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Imran Khan, Toshakhana Case, and
Islamabad High Court

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About NIAS Pakistan Reader

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 Short Notes

Imran Khan, Toshakhana Case, and Islamabad High Court

By Dhriti Mukherjee



Source: Business Standard

On 25 August, Chief Justice of Islamabad High Court (IHC), Justice Amir Farooq, stated that the decision on the plea against Imran Khan had been deferred to 28 August, despite protests by his party members. He further noted that the high court bench was "sandwiched" between the trial court and the Supreme Court (SC) while discussing PTI Chairman Imran Khan's applications for the right to defence in the Toshakhana case. This statement was made with reference to the court's hearing of the Toshakhana case, and the IHC adjourned the hearing of the appeal until Friday.

The counsel for the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP), Amjaz Pervez, brought up the fact that the SC had taken up similar applications against the 4 August order of the IHC. Despite identifying procedural defects in the trial court's decision, the court made the decision to intervene only after hearing what the IHC had to say.

Chief Justice Umer Ata Bandial, who headed a three-member bench for the case, emphasized that there would be no compromise on dispensation of justice and decisions would be made according to the law and Constitution. This statement was essential due to the growing number of claims that all the procedures regarding Khan's case had been biased and unfair. The SC directed the attorney general to file a report by 28 August regarding the conditions under which Imran Khan was being held in jail, a matter which has been the centre of heated debate in the last few weeks.

Imran Khan's Conviction and Supreme Court's Acknowledgment

With reference to Khan's conviction in the Toshakhana reference by a trial court on 5 August, "procedural defects" were recognised by the SC. However, despite this acknowledgment, Chief Justice Umar Ata Bandial stated that they would wait for the decision of the IHC on the plea seeking suspension of the three-year sentence before taking

any action. The trial court was given the case back by the IHC for reconsideration. This was done not just as a result of the SC observing "serious defects," but also due to questions regarding the trial court's hurried decision that failed to consider statements by witnesses. Additionally, the trial court failed to follow the IHC's directions. The court decided to let the IHC decide the matter first and then proceed accordingly.

IHC Chief Justice's Comments and Imran Khan's Allegations

IHC Chief Justice Aamer Farooq remarked during the hearing that the trial court "did wrong" in convicting Imran Khan in the Toshakhana case. He showcased hope towards the high court acting on the points that had been brought forward by the counsel.

Meanwhile, Imran Khan accused the IHC Chief Justice of harbouring a deep-rooted sense of bias, which led him to keep Khan in jail so he would not be able to stand in the upcoming elections. Khan's petition thereby requested the SC to transfer his cases to either the Lahore High Court or Peshawar High Court, amid allegations by his lawyers and advocates that the IHC has displayed unfair bias and prolonged the hearings more than necessary. Combined with the public outcry and the conditions in which he is allegedly being held in, these new developments have complexified the legal proceedings, as more courts continue to get involved in the process.

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Pakistan on Chandrayaan Mission: From appreciation to introspection

By Rohini Reenum



Source: *The Economic Times*

On 23 August, India successfully completed Chandrayaan-3's landing on the Moon. Its efforts were lauded across countries

Political and Governmental Responses

Responses from Pakistan – by the government, leaders and people were surprisingly positive. Fawad Chaudhry, former minister of Information and Broadcasting in the Imran Khan government, who had mocked India after Chandrayaan-2 failed to land successfully, described it as a “great moment.” He tweeted the following “What a great moment for #ISRO as #Chandrayaan3 lands on the Moon, I can see lots of young scientists celebrating this moment with Mr Somnat Chairman ISRO, only Younger generation with dreams can change the world ... good luck,”. Hours before the Chandrayaan-3 landing, he had urged the Pakistani government to broadcast the event live on national television. This request triggered a debate on Pakistan's social media platforms, prompting a YouTuber to gather public opinion on whether India's big moon moment should be televised. Foreign Office spokesperson Mumtaz Zahra Baloch during her briefing on Friday said: “I can only say that it is a great scientific achievement, for which ISRO (Indian Space Research Organisation) scientists deserve appreciation.”

Critical introspection

There were some hilarious responses from the Pakistani citizens on social media. One person compared Pakistan to moon as both of them lag behind in basic infrastructure, like water, gas and electricity. This response was picked-up and reported by several media outlets in India.

Responses in Media

Dawn in an article titled “India becomes first nation to land spacecraft near Moon's South Pole,” stated that India is closing in on milestones set by global powers such as the United States and Russia, conducting many of its missions at much lower price. It also mentioned that India has been able to do that by adapting existing technology and using

an abundance of highly skilled engineers who earn a fraction of their foreign counterparts' wages.

Introspection on Pakistan's Space Programme

The success of the mission has also brought into focus Pakistan's own space programme and its achievements and pitfalls. In an article titled, “India's space quest,” Dawn while lauding India's achievement, cited reasons for the earth-bound nature of the Pakistani space programme. It stated that this is since Pakistan has become a consumer of science and technology rather than a producer of knowledge. It further argued that Pakistan's space agency has been helped by retired military men and not experts in the field and that their education system is not producing required manpower to give Pakistan a qualitative edge in Science and Technology.

President invites Chief Election Commissioners to set general elections date

By Femy Francis



Source: *The News International*

On 24 August, President Arif Alvi in a letter requested to invite Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) Sikandar Sultan Raja to decide on an “appropriate date” to hold the upcoming general elections for Pakistan. He pointed out that the National Assembly was dissolved on 9 August on the advice of Prime Minister and according to Article 48 clause 5 of the constitution, it is the President's responsibility to allocate the date for the upcoming polls within the stipulated 90 days period from dissolution.

The News International, was informed by an anonymous source that CEC Raja may not accept the invitation stating that the CEC held a meeting to discuss the matter as ECP does not require to have any consultation with the President expressing: “The law is very clear about it. President has cited the wrong article for this purpose.” He clarified Article 48 clause 5 stands when the ‘President’ dissolves the National Assembly then he shall appoint a date. Contrary to the situation here the National Assembly was dissolved at the recommendation of the Prime Minister and

therefore provides no jurisdiction to the President to make the decision.

Regardless even if the President does dissolve the assembly, the recent amendments to elections law Article 57 clause 1 by PDM clearly stripped of the Presidential power to fix election date. The amendment states that: “The commission shall announce the date or dates of the general elections by notification in the official gazette and shall call upon the constituencies to elect their representatives,” which gave the power to set poll date to ECP as originally in the constitution that was taken away by General Ziaul Haq and relocate to the President during his tenure.

Additionally, US Ambassador Donald Bloom reasserted their support to CEC Sikander Sultan Raja for conducting free and fair elections, conducted in following the constitution and law. Bloom expressed that ambiguity lays over the upcoming elections and that US will remain committed to deepen their relationship whomsoever the leader or party may be.

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- “[In meeting with CEC, US envoy Donald Blome urges Pakistan to move ahead with free, and fair elections.](#)” Daily Pakistan, 24 August 2023

Continuing controversy over President’s assent

By Femy Francis



Source: Dawn

Petitioned filed against suspensions of controversial bills

On 22 August, Advocate Zulfiqar Ahmed Bhutta filed a petition to suspend both controversial legislations, the Official Secrets Act and the Army Act amendments. He urged the apex court to review the two bills under Article 186 of Advisory Jurisdiction, where at any time, the president can

infer Supreme Courts opinions on law’s that stand for public importance. The petitioner mentioned President Arif Alvi’s recent “deemed assent” controversy and expressed that the discrepancies would influence both the accused and the general public. He called the legislations that were passed as “dubious in nature” and that it violated Article 4 on the rights of the individual to be dealt in accordance with law and Article 5, which iterates obedience towards the constitution.

Letter by Principal Secretary Waqar Ahmed

On 21 August, after the startling revelation, President’s Secretariat informed the Principal Secretary, Waqar Ahmed, that his services would not be required by the President. Waqar requested the withdrawal of his removal and refuted the allegation purported against him. President Arif Alvi claimed that he directed his staff to return the bill as he did not agree with the legislations and stated that his staff undermined his authority and did not follow suit. Waqar refuted these allegations levied against him in a letter stating that the two controversial bill Army Act and Official Secrets Act reached the president’s office on 2 August and 8 August respectively and the deadline were specifically mentioned as 11 August and 17 August. Waqar asserted that neither the President assented nor gave any written order to return the bill and that both bills remained within the President’s office till 21 August. Refuting the allegations, he iterated that he neither made a mistake nor delayed the proceedings and that his removal was unjustified, demanding to be reinstated to Establishments Division.

Adding to the controversy, a conversation also surfaced between President Arif Alvi and Secretary Waqar Ahmed, where the former agreed that Waqar was not involved in the bill approval process and that he was facing pressure from PTI party. Amid the altercation Presidential Secretariat issued notice for the appointment for new Principal Secretary of a grade 22 DMG officer Humaria Ahmad, Humaria has refused to take on the offer expressing her concerns against being included in the ongoing controversy.

Opinions and Response to the controversy

On 22 August, Awami National Party (ANP) vice president Ameer Haider Khan Hoti accused President Arif Alvi of playing a “double game” and that he did not want to offend the state institutions and the PTI party owing to his loyalties. He accused the president for: “intentionally created this controversy.” The discrepancies in the facts have created a vacuum of doubt where an editorial in Dawn, ‘[Persisting doubts](#)’ stated whatever may be Alvi’s position on the bills, he did not ascribe a position as to why he did not assent to bills in

writing and that his half baked apology and laid back approach and firing of his staff without assigning a reason is perplexing.

Another editorial in Dawn, 'Presidential indiscretion' by Zahid Hussain analyzed the controversy. Where he made note that while the constitutional proceeding was at question with the validity of the claims made by the president. What needs to be investigated is the fact that the two bills were pushed through the parliament for approval, just days before the dissolution of the previous PDM government. The urgency with which the bill was passed shows the ruling coalition's alliance towards providing more powers to the security and military agencies over civilian rights. Where the draconian laws the coalitions pushed for to reprimand its opponents will haunt the democratic process of the country. The editorial stress on the repercussions and the alleged targeting of the opposition party PTI, where the accused members will face court under both controversial amended acts.

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"ANP accuses Alvi of playing double game," The News International, 23 August 2023;
Syed Irfan Raza, "Bureaucrats refuse posting to Presidency after bills saga," Dawn, 23 August 2023

Violence against Christians: Update

By Genesy Balasingam



Source: Reuters

What happened?

On 17 August, following an alleged case of blasphemy in Jaranwala, in the Faisalabad district of the Punjab province, a violent crowd of hundreds damaged and torched five churches, attacking the homes of Christian community members. Rioting broke out after some neighbours claimed that desecrated Holy Quran pages had been

uncovered outside the home of two Christian brothers.

Public response

A middle-aged woman who is the neighbour to the victims remarked "I simply want to make sure their church is burned to the ground." Despite living next door for years, the aggression is being met with a lack of understanding and humanity. During the rampage, victims claimed that police officers did nothing but watch the mayhem, failing to restrain the crowd from harming minorities. It is also in direct opposition to the vision of Pakistan's founder. It also breaches the qualities of objective resolution, which grant minorities the right to freely proclaim, practice, and develop their religions and cultures. This is the fast-emerging new Pakistan which contrasts with Jinnah's vision for Pakistan, which claimed that whoever was in Pakistan and pledged loyalty to it was an equal Pakistani, regardless of their religious affiliation.

History

In Pakistan, Christians have always been a minority. Even though the bulk of Hindus in Pakistan separated with the founding of Bangladesh in 1971, Hindus continue to be the country's largest minority. In terms of Christian educational institutions and hospitals, Christian minorities have left a lasting effect on both the state and society. Despite their prominence and common religious components, they were denied equal rights and liberties, contrary to the constitution. Following the partition, a few hundred Christian families relocated and many Christian upper and middle-class people left the country, resulting in the retention of poor, illiterate, and primarily rural minorities, who were subject to religious and caste prejudice. These Christians then attempted to reinvent themselves by doing additional things in order to be accepted as Pakistanis. The outcome of all this patriotism is Shantinagar in 1997, Gojra in 2009, Joseph Colony in 2013, and Jaranwala in 2015. They are not only discriminated against at the state level, particularly in education, but are also social outcasts in most places. The government failed to provide equality amongst its citizens irrespective of their religious beliefs.

Government Response

In contrast to previous situations, the caretaker administration has demonstrated fresh compassionate support for the victims of the rampage. Caretaker Prime Minister Anwaar-ul-Haq Kakar and caretaker Punjab Chief Minister Mohsin Naqvi visited the area and distributed compensation cheques to families whose homes and belongings had been burned down. They also attended Sunday services in the area, sitting among the rubble of a ransacked church. The district administration has also requested immediate repairs. This public

display of solidarity has instilled in the victims a sense that the state of Pakistan has their back.

In perspective

This violence will end only if the underlying causes of these situations are addressed. Minorities will continue to walk on eggshells, unsure what misspoken remark or misconstrued notion will bring the mob to their door. Changing the result of decades of state-sanctioned indulgence of ultra-right pressure organisations for political goals is the only way of undoing the harm inflicted. The state's new response of solidarity, as well as their arduous aim to punish violators and intolerance to such activities, may mark the beginning of a new Pakistan with new norms. Only time will tell why the government's response has shifted so dramatically. Will the caretaker government earn a permanent seat in Pakistan politics by reducing communal divisions amid political instability, or will it face severe criticism from the majority and

fail as a caretaker government, exacerbating political upheaval in the region?

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"Show of solidarity," Dawn, 23 August 2023

PR DAILY BRIEFS

POLITICS



Source: *The Times of India*

Interim Prime Minister forms Cabinet Committee for Disposal of Legislative Cases

On 24 August, Interim Prime Minister Anwaarul Haq Kakar created a Cabinet Committee for Disposal of Legislative Cases (CCLS). The aim of the new cabinet is to formulate law and review recent legislations and check what falls under the jurisdiction of the Parliament. The initiative questions the intention of the cabinet as the suggestion falls outside of their jurisdiction. The constitution mandates the interim government to just focus on running and completing the daily affairs related to economic matter and projects initiated by the previous government.

The previous government passed 76 legislations out of which 36 are approved to be referred for review. CCLC also states in case of amendments in policy matters and the proposal will be placed before the cabinet for approval. Kakar also plans to constitute two more committees to handle energy and Chinese investment related projects. Cabinet Committee on Chinese Investment Projects (CCoCIP) will be chaired by Kakar which would focus on protecting Chinese nationals working in Pakistan. Cabinet Committee on Energy (CCoE) will be headed by the power minister, minister for finance planning, communication, and law, where they would overview the consistent working of energy projects and deadlines. (Shahbaz Rana, "[PM sets up panel for law review](#)," *The Express Tribune*, 25 August 2023)

ATC allows arrest and interrogation of Imran Khan

On 24 August, *The Friday Times* reported that an anti-terrorism court (ATC) in Lahore granted permission to the police to arrest and question Imran Khan in relation to the 9 May vandalism incident at Jinnah House. The ATC decision comes amid countrywide protests following Khan's detention by Rangers on 9 May. The court's move is in response to a petition from the Lahore police investigation chief, who cited the need to

investigate Khan's alleged involvement in the Jinnah House arson case. ("[ATC Allows Police to Arrest, Interrogate Khan in Jinnah House Attack Case](#)," *The Friday Times*, 24 August 2023)

Supreme Court questions Imran Khan's probe in the Toshakhana case

On 24 August, Chief Justice of Pakistan Umar Ata Bandial proclaimed that there are 'prima facie' serious defects in the verdict of Toshakhana case against PTI chairman Imran Khan. The three-bench proceeding consisted of CJP, Justice Mazahar Ali Akbar Naqvi and Justice Jamal Khan Mandokhail who heard the plea issued by Imran Khan. The probe against Imran Khan lays pending in the Islamabad High Court where the three-member bench suggested to reconsider the judgment from the trial, convicting the party leader to three years of imprisonment. The bench questioned the manner of the proceedings stating why there was an urgency that they did not record statements of the witnesses.

Additionally, PTI chairman Imran Khan's legal team gets a jolt with their lead counsel Khwaja Haris refusing to represent Imran in cases over discipline issues within the team. It is reckoned that the differences arose within the legal team over Haris's suggestion to not to raise objection against the Islamabad High Court judgment. ("[There are 'serious flaws' in Toshakhana case judgment, observes SC](#)," *Pakistan Today*, 23 August 2023; "[Khwaja Haris quits Imran Khan's legal team amid Toshakhana hearings](#)," *Pakistan Observer*, 24 August 2023)

Sindh: PPP accuses census of undercounting Sindh's population

On 22 August, Senator Taj Haider of the Pakistan People's Party (PPP) issued a statement, saying that the computational damage done by the "so called census" to Sindh was more than anticipated. He alleged that the average family size had been reduced in the census, leading to a population reduction by roughly 20 per cent. Post calculations made by the PPP election cell in-charge, the party stated that the population of Sindh had been underreported, and expressed concern over potentially not receiving enough revenue assignment for infrastructural development. Though Haider asked for the statistical method of calculation, his "protests fell on deaf ears." ("[PPP rejects 'so-called results' of digital census](#)," *The News International*, 23 August 2023)

Courts intervene in Imran Khan's contempt proceedings

On 22 August, the final decision on Imran Khan's contempt proceedings and early release request in the Toshakhana case conviction were halted and postponed. In the case of the former, Justice Waheed Khan recommended to the chief justice to have a larger bench for further deliberations, through an injunctive order on the PTI's petition. This was opposed by Khan's advocate, who stated that the chief election commissioner had no authority in this matter, citing sections 10 and 4(2) of the Elections Act 2017.

Separately, in matters of early release, the Islamabad High Court (IHC) bench in charge of examining the matter, adjourned the hearing till 24 August 2023. This is amid protests by Khan's advocate, who stated that the day-to-day hearings of the trial court retrenched the rights of Khan, and asked for a decision on the same day, to no avail. (Malik Asad, Wajih Ahmad Sheikh, "LHC bars ECP from issuing verdict in contempt case against Imran," *Dawn*, 23 August 2023)

VIOLENCE AGAINST CHRISTIANS



Source: BBC

HRCP reported on incident of 'hate campaign' against Christians

On 26 August, *The News International* reported that according to the HRCP (Human Rights Commission of Pakistan) mission report, several mob attacks against the local Christian community in Jaranwala resulted in the burning and looting of at least 24 churches, many chapels, and numerous homes. In its conclusions, the team stated that it "cannot rule out the suspicion that this was not a spontaneous or random crowd, but rather that these attacks were a component of a larger campaign of hatred against the local Christians."

The report advised revising the laws against blasphemy to prevent their abuse against people or any religious minority. In order to prevent such groups from undermining the authority of the state, policies, and tactics to deal with organized extremist groups should be developed, especially with relation to the enforcement of law and order. The mission urged the Punjab government to act to put the court's recommendations into effect in order

to ensure that organized Muslim religious groups that openly declare their intentions to use violence against religious minorities are not treated with impunity. The judicial inquiry was held after communal riots in Gojra in 2009. ("Jaranwala incident: Attacks on churches, Christian houses were part of hate campaign: HRCP mission," *The News International*, 26 August 2023)

The British High Commissioner expressed her concern over Jaranwala tragedy

On 25 August, the British High Commissioner Jane Marriott met the interim Chief Minister of Punjab. The High Commissioner received congratulations from the CM of Pakistan on her new position in Pakistan. The British government and the Punjab government's collaboration in the areas of health, culture, officer training, and other ministries were discussed as well as issues of shared interest. The Jaranwala catastrophe and developing a plan to prevent similar incidents in the future were topics of discussion.

The interim chief minister informed of the deeply upsetting occurrence occurred in Jarwanala, and that the Punjab government quickly intervened to apprehend the criminals. He claimed that five churches have been repaired, and work is swiftly being done to rebuild the remaining churches. He also apprised the cabinet meeting was held in a church for the first time in Punjabi history, and PKR 2 million in financial support for each affected family were allocated. ("National Jaranwala tragedy: Strategy being evolved to curb such incidents: Naqvi," *The News International*, 26 August 2023)

Pakistani Christians rallied in front of the UN building

On 25 August, hundreds of Pakistani Christians protested in front of the UN building to call on the organization to take swift action to defend Christians from mob assaults. Protesters requested the UN in a resolution presented to UN representatives that Pakistan pass legislation to prevent further atrocities of minorities. The resolution called for legislation to put an end to the practice of utilizing blasphemy allegations for private gain and to prevent the abuse of blasphemy laws. Additionally, it exhorted the UN to fulfill its responsibility of upholding religious freedom and to put an end to forced conversions. (Anwar Iqbal "UN protection sought for Jaranwala victims," *Dawn*, 26 August 2023)

Religious leaders issue a joint declaration for the reconstruction Jaranwala Church

On 23 August, The Interfaith Harmony Conference organized by Pakistan Ulema Council (PUC) invited several religious heads and representatives to discuss the Jaranwala tragedy of Church burning. The leaders of various religious groups and sects demanded the reconstruction and rehabilitation of the vandalized Church and the houses of the aggrieved Christian community victims. The leader called the incident an act of: "sheer cruelty" not only against the Christians but Pakistan, where the chairman of Council of Islamic Ideology Qibla Ayaz said: "We are ashamed of this incident", and demanded that special tribunal should look into this incident by functioning day and night so that criminals should not only be punished but also fined." The joint declaration also issued that all the religious heads will comply to the investigation proceedings. (Kalbe Ali, "[Call to reconstruct vandalised churches, houses in Jaranwala](#)," *Dawn*, 24 August 2023)

PAKISTAN ELECTIONS 2023



Source: Associated Press

PPP and PML-N disagree on conducting delimitations

On 26 August, Pakistan People's Party and the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz have different opinions on whether the country should redraw the boundaries of its electoral districts before the next general elections. While the PMLN stress that the ECP is required by the Constitution to conduct new delimitations of constituencies in the nation following formal approval of the census results, the PPP observes that the Election Commission of Pakistan is constitutionally required to hold the elections within 90 days regardless of the results of the new census. According to the senior PMLN leader, there is a risk that some districts may be overrepresented in legislatures while other districts will be underrepresented if the ECP decides against carrying out new delineations of seats. Syed Nayyar Hussain Bukhari, a senior PPP leader, claimed that the Constitution did not include any language addressing delimitations and required elections to be held within 90 days. (Azeem Samar "[PMLN, PPP at odds over fresh delimitations](#)

[ahead of polls](#)," *The News International*, 26 August 2023)

Election commissioner Sikandar Sultan Raja, appears to have apathy for the Constitution, says Dawn

On 26 August, in an opinion from *Dawn*, the PDM government's 'timely' approval of census results and the justification of new constituency delimitation it has provided have contributed to the unlawful and unjustifiable delay of long overdue elections to the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Punjab assemblies, making it clear that the constitutional timeline for general elections will not be followed either. The ECP under Mr. Raja continues to operate as though it had no desire to quickly regain control over the political sphere. President Arif Alvi had invited Mr. Raja to a meeting on Wednesday so that they could discuss and decide on a schedule for the next general election. Article 48(5) of the Constitution grants the president the right to call general elections for the National Assembly within 90 days of that body's dissolution. The invitation was politely declined the next day by Mr. Raja, who deemed the president's gesture to be of "scant consequence" considering recent revisions to the election law. ("[Scant regard](#)," *Dawn*, 26 August 2023)

Regarding the schedule of the general elections, PPP is adopting a different strategy

On 26 August, the PPP, despite continuing to be a close ally of the PML-N-led government, adopted a distinct stance over the scheduling of the general elections as well as the standing of the Pakistan Army (Amendment) Bill, 2023, and Official Secrets (Amendment) Bill, 2023. The reason why the gap between the PPP and security establishment is growing so quickly after the dissolution of the assemblies is the subject of ongoing discussion. In a recent statement, PPP Chairman and former foreign minister Bilawal Bhutto Zardari warned that his party would not support the passage of the most recent budget in the National Assembly if the flood funds held by the Sindh government were not released. A senior political analyst claimed that the "powerful circles" were upset with this statement because it implied that the Sindh government was not releasing the flood funds. The PPP chairman expressed unhappiness with his father Asif Ali Zardari and PML-N leader Nawaz Sharif's approach to the establishment during a speech he gave in the lower house of parliament. (Hasnaat Malik "[PPP opposing 'powerful circles' again?](#)," *The Express Tribune*, 26 August 2023)

Delay in elections linked to Nawaz Sharif's return

On 26 August, in an editorial from The News International it is said that with the arrival of PML-N supremo Nawaz Sharif return is linked to elections in February 2024 and will be leading the PML-N's election campaign and would need a few months to mobilize his voters in Punjab. Even before the Council of Common Interest (CCI) gave its approval to the new census, the PML-N leadership had been warning that elections would be delayed. Despite criticism from observers that the PPP had approved the census and should have been aware that elections could be delayed if they proceed in accordance with the new census, the PPP has taken a strong stance on this subject. Regardless of the PPP's objections, it is nevertheless true that no democratic political party should gladly accept or support a delay in the general election. ("The 90-day friction," *The News International*, 26 August 2023)

ECP to delimitation constituencies and update the electoral rolls

On 25 August, the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) announced that it would work on delimitation of the constituencies and updating the electoral rolls side by side to guarantee the task is done in the shortest amount of time feasible, reigniting hope for elections in February of the next year. A PML-N delegation that had a consultative meeting on 25 August with the ECP regarding the election road map was given the guarantee. Its relays concern over the delay of elections for several months after completion of delimitation under the guise of synchronizing electoral rolls with new census blocks. Before 14 December 2023, the PML-N urged the ECP to finish the delimitation and electoral record update processes. The PML-N delegation was told by Chief Election Commissioner Sikandar Sultan Raja that the two duties would be finished concurrently and elections would be held as soon as practicable. (Iftikhar A. Khan "Fresh ECP assurance rekindles hopes for elections in February" *Dawn*, 26 August 2023)

Peshawar High Court: ECP ordered to respond to petition issued against them

On 23 August, Peshawar High Court ordered Election Commission of Pakistan to respond to the petition issued against them over the delimitation of the constituencies and the reason for the delay of elections. The petition was issued by Naeem Ahmad Khattak seeking to protect the electoral period as ascribed in Article 224 of the constitutions. He demanded contempt proceeding over CEC Sikandar Sultan Raja's violations of refusing Supreme Court order to hold elections by

14 May. He further accused that the ECP is purposefully taking steps to delay the elections by systemically planning and allowing delayed holdings. ("PHC seeks ECP's reply to plea against delimitation notification," *Dawn*, 24 August 2023)

SECURITY



Source: *The Express Tribune*

Hand grenade attack at Jhalawan Complex

On 22 August, there was a hand grenade thrash at the Jhalawan complex on Quetta-Karachi National Highway in Khuzdar. According to the police report, two were injured in the incident. Mastung, a hand grenade attack was also reported in another similar incident at Major Chowk. There was no loss of human life; however, the windows of the nearby shops were impaired due to the explosion. (Abdul Wahid Shahwani "Two injured in Khuzdar hand grenade attack," *Dawn*, 23 August 2023)

Six soldiers killed in the exchange of fire in Asman Manza area

On 22 August, according to the reports from the Inter-Services Public Relations (ISPR) media of the military wing, an exchange of assaults took place between the soldiers and terrorists in Asman Manza of South Waziristan district of Pakistan. It has been reported that six soldiers have lost their lives in the gruesome incident. Despite the tragic event, the armed forces managed to kill four terrorists. The report stated that "such sacrifices of our brave soldiers further strengthen our resolve."

Concurrently, the local police have acquainted that in Sherwangi area, a squad of the Baloch Regiment came under attack by targeting a convoy of security forces. Tehreek-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP), an outlawed organization, has claimed responsibility for the attack. They also reported that there has been significant presence of Afghan militants carrying out improvised explosive device (IED) during the time of the incident. (Dilawar Wazir "Six soldiers martyred in S. Waziristan gun battle," *Dawn*, 23 August 2023)

ECONOMY



Source: Observer Research Foundation

IMF: State owned enterprises to be under Finance Ministry oversight

On 23 August, Dawn reported on a Reuters article that the International Monetary Fund informed that the government requires to keep all state-owned enterprises (SOE's) under finance ministry oversight. In accordance with the Stand by Agreement the financial year budget aims to aid fiscal adjustments and protect debt sustainability. In addition to that they want the economy to return to market determined exchange rate and functioning forex market to eliminate the forex shortage. They suggest structural reform, in the energy sector, state-owned enterprises and climate resilience. IMF representative to Pakistan Esther Perez Ruiz said to Reuters: "Following through on the previously agreed 2021 triage reform process, and other governance and private sector reforms, is important to durably attract foreign investment." ("Pakistan required to keep SOEs under finance ministry oversight: IMF," Dawn, 23 August 2023)

Pakistan's rupee fell low in the interbank market

On 22 August, Pakistan's rupee dwindled by engendering the demand for dollars upon the relaxation of import restrictions and the capricious rising associated with financing the country's present account deficit. According to the data from the central bank, the currency fell from 0.63 per cent to 299.01 per dollar in the interbank market. It was close to 298.93 per dollar in May as per the record. The current account deficit (CAD) figures have also warned over future external outlook and funding requirements.

The market-based exchange rate to obtain financial aid from the IMF has also paved the way to the currency's frailty. The country's depreciation balance of payments has also significantly affected the value of the currency. With a USD 809 million deficit in July, there has been concern over the account deficit which will eventually put constraints on the local unit. According to the analysts, the current account deficit gap will increase by daunting the rupee if the imports rise accompanied with high prices of oil and low

remittances. (Erum Zaidi "Rupee sinks to all-time low of Rs299/dollar in interbank market," *The News International*, 23 August 2023)

EXTERNAL



Source: Wion

Afghanistan poses a threat to the polio program of Pakistan

On 25 August, according to a statement made by the Polio Emergency Committee, there is still a chance that the wild poliovirus would expand abroad due to the continuous danger of transmission in eastern Afghanistan and its potential cross-border spread into Pakistan. The five new wild poliovirus cases reported in Afghanistan, all from Nangarhar province, according to the committee. 32 positive environmental samples have been found so far in 2023, all in the eastern area except for one site in Kandahar in the southern region and one from Balkh in the northern region.

Despite more positive samples in Afghanistan in 2023 than there were in 2022, this was partly because of more extensive surveillance in the nation, which included sampling more places and testing more frequently. Even though the action plan in southern Khyber Pakhtunkhwa has led to the vaccination of 160,000 more children, the environment is still difficult due to political unrest, a lack of safety in some areas, which necessitates police patrols for front-line workers, and vaccination boycotts wherein communities demand other services in exchange for vaccination against polio. ("Afghan polio cases threaten Pakistan's progress," Dawn, 26 August 2023)

'Pakistan had not yet submitted a formal request to join BRICS' says Mumtaz Zahra Baloch

On 25 August, Foreign Office spokesperson Mumtaz Zahra Baloch said that Pakistan had not yet submitted a formal application to join the BRICS group of developing countries. She said: "We will examine the latest developments and make a determination about our future engagement with BRICS" and "Pakistan is an ardent supporter

of multilateralism and as a member of several multilateral organizations it has always played an important role for global peace and development." Additionally, Ms. Baloch expressed her appreciation to Indian Space Research Organization (ISRO) scientists for Chandrayaan-3's successful landing, calling it "a great scientific achievement." When questioned about the statements made by the UN and other international bodies in the wake of the attacks on the Christian community in Jaranwala, Ms. Baloch stated that Pakistan had harshly denounced the atrocity. ("Pakistan never asked to join BRICS, says FO," *Dawn*, 26 August 2023)

Think Tank delegation visits Afghanistan

On 21 August, the Institute of Strategic Studies Islamabad (ISSI), one of the leading think tanks in Pakistan, upon the invitation of the Centre for Strategic Studies in Kabul, sent a delegation to Afghanistan during 21-23 August. Led by Director General ISSI Ambassador Sohail Mahmood, the delegation engaged in discussions aimed at enhancing Pakistan-Afghanistan relations. They met the acting Afghan Foreign Minister. It was reported that they discussed areas of mutual interest including security, economy, and counter-terrorism. ("Think-tank delegation discusses Pak-Afghan ties in Kabul," *Dawn*, 25 August 2023)

PROVINCES



Source: Dawn

Khyber Pakhtunkhwa: Police to form a SWAT team

On 25 August, Dawn reported the formulation of special weapons and tactics team (SWAT) by the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa police. The initiative came in to address the rising issues of militancy and attacks in the province. The police department found that two-third of nationwide attacks happen in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. The team aims deal with "high-risk" situation and terrorist attacks where the centralized core intelligence wing will look into an investigative approach. ("Police form special teams to fight militancy," *Dawn*, 25 August 2023)

Balochistan: "Our voices aren't heard in the president's or prime minister's offices," says BNP-President

On 24 August, BNP-M president Sardar Akhtar Mengal expressed his concern over the failure of provincial and federal government in reinstating peace in Balochistan province even after spending billions. He said that the province had always been exploited by projects like Reko Diq, Saindak and Sui gas. Also, he questioned the validity of the census that while almost all individuals participated in the census their population came down to only 7.3 million and therefore constituting them with lesser share in the National Finance Commission. Mengal claims that after the report of recent census came out Council of Common Interests (CCI) was told to decrease the population. Furthermore, he alleges that the restructuring of constituencies was just a ploy to delay the election process. (Saleem Shahid, "BNP-M chief laments govts' failure to restore peace in Balochistan," *Dawn*, 25 August 2023)

ENERGY/ENVIRONMENT



Source: Reuters

Pakistan and climate change

On 26 August, as per an editorial in *The News International*, Pakistan prepared for flooding as the escalating summer heatwaves and monsoon season combined to cause several flood problems across the nation. Global Water Security 2023, the most recent UN report, rates Pakistan as critically insecure. The Indus River serves as Pakistan's primary source of water and is the focal point of the biggest man-made irrigation network in the world, which is concentrated in the Punjabi plains. Pakistan is currently experiencing significant levels of intensity and unpredictability in the form of rainfall patterns.

Water, climate adaptation, and cross-sectoral demand management must all be integrated into the framework, according to the Federal Ministry of Planning. In order to change irrigation and crop varieties in the provinces, Ministry for Food Security should establish resilience toolkits, scale up its climate-smart agriculture solutions, and promote sustainable irrigation models. The provinces should conduct an assessment,

implement frameworks for policy, and begin implementing flood zoning, water conservation, metering, and city management laws through the courts. (Sherry Rehman "[Securing Pakistan's water](#)," *The News International*, 26 August 2023)

Sutlej river in medium to high Flood as thousands evacuated in Punjab, Pakistan

On 24 August, the Sutlej River in the Punjab province of Pakistan was reported to be in medium to high flood on Thursday night. Water was overflowing over the spillways at various sites at a higher rate than usual. Over the past 24 hours, rescue teams evacuated more than 6,500 people from flood-affected areas of Punjab. The Provincial Disaster Management Authority (PDMA) set up camps, transported people to safe places, rescued individuals, transported cattle, and provided food in districts including Bahawalnagar, Kasur, Okara, Vehari, Lodhran, and Bahawalpur. The flood situation has been ongoing since August 17 due to the high flood in the Sutlej River. (Imran Gabol, "[Over 6,500 rescued at Sutlej still in flood stage](#)," *Dawn*, 25 August 2023)

Cabinet committee on energy reconstituted in Pakistan

On 24 August, caretaker Prime Minister Anwaar-ul-Haq reconstituted the Cabinet Committee on Energy (CCoE), with the Minister for Power and Petroleum as its chairman. The central aim of the committee is to corroborate the implementation of energy projects, in particular the ones that are related to the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor. It also intends to identify and solve bottlenecks during project implementation. Additionally, it will review the existing energy policy and conduct inter-ministerial coordination regularly. ("[CCoE reconstituted](#)," *Business Recorder*, 25 August 2023)

Sutlej floods 100,000 people evacuated from Punjab

On 23 August, *The Friday Times* reported that over 100,000 civilians evacuated from eastern Punjab region when the flood ravaged the 'dry' River Sutlej after India released its rainwater downstream. Thousands of acres of land and some villages were overwhelmed after the burst into the river Sutlej. The at-risk areas include Sulemanki, Kasur, Okara, Bahawalnagar, Pakpattan, Vehari, Bahawalpur and Lodhran. Punjab Disaster Management Authority have issued for evacuation proceedings specially in the high-risk areas as the situation is set to get worse with the monsoon rains. This come at a time when Pakistan is still rehabilitating and recovering from the devastating

floods of 2022 that affected more than 33 million Pakistani's. ("[Sutlej Floods Prompts Evacuation of Thousands in Eastern Punjab](#)," *The Friday Times*, 23 August 2023)

IMF on Circular Debt Management plan of energy sector

On 23 August, the International Monetary Fund discussed with Pakistan on the losses of energy sector and the aim to reduce the circular debt. The circular debt in the power sector is estimated to be PKR 2.5 trillion. IMF expressed its concerns over Circular Debt Management (CDM) plan's sustainability with declining pace of recoveries. They demanded that the government need to outline a better strategy to tackle the issues. ("[Pakistan, IMF hold virtual talks on energy sector](#)," *The News International*, 24 August 2023)

New hike over electricity, effective from September's bill

On 23 August, according to *Dawn*, PKR 2.07 per unit in the billing month of September will be charged for electricity consumed in July, with the regular tariff 26pc which came into effect from 1 July. The Central Power Purchasing Agency (CPPA) and the Wapda distribution companies (Discos) have filed a joint appeal with the National Electric Power Regulatory Authority (NEPRA) for an additional fuel cost adjustment (FCA). The NEPRA has acknowledged the petition and scheduled public hearings for 30 August to determine whether the planned rate increase complies with monthly FCA processes, and whether the proper procedures were followed when using power generation facilities in July.

Once approved, the Discos would charge their customers an additional amount of approximately PKR 29.8 billion for the electricity used in July, at an additional FCA of approximately PKR 2.07 per unit, despite almost 64 per cent of the power was generated using domestically available and cheaper fuel, up from 58 per cent in June, 56 per cent in May, and 54 per cent in April. (Khaleeq Kiani "[Another jolt awaits power consumers as Discos seek Rs2.07 hike for July](#)," *Dawn*, 23 August 2023)

Country's power generation increased by nearly five per cent

On 22 August, according to the data from National Electric Power Regulatory Authority (NEPRA), the power generation of Re-gasified Liquefied Natural Gas (RLNG), hydel, and coal were increased by five per cent, with the receding rate of fuel, gas, oil, and wind. Compared to last year, the total cost of generating electricity fell by 22.1 per cent and this

is due to the high share of renewable sources in the energy mix and low fuel prices. The power generation increased by 8.2 per cent in July compared to June on a monthly basis. This improvement is credited to the increase in hydel power by 33.5 percent, 14.7 per cent increase in RLNG and 13.5 per cent increase in nuclear power generation. However, other sources such as fuel, gas, oil, and wind, declined due to the lower generation of power. ([“Power generation up 5pc in July, cost down 22pc,”](#) *The News International*, 23 August 2023)

CHINA AND CPEC



Source: The News International

CPEC demands punctual payments to a powerhouse to be ensured by the government

On 23 August, CPEC firms in the power sector demanded the government to take charge of punctual payments over the sale of electricity to the Central Power Purchase Agency (CPPA). The CPEC projects are estimated to have over dues payments of USD 1.2 billion. The Chinese national insurance companies like Sinosure reduced their coverage of projects to 70 per cent and the banks are demanding 25 per cent coverage from the third party. A unanimous representative expressed: “If the status quo continues, it would be no more sustainable for Chinese enterprises to keep their projects fully operational.” “We are getting some portion of our receivables enabling us to pay loan installments with interest to our lenders.” (Khalid Mustafa, [“CPEC firms ask govt to ensure timely payments to operationalise powerhouses,”](#) *The News International*, 24 August 2023)



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We are hoping to build this initiative into a credible independent global portal with independent research and analysis on contemporary Pakistan in a real-time basis. In the process, we are also looking forward to building capacity amongst young scholars who would want to work on Pakistan.



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