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Sednaya Prison

The Slaughter House in Syria

PTI's Internal Politics

Navigating Leadership Crises

Madrisah Politics

JUI-F Chief delays Islamabad March

SYRIA

50 YEARS RULE OF ASSAD'S FAMILY ENDS



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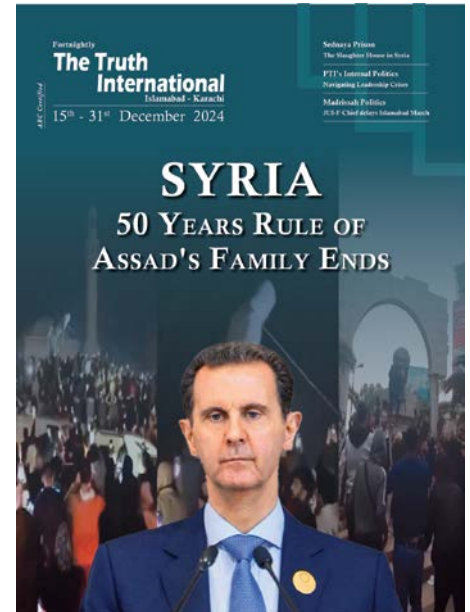


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50 Years Rule of Assad's family ends in Syria

Elated but bewildered, freed political prisoners emerged from Assad's notorious detention centers, reuniting with their families in scenes of overwhelming emotion. The White Helmets, a volunteer rescue organization, dispatched teams to locate underground cells believed to hold remaining detainees.



By Javed Mahmood

Syrians woke on Monday (Nov 9) to a cautious sense of hope and uncertainty after rebels seized Damascus, prompting President Bashar al-Assad to flee to Russia, effectively ending a 13-year civil war and over five decades of his family's authoritarian rule. The swift advance of a militia coalition led by Hayat al-Tahrir al-Sham (HTS), a former al-Qaeda affiliate, marked a historic turning point for the Middle East. Assad's ouster dismantled a key base for Iranian and Russian influence in the Arab world. Russian media confirmed that Assad and his family were granted asylum in Moscow, with Mikhail Ulyanov, Russia's ambassador to international organizations in Vienna, sharing the news on his Telegram channel.

Global leaders welcomed the collapse of the Assad regime, acknowledging the profound implications for the region. U.S. President Joe Biden noted that Syria now faces a period of significant risk and transformation, marking the first time in years that Russia, Iran, and Hezbollah no longer wield dominant influence there. Despite

attempts to rebrand itself, HTS remains designated a terrorist organization by the U.S., Turkey, and the United Nations. The group now faces the monumental challenge of governing a war-torn nation and addressing the concerns of Syria's diverse population.

Japan's Chief Cabinet Secretary Yoshi-masa Hayashi announced Tokyo was closely monitoring the evolving situation. Meanwhile, Assad's downfall threatens to disrupt Iran's weapons supply networks and jeopardize Russia's Mediterranean naval base, potentially shifting regional dynamics. The change also raises hopes for the return of millions of refugees displaced across Turkey, Lebanon, and Jordan.

Rebel alliance begins transitioning to a new government

The sudden overthrow of President Bashar al-Assad has left Syrians, regional nations, and global powers grappling with uncertainty about what lies ahead, as the rebel alliance begins transitioning to a new government. The United Nations Security Council

convened behind closed doors on Monday, with diplomats expressing shock at the rapid collapse of Assad's regime, which occurred over just 12 days after a 13-year civil war that had been mired in a prolonged stalemate.

"Everyone was caught off guard, including the members of the council. We now have to observe and evaluate how the situation develops," Russian U.N. Ambassador Vassily Nebenzia said. Russia had been a key ally of Assad, providing military and political support to his government. Assad fled Damascus to Moscow on Sunday, marking the end of more than 50 years of his family's authoritarian rule.

On Monday, in the midst of celebrations in Damascus, Assad's Prime Minister, Mohammed Jalali, agreed to transfer power to the rebel-led Salvation Government, based in the north-west of Syria. According to sources, rebel commander Ahmed al-Sharaa (Abu Mohammed al-Golani) met with Jalali and Vice President Faisal Mekdad to negotiate the transition. Jalali reportedly stated the handover could take several days to finalize.

The Salvation Government, led by Mohamed al-Bashir, will head the transitional authority, according to reports by Al Jazeera. This swift and decisive takeover by the militia alliance, spearheaded by Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS)—a former al-Qaeda affiliate—marks a significant turning point in the Middle East.

The Syrian civil war, which began in 2011, claimed hundreds of thousands of lives, triggered one of the largest refugee crises in modern history, and devastated the country's cities, economy, and population. Despite this seismic shift, the rebel alliance has yet to outline its vision for Syria's future, leaving questions about stability and governance unanswered.

Regional Turmoil Escalates

Amid the upheaval, Israel seized a buffer zone in southern Syria, drawing condemnation from Egypt, Qatar, and Saudi Arabia. Saudi Arabia warned that such actions could jeopardize Syria's chances of achieving lasting security.

Overnight, Israeli airstrikes targeted Syrian military installations, airbases, and Republican Guard assets in and around Damascus. Sources within the fallen Syrian army and regional security officials reported that approximately 200 airstrikes had obliterated Syria's military infrastructure, including helicopters and jets.

Israel defended its actions, claiming they were limited, temporary measures for its own security. Addressing the U.N. Security Council, it denied direct involvement in Syria's conflict but stated that operations would continue for several days.

As Syria's fate hangs in the balance, the lack of a clear roadmap for the nation's future underscores the fragility of the region's stability.

Rebuilding Syria

The rebels now shoulder the responsibility of reconstructing a nation devastated by conflict, which left hundreds of thousands dead, cities reduced to rubble, and an economy crippled by sanctions. Syria will require billions in aid to recover. Ahmed al-Sharaa, also known as Abu Mohammed al-Golani, the leader of HTS, addressed a

jubilant crowd at Damascus' Umayyad Mosque, a site of deep religious significance. Declaring this victory a pivotal moment for the region, he vowed to rebuild Syria into "a beacon for the Islamic nation."

Elated but bewildered, freed political prisoners emerged from Assad's notorious detention centers on Sunday, reuniting with their families in scenes of overwhelming emotion. The White Helmets, a volunteer rescue organization, dispatched teams to locate underground cells believed to hold remaining detainees. Damascus remained calm overnight under a rebel-imposed curfew, with streets largely deserted. Some incidents of looting occurred, including a raid on Assad's presidential palace. The rebel coalition announced plans to establish a transitional governing body to steer Syria toward stability.



A Shifting Middle East

The rapid developments stunned global capitals, raising concerns about further instability in a region already grappling with numerous crises. The U.S. Central Command reported conducting airstrikes on Daesh positions in central Syria to prevent the resurgence of extremist groups.

During the civil war, Assad's forces, supported by Russia, devastated Syrian cities, creating one of the largest refugee crises in modern history. Turkey, which supported some rebel factions along its border, and the U.S., which backed Kurdish-led forces against Daesh, have had significant stakes in Syria's conflict. Now, as Syria turns a new chapter, the world watches closely, bracing for the challenges and opportunities that lie ahead.

Syrians celebrate the fall of the Bashar Al-Assad regime

Early Sunday morning, Syrians across the country poured into the streets to celebrate the dawn of their "freedom." With the collapse of Syria's Baath regime and the end of the Assad family's decades-long rule, crowds toppled statues of Hafez al-Assad, the late father of ousted President Bashar al-Assad, in cities nationwide.

Jubilant anti-Assad activists and social media users hailed the regime's fall as a victory for the nation. From the capital, Damascus, to the Assad family's coastal stronghold of Latakia, symbols of the government were dismantled as celebrations erupted.

In Damascus, crowds stormed Bashar al-Assad's palace, marking a symbolic end to his rule. Media reports showed festivities continuing across the country, with unity and relief dominating the streets.

Syrian state television aired a video statement by a group claiming to represent opposition fighters. They announced the overthrow of Bashar al-Assad, the release of all political prisoners, and called on citizens to safeguard the institutions of a "free Syrian state."

The Fall of a Dynasty

The celebrations were particularly significant in Hama, a city scarred by the 1982 massacre under Hafez al-Assad when thousands were killed following an uprising. Survivors and family members of

the victims saw this moment as justice long delayed. Entire neighborhoods that had been destroyed in that brutal crackdown became rallying points for joy and remembrance.

Videos from Damascus showed people kissing the ground, many in tears, while teenagers smiled widely—scenes of unrestrained emotion rarely seen in a country that has endured decades of fear and repression. Crowds gathered in mosques to pray and in public squares to chant, “God is great.”

A New Chapter

Residents expressed disbelief at how quickly Assad’s regime crumbled after nearly 14 years of devastating civil war. “I did not sleep last night,” said Mohammed Amer Al-Oulabi, a resident of Damascus. “From Idlib to Damascus, it only took them a few days, thank God. May God bless the heroic lions who made us proud.” In the heart of Damascus, central squares are filled with jubilant crowds. In some areas, celebratory gunfire rang out.

“My feelings are indescribable,” said Omar Daher, a 29-year-old lawyer. “After years of living in fear under Assad and his father, I can’t believe this moment is real.” Daher, whose father was killed by Assad forces and whose brother remains missing in detention, described the fallen regime as a “tyranny finally defeated.”

For many Syrians, the collapse of the Assad regime symbolizes the end of an era of fear and oppression, and the beginning of a hopeful but uncertain future. As they celebrate, the task of rebuilding their country lies ahead.

Syrians looted valuable items from the Palace of Bashar al-Assad

Groups of Syrians roamed through the once-restricted presidential palaces of Bashar al-Assad on Sunday, following his ouster from power. Citizens wandered from room to room, taking photographs, and some even removed furniture and decorative items from the lavish residences.

Footage obtained by Reuters captured scenes inside the Al-Rawda Presidential

Palace, where children played in grand halls, and men dragged a large trunk across its ornate flooring. Several individuals were seen carrying luxurious chairs over their shoulders. In one storeroom, cupboards had been ransacked, with belongings scattered across the floor.

At another site, the Muhajreen Palace, verified video showed men and women walking on a polished white marble floor and through towering wooden doors. A man held a vase, while an empty cabinet stood ajar in the background.

Syrian rebels seized control of Damascus on Sunday, forcing Assad to flee and bringing an end to his family’s decades-long rule. This pivotal moment follows more than 13 years of brutal civil war, marking a seismic shift in the Middle East’s political landscape.



According to two senior army officers, Assad fled the capital on Sunday. This came after a rapid rebel advance into Damascus earlier in the week. Rebel forces took control of the city without encountering any significant military resistance.

Israel deploys its tanks in the Buffer Zone on the border with Syria

Israel has deployed tanks into the buffer zone in the occupied Golan Heights along its border with Syria following a swift advance by Syrian opposition forces that ended Bashar al-Assad’s regime.

“Together with the Defense Minister and with full backing from the Cabinet, I instructed the IDF yesterday to take control of the buffer zone and the key positions near it,” Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu announced during a visit to the Golan Heights.

“We will not permit any hostile force to establish itself on our border,” he added.

This marks the first deployment of Israeli troops into the buffer zone since it was designated as a line of control under a 1974 agreement between Israel and Syria. While Israeli forces have briefly entered the zone on previous occasions, it has mostly been patrolled by United Nations peacekeepers.

Israel captured the Golan Heights from Syria during the 1967 war and formally annexed the territory in 1981, a move not recognized internationally.

Netanyahu stated that the 1974 agreement effectively collapsed with the fall of the Assad regime and the retreat of Syrian troops, making the Israeli takeover necessary to secure the area.

Israeli airstrikes in Damascus

Israel carried out three airstrikes in Damascus on Sunday, targeting a security complex and a government research center that it has previously accused of being used by Iran to develop missiles, according to two regional security sources speaking to Reuters.

The strikes caused significant damage to the main customs headquarters and buildings adjacent to the military intelligence offices within the Kafr Sousa district of the Syrian capital. The research facility was also reportedly damaged, the sources said on condition of anonymity. One source stated that the strikes targeted infrastructure used for storing sensitive military data, equipment, and guided missile components.

Earlier that day, Israel struck at least seven sites in southwest Syria, including the Khalkhala air base north of Sweida, which Syrian army troops had vacated the previous night. Additional strikes near Mezzah military airport, southwest of Damascus, reportedly hit ammunition depots.

U.S. Airstrikes on Islamic State

Simultaneously, the U.S. Central Command (CENTCOM) announced that its forces conducted over 75 airstrikes in central Syria on Sunday, targeting Islamic State leaders, operatives, and camps. CENTCOM stated on social media that the operation employed various aircraft, including B-52s, F-15s, and A-10s. The strikes aimed to prevent the Islamic State from exploiting the current instability in Syria.

Israeli Moves in Golan Heights

On the same day, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu ordered the military to "seize" the demilitarized buffer zone along the Syrian border after the collapse of a 50-year-old disengagement agreement between the two countries. Netanyahu claimed that Syrian forces had abandoned their positions in the area.

The Israeli military imposed a curfew in five Syrian towns in the Golan Heights, instructing residents to remain indoors for their safety. Netanyahu, visiting the Israeli-occupied Golan Heights, stated that the Israeli Defense Forces (IDF) had been directed to take control of the buffer zone and nearby strategic positions.

The buffer zone, established in 1974, separates Israeli-held territory from Syrian

areas and is monitored by UN peacekeepers. A UN Peacekeeping spokesperson reported that unidentified armed individuals were observed in the separation area, with some entering UN positions.

Iranian Reaction and Embassy Incident

Iran, a key ally of the Assad regime, reiterated its stance that Syria's future should be determined solely by its people, free from foreign interference. The Iranian foreign ministry called for a national dialogue to form an inclusive government and expressed optimism about continued cooperation between Tehran and Damascus.



However, on Sunday morning, unidentified assailants were seen rummaging through furniture and documents at the Iranian embassy in Damascus, according to footage aired by Saudi Arabia's Al Arabiya channel.

Russia's Response

Russian President Vladimir Putin, who played a pivotal role in keeping Assad in power through Moscow's military intervention in 2015, has not yet commented on the situation. The Russian Foreign Ministry issued a statement saying it was "closely monitoring the dramatic events in Syria". It urged all parties to resolve the crisis through political dialogue rather than violence.

The ministry revealed that Assad decided to resign and leave the country following negotiations with various armed factions, facilitating what it described as a "peaceful

transfer of power." It emphasized that Russia was not directly involved in these discussions and confirmed that it remained in contact with all Syrian opposition factions.

Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov reiterated the Foreign Ministry's stance, while the Russian Embassy in Damascus assured state-run TASS news agency that its staff members were safe. "We are fine," an embassy representative said without elaborating.

Priorities for Moscow

Senator Konstantin Kosachev stressed that Russia's main priority is ensuring the safety of its citizens in Syria, including diplomats,

their families, and military personnel stationed at Russian bases in the country. Russia operates two key military facilities in Syria: the naval base in Tartus and the Khmeimim airbase, both critical for Moscow's regional operations and its strategic reach into Africa.

The Foreign Ministry confirmed that Russian military bases in Syria had been placed on heightened combat readiness amid the unfolding crisis.

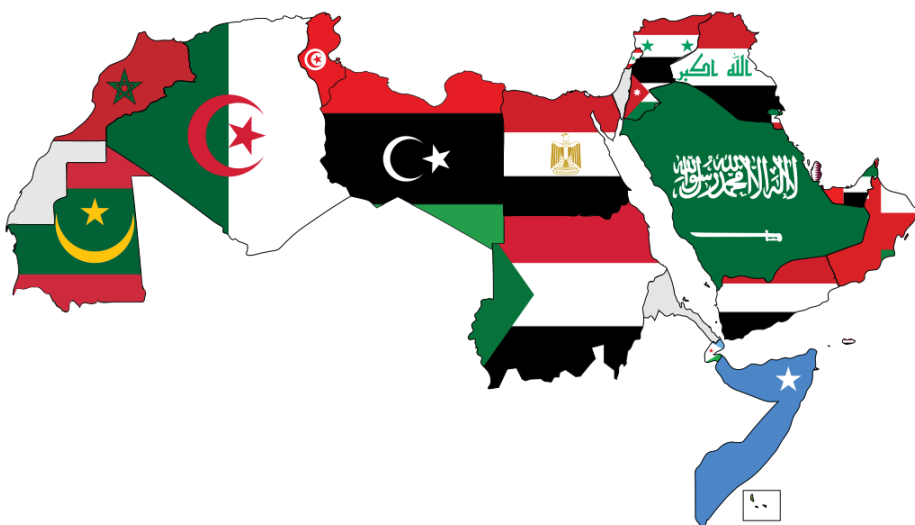
Diplomatic Moves

On Saturday, Russia held discussions with Iran, a staunch Assad ally, and Turkey, which has supported the Syrian opposition, during a meeting in Qatar. The talks aimed to prevent Syria from descending into further chaos following the rebel offensive.

Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov empha-

sized the importance of ensuring Syria does not fall into the hands of extremist groups, specifically naming Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS). The Islamist group, rooted in the Syrian branch of Al-Qaeda, has led the assault on Damascus. Although HTS has sought to rebrand itself in recent years, it remains designated as a "terrorist organization" by Western governments.

The developments mark a significant shift in Syria's decade-long conflict, raising concerns about a potential power vacuum and the future of the country. Russia, with its military assets in Syria and its role as a key stakeholder in the region, faces the challenge of safeguarding its interests while navigating the complexities of the new political landscape.



Arab countries welcome the ouster of Bashar al-Assad

Several Arab nations have expressed support for the recent developments in Syria that led to the overthrow of Bashar al-Assad's regime, calling for measures to ensure stability, unity, and development while preventing chaos.

Saudi Arabia

Saudi Arabia's Foreign Ministry welcomed the changes in Syria, describing them as positive steps toward safeguarding the Syrian people, preserving state institutions, and preventing bloodshed. The ministry called on the international community to stand with the Syrian people, cooperate in

their best interests, and avoid interfering in Syria's internal affairs.

Qatar

Qatar's Ministry of Foreign Affairs emphasized the importance of preserving Syria's national institutions and state unity to prevent chaos. It reiterated its commitment to resolving the Syrian crisis in line with international legitimacy and UN Security Council Resolution 2254, aiming to secure the country's sovereignty, unity, and independence while prioritizing the welfare of its people.

Bahrain

Bahrain's Ministry of Foreign Affairs highlighted its commitment to Syria's

solidarity with the Syrian people and respect for their choices. During a National Security Council meeting, he stressed the need to safeguard Syria's security, ensure stability, and avoid further conflict that could lead to chaos.

Yemen

Yemen's Presidential Leadership Council congratulated the Syrian people on the downfall of Bashar al-Assad. It reaffirmed its support for Syria's territorial integrity, independence, and the aspirations of its people for freedom, peace, and stability.

Iraq

Iraq's government spokesperson Basim al-Awadi emphasized Iraq's commitment to promoting stability and public order in Syria. He warned against interference in Syria's internal affairs, stating that such actions would only exacerbate divisions and conflict.

Algeria

Algeria underscored its solidarity with the Syrian people, highlighting shared historical and cultural ties. It called for dialogue among all segments of Syrian society, focusing on national interests, safeguarding resources, and building inclusive institutions free from foreign influence.

Palestine

The Palestinian presidency expressed its solidarity with the Syrian people, respecting their political choices and aspirations for security and stability. It called for unity among political factions to restore Syria's regional and international role, which it said aligns with the Palestinian struggle for freedom and independence.

Shared Vision

Across the region, Arab nations have emphasized the importance of dialogue, national unity, and a peaceful political transition to rebuild Syria. These governments have urged all stakeholders to prioritize the welfare of the Syrian people and avoid actions that could further destabilize the country.

security, stability, sovereignty, and territorial integrity. The ministry urged all Syrian factions to prioritize national interests, safeguard public institutions, and protect vital infrastructure to ensure the well-being of the population.

Egypt

Egypt's Foreign Ministry reaffirmed its support for Syria's sovereignty, territorial integrity, and national unity. It called on all Syrian parties to preserve state resources, prioritize the national interest, and initiate a comprehensive political process to achieve internal peace and restore Syria's regional and international standing.

Jordan

King Abdullah II of Jordan expressed

A finale for an alternate path

A big setback for opponents of Abraham Accords



By Naqi Akbar

It goes without saying a single word that the mood in the circles who have anticipated a thumping rout for the IDF in the coming months is somber, filled with despair. The manipulation of the weaknesses within created a situation, which were exploited optimally by the international vested interests. Back into the timeline 53 years ago in the sub-continent, when the two-nation theory was publicly ridiculed for being a nonstarter, today for any light-hearted, going with the international established order seems to be the favorable path forward.

Elaborating the preamble; the fall of the Baathist dictatorship of the Syrian chapter after almost 5 decades of iron rule was a moment of joy for the people of Syria, who have been living under the system for a long. They were justified in their wish for the end of the rule. However, in the manner which the dictatorship ended created more questions than solving the previous ones.

Not dwelling on the constitutional wish list as to what could have been done during the last five decades, the fact is that the buffer between the Jewish entity and the rest of the Arab world has been effectively removed for the benefit of the IDF.

The gratitude of the new rulers, even in an interim structure for the IDF, the coordinated strikes by the IDF in destroying the infrastructure of the Syrian state and the defence forces indicates that the situation is even graver than what the Pakistanis witnessed in the morning of December 17, 1971. The Pakistani defence forces had a much decent enemy in the person of Manek Shaw who abided by the Geneva Conventions regards the military hardware and safety of the POWs; jingoistic propaganda notwithstanding.

Back to the Middle East, the resistance infrastructure in place for opposing the Abraham Accords is effectively gone.

Iranian state which through a mix of incentives and friendship with the Syrian faction of Baath, has lost its foothold in the region; very much like the exit of Muhammad Raza Pahlavi in 1979 left the Israeli and American interests without any effective cover.

The result, the Iranians were able to catch up and by the time Americans recuperated to understand, much was gone from the hands. Despite that fact that the infrastructures were of no immediate utility for the Iranians back in early eighties, the unguarded suicide by the Bush Administration in the dismantling of the Baathist structure in Iraq opened the floodgates of opportunities for the much dreaded 'Shia Crescent' in the Middle East. Ironically, the dismantling of the Syrian Baath proved to be a disadvantage for the same Crescent though. The fall of Saddam's regime allowed the Iranians enough opportunities to build lifelines for its interests, which it made good use of

when the waves of Arab Spring in 2011-12 threatened its ally government of Bashar AL Assad. That same infrastructure was instrumental in combating the resurgence of Al Qaeda rebranded as ISIS or Daesh. That resurgence almost took the two states of Iraq and Syria by surprise, threatening their existential presence for a few months in 2014-15. That resistance axis was able to neutralize to the point where the actual business of the axis was managed without much hassle.



Here it may be pointed out that the military training and capabilities of the anti-Israel groups like Palestinian Islamic Jihad, Hamas, and lastly Hezbollah might not have been possible if the quiet ammunition lifeline through Central Syria coming from Iraq onwards to the Bekaa valley into Lebanon and possibly into the occupied territories has not been in place.

For a common man in the streets of Karachi or Islamabad, the events unfolding in Damascus might have been restricted to the benefit of the citizens of that city or country. The fact of the matter is that the impact of that geo political coup will be visible in the manner the resistance groups are able to put on an effective defence or offensive mode vis a vis the IDF.

The instant identification of the Israeli PM Netanyahu with the opposition groups in

Syria and these groups' words of gratitude for the IDF makes it clear that acts were well coordinated. Here it goes without saying that the IDF played its master stroke in a manner at a timing when it was about to be routed towards a meaningful settlement for the one-nation solution for the Palestinians. However, the "Jihadi" groups in Syria benefited the IDF in a manner that only these two stakeholders can understand; the IDF and HTS. Here one is reminded of the operational

destruction of Two PN Orion anti-submarine platforms by TTP in May 2011 at a PN base, which might not have benefited the TTP in operational sense, but definitely benefited the Indian Navy for a considerable period of time.

Back to the Middle East, the happenings of the last few days might precipitate a retrospect in the Iranian capital, which is already plagued with indecision as well as division of perception. While the IRGC under the supreme leader might have opted for an aggressive approach; or they might still be toying with the same in the coming days, the reformist administration or the Zarif camp has been trying to stay clear of anything which might block their reproachment with the Americans for a possible JCPOA2, their only tangible offering in the turbulent setting of the Iranian political landscape.

The Zarif camp reach could be felt when the anticipated strikes in the aftermath of Ismael Hania failed to take place and as was obvious, that emboldened the IDF to go for the entire leadership of the Hezbollah group in Beirut, initially targeting individuals through the pagers and then through the bunker buster ammunition delivered through F-35 jets.

The October strike by IRGC was a balancing act from the Rahbar to Zarif; that 'he still called the shots. The resultant IDF strike on Iran, practically from Iraqi Kurdistan proved the operational capability of Iranian air defence; however, the shadow of Zarif's pro-US stances neutralized the Iranian defence forces to undertake any meaningful step despite the capacity or capability to do so; in response to the Israeli strikes.

The mixed bag of an alert enemy and a slack friend finally translated into a situation, where Iranians and their allies are practically clueless about what steps to take next. If they take a suicidal step, it is bound to boomerang on them with devastating impact. Any further restraint is going to embolden the IDF even more.

The situation in the Middle East is pretty fluid. Iran and its allies are caught in a situation, they have not anticipated would develop too early. For the IDF and Netanyahu, it is the victory moment. The pressure is considerably gone. The destruction of Gaza is complete, Hezbollah and Hamas affective decapitated and the critical supply line went within a matter of days.

For the resistance, a quick set solution is imperative if they want things to be still managed. Failing this another US and NATO-backed peace accord is likely to be imposed on the Palestinian groups. Much depends upon how the Iranians, Hezbollah, and Hamas recover from the shock.

Conclusively there can be surprise for the region in the coming months, for the benefit of the Abraham Accord supporters. However, in an unpredictable scenario, attrition between the anti and pro-Abraham Accord forces might escalate to formulate a bloody showdown between all concerned. For the supreme leader, Zarif, and Pezeshkian, it is a time to retrospect and think over what is next.

Sednaya Prison (Slaughter House) Syria



By Hina Kashif

Saydnaya Military Prison is situated 30 kilometers north of Damascus, Syria. It is operated by the Military Police under the authority of the Minister of Defence. The prison gained notoriety after a 2008 detainee riot for its brutal use of torture and excessive force. The facility consists of two buildings capable of housing between 10,000 and 20,000 prisoners.

Since the outbreak of the Syrian conflict in 2011, Saydnaya has become a final destination for both peaceful opponents of the regime and military personnel suspected of dissent. In Saydnaya, torture and beatings are not merely a form of punishment but appear designed to eliminate the weak, with many prisoners facing death upon arrival. Detainees often spend months or years in other detention centers before being transferred here, typically after an unjust trial in a secret military court or without any trial at all. In many cases, they arrive without knowledge of the charges against them or any sense of when or if they will be released.

Amnesty International has documented testimonies from survivors who described

daily, systematic beatings, inhumane conditions, and constant degrading treatment. Prisoners routinely suffer from severe deprivation, including extended periods without food or water. Guards enforce a strict silence, and there are no formal interrogations; torture is used not to extract information but as a method of humiliation, punishment, and control. Many survivors report that the constant threat of violence only intensified after family visits, which were frequently followed by brutal beatings.

Prisoners in Saydnaya do not have access to legal representation. In some cases, families were falsely informed that their loved ones had died, while in reality, they were still imprisoned there.

Freed Prisoners Recount the Horrors of Their Past

Idlib, Syria – “My name was number 1100,” Hala said, still anxious about using her real name.

Hala is one of the thousands who were freed from the prisons of ousted Syrian

President Bashar al-Assad's regime after it rapidly crumbled in a stunning defeat during a rebel offensive in less than two weeks. She recalled being detained at a checkpoint in Hama in 2019, falsely accused of “terrorism”—a charge often used against anyone suspected of opposing the government. She was transferred to Aleppo, where she remained in various prisons until Syrian opposition forces took control of Aleppo's Central Prison on November 29, freeing her and many others.

“We couldn't believe it was real, and that we would finally see the light,” she said, recalling the moment the prison gates were opened by rebel forces led by Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS) in late November.

“The joy was overwhelming; we ululated and cheered, wishing we could hug and kiss them,” Hala recalled of the liberators. “The happiness grew even more when I reached my family. It was like being born again.” Hala was one of over 136,000 people, according to the Syrian Network for Human Rights, who were imprisoned in Syria's brutal detention system before the rebel advance.

Syria's prisons have long been a cornerstone of the Assad regime's power. In 2013, images smuggled out of the country provided what Human Rights Watch called "irrefutable evidence" of widespread torture, starvation, beatings, and disease in Syrian government-run prisons, which they described as crimes against humanity.

Hala also recalled the arrest and subsequent torture of a 16-year-old girl, who she says died after her ordeal. The girl was arrested just two months after her marriage, along with a university student, an elderly woman, and two doctors accused of treating revolutionaries.

Maher, who also wished to remain anonymous, was among those released from Syria's brutal prison system. Arrested in 2017 on charges of "funding terrorism," he spent the next seven years imprisoned without trial. During his detention, he felt as though he had been "forgotten" by the authorities, reduced to nothing more than a number. He described the unimaginable horrors he endured and witnessed behind bars.

"Every minute felt like drawing closer to death because of the severity of the torture and its brutal methods, which even an animal couldn't endure," Maher said.

However, one of his most shocking experiences occurred at the infamous Mezzeh Prison in Damascus, when he encountered a relative.

"A bus arrived, bringing new prisoners to my cell," Maher recalled. "Among them was a detainee who looked like my brother-in-law. At first, I hesitated and thought to myself, 'This can't be Ayman. His legs weren't amputated, right?'"

Maher approached the man to confirm his worst fear, only to find that the amputee had "lost his mind."

It wasn't until Maher noticed a tattoo that he realized the man before him was indeed Ayman, the relative he had known before his imprisonment.

Mezzeh was just one of the many facilities where Maher was held. After enduring years of torture, he never imagined he would leave Aleppo prison alive. But then, the unexpected occurred.

"As the sound of gunfire grew closer to the prison, we all began chanting 'Allahu Akbar' [God is great], unable to believe that this dream was actually happening," Maher said. "We broke down the doors, fled the prison, embraced the revolutionaries, and prostrated to God in gratitude. We were kept safe until I reached my sister's home in Idlib, where she and her family welcomed me."

"It was like the day I was born, as if it were the first day of my life," 49-year-old Safi al-Yassin said, reflecting on his release from a prison in Aleppo.

"The happiness is beyond words,"

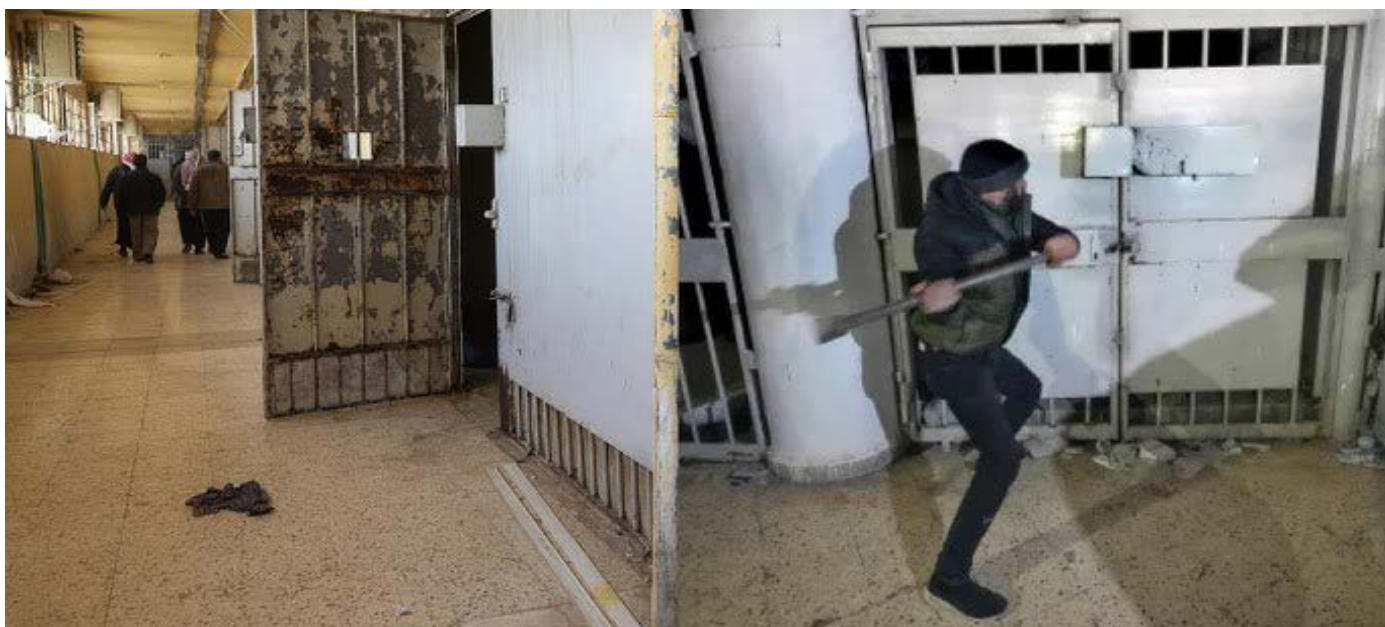
Al-Yassin described the moment before November 29, when he and other prisoners heard the sounds of fighting drawing closer to the prison, followed by a sudden silence and the victorious chants of the rebels. "There were about 5,000 prisoners," he recalled. "We began breaking the windows and smashing the doors to escape. Even the officers and guards changed into civilian clothes and left with us, trying to avoid capture by the rebels."

Before his detention, al-Yassin had worked as a blacksmith in Baniyas, a coastal city in northwest Syria. He was nearly halfway through a 31-year sentence for participating in one of the early demonstrations of the Syrian revolution in 2011.

Over the next 14 years, al-Yassin endured "severe physical and years of psychological torture" at various prisons throughout Syria. He was transferred between facilities, each known for its own brutal methods of interrogation, including a year spent in the infamous Saydnaya prison, which Amnesty International described in 2017 as a "human slaughterhouse." He was later moved to Sweida and eventually to Aleppo.

The treatment he suffered in Saydnaya, he said, was "indescribable and unwritable."

"The images I saw there will never leave me, even until my death," al-Yassin recalled, vividly remembering "an elderly man covered in blood, who later passed away."





Thousands of prisoners were freed from Assad's prisons after Syrian forces toppled his two-decade-long dictatorship during a swift rebel offensive. Among those who emerged were many long feared dead. Days later, crowds still gather at Saydnaya, desperately hoping for news of loved ones who vanished into its depths years ago. "I had four children in this prison," said Hosni Korno, clutching a record of their birth dates. "Since 2013. Here in this prison." A 2017 report by Amnesty International referred to Saydnaya as a "slaughterhouse," documenting systemic abuse on an industrial scale, including rape, torture, and executions. Many were imprisoned for participating in protests, opposing the government, or for simply being journalists, aid workers, or students. The prison is also suspected to have had its own crematorium.

On Tuesday, the leader of the rebel group responsible for ending Assad's regime vowed to track down former government officials involved in torture or other atrocities.

"We will not hesitate to hold accountable the criminals, murderers, and security and army officers involved in torturing the Syrian people," Abu Mohammed Al-Golani stated in a message on Telegram. His forces liberated prisoners from jails across cities like Aleppo, Homs, and Damascus during their lightning offensive, which

culminated in Assad fleeing to Moscow, where the Kremlin granted him asylum.

At Saydnaya, horrific scenes unfolded as cell blocks were forced open, revealing emaciated prisoners, some too weak to stand. The women's section included children born and raised in captivity.

Outside the prison, a young rebel fighter carried a thick pile of papers listing the names of those who had worked at the prison, including the guards.

"We want to give them to our leaders," said 25-year-old Abou Seif El-Dine, his face obscured by a balaclava. "We want them to be considered in an international court. They did a lot of things."

The London-based Syrian Observatory for Human Rights estimates that around 30,000 people were killed at Saydnaya between the start of the civil war in 2011 and 2020. Syria's prison system had already been vast and oppressive under Assad's father, Hafez, but after Bashar's ascent to power in 2000, these facilities became one of his most brutal instruments of repression. The sight of anyone who spoke out against him disappearing into the prison system spread fear throughout the country. Many prison locations were kept secret, and rights groups estimate that around 100,000 people went missing during the civil war, most of them within these hidden walls.

The lasting trauma is evident in the crowds that now flock to Saydnaya. Syrian rescue teams, including the White Helmets, have searched for hidden cells and report that everyone still alive has been released.

It's impossible to move through the crowds without being approached by people asking for pictures of missing loved ones—brothers, sons, friends. Ahmed al-Ahmed, whose two sons he believes were imprisoned at Saydnaya, said he applied 16 times for permission to visit them. Each request was denied.

"We don't want peace with anyone until we get our families back," he said. "There are around 44 prisons in this area. Please deliver this message to the whole world."

Some of those who enter the prison to see the dark, cramped cells their loved ones endured return shaken, many women overwhelmed with emotion. Men emerge from the basement rooms carrying rope nooses they've found hanging in the lower levels. At one point, rebels patrolling the grounds urge the crowd to be silent as sonar equipment is used in the search for secret underground chambers, although the searchers have insisted there are none.

But as long as hope remains, so does the belief that their loved ones are still alive.

Resource: Al-Jazeera, CBC

Drone Warfare and Trade Wars: China, the U.S., and the Future of the Russia-Ukraine Conflict



By Romana Afsheen

The war in Ukraine, ignited by Russia's invasion in February 2022, has rapidly transformed from a regional conflict into a major global crisis, reshaping the landscape of modern warfare. The ongoing conflict in Ukraine, now in its third year, has seen the battlefield evolve with the integration of advanced technologies, most notably drones. Over the course of the conflict, both sides have increasingly turned to advanced technologies, with unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs) or drones emerging as a pivotal tool in surveillance, targeting, reconnaissance, and defense. Drones, particularly small, commercially available models, have become a staple of Ukrainian military efforts against Russia. However, recent geopolitical tensions, particularly between China and the United States, have introduced new complexities to this already volatile situation. With China restricting exports of critical drone components to U.S. and European manufacturers, the global supply chain for drones essential to

Ukraine's war effort is being severely disrupted. This escalation in trade tensions could have serious consequences for Ukraine's ongoing struggle and could shift the dynamics of warfare in ways not yet fully understood.

China's Role in the Global Drone Supply Chain

The role of China in the global supply chain for drones is significant, as the country dominates the market for drone components, from batteries to flight controllers. According to estimates, China controls 90 percent of the drone market in the United States and about 80 percent globally. This vast market control gives China considerable leverage over the flow of critical components used in military-grade drones. The United States, while it maintains an advantage in larger military drones, is

heavily reliant on China for smaller, commercially available drones that are frequently used in both military and civilian applications.

For Ukraine, which has relied on affordable, commercial drones to counter Russian forces, China's control over the supply chain has become an increasingly important factor. Drones have proven essential in Ukrainian military operations, providing a cost-effective means of conducting surveillance, dropping explosives on targets, and defending against Russian advances. Given the low cost and availability of these drones, their use in Ukraine has been widespread.

In response to the growing tensions with the U.S., Beijing has taken steps to restrict the sale of essential drone parts to both American and European companies. This action marks a significant shift in the trade dynamics, particularly because it impacts

the supply of parts critical to Ukraine's military effort. By curbing the availability of these components, China is, in effect, targeting a vital element of Ukraine's war capabilities.

The U.S.-China Trade War and Its Impact on Ukraine's Drone Supply

The trade war between the U.S. and China has escalated over the past few years, particularly with Washington's decision to impose export controls on high-tech items such as semiconductors and memory chips. This move, aimed at limiting China's technological advancement, particularly in the military sector, has prompted Beijing to retaliate by imposing its own restrictions. In December 2023, the U.S. moved to restrict the sale of high-bandwidth memory chips and semiconductor equipment to China. Beijing's response was swift, with measures aimed at cutting off dual-use materials—those that have both civilian and military applications—from U.S. companies. This included not only high-tech materials but also drone components that are crucial for Ukraine's defense.

While the restrictions on drone parts are part of a broader strategy by China to counter U.S. trade policies, they represent a targeted move against Ukraine's military capabilities. The Chinese sanctions could have a tangible impact on the battlefield, where drones have become a key asset for Ukraine. The restrictions include the supply of motors, batteries, and flight controllers—all essential components for the production of drones. In one high-profile case, the U.S. drone manufacturer Skydio, which supplies drones to Ukraine, was hit by Chinese sanctions in October after winning a contract from Taiwan, a territory that Beijing claims as its own.

Skydio, which has worked hard to establish an independent supply chain outside of China, found itself relying on Chinese-made batteries for its drones. The restriction on the supply of these batteries left the company scrambling to find alternatives, delaying shipments to its clients, including the U.S. military and, by extension, Ukraine. This highlights the vulnerability of countries dependent on China for critical technologies, particularly in the

context of modern warfare where drones have become indispensable.

Ukraine's Efforts to Diversify Its Drone Supply Chain

For Ukraine, the dependence on Chinese drone parts has presented a significant challenge. Despite efforts to create local alternatives, Ukrainian drone manufacturers continue to rely on Chinese components to produce cost-effective and high-performance drones. This has been particularly problematic as China has moved to restrict exports of dual-use equipment. Although China has denied supplying weapons directly to either side of the conflict, it has been clear that the flow of dual-use technology, such as drone parts, has continued, indirectly benefiting Russia in its war effort.



In July 2023, China imposed a ban on exports of drones for military use, further complicating matters for Ukraine. This move, however, has not completely stopped the flow of parts. There are still numerous Ukrainian drone producers who rely on Chinese components, making it difficult for Kyiv to diversify its sources. While alternative suppliers are being sought, such as those in Japan and Taiwan, the process of shifting away from reliance on China's supply chain is slow and fraught with difficulties.

Taiwan, recognizing the growing importance of drones in modern warfare, has begun to shore up its own drone supply chain. The island nation has entered into discussions with European countries like

Latvia, Lithuania, and Poland to collaborate on drone development, ensuring that it can maintain a robust supply in the event of increased hostilities with Beijing.

The moves by Taiwan, however, do not solve Ukraine's immediate problem. The Ukrainian military remains reliant on China's drone parts, and as Beijing tightens its grip on these supplies, the challenge for Kyiv will only grow. Experts suggest that the drone market may witness the emergence of new supply chains, but they warn that China is likely to continue exerting control over global drone technology to prevent competition from emerging.

The Drone War and Its Strategic Implications for Ukraine

The impact of drone warfare on Ukraine's ability to defend itself is significant. Drones,

especially small and inexpensive models, have become the backbone of Ukraine's military strategy. These drones are used for a variety of roles, including intelligence gathering, surveillance, and precision targeting of Russian military positions. In the face of a larger, more powerful Russian military, drones have allowed Ukraine to level the playing field, enabling it to carry out operations that would have otherwise been impossible with traditional military resources.

However, with Chinese restrictions tightening, the future of Ukraine's drone capabilities is uncertain. The loss of access to critical parts could hamper Ukraine's ability to maintain its current operational tempo and potentially shift the balance of

power on the battlefield. Experts suggest that the ongoing trade conflict between the U.S. and China is not just an economic issue but one that could have real military implications.

Joseph Webster, a senior fellow at the Atlantic Council, noted that the Chinese restrictions are likely to have battlefield consequences for Ukraine. “These new controls only underscore the importance of strengthening our efforts with other countries to de-risk and diversify critical supply chains away from China,” he stated. While alternatives to China’s supply chain may eventually emerge, the immediate effects of these trade wars could be devastating for Ukraine’s defense capabilities.

Kadyrov’s influence within Russia’s military hierarchy has grown, with the Chechen leader reportedly controlling two National Guard regiments. These units, composed primarily of Chechens, have faced criticism for their alleged involvement in staged combat scenes and for their retreat during Ukrainian advances. Despite this, Kadyrov’s forces remain a significant part of Russia’s military effort in Ukraine.

Kadyrov’s rhetoric has also evolved. He claims to have 70,000 fully armed soldiers at his disposal, a number that includes volunteers from other parts of Russia. While the true size of Kadyrov’s forces is unclear, it is evident that his role in the conflict has been crucial, particularly in

describing it as a part of their broader strategy to target individuals linked to Russia’s military-industrial complex.

Shatsky’s death highlights the growing use of targeted killings in the ongoing conflict. As both sides of the war continue to engage in not just military combat but also a shadow war involving intelligence operations, the assassination of figures like Shatsky underscores the high stakes involved. The targeting of key individuals within Russia’s defense sector is a direct response to Russia’s aggression in Ukraine and signals that Ukraine will continue to pursue methods of weakening Russia’s military capabilities, even beyond the battlefield.

Conclusion: The Intersection of Trade, Technology, and Military Strategy

The geopolitical tensions between China and the United States have now entered a new phase, with the global supply chain for drones becoming a critical battleground. As China tightens

its control over drone components, Ukraine faces increasing challenges in maintaining its technological edge on the battlefield. The implications of this shift are profound, as drones have become indispensable tools in modern warfare. The impact of these trade restrictions is likely to extend beyond Ukraine, affecting other countries engaged in similar conflicts.

As the war in Ukraine evolves, it is clear that the intersection of trade wars, technological advancements, and military strategy will continue to shape the global order in profound ways. Whether Ukraine can secure alternative sources for drone technology or whether it will be forced to adapt its strategy in response to these supply chain disruptions remains to be seen. What is certain, however, is that the battlefield will continue to be shaped by the interplay of these complex forces, and the future of warfare will likely depend on how countries navigate these emerging challenges.



Kadyrov’s Expanding Influence and the Role of Chechen Forces in Ukraine

The war in Ukraine has also seen the emergence of new players within the Russian military apparatus. One of the most notable figures is Chechen leader Ramzan Kadyrov, who has used the war as an opportunity to expand his influence within the Russian military. Before 2022, Kadyrov commanded seven battalions and regiments under the formal authority of Russia’s National Guard and Interior Ministry. However, since the beginning of the invasion, Kadyrov’s forces, known as the “Kadyrovtsy,” have significantly expanded. According to investigative reports, Kadyrov has established 10 additional units, eight of which are under Russia’s Ministry of Defense.

terms of bolstering Russian forces in regions where local support is lacking. Kadyrov’s personal loyalty to Russian President Vladimir Putin further solidifies his position within Russia’s military framework.

The Assassination of Mikhail Shatsky: A Reflection of the Shadow War

Amid the broader military and geopolitical developments, a significant event unfolded near Moscow with the assassination of Mikhail Shatsky, a senior engineer at the Moscow Experimental Design Bureau Mars. Shatsky was a key figure in the development of cruise missile technologies used by Russia in its invasion of Ukraine. Ukrainian intelligence sources have claimed responsibility for the assassination,

South Korean President Yoon Survives Impeachment Amid Martial Law Controversy



By Romana Afsheen

On December 7, 2024, South Korean President Yoon Suk Yeol narrowly survived an impeachment attempt, which was brought forward by the opposition-controlled National Assembly. The impeachment motion, triggered by controversial actions surrounding a martial law declaration, marked a significant political crisis for the administration. Despite intense opposition efforts, President Yoon's ruling party, the People Power Party (PPP), effectively blocked the vote by choosing to boycott the process, preventing the motion from reaching the necessary threshold of 200 votes required for passage.

Although the motion to remove President Yoon from office failed, the political ramifications of the impeachment attempt continue to reverberate throughout the South Korean political landscape. In what can only be described as a tumultuous period for South Korea's leadership, the failure of the impeachment does not mark the end of

the political crisis. The opposition, which holds a significant majority in the National Assembly, has vowed to continue pushing for Yoon's ouster, with plans for another impeachment vote already in the pipeline. Their main point of contention remains President Yoon's actions, particularly his shocking declaration of martial law on December 3, 2024.

The Martial Law Crisis

On December 3, Yoon's government made the unprecedented move of declaring martial law. This was the first time such an order had been issued in South Korea since the country transitioned to a democracy in the late 1980s. The martial law decree, which granted military powers to deal with "anti-state forces" and political opponents, was issued amidst growing political instability, as protests against Yoon's government intensified.

The declaration of martial law raised alarm across the nation, with many accusing the president of overstepping his bounds and threatening to undermine the democratic values that South Korea had fought hard to establish over the past several decades. Protests quickly erupted in the streets, with opposition parties, civil society groups, and ordinary citizens voicing their concerns about the potential erosion of freedoms and civil liberties.

Within hours, the military order was rescinded. Under immense pressure from both opposition lawmakers and the general public, the decree was revoked just six hours later. However, the brief period in which martial law was imposed proved to be enough to spark a larger political firestorm. The national outcry against the martial law declaration led to public protests that called for Yoon's resignation, and further intensified calls for impeachment.

The decision to declare martial law has prompted significant questions about President Yoon's leadership and judgment. Many view the move as an attempt to consolidate power in the face of growing public dissent, suggesting that it could be a precursor to a more authoritarian style of governance. Critics argue that Yoon's actions undermine the very foundations of South Korean democracy, and have ignited a fierce debate over the balance between national security and individual freedoms.

there has been no official statement on a timeline for such an event, reports suggest that these discussions could pave the way for a shift in leadership. If Yoon steps down, Prime Minister Han could be in line to take over as the country's new leader. However, this potential change in leadership raises several questions about the future direction of the South Korean government, and whether a new administration could help resolve the political chaos that has unfolded in recent weeks.

large, with concerns about the potential long-term impact on South Korea's international relations and its ability to navigate regional security challenges.

Criminal Investigation and Fallout from Martial Law

The political crisis surrounding President Yoon deepened following revelations that South Korean prosecutors were launching a criminal investigation into his role in the martial law debacle. Prosecutors are investigating President Yoon and key officials involved in the declaration of martial law, including former Defense Minister Kim Yong-hyun. Kim, a close ally of Yoon, was arrested and placed under investigation on charges of insurrection and treason. The arrest of Kim, a former top military official, signals the severity of the legal fallout from the martial law crisis.

Kim, along with Yoon and other senior officials, is accused of orchestrating the martial law declaration, which granted the military sweeping powers to suppress political opposition and dissent. The decree, which sought to eliminate what were described as "anti-state forces," was seen by many as an attempt to stifle political opposition and cement Yoon's hold on power. Following the rescinding of the decree, the fallout has led to calls for criminal accountability and a deeper investigation into whether Yoon and his government violated the constitution and the principles of democracy.

The investigation has sent shockwaves through South Korea's political establishment, with many fearing that the fallout from the martial law crisis could be far-reaching. If President Yoon is found to have acted illegally, it could lead to further political instability and legal challenges. The specter of a criminal investigation also casts a shadow over Yoon's future in office, as the possibility of criminal charges could hasten his departure from the presidency.

Resignation of Defense Minister Amid Crisis

In another significant development, South Korea's Defense Minister Kim Yong-hyun resigned in the wake of the martial law



Political Repercussions and Ongoing Instability

Despite surviving the impeachment vote, President Yoon's political future remains uncertain. Public opinion in South Korea is deeply divided, with growing protests calling for the president's resignation or removal from office. The opposition parties, led by the Democratic Party, have shown no signs of backing down in their pursuit of impeachment. The National Assembly, which holds the legislative power, continues to be a battleground for political rivalry, with many calling for a new vote on Yoon's removal, citing his handling of the martial law crisis as a critical failure in leadership.

Prime Minister Han Duck-soo and PPP leader Han Dong-hoon are said to be holding private discussions about the possibility of Yoon's resignation. While

The martial law crisis has also exposed deep divides within South Korea's political establishment. Although the PPP successfully blocked the impeachment attempt, the ruling party is not entirely unified in its support for President Yoon. A number of lawmakers within the PPP have voiced their concerns about Yoon's handling of the situation, with some defecting from the party's official stance. This internal division within the ruling party could further weaken Yoon's position and make it more difficult for him to maintain control over the government.

As protests continue to grow in size and intensity, the country's political landscape remains volatile. Yoon's leadership is increasingly being questioned, and many South Koreans are left wondering whether the country's democratic institutions will be able to withstand the ongoing crisis. The threat of further political instability looms

scandal. Kim had been one of the key architects behind the martial law declaration and was a central figure in advising President Yoon on the matter. His resignation marks a major blow to the president's administration, as Kim had held a key position in the government and military.

Kim's resignation came just days after the martial law decree was rescinded, and it underscores the political and legal pressure facing the government. Kim's departure is seen as a response to the mounting criticism of the martial law declaration, and it further deepens the sense of crisis surrounding Yoon's leadership. The resignation also highlights the growing divisions within the ruling party, as key figures within the administration begin to distance themselves from the controversial actions of the president.

In the wake of Kim's resignation, President Yoon appointed Choi Byung-hyuk, South Korea's current ambassador to Saudi Arabia, as the new Defense Minister. Choi's appointment is seen as an attempt to stabilize the government amid the ongoing crisis, although his ability to navigate the political turbulence remains uncertain. With South Korea facing increasing instability, the new Defense Minister will have to address pressing national security challenges while also dealing with the fallout from the martial law scandal.

Implications for South Korea's International Relations

As South Korea grapples with its internal political turmoil, concerns are growing about the potential impact on its international relations. Key allies such as the United States and Japan are closely monitoring the situation, as the crisis threatens to undermine South Korea's ability to maintain stable diplomatic and security relations in the region.

The martial law declaration and subsequent protests have already raised concerns about South Korea's commitment to democratic values and human rights. If the crisis continues to escalate, it could lead to a deterioration in relations with the international community. South Korea's standing as a regional leader in East Asia could be called into question, especially at a time when tensions with North Korea are already high.

Moreover, the political instability could weaken South Korea's position in negotiations with the United States and Japan on key security issues, including defense cooperation and regional security challenges. The United States, in particular,

is likely to be concerned about the potential for instability in one of its key allies in East Asia, particularly as North Korea's nuclear and missile threats continue to pose a significant challenge.

The ongoing political crisis in South Korea, sparked by President Yoon Suk Yeol's controversial martial law declaration, has thrust the country into a period of uncertainty. While Yoon has narrowly survived an impeachment attempt, the future of his presidency remains in question. Protests, criminal investigations, and resignations within the government are all signs of a deepening crisis that threatens to destabilize South Korea's political landscape.

As the country grapples with the fallout from the martial law debacle, questions about the future direction of South Korea's leadership remain unanswered. The ongoing instability is raising concerns not only within the country but also among its international allies, as the potential for a shift in power looms large. The coming months will likely be a pivotal period in determining whether South Korea can weather this storm and maintain its democratic institutions, or whether the crisis will lead to further political upheaval and long-term instability.



Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf's Internal Politics: Navigating Leadership Crises Amid Controversies



By Kanwal Munir

Introduction

The Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI), once hailed as a symbol of political transformation in Pakistan, is now grappling with significant internal and external challenges that threaten its ideological coherence and leadership unity. Originally founded by Imran Khan in 1996, PTI positioned itself as an anti-corruption movement with promises of reforming Pakistan's political system and breaking the traditional dynastic hold. Over the years, the party managed to gather significant support, culminating in its rise to power in 2018. However, the party's trajectory from a grassroots movement to the ruling party has revealed deep-rooted vulnerabilities, including leadership fractures, strategic inconsistencies, and ideological shifts. Furthermore, allegations of external interference and political engineering have further complicated PTI's standing, both domestically and internationally, casting a shadow over its future in Pakistani politics. These developments have led to a growing sense of uncertainty about the party's stability and its ability to navigate the complex political landscape.

Leadership Struggles and Fragmentation

Imran Khan, the founding leader of Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI), has long been the central figure shaping the party's political agenda. However, recent developments have cast a shadow over the party's internal unity. Critics within the party have pointed out that Khan's leadership style, characterized by a lack of inclusivity in decision-making, has alienated key figures who were once pivotal to PTI's early success. The situation worsened after the dramatic events surrounding Khan's arrest in May 2023, which led to violent protests and mass resignations of party leaders. These events exposed significant weaknesses in PTI's organizational structure, as many key leaders were detained, further eroding the party's stability.

The party has struggled to manage internal disagreements, which have contributed to an ongoing leadership crisis. With many factions emerging, PTI's ideological unity has been severely compromised. The internal rifts have weakened the party's ability to maintain a cohesive direction, and its

influence has waned as a result. The leadership vacuum and political disarray, coupled with a growing sense of disenchantment among its ranks, have left PTI at a crossroads in its quest to reclaim its former prominence in Pakistan's political landscape.

Incidents Highlighting PTI's Internal Rift

1. Aleema Khan's Allegations: A Proposed Deal for Imran Khan's Release in Exchange for a Sit-in

Aleema Khan, the sister of PTI's founder and former Prime Minister Imran Khan, made significant allegations during a media briefing outside an anti-terrorism court (ATC) in Lahore on Saturday. She claimed that the government had proposed a deal to Barrister Gohar Ali Khan, PTI's legal representative, offering the release of Imran Khan in exchange for staging a sit-in at Sangjani, a strategic location in Islamabad.

Aleema detailed her frustrations regarding delays in the trial proceedings of cases linked to the May 9



incidents, particularly the case involving the attack on Jinnah House. She expressed her discontent over the trial's slow pace, stating that despite the passage of time, hearings had yet to begin. Aleema emphasized that PTI was not asking for bail, but rather for the trial to commence in a timely manner. Furthermore, she accused the prosecution of failing to provide necessary evidence to support the charges against PTI members.

In her media briefing, Aleema further stated that the government's panic was evident as public gatherings in support of PTI gained momentum. She suggested that the government had resorted to contacting Barrister Gohar to discuss a proposal in which the party would halt its planned protest in exchange for Imran Khan's release within 20 days. According to Aleema, the government sought a demonstration at Sangjani to ease political pressure, but this offer was firmly rejected by PTI leaders.

2. Barrister Gohar Ali Khan Denies Allegations of Deal

In response to Aleema Khan's claims, Barrister Gohar Ali Khan, a prominent PTI figure and the party's legal representative, denied that any such offer or deal was ever made by the government. In a phone interview, he dismissed the allegations and clarified that no discussions regarding Imran Khan's release had occurred with the authorities. Gohar emphasized that he had not been in contact with government officials on November 24 or prior to that date regarding any potential deal or discussions about the PTI founder's release.

Gohar also pointed out that there had been no direct dialogue with the government about halting PTI's protests, nor any indication that Imran Khan's release was guaranteed. This direct contradiction to Aleema Khan's claims adds further complexity to the ongoing political narrative, suggesting that the internal dynamics of PTI may be affected by differing perspectives on how to navigate the party's ongoing struggles.

3. PTI's November 24 Protest and Escalating Tensions

The alleged deal came in the wake of PTI's "do-or-die" protest scheduled for November

24, which aimed to demand the release of Imran Khan. The protest, led by Bushra Bibi (Imran Khan's wife) and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Chief Minister Ali Amin Gandapur, saw PTI supporters rallying in the capital, despite government efforts to control public demonstrations.

The protest was cut short due to a law enforcement operation on the night of November 26-27, which saw the clearing of the Red Zone and the dispersal of PTI supporters. The government's strong response to the rally, combined with the allegations of government pressure on PTI, highlights the continued tensions between the ruling authorities and the opposition party.

Aleema Khan's public disclosure of the alleged offer reflects not only PTI's internal challenges but also the broader political maneuverings surrounding Imran Khan's detention. The contrast between her claims and Gohar Ali Khan's denial further fuels the ongoing political discourse, adding to the uncertainty within PTI and its future strategies.

4. Resignations and Factionalism

Recent months have seen a spate of resignations by senior PTI leaders, including the abrupt departure of Salman Akram Raja as Secretary General. His resignation, although which he later retracted, citing irreconcilable differences, sent shockwaves through the party and highlighted a lack of alignment within the leadership.

Non-Bailable Arrest Warrants Issued for PTI Leaders in GHQ Attack Case

In a major development, an Anti-Terrorism Court (ATC) issued non-bailable arrest warrants for prominent leaders of the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) in connection with the May 9, 2023, attack on Pakistan's General Headquarters (GHQ). These warrants include the names of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Chief Minister Ali Amin Gandapur and other key PTI figures such as Shibli Faraz, Shehryar Afridi, Zain Qureshi, Kanwal Shauzab, and Malik Taimoor Masood. The court, under Judge Amjad Ali Shah, directed the immediate

presentation of these accused individuals by December 10, 2023.

The attack on the GHQ and other military installations across the country followed the controversial arrest of PTI leader Imran Khan. His arrest sparked violent protests by PTI supporters, leading to widespread unrest and damage to government and military properties. The issuance of these arrest warrants adds to the growing legal pressure on PTI leaders involved in the unrest.

PTI's Legal and Political Response

In response to the arrest warrants, PTI has vowed to intensify its protests unless the government meets its demands. The party has condemned the legal actions as politically motivated, aimed at suppressing PTI's leadership. Barrister Gohar Ali Khan, PTI's Chairman, has warned the government that failure to address their concerns, such as the repeal of the 26th Constitutional Amendment, will lead to nationwide protests. PTI leaders have consistently demanded the immediate release of several imprisoned members, including Imran Khan and Shah Mahmood Qureshi.

The 26th Constitutional Amendment, which seeks to limit judicial power in judicial appointments, is a point of contention for PTI. The party argues that it is an attempt to weaken the independence of the judiciary, and they have pledged to continue their opposition to it through protests and legal challenges.

National Assembly Tensions: Government and Opposition Clash

Tensions have escalated in the National Assembly as opposition parties, especially PTI, have been critical of the government's handling of the situation. During a recent session, PPP leader Naveed Qamar pointed out the absence of government ministers during the question hour, which is crucial for addressing public concerns in parliament. Law Minister Azam Nazeer Tarar promised to improve the process, but this did little to quell the growing discontent in the opposition.



The situation became more heated when opposition figures accused Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif's government of ordering security forces to use excessive force against PTI protesters on November 26, 2023. Defence Minister Khawaja Asif, however, denied these allegations, claiming that the opposition was spreading false narratives about the death toll and the actions of security forces. According to the government, the opposition was manipulating the situation for political gain.

Despite the government's denials, PTI continues to demand an independent inquiry into the events of November 26, which saw significant casualties among PTI supporters during the clashes with security forces. The opposition has accused the government of attempting to suppress the truth regarding the deaths and injuries that occurred during the protests.



Call for Accountability and Independent Inquiry

PTI's call for an independent inquiry into the November 26 clashes has gained traction among its supporters, who demand that the government be held accountable for the deaths of several PTI workers. The opposition has criticized the government for failing to investigate these deaths and for its handling of the protests. They argue that the use of force by security personnel was unwarranted and that the government's response was disproportionate.

As the political standoff continues, PTI has vowed to keep pressing for justice and accountability, while the government insists that it is committed to maintaining law and order. The clash of narratives

between the government and opposition highlights the deepening political crisis in Pakistan, with both sides accusing each other of mismanagement and authoritarian tactics.

General Faiz Hamid: Indictment and Allegations of Political Engineering

The recent indictment of Lt. Gen. (retd) Faiz Hamid has introduced another layer of complexity into PTI's already tumultuous internal politics. Once considered a close ally of Imran Khan, General Faiz's role in facilitating PTI's rise to power during his tenure as the ISI chief has long been a topic of debate. However, his post-retirement activities have sparked controversy, especially regarding his alleged

involvement in the May 9 protests, which led to his indictment under the Pakistan Army Act. The charges against him include misuse of authority and violations of legal provisions, marking an unprecedented move to hold a senior retired officer accountable for political interference. This indictment reflects the military's attempts to distance itself from allegations of political favoritism.

In a related development, PTI's information secretary, Sheikh Waqas Akram, condemned recent government statements targeting General Faiz, particularly those made by Information Minister Ataullah Tarar and Senator Faisal Wawda. Akram accused the government of politicizing the military and argued that the army should remain impartial. PTI has repeatedly

emphasized that it refrains from politicizing military affairs, maintaining that the army should stay out of party politics despite the ongoing tensions between PTI and the military leadership.

Impact on PTI's Credibility

The fallout from General Faiz's indictment has significant implications for PTI. While some party members have distanced themselves from the retired general's actions, others view his strategic interventions as integral to PTI's political strategy. The association with controversial figures like General Faiz has, however, tarnished the party's image as an independent political entity.

Moreover, internal divisions within PTI over its stance on military involvement in politics have further eroded its credibility. As the party attempts to rebuild its organizational framework, addressing these fractures and establishing a clear ideological narrative remain pressing challenges.

Strategic Recalibration

Considering these challenges, PTI must urgently recalibrate its strategies to restore organizational cohesion and public trust. The party's leadership needs to prioritize transparency, democratic decision-making, and policy clarity to reestablish itself as a credible political force.

Conclusion

PTI's internal politics and the indictment of General Faiz Hamid highlight the broader challenges of political accountability and party dynamics in Pakistan. As the party navigates a turbulent period, its ability to reconcile internal differences, maintain ideological coherence, and distance itself from controversial alliances will determine its future trajectory.

For PTI, the path forward requires introspection and strategic recalibration. The party's leadership must prioritize rebuilding trust among its members and the electorate while ensuring transparency and accountability in its political operations. Only through such measures can PTI hope to reclaim its position as a transformative force in Pakistan's democracy.



Maulana Fazlur Rehman Postpones JUI-F's Islamabad March: Scholars oppose change in Madrassah system



By Hina Kashif

Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam-F (JUI-F) Chief Maulana Fazlur Rehman has postponed his party's planned march to Islamabad, which was aimed at pressuring the government to pass the Societies Registration (Amendment) Bill, legislation intended to register madrassahs.

Addressing a conference in Peshawar, Fazl stated, "I had earlier mentioned making a final decision at the public rally in Peshawar. Today, I spoke with Mufti Taqi Usmani, and it has been decided to hold a meeting with all allied madrassahs to discuss the matter and form a unified stance. If needed, we will take further steps after that meeting, which is scheduled for December 16 or 17."

The Societies Registration (Amendment) Bill, 2024, stems from an agreement between JUI-F and the government supporting the 26th Constitutional Amendment. It expands the provisions of the Societies Registration Act of 1860 and introduces regulations for the registration of 'Deeni Madaris' (religious seminaries) through the deputy commissioner's office.

Under the new bill, madrassahs with multi-

ple campuses will require only a single registration, and each institution will have to submit an annual report of its educational activities. Additionally, madrassahs will be required to audit their financial accounts and submit the audit reports to the registrar. The bill also prohibits seminaries from promoting militancy, sectarianism, or religious hatred.

President Asif Ali Zardari returned the bill to the federal government, citing objections.

In his speech, Fazl warned the government not to issue threats, saying, "Do not send us threats, whether from uniformed personnel or agencies. We are not afraid of threats; they only provoke us. We are exercising restraint and have kept our passionate supporters in check. If we decide to take action, your bullets will run out, but our resolve will not."

Fazl also condemned Israel's actions in Gaza, noting that 75% of the nearly 50,000 martyrs are women and children. He criticized the U.S. for supporting Israel, asserting, "The U.S. and Israel are the killers of humanity."

He reaffirmed JUI-F's solidarity with the Palestinian cause, stating, "The land of Palestine belongs to the Palestinians, and we stand shoulder to shoulder with them."

The JUI-F leader further condemned the violence against Muslims in Afghanistan and Gaza, calling the bombing of helpless Muslims "indiscriminate."

Fazl also addressed the 26th Constitutional Amendment, stating that while the government presented the amendment as a "dark snake," JUI-F had worked to reduce it from 56 to 34 clauses. He criticized the government for not representing the people and alleged that judges have been undermined in the current political climate.

JUI-F Leader Maulana Asad Mehmood Hints at 'Jail Bharo Tehreek'

JUI-F leader Maulana Asad Mehmood hinted that the party would respond "affirmatively" to calls for a 'Jail Bharo Tehreek' (Fill the Jails Movement). Speaking at the same conference in Peshawar, Mehmood said, "When we go to Islam-



abad, we will not return like PTI members.”

He criticized Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Chief Minister Ali Amin Gandapur, alleging that he had hidden in Dera Ismail Khan Cantt after the no-confidence motion against PTI founder Imran Khan. Mehmood claimed that Gandapur had not come to power through votes but through financial influence, accusing him of being a representative of the establishment.

Maulana Ziaur Rehman of JUI-F also criticized KP CM Gandapur for his lack of academic engagement, citing his history of problematic behavior, including being removed from the National College of Arts for inappropriate conduct.

Meanwhile, JUI-F's provincial leader Maulana Attaur Rehman slammed the PTI government in KP, stating, “We do not regard the PTI government even at the tip of our shoes. Those who sit on the strength of the establishment should not challenge us.” He added that JUI-F would not tolerate restrictions on madrassahs, addressing President Zardari directly, stating, “Even Hakim Ali Zardari cannot impose bans on madrassahs.”

Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) President Nawaz Sharif directed Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif to resolve the concerns raised by Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam-Fazl (JUI-F) chief Maulana Fazlur Rehman about the madrasa registration bill.

The Sharif brothers met at their Jati Umrah residence to discuss the political situation in the country. During the meeting, Prime Minister Shehbaz assured Nawaz that steps would be taken to address Maulana Fazlur Rehman's concerns, and efforts would be made to involve him in discussions regarding the bill.

- **The Madrasa Registration Bill:** This legislation, currently under consideration, focuses on registering religious schools (madrasas) and establishing regulations for their operation. The bill has raised concerns among some religious groups, particularly Maulana Fazlur Rehman, regarding its implications on religious freedom and autonomy.

- **The Political Context:** Nawaz Sharif, as the PML-N leader, is involved in guiding party strategy, especially on important political matters. Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif, as his brother, oversees the day-to-day governance of the country and is tasked with addressing concerns and keeping key political allies, like Maulana Fazlur Rehman, on board with government policies.
- **The Significance of the Meeting:** The discussion highlights the ongoing political balancing act the PML-N government faces, trying to manage relationships with different political factions, including religious groups like JUI-F, while advancing its legislative agenda. The assurance that Fazlur Rehman would be taken into confidence suggests an attempt to address potential opposition and maintain political stability.

Speaking at the Israel Murdaabad Conference in Peshawar, Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam-Fazl (JUI-F) chief Maulana Fazlur Rehman reaffirmed his party's unwavering support for the Palestinian cause and condemned Western powers for their historical and ongoing atrocities.

Addressing a large audience, Rehman emphasized that the conference sent a powerful global message of solidarity with the Palestinian people and their rights. “We stand firm on our principled stance. The West, responsible for massacres during the World Wars, continues to kill Muslims in Afghanistan, Iraq, and Palestine,” he stated.

He accused the US and Western nations of being “the murderers of humanity,” citing the deaths of 50,000 women and children in Palestine. He further questioned, “If Saddam Hussein was executed for military operations in one city, why isn't Netanyahu held accountable for similar crimes?”

Maulana Fazlur Rehman, the Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam-Fazl (JUI-F) leader, strongly criticized Pakistan's past and present policies, especially under former President General Pervez Musharraf, for aligning too closely with the United States. He condemned the decision to allow the US to use Pakistan's military bases and air

corridors for operations in Afghanistan, which he believes compromised the country's sovereignty. Rehman warned that if the current government continued these policies, they would face fierce opposition from his party's workers.

Rehman further claimed that Pakistan's political establishment is increasingly out of touch with the public. He contrasted Pakistan's leadership with Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi, who has openly supported Israel, noting that Pakistan's leadership has failed to take a strong stand in support of Palestinian rights. Rehman called on the public to reject the current government, saying it represents the interests of the “establishment” rather than the people. He insisted that Pakistan should belong to all citizens, not just a few powerful institutions, and emphasized that it was the duty of his party to defend the country's founding principles, which he accused the current leadership of betraying. He warned that their actions would ultimately harm the nation.

The JUI-F leader also expressed strong opposition to the proposed 26th Amendment, claiming that if it had passed in its original form, it would have undermined key democratic institutions like Parliament and the Constitution. However, Rehman said that his party's efforts helped reduce the number of clauses in the amendment from 34 to 22, removing provisions he believed were harmful.

On the matter of religious seminaries (madrasas), Rehman assured that while these institutions would be registered, they would not be subjugated or controlled by the government. He highlighted that agreements made in 2010 were being violated, but his party would ensure that madrasas' rights were protected. He stressed that while madrasas would be registered with the education department, they would maintain their independence.

Rehman also warned the government against attempting to divide religious scholars, particularly by using media platforms to create discord. He stated that any interference in the affairs of religious seminaries would not be tolerated. He reiterated that agreements concerning the financial management, curricula, and administrative structures of madrasas must



be respected.

Concluding his speech, Rehman urged his supporters to stay vigilant and ready for action. He pledged that when the time was right, his party would mobilize for the stability, ideology, and survival of Pakistan, sending a strong message to the ruling government.

Barrister Gohar Defends PTI's Madrasah Registration Agreement

Speaking to the media outside Adiala Jail, Barrister Gohar Ali Khan, Chairman of Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI), defended the party's 2019 agreement on madrasah registration. He reiterated PTI's commitment to the deal, emphasizing its significance in ensuring that religious schools, or madrasahs, operate within the framework of the law.

Barrister Gohar explained that registering madrasahs is necessary to curb any illegal activities and to ensure that these institutions comply with national regulations. He further highlighted the importance of modernizing the madrasah curriculum by incorporating contemporary subjects. This, he argued, would help align religious education with current educational standards and equip students with a broader skill set for the future.

Scholars oppose any change in the existing Madrasah system

Tensions over madrasah registration remain unresolved, as proponents of the 2019 agreement have joined the debate and urged the government to retain the current system.

"We do not wish for confrontation while everyone wields power," said Pakistan Ulema Council Chairman Hafiz Tahir Ashrafi during the Conference on Madrasah Registration and Reforms held in Islamabad.

The conference took place amidst warnings from Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam-Fazl leader Maulana Fazlur Rehman, who threatened a march on Islamabad if the president failed to enact the Societies Registration (Amend-

ment) Bill—legislation aimed at formalizing madrasah registration. President Asif Ali Zardari recently returned the bill to the federal government, citing objections, adding to the uncertainty. Religious scholars have called for preserving the existing registration framework for madrasahs and urged the government to resist external pressures to alter it.

Key Figures Address the Conference

A conference titled "Positive Effects of Madrasa Registration" convened in Islamabad with participation from Director General of Religious Education Ghulam Qamar, Federal Ministers Khalid Maqbool Siddiqui (Education) and Chaudhry Salik Hussain (Religious Affairs), and Information Minister Ataullah Tarar. Ashrafi chaired the session.



Ashrafi highlighted that around three million students are studying in madrasahs across Pakistan. He emphasized the long-standing demand for the official recognition of religious education. He noted significant progress since 2019, mentioning the establishment of 10 new educational boards, raising the total number to 15 from the previous five. Education Minister Siddiqui clarified that registration is intended to enhance madrasah education, not control it, stating, "The future of 30 million children is at stake. We will not bow to political pressure."

Scholars Advocate for Unity

Ruet-e-Hilal Committee Chairman Maulana Abdul Khabeer Azad reiterated the importance of madrasahs, describing them as "bastions of faith representing all sects." He called for collective efforts to safeguard these institutions and highlighted the unity among scholars from diverse backgrounds at the gathering.

Clarifications and Collaboration

Ashrafi, who also serves as a patron of Wafaqul Madaris Al-Arabia Pakistan, reaffirmed his alignment with the organization's stance on madrasah registration. He criticized the media for misrepresenting his views, asserting that religious madrasahs are the "protectors of

the country's ideological boundaries" and critical for preserving the faith of future generations.

Religious Affairs Minister Chaudhry Salik Hussain stressed the importance of collaboration between the state and religious scholars to advance societal progress. He highlighted the need to integrate religious and technical education in madrasahs, saying, "Providing dual education is essential to ensure a brighter future for seminary students." Hussain underlined the role of scholars and mosques in guiding society, urging a collective focus on shared objectives to overcome challenges.

US Charge D’Affaires Natalie Baker highlights the significance of US-Pakistan bilateral ties

The United States remains Pakistan’s best trading partner. Let me tell you why. The United States is Pakistan’s largest export market globally – Pakistan sends around 16 percent of its total exports to the United States each year. Pakistan’s exports to the United States have grown substantially over the last decade. This is a testament to the robust economic relationship we share.



By Harry Javed

Natalie Baker, Charge D’Affaires of the US Embassy in Islamabad Thanked Waqar Khan, Anwer Azam, and Usman Shaukat for inviting her to speak today to the Pak America Business Forum and the Rawalpindi Chamber of Commerce and Industry for organizing this conference.

She said, “Your work in strengthening the business ties between the United States and Pakistan is very important to our bilateral relationship and to the prosperity of both countries.”

Natalie said, “I have been asked to speak on how the U.S. Mission facilitates investment in Pakistan through diplomacy and policy advocacy. It’s a timely question, as Pakistan looks to move beyond the economic crisis and implement difficult but necessary structural economic reforms to realize a more prosperous future.”

Ambassador Blome and I believe that

the United States is Pakistan’s indispensable partner in this endeavor. Our economic partnership has been a cornerstone of our bilateral relationship.

The United States remains Pakistan’s best trading partner. Let me tell you why. The United States is Pakistan’s largest export market globally – Pakistan sends around 16 percent of its total exports to the United States each year. Pakistan’s exports to the United States have grown substantially over the last decade. This is a testament to the robust economic relationship we share.

Similarly, U.S. investors have contributed enormously to Pakistan’s economic development. Right now, over 80 U.S. firms directly employ 120,000 Pakistanis and indirectly support the livelihoods of over a million Pakistani workers. These companies bring

American values of openness, transparency, and responsible corporate citizenship. These businesses also drive critical research and development and provide new opportunities to local communities.

This economic relationship is important for the United States – that’s why we continue to invest in Pakistan. We recognize Pakistan’s enormous potential. It is one of the world’s most populous countries, with a growing and dynamic young population.

In my engagements with Pakistan’s youth, I continue to be impressed by their ambitions, their ideas, their commitment to seeing a better and brighter future for their country.

That brighter future includes economic opportunities in technology, business, trade, climate resilience, and security. If Pakistan realizes its potential in these areas for growth and development, the

result will not only benefit Pakistan, but also the region and the world.

We want Pakistan and its citizens to succeed and to become an economic powerhouse.

The U.S. Mission in Pakistan – which includes the Embassy in Islamabad and our consulates in Karachi, Lahore, and Peshawar – is committed to increasing two-way trade and investment to help Pakistan unlock these economic possibilities.

My colleagues in the Foreign Commercial Service, Foreign Agriculture Service, and on the economic teams throughout Mission Pakistan are conducting the day-to-day diplomacy to grow our business relationships.

My team works hard to connect U.S. and Pakistani businesses, assist U.S. investors in navigating the Pakistan market, and advocate for business climate improvements.

With senior leaders throughout the Pakistani government, we advocate for policies that will make it easier to invest and trade in Pakistan.

In our economic diplomacy, we have a secret weapon – all of you, the Pakistan-American community. Pakistanis abroad are not only innovative and entrepreneurial – they are committed to giving back to Pakistan.

Today, Pakistan is emerging from serious economic challenges and is looking to undertake difficult but desperately needed economic reforms. The United States will support Pakistan through this transition.

We believe that unlocking the potential of the private sector is pivotal to that effort and this includes the Pakistani business community abroad. We envision more Pakistani-American investment and trade with Pakistan. It is a natural role for you to play in securing a more prosperous future for all Pakistanis.

That's why USAID launched the Pakistan Investment Promotion Activity in 2021. The project has organized Pakistan Investment Roadshows in Dubai, Riyadh, New York, San Francisco, and Washington, D.C., showcasing 48 companies that are now engaged directly with international investors.

Many of these investors are part of the Pakistani diaspora. Collectively, these initiatives have helped firms raise \$13 million in foreign direct investment while increasing U.S.-Pakistan bilateral trade by \$41 million and generating \$14.5 million in private-sector investment.

We also look to Pakistan to bolster the U.S. economy through our SelectUSA program, which promotes foreign direct investment in the United States. In June, Pakistan sent a delegation to the SelectUSA Summit in

Washington, DC.

The delegation included GharPar, a women-led online beauty company from Lahore that is redefining women's economic empowerment. The company participated in a U.S. government-funded entrepreneurship training program in 2016 and created approximately 1,000 jobs here in Pakistan.

SelectUSA is a valuable opportunity for companies like GharPar that are now looking to take their business to the next level by expanding operations into the United States. I hope all of you will consider participating in our next SelectUSA Summit on May 11-14, 2025, in National Harbor, Maryland.

I want to emphasize again that we in the U.S. Mission are here to help your businesses take advantage of these opportunities. All of you here today are uniquely positioned to make trade and investment happen and bring our countries closer together, creating a brighter future for both of our countries.

Thank you again to the Pak America Business Forum and Rawalpindi Chamber for hosting this event and providing this opportunity for us to meet and discuss improving our bilateral trade and investment. I look forward to learning more about your businesses and sharing ideas on where we can collaborate.



Breaking Latin America's cycle of low economic growth and violence



By J. Choudhry

Violent crime and insecurity have a disproportionate impact on Latin America and the Caribbean, with severe consequences for socioeconomic development. Despite representing just 8% of the world's population, the region accounts for nearly one-third of global homicides. This as well as other alarming statistics highlight the urgent need for comprehensive strategies to address the far-reaching effects of crime and violence.

New research by the IDB and IMF highlights how crime, insecurity, and low growth reinforce each other in a vicious cycle that stifles investment, reduces tourism, and accelerates emigration. Macroeconomic instability—recessions, inflation spikes, and rising inequality—is associated with increased violence. Easily available firearms and organized crime amplify these effects, undermining institutions and the rule of law.

Quantifying the Costs of Crime

A recent IDB paper quantifies the direct losses, estimating that crime and violence

cost the region 3.4 percent of GDP annually. These costs stem from productivity losses due to lives lost, injuries, and imprisonment; private-sector expenditures on security; and public spending on police, justice, and prisons. This is equivalent to 80 percent of the region's public education budgets and double its social assistance spending.

But the impact of crime doesn't end there. It discourages investment, reduces tourism, and drives emigration, further weakening economic resilience and constraining the region's future growth. IMF research reveals that crime hampers innovation and reduces firm productivity, compounding economic stagnation over time. Leveraging geo-localized data on nightlights, the study finds that halving homicide rates in violent municipalities could increase their economic output by up to 30 percent. At the regional level, as shown in last year's IMF research, reducing homicide rates to the global average could boost Latin America and the Caribbean's annual GDP growth by 0.5 percentage points.

Conversely, macroeconomic instability

often fuels spikes in violence: a recession in LAC is associated with a 6 percent increase in homicides the following year, while inflation spikes above 10 percent are linked to a 10 percent rise in homicides the year after. Growing inequality further exacerbates the link between economic stagnation and crime.

How can policymakers help break the cycle?

Breaking this vicious circle requires a deeper understanding of its root causes and impacts. Rigorous research and better data are essential for designing public policies that effectively reduce crime. Institutions like the IDB and IMF can generate evidence, monitor crime dynamics, advise member countries, and facilitate discussions. As the topic has become macro critical in the region, the institutions brought together experts and policymakers in a joint conference a few weeks back.

First, sound economic policy plays a preventive role. Stability, low inflation, robust social safety nets, and opportunities that reduce inequality and expand access to

education and employment are critical to breaking the cycle of violence and stagnation. Financial authorities are also uniquely positioned to weaken criminal networks by addressing illicit markets, curtailing financial flows, and tackling money laundering—cutting off resources that sustain organized crime.

Second, because the impact of crime extends far beyond direct economic costs, economic policymakers must adopt a broader role by targeting high-risk groups, improving crime monitoring, and enhancing interagency coordination.

Effective interventions can deliver transformative results. With IMF support, Jamaica implemented reforms that protected public investment and social spending while successfully halving debt between 2012 and 2022. Community-based interventions supported by the IDB reduced gang violence in 68% of affected neighborhoods.

In Rosario province, Argentina implemented a comprehensive strategy to combat crime, including territorial control of high-risk neighborhoods by the Federal Police, stricter prison systems for high-profile offenders, and collective prosecution of criminal groups under new legislation like the anti-mafia law. These efforts, alongside progress on a juvenile penal code to deter drug traffickers from recruiting minors, have led to 65% reduction homicides in 11 months. In Honduras, strategic security reforms contributed to a 14% decline in the homicide rate and an 8% increase in public confidence in law enforcement.

Policymakers must prioritize using resources effectively, given the scope of the challenge. Public spending on security in the region is already high—around 1.9 percent of GDP, or 7.4 percent of total public expenditure—and may be even greater where the military and subnational governments are involved. Finance ministers and fiscal authorities need a full understanding of these costs, covering police, courts, prisons, and related institutions, to ensure funds are allocated efficiently to areas with the highest impact. They also need to monitor them in the same way they surveil other large spending tickets, evaluating their impact and pressing for results.

Transnational Crime Demands Regional Cooperation

Tackling crime solely at the national level isn't sufficient. Criminal groups operate across borders, making isolated responses ineffective and fragmented. To address this shared challenge, countries must collaborate more closely to develop stronger, more coordinated solutions.

Recognizing the transnational nature of crime, the IDB's Alliance for Security, Justice, and Development seeks to unite governments, civil society, and private-sector actors. This alliance not only aims to strengthen institutions and enhance cooperation but also supports public policies and mobilizes resources to implement evidence-based solutions that effectively combat organized crime and violence.



Regional collaboration is crucial for disrupting the sophisticated, interconnected networks of organized crime that undermine the rule of law and economic stability. By fostering unified efforts, institutions like the IMF and IDB alongside governments and civil society, have a critical role to play in this effort.

With people's lives on the line, the true impact of these efforts must be felt on the ground—by creating safer streets, restoring hope in communities, and offering individuals a real chance to thrive economically in a future free from violence.

Economic Challenges for Latin America

Latin America faces several interrelated challenges to enhancing economic growth. These include structural issues, external vulnerabilities, and internal policy challenges:

1. Low Productivity Growth

- **Informal Economy:** A significant portion of workers and businesses operate in the informal sector, which limits access to credit, investment, and social protections.
- **Skills Gap:** Education systems often fail to provide the skills demanded by modern economies, leading to mismatches in the labor market.
- **Innovation Deficit:** Low investment in

research and development (R&D) and limited technological adoption hamper productivity improvements.

2. Dependence on Commodity Exports

- **Volatile Global Markets:** Heavy reliance on commodities like oil, copper, and agricultural products exposes economies to price fluctuations.
- **Lack of Diversification:** Many countries struggle to develop competitive manufacturing or service sectors, limiting economic resilience.

3. Inequality and Social Exclusion

- **Income Disparity:** Latin America remains one of the most unequal regions globally, with disparities in wealth and access to opportunities.
- **Social Unrest:** Inequality often fuels political instability and social unrest, which can discourage investment.

4. Governance and Corruption

- **Weak Institutions:** Corruption, inefficiency, and lack of transparency undermine trust in public institutions and economic competitiveness.
- **Policy Instability:** Frequent changes in policy direction due to political instability discourage long-term investment.

5. Infrastructure Deficits

- **Transport and Energy:** Insufficient infrastructure increases costs for businesses and limits integration into global value chains.
- **Digital Divide:** Limited access to digital technologies and internet connectivity hinders participation in the digital economy.

6. Climate Change and Environmental Risks

- **Natural Disasters:** Vulnerability to hurricanes, droughts, and floods disrupts economic activity, especially in agriculture.
- **Environmental Degradation:** Deforestation, water shortages, and pollution threaten sustainable development.

7. Demographic and Health Challenges

- **Aging Population:** While some countries still benefit from a demographic dividend, others face aging populations that strain pension and healthcare systems.
- **Public Health Risks:** Inequities in healthcare access and exposure to health crises, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, undermine productivity.

8. External Dependence

- **Global Financial Conditions:** Many

economies are vulnerable to changes in interest rates and capital flows from advanced economies.

- **Geopolitical Tensions:** Dependence on trade with key partners like the U.S. and China makes the region susceptible to external shocks.

9. Regional Integration and Trade

- **Fragmentation:** Weak regional integration limits the potential for trade and collaboration between countries.
- **Trade Barriers:** High tariffs, non-tariff barriers, and bureaucratic hurdles restrict international trade.

10. Public Debt and Fiscal Constraints

- **Debt Burdens:** Many countries face high levels of public debt, limiting their ability to invest in infrastructure, education, and health.
- **Tax System Challenges:** Weak tax collection and reliance on regressive taxes exacerbate inequality and constrain revenue generation.

Addressing these challenges requires coordinated policies focusing on education, innovation, governance reforms, climate adaptation, and greater regional integration.

How to boost the economy of Latin America?

Boosting the economy of Latin America requires a multifaceted strategy that addresses its structural weaknesses, leverages its strengths, and prepares the region for global economic trends. Below are key approaches:

1. Promote Economic Diversification

- **Reduce Reliance on Commodities:** Encourage the development of non-commodity sectors such as manufacturing, services, and technology.
- **Support Emerging Industries:** Invest in high-growth areas like renewable energy, biotechnology, and digital services.

2. Invest in Human Capital

- **Education Reform:** Improve access to quality education, emphasizing STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Mathematics) and vocational training.
- **Workforce Upskilling:** Provide training programs to bridge the skills gap and prepare workers for the digital economy.
- **Health Investments:** Strengthen health-care systems to improve worker productivity and quality of life.

3. Strengthen Infrastructure

- **Transport and Logistics:** Invest in roads, ports, and railways to reduce trade costs and improve connectivity.
- **Digital Infrastructure:** Expand internet access and invest in digital technologies to enable e-commerce and innovation.
- **Energy Transition:** Focus on renewable energy sources to reduce costs and meet climate commitments.

4. Enhance Regional Integration

- **Trade Agreements:** Strengthen regional trade blocs like Mercosur, Pacific Alliance, and CARICOM to facilitate intra-regional trade.
- **Harmonize Regulations:** Simplify trade procedures and reduce non-tariff barriers to encourage cross-border commerce.
- **Cross-Border Infrastructure:** Develop shared infrastructure projects to enhance connectivity between countries.

5. Foster Innovation and Entrepreneurship

- **R&D Investments:** Increase funding for research and development, particularly in universities and tech sectors.
- **Support Startups:** Create incubators, accelerators, and funding mechanisms for small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs).
- **Tax Incentives:** Provide tax breaks and subsidies for companies investing in innovation and digitalization.

6. Strengthen Governance and Rule of Law

- **Fight Corruption:** Implement transparency initiatives, strengthen anti-corruption laws, and build independent judicial systems.
- **Institutional Reforms:** Modernize bureaucracies to improve efficiency and reduce red tape for businesses.
- **Political Stability:** Foster inclusive governance to reduce political instability and promote investor confidence.

7. Leverage Natural Resources Sustainably

- **Sustainable Practices:** Adopt environmentally friendly methods in agriculture, mining, and forestry.
- **Renewable Energy:** Capitalize on Latin America's potential in wind, solar, and hydroelectric energy.
- **Eco-Tourism:** Develop sustainable tourism to diversify income sources and preserve natural assets.

8. Attract Foreign and Domestic Investment

- **FDI Incentives:** Offer competitive incentives to attract foreign direct investment in strategic sectors.

- **Public-Private Partnerships (PPPs):** Encourage collaboration between governments and private firms for large infrastructure projects.
- **Ease of Doing Business:** Simplify regulations and strengthen property rights to make it easier for businesses to operate.

9. Address Social Inequalities

- **Progressive Taxation:** Reform tax systems to be more equitable and expand social safety nets.
- **Financial Inclusion:** Provide access to credit, banking, and financial services for marginalized populations.
- **Empower Women and Youth:** Support policies that increase labor market participation for women and young people.

10. Adapt to Climate Change

- **Resilience Measures:** Build infrastructure to withstand natural disasters and invest in climate-smart agriculture.
- **Green Bonds:** Use innovative financial instruments to fund sustainable development projects.
- **Regional Cooperation:** Work collectively on climate adaptation strategies to share risks and benefits.

11. Strengthen Global Engagement

- **Diversify Trade Partners:** Expand trade relations beyond the U.S. and China to reduce vulnerabilities.
- **Leverage Diaspora Networks:** Engage with Latin American diaspora communities to attract investments and remittances.
- **Participate in Global Value Chains:** Develop the capacity to integrate into manufacturing and service supply chains.

12. Fiscal and Monetary Policy Discipline

- **Debt Management:** Reduce reliance on external debt and ensure sustainable public finances.
- **Efficient Spending:** Prioritize investments in growth-enhancing sectors like education, health, and infrastructure.
- **Monetary Stability:** Maintain low inflation and stable exchange rates to attract investors.

By addressing these areas, Latin America can build a more inclusive, sustainable, and resilient economy that positions it competitively in the global landscape.



German Economy in 'Troubled Waters,' Warns Ministry



By Hina Kashif

Germany, Europe's largest economy, has experienced little to no growth in the past two years. On Friday, the country recorded a modest 0.1 percent growth from July to September, but it is projected to shrink for the year. Economists do not anticipate a return to growth in 2025 unless a new government can implement significant reforms quickly.

This warning was underscored on Friday by Germany's largest auto supplier, Bosch, which announced plans to cut 5,500 jobs, starting in 2027, with more than two-thirds of those cuts affecting German factories.

High energy prices, a complex regulatory environment, outdated public infrastructure, and geopolitical issues have all hurt Germany's export sector. Political gridlock under the previous government has only made matters worse. The three-party coalition led by Chancellor Olaf Scholz spent much of the past year in conflict over issues ranging from energy to immigration,

ultimately collapsing this month. Early elections are scheduled for February 23, which could result in a new government with the potential to address the country's challenges.

However, economists caution that turning the economy around will require substantial changes to tax and welfare policies, deregulation, and a renewed focus on infrastructure investment. "Without significant policy adjustments, the long-term growth potential of the German economy is extremely limited," said Salomon Fiedler, an economist at Berenberg, a private bank. German industrial production has shrunk by more than 12 percent since 2018, with many businesses citing a lack of clear direction from the government on investment priorities.

A case in point is the government's abrupt decision to end subsidies for electric vehicles at the end of last year in an effort to reduce the budget deficit. Automakers,

who had been ramping up production of electric cars, saw a sharp decline in demand as customers pulled back. The fallout from this policy has resulted in significant job cuts in the automotive sector. On Wednesday, Ford Motor announced the elimination of 4,000 jobs in Europe, with the majority of those cuts taking place in Germany. Volkswagen has also threatened to shut down up to three of its 10 German factories as part of a restructuring plan aimed at restoring profitability.

After losing access to Russian natural gas following its invasion of Ukraine in 2022, Chancellor Scholz's government quickly shifted to importing liquefied natural gas (LNG), which has helped keep homes warm and reserves well-stocked. However, this transition also led to a 40 percent increase in prices compared to the previous year. Despite this, the government proceeded with plans to shut down Germany's remaining nuclear reactor.

Analysts note that such inconsistent strategies make it challenging for business leaders to plan investments or predict future costs. This uncertainty has contributed to unprecedented pessimism among Germany's industrial leaders, as highlighted in a survey by the Ifo Institute in Munich.

"There was no clear direction from politicians, which created significant uncertainty," said Stefan Sauer, an economic researcher involved in the report. "This is likely one of the primary reasons for the negative sentiment and the resulting decline in competitiveness."

Germany's economic challenges are rooted in its once-dominant industrial sector, which is projected to see a 3 percent decline in production in 2024, marking the third consecutive year of contraction, according to the German industrial association BDI. Facing rising energy costs, stricter environmental and digital regulations, and increasing competition from China, companies that once led industries such as automotive, machinery, and steel are now under pressure to cut costs and restructure.

"German industry is under immense pressure," said Tanja Gönner, managing director of the BDI. "A recovery in 2025 is not on the horizon."

This month, Germany's largest steelmaker, ThyssenKrupp, wrote down the value of its steel division by 1 billion euros (\$1.04 billion) after reporting a net annual loss of €1.4 billion (\$1.5 billion). The company has faced years of challenges in decarbonizing its steel production, with the cost of operating its coking plants soaring.

Beyond its industrial giants, Germany's economy also depends on innovation and expertise. Yet in an increasingly digital world, Germany is struggling to produce new startups that can fuel the next wave of growth. While government funding is available for entrepreneurs to start businesses, many are drawn to the United States, where venture capital is more readily accessible, and taxes are lower, when it comes time to scale.

"Our main problem is not what's happening to ThyssenKrupp," Danyal Bayaz, finance minister for Baden-Württemberg, remarked at the German American Confer-

ence at Harvard last week. "It's why the last successful German startup is 50 years old?"

Germany, the world's third-largest exporter, is facing challenges in key sectors such as automotive, chemicals, and machinery, as global trade has been disrupted by geopolitics and shifting supply chains in recent years.

In 2023, the United States overtook China as Germany's largest trading partner, with goods worth €157.9 billion (\$164.3 billion) flowing across the Atlantic. However, with President-elect Donald Trump pledging widespread tariffs as part of his economic agenda, including 60 percent or higher levies on Chinese imports, this trade volume could decrease, further impacting Germany's economy.



Many German companies, including BMW, Mercedes-Benz, Volkswagen, and various automotive suppliers, are heavily invested in the U.S. market. Leading chemical and pharmaceutical firms also have significant stakes. However, these companies could be hurt if Trump's trade policies spark a broader trade conflict. Over the past year, German companies have invested €15.7 billion (\$16.3 billion) in the U.S., attracted by cheaper energy and lower taxes, as well as incentives from the Inflation Reduction Act—an initiative that Trump has vowed to repeal.

During his first term, Trump frequently criticized Germany for its "massive trade deficit," and concerns linger over whether Germany's surplus with the U.S., which

reached €63.3 billion in 2023, will become a point of contention again.

Economists warn that regardless of how Trump's economic policies unfold, they are unlikely to benefit Germany.

"Whether it's the threat of tariffs or U.S. tax cuts and deregulation undermining German competitiveness, it's hard to see how U.S. economic policies won't negatively affect the German economy," said Carsten Brzeski, an economist at ING Bank.

Germany's economy is expected to shrink for the second consecutive year, with the government revising its forecasts downward, according to a leading daily. The downturn is attributed to factors such as an industrial slowdown, declining exports,

and rising energy costs. The German Economy Ministry now anticipates a 0.2% contraction in 2024, a sharp revision from its previous projection of 0.3% growth, as reported by the *Süddeutsche Zeitung* on Sunday.

"Rather than gaining momentum, the economy remains marked by a general reluctance among consumers to spend," the newspaper said.

However, the government remains cautiously optimistic for the years ahead. The ministry is expected to announce on Wednesday that it forecasts 1.1% growth for 2025, an increase from the previous estimate of 1%. By 2026, the economy is predicted to grow by 1.6%, the report added.

In 2023, Germany was the only major advanced economy to contract, struggling under the weight of an industrial slowdown, a decline in export orders, and surging energy prices exacerbated by Russia's invasion of Ukraine. While there were hopes that easing inflation and interest rate cuts by the European Central Bank would stimulate growth this year, weak demand both domestically and internationally has offset these positive factors.

The government's grim outlook aligns with the forecasts of Germany's leading economic institutes, which have also lowered their projections. They now predict stagnation or a slight contraction of 0.1% this year. Their forecasts for the next two years are even more cautious, with growth

Christian Lindner, known for his focus on budgetary discipline, Germany will reintroduce its cap on new net borrowing for 2024 and address a funding gap of 17 billion euros primarily through cost-saving measures.

However, this decision is expected to further strain the country's already weak growth. Three major German economic institutes have downgraded their growth forecasts for 2024, citing the budget crisis as a key factor delaying recovery. The Ifo Institute now forecasts growth of just 0.9% (down from 1.4%), RWI revised its prediction to 0.8% (from 1.1%), and DIW reduced its forecast to 0.6% (from 1.2%).

Timo Wollmershaeuser, head of forecasts

reducing bureaucracy, modernizing public services, meeting ambitious net-zero emissions goals, and overhauling public transport.

Structural Challenges and Labour Shortages

Germany, like many other industrialized nations, is facing significant labour shortages, particularly in high-demand sectors. Official estimates suggest that by 2035, the country could be short of 7 million skilled workers. To address this, the government is aiming to attract immigrants from outside the EU to fill these gaps. However, despite the reform of immigration and citizenship laws in 2023, progress is expected to be slow, with Germany's administrative systems already burdened by a backlog of citizenship applications.

Chronic problems such as excessive red tape and underinvestment continue to hamper key areas of the economy, including the energy transition and the roll-out of high-speed internet. Germany aims to cut its greenhouse gas emissions by 65% by 2030 (compared to 1990 levels) and achieve carbon neutrality by 2045. However, the financial resources needed to meet these ambitious goals have become increasingly constrained, especially after the court ruling that canceled 60 billion euros in unused debt previously earmarked for climate projects.

Trade Challenges and Global Economic Risks

Germany's economy, heavily reliant on trade, is vulnerable to global economic shifts. Weak growth worldwide, particularly in China, and high interest rates are expected to limit demand for German exports. Additionally, disruptions in shipping routes in the Red Sea and escalating tensions in the Middle East could further complicate trade prospects.

Carsten Brzeski, global head of macroeconomics at ING, summed up the trade situation, stating, "Like the rest of the German economy, exports remain stuck in the twilight zone between recession and stagnation."



for 2025 revised down to 0.8% from 1.4%, and 2026 growth estimated at just 1.3%.

In addition to these challenges, Germany is grappling with rising competition from China, a shortage of skilled workers, and the difficulties of transitioning from fossil fuels to renewable energy sources.

Budget Turmoil in Germany as Economic Growth Faces Challenges

In December, following weeks of negotiations triggered by a Constitutional Court ruling that threw the government's finances into disarray, Chancellor Scholz's three-party coalition announced an agreement on the key points of the 2024 draft budget. As advocated by Finance Minister

at Ifo, pointed out that the uncertainty surrounding the budget is hindering recovery, causing consumers to save more and reducing the willingness of both businesses and households to invest.

Weakened Coalition and Political Fallout

The budget negotiations have exacerbated tensions within the already strained three-party coalition. Polls indicate that the main beneficiaries of the crisis are the opposition conservatives and the far-right Alternative for Germany (AfD). Increased infighting within the coalition and the focus on finalizing the 2024 budget agreement have delayed key structural reforms promised by the government. These include

One Water Summit: A Global Effort to Accelerate SDG 6 and Address the World's Water Challenges



By Kanwal Munir

Introduction

The One Water Summit is set to be a pivotal event in addressing global water-related challenges, with a firm emphasis on advancing Sustainable Development Goal 6 (SDG 6)—clean water and sanitation—by fostering international cooperation, innovation, and strategic solutions. Scheduled to convene on December 3, 2024, in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, the Summit is anticipated to be a landmark event on the sidelines of the 16th session of the Conference of the Parties to the UN Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD COP 16).

This summit marks a critical opportunity for governments, civil society organizations, businesses, and international stakeholders to build momentum in addressing the challenges of water scarcity, water infrastructure, and transboundary water cooperation. Designed to align with the objectives of the 2026 UN Water Conference, the One Water Summit will aim to integrate technical solutions, promote Nature-based Solutions (NbS), and create pathways to overcome global financing gaps in the water sector.

Understanding the One Water Summit

The One Water Summit represents a global initiative aimed at addressing

interlinked water challenges while accelerating efforts to achieve SDG 6. Scheduled to be held in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, this Summit will bring together world leaders, organizations, stakeholders, and experts to create practical strategies and solutions for water security.

Water is at the intersection of climate change, pollution, and biodiversity loss. The One Water Summit will recognize these interconnected challenges, emphasizing innovative solutions, technical cooperation, and financing to overcome the water crisis. It is a call for global action on water scarcity, deteriorating water quality, and climate change adaptation strategies.

Summit Overview and Strategic Goals

The One Water Summit is much more than just a conference. It represents a unified call to action from countries and international organizations to confront the multidimensional water challenges facing humanity. These challenges include the increasing risks of climate change, rising urban demand for water, and the threats posed by deteriorating water quality and natural disasters.

The summit is a strategic event designed to accelerate progress toward

achieving SDG 6 (clean water and sanitation) by fostering coordinated efforts and partnerships among governments, civil society, the private sector, and other stakeholders. The One Water Summit's goal is to identify and scale innovative solutions to these challenges in preparation for the 2026 UN Water Conference.

Origins of the One Water Summit

The One Water Summit finds its origins in strategic international diplomacy and climate leadership. It was officially announced by Emmanuel Macron, President of France, and Kassym-Jomart Tokayev, President of Kazakhstan, during the 2023 United Nations Climate Change Conference (UNFCCC COP 28). Both leaders recognized that water issues are deeply intertwined with climate change, pollution, biodiversity, and sustainability, requiring immediate, multilateral attention and coordinated global action.

The Summit is a key initiative under the umbrella of the One Planet Summit, a program spearheaded by the French Government in partnership with the United Nations, the World Bank Group, and Bloomberg Philanthropies. With the shared vision of addressing interconnected environmental issues, the One Planet Summit

strives to bring stakeholders from across the globe into meaningful partnerships.

The One Water Summit is expected to facilitate international dialogue, policy development, and innovative technical solutions while emphasizing the importance of bridging the financing gap that affects global water security. It will do so by focusing on partnerships, knowledge-sharing, and integrated solutions.

Understanding the Water Crisis and Why the Summit Matters

The One Water Summit will address some of the most pressing water-related challenges facing communities worldwide. These issues are not isolated—they intersect with climate change, urbanization, natural resource depletion, and geopolitical tensions. Here's a breakdown of the major water-related issues the Summit will address:

1. Water Quality Deterioration:

Water pollution remains a key issue worldwide. Industrial waste, urban runoff, and the overuse of chemicals are contributing to the rapid degradation of water quality. This makes access to safe drinking water an increasing challenge in urban and rural communities alike.

2. Shrinking Water Availability:

Climate change has altered weather patterns, impacting seasonal rainfall and the availability of clean, natural sources of water. Regions across the globe are grappling with prolonged droughts, melting glaciers, and shrinking water reserves.

3. Rising Water Demand:

According to Barbara Pompili, special envoy to the President of the French Republic for the One Water Summit, demand for water is projected to increase by 50% by the year 2030. Urban population growth, industrial development, and agricultural expansion are major contributors to this rising demand.

4. Water Scarcity and Natural Disasters:

Many communities are increasingly exposed to both water shortages and excess

water caused by natural disasters such as floods and hurricanes. Adaptation to these conditions is a pressing issue that requires technical, financial, and policy interventions.

5. The Role of Climate Adaptation in Water Policy:

With climate change posing direct threats to water security, adaptation strategies centered around water policy are vital. These strategies include implementing sustainable practices, building resilient infrastructure, and utilizing innovative, Nature-based Solutions (NbS).

The One Water Summit will create a vital platform to directly address these interconnected challenges. By fostering discussions among governments, businesses, NGOs, and scientific experts, the summit aims to generate both short- and long-term solutions to ensure that vulnerable populations have equitable access to clean water and sanitation.

Key Themes of the One Water Summit

The One Water Summit will tackle a wide array of topics, offering a comprehensive approach to water governance, innovation, and climate adaptation strategies. Below are the key themes the Summit will focus on:

1. Strengthening Transboundary Water Cooperation

Many of the world's river basins are shared by multiple countries. Transboundary water challenges, such as equitable sharing of water resources, water pollution, and upstream-downstream conflicts, threaten regional stability and human security. The Summit will highlight opportunities to strengthen international partnerships to address these issues.

2. Exploring Nature-Based Solutions (NbS)

Nature-based Solutions represent a promising path to sustainable water management. NbS are ecosystem-based approaches that harness the power of natural processes to address water challenges, such as droughts, floods, and urban water shortages. These solutions could include reforestation, wetland restoration, and urban green

infrastructure.

3. Closing the Global Water Financing Gap

One of the greatest challenges in achieving SDG 6 is the lack of funding to implement water projects. The Summit will explore creative financing mechanisms and opportunities for governments, private investors, and international financial institutions to collaborate and invest in innovative water management strategies.

4. Strengthening Multi-Stakeholder Partnerships

The Summit seeks to foster multi-sector partnerships between governments, businesses, international organizations, and civil society groups. Collaborative efforts are vital to scaling up successful water initiatives and ensuring they have a long-term impact.

5. Scaling Up Innovative Solutions to Address Climate Risks

Climate change is exacerbating the challenges of water scarcity and excess water. The Summit will explore innovative technical solutions and approaches to build climate resilience through improved water governance, infrastructure, and community-based solutions.

Expected Outcomes from the Summit

The One Water Summit is expected to deliver several transformative and impactful outcomes that will shape the future of global water governance and address pressing water-related challenges. These anticipated outcomes are as follows:

- **Strengthened International Collaboration:**
 - o The Summit will enhance cooperation among nations to address shared water risks.
 - o It will focus on transboundary water management, shared resources, and climate-induced water scarcity.
 - o Collaborative frameworks will allow nations to share knowledge, technologies, and resources for effective water management.

- **Increased Investments in Innovative Water Financing and Resource Management Solutions:**

- o Financing remains a significant barrier in addressing water challenges world-wide.
- o The Summit will prioritize creative financial strategies such as public-private partnerships and innovative funding mechanisms.
- o Increased financial support will help scale projects, improve infrastructure, and implement climate-resilient water solutions.

- **Practical Implementation of Nature-based Solutions (NbS):**

- o NbS utilize natural processes like wetland restoration and natural floodplains to manage water risks sustainably.
- o These strategies are climate-resilient, cost-effective, and environmentally sustainable.
- o They will be promoted as key tools for addressing water-related climate risks, preventing flooding, and restoring ecosystems.

- **Technical Knowledge-Sharing and Cross-Sector Partnerships:**

- o The Summit will act as a knowledge hub for the exchange of expertise and successful strategies.
- o It will bring together governments, NGOs, and private sector stakeholders to share technical expertise and solutions.
- o Cross-sector partnerships will help scale effective water management initiatives globally.

- **Improved Pathways Toward Achieving SDG 6 (Clean Water and Sanitation for All):**

- o The Summit will emphasize equitable access to clean water and sanitation, particularly for vulnerable and marginalized groups.
- o Strategies will focus on addressing disparities in water access and ensuring no one is left behind in efforts to meet SDG 6 goals.

The One Water Summit will act as a comprehensive platform for dialogue, collaboration, and innovation. It will build momentum for achieving the goals of the 2026 UN Water Conference while offering solutions, partnerships, and opportunities to address water scarcity, climate change, and sustainable development through innovative and collective action.

How to Participate and Stay Informed

The One Water Summit offers a unique opportunity for governments, organizations, and stakeholders with an interest in addressing water-related challenges to actively engage in collaborative efforts. This high-level event encourages partnerships and shared initiatives, fostering opportunities to pool



expertise, resources, and innovative strategies toward achieving shared objectives. Participating organizations and governments will have the chance to showcase their efforts, exchange knowledge, and build cross-sector partnerships that can lead to sustainable and practical solutions for global water issues.

The Summit serves as a vital platform for networking and sharing insights on clean water, climate adaptation, resource management, and financing solutions. It provides participants with the opportunity to connect with like-minded organizations and governments committed to solving water scarcity and climate risks.

To stay informed about the Summit's key discussions, strategic outcomes, and critical insights:

- Subscribe to receive SDG event

notifications and updates, ensuring you remain aware of the latest developments related to the Summit.

- Join peer-to-peer networks that facilitate the exchange of information about organizational initiatives, innovative projects, and strategic solutions within the water sector.

These actions will enable organizations and governments to strengthen their efforts and partnerships while contributing meaningfully to the success of the One Water Summit and the global goal of achieving SDG 6 – clean water and sanitation for all.

Conclusion

The One Water Summit offers a vital platform to address the pressing water challenges of the 21st century through

innovation, collaboration, and shared commitment. Scheduled for 3 December 2024 in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, this Summit brings together governments, international organizations, and diverse stakeholders to generate practical solutions aimed at ensuring clean water and sanitation for all, combating climate risks, and advancing SDG 6. It emphasizes the power of collective global action, highlighting that through partnerships and coordinated efforts, water scarcity and its associated challenges can be effectively tackled. The Summit will not only promote groundbreaking strategies but will also strengthen international cooperation, ensuring that clean water and sustainable development remain central to addressing global environmental and social priorities. The One Water Summit is a hopeful reminder that transformative change is possible when the world unites to confront shared challenges with innovative solutions and collective determination.

Smog adds to climate woes of Pakistan's fragile agriculture

Smog has wiped out 50% of vegetable crops in the country's breadbasket, Punjab province, which accounts for 60% of Pakistan's total agricultural exports



By Aamir Latif

- 'It's negative impact on general public has already started to surface in the form of soaring (vegetable) prices, particularly in the big cities,' Shaukat Ali Chadhar, head of a local farming board, tells Anadolu
- The South Asian country's citrus exports have also declined by 50% due to climate change impacts, according to Waheed Ahmed, head of the Pakistan Fruit and Vegetable Exporters Association

A thick pall of smog that blanketed large areas in northeastern and northwestern Pakistan last month has largely dissipated, providing some relief to frustrated citizens suffering from sore throats and itchy eyes.

However, its adverse effects are expected to linger, with repercussions for food inflation and agricultural exports in the coming months.

The combination of smog and smoke began enveloping major parts of northeastern Punjab province — the country's breadbasket — and northwestern Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province in late October and persisted until the third week of November. This not only exposed thousands to airborne diseases due to poor air quality but also caused severe damage to vegetable crops and other produce.

Nearly 50% of the vegetable crops in Punjab, which accounts for 60% of Pakistan's total agricultural exports, have been destroyed by the smog, according to Shaukat Ali Chadhar, president of the Kisan Board of Pakistan, a non-governmental agricultural advisory and research organization.

Along with the Indian capital New Delhi, Pakistan's second-largest city, Lahore, and various other districts in Punjab have consistently ranked among the world's

most polluted cities for several years, with their air quality breaching all possible danger levels.

Speaking to Anadolu, Chadhar said seasonal vegetables, mainly potatoes, peas, and tomatoes, have suffered from the smog, causing huge losses to farmers.

"It has not only caused financial losses to the farmers but it's negative impact on general public has already started to surface in the form of soaring vegetable prices, particularly in the big cities," he noted.

He added that while crops like maize and sugarcane have also been affected, the damage is less severe as these crops can recover once sunlight returns.

"Smog impacts crop growth and development at different levels like soil moisture uptake, shoot growth, and photosynthesis, which results in total destruction of short-term crops," he explained.

Agriculture employs 38% of Pakistan's population of over 240 million and contributes 23% of the country's gross domestic product.

Citrus fruit exports likely to decline further

About 70% of Pakistan's exports are directly or indirectly linked to agriculture.

Among the agricultural products impacted by climate change is the mango, one of the country's most prized exports. Mango production has declined for three consecutive years, primarily due to climate-related factors.

Exporters warn that the country is also likely to see a 35% drop in production of its famed kinnow citrus fruit this season, largely due to a combination of smog and fog.

Punjab's Sargodha district, renowned for its citrus fruits — including kinnow, oranges, and lemons — is among the world's top citrus-producing regions. However, climate change, along with aging orchards, has caused Pakistan's citrus exports to plummet by 50% over the past five years, according to Waheed Ahmed, head of the Pakistan Fruit and Vegetable Exporters Association.

Pakistan's kinnow export target for this

season has been set at 250,000 tons — 50,000 tons less than last year and 50% lower than five years ago, Ahmed told Anadolu.

"The production and quality of kinnow is being affected to an alarming extent due to climatic effects. Kinnow season is also delayed due to prolonged heat and late arrival of cold weather while, on the other hand, production is expected to be less by 35%," he explained.

As a result of reduced production, Ahmed predicts a 10% increase in local kinnow prices this year.

Chadhar echoed Ahmed's concerns, noting that Pakistan's citrus crop, especially kinnow, has also been severely impacted by a viral disease over the past year.

Beyond agricultural losses, he highlighted that the Punjab government fined farmers 2 billion Pakistani rupees (about \$7.2 million) for burning stubble to clear fields for the next crop during the past month.

"Instead of controlling the real smog-causing factors like vehicular emissions, the government is targeting already financially-burdened farmers for burning stubble, which makes up only 3% of air pollution," he said.

New varieties needed

Ahmed pointed out that Pakistan's variety of kinnow is 60 years old and increasingly unable to withstand diseases and adverse weather conditions, while no variety globally remains viable for more than 25 years.

For the past 10 years, he went on to say, his association has been urging the provincial and federal authorities to "promote research and development and plant new varieties of kinnow in new areas."

"But no attention has been paid," he lamented, adding that this has led to a sharp decline in exports.

"A combination of prolonged heat waves and late arrival of winter have already delayed the kinnow production for this season by two weeks, affecting its sweetness, moisture and quality," Ahmed added.

He warned that if three to four new kinnow varieties are not urgently developed, Pakistan's exports of the product could cease entirely within three years.

With over 100 kinnow processing plants already shut down due to financial losses, the livelihoods of 300,000 people and investments worth 300 billion rupees in the industry are at serious risk, he cautioned.



Balochistan and UNFPA have established anti-rape crisis cells



By Harry Javed

The Legal Aid Society (LAS), in collaboration with the Ministry of Law and Justice, the Government of Balochistan, and the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), hosted a pivotal consultation to strengthen the implementation of the Anti-Rape (Investigation and Trial) Act, 2021, and establish Anti-Rape Crisis Cells (ARCCs) in Balochistan. This event underscored the importance of multi-sectoral collaboration, uniting government officials, legal experts, and key stakeholders to address challenges and develop survivor-centric strategies.

Discussions focused on barriers to implementing the Act and the operational requirements for ARCCs, which aim to provide medical, psychological, and legal support to survivors of sexual violence.

The event commenced with remarks by Sadia Atta, Program Coordinator for UNFPA, "All of you present here, it is through your contributions and input that a proper action plan will be developed, which will help UNFPA and the Department of Health Balochistan move forward," she said, highlighting the importance of collective effort.

Raja Naeem Akbar, Federal Secretary of Law and Justice, emphasized, "Coordination between the federal and provincial governments is essential, and we are committed to doing whatever is necessary to strengthen it."

Further support came from Mujeeb Ur Rehman Panezai, Secretary of the Health Department, who reaffirmed, "The Health Department is committed to bridging the gaps in support systems for survivors and ensuring they receive the care and assistance they need."

Hamza Shafqaat, Commissioner of Quetta Division, advocated for robust legal foundations, "While it is often believed that the implementation of laws is lacking, we must also recognize the need to strengthen the very foundation of these laws. I strongly support the establishment of ARCCs in Balochistan and remain committed to ensuring their effective creation and operation."

Javad Raza Sultan, Section Officer from the Ministry of Law and Justice, led the session on requirements under the law and reflected, "A more victim-centric, suspect-focused and context-led approach will ensure

desired result under the Anti-Rape Act, 2021."

Dr. Summiya Syed-Tariq, Police Surgeon Karachi and member of the Special Committee on Anti-Rape, emphasised, "Creating a sustainable and contextual multi-sectoral model is essential, and this begins with leveraging the resources we already have. To make meaningful progress, we must prioritize data integrity and develop evidence-based solutions that address the entire process from start to finish."

Maliha Zia, Associate Director at LAS, highlighted the importance of a survivor-first approach in addressing sexual violence, "A survivor-first approach ensures that every step of the process, from reporting to recovery, is built around the dignity, safety, and well-being of survivors."

The consultation concluded with a strong commitment from participants to turn discussions into tangible actions that benefit survivors in Balochistan.

This event marks a significant step in institutionalizing justice and support mechanisms for survivors of sexual violence, contributing to national

efforts to create an equitable and survivor-centric justice system while empowering marginalized communities.

How to curb rapes in Pakistan

How to curb rapes?

Controlling and ultimately eliminating sexual violence, including rape, in Pakistan—or anywhere—requires a comprehensive, multi-faceted approach that addresses cultural, legal, social, and economic factors. Below are key strategies to consider:

1. Legal Reforms and Enforcement

- **Strengthen Laws:** Ensure laws related to sexual violence are clear, comprehensive, and stringent. Close loopholes that allow perpetrators to evade justice, such as provisions for "forgiveness" (e.g., Diyat laws) by victims or families.
- **Fast-track Courts:** Establish special courts to handle sexual violence cases, ensuring swift justice.
- **Accountability for Police:** Train law enforcement officials to handle cases with sensitivity and professionalism, and hold them accountable for mishandling or neglecting cases.

2. Public Awareness and Education

- **Sex Education:** Introduce age-appropriate education about consent, bodily autonomy, and gender equality in schools.
- **Awareness Campaigns:** Launch nationwide campaigns to challenge rape myths, reduce victim-blaming, and encourage reporting.
- **Engage Men and Boys:** Encourage conversations among men and boys about respecting women, rejecting toxic masculinity, and understanding consent.

3. Victim Support and Rehabilitation

- **Counseling and Safe Spaces:** Provide psychological counseling, medical support, and secure shelters for survivors.

- **Legal Aid:** Ensure survivors have access to free legal support.

- **Rehabilitation for Perpetrators:** For minor offenders, introduce rehabilitation programs to prevent repeat offenses.

4. Address Cultural Norms

- **Challenge Patriarchy:** Promote gender equality and challenge societal norms that dehumanize or objectify women.
- **Community Engagement:** Work with religious scholars, tribal leaders, and influencers to address harmful cultural practices, such as karo-kari (honor killings).
- **Empower Women:** Promote women's education, economic independence, and participation in decision-making at all levels.

5. Technological and Structural Improvements

- **Hotlines and Reporting Tools:** Establish 24/7 helplines and mobile apps for confidential reporting and support.
- **CCTV and Monitoring:** Improve surveillance in public spaces to deter potential offenders.

6. Root Causes and Poverty Alleviation

- **Education Access:** Provide free and compulsory education, especially for girls, to break cycles of illiteracy and poverty.
- **Economic Opportunities:** Create job opportunities and social safety nets to reduce desperation-driven crimes.

7. Political Will and Oversight

- **Leadership Commitment:** Political leaders must prioritize sexual violence prevention as a national issue and allocate resources for its eradication.
- **Independent Monitoring:** Establish independent bodies to monitor and evaluate progress in reducing sexual violence.

This is not a simple problem, and progress will require sustained effort from all sectors of society. Collaboration between the

government, civil society, media, and international organizations is essential for creating a safer environment for everyone.

Causes of Rapes

The causes of rape are complex and multi-faceted, influenced by a combination of individual, societal, cultural, and systemic factors. While no single factor can fully explain the occurrence of rape, the following are some of the primary contributors:

1. Power and Control

- **Assertion of Dominance:** Rape is often about exerting power and control over the victim, rather than sexual desire. It reflects a perpetrator's need to dominate, humiliate, or subjugate.
- **Patriarchy:** Societies with deeply ingrained gender inequalities may perpetuate the belief that men are entitled to control women, leading to higher rates of sexual violence.

2. Cultural and Social Norms

- **Normalization of Violence:** In some cultures, violence against women is normalized or accepted as a disciplinary measure.
- **Victim-Blaming Culture:** Societal tendencies to blame the victim discourage reporting and embolden perpetrators.

- **Objectification of Women:** Media, entertainment, and cultural narratives that portray women as objects can desensitize individuals to their autonomy and humanity.

3. Lack of Education and Awareness

- **Ignorance About Consent:** A lack of understanding about consent and healthy sexual relationships can lead to harmful behaviors.
- **Absence of Sex Education:** Inadequate education on bodily autonomy and mutual respect fosters misconceptions and abusive tendencies.

4. Systemic Failures

- **Weak Legal Systems:** Ineffective laws, low conviction rates, and impunity for perpetrators encourage repeated offenses.

- **Corruption and Nepotism:** In some cases, law enforcement or judicial authorities may protect perpetrators, especially if they are powerful or well-connected.
- **Victim Intimidation:** Fear of retaliation or public humiliation often prevents victims from seeking justice.

5. Psychological and Personal Factors

- **Childhood Trauma:** Individuals who experienced abuse, neglect, or violence during their formative years may develop distorted views about relationships and power.



- **Mental Illness:** Although not a justification, certain mental health issues can contribute to impulsive or violent behaviors.
- **Substance Abuse:** Drugs and alcohol can impair judgment and lower inhibitions, increasing the likelihood of committing crimes like rape.

6. Socioeconomic Inequalities

- **Poverty and Unemployment:** Desperation, frustration, and lack of opportunities can sometimes lead to criminal behavior, including sexual violence.
- **Urbanization and Overcrowding:** In densely populated, poorly regulated areas, crimes like rape may increase due to lack of oversight and accountability.

7. Media and Technology

- **Exposure to Violent Pornography:** Easy

access to material that depicts sexual violence as normal or gratifying can desensitize individuals and perpetuate harmful behaviors.

- **Social Media Harassment:** Online platforms sometimes facilitate predatory behavior or normalize harassment, making it easier for perpetrators to target victims.

8. War and Conflict

- **Weapon of War:** In conflict zones, rape is often used as a deliberate strategy to terrorize communities, destabilize populations, and assert dominance over enemies.

9. Peer Influence and Toxic Masculinity

- **Peer Pressure:** Male-dominated peer groups that glorify aggressive behavior or dismiss consent as trivial can encourage harmful acts.
- **Toxic Masculinity:** Ideals of masculinity that equate dominance, aggression, and control with power contribute to a culture of violence.

10. Absence of Accountability

- **Low Reporting Rates:** Many cases go unreported due to fear of stigma, lack of trust in the system, or cultural taboos.
- **Normalization of Silence:** Societal reluctance to address sexual violence allows perpetrators to act without fear of consequences.

Addressing the causes of rape requires a

comprehensive strategy that targets these root factors while fostering a culture of respect, equality, and accountability.

The Role of the Society in discouraging rapes

The role of society in discouraging rape is critical, as societal attitudes, norms, and structures significantly influence behavior and shape responses to sexual violence. Here are key steps a society can take to prevent rape and create a safer environment for all:

1. Promote Gender Equality

- **Challenge Patriarchy:** Address and dismantle patriarchal norms that perpetuate male dominance and entitlement over women.
- **Equal Opportunities:** Ensure women have access to education, employment, leadership roles, and decision-making platforms.

2. Educate on Consent and Respect

- **Start Early:** Teach children about respect, empathy, and bodily autonomy from a young age.
- **Comprehensive Sex Education:** Implement education programs that emphasize the importance of consent, healthy relationships, and the consequences of violating others.

3. Eliminate Victim-Blaming

- **Support Survivors:** Encourage empathy and nonjudgmental attitudes toward victims to create a culture where survivors feel safe coming forward.
- **Challenge Myths:** Dispel harmful stereotypes, such as blaming victims for their clothing, behavior, or presence in certain locations.

4. Encourage Men to Be Allies

- **Engage Men and Boys:** Educate men to reject toxic masculinity, challenge peers who condone violence, and advocate for gender equality.
- **Role Models:** Highlight male leaders and influencers who promote respectful and positive behavior toward women.

5. Strengthen Community Support Systems

- **Safe Spaces:** Establish support networks for survivors, including counseling centers, helplines, and community groups.
- **Awareness Campaigns:** Run local and national campaigns to raise awareness about sexual violence and encourage collective responsibility.

6. Advocate for Stronger Legal Systems

- **Support Legislation:** Push for laws that protect victims, punish perpetrators, and ensure fair trials.
- **Hold Authorities Accountable:** Demand police, judicial, and governmental transparency and action in handling sexual violence cases.

7. Change Media Narratives

- **Responsible Reporting:** Urge media to avoid sensationalizing or blaming victims in coverage of sexual violence.
- **Positive Portrayals:** Promote media content that challenges gender stereotypes and normalizes respect and equality.

8. Build a Community of Accountability

- **Speak Out:** Encourage individuals to report harassment or assault and support others in doing the same.
- **Bystander Intervention:** Train people to recognize and intervene in situations that could lead to sexual violence.

9. Address Cultural and Religious Factors

- **Engage Religious Leaders:** Work with religious and community leaders to promote messages of respect, dignity, and nonviolence.
- **Challenge Harmful Practices:** Confront traditions or beliefs that enable or excuse violence against women.

10. Foster Economic and Social Empowerment

- **Support Women's Independence:** Help women gain economic stability, which reduces their vulnerability to abuse.
- **Reduce Inequalities:** Tackle poverty, unemployment, and other socio-economic disparities that contribute to violence.

11. Encourage Open Dialogues

- **Public Forums:** Create spaces where people can discuss issues related to sexual violence without fear of judgment.
- **Normalize Conversations:** Break the taboo around discussing rape, consent, and sexual health to foster understanding and prevention.

12. Role of Influencers and Celebrities

- **Advocacy:** Leverage the influence of public figures to spread awareness and promote positive social change.
- **Lead by Example:** Encourage them to actively oppose misogyny, harassment, and violence in all forms.

By collectively addressing these areas, society can create an environment where respect, accountability, and safety are prioritized, significantly reducing the prevalence of rape and other forms of sexual violence.



Gender-based violence is on the rise

In the post-COVID world, we must re-align our priorities when talking about GBV. We need multi-sectoral collaboration and vital stakeholder management between individual experts and government agencies, medical experts and general educationists, media, and civil society at large



By Zeeshan A. Shah

On International Human Rights Day today, it is time to revisit the origins of gender-based violence (GBV) against women in Pakistan by going to the root cause through fact-finding missions to explore why gender-based violence continues to rise in Pakistan. Is it weak legislation or cultural taboos? Is it a governance failure, poor health facilities, or lack of regulatory compliance? It is time to reflect and understand the reasons behind excessive human injustice and emotional trauma in our society.

We need to invest in the protection of our women against gender-based violence. Pakistan has always been under the radar when it comes to understanding human rights as we continue to ignore our mandatory commitment to public health. Women and children continue to face tragic mental and emotional trauma, as the post-covid era for Pakistan has been tremendously turbulent and chaotic. As we slowly continue to stumble out of the post-pandemic crisis, we refuse to see the misery of our population enduring severe mental health issues of deprivation, isolation, and insecurities that are toxic and deep-rooted.

According to the UN Secretary General's call to UNITE by 2030 to end violence against women, these 16 days made us realize how far behind we are on this mission to protect our women

from the dangers of mental health, emotional trauma, and physical violence.

This month, the World Health Organization (WHO) has taken a bold step forward in the fight against Gender-Based-Violence (GBV), commemorating "16 days of Activism" -for a world free of Gender-based violence that started on 25th November and culminates today on Human Rights Day. The initiative was commendable as it stood out as a stark reminder that we must take the fight against GBV to the next level of advocacy and awareness. It was yet another beginning of the battle against GBV.

In a recent event earlier this month in Karachi, WHO Head of Office Sindh Dr Sara Salman further emphasized on immediate collaboration of key stakeholders to unite to fight against gender-based violence. According to recent WHO global updates, approximately 736 million women (1 in 3) experienced physical and sexual violence while 1 in 8 women aged b/w 15-49 faced excessive violence from their partners. Shockingly, more than 65% of all homicide crimes and killings of women are committed by partners or family members. In 2022, approximately 89000 women and girls were

killed globally.

We are entering a new age of "Human Trauma", stated one of the participants.

By 2030, there will be an estimated 9 million forced marriages of underage girls worldwide. In contrast to men, 70 % of women have experienced GBV in humanitarian contexts while the percentage of displaced women due to climate change has risen to 80%. While over 104 countries have comprehensive laws addressing domestic violence against women, most nations including Pakistan, have extremely low conviction rates against such horrific crimes.

We are a fragmented nation today, embroiled in crimes of cruelty across all fronts where women and young children bear the brunt of it all. Most people today are in the process of healing and recovery while some are dealing with extreme traumatic stress disorders. On the exterior, things may look very calm and stable, while the trauma remains hidden and dormant inside. As a civil society, we must venture out carefully. It is extremely important today to register the reality of the "man-made stress" as we try and heal as a delicate nation and reset our lives.

The pandemic is still not over in our minds as people learn to understand

“traumatic stress” to navigate their lives. For example, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) is a seriously ignored ailment in some parts of the world where knowledge of treatment is limited. In Pakistan, a severe degree of mental health disorders is not reported.

We need to analyze the triggers. Real problems faced by families today like poverty, population, and polarization lead to fear, numbness, or disconnection as people simply cannot cope with the stress. Individuals end up with permanent mental scars that they genetically pass on to their children. PTSD is a long-term condition with severe consequences for the entire family and not just the individual patient or victim.

According to a US report by the National Center for PTSD, women are at a higher risk of developing PTSD at 10.4%, compared to men at 5%. In less developed nations like ours, the numbers are higher, due to the severe number of rapes, childhood physical abuse, and general illiteracy, and the absence of justice.

How we respond to stress is important today. No one is alike therefore everyone reacts to stress differently. Trauma victims may develop different emotional responses to highly stressful experiences, be it terror, blame, guilt, shock, anger, sadness helplessness, grief or difficulty feeling happy. Some are ‘cognitive’ responses where the symptoms of mental stress are not physically identifiable. For example, common symptoms like confusion, self-blame, disbelief, nightmares, intrusive memories, decreased self-esteem and impaired concentration are usually ignored and not taken seriously.



Traumatic stress may also affect us physically leading to side-effects like fatigue, insomnia, poor appetite, severe headaches, decreased libido, and a reduced immune response. Once again, we fail to predict common psychological interpersonal disorders. The obvious signs and triggers we ignore include increased relational conflict, alienation, social withdrawal, impaired work performance, distrust, rejection, over-protectiveness and feelings of abandonment. In our women today, GBV leads to all of the above and eventually becomes a long-term human trauma.

One thing we must avoid is “burnout”. In a close-knit culture, we live & thrive as a family unit. Sometimes, the helpers get impacted by the victims and the healthy person becomes a patient in the process. Longer working hours, lack of empathy, professional isolation and failure to live up to expectations of self. For example: doctors are given weekly breaks from duty rosters to avoid slow depression or exhaustive burnout.

We are a “modern primitive society” – with negative media shaping our savage instincts and feeding our lethal mindsets. Here, the men in our society must play their part in protecting their women and children. Unfortunately, they usually become part of the problem rather than a part of a solution.

In the post-covid world, we must re-align our priorities when talking about GBV. We need multi-sectoral collaboration and vital stakeholder management between individual experts and government agencies, medical experts and general educationists, media, and civil society at large.

This mission must carry on beyond 16 days of activism as our women & children need protection and peace of mind and in a way, so do our men. Mental health and wellbeing remain primary human rights and we must fight for them every day. The Writer is a freelancer, former banker and energy sector analyst.



ANKARA HOSTS PHOTOGRAPHIC EXHIBITION ‘FRAMES OF FRIENDSHIP’: A PHOTOGRAPHIC TRIBUTE TO ECO CULTURES



The Embassy of Pakistan in Ankara in collaboration with the Economic Cooperation Organization Cultural Institute (ECO CI) and Keciören Municipality, organized a photographic exhibition under the theme “Frames of Friendship: A Photographic Tribute to ECO Cultures”, showcasing the rich and diverse cultures of ECO member states. The exhibition was attended by Turkish Member Parliament Burhan Kayaturk, Ambassador of Pakistan Dr. Yousaf Junaid, Deputy Mayor of Kecioren Mr. Atilla Zorlu, diplomats from the ECO countries, civil society and media.

Before the inauguration of the exhibition, a moment of silence was observed for the martyrs who lost their lives in a helicopter accident yesterday. The exhibition featured the stunning works of renowned photographers who captured the breath taking natural beauty, varied topography, and unique architectural heritage that define the ECO region. From the majestic mountains of Pakistan to the vibrant landscapes of Afghanistan and the scenic vistas of Central Asia, each photograph told a story of friendship, unity, and shared heritage among ECO member states.

Emphasizing on the significance of cultural diplomacy in fostering respect and stronger ties between nations, Member Parliament Burhan Kayaturk stated that the exhibition was a celebration of bonds of friendship and shared values between ECO countries.

Speaking at the occasion, Ambassador Dr. Yousaf Junaid stated that ECO region is a crossroad of civilizations, where ancient empires, nomadic tribes and vibrant modern culture intersect. From bustling bazars of Baku to intricate handicrafts of Multan and the grand mosques of Istanbul, the displayed photographs reflect our culture, traditions and way of life.

Deputy Mayor Kecioren Mr. Atilla Zorlu appreciated the efforts of Pakistan Embassy and ECO CI in bringing the enriching event to Ankara, providing an opportunity to experience the rich tapestry of ECO cultures through the lens of artistic expression.

President ECO CI, Dr. Saad Sikander Khan highlighted that one of the key objectives of ECO is to promote sustainable development and regional cooperation. He encouraged the audience to feel the beauty of landscapes and the diversity of the ECO countries reflected through the photographs.

On the occasion, the photographers Mr. Ali Tahir Zaidi, Mr. Muzamil Hussain, Mr. Sajid Hyderi and Mr. Aytac Unal briefly described their photographic journey and shared stories behind their captivating works, earning appreciation from the visitors.



SHARED LITERARY HERITAGE OF ECO COUNTRIES CELEBRATED AT A POETRY EVENT IN ANKARA

The Economic Cooperation Organization Cultural Institute (ECOCI) and the Pakistan Embassy in Ankara hosted a poetry event "From Hearts to Horizons: Urdu, Turkish, and Persian Expressions", at Pakistan Embassy International Study Group in Ankara. The event which brought together poets, literary enthusiasts, and diplomats from across the ECO member states showcased the rich literary traditions of Urdu, Turkish, and Persian languages and deep cultural, historical, and civilizational linkages that bind the peoples of the ECO region. The program included poetry readings in all three languages, accompanied by translations to ensure the wide-reaching message of cultural unity.

Ambassador of Pakistan to Turkiye Dr. Yousaf Junaid welcomed the guests along with Dr. Saad Sikander Khan, President ECOCI. Ambassador of Iran H.E Mohammad Hassan Habibollah Zadeh, Executive Director ECO Educational Institute Dr. AbdulKarim Sadeghdoost, academicians and diplomats from ECO region were in attendance.

In his speech, Ambassador Dr. Yousaf Junaid highlighted that ECO region, stretching from the Caucasus to Central Asia to South Asia, is home to a staggering diversity of languages and cultures. Poets, saints and writers of our region have carried forward the messages of wisdom, peace, and resilience that had shaped the cultural identity of our peoples. Whether we turn to the great works of Omar Khayyam, the spiritual guidance from Masnavi of Maulana Rumi, timeless verses of Mirza Ghalib, the thought-provoking poetry of Dr. Allama Muhammad Iqbal, the passionate work of Mehmet Akif Ersoy, or the contemporary voices from our region, we find messages that resonate not just with the people of this area, but with all of humanity, he said.

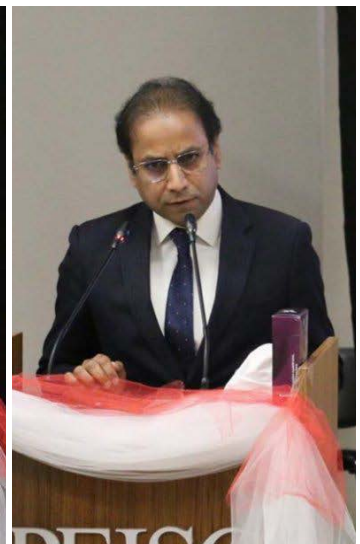
Ambassador Junaid emphasized on the importance of cultural diplomacy in the contemporary world divided by geopolitical and ideological tensions. He stressed that ECO region must continue to place a premium on cultural exchange, on nurturing the voices of



our writers and poets, and cultivating critical thinking, and creativity. 'In the 21st century, as our region becomes more interconnected through trade, technology, and communication, the cultural bonds that unite us are more important than ever. Our collective future depends not just on economic growth, but on the cultivation of a shared vision rooted in mutual respect, understanding, and collaboration', he said.

Speaking on the occasion, Ambassador of Iran H.E Mohammad Hassan Habibollah Zadeh stated that the event was a powerful reminder of how literature could bridge diverse cultures, fostering mutual understanding and appreciation between nations. While appreciating the efforts of Pakistan Embassy and ECOCI for organizing the event, he stated that more events highlighting our common literary heritage should be arranged in future.

While underscoring the significance of the event, President ECOCI, Dr. Saad Sikander Khan stated that the event reflected on the common heritage, shared through literary traditions. He highlighted that Urdu, Turkish, and Persian poetry has not only enriched our lives but also strengthened the bonds of friendship, cooperation, and peace among the ECO member states.





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