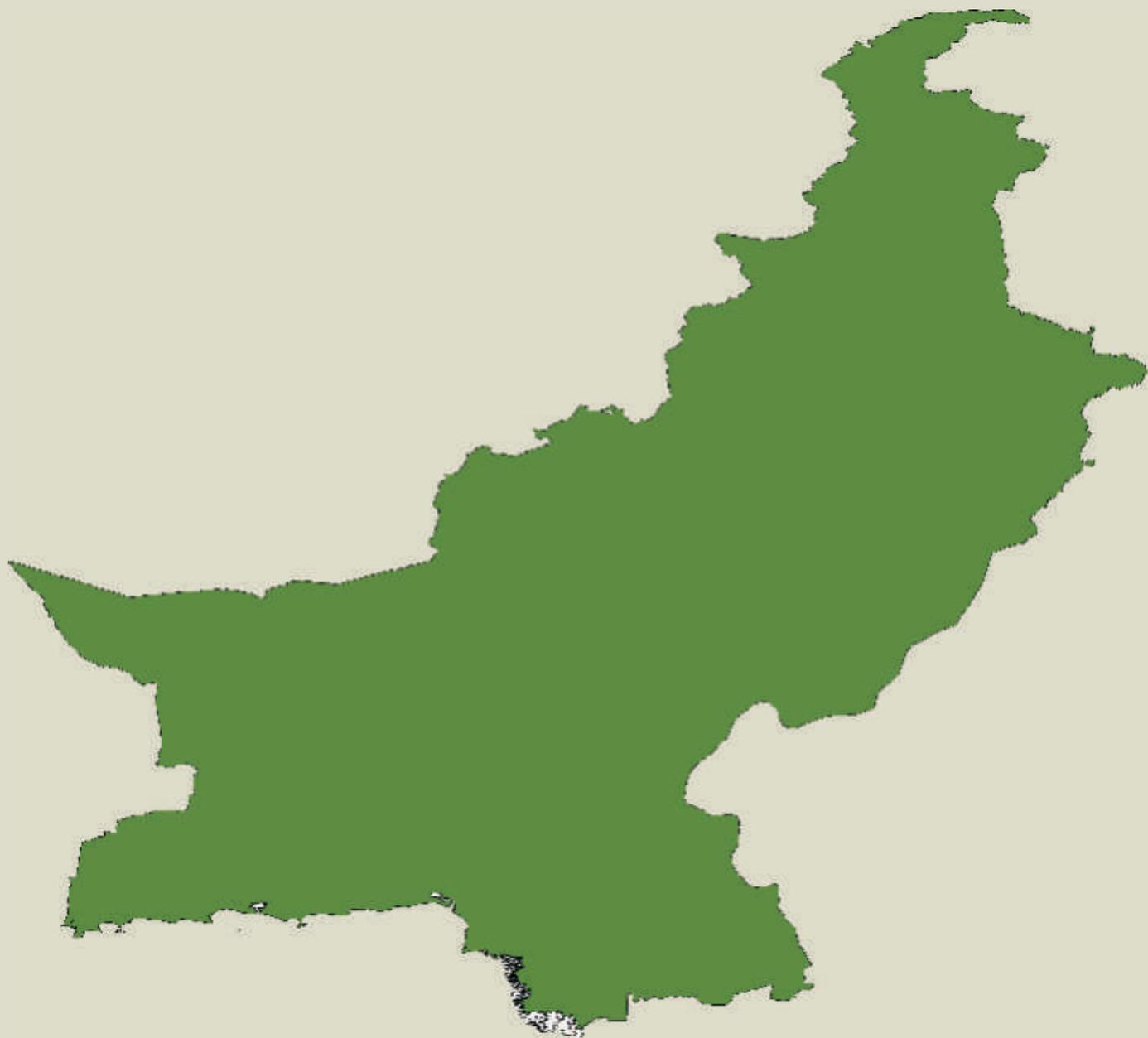


February 2021

PAKISTAN NEWS DIGEST

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



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



MANOHAR PARRIKAR INSTITUTE FOR
DEFENCE STUDIES AND ANALYSES
मनोहर पर्रिकर रक्षा अध्ययन एवं विश्लेषण संस्थान

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POLITICAL DEVELOPMENTS

Misplaced PTI euphoria? Abbas Nasir, *Dawn*, 31 January¹

The next three months will test Prime Minister Imran Khan's hypothesis that the opposition Pakistan Democratic Movement has run out of steam and is in the process of disintegrating with the coalescing partners PPP and PML-N pulling in different directions. It was a sign of the prime minister's supreme confidence in his ability to stay in the saddle that on Thursday he openly suggested he favoured an authoritarian system and blamed democratic dispensations for the country's lack of economic progress. *The opposition claims that people are angry and fed up with the inflation triggered by massive devaluation and unemployment due to the faltering economy.* Therefore, they will nullify any incumbency advantages accruing to the PTI in the by-elections. This claim is yet to be tested at the ballot box. *If the PML-N were to win the by-elections in any significant manner, the party will feel encouraged to offer mass resignations even if the PPP refuses to follow suit.* The government may have said it will happily hold by-elections if that were to happen, but the truth is it won't be easy to control and contain mass mobilization during scores of by-elections. *If the party does not do as well as it thinks it will in the by-polls, the PPP proposal to move a no-confidence motion against Punjab Chief Minister Usman Buzdar, to start with, may become acceptable to those PDM parties that have not warmed up to it thus far.* Given the numerical strength of the prime minister compared to the Punjab chief minister, the latter seems more vulnerable to such a move. But even that vulnerability will hinge hugely on whether the establishment stays neutral. If it does not, the move could well be stillborn. *Against the backdrop of Nawaz Sharif's insistence that any in-house change is pointless unless a new social contract is in place and fresh, fair elections are held, the political moves the PML-N makes will be significant.*

The Jan 31 deadline, Editorial, *The Express Tribune*, 01 February²

It was an ultimatum and an oft-repeated one, first given out in mid-December. The PDM had warned Imran Khan to quit as Prime Minister by January 31 or face action. What kind of an action? Long march? En masse resignations from assemblies? Or, a no-confidence motion? Well, this was the sticking point and still is. A consensus continues to elude the 10-party opposition alliance on the kind of action to be taken against a "non-compliant" prime minister and his government. So much so that the

¹ <https://www.dawn.com/news/1604632>

² <https://tribune.com.pk/story/2282265/the-jan-31-deadline>

January 31 deadline has passed away quite quietly. And the PM is not bothered at all. Apart from a tweet from Bilawal Bhutto Zardari, marking the passing of the deadline, the PDM leadership preferred to keep mum rather than speak in justification of their lack of action. *And what is it that hinders the PDM from stepping out in pursuit of its stated objectives?* Well, there are two factors in the context *one*, lack of mass support required for something as big as an anti-government movement; and *two*, the PPP's divergent position within the alliance. That the PDM has failed to mobilise the masses against the government has no two opinions something that the opposition alliance might have also realized. *First it was the flop show in Lahore on December 13 that exposed the PDM's lack of preparedness. Then came a lackluster protest outside the ECP on January 20, clearly showing where this anti-government coalition stands.*

Senate polls, Editorial, Dawn, 05 February³

The government has tabled a bill in the National Assembly to change the voting mechanism in the Senate elections from secret to open balloting but the opposition has blocked voting on the bill in this session. It is the responsibility of all political parties to bring about reforms that can eliminate this practice of vote buying in the Senate. *However, the way that the government has gone about doing this is unfortunate. It has launched parallel initiatives in the Supreme Court as well as parliament to change the system of voting without making a substantive effort to build a consensus on this reform. The Supreme Court is hearing the case and has yet to issue a verdict.* It is strange that without waiting for the court to announce a judgement, the government tried to get a vote in the National Assembly. In addition, the government knew fully well that it did not have the numbers to push through a constitutional amendment. This is why this entire exercise appears geared towards gaining political mileage by pointing out that the opposition does not want to legislate on reform which, the government feels, can eliminate corruption in the Senate electoral process. *By needlessly politicising the issue, the government has wasted an opportunity to bring about legislation through a detailed process of debate, discussion and consensus.*

A flawed system, Zahid Hussain, Dawn, 10 February⁴

It is not for the first time that the Senate elections have generated such intense debate over their transparency. But the issue had never hit such a low before. The spectacle of rowdiness witnessed in the National Assembly during the government's abortive move to introduce open balloting for the coming

³ <https://www.dawn.com/news/1605572/senate-polls>

⁴ <https://www.dawn.com/news/1606508>

Senate elections last week yet again demonstrated the dysfunctionality of our legislature. *The presidential ordinance striking down secret balloting is yet another demonstration of the arbitrariness that has become the hallmark of the PTI government that refuses to adopt a bipartisan approach to important constitutional issues.* It is a desperate attempt to prevent possible defections from its ranks in the polls. Pakistan's Senate elections manifest all that is flawed in the country's democratic process. Horse-trading and the selling and buying of votes have become the norm, raising questions about the legitimacy and sanctity of the upper house. *Yet, there has not been any serious effort on the part of our political leadership across the spectrum to make the process more transparent and credible.* There is certainly a need to revisit the entire Senate election process to make it more credible and representative. But more importantly, it is for the political parties to end controversial practices within their own ranks.

Game on Hai! Najam Sethi, *The Friday Times*, 12 February⁵

The fact that the public perceives a rise in the corruption and fall in the democracy index during this Military-PTI rule can only be a source of great discomfort to the ISPR. Some pundits are inclined to believe that this statement is not so much aimed at the PDM as it is at the PTI. Is the Militablistment washing its hands of Imran Khan? *Probably not as yet. But there is, at the very least, increasing disquiet within the Militablistment at the failure of this Imran Khan-led "hybrid" system that has flopped and discredited the "selectors".* Further turmoil and instability, including loss of support in the superior courts, could spell doom for it by compelling the "selectors" to opt out. Under the circumstances, far from looking weak and disorganized and confused, the PDM is gearing up to bowl on a wicket that is fast crumbling. *Its strategy of fighting tooth and nail in the Senate elections is giving Imran Khan, the selected prime minister, and Sheikh Rashid, the perennial Pindi punter, sleepless nights.* The former is telling the PDM to accept open voting in the Senate while the latter is advising against resignations from the National Assembly. *The irony is lost on both of what might happen in the event that the PDM chooses to ignore the former and abide by the latter!*

Navy Games, Editorial, *Daily Times*, 12 February⁶

Pakistan is set to host the seventh edition of the largest multinational naval exercise "Aman 21" in Pakistani waters with more than 45 countries. *World-renowned navies from the US, China and Turkey agreeing to gather under one*

⁵ <https://www.thefridaytimes.com/game-on-hai/>

⁶ <https://dailytimes.com.pk/722868/navy-games/>

platform is an unparalleled diplomatic win for Pakistan; something that is bound to set the tune for its ties with many countries. Even more significant is the fact that the Russian Navy has sent in its delegation to a military drill attended by NATO members. Convening the US, Chinese and Russian navies for the first time in a decade would definitely go down as a paramount high in Pakistan's diplomatic clout. The international community is not forced to acknowledge that it holds the engaging cards to bring together countries, even those that are otherwise not on the same wavelength. Organised under the slogan, "Together for Peace," the naval exercise aims to "foster international cooperation to fight piracy, terrorism, and other crimes." Pakistan should be appreciated for realising the grave need to collaborate with countries whose prosperity goals are also bonded with their seas.

Making Arabic compulsory, Pervez Hoodbhoy, Dawn, 13 February⁷

In every school of Islamabad every child shall henceforth be compelled to study the Arabic language from Grade 1 to Grade 5. Thereafter he or she shall learn Arabic grammar from Grade 6 to Grade 12. By unanimous vote, that's what the Senate of Pakistan has decided. Introduced on Feb 1, 2021 as a private member's bill by Senator Javed Abbasi of the PML-N, the Compulsory Teaching of Arabic Language Bill, 2020, will become an act of parliament once approved by the National Assembly. Thereafter it is likely to be applied across the country. In forcing kids to learn Arabic, all those sitting in Pakistan's Senate with just a single exception forgot that they are Pakistanis first and that Pakistan was made for Pakistanis. *Rather than behave as sniveling cultural orphans seeking shelter in a rich uncle's house, they need to take pride in the diversity and strength of the myriad local cultures and languages that make this land and its people.*

Senate elections, Editorial, Daily Times, 14 February⁸

The grand opposition alliance has nominated former Prime Minister Syed Yousaf Raza Gilani and seasoned politician Farhatullah Babar as joint candidates. *It is pretty clear that the opposition parties are in the run with the sole aim to overthrow the government. There is already an uproar over the government bid to change the voting mechanism in the elections from secret to open balloting.* The constituent parties of Pakistan Democratic Movement (PDM) have come a long way from expressing strong reservations over participation in Senate polls. Now, they are sharpening their claws to take over seats while raising a loud ruckus over the nitty-gritties. Stepping forward with leaders who have time and again commanded tremendous

⁷ <https://www.dawn.com/news/1607107/making-arabic-compulsory>

⁸ <https://dailytimes.com.pk/723500/senate-elections-3/>

control over both upper and lower houses, the PDM has a clear agenda: pull the maximum number of seat away from the government. The fact that senate candidates pour in record sums of money to buy votes from members of their electoral college. *The PTI should be appreciated for trying to ensure that money does not influence elections. Prime Minister Imran Khan has already told the parliamentary board that tickets should be awarded on merit.* However, all political parties should realize their immediate responsibility of cleaning the house. A senate that is free from the menace of vote-buying is in a far stronger position to legislate on key issues.

Bye-elections, Editorial, *The Express Tribune*, 22 February⁹

The last week's bye-election in NA-75 Daska offers a peep into what's going to happen in the next general election in the country unless all stakeholders agree to carry out genuine electoral reforms and ensure their implementation in letter and spirit. It also raises questions on the seriousness and capability of the Election Commission of Pakistan to fulfil its constitutional duty of holding free and fair elections. *It throws into doubt the intentions of the sitting government about ensuring peaceful polling through impartial use of the administrative machinery.* The election in the Sialkot district of Punjab was marred by incidents of rigging and clashes between the voters and supporters of the rival parties the PTI and the PML-N. The violence rose to an extent that it claimed the lives of two persons, besides injuries to several others. Meanwhile, the results in six other bye-elections must be an eye-opener for Prime Minister Imran Khan as his PTI only managed to win one of them in NA-45 Kurrum. The rest of the poll battles in PB-20 Pishin, PS-43 Sanghar, PP-51 Gujranwala, PK-63 Nowshera and PS-88 Malir, Karachi ended in the PTI's defeat. *The loss of the Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa assembly seat from Nowshera, the home town of former chief minister Pervez Khattak, is a huge setback for the party* which must send its leaders into some serious introspection. The PTI needs to seriously focus on controlling price hike and providing at least some relief to the people before it gets too late.

The political chessboard, Zahid Hussain, *Dawn*, 24 February¹⁰

Statement by Yusuf Raza Gilani that the establishment is neutral in the ongoing battle between the opposition and government is quite significant in the current political milieu. One is not sure what has made the opposition believe in the establishment's neutrality now and how this could affect the Senate elections. *Surely everything is possible in this political game of chess. But there is no evidence yet of any cleavage between the civil and military*

⁹ <https://tribune.com.pk/story/2285428/bye-elections>

¹⁰ <https://www.dawn.com/news/1609091/the-political-chessboard>

leadership that could change the existing power matrix. Staying neutral in the Senate elections would not necessarily mean that the establishment would allow the opposition to topple the PTI government. While any setback in the Senate elections would certainly weaken the government's legitimacy, a defeat for Gilani could also have serious consequences for the PDM. *What happens on March 3 will also determine the future course of politics in the country. It is a war of nerves between a shaky government and a strident opposition coalition. It remains to be seen who wins the battle.*

ECONOMIC ISSUES

CPEC-Challenges and opportunities, Daily Times, Dr Shahid Raza, 01 February¹¹

Pakistan-future of "Tiger of Asia" and CPEC can play an important role in this regard and its great opportunity for Pakistan. This great country is full of natural abundant resources from north to south and east to west and has a real geostrategic position. Pakistan being at an intersection of south Asia, central Asia, and China can play a positive role for the greater geo-economic development and in the region by regional connectivity. *The total allocated amount under CPEC is 50 billion dollars included 35 billion dollars for energy projects and 15 billion dollars for Gwadar infrastructure, industrial zones. This project needs to be completed by 2030.* Energy-related projects need to be completed by 2019. Gwadar development and roads related projects will be completed by 2020. Railways and industrial zones to be completed by 2025. China and Pakistan can exploit natural resources through cooperation. CPEC will speed up the industrialization process in Pakistan through its high-quality infrastructure. CPEC is the growth axis and is the engine of the growth for the entire region with aim of socio-economic development, prosperity, and security in the region along with it. It will not only help and benefit Pakistan and China but the whole region including Afghanistan, Iran, India, and central Asia republics with real impact. *Road, rail, and air linkages will lead to win-win model for all and is considered a real hope of better regain of the future with growth and development of the economy. India and Afghanistan will join sooner or later this project.*

¹¹ <https://dailytimes.com.pk/719184/cpec-challenges-and-opportunities/>

Exports under pressure, Khurram Hussain, Dawn, 04 February¹²

The trumpets of triumph have not died down and already the tide looks like it might be preparing to recede. For a number of weeks now, we have been hearing triumphant talk coming from the government on how exports in the month of December registered an 18 per cent increase that government fans said was the largest increase in many years. "I wish once again to congratulate the exporters and the Ministry of Commerce for this achievement", the prime minister tweeted on Jan 7. Of course, the real numbers, released later by the State Bank, did not show an 18pc increase, but a 6.7pc increase instead (compared to December last year). Textile exports in particular showed a 10pc increase. Here is what's critically important in this conversation around exports: the bump seen in the last few months is already coming under growing stress and question marks have surfaced over how much longer it can sustain itself. A number of reasons lie behind this, and in no particular order of importance, this is what they are. Exporters are now finding out that their buyers are asking for detailed certifications of their entire cotton supply chain to first determine eligibility before placing orders. At the same time, the IMF is mounting pressure that the entire sprawling apparatus of supports provided to export-oriented industry should be dismantled, or at least its impact on the fiscal accounts should be eliminated, which amounts to dismantling it. Exports had not amounted to what the government was presenting in the first place, but given these uncertainties, the trend has run into powerful headwinds already.

IMF is back, Editorial, The Express Tribune, 18 February¹³

The IMF loan programme, stalled in February 2019, in the wake of the Covid-19 outbreak, has been revived at a cost that the people of Pakistan have already started paying in terms of a higher power tariff and costlier petroleum products. There may well be more to come as the IMF conditions related to rationalizing expenditures, increasing electricity prices and slapping additional taxes are to be complied with by the federal government between February and May this year. With the fresh tranche, the total IMF disbursements to Pakistan would reach \$3.36 billion including \$1.4 billion worth of emergency support related to Covid-19. It goes without saying that these measures are unlikely not to make life difficult for the common man as well as the business community, at least in the short- and medium-term. Thus the masses are in for further belt tightening at a time when the prices of the items of daily use have already rocketed into the sky, the power and gas

¹² <https://www.dawn.com/news/1605404/exports-under-pressure>

¹³ <https://tribune.com.pk/story/2284701/imf-is-back>

tariffs have become unbearable, and the rates of petroleum products are unprecedentedly high. Let's only hope that the harsh reform measures would not affect the implementation capacity for the reforms themselves.

SECURITY SITUATION

Living under the wrath of 'Jirgas', Editorial, *Daily Times*, 08 February¹⁴

Due to their disturbingly misogynistic verdicts (rallying the call for gender violence), Jirga's often find themselves under fire. Equally problematic are their directives, which are glaringly against the spirit of the constitution and Pakistan's commitments to human rights covenants. One such logic-defying decision by Bajaur Jirga was recently brought to light that banned women from collecting cash stipends from World Bank grant centres as well as making telephone calls to local radio stations. Insisting that these acts were against local customs, the elders also announced fines for any rule-breakers. Tribal women have been invisible for decades so much so that even their population count is made using estimates. *Group of middle-aged men, which are not even acknowledged by the constitution, regularly subject innumerable women to abject poverty and denial of property, education and healthcare.* We are all silent spectators as fundamental rights of these women continue to be bargained away in the name of customs; in the name of dignity; in the name of Jirga's. The state must take its place as the enforcer of the law so these horrible remnants of past can finally be bidden farewell to.

Militancy threat, Editorial, *Dawn*, 09 February¹⁵

The ungoverned spaces of Afghanistan have long posed a threat to that country's security as well as regional peace, and Pakistan has been saying all along that more needs to be done to address this issue. Now, as per a recent UN report, this country's stance has been vindicated, as the global body has said that the presence of the banned TTP in eastern Afghanistan has led to an uptick in attacks. *To ensure the security of Pakistan as well as Afghanistan's internal stability, it is essential that this threat to regional peace be neutralized effectively. The TTP has shown that it poses a threat to both states, which means that a combined effort is required to eliminate it.* Furthermore, its contacts with IS present a fresh challenge, considering the latter outfit's ferocity and ruthlessness, as witnessed in Iraq and Syria. Therefore, instead of trading blame, Kabul and Islamabad must formulate a coordinated policy to tackle the TTP and its sub-groups.

¹⁴ <https://dailytimes.com.pk/721553/living-under-the-wrath-of-jirgas/>

¹⁵ <https://www.dawn.com/news/1606311/militancy-threat>

PM seeks Ulema's role for intellectual revolution, Maqbool Malik, *The Nation*, 09 February¹⁶

Prime Minister on Monday urged religious scholars to play their due role in Pakistan's intellectual revolution by spreading mass awareness about cleanliness, righteousness and national unity to make the country a great nation. **Addressing the Ulema and Mashaikh conference** in the capital, the Prime Minister said that Pakistan as a country had drifted quite far from the ideals on which it was made. *He said the scholars had an important role in its course correction and "bringing us back to that path". "I am talking about an intellectual revolution in the country and Imran Khan alone can't do anything if you don't become part of this struggle and effort", said the Prime Minister. He said the project of making Pakistan like the state of Madina was a struggle primarily in "character building" and correcting the values.* The premier firstly asked the Ulema to elaborate and explain the principles of the state of Madina to the people wherever they get the opportunity to do so. *"There is a reason why the Holy Quran says to learn from him," said the premier, referring to Prophet Muhammad (PBUH).*

Use of force, Editorial, *Dawn*, 12 February¹⁷

The federal government has negotiated a settlement with the protesting government employees to give them increments but it has paid a price for mishandling the issue. The employees had been protesting for many months and demanding that their salaries be increased in the face of the rising cost of living. It was only when they gathered in large numbers to protest against the indifference of the government that the relevant officials woke up to the crisis. The situation took an unfortunate turn when the government decided to use force to disperse the protesters instead of engaging them in talks which it ultimately had to the next day. The scenes in Islamabad's Red Zone on Wednesday were worrisome. *The police unleashed tear gas and batons on the men and women gathered on Constitution Avenue, leaving scores injured.* This display of state power against hapless citizens should have been avoided. The sad part is that such force against demonstrators has become a routine in Pakistan. Governments habitually order the police to rough up citizens and arrest them for exercising their constitutional right to protest. *No one was a greater proponent of allowing people to protest than the prime minister himself. While in opposition, he would say repeatedly and especially during his dharna in Islamabad that citizens must use this right to express their disenchantment with a government.*

¹⁶ <https://nation.com.pk/09-Feb-2021/pm-seeks-ulema-s-role-for-intellectual-revolution>

¹⁷ <https://www.dawn.com/news/1606881/use-of-force>

Attack on media, Editorial, Dawn, 23 February¹⁸

The attack on the head offices of the Jang Group by charged protesters exhibits the kind of pressure that journalists in the country must work under. *On Sunday, scores of people ransacked the reception areas of the Geo office in Karachi, and also beat up a cameraman and other staffers. The mob was said to have been enraged over some comments made by an anchor-person on a show focusing on political humour.* Although construed as offensive by some, the remarks aired were evidently in the context of the satirical and tongue-in-cheek nature of the show. *The attack was roundly condemned by journalists' associations, representatives of the Sindh, Punjab and federal governments and other high-ranking officials. Later, the Sindh Police promised to take action against the suspects after "collecting CCTV footage" of the incident.* In an environment where news organisations and journalists are already intimidated and routinely feel the necessity to 'sanitize' their work, such violent attacks expose the government's hollow claims of a 'free media', making reporters, anchor-persons and others in the field even more vulnerable to outside pressure. *One hopes that the promise of better security made by the Sindh government is fulfilled soon and that the inquiry ordered by Chief Minister Murad Ali Shah leads to action against those responsible for the violence.*

Return of Militancy, Editorial, Dawn, 24 February¹⁹

A worrying trend observed in Pakistan's northern areas over the last several months saw a dramatic escalation on Monday. In a brazen daytime attack, masked gunmen shot dead four female vocational trainers travelling in a van near Mirali, North Waziristan district. Nothing, however, *quite underscores the return of violent extremism as does the mass murder of innocent women working for the good of society.* And make no mistake, this act, the very audacity of it, was meant to send a message: the militants are confident enough to again carry out the kind of attacks that spread terror in large swathes of the country not too long ago. The signs have been there for some time. There has been an unmistakable uptick in targeted killings of civilians as well as deadly clashes of militants with security personnel in the tribal areas. The reunification in Afghanistan of several splinter groups with the TTP that, according to a recent UN report, was overseen by Al Qaeda, have heightened the terrorist threat in the region.

Terrorist's escape, Editorial, Dawn, 26 February²⁰

¹⁸ <https://www.dawn.com/news/1608881/attack-on-media>

¹⁹ <https://www.dawn.com/news/1609087/return-of-militancy>

²⁰ <https://www.dawn.com/news/1609484/terrorists-escape>

The military's revelation this week about the escape of former TTP spokesman Ehsanullah Ehsan has given rise to more questions about an incident that was already steeped in mystery. It has now been confirmed by the army that Ehsan escaped from its custody a year ago a development that had been largely met with conspicuous silence, until now, from both the government and security establishment. The military's official disclosure of action against those responsible for the escape is a step in the right direction as Ehsan's escape is indeed a serious matter. However, details about the events that led to Ehsan's surrender and eventual getaway are few. It is alarming that the nation knows so little about the circumstances of the escape of a terrorist who has in the past claimed with relish some of the most chilling terror attacks in Pakistan including the killing of scores of students in the Army Public School attack as well as the assassination attempt on rights activist and Nobel laureate Malala Yousafzai. The lack of transparency surrounding the entire Ehsanullah Ehsan affair is unacceptable.

URDU MEDIA

Doha agreement under threat, Editorial, Jang, 02 February²¹

One of the senior officials of NATO has said that "Foreign troops will stay in Afghanistan even after the deadline as agreed in the Doha Agreement with the Taliban." *Though the statement might have disappointed many who expect peace in Afghanistan, the situation seems demanding the same. A report of Reuters said that the NATO official said that "since the Taliban has not acted on the agreement, the new Biden administration would change (Afghan) policy." According to a source from NATO, 10,000 foreign troops, including the Americans, are present in Afghanistan. Afghanistan, America and many other countries are saying that the Taliban have not reduced violence from its side and have not broken its links with Al Qaida and other terrorist groups. Therefore, the Biden administration has started revisiting the agreement with the Taliban. According to a source from the foreign office, Joe Biden wants to end the war for ever while protecting the Americans from any threat. The Taliban office in Qatar has said that "America violates the agreement on a daily basis. The Americans attack common people, houses and villages. We have been warning them. These are not only in violation of the agreement but human rights violations." The situation seems to tell that the Doha Agreement is in danger. The possibility of peace that was appearing near, because of irresponsible behavior can get postponed for uncertain time.*

²¹ <https://e.jang.com.pk/02-02-2021/karachi/page6.asp>

Therefore, to avoid such a scenario, all the actors, the Taliban, America and Afghanistan should act on the agreement.

Maulana Fazlur Rahman's U-turn, Editorial, *Jasarat*, 02 February²²

PDM chief Maulana Fazlur Rehman, while talking to the media in Peshawar, contradicted his own position and said *"our war is against the government," and not against the establishment.* We have some grievances with the establishment and one has complaints against his own people. Earlier Maulana Fazlur Rehman's five or six such statements can be seen in the newspapers in which he has launched a full-scale attack on the establishment. In these statements, *Maulana actually said that his war is against the Establishment. Mian Nawaz Sharif, head of the Nawaz League, the largest party in the PDM, has clearly said that his difference is not with Imran Khan but with the Establishment.* In fact, he has even mentioned the names of General Bajwa and General Faiz in this regard. But suddenly Maulana Fazlur Rehman has realized that his war is not with the Establishment but with Imran Khan's government. *It seems that Imran Khan is also enjoying power at the moment and the country's foreign and domestic policies are entirely in the hands of the Establishment.* Unfortunately, the moral credibility of the leadership of the major parties is not such that they can resist the establishment. It is said that Nawaz League and PPP are the major parties of the country but these parties cannot bring even fifty thousand people on the streets to resist the establishment. *Maulana Fazlur Rehman made strong statements against the Establishment but after his latest statements he has also joined the ranks of Mian Nawaz Sharif and Asif Ali Zardari vis-à-vis establishment.*

The future of Afghan peace deal? Abdul Majid Qureshi, *Nawa-i-Waqt*, 04 February²³

National Security Advisor to President Joe Biden, Jacob Jeremiah Sullivan has said that the Biden administration is seriously revisiting the Afghan peace deal. It is trying to find out whether the Taliban has acted according to the deal and whether they have broken their links with Al Qaida. *Reacting to the statement, the Taliban while warning the new administration in the White House, has said that if the US does not withdraw its troops from Afghanistan, they would take some important decisions.* Mullah Baradar of the Taliban said that so far the progress on the Doha agreement has been satisfactory. America has vacated five bases in Afghanistan and has reduced

²² <https://www.jasarat.com/2021/02/02/210202-10-3/>

²³ <https://www.nawaiwaqt.com.pk/E-Paper/lahore/2021-02-04/page-10/detail-11>

the number of its troops to 8,600. The withdrawal of the troops continues. But if the US stops the process of withdrawal then the Taliban would have to take important decisions, he added. The agreement between the US and the Taliban was signed in February 2019 and from September 2019 talks on the agreement were started. No major progress has been made so far. *Meanwhile, in the last few months, journalists, politicians, women judges and human right activists have been killed. There is no denial that the Taliban has been involved excessive of violence which worsens the issues rather than resolving. It is clear that resident Ashraf Ghani is not in favour of the agreement. In fact, he is trying everything to sabotage it.* He does not seem to understand that ending the agreement would mean violence in the country and he cannot save his government. *Pakistan has a role in the peace deal and has good contacts with the Taliban. It was Pakistan that brought the Taliban to the negation table. The role had helped to reestablish Pak-US relations. If the agreement fails, there is a possibility of America lessening its interests in Pakistan.* Pakistan, Iran and Russia want peace in Afghanistan. Iran and Russia have accepted the Taliban as a political force in the country. So has of late China. It is to be seen whether Joe Biden continues Trump's policies. *But all the actors mentioned above look at the Afghan peace process from the perspective of their domestic issues.* They fail to understand that peace in Afghanistan is key for regional peace.

“Electable” looking for new targets? Editorial, Daily Pakistan, 12 February²⁴

PTI member in Punjab assembly Khurram Sohail Khan Laghari has announced to leave PTI. *He has said that 10th fail to become ministers and educated are left behind. He said that more money is spent on the areas of the chief minister.* On the other hand, the governor Punjab and the speaker of Punjab assembly have been given the task to bring pro-PTI people back in the party. It is possible that more PTI members would come forth in future, saying that they are being ignored. *Neither the chief minister of Punjab hears their demands nor is the Prime Minister ready to listen to their grievances. These members think that, since the Senate elections are around the corner, this is the apt time to get themselves heard. If they are not satisfied, they would leave the party.* But since every single vote matters in the Senate elections, it is possible that the demands of the unhappy members would be accepted. In every election, “electable” start joining the party which has higher chances to emerge as victorious. *In the 2018 elections, many electables decided to join PTI. The electable joining the PTI was much higher than their earlier flips.* It can be said that these unhappy members might revisit their

²⁴ <https://dailypakistan.com.pk/E-Paper/lahore/2021-02-12/page-9/detail-0>

decision and continue to be part of PTI. *But it is also possible that they might go some sense of the next elections and are already formulating their future strategy.* PTI had promised that its government would create South Punjab as a province within 100 days. Nothing has happened on that promise after two and half years. *Chief Minister of Punjab has been claiming to have worked for development of the whole Punjab. But now when angry members of the assembly have to be convinced, it's the governor and the speaker of the assembly who have been appointed to talk to these people, not him.*

Pak Navy's "peace exercises" Editorial, Roznama Dunya, 12 February²⁵

Pakistan Navy's exercises dubbed as "aman-2021" (peace-2021) are going in the sea, near Karachi. *These exercises, held in every two years, have the purpose to show resolve against fighting terrorism in the sea, keeping the sea safe and free, mutual cooperation and improving coordination with regional and other naval forces.* The participant countries use advanced technology in the exercises to check their preparations in case of a war. It is a fact that along with PAF and Pakistan Army, Pakistan Navy has played a crucial role in defending the country, whenever required. Despite the technological advancements, challenges also have changed. For that it becomes important to keep oneself ready for any challenge. The exercises would also increase Pakistan's cooperation with the participant countries. *Since Pakistan's reliance on the sea is going to increase because of CPEC, these exercises prove that the Pakistan Navy is ready to deal with any challenge from the sea.*

Maltreatment of the Baloch, Hamid Mir, Jang, 18 February²⁶

Some sad and disappointed mothers, sisters and daughters have come to Islamabad so that they can give their message to Prime Minister Imran Khan (about their missing relatives. *Unfortunately some of the ministers of Imran Khan's cabinet have rather taunted these protesters. They have said these mothers could come and protest in Punjab as no one was going to check their IDs and shoot them in Punjab. But what about the mothers of those Punjabis who's IDs are checked in buses and killed in Balochistan. The relatives of disappeared people in Balochistan had come to Islamabad as Pakistanis to meet and give message to the Prime Minister of the country. But here they are confused with Balochistan-Punjabi issue. These protesters were removed the national Press Club by the police when they arrived there the last week.* They had to take help from the administration of the National Press Club for sitting at the site. These Baloch protesters sat there for six days. They even requested

²⁵ https://e.dunya.com.pk/detail.php?date=2021-02-11&edition=LHR&id=5512261_48441516

²⁶ https://jang.com.pk/news/887137?_ga=2.186451945.1522146348.1613366341-835994399.1598849708

the Chairman Senate Muhammad Sadiq Sanjrani to convey their message to the Prime Minister but nothing happened. *After complete disappointment, these protesters started marching towards the parliament. The police tried everything to stop them. But how was it possible to stop a mother or a sister who were looking for their disappeared relatives! Our rulers started raising the Punjab issue.* They forgot that cruelty has no religion and nationality. The cruel is only cruel and victim only a victim. Neither have any religion or caste. For not addressing the pressing issue, first Akhtar Mengal withdrew his support to Imran Khan and now some others are also unhappy.

Army Chief's important statement, Editorial, Jang, 19 February²⁷

Army Chief Gen Qamar Bajwa's speech to the participants of the 34th War Corps is important in the context of the current international situation. Gen Bajwa said that Pakistan needs to be ready for every possible situation. PAF officers should familiarize themselves with modern trends. *There is no denial that along with economic stability, invincible defence remains indispensable. The regional and international trends demand that Pakistan's defence system needs to be alert and also master the changing trends to deal with them.* All possible steps need to be taken to strengthen the defence of the country. The recent military exercises in the Thar Desert and "Aman-2021" naval exercise in which 45 countries participated, show that our military is ready to ward off any aggression. Pakistan's successful tests of latest missiles also prove that. *Pakistan's resolve and goals have never been aggressive. But the situation that Pakistan is facing was covered in the Army Chief's one statement that "In the given challenges Pakistan needs to be ever alert."* This is not the responsibility of the military only but every Pakistani.

PTM stands divided, Report, Ummat, 24 February²⁸

The Pashtun Tahafuz Movement (PTM) has got divided into two factions. *Because of the differences in the leadership and on the agenda, a section under the leadership of Mohsin Dawar has started to form a new national group/party.* For that work on the constitution and manifesto has begun. *Manzoor Pashteen, meanwhile, has rejected expanding the movement beyond the two-point agenda.* The other day, an important meeting of PTM was held which was presided over by Afrasiab Khattak. The meeting was attended by Mohsin Dawar, Jamila Gilani, Bushra Gohar and many journalists and intellectuals. *According to a source, prior to the meeting, four*

²⁷https://jang.com.pk/news/887564?_ga=2.210185045.1522146348.1613366341-835994399.1598849708

²⁸ <https://www.ummat.net/2021/02/24/news.php?p=story3.gif>

secret meetings were held. In these secret meetings Manzoor Pashteen was asked that a new political party should be formed. Through this party, in the forthcoming municipal elections PTM candidates would have been made to win the elections. It was also said that in this way these people would have a say in the National Assembly. To strengthen the new party, members of ANP, Qaumi Watan Party, Mazdoor Kissan Party (MKP) and other nationalist groups would be taken in. However, Manzoor Pashteen maintained his position throughout the four secret meetings that PTM was formed on a two-point agenda. One, to recover the disappeared persons and the second, setting up a commission on the "Waziristan operation". If the government of Pakistan, he said, agrees to discuss and address those two points, the purpose of the PTM was achieved. According to the source, "patrons" of PTM do not agree with Manzoor Pashteen's two-point agenda. That is why they have asked their supporters in India, Afghanistan, America and especially in London to build pressure on the PTM leadership for forming a political party. So that they can raise the issue of state brutality at the UN and other forums.

ELECTRONIC MEDIA

Interview of ex-ISI chief Asad Durrani by Taha Siddiqui, South Asia Press, 01 February²⁹

Journalist Taha Siddiqui of the South Asia Press interviews former ISI chief General (r) Asad Durrani, *who has been in the crosshair with his former employer the Pakistan Army, where he served for over 30 years, in key positions.* The host discuss with him about his dispute with the military, his court case to get his name out of the Exit Control List (ECL) and his persecution at the hands of General Bajwa led regime. *He also asked if DG ISPR control narrative on Pakistani media. Q: Why there is a court case on you & why the government has put your name on ECL? A:* Durrani underlined that from all the strategy used by the government on him from putting his name on ECL, stopping his pension, he concludes that the issue in reality is not about the books he wrote, it has just given establishment an opportunity to get back to him for some other personal past grudges. He pointed out that the blame that he is in touch with RAW is baseless, had that been so they (army) would have taken much more staunch and coercive action. *Q: What is the case against you? A:* He underlined there is one past case in court against him and along with that most importantly the

²⁹ <https://www.facebook.com/SAsiaPress/videos/407248087036565>

predications made by him in the Abbottabad operations against Osama Bin Laden before seven years mostly proved right and this has irritated the establishment. Because the military is the most powerful institution in Pakistan, they can influence the court and ministry of interior is nothing in front of them. It is painful and embarrassing for me as well as the army as an institution, he added. He pointed out that "ISPR has approved some & banned other military analysts. *They want to push their narrative only. This was never the case before*" and added *there were lifafa journalists, now there are lifafa generals,*" (who take money under the table) He narrates how he's being hounded by Pakistan Army because Gen Bajwa is settling old scores of Gen Beg & Gen Kayani. **Q: What is wrong with your analyses in the books?** **A:** I have given an honest assessment in my books but since 2011 some people from the establishment kept coming to me saying your books will be read worldwide and the readers will think that I have internal information which is made public.

Jirga with Saleem Safi, Inflation in double digit, Geo News, 03 January³⁰

The host underlined that the current government is busy pointing out that the state of economy is going towards stabilization, however contrary to this we have witnessed a sharp food inflation and price increase of basis essential commodities. *In this episode he asked is the economy going towards betterment or getting worse. Should the people of Pakistan be worried or relaxed?* **Guests:** Economic analysts: Dr Farooq Saleem, Mehtab Haider & Shahbaz Rana. *Dr Farooq Saleem* pointed out that one should always stay away from those economists (mahishad dan) who put a different picture about the state of economy, into the ears of the minsters, especially to the PM which is far from reality on the ground. The PTI government is using jargonized words like current account surplus, large scale manufacturing and talking about stock market which has nothing to do with the common public and they don't understand these processes. *He informed that in the 2018 manifesto of the PTI there was no mention about current account deficit, what they have mentioned is the word "reform in economic sector" 46 times here and there.* He underlined that the basic need of the people is flour, sugar & electricity and we do not need any economist or PM or minster to tell how the economy is going on. Nine crore Pakistani right now living below poverty line, he informed. *Shahbaz Rana* pointed out that that in experienced people should not be put on economic committees, they should take prior training. *He said that the current government criticise the past governments for borrowing money but within two and half years the PTI have drowned the country into a borrowing spree.* Imran Khan has diverted the debate on

³⁰ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MbEsg6ANPK8>

inflation by talking about current account surplus but the reality on the ground is different. Poverty and unemployment is on a new high and the PM have no idea, so how will the economy improve. **Mehtab Haider** pointed out that the PM while coming into power said that change will come but did not say bad or good change He underlined that if the PTI government complete five years, they will create a new record in public debt and liabilities.

Sethi Sey Sawal, Imran Govt: Corruption Up, Democracy Down! Najam Sethi Official, 07 February³¹

The host Tamkinet Karim pointed out that recently two international reports on corruption and democracy placed the spotlight on Pakistan as the country jumped three positions higher on corruption and democracy also indicated as suffering in the country. The transparency international report showed Pakistan corruption index jumped from number 117 to 120, three points up. The economist intelligence unit report on democracy shows Pakistan at number 105 and put it under hybrid regime category. **Q: The PTI since 2011 has been riding on the back of anti-corruption drive and since it is in power from 2018, it has emphasized on uprooting the corruption from the country, so what went wrong? A:** He pointed out that this report is more of a perception index since the heavily rely on external sources like NGO to collect data on corruption but having said that it cannot be denied that corruption has seen a jump. For example KP which is ruled by PTI has seen rise in corruption and PM does have an idea that at local level corruption is rampant there, commissions, contracts and funds (MNA's) are given out, there are major source of corruption in these fields. He underlined that corruption is at two levels, one at national level and second local. There is rampant corruption at local or provincial level. *The PTI government has been shouting its lung out about corruption by opposition but there has been no convictions or cases on anyone except Nawaz Sharif.* There is so much corruption in Punjab. **Q: Should PM not take responsible for the corruption in the country? A:** *He pointed out the worst mistake of Imran Khan is his team (electables) which he has taken from here and there to increase the strength of his party and these people are the main reason for corruption because it is there old trade to survive.* PM's hand is tied and cannot come out of this mud of corruption. If there was development under PTI government than there would have massive corruption. **Q: The economist intelligence unit has put Pakistan on number 105 and surprisingly Bangladesh is at 76 which means democracy in Pakistan is worst then in Bangladesh, where is Pakistan standing? A:** *Sethi pointed out that it is off course a hybrid regime, half army and half elected. Democracy is full-fledged civilian rule but in Pakistan its army rule with face*

³¹ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bMUGiMGMB3w>

of civilian, no full-fledged democracy. In Myanmar too there was a hybrid government and Aung San Suu Kyi was supporting it with comprise with the army and now that comprise has fallen off and army has taken power completely. *Pakistan is trying to copy the model of Burma but the problem is that this model will not go long or work.*

Capital Talk with Hamid Mir, Open or secret ballot: The politics of Senate election, Geo News, 17 February³²

Hamid Mir informed that as the politics around the senate elections is taking over the political corridors of Pakistan, PM Imran Khan has warned that if the senate elections take place through secret ballot then opposition will cry and suffer, while at the same time he is pressing hard for open ballot, why is he in favour of open ballot? On the other hand Maryam Nawaz visited the Baloch protesting for the missing persons and demanding justice from PTI government, she met the mothers and children in Islamabad at the protest site. Surprisingly interior minister Sheikh Rashid too met the protestors and assured justice to them. **Why the Baloch always protest at D-chowk and in front of press club and not march to Supreme Court? Will Imran Khan meet the protestors and address the missing persons issue, Hamid Mir asked in the latest episode.** Guests: Nasir Hussan Shah-PPP, Rana Sanaullah-PTI & Ali Muhammad Khan- PTI **Ali Muhammad Khan Pointed out that the PPP should fulfil Late Benazir Bhutto's wish of scrapping secret ballot and bring open ballot and Maryam Nawaz seems to be taking U-turn from her own fathers politics** (Nawaz Sharif favoured open ballot for Senate elections). We are looking at Supreme Court's justice because it will be the ultimate judgment. For Chairman Senate and Speaker elections, the process of voting is kept secret because they are important seats. *About missing persons protest, he argued that it was Nawaz Sharif's government that used stick on them, can Maryam Nawaz ask her father what he has done for the missing persons.* We are bringing law on missing persons and Imran Khan has talked about the issue from long back. Hamid Mir reminded him that Akhtar Mengal left the PTI on the same issue of Balochistan. **Rana Sanaullah** the only thing the government is good in doing is to curse the opposition. Till now they have said that everything they do is to expose opposition, even the open ballot is targeted to the opposition. *Who are the four independent for Senate elections from Peshawar, the PTI should answer, they are themselves involved in horse trading.* He questioned the videos released by the government and asked why they have not removed the minister from cabinet if they have seen the videos of horse trading long time back. **Nasir Hussan Shah** underlined that they do not want to bring the ordinance on open ballot

³² <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wiV-dGzOSEk>

properly but to create a hype, *instead of brining it for debate in Parliament they have taken it to Supreme Court. Main issue is that of the dual nationals, the PTI want to make them eligible for the senate elections.* The proposal for open ballot is a novel idea but it should be brought through proper channels constitutionally.

Shahzeb Khanzada ke Sath, ECP declare NA-74 Daska by-poll null & void*Aaj, Geo News, 26 February*³³

In a set back to the ruling PTI government, the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) on Thursday declared poll held in the entire NA-75 Daska constituency on February 19 as null and void. It ordered re-election be held on 18 March after suspicions that the results may have been falsified. Additionally, the ECP ordered the Establishment Division to suspend Sialkot's deputy commissioner and district police officer as well as the Daska assistant commissioner. The PTI has said that it will challenge the ECP's decision in the Supreme Court. *In this episode the host discusses this development with his guests. Guests: Senior Analysts, Hamid Mir & Suhail Warraich. Hamid Mir* underlined that the ECP press release is a charge sheet for Punjab government and there is no doubt that there was an open rigging and interference in the election preceding in Daska. He pointed out that this kind of open rigging by the Punjab government with the help of Federal powers has broken all the previous records of rigging in the past. The presiding officers mysteriously vanished and police were posted in the constituency just to assist in this rigging. Talking about the Punjab Senate elections, he informed that *there will be no polling for the 11 Senate seats from Punjab as all the candidates for three categories, seven general and two seats each reserved for women and technocrats, stand elected unopposed after disqualification or withdrawal of papers by other contestants.* Five seats each have gone to the ruling Pakistan Tehreek-i-Insaf (PTI) and opposition Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N), while one has been grabbed by the PML-Quaid, an ally of the PTI. *Suhail Warraich* pointed out that the ECP has taken the right decision, the PTI and Punjab government were not at all expecting such a harsh step by the ECP, announcing re-elections and terming the previous by poll elections null and void. Efforts were made at the local level (firing to slow the elections) to interfere in the process. This decision has definitely demoralized the PTI government. The government is trying its best to avoid a situation of no confidence motion by the PDM after the March 03 Senate elections but the ECP ruling in Daska has gone against the government and somewhat in favour of the PDM. *On the other hand, the PTI had claimed*

³³ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=x6mtv6aDxGU>

to win the election and had lashed out at the opposition party for only accepting those results that came out in its favour.

BOMBINGS, SHOOTINGS AND DISAPPEARANCES

(Select incidents culled out from the Pakistan media)

Place	Date	Description	Killed	Injured
Khyber Pakhtunkhwa				
North Waziristan ³⁴	04/02/2020	Four terrorists killed in North Waziristan security operation.	04	00
South Waziristan ³⁵	12/02/2021	Four soldiers martyred in South Waziristan terrorist attack	04	00
North Waziristan ³⁶	17/02/2012	Security forces kill three terrorists in North Waziristan: ISPR	03	00
Mirali ³⁷	23/02/2021	Four women vocational trainers shot dead in Waziristan	04	00
Sindh				
Karachi ³⁸	08/02/2021	1 killed, 5 arrested in CTD operation against suspected militants in Karachi	01	00

³⁴<https://tribune.com.pk/story/2282529/four-terrorists-killed-in-north-waziristan-security-operation>

³⁵<https://dailytimes.com.pk/723122/four-soldiers-martyred-in-south-waziristan-terrorist-attack/>

³⁶ <https://nation.com.pk/17-Feb-2021/security-forces-kill-three-terrorists-in-north-waziristan-by-security-forces-ispr>

³⁷<https://www.dawn.com/news/1608852/four-women-vocational-trainers-shot-dead-in-waziristan>

³⁸<https://www.dawn.com/news/1606190/1-killed-5-arrested-in-ctd-operation-against-suspected-militants-in-karachi>

