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Acute Gaza clean water crisis

Amid further evacuation orders issued by the Israeli military in Gaza, UN humanitarian officials issued a fresh warning Monday over the dire sanitary emergency there and the urgent need for a mass polio vaccination campaign in the enclave wracked by deadly Israeli attacks.

UNICEF, the UN Children's Fund, issued a statement from Deir al-Balah in Gaza's central area, where untreated sewage run-off formed large pools on the road next to shelters for forcibly displaced people.

"Sewage water is all over the streets," said UNICEF spokesperson Salim Oweis, who highlighted the destruction of Gaza's water and sanitation network, and its sewage treatment plants, since 7 October.

Diarrhoea and skin rashes continue to impact Gazans forced multiple times from their homes and shelters, according to UNICEF, amid increasingly urgent calls for a ceasefire to allow the delivery of oral polio vaccines after traces of the disease were discovered in sewage water in June and confirmed in July.

It is understood that no one in the enclave has yet been vaccinated for polio.

The development came as the Israeli military ordered the evacuation of parts of the southern city of Khan Younis on Sunday, citing "significant terrorist activity and exploitation" of its self-designated "humanitarian zone", including rocket fire towards Israel from the Aljalaa area.

UNRWA, the UN relief agency for Palestine refugees, highlighted the impact of "multiple" evacuation orders issued since last Thursday on Gaza's most vulnerable individuals in Khan Younis, some of the approximately 75,000 people believed to have been displaced:

"There was one elderly man who was desperately trying to push his mobility scooter, which kept getting stuck in the sand," Louise Wateridge, UNRWA senior communications officer, told UN News, a media news site.

"He had very few belongings on the scooter... He is pushing it through this horrible sandy road and some young men kept coming to help him dig it out of the sand to continue pushing it. But you could just see the exhaustion and the struggle that he was going through."

More than 10 months into the war, Gazans remain desperate for clean water, food and medical help, while temperatures remain dangerously hot, Ms. Wateridge said.

"These people, they've lost absolutely everything. They don't seem to be carrying much at all. Children were dragging empty water canisters because that's one of the most precious items. Now anything that you can put water in, it is one of your most precious valuables... There were mattresses being carried, jerry cans and empty water cans and not much else, because people can only really carry what they can, in their hands."

The UNRWA officer explained that families continue to seek shelter in parts of Deir al-Bala in central Gaza and Western Khan Younis further south.

"Both areas are already heavily overcrowded, they have very limited shelters and services available and can barely accommodate the additional influx of displaced people," Ms. Wateridge added.

14th August Pakistan's Independence: A Legacy of Resilience and Determination

Dr. Muhammad Shahzad Ashfaq

The 14th of August marks a date of profound significance in the history of South Asia: it is the day Pakistan gained independence from British rule in 1947. This moment marked the birth of a nation and it represents the peak of Muslims struggle. Persistent determination by the people who sought to carve out a distinct identity and homeland for themselves. The legacy of Pakistan's independence has continued to resonate throughout its history, yielding narratives of resilience and commitment.

To understand Pakistan's journey to independence, it is essential to contextualize the socio-political landscape that influenced the emergence of a separate nation. The Indian subcontinent was under British colonial rule for nearly two centuries. By the early 20th century, political awareness and sentiments for self-determination grew among various communities, including the Muslim population, which felt increasingly marginalized in a Hindu-majority India.

The demand for a separate nation represented by the All-India Muslim League, led by Muhammad Ali Jinnah, gained momentum, particularly after the Lahore Resolution in 1940, which called

for independent states for Muslims in the northwestern and eastern zones of India.

The struggle for independence was not just a political movement; it was deeply rooted in the cultural and religious identity of its people. The narrative of Pakistan's beginning is connect to complex social dynamics, wherein millions of Muslims aspired for a political entity that would ensure their rights, safeguard their interests, and foster their religious identity. This ideal prompted widespread mobilization that galvanized support among the populace, culminating in large-scale demonstrations and civil action ahead of independence.

As the deadline for achieving independence approached in 1947, the situation became fraught with tension. The British decision to partition India was spoiled by communal riots, violence, and a massive population exchange that resulted in unprecedented displacement; millions were uprooted from their homes as they crossed new borders created by the Radcliffe Line. Amid this turmoil, Pakistan emerged as a reality, forged in the struggles and sacrifice of its people. August 14, 1947, remains stamped in the collective memory of Pakistanis as the day their dream transformed into reality an assertion of their resilience and determination.

The legacy of Pakistan's independence is a testament to the challenges frequently faced in its succeeding years. The budding state grappled with difficult obstacles,

including the integration of a fragmented society, governance issues, and economic constraints. However, the determination displayed by its leaders and citizens alike became the driving force behind the nation's efforts to establish itself as a viable, sovereign entity. They tackled these challenges head on, demonstrating an unwavering spirit even within trials.

Since its beginning, Pakistan has embarked on various developmental and nationalist agendas that seek to establish a coherent national identity amidst diverse ethnic and cultural divisions. Nationalism as a force in Pakistan swayed between aspirations of religious unity and regional consciousness, further complicating its historical flight. Despite these nuances, the spirit of independence largely persists as a shared franchise among its citizenry, symbolizing hope, determination, and the fight for self-governance.

Pakistan, Independence Day serves as more than just a public holiday; it stands as an annual reminder of the sacrifices made in pursuit of liberty. Celebrations often feature parades, cultural festivities, and reflections on the nation's journey each marked with an affecting appreciation for the freedoms enjoyed and acknowledged conflicts still inherent within society. Pakistan continues to reinforce its identity, drawing upon the values of introspection, resilience, and optimistic vision for the future.

The legacy of Pakistan's independence

is thus multifaceted, stitched together by narratives of struggle, bravery, and unity. It serves as an enduring symbol of what collective determination can achieve and underscores the importance of holding steadfast to national ideals. As Pakistan navigates the complexities of modernity, the resilience that birthed the nation remains the cornerstone of its pursuit for progress, unity, and enduring sovereignty. Such a reflection resonates within the heart of every Pakistani an embodiment of past trials, illuminated by the long-pursued promise of hope and self-determination.

The historical narratives restricting from the independence movement serve as vital components of national identity and highlight the aspirations underpinning the formation of Pakistan. While the past poses challenges in nurturing unity amid diversity, it also presents a powerful chronicle of resilience. As Pakistan navigates contemporary societal and geopolitical issues, the lessons drawn from its intricate history of struggle, bravery, and unity remain relevant and essential for continual growth as a nation. Understanding this legacy is critical for future generations, as it displays the foundational principles on which Pakistan was established and the enduring human spirit in pursuit of a common goal.

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Cartoon by Amjad Rasmi. (Courtesy of Asharq Al-Awsat)

Does May 9 streamline Imran Khan?

An incident happened on 9th May in response of founder of Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf, Imran Khan arrest in Islamabad High Court. Imran Khan reached the Islamabad High Court for biometrics to contest his cases in the relevant court. Khan was arrested on the premises of Islamabad High Court by the Rangers in the Toshakhana case. Rangers claimed that they helped National Accountability Bureau (NAB) officials arrest

Imran. Lawyers and court officials were injured during the arrest. In addition to that, Imran Khan was in the custody of NAB Rawalpindi in the Toshakhana case. The petition was filed by Khan's lawyers in the Supreme Court on an urgent basis, and the application was hired by the Supreme Court, and the existing Chief Justice of Pakistan, Umar Atta Bandial, ordered the Islamabad Police to produce the PTI Chairman within the set timeline in the Court. The Supreme Court released him and nullified and void the NAB stance.

Imran Khan has a strong stance on the May 9 incident and has demanded a neutral investigation to point out the actual details and culprits. It is a day-one demand of Imran after an incident. He claimed that it was the London plan formula and that PTI workers were not involved in it. The name of Khan is Sensor; and he is banned by all the media, but nobody reports him. He plays a mind game to remain under discussion regarding politics and in contact with people and the media. He stated that substantial footage of workers had to be presented in front of people involved in the strike. If people belong to Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf, he will rule them out of the party and present them to punishment. He defends his political workers, stance, and campaign categorically. People rejected the May 9 slogan in the

general elections, and Khan secured the highest vote. However, the Supreme Court withdrew the party symbol of Pakistan, Tehreek-e-Insaf, just before the election.

Furthermore, Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf was on the sidelines, and a brutal crackdown was initiated against the party and its supporters. They arrested nearly ten thousand supporters of the party. The aim was to weaken the party and minimise the number of supporters in the coming elections.

Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf Chairman Imran Khan asserted that he would surrender till his last drop of blood and was ready to compete with his opponent. His opponent's political parties were in danger, posed by Khan's popularity. They knew that they would not win their elections, and he adopted a strong policy against Imran Khan, which was an immature decision to tackle popularity. Political popularity needs political answers, not to open up the front directly. A leader will be famous when he faces hardship, unconstitutional behaviour, false cases, and an immoral attitude.

Additional, Democracy allows freedom of speech and the expression of opinions, which are more important for politicians. Politics is all

about speech, expression, opinions, and moral standards. When morality ends, democracy will not survive in the country. It is based on the moral principles of tolerance and compassion for prosperity and development. It is important to understand that democracy is the true face of people who transfer power to representatives peacefully. In the past, they fought for power, and thousands of people were homeless and killed to take power. People had to obey their rulers, whether they liked them or not. In the modern era, people vote for those who have capable and loving personalities. Now, the masses don't accept dictatorship. Political instability hinders progress and prosperity in Pakistan. Unfortunately, Pakistan failed to achieve its objectives and desired results after Quaid-e-Azam Muhammad Ali Jinnah.

Lastly, political instability leads to major crises in the country, and there are many notable examples in the countries of Afghanistan, Sri Lanka, and Bangladesh. The escalation of conflicts could not be handled when they erupted. Bangladesh was part of Pakistan and separated in 1970 due to political failure. The history of the downfall of countries and nations is an example of Pakistan, and we learnt a lesson from the history. Sometimes, political failure leads to ethnic cleansing and unending problems, which are harmful politically, socially, and economically. It is important to understand that this is a challenging situation and that you have the right to solve problems. Democratic governments are accountable, answerable in front of people. Those parties are not prepared to fulfil their constitutional and moral objectives and will fail in the country. People will transfer power to other parties, which is a true way to hinder their popularity. The use of power to suppress political parties will become more chronic in the country. Political matters should be resolved politically.

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The Tax Nightmare: How High Taxes Are Crippling Pakistani Businesses

Shoaib Aijaz

As the clock strikes midnight, many Pakistani business owners are kept awake by a relentless worry about the oppressive burden of taxes. This anxiety, far from being an irrational fear, mirrors the harsh economic reality that businesses face daily. With the country's fiscal policies becoming increasingly stringent amidst economic uncertainties, the fear of taxation has become a profound concern, underscoring the urgent need for comprehensive tax reforms and economic stabilization measures.

Recent industry surveys and economic analyses reveal a troubling trend: escalating tax rates are eating into profits, forcing many businesses to close or scale back operations. Over the past few years, tax rates in Pakistan have significantly increased, placing a substantial burden on the business sector. To keep their doors open, many companies have turned to bank financing. However, with the Karachi Interbank Offered Rate (KIBOR) hovering around 22% as of mid-2024, the cost of borrowing has become prohibitively expensive, leaving businesses financially crippled.

This high KIBOR rate, which serves as a benchmark for lending, exacerbates the financial struggles of businesses already contending with double-digit inflation. According to the State Bank of Pakistan, inflation surged past 24% in 2023, making it increasingly difficult for industries to generate the revenue needed to cover borrowing costs and maintain profitability.

Electricity tariffs for the industrial sector have also reached unprecedented levels. As of 2024, industrial users are paying upwards of Rs 50 per unit, with some variations depending on the region. This sharp increase in energy costs has sent operational expenses soaring, placing an additional strain on businesses. A recent survey by the Karachi Chamber of Commerce and Industry (KCCI) indicates that

more than 30% of manufacturing units have either shut down or postponed expansion plans, citing the unsustainable costs of financing and electricity as primary reasons.

Moreover, the business environment is further strained by rising import and export duties. The current duty on certain imports stands at around 20%, while export duties and other associated taxes are compounding the cost of doing business. The general sales tax (GST), currently at 18%, further erodes profit margins, particularly in an economy where operational costs are already inflated.

The Pakistan Institute of Development Economics (PIDE) has repeatedly warned that Pakistan is trapped in a cycle of increasing taxes without adequately considering the impact on investment and economic growth. Studies suggest that while governments globally often rely on strategic debt to finance development, Pakistani businesses find themselves burdened by what essentially amounts to hidden taxes debt repayments that stifle their ability to reinvest and expand.

To foster business growth and attract new investment, Pakistan urgently needs comprehensive tax reform. Lowering the tax burden on businesses could stimulate economic activity, allowing companies to grow, create jobs, and contribute more robustly to the economy. Additionally, targeted financial support and incentives are crucial to restoring investor confidence and positioning Pakistan as a competitive market for both domestic and international investors.

The tax nightmare that haunts Pakistani businesses is not merely a psychological burden but a reflection of severe economic challenges. By addressing these issues through comprehensive tax reform and supportive economic policies, Pakistan has the opportunity to turn this nightmare into a chance for revitalization. The time for change is now, and the business community's survival depends on it.

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