

January 2024

PAKISTAN NEWS DIGEST

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



Prepared by

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Dr. Nazir Ahmad Mir

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MANOHAR PARRIKAR INSTITUTE FOR
DEFENCE STUDIES AND ANALYSES

मनोहर पर्रिकर रक्षा अध्ययन एवं विश्लेषण संस्थान

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POLITICAL DEVELOPMENTS

Symbolic violence, Editorial, *Dawn*, 05 January¹

The fresh setback is expected to be challenged soon by the PTI, this time reportedly before the Supreme Court. With most observers in agreement that the ECP has overstepped limits with its overzealous scrutiny of PTI's intra-party polls, the party hopes its appeal will be upheld once the fairness of the electoral watchdog's decision is examined from all angles. On its part, the ECP has been trying to spin its decision to deprive the PTI of the bat as a 'routine penalty'. However, given everything else that is being done to put the PTI at a disadvantage, it merely smacks of another ploy to deprive the party of a fair chance at the polls. Where the ECP once seemed to be merely failing to ensure a level playing field for all contestants, it has now started seeming complicit in efforts to make the upcoming general elections as unfair as possible. A decision that denies a major political party the use of its most easily recognizable identifier on the ballot paper just weeks before a general election is to take place is indefensible when one considers the fact that intra-party elections conducted by major political parties have never been scrutinized with such gusto in the past. In general, internal elections in political parties barring a few are a routine farce and unlikely to hold up to the same scrutiny the PTI was subjected to. *Therefore, though the ECP's decision has been upheld by the Peshawar High Court due to procedural defects in its earlier granted relief in the matter to the PTI, it is necessary that the matter is taken up and settled decisively and fairly, in a relevant court of law, at the earliest, and by an empowered bench.*

PTI's delicate moment, Editorial, *The Express Tribune*, 04 January²

The judicial ruling to once again take away 'cricket bat' election symbol from PTI is contentious. It has put the party in a delicate moment. The fact that the Peshawar High Court itself had earlier scrapped the ECP decision to deny 'bat', and then reversed the same in a review petition thickens the plot. This has thrown the impartiality of upcoming general elections under question, and the manner in which the most popular political party is being pushed to the wall is

¹ <https://www.dawn.com/news/1803361>

² <https://tribune.com.pk/story/2452082/ptis-delicate-moment>

worrisome and unacceptable. PTI's new acting Chairman Gohar Ali's and other stalwarts' fear that the party may not be allowed to participate in polls as a single entity and under one symbol are not unfounded. If so, then PTI candidates may be forced to contest in individual capacity and this will open floodgates of floor crossing tendency in the new parliament. At the same time it will put the party under pressure and in a state of disarray. PTI candidates are already under undue vigilance by the electoral watchdog, making the ballot a one-sided affair and incredible. The constitutional body must act judiciously in providing a level playing field to all. *International rights organisations and foreign observers are casting their doubts on the credibility of the electoral process, and in such a situation the new measures to uproot the PTI will surely invoke criticism.* Holding free and transparent elections is a must to merit a favourable response from international donors, and certainly in national interest. Let PTI have its due space as a political party.

Overburdened courts, Editorial, *The Express Tribune*, 08 January³

Speedy and timely dispensation of justice remains a far cry in Pakistan. The reason is not only the impediments created by the legal bureaucracy but also the plethora of cases that are stashed with the judiciary. *It becomes a time-consuming affair with lethargy setting in with the passage of time. Most of the problems and concerns raised in the ensuing litigations pertain to seeking recourse from lower courts and magistrates, but they are not forthcoming.* Lack of staff, corrupt practices of fleecing the applicant and influence of the 'mighty' has rendered justice unattainable in Pakistan. More to add is an abject non-functioning of state organs as per the Constitution, and the tendency to move the top court for cases of public interest that could otherwise be tactfully dealt with at the executive and legislative levels. Chief Justice Qazi Faez Isa was on the spot as he castigated the practice of taking every matter to the Supreme Court, and went on to rightly advise empowering the lower strata of judiciary. Presently, a little less than 100,000 cases are pending a hearing in different courts countrywide, which ultimately goes on to sink the confidence of the masses in the judiciary. *Empowering the parliament and making it a responsive unit for public concerns would surely lessen the pressure on the judiciary. It is ironic as to why courts should sit on to decide in framing regulations and*

³ <https://tribune.com.pk/story/2452483/overburdened-courts>

parameters for cases pertaining to eligibility of legislators and likewise other modus operandi. The apex court is an appellate forum and all it has to do is to revisit the constitution and come up with a judicial review, as and when desired.

Decaying politics, Dr. Niaz Murtaza, Dawn, 10 January⁴

Stagnant patronage is now our main political form, vacuous populism its main challenger, religious extremist politics the main wild card, and terrorist politics the main spoiler, cutting a bleak view of our politics. This state is mainly due to the establishment's autocratic politics that serves as the bedrock of our politics. It has ruled directly for 30 years and runs politics covertly, and even otherwise, by furthering various forms of political patronage. ***Our huge economic, security, social and foreign policy failures stem from our political failures. Our political failures exist because powerful forces have blocked our natural political evolution for six decades.*** The view is not entirely bleak as small pro-poor forces are rising. Strangely, these are mainly in the two poorest and most violent areas: ex-Fata and Balochistan. The misery from poverty is magnified by terrorism religious in ex-Fata to conquer the state and ethnic in Balochistan. PTM won two national seats in 2018 in ex-Fata. Baloch forces are still loose as seen in Gwadar protests and Baloch march. So, politics in these areas now has three forms: patronage politics, militant politics, and mass politics, which rejects both. The state is unwisely crushing it, not seeing its value in ending both forms of terrorism. The huge political energy of Baloch protests must crystallise into durable political forms like PTM. In my solidarity visits to the Baloch protest camp in Islamabad, I requested Mahrang Baloch and others to think on these lines. ***Our political decay reflects a larger SAARC proclivity: Bangladesh embraces one-party autocracy, India has illiberal extremism and Sri Lanka stagnant politics. Yet nowhere are multiple crises and the need for mass politics bigger than in Pakistan.***

No ball, Editorial, Dawn, 11 January⁵

The umpire wants the bat back at the crease. The Peshawar High Court has for the second time overturned the Election Commission's regrettable order stripping the PTI of its iconic

⁴ <https://www.dawn.com/news/1804332/decaying-politics>

⁵ <https://www.dawn.com/news/1804896/no-ball>

election symbol ahead of the upcoming general election. The decision, delivered just in time, reverses one of the severest handicaps imposed on the PTI ahead of the upcoming elections. *It is worth pointing out that the ECP's decision to strip the bat would have rendered the PTI's candidates able to contest the elections due on Feb 8 as independents only. Such a severe penalty would kill any party's election prospects, especially since multiple candidates vie for the same party's ticket in most constituencies*, and it is impossible for the parties' voters to know which of the people named on the ballot are being formally backed by their party in the absence of the familiar election symbol against anyone's name. In case enough voters are confused which is quite likely, considering the variety of candidates on the ballot paper this could mean the difference between a large victory and an overwhelming defeat. As such, it is the correct decision. As was pointed out in the arguments in court over the matter, no party has ever been made to contest elections without its symbol except for under a dictatorship. It is a shame that matters came to this, but the court has thankfully ruled in favour of a fair contest. The PML-N, PTI and PPP now have a fight to win. It is time to kick off the campaigns in earnest.

On your mark, Editorial, Dawn, 16 January⁶

After the Supreme Court's shock verdict depriving the PTI of its election symbol late Saturday, many observers have wryly questioned the need for having elections at all, given how neatly the field now appears to be set up. *However, the show must go on. By now, most of the parties, including the PTI, have issued lists of candidates to whom tickets have been awarded, and these hopefuls have very little time to canvass for votes. They must get going with their campaigns forthwith.* The PML-N still seems considerably behind compared to the PPP, which has taken a head start as far as holding workers' meetings and jalsas is concerned. The PTI, unfortunately, faces new, serious existential challenges after losing the bat. However, the party has displayed grit and determination thus far, and it is hoped, for the sake of Pakistani democracy, that it will manage to make the best of the hand it has been dealt. The lesson that ought to have been learned in 2018 was that engineering results by interfering in the electoral process invariably has disastrous consequences. *Those benefiting from such 'interventions' may reap short-term benefits, but without meaningful public support and*

⁶ <https://www.dawn.com/news/1806208/on-your-mark>

the legitimacy conferred by a fair election to strengthen their hand, they cannot expect to survive the pressures that come with executive power.

Bilawal's politics, Editorial, Dawn, 24 January⁷

In a series of recent political gatherings in Punjab, PPP chairman Bilawal Bhutto-Zardari has been advocating for the burial of the 'politics of vendetta' that has long scarred our political landscape. His appeals may resonate with voters who are weary of the never-ending political strife in the country, but are, essentially, part of a poll strategy to shore up support for his own party that has lost its national moorings over the years, and is now confined to Sindh. *The PPP chairman's overtures to PTI supporters, interspersed with his critical view of the PML-N's governance, underscore an astute realisation: the path to strengthening PPP's footing outside Sindh necessitates winning over to his side those who might be too demoralised to vote after the crackdown on the PTI. By positioning the PML-N as a common foe and publicly deploring the politics of division and hatred, Mr. Bhutto-Zardari wants to be seen as steering his party towards constructive engagement.* This strategy may appear politically shrewd at the moment, but will it work, given that the PPP was very much a part of the events that brought down the PTI government in 2022? In fact, Mr Bhutto-Zardari's censure of the PML-N's economic mismanagement and governance failures invites a reflective gaze upon the PPP's own tenures. It is imperative for his party to look inwards and address the critiques of its past administrations. Promises to establish a 'truth and reconciliation' forum and pledges to redirect resources towards the marginalised are all high-sounding. But given the PPP's long record of poor governance and political games which, admittedly, all parties have played it remains to be seen how many will be convinced by such rhetoric.

Pressure mounts on authorities as GB protests widen, Jamil Nagri, Dawn, 28 January⁸

Life in Gilgit-Baltistan remained paralysed for a second consecutive day as protests grew against the hike in wheat prices and other grievances on Saturday. Demonstrations were staged in various districts of the region including Astore, Diamer, Ghizer, Hunza, Nagar, Skardu, Shigar, Kharmang and Ghanche districts. Main roads including Karakoram

⁷ <https://www.dawn.com/news/1808180/bilawals-politics>

⁸ <https://www.dawn.com/news/1809202/pressure-mounts-on-authorities-as-gb-protests-widen>

Highway, Skardu Road, Ghizer Road wore deserted look as protests were staged on various sections of these roads. According to experts it was successful strike and protest in history of GB as thousands people participated in protest rallies. *Routine life in Gilgit-Baltistan remained paralysed across the region in two days. The protesters said they would call off the strike after the authorities meet their 15 demands, including the restoration of subsidised wheat rate at 2022 level, suspension of Finance Act 2022, withdrawal of various taxes, ensuring GB's share in the NFC Award, and provision of land ownership rights to locals.* The charter of demands said all leases granted to the outsiders for the exploration of minerals should be cancelled, 80 per cent royalty of Diamer-Bhasha Dam under net hydel profit should be given to GB people, ensure electricity supply to GB residents ending power outages, establishing medical and engineering colleges in the region. Addressing crowd at Etihad Chowk, Advocate Ehsan Ali, the ACC chief organiser, said it was decided to call off the protest after fulfillment of 15-point charter of demands. "GB has been getting subsidies on 10 items since 1970s, they were removed one by one, now the only subsidy on wheat for GB people was also being removed, it is injustice," he said. He said it was a universal principle that people who had no constitutional rights and facilities, state provide subsidies to the residents and cannot impose taxes.

SECURITY SITUATION

Security scare: unresolved puzzle of terrorism in Pakistan, Editorial, *The Express Tribune*, 10 January⁹

Security situation in Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa and Balochistan is precarious. A spike in attacks on frequent intervals has left everyone guessing. This dilapidated scenario is getting more worrisome as general elections are near, and coupled with this is the influx of extra-territorial factors that are yet to be tamed at home and on the western frontiers. The attack on a police van in Bajaur the other day has left seven dead, and led to the suspension of the vaccination programme in the province. It is more horrendous that this attack too was claimed by TTP, simply bringing

⁹ <https://tribune.com.pk/story/2452725/security-scare-1>

to the fore the unresolved puzzle of terrorism. Bajaur's ambush must be read in line with one of the deadliest attacks on the armed forces last month in Dera Ismail Khan's Daraban area, in which 23 soldiers embraced martyrdom. Likewise, sporadic casualties across Balochistan and in the former tribal areas, especially Waziristan, and that too against a particular ethnic community indicates a nefarious plot. The intention, obviously, is to bleed the nation and create misunderstanding among provinces. The home-grown and foreign terror fissures are in it, and this invites some deep introspection. *Pakistan has also played the smart card of sending a political delegation to Kabul to iron out the odds. The visit of the delegation, led by JUI-F chief Maulana Fazalur Rehman, is meant to simply illustrate the fact that Pakistan is sincere in a thaw with Kabul provided the latter acts in exterminating non-state actors.*

Iranian stunt, Editorial, *The Express Tribune*, 18 January¹⁰

Iran's surprising stunt to conduct a so-called hot pursuit inside Pakistan's territory is worrisome. It has badly hurt the congeniality between the two states, and will take a long time in some fence-mending. The daredevil attack, carried out in the Panjgur district of Pakistan's Balochistan province, led to the killing of two innocent children, belying Iran's claim of targeting the Jaish Al-Adl militant group. While both countries already have a counterterrorism understanding, it would have been more rational for Iran to have taken Pakistan in confidence. The Foreign Office has conveyed strongest condemnation of this blatant violation of Pakistan's sovereignty, and warned that the responsibility for consequences would rest with the Islamic Republic, its intelligence and the IRGC. *The spin that Iran and its proxy in Lebanon are trying to portray is that the attack was choreographed with Pakistani authorities well in time. That is, however, not the case. This is why Pakistan has decided to recall its ambassador from Iran and suspend all high-level visits ongoing or planned between the two countries.* The irritating aspect is that Iran has, for quite some time, been seen flexing its muscles. Its trigger-happiness is evident as it went for incursions in Iraq, and influenced the Houthis to go wayward extraterritorially. Terrorism and non-state actors are a nuisance in the region, and elements like TTP and Jaish Al-Adl, as well as BLA, BLF and IS-K, are out to play havoc with peace and security. Indian spy Kulbhushan Jadhav crossed over from

¹⁰ <https://tribune.com.pk/story/2453580/iranian-stunt>

Iran to carry out his nefarious mission of destabilising Pakistan. Terrorists from across the Iranian borders have also frequently targeted Pakistan border guards.

Violent election rallies, Editorial, *The Express Tribune*, 31 January¹¹

In a poignant reminder of the stakes involved in democratic processes, an unfortunate clash occurred during an election campaign in Karachi's Nazimabad, resulting in the loss of a precious life. *The clash erupted outside the MQM-P office when a PPP rally passed through the area. Workers from both parties engaged in a heated exchange of slogans that swiftly escalated into a physical altercation, culminating in tragic gunfire from both sides. An MQM-P worker lost his life, and a PPP worker sustained injuries as political fervour took a distressing turn.* The incident prompts reflection on the question of whether it is advisable for a political party to route its rally through the office of another party. This consideration extends beyond the immediate tragedy, raising important questions about the need for prudence and sensitivity in the planning of election campaigns. MQM-P leader Mustafa Kamal, in a press conference, attributed the attack to PPP leader Dr Asim Hussain, adding that this was the sixth incident in three months. Such allegations highlight the growing tensions and adversarial dynamics that can overshadow the democratic process. *Politicians should instead prioritize dialogue, understanding and a commitment to the broader democratic agenda over personal or party-specific interests.*

URDU MEDIA

Election symbol problem? Editorial, *Jang*, 05 January¹²

The issue of Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf's (PTI) election symbol is once again looking confusing. In a decision of the Peshawar High Court (PHC) on 03 January, the PTI's electoral symbol of bat was again taken away. Barrister Gohar Khan was also deprived of the party chairmanship. Accepting the supplementary applications filed by the Election Commission in this regard and adjourned

¹¹ <https://tribune.com.pk/story/2454941/violent-election-rallies>

¹² <https://e.jang.com.pk/detail/603818%22>

further hearing till 9 January 2024. The High court declared that the decision given is not an interim relief but the final relief sought in this case. No notice was issued to the Election Commission and a prohibitory order has been issued against it; therefore, the order cannot be sustained. On the other hand, *PTI leader Barrister Gohar Khan announced that he would approach the Supreme Court against the decision to withdraw the ban on the election symbol of "bat". However, it is clear from his statement that the PTI would follow plan-B, if the symbol was not returned.* In the decision of the single bench comprising Justice Ejaz Khan Sabi, it was said that the power exercised by the PHC would have an impact on the entire country. On the other hand, *the Supreme Court has issued a notice to the Chief Secretary, Advocate General and IG Punjab on PTI's request regarding level playing field and sought their response. Heading the three-member bench, Chief Justice Qazi Faiz Isa remarked during the hearing that the courts stand behind every political party for the election. The summary of this issue is that PTI is currently deprived of its election symbol- bat. But it's innings continues in the legal field. Contesting an election without a publicly known election symbol is certainly a difficult task. But other political parties have faced similar situations in the past. The People's Party (PPP) had to lose the symbol of the sword, on which its founder Zulfikar Ali Bhutto contested the elections. This party celebrated its existence by contesting elections with the election symbol of an arrow. The Muslim League (N) also had to use the election symbol of "Lion" after being deprived of the bicycle symbol.* If the PTI candidates contest the elections as independent candidates on different symbols, it may cause confusion for the voters who support the party. It would be good for the country if the general elections are more credible by creating a level playing field. The political parties also have the capacity and flexibility to fully cope with the difficult situations.

Baloch protestors to continue sit-in in Islamabad, protests in Balochistan and Pakistan
*Daily Sangar, 03 January*¹³

The members of the ongoing sit-in protests in Islamabad against Baloch genocide in Balochistan, have said that online conferences would be organized to inform the international world. They said if this attitude of the state continues, they would move the sit-in from the Islamabad Press Club in front of the United Nations (UN) office in Islamabad. Leaders of Baloch Solidarity Committee

¹³ <https://dailysangar.online/?p=42734>

against Baloch Genocide, Dr. Maharang Baloch and others while holding a press conference said that today (3 January) was the 41th day of the movement of Baloch Solidarity Committee against Baloch genocide. For the last 12 days, we have been present, protesting in front of the National Press Club, Islamabad. *Dr. Maharang Baloch, addressing the journalists, said that you would remain a lifelong witness of how Baloch's peaceful long march (which did not turn violent for a single moment during this entire period) passed through Balochistan as soon as If it entered Islamabad, Islamabad police showered it with cruelty* For three days the Baloch protectors were facing state violence, arrests and jails in Islamabad and dozens of elders, women and children involved in this long march were facing water cannons and batons in those bitterly cold nights. She said that despite all atrocities and brutality, we did not retreat from our peaceful struggle and our morale did not weaken. Rather, we sat in front of the Islamabad Press Club in a peaceful sit-in after being released from prisons with more courage. *She said that every citizen who came to our sit-in here is a witness of the violent and aggressive measures taken by the state against our peaceful protestors. Even people bringing blankets or food for the protestors are not being allowed and are humiliated on the pretext of checking them.* When arguments are tried to find out the reasons for this behavior, these police men behave rudely and try to harass us in different ways. The protestors have all indisputable evidence of violent behavior and irresponsibility of the state in the form of videos and you journalists, political workers and citizens of Islamabad are also witnesses of this. *Addressing the press conference, she added that once again we want to inform the state through the media that we are ready to negotiate with the state on our demands. But for this the state needs to change its childish behavior and act like a state.* It should stop its retaliatory actions against the peaceful protestors across Balochistan including in Islamabad. If there is no change in the attitude of the state, then we would further expand this ongoing movement against Baloch genocide. Violence, arrests, threats and harassment cannot stop our way in any way, she added.

PTI's troubles, Editorial, Jang, 11 January¹⁴

With less than a month to go before the general elections, Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf's (PTI) difficulties seem to be mounting. In the past political parties have been facing various problems

¹⁴ <https://e.jang.com.pk/detail/607629>

including being banned in Pakistan. PTI has been accused of having made many mistakes which caused difficulties for the party. *What happened on 9 May could not be ignored and the manner in which the intra-party elections were conducted raised serious questions from the party members. Then the Election Commission declared it against the rules made by the party itself.* On 10 January, the Peshawar High Court (PHC) restored PTI's election symbol "Bat". The Supreme Court suspended the Election Commission's decision and issued a certificate to the party. The hearing of petitions related to the PTI founder chairman's 5-year disqualification and permission to contest elections is scheduled on 12 January in the Lahore High Court. On the one hand, because Imran Khan is in jail there is an internal dispute over the distribution of party tickets and the list of candidates could not be finalized. On the other hand, till Tuesday, PTI's name was not included in the list of 145 parties whose electoral symbols are part of a letter sent to returning officers by the Election Commission. On the other hand, the chairman of PTI has been arrested by the Rawalpindi police in at least a dozen cases of violent incidents including the attack on GHQ. An accountability court in Islamabad has arrested Imran Khan and former first lady Bushra Bibi in the Toshakhana reference. All the same, *PTI leader Barrister Gohar Ali Khan's prediction that the party would get back its election symbol "Balla" came true. If the fixed election symbols of the political parties are in the ballot paper on the Election Day, it clears any confusion in the mind of the voter and can cast a vote with a clear mind.*

Political parties issued most tickets within families! Irshad Khokar, *Ummat*, 16 January¹⁵

Like in other provinces, various political parties have given tickets to their family members in Sindh as well for the 8 February elections in Pakistan. The People Party (PPP) tops the list in awarding sons, daughters, nieces, nephews, wives along with other relatives. The Grand Democratic Alliance (GDA) and the Jamaat Ulema-i-Islam (JUI-F) have also issued tickets on the same pattern. Almost 16 families in Sindh have got two or more tickets from the same party. According to Ummat surveys in Ghotki district's six national and provincial assemblies, the PPP has given three tickets to Mehr family members. In Sukkur district the PPP has given tickets to the former minister for the national assembly seat Khursheed Shah while the tickets for two provincial assembly seats in the district have been given to his son

¹⁵ <https://ummat.net/epaper/news.php?date=2024/01/16/&p=story2.gif>

and nephew. In the same district a ticket has been given to Nasir Hussain Shah whose son is the chairman of the District Council Sukkur. In the Khairpur District former Chief Minister Syed Qaim Ali Shah, his daughter and nephew have been awarded tickets. *In the Qambar Shahdadkot district the PPP has given tickets to Mir Nadir Magsi and his brother Amir Megsi. In the Dadu district the PPP candidates would face the family of the former chief minister of Sindh Liaquat Ali Jatoi. Liaquat Jatoi, his brother Sadaqat Jatoi and son Kareem Bakhsh Jatoi are candidates in the district provincial seats.* ... In the Badin district former cabinet minister *Dr. Fahmida Mirza, her husband Dr. Zulfikar Mirza and son Husnaan Mirza have been fielded by the GDA.* Similarly in Punjab and Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa (KP) most of the parties have issued tickets to influential families only. *In KP apart from the JUI-F Chief Maulana Fazlur Rehman, his brother and son are also fighting elections. Two sisters of the Moulana's wife are also fighting from reserved seats. Pakistan Muslim League's Nawaz Sharif, Shehbaz Sharif, Maryam Nawaz and Hamza Shehbaz are also fighting elections.* Other families have also been awarded tickets for the upcoming elections in the country.

How to talk to Iran? Saleem Safi, *Jang*, 24 January¹⁶

In 2007, when this author first started receiving information that Iran has established links with Al-Qaeda and that Al-Qaeda affiliates from Arab countries to Afghanistan are now using Iran's route, it was not something to be believed. But this was happening. Journalists Cathy Scott-Clark and Adrian Levy in their well-researched book, *The Exile* (2017). ... They write that immediately after 9/11, Iranian intelligence contacted Al-Qaeda and after several promises, the entire Kandahar Shura was transferred to Iran except for the three leaders (Osama bin Laden, Ayman al-Zawahiri and Khalid Sheikh Mohammed). ... By hosting al-Qaeda leaders Iran achieved many goals. One, it protected Iran from Al-Qaeda and the world saw that Al-Qaeda carried out operations in Saudi Arabia and Pakistan, but did not explode even a single firecracker in Iran. On the other hand, Tehran used the leadership of Al-Qaeda to blackmail the group for its own purposes. America continued to look for Al-Qaeda in Pakistan but most of the members of Al-Qaeda remained in Iran, except for the three elders. But no one doubted Iran in this regard. It is clear from this that how *Iranian intelligence plays*

¹⁶ <https://e.jang.com.pk/detail/616407%22>

a double, even triple game. When 9/11 happened, it seems that Iran, the enemy of America, was not only cooperating with it, but kept urging it to attack Afghanistan as soon as possible. Immediately after 9/11, American officials had a secret meeting with Qasem Soleimani in Geneva where the latter shared with them the maps of Al-Qaeda and Taliban hideouts in Kandahar and other cities. On the other hand, the world saw that the Taliban leader Mullah Akhtar Mansour was entering Pakistan after staying in Iran, when the American drone targeted him. Iran is playing the same game in West Asia by using proxies like Hezbollah, Hamas and Houthis. Iran has adopted the same attitude towards Pakistan. On the one hand, it calls Pakistan a “brother” and on the other hand, it does not miss any opportunity to harm Pakistani interests Pakistan does not go beyond a certain extent in cooperation with Arab countries to avoid Iran's displeasure (not sending troops to the Yemen war is a proof of this). On the other hand, Iran treats Pakistan as a rival. It has been a long time that Iran has made India its strategic partner. Both have united against Pakistan's interests in Afghanistan. Tehran harbors people like Kulbhosh Yadav. For some time now, there have been reports of Iran increasing ties with the Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP). Iran has been a haven for Baloch militants for a long time.

ELECTRONIC MEDIA

Road clear for Nawaz Sharif, Off the Record with Kashif Abbasi, ARYNews, 01 January¹⁷

The host pointed out that that amid the debate of the PTI and other parties about level playing field, one thing is clear that all the barricades and barriers for Nawaz Sharif is been removed one by one paving way for him to be the next PM of the country. The manner in which he was given protocol from and brought to the country from London is itself a hint of the mood of the powers/establishment and how it is swinging in favour of the PML-N and Nawaz Sharif. He said the ground is now clear for Nawaz Sharif and now what he has to do is just run. On the other hand the PTI and Imran Khan has been mistreated and punished and all efforts are put in to keep Imran Khan behind the bars till elections are over.

¹⁷ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1JLjStRH4Uk>

An attempt is made to snatch the bat symbol from the party. The PTI is dismantled and all leaders are labelled with cases, on top of it the process of filing paper for PTI was made very difficult. He asked the way things are taking shaping in the country, in which direction the country and the election process is going. **Salman Akram Raja**, Senior Lawyer pointed out that it looks like that giving the bat symbol back to the PTI is a national issue and against the establishment and the government of the country. The way they have created an issue out of nothing is such a strange thing, and on top of it the way they are haunting the leaders of the PTI and making an attempt not to let them file their papers is harrowing. **Kanwar Dilshad** the Former Secretary ECP the things that are taking place in the country is very strange and the PTI party is haunted and chased on all levels, there is no level playing field. The way papers of the PTI leaders are rejected is on baseless points, and the papers are sent back. Even papers of leaders like Akhter Mengal are sent back, and tall leaders of PTI like Shah Mehmood Qureshi, their papers are out rightly rejected. The returning officers this time seems like they are well trained and there is no judicial help. **Munizae Jahangir**, Analyst and head Human Rights Commission pointed out that the PTI has been broken into pieces according to a propaganda and nomination papers are rejected on flimsy grounds not only of PTI leaders but other party leaders like Akhter Mengal. Beyond the debate of the level playing field, there is no field for the opposition to stand in the race for elections. This election is not only for politicians but for the locals and it is the right time to talk about issues like the Baloch is doing about missing persons. If the bat symbol of PTI is taken back, it will prove that there is selective justice and no level playing field. This will also put a question mark on the function of courts.

Peshawar High Court again put stay on PTI's 'bat' symbol? On the Front with Kamran Shahid, *Dunya News*, 03 January¹⁸

On one hand the PTI is talking about level playing field and asking the court to intervene while on the other hand, *they are struggling to keep the symbol bat for his party for the coming elections*. After losing the bat symbol, getting it back and now they have again lost the symbol after Peshawar high court took away the stay on bat symbol and banned it before the date of decision on 9th January. **Irshad Bhatti** senior analyst pointed out that the Peshawar high

¹⁸ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KtuqESm1wNo>

court took the stay too soon, they should have waited till 9th and the court could have decided after that PTI could have gone to the court. *The problem is that nothing can be now looked at without attaching it to the 9th May incident and the PTI has invited the trouble by attacking public property on 9th May.* He added that although the PTI should get the symbol and be given a fair chance to take part in the elections but things are very complicated and the PTI should now retreat. *Barrister Ahmad Pansota*, advocate Supreme Court (SC) pointed out that ECP has not laid any criteria for intra party elections and in such a scenario taking the symbol of PTI, trying to ban it is opposite to the free and fair election policy of the ECP. *The PTI can go to Supreme Court in the symbol case, it does not appeal to a logical mind first to ban them and then unban them after the elections are over, and it's irrelevant.* Until and unless the Peshawar high court takes decision on the symbol case, SC cannot give its judgment but if the matter becomes matter of urgency and of public interest, the SC can give the hearing on the case. *Dr. Tariq Fazal Chaudhry of the PML-N underlined that bat symbol if it stays with the PTI or not, the party will go into elections and it has been made clear by the appointed chief of the party Barrister Gohar Khan.* He informed that even in the Senate elections, the PML-N leaders were not allowed to use party symbol and were forced to fight elections independently. Also Nawaz Sharif was allowed to take part in elections for just one time in 26 years in the year 2013, so PTI should stop talking about level playing field and credibility.

Supreme Court's verdict of Lifetime disqualification, who will benefit? Capital Talk with Hamid Mir, Geo News, 09 January¹⁹

The Supreme Court's landmark elimination of lifetime disqualification for lawmakers under Article 62(1) (f) of the Constitution in a 6-1 majority verdict generated mixed reception within the legal community and has generated lots of discussion in the country. In the new ruling the Supreme Court pointed out that the lifetime disqualification will remain for five years from now. After this decision the host underlined that the general view is that Nawaz Sharif and Jahangir Tareen will be able to take part in the upcoming elections and some also think that this can benefit Imran Khan too as he will be allowed to take part in the elections after five years. The host asked who will benefit from the decision. Barrister Senator *Ali*

¹⁹ https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4TeRGKv_35Q

Zafar of the PTI pointed out that so many leaders have been disqualified under this law in the past, the time changes and the court has the right to change its decisions, so nothing can be said in Pakistan. It looks like the Supreme Court is saying that article 62 1 F is just like a wish list and no one will be disqualified in the future by this decision. It also implies that from now the fate of leaders will be decided by votes not court and people will decide if a leader is *Sadik* and *Ameen* during elections. Senator *Taj Haider* of the PPP pointed out that there should not be any pressure on the court and they should not be forced to take favorable decision. He added that every sentence has a term and under the disqualification law there was no defined term for disqualification and this court has put a term which is a good decision. Senator *Afnan Ullah* of the PML-N underlined that elections will take place on time and this is not an optional game, despite of this decision 8th February is the date of election. The composition of the bench in the court is very important and the current bench is working on merit. The disqualification is a very bad thing and is totally undemocratic, this decision by the court is a relief for all including Nawaz Sharif. His lifetime disqualification has been quashed and now paved way for taking part in the election.

How will PTI compete in elections without their electoral symbol "Bat"? Off the Record with Hamid Mir, *Geo News*, 16 January²⁰

There is so much politics on the bat symbol for PTI and now again the Supreme Court has taken a decision to again take back the symbol and also the letter the PTI submitted to the court for level playing field has been taken back by Latif Khosa before it was destined for rejection. Now the party leaders will contest the elections on different election symbols, some got kettle, some cup etc. So much pressure that now the PML-N is saying that the PTI is a terrorist organisations and it should be banned. *Barrister Gohar Khan*, acting Chairman of the PTI talked about the tremendous pressure to the PTI and its leader and underlined that now the judgment of the SC has put the party to the wall and tightened its scrutiny. He also pointed out that all our nomination papers were field according to the law but the SC does not want to see the truth. He informed that we had a transparent intra party election and it was for everybody to see he added he was elected unopposed as he was Imran Khan's nominee. When we visit the jail they do not let us take pen and paper, the truth is that we

²⁰ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iDc9dIDGxh8>

have to take instruction from Imran Khan and we have to take notes. When asked about Maryam Nawaz's statement that PTI is a terrorist organisations and should not be give the symbol back, Barrister Gohar Khan informed that Maryam Nawaz is sitting and basking in power and she has the freedom to say whatever she feels like. When the SC asked about the nomination paper of Barrister Khan as the acting chair, why you said that there is no paper and it came out in the news. He argued that there should be no question about who nominated me as it came out in the news, it is an internal issue and we do not need to prove to anyone. He pointed out that we were expecting the SC to listen carefully to us, and give us a favourable judgment. PTI is fighting for rule of law and is nothing is done illegally so therefore there is no way that our party should be banned and not let to fight elections. The intra party elections were brought by Musharraf and it was said to be done in sealed ballot but later it was dissolved. When asked about different election symbol, Barrister Khan got kettle but now our candidates are positive and now we will finalize the list. After this we will give instructions and make it viral our case is now in public to decide. MNA and MP's of PTI will fight with our support and they have letter of affiliation of PTI and we have faith in our leaders they will win and stick to the party. We have a plan C post elections. Our party will campaign for leaders fighting elections from behind the jail. When asked about the tweet of a leader of the newly formed Pakistan-e-Istakam (IPP) party of Jahangir Tareen saying that the independent candidates of PTI fighting the elections, if they win they will all join IPP, Khan underlined that they will stick to the party.

Pakistan responds, Attacks Iran: A new conflict front opened for Pakistan? Wajahat S. Khan, 18 January²¹

It has to be noted that on 16 January late evening *Iran strike* aerially into the *Balochistan* province of Pakistan claiming that the target was *Jaish-al-Adl* that has been launching attacks on Iran since 2013. It is claimed that Iranian strikes damaged a mosque in Balochistan's Panjgur district, about 50km (30 miles) inside the border. The Pakistan Government accused Iran of violating its airspace in attack targeting armed group Jaish al-Adl and recalls ambassador from Tehran. The Pakistani foreign ministry on Wednesday said it had recalled its ambassador from Iran and that the *Iranian ambassador to Pakistan*

²¹ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aON8wRNJOwQ>

would not be allowed to return. “This illegal act is completely unacceptable and has no justification whatsoever,” it said in a statement. “Pakistan reserves the right to respond to this illegal act. The responsibility for the consequences will lie squarely with Iran,” it warned. *Tehran and Islamabad frequently accuse each other of allowing armed groups to operate from the other’s territory.* Pakistan strike back with aerial strike on seven locations near Iran border after the majority opinion backed for a response. The operational details were kept discrete, although the pulling out of ambassadors was a hint. A third friendly country first tried to resolve issue peacefully and asked Iran to apologize to Pakistan but it denied. Interestingly US has blamed that Iran is a terrorist state and it is attacking Pakistan. *Iftikhar Firodus*, founder of *Khorasan Diary* informed that in Sistan Balochistan seven strikes have been sent from Pakistani side and there are multiple casualties on the Iran side. Initially Pakistan wanted to show restraint and solve it diplomatically and deescalate. But it would have been an embracement as Pakistan supported Iran always. May be if Iran would have took soft stance towards Pakistan things would have been peaceful. This is almost fourth instance that Iran strike inside Pakistan, but it would have died down this time if there was a silence from Iranian side. But this time they immediately published in media both in English and Farzi language which was a new thing. *Michael Kugelman*, South Asia expert at *Wilson Centre* talking about the incident pointed out that there are number of Iran sponsored proxies in Middle East and this Iran Pakistan is the latest case of bringing instability and opening new fronts from the Iran side. Till now Pakistan has kept a neutral stand on conflicts in middle east and especially so much is happening internally at this point of time inside the country. Even if there is no statement from US on the right to strike back by Pakistan, it obviously supports the strike back and they are really worried about the way Iran is behaving. The US and Pakistan will now understand that they have a common interest in the security challenges in Iran and the US is trying to do everything to degrade the threats posed by Iran and its proxies. It looks like Pakistan has been dragged into the Middle East conflict by Iran by striking on the Pakistani soil. He also added that *India’s Foreign Minister was in Iran before the attack on Pakistan*, saying it may be a co incidence but is a point to be observed. Iran has to preserve its security interest and Iran is feeling vulnerable due to the Middle East conflict and this strike is a way to let out.

No taxation without representation: Gilgit-Baltistan? Syed Muzammil, Podcast, 29 January²²

The video discusses the history of the grievances of the people of GB and their current demands which include resumption of wheat subsidies as agreed in the 1970s and the ownership of their indigenous lands. In this vlog the host Syed Muzammil talks about the current situation in Gilgit Baltistan and underlined that there is complete blackout of the protests of GB in the mainstream media of Pakistan where they are busy talking about who will be the next king (PM) of the country. They are discussing about the political parties and their jalsa and campaigns but the real public that are literally on roads in this subzero temperature demanding their rights are sidelined. *He added that the protests were started because the government increased the wheat rates by 80%, he asked in a region where there is no other source of income and is run on subsidies how can the government slab taxes, and increase the rates.* Their main source of income is farming and wheat, there is no local indigenous industries. GB is a disputed territory, there is no constitution like Azad Jammu and Kashmir, whenever the government is asked about rights of the people, it is a disputed area, and neither is it given province. Then how can you put tax on disputed region. How their movements can be restricted by anti-terror laws (6th schedule) if it is not part of the country. According to UN rules a disputed region should get subsidy on 37 items but Pakistan is even taking back subsidy on essential items. Also the right to land is only to the indigenous people but there is land grabbing. Also, GB assembly is a joke, a minister from Punjab is more powerful than this assembly. What is the use of 18th Amendment when GB is not made a province. People are demanding the basis rights for their daily bread and the solution should be giving to the demands of the people. *The host underlined that in this day and age where India has reached the moon, it is a shame for Pakistan that its people are still waiting for a sack of wheat.* No taxation without representation is a famous slogan by the people of the region. He added that all fifteen demands of the people are legitimate and there is no radical angle to it. He added that GB is a peaceful place but the government is turning this region into a volatile

²² <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=s3v52B6d0so>

area, first they divided the region on sectarian basis and now due to the subsidy. There should be a bottom up approach to GB.

BOMBINGS, SHOOTINGS AND DISAPPEARANCES

(Select incidents culled out from the Pakistan media)

Place	Date	Description	Killed	Injured
Balochistan				
Zhob ²³	22/01/2024	7 terrorists killed in intelligence-based operation in Zhob: ISPR Shootout between Pakistani troops and insurgents in border	07	00
Sibi ²⁴	30/01/2024	Election Rally Bombing, Insurgent Raid Kill Several in Southwestern Pakistan	04	05

²³ <https://www.dawn.com/news/1807773/7-terrorists-killed-in-intelligence-based-operation-in-zhob-ispr>

²⁴ <https://www.voanews.com/a/election-rally-bombing-insurgent-raid-kill-several-in-southwestern-pakistan-/7463491.html>