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Unrest Unlimited
Road to Nowhere

COP29 Summit
A Turning Point for Climate Change

US President-Elect
Trump's Jewish Cabinet Members & Muslims

PTI's "DO OR DIE" PROTEST ENDS IN FIASCO



Politics

PTI's "Do or Die" Protest Ends in Fiasco at D-Chowk By Javed Mahmood – Page 04



PTI Protest By Romana Afsheen – Page 08

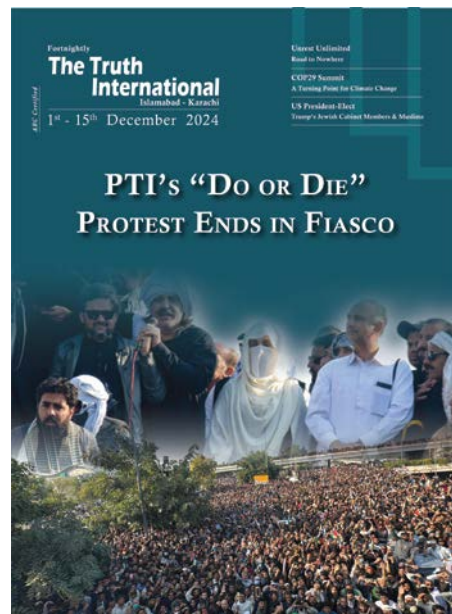


Unrest Unlimited: Road to Nowhere By Naqi Akbar – Page 12



Foreign Affairs

COP29 Summit: A Critical Turning Point for Global Climate Finance By Kanwal Munir – Page 14



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Trump's Jewish advisers and pro-Israel cabinet members stun the world By Hina Kashif – Page 18



Russia-Ukraine War: A Comprehensive Overview and Key Developments By Kanwal Munir – Page 24



Diplomatic Showdown: India-Canada Tensions Escalate By Hina Kashif – Page 27



"Strengthening Ties: A New Era of Pakistan-Belarus Cooperation through Strategic MOUs" By Hina Kashif – Page 30



Economy

IMF assessment of the economy of Pakistan: Govt faces tough fiscal challenges By Javed Mahmood – Page 33



World Bank sets ambitious goals for social protection to 500 million people by 2030 By Harris Choudhry – Page 37

National

IDEAS 2024: A Showcase of Pakistan's Defense Innovation and Global Engagement By Romana Afsheen – Page 39



Bloodshed in Kurram: Shia Muslims Face Brutal Attacks in Parachinar By Kanwal Munir – Page 42

Entertainment

Jannat Mirza stuns her millions of fans with stunning fashion By Harry Choudhry – Page 45



PTI's "Do or Die" Protest Ends in Fiasco at D-Chowk

The security officials launched a well-planned crackdown on the PTI protesters and arrested more than 500 PTI activists late Tuesday night while Bushra Bibi and Ali Amin Gandapur ran away from the D-Chowk, leaving their party workers at the mercy of the law enforcement agencies.



By Javed Mahmood

Late Tuesday night well-organized operation by the security officials at the D-Chowk entirely changed the scenario regarding the PTI's "Do or Die" protest. The protest that succeeded in reaching the D-Chowk after bulldozing multiple barriers and throwing away scores of containers at different places, the much-hyped protest of the PTI ended in a fiasco.

Now, a blame game has started within the PTI ranks as to who is responsible for the protest's failure. Importantly, most of the PTI leaders are blaming Bushra Bibi for this unexpected and shocking end of the Islamabad march, saying that "she insisted for protest at D-Chowk," ignoring party leaders' desire to shift the venue to Sangjani with the government's consent. Soon after the massive operation, PTI called off the protest.

The security officials launched a well-planned crackdown on the PTI protesters. They arrested more than 500 PTI activists late Tuesday night while Bushra Bibi and Ali Amin Gandapur ran away from the D-Chowk, leaving

their party workers at the mercy of the law enforcement agencies. The crackdown on PTI protesters took place in Islamabad late Tuesday night. Consequently, law enforcement forces cleared the key protest zones, including Kulsoom Plaza Chowk and the Blue Area. Reports indicate that the main PTI protest convoy has dispersed, with Imran Khan's wife, Bushra Bibi, and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Chief Minister Ali Amin Gandapur disappearing together in the same vehicle. Later on, PTI leaders confirmed that both the leaders were at the KPK Assembly Speaker's residence.

The operation, which involved Rangers, ATS commandos, and approximately 1,500 personnel from Punjab and Islamabad police, led to the arrest of over 500 PTI workers. In addition, security forces have reinstated all containers that protesters had removed from Jinnah Avenue to restore the blockades.

Initially, reports were suggesting that Bushra Bibi and Gandapur would be arrested. However, it later emerged that

the two had left their containers two hours prior. Witnesses reported intense shelling and gunfire between Khyber Chowk and Kulsoom Plaza as police advanced to clear the protest zones.

PTI container catches fire

Additionally, a key container used by PTI in their march caught fire near Kulsoom Plaza Chowk. Authorities are still investigating the cause of the blaze. Earlier in the evening, law enforcement teams from Rangers, Islamabad Police, and Punjab Police successfully cleared D-Chowk and China Chowk of PTI protesters.

The joint operation forced the demonstrators back to Kulsoom Plaza Chowk and Khyber Plaza Chowk. A large contingent of Rangers and Punjab Police was deployed to secure these areas, while police teams armed with tear gas were stationed on nearby rooftops. Tear gas was fired intermittently to disperse the remaining protesters, with several arrests taking place during the operation.



Cops welcome PTI protesters with intense tear gas shelling at D-Chowk

As PTI protesters gathered at Islamabad's D-Chowk, intense tear gas shelling ensued as security forces moved to control the situation amid a deadlock in negotiations between the government and the opposition.

Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif condemned what he described as an "attack by protesters," while the interior minister confirmed the deaths of at least four security personnel during the clashes.

The standoff comes as PTI convoys, traveling across the country since Sunday, converged on the capital for a major demonstration demanding the release of party founder Imran Khan and other concessions. Protesters were seen near D-Chowk, scaling containers placed by authorities to block their path. Army personnel were also stationed atop the barriers, maintaining a strong presence. D-Chowk, located in Islamabad's high-security Red Zone, has long been a focal point for political demonstrations. The area provides access to key government buildings, including the Parliament House, the Supreme Court, the Pakistan Secretariat, and the Prime Minister's Office.

Bushra Bibi insisted on the D-Chowk protest

Barrister Muhammad Ali Saif, Adviser to the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Chief Minister on Information, has accused federal ministers of planning operations against protesters under the cover of darkness. Saif claimed that "eight bodies have already been transferred to hospitals" and alleged the use of "systematic sniping" by security forces. The remarks came as thousands of supporters of jailed former prime minister Imran Khan stormed Islamabad, escalating their confrontation with the government. The protesters, led by Khan's wife, reached the edge of the highly fortified red zone, where hundreds of security personnel pushed them back. The red zone, guarded by army soldiers, houses key government offices, parliament, and foreign missions.

Saif expressed concerns that authorities might exploit nighttime operations, believing fewer people would be present to resist. When pressed about his mention of a "hidden hand," he suggested that Interior Minister Mohsin Naqvi should explain.

Barrister Saif stated that the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) had initially planned to reach D-Chowk but shifted focus to Sangjani after discussions with Imran Khan. Saif advised against going to D-Chowk due to expected government resistance, and Khan reportedly agreed to the change. However, Saif alleged that complications arose when "Bushra Bibi

warned, urging immediate discussions to prevent further violence. He reiterated that the issue regarding Sangjani had been resolved and expressed hope for a peaceful resolution.

Gandapur and Bushra Bibi are safe

Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP) Chief Minister Ali Amin Gandapur and Imran Khan's wife, Bushra Bibi, have arrived at the residence of KP Assembly Speaker Babar Saleem Swati, hours after going incommunicado amidst the ongoing government crackdown in Islamabad. Senior PTI leader



insisted on heading to D-Chowk," which disrupted negotiations. He emphasized the importance of keeping dialogue channels open, claiming that Khan had advised the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa chief minister to protest peacefully in Sangjani. Saif also suggested that Khan's wife doubted whether their message was being properly conveyed, a perception he believed should change.

Saif further alleged that Khan had been confined to a small cell for 36 hours without access to exercise or fresh air. He called on the government to engage in genuine negotiations, stating that Khan could potentially end the sit-in if dialogue resumed. However, he warned that any attempt at intimidation or a nighttime crackdown would only escalate tensions and complicate the situation further.

"The lives of people are at stake," Saif

Taimur Saleem Khan confirmed their whereabouts, stating that both Gandapur and Bushra Bibi were also accompanied by National Assembly Opposition Leader Omar Ayub.

Sources indicated that the group, which included Ayub and Swati, spent the night at the Circuit House in Mansehra after fleeing the federal capital. This development comes after Bushra Bibi's sister, Maryam Riaz Wattoo, raised concerns about the possibility of her sister being arrested. Meanwhile, PTI's announcement to call off its "do-or-die" protest in Islamabad after a midnight crackdown by law enforcement, dispersed PTI workers who had gathered in the capital. The party's central media cell issued a statement, suspending their peaceful protest due to the government's actions, which they described as turning the federal capital into a "slaughterhouse" for unarmed citizens.



"We are announcing the temporary suspension of our peaceful protest," the statement read, adding that future actions would be determined based on guidance from their imprisoned party leader, Imran Khan. PTI also claimed that eight of its workers had been martyred during the protests, naming several victims.

Return to Normalcy

Meanwhile, life in the country is beginning to return to normal following the disruptions caused by the protests. Several key roads, which had been severely affected by roadblocks and security measures, have now been reopened. Motorway authorities confirmed that all motorways are accessible again after being closed for four days. The

she refused to heed their advice and forwarded the convoy to D-Chowk. Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Chief Minister Ali Amin Gandapur was also against Bushra Bibi joining the march from Peshawar. He urged her to stay back, but she was adamant and took a leading role by boarding a container to lead the protest. In the days leading up to the march, there were opportunities for a breakthrough in the background negotiations between the government and PTI leadership. Three days before the November 24 protest, both sides had the chance to enter formal talks.

However, PTI's founder, Imran Khan, made his release from custody by Friday a precondition, which the government rejected. Over the next two days, PTI

PTI leader seeks internal probe: Abrupt end of protest

Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) leader Shaukat Yousafzai voiced his disappointment over the abrupt conclusion of the Islamabad protest, criticizing the party leadership for their lack of direction and planning. Yousafzai lamented that the leadership had "disappointed" him, particularly during the three-day protest that began on November 24 and ended abruptly late at night on Nov 26 at D-Chowk.

He expressed concern over the absence of clear guidance throughout the protest, highlighting that aside from Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Chief Minister Ali Amin Gandapur, no other leader stepped up to lead the demonstration.

According to Yousafzai, the lack of consultation and strategic planning was evident, especially in the decision to focus on D-Chowk as the primary protest site. Yousafzai questioned why the party did not engage with the government despite its offer for negotiations, noting that it was widely anticipated that the authorities would adopt strict measures at D-Chowk. He called for an internal investigation to determine why this location was chosen without proper consideration of potential consequences.

He also raised concerns about the absence of key figures like Barrister Gohar Ali Khan, Salman Akram Raja, and Sher Afzal Marwat during the protest, emphasizing that their presence could have strengthened the leadership during critical moments.

Reflecting on the disorganization, Yousafzai criticized the mobilization of numerous party workers despite the leadership's apparent lack of decision-making authority. He stressed the need for better coordination and accountability within the party to avoid such failures in the future. Yousafzai assured that Bushra Bibi, the wife of PTI founder Imran Khan, and KP Chief Minister Gandapur were safe and currently in Mansehra.

According to federal ministers, the two had fled in the same vehicle following the crackdown on protesters.



Islamabad-Lahore motorway (M-2) is now open, providing relief to commuters, while the Lahore-Sialkot motorway has also been restored. Other motorways, including M-3, M-4, and M-5, have resumed service, easing transportation across various regions.

In addition, life in Islamabad, which had been the epicenter of the PTI protests and clashes between party supporters and law enforcement, is starting to return to normal after several days of turmoil.

Meanwhile, Interior Minister Mohsin Naqvi engaged with several PTI leaders to mediate during the protest march. He even provided a helicopter to two leaders to travel to Hassan Abdal to convince Bushra Bibi not to proceed to D-Chowk. However,

leaders attempted to meet Imran Khan to persuade him to alter the march's destination from D-Chowk, in line with an Islamabad High Court ruling, but they were denied access to him.

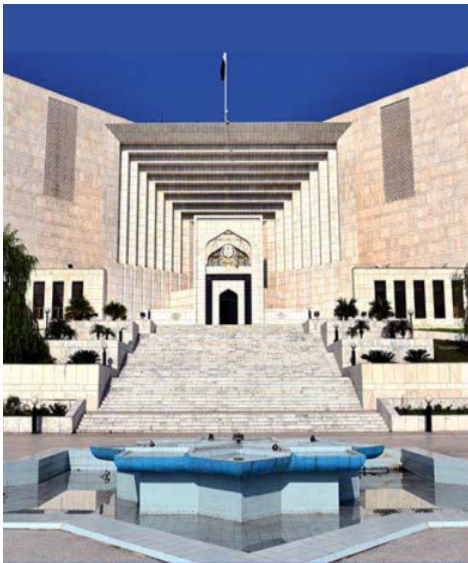
For two days during these negotiations, Gandapur and PTI Chairman Barrister Gohar Ali Khan were facilitated to meet Imran Khan in Adiala Jail, with Mohsin Naqvi playing a key role in seeking a resolution. On the second day of the protest march, Barrister Gohar and Barrister Saif were again allowed to meet Imran Khan, who eventually agreed to shift the protest to Sangjani, on the outskirts of Islamabad, and instructed the party leadership to continue their sit-in there until further progress in the dialogue.



Meanwhile, the aftermath of the protest was marked by chaos. Security forces launched a raid on PTI supporters in Islamabad, leading to hundreds of arrests. Protesters abandoned dozens of vehicles on Jinnah Avenue and Seventh Avenue as they fled while women and children were later seen scavenging recyclables from the burnt truck used by Bushra Bibi during the protest.

Supreme Court rejects suo motu plea on PTI's casualties

The Supreme Court on Wednesday rejected a verbal plea to take suo motu notice of the deaths that occurred during Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf's protest in the federal capital. During a hearing, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa's (KP) Additional Advocate General (AAG) requested the court's constitutional bench to take suo motu notice, stating, "Yesterday, there were deaths on both sides; the constitutional bench should take notice of this issue."



Government officials reported that at least three Rangers personnel and two police officers were killed during the protest, while PTI claims that eight of its members lost their lives.

The AAG requested while appearing via video link in a case related to the climate change authority. In response, Justice Musarrat Hilali advised against making political statements in court.

Justice Aminuddin Khan, head of the

constitutional bench, clarified that the court cannot address matters not formally presented before it. Similarly, Justice Jamal Khan Mandokhail emphasized that the bench was not inclined to comment on issues outside its jurisdiction.

The constitutional bench ultimately rejected the plea. Meanwhile, in the early hours of Wednesday, PTI announced a "temporary suspension" of its "do-or-die" protest following a midnight crackdown by law enforcement that led to the dispersal of PTI workers.

Stock Market welcomes crackdown on PTI protesters, KSE-100 index surpasses 100K level

The Pakistan Stock Exchange (PSX) reached a historic milestone on Thursday, surpassing the 100,000-point mark, signaling robust investor confidence fueled by positive economic indicators.



The benchmark KSE-100 Index surged by 1,077.25 points (1.09%) during intra-day trading, climbing to 100,346.50 points from its previous close of 99,269.25.

Earlier this week, the market experienced a significant setback, plummeting over 3,500 points due to political instability following violent clashes during PTI's march on Islamabad. However, the market rebounded strongly, gaining more than 4,600 points after the protest was called off amid a government crackdown on demonstrators.

Market analysts attributed this record-breaking performance to the government's steadfast implementation of economic reforms. Head of Research at Pak-Kuwait Investment Company, noted that declining yields and easing inflation expectations have also bolstered investor sentiment.

According to the Finance Ministry's latest economic report, inflation is expected to slow to 5.8%-6.8% in November and further to 5.6%-6.5% in December, providing additional confidence to the market.

Earlier, shares at the Pakistan Stock Exchange (PSX) traded in the green on Wednesday after initial volatility triggered by the final protest call of a political party. The benchmark KSE-100 Index surged by over 3,600 points, or 3.5%, to cross 98,000 points once again. An expert attributed the market's recovery to easing concerns over the PTI's protest after it was called off. "The stock market is rebounding as fears surrounding political unrest subside," he remarked.

"The market is recovering from a sharp correction as the government successfully dispersed protestors in Islamabad," he said, adding investor focus had shifted back to positive economic indicators, such as declining interest rates and potential earnings growth. Analysts advised retail investors to focus on long-term strategies, stating, "Investors should look beyond short-term fluctuations and focus on well-established Pakistani companies with consistent growth in earnings and payouts."

The PTI announced early Wednesday that it was suspending its Islamabad sit-in "for the time being," following a day of violent clashes in the Red Zone. The decision came after police and security forces deployed intense tear gas to disperse supporters nearing the barricaded D-Chowk late Tuesday night. The retreat by PTI leadership, including Bushra Bibi and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Chief Minister Ali Amin Gandapur, occurred after Gandapur was heard advising supporters to "go home, have dinner, and return on Wednesday."



PTI Protest



By Romana Afsheen

After law enforcement successfully dispersed Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) protesters from Islamabad, Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif emphasized the necessity of making difficult decisions to eliminate the politics of agitation and restore stability in the country. Speaking at a federal cabinet meeting on Wednesday, the prime minister stated, "We must choose between saving Pakistan or allowing sit-ins to continue."

These remarks followed PTI's high-profile "do-or-die" protest, which led to violent clashes between party supporters and law enforcement, along with road blockages and school closures. The protest was called off early Wednesday morning after a crack-down. Earlier, Interior Minister Mohsin Naqvi announced that life had returned to normal across the country, with roads cleared and mobile and internet services restored.

The protest was part of PTI's ongoing efforts to secure the release of Imran Khan, who has been incarcerated in Rawalpindi's Adiala Jail on various charges for over a year. The prime minister expressed that no one had previously imagined an assault on Islamabad and stressed the need for tough

decisions to be made through mutual consultation. "We have two paths before us, and it is clear that we must choose the path of development and prosperity," he said.

PM Shehbaz also discussed the economic damage caused by the protests, noting that businesses were forced to close, and daily life in Islamabad and Rawalpindi came to a standstill. "Our stock exchange, which had surpassed 99,000, dropped by over 4,000 points yesterday due to the riots," he regretted. "The economy is losing Rs190 billion daily due to these protests."

The prime minister reflected on PTI's 2014 sit-in, recalling how it disrupted the country for 126 days and led to the cancellation of a high-profile visit by the Chinese president. He also pointed out that the latest disturbances had raised concerns among international guests ahead of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) summit in Islamabad. "Our guests were uncertain about visiting Pakistan," he added.

PM Shehbaz also mentioned the upcoming visit of the Belarusian president to Pakistan in January, where both countries are expected to sign agreements. He expressed regret that stricter punishments for the criminals

responsible for the May 9 incidents could have prevented the current situation. "After careful consideration, we must decide which direction to take," he said.

The prime minister also noted the rising terrorism in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP), citing recent clashes in Kurram that led to significant casualties. He criticized the KP government for not resolving issues in Parachinar and Kurram, while instead using state resources to attack Islamabad. "This is not a movement; it is sedition, and there is no place for sedition in politics," PM Shehbaz declared, calling it a conspiracy that must be eradicated at all costs. "We will break the hand that seeks to harm Pakistan," he emphasized.

Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Chief Minister Ali Amin Gandapur held a press conference in Mansehra, following several delays, where he confirmed that the PTI's sit-in movement was still ongoing.

"The sit-in continues," Gandapur declared to the cheers of PTI supporters gathered at the party's secretariat in Mansehra since the morning. He stressed that the protest would remain in place until PTI leader Imran Khan decided to call it off.



Although security forces had officially dispersed the sit-in in Islamabad on Tuesday night, Gandapur's remarks led to some confusion about whether he was referring to the ongoing protest in Islamabad or a new one being held in Mansehra. He did not provide clarity on this point.

Gandapur strongly condemned what he described as "fascism" directed at PTI, claiming that the party had been denied its right to protest for more than two and a half years. He insisted that PTI workers had only reacted to the violence they faced from law enforcement. He also promised to secure the release of PTI workers who were arrested during the Islamabad protest and added that normalcy had returned to the capital by Wednesday.

"Why were bullets fired at our peaceful protesters?" Gandapur asked, emphasizing the party's dissatisfaction with the treatment of its supporters.

The press conference, which was originally scheduled for 11:00 AM, was delayed several times and only began after 2:30 PM. The delays were reportedly caused by a meeting Gandapur had with senior officials, including the Commissioner and Deputy Inspector General (DIG) of Police in Mansehra. Sources suggested that Gandapur might travel to Peshawar by helicopter after the meeting concluded.

What was meant to be a media briefing quickly transformed into a gathering for PTI workers, who had come in large numbers. As Gandapur spoke, PTI supporters raised slogans, and journalists, who had been waiting for hours, expressed frustration at the event's change in focus.

The ongoing delays sparked interest in the party's next steps, particularly regarding its protest strategy. Discussions within PTI about future actions have gained attention. Barrister Saif confirmed that the government had offered PTI a designated space in Sangjani for a public gathering, which Imran Khan had approved. However, Bushra Bibi insisted on holding a rally at D-Chowk in Islamabad. When the government cracked down on the D-Chowk plan, party leaders, including Bushra Bibi and Gandapur, fled to Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.

PTI leader Shaukat Yousafzai raised serious concerns about the party's overall strategy, particularly questioning why negotiations with the government had not been prioritized. He expressed his frustration during a political committee meeting, where several members also voiced their dissatisfaction with the recent protest held in Islamabad. Members highlighted that the protest did not follow the instructions of party founder Imran Khan, which further revealed cracks in the leadership's

approach. Yousafzai and other committee members questioned why the leadership had deviated from Khan's directives, including the decision to hold the protest at D-Chowk instead of the originally designated location at Sangjani, as per Khan's clear instructions.

According to sources within the meeting, there was a strong objection to the shift in protest location. "Why weren't Imran Khan's instructions followed?" members reportedly asked, expressing disappointment that the protest had been moved to D-Chowk, when Khan had explicitly outlined Sangjani as the designated area for the demonstration. This move not only ignored Khan's orders but also highlighted a broader leadership issue within the party. The sudden shift in location appeared to be a significant misstep, which, according to the committee members, demonstrated a lack of coordination and foresight from the leadership.

Shaukat Yousafzai expressed his disappointment over the abrupt end to the Islamabad protest, which had begun on November 24 and ended unexpectedly on November 26. He criticized the leadership for its failure to establish a clear strategy and plan for the protest. "The protest was supposed to be a significant event, but it ended suddenly without any clear direction





or a coherent plan," Yousafzai lamented. He questioned the decision-making process, particularly why the protest, which was intended for Islamabad, was concluded prematurely at D-Chowk. He expressed concern about the lack of foresight and planning, noting that the protest's premature end undermined the party's ability to achieve its goals.

In the meeting, members raised further concerns about the lack of negotiations with the government, despite several offers for dialogue. Yousafzai questioned the leadership's reluctance to pursue talks with the government, especially in light of the harsh measures expected to be implemented at D-Chowk. He asked, "Why didn't the

protest's critical moments. He pointed out that their absence had left a significant gap in the party's leadership at a time when decisions were being made in haste and without proper consultation.

Following this, PTI Chairman Barrister Gohar Ali convened a core committee meeting to review the outcomes of the protest and to discuss the party's position on negotiations with the government. In the meeting, the committee expressed deep regret and sorrow over the losses incurred during the protests, including the deaths of PTI workers and security personnel. Members of the committee acknowledged the toll these events had taken on both sides, emphasizing the need for an urgent

an update on the safety of Bushra Bibi, Imran Khan's wife, and KP Chief Minister Gandapur, confirming that they were both safe and currently in Mansehra. This came after reports surfaced that Bushra Bibi and Gandapur had fled the protest in the same vehicle during the crackdown, taking refuge in Mansehra to avoid potential arrest or harm. This was a significant development as the PTI leadership had been facing increasing pressure from both the public and security forces during the protest.

Earlier, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Chief Minister Ali Amin Gandapur condemned the government's alleged use of live ammunition against PTI workers. In a press conference in Mansehra, Gandapur accused the government of practicing fascism and oppression against PTI over the past two and a half years. He reiterated that PTI remains a peaceful party committed to upholding the rule of law and promoting true democracy for future generations, emphasizing the party's dedication to protecting democratic principles and ensuring a brighter future for the youth.

A new video circulating on social media shows Bushra Bibi, the wife of PTI chairman Imran Khan, leaving a container at D-Chowk in Islamabad shortly before it was set on fire.

The video, reportedly filmed on Tuesday night, captures Bushra exiting the container and entering a waiting vehicle. It is clear from the footage that no fire occurred at the time of her departure, as the container was only set ablaze afterward. As she leaves, Bushra waves at PTI workers, acknowledging their presence before getting into the car.

Bushra and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Minister Ali Amin Gandapur arrived in Mansehra on Tuesday night and stayed at the Circuit House, a fact confirmed the following morning. While PTI had scheduled a press conference, Bushra did not attend. She also did not accompany Gandapur to Peshawar, choosing instead to wait for a separate helicopter.

Aleema Khan, Imran Khan's sister, raised concerns about the situation, questioning why the sound system and lights on the main container at D-Chowk were turned off in the evening. She noted that requests



leadership engage in negotiations when the government had offered them?" This pointed to a missed opportunity for the party to resolve its issues through diplomatic means rather than resorting to protests and confrontations.

Furthermore, Yousafzai stressed the need for an internal investigation to understand why D-Chowk was chosen as the protest location without adequate consideration of the potential consequences. He noted the absence of crucial party figures such as Barrister Gohar Ali Khan, Salman Akram Raja, and Sher Afzal Marwat—individuals whose expertise and leadership could have provided much-needed direction during the

reassessment of the party's strategy going forward.

Yousafzai also raised concerns about the mobilization of PTI workers for the protest, pointing out that it occurred despite the lack of any clear decision-making authority or coordinated strategy from the leadership. He stressed that better coordination and accountability were needed within the party to avoid such disorganized actions in the future. He said, "The mobilization of our workers without a clear plan has led to confusion and disorder. We need better coordination and accountability in future actions."

Meanwhile, Shaukat Yousafzai provided



to keep the lights and sound system running throughout the night were ignored. Meanwhile, Bushra's sister, Maryam Riaz, took to Twitter to inquire, "Where is Bushra Imran Khan?"

Islamabad's Inspector General of Police (IGP) Ali Nasir Rizvi announced that 954 protesters were arrested during a three-day operation aimed at controlling Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) protests. Additionally, 210 vehicles and a large stockpile of weapons were seized.

In a joint press conference with Islamabad Commissioner Muhammad Ali Randhawa on Wednesday, IGP Rizvi drew a clear line between lawful protests and acts of terrorism. He stated that while peaceful protests serve to express opinions and achieve legitimate goals, any acts of violence, including attacks on law enforcement, property damage, and other aggressive actions, qualify as terrorism. Rizvi remarked, "Besieging 2.5 million citizens is not a protest," emphasizing that protests involving weapons like AK-47s would not be tolerated. He further disclosed that protesters had directly attacked Rangers and police officers with firearms, tear gas shells, and other resources provided by provincial authorities. Many of the protesters were allegedly armed with sniper rifles and wore masks.

The operation led to 954 arrests, including 610 on a single day, with 71 law enforcement officers injured, 27 of whom suffered gunshot wounds. Three Rangers personnel were killed in the violence. Rizvi noted that the protests caused billions of rupees in damages.

Commissioner Randhawa echoed Rizvi's concerns, stating that a designated area in Sangjani had been provided for protests as per court orders, but PTI ignored this location. He condemned the destruction of Safe City cameras, green belts, metro stations, and other public infrastructure, as well as attacks on journalists and media houses, arson incidents, and damage to private properties like petrol stations. He also announced increased patrolling in sensitive areas and stricter security measures to prevent unauthorized individuals from staying in Islamabad.

The aftermath of the protest saw chaos in

Islamabad. Security forces raided PTI supporters, leading to hundreds of arrests. Protesters abandoned their vehicles on Jinnah Avenue and Seventh Avenue as they fled, and women and children were seen scavenging recyclables from a burnt truck used by Bushra Bibi. Several journalists were injured during clashes with PTI protesters attempting to force their way into the National Press Club (NPC) and other media offices.

NPC Secretary Nayyar Ali reported that a group of 50-60 protesters tried to bulldoze a gate at the NPC, harassing staff when stopped. The protesters also attempted to scale the walls and attacked staff, including

damaged. Another journalist, Quratul Ain, was injured near Express Chowk when protesters pushed her and a colleague while they were working. She was struck with a spiked baton, injuring her leg.

Earlier in the day, several journalists and Digital Satellite News Gathering (DSNG) vans were targeted during clashes between protesters and police at Chungi No. 26.

The recent PTI protests in Islamabad have not only highlighted the deepening political divisions in Pakistan but also underscored the growing challenges to national stability. While Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif emphasized the need for decisive action to



female journalists. In other parts of the capital, several journalists were injured while on duty. PTI protesters also raided offices of Aik TV, Samaa TV, and Geo News, holding staff hostage. The Aik TV office near Express Chowk was vandalized, with stones thrown and windows smashed, injuring journalist Mohammad Adil. Protesters also stormed the Samaa TV office, though no significant damage was reported. Witnesses stated the group claimed they were pursuing police officials.

Meanwhile, Mohammad Yousaf, a cameraman with the Associated Press, was attacked by protesters on the Srinagar Highway near G-10. He was struck on the head with an iron rod, and his vehicle was

end the cycle of unrest, the PTI leadership's internal divisions and strained relations with the government continue to fuel tensions. The violent clashes and economic setbacks caused by the protests have left a significant toll on both the nation's security and its economy. With the government promising tougher measures to maintain order and the PTI vowing to continue its struggle, it remains to be seen how the political landscape will evolve in the coming weeks. What is clear, however, is that the country's path to peace and prosperity will require difficult compromises and a commitment to dialogue, as well as a strategic shift away from disruptive tactics.



Unrest Unlimited: Road to Nowhere

Pakistani political scene remains plagued with instability



By Naqi Akbar

The world's political processes are guided by constant referral to the electorate; which decides who will manage the state and society for an agreed-upon period. In various countries with a centrist policy-making nature, the elected governments or administrations are allowed the space to complete their tenure. The final judgment is better left to the electorate.

Regretfully, in Pakistan, during the last decade, the country has been subjected to haphazard experiments played and scripted by the powers in the background. As things stand; despite all the claims that the current Pakistani state can attract economic activity within and from foreign investors; the country is portraying a sorry image of a nation-state; plagued with misgovernance, political instability, and an economy that despite the deafening noise of the 'system apologists' is showing no signs of recovery; precisely on the count that the variables needed are not in place altogether.

The current situation, as it precipitated in the federal capital, does not promise any 'national reconciliation'; rather, it is likely to fuel the hardening of political stances and further strengthen the polarization society has been subjected to during the last decade.

Towards that end, a careful case study of Pakistan and a few regional countries would suffice as the basis of the developing argument. To begin with the Indian nation-state despite many contradictions has been able to strengthen the democratic institutions as well as maintain a very delicate balance between the elected civilian leadership and the civil-military bureaucracy. For that commitment to professionalism has been the hallmark of that state.

Go west; although the modern Turkish nation-state was built on the premise of containing religion as a tool of politics; the

political controls were loosened up a bit to make the society plural. It was no small development that the current strongman Erdogan started his political career as Mayor of the major city of Istanbul. The system did not stop his path provided he satisfied the basic preambles of the Turkish nation-state. Coming back to India; the last decade under Modi has changed the political image of the state; for good as well as for bad. For regional countries like Pakistan; things might take a negative turn. But the fact remains that for the Indian populace; it is like redefining India while trying to keep its basic preambles intact.

In the West, we are faced with another ideological state; the theocratic republic. Even though the various administrations might not be seeing eye to eye with the 'supreme' leadership; each administration has been allowed as per the constitution to complete its tenure; no matter if the administration has been radical, conservative or



reformist. Above that the theocratic state despite resources at its disposal has not tried to control the reform movement under the labels of 'software updates'; the political movements; whether it is the Islamists of Turkey or reformists of Iran; have been given a free hand. In the current geo-political scenario; the impact of that policy can be seen in the fact that despite all the preparedness of the IRGC to strike IDF, the reformist administration best personified in the person of Jawad Zarif has actually delayed or potentially fissiled out the effectiveness of the much awaited 'Iranian retaliation'.

These signs of stability in the two states Iran and Turkey have paid off in a better international standing political or otherwise for them. Coming back to Pakistan; it is the other way round. Pakistan was subjected to a political experiment that precipitated the 2018 government; aimed at a better understanding of the political and military spheres of the leadership. What the 'hybrid' was that there was a 'civilian' face to a thought process strategic in nature.

The arrangement for obvious reasons fell out in 2022; which prompted the major players to restart the process in a proverbial 'midair tailspin' with new pilots transported in.

Comparing that with the incidence of 2009 administration of Ahmadinejad completing its tenure in 2013 and Rouhani reformist one of 2017 completing its tenure; it would sound saner that the theocratic leadership followed the public sentiment and controlled the temptation to disturb the status quo; despite the fact that the two above named leaders had created enough baggage for themselves to qualify for 'impeachment' as enshrined in that state constitution.

What happened in Pakistan was a palace coup in the pattern earlier witnessed during the 1988 to 1999 democratic interludes. While those interludes caused new elections; this 2022 experiment went wrong; as it precipitated extreme polarization in the society. Changes in leadership in key institutions further added to the polarization and radicalization of the polity.

That polarization caused a situation where

the political processes as defined in the 1973 constitution looked more of a subjective exercise than anything to do with an objective appraisal of the outgoing administrations. In the common street argument; an administration which was more likely to be booted out by the public disapproval was booted out in literal sense; the result hardening of the political stances with each player; those in the government and those out of favor going for a do or die mode.

That state of affairs was further given the fire by political grouping in all the key institutions. That precipitated, despites stances of neutrality that the man in the street knew; who was the favorite and who was out of favor. The man in the street was

towards that option. Predictably; such a country; in this case Pakistan can at best tread a path of political instability. Such instability can be refuted through artificial hypes in the stocks, but cannot make an investor in the real sector take a plunge. Coupled with that the increasingly high-cost nature of doing business in Pakistan; is a killer indicator for any tangible economic recovery.

With the postmortem state currently in place regarding the political protest and its handling by the deep state; where there are conflicting claims and counterclaims; the political landscape for all practical purposes has been complicated beyond repair. Towards that end the absence of a broad



conscious of that on the eve of 2018 elections and was again vigilant that his mandate might not carry through in the February 2024 electoral exercise. The key to that apprehension rested in the stark truth that objectivity was compromised in the first place.

The February 2024 elections predictably did not approve the new 'pilots' post-2022 coup. However, with the state stance deeply compromised; it was a futile exercise for all to resist even in a court of law.

Such a dismal performance in any nation-state can always push the aggrieved party to come to the streets or even attract swinging votes and sections of the populace

spectrum of Pakistani society in the current political crisis, maintaining aloofness; is going to further polarize as well as radicalize the stances of those left out in the political race.

Conclusively, Pakistan has emerged deeply bruised during the calendar year 2024. The state structure has proven to be a fragile arrangement which cannot neutralize likes and dislikes or any other polarization emanating from individuals and institutions. It remains to be seen; if the international opinion at the right places matters or the public anger all inclusive; not restricted to a particular region of political shade; decides the much-needed Magna Carta.

COP29 Summit: A Critical Turning Point for Global Climate Finance



By Kanwal Munir

Introduction

The 29th Conference of the Parties (COP29) summit in Baku, Azerbaijan, was more than just a gathering of world leaders and negotiators—it was a turning point in the global climate conversation. As countries around the world grapple with the increasing severity of climate change, the issue of climate finance emerged as one of the most pressing topics of discussion. Climate finance refers to the financial resources required to help countries mitigate and adapt to the impacts of climate change. This funding is especially critical for developing countries, which bear the brunt of climate impacts despite contributing the least to global emissions.

COP29 proved to be a crucial moment in determining the future direction of global climate finance. Discussions revolved around the responsibility of wealthier nations to provide financial support to developing nations, the mechanisms through which funds would be disbursed, and the practical

steps required to ensure these funds reached those who needed them most. As countries prepare for the next stages of climate action, the outcome of COP29 will have far-reaching implications for the future of global climate cooperation.

Climate Finance: The Heart of COP29

At the heart of COP29 discussions was the issue of climate finance—a topic that has been a major point of contention in international climate negotiations for years. Developed countries, particularly the United States, European Union, and Japan, have long been expected to provide financial assistance to the developing world to help them tackle climate change. The demand for climate finance stems from the recognition that the Global South is disproportionately impacted by climate change, even though these nations are responsible for only a fraction of global greenhouse gas emissions.

The financial commitments made by

wealthier nations to support developing countries in their climate adaptation and mitigation efforts have been insufficient to meet the growing needs. According to estimates, the global cost of climate adaptation for developing countries could reach up to \$140 billion per year by 2030, and this figure is expected to grow significantly in the years ahead. The financial support pledged in previous COP meetings has often fallen short of these targets, leaving developing nations in a precarious position as they struggle to protect their populations from climate-related disasters.

COP29 was seen as an opportunity for developed nations to address this funding gap and provide concrete financial commitments to support climate action in the Global South. The primary question on the table was whether wealthier countries would increase their climate finance pledges to meet the growing needs of developing nations. While some progress was made, the issue remains far from resolved, and the path forward for climate finance is still uncertain.

The Commitment to \$300 Billion: A Step Forward

One of the major outcomes of COP29 was the commitment by developed countries to increase their financial contributions to climate action, reaching a target of \$300 billion per year by 2035. This pledge was a significant step forward, but many experts argue that it is still insufficient to meet the scale of the climate crisis.

The \$300 billion pledge represents a substantial increase from previous commitments, which had been criticized as inadequate. For example, the goal set in 2009 at COP15 in Copenhagen, which was to mobilize \$100 billion per year by 2020, was repeatedly missed. At COP29, negotiators acknowledged that climate finance must be significantly scaled up to avoid the worst impacts of climate change and to ensure that developing countries have the resources they need to transition to a low-carbon, climate-resilient future.

Despite this positive step, there remains significant skepticism regarding the ability of wealthy nations to fulfill this pledge. For many developing countries, the \$300 billion target is just the beginning. Some argue that this amount will not be enough to cover the costs of both mitigation and adaptation, particularly in the face of increasingly frequent and severe climate events. Furthermore, there is concern about the transparency and effectiveness of climate finance mechanisms—whether the funds pledged will actually be disbursed and used as intended.

U.S. Climate Finance and the Trump Administration's Legacy

One of the most significant challenges in the climate finance conversation has been the role of the United States. Under former President Donald Trump, the U.S. withdrew from the Paris Agreement and rolled back many environmental protections. The Trump administration's stance on climate change not only undermined global efforts to reduce emissions but also resulted in a significant reduction in the United States' financial contributions to climate initiatives.

During Trump's tenure, the U.S. ceased its financial contributions to the Green Climate Fund, a key mechanism established under the Paris Agreement to help developing countries mitigate and adapt to climate change. This decision was met with widespread criticism from both developing nations and environmental organizations, who saw it as a direct affront to global climate cooperation. The U.S. withdrawal from the Paris Agreement also raised doubts about its commitment to addressing climate change and supporting vulnerable nations.



However, the Biden administration's return to the Paris Agreement has brought a renewed focus on climate finance. President Biden has pledged to restore the U.S.'s financial commitments to climate action, including increasing funding to the Green Climate Fund and other climate initiatives. While this shift in policy is welcome, it is unclear whether future U.S. administrations will continue to honor these commitments. The upcoming 2024 presidential election could further complicate the future of U.S. climate finance, as the re-election of Trump would likely lead to a rollback of these efforts.

Climate Finance and the Role of the Private Sector

While government commitments are crucial, the private sector also has a pivotal

role to play in financing the global climate response. Private investment will be essential for scaling up climate action, particularly in areas such as renewable energy, clean technology, and sustainable infrastructure. However, the private sector's involvement in climate finance has been inconsistent, with many companies reluctant to invest in long-term climate projects due to perceived risks and uncertainties.

At COP29, there was a strong emphasis on the need to align private sector investments with the goals of the Paris Agreement.

Financial institutions and private companies must redirect investments away from fossil fuels and toward low-carbon solutions. This shift will require greater incentives and regulations to ensure that private sector financing supports sustainable development and climate resilience.

Several mechanisms have been proposed to encourage private sector involvement, including carbon pricing, green bonds, and climate-related financial disclosures. These tools aim to make it easier for businesses and investors to assess the climate risks associated with their investments and ensure that their portfolios align with global climate goals. However, much more needs to be done to create the necessary conditions for private sector engagement, including regulatory frameworks that support green investments and mitigate risks associated with climate change.

Adaptation Finance: A Growing Concern for Vulnerable Nations

While much of the focus at COP29 was on mitigation—the efforts to reduce global greenhouse gas emissions—there was also considerable attention on adaptation finance. Adaptation refers to the measures that countries must take to protect themselves from the impacts of climate change, such as rising sea levels, extreme heat, and droughts. For many developing nations, adaptation is a matter of survival.

The costs of adaptation are expected to increase dramatically in the coming

development of climate-resilient infrastructure, and the restoration of ecosystems that can help mitigate the impacts of extreme weather events.

Transparency and Accountability in Climate Finance

One of the key themes at COP29 was the call for greater transparency and accountability in the allocation and use of climate finance. Developing countries have long criticized the lack of clarity around how climate funds are disbursed and whether they are reaching the intended recipients. There is also concern that some funds are

most affected by climate change. These groups must have a say in how climate finance is spent and how projects are designed and implemented. Greater inclusion of local voices will help ensure that climate finance is used to address the most pressing needs on the ground.

Calls for More: Brazil and Sierra Leone's Demands

As the negotiations continued, several countries, particularly those most vulnerable to climate change, called for an even more ambitious financial target. Brazil, which is set to host the COP30 summit in 2025, has been one of the strongest advocates for an increase in climate finance. Brazilian President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva, a long-time champion of climate action, has made it clear that \$300 billion is not enough and that the international community must do more to address the crisis.

Lula has argued that the target should be \$390 billion per year by 2035, with the extra funds allocated specifically to help developing countries adapt to the inevitable impacts of climate change. His argument is based on the fact that the most vulnerable nations will face the worst effects of global warming and need additional financial support to cope with these changes. The Brazilian government has argued that if the international community is serious about meeting the Paris Agreement's goal of limiting global warming to 1.5°C, it will need to invest far more than \$300 billion annually.

Sierra Leone, a country that has been heavily impacted by climate change, also voiced concerns about the proposed financial targets. Minister Abdulai Jiwoh of Sierra Leone said that the initial offer of \$250 billion was insufficient and demanded that wealthier nations provide more funding to help African nations adapt to climate change. Sierra Leone, like many other African countries, is already experiencing extreme weather events that are disrupting agriculture and causing food insecurity. For these countries, securing adequate climate finance is not just a matter of addressing future impacts but also a question of survival.



decades. According to the United Nations, adaptation finance could reach \$300 billion annually by 2050. At COP29, developing nations made it clear that they need more funding to build resilience against the impacts of climate change. Countries such as the Maldives, Bangladesh, and Sierra Leone are already experiencing the devastating effects of climate change, and they emphasized the urgency of securing more funding for adaptation.

There were calls for adaptation finance to be prioritized alongside mitigation efforts. Developing nations argued that the funds allocated to climate action should not just focus on reducing emissions but also address the immediate needs of communities affected by climate impacts. This includes funding for disaster resilience, the

being used to finance projects that do not directly address climate change or benefit vulnerable populations.

At COP29, negotiators discussed the need for robust monitoring and reporting mechanisms to ensure that climate finance is being used effectively. This includes tracking how funds are allocated, who is receiving them, and whether the projects funded are having the intended impact. Transparency is essential for building trust between donor countries and recipients and for ensuring that the financial commitments made at COP29 are fulfilled.

Furthermore, there was agreement that climate finance should be accessible to local communities, including Indigenous peoples and marginalized groups, who are often the

The Divisions Between Wealthy and Developing Nations

The negotiations at COP29 have highlighted the growing divide between wealthy and developing nations, not just in terms of climate finance but also in terms of the broader issue of global equity. Developing nations argue that they have contributed the least to the climate crisis and yet are suffering the most from its impacts. Many countries in the Global South, including those in Africa, Asia, and small island nations, have been at the forefront of climate change's devastating effects. These countries argue that wealthy nations, which are responsible for the majority of historical emissions, should bear a larger share of the financial burden.

On the other hand, wealthy nations argue that they have already made significant contributions to climate finance and that they should not be expected to bear the entire burden of climate action. Countries like the United States, the European Union, and Japan have already pledged billions of dollars to global climate efforts, but many developing nations believe that these contributions are insufficient.

This divide was clearly reflected in the negotiations at COP29. Developing nations pushed for stronger commitments and greater financial support, while wealthy nations, particularly those with large carbon footprints, were reluctant to increase their contributions. This divergence has made it difficult to reach a consensus on key issues, and it remains to be seen whether the final agreement will be enough to satisfy both sides.

The Broader Goal: Raising \$1.3 Trillion Annually by 2035

As discussions continued, it became clear that the \$300 billion commitment made at COP29 was only a starting point. The broader goal, as outlined by the United Nations, is to raise \$1.3 trillion annually by 2035 for global climate finance. This ambitious target is seen as necessary to fully address the scale of the climate crisis. The \$300 billion commitment, while significant,

falls short of what is needed to meet the global challenge of reducing emissions and adapting to climate impacts.

The \$1.3 trillion goal would include not only public sector contributions from developed nations but also private sector investments. The private sector has a critical role to play in mobilizing climate finance, particularly through green investments and sustainable business practices. Governments have called for a more coordinated effort to align private sector investments with climate goals, but there are concerns that this will not be sufficient without strong public sector leadership.



Moving Forward: Challenges and Opportunities

COP29 was a critical moment in the global climate finance conversation, but much work remains to be done. The \$300 billion annual commitment made by developed nations is a step forward, but it is still far from sufficient to meet the full scale of the climate crisis. The road ahead will require greater financial contributions from wealthy countries, stronger involvement from the private sector, and better mechanisms for ensuring that climate finance is transparent and effective.

As we look ahead to future climate summits, the issue of climate finance will continue to be at the forefront of global negotiations. The world's most vulnerable nations will

continue to demand greater financial support to help them cope with the impacts of climate change. At the same time, the global community must work together to create a more sustainable and equitable financial system that supports the transition to a low-carbon, climate-resilient future.

COP29 was an important step, but it was only the beginning. The next few years will be crucial in determining whether the promises made at COP29 are fulfilled and whether the global community can rise to the challenge of addressing the climate crisis in a way that is fair, inclusive, and effective for all.

Conclusion

COP29 stands as a pivotal moment in the global effort to combat climate change, particularly in addressing climate finance. The revised \$300 billion annual target by 2035 marks progress, but significant gaps remain in ensuring equitable distribution and meeting the demands of developing nations. The summit underscores the need for collective global action, with wealthier nations bearing greater responsibility while addressing calls for transparency, grants over loans, and private sector involvement. As the world faces escalating climate threats, COP29's outcomes will shape the path toward resilience and sustainability, highlighting the urgency for ambitious, inclusive, and actionable commitments.

Trump's Jewish advisers and pro-Israel cabinet members stun the world

Trump Endorses Controversial Florida Lawmaker for Congress, Sparking Outrage



By Hina Kashif

Trump's endorsement of Fine (Florida State Senator Randy Fine, who has a history of making inflammatory anti-Muslim and pro-Israel remarks, encouraging him to run for a congressional seat in Florida) further signals his alliance with far-right and pro-Israel forces, despite his earlier attempts to soften his rhetoric toward Arab and Muslim voters. Trump has long been known for his anti-Muslim remarks, including his infamous "Islam hates us" statement and the travel ban he imposed on several Muslim-majority countries during his presidency.

Trump made the endorsement on social media, stating that Fine would have his "Complete and Total Endorsement" if he chose to run for Congress. Fine, a legislator with a long track record of controversial statements, faced backlash earlier this year for celebrating the killing of Aysenur Ezgi Eygi, a US activist fatally shot by the Israeli military in the occupied West Bank. Fine had written on social media: "Throw rocks, get shot. One less #MuslimTerrorist. #FireAway." Eygi was taking part in a peaceful protest at the time of her death,

which both Israel and the Biden administration have dismissed as an accident.

This incident is just one example of Fine's history of anti-Muslim and Islamophobic rhetoric. He has previously expressed views such as calling for violence against Palestinians and sharing offensive comments about Jews supporting Palestinian rights. In 2021, he responded to a comment about Palestinians being evicted from their homes with the words "#BlowThemUp."

The Council on American Islamic Relations (CAIR) has condemned Fine's remarks and called for Florida lawmakers to censure him. CAIR's deputy executive director, Edward Ahmed Mitchell, described Fine's actions as a celebration of the murder of an American citizen and a dangerous alignment with far-right elements.

Despite these comments, Trump referred to Fine as an "America First Patriot" and encouraged him to run for the congressional seat currently held by Congressman Mike Waltz, who is leaving to serve as a national

security adviser. Fine has yet to announce his candidacy, but he welcomed Trump's endorsement, calling it an honor.

Complete guide to Trump's Jewish advisers and pro-Israel cabinet

President-elect Donald Trump began to form his cabinet this week, unveiling nominations that include individuals with strong ties to the Jewish and pro-Israel communities, such as Mike Huckabee, Steve Witkoff, and Marco Rubio.

His initial national security appointments are staunch supporters of Israel, with some having questioned the existence of the Palestinian people and advocating for the annexation of the West Bank. These appointments are poised to help advance his "America First" agenda and hardline populist stance during a potential second term. They may also signal potential shifts in U.S. foreign policy, particularly about Iran and efforts to address ongoing conflicts in the Middle East.

Here's an overview of the key figures and potential candidates in Trump's incoming cabinet and advisory circles related to Jewish and Israeli issues.

Why Trump picked Marco Rubio: Rubio, vice chair of the Senate Intelligence Committee and a member of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, brings significant national security experience and strong connections that are expected to facilitate a smooth Senate confirmation.

What he's said on Israel: Rubio, 53, aligns with Trump's "peace through strength" doctrine and advocates for giving Israel the autonomy to defeat Hamas. In a viral video earlier this year, Rubio stated his expectation that Israel would "destroy every element of Hamas." He compared the Israeli ground operation in Rafah, which was opposed by the Biden administration, to the Allies' pursuit of Adolf Hitler during World War II.

What he's said on Iran: Rubio has been a strong proponent of reinstating stringent economic sanctions on Iran, aiming to disrupt its terror networks and prevent the country from acquiring nuclear weapons.

Relationship with the Jewish community: Rubio's political patron is Norman Braman, an auto dealership magnate and former president of the Greater Miami Jewish Federation. However, Rubio surprised some pro-Israel supporters when he voted against emergency funding for Israel in April, citing the absence of border enforcement measures. Rubio also defended Trump after the latter made repeated accusations that American Jews were disloyal to Israel and suggested that those voting for Democrats must hate their religion. Additionally, Rubio angered Orthodox Jewish leaders in 2022 by introducing a bill to make daylight saving time permanent, a measure they argued would interfere with morning prayers and work schedules.

Pete Hegseth, Secretary of Defense

What he's said on Israel: Hegseth, 44, a Fox News host, has consistently expressed strong support for Israel. He credits his time in the U.S. Army with shaping his positive view of the Jewish state. In March, he

interviewed Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, affirming that "Israel needs our support." He also produced a three-part Fox Nation series titled *Battle in the Holy Land: Israel at War*, focusing on the conflict in Gaza and the Israeli-Palestinian situation. Hegseth echoed Trump's stance, saying, "There's no doubt this is a fight that Israel needs to finish," referring to Israel's efforts to eliminate Hamas.

A hardliner on Iran: Hegseth has been vocal about taking a tough stance on Iran, advocating for U.S. military action back in 2020. "I don't want boots on the ground, I don't want occupation, I don't want endless war," he stated on Fox News. "But Iran has been in endless war with us for 40 years. Either we put up and shut up now and stop it, or we kind of wait, go back to the table, and let them dither while they attempt to continue to develop the capabilities to do precisely what they said they want to do."



Mike Waltz, National Security Adviser

Why it matters: The selection of Rep. Mike Waltz from Florida, a former Green Beret with a solid pro-Israel record, to lead the National Security Council reflects Trump's commitment to continuing strong support for Israel in his second term, along with adopting a tougher stance on Iran.

What he's said on Israel: Waltz, 53, has been critical of the Biden administration's foreign policy, calling it one of "concession and chaos." He has strongly backed Israel's military actions in Gaza, praising the

elimination of key Hezbollah leaders. Even before the Gaza conflict, Waltz had advocated for allowing Israel to strike Iran's nuclear program. Last month, he suggested Israel target Kharg Island, a vital hub for Iran's oil exports, and Iran's Natanz nuclear facilities.

One of his key tasks: Waltz, a fervent supporter of expanding the Abraham Accords, will be central to talks with Saudi Arabia to advance Trump's vision of regional peace and work towards resolving the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

Elise Stefanik, U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations

What it means for Israel: Stefanik, 40, brings significant national security experience and a bold, uncompromising approach to the U.N. during a pivotal time

for Israel and the Middle East. As tensions rise over Iran's nuclear ambitions and mounting international pressure to address the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, Stefanik could become a powerful advocate for Israel. Recently, she called for cutting U.S. aid to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine (UNRWA), the primary provider of humanitarian assistance to Palestinians in Gaza.

Her popularity among conservative Jews: Stefanik has garnered strong support within the Jewish and pro-Israel communities, particularly after she challenged the presidents of Harvard, MIT, and the

University of Pennsylvania regarding whether campus calls for the genocide of Jews violated their institutions' codes of conduct.

Mike Huckabee, U.S. Ambassador to Israel

Why he got the job: Huckabee, 69, has earned the trust of both President Trump and Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu. A Baptist minister, Huckabee has visited Israel more than 100 times since his first trip in 1973. A loyal MAGA supporter, he is a staunch advocate for Israeli interests. His appointment is seen as a way to strengthen Netanyahu's outreach to U.S. evangelicals, a group the Israeli prime minister has increasingly focused on over American Jews in recent years.

What he's said on Israel: Huckabee has been a vocal supporter of Israel for years. After the October 7 attacks, he led a delegation of evangelical leaders to Israel, declaring, "Evangelicals stand with Israel." In 2008, Huckabee controversially stated, "There's really no such thing as a Palestinian." He also viewed the occupied West Bank as "an integral part" of Israel during the 2016 Republican primary, and in 2017, he called the area "Judea and Samaria," dismissing the term "West Bank" and rejecting the idea of settlements.

A supporter of annexation: In a radio interview after his appointment, Huckabee suggested that under a second Trump term, Israel may be given the go-ahead to annex the West Bank.

An unconventional pick: Traditionally, the role of U.S. Ambassador to Israel is filled by prominent Jewish donors, trusted Jewish officials, or seasoned diplomats. Huckabee would be the first non-Jewish ambassador since 2011, and the first in more than 40 years without prior diplomatic experience.

Steven Witkoff, Special Envoy to the Middle East

Why he was picked: At 67, Witkoff lacks formal diplomatic experience, but he has a long-established, trusted relationship with President Trump and his son-in-law, Jared Kushner. Kushner played a key role in the first Trump administration's peace efforts and the brokering of the Abraham Accords, and Witkoff brings a similar real estate negotiation approach that Trump values. He also served as a key liaison between the Trump campaign and the Jewish business community, especially after President Joe Biden paused the shipment of heavy weapons to Israel.

Relationship with Israel: Witkoff attended

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's address to Congress in July, which deeply resonated with him, particularly Netanyahu's remarks about the hostages in Gaza—some of whom were present at the Capitol that day. Witkoff described the experience as "spiritual" and expressed disappointment over the lack of similar sentiment among many Democratic lawmakers, sharing his thoughts on Fox Business the following day.

Howard Lutnick, Secretary of Commerce

Why he was picked: Lutnick, co-leader of Trump's transition team, was initially considered for Treasury Secretary before being nominated to head the Commerce Department. He has been a key liaison between Trump and the business community, staunchly supporting the president-elect's economic agenda, including the push to increase tariffs—despite concerns from some business leaders about its potential impact on the economy. During the election, Lutnick raised \$75 million for Trump's campaign, in addition to personally donating \$10 million.

Lutnick is perhaps best known for his leadership of Cantor Fitzgerald in the aftermath of 9/11, when the financial services firm suffered the highest number of



fatalities among any business in the terrorist attack.

Jewish ties: Lutnick has long been a supporter of Jewish causes. He is involved with organizations such as the Park Avenue Synagogue and the Synagogue of the Hamptons, where he serves as an honorary trustee. This year, he and his wife chaired United Hatzalah's annual gala in New York, the first since the October 7 attacks, drawing a connection between his losses on 9/11 and the suffering caused by Hamas' attack on Israel. Lutnick also accompanied Trump to the Ohel, the burial site of Rabbi Menachem Schneerson, to honor the Orthodox Jewish community.

Scott Bessent, Treasury Secretary

His background: Bessent, 62, is known for his longstanding association with Jewish billionaire George Soros, having spent two decades as the Chief Investment Officer at Soros Fund Management. While Trump has previously alluded to antisemitic conspiracy theories involving Soros in his fundraising efforts, Bessent's career is rooted in high-level financial strategy and management.

What he said about Iran: As Treasury Secretary, Bessent would oversee U.S. sanctions on Iran and other adversarial nations. In a recent interview, he supported Trump's "maximum pressure" approach toward Iran, stating, "I say, let's make America great again, and let's make Iran broke again," emphasizing his tough stance on the Iranian regime.

Stephen Miller, Deputy Chief of Staff and Homeland Security Adviser

Jewish with Strong Nationalist Views: Miller, 39, known for his hardline stance on immigration, made headlines last month at Trump's Madison Square Garden rally, stating, "America is for Americans and Americans only." A key architect of the tough immigration policies during Trump's first term, Miller played a major role in crafting the controversial policy of separating children from their undocumented parents. He was also behind the 2017

Muslim travel ban and reportedly sought to eliminate all refugee admissions to the U.S., effectively dismantling policies established after the Holocaust.

Condemned by Family and Classmates: Miller's views have sparked condemnation from his Jewish family, many of whom are descendants of immigrants who fled pogroms. His uncle, Dr. David Glosser, a retired neuropsychologist, called him an "immigration hypocrite." Additionally, his former rabbi likened Trump and Miller's rhetoric to "ominous promises that Jews have heard throughout history."

Lee Zeldin, EPA Administrator

A Jewish MAGA Loyalist: Zeldin, 44, has built a strong relationship with Trump, particularly after voting against certifying



the 2020 election results while serving as a congressman. During the campaign, Zeldin was a vocal Trump surrogate, strongly criticizing anti-Israel sentiment within the Democratic Party. He defended Trump's controversial remarks about Jews being responsible for the former president's election loss and accused Pennsylvania Governor Josh Shapiro of "trying to un-Jewish himself" in an attempt to secure a spot as Kamala Harris' vice-presidential candidate.

His Jewish Background: Zeldin, who is married to a Mormon, emphasized his Jewish roots to gain support from Orthodox voters during his 2022 gubernatorial campaign in New York. He is named after his great-grandfather, Moshe Efraim

"Morris" Zeldin, an Orthodox rabbi and early Zionist movement leader in Brooklyn. Raised in Suffolk County, Long Island, Zeldin spent much time with his grandfather, Bernard Zeldin, who founded the Farmingdale Jewish Center. His mother, Merrill Schwartz, was a fourth-grade teacher at a yeshiva in Brooklyn.

Pam Bondi, Attorney General

Her Background: Bondi, 59, served as Florida's attorney general and later joined Ballard Partners, a prominent Republican lobbying firm, in 2019. One of her clients was the government of Qatar, a Gulf state known for hosting Hamas leaders and facilitating a ceasefire between Hamas and Israel. During her 2010 campaign for attorney general, Bondi's Jewish opponent, Dan Gelber, accused her of running a

smear campaign to undermine him among Jewish voters, a claim she consistently denied.

What it Means for Jews: As Attorney General, Bondi would oversee the prosecution of violent extremism and hate crimes. She has described antisemitism as "rampant" in the U.S. and expressed concern over the growing hostility toward Jews in the country. After a 2017 meeting between Trump and state attorneys general about rising antisemitic threats, Bondi stated, "I know firsthand President Trump cares deeply about our Jewish community and is extremely upset by these attacks." If confirmed, Bondi would succeed Merrick Garland, a former federal judge of Jewish descent.

Her Views on Israel: Bondi has visited Israel "multiple times" and has criticized President Joe Biden for not advancing the Abraham Accords. In the wake of the October 7 attacks, Bondi suggested that federal authorities should take a tougher stance on pro-Palestinian protests at U.S. colleges, including revoking visas for non-citizen participants.

Kristi Noem, Homeland Security

What it Means for Jews: The Department of Homeland Security plays a crucial role in providing resources and guidance to houses of worship, including the Jewish community, through the Nonprofit Security Grant Program. Strong collaboration with Jewish leaders will be essential in addressing rising security concerns and threats. Earlier this year, Noem, 52, as governor of South Dakota, signed a bill into law that mandates the use of the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA) definition of antisemitism when investigating discrimination claims.

Best Known For: Noem gained national attention earlier this year after her memoir revealed a controversial action that hindered her chances of being selected as Trump's vice-presidential running mate. She disclosed that she had shot her hunting dog, a decision that sparked backlash, particularly as views against animal cruelty have been rooted in moral and religious teachings, including those found in the Talmud.

Robert F. Kennedy Jr., Department of Health and Human Services

What it Means for Jews: The 70-year-old political heir and vaccine skeptic has made controversial and troubling remarks in recent years. At an anti-vaccine rally, Kennedy likened vaccine and mask mandates to the Holocaust, drawing significant backlash. He also met with Louis Farrakhan of the Nation of Islam in 2015 to discuss measles vaccines. During his 2024 presidential campaign, he was criticized by major Jewish organizations for promoting antisemitic conspiracy theories, including claiming that COVID-19 was an "ethnic-

ally targeted" bioweapon that spared Ashkenazi Jews. Kennedy defended his comments, stating that he had "literally never said an antisemitic word in my life."

In 2020, Kennedy spoke at a rally attended by antisemitic and neo-Nazi groups. He also retracted his praise of Roger Waters, the former Pink Floyd frontman, after Waters faced backlash for using Holocaust imagery during his concerts.

What He's Said: Kennedy has repeatedly insisted that he has "never said an antisemitic word in my life" and emphasized his commitment to Holocaust education, stating that he has spent a lifetime studying the Holocaust and has "many friends who are Holocaust survivors."

Sebastian Gorka, Director of Counterterrorism at the NSC

Gorka, who served as a White House adviser during Trump's first term, has been a controversial figure due to his past affiliations and rhetoric. Reportedly under consideration for deputy national security adviser, Gorka has faced scrutiny for previously swearing allegiance to a Hungarian neo-Nazi group, a connection that has sparked significant backlash.

In 2022, Gorka likened the FBI's raid of Trump's Mar-a-Lago resort in the classified documents investigation to "Gestapo Stasi tactics," drawing further criticism for his extreme language.

More recently, Gorka provoked controversy in an interview by asserting that "there is no such thing as Palestine." He also stated that Trump's success in brokering peace in the Middle East was due to ignoring the Palestinian Authority, accusing them of indoctrinating children with hatred toward Jews.

Other Appointments

- Will Scharf, a former prosecutor and Trump attorney, has been appointed White House staff secretary. Scharf, who is Jewish, previously lost a contentious Republican primary race for Missouri attorney general in August.

- Vivek Ramaswamy, 39, a biotech entrepreneur with no previous public office experience, has been named to an external government body called the Department of Government Efficiency. He will serve alongside Tesla CEO Elon Musk. Ramaswamy has publicly questioned the continued necessity of U.S. military aid to Israel.
- Tulsi Gabbard, a former Democratic congresswoman who left the party to join the Republicans, has been nominated for director of national intelligence, raising concerns within the pro-Israel community due to her anti-war stance.
- Boris Epshteyn, a Jewish senior adviser to Trump since 2016, is likely to receive a position in the new administration. Epshteyn served as counsel during Trump's hush money trial and remains a key figure in Trump's circle. He has expressed interest in becoming the special envoy for the Russia-Ukraine conflict and, as a Russian immigrant, has family members involved on both sides of the ongoing conflict.
- Rick Grenell, former ambassador to Germany and acting director of national intelligence at the end of Trump's first term, was on the short list for secretary of state. He may still land a significant role in the administration, with reports suggesting he could be appointed as special envoy for the Russia-Ukraine conflict. Grenell played a major role in advancing sanctions against Iran and in the normalization of relations between Israel and the UAE. He was also instrumental in Trump's outreach to Arab American and Muslim voters in Michigan during the presidential campaign.
- Kevin Warsh, an economic policy adviser during the George W. Bush administration and former Federal Reserve Board member, was a finalist for treasury secretary. There are reports that Trump is also considering Warsh for the position of Federal Reserve chair in 2026. Warsh is married to the daughter of Ronald Lauder, the cosmetics heir and president of the World Jewish Congress, who was an influential

advisor to Trump during his first term.

- Marc Rowan, CEO of Apollo Global Management, is a candidate for a top economic role in the administration.

Outside Jewish Advisers and Key Figures with Access

- Jared Kushner, Trump's son-in-law and former Middle East adviser, has stated he will not return to the White House. However, he remains influential behind the scenes and could play a key role in any potential normalization agreement between Saudi Arabia and Israel.
- Massad Boulos, the Lebanese American father-in-law of Tiffany Trump, who led outreach to Arab-American communities during the election, is expected to serve as the point person for Lebanon and maintain significant influence on Trump regarding Middle East issues.
- David Friedman, Trump's first ambassador to Israel, is eager to return to a national security position where he can shape Middle East policy and promote a pro-settlement agenda.

Key Jewish Influencers and Supporters

- David Sacks, a tech entrepreneur and long-time friend of Elon Musk, who bundled millions for Trump's campaign, remains a key ally.
- John Paulson, a financier and Trump supporter, withdrew from consideration for the Treasury Secretary position due to personal financial obligations.
- Steve Schwarzman, CEO of Blackstone, is expected to play an influential role in shaping antitrust policies and trade regulations, providing advice on potential administration roles.
- Wayne Berman, head of global government affairs at Blackstone and a board member of the Republican Jewish Coalition, has been suggested as a possible deputy secretary of the Treasury.
- Miriam Adelson, widow of the late GOP megadonor Sheldon Adelson, who contributed over \$100 million to Trump's campaigns, continues to be a prominent figure in GOP circles.
- Matt Brooks, CEO of the Republican Jewish Coalition, played a significant role in increasing Jewish voter support for Trump, with a \$15 million investment in outreach efforts.
- Elan Carr, CEO of the Israeli American Council and former antisemitism envoy during Trump's first term, remains an influential figure in Jewish outreach.
- Jeff Miller, from Miller Strategies, was one of Trump's top fundraisers.
- Arthur Schwartz, a longtime political adviser to Donald Trump Jr., has connections with Vice President-elect JD Vance and is seen as a behind-the-scenes operator.
- Bill Ackman, a hedge fund billionaire, has been vocal in his criticism of the pro-Palestinian protest movement at Harvard and the university's handling of antisemitism issues. He's also opposed diversity, equity, and inclusion initiatives.
- Ike Perlmutter, a former Marvel executive and Mar-a-Lago member, was influential in shaping veterans' affairs policy during Trump's first term.

- Steve Wynn, a Las Vegas casino mogul and close Trump ally, played an advisory role during the campaign, warning Trump to stay on message.
- Paul Packer, former chair of the Commission for the Preservation of America's Heritage Abroad, co-chaired the Trump campaign's Jewish Leadership Coalition, a key fundraising group.
- Bruce Blakeman, Nassau County's first Jewish executive and a close Trump ally, is considered for a role in the administration.
- Sid Rosenberg, a conservative New



- York-based radio host, was one of Trump's most vocal Jewish surrogates.
- Yehuda Kaploun played a role in Trump's outreach efforts to Orthodox Jewish leaders during the campaign.
- Laura Loomer, a controversial figure and conspiracy theorist who used her Jewish identity to attack political opponents, has been closely associated with Trump.

Other Influencers Linked to Controversial Views

- Tucker Carlson, Steve Bannon, and Charlie Kirk, who have been criticized for promoting antisemitic tropes and associating with white nationalist groups, also maintain close ties to Trump's circle.

Russia-Ukraine War: A Comprehensive Overview and Key Developments



By Kanwal Munir

Introduction

The Russia-Ukraine war, which began in February 2022, has become a major geopolitical conflict with far-reaching consequences. Beyond the devastating human toll, the war has reshaped international alliances, disrupted global economic systems, and caused significant environmental damage. As the conflict enters its third year, with no resolution in sight, it continues to be a central issue in global politics. This article offers a detailed overview of the ongoing war, including military developments, the humanitarian crisis, economic disruptions, and environmental consequences. It also examines diplomatic efforts aimed at resolving the situation. The war's impact is felt worldwide, from the displacement of millions to the strain on global supply chains, highlighting the urgency of finding a lasting solution. The situation remains complex, with multiple challenges facing both Ukraine and Russia, while the international community works toward peace and stability in the region.

Ongoing Military Operations: A Prolonged Stalemate

As of late 2024, the Russia-Ukraine conflict continues to be characterized by a prolonged military stalemate. Despite the intensity of the fighting, significant territorial changes have been limited, and both sides have entrenched themselves along well-defined frontlines. Russian forces maintain control over important cities such as Donetsk and Mariupol in the eastern part of Ukraine. However, Ukrainian forces have demonstrated remarkable resilience, launching counteroffensives to reclaim lost territories.

In the eastern Donbas region, the Ukrainian military has focused on liberating territories controlled by Russian-backed separatists, while also mounting a vigorous defense of its southern regions, particularly those near the Black Sea. Cities such as Odessa are not just strategically vital but also crucial for Ukraine's economy, as Odessa serves as a critical port city for exports. As such,

Ukraine's efforts to defend its southern territories are aimed at maintaining vital trade routes.

On the Russian side, despite challenges such as supply shortages, morale issues, and battlefield setbacks, President Vladimir Putin's forces have managed to reinforce their positions in contested areas. Russian tactics have included the mobilization of additional troops and a heavier reliance on artillery bombardments and airstrikes. Notably, the use of long-range missiles and drones has escalated in recent months, targeting critical infrastructure in Ukrainian cities. In contrast, the Ukrainian army has benefited from significant Western military aid, including advanced weapons systems such as artillery, tanks, and anti-aircraft systems, all of which have allowed Ukraine to regain some territory in strategic regions like the Donbas and Kherson.

However, despite the support, Ukraine's counteroffensive has faced numerous challenges. The Russian forces have dug in deeply, establishing robust defensive lines that include extensive minefields, trench

systems, and artillery positions. These fortifications, combined with the challenging terrain of the Donbas region, have made advances by Ukrainian forces slow and laborious.

Misidentification of Civilian Aircraft by Russian Security Forces

In one peculiar incident, on the night of Wednesday, Russian security forces mistakenly opened fire on a civilian aircraft flying over Bashkortostan, believing it was a Ukrainian drone. The Antonov An-2 biplane, which had permission to fly between Ufa and Salavat, was clearly marked with navigation lights, but security personnel mistook it for a hostile aerial threat. The resulting gunfire created panic and even led to an air raid alert in Salavat. Fortunately, the plane was able to land safely at Ufa Airport, and the situation was clarified quickly. This episode serves as a stark reminder of the dangerous environment in which civilians and aid workers now operate. The ongoing conflict has led to frequent misidentifications and miscalculations, putting non-combatants at grave risk.

Ukraine's Counteroffensive: Progress and Challenges

Ukraine's military has launched a concerted counteroffensive in the summer of 2024 as part of its strategy to regain lost territories. This effort has been bolstered by the consistent military support provided by the United States and European Union, including advanced air defense systems, tanks, and artillery. However, despite these resources, Ukraine's progress has been slowed by the formidable Russian defensive positions.

The heavily fortified Russian defenses, built over months of preparation, include layers of trenches, reinforced bunkers, and minefields, all of which have made it extremely difficult for Ukrainian forces to break through. Ukrainian commanders have noted that the pace of the counteroffensive has been significantly hampered by logistical difficulties, including the challenge of moving troops and equipment through contested territory, especially in the southern regions.

The terrain has also played a crucial role in limiting Ukraine's military effectiveness. In particular, the fields and forests of the southern regions have proven to be difficult to navigate for mechanized units, slowing the movement of tanks and artillery. The Ukrainian military has been forced to adapt, relying heavily on infantry-led operations to clear minefields and advance in some areas. Despite these challenges, Ukrainian forces have made notable gains, reclaiming a series of villages and towns in the Donbas region, which has provided both a military and psychological boost to their efforts.

Humanitarian Impact: A Crisis of Unprecedented Proportions

The humanitarian crisis caused by the Russia-Ukraine war is one of the most severe in modern history. The war has displaced more than 13 million people, with millions of Ukrainians seeking refuge in neighboring countries such as Poland, Romania, and Hungary. The scale of displacement has overwhelmed refugee centers, with many individuals and families living in crowded conditions and facing uncertain futures.

In Kramatorsk, a city located near the frontlines in eastern Ukraine, the situation is dire. Pastor Evgueny, who has been running a refugee center, reports that up to 30 people arrive daily, seeking shelter from

the heavy artillery bombardment and airstrikes. The center, which is run by a local church, has become a vital lifeline for displaced families. However, resources are increasingly stretched, and many refugees face the harsh reality of living in temporary shelters without access to basic necessities such as clean water and medical care.

One of the most heart-wrenching stories comes from Iryna, a woman who was forced to flee her home in Chasiv Yar after a Russian airstrike destroyed her neighborhood. "We were living in constant fear," Iryna shared, explaining how her home was bombed in 2023. "I have no idea what happened to our house now, but I cannot return. It is too dangerous." Iryna, along with her children, found refuge in Kyiv, but like many displaced people, they face the challenges of starting over in a new city with limited financial resources.

Dangerous Frontlines and Evacuation Efforts

The shifting frontlines of the conflict have made evacuation efforts increasingly hazardous. Humanitarian workers, such as Philippe Jacob, who assist in evacuating civilians from conflict zones, have expressed growing concerns over the risks posed by Russian drones. These drones, which are often used to target civilian infrastructure, have increasingly bypassed jamming systems, creating a volatile situation for those attempting to provide



assistance. In early October 2024, one such drone attack led to the tragic death of Tigran Galustyan, an evacuation worker who had been helping civilians escape from conflict zones. His death underscores the perilous conditions under which humanitarian efforts are being carried out in the region.

Environmental Consequences of Military Activity

The war has also taken a heavy toll on the environment, with significant damage to natural ecosystems as a direct result of military activities. The Caspian Sea, a vital ecological zone, has seen the deaths of large numbers of fish, which experts suspect is

The environmental damage is not limited to marine life. Land-based military operations have also led to the destruction of forests, farmland, and wildlife habitats. In the conflict's most heavily bombed areas, such as the Donbas region, the landscape has been permanently altered. The extensive use of artillery and explosives has created widespread contamination, making it difficult for life to return to these areas once the conflict ends.

Economic Consequences: Global Disruptions

The economic repercussions of the Russia-Ukraine war are felt globally, as the conflict has disrupted energy markets,

production on a massive scale. As a result, food prices have risen globally, particularly in regions that rely on Ukrainian exports. The loss of fertile agricultural land due to military occupation, combined with disruptions in transportation networks, has further hindered Ukraine's ability to produce and export food.

Ukraine's infrastructure has been severely damaged during the war, with billions of dollars in losses. The destruction of roads, bridges, and power plants has crippled the country's economy and will require years of reconstruction. The international community will need to provide significant financial assistance to help rebuild Ukraine's infrastructure and economy.

Conclusion: The War's Broader Implications

As the war continues into its third year, it is evident that the conflict has far-reaching consequences that extend well beyond the borders of Russia and Ukraine. The international community remains deeply divided, with Western nations continuing to support Ukraine while Russia seeks to strengthen its alliances with countries such as China and Iran. The situation is further complicated by ongoing diplomatic tensions, with the U.S. and NATO providing substantial military support to Ukraine, while Russia decries this as foreign interference in what it considers a domestic issue.

The war has also led to a rethinking of international security arrangements, with countries in Europe reassessing their defense strategies in light of the ongoing conflict. Meanwhile, the conflict has spurred debates on the role of international law, particularly concerning the legality of military interventions, the treatment of prisoners of war, and the protection of civilians in conflict zones.

As the war rages on, there is little hope for an immediate resolution. The humanitarian, economic, and environmental impacts continue to mount, and both Russia and Ukraine are entrenched in a bloody struggle that shows no signs of abating. The international community must work toward finding diplomatic solutions that will lead to a peaceful resolution, while addressing the immediate humanitarian needs of those affected by this devastating war.



linked to the increased military activity by the Russian Caspian Sea fleet. These ships have been responsible for launching missiles at targets in Ukraine, and the byproducts of such attacks—particularly from missile fuel—may have contaminated marine life.

Azerbaijani authorities have reported unusual deaths of fish and other marine animals off the coast of the Caspian Sea, which are believed to be linked to the military operations taking place nearby. Additionally, concerns have been raised about the environmental impact of missile strikes on marine life, with reports suggesting that chemical pollutants from these weapons could have entered the ecosystem.

agricultural production, and supply chains. The war has led to a sharp rise in global energy prices, particularly for natural gas and oil. Russia's role as a major supplier of energy to Europe has been disrupted by the war, leading to energy shortages, inflation, and rising costs in countries that were heavily dependent on Russian exports. The European Union, in particular, has been forced to seek alternative energy sources to offset the loss of Russian supplies, further straining the global energy market.

Ukraine, a major agricultural producer, has seen its economy devastated by the war. Both Russia and Ukraine are significant exporters of wheat, corn, and sunflower oil, and the war has disrupted agricultural

Diplomatic Showdown: India-Canada Tensions Escalate



By Hina Kashif

Who is Hardeep Singh Nijjar

Hardeep Singh Nijjar was born in Jalandhar, a district in the northern Indian state of Punjab. In 1997, at the age of 22, he moved to Canada, where he settled in British Columbia. Over the years, he built a life, marrying, raising two sons, and working as a plumber. However, he also became known for his outspoken advocacy for Khalistan, a proposed independent homeland for Sikhs, a religious minority that constitutes about 2% of India's population.

Nijjar's advocacy for Sikh independence led to his being labeled a terrorist by the Indian government, which accused him of being involved in militant activities. India specifically accused him of being the "mastermind" behind the Khalistan Tiger Force (KTF), a banned militant group operating in India.

On June 18, 2023, Nijjar, 45, was shot and killed outside a Sikh temple in Surrey, a suburb of Vancouver, by two gunmen wearing dark clothes and hoods. The gunmen opened fire on Nijjar's grey pickup truck, shattering the windows while he was

behind the wheel. Eyewitnesses reported the attack, and police confirmed that Nijjar died at the scene.

Close associates of Nijjar have claimed that, prior to his death, Canadian intelligence agencies warned him he was on a "hit list." The Indian government has vehemently denied any involvement in the killing, dismissing Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau's accusations as "absurd."

To his supporters, Nijjar was a peaceful advocate for Sikh self-determination in Canada, someone who cared deeply about his community. A large memorial was erected outside the Surrey Gurdwara, where he had served as president, and his funeral attracted hundreds of mourners. However, in India, Nijjar was considered a wanted man under the country's Terrorist and Disruptive Activities (Prevention) Act, due to his alleged involvement in several high-profile incidents. These included a 2007 cinema bombing in Punjab that killed six people and injured 40, as well as the 2009 assassination of Sikh politician Rulda Singh. In 2020, India's government accused Nijjar of "operationalizing,

networking, training, and financing" KTF members. He was also accused of running terrorist training camps in British Columbia for individuals believed to be planning attacks in India.

In July 2022, India's National Investigation Agency (NIA) offered a \$1.2 million reward for information leading to Nijjar's arrest.

Allegations of his terrorist activities first surfaced in media reports in India in 2016, and subsequently in Canada. During this period, the Indian government formally raised its concerns with Canadian authorities. Canadian police acknowledged being aware of the allegations, but Nijjar was never charged in Canada. In 2016, Nijjar sent a letter to Prime Minister Justin Trudeau, in which he denied any involvement in violent activities. He described himself as a "Sikh nationalist" and reaffirmed his support for the right of Sikhs to self-determination and independence for Indian-occupied Punjab through a future referendum, though he insisted that he had "never believed in, supported, or been involved in any violent activity."

What is the Khalistan movement?

The Khalistan movement is the push for a separate Sikh nation, proposed to include the Indian state of Punjab and other Punjabi-speaking regions of northern India. It first gained prominence in the 1970s and 1980s but has seen a resurgence among the global Sikh diaspora in recent years.

The proposed boundaries for the Khalistan state have sparked debate among supporters. Most agree that it would encompass the Indian state of Punjab, but some advocates have called for including the Pakistani province of Punjab, while others push for the incorporation of regions in neighboring Haryana and Himachal Pradesh, arguing that these areas also have significant Sikh populations.

Historical Roots of Khalistan

The idea of Khalistan is deeply intertwined with Sikhism, a religion that emerged in the 15th century in the region now part of northern India, during the time of Mughal rule. Sikhism was founded by Guru Nanak and developed through successive Gurus, with the concept of the Khalsa—a community of baptized Sikhs—becoming a central tenet under Guru Gobind Singh in 1699. The Khalsa was not only a religious order but also a political entity created to protect Sikhs from persecution and to establish self-rule.

After the Partition of India in 1947, which divided the Indian subcontinent into India and Pakistan, Sikhs in Punjab felt marginalized, particularly in terms of their cultural and linguistic identity. This led to the Punjabi Suba Movement of the 1950s, which called for a Punjabi-speaking autonomous Sikh state within India.

The Rise of Khalistan

The Khalistan movement as it is known today began to take shape in the 1970s and 1980s, particularly under the leadership of Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale, a charismatic Sikh leader who championed the idea of Sikh self-determination and autonomy. Bhindranwale's rise was fueled by widespread discontent among Sikhs over their political and economic treatment by

the Indian state, and a growing desire for greater representation and rights for Sikhs.

In the early 1980s, the movement escalated into an armed rebellion, with Bhindranwale and his supporters taking refuge in the Golden Temple in Amritsar, the holiest site in Sikhism. The Indian government, led by Prime Minister Indira Gandhi, ordered a military operation to flush out the militants in 1984. The operation, known as Operation Blue Star, resulted in the deaths of around 400 people, though Sikh groups claim the toll was much higher, including the death of Bhindranwale himself. The operation caused deep trauma within the Sikh community, both in India and abroad.

Aftermath and Tragedy

The military assault on the Golden Temple led to a wave of anger and grief among Sikhs, and just months later, on October 31, 1984, Indira Gandhi was assassinated by her Sikh bodyguards in apparent retaliation for the attack on the temple. Her assassination triggered a horrific wave of anti-Sikh riots, especially in Delhi, where mobs hunted down Sikhs, burning homes, businesses, and gurdwaras, and killing thousands.

In the wake of these events, the Khalistan movement gained even more traction, particularly among Sikhs in the diaspora, many of whom were increasingly vocal about their support for an independent Sikh state. On June 23, 1985, the movement reached a tragic new milestone with the bombing of Air India Flight 182 over the Atlantic Ocean, killing all 329 people on board. The bombing was attributed to Canadian-based Sikh militants who sought revenge for the military raid on the Golden Temple.

The Ongoing Debate

Though the intensity of the armed rebellion subsided after the crackdown by Indian forces, the call for Khalistan continues to echo, particularly within the global Sikh community. Supporters argue that a sovereign Sikh state would preserve the rights and identity of Sikhs, while opponents of the movement—both within India and abroad—point to the violence associated with the movement's past, including the bombing of Flight 182 and other acts of

terrorism, as reasons to reject it.

The Khalistan movement remains a source of tension within India, with the Indian government rejecting any form of separatism and actively working to prevent the resurgence of such calls for independence. Meanwhile, diaspora communities, particularly in countries like Canada, the UK, and the US, continue to rally for the cause, sparking a complex and often heated debate over the political, cultural, and religious rights of Sikhs worldwide.

As long as divisions exist over the boundaries, methods, and legitimacy of the Khalistan movement, it seems set to remain a point of contention in both India and the Sikh diaspora.

The Sikh separatist movement has long been a contentious issue in the relationship between Canada and India, and analysts suggest that tensions between the two countries have reached a new low in recent years.

India has consistently opposed the Khalistan movement, with all major political parties—both in India and Punjab—denouncing violence and separatism.

Prime Minister Justin Trudeau stated that Canada was investigating "credible allegations potentially linking" the Indian state to the murder of Hardeep Singh Nijjar.

Nijjar was shot and killed outside a Sikh temple in Surrey, British Columbia, on June 18. In response to the allegations, India expelled a Canadian diplomat after Canada had expelled Indian diplomat Pavan Kumar Rai in connection with the case.

During a speech in parliament, Trudeau said he had raised the issue of Nijjar's killing directly with Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi at the recent G20 summit in Delhi. "Any involvement of a foreign government in the killing of a Canadian citizen on Canadian soil is an unacceptable violation of our sovereignty," he told lawmakers.

The next day, India's Ministry of External Affairs firmly rejected Trudeau's claims, calling them "absurd" and politically motivated. In a statement, the ministry emphasized that India is a "democratic

polity with a strong commitment to the rule of law" and accused Canada of harboring "Khalistani terrorists and extremists" who pose a threat to India's security.

"We urge the government of Canada to take prompt and effective legal action against all anti-India elements operating from their soil," the statement added.

Following Trudeau's comments, several large posters and tributes to Nijjar appeared at the Guru Nanak Sikh Gurdwara in Surrey. Moninder Singh, a spokesman for the British Columbia Sikhs Gurdwaras Council, expressed the community's appreciation for the prime minister's stance, stating that they were grateful that "at least the prime minister stood up and acknowledged that there is a foreign hand behind this murder."

Other Sikh organizations in Canada, including the World Sikh Organization, praised Prime Minister Justin Trudeau's statement, stating that it confirmed what had long been suspected within the community. Trudeau's remarks came after a tense exchange with Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi during the G20 summit in Delhi, where Modi accused Canada of failing to take sufficient action against "anti-India activities of extremist elements," referring specifically to Sikh separatists.

In addition to the diplomatic tension over Nijjar's murder, Canada recently suspended negotiations for a free trade agreement with India, though it did not provide specific reasons. India, however, pointed to "certain political developments" as a factor in the suspension.

Nijjar's killing marks the third high-profile Sikh death in Canada in recent months, further deepening concerns within the community.

India-Canada Tensions Disrupt Students and Education Consultancies

Several students from India, particularly from northern states like Punjab and Haryana, who had planned to go to Canada for their studies, have had to rethink their options due to the deteriorating diplomatic relations between the two nations. This tension stems from the killing of Hardeep

Singh Nijjar, a Canadian Sikh linked to the Khalistan movement, a separatist movement seeking an independent Sikh state. Nijjar was assassinated in June 2023 by two masked gunmen in Surrey, British Columbia.

In the aftermath of the killing, Canada accused India of being involved in the assassination, and Ottawa has leveled further accusations against Indian authorities, including Home Minister Amit Shah, alleging a campaign of violence against Sikh activists. Diplomatic reprisals followed, with both countries expelling diplomats, escalating the diplomatic standoff.

Impact on Students and Education Consultants

Beyond the political fallout, the tensions have cast a shadow over the aspirations of thousands of Indian students who had planned to go to Canada for higher education. Many students, like Singh, are now reconsidering their choices or deferring their plans.



The diplomatic crisis has also affected education and immigration consultants, who rely heavily on students heading abroad. These consultants, who charge fees ranging from 50,000 to 500,000 rupees (about \$594 to \$5,945), assist students with application processes, documentation, and university selection. The ongoing uncertainty surrounding Canada has created a significant disruption in their business as well.

As of 2024, over 1.3 million Indian students

are studying abroad, with Canada hosting the largest number—427,000, accounting for 41 percent of all international students in the country. In comparison, the United States has 337,000 Indian students, the United Kingdom has 185,000, and Germany hosts 42,997. With Canada being a popular destination for Indian students, the current diplomatic standoff represents a significant blow to the higher education plans of many.

Policy Changes and Stricter Regulations

Canada's policy changes are also discouraging students. Traditionally, many international students viewed Canadian student visas as a route to settle in the country. Graduates of Canadian universities could apply for an open work permit, which allowed them to work across various sectors—even in jobs unrelated to their field of study. Spouses of students could also get work permits. This policy led to the growth of several educational institutions, including private career colleges offering courses in collaboration

with public colleges, although the quality varied widely.

However, the Trudeau government recently restricted the issuance of open work permits to postgraduate students in public colleges and universities, effectively barring private and public-private colleges from offering such permits. While spouse work permits continue to be issued, the shift has led many students to reconsider their plans to move to Canada, especially those from India, said Sandhu.

"Strengthening Ties: A New Era of Pakistan-Belarus Cooperation through Strategic MOUs"



By Hina Kashif

Belarusian President Aleksandr Lukashenko when arrived in Islamabad for a three-day official state visit. He was warmly received at Nur Khan Airbase by Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif and senior officials, including Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Ishaq Dar, Information Minister Attaullah Tarar, and Interior Minister Mohsin Naqvi.

A high-level Belarusian delegation, consisting of 68 members, had also reached Islamabad. The delegation included Belarus' foreign minister, ministers for energy, justice, transport, natural resources, and emergency situations, along with the chairman of the Military Industry Committee. Additionally, 43 leading Belarusian business figures were part of the delegation.

The visit came at a time of heightened security in Islamabad, with the city being on alert due to the PTI's final protest call. Authorities had sealed off the Red Zone, which contained key government buildings and the Diplomatic Enclave.

Handcrafted Rickshaw

At the Pakistan-Belarus Business Forum 2024, Federal Minister for Commerce Jam Kamal Khan made a remarkable cultural contribution by showcasing a beautifully handcrafted rickshaw.

This two-person taxi, known for its intricate design and local craftsmanship, not only caught the eye of attendees but also received special admiration from Belarusian Energy Minister Alexey Kushnarenko.

The handcrafted rickshaw, a symbol of Pakistan's rich artistry, became a highlight of the event, adding a unique cultural dimension to the discussions.

After the forum, in a lighthearted moment, Minister Kushnarenko took a closer look at the rickshaw. Sitting inside to appreciate its design and comfort, he expressed his interest in the cultural and economic value of the vehicle.

Jam Kamal Khan, while discussing the

details of the rickshaw, highlighted the immense effort and traditional skills that went into crafting such a unique piece of transportation.

The minister also extended an offer to export these iconic rickshaws to Belarus, emphasizing their potential in the Belarusian market and the value they could add to the country's economic landscape.

Minister Kushnarenko responded with enthusiasm, indicating a keen interest in exploring such unique trade opportunities, which could foster closer ties between Pakistan and Belarus.

This exchange symbolized a deepening of bilateral relations, moving beyond business discussions to include cultural appreciation and mutual respect.

The backdrop to this cultural exchange is the ongoing visit of Belarusian President Aleksandr Lukashenko, who is in Pakistan with a 68-member business delegation.

Roadmap for Comprehensive Cooperation' agreement

Pakistan and Belarus signed a three-year, wide-ranging 'Roadmap for Comprehensive Cooperation' agreement, aimed at strengthening economic ties between the two countries.

The Roadmap for Comprehensive Cooperation between Pakistan and Belarus for 2025-2027, described by the Pakistani government as a "key outcome" of the visit, was one of 15 Memorandums of Understanding (MoUs) and agreements signed during talks between Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif and Belarusian President Aleksandr Lukashenko. These were followed by a delegation-level meeting.

According to the PM Office, the roadmap "outlined a strategic framework for enhancing economic ties through high-level meetings, intergovernmental commissions, and targeted collaborative initiatives."

Other MoUs signed on the occasion covered cooperation in e-commerce, science and technology, accreditation, auditing, vocational education, health services, and halal trade.

The two countries also agreed to collaborate on intelligence sharing related to money laundering and terrorism financing, customs statistics on bilateral trade, international road transport, and disaster management. Additionally, agreements were reached on environmental and climate change cooperation, as well as an extradition treaty to bolster legal frameworks.

These include the landmark "Roadmap for Comprehensive Cooperation" covering the period from 2025 to 2027, aimed at enhancing collaboration across various sectors.

The roadmap focuses on boosting bilateral economic cooperation through initiatives such as high-level meetings, timely meetings of inter-governmental commissions, and promoting collaboration in key sectors of mutual interest. Other significant agreements include cooperation in e-commerce, science and technology, accreditation, auditing, exchange of financial intelligence related to money laundering and terrorism financing, exchange of customs

statistics on bilateral trade, international road transport, environment and climate change, disaster management, vocational education, an extradition treaty, health services, and halal trade.

The President of Belarus, Aleksandr Lukashenko, paid an official visit to Pakistan from November 25 to 27 at the invitation of Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif. During the visit, the two leaders reviewed the full range of bilateral relations and reaffirmed their commitment to strengthening friendly ties across political, trade, economic, cultural, social, and other areas.



During their meeting, the leaders emphasised the importance of advancing political dialogue and strengthening inter-parliamentary relations. They also focused on expanding trade and economic cooperation, adopting a collaborative approach to regional economic integration and connectivity, and enhancing the legal framework to facilitate bilateral collaboration.

Acknowledging Belarus's advanced agricultural manufacturing capabilities and Pakistan's agriculture-based economy, the two sides agreed to promote joint ventures in agriculture and industrial sectors, including the production of high-tech agricultural machinery.

Both sides also agreed to collaborate on the

sales, manufacturing, and servicing of vehicles, including through partnerships between public and private organizations from both countries.

Pakistan and Belarus agreed to expand the network of Belarusian agricultural machinery sales and services in various Pakistani cities, including through partnerships with local organizations. They also considered initiating educational programs in agricultural machinery manufacturing.

During the visit, the Trade Development Authority of Pakistan (TDAP) and the Federation of Pakistan Chambers of

Commerce and Industry (FPCCI), in collaboration with the Belarusian Chamber of Commerce and Industry (BelCCI), organized the Belarus-Pakistan Business Forum.

The forum saw participation from over 30 Belarusian companies and nearly 100 Pakistani counterparts from various sectors, fostering valuable interactions and potential business opportunities.

The two leaders expressed satisfaction with the successful organization of the forum and agreed to encourage both government and private sectors to collaborate on organizing a series of seminars on "Doing Business with Each Other" to reduce trade barriers and facilitate market access.

To enhance trade linkages, both sides welcomed the signing of an MoU between the National Logistics Corporation (NLC) and Beltamozh Service and agreed to encourage other stakeholders, including logistics companies, to develop optimal maritime and land routes for efficient goods delivery to each other's markets. This initiative aims to streamline transportation, reduce costs, and improve the overall efficiency of trade between the two countries.

Both countries emphasized the importance of enhancing bilateral trade in pharmaceutical products, medical devices, health-related items, and over-the-counter products. They agreed to develop strategies to improve trade facilitation by identifying and addressing trade barriers, particularly regulatory challenges, to streamline market access.

Additionally, both sides committed to exploring and implementing policies that enhance mutual market access for these sectors, ensuring compliance with national regulations while promoting growth and cooperation. The two sides also discussed important regional and international issues. The Pakistani side briefed the Belarusian side on the situation in Jammu and Kashmir. Both sides underlined the need for the resolution of all international disputes through peaceful means, in accordance with the UN Charter and UN Security Council resolutions.

Pakistan and Belarus Ink 16 MoUs

Financial Intelligence Cooperation

The Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between the financial authorities of Belarus and Pakistan will enhance the exchange of information related to money laundering, promoting stronger financial intelligence cooperation.

Customs Data Exchange

An agreement between the State Customs Committee of Belarus and Pakistan's Federal Board of Revenue (FBR) aims to facilitate the exchange of bilateral trade statistics and customs data, improving trade monitoring and efficiency.

Vocational Education

A partnership between the Republican Institute for Vocational Education of Belarus and Pakistan's National Vocational and Technical Commission will focus on advancing the development of vocational education programs.

Environment and Climate Change

This MOU will foster collaboration between the two countries to address environmental issues and combat climate change, strengthening joint efforts in environmental protection.

Collaboration in Science and Technology

Agreements between the National Academy of Sciences of Belarus and the Pakistan Academy of Sciences will promote scientific research and technological innovation, encouraging greater cooperation in these fields.

Extradition Agreement

Both nations are set to sign an extradition agreement, which will enhance legal cooperation and support the efficient processing of requests related to criminal matters.

Protection of Classified Information

This agreement will ensure mutual protection of sensitive and classified information, safeguarding the national security interests of both countries.

Comprehensive Cooperation Roadmap

A strategic roadmap for cooperation between 2025 and 2027 will outline clear objectives and actions for enhancing bilateral relations across various sectors.

E-Commerce Cooperation

An MOU between the Belarusian Ministry and Pakistan's Ministry of Commerce will strengthen cooperation in the growing field of e-commerce, facilitating digital trade and innovation.

Emergency Prevention Cooperation

This agreement will focus on cooperation

to prevent and manage emergencies, ensuring that both countries are better prepared to tackle natural or man-made crises.

International Road Traffic

The international road traffic agreement aims to enhance transport cooperation between the two countries, promoting safer and more efficient road travel.

Health Service Cooperation

Through collaboration between Pakistan's Drug Regulatory Authority (DRAP) and Belarus's health examination center, the two nations will work together to improve health service standards.

Halal Trade Cooperation

This MOU, signed between the Pakistan Halal Authority and the Belarusian Halal Standardization Centre, aims to boost trade in halal products, ensuring quality and standardization.

Accreditation Cooperation

An agreement between the Pakistan National Accreditation Council and Belarusian accreditation bodies will help improve the standards across various sectors, ensuring quality and compliance.

Scientific Research Cooperation

The collaboration between Pakistan's Council of Scientific and Industrial Research and Belarusian scientific institutions will encourage joint scientific projects, advancing innovation and research.

Cultural and Educational Exchange

A series of MOUs will promote cultural and educational exchanges, strengthening people-to-people ties and fostering mutual understanding between the two nations.

The signing of these MOUs marks a significant milestone in strengthening the relationship between Pakistan and Belarus. These agreements, spanning multiple sectors such as finance, education, environment, and technology, lay the foundation for increased collaboration and development in the coming years. Both nations are committed to enhancing their cooperative efforts, unlocking new opportunities for growth and mutual benefit.

IMF assessment of the economy of Pakistan: Govt faces tough fiscal challenges

Pakistan faces a tight fiscal situation. The ratio of public debt-to-GDP has risen significantly in recent years, growing by around 16 percentage points of GDP between FY17 and FY23. This is due to a combination of factors, including weaker-than-expected GDP growth, a depreciation of the rupee, the high cost of responding to natural disasters, and the pandemic problem.



By Javed Mahmood

Pakistan faces a tight fiscal situation, which will require strong control over the budget in the coming years. Public debt has increased considerably, and interest payments now absorb 60 percent of budgeted revenue. Multiple external shocks and the unprecedented floods in 2022 have buffeted the economy and the government's fiscal position. These shocks have been compounded by policy slippages including unbudgeted subsidies, and delays in implementing revenue measures. The authorities now have the difficult task of converting a primary deficit of 1.3 percent of GDP for FY23 into a primary surplus for FY24 and continuing to exercise fiscal restraint, while preserving essential social and development spending. In this context, it will be crucial to further enhance the country's Public Financial Management (PFM) system, as well as strengthen revenue mobilization and administration.

This report focuses on how to strengthen budget preparation, execution, and controls, including ways to harness digital technologies for that purpose. There are other important areas in PFM where the authorities are making progress, such as the oversight of state enterprises, cash and debt management, the Treasury Single Account (TSA), and public investment management, which have been the focus of previous IMF technical reports. An examination of Pakistan's recent budgetary outcomes reveals substantial deviations from planned budgets. While these discrepancies are partially due to an unstable external environment and political uncertainties, the establishment of stronger fiscal institutions can help deliver a more credible budget, tighten its execution, and prevent policy slippages. This report identifies how this can be done in Pakistan.

Its main findings are:

- **Macro-Fiscal Forecasting.** Macro-fiscal functions are distributed among different institutions that are responsible for forecasting macroeconomic indicators, tax revenue, public debt service, and development spending (largely comprising capital projects), but are poorly coordinated. A macro-fiscal policy unit (MFPU) has been put in place in the Economic Adviser's Wing but is at an early stage of development and does not yet provide effective support for the Finance Division, particularly its Budget Wing. A National Macro-Fiscal Framework is prepared but does not kickstart the budget preparation process.
- **Budget preparation.** A top-down, strategic phase at the start of

budget preparation could be strengthened, with spending ministries and agencies required to prepare their budget submissions under relatively weak constraints and insufficient guidance on the available fiscal space. Several other budgeting practices could be strengthened: (i) there is an inefficient dual budgeting system with a bloated pipeline of projects in the Public Sector Development Plan (PSDP) and separate decision-making processes for recurrent and development spending; (ii) the budget call circular (BCC) provides spending ministries and divisions with little guidance on budget priorities and spending ceilings are out of date; and (iii) the organization of the Finance Division is fragmented and not well tuned to provide effective policy advice on the budget, and effective scrutiny of budget proposals.

- Budget execution. The Executive is a relative outlier internationally in terms of its ability to award in-year supplementary grants without ex-ante approval from the National Assembly, and any limit on their size. Extensive use of these grants has been made in recent years. They amounted to 14 percent of approved spending in the last two years. In addition, technical supplementary

grants, or 8 reallocations across budget appropriations, amounted to another 13 percent of approved spending in the last two years. While legislative approval may occasionally hinder prompt responses to emergencies, a balanced solution should be adopted in Pakistan, as is the case elsewhere. The example of the previous caretaker government, which oversees the budget without resorting to supplementary grants, shows that strong commitment can lead to effective budget management without total flexibility. Another challenge in budget execution is the absence of comprehensive commitment control mechanisms, which, at a minimum, affects proper budget monitoring, but can, more worryingly, lead to over-commitment of spending, unwanted supplementary grants, and arrears.

- Digitalization of budget processes. The Ministry of Finance has put in place measures to (i) enhance the digitalization of the budget preparation and execution processes; and (ii) improve fiscal monitoring and reporting. Despite several reforms, however, budget processes still involve significant manual and paper-based steps. Fully digitalized processes are yet to be prepared and implemented in the

Financial Accounting and Budgeting System (FABS). The Finance Division has designed a data warehouse to store fiscal data and made available a set of dashboards for use by stakeholders, but this is hampered by the lack of timely data provided by some key entities. As a result, fiscal reporting is not yet comprehensive and timely. The regulatory framework and fiscal data governance (FDG) practices, including data exchange, do not yet fully address these challenges.

The report provides the following high-level recommendations:

- Strengthen capacity at the Finance Division to lead and coordinate macro-fiscal forecasts to support budget preparation, as well as increase forecast cycles and synchronize them with the budget.
- Introduce a strategic phase to the budget process, in line with the Public Financial Management Act (PFMA) 2019 and the accompanying Budget Manual; include more guidance and binding ceilings in the Budget Call Circular; and undertake actions to minimize dual (“recurrent/capital”) budgeting.



- Consider reorganizing the Finance Division with a focus on its budget and budget management functions, to bring the structure into line with good international practice.
- Implement the Supreme Court ruling on supplementary grants No. 20 of 2013 that Supplementary Budget Statements be subject to the same scrutiny and procedure as the Annual Budget Statement, including ex-ante approval by the National Assembly of supplementary grants. Relevant laws and rules can be amended to ensure greater certainty and clarity on the interpretation and application of this ruling, including potentially Article 84 of the Constitution. Propose the creation of a Contingency Reserve in the budget to maintain budget flexibility. Concurrently, the Auditor General of Pakistan (AGP) could conduct a special audit of the mechanisms and effectiveness of supplementary grants in past years.
- Prepare a PFM Digitalization Master Plan, establish a high-level Steering Committee to oversee the coordination and implementation of the Plan, strengthen Fiscal Data Governance (FDG) practices, consider the next steps after SAP life support ends in 2025, and review the budget preparation and budget execution business processes in FABS.

Pakistan faces a tight fiscal situation

Pakistan faces a tight fiscal situation. The ratio of public debt-to-GDP has risen significantly in recent years, growing by around 16 percentage points of GDP between FY17 and FY23. This is due to a combination of factors, including weaker-than-expected GDP growth, a depreciation of the rupee, the high cost of responding to natural disasters and the pandemic, underperforming State-Owned Enterprises (SOEs), but also the general challenges in delivering on planned fiscal consolidation. Concurrently, the proportion of budget revenue consumed by interest payments has doubled since FY17 and now stands at 60 percent of tax revenue.

The authorities have the difficult task of converting a primary deficit of 1.3 percent of GDP for FY23 into a primary surplus of 0.4 percent of GDP for FY24. This goal is predicated on the materialization of additional revenues from recent measures and significant restraint across all areas of expenditure while prioritizing social and development spending. The objective in the medium term is to bring down debt below 60 percent of GDP, from 74 percent currently, in line with the Fiscal Responsibility and Debt Limitation Act (FRDLA) of 2005. In recent years, actual fiscal outcomes at the Federal level have fared worse than the projections. The actual fiscal deficit exceeded the budgeted deficit by 25 percent on average over the period FY17-23. Budget estimates for revenue have



consistently been overestimated. The performance of non-tax revenue (against budgeted amounts) has notably deteriorated in recent years, experiencing a year-on-year drop of 53 percent in FY19 and 43 percent in FY22. In years before FY20, this revenue shortfall was met by spending offsets, particularly by cuts in non-interest recurrent expenditure and development expenditure. In recent years, however, the authorities have failed to contain spending, despite making large cuts to development spending. At the same time, interest payments have risen sharply, due to the increase in public debt, largely domestic and non-concessional in nature, and a rise in borrowing costs.

Factors behind the government's poor performance

The Federal government's recent poor fiscal performance is attributable to several factors. These include the devastating floods of 2022, with losses estimated at 5 percent of GDP; substantial volatility in commodity prices; and tightening external and domestic financing conditions. These unforeseen challenges have complicated budget planning and execution. The government was required to undertake emergency measures in response to the floods, the slowdown in economic growth, and the rise in consumer prices. 5. Policy slippages have also contributed to the current tight fiscal situation. In FY23,

unplanned and untargeted subsidies, and delays in rolling out planned revenue measures delayed planned fiscal adjustments.

In FY22, amid political tensions, a relief package provided generous subsidies on petrol and diesel, lowered electricity tariffs, and provided tax exemptions and a tax amnesty. These measures were accompanied by increases in public wages and pensions and additional food subsidies. As a result, there have been substantial changes to the size and composition of spending compared to the approved annual budget. These in-year changes have occurred either through technical supplementary



grants—or through supplementary and excess grants, which are additional grants approved during the year not met by the surrender of existing grants (as defined by Article 84 of the Constitution).

In FY23, the sum of these supplementary grants exceeded 50 percent of budget spending. As discussed later in this report, given the extraordinary latitude taken by the Executive in its interpretation of Article 84 of the Constitution to approve these grants without the prior approval of the National Assembly, this means that a significant proportion of spending does not undergo the prior scrutiny of the latter.

Effective control over the budget will be paramount, both this year and in the foreseeable future. While these

discrepancies identified above are due to an unstable external environment and policy slippages, the establishment of stronger fiscal institutions can help deliver a more credible budget and tighten its execution. This report identifies how this can be done in Pakistan by addressing some key shortcomings of the PFM system, especially by strengthening budget preparation and tightening budget execution. This report provides specific recommendations on these two aspects, including using digitalization as an enabling factor. Other areas of PFM reforms are equally critical, such as SOE reforms, the implementation of the Treasury Single Account (TSA), and proactive cash and debt management, and have been dealt with in other IMF reports, but they fall outside of the scope of this report.

Digitalizing the Budget Process

Pakistan has made advances in digitalizing PFM processes in recent years, particularly in budget execution. According to the World Bank's GovTech maturity index, the digitalization of PFM in Pakistan is broadly equivalent to its peers. FABS is at the heart of the PFM system. It is a tool designed to support budget preparation and execution at the federal and provincial levels. FABS captures budget data and processes for more than 33,000 cost centers across the government, of which 5,500 are at the federal level.

In addition, the FABS department, located in the Office of the Controller General of Accounts, has implemented a Data Warehouse where fiscal data is collected and made available to stakeholders through a set of dashboards. The planning and implementation of development projects, including the submission of project proposals, appraisal, approval monitoring, and evaluation of projects, are supported by the Intelligent Project Automation System (iPAS); and procurement is supported by the ePADS. The FABS department is planning to employ the e-Office system operated by the Pakistan National Information Technology Board which would provide an interface with FABS and reduce the number of required FABS licenses.



World Bank sets ambitious goals for social protection to 500 million people by 2030

Globally, economic inclusion initiatives are on the rise. These programs now reach 15 million households, benefiting over 70 million people in 88 countries, according to the new State of Economic Inclusion Report 2024 by the World Bank-hosted Partnership for Economic Inclusion. Government-led programs often spearhead these efforts, having reached nearly 75 percent of these households.

By Harris Choudhry



As the world grapples with complex global concerns like poverty, inequality, and climate change, it's the poorest communities that are often hardest hit and the most challenging to support.

To address these pressing issues, the World Bank Group has set ambitious goals to provide social protection measures to at least 500 million people by 2030, including 250 million women.

As we work toward these aims, economic inclusion programs, which help boost the income and assets of the world's poorest groups, will be instrumental as they are proven pathways to better job opportunities and a life of dignity. These efforts drive change by layering solutions like digital cash transfers with skills training, business capital, coaching, and access to markets. By doing so, they contribute to breaking the cycle of poverty and building resilience.

Globally, economic inclusion initiatives are on the rise. These programs now reach 15 million households, benefiting over 70 million people in 88 countries, according to the new State of Economic Inclusion Report 2024 by the World Bank-hosted Partnership for Economic Inclusion. Government-led programs often spearhead these efforts, having reached nearly 75 percent of these households. Nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) offer additional support and further expand the reach.

But the fight to reduce extreme poverty is far from over, with almost 700 million people still living on less than \$2.15 per day, many of whom face severe food insecurity. This recent report builds on findings from 2021, showcasing the vast potential for scaling up economic inclusion programs as we work to end poverty.

Evidence backs the power of economic inclusion

Research shows that economic inclusion programs are impactful and cost-effective, and they empower individuals and communities. In Niger, for instance, household spending on food, health, education, and other goods and services grew by 15 percent thanks to such an initiative, while women's business revenues doubled. Similarly, in Zambia, the Supporting Women's Livelihood program led to a nearly 20 percent rise in spending on food and non-food items and a 45 percent increase in business profits, with the program breaking even within a year. In Afghanistan, participating households had 32 percent higher income and more diverse earning sources five years after an intervention, helping them endure a series of droughts and conflicts.

Such results not only highlight the cost-effectiveness of these programs, but also their potential to deliver significant returns on investment when integrated into government systems. Our report pulls together these success stories and offers guidance on how to scale up such programs in ways that overcome the specific constraints of their participants to unleash their economic potential.

Engaging women and youth for lasting change

One of the major impacts of economic inclusion programs can be their ability to gainfully employ women and youth. Yet more can be done. Ninety percent of these programs target women, but only a third focus explicitly on empowering women economically. A few design changes to address issues like social norms, unpaid care burdens, and legal and regulatory hurdles can further boost the impact of these efforts.

Youth unemployment is another priority, especially in regions with a burgeoning young population. Approximately two-thirds of economic inclusion programs target youth, primarily encouraging self-employment in rural settings. In urban areas, programs that help expand wage employment through skills training, apprenticeships, and partnerships with employers could offer young people with more diverse and sustainable economic

opportunities. In Bangladesh, for example, the World Bank works with the government to provide vulnerable urban youth, particularly women, with mentorship and life skills training to increase their confidence and with apprenticeships in traditionally male-dominated occupations to help unlock their economic potential.

Building climate resilience

Economic inclusion programs can also help address climate change. Today, 66 percent of these programs integrate climate resilience measures, equipping participants to manage environmental risks. In the Sahel, for example, nearly 600,000 vulnerable people across six countries received support to diversify their livelihoods toward more climate resilient ones. Innovative approaches, such as climate risk insurance and low-cost green technologies, can further empower communities to adapt and build resilience, linking economic inclusion with sustainable, climate-resilient livelihoods.

Greater reach and impact with coordinated partnerships

Scaling these programs to reach more people requires both efficiency and greater quality in their implementation. Government-led delivery systems that are support-

ed by digital technologies and partner with NGOs, community-based organizations, and the private sector can significantly expand the reach of economic inclusion programs.

This flexible approach, which adapts programs to local needs and outcomes so they can scale and expand successfully, needs to be embedded within national social protection systems. An integrated model of delivering employment to the poor and vulnerable, supported by protection during times of crisis, is a smart investment choice for any government committed to fighting poverty and giving all its citizens a level playing field to move up the ladder of opportunity.

Toward a future of resilience with equity

The State of Economic Inclusion Report 2024 reminds us that economic inclusion is not just an investment choice for governments, it is also a path to meaningfully change the lives of millions of people who struggle daily against poverty, lack of opportunity, disillusionment, and despair. We can do better. Whether we are policy makers, development practitioners or partners, we can try to scale up economic inclusion programs wherever possible. If we want to create a more resilient, inclusive, and equitable future, this must be an urgent priority.



IDEAS 2024: A Showcase of Pakistan's Defense Innovation and Global Engagement



By Romana Afsheen

The International Defense Exhibition and Seminar (IDEAS) 2024 unfolded in Karachi from November 19 to 22, bringing together global defense players to display cutting-edge military technologies and explore collaboration opportunities. As one of the most anticipated events in South Asia's defense calendar, IDEAS 2024 featured a record-breaking attendance of 557 exhibitors, including 333 international companies from 53 countries. Türkiye emerged as the largest foreign participant, showcasing a strong portfolio of advanced technologies, while Iran and Italy marked their first-ever participation, signaling the growing prestige of this biennial event.

Inaugurated by Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif, the event reinforced Pakistan's position as a rising hub for defense manufacturing. It also emphasized the government's aspirations to double the country's annual arms exports to \$500 million over the next

five years. Beyond its focus on showcasing defense capabilities, IDEAS 2024 served as a platform for fostering bilateral trade agreements, enhancing technological cooperation, and encouraging innovation-driven growth in the defense sector.

An Inauguration of Strategic Significance

Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif set the tone for IDEAS 2024 by highlighting the event's significance in strengthening Pakistan's defense sector and boosting international partnerships. He praised the exhibition as a symbol of Pakistan's dedication to self-reliance in defense manufacturing, noting its growing global appeal. The inaugural ceremony drew high-ranking officials, military leaders, and representatives from global defense industries, reflecting the event's expanding reach.

Security measures during the exhibition were unprecedented, underscoring

its importance on the national and international stage. The high-profile attendance included delegates from the United States, Russia, China, the United Kingdom, Azerbaijan, and more, demonstrating the event's ability to transcend geopolitical boundaries.

Pakistan's Defense Manufacturing in the Spotlight

A focal point of IDEAS 2024 was the display of Pakistan's indigenous defense technologies, which have made significant strides in recent years. Global Industrial Defence Solutions (GIDS) unveiled its flagship Shahpar III combat drone, drawing widespread attention for its advanced operational capabilities. The UAV, capable of performing precision strikes with bombs, missiles, and torpedoes, boasts a remarkable operational altitude of 35,000 feet and a 24-hour endurance, making it a competitive offering for modern military operations.

Heavy Industries Taxila (HIT) showcased the Haider Main Battle Tank, an advanced armored vehicle designed for modern battlefield scenarios. Developed in collaboration with China's NORINCO, the Haider tank represents a new era of military technology for Pakistan, emphasizing speed, agility, and firepower. Alongside the Haider, HIT also displayed its widely acclaimed Al-Khalid and Al-Zarrar tanks, which continue to serve as mainstays of Pakistan's armored forces.

Another standout exhibit came from the National Aerospace Science and Technology Park, which highlighted the SR-3D radar, a state-of-the-art system aimed at enhancing situational awareness in high-stakes environments. Complementing

to cybersecurity technologies and naval platforms.

STM's drones, including the Kargu, Togan, and Boyga models, stood out for their versatility and advanced features. Designed for roles such as surveillance and precision strikes, these UAVs showcased the innovation driving Türkiye's defense sector. Similarly, the STM500 submarine, tailored for coastal defense and special operations, highlighted Türkiye's expanding capabilities in maritime technology.

Havelsan unveiled its groundbreaking "digital troops" concept, integrating AI-driven software solutions for enhanced operational efficiency. The Caka submersible-kamikaze unmanned surface

trial technology. Such collaborations could enhance Pakistan's manufacturing capacities while promoting technology transfer, a key component of its defense strategy.

The event also provided a platform for negotiating defense agreements aimed at boosting Pakistan's export revenues. A Defense Ministry official revealed that discussions with international buyers centered around key products, including drones, radar systems, and fighter jets. These deals could help Pakistan achieve its ambitious target of increasing arms exports to \$500 million annually.

The Role of Startups and Innovation

One of the highlights of IDEAS 2024 was the introduction of a dedicated pavilion for startups, an initiative driven by the National University of Sciences and Technology (NUST) and the National Aerospace and Technology Park. This pavilion focused on cutting-edge fields such as artificial intelligence, robotics, and autonomous systems, emphasizing their applications in modern defense.

By showcasing the work of young innovators, the pavilion aimed to bridge the gap between academia and the defense industry. Startups displayed AI-driven surveillance tools, robotic combat systems, and next-generation cyber-defense platforms, capturing the interest of both local and international delegations. This emphasis on emerging technologies aligns with Pakistan's strategy to remain competitive in the global arms market by fostering home-grown innovation.

IDEAS 2024 as a Catalyst for Strategic Growth

IDEAS 2024 underscored Pakistan's commitment to self-reliance and export-oriented growth in the defense sector. The country's focus on indigenous production has significantly reduced its reliance on imports, paving the way for economic resilience and technological advancement.

The agreements and collaborations resulting from the event are expected to strengthen Pakistan's position in global defense markets. Countries in Africa, the Middle East, and Central Asia have shown keen



these innovations was the GM 500 Turah stealth loitering munition, a highly adaptable weapon that garnered interest from international buyers. These exhibits not only underscored Pakistan's growing technological expertise but also showcased its potential to cater to global defense markets.

Türkiye's Leading Role at IDEAS 2024

Türkiye emerged as the most prominent participant at IDEAS 2024, reflecting its robust partnership with Pakistan in defense and technology sectors. With 30 Turkish companies present, the event served as a testament to Türkiye's growing influence in the global arms industry. Companies like STM, Roketsan, Havelsan, and Meteksan displayed a wide range of cutting-edge solutions, from UAVs and missile systems

vehicle, another standout from Havelsan, demonstrated the potential for autonomous systems in naval combat scenarios. Roketsan, known for its precision weapons, showcased advanced munitions like the Cakir cruise missile and MAM series, which cater to land, air, and naval platforms. These displays not only reinforced Türkiye's technological leadership but also opened avenues for deeper collaboration with Pakistan.

Bilateral Partnerships and Economic Growth

IDEAS 2024 facilitated meaningful discussions on strengthening bilateral ties, particularly between Pakistan and Türkiye. Federal Commerce Minister Jam Kamal Khan engaged with Ismail Demir, Chairman of Türkiye's KARDEMİR, to explore partnerships in steel production and indus-

interest in acquiring Pakistani defense products, particularly its UAVs and radar systems. These partnerships not only enhance Pakistan's export revenues but also contribute to its strategic influence in these regions.

Expanding Global Influence

Since its inception in 2002, IDEAS has grown from a regional event to a globally recognized platform for defense collaboration. The 12th edition of the exhibition reflected its expanded scope, with first-time participants such as Iran and Italy joining traditional attendees like the U.S., Russia, and China. This diverse representation underscores IDEAS' role in bridging geopolitical divides and fostering dialogue among nations.

The seminar on Pakistan's defense production potential, held alongside the exhibition, provided valuable insights into the challenges and opportunities facing the sector. Experts from around the world shared strategies for innovation, resource optimization, and international collaboration, charting a roadmap for future growth.

Türkiye-Pakistan Collaboration: A Growing

Partnership

The synergy between Pakistan and Türkiye stood out as a defining feature of IDEAS 2024. Over the years, the two nations have deepened their ties, particularly in defense cooperation. Joint ventures in areas like drone technology, naval platforms, and armored vehicles have not only strengthened their military capabilities but also fostered economic growth.

Türkiye's significant presence at the event reflected its commitment to this partnership. Beyond showcasing advanced technologies, Turkish companies engaged in discussions on joint manufacturing and research initiatives, aiming to leverage the strengths of both nations. This collaboration could serve as a model for other countries seeking to build sustainable defense partnerships.

Future Prospects for IDEAS

IDEAS 2024 has set a new benchmark for defense exhibitions in South Asia, highlighting the potential for innovation, collaboration, and economic growth in the defense sector. The success of this edition reinforces Pakistan's role as a hub for global defense players, offering a platform for meaningful exchanges and partnerships.

The agreements signed during the event are expected to boost Pakistan's export revenues and technological capabilities, while the exposure provided to startups could pave the way for innovation-led growth. As the country continues to invest in indigenous production and export-oriented policies, it is well-positioned to become a significant player in the global arms market.

Conclusion

IDEAS 2024 was more than a showcase of military hardware; it was a testament to Pakistan's evolving defense landscape and its aspirations for global collaboration. From groundbreaking innovations like the Shahpar III drone to the growing influence of Türkiye in the event, IDEAS highlighted the possibilities of technology-driven growth and international partnerships.

As the event concluded, its impact resonated beyond the exhibition halls. The discussions, agreements, and innovations showcased at IDEAS 2024 will shape Pakistan's defense and industrial future, positioning it as a key player in the global defense arena. With a strategic focus on self-reliance, innovation, and collaboration, Pakistan is poised to achieve its ambitious goals and strengthen its role on the world stage.



Bloodshed in Kurram: Shia Muslims Face Brutal Attacks in Parachinar



By Kanwal Munir

Introduction

Parachinar, the picturesque capital of Kurram District in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan, has long been marred by waves of sectarian violence and tribal conflicts. Once known as the "Paradise on Earth" for its scenic beauty, the region now finds itself at the heart of a humanitarian crisis, with its Shia Muslim community often bearing the brunt of targeted violence. Recent incidents, including a deadly attack on a convoy of Shia travelers, have claimed dozens of lives and left scores injured, exposing the grim realities of deep-rooted sectarian divisions and weak governance.

Geopolitical factors, historical tensions, and the region's strategic location along the Afghan border have amplified local disputes, turning them into larger-scale conflicts. Despite government efforts, including jirga-mediated ceasefires, sustainable peace remains elusive, with frequent outbreaks of violence devastating the local population. The impact on residents—especially women and children—is profound, as they face loss, displacement, and a lack of basic services like education and healthcare.

The ongoing bloodshed highlights systemic

failures in governance, the unchecked influence of extremist elements, and the urgent need for comprehensive reforms. Addressing these issues is essential not only for restoring stability to Kurram but also for ensuring justice and security for its beleaguered communities.

The Historical Context of Parachinar's Sectarian Tensions

The sectarian violence in Parachinar can be traced back to historical tribal and sectarian rivalries. Parachinar, located in the upper part of Kurram, is a Shia-majority town, while the surrounding areas are predominantly Sunni. The Turi and Bangash tribes, the two primary Shia tribes in Parachinar, have lived in relative harmony with their Sunni neighbors for centuries. However, this peace has been repeatedly shattered by external and internal factors that have fueled tensions.

In the 1980s, the region saw a surge in sectarian violence as a result of the Afghan jihad, during which Pakistan became a key ally of the United States and its Mujahideen forces. The influx of Afghan refugees, many

of whom were Sunni Muslims, into the region, combined with the rise of extremist Sunni ideologies, led to an increase in sectarian violence. The Pakistani state's decision to arm and support Sunni factions in the Afghan war also contributed to the polarization of the Shia and Sunni communities in Parachinar.

The Iranian Revolution of 1979 further exacerbated tensions, as it inspired Shia political movements in the region, including those in Pakistan. These factors, coupled with the introduction of armed militias and the ongoing regional conflict in Afghanistan, created an environment where sectarian violence could thrive. Since then, the violence has been intermittent, with periodic outbreaks of violence between Shia and Sunni groups.

The most significant incident in recent history occurred in 2007, when a series of deadly clashes between Shia and Sunni groups in Parachinar resulted in over 3,000 casualties, with more than 50 villages burned and hundreds displaced. This marked a turning point in the region's history, and while some periods of peace have followed, the underlying tensions remain unresolved.

The Role of Land Disputes and Tribal Rivalries

A significant factor driving the violence in Parachinar is the longstanding land disputes between different tribes. These disputes often involve issues such as water access, the cutting of wood from forests, and the denial of road access. The Kurram District, like many tribal areas, has a complex system of land ownership, and these disputes often escalate into larger sectarian conflicts.

In many cases, these land disputes have been politicized and exploited by extremist elements. The presence of militant groups such as the Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) has further intensified these tensions. These groups have sought to exploit the local conflicts for their own political and religious agendas, turning what would have been local, tribal disputes into larger, more violent sectarian clashes.

Land disputes in the region often spill over into sectarian violence due to the involvement of extremist ideologies and political agendas. For example, Sunni extremist groups have targeted Shia civilians in retaliation for perceived Shia support of Iran, while Shia militants have sought to protect their community from Sunni attacks. This cycle of violence has created a highly volatile situation where small disputes can quickly spiral out of control, resulting in bloodshed and destruction.

The Recent Violence: An Escalating Crisis

The recent violence that has engulfed Parachinar is part of a recurring pattern of clashes between the Shia and Sunni populations. Recently, a tragic sectarian attack took place in Kurram District, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan, on November 21, 2024. A convoy of over 200 vehicles carrying Shia Muslim passengers traveling from Parachinar to Peshawar was ambushed. Gunmen targeted police escorts and passengers, killing at least 54 individuals, including five children and eight women, and injuring 86 others. The attack, described as one of the deadliest sectarian incidents in the region, lasted approximately 40 minutes, with gunmen firing from

nearby fields. The violence escalated tensions in Kurram, leading to riots in villages like Bagan and Bacha Kot, where shops and government buildings were set on fire. Tribal clashes also intensified in Lower Kurram Agency between the Alizai and Bagan tribes.

To address the unrest, a seven-day ceasefire agreement was recently reached between warring factions in Kurram. This truce aims to ease tensions while broader reconciliation efforts continue. The attack has further underscored the urgent need for improved security measures and community dialogue in the region.

In late July 2024, a property dispute between two local tribes in the Kurram district escalated into full-scale violence. The Boshehra and Maleekhel tribes, both of whom live in the area, engaged in armed clashes that quickly spread to neighboring villages. The violence resulted in 36 deaths and over 160 injuries, primarily affecting the Shia population of Parachinar.

The violence was fueled by extremist rhetoric spread through social media platforms, such as WhatsApp and Facebook, where calls for jihad were made. These platforms have increasingly become a tool for inciting hatred and violence, and in this case, they played a significant role in escalating the conflict. Militant groups from outside the region, including the TTP, also joined the violence, further exacerbating the sectarian divide.

The Pakistani government's response to the violence has been widely criticized. While local jirgas (tribal councils) attempted to broker a ceasefire, their efforts were largely ineffective. The violence has resulted in the closure of the Parachinar Road, cutting off access to essential goods, including food and medicines, for the residents of the area. Educational institutions were also shut down, and mobile and internet services were suspended, leaving the people of Parachinar in a state of isolation and fear.

The Human Toll: Impact on the Shia Community

The violence in Parachinar has taken a heavy toll on the Shia community. In addition to the deaths and injuries, the conflict has left many families devastated.

Women, in particular, have suffered greatly, losing their husbands, fathers, and brothers in the violence. Mariam, a 28-year-old resident of Parachinar, shared her personal story of loss, recounting how her brother was killed in the twin bombings that shook the town in 2017. With the death of her brother, Mariam's family was left without a breadwinner, and her mother had to take on the responsibility of supporting the family as a midwife.

The ongoing violence has also severely impacted the education and healthcare sectors in Parachinar. Schools and colleges in the region have been forced to close during periods of unrest, depriving children of an education. The lack of qualified medical staff, equipment, and resources in local hospitals has compounded the suffering, making it difficult to treat the injured during and after outbreaks of violence.

The Shia community in Parachinar has been left in a state of constant fear and uncertainty. Despite their peaceful existence in the region for centuries, they are now faced with the reality of being targeted for their religious beliefs. The failure of the government to protect them and address the underlying causes of the violence has only deepened their sense of vulnerability and despair.

The Government's Response: A Failure to Protect the Shia Community

The Pakistani government has been widely criticized for its inadequate response to the violence in Parachinar. Despite numerous appeals from local leaders and activists, the government has failed to take decisive action to protect the Shia minority.

In particular, the government's failure to provide adequate security and law enforcement in the region has allowed extremist groups to operate with impunity. The lack of a comprehensive strategy to address the root causes of the violence, such as land disputes, sectarian tensions, and the rise of militant groups, has allowed the situation to deteriorate.

Local authorities in Kurram have also been criticized for their inability to control the

violence. While jirgas and peace committees have made efforts to mediate between the warring parties, these efforts have been largely unsuccessful. The violence has continued to escalate, and the government has been unable to enforce the peace agreements reached by these tribal councils.

Moreover, the government's focus on short-term solutions, such as imposing curfews or temporarily closing roads, has done little to address the underlying causes of the violence. A long-term strategy is needed to bring lasting peace to Parachinar and ensure the safety of the Shia population.



The Role of Media in Shaping Public Perception

The role of local and international media in highlighting the sectarian violence in Parachinar has been inconsistent. While some media outlets have reported on the violence, there has often been insufficient coverage of the ongoing humanitarian crisis in Parachinar. This underreporting has contributed to the marginalization of the Shia community in the broader national discourse.

On the other hand, media coverage of sectarian violence tends to sensationalize certain aspects of the conflict, which can exacerbate tensions between Sunni and Shia communities. Some reports have been criticized for failing to differentiate between the actions of local Shia and Sunni tribes versus the extremist groups that often fuel the violence. Increased independent journalism and unbiased reporting are needed to raise awareness of the human rights violations and to hold both militant

groups and the state accountable. Social media, however, has played a more active role in giving voice to the victims, with individuals from Parachinar and other affected areas sharing their stories online.

The Role of Extremist Groups and Geopolitical Tensions

The rise of extremist groups such as the TTP has further exacerbated the sectarian violence in Parachinar. These groups have exploited the political and social divisions in the region to advance their agenda of

religious intolerance and violence. The TTP, in particular, has been responsible for numerous attacks on Shia Muslims in Parachinar and other parts of Pakistan.

Geopolitical factors also play a significant role in the violence. The Kurram District borders Afghanistan, a country that has long been a hotbed of sectarian and political conflict. The presence of militant groups along the border, combined with the ongoing conflict in Afghanistan, has created a volatile environment in which sectarian violence can thrive. Additionally, the involvement of external powers, including Iran and Saudi Arabia, has further fueled sectarian tensions in the region.

The combination of internal factors, such as land disputes and tribal rivalries, and external factors, such as the presence of militant groups and geopolitical tensions, has created a perfect storm for sectarian violence in Parachinar. This complex web of factors has made it difficult to resolve the conflict and bring lasting peace to the region.

The Path to Peace: A Call for Comprehensive Reforms

To address the ongoing violence in Parachinar, a comprehensive and multifaceted approach is required. First and foremost, the government must take decisive action to protect the Shia community and ensure their safety. This includes increasing security in the region, arresting and prosecuting those responsible for inciting and carrying out the violence, and providing adequate support for the families of victims.

Furthermore, the government must address the underlying causes of the violence, including land disputes, tribal rivalries, and the rise of extremist ideologies. This requires a long-term strategy that focuses on education, economic development, and reconciliation between the Shia and Sunni communities in Parachinar. It is essential that both local and national leaders work together to foster dialogue, trust, and understanding between these communities.

Finally, the international community must play a role in supporting peace efforts in Parachinar. This includes providing humanitarian aid to those affected by the violence, as well as supporting initiatives aimed at promoting interfaith dialogue and tolerance in the region.

Conclusion

The ongoing violence in Parachinar represents a tragic chapter in the history of sectarian conflict in Pakistan. The Shia community, once peaceful and prosperous, is now subjected to targeted violence and fear, largely driven by extremist groups and tribal rivalries. The failure of the government to effectively address the causes of the violence has left the community vulnerable and in desperate need of protection.

Only through a comprehensive, long-term strategy that addresses both the immediate security concerns and the root causes of the conflict can Parachinar begin to heal. The international community must also lend its support to ensure the safety and well-being of the Shia population. Until then, the bloodshed in Parachinar is likely to continue, perpetuating the cycle of violence and division that has plagued the region for decades.

Jannat Mirza stuns her millions of fans with stunning fashion

Speaking at an event in Canada, Hania stated that whenever she decides to get married, she will make sure to announce it publicly and will not keep it a secret. This statement comes amidst growing curiosity surrounding her personal life, particularly her relationships and any potential future marriage.



By Harry Choudhry

Popular Pakistani TikToker Jannat Mirza continues to captivate her fans with her engaging content on social media.

Recently, the Shayar star shared a new set of joyful photos on Instagram, showcasing her vibrant personality. Wearing minimal makeup and radiating happiness, Jannat once again proved why she's seen as a style icon by her followers.

Fans were quick to respond with enthusiastic comments, with one admirer writing, "Look so beautiful," while others filled the comments section with appreciative emojis. Jannat's popularity on Instagram has soared, amassing over six million followers who enjoy her fashionable and cheerful posts.

Areej Chaudhry reveals criticism from fans for her negative roles

Actress Areej Chaudhry, best known for her captivating performances in

Pakistani dramas, recently opened up about the backlash she has faced for playing negative roles on-screen.

In an interview on a morning show, Areej shared that while she mesmerized audiences with her role in the popular drama *Kabhi Main Kabhi Tum*, her portrayal of antagonistic characters has led some viewers to curse her and misjudge her real-life personality.

"I have a positive personality, and in real life, I oppose many of the things that are portrayed in negative roles," Areej explained. She highlighted the challenges of playing these roles, saying, "Understanding and working on a negative character is extremely difficult."

Despite her real-life beliefs, she has had to delve into morally complex characters for the sake of her craft. One of Areej's most talked-about performances was when she shared the screen with actor Emmad Irfani in a drama where her character engaged in an extramarital affair. The plot took a dramatic turn

when her character's secret was exposed by Rubab, played by Naeema Butt, during a pivotal scene at a birthday celebration for Adeel, the character played by Irfani.

This storyline, particularly her role in breaking up a marriage, left a strong impression on viewers, and many found it hard to separate the character from the actress playing it.

Areej admitted that portraying such a negative character was mentally taxing. "In a drama, there is a husband and wife, and I am playing the role that separates them. I often found myself thinking about what I was doing on-screen, which was a significant challenge. It was a completely different experience for me," she said.

While discussing her experience with negative roles, Areej shared that she has faced criticism and hostility on social media. "People often curse me and give me bad wishes because of my negative roles," she revealed.

However, she noted that when people

meet her in person, their opinions tend to change. "After meeting me, their perspective shifts; they tell me I don't seem bad at all," she said with a smile, emphasizing that audiences often confuse her with the roles she portrays.

Despite the challenges, Areej has earned acclaim for her performances in various hit dramas, including *Woh Pagal Si*, *Turk Wafa*, and *Gentleman*.

Her versatility as an actress has made her one of the most recognized faces on television, though her negative roles continue to spark strong reactions from fans.

Nonetheless, Areej remains committed to her craft and views each role as an opportunity for personal and professional growth, even if it comes with the price of being misunderstood. With her dedication to portraying complex characters and her ability to evoke strong emotions in viewers, Areej Chaudhary has established herself as a talented and multifaceted actress in the Pakistani entertainment industry.

Hania Aamir reveals her plans for her marriage

Pakistani actress Hania Aamir has opened up about her thoughts on marriage,

assuring her fans that she will be transparent when it comes to such personal matters.

Speaking at an event in Canada, Hania stated that whenever she decides to get married, she will make sure to announce it publicly and will not keep it a secret. This statement comes amidst growing curiosity surrounding her personal life, particularly her relationships and any potential future marriage.

Hania emphasized that personal boundaries should never get in the way of forming meaningful connections with others, regardless of where they are from or their background.

This statement reflects her belief in the importance of genuine human connections beyond cultural or geographical divides.

Over the years, Hania's personal relationships have attracted significant media attention. One of the most notable was her romance with singer Asim Azhar. The couple's highly publicized breakup sparked a wave of speculation and discussions about Hania's love life, with many fans eager to know what her future marriage plans might look like. Despite the scrutiny, Hania remains unfazed and assures her fans that when she decides to marry, she will be

open about it.

As her career continues to flourish, Hania Aamir has become a household name not just in Pakistan but internationally as well. Her performance in the popular drama *Kabhi Main Kabhi Tum* alongside Fahad Mustafa has earned her widespread recognition. The drama, which captivated audiences both in Pakistan and abroad, highlighted her acting skills and resonated with viewers from different cultural backgrounds, particularly in India, Bangladesh, and the UAE.

In fact her rising international fame was further underscored when Indian singer Diljit Dosanjh invited her on stage during a concert in Canada. Dosanjh expressed his admiration for Hania, sharing that he was a fan of her work and enjoyed watching her dramas.

Moreover, senior actor Javed Sheikh, who played Fahad Mustafa's father in *Kabhi Main Kabhi Tum*, shared that the drama's ending was well-received by viewers in both Pakistan and India, as audiences were thrilled to see the characters of Sharjeena and Mustafa finally unite.

Fans had long hoped for the couple's reunion, and the conclusion of their love



story captured the hearts of many.

Hania Aamir's openness about her personal life, along with her flourishing career and international recognition, continues to make her a beloved figure in the entertainment industry.

Beyonce makes history with a record nomination for Grammy Awards

Beyoncé has made history with the most Grammy nominations of any artist, securing 11 nods for the 2025 Grammy Awards, bringing her career total to 99 — the highest in Grammy history.

The singer's country-inspired album *Cowboy Carter* earned nominations for both Album of the Year and Country Album of the Year, while her hit song "Texas Hold 'Em" garnered nods for Record of the Year, Song of the Year, and Country Song of the Year. This marks Beyoncé's debut in the country and Americana categories, making it a groundbreaking year for the superstar.

Beyoncé previously shared the record with her husband Jay-Z, both having 88 career nominations. Now, she stands alone as the artist with the most Grammy nominations ever. If she wins Album of the Year, Beyoncé will make history as the first Black woman to take home the award in the 21st century. The last Black woman to win the category was Lauryn Hill in 1999 with *The Miseducation of Lauryn Hill*.

Rapper Post Malone also made waves this year, receiving his first Grammy nominations in the country genre. His August release, *F-1 Trillion*, earned a nod for Country Album of the Year, while his collaboration with Morgan Wallen, "I Had Some Help," is up for Country Song and Country Duo/Group Performance — Wallen's first Grammy nominations as well.

Behind Beyoncé, Post Malone is tied for the second-most nominations this year, alongside Billie Eilish, Kendrick Lamar, and Charli XCX, each with seven. Lamar's diss track "Not Like Us" received multiple nominations, including Record of the Year, Song of the Year, Rap Song, Music Video,

and Best Rap Performance. Lamar also made history with two simultaneous entries in the Best Rap Performance category, a first in his career.

Taylor Swift, along with first-time nominees Sabrina Carpenter and Chappell Roan, earned six nominations each. Swift's nod for *The Tortured Poets Department* adds to her record-breaking streak in the Album of the Year category, where she has won four times. This year, she makes history with seven career nominations in the category — the most by any female artist.

The Album of the Year category reflects a diverse range of musical genres, with nominees including André 3000's alt-jazz album *New Blue Sun*, Jacob Collier's



Djesse Vol. 4, and pop newcomers Carpenter and Roan with *Short n' Sweet* and *The Rise and Fall of a Midwest Princess*, respectively. Other nominees include Eilish's *Hit Me Hard and Soft* and Charli XCX's *BRAT*, making this year's nominations one of the most varied in recent memory.

Recording Academy CEO Harvey Mason Jr. expressed excitement about the range of genres and voices represented in this year's nominations, attributing it to an increasingly diverse voting body. He emphasized that the Academy has been intentional in expanding its membership to include not just gender and racial diversity, but also a wider array of genres and regional representation.

Princess Kate's stunning appearance at the Festival of Remembrance

Princess Kate's recent appearance at the Festival of Remembrance, where she wore her famous sapphire engagement ring — once owned by Princess Diana — has sparked a flurry of discussion among royal observers and jewelry experts. For the first time in months, the Princess of Wales, 42, publicly donned the ring, which has become a symbol of continuity within the Royal Family. Many are speculating that the gesture carries a deeper message of respect and connection to the family's legacy.

Jewelry experts believe Kate's decision to wear the ring, originally inherited by Prince Harry but later passed to Prince William, highlights her reverence for Diana's memory and her role within the royal lineage. Tobias Kormind, Managing Director of 77 Diamonds, pointed out that the ring was famously worn by Diana even after her divorce from Prince Charles, and now serves as a link between generations. "It speaks to a strong sense of continuity and perhaps a subtle nod to Kate's appreciation for the Royal Family," Kormind said in an interview with GB News.

The Festival of Remembrance, which took place ahead of Remembrance Sunday, saw Kate attending the solemn event at the Cenotaph, dressed in a timeless black Catherine Walker coat dress.



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