that exists today, in its foods, dressing and music, languages that people speak, the built architecture, and its popular religions, among others.

In the south of the peninsula, the ‘Hindu’ Vijaynagara empire (1350-1550) drew significantly from Islamic influence in military technology, secular architecture, courtly dress, as well as local languages. The successor ‘Muslim’ sultanates of the Bahmani state in the Deccan too, followed in this tradition, most importantly in their patronage to local languages, so much so that Golconda rulers, around today’s Hyderabad, occupied an important place in the historical memory of Telengana language — with one of the sultans, Ibrahim Quli Qutub Shah (1550-1580) often called Ibharama Chakravati by Telgu poets.

Bijapur’s Ibrahim Adil Shah II (1580-1627), called Jagat Guru, authored a collection of songs in dakani, *Kitab-e-Nauras* (book of nine rasas), that opens with an invocation to Saraswati, Hindu goddess of learning, followed by praise of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) and then the Chisti saint Gisu Daraz. These were no exceptions.

In Bengal, the Hussain Shahi (1493-1538) rulers adopted local customs, such as purification by the water of Ganga at coronation ceremonies, and the Sufi poet, Saiyid Sultan (d 1648) published a genealogy of prophets of Islam, called *Nabi Vamsha* that included the Hindu god, Krishna.

In Gujarat, amid the flourishing literary tradition that the Ahmad Shah rulers patronised was the Sanskrit work *Raja-Vinoda* (pleasure of the kings), written in honour of the ruler, Mahmud Begada (1460s), presenting the sultan as an ideal Indic king, whose court was graced by the presence of the Hindu deity Saraswati, the goddess of learning. In Malwa, in central India, capital Mandu had fine libraries that included among their collection the track *Nimat-nama* (c. 1500), an illustrated recipe book for making dishes suitable for all seasons, including vegetarian as well as meat-based, with illustrations drawing on both Persian and Indic tradition, including the Bhagwata Purana.

However, it was the Mughals, especially Akbar (1556-1605), who helped create a

state that was more Indian in character. The aesthetic that developed under Akbar's guidance was composed of a fusion of Timurid and Indic models, and which went on to set a standard for subsequent Mughal arts and culture, including food, architecture and courtly dress and culture, Asher and Talbot argue.

Besides, in the realm of built architecture, of which there is ample evidence, literary production was an important site of Indic and Islamic collaboration. Examples are the translation of Ramayana and Mahabharata in Persian (Razm-nama) and Abul Fazl's including in his Ain-i-Akbari, extensive sections on "the learning of India" — including philosophical schools, music, life cycle rituals, and modes of image worship. The scale of the borrowing led Audrey Truschke, a prominent historian of Sanskrit at the Mughal court, to conclude that these were efforts on the part of Abul Fazl to convince Akbar's supporters of the virtues of infusing Sanskrit knowledge into Indo-Persian thought.

The tendencies towards synthesis had significant consequences. Man Singh, the highest ranking noble in Akbar's court, only after his sons, built temples throughout the domain, including the Govinda Deva temples in Vrindavan, the largest in North India, in a recognisably Mughal style, and helped to spread Akbar's belief in multiculturalism, just as Abdul Rahim Khaan-e-Khanan did by commissioning an illustrated Ramayana.

Among the most consequential contributions of the Mughal court to Indian letters, Allison Busch shows, was its engagement with Brajbhasha. A local (Hindavi) dialect of the region around Agra and Delhi, Mughal heartlands, Brajbhasha had existed until then, mostly as bhakti devotional poetry. Under Mughal patronage, it developed a sophisticated courtly style, inspired by Sanskrit poetics, and became the principal poetic language of north India. In creating the outcome, that could be described as classical Hindi, were Akbar's nobles composing works in the language, including Todar Mal, Birbal and the Rajput nobles, as also Faizi and Abdul Rahim Khana Khanan — showing how courtly literature in Brajbhasha was nurtured within the multicultural context of elite Mughal society.

There were other enduring contributions too, of this age and milieu, outside the courtly realm. A major influence in the early part of this period was Sufis, and their dispersal, throughout much of the subcontinent. By the 14th century, the practice of Sama, devotional musical congregations, and Urs, annual pilgrimage to the shrines of Sufi saints, had become established Sufi traditions. Sufi shrines drew both Muslims and Hindus, and were themselves influenced by local traditions, including the Shattari Sufis of Bengal drawing on Nath yogis, and Rishi Sufis of Kashmir who led celibate lives and practised vegetarianism.

Sufism also contributed to reform in Hindu tradition, starting in the 14th century with the rise of sants, who like Sufis, were mystics, believed in a formless God, and extolled devotion to God as a primary religious practice. Kabir, the most influential, attacked rituals and customs of traditional religions, and excoriated the caste system. Guru Nanak (born in 1469), the founder of the Sikh tradition, also came from the same context.

Notably, Sufism also influenced Hindu bhakti tradition, as the historian of Indian religion John S Hawley points out. This is evident in the commonalities that the latter began to show in its focus on love for God, as did Sufis, the use of poetry and music in worship, and an ethics of compassion for others. Tulsidas's Ramcharitmanas (1575), crafted in about the same age and the middle Gangetic Awadhi milieu of Sufi poets, Malik Mohammad Jayasi (Padmavat, 1540) and Mir Siyyid Manjhan (Madhumalati, 1545), exemplified this shift. Ram, an incarnation of Vishnu, became the preeminent object of devotion, in place of Siva.

It is these constructions of a cosmopolitan Indian paradigm, resulting in innovations that spoke to both traditions that Hindu nationalists must disentangle and destroy to be able to achieve their vision of a Hindu supremacist India. This will undoubtedly leave much violence in its trail.

'Authentic fantasies' of suffering

These historical accounts of co-living and co-production contradict Hindutva claims that have much purchase today, in popular as well as scholarly circles about the

thousand years of conflict between Muslim "outsiders" and "local" Hindus; of forced conversions and the wanton destruction of temples. Hindu nationalists have developed a wide repertoire of suffering and victimhood of Hindus at the hands of Muslims. Evidence to support their thesis is slim.

Richard Eaton, one of the foremost historians of medieval India, shows how the claim that Islam spread in South Asia by the sword is incongruent with the geography of Muslim conversions in South Asia. There is an inverse relationship between the degree of Muslim political penetration and the degree of conversion to Islam, he notes. Most conversions happened in the north west and north east — Punjab and Bengal, farthest away from centres of Muslim power.

As to temple destruction, Eaton found, over a span of more than five centuries from 1192 to 1729, there were "some 80 instances of temple desecration", well short of the 60,000 claimed by Hindu nationalists. Typically, the desecrated temples would have been associated with the authority of an enemy kingdom. The instances of desecrations followed a long-established pattern in India, of temples having been natural sites for the contestation of kingly authority, well before the coming of Muslim Turks, including their destruction. Among the most recent examples was the destruction in the 10th c of the Pratihara temple of Kalapriya near Jamuna, by the Rashtrakuta king Indra III.

But as the Bosnian historian, Edin Hajdar-pasic, shows from his study of Balkan nationalism in the 19th century, enthusiastic depictions of suffering convey the essence of a political threat more vividly than simple facts or documentary narratives — a phenomenon he calls "authentic fantasy". Hindu nationalists, themselves inspired by European nationalist movements at the turn of the 19th century, relied much on the construction of suffering and victimhood of Hindus, however divorced from facts.

Decolonial historiography shows how they drew on the Orientalist bias of British colonial historians, who saw the period of the previous 600 years, as a history of Muslim arrival and their dominance over Hindus, marked by Muslim fanaticism, and

temple destruction, forced conversion, and Hindu oppression. In contrast to the dark Muslim medieval age, colonial historians like James Mill posited the ancient Hindu age as golden, and modern British, as liberal.

Call to violence

Hindu nationalists in power today are seeking to inflict retribution for their perceived sufferings by rewriting history. In some cases, this has taken physical forms — such as in the destruction in 1992 of the 15th century Babri mosque in Ayodhya, a criminal act that was legitimised by the Supreme Court of India in 2019. Claims for several other historical mosques to be converted into temples have been set in motions across the country.

Elsewhere, place names have been changed to erase any hint of their Muslim heritage. Allahabad is now Prayagraj, Mughalsarai station is Pandit Deen Dayal Upadhyaya Junction, Aurangabad is Sambhajinagar and Gulbarga is Kalaburagi. Not satisfied with occasional erasures, the BJP government has thought fit to change high school history and politics textbooks by significantly altering and in some cases, fully scrapping the sections on Mughal history.

The act of political forgetting targets minorities to deprive them of history, of the right to narrate, of the capacity for recognition. History tells us it is also a precursor to violence. As eminent historians Aditya and Mridula Mukherjee noted recently, “...genocide of a community is often preceded by the community being demonised, their names changed, their history being erased”, claiming “these processes have begun in India and open calls for genocide of Muslims are being given in various parts of the country with amazing impunity”.

More than Jim Crow South, the history of the Balkans in the late 19th century and post-Yugoslavia 20th century provides a better guide to understanding the future of minorities in India today. Hajdarpasic’s account of Balkan history alerts us to the real consequences of the claims of victimhood. Nationalists there used stories of suffering not only to inspire collective sacrifice but also to encourage mass

violence against entire communities perceived as threats. He demonstrates how certain stories of victimisation in the region long outlived their original inspirations. Decades after overthrowing Turkish rule, Serbian nationalists could revive narratives about Turk-like enemies even in the late 20th century with catastrophic consequences.

Tanika Sarkar, eminent historian of modern India, demonstrates similar impulse in early modern Hindu nationalist thought. Emblematic of this repertoire was



Bankim Chandra Chatterjee’s 1818 novel, *Anandmath*, whose main character, the Hindu sanyasi (ascetic) rebel, Satyanand, is engaged in a messianic battle “for exterminate(ing) all Muslims on this land, as they are enemies of God”, a recompense for “inflicting misfortune on Hindus”. The novel is set in the context of the 1770 famines in Bengal, as the East India Company was inserting itself at the expense of the Nawabs of Bengal, and that resulted in a third of the population starving to death, both Hindus and Muslims. Historians inform Muslim fakirs (ascetics) rose up, along with sanyasis, against the depredations.

Sarkar calls for *Anandmath*, “the first explicit message in our literary history for ethnic cleansing”, one foretelling Hindu nationalist thoughts to emerge later in 20th century. Its protagonists deemed “elimination of Muslim rule and Muslim presence from the land” an act of worship of Bharat Maata (motherland), a deity that first emerged in the novel. In 1920, Savarkar

and Golwalkar adopted *Vande Mataram* — hymn to Bharat Maata, contained in *Anandmath* — as a Hindu nationalist anthem. *Vande Mataram* was also the rallying cry of Hindu communalists in anti-Muslim violence to follow during Partition.

Vande Mataram continues to inspire Hindu nationalist thoughts and action to this day. So when the terror-accused BJP MP Pragya Thakur recently instructed her audience to “keep your weapons sharpened”, to “in this world created by god ... finish all oppressors, wrong-doers, sinners...”, she was deploying *Anandmath*’s template of the holy war — calling for violence against the entire Muslim population.

It is in such violent contestations borne out of ‘authentic fantasies’ of past sufferings that Hindu nationalists of today — following that of Savarkar and other Hindutva ideologues — seek to create Hindu supremacy, by waging permanent war against India’s 200 or so million Muslims and other ‘foreign elements’. Already, United Nations experts are alerting us to the fact that “India risks becoming one of the world’s main generators of instability, atrocities and violence, because of the massive scale and gravity of the violations and abuses targeting mainly religious and other minorities, such as Muslims, Christians, Sikhs and others.”

Mass atrocity experts are warning: “If nothing is done to address these risks, India may continue to experience a rise in the number of violent (and fatal) attacks against religious minorities, an escalation in the scale of the violence, and an increased level of state involvement in atrocities.”

The burden on Indian voters to use the ballot to forestall the institutionalisation of Hindu nationalism, before it reaches a point of no return, is therefore, even heavier.

This piece is a longer version of the article, titled “Is the 2024 Lok Sabha election India’s last chance before the point of no return?” by Sajjad Hassan published on Scroll.in. It has been reproduced here with permission.

Courtesy Dawn

'Invisible in our own country': Being Muslim in Modi's India

By Soutik Biswas

Six years ago, a Muslim boy returned red-faced from a well-known school in the northern Indian city of Agra.

"My classmates called me a Pakistani terrorist," the nine-year-old told his mother.

Reema Ahmad, an author and counsellor, remembers the day vividly.

"Here was a feisty, little boy with his fists clenched so tightly that there were nail marks in his palm. He was so angry."

As her son told the story, his classmates were having a mock fight when the teacher had stepped out.

"That's when one group of boys pointed at him and said, 'This is a Pakistani terrorist. Kill him!'"

He revealed some classmates had also called him *nali ka kida* (insect of the gutter). Ms Ahmad complained, and was told they "were imagining things... such things didn't happen".

Ms Ahmad eventually pulled her son out of school. Today, the 16-year-old is home-schooled.

"I sensed the community's tremors through my son's experiences, a feeling I never recall having in my own youth growing up here," she says.

"Our class privilege may have protected us from feeling Muslim all the time. Now, it seems class and privilege make you a more visible target."

Ever since Narendra Modi's Hindu nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) swept to power in 2014, India's 200 million-odd Muslims have had a turbulent journey.

Hindu vigilante mobs have lynched suspected cow traders and targeted small Muslim-owned businesses. Petitions have been filed against mosques. Internet trolls have orchestrated online "auctions" of Muslim women. Right-wing groups and sections of mainstream media have fuelled Islamophobia with accusations of "jihad" -



"love jihad", for example, falsely accuses Muslim men of converting Hindu women by marriage.

And anti-Muslim hate speech has surged - three quarters of incidents were reported from states ruled by the BJP.

"Muslims have become second-class citizens, an invisible minority in their own country," says Ziya Us Salam, author of a new book, *Being Muslim in Hindu India*.

But the BJP - and Mr Modi - deny that minorities are being mistreated in India.

"These are usual tropes of some people who don't bother to meet people outside their bubbles. Even India's minorities don't buy this narrative anymore," the prime minister told *Newsweek* magazine.

Yet Ms Ahmad - whose family has lived in Agra for decades, counting many Hindu friends amid the city's serpentine lanes and crowded homes - feels a change.

In 2019, Ms Ahmad left a school WhatsApp group where she was one of only two Muslims. This followed the posting of a message after India launched air strikes against militants in Muslim-majority Pakistan.

"If they hit us with missiles, we will enter their homes and kill them," the message on the group said, echoing something Mr Modi had said about killing terrorists and enemies of India inside their homes.

"I lost my cool. I told my friends what's wrong with you? Do you condone killing of civilians and children?" Ms Ahmad recalled. She believed in advocating for peace.

The reaction was swift.

"Someone asked, are you pro-Pakistani just because you are Muslim? They accused me of being anti-national," she said.

"Suddenly appealing for non-violence was equated with being anti-national. I told them I don't have to be violent to support my country. I quit the group."

The changing atmosphere is felt in other ways too. For a long time, Ms Ahmad's spacious home has been a hangout for her son's classmates, regardless of gender or religion. But now the bogey of "love jihad" means she asks Hindu girls to leave by a certain hour and not linger in his room.

"My father and I sat my son down and told him that the atmosphere was not good - you

have to limit your friendships, be careful, not stay out too late. You never know. Things can turn into 'love jihad' at any time."

Environmental activist Erum, a fifth-generation resident of Agra, has also noticed a shift in conversations among the city's children as she worked in local schools.

"Don't talk to me, my mother has told me not to," she heard one child tell a Muslim classmate.

"I am thinking, really?! This reflects the deeply ingrained phobia [of Muslims]. This will grow into something which will not heal easily," Ms Erum said.

But for herself, she had lots of Hindu friends, and did not feel insecure as a Muslim woman.

It's just not about the children. In his small office along a bustling Agra street, Siraj Qureshi, a local journalist and interfaith organiser, laments the fraying of the old bonhomie between Hindus and Muslims.

He recounts a recent incident where a man delivering mutton in the city was stopped by Hindu right-wing group members, handed over to the police and thrown into jail. "He had the proper licence, but the police still arrested him. He was later released," Mr Qureshi says.

Many in the community note a shift in behaviour among Muslims traveling by train, prompted by incidents in which Muslim passengers were reportedly attacked for allegedly carrying beef. "Now, we're all cautious, avoiding non-vegetarian food in public transport or opting out [of public transport] altogether if we can afford to," says Ms Ahmad.

Kaleem Ahmed Qureshi, a software engineer-turned jewellery designer and musician, is a seventh-generation Agra resident, who also leads heritage walks in the city.

Carrying his rubab, a lute-like musical instrument commonly played in Afghanistan, he took a shared taxi with a Hindu co-passenger from Delhi to Agra recently. "When he saw the case, he asked me to open it, fearing it was a gun. I sensed his reaction was influenced by my name," Mr

Qureshi says.

"There is this anxiety [which we live with]. When I travel now, I have to be very aware of where I am, what I say, what I do. I feel unease even at disclosing my name to the ticket checker in the train."

Mr Qureshi can see a clear root cause: "Politics has mixed poison in the relationship between the communities."

"There is no reason for Muslims to be anxious," Syed Zafar Islam, a national spokesperson of the BJP, told me on a recent warm afternoon in Delhi, attributing rising Islamophobia to "irresponsible media houses".

"A small incident takes place somewhere, and the media amplifies it like it has never happened before. In a country of 1.4 billion people, several such incidents can take place between communities or within communities," he adds.

"You cannot generalise one or two incidents [and say the ruling party is anti-Muslim]. If someone portrays it as something targeted against Muslims, they are wrong."

I asked him how he'd react if his child came home from school, saying classmates had labelled him a "Pakistani terrorist" because of the family's religion. The ex-banker, who joined the party in 2014, has two children, one currently in school.

"Like any other parent, I would feel bad. It is the responsibility of the school to make sure such things don't happen. Parents should make sure they don't say such things," he said.

What about the talk of BJP establishing a Hindu rashtra (state) in a country where 79% of the people are Hindu?

"People know this is rhetoric. Has our government or party said such things? Why does media give so much space to people who say such things? We feel upset when media gives space to such people," Mr Islam said.

But then, what about the lack of Muslim representation? The BJP has no Muslim ministers, MPs in either house of the parliament, and only one member of a local

assembly (MLA) among the more than 1,000 nationwide.

Mr Islam, a former BJP MP himself, said this was not intentional.

"Muslims are being used by the Congress and other opposition parties to serve their agenda to defeat the BJP. If a Muslim candidate is fielded by a party and Muslims don't vote for him, which party is going to give him a ticket?"

It is true only 8% of India's Muslims voted for the BJP in 2019, and are increasingly voting as a bloc against Mr Modi's party. In the 2020 Bihar state elections, 77% supported an anti-BJP alliance; in 2021, 75% backed the regional Trinamool Congress in West Bengal; and in 2022, 79% supported the opposition Samajwadi Party in Uttar Pradesh.

But Mr Islam argues the Congress-led opposition parties instilled "fear and anxiety" in the community to ensure they remained loyal. The Modi government, on the other hand, "doesn't differentiate [between communities]".

"The welfare schemes are reaching all the people. Muslims are the biggest beneficiaries of some of the schemes. No big riots have taken place in the past 10 years." In fact rioting in Delhi over a controversial citizenship law in 2020 left more than 50 people dead, most of them Muslims - but India has seen far worse over the years since independence.

Mr Islam blamed the community for insulating itself from the mainstream.

"Muslims must introspect. They should reject being treated as a [mere] vote bank, and not be influenced by religious leaders.

"Mr Modi is trying hard to bring society together so that people coexist happily and they are not misled."

I asked him about how he looked at the future of Muslims in India under Mr Modi's leadership?

"It is very good.... Minds are changing slowly. More Muslims will be joining the BJP. Things are looking up."

It is difficult to say whether things are looking up or not.

It is true that, amidst these turbulent times, many Muslims say their community is undergoing a process of reform.

"Muslims are looking within and getting educated. There is a concerted effort by Muslim educationists and intellectuals to help deserving, needy community students to get educated. The effort to improve on your own is laudable but it also betrays lack of faith in the government," says Mr Salam.

Arzoo Parveen is one of those who can see a way out of poverty with her family in Bihar - India's poorest state - with education.

a state-run school, but Rahmani30, a free coaching school for underprivileged Muslim students set up by Maulana Wali Rahmani, a Muslim former politician and academician, in 2008.

Rahmani30 now mentors 850 students - girls and boys - in three cities, including Patna, Bihar's capital. Chosen students live in the school's rented buildings and cram for national entrance exams in engineering, medicine, and chartered accountancy. Many of them are first-generation learners, children of fruit vendors, farm workers, labourers and construction workers.



Unlike Ms Ahmad's son, the road block was not religious tensions, but her own father, scared of what others would think.

"He said we have money problems at home, you are a grown-up girl, villagers will talk about it. I told him we can't continue to live like this. Women are moving ahead. We can't put our futures on hold."

Arzoo's dream is to become a doctor, inspired after hearing how her mother died at the local hospital. But it was village teachers' stories of women becoming engineers and doctors that made her believe it was possible.

"Why not me?" she asked, and within a year she had become the first woman in her family to pursue higher education.

Her road out of the village was not through

Some 600 alumni are already working as software engineers, chartered accountants and in other professions. Six are doctors.

Next year, Arzoo will join more than two million competitors - if not more - to compete for one of the 100,000-odd seats that India's 707 medical colleges offer every year.

"I am ready for the challenge. I want to become a gynaecologist," she says.

Mohammed Shakir sees education at Rahmani30 as his ticket to a better life - one which will allow him to take care of his struggling family.

Last April, the 15-year-old, and his friend embarked on a six-hour bus journey to Patna, travelling through a district hit by religious riots sparked by a Hindu festival

procession. They made the journey with a bottle of water and a few dates, stayed overnight in a mosque, sat for the Rahmani30 entrance exam and cracked it.

"My parents were so scared, they said don't go. I told them, 'The time is now. If I don't go now, I don't know what my future will be,'" Shakir said.

For this teenager, who dreams of becoming a computer scientist, the fears over religious tension appeared to be the least of his worries.

"I had told my mum that I will return after acing the exam. Nothing will happen to me on the way. After all, why should anything go wrong? In my village, Hindus and Muslims live together in perfect harmony."

Short presentational grey line

So what about the future of India's Muslims - also divided on class, sect, caste and regional lines - in the world's most populous country?

Mr Salam talks about a sense of "lingering fear".

"People talk about lack of jobs and inflation for Muslim community. But it's just not about inflation and employment. It is about right to life."

Recent memoirs by young Muslims speak of similar fears.

"Almost everyone has picked a country where they would run to when the inevitable happens. Some have got in touch with uncles settled in Canada, the US, Turkey or the UK, if they ever need asylum. Even someone like me, who felt safe even in times of communal violence, now worries about my family's future in my homeland," writes Zeyad Masroor Khan in his recent book *City on Fire: A Boyhood in Aligarh*.

In Agra, Ms Ahmad also feels the weight of uncertainty about the future.

"In the beginning I thought it [Muslim-baiting] was fringe and it would pass. That was 10 years ago. Now I feel a lot has been permanently lost and damaged."

Courtesy BBC

New IMF Loan and Challenges Ahead

Why is the coalition government seeking another bailout program from the International Monetary Fund after the completion of a \$3 billion standby arrangement in April this year?



By Javed Mahmood

The International Monetary Fund and the Pakistan government appear on the same page for negotiating a new loan program. Pakistan has officially approached the IMF for the next bailout package, seeking \$6 to \$8 billion with the potential for additional financing through climate funds. The request includes a review mission next month to finalize details of a new three-year bailout package under the Extended Fund Facility (EFF).

Interestingly, the IMF officials have shown their willingness to provide another bailout package to Pakistan amid gradual economic recovery in the country.

A delegation led by Finance Minister Muhammad Aurangzeb visited Washington to attend the IMF/World Bank spring meetings. Despite a positive economic outlook, Pakistan faces challenges highlighted by the IMF's latest report, citing worsening external buffers due to ongoing debt repayments, including Eurobonds.

Why is the coalition government seeking another bailout program from the International Monetary Fund after

the completion of a \$3 billion standby arrangement in April this year?

There are multiple reasons for the government to obtain a new IMF loan program. For example, in the next financial year, Pakistan will have to return more than \$20 billion worth of foreign loans while the reserves of the State Bank of Pakistan are fluctuating around \$8 billion that too with money borrowed from Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, and China. Hence, in the next five years, Pakistan will have to repay more or less \$100 billion in external loans.

Meanwhile, the Special Investment Facilitation Council (SIFC) is striving hard to attract foreign investment worth billions of dollars to magnify economic activities and growth, and to stabilize the investors' confidence, value of the rupee, and foreign exchange reserves as well. The privatization program is also being pushed forward to mop up foreign investment and reserves.

All these initiatives are strongly connected to the IMF program that is being negotiated these days. Also, the recent record growth in the stock

market and stability in the dollar-rupee value are being attributed to the possibility of the approval of another IMF loan program for Pakistan. If IMF approves a new bailout package, it will be Pakistan's 24th program with the Fund that targets economic revival and growth, and avert the risks of default.

Therefore, the officials of the IMF are expected to reach Islamabad in the coming days to negotiate the new loan and its related matters with the government team, including an increase in the tax revenue, tax base, energy sector reforms, and phasing out of subsidies. As the present government has indicated its willingness to pursue the IMF requirements to obtain a new loan, it is understood that the government will not hesitate to further enhance the utility prices and cut subsidies, making energy bills more unbearable for the common people. There is a perception in the masses that as long as the country is in the IMF program, they will not get any major relief in the cost of electricity, gas, or petroleum products.

The IMF recently reached a staff-level agreement on the final review of

Pakistan's stabilization program under a \$3 billion standby arrangement approved last July. This agreement paves the way for continued support and collaboration. The IMF report emphasized the need for tight monetary policy in countries facing inflationary pressures, including Pakistan, while closely monitoring risks. It projects a rebound in Pakistan's growth to 2 percent in 2024, supported by positive base effects in the agriculture and textile sectors.

Finance Minister Aurangzeb told the World Bank in Washington that with key reforms implemented, Pakistan's economy could potentially reach \$3 trillion by 2047. The current \$3 billion arrangement with the IMF expires in late April, and the government seeks a longer and larger loan to ensure macroeconomic stability and implement structural reforms. Aurangzeb mentioned that Pakistan needs two to three years to implement the IMF's suggested reforms, aiming to break the cycle of financial struggles and bailouts.

Meanwhile, the IMF executive board is scheduled to meet on April 29 to discuss the approval of a \$1.1 billion funding package for Pakistan, the second and final installment of a \$3 billion standby arrangement secured last summer.

Earlier, Finance Minister Muhammad Aurangzeb told the media that Pakistan aims to reach a staff-level agreement on a new, larger, long-term loan from the IMF by early July. Discussions are already underway between the Fund and the Pakistani government. If secured, this would be Pakistan's 24th IMF bailout. The country is grappling with a balance of payments crisis, facing the task of repaying nearly \$24 billion in debt and interest over the next fiscal year, three times the amount in its central bank's foreign currency reserves.

Pakistan anticipates a 2.6% growth in the current fiscal year, with an average inflation rate projected at 24%. It aims to agree on a new IMF loan in May and return to international debt markets. Plans for a potential international capital markets issuance, possibly through a green bond, are being discussed for the 2025/2026 fiscal year.

IMF Managing Director asks Pakistan to address past shortcomings

International Monetary Fund (IMF) Managing Director Kristalina Georgieva reiterated her call for Pakistan to enhance tax collection from its affluent citizens while ensuring the welfare of the underprivileged. The meeting, held on the sidelines of the 78th UNGA session in New York, focused on aligning these efforts with the IMF program aimed at supporting the Pakistani populace and revitalizing the economy. Ms. Georgieva emphasized the importance of Pakistan rectifying past shortcomings and implementing policies to benefit its citizens. In 2022-23, IMF approved a \$3 billion Stand-By Agreement (SBA), aimed at assisting Pakistan's economy.

The IMF Managing Director commended Pakistan's dedication to economic recovery policies and reforms, reaffirming the IMF's commitment to ongoing collaboration. Ms. Georgieva stressed the need for strong policies to ensure stability, foster sustainable and inclusive growth, prioritize revenue collection, and protect the most vulnerable in Pakistan.

This stance is not new for the IMF or Ms. Georgieva. She previously issued a similar statement earlier this year, urging Pakistan to raise tax revenues and ensure fair distribution of subsidies to those in need. It is the second time she has publicly emphasized the IMF's stance on collecting more taxes from the wealthy and protecting the poor. The current caretaker government, as well as previous coalitions, have cited their IMF program as a constraint in providing tax relief.

52% growth in foreign investment shows signs of economic revival

In March 2024, Pakistan's foreign direct investment (FDI) landscape experienced a significant uptick, indicating a promising shift in the country's economic trajectory.

According to the latest data from the State Bank of Pakistan (SBP), FDI inflows surged by an impressive 51.7%

month-on-month (MoM), reaching \$258 million. This marked a notable increase from \$170 million recorded in the same period last year. The March FDI inflow represents the highest figure since June 2022, signaling renewed confidence among international investors in Pakistan's economic potential.

Despite this positive momentum, FDI inflows for the first nine months (July-March) of the current fiscal year witnessed a modest decline of 9.7% compared to the previous year. Pakistan received \$1.099 billion in FDI during this period, down from \$1.217 billion in the corresponding period of the preceding year. Pakistan has traditionally attracted around \$2 billion in FDI annually, making it a focal point for foreign investors within the region. However, a closer examination of the data reveals mixed trends, with certain key contributors experiencing fluctuations in their investment patterns.

China and the UAE, significant sources of FDI for Pakistan, saw notable declines in their investment flows. FDI from China dropped to \$262 million in the first nine months of FY24, a substantial decrease from \$556.6 million during the same period last year.

Similarly, FDI from the UAE witnessed a significant downturn, with inflows decreasing to \$27.7 million from \$88.7 million previously. Despite these declines, the government remains optimistic about attracting substantial investments from the UAE, particularly under the Special Investment Framework Agreement. Amidst these fluctuations, other countries emerged as noteworthy contributors to Pakistan's FDI landscape. Hong Kong's investment surged by 46% to \$26.4 million, indicating growing confidence in this region.

Meanwhile, the UK maintained its position as a prominent investor, with FDI amounting to \$196.3 million. The USA also continued its investment commitment, albeit with a slight decrease to \$100.7 million. In a surprising turn, the Netherlands witnessed a remarkable uptick in investment, recording a staggering 306% increase to \$6.7 million during the nine months.

Karachi, the economic hub of Pakistan, played a pivotal role in this FDI resurgence,

attracting a diverse range of investments across sectors. The city saw a doubling of FDI every month in March 2024, marking a significant milestone in Pakistan's journey towards economic revitalization.

Current Account Surplus hits record high level

In March 2024, Pakistan's economic landscape witnessed a significant improvement as reported by the State Bank of Pakistan (SBP), with a substantial current account surplus of \$619 million. This remarkable figure marks the highest monthly surplus since February 2015, indicating a positive turn for the country's financial health.



The surge in surplus can largely be attributed to a remarkable increase in workers' remittances, a key contributor to Pakistan's economy. Compared to the previous month's surplus of \$98 million, March's surplus represents a significant leap. Moreover, in March 2023, the surplus stood at \$537 million, indicating a substantial year-on-year improvement.

On a cumulative basis, the current account deficit for the first nine months of fiscal year 2024 amounted to \$508 million. This reflects an impressive 87.5% year-on-year improvement compared to the deficit of \$4.05 billion recorded in the same period of the previous fiscal year. The rise in total exports by 4.6% year-on-year, reaching \$3.23 billion, contributed to the positive momentum.

Similarly, total imports saw an increase of 7.9% year-on-year, totaling \$5.25 billion. However, while the trade deficit widened both on a yearly and monthly basis, the overall trend remains positive. Breaking down the data, the trade deficit in goods reached \$1.93 billion, up 11.2% year-on-year, driven by increases in both exports and imports.

Additionally, the trade deficit in services expanded to \$89 million, marking a significant year-on-year increase. The standout performer, however, was workers' remittances, which soared by 16.4% year-on-year to \$2.95 billion in March. Every month, remittances surged by 31.3%, reaching \$2.25 billion.

Cumulatively for the first nine months of the fiscal year, workers' remittances totaled \$21.04 billion, a slight increase from the previous year. Overall, Pakistan's economic indicators portray resilience and growth, driven by robust remittances and improving trade balances.

KSE-100 Index surges above 72,000 level

In recent days, the KSE-100 index has set a new record by surpassing the 72,000 level for the first time. Gradual economic recovery backed by positive economic developments and the government's decision to obtain another loan from the IMF has made the stock market sentiment bullish. Analysts believe that after the approval of the next loan program, the stock market and other corporate sectors will see a further boom in their economic activities.

SBP's Foreign Exchange reserves to stabilize around \$10 billion in June

Finance Minister Muhammad Aurangzeb announced that Pakistan's foreign exchange reserves are expected to reach \$9-10 billion by June 2024. The Finance Minister stated this recently while speaking to the media after addressing the "Leaders in Islamabad Business Summit 2024 Collaborating for Growth."

About the increase in electricity and gas prices, Aurangzeb stated that the government has its priorities regarding these prices. During his address at the Summit, the finance minister stated that Pakistan's foreign exchange reserves, after receiving one billion dollars from the IMF, would reach \$9 billion. By the end of June, foreign exchange reserves are expected to reach \$10 billion. He dispelled the impression of low growth in the IMF program, highlighting the potential for agriculture and livestock sectors to boost economic growth. However, he noted that it is uncertain about the size of the IMF's next program. According to the SBP's latest data, released on April 26, the central bank's reserves stood at \$7.9 billion by April 19. Total reserves amounted to \$13.28 billion after including the private banks' foreign exchange reserves.

Aurangzeb emphasized the importance of increasing the tax-to-GDP ratio to 13 percent in the coming years for economic stability. He also stressed the need for the government to make decisions and ensure their implementation to fix the economy. The minister expressed concern over the large number of tax cases stuck in various forums due to litigation and called for their early resolution. He also mentioned plans to strengthen the track and trace system.

Regarding privatization, Finance Minister Aurangzeb stated that the government is working on privatizing electricity distribution companies and has taken steps in this regard for PIA. Discussions are also underway regarding Islamabad Airport services. He added that the inflation rate is decreasing in Pakistan.

Saudi Investment: Pakistan's Economic Lifeline or Diplomatic Tightrope?

By Nimra Atiq

Saudi Arabia, a key ally of Pakistan, has invested in the country to boost its economy and create employment opportunities. Given the longstanding diplomatic relations between Pakistan and Saudi Arabia, it is hardly unexpected that Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif made the country his first overseas trip after taking office and discussed the possibility of expediting Saudi investment in Pakistan.

Pakistan's economy has been facing challenges in attracting foreign investment due to political instability, security concerns, and inconsistent economic policies. However, the recent investment of \$25 billion from Saudi Arabia can help Pakistan create new jobs and stimulate economic growth. This investment comes at a critical time, as Pakistan is struggling with high levels of unemployment, especially among young people. By establishing new businesses and expanding existing ones, Saudi investment can provide much-needed employment opportunities for the people of Pakistan.

The government of Pakistan has been trying to attract Saudi interest in various sectors of the economy, including industry, agriculture, mining, and minerals. The hope is that Saudi investment and aid can help compensate for Islamabad's reduced spending on social services, caused by the impact of natural disasters and climate change on infrastructure in some of the poorest parts of the country.

Furthermore, the government wants to attract Saudi interest in Pakistan International Airlines (PIA). The exact destination of Riyadh's investment remains unknown, but rumors suggest that the Saudi state might use the money for other industries in addition to mining, particularly the Reko Diq project.

However, Pakistan must create a pro-business environment with less red tape and corruption to encourage foreign investment. If foreign players invest in Pakistan, they will not be looking to dole out charity. They will come to make money, which is



why profit repatriation must be smooth to ensure continued foreign investment. A few billion dollars will hardly turn around Pakistan's economy.

Interestingly, while Saudi Arabia is investing heavily in Pakistan, it is also eyeing a \$100bn investment plan in India and wants peace in the neighborhood. It remains to be seen if the allure of Arab money can convince India's leadership to talk peace with Pakistan.

The Saudi Factor in Pakistan-Iran Relations

Pakistan is currently facing a challenging situation due to the ongoing rivalry and tensions between Iran and Saudi Arabia. These two countries have long-standing political, religious, and geopolitical differences, which have put Pakistan in a difficult position. Pakistan is trying to maintain good relations with both of them without upsetting either one.

Recently, Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi visited Pakistan for three days, with a focus on business. His visit came shortly after two important Saudi Arabian visits, one of which was from Foreign Minister Faisal bin Farhan, who came to Pakistan to strengthen bilateral economic cooperation and explore areas of mutual interest.

During Raisi's visit, both countries agreed to bilateral deals worth \$10 billion to be completed over the next ten years. They also agreed to expeditiously finalize a free trade agreement. The deals will cover areas such as energy, infrastructure, and technology, which will help strengthen economic ties between the two countries.

Pakistan shares common security concerns with both Iran and Saudi Arabia, such as fighting terrorism and extremism. However, the ongoing conflict between these two countries, along with Pakistan's close ties with Saudi Arabia, has occasionally led to conflicts between Pakistan and Iran.

Pakistan is trying to navigate this complex geopolitical landscape carefully, using diplomatic means to balance its relationships with both countries while also addressing regional issues such as the instability in Afghanistan, which affects all three countries.

There is no denying Pakistan's financial reliance on Saudi Arabia. The regularity of military-to-military communication between Iran and Pakistan suggests that the two armies often exchange intelligence regarding regional security. In the absence of Saudi backing, Pakistan's calculations regarding meeting its international financial responsibilities are not well-suited to its tight ties to Iran.

The question of how Pakistan will handle its relations with Saudi Arabia should it choose to pursue stronger economic, military, and security ties with Iran remains unanswered. Then there is the concern that improving ties between Pakistan and Iran could result in US sanctions.

There exists a substantial consensus, meanwhile, that asserting Saudi Arabia-Iran tensions is not advantageous for Pakistan, and Pakistani diplomacy must take immediate action to defuse the situation. In Pakistani society, rising hostilities between Shia and Sunnis could harm domestic security by escalating tensions between the two countries.



Pakistan needs to maintain neutrality in this situation to prevent tensions from escalating between Iran and Saudi Arabia, as it seeks to avoid being drawn into a larger regional crisis. Pakistan is a significant regional player, and its ability to remain neutral will be severely tested as the

situation within the triad continues to evolve. Pakistan's diplomatic dexterity is critical to balancing its relationships with both countries and preventing any conflicts that could jeopardize its security and stability.



A landmark conviction

Spousal violence against women is a pressing issue in Pakistan, linked to a distressing array of mental, physical, emotional, and economic health challenges



By Rida Tahir

According to estimates published by the WHO, approximately one in three (30 three) women worldwide has experienced either physical and/or sexual intimate partner violence (IPV) in their lifetime. Pakistan is no exception. Almost 34 per cent of ever-married women aged 15-49 have experienced IPV, according to the Pakistan Demographic and Health Survey 2017-2018. Therefore, recent news regarding Sindh's first conviction for marital rape is a step forward.

However, continued efforts, including continuous legal and gender sensitization training, are necessary along with the concerted efforts by all criminal justice system (CJS) actors to prevent IPV in all its forms. It is important to highlight that Pakistan is yet to see the first conviction for marital rape under Section 375 of the Pakistan Penal Code (PPC). As per the judgment dated January 15, 2024 by the Additional Sessions Judge (South), the convict was punished under Section 377 (unnatural offences) of the PPC to three-year rigorous imprisonment and a fine of Rs30,000.

Section 377 of the PPC states that: "Whoever voluntarily has carnal intercourse against the order of nature with any man, woman or animal, shall be punished with imprisonment for life..." It was introduced in the penal code in 1861, during the British rule of the Subcontinent. Modelled on the Buggery Act 1533 in England, it criminalizes sexual activities "against the order of nature." The section on rape in the PPC is 375. Therefore, the case highlights the reluctance of CJS actors to acknowledge marital rape under Section 375, as it would challenge patriarchal norms in the country.

Let's travel through time to understand the amendments in law and the journey of women's rights activists that criminalize marital rape in the legal system of Pakistan. This is important to explain because it took massive efforts by women's rights activists in the country to criminalize various forms of sexual violence against women. Therefore, the reluctance to use the correct sections of the law marks a significant challenge in tackling violence against women.

The Offence of Zina (Enforcement of Hudood) Ordinance 1979 removed 'rape' from the PPC. Under Section 6(1) of the Hudood Ordinance, Zina bil-jabr was defined as "sexual intercourse with a woman...to whom he or she is not validly married."

However, after years of advocacy by women activists, the Protection of Women (Criminal Laws Amendment) Act 2006 was passed by the parliament of Pakistan. This inserted 'rape' and its punishment into the PPC through Sections 375 (rape) and 376 (punishment for rape). The definition stipulated in Section 375 stated that: "a man is said to commit rape who has sexual intercourse with a woman...(i) against her will and (ii) without her consent." Marital rape was read into the law because the phrase "he or she is not validly married" was removed. By comparison, in India, exception 2 of Section 375 of the Indian Penal Code explicitly states that "sexual intercourse or sexual acts by a man with his own wife, the wife not being under fifteen years of age, is not rape".

Nevertheless, many core components were still missing from the law in Pakistan, which are essential in a trial of sexual violence. The Criminal Law (Amendment) (Offences Relating to Rape) Act 2016 aimed to fill these gaps. Although this amendment did not amend the definition of rape in Section 375, it amended Section 376 (punishment for rape) of the PPC, establishing that whoever commits rape of a minor or a person with mental or physical disability shall be punished with death or life imprisonment, including public servants such as police officers, medical officers, or jailers, who, taking advantage of their official position, may commit rape of vulnerable persons.

It was through the Criminal Laws (Amendment) Act 2021, in the backdrop of the Lahore-motorway rape case, that the definition of 'rape' stipulated in Section 375 of the PPC was redefined. The new definition of rape encompasses gender-neutral language and increases the scope and the ambit of the complex crime of rape. It covers all facets of rape and penetration of a sexual nature, including through objects. Therefore, after the amendment, marital rape falls within the definition of rape stipulated in Section 375 of the PPC. As per the judgement dated 15.01.2024 by the Additional Sessions Judge (South), neither the FIR was lodged under Section 375 or 376, nor did the trial court examine the applicability of Section 375 (rape) to the facts of the case.

While the conviction is the first step in the right direction, it also highlights the



reluctance of CJS actors to acknowledge marital rape under Section 375 of the PPC and instead terms the serious offences against women as 'unnatural offences'. Due to this, the correct section that defines the offence of rape will not evolve.

In the 1991 case of *R v R* in the United Kingdom, the House of Lords established that it is a crime for a husband to rape his wife, effectively abolishing marital rape exemption under common law. This case was reviewed by the European Court of Human Rights, which stated that the case was the "evolution of law". The parliament of Pakistan has progressively criminalized marital rape; however, our laws must progressively evolve through the jurisprudence of the high courts and the Supreme Court of Pakistan as they set a binding precedent for the trial courts. The law (Section 375) should be actively applied by CJS actors – by prosecutors when scrutinizing the challan, the police when lodging the

FIR, and trial court (and superior court) judges when interpreting the law.

The conviction leaves room for progress across the country. However, capacity-building training needs to continue along with efforts to improve the reporting of these cases. Keeping this in mind, the Sindh Human Rights Commission (SHRC) has requested the establishment of women police stations in all districts of Sindh while conducting training for law inspectors, investigating officers and the newly appointed judicial magistrates/civil judges/family court judges.

Such initiatives need to be replicated in other provinces as well. As we move forward in the journey to eliminate violence against women, we see light at the end of the tunnel. We must walk towards the light. This conviction is definitely a step forward.

Courtesy The News



Water - A New Weapon of War



By Zeeshan A. Shah

On World Water Day today (April 24), we are faced with imminent threats of water wars as many continents from Africa to Europe, Asia to the Middle East face a developing water crisis in the age of war. Water Wars were predicted time and again, with battle lines drawn by nations over water resources, making water the new weapon of war.

The world is entering a more decisive phase of water wars. From a historical perspective, Syria, Iraq, and Turkey occupy a conflict zone over shared rivers- the Tigris and Euphrates. In Africa, the same situation persisted in the construction of the Renaissance Dam over the Blue Nile. In Yemen's war, over 4 million residents have faced devastating consequences, due to water scarcity after was ravaged the nation. According to reports, over 5000 deaths take place each year due to local land and water disputes, leading to civilian casualties and mass migrations.

In the Middle East, the largest dam in Iraq -the Mosul Dam that controls major water arteries is now the center of the battle between Daesh and Kurdish Iraqi forces, whereby water cut-offs and dam takeovers are used as

tools to control and manipulate governments. A devastating battle for resources in the Israel-Palestine war is currently underway where deadly attacks on water resources have left deep scars on the land and its people where women and children have been ruthlessly slaughtered and further deprived of drinking water leading to mass casualties, with no hope in sight.

Analysts have indicated that the civil war in Syria was a direct result of the intense drought of 2007 with over 0.5 million people massacred and 20 million people displaced if triggered by a major water war. During the Gulf War of 1991, American forces destroyed water resources and infrastructure, leading to the rise of Daesh and a huge water crisis, as a by-product of the American Invasion.

In South Asia alone, a full-blown war over water would be catastrophic for hundreds of millions of people depending on the Indus Water Treaty hanging by a thread. The construction of dams on both sides of the border between India and Pakistan could dry out fresh water banks, with frequent threats by India to cut off the water supply to Pakistan.

Researchers in 2019 predicted that 200-300 million in Pakistan were feared to be running out of access to safe drinking water. The race to acquire equitable distribution of water resources is a bigger challenge today in major cities, while the situation gets worse in rural communities as water shortage increases due to higher agricultural requirements, without a proper water conservation plan. To date, there has not been a comprehensive water policy approved by the government.

Water is a public health issue and a household concern today, as the price of water as a commodity has risen sharply in the last 5 years. The nation is enslaved by excessive water theft illegal water distribution and profiteering. Unfortunately, there is always someone who benefits from the water crisis and it is not the poor people of this country. In the major city of Karachi for example, millions of gallons of substandard water are sold at abnormal prices to the common man.

Let us get a historic perspective on 'water'. In the 6th largest city in the world, there is a severe water crisis. A few years back, the average requirement of water in major cities like

Karachi was somewhere around 835 MGD (million gallons per day) with only 10% of the city water supply coming through tankers. With 40% of the water supply for such cities affected due to organized crime, through home suction devices and illegal hydrants, this indicates illegal pricing and sale of water as a commercial commodity with various mafias involved. There are harsh implications. Supply and distribution of unclean at unaffordable prices to the public may result that may lead to civil war and water wars.



In 1991, as per the water accord, it was documented that downstream water supply to Sindh would be mandatory and a survey would also be conducted to oversee the exact amount of water supply required for the benefit of the people of the province, based on high malnutrition and water scarcity in the province. Moreover, the flash floods of 2022 left people devastated and destroyed infrastructure in the aftermath.

The Indus Delta Basin - the 6th Largest delta in the world has been damaged due to depleting water resources. More than 10 MAF (million-acre-feet) of water was the estimated minimum requirement a few years back. Moreover, a lack of available data or a comprehensive water policy needs to be devised as a policy manual to address this problem. An estimated 4.5 -5 million acres of fertile land have been inundated by rising sea levels as a result of climate change and global warming, in different coastal areas of the province of Sindh.

Lack of infrastructure is a challenge. The water pipelines laid out for the transportation of clean water need to be checked, as most of them are rusted or broken and sewage has started to penetrate these water lines, increasing the risk of disease and hazardous chemicals in the drinking water supply. Over 20% of the water that reaches city populations is being used to wash cars, being unsuitable for human drinking consumption.

For the majority of residents living in

apartment buildings today, the price of water has risen from Rs 4000 per tanker in 2019 to almost Rs 15,000 per tanker today. With inflation over 25% in Pakistan, the citizens of the nation may be unable to afford water at their current wage rate.

Some of the immediate required measures include 1) Review the Water Accord of 1991 – Through possible construction of new dams. For example, the Tarbela Dam was commissioned forty years back, where Sindh received an additional 7.0 MAF of water that led to the cultivation of over 27 lakh acres of land. 2) Infrastructural investments – by repairing existing water supply avenues and building water treatment plants. 3) Water Conservation- Through social media awareness campaigns launched in populated areas of major cities to minimize water wastage. 4) Harvesting rainwater- At individual and community levels to sustain available water. 5) Desalination – By exploring extra sources of freshwater in coastal areas and building

desalination plants 6) Good governance- By implementing transparent laws that may govern water management practices. 7) Partnerships-Private partnerships with government to ensure water service delivery to end consumers.

Quoting a famous book, “The Price of Thirst” –water Scarcity and the coming chaos, the author documented three big challenges that every government has to resolve- the rise of extremism, privatization of water resources and water scarcity must be addressed to eradicate potential water wars.

A UN report has confirmed that by 2025, the world will face a global water shortage of 40%, where global water demand will increase by 55% by 2050. Safe drinking water is shrinking globally, with a multiplied damage due to rising climate change as over 90% of the world's countries share river basins and lakes. Today, 100 liters of water per person per day is barely enough.

Questions remain. Are banks financing water projects for public utilization? Is the government adopting water policies and implementing water laws? Is there a country water policy for Pakistan and other poor nations? In the 1950s, 2.5 billion people. By 2050, 40% of global youth will migrate to Asia, another 50% may decide to migrate to Africa. Global GDP will triple, natural resource consumption will double and we will see increased climate risk. Without water, there will be no future growth for many emerging nations, including Pakistan.

Pakistan cannot succeed as an agricultural economy till it puts “water policy first” and avoids a water emergency. To grow food, we need water or we may never export anything overseas. Sooner than later, the lack of adequate water reservoirs in the country will lead to water wars. In the end, we need to battle this challenge, for the great good of the public.

The right to clean and safe drinking water is the primary challenge to manage the healthcare emergency in the country as well as to save our populations from starvation. The matter should be immediately tabled for action by the new government to ensure social justice for the masses before the nation is crippled by perpetual water wars.

The ban on X: The ‘national security’ rationale doesn’t fly anymore

National security has become a convenient shield for arbitrary censorship, leaving us questioning the true intentions behind the systematic suppression of our digital freedoms



By Usman Shahid

“National security” — a term abused so frequently by successive governments in Pakistan that it would be better off archived. Over the years, the term has been stripped of its true essence — devolved to an enervating level of widespread dismissal among many of us; mutated into an ugly weapon and spiked with alarmingly sweeping conditions.

From the deepest recesses of ambiguity, “national security” is very conveniently dislodged to cover arbitrary measures — an easily predictable rationale from the state to justify its blatant infringements across the rights spectrum. Hence, when the continuing suspension of X (formerly Twitter) was recently ascribed to “national security” threats by the Ministry of Interior in court, it hardly came as a surprise.

We are no longer buying into this rote rationale. And no apologies for not doing so.

Continuous blackout

This week marks the second month of X’s suspension in Pakistan, with the platform having been inaccessible since February 17, 2024, in the country, a week after the nation went to polls. The election day itself saw the light of day through an enforced connectivity blackout.

Citizens seeking their polling details were left in the dark. Cellular services were shoved into a spiral of frustrating inoperability. Phone calls stumbled into empty signal bars on the screens. Access to information about real-time events during the polls was lost — or to frame it more accurately — strategically blocked. Lofty promises to hold “free” and “fair” elections were shredded in plain sight. No surprises there. All was carried out under the pretext of “national security” on a day when the nation was exercising the right to decide its future.

It is curiously difficult to understand why citizens have to bear the brunt of these perceived national security concerns specifically on communication channels, and of late, social media platforms. The law and order situation in Pakistan does not illustrate a pleasing picture either. It hasn’t for as long as I can remember.

We wake up to horrific reports on a range of crimes. Raping of minors and adults, young people shot dead in street robberies, brutal crimes against women, targeted killings, attacks on minorities, mob lynchings, and enforced disappearances are just a few of the unfortunate realities to which we have inadvertently become accustomed over the years. I, to this day, wonder how I survived the mugging on a busy road that left my head split open despite zero resistance. If all that does not concern security and does not warrant proactive containment measures, it would be enlightening to know what does.

With these crimes only on the rise, it is beyond one's ability to comprehend how the surreptitious takedown of an entire social media platform will preserve national security. To say the suspension of X without any word from the government for months is beyond embarrassing would be an understatement, given our consistently fragile position in the international digital market.

Mum's the word

What is frustrating is not just the ban itself, but the way it has been treated with sheer ignorance and appalling lack of accountability. It has made a spectacle of our presence in the global digital community, where we are already languishing in the lowest ranks. And that too on several fronts, be it access to the internet or establishing safe spaces to safeguard digital rights, Pakistan's performance is nothing short of disappointing.

However, when it comes to content takedowns, such as on TikTok, we even surpass the United States (US), which boasts a far more advanced communications infrastructure — not to mention the geography and its status as a “superpower”. There is, however, no transparency around such large volumes of content removals. National security concerns or breach of hidden sanctimonious statutes of “morality” and “decency”? The government knows best, of course. We, as a people, can only take a guess out of the two — as these are the only official stock responses.

Maybe our national interests are not even remotely compromised by our federal information minister very casually dismissing the suspension of X in the media to the nation. Twitter is working in the country. Tweets are also being made. Show a notification on the ban if there's any, and we'll talk then. The public servant only went on to admit later that the platform was already banned when the new government came into power. The audacity to pull off such a farce in the face of naked truth.

Forget the media, the travesty of accountability by authorities in courts continues to breed the rampant culture of impunity. The apportioning of the blame. The obviously deliberate attempts to weasel out of answer-

ing. The back-and-forth tossing of responsibility. The flagrant flouting of fundamental rights enshrined in the Constitution. That does not undermine our national interests at large, maybe, and by extension, national security.

Block everything

Facebook, YouTube, TikTok, Bigo — you name the platform and we already have a blockage either in continuity or indented in history. Maybe blocking is the easy way out. It at least projects some semblance of dedicated efforts on the part of the authorities. With blocking comes a modicum of what the state wants us to believe guarantees security.



A religious event or festival approaching? Block mobile phone services across the country, for who exactly would a complete loss of communication impact? Cricket happening? Block the roads, for hours-long snarlups across the country's largest city (Karachi) wouldn't hurt. Some random figure in the government took offence at some random piece of content posted online by some random person from some random corner of the country? Block the platform for the whole nation, as who, in their right mind, wouldn't want an entire online resource taken down for “sacrilegious” content? How lightly the weightage of security is eroded. Again, threats to

national security concerns, maybe.

If you don't agree with these control or mitigation strategies, then it brings us to what exactly preserves national security. Is it the failure to contain the continuing crimes highlighted above? Is it the draconian cyber legislation aimed at equipping the authorities with formulated controls to broaden censorship and surveillance and target citizens? Is it the killing or disappearance of journalists who are picked up from their homes by unidentified men or them being taken to court for merely doing their work by law enforcement agencies? Is it the watchdogs still seeking out and harassing dissenting voices under laws that have been struck down by the court? Or is it the

aversion to resounding calls to respect fundamental rights by advocacy groups from around the world?

Not much to be achieved through these arguments. Maybe it is the blocking of a social media platform, after all. Don't forget. It is “national security” that is at stake here.

But please be reliably informed. While the government may claim it's all in the name of national security, many of us aren't entirely sold on that explanation. We can't just swallow what we're being fed without questioning it.

Courtesy Dawn

A Recap of Pakistan vs New Zealand T20 Series April 2024

By Kanwal Munir

In April 2024, cricket enthusiasts were treated to an electrifying showcase of talent and skill as Pakistan and New Zealand engaged in a riveting T20 series that captivated audiences worldwide. The series unfolded as a saga of intense cricketing battles, with each match serving as a stage for the clash of titans. Against the backdrop of Rawalpindi and Lahore, two cricketing powerhouses locked horns in a spectacle that showcased the essence of T20 cricket at its finest.

Prior to the series, the Pakistani cricket team embarked on a transformative journey of preparation and training at the prestigious Pakistan Military Academy (PMA) in Kakul, Abbottabad. This preparatory phase served as a crucible, forging a team united in purpose, and primed for success. Meanwhile, New Zealand braced themselves for the challenge ahead, navigating through their own set of obstacles and uncertainties. Led by coach Gary Stead, the Kiwi squad embarked on a mission to defy the odds and make their mark on the international stage. As anticipation reached a fever pitch, cricketing fans eagerly awaited the showdown between these formidable adversaries, knowing that every match would be a testament to the spirit of competition and the pursuit of excellence in cricket.

PAK vs NZ T20 SQUAD:

In the intense battles of the T20 series between Pakistan and New Zealand in April 2024, both teams showcased their talent and resilience with formidable squads.

New Zealand Squad:

1. Michael Bracewell (c)
2. Tom Blundell
3. Mark Chapman
4. Josh Clarkson
5. Jacob Duffy



6. Dean Foxcroft
7. Ben Lister
8. Cole McConchie
9. Zack Fowlkes
10. Jimmy Neesham
11. Will O'Rourke
12. Tim Robinson
13. Ben Sears
14. Tim Seifert
15. Ish Sodhi

Pakistan Squad:

1. Babar Azam (c)
2. Abrar Ahmed
3. Azam Khan
4. Fakhar Zaman
5. Iftikhar Ahmed
6. Imad Wasim
7. Abbas Afridi
8. Mohammad Amir
9. Irfan Khan
10. Naseem Shah
11. Saim Ayub
12. Shadab Khan

13. Shaheen Afridi
14. Usama Mir
15. Usman Khan
16. Zaman Khan

During the series, Pakistan's Mohammad Rizwan sustained an injury in the 3rd match, rendering him unable to continue. This setback required the squad to adjust their strategies and adapt to the absence of one of their key players.

OVERVIEW OF THE MATCHES:

The T20 series between Pakistan and New Zealand in April 2024 unfolded with five thrilling encounters, showcasing the highs and lows of T20 cricket.

1. 1st T20I (April 18 - Rawalpindi): The series commenced with an eagerly anticipated match in Rawalpindi. However, unfortunate circumstances led to the match ending without a result, leaving both teams hungry for action and eager to make their mark.

2. 2nd T20I (April 20 - Rawalpindi): Pakistan asserted their dominance in a commanding performance, chasing down New Zealand's modest total of 90 runs with ease. The Pakistani batsmen displayed exceptional skill and composure, securing a resounding victory by 7 wickets with 47 balls remaining.

3. 3rd T20I (April 21 - Rawalpindi): New Zealand staged a remarkable comeback after their defeat in the second match. Demonstrating their batting prowess, they successfully chased down Pakistan's formidable total of 178/4, clinching victory with 7 wickets in hand and 10 balls to spare.

4. 4th T20I (April 25 - Lahore): The series moved to Lahore, where New Zealand emerged victorious in a closely contested encounter. Setting a challenging target of 178/7, New Zealand's bowlers defended their total with resilience, restricting Pakistan to 174/8 and securing a narrow victory by 4 runs.

5. 5th T20I (April 27 - Lahore): The series concluded with a high-stakes finale, as Pakistan set a target of 179 runs for New Zealand to chase. Despite a valiant effort, New Zealand fell short in their pursuit, managing only 169 runs, resulting in a crucial 9-run victory for Pakistan to level the series.

PLAYER OF THE SERIES:

Shaheen Afridi's exceptional performance throughout the series earned him the prestigious Player of the Series title. His impactful contributions with both bat and ball played a pivotal role in Pakistan's success, showcasing his talent and versatility on the field.

PREPARATORY TRAINING AT PMA:

Leading up to the series, Pakistani cricketers underwent an intensive and comprehensive training regimen at the renowned Pakistan Military Academy (PMA) in Kakul, Abbottabad. Spearheaded by the collaborative efforts of the Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) and the Pakistan Army, this training camp was designed to elevate the players' physical fitness, mental resilience, and tactical acumen to peak levels.

Under the guidance of experienced trainers from the Pakistan Army, the cricketers engaged in a variety of activities aimed at enhancing their overall athleticism and cricketing skills. The training program encompassed a diverse range of exercises, including cardiovascular workouts, strength training, agility drills, and endurance-building routines. Each session was

meticulously planned and tailored to address the specific needs and requirements of cricketing performance at the highest level.

In addition to physical conditioning, the players also underwent mental preparation sessions to sharpen their focus, concentration, and decision-making abilities on the field. Through mindfulness practices, visualization techniques, and mental toughness training, they developed the mental fortitude necessary to thrive under pressure situations during intense matches. The training camp at PMA provided the players with a conducive environment for camaraderie, teamwork, and unity. As they trained alongside each other, they forged strong bonds and developed a sense of mutual trust and support, laying the foundation for a cohesive and resilient team.



The collaboration between the PCB and the Pakistan Army underscored the importance of teamwork, discipline, and dedication in achieving success in cricket and beyond. By leveraging the expertise and resources of both organizations, the training camp at PMA exemplified the synergy between sports and the armed forces, showcasing the shared commitment to excellence and national pride.

NEW ZEALAND COACH'S PRIDE:

Gary Stead, the coach of the New Zealand team, radiated pride as he reflected on his side's performance during the T20 series against Pakistan. Despite facing significant challenges, including the absence of key players and the daunting task of competing in unfamiliar conditions, Stead's faith in his squad remained unwavering. He applauded

the resilience and determination displayed by his inexperienced players, noting their commendable fightback after a disappointing start in the series opener.

Stead lauded the character and spirit shown by his team as they bounced back from adversity, showcasing remarkable improvement with each passing match. He emphasized the positive strides made by individual players, highlighting standout performances and contributions that epitomized the team's collective effort. Stead's pride stemmed not only from the results achieved on the field but also from the growth and development witnessed within his squad throughout the series. As he looked ahead to future challenges, Stead remained confident in the potential of his team and their ability to overcome obstacles with resilience and determination.

CONCLUSION:

The T20 series between Pakistan and New Zealand in April 2024 provided cricket fans with riveting entertainment and captivating moments. From intense battles on the field to rigorous training off the field, the series encapsulated the essence of cricketing excellence and competitive spirit. As the series concluded with a 2-2 draw, both teams demonstrated their skill and determination, leaving a lasting impression on spectators worldwide. With valuable lessons learned and experiences gained, the teams now look ahead to future challenges, guided by the spirit of camaraderie and sportsmanship fostered during the series. As cricket continues to unite nations and inspire generations, the April 2024 series between Pakistan and New Zealand will be remembered as a testament to the enduring passion and excitement of the sport.

Four games, three points & one massive Old Firm derby



By Nick McPheat

Not since 2011 has there been such a tight Scottish Premiership title race.

Three points is the gap between leaders Celtic and rivals Rangers with four games remaining, one of which is a potential derby decider in the east end of the city next month. On the back of two hard-fought away wins for both Old Firm clubs, BBC Scotland looks at the state of play in a gripping tussle for Scotland's top-flight crown.

'Three points all that matters'

It's a part of the season where performance very much becomes secondary. Even still, both Celtic and Rangers have been far from flawless throughout this term. Between the pair, they have failed to win 18 games between them - Rangers losing six and drawing three, while Celtic have lost three and drawn six.

The fragility both sides have shown at times, which has made a captivating title race all the more absorbing, was apparent in spells on Sunday. Rangers rode their luck against St Mirren in Paisley, especially in the first half, but gritted their teeth to edge to a victory thanks to the 20th goal of the

maligned Cyriel Dessers' debut season.

Celtic's luck-riding was done in the second period against Dundee at Dens Park, but a double from James Forrest - making his first start since November - ensured the leaders restored their three-point advantage.

"The performance doesn't matter, it's all about the result," former Rangers striker Steven Thompson said on Sportsound.

Fellow former Ibrox forward Billy Dodds echoed that view, adding: "At this stage - with the nerves and with what's at stake - all that matters is getting three points. That's what Celtic and Rangers did [on Sunday]."

Meanwhile, Philippe Clement rhymed off his usual "I'm only busy with Rangers" line, but the Ibrox boss hailed his side's "character" and "resilience" as Rodgers praised the "spirit" of his squad. It goes without saying, whoever demonstrates those three qualities best will almost certainly prove to be decisive in the four remaining games.

What's next in gripping finale?

The nature of the split means both clubs face the league's top teams in their final

fixtures. Next up for Celtic is the visit of a Hearts side who have defeated the leaders twice already this season - including a win in Glasgow in December.

Twenty-four hours later, Kilmarnock, who have won seven points against the Old Firm this campaign, go to Ibrox. A midweek trip to Rugby Park, where Celtic have lost twice this term, on the penultimate matchday could prove to be quite the test for Rodgers' side, as could Rangers' journey to Tynecastle on the final day.

But before all that is a potential derby decider at Celtic Park, where the men from Ibrox will likely have to win for the first time in almost four years to have any chance of wrestling top spot off their rivals.

And when all that's done, and the medals are handed out, there's the small matter of a Scottish Cup final showdown to look forward to. For Celtic, that could be the chance of a league and cup double. If not, they will be aiming to deny Rangers a domestic treble. Clear your diaries, a blockbuster end to the season is only just beginning.

Courtesy BBC

April 2024: An excellent month for music

From new album announcement to the comeback of music's biggest property, here's a glimpse into why April has been a significant month for music

By Maheen Sabeeh



Coke Studio 15 comeback

Transcending geographical boundaries and setting a standard for how music should be both heard and viewed, while showcasing a diversity that had never been seen before, Coke Studio in Pakistan and as a South Asian product cannot be minimized or diminished.

Season 14, released in 2022, marked a complete audio and visual overhaul, featuring all original songs. Helmed by Xulfi as producer and curator, with a team of musicians working under him, including the likes of Abdullah Siddiqui, among others, season 14 was undoubtedly one of the best Coke Studio seasons. However, its only drawback was the lack of focus on folk artists, except for one song.

Correcting that mistake and returning after two years, Coke Studio 15 has changed its modus operandi.

According to a press statement, the new season will feature 11 original songs. The visual team has expanded with several directors including Awais Gohar, Murtaza Niaz, Jamal Rahman, Zain Peerzada, and Luke Azariah,

alongside the show's veteran directors Zeeshan Parwez and Kamal Khan.

Xulfi is back as the season producer for the second time and stated in a press statement, "This season celebrates the enduring power of art, the power of music – the power of love, of warmth and of connection. Each story and world is built on Pakistan's rich and diverse tapestry: both its heritage and future, fostering a sense of shared identity."

Taking into account the absence of folk music from season 14, the first song released by Coke Studio 15, is fortunately a beautiful piece titled 'Aayi Aayi' by Noman Ali Rajper x Marvi Saiban x Babar Mangi.

There is a synergy to the song 'Aayi Aayi' where no artist feels out of place. It is an intelligent collaboration where the audio and the video insistently transport you to Sindh, and the single feels like it embodies the essence of the soil, the desert, and its culture. The voices in the song feel representative of the desert, of its people, and the music video is a showcase of the cultural norms of Sindh.

But it isn't just a beautiful collabora-

tion; there is a story to the song that becomes palpable after watching it without distraction. The overall narrative illustrates how Sindh is a place where all are welcome. Credit must be given to Coke Studio for giving these dynamic artists a national platform. Given the beauty of this song, great things are expected from the new season.

Guess who's back?

There are many reasons to admire Arooj Aftab. As an artist, she possesses qualities that go beyond singing. She is an incredible vocalist with a haunting voice that is easily recognizable. She is a brilliant live music performer, which is evident from her performances on prestigious stages like the Grammy Awards, NPR's Tiny Desk (Home) Concert, Brodie Sessions, among several others. She values the importance of collaborations, as seen prominently in the collaborative album, Love in Exile, by Arooj Aftab, Shahzad Ismaily, and Vijay Iyer.

She is also adept at producing work for other artists such as Anoushka Shankar and Sheherazaad. Fans awaiting an Arooj Aftab album can rejoice since a

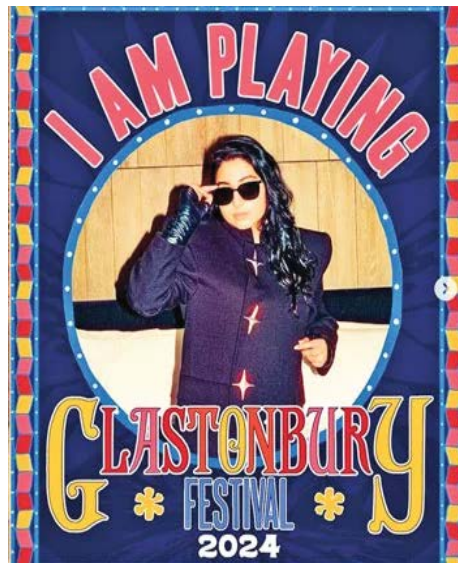
new album from the artist, titled *Night Reign*, is set to release this year, and the first single from the album, 'Raati Ki Rani' has been released along with a captivating music video directed by Tessa Thompson.

Pakistani musicians go global

Musicians from and associated with Pakistan have become strong representations of South Asian identity to the extent that their performances in venues previously unimaginable a decade ago are no longer surprising.

In 2024, Arooj Aftab is set to perform at the United Kingdom's Glastonbury festival for the second time (in June). Meesha Shafi recently performed with KUNE, Canada's global orchestra just last month, and more performances are on the horizon. A notable example is Ustaaad Naseeruddin Saami, who is scheduled to perform at the Aga Khan Museum in Canada as part of a show titled: *Reflections on Khusrau and Kabir*. Ustaaad Naseeruddin Saami, 80, is a revered classical musician and a legend in *Khayal Gaiki*. Apart from appearing in season four of *Coke Studio*, he has performed around the world in countries such as India, USA, France, Sri Lanka, and Afghanistan. This upcoming performance, presented by Small World Music and the Aga Khan Museum, will see Ustaaad Saami focusing on the rich legacy of Amir Khusrau.

In the same month, a qawwali performance by Saami Brothers will be held at The Creative School Chrysalis (TMU Theatre) the next day.



With love, from Scotland

One of the brightest names in music, Rakae Jamil, a founding member of the music group Mughal-e-Funk and a sitar virtuoso, is currently on tour in Scotland. According to Rakae, this trip to Scotland has allowed him to collaborate with Scottish musicians and be a part of musical theatre called 'When Mountains Meet'.

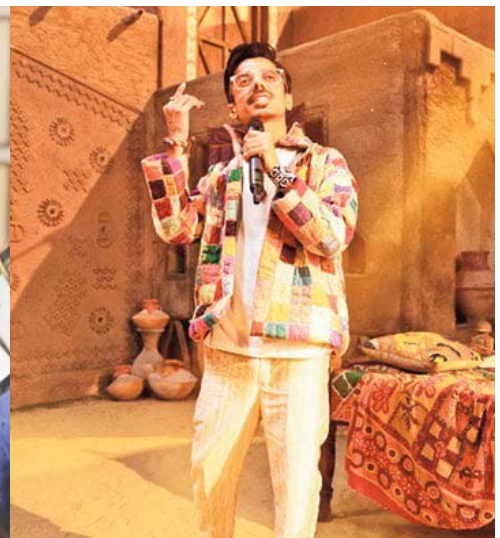
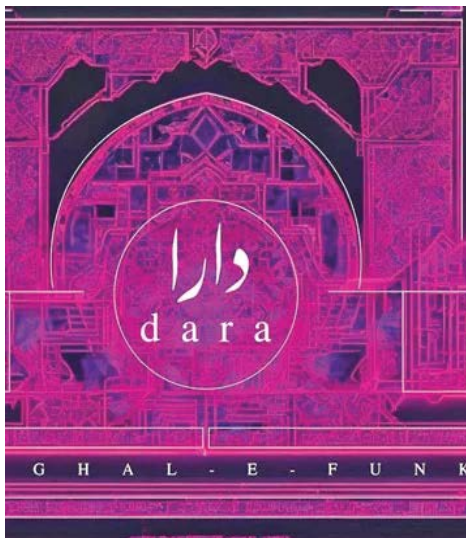
From being a music producer to teaching music to his band, Rakae shared insights into what has kept him busy in 2024. In the first month of the year, Mughal-e-Funk released a song called 'Dara', named after the Mughal prince Dara Shikoh, the eldest son of the Mughal emperor Shah Jehan.

Beyond the song, Rakae mentioned that he has finished an OST for a drama serial. He has also been producing music with Farhan

Ali on some projects. On the performance front, Rakae revealed that he has done some concerts with The Colony, based in Lahore, as a guest artist, playing sitar in their choir performance, and at least one gig with Farheen Raza Jaffry, an upcoming ghazal vocalist. He is also working on releasing solo songs, teaching at the National College of Arts (NCA), and has some other projects in the pipeline.

In conclusion, April 2024 has been a remarkable month for the music scene, marked by significant comebacks, global recognition for Pakistani artists, and the continued evolution of musical endeavours. As musicians continue to break boundaries and collaborate across borders, the future of music looks promising, filled with innovation, cultural exchange, and artistic excellence.

Courtesy The News



Streaming Special

Discover the must-watch shows and films that deserve your attention and explore why they're significant



In today's digital landscape, algorithms wield significant influence, subtly shaping our preferences and behaviours as consumers. Despite our reluctance to acknowledge it, this reality is undeniable. The notion of choice has become somewhat diluted as our past interactions with streaming platforms dictate the content we're presented with.

Moreover, the plethora of streaming options available contributes to a constant bombardment of content. The role of AI cannot be overstated, exemplified by Netflix's reliance on AI-driven recommendations, a key factor in the platform's widespread popularity.

However, this shift has also resulted in the audience relinquishing a degree of control, often without their awareness. Access hinges on user identity, and the content presented is tailored based on past viewing habits.

Approximately a decade ago, this platform sparked a revolution in the realm of television and film. Films that might have struggled in theatres found newfound success once they transitioned to streaming services, potentially achieving hit, super hit, or even blockbuster status.

To that end, here is a selection of content that you must lookout for and watch – whether

you are presented with the option by a streaming platform or not.

Given that Netflix is leading the charge and investing substantially more in content creation than its competitors, we present you with a curated array of titles spanning from limited series to films.

Reelpolitik

You can find any number of films and limited series that are drawn from reality. However, there are two productions that you must watch because of the subject and how they have been presented.

The first title is a film called *She Said*. It delves into the genesis of the #MeToo movement and tells the story that shook Hollywood and had a trickle-down effect around the world.

The compelling narrative chronicles how journalists from The New York Times broke the story about the biggest producer in Hollywood, Harvey Weinstein, and why it was imperative for numerous actresses to come forward. Featuring real-life figures such as Ashley Judd and Rose McGowan portraying themselves, alongside a brilliant performance by Carey Mulligan, *She Said* is an unmissable film.

The second production in question is *Scoop*, exploring the intricate ties between the British royal family's Prince Andrew and Jeffrey Epstein, the man whose sexual abuse of young people came to light as the second major story from #MeToo movement. This thought-provoking film also explores the dynamics between the media and the British royal family.

With stellar performances, notably by the brilliant Gillian Anderson, *Scoop* offers a nuanced portrayal that diverges from the traditional positive depiction of the British royal family as seen in the acclaimed award-winning series, *The Crown*.

Director's cut

It is often said that filmmaking is a director's medium. To truly grasp the significance of this statement, you need to watch two masterpieces of cinema.

The first one is called *The Power of The Dog* featuring an intriguing ensemble led by Benedict Cumberbatch. However, rather than merely watching the film, delve deeper into the creative process by watching *Behind the Scenes with Jane Campion*. This 17-minute BTS not only reveals how the film was adapted from a novel of the same name by Thomas Savage but also how Jane Campion's singular vision elevates the film to remarkable heights.

The second film (radically different from this Western) is called *The Irishman* featuring legendary actors Al Pacino, Robert Di Niro and Joe Pesci. After viewing the critically acclaimed film, follow it up with the 23-minute long *The Irishman in Conversation*, featuring the esteemed actors alongside the film's director, Martin Scorsese.

Both of these films and conversations with their respective directors illuminate a critical insight: while exceptional actors can carry a film, true greatness is achieved when they are guided by a director's vision and expertise. It becomes apparent that a compelling story and talented cast can only reach their full potential under the guidance of a director who possesses a profound understanding of cinematic craft.

Laugh out loud

There are many reasons why a documentary on any subject can make your heart sink and make you wonder what kind of world we have inherited and whether a global apocalypse wouldn't be such a bad thing. However, there are occasions when a touch of humour can offer solace. We recommend that you watch two titles ahead of

others: *Don't Look Up* and *The Laundromat*.

Both have an extensive cast of A-list actors and both shine a light on two powerful issues confronting us as a people.

Don't Look Up is about the destruction of planet earth and the response of global leaders. The film is a satirical take on the response to climate crisis and makes you realize why it is an urgent issue and how we're struggling to address it properly and in a timely fashion.

Despite the gravity of the subject matter, the film's comedic elements, enhanced by the stellar performances of Hollywood's elite, including Meryl Streep, Jennifer Lawrence, Timothee Chalamet and Leonardo Di Caprio, render it both entertaining and thought-provoking. It encourages viewers to contemplate individual actions in the face of governmental inaction. It also makes you realize that not everything should be converted into a hashtag.

Another must-watch satirical masterpiece is *The Laundromat*, a star-studded affair featuring Gary Oldman, Antonio Banderas, Meryl Streep, and an array of talented actors. This hilarious film is about the insidious nature of greed, showcasing how it permeates through individuals, governments, laws, and financial institutions. Through an unconventional narrative style, the film explores the creation of paper corporations, the intricacies of shell companies, and the ripple effect of cost-saving measures implemented by businesses. It is also beneficial because it also allows you to understand the nature of fraud across the board. *The Laundromat* not only entertains with its wit and humour but also offers valuable insights into the pervasive nature of fraud in various sectors. It's a compelling watch that's as educational as it is entertaining.

By Maheen Sabeeh

Courtesy The News



Honouring the Legacy of Zafar Siddiqi (1948-2024)

Amir Jahangir remembers Zafar Siddiqi



By Amir Jahangir

Zafar Siddiqi was a luminary whose journey from the realms of finance and accounting with Klynveld Peat Marwick Goerdeler (KPMG) to the dynamic world of television production illuminated pathways for countless aspirants. With a distinguished tenure spanning 18 years at KPMG, including a stint as a partner and later as the managing director of a consultancy practice, his transition into the media sphere was marked by an unwavering commitment to excellence and innovation.

In the mid-nineties, his keen eye for opportunity led him to establish Television Business Production (Telebiz), a pioneering TV production house in Pakistan specialising in business programmes for international audiences. He also gave a new flavour and temperament to news in the form of Tijarti Khabrain and Karobari Dunya, programming that helped make economic and business news more relevant.

I first met Zafar Siddiqi in October 1998 at the offices of Telebiz in Bath Island, Karachi. At the time, I was only 26 years old, navigating the realm of journalism and business development associated with a

technology magazine. Zafar Sahib, as I came to know and call him, shared his grand vision with me and extended an invitation to join him in reshaping the media landscape. More than a job offer, it was a call to revolutionise how news was made, a vision he would later realise with the launch of CNBC Pakistan in 2005.

In the midst of personal loss, his compassionate embrace remains etched in my memory. Following the passing of my father in August 2000, his heartfelt gesture at the funeral, the only time he ever embraced me in our 15-year association, offered solace beyond words. Whispering in my ear, he imparted strength, assuring me that I was not alone. His support extended even further as he entrusted me to the care of his dear friend and my immediate boss and lifetime mentor, Pervez Ehsan, whose guidance continues to shape my journey even today.

While the world may recognise Zafar Siddiqi as a media tycoon and the driving force behind CNBC franchises across the three continents, to those of us who witnessed his early struggles at Telebiz, he

is simply 'ZS'. Balancing long days at KPMG with tireless evenings at Telebiz, he exemplified the ethos of hard work and dedication. His approach to leadership, characterised by humility and a hands-on attitude, left an indelible impression on all who had the privilege of working alongside him.

His tireless efforts to advocate for Pakistan's media prominence extended beyond the confines of boardrooms and studios. His weekly excursions at the start of the new millennium to Islamabad were a testament to his dedication to propelling Pakistan onto the global stage. With fervent conviction, he sought to impress upon policymakers the transformative potential of the media in shaping Pakistan's narrative on the world stage.

I remember him travelling to Islamabad in the same black suit, white shirt and yellow tie, a signature mark of his distinguished presence. This attire set him apart from the usual media and business moguls in Pakistan, underscoring his unique style and individuality while reflecting his simplicity and grace.

His vision extended to animation and graphics, where he envisioned Pakistan as a hub of excellence capable of competing on the international stage. As early as 2004, he championed this cause, recognising the potential for Pakistan to emerge as a key player in the global animation industry. Despite facing scepticism from bureaucratic quarters, he remained resolute, tirelessly advocating for the realisation of this vision. Yet, the short-sightedness of the bureaucracy at the time failed to grasp the magnitude of his vision, dismissing it as fanciful ambition. It wasn't until 2020 that the realisation dawned, albeit too late. By then, the window of opportunity had passed, with other nations seizing the initiative decades earlier. In the face of scepticism, Zafar Sahib's unwavering determination and foresight stand as a reminder of the power of perseverance. Although his dreams for Pakistan's media landscape may have been deferred, his legacy lives on as a beacon of inspiration for future generations.

His commitment to excellence extended beyond borders with the establishment of CNBC Africa, CNBC Arabia, CNBC Pakistan, Samaa TV and Samaa Radio, each a testament to his vision and tenacity. Under his guidance, Samaa TV emerged as a beacon of journalistic integrity, contributing significantly to discourse in Pakistan.

His influence extended beyond broadcasting and production, permeating into the realm of education and leaving an indelible

mark on the landscape of media learning in the region. With the launch of Murdoch University's campus in Dubai, he brought quality media education to the forefront, ensuring that aspiring media professionals had access to world-class instruction and training.

Zafar Sahib's touch had a transformative effect on everything it graced. His visionary leadership and commitment to quality ensured that every endeavour he undertook shone brightly, drawing admiration and respect from all quarters. In fact, his legacy transcends professional achievements, extending to his roles on the board of the International Emmy Awards and as an advisory council member to the president of Nigeria. His thoughtful insights into the evolving media landscape found expression in his seminal work, *TV News 3.0: An Insider's Guide to Launching and Running News Channels in the Digital Age*, a testament to his commitment to knowledge dissemination.

Although he seldom spoke of his personal struggles, Zafar Sahib's resilience in the face of challenges served as an inspiration to all who knew him. His unwavering belief that progress must benefit Pakistan above all else echoes as a guiding principle in our collective endeavours.

As I reflect on the events of those fateful days, emotions swirl within me like a tempestuous sea. Arriving in Dubai on

February 22, my heart heavy with anticipation, I was met with the crushing news on the 23rd that he was no more, and the sorrow that engulfed me in that moment was overwhelming.

While visiting his family home in Emirates Hills, I was overcome by a flood of memories. Here, amidst the echoes of shared visions for innovation in the media landscape, I found solace mingled with grief. Meeting his daughters, Sarah and Ayesha, once vibrant young children, now grown into confident media CEOs and authors, served as a poignant reminder of their father's legacy. Their strength and resilience mirrored that of their father and his beloved wife, Seema Manazir.

In that moment, surrounded by the echoes of our shared journey, I couldn't help but feel an overwhelming sense of gratitude for the profound impact Zafar Sahib had on my life. His wisdom, guidance, and belief in the power of innovation will continue to inspire me, guiding my path forward – even in his absence.

As we bid farewell to this visionary, let us honour Zafar Siddiqi's memory by embodying his ideals and continuing his legacy of excellence and service. Thank you, Zafar Siddiqi Sahib, for your wisdom, kindness, and unwavering dedication to Pakistan and its people. May your spirit continue to inspire us all. Ameen.





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