

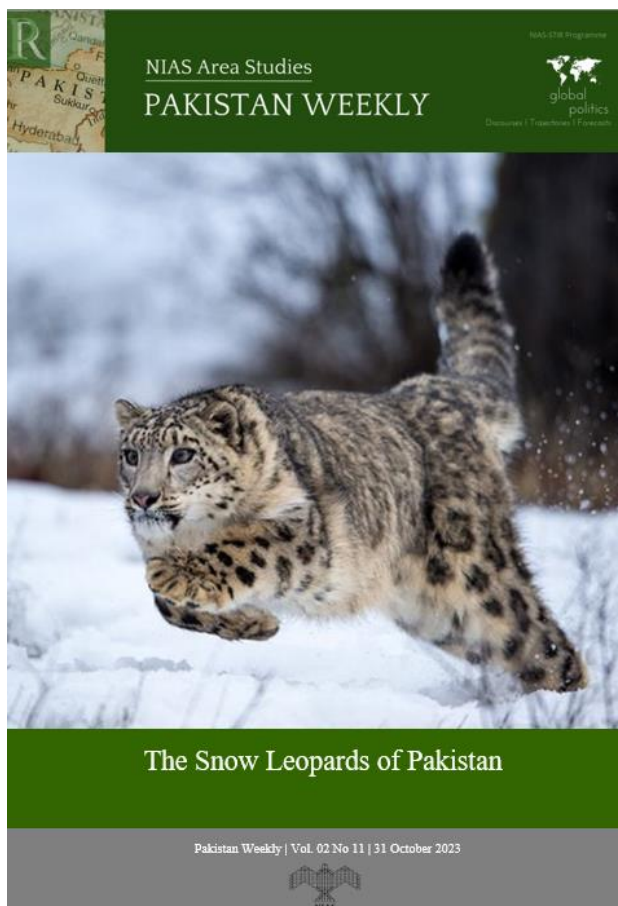
NIAS Area Studies

PAKISTAN WEEKLY



The Snow Leopards of Pakistan





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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.

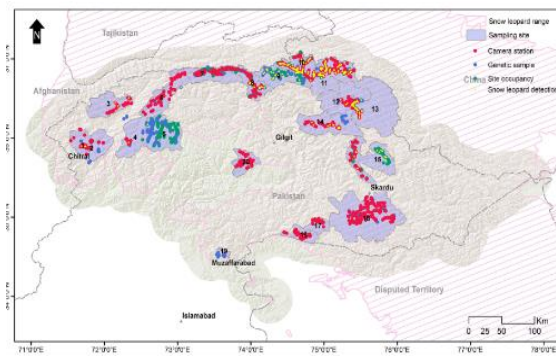
PR Commentary

The Snow Leopards of Pakistan

By Sneha Surendran

Despite being a protected species, snow leopards continue to be hunted for their luxurious fur and bones and is popular in illegal wildlife trade markets

In the Hindu-Kush and Karakoram mountains in northern Pakistan, including parts of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Gilgit Baltistan, and Pakistan-occupied Kashmir (POK) roam the elusive and majestic snow leopards. Pakistan houses the third biggest population of these animals globally with Gilgit Baltistan recording the most numbers here.



Source: Research Gate, Muhammad Kabir

In these mountainous regions, snow leopards are found at elevations of 3000-4500m with cliffs, rocky outgrowths, and deep ravines dotting the landscape. Also known as the ‘ghost of the mountains’ they are solitary and formidable predators, capable of withstanding frigid conditions. It is estimated that there are nearly 8,000 snow leopards remaining in the world, of which around 400 reside in the northern mountain ranges of Pakistan. However, these numbers are rough estimates as the snow leopards' elusive nature and camouflaging abilities render them difficult to track. The International Union for Conservation of Nature has flagged these animals under the “vulnerable” species category.

As recently as till 2017, it was believed that snow leopards were a monotypic species, that is, no sub-species of snow leopards existed. However, recent studies indicate that there could possibly be three subspecies. Furthermore, the snow leopards inhabiting the mountainous regions of Pakistan, Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan, and India potentially belong under the same sub-species.

Threats facing the snow leopards in Pakistan

Prey depletion: Apart from snow leopards, the mountains are inhabited by ibex, markhor, marmots, and other smaller mammals that are part of the leopards’ diet. However, illegal hunting and poaching of ibex and markhor is leading to a prey shortage apart from upsetting the balance of the mountain ecosystem. For instance, the markhor (large, wild goat), which is also the national animal of Pakistan, has recorded a significant drop in numbers from 2868 individuals in 2019 to nearly 800 in 2022.

In recent years, there has been a recorded increase in the population of feral dogs along the mountainous regions. These dogs hunt markhors, one of the snow leopard's primary preys, reducing food availability for the leopards. For instance, between 2006-2020, 392 markhors were killed in the Chitral Gol National Park in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province alone. Moreover, snow leopards are solitary animals that are wary of direct confrontations with humans and other predators. The presence of feral dogs in their territories can cause stress and disruption to the leopard's movement, hunting patterns, and reproduction cycles.

Illegal hunting: Despite being a protected species, snow leopards continue to be hunted for their luxurious fur and bones and is popular in illegal wildlife trade markets. Furthermore, the bones, fur, and other parts of the animal are also used in Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM). TCM has long been scrutinized by modern medicine, apart from being called out for using body parts of protected wildlife. The promotion of TCM is one of the goals of China's ambitious Belt and Road initiative and has naturally sparked concerns among wildlife conservationists.

Retaliatory killings: Conflict with humans is a major threat faced by these big cats. However, this is a result of other contributing factors, primarily prey depletion which causes snow leopards to go after livestock reared by the agro-pastoralist communities inhabiting the mountains. The predators occasionally descend to the villages from

their high-altitude lairs and engage in “surplus killings” by breaking into cattle corrals (enclosures used to keep livestock). There have been reports of a single snow leopard attack resulting in up to 50 animal deaths. Angered by the killing of their animals and the consequent financial stress on their livelihoods, people have resorted to killing snow leopards despite the Gilgit-Baltistan (Northern Areas) Wildlife Preservation Act 1975 outlawing this activity.

Conservation

Taking into cognizance the importance of protecting snow leopards in Pakistan, conservationists and independent organizations have stepped up with solutions to tackle the issues plaguing the safety of these big cats.

Through National Parks: Gilgit Baltistan's biggest national parks, the Khunjerab National Park and the Central Karakoram National Park enclose snow leopard territory. Conservation groups have partnered with local communities to protect and study the leopards in this region. This includes the installation of cameras to monitor the population and movement of the animals, training local herders as well as awareness campaigns on snow leopard conservation. Camera trapping studies in Chitral Gol National Park have helped researchers understand the snow leopard ecology in that area.

Environmental anthropologist Shafqat Hussain is a notable name in the field of snow leopard conservation in Pakistan. For over two decades, he has campaigned and initiated programs to conserve the snow leopards in the Gilgit Baltistan region, which he says is the “best snow leopard habitat in the world.” According to Hussain, snow leopards are keystone predators that are a vital component in

the maintenance of balance in the ecosystem which makes it imperative to conserve them.

In 1999, Hussain initiated ‘Project Snow Leopard’ which later transformed into the ‘Baltistan Wildlife Conservation and Development Organisation (BWCDO)’. This organization works closely with local communities to spread awareness on conservation. A commendable achievement for BWCDO was largely convincing local herding communities to refrain from retribution killing of snow leopards. This they did by introducing a novel livestock insurance scheme that compensates herders whose animals fall victim to the predators. The organization also helps construct leopard-proof corrals to protect livestock, invests in the education of the children of the communities, and promotes creative exercises in local schools to inculcate the importance of wildlife conservation in the youth of the region.

In 2018, the Pakistan Snow Leopard & Ecosystem Protection Program (PSLEP) was launched for a five-year period at an event organized by the Ministry of Climate Change, UNDP-Pakistan, and the Snow Leopard Foundation (SLF). PSLEP covers almost 4,100,000 ha of three prime regions of snow leopard habitats namely, Gilgit-Baltistan, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, and POK. It aims for sustainable land and forest management practices to conserve the territories and populations of snow leopards and other animals. It also promotes climate change adaptation into conservation efforts. Furthermore, the program calls for the creation and maintenance of biological corridors to enable the movement of snow leopards and other mountain wildlife to new regions for safety during stressful times.



Source: The Express Tribune

PR Short Note

Tehreek-i-Labbaik Pakistan: Religious extremist or militants?

By Femy Francis



Source: Atlantic Council

On 26 October, the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) issued that the right-leaning Barelvi group, Tehreek-i-Labbaik Pakistan (TLP) was not part of any “anti-state activities/ terrorism.” The Supreme Court begins the hearing by appeals against the foreign funding received by the party, headed by the Chief Justice of Pakistan Justice Qazi Fae Isa. The probe against the party was due to the 20-day protest in 2017 that brought cities to a stand-still, this was investigated by the National Counter Terrorism Authority (Nacta) and the reports examined by the ECP found that: “the commission was of the view that the respondent party, the TLP, was not involved in any anti-state activity or terrorism. Hence the commission disposed of its inquiry.” The scrutiny regarding the funding was found moot based on the fact that such a small amount cannot be accused of being acquired through prohibited funding.

Roots of Tehreek-i-Labbaik Pakistan

TLP belongs to the Sufi Barelvi thought that proclaims itself as the defender of Prophet Muhammad and often resorts to extremist violent punitive action against those who violate the sanctity. In 2021, TLP was accused of lynching Priyantha Kumara Diyawadana for the alleged sacrilegious act of violating posters of Prophet Muhammad. TLP was linked to the incident owing to its slogan: “Man Sabba Nabbiyan Faq Tulu,” kill blasphemers of the Prophet. The party officially was formed after the 2011 assassination of Salman Taseer by his police guard Qadri for defending Asia Bibi, a Christian accused of blasphemy. The guard was then detained and issued a death sentence, the Barelvi group staged a mass protest in his support. He was finally hanged in 2016 under Nawaz Sharif’s regime, after his death he was considered as a “martyr” were thousands turned in for his funeral.

His death instigated the already emerging movement of Barelvi groups collaborating under their leader Allama Khadim Hussain Rizvi. Rizvi an outstanding orator and was able to appeal to and consolidate the groups and soon was able to establish a solid support base with funds coming in from wealthy clerics and businessmen from the community.

TLP and Nawaz Sharif

In 2017, a massive protest erupted led by the TLP against the changes in oath-taking for Prophethood. This protest has Islamabad halted for 21 days. The establishment was not interested in dealing with it and suggested that the federal government have a sit-in negotiation. At last, peace was brokered by the army with the law minister removed. During this, a controversial video went viral where a military official was found giving money to disperse the crowd. This was a huge blow to the credibility of the party, with news leaked that the government urged the military to act against the militant groups. It is widely questioned if the army urged TLP to weaken PML-N to form a government again owing to the growing differences.

Radical extremism of TLP

TLP has used its extremist ideologies, radical sentiments and growing Islamophobic nature of the West furthered the party to the political sphere of Pakistan. In 2023, TLP was found responsible for vandalizing through a Christian colony and five churches after accusing a Christian house help of disrespecting the Quran. This led to the displacement of 500 Christian families. In 2020, the party staged an anti-France protest after a magazine was found publishing a caricature image of Prophet Muhammad. Soon after the rally, their founder and dear leader Rizvi passed away creating a huge vacuum in the leadership filled by his son Saad Rizvi.



Source: The Nation

TLP in the General Election of 2024

TLP is a political force in Pakistan politics and has had a detrimental influence in the ousting of Nawaz Sharif's regime. In 2018, the party was the fifth-largest party with 2.3 million votes. The numbers were impressive considering this was the first campaign by the party. With the retracting of militant claims against the party, it has revived the TLP to resume its activities with stronger claims. While it's questionable that the party would be able to topple top layers in the elections. But with the growing group's ideology and the instalment of recruits and followers, TLP will be a vital player in

splitting votes and spoiling aspirations for the contested seats. TLP can be seen to leverage its political clout and support to further its agenda create a systemic alliance and influence the outcome of the General elections in 2023. The mainstream nature of TLP in Pakistan's politics shows a trend towards a rise of radicalized parties, in politics.

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Source: Arab News

PR Short Note

Pakistan International Airlines: On the verge of Shutdown

By Femy Francis



Source: Dawn

On 25 October, Dawn reported that Pakistan International Airlines cancelled over 300 flights within the last ten days. The flagship airline is on the verge of shutdown due to the unavailability of fuel and the economic crisis facing the company. Its fuel supplier Pakistan State Oil refuses to supply oil to the company owing to unpaid dues. A recent negotiation was achieved where PIA pays in cash for its daily requirements to get the fuel, a task the airline is struggling to consistently complete.

The golden days of PIA

In 1946, Mohammad Ali Jinnah the first Prime Minister of Pakistan ordered a leading industrialist M. A. Ispahani to establish a national airline for the newly independent country. Following this Orient Airways was formed which was privately owned and had limited capital and resources. The government then invited the aviation company to merge with them and form a state-owned airline in 1955 the Pakistan International Airlines. PIA saw good days when in 1962, it broke the world record for the fastest flight between London and Karachi. In 1964, PIA became the first airline to charter a flight to China from a non-communist country. During this period the flagship airlines expanded its fleet of aircraft with 720B and two Fokker F-27s. A forgotten part of the PIA history is that it provided crucial support for the now aviation giant and the most sought-after airline the Emirates. In 1984, the Dubai-based new venture approached PIA and asked for support with a budget of USD 10 million. Emirates rented two aircraft and ran the airlines operated by PIA crew and staff, with that PIA provided additional training to the new airlines. Privatization of PIA

On 19 September, Minister for Privatization Fawad Hasan Fawad held a meeting to kickstart the privatization process for the loss incurred by

Pakistan International Airlines, the committee looked to set up clear timelines to expedite the process. Finance Minister Shamshad Akhtar estimated that the airlines will be liable for PKR 12 billion loss per year. As per the official PIA Half Yearly Report of 2023, till June 30 2023 revenue was PKR 120 billion with a gross profit of PKR 11.252 billion while there was a staggering increase of 359 per cent in profit, the net loss surged as well with PKR 60.715 billion.

On 25 October, in a bid to save the flagship airlines, the government and commercial bank representatives held a twelve-member committee to formulate a plan for debt restructuring to keep the airline afloat for the coming six months. The committee is allotted the responsibility to accumulate PKR 15 billion to cater for the immediate needs of the airlines.

The cause of downfall of PIA

First, Inefficiency and lack of accountability. PIA was fully supported by the government and creditors for continued operations. The airlines were incurring losses for a prolonged period due to which Prime Minister Anwaarul Haq Kakar refused to provide cash assistance for the state-owned airline and ordered restructuring. The airlines only serve three per cent of the local population while consuming a major chunk of public funds. The lack of accountability and the overlooking of the SOEs led to the massive crisis.

Second, Lack of competition. The Market is largely a self-sustaining engine based on survival and profit. The drive of competition and no protection drives private entities to keep their accounts and profits in check. The lack of competitiveness has led to the employees slacking where the national flag carrier suffered a loss of over PKR 38 billion just because of the slackness and inefficiency of its technical staff. The airline's engineering department took up to 905 days to complete maintenance jobs that were supposed to be completed in less than a month.

Third, corruption and political favours. The airline is riddled with corrupt practices, and several political leaders have used the airline for their benefit. The airlines ran on political favours and pressure where the heads of the airlines were mere cronies of the political bosses placed there on vested interests.

Hurdles facing the flagship carrier

First, hands tied due to IMF review. The ministries are rushing to sort their affairs before the first review meeting with the IMF high-power delegates to check if the conditionalities were met according to the stand-by agreement. The current government has been making moves to alter the economic landscape by privatizing loss-incurring businesses like PIA and increasing tariffs on oil. Pakistan was able to acquire 1.2 billion out of the 3 billion bailout plan and it is therefore essential for the government to deal with liabilities like PIA.

Second, taking care of the liabilities incurred by the airlines. PIA requires major restructuring to deal with the legacy liabilities. The solution had been originally floated around and approved during PM

Nawaz Sharif's government. Whereby the company would be divided into two and the staff would be slashed by 25 per cent. This would result in the lowering of PKR 457 billion worth of liabilities by 2023. What stands is that the government either would have to absolve and pay for PIA's debts or shut down the airlines to stop them from generating further losses.

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Profit & Loss Statement	Six months Period ended June 30,	
	2023	2022
	(PKR in Millions)	
Revenue	120,278	71,196
Operating Expenses		
<i>Fuel & Oil</i>	(48,349)	(30,578)
<i>Others</i>	(60,677)	(44,960)
Gross Profit / (loss)	11,252	(4,342)
<i>Other Operating Expenses</i>	(9,359)	(6,154)
<i>Other Income</i>	1,680	4,130
Profit from Operations	3,573	(6,366)
<i>Exchange Gain/(Loss)</i>	(27,465)	(13,835)
Loss Before Interest & Taxation	(23,892)	(20,201)
<i>Finance Cost</i>	(36,823)	(21,118)
Loss Before Taxation	(60,715)	(41,319)

Source: PIA Half Yearly Report 2023

PR Short Note

On the “military trials” of civilians: Pakistan’s Supreme Court consider it as “Ultra Vires”

By Femy Francis



Source: Dawn

On 23 October, a five-member bench of Pakistan’s Supreme Court gave a verdict against the trial of civilians by the military courts pertaining to the 9 May violence. The verdict saw a leaping majority; four out of five judges stated the trials as “unconstitutional and without legal effect.” The bench was led by Justice Ijazul Ahsan, Justice Munib Akhtar, Justice Yahya Afridi, Syed Mazahar Ali Akbar Naqvi, and Justice Ayesha A Malik. The verdict ordered that the trial of the accused in the 9 May violence to proceed in criminal court for the civilians.

The Verdict: Pakistan Army Act “Ultra Vires”

According to the short order of the Supreme Court, the Pakistan Army Act (PAA) of 1952 is in violation of the constitution and it is “Ultra Vires” that is beyond its powers, making it of no legal effect. The accused were detained under PAA Section 2(1)(d) which stated that any person who is accused of seducing or an attempt to seduce anyone against his duty or has allegiance to the government and is committed to work under any branch of the Pakistan military or defence, can be tried under the act. While Section 59 (4) states that anyone who has been accused under PAA will be liable to be tried under this act. The Court ordered: “It is further declared that any action or proceedings under the Army Act in respect of the aforesaid persons or any other persons so similarly placed (including but not limited to trial by court-martial) are and would be of no legal effect.”

Additionally, petitions by nine accused of the 9 May urging the apex court to expedite the conclusion of their case under the military court were dismissed. Stating that they have full faith and confidence in the military authority. This was

rejected by the court stating that the application was not supported by proper affidavits.

Background to the “Military Trials”

The incarceration of Imran Khan, PTI’s chairman resulted in violent protests on 9 May, where the supporters and activists participated in vandalism of state and military installations. The then federal government decried the violence and demanded the need to try the accused under “military court,” leading to months of discussion and back-forth between parties and courts. In August the former Chief Justice of Pakistan Umar Ata Bandial put off the hearing related to indefinitly stating that the court did not want the Army pointing guns at civilians. The statement was a response to Attorney General of Pakistan Mansoor Usman Awan’s point where he said that the soldiers performed restrain considering they are well trained to shoot.

Pakistan Army Act

The Pakistan Army Act (PAA) was established in 1952 for the special trial of military personnel under the act with their own legal code that is different from the civilian criminal court. The act aims to prosecute the military or any civilian linked with the military in the wrongdoing or violation of law. In 1966 during the military rule of Ayub Khan the purview of the law was extended to civilians participating in mutiny. The former cabinet consisting of the PML-N and the PPP coalition amended the Pakistan Army Act and the Official Secrets Act in 2023 under which once found guilty one could be detained for up to five years. Section-A of the amendment states: “Anyone who discloses or causes to be disclosed any information... shall be [...] punished with rigorous imprisonment for a term which may extend to five years,” and Section 26-B forbids any participation by the accused under the act and a hiatus have to observed for two years after the release.

The pressure imposed by the PDM coalition is heavily criticized as political targeting against the PTI leaders and their chairman Imran Khan before the general elections. The amendment further came under scrutiny as President Arif Alvi claimed that he did not assent to the Official Secrets Amendment Bill 2023 & Pakistan Army Amendment Bill 2023 and that his office disregarded his orders and furthered the bill.

Responses: Political parties, Legal fraternity, Media and Military

The verdict gathered laudations across the political, legal and civilian spectrum. Senior counsel Khwaja Ahmad Hosain called the Judgment “historic and bold,” with the court supporting the constitution without any fear or favour. He also said: “As long as courts were independent, challenges could be faced and overcome. The nations with independent judges giving decisions in accordance with their oaths of office flourish and prosper.” Advocate Usma Khawar said: “trailblazing verdict, challenging military trials for civilians, marks an unprecedented stride.” PTI lawyer Aitzaz Ahsan stated: “Today's verdict is highly significant and it will help strengthen the constitution, law, and the civilian institutions of the country. “The legal experts also weighed in on the verdict stating that as long as the civilian courts are functioning there is no need to try civilians under military.

The verdict also garnered staunch protest with Attorney General for Pakistan (AGP) Mansoor Usman Awan assuring a petition will be filed against the verdict. Expressing his disapproval, he believes that the military country fulfils all the requirements of criminal courts. He snidely remarked that: “Constitutional amendment was required to try terrorists but not for civilians? I am trying to understand your argument.” PML-N Deputy Secretary Ataullah Tarar said that there was no need for the appeal in the first place as the military court protects the rights of the accused.

An op-ed in Dawn, ‘Military courts’ suggested that the state would be better off accepting the order mandated by the Supreme Court. The author pointed out that the actions of the accused in light of the arrest of their leader did cross the line but the decision of their trial under court-martial was a bit excessive. The op-ed circles back to the excessive nature of the previous verdict and that they cannot be tried on par with actual terrorists and foreign spies. The trial would further the massive imbalance of power between the civilians and the establishment.

An Editorial in Dawn, ‘Situationer: Why these cases may not end up in ‘ordinary’ courts’ by Malik Asad stated even after the verdict it is unlikely that the accused will be tried under common criminal court and that they would be shifted to either the special court or anti-terrorism court which are opaque in nature as well. Asad highlighted an anonymous military law expert’s opinion that the verdict stands to question all the decisions made under military court and the previous incarceration under the same act. The verdict “incapacitated the army to proceed against a civilian even in cases pertaining to the “work of defence, arsenal, naval, military or air force affairs.”

It is expected that an appeal would be filed against the judgment demanding the trial under a controversial “military court.” What is to be considered is how long the discussion will be prolonged and what about the accused awaiting the judgment. The final verdict on the issue stands to be vital and would have an overarching effect on the political spectrum of Pakistan.

Excerpts from the Supreme Court's Short Order

First, Act “Ultra Vires”

“It is hereby declared by Mr. Justice Ijaz ul Ahsan, Mr. Justice Munib Akhtar, Mr. Justice Sayyed Mazahar Ali Akbar Naqvi and Mrs. Justice Ayesha A. Malik that clause (d) of subsection (1) of Section 2 of the Pakistan Army Act, 1952 (in both of its sub clauses (i) & (ii)) and subsection (4) of Section 59 of the said Act are ultra vires the Constitution and of no legal effect.”

Second, Accused to be tried under criminal court
“Without prejudice to the generality of the foregoing the trials of civilians and accused persons, being around 103 persons who were identified in the list provided to the Court by the learned Attorney General for Pakistan by way of CMA No.5327 of 2023 in Constitution Petition No.24 of 2023 and all other persons who are now or may at any time be similarly placed in relation to the events arising from and out of 9th and 10th May, 2023 shall be tried by Criminal Courts of competent jurisdiction established under the ordinary and / or special law of the land in relation to such offences of which they may stand accused”

Third, No action proceeding under the act of legal effect

“It is further declared that any action or proceedings under the Army Act in respect of the aforesaid persons or any other persons so similarly placed (including but not limited Constitution Petition to trial by Court Martial) are and would be of no legal effect.” (“SC rules against civilians’ court martial,” The Express Tribune, 23 October 2023)

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PR Short Note

Nawaz Sharif's return and agenda for Pakistan's revival

By Dhriti Mukherjee



Source: Reuters

On 21 October, former Pakistani Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif's return to Pakistan after a four-year absence marked a significant moment in the country's political landscape. During his address to a massive gathering at Minari-Pakistan, Sharif presented a comprehensive nine-point agenda aimed at addressing ongoing crises, inflation, poverty, and unemployment. Sharif's return has ignited anticipation and debate, as he embarks on his mission to revive Pakistan's economic and political landscape.

[Sharif's resurgence in Pakistani politics](#)

Sharif's massive gathering at Minar-i-Pakistan marked the formal beginning of the election campaign for the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N), as he presented his economic and political agenda before a crowd of thousands. He addressed a massive public rally in Lahore and held meetings with his party leaders, as well as representatives of other political parties. These meetings included prominent figures such as former Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif, PML-N Chief Organiser Maryam Nawaz, former Finance Minister Ishaq Dar, and others.

During the meetings, the political and economic situation of the country was discussed in detail. Additionally, the upcoming court proceedings on 24 October, related to legal and judicial issues concerning Nawaz Sharif's case, were a central topic of conversation. Asam Tarar briefed the meeting about legal and judicial issues concerning Nawaz Sharif's case and the upcoming court proceedings on 24 October.

[Exploring the nine-point agenda](#)

Sharif's nine-point agenda, presented upon his return to Pakistan, reflects his vision for addressing the country's economic and political challenges.

While the speech contained key priorities, it lacked specific details about implementation strategies. Sharif's agenda underscores the urgent need for fiscal responsibility, economic stability, and comprehensive reforms to revitalise Pakistan's economy and legal system.

In his speech, Sharif emphasised the need to reduce government and administrative expenditures. He highlighted "the need for better fiscal management." Sharif brought forth the point of increasing income and revenues while implementing fundamental reforms in the taxation system. The need for "strengthening exports" to achieve "sustainable economic growth" was also underlined. Sharif went on to identify the IT sector as "an essential driver of economic growth globally," stating that Pakistan "should harness its potential."

The agenda also included the importance of "addressing energy price concerns" and the "effective management" of the country's state-owned enterprises, as current inefficient management is leading to a substantial public burden. Along these lines, he noted that to address the plight of the public, "employment generation" remains critical. Finally, when speaking of reforms, Sharif understated that the "modernisation of agriculture" and bringing about reforms for a "swift and inexpensive" justice system are factors of rising importance in Pakistan's journey of growth and development.

[Reconciliation and Outreach](#)

A key development was the decision for Sharif to act as the focal person for the Pakistan Democratic Movement (PDM), a coalition of opposition parties. The PDM parties would be contacted again, and Sharif would personally reach out to various leaders, including Asif Ali Zardari, Maulana Fazlur Rahman, Attaullah Mengal, and Bilawal Bhutto Zardari. Sharif stated that he would thank the PDM leadership for its support of Shehbaz Sharif's government.

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PR Daily Briefs

POLITICS



Source: AFP

Islamabad High Court rejected Imran Khan's post-arrest bail in Cipher case

On 27 October, Islamabad High Court refused PTI Chairman Imran Khan post-arrest bail in the Cipher case. The verdict stated that in accordance with the Official Secrets Act 1923 Section 5(1)(a), based on wrong communication he was detained and it remains to be applicable. Imran Khan was told that he had no authority to declassify the diplomatic cable. Stated due to irrefutable evidence he could not procure the bail. Additionally, a day prior Imran Khan's legal team appealed to stop the trial, which was also swiftly rejected in light of being "without merit." The verdict outlined: "Moreover, the petitioner is [a] co-accused in the case and even if the arguments advanced for [the] quashing of [the] FIR on his behalf are accepted, [the] FIR cannot be quashed in as much as there are other co-accused and there cannot be a partial quashing of [the] FIR." ("Imran denied bail in cipher case," *The Express Tribune*, 28 October 2023)

Railway employees stage protest over unpaid salaries

On 27 October, the protest by railway employees prevailed as they faced financial trouble leading to delays and several unpaid salaries. Inter-city trains from Lahore to Karachi did not depart owing to the protests by staff. The situation escalated as the passengers added to the protests claiming that what did they do to deserve the punishment? The protestors expressed their frustration against the railway administration causing delayed salaries. Chief Executive Officer Shahid Aziz, was informed of the dire situation of the Railways, where the sector needs PKR 35 billion in bailout package, with outstanding liabilities further plaguing the conditions. ("Unpaid railway employees bring

trains to a halt," *The Express Tribune*, 27 October 2023)

TikTok removes 14 million videos from Pakistan

On 27 October, The Friday Times reported on the removal of over 14 million videos posted in Pakistan's TikTok, in light of violating community guidelines. A statement was issued by TikTok "Community Guidelines Enforcement Report for the second quarter of 2023" where it informed that 14,141,581 videos from Pakistan were removed accounting for 13.28 per cent of all videos taken down globally. The removal focused on eliminating spam accounts and underage users to safeguard younger ones. They expressed that the community guidelines are meant to create a safe environment for all its users and viewers. ("Automated Censorship? TikTok Removed Over 14m Videos In Pakistan," *The Friday Times*, 27 October 2023)

The case of Justice Naqvi highlights judicial politics

On 28 October, A discussion concerning the relevance of judicial politics erupted once more in response to the Supreme Judicial Council's (SJC) disagreement on whether to pursue legal action against Justice Sayyed Mazahar Ali Akbar Naqvi of the Supreme Court. Regarding Justice Naqvi, who will be given until 10 November to respond to many charges after receiving a show-cause notice from the SJC, three types of politics are pertinent: judicial, bar, and national. Judge Sardar Tariq Masood, a member of the SJC, has previously been criticized by Justice Naqvi for holding back on offering his assessment of the misconduct charges brought against him. (Hasnaat Malik, "Justice Naqvi's case brings judicial politics into focus," *The Express Tribune*, 28 October 2023)

Centers for illegal immigrants

On 26 October, Interior Minister Sarfraz Bugti disclosed that foreign nationals living in the nation without identity documents will be held at "holding centers" before being deported to their respective countries, as Pakistan ruled out extending the deadline for the forced repatriation of undocumented immigrants, primarily Afghan nationals. Rather than imprisoning them, the

authorities would put them in detention centers established throughout all provinces, including Azad Kashmir, Gilgit-Baltistan, and Islamabad. In particular, he guaranteed that women, children, and the elderly would be treated with "respect" while being housed in these centers, where they would also get food and medical attention. He stated, "But after the November 1 deadline, we will not compromise on the issue of expulsion of illegal immigrants". The minister made note of the fact that those who obtained passports or national identity cards for Pakistan without authorization through the National Database and Registration Authority (Nadra) would likewise be banished after their identity documents were revoked. Mr. Bugti issued a warning, saying that "illegal immigrants" and their "local facilitators" will face consequences for their properties. In addition, the minister threatened Pakistanis who were "facilitating" these migrants, stating that they were "violating the law and the government would take strict action against them as well." To escape consequences, the minister also urged all unauthorized immigrants to voluntarily leave the nation. "We support voluntary return," he added. (Iftikhar A. Khan, ["Holding centres to house illegal immigrants."](#) *Dawn*, 27 October 2023)

PTI delegation met JUI-F chief Maulana Fazlur Rehman

On 26 October, a delegation of the Pakistan Tehreek-i-Insaf (PTI) met Jamiat Ulema-i-Islam-Fazl (JUI-F) chief Maulana Fazlur Rehman at his residence exhibiting a degree of flexibility that in contrast to the party's usual norm. Leaders of both parties described it as a "non-political event," claiming that the PTI delegation, headed by former speaker of the National Assembly Asad Qaiser, had only travelled to Maulana Fazl to offer their condolences for his mother-in-law's passing. However, political analysts and experts are hailing it as a "significant development," given the history of bitter rivalry between the two parties. In addition to Mr Qaiser, the PTI delegation consisted of former senator Barrister Muhammad Ali Saif, former MNA Junaid Akbar, and former minister in Imran Khan's cabinet, Ali Mohammad Khan. Barrister Saif said there was no political motivation for the visit, just a simple desire to express sympathy for Maulana Fazl's mother-in-law's passing. Speaking to Dawn the spokesman for the JUI-F Hafiz Hamdullah, stated that his party was not at odds with the PTI or its leadership. (Kalbe Ali, ["PTI team meets 'sworn rival' Fazl as ice melts."](#) *Dawn*, 27 October 2023)

IHC upholds Nawaz's appeals against his conviction in Al-Azizia; cites Avenfield

On 26 October, the PML-N supremo Nawaz Sharif's appeals against his conviction in the Avenfield Apartments and Al-Azizia references were upheld by the Islamabad High Court (IHC). The ruling was made during a hearing on Nawaz's requests for protective bail in the cases and for the restoration of his appeals against his conviction. In the Avenfield properties corruption reference, Nawaz was sentenced to 10 years in prison for owning assets beyond known income and one year for not cooperating with the NAB; these terms were to be served concurrently. NAB Prosecutor General Ehtesham Qadir Shah opened the session by saying the court has ordered the chairman of the watchdog to offer a view on the bail requests. "We had an extensive discussion regarding the petitions," he told the court. Shah stated that if the result in the Avenfield case had not yet been made public, the reference might be removed. Furthermore, he emphasized that the reference may be withdrawn at any time while the trial was still in progress. "The reference cannot be withdrawn if an appeal against a decision is accepted under Pakistan laws," he stated. He further added, "If an appeal is filed, a decision must be made; it cannot be rejected for non-compliance." (Umer Burney, ["IHC restores Nawaz's appeals against conviction in Al-Azizia, Avenfield references."](#) *Dawn*, 27 October 2023)

Supreme Court setting new rules

On 27 October, not long after Chief Justice Umar Ata Bandial retired, the Supreme Court flexed its powers by rendering rulings this month that could have an impact on the interests of the "powerful circles." In an extraordinary decision, a five-judge panel chaired by Justice Ijazul Ahsan ruled that a 56-year-old legislation allowing civilians to be tried in military courts was unconstitutional. The bench further decided that the citizens being held by the military on suspicion of attacking its installations would face regular criminal proceedings. It has come to light that the temporary federal administration intends to file an appeal against the ruling made by the higher bench. The government will also ask that the order of the enlarged bench be suspended. A senior government official questioned how five judges could rule that some elements of the Army Act, of 1952 were unconstitutional when, in the past, a larger bench with the same number of members had upheld those same provisions. (Hasnaat Malik, ["SC shows guts as Bandial retires."](#) *The Express Tribune*, 27 October 2023)

More than a dozen PTI leaders have warrants issued on them

On 26 October, PTI leader Zulfi Bukhari had a red warrant out for him, and in a case involving

violence outside the Federal Judicial Complex (FJC) in March of this year, an Anti-Terrorism Court of Islamabad issued perpetual arrest warrants for more than a dozen additional PTI leaders. The Special Secretary of the Ministry of Interior has authorized the issuance of a red notice against Syed Zulfikar Abbas, also known as Zulfi Bukhari, in connection with the judicial complex attack case that was filed under the Anti-Terrorism Act at the Golra police station. On 18 March, hours-long battles between PTI supporters and police in the federal capital resulted in at least 25 injuries, the burning of 30 cars, including motorbikes, and the destruction of a police chowki. The PTI leadership called on followers to come to the court complex via social media, and this led to the enormous crowd that assembled at the FJC. (“Warrants issued for over a dozen PTI leaders,” Dawn, 26 October 2023)

"In the PTI era, government resources were used to promote party image and leaders."

On 26 October, it was revealed that there was a scheme in place to promote a phoney image of the PTI chairman. A significant scandal from the PTI administration has surfaced, in which state money was misappropriated for unlawful political publicity campaigns, PTI leadership publicity, and the creation of fake propaganda disparaging official institutions. The mission assigned to social media teams was to disseminate a false narrative about PTI under the pretext of the Annual Development Programme (ADP). In addition to agitating people, these accounts were utilized to advance the political goals of the PTI and start a disinformation campaign. With the use of public funds, the propaganda accounts' fan base grew. This project has a set cost of PKR 870 million. The salary range for the staff members was PKR 25,000 to PKR 40,000. (“Govt resources used in PTI era to promote party image, leaders,” The News International, 26 October 2023)

PIA: Spokesperson expresses fear of closure

On 25 October, Dawn reported that a Pakistan International Airlines spokesperson hinted that the aviation company might be facing closure or is on the verge of shutdown. This shutdown allegations are owed to the cancellation of 300 flights within ten days owing to unavailability of fuel and the crisis looming over the state-owned enterprise. The Pakistan State Oil has time again cut the supply of fuel to PIA owing to pending debts owed to PSO. The frequent cancellation has led to several thousand passenger's flights being on hold with no information regarding the rescheduling of flights. (Mohammad Asghar, “Over 300 PIA flights cancelled in 10 days,” Dawn, 25 October 2023)

Repatriation of Afghan refugees: PHC strikes down petition against “harassment” of legal Afghan refugees

On 24 October, the Peshawar High Court refuted the petition alleging “harassment” faced by the Afghan immigrants with proper documentation owing to the repatriation order issued by the government. The court stated that the order had been issued for “illegal aliens” and unregistered Afghan refugees in the country and that no mandate was announced against documented refugees from Afghanistan. The petitioner lawyer Saifullah Muhib Kakakhel demanded that the court announce the detainment of Afghan refugees who have Proof of registration as “illegal,” and not book those who are entitled to Pakistani citizenship. The petition urged a formulation of measures to protect entitled Afghan refugees living in Pakistan. (“Only ‘illegal’ Afghans to be deported, PHC told,” Dawn, 25 October 2023)

The PRI exodus: Three leaders join the IPP

On 24 October, three PTI leaders Andleeb Abbas, Sadia Sohail, and Sumaira Bokhari parted their ways with PTI. Following the stream of exodus of PTI leaders from the party, three women party members joined Jahangir Tareen's Istehkam-e-Pakistan Party (IPP). IPP is a newly formed party in Pakistan secessionism from PTI, formed on 8 June by former PTI leaders Tareena and Aleem Khan. The party saw mass defection with PTI political crackdown after the 9 May violence with several PTI ‘loyalists’ leaving. (“In another blow to PTI, three women leaders join Jahangir Tareen's IPP,” The News International, 24 October 2023)

Supreme Court calls the military court trial of civilian's as unlawful

On 23 October, a five-member Supreme Court bench pronounced the military trials of civilians for their alleged involvement in attacks on army posts unlawful by a vote of 4-1, a decision that was applauded across the political spectrum. The panel, which included Justice Ijazul Ahsan as its chair, Justice Munib Akhtar, Justice Yahya Afridi, Syed Mazahar Ali Akbar Naqvi, and Justice Ayesha A Malik, unanimously emphasized that the criminal courts will hear the cases of the accused involved in the 9 May disturbances. The order stated that “without limiting the generality of the foregoing criminal courts of competent jurisdiction established under the ordinary and/or special laws shall conduct the trials of civilians and accused persons, being approximately 103 persons identified in the list provided to the apex court by the attorney general for Pakistan (AGP), and all

other persons who are now or may at any time be similarly placed in relation to the events arising from and out of May 9 and 10, 2023.” (Nasir Iqbal, “SC strikes down ‘military justice’ for civilians,” Dawn, 24 October 2023)

Over PKR 474m is recovered by Iesco from power pirates

On 24 October, in an ongoing effort that started on 1 September, Islamabad Electric Supply Company (Iesco) collected PKR 474.63 million from 28,866 clients. Iesco reportedly conducted indiscriminate and rigorous operations against power thieves and defaulters in all of the regions, including Islamabad, Rawalpindi City, Rawalpindi Cantt, Attock, Chakwal, and Jhelum Region. Iesco Chief Executive Dr Mohammad Amjad Khan said that no one had the right to use energy without paying the bill and that every effort was being made to recover electrical debts from defaulters. He made this statement during a meeting to review the effectiveness of the ongoing campaign for recovery and anti-power theft. Data shows that Iesco's recovery teams have recouped PKR 220.72 million from 20,167 running defaulters and PKR 253.91 million from 8,699 dead defaulters. Iesco has recovered PKR 474.63 million in total from 28,866 clients during the campaign. The Iesco detection teams, on the other hand, tracked down energy theft totaling PKR 3.24 million units and fined 2,358 offenders PKR150.27 million. Three hundred sixty-six thieves were detained by police after 453 FIRs were filed. (“Iesco recovers over Rs474m from power pilferers,” Dawn, 24 October 2023)

A new "dictatorship 2.0" will sweep the nation says Bilawal

On 23 October, the leader of the Pakistan People’s Party (PPP), Bilawal Bhutto-Zardari, expressed alarm over the country's growing exposure to a "new form of dictatorship" and demanded that the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) declare the date of the general elections right away. Bilawal thanked the Supreme Court Bar Association (SCBA) for its crucial role in protecting the Constitution during a celebration of the 50th anniversary of the 1973 Constitution, which was hosted by the SCBA. He also highlighted the SCBA's important role in defending democratic values and human rights. He stated, “The nation values this bipartisan struggle against dictatorship waged by the legal fraternity. This indeed raises our hopes in democracy and fighting dictatorship. We salute your courage and determination in the relentless struggle for the rule of law in Pakistan.” According to the PPP leader, the court has supported constitutional amendments made by

tyrants in the past both under the guise of the "doctrine of successful revolution" and under the "doctrine of necessity." (“Bilawal warns of emerging 'dictatorship 2.0' engulfing country,” The Express Tribune, 24 October 2023)

Imran Khan’s indictment

On 23 October, Imran Khan and Shah Mehmood Qureshi's indictment was roundly condemned by the PTI, which has referred to it as "a fatal blow to justice and the legal system" and "a move against justice and the system." A party spokeswoman responded with a scathing statement criticizing what he called Pakistan's callous destruction of justice, a worrying trend that has persisted. The spokesperson emphasized her serious concerns regarding the protection of the rule of law, the supremacy of the constitution, and the rights of citizens, particularly PTI supporters. The spokesperson lamented the "judiciary's failure to deliver fair justice to the nation" and warned that widespread lawlessness was roiling the very fabric of the state. He also emphasized the system's paralysis and underlined that over the previous 18 months, the state's vision had been lost, followed by a loss in its intellectual capacity, leaving the justice system in disarray and the state's entire existence in a condition of paralysis. (Imran Adnan, “Imran’s indictment ‘death knell to legal system’: PTI,” The Express Tribune, 24 October 2023)

PM anticipates a noticeable effect from the drop in oil prices

On 23 October, Prime Minister Anwaarul Haq Kakar ordered that the advantages of the 12.38 per cent drop in gasoline prices and the 4.7 per cent drop in diesel prices be distributed to the general public as soon as feasible. The prime minister presided over the meeting to ensure that the results of the decline in the price of petroleum products are passed on to the average person through a decrease in the price of necessary commodities. The meeting was informed, according to the Prime Minister's Office, that the recent drop in the price of petroleum products caused the inflation rate to fall by 1.7 per cent, the greatest reduction in a year. According to the prime minister, a total of PKR 41 billion has been saved as a result of the dollar's stability and the drop in the price of petroleum goods, and this alleviation would be distributed to the general public. Kakar commanded fast action against hoarders and profiteers and intensified measures to ensure that the benefits of lower petroleum product prices reach the average person. He said that the operation against power theft and smuggling helped the average person. (Zaheer Abbasi, “Cut in oil prices: PM expects a visible

trickle-down effect.” Business Recorder, 24 October 2023)

Supreme Court pressed for the military trials to end quickly

On 23 October, at least nine defendants facing trials under the Army Act petitioned the top court for an early resolution of their cases by the military courts as the Supreme Court resumes hearing on a series of challenges to trials of civilians in the military courts. A five-member bench led by Justice Ijazul Ahsan will start debating objections to the military courts' use of civilian defendants in trials. Judges Sayyed Mazahar Ali Akbar Naqvi, Yayha Afridi, Munib Akhtar, and Ayesha A. Malik are on the bench. Thirteen distinct petitions against military courts will be considered. Former Chief Justice of Pakistan Jawwad S. Khawaja is one of the petitioners, along with senior attorney Aitzaz Ahsan, Karamat Ali, Zaman Khan Vardag, Junaid Razzaq, the Supreme Court Bar Association, Imran Khan, the leader of the PTI, Hafeezullah Khan Niazi, retired Lt Col Inamul Rahim, and Naeemullah Qureshi. (Nasir Iqbal, “SC moved for swift conclusion of military trials.” Dawn, 23 October 2023)

Chaman border protest intensifies over visa and passport rules

On 22 October, for the second day in a row, protesters in Chaman, including workers, supporters, and members of the all-party traders' alliance, participated in sit-in protest against the government's decision to require valid passports and visas for entry into Pakistan from Afghanistan. On the highway, protesters-built camps, preventing traffic from moving in the direction of the Pakistan-Afghanistan border. The movement of trucks and other vehicles carrying import and export commodities was severely hampered as a result. Beginning on 1 November, the Pakistani government will only permit persons with legitimate passports and visas to cross the border. No one will be permitted to cross the Pakistan-Afghanistan border after 31 October while using a Pakistani ID card or an Afghan permit (Tazkira). Nevertheless, the combination of party leaders, trade associations, and industry leaders rejected the government's choice. (Saleem Shahid, “Chaman border protest escalates over passport, visa policy.” Dawn, 23 October 2023)

ECONOMY



Source: Dawn

Fears over supply cause oil to rise by 3 per cent

On 27 October, concerns over the possibility that tensions between Israel and Gaza could escalate into a larger battle that would impair the world's supply of crude oil caused oil prices to rise by almost 3 per cent to a one-week high. Brent futures had increased USD 2.25, or 2.6 per cent, to USD 90.18 per barrel. US West Texas Intermediate (WTI) oil reached USD 85.35, up USD 2.14, or 2.6 per cent, from USD 83. The difference between Brent and WTI was headed to its greatest level since July, which increased the appeal for oil companies to deploy ships to the US to pick up petroleum for export. WTI was down almost 3 per cent for the week, and Brent was down nearly 2 per cent. (“Oil jumps 3pc on supply worries.” Dawn, 28 October 2023)

Regulatory framework in place to use Chinese currency, says Finance Minister Shamshad Akhtar

On 27 October, according to Finance Minister Dr Shamshad Akhtar, the necessary regulatory framework, which enables the use of Chinese currency (RMB) in trade and investment operations, has already been put in place by the State Bank of Pakistan. China and Pakistan are strategic corporate partners that are weatherproof, according to the finance minister, who made this statement on Friday at the Industrial and Commercial Bank of China (ICBC) RMB clearing bank event. The RMB clearing operation, she continued, will aid in bridging the gap between China's onshore and Pakistan's offshore RMB markets, enabling cross-border transactions across a variety of industries and domains. According to Akhtar, the RMB's increasing significance in international trade led to its inclusion in the International Monetary Fund's (IMF) special

drawing basket in October 2016, which further highlighted China's growing influence in the global economy. She continued by saying that there has been a rise in the use of RMB in international trade based on data from the Swift Trade Settlement System. She further added the necessary legal framework for enabling the usage of Chinese yuan (RMB) in trade and investment activities has already been established by the SBP. (Zaheer Abbasi, "[Use of RMB: Regulatory framework put in place: minister.](#)" *Business Recorder*, 28 October 2023)

Seventy hospitals were delisted from the Sehat Card Plus program

On 28 October, Dawn reported that 71 private hospitals were removed from the Sehat Card Plus (SCP) program owing to their failure to meet the criteria set by the government. The decision stated that this is part of the government's plans to reduce free healthcare provisions to ensure quality services to the patients and therefore delisted hospitals. Currently out of 129 hospitals providing free healthcare services only 58 are left. It has also limited the free treatment to selected diseases and health conditions like cancer patients, dialysis and emergency services. (Ashfaq Yusufzai, "[Over 70 private hospitals removed from health card panel.](#)" *Dawn*, 28 October 2023)



Source: Dawn

PIA is running selective flights because of the fuel issue

On 26 October, a spokesperson for Pakistan International Airlines (PIA) said that because of fuel scarcity, the airline has had to cancel 349 flights in the past two weeks and is currently managing its daily flight schedule. Two weeks passed when Pakistan State Oil (PSO) shut off the national carrier's fuel supply, resulting in "the most severe crisis" in the airline's existence. The spokesperson acknowledged that just ten flights, including nine foreign ones, were conducted. However, the number of cancelled flights was not

disclosed. This indicates that, even after two weeks, the issue is far from resolved, despite the management's declarations. The spokesman further added flight schedules were set based on fuel supply. The aircraft that can be guaranteed fuel are the only ones setting off. According to Reuters, the problem happened at a time when the government was trying to move quickly to privatize the airline as part of a plan for budgetary restraint that was approved as part of an IMF bailout in June. In the meantime, workers are being reminded to maintain focus "for ensuring organisational compliance" by PIA CEO Muhammad Amir Hayat. (Mohammad Asghar, "[PIA operating 'select flights' due to fuel crisis.](#)" *Dawn*, 27 October 2023)

Taxes are not paid by 15 million members of the wealthy class, says FBR chairman

On 25 October, the chairman of the Federal Board of Revenue revealed that a startling 15 million people, including those with incomes from agriculture, do not currently pay any taxes. "This number signifies a noteworthy segment of the populace that stays outside the tax system," Zubair Tiwana stated at a Senate Standing Committee on Finance meeting. The senator Saleem Mandviwalla presided over it. In response to a query, Mr Tiwana stated that it was not practical to levy taxes from low-income households, who make up 65 per cent of the population. Mr Tiwana expressed optimism that if 15 million prospective taxpayers "fulfil their obligations," the tax gap may be considerably decreased. He claimed that 1.2 million more people were added to the tax rolls in the previous year, bringing the total number of taxpayers to 4.9 million. Despite agriculture providing 40 per cent of the country's revenues, according to the FBR chairman, the industry does not generate any tax money. (Mubarak Zeb Khan, "[15m high earners are not paying taxes: FBR chief.](#)" *Dawn*, 26 October 2023)

Cash surpluses in Sindh and Balochistan help to reduce the fiscal imbalance

On 25 October, according to the Fiscal Operations Data that the Ministry of Finance made available, the total fiscal deficit of Pakistan, which is the gap between its income and outlays, was recorded at 0.9 per cent of GDP, a little decrease from the 1.0 per cent recorded during the same period in the previous year. The fiscal deficit increased to an absolute PKR 962.80 billion in the first quarter of FY24 from PKR 819.30 billion in the same period the previous year. However, if cash surpluses from the provinces of Sindh and Balochistan weren't there, the budget deficit in the first quarter of FY24 may have reached PKR 1.014 trillion. On the other hand, all four provinces produced cash surpluses in

the first quarter of FY23, which reduced the federal government deficit to PKR 1.037 trillion. There was a modest increase in total revenue from 2.4 per cent of GDP during the same period last year to 2.5 per cent in the first quarter. The main cause of this marginal gain is the rise in non-tax revenue, which in 3MFY24 increased from 0.3 per cent of GDP in the previous fiscal year to 0.4 per cent. Meanwhile, tax receipts did not change. (Mubarak Zeb Khan, [“Balochistan, Sindh cash surpluses help contain centre’s fiscal deficit.”](#) *Dawn*, 26 October 2023)

IMF’s budget deficit targets for Q1 via strict measures

On 25 October, Due to a remarkable 362 per cent increase in petroleum levy collection and a sharp decrease in federal subsidies and development expenses, Pakistan complied with a major requirement of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) regarding the reduction of the budget deficit during the first quarter, according to a report released by an official. The finance ministry’s report also revealed an unsettling trend of unrelenting spending by the interim administrations in Punjab and Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa (K-P). The Punjab government was consequently in the red since, from July to September, its expenses exceeded its revenue by PKR 28.6 billion. However, all things considered, the finance ministry had succeeded in demonstrating a primary budget surplus of PKR 417 billion, exceeding the IMF requirement. The IMF team will be arriving in Pakistan on 2 November for the first round of review talks. Post the negotiations, the next loan tranche, totalling USD 710 million, will be released in December. Previous patterns indicate that the surpluses in the first quarter usually translate into deficits in the following quarters. The finance ministry has been able to maintain some fiscal restraint thus far, even though its current expenditures increased by 23 per cent during the July–September quarter. Including interest costs, the total budget deficit for the first quarter of the current fiscal year was PKR 963 billion, or over 1 per cent of GDP, which is an increase of 18 per cent from the same period in the previous fiscal year. (Shahbaz Rana, [“Strict measures help meet IMF’s budget deficit target for Q1.”](#) *The Express Tribune*, 26 October 2023)

IMF Visit: Envoy to reach Pakistan on 2 November for the first review

On 25 October, The Friday Times reported of the IMF visit to Pakistan to take place on 2 November as part of the first review under the stand-by agreement. Pakistan facing an economic crisis was able to get the USD 3 billion bailout package to stop defaulting, out of which the first installment

was sent of USD 1.2 billion in July. The current government has been taking stringent measures to revive the economy, with the privatization plan of loss incurring SOEs and increasing gas tariffs. ([“IMF Delegation To Visit Pakistan On Nov 2 For First Review Of SBA.”](#) *The Friday Times*, 25 October 2023)

ECC approves hikes in natural gas tariff

On 23 October, the Economic Corridor Committee approved the 194 per cent hike in the prices of natural gases. The consumers will also face a surge in fixed monthly charges. The surge in prices was due in July which was deferred by the PML-N government leaving the difficult task to be pulled off by the interim setup. The Petroleum Division of Pakistan estimates that the natural gas reserves are depleting. The hike is segregated amongst the types of consumers with the traffic remaining unchanged for the residential protected consumers, a significant rise of 50 per cent of PKR 300 was approved for non-protected residential consumers whereas the commercial consumer saw the biggest hike of 136 per cent raising the rate to KR 3,900 per mmBtu. (Mubarak Zeb Khan, [“ECC okays massive hikes in gas tariffs.”](#) *Dawn*, 24 October 2023)

Ministers alerted to prepare itself for the first IMF review under the stand-by agreement

On 24 October, the Business Recorder reported that the Ministry of Finance has ordered all ministries and departments to prepare for the first review of the International Monetary Fund’s stand-by agreement. All departments are required to submit the data to the financial division for submission to the IMF. The first review is scheduled to be in November and therefore it is vital that their affairs are in order with all benchmarks, quantitative requirements, targets and other commitments met. Some of the requirements under the Memorandum of Economic and Financial Policies state that a ceiling be established by September, the structural benchmark for annual rebasing and limited spending on energy subsidies amongst others. (Mushtaq Ghumman, [“Govt braces itself for first review of SBA.”](#) *Business Recorder*, 24 October 2023)

Prime Minister Kakar urges that benefits from reduced petrol prices reach the public

On 23 October, Prime Minister Anwaarul Haq Kakar ordered that a decrease of 12.38 per cent in petrol prices and a 4.7 per cent decrease in diesel prices reach the common people. He said that the decline in prices and the benefits should reach the common man with the reduction in prices of

essential commodities providing a sigh of relief. This benefit came due to the stability of the dollar and the decrease in prices, saving PKR 41 billion. Kakar stated that due to unyielding efforts by the administration the prices of essential prices will observe a decrease and a substantial reduction will be seen in the prices of agricultural production, electricity and rents. (Zaheer Abbasi, [“Cut in oil prices: PM expects a visible trickle-down effect,”](#) *Business Recorder*, 24 October 2023)

PSO supplies fuel to 120 aircraft of PIA

On 23 October, Pakistan State Oil approved the refueling of its supply for 120 Pakistan International Airlines which it halted owing to pending outstanding debt. PIA as per the daily agreement paid PKR 84 million in two installments. As per the PSO spokesperson, the outstanding amount remains to be PKR 26.825 billion. Prime Minister Anwaarul Haq Kakar in a meeting stressed the need to expedite the process of privatization within the stipulated period, to cut the losses. (Wasim Iqbal, Nuzhat Nazar, [“PSO restores fuel supply to at least 20 PIA flights,”](#) *Business Recorder*, 24 October 2023)

The government is prepared to approve rising gas prices before the IMF assessment

On 23 October, the government called a special meeting of the Economic Coordination Committee (ECC) to discuss and approve an unprecedented increase of 3,900 per cent in fixed monthly charges and a 194 per cent hike in consumer rates for natural gas before seeking final dates for the second review of the ongoing IMF loan programme. These pricing hikes are expected to take effect backwards from October 1 and are scheduled for approval by the cabinet on 24 October. This is in addition to the petroleum division's request to switch to a new gas pricing mechanism based on the weighted average cost of domestic and imported gas (WACOG) to ensure the actual cost of gas supply and eliminate the flow of the gas sector's circular debt, which, according to a summary provided to the ECC, stands at PKR 2.1 trillion as of this June. There is, however, a discrepancy in the stated numbers. In news conferences, interim petroleum minister Muhammad Ali, a former chairman of the corporate watchdog Securities & Exchange Commission of Pakistan (SECP), has referenced the circular debt for the gas sector, which is higher at PKR 2.9 trillion. (Khaleeq Kiani, [“Govt set to ratify soaring gas charges before IMF review,”](#) *Dawn*, 23 October 2023)

PIA cancels flights amid fuel shortage

On 22 October, Pakistan International Airlines grounded 43 international flights and 29 domestic flights. The aviation company is regularly cancelling flights owing to fuel supply shortages by the Pakistan State Oil. PSO refuses to provide fuel to PIA due to overdue payments pending. In just one day the airline incurred a PKR 700 million loss. The Federal Board of Revenue mediated that an advance would be paid by PIA to procure oil from PSO, the difference rose again as PIA surpassed its daily limit. (Aftab Khan, [“Shortage of fuel clips PIA wings,”](#) *The Express Tribune*, 22 October 2023)

EXTERNAL



Source: Dawn

90 per cent of the Afghan refugees are residing in Pakistan and Iran says the UN

On 25 October, the United Nations announced that the number of Afghan refugees worldwide has climbed from 5.7 million to 6.1 million, primarily due to updated demographic estimates released by the Pakistani government. Ninety per cent of all Afghan refugees were housed in Iran 3.4 million and Pakistan 2.1 million, according to a recent study from UNHCR, the UN organization for refugees. In its Mid-Year Trends Report, which examines forced displacement during the first half of 2023, it stated, "By the end of June, there were an estimated 35.8 million refugees globally, most of whom have been in displacement for many years." This number has increased by 50 per cent in just seven years. The UNHCR reported that by the end of June 2023, there will be 110 million people worldwide who have been displaced due to conflict, persecution, violence, and violations of their human rights, up from 108.4 million at the end of the previous year. (Amin Ahmed, [“Pakistan, Iran hosting 90pc of all Afghan refugees: UN,”](#) *Dawn*, 26 October 2023)

New agreements with China to shape CPEC

On 25 October, Prime Minister Anwaarul Haq Kakar stated that Pakistan remained dedicated to carrying out the various sectors' recently completed projects with China. He declared that the China-

Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) would enter a new phase with the recent agreements between the two nations. He claimed that China's Belt and Road Initiative was the guarantee of the growth and prosperity of the entire region during a meeting with Chinese Ambassador Jiang Zaidong. During his recent visit to China, the prime minister conveyed his appreciation to Chinese President Xi Jinping and the Chinese government for the cordial welcome and arrangements. He also said that Pakistan would ensure to implementation of the memorandum of Understanding and agreements during the visit. Kakar finally lauded that both countries are aiding through CPEC. ("Recent accords with China to add a new chapter to CPEC: PM Kakar." *Dawn*, 26 October 2023)

The Khunjerab Pass will remain open all year for trade and travel

On 23 October, the Khunjerab Pass route will remain open all year for trade and other operations involving international transit between Pakistan and China. In this regard, Naseem Khattak, a member of Engineering Coordination, wrote to the Chairman of the Federal Board of Revenue (FBR) to request the required procedures for facilitating international transit trade and general travel. The letter made note of the likelihood that the Karakoram Highway (KKH) will be open throughout the winter. The letter stated that from December to April, traffic is restricted on the KKH between Sost and Khunjerab (86km) because of the unusually high altitude and significant snowfall. According to the letter, it has been agreed to keep this route open all year long in light of the trade activity associated with the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC). According to the report, the Frontier Works Organization (FWO) workforce has been assigned to the KKH for normal maintenance tasks under the term- and length-based annual maintenance contract. (Jamil Nagri, "Preparations in full swing to keep Khunjerab Pass open for trade, travel all year round." *Dawn*, 23 October 2023)

Long March by BNP Due to Worsening Balochistan Situation

On 22 October, the Balochistan National Party (BNP) began a lengthy march against pressing problems the province is dealing with, such as the rise in terrorism and the ongoing problem of Baloch missing people. However, the party rejected the state's threats of arrests and other measures. BNP leader Akhtar Mengal claimed that the march was a protest against those armed organizations that operate in the area with impunity to kidnap people, demand ransom, and leave their desecrated bodies on the roadways in an interview with local

media in Watt before the march. The lines get hazy, he continued, "when the state either creates or supports groups harming the people," adding that "the state is responsible for protecting the lives and property of its people." ("BNP Launches Long March Over Worsening Situation In Balochistan." *The Friday Times*, 23 October 2023)

Iranian envoys suggest Pakistan-Iran economic corridor

On 22 October, the Iranian Ambassador in Pakistan Reza Amiri Mughaddam suggested that the 950-kilometre border sharing between Pakistan and Iran can become a vibrant economic corridor. Reza said the absence of a banking sector between the two countries poses a hurdle for bilateral trade. He also talked of the common friendship they had in the region with China and Russia and that by engaging in trade they can increase their revenues by 10 times. He iterated that Iran has always given primacy in enhancing ties with its neighboring countries and Pakistan has always been on top. Both countries have recently opened three border markets and are looking to open more. (Hassan Abbas, "Pak-Iranian border can be turned into 'economic border': envoy" *Business Recorder*, 23 October 2023)

West concerned over Pakistan deportation plans

On 22 October, The Express Tribune reported on concerns expressed against Pakistan's "illegal aliens" deportation plans. US diplomats urged Pakistan to not deport Afghani migrants who are awaiting US visas. This was signed by 80 former US officials and was significant. United Nations warned Pakistan that forced deportation is a Human Rights violation, Pakistan said they are not targeting any particular group but aim at lawful removal of illegal migrants. (Kamran Yousaf, "Pakistan allays West's concerns on deportation plan." *The Express Tribune*, 22 October 2023)

PAKISTAN ELECTIONS 2023

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Source: ABP

President Arif Alvi uncertain about January elections

On 25 October, Pakistan's President Dr Arif Alvi was uncertain about the forthcoming elections. In an interview with a private TV channel, President Alvi stated "I do not believe that elections will be held in January." The timeline stated that new delimitations of the national and four provincial assembly constituencies would be finished by 14 December, more than a month beyond the general elections' ninety-day deadline. Alvi extended an invitation to Chief Election Commissioner Sikandar Sultan Raja at the end of August to talk about scheduling the election within the ninety-day constitutional window that closes in early November. The president claimed in the interview that the ECP told him that it "is not necessary" to address the issue when he issued a letter offering to do so. ("President doesn't see elections taking place in Jan," *The Express Tribune*, 26 October 2023)

DEFENCE



Source: Dawn

Firing at the Jammu and Kashmir border

On 26 October, Firing was opened between Pakistan and the Border Security Forces (BSF) of India. The firing happened at places along the international border in Arnia and RS Pura sectors in Jammu and Kashmir. During the exchange of fire, two BSF personnel were injured. Pakistani Rangers began shooting small weapons in the Arnia area; this quickly escalated into mortar shelling.

Meanwhile, Military reports claim that after Pakistani forces shot down a drone that tried to enter Pakistani territory, the gunfire started. ("Alarm in border areas after 'heavy Indian firing'" *Dawn*, 27 October 2023; "3, including 2 BSF jawans, injured as Pak Rangers open fire along border in J&K's Arnia, RS Pura sectors," *The Indian Express*, 27 October 2023)

Every Pakistani person's safety is extremely important, says COAS

On 26 October, according to Chief of Army Staff (COAS) General Asim Munir, the safety and security of every Pakistani person is of utmost significance and cannot be compromised "at any cost." During the National Security Workshop, he made these statements regarding the deportation and repatriation of foreign nationals living in Pakistan without authorization, according to the military's media affairs department. According to the ISPR, the workshop attendees received an overview of the national security landscape as well as the dynamics of internal and regional security. The forum was informed of a variety of actions being implemented to stop illegal activity, including smuggling, power theft, the prevalence of drugs, border control measures, and the return of illegal aliens from Pakistan, according to the statement. While addressing the attendees, Gen. Munir remarked, that despite sustained and varied support from inimical forces, the Armed Forces of Pakistan and its security and intelligence setups have fought the menace of terrorism in an exemplary manner. He further added, "Success will be ours InshAllah with the continued support of the people of Pakistan,". (Iftikhar Shirazi, "Safety of each Pakistani of paramount importance, cannot be compromised 'at any cost': COAS," *Dawn*, 27 October 2023)

SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY



Source: Dawn

Framework for sharing telecom infrastructure and 5G auction

On 25 October, IT Minister Dr Umar Saif announced that the federal cabinet has approved the

framework for telecom sharing and given the go-ahead for the creation of a committee to auction off the spectrum for the next 5G wireless network. The goal of the infrastructure-sharing framework is to maximize resource consumption and perhaps reduce operating costs for telecom businesses by enabling them to share resources such as towers, antennas, and cable ducts. The minister believed that the adoption of the framework will allow new businesses to enter the domestic telecom market. Regarding the 5G auction, he stated that the new committee, which will be led by the Finance Minister Shamshad Akhtar, would be crucial to the deployment of the quicker network. The Federal Board of Revenue officials, secretaries of pertinent ministries, and ministers of IT, research and technology, industry, and production would also be on the committee. (Kalbe Ali, [“New telecom framework, 5G auction committee approved.”](#) *Dawn*, 26 October 2023)

PROVINCES

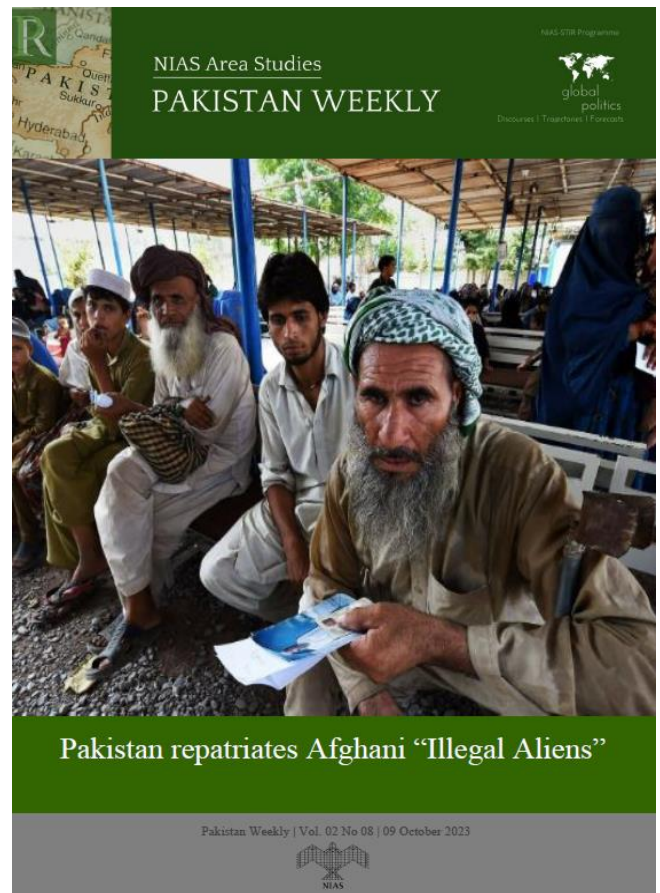
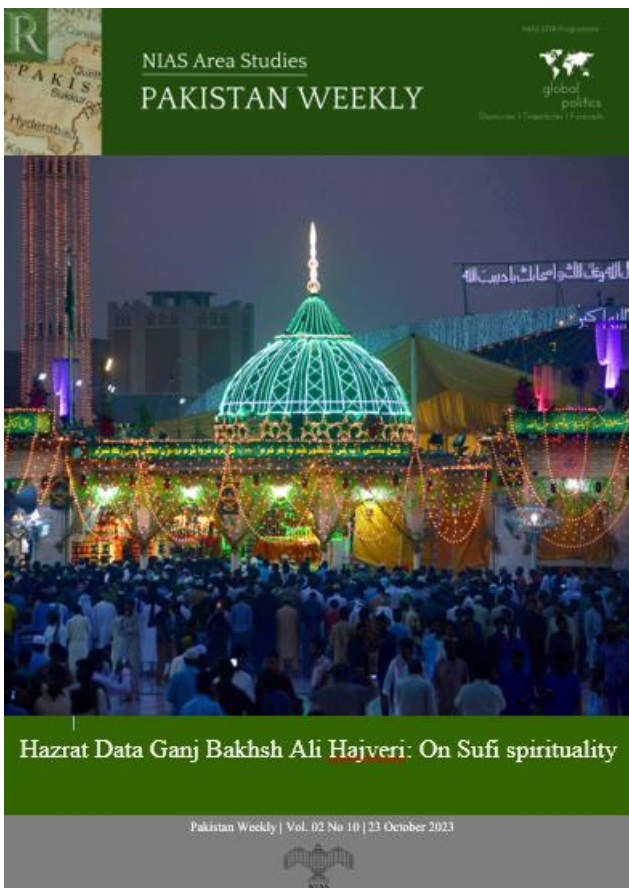


Source: Dawn

Sindh: Asian Development Bank to assist with coastal resilience

On 25 October, Dawn reported that the Asian Development Bank will now provide technical assistance to the Sindh Coastal Resilience sector. The project aims to further the coastal region with a high degree of resilience and enhance readiness in the region. The investments will be made in the sensitive environmental districts of Thatta, Sujawal and Badin, facing the aftermath of flooding, soil erosion and saline intrusion. Previously, the Japan Fund for Prosperous Resilient Asia and the Pacific provided the region with USD 2 million. The National Adaptation Plan pointed out that Pakistan's coastal region is under threat of repercussions by climate change. (Amin Ahmed, [“ADB okays help for Sindh coastal project.”](#) *Dawn*, 25 October 2023)

PR Previous publications





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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