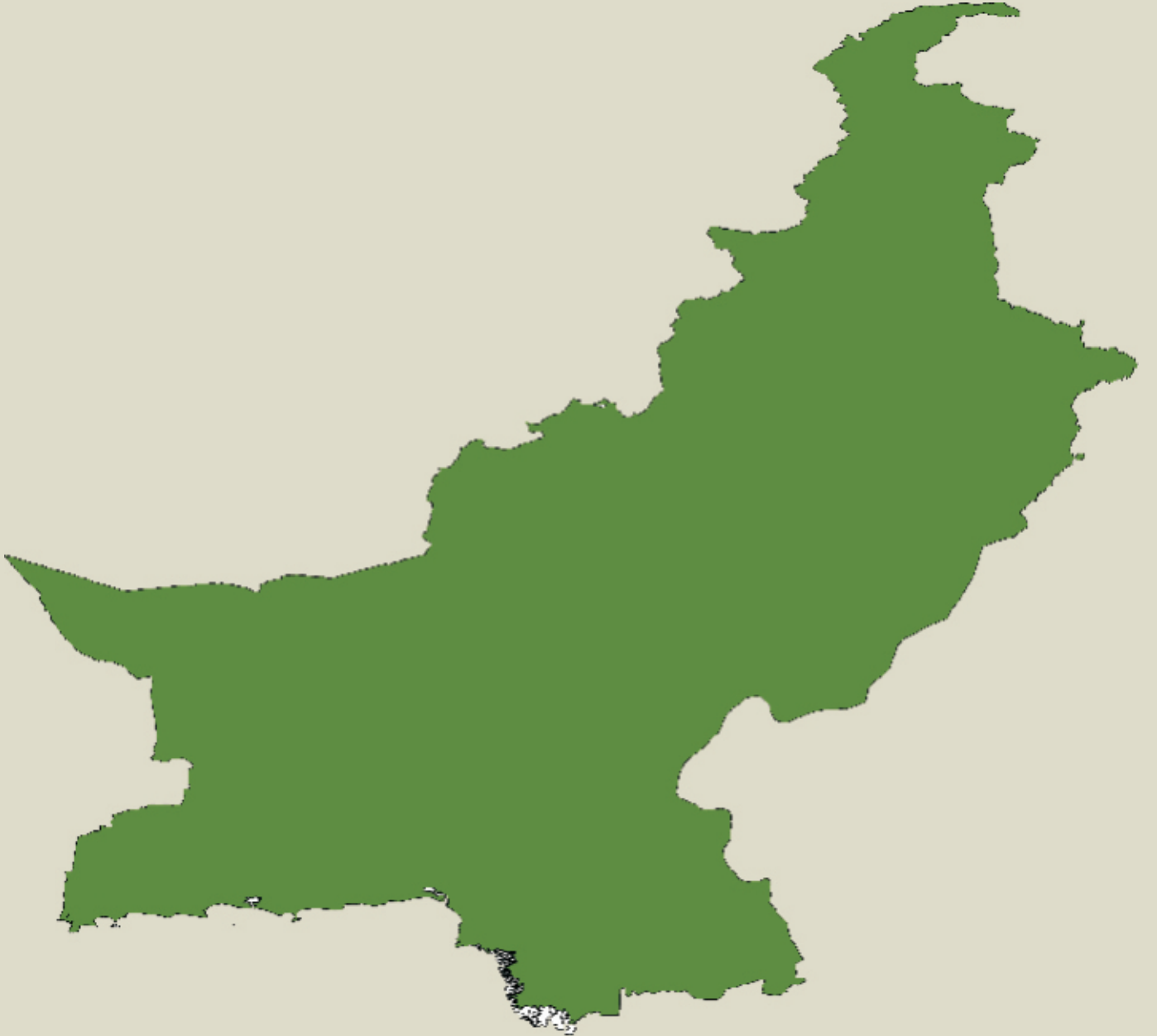


December 2023

# 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  
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## POLITICAL DEVELOPMENTS

**Electable politics**, Editorial, *Dawn*, 04 December<sup>1</sup>

*If Pakistani democracy were ever to be mapped within the country's geographical boundaries, large parts of it would be shaded in grey for all the domains where the rules of democratic politics do not seem to apply. Within these domains, voters are believed to be so beholden to a few local notables that national political parties feel they do not need to expend their time or resources canvassing for votes as long as they have the area 'electable' in their pocket.* So, it is a different kind of politics that plays out in these areas before a major election; a politics that determines winners and losers not on the strength of any manifesto but on bidders' ability to satisfy the interests of a small group of local influential. With weeks remaining for the next general elections in February, the race for electables is underway, with the PPP and PML-N trying to outmanoeuvre each other in a bid to bolster their individual prospects in the next assemblies. So far, both parties seem to have made decent inroads in Balochistan, which is ground zero for all electable contests ahead of a major election. *Nawaz Sharif was the first to visit the province in November, leaving with more than two dozen electables under his belt.* The PPP's efforts have only just started, with the father-son duo of Asif Ali Zardari and Bilawal Bhutto-Zardari launching their campaign to make inroads in Balochistan's power politics in the last few days and already enjoying some early successes.

**Baloch Discontent**, Editorial, *The Nation*, 08 December<sup>2</sup>

*The decision to shift the two-week protest from Turbat to Quetta following the alleged extrajudicial killing of Balaach Mola Bakhsh has intensified concerns over the unresolved issue in Balochistan.* This tragic incident has sparked outrage and mobilised various stakeholders, underscoring the need for swift resolution and accountability. The sequence of events leading to the relocation of the protest signifies the gravity of the situation. Balaach Mola Bakhsh's reported extrajudicial killing by the Counter Terrorism Department (CTD) has triggered widespread discontent. The CTD's claim of an armed

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.dawn.com/news/1794888/electable-politics>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.nation.com.pk/08-Dec-2023/baloch-discontent>

clash resulting in Bakhsh's death, along with three other suspects, has been met with scepticism. His sudden appearance at Turbat Teaching Hospital after being arrested and presented before the Anti-Terrorism Court (ATC) has raised serious questions about the circumstances of his demise. *Such instances exacerbate the existing mistrust between the Baloch people and law enforcement agencies. Disrupting traffic on the D-Baloch CPEC road reflects the urgency of addressing this issue promptly. The relocation of the protest to Quetta, the provincial capital, demonstrates the determination of the affected parties to seek justice.* It should serve as a clarion call for the government to take immediate notice, conduct a fair and impartial investigation, and address the underlying concerns.

**Future plans, Editorial, Dawn, 11 December<sup>3</sup>**

*Nawaz Sharif is planning ahead. Perhaps confident of his chances in the next election, he seems keen to want to avoid the run-ins he has had with security establishments during past stints in power. In general, it seems like he wants to take a strong stance on civilian supremacy and wants some guarantees that he will be able to run the country unhindered this time around.* It is a carefully calculated power move. The state seems to have all but run out of options, and Mr. Sharif is leveraging the opportunity to push back on the issues that are most important to him. For example, he has repeatedly tested the waters by reiterating his demand for the accountability of those who 'conspired', in his view, to push him out of power in 2017. It is encouraging to see that Nawaz Sharif remains committed to a strong civilian government and an independent foreign policy, and he is fully entitled, as a former chief executive, to pursue accountability and push the overreaching arms of the state back into their respective domains. *However, Mr. Sharif should perhaps not consider himself the 'ideal' candidate just yet. It is clear that he still has a weak understanding of the Pakistani economy, which seems heavily influenced by the thoroughly discredited ideas of Ishaq Dar.* Therefore, while his ideas about civilian supremacy and assertive policymaking are commendable, until both he and his party figure out what good fiscal management entails, there is not much they can offer inflation-weary Pakistanis desperate for growth and meaningful change.

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<sup>3</sup> <https://www.dawn.com/news/1796902/future-plans>

### **Prickly questions, Editorial, Dawn, 12 December<sup>4</sup>**

The 18th Amendment has, quite unfortunately, become the elephant in the room in policy circles just because our political leaders refuse to engage in debate over the issues that divide them. *Recently, the PML-N and PPP sparred extensively over the matter after some remarks from N-League leaders were interpreted by the PPP as being suggestive of a fresh conspiracy to roll back the amendment. Criticism of the 18th Amendment has picked up in recent years as the federal resource pie has shrunk in size, and is seen to have come mainly from ‘security’ circles and parties that have sought to curry favour with them.* As the PML-N’s star shines bright these days, it was not really surprising, then, that comments on the 18th Amendment from its leaders raised hackles in the PPP, which has jealously defended it as one of its key legislative achievements. However, while the PML-N has since ‘clarified’ that it does not intend to do away with the 18th Amendment, just to see it implemented in its original spirit which, it argues, entails a further devolution of power to the local government level the PPP has continued to insist this is another disguised attempt at reversing the law and revoking provincial autonomy. One way to gain greater control over the debate on the 18th Amendment may be to take the lead in discussions and steer them towards a direction that is acceptable to all. Ultimately, it is parliament that must decide the amendment’s fate. It would be far better if this were to be done through consensus and debate rather than by railroading changes through the legislature without fully understanding their long-term implications.

### **Beyond the election, Kamila Hayat, The News, 21 December<sup>5</sup>**

The question of whether elections will be held strictly on time in early 2024 continues to be debated in the country, and the same question recently made its way through the courts. For some people, elections are complex: *they see it as an exercise which is in many ways crucial to national interest but also acknowledge that in many ways this exercise means nothing at all. People have become so disenchanted with democracy that many say they have no intention to vote, and others argue that there is no candidate worth putting in their vote for.* Some also

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<sup>4</sup> <https://www.dawn.com/news/1797196/prickly-questions>

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.thenews.com.pk/print/1140222-beyond-the-election>

say that the situation in the country is such that elections hold no meaning and carry no weight. Local governments are vital so that ordinary people can approach their councillors and ask for help in solving their problems. They cannot do so if the representative nearest to them is an MPA or MNA. These people are unapproachable most of the time. Those who win at the level of union or tehsil councils are far easier to reach and should be dealing with problems such as supplying water to communities or mending roads rather than leaving this task to politicians who see them essentially as a photo opportunity. It is true that there are many flaws within Pakistan's democracy. *These have been discussed extensively by analysts and commentators of all kinds. The flaws and cracks in the system will not be fixed immediately. And for the system to recover, we need patience and time. Only if we allow this time to pass and for the peaceful transfer of democracy to become an established reality can Pakistan move forward.*

### **The unheard voice of Baloch, Editorial, *The News*, 22 December<sup>6</sup>**

*Long or short 'marches' in Pakistan tend to usually be conducted in luxury vehicles, punctuated by the occasional leisurely stroll by 'leaders'. Not so by the Baloch who have taken to the highways and streets of Pakistan time and again over the years, marching to get the centre to listen to their otherwise neglected voices.* Media attention has traditionally been denied to most protests and marches by those we conveniently call 'peripheral communities'. There has been little sympathy from official circles, and the Baloch have hardly ever found any support in the centre partly because of the assumption that everyone campaigning for their rights must be a separatist. Whether through ignorance or malice, the government usually gets the order wrong. And yet these marches have gone on, the latest from Turbat to Islamabad. *Wednesday night's incident has once again brought to light the longstanding grievances of the Baloch. The march, led by political activists and the families of missing persons, had aimed to draw attention to the injustices faced by the province, including the spectre of enforced disappearances that the Baloch say has haunted them for decades.* Balochistan has been plagued by a history of neglect, economic disparity, and political marginalization. The province is rich in natural resources, and yet remains one of the most impoverished regions in Pakistan. There are no easy solutions to this issue but when the state takes on

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<sup>6</sup><https://www.thenews.com.pk/print/1140518-voices-unheard>

its citizens in such a brutal manner, peace will always remain elusive. The least they – and any civilian in the country – are owed is a hearing of their grievances and demands with dignity. *The idea of Pakistan as a federation is not to dismiss the grievances of smaller provinces but to give equal rights and autonomy to all provinces. Only through genuine efforts to address the root causes of the issues in Balochistan can lasting peace and prosperity be achieved in the region.*

## **ECONOMIC ISSUES**

**IMF Reassurance, Editorial, *The Nation*, 18 December<sup>7</sup>**

In a recent turn of events, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) resident representative in Pakistan has categorically refuted media reports suggesting an imminent increase in taxes on salaries and business income, along with alterations to the petroleum levy. This denial by Esther Perez Ruiz provides a momentary relief to the Pakistani populace, especially the middle and upper-middle-income groups, who were apprehensive about potential tax reforms. *It is imperative to acknowledge the vital role played by the IMF in stabilising Pakistan's economy under the \$3 billion Stand-by Arrangement (SBA) approved in July. The country was on the brink of a balance of payments crisis, facing severe economic challenges such as dwindling foreign exchange reserves, historically high inflation, and an unprecedented currency devaluation. The IMF's financial assistance, including the \$1.2 billion received as the first tranche, proved instrumental in averting a sovereign debt default.* While the economic measures taken as part of the IMF bailout deal did contribute to an all-time high inflation rate, hovering above 30 percent, the stabilisation of the economy remains a priority. The denial of tax increase reports offers a momentary respite, allowing the government to address economic challenges without causing additional burden on the populace. As Pakistan navigates through this critical juncture, the IMF's continued support and transparent communication are paramount for sustaining economic stability and fostering public trust in the country's financial management.

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<sup>7</sup> <https://www.nation.com.pk/17-Dec-2023/imf-reassurance>



### **Cautious hope?** Editorial, *Dawn*, 12 December<sup>8</sup>

*The \$9m current account 'surplus' recorded in November has been delivered primarily by a combination of administrative actions taken by the government and the State Bank to restrict the inflow of imports to shrink the trade deficit, as well as the suppression of demand by a tight monetary and fiscal policy.* The almost zero current account balance for the last month squeezes the current account deficit for the first five months of the fiscal year to \$1.16bn from \$3.264bn a year ago. With the deficit already down by nearly 64pc, the government now expects it to remain in the range of \$4bn to \$4.5bn for the entire fiscal year. The SBP is even anticipating a situation in which the current account deficit closes at 1pc to 1.5pc of GDP. That is good news for a dollar-starved economy; the reduction means less pressure on our meagre foreign exchange reserves as official and private capital inflows dry up in spite of the IMF programme. The likelihood of the economy wriggling out of this situation in the short to medium term will depend on significantly large capital inflows, enough to allow the authorities to fully lift import restrictions and also move towards monetary easing. *However, the short- and long-term solutions to our economic woes require a stable, elected set-up. The delays in the promised investments from friendly Arab nations underscores lenders' and foreign investors' reluctance to enter politically unstable markets. Without foreign flows, we will continue to look for solutions to survive.*

### **Inflation woes,** Editorial, *The Express Tribune*, 27 December<sup>9</sup>

*The outgoing year was one of hyper-inflation and extreme financial somersaults. It made life miserable for the commoners, and even the upper middle class was sizzling with its impact as purchasing power nosedived, and there was no relief in sight.* The year 2023, which saw two governments change hands amidst abject political instability, was tough in economic terms as the price of POL products, gas and electricity jacked up to unprecedented levels. Simply in the case of petrol, the prices shot up from Rs50-70 per litre, only to dip down as a mark of correction owing to a slump on the international index. Whereas, the tariff of domestic gas consumption for the first time in history was auto-corrected by raising it by around 300

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<sup>8</sup> <https://www.dawn.com/news/1799345/cautious-hope>

<sup>9</sup> <https://tribune.com.pk/story/2451238/inflation-woes-1>

per cent, and came as a rude shock in a country that fares on imported LPG, LNG and exorbitant power producers. *The crackdown on trans-border smuggling, especially on the western frontier, and black-marketers and hoarders were few of the appreciated measures in bringing down the sky-rocketing prices.* But that did not carry at length as the local district administrations failed to micro-manage prices, and governmental listing was thrown to the wind. If inflation is to be addressed, the government will have to squarely work on stemming the energy prices and coming up with instant relief on food products. It is an enigma that despite good agri produce, the prices of vegetables and fruits are out of reach of common men, and so is the apathy of importing cereals, rice and wheat in our policy-confused decorum of economic management.

**Debt crisis concerns, Editorial, *The Express Tribune*, 28 December<sup>10</sup>**

*International agencies continue to worry about Pakistan's economic prospects like most of the country and a recent report asserts that debt is the United Nations Development Programme's top concern.* The UN agency's new Development Advocate Pakistan publication says that apart from a good debt management plan, the country needs a reform agenda centred on responsible financial management, increasing revenue, enforcing fiscal discipline and diversifying its funding sources. While there may not have been a lot of surprises in the broader points, a few specifics are worth focusing on, including increased parliamentary oversight for treasury operations while parliament does have oversight of the treasury, most ruling parties use their parliamentary majorities to bypass this authority and keep debate on any related decisions limited to the cabinet. *The end goal here would be economic stabilisation and sustainable growth, along with lowering the debt-to-GDP ratio. Another 'fresh' suggestion is for Pakistan to join the Open Government Partnership, which would promote transparency, accountability and citizen engagement while also opening the door for cooperation with other member states on adopting best practices.* This may be one way for the new government to come up with a debt management strategy that doesn't force it to expend all of its political capital, because debt is only one piece of the puzzle that the party in power will have to address through unpopular decisions that will invariably break election promises.

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<sup>10</sup> <https://tribune.com.pk/story/2451351/debt-crisis-concerns>

## SECURITY SITUATION

**Turbat protest, Editorial, Dawn, 01 December<sup>11</sup>**

*Once again, people in Balochistan are out on the streets against the alleged excesses of the state. The trigger of the latest controversy has been the killings on Nov 24 in Turbat, allegedly by CTD personnel, of a number of individuals, including Balaach Mola Bakhsh, in an ‘encounter’.* The slain man’s family claim the encounter was fake, and that Balaach had actually been in custody. Protesting has been ongoing since the killings and the slain individual was laid to rest on Wednesday. The protest has affected large parts of Makran, with political parties, civil society activists and traders calling for a judicial inquiry into the incident. In a related development, the Islamabad High Court hauled up the state for failing to retrieve missing Baloch students. Justice Mohsin Akhtar Kayani asked why 28 students remained untraced, and warned that the prime minister and other officials could have cases registered against them if the students were not recovered. The caretaker interior minister promised to “fulfil our responsibility”. *Dubious encounters are a countrywide problem, but the situation in Balochistan is particularly acute due to other contributory factors. As Justice Kayani noted, if individuals are suspected of involvement in anti-state activities, they must be dealt with according to the law.* Extrajudicial methods will hardly bring stability to Balochistan.

**Pakistan’s tough choices, Kamran Yousaf, The Express Tribune, 04 December<sup>12</sup>**

Pakistan, meanwhile, is not ready to budge. It is not willing to talk to the terrorist outfit. There is a sense that the TTP always used talks to regroup. When Pakistan first entered into talks with the TTP after Afghan Taliban returned to power, there were some positive movements initially. Brokered by the Haqqani Network, talks led to a ceasefire by the TTP. *In return for the truce, Pakistan freed certain TTP members. It also allowed return of hundreds of TTP militants as part of the confidence building measures. The move, however, quickly backfired. The returning terrorists soon began targeting security forces.* Government’s

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<sup>11</sup> <https://www.dawn.com/news/1794106/turbat-protest>

<sup>12</sup> <https://tribune.com.pk/story/2448829/pakistans-tough-choices>

own figures suggest that there has been 60 per cent increase in terrorist attacks and 500 per cent rise in suicide attacks since the Taliban takeover in August 2021. *After the recent attacks, Pakistan has informed the Kabul regime through diplomatic channels that any future attacks would invoke a robust response. Officials would not divulge the details but the possibility of cross-border strikes is not ruled out. In April last year Pakistan did carry out cross-border air strikes. But those strikes were never publicly acknowledged.* What those strikes did was that Afghan Taliban persuaded the TTP to come to the negotiating table and declare a ceasefire. But this time Pakistan has no interest in talks. The only thing it wants is the end to cross-border terrorist attacks. Will Pakistan's warning work? Indications are that the Afghan Taliban may not offer anything tangible. Ultimately, Pakistan has to opt for options that carry many reunifications.

### **Escalating terrorism, Editorial, *The Express Tribune*, 05 November<sup>13</sup>**

In recent months, Pakistan has witnessed a distressing surge in terrorist activities, posing a grave threat to its security and stability. The data from the Pakistan Institute for Conflict and Security Studies (PICSS) reveals a disconcerting 34% increase in anti-state violence within the past month alone. The numbers paint a grim picture 63 militant attacks in November resulting in 83 fatalities, including 37 security forces personnel and 33 civilians. The toll on civilians is particularly troubling, emphasising the impact of these attacks on innocent lives. *The recent upswing in terrorism in Pakistan can be attributed to a confluence of factors, with the deteriorating relationship with the Kabul government emerging as a prominent catalyst. The mutual mistrust between Pakistan and Afghanistan hinders effective collaboration in counterterrorism efforts, limiting information sharing and joint operations against militant networks.* The Afghan Taliban's reluctance to take decisive action against TTP further exacerbates the issue. Bolstering internal security measures, enhancing intelligence capabilities and fortifying border controls to curb the cross-border movement of militants are radical but prudent and necessary measures to rid the country of the scourge of terrorism that has long plagued its stability and security.

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<sup>13</sup> <https://tribune.com.pk/story/2448925/escalating-terrorism>

### **Chilas bus attack, Editorial, *The Express Tribune*, 05 November<sup>14</sup>**

Perhaps even more challenging than countering terrorism in urban areas is the threat posed by militants in remote regions of Pakistan. This is especially true in the rugged terrain of Gilgit-Baltistan and adjacent regions of KP. Here, in the shadow of towering peaks, tracing the perpetrators is arguably more difficult than it is in the cities. However, terrorists cannot be given a free hand to stomp through the mountains, killing innocent people at will. *In fact, the geopolitical and communal sensitivity of the area requires that strong counterterrorism measures be taken. No group has as yet claimed responsibility for Saturday's atrocity, in which at least nine people were killed when terrorists opened fire on a bus travelling on the Karakoram Highway in GB's Chilas area.* A number of suspects have been detained. The authorities have ruled out a sectarian motive, while the fact that two of the victims were military men could explain a possible motive for the attack. Meanwhile, in September, a militant incursion from Afghanistan was thwarted in Chitral, which also borders GB, resulting in a number of soldiers being martyred. These events show that this particular region of Pakistan is not immune from the terrorist threat. *Complicating matters is the fact that militant activity in the area often has sectarian overtones. Also, GB borders Afghanistan and China as well as India-held Kashmir, making it a target for transnational militant activity.*

### **The ugly face of terror, Editorial, *The Express Tribune*, 13 December<sup>15</sup>**

*Pakistan's security forces are battling a faceless enemy. The brave men have stood their ground in their endeavour to defeat terrorism, and accomplished great feats. This is why there are reprisals as desperate elements try to make their presence felt off and on.* Tuesday's tragedy which saw more than 25 Pakistan Army soldiers martyred in Dera Ismail Khan District was, perhaps, in retaliation to an unwavering resolve of security force to purge the country of brutal terrorists. More than 27 terrorists were also killed in three separate incidents countrywide. The unfortunate day will be remembered for registering the military's highest single-day death toll from terrorist attacks reported this year. The

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<sup>14</sup> <https://www.dawn.com/news/1795195>

<sup>15</sup> <https://tribune.com.pk/story/2449829/the-ugly-face-of-terror>

attack on a check-post in the Daraban area must be studied on a broader canvas in the wake of unabated infiltration from Afghanistan. *While the Tehreek-e-Jihad, an affiliate of the banned Tehreek-e-Taliban (TTP), has claimed responsibility for the vicious attack, it makes it crystal clear that foreign hand is involved in sabotaging peace in the country, and at the same time testing the determination and resilience of our security forces.* This calls for a coordinated and sustained response at civil, military and diplomatic levels to not only expose the ugly face of the enemy in disguise but also to eliminate the nefarious elements who act as abettors in various shades and guises. *The fugitive TTP and Baloch terror groups are behind this vicious terror campaign. Their intention is not only to bleed Pakistan but also to derail the pace of development under the banner of CPEC.* The fact that Kabul has not been able to honour its promise of reining in these non-state actors operating from its soil makes it an issue of counter-terrorism offensive. Regional players and major powers must take stock of the situation and prevail over the dispensation in Kabul to do the needful.

**Balochistan's wounds**, Editorial, *The Express Tribune*, 19 December<sup>16</sup>

*The state's usual response to grievances from Balochistan is either to ignore them, or crack down on those raising voices for their rights. This unfortunate formula has only fostered alienation and resentment in Pakistan's biggest province.* The handling of the protests triggered by the controversial death of Balaach Mola Baksh last month is a classic example of this failed approach. The slain man was killed under mysterious circumstances in Turbat allegedly by the CTD in an 'encounter'. His family have disputed the official version, saying that he had been in custody since October, and in fact had been presented in court a few days before his killing. *The CTD insists Balaach was killed by 'insurgents' during a raid. The protests around the man's killing have been continuing in Makran since late November, with political activists and human rights bodies supporting the family's call for justice. Last week, the demonstrators entered Quetta and from the provincial capital it was decided to march to Islamabad to highlight their cause.* From Quetta, under the banner of the Baloch Yakjehti Council, the marchers had been passing through different towns of the province. However, on Sunday, the protesters were

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<sup>16</sup> <https://www.dawn.com/news/1799073/balochistans-wounds>

stopped in Dera Ghazi Khan, Punjab. Numerous marchers were reportedly detained, including women, though the administration says they were later released. *The marchers were apparently stopped due to 'violation' of Section 144. This sense of deprivation and helplessness is often exploited by separatist militants. The people of Balochistan must be assured that the state cares for them, and that the Constitution's fundamental rights apply to them just as they are supposed to apply to the rest of Pakistan.*

## URDU MEDIA

**Nawaz Sharif's exoneration and rising questions on justice system, Editorial, *Nawa-i-Waqt*, 01 December<sup>17</sup>**

*The Islamabad High Court (IHC), accepting the appeal of former Prime Minister and leader of the Muslim League (N) Nawaz Sharif in the Avenfield reference, has annulled the 11-year prison sentence given to him by the accountability court. The court acquitted Nawaz in the case. ... On the other hand, the National Accountability Bureau (NAB) withdrew the appeal filed against the decision to acquit Nawaz Sharif in the flagship reference. During the hearing of Nawaz Sharif's appeal against the sentence in the Avenfield reference, Justice Gul Hassan of the IHC highlighted four points that must be proved for anonymity. If even one of them is not proven, a person cannot fall into the category of benami.* According to Nawaz Sharif's lawyer, NAB had to prove that Nawaz Sharif paid for the purchase of London properties. The most important in this is the question of ownership, while NAB did not present any evidence either verbally or through documentary that the relevant properties were ever owned by Nawaz Sharif. Nawaz Sharif was disqualified for life-based on Iqama in the Panama case by a five-member bench of the Supreme Court constituted by the then Chief Justice of the Supreme Court Saqib Nisar during his prime ministership in 2017. He was removed from the membership of the National Assembly and the leadership of the Muslim League (N), while the NAB court sentenced him to various terms of imprisonment in the Avenfield and Al-Azizia references. An appeal was filed

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<sup>17</sup> <https://www.nawaiwaqt.com.pk/01-Dec-2023/1749142>

by Nawaz Sharif against his convictions. Based on these convictions, Nawaz was disqualified from contesting the 2018 elections. According to the relevant clause of Article 62 of the Constitution, the penalty of disqualification is up to five years. However, the relevant bench of the Supreme Court had sentenced Nawaz Sharif to life disqualification. *Imran Khan was brought to fulfil a specific agenda. However, he only played the blame game during his tenure, as a result of which the political tension increased further.* Meanwhile, people faced increasing problems of livelihood and employment and resentment against the PTI government increased. Taking advantage of this, the then-opposition parties united on the platform of the Pakistan Democratic Movement (PDM). The PDM introduced a no-confidence motion against Imran Khan and came to power.

**Status of CPEC, Editorial, Roznama Dunya, 05 December<sup>18</sup>**

*Caretaker Prime Minister Anwar-ul-Haq Kakar addressed a gathering in Gwadar yesterday. He highlighted the significance of CPEC (China-Pakistan Economic Corridor) and the benefits of this game-changing project. He stated that in the coming years, trade worth \$36 trillion would take place through the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) in the form of infrastructure projects. Pakistan needs to be a part of this grand initiative.* The Caretaker Prime Minister emphasized the importance of deriving benefits from China and stressed that we should learn from China in terms of industrial development and poverty alleviation. The prospect of a \$36 trillion trade, and that too within the next ten years, is undeniably an attractive vision. Our national development projects should be invigorated by this bright future and draw strength from it. *In the context of CPEC, the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) undoubtedly has the potential to be a game-changer for our economy. Therefore, the completion of these projects must be given top priority. While much work on infrastructure has been completed, there is a strong need for robust attention to the construction and development of economic zones. Additionally, a comprehensive project for the renovation of railway lines has not yet commenced. There is also a need to focus on projects related to energy, especially those working on environmentally friendly energy.* The recent increase in investments with the countries of the Middle East and progress in the Free Trade Agreement with Gulf

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<sup>18</sup> [https://e.dunya.com.pk/index.php?e\\_name=LHR&edate=2023-12-05&page=12](https://e.dunya.com.pk/index.php?e_name=LHR&edate=2023-12-05&page=12)



countries is beneficial primarily because it leads to the import of industrial products from these nations. Pakistan has a significant workforce, and the youth majority in the country can contribute to this advantage by initiating industrial development. The Prime Minister's mention of a future vision is essential, but it is also necessary for the country to achieve political stability and focus on the current situation of peace and security.

**General elections: A matter of national future**, Editorial, *Roznama Dunya*, 11 December<sup>19</sup>

*The hopes from the leaders of political parties before the elections do not seem to be fully realized yet. General elections are crucial for the future of the country; therefore, during this time, political leaders need to clarify their practical wisdom and thoughts about the upcoming challenges. However, our political leadership seems lost in the malaise of the past. But can anything be achieved from this?* At first glance, the answer may be negative, as changing the past is beyond human control. We can only influence the future and learn valuable lessons from the past in this endeavour. If politics continues to focus on the past, the possibility of future reforms diminishes. In this regard, political leaders need to learn from the world. Difficult times may come for individuals and nations, but successful are those who did not ride the past as a burden, nor did they turn it into a motive for revenge. Instead, they directed their attention towards the future. Our politicians need to adopt this approach as well. *It is evident that our country has fallen behind other countries in the region. Inflation has reached up to 42% at the moment, industrial progress is stagnant, and our trade is significantly lower compared to most countries in the region. The solution to the real and serious issues of the country and the nation can be effective not by dwelling on the past but by addressing them in the present. There is no doubt that the negligence and deprivation in this predicament involve the consequences of past mistakes made by political leaders.* However, the focus should now shift towards addressing the fundamental issues at hand and taking action to solve them.

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<sup>19</sup> [https://e.dunya.com.pk/index.php?e\\_name=ISL&edate=2023-12-11&page=12](https://e.dunya.com.pk/index.php?e_name=ISL&edate=2023-12-11&page=12)

## **P. T.I.'s Popularity...Reality or Myth? Irfan Siddiqui, *Roznama92 News*, 12 December<sup>20</sup>**

There is an English proverb that says, 'Perception is stronger than reality.' *In the first general elections of 1970, it appeared that the Jamat-e-Islami in East Pakistan would fiercely resist the Awami League. However, that did not happen. In 1993, the late Justice (Retd.) Qazi Hussain Ahmad established the 'Pakistan Islamic Front' in a manner that captivated the masses. The slogans of 'Oppressors! Qazi is coming!' resonated, and the earth trembled with their chants. Only three out of 93 candidates won from the Front, securing a mere 3.15% of the votes.* These are examples of the disparity between ground realities and public perception. The example of 2013 is not too old. The new and inexperienced revolutionaries, the vibrant and influential media, and the dream-selling intellectuals collectively believed that a PTI (Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf) tsunami is about to sweep everything away. On the midnight of May 11, 2013, the magical spell of Imran Khan broke in such a way that Khan continued to plunder for five years. *Today, once again, systematic efforts are underway to embed the perception as an established ground reality in the hearts and minds that on February 8, the PTI is making every effort to sweep away all its opponents like dust and debris. A specific circle of 'overseers,' unwilling to relinquish the reins of power, is actively involved in creating this perception. The sole purpose is to prop up PTI and push the elections forward. According to a Gallup Pakistan survey in April 2022, when the Imran Khan government ended, 57% of Pakistanis expressed happiness. Among them, 63% were women. Generally, governments or their rulers are remembered for public welfare, development, and national progress.* Perhaps Khan's four-year tenure did not provide much comfort or relief to the common man. The well-known by-elections of 2022 also serve as evidence of this perception. *Imran Khan himself contested elections on all eight seats of the National Assembly and remained successful in six. He also secured a prominent position in the Punjab Assembly. The Pakistan Muslim League (N) claims that due to giving tickets to defectors from PTI, their voters did not come out of their homes. The figures confirm this, as the polling rate in these by-elections remained only 29%. Apparently, 71% of voters did not come to cast their votes. In the general elections, the turnout was 51.7%.* Another assumed impact is that a brigade of young people is becoming

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<sup>20</sup>[https://www.roznama92news.com/efrontend/web/index.php/index2?station\\_id=2&page\\_id=7&is\\_common=Y&n=1000&xdate=2023-12-12](https://www.roznama92news.com/efrontend/web/index.php/index2?station_id=2&page_id=7&is_common=Y&n=1000&xdate=2023-12-12)

voters for the first time. This is a big misconception. *The rate of first time voters has remained more or less the same in the past four elections.*

### **Rise in terrorism, Editorial, Roznama Dunya, 13 December<sup>21</sup>**

*In the security operations carried out by the security forces in the Dera Ismail Khan region, at least 27 terrorists were killed yesterday, while during an attack by terrorists on a security forces checkpoint in the same area 23 soldiers were martyred.* The mentioned operations of the security forces were based on raids at various locations, and the killing of 27 terrorists during this period is an extraordinary incident. In the southern districts of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, there have been multiple incidents of terrorism in recent years, and during this period, security forces in the same region have conducted various operations based on confidential information against militants. In both situations, it becomes evident that this specific part of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa has become a focal point for anti-state elements. In a broad perspective, it involves a significant aspect of Afghanistan's proximity. Although these areas are not directly connected with Afghanistan's border, they hold strategic importance due to tribal ties and their proximity to Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Punjab. Regarding involvement in terrorism, there is no doubt that these areas have connections with militant elements based in Afghanistan. *As for elements involved in terrorism, there is no doubt that they are affiliated with militant elements residing in Afghanistan. The details of how terrorist networks are escalating in Afghanistan have been outlined in a recent report. The report states that 23 terrorist organizations from Afghanistan are conducting terrorist activities in 53 countries, with Pakistan being at the forefront. The report also mentions that in 2020, there were 53 terrorism-related incidents in Pakistan, resulting in 317 casualties. In 2021, the number of incidents rose to 88, with 417 casualties, and in 2022, there were 113 incidents with 626 casualties. As of the current year, the number of terrorism-related incidents is 130, with casualties surpassing 850.* It means that since the establishment of the interim Taliban government in Afghanistan, there has been a noticeable increase in terrorism incidents in Pakistan, and by the end of this year, the incidents of terrorism and the extent of the damage have reached levels close to those observed during the period of terrorism in 2015. Efforts to establish and enhance relations with the interim government in Afghanistan at

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<sup>21</sup> [https://e.dunya.com.pk/index.php?e\\_name=ISL&edate=2023-12-13&page=12](https://e.dunya.com.pk/index.php?e_name=ISL&edate=2023-12-13&page=12)

both official and non-official levels from Pakistan's side are essential. These initiatives should not only continue through diplomatic channels but should also be pursued through the support of friendly countries and international organizations. Pakistan is expressing concerns about the emerging challenges from Afghanistan, and the confirmation of these concerns has been made by friendly countries and global powers and institutions. Reports depicting the rise of terrorism in Afghanistan also confirm Pakistan's concerns. *In such circumstances, it is necessary to advance security matters in two ways: through dialogue with the interim Taliban government and at the international level, engaging with friendly nations. Simultaneously, strengthening national security through effective systems of security and intelligence domestically is crucial for enhancing national security.*

**Who wants to delay elections? Suhail Warraich, *Jang*, 18 December<sup>22</sup>**

*After the clear and strict orders of the Supreme Court of Pakistan, the rumours and efforts to postpone the elections have died down. There is no obstacle to the 8 February elections, except the imposition of martial law. ...* Regarding the postponement of the elections, the most powerful and the second most powerful persons of Pakistan had an idea that the elections should be held on 8 February 8. Both were *also on the same page regarding that the removal of Nawaz Sharif had cost Pakistan politically as well as economically. They both want to remedy their past mistakes. Amidst this, the suggestions of postponing the election came from two important advisors of the most powerful people and two supervisory figures.* They had said that economic stability was prerequisite for the country. ... It was also felt that it would be difficult to prevent Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf's (PTI) victory in the snap election. The news, when it came, was published by this writer without any delay or change in it. There had to be a negative reaction. No, the Pakistan Muslim League-N (MPL-N) and other powerful personalities in the country emphasized that the elections should be held on 8 February. Sometimes the purpose of reporting, reporting a rumor or exposing someone is meant to derail the project ahead of time so that it does not reach completion. This is the power of journalism and all journalists expose many

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<sup>22</sup> <https://e.jang.com.pk/detail/592610>

## ELECTRONIC MEDIA

### A New PTI Chairman? **Dunya Kamran Khan Kay Sath**, *Dunya News* 01 December<sup>23</sup>

After the court directed PTI to conduct intra party elections otherwise risk to lose the party symbol bat, Imran Khan has nominated Barrister Gohar Khan as the new nominee for the chairmanship of PTI. The host underlined that although many top leaders of the PTI have left the party, but there are other senior leaders like vice chairman Shah Mahmood Qureshi though he is in jail, why was he not nominated. Imran Khan was once announced the lifetime chairman of PTI, now it looks like the new nominee who has been close to Imran Khan from few months has been appointed just save the party symbol. *Taimur Saleem Jghara* of the PTI talking about the new nominee of the PTI chairman underlined that elections are the main issue, so for short term we had to take a decision to save the party and the symbol. It has to be underlined that at least Imran Khan has not appointed any of his family as the interim chairman. Barrister Gohar Khan has worked hard for the PTI party and it is not fair to say that he has been associated with the party for a short term. PTI is going through a very difficult time and currently we are facing the odds and targeted politically. So for the time been, the chairman is kept non-political. When the host said that the hierarchal structure of the party is totally destroyed he underlined that PTI is a grassroots party and are doing well in local government elections. PTI has the support of the youth and the PTI workers are resisting the incentives given to them by the other parties. *Kamran Khan* pointed out that the decision to nominate ‘newcomer’ Barrister Gohar Ali Khan for the slot of PTI chairman in the upcoming party polls seems to have caused a rift within the former ruling party, with some leaders comparing the nomination to the appointment of Usman Buzdar as the Punjab chief minister a move that had drawn considerable flak for Imran Khan. *The appointment of Gohar Khan for the top slot ignored a number of other loyalists, such as Ali Muhammad Khan, Senator Humayun Mohmand, and Advocate Hamid Khan, said an insider.*

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<sup>23</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ChH4Ev5Pvc8>

## Army Chief Asim Munir on his first official US visit? Analysis, *Dunya News*, 10 December<sup>24</sup>

Army chief COAS has left for Pakistan on an official visit on 10 December 2023. The press release on the Inter Service Press Release (ISPR) website read, “General Syed Asim Munir, NI (M), Chief of Army Staff (COAS) has left today for United States of America (USA) on an official visit. *This is General Syed Asim Munir’s first visit to USA as COAS*”. On this show he asked Defence expert Syed Mohamad Ali about the significance and timing of his visit to the US? And According to *Mohammad Ali* underlined *three reasons* that makes the COAS’s visit to the US very important, *first*, he pointed out that during the last year of Imran Khan government a very negative image of the bilateral relations were created via social media that impacted the Pakistan-US relations and by this visit all those efforts to malign this relationship will be put to a side and a new chapter will be added. *Secondly*, this visit could be made possible only because the relationship between Pakistan and US is getting better and a friendly environment is created. *Thirdly*, Pakistan will have *a discussion on the changing dynamics in the Asia Pacific and its concerns with the US and information will be shared. COAS will also appeal the US to play its role in the strategic stability of the South Asian region*. He will also appeal the US to revive the Pak-US strategic dialogue so as to improve the bilateral relations. Most importantly he underlined that the security situation in *Afghanistan / counter terrorism* is getting worse and in this case, COAS will seek military to military cooperation. He will also brief the US about the **Sino-Pak relations** and underline that the bilateral relationship is for social benefits and betterment of the Pakistan society and not to harm the interest of any third country. CPEC is a peaceful project and is socio-economic development. He also added that all those elements like India that wish for Pak-US relations getting worse or kaput this visit by the army chief will clear up the air. India is involved in target killings in the US soil, and joining different blocks. The US understands that Pakistan is very important because of its geostrategic location and a better behaving country as compared to India.

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<sup>24</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kbGiEUBrtNQ>

**PTI will fight to retain its party symbol 'bat': Barrister Gohar Khan? Capital Talk with Hamid Mir, *Geo News*, 18 December<sup>25</sup>**

Hamid Mir pointed out that he some days back on the same show said that elections should take place on time and if it does not happen it would be for personal gain and not for the greater cause of the public. After that an election schedule was announced after interference of the chief justice of Pakistan Qazi Faiz Esa. Now the question is even if the elections take place on time on 08<sup>th</sup> February 2024, will the elections be free and fair, will there be level playing field for the PTI? ***Barrister Gohar Khan***, the acting chief of PTI pointed out that there has been an attempt to remove Imran Khan from politics and new cases are charged against him every coming days. Imran Khan took the hard decision to nominate me as the chief and to save the symbol of the PTI bat and we will do everything to retain the symbol. Imran Khan will not fight the elections this time to save the party. If there is an attempt to snatch our party symbol we will fight back and we are hoping the courts will intervene. Otherwise our candidates will be independent and the public voting for us will be in chaos and no symbol to vote on the Election Day. Taking away the symbol of the party from PTI will be a great damage to the party and to save it, Imran Khan took the hard decision not to fight elections. But he underlined although Imran Khan is in jail, but all decisions will be taken by him, unofficially he will be the chairman of the party for life. We will take all instructions from him. We had our online Jalsa on the weakened and many people attended it despite of the efforts of the government to slow down the speed of internet. Talking about military courts and the changing view (earlier supported military courts) of the party Gohar Khan pointed out that there ***should be no trial of the civilian in the military courts***. He added that there should be fair and free trial in an open court, there should be a perfect judicial system. We appeal the courts to do justice to the PTI and give fair trial to Imran Khan. The PTI has a mechanism and we will distribute the tickets to all our workers including lawyers. When asked why he was chosen as the chief he pointed out that Imran Khan has picked him up because he has a close contact with Imran Khan.

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<sup>25</sup> [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZXL\\_VS4R-6A](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZXL_VS4R-6A)

## Crushing Baloch Protestors in Islamabad? Why how & what's next with Sardar Akhtar Mengal? Wajahat S. Khan, 21 December<sup>26</sup>

In this latest video the host talks to Baloch leader *Akhtar Mengal of the BNP-Mengal* about the issues of Balochistan and the recent *Baloch protests* that started in Turbat and ended in Islamabad, faced with brutality by the police. *This protest mainly consisted of women and children and was led by Mahrang Baloch* who was struggling from long time to ask the authorities to either file an *FIR* or form a commission for his missing brother. The protestors were brutally attacked with *water cannons* in the capital and they were arrested and put behind bars. *Sardar Akhtar Mengal* pointed out that being a Baloch it is even a miracle to be alive in Pakistan. Things in Balochistan are more pressing and severe than in Kashmir and Palestine. The question is why they were marching towards Islamabad and facing water cannons in this cold? He added that when all the doors to legal solutions are closed these people had no option but to walk towards the capital. These families have faced a lot of issues due to forced disappearance and each family has a missing person in Balochistan. The government says that there is no missing persons, but then why these people are marching towards the capital? They have not broken any rule on the contrary who break rules use stones, burn buildings are not punished. Our party is supporting the protestors, the SC intervened and asked the police to release them but instead of this, they were not freed but put in buses and sent to *Quetta*. Our workers are in Islamabad and they will fight for the release of these people and will be stationed there till they are released. It has to be noted that this protest was started in November when *Balaach Mola Bakhsh was allegedly killed at the hands of CTD officials* in Balochistan's southern Kech district. **Manzoor Pashteen** also joined the protests and was subsequently arrested in between the protests. When asked despite of the party's governor in Balochistan why he is not able to do anything, he replied when they say in the encounter terrorist was dead, these are always converted into fake encounters in Balochistan. The case of Balaach was the same, the same drama and he was dead in the fake encounter. The point is no CTD officers are harmed in so called encounters. He informed he was chief minister for only 16 months, Pakistan become atomic power and when he asked why he was not taken into confidence about the

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<sup>26</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FNY0kXoHD9I>



same, he was removed from the post and his party was divided. During the coalition with PTI and PDM, the party always talked about missing person's issues, they agreed signed the agreement which shows they acknowledge that this is the issue in Balochistan, but later on they diverted from the agreement. *GHQ is the main power in Pakistan who brings any one in power, and everything runs on their direction.*

**Why is Shah Mehmood Qureshi being arrested again & again? Capital Talk with Hamid Mir, Geo News, 28 December<sup>27</sup>**

The host informed that after the rearrest of Shah Mehmood Qureshi different heads of jails/SHO from seven jails came to rearrest him in different incidents related to 9<sup>th</sup> May in the court and after the hearing he was taken by police on judicial terms, the demand for physical remand was rejected by the court. The host pointed out that the way he was manhandled by the police instead of his political past is shocking and it has grabbed international headlines. After this incident the host asked why he is been re-arrested in this way, is this all with a political agenda to change his point of view and political sides? Who is angry with Shah Mehmood Qureshi? Guests: Meher Bano Qureshi (Daughter of Shah Mehmood Qureshi *Meher Bano Qureshi* also asked why he is treated like this, there is no clarity behind the way he is re arrested again. She added but there is one thing all this is done to favour a particular political party and to ease the process of Kingman ship of a leader who is given all the protocol after his return, and magically all the cases against him is going away slowly. She also made it clear obviously there is some attempt to make him change his stand and putting pressure to change his loyalty. He added this *is a pure attempt to stop him from taking part in the elections.* But she pointed out that this is not about supporting Imran Khan, he is standing his ground for the truth and what is right. The re-arrest for the 9<sup>th</sup> May case is just an eye wash and it has been made up, anyways my father was with my ailing mother and for the record he preached for peaceful demonstrations. This is a *political witch hunt* of his father. She added they did not get *physical remand* for 30 days because his name was not in the initial list for 9<sup>th</sup> May incident. The court only *granted judicial remand.* The way police has rejected the *Supreme Court* order of his bail,

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<sup>27</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4C-WbyaRQxQ>

and manhandled him is indirectly rejecting the court orders. He is tortured physically and mentally and if people will know more about the treatment people will come out. She added he is in politics for forty years and is a tall politician and now he is treated like this, this is not expected. She informed that the process of filling the papers for PTI members and leaders has been made very rigged, this is the first step, and the elections are still remaining.

## BOMBINGS, SHOOTINGS AND DISAPPEARANCES

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

Place	Date	Description	Killed
Dera Ismail Khan <sup>28</sup>	12/12/ 2023	Dozens killed in Islamist militant attack on northwest Pakistan army base	24
Tank <sup>29</sup>	16/12/2023	Police and soldiers killed as more violence flares in northwest Pakistan	06
Police Line <sup>30</sup>	15/12/2023	Militants attack police HQ, checkpoint in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa; 5 officials killed	01 05

<sup>28</sup> <https://www.france24.com/en/asia-pacific/20231212-several-killed-dozens-wounded-in-suicide-attack-on-northwest-pakistan-police-station>

<sup>29</sup> <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/12/15/two-officers-killed-in-attack-on-police-station-in-northwest-pakistan>

<sup>30</sup> <https://www.livemint.com/news/world/pakistan-news-militants-attack-police-hq-checkpost-in-khyber-pakhtunkhwa-5-officials-killed-11702640251051.html>