

December 2020

PAKISTAN NEWS DIGEST

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



Prepared by

Dr. Zainab Akhter

Dr. Nazir Ahmad Mir

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MANOHAR PARRIKAR INSTITUTE FOR
DEFENCE STUDIES AND ANALYSES

मनोहर परिकर रक्षा अध्ययन एवं विश्लेषण संस्थान

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POLITICAL DEVELOPMENTS

Dangerous stand-off, Zahid Hussain, Dawn, 02 December¹

First there was a clampdown and then a retreat. *The panicky response to the Pakistan Democratic Movement (PDM) rally in Multan this week illustrates the growing chaos within the PTI administration.* With an increasingly aggressive opposition alliance on a collision course with the government, the latter's options are becoming narrower. *After the showdown in Multan, the battleground is now shifting to Lahore, the PML-N's political stronghold that may bring an unyielding prime minister under greater pressure.* But there is much more at stake than just the question of the Imran Khan government's survival. *The ongoing political confrontation is taking the country to a dead end with neither an obstinate prime minister nor a strident opposition alliance realising the consequences.* Support from the security establishment can only help prop up the government but will be of no use to the prime minister in countering the opposition's onslaught.

Pressure on Iran, Editorial, Dawn, 03 December²

While Iran is no doubt under immense pressure due to the crippling sanctions, and the murder of its scientist is a grave provocation, the Iranian leadership must react with caution and pragmatism. The suspension of inspections will only give Iran's foes the chance to further implicate Tehran, accusing it of seeking a confrontation with the international community. *Israel has long been believed to be running a covert operation to assassinate key Iranian officials, while some news outlets have reported that Mr Trump – in his final few months in office has allowed his administration to ramp up the pressure even more on Iran, with some suggesting the American president has given the green light for everything short of war.* Therefore, it is entirely possible that the Israeli hit targeting Fakhrizadeh had America's blessing. Over the last four years, President Donald Trump has tried his level best to reverse the limited progress made in Iran-US relations during the Obama era, primarily by unilaterally ditching the nuclear deal Tehran signed with the P5+1. *Further tightening the screws on Iran will strengthen the hand of the conservatives in that country and immensely reduce the chances of Tehran returning to the negotiating table.*

¹ <https://www.dawn.com/news/1593560/dangerous-stand-off>

² <https://www.dawn.com/news/1593739/pressure-on-iran>

Thaw in Pakistan, Bangladesh relations? Kamran Yousaf, *The Express Tribune*, 06 December³

Pakistan is seeking the activation of consultation mechanism at the foreign ministry level to improve the bilateral ties. The Bangladeshi PM told the Pakistani envoy that there was no ban on such regular activities. The foreign secretaries from the two sides may meet soon to take the next move. However, the statement issued by the Bangladeshi PM Office said the incidents of 1971 cannot be forgotten and forgiven. *This shows that the Bangladeshi government is still adamant that Pakistan must formally apologise over the events of 1971.* Islamabad nevertheless wants to bury the past and open a new chapter in ties with Bangladesh. The two sides, however, need to seek a mutual closure of bitter events that still haunt them both. *In Pakistan, at least there is belief that the new generation in both sides want to move on. Increased people-to-people contact and revival of interaction between the two countries at the official level can help address misgivings.* The region and the world are undergoing a transformation and this changing scenario provides an opportunity for both Pakistan and Bangladesh to start a new beginning.

PDM's dilemma, Editorial, *Dawn*, 07 December⁴

The bigger question is: what after Lahore? *This is where the PDM is struggling to come up with a unified strategy. JUI-F chief Maulana Fazlur Rehman is the strongest proponent for the march to Islamabad and subsequent resignations from the assemblies.* Since he has already experienced a solo march last year, and sensed the impact of the event, he seems better placed to make it happen. The other PDM parties also recognise that JUI-F cadres disciplined and hardy as they are will be crucial for the success of the march. This gives the Maulana significant leverage in terms of decision-making from this stage onwards. *The PML-N leadership is also leaning towards a harder line ever since Nawaz Sharif has taken a strong position against the role of the establishment. There may be many within the party who are not comfortable with the resignation option but given the prevalent mood of the top leadership, they may not have much of a choice if the decision is indeed made. However, the PPP has been uneasy with this action of last resort. It is the only party among the alliance that has a government to lose if the opposition decides to take the resignations' route.*

³ <https://tribune.com.pk/story/2274912/thaw-in-pakistan-bangladesh-relations>

⁴ <https://www.dawn.com/news/1594467/pdms-dilemma>

Unelected aides, Editorial, Dawn, 09 December⁵

The judiciary threw a spanner in the works of the privatisation process. But the principle on which it based its decision is a sound one that embodies the spirit of democracy. In a short order, the Islamabad High Court ruled that unelected advisers and special assistants could not head government committees. *No one begrudges the prime minister bringing on board people with the expertise to augment the government's decision-making.* PPP and PML-N governments in the past have done so as well, with advisers sitting in on cabinet meetings and even attending parliament. *Prime Minister Imran Khan, however, seems to be governing largely through individuals that he has handpicked rather than those selected by the electorate.* This state of affairs has justifiably given rise to much resentment among the party's legislators. The two verdicts make it clear that unelected individuals are to occupy a niche, supporting role. Their link must be to the prime minister alone, not to the bureaucracy or to the public.

Resignation talk, Editorial, Dawn, 10 December⁶

The Pakistan Democratic Movement has further raised political temperatures with the announcement that its constituent lawmakers will hand over their resignations to their respective party leaders before the year ends a development that would create more uncertainty and turmoil in an already tense environment. Although it is not yet clear when the PDM parties will hand these resignations over to the national and provincial assembly speakers, the very prospect of half-empty assemblies, more protests and marches, the talk of by-elections and the possibility of a boycott all point to a deeply chaotic and challenging new year. *Not only will en masse resignations push an already dejected and battered nation into further disarray, an alliance that has been forged to strengthen democracy may inadvertently strengthen undemocratic forces.* Despite all its efforts, the opposition may not succeed in bringing down the government, *but the paralysis that would result from the sustained protests of those who have resigned from parliament can be harmful for democracy.*

More reshuffling, Editorial, Dawn, 13 December⁷

The PTI government has become quite adept at cabinet reshuffles. Since it assumed power more than two years ago, it has experimented with its team multiple times. In the most recent such exercise, Sheikh Rashid Ahmed was

⁵ <https://www.dawn.com/news/1594804/unelected-aides>

⁶ <https://www.dawn.com/news/1594973/resignation-talk>

⁷ <https://www.dawn.com/news/1595469/more-reshuffling>

moved from the railways ministry and inducted as the federal minister for interior. Azam Swati, who is already on his second ministerial assignment, was appointed as the railways minister in Sheikh Rashid's place. In another significant move, Dr Hafeez Shaikh was elevated from his position as adviser on finance to a full-fledged federal minister for finance. *Sheikh Rashid's appointment as the interior minister is being seen in the context of the Pakistan Democratic Alliance's agitation movement and a possible long march to Islamabad.* However, the larger issue is the government's inability to settle down with a team that can produce results. *Key ministries like finance, interior, information, petroleum and a few others have witnessed multiple changes in command and this suggests shoddy homework in terms of team selection.* It does not inspire much confidence if appointments at such a senior level, with such high stakes, are a byproduct of a process of trial and error. A constant flux within cabinet membership is keeping the ministers on tenterhooks and other hopefuls queuing outside with greedy anticipation. Such fluctuations take a toll on the overall performance of the government, and it is showing.

Slowing down democracy, Editorial, Dawn, 14 December⁸

For democracy to work in any country, elections must be free, fair and held within the constitutionally stipulated time frame. This, unfortunately, has not been the case in Pakistan, where frequent military interventions have overthrown civilian governments adding to democracy's slowdown, even regression. Today, too, with the PDM gunning for the PTI-led administration's ouster, the root cause of the crisis is the perceived lack of legitimacy of the polls and the opposition's refusal to accept the rulers. To ensure that the country has a credible electoral system several things are needed. *Firstly*, all forces should realize that the beauty of democracy lies in an electoral process and rule that is allowed to evolve unhindered. Let the people choose their representatives, and let them complete their terms. *Secondly*, genuine electoral reform is sorely needed, so that the process is seen to be transparent, and accusations of electoral fraud are reduced to a minimum. *Thirdly*, parties themselves need to practice democracy and promote democratic norms within their ranks, instead of indulging in dynastic politics, or siding with unelected quarters for paltry gains.

Lahore rally and its aftermath, Hassan Khawar, The Express Tribune, 14 December⁹

Some opposition leaders are also expecting 'behind the scenes' developments in January, before the long march, which can rattle the government. It is not

⁸ <https://www.dawn.com/news/1595667/slowing-down-democracy>

⁹ <https://tribune.com.pk/story/2275950/lahore-rally-and-its-aftermath>

clear what these developments could be, but one could speculate that *the opposition is either counting on a wedge within the ranks of establishment, creating pressure on it to withhold its support for the government or it is banking upon some pressure from international quarters*. The opposition has already used its ammunition by naming and highlighting specific individuals and harping on the individuals-versus-institution narrative, which has failed to create enough pressure on the establishment. This is unlikely to change without the PDM playing any new cards. Regarding the latter option, the *PM last week did hint at some possible international support for the opposition. But it seems highly unlikely that any such support can push the government to resign*. For now, it seems that the opposition would stage a reasonably well-organised long march towards Islamabad sometime in February, but that's not likely to disrupt the upcoming Senate elections or jeopardize the ruling party and its coalition partners' chances to secure a majority in the upper house.

Democracy, Anarchy, Fascism, Najam Sethi, *The Friday Times*, 18 December¹⁰

After a month of good Jalsas across the four provinces, the PDM climaxed in Lahore. The government claims it was "a flop". *The PDM insists it was a resounding success. Most commentators are focused and divided over how "big" and "motivated" it was, linking these factors to the success or lack thereof in the PDM's strategy because Lahore is supposed to be the throbbing heart of the PMLN, therefore a barometer of its support for the party's narrative*. But the significance of the Jalsa's lies beyond the cold arithmetic of mere numbers, past the point where "good" is trumped by "great" or "stupendous". Several factors have served to curb the enthusiasm of the PDM's supporters. *But the most insidious and effective tactic to "fail" the Jalsa related to effective "media disinformation management" by the Miltabishment*. The truer significance of the PDM campaign lies in several unprecedented facts. First, it includes Pakistan's main left, centre, right, secular, conservative and religious parties. Two, all are focused on targeting the unaccountable Miltabishment instead of the government. **Third**, their protest is largely centered in the Punjab, the traditional power base of the Miltabishment. **Fourth**, the protest is drawing nourishment from the people's anger *at the hardships imposed by the incompetent management of the economy by the Miltabishment-supported PTI government*. The next few months are crucial to the PDM project. Either it will show a united and aggressive front and take the long march and resignation issue to its logical conclusion, including successfully sabotaging any possibility of bye-elections, *thereby posing a serious threat to the stability of the Miltabishment-PTI Project, or it will*

¹⁰ <https://www.thefridaytimes.com/democracy-anarchy-fascism/>

stumble in a divided and confused manner, lose steam and succumb to the full repressive might of the status quo in power.

UAE visa issue, Editorial, Dawn, 22 December¹¹

Concerning the suspension of UAE visas for Pakistanis as well as around a dozen other mostly Muslim-majority states that took effect last month, the Emirati government has assured Pakistan that the curbs are “temporary”. *These are of course welcome developments, as after news of the ban emerged there were rumours circulating over the nature of the visa suspension.* For example, it was being conjectured that the changing geopolitical situation could have been behind Abu Dhabi’s decision. *Specifically, the UAE’s acceptance of Israel came as a bombshell in September, while rumours were circling that many foreign friends of Pakistan were also pressuring this country to recognise Tel Aviv.* However, if the ban is indeed about Covid-19 doubts still remain then the UAE must communicate to Pakistan the steps it needs to take to resolve the issue and ensure that Pakistanis can travel to the Emirates without hindrance. But questions will linger on about why Pakistan and the other states were singled out for the visa ban. *Indeed, the matter is a serious one for Pakistan, as nearly 1.5m citizens of this country live and work in the sheikhdom.* While such economic and political ties are important for Pakistan, it is also true that foreign policy decisions must be made on the basis of national interest.

Warming up to Gulf sheikhs, Editorial, Daily Times, 22 December¹²

Pakistan has always had very good relations with Gulf States, since long before they became the center of global attention because of their oil wealth and its judicious use actually, even if over time this relationship has become somewhat transactional. Now, as things stand, we supply them with an army of our labour force, which helps build their grand cities, etc, and they sign the checks that make up a very big part of our annual remittances. *And Pakistan, especially, has no reason to want it any other way; at least for the time being since we continue to struggle with our foreign exchange reserves. But Pakistan is put in a particularly awkward position when it is forced to choose between our friends in the Gulf and our Iranian neighbours.* Lately, especially during the Trump administration when Iran was sanctioned more brutally and unfairly than at any other time in history, Pakistan was forced to maintain a safe distance with Iran, so to speak, owing to dual pressure from the Arabs as well as Washington. *The new PTI government tried to break the*

¹¹ <https://www.dawn.com/news/1597158/uae-visa-issue>

¹² <https://dailytimes.com.pk/704500/warming-up-to-gulf-sheikhs/>

ice by offering to mediate between the two estranged Muslim blocs that dominate the Persian Gulf, but unfortunately that drive lost steam rather quickly. Hopefully in his latest dealings with the Arabs the foreign minister as well as the prime minister would have reminded them of our need to play ball with both camps. Good relations with Gulf countries are always very welcome, but we should do more to improve our ties and trade with Iran as well.

Pakistan-Saudi ties, Editorial, Dawn, 23 December¹³

The relationship between Pakistan and Saudi Arabia is indeed a strong one that goes back decades. While Pakistanis have a special regard for the kingdom due to its position as the custodian of Islam's holiest cities, political, economic and military ties are also robust. However, the relationship has experienced turbulence over the past few years, mainly because of changing geopolitical realities in the region, and the varying responses Islamabad and Riyadh have given to meeting these challenges. The most recent manifestation of unease in ties was the Saudi demand for timely repayment of part of a loan Pakistan had taken from the kingdom. Though the money was returned to the Saudis with China's help, in the past such demands were unthinkable from Riyadh. *The Saudis are wary of seeing the formation of a bloc including Pakistan, Malaysia, Iran and Turkey lest it challenge Arab 'leadership' of the Muslim world.* Also, Prime Minister Imran Khan has said he has been facing demands to recognise Israel, with speculation that our Arab friends may be nudging us to establish ties with Tel Aviv.

Performance record, Editorial, Dawn, 24 December¹⁴

For the past two years, the country has faced multiple crises. From an economy in a downward spiral and a near war with India to the Covid-19 pandemic and the wheat, sugar and power crises, the challenges have had real consequences for millions of people. For the prime minister to admit that his administration was getting acquainted with governing against the backdrop of at least four cabinet reshuffles with *one as recent as this month is an indictment of the leadership's grip on the country's affairs.* There is no doubt that the opposition have made governing more difficult for the current rulers but the challenge might have been less intimidating *had the government built less acrimonious connections with the opposition. It is also high time that disputes within the PTI, which have so often spilled into the public domain, were addressed by the prime minister.* Public admission of the government's

¹³ <https://www.dawn.com/news/1597341/pakistan-saudi-ties>

¹⁴ <https://www.dawn.com/news/1597545/performance-record>

teething problems are not going to inspire confidence, but stepping up to the challenge and turning in a good performance might do the trick.

Maulana Sheerani forms own faction of JUI, Kalbe Ali, Dawn, 30 December¹⁵

Former JUI-F leader Maulana Mohammad Sheerani Khan on Tuesday announced the formation of his own faction of the Jamiat Ulema-i-Islam to be called JUI-Pakistan and said the policy of the new party would be to isolate Maulana Fazlur Rehman through 'power of truth'. The expelled members of the JUI-F held a meeting at the residence of Maulana Sheerani in the Barakahu area of Islamabad along with their supporters. Hafiz Hussain Ahmed participated in the meeting via a video link. The participants alleged that Maulana Fazl had made the JUI his personal property and the party was being used as a platform for obtaining personal gains only. Briefing the media after the meeting, Maulana Sheerani claimed that he and his group had never been part of the JUI-F, but Jamiat Ulema-i-Islam. He accused Maulana Fazl of breaking the party and forming his own faction of JUI. He said the new group had been formed to "end chaos in Jamiat".

Show of hands? Editorial, Dawn, 30 December¹⁶

This newfound liking for a show of hands forces one to ask: why now? Is the PTI not confident of its numbers for the elections? Is it fearing desertions? Is it sensing its expected majority in the upper house could be dented due to the unpredictability of the secret ballot? *What makes this more worrisome is that the ruling party is opting for a legal solution to a purely parliamentary issue. If it really wants this change to happen, the preferred way is to take the opposition on board and allow for the matter to be debated as is the norm for issues that require to be voted on in the house.* There are pros and cons of the open ballot mode of elections, and in this case, they need to be discussed in detail both in the committees and in the house before a vote takes place. *The PTI should abstain from sneaking it in through a legal back door. It would not pass the smell test. In any case, this change should be part of a larger set of electoral reforms that need to be undertaken before the next general elections.* The ruling party should shun haste and choose prudence.

¹⁵ <https://www.dawn.com/news/1598635/maulana-sheerani-forms-own-faction-of-jui>

¹⁶ <https://www.dawn.com/news/1598638/show-of-hands>

ECONOMIC ISSUES

Growing deficit, Editorial, Dawn, 09 December¹⁷

Many are already predicting that the government may breach the overall fiscal deficit target of 7.5pc for the entire year by a big margin. *The extremely low tax revenue growth is mainly attributable to the government's consistent failure to reform its tax machinery and broaden the net through documentation of the economy.* The only other plausible reason for the listless tax revenue growth could be that the economy is not picking up as fast as the government claims in the Covid-19 period since July. With the increasing number of coronavirus infections in Pakistan and its trading partner countries dampening the hopes of any significant recovery, *chances are that the government will be forced to substantially reduce its tax target going forward, as well as cut development and other essential spending to achieve the deficit target.*

Provincial autonomy, Editorial, Dawn, 18 December¹⁸

The government's decision to "devise a mechanism to hold provinces accountable" for how they spend money they receive as their share from the federal tax pool under the NFC award is at best illogical and at worst lacks a constitutional basis. It will also be seen as an attempt by the centre to deflect public attention from its own failings in implementing reforms to boost tax revenues, cutting back on its own growing current expenditure and reducing its size despite the devolution of several major functions to the federating units after the passage of the landmark 18th Amendment. *The move is going to be interpreted by critics as a likely assault on hard-won provincial autonomy with a view to extending greater federal authority over the provinces, especially those ruled by the opposition parties.* Additionally, the provinces get the powers to spend their money the way they want to from their assemblies. Therefore, any plan "seeking to improve the mechanism for funds distribution" will require radical constitutional changes. *The provinces should stop looking towards the centre for cash outside the NFC mechanism every time they need resources to fix their own mess. The centre would do everyone a service by helping the provinces reform their budgets and devolve powers to the local government instead of trying to take from them to pay its own bills.*

FDI contraction in November, Editorial, Daily Times, 20 December¹⁹

¹⁷ <https://www.dawn.com/news/1594803/growing-deficit>

¹⁸ <https://www.dawn.com/news/1596395/provincial-autonomy>

The government seems surprised by the sudden contraction in Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) in the month of November, and rightly so. Even if monthly increases leading to October were rather small, the rising trend still gave the government something to write home about and the prime minister and his team could mention it every time they claimed that the economy had improved. Suddenly there was a net outflow in November to the tune of \$16 million, which has left many in Islamabad scratching their heads. And while the uptrend could well resume next month, considering how it is whipsawing, and the government will no doubt investigate the reasons for the outflow, a far more urgent question is what to do to stabilise reserves in a way that the economy is not always dependent on foreign loans or investments. When countries have to rely on other countries or lending institutions just for their day-to-day functioning, they compromise on both their international standing and their national prestige. *The FDI contraction in November, though in no manner a welcome development.*

SECURITY SITUATION

Police killings, Dawn, 09 December²⁰

To do away with the menace of extrajudicial killings carried out by law-enforcement officials in the country, it is essential that the institutions concerned the police hierarchy itself, the courts and the administration send out a clear message that there will be consequences for this crime. In this regard, while hearing an appeal on Monday, a Sindh High Court bench ordered the registration of a case against five policemen for the murder of two men in an alleged encounter in Karachi's Surjani Town area last year. *If fake encounters and the associated murders of innocent people are to be done away with, those men in uniform who resort to such criminal practices must be punished.* The message must be clear: those who engage in these methods will not be able to get away with the crime. Of course, this is easier said than done as police forces across the country have been known to boast 'encounter specialists' within their ranks who have earned considerable infamy for taking the law into their own hands. Along with strengthening the criminal justice system, the police hierarchy and courts must punish those law enforcers who indulge in extrajudicial killings.

Safeguarding the basis of our Islamic system, Gen (r) Mirza Aslam Beg, The Nation, 09 December²¹

¹⁹ <https://dailytimes.com.pk/703739/fdi-contraction-in-november/>

²⁰ <https://www.dawn.com/news/1594802/police-killings>

²¹ <https://nation.com.pk/09-Dec-2020/safeguarding-the-basis-of-our-islamic-system>

But the worst happened to Pakistan in 2007, when the US allocated a sum of US\$ 1.4 billion, for perception management of the Pakistani nation, as if we were the Native Americans to be disciplined. And shamelessly, our elected government allowed such funds to be dished-out direct to institutions, NGOs, individuals and for that matter, to anybody willing to achieve the purpose, *with the result that a mindset has now developed amongst our educated lot, who talk of liberalism and secularism and a social order, where the individual, and not God is supreme. This is the phenomenon which has created a dangerous social conflict in Pakistan*, while our democratic order is so deeply fractured. Therefore, the need of the hour is to seek social harmony based on a just democratic order that could *safeguard the 'basis of our Islamic system' resonating in harmony with Revolutionary Iran and Jihadi Afghanistan, to provide the much-needed strategic depth of security, to this part of the Islamic world, under attack.*

Violating human rights in the name of curbing corruption, Farhatullah Babar, *The Friday Times*, 11 December²²

Enforced disappearances, internment centers, the black holes of former tribal districts controlled by the military, murder with impunity of citizens in Chaman and tribal districts by security forces, media curbs, plight of minorities and their forced conversions are too well known to bear repetition. It is also known that the disbanding of National Commission on Human Rights (NCHR) and the National Commission on the Status of Women (NCSW) under the present government has closed the doors of redress mechanisms and further aggravated the grim situation of human rights in the country. As if these violations were not serious enough, another threat to human rights has emerged during the past two years: the threat of arbitrary and prolonged detentions, torture and harassment by the National Accountability Bureau (NAB) in the name of curbing corruption. A few weeks ago, Senator Sehar Kamran published an in-depth research report titled *Human Rights Violations and Misconduct by the National Accountability Bureau*. The report documents with appropriate references 12 cases of how people have been tortured and how their rights and human dignity was violated in NAB custody. There has been a suicide, attempted suicides and deaths believed to be caused by NAB's inhuman treatment. *The most glaring case quoted by Senator Sehar Kamran is that of the suicide by Brigadier (r) Asad Munir, and the note he left behind for the chief justice of Pakistan.*

²²<https://www.thefridaytimes.com/violating-human-rights-in-the-name-of-curbing-corruption/>

Journalists targeted, Editorial, Dawn, 15 December²³

Pakistan once again features on a list of countries with the largest number of journalists killed in the last 30 years is a damning indictment of a state that has failed to protect the country's media workers who fulfil an essential role in a democratic system. According to the **International Federation of Journalists**, that published a White Paper on Global Journalism, Pakistan is among the five nations considered the “most dangerous countries for practice of journalism in the world”. The paper notes that Pakistan has seen the deaths of 138 journalists since 1990 a grim statistic that bodes ill for freedom of press in the country. This report comes in the same year in which the Freedom Network recorded at least 91 cases of violence which includes murder, assault, censorship, threats and legal suits against journalists in Pakistan over the past year. *Sadly, even though fewer journalists are being murdered in Pakistan today, more of them are being intimidated, threatened, censored and punished than ever before a phenomenon that shows that both state and non-state actors are adopting new ways to silence media workers.* The reality under which journalists in Pakistan operate is highly disturbing and points to the rapidly shrinking space for criticism and independent thinking. Journalists are openly threatened and rebuked on social media often by accounts linked to the government.

Fencing of Gwadar, Rafiullah Kakar, Dawn, 26 December²⁴

Media reports about the federal government's plan to fence the port town of Gwadar for security reasons have sparked a controversy. Baloch political parties have termed it a conspiracy and vowed to resist it at all forums. This discontent is part of a wider societal skepticism towards Islamabad-led mega economic development projects in Balochistan, especially the multibillion-dollar CPEC. In response, the civilian and military elites maintain that CPEC will promote economic development and address major gaps in physical and energy infrastructure. *Further, the non-inclusive, extractive model of development pushed by the ruling elites in Islamabad has not only created resentment but also contributed to the de-legitimization of parliamentary politics and alienation of pro-federation Baloch political voices.* Baloch nationalist parties, which advocate non-violent parliamentary means for the resolution of their grievances, have traditionally been criticised by Baloch insurgents for giving legitimacy to what they dub as an ‘ineffective’ parliamentary system. The intensification of the militarized, exploitative approach to economic development has strengthened the former narrative

²³ <https://www.dawn.com/news/1595866/journalists-targeted>

²⁴ <https://www.dawn.com/news/1597883/fencing-of-gwadar>

and undermined non-violent, pro-federation political voices in the province. *A militarized approach to economic development inadvertently puts off prospective investors and foreign governments for whom the enhanced security measures are intended. The current political settlement in Balochistan is fragile and exclusionary in nature.* Fencing of Gwadar is likely to intensify feelings of deprivation and marginalization in Balochistan.

Harnai attack, Editorial, Dawn, 29 December²⁵

Where security issues are concerned, it is clear that Balochistan for years in the grip of separatist and sectarian terrorism is still not at peace. *While the separatist insurgency may be in a low phase, issues remain as militants retain their ability to stage attacks, specifically targeting symbols of the state.* On Saturday night, at least seven FC personnel were martyred in the province's Harnai district, with the military's media wing saying "anti-state forces" were responsible. *This has given rise to genuine grievances amongst the Baloch, which have been exploited by inimical actors. Numerous administrations have talked about 'packages' for Balochistan, but these have failed to improve the lives of the ordinary Baloch.* Therefore, to help eliminate violence from the province, a two-pronged strategy is needed. *Firstly*, the state must listen to moderate Baloch elements to help reach a political solution. Branding all those who fail to agree with the establishment's viewpoint as traitors is not a productive approach. *Secondly*, the Baloch must see development on the ground with schools, clinics, civic infrastructure in their towns and villages so that they can be assured that the state cares about them and their children.

What's up in Gwadar? Khurram Hussain, Dawn, 31 December²⁶

Sometimes around the first week of December, the residents of Gwadar woke up to find work taking place to build a large metal fence that would stretch from just north of the old airport and extend westward along a road known as the Balochistan Broadway Avenue. *In some places it is said that the fence is part of the Gwadar Smart Port Cities project. But nobody connected with that project has any inkling of it, neither the Makran Division bureaucracy, nor the GDA nor officials from relevant departments of the Balochistan government such as planning.* These are the people tasked with implementing the smart port cities project, and thus far none of them seem to know anything about this fence. I have long maintained that we in Pakistan don't have a clear idea of what exactly is being built in our country under the

²⁵ <https://www.dawn.com/news/1598436/harnai-attack>

²⁶ <https://www.dawn.com/news/1598832/whats-up-in-gwadar>

umbrella of CPEC. There are important gaps between what we are told is being built, and what we see coming up on the ground. *The Balochistan Bar Association has filed a legal challenge before the Balochistan High Court in Quetta around the fence, and the first hearing will be held today. Let's hope this legal action can shine a light on what is going on.*

PROVINCES & REGIONS

Gilgit Baltistan (GB)

PTI's Khalid elected chief minister of GB, Jamil Nagri, Dawn, 01 December²⁷

The Gilgit-Baltistan Assembly on Monday elected *Khalid Khurshid Khan of the Pakistan Tehreek-i-Insaf as chief minister and Pakistan Peoples Party's Amjad Hussain as leader of the opposition*. Mr Khan, who was fielded by the PTI-Majlis Wahdat-i-Muslimeen alliance, and Mr Hussain who was a candidate of the opposition parties JUI-F, PPP and PML-N, secured 22 and nine votes, respectively. Speaker Amjad Hussain Zaidi chaired the assembly session held to elect chief minister of Gilgit-Baltistan. Chief Minister Khan promised that every step would be taken to solve the issues being faced by GB people. He said health, education and other sectors would be solved on a priority basis. *The GB's merger with rest of Pakistan would be a historic move, he said, adding that the PTI was taking this step*. He said Prime Minister Imran Khan wanted to ensure promotion of tourism. He vowed that all resources would be utilized to boost tourism round the year instead of a few months.

Baba Jan's release, Editorial, Dawn, 01 December²⁸

After nearly 10 years of incarceration and an incredible struggle for justice, political activist Baba Jan, along with other activists, has been released from jail in Gilgit. It is clear today that Baba Jan was a political prisoner, for he would not have been released had he actually been a threat to the state. As his party, the AWP, said, Baba Jan and the other activists were "punished for speaking up for the affectees of the Attabad Lake disaster and for the rights of the working people of GB over their own resources". In any civilised society, his fight for a justified cause would have been welcomed. Instead, he was labelled a terrorist and left to languish in a jail cell. Although he is a free man today, his time in prison has come at a huge cost to him and his family, and indeed the wider community. Such activists provide an essential service to communities during crises. They also give people hope when the authorities

²⁷ <https://www.dawn.com/news/1593358/ptis-khalid-elected-chief-minister-of-gb>

²⁸ <https://www.dawn.com/news/1593371/baba-jans-release>

have forsaken them. To reward his struggle with a prison sentence was sheer cruelty. *The human rights ministry must look into Baba Jan's case and his unfair imprisonment. While nothing can compensate for the years he has lost due to a frivolous case, perhaps the human rights ministry can be persuaded to intervene and prevent such arrests of political activists on trumped-up charges.*

Tired but Happy: Baba Jan begins life outside prison, Umar Bacha, Voicepk.net, 02 December²⁹

Awami Workers Party leader Baba Jan was released on November 27 after spending around 9 years in prison over flimsy terror charges. He was the last of 14 activists to be released after massive protest in Hunza in early November. About his coming out of prison, *Baba Jan said that he would ensure that it would end up being a milestone and a sign of prosperity for Gilgit-Baltistan and that he would continue his peaceful activities and struggle for the rights of the people of GB.* "My friends and I were illegally detained in fake cases," he says. "We spent a huge chunk of our lives in prison. The case I was charged under could not have been real because I was in a *jirga* when the incident took place. We have always held peaceful protests and we never even lit a match stick. We believe in a non-violent struggle," he said. "We are against even torching tires in protest and are against those who take the law in their hands," He further said. *He said that the government and state authorities should not put innocent people behind bars as it only ends up in ruining lives.* He said there were all types of political wings, parties and their leaders should get together to talk with those in Islamabad and in view of the status of Gilgit Baltistan, the government should take measures in the best interest of the people. He added the federal government should now ensure provision of due rights of the Gilgit Baltistan.

URDU MEDIA

Danger for the government, Editorial, Ummat, 01 December³⁰

The government only capitulated to allow the PDM's Multan rally after the head of PDM threatened of violence. *The Mulan rally went according to the schedule and possible confrontation was avoided. According to a source, Maulana Fazlur Rehman had asked PDM workers to use sticks against police in case of a lathi-charge from the latter. When the admiration came to know*

²⁹ <http://voicepk.net/2020/12/01/tired-but-happy-baba-jan-begins-life-outside-prison/>

³⁰ <https://ummat.net/2020/12/01/news.php?p=idr1.gif>

that the PDM workers and JUI-F in particular had started collecting sticks, then it decided against stopping the rally. According to the source, the policy makers of the country played their role in avoiding the possible confrontation between the PDM workers and police. They argued that Pakistan could not afford any new challenge when already there are many to deal with. Some leaders in the government were also against taking on PDM. One leader of the PTI said that the only leaders of the party who were in support of using force against PDM have come to the party from outside. The Gilani family has said that the local administration was pressurized by foreign minister Shah Mehmood Qureshi to take action against Ali Musa Gilani (the son of the former Prime Minister Yousaf Raza Gillani). The issue was mainly because of the rivalry between the Qureshi-Gilani families. Finally the state authorities had to compromise. This would embolden the leaders of PDM further in the coming days.

China-Pak defence cooperation, Editorial, *Nawa-i-Waqt*, 02 December³¹

China and Pakistan have signed a MoU on defence cooperation (1 December). The agreement was signed during the visit of Chinese Defence Minister Gen Wei Fenghe to Pakistan. *China-Pakistan relations are important in every aspect, especially at a time when India is buying all kinds of sophisticated weapons. The main target of India remains Pakistan. India is challenging China and Pakistan together. It has started "occupying" disputed areas. This policy of India has brought China and Pakistan closer.* During his visit, the Chinese Defence Minister praised Pakistan's efforts for regional stability and for providing security to CPEC. Army Chief Gen Qamar Bajwa thanked China for its support to Pakistan. *Given India's aggressive behavior, Pakistan needs to make its defence system invincible within the allotted resources. China is helping to make Pakistan invincible.* The visit of the Chinese defence minister was a significant one in that context.

Political extremism in Pakistan, Qayyum Nizami, *Nawa-i-Waqt*, 02 December³²

Pakistan is witnessing a rise in political extremism. *Earlier only religious groups were extremist; slowly political parties have also become extremists. The kind of politics being done in the country has created a civil war like situation.* The political parties of the country are exposing the people to the coronavirus rather than helping in curbing the disease. In the past, historians, patriots and intellectuals would say that Pakistan would not change until and unless the British system changes in the country. *Crisis, differences, violence and extremism are inherent in the British political system. There is no space*

³¹ <https://www.nawaiwaqt.com.pk/E-Paper/lahore/2020-12-02/page-8/detail-2>

³² <https://www.nawaiwaqt.com.pk/E-Paper/lahore/2020-12-02/page-8/detail-7>

for honest and free and fair politics under the system. If Pakistan was re-configured according to the visions of Muhammad Ali Jinnah and Allama Iqbal, the country would not have been facing the religious and political extremism. The biggest reason for political stability in Pakistan is democracy. The system needs to be appropriated according to the social and Islamic principles. Unless and until Pakistan brings democracy and politics under the rule of the constitution and law, there would not be a stable state nor an end to religious and political extremism. The current situation demands that Pakistan appropriates the ideas and vision of Jinnah and Iqbal to stabilize the country.

Political crisis needs a solution, Editorial, Jang, 07 December³³

The opposition continues to hold rallies under the 11-party alliance of People's Democratic Movement (PDM) against the PTI led government. Next rally is scheduled in Lahore and then a "long march" would be started towards Islamabad. *On the other hand, Prime Minister Imran Khan has said that the opposition leaders were holding rallies so that they could get NRO. But they would never get it, he has cleared.* PDM leaders have said that the next plan would be decided after the Lahore rally on Tuesday. It is said that the decision about a long march to Islamabad and converting it into a dharna would be taken in the meeting. *The current political crisis is causing uncertainty at the national level. At a time when the country is facing many internal and external challenges, national unity should be the priority. Unfortunately, the rule of one and half years of the current government has been dividing and full of crisis at the national level.* Prime Minister Imran Khan has been calling the opposition leaders as robbers, looters and thieves from the first day. While the opposition leaders are criticizing the government on its failure to stabilize the economy and its failure on the Kashmir cause. They demand that every institution in the country should work under the constitution. The powerful institution (the army) should not meddle in politics and the people present in the government should also be held accountable by NAB. *It should be better for the government that instead of repeating that the opposition leaders want NRO hold a grand, national dialogue to resolve the issues.* There is no other way to come out of the ongoing crisis in the country.

³³https://jang.com.pk/news/854755?_ga=2.63357800.636448578.1607319579-835994399.1598849708

Conspiracy and suspicion, Sohail Warraich, Jang, 08 December³⁴

When there is no rule of law in a country, conspiracies and suspicions become normal. Everyone doubts the other. *The Prime Minister has no doubt that the opposition is conspiring against him. The opposition thinks that the government is conspiring to end its influence. The establishment suspects both the government and the opposition. It doubts the opposition for that the latter wants to create a conflict between the government and the establishment to separate and weaken them. It doubts the government because the latter is putting the establishment and the opposition against each other and securing itself. Maryam Nawaz has been informed that at the higher level her assassination is being planned.* She thinks that she might be killed in an air accident. If Maryam thinks like that, it is appropriate in the current environment when there are suspicions all around. In a place where there is no honesty and only cruelty, deaths like that of Khadim Rizvi, Judge Arshad Malik and Justice Waqar Ahmed Seth also become suspicious. Even the ambulance that was carrying the Quaid Muhammad Ali Jinnah was stopped on the road for hours without a replacement coming to carry him to a hospital. Even in such an environment it is the responsibility of the state that if Maryam Nawaz is under threat, to protect her. *The best way to show how just and democratic a state is to protect the rights of minorities and opposition.* Maryam Nawaz's family is in London; her cousin brother and uncle are in jail. She is fighting her battle alone. If she is threatened to – or really she will – be killed is a serious matter.

Hold a dialogue, Editorial, Daily Dunya, 15 December³⁵

PDM leadership has signaled that they may stop their anti-government movement till February 2021 because of the cold weather. *This provides an opportunity to both the government and the opposition to find a political way out to the problem. Only through political dialogue can Pakistan strengthen the democratic system in the country.* The condition for that is that both the groups should come on the negotiation table with good intentions. The trend would be set by the conditions put for the talks. If these are according to the constitution, no one should have any problem with them. *For that the government and opposition need to bring down the aggressive tone with which they have been speaking against each other to create an environment of trust in which talks would be possible.* The opposition also needs to revisit its agenda. So far it has not any constructive agenda on strengthening

³⁴https://jang.com.pk/news/855188?_ga=2.58706029.636448578.1607319579-835994399.1598849708

³⁵ https://e.dunya.com.pk/detail.php?date=2020-12-15&edition=LHR&id=5438800_38581714

democracy in the country. It needs to identify and highlight the issues that the country is facing. Economy can be one such issue on which the government can be asked what plans it has to address the problem. One other issue can be the Coronavirus pandemic. *Highlighting these issues is not only the responsibility of the opposition. It would also be beneficial for their politics: people in the country want to know which party has a solution to their problems.* If the opposition plays that role what better can they expect. The government needs to offer genuine talks and avoid any further political crisis in the country. To start with, it should invite the opposition for talks.

Ulemma's also in favour of Israel? Editorial, Ummat, 22 December³⁶

The debate on whether to establish diplomatic ties with Israel, after many Muslim countries have recognized the Zionist state, has started in Pakistan. *Pros and cons of the decision of recognizing Israel are being discussed. It is being implied that recognizing Israel would resolve all the problems of Pakistan.* The point of liberals and atheists has that Israel has occupied the land of Palestinians and it was an Arab issue. Pakistan's opposition has been uncalled for. Now they say when the Arab countries are recognizing Israel, what is wrong with Pakistan recognizing it? *Even "ulema" have started detailing benefits of recognizing Israel "senior leader of JUI-F and the former chairman of the Council of Islamic Ideology (CII), Maulana Muhammad Khan Sherani said in an interview that Israel should be recognized. He said that on the East should be Palestinian state and on the West the Israeli state. He said Palestine was the mandate of the Ottoman Empire and Turkey has accepted Israel. Even the Arabs also have recognized Israel. Maulana Sherani said that Palestine is not a religious issue but a state issue and it should be resolved without war.* He also said many things about his party. Maulana Sherani gave the same argument for recognizing Israel as liberals. Pakistan's position on Israel has been clear right from Jinnah's statement in 1940 that he would not accept any conspiracy against the Palestinians. However, the liberals started arguing for recognizing Israel when Jinnah was alive. *After the meeting between George Bush and Pervez Musharraf in June 2003, the talks about establishing diplomatic ties were started. A survey was done after the meeting which showed that a good number of Pakistanis were in favour of recognizing Israel. Subsequently, a report was prepared which detailed how the relations with Israel would benefit Pakistan economically, politically and militarily.* Despite the fact the Imran Khan led government has clearly said that it would not recognize Israel until a peace deal with the Palestinians, doubts remain.

³⁶ <https://ummat.net/2020/12/22/news.php?p=idr1.gif>

PDM and PPP differ, Saleem Safi, Jang, 23 December³⁷

Asif Ali Zardari is considered a shrewd politician like Maulana Fazlur Rehman. *Zardari has mostly preferred a democratic approach and has not targeted his opponents and media when in power. Zardari also owns the credit for starting CPEC and moving Pakistan closer to China and Russia and away from the US. He also managed the relations with the establishment better than Nawaz Sharif and Imran Khan.* It was once said that one Zardari is dominating all others. For some time, however, Zardari has been playing strange politics: may be because of the fear of possible cases that may be pursued against him or his fear of losing the government in Sindh or because of Nawaz's betrayal. *It seems that Zardari is himself destroying PPP. He is also limiting the prospects of Bilawal's future politics. Most of the secrets dealing with the powerful elements are known to him, his sister Faryal Talpur, Bilawal and sometimes to Farooq Naik. Other leaders of the party have no idea what is going on.* Bilawal tried hard to show himself as the heir of Bhutto and Benazir. But Zardari changed him to Bilawal Zardari as well. Zardari also played politics in the Senate elections by allying with the establishment. *He helped to make Sadiq Sanjrani the chairman of the Senate. Also he helped PTI to make its candidate the president, angering Maulana Fazlur Rehman. On the one hand, Bilawal Bhutto kept calling Imran Khan a selected Prime Minister. On the other hand PPP would cooperate with PTI government on every issue and sabotage any chances of forging unity in the opposition.* For the first year, no single decision of PPP was of an opposition. Despite that, it was not left alone by the PTI led government. *The government and its backers started to woo the opposition parties. All rejected such moves but PPP secretly tried to reach a consensus. It started to take some steps to show its loyalty. First Bilawal gave some surprising statements in a BBC interview which hit PDM hard. Then PPP tried that PDM should not go ahead with the decision to resign and plan the Islamabad dharna. It tried to delay the date for resignations. It meanwhile asked for holding by-election for the vacant states.* Its schedule for the PDM rallies looks less like protests and more an election campaign.

Helplessness of Pakistan's politics, Sohail Warraich, Jang, 29 December³⁸

³⁷https://jang.com.pk/news/861977?_ga=2.99775070.1933866524.1608530334-835994399.1598849708

³⁸https://jang.com.pk/news/864599?_ga=2.89836882.890772453.1609133251-835994399.1598849708

The nature of politics in Pakistan is strange: everyone is helpless. *The government is helpless to deliver. The opposition is helpless to dethrone the government. The third partner (the establishment) appears helpless in dictating the terms to the government. The government does not seem to be doing anything. The opposition does not seem to make any change. The referee (the establishment) seems to keep advising the government but neither in Punjab nor the federal level changes are happening. The system in Pakistan is created as such that if something happens to the government, the third party (the establishment) would be affected. That is why a Grand National dialogue is being proposed along with two other things: the demand for resignation of the Prime Minister would not be accepted and the elections would not be held before their due time.* Given the experience of the opposition, PML-N and PPP in particular, it is unlikely to commit any mistake. All the parties would try to use the moment to their benefit and to inflict damage on the government. In regard to the idea of resigning from the National Assembly, it would be under debate whether that should happen before the march to Islamabad or after that. On the other hand, the government would try to survive the march and hold the Senate elections before the march. The government thinks that after the elections it would have a majority in the Senate and subsequently there would be no big political event for the next two years. *Thus the government and the opposition are both fighting for the survival and ending of the system. The opposition thinks that the system would not work for five years. The government thinks that it would be able to make it work for five years.* That is why the governor of Punjab, Chaudhry Mohammad Sarwar has selected a constituency for himself to fight elections in Sahiwal district.

PPP's strategy, Editorial, Jang, 31 December³⁹

Given the statements of Bilawal Bhutto after the PPP's Central Committee meeting, it appears that the party has kept all options open to meet its goals. *The party has decided to seek the resignation of its 31 parliament members. At the same time, it also has decided to take part in the coming by elections and the Senate elections. It seems that PPP agrees with the PDM agenda on many issues but it also wants to face the challenges in the future. It appeared that Bilawal would try to convince the PDM allies to participate in the Senate elections.* He said that we "would act according to the PDM's action plan". Bilawal Bhutto says that the Prime Minister would have to go. How would that happen, he does not share. *He says that every possible political way would be tried to send Imran Khan packing, including the*

³⁹https://jang.com.pk/news/865419?_ga=2.9780534.225419029.1609396996-835994399.1598849708

Senate elections. It appeared from Bilawal's press briefing that the party has realized that sometimes leaving the space free causes damage. PPP has a long experience to deal with such situations in the past. Other parties should think over it. All the same, the fact of the matter is that whatever the issues, the political forces should not create a situation that threatens the system. One way to resolve the differences is dialogues. On that the government needs to be proactive.

ELECTRONIC MEDIA

Capital Talk with Hamid Mir, Ishaq Dar' interview shown on TV channels despite of the prohibition order by PEMRA on broadcast of interviews of proclaimed absconders? *Geo News*, 02 December⁴⁰

The host informed that the PTI government seems very happy with the interview of the ex-finance minister and PML-N leader Ishaq Dar to BBC and its leaders including PM Imran Khan are referring to the interview as a depiction of the leader and PML-N's past wrong doings and financial theft. Almost all the TV channels are showing the clip of the interview. **Hamid Mir asks, is the ban on broadcast of interviews of proclaimed offenders/absconders referred to in the prohibition order by PEMRA on 01 October 2020 now null and void? Do the government think that this interview has undone the benefits of the PDM movement by opposition? Guests:** Shibli Faraz, Federal Information Minister & Muhammad Zubair, Senior leader PML-N. **Shibli Faraz** pointed out that he has exposed himself through this interview and it has made of job easier, now it is there for the whole world to see. *As Finance Minister Ishaq Dar was involved in money laundering and played a key role in increasing the wealth and property of the Nawaz family.* About the PEMRA order the Minister tried to dodge the question by saying the interview was conducted by a foreign media and not any Pakistani media channel, they were just broadcasting it. *He argued that Ishaq Dar was defaming Pakistan by talking about human rights violation in his own country on a foreign channel.* **Muhammad Zubair argued that Multan Jalsa was one of the best protests of PDM and the PTI government and its leaders like Shibli Faraz has played a vital role in making it successful.** About the interview of Ishaq Dar he argued that the questions were indeed hard and the leader answered them but the difference is that had it been in Pakistan, knowing that the anchor could be kidnapped like Matiullah Jan, he would have never asked those questions. *He agreed that the interview is discussed more than the Multan Jalsa and*

⁴⁰ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9zBjSPsADhU>

that the timing was not so good. He asked if Ishaq Dar talks about economy on any channel will the national TV's in Pakistan broadcast it?

PM Imran Khan's Journey towards Allah Tala & Akirat! Interview with Hamza Ali Abbasi, HUM News, 05 December⁴¹

It is now a known fact that PM Imran has been talking about transforming Pakistan into a *riyaste-e-Madina* inspired and based on the tenets of Islam & life of Prophet Muhammad (SAW). In this episode Imran talks about his spiritual journey and why *Allah and Akirat (day of judgement)* are the most important things for Pakistan. **Q: We have seen a great change in your approach to Islam and your speeches are reflective of how you are moving towards Allah and dean. At what point this change started?** **A:** In the beginning when I went to England I use to think that both Allah and Akirat are outdated concepts as it was not fashionable there but having seen the west and Pakistan after some time *I realized that the best thing about Pakistan is the believe of its people in Allah and Akirat and its family system (our family system give protection to an individual on the verge of collapse as does the welfare system in the west)*. What happened in the western culture is that they normalized the crimes like drugs (Sex, drugs and rock and roll) and therefore the youth got attracted to this where as in Quran it's said that we should hide the sins so that it does not get normalized. So in order for the society to copy the west we need to look into tenets of Islam. **Q: You have talked about one education system in Pakistan, i.e. mainstreaming the madrassa education system. Would it be possible in your tenure as PM?** **A:** *There are currently three tire system in the education system of Pakistan, English medium, Urdu medium and Deani Madrassa system and all three have a different approach* altogether and therefore there is a need for one education system. I have done a research and read books on Islam and got impressed from the life of prophet Mohammad (SAW) life. Happiness comes from Allah and walking on his teachings and pleasure comes from worldly things like drugs etc. Showkat Khanum hospital opened by me gave me internal happiness at the same time Cricket was pleasure for me. Prophet is our role model and we should teach the youth about his life, therefore in the effort of one education system we have kept one chapter on Seeert-ul-Nabi (life of Prophet) for class 8th, 9th and 10th students in all Schools and it will be implemented by next year. Also there will be PhD classes on Seert-ul-Nabi in Universities, there is one university and another we are *building Al Qadir University which will be dedicated on research on life of Prophet and Sufism. In Madrassas we are planning to introduce other subjects in an effort to mainstream them.*

⁴¹ : https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_k3LyXJPjMI

View Point, Lahore Jalsa: Hit or Flop, GNN, 13 December⁴²

Pakistan Democratic Movement (PDM) held its much awaited final showdown at *Lahore's Minar-e-Pakistan on Sunday as the 'first phase' of its anti-government campaign, under the 11-party alliance came to an end.* The public meeting was held despite the PDM leaders being issued security threat alerts as well as being requested by the government to not hold public gatherings as the second Covid-19 wave intensified in the country. PML-N supremo Nawaz Sharif also addressed the rally via video-link from London and underlined *the country can never prosper without a change in system and under "hijacked democracy" and that "time has come to get freedom from this selected set-up,"* PDM convener Fazl Ur Rehman announced that opposition parties *will march on Islamabad by the end of January or in the start of February, 2021.* "We will move towards Islamabad with resignations in hand and will not stop until the end of this illegitimate government." **In this episode the host Samina Pasha asks the analysts Zafar Hilaly and Imran Yaqub Khan if the PDM Lahore Jalsa was flop or hit.** *Zafar Hilaly* argued that despite of all the preparations in the run to the main Lahore Jalsa, the PDM had a pathetic show at Minar -e-Pakistan and PML-N was not able to pull crowd in its stronghold Punjab. He argued that both Bilawal Bhutto and Maryam Nawaz are inexperienced and that Maryam raised the hopes of the people for Lahore Jalsa but could not deliver. *Imran Yaqub Khan* agreed that the Lahore Jalsa was not as big as expected and turned out to be similar to other PDM routine Jalsa's. Actually the PML-N voters are not the agitating types who will come out on roads for protests like PTI supporters and therefore the less crowd for Lahore Jalsa. **But he underlined that if Maryam Nawaz did not organise the corner Jalsa's in and around Punjab the turnout at the final Lahore Jalsa would have been lesser.** He said the absence of Hamza Shehbaz was felt in the rally and if he was not in jail he would have mobilized a bigger crowd for the protest. *Firdous Ashiq Awan* on government behalf argued that we will give a free hand to the PDM and leave the judgment to the public to expose them. This was seen in the Lahore Jalsa how public did not join the protest. The Government will not engage the PDM for NRO or for their ulterior motives.

⁴² <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RkN3vvod6m4>

11th Hour with Waseem Badami, PDM will not give resignations unless there is assurance of toppling of PTI government, ARYNews, 23 December⁴³

The host underlined *that the antigovernment protests started in December 2019 as Azadi March in which it was claimed that PTI government will fall has now stretched to December 2020*. Maryam Nawaz and Bilawal Bhutto during the GB elections claimed that the PTI government has to pack and leave by 31 January 2021. *Now senior leader of the PML-N Rana Sanaullah has pointed out that there is a section of PDM that thinks January-February 2021 is not suitable for protests, therefore after the long March to Islamabad in March/April 2021 if the PTI government does not leave then another round of anti-government protests should be started till October 2021*. Waseem Badami pointed out that PDM has started the third phase of protest with Mardan where Bilawal Bhutto was missing next Jalsa will be organised by PPP in Larkana on 27 December and there is no clarity if JUI-F will take part in the event. **He asked are all the opposition leaders in the PDM on same page, why there is so much confusion in the timeline.** **Guests:** Rashid Mohammad Sumro, JUIF; Moeed Pirzada Suhail Wadich & Rauf Klasra, Senior anchor and analysts. **Rashid Mohammad Sumro** pointed out that the JUI-F has the same stand from the day of elections on 25 July 2018 against the PTI government and now after two years all the opposition parties agrees to our views. Maulana Fazl Ur Rehman started the Azadi march against the government to Islamabad in 2019 with only JUI-F's support but now the PDM is with us and ready to march to Islamabad to topple the selected government of Imran Khan. Talking about the absence of Bilawal Bhutto in Mardan rally he underlined that although he was no there but other PPP leaders took part in the rally *and about the 27 December rally in Larkana it is not a PDM rally but organised by PPP for celebrating the death anniversary of late Benazir Bhutto. PPP has invited the PDM to be part of the event and it depends on the parties and leaders if they want to attend*. It is still not clear if Maulana Fazl Ur Rehman will take part in the event or not and JUI-F will decide if to send the workers or not. **Suhail Wadich** pointed out that the PDM's main is to gain from the protests by toppling the PTI government and therefore will not take any step that will not be in their favour. *In other words they will not resign unless there is assurance that by taking that step the government will topple*. Resignations are only given when the next step is general elections not bi-elections and right now the environment is not rip for resignations and therefore the PDM has to decide about this after the long march to Islamabad. **Moeed Pirzada** pointed out that he agrees with Suhail Wadich that the PDM is right now testing the waters if they will gain or lose. The comment by Rana Sana Ullah to a TV channel is important where he also pointed out that the

⁴³ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=N4IyhtFv098>

PDM will resign only in case when the next step is elections. They are waiting for the time when law and order break and the establishment comes in and talks or is forced to talk to the PDM. *Now the PDM is trying to prove that they can pressurize the PTI government by starting another round of protests.* Rauf Klasra pointed out that the PML-N and PPP leaders have reached a point of no return with the army after attacking the establishment left, right and center. The opposition knows that after all these there can't be any deal with the secret agencies or army and no chance of forming an environment for resignation.

Analysis with Saleem Safi, Internal differences within JUI-F, 26 December⁴⁴

Reports of internal differences within JUI-F came as a major blow to the party when after Maulana Sherani, three more prominent leaders came out in support of Sherani in criticism of its head Maulana Fazl Ur Rehman. The JUI-F have decided to flush them out of JUI-F. Safi in this episode analyse *will the defection and criticism result in a big blow for the party, especially at this point when Fazl Ur Rehman is leading the PDM which is in the final stage of antigovernment protests. Also will these ex-JUI-F leaders be able to form a new religious party in opposition to JUI-F?* Saleem Safi underlined that off course this will be a big blow to the JUI-F and Fazl Ur Rehman that these leaders choose to open their mouth and criticise the party and its leaders at this point of time. But they will not be able to form a new party because they all belong to different provinces and have had internal differences within and to top it all none of them have big religious madrassa (schools) and a support system of the religious students as the JUI-F and Maulana Fazl Rehman does. Also Safi pointed *out that three out of the four leaders are not keeping well due to age factor so they cannot do much and the truth is that these leaders who are now calling Fazl Ur Rehman selected were not happy after the party elections and nominations in 2019. Why did not they said anything in public that time, and why they choose to speak now raises many questions?* From this it can be derived that these ex leaders are ceasing the opportunity to attack Fazl Ur Rehman when a momentum is built against him for attacking the establishment and the government. Also Safi added that among the PDM, the JUI-F and its head are most at the receiving end of the government and army as they consider him and its party as the real threat. The biggest Mistake made by Maulana Sherani in the Press conference against JUI-F chief is that he talked 'Pakistan's recognition of Israel'. *It is an irony that a party like JUI-F whose roots are based in criticism of Israel, that an ex JUI-F leader is talking in favour of Israel.* Therefore these leaders cannot become any threat to Maulana as far as JUI-F is concerned.

⁴⁴ https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aEP_wskSUpY

BOMBINGS, SHOOTINGS AND DISAPPEARANCES

(Select incidents culled out from the Pakistan media)

Place	Date	Description	Killed	Injured
Gilgit Baltistan (GB)				
Minimarg ⁴⁵	28/12/2020	Army helicopter carrying martyr's body crashes in GB; 4 martyred	04	00
Punjab				
Rawalpindi ⁴⁶	13/12/2020	One killed, eight injured in Rawalpindi explosion	01	08
Rawalpindi ⁴⁷	13/12/2020	At least 25 injured in Rawalpindi's Ganj Mandi blast	00	25
Balochistan				

⁴⁵ <https://dailytimes.com.pk/706913/army-helicopter-carrying-martyrs-body-crashes-in-gb-4-martyred/>

⁴⁶ <https://tribune.com.pk/story/2274630/one-killed-eight-injured-in-rawalpindi-explosion>

⁴⁷ <https://tribune.com.pk/story/2275802/at-least-25-injured-in-rawalpindis-ganj-mandi-blast>

Harnai ⁴⁸	27/12/2020	7 soldiers martyred in terrorist 'fire raid' on FC post in Balochistan's Harnai: ISPR	07	00
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⁴⁸ <https://www.dawn.com/news/1598158/7-soldiers-martyred-in-terrorist-fire-raid-on-fc-post-in-balochistans-harnai-ispr>