

December 2022

PAKISTAN NEWS DIGEST

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



Prepared by

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MANOHAR PARRIKAR INSTITUTE FOR
DEFENCE STUDIES AND ANALYSES

मनोहर पर्रिकर रक्षा अध्ययन एवं विश्लेषण संस्थान

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POLITICAL DEVELOPMENTS

Elite politics, Maleeha Lodhi, *Dawn*, 05 December¹

Unremitting political confrontations have left the country exhausted and emaciated. Political tensions show no sign of abating. Political leaders often claim the next round of battle will be decisive but their war rages on. The war paradigm guides their political behaviour. Opponents are seen as enemies, not competitors. Politics is about vanquishing the enemy and eliminating them from the political scene in a terminal conflict. ... *These endless political feuds opened space for the military's manipulation of politics and frequent return to the political stage. There was another cost to the country. The lack of a stable and predictable environment proved a huge hurdle to solving the country's daunting problems, which were either left to fester or met by imprudent short-term policy responses. Pakistan's economic troubles are in no small measure a consequence of this.* ... The availability of external resources as a result of Pakistan's foreign policy alignments during the Cold War and beyond created a habit of dependence on 'outside help'. This habit urged successive governments representing rural and urban elites to avoid economic reform, mobilize adequate revenue or tax its network of influential supporters. This intra-elite conflict is hardly obscured by the highfalutin rhetoric which it is wrapped in. It's most troubling aspect is that it offers no escape from the quagmire the country is trapped in of dysfunctional politics, mounting governance challenges, visionless economic management and crumbling public faith in state institutions.

PTI's plans, Editorial, *The News*, 14 December²

If Punjab's elections do take place though, the PTI believes it will be able to get a simple majority in Punjab, if not a two-thirds majority. This would go in favour of the PTI at the centre even if the general elections were to be held later in 2023. With Punjab in its hands, the PTI would be in a far better position for elections on Punjab's National Assembly seats. Per political analysts, the PTI could be thinking that if general elections were to take place on time in all four provinces and on National Assembly seats, the party may have lost its momentum by then. That, and with cases pending against Imran, the party is banking on its popularity wave to 'secure' Punjab right away. This would be a practical enough plan if it weren't for Imran continuing to ask the establishment – past and present – to ensure early elections. Does the PTI not have faith in the people? The party and its leader have continued to drag in the institutions in what is a political matter. *The only way forward*

¹ <https://www.dawn.com/news/1724746>

² <https://www.thenews.com.pk/print/1019762-pti-s-plans>

should be to be part of the political process. It is believed that from within the PTI too there are those who are pushing for talks but Imran has stuck to his decision to not sit in parliament or talk to the PDM government. If the PTI dissolves the Punjab Assembly, it is clear that for Imran Khan the best way forward even now is an aggressive posture and an attempt to arm twist the political and any other establishment into early elections. That will likely lead to just more chaos and a derailment of the democratic process. No one in the political realm wins in that case – not even Imran Khan.

Pakistan's Afghan dilemma, Kamran Yusuf, *The Express Tribune*, 19 December³

After 2018 there had been fewer terrorist attacks in Pakistan. Life started returning to normalcy. One evidence of that was the return of international cricket to Pakistan. *The Afghan Taliban regime has not only failed to address Pakistan's concerns on TTP but its border forces are now targeting civilians in Pakistan.* Last week, Afghan border security forces twice fired at civilians across the Chaman-Spin Boldak border using heaving weapons. At least 19 civilians were killed in those incidents. The border clashes were triggered after Pakistani authorities tried to repair the fence along the border. Like previous governments, the Afghan Taliban too are opposed to Pakistan fencing the 2600km long border. This shows once again that Pakistan clearly misunderstood the Afghan Taliban or had unrealistic expectations from them. Pakistan has so far showed restraint and opted to downplay the recent incidents though after criticism it has summoned the Afghan diplomat to convey a strong protest. But the response from Pakistan is still very guarded. The reason Pakistan is acting cautiously is that it doesn't want any rupture in the ties with the Afghan Taliban. *Despite setbacks Pakistani decision-makers feel the country has to stay engaged with the Afghan Taliban. For them the Afghan Taliban are still the best bet. But it is feared that the situation will only get worse.*

Punjab puzzle, Editorial, *The Express Tribune*, 22 December⁴

Political heat in Punjab has pushed back the chillness of weather. The fate of not only the Punjab Assembly hangs in balance but also the chief minister ship of Perviz Elahi. There is a serious constitutional row, and confusion reigns supreme. The Punjab Governor's order to seek a vote of confidence, coupled with the opposition legislators' separate no-trust motion against Elahi, and has complicated the mosaic of governance. The stance from the Speaker that the Governor's orders are "illegal and against the provisions of the Constitution" have pitched the decorum for a plausible intervention. With the Federation

³ <https://tribune.com.pk/story/2391710/pakistans-afghan-dilemma>

⁴ <https://tribune.com.pk/story/2392200/punjab-puzzle>

mulling Governor's rule, it seems a possible de-notification of the chief executive will plunge the province in utter chaos and pestering instability. The good point, however, is that both the warring parties are holding their horses. Hectic political activity is unnerving the already fragile situation, and it surely will have a negative impact. The PDM has, nonetheless, found a rare chance to install their government in Punjab if a couple of ruling dispensation MPAs could be opted out of their vote, in case it is conducted on the floor of the house. *Likewise, extreme positions call for sealing the CM House, a move that would land with the court of law. The PTI's tapping on the door of the Presidency is also in sight.*

ECONOMIC ISSUES

Dollar outflow, Editorial, *Dawn*, 28 December⁵

There has been a consistent, significant outflow of dollars from Pakistan to Afghanistan ever since the US froze the war-ravaged country's reserves following the Taliban takeover in summer last year. Until then, Afghanistan had been a notable exporter of dollars poured into its economy by the US to Pakistan for years. Thus, the reversal of Afghan fortunes has had a considerable impact on Pakistan's weakening external sector, as stressed by the Exchange Companies Association of Pakistan on Monday. The illegitimate dollar outflow is one of the many factors that have brought Pakistan's exchange rate under immense pressure in recent months and contributed to market dislocation, resulting in different exchange rates in the interbank and open markets. There are no two opinions on the need to plug the illegitimate dollar flows from the country to Afghanistan. However, the dollar outflow is not restricted to Afghanistan, as shown by the arrest of three Gulf-bound passengers and the recovery of \$60,000 from them. Pakistan needs to strengthen its controls at its land borders and ports to ward off the dollar's flight from the country, be it in any direction.

It's not just about default or not, Editorial, *The Express Tribune*, 30 December⁶

Pakistan's economy is in dire straits. There are no two opinions that it is stagnated, and is on the verge of a formal default. The Finance Minister thinks otherwise, though. Ishaq Dar has assured the investors and traders, while talking to bourses dealers last Wednesday that Pakistan will never default, and advised the businessmen not to lend an ear to rumour-mongers. Though the finance wizard tried to put up some decent

⁵ <https://www.dawn.com/news/1728639/dollar-outflow>

⁶ <https://tribune.com.pk/story/2393315/its-not-just-about-default-or-not>

explanations by hiding behind exigency, his body language was not supportive of his claims. He was visibly disturbed and seemed concerned as the economy is not performing well and hangs at the cliff of balance-of-payments dilemma. The point is that there is a serious economic crisis, and the figures at hand paint a dismal picture in fact threatening. Foreign exchange reserves have slumped to something around \$6 billion, and the canvas of remittances from abroad has shrunk remarkably, as compared to the corresponding period last year. Foreign direct investment, while already meager, have declined by half in the first five months of the ongoing fiscal year; and exports figures too are not something to write home about, having suffered a 3.8% fall so far this fiscal year. While banks are not in a position to open new letters of credit (LCs) owing to dipping forex reserves, necessary imports are perishing by languishing at sea ports. This pins at a technical default, at least, on the domestic side. But Dar may be right in saying that the geostrategic scope of the country may prevent it from defaulting on the sovereign side of its commitments, but the flak is evident as credit rating agencies have posted the country in negative benchmarks.

Economy in 2022, Editorial, *The News*, 30 December⁷

Pakistan started the year 2022 amid talk of default, slogged through the mid-year escaping default by a hair's breadth and the third quarter averting default with help from the IMF, and is now closing the year amid renewed chatter about imminent default. One significant departure from last December is that the IMF's Extended Fund Facility (EFF) was on a hiatus back then, but is on track now. Or is it? The markets are not sure, regardless of what Finance Minister Ishaq Dar has to say. To be sure, there are other differences between then and now. Since December 31, 2021, the rupee has slid from Rs176 to Rs226 to a dollar; and per-litre pump price of petrol has soared from Rs141 to Rs214, and of diesel from Rs131 to Rs227. *And yet, Finance Minister Dar insists the situation is tough but not desperate. But now that Dar is at the helm of the economy, it is up to him to improvise and make the most of a bad situation.* He must know that inflation has almost doubled from around 12 per cent last December to nearly 24 per cent now, likely becoming entrenched so that it may take until next December to unwind. Going by conventional wisdom, mending fences with the IMF is pretty much Pakistan's only shortcut to pacifying the markets and making some headway towards stabilization in short order. But Dar has successfully challenged conventional wisdom in the past. If he can dream up an outside-the-box solution to Pakistan's external financing conundrum in a hurry, the economy that was on track back in 2017 to generate the world's 18th largest GDP by 2023 may at least rise to its feet that year against all odds, kicking the shackles of IMF programmes.

⁷ <https://www.thenews.com.pk/print/1025163-economy-in-2022>

SECURITY SITUATION

Exterminate terrorism, Editorial, *The Express Tribune*, 08 December⁸

There shall be no appeasement to terror. The resolute words came from Army Chief General Asim Munir, as he visited the forward positions on the western front in the tribal areas. The reaffirmation that the military would not tolerate non-state actors, and the fissures of terror shall be nipped in the bud, was of utmost importance. It has come from the new military leadership at a time when unscrupulous elements are raising their ugly heads in Pakistan's settled and tribal areas. Coupled with this is the cessation of a ceasefire unilaterally on the part of the Therik-e-Taliban Pakistan, and their nefarious designs to bleed Pakistanis. This scenario demands a strong rebuttal and the chief of army staff has won hearts of the nation by exhibiting his valour and wisdom. The recent attacks on Chaman border and the Pakistan mission in Kabul by unknown terror groups have simply confirmed that the remnants of terror are regrouping. Moreover, they have an agenda to penalize Pakistan, and that could be hand in glove with foreign agents. The level of revulsion that was witnessed in Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa as security forces and civilians were targeted by elements who had come back from Afghanistan hints at a big mischievous plot. While Pakistan has always been an advocate of a political approach to address discontent, the same leniency cannot be shown when it comes to dealing with hardened criminals. This is why Gen Munir has categorically stated that fight against terrorism will continue till the achievement of enduring peace and stability in the country.

Bannu beheading, Editorial, *Dawn*, 08 December⁹

In the brutal world of militancy, there are few rules, and the most blood-curdling of methods are applied to spread terror. The reported beheading of a Frontier Constabulary soldier in Bannu is an instant red flag for the authorities, who need to act fast to contain the terrorist threat. According to the chilling account of the martyred soldier's wife, Rehman Zaman and his son were gunned down while they slept when around 20 armed militants stormed their house. The widow says the terrorists then proceeded to behead Zaman, telling her the gruesome act was committed due to the victim's "government job". Eyewitnesses told this paper that the martyred soldier's head was later found hanging from a tree in a local market. This was not the only act of militant violence that has afflicted KP over the last few days. Police claimed killing three TTP militants in Dera Ismail Khan

⁸ <https://tribune.com.pk/story/2389939/exterminate-terrorism>

⁹ <https://www.dawn.com/news/1725268/bannu-beheading>

while fighters also attacked a police convoy in the same area. A little-known group called the Ittehadul Mujahideen Khorasan has claimed responsibility for the grotesque beheading. In the past, the TTP has also employed this reprehensible tactic against security men as well as civilian hostages. Those responsible for Rehman Zaman's brutal killing need to be tracked down and brought to justice, while the civilian and military arms of the state must launch a relentless campaign to cleanse the affected areas of terrorism. *This can come in the form of intelligence-based operations, as well as kinetic actions. Whatever shape the actions take, under no circumstances should the militants be allowed to establish their reign of terror in KP and the rest of Pakistan.*

Flames of Terror, Editorial, *The Daily Times*, 09 December¹⁰

It is getting increasingly certain that the banned militant umbrella cannot stomach being ignored for a single day. The recent bloodbath in Quetta was orchestrated on the heels of a formal announcement to call off the ceasefire in a bid to hit the headlines with far greater vigor. Instead of showing a resolute determination to defend the motherland come what may, the state continues to dilly-dally; throwing a spree of ambiguous buzzwords in a desperate attempt to evade a tight line of questioning. While the newly-appointed army chief did not waste any time in showing where he stood on terrorism, he has inherited far too nasty of a can of worms and therefore, needs to substantiate his policies with actions. *Some startling revelations echoed in Senate yesterday as National Counter-Terrorism Authority tugged at the "peace talk's process" for serving as a fertile ground for the TTP to spread its network far and wide. But what might have appeared utterly shocking for the ruling elite was constantly being blared out of megaphones by tens of thousands in the mountainous tribal regions as they implored the state to stop this resurgence of lawlessness, misery and death in their valleys.* The disastrous comeback of extortion calls, mysterious death warrants, deadly shootings, bombings and kidnappings could be seen by all but Islamabad was far too busy fighting a million fires raging in every corner to lend the hapless folks a passionate ear.

An emboldened TTP, Editorial, *The News*, 12 December¹¹

After using the peace talks as camouflage, the TTP called off the ceasefire agreement with the government in November. The militants have been sabotaging peace in this region for long each time using some new excuse. This time once again they are blaming the Pakistani state for attacking them. The TTP would like everyone to believe that it is just staging

¹⁰ <https://dailytimes.com.pk/1037299/flames-of-terror/>

¹¹ <https://www.thenews.com.pk/print/1019136-an-emboldened-ttp>

'retaliatory attacks' but the reality is that the group has been violating ceasefires for over a decade. The talks that Pakistan officials held with the militant outfit were mysterious and opaque and even then the negotiations broke down in August due to a deadlock on the revocation of the merger of the erstwhile tribal areas with Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. Luckily, in the face of increasing TTP presence, local residents of these areas took it upon themselves to raise a voice against militancy. Their voice clear and unambiguous –was heard loud and clear. The Nacta report also maintains that US withdrawal from Afghanistan last year gave the TTP impetus to strike again. The rise in the terrorism index should be alarming for the government of Pakistan. *There is no room for any complacency. If militant attacks are to be stopped, it cannot be through purely defensive measures at the scene of the attack.* Check posts, bomb detectors and the like may slow determined suicide bombers but cannot stop them. The work needs to be done before the attacks take place, with good intelligence giving us the opportunity to thwart the attacks.

Chaman clash, Editorial, Dawn, 13 December¹²

The tragic incident at the Pak-Afghan border in Chaman on Sunday indicates that either Kabul's rulers are incapable of securing their borders, or that some elements within the Taliban want to test Pakistan's limits. At least seven deaths were reported on the Pakistani side after Afghan forces resorted to unprovoked shelling at the border town, says ISPR, with Pakistan's security personnel returning fire. The skirmish resulted in the brief closure of the border crossing, and appeared to be a repeat of a similar incident last month that resulted in the closure of the Chaman crossing for more than a week. Then, too, gunfire from Afghanistan had resulted in casualties here. The prime minister has condemned the incident, calling upon the Afghan rulers to ensure such episodes are not repeated. *Certain reports say that smugglers were trying to cross the fenced border area into Pakistan, reportedly with support from the Taliban forces, though some Afghan officials link the flare-up to the construction of checkpoints in what they claim is Afghan territory.* Pakistan should clearly communicate to the Taliban that it is ready to defend itself from aggression. It is unfortunate that while it is the Taliban's responsibility to keep the peace on their soil, they have not, previously as well as now, reined in violent, lawless elements, including militants a fact that Pakistan, which has suffered as a consequence, cannot lose sight of. *It is in this context that Pakistan must display firmness, despite its support for the Afghan people. It is the Taliban's responsibility to restrain smugglers, terrorists and criminal elements trying to sneak into Pakistan.*

¹² <https://www.dawn.com/news/1726091/chaman-clash>

Is K-P government failing to tackle terror? Adeela Naureen/Waqar K Kauravi, *The Express Tribune*, 27 December¹³

Last three months have witnessed a string of terror attacks across Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa which should have rattled any government. However, the functionaries, including the Chief Minister, seem immersed in political shenanigans. Since Pakistan Army sanitised the province from the scourge of terror in 2020, there was a hope that the provincial government and bureaucracy would come forward to build upon the success of Army and FC and corroborate and strengthen law enforcement apparatus to a level that terror would not return to this critical province. A comparison of the CTD Punjab with K-P suggests that the latter has been underfunded and less trained, despite the general impression that the K-P government has worked wonders in areas of civil bureaucracy and governance. If one looks at the activities of the K-P Chief Minister and the ministers responsible for law enforcement, over the past three months, it becomes clear that their focus is on party politics and dealing with the 'specter of terror' has taken a backseat during their time in office. Pakistan can ill afford such attitudes and apathy towards responsibility. Should the federal government and the establishment impose an emergency in K-P, once again, to uproot the scourge of terror from K-P? This is a million dollars question.

URDU MEDIA

Resolve to eliminate terrorism, Editorial, *Jang*, 08 December¹⁴

Army chief Gen. Asim Munir has reiterated Pakistan Army's resolve to eliminate terrorism from Pakistan. The security forces of the country have the support of the entire nation in this war. The army chief made it clear that the country's defense is the top priority and no one who tries to harm the country, would be spared. The statement from the army chief was necessary in the context that the Therik-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) had ended the ceasefire in November which was signed in June. In the recent months there have been terror attacks in various parts of the country. ... In this background the army chief spent a whole day with the soldiers deployed in Khyber district, KP. He took briefings regarding the operational preparations and measures regarding the border control. Gen. Munir also visited Headquarter Peshawar as well. *Taking note of the visit by the army chief it is clear that in the changing global and regional situation Pakistan needs to be alert. The strategic*

¹³ <https://tribune.com.pk/story/2392941/is-k-p-government-failing-to-tackle-terror>

¹⁴ <https://e.jang.com.pk/detail/310751>

location of Pakistan creates opportunities and challenges. The Pakistan military had foiled the war which was brought in the region via Afghanistan. But conspiracies of the enemy continue which will be foiled by the military and the nation together. It would be better if the politicians also unite in these tough times in the country's interest!

American Congress increases aid to Pakistan, Editorial, *Nawa-i-Waqt*, 05 December¹⁵

A member of the American Congress Sheila Jackson has written a letter to the committee of the foreign affairs to increase aid to Pakistan. In the letter the woman member wrote that the aid to Pakistan should be given \$600 million for helping the flood victims. Pakistan is still recovering from the devastation caused by the August floods. For relief and reconstruction work foreign aid is used to help the victims. The devastation was so big that the UN Secretary General António Guterres himself had said that the floods have caused huge damages and the world should come forward to help Pakistan financially. The coldness found in the US-Pakistan relations seems to have reduced in the recent months. It was clear in the change of the US perception vis-à-vis Pakistan in the last few weeks. That is the reason for that in the last few months many American officials have paid visits to Pakistan which helped in clearing misunderstandings and reduce the tension between Islamabad and Washington. The American ambassador in Islamabad has also said that good relations between the US and Pakistan is a positive thing. Now American Congress member Sheila Jackson has asked for increasing aid to Pakistan to help the flood victims. This will further strengthen the ties. Floods are a natural calamity. Human efforts can only reduce the impact of floods. But at the same time the international community should take notice of India's activity in which New Delhi releases water during the monsoon season towards Pakistan. This increases problems for Pakistan. The world is facing repercussions of climate change. America, being mainly responsible for climate change, should come forward and help the countries that are affected by climate change.

Army Chief's visit to Balochistan, Editorial, *Nawa-i-Waqt*, 12 December¹⁶

Pakistan's Balochistan province is rich in mineral treasures, but anti-national forces do not miss any opportunity to destroy its peace. This is the reason that no matter what the government is, there is chaos and confusion in this province. Those sections here who went to the mountains due to the feeling of deprivation and then played in the hands of the enemies of the country and became their agents are now spreading terrorism in this beautiful land through subversive activities. Pakistan Army is the biggest deterrent to their

¹⁵ <https://www.nawaiwaqt.com.pk/E-Paper/Gujranwala/2022-12-05/page-8/detail-9>

¹⁶ <https://www.nawaiwaqt.com.pk/E-Paper/lahore/2022-12-12/page-8>

nefarious designs. *Chief of Army Staff (COAS) General Syed Asim Munir visited Quetta and Turbat on Saturday. According to the Inter-Services Public Relations (ISPR), the Army Chief was given a detailed briefing on operational, training and other formation matters. He also visited the command and staff college Quetta and the school of infantry and tactics where he addressed officers and jawans and said that all possible efforts would be made for the safety and security of the people of Balochistan.* Sustainable peace in the province can pave the way for socio-economic development and ensure a conducive environment. No one can deny the army's defence capabilities, professionalism and patriotism. In every period and in every hour of the trial, the army actively participated and played a positive role in providing relief to the people. Every step taken by the Army Chief for the safety and health and security of the people of Balochistan is not only praiseworthy but also worthy of emulation, the army and the nation can become a force together and through this power, anarchy and unrest within the country can be overcome on the one hand and on the other hand external aggression can also be fully resisted. *Our political leadership should also pay attention to the fact that in many areas of Balochistan, people are deprived of even basic rights and anti-national elements are taking advantage of their deprivation. By giving Baloch people their rights, the nefarious designs of separatist elements can be destroyed.*

What is Imran Khan's real goal? Sajjad Abbasi, Roznama Ummat, 22 December¹⁷

Over the past few weeks, events have been taking place on the political horizon so fast that comments on an issue become irrelevant and outdated within a few hours. Every few hours, a new event eats up the previous one or many new events arise from the old event and analysts sit holding their heads. *But there is no option but to give credit to PTI chief Imran Khan that all the political events that have taken place in the country for the last several months somehow revolve around his personality.* In recent days, his announcement of the dissolution of two assemblies has caused turmoil in the political arena. There is an atmosphere of uncertainty and anxiety across the length and breadth of the country. In the same fog of uncertainty, the battle is also going on to topple and save the throne of Lahore, the capital of Punjab. Two days ago, Imran Khan met the organization of newspaper editors in Lahore, where he has made his ancestral home Zaman Park his residence nowadays. The importance of this meeting was further increased because in view of the changing situation, two hours before that, the scheduled meeting of our delegation with Punjab Chief Minister Pervaiz Elahi was suddenly cancelled, while the scheduled meeting with Imran Khan himself was also extended by an hour. In the next few hours, we understood why this decision to cancel was taken suddenly by Chaudhry Pervaiz Elahi.

¹⁷ <https://www.ummat.net/2022/12/22/page-4.php>

At the same time when Imran Khan was making comments on the former Army Chief General Bajwa in a conversation with the editors, Chaudhry Sahib was strongly defending the former commander in a loud and thundering voice and warning him.

Security challenges, Editorial, *Daily Dunya*, 27 December¹⁸

Terror attacks across the country are increasing. In the last few weeks Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa (KP) was the target of these attacks. In Balochistan in the last week the Pakistani soldiers showed their bravery against terrorists. *People involved in these incidents belonged to different groups but they had one thing in common: They have sanctuary and strong centers across the border in Afghanistan. Contrary to the claims of the Afghan Taliban, the Afghan territory has become a center for terrorists. It was proven by the hijackers in Bannu when they asked for safe passage to Afghanistan in return if they were to free hostages.* These terrorists were finally gunned down the next day. After the arrival of the Afghan Taliban in Afghanistan Pakistan had hoped that once the Afghan Taliban would be back in the realm of affairs the relations between the two countries would improve. The region would focus on development and welfare. The environment of war would be left far behind. However, one and half years have passed since the Taliban takeover and still there is no sign of stability in Afghanistan. *It is a sign of weakness of the interim government in Kabul that terrorists are able to use the Afghan territory against the neighboring countries. In this context Pakistan needs to frame a comprehensive strategy to deal with this menace. The first thing to do is to fence the Af-Pak border to stop infiltration.* Sometimes non-state actors are reported to break the fence. This can be controlled by increasing defense measures.

Talk about interests of Pakistan, Editorial, *Daily Dunya*, 28 December¹⁹

The head of PML-Q Chaudhry Shujaat Hussain has said that the political parties need to shun their party politics and think about Pakistan's economic and political stability. The points underlined by this veteran politician are important for correcting the politics of Pakistan. Still however no step has been taken in that direction. *Political crisis and economic uncertainty are correlative: Its impacts are clear. But the national political leadership in Pakistan seems to be unable to understand the sensitivity of the situation. Despite knowing and agreeing to the fact that without ending the political crisis in the country other important issues will not be addressed the political leaders are involved in political tussle.* It is a fact that the ruling alliance cannot wash its hands off from the

¹⁸ https://e.dunya.com.pk/detail.php?date=2022-12-27&edition=LHR&id=6534297_63780839

¹⁹ https://e.dunya.com.pk/detail.php?date=2022-12-28&edition=LHR&id=6536156_70561573

abysmal economic situation; nor can it blame the past governments for fooling the public. This is not the time to distort facts for one's vested interests. The rulers of the day are answerable to the public. They need to keep it in mind. *Indubitably the economic crisis is much worse than in the past. Inflation is at an all-time high. Production in the country is decreasing, leading to unemployment. The loans from the IMF have become like medicine. The government, despite accepting the strict conditions of the IMF, is unable to get the loans from the international financial body.*

Worse economic situation, Editorial, Daily Dunya, 30 December²⁰

Finance Minister Ishaq Dar has said that there is no possibility of Pakistan going bankrupt. He has said that people should not pay attention to such retours. Though the statement of the finance minister is welcome, the economic indicators are showing a possibility of bankruptcy. The country's exports are decreasing consistently; while despite the ban imports are increasing. Because of the increasing value of USD, the current account deficit is huge and foreign reserves are eroding fast. The value of the dollar was PKR 178 in January 2022 which has gone up and reached PKR 227 against one dollar. Ongoing Political instability and energy crisis have badly impacted the manufacturing sector. Along with two big car companies, many textile mills have closed their production units which has increased unemployment. It is necessary that the government instead of issuing satisfactory statements brings out a comprehensive economic policy that would stabilize the country's economy. Increasing the country's exports and sources of remittance can help in increasing the country's foreign reserves. The government should take concrete measures to achieve these goals.

The people of Gwadar should get the right, Riyaz Ahmad Chaudhary, Roznama92 News, 30 December²¹

Balochistan is a sensitive and very important province for the entire country. The employment and necessities of the people of Makran Division are entirely dependent on border trade. The trawler mafia has snatched the employment of fishermen in the coastal areas of Gwadar Pasni, which is completely illegal and cruel. Jamaat-e-Islami's former parliamentary leader Liaquat Baloch has said that the demands of the people are legitimate in the 31-day -long "Gwadar Ko Haq Do" movement in Gwadar. Federal, provincial governments, and civil administrations should accept the demands of the people without delay and provide relief to the people of Gwadar, Turbat, and Panjgur. Gwadar is an

²⁰ https://e.dunya.com.pk/detail.php?date=2022-12-30&edition=ISL&id=6537969_85564576

²¹ https://www.roznama92news.com/efrontend/web/index.php/index2?station_id=2&page_id=8&is_common=Y&n=1000&xdate=2022-12-30

important starting point of CPEC, but the failure of the Government of Pakistan and China to provide facilities to the people of Gwadar on a priority basis has brought the situation to a level of protest. CPEC is an excellent agreement with China, but the people of Balochistan, especially Gwadar, have the first right to reap the fruits of its development. Employment should be provided to the youth here. The humiliation of men and women at illegal and unnecessary check posts should be stopped. The people here should be freed from the illegal trawler mafia on the coast of Gwadar. Balochistan is a very sensitive province, which shares borders with Iran and Afghanistan. The federal and provincial governments should realise its sensitivity and provide the people of Balochistan with their legitimate rights at their doorsteps. The sit-in under the leadership of Maulana Hidayat-ur- Rehman is the expression of the sentiments of the people of Balochistan. The sit-in has the support of all parties and every section of the people.

ELECTRONIC MEDIA

Capital Talk with Hamid Mir, Foreign Investment Bill 2022: Ruckus in Parliament? *Geo News, 13 December*²²

Both houses of parliament passed the Foreign Investment (Promotion and Protection) Bill, 2022, paving the way for signing of a settlement deal on Reko Diq mining project amid opposition from within the ruling coalition including JUI-F. *Maulana Akbar Chitrali of Jamaat-i-Islami also opposed the bill, saying an important asset of the country was being sold out through legislation in the darkness of night and termed the legislation unconstitutional.* As the bill earlier passed in the Senate was about to be introduced in the National Assembly, *Sardar Akhtar Mengal rose in his seat to protest and underlined that coalition partners were not taken into confidence* before passing the bill. It has to be noted that this Bill, 2022, aims to protect investors from unnecessary court proceedings and other hassles. **Guests:** Sardar Akhtar Mengal-Balochistan National Party, Latif Khosa-PPP & Kamran Murtaza-JUI-F, *Sardar Akhtar Mengal* said that since Pakistan came into being, no government considered Balochistan as its part, but benefited from its resources. *He accused the federal government of appeasing foreign powers and capitalists, but warned it would fan hatred in Balochistan.* We are not in the way of development but if everything will be snatched from us in the development and centre takes all the decisions then why are we still talking about 18th Amendment. Mine and mineral, social welfare and all the things will be in the control of centre then what the role of Provisional government is and what about their powers. We are also answerable to the people of Balochistan and the way

²² https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8x_TXCa4Qlo

the government is treating us, there is a chance that we will draw away our support from the government and leave the coalition. For them the head of a CEO is more important than us, a party who supported them from day one is not important. *Latif Khosa* pointed out that the views and fears of Akhtar Mengal about Balochistan and its resources are bound to be there and he is right in worrying about the Foreign Investment bill 2022. There is a need to sit and resolve this issue otherwise it will be blown out of proportion. The leader of the opposition is seating out of the Parliament but the fact is that they should sit in the opposition and debate about the issue. It is true that there should have been consultation on the issue with all the stakeholders. *Kamran Murtaza* pointed out that this time the JUI-F was not taken into confidence and this was not brought amid the committee. When NAB laws are formed they consult with us and not this time. This bill was not in the agenda and brought in the Parliament unexpectedly. Balochistan is a main issue for JUI-F and this time they by passed us this time. Chairman senate sat with us to make us understand the issue till 10 pm and he claimed that it is his right. The government has taken is for granted and this time it is a big deal.

Imran Khan sees early elections in March/April 2023: Analysis by Moeed Pirzada, 26 December²³

While many things are happening in Pakistani politics in a slow motion, main debate is: *If Nawaz Sharif and PMLN are considering early elections?* Argument is that early elections can be scheduled immediately after the end of Ramazan, say *before the end of April 2023*. Impetus will be to save PMLN's politics from presenting a difficult budget in June 2023. Moeed Pirzada Analysis on this debate. While may factors may support this thesis, *the fact remains that Nawaz Sharif thinks of himself and his family and wanted to see Maryam Nawaz as the next PM*; is he any close to this mission or has realised his mistakes and surrendered to the emerging reality of Pakistan? The leadership of PML-N has given signal in few words that PTI needs to come back to Parliament to decide on elections. *There is news that Nawaz Sharif is ready for an early elections in March-April 2023, this debate is taking lead in Pakistan. In his latest interview of Imran Khan, he also hinted of early elections in April 2023 and without giving any background story he said that it is because we need to save the economy and the new government should negotiations with internal and external stakeholders.* He repeated this argument after the interview on many times and also was mentioned in newspapers. Sabir Shakir in his vlog also mentioned about this and underlined that Nawaz Sharif is ready for a new early elections and he also mentioned that trust is build due to talks between Finance Minister Isaac Dar and President Arif Alvi. **Negotiations with IMF: With the country's foreign exchange reserves depleting to**

²³ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=743yHSzsTwk>

dangerous levels, all eyes are on the government to see how its negotiations with the IMF pan out. State Bank of Pakistan does not have foreign reserves and not enough to manage the imports of the country. The external payments are also adding in drying down the reserve and therefore it is in dire need of IMF funds. Pakistan is taking money to do away its debt. *Whatever the political costs of taking difficult measures, the hammering the PDM is likely to receive if the economy continues to be run aground is going to be far worse. With time rapidly running out, Mr. Dar must decide whether his party's political standing is dearer to him or the country's economic future.* He ought to have understood by now that the PDM's decision to keep its government was going to come with political costs, especially during a time when the country is wracked by multiple crises.

Off the Record with Kashif Abbasi, Talks on to bring in a caretaker set-up in Pakistan? *ARY News, 29 December*²⁴

Former Finance Minister and expert Economist Syed Mohammad Shabbar Zaidi informed that Pakistan has officially entered in a deadlock with the IMF and the next review meeting in the US will only take place in March 2023 after the holidays. **Guests:** Syed Mohammad Shabbar Zaidi-Former Finance Minister and expert Economist; Hamad Azhar-PTI & Rauf Klasra-Senior Analyst. **Shabbar Zaidi** underlined that Pakistan is in a worst economic crisis and needs to take some decisions this week on the state of economy. In the recent meeting of economist this thinking was put forward that there is a need to bring a new interim government who can then negotiate with IMF next year. The government will be based on economists and there is talks to extend this interim government to two years (*looking for options in the constitution to do so*) which can take important decisions related to the economy of the country which the political government is unable to do so. He informed *that very soon a decision will be taken on the caretaker government and the time frame is less than a month. Pakistan can declare economic emergency to set up a caretaker government.* **Hamad Azhar** informed that we are also told that the caretaker government idea is on the play in Pakistan and it's not a good news. *Even if they bring legislations to set up a caretaker, it is better to put martial law, already this government in place is non-functional.* This will be again an experiment to minus Imran Khan from politics and to keep the PTI out of power and sideline the views of the public. The failure of the PDM government should not be equated to the failure of a political set-up and should not be used to bring in a caretaker government. A technocratic set up will not be tolerated by the PTI and we will again start a movement to restore democracy. **Rauf Klasra** pointed out that it is a slap on the face of politicians that such a talk is taking rounds of a caretaker government after 13-14 years. Why there is a need of a caretaker to take tough decisions, it

²⁴ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=do4kOMKTxys>

is the job of the parties in power to take such decisions, they should not think of vote banks while taking these decisions. *It suits the current PDM government to bring a caretaker government, they will get a breathing space and get ready for the next general elections.* The point is that the new army chief cannot complete the whole process in such a short time, they will need time. This will be used as a bargaining chip with the PTI. Caretaker government will be a huge setback for the PTI as they think that the PTI can come to power if there is elections. But the question is of implementation, how it can be done.

Establishment in action: Shehbaz Sharif countdown? Analysis by Irfan Hashmi, 30 December²⁵

The anchor underlined that the establishment has used the imported government of Shehbaz Sharif enough and now have decided to bring it down and put a caretaker set up in the country. *The PDM led government was looking for a long haul and wanted to continue ruling on the basis of the fact that they will have to work hard on the economy and their cannot be fresh elections. But they had other plans and had the idea of putting a technocrate government in power to review the economic crisis in the country.* The senior team of establishment has informed Shehbaz Sharif and Finance Minister that they have failed to review the economy in the eight years, even due to failure of Foreign Minister Bilawal Bhutto, the relationship between Pakistan and Afghanistan is getting worse especially in the tribal areas. And that terrorism has taken a new high near Pakistan-Afghanistan border. Establishment has also informed the government that they have failed to negotiate with the IMF and the funds in reserve donated by China is getting dried and soon there will be a economic crisis. They have been given the warning to show results till August and bring the country out of the crisis. Therefore establishment has presented a charge sheet on Afghanistan and economy and been told about the idea of a technocrat government. He pointed out that there *will be no check and balance of a technocrat government set up and they are not answerable to the public.* They will come and fill their briefcase with money. The PTI has decided to restart a *mehangyi march* all over the country and have said that they will fight against this move by the establishment to bring a caretaker setup. The PML-N and the PDM is not as happy with the decision of the army as they know that after this setup there will be fresh elections which will not go well for the party. He also added that the PTI should have maintained the momentum of the protests and not stop in between in order to register their protest, they almost made connect with the public and its issues.

²⁵ https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zRPD4_jyuCA

BOMBINGS, SHOOTINGS AND DISAPPEARANCES

(Select incidents culled out from the Pakistan media)

Place	Date	Description	Killed	Injured
Punjab				
Islamabad ²⁶	23/12/2022	Pakistan: Islamabad car bombing kills police officer	01	00
Khyber Pakhtunkhwa				
Peshawar ²⁷	15/12/2022	2 dead, 9 injured in bomb blast in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa	02	09

²⁶ <https://www.dw.com/en/pakistan-islamabad-car-bombing-kills-police-officer/a-64195740>

²⁷ <https://indianexpress.com/article/pakistan/pakistan-bomb-blast-khyber-pakhtunkhwa-8325987/>