

Fortnightly

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Pakistan and IPPs

Electricity tariffs cannot be reduced as long as capacity and fixed charges persist

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Political turmoil is damaging common man heavily

Martyred in Tehran



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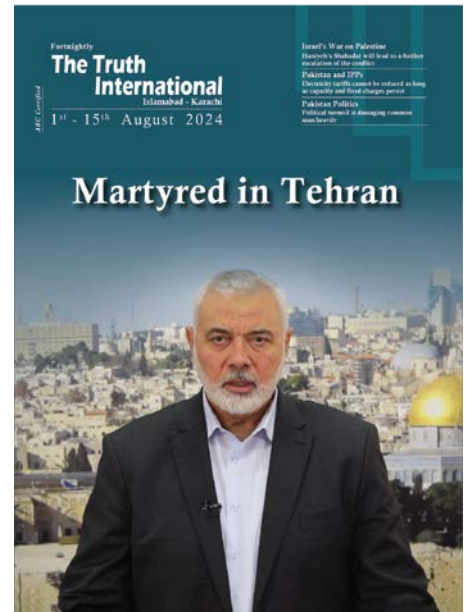
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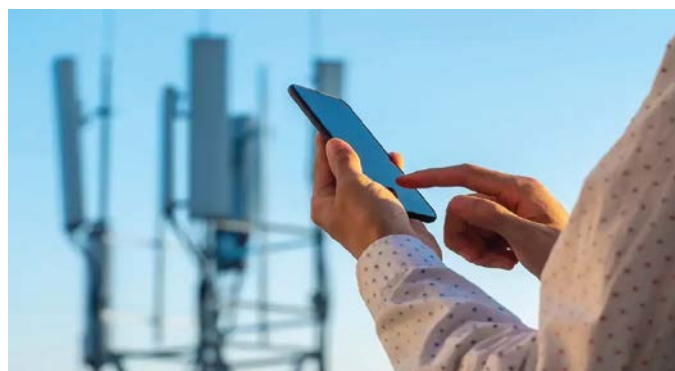
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Reactions to the killing of Hamas's Ismail Haniyeh in Iran

Hamas's political chief was in Tehran when he was killed, with the Palestinian group that governs Gaza blaming Israel



Hamas's political leader Ismail Haniyeh has been killed in Iran, the Palestinian group that runs the Gaza Strip and Iran's elite Revolutionary Guard Corps said in separate statements.

Here are some reactions to Haniyeh's death:

Sami Abu Zuhri, senior Hamas official

"This assassination by the Israeli occupation of Brother Haniyeh is a grave escalation that aims to break the will of Hamas and the will of our people and achieve fake goals. We confirm that this escalation will fail to achieve its objectives.

"Hamas is a concept and an institution and not persons. Hamas will continue on this path regardless of the sacrifices and we are confident of victory."

Amichai Eliyahu, Israel's minister of heritage

"This is the right way to clean the world of this filth. No more imaginary peace/surrender agreements. No more mercy. The iron hand that will strike them is the one that will bring peace and a little comfort and strengthen our ability to live in peace with those who

desire peace. Haniyeh's death makes the world a little better."

Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas

Abbas strongly condemned the assassination, describing it as "a cowardly act and a dangerous development", according to a statement from the official Wafa news agency. The president also called on Palestinians to unite and "be patient and steadfast in the face of the Israeli occupation".

Mikhail Bogdanov, deputy foreign minister of Russia

"This is an absolutely unacceptable political murder, and it will lead to further escalation of tensions."

Mohammed Ali al-Houthi, head of Yemen's Houthi Supreme Revolutionary Committee

"Targeting Ismail Haniyeh is a heinous terrorist crime and a flagrant violation of laws and ideal values."

Tough-talking Haniyeh was seen as the more moderate face of Hamas



Ismail Haniyeh, the Hamas leader who was killed in Iran, was the tough-talking face of the Palestinian group's international diplomacy as conflict raged back in Gaza, where three of his sons were killed in an Israeli airstrike.

But despite the rhetoric, he was seen by many diplomats as a moderate compared to the more hardline members of the Iran-backed group inside Gaza.

Appointed to the Hamas top job in 2017, Haniyeh moved between Turkey and Qatar's capital Doha, escaping the travel curbs of the blockaded Gaza Strip and enabling him to act as a negotiator in ceasefire talks or to talk to Hamas' ally Iran.

"All the agreements of normalisation that you (Arab states) signed with (Israel) will not end this conflict," Haniyeh declared on Qatar-based Al Jazeera television shortly after Hamas fighters launched the October 7 raid.

Israel's response to the strike has been a military campaign that has killed more than 35,000 people inside Gaza so far, according to health authorities in the territory.

Sons killed in airstrike

Three of Haniyeh's sons — Hazem, Amir, and Mohammad — were killed on April 10 when an Israeli air strike struck the car they were driving, Hamas said. Haniyeh also lost four of his grandchildren, three girls and a boy, in the attack, Hamas said.

Haniyeh had denied Israeli assertions that his sons were fighters for the group, and said "the interests of the Palestinian people are placed ahead of everything" when asked if their killing would impact truce talks.

For all the tough language in public, Arab diplomats and officials had viewed him as relatively pragmatic compared with more hardline voices inside Gaza, where the

military wing of Hamas planned the Oct 7 attack.

While telling Israel's military they would find themselves "drowning in the sands of Gaza", he and his predecessor as Hamas leader, Khaled Meshaal, had shuttled around the region for talks over a Qatari-brokered ceasefire deal with Israel that would include exchanging hostages for Palestinians in Israeli jails as well as more aid for Gaza.

Israel regards the entire Hamas leadership as "terrorists", and has accused Haniyeh, Meshaal, and others of continuing to "pull the strings of the Hamas terror organisation".

But how much Haniyeh knew about the Oct 7 assault beforehand is not clear. The plan, drawn up by the Hamas military council in Gaza, was such a closely guarded secret that some Hamas officials seemed shocked by its timing and scale.

Yet Haniyeh, a Sunni Muslim, had a major hand in building up Hamas' fighting capacity, partly by nurturing ties with Shi'ite Muslim Iran, which makes no secret of its support for the group.

During the decade in which Haniyeh was Hamas' top leader in Gaza, Israel accused his leadership team of helping to divert humanitarian aid to the group's military wing. Hamas denied it.

Shuttle diplomacy

When he left Gaza in 2017, Haniyeh was succeeded by Yahya Sinwar, a hardliner who spent more than two decades in Israeli prisons and whom Haniyeh had welcomed back to Gaza in 2011 after a prisoner exchange.

"Haniyeh is leading the political battle for Hamas with Arab governments," Adee Ziadeh, a specialist in Palestinian affairs at Qatar University, said before his death, adding that he had close ties with more hardline figures in the group and the military wing.

"He is the political and diplomatic front of Hamas," Ziadeh said.

Haniyeh and Meshaal had met officials in Egypt, which has also had a mediation role in the ceasefire talks. Haniyeh travelled in early November to Tehran to meet Iran's supreme leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, Iranian state media reported.

Three senior officials told Reuters that Khamenei had told the Hamas leader in that meeting that Iran would not enter the war having not been told about it in advance. Hamas did not respond to requests for comment before Reuters published its report, and then issued a denial after its publication.

As a young man, Haniyeh was a student activist at the Islamic University in Gaza City. He joined Hamas when it was created in the First Palestinian intifada (uprising) in 1987. He was arrested and briefly deported.

Haniyeh became a protégé of Hamas' founder Sheikh Ahmad Yassin, who like Haniyeh's family, was a refugee from the village of Al Jura near Ashkelon.

In 1994, he told Reuters that Yassin was a model for young Palestinians, saying: "We learned from him love of Islam and sacrifice for this Islam and not to kneel down to

these tyrants and despots."

By 2003 he was a trusted Yassin aide, photographed in Yassin's Gaza home holding a phone to the almost completely paralysed Hamas founder's ear so that he could take part in a conversation. Yassin was assassinated by Israel in 2004.

Haniyeh was an early advocate of Hamas entering politics. In 1994, he said that forming a political party "would enable Hamas to deal with emerging developments".

Initially overruled by the Hamas leadership, it was later approved and Haniyeh became Palestinian prime minister after the group won Palestinian parliamentary elections in 2006 a year after Israel's military withdrew from Gaza.

The group took control of Gaza in 2007.

In 2012, when asked by Reuters reporters if Hamas had abandoned the armed struggle, Haniyeh replied "Of course not" and said resistance would continue "in all forms — popular resistance, political, diplomatic and military resistance".

Courtesy Dawn



Why are global health organisations not speaking up on genocide in Gaza?

Given Israel's systematic attacks on the medical sector and workers in Gaza, what is happening there is very much a global health issue



By Eric Reinhart

It has been more than six months since the International Court of Justice ruled in *South Africa v Israel* that the latter was plausibly in violation of the Genocide Convention for its treatment of Palestinians. Israel's ongoing systematic attacks on Gaza's health workers and infrastructure have played a central role in the court's deliberations, putting the unfolding violence squarely within the domain of health scholars and institutions.

It is striking then that nearly all influential United States-based global health organisations have ignored what may be the most acute and most preventable global health catastrophe in the world today. From the gargantuan Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation to the many smaller NGOs and academic centres that shape this field, these organisations have abstained from taking any meaningful stand against the systematic destruction of health infrastructure in Gaza actively enabled by the Biden administration's provision of arms, funds and diplomatic cover for Israel.

Given such organisations' extensive lobbying and collaborations with the US government, receipt of funding from it, and close relationships and substantial influence among many of its top officials, this silence is especially disappointing.

It also testifies to the enduring relevance of what Frantz Fanon observed in his 1959 essay *Medicine and Colonialism* while working as a psychiatrist in French-colonised Algeria during its struggle for liberation. Doctors, when economically or otherwise professionally incentivised, are an "integral part of colonization, of domination, of exploitation", he wrote, and "we must not be surprised to find that doctors and professors of medicine are leaders of colonialist movements."

This is also true of global health today – a field previously known as colonial medicine, tropical medicine and then international health – which has always been mired in complicity with colonial domination and white supremacist ideologies.

But while Fanon testified firsthand to organised medicine's tendency to align with state violence, he also believed and showed through his own life that individual doctors and collectives can choose to do otherwise and instead become vital contributors to movements for freedom, care and justice.

Today, Palestinian health workers and organisations like Doctors Without Borders (known by its French acronym MSF), which was founded in France nine years after Algeria won its independence, most poignantly illustrate the truth of Fanon's observations. When doctors are themselves "sleeping on the ground", Fanon wrote, and "living the drama of the people" alongside the oppressed, they can become genuine allies against oppression rather than collaborators with it.

Working side by side with Palestinians, MSF staff members are doing just that and using their organisation's international influence not only to provide care for those maimed by Israeli attacks on civilians but

also to publicly document and condemn the crimes that Israel continues to perpetrate with US-supplied weapons.

This decision has come at a profound cost: Six MSF staff members and several members of staff families have been killed by Israeli attacks – as have about 500 other health workers, almost all of whom were Palestinian.

MSF has not always taken such a strong stand against the political actors and decisions behind the infliction of disability and death on civilian populations. Since its founding, the organisation has debated the use of expressly depoliticising paradigms like “neutrality”, “témoignage” (a French term for testimony or bearing witness), and “humanitarianism”. It has seen them as tools for securing access to conflict zones and occupied territories without falling into disfavour with political groups that could either target MSF staff or prohibit the organisation from reaching affected populations.

These frameworks help avoid offending philanthrocapitalists and formerly colonising governments in the Global North wary of political criticism about their ongoing neocolonial policies and practices sustaining the economic inequalities from which they benefit while the global poor die.

But over the past several decades in response to both internal and external criticism as well as the Rwandan genocide that underlined in bold the untenability of neutrality, many within MSF have increasingly confronted the fact that there is no possibility of effectively caring for people or of stopping atrocities except through political engagement, even when it displeases donors and politicians.

By contrast, other medical organisations in the Global North are refusing to follow suit. Although the Euro-American global health and humanitarian industry – much like the US medical profession with which it is intimately entwined – is built on evasion and denial of this reality, the simple fact is that human life and health is, from birth to death, determined by political decisions.

By selectively appealing to political neutrality and depoliticising ideologies like “humanitarianism” and “crisis” as a way of sidestepping the political-economic determinants of health amid an unfolding genocide, most institutional leaders and rank-and-file doctors in the US are once again retreating from their ethical responsibility to do all they can to protect life. The history of humanitarian organisations is riddled with impossible choices and genuine ethical dilemmas. This truth has, in turn, been used to create abundant opportu-

nities for organisations to hide behind the terms that “humanitarianism” has created to navigate access under challenging circumstances.

But the well-established facts of Israel’s deliberate targeting of health workers and infrastructure, killing of civilians in hospitals and refugee camps, and use of famine as a weapon of war alongside open declaration of genocidal intent do not present an ethically ambiguous choice for any organisation truly concerned about either global health or the medical humanitarian act.

The medical profession, global health practitioners and our institutions have betrayed our most basic ethical responsibilities time and time again, and yet we continue to refuse to learn from our sordid past.

By staying silent in the face of a politically determined atrocity, we may evade professional risks and loss of funding that could result from taking a principled stand against the violence of US imperialism and Israeli occupation. But the decision by global health organisations today to remain “neutral” – or worse – in the face of a genocide is sacrificing something far more valuable and difficult to recover: any plausible claim to ethical credibility.

Courtesy www.aljazeera.com



Are Palestinians being tortured in Israeli prisons?



The detention of nine soldiers has prompted protests in Israel. What are the soldiers accused of doing to the prisoners?

Israel has detained nine soldiers working at the Sde Teiman detention camp in the Naqab (Negev) desert, accused of abusing Palestinians held there.

The base – which has been compared to Guantanamo – has been used as a facility to house Palestinians rounded up in Gaza and held without charge. Many are now pointing to the detention of the soldiers as evidence of the continued abuse of prisoners. Reports from human rights organisations indicate that at least 13 prisoners have died from abuse in Israeli prisons — and Israeli newspaper Haaretz reported that number is as high as 27 — since October 7, when Israel's current war on Gaza began.

However, right-wing Israelis – including leading ministers and politicians – reacted to the arrests of the soldiers on Monday with anger, and a mob broke through the gates of Sde Teiman in an effort to free the soldiers. The detained soldiers were taken to another facility.

What has Israel been accused of doing to Palestinian prisoners at Sde Teiman?

Members of a unit known as Force 100 are alleged to have committed “substantial abuse” towards Palestinian prisoners. Israeli media outlets reported that one prisoner was taken to hospital after suffering severe injuries that prevented him from being able to walk. The “severe injury to the buttocks” could not have been self-inflicted, medical officials were reported to have said.

Abuse of Palestinian prisoners has previously been reported at Sde Teiman. One Palestinian journalist held at the base recounted to a lawyer that he had witnessed the rape of detainees from Gaza.

International news outlets such as CNN and The Associated Press (AP) have also reported on the conditions at Sde Teiman. CNN's report, based on testimony from three Israelis who worked at the base, said that Palestinians held without charge were blindfolded, beaten, and held in stress

positions. Whistleblowers claimed that some prisoners even had their limbs amputated after they were so badly injured from constantly being held in handcuffs.

One worker who spoke to The AP said that most detainees were forced to wear nappies and not allowed to use the toilet. The same report said that some of those held at the base appeared to be non-combatants, and that disease was rife because of the conditions the prisoners were being held in.

Is it just Sde Teiman where this abuse is being reported?

Similar allegations have been reported from prisons holding Palestinians across Israel and the occupied West Bank.

Reporting from Gaza after the release of prisoners from Ofer prison in the West Bank earlier in July, Al Jazeera's Hind Khoudary said that eight former prisoners said they had been tortured, and deprived of medicine and clothes. Some of the prisoners showed signs of physical abuse on their bodies.

Another released prisoner, Muhammad Abu Salmiya – the director of Gaza’s al-Shifa Hospital – said that several inmates had died in interrogation centres, and that prisoners had been beaten.

Isn't that torture under international law?

The Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment, adopted by the United Nations General Assembly in 1984, defines torture as “any act by which severe pain or suffering, whether physical or mental, is intentionally inflicted on a person” for purposes such as extracting information or a confession, or punishment for an act suspected to have been committed.

The description of the acts committed against Palestinian prisoners in Israeli prisons, if proven, would appear to match that definition.

Amnesty International has previously called on Israel to end what it called the “rampant torture” taking place in its prisons, saying it had documented 31 cases of prisoners being held incommunicado, and finding credible evidence of widespread use of torture.

How has Israel responded to the allegations?

Despite the numerous reports of abuse and

deaths of prisoners, Israel has previously not publically acknowledged any investigation into the conduct of soldiers and guards working in prisons.

However, with increased attention on Israel following South Africa’s genocide case at the International Court of Justice, and arrest warrants for Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and Defence Minister Yoav Gallant sought by the International Criminal Court’s chief prosecutor, it appears to be under more pressure to act.

Israel’s military launched an investigation into the abuse of prisoners at Sde Teiman, and nine soldiers have been held for questioning.

However, the move was met with anger from many Israelis who are opposed to any punishment for abuse committed against Palestinians.

After a confrontation between soldiers at Sde Teiman and another force that had come to detain the accused soldiers, a crowd gathered at the base’s gates and forced its way in.

Demonstrators then tried to break into the Beit Lid military base, where the detained soldiers had been taken.

How divided is Israel over the detention of the soldiers?

The right wing in Israel has clearly set out

its stall: it is opposed to any legal consequences for the soldiers, and sees the abuse of Palestinian detainees as justified. One member of the Israeli parliament told a committee meeting that it was “legitimate” to do anything if the detainee was a member of Hamas’s elite forces, including inserting a stick in their rectum.

Far-right National Security Minister Itamar Ben-Gvir said on Monday that he was on his way to Sde Teiman to demand the release of the soldiers, while the chairman of the parliament’s foreign affairs and defence committee, Yuli Edelstein, said he would hold a hearing on Tuesday to discuss the arrests, calling them a “contemptible pursuit of our soldiers” that was “unacceptable”.

Head of the military Herzi Halevi, meanwhile, condemned the protests, and Netanyahu released a short statement, condemning the storming of the base and asking for calm.

Opposition leader Yair Lapid said the mob attack was an “attempted coup by an armed militia against a weak prime minister who is unable to control his government”, serving as a reminder of the deep divisions in Israeli politics, and the accusations Netanyahu faces of being forced to bow down to the far right to keep his coalition alive.

Courtesy www.aljazeera.com



Israeli protesters enter army base after soldiers held over Gaza detainee abuse



By Mark Lowen

Israeli far-right protesters broke into an army base in a show of support for soldiers accused of severely mistreating a Palestinian prisoner there.

Large crowds gathered outside the Sde Teiman compound after Israeli military police entered it to detain the reservists, who are now subject to an official investigation.

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu released a statement strongly condemning the incident and calling for "an immediate calming of passions".

Protesters also broke into a second military base, where the reservists were taken for questioning, but a police spokeswoman said officers were able to clear it.

Sde Teiman, near Beersheba in southern Israel, has for months been at the centre of reports of serious abuses against Gazan detainees.

According to local media reports, at least nine Israeli soldiers at the base are accused of abusing the Palestinian detainee, a suspected Hamas fighter who was captured in Gaza.

He is said to have been hospitalised after what Israeli media reports describe as serious sexual abuse and injuries to his anus that left him unable to walk.

The Israeli military said its advocate gener-

al had ordered an inquiry "following suspected substantial abuse of a detainee".

On Monday dozens of protesters, including far-right MPs from Israel's governing coalition, burst through the base's gate as others tried to scale the fence, chanting "we will not abandon our friends, certainly not for terrorists".

Some soldiers at the base reportedly used pepper spray against the military police personnel who arrived to detain the reservists.

Israeli military Chief of Staff Lt Gen Herzi Halevi said the break-in at Sde Tieman was "extremely serious and against the law".

"We are in the midst of a war, and actions of this type endanger the security of the state," he said.

"I strongly condemn the incident, and we are working to restore order at the base."

Demonstrators also entered the Beit Lid military base in central Israel where the accused reservists were taken for questioning.

Defence Minister, Yoav Gallant, said the investigation into the soldiers' conduct must be allowed to continue, adding "even in times of anger, the law applies to everyone".

However some Israeli politicians have

condemned the arrest of the reservists. Itamar Ben-Gvir, the far-right national security minister, called their detention "nothing less than shameful".

Since the 7 October Hamas attack, Israeli authorities have rounded up and held thousands of Palestinians, often without legal representation.

The BBC has previously spoken to medical workers at a field hospital set up in Sde Teiman, who alleged that detainees have been blindfolded, permanently shackled to their beds, and made to wear nappies rather than having access to a toilet.

Last month, Israel's Haaretz newspaper published allegations made by a doctor at Sde Teiman that leg amputations had been carried out on two prisoners, because of cuffing injuries. The BBC has not independently verified the claims.

Detainees there have told journalists and United Nations officials that they were beaten and attacked. The Israeli Defence Forces (IDF) have denied systematic abuse.

Many Gazans detained by Israel's army are released without charge after interrogation. Amnesty International this month called on Israel to end the indefinite detention of Gaza Palestinians and what it called "rampant torture" in its prisons.

Courtesy BBC

Fatah and Hamas: A Complex Path to Unity Amidst Persistent Divides and International Pressure

By Romana Afsheen

Fatah, founded in the late 1950s by diaspora Palestinians, is a secular movement named after the reverse acronym for “Harakat al-Tahrir al-Filistiniya” (Palestinian National Liberation Movement). Initially focused on armed struggle, Fatah became the dominant party in the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) after the 1967 Arab-Israeli War and later supported a two-state solution, leading to the Oslo Accords and the establishment of the Palestinian Authority.

Hamas, founded in 1987 during the first Intifada by Sheikh Ahmed Yasin and Abdul Aziz al-Rantissi, is an Islamic resistance movement initially linked to the Muslim Brotherhood. It established the Izz al-Din al-Qassam Brigades for armed resistance and provides social services. Hamas entered politics in 2005, winning the 2006 elections and taking control of Gaza in 2007. It has since been involved in frequent conflicts with Israel, leading to severe conditions in Gaza due to the ongoing blockade.

Difference in objectives

With the release of Hamas’ 2017 political document, the goals of both Hamas and Fatah are effectively aligned, aiming to establish a Palestinian state based on the 1967 borders.

Political analyst al-Aqtash noted that the clause in Hamas’ document about not relinquishing claims to historic Palestine has limited significance. He believes that Hamas has accepted a political compromise that they cannot retract.

According to al-Aqtash, while all Palestinians aspire to liberate historic Palestine, the focus today is on pursuing a practical solution. The emphasis has shifted from what they hope to achieve to what can realistically be accomplished.

The main difference between Hamas and Fatah today is their stance on Israel. Hamas maintains its commitment to armed resistance, while Fatah supports negotiations and rejects attacks.



The Oslo Accords granted Israel significant control over the West Bank’s economy and security, requiring the Palestinian Authority (PA) to coordinate with Israel on security matters and any planned attacks. This coordination is controversial and viewed by some as collaboration with the Israeli occupation.

Tensions have been exacerbated by incidents like the killing of activist Basil al-Araj by Israeli forces after his arrest by PA security for alleged attack planning. PA President Mahmoud Abbas publicly condemns armed resistance, raising doubts about the effectiveness of recent unity agreements. Political analyst Abdulsattar Qassem warns that the PA’s rejection of Hamas’ armed resistance could undermine any new unity government.

National Unity Deal

Palestinian factions signed a “national unity” deal, generating both hope and skepticism about the potential for reconciling their ideological differences and contentious history in their efforts to end Israel’s occupation. Analysts are divided on whether this new agreement will lead to lasting cooperation between the rival movements.

The deal, concluded in Beijing after three days of intensive talks, sets the stage for an interim “national reconciliation”

government to take control of post-war Gaza and pursue their shared goal of self-determination. Despite this breakthrough, there is considerable skepticism, as multiple previous attempts at reconciliation between Fatah and Hamas have failed.

Omar Rahman, an expert on Israel-Palestine with the Middle East Council on Global Affairs in Doha, Qatar, acknowledges that while skepticism is reasonable, he remains hopeful that the recent unity agreement will be successful. Rahman emphasizes the pressing need for this agreement due to the current crises in Gaza and the West Bank, including the recent conflict and increased violence and land confiscation in the West Bank.

Since the Hamas-led attack on Israeli communities and military outposts on October 7, which resulted in 1,139 deaths and 251 captives, Israel has launched a severe retaliatory assault on Gaza. UN experts have described this response as potentially genocidal. Over the past nine months, Israel has killed more than 39,000 Palestinians and displaced nearly the entire population of Gaza, which numbers 2.3 million. The conflict has dominated global news, allowing Israel to quietly expand its land seizures in the West Bank more than in any other year in the past three decades.

Amidst this backdrop, the two main Palestinian factions, Fatah and Hamas, remain divided. Fatah controls most of the West Bank through the Palestinian Authority (PA), established by the 1993 Oslo Accords, which promised Palestinian statehood in return for renouncing violence and recognizing Israel. In contrast, Hamas, which has governed Gaza since expelling Fatah in a brief civil war in 2007, continues its commitment to armed struggle.

Despite their fraught history, both Fatah and Hamas, along with twelve smaller factions, signed the Beijing deal. This agreement aims to establish a Palestinian state encompassing Israeli-occupied East Jerusalem, the broader West Bank, and Gaza, territory seized by Israel during the 1967 Arab-Israeli War.



Whether the deal will hold remains uncertain. Tahani Mustafa, a Palestinian expert with the International Crisis Group, points out that Fatah and PA leader Mahmoud Abbas, also known as Abu Mazen, have previously undermined reconciliation efforts with Hamas. She suggests that Abbas and his close allies have not shown genuine political will to unify the Palestinian leadership against Israel's occupation.

Fatah's control over the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) might be another obstacle, as it fears losing its dominance if Hamas and other factions gain representation. Mustafa notes that adding Hamas and the Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ) to the PLO would challenge Fatah's monopoly.

Israel and the United States might also attempt to undermine the agreement. Israel

has resisted allowing the PA or Hamas to govern Gaza in a post-war scenario, while the U.S. has demanded that Hamas recognize Israel and renounce violence before participating in a Palestinian government. Although Hamas's 2017 charter accepted the creation of a Palestinian state along the 1967 borders, it did not explicitly recognize Israel's right to exist, which Mustafa argues reflects a lack of pressure on Israel to reciprocate.

Hugh Lovatt from the European Council for Foreign Affairs highlights that Israel may seek to derail the agreement by pressuring Western allies to withhold funds from the PA. The PA relies heavily on financial support from the U.S. and Europe, and key PA figures may prioritize their personal standing over a potential deal.

The PA has previously blamed Hamas for the failure of past unity deals due to Hamas's refusal to fully adhere to the Oslo Accords, including recognizing Israel and renouncing violence. Abbas has stated a desire for an agreement based on international legitimacy but has faced challenges in aligning with Hamas's terms.

The significance of this deal is highlighted by its potential to address long-standing issues between Israel and Palestine. Previous reconciliation efforts have faltered, but Rahman emphasizes that this agreement's success is crucial. He argues that shifting international perspectives on Israel-Palestine present a chance for a unified Palestinian leadership to advocate against the "genocide" in Gaza and Israel's "annexationist" actions in the West Bank.

Recently, an advisory opinion from the International Court of Justice (ICJ) deemed Israel's 57-year occupation of East Jerusalem, the West Bank, and Gaza as "illegal," citing violations of international law due to settlement expansions and continued Israeli presence in these areas.

Israel's Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu dismissed the ruling as "absurd," asserting that Israelis living in their "ancestral home" cannot be considered illegal.

Rahman points out the dire situation for Palestinians, stressing the need for unified leadership to gain international support. However, this unity lacks backing from a key global player: the US. The US State Department, through spokesperson Matthew Miller, has stated that "there can't be a role for a terrorist organization."

Hamas, classified as a "terrorist" organization by the US, Israel, and the European Union, is viewed by many Palestinians as a legitimate resistance group. Lovatt suggests that despite the PA's commitment to the agreement—by including Hamas and other factions in decision-making—US pressure could undermine Palestinian unity. He questions whether Abbas will remain steadfast or retreat under international pressure.

Since 2007, Hamas has governed the Gaza Strip after defeating President Mahmoud Abbas' Fatah party in parliamentary elections. The ideological divide between the two groups is stark: Hamas adheres to an Islamist ideology and employs armed resistance against Israel, whereas Fatah is secular and prefers negotiations.

Regarding their objectives, Hamas does not recognize Israel but accepts the establishment of a Palestinian state based on the 1967 borders. In contrast, Fatah recognizes Israel and seeks to build a state within the same borders. The conflict between them escalated when Hamas pushed Fatah out of Gaza due to Fatah's refusal to accept the election results.

As a result, Hamas controls Gaza while Fatah governs the West Bank. Despite both groups working towards the goal of a Palestinian state encompassing East Jerusalem, Gaza, and the West Bank, their methods and objectives differ significantly.

IPPs and Financially Collapsing Pakistan



By Javed Mahmood

Financial crisis in Pakistan has been deteriorating with the passage of time. The crisis has deepened to such an extent that a hue and cry has started in the country over critical issues crippling Pakistan. Among them the issue of Independent Power Producers (IPPs) has emerged as a hot topic, haunting the power consumers being forced to pay inflated bills and those who are advocating to get rid of payment to those IPPs which are not generating electricity. In 2023-24, the government paid around 1930 billion rupees as capacity charges to the IPPs while in this financial year, the government would have to extort more than 2000 billion rupees from the electricity consumers to pay to IPPs as capacity charges.

Recently, Energy Minister Sardar Awaiz Khan Leghari and former caretaker minister for Commerce and Industries, Dr. Gohar Ejaz, have criticized the agreements with independent power producers (IPPs), stating they benefit the companies at the expense of consumers due to government "incompetence."

Minister Leghari pointed out that each consumer is paying around Rs 18 per unit as capacity charges which is a main source of headache for the public.

Meanwhile, in a post on X (formerly Twitter) on Monday, Dr. Ejaz argued that the government should limit its role to policymaking and regulation, as it lacks the competence to manage businesses effectively. He emphasized the need for privatization and other reforms to lower electricity prices. "The government is a policymaker and a regulator. It is not competent to do business, and the power sector is a true reflection of this incompetence, imposing misery on all electric consumers in Pakistan through these IPP agreements that benefit 40 companies over 240 million people," Ejaz wrote.

He highlighted the issue of capacity charges, noting, "Capacity charges of over Rs2 trillion, which should be Rs8 per unit, are being charged at Rs24 per unit due to non-operation and over-invoicing of these power plants, many of which are government-managed and half-operated. They should all be

privatized, and the power sector should operate as merchant plants and through electricity exchanges, selling electricity at the cheapest rates to privatized distribution companies, not at fixed capacity charges and pass-through fuel costs. Electricity will cost less than half, at Rs30 per unit compared to Rs60 per unit for all consumers—domestic, commercial, and industrial. We are all victims of incompetence," the former caretaker minister added.

Experts argue that Pakistan's economic crisis is significantly driven by its power sector and propose bypassing government involvement.

Dr. Ejaz previously stated that the actual power tariff should be below Rs8 per unit, but the government is charging Rs60 per unit due to flawed contracts with the IPPs. "Why was a Rs2 trillion capacity payment made to power plants last year, costing all consumers Rs24 per unit when the actual cost should be below Rs8 per unit? Payments were made for idle capacity to IPPs, which should only be

paid for power produced and delivered to the National Grid," he said.

He criticized the "Take or Pay" conditions in the contracts with IPPs, calling for their cancellation. "As per the contracts, capacity payment charges are due even if electricity is not produced by these IPPs, which is unsustainable. These electricity tariffs of Rs60 or 21 cents per unit do not exist anywhere else in the world."

The former minister argued that if electricity were bought from the cheapest suppliers without any capacity payments and treated as merchant suppliers, prices would fall below Rs30 per unit instead of over Rs60 per unit. In another post on X, Dr. Ejaz cited a National Electric Power Regulatory Authority (NEPRA) order from July 2023, projecting fixed capacity payments to total Rs1.954 trillion in 2023-24 for all power generators.

Moreover, one of the primary reasons often cited for the high electricity charges is the substantial payments to independent power producers (IPPs) under the sovereign power purchase agreements signed by the authorities. The real issue lies with the officials responsible for formulating power policies, drafting and approving contract documents, and ultimately signing these agreements. These contracts become binding once signed, and any flaws that negatively impact the power purchaser should have been addressed beforehand. Complaining now won't help.

A significant objection from the purchaser is the high capacity charges paid to IPPs even when their power plants are idle and no power is drawn. IPP charges consist of fuel costs for thermal plants and fixed charges based on the plant's capacity, which must be available on demand.

Therefore, consumers pay for the potential to generate and deliver electricity even if it's not used. For the 2023-24 fiscal year, it's estimated that consumers will pay Rs1.3 trillion in capacity and fixed charges to IPPs. Over the past five years, capacity charges have increased from one-third to two-thirds as more generation capacity has been added. Furthermore, net hydel profits are being paid to Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP) and Punjab, further increasing consumer bills.

According to the tariff structure, fixed charges comprise two-thirds, while fuel charges make up one-third of the total charges of a typical thermal IPP under the 'take or pay' contracts adopted in Pakistan. A major flaw in these contracts is that they were mostly awarded without a competitive bidding process. The purchaser lacked professional expertise and did not hire neutral consultants to manage the numerous IPPs. The contracts mandate buying a minimum fixed percentage of power from the IPPs.

Electricity tariffs cannot be reduced as long as capacity and fixed charges persist. No efforts have been made to mitigate these charges. One potential solution is to sell electricity from such power plants at reduced rates to a selected group of consumers, eliminating distribution and transmission system add-ons, taxes, duties, and surcharges, including net hydel profits of KP and Punjab.

The goal is to reduce payments to idle IPPs or those operating below the minimum guaranteed takeoff and to provide incentives to specific categories of industrial, agricultural, and other consumers whose increased output would benefit the national interest.

For example, the export industry could become more competitive internationally due to lower input costs from cheaper electricity, encouraging it to boost production. The National Electric Power Regulatory Authority (Neptra) has been criticized for its role in handling tariffs. It engages in simplistic exercises and public hearings without proper due diligence in tariff determination.

The coal power plant at Jamshoro is a notable example of success due to the availability of required expertise. Similarly, regasified liquefied natural gas (RLNG) power plants achieved low prices through competitive bidding. 'Take or pay' contracts are feasible only if managed by professionals and awarded through competitive bidding to protect the purchaser's commercial interests.

Furthermore, the Federation of Pakistan Chambers of Commerce & Industry (FPCCI) has launched a final attempt to rescue the Pakistani economy and its citizens from the "unbearable capacity

charges" imposed by independent power producers (IPPs). Recently, the FPCCI Acting President announced the organization's plan to contest these charges in the Supreme Court and the Special Investment Facilitation Council (SIFC). He highlighted the frustration of the business community, noting their "loud and clear" objections to the IPP capacity charges. He expressed disappointment that, despite being the primary stakeholders, the business community had been excluded from discussions to resolve this issue.

The FPCCI proposed a three-pronged strategy to address the power sector crisis: conducting a forensic audit of IPPs, abolishing capacity charges in favor of payment based solely on generated electricity, and renegotiating power purchase agreements. Khan highlighted the severe financial burden, stating that Pakistan paid an estimated Rs 2,000 billion in capacity charges during FY24, with expectations of an increase to Rs 2,700-2,800 billion in FY25. He explained that dollar-indexed guarantees, coupled with a weakening Pakistani rupee, result in higher returns for IPPs, placing additional financial strain on both the government and the public.

The FPCCI's demands extend to a comprehensive review of IPP agreements, price reevaluations within legal boundaries, and enhanced oversight to prevent over-invoicing. They also called for an examination of energy infrastructure contracts for potential misinformation and fraud.

Khan concluded by urging the federal government to develop a comprehensive strategy to manage IPPs and ensure affordable electricity, emphasizing the importance of national interest and industrial development.

The Textile Industry and Energy Crisis

Supporting the FPCCI's concerns, the Pakistan Yarn Merchants Association (PYMA) also called for a reevaluation of IPP contracts. PYMA Chairperson Sheikh Khalil Qaiser, along with senior officials including Senior Vice Chairperson Sohail Nisar, Vice Chairperson Jaweed Khanani, and members of the Executive Committee, voiced fears that high electricity and gas rates, combined with additional IPP



capacity charges, could devastate the textile industry and significantly impact exports.

PYMA officials stressed the crippling effect of unsustainable energy costs on the industry, warning that further burdens could lead to widespread closures. They questioned the government's commitment to economic stability when such policies threatened the very foundation of industrial operations.

IPP owner SM Tanveer ready to reduce capacity charges

Eminent businesspersons gathered under the banner of the Federation of Pakistan Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FPCCI) on Friday to reject the costly contracts with Independent Power Producers (IPPs) and called for an independent energy tariff assessment by a reputable international auditing firm. They deemed the current expensive energy tariffs unacceptable, unviable, and disastrous for the country's industry.

"I am ready to get my two power plants' electricity tariff revised," offered SM Tanveer, former caretaker Punjab minister for industry, during a press conference alongside former caretaker federal minister Gohar Ijaz. Tanveer urged the government to negotiate with IPPs to reduce power tariffs. "Such an expensive energy tariff doesn't suit the industry to flourish," he said, accompanied by other FPCCI officials.

He pointed out that while IPPs had invested Rs50 billion, they had earned Rs400 billion. "Consumers are being charged

Rs73 billion as capacity charges," he added. Gohar Ijaz, speaking on the occasion, highlighted that some IPP plants provided no supply in January, February, and March, yet were paid Rs10 billion each month. "Electricity is very expensive and has become unaffordable. Capacity charges are just bad contracts. The electricity tariff is a major problem in Pakistan right now. Annually, Rs240 billion are being taken out of the pockets of the people in the form of capacity charges while 25% of the industry has been closed," he said, criticizing the government.

Ijaz further explained that in 2015, an average of 13,000 megawatts of electricity was being used, with capacity charges amounting to Rs200 billion. However, in 2024, capacity payments have soared to Rs2 trillion, even though consumption remains at 13,000 MW with a total capacity of 43,400 MW. "Rs2 trillion is being paid to all these IPP plants with partial or zero generation of electricity. The country cannot sustain such IPP agreements," he asserted.



The business community also expressed displeasure over changes to exporters' tax regimes and the increased powers granted to the FBR to audit quasi-exporters. Pakistan's power sector is currently facing a severe crisis, with issues spanning generation, transmission, and distribution. Circular debt is at its peak and appears insurmountable. The sector has never been in such dire straits. Inefficiencies, political interference, outdated infrastructure, and soaring fuel costs are some of the problems plaguing it. The root cause of this crisis lies in an inconsistent policy framework and governance issues. Independent Power Producers (IPPs) have further complicated the situation, making it impossible for ordinary Pakistanis to afford their electricity bills, especially due to ever-increasing capacity charges, which have reached Rs2.5 trillion. This is the main reason for the hike in electricity charges. The IMF program also emphasizes reducing circular debt by reforming the power sector, necessitating action from the Ministry of Power.

Power generation companies (GENCOs) and distribution companies (DISCOs) need urgent reforms, from infrastructure development to tackling distribution losses and theft, particularly in rural areas. The National Transmission and Despatch Company (NTDC) also needs to be reformed, as it cannot handle the load of the installed generation capacity due to its outdated infrastructure. Inconsistent power policies have worsened the situation. The 1994 Power Policy introduced the concept of IPPs, affecting electricity tariffs due to fluctuating oil prices. Moving away from hydel power development was a significant misstep, as Pakistan had the potential to generate cheap hydel power by building dams.

The 1998 power policy introduced competitive bidding among IPPs with predetermined tariffs, which was relatively better. The 2002 policy focused on renewable energy, and the policy introduced during CPEC aimed to attract investment in the sector.

Issues in the regulatory framework have shaken the confidence of investors and consumers. NEPRA's inconsistent policies on tariffs and taxes have resulted in power bills carrying multiple taxes. Public-private partnerships (PPPs) have further complicated the power policy framework. There should have been a consistent regulatory framework for determining tariffs and taxes for IPPs, WAPDA-related hydel projects, and renewable energy projects. This inconsistency has created confusion regarding power tariff distribution.

Investment in the transmission and distribution (T&D) network maintained by NTDC has been lacking. T&D losses and theft have been persistent problems, ranging from 20%-30%. NTDC's infrastructure cannot handle more than 25,000 MW, while the installed capacity is around 42,000 MW. This mismatch is one reason for the high capacity charges paid to non-producing IPPs, which is unsustainable.

Pakistan relies heavily on non-renewable energy produced by IPPs running on furnace oil and LNG. The PTI government attempted to renegotiate these contracts, achieving some progress. However, CPEC projects remained largely un-renegotiated due to various reasons. The only solution now is for the government to renegotiate

with IPPs to reduce the burden of capacity charges.

Governance issues are also significant. Many CEOs of DISCOs are political appointees working on an ad-hoc basis, leading to inefficiencies, low recovery of electricity bills, and continuous theft and leakages. Circular debt is ballooning due to these inefficiencies, hindering economic activities and eroding investor confidence. Circular debt could have been avoided by fully utilizing the generation capacity and developing special economic zones (SEZs) in the next phase of CPEC.

Initially, 27 SEZs were proposed, with nine priority zones for the possible relocation of Chinese industries. The installed capacity of CPEC-affiliated IPPs was initially increased to cater to these relocated industries. However, due to the unavailability of required facilities at these SEZs, these industries have not been relocated, leading to high capacity charges and price hikes.

The power sector crisis is exacerbated by policies that offer high returns to IPPs, along with dollar indexation. Power plants run on imported oil with fluctuating prices and exchange rates, raising production costs. Capacity payments further complicate the situation. These policies seem ill-conceived and favor IPPs, offering a return of 25%-30% on top of capacity charges. Some argue that political appointees made these decisions in exchange for personal favors, neglecting the national impact.

The tariffs and taxes being passed on to

end consumers further burden the public. Decision-makers, benefiting from the system, do not consider the suffering of the poor, who bear the brunt of price hikes and high inflation. Political appointees often lack knowledge about tariffs and taxes proposed by GENCOs and DISCOs, resulting in unaccounted-for losses from outdated T&D infrastructure. Pakistan needs to focus on hydel projects, with a potential generation capacity of about 150,000 MW from hydel power. Solar energy has significant potential in Pakistan and this can substantially contribute to meeting energy needs.

Jamaat-e-Islami's protest against IPPs and Inflated Bills

So far, Jamaat-e-Islami is the only political party in the country that has launched protests and sit-in in Rawalpindi from 26th of July, demanding scrapping of the IPPs deal and cut in the highly inflated and unbearable bills of the consumers throughout the country. Except JI, all other political parties are almost silent on the IPPs mega scam and issuance of exorbitant power bills to the consumers. Why are the leading political parties silent on this issue? It is not a secret any more that key leaders of mainstream parties are beneficiary of the controversial IPPs deal.

In the prevailing situation, analysts believe that the IPPs and Pakistan cannot co-exist and the government must give up trillions of rupees payments to the power producers not generating electricity.



IPPs: currents of discontent

Evolution of IPP policies in Pakistan can be broadly categorized into three main phases

By Dr Abid Qaiyum Suleri

With the recent increase in electricity tariffs, there is renewed debate over the rationality of capacity payment charges (CPC) to independent power producers (IPPs).

Previously, only a few voices raised concerns about these charges, but now the debate has expanded, and nearly everyone outside of the treasury benches is discussing the need to renegotiate the capacity payment arrangements with the IPPs to lower electricity tariffs.

The government is in a catch-22 situation. The high cost of electricity has become a contentious political issue, with opposition parties leveraging public dissatisfaction to criticize the incumbent government's handling of the energy sector. Industrial bodies like the FPPCCI and APTMA are demanding a renegotiation of contracts with the IPPs to lower electricity tariffs so that industry and manufacturing remain competitive.

In the past, the government could have deferred passing on the CPC in the electricity bills, making them part of the energy circular debt, and thus calming the situation. However, to secure the next bailout programme with the IMF, it cannot defer passing on CPC to the consumers. The IMF's financial assistance is tied to strict fiscal discipline and structural reforms, which include reducing subsidies and increasing cost recovery in the energy sector. These conditions pressure the government to pass on the high costs of electricity to consumers, exacerbating public discontent and economic strain.

Before discussing the way forward, let's consider how we got here.

The evolution of IPP policies in Pakistan can be broadly categorized into three main phases: the 1994 policy, the 2002 policy, and the 2015 policy. Each of these policies has had distinct features but shares some common elements that have influenced electricity tariff determination.



Pakistan's reliance on IPPs dates back to the Power Policy of 1994, introduced to alleviate the chronic energy shortages that plagued the country. The policy aimed to attract private investment by offering generous terms. The return on equity was set at an attractive 18 per cent, indexed to the US dollar, with a provision to include capacity payments. These payments are fixed charges made to IPPs to ensure the availability of electricity capacity, regardless of actual electricity generation or consumption. While this model provided the financial security necessary to draw private investors, it laid the groundwork for future challenges, including high-capacity payments and an over-reliance on expensive fossil fuel-based energy.

In contrast, the 2002 policy aimed to correct some of its predecessor's inefficiencies by reducing the return on equity to 12 per cent. This policy sought to balance investor interests with Pakistan's economic realities, but it continued the trend of indexing returns to the US dollar. This indexing remained a double-edged sword, protecting investor returns from local currency depreciation while exacerbating the financial burden on the government (read consumers) whenever the rupee weakened.

The 2015 policy introduced further

refinements, emphasizing a more diversified energy mix, including renewable energy sources. While this policy continued to offer returns indexed to the US dollar, it also aimed to attract investment in cleaner energy projects. Despite these positive changes, the legacy issues of high-capacity payments and over-invoicing persisted, largely due to the entrenched structures and practices established by the earlier policies.

Comparing these policies reveals several similarities and consistent challenges that have affected electricity tariff determination. All three policies maintained the practice of offering returns indexed to the US dollar, which, while attracting foreign investment, also made the energy sector highly sensitive to exchange rate fluctuations. This indexing has significantly contributed to the rising electricity tariffs, as the depreciation of the Pakistani rupee has consistently increased the financial obligations to IPPs.

Furthermore, each policy has struggled with the issue of overcapacity. The generous terms offered under the take-or-pay agreements have led to an installed capacity that far exceeds actual demand. This overcapacity results in higher per-unit costs for electricity, as the fixed costs of capacity payments are spread over a small-

er-than-expected consumption base. Consequently, consumers face higher tariffs, contributing to economic strain and reducing industrial competitiveness.

Another issue that all three IPP policies failed to handle is over-invoicing on capital goods in some instances. Such artificially inflated project costs lead to perpetual returns on 'ghost equity' that burden the economy without corresponding benefits. Additionally, allegations of misreporting and overbilling by IPPs, such as overstated operational and maintenance margins, have further inflated costs and strained the energy sector.



The flawed contractual arrangements have contributed to a spiralling circular debt, reaching Rs2.64 trillion as of February 2024. This debt cycle exacerbates financial instability and hampers economic growth. The surge in electricity tariffs has led to premature deindustrialization, making Pakistani exports less competitive in the global market. High electricity costs strain both households and businesses, reducing overall economic productivity and growth.

From the IPPs' perspective, capacity payments assist in servicing their debt and recovering capital expenditures, ensuring financial viability and continuous operation. These payments also ensure that power plants are available to meet peak demand and emergencies, thereby maintaining grid reliability and avoiding blackouts.

One appreciates the IPPs' perspective. However, that does not help the tariff-stricken consumers who are staging sit-ins to revoke these contracts. The contracts are backed by sovereign guarantees from the government of Pakistan, and

unilaterally revoking the contract can land the country in trouble. Even renegotiating the agreements is inherently challenging for several reasons. Besides the issue of sovereign guarantees, renegotiation can undermine investor confidence, deterring future investments not only in the energy sector but across the broader economy.

Third, the complexity of the contracts, which often include multiple stakeholders such as local and international investors, financial institutions, and government entities, complicates renegotiation efforts. Achieving consensus among all parties on revised terms can be a protracted and

contentious process. Finally, the entrenched interests and potential resistance from powerful IPP lobbyists pose significant political and bureaucratic hurdles.

Having said that, the PTI government renegotiated with a few IPPs, leading to reduced returns on equity and capping the dollar exchange rate at Rs148. However, the overall impact of these renegotiations was mixed. While there were some immediate financial reliefs, the fundamental structural issues remained unaddressed, and the benefits were not as substantial as hoped. The PTI government was unable to persuade the Chinese Independent Power Producers (IPPs) to renegotiate. Reportedly, the Chinese asked Pakistan to first renegotiate with the local IPPs (the complete list of which and their owners are now in the public domain), reach an agreement, and then engage in similar discussions with Chinese investors.

The current government has also approached Chinese IPPs for a renegotiation and is awaiting their response. However,

two things should be kept in mind. First, Pakistan has not yet renegotiated with the local IPPs. Second, it should not expect any favours from China just by making a noise about it. CPEC is a small part of the broader Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). If China extends any favours to Pakistan, it may need to do the same for its other BRI partners. Therefore, Pakistan needs to pursue closed-door diplomacy to obtain any concessions from Chinese IPPs, and this should happen after successful renegotiation with the local IPPs.

The political implications of the controversy surrounding capacity payments to IPPs are equally significant. The burden of high electricity tariffs falls disproportionately on the middle and lower-income segments of society, fueling public outrage and eroding trust in the government's ability to manage the economy. The controversy also exposes the challenges of governance and accountability in Pakistan's energy sector. Addressing these governance issues is crucial for restoring public trust and ensuring the sustainable development of the energy sector.

In the best-case scenario, successful renegotiations with both local and international IPPs could lead to significantly lower electricity tariffs, increased industrial competitiveness, and enhanced public trust in the government's ability to manage the economy.

In the worst-case scenario, failed renegotiations could exacerbate the financial strain on the government and consumers, leading to higher electricity tariffs, crippling industry, and increased public unrest. Any deviations from IMF conditionalities to appease public sentiments will endanger Pakistan's next IMF programme, jeopardizing its macroeconomic stability.

In the business-as-usual scenario, the government may continue to struggle with piecemeal solutions and temporary relief measures. This would likely maintain the status quo of high electricity tariffs and periodic public discontent.

The prime minister takes pride in choosing economic revival over politics. Let's see how this translates in the energy sector.

Courtesy The News

This is a budget for the rich

Another indicator of country's recession is stable exchange rate



By I Hussain

The major issue with the federal government's recently announced budget is its failure to convince anyone outside the government's core supporters that it can achieve its intended results.

Another significant problem concerns fairness. Why should the salaried class, already bearing the bulk of income taxes, be expected to pay even more when those who own the overwhelming majority of the country's assets, particularly land and property, benefit from tax exemptions?

According to the latest edition of the 'Pakistan Economic Survey' published by the government of Pakistan's finance ministry, the cumulative growth of per capita income between 2017-18 and 2022-23 was 98 per cent. Concurrently, the cumulative growth of the Consumer Price Index (CPI), a measure of inflation affecting the average household, during this same period was slightly less than income growth at 87 per cent, resulting in a meager annual average real per capita income growth rate of just over 1.0 per cent.

The planners need to address how, given

the severe recession indicated by the Economic Survey figures for the large-scale manufacturing industry, the government plans to generate a massive 40 per cent increase in tax collections with its heavy reliance on increased direct and indirect taxes? This is like asking a severely dehydrated person to become a blood donor which is unlikely to end up well for the prospective donor should he agree to go ahead.

Another indicator of the country's recession is the stable exchange rate. Data show that if Pakistan's GDP grows at 4.0 per cent or more, the Pak rupee tends to depreciate significantly. The rupee's relative stability compared to the previous year reflects the slowdown in economic activity.

Electricity and gas bills are at rich country levels in a desperately poor country in which the large majority is barely getting by is a cruel imposition. Amidst scorching summer temperatures defaults on payments as well as theft will skyrocket, exacerbating the circular debt issue.

The budget also fails to address the massive

level of current government expenditures (debt servicing, defense, etc.) relative to revenue collections.

Between 2017-18 and 2022-23, the annual average growth rate of all government revenue (both tax and non-tax and federal and provincial) was 13.6 per cent (the compounded annual growth rate was 13 per cent). However, the average annual growth in total expenditure for both the central and provincial governments was 16.9 per cent (the compounded annual growth rate was 16.6 per cent). Escalating fiscal deficits of 6.0 per cent of GDP or more are now more the rule than the exception.

On the other hand, development spending is anemic at best. The average annual growth rate of development expenditure was 5.5 per cent between 2017-18 and 2022-23, far lower than the cumulative inflation during this time, meaning that in real terms, development spending has decreased significantly.

Currently, debt servicing (comprising repayments of both interest and the princi-

pal amount) is an onerous burden. The country's debt servicing requirement amounted to 37 per cent of total revenue in 2017-18 but climbed to 63 per cent in 2018-19 and 2019-20. There was a decline to 54 per cent in 2020-21, possibly due to Covid-related relief from international creditors. However, this decrease proved fleeting.

Thus, in 2021-22, debt servicing resumed its upward climb, crossing 61 per cent, and then soaring to a stratospheric 91 per cent in 2022-23. Contributing factors to this latter spike were a State Bank interest rate hike from 13.75 per cent in end-June 2022 to 21 per cent by end-June 2023 and a depreciation of the rupee against the US dollar by about 37 per cent in FY2022. (The nine-month figures for 2023-24 are a continuation of past trends as total debt servicing as a percentage of revenues exceeds 70 per cent).

The current budget projects a fiscal deficit of around 6.0 per cent of GDP. Because of the heavy reliance on borrowing from commercial banks and the public, interest rates should stay elevated keeping private investment subdued with adverse effects on GDP and employment growth.

The need for tax reform has been evident for many decades. For example, in the mid-1980s, two noted public finance experts, Dr Ehtisham Ahmad and Professor Nicholas Stern, conducted a thorough review of Pakistan's tax system. They recommended that the federal government introduce a Value Added Tax (VAT) on wholesalers that could later be extended to the retail sector. They envisaged a less significant role for customs duties. A VAT system of one or two rates was suggested along with selected excise duties (cement, tobacco, petroleum products) and a strengthened income tax.

The duo also suggested a land tax that the provincial governments could enact with an exemption for land holdings below 12.5 acres. The quality of the land would be assessed by an updated valuation of the traditional standard for measuring land productivity through the prevailing system of 'Produce Index Units' assigned to specific parcels of land.

Their proposals were not implemented.

However, a modified VAT system was introduced in 1990 called the General Sales Tax (GST) but this failed to achieve its revenue objectives due to poor administration, limited coverage of businesses, and 'rent-seeking'.

The current proposal to tax agricultural incomes by the provincial authorities is a welcome move to strengthen the finances of the provincial government. However, can this initiative come to fruition?

Most of the large land holdings belong to the political elites of this country with many paying no tax. Getting them to agree to act against their own financial interest without an element of coercion goes against the grain of human nature; otherwise, it would already have happened given the dire need for revenue by the center and the provinces.



What the IMF should have highlighted – but may have avoided doing thus far (at least from the discussions made public) – are the mechanics of implementing an agricultural income tax.

Is there a cadastral survey in place which would be like Google Maps for rural areas? Given that many land holdings are not contiguous, who is going to decide upon land titles? Will it be the village patwari with his musty register containing an illegible scrawl of land ownership or have land titles already been digitized at the provincial level? Can the patwari defy the will of the local landlord given the huge imbalance in their economic and social status?

Even if land titles are set, how is agricultural income going to be measured? On a presumptive basis or on the value of gross output using modern technology such as drones? Who will be exempted from payment and on what criteria? These are issues that make it quite difficult to believe that the agricultural income tax is going to be successfully implemented in Pakistan.

The country cannot get out of the doom loop it is trapped in without a drastic restructuring of its economy that includes at a minimum a rescheduling of its domestic debt (since foreign creditors are unlikely to grant concessions). Foreigners will point to the fact that the Pakistani ruling elites already own billions of dollars of property in Dubai or in foreign bank accounts and therefore any leniency shown will only add to capital flight.

One major reason why many IMF programmes fail to achieve their objectives is that the IMF avoids focusing on political and social issues to avoid offending a member country's government. The IMF's policy recommendations, made by a team comprising economists, focus primarily on key macroeconomic variables. These, however, avoid dwelling on the political and cultural realities of a country that influence macroeconomic outcomes.

That is why interdisciplinary teams comprising economists as well as experts from other social science disciplines that can devise plausible alternative economic scenarios have better chances of success.

Courtesy The News

What's going on in the remittance market?

Pakistan is mostly likely to receive more foreign exchange through higher remittances inflows in the coming years

By **Almazia Shahzad**

Pakistan's remittance market comprises two types of remitters – those who send money to support the families they leave behind for employment overseas, and those seeking investment/savings opportunities back home, often the well settled members of the diaspora.

This distinction is central for understanding the dynamics of the market. Remitters' motives determine how their behaviour and choices may change over time and subsequently affect remittance inflows. Besides their motive, an important decision that remitters make is to choose either remitting an amount equivalent to a specific Pakistani rupee value, which in US dollar terms would fluctuate owing to exchange rate variations, or a specific US dollar amount.

The first category of remitters has a tendency to respond promptly to inflation levels and changes in the exchange rate. In FY2023 and FY2024, inflation levels averaged around 29.2 and 23.4 per cent respectively, peaking at 30.8 per cent in the first half of FY2024.

To meet the rising cost of living in the country – including utility bills, expenses on food, clothing and rent – remitters had to send more remittances in rupee terms. However, the exchange rate during the period was depreciating and highly volatile, and the kerb market premium – the gap between the open market rate and the official rate in the interbank market – was increasing, estimated to be around 4.0 per cent in mid-FY2023.

The misalignment shifted the remitters' preference to unofficial channels offering higher rupee amounts against the same dollar amount. Due to depreciation, remitters were able to send more rupees with even lower dollars. Hence the data reports 12.6 per cent decline in FY2023. In FY2024, the increase of 10.7 per cent is partly associated with stability in the exchange rate market and convergence of the two rates, reducing the friction towards use of official channels.



The second category of remitters bases its decision to remit on maximizing their returns on savings, therefore economic certainty or lack of it – indicative of risk level – and interest rate differential between home and host country are important variables. FY2023 was plagued by low growth and high economic uncertainty, not surprisingly saving oriented inflows remained subdued.

Though the economic mood remains grim, some economic certainty returned in FY2024. The State Bank raised the monetary policy rate up to 22 per cent to counter the inflation, offering a sufficiently large buffer against potential risks to invested amounts in domestic saving instruments by the diaspora.

These observations each have important policy implications. First, the substitution between official and unofficial channels to remit money highlights the absolute necessity to ensure proper functioning of Pakistan's exchange rate market, such that the two rates are aligned, to draw valuable foreign exchange from Pakistanis abroad. This means that the government and central bank's exchange rate policy should go beyond valuation of foreign debt and trade policy in its consideration.

Remittance initiatives such as the Sohni Dharti Remittance Program may be insufficient to outweigh monetary benefit to remitters from using unofficial channels. Provision of saving opportunities or higher

rates of return alone may also not be sufficient to attract diaspora savings, rather reduced risk to the investments through economic stability and continuity of policies are key in capturing their interest and willingness.

Setting aside the brain drain debate and its implications for Pakistan's labour market, the high number of out-migrants has begun to translate into higher remittances. Between January and December 2023 around 862,000 migrants left; the remittance data for the same period shows an uptake in inflows after June 2023 and has increased on average 4.0 per cent monthly. This pattern appears to be in line with the literature which suggests that it takes around six months before migrants are able to send remittances back home. So the jump we are seeing in data is a lagged response to migration outflows, and is in fact not so abrupt. Data adjusted for seasonality and unexpected one-off shocks indicates that the upward trend in FY2024 had been gradually building up.

With the prevailing view that more people are increasingly pursuing life abroad, Pakistan is mostly likely to receive more foreign exchange through higher remittances inflows in the coming years. But the policy related cautions mentioned earlier must be borne in mind by the policymakers or we might end up losing a significant share of these flows to the alternatives.

Courtesy The News

CPEC 2.0: expanding horizons

CPEC represents a visionary commitment that has significantly shaped the trajectory of Pakistan's economic landscape



By Dr Imran Khalid

This month marks a significant milestone as Pakistan and China celebrate the 11th anniversary of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), a cornerstone of China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI).

Over the past decade, this partnership has witnessed a remarkable surge in China's dedication to enhancing Pakistan's economic landscape, solidifying a robust bond between the two nations. China has emerged as Pakistan's foremost benefactor, providing substantial investments, loans, and grants that have been crucial in driving Pakistan's growth.

Since its inception on July 5, 2013, when the MoU was signed, CPEC has represented a transformative journey for both countries. The initiative has not only strengthened connectivity but has also fostered long-term collaboration. China's investment has rejuvenated Pakistan's infrastructure, energy, and production sectors, especially at a time when traditional international donors were reluctant to engage.

The corridor has become a symbol of mutual prosperity and enduring camaraderie, demonstrating China's strategic commitment to its friend. Its impact on Pakistan's economic development and the deepening of Sino-Pakistani ties continue to highlight the strategic significance of this enduring partnership.

CPEC represents a visionary commitment that has significantly shaped the trajectory of Pakistan's economic landscape. Launched with an ambitious plan, CPEC united Pakistan and China in their pursuit of shared prosperity, connectivity, and enduring friendship. China's pledge of \$60 billion in investments aimed at revitalizing Pakistan's infrastructure, energy, and production sectors arrived at a critical juncture when traditional international donors were hesitant and Pakistan's economy faced severe challenges.

CPEC's potential impact on Pakistan is often likened to the Marshall Plan, which transformed post-war Europe. By fostering substantial economic growth, CPEC was projected to create over 2.3 million jobs

between 2015 and 2030 and contribute an additional 2.0 to 2.5 percentage points to Pakistan's annual economic growth rate. This corridor is not merely an investment but a strategic catalyst poised to revitalize Pakistan's economy. Its role in providing a lifeline at a time of economic vulnerability underscores the corridor's transformative power and highlights the deepening Sino-Pakistani partnership.

Over the past 11 years, China's investment of over \$25.4 billion in Pakistan has profoundly impacted key sectors such as transport, energy, and infrastructure, all central to the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). This significant commitment reflects Beijing's focus on improving connectivity and promoting economic growth. Beyond direct investments, China's support includes a substantial 30 billion Chinese yuan in loans and the creation of a currency swap arrangement.

This strategic partnership has been a crucial lifeline for Pakistan, shielding its financial stability and strengthening its debt management capabilities. The assistance has not

only eased the pressure of debt repayments but also allowed Pakistan to diversify its trade practices, decreasing its dependence on the dollar and improving its foreign exchange reserves. The impact of this support highlights the deepening economic ties between the two nations and underscores China's role in bolstering Pakistan's economic resilience.

CPEC is reshaping Pakistan's economic landscape with its extensive network of roadways linking rural and urban areas. A pivotal element of this initiative is the strategic placement of nine Special Economic Zones (SEZs) along these critical routes, designed to attract substantial investment and drive economic growth. Four of these SEZs are nearing operational status, marking a significant milestone in the project's development. The remaining five SEZs are expected to become fully functional by 2030.

This ambitious timeline underscores the transformative potential of CPEC, signaling a potential overhaul of Pakistan's economic environment. The SEZs are more than just industrial hubs; they represent a strategic vision to stimulate investment, foster industrialization, and catalyze regional development. By harnessing the power of these economic zones, Pakistan aims to leverage its position within the CPEC framework to unlock new opportunities and drive sustained economic advancement. As the SEZs come online, they promise to be pivotal in reshaping the economic future of Pakistan, cementing CPEC's role as a game-changer in regional development.

This mega project exemplifies a forward-thinking approach to energy infrastructure, integrating a broad spectrum of power projects. From coal and hydro to solar and wind power plants, CPEC has made significant strides in expanding Pakistan's power generation capacity. This comprehensive energy strategy not only addresses the immediate demands but also sets the stage for a more sustainable and environmentally conscious future.

By diversifying its energy sources, CPEC is transforming Pakistan into an energy-surplus nation, a crucial development for a country long plagued by power shortages. This transformation is more than just a

technical upgrade; it represents a strategic shift that fosters industrial growth and enhances economic stability. The promise of reliable and diversified energy sources is proving to be a magnet for foreign investment, highlighting CPEC's role in reshaping Pakistan's economic landscape.

It has significantly impacted Pakistan's growing blue economy, with Gwadar port standing out as a central success. Once a modest vision, Gwadar has transformed into a thriving maritime hub, actively facilitating global trade and commerce. This evolution highlights the port's critical role in Pakistan's economic strategy and



underscores the tangible benefits of CPEC for both nations. Initially designed to connect Gwadar Port with China's Xinjiang region, CPEC has expanded into a comprehensive initiative that includes energy projects, infrastructure development, and industrial collaboration.

The development of nine Special Economic Zones (SEZs), particularly the burgeoning Gwadar Free Economic Zone, is reshaping the economic landscape, positioning CPEC as a leading investment hub in the region. The transformation of the Gwadar Port into a fully operational trade centre is a testament to CPEC's ambitious scope and its potential to drive significant economic growth. This expansion reflects a broader vision, where infrastructure improvements and strategic investments not only elevate Pakistan's economic standing but also reinforce the bilateral ties between China and Pakistan.

During Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif's recent visit to China, the announcement of CPEC's second phase, often referred to as

CPEC 2.0, marked a significant expansion of the initiative. This new phase broadens the project's scope beyond its original focus, incorporating agriculture and information technology into its ambit. By venturing into these sectors, CPEC 2.0 aims to enhance economic collaboration and technological integration, reflecting a strategic evolution in China's ambitious Belt and Road Initiative.

This expansion underscores the growing significance of CPEC as a comprehensive framework for fostering bilateral ties and advancing mutual economic interests. As both neighbours embark on the second

phase of CPEC, Beijing's promise of an additional \$1 billion grant to Pakistan underscores a deepening partnership rooted in shared prosperity. Notably, over 30,000 Pakistani students are currently benefiting from educational opportunities in China, reflecting the rich cultural and academic exchange between the countries.

Looking ahead, the second phase of CPEC plans to complete 63 new projects, with an estimated value of \$35 billion by 2030. This ambitious expansion highlights a mutual commitment to not only enhancing regional connectivity but also to fostering economic integration that reaches into Afghanistan and Central Asia.

The future of CPEC promises significant transformation, as both China and Pakistan work together to realize a vision of comprehensive development and cooperation. This evolving partnership is set to redefine economic landscapes and reinforce the strategic importance of their collaboration on a global scale.

Political Turmoil in Pakistan: Cases Against Imran Khan and PTI



By Daniyal Wali

In a nation already grappling with deep political divisions, recent moves by the Pakistani government against the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) and its leader, former Prime Minister Imran Khan, have further stirred the political pot. These developments underscore the precarious balance of power in Pakistan and raise significant questions about the future of its democracy.

Just last month, Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif extended an olive branch to PTI, emphasizing the need for political unity. "In 76 years since Pakistan's independence, we've reached a point where we even hesitate to shake hands with one another," Sharif said on June 26, acknowledging the nation's deep political divide. However, this gesture of reconciliation was short-lived. On July 15, Information Minister Attaullah Tarar announced the government's intention to ban the PTI, citing accusations of inciting violent protests and leaking classified information. This move, perceived as a drastic shift in political strategy, drew widespread condemnation from political rivals, allies, and human rights groups alike.

The Backlash and Political Implications

The announcement was met with

immediate backlash. Leaders of the Pakistan People's Party (PPP), a key ally in the ruling coalition, claimed they were not consulted. Senator Saleem Mandviwalla of the PPP expressed surprise, stating that they learned of the decision through the media. The Human Rights Commission of Pakistan (HRCP) labeled the decision as "political desperation" and warned it would deepen polarization and lead to political chaos.

Facing intense criticism, the ruling Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) has since backtracked, indicating that any final decision would require consensus among coalition partners. Defence Minister Khawaja Asif emphasized that the government would first present its case to its allies before taking further steps. The government's attempt to ban PTI follows a Supreme Court verdict that affirmed the party's right to participate in elections and retain its status as a political entity. This decision came after a controversy over reserved seats in the national and provincial assemblies, which saw PTI securing significant victories despite the loss of its electoral symbol, the cricket bat.

The move to ban PTI raises significant legal questions. According to constitutional expert Faisal Fared Chaudhry, only the Supreme Court has the

authority to ban political parties, and such a ban must be based on substantial evidence of actions against state sovereignty or collusion with a foreign power. He suggested that the government's case might lack the necessary evidence, implying that the move could be a strategy to pressure the judiciary, which has recently ruled against the government.

Historical Context of Political Bans

Pakistan has a history of banning political parties under both military dictatorships and civilian administrations. The last two bans occurred under PTI's government: the Sindhi Nationalist party Jeay Sindh Qaumi Mahaz-Aresar in 2020 and the far-right religious outfit Tehreek-e-Labbaik Pakistan in 2021. Both bans were contentious, with the latter being successfully appealed and lifted within the same year. The current situation is particularly charged given Imran Khan's ongoing confrontations with the military establishment. Since his ousting in April 2022, Khan has accused the military of colluding with his political rivals to undermine his political career. The military, which has ruled Pakistan directly for over three decades and continues to wield significant political influence, denies these allegations.



The Toshakhana Case and Recent Arrests

Adding to the complexity of PTI's troubles are the fresh cases against Imran Khan and his wife, Bushra Bibi, related to the Toshakhana (state gift repository) scandal. The couple was remanded for eight days following their arrest by the National Accountability Bureau (NAB). They are accused of illegally possessing and selling high-value state gifts, including watches and jewelry.

This case has further complicated Khan's legal battles. His legal team recently withdrew petitions for pre-arrest bail in several cases related to violent protests on May 9, which followed Khan's brief detention. The Lahore High Court (LHC) dismissed these petitions as "infructuous" since Khan was already in custody. Moreover, the LHC overruled objections to a petition challenging Khan's physical remand in eight riot-related cases, setting the stage for further legal proceedings.

The government's actions against PTI and its leadership appear to be part of a broader strategy to weaken its political rivals. However, political analyst Ahmed Ijaz warns that such attempts to ban PTI could backfire, potentially strengthening the party's resolve and support base. He notes that past attempts to ban political parties have rarely been successful, even under military regimes. Former PTI Secretary General Asad Umar, who retired from politics in November 2023, expressed skepticism about the seriousness of the ban threat, suggesting it might be a tactic to buy time and apply pressure. Meanwhile, PTI continues to challenge the government's actions in court, with constitutional experts arguing that any ban would ultimately need to withstand judicial scrutiny.

International Concerns and Domestic Responses

The proposed ban has also attracted international attention. Western governments, including the United States, have expressed concerns about the potential implications for democracy in Pakistan. In response, Defence Minister Khawaja Asif has insisted that the decision is a domestic matter and

should be respected as such. Domestically, the political landscape remains tense. The government faces the challenge of balancing its efforts to maintain control with the need to uphold democratic principles. As the legal battles unfold, the political future of PTI and its leader hangs in the balance, with significant implications for Pakistan's democracy and stability.

The unfolding drama surrounding the potential ban on PTI and the legal troubles of Imran Khan and his associates not only reflects the immediate political crisis but also highlights deeper issues within Pakistan's political system. The recurrent clashes between political parties, the military's significant influence, and the judiciary's pivotal role underscore the complexity of governance in Pakistan. The PTI's troubles are a symptom of a broader malaise. Political instability has long plagued Pakistan, with frequent changes in government, allegations of corruption, and a lack of cohesive policy direction. This instability often results in economic uncertainty, affecting everything from foreign investment to the daily lives of ordinary Pakistanis.

The Role of the Judiciary and Military

The judiciary's role in this political saga is crucial. Pakistan's courts have a history of significant interventions in political matters, often becoming arbiters in disputes that shape the country's political trajectory. The recent Supreme Court verdict affirming PTI's right to participate in elections is a case in point. This decision not only provided a lifeline to PTI but also reinforced the judiciary's role as a check on executive power.

However, the judiciary's involvement is a double-edged sword. While it can act as a guardian of democratic norms, its decisions can also be perceived as politically motivated, especially in a highly polarized environment. The government's recent actions against PTI are seen by some as an attempt to undermine the judiciary's authority, further complicating the political landscape.

The military's role in Pakistan's politics cannot be overstated. With a history of direct and indirect rule, the military remains a powerful actor. Imran Khan's

allegations against the military reflect a long-standing tension between civilian governments and the armed forces. This tension is exacerbated by the military's continued involvement in political and economic matters, often justified as necessary for national stability and security. Khan's confrontations with the military are part of a broader narrative of civilian leaders seeking to assert their authority. However, these confrontations often lead to political instability, as seen in the aftermath of Khan's ousting. The military's denial of collusion with political rivals does little to quell suspicions, highlighting the need for a clearer delineation of roles between civilian and military institutions.

The Economic Dimension

The political turmoil also has significant economic implications. Political instability often deters foreign investment and affects economic policies. Pakistan's economy, already struggling with inflation, debt, and unemployment, faces additional pressure from the current political crisis. Economic stability is closely linked to political stability, and the government's actions against PTI could have far-reaching economic consequences.

To conclude, the recent cases against Imran Khan and PTI are emblematic of the broader political turmoil in Pakistan. The government's aggressive stance against its main opposition party, coupled with legal and constitutional challenges, underscores the fragility of Pakistan's political landscape. As the nation navigates this turbulent period, the actions of its leaders will be closely watched, both domestically and internationally, for their impact on the country's democratic fabric and future stability.

The potential ban on PTI and the ongoing legal battles are more than just political maneuvers; they are indicative of deeper systemic issues. The interplay between the judiciary, military, and political parties creates a complex and often unstable political environment. The future of Pakistan's democracy depends on navigating these challenges effectively, ensuring that political power is exercised within constitutional limits and that democratic norms are upheld.



Avoiding a gaga President



By M A Niazi

Well, the inevitable happened. Joe Biden decided not to run for re-election. No, it's not because he forgot, but because he caught covid-19 and went into self-isolation. That meant he had to leave the campaign trail just when he was supposed to have been gearing up for the party's convention, for which he had already sewn up the delegates, as he was supposed to have done. (No sitting Democrat president has ever sought re-nomination and been refused, and only one Republican, Chester Alan Arthur, in 1884)

I suspect that he got some me time, which allowed him to assess how he was doing. Look, he's 82, he's been President of his country. So he probably realized that it was better to leave while he had most of his marbles. Rather than at the end of another four years, when the weight of the world on his shoulders would have made would have greatly speeded up the progress of his illness, and if he had shuffled out of the White House, not knowing what day it was, what place it was, or even who he was.

I wonder. I can remember another old man, François Mitterrand, who was re-elected

President of France for a second seven-year term in 1988. He was diagnosed with [prostate cancer, but kept it concealed, completing his term in May 1995. In January 1996, he died of that cancer. That might be how Joe Biden would like to go.

Frankly, I'm not sure that Donald Trump will be much better. After all, he will also hit Biden's age by the time his term comes to an end. No one really wishes the USA to go through the trauma of a presidential death, the last one, that of John F. Kennedy in 1965 being particularly disturbing. It might have been behind Mitterrand's wish to spare France the trauma of a presidential death.

Still, the next time his party took the Presidency, the holder of the office put France through not so much a trauma as an embarrassment, when he was photographed on a scooter, sneaking at night from the Elysee Palace to go to his mistress.

The Socialists have been an embarrassment for France. Mitterrand may not have died in office, but the nation was shocked or perhaps amused, to find out that he had an illegitimate daughter. Well, Trump is

around to embarrass Americans. He will be elected, and then take office, as a convicted criminal. And the crime is not murder or even bank robbery, but tax fraud. That's the same offence for which Al Capone was jailed. But Al Capone got it in the neck because he was bootlegging. Trump has been convicted because he gave money to a strip dancer to help him hide their affair,

It would have played out very well over here. One of most popular leaders has been convicted of various offences, including that of suborning the affections of another man's wife, while his ex-wife brings up a girl with whom his connection remains murky. Is he as Teflon as Trump? There's no stripper involved in his story, just as there's no khwaja sirah in Trump's.

There are other reOnances. Imran just admires real-estate tycoons. Trump is one. Trump has twitted Biden about his age, while Imran seeks the youth vote.

Is Maryam Nawaz going to be Imran's Kamala Harris? It's a little difficult to imagine Mian Nawaz as a Jamaican. It's even more difficult to imagine him as an academic.



Bellicose democracy



By Tariq Khosa

A few recent developments provide some examples of how the deep state systematically encroaches upon the citizens' constitutional freedoms and fundamental rights. The government, through an SRO, recently allowed personnel of the premier intelligence agency to intercept and trace the communications of any citizen "in the interest of national security". Obviously, this was done in response to the strictures passed and observations made by some conscientious judges against the widespread practice of illegal technical surveillance.

Separately, in a statement made before the Sindh High Court, the interior ministry justified the ban on X, claiming that the social media platform was a "threat to peace and national security". It further said that "hostile elements operating on X have nefarious intentions to create an environment of chaos and instability, with the ultimate goal of destabilising the country and plunging it into some form of anarchy".

This paper correctly noted that "silencing social media is no solution to the actual problem of growing public discontent".

Why is the state bent on 'suppressing a restless public and blocking dissent'? This is the question to ask. Can democracy thrive without debate and dissent? How does it survive the draconian measures and series of follies committed by state institutions in the recent past?

"Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold," wrote William Butler Yeats in a different era of fear and violence. Yeats refers "not to some kind of moderate political middle, but rather to the moral centre of civilisation. When the moral centre gives way, nations fall," David French asserts in a recent piece for the New York Times.

In the corridors of power, the resurrection of the PTI was seen as an insurrection.

The most important post-elections development has indeed been the stunning reversal of fortunes for the beleaguered PTI, which was being treated as a defunct political party by the Election Commission following the chief justice-led Supreme Court bench's controversial Jan 13 verdict in the 'bat' symbol case. In a clear majority verdict, eight judges of the 13-member full court bench not only recognised the PTI as

a lawful political party but also ruled against the blatant misuse of authority by the ECP in wrongly distributing its share of reserved seats for minorities and women among the ruling coalition parties.

While the judicial structure comprises various tiers of the courts of law, it is the Supreme Court that is recognised by the Constitution as a court of both law and justice. Indeed, injustice was undone by it in the reserved seats verdict. The decision was hailed as a verdict against the establishment's machinations to deny a mandate to the real winners of the Feb 8 national elections.

A significant milestone of restorative justice was achieved by the highest court when the majority of the judges ruled against "the series of wrongs that had been caused by the ECP's reprehensible decisions" based on the earlier, patently unjust, 'bat' verdict. The decision also exposed the political engineers who colluded to defy the will of the people.

The response of the PML-N-led coalition government reflected desperation. Announcing a ban on the PTI was a



knee-jerk reaction, an ill-advised, hasty move. “Like grains of sand, power slips quicker from the hand the tighter the fist is clenched,” said this paper. In the corridors of power, the resurrection of the PTI was seen as an insurrection. It seemed that 11 judges of the apex court, including the chief justice, recognising “the PTI’s bona fides as a political party” came as a rude shock to the power brokers who had built their political castle on the false sands of realpolitik.

If it were carried out, the decision to ban the largest and most popular political party would be extremely ill-advised. The devastating potential consequences have clearly not been thought through. It would entail the dismissal of a government formed with an overwhelming mandate in the province of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, led by a political party that has won three previous

elections, held in 2013, 2018 and 2024, in the province. Sacking the KP government may trigger violent protests against the federation by a people already reeling under the ravages of terrorism and bloodshed. A grassroots rebellion could unravel the state; why, then, was such a reckless move even conceived? Have the power brokers lost all sense and reason?

Separately, the government has also sought a review of the Supreme Court ruling in the reserved seats case, knowing well that the same 13-member full court will hear the petition and the decision is unlikely to be reversed. The move amounts to defying the verdict of the people of Pakistan, who defeated the state’s designs in the Feb 8 elections with a vote in favour of an incarcerated leader who seems to have become something of a symbol of defiance. The result was simply a vote against the

establishment and an answer to the perpetrators of persecution, who had unleashed a reign of terror through a blatantly bellicose democratic process.

The way forward suggested recently by this paper through an editorial is a sensible option for the government: that it should “form a parliamentary Committee of the Whole comprising all current lawmakers”. All contentious issues pertaining to political instability, economic and fiscal pressures, insecurity, violence and blatant violations of human rights and due process of law should be debated freely within parliament. The current polarised political environment requires a pause in order to facilitate “constructive engagement between the rival factions”. Meanwhile, the PTI should shun a “rigid approach” and participate in the debate with an open mindset that is conducive to finding solutions instead of laying down “impossible preconditions” that could scuttle dialogue.

Politics is the art of the possible and requires flexibility through a give-and-take approach. Only constructive, mature and serious deliberations within parliament can give a clear message and warning to unelected institutions. Our salvation lies in pursuing the democratic path to resolving the contentious issues facing the nation.

Courtesy Dawn





Why protest by ethnic Baloch has put Pakistan's key port of Gwadar on edge

Authorities block highways to stop a meeting of Baloch groups in the port city, leading to clashes in which at least two, including a soldier, are killed



By Abid Hussain

Tensions are high in Pakistan's port city of Gwadar in the southwestern Balochistan province where an ethnic Baloch group has been protesting for days, following the arrests of some of their members and deadly clashes with security forces.

Gwadar is Pakistan's only deep-sea port on the Arabian Sea, and is a key route of the \$60bn China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC).

The latest tensions in the port city began on Friday after the Baloch Yakjehti Committee (BYC) gave a call to demonstrate against alleged human rights violations, enforced disappearances and extrajudicial killings of people in Balochistan, Pakistan's largest and poorest province.

Home to approximately 15 million of Pakistan's estimated 240 million people, according to the 2023 census, Balochistan is rich in natural resources, including oil, coal, gold, copper, and gas reserves, which

generate substantial revenue for the federal government.

The ethnic Baloch allege that the Pakistani state has neglected their community and exploited the province's mineral resources. The anger fuelled separatist sentiments, with the province witnessing at least five rebellion movements since the formation of Pakistan in 1947.

The latest wave of rebellion began in the early 2000s to demand a larger share of the province's resources and even calls for complete independence. The Pakistani security forces have since launched a severe crackdown on the rebellion, killing thousands of people in the last two decades.

Gwadar, due to its economic prominence, has been a hotbed of violence by armed and separatist groups, the latest being in March this year, when eight men tried to enter the Gwadar Port Authority complex before they were killed by security officials.

Arrests and blockades

On Sunday, the BYC called for a "Baloch Rajee Muchi", or Baloch National Gathering, in Gwadar. However, as convoys from different parts of the vast province made their way to the city, law enforcement officials started blocking major highways that lead there, resulting in clashes in some places.

The BYC claims security forces opened fire during one such clash on Saturday in Mastung district, killing one person and wounding several others.

"The paramilitary force opened fire on a convoy comprising hundreds of people, including women and children, who were travelling from Quetta to Gwadar," BYC representative Bebag Baloch told Al Jazeera.

In a statement on Monday, the Pakistani military said one of its soldiers was also killed in the "unprovoked attacks by a



violent mob” and 16 other soldiers were injured.

Dozens of Baloch were arrested by security forces during the clashes as mobile and internet services were suspended in Gwadar for a fifth consecutive day on Wednesday.

The BYC said two of their prominent leaders, Sammi Deen Baloch and Sabiha Baloch, were picked up by the authorities in Gwadar on Monday and their whereabouts are unknown.

Angry protesters gathered in other towns in the province as well, including provincial capital Quetta, Kech and Mastung to demand their release.

Meanwhile, BYC leader Mahrang Baloch issued a statement late on Sunday night, outlining two main demands: the opening of highways to allow the Baloch protesters to reach Gwadar, and the release of dozens of their members arrested by law enforcement agencies since last week.

Speaking to a crowd of hundreds in Gwadar that night, Mahrang, 31, said the people of Gwadar had come out in large numbers to resist “state oppression”.

“The state and its institutions have attempted to prevent us from holding this gathering by blocking highways and arresting our people, but today the entire Gwadar is here

to send a message: we will not tolerate further oppression of the Baloch nation,” she said.

“I know I may be the next target of this state, but unity is our strength, and we must remain united.”

BYC member Sadia Baloch told Al Jazeera from Quetta on Tuesday that they will continue to protest until all those arrested are released.

“We have thousands of people protesting all over in Balochistan who were stopped by authorities from travelling to Gwadar,” she told Al Jazeera. “Sammi and Sabiha were picked up from a sit-in and we don’t know where they are. Nobody from local authorities is giving a response.”

Al Jazeera reached out to local authorities and government officials in Gwadar and Quetta, but did not get any response.

‘Repeated punitive crackdowns’

Balochistan’s Chief Minister Sarfraz Bugti on Monday slammed the protests.

“We were offering them space to hold a rally elsewhere, but they refused and remained adamant to hold it in Gwadar. The purpose behind this chaos is to sabotage all the development and progress

that the province has seen,” he said from inside the state assembly.

Bugti said that while the citizens have a right to assemble, they should not have the “intentions to disrupt peace and order”.

But rights group Amnesty International on Tuesday accused the authorities of trying to “vilify and criminalise peaceful protesters”.

“Every time Baloch protests take place, their demands are met with violence by security forces and mass arrests,” it said in a statement shared with Al Jazeera, demanding that “repeated punitive crackdowns” on Baloch protests must end.

“Amnesty International calls for an end to the brutal crackdown on the Baloch protests and the immediate and unconditional release of all those arrested for exercising their right of peaceful assembly,” it said.

The Human Rights Commission of Pakistan (HRCP) also criticised the “unnecessary” use of force against Baloch protesters and the suspension of internet and mobile services.

“They should constitute a high-level parliamentary delegation to meet with Baloch representatives and listen carefully to their demands,” it said in a statement.

Courtesy www.aljazeera.com



The 2024 U.S. Presidential Election: A Focus on Kamala Harris and Donald Trump

By Kanwal Munir

INTRODUCTION

The 2024 United States presidential election, scheduled for November 5, 2024, promises to be a landmark event in American politics. As the 60th presidential election in U.S. history, it will be the first to occur following the reallocation of Electoral College votes after the 2020 redistricting cycle. This election is characterized by a high-profile contest between Kamala Harris (D) and Donald Trump (R), both leading their respective parties with distinctive platforms and strategies. This article delves into their campaigns, examining their platforms, strategies, and the broader implications of their candidacies.

KAMALA HARRIS'S CANDIDACY

Announcement and Nomination

Kamala Harris, the current Vice President of the United States, officially announced her candidacy for president on July 21, 2024. Her announcement followed President Joe Biden's withdrawal from the race, positioning her as the presumptive Democratic nominee. According to an Associated Press survey of Democratic delegates, Harris had reached the majority delegate threshold necessary to secure the nomination by July 22, 2024. The Democratic Party is set to formally nominate its presidential candidate through a virtual delegate roll call vote in early August, solidifying Harris's status as the likely nominee.

Political Career and Platform

Harris's political career is distinguished by her roles as the District Attorney of San Francisco, Attorney General of California, and U.S. Senator from California before becoming Vice President. Her campaign focuses on continuing the achievements of the Biden administration while addressing



critical national issues. Key elements of her platform include:

Economic Policies

Harris advocates for a progressive tax system aimed at reducing economic inequality. She supports raising the minimum wage and expanding social safety nets to ensure broader economic security. Her platform emphasizes the need for substantial investments in infrastructure and public services to stimulate economic growth and address disparities.

Healthcare

Harris is a proponent of expanding the Affordable Care Act (ACA) and supports introducing a public option to provide affordable healthcare access to all Americans. Her plan includes addressing mental health and substance abuse issues, which she considers critical to overall health reform. Additionally, Harris has proposed increasing funding for preventive care and reducing prescription drug prices.

Climate Change

Harris is committed to tackling climate change through a multifaceted approach. Her platform includes rejoining the Paris Agreement, investing in renewable energy sources, and implementing stricter environmental regulations. She also emphasizes the

importance of transitioning to a green economy and creating jobs in sustainable industries.

Criminal Justice Reform

Drawing from her background as a prosecutor, Harris aims to reform the criminal justice system by addressing systemic racism, ending mass incarceration, and enhancing police accountability. Her proposals include revising sentencing laws, promoting alternatives to incarceration for non-violent offenses, and supporting community-based policing initiatives.

Harris has garnered significant endorsements from prominent Democratic figures, including governors, senators, and former presidential candidates. Influential leaders such as Pete Buttigieg, Roy Cooper, and Raphael Warnock have publicly supported her campaign. Additionally, Harris's campaign strategy focuses on grassroots organizing and digital outreach to engage voters, particularly among minority communities and younger demographics.

DONALD TRUMP'S CANDIDACY

Announcement and Nomination

Donald Trump, who served as the 45th President of the United States, declared his candidacy for the 2024 presidential

election on November 15, 2022. Despite his presidency being marked by controversies and two impeachments, Trump remains a significant force within the Republican Party. He secured the majority of delegates at the 2024 Republican National Convention on July 15, 2024, consolidating his position as the party's nominee.

Political Career and Platform

Trump's presidency was characterized by major policy shifts, including tax cuts, deregulation, and an "America First" foreign policy. His 2024 campaign revisits themes from his previous campaigns, focusing on:

Economic Nationalism

Trump advocates for policies that prioritize American workers and businesses. His platform includes supporting tariffs on foreign goods, renegotiating trade deals, and incentivizing companies to relocate jobs back to the United States. Trump argues that these measures are essential for protecting American industry and maintaining economic sovereignty.

Immigration

A cornerstone of Trump's campaign is his stance on immigration. He supports building a wall along the southern border, enforcing stricter immigration controls, and reducing legal immigration to safeguard American jobs and national security. Trump argues that strong immigration policies are necessary to address illegal immigration and uphold the rule of law.

Law Enforcement

Trump advocates for increased funding for police departments and supports tougher penalties for crimes. He opposes the defund the police movement and emphasizes the need for strong law enforcement to maintain public safety. His platform includes measures to enhance police training and community relations.

Foreign Policy

Trump's foreign policy is centered on the principle of "America First." He seeks to reduce U.S. involvement in international conflicts, renegotiate international agreements, and adopt a tougher stance on adversaries such as China and Iran.

Trump's approach involves reasserting U.S. interests and prioritizing domestic over international concerns.

Trump's campaign continues to leverage his strong base of support among Republican voters. His media strategy includes frequent rallies, social media engagement, and public appearances. The selection of U.S. Senator J.D. Vance (R-Ohio) as his vice-presidential running mate has also energized his campaign, particularly among conservative and populist voters.



ELECTION DYNAMICS

Key Battleground States

The 2024 election is anticipated to hinge on key battleground states such as Arizona, Georgia, Michigan, and Pennsylvania. Both Harris and Trump are expected to invest heavily in these states, employing targeted outreach and extensive advertising to secure crucial electoral votes. The shifting demographics and political landscapes in these states will be a focal point for campaign strategies.

Voter Mobilization

Voter mobilization is critical to the election's outcome. Harris's campaign is focused on increasing turnout among minority communities, women, and young voters. This includes organizing community events, leveraging digital platforms, and enhancing voter registration efforts. In contrast, Trump's campaign aims to mobilize his base of white working-class voters, rural communities, and conservative Christians. His strategy involves rallying his core supporters and addressing their concerns directly.

Both candidates will also need to engage independent and swing voters, who could play a decisive role in determining the election's outcome. Understanding and addressing the concerns of these voters will be crucial for both campaigns.

Major Issues

The 2024 presidential election is expected to be dominated by debates over the economy, healthcare, immigration, climate change, and the ongoing COVID-19

pandemic. The candidates' differing approaches to these issues highlight the broader ideological divide between progressivism and conservatism. Discussions on economic recovery, healthcare reform, and climate policies will be central to the campaign narratives.

CONCLUSION

The 2024 U.S. presidential election represents a critical juncture in American history. Kamala Harris's candidacy symbolizes a continuation of progressive policies and a historic advancement in representation and diversity, while Donald Trump's campaign reflects a resurgence of conservative values and economic nationalism. As the election approaches, both candidates will need to navigate a complex political landscape, address a divided electorate, and present compelling visions for the future of the United States. The results of this election will not only shape the next four years but also influence the nation's trajectory for years to come, potentially redefining key aspects of American political and social life.

Republican ascendancy and the future Middle East

Tensions to escalate



By Naqi Akbar

The decision by the Democrat camp to withdraw support from the incumbent President Joe Biden and literally leaving the field for the Republican candidate Donald Trump, has in its store major changes for the world peace as it transits into the calendar year 2025. With the two wars in the Middle East raging at high and low pace namely; containment of the Palestinian resistance and containment of Iran, the two agendas are likely to escalate in the Oval Office in the post November 4, 2024 scenario.

The reason, why the Republicans are likely to make a big difference rest in the fact that their last four years in the office between 2016-2020 were wrought with developments, which could have escalated into war or worse, if the Democrats interlude courtesy 2020 elections had not happened.

The Trump administration took no time in escalating the formation of the Abraham Accord Middle East in 2016-17, which was infact the erasing the Palestinian state in whichever form it existed till then. On the

other front, the JCPOA, a painstakingly made accord by the Rouhani reformist administration and Democrat Obama administration was thrown in the dustbin without any qualms by the Trump administration.

If the 2020 US elections had brought back the Republicans, a war with Iran and a decisive action against Palestinian resistance was a foregone conclusion. However, the electoral swing in United States saved the world a big conflict for at least four years on. The outbreak of Corona was another contributing factor for the United States to look inward, instead of outwards.

The events on October 7, 2023 did escalate the situation to the point where United States seems to have decided to plunge into the war. However, on ground it did not went beyond intelligence gathering along the Mediterranean coasts onboard Northrop Global Hawk pilotless drone. Despite the fact that the US administrations cannot afford to look the other way with the Jewish

Lobby, under Biden, it still tried to create a semblance of balancing things out for at least leaving some good will for the United States in the international arena.

During the high point of Iran and Israel escalation, there were talks of US talking directly to Iran to trade in cancellation of strike on Israel in exchange for forcing Israel to cease hostilities in Gaza. That was all indicative of the Biden administration will to take along all the stakeholders.

However, the scenario changed gradually in May 2024. The untimely death of the incumbent President Raeesi in a helicopter crash and the snap presidential elections in June end brought in a surprise winner for the Iranians. President Massoud ascendancy to the post as a reformist minded individual who had the support of even the disgruntled sections of the Iranian society and his acceptance by what we can term as Iranian establishment, meant that Iranian leadership is rebranding itself in a way to be viewed as a state which values progress as much as its ideological lines. In a way

Iranians are trying to go the Chinese Communist Party change of clothing, where a Marxist state emerges as a trading partner to be taken seriously. The Presidential investiture ceremony has been generally a private affair both at the Leadership office as well as in the parliament. However, this time, foreign guests are likely to stream in to Tehran.

A peek into the local Iranian Persian speaking media reveals that the society at large is pinning too many hopes on the president elect, more than even he had contemplated in the first place. The very reason that the reformist administration is being given an image of not a faction administration but belonging to all the Iranians, even those who are against the system altogether.

In the backdrop of these developments, the JCPOA revival is going to be the major task, as it would bring Iran back into the world trade regime, payment systems as well the international community. If the Iranian side initiative is to be gauged, the reformist president with support from Khamenei is likely to go full throttle for Iranian reentry into the trade arena, as resumption of trade and removal of sanctions will automatically translate into the economic growth and remove the causes of discontent in the Iranian society and economy.

Given the fact that there is no contender threatening enough among the Democrat

cadre to challenge Trump likely reelection as the President of the United States, the future scenario might be a liability than an asset for the Reform group in Iran domestically.

The JCPOA as finalized by the Rouhani-Obama admins was slaughtered by the Republicans in 2016. Any revival on the basis of common wisdom demands that both side in Tehran and in Washington as in place to practically revive that. Despite that fact that Biden will be an effective president till January 19, 2025, the Democrat administration will not be interested to finalize anything about whose continuity it is not sure itself. If they are sure that they can field in a strong candidate, then the scenario can be different.

As things stand, the next few months in the United States election battle will determine, how the global scenario will rest in the post January 20, 2025 period. If the Republicans gather much pace till the cut off time, it means that the incumbent Democrats will not set the ball rolling for the revival of JCPOA.

While the Republicans will not effective till January 20, 2025, the time of US Presidential investiture, the general sentiment will undoubtedly guide about the turn of events. A Republican ascendancy means; Israel will be emboldened enough to actually uproot in physical sense the Palestinian state as visualized in Oslo 1993 accord. This means an escalation in the current war

situation in Middle East.

For Iran, the responses are predictable. JCPOA might actually be put to rest and buried. The Israeli connection with the Republican administration, will mean that Israel will be able to market their idea successfully that the regime change in Tehran is the only option to get the lasting peace, from their definition in the Middle East. The likely scenarios can be crippling sanctions for Iran under the new reformist President; much like the Rouhani closing years. The sanctions can actually undo much of the goodwill generated within Iran for the Nezam. The republicans would certainly try to bring down the Nezam through economic and political unrest in Iran.

Conclusively, much of the scenario is still fluid with every possibility on ground. However, one thing is quite clear. The number of destabilizing factors will certainly escalate if the Republican victory is in the sight. It is going to be tough fight for Hamas and Iran to cross the proverbial gravitational pull of the current global order to achieve, what they have sights put on, for Hamas, the realization of some settlement with Global guarantees' of what is their rightful right. For Iran, it is high time that they be treated as growing economy and the state and not a bad boy of the street, made history sheeter due to the pressure of the Global supremo United States on the world at large.



'He likes family': Trump defends running mate's cat lady slur

By Graeme Baker

Donald Trump on Monday defended his running mate's claims that "childless cat ladies" had destroyed American values, but also said he believed adults without children were just as good as parents. JD Vance's 2021 comment that Vice-President Kamala Harris and other Democrats were "a bunch of childless cat ladies miserable at their own lives" resurfaced after Trump selected the Ohio senator as the Republican vice-presidential candidate.

In a Fox News interview on Monday, Trump said that Mr Vance "likes families", but Trump also said he did not place a higher value on parenting.

"You know, you don't meet the right person, or you don't meet any person. But you're just as good, in many cases, a lot better than a person that's in a family situation," he said.

Ms Harris, the presumptive Democrat candidate, has two stepchildren with her husband, lawyer Doug Emhoff. Mr Emhoff's ex-wife has called such attacks "baseless" and described Harris as a "loving, nurturing, fiercely protective" co-parent. Trump said Mr Vance was simply trying to show how much he values family life.

"He grew up in a very interesting family situation, and he feels family is good. And I don't think there's anything wrong in saying that," Trump said.

"All he said is he does... like I mean, for him, he likes family."

Asked by Fox News television host Laura Ingraham on Monday whether he could vouch for Mr Vance as an "excellent pick" for the November election, Trump said: "He's got has tremendous support, and he really does among a certain group of people - people who like families."

"That does not mean that people who aren't members of a big family... he's not against anything. He loves family, it's very important to him."

Mr Vance defended his roundly criticised remarks, saying that it was "obviously... a sarcastic comment". "People are focusing so much on the sarcasm and not on the substance of what I actually said," Mr Vance said during The Megyn Kelly Show on Friday. "The substance of what I said, Megyn - I'm sorry, it's true," he added.

Mr Vance, who has three children, said he was not criticising people who do not have children. "This is about criticising the Democratic Party for becoming anti-family and anti-children," he told.

"The simple point that I made is that having children, becoming a father, becoming a mother, I really do think it changes your perspective in a pretty profound way," he said. "I'm making an argument that our entire society has become sceptical and even hateful towards the idea of having kids."



On Friday, Mr Vance said: "I wish her step-children and Kamala Harris and her whole family the very best. The point is not that she's lesser. The point is that her party has pursued a set of policies that are profoundly anti-child."

'The best pick'

In the original interview with Tucker Carlson, Mr Vance questioned why some leading politicians did not have children. He named Ms Harris as an example.

"The entire future of the Democrats is controlled by people without children," he said at the time. "How does it make any sense we've turned our country over to people who don't really have a direct stake in it?"

The senator from Ohio said the country was being run "by a bunch of childless cat ladies who are miserable at their own lives and the choices that they've made and so they want to make the rest of the country miserable too". Actress Jennifer Aniston, who has spoken publicly about her struggles to have children through in-vitro fertilisation (IVF), was among those who recently criticised his comments.

"I truly can't believe that this is coming from a potential VP of the United States," she said on Thursday. US Secretary of Transportation Pete Buttigieg, a Democrat, named by Mr Vance in the original interview, also addressed the comments earlier this week, speaking about adopting twins with his husband, Chasten.

"The really sad thing is he said that after Chasten and I had been through a fairly heartbreaking setback in our adoption journey," Mr Buttigieg told CNN's The Source programme. Speaking to Fox News, Trump co-campaign chairman Chris LaCivita rejected any suggestion that Trump might regret his choice of running mate.

"JD was the best pick," Mr LaCivita said. "The president loves him. We love him."

Courtesy BBC

Painful signs of a UK in decay



By Abbas Nasir

Decaying and decrepit are the words that jump to mind whenever a mention is made of the United Kingdom (of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, no less) and this can be attributed to the 14 years of Conservative rule that catered primarily to the needs of the few.

It is abundantly clear that from a social welfare state in the post-war years, it has now regressed to letting the less fortunate, the have-nots fend for themselves. The British pride, the National Health Service (NHS), the prime example, is in tatters, having been systematically deprived of adequate funding.

There was method to this madness. It was aimed at failing the state-run system and promoting and giving an ever-growing stake to the private sector companies in the health sector. This, despite the American example of a similar private sector-run system, which may provide state-of-the-art healthcare to those who can pay, but leaves millions without any cover because they can't afford it.

Despite the growing footprint of the

private, profit-driven, companies by stealth in the UK, the Tories continued to harp on about a system that was 'free at the point of delivery'. That it may be so but gross underfunding of the NHS has created an existential crisis for it. And many on the right see a quick fix in an ever-great private sector role.

It is abundantly clear that from a social welfare state in the post-war years, the UK has regressed.

All opinion surveys show a majority of Britons prefer it over any alternative. Equally, the surveys demonstrate they are also unhappy with the state of affairs. That is not surprising. Underfunding has meant acute shortages of staff from doctors and nurses to technicians.

Our friends visiting us from the UK last week were shocked to see that in a relatively much less prosperous European country, Spain, we could get a doctor's appointment literally for the next day, whereas they had to wait weeks if they needed to see their GP.

And the GP is the gateway for all diagnostic

tests to referrals to specialists in case of need. The list of those needing elective (non-emergency) surgery in the UK has swollen to nearly eight million people. The NHS constitution mandates no more than 18 weeks waiting time for such procedures; the reality is that in many cases more than half the patients have to wait more than 52 weeks.

One could argue that non-emergency surgery can wait. But if you are suffering from cataract and have seriously impaired vision or need a hip or knee replacement because of acute arthritis you are dysfunctional and can't live a normal life. Ergo, the waiting times are atrocious.

Shortages of GPs and non-availability of appointments mean that people who are ill end up in Hospital Accident and Emergency departments which themselves are short-staffed. Waiting times run into 18-24 hours at A&Es for ailments classified as non-life-threatening.

A friend's mother in her late 80s who suffers from dementia had to wait 30 hours before she was attended to. Because of her

particular predicament, it created a very trying situation for her family members who'd taken her to hospital.

The patients are not the only ones on the receiving end. My elder daughter who is a doctor in the NHS has routinely spoken of feeling burnt out while working in A&E because of the long working hours and the stress of not being able to treat all patients within a reasonable time frame.

Two of her colleagues have said adieu to the profession after investing so much time and effort in becoming doctors because the stress became unbearable and they feared it impacted their decision-making ability adversely. They quit rather than take risks with patient safety.

There have been many signs of the decay in the UK under the Tories. One that affects me personally whenever I travel there is how poorly and callously under-resourced the facilities for the disabled are. I use a wheelchair as an injury has eaten into my ability to walk long distances in short periods of time, as I used to, despite having had polio as a child.

If you need a wheelchair, the UK must be at the bottom of the pile. Yes, we groan and moan endlessly and, I'd say, rightly about the lack of facilities and empathy for those needing extra help in Pakistan but at least at airports I have never experienced any issues getting a wheelchair.

Even with its free market, capitalist ethos,



the US has legislation safeguarding the rights of the disabled/ differently abled. Over the years, whenever I have arrived at a US airport I have never had to wait for a wheelchair. It is waiting at the door and the cabin crew ensure I am first off the aircraft.

Spain is no different. In fact, those tasked with facilitating people with special needs always seem to take pride and pleasure in doing their jobs. They are forever smiling. My recent experience at Munich airport was identical.

I shudder at the thought of arriving at London Heathrow or Gatwick airport, for that matter, because the waiting times for a wheelchair and the attitude of most of the special handling staff makes me feel as if I am not wanted, as if my disability is a ruse to bother those presumably paid to assist me.

The family has to go one way and I another. More than once they have gone through immigration, picked up our luggage, exited the arrivals area and waited up to 45 minutes for me outside. A lovely South African-origin Swiss staff member who assisted me at Zurich airport just this last month said they never separated families from passengers with special needs, as it created avoidable anxiety.

When I groaned about how awful things were in the UK, he had the perfect explanation:

"Sir, they colonised us, looted and plundered our resources. That wealth seems to be running out now. And that's the reason everything is falling apart."

Courtesy Dawn



'Human stories are always about one thing - death': Why the shadow of death and WW1 hang over The Lord of the Rings

By Myles Burke

In a 1968 interview, the BBC spoke to author JRR Tolkien about his experiences during World War One, how they had a profound effect and influenced his epic fantasy novel, *Lord of the Rings*.

"Stories – frankly, human stories are always about one thing – death. The inevitability of death," The *Lord of the Rings* author JRR Tolkien told a BBC documentary in 1968, as he tried to explain what his fantasy magnum opus was really about.

The novel, the first volume of which was published 70 years ago this week, has enthralled readers ever since it hit the shelves in 1954. The *Lord of the Rings*, with its intricate world-building and detailed histories of lands populated with elves, hobbits and wizards, threatened by the malevolent Sauron, had, by the time of the interview, already become a bestseller and a cornerstone of the fantasy genre.

To better explain what he meant by the story being about death, Tolkien reached into his jacket pocket and pulled out his wallet, which contained a newspaper clipping. He then read aloud from that article, which quoted from Simone de Beauvoir's *A Very Easy Death*, her moving 1964 account of her mother's desire to cling to life during her dying days.

"There is no such thing as a natural death," he read. "Nothing that happens to a man is ever natural, since his presence calls the world into question. All men must die: but for every man his death is an accident and, even if he knows it and consents to it, an unjustifiable violation."

"Well, you may agree with the words or not," he said. "But those are the key-spring of *The Lord of the Rings*."

It was a kind of double coming home, which made the effect of the ordinary English meadows, countryside breaks, immensely important to me – JRR Tolkien



The spectre of death had loomed large over Tolkien's early life and those experiences had profoundly shaped the way he saw the world, influencing the themes that he would repeatedly revisit when writing his tales of Middle-earth.

John Ronald Reuel Tolkien was born in 1892 to "two, very English, extremely British parents" in South Africa, where they had moved, while his father pursued a career in banking.

When he was three, during a visit home to see his English family with his mother and his younger brother Hilary, his father – who had planned to join them – unexpectedly died of rheumatic fever. Being the breadwinner, his sudden death rendered the family destitute. His mother, Mabel, decided to stay in the UK, settling in a cheap cottage in the village of Sarehole, near Birmingham.

His return to England was "a kind of double coming home, which made the effect of the ordinary English meadows, countryside breaks, immensely important to me," Tolkien told the BBC.

The mixture of the countryside of the surrounding area and the industrialised nearby Birmingham went on to heavily influence the landscapes he later conjured up in *The Lord of the Rings*.

Tolkien was extremely close to Mabel, who taught her sons at home and awakened in him a love of storytelling, myths and botany. She nurtured his remarkable gift for languages, schooling him in Latin, French and German at an early age, and inspiring him to invent his own languages later purely for enjoyment.

When he was 12, Mabel was diagnosed with type 1 diabetes, which before the discovery of insulin in 1921, proved to be a fatal prognosis. Tolkien's mother had converted to Catholicism at the turn of the century, and when she died on 14 November 1904, the two orphaned boys were left in the custody of a priest, Father Xavier Morgan, and then with an aunt.

Tolkien's academic prowess secured him a place at Oxford University, where he studied classics before switching to philology because of his talent for languages.

When World War One broke out in 1914, he managed to defer enlisting due to his studies. But upon his graduation the following year and faced with increasing social pressure from relatives, he was commissioned as a second lieutenant in the Lancashire Fusiliers and shipped off to the Western Front.

'Mud, chaos and death'

Tolkien's battalion arrived at the Somme in early July 1916. The battle would prove to be one of the bloodiest conflicts in human history. The brutal horror of the trench warfare he endured there, with its mud, chaos and death, left an indelible mark on him, and went on to permeate his later writing.

He'd lost two of his dearest friends on the Somme and, you can imagine, he must have been inside as much of a wreck as he was physically – John Garth

The war-ravaged battlefields of France and Belgium can be seen in his descriptions of the hellish, desolate landscape of Mordor in *The Lord of the Rings*. Echoes of the immense suffering and carnage he witnessed – wrought by the new mechanised warfare – can be found in his portrayal of the terrifying orcish war machines and the corrupted wizard Saruman's deforestation of Middle-earth.

Author of the book *Tolkien and the Great War*, John Garth, told the BBC in 2017 that he believed the novelist used his writing like an "exorcism" of the horrors he saw in WW1. Trench fever was not the only way in which the war affected the novelist, he suggests. "He'd lost two of his dearest friends on the Somme and, you can imagine, he must have been inside as much of a wreck as he was physically," he said.

That belief is shared by Dr Malcolm Guite, poet and theologian. He told the BBC *Great Lives* podcast in 2021 that "there are details which I think come straight from his war experience, and which he probably couldn't have written directly [afterwards]. He was traumatised. So, the dead bodies in the pools in the marshes looking up. The terrible waste in front of Mordor with the poisonous fumes coming out of the earth. That's all out of the Western Front."

Similarly, Tolkien's experience of the deep

camaraderie formed between soldiers enduring such atrocities adds subtle, meaningful realism to the unwavering bond between the two leading hobbits in *The Lord of the Rings*, Sam and Frodo.

"Tolkien specifically said that was the relationship of those young officers who were slaughtered, and their batman [a soldier assigned to an officer as a personal servant] as they were called," said Guite. In November 1916, after months of battle, Tolkien contracted trench fever, a disease caused by lice, and he was invalided back to England. By the end of the war, almost all of the people he had served with in his battalion had been killed.



While Tolkien's wartime experiences may have added depth and authenticity to the mythological world he created, the author himself always maintained that he did not write *The Lord of the Rings* as an allegory for WW1, or indeed any other specific event from history.

"People do not fully understand the difference between an allegory and an application," he told the BBC in 1968.

"You can go to a Shakespeare play and you can apply it to things in your mind, if you like, but they are not allegories... I mean many people apply the Ring to the nuclear bomb and think that was in my mind, and the whole thing is an allegory of it. Well, it isn't."

But part of the enduring appeal of *The Lord*

of the Rings is that it is more than merely a direct allegory. The themes it explores – war and trauma, industrialisation and the despoiling of the natural world, the corrupting influence of power and how the bond of friendship can help people endure adversity and loss – resonate far beyond a single event or time.

The fantasy novel has, at times, been dismissed by some critics as just an adventure story of valiant friends battling an unspeakable evil. But *The Lord of the Rings* is not a glorification of war – it is a reflection on how death and the trauma of conflict irrevocably changes those who witness and live through it.

The dislocation felt by many soldiers who served in WW1 on their return home, greeted by those who were unable to comprehend what they had seen and done, is mirrored in the last book when the hobbits return to the Shire. They find their world changed in the aftermath of the battle, with their fellow hobbits unable to fathom why Frodo and Sam, who are haunted by what they have been through on their journey, can never be that innocent again.

"One reviewer once said it was a very jolly book, isn't it?" Tolkien said to the BBC. "All the right boys come home and everybody is happy and glad. It isn't true, of course. He couldn't have read the story."

Courtesy BBC

Govt decision to introduce firewall and its side effect



By Ayesha Shaeban

What basically firewall is?

A firewall is a critical component of network security that acts as a barrier between a trusted internal network and an untrusted external network, such as the internet. Its primary purpose is to monitor, filter, and control incoming and outgoing network traffic based on predetermined security rules. This helps to protect networks from unauthorized access, cyberattacks, and other security threats. Firewalls can be implemented in both hardware and software forms, and they play a crucial role in safeguarding sensitive information and maintaining the integrity of network operations.

Here's a detailed look at its functions and importance:

Functions of a Firewall

1. Traffic Filtering
2. Access Control
3. Intrusion Detection and Prevention
4. VPN Support
5. Content Filtering
6. Logging and Monitoring

Importance of a Firewall

1. Network Security
2. Regulatory Compliance

3. Prevention of Data Loss
4. Mitigation of Cyber Threats
5. Enhanced Network Performance
6. Centralized Security Management

Pakistan Government's Decision to Introduce Firewall

Background

In recent times, the Pakistan government has taken steps to enhance the country's cybersecurity infrastructure, one of which includes the introduction of advanced firewall systems. This decision comes in response to increasing cyber threats, including hacking attempts, data breaches, and other forms of cybercrime that pose risks to national security, economic stability, and privacy.

Key Details of the Decision

Objective:

Purpose: The primary goal of introducing new firewall technology is to bolster the security of governmental and critical national infrastructure. This initiative is part of a broader strategy to safeguard sensitive information and ensure the protection of digital assets against cyber threats.

Technology

Advanced Features: The firewalls to be introduced are likely to be next-generation firewalls (NGFWs) equipped with features such as deep packet inspection, intrusion detection and prevention systems (IDPS), and advanced threat protection.

Implementation

Phased Rollout: The deployment of firewall systems will likely be carried out in phases, starting with critical governmental departments and key infrastructure. Over time, the implementation may extend to other sectors as needed.

Regulatory Framework

Policies and Guidelines: Along with the introduction of firewalls, the government is expected to establish policies and guidelines for their usage. This might include protocols for monitoring, maintenance, and response to security incidents.

Impact

Enhanced Security: The introduction of advanced firewalls aims to improve the security of digital communications and data management, reducing the risk of unauthorized access and cyberattacks.

Economic and Strategic Benefits: Improved cybersecurity can protect economic interests by safeguarding business operations and sensitive information, as well as contributing to national security by protecting critical infrastructure.

Challenges and Considerations

Costs: The implementation of advanced firewall systems involves significant costs, including procurement, installation, and ongoing maintenance. The government will need to allocate budgetary resources and manage these expenses effectively.

Training and Awareness: Successful deployment of firewalls also requires training for IT personnel and raising awareness about new security protocols among users to ensure proper use and management.

Ongoing Updates: Cyber threats are constantly evolving, so the firewall systems will need regular updates and maintenance to stay effective against new types of attacks.

Public and Private Sector Collaboration

Coordination: The government is likely to collaborate with private sector cybersecurity firms to leverage expertise and technology in deploying and managing the new firewall systems.

Partnerships: Engaging with industry leaders and cybersecurity experts can enhance the effectiveness of the firewall implementation and contribute to the development of a robust national cybersecurity strategy.

The decision by the Pakistan government to introduce advanced firewall systems represents a proactive approach to enhancing national cybersecurity. By investing in state-of-the-art technology and establishing a comprehensive regulatory framework, the

government aims to protect critical infrastructure, safeguard sensitive data, and improve overall digital security. This initiative reflects a commitment to addressing the growing threat of cyberattacks and ensuring the integrity and safety of digital communications across the nation.

How this decision might affect Pakistan and its people

The Pakistan government's decision to introduce advanced firewall systems represents a significant step in enhancing the nation's cybersecurity framework. This move is intended to bolster the protection of critical infrastructure and sensitive data from increasing cyber threats. However, the implementation of these firewalls comes with potential side effects that could impact both the country and its citizens. One major concern is the potential increase in government surveillance and the invasion of privacy, as advanced firewalls often involve deep packet inspection and monitoring of internet traffic. This could lead to restrictions on access to information and online services, raising issues about freedom of expression and the availability of content.



The financial burden associated with deploying and maintaining sophisticated firewall systems is another concern. The costs involve not only purchasing and installing the technology but also updating and managing it to counter evolving threats. This financial strain might be felt by both the government and businesses, particularly those needing to comply with new security measures. Businesses may face additional costs related to compliance, such as software updates and training, and could experience operational disruptions if the firewalls inadvertently block legitimate traffic.

Moreover, the technical complexity of managing advanced firewalls could lead to challenges such as false positives, where legitimate traffic is incorrectly flagged as malicious, causing unnecessary interruptions. Public services that rely on online platforms may also experience temporary disruptions during the installation and configuration phases. To address these concerns, the government must ensure that firewall systems are implemented with careful consideration of privacy laws and operational efficiency. Maintaining transparency and managing public trust will be crucial in balancing the need for enhanced security with the protection of individual rights and freedoms.

Technology and Changing Consumption Lifestyles

The future of consumption in Pakistan is intricately linked to technological advancements, infrastructural development and sustainable practices



By Amir Jahangir

By the year 2027, annual consumption in Pakistan is expected to see significant growth, and this will inevitably have an environmental impact. The need for sustainable consumerism in Pakistan has never been more critical. The good news is that Pakistani consumers are increasingly willing to pay a premium for customised products that meet their needs and preferences. However, with this empowerment comes the responsibility for businesses to meet higher standards. In Pakistan, where consumer spending is crucial to fuelling the economy, trust in businesses is often lagging; and yet, building and maintaining consumer trust is essential for sustained economic growth. Promoting green technologies and eco-friendly products can play a significant role in this regard. The expanding middle class in Pakistan is demanding healthier consumer options, a trend that is shaping the future of consumption.

The rise of automation poses a significant challenge to inclusive consumption. If people lose their jobs to automation, their ability to fuel consumption-driven economic growth diminishes. It is therefore crucial to address the potential displacement caused by automation and ensure that economic growth remains inclusive. Viewed as an opportunity, people should transition from low-skill jobs to more sophisticated and higher-paid positions. However, the key lies in skill development and elevating labour standards.

Technology has revolutionised the way consumers shop and pay for goods and services and the Digital Payments Road Map outlined in the State Bank of Pakistan's (SBP) Strategic Vision 2023-2028 aims to make digital payments as convenient, efficient and cost-effective as cash transactions. Key initiatives include expanding Raast, Pakistan's instant

payment system, to cover almost all retail and bulk payments, thereby strengthening the SBP's capacity to enhance the use of digital payments and ultimately creating more data from the transactional economy. With the digital economy's expansion, building consumer trust in online transactions is paramount. Ensuring robust cybersecurity measures, transparent data handling practices, and reliable online services are critical to gaining and maintaining consumer trust.

The Internet of Things (IoT) is set to revolutionise consumer behaviour intelligence in Pakistan. IoT devices can collect vast amounts of data on consumer preferences, habits and behaviours. This data can be used to gain deeper insights into consumer needs and tailor products and services accordingly. Smart home devices, wearable technology, smart internet-connected cars and connected appliances are just a few

Global warming and its impact on weather



By Ayesha Shaeban

Global warming, driven primarily by human activities such as burning fossil fuels, deforestation, and industrial processes, has had profound effects on climate and weather patterns worldwide. As we progress through 2024, the repercussions of climate change have become increasingly evident, influencing weather events, temperature norms, and environmental conditions. This comprehensive overview explores how global warming has impacted 2024's climate and weather, detailing both current effects and ongoing consequences.

Rising Global Temperatures

One of the most immediate effects of global warming is the increase in global temperatures. In 2024, the world has experienced some of the highest average temperatures on record. According to recent data, global temperatures have risen approximately 1.2°C above pre-industrial levels, a trend consistent with the broader pattern observed over the past few decades. This rise in temperature has led to more frequent and intense heatwaves across various regions. Cities and rural areas alike have faced record-breaking temperatures, putting additional strain on infrastructure,

health systems, and energy resources. For instance, several European cities experienced unprecedented heatwaves this summer, resulting in higher rates of heat-related illnesses and fatalities.

Intensified Extreme Weather Events

Global warming has significantly amplified the intensity and frequency of extreme weather events. In 2024, the world has witnessed a surge in the occurrence of severe weather phenomena, including hurricanes, typhoons, and cyclones. These storms have become more powerful due to warmer sea surface temperatures, which provide additional energy for storm systems. The Atlantic hurricane season, for example, has been particularly active, with several major hurricanes making landfall with unprecedented strength. Similarly, the Pacific has seen an increase in the number and severity of typhoons, causing widespread destruction and flooding in affected areas.

Altered Precipitation Patterns

Changes in precipitation patterns are another notable impact of global warming. In 2024, many regions have experi-

enced shifts in rainfall distribution, leading to both increased flooding and prolonged droughts. Areas that were once reliable sources of rainfall have seen diminished precipitation, while other regions have faced intense and concentrated rainfall events. For example, parts of South Asia have encountered severe flooding due to torrential rains, while regions in Australia have faced extended drought conditions, affecting agriculture and water supplies. These altered precipitation patterns not only impact water availability but also contribute to the deterioration of ecosystems and biodiversity.

Melting Ice and Rising Sea Levels

The melting of polar ice caps and glaciers continues to be a significant consequence of global warming. In 2024, the Arctic and Antarctic regions have experienced accelerated ice loss, contributing to rising sea levels. The melting of ice sheets in Greenland and Antarctica has led to increased freshwater flow into the oceans, exacerbating sea level rise. Coastal areas worldwide are facing the impacts of this phenomenon, with more frequent and severe coastal flooding and erosion. Cities such as Miami and

Jakarta are grappling with the challenges posed by rising sea levels, which threaten to inundate low-lying areas and displace communities.

Disruption of Ecosystems

Global warming has profound effects on ecosystems and biodiversity. In 2024, many ecosystems are showing signs of stress due to changing climate conditions. Coral reefs, for example, continue to suffer from coral bleaching events caused by elevated sea temperatures. These reefs, which are vital to marine biodiversity, are struggling to recover from repeated bleaching episodes. Similarly, terrestrial ecosystems are experiencing shifts in species distributions, with some species moving to higher elevations or latitudes in search of suitable habitats. The disruption of ecosystems can have cascading effects on food chains and overall ecological balance, impacting both wildlife and human communities that rely on these systems.

Impact on Agriculture and Food Security

Agriculture has been significantly affected by global warming, with 2024 witnessing disruptions in crop production and food security. Higher temperatures and altered precipitation patterns have led to reduced yields for several staple crops, including wheat, rice, and maize. Heat stress and water scarcity have become major challenges for farmers, impacting their ability to produce sufficient food. This, in turn, has led to increased food prices and concerns about food security in vulnerable regions. The agricultural sector is facing pressure to

adapt to changing conditions, with innovations in crop varieties and farming practices being explored to mitigate the impacts of climate change.

Human Health and Well-being

The effects of global warming extend to human health and well-being. In 2024, there has been an increase in health issues related to climate change. Heatwaves have contributed to a rise in heat-related illnesses and fatalities, particularly among vulnerable populations such as the elderly and those with pre-existing health conditions. Additionally, changing weather patterns have influenced the spread of vector-borne diseases, with warmer temperatures and altered precipitation creating more favorable conditions for disease-carrying vectors like mosquitoes. Regions that were previously less affected by diseases such as malaria and dengue fever are now experiencing increased incidence rates.

Economic Impacts

The economic ramifications of global warming are becoming more apparent in 2024. The costs associated with extreme weather events, such as damage to infrastructure, property, and agricultural losses, are mounting. Insurance companies are facing increased claims related to weather-related damages, leading to higher premiums for individuals and businesses. Governments and organizations are also investing heavily in disaster response and recovery efforts, adding financial strain to national and local budgets. The economic impacts of global warming are prompting

discussions about the need for increased investment in climate adaptation and mitigation measures to protect communities and economies from future losses.

Ongoing and Future Implications

The effects of global warming observed in 2024 are part of a broader trend that is likely to continue in the coming years. As greenhouse gas emissions persist and global temperatures rise, the frequency and intensity of extreme weather events are expected to increase. The continued melting of ice caps, rising sea levels, and disruption of ecosystems will pose ongoing challenges for societies worldwide. It is crucial for governments, organizations, and individuals to take proactive measures to address climate change, including reducing emissions, investing in renewable energy, and implementing adaptation strategies to minimize the impacts of a warming world.

In conclusion, global warming has profoundly affected climate and weather patterns in 2024, leading to rising temperatures, intensified extreme weather events, altered precipitation patterns, melting ice, and disruptions to ecosystems. These impacts have significant implications for agriculture, human health, and economies. As we move forward, addressing the root causes of climate change and implementing effective adaptation and mitigation strategies will be essential for managing the ongoing and future challenges associated with a warming planet.

Courtesy The News



The 10 players with the most Golden Boot awards in Europe in the 2000s: Cristiano Ronaldo only fourth...



By Mitchell Wilks

Cristiano Ronaldo's scoring prowess has surprisingly been bettered on several occasions by his rivals when comparing Golden Boot awards.

Scoring goal is the most difficult trick of all in the game of football in the eyes of many, from grassroots level right up to the very top of the mountain. It's jaw-dropping, then, when we see some of the game's biggest names racking up Golden Boot awards like they're going out of fashion.

In what is a true showing of elite-level quality, we've taken a look at the 10 male players with the most domestic Golden Boot awards to their name in Europe's top five leagues since 2000.

10. Mohamed Salah

Sneaking into the list with three Premier League Golden Boots to his name so far, Salah's firing rate since joining Liverpool in 2017 has been nothing short of outstanding.

He set the record for the most goals scored in a Premier League season (32) in his first season back in England's top-flight and has also lifted a Premier League title, been named the Premier League Player of the Season and won a Champions League.

That's all been as a right winger too, by the way. Insane stuff.

9. Edinson Cavani

A real throwback striker, they don't make them like Cavani anymore. He's also won three Golden Boot awards in Europe's top five leagues, two of which came during a glorious and trophy-laden stint with Paris Saint-Germain, the other one coming in 2012-13 with Napoli.

'El Matador' is actually Les Parisiens' second all-time top scorer, which makes it somewhat surprising to hear that he only finished as top scorer in Ligue 1 on two occasions, especially considering he left Paris having also won six league titles.

8. Thierry Henry

Despite having not kicked a ball professionally since 2014 when he retired, Henry still holds a spot in this list, which is testament to his freakish abilities during his peak years in the 2000s.

All four of the Frenchman's Golden Boot awards came in the Premier League with Arsenal, which remains the most Golden Boot awards won in the league by one player.

Even more impressively, three of Henry's four came back-to-back-to-back, from 2003 to 2006. Insane scoring prowess.

7. Ciro Immobile

Somehow significantly overlooked and criminally underrated for much of his career, Immobile spent years plugging away and terrorising goalkeepers in Serie A with Lazio, without much fuss ever being made about him.

Eighth in the all-time scorer rankings for Serie A, Immobile is also Lazio's all-time scorer and won the European Golden Shoe in 2019-20 when he fired home 36 league goals, equalling the record for the most scored in a season in Italy's top-flight.

He's at Besiktas these days and is thus unable to add to his tally due to being out of Europe's top five, but what a player.

6. Harry Kane

Enough of the 'fraud until he wins a trophy nonsense'. We're not having it and neither should you.

Kane won three Premier League Golden Boot awards at Tottenham, the final of which in 2020-21 came in a season where they finished seventh. He then moved to Bayern Munich in 2023-24 and finished his first season in Bavaria as the European Golden Shoe winner with 36 goals. That is outstanding.

At 31, the English forward has been painfully unlucky to have not won a major honour, but his scoring prowess can never be denied.

5. Zlatan Ibrahimovic

The reason why Cavani couldn't add more to his name, Ibrahimovic finished as Ligue 1 top scorer three times himself while at PSG, after having already finished as Serie A's 'Capocannoniere' on two occasions – with two rival clubs.

Zlatan hit the ground running with Inter and finished as Serie A top scorer in 2008-09 as they won the league, but after a brief spell at Barcelona where he fell out with Pep Guardiola, he returned to Italy with Milan and finished as top scorer again in 2011-12 to fire them to the Scudetto. That made him the only foreign player to have won the Serie A Golden Boot with two separate teams.

4. Cristiano Ronaldo

That's right – the five-time Ballon d'Or winner doesn't even make the podium in this list.

And unless he makes a dramatic return to European football and recovers his best form, this is as high as Ronaldo will get. The Portuguese forward has won five Golden Boot awards across three of Europe's top five leagues, with his most memorable work coming with Real Madrid.

Ronaldo finished La Liga top scorer on three separate occasions, all three times of which saw him win the European Golden Shoe. However, it all started at Manchester United, where he scored 31 Premier League goals (and 42 in all competitions) in 2007-08, winning his first European Golden Shoe and later his first Ballon d'Or.

3. Kylian Mbappe

Rather astoundingly, Mbappe has won the Ligue 1 Golden Boot award six times, but is yet to actually win a European Golden Boot at all.

Mbappe, now 25, has won the Ligue 1 Golden Boot every season since winning his first in 2018-19 and thus arrives to Real Madrid with a freakish scoring pedigree. On the hunt for his first Champions League with Los Blancos, we're backing him to chase down his first European Golden Shoe also.

2. Robert Lewandowski

We're into the nigh-on superhuman scoring feats now and kicking off with Lewandowski, who has made career out of scoring goals for fun wherever he's been.

Seven of his eight Golden Boot awards came in the Bundesliga, winning two of them with Borussia Dortmund before an inevitable transfer to Bayern Munich, where the freakish firing rate only improved further.

Upon leaving Bayern for Barcelona in 2022, Lewandowski signed off as the only player other than Johan Cruyff to have won a European treble while being the top goalscorer in all three competitions. Baller.



1. Lionel Messi

Who else?

Perhaps surprisingly, Messi isn't clear in this list and has to share top spot with Lewandowski. But while many would say it's proof that Messi is human after all, we're more convinced it's actually just that Lewandowski might also be an alien.

Unsurprisingly, all eight of Messi's Golden Boots came at Barcelona where he scored 672 goals from 778 games. His time at PSG was much more forgettable, but his legacy was already cemented by the time he had to move to the French capital in 2021.

Nobody is yet to eclipse or even equal his record of six European Golden Shoes, and we're unsure if anyone ever will. GOAT.

Courtesy MSN

We wanted to go out with a bang Niteworks say farewell



By Jonathan Geddes

There is no rock n' roll drama to the end of Niteworks.

The Skye band are calling it quits later this year, after a career in which they merged together traditional Gaelic music with club beats and electronica.

For guitarist and bagpipe player Allan MacDonald the decision was a simple, if emotional one.

"More and more we found that we weren't able to give the time to the music that it deserved or needed," he says, ahead of a closing run of shows in the autumn.

"Niteworks have never been our full time vocation - we all have day jobs. We're all getting a bit older, we all have families and it was getting to the point where you have to prioritise things.

"It got to a point of thinking 'let's go out on a high and draw a line under it. We wanted to go out with a bang."

That noisy farewell has included several headline festival appearances in recent months, including a memorable night topping the bill at the Reeling

festival in Rouken Glen Park in East Renfrewshire.

There has also been a farewell single, with the quartet - Allan, Innes Strachan, Christopher Nicolson and Ruairidh Graham - covering Runrig's "An Toll Dubh" ("The Dungeon"), a choice that showcased the Gaelic heart of the group.

"It's a warning to young Gaels, and to young people in general really, that if you don't use and celebrate your culture and your language there is a chance it will fade away and get locked in the dungeon," says Allan.

"We thought it was a good message to portray. We don't want to sound grandiose but just because we are bowing out that doesn't mean others should stop."

Modesty aside, the group deserve plenty of lavish praise.

They formed in 2007, having all been friends at school, and were inspired by "some very strong bands doing fusion music".

Among those acts was Martyn Bennett, the influential musician who fused Celtic and dance music together on several brilliant albums, before dying from cancer in 2005 aged just 33.

Within years Niteworks were being compared to the likes of Bennett, having blended together modern and trad styles.

They became regulars on the festival circuit and released three critically acclaimed albums, although Allan admits that scepticism regarding their usage of Gaelic came so heavily that it "felt like a fight, to a point where it was verging on demotivating".

That changed as time progressed, though.

"One of the things we have noticed over the time we have been doing this is a broader acceptance in general," reflects Allan.

"It's cooler than it used to be to be speaking Gaelic or to be playing trad music. For example we were asked to score the fireworks at Edinburgh's Hogmanay one year, which was the

first time they had done that to music.

"We were quite a small band at the time and that was just a massive opportunity for us. We packed it with Gaelic and with pipes and everyone seemed to love it."

Allan is a passionate advocate for Gaelic culture, with a recent report warning that the language is in a "perilous state" and he fears that "so much history of the Highlands would be lost" if the language disappeared.

"There is so much identity wrapped up in the Gaelic culture and language. I think it's just a great part of what it means to be Scottish, or from the Highlands, and on a more practical level it's because of this culture that all these opportunities opened up for us, and for many other musicians."

Gaelic culture is not the only thing connected to the band disappearing.

Scottish music venues have declined in recent years, and old haunts of the group - including the famous Ironworks venue in Inverness - have closed.

"I think people were going through a moment of panic after Covid, like what does this mean for live music going forward," says Allan.

"It's been boom and bust since then, where



immediately after Covid everyone was so desperate for stuff – the band included – and people were going to everything.

"Then once that rush died, it has been difficult, whether festivals have overstretched themselves or just that the costs of everything have gone up ridiculously.

"A prime example of that struggle is we were looking for a place in the Highlands to play on this tour. We searched every village hall and every possible place, and there's really only a handful available."

The quartet eventually settled on Eden Court in Inverness, which will join the Liquid Rooms in Edinburgh and the O2 Academy in Glasgow for the farewell tour

come November.

The guitarist and piper is by no means done with music, and is hoping to juggle work as a DJ with his day job at a renewable energy company.

As for the band, he simply hopes they'll leave a legacy behind them.

"It would be cool if in some years time people looked back and said we'd inspired them, and it would be great to see bands pushing it further in whatever direction they chose to take it.

"I hope someone takes bits of pieces from us and does their own thing with it."

Courtesy BBC



Ambassador Ladislav Steinhubel visits Pakistani Switzerland



The recent visit of H.E. Ladislav Steinhubel, the Ambassador of Prague, Czech Republic, and Madam Dagmar Steinhublova to Swat Valley, on invitation of Sardar Waqar Shahzad Advocate at his residence Gujar house Swat, was a true testament to the beauty and hospitality of the region. Over the course of three days, Mr and Mrs Ambassador were treated to an array of unforgettable experiences.

Their journey began with a warm welcome in Chakdara, followed by a delightful lunch at a local hotel before setting out for Malamjaba. The scenic route to Malamjaba offered breathtaking views of winding roads and forested hills, culminating in a visit to one of Swat's most beautiful hill stations.

After a relaxing time with high tea at the resort, the day concluded back at the hotel in Saidu Sharif.

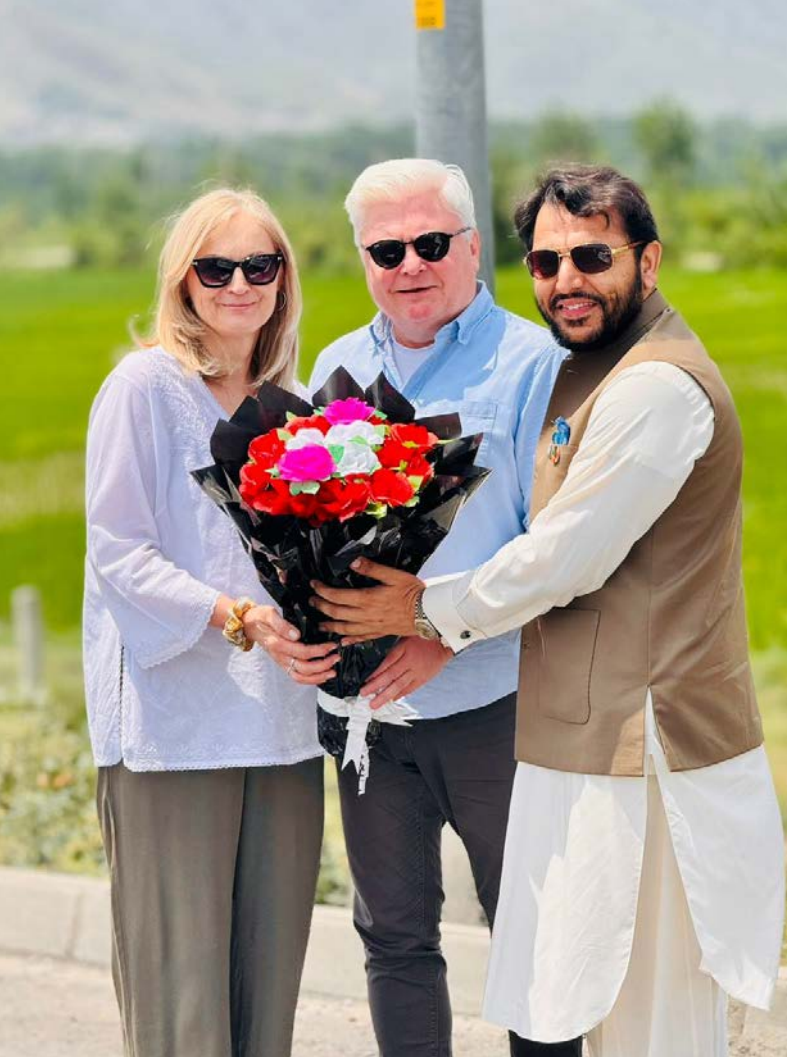
The following day saw an early start for Ushu, with a picturesque drive passing through Madyan, Bahrain, and Kalam before reaching the destination. A memorable lunch at the famous Ushu Hotel by the riverside, featuring fresh trout from the river, provided a truly delicious experience. The day ended with serene moments by the riverbank, capturing precious memories before returning to Saidu Sharif.

On the third day, a visit to the Mingora shopping market allowed the guests to

explore local handicrafts and dry fruits, adding cultural experiences to their itinerary. This was followed by a tree plantation event at Gujar House Kanju, where a Cake Cutting Ceremony celebrated the Pakistan-Czech Republic friendship.

En route to Chakdara, a stop at Manyar provided a glimpse of Buddhist history with the viewing of a Buddha statue, underscoring Swat Valley's rich heritage. The journey concluded with fond farewells as the guests made their way back home, marking the end of a remarkable visit that showcased the charm and cultural depth of Swat Valley. Such an enriching experience deserves to be shared in media papers, highlighting the unique bond between nations and the treasures of Swat Valley.









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