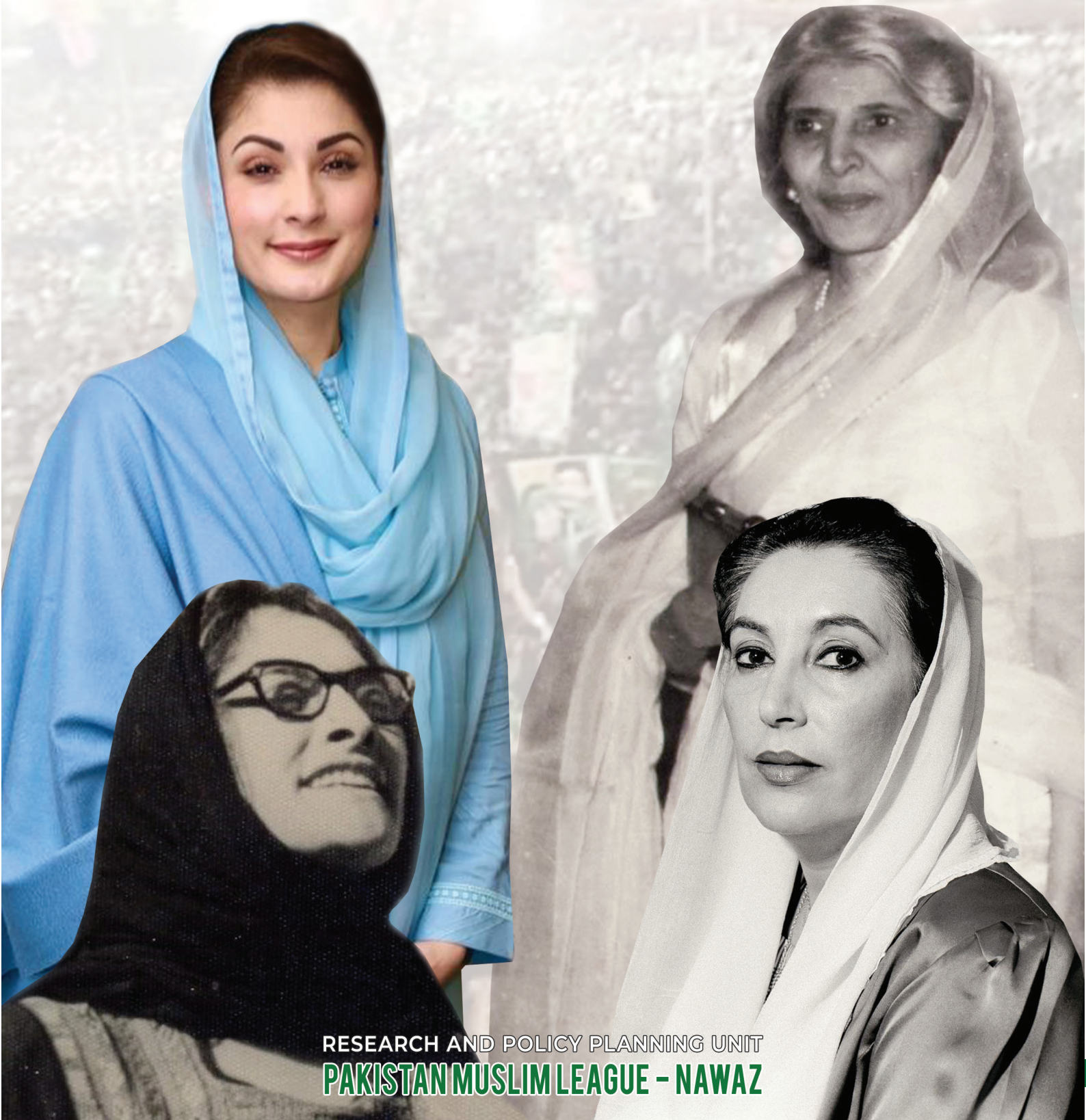


March 2023

HORIZON



RESEARCH AND POLICY PLANNING UNIT
PAKISTAN MUSLIM LEAGUE - NAWAZ

FROM THE EDITOR'S DESK

Dear Readers,

The winter is gone and the spring season is in full bloom. Prime Minister Mian Shehbaz Sharif started the spring tree plantation drive by planting a sapling in Islamabad. During this drive, 240 million new trees will be planted. "Bequeathing a pollution-free environment is our collective responsibility. I appeal to all segments of society to come forward and play their part," he said in a tweet. Preserving our environment and mitigating the effects of climate change is indeed a responsibility we all must take seriously.

The month of March brings with it an annual reminder that women who constitute half of the country's population still do not enjoy the same rights as their male counterparts. It is also a reminder of the progress and achievements made so far in emancipating women. We hope things will change for the better as more women are asserting their presence in public spaces and demanding their rights guaranteed in the constitution of Pakistan. PML-N Chief Organiser and Senior Vice President Maryam Nawaz took time out of her very busy schedule to celebrate Women's Day by cutting a cake, accompanied by the party's committed female workers. We have covered women's struggle in the political arena in an article by Maraj Hamayun Khan.

Maryam Nawaz emerged as a household name when she took the mantle of her father in his absence. She has been touring various districts to organise the party and energise workers for the upcoming elections. Everywhere she goes, she is welcomed with great fervour. Now that PML-N leader Hamza Shahbaz has also returned to Pakistan after a months-long absence, it is hoped that the two young leaders would lead their party from the front and claim the political space stolen from it through political engineering.

Coming to international developments, we would like to congratulate the great world leader Xi Jinping on getting elected as China's president for an unprecedented third term. The nearly 3,000 members of China's parliament, the National People's Congress, voted unanimously for Xi after the constitution was changed to remove the traditional two-term limit for the post. He has worked to consolidate China's position as a significant power on the global stage and continues to build strategic alliances in the region and beyond. He recently brokered a deal between Iran and Saudi Arabia which bodes well for long-term peace in the region and provides an avenue for Pakistan to take advantage of this opportunity for regional integration.

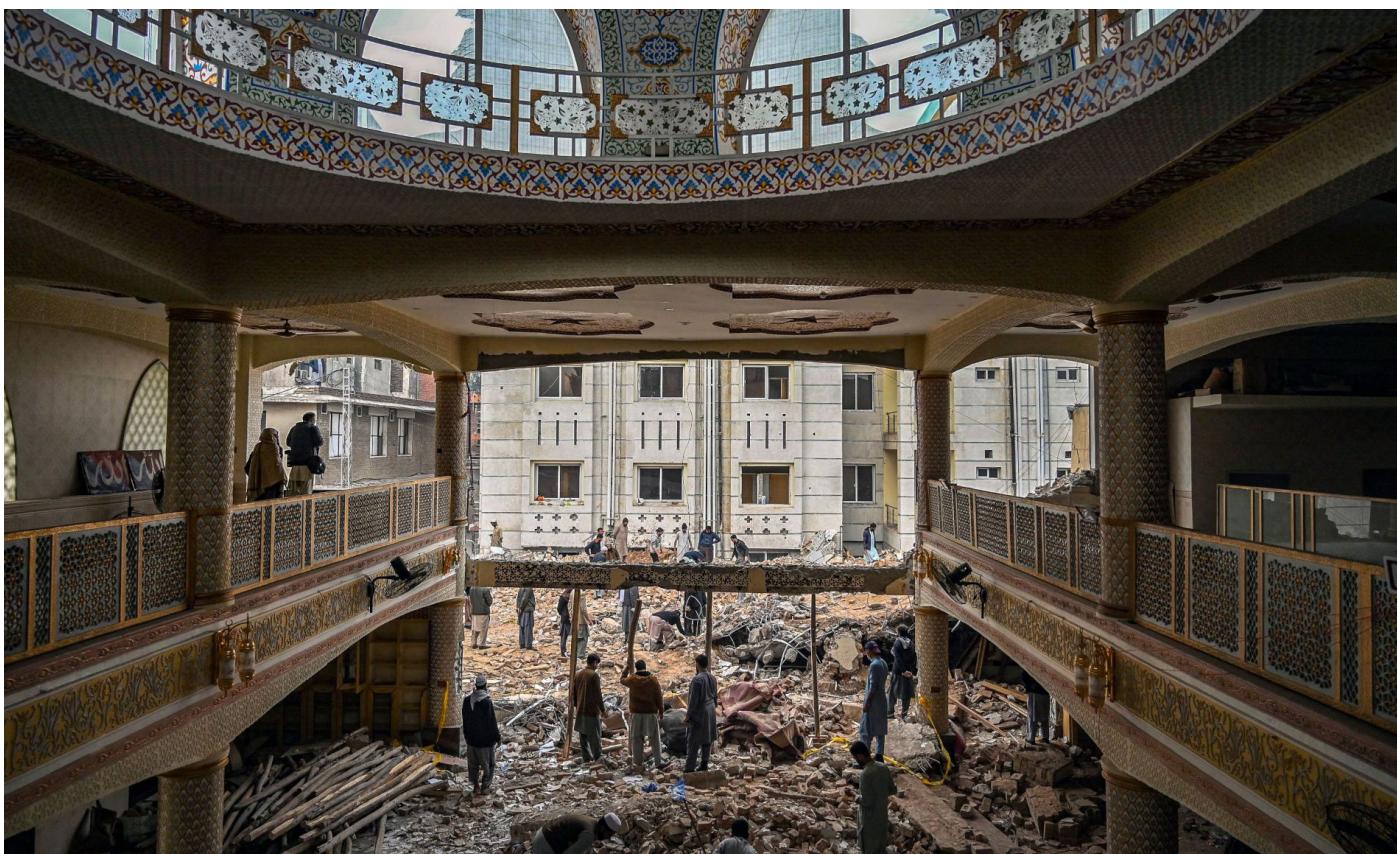
Finally, this March, the sacred month of Ramazan is arriving. While Muslims will be performing their religious duty by fasting and prayer, the government will be taking measures to alleviate the suffering of the poor who are groaning under inflation. Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif has announced the distribution of free wheat flour to the poorest families this Ramazan. The government continues to work on the economic front to bring long-term relief for the poor.

Happy Ramazan to Muslims all over the world.

Saira Bano
Editor-in-Chief

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TERRORISM THREATENS STABILITY

JAHANGIR KHANZADA

Since the Taliban came to power in Afghanistan around one-and-half years back, hundreds of terrorist attacks have taken place in Pakistan. Yet it was the January 2023 Peshawar attack, which claimed over a 100 lives, that shook the nation to its core. Citizens of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP) took to the streets, demanding the government take stern measures to control this wave of terrorism. Weeks later, in Karachi, the Taliban attacked the Police Headquarters, which was recaptured after pitched battles with militants. This presents a dire picture of the security situation in the country.

As per the Pakistan Institute for Conflict and Security Studies (PICSS), 294 militant attacks were carried out in Pakistan in 2021 while the Centre for Research and Security Studies (CRSS) annual report released in the last week of December 2022, stated that 376 terror attacks took place in 2022 that resulted in an increased number of casualties in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and

Balochistan. It added that banned terror outfits such as Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) claimed responsibility for a majority of these attacks while KP experienced an “exponential rise in violence” where the number of deaths remained high.

The Zarb-e-Azb and Radd-ul-Fasaad operations in 2013 and 2017 respectively helped improve the security situation tremendously. Security improved to a level that Pakistan was ranked the world’s top adventure tourism destination by the British Backpacker Society in 2018. A year later, the United Nations also restored Islamabad’s status as a family station for its staff in June 2019, followed by several diplomatic missions.

However, after the Taliban’s capture of Kabul in 2021, all sorts of militants were emboldened and Pakistan faced hundreds of terrorist attacks. Instead of taking this threat seriously, then Inter-Services Intelligence



“ **ALTHOUGH THE GOVERNMENT IS MAKING ALL EFFORTS TO CONTAIN THE MENACE OF TERRORISM, IT STILL POSES A CREDIBLE THREAT TO POLITICAL ACTIVITY IN THE COUNTRY.** ”

(ISI) Director General, Lieutenant General Faiz Hameed negotiated with the Taliban without taking parliament into confidence. In September 2021, the PTI government allowed him to visit Kabul unannounced to conduct talks with the Afghan Taliban while they were consolidating their control over Afghanistan after the US withdrawal. A foreign journalist managed to question him about his visit in the hotel lobby, to which he confidently said, “Don’t worry, everything will be okay.” Regardless of whether things improved in Afghanistan, they became worse in Pakistan as the country was soon hit by a wave of terrorism.

Two months after the Taliban took over Afghanistan, then Chief of Army Staff General Qamar Javed Bajwa and DG ISI Lieutenant General Faiz Hameed briefed members of the Senate and the National Assembly on matters regarding national security, foreign affairs, as well as internal and external challenges faced by the country. Instead of improving, the security situation has gone from bad to worse since then.

Following the Peshawar attack this year, in February a senior Pakistani delegation visited Kabul for talks with the Taliban officials, days after the closure of their busiest border crossing raised tensions between the two countries. Pakistan’s Defence Minister Khawaja Asif was joined by other top officials, including Director General of ISI Lieutenant General

Nadeem Anjum, in his meeting with Mullah Abdul Ghani Baradar, Afghanistan’s acting deputy prime minister for economic affairs.

Allegedly, the delegation found out that Faiz Hameed promised the Taliban that Pakistan would release TTP workers who were imprisoned in its jails and also forgive sentences of TTP militants while keeping the Pakistani government in the dark. The PTI government honoured these promises.

Pakistani officials claim that the TTP launches attacks on their country from their bases in Afghanistan. The Taliban have denied those accusations, asking why TTP would only attack places in Pakistan and not in other neighbouring countries. They also asked that why Pakistan blames only Afghanistan for terrorist activities on its soil and no other neighbouring states. They claimed that terrorism is Pakistan’s internal matter, contrary to Pakistan’s position that TTP is based in Afghanistan.

The people of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province have largely borne the brunt of terrorist attacks and the war on terror in the past. They have been witnessing increased visibility of militant outfits in their areas recently and took to the streets in the first week of February, asking the government to take stern action against terrorists.

The participants were carrying white flags, demanding justice for the victims of the Peshawar blast on January 30 and peace in the province. From the protests, it appears that the citizens are far more aware of the threat that terrorists pose now, as compared to back in the 2000s.

Pashtun Tahafuz Movement leader Manzoor Pashteen led the main rally while another rally was led by Awami National Party’s provincial general secretary Sardar Hussain Babak. Pashteen also tweeted that the heart of Pakhtunkhwa spoke loudly that they did not want any more wars or targeted killings. “We will not accept wars and colonial policies.”

In the wake of the Peshawar attack, an Apex Committee meeting was called in Peshawar on 3



February 2023 where Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif expressed “unflinching resolve to protect the people of the country at any cost.” Those who are involved in attacking innocent citizens will be brought to justice, said the premier, adding that they would not allow anti-terror gains to be reversed. This was followed by a meeting of the Central Apex Committee three weeks later in Islamabad.

At the meeting, the civil and military leadership held the banned TTP responsible for the Peshawar carnage and decided to discuss this matter with the interim Afghan government, saying Pakistan would no longer tolerate cross-border terrorism. Addressing the Apex Committee meeting, Army Chief General Asim Munir said that the army would act according to the direction of the civilian government in the fight against terrorism.

The meeting also decided to construct a Counter Terrorism Department (CTD) headquarters in KP, in addition to a modern forensic laboratory. Moreover, a Safe City Project would also be launched in various cities of the province while modernising police equipment, and improving police training and efficiency. The body also agreed that the federal and provincial governments would adopt a uniform strategy to root out terrorism.

Discussing the matter of border management control and the immigration system, the meeting considered

the steps to be taken against terrorists regarding their investigation, prosecution, and punishment.

The meeting urged religious scholars and the community to use their forums to eradicate terrorism and create awareness among the public that such acts are not permissible in Islam.

The Central Apex Committee also deliberated on the media’s role, particularly social media, during terrorist incidents and operations of security forces. It was recommended to take guidance from the experience of other countries so the appropriate procedures can be formulated to prevent rumours, misleading information, or spreading fear in emergency situations. The government has since given a nod to the establishment of a National Counter-Terrorism Department, which would operate under the National Counter-Terrorism Authority (NACTA). It will soon carry out other decisions taken at the Apex Committee meetings. Terrorism is menacing, but cannot stand in the way of the country’s resolve to root it out.

Although the government is making all efforts to contain the menace of terrorism, it still poses a credible threat to political activity in the country. With Punjab and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa elections scheduled in the coming months, we must consider whether holding elections in such an atmosphere would be worth the exercise ■

2023: YEAR OF THE YOUTH

RAHILA KHADIM HUSSAIN



On 28 February, Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif declared 2023 as the Year of the Youth in Pakistan in a televised message on PTV, announcing that it would be marked by various events. The year 2023 also marks the completion of 10 years of the Prime Minister's Youth Programme, a flagship initiative taken by ex-Prime Minister Mian Nawaz Sharif in 2013. Since coming to power, the Pakistan Democratic Movement (PDM) government has revived this programme. Led by Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N), these initiatives are already benefitting millions of youth in the country.

Special Assistant to Prime Minister (SAPM) on Youth Affairs and Chief Coordinator of the Prime Minister's Youth Skill Development Programme Shaza Fatima Khawaja, who herself was the youngest parliamentarian in Pakistan's history at the time of her induction as a member of the National Assembly,

is now overseeing these initiatives under the able leadership of Prime Minister Mian Shehbaz Sharif.

For the first time in the history of Pakistan, the government is devising a national youth employment policy, which will bridge the gap between industries and academia. Under the policy, the government will aim to provide two million jobs to the youth every year. SAPM Shaza Fatima Khawaja has stated that 100,000 youth will be provided with training in different fields with a special focus on IT.

Prime Minister's Youth Programme is an umbrella for several projects which include Prime Minister's Youth Business and Agriculture Loan Scheme, Prime Minister's Skills Development Programme, Talent Hunt Youth Loan Scheme, Green Youth Movement, Digital Youth Development Centres, and National Innovation Award. In addition, Prime Minister's

PRIME MINISTER'S SKILLS DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMME

The programme aims to develop the expertise of Pakistani youth in demand-driven and employable skills along with formal education. It focuses on providing high-end and high-tech skills, introducing reforms in the skills development sector, promoting inclusivity by focusing on reducing gender disparity, including marginalised youth and youth workers in the informal sector, and emphasises building competence of the trainees through practical training. Under this project, a state-of-the-art national job portal with smart categorisation based on area, trade, expertise, gender etc. which is also connected with 100 plus Career Counselling and Job Placement Centers (CC&JPCs) across the country for in-person career counselling, will be developed.

The 14 areas of interventions proposed under the Skills for All strategy aim to catalyse the transformation of the entire Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) system in the country. These include the development and standardisation of 200 TVET qualifications; accreditation of 2000 TVET institutes all across Pakistan, international accreditation of 50 TVET institutes and joint international degree programmes, establishment of 100 smart tech labs across Pakistan for distance learning technical and vocational skills, 10 country-of-destination-specific facilitation centres across Pakistan, 70 new labs/workshops in madrassas for skill development, apprenticeship training of 25,000 youth in various industries, recognition of prior learning of youth to certify their informally acquired skills, establishment of national accreditation council in Islamabad, training of 2,500 TVET teachers according to international TVET practices, among others.

PRIME MINISTER'S LAPTOP SCHEME

First launched in 2013, the laptop scheme demonstrated its success with the youth using them to find educational and career opportunities.

This year, a batch of 100,000 laptops will be distributed among high-achieving students. There will be a 50



Laptop Scheme, whose success in the past has been well-documented, has also been revived.

The purpose of all these projects and initiatives is to empower youth and enable them to fully realise their potential. A detailed overview of these projects is given below.

PRIME MINISTER'S YOUTH BUSINESS AND AGRICULTURE LOAN SCHEME

Revived in December 2022, this scheme promotes entrepreneurship among youth by providing business loans on simple terms, with reduced markup through 15 commercial, Islamic, and small and medium enterprises (SME) banks. All Pakistani residents, aged between 21 and 45 years with entrepreneurial potential are eligible to apply for the loan. For IT or e-commerce-related businesses, the lower age limit is 18 years.

Loans provided under this scheme are segregated into three tiers. In the first tier, collateral-free loans of up to Rs0.5 million can be secured with a zero per cent markup. In the second tier, loans from over Rs0.5 million up to Rs1.5 million can be secured with a 5 per cent markup on a personal guarantee. In the third tier, any amount above Rs1.5 million up to Rs7.5 million can be secured on a 7 per cent markup with collateral as per the lending bank's credit policy.

REPORT

per cent share for women while transgender persons will also be accommodated. The quota of Balochistan in the scheme has also been doubled.

TALENT HUNT YOUTH SPORTS LEAGUE

Talent Hunt Youth Sports League aims to engage the youth of Pakistan in healthy physical activities through sports. It was initiated in collaboration with the Higher Education Commission (HEC). One of the long-term objectives of the project is to develop a pool of talented young players to produce professional players to compete and represent Pakistan on the national and international front.

The programme includes 12 games: badminton, boxing, cricket, football, handball, hockey, judo, squash, table tennis, and volleyball for men and women whereas weightlifting and wrestling are for men only. All Pakistani including nationals from Azad Jammu and Kashmir (AJK) and Gilgit Baltistan (GB) aged between 15-25 years on January 30, 2023, are eligible to participate in the sports league.

Local trials of some games were completed in 2022, while registration for trials of other games was opened in January and the process of selection will be completed within 2023. Trials will be conducted in 25 different locations across the country including the federal capital, Punjab, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Sindh, Balochistan, AJK, and GB.

Selected candidates will get opportunities such as coaching and development facilities under the patronage of the Pakistan Sports Board and the award of scholarships for pursuing higher education. Selected players will be attached to sports academies to continuously develop their skills, competency, and physical fitness required for professional players.

GREEN YOUTH MOVEMENT

This initiative is focused on sensitising and organising youth for the promotion of environmental conservation and eco-friendly behaviour among the masses. It will mentor and promote young eco-inventors at the national, regional, and international levels and establish model green campuses - living

labs for the promotion of best practices in renewable energy, waste management, water conservation, air quality maintenance, forestation/plantation, and eco-tourism. Initially, youth will be engaged in plantation drives twice a year, quarterly cleaning drives, water and energy conservation drives, and anti-littering campaigns at holiday destinations, in addition to creating awareness about conducting green sports and green elections with a minimal carbon footprint.

YOUTH DEVELOPMENT CENTRES

The Youth Development Centres will act as one-stop shops for university students for necessary information, counselling, and resources through a single window system. They will be focused on career counselling and job placement, life skills development, national and international scholarships, national volunteer service and youth cards, capacity building, apprenticeships and internships, and fostering entrepreneurship culture through business incubation centres.

NATIONAL INNOVATION AWARD

The objective of the National Innovation Award is to improve Pakistan's ranking in the Global Innovation Index and foster an entrepreneurial culture among the youth. It is an opportunity for Pakistani youth to propose innovative ideas, and get funding and technical support from industry experts along with a six-months incubation facility to transfer their ideas into flourishing businesses.

Last year, 13,000 applications were received in October and November for this award from aspiring youth aged 15 to 30 years from across Pakistan. The applications were open to all kinds of innovative ideas including but not limited to information technology, sustainable energy, food security, water management, etc. Over 250 innovators were selected and received extensive training through regional 5-day boot camps on idea pitching by five partner universities. In this process, 50 ideas will be finalised for the award in the first phase. Each startup idea will be competing for funding of up to Rs2 million ■



WOMEN IN POLITICS

MERAJ HAMAYUN KHAN

When opponents resort to unparliamentary language, one can be certain that the woman referred to has made her mark in her profession and men around her have started exhibiting their insecurity. Pakistan has experienced this phenomenon from the very beginning of its existence when the sister of Quaid-e-Azam, Mohtarma Fatima Jinnah, was derided and made a butt of jokes because she had 'dared' to challenge General Ayub Khan in the 1965 presidential elections. Then followed the rise of Begum Nasim Wali Khan who boldly faced alleged scandals and accusations and led her party for ten years. Shaheed Benazir Bhutto was the third political hero whose success could not be easily digested yet she pushed on, paying no heed to idle gossip and vain statements of her rivals. These were political women but this male-dominated society has not spared successful women in any field. Asma Jahangir of the judiciary, Marvi Sirmed and Asma Shirazi in the media and countless other women have also encountered their share of nasty criticism.

At 49 years old, Maryam Nawaz is Pakistan's latest sensation. Making her formal entry into politics in 2012 as the campaign manager for her father, she has slowly but surely edged her way to the centre of the political debate in the country. Her current breezy tour of the metropolitan cities to address massive crowds as the leader of Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz

(PML-N) has assured her a position in the highest echelons of the political arena. Many observers and analysts are tipping her as the future prime minister of Pakistan. Initially diffident, she rallied her confidence and strength to build a strong campaign around her party's slogan, 'Vote Ko Izzat Do' (Respect the Vote). She speaks eloquently and with a dignified assurance and the crowd listens with attention and admiration.

Looking closely at the life of the four illustrious political leaders here, one can find some similarity in the way they were forced into politics perhaps against their wishes. All four witnessed the suffering and humiliation that their beloved family members were put through. Fatima Jinnah lived through the agony of the last days of her ailing brother first in Quetta and then later in Karachi. Added to this pain was the feeling of disgust with the takeover of the military and the total disregard for Quaid's beliefs and practices. She put up a bold fight and contested the presidential elections of 1965 against the powerful General Ayub Khan, but in the presence of a strong lobby working against her, she could not succeed.

Begum Nasim Wali Khan, a homely person from a conservative Pakhtun region, threw all caution to the winds and came out on the road with her daughters and other Pakhtun women and men to condemn the



imprisonment of her husband, Abdul Wali Khan, president of the then National Awami Party in 1975. With encouragement from her husband and brother, she won a seat in the general elections in 1977 and became the party's president for 10 years.

Shaheed Benazir's story is the saddest of all. Stepping out as a young lady in mourning for her executed father, Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, she succeeded in pulling together the scattered workers of his party and infused new vigour, hope, and determination into them. Her efforts resulted in the PPP becoming the most popular party of the country at the time and her successful two time election as prime minister. However, she could not survive the intricate conspiracies woven around her allegedly by her male associates and opponents, who rested only after her cold blooded assassination in December 2007.

These four formidable women from elite families have created an image of a politically gender-balanced country. There is no doubt that Pakistani women are strong and very vocal. They are also aware of their strengths, which they strive to put to good use. They are ambitious, competitive, and hardworking. Moreover, they are resilient and have proved on several occasions that they can endure and survive in very challenging circumstances. Given an opportunity, they never fail

to exhibit their brilliant execution of tasks entrusted to them. As artists, bankers, judicial experts, writers, or managers, women's consistent struggle to change their lives has helped them to infiltrate into the spaces so far dominated by men. Yet the political system of the country has failed to harness this strong force effectively. Women remain largely unseen in the political arena, under instructions to follow the line adopted by men. Though women got their right to vote much earlier than in some European countries, their presence in the law-making institution, the parliament, is minimal. A meagre 56 women have been able to get elected to general seats during 14 tenures of the National Assembly, from 1985 - 2018. Pakistan ranks 112th for its percentage of women in parliament, the majority of whom were elected on reserved seats.



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AS ARTISTS, BANKERS, JUDICIAL EXPERTS, WRITERS, OR MANAGERS, WOMEN'S CONSISTENT STRUGGLE TO CHANGE THEIR LIVES HAS HELPED THEM TO INFILTRATE INTO THE SPACES SO FAR DOMINATED BY MEN. YET THE POLITICAL SYSTEM OF THE COUNTRY HAS FAILED TO HARNESS THIS STRONG FORCE EFFECTIVELY.

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Security and economic challenges have pushed the political empowerment of women down the list of national priorities. This is unfortunate, as women's political strengthening and participation in decision making are directly linked to the overall development of a nation. Disinterest of the state coupled with religious and cultural patriarchy has seriously impacted women's contribution to the country's GDP, which stands pathetically at 24 per cent. Women face gender discrimination, endemic sexual violence and harassment. A 2021 report by Women, Peace and Security places Pakistan as the 6th most dangerous country for women.

Despite these statistics, there is light at the end of the tunnel. Institutions set up for strengthening the gender development process such as the Commissions on the Status of Women are working closely with women parliamentarians, law enforcement agencies, and

civil society organisations to effect change. The Election Commission of Pakistan and the National Database and Registration Authority (NADRA) are jointly working to increase the number of women voters which is currently 45 per cent against the male figure of 55 per cent. Women activists are pinning their hopes on the power of the vote and the local government elections are helping women gain confidence to withstand pressures from men in their community. Judging from the last couple of years, women's prospects look bright. Social media is playing a significant role in revolutionising thinking and attitudes. More and more women are mustering courage and taking full advantage of the sudden and unexpected freedom available to them. The best part is that this media has no biases, no prejudices, and no injustices. Women from everywhere, irrespective of, to use the oft-repeated cliché, cast, colour, and creed, can use this platform and be heard. There is no urban-rural or rich-poor divide. Used effectively, one can look forward to a truly egalitarian society created and controlled by the people, both women and men, themselves ■

The writer is the senior vice president of PML-N's Women Wing, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and founder and chief executive of the De Laas Gul Welfare Programme.

THE YOUNGEST PARLIAMENTARIAN, 10 YEARS LATER

RESEARCH & POLICY PLANNING UNIT



When Shaza Fatima Khawaja was nominated for a reserved seat for women in Pakistan's National Assembly in 2013 by PML-N, she was barely 25 years old and looked several years younger than her age. At the time, she was the youngest parliamentarian in Pakistan. She was again nominated in 2018 and came to the National Assembly as a member. Since then, she has done remarkable work and proved her mettle as a young, educated female legislator. Currently, she is serving as special assistant to prime minister (SAPM) on youth affairs, and chief coordinator of the Prime Minister's Youth Skill Development Programme. Horizon sat down with her to learn about her political journey and achievements.

HORIZON: Thank you very much for taking time out of your busy schedule and inviting us to your place for this interview.

SHAZA FATIMA KHAWAJA: The pleasure is all mine.

HORIZON: So, for our readers, we want to know who is Shaza Fatima Khawaja.

SFK: I was born in Murree. My father, Khawaja Muhammad Naeem was posted there as assistant commissioner. I am the only sister to two brothers. I started my schooling at Convent Sahiwal and in 1992 when we shifted to Lahore, I did my O level from Beaconhouse School and A Level from Lahore Grammar School. I did my undergraduate in economics and politics from Lahore University of Management Sciences. Then I went on to do my master's in international relations from the University of Warwick, UK.

After coming back to Pakistan, I started my first job in an international consultancy, then switched to the business development of a newly launched dairy company and then finally I joined my alma mater LUMS as a faculty member in political science and international relations

INTERVIEW

HORIZON: How was your childhood?

SFK: I had a wonderful childhood. Not only was I good at my studies, but I excelled in sports too. I was a member of table tennis, netball, throwball, and badminton teams in my school, and at university also I was a member of ten sports teams. I was captain of the university table tennis and badminton teams. I also represented LUMS twice in Turkey as a member of the football team.

During my school days, I served as head girl in school and also remained a member of the student council throughout my educational career. I was also an elected member of the student council at my university.

HORIZON: How did you join politics?

SFK: I belong to a political family from Sialkot. My maternal grandfather Khawaja Safdar was a well-known politician of his time. My maternal uncle, Khawaja Muhammad Asif, is also a well-known politician, who has served the nation in different capacities as foreign minister, minister of power, and minister of defence. Our family has always supported the PML-N. Since childhood, I had accompanied my mother and aunts in electoral campaigns, our dinner table conversations always revolved around politics and national issues, so my interest in politics was natural, which eventually led to my becoming a legislator.

HORIZON: Interesting, so how is your experience of being a politician?

SFK: Initially I got a series of shocks – cultural shocks and professional shocks. Parliamentary democracy is a complicated system. I was clueless and had a steep learning curve. It took me a couple of years to learn the processes. I learnt the rules of business, how the national budget is prepared, how standing committees are run, and oversight is done, etc. There were days when I had nothing to do and I felt useless. Still, it was a great opportunity for me to learn, grow, and work for the betterment of the people. Having a political background accelerated my learning process. It goes

without saying that I had the backing of my uncle at every step.

I took my job very seriously and worked in the assembly with great dedication. In my first term as MNA, I was elected general secretary of the Young Parliamentarian Forum. Together with other legislators, I organised international and national conferences, including the first parliament-led international conference on Kashmir, and worked on youth policies and inter-provincial youth coordination and oversight through this forum. In 2017, after Mian Nawaz Sharif was forced to resign as prime minister, I was appointed as parliamentary secretary for the Ministry of Commerce and Textile.

This is my second term. I learnt a lot while sitting on opposition benches as well during PTI's government. Since Pakistan Democratic Movement took charge in April 2022, I have been working as a special assistant to the prime minister (SAPM) on youth affairs and chief coordinator of the Prime Minister's Youth Skill Development Programme.

HORIZON: How is your experience as a female parliamentarian?

SFK: It was double jeopardy because I was both a female and young parliamentarian. It's a challenge being young and female in any workplace. I'd say that women have to work ten times as hard as men to get a place on the table. I got a cultural shock in parliament, which is a microcosm of Pakistani society itself, where all kinds of points of view exist. I found that the things that I considered normal, like conversing with our male colleagues, sometimes engaging in light banter, going out with them for tea or lunch, or wearing certain clothes, can invite criticism if you are a woman. I had to learn to work with diverse people and understand their points of view. But I am also cognisant of the privileges I have had due to my political background and my education, which unfortunately are not available to all women parliamentarians. I see this every day in how people treat my female colleagues who are not as well connected as I am. It's easy to character assassinate a woman if she makes an achievement. Like all

workplaces around the world, we do have harassment issues, we have a tough time proving ourselves, and we fight through all sorts of conversations, but we have to keep going. I'd urge people, especially women, to support fellow women. It's due to the work of women politicians and political workers before us, be it Fatima Jinnah, Benazir Bhutto, Kulsoom Nawaz or others, that we are standing here today.

HORIZON: Politicians, especially parliamentarians are questioned about the perks and privileges they get, do politicians get all the rumoured perks and privileges?

SFK: Thank you for asking this question. I so wanted to speak on the matter. There is no bar on anyone contesting elections in Pakistan. PhD holders and those with minimal education can both become members of parliament. Likewise, a 25 and a 90-year-old person are both eligible to become a member. The world over, parliamentarians have a support system. Each legislator has a researcher, a technical legal person, an administrative assistant, and may even have a communication professional attached to them. A legislator may not be very sharp academically but can be an excellent representative of their people. They can have a better understanding of their people's issues and perspectives. But their job is to legislate, for which they need all this support staff to carry out their work efficiently. We have no such support system and legislators are expected to wear all these hats themselves. They are expected to legislate, know the Sustainable Development Goals, carry out oversight, know how to run a standing committee, interpret the finance bill, know the rules of business, and be legal experts. Legislators do not get an office. They meet their visitors in parliament's corridors, their residences, or restaurants.

Legislators' remuneration is not enough that they can carry out their responsibilities without contributing from their own pockets. For instance, a legislator is expected to travel all the way from Zhob to Islamabad to attend the National Assembly session, spend time in his constituency, and carry out all the legislation work. But they receive only Rs168,000 after the deduction of taxes. If they attend all the sessions, they



can get a travel allowance and daily allowance, which can go up to Rs100,000 maximum. They do not have a fuel quota nor receive an official vehicle. They receive an official residence in parliamentary lodges in Islamabad, for which they pay rent and utility bills from their own pockets. In effect, they run two households, one in Islamabad and the other in their constituency, in addition to running their political offices.

This is the biggest flaw in our system due to which our parliament has not strengthened as an institution. This is how the system ensures that only rich people enter the system. The system doesn't support a middle or lower-class political aspirant, which is why policymaking remains skewed. We need to change this.

HORIZON: You are working as SAPM on youth affairs and in this capacity, you are head of the youth loan scheme as well. How do you compare the current scheme with the previous government's scheme?

SFK: Youth loan scheme was originally launched in 2013 by Mian Nawaz Sharif. One of his first initiatives as prime minister was the establishment of a youth affairs programme in the prime minister's office under a special initiative. It was headed by Ms Maryam Nawaz Sharif. It did not have any financial rights, and coordinated and provided strategic direction to various schemes implemented by relevant ministries.

INTERVIEW

Under this initiative, scholarships for students of underdeveloped areas, interest-free loans, laptops, business loans, skills development, and a national internship programme for youth were initiated. The idea was to give young people tools and skills to find gainful employment or start their own businesses through access to capital. It was successfully implemented for five years and benefitted hundreds of thousands of young people. Unfortunately, when the previous regime was installed in 2018, they rebranded this programme as Kamyab Jawan, loan programme was brought under the Ehsaas programme, and the scholarships were called Ehsaas scholarships. The skills development initiative was also rebranded. They changed the loan amount from collateral-free two million to 25 million with collateral, thus killing the fundamental idea of giving young people the opportunity to establish small and medium enterprises. As a result, banks started benefitting their rich clients, who could pledge collateral to get soft loans. When we came back to power, we reduced the loan amount again, keeping the currency devaluation in view. You will be pleased to know that the majority of applicants this time are women and their area of interest is dairy. The prime minister inaugurated this on 24 January and I feel immensely proud to tell you that by February 2023, we have disbursed around Rs2.5 billion in loans to around 10,000 beneficiaries. For the first time, we have included agricultural and allied sectors in this loan scheme. This year is the 10th anniversary of this programme. Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif has declared 2023 as the Year of Youth.

HORIZON: What is the status of loan recovery?

SFK: The loans disbursed in 2013 are maturing now and their return rate is very good. Recovery of micro-loans is 99 per cent.

HORIZON: Laptop distribution was also part of the youth programme; is it being revived as well?

SFK: Yes, it is being revived. Procurement of 100,000 laptops is in process and distribution on merit will start very soon. This laptop scheme has changed the life of many young educated people and



in developing a country like Pakistan, such schemes are direly needed.

HORIZON: What are other youth initiatives by this government?

SFK: We are supporting innovation through a national innovation award. The top 100 innovators would be given financial grants in two rounds of 50 each, they would be incubated and connected with investors, so that young people's ideas could be converted into marketable products. Likewise, we are creating a digital youth hub, which is a mobile application for Prime Minister's Youth Programme. We are also hunting sports talent. All the schemes mentioned earlier are being brought together in one mobile phone application. This will eventually be converted into a scholarship and job portion through which every child in Pakistan could access all the available opportunities through a mobile phone application.

HORIZON: On a lighter note, what do you like to eat, and do you also cook?

SFK: Life didn't give me a chance to learn cooking. I was first busy with studies and then work. I can make some very basic things if necessary. When I was studying abroad, a few Pakistanis lived in my dorm. They cooked so well that I didn't need to cook. My duty was on dishes, not cooking. As for my favourite food, I like all kinds of foods, especially home-cooked foods, like vegetables or meat curry with roti ■



PAKISTAN STANDS WITH TÜRKİYE, SYRIA

DR. RANA KHALID MEHMOOD

Two strong earthquakes of magnitude 7.8 and 7.5 shook southern Türkiye near the Syrian border on 6 February at 4 am. As a result, more than 52,000 people have died inside Türkiye and 5,900 in Syria. Similarly, 115,000 people were injured and around 140,000 buildings were destroyed due to which more than one million people are currently living in tents. Pakistan's government and people stand in solidarity with the Turkish and Syrian people at this hour.

According to the United Nations Development Programme officials, since 6 February, the affected areas have sustained a financial loss of more than \$100 billion. Since the initial earthquakes, Türkiye's Disaster Management Authority noted more than 9,100 aftershocks of both small and large scale. The aftershocks are expected to continue for some time.

Turkish and international rescue teams immediately started rescue and relief activities in the affected regions in Türkiye. However, in Syria, rescue and relief ran into difficulties due to lack of a single

authority in control of Syria, due to which the already existing humanitarian crisis in Syria has exacerbated. The government and people of Pakistan have expressed full solidarity with the people of Türkiye and Syria. Immediately after the earthquake, Prime Minister of Pakistan Shehbaz Sharif and his cabinet met the ambassador of Türkiye in Islamabad and expressed his condolences and reiterated his commitment to helping. Prime Minister of Pakistan Shehbaz Sharif announced a relief fund of Rs10 billion for Türkiye and Syria. Pakistani rescue teams were among the first to carry out relief activities in the affected areas. Pakistan Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif reached Ankara on 16 February, where he offered his condolences to Turkish President Tayyip Erdogan at the presidential palace for the loss of lives and property. He arrived in Adiyaman from Ankara on 17 February and inspected the relief activities.

Pakistan sent relief goods to Syria and Türkiye through special flight operations and by sea. The National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA) sailed off



“ WE CANNOT BRING BACK THOSE WHO LOST THEIR LIVES IN TÜRKIYE AND SYRIA, BUT IT IS HEARTENING TO SEE OUR GOVERNMENT AND PEOPLE STAND WITH OUR TURKISH AND SYRIAN BROTHERS AND SISTERS. ”



the first sea cargo of 1,000 tonnes for both countries through PNS Nasr, which reached its destination in Syria on March 13, and would reach its destination in Türkiye on March 20. Another ship PNS Moawin with 550 tonnes of relief goods for both countries sailed off from Karachi on 12 March.

Pakistan also started special flight operations to send relief goods to Türkiye on March 11, 2023. On March 13, NDMA, on the directions of the Prime Minister, dispatched the 4th Cargo Plane with 1,200 winterised fire-resistant family tents (90 tons load) from Lahore, the NDMA shared on its Twitter handle. Former Punjab Education Minister, Rana Mashhood Ahmad Khan and a journalist accompanied the relief aid.

So far, 4,800 winterised tents (360 tonnes load) have been dispatched through this operation. The NDMA has lined up more than 34 cargo flights to speed up the dispatch of relief assistance to Türkiye. The flight operations will continue till March 23.

In addition to the government, the people of Pakistan came forward to help. An anonymous Pakistani went to the Turkish embassy in America and deposited a donation of \$30 million. This gesture has been widely reported in the Turkish and Pakistani media. Likewise, Pakistan's leading humanitarian organisation Edhi



Foundation has been carrying out relief activities in Türkiye by running free kitchens in relief camps and distributing rations and other goods to the affected in coordination with local volunteers.

The Turkish people have appreciated Pakistan's cooperation. Videos have surfaced in which aviation staff clapped for Pakistani rescue teams heading home after completing their work.

We cannot bring back those who lost their lives in Türkiye and Syria, but it is heartening to see our government and people stand with our Turkish and Syrian brothers and sisters. We hope and pray that Türkiye and Syria recover from his massive disaster and turn around their lives soon ■

PICTURE GALLERY



PML-N CHIEF ORGANISER AND SENIOR VICE PRESIDENT MARYAM NAWAZ ADDRESSING A PARTY WORKERS CONVENTION IN RAWALPINDI. 19 FEBRUARY 2023



GOVERNOR PUNJAB MUHAMMAD BALIGH UR REHMAN AND HIS WIFE PARTICIPATED IN A MASS WEDDING OF 25 COUPLES FROM POOR FAMILIES ORGANISED BY A CHARITY AT THE GOVERNOR HOUSE. 6 MARCH 2023



PRIME MINISTER MUHAMMAD SHEHBAZ SHARIF WITH STUDENTS ON SCHOOL ON WHEELS BUSES IN ISLAMABAD. 28 FEBRUARY 2023



PRIME MINISTER MUHAMMAD SHEHBAZ SHARIF KICK STARTS THE SPRING TREE PLANTATION DRIVE BY PLANTING A SAPLING IN ISLAMABAD. 28 FEBRUARY 2023



PRIME MINISTER MUHAMMAD SHEHBAZ SHARIF ADDRESSES A SPECIAL COMMEMORATIVE SESSION SUMMONED TO CELEBRATE THE GOLDEN JUBILEE OF THE SENATE OF PAKISTAN. MAR 16, 2023



PML-N CHIEF ORGANISER AND SENIOR VICE PRESIDENT CELEBRATING INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY BY CUTTING A CAKE. 8 MARCH 2023



PRIME MINISTER MUHAMMAD SHEHBAZ SHARIF WITNESSED INTERNATIONAL FLEET REVIEW AS PART OF THE FIVE-DAY MULTINATIONAL MARITIME EXERCISE AMAN-23 UNDER THE PAKISTAN NAVY.



PRIME MINISTER MUHAMMAD SHEHBAZ SHARIF DISTRIBUTING CHEQUES AMONG THE BENEFICIARIES OF PRIME MINISTER YOUTH LOAN SCHEME. 23 FEBRUARY 2023



PRIME MINISTER SHEHBAZ SHARIF APPRECIATED THE HUMANITARIAN SERVICES OF PAKISTAN'S SEARCH AND RESCUE TEAMS SENT TO TÜRKIYE AND SYRIA. 1 MARCH 2023



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