**[Success, Pakistan style](https://www.dawn.com/news/1762907/success-pakistan-style)**

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PRIME MINISTER Shehbaz Sharif has pulled a rabbit out of the hat by [successfully negotiating](https://www.dawn.com/news/1762360) the IMF programme. The fear of default is over, say those who are in the know and those who know the economy (the two don’t necessarily overlap much).

For once, the glory that is the prime minister’s is not being contested by anyone; there are no hushed whispers or declamations of who worked on the matter behind the scenes despite the breaking news which came days earlier about the riyasat having decided to complete the programme.

The finance minister should also get some of the credit but it is hard to decide if he should get the credit for the success of the negotiations or the earlier eyeball-to-eyeball contest.

Moving on, if I actually had any grasp of economic affairs, I would hold forth — intelligently and poignantly — of our sad state of affairs where success has come to be defined as completing negotiations with the IMF (not even a completion of the programme but just the negotiations). But this is best left to those who understand the issues.

For the likes of ordinary hacks and commentators, it is easier to simply applaud and look forward to the new targets — or definitions of — success we have and will continue to set. From reimagining Pakistan to redefining success, we have it all covered.

But success it surely is because now the risk of default is over, and so is the uncertainty. Or so we are being told. And the uncertainty didn’t simply refer to default but also politics. For why else would there be renewed talk about polls where even ministers in the ‘caretaker’ governments are now claiming they are here only to hold elections?

Indeed, the statements about the impending general elections are being delivered with an increased quotient of certainty. So much so that they are said to be the main discussion point of the [meeting of the PPP and PML-N chieftains in Dubai](https://www.dawn.com/news/1762526). If news reports are to be believed, from seat adjustment to public sentiment to much else, it was all discussed when the titans met in the Gulf.

How much can the law achieve? Keep an individual out of elections? Or more?

Considering that both families had to fly to a third destination for this important discussion, it was surely more important than the economy and the IMF which Dar sahib and the prime minister have successfully handled, while staying put in Pakistan.

However, those in the know link the elections to our resounding success in having completed negotiations with the IMF. For as it is a short programme, which has to be followed by successful negotiations of the next, longer programme, elections have to be held, a government brought to power which will then take over from where Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif has left the economy and talks with the IMF.

Seems logical enough. But to be honest, I never realised the uncertainty over the elections was due to the IMF and kept mistakenly linking it to the undesired results of polling.

The latter situation may not witness much change in the coming days. For while there has been more than one sigh of relief at the IMF news, chances are it will bring little good news to the ones who have to exercise their right to vote. Obviously, they would have been worse off had the default occurred but this may not be consolation enough or a convincing enough argument to vote for the coalition in power.

As they struggle to pay bills of utilities and of food, they may not be grateful enough to realise that had default occurred, they wouldn’t have had food available in the stores or fuel available for their cars or electricity.

And hence the confusion about the election. Even with the IMF, the people may still want a broader choice than PDM on the one hand and Raja Riaz and Jahangir Tareen-led stability on the other.

Such dangerous desires on the part of the people may still be a cause for concern. And for this reason, whatever has so far been ensured through the power games has to be complemented by legalese.

But how much can the law achieve? Keep an individual out of elections? Or more? While elsewhere we have set lower and lower targets for what counts as success, in the political sphere, ambitions are sky-high; to ban not just an individual but also a party. For even Ziaul Haq couldn’t manage this back in the big, bad days, which were so much worse than the unprecedented times of today.

This is more than the IMF deal and its benefits may just continue to feed the uncertainty surrounding us. And we may just have to wait till October to get some answers.

For whichever way we go — election and a ‘happily forever’ for PDM — or no election and a ‘happily forever’ for Sheh­baz Sharif — it does not seem to lead to certainty any time soon. The IMF may not have provided an answer to our political questions either way.

Postscript: It is worth remembering the ‘stability’ experienced during the Zia or Musharraf period had more to do with the generosity of the West during those years than the abilities or the power exercised by these men themselves. Even authoritarianism requires deep pockets.

PPS: A journalist is missing. He is a journalist and he has been missing for nearly two months now. This is all that matters; his views, his professionalism or even his biases are irrelevant. Journalists can be good or bad, professional or unprofessional, but none of this justifies a disappearance.

Can the government pay attention to this issue? And perhaps the industry called the media? Imran Riaz’s disappearance and the ensuing silence is the collective failure of our employers and press representatives. But eventually, history will only remember the government under the watch of which he disappeared. And it might be remembered for longer than the IMF negotiations.

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