**[Restoration, 2024](https://www.dawn.com/news/1819767/restoration-2024)**

[F.S. Aijazuddin](https://www.dawn.com/authors/1314/f-s-aijazuddin) Published March 7, 2024 Updated 2 days ago

IN 1660, Charles II returned to England to reclaim his throne, after years of exile in France.

This year 2024 marks the restoration of another monarchy, in Pakistan. Here, history is replayed with a local twist. Our Charles (aka Nawaz Sharif) returned after years of royal exile in the United Kingdom, only to yield the throne to his less popular younger brother Shehbaz. History, though, is replete with warnings. Charles’ younger brother, later King James II, ruled only for three years before being deposed.

Pakistan has not one but two monarchies — the Sharif and the Bhutto-Zardari dynasties. Once rivals, they have decided to join, not in matrimony like the union of the Spa­nish royal houses of Aragon and Castile in 1469, but in an unequal, uneasy partnership. They have agreed to share the crown of thorns.

Pakistan has never been an easy country to govern, and never more so than today. It is confronted by a phalanx of problems — unbridled population growth, insufficient resources, recurring insolvency, and an arthritic administrative structure. It is an indigent geriatric — too poor to live, and too indebted to die.

Short is the period between being sworn in and being sworn at.

Soon, if PM Modi has his way (he has already vitiated the UN’s role in the Jammu & Kashmir dispute, and threatens to ignore the World Bank mediation clause in the Indus Waters Treaty), we will be also afflicted with agricultural dehydration. The IWT, Punjab’s five rivers, and the irrigation system bequeathed to us by the British may soon be a memory. The once fertile Punjab and Sindh, like parts of the US a century ago, could become an arid dust bowl. It is not too late to heed president Franklin D. Roosevelt’s warning: “The nation that destroys its soil destroys itself.”

What are the new government’s plans for agriculture, for commerce, industry, debt management, in fact for anything other than its own survival?

Before the recent elections which propelled them into power, neither the PML-N nor the PPP presented any plausible manifesto to voters. Today, even as coalition partners, they are in no hurry to cobble together any policy paper. They should remember: short is the period between being sworn in and being sworn at.

The Sharifs would have us believe that our economic revival would be accelerated by increased government borrowing and spending — for example, by the construction of yet more motorways.

The expansive Reichsautobahn system worked for Hitler in the 1930s. It stimulated Germany’s post World War I recovery. In the 1940s, it enabled the forces of Nazi Germany to reach the borders of Austria, France, Holland and Belgium in record time.

If anyone dared to trespass our eastern borders, it would take them longer to navigate through the congestion around Lahore or Multan than to skid across our uncluttered motorways to Islamabad, Rawalpindi and Peshawar. Motorways increase mobility; they also accentuate our vulnerability.

What are our new government’s priorities? And who is being tasked to define them?

Economists will remember the days when the World Bank encouraged developing cou­ntries like ours to use a Planning Commission as the fulcrum for coordinated action.

In the 46 years from 1953 to 1999, the Indian Planning Commission had 21 deputy chairpersons. (The post of chairman IPC devolved on the sitting prime minister.) In the final 15 years of its existence (1999-2014), it had only two: K.C. Pant and M.S. Ahluwalia. Pant controlled the IPC for five years, Ahluwalia for 10. He oversaw India’s 11th and 12th five-year plans, covering the years 2007–2017.

In 2014, however, the newly elected PM Modi decided he would plan India’s future himself. He did not need a central Pla­nning Com­mis­sion, especially after so many Ind­ian states had mat­ured into economic solvency. He redu­ced the In­­dian Pla­nning Co­­mmission to rubble.

Comparably, the Planning Commis­sion of Pakistan, in its first 46 years (1953-1999), had 16 deputy chairmen. Over the next 23 years (2000 until 2023), it had 11 DCs passing in and out of its revolving doors. Who can be expected to plan for his country when he cannot even plan his own tenure?

The 18th-century French economist Jean-Baptiste Say (founder of the world’s first business school) once argued: “It is the aim of good government to stimulate production, of bad government to encourage consumption.”

Pakistan’s Industrial Production Index oscillated between a high of 76.5 per cent in September 2000 and an abysmal low of -45.6pc in April 2020. Our consumer spending per capita has doubled from $655 in 1986 to $1,392 in 2022. Like ancient Romans, we are in danger of gagging on our gluttony.

The new government is approaching the IMF for yet another loan. Where will that money go? Will the new government control its weakness for conspicuous consumption? Or will it share Charles II’s reputation for frivolous, fiscal laxity?

*The writer is an author.*

[**www.fsaijazuddin.pk**](http://www.fsaijazuddin.pk)

*Published in Dawn, March 7th, 2024*