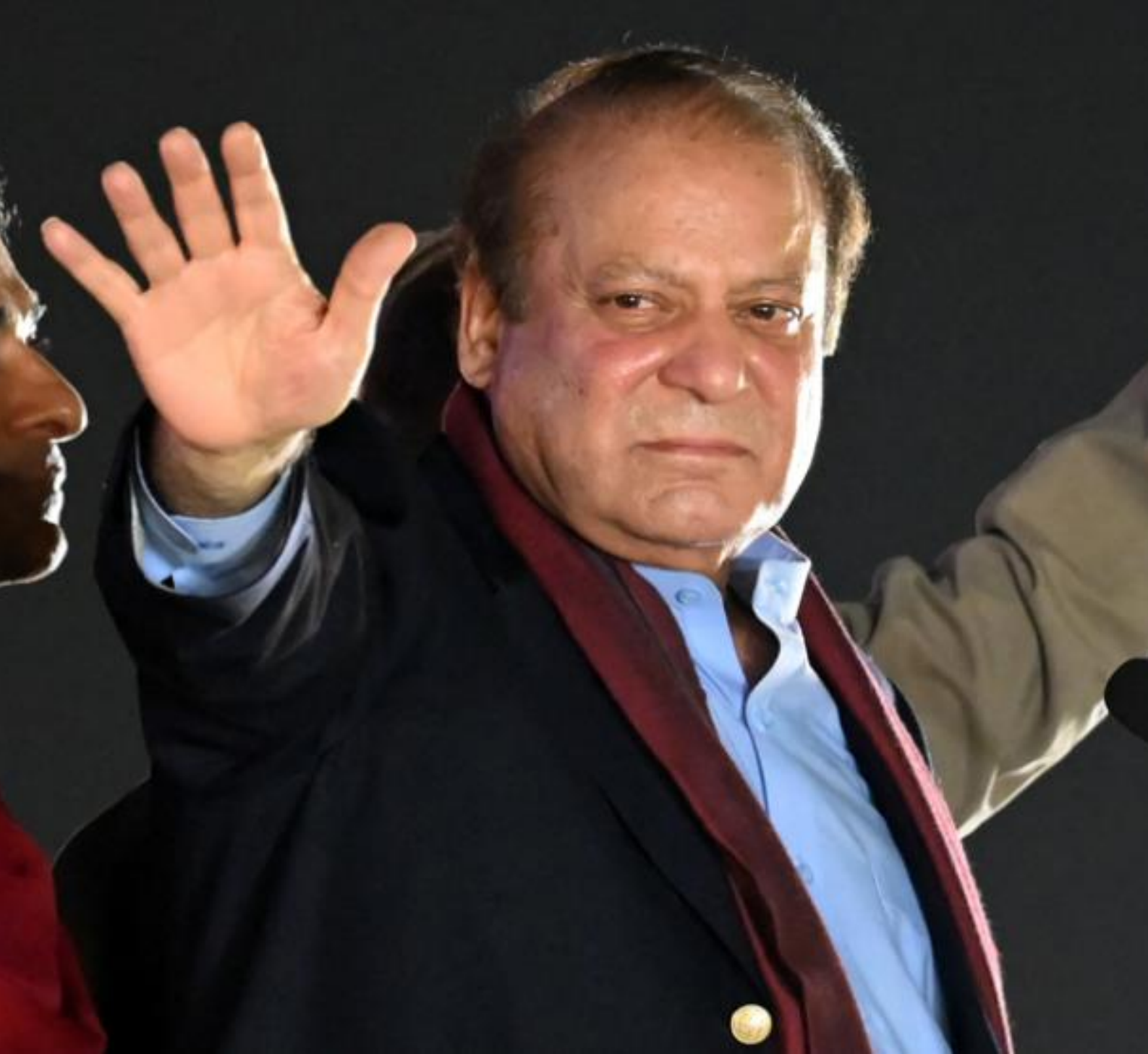


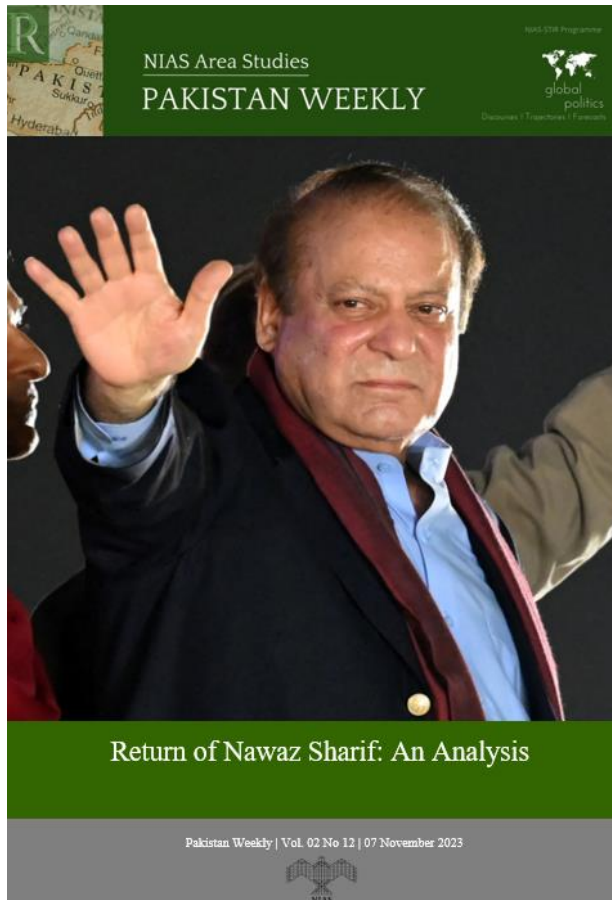
NIAS Area Studies  
PAKISTAN WEEKLY



Return of Nawaz Sharif: An Analysis

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### About NIAS Global Politics

Global Politics is a primary focus of the NIAS Programme on Science, Technology, and International Relations (STIR). The primary focus is on contemporary world affairs. The Programme publishes *The World This Week*, and *NIAS Fortnightly on Science Technology and International Relations*.

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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 Commentary

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### Return of Nawaz Sharif: An Analysis

By Shamini Velayutham

On 21 October, Nawaz Sharif returned home to launch his party's campaign ahead of the parliamentary elections scheduled for January 2024, following four years of self-imposed exile in London. Nawaz, who was previously overthrown in a military coup, held the office of Prime Minister of Pakistan for three non-consecutive terms. As the leader of one of the two dynastic parties that have historically controlled Pakistani politics, the Pakistan Muslim League (Nawaz), or PML-N, was headed by Nawaz in the past. In a 2017 decision pertaining to accusations of corruption, the Supreme Court declared him ineligible to remain in office.

He was ordered a seven-year prison sentence the following year for corruption, which he denied. However, the sentence was suspended stating medical reasons, allowing him to receive treatment abroad as long as he returned within four weeks, a clause that he later broke for four years. Since his trip to the UK, Nawaz returned with a big fanfare right before the elections. On his return the Islamabad High Court granted him protective bail, which prevented him from being taken into custody before his court appearance.

#### Why did Nawaz return now?

First, the political circumstances. Pakistan has been facing economic, political turmoil and terrorism. PML-N when faced with elections wanted Nawaz to return as their leader to bring the party back to power in 2024. The systemic crackdown of PTI only made the party more popular and dwindled the PML-N's support. Nawaz Sharif's popularity stands vital to compete with the ever-growing popularity of PTI Chairman Imran Khan.

Second, a well-timed return. Nawaz Sharif scheduled his comeback in accordance with Pakistan's legal system. He intended to coincide his comeback with Chief Justice Umar Ata Bandial's retirement, as the latter's support for Imran Khan was legendary. On 23 August, Nawaz during the interview stated that, "The chief justice is well aware that Imran Khan has wreaked havoc on Pakistan's economy, ethics, and culture. He has

propagated violence and repeatedly violated the Constitution." Nawaz has constantly accused Bandial of his support towards Imran Khan in the Toshakhana corruption case verdict. However, Nawaz Sharif believed that Faez Isa, his successor, would be a safer choice because he wasn't viewed as an acolyte of Imran Khan or the Army.

Third, Shift in military policy. Pakistan is dependent on foreign funders, particularly the International Monetary Fund, and coups frequently come with a significant cost in terms of international sanctions. Pakistan's military chose to send out a figurehead who would enable it to stay in the background and maintain control over its key priorities, which included the country's relations with China, the US, Afghanistan, and India. Imran Khan's nationalism fostered relationships with the armed forces as well. In contrast to his competitors, he had no ties to any particular province.

The military adored Imran Khan at first, then turned against him. Khan specifically named General Asim Munir COAS, as the person attempting to destroy his political party. Previously, he had been labelled as a traitor to General Bajwa, the former head of the army, who had played a crucial role in placing and maintaining him in office. In addition, he accused a general in the ISI of being behind an attempted assassination attempt on him. As Khan is ousted from the regime, political experts like Wajahat Massod feel that the military is inclined to give him another chance. Despite the tumultuous past, the military's policies are slowly in favour of Nawaz. It is also evident that Nawaz's return to Pakistan was not publicly opposed by the military, henceforth Nawaz could be the military's saviour.

#### What does his return signify?

First, the forthcoming elections. Sharif's choice to go back to Pakistan indicates that political forces have a reasonable amount of faith without reaching an agreement, Sharif would not have chosen to go back to Pakistan. The argument has merit in Pakistan, where the strong military has been charged with exerting influence in the political sphere. The country would benefit even if an agreement made it possible for Sharif to return to Pakistan. Particularly in recent years, Pakistan's politics have been extremely divisive. Therefore, Nawaz's return would create political normalcy.

Second, a fresh start for Nawaz. Sharif appears to be unwilling to take up his political career and resume their old rivalry with the current military leadership. Supremo Nawaz Sharif on his first day of the arrival spoke to an extensive crowd of supporters at the famed Minar-i-Pakistan in Lahore. He stated, "I am meeting you today after several years, but my relationship of love with you is the same. There is no difference in this relationship. The love I am seeing in your eyes, I am proud of it." Sharif emphasized the personal toll that politics had inflicted. He discussed the deaths of his mother and wife "to politics" and expressed regret for not being able to give them a befitting send-off. The prospect of political normalcy returning to the nation is symbolized by his return.

#### Challenges awaiting Nawaz

Nawaz Sharif will need to address Pakistan's political and economic future as well as establish and improve his policies. Even while the IMF's prediction for the country's economy is getting a little better, there are still no simple solutions for the issues facing the country. The legality of Nawaz Sharif's earlier disqualification from the electoral process remains unclear, even though the PML-N has effectively fielded him as its prime ministerial candidate, should it win the 2018 elections.

There is a greater chance than ever that Nawaz Sharif would clash with the army head at some

point, whether the current one or a successor, given the army's most recent incursion into the political sphere. The dynamics between Pakistan's prime ministers and army chiefs are determined by their respective ideologies, stances, and political outlook. The sheer structure of constitutional democracy, even one as weak as Pakistan, puts the brass at odds with the de facto chief executives, as militias are ill-equipped to govern complicated governments.

#### Views of the other political parties

**PTI:** The supremo of the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) has returned to the country, to the dismay of Imran Khan's Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf, which declared that the "coward fugitive is returning under judicial asylum". A PTI spokesman claimed that to facilitate the repatriation of a "national criminal" from London, the "state has buried shame, modesty, law and justice with its own hands."

**MQM-P:** As the political parties compete for control ahead of the elections, talks about potential cooperation have been initiated between the PML-N and the MQM-P by former prime minister Nawaz Sharif. Discussions about potential future collaboration have been held by both sides.



Source: Dawn

## PR Daily Briefs

### POLITICS



Source: Dawn

#### Deportation of illegal immigrants in Sindh suspended for one day, to resume by train

On 7 November, the deportation of illegal immigrants from Sindh, primarily Afghan nationals, was temporarily suspended for one day. The government decided to send them back to their country by train instead of buses. Approximately 80 illegal Afghan immigrants were brought to Afghan transit centers in Sultanabad. A decision was made to deport 760 immigrants to Balochistan by train, with a special train set to depart for the Chaman border. The process involves verifying the identities and documentation of these individuals, with the assistance of mobile vans provided by the National Database and Registration Authority (Nadra). There was a meeting in Islamabad to discuss the repatriation process and address challenges related to verification and documentation. The pace of repatriation had slowed down due to “certain factors,” including the number of illegal foreigners being on the “higher side.” Steps were taken to expedite the process while ensuring security and border clearance. (Imtiaz Ali, “[Sindh to send illegal immigrants back to Afghanistan by train.](#)” *Dawn*, 8 November 2023)

#### Pakistan’s caretaker PM discusses election preparations with chief election commissioner

On 7 November, Caretaker Prime Minister Anwaarul Haq Kakar held a meeting with Chief Election Commissioner Sikandar Sultan Raja to review preparations for the upcoming general elections scheduled for 08 February. During the meeting, the chief election commissioner briefed the prime minister about the Election Commission of Pakistan’s (ECP) readiness and revealed that a final list of redrawn constituencies would be issued on 30 November. The schedule for the general elections will be announced soon after. Current hearings on objections related to delimitations are ongoing, with a substantial number of objections

already filed. Additionally, the prime minister is preparing for a series of international visits, starting with the Economic Cooperation Organisation (ECO) summit in Tashkent, Uzbekistan, and attending an Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) conference on Gaza in Saudi Arabia. (Syed Irfan Raza, “[PM assures CEC of full support for free, fair elections.](#)” *Dawn*, 8 November 2023)

#### Delayed passport issuance in Pakistan leaves thousands in limbo

On 08 November, *The Express Tribune* reported that a nationwide shortage of lamination paper for passports has created a significant backlog and delays in passport issuance in Pakistan. Thousands of individuals who need passports for international travel, including students and workers, are facing uncertainties and cancellations of their travel plans. The Directorate General of Immigration & Passports (DGI&P) acknowledged the issue, with the Director General for Media of the Ministry of Interior, Qadir Yar Tiwana, saying that the “situation will soon be under control and passport issuance will continue as normal.” Many people have expressed frustration, saying that they have “had to cancel” their travel plans, as the “mismanagement of the DGI&P” has cost them their “golden ticket out poverty and this country.” (Muhammad Ilyas/Aihtesham Khan/Razzak Abro, “[Passport shortage leaves many stranded.](#)” *The Express Tribune*, 08 November 2023)

#### PTI accuses Karachi police of crackdown against the party

On 7 November, PTI accused the Karachi police of discriminately arresting PTI workers ahead of their 12 November rally. The party member stated that they were not even nominated and that these actions were sheer injustice and political vendetta against the party and called it a “crackdown.” Regarding the rally, Barrister Fayaz Samor announced that they have finalised all arrangements from their end. (“[PTI says police pick up eight workers in Karachi’s Korangi.](#)” *Dawn*, 8 November 2023)

#### PTI and Imran Khan loyalists can contest in polls, says Kakar

On 31 October, Prime Minister Anwarul Haq Kakar stated that PTI leaders and loyalists of Imran Khan will be allowed to contest in elections, clarifying that there is no provision being made to ban PTI. Rumours have been circulating in the political sphere of Pakistan that the party might be banned and that they would be banned from using

their official symbol the “bat.” To which Kakar clarified that it is in ECP’s jurisdiction that is beyond their authority and that currently there has been no such proposal. He was further questioned over the refusal to announce election dates to which he again stated that it is under ECP’s jurisdiction. (Zulqernain Tahir, [“Imran’s loyalists won’t be barred from contesting polls: PM Kakar.”](#) *Dawn*, 1 November 2023)

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### **Shehbaz Shari and his son summoned against the Ramzan Sugar Mills case**

On 31 October, PML-N leader Shehbaz Sharif and his son Hamza Shehbaz were acquitted by an accountability court in the Ramzan Sugar Mills case. The National Accountability Bureau approached the court to reopen the case of alleged corruption case of over PKR 500 million, where the case accused both father and son duo of corruption of PKR 213 million. The NAB accused the duo of misusing their authority and the son abetted the crime. ([“Ramzan mills reference reopens: Lahore court summons Shehbaz, Hamza,”](#) *Dawn*, 1 November 2023)

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### **Nawaz strolls into the country to restore the party’s fortunes**

On 1 November, as the Islamabad High Court reviewed the appeals of former Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif and suspended his charges in the Al-Azizia case, the PML-N supremo headed the party meeting which was held at Jati-Umra for the first time in four years after his party came into power. The meeting briefed about PML-N’s relationship with other political parties. Most importantly, the meeting also conferred about Elder Sharif’s political tour all over the country. He is set to visit all the provinces in November to restore and strengthen his party; 's goals and virtues. PML-N is in the process of releasing a new manifesto according to the concurrent events that are happening in the country. Post the meeting, PML-N Secretary General Ahsan Iqbal stated, “We think at the end of January 2024, the elections will be held. The party will start receiving applications from interested candidates across the country from Wednesday (today) till Nov 10 and the central and provincial election boards will be set up for awarding tickets for upcoming polls.” He also stated that a new manifesto committee under Senator Irfan Siddiqui has also been initiated with a focus on the economy and judiciary. (Zulqernain Tahir, [“Nawaz to embark on country tour to revive party’s fortunes,”](#) *Dawn*, 1, 2023)

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### **Pakistan cracks down on over 150 surrogate betting companies, citing billions in economic losses**

On 31 October, *The News International* stated that the Pakistani government has initiated a crackdown on more than 150 surrogate betting companies operating in the country, which are accused of causing substantial economic losses by normalising gambling and betting activities. These companies operate primarily online, facilitating bets on sports, especially cricket. The Ministry of Information and Broadcasting warned against any association with such companies and stressed the need to terminate any existing agreements. It is alleged that untaxed money from these operations is transferred abroad, with indications that much of it flows to India. The government is cooperating with various institutions, including the military, to eliminate these companies. (Kasim Abbasi, [“Crackdown launched on 150 betting companies,”](#) *The News International*, 31 October 2023)

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### **Justice Mansoor Ali Shah dissents on NAB Amendments verdict, asserts accountability for armed forces and judges**

On 30 October, in a dissenting note on the National Accountability Bureau (NAB) amendments verdict, Justice Mansoor Ali Shah of Pakistan’s Supreme Court (SC) stated that members of the armed forces and judges should be accountable under the accountability laws. The SC had earlier annulled certain amendments to the National Accountability Ordinance, which sparked controversy. Justice Shah emphasised the importance of the “trichotomy of power,” saying no state organ should claim superiority over the others. He stated that none of them could “usurp” each other in “the exercise of each other’s functions.” Further, Justice Shah dismissed Imran Khan’s objections to the amendments, asserting that they relate to procedural matters and “in no way take away or abridge any of the fundamental rights guaranteed by the Constitution to the people of Pakistan.” (Maryam Nawaz, [“Military officers, judges ‘fully liable’ under NAB law: Justice Shah,”](#) *The News International*, 31 October 2023)

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### **Sindh government needs PKR 2 billion to repatriate migrants**

On 29 September, the provincial and federal authorities of Pakistan said that they had finalised the preparations to encompass people who do not adhere to the government deadline for the expulsion of illegal immigrants from Afghanistan. Interior Minister Bugti stated, “After the November 1 deadline, there will be no compromise on the issue of the expulsion of illegal immigrants.” An official from the Commissionerate

for Afghan Refugees apprised illegal immigrants residing in Pakistan are already seeking settlements in Europe, the US and the UK under the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and some choose to remain undocumented. Along the sidelines of the repatriation, the Sindh government has finalised arrangements for the Afghan refugees. However, it claims that it requires about PKR 2 billion to provide shelter, food and transportation for them to their home country. Home Minister Haris Nawaz stated that the Sindh government will pay for all costs associated with deporting illegal immigrants who resided in the province. He declared that a request for PKR 2 billion in funding for the exercise will be made soon by the home department to the Sindh government. ( "No sign of let-up as repatriation deadline nears" *Dawn*, 30 October 2023); Imtiaz Ali, "Rs2bn needed for the deportation of illegal immigrants from Sindh," *Dawn*, 30 October 2023)

### **Wajiha Qamar of PTI joins PMLN**

On 29 September, after meeting with former prime minister Shehbaz Sharif, Wajiha Qamar, a different former member of Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI), announced her joining the Pakistan Muslim League Nawaz (PMLN). The most recent PTI leader to leave the party was Wajiha Qamar. The former prime minister congratulated her on joining the PML-N during his speech at the event. She declared that she had total faith in Nawaz Sharif, Shehbaz Sharif, and the party platform. She praised Nawaz Sharif but also stated that the party he led had previously played a "historical role" in Pakistan's growth and development. ( "PTI leader Wajiha Qamar joins PMLN," *The News International*, 30 October 2023)

## **ECONOMY**



Source: Dawn

### **Pakistani traders seek private airlines' support for business facilitation**

On 7 November, the Sarhad Chamber of Commerce and Industry (SCCI) President, Fuad Ishaq, called on private airlines, including Emirates

Airlines, to introduce new schemes and initiatives aimed at facilitating the business community. During a meeting with Emirates Airlines officials, Ishaq suggested the airline provide special incentives, loyalty cards, and joint promotions with SCCI. The goal is to create an "ease of doing businesses and removal of irritants in smooth promotion of businesses, trade and industries in the province." The airline representatives expressed their willingness to consider these recommendations and ensure further facilitation for SCCI members. ("Private airlines asked to facilitate traders," *Dawn*, 8 November 2023)

### **70 per cent of the oil and gas field is undiscovered says Federal Minister for Energy**

On 7 November, Federal Minister for Energy Muhammad Ali, addressing as the keynote speaker at a conference, stated that up to 70 per cent of Pakistan's land is still uncharted and has to be assessed for the search for oil and gas to lower the country's reliance on fuel imports. The Society of Petroleum Engineers (SPE) and Pakistan Section, along with the Pakistan Association of Petroleum Geoscientists (PAPG), organized the two-day 29th Annual Technical Conference (ATC). The conference this year has "Exploring the Unexplored: High-Risk Plays and Economic Challenges" as its theme. Ali added that both domestic and foreign businesses would be encouraged to participate in the two-phase auction of 24 oil and gas wells that would take place in a few months. He also emphasized the value of these kinds of technical conferences and asked experts for advice so they might pool their knowledge to solve the nation's energy and economic problems. (Wasim Iqbal, "Oil, gas: 70pc area remains unexplored," *Business Recorder*, 8 November 2023)

### **Saudi to seek control over Shell Pakistan**

On 31 October, Shell Pakistan Ltd (SPL) stated that Saudi Arabia-based company WAFI Energy LLC is set to buy 77.42 per cent of its shares that were put on hold by the foreign sponsor in the oil marketing company (OMC). The Shell Petroleum Company which is a branch of Shell Plc is the sole company that is said to be the largest shareholder in the Pakistan economic market. The public owns 15.2 per cent of shares and the rest is taken care of by public-sector companies, banks mutual funds and so on. In July 2023, Pakistan Refinery Ltd and Air Link Communication Ltd expressed their interest in jointly buying the majority shares of SPL. Meanwhile, the British investment firm Prax Overseas Holdings Ltd also announced their interest in buying the local OMC. (Kazim Alam, "Saudi firm eyes control of

Shell Pakistan,” Dawn, 1, 2023)

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### **US stays as the top exporter for Pakistan**

On 1 November, according to the data from the State Bank of Pakistan (SBP) during the first three months of the current fiscal year 2023-24, the US remained the top export place for Pakistani goods. The list was followed by China and then the UK. The products that were exported were about USD 1, 376.125 million. As per China, Pakistan has exported goods amounting to USD 633.374 million and the UK imported around USD 518.948 million from Pakistan. (“US remains top export destination for Pakistan,” The Express Tribune, 1 2023))

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### **Oil prices drop over three per cent as fears ease about Israel-Gaza conflict**

On 30 October, oil prices fell more than three per cent as concerns about the Israel-Gaza conflict disrupting oil supply eased, with Brent crude futures down 3.21 per cent to USD 87.58 a barrel, and US West Texas Intermediate crude dropping 3.67 per cent to USD 82.40. The initial boost in oil prices from the conflict subsided as analysts noted no disruptions to supply. An analyst at Price Futures Group, Phil Flynn, described the situation saying that “the war premium has come out of the market.” The World Bank has also expected global oil prices to spike as a result of the conflict, highlighting three risk scenarios based on previous conflicts, and how a bigger disruption means a larger reduction in supply. (“Oil falls over 3pc as supply concerns ease,” Dawn, 31 October 2023))

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### **State Bank of Pakistan keeps key interest rate unchanged at 22 per cent**

On 30 October, the State Bank of Pakistan (SBP) decided to maintain the key interest rate at 22 per cent, anticipating a significant decline in inflation in October due to reduced fuel prices and easing rates of some major food commodities. The SBP cited improved crop output and a substantial reduction in the current account deficit as factors supporting its decision, while emphasising the need to continue with a tight monetary policy stance to achieve its medium-term inflation target. However, it noted that “global oil prices remain quite volatile and the conflict in the Middle East makes its outlook even more uncertain.” (Shahid Iqbal, “SBP maintains key interest rate at 22pc,” Dawn, 31 October 2023))

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### **Pakistan International Airlines to resume more flights as Pakistan State Oil company extends credit facility**

On 30 October, the Pakistan International Airlines

(PIA) stated that is set to restore more flight operations as Pakistan State Oil (PSO) company has extended a credit facility for fuel purchases. The PIA had faced disruptions due to fuel supply issues, resulting in the cancellation of numerous flights. However, the airline has now said that “flight operations are expected to come back to normal routine in next few days with more improvement in the fuel supply.” In a statement, PSO said that the credit had been extended “to further support the national carrier.” (“PIA set to run more flights after credit line extended,” The Express Tribune, 31 October 2023))

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### **World Bank forecasts modest 1.7 per cent growth for Pakistan in FY 2023-24**

On 31 October, *Business Recorder* reported that in its latest report titled “South Asia Development Update Toward faster, cleaner growth,” the World Bank predicted a modest growth rate of 1.7 per cent for Pakistan in FY 2023-24. The bank’s report highlights the fragility of Pakistan’s economic situation, with a shrinking economy and significant challenges, including ongoing inflation pressures, fiscal policy constraints, and extensive flood damage. Import controls intended to narrow the trade deficit have also affected the supply of industrial raw materials. While economic conditions are challenging, Pakistan remains dependent on capital inflows to finance fiscal and current account deficits, and foreign exchange reserves are limited. The report also notes that Pakistan is one of three South Asian countries in a crisis, along with Bangladesh and Sri Lanka. (Tahir Amin, “World Bank projects 1.7pc growth rate,” Business Recorder, 31 October 2023))

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### **Punjab allocates PKR 83 billion for wheat loan in upcoming four-month budget**

On 31 October, *Business Recorder* reported that the Punjab province in Pakistan has allocated PKR 83 billion for a wheat loan in its upcoming four-month budget, out of an estimated budget of PKR 2,076.2 billion. Additionally, the budget includes provisions for services (PKR 218.5 billion), debt repayment to federal institutions (PKR 80 billion), and funds for the evacuation of foreigners residing illegally in Punjab after 31 October (PKR 0.4 billion). The caretaker government assured that elections in Punjab will be held on time, with additional security measures at sensitive polling stations, involving over 260,000 police personnel and more than 145,000 rangers and army personnel. The budget also includes allocations for various development projects, social protection initiatives, and addressing the smog situation. (“Federal institutions: Rs80bn set aside for debt repayment,” Business Recorder, 31 October 2023))



### **Govt scurries to secure loans of PKR 8 billion for PIA**

On 29 October, The Ministry of Finance was trying to find room for PKR 8 billion in loan guarantees to keep within the agreed-upon restrictions of the IMF, despite a 70 per cent reduction in earnings due to the cancellation of over 600 PIA flights. As per the sources, PIA's daily revenue had drastically decreased by 60 to 70 per cent; formerly, it was generating between PKR 700 and PKR 800 million. Currently, this is down to PKR 300 million. After difficult talks, PIA persuaded them to pay USD 25 million instead of the outstanding USD 30 million. PIA had requested PKR 24.6 billion from the Pakistani government to cover its operational costs. The demand for this injection was first turned down by the Ministry of Finance, which cited PIA's history of proposing financial injections with the promise of implementing a restructuring plan that was never carried out. (Mehtab Haider, "[Govt scrambles to get Rs8bn loan guarantees for PIA.](#)" *The News International*, 30 October 2023)

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### **USD 97.2 billion deal signed between Pakistan and China's BRI**

On 29 October, the Consul General of China Zhao Shiren at the third Belt and Road Forum stated that the forum has paved the way for new high-quality cooperation between Pakistan and China. Speaking at the conference he said both sides have agreed to swiftly follow up on the development of the Gwadar Port and ML-1 upgradation. The Beijing Initiative for Deepening Cooperation on Connectivity, Belt and Road Green Development, International Digital Economy Cooperation, Green Investment and Finance Partnership, and High-Level Principles on Corruption-free Belt and Road Building are just a few of the 458 outcomes that have been reached during the BRF. At the BRF CEO conference, business deals totalling USD 97.2 billion were also signed, contributing to the creation of jobs and economic expansion in the BRI nations. According to Shiren, the conference also resolved to create a BRF secretariat to aid in the establishment of institutions and the execution of projects. (Asif Mehmood Butt, "[\\$97.2bn pacts signed at Belt and Road Forum: Chinese envoy.](#)" *The News International*, 30 October 2023)

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### **PR Exclusive Update Repatriation of Illegal migrants**



*Source: The Express Tribune*

### **NCHR petition against the forced repatriation plans of Pakistan**

On 31 October, a petition was issued by the National Commission for Human Rights to the Pakistani government stating their concerns against the repatriation program of "Illegal" Afghans. The petition urged the NHRC to protect the refugees and push the government from forcefully deporting or harassing the asylum seekers. UNHCR was also urged to expedite the asylum application by the refugees in Pakistan. It advised the government that any person holding expired government documents should not be removed and the administration should make sure that no families or children were separated. There is an urgent requirement for the development of a proper guideline for the refugee policy after consulting the stakeholders, civil society and the government. ("[NCHR asks govt not to repatriate vulnerable groups, asylum seekers.](#)" *Dawn*, 1 November 2023)

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### **The US ambassador to Pakistan met with the Foreign Minister to discuss the relocation of refugees**

On 31 October, US Ambassador to Pakistan Donald Blome met with Pakistani Foreign Minister Jalil Abbas Jilani to discuss his concerns over the safe repatriation plans for illegal refugees and the processing of refugees eligible for citizenship. They conferred over a plethora of bilateral issues facing proper repatriation and the special measures installation regarding the resettlement of eligible citizens to the US. The US mission spokesperson Jonathan Lalley informed of the meeting and stated that both sides agreed that their priority to ensure the safety of the refugees is paramount and that they would install proper screening systems. ("[Donald Blome discusses relocation of Afghans to the US with Jilani.](#)" *Dawn*, 1 November 2023)

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### 100,000 “illegal refugees” from Afghanistan return through Torkham border

On 1 November, *Business Recorder* reported that within the last two weeks, more than 100,000 illegal Afghan nationals have voluntarily returned to Afghanistan from the Torkham border crossing. The last date for repatriation was set to 1 November when the government directed all the migrants staying illegally should sell their assets and leave. Interior Minister Sarfraz Bugti estimated that 1.73 million undocumented refugees were living in Pakistan. Pakistan’s Foreign Ministry spokesperson Mumtaz Zahra Baloch said: “The decision is in the exercise of Pakistan’s sovereign domestic laws, and compliant with applicable international norms and principles...All foreign nationals legally residing/registered in Pakistan are beyond the purview of this Plan.” (“104,000 undocumented Afghans returned to Afghanistan through Torkham border: Pakistan official,” *Business Recorder*, 1 November 2023)

## SECURITY



Source: Dawn

### The prime minister states that terror activities have risen since the inception of the Taliban in Afghanistan

On 8 November, Prime Minister Anwaarul Haq Kakar noted that there has been a rise in terror activities in Pakistan since the inception of the Taliban administration in 2021 after the US left. He said: “After the establishment of the interim Afghan government in August 2021, we had a strong hope that there would be long-term peace in Afghanistan. [...] Strict action would be taken against Pakistan-opposing groups, especially the Tehreek-i-Taliban Pakistan, and they would not be allowed to use Afghan soil against Pakistan.” He estimated that 2,267 innocent lives have been taken by the Afghan terrorist group TTP. (“Terror incidents increased since Afghan interim govt came to power in 2021: PM Kakar,” *Dawn*, 8 November 2023)

### Inaction by Pakistan to stop the growing crimes against journalists

On 29 October, according to the Freedom Network’s Annual Impunity 2023 report, despite passing laws to protect journalists, Pakistan has not been able to stop the growing impunity for crimes against them. Ahead of 2 November, the International Day to End Impunity for Crimes against Journalists, a report titled “One step forward, two steps back - Pakistan legislates on the safety of journalists, but still fails to protect them” was released. In the two years following the legislation, “Pakistan continues to record an alarming increase in journalist persecution, especially by government authorities and state agencies, including kidnapping, physical assaults, and serious legal cases against them including on unproven charges of sedition, treason, and electronic crimes,” the statement read. The report highlighted that just in Islamabad, 37.5 per cent of the 248 cases that were reported between August 2021 and August 2023 (93 cases total) were infractions. The report also stated that Sindh was the second worst province in Pakistan, accounting for 22.5 per cent of the infractions (56 incidents) and that it was ironic that the majority of attacks against journalists were recorded from areas that had laws protecting their protection. (“Pakistan failing to combat rising impunity for crimes against journalists: report” *Dawn*, 30 October 2023)

## PROVINCES



Source: The Express Tribune

### Sindh: Agreed to allot PKR 4.5 billion for the deportation of Afghan refugees

On 31 October, the Sindh government approved PKR 4.5 billion for the repatriation of illegal immigrants who are residing in the Sindh province. The Chief Minister Maqbool Baqar chaired the cabinet meeting. The Home Secretary Muhammed Iqbal Memon told the cabinet that the deadline is near to deport all illegal immigrants and has shared the Illegal Foreigners Repatriation Plan (IFRP),

which contains necessary actions that are to be taken by all the provinces. He further added that the cabinet has approved and agreed to bear logistics and other things that have to be done. Meanwhile, Baqar has directed the police officers to support them during the deportation. (Tahir Siddiqui, "Sindh cabinet okays Rs4.5bn for deportation of illegal immigrants." *Dawn*, 1, 2023)

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**Punjab: Caretaker cabinet approves surplus budget of PKR 2.07 trillion for four months**

On 30 October, the Caretaker Punjab Cabinet has approved a surplus budget of PKR 2.07 trillion for the next four months, including an allocation of PKR 351 billion for development expenditures. This budget aims to cover ongoing expenses and allocate funds to critical sectors such as health, education, and agriculture. Additionally, a minimum wage of PKR 32,000 for workers has been approved, and anti-smog measures and regulations on essential commodities have been emphasized. The government is committed to ensuring free, fair, and impartial elections, with the delimitation phase set to conclude by 30 November. (Imran Adnan, "Punjab approves Rs2.07 trillion budget for next four months." *The Express Tribune*, 30 October 2023)

**Punjab: The government to present PKR 2.1 trillion budget**

On 30 October, the cabinet, chaired by Chief Minister Mohsin Naqvi, will hear the caretaker Punjab government's second four-month budget for the current fiscal year 2023–24. The caretaker government authorized a budget of PKR1.72 trillion for the first four months of FY23, from July to October, earlier in June, after using the remaining six months' budget, from January to June 2023, which was approved by the previous PTI government. The lack of information in this budget, which is set to expire tomorrow, 31 October, regarding the funds to be used in the lead-up to the elections which were initially scheduled for October provoked curiosity among many people. A budget of over PKR 320 billion has reportedly been created by the Punjab Planning and Development Board for the approximately 4,900 development projects that are presently being carried out in the province. The monies are available for use for 120 days, starting on 1 November. (Mansoor Malik, "Punjab govt to present Rs2.1tr budget for next four months, today." *Dawn*, 30 October 2023)

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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 this 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.

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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