

Fortnightly

The Truth International

Islamabad - Karachi

1st - 15th January 2025

Monetary Policy

Decline in headline inflation

D-8 Summit 2024

Enhancing economic partnerships

The Pain and Unheard cries of Gaza Children

The most dangerous place in the world to be a child

MADRASSAH REFORM

CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES AHEAD



Politics

The Madrassah Registration Bill: Legal Challenges, Political Dynamics, and Future Prospects By Kanwal Munir – Page 04



Foreign Affairs

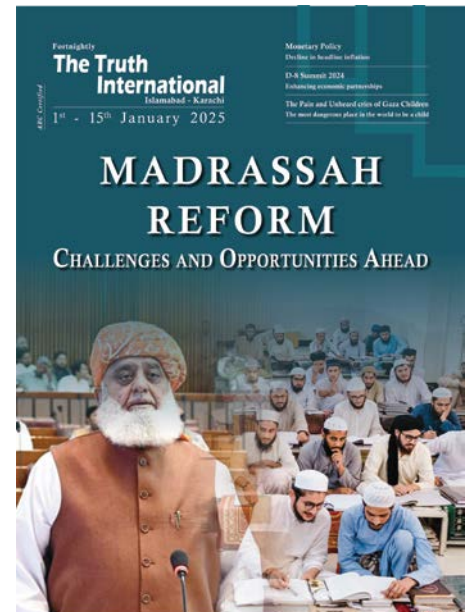
The D-8 Summit 2024: Shaping the Future of Economic Cooperation Among Developing Nations By Kanwal Munir – Page 09



The Pain, Suffering, and Unheard Cries for Help from Gaza's Children By Hina Kashif – Page 13



What should be the policy of Iran towards United States after inauguration of Trump By J. Choudhry – Page 17



Editor:

Zaheer ud Din Babar Thaheem

Circulation & Marketing / Advertisement:

Aghzaz Ullah Raj

Contact: 0340-9850810

Email: admin@tti.org.pk

Letter to Editor:

Feel free to mail us at: editor@tti.org.pk

Postal Address:

Fortnightly "The Truth International"

Head Office:

205-D, 2nd Floor, Evacuee Trust Complex,
Agha Khan Road, F-5/1, Islamabad, Pakistan.

Contact: +92 51 2820180-1

Karachi Office:

Shop No. 08, Mezzanine Salalah Apartments,
Dawood Pota Road, Karachi Cantt.

Contact: +92 21 35221000-1

Email: info@tti.org.pk

Web: www.thetruthinternational.com

Price: Rs. 435

Publisher:

Muhammad Fahad Thaheem

Printer:

Masha Allah Printers

Basement # 9, Ratta Mansion, Fazal e Haq
Road, Blue Area, Islamabad.

Design & Layout:

Abdul Qadir

DISCLAIMER: The articles published in this magazine collected from various writers, and sources are disseminated for information only. Therefore, the publisher shall not be responsible for any mistake/error.

New World for 2025 By Naqi Akbar – Page 21



Is Russia really involved in Azerbaijan Air crash and why? By Hina Kashif – Page 23



Russian Generals assassinations stun the world By Hina Kashif – Page 26

Paying millions for death trap in the deep sea By Javed Mahmood – Page 29



The Deadliest Wars in Modern History: An Overview By Kanwal Munir – Page 33



Economy

Monetary Policy Update: Navigating Inflation, Growth, and Stability in FY25 By Romana Afsheen – Page 36



Bitcoin Surges Beyond \$107,000 Amid Strategic Reserve Speculation and Trump's Pro-Crypto Policies By Romana Afsheen – Page 39



Science

Black Holes: Primordial Seeds of the Universe? By Romana Afsheen – Page 41

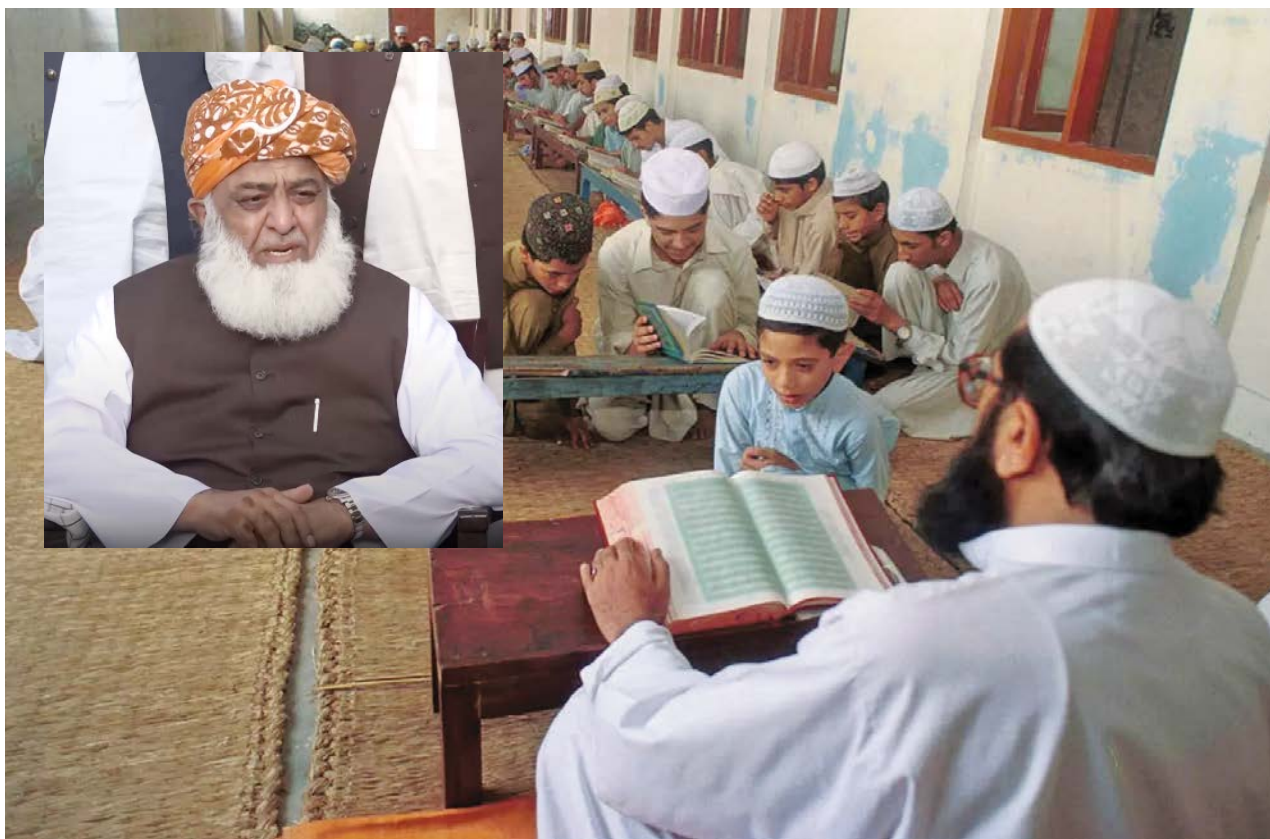
Sports

Pakistan vs South Africa 2024/25 Cricket Series: A Comprehensive Analysis By Kanwal Munir – Page 43



Prize Distribution Ceremony For 7th Edition of 'Jinnah Young Writers Award' Held In Ankara By Javed Mahmood – Page 46

The Madrassah Registration Bill: Legal Challenges, Political Dynamics, and Future Prospects



By Kanwal Munir

Madrassahs, or religious schools, have long been a pivotal component of the educational system in Pakistan. These institutions primarily offer religious education, with a significant number of students enrolled in them, especially in rural regions where access to conventional schooling is limited. However, over the years, concerns regarding the lack of regulation, accountability, and standardization within madrassahs have been raised. In response to these concerns, the Government of Pakistan has introduced the Madrassah Bill, a proposed piece of legislation aimed at bringing madrassahs under state regulation, ensuring quality education, and addressing issues such as extremism and unaccounted funding. This article delves into the provisions of the Madrassah Bill, its implications for religious education, potential challenges, and its broader impact on society.

Background of Madrassahs in Pakistan

Madrassahs have played an essential role in Pakistan's education system, particularly in areas where access to formal education is scarce. Historically, these institutions were established to teach religious subjects, including the Quran, Hadith (sayings and actions of Prophet Muhammad), Fiqh (Islamic jurisprudence), and other Islamic studies. Over time, some madrassahs expanded their curriculum to include subjects like Arabic, logic, and philosophy.

In modern-day Pakistan, the number of madrassahs has surged, with estimates suggesting that more than 20,000 madrassahs are operational across the country, educating millions of students. However, the growth of madrassahs has raised serious

concerns. Critics argue that many madrassahs do not offer a balanced education and fail to prepare students for the challenges of the modern workforce. Additionally, certain madrassahs have been accused of promoting extremist ideologies, fuelling sectarian violence, and acting as hotbeds for radicalization. The increasing political influence of some madrassah leaders has compounded these issues, with claims of links to militant groups in certain cases.

The absence of a standardized curriculum across madrassahs, along with inadequate teacher training and funding transparency, has further led to calls for reform. Recognizing these issues, the Government of Pakistan has introduced the Madrassah Bill to regulate madrassahs, integrate modern education into their curriculum, and counteract extremist ideologies.



Key Provisions of the Madrassah Bill

The Madrassah Bill contains several provisions aimed at addressing the key issues facing madrassahs in Pakistan. These provisions are intended to bring greater transparency, accountability, and modernity to religious education in the country.

1. Registration and Monitoring of Madrassahs

One of the cornerstone features of the Madrassah Bill is the mandatory registration of all madrassahs. This provision will require madrassahs to register with the Ministry of Education and other relevant authorities. The aim of this provision is to ensure that madrassahs comply with state regulations, operate within the legal framework, and are subject to regular monitoring.

Registration will also help track the number of madrassahs, their locations, and the number of students they serve, facilitating better planning and resource allocation for education. The government can then provide support to madrassahs that may be underfunded or struggling to meet regulatory standards.

2. Curriculum Reforms

A significant aspect of the Madrassah Bill is the proposed integration of modern subjects such as mathematics, science, social studies, and computer literacy into the madrassah curriculum. This change will ensure that students are not only well-versed in religious studies but also gain knowledge in other subjects that are essential in today's world.

The new curriculum will strike a balance between religious education and secular subjects, enabling madrassah students to compete on an equal footing with those studying in conventional schools. This reform could also help reduce the number of students graduating from madrassahs without practical skills for employment in a rapidly evolving economy.

3. Accountability and Funding Transparency

The bill mandates increased transparency in the funding of madrassahs. Currently,

many madrassahs receive funding from unknown or unregulated sources, and there are concerns that some of these funds may be used for purposes that are not aligned with the interests of Pakistan's national security or development. The bill requires madrassahs to disclose the sources of their funding and maintain financial records subject to audit by the relevant authorities.

This provision is critical in ensuring that madrassahs do not become conduits for financing extremist activities or other illicit operations. By introducing strict financial oversight, the government hopes to curb the misuse of madrassah funds and promote a more transparent educational environment.



4. Teacher Qualifications and Training

The Madrassah Bill also places emphasis on improving the quality of teaching within madrassahs. Under the bill, teachers will be required to have appropriate qualifications and undergo regular professional development. The bill calls for training programs that will help madrassah teachers enhance their pedagogical skills, adapt to the new curriculum, and effectively teach modern subjects alongside religious studies.

In particular, the government plans to train madrassah teachers in subjects such as mathematics, science, and technology to ensure that these subjects are taught with the same rigor as traditional Islamic studies. This focus on teacher training is vital to ensure that students are receiving a high-quality education and are being prepared for both spiritual and practical challenges.

5. Combating Extremism and Radicalization

The bill introduces mechanisms aimed at preventing madrassahs from promoting extremist or sectarian ideologies. The new regulations will allow authorities to monitor the content being taught in madrassahs and ensure that it aligns with Pakistan's commitment to peace, tolerance, and moderation. Madrassahs that are found to be inciting violence or promoting hate speech will face penalties, including closure. This provision aims to curb the spread of radical ideas and ensure that madrassahs contribute to promoting peace and unity within Pakistani society.

Recent Developments in the Madrassah Registration Bill

The Madrassah Registration Bill has experienced significant political and legal developments in recent weeks. These events highlight the ongoing tensions between the government, religious parties, and the President of Pakistan, shaping the future of the bill. Below, we delve deeper into these key developments:

JUI-F Chief Maulana Fazlur Rehman Optimistic about Societies Registration (Amendment) Bill 2024

Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam-Fazl (JUI-F) chief Maulana Fazlur Rehman has expressed optimism regarding the approval of the Societies Registration (Amendment) Bill 2024, which deals with the registration of



madrassas. Following a meeting with Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif, Rehman stated that practical steps would be taken in accordance with the constitution, as per the demands of his party. The meeting, held on Friday, was aimed at resolving the long-standing issue surrounding the registration of religious seminaries.

The Meeting and Government's Response

The meeting was attended by various prominent political figures, including National Assembly Speaker Ayaz Sadiq, Deputy Prime Minister Ishaq Dar, and Law Minister Azam Nazeer Tarar. This gathering was a follow-up to a previous

tion of Pakistan, when a bill is returned by the president, it must be reconsidered in a joint sitting of parliament. If it is passed again, the president must give assent within ten days, or it will be deemed to have been approved.

Incorporate the latest objection from President Zardari here: President Zardari raised eight objections, including concerns that the bill might lead to international sanctions from the FATF and GSP+ due to the registration of madrassas under the Societies Registration (Amendment) Bill 2024. Zardari's objection included the risk of exacerbating sectarian tensions and causing law and order issues. He further stated that the contradictions in the bill

impacts of registering madrassas under the Societies Registration (Amendment) Bill 2024. One of his major concerns is the possibility of sanctions from international bodies such as the Financial Action Task Force (FATF) and the European Union's Generalised Scheme of Preferences Plus (GSP+). Zardari warned that the registration process could lead to sectarianism and law-and-order problems. He also raised concerns about contradictions in the definition of madrassas within the bill, which could lead to their misuse for purposes other than education.

Additionally, the president cautioned that the bill might cause international criticism, which could further impact Pakistan's international standing. He urged parliamentarians to consider the global ramifications when drafting such legislation.

Path Forward: Will a Joint Sitting be Required?

Fazl, however, suggested that a joint session of parliament might not be necessary to resolve the issue, as the government seemed committed to addressing the matter promptly. Despite the objections, he remained confident that the bill would eventually pass, given the government's willingness to engage in dialogue.

Support from MQM-P

The Muttahida Qaumi Movement-Pakistan (MQM-P) has aligned with Maulana Fazlur Rehman on the Madrassah Registration Bill, bolstering calls for its swift implementation under the 26th Constitutional Amendment. Their endorsement provides the bill with added momentum, strengthening its political viability within the ruling coalition. By supporting Rehman's position, MQM-P underscores the importance of honouring agreements previously established with religious factions.

This alignment, however, introduces additional challenges. While it reinforces the bill's legitimacy, it also intensifies the pressure on both the government and religious parties to resolve differences amicably. The MQM-P's backing amplifies demands for the bill's enactment, pushing for urgency in addressing unresolved objections. This development reflects



contact by Prime Minister Sharif, who had invited the JUI-F to discuss the madrassa registration bill after President Asif Ali Zardari raised objections. The updated information about the meeting should be placed here, highlighting that the meeting was part of an ongoing dialogue on the madrassa registration bill, and emphasize that the JUI-F received a "very positive response" from the Prime Minister.

The Status of the Bill and President's Objections

The bill, which has already been passed by both houses of parliament, now requires President Zardari's assent to become law. However, the president returned the bill earlier this month, citing legal objections. According to Article 75(2) of the Constitu-

tion could lead to the misuse of madrassas for purposes other than education, such as being used for activities that could tarnish Pakistan's international reputation.

Fazl emphasized that, despite the objections raised by President Zardari, the bill had already become an act following its approval by the National Assembly and Senate. He also noted that the speaker had addressed some of the objections raised by the president, particularly the constitutional validity of the second objection.

Concerns Raised by President Zardari

Integrate more details from Zardari's objections here: President Zardari's objections focus on the potential negative



growing complexities in negotiations, as stakeholders now face heightened expectations to reconcile diverse perspectives. Consequently, the MQM-P's involvement is both a stabilizing force and a catalyst for expedited decision-making, further polarizing opinions within the legislative landscape.

Demand for Gazette Notification

The Ittehad-e-Tanzeemat-e-Madaris, a coalition representing religious institutions, has urged prompt issuance of the Madrasah Registration Bill's gazette notification. Prominent figures such as Mufti Taqi Usmani and Mufti Munib-ur-Rehman have strongly advocated for decisive action, stressing the bill's approval by Parliament. They insist it is crucial to implement the legislation without unwarranted postponements or complications.

According to these leaders, the bill carries no contentious provisions and should not become a victim of political delays. They highlight the importance of respecting the legislative process and avoiding unnecessary controversies that could hinder progress. Their stance underscores the urgency for governmental accountability and adherence to parliamentary decisions. This demand signals a growing impatience among religious representatives, who view delays as undermining the trust and

effectiveness of legal procedures. The coalition's pressure reflects an intensifying call for clarity and resolution in addressing this legislative matter.

Challenges in Implementing the Madrasah Bill

While the Madrasah Bill represents a significant step toward reforming religious education in Pakistan, its implementation is not without challenges. Several obstacles may hinder the success of this bill.

1. Resistance from Religious Leaders and Madrasah Administrators

One of the major challenges facing the Madrasah Bill is the resistance from religious leaders and madrasah administrators. Many of these stakeholders view the bill as an encroachment on religious freedom and the autonomy of madrasahs. There may also be fears that the integration of modern subjects will dilute religious education, which is viewed as the primary mission of madrasahs.

To overcome this resistance, the government will need to engage with religious leaders and madrasah heads in a dialogue to ensure that the reforms are understood as

complementary rather than conflicting with the core mission of madrasahs.

2. Resource Constraints

The successful implementation of the Madrasah Bill hinges on allocating adequate resources. To comply with the new requirements, madrasahs must receive essential support, including improved infrastructure, comprehensive training programs, and sufficient financial assistance. For institutions in remote or underserved regions, limited access to these resources poses a considerable challenge. Addressing these disparities will be crucial in ensuring equitable application of the bill's provisions. The government must prioritize bridging these gaps by providing targeted support to disadvantaged madrasahs, fostering an environment where all institutions can meet the stipulated standards without undue strain or compromise in their operational effectiveness.

3. Political and Institutional Resistance

The Madrasah Bill is likely to encounter political resistance due to its expansive scope and implications. Political parties aligned with religious organizations may oppose or seek to weaken its core provisions, complicating the legislative process. Moreover, entrenched bureaucratic inefficiencies



within the education sector could further impede the timely implementation of its reforms. Overcoming these challenges will necessitate steadfast political determination and robust institutional backing. The government must engage with stakeholders, address concerns, and streamline administrative procedures to ensure the bill's objectives are achieved without compromising the autonomy or credibility of madrassahs, fostering an inclusive approach to educational reform.

4. Cultural Sensitivities

Religious education holds a deeply rooted place in Pakistan's cultural and social framework, with madrassahs serving as vital institutions for spiritual and educational guidance. Reforms targeting these traditional systems may provoke resistance from communities that view madrassahs as integral to their religious identity and heritage. The challenge lies in balancing modernization with respect for cultural values to minimize dissent. Implementing the Madrassah Bill will require inclusive dialogue with religious leaders, educators, and local stakeholders to address concerns and foster trust. By aligning reforms with the community's aspirations for educational and societal progress, the government

can create a framework that honours cultural sensitivities while advancing modern education standards in the country.

Impact of the Madrassah Bill

The successful implementation of the Madrassah Bill holds the potential to significantly enhance Pakistan's education landscape. By mandating a standardized curriculum, including modern subjects alongside religious studies, the bill aims to equip madrassah students with a holistic education that prepares them for diverse career opportunities. This integration bridges the gap between traditional and contemporary education, fostering better prospects for madrassah graduates in the broader economy.

The bill's focus on countering extremism and encouraging tolerance is a step towards cultivating a more peaceful and inclusive society. By promoting critical thinking and ethical values, the reformed madrassah system could play a pivotal role in shaping responsible citizens. Moreover, the introduction of accountability mechanisms will ensure greater transparency, reducing the potential for misuse of madrassah resources. These measures collectively aim

to transform madrassahs into centers of excellence that contribute meaningfully to national development while respecting Pakistan's rich religious and cultural traditions.

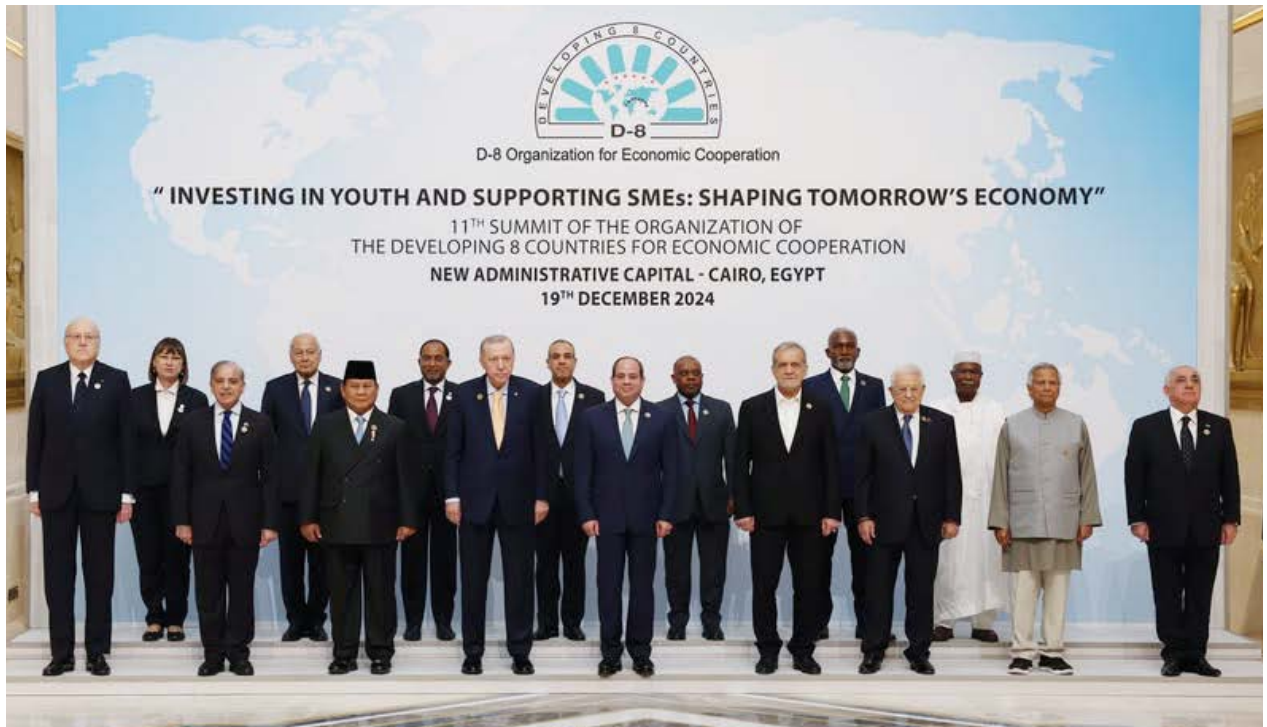
Conclusion

The Madrassah Bill represents a significant and necessary reform in Pakistan's education system, one that aims to integrate religious education with modern subjects while addressing critical concerns such as extremism and funding transparency. Despite the challenges it faces, including political resistance, resource constraints, and cultural sensitivities, the bill has the potential to transform madrassah education in Pakistan and contribute to the development of a more balanced, inclusive, and tolerant society.

For the bill to succeed, it will require cooperation between the government, madrassah administrators, religious leaders, and civil society. By fostering a dialogue and ensuring that the reforms respect the religious and cultural context of madrassahs, Pakistan can build a more robust and comprehensive educational system that prepares students for both spiritual and worldly success.



The D-8 Summit 2024: Shaping the Future of Economic Cooperation Among Developing Nations



By Kanwal Munir

The Developing Eight Organization for Economic Cooperation (D-8), a platform for fostering economic and political collaboration among Muslim-majority developing countries, held its 11th summit on December 19, 2024, in Cairo, Egypt. This summit was pivotal not only for its discussions on economic cooperation but also for the major announcements that outlined the future direction of the organization. The D-8, comprising Turkey, Egypt, Nigeria, Pakistan, Iran, Indonesia, Malaysia, and Bangladesh, has steadily evolved into a significant group in the global economic landscape, focusing on enhancing trade, development, and collaboration among its member nations. The summit served as a stage for reflecting on the organization's past achievements and addressing the challenges that lie ahead, especially in a world facing complex geopolitical and economic issues. The active engagement of members during the summit reflected the growing unity

within the D-8, paving the way for more robust intergovernmental and economic partnerships in the coming years.

The Growing Influence of the D-8

The D-8 was established in 1997 to address the economic challenges faced by its member countries and to increase their global trade share. The organization aims to bolster collaboration across various sectors, including trade, agriculture, energy, infrastructure, and technology. Since its inception, the D-8 has worked towards promoting mutual understanding, enhancing economic partnerships, and ensuring that its members have a stronger voice in the international decision-making arena. Over the years, the organization has steadily worked on integrating its members' economies, creating pathways for trade liberalization and establishing a system of mutual economic benefit.

At the heart of the D-8's mission lies the principle of cooperation between developing countries. By focusing on areas where member nations share common challenges and opportunities, the D-8 has become a symbol of how regional cooperation can improve economic outcomes, reduce poverty, and create sustainable development opportunities. The summit discussions in Cairo underscored the need for these countries to work together on environmental sustainability, technological innovation, and human rights to create an inclusive growth model that meets the aspirations of their populations. The growing influence of the D-8 is not only seen in its expanding membership but also in its ability to negotiate and collaborate with other regional and global organizations, increasing the economic leverage of its member states.

The Cairo Summit marked a significant turning point in the organization's journey. The summit was not only a platform to discuss

traditional economic issues but also an opportunity to address global humanitarian challenges, notably the ongoing crises in Palestine and Lebanon. With an eye on expanding its influence, the D-8 moved to accept Azerbaijan as a full member, further expanding the group's geographical reach and political leverage. This expansion adds to the broader goal of creating a united front of developing nations that can work together to shape international policies, from trade agreements to sustainable development initiatives.

Key Developments at the D-8 Summit 2024

The 2024 D-8 Summit was filled with key announcements, decisions, and deliberations that underscored the group's vision for the future. These developments are critical as they highlight the organization's commitment to tackling both present challenges and future opportunities. Here are the key developments that shaped the summit:

1. The Expansion of D-8 Membership

One of the most significant outcomes of the summit was the unanimous decision to admit Azerbaijan as the newest full member of the D-8. This marks a crucial development for the organization, as Azerbaijan's geographical position and strategic economic potential in the South Caucasus region will offer new opportunities for trade, energy cooperation, and regional stability. Azerbaijan's natural resources, particularly in oil and gas, will enable the D-8 to strengthen its energy agenda, particularly in terms of energy security and diversification for its member states.

The inclusion of Azerbaijan aligns with the D-8's goal of expanding its reach and creating a more inclusive economic space for countries that share similar developmental goals and challenges. Azerbaijan's membership is expected to contribute significantly to the group's priorities, particularly in sectors such as energy, agriculture, industry, and transportation, where Azerbaijan has substantial capabilities. Additionally, Azerbaijan's location as a strategic energy hub could position the D-8

as a key player in the global energy transition, allowing for closer ties between member nations in the development of renewable energy sources and fostering greater interregional energy trade.

The strategic importance of Azerbaijan's integration into the D-8 cannot be overstated, as the organization's broader economic plans could benefit from Azerbaijan's infrastructure developments, notably its oil pipeline networks, which connect Europe and Asia. As trade corridors are strengthened, the region could become even more pivotal in the evolving global economy. This decision further solidifies the D-8's commitment to increasing its geopolitical influence and expanding its economic reach.

2. Indonesia to Host the Next D-8 Summit

In a major announcement, Indonesia was officially named as the host of the 12th D-8 Summit, which will take place in 2025. As the new chair of the organization, Indonesia's leadership will play a key role in shaping the agenda for the next phase of D-8 cooperation. Indonesia has long been recognized for its contributions to regional stability, trade growth, and sustainable development. As a leading member of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), Indonesia's role within the D-8 is expected to further solidify the group's position as a global economic force.

The exact date and location of the summit will be confirmed later, but this announcement signals Indonesia's growing influence within the organization and its continued commitment to driving the D-8's vision forward. Indonesia is already at the forefront of various initiatives within ASEAN, such as the ASEAN Economic Community (AEC) and green technology collaborations. As the next summit's host, Indonesia is likely to bring innovative approaches to issues like climate change, technology transfer, and inclusive growth, which align perfectly with the D-8's overarching goals.

The selection of Indonesia as the next host is also symbolic, as the country has been a staunch advocate for regional cooperation and sustainable development. Indonesia's efforts to promote green technology,

inclusive trade practices, and innovation align well with the D-8's core mission. This will likely create new opportunities for cross-border partnerships in sectors such as sustainable agriculture, renewable energy, and digital transformation, all of which are key areas for D-8 countries in the years ahead.

3. The Cairo Declaration: Key Priorities for the Future

At the conclusion of the summit, the Cairo Declaration was issued, outlining the D-8's key priorities for cooperation in the coming years. These priorities are expected to guide the actions of member nations as they work to enhance their economic standing on the global stage. Among the core areas identified for future collaboration were:

- **Agriculture and Food Security:** The D-8 countries share common challenges in ensuring food security for their growing populations. The summit highlighted the importance of improving agricultural practices, promoting sustainable farming, and increasing food production to meet the demands of member nations. Collaborative efforts in this sector include agricultural research, technology transfer, and modern irrigation systems, which are vital to boosting crop yields and ensuring long-term food security. Partnerships focused on reducing food waste, advancing food processing industries, and improving distribution channels were also discussed.
- **Energy Cooperation:** With global energy demands continuing to rise, the D-8 nations emphasized the need for greater energy collaboration, particularly in renewable energy sources such as solar, wind, and hydroelectric power. Several countries, including Malaysia, Indonesia, and Iran, have significant expertise and resources in these areas, and future initiatives will focus on sharing technology, developing joint energy projects, and reducing reliance on fossil fuels. The establishment of a D-8 Energy Cooperation Council is also in the works, designed to foster partnerships between energy producers, innovators, and consumers within the region. This effort aims to transition to cleaner, more sustainable

- energy sources while enhancing energy independence.
- Science, Technology, and Innovation: As the world rapidly transitions to a digital economy, the D-8's focus on science and technology is critical. The summit underscored the need for greater collaboration on cutting-edge technologies, including artificial intelligence (AI), cybersecurity, and nanotechnology. Member countries are exploring ways to leverage these technologies to drive economic growth, create new jobs, and develop smart industries. The establishment of innovation hubs and technology incubators within D-8 countries will encourage collaboration in high-tech fields like green technology, bioengineering, and blockchain development, ensuring that these nations remain competitive on the global stage.
- Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs): Recognizing the pivotal role that SMEs play in driving economic growth and job creation, the summit also discussed strategies for supporting SMEs across the member states. The promotion of entrepreneurship, innovation, and access to finance will be critical to enhancing the competitiveness of SMEs and empowering young entrepreneurs. The summit

highlighted the need for access to digital platforms, funding mechanisms, and mentorship programs to ensure that SMEs can thrive in a rapidly changing global economy. Additionally, the D-8 is exploring ways to harmonize regulations, facilitating easier market access for these businesses.

- Infrastructure and Transportation: The D-8 is committed to improving infrastructure connectivity among its members. Efficient transportation systems, including road networks, ports, and air travel, are essential to enhancing trade and investment across the region. Future plans include improving transport corridors, creating logistical hubs, and ensuring reliable supply chains within the D-8 region. The organization is also focusing on creating more sustainable urban infrastructure, which will include the promotion of green buildings, smart cities, and digital transport solutions.

4. Addressing Global Humanitarian Challenges

The 2024 summit also highlighted the growing importance of addressing humanitarian crises and regional conflicts. A special session was dedicated to discussing

the Palestinian-Israeli conflict and the Lebanese crisis, where the summit expressed solidarity with the people of Palestine and Lebanon, condemning the violence and destruction caused by ongoing conflicts. The D-8 reiterated its commitment to human rights and international law, calling for a just and lasting peace in the Middle East.

This session also marked the first appearance of Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas and Lebanese Prime Minister Najib Mikati at a D-8 summit, underscoring the group's commitment to being a voice for peace and human rights in the Middle East. The session called for international intervention, urging member states to provide humanitarian aid and support for reconstruction in the affected regions. This aligns with the D-8's broader efforts to provide a platform for dialogue on conflict resolution, peacebuilding, and humanitarian aid.

5. Bilateral Discussions and Economic Cooperation

Alongside the formal summit discussions, bilateral meetings took place between various leaders, with a particular focus on strengthening economic ties and exploring new areas for cooperation. Pakistan's Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif met with Bangladesh's Chief Advisor Dr. Muham





mad Yunus, discussing avenues for expanding trade and fostering cultural exchanges between the two countries. They emphasized the potential for growth in sectors such as chemicals, cement, surgical goods, and IT.

The importance of people-to-people contact, and cultural exchanges was also a key part of these discussions, with both leaders agreeing on the need to build deeper, more cooperative relationships across different sectors. Additionally, agreements on joint ventures in agriculture and textiles were proposed to bolster trade and economic integration across South

Asia. The focus on regional economic cooperation is expected to lead to greater mutual prosperity and shared development goals across the D-8.

6. Iran's Strategic Role

One of the notable aspects of the 2024 summit was Iran's participation. For the first time in over a decade, an Iranian president visited Egypt, signaling a thaw in relations between the two countries. Iran's involvement in the D-8 is particularly significant, as the country seeks to bolster its global economic standing despite ongoing sanctions.

President Masoud Pezeshkian used the summit to advocate for greater economic cooperation with D-8 nations, particularly in the energy sector, where Iran has vast expertise. Additionally, Iran's leadership has been pushing for expanded infrastructure projects, trade corridors, and technological collaboration within the D-8 framework. The country's presence in the D-8 is also an opportunity for the organization to leverage Iran's advanced manufacturing sector, which includes key industries such as petrochemicals, automotive, and electronics.

Conclusion: A Platform for Progress and Cooperation

The D-8 Summit 2024 in Cairo was a defining moment for the organization, with significant strides made towards economic integration, regional cooperation, and humanitarian support. The Cairo Declaration sets the stage for greater collaboration across key sectors, ensuring that the group remains focused on inclusive growth, sustainable development, and peace in the years to come. As the D-8 prepares for its 2025 summit in Indonesia, it is clear that this group of nations is more committed than ever to building a stronger, more resilient economic future for their citizens and the broader global community.



The Pain, Suffering, and Unheard Cries for Help from Gaza's Children



By Hina Kashif

The children of Gaza endure unimaginable pain and suffering, trapped in the horrors of war. With their lives shattered by violence, many experience physical and emotional trauma that remains unseen and unheard by the world. The cries for help from these innocent children go largely ignored, as they continue to face devastation and despair in the midst of a brutal genocide.

The scale of destruction is immense. Estimates of Palestinian deaths range from tens of thousands to hundreds of thousands. The International Rescue Committee has labeled Gaza “the most dangerous place in the world to be an aid worker, as well as the most dangerous place to be a civilian.” UNICEF deems it “the most dangerous place in the world to be a child.” Oxfam reported that in Al-Mawasi, the area designated as a humanitarian safe zone by Israel, there is one toilet for every 4,130 people. Despite American officials blaming Hamas for prolonging the war and obstructing negotiations, Israeli news sources consistently report that Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has sabotaged ceasefire talks with both Hamas and Hezbollah, opting to escalate the conflict rather than pursue an agreement

that could achieve many of Israel’s stated objectives, including the release of Israeli hostages.

Was this devastating outcome for the Palestinians and Israel worth undermining the rule of law within the United States? The Biden-Harris administration cannot claim ignorance of the consequences. Eight sitting U.S. senators, 88 members of the House of Representatives, 185 lawyers (including many within the administration), and 12 civil servants (who resigned in protest of the U.S. Gaza policy) have argued that continuing to arm Israel is illegal under U.S. law. In September, ProPublica reported on the lengths the Biden-Harris administration went to avoid adhering to laws that define clear consequences for countries like Israel that block humanitarian aid. In this context, journalist and commentator Peter Beinart recently suggested that Vice President Kamala Harris could “signal a clear break” with the administration’s Gaza policy during her presidential campaign. How? “Ms. Harris should simply say that she’ll enforce the law.”

On Tuesday, Nov. 19, Dr. Feroze Sidhwa, a general, trauma, and critical care surgeon,

spoke at the Program in International Studies, sharing his firsthand experiences working at the European Hospital in Gaza. This event, co-sponsored by several university programs, gave the campus community a rare, on-the-ground perspective on the medical crisis in Gaza amid ongoing conflict.

Dr. Sidhwa, a graduate of the University of Texas Health Science Center at San Antonio and the Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health, volunteered at the European Hospital in Khan Younis, Gaza, in March and April of 2024. Upon returning to the United States, he has worked to raise awareness about the dire medical conditions in Gaza. His advocacy includes participation in a panel at the Democratic National Convention, a Politico article about his patient encounters, and organizing nearly 100 doctors to urge President Joe Biden to end U.S. military support to Israel.

Dr. Sidhwa described Gaza as one of the world’s most densely populated and impoverished areas. He pointed out that nearly half of Gaza’s population is unemployed, over 75% rely on humanitarian aid, and the region is under intense military occupation. According to the United Nations, Gaza has

become the deadliest place for aid workers in the world.

Shocked by the devastation he witnessed, Dr. Sidhwa described the situation in Gaza as "far worse than Aleppo, Mariupol, or even Dresden and Rotterdam during World War II." He explained that almost the entire population is homeless and displaced, and each person has access to less than four liters of water daily for all their needs.

Dr. Sidhwa then shared two powerful medical cases that illustrated the extreme conditions he encountered. One involved a nine-year-old girl who had been severely injured in an explosion, leaving part of her femur missing and multiple bones exposed. After hours of surgery, the medical team managed to stabilize her and arrange for transport to Egypt for further care. Dr. Sidhwa mentioned that the girl would likely need 20 to 30 surgeries throughout her life. He emphasized that her case is far from isolated, as thousands of people in Gaza are enduring similar suffering.

Aufa Bajwah, a freshman who attended the talk, reflected on how Dr. Sidhwa's presentation humanized the crisis. "I think it definitely gave a very human aspect to [the news] because I think a lot of us see the numbers," Bajwah said. "It felt important to hear firsthand from someone that has that experience and hear anecdotal experiences."

Another case Dr. Sidhwa discussed involved a 29-year-old nurse who had been shot in the knee by an Israeli soldier and later tortured for 45 days. The man, who had been working in a hospital, was kidnapped by the Israeli military, beaten, and ultimately lost an eye as a result of the torture. Dr. Sidhwa expressed his frustration, questioning the purpose behind such brutal treatment: "What was the point of breaking this man — this man who spent his life trying to heal others?"

Dr. Sidhwa concluded his talk by urging the audience to recognize the severity of Gaza's medical crisis and to take action in support of the Palestinian people.

Doctors in Gaza Describe the Horror for Children Affected by War

Since the start of the Israeli-Hamas conflict (genocide), more than 14,000 Palestinian children have been killed, with experts expressing growing concern for those who have survived. Amid the atrocities of war, it is the broken and bloodied children that haunt the doctors working in Gaza.

"The first child I saw was a 3-year-old girl with her thigh peeled off her bone," said Dr. Javid Abdelmoneim, a physician with Médecins Sans Frontières (Doctors Without Borders), who returned from two months of duty at Nasser Hospital in Gaza. "The last patient I saw that day was a girl we had to leave for dead. She was unaccompanied, had no family, and was breathing with a head injury. But we were overwhelmed. We didn't have enough blood, and there were no beds."

Dr. Abdelmoneim became emotional as he recounted his experiences at a news briefing on Thursday, joined by other medical workers and human rights advocates who shared their stories from Gaza.

"We stood between bodies on the floor of children in different stages of death and dying and realized there was nothing we could do," recalled Dr. Ahmad Yousaf, an Arkansas pediatrician who volunteered at al-Aqsa Martyrs Hospital in central Gaza. Yousaf had joined a medical mission organized by the international humanitarian NGO MedGlobal. "There was only so much gauze and so many hands to place on bleeding limbs."

These doctors arrived in Gaza after Israel cut off water, electricity, and fuel supplies following Hamas's attack on Israel on October 7. Abdelmoneim said, "The system is on its knees. Nowhere is safe."

The trauma of working in Gaza is compounded by the personal toll it takes on the healthcare workers themselves. Their own families have been impacted, with homes destroyed and loved ones killed. Additionally, the ongoing conflict has led to widespread illness due to poor sanitation and lack of water, even affecting the aid workers, further crippling the medical response, according to Alexandra Saieh, head of humanitarian advocacy at Save the Children International.

Saieh reported that over 14,000 Palestinian children have been killed since October,

and more than 20,000 are missing, including many separated from their families or trapped under rubble. "A staggering number of children are losing limbs and facing life-altering injuries due to the use of explosive weapons," she added. "They lack access to prosthetics or physiotherapy and cannot flee when Israel issues evacuation orders."

World Health Organization

The World Health Organization has also warned of the potential spread of polio in Gaza, after wastewater samples tested positive for the virus.

But perhaps the most heartbreaking concern is the lasting impact on the children who survive. "The top diagnoses in our primary health centers are all water- and sanitation-related: diarrhea, scabies, skin infections, and eye infections," Dr. Abdelmoneim said. "We have children dying from hepatitis A, which can be spread through contaminated water."

Dr. Yousaf spoke about the deep emotional scars that many children will carry. He described young children, as young as 3 years old, "wide-eyed, clinging to their parents, or what's left of them," as they watched loved ones die from traumatic injuries. "What will that do to that child for the rest of their lives?" he asked. "Who will they be 20 years from now, when they've lost all ability to cope because of the prolonged, persistent trauma? That's something that will live with me."

Doctors in Gaza Describe the Horror of Caring for Children Affected by War

Since the onset of the Israeli-Hamas conflict, Gaza has become a place of unimaginable suffering, with children bearing the brunt of the violence. More than 14,000 Palestinian children have been killed, and tens of thousands more have been severely injured, many suffering amputations or life-altering injuries. Amid the ongoing carnage, doctors working in Gaza are haunted by the heartbreaking reality of treating these young victims.

Dr. Fozia Alvi, a Canadian doctor volunteering at the European public hospital in southern Gaza, recalls her last day making rounds in the intensive care unit. She came across two young children, both around seven and eight years old, severely wounded by sniper shots to the brain. “I asked the nurse, ‘What’s their history?’ She said they had been brought in just a few hours ago. They were shot in the head by a sniper,” Alvi said, her heart sinking. “They couldn’t talk, they were paraplegic, just lying there like vegetables on those beds.”

Alvi emphasized that these children were not the only ones. She witnessed many others with sniper wounds to the head and chest—children who were innocent, non-combatants. “They were just small children,” she said.

The Palestinian health ministry reports that children account for more than one-third of the over 32,000 deaths in Gaza due to Israel’s extensive airstrikes and military operations. The doctors working in Gaza, many of whom are foreign volunteers, confirmed that the majority of child casualties were caused by shrapnel or burns from airstrikes that obliterated residential neighborhoods. Others were crushed by falling buildings or buried under rubble. But doctors also treated children who had been hit by single bullets, leading many to suspect they were specifically targeted by Israeli forces.

Dr. Vanita Gupta, an intensive care doctor from New York City, also volunteered at the European hospital in Gaza in January. She recounted the arrival of three children, all severely wounded by gunshots to the head, with no other adults brought in from the same area. The families told Gupta that the Israeli military had withdrawn from the area, but those snipers remained, continuing to fire on civilians. “The families said the snipers stayed on and started firing at the children,” Gupta said.

Other doctors described similar incidents. At Nasser Hospital in southern Gaza, more than two dozen people, including children, were killed or injured by what appeared to be sniper fire while entering or leaving the hospital. In one heartbreaking case, 14-year-old Ruwa Qdeih was shot outside the hospital as she went to collect water, with no active fighting in the area at the

time. Other doctors in Gaza reported similar cases of children being deliberately targeted.

Witness accounts from Gaza describe an alarming pattern of civilians, including children, being fired upon by Israeli snipers, often while trying to flee or surrender. In some cases, victims were holding white flags, a symbol of surrender or a plea for protection, yet they were still shot.

In response to these reports, the Israeli Defense Forces (IDF) maintains that they only target military threats and follow international law, dismissing allegations of deliberately targeting civilians. However, doctors and humanitarian workers on the ground in Gaza say otherwise, sharing chilling accounts of children and families being intentionally targeted by Israeli snipers, even in the absence of active combat.



The ongoing violence has left a deep emotional and psychological toll on Gaza’s medical workers, who, despite their best efforts, often find themselves unable to save the children brought to their hospitals. These doctors continue to speak out, calling for an end to the targeting of civilians and for the international community to address the systematic violence affecting Gaza’s most vulnerable populations.

Dr. Irfan Galaria, a surgeon based in Virginia, volunteered at a European hospital in January, where he slept on the operating room floor between shifts. During his time there, he treated children severely injured by high-caliber bullets.

One case that stood out to him involved a 14-year-old boy who had been shot in the back. During surgery, the doctors discovered that the bullet had lodged in the boy’s stomach. “He was very lucky because it missed many vital organs, but it was just sitting in his abdomen,” Dr. Galaria said.

He took a photo of the bullet, which former IDF soldiers identified as a powerful .50 caliber round, commonly fired from a machine gun mounted on an armored vehicle. While these weapons have advanced targeting systems, large numbers of .50 caliber rounds are often fired without precision, making it unclear if the child was intentionally targeted.

Other bullets found in young Palestinian victims included 5.56mm rounds, which are standard issue for all IDF infantry rifles and also used by marksmen attached to infantry units.

Dr. Gupta provided the Guardian with CT scans showing head injuries in children, including one of an eight-year-old girl who had a gunshot wound to the head. A pathologist described the scan as showing a bullet lodged in the child’s brain. Doctors were shocked by the high number of child victims, but they believed the shootings were part of a larger pattern of targeting Palestinian civilians, including the elderly.

“The vast majority of the people we saw were not combatants,” said Ahmad, a fellow doctor. “There was an elderly woman, between 60 and 70 years old, who was shot while riding on a donkey cart. The bullet lodged in her spine, leaving her

paralyzed from the waist down and causing her lung to collapse."

'Sniper wounds were common'

Dr. Osaid Alser, who helped organize a team of doctors outside Gaza, provided remote guidance to the only remaining Palestinian general surgeon at Nasser Hospital. Alser, who grew up in Gaza City and now lives in Texas, noted that sniper wounds and injuries caused by quadcopters were common.

"Sniper wounds were frequent, and so were injuries from quadcopter gunfire," said Alser. He explained that sniper rounds typically cause more severe damage, especially in children whose smaller bodies cannot absorb the shock waves from larger bullets.



"When a sniper is involved, the bullet is often larger and causes significantly more damage due to the shock wave. It can lead to amputations, damaging not only bone and tissue but also the vascular and nerve structures," he said.

Another common pattern was injury to the spinal cord from shots to the abdomen or back. While spinal injuries aren't always fatal, they can lead to long-term disabilities, especially if the neck is affected.

A British surgeon who worked for a month in Gaza said Tuesday that he saw a number of children with bullet wounds to the head after they were "deliberately targeted" by Israeli snipers.

"It doesn't matter who you are in Gaza. If you're Palestinian, you're a target," Nizam Mamode said during a session of the International Development Committee in Britain's House of Commons on the humanitarian situation in Gaza.

Giving evidence in his testimony, Mamode, who worked at Nasser Hospital in Gaza from mid-August to mid-September, said that 60% to 70% of the people who they treated in Gaza were women and children.

Asked about his experience with injured women and children, he cited the head wounds from snipers.

'I've never seen anything on this scale'

British surgeon Nizam Mamode, who worked in Gaza for a month, reports

witnessing children being 'deliberately targeted' with 'single shots to the head' by Israeli snipers and describes strict limits on medical aid...

— Anadolu English (@anadoluagency) November 13, 2024

"We saw a number of children with sniper injuries to the head, a single shot to the head. No other injuries. So clearly, they were deliberately targeted by Israeli snipers, and yeah, that was day after day," he noted.

The surgeon, who has worked in a number of dangerous conflict zones, highlighted that he had never seen anything on the scale of what he saw in Gaza.

"I've worked in a number of conflict zones in different parts of the world. I was there at the time of the Rwandan genocide. I've never seen anything on this scale, ever," he said.

"I've never been in a conflict area where medical aid has been restricted to that extent...It's not allowing supplies in, bombing health care facilities, attacking ambulances, killing health care workers."

"If all of that didn't happen, then tens of thousands of lives would be saved," he added.

Mamode said that any army that is engaged in a war has a responsibility to the civilian population on both sides, adding he is seeing the opposite in the Gaza Strip.

'Difficult to find another word' than genocide

Asked whether he regards what he saw as a genocide, Mamode said it is "difficult to find another word for it, given what we've seen. And I certainly think that the Palestinian people feel that's what's happening to them and there's a sense of resignation that they're all just waiting to die with no chance of escape. So, in a word, yes."

He was then asked about the Israeli army's claims that they are dropping leaflets warning people to move to different areas before targeting the locations.

Mamode replied that most of their casualties were coming from the Green Zone, which supposedly should not be targeted, and many of them had no evacuation, no warning at all.

"We had a vehicle blown up five meters from the emergency department in the main street. We certainly didn't get any warning. And if I'd been crossing the road to buy something, that would have been the end of me," he added.

He said that guesthouses which were designated as safe houses were also targeted by Israeli attacks in the Gaza Strip.

(Source: news websites and articles by medical specialists worked in war zone)

What should be the policy of Iran towards United States after inauguration of Trump



By J. Choudhry

January 20, 2025, marks the return of Donald Trump to the presidency, prompting global attention on the anticipated direction of U.S. foreign policy under his second term. His first term, from 2017 to 2021, introduced significant shifts in U.S. foreign policy, particularly impacting relationships with key allies.

During his first term, Trump's approach challenged established norms in transatlantic relations. He frequently questioned the value of NATO, accusing European members of insufficient defense spending and threatening U.S. withdrawal—moves that deeply unnerved European leaders. This was coupled with trade disputes, as Trump imposed tariffs on steel and aluminum imports from the EU, triggering retaliatory measures.

While relations with Canada were more outwardly cordial, Trump still strained ties by imposing tariffs on Canadian steel and aluminum, citing national security concerns. He also initiated a renegotiation of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), which he deemed detrimental to U.S. interests.

Looking ahead, Trump's recent communications suggest a continuity, and potentially an intensification, of these policies. On December 20th, he stated that the EU should increase its purchases of U.S. oil and gas to avoid tariffs. Additionally, he suggested on social media that Canada would benefit from becoming the 51st U.S. state, hinting at the potential for territorial expansion which followed more incendiary expansionistic remarks on Greenland, the Panama Canal, and Mexico.

In West Asia, Trump's policies led to a significant realignment of relationships. Under Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, Israel experienced notable policy benefits, including the U.S. recognition of Israeli sovereignty over Syria's Golan Heights. The relocation of the U.S. embassy to al-Quds (a move that prompted strong reactions in the Muslim world) and the facilitation of "normalization" agreements between Israel and several Arab states, such as the UAE and Bahrain, further solidified this shift.

However, these changes were accompanied by significant challenges for other parties in

the region. His approach strained bilateral ties across West Asia, and his dealings with Saudi Arabia, the most important Arab partner of the U.S., led the kingdom to strengthen ties with China and later warm up to Iran under Beijing's mediation.

Trump's relationship with Iran proved particularly volatile. His administration's withdrawal from the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) in 2018 created a lasting impasse over Iran's nuclear program. This period culminated in a dangerous escalation when Trump ordered the assassination of Iranian military official Lieutenant General Qassem Soleimani, triggering a missile attack by Iran on the U.S. Ain al-Assad Airbase in Iraq—the first attack on a U.S. installation since World War II.

Trump's future plans regarding West Asia remain uncertain. While he has publicly voiced support for Israel, he has also indicated a stronger inclination to end the regime's war in Gaza than his predecessor, Joe Biden. On Iran, Trump has stated his desire to "prevent Tehran from developing nuclear weapons", while also expressing

that he does not seek war. Reports from a reformist Iranian newspaper suggest that Trump has communicated with Iran through Oman, and expressed a desire to de-escalate tensions. However, this assertion is met with skepticism, given his past rhetoric and the selection of advisors and officials known for their hawkish stances toward Iran.

To explore these potential shifts in policy, The Tehran Times recently conducted interviews with multiple experts and officials to discuss the possible future of Iran-U.S. engagements, and how Iran should strategize its future plans.



Abolfath: Iran must enter negotiations regardless of potential results

American affairs expert Amir Ali Abolfath argues that Iran should not shy away from engaging in negotiations with the United States.

Abolfath emphasizes that dialogue between the two nations is a persistent reality, not an occasional event. "Iran and the United States have never truly stopped talking," he points out. "They've engaged in indirect negotiations and relied on third-party intermediaries for years. Furthermore, the nature of negotiations has evolved; in 2024, even a carefully crafted social media post can serve as a form of communication and strategic messaging between parties."

However, Abolfath tempers his call for engagement with a dose of realism. He says current geopolitical dynamics present significant hurdles to productive talks. "The

situation has fundamentally shifted," he explains. "Iran's increased power and perceived assertiveness have hardened the West's stance. Simultaneously, Iran's skepticism and distrust of the U.S. have deepened."

He notes that while strained relations between Washington and Tehran predate the 1979 Iranian revolution, the withdrawal of the U.S. from the 2015 nuclear deal under the Trump administration has exacerbated tensions considerably. "While I firmly believe that Iran should pursue negotiations, I must confess that I hold limited optimism about.

Rezaei: Iran holds a stronger negotiating position than the 2010s

Ebrahim Rezaei, the speaker for the Iranian Parliament's Foreign Policy and National Security Committee, believes there are three key considerations when it comes to devising Iran's strategy in regard to the upcoming U.S. administration: the diminished capabilities of the U.S. government, the constraints it faces, and the evolving dynamics of regional actors.

Rezaei argues that the Trump administration, should it return to power in 2024, will not possess greater capabilities than during its previous term. "Despite extensive efforts to destabilize the Iranian government, the U.S. has been ultimately unsuccessful. The failure of U.S. policies over the past eight years has solidified the resilience of Iran and its ability to withstand external pressures. This means Iran can approach any future negotiations or confrontations from a position of relative strength," Rezaei declared.

Moreover, the lawmaker emphasized that the complexities of domestic and international issues facing the U.S. government will further limit its capacity to exert influence over Iran. "Multiple simultaneous crises—ranging from the Ukraine conflict to tensions in West Asia—will divert American attention and resources." This fragmentation of focus, Rezaei argues, will constrain the U.S.'s ability to adopt aggressive policies toward Iran.

In light of these factors, Rezaei advocates for a proactive and assertive Iranian foreign policy. He suggests that Iran should leverage its stability and regional influence to counter any potential aggressive moves by a Trump-led administration. "By adopting a preemptive approach, Iran can safeguard its interests and maintain its sovereignty against external pressures."

Abbasi: Iran should prioritize ties with China, Russia amid Trump's hardline team

According to Mohammad Mehdi Abbasi, an expert in North American affairs, the fact that Trump's inner circle is heavily populated with individuals who hold decidedly anti-Iran views, renders any prospective negotiations unproductive.

"From the Secretary of State and U.S. envoy at the United Nations to the Secretary of Defense and National Security Advisor, nearly every key figure in Trump's anticipated foreign policy leadership is deeply hawkish and fundamentally opposed to Iran," Abbasi asserts. "Attempting to engage in talks with individuals who question your integrity and are predisposed to adversarial policies is almost guaranteed to yield no positive outcomes."

Abbasi further argues that this situation also extinguishes the possibility of achieving specific agreements, such as the prisoner swap deal that occurred during the Biden administration.

Given this challenging backdrop, Abbasi advocates for a strategic pivot towards strengthening ties with China and Russia. He criticizes some Iranian officials for what he perceives as an excessive reliance on Washington. "We must prioritize solidify-

ing our relationships with non-Western powers, especially China and Russia," Abbasi emphasizes. "We should focus on materializing our strategic agreements with these two nations, as our continued pursuit of fruitless engagement with the West may be interpreted as a lack of commitment towards them."

Gharemanpour: Isolationists and new figures like Musk could make future different

While many anticipate a further deterioration in relations between the United States and Iran under a second Trump presidency, international affairs analyst Rahman Ghahremanpour argues that such predictions may be premature. He suggests that the complex geopolitical landscape and shifting domestic priorities within the U.S. could significantly influence the trajectory of their relationship, making it far less predictable than a simple repeat of Trump's first term.



Ghahremanpour emphasizes that the circumstances surrounding a second Trump administration are vastly different than those of his first. "During his initial term, Trump had greater latitude to exert pressure on Iran," he explains. "Currently, the U.S. is significantly preoccupied with conflicts in Ukraine and Gaza, which could push Iran down the list of Trump's priorities. The prominent anti-Iran voices within his team are also staunchly anti-China, potentially leading to a redirection of Trump's focus and resources towards harming Beijing."

This shift in focus, according to Ghahre-

manpour, could create a dynamic where Iran is not the primary target of U.S. foreign policy. Moreover, he points to other factors that may shape the future. "The resurgence of isolationist sentiments within the U.S., which favor a more inward-looking approach to American affairs, coupled with the rise of new influential figures like Elon Musk, could further alter the playing field," he states.

Aslani: A new dynamic opens, but with conditions

West Asia analyst Abbas Aslani cautions against assuming a repeat of Trump's first term, pointing to significant shifts in Iran's own position and motivations. He argues that these changes could create a drastically different dynamic, potentially opening up new avenues for negotiation, albeit with firm conditions.

Aslani notes that the landscape has changed significantly since Trump's first

fixation on dismantling the JCPOA was partly driven by its association with the Democratic Party," he suggests. "He may now be motivated to secure a significant deal with Iran under his own auspices, giving him a personal stake in any outcome."

However, Aslani stresses that while Iran should not avoid negotiations with Trump, it should not be willing to accept any deal under any conditions. "It is clear," he states, "that if Trump continues to pursue a pressure-based approach against Iran, Tehran must disrupt Washington's calculations as the Leader of the Islamic Revolution has indicated." As an example, he notes that while Iran currently has no plans to alter its nuclear policies, continued hostility from the U.S. could prompt a reassessment of its nuclear doctrine.

Iranian FM rushes to China to explore new chapter of bilateral ties

Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi has embarked on an official visit to China, aiming to deepen the longstanding partnership between Tehran and Beijing.

Araghchi and his delegation arrived in Beijing on Friday at the invitation of his Chinese counterpart, Wang Yi.

Speaking to reporters upon his arrival in Beijing, Araghchi described his trip as a critical opportunity for consultations on key regional, international, and bilateral issues. "The primary purpose of this visit is to engage in consultations on regional, international, and bilateral issues," he said.

Reflecting on the longstanding partnership between Iran and China, the minister noted, "For years, we have consistently maintained close consultations with China on all regional and international matters. The current situation is highly sensitive, with escalating tensions in the region and numerous international challenges. Furthermore, our nuclear discussions will encounter new dynamics in the coming year, making increased dialogue with China essential."

Araghchi emphasized the strength of Iran-China bilateral relations, stating, "These relations have always been solid

term. "During his initial presidency, Trump was adamant about dismantling the JCPOA, while Iran insisted it wouldn't consider any new agreements," he explains. "Today, Iran has scaled back on several of its JCPOA commitments, and even Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi has acknowledged that the JCPOA alone is no longer sufficient and that a new deal is necessary." This fundamental shift in Iran's position, he suggests, could alter the parameters of any future engagement with Washington.

Aslani further speculates on Trump's motivations. "It's possible that Trump's

and remain strong. It is only natural that we continue our dialogue on various issues to address shared concerns."

He also highlighted the timing of the visit, calling it particularly significant. "This trip coincides with an opportune moment and aligns with the invitation from our Chinese friends. At the start of the new year, we aim to strategize and prepare for the challenges ahead, including those related to the region, global developments, and the United Nations Security Council," Araghchi explained.

‘Start of a golden era’

In an article published in China's People's Daily on the day of his arrival, Araghchi highlighted the importance of the visit in shaping the "next golden 50 years" of cooperation between the two countries.

He underscored Iran and China's mutual commitment to multilateralism, economic collaboration, and shared opposition to unilateralism in international affairs.

"The next golden 50 years of Iran-China relations will demonstrate that this visit marks the beginning of a new chapter of strategic cooperation between the two countries," he wrote.

The Iranian foreign minister highlighted the deep-rooted cooperation between Tehran and Beijing, including political and defense coordination, the exchange of high-level delegations, and joint initiatives such as the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO).

He also pointed to their collaboration in the BRICS group of emerging economies and their role in brokering peace in the region, including the landmark agreement between Iran and Saudi Arabia in March 2023.

"Iran and China share common interests and concerns not only at bilateral and regional levels but also on trans-regional and international platforms," Araghchi noted. Both nations, he added, firmly believe in multilateralism and work together in global mechanisms to promote shared prosperity.

Araghchi also turned his attention to pressing issues in West Asia, particularly the humanitarian crisis in Gaza. He condemned Israel's ongoing genocide, supported by certain world powers, and called for an immediate ceasefire and delivery of humanitarian aid. He criticized the international community's inaction, calling it a failure of responsibility.

On Syria, the minister reiterated Iran's stance on respecting the country's sovereignty and territorial integrity, emphasizing that the Syrian people should determine their own future without external interference.

"We are witnessing unprecedented changes in the world that have simultaneously created complex opportunities and challenges," Araghchi said, stressing that countries are at a historical crossroads between cooperation and confrontation, openness and exclusion, chaos and peace.

Araghchi criticized states that impose their values and interests on others through

coercion, sanctions, and double standards. He argued that dividing the world into "democratic" and "non-democratic" blocs distorts reality and undermines global harmony. "Iran and China will always stand on the right side of history," he said, vowing to champion development, cooperation, and friendship among nations in the Global South while resisting unilateralism and bullying.

China remains Iran's largest trading partner, and both countries have faced sanctions imposed by the United States. Their relationship was solidified in March 2021 with the signing of a long-term strategic partnership agreement aimed at reinforcing their economic and political alliance.

Iran's former ambassador to China, Mohammad Keshavarzzadeh, also emphasized the critical importance of strengthening Tehran's ties with Beijing in light of evolving global dynamics. Speaking in an interview with the Islamic Republic News Agency (IRNA), Keshavarzzadeh highlighted the changing international landscape and the potential resurgence of Donald Trump in the U.S. presidency as key factors necessitating closer cooperation between the two nations.

"Given the current circumstances the international community is experiencing, coupled with the potential return of Donald Trump to power in the United States, the development of Iran's relationship with China is no longer a matter of choice but has become an unavoidable necessity," Keshavarzzadeh remarked.



New World for 2025

What's in the box for Pakistan



By Naqi Akbar

As the world winds down with the calendar year 2024, there is much anticipation as well as skepticism for the year 2025, which is just round the corner. Keeping in view the fact that the receding year has been a game changer and simultaneously a devastating year for many, the hopes and skepticism is equally justified. Not to ignore the fact that the developments in the globe have undeniable impact of the way events are unfolding in Pakistan.

To begin with, the election results in the United States is going to be the biggest factor in the constructive or destructive trends going forward in the hotspots in the geo political map; North Korea deadlock, China encirclement and lastly the war in the Middle East.

Regards North Korea, the new US administration keeping in view its track record, might not be getting into the conflict. Likewise, the war with China might translate more into a trade war than any actual combat in East Asian seas. Regards the ongoing war in the Middle East; especially keeping in view the fact that

previous Trump administration has been a vociferous supporter of the Abraham Accords, given that the IDF has actually advanced beyond the permissible limits in making that accord a reality; it is a safe bet that the conflict instead of winding down might escalate for a proverbial photo finish.

Elaborating the rationale for that photo finish, the previous Trump administration support for the Abraham Accord, crippling sanctions over Iran; all combined to make an obvious point; forcing the Muslim states to diplomatically accept Israel; in other words, the success of Abraham Accords and weakening of the resistance to the Accord by trying an obvious regime change in Iran.

That situation is expected to escalate on two points. Despite remarkable resistance by the Hezbollah and Hamas to the one-sided IDF campaign with full support from the Biden administration, the setbacks on the two above mentioned fronts and change of leadership in the center of resistance; Iran make it an easy ride for the Trump administration to reach its goal.

The near genocidal war campaign undertaken by the IDF through its Air Force has caused colossal loss of infrastructure and life in Palestinian territory. The declared resolve of the Netanyahu government to ensure that nothing is left living in the war zone means that the Israeli government has practically laid down a conducive ground for the Trump administration to go forward with the Abraham Accords.

With the loss of Syria to Iran as a friendly front-line state, there are few options for Iran, Hezbollah and Hamas to oppose the Abraham Accord, while the Trump and Netanyahu administrations are fully in control to make the most of the situation.

Internally, the Iranians might be looking for the impeachment of Zarif as the Vice President for strategic affairs or a possible impeachment of the new president elect; but the hard fact remains that June onwards Iran has lost or ceded much ground to the IDF due to its somewhat 'mysterious' inaction.

Any new sanctions on Iran impacting the

cost of living for an ordinary Iranian coupled with reform government in Iran withdrawal from power generation in hard winters; meaning lesser cooling options for the Iranians in the period leading up to the Norouz, can potentially make the job for the Americans from within Iran much easier than anticipated.

There is obviously going to be resistance from the sections of Iranian society which are loyal to the Islamists to make their presence felt, politically as well as in the strategic sense. That can be the cause of civil war in Iran, which can turn bloody on both sides of the divide. However, given the ground realities, the going for the Iranian revolutionary set up is likely to be tough once the Trump administration gets into the act through the sanctions.

Moving to Syria, the new puppet revolutionaries are likely to follow the path set by the Netanyahu and Trump administrations. Recently Iranian government is reportedly being demanded US\$ 30 Billion for Civil War damages for its support to the old 'Baathist Regime' during the 2011 to 2024 period. That situation coupled with other factors can translate into an attrition and possible war between Iran and IDF.

With the Middle East not likely to deescalate after the swearing in of Trump in Washington DC; the year 2025 might have much more regime changes in the store;

which can include Iran and subsequent changes elsewhere; not to ignore Pakistan.

In the context of Pakistan, the dice might be inverted for the political players here. Given the fact that the Biden government was not very much inclined to have its impact on Pakistan, making it an easy ride for the establishment to have its way; as they liked to; the current change of sentiment in United States regards Pakistan; starting with objections over February 2024 electoral process, the Pakistan Army Missile program and lastly the Human Rights Situation in Pakistan strongly indicates that with the new president on the seat in White House; winds of positive change can blow in Pakistan if not in rest of the world.

In Pakistan, there can be changes; mostly modeled as palace coups suggesting that United States might be well changing its priorities in this country. United States would definitely not like to abandon Pakistan altogether; however, would take corrective action and then withdraw and observe.

Changes in Pakistan will likely balance out various players, if not eliminating the contradictions altogether in the political map. United States, might not want a true form of democracy to ever flourish in Pakistan, given that fact that its rating since inception has been of a client state with nil cultural baggage or even a political legacy.

Coming back to the global scenario; the geo political tensions have the potential to escalate further and actually borne out tangible results, which can be multiple regime changes; especially in the Middle East. Looking forward the Syrian; 'story' if not winded down properly by the international community has the potential to destabilize the region further, much greater than the fall of Baathist government in Iraq in 2003. If the governments involved can put their weightage, then there can be chances of normalcy in the coming days.

The simmering assertiveness of the Turkish nation state given 100 years have passed since the 1923 treaty which ceased Turkish control of the Aran lands; the new harsh realities where the Türkiye and IDF have a joint Syrian project have the potential to complicate things. With the Iranian 'obituary' in process courtesy Zarif administration; the IDF and Turkish established order being the prime stakeholders in the new setup, peace still cannot be guaranteed.

For Pakistan, the impact of these developments is undeniable. If the popular will triumphs in Pakistan, the stances over Abraham Accords would still be the deciding factors or stumbling blocks for the new political dispensation in Pakistan. Conclusively the world in general and the region encompassing Middle East is up for surprises and unpredictable scenarios all along.



Is Russia really involved in Azerbaijan Air crash and why?



By Hina Kashif

A tragic accident involving Azerbaijan Airlines has claimed the lives of 38 individuals in Kazakhstan on Wednesday, leaving a trail of heartbreak and drawing widespread attention.

Azerbaijan Airlines Flight 8243, an Embraer 190 aircraft, was en route from Baku, the capital of Azerbaijan, to Grozny in Russia's North Caucasus region on Wednesday when it was diverted under unclear circumstances. The plane crashed while attempting to land at another airport in Aktau, western Kazakhstan.

The airline reported that 67 people were aboard the flight, including 62 passengers and five crew members. Of those, 38 lost their lives in the crash, while 29 survived.

Investigators have recovered both of the black boxes—the flight data recorder and cockpit voice recorder—from the crash site.

Cellphone footage seemed to capture the aircraft making a sharp descent before crashing and erupting in a fireball approximately two miles from Aktau airport.

The disaster has been amplified by a passenger's video that surfaced online, capturing the final moments of the ill-fated flight and the ensuing chaos.

The footage, filmed from within the cabin, offers a harrowing glimpse into the experience of those onboard as the aircraft began its rapid descent.

A passenger is heard exclaiming “Allahu Akbar” repeatedly, a phrase that translates to “God is Great,” along with reciting the Shahada, an Islamic declaration of faith.

The atmosphere inside the cabin is a mixture of prayers and cries of fear, reflecting the passengers' desperation as they faced the grim reality of their situation.

The scene inside the plane was one of sheer panic and despair. Yellow oxygen masks were seen dangling from the overhead compartments, a stark indication of the severity of the emergency.

Passengers were visibly distressed, some holding onto each other for comfort while

others prayed loudly. The alert instructing passengers to fasten their seatbelts blared in the background, adding to the tense environment.

In a separate video released by the Russian news agency RT, the extent of the devastation becomes even clearer. The aircraft is shown colliding with a ceiling panel, causing significant damage to the interior. Injured passengers are depicted lying on the floor, many crying out for assistance.

Among them, a bleeding individual is seen with visible head injuries, underscoring the traumatic impact of the crash. A survivor wearing a damaged yellow life jacket is also captured in the video, emphasizing the chaotic struggle for survival.

The harrowing videos have sparked widespread discussion online, with many expressing grief and solidarity for the victims and their families.

The reasons behind the diversion of Azerbaijan Airlines Flight 8243 have been surrounded by conflicting reports, but

several key factors have been highlighted as contributing to the decision to change course.

Initially, Russia's civil aviation authority, Rosaviatsia, stated that the plane had been diverted to Aktau due to a bird strike, a claim that later became disputed. Subsequently, both Russian and Azerbaijani officials suggested that the aircraft's rerouting was primarily due to poor weather conditions, specifically dense fog over Grozny, which made landing unsafe. Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev, speaking at a news conference, said that the plane's change in course occurred due to worsening weather conditions between Baku and Grozny, and the aircraft then

This sequence of events has raised multiple questions about the specific cause of the diversion. Kazakhstan, Azerbaijan, and Russia have all opened investigations into the crash, and each has sought to understand whether external factors, such as drone activity or weather, played a decisive role. The Kremlin has urged caution, asking the public not to jump to conclusions before the investigation is complete.

Meanwhile, there have been significant developments regarding possible external interference. Azerbaijan Airlines, in a statement, mentioned that the aircraft had experienced "external physical and technical interference," but did not specify the source of this interference. The suspension



headed toward Aktau for a safe landing. However, this explanation did not fully account for all circumstances surrounding the crash.

In addition to the weather, further details from Russian officials raised the possibility that the diversion was also influenced by the presence of Ukrainian drones targeting Grozny. Dmitry Yadrov, head of Rosaviatsia, explained that as the plane prepared to land in Grozny, deep fog obstructed visibility, and Ukrainian drones had been targeting the city, prompting authorities to close the airspace to incoming aircraft. As a result, the pilots were forced to consider alternate landing options. Despite two failed landing attempts in Grozny, the captain ultimately opted to reroute the plane to Aktau, Kazakhstan, across the Caspian Sea, where the plane tragically crashed during its landing approach.

of flights to certain Russian airports followed, as the airline continues to assess the situation.

An anonymous U.S. official, speaking to CBS News, suggested that Russian anti-aircraft fire could have downed the plane, particularly given the ongoing conflict between Russian and Ukrainian forces in the region. U.S. intelligence reportedly pointed to the possibility that a Russian air defense system may have struck the aircraft, although this has not been confirmed. White House National Security Council spokesman John Kirby confirmed the U.S. had seen early indications pointing toward this possibility but emphasized that Kazakhstan and Azerbaijan would lead the investigation, with the U.S. respecting their process.

Aviation experts have cast doubt on the initial explanation of a bird strike. CBS

News aviation safety analyst Robert Sumwalt, a former chairman of the National Transportation Safety Board, expressed skepticism, citing the plane's damage as inconsistent with a bird strike. "Birds don't fly at the type of altitude that the initial damage occurred on this airplane," he said. Additionally, independent military expert Yan Matveyev noted that images of the plane's tail showed damage consistent with shrapnel from a small surface-to-air missile, such as the Russian Pantsyr-S1 air defense system.

As speculation around the cause of the crash continued to grow, Russian President Vladimir Putin expressed condolences to Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev, calling the incident a "tragic" one, though he stopped short of admitting that Russia's air defense systems were to blame. In an official statement, the Kremlin acknowledged that air defense systems had been active near Grozny due to a Ukrainian drone strike on the same day but did not confirm that these systems had struck the aircraft.

Survivors of the crash have provided additional details of the chaotic moments leading up to the disaster. Passengers and crew members reported hearing loud bangs during the flight, with some survivors recounting that they heard explosions before the plane descended rapidly. Flight attendant Aydan Rahimli described a loud noise followed by the automatic deployment of oxygen masks. A colleague, Zulfugar Asadov, who was injured, said that the sounds resembled something hitting the plane from the outside. Other survivors also mentioned hearing explosions, with one survivor, Jerovali Salihat, describing "something exploding" near her leg, and Vafa Shabanova recounting hearing "two explosions in the sky" before the plane ultimately crashed.

These conflicting accounts and the ongoing investigations suggest that the true cause of the flight's diversion and subsequent crash may involve a complex combination of factors, including weather conditions, potential drone activity, and possibly even missile fire from Russian air defense systems. The full details will only emerge once the investigations are concluded.

Putin apologises over plane crash, without saying Russia at fault

Russian President Vladimir Putin has expressed his condolences to Azerbaijan's President Ilham Aliyev following the downing of a commercial airliner in Russian airspace on Christmas Day, which resulted in the deaths of 38 people. However, he refrained from admitting Russia's direct responsibility for the incident.

In his first public statement on the crash, Putin described it as a "tragic incident" that occurred while Russian air defense systems were responding to Ukrainian drone attacks. Putin stated that the plane, which was attempting to land in Chechnya, had been forced to divert after coming under fire from Russian air defenses. The Azerbaijan Airlines flight then crash-landed near Aktau in Kazakhstan, killing 38 out of the 67 people on board. The majority of the passengers were from Azerbaijan, with others from Russia, Kazakhstan, and Kyrgyzstan.

It is believed that most of the survivors were seated toward the rear of the plane. The flight, J2-8243, was en route from Baku, the capital of Azerbaijan, to Grozny, the capital of Chechnya, when it came under fire on December 25th. The plane was subsequently diverted across the Caspian Sea to Kazakhstan.

The Kremlin issued a statement on Saturday, announcing that President Putin had spoken to President Aliyev by phone. The statement included Putin's apology for the tragic incident occurring in Russian airspace and his heartfelt condolences to the victims' families. Putin also wished a speedy recovery to the injured passengers.

In his remarks, Putin acknowledged that the plane had made multiple attempts to land in Grozny, but those efforts were hindered by ongoing Ukrainian drone attacks. He explained that Russian air defense systems had been actively repelling these drone strikes in the region, including in the cities of Grozny, Mozdok, and Vladikavkaz. However, the Kremlin's statement stopped short of confirming that the plane had been hit by Russian missiles.

In response, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky criticized Russia for spreading disinformation about the crash and pointed out that the damage to the aircraft's fuselage appeared to resemble that of a missile strike from an air defense system. Zelensky emphasized that a thorough investigation was necessary to clarify the cause of the crash and urged Russia to provide clear explanations.

Before Putin's public apology, the Kremlin had refrained from acknowledging its involvement, stating that investigations were still ongoing. Russian aviation authorities had previously indicated that the situation in

the region was complex due to the presence of Ukrainian drone strikes. Some aviation experts, as well as officials in Azerbaijan, speculated that the plane's GPS systems may have been disrupted by electronic jamming, followed by damage from shrapnel due to a Russian air defense missile.

Survivors of the crash reported hearing loud bangs before the plane went down, suggesting that it had been targeted by an external force. While Azerbaijan had not officially accused Russia of downing the plane, the country's transport minister described the incident as involving "external interference," with the plane suffering internal and external damage as it attempted to land.

U.S. defense officials also expressed the belief that Russia was likely responsible for the downing, further intensifying international scrutiny of the incident.

In the wake of the crash, the Kremlin announced the launch of a criminal investigation into the disaster. Both Azerbaijan and Kazakhstan have also opened investigations. Russian, Azerbaijani, and Kazakh agencies are reportedly working together at the crash site near Aktau.

In response to the ongoing investigation, several Azerbaijani airlines had already suspended flights to most Russian cities. The suspension will remain in effect until the investigation is completed.



Russian Generals assassinations stun the world



By Hina Kashif

Assassination of Lieutenant General Igor Kirillov

A senior Russian general, Lieutenant General Igor Kirillov, was killed in a bombing that occurred near an apartment building in Moscow. The explosion, which was concealed in an electric scooter, claimed the life of Kirillov, who was overseeing Russia's nuclear, biological, and chemical protection forces. His assistant also died in the attack.

The explosion took place on Ryazansky Prospekt, approximately 7 kilometers (4 miles) southeast of the Kremlin. The Russian Investigative Committee confirmed the deaths, stating that Kirillov, who headed the Russian Federation's Radiation, Chemical, and Biological Protection Forces (RKhBZ), and his assistant were killed in the blast.

Images circulating on Russian Telegram channels showed the damaged entrance of a building, littered with debris, and two

bodies lying in blood-stained snow. Authorities have launched a criminal investigation into the incident.

Kirillov's unit, the RKhBZ, specializes in operations in environments contaminated by radiation, chemicals, and biological agents, playing a key role in Russia's defense capabilities.

A source within Ukraine's Security Service (SBU) has claimed that Lieutenant General Igor Kirillov, the Russian military official killed in a recent bombing, was a "legitimate target." The SBU accused Kirillov, 54, of committing war crimes, specifically highlighting his responsibility for the mass use of banned chemical weapons. The SBU charged him in absentia and stated on Telegram that he was "responsible for the widespread use of chemical weapons."

In October, the United Kingdom imposed sanctions on Kirillov, accusing him of overseeing the use of chemical weapons in Ukraine. The UK also criticized him for being a key figure in spreading Kremlin disinformation. According to the SBU,

under Kirillov's leadership, Russia is alleged to have used chemical weapons over 4,800 times in the ongoing conflict.

Moscow has strongly denied these allegations, rejecting any claims of chemical weapon use.

While assassinations of high-ranking officials have occurred in Russia in the past, attacks in Moscow are uncommon.

Russia's Investigative Committee has announced the opening of a criminal case. Svetlana Petrenko, a spokeswoman for the committee, stated that Moscow is treating the bombing as a "terrorist" attack.

Maria Zakharova, the foreign ministry spokeswoman, honored Kirillov, describing him as someone who worked "fearlessly" for the "motherland" to expose Western chemical weapons crimes and other offenses.

Dmitry Medvedev, deputy chairman of Russia's Security Council, commented, "Realizing the inevitability of its military

defeat, [Ukraine] is launching cowardly and despicable attacks on peaceful cities."

Assassination of Mikhail Shatsky, (a senior Russian cruise missile engineer)

Mikhail Shatsky, a senior Russian cruise missile engineer, was fatally shot near Moscow, with Ukrainian media attributing the assassination to Ukraine's intelligence services.

Shatsky's body was discovered in Kuzminski Forest Park, located in the Kotelniki suburb southeast of Moscow. He held the position of deputy chief designer and head of software development at the Moscow Experimental Design Bureau Mars, part of Russia's state nuclear corporation Rosatom. The bureau specializes in creating automated control and navigation systems for satellites and drones.

Exiled journalist Alexander Nevzorov, who first reported the incident, revealed that Shatsky was involved in the development of the Kh-59 missile, which was later upgraded into the advanced Kh-69 version. Both missile types are used by the Russian military in its attacks on Ukraine.

Ukrainian outlets, including RBC and Ukrainska Pravda, cited anonymous sources who claimed that Shatsky's killing was part of a "special operation" by Ukraine's HUR military intelligence agency. One source, quoted by Hromadske, stated that individuals involved in Russia's military-industrial efforts are legitimate targets for Ukraine's defense forces. Earlier this week, the Ukrainian air force intercepted two Kh-59/69 missiles over the Dnipropetrovsk region, highlighting the importance of these weapons in the ongoing conflict.

Russia's investigative news platform, Important Stories, geolocated the site of Shatsky's death to a spot just a 10-minute walk from his home in Kotelniki.

Several Ukrainian outlets, including Ukrainska Pravda and The Kyiv Independent, have reported that the shooting was carried out by Ukraine's military intelligence agency, GUR, citing anonymous Ukrainian defense sources.

"Anyone involved in the development of Russia's military-industrial complex and the support of Russian aggression in Ukraine is, in one way or another, a legitimate target of the Ukrainian Defense Forces," one such source told The Kyiv Independent.

On Friday, Russia launched a large-scale missile attack on energy infrastructure in western Ukraine, according to Kyiv. This attack is the latest in a series of assaults, raising concerns that the Kremlin is seeking to cripple Ukraine's power generation capacity before the onset of the cold winter.

Casualties of North Korean Troops fighting For Russia

North Korean forces have reportedly suffered "several hundred" casualties while

The official explained that the heavy losses are partly due to the North Korean soldiers' lack of combat experience. "These are not battle-hardened troops. They haven't been in combat before," the official added. This revelation comes after Ukraine's Commander-in-Chief Oleksandr Syrsky remarked that North Korean soldiers have played a central role in Russia's "intensive offensive" in the Kursk region in recent days.

Since Russia's invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, military ties between Russia and North Korea have deepened, with a landmark defense pact signed in June taking effect earlier this month.

Experts believe that North Korea's leader, Kim Jong Un, sees this cooperation as an opportunity to obtain advanced technology from Russia while providing his troops with crucial battle experience.



fighting Ukrainian troops in Russia's Kursk region, according to a senior U.S. military official on Tuesday.

Pyongyang has deployed thousands of troops to support Russia's military efforts, including in the Kursk region, where Ukrainian forces regained territory earlier this year.

"Our latest estimate indicates that the DPRK [Democratic People's Republic of Korea] has suffered several hundred casualties," the official, who spoke anonymously, said. "This includes a range of injuries, from light wounds to killed in action (KIA)," with casualties spanning various ranks among the North Korean troops.

U.S. Support for Ukraine and Concerns Over Transition

Meanwhile, the Biden administration in the U.S. has continued to provide strong support for Ukraine, expediting billions of dollars in authorized aid. However, with President-elect Donald Trump poised to take office next month, concerns are growing in Ukraine and Europe about the future of U.S. assistance.

Trump has been openly critical of U.S. aid to Ukraine, suggesting he could negotiate a ceasefire "within hours" of taking office. This has raised fears in Kyiv about the potential reduction or loss of critical military support under his administration.

A senior U.S. defense official acknowledged that some of the remaining \$5.6 billion in aid authorization may not be fully utilized before the Biden administration concludes. "There could be remaining authority that transitions and becomes available for the next administration to use," the official stated.

The situation highlights the growing complexity of the conflict, with North Korea's involvement indicating further escalation in the war. As Ukraine continues to defend itself against Russian forces bolstered by foreign troops, the future of international support remains a critical factor in the ongoing war.

Russian soldiers with previous criminal records

Verstka, an independent Russian news outlet, reports that at least 242 Russians have been killed by soldiers returning from Ukraine, with another 227 suffering serious injuries.

Many of these soldiers have prior criminal records and were released from prison specifically to join Russia's military efforts in Ukraine.

The BBC estimates that the Wagner mercenary group recruited over 48,000 prisoners to fight in Ukraine. Following the death of Wagner leader Yevgeny Prigozhin in a plane crash last year, the Russian Ministry of Defence took over the recruitment of prisoners.

These developments have had a significant

impact on Russian society, according to sociologist Igor Eidman.

"This is a very serious problem, and it could potentially get worse. All the traditional notions of good and evil are being upended," he told the BBC.

"Individuals who have committed heinous crimes—such as murderers, rapists, cannibals, and paedophiles—not only escape punishment by going to war, but they are being celebrated as heroes, which is unprecedented."

There are several reasons why Russian soldiers fortunate enough to return from the war may believe they are above the law.

Official media hail them as "heroes," and President Vladimir Putin has described them as Russia's new "elite." Soldiers recruited from prisons often have their convictions erased or receive pardons. It is not uncommon for released convicts to return from fighting in Ukraine, reoffend, and avoid punishment once again by rejoining the front lines.

This has led to despair among some police officers. "Four years ago, I sentenced him to seven years," said officer Grigory in an interview with Novaya Gazeta. "And now he's standing in front of me, saying: 'You won't be able to do anything, officer. Now is our time, the time of those shedding blood in the special military operation.'"

Russian courts have frequently cited participation in the war against Ukraine as a reason to impose lighter sentences.

However, many cases don't even make it to

court. Moscow has introduced a law against "discrediting the Russian armed forces," which has made some victims of crimes by veterans hesitant to report them.

Olga Romanova, head of the prisoner rights group Russia Behind Bars, says this growing sense of impunity is fueling rising crime rates.

"The main consequence is the widening gap between crime and punishment in the public's perception. If you commit a crime, it's far from certain you'll face any consequences," she told the BBC.

In 2023, serious crimes in Russia increased by almost 10%, and in the first half of this year, the number of military personnel convicted of crimes more than doubled compared to the same period the previous year.

Sociologist Anna Kuleshova argues that violence is becoming more normalized in Russian society, especially since criminals can now evade punishment by going to war.

"There is a tendency to legitimize violence. The idea that violence is a norm will likely spread—violence in schools, domestic violence, violence in relationships, and using violence to resolve conflicts," she said.

"This is being facilitated by the militarization of society, a shift towards conservatism, and the romanticization of war. Violent crimes committed within the country are being justified by the violence of war."



Paying millions for death trap in the deep sea

Whenever a new tragedy occurs, we hear about a crackdown on the agents and its related developments. A few weeks later, everyone forgets it, until a new mishap surfaces. It shows the law enforcement agencies in Pakistan, especially the Federal Investigation Agency that deals with human trafficking are either least interested in protecting people or lack resources to curb this death trap in the form of migration to Europe from Libya and other countries.



By Javed Mahmood

Once again, a boat carrying migrants, including many Pakistanis, capsized near Greece in the deep sea. The tragedy occurred after the boat collided with a ship in the deep ocean. According to media reports, every Pakistani migrant paid more than 2 million rupees to the agent to reach Europe illegally via boats from Libya.

In the latest tragedy, about 40 Pakistanis (out of 80+) on board the ill-fated boat are still missing while the bodies of five have been recovered. In other words, each Pakistani victim has paid millions of rupees to materialize their dream of reaching Europe, but the journey ended in their death. Almost every month, a similar tragedy occurs near the coasts of European countries, but Pakistanis and other countries youngsters are still taking the risk of falling into the death trap.

Pakistan's Ambassador to Greece, Aamar Aftab Qureshi, has revealed that more than 80 Pakistanis, including minors, were aboard the ill-fated vessel that capsized near Greece on Saturday. Addressing a press conference, Qureshi stated that the overloaded boat sank after its hull cracked.

"The rescue operation is ongoing, but the chances of survival for those still missing

are very low," the ambassador said. He also noted that dozens of Pakistanis — who were traveling illegally from Libya on multiple boats — remain unaccounted for.

The tragedy has claimed the lives of at least five Pakistani citizens, with authorities confirming the deaths following the capsizing of the wooden boat near the Greek islands.

Ambassador Qureshi announced that the embassy would bear all expenses for transferring the bodies back to Pakistan. Expressing concern over the involvement of minors, he urged parents to avoid sending their children on such perilous journeys and called for strict action against human smugglers facilitating these illegal routes.

Investigation and Crackdown on Human Smuggling

Following the tragedy, Interior Minister Mohsin Naqvi, under the directions of Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif, has formed an investigation committee led by the Additional Secretary of the Ministry of Interior. The committee has been tasked

with completing its investigation and submitting findings within five days.

The Federal Investigation Agency (FIA) has also been directed to launch nationwide operations against human smuggling networks.

Survivors' Accounts: A Journey of Horror

Pakistani survivors, currently staying in a camp in Greece, have shared chilling details of the tragic journey. They revealed that the vessel lacked a proper engine, communication equipment (such as a walkie-talkie), and even a qualified driver.

The survivors said they departed from Libya on December 11 after being stranded there for more than a month. The incident occurred late Friday night when the sea conditions were extremely rough.

Decrying their dire circumstances, survivors shared that they lack clothes and shoes and have urgently appealed to authorities for assistance and relief.

Earlier, the Foreign Office confirmed that 47 Pakistanis were among those rescued in the recent boat tragedy off the coast of

Greece. The incident occurred near a southern Greek island, involving a vessel carrying migrants attempting to enter Europe illegally.

A Foreign Office spokesperson shared that preliminary reports have confirmed the death of one Pakistani national. However, the exact number of missing and deceased Pakistani citizens has yet to be definitively determined.

The Pakistani embassy in Athens is in ongoing contact with local authorities to gather more information and provide assistance. Embassy staff have already arrived at the site to meet with the rescued Pakistanis and offer necessary support. The spokesperson reaffirmed Pakistan's commitment to helping its citizens abroad in times of crisis and highlighted the importance of coordinated efforts to prevent such tragic incidents.

Migrant boat sinks near Spain

Meanwhile, at least four young Pakistani men tragically suffocated while attempting to migrate to Spain via a boat journey from Mauritania. One of the victims, identified as Abu Huraira from Jinnah Colony, Wazirabad, had left home two months ago without informing his family of his plans to reach Europe.

The other three men aboard remain unidentified. Reports indicate that the victims were hidden in the boat's cargo compartment to avoid detection, which led to their suffocation due to a lack of ventilation.

Abu Huraira's family received the heartbreaking news from the agent who arranged the voyage, who explained that the men were concealed among the cargo. Recognized through images shared on social media, Abu Huraira was married just two years ago, and his funeral prayers in absentia have already been held in a local park in Wazirabad.

Efforts are ongoing to gather more information about the identities of the other three deceased men and their families.

This incident follows another tragedy on August 26, when at least 13 people lost their lives and 14 went missing after a migrant boat sank off the coast of Yemen,

highlighting the dangers of perilous migration routes. The International Organization for Migration (IOM) reported that the vessel had departed from Djibouti with 25 Ethiopian migrants and two Yemeni nationals. As search operations continue, the cause of the shipwreck remains unclear.

Another boat sinks in Nigeria

At least 150 people are missing after a boat capsized in western Nigeria. This tragic incident occurred in the first week of October 2024. The incident occurred late Tuesday night in the Mokwa region, according to Abdullahi Baba, director general of the Niger State emergency agency. The boat was reportedly carrying around 300 individuals who were en route to an annual Muslim religious celebration. Rescue efforts are currently underway to find more survivors.

In a separate incident on September 15, eight migrants lost their lives when their overcrowded vessel sank while attempting to cross the English Channel from France to England. This tragedy brings the total number of migrants who have died trying to reach England from France this year to 46, a significant increase from just 12 in 2023.

Both the French and British governments have been working to curtail the flow of migrants, many of whom pay smugglers thousands of euros to make the perilous journey on overcrowded inflatable boats.

In July, a similar tragedy occurred off the coast of Mauritania, where at least 15 migrants died and dozens went missing after their boat capsized, according to the International Organisation for Migration (IOM) and local sources.

Casualties were reported in a boat tragedy off the coast of Spain's Canary Islands

A tragic incident occurred off the coast of Spain's Canary Islands when a boat carrying migrants capsized overnight, resulting in the deaths of at least nine individuals and leaving 48 others missing. This fatal incident has been reported in the

month of September 2024.

According to the National Maritime Rescue Service, the boat had 84 people on board when it encountered distress. A distress call was received shortly after midnight from an area off El Hierro, one of the islands in the Canary archipelago, prompting a rescue mission. Twenty-seven people were saved, but the fate of the remaining passengers remains uncertain.

This tragedy follows another devastating event in early September when 39 migrants lost their lives after their boat sank off the coast of Senegal. They, too, were attempting a dangerous crossing to the Canary Islands, a gateway from which many hoped to reach mainland Europe.

Unfortunately, these perilous journeys often result in loss of life as overcrowded, poorly maintained boats are no match for the powerful Atlantic currents. In recent years, thousands of migrants have perished while attempting to reach Europe via the Atlantic.

The journey is particularly treacherous due to the strong ocean currents and the long distances that some boats must travel, with some departing from African shores as far as 1,000 kilometers (620 miles) from the Canary Islands. Many of the boats are in poor condition, leaving them vulnerable to capsizing or sinking.

Spain has been grappling with the increasing number of migrants attempting to reach its shores. As of mid-August, 22,304 migrants had arrived in the Canary Islands since the start of the year, a significant increase compared to 9,864 during the same period the previous year.

In response to the crisis, Spain's prime minister visited Mauritania and The Gambia in late August to sign cooperation agreements aimed at curbing human smuggling while also expanding legal immigration channels.

The International Organization for Migration (IOM), a UN agency, estimates that since 2014, at least 4,857 people have died attempting to cross the Atlantic to reach the Canary Islands.

However, many aid organizations believe this number is severely underreported.

Caminando Fronteras, a Spanish NGO that assists migrants, estimates that the true death toll is much higher, with 18,680 migrants having died trying to reach Europe over the same period.

These tragic incidents highlight the dangers faced by migrants and the urgent need for improved safety measures and policies to address the ongoing migration crisis.

Why the migrant boats are sinking near Europe?

The sinking of migrant boats near Europe is a tragic and complex issue caused by a combination of factors, including unsafe vessels, desperate journeys, and broader systemic challenges. Here's a breakdown of the main reasons:

1. Overcrowded and Unsafe Boats

Unseaworthy vessels: Many boats used by human traffickers are old, poorly maintained, or not designed for open-sea travel.

Overcrowding: Smugglers maximize profits by cramming as many people as possible onto small boats, making them unstable and prone to capsizing.

Lack of safety equipment: Many boats lack life jackets, navigation tools, or emergency supplies, leaving passengers vulnerable in case of emergencies.

2. Human Smuggling Networks

Profit-driven smugglers: Traffickers exploit migrants' desperation, offering dangerous journeys across the Mediterranean with little regard for safety.

Deliberate sabotage: Some smugglers intentionally damage or abandon boats at sea to avoid detection by authorities, leaving migrants stranded.

3. Dangerous Sea Routes

Rough waters: The Mediterranean, particularly during winter, has unpredictable weather and strong currents that can overwhelm small boats.

Long journeys: Migrants often attempt to cross vast stretches of open water from North Africa or the Middle East to Europe,

increasing the risk of sinking.

4. Lack of Legal Migration Pathways

Desperation to escape: Many migrants fleeing war, persecution, poverty, or climate change have no legal means to seek asylum or migrate, forcing them to take perilous journeys.

Barriers to safe routes: Strict immigration policies and limited resettlement programs push migrants toward illegal and dangerous options.

5. Delayed Search and Rescue Operations

Insufficient patrols: Some areas lack adequate rescue operations or coordinated responses to migrant boats in distress.



Political resistance: Some European governments have reduced search-and-rescue missions, citing concerns that such efforts encourage migration.

Pushback policies: Migrant boats are sometimes intercepted and forced back to unsafe countries, leaving them at risk during the return journey.

6. Climate and Environmental Factors

Rising sea levels: Climate-related displacement is driving more people to flee their homes, increasing the number of dangerous crossings.

Extreme weather: Changing weather

patterns make sea crossings more hazardous.

7. Political and Economic Instability in Departure Countries

War and conflict: Ongoing crises in countries like Libya, Syria, and Sudan force people to flee, often via dangerous routes.

Lack of governance: In some regions, weak governments allow smugglers to operate freely, facilitating unsafe migration.

8. Lack of Coordinated International Action

Divided policies: European countries often disagree on how to handle migrants, leading to inconsistent responses.

Limited funding: Underfunded rescue

missions and migrant support programs exacerbate the crisis.

Criminalization of NGOs: Some countries have criminalized non-governmental organizations (NGOs) conducting search-and-rescue operations, reducing assistance for boats in distress.

Possible Solutions

Expand legal migration channels: Provide more safe and legal pathways for asylum-seekers and migrants.

Crack down on smuggling networks: Strengthen international efforts to dismantle trafficking rings.

Improve rescue operations: Increase funding and cooperation for search-and-rescue missions in the Mediterranean.

Address root causes: Invest in stabilizing conflict zones and addressing poverty and climate change in origin countries.

Shared responsibility: Ensure European countries collaborate to fairly distribute asylum-seekers and support migrants.

The ongoing loss of life in these tragedies underscores the urgent need for coordinated action to protect migrants and prevent further disasters. Let me know if you'd like to dive deeper into any specific aspect!

How to curb human trafficking?

Curbing human trafficking requires a multi-faceted approach involving governments, communities, organizations, and individuals. Here are key strategies to combat human trafficking effectively:

1. Strengthening Laws and Policies

Enforce strict anti-trafficking laws: Countries must adopt and enforce laws that criminalize all forms of trafficking, with severe penalties for offenders.

Support victim-centered policies: Ensure policies provide protection, rehabilitation, and reintegration for survivors, rather than punishing them.

Regulate labor markets: Strengthen oversight in industries prone to trafficking, such as agriculture, construction, domestic work, and entertainment.

2. Educating and Raising Awareness

Public campaigns: Educate communities about the signs of trafficking, how it happens, and how to report it.

Target vulnerable populations: Teach at-risk groups (e.g., women, children, migrants) about their rights and how to avoid exploitative situations.

Training professionals: Train law enforcement, healthcare workers, teachers, and social workers to identify and assist traffick-

ing victims.

3. Addressing Root Causes

Poverty reduction: Invest in education, job creation, and social safety nets to reduce vulnerability to trafficking.

Combat discrimination: Tackle gender inequality and social exclusion, which increase the risk of exploitation.

Reduce demand: Target industries that profit from trafficked labor or exploitation, including the commercial sex industry and forced labor sectors.

4. Improving Law Enforcement and Justice Systems

Proactive investigations: Strengthen police capabilities to investigate trafficking networks and collaborate internationally.

Punish traffickers: Ensure traffickers face prosecution and significant penalties.

Prevent corruption: Address corruption that enables traffickers to operate with impunity.

5. Providing Support for Survivors

Safe shelters: Offer secure housing and trauma-informed care for victims.

Legal and financial assistance: Help survivors navigate legal processes and rebuild their lives through financial aid and job training.

Counseling and reintegration programs: Provide psychological support to help survivors recover and reintegrate into society.

6. Strengthening International Cooperation

Cross-border collaboration: Enhance partnerships between countries to track and dismantle trafficking networks.

Share intelligence: Facilitate information exchange on trafficking patterns and perpetrators.

Global initiatives: Support international organizations like the UN and NGOs that combat trafficking worldwide.

7. Encouraging Community Action

Hotlines and reporting systems: Promote easy and anonymous reporting channels for suspected trafficking cases. Community vigilance: Engage local leaders and citizens in identifying and preventing trafficking.

Corporate responsibility: Hold businesses accountable for monitoring their supply chains to eliminate forced labor.

8. Leveraging Technology

Monitor online platforms: Track and shut down websites used for trafficking recruitment or exploitation.

Data analysis: Use AI and data to identify trafficking hotspots and patterns.

Awareness through media: Harness social media to spread anti-trafficking messages widely.

9. Support Advocacy and Non-profits

Partner with NGOs: Support organizations dedicated to rescuing victims, providing services, and advocating for systemic change.

Volunteer or donate: Offer time or resources to groups fighting trafficking locally or globally.

10. Involve Survivors in Solutions

Empower survivor leaders: Involve survivors in policy-making and awareness campaigns. Listen to their experiences: Survivor input can guide effective interventions and prevention strategies.

Conclusion

Whenever a new tragedy occurs, we hear about a crackdown on the agents and its related developments. A few weeks later, everyone forgets it, until a new mishap surfaces. It shows the law enforcement agencies in Pakistan, especially the Federal Investigation Agency that deals with human trafficking are either least interested in protecting people or lack resources to curb this death trap in the form of migration to Europe from Libya and other countries.

The Deadliest Wars in Modern History: An Overview



By Kanwal Munir

Throughout modern history, several wars have not only resulted in staggering loss of life but also caused widespread destruction and displacement of populations. These conflicts, often complex and multifaceted, have been shaped by a combination of political, social, and economic factors. The ongoing nature of many modern wars and the human cost they impose upon the world highlight the fragility of global peace and stability. Below is an exploration of some of the deadliest wars in modern history, each leaving an indelible impact on the countries and regions involved.

1. Second Congo War

The Second Congo War, also known as the Great War of Africa, lasted from 1998 to 2003 and involved nine African nations, with the central conflict taking place in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). It began when the Rwandan and Ugandan backed *Rassemblement Congolais pour la Démocratie* (RCD) rebel group launched an offensive against the government of Laurent-Désiré Kabila, who had ousted Mobutu Sese Seko in 1997. Tensions between Kabila and his former allies, particularly Rwanda, quickly escalated, leading to full-scale war.

The conflict saw the involvement of numerous nations: Rwanda, Uganda, Burundi, and Zimbabwe played significant roles, with Rwanda and Uganda supporting various rebel factions while Zimbabwe, Angola, and Namibia supported Kabila's government. The war soon evolved into a regional conflict, with several neighboring countries backing different sides based on political, ethnic, and economic interests. Multiple rebel groups also emerged, including the *Mouvement de Libération du Congo* (MLC), backed by Uganda.

The war caused one of the deadliest conflicts since World War II, with estimates of 3-5 million deaths, primarily due to disease, famine, and violence. The humanitarian crisis was exacerbated by widespread displacement, as millions fled their homes.

Despite attempts at peace talks, including the Lusaka Ceasefire Agreement in 1999 and the Pretoria Accord in 2003, the conflict didn't officially end until 2003, when a transitional government was established. However, violence persisted in eastern DRC, and peace has remained elusive, with armed groups still active in the region. The war's legacy of instability continues to impact the DRC and the wider

Great Lakes region.

2. Syrian Civil War

The Syrian Civil War, which erupted in 2011, is one of the deadliest and most devastating conflicts of the 21st century. It started as a peaceful uprising against President Bashar al-Assad's regime, fueled by grievances related to the political and social conditions in Syria. The uprisings were inspired by the Arab Spring protests that spread throughout the Middle East, where citizens rose against long-standing autocratic rulers. In Syria, however, the government responded with brutal force, leading to an escalation that quickly transformed a peaceful protest movement into a full-blown civil war.

From the outset, the conflict was marked by violence and brutality, with the regime using military force, including airstrikes, chemical weapons, and barrel bombs, against civilians. This led to the formation of opposition factions, some of which were backed by foreign governments, including the United States, Turkey, and several Arab states. The intervention of foreign powers turned the war into a proxy conflict, with each side receiving support from international allies. On the opposing side, the

Syrian government received substantial backing from Russia and Iran, who sought to maintain their influence in the region.

The war has led to between 400,000 and 600,000 deaths, with millions of people displaced both internally within Syria and to neighboring countries such as Turkey, Lebanon, and Jordan. The conflict has also created one of the largest refugee crises in modern history. Cities like Aleppo, Homs, and Damascus have been reduced to rubble, and basic infrastructure, including hospitals, schools, and markets, has been destroyed. While the conflict has witnessed several ceasefire agreements, such as the one mediated by the United Nations in 2018, these have not been successful in halting the violence. The war continues to cause immense suffering and remains a tragic symbol of the devastating effects of war on civilians.

The use of chemical weapons, particularly by the Syrian government, has drawn widespread international condemnation, with accusations of war crimes. Despite various peace talks, including negotiations in Geneva and Astana, the war shows no signs of ending. The humanitarian situation is dire, and the long-term stability of Syria remains uncertain.

3. Darfur Conflict

The Darfur Conflict, which began in 2003, is a devastating conflict that has claimed over 300,000 lives and displaced millions of people. It is a conflict rooted in ethnic tensions, poverty, and political marginalization. The war began when non-Arab rebel groups, seeking autonomy and equality for the indigenous African populations in the Darfur region of Sudan, took up arms against the Sudanese government. These rebel groups accused the Sudanese government of neglecting the needs of the Darfur region and engaging in policies that marginalized the indigenous African population in favor of Arab Sudanese.

In retaliation, the government of Sudan, under the leadership of then-President Omar al-Bashir, supported the Janjaweed militias, a group of Arab fighters accused of committing atrocities against the non-Arab populations in Darfur. The Janjaweed carried out a brutal campaign of ethnic cleansing, which included mass killings,

rapes, and the destruction of villages. Thousands of people were forcibly displaced, with many fleeing to neighboring Chad.

The international community initially reacted with condemnation and calls for intervention. The United Nations and the African Union launched a joint peacekeeping mission, but these efforts were insufficient to stop the violence. Despite the deployment of peacekeepers, attacks against civilians continued. The conflict has led to the deaths of an estimated 300,000 people and left over 2.5 million people displaced. The humanitarian crisis is ongoing, and many parts of Darfur remain in a state of instability and insecurity.

Although the conflict is not as widely covered as other major wars, it remains a significant humanitarian disaster. The failure of the international community to effectively intervene and stop the violence has led to widespread criticism, and the legacy of the Darfur conflict continues to affect Sudan to this day.

4. Iraq War

The Iraq War, initiated in 2003, is one of the most controversial and costly conflicts in modern history. The war was triggered by the U.S.-led invasion of Iraq, which was justified by the claim that the Iraqi government, led by President Saddam Hussein, possessed weapons of mass destruction (WMDs) and had ties to terrorist organizations, particularly al-Qaeda. Despite the lack of evidence to support these claims, the United States and its allies, including the United Kingdom, launched a military campaign aimed at removing Saddam Hussein from power and ensuring the disarmament of Iraq.

The invasion led to the swift collapse of Saddam Hussein's regime, but it also created a power vacuum that plunged Iraq into chaos. The initial phase of the war was marked by heavy bombing campaigns and ground battles. However, after the fall of Baghdad, the situation deteriorated into a full-blown insurgency, with various factions, including Sunni extremists, Shiite militias, and Kurdish forces, fighting for control of the country.

The Iraq War led to the deaths of an

estimated 150,000 to over one million people, with the vast majority of casualties being civilians. Major battles, such as the Battle of Fallujah and the Battle of Ramadi, saw intense urban warfare and resulted in widespread destruction of infrastructure. The war also led to the rise of extremist groups like ISIS (Islamic State), which capitalized on the instability to establish a self-declared caliphate in Iraq and Syria. ISIS's actions contributed to the further loss of life, displacement, and suffering in the region.

The financial cost of the war is estimated at over \$2 trillion, making it one of the most expensive wars in modern history. Despite the initial success of the U.S. military, Iraq remains deeply unstable, and the consequences of the war are still felt in the region today. Sectarian violence, the disbandment of the Iraqi army, and the lack of post-war reconstruction contributed to the ongoing instability.

5. Afghanistan War

The Afghanistan War, which began in 2001 following the September 11 attacks, has been another long-running and deadly conflict. The war began as a response to the Taliban's refusal to hand over al-Qaeda leader Osama bin Laden, who was blamed for orchestrating the attacks. The U.S. and its allies quickly overthrew the Taliban government and established a new government in Afghanistan. However, the Taliban quickly regrouped as an insurgent force and began a protracted guerrilla war against the Afghan government and foreign troops.

Despite the initial successes of the U.S. and NATO forces, the war quickly became a quagmire. Over the years, the Taliban regained strength, and other insurgent groups emerged. The war has caused the deaths of over 100,000 civilians and left millions of people displaced. The cost of the war, both in terms of lives lost and economic resources expended, is enormous, with estimates of the financial cost exceeding \$2 trillion.

In 2018, the U.S. and the Taliban reached a peace agreement, but violence continued. In 2021, the U.S. withdrew its forces from Afghanistan, leading to the rapid collapse of the Afghan government and the Taliban's return to power. The withdrawal

marked the end of a two-decade-long war, but the situation in Afghanistan remains unstable, and the future of the country is uncertain. The conflict left behind a devastated Afghanistan, with widespread poverty, lack of infrastructure, and a fractured political system.

6. War Against Boko Haram

Since 2009, Boko Haram, an Islamist militant group based in northeastern Nigeria, has waged an insurgency against the Nigerian government. The group, whose name translates to "Western education is forbidden," seeks to establish an Islamic state in the region. Boko Haram has been responsible for a wide range of atrocities, including bombings, kidnappings, and attacks on civilians. The group has also targeted schools and government institutions, further exacerbating the crisis.

The conflict with Boko Haram has led to the deaths of more than 20,000 people and displaced millions of others. The group's attacks have destabilized not only Nigeria but also neighboring countries like Chad, Niger, and Cameroon, leading to regional instability. Despite significant military efforts by the Nigerian government, Boko Haram has remained active, and the situation in the region continues to deteriorate.

The humanitarian impact of the war is severe, with millions of people living in refugee camps and struggling to access food, water, and medical care. The economic cost of the conflict has been substantial, with the region's GDP declining by 25%. Boko Haram's influence has also led to the rise of other militant groups in the region, further complicating efforts to restore peace.

7. Yemeni Civil War

The Yemeni Civil War, which began in 2015, has caused widespread devastation in Yemen. The conflict began when the Houthi movement, a Zaidi Shia-led insurgent group, launched an uprising against the internationally recognized government of President Abdrabbuh Mansour Hadi. The Houthis, who accused the government of corruption and neglect, seized control of the capital, Sana'a, and

later declared themselves the legitimate rulers of Yemen. In response, a Saudi-led coalition, backed by the United States and other Arab nations, launched an extensive air campaign to restore Hadi to power.

The war has caused over 100,000 deaths and displaced more than 3 million people. The humanitarian crisis in Yemen is one of the worst in the world, with millions of people in need of food, medical care, and shelter. The conflict has created widespread famine, a cholera outbreak, and the destruction of vital infrastructure. Despite various ceasefire attempts and peace negotiations, the war continues, with no end in sight. The international community's efforts to mediate peace have been largely unsuccessful, and the humanitarian crisis deepens.



8. The Russia-Ukraine Conflict

The Russia-Ukraine Conflict began in 2014 when Russia annexed Crimea following the ousting of Ukrainian President Viktor Yanukovich. The political instability in Ukraine provided an opportunity for Russia to assert its influence in the region, and the annexation of Crimea was followed by the emergence of pro-Russian separatist movements in eastern Ukraine. These separatists, with alleged support from Russia, declared independence in the Donetsk and Luhansk regions.

The Ukrainian government responded with military force, leading to a prolonged conflict that resulted in significant loss of life and displacement. Efforts to negotiate

peace, such as the Minsk Agreements, were largely ineffective, as both sides violated the terms of the ceasefire. The situation escalated in 2022, when Russia launched a full-scale invasion of Ukraine, sparking widespread condemnation from the international community.

The ongoing war has led to tens of thousands of deaths and millions of people displaced from their homes. Russia's invasion has also caused significant economic damage to Ukraine and its neighbors, particularly through the disruption of energy supplies and trade routes. The international community has imposed severe sanctions on Russia and provided military aid to Ukraine, but the conflict remains unresolved. The humanitarian crisis in Ukraine continues to worsen, and

the international community continues to seek a diplomatic resolution to the conflict.

Conclusion

The wars described above represent some of the most destructive and deadly conflicts in modern history. Each of these wars has left a lasting legacy of death, displacement, and suffering. Despite the efforts of the international community, many of these conflicts remain unresolved, and the human toll is immeasurable. The scale of destruction in these wars serves as a somber reminder of the catastrophic consequences of armed conflict. The ongoing humanitarian crises in many of these regions call for continued global attention and action to bring about peaceful resolutions and prevent further suffering.

Monetary Policy Update: Navigating Inflation, Growth, and Stability in FY25



By Romana Afsheen

In its meeting held on December 16, 2024, the Monetary Policy Committee (MPC) made the significant decision to reduce the policy rate by 200 basis points, bringing it to 13 percent. This reduction will take effect from December 17, 2024. The decision reflects the recent decline in headline inflation, which stood at 4.9 percent year-on-year in November 2024, aligning with the MPC's projections. The reduction in inflation has been primarily attributed to the ongoing decrease in food inflation and the dissipation of the impact of the gas tariff hike implemented in November 2023. Despite this progress, core inflation remains persistently high at 9.7 percent, and inflation expectations among consumers and businesses continue to display volatility. The Committee acknowledged these challenges and reiterated its expectation that inflation may exhibit short-term volatility before stabilizing within the target range. Furthermore, the MPC's decision reflects an improved economic growth outlook, as evidenced by high-frequency indica-

tors signaling increased economic activity. Overall, the Committee assessed that the measured approach to rate cuts has effectively balanced inflationary pressures and external account challenges while fostering sustainable economic growth.

Key Developments Since the Last Meeting

The MPC highlighted several developments since its last meeting, which have implications for the macroeconomic outlook:

1. Current Account Surplus:

- o The current account remained in surplus for the third consecutive month in October 2024. This surplus has contributed to an increase in the State Bank of Pakistan's (SBP) foreign exchange reserves, now totaling approximately \$12 billion, despite weak financial inflows and substantial official debt repayments.

2. Global Commodity Prices:

- o Favorable global commodity prices have positively influenced domestic inflation and reduced the import bill.

3. Private Sector Credit Growth:

- o Credit to the private sector has risen significantly, driven by improved financial conditions and efforts by banks to meet the advances-to-deposit ratio (ADR) thresholds.

4. Tax Revenue Shortfall:

- o The shortfall in tax revenues compared to targets has widened, posing challenges to fiscal management.

These developments collectively indicate that the cumulative impact of policy rate reductions since June 2024 is beginning to manifest and is expected to continue influencing the economy over the coming quarters. The

MPC's decision to maintain a positive real policy rate aligns with its goal of stabilizing inflation within the 5-7 percent target range.

Real Sector Outlook

The economic growth outlook has shown improvement, supported by positive developments in various sectors:

1. Agriculture Sector:

- o Downside risks to the overall crop outlook have diminished, driven by better-than-expected cotton arrivals and promising initial data on the sowing area for the wheat crop, corroborated by satellite imagery.

2. Industrial Sector:

- o Industrial activity has gained momentum, with large-scale manufacturing (LSM) sectors such as textiles, food, automobiles, petroleum products, and tobacco reporting robust growth until Q1-FY25. High-frequency indicators, including domestic sales of cement, automobiles, fertilizers, and petroleum products, suggest that this growth momentum is persisting.

3. Services Sector:

- o Improved prospects for commodity-producing sectors and reduced inflationary pressures are expected to

have positive spillover effects on the services sector.

4. Business Confidence and Financial Conditions:

- o Improving business confidence and easing financial conditions are anticipated to further support economic growth.

Taking these factors into account, the MPC projects real GDP growth for FY25 to fall within the upper half of the 2.5-3.5 percent range.

External Sector Performance

The external sector has continued to show marked improvement:

1. Current Account Surplus:

- o The current account posted a \$0.2 billion surplus during July-October FY25, primarily driven by robust workers' remittances and strong export performance.

2. Export Growth:

- o Exports grew by 8.7 percent, led by high-value-added (HVA) textiles, rice, and petroleum products. Favorable global commodity prices helped contain the import bill despite increased import volumes.

3. Workers' Remittances:

- o Supported by a narrowing gap between interbank and open market exchange rates, as well as enabling policies, workers' remittances have remained strong.

4. Foreign Exchange Reserves:

- o The combination of current account surplus and improved foreign investment inflows has bolstered SBP's foreign exchange reserves. These reserves are projected to exceed \$13 billion by June 2025.

Looking ahead, sustained growth in remittances and exports, along with favorable international commodity prices, is expected to keep the current account deficit within the lower bound of the 0-1 percent GDP range for FY25.

Fiscal Sector Challenges

Revised data for fiscal operations during Q1-FY25 reveal a mixed picture:

1. Revenue Growth:

- o Federal Board of Revenue (FBR) revenues grew by 23 percent year-on-year during July-November FY25, falling short of the growth required to meet the annual tax collection target.



2. Expenditure Savings:

- o Declining yields have led to significant savings in interest payments on domestic debt compared to budget estimates, which will help contain the fiscal deficit. However, achieving the targeted primary surplus remains challenging.

3. Need for Fiscal Reforms:

- o To meet revenue targets and achieve fiscal consolidation, the government must implement substantial fiscal reforms aimed at broadening the tax base.

Money and Credit Dynamics

The monetary and credit environment has exhibited notable trends:

1. Broad Money Growth:

- o Broad money (M2) growth decelerated to 13.9 percent year-on-year at the end of November 2024, down from 15.2 percent during the previous MPC meeting. This deceleration is primarily due to reduced government borrowing, although the contribution of net foreign assets (NFA) to M2 growth has increased.

2. Private Sector Credit:

- o Credit to the private sector and non-bank financial institutions has accelerated, reflecting the easing of

financial conditions and banks' compliance with minimum ADR thresholds. Consumer financing also saw a noticeable increase in October 2024.

3. Deposit Growth:

- o Deposits continued to drive M2 growth, although the currency-to-deposit ratio experienced a slight uptick.

Inflation Trends and Outlook

Headline inflation has continued to decline:

1. Current Trends:

- o Headline inflation fell to 4.9 percent year-on-year in November 2024 from 7.2 percent in October 2024. This decline is largely attributed to a favorable base effect from gas prices, continued moderation in food inflation, and benign global commodity prices.

2. Near-Term Outlook:

- o These factors are expected to persist in the near term, potentially bringing headline inflation even lower in the coming months. The MPC has revised its FY25 inflation forecast significantly downward from the earlier range of 11.5-13.5 percent.

3. Core Inflation and Expectations:

- o Core inflation declined marginally in

November 2024, yet consumers' inflation expectations increased slightly.

4. Risks to Inflation:

- o Key risks to the inflation outlook include measures to address revenue shortfalls, a resurgence in food inflation, and potential increases in global commodity prices. Despite these risks, the MPC assessed that the current monetary policy stance is adequate to stabilize inflation within its target range.

Conclusion

The MPC's decision to cut the policy rate reflects a balanced approach to addressing the evolving macroeconomic landscape. While inflationary pressures have moderated, the Committee remains vigilant to risks and is committed to ensuring price stability. Simultaneously, the MPC's focus on fostering sustainable economic growth is evident through its support for improved credit conditions and business confidence. The external sector's improved performance and fiscal management efforts are expected to complement these monetary policy measures, positioning the economy on a trajectory of stable growth and low inflation. Going forward, the MPC will continue to closely monitor economic developments and make data-driven decisions to achieve its dual mandate of price stability and economic growth.



Bitcoin Surges Beyond \$107,000 Amid Strategic Reserve Speculation and Trump's Pro-Crypto Policies

By Romana Afsheen

The cryptocurrency market reached a monumental milestone in December 2024 as Bitcoin surged past \$107,000, marking a historic high. This rally has been driven by a confluence of factors, including President-elect Donald Trump's pro-crypto stance and his proposed plan to create a U.S. Bitcoin strategic reserve akin to the country's Strategic Petroleum Reserve. This initiative, coupled with significant developments such as MicroStrategy's inclusion in the Nasdaq 100 index, has reinvigorated investor enthusiasm and further propelled Bitcoin into the global spotlight.

The Record-Breaking Rally

On December 16, Bitcoin, the world's largest cryptocurrency, hit an unprecedented \$107,148 during trading, ultimately settling at \$106,877, marking a 5.43% increase from the previous Friday. Ethereum, the second-largest cryptocurrency by market capitalization, also saw gains, climbing 1.85% to \$3,975.70. The sharp ascent of Bitcoin's value has brought renewed optimism to the cryptocurrency market, which has seen a 150% increase in 2024 alone.

Tony Sycamore, an analyst at IG, described the phenomenon as entering "blue sky territory." He noted that the market's next target is \$110,000, emphasizing the resilience of Bitcoin's momentum despite earlier expectations of a pullback. The rally is not merely a speculative bubble but a reflection of heightened optimism surrounding the incoming administration's crypto-friendly policies.

The ongoing rally has had a profound impact on the broader cryptocurrency market. Altcoins, which often follow Bitcoin's trajectory, have also experienced notable gains. For example, Solana (SOL) and Cardano (ADA) have seen significant upticks, further bolstering confidence in the digital asset ecosystem. The crypto community is buzzing with speculation about how



this trend might redefine financial markets globally.

Trump's Strategic Reserve Proposal

Central to the excitement is Donald Trump's proposal to establish a strategic Bitcoin reserve. During an interview with CNBC, Trump revealed his intention to develop a cryptocurrency reserve, arguing that the U.S. should not lag behind countries like China, which have aggressively embraced digital assets. This policy aims to position the U.S. as a global leader in cryptocurrency, fostering a favorable regulatory environment that could catalyze further adoption.

Governments worldwide have been accumulating Bitcoin as part of their strategic reserves. As of July 2024, global governments held approximately 2.2% of Bitcoin's total supply, with the U.S. accounting for nearly 200,000 bitcoins, valued at over \$20 billion. Other nations, including China, the United Kingdom, Bhutan, and El Salvador, have also made significant investments in Bitcoin.

Russian President Vladimir Putin recently emphasized the importance of cryptocurrencies as an alternative to the U.S. dollar in global trade. "Who can prohibit Bitcoin? No one," Putin declared, underscoring the

asset's potential as a decentralized and unregulated financial instrument. Trump's proposed reserve aligns with this global trend, signaling a paradigm shift in how governments view digital currencies.

The proposal has sparked a variety of debates, both within the U.S. and globally. Advocates believe this initiative will encourage innovation and place the U.S. at the forefront of the crypto revolution. Critics, however, warn of potential economic and environmental risks, suggesting that a poorly implemented strategy could destabilize markets.

Pro-Crypto Policies and Market Impact

Trump's administration has already begun laying the groundwork for a crypto-friendly environment. Key appointments include former PayPal executive David Sacks as the White House's czar for artificial intelligence and cryptocurrencies, and pro-crypto attorney Paul Atkins as the nominee for the Securities and Exchange Commission's chairmanship. These moves have reassured investors that the administration is serious about fostering innovation in the cryptocurrency space.

During his campaign, Trump pledged to make the U.S. the "crypto capital of the planet." He promised to remove regulatory

barriers and encourage investments in blockchain technology. His rhetoric resonated with the cryptocurrency community, which has long sought a more supportive regulatory framework. Trump's newfound enthusiasm for digital assets marks a stark departure from his earlier skepticism, where he labeled cryptocurrencies as "volatile" and "based on thin air."

The alignment of Trump's policies with the cryptocurrency community's aspirations has created a unique synergy. By reducing bureaucratic hurdles, the administration aims to attract institutional investors who were previously wary of regulatory uncertainties. This shift in perception could mark a turning point for the cryptocurrency market, transforming it from a niche asset class to a mainstream financial instrument.

MicroStrategy's Role in the Rally

Another catalyst for Bitcoin's rally was the announcement that MicroStrategy, a prominent corporate holder of Bitcoin, would be included in the Nasdaq 100 index. This inclusion is expected to attract institutional investors, further driving up demand for the cryptocurrency. Led by CEO Michael Saylor, MicroStrategy has aggressively invested in Bitcoin, amassing a substantial reserve funded through debt and equity offerings. The company's market value has surged to nearly \$94 billion, making it a key player in the cryptocurrency ecosystem.

Matthew Dibb, Chief Investment Officer at Astronaut Capital, noted that MicroStrategy's inclusion in the Nasdaq 100 creates a "looping cycle of capital." As investors buy MicroStrategy shares to mirror the index, the company can leverage its increased valuation to acquire more Bitcoin, thereby influencing the cryptocurrency's spot price.

This development underscores the growing interdependence between traditional financial markets and the cryptocurrency sector. As major corporations like MicroStrategy integrate Bitcoin into their business strategies, the lines between conventional finance and digital assets are becoming increasingly blurred. This trend could pave the way for broader acceptance and integration of cryptocurrencies in mainstream financial systems.

Challenges and Skepticism

Despite the optimism, skepticism remains about the feasibility and implications of a U.S. Bitcoin strategic reserve. Federal Reserve Chair Jerome Powell likened Bitcoin to gold, highlighting its volatility and speculative nature. Critics argue that implementing such a reserve would require careful consideration of market dynamics and potential risks.

Chris Weston, head of research at Pepperstone, cautioned against premature optimism. "A Bitcoin strategic reserve is not likely to happen anytime soon," he stated, emphasizing the need for transparent communication and thorough planning. Moreover, the decentralized nature of Bitcoin mining presents logistical challenges. The U.S. currently accounts for less than half of global crypto mining, which is heavily concentrated in regions with abundant and affordable energy.

Environmental concerns also loom large. Bitcoin mining is notoriously energy-intensive, with critics pointing out its significant carbon footprint. The prospect of establishing a strategic reserve could intensify these concerns, prompting calls for sustainable mining practices and renewable energy integration.

Broader Implications for the Cryptocurrency Market

The creation of a U.S. Bitcoin strategic reserve would have far-reaching implications for the cryptocurrency market. Such a move would likely stabilize Bitcoin's price by reducing its circulating supply and signaling long-term government support. However, it could also invite regulatory scrutiny and geopolitical tensions, particularly if other nations perceive it as an attempt to dominate the digital currency landscape.

The cryptocurrency market has already witnessed a surge in activity following Trump's election. The total market capitalization of digital assets has nearly doubled in 2024, reaching a record \$3.8 trillion. Major exchanges like Coinbase and Kraken have reported increased trading volumes, and institutional interest continues to grow.

Furthermore, the establishment of a strategic reserve could serve as a model for other nations, prompting a wave of similar initiatives worldwide. This development could accelerate the mainstream adoption of cryptocurrencies, potentially reshaping the global financial order.

Industry Support and Criticism

The cryptocurrency industry has largely welcomed Trump's pro-crypto policies. Companies like Ripple, Coinbase, and venture capital firm Andreessen Horowitz have contributed millions to his campaign, signaling their confidence in his vision. However, not all industry players are convinced. Ethan Vera, COO of Luxor Technology, argued that Trump's promise to make all Bitcoin "Made in the USA" is unrealistic given the decentralized nature of mining operations.

Trade tensions with China could further complicate matters. Most Bitcoin mining hardware is manufactured in China, and any restrictions on imports could drive up costs for U.S.-based miners. Additionally, the energy-intensive nature of Bitcoin mining raises environmental concerns, which could undermine public support for the initiative.

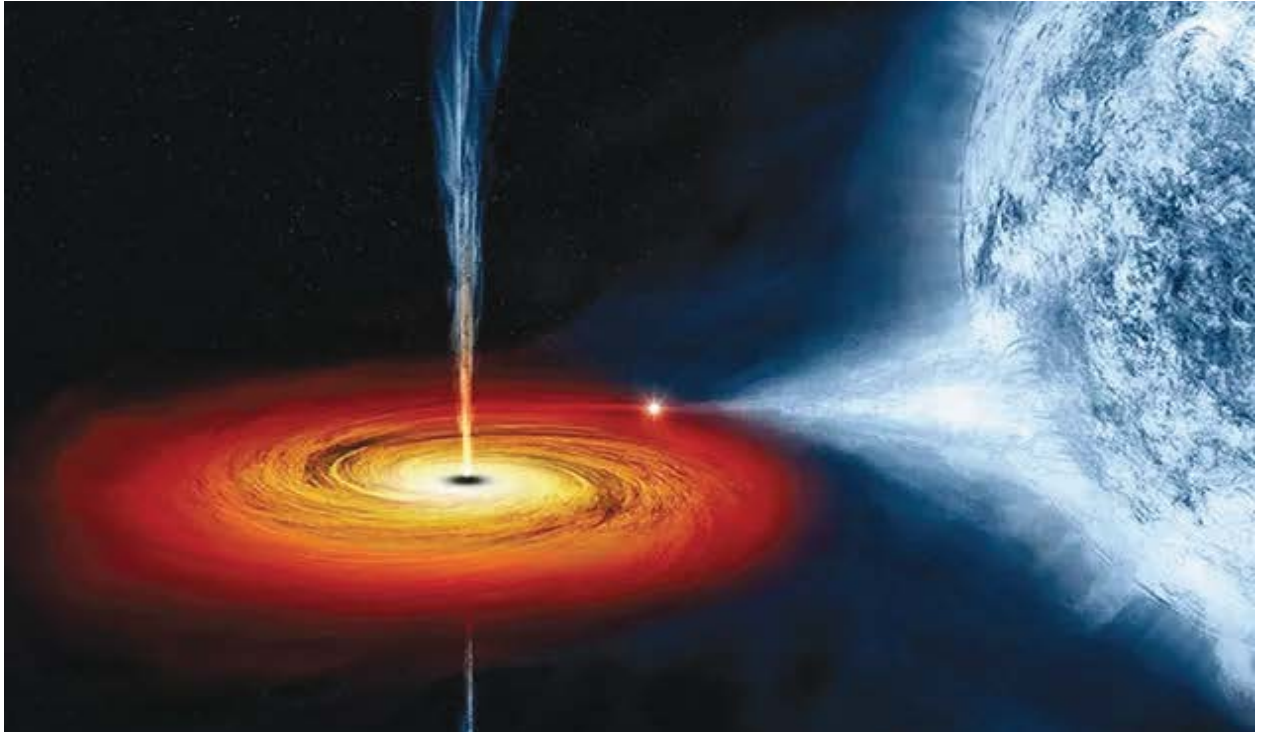
The debate over Trump's policies highlights the complex interplay between innovation and regulation in the cryptocurrency space. While the administration's approach has garnered significant support, it also underscores the need for balanced and inclusive policymaking.

Strategic Reserves: Lessons from Oil

The concept of a strategic reserve is not new. The U.S. Strategic Petroleum Reserve (SPR), established in 1975, serves as a model for Trump's proposed Bitcoin reserve. The SPR was created in response to the Arab oil embargo, which disrupted global energy markets and caused economic turmoil. By stockpiling crude oil, the U.S. aimed to mitigate the impact of future supply shocks.

A Bitcoin strategic reserve would function similarly, providing a buffer against market volatility and potential economic crises.

Black Holes: Primordial Seeds of the Universe?



By Romana Afsheen

Black holes are among the most mysterious and fascinating objects in the universe. These regions of spacetime possess gravitational fields so intense that nothing—not even light—can escape their grasp. While traditionally linked to the death of massive stars, a growing body of evidence suggests that some black holes may have an origin far older and more exotic. Recent findings from the James Webb Space Telescope (JWST) hint at the presence of supermassive black holes within the first few hundred million years of the universe's existence.

This raises profound questions: How could such massive objects form so early? Could black holes predate stars and galaxies themselves? A new study, published in the *Journal of Cosmology and Astroparticle Physics*, suggests an intriguing answer: black holes might have originated as "seeds" during the Big Bang. These hypothetical primordial black holes could hold the key to understanding the universe's earliest stages and the rapid formation of massive celestial structures.

Black Holes: Revisiting the Conventional Paradigm

Traditionally, black holes form through a well-understood process tied to stellar evolution. Massive stars, many times larger than the Sun, burn through their nuclear fuel over millions to billions of years. When this fuel is depleted, the outward pressure from nuclear fusion can no longer counteract the inward pull of gravity. The star collapses, triggering a supernova explosion, and the remaining core may condense into a black hole.

This model accounts for the "stellar-mass" black holes observed in our galaxy and others. However, it requires a significant amount of time to unfold—time for stars to form, live, and die. Furthermore, even the most massive stars produce black holes only a few tens of times the mass of the Sun. Growing these black holes into the supermassive behemoths observed in the early universe would typically take

billions of years, according to standard accretion models.

The JWST's Revelation: Black Holes at the Cosmic Dawn

The James Webb Space Telescope, launched in 2021, has transformed our ability to peer into the distant past. By capturing light that has traveled billions of years across the expanding universe, the JWST provides snapshots of the cosmos as it existed shortly after the Big Bang. Among its remarkable discoveries is evidence of supermassive black holes at the heart of galaxies during the "cosmic dawn," just 200–300 million years after the universe's birth.

These observations challenge existing models of black hole growth. How could such massive black holes exist so soon? Conventional processes of stellar collapse and accretion seem insufficient to account for their rapid formation. This has led scientists to

explore alternative explanations, including the theory of primordial black holes.

The Theory of Primordial Black Holes

Primordial black holes are not a new idea. In the 1970s, physicist Stephen Hawking and others proposed that black holes could form not just from stars, but directly from the extreme conditions of the Big Bang itself. During the universe's first fraction of a second, it was a seething cauldron of energy, matter, and radiation. In this chaotic environment, slight fluctuations in density could have created pockets of matter dense enough to collapse into black holes.

These "primordial" black holes would differ fundamentally from their stellar counterparts. Instead of being the remnants of stars, they would be relics of the Big Bang, forming within the first few seconds of the universe's existence.

Formation Mechanism

The process begins with quantum fluctuations—tiny variations in energy density that arose during the Big Bang. As the universe expanded and cooled, these fluctuations could have been amplified by inflation, a brief period of exponential expansion that stretched spacetime. In regions where density was particularly high, gravitational collapse might have occurred, creating black holes.

Primordial black holes could theoretically span an enormous range of sizes and masses. Some might be microscopic, smaller than an atom, while others could rival or exceed the mass of the Sun. Their distribution and characteristics would depend on the specific conditions of the early universe, such as the rate of expansion and the nature of inflation.

Evidence and Challenges

Despite their theoretical appeal, primordial black holes have proven elusive. Direct detection is challenging because they do not emit light, and their small size makes them difficult to observe. However, scientists have searched for indirect evidence, such as their potential contributions to dark matter or the gravitational waves produced by their mergers.

If primordial black holes exist, they could explain several astrophysical mysteries:

1. **Dark Matter:** Some researchers propose that primordial black holes could account for at least a fraction of the universe's dark matter. This invisible substance makes up about 27% of the cosmos but has never been directly observed.
2. **Gravitational Wave Signals:** The detection of gravitational waves by LIGO and Virgo has revealed unexpected black hole mergers involving objects with unusual masses. These could be primordial black holes.
3. **Early Supermassive Black Holes:** The rapid growth of black holes in the early universe may be easier to explain if they started as primordial seeds.

Growth into Supermassive Giants

If primordial black holes existed, how could they grow into the titanic objects observed by the JWST? Researchers propose several mechanisms:

1. **Accretion of Matter:** In the dense regions of the early universe, primordial black holes could have rapidly accumulated gas, dust, and other material. This accretion would allow them to gain mass at an accelerated rate.
2. **Mergers:** Interactions between black holes could lead to mergers, combining their masses and creating larger objects.
3. **Super-Eddington Accretion:** Under certain conditions, black holes can accrete matter at rates exceeding the theoretical Eddington limit, which governs the balance between radiation pressure and gravitational pull. This could explain the rapid growth of primordial black holes.

Implications for Cosmic Evolution

The existence of primordial black holes would fundamentally reshape our understanding of cosmic history. They could provide insights into the nature of the Big Bang, the distribution of matter and energy in the early universe, and the processes that led to the formation of galaxies.

For instance, black holes influence their surroundings through their immense gravitational pull. By acting as "anchors" for matter, they may have played a crucial role in the emergence of the first galaxies. Additionally, the energy released by accretion onto black holes could have contributed to the reionization of the universe, a key phase in cosmic evolution.

Future Prospects for Detection

Advances in technology are bringing us closer to uncovering the secrets of primordial black holes. Observatories like the Square Kilometre Array (SKA) will map the distribution of matter in unprecedented detail, potentially revealing signatures of these objects. Similarly, the Laser Interferometer Space Antenna (LISA) will detect gravitational waves from black hole mergers, which could include signals from primordial black holes.

Other promising avenues include searching for gamma-ray bursts, which might be produced by the evaporation of small primordial black holes through Hawking radiation, or analyzing microlensing events, where black holes temporarily magnify the light from distant stars.

Conclusion

The hypothesis of primordial black holes represents a bold and exciting frontier in astrophysics. If confirmed, it would offer a new window into the early universe, shedding light on phenomena ranging from the rapid growth of supermassive black holes to the nature of dark matter.

As the JWST and other next-generation observatories continue to explore the cosmos, the answers to these profound questions may soon be within reach. The idea that black holes could be as ancient as the universe itself challenges us to rethink our understanding of these enigmatic objects and their role in shaping the cosmos.

In the words of Stephen Hawking, "Only time (whatever that may be) will tell." As scientists unravel the mysteries of primordial black holes, they may uncover not only the origins of these cosmic titans but also the very nature of space, time, and existence itself.

Pakistan vs South Africa 2024/25 Cricket Series: A Comprehensive Analysis



By Kanwal Munir

In December 2024, Pakistan's tour to South Africa captivated the cricketing world with a thrilling multi-format series. The teams faced off in T20 Internationals (T20Is), One-Day Internationals (ODIs), and Tests, each offering unique challenges. In the T20Is, South Africa dominated with explosive batting, but Pakistan's resilience in the middle overs kept the contests exciting. The ODIs saw a fierce battle for supremacy, with key players from both sides stepping up, while the Test series tested endurance and skill. Standout performances included Pakistan's star all-rounders and South Africa's top-order batters. The tour proved to be a showcase of high-level cricket, featuring memorable moments and key player contributions that will resonate long after the series concluded.

T20 International Series

The T20I series was the opening contest of the 2024/25 tour, featuring three games, which provided plenty of thrilling moments. South Africa,

currently a dominant force in limited-overs cricket, looked to continue their excellent run in the shortest format, while Pakistan, with their emerging squad, was looking to make a strong statement.

1st T20I - Durban, December 10, 2024

The first T20I was held at the Kingsmead Cricket Ground in Durban. South Africa won the toss and opted to bat first. A total of 183/9 in their 20 overs appeared competitive, but Pakistan's bowling unit managed to keep the scoring rate under control.

Top Performers:

- o **South Africa:** Heinrich Klaasen was the standout performer with a remarkable 86 runs off 97 balls, providing the backbone of the innings. His knock included six fours and two sixes, anchoring South Africa to a respectable total. The middle-order contributions were minimal, and Pakistan's bowlers, led by Shaheen Shah

Afridi, managed to pick up wickets at regular intervals.

- o **Pakistan:** In reply, Pakistan's chase faltered as they could only reach 172/8 in 20 overs, falling short by 11 runs. Saim Ayub played a valiant knock, scoring 45 runs off 38 balls, but the absence of significant partnerships led to their downfall. South Africa's bowlers, including Kagiso Rabada, held their nerve and helped secure a narrow win.

2nd T20I – Centurion, December 13, 2024

By the time the second T20I came around, South Africa had already taken a 1-0 lead in the series. The match was played at the Centurion Park, a venue known for its high-scoring games. South Africa won the toss once again and opted to chase down Pakistan's challenging total of 206/5 in 20 overs.

Top Performers:

- o **Pakistan:** Saim Ayub was the shining light in Pakistan's innings,

scoring an explosive 98 runs off 55 balls, including nine boundaries and four sixes. However, despite his heroic effort, Pakistan could not accelerate enough in the latter stages of the innings to get to a total that would prove enough.

- o **South Africa:** In reply, Reeza Hendricks played a sensational knock, scoring 117 runs off just 63 balls. His blistering innings, including 10 sixes, propelled South Africa to a comfortable win, reaching 210/3 in 19.3 overs with three balls remaining. The partnership between Hendricks and Klaasen, who chipped in with a solid 37, took the game away from Pakistan.



3rd T20I - Johannesburg, December 14, 2024

The third T20I, scheduled to be the series decider, was abandoned without a ball being bowled due to persistent rain in Johannesburg. The weather caused severe disruptions, leaving the series in South Africa's hands, as they led 2-0.

While rain marred the end of the series, it could not overshadow the standout performances, particularly from Hendricks and Klaasen, who dominated the T20I series.

One-Day International Series

Following the conclusion of the T20I series, the teams moved into the 50-over format.

The ODI series was set to be an exciting contest, with both teams looking to fine-tune their squads for future international tournaments. The ODI series was also seen as a stepping stone for Pakistan to establish themselves as a formidable side in the 2025 ICC Men's Cricket World Cup qualification campaign.

1st ODI - Paarl, December 17, 2024

The first ODI match was held at Boland Park in Paarl, a ground known for its balanced pitch conditions that could favor both batsmen and bowlers. South Africa won the toss and chose to bat first, setting a target of 239/9 in 50 overs.

Top Performers:

- o **South Africa:** Heinrich Klaasen continued his fine form from the T20Is and top-scored with 86 runs from 97 balls. His knock anchored South Africa's innings, with contributions from David Miller (34) and Aiden Markram (25). Pakistan's bowlers were disciplined, with Shaheen Shah Afridi taking 4 wickets for 47 runs, which helped Pakistan restrict South Africa to a chaseable total.
- o **Pakistan:** In reply, Pakistan faced some early jitters but managed to chase down the target with 240/7 in 49.3 overs. The chase was made nervy by regular wickets falling, but Saim Ayub's contribution of 109 runs off 119 balls steadied the ship. His knock was the highlight of the innings, and Pakistan secured a

thrilling 3-wicket victory with three balls remaining.

2nd ODI - Cape Town, December 19, 2024

The second ODI took place at the iconic Newlands Cricket Ground in Cape Town, another ground with a reputation for helping both pace and spin bowlers. Pakistan, riding high from their win in the first ODI, won the toss and chose to bat first, posting a strong total of 329 all out in 50 overs.

Top Performers:

- o **Pakistan:** Kamran Ghulam played a crucial role in Pakistan's total, scoring 63 runs off 32 balls. His quickfire innings, alongside contributions from Babar Azam (52) and Fakhar Zaman (48), enabled Pakistan to post a daunting total. South Africa's bowling was inconsistent, with Kagiso Rabada and Anrich Nortje both struggling to maintain pressure.
- o **South Africa:** In reply, South Africa was restricted to 248 all out in 43.1 overs. Although Heinrich Klaasen continued to impress with 97 runs off 74 balls, Pakistan's bowlers, led by Afridi (2 wickets for 37), did a fine job of keeping the South African batsmen in check. Pakistan won the match by 81 runs, taking a 2-0 lead in the series.

3rd ODI - Johannesburg, December 22, 2024

The third ODI, which took place at The Wanderers in Johannesburg, was set to be the decider for the series. Unfortunately, it was a rain-impacted match, and the DLS method came into play. Pakistan batted first and posted 308/9 in 47 overs, a formidable total despite the rain interruptions.

Top Performers:

- o **Pakistan:** Saim Ayub, once again, was the star of the innings, scoring a brilliant 101 runs off 94 balls. His hundred was crucial in setting the tone for Pakistan's total. Contributions from Mohammad Rizwan (49) and Shadab Khan (38) helped Pakistan set a challenging target for South Africa.

- o **South Africa:** South Africa, chasing a revised target of 271 in 42 overs, managed to score 271 all out in 42 overs, falling 36 runs short. Klaasen was again in the spotlight, scoring 81 runs off 43 balls, but it wasn't enough. Pakistan's disciplined bowling attack, with Haris Rauf contributing with 2 wickets for 49 runs, helped seal the series 3-0 in their favor.

Test Series Preview

Following the ODI series, Pakistan and South Africa faced off in a two-match Test series, which began on December 26, 2024, at the SuperSport Park in Pretoria. The Test series is important for both teams, as they aim to qualify for the ICC World Test Championship final. South Africa, in particular, is looking to maintain its position at the top of the table, while Pakistan is aiming to solidify its credentials as a consistent Test side.

The first Test match is still in progress, and the outcome is expected to be highly competitive. The first Test between South Africa and Pakistan at Centurion Park has been an intriguing contest. South Africa batted first and posted a solid total of 301 runs. Aiden Markram played a key role with a fluent 89, while debutant Corbin Bosch provided valuable resistance at the lower order, remaining unbeaten on 81. The Pakistani bowlers fought hard, with Naseem Shah taking 3 wickets, but couldn't prevent South Africa from building a significant total.

In reply, Pakistan faced a tough challenge.

Despite some resistance from the top order, they were dismissed for 211 runs. South Africa's bowlers, led by Kagiso Rabada and Anrich Nortje, showed their class, keeping Pakistan's batting line-up under pressure. At the close of Day 2, Pakistan were 88 for 3, trailing by just 2 runs. Babar Azam was at the crease on 16, while Saud Shakeel was on 8*. The partnership between these two will be crucial for Pakistan if they hope to level the scores or build a lead.

With the match hanging in the balance, the third day promises an exciting contest. Pakistan needs to dig deep to recover, while South Africa will look to exploit the conditions and press for an early breakthrough. The match remains finely poised.

Pakistan's strength lies in its pace attack, led by Shaheen Shah Afridi, while South Africa's top order, bolstered by the experience of Dean Elgar and Aiden Markram, will be crucial in determining the outcome.

Player Highlights

The series saw numerous standout individual performances:

- **Saim Ayub:** The young Pakistani opener was the breakout star of the series, contributing across formats. His century in the third ODI and crucial knocks in the T20Is and first ODI highlighted his potential as a future star for Pakistan.
- **Heinrich Klaasen:** The South African wicketkeeper-batsman was in superb form, finishing as the highest run-scorer in both the T20I and ODI series. Klaas-

en's ability to anchor the innings while also accelerating at crucial moments was key to South Africa's competitiveness throughout the series.

- **Shaheen Shah Afridi:** The Pakistani pacer was a constant threat with the ball, picking up wickets at critical moments. His 4-wicket haul in the first ODI was particularly memorable.
- **Reeza Hendricks:** Hendricks was exceptional with the bat in the T20Is, particularly his blistering century in the second T20I, which helped South Africa win the series. His consistency provided a solid foundation for the South African batting lineup.

Conclusion

The Pakistan vs South Africa 2024/25 series has been a captivating affair, filled with intense competition and remarkable individual performances. While South Africa dominated the T20I series, Pakistan responded with a clean sweep in the ODI series. As both teams head into the Test series, the excitement is set to continue, with the series offering valuable points for the ICC World Test Championship and providing both sides with important lessons ahead of future international challenges.

Both teams have shown areas of strength and vulnerability, but the real winners are the fans, who have witnessed exceptional cricket across all formats. The 2024/25 series between Pakistan and South Africa will surely go down as one of the most thrilling encounters in recent cricket history.



Prize Distribution Ceremony For 7th Edition of 'Jinnah Young Writers Award' Held In Ankara

By Javed Mahmood



The seventh edition of the prestigious 'Jinnah Young Writers Award' essay competition took place in Ankara today, marking a significant milestone in the strengthening of Pakistan-Turkey relations through intellectual collaboration. The event, which celebrates the literary talent of senior high school students in Turkey, featured a prize distribution ceremony graced by distinguished guests, including the Turkish Deputy Minister for National Education, Ms. Celile Eren Okten, and Dr. Yousaf Junaid, the Ambassador of Pakistan to Turkey. The award ceremony underscored the importance of nurturing young minds and fostering bilateral relations between the two nations.

A Glimpse into the Award and Its Importance

The Jinnah Young Writers Award is named after Quaid-e-Azam Muhammad Ali Jinnah, the founder of Pakistan, and it stands as a prominent feature of Pakistan's public diplomacy efforts in Turkey. This annual essay competition aims to foster intellectual engagement and creative writing among Turkish students while also promoting a deeper understanding of Pakistan. The competition is open to senior high school students in Turkey, offering them an opportunity to explore different aspects of Pakistan's rich culture, history, and beauty.

This year's theme, 'Enchanting Landscapes and Architectural Marvels: Exploring the Beauty of Pakistan and Turkey', invited participants to draw comparisons between the remarkable landscapes and architecture of the two nations, highlighting the deep cultural and historical ties that bind them. The theme was carefully chosen to reflect not only the natural beauty and historical significance of both countries but also their shared values and experiences.

Addressing the Participants and Audience

In her address at the ceremony, Deputy Minister for National Education Ms. Celile Eren Okten emphasized the importance of joint initiatives like the Jinnah Young Writers Award in reinforcing the bond of friendship and cooperation between Turkey and Pakistan. She noted that these initiatives aim to pass on the legacy of shared friendship to future generations as a sacred trust. Ms. Okten also highlighted the significance of the competition in providing young people with the opportunity to enhance their creative writing skills while also developing a deeper understanding of Pakistan, a country with which Turkey shares not only a strong historical connection but also a rich cultural heritage.

In a heartfelt speech, Ambassador Dr. Yousaf Junaid conveyed the sentiment that the phrase "İki devlet, Tek millet" (Two States, One Nation) aptly encapsulates the profound and fraternal relationship between Pakistan and Turkey. He highlighted the long-standing bonds of religion, culture, and history that unite both nations and noted that Pakistan and Turkey have consistently supported each other through thick and thin on various international issues. Ambassador Junaid acknowledged the critical role of the Jinnah Young Writers Award in educating the younger generation about the shared history and glorious brotherhood between Pakistan and Turkey. He further emphasized that the Pakistan Embassy would continue to organize and expand the competition, ensuring greater participation in the future.

The Role of the Jinnah Young Writers Award

The competition serves as a vital tool for strengthening

people-to-people ties between the two nations, helping students from Turkey understand the rich history, culture, and values of Pakistan. Through their essays, the students not only explored the beauty of both nations but also gained a deeper appreciation for the friendship between Pakistan and Turkey, which dates back centuries. The essays showcased their creative ability to link the shared experiences of the two countries, offering unique perspectives on the intertwined landscapes, architectural wonders, and cultural marvels.

The competition is also instrumental in promoting the development of soft skills among the younger generation, allowing students to refine their writing, analytical, and critical thinking skills while encouraging a sense of intellectual curiosity about the world. By engaging with the theme, students learned to appreciate the architectural heritage and natural landscapes of both Pakistan and Turkey, strengthening their cultural literacy and encouraging them to think beyond borders.



Celebrating the Winners

The awards ceremony saw a wide range of outstanding contributions from the students, with their essays reflecting the strong bond of friendship between Turkey and Pakistan. The competition culminated with the announcement of the winners and runners-up, whose essays stood out for their insight, creativity, and depth.

- Sultan Ayhan, a student from Mehmet Uzel Sosyal Bilimler Lisesi Burdur, claimed the first position with an essay that beautifully captured the essence of the architectural and natural splendor shared by Pakistan and Turkey.
- Zeynep Ceren Seven from Atatürk Anadolu Lisesi Ordu secured the second prize, with her essay offering an evocative comparison of the two countries' landscapes.



- Abdulhadi Sahin, a student from Tuzla Tugrulbey Anadolu Lisesi, earned the third prize with his insightful analysis of the shared cultural and historical ties between Pakistan and Turkey.



In addition to the top three prizes, Honorary Mentions were awarded to several students whose essays demonstrated excellence in creativity and thematic exploration:

- Isilay Veziroglu from Kumluca Kız AIHL Antalya,
- Zeynep Oztek from Gol Anadolu Lisesi Kastamonu, and
- Eren Ulug from Tarsus Fatih Anadolu Lisesi Mersin.

These awards were a testament to the hard work and dedication of the students, who not only demonstrated their writing talents but also showcased a deep understanding of the cultural and architectural treasures of both countries.



The Path Forward

The Jinnah Young Writers Award is more than just a competition; it is a symbol of the enduring friendship and collaboration between Pakistan and Turkey. Through such initiatives, both countries continue to invest in their future by nurturing the intellectual growth of their youth. The ongoing success of the competition has reinforced the need for continued cooperation between the two nations, both on an academic and diplomatic level.

With the competition set to expand in future editions, the Pakistan Embassy in Turkey remains committed to organizing events that celebrate the shared history, values, and experiences of both nations. By engaging the youth through such initiatives, Pakistan and Turkey are fostering stronger ties that will undoubtedly continue to flourish for generations to come.



الخدمت فاؤنڈیشن پاکستان
ALKHIDMAT FOUNDATION PAKISTAN

PALESTINE

EMERGENCY APPEAL

SEND AID TO GAZA &
SAVE LIVES TODAY



Medical Aid



Shelter



Food Packs

Donate Now

alkhidmat.org/donate

MEEZAN BANK: 0214-0100861151

IBAN: PK35MEZN0002140100861151 Swift code: MEZNPCCA

 **0800 44 448**