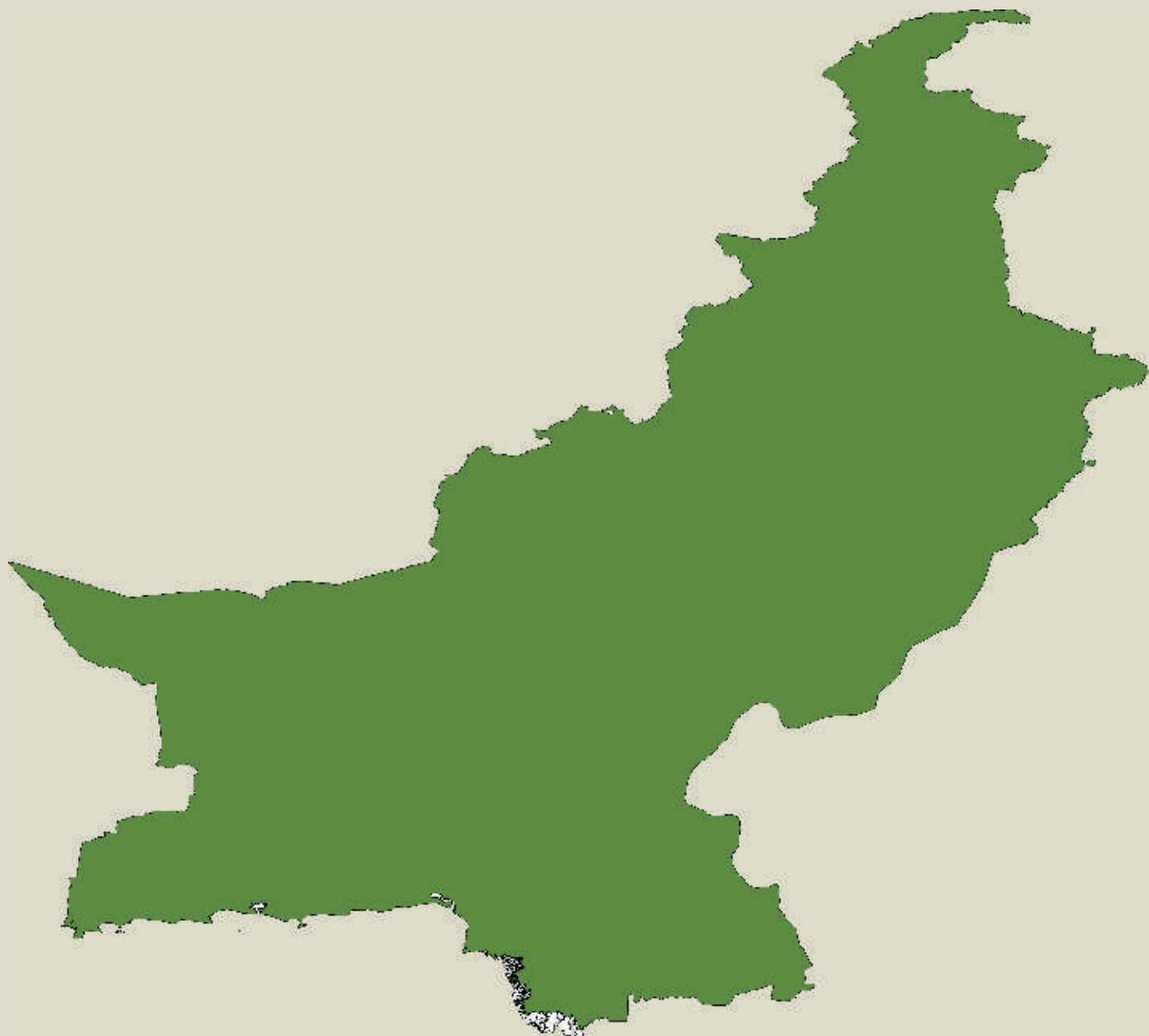


February 2022

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

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POLITICAL DEVELOPMENTS

NSA's visit, Editorial, *Dawn*, 01 February¹

National Security Adviser Moeed Yusuf has concluded his two-day visit to Kabul his first to the Afghan capital since the Taliban takeover last August. Dr Yusuf, who heads the Afghanistan Inter Ministerial Coordination Cell, met acting Deputy Prime Minister Abdus Salam Hanafi and acting Foreign Minister Amir Khan Muttaqi to discuss humanitarian requirements and Pakistan's proposals for strengthening the economic engagement to help Afghanistan tackle its financial challenges. An official announcement by the Prime Minister's Office said that the visit resulted in "substantive outcomes" in terms of forward movement on trade facilitation and social sector support. Both sides also reiterated their commitment to the early completion of three major connectivity projects. *Notwithstanding Pakistan's own economic challenges, as Afghanistan's immediate neighbour, this country cannot afford to sit on the fence, watch the economic situation deteriorate next door and face another round of exodus from there.* The formal agreement on border trade and trade in local currency will no doubt mitigate some of the challenges of the larger agrarian population in Afghanistan.

Indispensable ally, Editorial, *The Express Tribune*, 09 February²

A high-powered Saudi delegation led by Interior Minister Prince Abdul-Aziz bin Saud bin Naif was on a day-long visit, underscoring the indispensability of bilateralism. Both the countries revisited their resolutions in the domains of beefing investment profiles, easing of travel restrictions, freeing of prisoners' from Saudi jails, and buoying trade and economic interaction. Likewise, the Kingdom is home to around 2 million Pakistani expatriates, who form the backbone of Pakistan's forex reserves in terms of remittances. It was agreed to facilitate the diaspora in all possible ways, and it reflected on the importance of Pakistani labour and skilled workforce in the Middle East country. That the delegation met President Arif Alvi, apart from having a major huddle at the Ministry of Interior, before calling on the PM reflected the workaholic agenda at hand, and was an opportunity to minutely streamline cooperation in a befitting manner. Pakistan and Saudi Arabia enjoy strategic understanding in terms of defence affairs, and this aspect has a sacrosanct meaning as Islamabad is committed to defend the holy lands in case of any eventuality. This is what makes their relations an episode beyond realpolitik. *The all-weather friendship is free from political narrative, as it has the underlining of being state-centric. This is what makes it paramount for all times to come.*

¹ <https://www.dawn.com/news/1672655/nsas-visit>

² <https://tribune.com.pk/story/2342642/indispensable-ally>

Threats from within, Tariq Khosa, Dawn, 10 February³

The Tehreek-i-Labbaik Pakistan is a classic example of the state's abject surrender to a monster created and fostered to unleash violence against those deviating from the path set by the string-pullers. How was the TLP registered as a political party? The ECP asked no questions. Forming a platform of a large chunk of the Barelvi vote bank, it was used as an instrument of political engineering during the 2018 national elections. Both the previous PML-N-led government and the present PTI-led government had to beat a hasty retreat against the marauding hordes of bigots when they resorted to violence and sit-ins to achieve the agenda of certain undemocratic forces. Another malady is the 'culture of impunity'. Corruption has permeated every walk of life. *A source in NAB revealed that bureaucrats and businessmen were more corrupt than politicians. The phenomenon of 'elite capture' is reflected in the farcical accountability process.* Both the military and civilian governments have misused the institution that was ostensibly created to carry out across-the-board accountability. *NAB is an utter failure. It lacks transparency, autonomy and integrity. The process of appointment of its chairman has become tainted.* Another unresolved malady is the issue of missing persons or 'enforced disappearances', a wound that continues to fester due to the impunity enjoyed by certain state agencies.

Playing politics, Editorial, The News, 11 February⁴

Our national political scene appears to have turned into a situation where both the government and the opposition are looking more at power plays, and less at the rights of citizens and the problems they currently face. Unfortunately, in this cynical game for power, neither side appears to be able to find a definite direction. On its part, the ruling PTI appears determined to strengthen its position and has decided to reach out to the people via public rallies to be addressed by Prime Minister Imran Khan himself. The idea is to put Brand Imran forward – once again. While this tactic worked somewhat post-2014, whether the ruling party can pull this off now in the face of rising inflation and the lack of confidence shown for the PTI in recent local body's polls and by-elections – is unclear. In a strange attempt at looking to be seen to be doing something, on Thursday the prime minister handed out performance certificates to ministers and ministries that have apparently performed well. Meanwhile, the opposition groups, led by the PML-N and the PPP, have been meeting with leaders of smaller parties and a no confidence move is now being talked about much more confidently. *It is, however, uncertain what result this would have and the questions we have asked before remain up in the air for now what happens after a no-confidence move? What timeline are the opposition parties looking at when it comes to the next elections? And who gets the much-sought-after 'deal'?* It is

³ <https://www.dawn.com/news/1674308/threats-from-within>

⁴ <https://www.thenews.com.pk/print/932469-playing-politics>

significant that former Prime Minister Shahid Khaqan Abbasi continues to maintain that any no confidence move would only take place once the required numbers are in place.

PTM dharna, Editorial, Dawn, 15 February⁵

*Leaders and supporters of the Pashtun Tahafuz Movement are once again on the roads, this time camping out in front of the Sindh Assembly building until their demands are met. Their primary demand is the release from detention of their leader and MNA Ali Wazir. Mr. Wazir and other key figures of his movement had been booked for alleged anti-state speeches made at a rally in Karachi's Sohrab Goth in December 2020. On Sunday, members of the PTM marched up to the Sindh Assembly and after a brief stand-off were allowed to stage the dharna. They argued that if the Jamaat-i-Islami which recently held a month-long protest in front of the provincial assembly against the Sindh local government law could be allowed to hold a demonstration at the location, there was no reason why they should be treated differently. Here lies the crux of the problem. **Yet the state has refused to yield, while on the other hand it has acquiesced before violent, extremist movements. This has fueled resentment, for as a PTM leader pointed out on Sunday, if the state can negotiate with outfits known for their frequent use of violence to forward their claims why is there no tolerance for the PTM's demands?** Instead of creating fresh crises, the government needs to grant Ali Wazir bail and drop frivolous charges against the lawmaker, while peaceful movements calling for basic rights must not be termed anti-national simply for disagreeing with the dominant narrative.*

Political rhetoric, Sajad Jatoi, The News, 17 February⁶

*Last week, PM Imran Khan distributed 'certificates of appreciation' to the top 10 best-performing federal ministers. Before 'honouring' his ministers, the PM should have realised that even after the completion of almost four years of his five-year-long term, he is yet to fulfil the promises he made to the people to win the 2018 elections. The 'looted' wealth of the country is yet to be brought back, young people are yet to get jobs, new houses are yet to be built, and a new province is yet to be established in Punjab. Almost all of his promises are yet to be fulfilled. **Of all his promises, making Pakistan corruption-free was one which tempted people to vote him into power. However, since he assumed power, the country has plunged into the new depths of corruption as it dropped 16 places in the Global Corruption Perception Index from 124 to 140.** This is a big failure of his government. When he was in opposition, he used to make fiery speeches against the corruption of the previous governments, and had promised to make the country corruption-free. He has not only failed to keep his promises but also gone one step further. Contrary to his promises of making institutions strong and independent, he has weakened and politicised them. **The***

⁵ <https://www.dawn.com/news/1675163>

⁶ <https://www.thenews.com.pk/print/934265-political-rhetoric>

PM was ill-prepared to run the government and not ready to support the crumbling economy, contain soaring inflation, reduce the unemployment rate, and deal with numerous other issues. Perhaps he did not know that criticising a government while being in opposition is easier than running the country at the helm.

Look East reoriented, Editorial, *The Express Tribune*, 24 February⁷

Prime Minister Imran Khan has exhibited Pakistan's priority for regional integration. He set the tone of foreign policy, before his landmark visit to Russia, *by saying Islamabad will desist from being part of any camp in realpolitik, and will be an equal partner in peace and development. His visit to Moscow has come at a time when the stakes are down in Ukraine, fearing an imminent invasion by Russia, and Pakistan too is pitched to choose between Beijing and Washington as it flexes its muscles in an era of geo-economics in the wake of hurried withdrawal of the United States from Southwest Asia.* By focusing on trade and joint ventures, PM Khan has wisely watered down the notion of moving towards Russia as an alternative to the reigning superpower. In an interview to Russia Today, as a curtain-raiser before his visit, the PM made it clear that trade relations with all the countries are indispensable to lift its populace out of poverty, and he inadvertently hinted at India too. *By categorically mentioning strained ties with Delhi, and listing the reason behind it as India's power arrogance, Pakistan has aptly pointed out the flip side of the story to India's allied ally, as it inches towards it. The ball has been serviced into Russian President Vladimir Putin's court.*

PPP on the move, Editorial, *Dawn*, 28 February⁸

The PPP's 'long march' on the capital that kicked off from Karachi yesterday appears to be more of a mass mobilization drive in preparation of the fast-approaching 2023 elections than a strategy to oust Prime Minister Imran Khan. We know well that such protest campaigns don't bring down a party in power. The PPP isn't the only one whose engines are trying to groan back into life to make the party relevant to voters ahead of the polls. Others, including the ruling PTI itself, are also slowly moving into election mode. *The PDM, the multiparty opposition alliance of which the PPP was a major part until a year ago, has announced its support for the march ever since the opposition parties decided to join forces in order to overthrow the PTI set-up through a vote of no-confidence against the prime minister.* The PDM too is planning to march on the capital on Pakistan Day unless the opposition introduces its planned no-confidence motion in the National Assembly earlier. **In a tit-for-tat response to the PPP's long march plans**, the PTI and its allies from the province also took out a rally against the Sindh government on Saturday from Ghotki to Karachi. Such activities are expected to gain momentum whether or not the

⁷ <https://tribune.com.pk/story/2344959/look-east-reoriented>

⁸ <https://www.dawn.com/news/1677408/ppp-on-the-move>

opposition's move against Mr. Khan succeeds. *If the opposition parties fail to win over the PML-Q, they will have to depend on a rebellion from within the PTI, with dissenters agreeing to resign from the Assembly or vote with them again at the cost of their seats.*

ECONOMIC ISSUES

Soaring inflation, Editorial, *The Express Tribune*, 03 February⁹

Inflationary trend is here to stay. At an average rate of around 10 per cent consistently for the last six months, it has reached a two-year high of 12.96 per cent. The month of January has seen inflation touch 14.6 per cent, and is casting an adverse impact on the economy, as well as on the purchasing power of the consumers. Apparently the prime reason behind this escalation is the rise in oil and food prices internationally, but the Omicron bite is making it more awkward. These are the factors with which the global economy has to live on for many years to come, but in our case there is a lack of foresight. The government's inability to curb unnecessary imports and buoy the rupee against the dollar will continue to wreck the ship of the national economy. The million dollar question is: what to do? On the one hand, the government claims that the growth trend is balanced, and there has been considerable progress in exports, along with a bumpy agrarian yield. But the flip side is mismanagement on the part of the authorities when it comes to keeping an eye on demand and supply. There is literally no control over hoarders and black-marketers, and the result comes in the form of increasingly burdening consumers. *The worst is yet to come as the central bank will have to review its interest rate, which are now pinned on headline inflation, rather than evolving rates. But by all means this double-digit enigma will stay on and keep on browbeating public welfare.*

Cementing CPEC-II, Editorial, *The Express Tribune*, 08 February¹⁰

It was a new turn of leaf in Sino-Pak relations as their respective leadership huddled to foment the phase-two format of CPEC. Prime Minister Imran Khan's four-day visit to Beijing came at an opportune moment, and it simply demonstrated the importance of China in Pakistan's foreign policy. At a time, when the United States had bid adieu to the region, after a contested two decades of maneuvering in Southwest Asia, and as the world is once again sliding towards bipolarity, Islamabad made its geostrategic inclinations loud and clear by rallying behind Beijing. The generosity and forbearance exhibited by the Chinese leadership, as always, towards Pakistan is one of the greatest tangibles of

⁹ <https://tribune.com.pk/story/2341657/soaring-inflation>

¹⁰ <https://tribune.com.pk/story/2342439/cementing-cpec-ii>

bilateralism, and goes on to cement a diverse relationship in decades to come. *Prime Minister Imran's third visit to China in three years also signifies how indispensable relations with the emerging superpower are, and to what extent the Red Giant has been forthcoming to Pakistan's concerns.* The articulation was resounding as PM Imran enjoyed a consensual approach on his vision of geo-economics in the region, and how effective CPEC could be in changing the lives of billions of people in the region. *This incorporates policies for sustained growth, industrial development, agricultural modernization and regional connectivity.*

IMF and SOEs, Editorial, *The Express Tribune*, 16 February¹¹

The IMF has touched on a pertinent issue. Even if we do not agree with many of its dictates, the point that we need to reform our economic base is quite a logical demand. One of the pestering issues of Pakistan's growth dismay is that it has a plethora of sick units. These white elephants are eating away into the vitals of our resources, and are no less than a scourge. From steel mills to airlines and from cooperative units to ailing industries, we have a rotten battery where we keep on pumping in money to just keep them afloat. This has to change for good. *And the IMF's demand to address these liabilities through proper legislation, open to lenders' inspection, is worth-considering.* Thus, by making legislation and guarantees in this context as a precondition, the IMF may have transgressed its limits or in a way intervened in our sovereign limits, but it is a bitter fact and it needs to be addressed. The donor's call for bringing in transparency and an audit in this regard by June, to manage these companies vibrantly, has come as another political riddle. *The government has recently caved into a similar demand by bulldozing the autonomy legislation for the central bank, and is hardly out of rough waters. Handling these toxic loss-making units is certainly a challenge.* They are adversely impacting the economy and stealing away resources from potential allocations. The fact that non-financial commercial SOEs are to the tune of 44 per cent of GDP, and merely employ 0.7 per cent of employees, is no less a quagmire.

Rising food imports, Editorial, *The Express Tribune*, 21 February¹²

Aside from the fact that wheat imports will increase in quantity, poor harvests and political tensions in Russia and Ukraine two of Pakistan's main wheat import sources mean that prices will rise in international markets. While a recent meeting of the National Assembly's Special Committee on Agricultural Products focused on improving yields, it ignored several problems that cannot be addressed through increased efficiency alone. Granted, some of these are beyond its mandate, but we cannot address food insecurity without addressing the elephant in the room overpopulation. Pakistan has been heavily

¹¹ <https://tribune.com.pk/story/2343665/imf-and-soes>

¹² <https://tribune.com.pk/story/2344477/rising-food-imports>

water-stressed for decades, and the situation is only going to get worse. We are already dependent on foreign sources for many staple food items, including wheat, sugar and cooking oil. **Some panel members called for more investment in agriculture and other reforms. But reforms to improve agriculture can only do so much. Economic planners need to prepare for a time when the country is primarily dependent on imported food because they are sure not doing anything to address population growth.** Pakistan's population grows by about five million people every year. Even if we were to optimize yields, limited water and land availability mean that we will only be delaying the inevitable.

Inflation as political burden, Shahid Javed Burki, *The Express Tribune*, 14 February¹³

It is not surprising that deep concern about rising prices has become a serious political issue in Pakistan. The opposition is threatening that it would take to the streets and bring down the government by focusing on the issue of inflation. ***But Pakistan is not alone where rise in prices has become a political issue. However, in politically weak countries such as Pakistan it can prove to be distracting.*** It is important for the people in Pakistan to understand what is behind the rapid rise in prices and focus on the real causes. Bringing politics into the discussion is the right thing to do: it focuses the attention of those who manage the economy. But policymakers must not be distracted from the task at hand. Prices have risen and are rising in the country for two reasons: Pakistan is following a global trend that has sent up prices all around the world. What are the trends and how they can be addressed? Second, the government that currently holds the reins of power has taken several steps that have aggravated the problem but these were adopted to help the poorer segments of the population. Pakistan is experimenting with programs that aim to pump money into hands of the poor. ***The government of Imran Khan built upon the Benazir Income Support Program by launching the Ehsaas Emergency Cash Program on April 1, 2020. Under the program, a total of Rs203 billion would be dispersed to 15 million families, with each family getting Rs12, 000.*** The program would provide relief to one-third of the country's total population. It has been designed to keep bureaucratic controls to the minimum.

Implications of the resumed IMF deal, Syed Mohammad Ali, *The Express Tribune*, 18 February¹⁴

Forgetting the fiery rhetoric of the incumbent Prime Minister, as that of leaders before him, aiming to breaking the shackles of IMF lending, our economic pundits must be relieved to see the resumption of the stalled \$6 billion IMF loan package. The dispersal of an immediate \$1 billion will provide another lifeline to our struggling economy, but the

¹³ <https://tribune.com.pk/story/2343324/inflation-as-political-burden>

¹⁴ <https://tribune.com.pk/story/2344002/implications-of-the-resumed-imf-deal>

consequences of the reform conditionalities attached to the IMF loan will not bring good news for the already struggling masses. Pakistan remains amongst one of the most longstanding clients of the IMF. *The IMF has been lending money to Pakistan since the 1950s and it has increasingly been providing the country expert guidance based on its own macroeconomic ideology. While the Pakistani government may not have paid heed to repeated IMF advice that has not prevented this lending agency from giving Pakistan repeated loans.* Yet, the stated objectives of helping Pakistan become a more prosperous country with a sustainable economy remains a distant dream. The current \$6 billion IMF loan was taken back in 2019 and it was meant to go on for 39 months. Yet, the loan was suspended in January 2020, when Pakistan resisted IMF recommendations to increase electricity prices and impose additional taxes. After several bouts of negotiations, this past November, an agreement was reached for the resumption of this same loan. The IMF's decision to resume lending to Pakistan may be interpreted as a sign of the lender's largesse, but this largesse will undoubtedly imply that Pakistan will need to cut its expenditure over the coming months.

Burdened economy, Editorial, *The Express Tribune*, 28 February¹⁵

Pakistan economy is in a struggling mode. Though its macroeconomics indicators are defined, it is a plethora of external factors that is derailing it off and on. The surging current deficit and plummeting of rupee is primarily owing to oil and spiraling food prices on the international market. Furthermore, the fact that imports are pouring in despite curbs installed on them and inflation is uncontrollable are worrying symptoms. As the sixth IMF programme, the harshest in history, comes to an end in September, the government remains fingers-crossed as to what's next. The slippages in achieving budgetary targets are likewise a writing on the wall, and the concern is that the strategy to stem the rot is not picking momentum. *A governmental report says policy measures to contain imports couldn't create an impact. The good aspect, thus, is that exports grew by 29 per cent during the first half and reached \$15.2 billion.* There are more whooping worries as the country registered a current account deficit to the tune of \$11.6 billion in the first six months of the current fiscal year, and the government swallowed its highest single-month deficit of \$2.6 billion. This is untenable. The least that is needed is setting new benchmarks and consistently going after them. It is a foregone conclusion that auxiliary imports should be totally scrapped, and even necessary one scrutinized to the core. *This swirling twin deficits are a looming threat. They have to be taken care of. The sooner the better.*

¹⁵ <https://tribune.com.pk/story/2345550/burdened-economy>

SECURITY SITUATION

Persecuted media, Editorial, *Dawn*, 02 February¹⁶

The media freedom report compiled by the Council of Pakistan Newspaper Editors paints an abysmal picture of the realities of being a journalist in the country. It highlights how, in the last year alone, five journalists were killed in the line of duty and how overall attempts to stifle the media and block access to information have grown. It talks about the ghastly kidnapping and murder of local journalist Nazim Jokhio, as well as the threats, lawsuits and attempted attacks on other journalists. Not only does it speak of the serious threats to the lives of media workers who report on sensitive and controversial issues, it documents how the pandemic, too, claimed the lives of nine journalists. Media workers, both field reporters and desk staff, are increasingly experiencing either harassment or financial hardship or both. *They are being threatened, silenced and squeezed.* Be it a prime time TV anchor or a beat reporter, the threats exist for everyone. Even media group owners are not immune to such harassment. All these examples point to an ugly truth, that *the space for free speech and truthful accounts in our country is shrinking.* Unfortunately, the ruling party has no concern for the media's plight. The prime minister has little sympathy for journalists under threat, and has spoken dismissively about serious cases such as the disappearances of journalists. *His media advisers, too, are often in the limelight for trolling journalists on social media, or making unprofessional and personal comments about them.*

NSP and camp politics, Dr Talat Farooq, *The Express Tribune*, 04 February¹⁷

The foreign policy section of the National Security Policy (NSP) document states that "Pakistan does not subscribe to camp politics." Elsewhere relevant government quarters have insisted that Pakistan wants 'excellent' relations with both the US and China and can serve as a 'bridge' as it did during the Cold War. Sounds prudent. But is it doable? The fundamentally security-oriented great power rivalry continues to shape US-Pakistan relations. *The "Afghanistan leverage" might work in the long run but as things stand today, there is bipartisan consensus on Islamabad's perceived role in the US defeat.* Recognition of the Taliban government is not on the horizon. And Biden's recent statement that Afghanistan cannot be unified under one government sounds ominous! The US controls international lending organisations and financial watchdogs and is Pakistan's largest export market. Make no mistake, the US does subscribe to camp politics. *To balance relations, Pakistan needs economic and military diversification. Economics is part of geopolitics and so CPEC is a thorny issue for the US. But CPEC remains crucial for Pakistani and Chinese respective strategic goals.* It is facilitating Pakistan's growing

¹⁶ <https://www.dawn.com/news/1672846/persecuted-media>

¹⁷ <https://tribune.com.pk/story/2341827/nsp-and-camp-politics>

economic and military relationship with China and can reduce Islamabad's dependence on the US. Bureaucratic, political and business issues therefore must be addressed to ensure timely completion of the project.

Pakistan's war on terror-II, Kamran Yusuf, *The Express Tribune*, 06 February¹⁸

There has been a sudden spike in terrorist attacks in restive Balochistan province over the last couple of weeks. The first major attack happened on the night between January 25 and 26 when terrorists targeted a security check post in Kech district. At least 10 Pakistani soldier's embraced martyrdom in the attack before the security forces neutralised the terrorists. *Baloch insurgency has always been backed by regional and extra-regional players. Pakistan has time and again said the Afghan soil had often been used by those elements to advance their strategic interests. But Pakistan was hoping that the exit of the US forces from neighbouring Afghanistan would discourage those elements or deny them the space under Taliban rule to operate out of Afghanistan.* Recent events, however, suggest the contrary. The number of terrorist attacks in Balochistan and in other parts of the country saw an increase in 2021 compared to 2020. In fact the surge in attacks coincided with the Afghan Taliban takeover. In September last year just a month after the chaotic US exit from Afghanistan, a top US general warned that the US withdrawal could affect Pakistan the most.

New wave of terror, Editorial, *The Daily Times*, 08 February¹⁹

Finally, after weeks of terrorist attacks in different parts of the country, the Pakistani government has "strongly condemned" the use of Afghan soil by terrorists as five more servicemen lost their lives in Khurram Agency to militant fire from across the border. But even in its condemnation, Islamabad only went as far as saying that it "expects that (the) interim Afghan government will not allow conduct of such activities against Pakistan in future", instead of firmly putting its foot down, demanding immediate action against TTP, and warning of serious consequences if matters are not handled properly. *It has been noticed lately that while it is very right to lobby for resumption of aid to Afghanistan, considering the humanitarian catastrophe unfolding there, the Pakistani government has been a little too soft in its interactions with the Taliban.* Not only have they done nothing to honour their promise of keeping TTP in check, but the incident involving Taliban fighters tearing down part of the border fence on the Pakistani side, then attacking Pakistani soldiers who were repairing it, and then threatening more such attacks against the fence, was not really handled like it should have been. Now that we are well and truly in the grip of a new wave of terrorism, it's a little concerning that the government's

¹⁸ <https://tribune.com.pk/story/2342304/pakistans-war-on-terror-ii>

¹⁹ <https://dailytimes.com.pk/881283/new-wave-of-terror/>

approach doesn't seem to involve anything more than waiting for the next attack and issue the usual condemnation after it.

Another lynching, Editorial, *The Express Tribune*, 15 February²⁰

One more disgusting mob lynching incident has left our heads hanging in shame. In what seems to be a fist of anger by a misguided crowd, a mentally retarded person who allegedly resorted to blasphemy was brutally killed in Khanewal town of Punjab. This highly condemnable incident simply underlines the fact that similar previous acts failed to stand the test of trial, and there was no exemplary retribution. Thus, the psyche of all those who believe in taking law into their hands is upbeat, and they do not bother to look at the saner picture of compassion and consolation. Likewise, there is no fear instilled in their hearts that the law would take its course. It squarely reflects how intolerant we are as a societal unit, and how ineffective valves of redressing grievances have turned out to be. Peer leaders, politicians, administration and religious scholars have not lived up to the expectations of carving out a rational and considerate society, and this is why extremism thrives. *The Khanewal lynching wherein a middle-aged man was stoned to death after being tied to a tree is shocking. If one goes further into the details of the gruesome incident, it was evident that even police personnel were unable to rescue the victim, and the mob had its way.* This speaks a lot about the incapacity of the police, and even hints at the superficial role they played under pressure from a charged crowd.

Pakistan's Appeasement of the Taliban Will Never Result in Peace, Mohsin Dawar, *Friday Times*, 26 February²¹

Once again, Pakistan is attempting to resume 'peace talks' with the Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP). This is despite the fact that Islamabad blamed the shadowy group for a decade and half of the violence that killed more than 70,000 civilians and soldiers. *Local elders of the Wazir, Mehsud and Dawar tribes from North and South Waziristan are being used as jirgas to engage the TTP and other Taliban groups for talks in Afghanistan that are being said to have been facilitated by the Haqqani Network.* These jirgas are meant to convey the state's willingness to talk to the TTP and to engage them in dialogue. The state has yet to take the locals of these areas or the country's citizens at large in confidence about these negotiations. Our people are being used by the state for its own objectives. The Pakistani government's latest attempt to negotiate peace with the group ended in futility last year. After a brief ceasefire, the TTP escalated its attacks on the security forces and practically demanded a surrender of the state. Ominous warnings overshadow the new effort to negotiate peace with the TTP. *Pakistani civil society, peace activists, and some opposition politicians point to Islamabad's failure in winning over Islamic extremists by appeasing them. Yet the government and the powerful military establishment are not*

²⁰ <https://tribune.com.pk/story/2343447/another-lynching>

²¹ <https://www.thefridaytimes.com/pakistans-appeasement-of-the-taliban-will-never-result-in-peace/>

listening. This internal squabbling within the Taliban is linked to the fate of the TTP. Historically, the group has functioned as a frontline defense force of the Haqqani Network, which orchestrated its creation to protect interests and safe havens in Pakistan's tribal areas. Even when Pakistan was leading operations to wipe out the TTP, the group survived thanks to the support and protection extended by the Haqqani Network. In the current environment, the Haqqani Network appears unwilling to disarm the TTP, which is its main frontline defense force and primary supplier of suicide bombers and fighters. *Losing the TTP will cause the Haqqani Network to give up its entire support base. Hence its interests in Afghanistan will limit how far the Haqqani Network will go against the TTP.*

URDU MEDIA

Compatibility between national security and economic policies, Editorial, Ummat, 02 February²²

Some economists predicted at the end of the cold war that this is the starting point of economic war. The economy is going to play a decisive role in wars of every kind. The Jewish economic supremacy was established in the guise of The World Bank and IMF. *These institutions targeted developing countries, particularly Islamic countries. Pakistan tops in their target. The way the Pakistani economy is tied with foreign debts is not allowing Pakistan to formulate other policies independently.* This is a worrying matter. Tomorrow IMF may interfere in our security policies. *It is worthy to note the picture of the Pakistani economy drawn by former FBR chairman Shabbar Zaidi is very disturbing. He said Pakistan has become bankrupt economically. There are other economists who seem to be worried about the country's economy. A well-known economist Dr. Qaiser Bengali whose video of talk show went viral admits that Pakistan is bankrupt now and reached a point if the remedy is provided at the war level.* There might come a time soon when Pakistan has to surrender its atomic programs. To avoid this danger not only the government but the whole nation has to think. We have to end the political tension. The recently announced national security policy (NSP) was formed without consulting the opposition parties. The government and opposition should sit together before making any policy.

²² <https://www.ummat.net/2022/02/02/news.php?p=idr1.gif>

Prime Minister Imran Khan's visit to China, hopes and expectations, Editorial, *Nawai Waqt*, 03 February²³

Prime Minister Imran Khan is leaving for a three-day visit to the People's Republic of China today. The Prime Minister's delegation will also include five federal ministers. During his three-day visit, the Prime Minister will meet with Chinese President Xi Jinping and Prime Minister Li Keqiang and attend the opening ceremony of the Winter Olympics. The Prime Minister will also hold talks on a \$ 3 million loan from China. In view of the changing situation in the region and Pakistan's internal and external affairs, the Prime Minister's visit to China is being seen as of paramount importance in diplomatic circles. It will not only enhance the friendly relations between the two countries but also have far-reaching effects on the region. *China got independence a year later after Pakistan. Despite that it reached a stage of development which is unimaginable. Initially, China also faced many internal problems like Pakistan. Hunger and poverty were its main challenges internally.* The external challenge was that no country was willing to have diplomatic relations with it. *As a socialist economy, even the western countries were reluctant to accept it, while the pro-capitalist United States and its allies were not ready to befriend China. Despite this global isolation, the Chinese leadership did not give up and went to great lengths to give its country internal stability. Pakistan was the first country to extend a hand of friendship to China.* Even when China was isolated globally, Pakistan played a key role in China's relations with the United States. Which is a milestone in the relations between the two countries. Thus, Pak-China friendship emerged as an example all over the world and it was said that Pak-China friendship is higher than the Himalayas, deeper than the sea and sweeter than honey. Today, China, under the able leadership of President Xi Jinping, is rapidly advancing towards prosperity and development. As a reliable friend of Pakistan, China's development and prosperity is also welcome in Pakistan and its fruits are also reaching to Pakistan as well.

Challenge to the judiciary! Editorial, *Jang*, 03 February²⁴

Speeches made in the full court reference on the retiring day of Chief Justice of the Supreme Court Gulzar Ahmed, would help in understanding the challenges that the Supreme Court has faced in the past and may be dealing with in the coming days. It should be acknowledged that the senior judges set an example of hard work and also worked during the holidays but there are still a large number of pending cases which is definitely a big challenge for the new Chief Justice. *The decision to start the hearing via video link was a wise one after the breakup of the pandemic. Eight judges, including the chief justice, were affected by the corona, but judicial work continued.* By adopting digital methods and doubling the capacity of video link, 4143 cases were heard through video link. This is, of

²³ <https://www.nawaiwaqt.com.pk/03-Feb-2022/1494718>

²⁴ <https://jang.com.pk/news/1045301>

course, an unforgettable chapter in our judicial history. In response to the challenges, the newly appointed Chief Justice of Pakistan Omar Ata Bandial referred to the unconstitutional, illegal and immoral practices of scandalizing high court judges on social media. Instead of criticizing the verdicts, he sent a message to those who are defaming the judges to think before taking action against the judiciary. *Justice Omar Ata Bandial emphasized the need for elimination of unnecessary litigation and measures for alternative justice systems. Outgoing Chief Justice Gulzar Ahmed, while stating that he had done his job with utmost honesty, also clarified that balance of powers is the basis of constitutional framework and ensures jurisdiction of state institutions.* Newly-appointed Chief Justice Omar Ata Bandial clarified that all the courts would have to conduct performance audits to identify weaknesses. He highlighted the point that differences in the opinion of judges are due to their judicial concepts. This diversity leads to an increase in perception.

People again bear the brunt of inflation, Editorial, Nawa-i-Waqt, 14 February²⁵

The government has increased the prices of electricity by PKR3.10 per unit in the monthly fuel adjustment. According to the notification, the Central Power Purchasing Agency (CPPA) had requested for an increase of PKR3.12 in electricity per unit. The inflation would be added in the bills of the month of February. Some also say that the prices of petroleum would also be raised. *In the current situation when the people are already suffering because of the economic crisis, the prices of the essential commodities have made things worse. They are angry over the policies of the government. Seeing an opportunity the opposition is trying to benefit from the situation and the anger of the people. It has started a no-confidence-motion against the government and is planning an in-house change.* On the other hand some alliance partners of the government are unhappy with the Imran led government as well. In such an environment increasing the prices of electricity and burdening the common people can make them angrier. People would find it intolerable and they may start expressing their anger against the government. *Some reports say that the prices of petrol may be raised on 16 February. Such reports create uncertainty among the people. The losses of the ruling alliances' candidates in the recently held local government elections in Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa (KP) and Punjab were because of these reasons.* But despite that the government's thinking doesn't seem to change. The government has only one year left. It's better to try to provide the people some relief during this time. More such reliefs, the more the government would benefit.

²⁵ <https://www.nawaiwaqt.com.pk/E-Paper/Gawadar/2022-02-14/page-4/detail-10>

Islamabad's unfortunate incident, Editorial, Daily Pakistan, 18 February²⁶

The arrest of a prominent journalist Mohsin Baig has raised many questions. Calling the actions of FBR illegal and bogus, the Additional district and session judge Zafar Iqbal said that FIA had no authority to raid the house of Mohsin Baig. However, Margalla police station has taken three day custody of Mohsin Baig and his son Hamza as they face charges of supporting terrorism. The action Mohsin Baig was taken after a written complaint filed by federal minister Murad Saeed to FIA's Cyber Crime Wing (CCW) in which he had accused Mohsin Baig of using derogatory language about Murad in a talk show, 'NewsOne'. However, FBR personnel had no warrant against Mohsen and they went to the latter's house in civil dress and crossed over the wall of the house; seeing this Mohsen brought out his revolver to defend himself. Mohsin Baig has accused the FBT personnel of assaulting him, which was also supported by the swelling on his head and face. The way Mohsin has been handled raises many questions, irrespective of what he has said about the minister. According to Mohsin neither was he summoned by FIA nor was he told that a complaint had been filed against him. That means that FIA acted out of the rules. The question is who forced the FIA to act rashly and illegally. If in the context of the incident some say that the action was taken on the behest of the government who can deny that. How come the FIA all of sudden became so united and fearless and in the capital of the country it searched the house of a journalist without a warrant. But it's true that if the state institutions have acted under pressure from the government neither has helped in the past nor will it in future. The way FIA flouted its legal duties is clear from the incident. Even the court has pointed it out. Prime Minister Imran Khan has been supportive of freedom of expression. It's his responsibility to prevent the incidents like of Mohsin Baig. The law can hold everyone accountable equally provided that it takes its due course.

China-Pakistan joint statement, Editorial, Jang, 08 February²⁷

Prime Minister Imran Khan met the Chinese President Xi Jinping on the last day of his three day visit to China. After the meeting a long 33 point joint statement was released in which defense and security cooperation between the countries was said to be essential. Both countries supported each other in their respective basic interests like trade, infrastructure, agriculture, and science and technological cooperation. The two also agreed on the handover of the responsibility for social and economic welfare of the local people to the CPEC committee on mutual cooperation. Both countries asked for international cooperation on addressing the humanitarian crisis in Afghanistan. *In the statement China has expressed its desire to help Pakistan in defending its autonomy and economic development; Pakistan on the other hand supported 'One China policy' and also expressed its support to China on the South China Sea, Taiwan, Hong Kong and Tibet.* According to

²⁶ <https://dailypakistan.com.pk/E-Paper/lahore/2022-02-18/page-9/detail-0>

²⁷ <https://e.jang.com.pk/detail/47822>

information minister Fawad Chaudhry and foreign minister Shah Mehmood Qureshi the visit of the prime minister was successful. That means the visit would further increase trust between the countries. *For the last few days the Chinese were unhappy over the slow work on CPEC and the security issues in Pakistan. To further enhance the trust the work on CPEC projects needs to be fastened and given the growing terrorist attacks in the country CPEC Pak-Saudi relations and Afghanistan.*

Pak-Saudi relations and Afghanistan, Editorial, *Nawa-i-Waqt*, 09 February²⁸

On a one-day long visit to Pakistan Saudi Arabia's Interior Minister Prince Abdul Aziz Bin Saud Bin Naif met President Arif Alvi, Prime Minister Imran Khan, interior minister Sheikh Rashid, army chief Gen. Qamar Bajwa and others. In these meetings the matters of mutual interest were discussed. *President Arif Alvi and Prime Minister Imran Khan thanked the Saudi government for financial aid to Islamabad. They expressed their satisfaction on the ties between the countries and asked to enhance people-to-people contact. They said that the countries would continue helping and standing by each other.* Prince Abdul Aziz also praised Pakistan's role in development and progress of the kingdom. *Saudi Arabia and Pakistan have brotherly relations. The situation demands that these ties are further strengthened and cooperation increased.* From the times of Shah Faisal Abdul Aziz, the Saudis have played a role of a leader of the Muslim world. At this time Afghanistan is caught in a very bad crisis. Because of the scarcity of food and medicine, people in Afghanistan are suffering. America has frozen the assets of Afghanistan. Other developed countries have not come forward either for support. *It is the responsibility of the Muslim world that not only should they recognize the interim government of the Taliban in Kabul but also help the Afghans and demand the UN to recognize the government in Kabul.* The 'Muslim world' needs to come together at this time of crisis.

Increasing debts more burden, Editorial, *Jang*, 25 February²⁹

It should be matter of concern for the financial team of the government that at a time when recently harsh condition set by the International monetary Fund (IMF) were accepted to next installment of loan from the international financial body, some sources have revealed that the in the first six months of the ongoing financial year the amount of foreign debt has doubled. According to the report, the total amount of the foreign debt was \$6.66 billion from July to September last year which has gone up to \$12.2 billion during the same months in the current year. The loans taken and grants in January 2020 of worth \$2.59 billion are extra. Additionally, if the loan taken from Saudi Arabia in December 2021, that was \$3 billion, is added the total amount will cross \$14 billion. And ten if the loans from the IMF are included, the amount will go up to \$17 billion. Still it can't be said to be long lasting for

²⁸ <https://www.nawaiwaqt.com.pk/E-Paper/Gawadar/2022-02-09/page-4/detail-10>

²⁹ <https://e.jang.com.pk/detail/60896>

the market. According to the experts, *during the current year, the true income of Pakistan is limited to the use of the loans which is used for running the institutions of the country, meeting the expenditures, including salaries etc.* Meanwhile, the rise in the prices of petroleum and electricity has crossed double digit numbers in a very small time. Many sections of the salary class think that they should spend their salaries on travel or on food only. The government should be prepared to deal with its negative impact as well.

ELECTRONIC MEDIA

Off the Record with Kashif Abbasi, Fresh medical report submitted in LHC advises Nawaz against travelling to Pakistan? ARYNews, 02 February³⁰

A fresh medical report of former Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif was submitted by the PML-N to the Lahore High Court on Tuesday 01 February, in which *the PML-N supremo was advised against travelling to Pakistan in light of possible health risks posed to him amid the ongoing Covid-19 crisis and the possibility of health-related complications he could develop after returning to "solitary confinement"*. The PTI government officials have criticised the move labelling it as yet another attempt to keep Nawaz Sharif in London on basis of fake medical reports. The report also underlined that Nawaz Sharif has to avoid solitary environment (*indicating jail*) due to stress and Covid situation. The host underlined that it has also been criticised that in Nawaz Sharif medical case only reports and advises are sent and made public but the details of the tests are not disclosed. *Guests: Mia Javid Latif-PML-N & Ali Nawaz Awan-PTI. Mia Javid Latif* pointed out that when Nawaz Sharif left the country, it was PTI government and today still it is their government, Imran Khan himself checked the report after which Nawaz Sharif left the country. If the medical reports were wrong why the government did not investigate, it has been two years since. Why the government asking questions now? There was no board formed for bringing Nawaz Sharif back. No one in Pakistan is happy with the performance of the PTI government and they are full of mafias. *Ali Nawaz Awan* pointed out that the Islamabad High Court has underlined that Nawaz Sharif can be treated in Pakistan and he should return back to the country. Punishment is given to give stress and not to reduce stress, and in this case Nawaz Sharif has to be punished for robbing the country's wealth and stashing it in foreign banks. He is labelled absconder by IHC and is convicted.

³⁰ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IMxojar78V8>

Breaking Point with Malick, PTI allies meeting the opposition: Will there be vote of no confidence? Hum News, 08 February³¹

The host underlined that there has been a sudden rise in activities of the opposition parties as they are hosting meetings with each other. If things process in the same speed it looks like that a joint opposition will be formed soon to move no confidence motion against the PTI government. Shahid Khaqan Abbasi the host informed that has said that 10 to 20 PTI members will soon come out in support of the no confidence motion against the PTI government. **Guests:** Arif Hameed Bhatti-Senior Analyst, Mazhar Abbass-senior analyst & Shahid Khaqan Abbasi-PML-N Vice President. *Arif Hameed Bhatti* pointed out that something has been cooking from few days, some allies of the PTI government are openly saying that they support the establishment and not PTI and if the establishment is not supporting the PTI government, why should they. *The opposition parties meeting each other is not the issue, they have been doing this in the past formed PDM, but the real issue is that the PTI allies like MQM, PML-Q are now meeting opposition party leaders and this is a solid development.* Even the CM Balochistan is saying that PTI government has cheated them. He underlined that the ground is slowly slipping away from the governments hands. *Mazhar Abbass* pointed out that PM Imran Khan has always kept one arm distance with the PTI allies and the allies are not happy with his attitude for a long time. If the PM does not want to meet his allies, then the meeting of allies with opposition is but natural. Now the PM is saying that he will make contact with the public instead of talking to the allies. The allies have played a very important role so far to keep the PTI government intact.

Shahid Khaqan Abbasi pointed out that it is opposition's responsibility to move vote of no confidence against the PM. I have no issue with the PPP personally, but when it is politics it is a different ball game. PML-Q has made it clear till *Riyasat* (establishment) is with PTI, they will stand with PTI government. We need ten more members from the government allies to bring vote of no confidence. I have met 22 PTI MNA's and we are talking about the vote of no confidence.

PM Imran Khan's visit to Russia: Is the timing wrong? Khabar Hai, GNN, 23 February³²

The visit of PM Imran Khan to Russia has coincided with the Russia Ukraine crisis that has now reached a critical stage with Russia attacking the Ukrainian land in support of the rebels. The International community is questioning Russia's move, so at such a crucial time questions are asked of the PM of Pakistan will cut short the visit or complete the trip and support Russia? What message Imran Khan is giving to West and European countries by this visit? **Guests:** Khurshid Mahmud Kasuri- Former Minister of Foreign Affairs & Arif

³¹ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=l1LWS25EjN4>

³² <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xP-JphHwCaw>

Hameed Bhatti-senior Analyst. *Khurshid Mahmud Kasuri* pointed out that this visit of Imran Khan to Russia was pre planned from a long time, before two, three months. The 2 billion dollar gas pipeline is been laid down from Karachi to Kasur, the guess was that during this visit the PM will talk about this pipeline and take further bilateral steps. Russia is also interested in the steel mill industry in Pakistan, and if comes the industry will be expanded but unfortunately it has not happened till now due to the government's policy. ***Pakistan should keep its door open for Russia. Pakistan should not be part of any camp, US or Russia and look at its strategic interests.*** Foreign office I hope must have given briefing to PM Imran Khan for his Russia visit and it should not look like that Pakistan is against the west and supporting Russia in the crisis. *Arif Hameed Bhatti pointed* out that top Pakistani government officials have termed the visit a rare opportunity to make headways in the energy sector and regional connectivity, while Russia seeks a greater role in Afghanistan post US-withdrawal. ***Even though the prime minister had played down the timing of the visit and the effect it would have on the country's relations with the West, it is a double-edged sword and that the government must tread with caution.*** Yes there is a global tension but the visit is of a bilateral nature, and a similar path was adopted during the recent visit to China where the economy, economic indicators and connectivity were at the heart of that tour," he remarked.

Aiteraz Hai with Adil Abbasi, PPP's antigovernment march to Islamabad & PTI's Haqooq-i-Sindh March starts from Sindh? ARY News, 27 February³³

Heralding the beginning of a "war on Prime Minister Imran Khan and his government", Pakis-tan People's Party (PPP) workers and supporters led by chairman Bilawal Bhutto-Zardari on Sunday, 27 February began to march towards the federal capital from the Quaid-i-Azam's mausoleum with the pledge that the long march would demonstrate that Imran Khan's government had lost the nation's trust. The PPP chairman raised a 38-point charter of demands and called for a nationwide and unified movement of all opposition parties to bring down the Pakistan Tehreek-i-Insaf (PTI) rule. On the other hand the PTI also started its 'Haqooq-i-Sindh March' on 26 February led by Foreign Minister Shah Mehmood Qureshi at Kamoo Shaheed in Ubauro town of Ghotki district. He said that PPP had done nothing for the uplift of Sindh and its people over the last almost 15 years. ***"The masses present here to join this march against PPP shows that they want a change and support Prime Minister Imran Khan,"*** he said. Is the PPP and PTI using Sindh to woo their voters, and are just strategies and counter strategies? Or something happen in Islamabad and the opposition will be able to bring vote of no confidence? ***Guests:*** Ali Mohammad Khan-PTI; Faisal Karim Kundi-PPP & senior analyst Mazhar Abbas ***Mazhar Abbas*** pointed out that PPP has taken a risk and the PPP is taking so much time to reach the federal capital on 5th march. They are planning that the moment the March reach Islamabad, vote of no

³³ https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_JpRcfUNE64

confidence will be submitted against the PTI. But he underlined how much crowd or charge crowd will reach with the PPP to federal capital on 9th march. In fact it is a big political activity, no doubt. The question is what is the use of the long march? Will the opposition be able to fix the inflation in case there is a vote of no confidence? **Faisal Karim Kundi** questioned when the PTI came into power in 2018 what was the condition of the country? PPP always provide empowerment when where they came into power. We will always use democratic manner to bring down the government and the march will be engraved in the history and remembered as bringing down the government of Imran Khan. PPP has given support to the people in the form of Benazir support income. **Ali Mohammad Khan** pointed out that the PPP exploited Sindhis and kept them deprived of their due rights. The PTI's march is for awareness of what the PPP has done wrong in Sindh. He asked people of Sindh to rise against PPP over the excesses. Opponents of Imran Khan and PTI see the sea of people coming here from all parts of Sindh and realise the support we have. ***PTI will rout PPP in Sindh in the 2023 general elections and form its government.*** Sindh lagged behind in education sector as thousands of schools were lying closed and thousands more occupied by PPP-backed feudal lords, who were using them as their warehouses and for other purpose.

BOMBINGS, SHOOTINGS AND DISAPPEARANCES

(Select incidents culled out from the Pakistan media)

Place	Date	Description	Killed	Injured
Balochistan				
Noshki & Panjgur ³⁴	02/02/2022	ISPR says attacks repulsed in Balochistan's Noshki and Panjgur; 4 terrorists killed	04	00
Quetta ³⁵	08/02/2022	Two security personnel injured in Quetta blast	00	02
Turbat ³⁶	24/02/2022	12 terrorists killed in Balochistan, KP: ISPR	12	00

³⁴ <https://www.dawn.com/news/1672907/ispr-says-attacks-repulsed-in-balochistans-noshki-and-panjgur-4-terrorists-killed>

³⁵ <https://tribune.com.pk/story/2342514/two-security-personnel-injured-in-quetta-blast-1>

³⁶ <https://www.thenews.com.pk/print/936328-12-terrorists-killed-in-balochistan-kp-ispr>