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The country can't run on subsidies

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Briefs

Pak have an edge over India in UAE

DNA

DUBAI: Pakistan have won their last 10 Twenty20 Internationals in the United Arab Emirates and captain Babar Azam claims that will give his men the edge over India in their World Cup opener. "Definitely we have played a lot of cricket in the UAE," Babar said in a news conference when asked about his team's dismal 0-5 record against India in T20 World Cup clashes. "These conditions suit us and we know how to play here. We need to keep things simple in all the departments."

Maryam digging her political grave

STAFF REPORT

ISLAMABAD: Minister for Interior Sheikh Rashid on Sunday said that PML-N Vice President Maryam Nawaz is "digging her political grave", referring to the often blunt nature of the statements she makes. The minister warned Maryam that dragging the army into a debate at Dhobi Ghaat or Lahore's Mochi Gate will "result in a political smack-down similar to what occurs in a dhobi ghaat" (when clothes are beaten with sticks while washing them). He said Maryam's moves to call out state institutions and speak against the country's leaders is "foolish". "With these judo karate-like manoeuvres with the aim to slander (institutions), she is digging her political grave," he remarked.

Afghan peace vital for region

DNA

SWABI: Speaker National Assembly Asad Qaiser says peace in Afghanistan is vital for prosperity of the entire region. Addressing a function in Swabi on Sunday, he said Pakistan wants peace in Afghanistan which will bring positive impact on the situation of the whole region. Asad Qaiser said Rashakai Economic Zone will create hundreds of job opportunities besides promoting economic activities.

Opp to launch protests over rising inflation

"We appeal to the entire nation to fully participate in the protests and rallies," the PODM chief says

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

ISLAMABAD: ISLAMABAD: Pakistan Democratic Movement chief Maulana Fazlur Rahman on Sunday announced that within the next two weeks, the Opposition will hold countrywide protests against the growing inflation. "As soon as we are done with the celebrations of the Eid Milad un Nabi (SAW), we will start a full-fledged campaign against inflation," he said while speaking to the media after holding an information meeting with party members in Islamabad. "We appeal to the entire nation to fully participate in the protests and rallies," he said while giving details of how the government incurred debts and increased inflation in the country. Earlier in the day, PML-N President and Leader of the Opposition in the National Assembly Shahbaz Sharif had a telephonic conversation with Fazl and announced that the Opposition will start a campaign against the rising inflation in the country.

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'Economic woes temporary'

BUREAU REPORT

MULTAN: Foreign Minister Makhdoom Shah Mahmood Hussain Qureshi Sunday said that economic hardships were temporary as the government was trying its best to strengthen country's economy.

While talking to people, hailing from his constituency NA-156 here, the foreign minister stated the government was well aware of difficulties and problems of the masses. "Poverty alleviation is top priority of the incumbent government," he mentioned. Ehsas Programme, Health Card Scheme and some other

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MPAs hopeful of no trust motion's success

Balochistan Governor has summoned an important meeting of Balochistan Assembly on October 20

STAFF REPORT

QUETTA: The political uncertainty in Balochistan regarding the fate of beleaguered Chief Minister Jam Kamal Alyani who is facing no-trust motion in the provincial assembly has entered the final stage as the estranged cabinet members of the ruling Balochistan Awa-

mi Party have intensified their efforts to dislodge Kamal who on his part has also spurred his efforts to defeat the move. Sources said on Sunday that the angry lawmakers have accelerated their anti-CM campaign making contacts and consultation on Mr Kamal's removal. The estranged leaders including Speaker Abdul Qadoos Bezinjo, Zahoor Buledi,

Asad Ullah Baloch and others were seen making contacts with the opposition and allied parties for the success of their impending no-trust motion. The angry lawmakers claimed that the no-confidence movement against CM Kamal would be succeeded with majority. They decided to summon a meeting of

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LAHORE: Chakkrid Krachaiwong, Ambassador of Thailand to Pakistan enjoys corn cob during his recent visit to Lahore. - DNA



OSLO: Ambassador of Pakistan to Norway Babar Amin presented his credential to His Majesty King Harald V of Norway, at the Royal Palace. His Majesty congratulated Ambassador Babar Amin on his appointment and welcomed him in Norway. - DNA

Russia sees record high daily cases

DNA

MOSCOW: Russia reported 34,303 cases of new coronavirus infections in the past 24 hours, a record-high number since the start of the pandemic, data from the state coronavirus task force showed. It also reported 997 deaths from the disease, five fewer than the daily record-high of 1,002 reported the previous day. The latest coronavirus deaths brought the official national death toll to 223,312, with a total of almost eight million cases. Russian authorities blame a slow vaccination campaign for the sharp rise of infections and deaths, which forced the health ministry to ask retired, vaccinated medics to return to hospitals.

Warship in Taiwan strait: China slams West

DNA

BEIJING: The Chinese military condemned the United States and Canada for each sending a warship through the Taiwan Strait last week, saying the North American nations were threatening peace and stability in the region. China's People's Liberation Army's Eastern Theatre Command said its forces monitored the ships and "stood guard" throughout their passage. "The united states and Canada colluded to provoke and stir up trouble ... seriously jeopardising peace and stability of the Taiwan strait," it said.

India invites Pak in NSAs meeting

New Delhi has proposed two dates - November 10 and 11 - for the NSA Meeting

CENTRELINE REPORT

NEW DELHI: India has proposed to host a meeting of the national security advisers (NSA) of key stakeholder countries to address the humanitarian crisis and discuss the evolving situation in Afghanistan. According to a report published in India Today, invitations for the meeting have been extended to key

Taliban welcomes Turkish role in renovation

DNA

ANKARA: Turkey can play "an active role in investing, realizing some projects, renovating and restoring Afghanistan," with the resources it possesses, according to that country's acting foreign minister. In an exclusive interview with Anadolu Agency, Amir Khan Muttaqi said the official recognition of his government and international aid held great importance to the recovery of the country's economy.

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Coalition 'kills 160' Yemen rebels as battle intensifies

The coalition has said that since Monday, more than 700 rebels have been killed in air attacks

NEWS DESK

RIYADH: The Saudi-led coalition supporting Yemen's government says it has killed 160 Houthi rebels in air raids south of the strategic city of Marib, where loyalists say rebels have made advances. "We carried out 32 strikes ... in Abdiya over the past 24 hours," the coalition said on Saturday, as cited by the state-run Saudi Press Agency, adding that "11 military vehicles were destroyed and more than 160 terrorist elements eliminated".

The rebels rarely comment on reported losses and the toll could not be independently verified. The coalition has said that since Monday, more than 700 rebels have been killed in air attacks in the battle for Marib. The Houthis began a major push to seize Marib province in February and, after a lull, they have renewed their offensive in recent weeks. Tens of thousands of people have been displaced in the province this year, nearly

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No. of critical covid patients falls below 2,000

720 more people got infected with the viral disease

STAFF REPORT

ISLAMABAD: The Covid-19 pandemic claimed 17 more lives in Pakistan during the past 24 hours, taking the death toll to 28,269. According to the National Command and Operation Centre (NCOC), 720 more people got infected with the viral disease, lifting the nationwide tally of confirmed infections to 1,264,384. A total of 44,831 samples were tested, out of which 720 turned out to be positive, showing

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Pakistan military academies one of the best

Egyptian Defence Attache Col Mahmoud says, he had the opportunity to be one of those trainees in the Pakistani military academies, which greatly contributed to his career

EXCLUSIVE

ANSAR M BHATTI

ISLAMABAD: The Defence Attache of Egypt in Pakistan Col. Mahmoud Hassan has said relations between Egypt and Pakistan continued to grow even during the pandemic adding both countries can further cooperate with each other in various fields. Col Mahmoud expressed these views during an interview with Daily Islamabad POST.

This is his first interview to a Pakistani media after assumption of the charge of Egyptian Defence Attache. The interview shall also be published in the November issue of Centreline magazine. Here is the text of his interview.

1: Defence Attache of

Egypt's Role in Pakistan Egyptian defence Attache works on developing bilateral ties between Egypt and Pakistan in the military and defence fields, exchanging visits of military delegations between both countries and coordinating the implementation of joint exercises.

2: Pakistan and Egypt enjoy good political, military bilateral relations. How do you plan to further deepen/enhance bilateral military relations? Despite the difficulties that many countries are facing as a result of the pandemic crisis of Coronavirus, this did not affect the development of ties between the two countries. As, the insistence on conducting the Egyptian-Pakistani joint exercise (Sky Guard-1) on

June 2021 and the participation of the Pakistani armed forces in the joint exercise (Bright Star 2021) is one of the most important successes in deepening military bilateral ties and more in the future.

3: Military Attaches in Islamabad have a service

attaches association, to which you are also a member. Please tell us how such kind of associations can be helpful in strengthening relations with the host country? (COSA) is the corps of service attaches which represents the window

through which communication between all defense attaches and it facilitates their mission and develops links with the country of accreditation. Mainly, it is being planned to conduct many activities and visits that allows service attaches to witness many directions

and identify the available capabilities that may be useful for increasing aspects of collaboration with Pakistan. 4: Do the Egyptian military officials get training in Pakistani academies? Academic education is one of the most important means that contributes to preparing

officers in the military, and the Pakistani military academies are among the most important institutions that provide distinguished training and qualifications for officers. It is worth mentioning that I had the opportunity to be one of those trainees in the Pakistani military academies, which greatly contributed to my career. I would like to point out that the Egyptian Armed Forces celebrate this month the 48th anniversary of the glorious October victories, which arouse pride in the hearts of Egyptians and revive hope for the future. The Egyptians proved on the sixth of October that their determination was unrelenting and that victory was the result of the steadfastness of Egyptian people and the insistence of its army on restoration of dignity.



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Businessmen reject high jump in petroleum, power tariff rates - Page 07

Khan turning the country into 'Tiger Force': Bilawal - Page 08

Dengue crisis

AS the world grapples with the ongoing coronavirus pandemic, another familiar more urgent health emergency threatens the country and its health infrastructure. Pakistan has suffered the brunt of dengue epidemics before, with the country undergoing dire situations in 2017 and 2011. The numbers for dengue this year have not reached the height of emergency as they had in previous numbers, but the rising infection rate is alarming, with more and more dengue patients reporting in hospitals every day. The outbreak appears to have started in Lahore and has been getting worse in the provincial capital day by day. Lahore saw 146 new cases of the dengue virus in one day this week, with 740 patients admitted to Lahore hospitals. On Wednesday, the city reported 229 cases of the dengue virus out of the province's total number of 325. At this rapid pace, the ICUs, already crumbling with coronavirus patients, will soon run out of beds. What is unfortunate is that despite the early warning signs, the government was unable to contain the dengue epidemic to Lahore, and the virus has gained ground in Islamabad and KP as well now. The season's highest number of dengue cases was reported in the capital on Thursday, with 125 cases being reported in one day this week. The KP government has reported a grand total of 3,300 cases in the province, evoking bitter memories of the past when cities like Peshawar suffered the worst of dengue. Pandemics and epidemics cannot be compared, but the death toll of dengue has so far been reported being higher than the coronavirus. The rate of deaths in Islamabad from dengue fever has risen to six in an alarmingly short time. While the country continues to do well with dealing with the Covid-19 positivity rate, keeping it below 3 percent while its recovery rate has also improved, the government's negligence towards dengue cannot be ignored. The prevalence and spread of the dengue virus are unforgivable considering the country has time and time dealt with this health emergency and has protocols in place already. The government must start an aggressive dengue awareness programme and enact fumigation campaigns as soon as possible.

Shaping US Middle East policy amidst failing states

James Dorsey



Mr. Kissinger was focused on regional balances of power and the legitimisation of a US-dominated order. It was order, not peace, that Kissinger pursued because he believed that peace was neither...

THE future of US engagement in the Middle East hangs in the balance. Two decades of forever war in Afghanistan and continued military engagement in Iraq and elsewhere in the region have prompted debate about what constitutes a US interest in the Middle East. China, and to a lesser degree Russia, loom large in the debate as America's foremost strategic and geopolitical challenges. Questions about US interests have also sparked discussion about whether the United States can best achieve its objectives by continued focus on security and military options or whether a greater emphasis on political, diplomatic, economic, and civil society tools may be a more productive approach. The debate is coloured by a pendulum that swings from one extreme to the other. President Joe Biden has disavowed the notion of nation-building that increasingly framed the United States' post-9/11 intervention in Afghanistan. There is no doubt that the top-down nation-building approach in Afghanistan was not the way to go about things. It rested on policymaking that was informed by misleading and deceitful reporting by US military and political authorities and enabled a corrupt environment for both Afghans and Americans. The lesson from Afghanistan may be that nation-building (to use a term that has become tainted for lack of a better word) has to be a process that is owned by the beneficiaries themselves while supported by external players from afar. Potentially adopting that posture could help

the Biden administration narrow the gap between its human rights rhetoric and its hard-nosed, less values-driven definition of US interests and foreign policy. A cursory glance at recent headlines tells a tale of failed governance and policies, hollowed-out democracies that were fragile to begin with, legitimisation of brutality, fabrics of society being ripped apart, and an international community that grapples with how to pick up the pieces. Boiled down to its essence, the story is the same whether it's how to provide humanitarian aid to Afghanistan without recognising or empowering the Taliban or efforts to halt Lebanon's economic and social collapse and descent into renewed chaos and civil war without throwing a lifeline to a discredited and corrupt elite. Attempts to tackle immediate problems in Lebanon and Afghanistan by working through NGOs might be a viable bottom-up approach to the discredited top-down method. If successful, it could provide a way of strengthening the voice of recent mass protests in Lebanon and Iraq that transcended the sectarianism that underlies their failed and flawed political structures. It would also give them ownership of efforts to build more open, pluralistic, and cohesive societies, a demand that framed the protests. Finally, it could also allow democracy to regain ground lost by failing to provide tangible progress. This week's sectarian fighting along the Green Line that separated Christian East from the Muslim West in Beirut during Lebanon's civil war highlighted the risk of those voices being drowned out. Yet, they reverberated loud and clear in the results of recent Iraqi parliamentary elections, even if a majority of eligible voters refrained from going to the polls. "We never got the democracy we were promised, and were instead left with a grossly incompetent, highly corrupt and hypervolent monster masquerading as a democracy and traumatising a generation," commented Iraqi Middle East counterterrorism and security scholar Talha Abdulrazaq who voted only once in his life in Iraq. That was in the first election held in 2005 after the 2003 US invasion. "I have not voted in another Iraqi election since." Mr. Abdulrazaq's disappointment is part and parcel of the larger issues of nation-building, democracy promotion and provision of humanitarian aid that inevitably will shape the future US role in the Middle East in a world that is likely to be bi- or multi-polar. Former US National Security Council and State Department official Martin Indyk argued in a recent essay adapted from a forthcoming book on Henry Kissinger's Middle East diplomacy that the US policy should aim "to shape an American-supported regional order in which the United States is no longer the dominant player, even as it remains the most influential." Mr. Indyk reasoned that support for Israel and America's Sunni Arab allies would be at the core

of that policy. While in a world of realpolitik the United States may have few alternatives, the question is how alignment with autocracies and illiberal democracies would enable the United States to support a bottom-up process of social and political transition that goes beyond lip service. That question is particularly relevant given that the Middle East is entering its second decade of defiance and dissent that demands answers to grievances that were not expressed in Mr. Kissinger's time, at least not forcefully. Mr. Kissinger was focused on regional balances of power and the legitimisation of a US-dominated order. "It was order, not peace, that Kissinger pursued because he believed that peace was neither an achievable nor even a desirable objective in the Middle East," Mr. Indyk said, referring to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Mr. Indyk noted that in Mr. Kissinger's mind the rules of a US-dominated order "would be respected only if they provided a sufficient sense of justice to a sufficient number of states. It did not require the satisfaction of all grievances... just an absence of the grievances that would motivate an effort to overthrow the order." The popular Arab revolts of 2011 that toppled the leaders of Egypt, Tunisia, Libya, and Yemen, even if their achievements were subsequently rolled back, and the mass protests of 2019 and 2020 that forced leaders of Sudan, Algeria, Iraq, and Lebanon to resign, but failed to fundamentally alter political and economic structures, are evidence that there is today a will to overthrow the order. In his essay, Mr. Indyk acknowledges the fact that "across the region, people are crying out for accountable governments" but argues that "the United States cannot hope to meet those demands" even if "it cannot ignore them, either." Mr. Indyk may be right. Yet, the United States, with Middle East policy at an inflexion point, cannot ignore the fact that the failure to address popular grievances contributed significantly to the rise of violent Islamic militancy and ever more repressive and illiberal states in a region with a significant youth bulge that is no longer willing to remain passive and/or silent. Pointing to the 600 Iraqi protesters that have been killed by security forces and pro-Iranian militias, Mr. Abdulrazaq noted in an earlier Al Jazeera op-ed that protesters were "adopting novel means of keeping their identities away from the prying eyes of security forces and powerful Shia militias" such as blockchain technology and decentralised virtual private networks. "Unless they shoot down...internet-providing satellites, they will never be able to silence our hopes for democracy and accountability again. That is our dream," Mr. Abdulrazaq quoted Srinivas Baride, the chief technology officer of a decentralised virtual network favoured by Iraqi protesters, as saying.

Why only beg or dance? (Transgender)

Hira Ali Malik



"People often tell us to do a proper job with the able bodies God has blessed us with. No one would hire us though"

ASKING for money in streets with the intrusiveness of a beggar and dancing in 'dreadful' night functions is how most of us remember our first encounter with a transgender. Any person in a respectable, praiseworthy profession can either be a man or a woman. Finding a transgender in that position? Well, that will be stretching the normative character of our society a bit too far. "Some called me lerkhi. Others opted for khursa and aunty. My life was anything but normal. And I stopped going to school," says Sapna. Gifted with

the same two legs, two hands and a brain with equal capacity to develop an uneducated transgender remains confined to begging and dancing in order to earn a living. Finding work is equally hard for the moderately literate ones. "People often tell us to do a proper job with the able bodies God has blessed us with. No one would hire us though. The response for a job request is always the same; go find it somewhere else," says Rania with a matriculation certificate. More than the qualification it's the stigma with which our society at large has come to define transgenders. On a more practical level, it's the failure on part of the state apparatus to provide Identity to transgender. "Many people will not trust us without proper identity cards in this time of uncertain security conditions prevailing in our country," says Reema. "Identity Cards would at least remove a legal impediment in our quest to find proper employment." However, "since the provision of third gender on the registration certificate only a few could get themselves registered with National Database and Registration Authority (NADRA) due to the cumbersome procedure adopted by the database authority. When most of them are not able to identify their guardians or fulfill prerequisites of registration process, they disengage with the practice of getting a gender-specific Identity" says Sapna. In this regard there is a dire need to fix the procedure which is made simple under the directions of the apex court, and is required to be further simplified. In fact, it is the callousness, and consequently of the state, with which our society approaches the presence of transgender individuals living among us that is at the root of the problem. At the so-

cial level there is an absence of respect for all things human. This lack of respect comes down to seeing everyone through lenses of religion, caste, social status, and above all, gender. Politically, the proportion of transgender individuals in our society is not large enough to invite attention from our leaders. More importantly, in the post-covid scenario where vaccination based on National Database and Registration Authority (NADRA) is the only government adopted rule, there is no concern or an inclusive policy for those without an identity. The programs launched by government such as Sehat Sahulat Program (SSP) also enrolls only those with the valid NIC. Back in March 2021, there were only 1600 transgender people registered with NADRA as reported by the Ex-Special Assistant to the Prime Minister (SAPM). And only 500 out of the total got enrolled for SSP which is yet again alarming. Isn't it time we stop showing our young ones any transgender individual in market and discourage them when they narrate the incident back home as if they have seen something out of the ordinary? Isn't it time we stop pitying them and not offending them for fear of sin and start treating them as human beings? Isn't it time we stop letting Alisha lie to die while we wait to decide which ward of the hospital she belongs in? Identity is their foremost need and a constitutional right like everybody else in this Islamic Republic of Pakistan. To either beg or dance shall be nobody's only choice to earn a living. It must not be their only option either. Need of the hour is that transgender individuals should be provided with their due rights and be treated as plain human beings regardless of their gender.

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Rebuilding Afghanistan

THE lightning military victory of the Taliban in Kabul is a song-albeit astounding-of the yore for the daunting realities of an unimaginable humanitarian crisis have begun to set in. With an empty treasury, frozen foreign reserves and skyrocketing inflation, what else could have been expected from an economy already in a catastrophic free fall. Business is far, far from usual, no matter what goodwill Kabul may have up his sleeve. Ergo, propitious tidings from Washington at the end of first direct talks with Taliban must have come as a pleasant surprise to long queues of hapless Afghans and their empty coffers. If hope could magically solve all their predicaments! Since Biden Administration sounded just as reluctant as other international donors who are in no mood to deliver upon pledges of over \$1 billion, one can only pray for those still clinging to promises. Leaving haphazardly, the US troops had set the alarm bells ringing in the rentier state. For how could Afghanistan's weak economy function sans grants that made up 43 per cent of its GDP? How to ensure an uninterrupted food supply when only five per cent of households have enough to eat? Renewing aid linkages-that too, without waiting for political reconciliation-is of paramount importance here. Hunger cannot be allowed to turn into outright chaos. The collapsing healthcare (ill-equipped hospitals and salaries up in the air) when the country is plunging deep into the third wave of coronavirus is another sob story altogether. However, loosening the drawstrings alone cannot do the deed. More critical are the steps needed to ensure "self-reliance" in a system so deeply dependent on outside help. We need the taps back on so that Afghans can finally access the funds in their accounts. The beaming faces of Afghan girls returning to schools after the change in status quo is a heartening sight. Given the loss of those oiling the government machinery, keeping the education system functional remains the only viable solution. Let's just pray that cool heads prevail over the Taliban this time. If not for the welfare of their people, to gain a token of legitimacy? The abolition of the poppy crop in their earlier stint could have brought in many different policies had the world taken notice. Fingers crossed for 2021 when the poor and the destitute may find the miracle their mighty aggressors failed to bring to their doorstep!

Is the party over?

Fahd Husain



The stand-off has also brought the army's routine postings - announced on Oct 6 - to a standstill. This too may be unprecedented. Since the prime minister has not signed the notification for Lt Gen Nadeem Anjum to take charge as DG ISI, he has not relinquished charge as corps commander Karachi. Lt Gen Muhammad Saeed cannot therefore take charge as corps commander Karachi and Lt Gen Nauman Mahmood cannot relinquish charge...

POLITICS has gone into a tail-spin and stakeholders could be heading back to the drawing board. Here are 10 key pointers: The relationship between PTI and the establishment is under unprecedented strain ever since Prime Minister Imran Khan refused to notify Lt Gen Nadeem Ahmad Anjum as the new DG ISI as announced by the ISPR on Oct 6, 2021. The strain is getting more intense by the day as the disagreement slowly but menacingly morphs into a stand-off. It may get resolved sooner or later, but the damage appears to have been done. The stand-off has also brought the army's routine postings - announced on Oct 6 - to a standstill. This too may be unprecedented. Since the prime minister has not signed the notification for Lt Gen Nadeem Anjum to take charge as DG ISI, he has not relinquished charge as corps commander Karachi. Lt Gen Muhammad Saeed cannot therefore take charge as corps commander Karachi and Lt Gen Nauman Mahmood cannot relinquish charge as corps commander Peshawar to join as president National Defence University because Lt Gen Faiz Hameed cannot relinquish charge as DG ISI to take over as corps commander Peshawar. And round and round it goes for the others who received their posting orders 10 days ago. Things do not work like this in the army. Confusion exists whether the PM Office has received the summary containing three names for the appointment as DG ISI. There is a strange silence from the government. On Wednesday, ministers had confirmed the summary had been received and TV channels as well as newspapers ran the story. Military sources later denied the summary had been sent. In yet another unprecedented move, the names and photos of the three lieutenant generals supposedly presented for selection in the summary were flashed across TV screens. This made many within the establishment very uncomfortable. Now the PM wants to meet all three candidates so he can reject two three-

star generals. This too is making many in the institution very uncomfortable. PTI ministers, parliamentarians and party members are in a daze. Their political compass seems to have gone all wonky and true north is becoming impossible to navigate. They suddenly find themselves in 'Nawaz Sharif territory' in reference to tension with the establishment and this is as alien to them as landing on Mars. The situation has all the hallmarks of situations past when governments started their slide. "Is this the beginning of the end?" asked a PTI senator this week. He may have been reflecting the fears of a majority of his colleagues. Things were building up. Sources have confirmed that it was back in July this year that army chief Gen Qamar Bajwa had asked Prime Minister Imran Khan that he needed to make transfers and postings and Lt Gen Faiz Hameed would have to move out of the ISI as a routine. The PM had deferred the decision. The army chief raised the topic again in August and September and both times the PM said he would discuss the issue soon. In October, Gen Bajwa told the PM he could not wait much longer as three lieutenant generals were retiring and he had to order the transfers. Matters subsequently escalated into the events of the last 10 days. The stand-off continues. Till 10 days back, PTI was dreaming of a second five-year term. Now many in the party are concerned how they can hang on till the next elections. Their existential fears are based on the following: (a) their wafer-thin majority in the National Assembly is dependent on their allies MQM, GDA and PML-Q and if the allies ditch them the party for them might be over; (b) many among their own members are those who won as independents and will now be sniffing the wind, (c) a large number of PTI ticket holders are pro-establishment politicians and if they were forced to choose between the two sides, no one is in doubt which side they will opt for; (d) one establishment official recently remarked: "all we have to do is step back." This rupture was not supposed to happen so soon. Now that it has, the opposition has also gone back to the drawing board. PML-N is possibly drawing the following conclusion at this stage: (a) no change in the National Assembly or in the Punjab Assembly can happen without PML-N as per the numbers; (b) bringing down the PTI government in Islamabad is not a difficult task if the establishment steps back and withdraws its crucial support - more difficult is to agree on who or what replaces it; (c) PML-N will not like to be part of any set-up in the centre between now and elections in 2023, but it can support a new coalition if it means the ouster of PM Imran Khan; (d) This means PML-N can drive a hard bargain for this support but not such a hard one that it becomes a deal-breaker because if the present set-up is packed off, PML-N will be the biggest game in town - again. PM Khan would also consider his options: (a) refuse to step back and insist he appoints the DG ISI on his terms thereby sending a signal that he is the boss - regardless of the cost; (b) escalate further and appoint someone other than the person already announced; (c) send everyone packing home and call early elections; (d) get ousted and conjure up an anti-establishment narrative. None of these are good options knowing that PTI is burdened with: (a) weak parliamentary numbers and acute dependency on unreliable allies and members; (b) poor governance performance; (c) political isolation as a result of divisive politics; (d) shortage of anti-establishment space on the political spectrum in the presence of Nawaz Sharif.

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