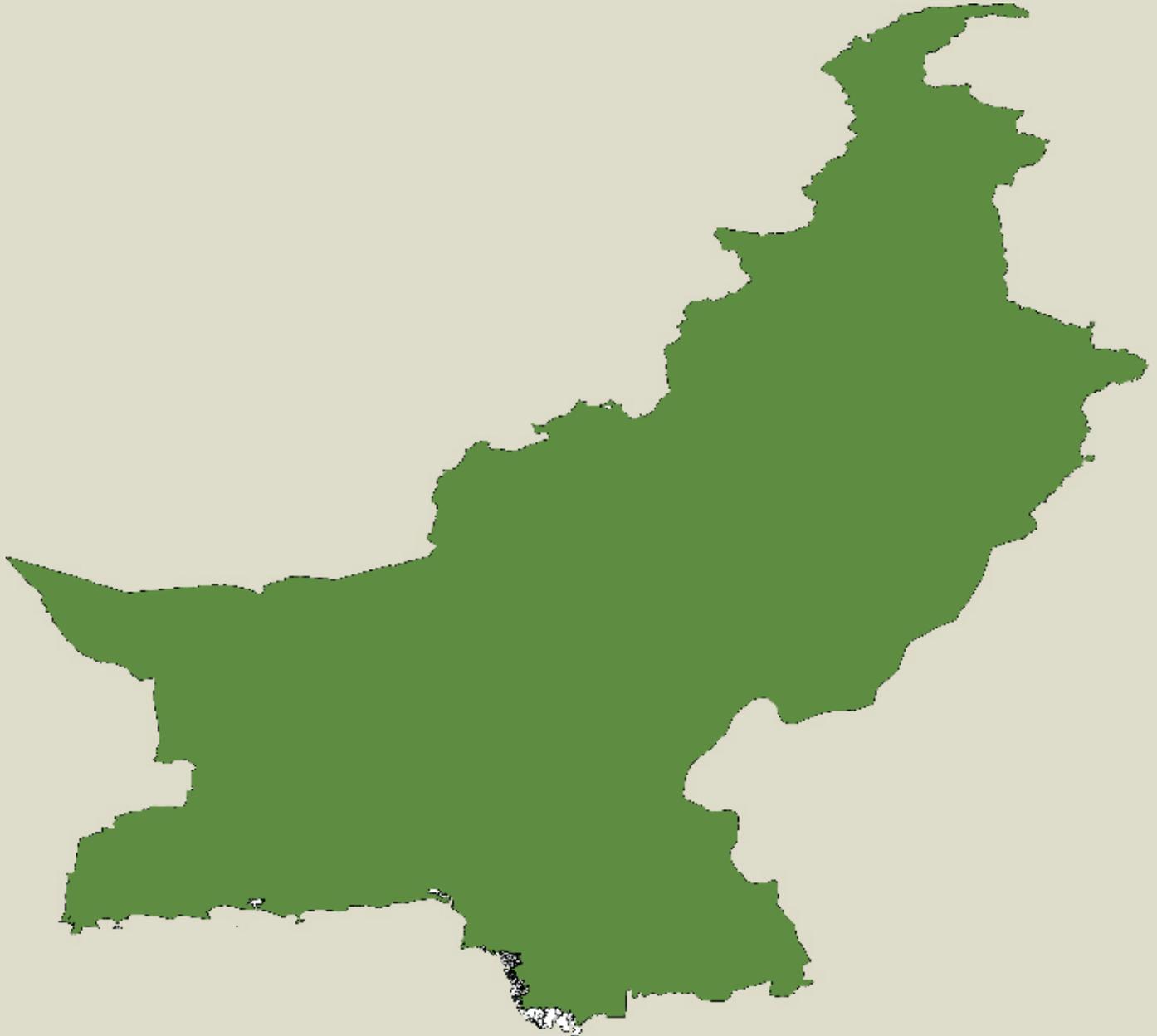


February 2019

PAKISTAN NEWS DIGEST

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



Prepared by
Dr. Zainab Akhter
Dr. Nazir Ahmad Mir
Dr. Mohammad Eisa
Dr. Ashok Behuria

idsa
INSTITUTE FOR DEFENCE
STUDIES & ANALYSES
रक्षा अध्ययन एवं विश्लेषण संस्थान

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INSTITUTE FOR DEFENCE STUDIES AND ANALYSES

1-Development Enclave, Near USI
Delhi Cantonment, New Delhi-110010

PAKISTAN NEWS DIGEST, February 2019

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Editorial

This month saw one of the deadliest suicide bombings in Kashmir, India that killed 40 CRPF personal on a convoy from Jammu to Srinagar. Jaish-e-Mohammad (JeM), A Pakistani based terror outfit took responsibility for this ghastly terror attack, once again exposing Pakistan's ulterior motives of providing safe haven to militant groups. The Pulwama attack changed the course of relationship between India and Pakistan and brought the two nations once again at the brink of a war. India pointed the fingers to Pakistan accusing it of having a direct hand in the attack. It called for global sanction against the JeM and its leader Masood Azhar and urged to enlist his name as terrorist by the UN Security Council. It has to be noted that India has in the past made attempts to put his name in the UN terrorist list but was repeatedly blocked by China, an important ally of Pakistan.

Pakistan on the other hand underlined that the Pulwama incident was unfortunate but categorically denied any involvement in the attacks. It firmly asked for "actionable evidence" and stated that it was ready to probe if India provides it. The Indian Prime Minister vowed to take revenge of the attack causing suspension that New Delhi will take action to avenge Pulwama. Within few days India celebrated the destruction and killing of camps and terrorist in Balkot on the other side of Kashmir, PoK. This further escalated the situation bringing the India-Pakistan relation to an all-time low. India strapped the MFN status from Pakistan and imposed 200% import tax on goods from Pakistan. All the routes were closed for any activity and a ban on Pakistani artists in the Indian movies were announced.

Meanwhile taking the war to the air, the air force from both sides fought a brief aerial war and it was during one such fight that Pakistan shot an Indian air force plane which crashed in PoK and air commander Abhinandan was taken as prisoner of war by Pakistan. The release of the pilot under the Geneva Convention by Pakistan helped to somewhat defuse the tension. But the ceasefire violations by Pakistan still continue but it has to be seen how India reacts given the fast approaching general elections.

Amid all these chaos and tension, the Crown Prince of Saudi Arabia Mohammad Bin Salman visited Pakistan and Pakistan put up quite a show and was marked with fanfare. Given that Pakistan is suffering from an account deficit and is fighting to secure its financial future the lavish welcome to roll the carpet reflected the desperation of another bail out by the Crown Prince, which turned out to be \$6 billion commitment by Saudi to better the yawning economy of Pakistan.

Zainab Akhter

POLITICAL DEVELOPMENTS

The endgame, Hussain Nadim, *Express Tribune*, 05 February¹

I also do not attribute too much agency to Pakistan in the endgame because its influence over the Taliban has over the years waned to a point of a facilitator than what was wrongly believed to be a 'puppet master'. Pakistan, however, does have a significant role to play, though, in the post-endgame. First, Zalmay Khalilzad, the US Special Envoy for Afghanistan and Pakistan, led six-day-long talks with the Taliban and early reports indicate an agreement over the ceasefire and the US withdrawal from Afghanistan in 18 months. The ceasefire helps the US to, in the meantime, figure out post-war adjustments between the Taliban and the Afghan government. *This is where Pakistan is being asked to play a key role to convince the Taliban for an adjustment and reconciliation with Kabul. But do the Taliban really need any convincing?* The settlement with Kabul, therefore, is almost crucial for the Taliban in its post-war legitimacy and stability. *However, for the Taliban who understand the growing US desperation to exit Afghanistan, it will push for a delay to get the best bargain, and ideally at its own terms to define the post-war political map of Afghanistan.* Afghanistan going up into flames after that is not the headache Americans will likely take. *This is where Pakistan fits into the Afghanistan equation for the US.* Now in the endgame, the US expects Pakistan to provide another service: manage the unavoidable post-war political mess in Afghanistan and bring stability in the region long after the US is gone. For Pakistan to pick up this task again is dangerous, but unavoidable. The only silver lining is the strong Chinese and Russian interest to help stabilize Afghanistan.

Afghan dynamics and déjà vu, Riaz Mohammad Khan, *Dawn*, 04 February²

Pakistan has an indispensable role but it must be played with circumspection. Pakistan should remain constructively engaged without appearing to be backing or taking responsibility for any Afghan party. The Qatar venue is fortuitous. A venue in Pakistan can rake up avoidable suspicion and speculation. We must look for positive results rather than kudos for helping the process. The regional actors and forums such as the Quadrilateral Contact Group, the Moscow Format or the Heart of Asia Initiative are important. They can nudge the peace process forward, but they are not the key to its success. *For argument's sake, a stable Afghanistan will diminish that possibility. Also*

¹ <https://tribune.com.pk/story/1903681/6-the-endgame/>

² <https://www.dawn.com/news/1461711/afghan-dynamics-and-deja-vu>

to contain mischief, we have to work with Kabul and Washington and not the Taliban or any other Afghan group. At the same time, we cannot object to Afghanistan and India having cooperation that is not at the cost of Pakistan especially in trade and the economic arena.

A new provincial map of Pakistan? Dr Moonis Ahmar, *Express Tribune*, 08 February³

If the 11-point agenda of the PTI had called for new provinces to be carved out from Punjab, why it is accused of backtracking from its election manifesto? Why the provincial map of Pakistan remains unchanged despite logical reasons to create new provinces so as to ensure empowerment of those regions which are perceived to be marginalized and underdeveloped? *If India can have 29 states, seven union territories and Afghanistan 34 provinces, why are there only four provinces in Pakistan?* Despite 72 years of its existence and facing the trauma of dismemberment in 1971, Pakistan is still grappling with the issue of new provinces. Prudence demands that instead of getting bogged down in carving out provinces on linguistic or ethnic grounds, 26 divisions of Pakistan are upgraded as states with each division having its own administrative center and its legal structures in the form of high courts and state assemblies. There is no guarantee that the issues of governance, poverty, underdevelopment and feelings of sense of deprivation will be resolved or mitigated if two provinces are carved out from Punjab or if a Hazara province is established.

MBS visit is a win for Pakistan, Editorial, *Daily Times*, 18 February⁴

As the crown prince of Saudi Arabia visits Pakistan, our foreign exchange reserves stand at just \$8.2 billion, an amount that covers less than two months of imports, and that too after already having received \$2 billion from Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates this January. In this bleak scenario, MBS emerges with billions in investment — of which \$7 billion is to reach Pakistan in the next two years. Memorandums of Understanding are to be signed in a wide variety of sectors including oil refining, liquid natural gas (LNG), renewable energy and mineral development. The agenda includes the establishment of an Aramco oil refinery in Gwadar and Saudi Arabia's purchase of two LNG-based power plants that the government has been looking to sell as part of a privatisation drive. \$4 billion in investment is also expected in deals on developing alternate energy power plants. Increased closeness with MBS could also help Pakistan's financially without direct

³ <https://tribune.com.pk/story/1905813/6-new-provincial-map-pakistan/>

⁴ <https://dailytimes.com.pk/355789/mbs-visit-is-a-win-for-pakistan>

investment. Pakistani expatriates in Saudi Arabia are one of the country's biggest sources of foreign exchange. However, since the past few years Riyadh has been looking to reduce its dependence on imported labour. As a result, remittances coming into Pakistan from Saudi Arabia have declined. Therefore, Prime Minister Imran Khan and Foreign Minister Shah Mehmood Qureshi must initiate negotiations regarding Pakistani labour in Saudi Arabia. These negotiations must also be comprehensive, meaning that the poor living condition of labourers employed by Saudi employers must also be discussed, and the Kingdom urged to follow global standards laid out by bodies like the International Labour Organisation.

Institutional decay, Najam Sethi, *The Friday Times*, 08 February⁵

A key PTI leader in the Punjab assembly, Aleem Khan, has been arrested by NAB in a case of "assets beyond known means of income". The timing is intriguing. *Mr Khan has made no secret of his desire to become CM Punjab, ostensibly with the support of the Militabishment that is unhappy with Mr Usman Buzdar's lack of performance. This has stirred a grand conspiracy theory: NAB is aiming to kill several birds with one stone. First*, it wants to show that by scooping such a big fish out of the PTI pond, it is not biased in Imran Khan's favour. **Second**, it may be preparing to "redress the balance" by arresting the PMLN ex PM, Shahid Khaqan Abbasi, in a case lodged four years ago relating to the purchase of LNG. Mr Abbasi is the leading contender for Militabishment favour in the event of any change in the parliamentary status quo. **Third**, Aleem Khan's arrest is simply a device to eventually declare him innocent so that his path to CMship of Punjab is cleared. The Election Commission of Pakistan is also infected by the same conspiracy theory. For many years, it has been "hearing" a case of PTI party funds misappropriation and mis-declaration by PTI leader Imran Khan that would render him ineligible for election to the National Assembly if proven true. But the almighty Respondent continues to obtain delaying adjournments, even though the petition is firmly grounded in facts. *Worst of all, the courts are not immune from this charge. There are several defamation petitions languishing against Imran Khan.*

PM's bold offer, Editorial, *Dawn*, 20 February⁶

For Delhi, which appears to be stuck in a rut and continues to blame Pakistan and rebuff dialogue, it would be practical to take up this offer and engage with Islamabad on the issue of Kashmir and cross-border militancy. Mr Khan's commitment to taking action against militant groups operating on our soil is a

⁵ <https://www.thefridaytimes.com/institutional-decay/>

⁶ <https://www.dawn.com/news/1464938/pms-bold-offer>

promising one which indeed appears to herald a 'naya Pakistan' considering Pakistan's previous association with groups accused by neighbouring countries of militancy. Islamabad should earnestly probe the involvement of the banned Jaish-e-Mohammad — that has been linked to this and past attacks in India-held Kashmir — and other members of militant groups proscribed in the country but that allegedly continue to operate under different names.

ECONOMY

Ready for reform? Moeed Yusuf, *Dawn*, 12 February⁷

To be sure, I can make a fairly compelling case that we exaggerate how politicized the IMF is and understate how negative Washington's intelligentsia remains on Pakistan. But what matters is the sense in the corridors of power. And there, the view is that the tide is turning and this will affect the IMF's attitude. The IMF has played hardball to date, asking for the moon in terms of conditionalities. Pakistan's muscle memory on IMF negotiations has always driven it to ask for an opiate without transforming its domestic economic behaviour — and it has almost always succeeded. Both sides are by now fairly clear that the deal is going to be somewhere in the middle this time. As far as I can tell, they know what the 'middle' is. *Lost here will be the fact that this money has taken us off the ventilator, nothing more. We are still sick and shall remain so if we don't overhaul the structures of the economy.* The bottom line is as simple as it gets: we spend way more than we earn and there is nothing short of real and intense structural transformation of the economy that can bridge this gap sustainably.

IMF bailout and structural reforms in Pakistan, Foqia Sadiq Khan, *Daily Times*, 15 February⁸

Despite over a dozen of IMF programmes, Pakistan has not been able to bring about structural reforms. Now IMF seems focused on raising the power tariffs to deal with circular debt. PTI government has already increased the interest rates and devalued the Pakistani currency, as the IMF might have demanded it. In a way, it is good that PTI government has not rushed into another IMF bailout this time around. Though, the government's thinking is quite fuzzy and pros and cons of waiting on the IMF have not been made public to a large extent. It would have been worthwhile to know the blueprint of economic programme that PTI has in store for us. There is also a need to determine whether the IMF demanded structural reforms are going to promote the welfare of people and strengthen the institutions. *If so, then there is need to*

⁷ <https://www.dawn.com/news/1463298/ready-for-reform>

⁸ <https://dailytimes.com.pk/354692/imf-bailout-and-structural-reforms-in-pakistan/>

analyze the structural impediments blocking such reforms in the past and strategize ways on overcome those challenges. In Pakistan's case, the potential losers from the reforms have been powerful enough to subvert the process of structural reforms. The government needs to become strong to impose its will and carry out reforms, if they are indeed going to improve the lives of us citizens of this country.

SECURITY SITUATION

Police reform, Editorial, Dawn, 04 February⁹

The police have long been an instrument of state oppression, whether it be to illegally seize land, facilitate criminal enterprises, assuage politicians' bruised egos by instituting false cases on their say-so, etc. Political interference in promotions, postings and transfers results in a 'police for the government', fuels corruption in the force, destroys internal discipline and demoralises upright, competent officers. Some particularly heinous incidents recently have further tarnished the reputation of law-enforcement agencies and increased the clamour for reform. The premier has quite rightly also directed the committee to come up with amendments to prevent the gross abuse of power that can result in incidents like the Sahiwal killings. However, the answer to reining in an out-of-control police is not to clip their wings further but to replicate the KP reforms and improve on them.

Extremism hasn't gone away, Editorial, Daily Times, 04 February¹⁰

The Pakistan Tehrik-e-Insaf (PTI) government has yet to come up with a plan to deal with barelvi strand of extremism, and the worrying aspect of its popularity among a segment of the country's population. Perhaps, the problem is that the leadership of the ruling party, like other mainstream parties, has yet to fully recognise extremism as a problem. This was evident in PTI leaders posturing during the election campaign. *Taking a leaf from other mainstream parties' books, PTI chairman Imran Khan, who now holds the office of Prime Minister, had attended a gathering organised by barelvis extremists in the hope of wooing votes. In the past few months, even the top leadership of unelected state institutions was seen photographed with extremists in private gatherings.* This raises serious question marks over the presence of political will to tackle the challenge posed by extremism. Ostensibly, it seems that the state has come to terms with the social support of the far-right religious lobby, whose

⁹ <https://www.dawn.com/news/1461710/police-reform>

¹⁰ <https://dailytimes.com.pk/350981/extremism-hasnt-gone-away/>

political narrative revolves entirely around the country's blasphemy laws. An effective approach will be to regulate activities of religious groups, including those of the barelvis, and not letting them indulge in hate speech against minority communities, or glorify terrorists like Mumtaz Qadri. Alongside, blasphemy law will have to be reformed to prevent its abuse.

Arman Loni's death, Editorial, Dawn, 06 February¹¹

However, in question here is not only the issue of whether or not Arman Loni was indeed a victim of police brutality, but the very nature of 'vigilance' being distorted by public servants to evade accountability and justify curtailing people's rights. Paranoid, overreaching measures taken in the interest of 'maintaining public order' are counterproductive. Thus, statements by the provincial home minister seeking to blame those who contest the official version of events (as it currently stands) while in the same breath promising a fair investigation will hardly serve to dispel such perceptions. *Loni's death demands an unbiased and transparent probe. But it also requires that the provincial and federal governments be responsive to the public's mood and work to de-escalate a potentially volatile situation.*

FATF warning, Editorial, Dawn, 24 February¹²

There is little doubt that FATF is ratcheting up the pressure on Pakistan, and the focus is entirely on terror financing. Naming specific groups means action needs to be taken against them, and not of the sort we have seen over the years, which appears to be more cosmetic in nature and easily reversible. Previous governments have struggled with the question of acting against those entities named by FATF and listed under UN Security Council Resolution 1267 as terrorist entities. Announcing a ban on a group is only the first step; this needs to be followed up with asset seizures and travel bans. *This is the point at which genuine compliance can be said to begin. For the moment though, the government is struggling with the very first step of notifying a ban, let alone following it up with concrete steps to separate the leadership of these groups from their operations and assets.*

A militant-free Pakistan, Muhammad Amir Rana, Dawn, 24 February¹³

¹¹ <https://www.dawn.com/news/1462147/arman-lonis-death>

¹² <https://www.dawn.com/news/1465739/fatf-warning>

¹³ <https://www.dawn.com/news/1465736/a-militant-free-pakistan>

First, militants should not be allowed to hide behind the state's religious-nationalist paradigm. Secondly, these groups should not have any space in the political or strategic calculus of the state. As far as denying physical space to militant groups is concerned, implementing the National Action Plan and the National Internal Security Policy would do the trick. First, militants should not be allowed to hide behind the state's religious-nationalist paradigm. Secondly, these groups should not have any space in the political or strategic calculus of the state. As far as denying physical space to militant groups is concerned, implementing the National Action Plan and the National Internal Security Policy would do the trick. Thirdly, the international community, including Pakistan's key strategic partner, China, has become less tolerant towards violent non-state actors that are considered a key hurdle in the way of progress and globalization.

Dangerous escalation, Zahid Hussain, Dawn, 27 February¹⁴

It is a risky gamble by the Indian prime minister. Such reckless action could easily spiral out of control and turn into a full-blown military conflagration. The underlying calculation of Modi's escalation is that India can afford this brinkmanship given the country's growing diplomatic clout. But it is hard to believe that this blatant act of aggression will go unnoticed. A major challenge for Pakistan is how to respond to the Indian bellicosity. *Yet few had expected Indian warplanes to strike inside Pakistan. According to several media reports, the attack took place in Balakot, KP and not along the Line of Control. It is not just a violation of the LoC ceasefire; it is also — very clearly — an act of aggression.* Meanwhile, the Indian claim has fed into the jingoistic frenzy being whipped up by the Modi government. It is an attempt by the Modi government to redefine its nuclear threshold. He is pursuing a strategy of what is described as 'vertical and horizontal' escalation. He is testing Pakistan's capability to respond without crossing the threshold. Modi believes his government can manage the diplomatic fallout of an escalation because India is today much better placed in the world. *Last week, the government reportedly launched a crackdown on madressahs run by Jaish-e-Mohammed. How come the group that was outlawed in 2002 and was allegedly involved in high-profile attempted terrorist attacks in Pakistan was not reined in as tightly as it should have been?*

¹⁴ <https://www.dawn.com/news/1466301/dangerous-escalation>

PROVINCES & REGIONS

Balochistan

The murder of Arman Loni, Talimand Khan, *Daily Times*, 07 February¹⁵

Such mayhem is connected through an embryonic cord with the policy environment controlled and dictated by the non-elected power centers. These policy choices, strategic assets and the enabling state paradigm had been maintained at a great cost by the powers to be after 9/11. Evidently, they intend to preserve the interventionist policies to retain hegemony after the US withdrawal from the region. The manipulation of grafting unrest and insecurity in the Pukhtun belt in Balochistan is reminiscent of similar methods used in FATA and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa to create 'safe havens' for the Taliban. In case remnants of the Quetta Shoorā relocate to Afghanistan, as a result of successful peace negotiations by the Taliban, the Pakhtun belt bordering Afghanistan in Balochistan will be a potential epicenter of a new phase of violence. The recent attacks on levies and police in the region seems a prelude. *Strangling the PTM through every means whether by connecting it to the TTP or extra judicially killing its members is a prefabricated scheme to pursue the strategic objectives post US withdrawal from Afghanistan.* Innocent voices for peace and fundamental rights like that of Arman's, are clashing with vested interests that want to nip them in the bud. However, the criminal silence of mainstream political parties, particularly the PML-N in this crucial juncture of history indicates that these parties use the constitutional and civilian supremacy over state institutions merely as a cover for self-interest.

URDU & ELECTRONIC MEDIA

Electronic

Jirga with Saleem Safi, Will there be War between India and Pakistan? *Geo News*, 24 February¹⁶

On this episode Saleem Safi invites Ex Indian High Commissioner Sartaj Aziz and Politician and writer Khurshid Ahmed Kasuri to discuss the recent development between India-Pakistan relations post Pulwama attacks in Kashmir. When asked about India's reaction after the attack, if it really want war or its just for political point scoring, **Sartaj Aziz** replies by saying that After coming to power *Modi decided that Kashmir should be made a non-issue*

¹⁵ <https://dailytimes.com.pk/352014/the-murder-of-arman-loni/>

¹⁶ <https://www.geo.tv/shows/jirga/229201-jirga-24-february-2019>

between the two nations. It decided to stop bilateral talks, change the demographic composition of Kashmir, start a resettlement drive and put Islam in the backseat. Due to all these coercive steps by the BJP led government in Indian held Kashmir, the Kashmiri people retaliated by picking up guns and militancy went to an all high in the valley. The killing of Burhan Wani by security forces in 2016 was the first threshold and the recent Pulwama attack is the second after which the situation in Kashmir will go to an all new low. **Khurshid Kasuri** on the other hand points to the fact that **Mumbai attack**, Parliament attack and serial bombing in India were much higher tragedies for India but India choose to restrain from any military actions that time as the dialogue process was believed to be the only solutions. But there is a difference in leadership then and now and Modi believes in keeping the war hysteria on for political gains, he adds. The stand of Pakistan to restrain from war both by civil and military are a welcome step but Pakistan will not step back if the its territory is breached, he said.

Urdu

Afghanistan and our regional policy, Nafees Siddiqui, Jang, 04 February¹⁷

After 18 years America finally has decided to withdraw from Afghanistan. *It has decided to talk to the Taliban with whom it has been fighting for all this period.* 18 years back, the mistake that Pakistan had committed, same type of mistake is being repeated. Again, Pakistan is following American policy and narrative. Now it is the time that Pakistan shapes its own policy that is in its national interest. ... America could not defeat the Taliban in 18 years and is finally handing over the reins of power to them. It has realized that Kabul-Government is losing control in the Afghan-territory and on people. Russia and Iran have also joined in and are taking the Taliban seriously, like Pakistan. *However they are talking to what they call 'good Taliban'. That is no way 'good' for us. The Taliban that America, Russia and Iran is 'engaging' is not good for Pakistan because they are these countries' old enemy. If the Afghan-government and the representatives of the Afghan-people talk to the Taliban, that is fine. There is none of them. Second, America is talking to the Taliban on the condition that the latter would not allow Daesh like groups to operate from Afghan-territory. The question is when strong countries like the US could not defeat the Taliban, how it is possible for the Taliban to counter and fight groups like Daesh.* It seems there is some new game being played. In place of the Afghan Taliban, *Daesh* can be new 'factor' in Afghanistan. Like the Taliban worked for the US agenda for 18 years, *Daesh* will work similarly. Keeping these threats in mind, Pakistan needs to shape its policy accordingly. We need to take China, Russia, Iran, Saudi Arabia and other neighbouring

¹⁷ https://e.jang.com.pk/02-04-2019/lahore/pic.asp?picname=06_005.png

countries in confidence and come up with united policy to defeat the US agenda.

The third wound, Hassan Nisar, Daily Jang, 06 February¹⁸

Like humans, nations also have psychology. The psychology of nations is deeply impacted by incidents, events and accidents. ... Pakistan as a nation is very 'young', about 70 year old. *However, in these 70 years two major events have deeply impacted our common psychology which neither can the political elite get rid of nor the people. First, the 'Fall of Dhaka' shook roots of our nation.* This unleashed such issues which had no existence earlier. ... *Second, the hanging of Zulfikar Ali Bhutto which is known as 'judicial killing'.* The hanging left deep effect on the psychology of the enemies of Bhutto. Were not these two wounds enough that there are rumours about the third one coming? It is said where there is smoke, there is fire. *There are some rumours about some 'deal'. It should be clear to the people who are involved that they should mindful of the fact this may be 'third wound' on the common psychology of the nation.* Beware that accountability may not become useless or remain accountability only in name. Beware that nation may lose the remaining trust and belief also. It is rumored that Nawaz Sharif is ready to give few billion dollars. If that is true, it should be reported... It will be disrespectful 'third wound' which will be disastrous. ... The nation should not be subjected to the third wound. Its impact will be unimaginable.

Not deal but fear of failure, Hamid Mir, Daily Jang, 07 February¹⁹

Some old companions of Prime Minister have grown fearful that they may fail. *I talked to a federal minister who said that he comes to office eight in the morning and leaves by nine in the evening. On asking he said Imran Khan is also working that long in the office.* Why is then there no relief or progress when the government is working for fourteen-fifteen hours? *The minister said that only old companions of Imran Khan are working seriously because only they are concerned about failure. The people who have joined the PTI late work as they like. It does not matter to them whether Imran fails as they were in the previous governments and will be in new government as ministers.* But we are with Imran. ... I asked one more minister that is he fearful that the PTI-

¹⁸ https://e.jang.com.pk/02-06-2019/lahore/pic.asp?picname=02_01.png

¹⁹ https://e.jang.com.pk/02-07-2019/lahore/pic.asp?picname=06_009.png

Government may fail? The answer was affirmative as he was also one of senior members of the party. ... *PML-N has given new tension to the PTI by stopping confrontation with the army and judiciary. Since there is no confrontation, Sheikh Rasheed is sensing some deal has taken place and is criticising it.* If it is so, who is the other party in the deal? It is known to everyone that Nawaz Sharif is ill and needs treatment. The government is responsible for to provide him the same. By raising hue and cry over the rumor of deal, these leaders are making the state institutions controversial. They should improve their performance, otherwise they will be in a place in future where Nawaz Sharif is today!

First round of Afghan-conference in Moscow, Editorial, *Nawa-i-Waqt*, 07 February²⁰

First round of the Afghan-conference in Moscow has started. *Abbas Stanikzai is representing the Afghan Taliban. The Taliban said they do not want political crisis after the US withdrawal.* America and the Kabul-government have expressed their reservations on the conference. *The conference is attended by Gulbuddin Hekmatyar, Sayed Mansur Naderi, and Muhammad Mohaqiq, former Taliban ambassador to Pakistan Abdul Salam Zaeef, Hamid Karzai, Ismail Khan, Atta Muhammad Noor, and Shahnawaz Tanai.* America wants to leave Afghanistan. The Taliban have also suffered a lot. They do not want to claim to be the sole actors in the country. As the Taliban representative said, it does not want political crisis after the US withdrawal. It is surprising that the US and Kabul boycotted the conference. It is America who wants to resolve the conflict. *Ashraf Ghani has said that any agreement without the government will be nothing but a piece of paper which implies he is fearful of any agreement.* There will be no likely breakthrough in the Moscow conference. It is an introductory meeting. More will follow. Ghani is afraid that he will lose power if the Taliban joins the mainstream. Since it mainly involves the Taliban and the US, Ghani should work in the interest of the country and stay silent.

Moscow talks, Waqar Masood Khan, *Nawa-i-Waqt*, 10 February²¹

Russia organised talks in Moscow to resolve the Afghan-conflict. Moscow's relations with Afghanistan are historical. More recently it had to leave the country in 1989 after its defeat at the hand of Mujahidin. At the end of the Cold War, Russia had gone in retrospection and was not active in international affairs. During this period, the US had increased its influence unprecedentedly

²⁰ <https://www.nawaiwaqt.com.pk/E-Paper/lahore/2019-02-07/page-10/detail-1>

²¹ <https://www.nawaiwaqt.com.pk/E-Paper/lahore/2019-02-10/page-13/detail-8>

in the region in which Russia used to have it say. ... *America's feasible defeat in Afghanistan has created chances for Russia to regain its influence. It is happening because of two reason mainly. One, since the US is leaving Afghanistan, Russia aims to fulfill the vacuum and broker a deal with the Taliban. Second, it knows that Daesh can enter in the Central Asia through Afghanistan and only the Taliban can stop them.* High hopes are associated with the Moscow talks. ... The progress in the talks with Taliban has surprised many. The way they are going, the Taliban feel emboldened and close to its goal. *It started talking only after its precondition that the Kabul-Government would not be part of it- was agreed to. The Taliban was represented by Sher Mohammad Abbas Stanikzai in the meeting. Others who attended it were Hamid Karzai, Hanif Atmar, Hizb-i-Islami, Tajik leader Yunus Qanuni, Herat Governor Ismail Khan, Zalmay Rassoul, Zalmay Akmal, former Balkh Governor Atta Muhammad Nur, among others.* One important point on which all participants agreed was that American troops should withdraw from Afghanistan immediately. This was one good point for Russia also as all the parties except the Kabul-Government want America to leave the country. After America's withdrawal, it will be Russia one of important diplomatic victories at the global level. *The Taliban also conceded many points and said it was revisiting many of its earlier policies, like women education. Stanikzai said on his speech that the Taliban does not want civil-war kind of situation and wanted to make an Islamic government by consulting all the groups.* He said that the Taliban does not accept the current constitution. Women will be given all rights according to Islamic principles. ... Moscow conference was a success. The Taliban appeared as victorious as despite it possible victory in the war, it is keen to talk to all groups. The way they held Russia, China and Iran with respect showed that they want to have diplomatic relations with other countries. It also means that they would not let the Afghan-territory to be used for terror activities. There is a hope now that after 40 years, there will be peace in Afghanistan.

18th Amendment- protecting vested interests or raising public issues, Editorial, Daily Khabrain, 11 February²²

Amendments in constitution is a commonplace practice across the world. While making such changes, it remains to be seen whether they are in national interests or serve purpose of some people. *According to a survey, 90 percent of people do not know basic 6 points of the 18th Amendment. Zardari was critical of the federal government the other day saying that it wanted to do away with the amendment.* Whenever an issue like the 18th Amendment is raised, it is always said that the federal Government wants to take away the provincial

²² <http://epaper.dailykhabrain.com.pk/popup.php?newssrc=issues/2019-02-11/79084/01.jpg>

autonomy. Pakistan was not create for a particular province. ... Zardari has said that there will be no more Bangladesh created. That is true. Even if more radical amendments, like the 18th one, are brought in. They will help the provinces to focus on health and education and reduce the Centre's burden. Zardari talked about 6-points that were raised by Sheikh Mujib-ur Rehman to waken the federal structure and strengthen a particular province. *No one would want that the centre should control the provinces. But too much freedom is not viable either. One senior minister of Sindh said recently that if the federal did not stop its anti-Sindh policy, no federal minister would be able to enter in Sindh.* ... This is really not wanted. Amendments are made to improve people's lives by giving authority to the provinces. These can be undone also if they do not work or turned out to be counter-productive. But the federal should retain at least the powers to do so.

Circumambulation of the place of humiliation, Editorial, Ummat, 12 February²³

If Foreign Minister Shah Mehmood Qureshi says that the meeting between Prime Minister Imran Khan and his accomplices with the IMF chief Christine Lagarde was successful and both the parties agreed on many points, it is good news for the PTI-workers. *However, the people of Pakistan are surprised at the complicity and happiness of Mr. Qureshi. First, the meeting was neither held in Pakistan nor at the IMF headquarters but in Dubai. Second, it is indeed humiliating for an autonomous and independent country to meet an institutions that works on the interests that it collects from its customers.* It may not be for Imran Khan. *Third, what secret talks were going on for last six months that the meeting was held in Dubai? Fourth, the Government of Pakistan did not issue any statement in this regard while the IMF said that Lagarde called the meeting constructive. Fifth, Prime Minister Khan had called going to the IMF as suicidal and now its government is dropping bomb after bomb on the common man. Sixth, if the Imran Khan government had already accepted the IMF's conditions, what was the need to meet the IMF chief and create a drama? Seventh, earlier conditions of the IMF had already made the rupee to fall 35 per cent. Eighth, by increasing the prices of electricity, gas and petroleum, inflation is already touching to the sky. Ninth, government has ended subsidy given to poor people on somethings.* Even the Haj subsidy has been taken away. *Tenth, the Prime Minister going from door to door with begging bowl is bringing shame and humiliation to the country.* The government does not realize it because it wants to retain power. Foreign

²³ <http://ummat.net/2019/02/12/news.php?p=idr1.gif>

Minister Qureshi should tell to the people that in what context was the meeting constructive? What was the bases for the consensus between IMF and Imran Khan? Is it that only the poor will bear the brunt of inflation! According to a report, to get loan from the IMF, Pakistan has decided to impose a tax of two trillion and thirty billion rupees. Because of the conditions, the inflation will be unimaginable. *The looted wealth amounts to much more than what is needed in the country. But the government is paying no attention to recovering it. ... Because it fears its people may also face the brunt as Jahangir Tareen, Aleem Khan, Imran's sister Aleema, and Prime Minister may also come in the grip.* That is the reason the government is not going after the Sharif family and Zardari. Pakistanis are ready to give any kind of sacrifice for their county. But the government has no intention to do anything. It goes from door to door humiliatingly begging for money.

Pak-Saudi economic cooperation, Editorial, Jang, 19 February²⁴

'Consider me the ambassador of Pakistan', said Muhammad bin Salman. It is a sign of MBS' love and concern for Pakistan. MBS chose Pakistan as first country for his first official visit after he rose to the position of the Crown Prince of Saudi Arabia. *Relations between the two countries have been friendly from the beginning and the visit has furthered them. The two countries signed agreements of worth \$20 billion.* They inaugurated Supreme Coordination Council, meant to supervise decisions taken by the two. Imran Khan said that Kingdom of Saudi Arabia has always supported Pakistan. While MBS said that Pakistan will progress under the leadership of Imran Khan. *Imran tried to re-energize Pakistan-Saudi relations which now seems to be paying off. It is good that China is ready to accept Saudi's investment in the CPEC.* The oil refinery in which the Saudis will invest, has been cleared. It will cost \$10 billion. All this has increased possibility of economic stability of Pakistan. However, there is still requirement of national unity. There should not be change in national policies with the change of governments.

²⁴ https://e.jang.com.pk/02-19-2019/lahore/pic.asp?picname=06_001.png

STATISTICS

BOMBINGS, SHOOTINGS AND DISAPPEARANCES

(Select incidents culled out from the Pakistan media)

Place	Date	Description	Killed	Injured
FATA				
Mirali ²⁵	09/02/2019	Security men hurt in Mirali blast	00	03
Khyber Pakhtunkhwa				
Dera Ismail Khan ²⁶	12/02/2019	Four policemen killed in Dera Ismail Khan shootout	04	03
Balochistan				

²⁵ <https://www.dawn.com/news/1462696/security-men-hurt-in-mirali-blast>

²⁶ <https://www.samaa.tv/news/2019/02/four-policemen-killed-in-dera-ismail-khan-shootout/>

Loralai ²⁷	02/02/2019	PTM leader killed in 'police crackdown' on Loralai protesters	01	00
Quetta ²⁸	02/02/2019	Three FC personnel injured in Chaman explosion	0	03
Quetta ²⁹	13/02/2019	Four security personnel injured in Mastung suicide attack	00	04
Quetta ³⁰	17/02/2019	Four FC personnel embrace martyrdom in Balochistan gun attack	04	06
Quetta ³¹	24/02/2019	One killed, 18 injured in Dera Murad Jamali blast	01	18
Islamabad				
Rawalpindi ³²	22/02/2019	Police killed, 4 injured in firing in Rawalpindi, Pakistan	01	04

²⁷<https://www.pakistantoday.com.pk/2019/02/02/ptm-leader-killed-in-police-crackdown-on-peaceful-loralai-protesters/>

²⁸ <https://arynews.tv/en/three-fc-personnel-injured-in-chaman-explosion/>

²⁹<https://tribune.com.pk/story/1909482/1-four-security-personnel-injured-mastung-bomb-attack/>

³⁰<https://en.dailypakistan.com.pk/pakistan/four-fc-personnel-embrace-martyrdom-in-balochistan-gun-attack/>

³¹ <https://tribune.com.pk/story/1917462/1-least-one-dead-five-injured-balochistan-blast/>

³² http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2019-02/22/c_137841721.htm

