

Scenario 261

NO-CONFIDENCE MOVE [NCM] (2022)

[SUMMARY: On 8th March 2022, most opposition parties in Pakistani parliament submitted a motion of no confidence against Imran Khan to the National Assembly's secretariat. On 27th March 2022, PM Khan waved a diplomatic cypher from US in the public, claiming that it demands to remove Khan's government in a coup. The matter was referred to the court of law because the PDM government held that the diplomatic relations with US had come on stake. On 1st April 2022, Prime Minister Khan announced that in context of the no-confidence motion against him in the National Assembly, the three options were discussed with 'establishment' to choose from viz: "resignation, no-confidence [vote] or elections". On 3rd April 2022, President Arif Alvi dissolved the National Assembly of Pakistan on Khan's advice, after the Deputy Speaker of the National Assembly rejected and set-aside the motion of no confidence; this move would have required elections to the National Assembly to be held within 90 days. On 10th April 2022, after a Supreme Court ruling (of 7th April 2022) that the no-confidence motion was illegally rejected, a no-confidence vote was conducted and Mr Khan was ousted from office, becoming the first prime minister in Pakistan to be removed from office by a vote of no confidence. Mr Khan claimed the US was behind his removal because he conducted an independent foreign policy and had friendly relations with China and Russia. There was an acute law & order situation on his removal and protests erupted in the whole country.... see the details.]

NO-CONFIDENCE MOVE [NCM] DEPOSITED:

On 8th March 2022; the joint opposition (labelled as the PDM) comprising PMLN and PPP including Fazlur Rehman's Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam [JUIF] and other smaller parties, introduced a no-trust motion in the parliament.

A day earlier, legal minds of opposition parties [PDM] had put forth input on the prospects of the ambitious vote of no-confidence against Prime Minister Imran Khan. A high-level meeting of the opposition leaders in this regard was held in Islamabad; prominent lawyers were also in attendance. The law experts fed the opposition leaders with all legal possible aspects and requirements of the no-confidence motion in the National Assembly. A draft of motion was also prepared in that hi-meeting. At that moment the PDM lacked sufficient votes - 172 in the 342-member National Assembly, to de-seat the prime minister were needed. But PM Khan had two political vulnerabilities that allowed the opposition measure to pick up support.

Firstly, **rifts within Khan's own party [PTI]** had widened; a sizeable number of parliamentarians who had joined the PTI after leaving their original parties intended to join them again. The PMLN, which retained its large base, appeared to have gained ground in its traditional stronghold Punjab, the country's most populous province with the largest number of

parliamentary seats AND where PM Khan's handpicked chief minister, Usman Buzdar, had zero acceptance amongst voters and the respective MPAs.

Secondly: **Rising inflation** during the last few months, in fact after-effects of Covid-19 the world over, was made a trap for PM Khan through street protests and Pakistani media made it hype. **Trap in the sense that during subsequent 16-months rule of PMLN with PM Shahbaz Sharif in saddles, the inflation was THREE TIMES multiplied.** But as PM Khan headed a coalition government with a razor-thin majority in the centre, the PTI government needed to keep key partners, the Sindh-based *Muttahida Qaumi Movement-Pakistan* [MQM-P], the Baluchistan-based *Baluchistan Awami Party* [BAP] and the Punjab-based Pakistan Muslim League-Quaid-e-Azam [PMLQ] intact, but it couldn't.

However, PTI leaders and federal ministers vowed to thwart the opposition's attempt to oust Prime Minister Imran Khan through that motion. In a statement, Foreign Minister Shah Mahmood Qureshi said filing the no-trust motion was the opposition parties' constitutional right BUT the PTI along with its coalition partners would defeat the opponents in **political battles.**

On 10th March 2022: Supreme Court Bar Association [SCBA] said that the no-confidence motion filed by the opposition against Prime Minister Imran Khan was in accordance with the Pakistani Constitution. The SCBA body was closely monitoring the rather fragile political situation of the country, and was valid in accordance with **Article 95 – 'which states that the NA was constitutionally bound to summon the meeting of Assembly after the expiry of 3 days and not later than 7 days, after the receipt of any such requisition'.**

Next day, the PTI's federal ministers suggested that the matter should be wrapped up before the **session of the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation** (OIC) in the federal capital. However, most ministers asked National Assembly Speaker Asad Qaiser to convene a session of the lower house of parliament for this purpose within a week; also, suggested that voting should be held a week after three days of debate. The ministers were of the view that the wrapping up of the no-trust motion before the OIC session would be major victory for the PTI government.

Federal Minister for Planning and Development Asad Umar claimed that Pakistan Muslim League-Q (PMLQ) and Mutahida Qaumi Movement-Pakistan (MQM-P) were both supporting the PTI government and leaders of both the parties had given clear statements in this regard; and that coalition partners having issues with PTI leadership were **mere speculations.**

On 11th March 2022; the tensions that had been simmering since the opposition deposited its no-confidence resolution against Prime Minister Imran Khan boiled over within 3 days when a heavy contingent of police raided the Parliament Lodges to expel members of the **Ansarul Islam** — a uniformed force of the JUI-F — who were invited in Islamabad by Maulana Fazlur Rehman to provide security to opposition lawmakers.

[On 24th October 2019; Interior ministry had notified ban on JUI-F's that 'militant wing'; the federal cabinet had approved a summary seeking a ban on Ansar-ul-Islam. The interior ministry on 10th March 2022 issued a notification announcing a ban on the "militant wing" of the JUI-F. The banning of Ansar-ul-Islam, which the ministry referred to as a **"private militia / Razakar Force of the JUI-F"**, came days before the Maulana Fazlur Rehman-led party was slated to lead an anti-government 'Azadi March'.

According to the notification, the federal government had *"reasons to believe that Ansar-ul-Islam was capable of functioning as a military organisation, in violation of the prohibition contained in Article 256 of the Constitution"*. The ban was imposed af-

ter approval by the federal government and obtaining the consent from all four provincial governments under Article 146(1) of the Constitution.

Through that notification, the federal government / the Ministry of Interior "entrusted the provincial governments the power to take appropriate actions under Section 2 of the Private Military Organisations (Abolition and Prohibition) Act 1974, against Ansarul-Islam".

The authority included, among others, "*the power to abolish / ban the said organisation and take further steps against them on ground*" in order to complete the action, the notice said. The JUI-F had challenged the said ban on *Insar ul Islam* in the Islamabad High Court (IHC) then. However, on 29th October 2019, the IHC Chief Justice Athar Minallah observed that the federal government's notification of a ban on Ansar-ul-Islam — a subsidiary of Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam-Fazl (JUI-F) — was infructuous.]

At least four legislators, along with two dozen *Ansarul Islam* volunteers, were arrested during the operation. A couple of legislators also courted arrest in protest over the police action at the parliamentarians' lodges; all the arrested persons were shifted to the police premises for further action.

Earlier on that day, JUI-F lawmaker Maulana Salahuddin Ayyubi reached the lodges with a few dozen motorcycle-riding volunteers. Some of the volunteers accompanied Maulana Ayyubi, while others gathered outside the main gate. Images of their presence outside the lodges aired on news channels caught the attention of authorities, who asked the Capital Police Chief to remove them from the premises.

In response, a large contingent of Police force, consisting of an anti-riot unit, police commandos, the Counter Terrorism Department and Anti-Terrorism Force along with prison vans reached the Parliament Lodges under command of the DIG and SSP Operations. All volunteers then moved to MNA Ayyubi's Lodge (A-401) and locked the door. Senior police officers asked them to surrender, but they refused; police cordoned off the premises and blocked all roads leading to the lodges. At around 8pm, the police party broke down the door of the MNA's flat, which led to a physical confrontation between police, legislators and the *Ansarul Islam* volunteers and during the confrontation a number of MNAs and volunteers sustained injuries. Police succeeded in arresting around two dozen volunteers, and four legislators (one Senator and three MNAs), who were dragged and bundled into police vehicles.

In a late-night press conference following the brawl at Parliament Lodges, Interior Minister Sheikh Rashid Ahmed said that all the private militias had been dissolved in 2019. He claimed police did not arrest any MNAs. He claimed that only 19 members of the JUI-F's private militia were in police custody, and he also issued a warning to those who were mobilizing in protest at Maulana Fazlur Rehman's call.

Worth noting was that the interior ministry had, in 2019, 'abolished' the *Ansarul Islam* after saying that they were 'capable of functioning as a military organisation' – BUT an order of the High Court (IHC) was also there – for media, it was all confusing.

On 14th March 2022: The joint opposition [PDM] held a consultative group to chalk out an effective strategy to make its no-confidence motion successful; the leadership had met over dinner at the residence of the PMLN president Shahbaz Sharif. Pakistan Democratic Movement (PDM) and JUI-F Chief Maulana Fazlur Rehman, PPP Chairman Bilawal Zardari, former president and PPP co-chairman Asif Ali Zardari, Balochistan National Party (BNP) Sardar Akhtar Mengal and other opposition leaders were in attendance. The meeting formulated a strategy to peel off allies of the ruling coalition to muster the required numerical backing to topple the PTI's premier from crest.

A huge dent was seen when **PTI Central Punjab President** Imtiaz Safdar Warraich rejoined the PPP on the same day; the development came ahead of vote on the no-confidence motion moved by the PDM. Next day, on 15th March 2022; PM Imran Khan reviewed his legal and political options in order to foil the opposition's no-confidence motion. Attorney General for Pakistan (AGP) Khalid Javed Khan briefed him on the process of no-confidence vote as well as the available legal options as to how the opposition's move could be handled. One PTI minister held:

*"Even the government functionaries are approaching the '**powerful circles**' to get their assistance for the allied parties' support. When the allies will announce their support for the government then the disgruntled MNAs will reconsider their position. The situation can change in favour of the (PTI) government in the next 48 hours."*

PM Imran Khan was holding meetings with the leadership of the coalition partners for their support. Likewise, the premier was also avoiding attacks on the opposition leadership as he used to do in his speeches till couple of days ago. On the other hand, **one section within the government was contacting the opposition leaders for 'reconciliation'**; the government was willing to give some concessions to the opposition in case their leadership agreed to withdraw the no-confidence motion. However, PMLN Punjab President Rana Sanaullah ruled out any dialogue with the PTI govt in the said political situation; suggesting that PM Imran should resign first.

PDM OFFERED POWER SHARING FORMULA:

Meanwhile, the anti-government alliance, PDM, along with major opposition party PPP devised a prospective '**power-sharing formula**' if no-confidence motion succeeded both at Centre and in Punjab. Under the power-sharing model, PMLQ senior leader Pervaiz Elahi could get the portfolio of Punjab chief minister while the size of provincial cabinet would be 'very low' (... as of then, the Punjab cabinet consisted of 38 ministers, four advisers and four special assistants – headed by CM Buzdar).

The PMLN lawmaker was to be elected as Punjab Assembly Speaker and PPP's Qamar Zaman Kaira's name was proposed for the slot of province's governor. Most of the ministries in the Punjab cabinet were to go with PMLN MPAs while PPP and PMLQ were to get share under the proposed power-sharing deal. Meanwhile, the ticket of PMLN had become a "**hot cake**" amid fluid political situation. PDM's next move was worked out - that after the no-confidence motion against PM Imran Khan and NA speaker Asad Qaiser, the opposition was seeking to turn its gun towards President Arif Alvi; former president Asif Ali Zardari was being considered to replace Mr Alvi.

A night earlier, four MPAs of the PTI in Punjab Assembly met with the PMLN leadership and assured them of their support and more than 18 MPAs belonging to the three divisions of South Punjab had also agreed to support the PDM. However, the then Speaker Punjab Assembly Ch Pervaiz Elahi, belonging to the PMLQ, announced that a consensus had been reached with the PTI government that the (then) assemblies would complete their terms.

The PMLQ, a party that was being speculated to be an '**at-risk ally**' of the ruling PTI, announced the decision after a two-day consultative meeting on the ongoing political situation developed following the PDM had submitted a no-confidence motion. PTI leadership announced that the party had made its decision and final consultation was underway with other coalition partners as they were working together.

In his interaction with the media after the meeting with PM Khan, Ch Pervaiz Elahi said that the allies of the PTI-govt — PMLQ, MQMP and the BAP — were working together. But, the statement regarding the completion of the assemblies did not win the PMLN and PPP's approval. **Both the major opposition parties had already thrown their weight behind**

fresh elections whereas, Mr Elahi's statement suggested that the change might only be witnessed in the Centre, in case the no-trust motion was successfully executed. A top legal mind of the PDM had also suggested its leadership to obtain affidavits from the turn-coat PTI MNAs, who were supporting the no confidence move. He informed that other than allies parties MNAs, the opposition had support of 182 MNAs against PM Imran Khan. A PTI leader had also admitted that the biggest dilemma for the incumbent PTI government was that it had **lost support from the media** (also) in that situation; in the media nobody condemned those who were elected on PTI tickets and later planned to vote against their prime minister Khan.

Senate Chairman Sadiq Sanjrani had vowed to support PM Imran Khan in his personal capacity on the issue of no-trust vote; saying that his party – the Balochistan Awami Party (BAP) – had not taken any decision on the no-confidence motion yet. Meanwhile, PMLN Senior Vice President and the former premier Shahid Khaqan Abbasi maintained that some of their lawmakers had received notices from the National Accountability Bureau (NAB) since the opposition had filed a requisition for a no-confidence motion against the government - "**It is not NAB chairman's [Justice (retd) Javed Iqbal] job to interfere in the no-trust move.**"

DISSIDENT PTI MNAs AT SINDH HOUSE:

On 16th March 2022; the Pakistan Bar Council – the apex body of the lawyers in the country – convened a meeting of all the lawyers' bodies to discuss the then prevailing political situation. Next day, on 17th March 2022: Several ruling PTI lawmakers announced that they would not follow the party line in the National Assembly ahead of the voting on the no-confidence motion against their Prime Minister Imran Khan; **at least 24 MNAs were staying at the Sindh House in Islamabad** at that moment. Raja Riaz, a member of estranged PTI faction known as the Jahangir Tareen group, claimed that they moved to the Sindh House due to "*security concerns after police stormed parliament lodges and tortured their lawmakers*".

On 18th March 2022: The ruling PTI lawmakers and workers stormed the Sindh House in Islamabad in protest against the dissident members of the ruling party, who were staying inside the building. The PTI legislatures and workers forcibly entered the building located in the Red Zone of the federal capital ahead of the PDM's no-trust motion against PM Imran Khan. They were seen knocking down the Sindh House gate and shouting slogans while holding Lotas (*spouted globulars*) in their hands to symbolise turncoats.

On the same day, on the request of the opposition leaders, the NA informed the MNAs about the no-confidence motion against PM Imran Khan; it was the requirement under the rules and regulations of the National Assembly; Article 95 of the Constitution was referred. The opposition leaders (PDM) once more urged PM Imran Khan to step down voluntarily as (apparently) he had **lost the majority** in the NA after several ruling party lawmakers announced that they would not follow the party line in the no-trust vote against the premier.

Next day, on 19th March 2022, PTI issued show-cause notices [SCNs] to dissident lawmakers for joining the opposition parties. In the notices, the ruling party reminded the dissidents that they were bound to follow the directions issued by the PTI as its member. It asked the lawmakers to explain within seven days about giving the impression that they were about to leave the party. The SCNs read as:

"It is abundantly clear from the provisions of Article 63-A(1) that you are bound to follow the directions issued by PTI as you are a member... and continue to be bound to follow the directions..."

The opposition parties unanimously said that Speaker NA, Asad Qaiser, had violated the Constitution by not calling the assembly session within the 14-days period; saying the failure to convene the session by 22nd March was an unconstitutional move and warranted punishment under Article 6 of the Constitution (high treason). They accused PTI's Speaker of abrogating the Constitution by summoning the session on 25th March 2022, instead of 22nd instant. The NA Speaker had to take shelter saying that: '**... due to renovations at the Parliament House ahead of the OIC moot, no suitable place was available to hold the session before 24th March**'.

An open show of dissent: Several dissident MNAs, including Raja Riaz, Malik Nawab Sher Waseer, Noor Alam Khan and Basit Bukhari from the ruling PTI came out open and were found staying at the Sindh House in Islamabad; with Raja Riaz and Malik Nawab Sher Waseer saying they would vote on the no-confidence motion tabled against PM Imran Khan in '**accordance with their conscience**' – **was a mockery of consciousness in deed**. That day's media & TV footage also showed another MNA named Wajiha Qamar flying over nowhere — staying at the facility, giving a clear indication which side they would be tilting towards in the upcoming vote that was to decide the fate of Prime Minister Imran Khan.

Raja Riaz, who was a member of the Jahangir Tareen group, spoke to **Geo News** senior anchor Hamid Mir and said there were around 24 PTI lawmakers staying at the Sindh House, citing fears of government action against them similar to the 10th March raid on JUI-F's militia by police on Parliament Lodges. Referring to the media news dated 17th March 2022, he had earlier said that:

"If PM Imran Khan gives the guarantee that no police action would be taken against the MNAs irrespective of their decision regarding the vote, he is ready to move to Parliament Lodges from the Sindh House. All media and the nation know that the police attacked the lodges and our opposition MNA was tortured and taken to the police station. After that, we — those who had been dissenting for a long time against inflation, corruption, the SAPMs and the lawlessness, and had been raising our voice in front of Khan sahib — felt that the incident that happened in the Lodges could also happen with us, and this is why we are here."

When asked by the media persons if he (Raja Riaz) had taken Rs:200 million to switch allegiance, Riaz chuckled and denied. Another PTI MNA, Noor Alam Khan was disappointed to know of allegations being levelled against dissident lawmakers, saying: *"When we came to Imran Khan sahib and had voted for him, were we given Rs:200m then? When we voted for the speaker, did we get 200 million then?"*

Another MNA Dr Ramesh Kumar Vankwani revealed two men from the PTI recently came to the Lodges and accused him of **being a traitor to the party** and even threatened to vandalise his cars. Then he approached Sindh CM Murad Ali Shah through someone and told him that I wanted a room at Sindh House. He added that:

"When I came here, I saw a completely different environment. There are around 24 MNAs ... most are joining the PMLN, two to three are joining the PMLQ, and two to three are going elsewhere. Three federal ministers have also left [the PTI]."

A day earlier, the PTI government had claimed the opposition had detained some ruling party lawmakers at Sindh House ahead of the vote after a statement by Punjab Assembly Speaker Ch Parvez Elahi that around a dozen MNAs belonging to the PTI had '**gone missing**'. Mr Khan said in a public address that opposition leaders were sitting in Sindh House with '**heaps of money to purchase loyalties of treasury lawmakers**' and had asked the Election Commission to take action against the alleged horse-trading.

A video clip had gone viral on notable media TVs and social media showing some of those dissident MNAs counting 'bundles of currency notes' in their hands and lying on the table in

front of them. At the same time, PPP leader Faisal Karim Kundi had earlier confirmed the stay of some lawmakers at Sindh House during a press conference with PPP MNA Shazia Marri – saying that '*.... MNAs are being kept there as they feared they could be kidnapped ahead of the no-trust vote.*'

PPP's Bilawal Zardari also claimed that MNAs had been '*threatened with violence, arrests and dire consequences if they participated in the no-confidence vote. Their lives, liberty and family are under threat. MNAs will take any and all means for their own protection against this fascist regime.*'

On 20th March 2022: The opposition (PDM) considered to launch the testing of its '**Plan-B**' in case its '**Plan-A**' - the ouster of the prime minister through no-confidence motion - fell short of achieving the target. As per the planned strategy to make the said no-trust move a success, the opposition also devised a '**Plan-C**' to keep the momentum going had the intended results not attained timely. Federal Minister for Interior Sheikh Rashid said the PTI government would not obstruct anyone from casting their vote on the no-confidence motion tabled in the National Assembly; the ruling PTI would not resort to extra-constitutional measures to sway the results of the motion of no-trust against PM Imran Khan.

Prime Minister Imran Khan maintained that he would rather give up his government than **compromising on his conscience**. Out of sheer frustration, the premier even urged the dissident PTI lawmakers to return to the ruling party's fold, saying that he was ready to forgive them like a compassionate father. An embattled premier said while addressing a public crowd in Dargai:

"A decisive moment has arrived in the country's history -- whether you [the nation] choose 'bandits' or those striving to end the menace of corruption in the country."

NA speaker Asad Qaiser, on 23rd March 2022, vowed to fulfil his constitutional obligations through an official Twitter message:

"I, as the custodian of the National Assembly of Pakistan, will fulfil my constitutional obligations and will proceed in accordance with Article 95 of the Constitution & rule 37 of the Rules of Procedure and Conduct of Business in the National Assembly 2007."

National Assembly Speaker Asad Qaiser summoned the session of the National Assembly for 25th March 2022 at 11 am at the request of the opposition parties. The decision to summon the session by the assembly speaker came a day after the joint opposition lashed out at the PTI government for alleged attempts to delay the crucial session under the guise of the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) moot in Islamabad on March 22-23, 2022. The opposition leader and PPP Chief Bilawal Zardari had even threatened to disrupt the session by staging a sit-in in front of the assembly.

On 25th March 2022: The session began with the recitation of the Holy Quran and prayers for three deceased members; then the speaker announced that it would be adjourned in light of the parliamentary convention. The NA Speaker Asad Qaiser adjourned the proceedings of the much-anticipated session till 28th March instant without tabling the said PDM's no-confidence motion. This move irked the opposition parties to issue a warning to the speaker that any further delay in tabling the motion would lead to protest.

[In Pakistan, it has been the parliamentary convention that the first sitting after the death of an MNA is limited to prayers for the soul of the departed and tributes other lawmakers wish to pay them. According to the tradition, the agenda is deferred to the next day when a member of the lower house had passed away.]

Next day, on 26th March 2022, the Leader of the Opposition Shahbaz Sharif wrote a letter to National Assembly Speaker Asad Qaiser, expressing reservations on the government's conduct, particularly the delay in convening the NCM session of the lower house. He highlighted that the motion was submitted on 8th March and the requisition was also submitted on the same day, adding that the notices for the motion could have been sent immediately. But that didn't happen, rather some members of the parliament received a copy of the notice on 19th March; he regretted.

Meanwhile, in its ramped-up efforts to salvage the vanishing support to survive the no-confidence-motion, PTI leaders held crucial meetings with PMLQ and MQM-P; a delegation led by federal ministers Shah Mahmood Qureshi and Pervez Khattak met with PMLQ leader and Speaker Punjab Assembly Ch Pervaiz Elahi to discuss the no-trust move. However, the efforts of the PTI government negotiation committee went in vain because the PMLQ leadership left the decision to vote on the no-confidence motion for the last day.

MR KHAN's 'CYPHER-RALLY' & AFTER:

On 27th March 2022: Thousands of PTI supporters flocked to the federal capital to attend PM Imran Khan's rally in backdrop of the **no confidence motion** (NCM). In his two-hour-long marathon speech at a sparkly, booming show in Islamabad – a cradle of his political movement from the 'container days' – PM Khan's appearance seemed to be a fiery effort to lean into the definitive agenda points of the PTI.

[More details of that day's activity are available in **CYPHER CASE Scenario** separately]

PM Imran Khan was in high trouble then. To counteract the threat posed by party dissidents, the PTI government approached the Supreme Court of Pakistan [SC] through a presidential petition, which, among other questions, asked the court if there could be a lifetime disqualification from legislative office for party defectors under Article 63-A of the Constitution, which de-seats a parliamentarian for violating party directives. That step couldn't help Mr Khan either. As both the joint opposition and the government escalated their efforts to woo the PTI's coalition partners, electoral calculations once again came into play. Perceiving the PMLN and PPP as apparently better placed than PTI in the forthcoming general elections, the BAP was the first to join the ranks of the opposition, followed by MQM-P.

On 28th March 2022; the much-anticipated session of the NA to deliberate on the no-confidence motion was held amidst high uproar and noise; after much excitement, the no-confidence motion was finally tabled in the NA against the sitting PM Imran Khan. Before the tabling of the motion, the NA Deputy Speaker Qasim Suri, who was presiding over the session, asked the lawmakers in favour of the motion to rise so that the count could be made. Within minutes, the deputy speaker announced that a total of 161 members of the opposition parties were present in the assembly and, thus, the leave for presenting the motion against the prime minister was granted.

As Mr Shahbaz Sharif stood up to present the motion, the treasury benches resorted to name-calling and continued making noise; some constantly shouted '**cherry blossom**' while other PTI lawmakers kept calling the opposition members '**chor**'(thieves). Nevertheless, the opposition leader presented the motion amid hue and cry made by the PTI lawmakers and desk-thumping from the opposition members.

The day the no-trust vote was scheduled, the opposition was confident it no longer needed PTI dissidents to send Mr Khan home. Imran Khan played his '**trump card**' then. A day before, he addressed a rally in Islamabad that he dubbed *Amr Bil Maroof* (enjoining what is good and forbidding what is wrong – an Islamic order). While continuing to accuse the opposition of buying the loyalty of PTI dissidents, he also warned of a '**foreign conspiracy**'

through CYPHER DRAMA behind its efforts to remove him. The general populace immediately picked up that Mr Khan was referring it to the US interference. Khan accused the opposition parties of receiving foreign funds and conspiring at the behest of a foreign power to oust him and the PTI government.

Imran Khan claimed that his visit to Moscow in February 2022, on the day Russia's attack on Ukraine took start – along with his **opposition to the US war in Afghanistan** {ref: [Report no: 320](#) dated 4th February 2022 available at Crisisgroup.org} – explains US attempts to remove him. Khan also insisted that Pakistan's military leadership agreed the US was trying to oust his government, Mr Khan claimed as evidence a '**threat letter**', it was a diplomatic cable following his 7th March meeting with the US assistant secretary of state for South and Central Asia. The Biden administration denied any such intention but President Vladimir Putin's government in Moscow backed Khan's allegations.

*{The said threat letter is separately dealt with as **CYPHER CASE** in the next book}*

No-Trust Motion against CM Buzdar: On the same day of 28th March 2022, PMLN and PPP lawmakers submitted a no-trust motion against Punjab Chief Minister Usman Buzdar, requesting the Punjab Assembly speaker to summon a session on it. The requisition was deposited with the Punjab Assembly Secretariat, and was addressed to Speaker Punjab Assembly Chaudhary Pervaiz Elahi. A total of 127 lawmakers, including PPP and PMLN MPAs, had signed that no-trust motion against CM Buzdar.

The following day, **CM Buzdar tendered his resignation** to Prime Minister Imran Khan vowing that he would always stand firmly with Imran Khan to fulfil the promise of '**Naya Pakistan**'. It was alleged by media gurus that CM Buzdar had resigned on the will and instructions of Imran Khan to make a way for Ch Pervaiz Elahi.

Same day, following CM Usman Buzdar's resignation, Premier Imran offered the Punjab chief minister's slot to PMLQ leader Ch Pervaiz Elahi, the incumbent provincial assembly speaker. The official statement from the PMLQ quoted the premier as saying during the meeting: '**I have taken the resignation from Usman Buzdar and I congratulate Ch Pervaiz Elahi for being nominated from my party's side as the chief minister of Punjab.**' In return, Elahi thanked PM Khan for entrusting him with the post of the chief minister, saying he would remain trustworthy.

On 29th March 2022: As the threat of losing his seat of power edged closer, PM Imran Khan formally barred lawmakers from the ruling PTI from attending the National Assembly session on the day of voting -- likely to be held in the first week of April then. The premier issued the directives as the leader of the parliamentary party of PTI, a day after the no-confidence motion was tabled in the lower house of parliament against him. '*No member of the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf shall attend or make himself / herself available at the time and day of voting on the resolution of No-Confidence,*' said a communiqué issued by the PTI.

Surprisingly, following the nomination of Ch Pervaiz Elahi, estranged PMLQ leader Tariq Bashir Cheema, who stepped down as minister for housing AND reiterated that he would support the no-trust motion against PM Imran Khan filed by the joint opposition in National Assembly. The deal reportedly prompted a rift within the party with Cheema revolting against the decision and announcing to vote against PM Imran Khan. Cheema also resigned from the federal cabinet, *giving rise to speculations regarding a rift within the family - Chaudhrays of Gujrat.*

Next day, on 30th March 2022, as the opposition focussed its guns on PM Imran Khan ahead of the no-confidence vote, the political earth of the country shook and seemed to tilt toward the opposition after the ruling party apparently lost its majority in the National Assembly following a pull-out of its key allies. The situation had come about in the wake of the MQMP's

seven members crossing over to the opposition's side after burning the midnight oil with the joint opposition and hammering out an agreement in the microscopic hours of the day.

Prime Minister Khan continued with his mantra that the opposition's no-confidence motion against him '**is a huge foreign conspiracy against Pakistan**' but emphasised that he could not name the country which sent the 'threatening letter (Cypher)' because its results would not be good for the country. Khan repeated that, as per the letter, Pakistan would face serious consequences if the no-confidence motion failed, adding that the language of the letter was extremely harsh and that the no-trust motion had been mentioned in it several times.

The details about the prime minister's remarks had emerged after he convened an urgent meeting of federal cabinet to discuss the issue of an international conspiracy to topple his government through a secret letter that he waved in his public rally in Islamabad on 27th March 2022. The said letter was sent by former Pakistani ambassador to the United States, Asad Majeed after having talks with the US Assistant Secretary of State for South Asia.

NATIONAL ASSEMBLY DISSOLVED...:

On 3rd April 2022: Pakistan's political turmoil deepened when Prime Minister Imran Khan avoided the said attempt to oust him ***and sought fresh elections after dissolving the parliament.*** The deputy speaker of parliament, Qasim Suri of the PTI, blocked the said opposition no-confidence motion that Khan had widely been expected to lose, ***ruling it was part of a foreign conspiracy and unconstitutional.*** Deputy Speaker Suri had said:

"No foreign power has the right to topple an elected government under any conspiracy. So, I rule the no-confidence resolution as against the national integrity and sovereignty, and I... disallow the no-confidence resolution."

That order of the Deputy Speaker (apparently) thwarted the opposition's attempt to come to power, and set up a potential legal showdown over the Constitution in the country. Opposition leader Shahbaz Sharif called the blocking of the vote '***nothing short of high treason***' and posted on Twitter there would be consequences for '***blatant & brazen violation of the Constitution***' and vowed to approach the Supreme Court expecting it to uphold the Constitution. Before, Shahbaz Sharif's petition, the CJP Bandial had announced to take up the issue as suo-moto case.

Meanwhile, the Deputy Attorney General of Pakistan Raja Khalid, the top prosecutor, resigned, calling the government's dissolving of parliament unconstitutional. '*What has happened can only be expected in the rule of a dictator,*' he told local media.

Immediately after, PM Khan lost his majority in parliament when allies quit his coalition government and he suffered a spate of defections within his PTI. The media held that Khan was ***as good as gone***, but he urged his supporters to come out in the streets ahead of the planned vote. On the streets of the capital Islamabad, there was a heavy police and paramilitary presence, with shipping containers used to block off roads at every crossing. Police were seen detaining three supporters of Khan's PTI outside the parliament, but the paths and roads were calm otherwise.

Soon after the speaker ended the session, Pakistani President Arif Alvi, acting on the prime minister's advice, dissolved the parliament and called fresh elections in 90 days, citing relevant constitution provisions. Mr Khan also dissolved his Cabinet – a political crisis had taken start. All eyes were set on the outcome of the hearing in Pakistan's highest court. Pakistan's military spokesman, Maj-Gen Babar Iftikhar, told foreign media that the military had nothing to do with the political turmoil, dismissing widespread speculation that a military intervention was imminent.

On 4th April 2022, the Supreme Court of Pakistan [SCP], giving priority to the constitutional crisis in the country, took up the *suo-moto* case of Dy Speaker Qasim Suri's ruling. Immediately ***it was declared by the apex court that any directions given by the president and prime minister would be subject to the court's orders***. An urgent hearing started into opposition allegations - the blocking of a no-confidence vote against PM Khan was generally taken as violation of the country's constitution; see the editorial of the DAILY EXPRESS TRIBUNE of 4th April 2022:

"This is a good omen. It is good to see, at least, that the executive, the parliament, and the judiciary are all claiming their due constitutional space and asserting their writ. It is a worthy achievement for the people of Pakistan who awe and aspire for representative rule. One hopes this constitutional hiccup too would be a passing reference in our checkered politics, and institutions will triumph over personalized whims and wishes."

Arif Alvi, largely a ceremonial president in Pakistan, had used his constitutional authority to allow Khan to work as an interim Chief Executive until a caretaker prime minister was appointed to supervise the general election. Also, that President Alvi wrote to both Mr Khan and Shahbaz Sharif, asking them to put forward names for a caretaker prime minister within three days. For his part, Khan proposed Monday the name of Pakistan's former chief justice, Gulzar Ahmed, to be the caretaker prime minister.

Gareth Price, senior research fellow in ***the Asia Pacific program at London***, questioned Mr Khan's claims, that the United States was behind the no-confidence vote against him:

"While US criticism of Khan's fence-sitting regarding Ukraine and general anti-Americanism is eminently plausible, a call for regime change, as Khan claimed, seems more far-fetched. A court ruling on whether or not the move (that blocked the no-trust vote) is legal is imminent. Either way, recent events have done little to resolve political polarization. Like many populists, Khan seems happy to conflate himself with Pakistan, describing his opponents as dacoits (bandits) and traitors."

SUPREME COURT DISCARDED DY SPEAKER'S RULING:

On 7th April 2022: Pakistan's Supreme Court [SCP] set aside the said ruling of Mr Qasim Suri, the Dy Speaker of the national assembly, that had blocked an opposition-led vote of no confidence against Prime Minister Imran Khan. The provocative and controversial ruling of 3rd April 2022 had led to the dissolution of the National Assembly, the lower house of parliament, by President Arif Alvi, acting on Khan's advice. The president had also called for fresh elections in 90 days and appointed Khan as the interim Chief Executive after the prime minister dissolved his Cabinet.

The five-judge panel of the top court led by Chief Justice of Pakistan [CJP] Umar Ata Bandial, however, unanimously declared as unconstitutional all the steps stemming from the deputy speaker's ruling, which had outlawed the no-confidence vote as having been sponsored by a **'foreign power'**, the United States, it was later named openly. The decision on the issue came after four days of hearings by the top court. The short judicial order declared:

".... the ruling to be contrary to the Constitution and the law and of no legal effect, and the same are hereby set aside. The advice tendered by the Prime Minister ... to the President to dissolve the Assembly was contrary to the Constitution and of no legal effect.

It is declared that all actions initiated for purposes of holding a general election to elect a new assembly – including but not limited to the appointment of a caretaker prime minister and cabinet – are of no legal effect and are hereby quashed.”

The verdict also restored Mr Khan as the prime minister and his Cabinet as well, ordering the session of the National Assembly to reconvene Saturday morning (the 9th April 2022) to reorganize the vote of no confidence to determine the fate of the embattled prime minister. It added that: ***“if the no-confidence resolution is successful then the assembly shall forthwith, and in its present session, proceed to elect a Prime Minister.”***

Earlier on that day, the 7th April 2022, the fourth day of hearings, Khan’s lawyers defended the controversial move and said the Supreme Court did not have jurisdiction to intervene in parliamentary affairs. The standoff threw the country of 240 million people into a full-blown constitutional crisis, and sent its currency to all-time lows against the dollar on that occasion of judgment. *‘As [the] dollar continues to soar, a massive economic meltdown is staring the country in the face,’* Shahbaz Sharif, who was to replace Mr Khan as prime minister, said.

Mr Khan had lost the majority in the 342-member house in the run-up to the said no-confidence vote after lawmakers from his ruling party defected and main coalition partners switched sides and joined the opposition. Khan had repeatedly alleged that the United States conspired with the opposition to topple his government to punish him for his recent visit to Russia and for not supporting the West in condemning President Vladimir Putin’s war on Ukraine. Pakistani opposition leaders had ridiculed the charges, and Washington had vehemently rejected them. Mr Khan’s attorneys had defended his actions as being in line with the constitution during their arguments before the Supreme Court – but of no avail. Opposition leaders and human rights activists declared the outcome of the legal proceedings as a landmark judgment – ***‘It is not the political parties or parliament that won or lost. The constitution retained its supremacy’***.

Pakistan’s powerful military had distanced itself from the political crisis stemming from 3rd April’s controversial proceedings in parliament; in fact they had already done their assignment. ***Michael Kugelman***, an expert on South Asia affairs at the Washington-based Wilson Center, while commenting on the Supreme Court verdict, said:

“After its euphoria subsides, and assuming it wins the no-confidence vote, the current opposition won’t have it easy. It’ll face an economic mess, and it will be hounded relentlessly by an angry PTI in opposition. Can’t rule out the possibility of early elections down the road.”

The united opposition, the PDM, already had announced that Shahbaz Sharif of PMLN, would be their candidate for prime minister. The PMLN, with 83 seats, was the second-biggest party in the assembly, followed by the Pakistani Peoples Party (PPP), with 53 seats. Mr Khan called its cabinet and parliamentary party meetings for next day following the court ruling – saying:

“My message to our nation is I have always & will continue to fight for Pakistan till the last ball. The court ruling fulfilled the people’s expectations.”

PPP leader Bilawal Zardari hailed the verdict as a ***victory for democracy and the constitution.***

On 10th April 2022: The Pakistani parliament voted no confidence for Prime Minister Imran Khan in the early hours of the day (***during mid-night exactly***). A chaos ended but another was ready to raise tensions in the country’s politics. PMLN and the PPP had long insisted that his victory in the 2018 general elections was the result of military interference; a report dated 13th April 2022 at crisisgroup.org is referred.

However, beyond that shared belief, the two parties differed over ways to oppose Imran Khan's government; the PPP had been calling for a no-trust vote in the federal parliament while the PMLN hesitated, opting at times to resign from the legislature and at other times to fill the streets in protest. The Khan government brought its two rivals together by consistently targeting their top leadership, Nawaz Sharif & Mr Zardari in particular, through a flawed and defective accountability process overseen by the controversial National Accountability Bureau [NAB]. Meanwhile, public anger at the government was growing because of apparently soaring inflation and governance failures; interference in policing like the earlier governments of PMLN and PPP, deprived citizens of basic services and security. Yet when the opposition agreed on a common goal, ousting Khan through constitutional means – a no-trust vote in the parliament – it posed a far bigger threat to the survival of Imran Khan.

Pakistan has time and again witnessed Pak-Army - America alliance bringing civilian government down unconstitutionally either by soft coup or by boots on ground and by exploiting the corrupt and compromised judiciary and politicians. IK was portrayed as the only leader who tried gallantly to resist that evil nexus, but unfortunately, he was surrounded by legacy-branded and disloyal, incompetent and opportunists type politicians and administration elite, which became a big factor behind his defeat in parliament [on 10th April 2022]. Not to mention the Army top brass who has historically been subservient to US - the battle between Bajwa and IK was won by B+B [Bajwa & Biden] alliance; although a strong public opinion prevailed that ***Khan would come back stronger in with 2/3 majority and better prepared.***

However, a section of intelligentsia also kept the opinion that in the backdrop of media analytical notes the world was rapidly turning against the US in a geopolitical scenario, while China, Russia, Iran, Asia pacific countries, Africa and the Muslim world were striving to put a serious dent in US hegemony over the globe. IK had plans to gain a renewed opportunity to steer the country towards an independent foreign policy. For Imran Khan and like-minded people, there were ample important lessons from the said defeat.

Also, Mr Khan was bound to rectify the mistakes he made on the domestic front especially in Punjab, the province that mattered the most; and the lack of far-sightedness, judiciousness and know-how he displayed in dealing with Gen Bajwa's sane advice, while ignoring PTI's experienced heads & balanced approach for America. ***He could have been firm yet flexible. He chose fighting too many battles at once with no recognised primacies.*** Forgetting emotions and rhetoric in the given scenario; the intelligentsia worked out practicalities of whether the parliament could be realistically functional.

[Going back to 2007-08, by then the two-party political system had been well established for over 20 years in Pakistan, with PPP and PMLN pitched against each other; PPP - legacy of ZA Bhutto and the PMLN - legacy of Gen Zia, who had hanged ZAB. All the political parties combined except PTI making up 174 seats in the National Assembly of the country.]

Truthfully, without the PTI, no one could be the leader of the opposition in the Parliament. Could one imagine a democracy where parliament could move with no opposition party and no leader of the opposition? Nothing could be more dysfunctional and chaotic. In the then prevailing situation on 10th April 2022, with only TWO seats difference between them, the largest political party was out, meaning the combined opposition became the ruling party and no opposition; legislations thus passed were going meaningless in deed.

On another note, and on the same day, the PTI supporters protested against '***regime change***' at Hyde Park, London. They were saying:

"No Imran, No remittances; we won't send any remittances until Imran Khan comes back. Overseas Pakistanis were seen withdrawing money from Roshan Digital Account after the ouster of Imran Khan's government,

claiming they don't want their hard-earned money to end up in accounts of corrupt looters....Within few hours approximately 1.8 Billion USD were withdrawn.

Referring to daily **TheNews** dated 11th April 2022: Till two days before, the country was being pulled down by economic meltdown and bankruptcy; the Supreme Court of Pakistan [SCP] arrested the slide. The verdict immediately caused recovery of the rupee, which had hit Rs:191 against the dollar, and a rally in the stock exchange.

During the four-day debate in the SCP's hearing, at one point, signals were given for fresh elections. But the SCP evaluated the interest of the state, economy, and constraints of the Constitution, restored the 3rd April status of the National Assembly - not buying the international conspiracy narrative of the PTI govt. Neither did it show any interest in the in-camera briefing of the PTI govt, nor ordered any inquiry into rhetoric conspiracy plots.

The world media, **including Reuters**, carried stories of international conspiracy and the US money behind the NCM of the opposition. But the popular version also appeared that the interests of America, GCC countries and Pakistan were aligned in many ways, particularly with the exit of Khan's govt which allegedly abandoned Pakistan's foreign policy interests with not only the US and EU but also with the UAE, Saudi Arabia and other Arabian states.

IMRAN KHAN's TERM FINISHED:

The fact remained that the TWO BIGS in the establishment, COAS Gen Bajwa and the sitting ISI DG got angry with the PTI govt due to obvious reasons. As anchor of stability, the establishment held its centre of gravity whether it was Russia-Ukraine crisis or US-induced PTI narrative of conspiracy of balancing relations with domestic political stakeholders; it played a role. However, the new prime minister, new cabinet and the new government of Shahbaz Sharif, had the uphill task to turn around the economy, control inflation, steer Pakistan out of FATF list, attract foreign investment and thwart any Indian designs.

Imran Khan's unbridled term as prime minister of Pakistan ended unceremoniously - following weeks of high political drama and days of constitutional chaos since ending year 2021. The Supreme Court had restored the parliament that Khan had sought to disband and mandated a vote of no confidence that he sought to avoid. Imran Khan was effectively left with a ***choice: resign or be voted out of office.***

Imran Khan's political demise was rooted in twin new realities. Inside parliament, Khan's PTI had lost the support of coalition allies, denying him the majority he needed to defeat the vote of no confidence. Outside parliament, Khan appeared to lose the support of Pakistan's powerful military, which had helped him win the 2018 general election, and had recently publicly fallen out with the prime minister over senior military appointments and policy decisions – though both, the PTI and the military, had denied the claims. Within six months, as the major opposition parties, the PPP and the PMLN, ramped up their efforts to dislodge Khan, coalition allies became vocal in their dissatisfaction with him. Senator Anwaarul Haq Kakar of the Baluchistan Awami Party (BAP), a coalition ally that withdrew support for Khan in late March (2022), said:

"As far as governance was concerned, the (PTI) government had totally failed. There was disgruntlement for the past two years. The party [BAP] was not happy about its share in the federal government and the ministerial portfolio it has been allocated."

Imran Khan became the first Pakistani prime minister to be removed from office after losing a no-confidence vote in parliament.

PTI's MASS RESIGNATIONS FROM PARLIAMENT:

On 11th April 2022: The PTI decided to resign from the National Assembly, minutes before the election for the new prime minister was scheduled to take place. The decision was taken in a party's parliamentary meeting, which was chaired by Chairman Imran Khan, at the Parliament House that afternoon. The PTI's official tweet said: '***The parliamentary party has decided to resign from the assemblies against the imported government.***'

Imran Khan's PTI parliamentary party, once again, faced a split over the ***issue of resignations from National Assembly.*** While Fawad Chaudhry and Sh Rashid Ahmad said the party parliamentarians would resign en-masse after the election of prime minister (on 11th April 2022). Both they were active in pushing the PTI out of the political scene thus pressurising Imran Khan to resign from the assemblies. Shah Mehmood Qureshi said no final decision had been reached yet while Ali Muhammad Khan said ***almost 95 per cent of the party MNAs were against quitting the assemblies.*** They believed if the PTI MNAs tender resignations en-masse, the new government under Shahbaz Sharif would get an opportunity to play openly on important appointments and legislation – it was the whole truth.

In the above scenario, Khan's PTI was bound to suffer an irreparable loss. Ch Fawad, briefing the media about the PTI core committee meeting at Bani Gala, said that the PTI MNAs would start resigning from the National Assembly a day after. PTI had nominated Shah Mehmood Qureshi as the candidate for the prime ministerial slot. There were two objectives of contesting the election: one was to challenge the papers of Shahbaz Sharif, as there was Rs:16 billion corruption case against him. Also, the day he would be contesting for the prime ministerial slot, the same day he was to be indicted in that corruption case by the respective court. PTI's Fawad Chaudhry also said:

"The resignations of most of the parliamentary party members had been handed over to Imran Khan. The entire nation expected guidance from Imran Khan at this time - if we disappointed the nation, and Imran Khan did not lead a big movement, then it would be betrayal of Pakistan's politics and the Constitution."

Awami Muslim League's ex-minister Sheikh Rashid declared in categorical terms that he would not sit in the National Assembly with thieves and robbers and he was going to resign from the National Assembly. After the said announcement, Murad Saeed tendered his resignation as member of the NA — the first from the PTI party. He confirmed that he made the decision in line with the party's narrative. He reiterated the former prime minister's claims of a foreign conspiracy, stating that sitting in the NA after these revelations would be akin to being a part of that plot – '***Should foreign powers have the right to make or break governments in Pakistan?***'

Murad Saeed also highlighted the charges against the opposition's candidate for prime minister, Shahbaz Sharif, while saying: '***They were and are corrupt.***' Former maritime affairs minister Ali Haider Zaidi also followed suit, announcing his resignation on Twitter, while saying: '***No way we should legitimize this foreign-funded regime change in Pakistan. The battle for the sovereignty of Pakistan will now be decided on the streets by the people, not these looters.***'

Former minister for Kashmir Affairs and Gilgit-Baltistan Ali Amin Gandapur also shared a photo of his resignation on the party's letterhead; saying: '*I am proud to be a follower of Imran Khan and will fight till my death for the freedom of Pakistan and parliament.*' PTI leaders Shireen Mazari, Hammad Azhar, and Shafaqt Mahmood shared their resignations on Twitter too.

[PTI leader Fawad Chaudhry said that the decision to resign was tied to the acceptance of PMLN President Shahbaz Sharif's nomination papers for prime minister's elections, to which the PTI had raised objections. '**It was a great injustice that Shahbaz would be contesting the election for the prime minister on the same day he is to be indicted in a money laundering case. What can be more insulting for Pakistan that a foreign selected and foreign imported government is imposed on it and a person like Shahbaz is made its head.**' [A special court (Central-I) of the Federal Investigation Agency (FIA) was to indict Shahbaz and his son, Hamza, in a Rs:14 billion money laundering case on the same day but the court had to defer the indictment.]

The NA session started shortly for the election of a new prime minister after an unceremonious end of Imran Khan's tenure. Shahbaz Sharif — who was the former joint opposition's candidate for the prime ministerial slot — and PTI's Shah Mahmood Qureshi were in the race to become the country's new prime minister. Both Shahbaz and Qureshi had filed their nomination papers a day before. During the submission, the PTI had raised objections to Shahbaz's nomination and subsequently PTI's Qureshi and Babar Awan had exchanged heated words with PMLN leaders Zahid Hamid and Atta Tarar. **The objections raised against Shahbaz were that the latter was contesting the election on the day of his expected indictment in a money laundering case.** They were of the opinion that Shahbaz didn't deserve to be the new PM due to his 'involvement in corruption cases'.

Among the two, the possibility of Qureshi going ahead with contesting the election was uncertain as the PTI was deliberating on resignations from the lower house of parliament. Also, that in line with the PTI's decision of mass-resignations, Shahbaz was to be elected as the new prime minister nearly unopposed — and it happened so. The new PDM government continued to urge Imran Khan and the PTI to come and sit on opposition benches in the assembly as an integral part of the democratic process — but the PTI's members kept discarding the invitations and continued to hold the boycott. **A total of 123 PTI MNAs had resigned en-masse.**

Ultimately, **on 17th January 2023**; the speaker of the National Assembly, Raja Pervaiz Ashraf, accepted the resignations of 34 PTI lawmakers, and one member, Sheikh Rashid, of the Awami League (AML); three days later, 35 more resignations were accepted. Ultimately, **on 25th January 2023**, the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) de-notified 43 PTI lawmakers and two days later announced the by-elections for the vacant constituencies of National Assembly on **16th March 2023**. It also announced 31 more by-polls for 19th March 2023 in the same row.

On 1st March 2023; the Islamabad High Court suspended the de-notification of three PTI lawmakers and a day later, the Balochistan High Court suspended the de-notification of PTI leader Qasim Suri and stopped the by-polls on his seat from Quetta. Two days after the Peshawar High Court suspended the notification for by-elections on 24 NA seats from Khyber KP, while the Sindh High Court suspended the ECP's notification for by-polls in nine National Assembly seats till 25th April instant.

The Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) called off by-elections in 37 National Assembly constituencies in light of the decisions of the high courts concerned. The announcement came as the ECP had kick-started a seven-week election process for the Punjab Assembly with the filing of nomination papers for the 30th April vote. The ECP was also holding by-elections on six National Assembly seats in the province. The ECP issued four separate notifications, calling off the by-polls in 24 constituencies in Khyber-PK, nine in Sindh, three in Islamabad and one in Balochistan, which were scheduled to take place **on 16th March 2023** and the 19th. The ECP notifications said that until further orders from the relevant courts, it was suspending the election schedule for the respective constituencies.

Meanwhile, the election process for the Punjab Assembly began as dozens of poll aspirants obtained nomination papers from the ECP regional offices.

PTI's LAST SESSION IN PARLIAMENT:

The opposition's no-trust motion against Prime Minister Imran Khan succeeded an hour past midnight ***on Sunday, the 10th April 2022***, with 174 members in the 342-strong house voting in favour of the resolution. PMLN's Ayaz Sadiq, who was chairing the session after Asad Qaiser resigned as speaker, announced the result, after which Imran Khan ceased to hold the office of prime minister, as per Article 95 of the Constitution.

Imran Khan was the first prime minister in Pakistan's history who was removed from office through a no-confidence vote. Before him, Shaukat Aziz in 2006, and Benazir Bhutto in 1989, survived the moves against them. Ayaz Sadiq could not cast his vote as he was chairing the session. ***PTI's dissenting members did not cast their votes either.***

Before adjourning the session, Sadiq said the nomination papers for the new prime minister may be submitted by 2pm today (Sunday, the 10th April 2022) and scrutiny would be done by 3pm. He summoned the session on Monday at 11am and said the new premier would be elected then. Later, it was announced that the assembly would meet at 2:00pm instead. Earlier, after announcing the result, Sadiq gave the floor to Shahbaz Sharif, who was the joint opposition's candidate for the post of prime minister. Shahbaz Sharif vowed that:

"The new regime would not indulge in politics of revenge. I don't want to go back to bitterness of the past. We want to forget them and move forward. We will not take revenge or do injustice; we will not send people to jail for no reason, law and justice will take its course."

After Shahbaz, Bilawal took the floor and congratulated the house for passing a no-trust resolution against a premier for the first time in history; saying:

"Today is 10th April 2022, and the one we had declared selected, the non-democratic burden this country was bearing for the past 3 years, today, welcome back to purana (old) Pakistan."

Minutes before voting began, National Assembly Speaker Asad Qaiser resigned from his post, saying he could not take part in a foreign conspiracy to oust the prime minister. Qaiser's resignation came almost 15 minutes before midnight, which according to legal experts, was the deadline to implement the Supreme Court's orders to conduct voting on the no-trust motion. By that time, activity was seen at the apex court's premises and official cars were seen entering and going out. Before announcing his resignation, Qaiser said that he had received ***important documents from the cabinet***, which he invited the leader of the opposition and the chief justice of Pakistan to see. He said:

"In line with our laws and the need to stand for our country, I have decided that I can't remain on the position of speaker and thereby resign. Because this is a national duty and it is the Supreme Court's decision, I will ask the panel chairman Ayaz Sadiq to run the session."

After Sadiq took the chair, he paid tribute to Qaiser for remaining with his party and opting for an honourable exit. Further: ***'He [Qaiser] had a very good relationship with all of us, a working relationship. He tried to conduct all these proceedings with dignity and together with the opposition.'*** Then, Sadiq asked for bells to be rung in the house

for five minutes to notify members that the voting process was about to begin, after which the doors of the assembly were closed. Voting on the resolution then began at 11:58pm, and members in favour of the resolution were asked to exit the gate. Sadiq then adjourned the session for four minutes since according to rules, a sitting of the same session couldn't continue through past midnight hours.

The session then resumed at 12:02am, with recitation of the Holy Quran and na'at. Following that, the voting process continued, with lawmakers confirming their votes by writing their names in a register placed near one of the assembly doors. Bells were then rung for another two minutes to signal that voting had ended and members returned to their seats. All government members except Ali Muhammad Khan had walked out of the house and boycotted the session after Qaiser announced his resignation as speaker.

As the lone voice in the house supporting Imran Khan, Ali Muhammad Khan delivered a fiery speech, reminding the former opposition of his leader's achievements, claiming that:

"Imran Khan sacrificed his government but did not accept slavery. God willing, Imran Khan will be back ... he will be back with a two-thirds majority.

Imran Khan talked about a Muslim bloc, that's his sin. Imran Khan talked about an independent foreign policy, that's his sin ... Russia [visit] is just an excuse, the real target has always been Imran Khan."

Earlier, the session called to decide the fate of Prime Minister Imran Khan through a no-confidence motion, was adjourned multiple times before voting on the resolution could take place. The last adjournment was the fourth of the day as the opposition's clamour for immediate voting throughout the day but had fallen on deaf ears amid lengthy speeches delivered from treasury members on the floor of the house. NA Speaker Asad Qaiser was chairing the session when it began at 10:30am sharp in the morning of 9th April, as per the Supreme Court's directives, and with the recitation of the Holy Quran. It was followed by the national anthem and prayers for the recently deceased mother of MNA Shazia Sobia.

Voting on the no-confidence motion against the prime minister was the fourth item on that day's agenda. PMLN MNA Rana Sanaullah, while talking to reporters, claimed that it had been agreed with the speaker to conduct the vote tonight after Iftar. However, when the opposition enquired about it after Iftar, it was told that the prime minister had not agreed to it.

While the opposition came out in full force for the session this morning, very few members of the treasury benches were in attendance before the session was adjourned for the first time. PM Khan was also not present. A meeting was held between the treasury and opposition benches in the speaker's chamber after the session was adjourned for the first time in the day, where the latter called for holding proceedings according to the Supreme Court's directives. Foreign Minister Shah Mahmood Qureshi and PTI leader Amir Dogar participated from the government's side while Bilawal Zardari, Rana Sanaullah, Ayaz Sadiq, Naveed Qamar and Maulana Asad Mahmood represented the opposition.

Following this, a meeting of the opposition's parliamentary group was called at the opposition leader's chamber. PMLN's Kh Saad Rafique, speaking in the NA after the adjournment, said that the speaker had promised that voting would be held after Iftar. Separately, the government sent a review petition to the apex court against its decision to set aside the deputy speaker's 3rd April 2022 ruling. The petition, however, was yet to be filed since the officers of the court did not process it on receipt. The question also cropped up that instead of placing the said threat letter before lawmakers in parliament, why did PTI use the letter to break the law and dismissed the no-confidence motion? Some claimed that PM Imran was fighting for

himself and not the nation; also, that the government was lying about the National Security Council (NSC) meeting's minutes on record.

Meanwhile, amid the crucial NA proceedings, the PTI submitted references against its 20 dissident members to the NA speaker; the references were sent by PM Khan. The references were filed under Article 63-A of the Constitution, which suggests disqualification on grounds of defection for not obeying the parliamentary party's directions in the election of the prime minister, chief minister or vote of confidence or no confidence or money bill etc.

The text of the references said that the dissidents were exposed via ***large-scale broadcast and videos*** to have left the PTI, joined the opposition for the no-trust motion against the prime minister and no denials or rebuttals were issued to the apparent acts of defection. The references stated that show-cause notices were sent to the dissidents to clarify why declarations to de-seat them from the NA should not be issued against them but the individuals failed to respond to them or clarify their position.

The text said that the members had failed to adhere to their ***sacred duty*** and had deceived the confidence of the party, the voters and the public by changing their loyalties to another party and caused ***irreparable loss to the democratic system ... and blatantly injured the cause and object of the PTI.***

PINCHING & CONCLUSIVE ANALYSIS:

It was a calm night of 10th April 2022; delighted for some and cruel for some others. Moments came when it seemed as if all the pillars of the state were waiting for a catastrophic collision. Calamity seemed ready to strike at the highest levels of the state. Even with his ouster a near certainty, Mr Khan seemed more than willing to turn a simple parliamentary procedure into a farce by forcing the heads of the judiciary and military, along with the entire legislature, to play along to the 'last ball' of his tiresome innings.

"Imran Khan was forced to finally let go just as the clock was about to run out on the day, allowing the opposition to finally have its say. And thus, in the early hours of Constitution Day, the PTI government fell not with a bang, but a whimper in the dead of the night", an **editorial** of a leading newspaper dated 10th April 2022 is referred.

When it emerged as the single largest party in the 2018 elections, the PTI had promised to be a breath of fresh air. Though political engineering and a faulty results transmission system had tarnished the legitimacy of its victory, the country had been generally willing to give it a chance. However, the party almost immediately found itself falling short of its lofty ideals.

Due to its failure to secure a simple majority, it shook hands with non-democratic forces to make a claim on the federal government. If the party's leaders had believed that the compromise could be compensated by their achievements in office, they were soon to be let down by their inexperience. Within a year, the prime minister was scrambling to reshuffle his cabinet.

More unfortunate was that instead of introspecting and compensating for its shortcomings, the PTI chose to go after the opposition instead. The strategy put off many who were expecting it to deliver real change. Meanwhile, it became increasingly reliant on the '***establishment for guidance***' in key decision-making areas. This ultimately proved fatal for it when the establishment decided they would no longer be providing any props for the PTI government to stand on.

Though inexperience ultimately became its undoing, the PTI did also record some **commendable achievements. Successful handling of the Covid pandemic, the multifaceted Ehsaas programme and a new public health insurance scheme made a positive difference in most citizens' lives.** Many would remember the former prime minister for it. Therefore, even if Mr Khan's time in government was up, it would be unwise to write him off. Imran Khan had always been a ferocious challenger when in the opposition; a fighter who doggedly pursued his goals. His unrelenting zeal and sense of divine mission made him a formidable force in Pakistan's politics. It is important for a true leader to unite the nation, not poison it with divisive narratives and corrosive politics – and Khan knew it well.

A day earlier, on 9th April 2022 – **Fahd Husain** wrote:
It didn't need to end like this.....

The momentous events of that week culminating in the Supreme Court judgement setting aside the constitutional violations by the ruling party's deputy speaker of the National Assembly constituted a defining moment in Pakistan's political and legal history. After nearly being pushed off the rails, the country was back on the constitutional track with greater strength and confidence. Fahd Husain bluntly wrote:

"But recent weeks have left scars that will not heal easily. The new government is expected to chart a less confrontational course, and it is also expected to build a better working relationship between all institutions, but the toxins of hate and loathing continue to hover in the air we breathe.

How does a political party — rooted as it is in the constitutional framework itself — reach such a stage of dysfunctional decision-making? How does it spawn a culture that enables it to override — or at least attempt to — the very foundation of the state? The PTI has been defeated by its own follies and blunders. If it intends to reform and redeem itself in the coming months and years, it will need to first acknowledge the mistakes he has made."

PTI as a party would therefore stumble and fall; would take a beating, get kicked around and whipped by the contradictions of its own self-righteousness. Hubris invites scorn; but scorn, however, was not the answer to the PTI problem. It allowed its critics the pleasure of venting, and it also enabled the new government to give as good as it got to its arch-rival. There was a vacuum created as PTI receded from people's expectations. There was something fundamentally non-linear about the rise and fall of the party.

Just look at the wide spectrum the IK-cult unleashed: hope, optimism, belief, joy, confidence, expectations, aspirations, anger, vitriol, hate, loathing, disgust, enmity — all laced with a healthy dose of blind support and a denial of reality. How could one leverage and channelise those contradictory and conflicting emotions? The flock that gathered around Imran Khan in the early days was made up of dreamers who genuinely believed they could one day be in a position to make that change – but all pack of failures.

From famous 30th October 2011's *jalsa at Minar-e-Pakistan* onwards, PTI got transformed into one force that thundered its way to victory in 2018, powered as it was by both by the public and establishment. In 2018, it was in power, however, the two elements began to drift apart. The party fumbled and stumbled with the task of governance; the party went too weak to handle the force of the establishment raging inside. Absolute incompetence, unfiltered arrogance and undeserved appointments, all these kept weakening the party even as Prime Minister Imran Khan — the supposed manifestation of the party — blundered his way through the delicate art of governance.

The blatant violation of the Constitution, wild quasi-profane rants, the reckless conspiracy theorising at the expense of national interests and the shocking lack of grace and sports-

man's spirit in acknowledging a defeat – all jointly created another set of disappointments for the party itself and its voters.

It didn't need to end like this.... ***but was a re-beginning of REFORMED & OPEN HEARTED IMRAN KHAN ahead.***