

Fortnightly

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Budget 2024-25

With 3.6 percent growth, 38 percent increase in tax collection totally unrealistic target

Budget and Allied Government

Despite Angry statements, PPP will ensure smooth approval of Budget 2024-25

Israel War on Palestine

Palestinian Massacre is likely to continue for long time as world is supporting IDF

Tax Tsunami Unleashed



City Notes

On advice of counsel By M A Niazi – Page 04

Economy

Taxes and Tariffs-laden budget will open a new Pandora's Box for all and sundry in the country By Javed Mahmood – Page 05



Pakistan's budget to support negotiations with IMF for new programme: Moody's – Page 09

The Good News is that Global Growth is Holding Steady, says the World Bank By Javed Mahmood – Page 10

Budget FY25: What's going up and what's coming down By Syed Talal Ahsan – Page 12

Inflation vs growth: misplaced priorities By Dr Miftah Ismail – Page 15



Budget FY25: Test of fiscal discipline By Dr Abid Qaiyum Suleri – Page 17

The Global Energy Crisis and How Solar Power Can Save the Day By Habib Hanzalah – Page 19



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Politics

Ruling Coalition on Shaky Ground as PPP, PML-N Disagreements Intensify By Nimra Atiq – Page 21



How Political Confrontation is Undermining Economic Stability and Democratic Governance? By Daniyal Wali – Page 23

A song of resistance, a ray of light By Raoof Hasan – Page 25

Communications Matter: The Silent Language of Diplomacy By Amir Jahangir – Page 27

Foreign Affairs

Indian Elections 2024: Modi's Third Term and the Future Landscape By Kanwal Munir – Page 29



Modi's 'guarantee' By Aizaz Ahmad Chaudhry – Page 31

The Process of Elections in India and the Impact of Latest Results on Asia By Habib Hanzalah – Page 32

The change is welcome, if cosmetic By Jawed Naqvi – Page 34

Iranian Snap Presidential....2024 By Naqi Akbar – Page 36



G7 agrees \$50bn loan for Ukraine from Russian assets By Jaroslav Lukiv – Page 38

Witnesses tell of 'unimaginable' Gaza shelter air strike By Yolande Knell – Page 39

Millions start Hajj in shadow of Israel's war on Gaza – Page 40



Social Issues

Women's rights and gender equality By Ayesha Shaeban – Page 42

National

From 'City of Lights' to 'City of Fear' Karachi's Battle with Street Crime By Hammad Hassan – Page 45

Sports

Pakistan Cricket Team Performance in T20 World Cup 2024 in USA By Romana Afsheen – Page 46



Making sense of Pakistan's self-destruction at T20 World Cup By Ahsan Iftikhar Nagi – Page 48

Naila Kiani is set to surmount more peaks soon By Aamir Latif – Page 51

Who will win? When is the final? Is Ronaldo playing? The Euro 2024 guide By Caryn James and Hugh Montgomery – Page 53

Entertainment

10 of the best TV shows of 2024 so far – Page 54

On advice of counsel

By M A Niazi

Every time there's loadshedding, I start wondering which of the neighbours has been enterprising enough to wriggle out of paying their electricity bills. Is that the world this new policy of what is called revenue-based loadshedding, giving the impression that people are falling over each other to pay for the privilege of having their power cut?

Are we now supposed to spy on our neighbours to find out if they've paid their power bill? I'm not even sure I know when any of my neighbours' bill is due.

As for the neighbour with whom we share a backwall, I don't know if we're on the same feeder or not. And with the weather playing up, we had a lot of loadshedding recently., so I'm afraid I may have used some intemperate words about my neighbours, for which I unreservedly apologise.

Though my neighbours are not criminals, I'm afraid the same can't be said about Donald Trump. He's been convicted of falsifying documents to cover up the hush money paid to Stormy Daniels, a porn star, to stop her talking about their affair in 2016, the year he was elected President.

You've got to hand it to Trump. He says he wasn't allowed to raise the defence that he acted on advice of counsel. He says he had nothing to do with Ms Daniels, but he authorised his lawyer to pay her a large sum, after his lawyer said it was OK.

He's still awaiting sentencing, which should happen around the end of the month. He can still run for President if jailed, and even serve if elected. He is not immediately disqualified and stopped from holding any office. It would be a turn-up for the books if he had to go to jail, but his inability to turn up at campaign events would probably cost him, and the disadvantage of having Black, Latino, Arab and other minority voters refusing to vote for Biden because of Palestine was overcome, and Trump became President again. But in jail.

It would be a triumph for Imran Khan, who would say the USA was so desperate that it elected a jailbird President. Trump and Imran are buddies, only Modi is also a Trump buddy. Modi has been re-elected, which means that the old gang is back. Well, almost.

Most recently, the poet Ahmed Farhad has turned up in the custody of the Dhirkot police in AJK, where he has been accused of misbe-

having with the policemen at Kohala Bridge when he was arrested. I doubt that a Dhirkot police party would have an opinion about Urdu poetry, so if the SHO is willing to take the burden of his arrest, it probably isn't because of any strong feelings about Ahmed Farjad's opus.

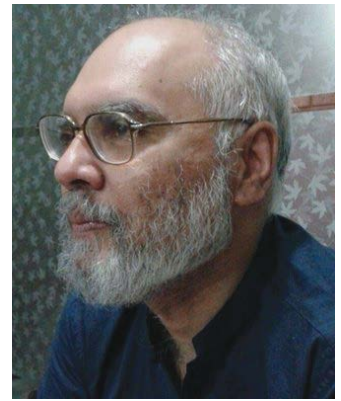
I recall that when last a poet was jailed, Oscar Wilde, he produced *The Ballad of Reading Gaol*, which is not the acme of English Literature, or even of his work. His novel *The Portrait of Dorian Gray* and his plays *The Importance of Being Earnest* are better remembered. Wilde was not imprisoned for fighting with the cops, but interfering with Lord Alfred Douglas.



I see there's a lot of rage at Pakistan's loss to the USA in the T20 World Cup in the Super-over. Wasn't the match in the book? I mean, hadn't the Mumbai Matchfixers decided that was going to happen?

But then, what else to expect at a tournament where Papua New Guinea found 77 almost a winning total, which Uganda overtook only after losing six wickets, and in the penultimate over? South Africa almost went down to The Netherlands. And I don't agree with comic writer Anwar Maqsood that losing to the USA was an IMF conditionality. I think that was a piece of bilateral diplomacy. The real diplomacy will be losing to India.

We're set for Eid on 17 June. But the in-charge of Makkah and Madinah, Abdur Rehman As-Sudais has called for shorter sermons on Fridays (and presumably on Eid) and recitations during prayers, because of the heat. He's taking all of the fun about being a khateeb, because what's the point of having a captive audience if you can't spread yourself and show the world what you have in you.



Taxes and Tariffs-laden budget will open a new Pandora's Box for all and sundry in the country

The Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf has labeled the Finance Bill 2025, presented by the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N)-led government in the National Assembly, as a "poisonous budget" and a "bundle of contradictions"



By Javed Mahmood

Finally, the IMF-dictated budget for 2024-25 had been rolled out on June 12. As was anticipated, the new budget is heavily laden with an increase in taxes and tariffs on electricity, and gas, and frequent hikes in petroleum products' prices. Also, the cost of imported products and raw materials will surge in the next financial year starting from July 1, 2024, as the government has revised the rates of taxes at the import stage. In a nutshell, the new budget will open a new Pandora's Box for all and sundry in the country. For example, the government has increased the tax revenue collection target by 3800 billion rupees in 2024-25 (Rs 13,000 billion) in comparison with the outgoing fiscal year 2023-24. Additionally, the consumers will have to bear the additional financial burden in the shape of massive increases in gas tariffs, the cost of electricity, petroleum prices, and other essential consumer items. It is understood that the new budget will make more miserable the lifestyle of common people in the country. And their anger will be reflected in the voting pattern as we observed in the recent elections. When

Imran Khan was ousted as Prime Minister through a no-confidence move, the PDM government led by PM Shehbaz Sharif resorted to massive taxation and hikes in utility prices, and this tendency made the PDM, particularly, PML-N unpopular. The people noted it during recent elections as PTI got the highest number of seats which were manipulated with Forms 45 and 47 to put in place the government of the PDM for the second time though this time JUI-F is not part of the PDM and the government as well.

On June 12, 2024, Finance Minister Muhammad Aurangzeb presented the first federal budget for the fiscal year 2024-25, with a total outlay of Rs18.9 trillion. The budget, hailed by analysts as broadly aligned with IMF guidelines, aims for a modest 3.6 percent GDP growth, emphasizing fiscal consolidation and compliance with international standards.

Opposition lawmakers, notably absent in previous budget sessions, disrupted proceedings with chants of "go, Nawaz, go," underscoring the charged political atmosphere. However,

Aurangzeb remained composed and steadfast in delivering his speech. The budget for the upcoming year is widely perceived as strategically crafted to meet IMF requirements for securing a larger and longer bailout.

Key highlights of the budget include:

Total spending is estimated at Rs18.9 trillion, reflecting a significant increase from previous years. Ambitious tax revenue target set at Rs13 trillion for the Federal Board of Revenue (FBR), aiming for a 38 percent increase from the previous fiscal year. Increase in petroleum levy on various fuels, signaling efforts to bolster revenue streams. GDP growth target set at 3.6 percent for the fiscal year 2024-25.

The budget deficit is projected at 6.9 percent of GDP, indicating fiscal challenges that need to be addressed. Emphasis on import incentives for raw materials used in key sectors such as solar panels and lithium-ion batteries, aimed at stimulating domestic manufacturing. Acknowledgment of the government's efforts to address

economic challenges, with a focus on the leadership of Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif in steering economic reforms. Aurangzeb underscored the importance of Pakistan's economic revitalization, urging collective efforts to capitalize on growth opportunities.

He commended the government's achievements in stabilizing key economic indicators, such as inflation and foreign exchange reserves, attributing these successes to strategic policymaking. In terms of tax policy, the government aims

Tax measures introduced in FY2024-25

The government has significantly increased both direct and indirect taxes to historic highs in the budget, indicating that the loan agreement with the International Monetary Fund (IMF) to stabilize Pakistan's economy takes precedence over the much-needed relief for the inflation-hit population, whose incomes have plummeted in recent years. The new tax hikes aim to generate additional revenues of Rs3.8 trillion, aligning with IMF demands.

To penalize non-filers, the tax rate for dealers, distributors, and wholesalers will increase from 0.2% to 2%, and for retailer non-filers from 1% to 2.5%. Additionally, the Federal Board of Revenue (FBR) proposes banning foreign travel for non-filers. A new tax category is proposed for late filers in real estate transactions, with rates ranging from 6% to 8%. Non-filers face increased rates for property transactions, up to 12%, 14%, and 16%, depending on the value. Capital Gains Tax is set at 15% for filers and 45% for non-filers, applicable to both real estate and stock gains.

To meet the FBR's annual tax collection target of Rs12.97 trillion for the next fiscal year, the agency aims to collect Rs2 trillion through nominal growth and recovery of stuck revenues in superior courts, with the remaining Rs1.761 trillion coming from additional taxation and enforcement measures. The additional Rs1.761 trillion will include Rs443 billion from increased income taxes on salaried and non-salaried individuals under Personal Income Tax (PIT), Rs485 billion from the removal of GST exemptions and new GST applications, Rs289 billion from increased FED and Rs700 billion from Customs Duty. The FBR also targets an extra Rs250 billion through enforcement measures and digitization. Despite pressure to increase the standard GST rate from 18% to 19%, FBR Chairman Amjad Zubair Taiwana assured journalists that this was not implemented.

For non-salaried individuals and associations of persons and salaried individuals, the taxable income ceiling remains at Rs 600,000, with progressive tax rates ranging from 15% to 45% for non-salaried individuals, and 5% to 35% for salaried individuals. Non-filers face higher business costs to compel them to file returns, with a new tax rate introduced for late filers—those who file returns after the due date to avoid non-filer rates, but still face higher rates than regular filers.

Progressive tax rates on property transactions categorize individuals into filers, late-filers, and non-filers, with rates for filers at 3% to 4%, late-filers at 6% to 8%, and non-filers at 12% to 20%, depending on property values. For property sales, filers face rates of 3% to 5%, while non-filers face a flat 10% rate. Late filers are taxed



to broaden the tax base, enhance documentation of the economy through digitization, and implement a progressive taxation regime to ensure equitable burden-sharing.

Aurangzeb reiterated the government's commitment to protecting vulnerable segments from the impact of inflation while pursuing fiscal discipline. Looking ahead, Aurangzeb called for a shift towards a market-driven economy, aligned with global standards, to foster sustainable growth and investment. He emphasized the need for structural reforms in sectors like energy and state-owned enterprises, highlighting the government's determination to address economic imbalances.

The presentation of the budget sets the stage for a robust debate in the National Assembly, where stakeholders will scrutinize the proposed allocations and policies. As Pakistan navigates economic challenges, the budget serves as a roadmap for steering the country toward stability and prosperity, guided by the principles of fiscal prudence and reform.

The government has increased taxes on salaried and non-salaried individuals, real estate, retailers, and vehicles, removed GST exemptions and imposed taxes on milk and milk products, mobile phones, tier-1 retailers of branded stores at 18%, poultry feed, tractors, medicines, diagnostic kits, and more. This includes raising the Federal Excise Duty (FED) on cement from Rs2 per kg to Rs3 per kg, and taxing items such as filter rods for cigarettes, commercial sugar supply at Rs15 per kg, newsprint at 10%, imported personal computers at 10%, and stationery items.

Sales tax on cellular phones has been set at 18% for phones not exceeding \$500 and 25% for those above \$500. Currently, individuals earning income from exports pay a 1% tax on their export proceeds, which is considered the final tax. To ensure horizontal equity—where taxpayers with similar incomes pay similar taxes—the government proposes that export income be subjected to normal tax rates, with the 1% tax on export proceeds serving as a minimum tax.

at 6% to 8%. Capital gains on securities acquired from July 1, 2024, will be taxed at a flat 15% for filers, and progressively from 15% to 45% for non-filers. Gains from mutual funds and collective investment schemes will be taxed at 15%, up from 10%.

The advance tax rate on profit from debt for non-filers will increase from 30% to 35%. The basis for tax collection on motor vehicles will shift from engine capacity to a percentage of vehicle value, with higher rates for vehicles over 2,000cc. Exemptions from income and withholding taxes for FATA/PATA regions, extended until June 30, 2024, will be further extended to June 30, 2025.

The FBR has increased FED on acetate tow to Rs 44,000, nicotine pouches to Rs 1,200 per kg, e-liquids, and sugar supply to manufacturers at Rs15 per kg. FED on cement rises from Rs2 per kg to Rs3 per kg, and on commercial and residential properties to 5%. FED on filter rods jumps from Rs 1,500 per kg to Rs 80,000 per kg, with retailers selling illicit cigarettes facing business premises closure.

Diplomats and diplomatic missions are exempt from FED, and the price threshold for locally manufactured cigarettes is raised from Rs 9,000 to Rs 12,500 to facilitate new brand launches within tier-2 cigarettes. The federal government plans to increase the maximum petroleum levy by Rs20 to Rs80 per unit on high-speed diesel oil and motor gasoline for the next fiscal year, up from Rs60 per liter in FY24.

Govt to slap travel ban on non-filers

Pakistan has decided to restrict foreign travel for non-filers, with exceptions for those traveling for Hajj, Umrah, or educational purposes, as the country unveiled its Rs18.9 trillion budget on Wednesday. The Finance Bill proposes a penalty of Rs10 million for travel agencies that fail to enforce these new regulations. In his speech, Aurangzeb emphasized the need to digitize the Federal Board of Revenue (FBR) and implement reforms to enhance tax collection.

The government has set an ambitious tax revenue target of Rs 1300 billion for the

FBR, representing a 38% increase from the current fiscal year. The Finance Bill also states that repeat offenses of non-compliance will result in a huge fine. Additionally, the government had previously prepared to take action against three million non-filers, including disconnecting their electricity and gas connections. Media reports indicate that the government will enforce these regulations to disconnect the utilities of non-filers, tightening measures against tax evaders by leveraging tax laws.

"We must include everyone in the tax net. Our goal is to ensure that all eligible individuals are on the active taxpayers' list," stated Aurangzeb in an interview with a private TV channel after announcing the budget.



"We need to eliminate the non-filer category in the country," he added. His remarks came shortly after presenting the federal budget for the fiscal year 2024-25 in the National Assembly.

The federal government has set an ambitious tax revenue target of 13 trillion rupees (\$46.66 billion) for the year starting July 1, representing a nearly 40% increase from the current year's budget. This move aims to bolster the case for a new bailout deal with the International Monetary Fund (IMF).

Key objectives for the upcoming fiscal year include reducing the public debt-to-GDP ratio to sustainable levels and prioritizing improvements in Pakistan's balance of payments position, according to the government's budget document. Pakistan is projecting a significant decrease in its

fiscal deficit for the new financial year to 5.9% of GDP, down from an upwardly revised estimate of 7.4% for the current year.

PTI declares new budget "poisonous"

The Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) has labeled the Finance Bill 2025, presented by the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N)-led government in the National Assembly, as a "poisonous budget" and a "bundle of contradictions." A PTI spokesperson claimed that the federal budget for FY25 was detrimental to the nation, employment, and economic development. The former ruling party accused the PML-N government of lacking control over the budgetary proposals, which they

alleged were dictated by the International Monetary Fund (IMF).

The PTI criticized the GDP growth rate set at 3.6%, calling it unrealistic and suggesting it would not exceed 2.4%, as estimated by the World Bank. According to the PTI spokesperson, the new taxation measures would trigger a "tsunami of inflation" across the nation. They also deemed the government's projection of maintaining the inflation rate at 12% as unrealistic.

The opposition party condemned the government for removing tax exemptions for exporters and increasing the tax burden on real estate, which they argued would promote cash transactions rather than expanding the tax net. Furthermore, the PTI criticized the modification of tax slabs, claiming it suffocated the salaried class.

They also mocked the federal government for allocating only Rs5 billion to the agriculture sector despite making significant promises of relief.

Additionally, the PTI denounced Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif's administration for raising government employees' salaries by up to 25% and increasing the petroleum levy to Rs80 per liter, which would place an additional financial burden on taxpayers.

The federal government's annual budget for the Fiscal Year 2024-25 has introduced price hikes for various items, including mobile phones, hybrid cars, cement, property, and cigarettes.



Finance Minister Muhammad Aurangzeb, while presenting the budget in the National Assembly session, emphasized a transition from a government-driven to a market-driven model. He outlined several tax adjustments and measures aimed at streamlining taxation and promoting economic efficiency.

Key proposals included

The GST rate on branded and expensive textile and leather items is being raised from 15% to 18% for TIER-I retailers. Standardizing mobile phone taxes at an 18% rate across different categories to eliminate market distortions.

Withholding tax is being levied on the copper, coal, paper, and plastic scrap sectors, citing their disorganized nature and minimal contribution to the national exchequer. Conversely, exemptions were proposed for iron and steel scrap to address

issues related to fake invoices and sales tax adjustments.

In a move to align advance tax on vehicle purchases with market realities, the government suggested levying taxes based on the price of the car rather than its engine capacity. Additionally, strict penalties were recommended for retailers selling cigarettes without tax stamps, including shop sealing.

Other notable proposals included

Imposing federal excise duty (FED) on acetate tow used in cigarette filter production and increasing FED on cement from

Rs2 to Rs3 per kg. Introducing a 5% FED on new residential and commercial plots to curb speculation in the real estate sector.

Defence budget raised to Rs 2122 billion

During the annual budget presentation in the National Assembly, Finance Minister Muhammad Aurangzeb revealed that Pakistan has earmarked Rs 2,122 billion for defense in the fiscal year 2024-25. This substantial allocation comprises several components:

Rs815 billion for employee-related expenses; Rs513 billion for operating expenses; Rs548 billion for physical assets; Rs244 billion for civil works.

Additionally, an extra Rs 6 billion has been set aside for 'defense administration', bringing the total allocation to Rs 2,128

billion. This budget marks a significant increase compared to the previous fiscal year's allocation of Rs 1,854 billion, representing a more than 19% rise from the previous year's Rs1.804 trillion. The allocation closely aligns with the forecasts of the International Monetary Fund (IMF), with whom Pakistan is negotiating an Extended Fund Facility to stabilize its economy. The IMF, in its second and final review documents of the Stand-By Arrangement, had forecasted this rise in defense allocation.

Pakistan recently concluded a nine-month \$3 billion IMF program, which helped prevent a sovereign default. However, the government of Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif emphasizes the necessity of a fresh, longer-term program to address both domestic and external imbalances. The short-term IMF program aimed at addressing these imbalances has yielded positive results, including moderate economic growth, improved fiscal position, and increased foreign exchange reserves. The IMF had projected Pakistan's defense allocation to be 1.72% of its gross domestic product (GDP) in FY25, reflecting the country's commitment to maintaining a robust defense capability while navigating economic challenges.

Pay raise for federal govt employees

The federal cabinet approved a substantial 25% salary increase for government employees. This increment applies to employees in Grades 1 to 16, reflecting the government's effort to enhance the financial well-being of its lower and mid-level workforce. Additionally, the government has sanctioned a 20% salary increase for employees in Grades 17 to 22.

The federal cabinet's decision aligns with its earlier approval of budgetary proposals for the upcoming fiscal year 2024-25, starting from July 1, 2024. A special cabinet committee, chaired by Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif, reviewed the budget proposals and subsequently approved the Finance Bill 2024, which outlines the government's financial strategy and expenditures for the next fiscal year.

Pakistan's budget to support negotiations with IMF for new programme: Moody's

Moody's Ratings, a global credit rating agency, on Friday said Pakistan government's newly-announced budget for fiscal year 2024-25 would "likely support" Islamabad's ongoing talks with the International Monetary Fund (IMF) for a new Extended Fund Facility (EFF). However, it warned that a resurgence of social tensions in the wake of high inflation could weigh on the government's reform implementation.

On Wednesday, Finance Minister Muhammad Aurangzeb announced Pakistan's federal budget 2024-25, targeting a modest 3.6% growth for the coming fiscal year, as Islamabad looked to appease the Washington-based lender and balance its burgeoning books with higher taxation. Pakistan is currently engaged in talks with the IMF for a longer, larger programme as it seeks permanent macroeconomic stability. Aurangzeb, during his budget speech and the post-budget press briefing, said early July is by when the staff-level agreement could be finalised.

Commenting on the budget, Moody's said the budget for FY25 outlines a quickening of fiscal consolidation to be achieved through increases in taxes and stronger projected nominal growth.

"The announced budget will likely support Pakistan's ongoing negotiations with the IMF for a new Extended Fund Facility (EFF) programme that will be crucial for the government to unlock financing from IMF and other bilateral and multilateral partners to meet its external financing needs," said the global rating agency.

"However, it will be the government's ability to sustain reform implementation that will be key to allowing Pakistan to meet its budget targets and continually unlock external financing to meet its needs, leading to a durable easing of liquidity risks."

Moody's warned that a resurgence of social tensions on the back of the high cost of living (which may increase because of higher taxes and future adjustments to energy tariffs) could weigh on reform implementation.

"Moreover, risks that the coalition government may not have a sufficiently strong electoral mandate to continually implement difficult reforms remain," it said.

The government on Wednesday announced a consolidated (federal and provincial) budget deficit of 5.9% of GDP for fiscal 2025, narrowing from an estimated 7.4% for fiscal 2024. The primary balance is set at a surplus of 2.0% of GDP for fiscal 2025, from around 0.4% for fiscal 2024. The government projects real GDP growth at 3.6% for fiscal 2025 and headline inflation at 12%.

Moody's said that the budget showed the government seeks to achieve quicker fiscal consolidation mainly through revenue increases, with little spending-containment measures. "The government has set a challenging target to substantially increase federal government revenue to Rs17.8 trillion, about 46% higher from a year ago," it noted.



Moody's noted the increase in revenue is led by a 40% increase in tax revenue that the government seeks to achieve through a combination of new taxes (for example, higher taxes on cars, cement, steel, gas and diesel) and stronger nominal growth. "Overall, the government targets an increase in revenue/GDP to 14.3% in fiscal 2025 from 11.5% in fiscal 2024."

At the same time, the budget is targeting an overall federal government expenditure of PKR18.9 trillion, about 25% higher than a year ago, it said. "The increase in expenditure reflects lack of significant cost-containment measures and Pakistan's very high interest payments," said Moody's.

The agency stated that the budget allocated subsidies increased by 27% to Rs1.4 trillion, mainly driven by large increases in subsidies to the power sector, reflecting limited progress in energy sector reforms. The government also announced an increase in public sector pensions and salary budgets.

Pakistan hopes for Moody's rating upgrade as economic indicators improve

"Meanwhile, the government spends more than half its revenue on interest payments, indicating very weak debt affordability which drives high debt sustainability risks," highlighted Moody's.

The budget estimated debt servicing payments to have increased by about 18% for fiscal 2025 compared with a year ago. About 55% of fiscal 2025 revenue (PKR9.8 trillion) is earmarked for interest payments on the government's debt.

"Pakistan's very weak debt affordability drives high debt sustainability risks," Moody's noted.

"Having a significant share of its budget allocated towards debt payments will constrain the government's capacity to service its debt while meeting essential social spending and infrastructure needs," it said.

Courtesy www.brecorder.com

The Good News is that Global Growth is Holding Steady, says the World Bank



By Javed Mahmood

The good news is that global growth is holding steady, having slowed for three consecutive years. Inflation has been cut to a three-year low. Financial conditions have brightened. The world economy, in short, appears to be in the final approach for a “soft landing.” Yet, more than four years after the upheavals of the COVID-19 pandemic and subsequent global shocks, it’s clear the world—and developing economies, in particular—has yet to rediscover a reliable path to prosperity.

Global growth is stabilizing at a rate insufficient for progress on key development goals—2.7 percent a year on average through 2026, well below the 3.1 percent average in the decade before COVID-19. By the end of this year, one in four developing economies will be poorer than it was on the eve of the pandemic. The World Bank has mentioned these economic developments in its latest Global Economic Outlook for 2024, released on June 14.

By 2026, countries that are home to more than 80 percent of the world’s population will still be growing more slowly, on average, than they were in the decade before COVID-19. Without better policies, it would take a stroke of luck for that outlook to improve: average global interest

rates are expected to average 4 percent through 2026, double the average of the previous two decades. Progress toward prosperity occurs when governments put in place policies that foster productivity, entrepreneurship, and innovation—and when they do so in a setting of closer international cooperation. That was the model that flourished after the fall of the Berlin Wall. By encouraging the flow of goods, capital, and ideas across borders, it ushered in an extraordinary era of global prosperity: a span of roughly 25 years when the incomes of the poorest nations, on average, were catching up with those of the wealthiest, and when the world came within striking distance of ending extreme poverty.

This edition of Global Economic Prospects offers a sobering assessment of the extent to which that model of international cooperation has been fracturing—and what it will take to retool it for the needs of this decade and the next. Trade policy uncertainty has reached this century’s highest level if you consider years involving major elections—when countries that collectively account for at least 30 percent of GDP went to the polls. Trade measures designed to restrain cross-border commercial flows are

proliferating at a historic pace. From 2013 through 2023, investment growth in developing economies more than halved, on average, from the pace of the 2000s. Against this backdrop, nearly half of developing economies will see their per capita income gap relative to advanced economies widen over the first half of the 2020s—the highest share since the 1990s.

Per capita income growth in developing economies is expected to average just 3 percent through 2026, well below the average of 3.8 percent in the decade before COVID-19. Many developing economies are expected to see no relative catch-up with advanced economies in the near term. There are, of course, notable bright spots in the global economy. The U.S. economy, in particular, has shown impressive resilience. Growth has remained buoyant in the teeth of the fiercest monetary policy tightening in four decades. U.S. dynamism is one reason the global economy enjoys some upside potential over the next two years. India and Indonesia are two additional examples of robust performance.

India’s economy has been buoyed by strong domestic demand, with a surge in investment, and robust services activity. It is projected to grow an average of 6.7 percent

per fiscal year from 2024 through 2026—making South Asia the world's fastest-growing region. Indonesia is expected to benefit from a growing middle class and generally prudent economic policies, expanding by an average of 5.1 percent over the next two years. The performance of these and a few other economies makes it clear that high growth can be sustained—even in difficult conditions. Countries can enhance long-term growth by enacting policies that build human capital, boost productivity, improve the efficiency of public spending, and encourage more women to enter the labor force.

This edition of Global Economic Prospects features two analytical chapters of topical importance to policymakers. The first outlines how public investment can boost economic growth and facilitate private investment. In developing economies, public investment accounts for just a quarter of total investment, on average, but it can be a powerful policy lever. Scaling up public investment by 1 percent of GDP can increase the level of GDP by more than 1½ percent over the medium term. The impact on private investment is also significant—it grows by as much as 2 percent over five years. These benefits are greatest when countries meet two criteria: they enjoy the fiscal space to increase public spending, and they have a track record of efficient public investment. The second analytical chapter explores the tragic predicament of developing economies that are small



states—those with a population of around 1.5 million or less.

These economies are home to just 17 million people but are often at the frontline of climate challenges. They face chronic fiscal difficulties. Two-fifths of them are at high risk of debt distress or are already in it. They face climate-related natural disasters at a frequency eight times the average of other developing economies. Comprehensive reforms can alleviate these challenges. First, small states should improve their ability to mobilize revenue from domestic sources, which constitute a more stable base than other alternatives. Second, they should improve spending efficiency—especially in health, education,

and infrastructure. They should establish fiscal frameworks capable of managing frequent natural disasters and other shocks. These steps are all essential, together with coordinated global policies and financial support, to help them stay on a sustainable fiscal path.

Policymakers have cause to celebrate today: a global recession has been avoided despite the steepest rise in global interest rates since the 1980s. But they would be wise to keep their eye on the ball: growth rates remain too slow for progress. Without stronger international cooperation and a concerted push for policies that advance shared prosperity, the world could become stuck in the slow lane.



Budget FY25: What's going up and what's coming down

By Syed Talal Ahsan

Finance Minister Muhammad Aurangzeb presented the budget for fiscal year 2024-25 on the floor of the National Assembly on Wednesday amid raucous proceedings with the opposition registering its protest with sloganeering and desk-thumping.

Pakistan's budget for the upcoming year aims for a modest 3.6 per cent GDP growth, and sets an ambitious Rs13 trillion tax collection target, raising taxes on salaried classes and removing tax exemptions for the rest.

Rise in minimum wage, increase in taxes

During his speech, the finance minister said there was a proposal for the minimum wage to be increased to Rs37,000 from Rs32,000.

He also said that salaries for government servants from grades 1-16 would be increased by 25pc and by 20pc for those in grades 17-22, along with an increase in pensions for retired employees by 15pc.

Meanwhile, some of the notable changes in taxes/duties introduced by the government in budget 2024-25, which will interest you, are that rates have changed for non-salaried individuals.

- There is no income tax if the annual income is up to Rs600,000.
- Beyond this threshold, tax rates for non-salaried individuals have five taxable slabs with progressive tax rates ranging from 15-45pc.
- Taxable income not exceeding Rs600,000: 0pc
- Taxable income between Rs600,000-1,200,000: 15pc of amount exceeding Rs600,000
- Taxable income between Rs1,200,000-1,600,000: Rs90,000+20pc of the amount exceeding Rs1,200,000
- Taxable income between Rs1,600,000-3,200,000: Rs170,000+30pc of the amount exceeding Rs1,600,000
- Taxable income between Rs3,200,000-5,600,000: Rs650,000+40pc of the amount exceeding Rs3,200,000
- Taxable income exceeding Rs5,600,000: Rs1,610,000+45pc of the amount exceeding Rs5,600,000

For salaried individuals, beyond the threshold of Rs600,000 per annum, there are five taxable slabs ranging from 5-35pc.

- Taxable income not exceeding Rs600,000: 0pc
- Taxable income between Rs600,000-1,200,000: 5pc of amount exceeding Rs600,000
- Taxable income between Rs1,200,000-2,200,000: Rs30,000+15pc of the amount exceeding Rs1,200,000



- Taxable income between Rs2,200,000-3,200,000: Rs180,000+25pc of the amount exceeding Rs2,200,000
- Taxable income between Rs3,200,000-4,100,000: Rs430,000+30pc of the amount exceeding Rs3,200,000
- Taxable income exceeding Rs4,100,000: Rs700,000+35pc of the amount exceeding Rs4,100,000

Separately, there will be higher tax rates for late-filers.

Documents shared by the government said that non-filers were presently subjected to higher tax rates to make their cost of doing business higher as well as to compel them to file their returns.

However, now a new tax rate was introduced for a new category: late-filers.

The government defined late-filers as those who become filers after the due date of filing tax returns only for the sake of a specific transaction to avoid higher rates for non-filers.

For such late-filers, a new tax rate was introduced, at a higher rate as compared to filers but lower than non-filers.

Outlining the income tax on immovable properties, the government also set out progressive tax rates on the purchases and sales of properties for three categories of individuals: filers, late filers and non-filers.

On the purchase of property, the rates of tax will be:

For filers:

- 3pc for values of properties up to Rs50 million
- 3.5pc for values of properties between Rs50m-100m
- 4pc for the value of properties above Rs100m

For late-filers:

- 6pc for values of properties up to Rs50 million
- 7pc for values of properties between Rs50m-100m
- 8pc for the value of properties above Rs100m

For non-filers:

- 12pc for values of properties up to Rs50 million
- 16pc for values of properties between Rs50m-100m
- 20pc for the value of properties above Rs100m
- On the sale of immovable properties, the budget proposed progressive advance tax rates at the source for the three categories.

For filers:

- 3pc for values of properties up to Rs50 million
- 4pc for values of properties between Rs50m-100m
- 5pc for the value of properties above Rs100m
- For non-filers: The rate is 10pc for properties of any value.

For late-filers:

- 6pc for values of properties up to Rs50 million
- 7pc for values of properties between Rs50m-100m
- 8pc for the value of properties above Rs100m

The budget also proposed a flat 15pc rate of tax on gains from the disposal of immovable property acquired on or after July 1, 2024, by filers regardless of the holding period.

For non-filers, the government proposed progressive tax rates based on the prescribed slab rates in Division I of Part I of the Income Tax Ordinance's First Schedule, with a minimum tax rate of 15pc.

Cracking down on non-filers

The government also proposed a host of other measures to crack down on non-filers and compel them to file tax returns, apart from the blocking of their mobile SIMs and severing their utility connections.

The budget suggested that the exit of such individuals from Pakistan be barred except for Hajj and Umrah travellers, minors, students and overseas Pakistanis.

Penalties were proposed for entities failing to fully disclose relevant particulars, submitting incomplete information in their tax returns or failing to file returns on discontinuation of their business.

Further, a penalty of sealing of shop was proposed for traders and shopkeepers who failed to register under a scheme.

The government also proposed that the failure by a shopkeeper or trader to register be made an offence punishable on conviction with

imprisonment for six months or with fine, or both.

Broadening scope of withholding tax

The government also said that advance tax was currently collected on sales to dealers, distributors, wholesalers and retailers of certain specified sectors.

Now, it proposed that such tax would be collected from all sectors of the economy so that it is expanded to the entire supply chain comprising all distributors, wholesalers, dealers and retailers with the aim to document traders.

Further, the rate for non-filers for dealers, distributors and wholesalers was enhanced from 0.2pc to 2pc and for retailer non-filers from 1pc to 2.5pc for the purpose of documentation of traders and to discourage non-filing.

Higher taxes on mobile phones

The government also proposed doing away with the current regime of sales tax for mobile phones which utilised a slab-based structure depending on pricing and had nominal sales tax as shown in Table II of the Ninth Schedule of the Sales Tax Act, 1990.

Cellular mobile phones in CKD/CBU form:

S. No.	Description / Specification of Goods	Sales tax on CBU at the time of import or registration (IMEI number by CMOs)	Sales tax on import in CKD/SKD condition	Sales tax on supply of locally manufactured mobile phones in CBU condition in addition to tax under column (4)
(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
1.	Cellular mobile phones or satellite phones to be charged on the basis of import value per set, or equivalent value in rupees in case of supply by the manufacturer, at the rate as indicated against each category:-			
	A. Not exceeding US\$ 30 (excluding smart phones)	Rs. 130	Rs. 10	Rs. 10
	B. Not exceeding US\$ 30 (smart phones)	Rs. 200	Rs. 10	Rs. 10
	C. Exceeding US\$ 30 but not exceeding US\$ 100	Rs. 200	Rs. 10	Rs. 10
	D. Exceeding US\$ 100 but not exceeding US\$ 200	Rs. 1,680	Rs. 10	Rs. 10
	E. Exceeding US\$ 200 but not exceeding US\$ 350	⁹⁹³ [18%] <i>ad valorem</i>	Rs. 1,740	Rs. 10
	F. Exceeding US\$ 350 but not exceeding US\$ 500	⁹⁹⁴ [18%] <i>ad valorem</i>	Rs. 5,400	Rs. 10
	G. Exceeding US\$ 500	⁹⁹⁵ [25%] <i>ad valorem</i>	Rs. 9,270	Rs. 10

Instead, the government has proposed charging a flat 18pc *ad valorem* sales tax on all mobile phones up to the value of \$500 for the three categories of imported completely built, imported semi-built and locally manufactured completely built.

For cellphones costing above \$500, the sales tax rate will be:

- 25pc *ad valorem* for imported completely built
- 18pc for imported semi-built and locally manufactured completely built

Mobile phones are thus now likely to get more expensive.

Cellular mobile phones in CKD/CBU form:

S. No.	Description / Specification of Goods	Sales tax on CBU's at the time of import or registration (IMEI number by CMOs)	Sales tax on import in CKD/SKD condition	Sales tax on supply of locally manufactured mobile phones in CBU condition in addition to tax under column (4)
(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)

1.	Cellular mobile phones or satellite phones to be charged on the basis of import value per set, or equivalent value in rupees in case of supply by the manufacturer, at the rate as indicated against each category:-			-
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Discouraging smoking and vaping

The budget also proposed a number of measures that seem likely to discourage smoking and vaping with higher related costs for cigarettes and e-cigarettes.

It said that the reduced tax rate on the supply of cigarettes by distributors be enhanced to 2.5pc from 1pc.

It also proposed the imposition of a federal excise duty (FED) of Rs44,000 on acetate tow — a material commonly used to make cigarette filters.

Other similar curbs include:

- FED on nicotine pouches at Rs1200 per kilogramme
- Enhancement of FED on e-liquids — liquid used in e-cigarettes
- FED on filter rods — cigarette body casings — to be enhanced from Rs1500/kg to Rs80,000/kg
- Power to seal business premises of retailers selling illicit cigarettes
- Price threshold for local manufactured cigarettes increased from Rs9,000 to Rs12,500

Health insurance for media personnel

The finance minister also announced a health insurance scheme for journalists and people associated with the media industry.

Hailing the move as a “historic step”, Information Minister Attaullah Tarar said health insurance would be provided to 5,000 people in the first phase.

He added that another 10,000 individuals would be provided health insurance in the second phase.

Other notable exemptions

Among other notable exemptions in duties or relief, the budget proposed:

- Exemption of customs duties on raw materials of fluids and powders for use in hemodialysers (hemodialysis machines)
- Exemption of customs duties on bovine lipid extract surfactant, a material indicated for rescue treatment of Neonatal Respiratory Distress Syndrome
- Withdrawal of regulatory duty (RD) on import of sliver cans and lollipop sticks
- Incentives for manufacturing of solar panels and allied equipment
- Extension in scope of exemptions on import of machinery and equipment for farming and processing of seafood

Notable levies

Conversely, there were some moves which are likely to hurt the common man's pocket:

- 10pc sales tax on imported personal computers, laptop computers and notebooks
- 10pc sales tax on many stationery items
- 10pc sales tax on local supply of vermicelli, sheermal, bun and rusk excluding those sold in bakeries, and sweet shops falling in the category of Tier-1 retailers
- 10pc sales tax on local supply of poultry and cattle feed
- 10pc sales tax on newsprint and books
- Withdrawal of exemption of RD on import of ground nuts and margarine imported by food confectionary
- Withdrawal of concession of customs duties on import of fresh and dry fruits
- Withdrawal of concessions of duties on import of hybrid vehicles
- Reduction in the concession of customs duties on import of electric vehicles having a value above \$50,000
- Increase of customs duty on import of containers for aerosol products (hair sprays, insect sprays.etc)
- Enhancement in rate of sales tax from 15pc to 18pc on supplies made by point of sale retailers dealing in “expensive and branded” leather and textile products
- FED of Rs15/kg on supply of sugar to manufacturers
- FED on cement enhanced from Rs2/kg to Rs3/kg

Inflation vs growth: misplaced priorities

Our economic growth rate is an anaemic 2.2%, which is less than our population growth rate of 2.55 per cent



By Dr Miftah Ismail

Although the inflation number for May has come down to 11 per cent from over 30 per cent in May last year, inflation for this fiscal year is still 24 per cent.

Our economic growth rate is an anaemic 2.2 per cent, which is less than our population growth rate of 2.55 per cent. Last year, our economic growth rate was close to zero. Thus over the last two years Pakistanis have become poorer by almost 3.0 per cent. And, given the lopsided effects of inflation, poor Pakistanis have become poorer by an even higher percentage. That is why, according to a World Bank calculation, 90 million Pakistanis are below the poverty line and another 10 million are expected to go below the line this year.

The two main interrelated reasons we have had such back-breaking inflation over the last two years are excessive printing of currency notes by our State Bank and rapid devaluation. The State Bank has had to print notes to finance the large and increasing federal deficits we have incurred since the last NFC Award in 2010.

Our currency has devalued rapidly because of the large foreign exchange loans our

government has to repay – loans we took not just to finance the trade deficit or difference between our larger imports and smaller exports, but also because we borrowed over the years substantial sums in foreign exchange for many megaprojects that have not resulted in any foreign exchange earnings. Now that these loans are coming due and we can't find newer and newer sources to finance our government's bad habits and policy mistakes, our currency is losing its value.

Unfortunately, inflation was also turbocharged by the inordinate increases in power and gas prices. We now have the highest prices of gas and power for most categories of customers in South Asia.

Worse still, Pakistanis are now paying the highest proportion of their incomes in utility bills compared to any other nation in Asia. And yet, such are the inefficiencies, theft and policy mistakes in the sector that, after trying for more than two decades under several different governments, we are not even close to ending the power sector and gas sector financial deficits that translate into circular debt or require government subsidies.

One reason we have been able to reduce inflation is due to the extremely high interest rates that have stifled economic growth and suppressed investments. Because of our very rapid population growth, more than two million young people enter the labour market annually. But with hardly any growth in the economy, overall employment hasn't grown and hence more people haven't been absorbed in the labour force. Thus high interest rates, set to bring down inflation, have resulted in a substantial increase in unemployment and poverty.

All economic choices have costs and benefits. To obtain the benefits of relatively reduced inflation, we imposed heavy costs on businesses and the unemployed. However, the federal or provincial governments didn't really share in this sacrifice. Their expenditures continued to grow unabated and we continued to produce high deficits.

The entire cost of bringing inflation down from its peak last year has been borne by the private sector and the taxpayers. Moreover, even as the May 2024 number is good, inflation is still in double digits and of course one month does not a trend make.

When inflation is still high, per capita growth is negative, poverty is increasing, fiscal deficits are unsustainably high, tax revenues as a percentage of GDP remain quite low, and both external debt and local debt are dangerously high – what is our government doing? Almost exactly what it should not be doing.

The prime minister and some cabinet members are in China meeting the Chinese leadership. An issue that might come up is that we still need to pay the Chinese power producers Rs470 billion (or about \$1.68 billion) of their past dues. Moreover, the IMF and World Bank want us to negotiate with China to reschedule the payments due to Chinese power companies over the next five years and pay them during the next ten years or so.

But even as we have delayed their past payments due to the financial crunch, the government is also seeking fresh new project loans for a new railway line from Karachi to Peshawar for \$6.8 billion (or Rs1900 billion) and a highway from Thakot to Raikot for about \$2 billion (or Rs560 billion).

So even as we have difficulty paying China's past dues, and are trying to reschedule trillions due to them over the next five years, and there are still many other loan-financed projects under construction, we are seeking new project loans for Rs2460 billion for these two

projects. (There are other projects, such as a power plant for Gwadar, that I am not discussing here).

Is this really the time for borrowing more foreign exchange for projects that are neither economically feasible nor will generate the foreign exchange required to service and repay these loans? Is this the right priority?

Then there are reports that our government is trying to come up with some 'relief' for the people in the budget. It sounds like a good initiative, but two things must be considered. One, the government's 'relief' to the people is paid for by borrowing more, which causes more inflation. Thus poor and working class people end up bearing the cost of the relief. Second, more often than not, the 'relief' is given to the politically powerful not the economically weak.

Rumours are also rife that rather than expanding the tax net to include large agricultural landlords or rich urban property owners, tax collection efforts this year will again focus on the manufacturing industry and salaried employees.

Although I earnestly hope that the government will not increase taxes on salaried people, I hear it government is looking to raise another Rs500 billion to Rs600 billion by taking away exemptions from personal income taxes – this includes business individuals too. This is why I firmly believe

that unless the federal government is allowed to tax agriculture and property, we will continue to squeeze the salaried and middle classes to the point of crushing them.

The federal and provincial governments' insatiable appetite to spend, coupled with the IMF demand that we limit our deficit to less than our total debt servicing, means that the federal government is now considering imposing 18 per cent sales tax on medicines, milk powder and other necessities.

I wish the government had used the last three months, after its stunning victory on February 9, to work with the provinces to broaden the tax base, reduce federal and provincial expenditures and adjust the NFC Award. But it seems the government will continue to tax the already taxed and continue to coddle the powerful. Another year wasted.

If Pakistan is to ever get out of the fiscal mess we have placed ourselves into, we will have to rethink how we finance our federal and provincial budgets and bring about horizontal and vertical equity in our tax regime. But as long as we tax only the salaried and the middle classes, and manufacturing and corporates, and protect the politically powerful, we will keep staring at the financial abyss.

Courtesy The News



Budget FY25: Test of fiscal discipline

In the good old days, a common practice was to overstate revenue estimates



By Dr Abid Qaiyum Suleri

Walking a tightrope to balance income against expenditure without hurting the people and losing political capital has always remained a challenge for the finance minister of Pakistan who is making the federal budget for Pakistan.

In the good old days, a common practice was to overstate revenue estimates, understate proposed expenditures, and at least in the budget documents adhere to the fiscal deficit target agreed upon with the IMF. However, the numbers presented in the budget for the outgoing fiscal year were immediately challenged by multilateral lenders who termed them unrealistic and over-ambitious. Consequently, the government had to revise the finance bill numbers before getting it passed by the National Assembly.

Unlike previous years, there was no room for shortcuts in preparing the budget for 2024-25. This budget is a quasi-prior-action to initiate negotiations with the IMF for the next extended fund facility programme (next loan). Convincing the IMF, the lender of last resort, of Pakistan's commitment to

implementing economic reform is crucial for Pakistan. The budget serves as a litmus test for this commitment.

The good news is that the numbers presented in the budget are quite realistic. The government did not use assumed 'provincial surplus' or 'unrealistic privatization proceeds' to add up numbers to reduce its fiscal deficit. It presents a series of fiscal measures aimed at consolidating finances and stabilizing the economy.

The federal government's spending can be categorized into four 'Ds': debt servicing, defence and security expenses, day-to-day running of the civil government, and development. The first three Ds are non-negotiable and non-discretionary. The allocations are substantial: Rs9775 billion for debt servicing, Rs2122 billion for defence affairs and services, and Rs839 billion for the day-to-day operations of the civil government. Additionally, pensions amount to Rs1014 billion, making the combined total for salaries and pensions Rs2122 billion.

After transferring Rs7438 billion to the

provinces under the National Finance Commission formula, the federal government is left with Rs10377 billion. This means it will rely on borrowing to meet its mandatory expenses. However, the financial obligations do not end with the above three categories. The fourth 'D' – development – encompasses a public-sector development programme, net lending, grants and transfers to provinces, subsidies, and emergency provisions, amounting to Rs5127 billion.

In total, Rs18877 billion is required to meet the federal expenditure. After fulfilling debt obligations, the government will have scant funds to cover other expenses, necessitating an additional Rs8500 billion in borrowing. Development initiatives will proceed only if the government successfully secures domestic (Rs7803 billion) or foreign borrowing (Rs666 billion). Otherwise, development spending will likely face significant cuts, repeating a familiar pattern that hampers both human development and long-term growth.

Within this non-flexible framework, there is very little room to experiment with innovative ideas. Despite the daunting fiscal environment, there are some positive highlights in the budget.

The government has initiated pension reforms, which is a significant step towards long-term fiscal sustainability (pensions are higher than civil government salaries). There is also an increase in the allocation for the Benazir Income Support Programme (BISP) to Rs593 billion, aimed at supplementing the income of poor and vulnerable segments of society.

There is no mention of taxing agricultural income, which could have broadened the tax base considerably. Additionally, the withdrawal of concessions on hybrid and electric vehicles is a misstep; luxury vehicles should be targeted through higher registration charges based on their value, rather than disincentivizing environmentally friendly options.

One is appreciative of the government resisting IMF pressure to tax pensions, increase the maximum tax rates, blanket increase in general sales tax (GST), or imposition of GST on seeds and medicines.

The budget's provisions for digital infrastructure and SME support, though present, are not comprehensive enough to drive significant growth and innovation. The lack of explicit fiscal arrangements for startups and micro-enterprises, crucial for job creation and economic diversification, is an omission that will cost our readiness for the era of artificial intelligence and data analytics.

The proposed budget is a necessary step towards fiscal consolidation and economic stabilization. However, addressing its potential negative impacts and implementing targeted reforms is essential to ensuring sustainable and inclusive growth for Pakistan. The government will have to ensure that its attempts to achieve economic stability at the macro level do not compromise the microeconomic security of its citizens.

Ultimately, the efficacy of any budget hinges not merely on its ambitious goals but on the practicality and enforceability of its policies. While the proposed budget lays out many good policies to plug the black holes in Pakistan's economy, its success will depend on the government's ability to implement these measures effectively.

Addressing structural issues, ensuring robust tax collection, fostering a conducive environment for investment, and boosting productivity are critical steps. Without practical enforcement and genuine commitment to these reforms, the budget's potential for economic course correction may remain unrealized. However, in this case, there will be no reversal for the suffering of regular citizens. The real test lies in translating policy into action, where intentions meet reality.

The budget's true cost will be borne by the people, who will endure increased inflation as a consequence of economic stabilization measures. They have been sacrificing in the hope of a better future. If the proposed measures fail once again, the public's trust in the system will erode, creating a trust deficit between the citizens and the government. If history is any guide, then such a trust deficit is much worse than fiscal and current account deficits.

Courtesy The News



Moreover, the increase in duty on cigarette filters and strict measures to stop the sale of non-duty paid cigarettes, the introduction of a new regime of capital gains tax on securities and real estate, and a more rational car registration duty based on value rather than engine capacity are commendable moves towards a fairer tax system. Additionally, the clear commitment to privatizing state-owned enterprises (SOEs) is assuring news that the government is serious about reducing the fiscal burden and improving efficiency. Concessions on importing solar system parts and an increase in minimum wages from Rs32000 per month to Rs37000 per month are also positive proposals.

However, these positive measures are counterbalanced by several shortcomings. The budget's failure to introduce tangible steps to bring retailers and traders into the tax net remains a significant oversight.

However, while adjusting the personal income tax slabs, it could have adjusted the minimum taxable income to account for inflation. The current exemption of Rs50000 per month is too little, and doubling the tax on those falling in the first tax slab will reduce their disposable income, exacerbating their economic hardships. Furthermore, rising fuel costs due to increased petrol levies and higher GST rates in specific sectors are expected to drive inflation further, impacting the cost of living.

While the Public Sector Development Programme (PSDP) has seen an increase, more than half of the allocation is directed towards infrastructure rather than directly impacting human development sectors like health and education. This approach could hinder progress towards the sustainable development goals (SDGs) and the overall well-being of the population.

The Global Energy Crisis and How Solar Power Can Save the Day

By Habib Hanzalah

The world is currently in a situation of unstable fossil - fuel supplies aggravated by geopolitical differences, changing prices on the global energy market, and the growing demand for clean and renewable energy to help mitigate the effects of climate change. Some energy providing countries are attempting to find a solution to their intensified energy demand and questions, while the solar power energy system has come to the fore as a potential solution to this issue.

Understanding the Energy Crisis

The global energy crisis is a multifaceted issue with numerous contributing factors: The global energy crisis is a multifaceted issue with numerous contributing factors:

Platform disruptions, drought and conflict in the Middle East and key locations in Eastern Europe, hence, increased cost. For instance, issues like the Russia-Ukraine war has affected global energy markets leading to a 20 % increase in the price of natural gas and 30% in the price of oil in 2022.

The coming of the new world order heavily based on fossil fuels has not only destroyed the environment, but also has made the economies susceptible to shocks that are accorded with price changes. Fossil fuel energy sources were dominant in the world by consuming nearly 81% of the total energy in the world in 2021. This is not sustainable in the long run as it creates dependency among consumers.

These effects include; The burning of fossil fuels as the root cause of climate change is causing extreme weather conditions such as prolonged droughts and intense rainfall, melting of the seas which consequently results in the rising of sea levels and other severe environmental effects. The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change which is an independent body provides NGO advise that the global warming has to be limited to 1.5 degrees Celsius means that therefore under the year 2030 at least



several percent of carbon emissions have to be cut down.

These high energy prices have delivered higher energy costs that companies and consumers have to bear; they exert inflationary and economic forces on the countries involved. Despite the effort that has been put in place to provide electricity for the population, many people in developing nations still enjoy limited or no access to electricity as per the data obtained in 2021.

Solar Power: A Sustainable Solution

Solar energy is a renewable and therefore brings along a proactively feasible approach for solving the energy problem all over the world. Here's how solar energy can make a difference: Here's how solar energy can make a difference:

Knowledge of the sun is vital since this natural material can supply more energy within one hour than is required by the whole world in one year. Utilizing this ample resource can indeed cut down the reliance on the earthly and scarce fossil fuels. Currently, Solar energy accounts for only 3 % of the world electricity generation; however, this figure has been forecasted to steadily increase in the subsequent years .

The utility of solar energy in power generation is exempt from emissions of greenhouse gases hence is ecofriendly. The shift to solar will go a long way in the fight against climate change, and a reduction of air pollution which can lead to a reduction of about 2. In the year 2030, it aims at reducing the emission of greenhouse gasses by 30 percent cutting on 5 billion metric tons of CO₂.

This is because the cost of incorporating solar technology in our daily lives has progressively reduced in the past decade. The cost of the solar photovoltaic system as stated by the International Renewable Energy Agency (IRENA), reduces by 85%, between the year 2010 and 2020. This affordability of renewable energy products and technologies can also increase consumer and business usage to cut their energy bills.

No doubt, the use of solar power in the country will help in decreasing reliance on imported fossil fuel which increases energy security. Solar energy can be harnessed locally at home thus will not expose our countries to cuts in the supply of electricity due to any global reasons. And, according to forecast for 2030, the total share of solar energy could reach 25 percent of the world's energy needs.

Solar power installations can take various

scales from topping on residences and commercial buildings to utility scale solar plants. This scalability flexibly enable a? its incorporation into the energy grid, which can be planned for particular energy requirement. As per the international energy agency report, the global installed capacity of solar power in 2022 was 942 GW which enunciating a victorious journey of the technology.

Global Adoption of Solar Power

Tackling the energy crisis is a growing challenge that nations across the globe are appreciating through coming up with solar energy. Here are a few examples:

China has become a global leader and accounted for 44% of global investment in solar projects injecting \$66 billion for solar based projects in 2022 taking its total installed solar capacity to over 330MW . China currently has an installed power capacity of around 1,100 GW and targets to achieve 1,200 GW by 2030 Renewable energy is therefore high on its agenda.

Solar penetration has advanced significantly in the United States to 125GW as we speak in the year 2023. With laws such as the IRA (Inflation Reduction Act of 2022), which aim to increase renewable energy investments toward a 100% clean electricity grid by mid-town the United States in the year 2035.

Currently, India is speeding up the solarization process, plans to install 450 GW of renewable power by 2030; out of which 280 GW is proposed to come from solar. India is targeting 100 GW of solar capacity by 2022 and it successfully commissioned 14GW of solar capacity in 2022 itself.

The EU has laid down high targets for independent energy sources to provide 40% of total electricity consumption of the Union by 2030. One of these is use of excess sunlight in generating electricity, where major investment has been made in housing and research. I learnt that the EU reach 165 + GW in the installed solar power by 2022 .Challenges and the Path Forward

While solar power holds immense promise, several challenges need to be addressed to maximize its potential:While solar power holds immense promise, several challenges

need to be addressed to maximize its potential:

The reliability of the solar energy is that the solar energy is irregular in nature and this means that to have a constant and reliable energy supply, proper storage system must be put in place. This barrier can be overcome through progress in at least two categories - battery systems and the power grid. The value of energy storage systems, worldwide is expected to get up from 12 GW in 2020 to 158 GW in 2030 .

The ability to increase solar capacity comes at a cost, which is the level of investment in infrastructure and policy support. The role of organizations of the civil society and private initiatives is also important to encourage the governments to improve the regulatory conditions and to promote the necessary financing. Instead, the IEA stated that for the country to meet its climate change objectives in the same year, annual solar investment must expand threefold, the global report found.

Advancements in new solar technologies are the improvements in this specific field whether it is in efficiency rates or fabrication materials, will augment the solar power system capacities and bring down the cost implications. For instance, the investigation into the workings of perovskite solar cells could one day result in substantial enhancements of productivity and cost-performance ratio.

Conclusion

The energy scarcity is however real and more so in the global perspective calls for urgent and likely drastic changes. It is clear that solar power presents a viable choice for building sustainable energy future due to its availability, renewability, and friendliness to the environment. Through acquiring solar energy, nations can indeed rely on it as a tool to fix the two global concerns of today through energy security and economic stability as well as work towards a noble vision of global climate change amendment. While the modern world is just starting its journey towards the diverse sustainable energy sources, solar energy is becoming a beacon of hope for humanity and the planet in general, which may show the path to a better and more sustainable future.

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Ruling Coalition on Shaky Ground as PPP, PML-N Disagreements Intensify



By Nimra Atiq

The relationship between the PPP and the PML-N seemed to be strained, as the PPP, a key ally in the ruling coalition, showed its displeasure by making only a symbolic appearance in the National Assembly's budget session, sending a warning to the government.

During the inaugural budget presentation by the coalition government led by the PML-N, the opposition, headed by the Sunni Ittehad Council (SIC), orchestrated loud and traditional protests in an attempt to disrupt the proceedings. Their efforts, however, proved unsuccessful. It was the eleventh-hour decision by their key ally, the PPP, that caused a significant delay, stretching the proceedings for nearly two hours. The PPP's boycott of the budget session stemmed from an alleged violation of a power-sharing agreement with the PML-N, which had been established subsequent to the February polls. The core contention was that the PML-N had circumvented this agreement during the budget preparation, prompting the PPP's action.

The PPP chairman only sent three of his MNAs—Naveed Qamar, Khurshed Shah, and Ijaz Jakhrani—to represent PPP in the session. This decision arose from the party's perception that PML-N has not only strayed from its post-election agreement but has also begun to take PPP for granted. Notably, the absence of the PPP chairman and other party lawmakers was conspicuous at the commencement of the session. The session witnessed the PPP and PML-N encountering a significant hurdle as they grappled with unresolved differences concerning the proposed 18% standard sales tax on agricultural inputs and machinery.

This tax measure, which the International Monetary Fund (IMF) is advocating as part of its initiative to eliminate tax exemptions in Pakistan, remains a key point of contention between the two parties.

Additionally, the PPP leadership has voiced dissatisfaction with regards to issues such as load shedding, untimely wheat imports, inquiry outcomes, and

the absence of relief for the agricultural sector in the budget. Perceiving a lack of attention from the PML-N, the PPP leadership openly expressed their discontent, criticizing the PML-N for sidelining a crucial coalition partner.

In recent times, there has been discord among the coalition partners, with the Pakistan People's Party (PPP) accusing the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) of disregarding its concerns related to the budget and taxation. The PPP has emphasized the significance of addressing these issues to maintain support from a key ally within the coalition.

Following a split mandate in the February 8 general elections, the PPP played a pivotal role in facilitating the formation of the government led by the PML-N at the center. The two parties reached an agreement and meticulously divided key constitutional offices, including the positions of Prime Minister, President, Governors, Chairman and Deputy Chairman of the Senate, as well as Speaker and Deputy Speaker of the National Assembly.



The government was paralyzed due to political upheaval and terrorism, and nothing seemed to be going in the right direction. The PPP's support was crucial for the PML-N in forming a federal government, but unlike other allies, the PPP chose to stay away from the cabinet. Analysts believe this decision was made to avoid criticism and public anger expected after the budget presentation, which is anticipated to include more taxes and increased utility tariffs. To shield itself from public backlash, the PPP opted to stay out of the cabinet and play it safe. While the PPP has the right to raise issues about development schemes with the federal government, some may question whether it is appropriate for the party to threaten to part ways with the government.

PTI and JUI-F Unexpected Alliance:

Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) and the Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam-Fazl (JUI-F) have put aside their differences and are working together to form an alliance against the government. The two parties have found common ground in their rejection of the 2024 general election results, with both parties claiming that the elections were rigged. There have been reports about a possible alliance between two parties that have been in opposition to each other for a long time. The media has been covering this development for a while now.

Allegations of election rigging on February

8th brought the PTI and the JUI-F closer together, which came as a surprise to many as it was unexpected that the relationship between the two parties would improve anytime soon. There have also been meetings between delegations from both parties. The recent closeness between Maulana Fazl and the PTI founder has led Maulana Fazl to take back his previous statements, in which he had called the PTI founder a tool of external forces. He now describes those statements as "mere political rhetoric".

This change in tone has also prompted the PML-N to show interest in Maulana Fazl. However, Maulana Fazl has not shown any sign of softening his stance. Maulana Ahmad Ali Darwesh, the provincial leader of Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, has suggested the possibility of an alliance with the PTI given the current political situation. The talks are ongoing, and it is not yet clear what the exact terms of the alliance will be or when it will be formalized. The implications of this alliance are far-reaching, and it will be interesting to see how it plays out in the coming days. One thing is certain, however, that this alliance has the potential to change the political dynamics of Pakistan and may pave the way for a new era of cooperation and collaboration between political rivals.





How Political Confrontation is Undermining Economic Stability and Democratic Governance?



By Daniyal Wali

Political confrontation has long been a feature of global democracies, but its intensification in recent years is causing significant damage to both economies and political scenarios around the world. The economic instability that results from political confrontation manifests in several ways. First, constant political wrangling creates an environment of uncertainty, which is detrimental to both domestic and foreign investment. Investors prefer stable environments where policies are predictable. When political confrontation is rampant, policies can change abruptly, deterring investment and economic growth. Second, when political factions are constantly at odds, the passing of essential economic reforms can be delayed or obstructed. This policy paralysis prevents the implementation of necessary measures to address structural economic problems, leading to prolonged economic distress.

Third, in politically unstable countries, governments often resort to borrowing to cover fiscal deficits caused by inefficient economic policies. For instance, Pakistan's gross domestic product (GDP) grew by only 0.29 percent in the fiscal year ending June 2023, well below the target. With a GDP of \$345 billion, Pakistan's current external debt stands at \$123 billion, and the country needs to repay \$78 billion by 2026.

Political confrontation exacerbates these issues by preventing cohesive action to improve fiscal health. Finally, protests and strikes, often byproducts of political confrontation, disrupt everyday economic activities. Businesses suffer from decreased productivity, supply chain interruptions, and additional costs associated with heightened security measures.

Pakistan's recent history provides a vivid example of how political confrontation can undermine economic stability and degrade the political environment. Pakistan faces numerous structural economic challenges, many of which are exacerbated by political confrontation. It has one of the lowest tax-to-GDP ratios in the world. Successive governments have struggled to expand tax collection, a challenge made more difficult by political infighting. Additionally, Pakistan has borrowed from the IMF 23 times since 1958, with the funds often used to cover past debts rather than for productive investments. This cycle of borrowing without substantial economic reform reflects the inability to implement long-term economic strategies due to political instability. The political dysfunction in Pakistan stems from deep-rooted issues.

Politics in Pakistan is deeply personal and

factional, with leading politicians often prioritizing personal power over national interest. This tendency hampers effective governance and economic planning. The military remains a powerful force in Pakistan, often intervening in political matters. This interventionist role has historically led to periods of direct military rule, undermining democratic processes and contributing to political instability. The rise of populist leaders like Imran Khan, who leverage mass dissatisfaction for political gain, has further polarized the political landscape. Khan's confrontational politics, particularly his aggressive stance against the military after his ousting, has deepened divisions and destabilized the political environment.

Political confrontation not only hampers economic progress but also degrades the overall political scenario. Persistent political confrontation weakens governance structures. Governments are often too embroiled in political battles to focus on effective governance, leading to administrative inefficiencies and corruption. Confrontational politics polarizes societies, creating deep divisions among the populace. This polarization can lead to social unrest, as seen with the protests and violence incited by Imran Khan's supporters in Pakistan. When



political confrontation becomes the norm, democratic processes and institutions suffer. The undermining of electoral integrity, as alleged by various factions in Pakistan's recent elections, erodes public trust in democracy. In countries with significant military influence, political confrontation can strain civil-military relations. In Pakistan, the military's role in politics has been a source of contention, contributing to political instability and hindering democratic governance.

The economic impact of political confrontation extends beyond immediate instability. It creates a hostile environment for long-term economic planning and development. Governments embroiled in political battles often neglect vital areas such as education, healthcare, and infrastructure development, which are crucial for sustainable economic growth. For instance, in Pakistan, the focus on political survival and power struggles has often overshadowed the need for critical economic reforms and investments. The neglect of these areas perpetuates a cycle of poverty and underdevelopment, making it even harder to achieve economic stability and growth in the long run.

Moreover, political confrontation often leads to a lack of continuity in economic policies. Frequent changes in government or leadership result in shifts in economic strategies, disrupting ongoing projects and reforms. This inconsistency can deter long-term investments, as investors are unsure about the future policy environment. In Pakistan, the constant power struggles between political factions and the military have resulted in frequent policy changes, undermining investor confidence and economic stability.

The international dimension of political confrontation also plays a significant role in economic outcomes. Countries engaged in political confrontations often struggle to maintain stable international relations, which are essential for trade, investment, and economic cooperation. In Pakistan, the ongoing political instability has affected its relationships with key international partners. For instance, strained relations with neighboring India over the Kashmir conflict have hindered potential economic cooperation and trade between the two

countries. Additionally, political instability has made it difficult for Pakistan to attract and maintain foreign investments, further exacerbating its economic challenges.

The social consequences of political confrontation are equally severe. Persistent political conflict creates an atmosphere of mistrust and fear among the populace. This environment can lead to increased social fragmentation, with different groups aligning themselves with various political factions. In Pakistan, the intense political rivalry has polarized the society, leading to social unrest and violence. The confrontational politics of leaders like Imran Khan have deepened these divisions, making it harder to achieve social cohesion and national unity.

Furthermore, political confrontation undermines the rule of law and weakens democratic institutions. When political leaders engage in confrontational tactics, they often disregard legal and constitutional norms. This behavior erodes public trust in the legal system and democratic institutions, leading to a crisis of legitimacy. In Pakistan, the frequent allegations of electoral fraud and manipulation have weakened public confidence in the electoral process and democratic governance. The military's involvement in politics further complicates this issue, as it undermines the authority of civilian institutions and the rule of law.

The long-term implications of political confrontation are severe. Without stability, economies struggle to grow. Long-term economic decline can set in as investment dwindles, public debt rises, and structural problems remain unaddressed. Persistent political confrontation can lead to widespread social unrest, further destabilizing the country. This unrest often stems from public dissatisfaction with both economic conditions and governance. In extreme cases, prolonged political confrontation can pave the way for authoritarianism, as citizens and political leaders alike turn to strongman tactics to restore order. This undermines democratic institutions and processes.

Based on current trends, several scenarios could unfold in Pakistan and similar countries experiencing intense political

confrontation. The most likely scenario is a weak civilian government that relies heavily on military support to maintain stability and implement economic reforms. This government may survive but will face continuous political noise and opposition, particularly from populist leaders like Imran Khan. A less likely but possible scenario involves widespread unrest instigated by opposition forces. This unrest could lead to calls for military intervention or even another round of elections, further destabilizing the political environment. The least likely scenario is a full-scale revolution led by populist forces or a direct military coup. While both are improbable given the current dynamics, they remain possible in a highly unstable political climate.

Political confrontation is a significant impediment to economic stability and political progress. The case of Pakistan illustrates how deep-rooted political dysfunction, military influence, and populist politics can create a cycle of instability that hinders economic growth and erodes democratic norms. To break this cycle, countries must prioritize political reconciliation, economic reform, and the strengthening of democratic institutions. Only then can they hope to achieve long-term stability and prosperity.

To achieve political reconciliation, it is essential for political leaders to engage in constructive dialogue and collaboration. This approach requires setting aside personal and factional interests for the greater good of the nation. In Pakistan, fostering a culture of political compromise and inclusiveness can help mitigate the destructive effects of political confrontation. Additionally, economic reforms must be implemented with a long-term perspective, focusing on sustainable development and reducing dependency on external borrowing. Strengthening democratic institutions involves ensuring the independence of the judiciary, protecting press freedom, and promoting transparency and accountability in governance. By addressing these key areas, countries like Pakistan can create a more stable and prosperous future, free from the damaging effects of political confrontation.



A song of resistance, a ray of light

This kept them busy to an extent that they had no inclination left to attend to other things, gradual destruction of country being most important



By Raoof Hasan

What this country has been so pathetically denuded of over the last many years is a quotient of hope. There is virtually no one, across societal divides, who still thinks that living here would be beneficial for them or their families. The rich want to leave here chasing their assets, mostly illicit and stashed abroad, and the poor want to go in anticipation of a better future where their merit would be acknowledged, and their labour rewarded.

This state of hopelessness has not been a sudden development. The decline had been visible for some time, but the ruling elite paid no heed as they were singularly engrossed in inventing ever more innovative ways of looting and plundering the country to amass their mountains of wealth and siphon it abroad. This kept them busy to an extent that they had no inclination left to attend to other things, the gradual destruction of the country being the most important.

Hope usually comes through the functionality of state institutions. With their perfor-

mance, they inspire people to get involved and help things move along for scaling challenging barriers towards progress. But if the institutions are stalled simply because their transparent and effective operation does not suit the interests of a small coterie of beneficiary usurpers, most notably those vested with the power to rule the country, they generate stagnation which, after some time, starts exuding a pungent smell. That is what we have experienced here in the past many decades as the acidity of this stagnation has continued to grow more stifling with time.

Though those in the seats of power will not concede it, the country is perched on the verge of collapse requiring a mere nudge to go hurtling down. While our debt continues to pile, we need further loans to pay the interest on previously drawn billions. So, with a begging bowl in our hands and clad in designer suits, we go from country to country and institution to institution beseeching for more dole-outs. Other than verbose communiques of support, we

secure little in substantive terms. But we don't feel humiliated and continue remorselessly in our mission to pile on further debt.

What we are confronted with is a monumental challenge that is growing worse with time. But, instead of realizing its enormity and taking remedial steps by initiating an informed and inclusive approach, we remain smitten with eliminating political opponents at the cost of the state and its inherent interests. That is not only increasing our alienation in the comity of nations but also rendering us untrustworthy and unreliable, thus making our challenge even more daunting and formidable. But those in the hollow seats of power, and those who command them, remain beholden to their ill-conceived design of perpetuating the myopic status quo.

But just when one thought that there was no coming out of this deepening quagmire, a light shone through the thicket of dark. It came from nowhere but the institution of the judiciary. Six judges of the Islamabad High Court (IHC) decided to break free of



the stranglehold and write their story on a piece of paper. Citing from the experience of being subjected to pressure from the executive and operatives of intelligence agencies, they approached the Supreme Judicial Council (SJC) to convene a convention to hear other judges about their experiences.

Instead of being inspired by the brave initiative, an effort was made to stifle it under a pile of executive authority. But when the honourable judge who was appointed to head the commission to investigate recused himself over his dissatisfaction with the SOPs, the matter was referred to the provincial high courts for their input.

More incriminating evidence was contained in the high courts' submissions which should have spurred urgent action. But no. Ever since then, the matter has been languishing in some pile of files.

But the original effort of six judges has given heart to so many others who have broken the shackles and started speaking their minds through their judgments, honouring their oath to uphold the tenets of the constitution and law. This has changed

the shape and tenor of the entire institution which is now basking in the light of a promising morning spelling its freedom from the chains of slavery and subjugation.

While the judiciary may have decided to charter a new course, some other institutions and operatives remain mired in the past and its inglorious practices. The causes could range from the fear factor to inertia caused over decades and the prospect of loss of billions in illicit earnings secured by submitting before the powerful.

Despite some bright sparks emanating from the judicial forums, the overall situation remains despondent. Bereft of any ground-breaking initiative from the power-wielders, the operatives remain caught up in their traditional practices, thus strengthening an unconstitutional and illegal authority that remains unwilling to cede its hold which has been used mercilessly in the past to cause incalculable damage to the interests of the state and the aspirations of the people. This has kept Pakistan frozen in the vestibule of time as one has seen it denuded of hope and the urge to resist the incursions of the despots.

While the power of the powerful enjoys no

legitimacy, the one who rules the hearts of the people remains incarcerated in a death cell with no exposure to the outside world. This reflects nothing but an infatuation with what is decidedly a gravely flawed approach of ostracising the popular leadership of the people and, in its place, hoisting those whose past is littered with volumes outlining their crimes and corruption. What is most alarming is the espousal of such people by those who hold real power as the mechanism of hoisting compromised leaders is bound to cause further damage to the state.

The process of untangling from a stricken past is difficult and painful as one will have to cede the appendages of power that one is used to flaunting. But if Pakistan is to survive and get back on course to redemption, this is the only path to follow: let power be exercised by those who have the mandate of the people.

The place for such leaders is not a death cell. They belong in the hearts of the people and that is where they shall continue serenading their song of resistance and spreading the ray of light.





Communications Matter: The Silent Language of Diplomacy



By Amir Jahangir

During Prime Minister Shahbaz Sharif's recent visit to China, while he made headlines as a true diplomat, the perception of him and his team by the Chinese government and its people was notably different. In the intricate theatre of international diplomacy, attire plays a silent yet profoundly eloquent role. Attire in diplomacy is not merely a personal choice or an aesthetic exercise; it is a potent instrument reflecting respect, tradition, and identity. It serves as a bridge to transcending cultures, communicating significance, and forging bonds of international understanding.

Prime Minister Shahbaz Sharif's preference for black ties or combinations of black was noteworthy. Traditionally, black ties symbolize formal evening occasions; however, wearing them during the daytime can convey somber or negative connotations. Surprisingly, his choice of tie colors did not include the more diplomatic and positive Pakistani Green or the Chinese Red and Yellow, which could have conveyed messages of vitality, growth, and prosperity—aligning closely with the goals of fostering positive international relations and being more appropriate for high-level engagements.

Adding another layer to the diplomatic visual narrative, Shahbaz Sharif often wore dark blue or a combination of blue and black ties. While dark blue is generally seen as a color symbolizing trust, stability, and calm in Pakistan and many other nations, it carries different connotations in China. In Chinese culture, blue can be associated with immortality and progress, but the combination of blue and black may not be perceived as favorable, potentially implying a lack of harmony and balance. This cultural nuance underscores the importance of understanding and respecting the host country's traditions and symbols in diplomatic attire.

PM Shahbaz Sharif's choice of brown and off-white suits, along with semi-formal and casual attire, added another dimension to his appearance. While these choices might reflect a more approachable and grounded persona, they could also be perceived as lacking the gravitas and formality expected in high-level diplomatic engagements. In diplomacy, where every detail is scrutinized, the choice of attire can send powerful messages about a leader's approach, respect for the occasion, and cultural awareness.

The PM's frequent use of religious termi-

nologies and references might have been ill-suited for a country grappling with Muslim insurgency issues. China's sensitivity to religious rhetoric, given its internal challenges, means that such references might not be appreciated and could even be counterproductive. Diplomacy often requires a careful balance of language to ensure inclusivity and sensitivity to the audience's context.

The absence of note-taking or the use of any paper or pens by the PM and his team was a stark contrast to their Chinese counterparts, who actively took notes on both paper and digital tablets. This difference in approach could be interpreted as a lack of preparedness or seriousness about the discussions. In high-stakes diplomatic meetings, the act of taking notes signifies engagement, attention to detail, and a commitment to follow up on discussions.

A significant moment during the visit was the meeting with President Xi Jinping, who consistently wears a dark suit with a white shirt and varies his ties according to the occasion and messages, always keeping them light in feel. President Xi did the same with a light blue tie, conveying trust, stability, and confidence.



During the meeting with President Xi, the PM wore an elegant dark suit with a Pakistani green color and a black floral tie. In the Chinese diplomatic cultural context, black flowers can symbolize elegance, mystery, and the blending of tradition with modernity. This subtle symbolism may convey an appreciation for the rich historical ties and the contemporary aspects of China's diplomatic relationships with Pakistan, suggesting a nuanced approach to diplomacy that values both the depth of tradition and the dynamism of modern international relations.

In contrast, General Syed Asim Munir, the Chief of Army Staff, was seen in a smartly tailored black suit paired with a gold tie. A gold tie signifies the ability to handle any situation while maintaining the demeanor of a gentleman, often worn to convey strength and approachability simultaneously.

An interesting moment occurred when the PM introduced the Pakistani delegation to the Chinese Prime Minister, Li Qiang. While the PM wore an outdated, tight whitish-grey double-breasted suit with a brown-lined tie and a light blue shirt, the Chinese PM Qiang confined himself to a black suit with a white shirt and a red tie. The occasion saw the Chinese PM introduced to the Pakistani delegation, with the Foreign Minister joining the top official later on. A surprising element was the COAS' joining in the line after the foreign

minister's intro and taking the first diplomat in the line, slipping in quietly and discretely.

The Prime Minister's entourage, consisting of more than a dozen ministers from various sectors, failed to offer insights into how Pakistan could provide value to its investors. The Finance Minister, Muhammad Aurangzeb, appeared burdened, seeking assistance from the Chinese explaining the world, and what inherited problems he is facing, instead of offering an incentive to explore and engage. While the Foreign Minister lectured on global governance and atrocities. His focus on visions of tunnels and pipes highlights constraints in his vision around global conflicts. This showcased a team unprepared to present Pakistan as a hub of investment opportunities, lacking a coherent and compelling narrative to attract international investors beyond the CPEC vision.

In the grand theatre of international diplomacy, attire plays a silent yet profoundly eloquent role. Attire in diplomacy is not merely a personal choice or an aesthetic exercise but a potent instrument reflecting respect, tradition, and identity. It serves as a bridge to transcending cultures, communicating gravitas, and forging bonds of international understanding.

Diplomatic uniforms are rich in tradition and symbolism, worn by ambassadors on

formal occasions to signify their roles and the traditions they uphold. Accessories like ties, lapel pins, and pocket squares can carry significant diplomatic weight. A red tie may symbolize passion or power, while a blue tie evokes trust and stability. Lapel pins can signify national pride or commitment to specific causes.

Evolving dress codes in diplomacy reflect gender equality, with female diplomats celebrated for their professionalism and attire that mirrors their male counterparts.

In the evolving world of diplomacy, attire is a potent language conveying respect, intent, and identity. Through careful selection of attire and accessories, diplomats can transcend borders and foster international understanding. The meticulous choice of attire is not just about fashion but a statement of diplomacy, bridging cultures and forging unity in a diverse world.

As we move forward through the stories behind suits, robes, pins, and scarves, we find ourselves in the heart of diplomacy's visual dialogue. In diplomacy, as in life, even the smallest details can make the biggest impact. Attire is not a superficial concern; it's an integral part of the intricate dance of diplomacy. It reminds us that beyond the language of words, there exists a universal language woven into the very fabric of our existence—a language of attire, a language of diplomacy.



Indian Elections 2024: Modi's Third Term and the Future Landscape



By Kanwal Munir

Introduction

The 2024 national elections in India, held from April 19 to June 1, have profoundly influenced the nation's political trajectory. Boasting 969 million registered voters, these elections were pivotal, defining governance under Prime Minister Narendra Modi and the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP). Modi's leadership, now extending into a third term, underscores a continuation of policies reshaping India's socio-economic fabric. The election's outcome solidifies the BJP's mandate, emphasizing centralization of power and economic reform as core agendas. Concurrently, challenges persist around democratic freedoms, civil liberties, and regional stability, notably with Pakistan.

India's behemoth seven-stage election reached its climax with the results announced on June 4. While exit polls were not revealed until the election process was completed on June 1, the likely outcome remained a third consecutive term for Prime Minister Narendra Modi and his BJP-led government.

The Indian National Congress (INC), as the principal opposition, faces strate-

gic re-evaluation post-elections, crucial for India's multiparty democracy. Geopolitically, India's foreign policy remains nuanced, balancing global alliances while addressing regional imperatives. As India charts its post-election course, the impact will resonate domestically and internationally, influencing policies across governance, economy, and international relations in the foreseeable future.

Modi's Leadership and Centralization of Power

Under Prime Minister Narendra Modi, India has witnessed a significant centralization of executive power over the past decade. The BJP-led National Democratic Alliance (NDA) government emphasized efficiency in governance, often bypassing parliamentary debate to enact crucial legislation. This approach raised concerns about democratic accountability and the erosion of federal principles, with Modi's leadership style increasingly characterized by direct intervention in policy implementation.

Recent legislative sessions, such as the contentious 2023 winter session, under-

scored the BJP's dominance in Parliament, where key bills were passed amid opposition protests and parliamentary suspensions. This trend reflects Modi's strategy to consolidate authority at the national level, positioning the NDA as a formidable force in Indian politics.

Challenges to Democratic Freedoms and Civil Liberties

Under the Modi government, India has faced increasing criticism for its treatment of dissent and civil liberties, alongside a concentration of power. Amendments to laws such as the Foreign Contribution Regulation Act (FCRA) and the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Amendment Act (UAPA) have tightened regulations on civil society organizations and stifled dissenting voices. These changes have raised significant concerns about democratic backsliding. Media freedoms have also suffered, highlighted by declining press freedom rankings, which reflect broader challenges to democratic norms in India. The combination of legislative amendments and restrictions on media underscores ongoing debates about the state of democracy in the country.

Economic Strategy and Geopolitical Imperatives

Economically, India navigates a complex landscape shaped by geo-economic pressures and domestic imperatives. Modi's government has prioritized economic reforms aimed at bolstering manufacturing, integrating into global supply chains, and negotiating bilateral trade agreements. These initiatives are crucial for enhancing India's resilience amid global economic volatility and achieving sustainable growth. By focusing on infrastructure development, digital transformation, and regulatory ease, Modi's administration seeks to position India as a competitive player in the global market, ensuring economic stability and creating opportunities for inclusive development.

India's Foreign Policy Dynamics

Under Prime Minister Modi, India's foreign policy balances strategic autonomy with expanding global partnerships. Relations with key allies like the United States and France have strengthened, highlighted by robust defense collaborations and diplomatic engagements. However, regional dynamics pose persistent challenges, especially with Pakistan, where tensions persist despite intermittent diplomatic efforts. Modi's administration navigates these complexities while advancing India's global standing, emphasizing bilateral ties and regional stability amidst strategic shifts in the Indo-Pacific region. The focus on enhancing India's role on the world stage includes deepening alliances and addressing security concerns, reflecting a nuanced approach to international relations that seeks to bolster India's influence globally.

Future of Congress and Opposition Dynamics

The Indian National Congress (INC) and the broader opposition alliance, the Indian National Developmental Inclusive Alliance (INDIA), offer a distinct counterpoint to the governance model of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) under Prime Minister Narendra Modi. As the principal opposition, the INC has the critical task of addressing internal challenges related to

leadership cohesion, electoral strategy, and ideological clarity to effectively present an alternative vision to the electorate. The outcome of the 2024 elections has significantly influenced the opposition's capacity to challenge BJP's political dominance and shape India's future political landscape.

Historically, the INC was the preeminent political force in India, instrumental in the country's independence movement and its early years as a republic. However, in recent years, the party has encountered substantial setbacks, struggling to reclaim its electoral strength against the BJP's well-organized campaign machinery and the personal appeal of Modi's leadership. The ability of INC to recover and influence national politics is contingent on its internal dynamics and strategic decisions. Addressing factionalism, revitalizing its leadership, and articulating a clear and compelling policy platform are essential for the INC to regain political ground.

Moreover, the broader opposition alliance, INDIA, represents a coalition of diverse political entities united in their opposition to the BJP. Their effectiveness in challenging the BJP's dominance depends on their ability to maintain unity, develop cohesive strategies, and mobilize support across India's varied electorate. The future of the INC and the INDIA alliance will be crucial in providing a robust democratic counterbalance to the BJP, potentially shaping policy debates and the direction of Indian democracy in the years to come.

India-Pakistan Relations: Strategic Realities and Regional Stability

India's relations with Pakistan remain fraught with challenges, characterized by periodic escalations and diplomatic stand-offs. Despite attempts at dialogue, deep-seated security concerns and unresolved territorial disputes, particularly over Kashmir, continue to impede substantial progress towards normalization. Modi's tenure has witnessed significant military modernization and strategic alignments aimed at bolstering India's defensive capabilities in the region, reflecting a more assertive stance in its security policy.

The border regions between India and

Pakistan have seen sporadic incidents of cross-border violence and skirmishes, underscoring the fragile nature of their bilateral relations. These incidents, often involving artillery exchanges and infiltration attempts, highlight the ongoing tensions and mistrust that plague both nations. The presence of nuclear capabilities on both sides adds a layer of complexity and urgency to their diplomatic engagements, making any escalation potentially catastrophic.

Efforts at dialogue, such as peace talks and confidence-building measures, have been intermittently pursued but have often faltered due to political changes, terrorist attacks, and mutual suspicion. High-profile incidents, such as the 2019 Pulwama attack and the subsequent Balakot airstrike, have further strained relations, leading to heightened military alertness on both sides.

Modi's approach to Pakistan has been marked by a blend of hardline rhetoric and occasional diplomatic outreach, aimed at demonstrating India's resolve against terrorism while leaving the door open for future dialogue. However, the prevailing security concerns and lack of trust continue to hinder meaningful progress. The international community often plays a role in mediating and urging both countries to engage in dialogue, but substantial breakthroughs remain elusive.

Conclusion

In conclusion, India's 2024 national elections have decisively shaped the world's largest democracy. Prime Minister Narendra Modi's third term, amidst debates over democratic freedoms, economic resilience, and regional stability, underscores the election's significance. The outcome will not only shape India's domestic governance but also its role in addressing global challenges and regional complexities in the years ahead.

With the eyes of the world on India, these elections have defined the country's path forward, influencing policies on democracy, economy, foreign relations, and national security. As India navigates its post-election phase, the decisions made will resonate far beyond its borders, impacting global geopolitics and the future of South Asia.

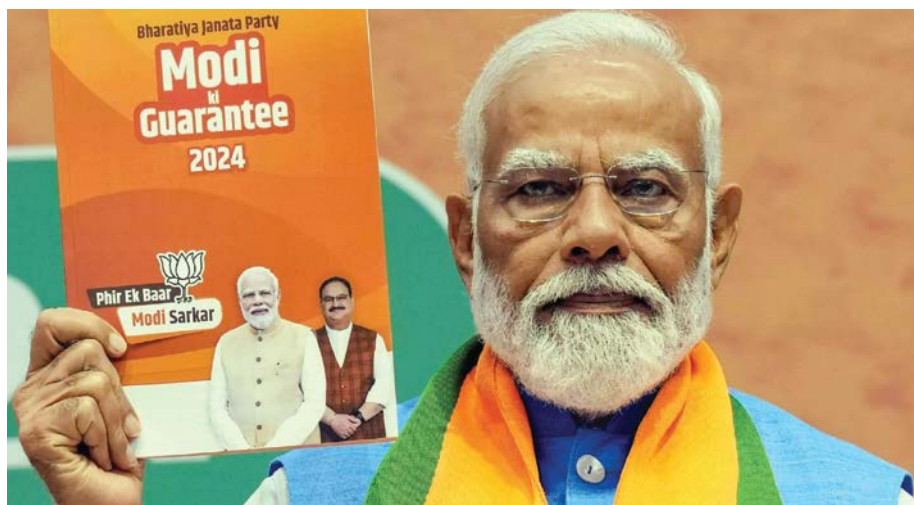
Modi's 'guarantee'

By Aizaz Ahmad Chaudhry

That Modi would win his third term was never in doubt. However, contrary to expectations, he did not achieve the landslide he was hoping for. Why has 'Modi ki guarantee' (a boastful commitment to people's welfare) not delivered the two-thirds majority to which he aspired? Several reasons are being cited: high unemployment rates, rising inflation, and the incumbency factor. The opposition projected Modi as a fascist in the making. His intense anti-Muslim rhetoric scared away not only Muslim voters, whom he called 'ghusbathiyai' or infiltrators, but also liberal Indians attached to India's secular and pluralistic ethos. Losing the seat housing the Ram Mandir in Ayodhya is a case in point.

Yet, with 240 seats, the BJP is the largest party in Lok Sabha, way ahead of the Indian National Congress, which secured 99 seats. With its coalition partners, the BJP is assured of a third consecutive term led by Modi. This has become possible because of several notable achievements, mostly in the economic field. Under his watch, India became the fifth largest economy, compared to the 10th when he took over the reins of power 10 years ago. GDP has grown by 162 per cent, average income by 135pc, and foreign exchange reserves by 113pc to \$620 billion. There has been a surge in internet usage, while digital transactions have grown by 358pc to \$95bn. A series of initiatives were launched to make India a manufacturing hub. Modi's government added 50,000 kilometres of national highways (a 60pc increase since 2014) and 31,000 km of rail networks, with plans to start bullet trains. Thirty million houses have been built for the poor.

With the economy doing well, India was able to spend more for its defence needs. According to the Stockholm-based organisation Sipri, India spent \$83.6bn on its military in 2023, the steepest annual rise since 2009, and a 44pc increase since Modi took over in 2014. It is now the fourth largest military spender in the world. Notably, the bulk of the funds for military procurement (75pc) were allocated to domestically produced equipment, which



has boosted local manufacturing, including that of homebuilt aircraft carrier, Vikrant. He also fast-tracked India's space programme, achieving the landing of Chandrayaan-3 on the moon in August 2023.

What does Modi's third term look like? Ostensibly, his top priority is to place India on course to become a developed country by 2047. He is also likely to continue his efforts to consolidate India's status as a 'Hindu first' nation, but it appears that this may not dilute his focus on the economy. He envisions that by 2030, India should be a \$6.7 trillion economy, surpassing Japan and Germany to become the third-largest global economy. Even though India is the third-largest climate polluter, Modi wishes to make India climate-friendly by 2070. He also plans to move the country towards digital governance.

What does Modi's third term look like?

India's foreign policy under Modi's third term is likely to continue in the same mode: navigating a tough balance in its relations with mutually antagonistic major powers: the US (strategic partner), Russia (enduring friend), and China (competitor); while enhancing special affinities with the Gulf sheikhdoms. He is likely to continue projecting his country's image as a leader of the Global South.

Modi has disconnected his country from Pakistan in every domain. During the election campaign, he was utterly hostile to

Pakistan. The jingoistic rhetoric of Modi's companions was centred around the mindset of 'ghus ke mareng' (infiltrate and kill), which is dangerous for regional peace. Its talk of targeting Azad Kashmir and Gilgit-Baltistan is also empty rhetoric, as any misadventure is likely to receive a befitting response, as in February 2019. India's accusation of Pakistan committing cross-border terrorism is also not borne out by the facts. It is not India that is suffering from terrorism, but Pakistan, where Indian operatives have managed to kill 20 Pakistanis during 2023, similar to what they did in Canada and the US.

It appears that in his third term, Modi might not take any positive initiative towards Pakistan, even though he wants a stable western border to continue his focus on his economic vision and goals. Pakistan's government would be well advised to wait until a positive initiative is taken by the Modi government.

Should he change his mind and approach Pakistan for limited cooperation, Pakistan should respond positively. Meanwhile, it should focus all its energies inwards to achieve a degree of political stability, continuity of economic policies, and human development in pursuit of a clear vision and positive strategy for the country. That is the only way Pakistan can regain its relevance in the eyes of friends and foes alike.

Courtesy Dawn

The Process of Elections in India and the Impact of Latest Results on Asia



By Habib Hanzalah

The Republic of India is the largest democracy of the world which possesses the sensitive institutionalised procedure of election which undeniably impacts not only itself but is also concerned with the destiny of the world's most significant power. 4 billion citizens but also the broader Asian region – and yet, there is a conspicuous lack of attention and coverage of this phenomenon by the social media platform. The recently held 2024 general elections in India have finally come to an end and the results of the election will undoubtedly play a massive role on the future of political, economic, and social growth in Asia.

The Electoral Process in India

The organisation of electoral process in India can be better understood as a colossal exercise in democracy and large-scale planning and politics. Here's a detailed overview of how this process unfolds: Here's a detailed overview of how this process unfolds:

The election calendar in India is set by the

Election Commission of India (ECI), which gives out a timeframe, often several months ahead. The 2024 Lok Sabha elections were successfully conducted in 7 phases spread over 38 days from 11 April to 19 May to take into account the huge base of voters in the country.

It is in this regard that political parties and independent candidates submit their nominations. Out of the 11,333 candidates who had vied for the 543 parliamentary seats in 2024, only 2000 were declared winners.

It is a lively season of carrying out agendas to the public, conducting meetings, and organizational debates, and widely broadcasted media platforms. During the 2024 electoral contested, the total expenditure has been reported to be above ₹60,000 crores (approximately \$8 billion), and out of which sizeable funds were utilized on the portion of digital campaigns and social media.

Voting is done electronically through the Electronic Voting Machines (EVMs) at approximately 1 million and one polling

stations. But, in 2024, the voter turnout was recorded to be approximately 67% with more than 900 million voters through worldwide.

The votes are also tendered electronically, and therefore, are quickly tallied and results are declared. With polling concluding on May 23, the 2024 General election saw victory for the BJP, winning an astounding 303 of the 543 contested seats.

Latest Election Results

Of course, the events unfolding in the political life of India show that after the 2024 elections the BJP headed by Narendra Modi reached another victorious apex. This victory is clear continuation of Modism and continuation of Modi's policies and leadership. Baladia identifies Modi's governance with favouritism among the public.

Implications for Asia

The recent elections held in India provide significant impacts towards changes in the structure and relations in the region as well as political, economic, and security aspects.

That way today prime ministerial candidate of BJP is in a positions with clear majority and therefore political stability in India is not an issue. The outbreak of this conflict also marks the need of stability in the South Asian region whereby any political shifts within a country have an impact on the whole of the region. These factors point to the stability of Indian government and its capability in either preventing conflict situations or act as an intermediary in any potential clashes between the ANSA members.

The current Modi led government has put emphasis on public constructions, digital reforms, and global mergers. Further continuation of these policies could strengthen India's economic relations with the neighbors countries. For instance, exports of products to Indonesia, Malaysia, Philippines and Thailand was \$81. Guaranteeing \$ 33 billion in 2023, it will continue to develop, improving the performance of the regional economies.

Security is a touchy point in Indian politics particularly as it relates to its neighbours Pakistan and China. The main policy of BJP would lead to increasing military budget, for which is already spent \$71

billion. By 2023 country has predicted to reach 1 billion through improved border security measures. These actions will affect regional security, especially within contentious areas such as the Gilgit-Baltistan region of Pakistan's administered Kashmir and the South China Sea.

In his foreign policy, Modi has focused on enhancing relations with global heavy-weight countries and wielding goodwill with SEA countries. Given the steps like the Act East Policy and the Quad, India's role and prominence in regional and global politics will further enhance. Cultural diplomacy involves the utilization of culture as a tool in forging stronger people to people links and relations which would also assist India in raising its profile in the region.

Today India's population enjoys democratic rights for the country is one of the most democratic and culturally diverse nations in Asia. The BJP's strengths in regard to cultural diplomacy can foster more open cultural relations as well as diplomatic collaborations, increase India's standing soft power.

The Indian stance on climate change and development is not a one-policy-fits-all

phenomenon since it has regional implications. Being an emerging hub for renewable energy capacity addition with an installed capacity of 450 GW by 2030, Indian commitment towards Paris Agreement will push regional cooperation over climate change mitigation efforts and successful implementation of sustainable measures across Asia.

Conclusion

People of India trust its electoral phases and for that democratic India is known in every part of the world. Sustaining Narendra Modi's leadership, the new, recent trends in the belief of political structures can potentially shape the Asian political and economic futures. Beyond the domestic sphere, India's elections have far-reaching effects in the regions of trade, economic integration, political security, and diplomatic relationships. Becoming increasingly assertive in claiming its position of a rising super-power, an important un-understanding of the detailed developments in the geographical region of Asia, which encompass India, is expected in the near future in light of the global policies and strategies that India displays.



The change is welcome, if cosmetic



By Jawed Naqvi

The change is cosmetic for the Modi government, for at the end of the day, it's still a Modi government. For the opposition, the elections have brought a new energy and clarity of purpose. Principally, it is the fight for the idea of India as enshrined in the constitution.

The poorest voters feared the 400 seats sought by Narendra Modi were to subvert Dr Ambedkar's statute book of rights and duties, which has so far guarded their core interests. They are the ones who cut the BJP to size.

If we remember Nehru's election symbol, it was a pair of bullocks, indicating the Congress party's rural base. After Manmohan Singh surrendered it to the stock exchange, Rahul Gandhi is putting the focus back on villages, their caste challenges, and the quest for jobs for their unemployed youth swarming the cities. The two ideals stated in the preamble that irk the Hindu right greatly are the promise to defend 'secularism' and 'socialism'. And both have surfaced promptly in the opposition's campaign. It is not uncommon in Delhi's drawing rooms to hear the Congress being cursed for egalitarian appeal but it appears to have been

reinvented with Rahul Gandhi's reinvention of himself.

On the other side, Prime Minister Modi has lost his swagger given the compulsions of yielding to powerful regional satraps pressing their own interests, which takes a toll. Listening to others for the first time would be a test of patience for him, for he has no experience whatsoever of working with a coalition — not in Gujarat, not in Delhi.

Equally importantly, meantime, is his giving up the habit of referring to himself in the third person. Modi's guarantee. Modi's promise. These have been replaced with NDA this, NDA that. He is lampooned more freely since the results downsized him on June 4. A caricature shows West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee measuring his hollowed chest with a tape, and exclaiming: "20 inch!" She, indeed, deflated the BJP in West Bengal by more than the 36 inches she expunged from Modi's boast of having a 56-inch chest.

All this is greatly amusing if the trimming of his wings is what one should be rejoicing over. True also are the visuals about Muslims, where the brakes have been

evidently applied on abusive trolling against them.

Has Modi given up his belief of being a divine avatar, different from fellow humans?

But has Modi given up his belief of being a divine avatar, different from fellow humans? None can say for sure, for Modi is Modi. How could he give up all his ingrained habits and beliefs in one go?

On the first day in office — while curiously delaying the allocation of portfolios to 72 ministers amid rumours of a tussle — he signed off a routine money transfer to the farmers' fund, only to claim to TV cameras that he was a lover of farmers. This gave the Congress a chance to interrupt his reverie. "The headline management and PR campaign of the one-third prime minister has once again started from the first day of his third term," said Jairam Ramesh. Opposition MP Supriya Sule ad-libbed that the need was to wipe off the farmers' debt — something Modi readily does for his corporate associates — not give them a dole.

Beyond the cosmetic veneer is the question: can he solve India's problems of unemploy-

ment and biting inflation? Not within the confines of the neoliberal top-down economy he embraced, in fact, inherited from Manmohan Singh's government. He gave five kilos of rice to the poor with his photo beaming from every bag or gas cylinder given in heavily advertised charity. During the campaign, he was seen asking the people to return the favour — and would they not. Indeed, many women voted for him.

Would that solve the problems of yawning disparity, sub-Saharan human development indices in BJP-ruled states? Very unlikely. When asked about the telling economic disparity, Mr Modi had famously snapped: "Shall I make everyone poor?" If that answer isn't tweaked or edited soon, things would begin to look pretty much as they did.

On the wider landscape, there is the challenge of social harmony. In the early hours of Friday, shortly before Mr Modi was unanimously asked to head the NDA group as a prelude to his third swearing-in, two Muslim men were lynched in BJP-ruled Chhattisgarh.

According to The Hindu, the residents of Uttar Pradesh — Guddu Khan and Chand Miya Khan — were found dead while a third, Saddam Qureshi, sustained injuries in the Arang area of Raipur district. A common relative of Chand and Saddam



said the three were lynched by a mob. He claimed they were waylaid, their vehicle was punctured, and they were thrashed and thrown off a bridge, causing the death of Chand and Guddu and injuries to Saddam. 'Nine to ten persons', some with previous history of cow vigilantism, have been questioned but a case was registered only for culpable homicide, not murder.

In Jammu, on Saturday, the day of the swearing-in, suspected Kashmiri gunmen opened fire on a bus carrying Hindu pilgrims to the Vaishno Devi Temple. The bus fell into a gorge killing nine and injuring several.

How shall we read both the incidents? Is India headed for more of the same under Modi's new term? Or will things change

because the two centrist allies are expected to heal the mistrust sowed between Hindus and Muslims in Kashmir and elsewhere? Are we to expect anything to improve the lot of Manipur where anti-Christian violence erupted again following the elections when the BJP retained power in the state assembly and the Congress won two MPs?

Meanwhile, an NDA ally from Maharashtra refused to take the oath of office, rejecting a junior minister's portfolio. Praful Patel has been a ranking minister in earlier cabinets. There's trouble brewing for Mr Modi ahead of crucial state polls in BJP-ruled Maharashtra and Haryana in October.

Courtesy Dawn



Iranian Snap Presidential...2024

A bland exercise at best!



By Naqi Akbar

The sudden demise of the incumbent President of the Islamic Republic of Iran, late Ayatollah Raeesi in a helicopter crash near the western city of Tabriz threw the Iranian political system to the specter of the snap exercise of the presidential elections one year before the schedule. That exercise was expected in June 2025.

In normal circumstances, as witnessed over many decades the exercise has been a lively practice drawing divergent political trends into the race, involving the electorate as well as the younger population of Iran. If one goes by the data, after the two terms of Syed Ali Khamenei from 1981 to 1989, post-war Iran was managed by another old guard Hashemi Rafsanjani for another two terms from 1989 to 1997.

After the exit of the old guard and upgrading of the former president Khamenei to be the supreme leader, the first-ever free elections in 1997 were swept by the reformist candidate Mohammad Khatami. The reformist President also swept again in 2001, continuing till 2005. Later the conservative Ahmadinejad was returned to power in the second round. His second bid was marred by the controversy of elections

being rigged, an allegation by the reformist-led Green Movement. Though the establishment, including; Khamenei, the IRGC, and the judiciary sided with the president-elect; Ahmadinejad, the establishment in the depth of its heart knew that it had to encourage a corrective action. In 2013, the electoral exercise was independent enough to ensure a reformist President Rouhani returned to power. The reformist government was allowed a free hand by the supreme leader to negotiate JCPOA and bring Iran back into the comity of nations. In its bargain with the IRGC, it allowed the latter to wage a multi-pronged proxy war to save the pro-Iranian Baathist government in Damascus.

It was only after the cancellation of JCPOA by the Trump administration that the reformists fortunes nosedived. In the 2021 elections, the late Raeesi, who was runner up with 47 percent votes in 2017 elections bagged 62 percent votes. In the backdrop of riots against the Islamic regime in 2019, it was generally thought over that if Raeesi is elected, as a conservative, he can correct things in order to bring back the regime its power base. The reception the late president got at his funeral confirmed to an extent

that he was able to develop a rapport with the common man, a rapport last cultivated by another slain president of the republic; Mohammad Ali Rajai, who could only stay at the presidency for barely 25 days.

The untimely exit of the slain president Raeesi from the scene; while created a good memory for him; but in turn exposed the system or Nezam to another test of will and wits. As the presidential race contestants are cleared allowed to run for the race; it looks like an expression of nervousness on part of the system; not to allow anyone from the reformist camp to run for the president. While in the midst of probables; no significant reformist fielded himself; it again was an expression of ill confidence on the system; firstly, that the guardian council will disqualify them and secondly, their electoral exercise might not make difference as the system might not allow the victory in the first place; and even if they return to the presidential palace, there are less chance that they will be able to do what they want to.

In the case of Ali Larijani, who is being silently suspected of being sympathetic to reform camp, his disqualification; a repeat

of 2021 decision, the electoral exercise is giving the expression to the electorate in Iran; that the exercise is just a formality to give the legitimacy to the Nezam in power and there is no real contest or even any chance of turning the tide within the system. likewise, the reformist central bank governor Abdol Nasir Hemati bid for the race being thwarted by the guardian council further reinforces a bland image of the exercise as a whole.

With many advisors and ministers being cleared to run for the president; their qualification gives an impression that they are just around to give the exercise a bit of legitimacy. The election of Baqir Qalibaf, the incumbent speaker of the Majlis seems a foregone possibility.

If seen from the factors present on the surface, it is creating an impression that the Nezam is showing no signs of bending to the will of the people, whether it pertains to cultural policies or economic policies. That impression can cause a lackluster participation in the exercise as a whole. There are ample chances that the lead candidate Qalibaf, might just have a walkover.

Given the international pressure on Iran

over the events in Palestine, the JCPOA shadows, the aspiration and frustration of the man on the street, the system of the government opting to go alone and refusing to take along the people in a big way can be counterproductive to the system and can possibly further isolate the regime/ system or Nezam.

As things seems to develop, it will again be squarely on the whims of the likely winner Qalibaf, how he steers the system towards a more people inclusive narrative. The late Raeesi despite being a conservative stalwart was able identify with the sections of society traditionally the domain of the reformist camp; like the people from the creative arts. Likewise, the Hijab laws were liberalized to an extent that the implementation was lax. If the new president will have the courage to challenge the conservative camp in these tested domains will an interesting development to monitor.

Another area, where Raeesi left his mark, despite difficulties, a very discouraging response from Saudi Arabia, Gulf and Pakistan can be the domain of foreign policy and regional trade. The new president will need to look at the work left

unfinished by the slain president to continue.

Conclusively, the system has been challenged unaware by the turn of event; either triggered or otherwise. The nervous response to the crisis, however creates an impression that the above-mentioned continuation of policy of reconciliation between the different camps might be reversed and the society is led towards greater polarization.

Iranian Nezam had the opportunity to look more inclusive in its response to the crisis. However, the current list creates an impression otherwise. If the electorate shows its interest in the exercise still, it will be a miracle. Cutting down the list of presidential candidates on the eve of every next presidential race speaks of dearth of candidates, whom the system regards 'safe enough' to run for the race. In the long run it is not an encouraging omen. An absence of younger leadership might soon turn the Islamic Republic into a Supreme Soviet, with average age of leadership above 70+, a red flag for the survival of the system going forward.



G7 agrees \$50bn loan for Ukraine from Russian assets

By Jaroslav Lukiv

The G7 has agreed to use frozen Russian assets to raise \$50bn (£39bn) for Ukraine to help it fight invading Russian forces.

US President Joe Biden said it was another reminder to Russia "that we're not backing down", but Moscow has threatened "extremely painful" retaliatory measures.

The money is not expected to arrive until the end of the year but is seen as a longer-term solution to support Ukraine's war effort and economy.

Also at the G7 summit in Italy, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky and Mr Biden signed a 10-year bilateral security deal between Ukraine and the US, hailed by Kyiv as "historic".

The agreement envisages US military and training aid to Ukraine - but it does not commit Washington to send troops to fight for its ally.

Some \$325bn worth of assets were frozen by the G7, alongside the EU, following Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022.

The pot of assets is generating about \$3bn a year in interest.

Under the G7 plan, that \$3bn will be used to pay off the annual interest on the \$50bn loan for the Ukrainians, taken out on the international markets.

Speaking at a joint news conference at the summit's venue in Puglia, southern Italy, President Biden said the \$50bn loan would "put that money to work for Ukraine and send another reminder to [Russian President Vladimir] Putin that we're not backing down".

The US leader stressed that Mr Putin "cannot wait us out, he cannot divide us, and we'll be with Ukraine until they prevail in this war".

President Zelensky thanked his American and other allies for their unwavering support.



And referring to the new security deal, he said: "It's a truly historic day and we have signed the strongest agreement within Ukraine and the US since our independence [in 1991]".

The G7 group of rich nations, Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, the UK and US, have been important financial and military supporters of Ukraine as it battles to contain occupying Russian forces.

Other G7 leaders also hailed the \$50bn loan deal, with UK Prime Minister Rishi Sunak describing it as "game changing".

The \$50bn loan is a sizeable pot of money, when compared with the \$61bn worth of US military aid that was finally agreed in May.

Some of those in Kyiv, who had been pushing for this cash, had wanted the G7 to release the whole frozen fund of \$300bn, not merely the interest it is generating. The European Central Bank had ruled that out.

Unlike the US aid package, which directly translated into more missiles being sent to the front line, this money will likely not arrive until the end of the year, meaning it will have little impact on the current course of the war.

For now, Ukraine says it still urgently needs more weapons - primarily air defence systems to blunt Russia's missile and drone

attacks on its cities and power stations, as well as long awaited F-16 fighter jets, which it hopes will start arriving as early as this summer.

At the G7 summit, Mr Zelensky said the new security agreement included US shipments of those warplanes.

The loan deal is also hugely symbolic for Ukraine. Its aggressor is now being forced to pay, not only to repair the devastation it has wrought - but for Ukraine to defend itself.

One of Mr Zelensky's closest advisers has said that the West's decision to punish Russia in this way, in one sense, marks a turning point in the war.

However, the loan is unlikely to force a Russian U-turn on its war in Ukraine.

Most of the frozen assets of the Central Bank of Russia are being held in Belgium.

Under international law, countries cannot confiscate those assets from Russia and give them to Ukraine.

Several hours before the G7 decision was announced, Russian Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Maria Zakharova warned that there would be "extremely painful" retaliatory measures.

Courtesy BBC

Witnesses tell of 'unimaginable' Gaza shelter air strike

By Yolande Knell

In a classroom-turned-bedroom at a UN school in Nuseirat refugee camp in central Gaza, Palestinian children clamber through rubble and blood-stained mattresses.

Just hours earlier, at least 35 people were killed and many more wounded at the site in an Israeli military strike early in the morning, according to the head of the UN agency for Palestinian refugees, Unrwa.

"I saw pieces of iron flying and everything falling down. What happened to us is unimaginable," said Naim al-Dadah from Gaza City, one of hundreds of displaced people sheltering there.

Israel's military says it carried out a "precision, intelligence-based strike" to target between 20 to 30 Hamas and Islamic Jihad fighters who were using the school as a staging ground to plan and launch attacks.

However, 14 children and nine women were among those killed, the Hamas-run government media office says. Earlier, medics reported similar numbers to a local journalist working with the BBC.

During the war, Israel has repeatedly accused Hamas of hiding its operatives in schools, hospitals, and other buildings, using civilians as human shields – charges the armed group denies.

"All of the red lines have been crossed," said Mr al-Dadah, suggesting that being in a UN institution had given his family no protection. He added: "The world treats us with double standards. Israel has violated all international laws."

Israel has faced growing diplomatic isolation over its conduct of the war, with cases against it before two international courts, but insists it has acted within the laws of armed conflict as it tries to counter what it sees as an existential threat from Hamas.

On a call with journalists, the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) spokesman Lt Col Peter Lerner said that some of the Palestinian armed fighters based in the Nuseirat school had been involved in the 7 October attacks, which killed about 1,200 people in southern Israel and triggered the war in Gaza. No evidence was immediately given.

Col Lerner suggested that Hamas and Islamic Jihad operatives would have "felt relatively safe" at the building, because it belonged to the UN. The IDF published a photo of the school with classrooms on the first and second floors marked to show the locations it said were targeted by warplanes.

To an unusual extent in this case, the Israeli military has stressed that it took steps to reduce the risk of harming civilians. "We actually called off the strike twice," Lt Col Lerner said.

The overnight attack was the latest case of mass casualties among Palestinians trying to find safety as Israel expands its offensives in the Gaza Strip.



Some of those staying at the UN school said that they came from northern Gaza – but had heeded Israeli military evacuation orders and headed south in the early stages of the war – only to be displaced in the past month from Rafah, on the Egyptian border.

This week, the IDF announced a new ground and air assault in central Gaza, targeting what it said were Hamas fighters who had regrouped there. Its forces have repeatedly returned to parts of the Palestinian territory which they previously withdrew from.

In a courtyard of the UN school, more than 20 corpses were lined up in body bags and blankets. A journalist working with the BBC filmed several women cradling the heads and hands of their dead sons. "It was a very harsh night," says Ibrahim Lulu, a teenager who said his cousin, Mohammed was killed.

"My brothers, friends and I were sitting together when suddenly there was an explosion. The mattress protected me because I was sitting against the wall. All the bodies were dismembered and torn."

Residents said the part of the school targeted was being used as a shelter for men and boys, with women and girls sleeping in a separate section. Part of the school had previously been targeted by an Israeli strike in mid-May with the IDF then saying it was being used as a "Hamas war room".

Overnight, casualties were rushed from Nuseirat to the al-Aqsa Martyrs' Hospital in nearby Deir al-Balah. In recent days it has been struggling to treat hundreds of wounded people following intense Israeli bombardment and shelling in the surrounded area.

The hospital had earlier reported an electrical generator failure saying that this would make it harder to treat patients.

On Wednesday, Medics from Doctors Without Borders (MSF) which is supporting the hospital described chaotic scenes there. It said that in the previous 24 hours, at least 70 dead people had been brought in, and more than 300 wounded, mostly women and children.

Courtesy BBC

Millions start Hajj in shadow of Israel's war on Gaza

Rituals expected to draw more than two million pilgrims this year, praying for peace in Gaza, Yemen and Sudan



More than 1.5 million Muslim pilgrims have gathered in Saudi Arabia's Mecca for the start of Hajj, taking place this year against the harrowing backdrop of Israel's continued onslaught on the Gaza Strip.

The annual pilgrimage began on Friday with crowds of robed worshippers circling the Kaaba, the black cubic structure at Mecca's Grand Mosque, many expressing sadness eight months into Israel's war on Gaza.

"Our brothers are dying, and we can see it with our own eyes," said 75-year-old Zahra Benizahra from Morocco.

Palestinians in Gaza were not able to travel to Mecca this year because of the closure of the Rafah crossing in May when Israel extended its ground offensive into the strip's southern city of Rafah on the border with Egypt.

"We were deprived of Hajj because of the closure of the crossing and because of the

war and destruction," Amna Abu Mutlaq, 75, told Al Jazeera. "We are unable to leave and every time we try to leave, they tell us that the crossing is closed and we cannot leave. They deprived us of everything."

Palestinian authorities said 4,200 people from the occupied West Bank had arrived in Mecca for the pilgrimage. One thousand more pilgrims, from the families of Palestinians killed or wounded in the war, who were already outside Gaza before Rafah was closed, were invited by King Salman of Saudi Arabia.

However, the Gulf kingdom's minister in charge of religious pilgrimages, Tawfiq al-Rabiah, warned last week that "no political activity" would be tolerated during the event.

This year's Hajj has also brought Syrian pilgrims to Mecca on direct flights from Damascus for the first time in more than a decade, part of an ongoing thaw in relations between Saudi Arabia and conflict-stricken Syria.

Syrians in rebel-held areas used to cross the border into neighbouring Turkey in their exhausting trip to Mecca for Hajj.

Uniting Muslims

Saudi authorities expect the number of pilgrims attending Hajj to exceed two million this year.

One of the world's largest religious gatherings, it involves a series of rituals in Mecca and its surroundings in western Saudi Arabia that take several days to complete.

Reporting from in front of the Great Mosque of Mecca, Al Jazeera's Hashem Ahelbarra said: "We're expecting pilgrims ... to perform the Friday prayers, to go to the plains of Mina to spend the night, and then tomorrow is going to be the very highlight of the Hajj with the day that they will spend in prayers, contemplation and incantations at the valley of Arafat.

"This is an extremely complex operation ... The Saudis are deploying massive person-

nel throughout this journey to ensure smooth traffic and safety for all the pilgrims,” he said.

One of the five pillars of Islam, Hajj must be performed at least once by all Muslims who have the means to do so.

Some have waited for years for the chance to make the trip, with permits allocated by Saudi authorities on a quota basis for each country.

Nonaartina Hajipaoli, 50, told the AFP news agency she felt privileged to be among the 1,000 pilgrims who came this year from Brunei in Southeast Asia.

“I’m speechless, I can’t describe what I feel,” she said.

The pilgrims will first perform the tawaf – circling seven times around the Kaaba.

They will then head towards Mina, a valley surrounded by craggy mountains several kilometres outside Mecca, where they will spend the night in air-conditioned tents.

The climax will come on Saturday with daylong prayers on Mount Arafat, where the Prophet Muhammad delivered his final sermon.

The pilgrimage is a moving spiritual experience for pilgrims who believe it absolves sins and brings them closer to God, while uniting the world’s more than two billion Muslims.



It is also a chance to pray for peace in many conflict-stricken Arab and Muslim countries, including Yemen and Sudan, where more than a year of war between rival generals has created the world’s largest displacement crisis.

Sweltering heat

As has been the case for several years, the gathering is taking place during the sweltering Saudi summer, with officials predicting average highs of 44 degrees Celsius (111 Fahrenheit).

Mohammed al-Abdulali, spokesman for the Saudi Ministry of Health, told the AFP news agency this week there were more than 10,000 documented cases of

heat-related illnesses last year, 10 percent of which were heat stroke.

Mitigation measures this year include misting systems and heat-reflective road coverings.

“The authorities have been asking pilgrims to take precautionary measures amid high temperatures expected throughout the Hajj,” said Al Jazeera’s Ahelbarra.

A text message sent to pilgrims on Thursday instructed them to “drink water regularly, more than 2 litres daily” and to “always carry an umbrella”, warning that temperatures could climb to 48C (118F).

Courtesy www.aljazeera.com



Women's rights and gender equality



By Ayesha Shaeban

Gender equality

Gender equality refers to the principle of equal rights, opportunities, and treatment for all genders, regardless of their identity or expression. It encompasses the belief that individuals should not be discriminated against or disadvantaged based on their gender. Gender equality seeks to create a society where everyone has the freedom to pursue their goals, aspirations, and interests without being limited by societal norms or expectations associated with their gender.

At its core, gender equality promotes fairness and justice by challenging traditional gender roles and stereotypes that often lead to discrimination and inequality. It recognizes that both men and women, as well as individuals of all gender identities, should have access to the same opportunities in areas such as education, employment, healthcare, politics, and decision-making processes.

Achieving gender equality requires addressing systemic barriers and biases that perpetuate inequality. This includes challenging harmful cultural practices, norms, and attitudes that reinforce gender-based discrimination

and violence. It also involves implementing policies and legislation that promote equal rights and opportunities for all genders, as well as providing support services and resources to those who have been marginalized or disadvantaged.

Furthermore, gender equality recognizes the intersectionality of different forms of discrimination, such as those based on race, ethnicity, class, sexual orientation, disability, and other factors. It acknowledges that individuals may experience multiple forms of oppression simultaneously and advocates for an inclusive approach that addresses these intersecting inequalities.

Importance of Gender Equality

Gender equality is crucial for several reasons, encompassing social, economic, and moral aspects:

1. Human Rights: Gender equality is a fundamental human right enshrined in international agreements such as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Everyone should have equal rights and opportunities regardless of

their gender identity or expression.

2. Social Justice: Gender equality promotes fairness and social justice by challenging discrimination, biases, and stereotypes based on gender. It fosters inclusive societies where everyone can participate fully and contribute to their communities without facing barriers.

3. Economic Development: Gender equality is essential for economic growth and prosperity. When women and marginalized genders have equal access to education, employment, and resources, it enhances productivity and innovation. Closing gender gaps in labor force participation and wages can boost GDP and reduce poverty.

4. Health and Well-being: Gender equality is linked to better health outcomes and well-being for individuals and communities. It enables access to healthcare services, reproductive rights, and information, leading to improved maternal and child health, lower rates of gender-based violence, and better mental health outcomes.

5. Peace and Security: Gender equality contributes to peacebuilding and conflict resolution efforts. Inclusive societies with equal representation of

women and men in decision-making processes are more stable and resilient. Addressing gender inequalities can prevent violence and promote social cohesion.

6. Education: Gender equality in education is essential for ensuring equal opportunities for future generations. When girls and boys have equal access to quality education, it empowers them to reach their full potential, break the cycle of poverty, and contribute to sustainable development.

7. Family and Community Dynamics: Gender equality promotes healthier family and community dynamics by challenging traditional gender roles and stereotypes. It encourages shared responsibilities in caregiving, household chores, and decision-making, leading to more equitable relationships and happier families.

8. Sustainable Development: Gender equality is a key driver of sustainable development. It is included as one of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) set by the United Nations, recognizing its importance in achieving other development objectives such as ending poverty, promoting inclusive societies, and protecting the environment.

In conclusion, gender equality is not only a moral imperative but also essential for achieving social progress, economic development, and sustainable peace. It requires concerted efforts from governments, civil society, the private sector, and individuals to address systemic inequalities and create a more just and equitable world for all genders.

Promoting gender equality requires a comprehensive approach that encompasses legal, policy, cultural, and behavioral changes. It involves efforts to close gender gaps in education, employment, healthcare, and political participation. It also entails challenging gender norms and stereotypes that limit individuals' choices and opportunities based on traditional roles and expectations associated with their gender. Gender equality is not just a women's issue but a fundamental human rights issue that benefits everyone. It fosters more inclusive, diverse, and equitable societies where all individuals can live free from discrimination and violence. Achieving gender equality requires collective action

and commitment from governments, civil society, the private sector, and individuals at all levels of society.

What impact and transformation does gender equality bring about?

Gender equality plays a significant role in bringing about transformative change at individual, societal, and global levels:

Empowerment of Individuals: Gender equality empowers individuals by providing them with equal rights, opportunities, and choices regardless of their gender identity. This empowerment enables individuals to fulfill their potential, pursue their aspirations, and contribute actively to society.



Social Change: Gender equality challenges traditional gender norms, stereotypes, and roles that limit opportunities and perpetuate discrimination. By promoting inclusivity and diversity, it fosters more open-minded and accepting societies where everyone is valued for their contributions regardless of gender.

Economic Growth and Development: Gender equality is closely linked to economic growth and development. When women and marginalized genders have equal access to education, employment, and economic resources, it boosts productivity, innovation, and entrepreneurship, leading to more prosperous and sustainable societies.

Health and Well-being: Gender equality improves health outcomes and well-being for individuals and communities. It enables access to healthcare services, reproductive rights, and information, leading to better maternal and child health, reduced rates of gender-based violence, and improved mental health outcomes.

Political Participation and Decision-making: Gender equality increases political participation and representation of women and marginalized genders in decision-making processes. This leads to more inclusive and effective governance, with policies and laws that reflect the needs and priorities of diverse populations.

Education and Knowledge Sharing: Gender equality promotes equal access to education and knowledge-sharing opportunities for all genders. It empowers

individuals with the skills, information, and resources needed to address social, economic, and environmental challenges and contribute to sustainable development.

Peacebuilding and Conflict Resolution: Gender equality contributes to peacebuilding and conflict resolution efforts by addressing root causes of conflict and promoting social cohesion. Inclusive societies with equal representation of women and men in peace processes are more stable and resilient, leading to sustainable peace and security.

Cultural and Behavioral Change: Gender equality drives cultural and behavioral change by challenging harmful practices

and attitudes that perpetuate discrimination and violence. It promotes respectful and equitable relationships, fosters empathy and understanding, and creates a more just and compassionate world for future generations.

Overall, gender equality is a catalyst for positive change, driving progress towards a more inclusive, equitable, and sustainable future for all. It requires collective action and commitment from individuals, communities, governments, and organizations to dismantle barriers, challenge stereotypes, and create a world where everyone can thrive regardless of gender.

pivotal component in the pursuit of gender equality. It encompasses enhancing a woman's self-esteem, decision-making autonomy, access to resources and opportunities, control over her own life both within and beyond the household, and capacity to drive change. However, gender equality issues extend beyond women alone; they revolve around the interactions between men and women in society. Therefore, the actions and attitudes of men and boys are indispensable in the journey towards achieving gender equality.

Women's rights refer to the entitlements

Political Rights: Political rights guarantee women's participation and representation in political processes and decision-making bodies. This involves ensuring equal voting rights, the right to stand for election, and representation in parliament, government, and other leadership positions. Efforts to promote women's political empowerment include affirmative action measures, gender quotas, and initiatives to eliminate barriers to participation.

Social Rights: Social rights encompass access to education, healthcare, and social services on equal terms with men. This includes initiatives to improve girls' access to education, address maternal and child health issues, and promote gender-sensitive healthcare services. Social rights also involve challenging harmful cultural practices and norms that perpetuate gender inequality and discrimination.

Economic Rights: Economic rights entail equal opportunities for women in the workforce, including equal pay for equal work, access to employment, and economic resources. This involves addressing gender gaps in employment, entrepreneurship, and leadership positions, as well as promoting policies to support work-life balance, parental leave, and affordable childcare. Economic rights also include efforts to combat workplace discrimination and harassment.

Reproductive Rights: Reproductive rights encompass the right of women to make informed decisions about their reproductive health and have access to reproductive healthcare services, including family planning, contraception, and safe abortion. This involves ensuring access to comprehensive sexual and reproductive health education and services, as well as combating stigma and discrimination related to reproductive choices.

Human Rights: Women's rights are human rights, as affirmed by international human rights instruments such as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW). This means that women are entitled to the full range of human rights and freedoms without discrimination based on gender.



Women's rights

Gender equality, a fundamental human right, remains elusive as disparities persist in access to opportunities and decision-making power between women and men globally. Women face fewer economic participation prospects, limited access to education, heightened health and safety risks, and inadequate political representation compared to men.

Ensuring women's rights and providing them with opportunities to realize their full potential is not only crucial for achieving gender equality but also for fulfilling numerous international development objectives. Empowered women and girls contribute significantly to the well-being and productivity of their families, communities, and nations, leading to positive ripple effects that benefit society as a whole.

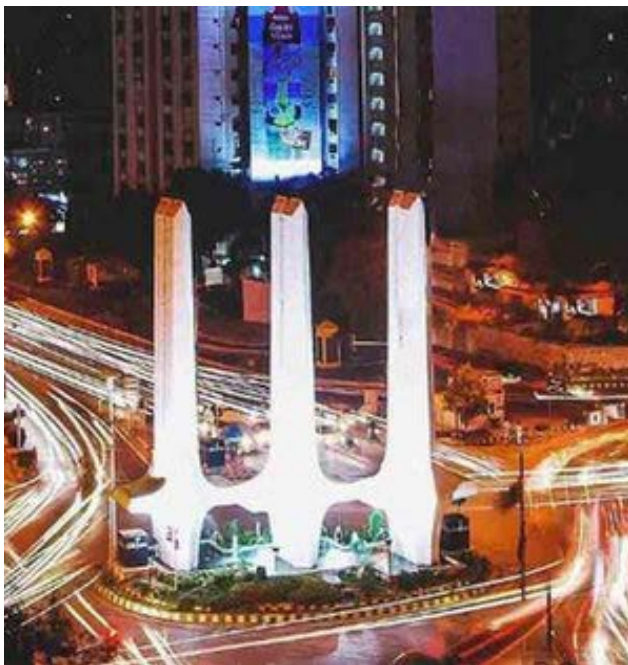
Women's empowerment stands as a

and freedoms that women should enjoy on equal terms with men in all aspects of life, including legal, political, social, economic, and cultural spheres. These rights encompass the fundamental principle of gender equality and aim to address historical and systemic discrimination and inequality faced by women.

Elaborating on women's rights involves examining various dimensions

Legal Rights: Legal rights ensure that women have equal protection under the law and are not discriminated against based on their gender. This includes rights related to marriage, divorce, inheritance, property ownership, and access to justice. Legal frameworks should prohibit practices such as child marriage, forced marriage, and gender-based violence.

From 'City of Lights' to 'City of Fear' Karachi's Battle with Street Crime



By Hammad Hassan

Karachi, Pakistan's vibrant financial hub, is struggling with an unrelenting surge in street crime that eclipses the sporadic terrorist attacks making headlines. Residents are confronted with a harsh reality, as fatal muggings become commonplace and suspected criminals are often lynched by furious mobs.

Once celebrated as the "City of Lights" in the 1960s and 1970s for its vibrant nightlife, Karachi's reputation has since been marred by decades of ethnic and political conflict. By 2014, it had earned the dubious distinction of being the world's sixth-most dangerous city.

Significant security operations, including the 2013 Karachi Operation, spearheaded by the Pakistan Army and Sindh Rangers, initially brought some stability. These efforts, targeting criminal networks involved in killings, kidnappings, terrorism, and extortion, resulted in a notable decline in violence and improved the city's safety, critical for a metropolis contributing about a quarter of Pakistan's GDP.

However, this relative peace has been short-lived. Over the past three years, more than 250 citizens have been killed and over 1,000 injured in street crimes. In just the first few months of 2024, police records indicate 33 people were fatally shot during robberies, though independent sources suggest the toll is over 50.

Karachi's ranking on the Economist Intelligence Unit's Global Liveability Index reflects its dire situation, placing 169th out of 173 cities in 2023. The city scored a dismal 20 in stability, unchanged from the previous year, contributing to its overall score of 42.5 out of 100—far behind top-ranked Vienna's 98.4.

Economic hardships, including soaring inflation and unemployment, are fueling this rise in violent crime. The Human Rights Commission of Pakistan has expressed alarm, urging immediate action to address the underlying economic issues exacerbating the crisis.

High-level directives from President Asif Ali Zardari and orders from the Sindh High Court's Chief Justice Aqeel Ahmed Abbasi for crackdowns on criminals have yet to restore a sense of safety. The city's residents remain on edge.

A journalist recounts her harrowing experiences of being mugged as a child, memories that still haunt her. "Seeing a motorcyclist approach makes you jumpy and scared," she said the theft of her phone means a loss far beyond its monetary value—it's a threat to her digital privacy and safety.

The constant threat of street crime forces residents to constantly calculate their risks. Many, like people believe the police are more focused on extracting bribes than combating crime. Fahad witnessed a murder over a feud just a year ago, a stark reminder of the daily dangers.

Shop owners are adjusting their routines to mitigate risks. many are now closing their store earlier, sacrificing business to ensure safety.

Despite concerted efforts to improve security, Karachi's battle with street crime continues. This vibrant city, home to countless migrants and the nation's economic heart, desperately needs sustained and effective measures to protect its citizens and restore its once-legendary sense of safety.

Pakistan Cricket Team Performance in T20 World Cup 2024 in USA

By Romana Afsheen

Pakistan's campaign in the ICC Men's T20 World Cup 2024 has been tumultuous, marked by disappointing performances and internal controversies. As the team grapples with setbacks on the field and off, including calls for player and management changes, the tournament has become a pivotal moment for Pakistan cricket. Amidst scrutiny and criticism, the national team led by Babar Azam faces crucial matches ahead that could determine their future in the competition and shape the direction of Pakistani cricket in the years to come.

Pakistan's poor performance in the ongoing T20 World Cup 2024 is expected to lead to significant changes, according to sources speaking to Geo News. Several players, including Mohammad Amir, Imad Wasim, Iftikhar Ahmed, Azam Khan, and Usman Khan, may be dropped from the team. There are also indications that senior manager and selection committee member Wahab Riaz could lose his position amidst suggestions of changes in the board's selection committee.

Sources revealed that three players in the Pakistan team allegedly blackmailed PCB officials, orchestrated by their manager who represents them. This group reportedly pressured the board into securing higher remuneration in the players' central contracts.

Decisions on changes within the national side will be informed by reports from captain Babar Azam, head coach Gary Kirsten, Senior Manager Riaz, and Assistant Coach Azhar Mahmood. Additionally, the findings of former director Mohammad Hafeez, who previously criticized players for prioritizing financial gains over performance, will also be considered.

Following Pakistan's disappointing performance in the T20 World Cup



and preceding series, players and selection committee members are likely to be "sent home," according to the sources.

These developments come after PCB Chairman Mohsin Naqvi expressed disappointment in the team's loss against India, emphasizing the need for a "major surgery" within the setup.

Naqvi underscored his awareness of the team's issues and reasons for their poor performance, stressing the national team's obligation to perform at a higher level. He asserted that such lackluster displays were unacceptable to the nation and vowed significant changes ahead.

Currently, Pakistan, led by Babar Azam, faces an uphill task in the tournament, needing victories against Canada and Ireland to have a chance at advancing to the Super Eight stage.

In the match against USA, Pakistan's experienced top order was effectively

neutralized, stifling their big hitters and resulting in a tied score of 159-all through measured batting. This deadlock forced a Super Over, where USA displayed composure akin to seasoned veterans while Pakistan struggled under pressure.

Notably, Pakistan's Mohammad Amir, the most experienced bowler, bowled three wides in the Super Over, allowing USA to capitalize on extras. Mohammad Rizwan's overthrow added another run, enabling USA to score 18 runs.

Saurabh Netravalkar, outstanding throughout, had earlier taken 2 wickets for 18 runs in his four overs and continued his brilliance in the Super Over, conceding only one boundary. Despite a late effort by Shadab Khan, who hit a boundary off the penultimate delivery and needed a six off the last ball to force another Super Over, he managed only a single to deep point, sealing USA's victory.

USA celebrated defeating a formidable opponent, leaving Pakistan with a significant setback before their crucial match against India. Throughout the match, USA maintained control for much of the duration, highlighting their dominance.

Netravalkar and Nosthush Kenjige were pivotal with five wickets between them, restricting Pakistan to a challenging total early on. Monank Patel's pivotal 50 off 38 balls anchored USA's chase, showcasing their measured approach and securing a memorable win on the global stage.

Despite Pakistan's late efforts to pull things back, including tight bowling in the death overs, USA's resilience and execution in critical moments ultimately decided the match, marking a historic upset in the T20 World Cup 2024.

USA's impressive victory over Pakistan not only underscored their rise on the global stage but also magnified Pakistan's cricketing woes, intensifying calls for a major overhaul in the team. The defeat, which culminated in a dramatic Super Over loss, highlighted Pakistan's struggle to maintain composure under pressure and exposed weaknesses in both bowling and fielding, as seen with Mohammad Amir's costly wides and other lapses.

However, in a thrilling encounter at Nassau County International Cricket Stadium in New York, the Indian men's cricket team orchestrated a remarkable comeback to secure a six-run victory over their arch-rivals in the ICC Men's T20 World Cup 2024 Group A match.

Opting to bat first, India faced early setbacks and were bundled out for a modest 119 in 19 overs. Rishabh Pant top-scored with 42 off 31 deliveries amidst a challenging bowling spell from Pakistan, led by Naseem Shah and Haris Rauf, who claimed three wickets each.

Chasing a relatively low target, Pakistan appeared poised for victory until India's bowlers staged a dramatic turnaround in the latter half of the innings. Their disciplined bowling restricted Pakistan to 113, marking India's lowest defended total in a T20I match.

India's innings began with rain interruptions and early dismissals of key batsmen Rohit Sharma and Virat Kohli, leaving them struggling at 19/2. Despite the challenging conditions, Rishabh Pant and Axar Patel (20 off 18) forged a crucial partnership to stabilize the innings before Pakistan's bowlers struck back.

However, Pakistan faltered in their chase despite a steady start from Usman Khan and Mohammad Rizwan. Jasprit Bumrah's pivotal early breakthroughs and a tight bowling performance in the death overs sealed the victory for India. Bumrah, with figures of 3/14, was instrumental in dismantling Pakistan's middle order and securing a crucial win.

With this victory, India climbed to the top of Group A with six points from three matches, while Pakistan faced their second consecutive defeat in the tournament.

Next, the Indian team faced the United States in their upcoming Group A fixture at the same venue, aiming to continue their winning momentum in the ICC Men's T20 World Cup 2024.

India secured a seven-wicket victory over the United States on Wednesday, securing their qualification for the second round of the T20 World Cup 2024. This win has crucial implications, as it keeps Pakistan's hopes alive in the tournament.

As per the current standings, India leads Group A with six points from three matches, followed by the USA with four points in second place. Pakistan occupies the third spot with two points, tied with Canada, while Ireland is at the bottom without any points.

Pakistan recently earned their first victory of the tournament against Canada, which was crucial for their survival. Their pathway to advancing further hinges on the USA losing their upcoming match against Ireland. Additionally, Pakistan needs India to defeat Canada on June 15 to enhance their chances of progressing.

However, any point gained by the USA in their remaining matches would end Pakistan's journey in the World Cup's initial stage. Even a single rain-affected

match could jeopardize Pakistan's prospects, as the USA only needs one more point to secure advancement.

Indian captain Rohit Sharma expressed relief at reaching the Super Eight stage, acknowledging the challenges faced during the match against the USA. Suryakumar Yadav played a pivotal role with an unbeaten half-century, supported by Arshdeep Singh's career-best figures of 4-9.

Pakistan's qualification hopes in the ICC T20 World Cup 2024 were hanging by a thread after consecutive losses to the USA and arch-rivals India. Their chances seemed bleak, but a spirited performance against Canada revived their prospects for advancing to the Super 8 stage. Adding to their lifeline, India's comprehensive 7-wicket victory over the USA has further bolstered Pakistan's chances in the tournament.

Looking ahead, Pakistan faces a crucial must-win encounter against Ireland on Sunday, June 16, amidst mounting criticism over their underwhelming performance in the tournament.

Gary Kirsten, Pakistan's new white-ball coach, emphasized the team's need for evolution to meet international standards. Following Pakistan's defeat to India, Kirsten stressed the importance of continuous growth and adaptation to the evolving demands of international cricket, warning that stagnation could lead to setbacks on the global stage.

As Pakistan navigates the challenges of the ICC Men's T20 World Cup 2024, the team finds itself at a crossroads, grappling with both on-field performance issues and internal management concerns. With significant decisions looming regarding player selections and team management, Pakistan faces a critical juncture in its cricketing journey. The upcoming matches against Ireland and the unfolding results in Group A will determine not only their fate in this tournament but also set the course for future reforms and rejuvenation within Pakistani cricket. Amidst mounting pressures and expectations, the team's resilience and ability to adapt will be crucial as they strive to reclaim their competitive edge on the international stage.

Making sense of Pakistan's self-destruction at T20 World Cup



By Ahsan Iftikhar Nagi

The situation was that Pakistan needed 40 off 36 with seven wickets in hand. The runs required should never have been more than the number of balls remaining but that's where the match stood. Mohammad Rizwan had been scratchy but the fact that he was still there gave assurance to Pakistan's dressing room. That's when Rohit Sharma threw the ball to Jasprit Bumrah, who jogged in, got into his stride, whipped the ball into Rizwan's stumps and ran off in celebration.

Rizwan dropped on his back knee, realising that the ball was a bit fuller to execute his trademark pick-up shot. He trudged back to the pavilion. When he had entered the field earlier, Pakistan had to chase 120 — exactly run-a-ball. When he left, the required run rate had shot up to seven and a half with the ball old and soft and Bumrah at the peak of his powers.

Pakistan needed luck to go into their favour. Much had been said and written about the dodgy drop-in pitches of the New York stadium in the lead-up to this contest.

Pakistan, before their arrival to play India, had never been at the venue. But, they knew, and the billions of cricket followers around the world knew, that they had the resources to make use of those conditions.

With an early morning start and rain expected, Pakistan needed some good fortune and they got it, when the coin, at the toss, fell how Babar Azam wanted it to. Aptly, under dark grey skies, he elected to bowl. After all, he had four fearsome fast bowlers to wreak havoc on a surface that offered exaggerated bounce, pace, and movement.

That this square had historically produced uneven bounce was another advantage for Pakistan, whose pacers could bowl fast from high release points.

The Pakistan fast bowlers came out strong and tore apart India's top order. Following a gutsy innings from Risbah Pant and a solid support act from Axar Patel, Pakistan also ran through India's middle and lower orders. In fact, India were bowled out with

an entire over to spare. The four pacers shared nine wickets between them. Job done, right? There is no way they can lose from here?

Well ...

By the time Indian innings had finished, the New York stadium and its pitch had basked under the sun for almost an hour — good enough to dry out the moisture and tilt the balance in the favour of batters.

Pakistan had a perfect start. Rizwan drove Arshdeep Singh through the covers and ran three. Babar played one through the covers for three more. Both batters had timed the ball to perfection — exactly what they and Pakistan needed.

What should have followed was Pakistan's utter domination of the Indian bowlers. After all, it was the world's best T20I opening pair that had got that start.

However, the Indian pacers dragged their lengths back from the next over and it resulted in a few plays and misses and some

edges. That's when panic crept in.

After starting with nine off the first six balls, RizBar accumulated only 12 off the next 18. Babar fell to Bumrah, trying to dab one to the third man despite a slip in place, and Pakistan's powerplay ended at 35 for one.

Powerplays present a unique opportunity for the batting sides to gather heaps of runs as that is when the conditions are most favourable for run scoring.

Australia defeated England on Saturday after scoring the first 200-plus score of the tournament. That they were able to do so on a tacky Kennington Oval pitch in Barbados that stayed low and spun from the first over was because of a belligerent opening stand between David Warner — who, by the way, was bowled out on the one that kept low — and Travis Head. Out of the 201 that they ended up posting, 72 had been scored in the powerplay.

On Sunday, despite batting in adverse conditions and losing both the openers, India, finished the powerplay 15 runs better than Pakistan, probably having contemplated the tricks the older ball would do on this surface. And, the older ball did do it tricks when India collapsed from 89 for three to 119 all out.

But Pakistan, over the years, have had a template that they stubbornly follow: start cautious in powerplay, build in the middle overs, and leave the slugfest for the death overs. There were promises to let go of it when they suffered a humiliating loss to Ireland on their way to the US. They had even separated RizBar in search of flair at the top.

When the pair came together for the first time this year, just one match out of the T20 World Cup, against England at The Oval, Pakistan put themselves on course towards a recline towards the template.

Such is the insistence on preferring conservative, risk-averse batting that despite the knowledge and evidence of how crucial run accumulation in the powerplay was, Pakistan were comfortable to leave the runs for the last phase when the conditions for batting would have become quite adverse.

Earlier, Pant had laid a perfect template with an audacious 42 off 31. Despite false

shots, the left-handed batter continued to attack to gather as many runs when the ball was hard.

With 40 needed off 35 now and an experienced, albeit underperforming, middle order, comprising Imad Wasim, Shadab Khan, and Iftikhar Ahmed, intact, one would have expected Pakistan to pull it off. After all, a contemporary T20 batter is innovative and courageous. He has a scoring shot for each possible ball.

But Pakistan seemed to have time travelled into the late 20th century as the middle order relinquished ramps, scoops, and other modern day shots. It was not until Naseem Shah's scoop off Arshdeep Singh on the fourth ball of the last over that Pakistan improvised.



Imad, brought into this side for his T20 prowess for only this World Cup, seemed fixated on square cuts. He would bring his bat late against Patel and Indian pacers — perhaps, because he was still recovering from the side strain.

Meanwhile, Iftikhar Ahmed failed to capitalise on Bumrah's hit-me full tosses. And Shadab, in a tribute to Pakistan's long-standing short ball woes, was undone by a Hardik Pandya bouncer. The three combining for mere 24 off 39.

It has been a chaotic year for Pakistan cricket. The changes in the board had translated into changes in the team and leadership. There had been experiments and excessive player rotations with the

'single point agenda of bringing the trophy home' as the incumbent chairman would say.

But those experiments and rotations have resulted in lack of role clarity and vision for the players. Teams around the world make use of the bilateral series/fixtures closer to the World Cup to dry run the already laid plans and pre-empt the challenges they might face.

Take Ireland, who Pakistan are scheduled to face in their last group match. When Pakistan were playing them last month, they rested captain Paul Stirling to provide Lorcan Tucker, their designated stand-in captain, an opportunity to put his leadership skills to test, in case he is required to fill in Stirling's shoes in the World Cup.

Pakistan, on the other hand, despite stating their ambitions of targeting high scores, when batting first, opted to chase in that match. They would do the same again in England.

Visualisation is one of the stronger preparation methods. It provides clarity of thought of how to react in what situations that a player or team may encounter during a match. When India prepared for the inaugural edition of the T20 World Cup, their bowling coach Venkatesh Prasad did away with the friendly football warm-up games before training sessions after reading the tournament's playing conditions. When Bowl Out used to be the tie-breaker, he introduced batters versus bowlers Bowl Out competitions as warm-up drills.

When the moment arrived at the biggest stage, India hit thrice. Pakistan did not hit even once.

Pakistan's coaching staff has been put together haphazardly over the last few months. Their head coach Gary Kirsten only joined the team two weeks out of the T20 World Cup. The fielding coach and mental conditioning coaches joined the team in England, and Azhar Mahmood, the all-format assistant coach, began his work in April.

These coaches could not have tinkered much in the lead up to this tournament. There simply was not enough time to cover all the bases and it showed when Pakistan came out to chase 19 in the Super Over against USA.

It would be expected of a team, playing a T20 World Cup, to have their Super Over batters and bowler designated. But, Pakistan were all over the place when they had to play one against USA. They put Iftikhar Ahmed, a right-hander, on strike against a left-arm fast bowler, despite left-handed Fakhar Zaman, who, by the way, is also one of the best hitters in the team, at the non-striker's end. Fakhar would not face a single ball and Pakistan

would lose the Super Over by seven runs.

Pakistan had never been to Nassau County International Cricket Stadium before. Their first-ever visit to the stadium was when they arrived to play India. Their first exposure to the drop-in pitches was less than 24 hours before the match when they practised at the nearby training facility.

In tournaments as big as a World Cup, competitive advantage can play a huge role in the outcomes. Boards open coffers for their teams so they can acclimatise to gain that competitive advantage. But, the Pakistan Cricket Board did none of that.

As is the practice, during the planning stages of the World Cup, the ICC and home board(s) share tentative itineraries with the participating sides well in advance for deliberations. The itineraries are thoroughly debated by the boards of the participating teams.

The schedule for this T20 World Cup was announced on January 5 and when these deliberations had to take place, the then administration — a rather ad-hoc management committee — was busy in either firefighting self-inflicted PR disasters or finding ways to circumvent the board's

constitution to have an unqualified person elected as the chairperson. Well aware that that committee would have ran its course by the time this tournament would begin, perhaps, it never came on the agenda.

Thus, Pakistan prepared for a tournament, expected to be played on tricky, low-scoring surfaces, on flat, high scoring pitches in Ireland and England. For the biggest and most challenging contest of the year, they practiced on the drop-in wickets only once in the nearby facility with the actual stadium out of bounds.

It has turned out to be a horrendous T20 World Cup for Pakistan. They still have an outside chance of making it to the Super Eights. They need to win all their matches and USA to lose all theirs while maintaining a favourable net run rate. They have a knack of springing surprises and many in the Pakistan cricket fraternity will hope that one such is around the corner.

But until inherent on and off the field issues are resolved, this trend of hoping against hope, of whose conversion rate is not that high, will continue to hold.

Courtesy Dawn



Naila Kiani is set to surmount more peaks soon

Born in Pakistan's northeastern garrison city of Rawalpindi, Kiani studied aerospace engineering at Queen Mary University London but later drifted toward the banking sector



By Aamir Latif

Naila Kiani exudes confidence, the kind that only comes at the dizzying heights of success she has – quite literally – reached. She is the only woman in Pakistan to have summited 11 of the world's 14 mountains higher than 8,000 meters (over 26,240 feet) and only the third Pakistani who has managed to do it. Kiani is also the fastest among both men and women to achieve the feat, as her mountaineering career began just three years ago, and she has no plans to slow down.

In an interview with Anadolu, she explained how this record-studded journey “began with an adventure.”

That adventure was Kiani's wedding photo shoot at the K2 base camp in 2018, which went viral and brought her to social media prominence.

The local mountaineers and porters, who helped arrange the entire thing, became her inspiration to enter the world of mountaineering.

“I had no idea growing up that I would be a

climber one day ... It all began with an adventure, which later turned into a passion,” she said.

Three years later, Kiani had scaled her first peak above 8,000 meters, Gasherbrum II (8,035 meters or 26,361 feet) in the northern Gilgit-Baltistan region.

On that expedition, she met Ali Raza Sadpara, an icon in the mountaineering community, whom she considers a mentor.

Sadpara, who ascended all five peaks in Pakistan that are above 8,000 meters a record 17 times, died in May 2022 at the age of 56 during preparations for a climb at K2.

“It was Ali Raza Sadpara who turned me into a professional climber,” she said. Kiani also credits her husband for her success.

“This was not possible without his support. He was the one who supported and encouraged me when I decided to make my first climb,” she said.

“We both thought it (Gasherbrum II

ascent) would be the first and the last attempt ... but it simply turned out to be a beginning.”

‘So many challenges’

Many professional climbers start off their careers with relatively easier targets and at a much younger age than Kiani.

She, however, took a different path in both respects, going for the daunting Gasherbrum II when she was on maternity leave after having her second daughter.

Born in Pakistan's northeastern garrison city of Rawalpindi, Kiani studied aerospace engineering at Queen Mary University London but later drifted toward the banking sector.

She was a senior vice president of an international bank in Dubai before ditching the corporate world to become a professional mountaineer.

In sports, boxing was her first love.

“I was an amateur boxer and I used to

compete,” she said, explaining that the spirit of competition gave her a pivotal push in mountaineering as well.

“That, combined with meeting the climbers on my first trek to the K2 base camp in 2018 and seeing their commitment, inspired me to experience it for myself.”

When she started off, Kiani said her only aim was to “experience climbing a mountain with elite mountaineers.”

“I wanted to feel what the body and mind goes through when you are climbing these high mountains,” she said.

“It’s really hard, especially for women. When people look at me, they see I’m small and I’m quite petite, so if I can do it, that means it’s easy. That’s not the case.”

The entire excursion, from beginning to end, is full of obstacles, she said.

“I would say mountaineering can be about life and death sometimes. We overcome so many challenges before going on the expedition and during the expedition,” said Kiani.

Kiani and Samina Baig are the only two

Pakistani women to summit the world’s tallest peaks – Mt. Everest and K2.

For women climbers, there is another particular set of challenges, she said.

“Climbing as a woman is even harder because there are not many women who climb, and it’s not easy to learn how to prepare yourself or about whatever challenges we may face as a woman,” she said.

“Lastly, we go through our monthly cycles and it’s even harder going through those hormonal changes while climbing.”

‘An inspiration’

From 2021 until now, Kiani has conquered 11 towering peaks: Mt. Everest (8,849 meters or 29,029 feet), K2 (8,611 meters or 28,251 feet), Lhotse (8,516 meters or 27,939 feet), Makalu (8,485 meters or 27,838 feet), Cho Oyu (8,201 meters or 26,906 feet), Manaslu (8,156 meters or 26,758 feet), Nanga Parbat (8,125 meters or 26,656 feet), Annapurna (8,091 meters or 26,545 feet), Gasherbrum I (8,068 meters or 26,469 feet), Broad Peak (8,047 meters or 26,400 feet), and Gasherbrum II (8,035 meters or 26,361

feet).

Kiani is now only behind fellow Pakistanis Sirbaz Khan and Shehroze Kashif, who have ascended 13 of the world’s 14 highest mountains.

The only peaks she is yet to scale are Kanchenjunga, the third-tallest mountain at 8,586 meters or 28,169 feet; Dhaulagiri, the seventh-highest at 8,167 meters or 26,795 feet; and Shishapangma, the 14th-highest at 8,027 meters or 26,335 feet.

“I aim to complete all 14 peaks, and I’m planning to do it by next year,” said Kiani, the only female athlete to receive Pakistan’s highest civilian honor, Sitara-i-Imtiaz.

What Kiani has achieved in the field of mountaineering goes beyond the personal, according to Karrar Haidri, secretary of the Alpine Club of Pakistan, the country’s official mountaineering association.

“Her phenomenal achievements make her an inspiration to the younger generation ... and will also be instrumental in bringing more women into the field of mountaineering,” Haidri told Anadolu.



Who will win? When is the final? Is Ronaldo playing? The Euro 2024 guide

By Caryn James and Hugh Montgomery

How many teams are playing in Euro 2024, what's the format and who is favourite? Al Jazeera answers all your questions.

Euro 2024, the 17th edition of the European Championship, will kick off in Germany on June 14.

Euro 2024 marks the return of the competition to its usual four-year cycle after the 2020 event was postponed to 2021 due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Italy are the defending champions, having won the last tournament by beating England in the Euro 2020 final on penalties.

Here's what you need to know about Euro 2024.

Which teams have qualified for Euro 2024?

A total of 24 teams will compete for the title.

Germany qualified for the tournament as the hosts, while 20 teams secured their spot through the qualifiers and three progressed via playoffs.

Among the participants, Georgia will be playing at the Euros for the first time.

All 24 nations' squad lists are now finalised.

From established players to breakout stars, Al Jazeera picks out 10 players to watch out for at Euro 2024 in Germany.

Also, check out Europe's top players who have missed out on playing at Euro 2024.

Euro 2024 is the last European Football Championship for several legendary players entering the twilight of their careers. Al Jazeera reveals the five superstars making their final Euros appearance.

When does Euro 2024 start and end?

Group stage: June 14 to 26

Round of 16: June 29 to July 2

Quarterfinals: July 5 and 6

Semifinals: July 9 and 10

Final: July 14

What's the format, groups and match schedule for Euro 2024?

Teams will be divided into six groups, consisting of four teams each. The top two sides from each group along with the best four third-placed teams will advance to the round of 16.

Winners of the last-16 will proceed to the quarterfinals followed by the semifinals and the final.

In the knockout stage, if a match is level at the end of normal



playing time, extra time (two periods of 15 minutes each) will be played. If still tied after extra time, the match will be decided by a penalty shootout.

Al Jazeera has a dedicated fixtures page listing the entire Euro 2024 match schedule, featuring all the kickoff times, venues and real-time goal updates.

Keep up to date with your team's progress in the tournament via the real-time Euro 2024 Group Standings page.

Which teams are favourites to win Euro 2024?

Al Jazeera has identified the six main contenders who could be lifting the Euro 2024 trophy come July 14.

We will send out these team features 24 hours before each team plays their first match.

England

France

Spain

Germany

Portugal

Italy

Where will the matches be played?

Ten venues have been chosen for the tournament. Of those, nine were used at the 2006 FIFA World Cup. The host cities are Berlin, Cologne, Dortmund, Dusseldorf, Frankfurt, Gelsenkirchen, Hamburg, Leipzig, Munich and Stuttgart.

Munich will be staging matches for the second Euro in succession; Munich Football Arena was one of 11 co-host venues that held matches during Euro 2020.

Check out the 10 stadiums to be used during Euro 2024.

Previous winners of the European Football Championships.

10 of the best TV shows of 2024 so far

From a brutal Japanese period epic to a controversial Netflix stalking drama and a hit video game adaptation, we pick the year's greatest programmes to stream right now.

1. True Detective: Night Country

It would have been enough if the fourth season of True Detective had done nothing more than use the unforgettable word "corpsicles" for murder victims frozen in ice, but this revamped series did much more. Jodie Foster is galvanizing as the acerbic police chief in a small Alaska town, who leads the investigation into an increasingly creepy multiple murder case. Set at a time of year when the sun doesn't rise for a fortnight, the show is beautifully shot in midnight blues that let you feel the chill and draw you into a world where high-tech scientists live side by side with locals with supernatural beliefs. You could spend hours teasing out the Easter eggs and connections to the original 2014 season of the show, as many have. But no need for that context. Writer and director Issa Lopez has reenergised the franchise in a way that makes it fresh and captivating from eerie start to jaw-dropping finish. (CJ)

2. Shogun

As soon as Game of Thrones ended in 2019, conversation turned to what could succeed it – cue many fantasy series, including Amazon's Lord of the Rings spin-off and HBO's own official Thrones prequel House of the Dragon, vying to take its place. But five years on, its most convincing successor has turned out to be a show without any fantasy credentials whatsoever – but rather a historical drama about real-life 17th Century Japan that nevertheless channels Thrones' harsh worldview, epic visuals, and keen interest in the business of political manoeuvring. Based on the historical novel by James Clavell, which was already made into a hugely successful miniseries back in the 1980s, Shogun centres on John Blackthorne (played by the Richard Burton-esque Cosmo Jarvis), a British sailor who is shipwrecked on the Japanese coast and gets wrapped up in a battle for power between members of the country's ruling council. What follows is at once gorgeously shot, brilliantly acted, and unflinchingly brutal, the characters' various machinations occasionally erupting in violence that pulls no punches. The cast, too, are uniformly brilliant, from Hiroyuki Sanada as embattled council member Lord Yoshii Toranaga to Anna Sawai as Blackthorne's translator, and lover, Mariko. And while it was originally intended as a limited series, such has been its success, FX has announced plans for two further seasons. Let's hope they can live up to the standards set by this one. (HM)

3. Baby Reindeer

Richard Gadd's autobiographical horror story seemed to land on Netflix out of nowhere yet has become, deservedly, one of the year's biggest, most talked about and unsettling hits. Gadd created and plays a struggling comedian named



Donny Dunn, who befriends Martha. She comes into the bar where he works, fantasises a relationship between them and goes on to harass him with emails and almost ruin his life. Jessica Gunning is amazing as she makes Martha both threatening and pitiable in her delusions. Tension builds to an excruciating point through the series. Donny is also repeatedly sexually assaulted, in stomach-churning detail, by a man who is a television producer promising to help his career. The show caused a controversy when viewers searched the internet and discovered Fiona Harvey, who they alleged was Martha's real-life counterpart; she has since given media interviews and is now suing Netflix for defamation, negligence and privacy violations. Putting aside those real-world aftershocks, Baby Reindeer is confessional art at its most captivating. (CJ)

4. Fallout

Last year, HBO's The Last of Us ended the tradition of sub-par video game adaptations with a gripping rendering of the bestselling action-adventure title. And now here's another screen translation of a post-apocalyptic gaming franchise, which is arguably even more successful: an eye-poppingly stylish and slyly funny take on the Fallout series, which imagines a world devastated by nuclear war where some people now live in shiny underground vaults. British actress Ella Purnell leads the cast as a bright-eyed Vault 33 resident who is forced on an eye-opening mission up to the Earth's surface to rescue her kidnapped father – where, in this future Wild West, she comes into contact with a nervy soldier (Aaron Moten) and a bounty-hunting "ghoul" (Walton Goggins) among others. Co-produced by Lisa Joy and Jonathan Nolan, the makers of the inferior but not dissimilar Westworld, it is an impressively immersive experience

which lives up to the source material while finding its own narrative groove. Meanwhile Purnell is a real star in the making, and Goggins is revelatory in a performance that stretches across two timelines. (HM)

5. Ripley

Andrew Scott is spellbinding as the lethal con man Tom Ripley in this Hitchcockian version of Patricia Highsmith's novel *The Talented Mr Ripley*. Set in Naples and Rome in the 1960s, the show's dramatic black and white, shot by the Oscar-winning cinematographer Robert Elswit, perfectly captures the beautiful shadowy world Ripley inhabits as he ascends from a small-time grifter in New York to a denizen of *la dolce vita*. As Ripley usurps the identity of his idle rich friend Dickie Greenleaf (Johnny Flynn), a single shifting look on Scott's face can reveal layers of the character's deceptions. Flynn, Dakota Fanning and Eliot Sumner are all brilliant as the people Ripley feeds off. In a style far different from the sun-drenched, memorable 1999 film, Steven Zaillian has written and directed a series as enthralling and visually glorious as they come. (CJ)

6. One Day

No show has stirred the emotions more than this year than this adaptation of David Nicholls' era-spanning British romance. It follows the up-and-down relationship of two friends, Dexter and Emma, from university onwards, by catching up with them on the same day, 15 July, every year for 20 years. Beginning in the 1980s, it makes for a glorious nostalgic trip for viewers of a certain age, complete with a winning, carefully curated soundtrack of period appropriate pop songs. But at heart what makes this work is the captivating performances of the two leads, individually and together: Leo Woodall, building on the promise he showed in season two of *The White Lotus*, makes the arrogant, upper-crust party boy Dexter convincingly irritating but also sympathetic, while Ambika Mod, who first came to attention in 2022 medical drama *This is Going to Hurt*, is on star-making form as the fiercely intelligent but vulnerable Emma. Be warned though: if you don't know what happens, then be prepared for some tears. (HM)

7. Monsieur Spade

One of the least likely premises for a series has led to one of the year's most delightful surprises. Clive Owen is wry as the Sam Spade, the private investigator created by author Dashiell Hammett and now relocated from seedy 1940s San Francisco to 1960s small-town France. Instead of mimicking Humphrey Bogart's celebrated tough-guy Spade from *The Maltese Falcon* (1941), Owen smartly delivers a character who is shrewd and emotionally cool but also sometimes befuddled, especially when trying to master the French language. There are intricate personal relationships – a glamorous lover (Chiara Mastroianni) and a young girl who becomes Spade's ward – and of course murders he can't help but investigate in a lush country town where unregenerate Nazis linger and scheme. Director Scott Frank (*The Queen's Gambit*) makes the show crisp and suspenseful. Owen makes Spade his own, a man with a heart beneath his considerable sangfroid. (CJ)

8. Mr Bates vs the Post Office

It's rare that a TV show can be credited with having a tangible impact on government business – but such was the case earlier this year with this brilliant British miniseries, focusing on the national Post Office scandal, which saw more than 700 post office branch managers wrongly charged for false accounting, theft and fraud because of a failed computer system. When it aired in the UK in January, it immediately caused huge reverberations, and prompted the Prime Minister Rishi Sunak to announce he would bring in a new law to "swiftly exonerate and compensate victims". What Gwyneth Hughes' four-part drama does so brilliantly is to thread together the human stories of the many upstanding victims – among them the titular Alan Bates (Toby Jones), who became the postmasters' leader in the fight for justice – and contrast that with the inhumane bureaucracy that they came up against. The show's impact proves that, for all the value of documentaries, sometimes a dramatisation can bring a story into the cultural consciousness like nothing else. Will Mr Bates inspire more TV getting to grips with institutional scandals of our time? Let's hope so. (HM)

9. The Regime

Kate Winslet is funny, chilling and on top form in this dark political comedy as Elena Vernham, dictator of a fictional Central European country. On the ludicrous side, Elena sings Santa Baby as part of her Christmas address to the nation, and calls its citizens "My Loves". On the ominous side, she masquerades as a populist but is ruthless in her determination to hold on to power, invading a nearby country and imprisoning her political opponents. It's as if she were the child of Eva Perón and Vladimir Putin. Winslet balances the character's comic and evil parts beautifully and is surrounded by a stellar cast, including Matthias Schoenaerts as the sociopathic soldier who becomes her lover, Andrea Riseborough as her cowed servant, and Hugh Grant in a single episode as the Chancellor whom Elena deposed. The Regime's tone is more absurdist than pointedly skewering, yet by the end its politically tumultuous world comes to mirror our own. (CJ)

10. 3 Body Problem

This sci-fi show arrived with considerable hype, being the next project from *Game of Thrones* creators David Benioff and DB Weiss. And while it may not have exactly become the phenomenon that the streamer might have hoped for, it deserved serious applause for its intelligence and creative ambition. Based on a Chinese novel, it tells the story of a group of scientist friends as they try and work out what is going on with a spate of suicides within their community – a story that involves flashbacks to the Chinese Cultural Revolution, a mysterious virtual reality game and much more besides. It's an initially mind-boggling mix that nevertheless settles around a brilliantly compelling and timely premise: what would we do if we knew the human race was going to be destroyed, but not for 400 years? Plus it has the single most shocking TV sequence of the year, one up there with GoT's infamous Red Wedding. Netflix have announced that it will return for a second and third season, and that will be it. Here's praying it can stick the landing. (HM)

Courtesy BBC



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