

Minutes - Miftah Ismail | The Cambridge Majlis 2023-24 | Easter Term

On Monday the 8th of May 2023, the Cambridge Majlis hosted Miftah Ismail at the Judge Business School. Introduced by Pro-Vice Chancellor for University Community and Engagement Prof. Kamal Munir, Ismail entered the sold out lecture theatre to loud applause. He spent the next 40 minutes elaborating his point for the day: that Pakistan is an elite captured state with an ineffective government that is in a severe economic crisis. His detailing of the extent to which Pakistan's elite control the country was thorough, speaking about education, politics, industry, the military and bureaucracy, health, terrorism, population planning, state owned enterprises and circular debt, with comparisons to the likes of Sri Lanka and Bangladesh used to highlight the dire current state of Pakistan. Speaking about his home country with the emotion and charisma of a man with years in the political limelight under his belt, he unfortunately did not have the time to expound upon the pillars of potential growth for Pakistan in the future, however we then opened the floor for audience questions.

This began paradoxically; a question on the current political situation that elicited a despairing response of 'no one's got the time or the mandate to make things better' was immediately followed by 'we need to keep hope, change will come somehow'. This struck home to me; under scrutiny, the political and economic atmosphere across South Asian countries is quite similar. The questions picked up after quickly, becoming more technical with audience members studying and well versed in south asian finance, history and economics questioning Ismail on what he means by restructuring the governance structure, financing over 100bn rupees for his ambitious education plan for children, defaulting on current national debt and stopping brain drain. Consistent throughout the hour and a half he spoke for however, was the need to educate; feeding and educating Pakistan's children would have been the main policy reform he would have implemented if he could go back in time to the 1970s. While he seemed to have all the answers, talking about specialisation, increasing the retirement age and hiring from the private sector, he was quite defensive when pointed out that he was also part of the problem, being himself a member of the political and industry elite in Pakistan. The often employed 'its not only the politicians to blame for the situation' phrase came to his aid here, and he quickly moved forward with answering the last few questions.

A thank you to the audience, a signature on the Majlis information sheet about him, a few polite conversations with people in the audience he knew and a picture with the Majlis committee after, he was swiftly escorted away by Prof. Munir and his team to see more of Cambridge before the end of the day.



Sulanya Pallewatte

Speakers Officer | The Cambridge Majlis 2023/24