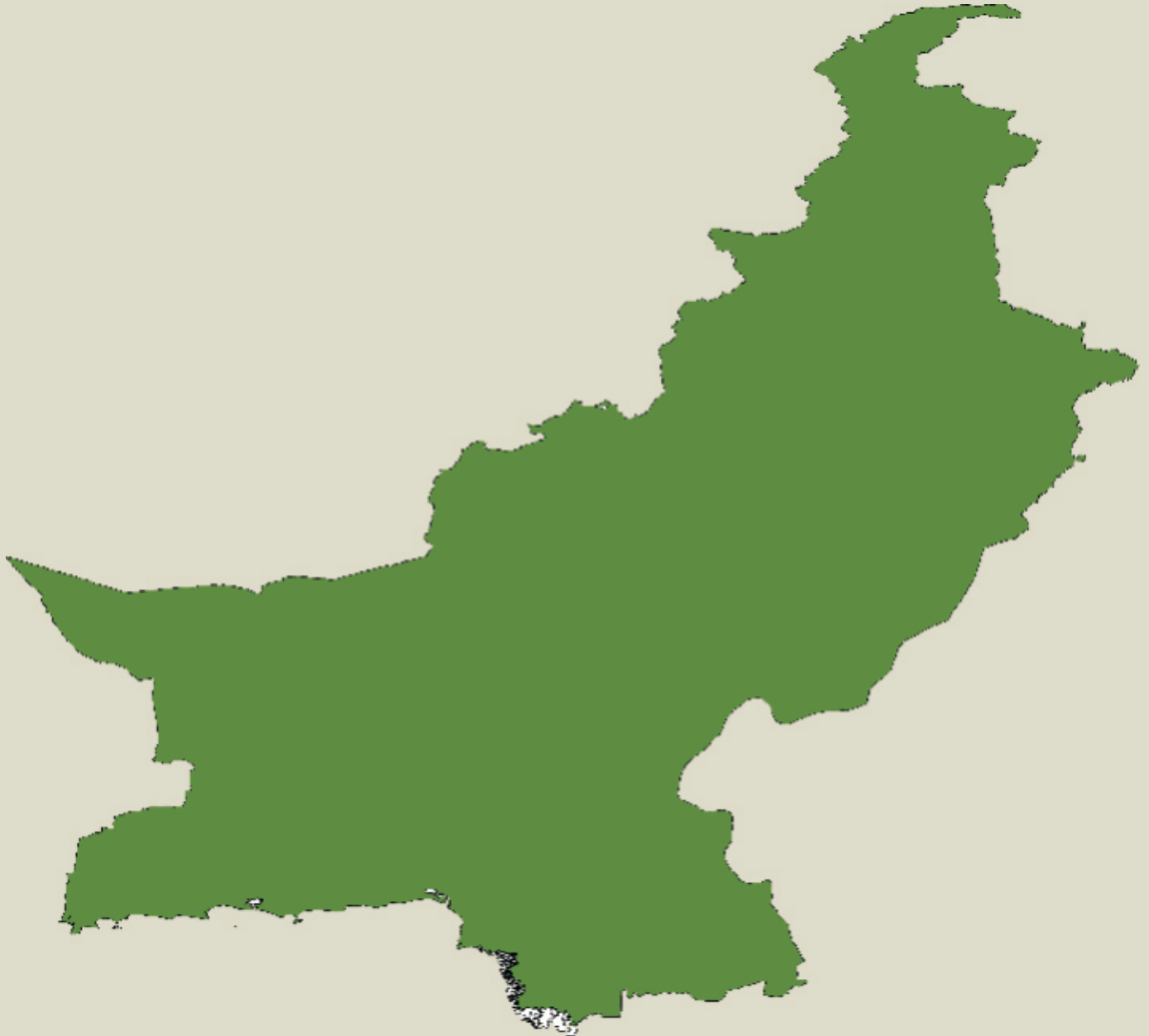


September 2023

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
Dr. Ashok Behuria

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POLITICAL DEVELOPMENTS

Election ambiguity, Editorial, Dawn, 05 September¹

The state apparatus is confused to the core when it comes to taking a position on holding general elections. Apart from defiance from some political quarters, the issue seems to be more crisscrossed in interpreting the constitutional provisions, and there is an evident gap in the stated positions of both the electoral watchdog and the presidency. As far as Caretaker Prime Minister Anwar-ul-Haq Kakar is concerned, he has thrown his weight behind the Election Commission, saying it is seized with the prerogative as per law in detailing out a plan for ballot. *The Election Commission, nonetheless, is shying behind the notification of the latest 2023 digital census approval by the outgoing cabinet, citing the need for fresh delimitation of constituencies under Section 17(2) of the Elections Act.* But that comes in extreme contravention with the President House, which believes that Article 244 of the Constitution makes it duty-bound to get the elections conducted within 90 days once the legislature is dissolved prematurely. Likewise, it goes on to establish its writ by stating that under Article 48(5) of the Constitution, the president is obliged to appoint a date not later than 90 days from the date of dissolution. *Pestering political instability, coupled with economic stagnation, demands of the state to abide by the Constitution, and let the electorate take a call. Delaying elections for reasons of political exigency is an unwise move, and the ECP can surely buckle up its machinery by enabling the nation to vote in the spirit of the Constitution.* The organs of the state must huddle up to exhibit unanimity.

Army Chief Gen Asim Munir tapes into Pakistan's business community, Editorial, The Express Tribune, 06 September²

Pakistan is thinking big, and mulling an out-of-the-box solution as economic woes are piling on. Bizarre of IMF dictations and its fruitless piecemeal packages, the country is perhaps trying to find a solution in terms of throwing open its potential for luring in big money. *The army chief is eyeing the silver-lining from Saudi Arabia and the UAE, as they had hinted at magnanimity in this hour of economic distress to Pakistan. Riyadh is likely to come up with a \$25 billion investment package, and so is the volume of expectation from Abu Dhabi. Likewise, other Gulf States such as Qatar and Kuwait are also in the loop as Pakistan is eager for project-oriented investment in avenues where these respective states have their own interest and expertise.* The SIFC is the way to go ahead as it has been tailor-made by taking out red-tapism in an endeavour to project a transparent mosaic free from complicity and malpractices. Pakistan has an

¹ <https://tribune.com.pk/story/2434098/election-ambiguity>

² <https://tribune.com.pk/story/2434283/sifc-task>

uphill task as it finds itself groped with a sinking currency, stagnated exports, soaring imports and a dejected growth profile. Moreover, crises in the form of spiralling inflation, exorbitant petroleum and electricity prices are challenges that will deter the investors if a complete paradigm turnaround is not assured. This is where the SIFC has to put in its brains. It is a challenge that has to be tackled in all sincerity.

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Minority visibility, Editorial, *The Express Tribune*, 15 September⁴

The tribal district of Kurram, one of the most conservative areas in the country, is now home to one of the country's handful of female-led police stations. But while we have seen women appointed as station house officers before, most of these have been in urban areas. What makes the appointment of Samreen Amir even more unique is not only that it is in a rural police station, but that she is from the minority Christian community. *While affirmative action is not without its hiccups, the fact of the matter is that Pakistan remains among the world's most dangerous countries for women. While some ultra-nationalists will quickly claim that India is even worse, that is no consolation to thousands of Pakistani women who must suffer in silence because neither society nor the state was willing to stand by them.* Having women as SHOs opens an avenue not only for women to lodge complaints we already had

³ <https://tribune.com.pk/story/2434283/sifc-task>

⁴ <https://tribune.com.pk/story/2435850/minority-visibility>

women reporting centres and a few women-only police stations but for the complaints to be reviewed, investigated and pursued by someone who does not think that the complainant is just 'weak' or 'doing it for the attention'. While progress in the traffic police is welcome they are among the police officials who have the most frequent interaction with everyday people guaranteeing the presence of women at district-level police meetings also ensures that more serious women's issues, especially violent crimes against women, are harder to ignore or brush aside.

Isa's era, Editorial, *The Express Tribune*, 18 September⁵

Justice Qazi Faez Isa has donned his robes as Chief Justice of Pakistan at a time when the judiciary itself is in the dock. The lack of proactivity in terms of prosecuting litigations at real speed; the piling up of more than 56,000 cases; the constitutional writ being in limbo; and coming up with a same wavelength of unanimity among Brother Judges are riddles on his face. It is, however, hoped that the maverick judge, from Balochistan, will be in a better position to pick up the loose threads and re-establish the decorum and prestige of the august court, as he is known for penning some of the landmark judgments pertaining to upholding of civil rights, supremacy of the Constitution and shunning interference of invisible quarters in the premise of lawful interpretation. The 29th chief justice of Pakistan is not new to the powers-that-be, and the political strata. By virtue of his indelible verdicts, he has drawn both admiration and controversy. The Memogate Commission, Justice Khawaja Sharif's probe, the Hudaibiya vs NAB ruling, audio-leaks probe and standing up for the victims of Hazara are some of the lawsuits wherein he displayed courage, conviction and left behind long-term consequences. While he is an ardent advocate of suo motu and had once ruled that "citizens shouldn't have to file applications when fundamental rights are violated or when they fear retaliation", it is hoped that the torpedoed mosaic of justice will see some prompt rectifications.

Polls in Jan? Editorial, *The Express Tribune*, 22 September⁶

Notwithstanding uncertainty, there is at least a fair idea when the general elections will be held. The Election Commission of Pakistan's formal submission that the nation can go to polls in the last week of January 2023 will now be up for debate. The pronounced date exceeds the constitutionally mandated period of 90 days, since the day the legislature was dissolved. *The gravity of the situation as far as holding elections is gathering volatility. Now almost all political parties, with the exception of PML-N, are on the same page and demanding elections within the 90-day timeframe. Likewise, the lawyers' movement has added a new impetus to the demand as they are quite clear*

⁵ <https://tribune.com.pk/story/2436416/isas-era>

⁶ <https://tribune.com.pk/story/2437061/polls-in-jan>

that the ECP tactics to hide behind an act of law by showing defiance to the Constitution is nothing but a ploy. How this gravitates in days and weeks to come is anybody's guess as political instability iced with economic slump is leading to frustration on the streets. The spiralling prices of essential commodities as well as the exorbitant energy bills might lead to political and administrative revulsion. This ordeal is in need of being addressed in a congenial manner. It's time for a judicial review and for all stakeholders, especially the ECP and the Supreme Court, to brainstorm a solution. As per Constitution, it's the writing on the wall; but if the mechanism to hold polls is literally impossible then a lawful outcome has to be choreographed. The syndrome of non-communication on this pivotal issue will lead to more confusion and chaos.

New party? Editorial, *The News*, 27 September⁷

Does Pakistan need a new political party? This is hardly the first time this question has been asked. Over the years, we have had a long wish list from varying sectors – academics, activists, generals, judges – over what kind of politicians, politics and parties the country needs. From left-wing politics to dreams of technocratic 'leaders' to more populist answers, the list has been long and nearly impossible to achieve. *The debate is back in the political arena, what with talk anew of another political party preparing to announce its presence on our political landscape. There is certainly no dearth of political parties in the country – though one can argue that we currently have three 'mainstream' parties, with a smattering of various smaller parties based on ethnicity or region or political ideology.* In the mainstream, a void has been felt recently – possibly due to a general disdain that seeped into society regarding everything political, even despite the populism of, and popular support for, Imran Khan. Less political rhetoric and more robust plans that address the issues of interventionary politics, human rights, women's rights, minorities rights, and most importantly Pakistani society's slide into regressive thinking and intolerance. But a new political party is nothing that new for Pakistan. Only in the past few months, two new parties have been birthed from within the PTI. *So it would not be unfounded scepticism to question just what a new political party would offer. The sceptics would argue that given the run of our other parties, why even wish for another status quo-ist entity?* Any new political entity would also face the age-old challenge of not entering the race to be the blue-eyed favorite of those that call the shots in the country. And how also to dispel any notions that a new party is not in fact a convenient 'third force'? Who fills this political void other than the three mainstream political parties is a question that can only be answered once there is a new party on the block, once we see its manifesto, and once we know if

⁷ <https://www.thenews.com.pk/print/1113791-new-party>

it has any real electoral prospects given that those who may be forming it are experienced politicians.

SECURITY SITUATION

Terror uptick, Editorial, *The News*, 04 September⁸

According to an investigation report published by an online news outlet 'The Khorasan Diary', the Islamic State of Khorasan (ISIS-K) has been using tech-savvy, Gen Z freelancers to spread its message to its tailored audience. While some young people treat this as a 'job opportunity', some get fascinated by the strongly convincing ideology and do the required job passionately. Lack of supervision and regulations regarding social media content has allowed people to spread dangerous messages through subtle and charming ways, and by the time such videos are taken down, the damage is already done. It has now become all the more important for authorities to work with IT experts to takedown posts and videos that inspire people to tread on a dangerous path. *According to a report compiled by the Pakistan Institute for Conflict and Security Studies (PICSS), there has been a sharp increase in militant attacks across the country – August recording 99 reported terror incidents, the highest number recorded in any single month since November 2014.* The PICSS data shows that Balochistan and former Fata were the most affected regions by militant violence in August. That TTP is operating from Afghan soil under the eyes of the Afghan Taliban government is also something that needs focus. Afghanistan has been warned several times by Pakistan but TTP safe havens still exist there. Now with newer challenges confronting our counterterror operations, Pakistan needs a whole-of-state approach to deal with this resurgence in terror, as soon as possible.

Brewing Unrest in GB, Editorial, *Dawn*, 05 September⁹

Away from the glare of mainstream media, trouble has been brewing in Gilgit-Baltistan in recent weeks. Demonstrations and counter-protests have been held in the mountainous region, with key thoroughfares blocked and mobile internet shut, as sectarian hatreds have returned to cast a long shadow over the area. According to reports, action was sought against a religious leader belonging to one school of thought, who had made a controversial statement last month. *After protests in Chilas and elsewhere, a case was registered against the said cleric. This led to protests in Skardu and other towns, while allegedly derogatory remarks were made by another cleric,*

⁸ <https://www.thenews.com.pk/print/1106503-terror-uptick>

⁹ <https://www.dawn.com/news/1774112/gb-unrest>

resulting in the filing of a case against this individual. Communal differences may only be a trigger for the protests, as there are several underlying factors in GB fuelling disaffection. However, the state's bulldozing of the **Criminal Laws (Amendment) Bill, 2023**, through parliament has certainly breathed new life into sectarian discourses that were largely dormant. GB may only be the first area where narrow communalism is being revived, thanks to this debatable legislation, and unless democratic forces and enlightened clerics speak up, the fire of hatred may spread, especially to those spots in the country where sectarian tensions are already high. As this paper has argued before, blasphemy cannot be condoned, and all religious figures should be respected. *But bringing complicated theological and historical issues before parliament which are better addressed by subject specialists and scholars of the highest calibre and then rushing them through without any debate will only add to divisions in the country. Such sensitive issues should not be codified in law in such a haphazard manner.* For over four decades, Pakistan has been reeling from the effects of terrifying sectarian violence. To prevent the misuse of blasphemy laws, and the violence this begets, the amendments need to be rethought.

The TTP's new battleground, Zahid Hussain, Dawn, 13 September¹⁰

There were some reports of the militants having infiltrated the border areas of the Kalash valley. The latest attacks in the treacherous mountainous region mark an expansion in the TTP's cross-border operations. *The strategically located north western part of Pakistan that borders Afghanistan's Kunar and Nuristan provinces has become the TTP's latest battlefield. The two Afghan provinces house the largest sanctuaries for the outlawed Pakistani militant group. With reports of the militants amassing on the border and tensions building up in the region for some time, the raid didn't come as a surprise.* According to some reports, the attacks were led by TTP head Noor Mehsud. The timing of the attacks seemed well calculated as the country celebrated Defence Day on Sept 6. The clashes left casualties on both sides. While there has been a significant rise in cross-border raids in the former tribal regions, incidents of terrorist violence have also escalated in recent months, taking a huge toll on Pakistani security forces. The militants have virtually declared a war on the Pakistani state. The TTP is not only active in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa but has also extended its operations to the troubled Balochistan province. Meanwhile, the latest incident in Chitral has added to our security concerns. Indeed, the return of Taliban rule across the border has been a major factor in the resurgence of militant violence in the country but the absence of a clear strategy has also helped the TTP regain some of its lost space. *The policy of appeasement has come back to haunt us. It was a serious mistake on the part of the state to engage in so-called peace negotiations with the outlawed group on the persuasion of the Afghan Taliban administration in 2021. The terms of engagement were set by the militants.* It is that

¹⁰ <https://www.dawn.com/news/1775603>

policy of appeasement that the country is now paying for. Indeed, we must put pressure on the Afghan Taliban administration to take action against the militants operating from its soil, but more importantly, we have to set our own counterterrorism policy in order. There still seems to be some confusion over how to deal with the rising TTP threat. The Chitral incident is yet another wake-up call for our policymakers.

Terror fissures in Balochistan, Editorial, *The Express Tribune*, 12 September¹¹

In a surprising operation, unknown elements took away five football players from an entourage on way to play a game in Sibi. The team was intercepted in Dera Bugti as it was in a qualifying round for the Balochistan Chief Minister Gold Cup. Incidentally, the bus was stopped and players screened, and to the amazement of many only five players and those belonging to Bugti tribe were taken away. This hints at a serious conspiracy, as the sitting federal caretaker interior minister is himself a Bugti. One could easily make out that dreaded anti-state elements who are out to create fissures in the restive province, as well as across the country, have knitted a plot. Likewise, the ambushing of a Frontier Constabulary vehicle, which resulted in the death of an officer in Peshawar, brings to full circle an exigency at hand, and one that is in need of being dealt with much more concentration. *The fissures that are emanating since the return of Afghans to Pakistan must be studied in proper perspective. The Torkham border is closed, and clashes have made it a no-go area for all kinds of cross-border activity. Last but not least, the revulsion in Chitral as reportedly non-state actors have made their way from the western border speaks of the Taliban government's inefficiency as they could not keep their word.* It is incumbent upon the regime in Kabul to stop these miscreants, and not to allow them to make use of Afghan soil for mercenary and terrorist activities.

URDU MEDIA

National election dilemma! Editorial, *Jang*, 01 September¹²

Even after 76 years there is no clear unified and automatic system of elections for national and provincial assemblies so that the nation would know when the citizens would have the opportunity to exercise their vote to elect their representatives. There is so much mistrust that never are the intentions of a ruling government taken as reliable. To address such issues a tradition of forming supervisory governments has been started for the past decades for free and fair elections. What is tragic is that even after elections the mistrust continues and losing parties accuse the interim rulers of

¹¹ <https://tribune.com.pk/story/2435287/terror-fissures-1>

¹² <https://e.jang.com.pk/details/525718>

rigging and corruption. Apart from 1970, there have been no elections that were admittedly not rigged. *Despite the president's consultation with the Election Commission and contacts with the Ministry of Law to obtain a legal opinion and majority of the parties demanding to hold elections within 90 days after the dissolution of the National Assembly, there is still dilemma about that when the elections will be held. This has given space to many speculations. Some even say that let alone in 2023, elections may not be held even in 2024.* Some political parties and the Supreme Court Bar Association have approached the Supreme Court in this regard. However, given the fate of the judiciary's decision to hold elections on 14 May 2023 of the Punjab Assembly, observers' have their reservations. In its reply to the President's letter, the Ministry of Law has said that only the Election Commission can decide the date of the election. The Commission says that given the fact that the results of the new census have been digitally approved it is bound to delimit constituencies which would take four months and would be completed in December 2023. Therefore elections will be possible till February 2024. *On the one hand, on the political front, there is uncertainty regarding the elections, on the other the economic situation is even worse. The outgoing government has increased the electricity bills so much that the whole nation is protesting against it. The caretaker government cannot give any relief without the approval of the International Monetary Fund (IMF).*

Controversy over the election dates? Editorial, Jang, 13 September¹³

In democratic countries, parliamentary elections are conducted at fixed times as per the constitutional requirements without anyone objecting to it. Even mid-elections are held according to the law only. *Rarely has the election process for the parliament and the assemblies completed without any controversy in Pakistan. Pakistan ones this uniqueness that no one has faith in the integrity of the elected government.* So when the elections are near, a caretaker interim government is established that is the legacy of an absolute dictator and no one dares to change it. *The country is heading towards elections under a caretaker government. But no one knows when the elections will be held. Some political parties, including the former ruling party Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI), are demanding elections within 90 days after the dissolution of the elected National Assembly (that happened on 9 August); some are in favor of delay in view of the economic crisis.* President Arif Alvi seems eager to fix the date of elections within 90 days on the demand of his political party PTI. In this regard, he has also taken the opinion of legal experts and met the supervising federal law minister for the second time yesterday, which he has described as part of the consultation process for the elections. It is believed that he can announce the date of elections at any time. On the other hand, caretaker Prime Minister Anwar-ul Haq Kakar has made it clear that the Election Commission is the authority to set the date of general elections. There should

¹³ <https://e.jang.com.pk/detail/5337>

be no speculation in this matter. The leadership of Pakistan People's Party (PPP), is divided on this issue. Asif Zardari is in favor of delay while Bilawal Bhutto wants elections within 90 days. The Pakistan Muslim League-N (PML-N) and some legal experts are challenging the authority of the President in this matter. They say that Arif Alvi's term of office has ended on September 9. He now has the status of an interim president and is not authorized to give the date of the election. It is the Election Commission authority to announce dates for elections. *Political circles and legal experts say that if the President sets the date for the elections, the Election Commission will reject it, as it did in the case of the Punjab Assembly four months ago. In such a case, there would be political instability and uncertainty. The economic crisis would worsen further. Perhaps that is why the President is also acting cautiously.*

Are these consolations of the time of "fall of Decca"? Editorial, Daily Jasarat, 06 September¹⁴

Time is running out fast. The rulers are comforting the people every day. The people know that the comforts of the rulers are false. The rulers cannot dare to break away from the slavery of the International Monetary Fund (IMF). It is reported that the IMF has rejected the unknown electricity relief package. *The government is lying about every sector: the situation will change, investment will come, electricity theft will be stopped, and tax net will be increased. ... Only the Minister of Energy has spoken a bit of truth; but even he blamed the dollar and petrol, saying that electricity is not likely to become cheaper until the prices of petrol and dollar are controlled. But making the dollar and petrol cheaper is also the government's job, for which, however, it needs permission of the master.* It is now reported that the IMF has asked for a fiscal consolidation plan and Pakistan has requested a postponement of fiscal tariffs and fuel price adjustments. No Pakistani institution, minister or caretaker can claim to have read or seen the terms of the IMF. The nation remains ignorant of the agreements with the IPPs and about the talks with the Tehreek-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP). It is only told that the IMF has assured or the IMF refused. All these are lies until the paper comes before the nation that what agreements have been made about. All the stuff that is being told that to the people in Pakistan that the government is doing such and such work, after that the hearts of the nation will go away, the nation will be prosperous, etc., etc., don't hold any water as when the time to assess the delivery comes the government would change> Then who to hold accountable? Again the nation is getting the news every day that the country is being destroyed, default is happening, but the ruling class is reassuring that nothing will happen and everything is fine. A fear has arisen in the nation that these consolations may not turn out to be like the consolation of the times of the fall of Dhaka. Then only blame game will be left behind.

¹⁴ <https://www.jasarat.com/2023/09/06/230906-03-3/>

Government ends and they run away from Pakistan, Mateen Fikri, Jasarat, 15 September¹⁵

For the Sharifs it has been like coming to Pakistan to govern; once if they lose the government, they have no interest in staying in Pakistan and they head straight to London. From London they play their role in Pakistani politics. Since this it was not the Sharifs alone but Pakistan Democratic Movement's (PDM) coalition government, all its leading people have found comfort in fleeing abroad. Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif had already booked his flight to London before even leaving the government. Ishaq Dar is running a business in Dubai so he expectedly to be there. Bilawal Zardari also went to Dubai along with his father as soon as he got the chance. It is said that Bilawal has returned but his father is staying in Dubai. Maulana Fazl-ur Rehman also went for a long journey. The Maulana was in favour of prolonging the PDM government and wanted the existing system to continue instead of having a caretaker government. But the establishment did not agree to this. It is said that no one had any role in appointing the caretaker Prime Minister. In fact Shehbaz Sharif wanted Ishaq Dar' as the caretaker Prime Minister but the establishment gave the name of Anwar-ul Haq Kakar and all parties had to accept it without any objection. Shehbaz Sharif should be thankful to the establishment for that even if only for 16 months, his longing to become the prime minister was fulfilled. Otherwise, Nawaz tried hard that Shehbaz should not become the Prime Minister. Shehbaz could not have revolted against Nawaz either. This is the reason that as soon as his term as the Prime Minister got over, Shehbaz went to Nawaz Sharif. Nawaz Sharif's entire focus is his daughter Maryam Nawaz and wants that if he does not become the Prime Minister for the fourth time, at least Maryam's name should be there. Nawaz has made a final announcement to return to Pakistan on 21 October 21. Some analysts say that this support is soon going to hurt Zardari. He has made Bilawal to demand elections and rub allies so that they can improve their image in the public. Bilawal Zardari and his People's Party are equally involved in what the coalition government of PDM has done to the country and the people.

Election Commission announces date for general elections, Editorial, Roznama92 News, 22 September¹⁶

According to the announcements of the Election Commission, general elections will be held in the last week of January as per the Election Commission. The Election Commission has reviewed the delimitation of constituencies and decided to publish the initial constituency list on September 27, 2023. Following the hearing of objections and suggestions, the final list will be issued on November 30. General elections will then be

¹⁵ <https://www.jasarat.com/2023/15/230915-03-5/>

¹⁶ <https://www.roznama92news.com>

held in the last week of January, 54 days after the final list. President of Pakistan Arif Alvi had written a letter to the Election Commission of Pakistan, requesting a date for general elections. In addition, the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) had also filed a petition in the Supreme Court, while various political, religious, and social groups, as well as lawyer's organizations, and were strongly demanding fair and transparent general elections from the caretaker government and the Election Commission in the country. Therefore, it is now imperative for caretaker governments to provide an equal playing field for all political parties so that the transparency of the elections can be ensured. *Just two days ago, the Asian Development Bank released the Asian Development Outlook report, which stated that Pakistan's economy could stabilize with the holding of elections, and confidence would increase. According to the report, Pakistan is facing economic challenges due to political instability, severe floods, and global price increases. The report further stated: "In the current fiscal year, a fiscal deficit of 7.5% of GDP is expected, and tax revenue will be 10.3% of GDP. In the fiscal year 2023-24, inflation will persist in Pakistan due to increases in the prices of electricity, gas, and petroleum products. Economic growth is expected to be 1.9%, and the overall average inflation rate will remain at 25%. However, the solution to all these issues lies in a fair and transparent election. As soon as the Election Commission announced the holding of general elections, the stock market improved along with it.* "The Election Commission has issued a draft of the code of conduct for political parties, election agents, and candidates before the announcement of general elections. *Under Section 233 of the Election Act 2017, the Election Commission has also requested a meeting with political parties on October 4, 2023, for consultation so that they can provide better feedback on the code of conduct during the consultation.*

Should the caretaker prime minister have gone to the US? Tanveer Qaisar, *Roznama Express*, 25 September¹⁷

New York is referred to as the 'capital of capitalism'. Situated on the shores of the Atlantic Ocean, this city is hosting the 78th Annual World Summit of the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) from September 19 to September 25, 2023. Our honourable Prime Minister, Mr. Anwar-ul-Haq Kakar, also participated in this summit with his delegation. He stayed in New York for five days and then travelled to London. By the time these lines are published, it is possible that he has returned to our country. *On his way to the US, the caretaker prime minister had said: "I will raise the Kashmir issue vigorously in the General Assembly." The question now is, what service could Prime Minister Anwar-ul-Haq Kakar provide to Pakistan and the Kashmir issue after delivering a speech and holding a few meetings? We all know this. In the press conference held in New York, he stated, "Overall, my visit to New York has been*

¹⁷https://www.express.com.pk/epaper/index.aspx?Issue=NP_ISB&Page=Editorial_PageC006&Date=20230925&PageNo=6&View=1

successful." How can any Prime Minister, regardless of whether they are responsible or not, say that their visit to the United States was unsuccessful? It was being suggested in Pakistan that Anwar-ul-Haq Kakar should not go to America. He should save himself. Former Foreign Minister and Chairman of the Pakistan People's Party, Bilawal Bhutto Zardari, had said, "Anwar-ul-Haq Kakar should not participate in the General Assembly session in New York. Instead, only the Caretaker Foreign Minister of Pakistan, Jalil Abbas Jilani, should represent Pakistan in the General Assembly." The caretaker Prime Minister has such a short and limited mandate for Pakistan that his participation in the UNGA assembly is not necessary. The conscious class is thinking, what benefit has Pakistan and the Pakistani people gained from this expensive participation? There are 46 countries in Asia, and economically, Pakistan ranks 43rd among them. Despite this dire poverty and need, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Ministry of Finance of Pakistan are not prepared to inform the Pakistani people about the expenses incurred by those travelling to this U.S. trip.

ELECTRONIC MEDIA

Electricity Bill Protest? Think Tank, *Dunya News*, 03 September¹⁸

The host and the panel discussed the current political and economic situation of Pakistan. *Ayaz Amir* pointed out that the PDM government has created this crisis and that the caretaker government can do nothing to stop it. The things happening in Pakistan right now in the name of law has never happened in the past. *Salman Ghani* on the other hand in a defensive manner questioned that in the history of Pakistan the way a party has went all in and criticised the establishment, attacking physically has not happened (05 May). He added that the caretaker government cannot be made accountable on national issues as they have only come for one reason, to conduct elections on time He also informed that the caretaker government is in touch with IMF and saying that it will give some relief in October bill. He also added that we cannot run to IMF to resolve our issues. It cannot be denied that the rise in the price of electricity, petrol and gas will fire up the common public of the country. *Dr. Hassan Askary* pointed out that the caretaker government cannot take long term decisions. The point is that the caretaker government has come to conduct elections within ninety days (three months) but now that they are not able to do it, they are keeping busy in other things like giving views or going behind other things. The IMF will ask for explanations if Pakistan give them the case of the increasing electricity bills and ask them to save the sinking boat. He added the distribution companies for electricity should be made

¹⁸ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4gYdk37y2MU>

accountable and their money should be adjusted in the electricity bills but the caretaker government will not do it.

Nawaz Sharif Finally Coming back on 21 October? On the Front with Kamran Shahid, *Dunya News*, 13 September¹⁹

In a major political development the President of Pakistan Muslim League (N) Shehbaz Sharif announced that former Prime Minister, architect of Pakistan and the leader of the people Muhammad Nawaz Sharif will return home (Pakistan) on October 21. He also added that there will be a grand welcome of Nawaz Sharif. The asked is the coming back of Nawaz Sharif is a sign of elections to be held on time? Who will give the date of elections? In another development the court and JIT has charged Imran Khan for the 9th May event for act of terrorism? Minus Imran Khan will it be a level play field the political parties in the elections? *Mian Javed Latif* of the PML-N informed that in the past, the PML-N also went into election minus Nawaz Sharif but we did not talk about any level play field. About the PPP and Bilawal's statement about level play field minus Imran, he added that before the 9th May event Imran Khan was eligible for elections but after the terror events of 9th May Imran Khan is not fit for elections. He added that whenever Nawaz Sharif has come back to Pakistan in the past he paved the country through dangerous waves. ***There cannot be any charter of democracy with a party (PTI) that has taken part in terrorism on 9th May If Nawaz Sharif comes back he will put the CPEC on track which will be the beginning of taking Pakistan on the path of recovery.*** **Shoaib Shaheen** of the PTI informed that why the government is running away from elections even after putting Imran Khan behind jail, because they are still afraid of Imran Khan and his participation in the elections. He added that all parties should come together with an agenda and struggle for elections and come against the interference of army in the politics while talking about relevance of Imran Khan in politics he added that even though he can be in jail but his relevance in politics is increasing and will never die. The result of elections will proof that name of Imran Khan is enough to secure vote. *Amir Ilyas Rana* analyst informed that it is true that the PTI has to be blamed for the 9th May events. He added that even after coming back of Nawaz Sharif the vote bank of PTI will be intact but after Nawaz Sharif lands in Pakistan and joins Maryam Nawaz in election campaigns it will change the game plan within the PML-N as well at the national level. He informed that the PTI stands divided today and do not come together for protests. Imran Khan has been cut to size and his party too, there is no way Imran Khan can take part in the elections. The way Imran Khan has defended himself against the establishment for the 9th May event had added to the issues of the party and Imran Khan.

¹⁹ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6Zt6j6dosDM>

Delimitation & Elections: PPP's U turn? Capital Talk with Hamid Mir, Geo News, 12 September²⁰

In the latest episode of the Capital Talk, the host and the guest talks about the changing pattern of PPP's politics. Initially it was a part of the PDM government and was on one page with the decision of all the allies. Now the PPP and its President Bilawal Bhutto are openly criticising the PML-N and other parties for not conducting elections on time, within ninety days of the dissolution of the PDM government. He asked why the PPP has taken a degree turn on the issue of elections. And also, will President Arif Alvi give order for elections within ninety days? *Qamar Zaman Kaira* of PPP pointed out that it is true that we stand for the election to be conducted elections within ninety days and Bilawal is campaigning for elections so he is in an attacking mode, the demand is same. He also added that the census was supposed to have taken place long time back and due to its delay it coincided with the assembly elections. In order to bring any delimitation, there should be a constitutional change. ECP has on our request shortened the census process and likewise it can also shorten time for elections and not stretch. *Khurram Dastagir Khan* of the PMLN party underlined that the census (delimitation) has added to the issue of elections and it might impact the date of the elections. The election Commission of Pakistan has started the process and it will complete the census process in the ending of November. Elections will most probably take place in January or February 2023. He pointed out that the PPP is taking a different stand because all parties are gearing up for elections and it is normal to see political point scoring. Senior Analyst *Ahmed Bilal Mehboob* pointed out that according to article 224 elections should take place within ninety days and article 51 for census there is no mention of delimitation, though it is written in legal files. On Bilawal Bhutto's speech on elections he added that it shows his position and trying to show a different angle from its PDM allies because all parties are trying to score points for elections. The ECP is saying that elections will take place in six months which will also impact other developmental projects. In Sindh the rehabilitation projects after the flood is also impacted by delaying elections and this should not be the case as these are ongoing process.

PTI still not Happy with President? Mansoor Ali Khan, 15 September²¹

Mansoor Ali Khan in his You Tube channel discussed PTI's new demand. Imran Khan's application for bail in Cypher Case was rejected yesterday. No prominent advocate is contesting this case and most of the advocates involved in this case are often busy in taking selfies, recording videos, and giving interviews to media channels. Most of their focus is on these issues. *In PTI itself, a number of people are not happy with their performance. PTI also accused Mansoor Ali Khan for creating division within PTI.*

²⁰ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CQ03OQqua9A>

²¹ <http://www.youtube.com.watch?v=BzFvsMOF14s>

Intazar Hussain Panjutha, one of the advocates of Imran Khan's team, stated that putting Imran behind bars is shameful. Instead, Donald Lu should have been called. Mansoor Ali Khan took a pot-shot on this demand and made fun of Panjutha. PTI's Shahbaz Gil stated that President Arif Alvi was asked to accept what establishment says, or else he would also be named in Cypher case. That's why Arif Alvi did what he did. Mansoor Ali Khan questioned this point of view and said that only Army Chief and DG ISI had met the President recently. He asked which one of them asked (threatened) Arif Alvi? And he also asked who leaked this to you? Then he himself answered Arif Alvi must have told you! If Army Chief has threatened .Arif Alvi, then Shahbaz Gill should come out and say that. Shabaz Gil is making these claims sitting in America. He then talked about a Jung News story regarding PTI not happy with Arif Alvi over election date announcement issue. PTI has termed his 13 September letter to Chief Election Commissioner as lifeless. PTI had conveyed the message to President to use his constitutional rights to declare the date of elections. But he transferred his responsibilities on Judiciary and Election Commission.

The issue of PTI's petition in Supreme Court for elections in 90 Days has been returned to PTI with certain objections. The Registrar of Supreme Court has objected to it as PTI had directly approached the Supreme Court and did not review it by any relevant forum. Other technical issues were also raised by the registrar.

Elections will take place in last week of January 2024: ECP Capital talk with Hamid Mir, Geo News, 21 September²²

The host informed that the election commission of Pakistan (ECP) has put out a statement announcing that the elections will take place in the last week of January 2024 but he underlined that there is no specific date mentioned. He asked is it important to announce a date for elections and was the President consulted before the announcement by *ECP*? Also *NAB* has opened many cases against tall leaders including Nawaz Sharif and Imran Khan. How will it impact the politics in the future? *Zafarullah Khan* of the PML-N pointed out that the ECP has given a week for elections and the exact dates will be given soon. This should be welcomed as the uncertainty has gone and all political parties should take it a positive step. Both constitution and constitutional conventions are very important. The letter of President to ECP is neither here nor there, and he has not given any date that means he has breached the constitution and his power. In regard to NAB case against Nawaz Sharif he added that the PML-N will take a protective bail and when he is in Pakistan he will appear in the courts. *Naeem Haider Panjutha* of the PTI underlined that the date of election should be given by President as according to the constitution and I reject the notification by the ECP. If they want to amend the act they should bring a bill and then bring change. The ECP on the other hand has broken

²² <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Uti5j8Ka7zw>

all the rules, if the Supreme Court has announced in the past elections in the provinces then why it did not happen. All the institutions should work according to merit including the NAB. The cases that has opened especially of Nawaz Sharif will put hurdles in his comeback. *Nasir Hussain Shah*, PPP pointed out we welcome the announcement by the ECP but we demand that a schedule should also be given. The President also did not give a clear date in the letter to the ECP, nothing is clear from both ECP and President. The PPP wanted elections to happen within ninety days according to the constitution but if extra days are needed for delimitation due to census then it should be given but one thing is there the ECP should give a schedule of the elections. NAB has always been used for political manoeuvring and the point is that these institutions should be free and fair.

Imran Riaz Khan Returns after 137 days! Wajahat S. Khan, 25 September²³

The journalist informed that Imran Riaz Khan is back to his home after 137 days. He added that out of this 137 days he spent one week in jail and he was kidnapped after that for the rest of the time. He informed that he has confirmed the news from Imran Riaz's family and they have said that he is indeed back although not in the best of his health. *While talking about the press freedom in Pakistan, he underlined that Pakistan ranks number 150 of the global media index and freedom of press is really under threat in Pakistan*, he added that in such a condition the news of Imran Riaz coming back home safe is good news and he is one of the lucky journalist to make it alive out of a kidnapping bid. He added that since 2001 he has been reporting and working in the media and, in this time he informed 93 reporters have been killed and we were afraid that Imran Riaz could have been another one of those casualties. He added that he is proud of his resilience and fight back attitude. He also added that some of the journalist are not even supporting media freedom and are still attacking him for his attitude and support of PTI party. He also underlined that *the judiciary has acted swiftly and kept the pressure on the proxies of establishment like IG Punjab. He even added that some local media, journalists and vloggers also kept the case alive and asked the right questions*. For example *Dawn* wrote a great editorial on Imran Riaz and asked the right questions about his abduction. While talking about the forces behind his abduction, i.e. establishment, he added that common sense prevailed and they took the right decision. He pointed out that *the case of Imran Riaz's abduction and his release tells everything about what is wrong in Pakistan*. The point is that where main stream media was muzzled and choked in Pakistan Imran Riaz Khan came out as a popular champion of digital media, he had a huge social media following. His popularity was due to some reason and people were following him and watching his vlogs for a reason. His last vlog before his abduction was watched by 2.2 millions of people on the digital platform. He underlined that the question is what happened to him while he was kidnapped, what

²³ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZPsDKO4c39Q>

will happen to him in the future? Imran Riaz Khan was abducted from Sialkot and then kept in Lahore and then in a depilated condition he was shifted to Karachi and was kept there for two months. Slowly the call to family of Imran Riaz was stopped from his side. It was during this time it was reported that he was killed in jail. *If Imran Riaz close down his channel these forces will win but if he continue to work on this channel, he added he is not sure if Imran Riaz will work with the same zeal and honesty because some compromise might have reached.* He added that it has to be underlined that in the end this whole game was neither of the court nor journalist but a third force (establishment) who has sorted it at last.

BOMBINGS, SHOOTINGS AND DISAPPEARANCES

(Select incidents culled out from the Pakistan media)

Place	Date	Description	Killed	Injured
Khyber Pakhtunkhwa				
Miran Shah ²⁴	02/09/2023	Pakistan: Major among two killed in gun battle with terrorists in Miran Shah	02	00
Chitral ²⁵	07/09/2023	Pakistani Taliban Attempts Land Grab To Boost Insurgency Against Islamabad	15	00
Zhob ²⁶	29/09/2023	Security forces kill three terrorists in Zhob.	03	00
N. Waziristan ²⁷	29/09/2023	At least five killed as another blast hits Pakistan on prophet's birthday	05	10

²⁴<https://theprint.in/world/pakistan-major-among-two-killed-in-gun-battle-with-terrorists-in-miran-shah/1743520/>

²⁵ <https://www.rferl.org/amp/pakistani-taliban-land-grab-insurgency-islamabad/32595679.html>

²⁶ <https://www.radio.gov.pk/29-09-2023/security-forces-kill-three-terrorists-in-zhob>

²⁷<https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/9/29/several-killed-as-another-blast-hits-pakistan-on-prophets-birthday>

Balochistan				
Peshawar ²⁸	11/09/2023	Peshawar blast leaves one FC personnel martyred, several injured.	01	06
Quetta ²⁹	30/09/2023	Death toll rises to 60 after suicide bombings rip through Eid Milad celebrations	60	50

²⁸ <https://www.thenews.com.pk/latest/1108813-vehicle-carrying-security-forces-targeted-in-peshawar-blast>

²⁹ <https://edition.cnn.com/2023/09/29/asia/pakistan-balochistan-blast-intl-hnk/index.html>

