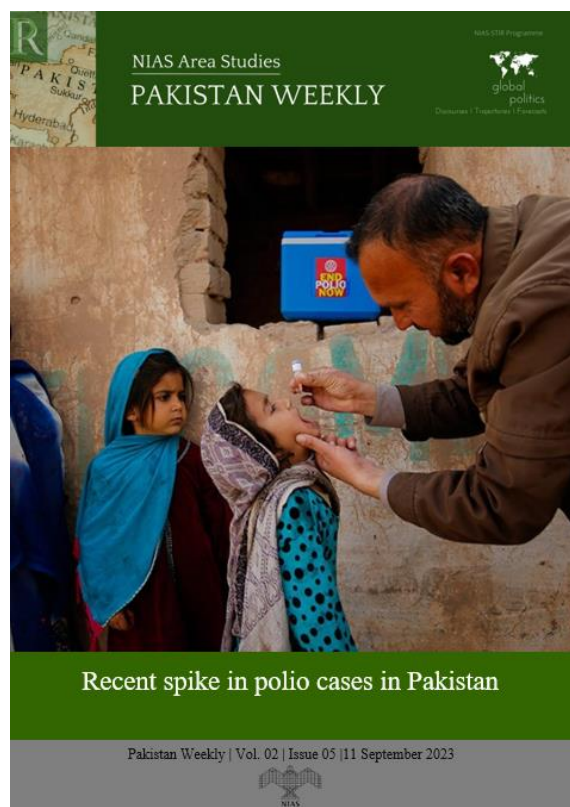


Pakistan: Recent spike in Polio cases

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Pakistan This Week

Closure of Torkham border crossing; SCBA country wide strike and the Demarche against Afghan diplomat over Chitral attack

By Femy Francis

Pakistan This Week - Is a weekly roundup of the major developments in Pakistan. The alert delivers a quick review of prominent issues during the week.

Closure of Torkham border crossing

In this edition of Pakistan Weekly Pakistan's relationship between Afghanistan and Pakistan soured with the closure of Torkham border crossing since 6 September, owing to the exchange of fire between Kabul and Islamabad security forces.



Source: Dawn

Pakistan accused the Taliban government in Afghanistan for building "unlawful structures" on Pakistan soil, violating their territorial sovereignty and indiscriminately firing on Pakistan officers and civilians. Contrarily, Taliban government accuses that the responsibility of escalation lay with the Pakistani security forces who opened fired at Afghan troops who were just repairing an "old security post." The closure left several stranded with civilians from Nangarhar Afghanistan protesting, stating their grievances that the Torkham border were regularly closed under insubstantial pretexts, where in February the closure left several thousand trucks with perishable goods stranded for days. With the estimated revenue of USD 1 million from bilateral trade between the two countries, the border closing effects major economic opportunities.

The Taliban government criticized the blocking of border crossing stating: "The Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan deems the closure of Torkham gate and opening of fire on Afghan security forces by the Pakistani side contrary to good neighbourliness," said Taliban's Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Furthermore, they warned of the effects of the closure in their bilateral relations with the financial losses incurred by the common trader.

The Pakistani Foreign Office urged the Afghan government to respect their territorial integrity and to ensure that their soil is not used to launch "militant attacks," in Pakistan. The Foreign Officer Spokesperson Mumtaz Baloch called the unprovoked and indiscriminate firing by the Afghan forces as unjust. Baloch stated that they have welcome Afghani citizens with open arms but the persistent unwarranted provocation forces the Pakistan government to use restrain. There has been a significant rise in militant attacks and activities in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa since Taliban came to power in Afghanistan. Correlating the two, the Pakistan government holds Afghan Taliban's subpar efforts to curb the militant activities in their soil, who use the Afghan as their haven and launching pad.

SCBA calls for a country wide strike

Supreme Court Bar Association (SCBA) announced to observe a nation-wide strike on 9 September calling for institutions of Pakistan to uphold the rule of law. The convention consisting of apex lawyers demanded end of military's influence in politics, release of the of all political prisoners and to outline the measures addressing the economic meltdown. The resolution stated that all institutions come under the purview of the constitution and that they cannot take any deviation from the mandates of law. Furthermore, the resolution demanded the release of all political prisoners and that the trial of all civilians to be not be held in military court.



Source: Dawn

On the delay of general elections, the SCBA stressed that no caretaker government can stay in power beyond the period of the mandated 90 days. Therefore, making the governments currently in power in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Punjab moot. The undertaking also outlined that all individuals should be treated equally before the law and the exorbitant rise in prices of electricity, sugar, oil and gas should be withdrawn.

[Chitral attack: Demarche issued against Afghan diplomat](#)

In Khyber Pakhtunkhwa's Chitral district four Pakistan soldiers died in an exchange of fire with the Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) killing seven terrorists. Inter Services Public Relations of Pakistan reported that the terrorists were heavily armed and they attacked two checkpoints in the

Chitral district which was coordinated from Kunar and Nuristan provinces of Afghanistan. In light of the growing militant attacks in the Khyber region the caretaker Foreign Minister Jalil Abbas Jilani announced a demarche against Afghan charge d'affaires. Jilani promulgates that the Pakistan government staunchly stand against the incident and that: "It is the responsibility of the Afghan government that if attacks are occurring in Pakistan from their soil, then it should stop them. So our expectation from the Afghan government is that it suppresses all such elements, whether it is the TTP (Tehreek-i-Taliban Pakistan) or others." Additionally, the caretaker Interior Minister Sarfraz Bugti stressed that Afghanistan need to abide by the Doha agreement and ensure that the Afghan soil is not used as haven for terrorist activities.



Source: Dawn



Source: Dawn

[Pakistan Reader: Elections Updates](#)

On 11 September, caretaker Prime Minister Anwaarul Haq Kakar announced that PTI will not be restricted from participating in election owing to the 9 May incident. He stated that the accused will be tried in accordance of law and that their focus is to facilitate a positive relationship amongst political parties.

On 10 September, PPP chairman Bilawal Bhutto Zardari accused that some allies of the Pakistan Democratic Movement coalition are "running away from elections" and that they are scared to participate. The statement said: "Unfortunately, the rest of our political allies have been scared. They are afraid. They run away from by-elections and local government elections, and maybe, they now want to run away from general elections."

On 11 September, Furthermore, the US State Department spokesperson Mathew Miller assured that the US had no plans to influence elections in Pakistan and that they hold not affiliations with political parties or a candidate, while they do support the need to have free and fair elections.

PR Special Commentary

Pakistan: Recent spike in Polio cases

By Shamini Velayutham

Pakistan's inability to eradicate polio puts the world's eradication efforts in jeopardy and is quickly growing into a major source of serious concern. Eradicating Polio, a dreadful disease amongst children is a challenging task for a developing country like Pakistan.



Source: *The Express Tribune*

What is happening?

Recently, a wild poliovirus, which is linked to Afghanistan, has been detected in the sewage system in Lahore which has indeed caused speculations in the region. The Pakistan Polio Laboratory at the National Institute of Health (NIH) confirmed it as the third positive sample recorded in the Lahore district. It is to be noted that Pakistan and Afghanistan are the only states in South Asia that still have considerable polio cases. Polio eradication efforts in Pakistan and Afghanistan are threatened by a lack of awareness and the unrestricted movement of people across the border. Currently, Polio virus cases have started to increase in both bordered regions of Afghanistan and Pakistan.

What has been the case so far?

Since polio has been rife in the area for a considerable amount of time, India has successfully eradicated it through its proactive actions. Pakistan and Afghanistan are still being eradicated, although at different rates. Poliovirus transmission in Pakistan is only present in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province out of the country's 171 districts as of 2020. Before the COVID-19 pandemic, Pakistan and Afghanistan had an increase in polio cases from just 12 and 21 cases recorded in 2018 to 147 and 29 cases in 2019. In Pakistan and Afghanistan, respectively, there were fewer occurrences of polio in 2020. The lowest level ever recorded for wild poliovirus-1 (WPV1) cases occurred in 2021, when there were only five cases total (4 in Afghanistan and 1 in Pakistan). The detection of two wild polioviruses in environmental samples taken from the D.I. Khan and Bannu Districts in the fourth

quarter of 2021 led to the designation of the southernmost portion of KPK province bordering Afghanistan as an area at high risk. As of now there have been 2 to 3 cases reported in both regions.

What are strategies for polio eradication in the country

UNICEF and partners of the Global Polio Eradication Initiative (GPEI) are stepping up efforts, working with Pakistan's government to launch catch-up vaccination campaigns. A lot of the focus is on communities that are close to the border with Afghanistan in western Pakistan, where there's a larger population of displaced children who are at higher risk of contracting and spreading the disease. The government of Pakistan and Afghanistan along with the international health organizations are actively implementing urgent immunization activities along with active surveillance in high-risk areas. Pakistan has implemented polio vaccination drives and has appointed health care workers to facilitate vaccines in the remote areas of the region.

Latterly, the operational polio leadership of the WHO and the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) traveled to Pakistan in recognition of the crucial role Pakistan plays in the global polio eradication effort in order to observe firsthand operations, the most recent advancements and innovations, and meet with newly appointed political leadership. When the team met with Dr. Nadeem Jan, the recently appointed interim Federal Health Minister, who made a trip to the polio National Emergency Operations Centre (NEOC) on his very first day in office in August, they were given the assurance that polio eradication is a top operational priority for Jan's tenure.

Jan stated: "It is important for us that our country and global partners and donors stand together in this final leg of the eradication journey. I am a polio worker at heart. I will ensure that not only does polio remain a priority at all tiers of governance, but efforts are more targeted and intensified." The interim administration assured to take full-fledged initiatives to overcome area-specific challenges by providing ceaseless flow of

vaccination to high and low risk regions of the country.

Why polio continues despite the efforts of the government

Pakistan's inability to eradicate polio puts the world's eradication efforts in jeopardy and is quickly growing into a major source of serious concern. Eradicating Polio, a dreadful disease amongst children is a challenging task for a developing country like Pakistan. The government's ambitious effort to suppress the spread of polio among the children has indeed helped miniscule population. However, the efforts are not operative for the elimination of the disease.

Firstly, the immunization services and health care centers provided by the government are not fruitful enough for the public to access. Although Pakistan's government provides vaccination drives, nevertheless, the geological structure of certain areas is regarded to be inaccessible. The inaccessibility overlaps with the security concerns as well. The tough geology of Pakistan, which includes the Himalayan Mountain range and glaciers in the north and the rough terrain of Balochistan in the south, adds to the country's difficulties in providing adequate public health care.

Secondly, the regional eradication effort has lagged because of the inadequate management and operational shortcomings. Many areas of the country badly lack a sufficient health infrastructure and service delivery system since less than 2 per cent of the Gross National Product (GNP) is spent on healthcare. Although the Global Polio Eradication Initiative's (GPEI) Pakistan operation is rather well funded, its effectiveness is jeopardized by a lack of governance transparency, a service for delivering public health that is underfunded, and a private health sector that is not adequately controlled.

Thirdly, the poor strategy of the government regardless of the party, for the elimination of polio is at stake. The failure of implementing strong policies due to the disruption and changing regimes has caused the disease to resurface in the region. Although the cases in other districts are

imperceptible, the government's reach in the high-risk area is limited.

Fourthly, security plays a significant role in the vaccination drives. Government's lack of security has made people stay indoors rather than taking vaccines. Limited health care workers with limited security in the remote regions has significantly resulted in the low vaccination rates.

Fifthly, the low production of vaccines has engendered polio cases amongst children. Despite the international funding, the government expense over the health care sector in the production of polio vaccines are comparatively lower than the expense spent on the military. Due to the low production of vaccines, the children are not able to get their immunization dosage in the stipulated time.

Finally, In Pakistan, vaccine apprehension has been influenced by factors such as illiteracy, socioeconomic status, culture, and religion. Despite the government efforts, the preconceived notion about the vaccine among the people of Pakistan defer themselves from being vaccinated. Pakistan's Taliban began an anti-polio campaign more than 10 years ago by spreading rumors that the vaccination was linked to fertility problems and calling it anti-Islamic. The Taliban has attacked vaccinators and the security officials protecting them. Illiteracy overlaid with lack of awareness has made people refrain from taking vaccines.

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PR Special Commentary

Pakistan, US and the Cipher Controversy: The problem of an inherently asymmetric relationship

By Femy Francis

Imran Khan claimed a foreign political conspiracy was being hatched against him, where he claimed to have the minutes of the "Cypher", which consisted of the conversation between state department heads of the US and Pakistan



Source: The Express Tribune

What happened?

On 9 August, The Intercept news organization reproduced the controversial "Cipher" cable transcript accounting for the minutes of the meeting between the US Assistant Secretary of State for the Bureau of South and Central Asian Affairs Donald Lu and the then Pakistan Ambassador to the US Asad Majeed Khan on 7 March 2022. The minutes of the conversation alleges that the US State Department pressurized Pakistan to impeach the then Prime Minister Imran Khan if they wanted warmer and cordial relation between the two countries. The document ascribed that the US was disgruntled with Imran Khan's neutral position on Russia's invasion of Ukraine and expressed their concerns over Imran Khan's visit to Moscow one day before the war.

On 19 August, PTI Vice Chairman Shah Mahmood Qureshi was taken into custody by the Federal Investigation Agency for claiming the "cipher" controversy is real and that the US did engineer the ousting of Imran Khan.

What is the controversy all about? And what does cipher say?

On 9 April 2022, Imran Khan was deposed by a no-confidence vote in the parliament. For the opposition, the no-confidence motion was because of the government's inability to revive the economy after COVID and Imran's failure to make Pakistan corruption-free. Imran Khan claimed a foreign political conspiracy was being hatched against him, where he claimed to have the minutes of the

"Cypher", which consisted of the conversation between state department heads of the US and Pakistan a month prior. Imran Khan repeatedly called his removal a "foreign funded conspiracy" by Washington and the then Army Chief General Qamar Javed Bajwa.

The Cipher document reflected the US's objection against Imran Khan's neutral stance on the Russia-Ukraine war, with Donald Lu expressing to Asad Majeed Khan: "I think if the no-confidence vote against the Prime Minister succeeds, all will be forgiven in Washington because the Russia visit is being looked at as a decision by the Prime Minister, otherwise I think it will be tough going ahead." Lu also warned Pakistan's Ambassador of "isolation," where not only US but they would be marginalized by their European allies as well.

Pakistani Ambassador stated that they felt they were being taken for granted, where Washington expects Islamabad's support on all its issues while the same is not reciprocated. Additionally, the Ambassador expressed that different rules were applied for India and Pakistan, where they had a different response to India's abstinence from taking a stance while they expected more from Delhi, but what bothered them more was the neutral stance of Islamabad. The conversation ended with Asad reaching out and hoping that this would not affect their bilateral relationship, while Lu quite explicitly proclaimed that the dent had already been made and asked the Ambassador to wait to see whether there was a change in the political setup. If there is a favourable shift, Lu conveyed that there will not be any disagreement and that the "dent will go away very quickly."

What have been the responses?

The US State Department spokesperson Mathew Miller iterated that the reproduced secret documents allegations that the US had a role in the political power shift in Pakistan: "are false, they have always been false, and they remain false." Miller stood to his earlier stance of disagreeing with US involvement. When asked about the case earlier in July, he responded: "The allegations that the United States has interfered in internal

decisions about the leadership of Pakistan are false, as we have stated they were false. They were always false and they remain false."

Shehbaz Sharif said they met with the National Security Committee and that if the "Cipher" document is valid, "then it is a massive crime." Rana Sanaulah, who was in Shehbaz Sharif's cabinet, questioned the cable's authenticity.

What does the controversy reflect?

First, overlapping loyalties of Pakistan. After Imran Khan, Pakistan has moved on from its neutral stance and has been leaning towards supporting the Ukrainian cause. Additionally, Pakistan has been an arms and ammunition supplier to Ukraine while acting as a bridge between the Western alliance and Ukraine, aiding with hardware supply. On the other hand, Pakistan has received a large shipment of discounted Russian crude oil, which was suspended on 13 August 2023, the government blames the quality of Russian crude oil where the refiners have objected to process the oil as more furnace oil was produced rather than petrol.

Additionally, on 03 August the federal cabinet signed a security agreement with US on the Communication Interoperability and Security Memorandum of Agreement (CIS-MOA). The pact facilitates bilateral military and defence closeness where Pakistan can get military hardware from the US. Pakistan has its leg on both boats trying to balance its way through the relationship's without compromising or losing the other. The move reflects the changing political dynamics where while US influence and role in Pakistan was minuscular with aggressive Chinese and Russian involvement. For US there is realigned focus towards Pakistan as it cannot escape the influence of big brother the US.

Second, questioning the US role amidst the controversy. Pakistan is trying to keep all channels of diplomacy open, where it is trying to strategically manoeuvre through and even leveraging bilateral ties for a better deal with regional and international players. The Cypher controversy is another example of the pressure exerted by the big brother US. There are speculations over US's role and even of the authenticity of the document. There is a possibility that Imran Khan's removal was premediated by the opposition and the establishment who allegedly got him to power but grew increasingly disgruntled with him. Since his ousting, Imran Khan and his party PTI has faced severe crackdown by the federal coalition headed by the PML-N. Several of its leaders have been ostracized there has been a wave of defections. This makes Imran Khan the latest addition to a long list of Prime Ministers of Pakistan who were unable to complete their tenure. The question that remains is whether it was a foreign conspiracy or a dissatisfaction by the opposition towards Imran Khan. Nevertheless, what can be concluded with certainty is that nearing the no-confidence motion there were several who stood disappointed with him and several who would be content with his removal.

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PR Short Note

A nationwide effort to crack down on electricity pilferage

By Dhriti Mukherjee



Source: Dawn

On 6 September, Power Minister Muhammad Ali and Information Minister Murtaza Solangi announced a “crackdown” on electricity pilferage, that has been identified as a major cause for inflated electricity bills. Among the numerous factors contributing to the exacerbated price of electricity, theft stands out prominently, as it is fuelled by corrupt elements within the various agencies responsible for power distribution across the country. According to data from the Power Division, electricity theft has inflicted a staggering loss of PKR 500 billion on the national exchequer. As part of this plan, since 8 September, provinces began undertaking several measures to filter out those who had been using electricity illegally.

Khyber Pakhtunkhwa's purposive stance

Khyber Pakhtunkhwa launched a robust three-day campaign, amounting to a significant reshuffling of officials within the Peshawar Electric Supply Company (Pesco). During a recent three-day campaign, approximately 500 illegal power connections were dismantled, and cases against 250 individuals were forwarded for the registration of First Information Reports (FIRs). Pesco spokesperson Usmal Saleem, emphasized the importance of this campaign and stated, “The crackdown was launched on Friday last and would continue till uprooting power theft in the province.” The authorities have made commendable strides in curbing this issue, with power thieves beginning to remove illegal connections and settle their dues.

Lahore's efforts to suppress power theft

On 08 September, there was internal reshuffling within the Lahore Electric Supply Company (Lesco) to tackle power theft. A massive reshuffle of officers and heads of field formations up to Grade 19 has been initiated. This reshuffling includes the transfer of officers directly or indirectly involved in facilitating electricity theft. As part of this strategy, 200 connections implicit with power theft were detected by Lesco teams,

with individuals involved ranging from former politicians to influential figures. Lesco CEO Shahid Haider emphasized, “We will also take action against all those officers if found involved in facilitating people to steal electricity.” The multipronged approach was stern in order to restore severely dwindling public trust.

Sindh's clampdown against power theft

In alignment with the federal government's plan, Sindh is poised to launch its crackdown on power theft, targeting high-loss commercial, agricultural, industrial, and domestic connections and defaulters. A task force, chaired by the Sindh home secretary, has been formed to devise a strategy for a focused and sustainable campaign against electricity theft. Home Secretary Iqbal Memon highlighted the importance of the proposed initiative while stating that “Indiscriminate action will be taken against electricity thieves and wilful defaulters of electricity bills.” The Sindh government has also put forth the proposition of creating district enforcement committees to address the problem with swift and efficient measures.

The spiralling cost of capacity payment

Apart from the immediate crackdown on power theft, Pakistan's power sector faces another critical challenge - the escalating cost of capacity payment. It is projected to reach a staggering PKR 3.766 trillion per annum by FY 31, constituting 75 per cent of the total electricity bill. The predicted rise in prices that are needed to offset the debt indicates a threat to consumers of various categories being able to afford electricity shortly. To reduce this impact, the Power Division has put forth a comprehensive plan to address the financial gap on “old proposed measures with new words.” While emphasising that failure is not an option for the caretaker government given the commencement of this crackdown, the Power Division laid out a National Electricity Plan. This Plan contains short, medium, and long-term actions to be implemented in different provinces based on the amount and cause of the debt. Some measures mentioned include an anti-theft campaign, a drive for energy conservation, and privatisation of Discos.

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PR Short Note

Pakistan and Afghanistan: The problem in Torkham

By Shamini Velayutham



Source: Reuters

On 6 September, a gunfire broke out between the Pakistan and Afghanistan border security forces, shutting down the prominent commerce route between the two countries at Torkham. Torkham is a key hub for the transportation of people and products between Pakistan and Afghanistan border crossing. The border closure came two days after caretaker Pakistani Prime Minister Anwaar-ul-Haq Kakar said the US military equipment left behind during the American withdrawal from Afghanistan had fallen into militant hands and made its way to the Pakistani Taliban, who are allied with the Taliban in Afghanistan.

Pakistani authorities asserted responsibility for starting a gunfight, which broke out after the Afghan government began constructing a roadblock on their side in a restricted area close to the main border crossing. On 7 September, followed by the previous incident, the border remained closed. The closing of the border has led to disruption in the border with a long-standing queue of heavy vehicles laden with goods in both the borders.

What/Where is Torkham?

Torkham is tucked into the steep Khyber Pass valley, which has been travelled by traders and invaders since Alexander the Great to the British Empire. In the 1980s, the US backed mujahideen utilized Torkham as a passage into Afghanistan. Torkham again acquired strategic significance since 2001; arms and equipment supply route for 75 per cent of the NATO coalition's supplies. These were shipped from Karachi, on the Arabian Sea coast of Pakistan, through Peshawar, then via the pass to Torkham it finally reached Kabul. Because of local extremist activity, traffic across the pass has frequently been impeded.

Why is Torkham in the news?

Following a deterioration in relations between Pakistan and the Taliban government in Afghanistan, the Torkham border crossing was shut down. A closure in February 2023, left thousands of trucks loaded with products stranded on both sides of the border for days this was one of the many times the crossing has been shut down. On 7 September, according to Pakistani authorities, hundreds of trucks carrying perishable goods, such as fruits and vegetables, were waiting on both sides of the border for the reopening of the Torkham crossing, which is an important commercial thoroughfare and Pakistan's trade route to Central Asian nations.

Dawn was apprised by local sources that no one was being permitted to enter the border beyond the Michni checkpoint, which is located close to the Landi Kotal bazaar and has a commanding view of the border crossing. According to Irshad Momand, the assistant commissioner for Landi Kotal, the subject is currently being considered at a higher level between Islamabad and Kabul "due to its global importance." He also stated that "We normally tackle and resolve local issues during our meetings with the Afghan authorities at a lower level according to our mandate. But the current border suspension is a sensitive matter and is now tackled at a high level."

What are the issues in Torkham?

On the Afghan-Pakistan border, tensions have been building for a while, culminating in exchange of gun fires. It is completely reasonable for Islamabad to want to protect its borders and control the movement of people and products into and out of Afghanistan. The 1,500-mile border between Pakistan and Afghanistan is unregulated for a large portion of the distance, which is the difficulty Pakistan must address. There are only a few checkpoints between the two nations, the biggest of which are in the south at Torkham and Chaman, but wide swaths of uncontrolled land allow everyone from migrants to militants to enter Pakistan undetected. As a result, while it is admirable to increase security at Torkham, Pakistan's border problems are unlikely to be resolved anytime soon. The Torkham encounter and Pakistan's capacity to exert control over the movement of products into and out of Afghanistan should serve as reminders to Kabul of how crucial it is to break its cycle of dependence on Pakistan and look into alternative trade routes. This advantage has been frequently employed by Pakistan as a negotiating and coercive tactic. In fact, Pakistan has shut down Torkham numerous times in the past whenever problems between Pakistan and Afghanistan have arisen.

PR Short Note

259th Corps Commander Meeting

By Femy Francis



Source: Twitter

On 7 September, Chief of Army Staff (COAS) General Asim Munir presided the 259th Corps Commander Meeting. The conference consisted of Army top brass reiterating their resolve to protect Pakistan from multitudinous threats of direct or indirect nature. The gathering comes in light with the Army cracking down against the dollar hoarders to stabilize the dwindling exchange rate of Pakistan. The recent actions against foreign currency smuggling have led to a remarkable rise in the rupee value by three per cent against the US dollar. This had a ripple affect against the value of gold reduction by 4.5 per cent. Also, there has been a surge in militant activities at the border crossing from Afghanistan, where the army aims to curb the infiltration of these bellicose groups. They noted that the Afghan governments negates from fulfilling its responsibilities and refutes the allegation of Afghan soil being used to perpetuate acts of violence in Pakistan.

The gathering first paid tribute to army officials who lost their lives in protecting the country and expressed that the soldiers and their families will be kept in high regards. The meeting briefed on the geo-strategic environment and the hurdles they face

in protecting their National Security. There was a unanimous agreement against the “facilitators and abettors” to face the full might and stringent measures imposed by the army. Additionally, the army elites reaffirmed that “inimical propogandists” efforts to destabilise the country by attempting to create differences between the state and public will be fraught with humiliation, stated Inter Service Public Relations of Pakistan (ISPR).

On the revival of the economy and the need for development, the Army announced its full support for the socio-economic development under the Special Investment Facilitation Council (SIFC). They further affirmed their determination to assist the government in cracking down against any illegal activities that might have a causal effect on destabilizing the economy and hampering investors’ confidence. SIFC was formed under Shehbaz Sharif administration, a civil- military body aiming to invite international investments in the areas of mining, agriculture and minerals. Additionally, Interim Prime Minister Anwaar -ul-Haq Kakar announced that UAE and Saudi Arabia have agreed to invest USD 25 billion each on projects under SIFC. A differential focus was given for the expedite development of Newly Merged Districts (NMDs) and Border Districts of Balochistan in order to facilitate sustainable peace and growth.

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PR Daily Briefs

POLITICS



Source: The Nation

Elections in Karabakh are deemed unlawful by Pakistan's Foreign Ministry

On 10 September, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs announced that Karabakh was deemed as Azerbaijan's sovereign territory and that any attempt to hold elections there by the unlawfully imposed regime be both morally and legally repugnant. The ministry's spokesperson, Mumtaz Zahra Baloch, responded to a question by stating that the conduct of elections in the Caucasus was "a grave violation of the UN Charter and principles of established international law." ("Pakistan calls elections in Karabakh illegal," *Dawn*, 11 September 2023)

Torkham border issue negotiations at a standstill

On 10 September, talks between the two nations to restore the Torkham border failed to yield any positive outcomes. The primary crossing point between Pakistan and Afghanistan remained closed for a fifth day. After a firefight between border security personnel from Pakistan and Afghanistan, the Torkham border crossing was closed on 6 September. The building of a new post by the Afghan Taliban near the border catalyzed the fighting. This construction is viewed as a breach of the two countries' agreement by Pakistan. According to the Afghan Taliban, the gunfight claimed the lives of at least two of its border guards. Since then, the border has been closed. (Kamran Yousaf, "No headway in talks on Torkham issue," *The Express Tribune*, 11 September 2023)

Iranian oil being smuggled into Pakistan

On 11 September, The Civil Intelligence Agency filed a report on oil smuggling to the Prime Minister House, that found more than 2.81 billion Liters of oil being smuggled from Iran to Pakistan each year. Due to this breach, it is estimated that Pakistan is losing more than PKR 60 billion. It was

also found that 90 government personnel and 29 politicians were also involved in this crime and that terrorist groups were using the earnings from oil smuggling for personal gain. As many as 995 gasoline pump outlets around the nation are involved in the selling of Iranian oil that has been smuggled. (Naveed Butt, "Smuggling of Iranian oil into Pakistan: 90 govt officials, 29 politicians found involved," *Business Recorder*, 11 September 2023)

Nawaz is anticipated to go back to Pakistan in the next month

On 9 September, Nawaz Sharif, the head of the PML-N, is expected to return to Pakistan next month, ending his more than four years of self-imposed exile from the nation, according to initial indications after months of speculations and various timetables. The PML-N supreme leader discussed his homecoming, on the report to the sources who were present when Mr. Nawaz addressed party members, but a precise departure date has not been made public. (Atika Rehman, "Nawaz likely to return to Pakistan next month," *Dawn*, 9 September 2023)

Supreme Court Bar Association resolution on civilian supremacy

On 8 September, the Supreme Court Bar Association (SCBA) organized a convention, calling for a nationwide strike on 9 September to support the rule of law. They demanded the release of political prisoners, an end to the military's political role, and solutions for the economic crisis. There was also emphasis on civilian supremacy and an opposition to civilian trials in military courts. The lawyers condemned arrests and harassment of women, demanded general elections, and insisted on enforcing judicial verdicts. A significant portion of the SCBA's resolution urged government officials and employees to abide by the constitution. Additionally, they called on the chief justice to decide on military court cases. (Nasir Iqbal, "Lawyers call for strike over state of affairs in the country," *Dawn*, 8 September 2023)

Sindh bar council challenges supreme court

On 6 September, the Sindh Bar Council (SBC) challenged the Supreme Court over the trial of civilians in military courts also contested the Pakistan Army (Amendment) Act, 2023, and the Official Secrets (Amendment) Act, 2023. This move follows President Dr Arif Alvi's recent controversial claim on social media, where he

stated that he had not signed these bills, accusing his staff of tricking him. The SBC's argument centres around the alleged unconstitutionality and wrongful exercise of power of charging the accused for the 9 and 10 May attacks, under the aforementioned Acts. They requested the court to declare these amendments null and void or ultra vires, as they expand the reach of military laws over civilians, including retired military personnel. ("Official Secrets Act, Army Act challenged in SC," *The Express Tribune*, 6 September 2023)

Caretaker government takes concrete steps to combat inflated bills

On 6 September, members of Pakistan's caretaker government announced an ordinance to tackle the electricity bill issue in a press conference. The ordinance serves to make significant amendments to the Electricity Theft Control Act aiming to tackle power sector losses. The year 2023 has had a PKR 343 billion increase in circular debt compared to 2022, primarily due to inefficiencies of the previous government. The energy minister emphasized that "consumers who pay their bills are effectively subsidising those who steal electricity." In order to address this, the government plans to use technology in low-theft areas and enforcement measures in high-theft areas, including raids and prosecution. Additionally, it will privatize or provincialize distribution companies, allowing for a more focused approach to policy and regulation. Aside from this, special courts will be set up in provinces to address electricity theft and power pilferage. (Zafar Bhutta, "Special courts to try electricity thieves," *The Express Tribune*, 6 September 2023)

Thirty-six PTI activists are detained again

On 6 September, Pakistan Tehreek-i-Insaf (PTI) activists were rearrested by the police after the Lahore High Court granted them bail. They were detained under Section 16 of the Maintenance of Public Order (MPO). The arrest is said to be in connection with a similar case of 9 May incident. Currently, they are detained in Adiala Jail, Rawalpindi. ("36 PTI activists arrested again in Rawalpindi despite getting bail," *Dawn*, 7 September 2023)

Supreme Court debates retrospective amendments to NAB law

On 6 September, the Supreme Court reserved its verdict on a petition challenging change to the National Accountability Bureau (NAB) law, with Chief Justice Umar Ata Bandial stating that something "short and sweet" would be released

soon. Justice Syed Mansoor Ali Shah questioned why, when the petition aimed for "across-the-board accountability," serving army officers' corrupt practices were excluded from NAB's jurisdiction. He referred to the 2001 Khan Asfandyar Wali case, stating that army officers have their own system of accountability under the Pakistan Army Act. Senior counsel Khawaja Haris Ahmed clarified that the petitioner had not challenged Section 5(m) of the NAB Ordinance, which shields officers under the Pakistan Army Act. During the hearing, Justice Shah asked if parliament could amend laws retrospectively and emphasized, "if we can't say anything against the parliament in this regard, then we have to live with it." (Nasir Iqbal, "SC mulls parliament's power of retrospective law making," *Dawn*, 6 September 2023)

PTI President Chaudhry Parvez Elahi re-arrested amid legal controversy

On 6 September, PTI President and former Chief Minister of Punjab Chaudhry Parvez Elahi, was re-arrested, this time in a terrorism, theft, and dacoity case, following a prior release that had led to legal disputes. The Islamabad High Court (IHC) had suspended his detention under the Maintenance of Public Order (MPO) Ordinance, leading to his re-arrest. Amid these events, the Capital Police made official statements on their actions. They initially stated, he had "been sent on the order of the court," followed by a second post claiming, "CTD police station arrested Parvez Elahi in a case No 3/23."

Elahi's lawyer argued before the IHC that his client had been in police custody since 1 June despite no evidence supporting the allegations. The Lahore High Court (LHC) had explicitly ordered that Elahi "shall not be arrested... nor shall be detained under any law relating to preventive detention." The IHC suspended Elahi's detention order, noting that it was passed without lawful authority and in violation of the LHC's order. They ordered his appearance in court on 12 September. The LHC also issued show-cause notices to police officials and ordered Elahi's production in court. (Malik Asad & Munaweer Azeem, "Elahi arrested even after IHC suspends detention," *Dawn*, 6 September 2023; Ag PPI, "Pervaiz Elahi released only to be rearrested," *The News International*, 6 September 2023)

COAS on revival of Pakistan's Economy

On 6 September, General Asim Munir Ahmed, the chief of army staff and a member of the Special Investment Facilitation Council's (SIFC) top committee, gave the business community the assurance that every effort would be made to ensure dollar rates in open and interbank markets

are transparent, as well as to bring money exchanges under taxation, stop smuggling at the borders with Iran and Afghanistan, and improve tax collection. The COAS also described how the SIFC helped Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Kuwait, and other nations attract investments totaling up to \$100 billion. He said that \$100 billion in investments across many sectors will strengthen Pakistan's economy. (Khalid Hasnain, "[Analysis: COAS' consultations reveal 'blueprint for revival,'](#)" *Dawn*, 6 September 2023)

Islamabad IG faces contempt notice over Chaudhry Parvez Elahi's detention

On 4 September, Lahore High Court (LHC) issued a show-cause notice to Islamabad Inspector General Dr Akbar Nasir Khan for contempt of court over the re-arrest of PTI President Parvez Elahi under the 3-MPO (Maintenance of Public Order). The LHC ordered the Islamabad police chief to appear in court on 08 September. Elahi's lawyer argued that his arrest was illegal and in violation of the court's order. The judge noted that the arrest interfered with the LHC's jurisdiction and was therefore illegal. Additionally, the district sessions judge was directed to recover Elahi from Attock jail and produce him in court. (Asim Hussain & Shahid Hussain, "[Parvez Elahi's arrest: LHC issues contempt notice to Islamabad IG,](#)" *The News International*, 5 September 2023)

PAKISTAN ELECTIONS 2023



Source: Radio Pakistan

PTI: The president needs to announce the election date right now

On 8 September, in an effort to put an end to the "chaotic and uncertain situation that gripped the country since the regime change conspiracy" last year, the core committee of Pakistan Tehreek-i-Insaf (PTI) urged President Dr Arif Alvi to use his authority and declare the polling date right away. According to the party, the Constitution reserves people's rights to certain powers and sovereignties,

which they can only exercise through duly elected public officials. The report noted that Pakistan was going through the most difficult time in its history and was dealing with extremely difficult issues at the constitutional, political, democratic, administrative, economic, and social levels. ("[President must give election date without delay: PTI,](#)" *Dawn*, 9 September 2023)

PPP requests that ECP release the election timetable

On 8 September, Chairman of the Pakistan People's Party (PPP), Bilawal Bhutto-Zardari, urged that the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) declare the date of the general elections and hold them within the 90-day window specified by the constitution. Days after allegations surfaced in a portion of the mainstream media saying that the PPP will "adjust" its position on elections in 90 days, Bilawal reaffirmed his party's unwavering stance. (Azeem Samar, "[ECP must give polls schedule, demands PPP,](#)" *The News International*, 9 September 2023)

MQM-P and GDA concur to make the next election "tough" for the PPP

On 5 September, the leaders of the two factions met and accused the PPP of establishing a rival system of governance in Sindh that was based on corruption, nepotism, and political prejudice. The MQM-P and GDA decided to keep up their newly acquired political understanding to give their shared competitor a hard time in the next elections while steadfastly adhering to their anti-PPP narrative. The MQM-P officials were also convinced that their alliance with the GDA would pave the way for the creation of a coalition government in Sindh during the next general elections. Growing discontent with the PPP may only result in a significant shift in the province if free and fair elections are held, according to the MQM-P leaders. (Imran Ayub, "[MQM-P, GDA agree to give PPP 'tough time' in next elections,](#)" *Dawn*, 6 September 2023)

PPP adjusts its position regarding polls within 90 days

On 5 September, as it called for elections to be held "according to the Constitution," without mentioning the three-month timeframe, the PPP seemed to break from its staunch position of having general elections within 90 days for the first time. Senior PPP members Sherry Rehman, Nisar Khuhro, and Nayyar Bukhari reiterated the demand, even suggesting that if the ECP did not fulfill the constitutional deadline, there would be

"legal course" to follow. However, PPP Chairman Bilawal Bhutto-Zardari emphasized in talks with party leaders that the country's many problems could only be resolved by continuing the democratic process. ("PPP 'adjusts' position on polls within 90 days," *Dawn*, 6 September 2023)

Syed Ehsan Shah absorbed the BNP-M into his party

On 5 September, Syed Ehsan Shah, the President of Pakistan National Party (PNP) merged his party with the Balochistan National Party-Mengal (BNP-M). Mr. Shah also expressed confidence in Sardar Akhtar Mengal, the president of the BNP-M. He declared that in order to protect the rights of the Baloch people, it was time for all Baloch nationalists to come together behind a single cause. The BNP-M leader welcomed Mr. Shah into his organization and invited other nationalist parties to participate in a joint struggle. (Saleem Shahid, "Ehsan Shah merges party with BNP-M," *Dawn*, 6 September 2023)

SECURITY



Source: Business Recorder

Security forces in Chitral kill seven terrorists and gravely wound six others: ISPR

On 10 September, Inter-Services Public Relations (ISPR) reported that the security forces engaged terrorists in a firefight in the Chitral area of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, killing seven and gravely injuring six others. ISPR stated that the clash occurred on Saturday in the general region of the Ursoon district when "troops effectively engaged terrorists' location." The region was being sanitized, it was further stated, to ensure that there were no nearby terrorists. Locals expressed their support for the security forces' efforts to eradicate terrorism from the nation and expressed appreciation for the operation, according to the ISPR. (Ifthikhar Shirazi, "7 terrorists killed, 6 critically injured by security forces in Chitral: ISPR," *Dawn*, 10 September 2023)

Five terrorists were killed in a clash in Quetta

On 7 September, five terrorists from the TTP-affiliated Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) were killed in a fierce gunfight in the Aghberg area. The operation was meticulously planned based on information given by Naseebullah, a purported TTP terrorist who had been held in CTD custody. His cooperation during questioning was crucial in revealing the whereabouts of the TTP in Quetta, who were reportedly well along in the planning stages of a sabotage campaign within the city. ("Five terrorists killed in Quetta encounter," *The Express Tribune*, 9 September 2023)

Balochistan police's counter-terrorism operation results in five TTP suspects being killed

On 7 September, five suspected members of the banned Tehreek-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) were killed in a successful operation conducted by the Balochistan police's Counter Terrorism Department (CTD). The operation was based on intelligence provided by TTP militant Naseebullah, who was previously arrested. Naseebullah revealed the presence of militants in the Aghberg area near Quetta, who were planning an attack in the city. During the operation, CTD personnel engaged in a firefight with the suspects, resulting in four of them being killed and one captured but later succumbing to injuries. The operation has also been hailed a success due to the recovery of a notable quantity of arms and explosives. This marks the third such operation in less than a week in the region. (Saleem Shahid, "Five TTP militants killed in Quetta, claims CTD," *Dawn*, 8 September 2023)

Christian priest threatened and shot

On 4 September, Reverend Father Eleazar Sidhu was discharged from a hospital, after being shot in Faisalabad on 03 September. As per the FIR filed, Sidhu claims that he was threatened by a group of people after objectionable religious slogans written by them on the wall of his church were erased. They stated "As our written slogans have been deleted from the wall of the church, soon you will also be deleted." The person who shot him is yet to be identified as investigations are underway. (Tariq Saeed, "Priest injured in Faisalabad shooting," *Dawn*, 5 September 2023)

ECONOMY



Source: *The Economic Times*

As losses surpass PKR 350 billion, a gas price increase is envisaged

On 8 September, to stop the annual losses of PKR 350 billion, the caretaker administration declared it would have to increase the gas tariff for all categories. Circular debt for the gas industry that includes interest payments has now reached PKR 2,700 billion. Dr Shamshad Akhtar, the minister of finance, also unveiled a plan for continuing economic liberalization and restriction-free imports, and he predicted that Pakistan would receive USD six billion from multilateral development donors (MDDs) for the entire fiscal year, including the World Bank, Asian Development Bank, and the International Monetary Fund (IMF). Gas sector losses amount to PKR 350 billion annually, hence the price of gas would need to increase, said Energy Minister Mohammad Ali during a press conference at the PID center. (Mehtab Haider & Muhammad Anis, [“Gas tariff hike planned as losses reach Rs350bn.”](#) *The News International*, 9 September 2023)

Kakar calls for a five-year economic plan for Pakistan’s economic future

On 8 September, *The News International* reported on caretaker Prime Minister Anwaar-ul-Haq Kakar tasking the Ministry of Planning with the responsibility of designing a five-year economic plan. This is to give the country an economic agenda which would guide related actions, to revitalise the economy. Aside from this, it has also been directed to eliminate obstacles in making Gwadar Port’s connectivity efficient. Highlighting the importance of the business community in economic strengthening, Kakar stated that plans for digitalising this sector were being implemented. Furthermore, having already launched a crackdown on drug smuggling across the borders, Kakar now intends to address power pilferage, consult with stakeholders, bring an “increase in tax collections,” and improve the performance of commercial attachés. (Mehtab Haider & Muhammad Anis, [“Kakar wants five year economic plan drawn up.”](#) *The News International*, 8 September 2023)

Crackdown on gas theft: Over 30 arrested in Islamabad

On 8 September, in response to Sui Northern Gas Pipelines Limited's (SNGPL) announcement of a crackdown against gas theft in Punjab and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, authorities arrested over 30 people in Islamabad for illegal gas usage. SNGPL Managing Director Amir Tufail stated that there is zero tolerance for gas pilferage, and the company has already reduced gas losses by 66 per cent in some areas. Over the past three years, field teams have recovered PKR 2.4 billion in cases related to gas theft. The government aims to reduce theft and recovery losses further through enforcement measures and public support. (Khalid Hasnain & Mohammad Asghar, [“‘Massive action’ kicks off against gas theft in Punjab, KP.”](#) *Dawn*, 08 September 2023; Editorial, [“Waking up.”](#) *Dawn*, 08 September 2023; [“Crackdown on power thieves begins.”](#) *The News International*, 8 September 2023)

Prime minister on tax reforms

On 6 September, As improving tax collection is the government's top objective, caretaker Prime Minister Anwaar-ul-Haq Kakar advised all pertinent organizations to collaborate on tax changes. He underlined the necessity of strengthening ties between the federation and the provinces about tax reforms while serving as the meeting's chair at a high-level discussion about the Federal Board of Revenue (FBR) and Privatization Division. He continued by saying that the process of privatizing state-owned enterprises (SOEs) that are losing money should be sped up by complying with all legal criteria, and all federal ministries should work closely with the Privatization Division. ([“PM lays focus on tax reforms, sell-off process.”](#) *Business Recorder*, 7 September 2023)

ECC boosts margins for fuel retailers and marketing companies

On 6 September, the Economic Coordination Committee (ECC) of the cabinet approved per-liter increases of PKR 1.87 and PKR 1.64 for oil marketing companies (OMCs) and petroleum dealers, respectively, on sales of gasoline and diesel and permitted PKR 40 billion in supplemental funds to the armed forces. A technical supplementary grant worth PKR 40 billion was also approved by the committee to support a number of Defense Services-approved projects as well as allowances, subsidies, and other expenses related to foreign security for the current fiscal year. (Khaleeq Kiani, [“Caretakers announce plan to tackle power theft, low recoveries.”](#) *Dawn*, 7 September 2023)

IMF doesn't forbid targeted subsidies for the needy, according to PM Kakar

On 5 September, the caretaker Prime Minister Anwar ul Haq Kakar, was questioned about the interim government's relief requests to the Fund and their subsequent denial during an interview with Dawn News' English Spotlight show. He said that neither the government nor the International Monetary Fund (IMF) prohibited or limited targeted power subsidies for low-income socioeconomic strata, who typically consume 200 units of electricity.

Additionally, PM Kakar gave the Economic Coordination Committee (ECC) instructions to present a comprehensive strategy for restructuring Pakistan International Airlines as soon as possible. Probing ahead, to stop smuggling, the caretaker premier instructed the customs authorities to set up monitoring systems at unauthorized border crossings. While presiding over a thorough briefing by the commerce ministry, he gave these instructions and also made some recommendations to increase effectiveness for improved scanning and inspection of trade items. (Iftikhar A. Khan, "[IMF doesn't proscribe targeted subsidies for poor, says PM Kakar](#)," *Dawn*, 6 September 2023)

Pakistan requests IMF Approval for staggered tariff adjustments amidst power bill relief debate

On 4 September, Pakistan requested the International Monetary Fund (IMF) to allow the staggering of upcoming quarterly tariff adjustments (QTAs) and Fuel Price Adjustments (FPAs) over the next four to six months. This is being done to provide respite to consumers, and comes as the IMF objects to providing additional subsidies for inflated power bills. The power sector is looking at a tariff hike of over PKR seven per unit due to losses, interest payments, and fuel price increases. The power ministry argues that improved bill collections in August warrant this request, which would help reduce the blow of the inflated bills. Furthermore, the ministry intends on seeking Nepra's help in setting the tariff rates for the coming months, keeping the forecasted seasonal changes in mind. (Mehtab Haider, "[Inflated power bills: IMF says no to tariff adjustment, additional subsidy](#)," *The News International*, 5 September 2023)

Caretaker government reverses polio eradication policy decision

On 04 September, Pakistan's caretaker government reversed the previous government's key policy

decision pertaining to a USD 1.785 billion foreign-funded program aimed at eradicating polio in the country. Originally, the program was intended to be managed by provincial authorities, but the caretaker government stated the new project "will supply polio eradication vaccines all over Pakistan and will be executed by WHO and UNICEF." This decision was made during a meeting of the Executive Committee of the National Economic Council (Ecneec) and marks a rare instance of a caretaker setup reversing a major policy decision. The program has a total cost of USD 1.784 billion and will supply polio eradication vaccines across Pakistan.

The previous government's decision, made on 11 July 2023, had placed the responsibility for polio eradication on the provinces, but it "placed the entire programme in a state of uncertainty" thus endangering "the lives of 44 million children who rely on these critical polio vaccines," according to the secretary of the National Health Services. uncertainty and raised concerns about the vaccination program's continuity, potentially affecting millions of children. The caretaker government's decision aims to ensure the smooth operation of the program and avoid interruptions in polio vaccination efforts. (Khaleeq Kiani, "[Reconstituted Ecneec reverses PDM's \\$1.7bn polio programme decision](#)," *Dawn*, 5 September 2023)

SCIENCE/TECHNOLOGY



Source: Business Recorder

Interim prime minister approves plans to bring Starlink and Paypal to Pakistan

On 07 September, the caretaker Prime Minister Anwaar-ul-Haq Kakar approved the plans put forth by the Ministry of Information and Technology (IT) and Telecommunications. It is anticipated that Starlink and PayPal are to be launched in Pakistan. Dr. Umar Saif, the interim minister of IT, lauded the ministry for its comprehensive programs aimed at maximizing the IT industry's boundless potential. He explained how the country's new IT strategy, which institutionalized dollar retention accounts and makes it easy for money to flow through IT corporate debit cards, aims to enhance the volume

of the nation's digital exports. ("Caretaker PM Kakar Approves Plan To Bring PayPal, Starlink To Pakistan," *The Friday Times*, 7 September 2023)

EXTERNAL



Source: Radio Pakistan

US Senator Van Hollen affirms to aid Pakistan's economic resurgence

On 11 September, Senator Van Hollen, who was born in Karachi, stressed the importance of a lasting relationship between the United States and Pakistan at the annual meeting of the DC, Maryland, and Virginia (DMV) chapter of the Association of Pakistani Physicians of North America (APPNA). He added that the United States would continue to help Islamabad's attempts to stabilize its economy and that it had been "very instrumental" in securing the most recent economic assistance for Pakistan from the International Monetary Fund (IMF). (Anwar Iqbal, "US to support economic recovery in Pakistan," *Dawn*, 11 September 20223)

Karachi detains forty 'illegal' Afghan immigrants

On 10 September, more than forty Afghan people were allegedly detained by police for residing in the city without valid travel permits. They said that a citywide operation on illegal immigration had begun, during which police forces from various areas detected suspicious individuals and verified their identity credentials. They also said that 50 unauthorized immigrants in all had been detained. SSP-East Irfan Bahadur reported that the district police conducted raids and caught 19 Afghans who were living illegally in the city. He described the events in detail, stating that the Ferozabad police apprehended 10 people while the Mobina Town police detained nine Afghans and opened complaints against them. ("50 'illegal' Afghan immigrants held in Karachi," *Dawn*, 11 September 2023)

Afghanistan: Torkham crossing closed after exchange of gun fire

On 6 September, a gun battle broke out between Pakistani and Afghan border authorities, closing the busiest commerce crossing between the two nations at Torkham, injuring at least two individuals, among them a Frontier Corps (FC) official. Pakistani authorities claimed responsibility for starting the two-hour-long noon gunfight, which broke out after the Afghan government began constructing a roadblock on their side in a restricted area close to the main border crossing. (Ibrahim Shinwari, "Torkham crossing shut as border forces exchange fire," *Dawn*, 7 September 2023)

PROVINCES



Source: The Friday Times

Khyber Pakhtunkhwa: Terrorist attack in Chitral kills sixteen

On 6 September, a cross-border attack by militants in Chitral, along the Pakistan- Afghanistan border, resulted in the death of four soldiers and the killing of twelve attackers. The Inter-Services Public Relations (ISPR) stated that there were "heavily armed terrorists" in the Kalesh valley, despite heightened security. Forces have been on alert due to the Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan's claiming the area recently. Despite heightened security, the terrorists launched their attack. The ISPR also emphasized that they are determined to "eliminate the menace of terrorism," and called on the Interim Afghan Government to deny terrorists the use of Afghan soil. This incident led to the closure of the main crossing point between Pakistan and Afghanistan. ("Defence Day Cross-Border Attacks By TTP In Chitral Martyrs Four Soldiers," *The Friday Times*, 6 September 2023; Kamran Yousaf, "12 terrorists killed as army repels TTP attack in Chitral," *The Express Tribune*, 6 September 2023; Iftikhar Shirazi & Murad Ali Khan, "4 soldiers martyred during operation to repulse terrorists in Chitral's Kalash area: ISPR," *Dawn*, 6 September 2023)

Punjab: Punjab Government blames LHC stay orders

On 5 September, the Punjab government cited the Lahore High Court's stay orders, which prohibited supervision of the sugar supply chain and prevented the application of the sweetener's notified price, as one of the primary causes of the skyrocketing price of sugar. A discussion about sugar pricing was presided over by interim Punjab Chief Minister Mohsin Naqvi. The food secretary said during the briefing that the collection of sugar mill records had been hampered by the Lahore High Court's stay orders. (Munawar Hasan, "Punjab govt blames sugar price hike on LHC stay orders," *The News International*, 6 September 2023)

speech made by cleric Agha Baqir Alhussaini, which resulted in the Karakoram Highway being blocked. Despite the issue almost being resolved after GB's parliamentary committee met with religious leaders, another speech made by Qazi Nisar Ahmed caused tensions to resurface. Following 13 police officials posting controversial content on social media platforms, internet was blocked in the region, with Khan stating that it will be restored a week after the issue is resolved. There were also student led rallies on 04 September, organised to "showcase their dedication to maintaining peace in GB, [and] to create a culture of care and love." (Jamil Nagri, "Will normalise GB situation within two days, claims CM," *Dawn*, 5 September 2023)

Pakistan Occupied Kashmir



Source: Reuters

Protest against the inflated bills

On 05 September, in protest of the rise in electricity costs and the lack of flour at official pricing, there was a wheel jam strike and shutter down. Seven districts of PoK, including Kotli, went on protest against high electricity costs and taxes. In numerous towns throughout PoK, thousands of protesters held sit-ins and protest rallies. In the whole state, all major and small routes are still closed. The people criticized the government and threatened to keep up the demonstration until their demands were met. Seven districts, including Shaheed Chowk, saw protests by the Awami Action Committee. The strike was joined by all organizations, including Anjuman Tajran, transport companies, and attorneys. ("Protests in AJK against inflated power bills," *The News International*, 6 September 2023)

Gilgit-Baltistan CM invites clerics to sort the issue within two days

On 04 September, the Gilgit-Baltistan Chief Minister Haji Gulbar Khan stated in a press conference that the regional uncertainty would be sorted out within the next two days, as clerics have been invited to help with the issue. The region has been dealing with the effects of a controversial



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