

Fortnightly

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ABC Certified

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Inflationary Budget includes discretionary spending for parliamentarians

Imran Khan and Politics

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Playing power politics

Tremours in KP



By M A Niazi

Khyber Pakhtunkhwa seems to be getting into the news for all the wrong reasons. Not only was the Chief Minister restoring electricity at a federal installation by throwing his (considerable) weight around, he was also threatening to write to the IMF that the federal government was not settling his province's dues. Then there was the Midyan incident, where a tourist was lynched by an angry mob for desecrating the Holy Quran, after the local police station was burned down along with a police mobile. This followed after the attack on Chinese engineers working on the Dasu hydropower project, in which five Chinese nationals were killed in March. As if to top it all, the PTI rejected the National Action Plan Apex Committee's decision to launch a new operation against terrorism, prompting Defence Minister Kh Asif to ask the PTI supported the terrorists.

The PTI probably does not support the terrorists, though it was in office in KP in July 2021 when nine Chinese nationals were among 14 killed in an attack. However, it would not like too close a look at the governance of KP, which has been under PTI rule since 2013. The links between the PTI and the Taliban have been alleged, but there has been no arrest at which evidence

must be provided to a magistrate, let alone a trial before a judge, at which such allegations have been tested. However, the attack on the Chinese was supposed to have been committed by the Baloch Liberation Army. While the TTP and the BLA have been linked before, there has been no allegation of links between the PTI and the NLA, or any Baloch nationalist group for that matter.

The Prime Minister and Defence Minister have both dialled back on the Azm-i-Istehkam operation, saying that it is not to be a full-scale operation like previous ones, but a continuation of the operations that are being already carried out. It was pointed out that the previous operations have not succeeded in eliminating terrorism. It may be argued that terrorism was at least being contained, and had not replaced the foothold it had lost, the control of the South Waziristan Agency. The importance of the Tribal Areas, of which the Waziristans are a part, can be gauged from the fact that they were first made part of the settled area of KP, and then the TTP demanded that they be reverted.

The KP government has to explain why it allowed the penetration of BLA activists

into the province. It has also been pointed out that the PTI's CM made no objection to the operation at the APEX Committee meeting, even though he was in attendance. The PTI's record in KP is longer than his, for he previously not even been a member of its Assembly. Though this is the PTI's third consecutive term, he is also the third CM provided by the party. The previous two deserted the party in the run-up to the February elections, when they had formed a separate party, the PTI Parliamentarians, which bombed badly, failing to win any seats in any Assembly.

KP's loyalty to the PTI is thus not based on the grip of some local strongman, but on loyalty to a single personality, Imran Khan. Though some of the sheen of the PTI wore off in the 2021-22 local body polls, when the JUI(F) succeeded in winning 35 Tehsil chairmanships while the PTI won 45, PTI-backed candidates won 91 of 115 seats in the Provincial Assembly and 25 of 43 seats in the National Assembly, which was its best result in four outings.

One of the problems with any operation against terrorism is that it needs a police force. The KP police has been under a great deal of pressure from terrorism, but the

Madyan attack provides a new challenge. The disconnect between the federal and provincial governments is on a number of levels.

KP, and previously the NWFP, had alternated between right and left in elections prior to 2013, when the PTI first won. However, it now seems that it had found a party of both the left and the right in the PTI. However, the effect of the Afghan jihad, the rule of the Taliban, the US occupation of Afghanistan, and now again Taliban rule, on KP, should not be ignored.

It should also be noted that the CM personally minds his constituency. His recent storming of an electricity feeder in Dera Ismail Khan showed that. He had restored electricity that had been cut off under the revenue-based loadshedding plan, whereby feeders with high nonpayment ratios experience more loadshedding than areas where consumers pay their bills. That kind of high-handedness is risky, because the grid station was under the federal government, and even a provincial CM should be careful when his party is not in office at the centre. However, he did have the assurance that no action would be taken against him, because even federal organisations only exercise force through provincial police

forces, and it would be a daring policeman indeed who would take any action against a CM even if he was stabbing someone to death in broad daylight. Ali Amin Gandapur would know that he could order the arrest of the grid station in-charge, even if the arrested official later got off.

His action encouraged others. PTI MNA Zubair Khan Wazir not only took over Jandola grid station, but issued it a loadshedding schedule, to be operated under the supervision of the men he stationed there. Now Jandola falls within the new South Waziristan district, but is still part of the Tribal Areas Electricity Supply Corporation, TESCO, which is separate from the Peshawar Electricity Supply Corporation, and which is a high defaulter, because the very idea of paying power bills has not entered anyone's mind.

A nasty clash could occur anywhere within the former tribal districts, both because of these large arrears, and the armed truculence of the consumers. Indeed, it was because of that armed truculence that TESCO allowed the running up of arrears, because when its staff, with police backing, tried to cut meters, they were not allowed to. The CM has issued police orders not to register any cases against MNAs or MPAs who do anything at a grid station. He has

therefore condoned in advance violations of the law.

That the law needs changing is another debate. Until the competent authority amends it, it should hold the field, and the CM's order itself seems illegal. Some police officials may disobey, be punished and go to court against that punishment, where the CM's order will be tested, but that will not happen. It is easy for an SHO not to register an FIR. It would require the order of a competent court to oblige him to do so.

The CM is still pressing the federal government, threatening to write to the IMF unless the federal government pays KP its dues. That is purely blackmail, but it has turned federal attention away from the challenge to its writ posed by ending loadshedding.

One of the problems with any operation against terrorism is that it needs a police force. The KP police has been under a great deal of pressure from terrorism, but the Madyan attack provides a new challenge. The disconnect between the federal and provincial governments is on a number of levels. The control of the government is being shrugged, but no one has any idea of who or what is replacing it.



Pros and Cons of Tax-laden IMF-dictated budget

Opposition parties have condemned the budget, arguing it will exacerbate inflation. The State Bank of Pakistan has also warned of potential inflationary effects from the budget, citing the need for structural reforms to broaden the tax base and noting that increased revenue will primarily come from higher taxes.



By Javed Mahmood

On June 28, the National Assembly approved the budget for the fiscal year 2024-25. Media coverage labeled it "tax-laden" with few promises of relief for the Pakistani people. The budget, finalized with the passage of the Finance Bill 2024, lacks innovation and repeats patterns from previous budgets, burdening the already overtaxed while failing to expand the tax net. The key motto of the new budget is to extort as much tax revenues from the masses as it expected in 2024-25. Thus, the IMF-dictated budget would create more miseries for the people who are looking some kind of relief from the government amid growing electricity and gas prices. And from July 1, 2024-25, people must expect further painful increase in the cost of utilities and petroleum prices. About Rs 4 trillion increase in the tax collection target for 2024-25 over 2023-24, reflects that the government would come up with more tactics and techniques to generate additional taxes from the consumers.

Instead of broadening the tax base, the

budget intensifies the existing tax net. It does not adopt an equitable approach, increasing taxes on the already stressed salaried class—whose purchasing power has nearly halved over the past five years—while reducing taxes on banks, which have been reporting record profits. This tax cut for banks is due to the government's dependence on bank borrowing to cover fiscal deficits.

The budget is inflationary, with increased expenditure across all areas, including discretionary spending for members of parliament. There is little emphasis on controlling expenditure, which is financed by taxing the already overburdened. This is evident in the imposition of sales tax on infant formula and packaged milk. In a country where 40% of children under five are stunted and malnutrition is widespread, taxing packaged milk discourages processing and could drive up milk prices, worsening malnutrition.

The budget lacks a coherent theme, focusing mainly on discretionary spending without promoting invest-

ment-led growth. The ongoing de-industrialization is unaddressed, with the budget favoring traders over actual producers. It further penalizes existing taxpayers, especially the salaried class, who have already lost over 45% of their purchasing power in the last five years and will continue to lose more due to increased taxation.

Opposition parties, particularly those supported by jailed former Prime Minister Imran Khan, have condemned the budget, arguing it will exacerbate inflation. The government, however, projects a sharp reduction in the fiscal deficit for the upcoming financial year to 5.9% of GDP, down from a revised estimate of 7.4% for the current year.

The State Bank of Pakistan has warned of potential inflationary effects from the budget, citing the need for structural reforms to broaden the tax base and noting that increased revenue will primarily come from higher taxes. The government has set a growth target of 3.6% for the upcoming year, with inflation projected at 12%.

This situation is ironic, as the salaried taxpayer first loses purchasing power due to the government's obsession with deficits, and then faces higher taxes to cover the same deficits caused by an inability to expand the tax net or reduce expenditure. The budget appears to cater to a small group of rent-seekers benefiting from a reckless fiscal regime, showing little interest in widening the tax net or reducing expenditure.

Despite some positive signs, such as modest reforms and reduced losses in state-owned enterprises, the reckless fiscal approach will alienate the populace and foster a sense of helplessness. A skewed taxation structure will likely accelerate the brain drain, as the incentive to participate in the formal economy diminishes while operating informally in a cash economy becomes more appealing.

To stabilize the country, reckless expenditure must be curbed, and those already overtaxed must not be further burdened. Paying developed-world taxes for subpar infrastructure and social services creates an environment where businesses and individuals may move their capital elsewhere. The economy needs a shift from consumption to investment, but this budget does nothing to facilitate that transition. Instead, it increases government consumption, financed by the usual taxpayers.

NA Passes New Budget

On Friday, Pakistan's National Assembly approved the annual budget for the fiscal year 2024-25, a crucial step as the country prepares for further discussions with the International Monetary Fund (IMF) on a new financial assistance program. The budget, heavily focused on tax increases, comes as Pakistan anticipates inflation rates as high as 13.5% for June.

The finance bill, presented by Finance Minister Muhammad Aurangzeb, aims to secure a loan between \$6 billion and \$8 billion from the IMF to prevent a potential debt default for Pakistan, currently the slowest-growing economy in South Asia. The bill's passage saw Pakistan's sovereign dollar bonds decline, with the 2031 maturity dropping 1.4 cents to 78.69 cents on the dollar. The government unveiled the national budget on June 12, setting an

ambitious tax revenue target of Rs13 trillion (\$46.66 billion) for the fiscal year starting July 1, 2024. This target represents a 40% increase from the current year, aimed at bolstering the country's case for an IMF rescue package.

A finance ministry report released on Friday described the budget as a pathway to sustainable and inclusive growth. The report projected consumer price inflation for June 2024 to range between 12.5% and 13.5%, up from 11.8% in May. It also highlighted various administrative, policy, and relief measures the government is implementing to control inflationary pressures.



The budget includes significant increases in both direct and indirect taxes, with direct taxes rising by 48% and indirect taxes by 35% over revised estimates of the current year. Non-tax revenue, including petroleum levies, is expected to surge by 64%. Specific tax hikes include an 18% increase on textile and leather products and mobile phones, as well as higher taxes on capital gains from real estate. Workers will also face higher direct taxes on income.

Opposition parties, particularly those supported by jailed former Prime Minister Imran Khan, have condemned the budget, arguing it will exacerbate inflation. The government, however, projects a sharp reduction in the fiscal deficit for the upcoming financial year to 5.9% of GDP, down from a revised estimate of 7.4% for the current year.

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potential inflationary effects from the budget, citing the need for structural reforms to broaden the tax base and noting that increased revenue will primarily come from higher taxes. The government has set a growth target of 3.6% for the upcoming year, with inflation projected at 12%.

Govt withdraws exemptions and unveils New Taxation Measures

After implementing taxation measures amounting to Rs1.761 trillion in the budget for 2024-25, the government introduced additional measures through amendments

to the Finance Bill 2024 on June 28. These include a 10% surcharge on the tax liability of individuals, including salaried individuals and associations of persons, where the taxable income exceeds Rs10 million. The amendments state that a 10% surcharge will be payable by every individual and association of persons on the income tax imposed under Division-I of Part-I of the First Schedule if the taxable income exceeds Rs10 million.

Additionally, the government imposed a 10% sales tax on stationery items, excluding exercise books and textbooks. The Federal Excise Duty (FED) on cement was increased from Rs3 per kg to Rs4 per kg through an amendment in the Finance Bill. Previously, the budget for 2024-25 had raised the FED on cement from Rs2 per kg to Rs3 per kg. Further, the excise duty on international air travel has been raised. A

new FED of Rs15 per kg will now apply to the supply of white crystalline sugar by any person to a manufacturing, processing, or packaging entity.

The Federal Board of Revenue (FBR) has also imposed a capital value tax (CVT) on farmhouses and residential houses within the Islamabad Capital Territory based on their area. The CVT rates are as follows:

Rs500,000 for farmhouses between 2,000 and 4,000 square yards

Rs1,000,000 for farmhouses exceeding 4,000 square yards

Rs1,000,000 for residential houses between 1,000 and 2,000 square yards

Rs1,500,000 for residential houses exceeding 2,000 square yards.

The duty on business and club class tickets to European destinations has increased by Rs60,000 to Rs210,000. For travel to New Zealand and Australia, the duty is now also Rs210,000. For China, Malaysia, and Indonesia, the excise duty on business and club class tickets has been raised to Rs210,000.

A tax expert noted that the reduced tax rates of 8.5% and 12.75% for hybrid vehicles with engine capacities up to 1800cc and between 1801-2500cc, respectively, will continue, but the benefit will be limited until June 30, 2026. The bill also extends sales tax benefits given to the erstwhile tribal areas for another year, until June 30, 2025. The government has maintained its earlier stance of taxing export income at a corporate tax rate of 29% plus the applicable super tax. Previously, exporters were

significant revisions to the federal government's pension system, slated to be officially implemented on July 1 following formal endorsement by the federal cabinet. Changes to the civilian pension scheme are set to take effect on July 1, with application to the armed forces scheduled for the subsequent fiscal year, starting in 2025-26. The ECC granted preliminary approval to the Finance Division for establishing a Pension Fund and endorsed a Defined Contributory Scheme for new entrants, effective July 1, 2024, and for the armed forces from July 1, 2025.

Many of the pension scheme amendments were previously announced in the budget speech for the fiscal year 2023-24 but had not been implemented. These amendments align with recommendations from the Pay and Pension Commission of 2020 aimed at controlling future pension costs while maintaining the government's pension philosophy.

Under the proposed rules, federal government employees would receive a gross pension based on 70% of average pensionable emoluments drawn during the last 24 months of service. There are provisions for penalties for voluntary retirement, with a flat reduction rate of 3% per year in gross pension capped at 20%. Future increases in pension will be calculated based on a baseline pension established at the time of retirement, subject to review by a pay and pension committee every three years. Family pensions, both Ordinary and Special, will be provided for specific durations or for life, depending on the circumstances of the pensioner's family members. Overall, these adjustments aim to streamline pension regulations and manage pension liabilities effectively across federal government employees and armed forces.

To sum up, the PML-N led coalition government had learned nothing from the past experience of unveiling bitter budgets under the PDM umbrella after removal of Imran Khan which eroded the popularity of the PDM especially PML-N. The new budget will further annoy the people and we should pray that Pakistan does not witness Kenya-like bloody protests against the IMF-dictated tax-laden budget.



Under the amended Finance Bill 2024, the excise duty on business and club class air tickets has been increased up to Rs350,000. Economy and economy plus air tickets issued on or after July 1, 2024, will be subject to a Rs12,500 duty.

For travel to the Middle East and African countries, including destinations like Dubai and Saudi Arabia, the duty on business/-club class air tickets has increased by Rs30,000 to Rs105,000. Travelers to the United States and Canada will now pay Rs100,000 in excise duty per business/club class ticket. For North America, Latin America, and Canada, the duty has risen from Rs250,000 to Rs350,000 per business/club class ticket.

paying 1% of export turnover, which was considered full and final.

The amended Finance Bill 2024 also specifies that the duty rate will be 3% of the gross amount of consideration involved where the buyer appears on the active taxpayer list. This applies to the allotment or transfer of commercial property and the first allotment or transfer of open plots or residential property by any developer or builder.

Reforms in Pension system

The Economic Coordination Committee (ECC) of the Cabinet recently approved

Why Does Tax Evasion Persist in Pakistan?



By Muhammad Fahad Thaheem

1. Lack of Trust in Government:

One of the primary reasons for tax evasion in Pakistan is a lack of trust in the government's ability to handle and utilize tax revenue honestly and efficiently. Many citizens are skeptical about how their hard-earned money is managed and whether it truly benefits society. Building public trust in state institutions, especially those responsible for tax collection, is crucial to address this issue.

2. Complex Tax Laws:

Pakistan's tax laws can be intricate and confusing. The complexity often discourages compliance, leading some individuals and businesses to evade taxes. Simplifying tax regulations and making them more transparent could encourage greater participation in the tax system.

3. Lack of Awareness:

A significant portion of the population remains unaware of their tax obligations. Low literacy rates and a limited understanding of tax laws contribute to this lack of awareness. Educating citizens about their responsibilities and the impact of tax evasion on the country's overall well-being is essential.

4. Fear of Punishment:

While fear of legal consequences can deter tax evasion, effective enforcement depends on the rule of law. When citizens perceive that tax evaders often escape punishment due to weak enforcement, compliance decreases. Strengthening legal mechanisms and ensuring consistent penalties can help address this issue.

5. Inefficient Use of Tax Revenue:

The mismanagement of tax funds further erodes trust. Citizens witness inadequate public services, including unreliable power supply, unsafe drinking water, and subpar healthcare. When essential services are lacking, people feel compelled to provide for themselves, leading to tax evasion.

6. Unfair Tax Burden:

Businesses often operate on slim margins, yet the government imposes a substantial tax burden. While businesses struggle to survive, the state's wasteful expenditures remain a concern. Rebalancing the tax burden and ensuring efficient utilization of funds could encourage greater compliance.

Conclusion

In summary, addressing tax evasion in Pakistan requires a multifaceted approach. Building trust, simplifying tax laws, raising awareness, and ensuring fair utilization of tax revenue are critical steps. Ultimately, the responsibility lies with the government to create an environment where citizens willingly contribute to the nation's progress.

Importantly, in the new financial year, 2024-25, the government has raised the tax collection target to 13 trillion rupees, up nearly four trillion rupees in comparison with the outgoing fiscal year's target. The new tax collection target is being termed very ambitious and detrimental for the economy and the consumers as well in the country as it would cause additional burden mostly on those who are already paying taxes.

Pakistan's SOEs losses hit Rs905bn in FY23

These losses resulted in aggregate net losses of Rs202 billion, reflecting a 25% increase year-on-year



By Ashraf Malkham

Pakistan's state-owned enterprises (SOEs) incurred aggregate losses of Rs905 billion for the fiscal year 2022-23, marking a 23% increase from the previous fiscal year of 2021-22.

It was revealed in a report titled "Aggregate Annual Report on Federal State-Owned Enterprises (SOEs) for Financial Year 2023," released by the Central Monitoring Unit (CMU) of the Finance Division on Tuesday.

These losses resulted in aggregate net losses of Rs202 billion, reflecting a 25% increase year-on-year. Liabilities also rose to Rs29,721 billion, a 20% increase indicating higher financial leverage.

Consequently, net equity declined to Rs5.49 trillion, down by 2.55%. The federal government remains concerned about overall portfolio volatility, with Value at Risk at higher levels. In the power sector, particularly within distribution companies (DISCOs), losses remained prominent. Aggregate losses on the power side totalled Rs304 billion, despite Rs759 billion being

allocated to support the sector. Additionally, entities in the infrastructure sector, such as the National Highway Authority (NHA), incurred high financial costs, exacerbating the overall loss-making scenario. The railways sector also contributed to the escalating losses, with aggregate losses over the past decade reaching Rs5,595 billion.

The government of Pakistan provided aggregate support amounting to Rs1,021 billion through Equity Injections (Rs267 billion), Grants (Rs223 billion), Subsidies (Rs403 billion), and Loans (Rs128 billion) to sustain these SOEs and bolster the economy.

However, this support accounted for more than 10% of the federal budget's receipts, underscoring significant fiscal strain. Various risks were identified within the SOE sector, notably substantial working capital lock-up due to aged receivables and payables across the chain, contributing to a circular debt exceeding Rs4 trillion. Operational inefficiencies in the power sector continued to negatively impact SOE profit-

ability, cascading throughout the chain. Guarantees provided amounted to Rs1,656 billion, while the debt stock reached Rs3,545 billion, with accrued interest on NHA loans alone exceeding Rs1,100 billion. The high debt and guarantee levels pose significant risks for the sector, exposing it to both systemic and unsystemic risks. Systemic risks include economic

downturns, inflation, and interest rate fluctuations, exacerbating financial strain on SOEs and making debt servicing more challenging. Moving forward, the report said, enhancing corporate governance was critical, necessitating more independent and technically qualified directors to ensure effective governance and robust monitoring criteria, maintaining a streamlined approach.

The SOEs contributed Rs466 billion to the national exchequer in taxes, a 24% increase, while non-tax revenues, including sales taxes, royalties, and levies, totalled Rs952 billion, up by 58%. Dividends contributed Rs63 billion, marking a 43% increase.

Bill Gates to invest billions in nuclear energy, oil prices to crash in the coming months



By Javed Mahmood

The urgency to generate substantial clean energy has increased as the tech sector, particularly Artificial Intelligence, consumes rapidly growing amounts of energy. For the first time in years, energy demand growth from the developed world has surpassed that of developing countries, largely due to the tech sector's rising consumption.

Bill Gates is ready to invest billions in advancing next-generation nuclear energy in the United States. As the world's sixth-richest person, Gates has long been a proponent of nuclear power and has already invested over a billion dollars into his innovative nuclear power start-up, TerraPower LLC. However, according to Gates, that initial billion is just the start. "I put in over a billion, and I'll put in billions more," Gates recently told Bloomberg.

Nuclear power is gaining global traction as a viable option for national and private decarbonization strategies. Advocates argue that the immense clean energy potential of nuclear power can no longer be

ignored, as it is a proven technology with substantial existing infrastructure, legal precedent, and high output capacity. Although not classified as renewable energy, nuclear energy emits zero carbon emissions and could play a crucial role in meeting global emissions targets.

The urgency to generate substantial clean energy has increased as the tech sector, particularly Artificial Intelligence, consumes rapidly growing amounts of energy. For the first time in years, energy demand growth from the developed world has surpassed that of developing countries, largely due to the tech sector's rising consumption.

"Currently, the entire IT industry is responsible for around 2 percent of global CO2 emissions," reported Science Alert in 2023. Technological research and consulting firm Gartner projects that without significant industry and policy changes, the AI sector will account for 3.5 percent of global electricity consumption by 2030. In response, tech leaders are seriously explor-

ing new sources of carbon-free energy to meet their companies' immense demands. Some of the biggest names in the industry are turning to nuclear power. Bill Gates' TerraPower, co-founded and co-funded by billionaire Warren Buffett, is likely to supply nuclear energy to power Microsoft's massive AI ambitions. TerraPower aims to make nuclear energy safer and less controversial by piloting a reactor that uses liquid sodium as a coolant, reducing water consumption and potentially recycling spent nuclear fuel.

A younger generation of tech entrepreneurs is also showing keen interest in nuclear energy to address AI's energy demands and greenhouse gas emissions. Sam Altman, founder of OpenAI, has publicly stated that nuclear energy is essential for managing AI's carbon footprint. Altman has also founded a start-up specializing in "nuclear microreactors." His AI-integrated nuclear energy firm, Oklo, went public in May.

Altman is also a strong advocate for nuclear fusion research. "The AI systems of the

future will need tremendous amounts of energy, and this fission and fusion can help deliver them," Altman told the Wall Street Journal last summer.

Big Tech leaders not only see nuclear energy as key to managing the sector's carbon footprint but also as a profitable venture, especially with innovations in new-age nuclear reactors. Historically, high construction costs have hindered nuclear power expansion, but smaller and more standardized reactors could significantly reduce these costs.

Bill Gates believes that making nuclear power affordable and efficient is within reach and plans to continue investing heavily until it becomes a reality. "Coal is being outcompeted by natural gas," Gates told CNN in a recent interview. "And so what we have to do is compete effectively with natural gas."

Meanwhile, Citi has predicted that oil prices will crash in the coming months. Citi predicts that oil prices will drop to the \$60s by 2025 as inventories build up after a tight market this summer, indicating a bearish outlook despite current high demand and elevated prices. Oil prices have recovered from early June losses when OPEC+ hinted at increasing supply in the fourth quarter, causing bearish market signals. Early on Friday, Brent Crude, the international benchmark, traded above \$85 per barrel, while the U.S. benchmark, WTI Crude,

was above \$82 a barrel, as signs of a tightening physical market emerged.

The market anticipates strong summer demand in the third quarter but fears that consumption growth will decline in the fourth quarter, putting downward pressure on oil prices. Citi, one of the most bearish major banks, expects oil to fall into the \$70s later this year and further to the \$60s in 2025 due to substantial inventory builds.

"Global inventories will be building a lot next year," Citi's global energy strategist Eric Lee told Yahoo Finance in an interview this week.

"We do think that there is a bit of a tight stretch [with supply] through the summer, so we see prices staying in the low- to mid-80s for a little longer," Lee added.

"But as we're looking through the second half of the year into 2025, we see markets getting a lot weightier."

Citi also expects global oil demand growth to slow, predicting that "oil demand can grow at a slower and slower rate relative to GDP and peak before the end of this decade," Lee told Yahoo Finance.

Citi holds one of the most bearish near and long-term views on oil prices and demand. In contrast, Goldman Sachs reported this week that "peak oil demand is still a decade away."

Earlier this month, the International Energy Agency forecasted that global oil demand would peak before 2030, a prediction criticized by OPEC. OPEC Secretary General Haitham Al Ghais stated that "peak oil demand is not on the horizon" and that the IEA's forecast "is a dangerous commentary, especially for consumers, and will only lead to energy volatility on a potentially unprecedented scale."

Goldman Sachs analysts believe oil usage will increase through 2034. They stated, "While some prominent forecasters have predicted oil demand will peak by 2030, our researchers expect oil usage will increase through 2034."

"We think peak demand is another decade away, and more importantly, after the decade it takes to peak, it plateaus, rather than sharply declines, for another few years," wrote Nikhil Bhandari, co-head of Asia-Pacific Natural Resources and Clean Energy Research, and analyst Amber Cai in their report.

In the near term, Goldman Sachs sees Brent crude at \$86 per barrel this summer amid strong consumer demand, leading to a significant market deficit in the third quarter. The investment bank also sees a floor of \$75 per barrel under Brent due to physical demand for crude, which tends to rise amid lower prices, including in China and the U.S. for the refill of the Strategic Petroleum Reserve (SPR).



Political Turbulence and Legal Battles: Imran Khan's Legacy and Pakistan's Polarized Landscape



By Romana Afsheen

Imran Khan's tenure as Pakistan's Prime Minister from August 2018 to April 2022 was marked by significant political turbulence and subsequent legal challenges. Following his removal through a parliamentary vote of no confidence, Khan and his Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) party faced a series of legal battles and accusations. These included convictions related to an unlawful marriage, illegal sale of state gifts, and leaking state secrets, though some of these convictions were later overturned by the Islamabad High Court. Despite these legal setbacks, PTI-backed candidates remained a significant force in subsequent elections, opting to stay in opposition rather than collaborating with political rivals. The aftermath of Khan's tenure continues to polarize Pakistan's political landscape, with ongoing controversies and legal proceedings involving prominent figures like Shah Mehmood Qureshi, reflecting the enduring challenges within the country's political sphere.

Imran Khan

Imran Khan served as Pakistan's Prime Minister from August 2018 until April 2022, when a parliamentary vote of no confidence led to his removal. Khan alleged that his ousting was part of a conspiracy involving the United States and Pakistan's military, although both parties refuted these claims. Following his removal from office, Khan, and his

Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) party encountered a government crackdown, especially after Khan's brief arrest in May 2023. Despite navigating various legal challenges and facing restrictions such as being barred from using their electoral symbol, PTI-backed candidates emerged as the largest bloc in the February elections, securing 93 seats. However, they opted to remain in opposition and did not engage in collaboration with other political factions.

Cases Against Imran Khan

Unlawful Marriage Case: This case, filed by Khawar Maneka, claims that Bushra Bibi did not observe the necessary three-month break required under Islamic law before marrying Khan. Maneka divorced Bibi in November 2017, and Khan announced their marriage in February 2018.

Illegal Sale of State Gifts: Khan and Bibi were handed a separate 14-year sentence related to the illegal sale of state gifts. However, this conviction was overturned by the Islamabad High Court in April.

Leaking State Secrets: Khan was sentenced to 10 years on charges of leaking state secrets, along with former Foreign Minister Shah Mahmood Qureshi. This verdict was overturned earlier this month, but Khan remained

in jail due to his conviction in the unlawful marriage case.

High-Profile Land Deal: Khan was granted bail in a case where he was accused of colluding with real estate tycoon Malik Riaz, resulting in a loss of more than \$239 million to the national exchequer. This deal was allegedly part of a quid pro quo arrangement to build an educational institute.

Overturned Convictions

Illegal Sale of State Gifts: Conviction overturned by the Islamabad High Court in April.

Leaking State Secrets: Verdict overturned earlier this month by the Islamabad High Court.

Current Conviction

Unlawful Marriage Case: Khan and Bibi are currently serving a seven-year jail sentence for their 2018 marriage, which was ruled to violate Islamic law.

A court in Islamabad, Pakistan, has rejected an appeal by former Prime Minister Imran Khan and his wife, Bushra Bibi, to suspend a ruling that their 2018 marriage violated Islamic law. This decision means that both Khan and Bibi will remain behind bars. The appeal was dismissed on Thursday, following a seven-year jail



sentence handed down on February 3, just five days before the country's general elections. The conviction stems from a case filed by Bibi's former husband, Khawar Maneka, who alleged that Bibi did not observe the required three-month waiting period after their divorce before marrying Khan.

Political Reactions

Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI): Sayed Zulfiqar Bukhari, a senior leader of Khan's PTI party, criticized the court's ruling, calling it a "sad day for the judiciary." Omar Ayub Khan, another senior PTI leader, condemned the decision and stated that an appeal would be filed.

Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PMLN): Rana Sanaullah, a top PMLN leader, accused Khan of sowing chaos in the country and alleged that some judges were favoring Khan. Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif also criticized certain judges for allegedly facilitating Khan's corruption.

Shah Mehmood Qureshi

A Joint Investigation Team (JIT) has found Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) Vice Chairman Shah Mahmood Qureshi guilty in seven cases, including charges of terrorism and involvement in the May 9 riots.

The police reported that Qureshi was found guilty based on contradictory statements and incriminating evidence. He failed to provide satisfactory answers regarding his involvement in the May 9 events and was implicated in acts of vandalism, corroborated by digital evidence.

The JIT interrogated Qureshi at Adiala Jail and recorded his statement three times. Subsequently, the police filed a charge sheet in court, declaring Qureshi guilty in all seven cases.

Previously, Qureshi had sought bail in the May 9 cases, arguing that the charges were politically motivated and that he was innocent. His plea stated that he was in Karachi for his wife's medical treatment on May 9, the day of the incidents.

Eight cases have been filed against Qureshi, including those related to attacks on Jinnah House, Askari Tower, and Shadman police station.

Also, in a recent statement, PTI President and former Punjab CM Chaudhry Pervaiz Elahi emphasized PTI's unwavering loyalty to Khan, pledging continued support. Elahi dismissed reports of deals and reiterated his steadfast support for PTI founder Imran Khan. This marked his first public appearance since his release, where he addressed allegations surrounding political negotiations.

Elahi firmly rebutted rumors of political compromises, stating, "Having spent over a year in jail, those who talk about deals and compromises are spreading baseless claims." He disclosed suffering severe injuries, including five broken ribs, during imprisonment, expressing gratitude for his survival and seeing a divine purpose in his recovery.



Strongly condemning what he termed as "misinformation," Elahi criticized certain individuals, including relatives and Interior Minister Mohsin Naqvi, for spreading false narratives about political compromises. He urged them to desist from such actions, asserting that allegations of deals were unfounded.

Looking ahead optimistically, Elahi expressed confidence in PTI's future, affirming the party's resolve to return to power soon. He also criticized those accused of manipulating electoral mandates, particularly addressing local political dynamics in Gujarat.

Meanwhile, an anti-corruption court once again postponed the indictment of former

Punjab Chief Minister Chaudhry Parvez Elahi and others in the Punjab Assembly illegal recruitment case. The court adjourned the hearing until July 8, summoning all accused for indictment on the next date. During the proceedings, Parvez Elahi's counsel submitted an exemption application citing his client's illness, including an unrecovered rib fracture and heart disease, requesting exemption from personal appearance for one day. The court granted the application, adjourning the hearing accordingly. In the aftermath of Imran Khan's removal from power and subsequent legal battles, Pakistan's political landscape has been deeply polarized. Khan's convictions, especially regarding his marriage and other alleged offenses, have sparked controversy and criticism from various political factions.

Despite alleging a conspiracy involving the United States and Pakistan's military, Khan and his Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) party faced convictions related to issues such as an unlawful marriage and leaking state secrets, although some verdicts were later overturned. Khan and his wife remain incarcerated following a court ruling on their marriage violating Islamic law. The aftermath continues to polarize Pakistan's political landscape, with ongoing controversies and legal proceedings involving prominent figures like Shah Mehmood Qureshi and Chaudhry Parvez Elahi. PTI, led by figures like Chaudhry Pervaiz Elahi, remains resilient amid accusations and legal setbacks, expressing determination despite their current opposition status.



Can the PTI - JUI-F Alliance Topple the Government?



By Nimra Atiq

Receiving a potential threat to democracy in the Islamic Republic, coupled with the weakening of the constitution and the absence of the rule of law, two prominent entities in Pakistan, namely the JUI-F and the Pakistan Tehreek-i-Insaaf (PTI), convened a comprehensive meeting. The primary focus of this gathering was to fortify constitutional ideals, reinforce democratic principles, and uphold the rule of law within Pakistan. This unexpected alliance comes at a time when Pakistan's political landscape is in a state of flux, with the country facing a range of economic and social challenges.

The former prime minister's message had been conveyed to the JUI-F chief. If both parties reach an agreement on the formation of an alliance, Imran and Fazl will sign the document. Reports of a possible alliance between both parties, which have remained bitterly opposed to each other, have been circulating in the media for some time. Claims of rigging in the February 8 general elections brought the PTI and the JUI-F closer to each other, surprising many

as people were not expecting the ice between both parties to melt, at least temporarily. There have also been meetings between the delegations of the two parties.

Maulana Fazlur Rehman, who was once skeptical of Imran Khan's style of politics, emphasized the need to improve communication and reduce bitterness between the two parties. He claimed that the Parliament has lost its importance and that democracy is losing its case, while the Constitution has "expired" as it has failed to provide peace to the common man. The goodwill increased to such an extent that the JUI-F chief had to state that his past references to the PTI founder as an agent of Jews were mere political statements. The bridging of differences prompted the PML-N to make overtures to Maulana Fazl, but the latter showed no sign of giving up.

Merging divergent groups introduces a multitude of challenges. The integration of their respective supporters necessitates adept navigation of delicate cultural nuances and the reconciliation of pre-existing political disparities. Failing to manage this

process meticulously could yield significant repercussions for PTI, particularly if they disregard electoral realities and cultural sensitivities in JUIF's strongholds.

PTI's interest in the alliance is potentially linked to capitalizing on JUIF's notable mobilization capacity for street protests against alleged election rigging. While this may yield immediate advantages, the long-term implications remain uncertain. Associating with a party renowned for its more conservative positions has the potential to alienate PTI's more moderate supporters and jeopardize its public image. Nonetheless, the proposed PTI-JUIF alliance is laden with intricacies and potential stumbling blocks. While immediate gains such as increased street power may appear enticing, neglecting the substantial historical, political, and cultural obstacles could exacerbate rather than resolve challenges. Ultimately, the success of this union hinges on astute navigation, prioritization of national interests, and addressing the concerns of both their supporters and the Pakistani populace at large.



Government Scrambles to Avert PTI-JUI-F Alliance Threat

Some Serious efforts appeared to be in full swing to pacify Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam-Fazl (JUI-F) chief Maulana Fazlur Rehman, as the government scrambled to forestall a potentially game-changer alliance between former rivals, the PTI and JUI-F, against the government and powerful circles.

The government is making concerted efforts to pacify the JUI-F leader, Maulana Fazlur Rehman, to prevent this alliance from materializing. The back-to-back meetings of the country's top office holders with the JUI-F chief have come against the backdrop of his ongoing movement against the ruling coalition and powerful quarters over what he calls "mandate theft" and the possibility of rapprochement between JUI-F and PTI in the coming days. The government and "powerful quarters" are deeply concerned about the prospect of a PTI-JUI-F alliance, as they view it as a "dangerous alliance" that could pose a serious challenge to the ruling coalition.

The government is particularly worried that a PTI-JUI-F alliance could "dim the idea of isolating incarcerated PTI founding chairman Imran Khan and his party. This suggests the alliance could undermine the government's strategy of marginalizing the PTI and its leader. The JUI-F's ability to mobilize large numbers of supporters,



combined with PTI's existing base, could allow the alliance to mount significant public pressure on the government through protests and demonstrations. This could undermine the government's legitimacy and popular support. Both PTI and JUI-F have strong support bases in the Pashtun-dominated regions of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Balochistan. A united front between these parties could shift the regional political dynamics and power balance, potentially challenging the government's influence in these areas.

The "Tehrike to Protect the Constitution" initiative marks a significant collaborative effort by Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) and Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam Fazl (JUI-F) to address critical constitutional and democratic concerns within the country. The alliance aims to tackle pressing issues related to the constitution and governance, signaling a strong stance against perceived

government overreach and violations of constitutional principles. If this alliance proves successful, there is potential for it to evolve and incorporate additional opposition parties, thereby solidifying and amplifying the opposition's stance. However, the long-term viability of this collaboration hinges on the ability of the participating parties to overcome ideological and strategic disparities and maintain a unified front in their collective resistance against the ruling government.

As the political dynamics continue to unfold, it is evident that the "Tehrike to Protect the Constitution" will be a major focal point in Pakistan's political landscape in the months ahead. The cohesion between PTI and JUI-F, fueled by their shared dedication to upholding constitutional principles, can instigate substantial transformative changes within the country's political landscape.





Do we need a new party?

Politics is the art of seeking possibilities out of the impossible



By Dr Azhar Aslam

Does Pakistan need a new political party? The answer is a resounding YES. In fact, Pakistan has seldom needed new politics, and a new party, more than it does now.

Politics is the art of seeking possibilities out of the impossible. Looking at the social and political landscape of the country, it is clear as day that despite 'endless possibilities and opportunities', everyone in Pakistan – politicians and the establishment included – are making 'impossibles' out of these possibilities. Entrenched positions have been taken, forgetting every social and political lesson of human history, even the teachings of our beloved Prophet (pbuh). No one is willing to contemplate the lessons of the Treaty of Hudaibiyah.

Meanwhile, the Pakistani awaam continue to languish in poverty, misery and hopelessness. The budget announced a few days back exposes the stark contrast and wide gulf between the two Ps: the 'plight' of the Pakistani awaam and the 'plans' of the Pakistani elite. 'Elite plunder' continues unabated. Human capital, the most precious resource of any nation, continues

to languish at the bottom of priorities with education and health ignored literally a few days after a national educational emergency was declared.

Pakistan has become a 'textbook' in itself for learning how to destroy a country. We first launder money out of Pakistan to invest \$15 billion in Dubai, and then proudly take a begging bowl to secure \$10 billion in loans from the UAE. The nauseating manner in which the 'triumphant return' of rulers is celebrated after their foreign visits to secure loans beats the clownish shenanigans of Rangeela Shah.

With education destroyed and health left to rot, we are producing weak and incompetent human beings who lack the capacity, quality and will to achieve anything greater in life. Life has become a rat race to survive. Even those who migrate – and it is much beyond brain drain now – lack the appropriate qualifications and skills for employability. Hence the stories coming out of various countries where Pakistanis are being kicked out for begging, which seems to have become our most successful national characteristic.

The divided social fabric of a society riven by sects, baradaris, tribes, class, language, and provincialism has been further deepened and widened by the extractive exploitation by the Pakistani elite. In fact, many of these divisions among the 'have-nots' of Pakistan have been created and promoted by the Pakistani elite, to hide their extractive exploitation. Survival has been made so difficult that each man to his own has become a law. The treachery runs deeper. Superficial religiosity has been created, promoted and imposed to cover the deep cracks, and in the course of doing that we have witnessed the worst possible abuse of religion, with every teaching distorted to suit the elite. In this, two Ms have aided and abetted.

At the risk of sounding like a cliché, we live in disruptively epochal times. Humanity faces existential threats like climate change. Artificial intelligence (AI) has already made every technology into a potential monster. The post-Covid world is full of uncertainty. Predictions of civilization teetering at a collapse abound. The so-called 'rules-based order' post the



Second World War lies exposed in its hypocrisy and is at a breaking point. Inequalities and populism abound in the developed world, resulting in soft populist revolts against 'techno-feudalism'. These countries are becoming insular and protectionist.

The era of 'hyperglobalization' is over. New concepts of 'friend shoring', 'asymmetric warfare', 'AI automation', along with headwinds against trade and integration are taking hold in countries that run international institutions – which Pakistan is at the mercy of. FDI may soon seem a concept of the past. Self-reliance may be all that is left. Suddenly Pakistan's critical geographical location may seem like a curse, given the international geopolitical struggles. With Modi being slapped down but a Trump presidency in the offing, the situation becomes more nuanced.

So here we are facing existential global challenges with a poor, deficient divided household. So does that provide a *raison d'être* for a new political party? With 186 registered political parties, why is it that not one of them, including those in power, are actually unable to even 'see' the stormy horizon, let alone grasp the gravity of the situation? The answer is plain and simple:

none of them is an institution. Most are parties on paper and those which matter are personal and family fiefdoms.

The most popular party – the PTI – revolves around one person whose whims and desires are the party, its politics and its practice. The PTI today has become a cult. Its followers, while filled with hatred and whimsical devotion, are without any original ideas – the past disastrous rule between 2018 and 2022 notwithstanding. Regarding the other two parties – the PML-N and PPP – the less said the better. They are the major culprits of the current disastrous state of affairs. Smaller parties in Pakistan all represent the extractive narrow interests of various sorts but again survival remains the first order of their business. No one has the wherewithal to chart the stormy waters. Above all, there is no political will beyond a mere power grab.

The question staring us in the face however is: how can a new political party come to the rescue? After all, it will be the same Pakistanis, same sociopolitical struggles, same hidden and open enemies and worsening socio-economic scenario both at home and abroad. The answer is that in these dark times many Pakistanis have come to similar conclusions and are

willing, ready and able to come together to tackle these challenges by building an institution of a new political party.

The shenanigans of our ruling elite over the last 12 months also seems to have triggered the national consciousness, providing an opportunity to fill the vacuum. What is needed is a political institution that is neither person-centric nor self-interested. A party rooted among ordinary Pakistanis and built bottom-up by them. A party which will reach out to both the Es – the establishment and the elite – to make them realize the gravity of the situation and their calamitous contribution to it as well as allow them space to self-correct and come back to the task of nation-building.

Pakistan needs a new political party that is built like an institution, unlike any political endeavour undertaken in Pakistan in the past. 'Awaam Pakistan' is being established as that institution. It has the will, ability and readiness to shoulder the responsibility of nation-building and national rehabilitation. It welcomes anyone with a sincere heart, selfless dedication and clean record to come on board.

Courtesy The News





Ailing democracy



By Maleeha Lodhi

At a time when democracy across the world is under challenge, there have recently been a number of developments, some that may shape its future trajectory.

Elections in India saw the BJP lose its majority and its leader Narendra Modi cut down to size — a verdict widely viewed as voters salvaging India's democracy from the authoritarian, autocratic direction a populist demagogue was taking the country in. India may have started to buck the global trend of democratic erosion but elsewhere developments have reinforced this trend.

Europe has just seen far-right parties make stunning gains in the European Parliament polls at the cost of French President Emmanuel Macron and German Chancellor Olaf Scholz's parties.

This prompted Macron to call snap legislative elections in a high-stakes effort to contain Marine Le Pen's National Rally party by turning it into a referendum on the far right. But the spectre looms of Le Pen's party winning power. Opinion polls now show that less than half of French voters see

that as a threat to democracy. In the US, former president Donald Trump is the front-runner in the presidential election due in November. Barring any legal impediment, he is poised to regain the presidency. In Britain, Nigel Farage's Reform party is expected to make gains in next month's elections at the expense of the Conservative party.

The resurgence of the far right in the West comes at a time when democracy is already under threat across the world. Democratic regression is now a worldwide phenomenon. Democratic backsliding has been pervasive in countries facing challenges from polarisation, intolerance, anti-minority sentiment and toxic politics. This global trend has been recorded by many international organisations.

In its annual Democracy Report 2024, the Swedish V-Dem Institute finds democracy has declined in almost all regions of the world with "the wave of autocratisation" becoming more pronounced. Its research shows a rollback of democratic rights and institutions. It says the level of democracy

enjoyed by citizens worldwide is down to levels last seen in 1985 — almost 40 years ago. According to the report 71pc of the world's population — 5.7 billion people — live in autocracies — an increase from 48pc 10 years ago.

Similarly, the latest edition of the Global State of Democracy 2023 report by the Stockholm-based International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance sees democracies continuing to contract globally with erosion in checks and balances and constitutional freedoms in nominally democratic states. It finds that for six consecutive years "more countries experienced net declines in democratic processes than net improvements".

Like many other countries Pakistan has also seen democratic regression in recent years.

Democratic weakening is also the finding by the Economist Intelligence Unit, which conducts an annual survey of the health of democracy in 165 countries, assessing them across five measures. Its report, published earlier this year, says conflict and polarisa-



tion have driven a new low for global democracy. Its democracy index shows less than 8pc of the world's population now reside in full democracies, and that 39pc are under authoritarian rule — up from 37pc in 2022. It designates Pakistan as a country under authoritarian rule, downgraded from the previous year when it was classified as a hybrid democracy. The report classifies India and America as flawed democracies. It finds 37pc of people living in a flawed democracy and 15pc in hybrid regimes.

The rise of the far right or ultra-nationalist populist leaders has much to do with democratic reversals. In countries witnessing this phenomenon elected leaders have acted with impunity to erode civil liberties, curb freedom of expression, suppress dissent, persecute minority groups and undermine any check-and-balance system that holds governments to account. They have shown disregard for democratic institutions and norms, engaged in authoritarian conduct and used hyper-nationalism to rally support, orchestrating anti-minority sentiment that often triggered violence. This has turned their political systems into illiberal or flawed democracies and deeply divided their societies.

In a recent op-ed in the Financial Times, Gideon Rachman makes a distinction

between the far right and the right, which is helpful to keep in mind. The dividing line is their attitudes to democracy. He writes, "If a political leader refuses to accept the results of an election and wants to smash the 'deep state' (in reality, the state itself), then he or she is clearly on the far right." But leaders who pursue reactionary, even racist policies (he includes Italy's Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni) but "within the framework of democratic politics and the rule of law", cannot be regarded as far right. Sometimes, he argues, the line between a new form of authoritarian conservatism and the far right becomes "blurry."

The global trend of democratic regression in the last decade or more raises the question of the underlying factors responsible for this and for the rise of far-right populist leaders. This cannot be attributed to any uniform set of reasons as each country's case is different with distinct factors shaping its political trajectory.

Some common features can still be identified although this is not an exhaustive list. They include the failure of traditional political parties and their policies to meet heightened public expectations, growing disconnect between political elites and the people, poor governance, increasing inequality, lack of responsiveness by institu-

tions to public concerns, political polarisation, as well as economic and social discontent spawned by globalisation and the cost-of-living crisis. Many analysts ascribe the far right's surge in Europe to public discontent with soaring inflation, fallout of the war in Ukraine, anti-immigrant sentiment and the cost of green policies.

Pakistan too has seen democratic decline, but for reasons different from those challenging de-mocracy elsewhere. The 2018 election led to a form of hybrid democracy that increasingly shifted the civil-military power balance and gave way to a greater establishment role in governance, the political system and even economic management. This has been accompanied by polarised politics and an unbroken political deadlock that has marginalised parliament and ruled out resolution of disputes by political means.

While efforts to curtail the freedom of expression have been resisted, the media is still subject to 'informal' controls. Meanwhile, the opposition continues to face coercive actions. This makes the outlook for democracy in Pakistan as cloudy as it is in other parts of the world.

Courtesy Dawn



The Hope to Stop Israel's Assault on Palestine: The Role of the Muslim World and Arab Countries



By Daniyal Wali

The ongoing conflict between Israel and Palestine has drawn international attention and widespread condemnation. Despite this, tangible efforts to halt the assault and support Palestine have been minimal, particularly from Muslim-majority countries. Many of these nations, while vocally condemning Israel, have not translated their rhetoric into meaningful action. This inaction stems from various factors, including geopolitical considerations, domestic issues, and fear of international repercussions.

Several authoritarian regimes within the Arab world view the Palestinian issue as a burden, fearing that taking a stronger stance against Israel could jeopardize their relations with powerful allies like the United States. These regimes often prioritize maintaining their political stability and economic interests over confronting Israel. The presence of nuclear weapons in Israel's arsenal acts as a significant deterrent. Muslim-majority countries, aware of Israel's military capabilities, are reluctant to engage in direct confrontation. The potential for devastating retaliation is a strong disincentive for taking more assertive actions. Many Muslim-majority countries are also

grappling with their own domestic issues, such as economic instability, political unrest, and internal conflicts. These challenges divert their attention and resources away from the Palestinian cause, leading to a passive stance.

Arab Regimes and the Palestinian Issue

Arab regimes, particularly those with authoritarian governments, often maintain a passive stance regarding the conflict. Their reluctance to act is influenced by several factors. Authoritarian regimes fear that taking a strong stance on Palestine could lead to increased public pressure and unrest within their own countries. They prefer to avoid actions that might destabilize their political control. These regimes are cautious about jeopardizing their diplomatic and economic relationships with Western powers. They are concerned that a more aggressive stance on Palestine could lead to sanctions or a loss of economic aid and investments. Historically, the Arab world has had a complex relationship with the Palestinian issue. While there is widespread public support for Palestine, political leaders often prioritize their national interests over regional solidarity.

The military dynamics of the Israel-Palestine conflict are heavily influenced by Israel's possession of nuclear weapons. This nuclear capability provides Israel with a strategic advantage, discouraging neighboring Muslim-majority countries from taking aggressive actions. While Pakistan is the only Muslim-majority country with nuclear weapons, it is geographically distant from Palestine. Neighboring countries lack such capabilities, raising questions about whether they were prevented from acquiring them or chose not to pursue them. Israel's nuclear arsenal serves as a powerful deterrent, allowing it to act with impunity. Muslim-majority countries, aware of the catastrophic consequences of a nuclear conflict, are understandably cautious.

Efforts by Egyptian, Qatari, and U.S. mediators to broker a ceasefire between Israel and Hamas have faced significant challenges. The primary obstacles to a ceasefire include Israel's reluctance to commit to a permanent cessation of hostilities and Hamas's insistence on such a commitment. These differences make it difficult to reach a lasting agreement. Despite the challenges, the need for a ceasefire is urgent to alleviate the humanitarian crisis in Gaza. Continued fighting only exacerbates

the suffering of Palestinian civilians and risks regional escalation.

The role of the United States in mediating this conflict cannot be overstated. The U.S. has significant leverage over Israel, given its substantial military and economic aid to the country. However, the U.S. has historically been reluctant to exert this leverage to its fullest extent, often prioritizing its strategic alliance with Israel over pushing for a more balanced approach to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The Biden administration, with its recent proposal, attempts to balance these competing interests by proposing a phased ceasefire that includes a humanitarian imperative. This approach aims to create momentum towards a longer-term peace agreement while addressing immediate humanitarian needs.

The phased approach to a ceasefire involves several critical components. In the first phase, Israel would withdraw its forces from populated areas of Gaza, and Hamas would release Israeli civilian hostages in exchange for the release of Palestinian prisoners. This initial phase aims to create a foundation for trust and cooperation between the two sides. The second phase would see the release of all remaining hostages and a full withdrawal of Israeli forces from Gaza, turning the initial ceasefire into a permanent cessation of hostilities. The third phase involves lifting the blockade on Gaza, allowing for the movement of people and goods and the beginning of full reconstruction efforts.

This phased approach seeks to address the core concerns of both parties. For Israel, it provides a mechanism to secure the release of hostages and ensure that its security concerns are addressed. For Hamas, it offers the promise of a permanent ceasefire and the lifting of the blockade, which are critical to improving the humanitarian situation in Gaza. However, the success of this approach hinges on the willingness of both sides to engage in good-faith negotiations and adhere to the agreed-upon terms.

The Path to a Lasting Peace

Despite these diplomatic efforts, the path to a lasting peace remains fraught with challenges. The mutual distrust between Israel and Hamas, the influence of

hardliners on both sides, and the broader geopolitical dynamics of the region all complicate the prospects for a durable resolution. Nonetheless, the phased ceasefire proposal represents a crucial step towards de-escalating the conflict and addressing the immediate humanitarian crisis.

The hope to stop Israel's assault on Palestine requires a multifaceted approach, involving diplomatic, political, and grassroots efforts. International mediators must continue to push for a ceasefire, leveraging their influence to bring both sides to the negotiating table. Sustained diplomatic pressure is essential to achieving a lasting peace agreement. Public opinion,



both within the Muslim world and globally, can play a crucial role in influencing government actions. Grassroots movements and advocacy can raise awareness and apply pressure on political leaders to take a more active stance on the Palestinian issue. Muslim-majority countries need to work towards greater regional solidarity and cooperation. A unified stance on Palestine, supported by coordinated diplomatic and economic actions, can strengthen their position and increase their leverage in negotiations. To effectively support Palestine, Muslim-majority countries must also address their internal challenges. Political stability, economic development, and social cohesion are essential to building the capacity to engage more robustly in international conflicts.

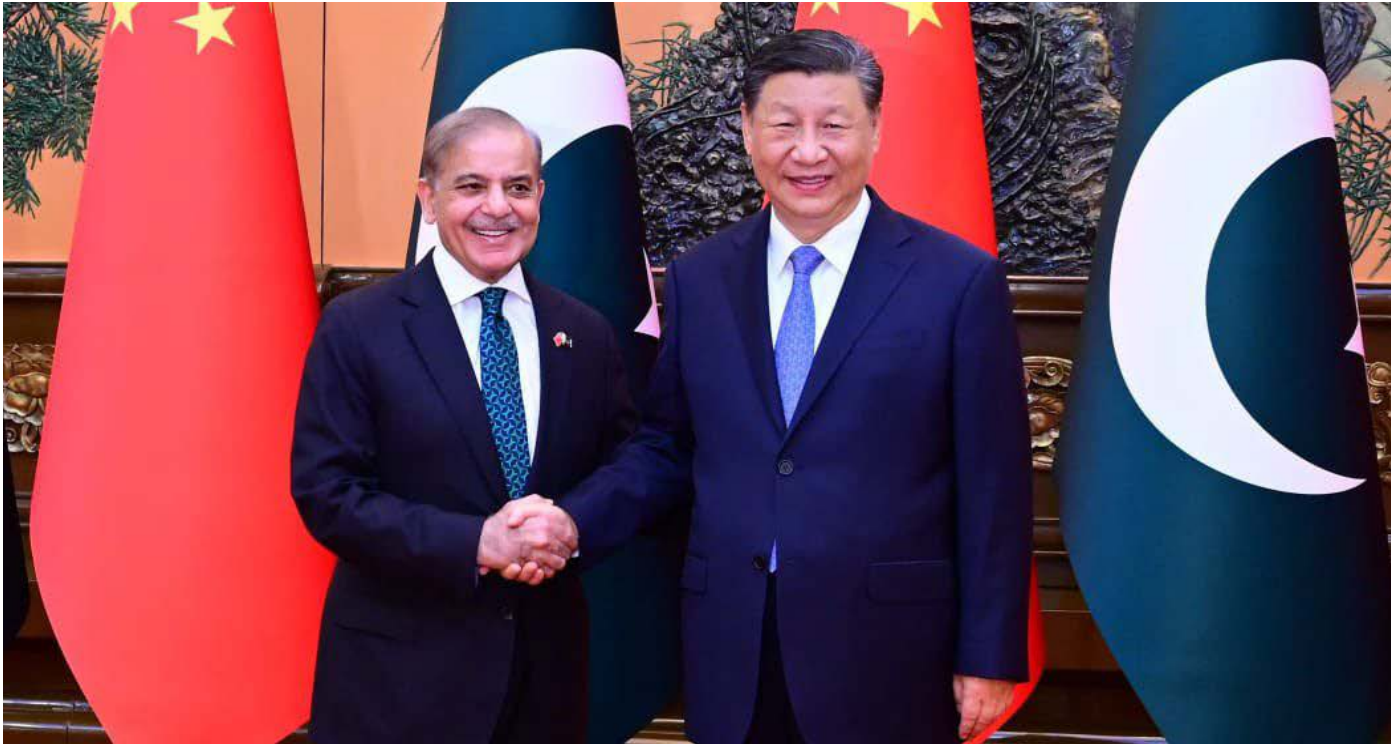
The role of the Arab and Muslim world in

addressing the Palestinian issue is critical. These countries possess significant diplomatic and economic influence that, if harnessed effectively, can contribute to a more balanced and just resolution of the conflict. However, this requires a shift from passive condemnation to proactive engagement. It also necessitates a willingness to confront the geopolitical challenges and internal pressures that have historically hindered a more robust response. The international community, particularly Muslim-majority countries, must rise to the occasion and take meaningful action to support the Palestinian people in their quest for justice and self-determination. This includes not only diplomatic efforts but also economic support for reconstruction and

humanitarian aid. It also involves advocating for the rights of Palestinians in international forums and using their influence to push for a more balanced approach to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

In a nutshell, the hope to stop Israel's assault on Palestine hinges on the actions of the Muslim world and Arab countries. While the challenges are significant, there are pathways to a more effective response. Strengthening diplomatic efforts, mobilizing public opinion, building regional solidarity, and addressing internal challenges are all crucial steps towards achieving a just and lasting peace for Palestine. The international community, particularly Muslim-majority countries, must rise to the occasion and take meaningful action to support the Palestinian people in their quest for justice and self-determination.

Pakistan-China Relations Under the New Government: Improvements and Progress on CPEC



By Kanwal Munir

Introduction

Pakistan's relationship with China has long been a cornerstone of its foreign policy, often described as an "All-Weather Strategic Cooperative Partnership." This alliance has weathered numerous global challenges, remaining resilient through various political changes and economic crises. Recent developments, particularly under the new government led by Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif, have sparked debates on whether these relations have further strengthened and how the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) projects have progressed. This article delves into these aspects, drawing insights from recent statements, project updates, and bilateral meetings.

Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif's recent visit to China marks a significant moment in the ongoing narrative of Pakistan-China relations. During his visit, Sharif met with Chinese President Xi Jinping, Premier Li Qiang, and other high-ranking officials. He also engaged with the Chinese business community at the Pakistan-China Business Forum 2024 in Shenzhen. His message was clear and strong: Pakistan remains committed to the CPEC, a flagship project under China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). Sharif's commitment to CPEC is not new. During his tenure as the chief minister of Punjab, his rapid execution of CPEC projects earned him the nickname "Shehbaz Speed" from Chinese diplomats. However, his recent trip was not just about reaffirming this commitment but also addressing China's concerns regarding political stability and security in Pakistan.

Political instability and security issues in Pakistan have been persistent concerns for China. The instability has exacerbated Pakistan's economic woes, while security issues, particularly targeting Chinese citizens, have cast a shadow over the bilateral relationship. These concerns were prominently featured in the 2024 China-Pakistan joint statement issued after Sharif's visit. Comparing the 2024 statement with those from 2018, 2022, and 2023 reveals shifts in priorities and language, reflecting the evolving dynamics of the relationship. Notably, the term "highest priority" in China's foreign policy concerning Pakistan, used in the 2018 and 2022 statements, was downgraded to just "a priority" in the 2023 and 2024 statements. This change suggests a possible reevaluation by China of its relations with Pakistan, perhaps in response to the ongoing instability and security challenges.

China's apprehensions are understandable given the volatile political landscape in Pakistan over the past few years. The arrest of former Prime Minister Imran Khan and the subsequent riots have added to the instability, which former Chinese Foreign Minister Qin Gang addressed during his visit to Pakistan in May 2023. Qin emphasized that stability is crucial for development and urged Pakistani leaders to build consensus for the nation's progress. This political instability, coupled with security threats targeting Chinese nationals, has strained the relationship, although China continues to express support for CPEC and remains engaged in dialogue with Pakistani leadership.

Progress on CPEC Projects

Despite the challenges, CPEC projects have made notable progress, particularly as the initiative enters its next phase. The Karot hydropower project, the first large-scale hydro power project under the BRI, has significantly contributed to Pakistan's energy sector, generating 3.1 billion kilowatt-hours of electricity in 2023. Additionally, two China-donated projects in Gwadar, including a seawater desalination plant and the upgraded Pak-China Friendship Hospital, have been inaugurated, addressing critical needs in the region. At the Karachi Nuclear Power Plant, the K2 and K3 units, using China's Hualong One reactors, are producing a combined 20 billion kilowatt-hours annually, supporting both residential and industrial energy demands. The groundbreaking of Unit 5 at the Chashma Nuclear Power Plant further exemplifies the deepening energy cooperation between the two nations.

The next phase of CPEC aims to advance in multiple areas, including connectivity, industrialization, and agriculture. The optimization of the ML-1 railway project and the realignment of the Karakoram Highway are expected to see significant progress. Both Pakistan and China have expressed satisfaction with the pace of CPEC projects, emphasizing third-party participation in areas like mining, agriculture, and information technology. CPEC's impact on Pakistan's economy has been profound. In its first phase, the corridor added over 8,000 megawatts of power to the national grid, built more than 800 kilometers of highways, and laid an extensive fiber-optic network. These projects have not only bolstered infrastructure but also created over 200,000 jobs, significantly contributing to economic growth.

However, some challenges remain. The 2024 joint statement reflects concerns over the security of Chinese nationals in Pakistan. The special mention of the suicide attack on Chinese engineers working on the Dasu Dam project underscores the severity of the issue. Following this attack, Pakistan took unprecedented steps by sacking security officials and police officers responsible for the convoy's protection. This action indicates Pakistan's seriousness in addressing China's security concerns, although it remains to be seen whether these measures will suffice to restore confidence fully.

Addressing Western Criticisms and Future Prospects

Despite the positive developments, CPEC has faced criticism, particularly from Western media, which have labeled it a "debt trap." Pakistani officials and Chinese observers have dismissed these accusations as baseless propaganda. The traditional channels for funding large infrastructure projects in developing countries, such as the World Bank and Asian Development Bank, have become less reliable, making Chinese financing crucial for countries like Pakistan. Pakistani Ambassador to China Khalil-ur-Rahman Hashmi has highlighted the importance of China's financing in achieving sustainable development goals.

He argues that instead of criticizing China, it should be appreciated for providing necessary funds for infrastructure and energy projects in developing nations.

The 2024 joint statement emphasizes an "upgraded version of CPEC" with eight major steps aligned with Pakistan's "5Es Framework"—Economy, Environment, Energy, Education, and Equity. This ambitious framework aims to address various sectors holistically, ensuring sustainable development. However, the absence of new major projects in the joint statement indicates a cautious approach, likely influenced by Pakistan's rising circular debt crisis. Financial concerns, particularly unpaid dues to Chinese power companies, have slowed progress on some projects, such as the ML-1 railway.

Looking ahead, the future of Pakistan-China relations and the progress of CPEC will depend on several factors. Ensuring political stability and improving security for Chinese nationals will remain top priorities for Pakistan. Additionally, effective implementation of the next phase of CPEC projects will be crucial in maintaining the momentum of economic cooperation. Both nations have shown a willingness to adapt and evolve their partnership, with an increased focus on third-party investments and new sectors like information technology and agriculture. The success of these efforts will determine the long-term viability and impact of CPEC on Pakistan's development.



Conclusion

In conclusion, the relationship between Pakistan and China continues to evolve, with significant strides made under the new government of Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif. Despite challenges related to political instability and security, both nations remain committed to deepening their economic and strategic partnership. The progress of CPEC projects, particularly in energy and infrastructure, highlights the tangible benefits of this cooperation.

As Pakistan navigates its internal challenges and seeks to stabilize its economy, the partnership with China through CPEC remains a critical pillar. The coming years will be crucial in determining the extent to which these projects can contribute to Pakistan's development and how effectively the two countries can address mutual concerns, ensuring the longevity and success of their strategic alliance.

Resistance by other means



By Maleeha Lodhi

On his first visit to Srinagar after he was re-elected prime minister, Narendra Modi declared that elections in occupied Jammu and Kashmir would soon be held. He also indicated that its statehood would be restored.

Meanwhile, the Election Commission of India announced that updated electoral rolls for J&K would be published on Aug 20. To understand the significance of this development and what the BJP government's motives and intentions are, it is necessary to rewind and recall what happened five years ago and thereafter.

Ever since India illegally annexed J&K in 2019 by abrogating Article 370 of its constitution, which gave the state special status, it has tried to convey the impression that the situation there was normalising. Aug 5, 2019, had, in fact, opened a new chapter in the tortured history of the occupied territory.

The bifurcation of the state and its absorption in the Indian union was in brazen violation of UN Security Council resolutions and was condemned throughout the state. A prolonged lockdown and commu-

nication blackout followed, the military siege tightened, public assembly was banned, the press silenced and Kashmiri leaders jailed, including pro-Delhi politicians, to prevent a popular upsurge against the move, which robbed the Kashmiri people of virtually all their rights.

The Modi government's claim that, over time, normalcy and stability had returned to Kashmir, was belied by continuing repression and human right violations, curbs on political activities, crackdown on the media, jailing of journalists, and induction of additional troops into what was already the world's most militarised region. Leaders of the All Parties Hurriyat Conference (APHC) continued to languish in jail or house detention.

Modi's earlier efforts to hold legislative elections by enticing pro-Indian political leaders to participate came to naught. In June 2021, he invited these leaders to a round table conference on Kashmir. The aim was to consolidate the 2019 action by persuading select politicians to rejoin a revived political process and create a facade of 'normality'. But even handpicked Kashmiri leaders rejected the government's

controversial delimitation move and, instead, demanded restoration of J&K's statehood. The meeting ended in failure.

People of occupied Kashmir will always find a way to say no to India.

In May 2022, India's Delimitation Commission carved out new electoral constituencies in J&K that aimed to disempower the Muslim population. The delimitation plan handed Jammu six more seats in the 90-member J&K Assembly, while Kashmir was given only one more. Under this plan, Jammu's representation went to 43 seats, leaving Kashmir with 47. This, despite the fact that, according to the 2011 census, the Kashmir Valley's population was seven million, while Jammu's was 5.3m. Delhi's move to recast the electoral map was rejected across Kashmir. APHC leaders denounced it while pro-Delhi Kashmiri politicians called the plan unacceptable as it sought to alter Kashmir's demography and aimed to turn the Muslim majority into a minority.

The post-2019 period saw almost every aspect of life for Muslims in occupied J&K come under assault by the BJP government.

A series of steps — administrative, demographic, electoral — were taken to disempower and disenfranchise Kashmiris and alter the Muslim identity of Kashmir.

Several actions mimicked Israeli settler policies in occupied Palestine. Demographic changes involved new domicile rules, with millions of so-called domicile certificates issued to non-Kashmiri outsiders, who became eligible after abrogation of Articles 370 and 35A of the constitution. Voting rights were also given to non-residents. Properties were confiscated and newland laws introduced to enable land to be seized from locals and transferred to outsiders.

In 2022, BJP authorities seized the J&K Waqf Board and all its properties across the region. This marked a drive to take control of all prominent places of religious significance for Muslims in the occupied territory, including shrines. Religious leaders and Islamic scholars were arrested and prayers barred in many mosques across Kashmir. These and other measures sought to systematically erode Kashmiri religious identity and culture.

The announcement about polls in J&K comes against this grim backdrop of Delhi's

use of force and fraud to marginalise Kashmiri Muslims and set the stage for assembly elections, designed to 'endorse' and legitimise its 2019 action. The government is legally obliged to hold polls by Sept 30, 2024, by the supreme court verdict of December 2023, which upheld the abrogation of Article 370 as 'constitutional'. The last assembly elections were held in 2014.

Apart from having to comply with the supreme court order, the Modi government has read the higher turnout in the Lok Sabha elections in J&K as a return to normalcy. Turnout in the three Lok Sabha constituencies in Kashmir certainly went up compared to the past, although in Srinagar, two-thirds of voters didn't cast their ballot. Still, the higher turnout was disingenuously cast by BJP leaders as 'vindication' of the abrogation of Article 370.

This was contrary to reality, which was so strongly evidenced by the election of Abdul Rasheed Sheikh from Baramulla. A fierce opponent of abrogation, he won from jail, being incarcerated on terrorism charges, defeating former chief minister Omar Abdullah. His campaign was run on the slogan "Jail ka badla vote se leinge" (Voting will avenge the jailing). The

support he drew across the board, especially from youth, reflected the depth of Kashmiri anger with Delhi in what was widely seen in the Valley as a vote against India.

There are some indications that many Kashmiris may want to use the vote in the assembly elections to convey their discontent and rejection of Delhi's policies. This could be a departure from the past, when they boycotted polls as a sham process under occupation. With other avenues to voice their demands closed, the vote may become a vehicle of protest against Delhi.

Although it is too early to say how this will play out, for now many Kashmiri residents are quoted in news reports as saying that voting, far from endorsing India or its policies, would be a way to register their dissent and resistance. The question, then, is if Delhi sees an electoral upsurge of resistance, would it still hold assembly elections?

What is beyond doubt is that the people of occupied Kashmir will reject any regime foisted on them and continue, one way or another, to express their aspiration for freedom from Indian occupation.

Courtesy Dawn



Democrats fear replacement scenarios as much as keeping Biden



By Edward-Isaac Dove

They're not writing anything down. They're not making any firm commitments. But between staring into phones that started buzzing about three minutes into the debate and haven't stopped since, several of Joe Biden's leading possible Democratic replacements and top aides have started to think through what an unprecedented last-minute fight into the August convention might look like.

They're already carefully monitoring their prospective opponents' moves as they go, looking both for openings and ways to call them out for getting ahead of the president. Multiple people connected with other candidates, for example, noted the "interesting timing" of an already-scheduled fundraising appeal that Michigan Gov. Gretchen Whitmer's PAC texted out on Friday evening that reads almost like a mission statement for her and points out how she won in her key presidential battleground state.

More than two dozen top Democratic officials, political operatives and donors

tied to Biden and to many of the people most discussed as potential substitutes – many of whom asked for anonymity to discuss the most politically fraught situation most have ever encountered – say they're terrified by nearly every scenario: Going forward with Biden, a Kamala Harris nomination, a nomination of someone else who would in that case have beaten the first Black female vice president, long nights of multiple ballots spilling ideological and personal feuds on national television, even just revelations of embarrassing details about people who have never been vetted by a national campaign.

"It would be a Category 5 hurricane," said one top Democratic official nervous about Biden considering what would happen if the president stepped aside. "People don't understand the sheer destruction that would be unleashed."

To others, that stems from a prisoner's mentality that doesn't consider how much resistance there is to Trump.

"I think we can absolutely swap and win," said a major Democratic donor. "If Joe Biden's the nominee, we're all in. If someone else is the nominee, we're all in."

A CBS News/YouGov poll out Sunday morning found only 55% of registered Democratic voters saying Biden should continue running, with 45% saying he should step aside. Biden campaign aides have spent the last couple of days pointing to metrics like some of their best grassroots fundraising days and a surge in job applications since Thursday.

None of the speculation matters if a president who will be three months older by the next scheduled debate doesn't step aside. So far, he has stuck to an apologetic but defiant posture in public while in private saying he knows how bad his performance was but that he still thinks his candidacy is the only way forward.

And since he won all the primaries, he controls most of the delegates, which means that they can only vote for someone else if he decides to pull out.

Democrats feeling the ground move beneath their feet

Multiple Democratic officials and operatives, some of whom are affiliated with alternatives and those who are not, rage that Biden has demonstrated too much of an ego to have bowed out before. The president's argument that he was the Democrat best able to beat Trump, several said, has now been turned on its head and they are left feeling he's the option least able to beat Trump.

They say the president's inner circle who have been running the campaign and prepared him for the debate – and who told some privately ahead of Thursday night that the prep had gone well – are either not being honest or are not capable of steering him either toward an exit or a recovery. At a LGBTQ fundraiser in New York City on Friday night, one attendee said some of the conversations even turned against Jill Biden, with the deep love for her as the quirky reluctant political spouse quickly curdling into exasperation that she is not willing to make the move that would lead to them leaving the White House.

Even as minds turn to a list that includes Harris, Illinois Gov. J.B. Pritzker, Whitmer, Kentucky Gov. Andy Beshear, California Gov. Gavin Newsom, Arizona Sen. Mark Kelly, Georgia Sen. Raphael Warnock, Transportation Secretary Pete Buttigieg and even relatively new Pennsylvania Gov. Josh Shapiro and Maryland Gov. Wes Moore, none have gone public with anything but words of support for Biden. They worry about being called traitors. They worry that it might make Biden dig in more.

A debate watch party in Los Angeles on Thursday night happened to feature Harris' husband Doug Emhoff, Pritzker, Whitmer and Beshear. There were other high-profile attendees – by a few answers in, Rob Reiner was screaming about losing and Jane Fonda had tears in her eyes, according to people in the room.

Even Barack Obama is choosing his words carefully. When asked about the debate by House Minority Leader Hakeem Jeffries at a fundraiser for House Democrats, he said

Biden has “the values that reflect the best in America,” but politics is a “team sport,” with the president as “the captain.” He added that getting Jeffries to be speaker is “probably the most important thing we can do for the Biden reelection campaign as well.”

Biden campaign aides dismiss not only the possibility that he will drop out, but that anyone could actually do better, or go up against Trump with a list of supporters that runs from progressive icon Rep. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez to conservative GOP former Georgia Lt. Gov. Geoff Duncan.

“You win elections by bringing everyone under one banner. If the imperative to you is winning, the best chance we have of doing it is the guy who has been in the White House, has a historic record of accomplishment and already beaten Donald Trump once, and not any of this mess,” a senior Biden adviser told CNN.

But in one demonstration of the scramble that the campaign is in over how to shoot down the replacement talk: on Friday morning, Biden aides said on a call that included a number of Democratic operatives that it would be dispatching Donna Brazile, the former interim chair of the Democratic National Committee, and leading Democratic operative Stephanie Cutter to explain why replacement would be a fantasy.

Brazile, who has written about how she looked into the possibility of a post-convention replacement of the nominee after Hillary Clinton's stumble at a September 11 event in 2016, told CNN that she was not told this in advance. Cutter said she had not been either.

But both said they remain committed to Biden and urged others to do the same.

New Jersey Gov. Phil Murphy, a Democrat who eyed a possible 2024 run of his own had Biden decided not to run, said he had dinner with Biden on Saturday night at a fundraiser he and his wife hosted and felt confident sticking by the president. Still, he mentioned the president's age twice in a brief interview, saying “he's 81.”

“There are very few people who can span the broad interests of our beloved Democratic Party in the same way he can. And

he's proven that,” Murphy said. “That's not a prospective, ‘Hey, I think he could do this.’ He has done it. Not sure who else can do that.”

Murphy said he hadn't considered another option because “based on every data point, a dimension that I'm aware of, he's not going anywhere.”

Harris' advantage going into an open convention

If there is an opening, most agree Harris would have the early edge.

If Biden did make a sudden exit, there would be pressure for him to give his party some direction, and doing anything other than tapping his vice president would be a snub bigger than when Obama wounded him so deeply by making clear that he saw Hillary Clinton as his own successor in the run-up to the 2016 election. To a convention hall full of loyal Biden delegates trying to recover their equilibrium, endorsing Harris could carry a lot of weight.

A Harris backer insisted that the interest in anyone else at this point is just “the appeal of the unknown.” Being unknown can have benefits, such as not having any of the entrenched bad feelings that have come to define her in the minds of some voters. But it also means that none of them have had their pasts and records delved into the way she has over her abbreviated presidential campaign, her time as running mate and as vice president.

As the other name on the Biden-Harris campaign, the vice president would also be the only one legally able to take over the entire existing operation, along with all the money already raised – a fact overlooked by the Biden campaign in an email from deputy campaign manager Rob Flaherty to supporters, which insisted that an alternative starting with zero dollars in their bank account would be “a highway to losing.” That would be on top of being the potential replacement with the largest national name recognition. She also stands even or a little ahead any of the other contenders in most of the polls that have posed the question of replacing Biden.

People around Harris have of course considered all this. But her approach since

the debate has been to put herself forward as the most dutiful and most loyal defender, to the point that the first lady – who has made her frustrations with Harris clear in the past – on Friday night picked up the defense that Harris landed on immediately after the debate.

The vice president's "I'm not going to spend all night with you talking about the last 90 minutes when I've been watching the last three-and-a-half years of performance," which people in her orbit say she came up with on the fly herself, has since been picked up by campaign operatives in addition to the first lady.

Harris would have other advantages too. A top outside political adviser, Minyon Moore, was months ago named the official in charge of convention proceedings, and others like her former chief of staff Tina Flournoy and Brazile have key committee roles too. Nor are her supporters shy about making their opinions known.

In an interview, Brazile said that her reaction to the calls that she has been getting since the debate with people inquiring about other candidates is: "How the f**k are you going to put all these white people ahead of Kamala?"

Backers of other possible candidates acknowledge that the internal feelings of deference toward her would be widespread and hard to overcome, and fears about the backlash among Black and women voters from ditching her would run extremely high.

"Biden's not stepping down and Kamala Harris gets the first shot in any open convention scenario," said one DNC delegate fond of one of the alternatives.

Still, many worry that that's the kind of feeling that could mean much more among delegates to a Democratic convention than a wider electorate, and that it would just be setting her up to be the one carrying the banner into defeat.

Potential for long nights fighting on national TV

Not everyone is convinced. In a time of crisis for the Democratic Party like what this would open up, a combination of

ambition and sense of duty would clearly be enticing. People connected with other prospective candidates say that Harris' years of scrutiny, association with Biden and her own word-salad answers could be too much to let her get a free pass.

Some are already gaming out Harris failing on the first ballot and jumping in then.

"Would it be very hard and challenging? Yes. but I think there's actually a benefit to whoever the white knight is, riding in on a horse to save the campaign and the country," said one senior Democratic operative.



But that probably would mean multiple candidates rushing around the convention floor making all sorts of promises, going through multiple ballots, with a melee of clashing candidacies and other interests all on non-stop coverage.

Not to mention that it's been decades since the last floor fight. The happy activists who tend to get picked as delegates don't know how to cut backroom deals. They don't even know the rules.

Democratic operatives always like to mock headlines that describe them as "in disarray." Now some tell CNN they worry they could end up in more disarray than ever.

Some operatives are already daydreaming about who would be part of various outreach teams, which chits they'd be able to call in from previous support, what strengths they'd emphasize about their preferred candidates and what points could undercut prospective opponents. This kind

of showdown would almost certainly benefit politicians who could get good teams together quickly, several acknowledged, making a Cinderella story less likely than an established force who moves in hard and fast.

Democratic operatives know that political junkies will love it, but they worry about the message that will send to the country overall as they try to put themselves forward as the alternatives to Trump-style chaos and fighting. That, several said, doesn't look like a formula for winning either.

"President Biden is the nominee and he's going to remain the nominee," said Cutter, who is on contract to produce the convention. "For those who are for looking for some sort of interparty fight, be careful what you wish for because that would ensure a Trump victory."

Among some, talk has turned to just soldiering through, hoping that the polls don't show a collapse and the debate panic fades into the July 4 holiday. Biden himself claimed at a fundraiser in the Hamptons on Saturday that "voters had a different reaction than the pundits" and he's seen polls that show the voters are backing him more after the debate.

"One hundred percent, he's the nominee," said California Rep. Robert Garcia, an avid Biden backer. "Anything else is unserious chatter."

Courtesy CNN

The reason why NATO and Europe found Biden's debate performance so alarming



By Luke McGee

Joe Biden's performance at the CNN presidential debate against Donald Trump has raised concerns with US allies – particularly within NATO and Europe.

Those concerns, to be clear, are not about whether or not Biden is fit to make decisions. They are not worried that he will implement dangerous policies or take dramatic actions internationally – always a factor when talking about the person in charge of the world's most powerful armed forces, a nuclear arsenal and largest economy.

The common view among US allies is that Biden is a sensible man who surrounds himself with sensible people and whatever happens, they will continue to make rational, reasonable decisions.

Nor is the concern that Biden's stumbling, at times incomprehensible, performance has ensured a second Trump term. The prospect of a Trump return is a concern, but it has already been baked into allied thinking.

Europe, in particular, has never really moved on from Trump 1.0 and has held the view since 2020: that if it could happen once, it could happen again. That has been at the heart of European strategic thinking

since Trump took office in 2016 and has continued through Biden's presidency.

The concerns that America's allies have are that the most powerful country on earth cannot provide the one thing they most want: stability.

Removing a candidate this late in the electoral cycle, diplomats fear, could undermine the whole process. It could allow adversaries like China and Russia to lash out at the US democratic system, making it look weak in comparison to their autocracies where strongmen grip power tight.

This may sound trivial, but diplomacy at this level is often seen in zero-sum terms: something bad or embarrassing for the West, particularly the mighty US, is good for its enemies.

These small shows of supposed weakness create openings for adversaries to spread propaganda, sow divisions in the US and the West itself through disinformation.

These risks would be bad enough in removing a candidate, but imagine if these conversations are taking place once Biden had secured a second term. Constant speculation about his ability to govern at home and abroad might be unfounded at a policy

level, but it would doubtless create division, distrust and panic throughout his second term.

What might that materially mean? Would Biden be able to push things like aid for Ukraine through the House? Would he have the political capital to take potentially unpopular action in the Middle East or Indo-Pacific if those regions further destabilise? And would a question mark over the White House's power embolden America's global adversaries in to act more aggressively in their own backyards? Meeting all of these challenges effectively requires stability.

That brings us back to Thursday night. The world saw an old man struggling to speak eloquently or coherently. Whether you are a supporter or opponent, that performance raises legitimate questions about whether or not he is simply too old for the job he wants to keep doing.

Stability means more than political stability or consistency. If the noise and questions about Biden's ability to govern continue, allies fear that he will be unable – fairly or unfairly – to provide the stability the West desperately needs at an uncertain time.

Courtesy CNN

The High profile British-Pakistani and Kashmiri candidates contesting the UK elections

By J. Choudhry

Around a dozen British-Pakistani and Kashmiri-origin parliamentarians are contesting in winnable seats for the July 4th, 2024 UK elections in a highly charged campaign dominated by the issues of economy, immigration, rising inflation, crime, and Israel's war on Gaza.

Most of the potential British-Pakistani candidates are contesting in areas of Birmingham and West Midlands (five seats), Greater Manchester (two seats), Bradford (two seats), Bedford and Dews-bury (one seat each), London and South-east (one seat each), and Scotland (two seats).

In an interesting first-time development, the challenge to Labour ticket-holding candidates comes not from the main parties such as Conservatives, Liberal Democrats, Green, or the newly reformatted Reform Party or the Workers Party of Great Britain headed by George Galloway but from an array of independents of Pakistani and Kashmiri origin campaigning on the issue of Gaza.

Almost all the "independents" in these areas campaigned primarily over Israel's war on Palestine since October 7th last year.

In former safe Labour strongholds with significant numbers of Muslim and Pakistani-origin voters, there is huge anger against the Labour Party and its support for Israel. The independents are trying to exploit that anger, mainly through social media sites such as TikTok, WhatsApp, and Instagram. A lot of fake news, disinformation, and toxicity are at play in these elections.

Below is a list of the high-profile Pakistani and Kashmiri-origin candidates who are either in safe seats, highly likely to win, or running as the main candidates from the major parties.

Birmingham – Ladywood

Shabana Mahmood (Labour) is a



high-profile British-Pakistani politician. The Oxford graduate was first elected on the Labour ticket in 2010 and has been winning ever since.

She is considered amongst the close circle of Labour leader Keir Starmer. She won the last election with a majority of 28,000 votes — 80% of the total votes cast. She was Labour's national campaign coordinator until a few months ago and was part of Starmer's core team that prepared Labour's manifesto.

Her opponents this time are Shazna Muzammil (Conservative), Akhmed Yakoob (Independent), Zoe Challenor (Green Party), Lee Dargue (Liberal Democrats), and Irene Henery (Reform UK).

Birmingham – Perry Barr

Khalid Mahmood (Labour) is the senior-most British-Pakistani parliamentarian, having first been elected in 2001. His

opponents are Sabah Hamed (Liberal Democrats), Garry Hickton (Conservative), Andy Chaffer (Communist Party of Britain), Kefentse Dennis (Green Party), Akshay Khuttan (Reform UK), and Shangara Singh (Socialist Labour Party). The strongest challenge to Khalid Mahmood is from Ayoub Khan (independent), a local councillor who resigned from the Liberal Democrats a few months ago.

Birmingham – Hall Green & Moseley

Tahir Ali (Labour) was first elected in 2019 with a majority of more than 28,000 votes. This time, he faces challenges from opponents Barrister Mohammad Hafeez (independent), Shakeel Afsar (independent), Zain Ahmed (Green Party), Henry Morris (Conservative Party), Izzy Knowles (Liberal Democrats), and Raja Babar Saleem (independent).

Bradford West

Naz Shah (Labour) is running for re-election on a Labour ticket. One of the highest profile Muslim and Pakistani-origin parliamentarians since her election first in 2015, she is facing challenges from Imad Ahmed (Liberal Democrat), Nigel Moxon (Conservative), Khalid Mahmood (Green Party), Jamie Hinton-Wardle (Reform UK), Umar Ghafoor (independent), Akeel Hussain (independent), and Muhammed Ali Islam (independent).

Bradford East

Imran Hussain (Labour) has opponents Jacob Anstey (Reform UK), Aubrey Holt (Conservative), Robert O'Carroll (Liberal Democrat), Richard Riley (Social Democratic Party), Lara Barras (The Yorkshire Party), and Celia Hickson (Green Party) standing against him. Mohammed Rahman (independent), Amer Rehman (independent), and Talat Sajawal (independent) are likely to pick up lots of votes.

Bolton South and Walkden

Yasmin Qureshi (Labour) was first elected in 2010. Her main opponents are Prof Reis Abraham Halliwell (Independent), Mohammed Afzal (Conservative), Gemma-Jane Bowker (Liberal Democrat), Jack Khan (Workers Party), Philip Kochitty (Green Party), and Julie Pattison (Reform UK).

Coventry South

Activist and campaigner Zarah Sultana (Labour) was first elected in 2019 with a slim margin of 401 votes. Her main opponents are Chris Baddon (Reform UK), Mattie Heaven (Conservative), Alastair Mellon (Social Democratic Party), Joshua Morland (independent), Niko Omilana (independent), Anne Patterson (Green Party), Stephen Richmond (Liberal Democrat), and Mohammed Syed (Workers Party of Britain).

Gillingham and Rainham

Rehman Chishti (Conservative) is currently the senior-most Muslim parliamentarian of the Tory party, first elected in 2010. This time around, he has Naushabah Khan

(Labour), Stuart Bourne (Liberal Democrat), Kate Belmonte (Green Party), Roger Peacock (Christian Peoples Alliance), Rizvi Rawoof (Reform UK), Peter Wheeler (Social Democratic Party), and Peter Cook (independent) running against him.

London – Tooting

Dr. Rosena Allin-Khan (Labour) is half-Pakistani and half-Polish. She was first elected in 2016 in a by-election when Sadiq Khan became London Mayor and resigned from his seat. Her opponents are Ethan Brooks (Conservative), Judith Trounson (Liberal Democrat), Tarik Hussain (Workers Party of Britain), Jas Alduk (Rejoin EU), Nick Humberstone (Green Party), Andrew Price (Reform UK), and Davinder Jamus (independent).

Manchester – Rusholme

Afzal Khan (Labour) was first elected in 2017 in a by-election from Manchester Gorton. In the last general election in 2019, Khan won with a majority of more than 30,000 votes. The former councillor, European Parliament member, and Lord Mayor is running to become the MP again from the newly formed Manchester Rusholme. His opponents are Alexandra Marsanu (Conservative), Thirza Asanga-Rae (Green Party), Mohmamed Bilal (Workers Party of Britain), Peter Clifford (Communist League), Joel McGuigan (Reform UK), and Faraz Bhatti (independent).

Meriden and Solihull East

Saqib Bhatti (Conservative) was first elected in 2019 from the safe Tory seat on a lead of 23,000 votes. He's facing competition from Sarah Alan (Labour), Malcolm Sedgley (Reform UK), Shesh Sheshabhattar (Green Party), and Virk (Liberal Democrat).

Sussex Weald

Nusrat Ghani (Conservative) was first elected in 2015 from the safe Tory seat. She has served in various cabinet positions in the last three Tory governments. This time, she is facing Dipesh Patel (Labour), Danielle Newson (Liberal Democrat), Stephen Gander (Social Democratic Party),

Austin Henderson (Green Party), Dominic Stemp (Heritage Party), Chris Magness (UKIP), David Morgan (Reform UK), and Shaun Bowler (independent).

Bedford

Mohammad Yasin (Labour) was first elected in 2017 from this seat. Though he won again in 2019, it was with the thinnest majority of just 146 votes. While seeking re-election this time, he faces competition from Prince Sadiq Chaudhury (Workers Party), Pinder Chauhan (Conservative), Ben Foley (Green Party), Tarek Javed (independent), Matt Lansley (Reform UK), and Henry Vann (Liberal Democrat).

Dewsbury and Batley

Labour's candidate for Dewsbury and Batley is Heather Iqbal. Her father is Pakistani and her mother is English. She is contesting the general election for the first time and is considered a strong ally of Labour leader Sir Keir Starmer. Her opponents are Iqbal Hussain (independent), John Edward Rossington (Liberal Democrats), and Lalit Raghunath (Conservative).

Airdrie and Shotts – Scotland

Scottish Pakistani Anum Qaisar has been given a ticket by the Scottish National Party (SNP) again. Qaisar was first elected in a by-election around three years ago. Her opponents in this election are Alexandra Herdman (Conservative), Kenneth Stevenson (Labour), Lewis Younie (Liberal Democrat), Josh Robertson (Alba), David Hall (Reform UK), and John Leckie (British Unionist Party).

Glasgow South West – Scotland

Dr. Zubir Ahmed is standing for Labour in Glasgow South West, a seat where the party came within 60 votes of winning in 2017. Labour requires a 6.43% swing to win in the constituency, one of the 126 the party needs to secure a majority in the House of Commons. The 42-year-old is a transplant and vascular specialist in Glasgow. His main opponents are Green Party's John Hamelink, Liberal Democrat's Paul McGarry, Reform UK's Morag McRae.

Kamal Siddiqi among 7 journalists to receive prestigious media award in Philippines



Renowned Pakistani journalist Kamal Siddiqi on Monday received the prestigious Journalists of Courage Impact Award at the East-West Center (EWC) International Media Conference in Manila, Philippines.

The former director news at Aaj TV is the first Pakistani to receive the biennial award, which honours journalists who have “displayed exceptional commitment to quality reporting and freedom of the press, often under harrowing circumstances.”

The six other recipients include Sincha Dimara, news editor at Inside PNG; Tom Grundym, editor-in-chief and founder of Hong Kong Free Press; Alan Miller, founder of the News Literacy Project in Washington DC; Soe Myint, editor-in-chief and managing director at Mizzima Media Group in Yangon, Myanmar; John Nery, columnist and editorial consultant at Rappler in Manila; and Ana Marie Pamintuan, editor-in-chief at The Philippine Star.

In February, Siddiqi said in a statement on X that he was “humbled”



at being named as one of the “Journalists of Courage and Impact” this year.

According to the four-day conference’s agenda, Siddiqi also spoke at a panel titled ‘The Whole World is Voting — Reporting in a Global Election Year’. Alongside him on the panel were seasoned journalists from Taiwan, Indonesia, India, South Korea and the Philippines.

Siddiqi is currently working at the Media Development Investment Fund as a senior programme officer focusing

on South Asia. He was previously the director at the Centre for Excellence in Journalism at the Institute of Business Administration.

Prior to that, he was the editor of The Express Tribune, and has also served as the president of the EWC’s alumni association in Karachi.

He is also a fellow of the Center for Democratic Development and Rule of Law at Stanford University and a senior non-resident fellow with the Atlantic Council, according to the EWC.

Extremism in Pakistan: Detecting a Weak Signal in the System



By Amir Jahangir

Extremism has long been a challenge for Pakistan, a nation with a rich cultural heritage and a complex political landscape. While the overt manifestations of extremism, such as terrorist attacks, receive significant attention, it is crucial to recognize the subtler, underlying signals that indicate its presence and evolution. These weak signals, often overshadowed by more immediate concerns, demand a proactive approach to prevent extremism from taking deeper roots and evolving into a terrorism streak in Pakistani society.

Weak signals are early indicators of potential trends or issues that may not yet be fully evident or widely acknowledged. In the context of extremism, weak signals could manifest as changes in social behaviors, shifts in ideological rhetoric, or minor incidents that hint at a growing problem. Recognizing these signals requires a keen understanding of the socio-political environment and an ability to connect seemingly disparate events and trends.

One of the primary weak signals of extremism is a gradual shift in cultural and social norms. In Pakistan, this can be observed through the increasing influence of conservative ideologies in various aspects of life, including education, media, and public discourse. When extremist ideologies begin to permeate these spheres subtly, they often go unnoticed until it becomes more entrenched and difficult to counteract. For instance, changes in school curricula that emphasize a narrow interpretation of religious texts, or the proliferation of extremist content on social media platforms, can serve as early warnings. Additionally, the marginalization of moderate voices and the glorification of extremist figures in popular culture are subtle but significant indicators of a growing problem.

The emergence of subtle indications, where that society is slipping into extremist-prone thinking, such as the rise and influence of religious right-wing parties like Tehreek-e-Labbaik Pakistan (TLP), which emerged in 2015, following a controversial execution. They quickly gained attention through protests. In 2017 they staged a major sit-in, paralyzing the federal capital and forcing a government minister to resign. TLP participated in the 2018 elections and garnered significant votes. They've also been at the forefront of protests against perceived blasphemy abroad and domestically. The group's leadership faced arrests and crackdowns, but also periods of release and agreements with the government. These agreements often centered around expelling foreign officials deemed disrespectful to Islam. TLP remains a controversial yet influential force in Pakistan's political landscape.

Blasphemy laws in Pakistan have undergone significant evolution, deeply impacting the nation's socio-political landscape. These laws, inherited from the British colonial era, were initially codified in the Indian Penal Code (IPC) of 1860 to protect religious sentiments. Post-independence, Pakistan retained these laws with relatively few changes until the 1970s and 1980s.

Under General Zia-ul-Haq's regime, significant amendments were made as part of a broader effort to Islamize Pakistan's legal system. Section 295-B was introduced in 1982, making the desecration of the Quran punishable by life imprisonment. In 1986, Section 295-C criminalized the defamation of Prophet Muhammad, prescribing death or life imprisonment as penalties. Additionally, Sections 298-A, 298-B, and 298-C were added to target derogatory remarks against religious figures and sects.

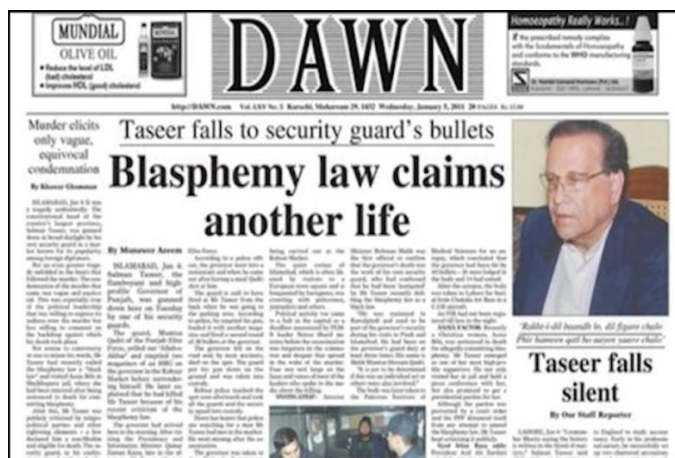
These stringent laws have often been misused to settle personal disputes, target minorities, and suppress dissent. High-profile cases like that of Asia Bibi, who was sentenced to death in 2010, highlighted the severe consequences of these laws. Critics argue that the laws are vague and prone to abuse, leading to wrongful imprisonments and extrajudicial killings.

The media reported the issue from different angles sides, however, the fear of criticism remained both on the left and right.

Despite significant domestic and international criticism, there has been little political will to reform the blasphemy laws, largely due to their deep-rooted support among conservative religious groups. Politicians advocating for reform, such as Punjab Governor Salman Taseer and Federal Minister for Minorities Shahbaz Bhatti, have faced severe threats and violence, resulting in their assassinations in 2011.

The Asia Bibi Case and the Killing of Governor Salman Taseer

The rise of social media has further complicated the issue, with online accusations leading to mob justice. Reform advocates emphasize the need for due process, protection of minorities, and safeguards against misuse. However, meaningful reform remains challenging in Pakistan's highly charged political and religious environment. The evolution of extremism and the blasphemy laws in Pakistan reflects the ongoing struggle to balance religious identity with human rights and legal justice.



Video Against Girls' Education: Potential Weak Signal of Extremism in Pakistan

A recent viral video on the internet posted by Fazal Ahmad Chishti, who presents himself as a religious scholar, a fake Mufti who calls himself a Hafiz, has garnered attention for his controversial and regressive messages on YouTube and Facebook. His channel, which includes religious-style recitations full of abusive language and hate speech, has sparked significant outrage due to its promotion of harmful and misogynistic views against girls' education and other societal issues. The social media accounts on YouTube <https://www.youtube.com/@hassaniqbalchishtifans> and @has-

saniqbalchishtifans on Instagram have a complete library of songs and kalams that incite hate and violence against girls' education. One of the weak signals of rising extremism in the country.

In the video, Fazal Ahmad is dressed as a religious scholar while he sings a kalam in Punjabi. He falsely claims the title of Mufti and urges parents to keep their daughters at home and veiled, suggesting that sending them to school will lead to dishonor as they only go there to dance. He has termed sending girls to schools as pimping daughters for prostitution.

The video, titled "Apni Dhi Schoolo Hata Le | Othy Dance Kardi Payi Ae | Kalam Hasan Iqbal Chishti," has sparked widespread condemnation. Although citizens are demanding action against the individual for promoting such regressive and harmful ideas. The impact has yet to be seen.



This incident highlights a troubling trend where extremist views are being disguised as religious teachings, potentially influencing and radicalizing segments of the population. The use of religious garb and titles to lend credibility to such messages is particularly concerning, as it can mislead and manipulate public opinion under the guise of faith. Addressing and countering these weak signals is crucial to preventing the spread of institutionalized extremism in Pakistan.

Islam places great emphasis on the importance of education for both men and women. The Quran and hadith make it clear that seeking knowledge is an obligation for all Muslims, regardless of gender. The Prophet Muhammad ﷺ (peace be upon him) said, "Seeking knowledge is mandatory for every Muslim," and he also emphasized the importance of educating girls. Islam has always recognized the dignity and rights of women, including their right to education, as evidenced by the examples of the Prophet's educated wives, Hazrat Khadija (RA) and Hazrat Aisha (RA).

Recently, in Swat, a local tourist Mohammad Suleman, was brutal-

ly beaten to death by a mob on Thursday night under the accusation of desecrating the Holy Quran. Following the lynching, the mob set both his body and the Madyan Police Station on fire, resulting in several policemen being injured during the chaos.

This incident echoes similar tragic events in Pakistan's recent history. In 2021, a Sri Lankan factory manager was lynched in a highly publicized case that sparked international outrage. Six individuals were sentenced to death for their roles in the lynching, highlighting the severe consequences of such violent acts.

The case of Mashal Khan, a university student lynched in 2017 over false accusations of blasphemy, further underscores a troubling trend of violence driven by extremism in Pakistan. These incidents are not isolated; they reflect a growing social mindset that perpetuates violent extremism. This extremism encompasses ideologies and actions aimed at achieving political, religious, or ideological goals through terrorism and other forms of communal violence, deeply affecting Pakistan's societal fabric.



Economic disparities and the marginalization of certain groups can also serve as weak signals of extremism. In Pakistan, regions with high unemployment rates, lack of educational opportunities, and poor governance are particularly vulnerable. Extremist groups often exploit these vulnerabilities, offering financial incentives and a sense of belonging to disenfranchised individuals. The recruitment of youth from economically disadvantaged backgrounds is a concerning trend that requires attention. Programs aimed at providing education, vocational training, and economic opportunities in these regions can help mitigate the appeal of extremist ideologies.

Political rhetoric and policy shifts towards more exclusionary or hardline stances can be weak signals of rising extremism as well. In Pakistan, political parties and leaders sometimes adopt nationalist or religiously charged rhetoric to garner support. While this may yield short-term political gains, it can also legitimize extremist views and create a fertile ground for radicalization. Monitoring

political discourse and policy changes, especially those that marginalize minority groups or promote intolerance, is essential. Encouraging inclusive governance and fostering dialogue between different communities can help counteract these trends.

Addressing weak signals of extremism requires a community-based approach that involves political capital, local stakeholders, religious leaders, educators, and civil society organizations. These groups are often best positioned to identify and address early signs of radicalization within their communities. Promoting community resilience through awareness campaigns, interfaith dialogues, and community policing can help identify and counteract extremist influences before they escalate. Empowering communities to take ownership of their security and well-being is a key strategy in recognizing and mitigating weak signals of extremism.

The National Action Plan (NAP) of Pakistan, while not directly mentioning "hate speech," targets actions that breed it through its focus on religious extremism and intolerance (Articles 4 and 5). This focus aims to curb sectarian violence and hate speech often rooted in religious extremism. Additionally, NAP calls for stricter enforcement against publications promoting hatred and intolerance (Article 7). This could encompass publications inciting blasphemy, a crime already enshrined in Section 295 of the Pakistan Penal Code. However, NAP doesn't explicitly address girls' education as a right. While a more tolerant society fostered by NAP could indirectly benefit girls' education, the plan's emphasis on religious extremism can be a double-edged sword. Critics argue it can be used to suppress critical voices, even those advocating for girls' education reform (Article 19 of the Constitution guarantees freedom of speech, while Article 25A ensures the right to education for all).

Furthermore, concerns exist regarding the selective application of NAP, potentially neglecting hate speech targeting women or minorities (Articles 25 and 26 of the Constitution guarantee equality before the law and protection from discrimination). Overall, NAP's effectiveness in promoting girls' education and tackling hate speech remains a complex issue with both potential benefits and drawbacks depending on its implementation. The implementation of the NAP in a revised form is not only a need but an immediate necessity for the social and economic stability of the country.

Extremism in Pakistan presents a multifaceted challenge that cannot be addressed solely through reactive measures. Recognizing and responding to weak signals is crucial in preventing the growth and entrenchment of extremist violent ideologies. By fostering cultural inclusivity, addressing economic disparities, monitoring political rhetoric, and promoting community-based approaches, Pakistan can build a more resilient society capable of countering extremism at its roots. In a nation as diverse and dynamic as Pakistan, the subtle and obvious signs of extremism must be acknowledged and addressed with urgency. Only through proactive and comprehensive strategies can the country hope to safeguard its future against the threat of radicalization and violence.

The stability of Pakistan is not just a matter of governance; it is crucial for securing the prosperity and future of over 250 million citizens as well.

Pakistan climate change act – challenges



By Hasnain Ibrahim Kazmi

The Government of Pakistan ratified the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) on June 1, 1984, the Kyoto Protocol on January 10, 2005, and the Paris Agreement on November 10, 2016. With these ratifications, Pakistan committed to implementing these international conventions and agreements comprehensively. This task requires extensive adaptation and mitigation measures across all sectors of the economy. It is a multifaceted, inter-provincial and inter-ministerial challenge that has to be addressed at the national level.

Pakistan participated in the Kyoto Protocol that is associated with the UNFCCC, which requires its member countries to set binding targets to reduce emissions. The protocol enables states to achieve these targets through national initiatives and provides mechanisms like International Emissions Trading, the Clean Development Mechanism, and Joint Implementation.

The spirit of the principle of climate change is expressed in the preamble of UNFCCC. The UNFCCC is based on the intention that climate change is a global issue that demands a collective

global response. Since greenhouse gas emissions originate from and affect all nations, it is critical for all countries to take action against this challenge.

The main objective of the UNFCCC is stated in Article 2, which is to stabilise greenhouse gas levels in the atmosphere to prevent dangerous human-caused interferences to the climate system. Article 3 of UNFCCC further outlines the principles steering this objective. Article 3(1) of UNFCCC categorically highlights the responsibility of parties to protect the climate system for the benefit of present and future generations, based on equity and according to their abilities. Article 3(3) of UNFCCC emphasises the need for precautionary methods to anticipate, prevent, or minimise the causes and adverse effects of climate change.

The states reaffirmed their commitment to tackle climate change in the 18th Conference of the Parties in Doha, Qatar, in December 2012, and laid the foundation for augmented ambition and action. The states established a timetable to adopt a Universal Climate Agreement by 2015. The objective was to reach a pact on a binding and universal agreement to limit greenhouse gas emissions,

preventing global temperatures from rising more than 2 degrees Celsius (3.6 degrees Fahrenheit) above pre-Industrial Revolution levels. The COP21 meeting in Paris, held in December 2015, culminated in 196 countries, including Pakistan, signing a new Climate Change Agreement on December 12, 2015. This is known as the Paris Agreement.

In the light of these legally binding international commitments, Pakistan Climate Change Authority was established under the Pakistan Climate Change Act of 2017. The primary objective of this Act is to fulfil Pakistan's obligations under international climate conventions and to address the effects of climate change within the country. The Act outlines that the Authority will operate under the guidance of a high-powered Pakistan Climate Change Council, chaired by the Prime Minister.

Despite the Act's provisions, the Authority was not constituted even after seven years. The august Supreme Court took cognizance of a public interest Constitution Petition (No.42/2022) which prompted the initiation of the formation process of the Authority. An advertisement for

the appointment of members of the Authority was published in newspapers and the process of appointments seems to be underway.

The Climate Act of 2017, in its current form, does not provide a comprehensive framework for implementing Pakistan's climate obligations under the international treaties, conventions and agreements. Specifically, it lacks:

- A definition of climate-related offences;
- Penal consequences for violations; and
- A prosecution mechanism and designation of competent courts to handle offences.

There is a distinction between environmental and climate issues. In Pakistan, the environment and climate change issues are being treated as one subject without recognising the differences between the two fields. The Government of Pakistan too conflated environmental and climate issues as one and the same thing. To effectively tackle climate change, it is crucial to understand and address these distinct subjects separately.

The Pakistan Climate Change Act of 2017 mandates the Pakistan Climate Change Authority to establish institutional and policy mechanisms for implementing federal and provincial adaptation and mitigation policies, plans, programmes and



projects. These include renewable energy and clean technology initiatives, energy efficiency and conservation measures, awareness-raising and capacity-building programs. However, the Act lacks provisions for dealing with those who violate its terms, either deliberately or unintentionally, and it does not include enforcement procedures.

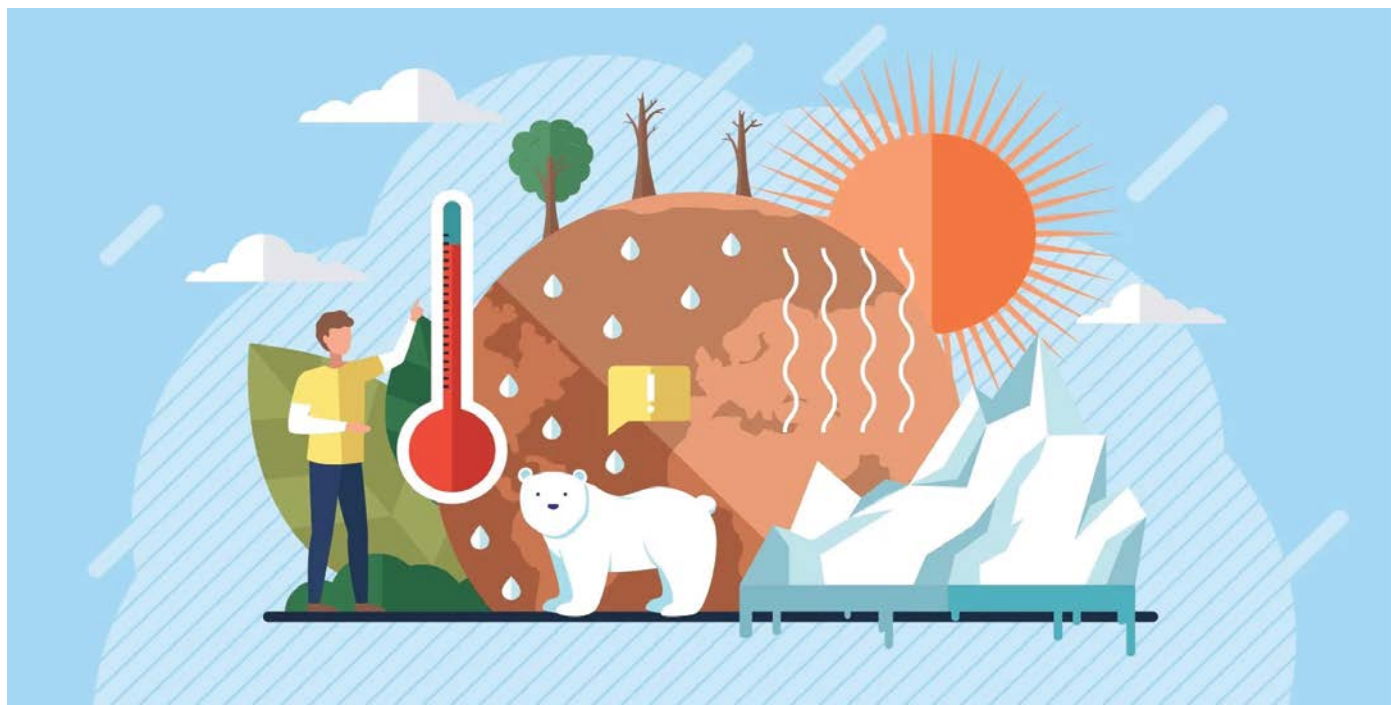
In contrast, the Pakistan Environmental Protection Act of 1997 includes provisions for offences, penalties, environmental tribunals, environmental magistrates and appeals from the orders of tribunals and magistrates. Both the Pakistan Climate Change Act of 2017 and the Environmental Protection Act of 1997 are federal laws addressing different issues. The Climate

Change Act of 2017, however, is ineffective without mechanisms to enforce its policies and guidelines, making it a “tiger without teeth”. Without addressing these enforcement mechanisms, the Climate Act of 2017 will face significant challenges in achieving its goals. Further, the significant gap as identified may not be abridged through the subordinate or delegated legislation as the basic provisions of implementation, enforcement and prosecution are missing from the main body of the Act of 2017.

The Federal Government may consider making necessary amendments to the Act of 2017 in order to address the potential challenges that could arise during its implementation in the times to come.



Climate Change is Affecting People's Health - Here's How the Private Sector in Pakistan Can Help

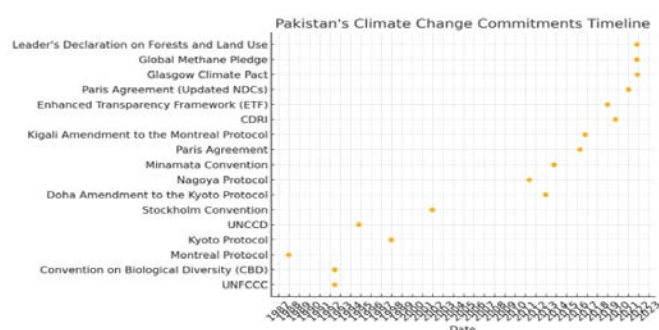


By Amir Jahangir

Climate change poses a significant threat to public health globally, and Pakistan is no exception. The complex, interconnected impacts of climate change in Pakistan are driven by systemic factors across infrastructure, agriculture, livelihoods, and healthcare. The health impacts of climate change threaten not only individuals but also businesses and workforces, underscoring the need for the private sector to leverage its resources and expertise in mitigation efforts. The private sector must collaborate with public and non-profit sectors to develop, apply, and encourage the adoption of new technologies to address this growing crisis.

Pakistan has made several commitments to international climate change treaties, including both historical and recent commitments to safeguard its interests.

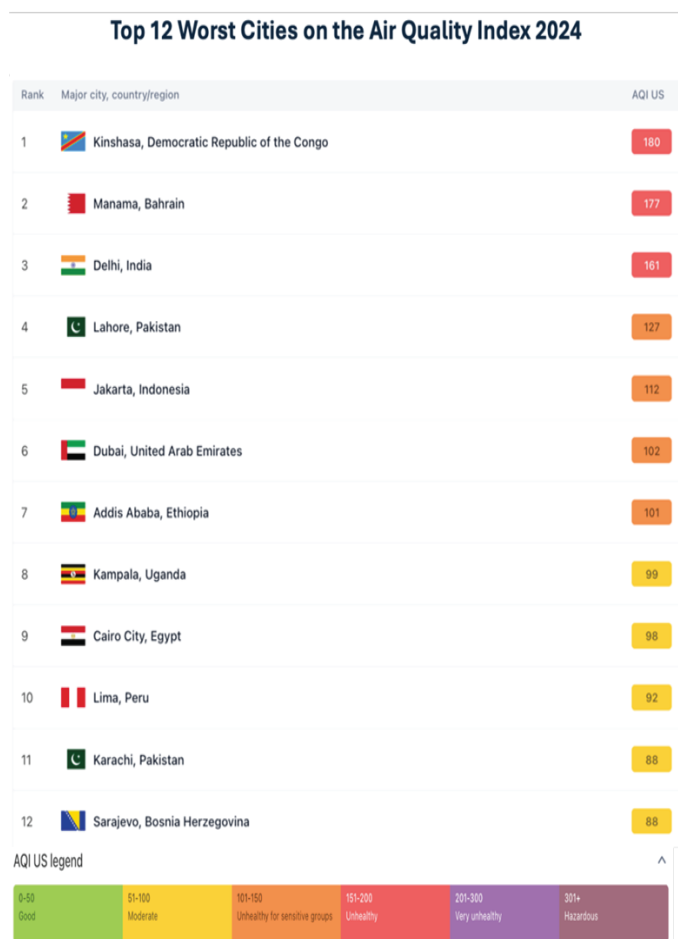
This list reflects Pakistan's ongoing and historical commitments to international treaties aimed at addressing climate change, promoting environmental sustainability, and enhancing resilience to climate impacts.



Treaty	Clause	Date of Signing
United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC)	Article 4: Commitments to develop and periodically update national inventories of greenhouse gas emissions.	June 13, 1992
Kyoto Protocol	Article 10: Voluntary commitments for non-Annex I countries to adopt policies and measures to mitigate climate change.	December 11, 1997
Paris Agreement	Article 4: Commitment to prepare, communicate, and maintain successive nationally determined contributions (NDCs).	April 22, 2016
Doha Amendment to the Kyoto Protocol	Amendment to Annex B: Adding new commitments for Annex I parties; Pakistan supports this as a non-Annex I country.	December 8, 2012
Montreal Protocol on Substances that Deplete the Ozone Layer	Article 2A: Control measures on consumption of controlled substances.	December 18, 1987
Kigali Amendment to the Montreal Protocol	Article 5: Phase-down of hydrofluorocarbons (HFCs) for developing countries.	October 15, 2016
Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD)	Article 6: General measures for conservation and sustainable use.	June 5, 1992
Nagoya Protocol on Access to Genetic Resources and the Fair and Equitable Sharing of Benefits Arising from their Utilization to the Convention on Biological Diversity	Article 5: Fair and equitable sharing of benefits.	May 11, 2011
Stockholm Convention on Persistent Organic Pollutants	Article 3: Measures to reduce or eliminate releases from intentional production and use.	December 6, 2001
Minamata Convention on Mercury	Article 3: Mercury supply sources and trade.	October 10, 2013
United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD)	Article 4: Commitments to combat desertification and mitigate the effects of drought.	October 14, 1994
Paris Agreement (Updated NDCs)	Article 4: Commitment to prepare, communicate, and maintain successive nationally determined contributions (NDCs).	Updated in 2021
Glasgow Climate Pact	Various commitments to accelerate climate action, including mitigation, adaptation, and finance.	November 13, 2021
Global Methane Pledge	Voluntary commitment to reduce global methane emissions by at least 30% from 2020 levels by 2030.	November 2, 2021
Leader's Declaration on Forests and Land Use	Commitment to halt and reverse forest loss and land degradation by 2030 while delivering sustainable development and promoting an inclusive rural transformation.	November 2, 2021
Coalition for Disaster Resilient Infrastructure (CDRI)	Commitments to promote the resilience of new and existing infrastructure systems to climate and disaster risks.	September 23, 2019
Enhanced Transparency Framework (ETF) under the Paris Agreement	Article 13: Enhanced transparency framework for action and support, providing clarity on mitigation and adaptation actions.	December 12, 2018

In Pakistan, the manifestations of climate change are already visible and alarming. The country has experienced a surge in extreme weather events, including unprecedented heatwaves, floods, and droughts, affecting millions of people. According to the Global Climate Risk Index of the World Economic Forum, Pakistan ranks among the top ten countries most affected by climate change. Extreme weather events in Pakistan have displaced communities, destroyed infrastructure, and led to significant economic losses, impacting around 20 million people annually.

Air quality in Pakistan has deteriorated drastically, with major urban centers like Lahore and Karachi frequently ranking among the most polluted cities globally. Air pollution in Pakistan is responsible for approximately 128,000 premature deaths annually, with indoor air pollution from the use of solid fuels in homes being a major contributor. This disproportionately affects urban populations and exacerbates respiratory and cardiovascular diseases, especially among vulnerable groups such as children, the elderly, and those with pre-existing health conditions.



Food and water security are also critical issues. Pakistan's agricultural sector, which employs a 70%+ population, is highly vulnerable to climate change. Changes in precipitation patterns, increasing temperatures, and water scarcity have reduced crop yields, contributing to food insecurity. According to the World Food Programme, around 60% of Pakistan's population faces food insecurity, and 44% of children under five suffer from stunted growth due to malnutrition. Additionally, water scarcity is a growing concern,

with around 22 million people lacking access to clean drinking water, further compounding health issues related to waterborne diseases.

Infectious diseases are another area of concern, as climate change alters the distribution and spread of pathogens. Rising temperatures and changing precipitation patterns create conducive environments for diseases such as malaria, dengue fever, and cholera. Pakistan has seen a resurgence of dengue fever in recent years, with outbreaks affecting thousands of people annually.

The table below looks into the possible infectious diseases that can potentially impact Pakistan's population due to climate change:

Disease	Impact	Climate Change Reason	Vulnerable Age Group	Vulnerable Population Area
Dengue Fever	Increased incidence and severity of outbreaks	Increased rainfall and warmer temperatures	All ages	Urban and rural areas
Malaria	Increased transmission and spread to new areas	Changes in rainfall patterns and temperature	All ages	Rural areas, especially in Punjab and Sindh
Chikungunya	Emergence and increased outbreaks	Expansion of Aedes mosquito habitat	All ages	Urban and semi-urban areas
Leishmaniasis	Increased incidence and spread	Altered vector ecology due to temperature and humidity	All ages	Balochistan, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa
Typhoid Fever	Increased outbreaks and severity	Contaminated water supply due to flooding	All ages	Urban and rural areas
Hepatitis A and E	Increased outbreaks due to water contamination	Contaminated water supply and flooding	All ages	Rural areas, particularly after floods
Diarrheal Diseases	Increased incidence and severity	Water contamination and sanitation issues	Children, elderly	Rural areas, flood-prone regions
Japanese Encephalitis	Emergence and increased incidence	Expansion of vector habitats in flooded areas	Children, elderly	Rural areas, particularly in Sindh
Rift Valley Fever	Emergence and increased outbreaks	Expansion of mosquito habitats and flooding	All ages	Flood-prone areas, particularly in Sindh

These diseases are influenced by climate change through various mechanisms such as altered vector ecology, changes in rainfall patterns, and increased temperatures, which affect the distribution, incidence, and severity of these diseases. The impacts are felt across different age groups and geographic regions in Pakistan.

To address these multifaceted challenges, it is crucial to identify how different manifestations of climate change directly and indirectly impact health. The Climate and Health initiative at the World Economic Forum (WEF), in collaboration with L.E.K. Consulting, has produced an insight report titled "Health Impacts of Climate Change: Evidence Landscape and Role of Private Sector." The report assesses the biggest health impacts of climate change and highlights critical interventions required to address the most urgent areas.

The report identifies ten areas of health most severely affected by climate change, emphasizing that infants, children, the elderly, and pregnant women are particularly vulnerable. Weakened physiological functions in these groups hinder their ability to adapt to environmental changes and combat infections. Socially disadvantaged populations, including lower-income individuals and racial minorities, face interconnected challenges such as higher rates of pre-existing medical conditions, substandard living conditions, and limited access to healthcare services. In Pakistan, rural populations are particularly vulnerable due to limited access to healthcare services and information.

Moreover, extreme weather occurrences can exacerbate these risks,

leading to sudden spikes in specific vector-borne diseases. For example, severe flooding in Pakistan in 2022 resulted in a five-fold increase in malaria cases within the country.

Addressing the complex and interconnected ways climate change affects health requires tackling systemic drivers, including infrastructural damage, agricultural disruption, livelihood loss, and healthcare access challenges. The report pinpoints twelve drivers categorized as primary contributors (direct effects of climate change), secondary contributors (drivers arising from primary contributors), and amplifiers (pre-existing conditions exacerbating the health effects).

The public sector plays a pivotal role in addressing the health impacts of climate change, but the private sector's involvement is equally critical. Private climate finance has been increasing at half the rate of public finance, with most progress made in funding renewable energy. However, there is a notable shortfall in adaptation and resilience finance. Private companies in various industries have a vested interest in enhancing climate resilience and can contribute valuable resources, expertise, and innovative solutions. For instance, healthcare and pharmaceutical companies in Pakistan are exploring digital tools to expand healthcare access, while agritech companies are developing innovative solutions to address climate challenges faced by farmers. The energy, construction, and transportation industries are deploying technologies to address issues like wastewater management and expanding electricity and connectivity for health facilities.

There is significant potential for public-private-philanthropic partnerships to support localized training of healthcare workers in addressing diseases exacerbated by climate change. Targeted areas for skill development and capacity building among healthcare professionals could include cardiovascular and maternal health risks exacerbated by extreme heat. This approach is particularly promising in many low- and middle-income countries (LMICs), where the private healthcare sector plays a significant role.

For instance, in Pakistan, engaging with private providers has proven successful in expanding access to services in remote areas and enhancing the functioning of public sector facilities. This model could be replicated and scaled to strengthen healthcare infrastructure and response capabilities in the face of climate-related health

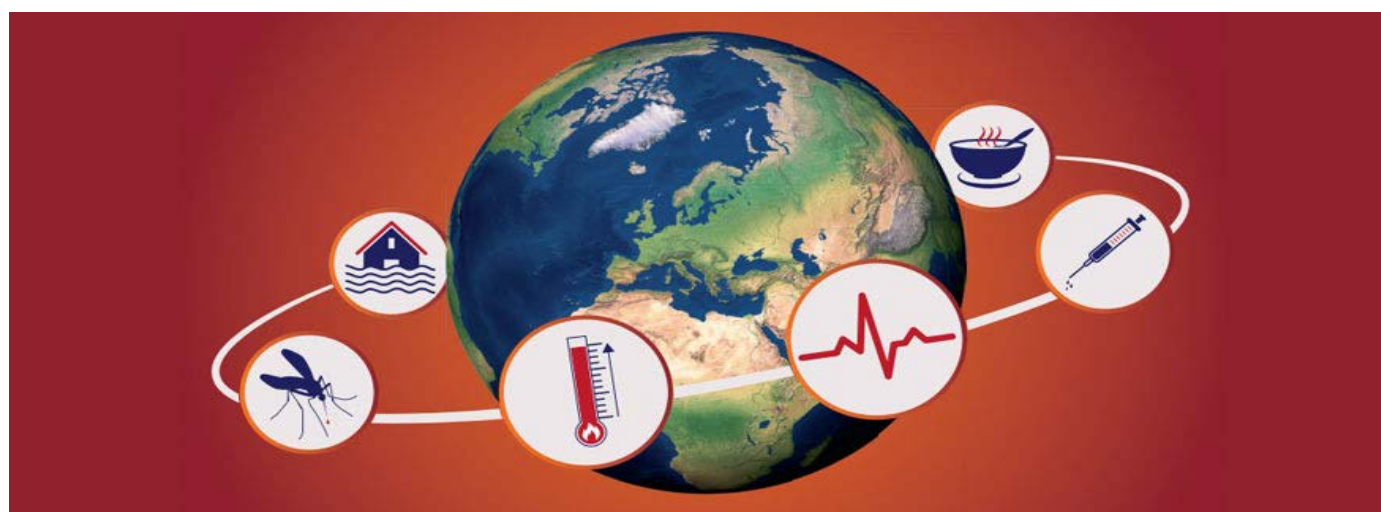
challenges.

The involvement of the private sector in addressing the climate-health nexus is not only beneficial but necessary. While the public sector shoulders significant responsibility in responding to climate change emergencies, private sector involvement is vital for accelerating and enhancing these efforts.

According to the 2022 Global Landscape of Climate Finance, private climate finance has been increasing, though at half the rate of public finance. Private organizations possess specialized knowledge and expertise across various industries, which can be leveraged to bolster the public sector's response capabilities. Collaborative efforts can adopt a more comprehensive and coordinated approach by tapping into industry-specific insights and resources. Private sector innovation drives the development of cutting-edge technologies and solutions to address climate and health challenges, leading to improved resilience and health outcomes.

Private organizations bring expertise, experience, and specialized skills across diverse industries to climate and health interventions, offering valuable insights and tailored approaches. Additionally, private sector partnerships can mobilize significant financial resources for research, development, and implementation of interventions, unlocking new funding sources and investment opportunities. Businesses often have agile and adaptable operational capabilities, enhancing the efficiency, cost-effectiveness, and scalability of interventions for widespread impact. With appropriate accountability mechanisms, greater private sector involvement can ensure adherence to rigorous standards, regulations, and best practices, ensuring the integrity and effectiveness of interventions.

To unlock the full potential of the private sector, industries must collaborate, leveraging their complementary skills and expertise to develop, apply, and adopt new technologies. Collaboration between the public sector, private companies, and non-profit organizations can bridge gaps in capabilities and knowledge, promoting inclusivity and maximizing the impact of climate resilience initiatives targeting public health. The combined strength of these diverse stakeholders can enhance Pakistan's resilience to climate change while improving the health of the country's vulnerable populations.



Mental Health Crisis in the Post-Pandemic World



By Habib Hanzalah

It will be remembered as a catastrophe not only for the number of people killed by the virus but also for the suffocation of millions of mental health. While the focus lies on the COVID19 disease in the present days after the infection spread and an acute phase impacts the world, the future raises concerns about the mental health of the global population. The issue of mental health has worsened due to isolation, uncertainty and pandemic-induced changes to previous ways of life, including the added intensification of pre-existing mental illnesses as well as the surfacing of entirely new ones, leading to the necessity of better solutions and resources for it.

COVID-19 has not only affected the physical well-being of people, but also a higher degree of stress and anxiety has emerged due to the outbreak of the pandemic. Restrictions of movement, wearing face masks, and other precautionary measures that have become the new normality elicited feelings of fear and anxiety. Another research by The Lancet noted that the amount of injected formaldehyde, which is toxic to humans, has risen by 30% in the first year of the pandemic. Such an increase was fostered by several elements. Company is essential to health and social relationships, fear of loneliness during Covid 19 restrictions and resultant isolation caused by the

Lockdown was a common complaint, especially among the geriatric population and those living alone. Accounting of Stress and Worry due to the Pandemic According to the Kaiser Family Foundation, in the United States, 56% of the adults reported developing at least one negative mental health impact due to stress or worry regarding the coronavirus. Work pressure too was a crucial factor in stress; many people lost their jobs, hence losing their source of income, others experienced unstable income and saw how the state of the economy changed; this affected their stress levels. Millions experienced the two main concerns of managing their financial needs and adjusting to newly applied work from home policies or, getting fired from work. Based on International Labour Organization report, the number of filled employment was reduced to the level of 255 million full-time jobs lost in 2020 due to the pandemic. In the same regard, the deaths that resulted from the pandemic reached millions worldwide hence compounding the problem of bereavement. Due to limitations set on the number of people able to gather, there was little opportunity for people to grieve traditionally. First, COVID-19 being an infectious disease, people's fear of getting infected was the primary cause of increased anxiety levels; second, concern for the health

of their close ones; third, people with existing health conditions blaming their worsening situations on COVID-19. Unofficial change of the daily life rhythm and the shift to distance education or to home office introductions of new stress factors, for example the parents having to manage both work and children at home. Preventing and treating mental illnesses rely not only on short-term interventions but also on an extended strategy that seeks to develop individuals and communities capable of preventing the onset of mental illness and promote their well-being. In telehealth services the pandemic has created convenient changes hence making mental health support reachable. Online counselling services, tele-support groups and tele-psychiatric services are some of the existing significant modalities. A study for JMIR Mental Health revealed that new telehealth mental health service delivery where there has been an effective three hundred and two percent boost from March 2019 to March 2020. It offers convenience and increases accessibility to health services especially for individuals who may be located in the rural area or a region with limited service provision. This is all owing to the effort of local community organizations which has acted as support mechanism. Some of the measures implemented include virtual community centers to tackle the

issue of social isolation, peers support/counselling group/ virtual community and community support work. Management and businesses, especially those in the recent past, have come to understand the need to cater for the mental well being of the employees. The EAPs (Employee Assistance Programs), mental health days, flexible working arrangements, and the WWP (Workplace Wellness Programs) are some of the most common activities. These measures demonstrate that 87 % of employers indicated that they have enhanced their investment in mental health provisions following the onset of the pandemic, as per the survey conducted by American Psychological Association. Community leaders and health professionals have initiated consciousness-raising activities to eliminate discriminations of those with mental health disorders, and to promote mental health as an important aspect of one's wellbeing that needs support. Such campaigns notably may contain details on symptoms that may signal a mental health issue and where help may be found. Funding for mental health care services and trying to make them a part of primary health care is a way forward. It also remains a crucial practice to train other healthcare providers in order to identify mental health problems and how to manage them. It is now common to see educational facilities from schools to universities adopting and instituting measures for promotion

of mental health among their learners. These programs have educational, and interactive elements focusing on skills for managing stress and asking for help when necessary. Citizens also need to understand and embrace mental health, while governments have a critical role in enacting policies that support the same. This could be through providing funds towards mental health research, expanding service provision, and supporting legislation related to mental health issues at work. The COVID-19 lockdown has raised the concern of a mental health crisis as a worthy topic that requires research attention. However, it is imperative that it is stated that there are several sources and options that are aimed specifically at helping those in need. For this reason, addressing the immediate needs for those who are struggling while investing in the development of technology that would allow for better tracking of attention-deficit disorders, workplace programs, and community support alongside raising awareness about mental health will help to build the foundation for both preventing mental health issues and providing better treatment for them in the future. It is crucial to say that we should carry on preserving the focus on mental health as one of the most important aspects that should be addressed having the pandemic behind us; the society must let persons in need to get professional help.

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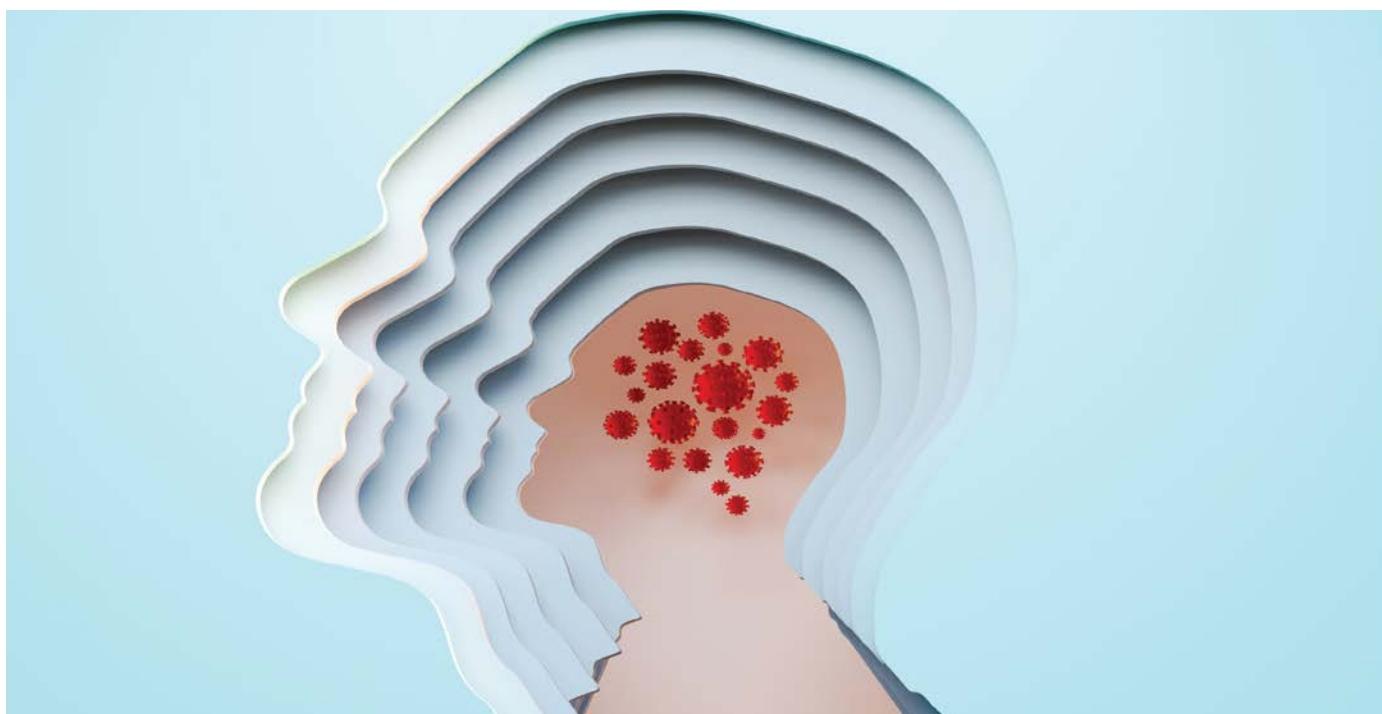
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Why did Denmark ban spicy Korean noodles?

By Ayesha Shaeban

Denmark has taken a unique step by removing several spicy ramen noodle varieties from Scandinavian shelves, manufactured by the popular South Korean brand Samyang Foods. The Danish government, concerned about excessive spice levels deemed unhealthy for consumers, issued a statement through the Veterinary and Food Administration. They specifically targeted products like Samyang Foods' Buldak Hot Chicken Ramen 3x Spicy, Buldak Hot Chicken Ramen 2x Spicy, and Hot Chicken Flavor Ramen Stew Type, instructing consumers to either discard or return these items as sales are now banned in the country. This action marks Denmark as the first and only nation to implement such a measure regarding these products.

The decision to recall these products reflects a proactive effort by the Danish government to ensure public safety. Specifically, concerns have been raised regarding the potential risks to children associated with a social media trend where they challenge each other to endure high levels of spiciness from popular snacks, including South Korean brand's renowned 'fire' noodles.

On June 11, the Danish Veterinary and Food Administration stated that noodle dishes marketed as extremely spicy must be withdrawn from sale due to the risk of acute poisoning, particularly among children. The agency highlighted the exceptionally high capsaicin content in products such as Samyang Buldak noodles, emphasizing its potential health hazards.

While not citing specific incidents in Denmark prompting the ban, the agency responded to consumer inquiries regarding the legality of selling these noodles in Denmark. Following an assessment of the spice levels, it concluded that the noodles pose a health risk due to excessively elevated capsaicin levels. Capsaicin, a natural compound found in chili peppers, is responsible for the pungent heat in spicy foods. This action underscores Denmark's commitment to safeguarding public health by preemptively addressing potential risks



associated with food products, particularly those popularized in social media challenges that may inadvertently encourage unsafe consumption practices among younger demographics.

Denmark's decision to ban excessively spicy food products stemmed partly from incidents in Germany, where individuals required medical attention after participating in viral challenges such as the One Chip Challenge by Pacqui and the Hot Chip Challenge by HOT-CHIP Company, based in the Czech Republic. These challenges involve consuming exceptionally spicy items, often containing some of the world's hottest peppers like the Carolina Reaper.

In November of the previous year, The Berliner reported that several young people were hospitalized at Virchow Clinic in Berlin after undertaking the One Chip Challenge. One teenager, with pre-existing health issues, was admitted to the intensive care unit as a precautionary measure.

Tragically, in the United States in September, a teenager from Massachusetts with a congenital heart defect died after participating in Pacqui's challenge. The autopsy report from the Chief Office of the

Medical Examiner indicated that the cause of death was cardiopulmonary arrest "in the setting of recent ingestion of food substance with high capsaicin concentration." This incident raised concerns about the potential dangers of consuming foods with extremely high capsaicin levels, especially for individuals with underlying health conditions. James Udelson, chief of cardiology at Tufts Medical Center, explained to the news agency that capsaicin, the active component in chili peppers responsible for their spiciness, can provoke severe heart reactions such as ischemia (reduced blood supply) to the heart muscle under certain conditions of heightened stimulation.

Following this tragic event, Pacqui voluntarily withdrew its One Chip Challenge product from shelves. This response highlighted the serious risks associated with extreme spicy food challenges, prompting regulatory bodies and health authorities worldwide to reassess the safety of such products, including in Denmark. The Danish Veterinary and Food Administration, in its June 11 statement, referenced these international incidents as part of its rationale for prohibiting the sale of certain

Samyang Foods' noodle varieties in Denmark. The agency expressed concerns over the potential for acute poisoning among consumers, particularly children, due to the exceedingly high capsaicin content in these products.

Although Denmark did not specify any direct incidents within its borders prompting the ban, the precautionary measure reflects a proactive approach to protect public health. The agency's decision underscores the growing awareness of the health risks posed by foods with extreme spice levels, exacerbated by trends like social media challenges that glamorize and popularize such consumption practices.

By restricting the availability of these spicy noodles, Denmark aims to mitigate potential health hazards and educate consumers about responsible food choices, particularly in light of incidents elsewhere that have demonstrated the severe consequences of ingesting excessively spicy foods under certain medical conditions. This regulatory action serves as a cautionary step to prevent similar incidents and promote safer eating habits among its population.

Intensity of spiciness

1. Excessive spiciness can lead to symptoms like burning sensations, discomfort, nausea, vomiting, and increased blood pressure.
2. Danish officials, led by Henrik Dammand Nielsen from the Food and Drug Administration, are urging shops to remove Samyang Foods products due to these risks, particularly for children and frail adults.
3. The Carolina Reaper pepper, found in Paqui's chip, measures 1.5 million Scoville units, indicating its extreme spiciness due to high capsaicin levels.
4. By comparison, a habanero pepper averages around 150,000 Scoville units, while jalapeno peppers typically register about 5,000 Scoville units.
5. Samyang Foods' 'fire noodles', known for their intense spiciness, are rated lower on the Scoville scale. Their spiciest product, Buldak Hot Chicken Ramen 3x Spicy, has a rating of 13,000 Scoville units, as reported by the news.

Nielsen from the Danish Veterinary and Food Administration contends that the spicy Korean noodles contain higher levels of hot chili compared to chili chips, which have previously caused incidents of poisoning among children in Germany. On the other hand, Rubin Truong, a shop owner in Copenhagen who sold these noodles, criticized the ban as unjustified and labeled it as "ridiculous."

In a video interview while removing noodle packets from his store shelves, Truong argued that the ban is based solely on the noodles' high capsaicin content, a natural component of chili peppers. He pointed out that according to a report from the Danish

highlighted the ongoing high demand for the noodles in South Korea and questioned whether genuine health risks exist, suggesting that if there were substantial concerns, they would have already surfaced in their home country.

In May this year, Samyang Foods saw its shares surge by 30%, reaching a record high and doubling its stock value for the year to approximately \$2.5 billion. This increase was partly attributed to a social media video by rapper Cardi B featuring the Buldak Carbonara Hot Chicken noodles, which are not affected by the current recall.

Despite their intense spiciness, which some



Food Administration, the noodles are equivalent in spiciness to fresh jalapenos and tabasco sauce. Truong emphasized the lack of clear guidelines or standards from the agency regarding acceptable spice levels in food products.

The Buldak instant noodle varieties, widely popular in Korea and globally, have enjoyed significant fame for several years, particularly after gaining traction through challenges like the Fire Noodle Challenge, where participants consume these spicy noodles quickly. Despite the controversy in Denmark, South Korean consumers like Min Ji Jun, a 26-year-old office worker, express skepticism about health concerns associated with the noodles. Jun

find unbearable, the Buldak noodles have a dedicated following who enjoy the fiery kick they deliver. Social media users have playfully mocked Denmark's decision to halt sales of these popular noodles, suggesting that the Danish palate may be less tolerant of spicy foods compared to others. Samyang Foods responded to the recall with a touch of humor, stating that the products were not recalled due to quality issues but because local authorities deemed them excessively spicy and potentially problematic. Some users on Reddit suggested that a warning label or parental advisory would suffice, likening the situation to other household items like bleach and alcohol that pose greater risks to children but remain on shelves.

Telco to tech: the shift in education'

For as long as I can remember, among engineering disciplines, electrical engineering has been the top choice



By Dr Ayesha Razzaque

A generation ago, Matric students going into higher secondary school (FA/FSc) were faced with a simple and stark choice: take up the pre-medical track in the hopes of being admitted to an MBBS (or BDS) programme or take up the pre-engineering track in the hopes of being admitted to an engineering programme or take the ISSB test to join the armed forces of Pakistan.

High school graduates who successfully joined a medical college, engineering university, or the armed forces were seen as being on a sure track to join the middle / upper-middle class. Those unsuccessful at all three would do something else and their prospects were considered unknown before they achieved some level of career success.

For as long as I can remember, among engineering disciplines, electrical engineering has been the top choice. An electrical engineering programme was (still is) versatile and can open doors in a wide variety of sectors. A university

engineering seat, electrical engineering especially, going unfilled was rare, unheard of.

In the mid-90s, two and three-year computer science bachelor's programmes began mushrooming across Pakistan. This was possible because there was effectively little to no oversight of these programmes, unlike engineering programmes, which are subject to oversight by the Pakistan Engineering Council (PEC), and medical programmes, which are subject to oversight by the Pakistan Medical and Dental Council (PMDC). For many years after computer science education reached Pakistan's shores, these programmes could operate with little interference and oversight. It would be a decade before the National Computing Education Accreditation Council (NCEAC) would be established in 2005 to perform a similar function for computing programmes.

The excitement of the global internet and dot-com boom of the late '90s and

the domestic embryonic technology startup ecosystem in Pakistan made computer science an attractive alternative for tens of thousands of high-school graduates who did not or could not get into the hypercompetitive medical and engineering programmes.

In 2000, just as the dot-com bubble of the previous decade was bursting in the US, Pakistan introduced the Calling Party Pays (CPP) policy in the cellular mobile telephony sector. The CPP policy had the effect of multiplying the number of cellphone service subscribers in the country year after year.

Shortly thereafter, in July 2003, this was followed by the broader de-regulation policy of the country's telecom sector. The telecom sector de-regulation brought new investment and new companies into the sector. This turbo-charged the demand for electrical engineers and many institutions that could meet the regulatory and accreditation requirements of an engineering programme, and even some who could

not, began launching electrical and overly specialized 'telecom' engineering programmes.

The Pakistani telco boom lasted for a little longer than a decade. By the early 2010s, several waves of telco engineers had gained experience working for Pakistani cell service providers and many had moved on to employers abroad. Career progression within companies had slowed, entry-level openings were few, subscriber count was asymptotic and competition between service providers was fierce. The introduction of 3G and 4G/LTE services gave the industry another jolt but slowed after that. The following years saw consolidation in the sector with exits and acquisitions continuing to this day.

Meanwhile, over the same period, the tech start-up sector had been growing and maturing with more startups launching every month, creating opportunities for capable computer scientists but also for the many electrical engineers willing to jump the fence.

If you keep an eye out on emerging technology trends, you will know that there have been many new technologies that have come out of computer science in the last 10-15 years (for example, smartphone services and app development, cloud computing, data science, artificial intelligence, self-driving cars and cybersecurity). Globally, electrical engineering has not been standing still either with advances in battery technology, Internet-of-Things, electric vehicles, drone technology, robotics, smart grids, and renewable energy.

While the former account for a significant part of Pakistan's technology sector, the share of opportunities of the latter is minuscule by comparison – between computer science and electrical engineering, the scale of opportunities is heavily tilted in favour of computer science.

Over the last few weeks, I have learned that one of the oldest and once most competitive engineering programmes has been struggling to attract applicants. Another more recently established but highly sought-after public university with a large portfolio of engineering programmes foresees it will be able to fill all its seats for this fall but has seen a massive drop in

applications to all engineering programmes except ones that are adjacent to computer science, like software engineering and computer engineering.

Furthermore, some universities in tier-2 and tier-3 cities are receiving large numbers of applications for computer science programmes but are seeing a large fraction of seats in engineering programs go unfilled.

Engineering, once the hottest ticket in technical education, has been overtaken by computer science and more specialized programmes in artificial intelligence and data science and could likely become a longer trend unless there are changes in our economy. Most engineering jobs require an active industrial manufacturing base.



The severe energy shortage in the early 2010s followed by an exorbitant rise in energy costs forced some Pakistani-owned industries, particularly in the textile sector, to close and, in many cases, move to regional neighbours like Bangladesh and Vietnam. The technology trends in electrical engineering that I listed above have had very little impact on Pakistani employment opportunities besides the odd employer here or there.

A 2023 report by the Pakistan Institute of Development Economics (PIDE) titled 'Disaggregating the graduate unemployment in Pakistan' reported that the average unemployment rate of graduates in Pakistan rose slightly from 14.9 per cent in 2018-19 to 16.1 per cent in 2020-21.

However, for engineering graduates, the same figure more than doubled from 11.2 to 23.5 per cent over the same period. For medical graduates, it rose from 6.4 to 10.8 per cent.

In conclusion, the evolving landscape of technical education in Pakistan underscores the urgent need for a reassessment of our academic priorities and industrial strategies. While computer science and related fields have surged ahead and offer abundant opportunities and align with global technological trends, traditional engineering disciplines, particularly electrical engineering, face dwindling interest and uncertain prospects.

As highlighted in PIDE's report, the stark rise in unemployment rates among

engineering and medical graduates, who make up a tiny fraction of the college-aged population, is a clear indicator of the unfolding de-industrialization and the mismatch between educational outputs and market needs.

To address this, policymakers, educational institutions, and industry stakeholders must collaboratively foster an environment that balances the development of emerging technological skills with the revitalization of our industrial base. By doing so, Pakistan can not only bridge the gap between education and employment but also pave the way for sustainable economic growth and innovation.

Courtesy The News

India Clinches T20 World Cup 2024 Title; Rohit Sharma and Virat Kohli Bid Farewell to T20Is



In a thrilling finale at Kensington Oval, Barbados, India secured their second T20 World Cup title after a dramatic seven-run victory over South Africa. The match, marked by tense moments and exceptional performances, saw India defend a challenging total of 177 runs, thanks to standout efforts from Jasprit Bumrah and a crucial catch by Suryakumar Yadav.

South Africa, chasing 178 for victory, seemed well-placed with Heinrich Klaasen's explosive 52 off 23 balls. However, a pivotal over from Bumrah, where he conceded just 2 runs and dismissed Marco Jansen, swung the momentum back in India's favor. Hardik Pandya's 3 wickets for 20 runs and Arshdeep Singh's tight bowling further stifled South Africa's chase, restricting them to 169 for 8.

Earlier, India had set a record final score of 177 for 7, led by Virat Kohli's resilient 76 and Axar Patel's blistering 47. Despite a shaky start that saw them lose quick wickets, Kohli and Patel's partnership revived India's innings, setting a target that proved just out of reach for South Africa.



The victory was not only a triumph for India but also marked the end of an era as both Indian stalwarts, Rohit Sharma and Virat Kohli, announced their retirement from T20 International cricket immediately after the match. Rohit, who captained India to this victory, reflected emotionally on his decision, stating, "No better time to say goodbye to this format. I've loved every moment of this." His retirement comes after an illustrious career that spanned 159 matches, where he amassed 4,231 runs and secured two T20 World Cup titles, including the inaugural one in 2007.

Kohli, declared Man of the Match in the final, echoed similar sentiments, expressing his joy at finally clinching the T20 World Cup title after a 13-year wait. "It was my last T20 World Cup and last T20 match. I wanted to finish it off with a win," said Kohli, whose impactful innings and leadership guided India to this historic victory.

With the retirements of Rohit Sharma and Virat Kohli, India bids farewell to two of its cricketing legends, leaving behind a legacy of achievement and leadership that will resonate for years to come.

Playing domestic cricket must for selection in Pakistan team: PCB

Mohsin Naqvi says quality domestic cricket to be promoted at every level by organising tournaments



By Sohail Imran

Days after the Men in Green's poor show in the T20 World Cup led to their early elimination, the Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) on Monday said playing domestic cricket would be must for selection in the Pakistan team.

The cricket body made this decision in a meeting presided by PCB chief Mohsin Naqvi at the National Cricket Academy in Lahore.

The meeting reached a decision to review contracts of the domestic players and devise a plan for this purpose.

The development has come after former cricketers censured Pakistan team for their early elimination from the T20 World Cup 2024 because of their below par performance. Some even suggested sending players to the domestic circuit to fortify their basic techniques.

Pakistan were defeated by debutants US by five runs in a Super Over tie and against

India by six runs. They managed to win against Canada on June 11 by seven wickets.

With the match between the US and Ireland abandoned due to rain on June 14, the co-hosts secured one point, consequently ending Pakistan's hopes of proceeding in the tournament.

The national team's last league game against Ireland was only a formality, after which the squad returned home.



Naqvi said quality domestic cricket would be promoted at every level and for this purpose, tournaments would be organised from the club to the national level with continuity.

"One of the best coaches will be hired for professional-style grooming of players, which will abridge the gap between national and international stage," he said.

A master coach would be appointed for training of domestic cricket coaches, he said vowing to invest on fresh talent to promote cricket at lower level.

The PCB chief said players would be selected on the basis of their performance and fitness only. No compromise would be made on merit, he maintained.

The meeting reviewed domestic cricket structure of India, Australia, England and New Zealand as well.

Courtesy The News

Rising Popularity of Football in Pakistan Reflects Growing Interest in the Sport



The growing trend of football in Pakistan reflects the promotion of the sport in the country. Thousands of fans flocked to Jinnah Stadium in Islamabad to support the FIFA qualifier matches. Let's discuss the history of this sport in the country and how it can be further improved.

The growing trend of football in Pakistan reflects the promotion of the sport in the country. Thousands of fans flocked to Jinnah Stadium in Islamabad to support the FIFA qualifier matches. Let's discuss the history of this sport in the country and how it can be further improved.

Pakistan beat Cambodia in first-ever football World Cup qualifying win | Football News | Al Jazeera

Football in Pakistan was prominently highlighted by players from Lyari. For many years, football in Pakistan was limited to a few areas, including Balochistan and Lyari. From 1948 to 2003, the National Championship was held in Pakistan. After 2003, the Pakistan Premier League also began. However, due to the lack of professional football clubs, football did not have access to quality coaching and staff. As football gained popularity on a global level, the sport's standing in Pakistan deteriorated. The main reason for this decline was the administration's lack of attention to football. According to reports, the departmental system running in Pakistan was abolished in other countries after the 1960s. Despite this, the passion for the sport is evident, as thousands of people still participate in local football matches in the city of Chaman, Balochistan.

On the other hand, while Pakistan manufactures footballs for international competitions, it has remained out of international football. FIFA imposed bans on the Pakistan Football Federation first in 2017 and then again in 2021. After the ban was lifted in 2022, Pakistan played a match against Nepal. With this, Pakistan returned to international football and, for the first time in history, reached the second round of the FIFA World Cup qualifiers. The next major milestone for Pakistan is the 2026 World Cup qualifiers. Football experts say that investment in football and the establishment of a league in Pakistan are essential.

Football coach Stephen Constantine believes that Pakistan is not yet ready to reach the third round of the FIFA World Cup qualifiers. It is crucial to further develop football talent by establishing proper coaching centers. The Dubai-based football club TFA organizes free talent hunt programs in Pakistan every year, providing opportunities for good players to play in international clubs. International clubs also conduct regular talent hunt programs, ensuring that talented players receive training and skills enhancement at the international club level.

If programs are organized in the style of these clubs' excellent efforts, Pakistan's talent can be brought to the forefront. Assistance from the coaching staff of international clubs should be sought so that young players can be introduced to new techniques. Talent hunt programs should be organized to promote football, bringing talent from the grassroots level to the forefront. Development programs need to be worked on to ensure that good players have access to international clubs.

Umroo Ayyar; Metaphor for Pakistan

Age old classics has takeaways for the society



By Naqi Akbar

Pakistani cinema goers were treated to a very different diet of; not an action-packed blockbuster; or an ISPR financed 'war of terror' movie or a romantic thriller. Umroo Ayyar produced and directed by previously unknown names in the film industry; cast picked up primarily from the TV list and no theme song as such to act as a teaser; proved to be a breath of fresh air as well as a potent food for thought.

The voice over before the movie starts gives the viewer a peek into what is in store for them for the next two hours. The voice over defines the 'Ayyar' as the elite intellectual minds of the society; who were always around to guide the polity, military, judiciary as well as the society towards the desirable course of history. The Ayyar was not a supra establishment; one might would like to confuse them to be. They were the minds who were close to the corridors of power and were available for conceptual or intellectual intervention.

A probe into the old classics; "Dastan Amir Hamza" and "Tilism Hoshruha", reveals the character of Umroo Ayyar;

whose exploits, in both the classics are primarily of intelligence and military nature were instrumental in successive victories gained by the character Amir Hamza in the former classic; and were vital for the destruction of the Tilism in the latter classic.

However, the takeaway as visualized by the production team weaves around the nose diving of the society as well as the world, as the team of "Ayyar" was not sought after. Rather the narrative guides the viewer that due to the concentration of power, money, military power and resources in the hand of the mafia and unscrupulous people, the Ayyar brigade, as the narrative suggests has to go underground.

The narrative that for the last 100 years or the role of this intelligentsia has waned in the world and the society makes a very pointed reference to the world and the state we are living in. Likewise, the discovery by the now underground Ayyar cadre of the son of the fallen comrade in an elite university of the country very suggestively points out to the reference of that the world around the viewer is referred to.

Similarly, the people who want to kill the hero are shown to be possessed when attacking him; equates the original evil Tilism of the classic with the fifth-generation brain washing of the current era.

The movie itself takes an unexpected trajectory where the importance of one self, the power of knowledge is quantified in a number of symbolic paradigms created by the script writer. The role of evil; best personified and acted by Laqqa played by a scion of a literary family of Lahore; Faran Tahir is shown to be influencing the minds, even among the Ayyar cadre; points out to the promotion of fifth generation warfare concepts by the deep states around the world. To put it more clearly, planting doubts in the minds of Ayyar cadre acts as a metaphor of media usage by the power structures around the world for misleading the public as well as getting the desired results as planned.

How much the crowd seems to have got the message remains to be assessed, however, the graduation of Pakistani cinema to an intellectually metaphoric

art form is a pleasant and surprise development. Usually, the Pakistani cinema has been subject to an onslaught of fifth generation prescriptions as desired by the established order. Any deviation has been usually met with harsh crackdown by the Censor Boards or the government itself. Ashar Azeem 2016 movie *Maalik*, Jamil Dehalvi 1977 movie *Blood of Husain*; the former taking a peek into the corridors of power and later; making a veiled reference to the 1977 coup by Zia. And there are many other movies which faced trouble due to the increasingly intolerant social norms of the society.

In that context; the production team taken a very calculated step in presenting the age-old theme of good versus evil in a more innovative and intellectual way. The narrative as earlier said gives the semblance of a commentary on the state and society itself. Here the team allows the minds liberty to either treat the 'Ayyar' as an independent technocrat or that same Ayyar can be equated to the rule of learned; a system of governance of society, polity and economy; where highly intellectual minds give the necessary guidance to the populace. However, despite a generally regimented

system of governance in place, the art form gives no legitimacy to a political system based on technocrats alone. Rather it very courageously questions the reasons, why the 'Ayyar' has been excluded from the decision making.

The themes presented are devoid of any marked religious or social undertones, which might make one suspect of the movie, being a political agenda. It is not like that. The intellectual drain the narrative says which is in place for the last 100 years or so can guide the thinking brains of the need to have a fresh look at the things.

Here one may point out to the intellectual characters like Bahlol Danna or Bahlol the intelligent; whose presence during the Abbasid despotism in Baghdad is referred to as an intelligent swipe on how the societies and politics were managed by the leaders of the society during these days. That swipe by these figures was basically a cultural resistance to what dislocation of priorities was done by the rulers or the much-dreaded establishment. The character apparently behaving like a mystic or a clergyman used to say things, which would make the people at the top speechless, while

at the same time enrich the common man perception. These persons were not among the people of the durbar or the royal court, rather were the men of the street; ready to impart wisdom as and when required.

Infact, people like him could be termed as the 'Ayyar' of their time; though out of favor and obviously not so effective to control the decision-making process. Coming back to the Pakistani context, the identification of movie as a vehicle for the food for thought has been reinforced by that unique art form.

Usually, movie producers go for very direct messages, which for reasons best understood land the directors in troubled waters. The fast-changing cultural landscape of Pakistan which is signified by continued surveillance like any dictatorship has inspired intellectual minds to communicate in a more subtle manner.

Conclusively, despite the fact that such movies are not common product in our cineplexes, the reception to the art form reinforces the hope that people do read between the lines and can relate to the realities with the concept.



Sonakshi Sinha and Zaheer Iqbal tie the knot in Mumbai



The star-studded reception was attended by Salman Khan, Kajol, Anil Kapoor and other Bollywood celebrities.

Bollywood actors Sonakshi Sinha and Zaheer Iqbal tied the knot in a star-studded wedding ceremony on Sunday.

According to the Times of India, the celebration began with an intimate civil ceremony, followed by a wedding party at the Bastian in Mumbai. The publication reported that the dress code was “formal and festive, just don’t wear red”.

Prior to the wedding, The Indian Express reported that the father of the groom, Iqbal Ratansi, said the celebration would include neither Hindu nor Muslim rituals and would instead be a civil marriage. He clarified that Sinha would not convert to Islam as religion had no role to play in the union.

An Instagram post shared by the newlyweds said, “On this very day, seven years back in each other’s eyes, we saw love in its purest form and decided to hold on to it. Today that love has guided us through all the challenges and triumphs... leading up

to this moment... where with the blessings of both our families and both our gods... we are now man and wife.”

The couple were matching in ivory as they signed their marriage documents. Sinha’s understated, chic look came from her mother’s wardrobe, according to India Today, she wore Poonam Sinha’s wedding saree and matching jewellery from her collection. Meanwhile, Iqbal complemented her in an ivory embroidered kurta and pyjama.



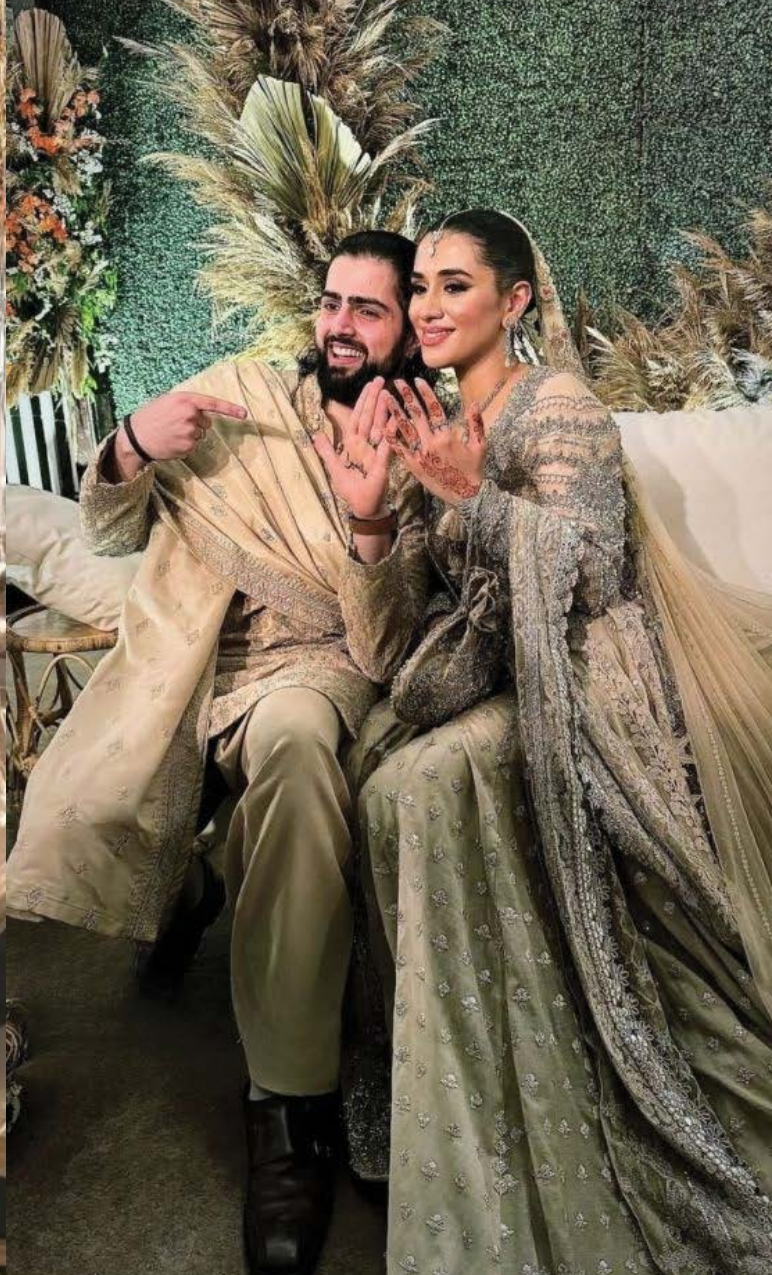
For the reception, Sinha switched it up and wore a traditional red Varanasi silk saree from brand Raw Mango. This custom saree featured delicate chand buta (gold crescent moon) motifs inspired by an 18th-century design from the brand’s archives and a matching gold border with intricate embroidery, PinkVilla reported. Her look was completed with jhumkay, a matching choker, and gajra in her hair.

Stars who attended the wedding reception included Salman Khan, Anil Kapoor, Rekha, Chunky Panday, Kajol, Arbaaz Khan, Saira Banu, Vidya Balan, Aditi Rao Hydari, Aditya Roy Kapur, and Tabu.

Rapper Yo Yo Honey Singh also performed as the couple and their friends danced along in the crowd.

Prior to the events, there was mass speculation from Indian publications about Sinha and Iqbal’s wedding, however, the Dabangg actor refused to confirm or deny the rumours, stating that it was “nobody’s business”. The news was later confirmed after the wedding invitation leaked online.

Courtesy image.dawn







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