



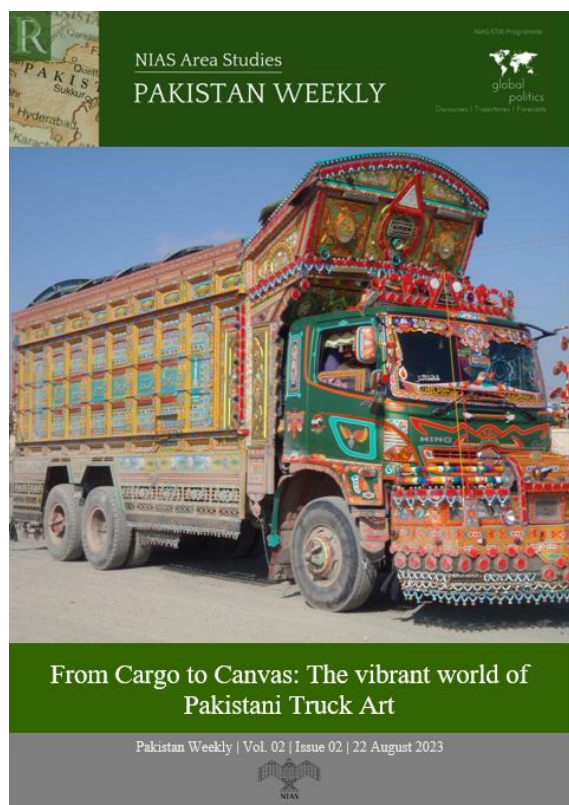
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**From Cargo to Canvas: The vibrant world of
Pakistani Truck Art**

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Pakistan Reader is an academic exercise at the National Institute of Advanced Studies (NIAS) in the Indian Institute of Science Campus, Bangalore, India. The objective of its alert - "Pakistan Reader - Evening Brief" is to update the readers on contemporary developments within Pakistan, on a regular basis.

The PR Evening Briefs are a part of the focus on Pakistan at the International Strategic and Security Programme (ISSSP) within the NIAS.

PR Special Commentary

From Cargo to Canvas: The vibrant world of Pakistani Truck Art

By Sneha Surendran

Truck painting traces its roots to the colonial period when Bedford trucks were imported by the colonial rulers. Back then, visual imagery on vehicles were easier for the largely illiterate population to identify trucks and their owners. The practice of truck art began among common people and over time, it rose to become an endearing tradition that captivated the imagination of the people.

Pakistan has over 277,000 registered trucks that play a vital role in the transportation of goods across the country. However, unlike trucks in other regions, the ones that rumble through Pakistan's roads are moving works of art with their extravagant embellishments, intricately coloured paintings, swaying bells, mirror works, and imposing size. Illustrations of birds, animals, flowers, and visages of actors, politicians, cricketers, and even army generals grace the outer walls of the trucks, alongside jokes, riddles, and poetry. The inside of the vehicles is no less decorated with hanging ornaments and embroidered drapes.

Truck painting traces its roots to the colonial period when Bedford trucks were imported by the colonial rulers. Back then, visual imagery on vehicles were easier for the largely illiterate population to identify trucks and their owners. The practice of truck art began among common people and over time, it rose to become an endearing tradition that captivated the imagination of the people. While the production of Bedford trucks has long ceased, the ones remaining in Pakistan continue to be treasured by their owners. The sheer size and load-bearing capacity of these once-common vehicles, along with the deeply intertwined tradition of decorating them has made these trucks an indelible part of Pakistani culture. Apart from the vibrant decor, Bedford trucks are distinguishable by the imposing crown on the front rim, called the "taj." The *taj* is also subject to beautification, which enhances the proportion of the already big trucks. Such is people's dedication to truck decoration that owners of non-Bedford trucks often customize their vehicles to enable the outer surface suitable for painting and embellishments.

Truck drivers and artists:

There are two sections of people behind the beautification of these trucks: the truck drivers, and the truck painters. Drivers regard their vehicles as their pride and prestige for as people who spend months on the move, the truck is their home. Well-decorated trucks also attract clients and add value points in marketing. There is an almost unsaid competition among these drivers to showcase the most eye-catching truck on the road. As a Karachi-based driver stated: "Someone can say it's a waste of money to decorate it, but when I buy a truck, it's my truck. I want it to be more beautiful than any

other truck on the road." Drivers shell out over USD 2500 for the upkeep, with paintings and decorations receiving retouching and maintenance almost every five years.

Despite its prominence, truck painting has not been accorded a formal status in Pakistan. It is propagated by self-taught artists or those who pick up the skills from others. While truck drivers may approach artists with specific design requests, the latter often rely on their creativity and expression to determine a style that best fits the client truck's model. Over time, truck painting has become localized with different regions of the country boasting a manner that is unique and distinguishable from others. For instance, trucks from Karachi display watercolour paintings, mirror works, and woodcarving whereas sticker art is favoured in Rawalpindi. Apart from the medium of expression, the style of depicting images also differs between regions and artists.

It is noteworthy that truck art has not remained confined to trucks alone, neither is it an art form unique to Pakistan. Truck art designs have been and continue to be faithfully rendered on bullock carts, rickshaws, and other modes of transportation including airplanes in the country. Furthermore, embellishing vehicles is also a practice in neighbouring India and countries elsewhere, but Pakistan's trucks take the cake for the magnitude of the decorations and the intensity of dedication from the actors involved.

Moving beyond individual expression:

The purpose of Pakistan's truck art has travelled beyond the simple initial goals it fulfilled, that being identification and personal expression. Now, truck art plays a larger role:

1. Billboard on wheels: Painted trucks have come in handy as a tool to spread awareness on socially sensitive topics. For this, activists have teamed up with truck artists and drivers to use the vehicles as advertising mediums that carry messages on sexual abuse, child marriages, honour killings, and education to name a few. Samar Minallah Khan, an anthropologist and a documentary filmmaker who is involved in such project's states how this form of advertising is compelling: "It's important to use culturally sensitive tools that resonate with local

audiences.” In another ongoing project, the faces of missing children are painted onto trucks along with helpline numbers. According to reports, five out of 20 missing children have been tracked down and rescued through these portraits.

2. Alleviating Islamophobia and breaking stereotypes: In 2015, Chattanooga, a city in Tennessee saw a wave of anti-muslim hate following a shootout perpetrated by a naturalized US citizen born in Kuwait. With a desire to tackle this discrimination, Kate Warren, founder of a local NGO named Art 120, teamed up with Sadaf Khan, a Pakistani truck artist, to launch the Jingle Truck Program in 2019. Through this initiative, Warren hoped to open young minds to cultures beyond their own and to use art as an icebreaker to begin conversations around Muslim culture and traditions. Khan decorated four-wheelers with Pakistani truck art designs, and incorporated features distinct to Tennessee within the paintings, creating an amalgamation of different cultures. Samar Minallah Khan has also pointed out how driving decorated trucks has helped unravel stereotypes surrounding the Pashtun community. The Pashtuns have historically been categorized as a warring faction. However, when these sturdy men set off on trucks bearing illustrations of nature and poetry, it helps propagate their artistic side. Khan reiterates: “Truck art breaks the stigma of seeing Pashtuns as men holding rifles. Through truck art, you celebrate the imaginative nature of Pashtuns.”

3. A medium of relief in trying times: Truck art again rolled onto the scene after the devastating floods of 2022, bringing cheer and hope to a battered population. Artist Ali Salman Anchan who works to promote Pakistani truck art worldwide was commissioned to decorate a van supplying medicines to flood-affected regions. Anchan and his team visited Sindh in May 2023 to interact with the survivors. Lending an ear to their stories of pain and resilience inspired the painters. Anchan described the project as fulfilling, stating: “...the villagers in the affected areas are suffering a lot of things. But when we parked the truck up, the villagers celebrated and were all so excited.” Art became a medium of alleviating pain, if only temporarily, and

inspired bonhomie among the affected individuals.

4. International recognition: Pakistan’s truck art has slowly found its way out of the dusty roads it traverses into the world beyond the country’s borders. For one, the tourism industry has realized the marketability of this localized art form. Dolce and Gabbana, an Italian fashion house, made use of Pakistani truck art-inspired patterns during a promotional campaign of the brand in 2015. In 2022, Blitzers, a K-pop boy band featured buses decorated with truck art designs in a music video that they shot in Lahore. Pakistani truck artists have also been invited to countries like China and Canada to spread awareness regarding their work through exhibitions, workshops, and live painting events.

While truck painting remains dear to the people, the arrival of transportation companies with modern truck fleets is slowly eroding this long-standing practice. Furthermore, the lack of incentives for artists is also forcing them to discontinue their trade and encourage their contemporaries to do the same. However, organizations and researchers dedicated to propagating truck art strive to advertise and preserve this tradition. As a Pakistani anthropologist quotes remarks on truck art: “It just celebrates their culture, their way of life. You see that they are artists. They are poets. They have a sense of humour. They are fond of nature. They are fond of, you know, so many things that need to be celebrated.”

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PR Special Commentary

Pakistan's Economy: Three questions

By Ankit Singh

It is quite evident in Pakistan, as the trade sentiment is down, advanced economies are looking inwards, the debt-trade linkage seems to be reducing for Pakistan

On 14 August, Nasir Jammal wrote a [commentary](#) in Dawn titled: 'Will the next Aug 14 see a stable Pakistan?' He highlighted on short and mid-term economic challenges for Pakistan on a few recent critical policy decisions. Nasir Jamal confesses a return to feel-good sentiment and consumption driven economy.

What does the analysis say?

1. Pakistan has a history of boom-and-bust cycles of economic growth. Adjustment with IMF loan program has been short sighted and usually ignored when there have been signs of -stabilization.
2. To absorb the working employable population, Pakistan needs to grow at seven-eight per cent and hence there is critical need for investment.
3. Pakistan has agreed to investment terms of Gulf allies which will improve balance of payment position which can as well enable ruling class to discontinue with IMF dictated fiscal discipline. And global investors need political certainty in Pakistan for short-term to mid-term recovery.

The above analysis raises the following three questions.

1. Why is Pakistan dependent on external investment?

According to a news report by [Dawn](#), Pakistan borrowed USD 5.115 billion in first five months of the current financial year (FY), Pakistan has borrowed USD 47.027 billion in loan money since 2018. The budget target for external inflow/support has been rising, for the current FY the expected borrowing is USD 23 billion. This might not change the characteristic of twin deficits which Pakistan faces in the short term, which means the expanded budget target for loans should be supplanted by increased government revenues, aid, and investments. A closer look at external aid data to Pakistan in the latest economic survey indicates that share of aid related to Balance of Payment (BOP) issue has increased project related has remained stagnant from 2000s up till 2022. This means that BOP related aid might as well increase but at the cost of a default, which will be more of a

commercial default, one which Pakistan may not be able to afford right now. Hence investment remains a priority so that government can reprogram its balance sheet.

2. Will Pakistan remain a consumption-driven economy?

Pakistan in its modern history has witnessed periods of boom-and-bust cycles. This means that economic sectors have catered to the domestic needs and have done lesser in terms of increasing their competition. On a comparative basis, according to General Statistics Office of Indonesia, the investment (also called Gross Fixed Capital Formation) in manufacturing have increased by 201 per cent from 2010 to 2018 and GFCF in retail sector increased by 250 per cent, while, according to General Statistics Office Vietnam, the GFCF in manufacturing has increased by 314 per cent, and GFCF in retail sector increased by 248 per cent from 2010 to 2020. However, in Pakistan, due to rebasing of the economy, the data from the previous economic survey can mislead. As per the latest survey published recently, GFCF in the large-scale manufacturing (LSM), and retail and wholesale trade sector by private sector has decreased by 0.78 per cent and increased by 165.3 per cent respectively from 2016 to 2022. According to [Business Recorder](#), LSM growth rate in LSM has been in negative double digits in 2023, as was also evident from foreign manufacturers selling their subsidiaries in Pakistan.

Therefore, the LSM and other allied industries in Pakistan have not gone ahead with comparative intensity when compared to its counterparts, like Vietnam and Indonesia, while retail and whole sector continues to grow. This implies that trade is not much a big indicator of macroeconomic growth in Pakistan, as Nasir Jamal also hinted. His commentary in Dawn was candid in confessing that each period of boom was consumption driven followed by bust due to high fiscal and current account deficits.

3. Will IMF provide more than short-term stability to Pakistan?

No. Multilateral financing in the post war period has enabled countries and their governments in supporting issue of deficits and maintaining

reserves. The staff agreements with Pakistan and other countries have mainly focused on improving sentiment for the market, while methodologies and framework to assess has been biased. The neo-imperial nexus through financial interdependence has not bode for well long-term growth projections in global south countries. The problem in methodology, which is based on a rational individual consumer needs to be addressed, as decolonised countries have their own historical experiences mercantilism and trade.

The problem of financing deficits has become so strong that more than the macroeconomic fundamentals, other factors like the role of geopolitics, debt-trade linkages, and finance-ability of debt rescheduling weighs more than the

former. It is quite evident in Pakistan, as the trade sentiment is down, advanced economies are looking inwards, the debt-trade linkage seems to be reducing for Pakistan. As Naseer Jamal discussed that around USD 37 billion of worth of investment is being expected in Pakistan but at the cost of privatizing public sector enterprises and ports. The services share of government will decrease but it does not mean private sector will take over loss making enterprises, if not at throw away prices. Therefore, the short-term stability by institutions like IMF is more like a extending the lifetime of global south specific critical issues in macro-governance. Pakistan may see a stability in the narrative of short term but a lot needs to be done for it catch up with its peers.



Source: The Express Tribune; Dawn

PR Short Notes

President and the Controversy over his assent to two bills

By Femy Francis

What has the President said?

On 20 August, President Arif Alvi denied that he assented the amendments to the Official Secrets Act and the Pakistan Army Act. He expressed his concerns on social media platform formerly known Twitter now X stating that he did not sign the bills as he disagreed with the laws and that he ordered his staff to return the bills unsigned within the 10-day stipulated period as to make them abortive. Additionally, he claimed that he repeatedly inquired whether they returned the bill and was assured by his staff that they were, contrary to his knowledge he found: “that my staff undermined my will and command.”

What has been the response from the caretaker government?

On 20 August, President Alvi’s claims were refuted by Interim Law Minister Ahmed Irfan Aslam and Information Minister Murtaza Solangi that he was unaware of status of the two bills and stated that he: “chosen to discredit his own officials” and he should “take responsibility for his own actions”. In a joint press conference to clear the ambiguity the legal and constitution interim heads informed that they had not received any of the bills within the 10-day time period and therefore the bills become law. In accordance with Article 75 of the Pakistan’s constitution when a bill reaches the president for approval, he can either assent or reject it by returning the bill unsigned and provide with suggested observations and the second time the bill reaches him he is obliged to sign it. Legal and constitution representatives Ahmed and Murtaza informed that president Alvi did not resort to any or the recourse and kept the bill pending therefore it automatically passed by assuming “Deemed Assent”.

What do the legal experts say and response by political parties?

The amendments made to the bill where in light of the prolonged political turmoil facing Pakistan, Since the attack on military establishment on 9 May by PTI members, there has been a crackdown against the party leaders and activists. The current changes in the bill stands to further facilitate and strengthen the army establishment and other security agencies of Pakistan like FIA. The reproduced “cipher” transcript influence can be reflected in the amendment, with the clause bringing in stringent measures against the actors who violate these laws. The discrepancy in the

current issues lays that President Alvi claims to have ordered the return of the bill to his staff and in accordance to which it was supposed to be reconsidered by Majlis-e-Shoora (parliament). If the bill was again passed the parliament without any changes, president would either have to assent within 10 days or it would be deemed to be assented. Which means the “deemed to be assented” claims made by the current interim government is invalid as it only applies after the bill reaches the president for the second time.

After President Alvi’s post political chaos ensued Pakistan with former Finance Minister Ishaq Dar finding Alvi’s statements as “unbelievable” and urged him to resign posting on ‘X’: “Unbelievable —minimum morality warrants Alvi Sb to resign, having failed to run his office effectively, efficiently and as per Rules of Business — official work is conducted on files and implementation ensured — such statements only indicate playing with the gallery.” Sherry Rehman president of PPP questioned Alvi’s ability to hold office. That if someone signed the bill from under his nose and he has no control over his staff then he should resign owing to his incompetency. Several leaders expressed their dissatisfaction with President Alvi’s statement and questioned if his loyalties still laid with PTI. PPP leader Raza Rabbani stated that the allegation made by president are very serious and the concerned players should appear before court.

PTI expressed solidarity with President Arif Alvi who contested from PTI in 2018. They thanked him for “rising above fears and taking a stand for the Constitution and law, the fundamental rights of citizens and the survival and security of democracy and the Parliament.” General Omar Ayub Khan PTI secretary demanded legal actions against those who disobeyed president’s order.

What are the bills about?

The amendment to Official Secret Act includes a definition for “enemy” where one would be considered if: “Any person who is directly or indirectly, intentionally or unintentionally working for or engaged with a foreign power, foreign agent, non-state actor, organization, entity, association or group guilty of a particular act... prejudicial to the safety and interest of Pakistan.” In addition to that 6-A amendment to the bill states that disclosure of identities of intelligence agency members, informant or source without authorization will be dealt with punitive actions with up to three years of jail and an additional fine of PKR 10 million. A clause has been added prohibiting access to military installations and office not only in time of

war but during peace times.

The Pakistan Army Act amendment outline stricter punishable measures, where a suspect if found guilty of divulging any information that they acquired in official capacity and or the information will affect the security and interest of the country or arms forces will be facing five years of rigorous imprisonment. Furthermore, the act forbids a person subject to Army Act to engage in political activities for the period of five years since probed and that any individual who defames, ridicules or scandalize armed forces will face punitive actions in accordance with the Prevention of Electronic Crimes Act and face up to two years of imprisonment. Both the bills have gained criticism as they empower the establishment more to further their influence.

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Election Commission to undertake delimitation. Five things to know

By Dhriti Mukherjee

On delimitation, what has the Election Commission decided?

On 17 August, the Election Commission of Pakistan announced that as per the delimitation that will be carried out, elections will now be delayed beyond 90 days despite the constitution’s provisions. The delimitation is being conducted in response to the findings of the 7th Population and Housing Census, 2023, as well as the legal provisions stipulated in Article 51 of the Constitution and Section 17(2) of the Elections Act, 2017. The projected timeline indicates that the delimitation process will conclude on 14 December, meaning the upcoming general elections are likely to experience a delay beyond the conventional 90-day constitutional limit.

What did the Council of Common Interests (CCI) say?

The decision to undertake the delimitation exercise was driven by the approval of the official results from the 7th Population and Housing Census, 2023, by the Council of Common Interests (CCI). The

population census revealed certain changes in demographic data. This prompted questions over the necessity of recalibrating the electoral constituencies, so that the entire population could be represented efficiently and fairly. These reactions showcased the importance of the relationship between the country’s electoral framework and evolving demography. By sanctioning the census results and thereby prompting the delimitation process, the CCI has indirectly influenced the timeline of the upcoming general elections. It also explicitly proves Pakistan’s attempt to make such processes which are an integral part of a democratic set up, more transparent and accurate, by guaranteeing that citizens have an equal say.

The new Census: What does the data reveal?

The 7th Population and Housing Census, 2023, gave a comprehensive overview of the present-day demographic landscape of Pakistan, including information on distribution and urbanization. The data from this census can be compared to previous ones, to allow an understanding of the shifts Pakistan’s population has experienced within its constituencies. Based on this, the delimitation process is carried out in a data-driven manner, to ensure each constituency corresponds to a roughly equal number of citizens. The accuracy of this process is vital for upholding the principle of "one person, one vote," as it guarantees that citizens' voices are not diluted by unequal constituency sizes.

This census holds historic significance as it marks the first time that Pakistan’s population was tracked digitally. However, there were calls for protests against the “fake census” by the Pakistan Tehreek-i-Insaf (PTI), which said that the digital census aimed at reducing the population of Karachi. More questions arose when there was a revision to the census made, which led to a decline in the population count from 250 to 241.5 million in three months.

Who is opposed to delimitation? Why?

Although this decision has been opposed by various actors, the PTI has proven to be the most prominent critic. It regards the delimitation exercise which will lead to an election delay as a “ploy to delay polls.” A PTI spokesperson said that the decision is a malicious deviation from Article 224 of the Constitution which mandates organizing general elections within 90 days of delimitation. It has also announced that it will challenge the decision in the Supreme Court on 18 August.

Aside from the PTI, the president of the think- tank PILDAT stated: “A law cannot overrule the constitution,” adding that despite the census results,

“delimitation is not a constitutional requirement.” There are also remarks from contesting parties which believe that this is a tactic to give the caretaker government more power to convene on “urgent matters.”

What does the above mean?

Primarily, the ECP’s decision to undertake the delimitation process means that Pakistan’s general elections will be delayed. The “cryptic” nature with which updates are being announced has become a cause of worry over whether the elections will be conducted at all. Although the census highlights the need for delimitation to maximise the democratic nature of the elections, the decision’s timing and resultant in elections have sparked debates and controversies. It has been predicted that the elections are likely to be held in February 2024, a month before the Senate elections. The Director Programs at the Free and Fair Election Network (FAFEN) Muddassir Rizvi spoke in favour of this possibility, saying: “One of the upsides to this can be that one of the biggest aberrations in our constituencies — unequal constituency strengths — can also be fixed. The newly amended election law makes it easier to allow for equal constituencies.”

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Composition of Pakistan’s new Cabinet

By Shamini Velayutham

On 18 August, a 24-member cabinet made up of politicians was installed by interim Prime Minister Anwaarul Haq Kakar. The newly nominated interim ministers were sworn in on 17 August by President Arif Alvi. Four advisers to the prime minister, three special assistants to the prime minister (SAPMs), and five federal ministers make up cabinet. The members and their designations are as follows.

- The former Governor of the State Bank of Pakistan (SBP) Shamshad Akhtar, has been given the portfolios of Finance and Revenue, Economic Affairs, Statistics, and Privatization.
- Former Foreign Secretary Jalil Abbas Jilani has been named foreign minister.
- Former Balochistan Home Minister Sarfaraz Bugti has been appointed federal

minister for interior, overseas Pakistanis, and drug control.

- Senior journalist Murtaza Solangi, who previously held the position of the Director General of the Pakistan Broadcasting Corporation, has been appointed to the Ministry of Information.
- Senior attorney and former member of the Supreme Court’s International Arbitration Cell, Ahmed Irfan Aslam, was handed the ministries of law and justice, climate change, and water resources.
- Former SECP chairman Muhammad Ali has been handed the ministries of petroleum and power.
- Gohar Ejaz, a well-known industrialist, has been given the portfolios of trade, industry, and production.
- Former PITB director Dr Umar Saif has been assigned two portfolios: science and technology, and information technology and telecom.
- Former federal secretary Muhammad Sami Saeed has been given the job of planning, development, and special initiatives.
- Jamal Shah, a well-known TV entertainer, has been appointed as the federal minister of national heritage and culture.
- The government education and professional training portfolio has been given to well-known Pakistani author, pundit, and journalist, Madad Ali Sindhi.
- Dr. Nadeem Jan, a renowned health specialist, has been given the portfolio of national health services, regulations, and coordination.
- The human rights minister has been given to Khalil George of the Balochistan Awami Party.
- Minister for religious affairs and interfaith harmony Aniq Ahmed is a scholar of religion.
- A retired captain named Shahid Ashraf Tarar has been handed three portfolios: communications, maritime affairs, and railways.

The caretaker ministers, advisers, and special advisers received their portfolio assignments from the interim premier shortly after the oath-taking ceremony.

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Pakistan: Following blasphemy allegations, mobs torch churches and Christian homes in Faisalabad. Caretaker PM promise action

By Genesy Balasingam

On 17 August, following an alleged instance of blasphemy in Jaranwala town of Faisalabad district in Punjab province, a violent crowd of hundreds trashed and torched five churches, attacked the homes of members of the Christian community and robbed items from residences abandoned by their owners due to fear of violence. The violence began after some residents claimed that numerous desecrated pages of the Holy Quran had been discovered outside a house, where two Christian brothers lived.

The vandalism and the attack on the minority community was condemned. Caretaker Prime Minister Anwaarul Haq Kakar has promised stern action against those responsible for the desecration and burning of several churches and houses belonging to the Christian community. PTI leader Shah Mahmood Qureshi stated that this kind of animosity and religious intolerance has no place in Islam or national values. Additionally, The United States and the European Union condemned the violence and demanded a fair investigation into the riots.

Religious minorities account for around 5 per cent of Pakistan'. 2023 saw a significant increase in attacks against minorities facing unprecedented insecurity and persecution in the country. Religious persecution initially targeted Ahmadis but has increased significantly over the course of decades to various other minority groups. Most of the accused in all these violence has openly disputed the blasphemy claims levelled against them, questioning the police's legitimacy as well as the allegation into question. Vested interests have used the blasphemy laws with impunity.

The recent Quran burning in Sweden, as well as the disarray that surrounded it, has increased sensitivity to blasphemy violence. As the Taliban gets a greater footing in Pakistan, increasing brutal attacks on religious minorities demonstrate the organisation's growing power and influence. These acts exacerbate the volatility of an already volatile country and demonstrate how Pakistan is now increasingly threatened by extremists. These attacks have escalated year after year, regardless of the regime in power. The occurrence of this attack during the caretaker government - a highly volatile political context amidst the delimitation process poses serious domestic security threat. Following the delimitation, one major fear is that these attacks

may escalate from religious blasphemy to full-fledged minority conflicts.

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President returns bills; will have to wait for the next Parliament

By Genesy Balasingam

On 16 August, President Arif Alvi returned over a dozen bills for the reconsideration of the parliament. These bills will be considered and agreed upon following the general elections and the formation of a new National Assembly. With the dissolution of the National Assembly, the uncertainties surrounding general elections, and the new NA, this evaluation has been postponed indefinitely. The returning laws were passed by both houses of parliament towards the tail end of the PML-N-led government's term without due review and in the presence of only 15 governing coalition lawmakers. The President has returned these legislation as they do not comply with the constitution's requirements or with the standards of parliamentary processes. These bills on the agendas were also not referred to the appropriate committees. The bills did not come from the NA and were sent directly to the Senate without any analysis or comprehensive deliberation, which will be problematic in the future. Within an hour of the session, which was presided over by the Speaker Raja Pervez Ashraf, the house had approved 29 of the 36 proposals. This has been interpreted as a ploy to avoid the responsibility of enacting such laws.

Among these proposals is a bill to amend the Code of Criminal Procedure to enhance the penalty for disrespecting the Holy Prophet (PBUH), his companions, and other religious leaders, from three to at least ten years in prison. This appeared to benefit some specific personalities. Other returned bills include the Press, Newspapers, News Agencies, and Books Registration Amendment Bill, which attempts to replace the word "federal government" with "Prime Minister" wherever it appears in the law. Given the region's current political insecurity, this substitution gives the caretaker Prime Minister more power. This further translates to an advantage to other parties in being able to blame the caretaker government for tighter

laws and their repercussions, which will aid contesting parties in securing votes in the next elections which have been delayed.

The collapse of the political establishment, along with the climate catastrophe, currency depreciation, inflation, and the lack of a solid administration, has raised the likelihood of people opposing the return of certain political regimes. As a result, hastily enacting these laws has allowed political parties to purchase more time in order to re-establish themselves as an avenue through which the region might rebuild stability. Restrictions on the fourth pillar of democracy is a tactic for limiting public opinion and restricting government criticism, resulting in a lack of accountability between the

government and the people. President Alvi has also returned the Higher Education Commission (HEC) measure, which sought to extend the term of the HEC chairman to four years. Other legislations that have been returned include the public sector commission amendment bill.

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Source: Dawn

PR DAILY BRIEFS

POLITICS



Source: The News International

Qureshi under the custody of the special court for four days

On 21 August, Shah Mahmood Qureshi PTI Vice Chairman of Pakistan was taken into custody under the supervision of the Special court judge Abul Hasnat Zulqarnain for the communication of information through a secret document. The Federal Investigation Agency (FIA) under Sections 5 and 9 of the Official Secrets Act, 1923 has held Qureshi for further investigation. The Counter Terrorism Wing (CTW) of the FIA stated that Imran Ahmad Khan Niazi, Shah Mahmood Qureshi, and their other associates were involved in the disclosure of contents of the "cipher." FIA apprised that the surreptitious meeting at Banigala on 28 March, 2022 elucidate their heinous act and a FIR has been registered for the same. Imran Khan is accused of intentionally ordering Muhammad Azam Khan, the then-prime minister's principal secretary, to create the minutes record note of the relevant covert meeting by altering the message's contents to serve his own interests at the expense of national security.

Furthermore, it is alleged that Imran Khan kept the numbered and traceable copy of the cipher telegraph transmitted to the prime minister's office and never gave it back to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Before his arrest, he requested the caretaker government, Chief Justice of Pakistan, and Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) to ensure a level playing field for the PTI during the upcoming elections. (Khalid Iqbal "[Special court remands Shah Mahmood Qureshi in FIA custody for four days](#)" *The News International*, 22 August 2023; Ikram Junaidi & Iftikhar A. Khan "[Cipher probe takes a dramatic turn as FIA nabs Qureshi](#)" *Dawn*, 18 August 2023)

PTI leaders judicial remand extended by Anti-Terrorism Court

On 21 August, the Anti-Terrorism court extended its judicial remand for 11 days against the former Governor of Punjab, Umar Sarfraz Cheema. PTI

leader Cheema was probed for his alleged role in the 9 May violence and the attack on Jinnah house and military installations. The court has requested the officials to bring him to the court on 1 September 2023. Meanwhile, the court also prolonged the remand for Khadija Shah, the former finance minister's daughter, in the Askari Tower attack case and rioting for a further 11 days. ("[May 9 Riots: ATC Extends Judicial Remand of Umar Sarfraz, Khadija Shah till Sept 1](#)" *The Friday Times*, 21 August 2023)

Shehbaz Sharif's visits Nawaz Sharif in London to discuss political developments

On 21 August, Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif arrived in London, reportedly to meet his elder brother and party leader Nawaz Sharif, to discuss significant political developments leading up to the general election. Meanwhile, a crackdown on human rights advocates and political figures continues, with Imaan Mazari and Ali Wazir arrested by Islamabad Police, and Asad Umar by the Federal Investigation Agency (FIA). The arrests are connected to their involvement in various rallies and controversies. Additionally, the cipher controversy resurfaces as Asad Umar is arrested by the FIA for investigation over a cipher leak, following the recent arrest of Vice Chairman PTI Shah Mahmood Qureshi in the same case. ("Shehbaz arrives in UK to meet Nawaz," *Dawn*, 21 August 2023; Sardar Shikandar Shaheen, "Asad Umar, Ali Wazir and Imaan Mazari arrested," *Business Recorder*, 21 August 2023)

PTI leader remanded and Asad Umar 'missing' in cipher case

On 20 August, in a twist of events, PTI Vice Chairman Shah Mahmood Qureshi has been remanded in FIA custody for a day in the ongoing cipher case, while former finance minister Asad Umar went 'missing' from the capital, sparking speculation of his arrest in the same case. The FIR naming Umar as one of the 'associates' sought for questioning in the cipher controversy added weight to the rumors. However, FIA officials denied having Umar in custody, stating his role is still under investigation. Umar's reported return home further added to the intrigue, while Qureshi rejected the allegations as politically motivated. (Ikram Junaidi, "Asad 'goes missing', Qureshi remanded in cipher case," *Dawn*, 21 August 2023)

Swat police arrested of PTM activists

On 19 August, several Pakhtun Tahaffuz Movement activists were arrested ahead of their demonstration against human rights violations in the country, including enforced disappearances. They were travelling to Islamabad to hold a peace demonstration outside the Supreme Court building on the call of their leader, Manzoor Pashteen. The arrests were made after the deputy commissioner filed warrants for activists under the MPO. They were later released, but the Swat police had arrested them under Section 3 of the Maintenance of Public Order Ordinance. Provincial head of the Pakhtunkhwa Milli Awami Party Mohammad Ali denounced the police raid on his party's PTM activists in the province and stated that the arrest of political activists is a threat to the country's democratic rights and liberties. (KP police arrest PTM activists ahead of Islamabad Protest, *Dawn*, 19 August 2023)

A note from the interim foreign minister

On 18 August, according to *The Express Tribune*, the newly appointed Foreign Minister Jilil Abbas Jilani, expressed his priorities on strengthening bilateral relations with all major powers, including the US, China, and the European Union (EU). He also stressed on improving ties with India and further securing cooperation with the Gulf countries as well. He apprised that there was a general understanding in Pakistan that it was necessary to have tight relationships with China while still having a positive relationship with the US.

The funding from UAE and Saudi Arabia is necessary for the army-led economic recovery strategy. Pakistan is seeking billions of dollars in investment from Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates to fix its long-standing economic problems, notably its current account problems, which has forced the nation to apply for IMF loans. He continued by saying that improving relations with India depended on both sides finding a solution to their long-standing disagreements, particularly the crucial Jammu and Kashmir problem. Jilani reiterated the significance of Pakistan's connection with the EU, and claimed that Pakistan's main trading partner was the EU and that benefited Pakistan. (Kamran Yousaf "New FM wants friendship with all, enmity with none" *The Express Tribune*, 18 August 2023)

The Punjab government filed an intra-court appeal (ICA), which the Supreme Court apprised the LHC to resolve

On 17 August, SC advised Lahore High Court (LHC) to decide on the petition which was

submitted by the Punjab Government against the protective bail to former Punjab chief minister Chaudhry Parvez Elahi. The appeal was filed by senior counsel Barrister Syed Ali Zafar on behalf of the PTI's Punjab president. The attorney contended that the single-judge decision had been suspended by the division bench without a hearing and that Chaudhry Parvez Elahi had the right to request access to a court in order to get pre-arrest bails.

The Supreme Court questioned the government's determination to deprive a fundamental right to petition a court for the preservation of their liberties during the hearing. Instead of going to court, Justice Jamal Khan Mandokhel recommended the parties involved to negotiate a resolution. According to senior attorney Barrister Syed Ali Zafar, the Federal Investigation Agency and the Anti-Corruption Department are not allowed to make an arrest without first granting the accused the opportunity to be heard during an investigation. (Nasir Iqbal "SC asks LHC to decide Punjab's plea against bail for Elahi on 21st" *Dawn*, 17 August 2023)

Internal debate within the PML-N on Nawaz's return

On 17 August, according to sources who spoke to *Dawn*, prominent party leaders and legal experts have been deliberating for the past few days on the timing of Mr. Sharif's return and the legal matters. A source also stated that the elder Sharif would have more time to resolve his legal disputes if elections were postponed until February or March. Shehbaz Sharif, the leader of the PML-N and a former prime minister, will fly to London to visit his elder brother after certain matters pertaining to Nawaz Sharif's return were resolved, the sources claimed. ("PML-N mulls securing bail for Nawaz before his return" *Dawn*, 17 August 2023)

VIOLENCE AGAINST CHRISTIANS



Source: Reuters

Demonstrations by Pakistanis in London

On 22 August, Pakistani Christians in London demonstrated outside the Pakistan High Commission, demanding protection for Christians in Pakistan and condemning recent violence in

Jaranwala. Over 100 participants carried banners advocating the end of blasphemy laws and asserting "Christian Lives Matter." Similar vigils were held in Washington, D.C., where Pakistani Christians prayed for those facing attacks over blasphemy allegations. United Nations Secretary-General Antonio Guterres emphasized preventing violence based on religion and belief. Interim Prime Minister Anwaarul Haq Kakar visited Jaranwala, expressing solidarity, distributing compensation, and stressing the government's duty to safeguard minority lives and properties. Faisalabad's district administration estimated that a damage worth PKR 67 million suffered by the community. (Atika Rehman, "[Pakistani's abroad express frustration, heartbreak over Jaranwala](#)," *Dawn*, 22 August 2023; Tariq Saeed, "[Damage to Jaranwala churches, homes estimated at Rs67m](#)," *Dawn*, 22 August 2023)

Caretaker PM Anwaarul Haq Kakar on church burning

On 19 August, Caretaker Prime Minister Anwaarul Haq Kakar, slammed those responsible for the ransacking and burning of churches in Jaranwala. Separately, interim Punjab Chief Minister Mohsin Naqvi reassured that all damaged churches in Jaranwala will be repaired by next week. The interim government, plans to endeavour to distinguish between politics and the rule of law while promising that the rule of law will not be jeopardised in any manner. Two important officials questioned the charges of sacrilege of the Holy Quran, which fuelled the mob's frenzy. Some believe that this was a plot to incite religious feelings among the Muslim population and incite rioting. Foreign influence and local religious components are believed to be one of the reasons behind the Jaranwala [incident](#). Religious leaders clearly labelled individuals promoting violence as enemies of Islam and Pakistan. ("[PM rebukes elements behind mob violence](#)," *Dawn*, 19 August 2023; "[Jaranwala incident triggers nationwide Condemnation Day](#)," *The Express Tribune*, 19 August 2023)

Who said what

On 18 August, the National Commission on Human Rights (NCHR) declared that a total of 17 churches were gutted in the unfortunate Jaranwala incident. On 17 August, there was more criticism of the Jaranwala tragedy, with national officials and international organizations urging justice for those whose residences and places of worship were pillaged and destroyed by a ravaging crowd. The Pakistan Penal Code Sections 295 (desecration of a worship place) and 295-A (hurting religious sentiments) were both mentioned in the FIRs filed

with the Jaranwala City police. Along with other laws pertaining to attacking, burning, and damaging properties owned by the Christian community, Section 7 of the Anti-Terrorism Act had also been included in the FIRs.

Amnesty International urged Pakistan to stop the abuse of its blasphemy laws. It also stated that "the blasphemy laws have long been misapplied, and the Pakistani authorities need no further evidence to see how dangerous the blasphemy laws are." This despicable act occurred not long after other fanatical crimes in Sweden and other parts of Europe. This could be an attempt to draw comparisons and upset the harmony in the community. Nevertheless, this must be a lesson in tolerance and reminded that the proper response to any maniacal act is neither cruelty nor brutishness. (Irfan Aslam "[Footprints: Nothing to come home to](#)" *Dawn*, 18 August 2023; "[No sympathy for mob attacks on Christians](#)" *Dawn*, 18 August 2023; Tariq Saeed & Asif Chaudhry "[Police round up 140 over Jaranwala mob violence](#)" *Dawn*, 18 August 2023; "[A pitiful day](#)" *The Express Tribune*, 17 August 2023)

SECURITY



Source: Dawn

Pakistan Rangers and SIU apprehend 'IS militants'

On 19 August, an intelligence-based raid was conducted in a joint endeavour between Pakistan Rangers (Sindh) and the Special Investigation Unit (SIU), where the suspects were apprehended. The accused Farmanullah alias Ihtisham and Daud alias Amir Sahib, were said to be associated with the extremist Islamic State (IS) organisation, according to a Rangers official. According to a press release from the Rangers, Farmanullah "was an active member of IS or Daish and continued to be involved in terrorist activities in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Bajaur, and Karachi." It also apprised Daud had ties with Tehreek-i-Taliban Pakistan, an organization that is now outlawed, in Bajaur. ("[Two 'IS militants' held in Karachi's Gadap](#)" *Dawn*, 19 August 2023)

ECONOMY



Source: Business Recorder

Caretaker Federal Minister proposes USD 80 billion economy boosting plan

On 18 August, Commerce Minister Gohar Ejaz briefed his plans of boosting country's economy with a USD 80 billion plan after he assumed his tenure as the caretaker Federal Minister. Ejaz emphasized the concerns at the briefing about the subsidies given to state-owned businesses and reaffirmed his intention to gradually eliminating these subsidies. He stated his commitment by addressing the obstacles that the commercial sector faces. In addition, he disclosed his ambitions to introduce flagship projects within the Special Economic Zone focusing on the apparel industry in an effort to promote innovation and industrial expansion. These programs are expected to boost economic growth, produce job opportunities, and strengthen the nation's position on the world economic stage. Ejaz raised objections to the subsidies given to state-owned companies throughout the briefing. ("Gohar assumes charge with \$80bn export goal on mind" *Business Recorder*, 19 August 2023)

A significant fiscal deficit: the disparity between income and expenditure was left behind by the previous PDM administration

On 18 August, with a difference of PKR 2.76 trillion between solely two heads, the federal government spent more than PKR 7.4 trillion on debt repayment and defense compared to its net income of PKR 4.6 trillion. The coalition administration, which imposed more taxes on citizens in the guise of reducing the deficit, not only missed its budgetary goals but also the amount to which it had agreed upon with the International Monetary Fund (IMF) in February 2023. As far as fiscal operations go, FY23 was one of the most unsuccessful since the coalition administration made many unsound financial decisions.

The Ministry of Finance's preliminary findings show that the government deficit increased by PKR 1.1 trillion, or nearly one-fifth, from the previous year. As a result, the administration of the Pakistan Democratic Movement (PDM) added PKR 18.5

trillion to the nation's debt in just 15 months, surpassing the amount racked up by Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf during its three-and-a-half-year rule.

The Ministry of Finance issued Fiscal Operations Data on 17 August, which indicated that the overall fiscal deficit for FY23 was PKR 6.521 trillion. The government declared the overall fiscal deficit at PKR 5.94 trillion while passing the current fiscal year FY24 budget in June, indicating a gap of roughly PKR 580 billion. (Shahbaz Rana "PDM gov't misses deficit target" *The Express Tribune*, 18 August 2023; Khaleeq Kiani "FY23 ended with 7.7pc deficit, not PDM's claimed 7pc", *Dawn*, 18 August 2023)

Debts and liabilities skyrocketed in the fiscal year of 2023

On 17 August, the State Bank of Pakistan reported that the liabilities and debts have surged by 20 per cent in FY23. The debt of the country has significantly dropped by \$ 6 billion for FY23 compared to the previous year. It also reported that total debt and liabilities reached 91.1 per cent, up from 89.7pc in FY22. According to the figures, domestic debt increased to PKR 38.8 trillion in FY23 from PKR 31.085 trillion the previous fiscal year.

The debt servicing, which increased to PKR 9.819 trillion in FY23 from PKR 5.578 trillion in FY22, shows the economic burden of this significant debt and liabilities. This shows a 76 per cent gain year over year and a GDP percentage of 11.6 per cent compared to 8.4 percent in FY22. The debt servicing, however, went from \$15.1 billion to \$20.8 billion in FY23, an increase of \$5.7 billion. In FY23, there was significant political and economic uncertainty, making it difficult for the government to get loans from commercial banks and other lenders. (Shahid Iqbal "Total debts, liabilities jump by 29pc in FY23" *Dawn*, 17 August 2023)

The caretaker government increases the fuel price

On 16 August, following approval from the caretaker Prime Minister Anwaarul Haq Kakar, the new fuel prices came into effect. The newly-installed caretaker administration increased fuel prices by up to PKR 20 per litre on 15 August, the second significant increase in a fortnight. However, the prices are not applicable to light diesel oil and kerosene. The surge in price is anticipated to further stimulate inflation, which had slowed during the previous two months. Despite a nominal drop in inflation last month, the State Bank of Pakistan (SBP) decided to maintain the benchmark

interest rate at 22 per cent amid May's record-high inflation rate of 38 per cent. ("Caretaker govt hikes petrol, diesel prices to highest-ever level" *The News International*, 16 August 2023; Khaleeq Kiani "Govt increases petrol price to record high" *Dawn*, 16 August 2023)

ELECTIONS



Source: Times of India

ECP refrains caretaker government from influencing elections

On 22 August, the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) stated that caretaker governments shall not attempt to influence polls in the country while they can make decision regarding multilateral and bilateral project engagements. The polls supervising body further urged in-charges of all its wings and provincial election commissioners to ensure "immediate completion" of all polling arrangements and the availability of relevant supplies and urged them to ensure "free and fair" elections in the country. The ECP secretary expressed satisfaction with the progress and asked the heads of all election commission divisions and provincial election commissioners to finalise preparations to ensure the availability of necessary election material. The ECP secretary has also requested provincial election commissioners and the additional director general (election) Islamabad to confirm the timely receipt of constituency maps and vital data from provincial governments and the Statistics Department. (Amna Ali, "Caretakers granted control over ongoing projects," *The Express Tribune*, 22 August 2023)

CPEC's delayed development owed to Pakistan's tumultuous economy

On 22 August, Chairman of China Overseas Port Holding Company (COPHC), Yo Bo, stated that Pakistan's economic situation is mostly to blame for the delay in the development of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC). Yo spoke to the Lahore Chamber of Commerce and Industry (LCCI) about Gwadar's transformative progress under CPEC. He emphasised the importance of Gwadar, describing it as the CPEC's vital axis. Gwadar's port and city development, as well as the Gwadar Free Zone, have completed the first stage.

Speaking about Balochistan's economic disparities, Chairman Yo emphasised the region's unrealized potential, which was rich in natural resources but hampered by underdevelopment and insignificant commerce. He also discussed how the port facilitates barter trade with Iran, Afghanistan, and Russia, as well as its geopolitical benefits. ("Pakistan's economic conditions delay CPEC development", *The Express Tribune*, 22 August 2023)

Shamshad appointed to document untaxed sectors

On 22 August, Caretaker Finance Minister Shamshad Akhtar met with the electricity sector for the first time since taking office and visited the Federal Board of Revenue (FBR) to monitor progress on the implementation of the International Monetary Fund's (IMF) USD 3 billion Stand-by-Arrangement (SBA). Due to power theft and non-recovery of billed amounts, the power industry is a key concern for the caretaker government, as it has been for all previous governments. During her visit to the FBR, Caretaker Federal Minister of Finance Shamshad Akhtar is alleged to have emphasized the significance of increasing the tax-to-GDP ratio. She reportedly stated her desire to bring in new taxpayers rather than burdening or squeezing existing taxpayers, an exhortation given by all prior finance ministers but to no result. The ECP has set up a group with the mission of finalising an action plan for handing over power distribution firms (Discos) operating under their authority to the provinces. (Zaheer Abbasi, "Power sector grabs finance minister's immediate attention," *Business Recorder*, 22 August 2023)

ECP suggested to properly demarcate the constituencies

On 21 August, Free and Fair Election Network (Fafen) a monitoring group spurred ECP to strictly ensure each constituency has roughly the same number of residents. According to Fafen, strictly following district lines during the delineation of the National Assembly and provincial assembly constituencies in 2022 caused 82 National Assembly and 88 provincial assembly constituencies to have populations that differed by more than 10 per cent from the quotas per seat, or the average population of a constituency for each province, as determined under Rules 8(1) and 8(4) of the Election Rules, 2017. The population variance of National Assembly constituencies from their respective regional quotas may exceed 10 per cent for constituencies of two-thirds of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa districts, half of Sindh districts, one-third of Punjab districts, and all of Balochistan

districts if district boundaries are respected as in the past. In order to implement the spirit of the recently inserted proviso to Section 20(3) of the Elections Act, the monitoring group has advised the Election Commission to take into consideration altering its guidelines on the redrawing of seats. (“ECP urged to ensure redrawn constituencies have equal population” Dawn, 21 August 2023)

ECP: Transparent elections prioritised over timely elections

On 19 August, Election Commission of Pakistan emphasised the importance of new constituencies in ensuring transparent elections. The ECP stressed that if general elections were held without the process of redrawing constituencies, real representation of the people in parliament would be jeopardized. It also unveiled its plan to redraw all national and provincial assembly constituencies based on new census data to protect the fundamental rights of candidates, political parties, and voters equally. This decision, however, meant that the forthcoming general elections would not be held within the constitutionally mandated 90-day term due to new constituency delimitation based on the new digital census. Critics have argued that the commission's timeline for redrawing seats was a ploy to postpone the elections. (Fresh delimitation vital for true representation: ECP, *The Express Tribune*, 19 August 2023; Hasnaat Maik, “PBC opposes delay in elections.” *The Express Tribune*, 19 August 2023)

On Elections: Supreme Court to the Election Commission of Pakistan

On 16 August, according to the Pakistan People's Party (PPP), the upcoming elections may be delayed. The ECP called a conference to discuss how to hold elections based on the newly approved population census. Delegations from the ECP stated that the announcement of the election date would tentatively be released in late September. However, legal professionals informed that it was possible that the Supreme Court would be involved in organizing the upcoming general elections. They are also awaiting Chief Justice Qazi Faez Isa's decisions which could majorly impact the election results.

The subject of delimitation is particularly sensitive in the Sindh province, according to Chief Justice Umer Ata Bandial, who also noted that complaints about erroneous delimitations frequently originated in the region. The votes of competing candidates in a constituency might be impacted, he claimed, wherever modifications to the delimitation procedure were undertaken. (Hasnaat Malik “Potential election delay as ECP tackles

legalities” *The Express Tribune*, 16 August 2023; Sohail Khan “ECP unable to give Supreme Court election date” *The News International*, 16 August 2023)

EXTERNAL RELATIONS



Source: GLLSP-II

Agreement signed between Balochistan government and World Food Program (WFP)

On 19 August, Dawn reported that the World Food Programme (WFP) signed an agreement with the Balochistan administration aiming to implement initiative in the province to fight food insecurity and promote sustainable development. The agreement was signed on 17 August in Quetta by WFP Country Director Chris Kaye and Additional Chief Secretary of Balochistan Planning and Development Department Hafiz Abdul Basit. Following the Economic Affairs Division's approval of the WFP Country Strategic Plan (CSP) for the following five years, aggregating of USD 780.7 million, an agreement was reached with the Balochistani administration. The partnership between the province administration and the WFP was hailed by the WFP as a crucial step in Pakistan's combat against food insecurity and for sustainable development. (Amin Ahmed, “WFP, Balochistan sign deal to fight food insecurity” *Dawn*, 19 August 2023)

PROVINCES



Source: Dawn

Balochistan: People forced to migrate amid gang rivalry

On 22 August, it was observed that following a deviation from the ceasefire by two rival groups belonging to the Mengal tribe in Wadh, a gun battle ensued which led to groups of people migrating to other areas of Balochistan. The violence has been going on for a week, leading to shops, business centres, and education centres shutting and causing a depletion of food and other necessities in and around Wadh. A local resident stated that they have “shifted to other towns of Balochistan and Sindh,” and since business is being affected, “most people belonging to the Hindu community have left Wadh” to eliminate future potential losses. (Saleem Shahid, “Exodus from Wadh as violence spirals,” *Dawn*, 22 August 2023)

Balochistan: Petition against digital census

On 21 August, a petition was filed in the Supreme Court over the approval of the digital census 2023, which was in “violation of fundamental rights of the people of Balochistan.” This census was approved by the Council of Common Interests (CCI) on 5 August, wherein the population of Balochistan was allegedly reduced by roughly seven million people. The petitioner stated that this could affect the allocation of financial resources and Balochistan’s representation in the National Assembly, and thereby requested for an appointment of an impartial commission to examine the information posted by the Pakistan Bureau of Statistics, by referring to the National Telecommunication Corporation Data Centres. (“Balochistan census results challenged,” *The Express Tribune*, 22 August 2023)

Balochistan: Interim chief minister consults for caretaker cabinet formation

On 21 August, Dawn reported that Balochistan's interim Chief Minister, Mir Ali Mardan Domki, is actively engaged in discussions and interviews to establish a two-phase caretaker cabinet. Initial reports suggest around 12 ministers will be inducted, with more to follow in the subsequent

phase. Domki has held talks with various individuals, including politicians and technocrats, to fill pivotal ministries like planning, finance, and health. Parties such as JUI-F and Jam group, instrumental in Domki's selection, are expected to secure key ministries. The swearing-in ceremony for the cabinet is anticipated soon, with Domki emphasizing his commitment to addressing provincial issues during his tenure. (Saleem Shahid, “Caretaker Balochistan CM navigates challenges to cabinet formation,” *Dawn*, 21 August 2023)

Interim Prime Minister vows to provide opportunities Balochistan

On 20 August, All Parties Conference in Kan Mehtarzai, the interim Prime Minister Anwaarul Haq Kakar expressed his gratitude to the people for the nomination as caretaker prime minister. The people are confident enough that Kakar will eliminate terrorism in the region and conduct transparent elections restoring law and order. Meanwhile, Kakar ensured that he will work towards providing opportunities in the extensive areas of Balochistan. Additionally, Mir Saleem Khoso, a former Balochistan Assembly member, spoke with interim Prime Minister Kakar about issues of mutual interest. Kakar expressed sorrow over the loss of life in “the senseless act of violence” following a terrorist strike in North Waziristan. (“Caretaker PM vows uplift of far-flung areas of Balochistan” *The Express Tribune* 21 August 2023)

Balochistan: Meeting to select interim chief minister postponed

On 18 August, according to a Balochistan Assembly official, only three members showed up for the meeting on 17 August. The opposition leader and the incumbent chief minister were unable to agree on a nominee, leading to the creation of the parliamentary committee. It is composed of three representatives from the treasury and three from the opposition in the previous assembly that had been established earlier in the day by Speaker Jan Muhammad Khan Jamali.

Following the dissolution of the assembly on 12 August, Mr. Bizenjo and former opposition leader Malik Sikandar Khan had three days to select a candidate. The committee will go over the names of the four candidates that the opposition leader and chief minister forwarded to the speaker. Former MNA Muhammad Usman Badini and former district nazim of Sibi Mir Ali Mardan Domki have received nominations from the opposition parties. Sources claim that Maulana Abdul Wahid Siddique, a member of the opposition, the departing Chief Minister Mir Abdul Qudoos

Bizenjo, and Sardar Abdul Rehman Khetran were not present for the meeting. The committee has till Friday to come to a consensus; hence the meeting has been postponed. (Saleem Shahid [“Meeting to pick interim Balochistan CM delayed”](#) *Dawn*, 18 August 2023)

Balochistan: Outgoing Chief Minister Bizenjo having hard time accepting interim chief minister

On 17 August, the parliamentary committee came to a consensus by selecting Mir Ali Mardan Domki. The interim candidate was suggested by former CM Jam Kamal Khan Alyani and Malik Sikander Khan. Mir Ali Mardan Domki and Usman Badini are two JUI-F candidates the opposition leader has put forth for the post of caretaker CM. However, the outgoing Chief Minister Bizenjo has refused to take Domki as his successor. In addition to his own name, Sardar Abdul Rehman Khetran from the BAP, and Zamarak Khan Piralizai from the ANP were the other two candidates submitted by CM Bizenjo to represent the government side in the parliamentary committee. (Saleem Shahid [“Rift over body to pick interim Balochistan CM”](#) *Dawn*, 17 August 2023)

Balochistan: Fire exchanges by armed groups of the Mengal tribe in Wadh

On 17 August, over two hours passed during an intense firefight. Additionally, blasts were heard throughout the little Wadh town, according to officials, who also stated that the Khuzdar-Karachi national highway was stopped to traffic for a number of hours. Residents residing on both sides of the Khuzdar-Karachi highway reported hearing mortar rounds and heavy weapon fire in Wadh town, which led to intimidation and anxiety among them. A cease-fire between the opposing groups was attempted by the Khuzdar and Wadh administration. Even though there was a cease-fire, armed troops with powerful weaponry from both sides continued to stand in the trenches. (Saleem Shahid [“Violent clashes continue in Balochistan’s Wadh for second day”](#) *Dawn*, 17 August 2023)

Balochistan: Interim Chief Minister to be finalised

On 16 August, since the outgoing Chief Minister Abdul Qudoos Bizenjo and the leader of the opposition Malik Sikander Khan were unable to agree on a candidate, it is possible that a parliamentary committee may have to decide who would serve as the interim chief minister of Balochistan. According to the Constitution, if the chief minister and the opposition leader fail to reach a consensus on a suitable name for interim chief minister within the prescribed period, the matter would be sent to the parliamentary committee. Despite the two leaders having discussed Ali Mardan Domki’s name, sources claim that Chief Minister Bizenjo refused to sign a summary naming Mr. Domki as his successor. (Saleem Shahid [“Parliamentary body may have to pick Balochistan’s interim CM”](#) *Dawn*, 16 August 2023)



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