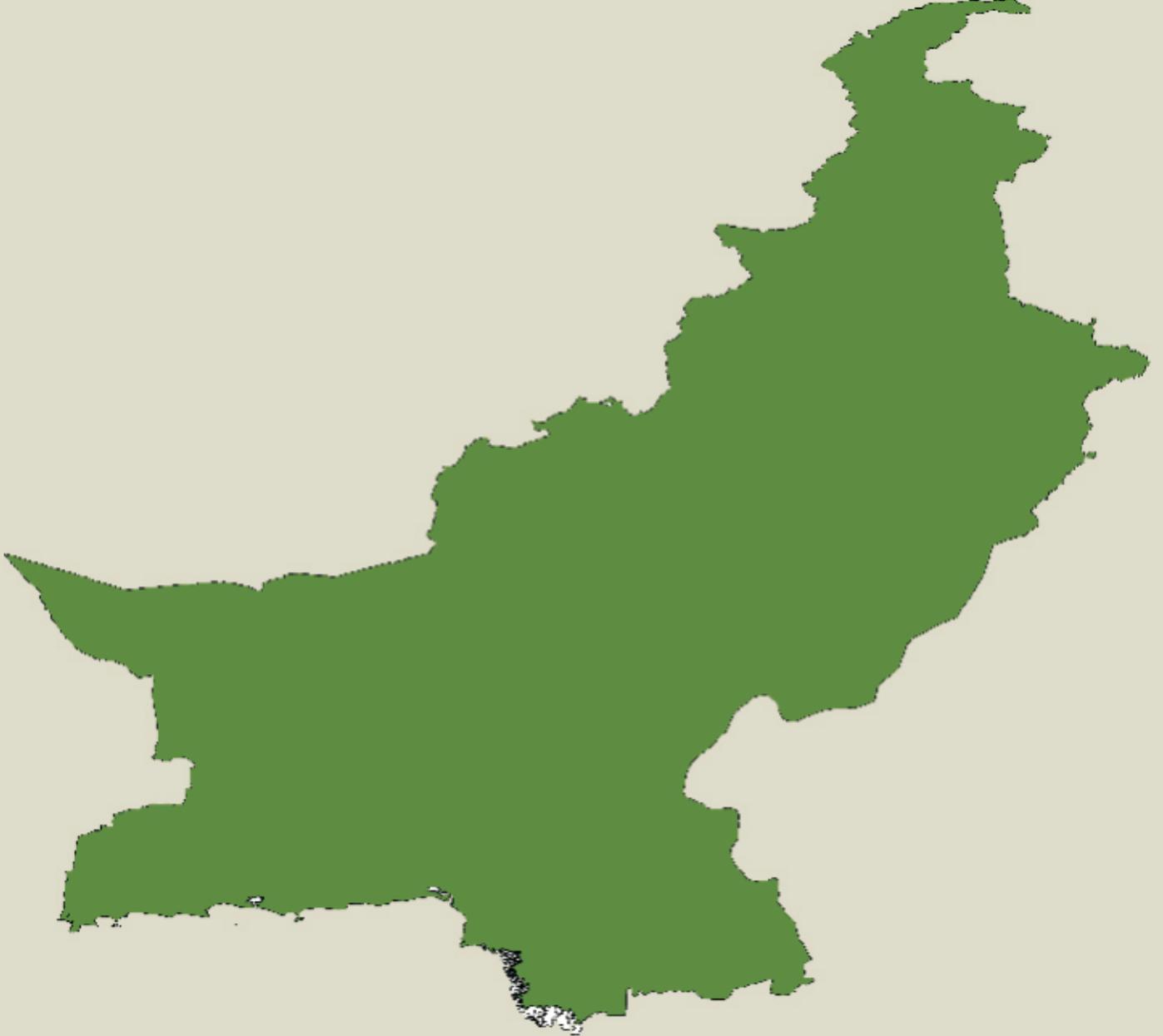


February 2024

# PAKISTAN NEWS DIGEST

*A Selected Summary of News, Views and Trends  
from Pakistani Media*



*Prepared by*

*Dr. Zainab Akhter*

*Dr. Nazir Ahmad Mir*

*Mr. Afroz Khan*

*Dr. Ashok Behuria*



MANOHAR PARRIKAR INSTITUTE FOR  
DEFENCE STUDIES AND ANALYSES

मनोहर पर्रिकर रक्षा अध्ययन एवं विश्लेषण संस्थान

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## POLITICAL DEVELOPMENTS

### **Toshakhana verdict, Editorial, *The News*, 01 February<sup>1</sup>**

It's raining verdicts and all of them seem to be going against PTI supremo Imran Khan. For someone who used to be seen as having a lucky streak with the courts, the past two days have been tough for Imran Khan, as he has been handed one sentence after another in the cipher and Toshakhana cases. On Wednesday, just a day after he was sentenced to ten years in the cipher trial, an accountability court on Wednesday awarded PTI founder Imran Khan and his wife Bushra Bibi 14 years of rigorous jail time each in the Toshakhana reference filed by the National Accountability Bureau (NAB). *The court has also imposed a fine of Rs1.5 billion on the couple and disqualified the former premier from holding public office for 10 years. NAB had filed the reference against the couple over a high-value Graff jewellery set, which included necklaces, earrings, bracelets, and a ring worth Rs1.57 billion.* It was found that Imran and his wife Bushra had only paid Rs9 million and had fixed the price of the jewellery set through a private firm. The PTI is, as expected, appealing the verdict in a high court. The party says that Bushra Bibi has been dragged into the case merely to pressurise Imran. This is reminiscent of how former prime minister and PML-N supremo Mian Nawaz Sharif was sentenced and his daughter Maryam Nawaz, who was not a public office holder, was also sentenced, and the father-daughter duo was jailed just before the 2018 elections. One wonders whether this vicious cycle will ever end.

### **Fears of violence, Editorial, *The News*, 02 February<sup>2</sup>**

*Contrary to what was being feared or wished the February 8 election is going ahead as planned. There were some apprehensions that a deteriorating law and order situation just days ahead of the general elections could lead to a pause in the election but after a meeting on Thursday, which had in attendance the ECP, caretaker interior minister, interior secretary, intelligence officials as well as chief secretaries and police chiefs of Balochistan and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Caretaker Interior Minister Gohar Ejaz put to rest all speculations about a delay in polls, saying that*

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.thenews.com.pk/print/1153343-toshakhana-verdict>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=whKkeXNIB9E>

the ECP and caretaker government will ensure the conduct of the polls on the designated date come what may. The meeting at the ECP took place a day after the army's top brass issued a stern warning against any attempts to disrupt the upcoming elections. Almost 51 per cent of the polling stations have been categorised 'sensitive' by the ECP for the upcoming general elections, and the last few weeks have seen a surge in violence in not just Balochistan and KP but there have been political clashes in Karachi and other cities also. Rehan Zeb Khan, an independent candidate contesting for a National Assembly seat from Bajaur, was murdered on Wednesday by unidentified armed assailants. On Sunday, violent clashes erupted in separate incidents in different parts of the country. With elections less than two weeks away, such violence does not bode well for the country. Miscreants targeted election offices of the PPP and the National Party (NP) in Balochistan on Sunday with grenades.

**Canvassing is over, Editorial, *The Express Tribune*, 07 February<sup>3</sup>**

*Polling arrangements have come full circle as the nation prepares to vote tomorrow. The February 8 ballot will long be remembered for pestering political instability and the crests and troughs that the electoral process had seen in the administrative and judicial domains.* The upcoming ballot, however, has bred some reservations pertaining to the new Election Management System. Though the Election Commission is sure that glitches, if any, will be taken care of, many fear that the repeat of 2018 dilemma of Form-45 and RTS breakdown can spoil the show altogether this time too. This is where extreme caution is desired to ensure smooth counting of votes, and their satisfactory sign-off from all the polling agents. *To dispel concerns, the ECP has assured that the EMS backup servers are linked to Nadra, and thus owe credibility in functioning and transparency. Coupled with this is an online platform to facilitate and address media complaints, as well as the presence of international monitors to vet the vote.* The future of Pakistan's progress and stability rests on the credible outcome of the February 8 vote. This is why a free and fair ballot is indispensable. While the campaign trajectory had been uneven, especially as the PTI struggled to reach out to its supporters, it is time for the state machinery to be judicious in compiling the verdict in the larger national interest. *The future of Pakistan's progress and*

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<sup>3</sup> <https://tribune.com.pk/story/2455678/canvassing-is-over>

*stability rests on the credible outcome of the February 8 vote. This is why a free and fair ballot is indispensable. While the campaign trajectory had been uneven, especially as the PTI struggled to reach out to its supporters, it is time for the state machinery to be judicious in compiling the verdict in the larger national interest.*

#### **Election reflections, Editorial, Dawn, 09 February<sup>4</sup>**

*All that was needed was for the ECP to let candidates campaign without restrictions, prepare the grounds for a clean and non-controversial contest, assist the country's adult population in freely exercising their right to self-determination, conduct a transparent count of their ballots, and quietly and respectfully bow out. As history will bear witness, it failed on almost all of those counts. From repeatedly delaying the elections on one pretext or the other to failing to protect the legitimacy of its last act, it betrayed its mandate by organising an exercise that will be remembered for all the wrong reasons. It is difficult not to be disappointed: given the number of times the ECP hid behind the Constitution's 'free and fair' condition to justify putting them off 'till it was ready', one would have imagined the exercise, whenever it was eventually held, would be largely irreproachable. Of course, the blame does not lie with the ECP alone. The caretaker government and the entire machinery of the state are equally culpable in robbing it of its sanctity. **Their actions worsened political polarisation, and they did not know when to stop. As a result, the exercise was doomed to controversy well before it began. It already seems clear that it will not provide any closure for the country's political crisis.** Crisis and instability will likely continue to plague the nation, with dissent kept in check through the use of fear tactics. It is a shame that such a momentous opportunity has been so carelessly lost.*

#### **Takeaway from elections, Editorial, Daily Times, 12 February<sup>5</sup>**

As the dust settles on the majority of the general election results, it is time to reflect the whole exercise and learn lessons to improve our social fabrics. **Political parties have started negotiations to form the form governments at both the federal and provincial levels. The**

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<sup>4</sup> <https://www.dawn.com/news/1812509/election-reflections>

<sup>5</sup> <https://dailytimes.com.pk/1169663/takeaway-from-elections/>

*imperative now is to establish stable administrations comprising capable officers, transcending personal and party interests in the face of formidable challenges.* The prevailing norm of bloated cabinets at the center and provinces needs reevaluation; a streamlined approach, aligned with genuine needs, would alleviate the burden of debt and redirect resources towards addressing the populace's concerns. In advocating for a departure from nepotism, there is need to adopt meritocracy as the guiding principle for appointments to government positions. The call is clear: qualifications should be the primary criterion, offering a way out of the current quagmire of difficulties. *With no single party securing a simple majority in the National Assembly, the inevitability of coalition governments emerges. The Pakistan People's Party in Sindh and PTI-backed members in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa appear poised to assume power in their respective provinces.* Mian Nawaz Sharif, claiming his party's position as the largest in the National Assembly and Punjab Assembly, extends an invitation for collaboration, putting the nation's interests above partisan considerations. In a broader appeal, this newspaper urges an end to the acrimonious trends that have marred national politics in recent years. A plea for understanding, harmony, and a departure from politics based on accusations and negative propaganda resonates strongly. Fostering unity is essential for the nation to embark on a path of development and prosperity, emphasizing that the journey forward hinges on collective efforts to transcend the divisive patterns of the past.

### **Rigging allegations, Editorial, Dawn, 13 February<sup>6</sup>**

*The integrity of the results tabulation exercise is under question, with dozens of candidates mostly belonging to the PTI, but also other parties and independents challenging in various forums the ECP's results on the basis of serious irregularities.* In most cases, the claims seem to be centred on Form 45 the polling station-level count of votes handed to contesting candidates which either wasn't issued in each case, thus preventing a proper check and balance on the tabulation exercise, or which do not tally with the final results announced. If the cases stand up under scrutiny and there is enough evidence to back the petitioners' claims, some results could be changed, which will alter the final tally for each party. *The*

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<sup>6</sup> <https://www.dawn.com/news/1813768/rigging-allegations>

*ECP should, in the interim, not worsen the controversies surrounding its results by notifying any victory in haste, especially not where the losing candidates seem to have a strong case.* Its terrible mismanagement of the result compilation process caused these problems, and the commission must now ensure that there was no tampering with the public's mandate before it starts issuing notifications. Lastly, the PTI and its supporters must temper their expectations regarding the recovery of their allegedly 'stolen' mandate. Considering what is at stake and the potential consequences for those allegedly involved, it will not be easy to have the ROs' decisions reversed. *They should also remember that, in the past, such disputes have sometimes taken years to resolve or been left unaddressed. One fitting example was the PTI's own deputy speaker in the last National Assembly, Qasim Suri, whose victory was challenged successfully by Nawabzada Lashkari Raisani.* The decision of the election tribunal was, however, stayed by the Supreme Court and never taken up again. Contestants should not let frustration get the better of them in such a scenario.

**Cobbling a coalition**, Editorial, *The Express Tribune*, 14 February<sup>7</sup>

The intricate process of forming a government at the Centre is underway marred by fears of the unknown. The PPP's decision to extend support to the PML-N on the floor of the house, and yet desist from being part of the cabinet is a Machiavellian choice. *That squarely means the Bhutto faction will keep the wafer-thin majority dispensation of Sharif's on tenterhooks, and grab the maximum they can out of it. In other words, it means the largesse will be issue-oriented, and with PPP reportedly bagging constitutional high-offices for its stalwarts, the House of Raiwind will be solo on a journey that is fraught with consequences.* Likewise, the system support from the MQM with 17 seats will be a colourful dressing of sorts with their own red and yellow cards in the air, as the coalition of the unwilling plans to keep the 90-odd PTI-led Independent legislators on the fences. The scenario is one of abject political instability, and does not bode well for the country. *The meltdown in the economy and the soaring fissures on the societal side call for a strong and viable political order. The PTI's passion to go solo, and to dump the gestures from PPP to be part of a coalition with it, will long be*

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<sup>7</sup> <https://tribune.com.pk/story/2456366/cobbling-a-coalition>

*debated on the merits of farsightedness.* The least that should be avoided is complicity and confrontation, and let the mandate of the people speak loud and clear.

**Alliance of convenience, Editorial, *The Express Tribune*, 15 February<sup>8</sup>**

A scene from the previous PDM government is being re-enacted. With Shehbaz Sharif staging his comeback as Prime Minister, and once again at the vanguard to stitch a fabric of convenience, political instability seems to be a constant in days ahead. This is so because the coalition with PPP and MQM will swing at the tail end of a simple majority, making the business of legislation and decision-making an arduous task. *Coupled with this will be the irresistible pressure from PTI on the floor of the house and streets, alike, as a viable opposition, if the tribunals go on to dump their Forms 45, and push it to the wall. Moreover, to what extent can the beleaguered coalition pick up a sinking economy is anybody's guess.* The PML-N has made a poor choice, and that too after having tasted the sourness of governance for 16 months. The damage left behind by the uncompetitive PDM rule is engraved on the minds of people, and the backlash vote on February 8 is a case in point. Likewise, ruling Punjab with a wafer-thin majority is no less than holding together a house of cards, and Maryam's amateur leadership will make it altogether difficult to navigate the tricky ends of Kautilya treatise. There is no way out, nonetheless, as the Sharifs are obsessed with riding the tigers without any consideration for the slip side of the story. *Thus the insurmountable tasks will be to deal with a maverick presidency of Asif Ali Zardari and keep the MQM happy for all times to come, if the intention is to stay afloat. Out of the parliament political voices this time around will be reverberating with more noises. The PTI can sit back to wait for the crumbling of cards.*

**PDM 2.0 set in, Editorial, *The Express Tribune*, 21 February<sup>9</sup>**

The Pakistan People's Party and the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz finally cooked up a deal on Tuesday night to once again sew together a coalition government in the Centre – ending ten days of intense negotiations after an inconclusive national election failed to

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<sup>8</sup> <https://tribune.com.pk/story/2456477/alliance-of-convenience>

<sup>9</sup> <https://tribune.com.pk/story/2457074/pdm-20-set-in>

crown a clear winner. *The parties reached a consensus on splitting up the power pie, deciding on crucial positions including prime minister, president, governorships, and chairman Senate. Under the power-sharing recipe, Shehbaz Sharif is set to assume the role of prime minister once again, while Asif Ali Zardari will reoccupy the presidential chair.* In addition, a PML-N leader confirmed that the PPP is slated to assume the roles of Senate chairman and Punjab governor, while the governors in both Sindh and Balochistan will belong to PML-N. Following much uncertainty post-polls, top leaders from both major parties confirmed that they were once again joining forces to form the government “in the nation’s best interest” in their seventh meeting. *The agreement put the brakes on the days of political limbo, potentially resolving the deadlock in the wake of the Feb 8 elections that left the national assembly hanging in the balance.* The development came as despite consecutive meetings, the situation appeared to be slipping out of control when Bilawal, in a press briefing earlier in the day, clearly stated that PPP would cast its vote for PML-N's prime ministerial candidate on its own conditions. However, by the end of the day, there was a surprising turn of events as Bilawal declared that the PPP would extend support to Shehbaz to become the premier before midnight.

**Muzzled nation**, Editorial, *The News*, 28 February<sup>10</sup>

It has been over a week and access to X, formerly known as Twitter, has still not been fully restored in Pakistan. According to at least one internet monitor, VPN services have also been restricted in the country, with those responsible for the outage seemingly leaving no stone unturned to shut Pakistanis out of the social media platform. *The authorities are yet to provide any explanation for the continuing outage, which coincides with the PTI's and others' claims of rigging in the last elections. Previous disruptions to X/Twitter access have coincided with a PTI virtual jalsa last December and a PTI virtual fundraiser in early January.* Though the Sindh High Court, after hearing a plea filed by multiple petitioners against the disruptions users have faced in accessing ‘X’ or Twitter, issued a directive for the authorities to restore access to the site this past Thursday (February 22), it appears to have had no impact thus far. It has not even elicited an explanation from the PTA or the IT

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<sup>10</sup> <https://www.thenews.com.pk/print/1162225-muzzled-nation>

ministry, with the former reportedly possessing the exclusive authority and capability to implement such a large-scale disruption. *Both these entities, along with the state as a whole, are included as parties to the case in the aforementioned petition, which highlights that the PTA can only disrupt access to online content or information in a very narrow context and that such a widespread disruption is an unlawful violation of the people's right to freedom of speech and expression and the right to receive information, guaranteed by Articles 19 and 19A of the constitution respectively.*

## SECURITY SITUATION

**Worsening security**, Editorial, *The Express Tribune*, 06 February<sup>11</sup>

Security situation is getting precarious as back-to-back attacks are reported on security personnel. The killing of 10 policemen at Chodhwan in Dera Ismail Khan district of Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa is too unnerving to report, as terrorists overwhelmed them in a late night operation, leaving behind many more injured including the local SHO. K-P as well as Balochistan are in the eye of the storm as periodic assaults have deterred the election campaign too. *The list of recent casualties is exhausting: a PTI candidate shot dead in Bajaur; a bomb blast at the party's rally in Sibi; an ANP activist killed in Qilla Abdullah; and last but not least a grenade attack at PPP election camp in Quetta. All this goes on to establish that there is a vicious plan at work wherein dreaded elements are out to spread chaos and mayhem.* The Chodhwan attack coincides with a similar ambush a month ago wherein 23 soldiers of Pakistan Army were martyred in the same district as militants rammed an explosives-laden truck into a security forces' post. Similar incidents in Waziristan, Chitral and Gwadar as well as in Punjab province establish that there is a serious security threat, and there are foreign elements in cahoots with abettors to fan unrest. The influx of homeless people from Afghanistan in the last two years is at the root cause of this revulsion. At the same time, it goes without saying that we had blinked somewhere as priorities to target unscrupulous elements were put on the backburner. This has provided terrorists a chance to regroup and

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<sup>11</sup> <https://tribune.com.pk/story/2455586/worsening-security>

take on the security forces that had valiantly put down the insurgency in tribal and settled areas during the war on terror.

### **Balochistan blasts, Editorial, Dawn, 08 February<sup>12</sup>**

*The prologue to today's national polls has been a blood-soaked one. Yesterday, just a day before people were to cast their votes to elect the next government, two deadly blasts rocked Balochistan, causing almost 30 fatalities.* In the first incident, a blast occurred outside an independent candidate's election office in Pishin; the second targeted a JUI-F election office in Qila Abdullah Both towns are located in Balochistan's Pakhtun belt. In fact, Balochistan and KP have been hit the hardest by terrorist violence, which picked up pace as the polls drew nearer. Several actors are involved in militancy, including religiously inspired groups such as the banned TTP and its offshoots, and Baloch separatist outfits. On Monday, 10 police personnel were martyred when militants struck a police station in KP's Dera Ismail Khan. Balochistan, meanwhile, has been rocked by dozens of grenade attacks across the province, targeting candidates and their supporters. *Pakistan had already been dealing with a fresh wave of militancy, and poll-related violence has only worsened the precarious security situation. At one time, rumours were circulating that the polls might be put off, at least in the militancy-hit areas, as candidates were killed and political activities targeted.* That did not come to pass, though the administration's crucial test remains today: to ensure violence-free polls.

## **URDU MEDIA**

### **IMF's prediction, Editorial, Roznama Dunya, 01 February<sup>13</sup>**

*The International Monetary Fund (IMF) has recently projected a 2 percent growth rate for the national economy in the current fiscal year in its latest World Economic Outlook, compared to 2.5 Percent, the World Economic Outlook of October last year. This is not only below the GDP*

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<sup>12</sup> <https://www.dawn.com/news/1812115/balochistan-blasts>

<sup>13</sup> [https://e.dunya.com.pk/index.php?e\\_name=ISL&edate=2024-02-01&page=25](https://e.dunya.com.pk/index.php?e_name=ISL&edate=2024-02-01&page=25)

*growth target set by the government for the current financial year at 3.5 percent, but it is not at all satisfactory for the country with a population of 240 million.* Such a low growth rate is incompatible with creating ample employment opportunities. The reduction in economic growth is contributing to an increase in unemployment, a decline in investment, and unchecked inflation. Therefore, specific measures are urgently needed for the progress of economic growth. In this context, the incoming government after the general elections, must bring forth a comprehensive economic plan. This will not only ensure an increase in the growth rate for the current fiscal year but also establish a foundation for sustained economic improvement. The highest interest rate is a significant impediment to industrial production processes and economic growth. To promote industrial operations and production processes, it is imperative to reduce the cost of energy and lower interest rates. When industries thrive, economic growth will also improve, resulting in a reduction in unemployment and inflation. This is the fundamental economic principle that needs to be implemented in practice.

### **Challenges for the incoming rulers, Editorial, *Nawa-i-Waqt*, 04 February<sup>14</sup>**

*The 9th meeting of the Special Investment Facilitation Council (SIFC) was held on 4 February in Islamabad under the chairmanship of Caretaker Prime Minister Anwar-ul Haq Kakar.* It was attended by caretaker federal cabinet members, Chief Ministers and relevant officials besides the army chief General Asim Munir. Addressing the meeting, the Caretaker Prime Minister emphasized that the next elected government should maintain continuity of economic policies in the larger interest of the country and benefit from the pace of economic initiatives established by SIFC. On this occasion, Army Chief General Asim Munir expressed his determination to fully support the government's initiatives for the economic stability and the economic and social improvement of the people. In the meeting, the Strategic Canals Vision in 2030 and reforms in the Federal Board of Revenue (FBR) were also approved. *It is a fact that when the interim setup was formed for the general elections in the country, it had to face the challenge of holding the free, fair and transparent elections on time and also stabilize the economy of the country. The outgoing PDM government had also promised to fulfill all the conditions imposed by the IMF while signing an interim bailout package of three billion dollars. To fulfill*

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<sup>14</sup> <https://www.nawaiwaqt.com.pk/04-Feb-2024/1762735>

*the conditions then became the responsibility of the interim government. By bowing down to the conditions of the IMF, the government had burdened the common man even more.* Finally, Army Chief General Asim Munir pledged full support for the government's initiatives to manage the country's economy, and the mission of solving the internal and external factors that are affecting the economy. In this regard, the Army Chief planned to correct the direction of the agricultural sector, apart from the industrial sector. A new strategy was decided to free the national economy from the impact of terrorism, for which national and provincial apex committees were revived. Actions were initiated and terrorism was suppressed and farmers also got incentives for agricultural development. But instead of decreasing, inflation continued to increase, burdening the people.

### **Major challenges after the elections, Editorial, Jang, 06 February<sup>15</sup>**

Today is the last day of campaigning for political parties participating in the general elections, ending at 12am? 8 February is the polling day in which millions of voters will vote for their representatives for the next government. *Given the adverse conditions and challenges that Pakistan is currently facing, power will be a garland of thorns, not metaphorical a bed of roses for the new government.* The attractive claims and promises made during the election campaign are not enough to overcome the national problems and difficulties; for that serious measures and hard work will be required to implement them. Caretaker Prime Minister Anwar-ul-Haq Kakar has called the economy undoubtedly the basis of all problems. He also said that after the economy, attention should be paid to terrorism, political instability and foreign policy. *In all the elections held in Pakistan so far except one, there have been allegations of rigging. To avoid this and to ensure fair and transparent elections, provision was made for the establishment of caretaker governments in the federal and provincial governments. It is equivalent to distrust of the ruling regime that it may use the resources at its disposal to influence the elections.* In view of the seriousness shown by the current caretaker government in handling the affairs of the country and taking policy measures, there were allegations that this is a conspiracy by which the caretakers want to extend their tenure. The Prime Minister dismissed these allegations as baseless and said that the issues that were referred to in this regard, including terrorism in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP) and Balochistan, should not be seen in a political

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<sup>15</sup> <https://e.jang.com.pk/detail/624237>

context. It will be the responsibility of the new government to carry forward the necessary work that we have done on our part. Kakar said that the Special Investment Facilitation Council (SIFC) is doing valuable work for foreign investment. Memorandum of Understandings (MoUs) worth \$35 billion have been signed with the United Arab Emirates (UAE) and Kuwait. After the establishment of the new government, Saudi Arabia and Qatar will also join this system. He said that if the outlawed TTP surrenders unconditionally, they should be given amnesty.

### **Post-election apprehensions and expectations, Sajjad Abbasi, *Ummat*, 07 February<sup>16</sup>**

In 24 hours are left for the elections, to be held on 8 February. *First time, perhaps, in the 76 years of Pakistan's history every institution was trying to say that the election would be held on the given date: the election commission, caretaker government, armed forces and the Supreme Court. Election campaign was going on, ballot papers were printed, the army was being deployed at the polling stations, still there were questions raised by the people on the possibility of elections on 8 February.* Actually the uncertainty was a given of the way of the ruling for the last 70 years in which at times decisions were taken in closed doors rooms and at times a tradition of assassinations was prompted. Thus, to doubt anything coming from the government has become a habit of Pakistanis. *Since elections are going to be held on 8 February, let's analyse the post-election scenario. Everywhere people are raising questions and expressing their views about the post-election scenario in the country. One of the important questions being raised is that will the upcoming government complete its term? Or it will be sent packing in a few months and it will be said that the election was the replica of 2018 elections?* Such a scene has been set in which a group is provided with such a "level-playing field" in which the other team is not even visible in the field. It is interesting that analysis does say this fact even the party (that is being favoured) has no issue with it as it says that the party at the receiving end was brought to power by bringing down its government. *There are clear signs implying that the Pakistan Muslim League-N (PML-N) will form the new government. But will the party get a simple majority or it will be dependent on others? It is said that if the party gets a simple majority then Nawaz Sharif will become the prime minister; otherwise Shehbaz Sharif will be the premier of Pakistan.* It is also said that who will sit on the throne has not been decided in the Sharif

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<sup>16</sup> <https://ummat.net/epaper/news.php?date=2024/02/07/&p=idr3.gif>

family. Meanwhile, observers have noticed that Shehbaz Sharif has again come to limelight. They say Shehbaz's media interactions and body language imply something. Sources say that Shehbaz has been accepted as the new prime minister. Now a lot will depend on the election results. The "powerful" sections require Shehbaz popularity.

**New checkerboard, new seals, Sohail Warraich, Jang, 08 February<sup>17</sup>**

*With a new election, a new chessboard is about to be laid and new seals are about to emerge. Economic agenda is already set.* All the sick institutions and corporations managed by the government will be privatized. The Pakistan Muslim League (PML-N) is fine with this economic model. The Pakistan people's Party (PPP) is not being included in the federal government because its economic model and vision are different. *It has been already decided that four major sectors will take the country to the next level of development. Foreign investments worth billions of dollars have been planned in agriculture, minerals, IT and energy sectors. Under the Bangladesh model, the new prime minister will have the full support of the powerful and the judiciary so that it can focus on the economy.* It is also decided that if Nawaz Sharif becomes the Prime Minister, he will lead the economic direction and vision for a year and then hand over the reins of power to his brother Shehbaz Sharif. *In order to prevent any conflict between "the powerful" and the PML-N, as in the past, it has been decided that Shehbaz will perform the duties of a liaison between Nawaz Sharif and the "powerful" and will make every possible effort so that there is no rift between two. Suppose that things fall in line like the government wants, then it means that the PPP will emerge as a major opposition party in the federation: Bilawal Bhutto will be the leader of the party in the National Assembly. On the other hand, there will be a group of Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) loyalists in the same National Assembly. The PTI and PPP will sit side by side in the opposition and both will have to choose the leader of the united opposition. Therefore, Bilawal Bhutto will be the leader of the united opposition, with the PTI left with no option but to accept him.* Perhaps Bilawal Bhutto's talk of soft treatment with the PTI is about his future politics in which both the warring groups will have to do politics together against the PML-N. *The "powerful" is clear that every obstacle in the way of improving the economy will be removed by the state as a duty. In the past, the "powerful" used to think that governments should be kept weak; this time, they want a strong government so that it can make*

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<sup>17</sup> <https://e.jang.com.pk/detail/625234>

*big decisions. Therefore, the “powerful” wants Nawaz Sharif to have a simple majority in the national assembly. A system like Bangladesh may prove to be good for economic development but it will be deadly poison for the all-round politics of Pakistan. Unlike Bangladesh, Pakistan has four nations, many religions and people of different schools of thought. There has been opposition here in every period.*

**Attack on Mohsin Dawar is an attempt to suppress the voice of the subjugated nations, Khalil Baloch, Daily Sangar, 11 February<sup>18</sup>**

*Former chairman of Baloch National Movement (BNM), Khalil Baloch has condemned the attack on Mohsin Dawar in Waziristan. In a post on microblogging website X, Khalil said that the murderous attack on Mohsin Dawar is a link in the chain of silencing the effective voices of the subjugated nations by Pakistan. It is a reprehensible act, he added. He said that Pakistan has a clear policy and strategy towards the subjugated nations (within Pakistan). The leadership of the subjugated nations, therefore, should take a clear position instead of keeping their nations in the dark. It should be noted that former Member of National Assembly Mohsin Dawar and his colleagues were injured in firing by security forces in the Miran Shah area of North Waziristan, Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa (KP). Protesters said that the army and police fired and shelled tear gas in North Waziristan to protest the delay in the election results. Mohsin Dawar and his companions were injured due to firing and shelling.*

## **ELECTRONIC MEDIA**

**Election campaign entered the final stages: Big Challenges, Aaj Shahzeb Khanzada Kay Saath, Geo News, 05 February**

The host informed that the election campaigning in Pakistan has entered final stage and all parties are claiming that they will win simple majority but the road to centre will be through Punjab and the parties are focusing their energy in Punjab. PPP and Bilawal Bhutto has challenged Nawaz Sharif and PML-N in Punjab and hope to give equal competition to the

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<sup>18</sup> <https://dailysangar.online/?p=44064>

party. He underlined that *the most interesting will be in Lahore where Maryam Nawaz is fighting elections for the first time, Bilawal Bhutto has also chosen a seat from Lahore, Nawaz Sharif is also entering the election from the same constituency.* In this episode he invited Hamid Mir, senior analyst to analyse the rundown to the elections. *Hamid Mir*, senior Analyst pointed out that people are asking the PML-N what they have done during the PDM tenure and it can be a bit of a problem for PML-N in Punjab and other parts. But Nawaz Sharif has now picked up the movement and it has to be seen if they get the 100 seat majority. He pointed out that *the judgments of Imran Khan in the three cases are not fair it should have been in open trail that has again shifted the public sentiments towards Imran Khan.* He added that the PTI MNA's will not shift their loyalties and never join PML-N and at the same time *Bilawal Bhutto is trying to woe the PTI MNA's towards PPP* and has said that if they win he will release the political workers (*hinting towards Imran Khan*). PTI has also a **plan C** that is secret till now, they will neither join PML-N nor PPP but another party within 24 hours, and then they will no longer be independent. He added that if *PPP and PTI join hands, it can block the road of PML-N to form government.* If PML-N cannot form simple majority, the PPP will try to form join hands with other parties to form a coalition government but PML-N will also try to hold hands of other parties.

### **Who will be the next PM of Pakistan? Capital Talk with Hamid Mir, Geo News, 06 February<sup>19</sup>**

Hamid Mir informed that all the parties including the PML-N and PPP are positive for their win but these major parties claim that the PM will be either Nawaz Sharif or Bilawal Bhutto. The PML-N seems over confident and in the rally in Kasur, Nawaz Sharif seemed very positive that he will be the next PM and said we are celebrating in advance. The ads of PML-N in newspapers give a message that they have already won. *Taj Haider*, PPP pointed out that in Pakistan two groups are very powerful, one is the establishment and another the public (*Awam*) and stressed that we should support the public and strengthen their power and neutralize the establishment. The army has already declared that they will not interfere in politics hence it is the right time to strengthen democracy. The PML-N workers are trying to interfere in the polling system of the PPP in a bid to interrupt the election process. *Farooq*

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<sup>19</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FiiCu8iHIQ0>

*Sattar*, MQM Pakistan pointed out that public have a hope that every new election will bring good leaders who will work for their betterment but each time the promises remain same and nothing is done. The prominent parties should sit and talk about these issues and work accordingly. But Nawaz Sharif and Bilawal Bhutto are just competing for the post of PM and not talking about their manifesto and solutions. Karachi has been avoided by all governments and now it is high time we take notice and resolve the issues. *Khurram Sher Zaman*, PTI and now independent candidate pointed out that it is not an election but a selection. The establishment is thinking to support such a party that provided a failure when they formed government under PDM. He added that if there is free and fair elections, the PTI will definitely win. The voters of *PTI* will come out in large numbers on 08<sup>th</sup> February and in *Karachi* claimed they will *win 16-17* seats very easily. In the *Iddat* case of Imran Khan and Bushra Bibi the whole world is making jokes about our judiciary and the country at large. *Musadik Malik* of the PML-N again talked about the 09<sup>th</sup> February incident as dark day that attacked the army and generals who protect the country and this was the first time in history of the country. Talking about Imran Khan and his case, he added the Khan broke his oath for personal gains and leaked official secrets. At the international level Khan has reduced the image of Pakistan and acted very casually on important issues. He added that the personal issues like *Iddat* should not be discussed in public.

**PPP can go for a Minus PML-N approach? Aaj Shahzeb Khanzada Kay Saath, *Geo News*, 8<sup>th</sup> February<sup>20</sup>**

If the PML-N does not win simple majority then there are chances that Nawaz Sharif will not be the PM, and in that case PPP will try to form government with other parties and if it does not work he may approach PML-N and Shehbaz Sharif can be the PM face of PML-N. On the other hand if PML-N wins simple majority, then Nawaz Sharif will be the next PM. Even the PML-N is trying its best not to work with PPP and therefore they have straightened their relations with all. *Bilawal Bhutto Zardari*, Chairman PPP on this show informed that we are targeting that PPP makes government and now it depends on the people as they go for voting. Asifa Zardari Bhutto has done a great campaigning but as far as giving her role in government if we win she does not want to come forward now, but he

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<sup>20</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=k6D9W1kWYis>

suggested she can do something in the health centre. In our manifesto we talk about land reforms and in Sindh we are building homes and we will give ownership to the people staying on the land, it is a big project (*land transfer and assets transfer*). We will regularize the *kacchi bastis* and give them land ownership. When asked about criticism of Nawaz Sharif, he added during campaigns we put forward the negative points of the opposition parties, but with Shehbaz Sharif we have a good working relationship but with the same old politics of the PML-N it has become problematic for me to work with them. When asked about political prisoners, he added I was talking in a historical context that PPP has not put any political prisoners behind jail. For that we have proposed a **truth and reconciliation commission** to bring the truth in front of the public. Imran Khan has legal options as he has been convicted, our view is not person specific. Talking about Punjab, he informed that the PPP was welcomed beyond expectations by the people and had a good response, and hopeful of better results. Whether its PTI or PML-N they are doing politics of revenge and if they agree to break with this tradition, then I am ready for negotiations with them. **Ground reality is that PML-N will not come anywhere near 100 seats.**

**Political Crisis Post-election? No clear mandate to a single party? Wajahat S. Khan, 11 February<sup>21</sup>**

Although the elections are over and the results showed a clear mandate of the people to the PTI affiliated candidate at the centre, but there is still so much uncertainty in Pakistan. PTI has started peaceful protest to demand their right and claiming that there was so much election rigging against its candidates. The PTI workers have been instructed specifically not to clash with the police and remain peaceful. But the police are trying to crackdown on these protest. Wajahat pointed out that the ones (PTI) who have won is been told that you have lost and the ones who have lost are behaving as if they have won. Stock market has crashed. *The establishment along with the PML-N are trying to engineer the election results and trying to form a coalition government. The PPP will ask for a lion's share in the government and some PPP leaders are saying that wither Bilawal Bhutto will be PM or the PPP will sit in the opposition.* He also added that the international media like Guardian and Bloomberg has pointed out that the results of the Pakistan elections are an indication of rejection of military

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<sup>21</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wSKudedQKQM>

rule by the public, and victory for democracy. The courts are starting changing its mood too, it has given relieve to Imran Khan and Shah Mehmood Qureshi and he underlined that it is because of the vote of the public that has pressured the judiciary to change its judgments. He informed that there was a peaceful protest in New York Times Square and this time they are trying seriously to mobilize against the rigging and the overseas Pakistan's are trying to connect and talk against the election results. He also added that the PPP also performed well and it indicates that the new voters are young and support new politics. PTI Leader Ali Muhammad Khan has rejected that there can be any alliance with PML-N or PPP but we can sit with MQM. The PTI claimed that they want to take power through vote and that they should not force them go on roads to take back their right.

**Shehbaz Sharif New PM of Pakistan: Maryam Nawaz will be Punjab's CM, 11<sup>th</sup> Hour with Waseem Badami, ARY News, 13 February<sup>22</sup>**

After marathon consultation of parties, the PPP finally decided to sit with the PML-N and for next government with other parties, in short a PDM 2.0. PTI announced alliance with Majilise wadetul muslimen and Jamaat Islami and after that in the press conference Bilawal Bhutto informed that the PTI backed candidates are not ready to sit with PPP and so only option is PML-N. Bilawal said that he will not put himself out as a candidate for the next PM. Asif Ali Zardari in the joint press conference said that they decided to sit together and form the next government, and also invited PTI in the reconciliation. Shehbaz Sharif announced Maryam Nawaz as the candidate for Punjab CM. *Omar Ayub Khan* of the PTI informed that all the parties write off PTI before elections and now they are inviting us to form alliance. He claimed that the PTI is the single largest party and will form government in Punjab, KP and federal level. We will recover national and general assembly seats from Karachi, our seats have been robbed and there is still time and soon we will form the government. He also added that Imran Khan will also come out of jail after due judicial process. Who is Asif Ali Zardari to offer reconciliation to PTI and its workers, we will go to judicial process and put cases on them, they have put PTI though horror. When asked will you talk to establishment, he answered who is establishment we have our constitution. *Allama Raja Nasir* head of Majilise Wadetul Muslimen (*MWM*) informed that it is true that

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<sup>22</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=51WDCuYILaY>

*the PTI affiliated candidates will join the party officially.* In the next parliament the biggest party will be MWM but in real sense it will be PTI. When asked about women reservation and minority, he answered that they have the choice to keep or not and legally it is not against the party. ECP should act legally and PTI will challenge this act and this is specially made against the PTI. All the rules were made to keep PTI out of elections. Imran Khan will decide everything, and ***MWM will unconditionally support the PTI.*** ***Kamran Tessori (Governor Sindh)*** talking about the meeting to form the alliance informed that we have all decided to sit together to form the government to bring the country out of instability. He also added that the whole World is watching at what the political countries are doing and how they will take decisions in favour of the people. ***MQM-P will be part of the alliance*** as it was before the elections in PDM and ***the party will conditionally support Shehbaz Sharif.*** ***Chaudhry Salik Hussain*** of the PML-Q informed that Chaudhary Shujaat has started the initiative and this meeting was held in Islamabad. ***PPP will not be part of the cabinet*** and MQM will be in cabinet. He informed that within one week things will be clear before the parliament is called and if the PTI can achieve the target then they are also welcome to form the government. ***Saeed Ghani*** of the PPP informed that PPP will form a committee and will decide on which issues they will support the PML-N. The central executive committee meeting has decided ***PPP will not sit in cabinet but will support PML-N led government on legislations and when they need vote and support.*** This committee is also open to talk with other parties.

### **PPP and PML-N Big Meeting: Important Press Conference, SAMAA TV, 20 February<sup>23</sup>**

In the joint Press Conference ***Bilawal Bhutto*** informed that PML-N and PPP has the numbers to form the government in the centre and soon will complete the formalities. He informed that the Sunni Itehad Council does not have the numbers to form the government and to bring the country out of the crisis, PPP and PML-N will form the government and soon Shehbaz Sharif will be the PM of Pakistan once again and after the PM election, Asif Ali Zardari will be the Presidential candidate and we are thankful to PML-N for supporting on this issue and our joint candidate will be Asif Zardari. ***Shehbaz Sharif*** thanked the PPP for arranging the presser for the joint statement of the two parties. We have in the beginning

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<sup>23</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=j2AVZ6chkFw>

invited the independent candidates who have won to form the government and that we would have welcomed them. We could have sat happily in the opposition benches but as you can see they do not have the numbers, they have arranged their alliance with Sunni Etihad and WM but still does not have the numbers to form the elections. Now we are in a position to form the government and thank Bilawal Bhutto, Asif Zardari and Nawaz Sharif for making it possible. Pakistan is faced with number of challenges and this alliance have also decided to appoint Asif Ali Zardari as the next President of the country for another five years. For this we are also thankful to other parties in the alliance, PML-Q, MQM etc. for supporting us. He added that it is *journey of blood, sweat and sacrifice* and we have to bring the country out of the crisis.

## BOMBINGS, SHOOTINGS AND DISAPPEARANCES

*(Select incidents culled out from the Pakistan media)*

Place	Date	Description	Killed	Injured
<b>Khyber Pakhtunkhwa</b>				
Dera Ismail Khan <sup>24</sup>	08/02/2023	At least nine people were killed and more than a dozen others injured in almost two dozen incidents of violence in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa's Dera Ismail Khan district and multiple districts of Balochistan on Thursday.	09	12
<b>Balochistan</b>				
Pishin <sup>25</sup>	07/02/2024	At least 20 killed as twin bombings rock Balochistan's Pishin, Qilla Saifullah	20	12

<sup>24</sup> <https://www.dawn.com/news/1812599/nine-killed-in-kp-balochistan-election-violence>

<sup>25</sup> <https://tribune.com.pk/story/2455747/at-least-12-killed-in-pishin-blast-targeting-election-office-1>