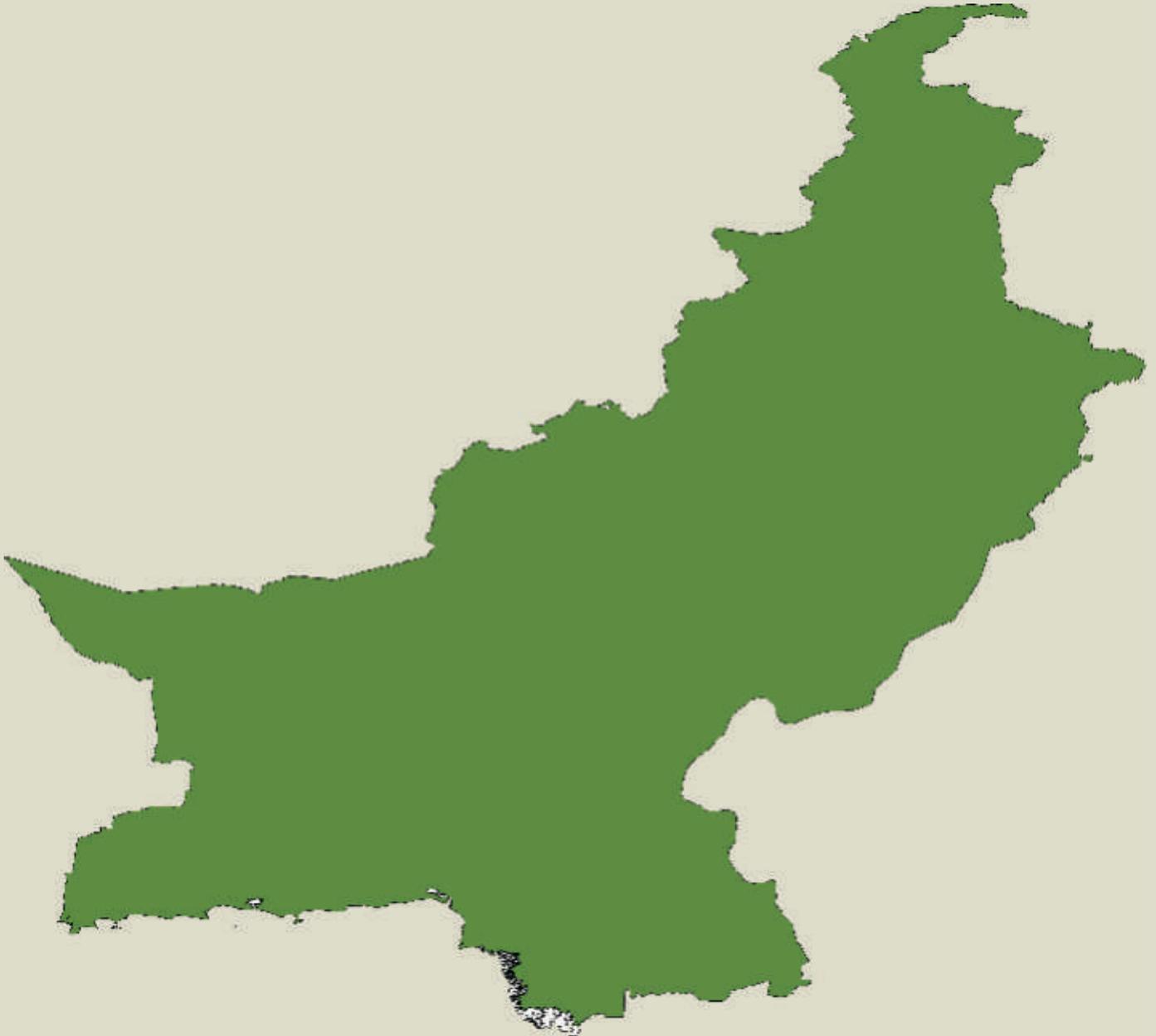


April 2021

PAKISTAN NEWS DIGEST

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



Prepared by

Dr. Zainab Akhter

Dr. Nazir Ahmad Mir

Dr. Mohammad Eisa

Dr. Ashok Behuria



MANOHAR PARRIKAR INSTITUTE FOR
DEFENCE STUDIES AND ANALYSES

मनोहर परिकर रक्षा अध्ययन एवं विश्लेषण संस्थान

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PAKISTAN NEWS DIGEST, April 2021

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POLITICAL DEVELOPMENTS

Five PDM parties to form separate bloc, Rizwan Shehzad, *The Express Tribune*, 05 April¹

The rift between two major opposition parties – the PML-N and the PPP over the office of the Senate’s leader of the opposition deepened on Friday when five opposition parties, including the PML-N, agreed to form a separate bloc of 27 opposition senators in the upper house of parliament. *Serious differences emerged between the parties both part of an anti-government alliance, the Pakistan Democratic Movement (PDM) after the PPP appointed its stalwart Yusuf Raza Gilani as Senate’s opposition leader, apparently in violation of what had earlier been agreed upon in a PDM meeting.* In a meeting held in Islamabad on Friday leaders of eight opposition parties agreed that “show cause notices” should be issued to the PPP and the ANP for disregarding the PDM’s decision, said sources. *Gilani was notified as opposition leader after some smaller opposition parties including ANP, Jamaat-e-Islami and the BAP threw their weight behind him.*

Controversial view, Editorial, *Dawn*, 06 April²

The myth that a woman’s clothing is somehow linked to the sexual violence against her has long been debunked, but it seems the prime minister still harbours this problematic view. During a telethon where members of the public were invited to ask him questions, Imran Khan’s response to one caller was unsettling. *Though Mr. Khan denounced crimes against women and children, his explanation that sexual violence is somehow a product of ‘obscenity’ which he described as a Western and an Indian import betrayed an ill-informed understanding of a very serious issue.* Not only did Mr. Khan say that the pervasiveness of obscene behaviour has contributed to these crimes, *he also implied that they can somehow be prevented if women observe purdah. In his words, purdah would lessen the temptation of those who lack willpower.* Mr Khan’s views on this subject are shockingly insensitive and even harmful to the women’s movement in the country. Blaming the increasing incidence of rape on Western influence is convenient, *but Mr. Khan should not forget that women in the countries he blames for obscenity and high divorce rates have better protections and more freedoms than women in Pakistan.*

¹ <https://tribune.com.pk/story/2292966/five-pdm-parties-to-form-separate-bloc>

² <https://www.dawn.com/news/1616674/controversial-view>

Policy shift? Editorial, Dawn, 07 April³

This is one U-turn that has been much needed. On Monday, while presiding over a meeting of his spokespersons in Islamabad, Prime Minister Imran Khan instructed them to refrain from criticizing the opposition in the media and instead highlight the government's achievements. Further, he termed the opposition as "harmless", saying they "did not matter" any longer. The rift in the PDM has lowered the political temperature and no doubt anxiety levels in government corridors at a time when the treasury benches need to engage with the opposition. The judicial and electoral reforms the government has proposed can only be carried out through dialogue with legislators as a whole, not just those belonging to PTI or its allied parties. Nevertheless, knowing the prime minister's predilection for self-righteousness and mercurial about-turns, it is difficult to gauge whether the political rhetoric will be dialled down for long. What is certain is that far-sighted leaders concentrate on the work the nation has entrusted them with rather than pursuing a barren policy of harking to the past.

Improving ties with Russia, Editorial, Dawn, 09 April⁴

The importance of his visit can be gauged from the fact that it is after nearly a decade that the top diplomat of Russia has made a trip to Pakistan. In the last 15 years or so, both countries have made a concerted effort to improve ties and establish solid grounds for building a stronger and mutually beneficial relationship for the years ahead. The present times accord a good opportunity to undertake such an endeavour. Pakistan's foreign policy is aligned with regional realities. While Russia retains a global reach in its policy, it is one of the most influential countries in our region and Mr. Qureshi was right when he said that Russia is a factor of stability in the region. This makes Pakistan's ties with Russia crucial from all aspects. Mr. Lavrov also assured his counterpart that Russia would be sending more Sputnik vaccine to Pakistan and this is a welcome gesture as vaccines are not easy to come by in the international market. Similarly, defence cooperation is a key area. It was announced that Russia would provide more counterterrorism equipment to Pakistan which is perhaps an acknowledgement of Pakistan's success in this area. Five rounds of Pakistan-Russia military exercises have already taken place. Pakistan-Russia ties are on an upward trajectory and it is important that Islamabad put greater effort into strengthening them even further.

³<https://www.dawn.com/news/1616877/policy-shift>

⁴ <https://www.dawn.com/news/1617242/improving-ties-with-russia>

Russia-Pakistan relations: embracing the bear, Inam Ul Haque, *The Express Tribune*, 15 April⁵

Russia-Pakistan relations have many constants and variables. Constants could be identified as geography/Afghanistan, history and the India factor. Variables are Russian defence and energy surpluses, US hostility towards Kremlin, China and our market. Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov visit is also attributed to the growing Russian clout in South Asia. *Moscow offered mediation for border talks between India and China and showed increasing interest in the Afghan peace process with Pakistan's involvement. Zamir Kabulov, the Russian special envoy for Afghanistan and a former ambassador to Kabul, is considered the main supporter of rapprochement with Pakistan, due to Islamabad's influence over the Taliban and Russia's own significant Muslim population.* A perceptible shift is underway in Russia's geo-strategic calculus. It is signalling to India not to expect Moscow's total fidelity if it continues to tilt towards the US. *China-Russia amity remains another factor. Pakistan needs to play up smartly and patiently keeping manageable expectations.*

Tehran visit, Editorial, *Dawn*, 23 April⁶

The two key takeaways from Foreign Minister Shah Mahmood Qureshi's trip to Iran on Wednesday were the need for better border security and trade relations between Islamabad and Tehran. The fact is that the Pakistan-Iran relationship, though amiable for the most part, has not been able to grow to its full potential. There are various reasons for this, most of them being geopolitical. *While both states share a long border and centuries of cultural, linguistic and religious ties, these links have failed to translate into robust bilateral trade relations. President Rouhani hinted at "unimplemented agreements" standing in the way of better trade ties, specifically mentioning the stalled Iran-Pakistan gas pipeline project. Pakistan has been wary of attracting US sanctions and annoying friends and benefactors in the Arab world by getting too close to Iran in the post-1979 era. However, it needs to explain to its friends that one relationship does not need to come at the cost of the other.*

Serious allegations, Editorial, *Dawn*, 30 April⁷

Former DG FIA Bashir Memon has opened a Pandora's Box by saying that Prime Minister Imran Khan wanted him to initiate proceedings against Supreme Court Justice Qazi Faez Isa. The matter should not end here. As a senior officer, Mr. Memon served in responsible positions while in service. He

⁵ <https://tribune.com.pk/story/2294738/russia-pakistan-relations-embracing-the-bear>

⁶ <https://www.dawn.com/news/1619867/tehran-visit>

⁷ <https://www.dawn.com/news/1621199/serious-allegations>

has come up with serious charges against those at the highest level. *Even if there is a grain of truth to them, his allegations should concern everyone who adheres to the rule of law. It is unfortunate that in Pakistan almost all governments have wielded power at the expense of their opponents. The accusations may well be unfounded.* However, it is critical that these allegations are investigated in order for the people to know the truth. Mr. Memon has said he is ready to face any inquiry into this matter. He should be taken up on this offer. *One way to unearth the truth would be to form a judicial commission that can probe the allegations without fear of pressure from the government. The PTI leadership should have no hesitation in offering itself for accountability, a process which it has always subscribed to.*

ECONOMIC ISSUES

Rising inflation worries Pakistanis: survey, Shahbaz Rana, *The Express Tribune*, 06 April⁸

Uncontrolled inflation has become the single most worrisome issue for Pakistanis, as two-thirds of respondents in a new poll have described the current economic situation as bad with increasing scepticism about any improvement in their conditions. *Ipsos- a global market research and consulting firm - conducted the survey a week before Prime Minister Imran Khan sacked his second finance minister in as many years for not controlling inflation.* Survey findings revealed that consumers had very low confidence and were reluctant to make investment decisions. *They were also not very optimistic about the future of economy and jobs.* The fear of losing jobs has remained far behind, as increasing inflation tops the list of economy-related problems. For 32% of respondents, inflation was the most worrisome issue, followed by unemployment (20%) and Covid-19 (16%), showed the poll results. The survey findings also put a question mark over the priorities of PM Khan, who talked about eradicating corruption more than lessening economic woes of the people.

IMF forecast, Editorial, *Dawn*, 08 April⁹

The recent changes in the top ranks of the government's finance team show that the country's political leadership is worried about slower recovery in a high-inflation environment. The reconstitution of the 'advisory council' and the inclusion of pro-growth businessmen and experts in it reflects a desire to

⁸ <https://tribune.com.pk/story/2293416/rising-inflation-worries-pakistanis-survey>

⁹ <https://www.dawn.com/news/1617060/imf-forecast>

change course from economic stabilization to growth in order to lessen the devastating effects of the health crisis on the economy and job creation, and to find fiscal space to help vulnerable groups as the current wave threatens to derail the fragile recovery seen since last summer. Prime Minister Imran Khan plans to approach the IMF for relaxation in its loan conditions as he sees disruptions in the near future on account of the infection's resurgence. Indeed, the government is in a difficult position: it cannot grow the economy rapidly or help businesses if it has to implement harsh IMF stabilization policies. Nor can it ditch the programme without sending wrong signals internationally. *The only way out is to convince the Fund to soften its conditions for the remaining period of the loan to provide the government with room to pursue pro-growth strategies.*

UAE rolls over \$2 billion loan to Pakistan, *The Express Tribune*, 21 April¹⁰

The United Arab Emirates (UAE) has rolled over \$2 billion loan it had provided to Pakistan as part of the financial bailout package after the PTI formed the government in August 2018. The loan was matured in March and the incumbent government was worried that like Saudi Arabia, the UAE might ask Pakistan to return the money. However, the official statement issued on *Tuesday after talks between Foreign Minister Shah Mahmood Qureshi and his UAE counterpart Sheikh Abdullah bin Zayed Al Nahyan confirmed that the \$2 billion loan had been rolled over.* The news would come as big relief for the PTI government as it needs this favour from the UAE to shore up its foreign exchange reserves. The official handout said FM Qureshi thanked the UAE for its continued support and cooperation bilaterally, as well as at the international fora. *Pronouncing the UAE's decision to roll over the \$2 billion deposit by the Abu Dhabi Fund, Foreign Minister Abdullah affirmed the UAE's commitment to extend every possible support to Pakistan.* Qureshi thanked his counterpart, underscoring that the decision reflected the warm and brotherly ties between the two countries.

SECURITY SITUATION

Judge's killing, Editorial, *The Express Tribune*, 06 April¹¹

The murder of a judge and three members of his family on the M-1 Motorway has sent shockwaves through the region. *Reports suggest that the attack was motivated by a 'personal enmity', a catch-all term often used by law enforcement when they have no leads.* Although a first information report has

¹⁰ <https://tribune.com.pk/story/2295798/uae-rolls-over-2-billion-loan-to-pakistan>

¹¹ <https://tribune.com.pk/story/2293367/judges-killing>

been lodged against five named suspects, the fact is that as an ATC judge, Aftab Afridi had hundreds, if not thousands, of very dangerous 'enemies'. *It would not be surprising if the attackers were part of a much larger conspiracy. The victims of this attack are not just those who were killed or injured. The victims are also millions of Pakistanis who will worry that other ATC judges may think twice about how to rule in the cases of dangerous terrorists or gangsters.* Any 'tough talk' about not being influenced by threats or such incidents can be set aside. Judges are also human. *Even the bravest judge one willing to put his or her life on the line for justice might think twice if their entire family was at risk. A functioning justice system requires security for all parts of the system.*

Forces' criticism bill, Editorial, Dawn, 09 April¹²

In a country where free speech is increasingly facing restrictions, a National Assembly panel's approval of a bill that seeks to criminalise criticism of the armed forces is bound to generate further misgivings. There is no doubt that this nation takes immense pride in its armed forces for their courage in defending the country's borders. *However, no one is above criticism, including the senior leadership of our security apparatus this includes those perceived as going beyond their scope of responsibilities.* The move to bring in such legislation sends the wrong message. It would give cause for some to say that the very goal here is to prevent legitimate criticism by opposition politicians and rights groups that have questioned the role of the army in civilian affairs. *It would also give weight to the argument that the present dispensation is a hybrid regime. This bill will criminalise legitimate questions about the military's alleged interference in civilian matters questions which in a country like Pakistan are necessary as the fear of derailment of the democratic project is ever-present.* Freedom to question here does not mean that the military's role in defending the country is being doubted. It simply gives people their constitutional right to question the alleged involvement of an institution of the state in affairs that are beyond its constitutional mandate. In the interest of democracy, parliament must ensure that this bill is either abandoned or rejected.

Ban is no answer, Editorial, Dawn, 16 April¹³

The government has officially banned the Tehreek-i-Labbaik Pakistan and issued a notification accordingly. This extreme step comes in response to nearly three days of rioting by the TLP after its leader Saad Rizvi was arrested. The government was unable to stop TLP workers from blocking roads and

¹² <https://www.dawn.com/news/1617241/forces-criticism-bill>

¹³ <https://www.dawn.com/news/1618522/ban-is-no-answer>

highways across the country and destroying public and private property. It is an open secret that the TLP was nourished by the state for its vested interests. If today it has spiralled out of control, the blame lies with those who helped it grow into the threat it is today. *But a blanket ban on the party is a futile attempt to solve a complex problem, and is an acknowledgement that the government does not want to take the difficult decisions needed to address the challenge thrown up by the TLP.* The ban will not dilute the narrative that fuels the party, it may even fan it. The government would be advised to take a more nuanced approach and desist from actions that are unlikely to produce the intended results.

Media blackout, Editorial, Dawn, 20 April¹⁴

The government used Pemra to forbid any coverage of the TLP failing which there could be consequences for the media. As the Pemra instructions applied to TV channels, this ban ensured that social media was the only source of information about the violence raging in the city. *With no filters for veracity, social media can be lethal if not countered with the process of verification through the mainstream media. This is what led to the TLP dominating the narrative even though much of what it was claiming may not have been accurate.* Silence from government officials for the better part of the day and the total absence of coverage from the mainstream media resulted in rumours and half-baked information circulating throughout the country. *Video clips devoid of authenticity in terms of time and context also went viral thereby creating perceptions that may have different from reality. Due to the media blackout, the TLP was able to blame the police for the attack and the ensuing violence.* It was only much later that the police could verify that in fact it was the TLP crowd that had attacked the police station and taken many policemen hostage. *In the current stand-off with the TLP, the government needs to make the case for its strategy and not allow the organisation to frame the issue from its own perspective.* Had the government not blacked out media coverage, citizens could have seen for themselves how the TLP generated violence on the streets.

TTP resurgence? Editorial, Dawn, 23 April¹⁵

At this stage, it appears the TTP's purpose was to create chaos. It is well known in Quetta that dignitaries and citizens congregate at the hotel after Taraweeh prayers in Ramazan, so such an attack would no doubt have the desired impact of creating fear and panic. Isolated attacks claimed by the TTP in Quetta and in North Waziristan are not uncommon, but the targeting of a

¹⁴ <https://www.dawn.com/news/1619275/media-blackout>

¹⁵ <https://www.dawn.com/news/1619868/ttp-resurgence>

high-security location has sparked fears of TTP resurgence. *The terrorist group's network was dismantled to a large extent after successive military operations in recent years, leaving it confined to pockets in North Waziristan and parts of Balochistan. Wednesday's attack underscores the need for continued vigilance and heightened security.* While there may be considerable truth to the officials' claim that a foreign hand is involved in attacks of this nature, better intelligence and improved investigation into how such an incident took place are imperative. *The government and military must ensure that their focus and resources are focused on dismantling terror networks that still exist.*

Labaik! Labaik! Labaik! Najam Sethi, *The Friday Times*, 23 April¹⁶

Last week, for the first time in nearly two decades, the specter of martial law hung over the horizon in Islamabad. The threat to state and society didn't come from the popular mainstream, nationalist, ethnic or secessionist parties, nor from foreign-inspired terrorist groups like the Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan or Al-Qaeda. It came from the Tehreek-e-Labaik Pakistan, a newly minted, religion-inspired party, tens of thousands of whose angry, passionate, militant supporters swept the squares of Lahore and fought pitched battles with the Punjab police that left over a dozen dead, scores injured and hundreds in prisons, provoking the PTI government to hurriedly brandish Anti-Terrorist laws to impose a ban on the party and stop it from marching on to Islamabad. In the event, a "dialogue" between the leaders of the TLP and representatives of state and government managed to diffuse the situation by shunting the matter to the National Assembly for resolution. Is this the beginning or end of the matter? The Miltabishment's response to the rise of the TLP is delusional. It claims it is being funded and propagated by India, America, Saudi Arabia and Israel to undermine Pakistan's pivotal role in the developing linkage of China to an anti-West bloc comprising Central Asia, Iran, Turkey and Russia. But the fact is otherwise. *The TLP is a product of the strategic miscalculations of the Miltabishment that have now put it squarely in the eye of a gathering storm that will exact a huge and bloody price from Pakistan.*

Taliban's obstinacy, Editorial, *Dawn*, 26 April¹⁷

In the backdrop of the postponed Istanbul peace talks on Afghanistan put off for the time being because the Afghan Taliban refused to attend the foreign ministers of Pakistan, Turkey and Afghanistan have issued a call to the armed group not to let this opportunity pass them by. Speaking under the banner of the 'Pakistan, Turkey, Afghanistan trilateral,' the trio called on all parties, "in

¹⁶ <https://www.thefridaytimes.com/labaik-labaik-labaik/>

¹⁷ <https://www.dawn.com/news/1620431/talibans-obstinacy>

particular the Taliban” to reaffirm their commitment to the peace process. The Taliban had said they would not be participating in the Istanbul meeting, which was scheduled for this month, *until all foreign forces leave their country, referring to the American decision to delay the withdrawal of troops from Afghanistan till September.* The Turkish foreign minister said the meeting would likely be convened after Eid. The fact of the matter is that the Taliban are an integral part of the Afghan puzzle, and without their participation the peace process is unlikely to succeed. From here on, the burden is on the Taliban: *they can either prolong the decades-long Afghan nightmare, or they can choose to participate in the peace process and arrive at a compromise with their rivals to help usher in an era of stability in their country.*

US general’s warning to Pakistan, Kamran Yousaf, *The Express Tribune*, 26 April¹⁸

Why Pakistan is seeking a peace deal is because it is aware of the negative fallout of another cycle of violence in Afghanistan. Last week’s terrorist attack at a five-star hotel in Quetta was a grim reminder that the fight against terrorism is far from over. The banned Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) claimed responsibility, something that should be a cause for concern for Islamabad. TTP was driven out of Pakistan particularly from the erstwhile tribal areas after Pakistan carried out successful military operations in the wake of the massacre at APS Peshawar in December 2014. *The government and the army have stated on a number of occasions that terrorist infrastructure of TTP and its affiliates have been uprooted from Pakistani soil. But these groups found refuge in Afghanistan, exploiting the volatile situation there.* The scenario for Pakistan is not ideal. Even if there is a peace deal and Afghan Taliban joins the government this may encourage the Pakistani Taliban. In the absence of a peace deal, the unrest in Afghanistan will also work in the advantage of groups like TTP. *It is because of this that Pakistan in recent years has laid greater emphasis on border management. The border fencing is part of the contingency plan Pakistan has been working to prevent or at least minimize the negative fallout of the civil war in Afghanistan.* As the threat of a new phase of terrorism looms large because of the Afghan endgame, there has been no debate in Parliament on the issue. Instead the government is busy in appeasing the banned TLP, something that highlights contradiction in our approach to deal with the larger issue of extremism.

¹⁸ <https://tribune.com.pk/story/2296693/us-generals-warning-to-pakistan>

Murder of a judge and his family, Editorial, Jang, 06 April¹⁹

Swat Anti-Terrorism Court Judge Aftab Afridi, along with his wife and two children, were murdered in a shootout near Swabi Interchange on the Peshawar-Islamabad Motorway on Sunday evening, while the gunman and driver were critically injured. *This incident on the motorway, which is considered to be largely safe in terms of security, is highly reprehensible and a question mark on the performance of the concerned security agencies.* According to police, Aftab Afridi was on his way to Islamabad from Peshawar with his family when his vehicle reached the Indus River Bridge near Swabi Interchange unidentified gunmen opened fire on him. The Peshawar-Islamabad Motorway is barely two-and-a-half hours long and has its own police, which is on 24-hour patrol. Also, different security agencies provide security to a judge of anti-terrorism court. *If a government official under a security cordon is killed in this manner along with his wife and children, then who will take the responsibility for the security of the common man? The police usually acquit themselves in such incidents referring to them as a matter of personal enmity. This incident has also been described as a personal feud with the family, but only an investigation in the right direction can determine the cause.* The IG Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and other concerned officials along with police teams have reached the spot and conducted a preliminary investigation. Further investigation will be carried out in light of this primary investigation. Since this is the murder of an anti-terrorism court judge, its links to terrorists cannot be ruled out. It would be imperative to investigate all aspects and negligent. Police personnel must also be brought under the scope of the investigation.

Anti-government resolution passed in the Senate Editorial, Daily Pakistan, 07 April²⁰

The Minister for Science and Technology, *Fawad Chaudhary has said that the government has a majority in the Senate. It could bring reforms (in the parliament) without the support of the opposition.* Attacking the opposition, the minister said that the former was immature and did not know what it wanted. *The claims of the minister were shattered on Monday when JUI-F senator Kamran Murtaza presented a resolution against the government and it was passed. Ministers of the government asked for a new draft of the resolution, a demand rejected by Senator Murtaza. The resolution read that the government had failed to provide a vaccine to the people against the*

¹⁹ <https://jang.com.pk/news/907876>

²⁰ <https://dailypakistan.com.pk/E-Paper/Lahore/2021-04-07/page-9/detail-0>

Coronavirus. It further read that the government had allowed the importation of the Russian vaccine Sputnik V which was sold at the price of 1500 in the market. Either the government should provide a vaccine to the people or sell it at the international market price. The opposition leader Syed Yousaf Raza Gilani said that the poor in the county cannot afford the price. The opposition in the Senate is divided. Also, the opposition leader Yousaf Raza Gilani is offering support to the government if needed. ***Still the government could not stop a resolution from passing that was against it.*** The government has the majority in the National Assembly. But at the time of the Senate elections, the majority could not save the government's candidate from losing the election. Consequently, the Prime Minister had to pass the majority test in the parliament. ***However, after some strong statements for a few days, no action was taken against the members of the parliament that were accused of selling their votes for money to Yousaf Raza Gilani.***

Test for the government, Editorial, Daily Dunya, 07 April²¹

Prime Minister Imran Khan has assured that the results of his government policies would emerge in the remaining years of his government. Though the government has not been able to give any positive impression in the last two and half years, there is no need to lose hope. ***But it needs to be asked what the basis of these hopes is? The government needs to provide details about its plans and policies that would provide relief to the people.*** The government is focusing on the sugar crisis and inflation. But a report submitted released by an inquiry commission last year had not been acted upon by the government. How can one believe that in the coming six months or a year revolutionary changes would happen? ***The government has to deal with and address the issue of profiteering, money lending, sugar crisis, fall in the quality of education system, health system, etc.*** On the economic front as well, the government has not been able to do much so far. ***Though a lot of hopes and expectations are associated with CPEC, in the last two and half years the work on CPEC projects has slowed down or stopped. For some parts of these projects that were completed, there is no plan to make them.*** Though the Coronavirus pandemic has adversely affected the economy, the performance of the government before the outbreak of the pandemic was not satisfactory either. If the same attitude continues, nothing would change in the remaining time of the government.

²¹ https://e.dunya.com.pk/detail.php?date=2021-04-07&edition=LHR&id=5579761_50199370

A new chapter in Pak-Russia relationship, Editorial, *Nawa-i-Waqt*, 08 April²²

The visiting foreign minister of Russia, Sergey Lavrov while meeting his Pakistani counterpart discussed possible increase in the cooperation of trade and energy between the two countries. In the previous year, trade between Pakistan and Russia witnessed a 46 percent rise and reached USD 790 million. It was a sign of improving relations between the two countries as well. *Afghanistan and the ongoing Afghan peace process were the main concerns of Lavrov's visit.* For the regional peace and security, peace in Afghanistan remains precondition. Pakistan's cooperation with Russia has increased in the areas of defence and counter terrorism efforts. *The relations between the two countries have great significance for the regional stability and balance. In the context of overall regional situation, Russia can convince India for a constructive role in the Afghan peace process.* Pakistan, meanwhile, needs to be careful of the US-India alliance to avoid any bad situation in the future. Pakistan's improving relations with China and Russia are encouraging for the country's development and stability. Also, they are a message to the countries that do not want Pakistan to develop. *Similarly, Russia's entry in the region would also help to balance the regional balance which was disturbed by the US. To counter America's and India's expansionist agenda in the region, a counter block remains essential. The block can comprise of Pakistan, China, Russia, Iran and.* For that the exchange of ideas and views between the foreign ministers of Russia and Pakistan is a good development.

Right demand to the West, Editorial, *Jang*, 19 April²³

While representing the emotions of the Muslims across the world, *Prime Minister Imran Khan has rightly pointed it out that Muslims have special attachment with Prophet Mehmood and some extremist leaders in West by support disrespectful things about the Prophet in the name of freedom of express were hurting the Muslim sentiments. He said that disrespect towards the holy prophet cannot be tolerated in the name of freedom of expression.* Imran said that like in the case of Holocaust, disrespect towards the Prophet should be made as punishable. Justifying the banning of Tehreek-e-Labbaik Pakistan (TLP), Imran said that it had become necessary because of TLP's continuous challenging of the state institutions and indulging in unrest in the streets and roads. To understand the situation better, last year French President Emmanuel Macron had supported the people who had drawn blasphemous sketches of Prophet Mehmood in the name of freedom of expression. Muslims across the world had given a strong reaction to Macron's stand. In Pakistan,

²² <https://www.nawaiwaqt.com.pk/E-Paper/lahore/2021-04-08/page-10/detail-4>

²³ https://jang.com.pk/news/914055?_ga=2.212027164.92457011.1618805408-835994399.1598849708

people protested against France and demanded that the French ambassador in Pakistan should be sent back. TLP was leading these protests and the government had promised that in three months' time the French ambassador should be expelled. *The recent protests by TLP were meant to force the government to act on its promise. But apparently, because of the mistakes from the both sides, these protests turned into lawlessness and commotion and the government banned TLP.*

Troop's withdrawal from Afghanistan Editorial, Jang, 15 April²⁴

After facing a dilemma over three months whether to withdraw from Afghanistan according to the Doha agreement, the Biden administration has said that Washington would complete the withdrawal from Afghanistan by the 20th anniversary of 9/11 attacks. According to the sources from America, the process of NATO withdrawal would start from May. If there is any delay, that would be only because of some travel inconvenience. *However, some apprehensions are being expressed as well. It is being said that if the American troops were attacked during the process of withdrawal, Washington would respond would full might.* It needs to be remembered that in the last month, the Biden administration had implied that the US might extend the military stay in Afghanistan. Pakistan had reacted to the report saying that a peaceful resolution to the Afghan conflict was the only way out. *Now, it seems better sense has prevailed and America has also accepted that if the NATO troops do not withdraw now, it might not be possible for them to leave later.* According to reports, President Biden would make the announcement for withdrawal in a few days' time. Only limited military personnel for providing security to the American embassy staff would be left behind. The four months of withdrawal are sensitive ones. During this time, the warring factions of Afghanistan for long lasting peace and stability in the country should not engage in any kind of violence.

The future of TLP and the NA resolution, Editorial, Daily Pakistan, 22 April²⁵

Prime Minister Imran Khan has said that the government has no intention to lift the recently imposed ban on Tehreek-e-Labbaik Pakistan (TLP). He said that if the group wants the ban to be removed, it should approach the court. While addressing the parliamentary party of PTI, the premier said that though the intentions of TLP are right but its ways are wrong. Briefing the members of the meeting about the talks with TLP, interior minister Sheikh Rasheed and the

²⁴https://jang.com.pk/news/912062?_ga=2.173002277.742054582.1618466039-835994399.1598849708

²⁵ <https://dailypakistan.com.pk/E-Paper/Lahore/2021-04-22/page-9/detail-0>

minister for religious affairs Maulana Noor-ul-Haq said that the members of TLP who are facing murder charges would not be taken back. *At the same time, minister of state for parliamentary affairs Ali Muhammad Khan has said that after the successful talks with TLP, the ban on the group would not continue. The contradiction between the statements of the Prime Minister and the minister for parliamentary affairs implies that the latter was not present in the PTI's parliamentary party's meeting. There should be similarity in the statements of the premier and his ministers.* In case if the Prime Minister takes some decision, no minister should contradict him. On the other hand, a resolution has been presented in the national assembly asking for a debate to be held on the issue of expelling the French ambassador from Pakistan. The opposition was not taken into consideration and they have decided to come up with their own detailed resolution on the matter. *It is clear that the resolution was presented in a hurry. Apparently, the resolution was presented according to a clause of the agreement agreed with TLP which the leaders of the group see as its success.*

Yet another attack in Quetta, Editorial, Jang, 23 April²⁶

In the blast in a hotel parking in Quetta, five people were killed and 10 injured. At the time of the blast, some important personalities were present in the hotel for iftar. According to the police, the explosive was put in a vehicle. The area is generally considered a secured one. *Despite that a vehicle with explosive could enter the area, raises questions on the security and law enforcing agencies.* The lapse should be investigated and guilty punished. For the last few years, terror attacks have been common in Balochistan. Blasts, attacks on security forces and other targets have been attacked. *There have been proofs for the involvement of external enemies in these attacks who in collaboration with local violent groups are trying to destabilize the province. ... All the attacks in the last six months in particular have a consistency which is a matter of concern.* Relevant institutions need to take extra measures to counter these attacks.

New wave of terrorism in Balochistan, Editorial, Nawa-i-Waqt, 30 April²⁷

A policeman was martyred and eight other people, including three policemen, were injured in a motorcycle bomb blast in Qila Abdullah on 28 April. The police men were on patrol when their vehicle was attacked. *Balochistan is at the target of terrorists again. The anti-Pakistan elements whether they belong to TTP or some separatist groups are targeting security forces and sensitive areas on the orders of their anti-Pakistan.* Few days ago a hotel in Quetta was

²⁶https://jang.com.pk/news/916146?_ga=2.132218829.231186055.1619067220-1172285561.1585539487

²⁷ <https://www.nawaiwaqt.com.pk/E-Paper/islamabad/2021-04-30/page-4/detail-8>

attacked. Fortunately the attack failed and only the parking of the hotel was damaged. Balochistan is a large province. Security forces are working hard to fight terrorism and maintain peace and security in the province. *Terrorists in the province are able to get access to weapons and money easily with the help of insiders at the behest of India that uses the Afghan territory for that purpose.* Security forces of Pakistan have broken the backbone of terrorism in Balochistan. But some secret hideouts have been used by these terrorists to carry out attacks whenever they get an opportunity. Such enemies of the country do not deserve any kind of mercy. They need to be eliminated at any cost. Also their facilitators need to be eliminated as well.

ELECTRONIC MEDIA

PDM splits into two groups: PPP sidelined, Breaking Point with Malick, Hum News, 02 April²⁸

The differences between PML-N and PPP *have finally led to the division of two groups. On one side is the PPP and ANP (in support of PPP) and the rest of the eight political parties. It has to be noted that Yusuf Raza Gilani was notified as leader of opposition after ANP, Jamaat-e-Islami and the BAP threw their weight behind him.* The PML-N is not happy with this arrangement and has alleged that it's morally wrong to take support of the government allies keeping PDM aside. *In the recent steering committee meeting of the PDM, the PPP and ANP were not invited. Latest episode discuss this major development with the guest. Guests: Shibli Faraz-PTI; Nabeel Gabol-PPP & Khurram Dastagir-PML-N. Nabeel Gabol pointed out that not inviting the PPP for steering committee meeting of the PDM is their mistake; there is no issue from our side. Even though if the PML-N does not want to hear our side and go ahead with isolating the PPP it's their choice. He pointed out that Bilawal Bhutto has underlined that if the members of the PDM keep fighting then the government will gain from this crack in the opposition parties. This is an insult of the PPP for not inviting us in the meeting. Today the government is supporting the PPP candidate Yusuf Raza Gilani.* PML-N is also not ready to bring down the government in Punjab. *Khurram Dastagir* showing some optimism he pointed out that there are still few days and remaining hope for reconciliation after the PPP and PML-N calls their respective committee meetings. *In the next PDM meeting this issue will be discussed and resolved. He added that the eight parties of the alliance will meet and in that meeting we will decide about the PPP.* The steering committee decided that the leader

²⁸ https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3T_KN3T9ukA

of the opposition should be of PML-N but the PPP disagreed. Maryam Nawaz is not going anywhere and stay in the country to deal with the government. *Shibli Faraz* argued that PDM is a short lived alliance which has no common agenda; they have difference of interests and now reached the logical end. He pointed out that the main players of the PDM are PPP and PML-N and the rest of the parties are there to clap. Maryam Nawaz has hijacked the movement for personal goals. *The PML-N behaves high and mighty and is treating the PPP as second class member of the alliance.* The leadership of Maryam has spoiled the PML-N's image.

Aaj Shahzeb Khanzada Kay Sath, ANP officially exit PDM, Geo News, 6th April²⁹

Awami National Party (ANP) has officially decided to part ways with the Pakistan Democratic Movement (PDM) over the issue of show-cause notice issued by PDM General Secretary Shahid Khaqan Abbasi. The PPP is also on the verge of getting out of the alliance over the issue of show cause notice and resignations from the national assembly. It has to be noted that both ANP and PPP were *directed to explain as to why they sought support from government senators in the election of the Opposition leader in Senate, as this move on their part caused damage to the Opposition alliance and the movement.* On this episode the host quizzed Shahid Khaqan Abbasi on this development and also put forward the point of view of other guests on the same issue. *Guests:* Shahid Khaqan Abbasi, PML-N, Hamid Mir & Suhail Warrich, senior analysts. *Shahid Khaqan Abbasi* argued that if the ANP had issues with the PDM or PML-N, they never raised it on the platform and today they are saying PDM has become a personal platform of PPP and PML-N. He pointed out that any party or *individual who tries to collaborate with the establishment or government will not be tolerated.* Even if the PPP leaves PDM, the eight party coalition of the PDM will continue the movement. Resignations from assemblies was another issue which the PPP was not on board but the point is that if the 160 seats become empty after oppositions resignations it will have been more impactful. *Hamid Mir* informed that PPP and ANP had issues with the PDM since its formation and the PML-N and JUI-F which is hardliners in the opposition alliance has now decided it is difficult to work with these parties. *They also somewhere have doubts that these two parties might be playing in the hands of the establishment.* The truth about who is making the allies in the PDM fight, it will take a long time to come out in the open. PPP cannot form a different alliance because only ANP is supporting them for the time. PDM will carry on despite of the ANP exit and

²⁹ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9f-db9AUEbA>

Maulana Fazl Ur Rehman will head it. **Suhail Warrich pointed out that for the time been the story of the united opposition is finished. The way PML-N, JUI-F and PPP behaved is condemnable. No party can force any other party to change its views or any party cannot force to bring back a leader (in this case Nawaz Sharif).** The show-cause notice to the ANP and PPP was in a bad taste as both these parties are prominent parties. The real challenge of the government is inflation and bad governance and now that the long march of the PDM is also postponed, there is no pressure for the government at this point of time.

The Reporters, Jahangir Tareen's show of power, ARYNews, 07 April³⁰

The Federal Investigation Agency (FIA) on Tuesday summoned sugar baron Jahangir Tareen who is facing money laundering and fraud charges in the sugar scam. *After one year Tareen is said to be looking for political options to stay relevant and on Wednesday in a show of support Punjab lawmakers from ruling party PTI accompanied Tareen to the court.* There are also rumours that Jahangir Tareen might meet with Asif Ali Zardari in the coming week as claimed by PPP senior leader Syeda Shela Raza. In this episode the Analysts, Sabri Shakir & Chaudhary Ghulam Hussain analyses this development and its impact on Imran Khan and PTI? Jahangir Tareen has played an important role in the PTI and its win in the elections of 2018. Even during the recent vote of confidence after the Senate election, Tareen is said to have worked behind the scene to make it favourable for PTI. It looks like now that Tareen is exploring other options and invited PTI MNA's for breakfast and displayed his show of power. He said that I am a friend to the PTI and do not put me in the enemy list and push towards enmity. I am asking for justice from PTI. I will make my voice louder for justice and these friends are with me. *Sabir Shakir underlined that when he said these friends are with me, he means that if the cases are not closed against him then the PTI MNA's standing beside him are in his support which can be dangerous for the PTI government. Chaudhary Ghulam Hussain pointed out that the PTI government should first make it clear, if Jahangir Tareen is the only one in the sugar scam and if not why he is singled out?* The PTI has suffered a big blow during the senate elections on 03 March and though it recovered but it seems has to learn its lessons. Even PDM has split but Imran Khan is not in a mood to take advantage of the development. Many PTI MNA's are supporting Tareen as seen standing behind him in Punjab. Tareen asked who ever is trying to take revenge from me and trying to keep me away from Imran Khan, they should be brought in the forefront. He said that 60% of the PTI MNA's are from political family in Punjab and they were not with PTI in

³⁰ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=25trRzDnbO8>

2013. *Hussain pointed out that Imran Khan should call Tareen and clear the confusion. Tareen also added that if PTI decides to isolate him, it would not be beneficial for the party.* Hussain pointed out that if the PTI has decided to isolate Tareen then they should also take action against the PTI MNA's of Punjab who was standing in solidarity besides him in the court without the blessings of Imran Khan. *Sabir Shakir reminded that something big is happening in the political sphere in Punjab, keeping in mind the tweet of PPP's Syed Shela Raza and what PML-N's Mia Javid Latif said a few days ago on this show. He informed that a large number of PTI MNA's from Punjab will leave PTI and join Jahangir Tareen and most probably will join PPP.* This is in preparation for the 2023 elections.

Is the ban on TLP real? Is the government ready to face the pushback of the ban? Naya Daur, 15 April³¹

The TLP went on the streets in protest with full preparations and were expecting the arrest of its leader. Although the government has cleared the big roads, but small cities and villages with TLP holds, the roads are still closed. *Raza Rumi asked in this episode can the government ban the TLP legally. Is the PTI government ready to face the pushback of the move to ban the TLP?* *Guests: Muzamal Suharwardy, Murtaza Solangi, Amber Rahim & Ayesha Siddiqa. Muzamal Suharwardy pointed out that banning an organization does not mean that the organization will go away, the nation has seen organizations like Saiph-e-Salah & Tehreek-e-Jafra getting banned by the governments but that in no ways have reduced their relevance in politics. Two kinds of organizations get banned, one the hardliner and extremist kinds like the TTP, they face state oppression. Second the religious-political parties but to ban political parties is not always a good idea. Now the TLP is in a different position, they believe in the constitution and its two members in Sindh Assembly have taken oath to safeguard the country. The main point is that the PTI government has encouraged the resistance politics of the TLP in the past and have never stopped its rallies and protests. This is the first time the state is stopping them and the TLP was fully prepared, the state miss calculated its move. Murtaza Solangi pointed out that the manner in which the government is trying to impose the ban, it will not be successful. First it adopted appeasement policy then out of a sudden takes a U-turn and decides to ban the TLP. In the past when government tried to ban these religious organizations, they have re appeared with different names. He underlined that unless government make a uniform policy for these religious political organizations and warn them not use mix religion with politics and fan*

³¹ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VihhjBZucLk>

terrorism, nothing will happen. Government cannot make different policies for different organizations. *Amber Rahim pointed out that when the TLP was registered as a political party in the Election Commission of Pakistan, it did not dig deep into its source of finance.* Now TLP has spread as a party all over the country and it will be impossible to control them. *The TLP is not a case of counter terrorism but counter extremism, reactive approach* like that taken by the PTI government will not work, it needs long term solution. The TLP is not only a stick wielding group but they also have a good amount of members who are politically sound and do the thinking. *The mainstream political parties meet them secretly during elections or when they need support.*

Off the Record with Kashif Abbasi, PTI government announces decision to ban TLP under anti-terrorism law, ARYNews, 14 April³²

While ongoing clashes between activists of the Tehreek-i-Labbaik Pakistan (TLP) and police claimed two more lives and left many others injured on a third consecutive day, Interior Minister Sheikh Rashid on Wednesday *announced the decision to ban the TLP party on Punjab government's recommendation under anti-terrorism law* but added that the summary would be sent to the federal cabinet for its approval. Talking to media in Sargodha, *Prime Minister Imran Khan said it was the responsibility of the state to ensure protection of public against riots and also establish writ of the state. Therefore, he added, the government had decided to ban Tehreek-i-Labbaik Pakistan in the larger interest of the public and state. The host asked how will it play out for the TLP and the PTI Government. Guests: Farrukh Habib-PTI; Atta Ullah Tarar-PMLN; Chaudhary Manzoor Ahmad-PPP & Atta Ur Rehman-JUI. Farrukh Habib* pointed out that TLP cannot dictate the state. The government opened a communication channel with the TLP but if it has not materialized that does not mean that the TLP will go on the streets, block roads and destroy public property in order to pressure the government to give into their demands. He informed that *the government was still committed to present a bill regarding Namoos-i-Risalat* (Protecting the Prophet's Sanctity) in the National Assembly and had held several meetings in this regard with TLP leaders. But Namoos-i-Risalat does not mean that TLP can use stick and stone to pressure the government. If TLP is a political party, it should behave like one. Imran Khan has talked about Namoos-i-Risalat on various international platforms and the TLP should let the government do its work. *Chaudhary Manzoor Ahmad underlined that although the party PPP does not approve of the violence on the streets by the TLP but pointed out that as an individual he thinks that the*

³² <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RHWAMmPGBHM>

ban is not justified. They have to first prove that the TLP is a terrorist organisation but it is also a political party. The government can tomorrow ban any other party, they need to be careful. *Atta Ullah Tarar this issue of the TLP is grossly mismanaged by the government but to put ban on the TLP the government has to go through various legal procedures.* There is a need to weigh the options and there is a danger that this can become the norm and the government can attack other opposition parties.

BOMBINGS, SHOOTINGS AND DISAPPEARANCES

(Select incidents culled out from the Pakistan media)

Place	Date	Description	Killed	Injured
Khyber Pakhtunkhwa				
Ambar Interchange ³³	04/04/2020	Swat ATC judge among four killed in 'targeted attack' near Ambar Interchange in KP	04	02
Balochistan				
Quetta ³⁴	21/04/2021	5 killed, at least a dozen injured in blast at Quetta's Serena Hotel	05	12

³³ <https://www.dawn.com/news/1616382>

³⁴ <https://www.dawn.com/news/1619534>