

International Relations This Week: Episode 69

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1. Developments in Pakistan

Political Crisis in Pakistan:

- Pakistan has plunged into a constitutional crisis after the parliament's deputy speaker rejected the opposition's no-confidence motion against the Prime Minister.
- The Leader of the Opposition in the National Assembly has tabled a no-confidence motion against Pakistan's Prime Minister, kicking off the process in the lower house to remove him.
- The opposition accuses Pakistan's Prime Minister of failing to revive the economy and combat corruption.
- Pakistan's inflation is high, its foreign reserves are depleting, and the country's budget deficit is growing. It is also part of a difficult bailout programme run by the International Monetary Fund.
- A motion of no confidence in the government was blocked by the deputy speaker of parliament.
- After dissolving parliament, Pakistan's Prime Minister called for new elections.
- Since Pakistan's independence from the United Kingdom in 1947, no prime minister has completed a full five-year term.

Reasons for the Pakistan Prime Minister's downfall:

- Inside parliament, Pakistan Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif's Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) party had lost coalition allies, denying him the necessary majority to defeat the no-confidence vote.
- Khan appeared to be losing the support of Pakistan's powerful military, which the opposition claims helped him win the 2018 general election.
- Meanwhile, a deepening economic crisis added to Khan's discontent, with double-digit inflation afflicting him for the majority of his term.
- The political and economic situation in Pakistan has set the stage for a challenge to Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif.
- The court now appears to be siding with Khan, at a time when the military is also losing faith in him.

Supreme Court's Ruling

- The Supreme Court held that the Deputy Speaker's decision to dismiss the no-trust motion; the PM's move to seek dissolution of the Assembly without seeking a vote; the President's decision to dissolve the Assembly and the appointment of a "Caretaker Prime Minister" were all "contrary to the Constitution and have no legal effect".
- The Supreme Court ordered the assembly to go through with the trust vote as originally planned.

- Experts feel that the Supreme Court discarded the constitutional term “doctrine of necessity” which the government had used to justify its earlier actions.

Consequences on democracy

- The rejection of the opposition’s no-confidence motion, according to political and legal experts, will have serious consequences for Pakistan’s democratic system.
- The recent events in Pakistan signaled yet another attempt by a Pakistani leader to sabotage the democratic process.
- Imran Khan avoided a constitutionally mandated mechanism by citing an unproven justification of a foreign conspiracy to avoid the no-confidence vote.
- According to experts, the constitution requires the presiding officer of the National Assembly to be neutral.
- It was a first-of-its-kind assault on democracy and the constitution by a democratically elected government.
- If the acting speaker’s actions are upheld, any future government will be free to use a made-up conspiracy to avoid a no-confidence vote.

Know more about [Implications of Pakistan’s Political Crisis](#)

Pakistan’s relationship with the US

- Pakistan is a nuclear-armed country with the world’s sixth-largest military.
- Pakistan has long been a thorny partner in the US war on terror, having been accused of aiding and abetting the Taliban.
- Meanwhile, in Asia, the US administration has been preoccupied with great-power competition with China and two national security crises.
- But, in light of the country’s recent political and constitutional crises, there hasn’t been much more in terms of a positive message for the US-Pakistan relationship.

2. Developments in Sri Lanka

Sri Lanka’s Economic Crisis:

- Sri Lanka’s external debt is dominated by market borrowings and international sovereign bonds constituting half of the country’s total foreign debt.
- The American credit rating agency “Fitch” downgraded the nation to a ‘CC’ rating, which is the lowest rating.
- Sri Lanka has been witnessing an economic crisis since August 2021.
- Sri Lanka’s foreign reserve which was already in peril due to economic troubles and 2019’s Easter Sunday terror attacks are being further drained after the pandemic.
- The critical aspects of the Sri Lankan economy involving exports (tea and garments), labour remittances and tourism sectors have been badly hit.

Know more in detail about the [Sri Lankan Crisis](#)

Challenges:

- The economic crisis in Sri Lanka has led to a steep rise in the prices of essential commodities and frequent blackouts.

- The economic disruption caused by the COVID-19 pandemic has only worsened the economic state of Sri Lanka which has been under pressure from high debt levels.

Know more about the [Challenges faced by Sri Lanka due to economic crisis](#)

India's assistance to Sri Lanka

- India has extended assistance totalling \$ 2.4 billion including:
 - a \$400 million RBI currency swap,
 - a \$500 million loan deferment,
 - credit lines for importing food, fuel, and medicines.
- Recently, a billion-dollar credit line was finalized.
- Indian assistance has been “being tied” to Indian key infrastructure projects in the island nation in the recent past.
- Know more about Srilanka Crisis and [Implications on India](#) and [options for India](#)

Know more about [Indian Projects in Sri Lanka](#)

Way Forward

- Economists believe Sri Lanka is at a crossroads in its economic crisis, which could lead to a debt trap on the one hand, but also provide an opportunity for a change in political and administrative paradigm on the other.
- It is past time for the people of Sri Lanka to develop a more inclusive mindset.
- Given the gravity of the situation, the country requires a meticulous plan for economic recovery before approaching international lenders for assistance.
- The establishment of macroeconomic stability must be prioritised.
- The current regime must be replaced by one that is concerned and accountable, and that is focused on the country's economic growth.
- There must be a recognition that voting based on emotions associated with race and religion will only serve the political class's interests while obstructing the countrymen's growth and development.
- As a result, a significant socio-political shift will lead to their economic liberation.

3. Developments in Europe

Background:

- For years, the governments of Hungary's Viktor Orbán and Poland's Mateusz Morawiecki have been accused of undermining the rule of law by weakening democratic institutions such as an independent judiciary and a free press.
- Following the fall of the Iron Curtain in 1989, both Poland and Hungary were hailed as models of democratic transition.
- However, they are now more commonly associated with their right-wing populist governments' democratic backsliding.
- Hungary's and Poland's governments have been widely accused of lowering standards in recent years.

- Both countries are being investigated for undermining the independence of the judiciary, the media, and non-governmental organizations.
- For years, Poland and Hungary have been chastised in the EU for allegedly undermining judicial and media independence, among other democratic principles.

Recent Development:

- The European Court of Justice ruled that adhering to the rule of law was a requirement for EU membership.
- Hungary and Poland lost their legal challenge to an EU rule that allows billions of euros in funding to be tied to democratic standards.
- The tool had been challenged by populist governments in both countries, who claimed that the 27-nation bloc lacked the legal authority to enact such a measure.

What triggered the dispute?

- Prime Minister Viktor Orban of Hungary has pushed for “illiberal democracy,” which his critics say amounts to suffocating democracy.
- The Polish government has come under increasing fire from other EU member states. To gain political control over courts and judges, the right-wing government has broken the country’s own laws.

Other Geopolitical aspects:

- Some European right-wing leaders’ pro-Russian views have been a potential problem for a united European right for some time, but they are expected to worsen in the wake of the Ukraine conflict.
- Poland has Europe’s only major far-right government that is anti-Russian, despite potential allies.
- Warsaw has been watching Hungary’s close ties to the Kremlin for some time, with some government officials warning that the chasm between the two could widen.
- At the moment, Poland extracts coal that is of lower quality than coal imported from the East.
- Despite being one of Poland’s closest allies in the bloc, Budapest has rejected Warsaw’s idea of banning Russian fossil fuel imports into Europe and has threatened to block any serious sanctions concerning Russian oil and gas.
- The majority of Hungary’s oil and gas imports come from Russia. Ninety percent of Hungarian households have gas-powered heating systems. Without Russian fossil fuels, the Hungarian economy would collapse.
- Although some countries, such as the Baltic states, agree with Poland, the concept of a total ban on Russian fossil fuels has more opponents than supporters within the EU27 bloc.

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