

July 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*

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MANOHAR PARRIKAR INSTITUTE FOR  
DEFENCE STUDIES AND ANALYSES

मनोहर परिकर रक्षा अध्ययन एवं विश्लेषण संस्थान

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PAKISTAN NEWS DIGEST, July 2021

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## POLITICAL DEVELOPMENTS

### **More press curbs, Editorial, Dawn, 06 July<sup>1</sup>**

*It is a reflection of the grim times we live in that a provincial assembly can adopt a bill authorizing the speaker to constitute a committee with magisterial powers and jail journalists for anything they report which is deemed as violating the privileges of the parliamentarians. The Punjab Assembly has passed this draconian bill that has justifiably triggered a wave of alarm and protest by media bodies. This is nothing less than an outrage. However, sadly, it is not surprising. Over the last few years and especially since the PTI came into power there is a visible and sustained trend to curtail the independence of the media by keeping it under all kinds of pressure. This is evident from the attitude and policies of government functionaries and the institutions they represent. Time and again journalists and media organizations have complained of visible and invisible pressures that are aimed at browbeating them into silence. The physical attacks on journalists almost all unexplained till date are a reminder that the cost of speaking truth to power is getting steeper by the day. The latest to fall victim to state hounding is TV journalist Nadeem Malik who has been summoned by the FIA in what is a thinly veiled attempt at harassment. Mr. Malik had revealed in his programme some alleged details of how the now deceased judge Arshad Malik had been hounded and blackmailed by powerful people to give a verdict of their choice in the case against former Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif.*

### **Govt lays groundwork for talks with angry Baloch, The Express Tribune, 07 July<sup>2</sup>**

Prime Minister Imran Khan appointed Jamhoori Watan Party (JWP) chief Nawabzada Shahzain Bugti as his Special Assistant (SAPM), a move seen as laying the groundwork for initiating a dialogue with the 'angry' Baloch elements. Bugti, a member of the National Assembly from NA-259, Dera Bugti-cum-Kohlu-cum-Barkhan-cum-Sibbi-cum-Lehri, had been appointed as the SAPM on Reconciliation and Harmony in Balochistan, according to a notification issued by the Cabinet Division. *The appointment of Bugti, a grandson of former Baloch nationalist leader Nawab Akbar Bugti, is part of major changes in the province announced on Wednesday, which included the replacement of Governor Amanullah Yasinzai with Zahoor Agha.* The move also comes after back-to-back initiatives at the highest level to try to bring the disgruntled Baloch elements into the mainstream and restore the law and order in the province. On Monday, the prime minister himself indicated that he was

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.dawn.com/news/1633420/more-press-curbs>

<sup>2</sup> <https://tribune.com.pk/story/2309420/govt-lays-groundwork-for-talks-with-angry-baloch>

considering holding talks with the “angry Baloch”. *Chief of Army Staff Gen Qamar Javed Bajwa said that Balochistan was in sharp focus of the national leadership and that the army was fully engaged in enabling the national and provincial response in synergy with other institutions of the state.*

### **Criminalizing torture, Editorial, Dawn, 14 July<sup>3</sup>**

*On Monday, 11 July the Senate passed The Torture and Custodial Death (Prevention and Punishment) Bill 2021, which will now go to the Lower House for assent and then be signed into law by the president. The remaining process must be completed as soon as possible; the government has dragged its feet on the matter for far too long. It has been 11 years since Pakistan ratified the UN Convention against Torture and four years since it committed to enacting legislation criminalizing torture during its state review under the International Convention on Civil and Political Rights. Sherry Rehman introduced the bill in the Upper House in February 2020, and it has been a year since the Senate human rights committee approved it. Ending the impunity with which torture is routinely practiced will be a major step towards bringing in more effective ways of investigating crime. Law-enforcement officials must be imparted training in forensic evidence gathering techniques and in alternative methods of interrogation. This legislative change requires nothing less than a cognitive shift in how policing is viewed. Barbaric practices undermine the rule of the law, rather than strengthening it. Equally important, when the legislation against torture and custodial death is on the statute books, it must be implemented strictly without regard to rank or connections.*

### **Saudi FM’s visit, Editorial, Dawn, 29 July<sup>4</sup>**

The Saudi-Pakistan relationship is decades old and has weathered a number of geopolitical storms. Of late, ties came under stress over Yemen, Iran, and the Kashmir question yet these disagreements have been handled through diplomatic channels without major damage to bilateral relations. On Tuesday, *the Saudi foreign minister landed in Islamabad heading a delegation to meet his Pakistani counterpart, while later the Saudi side also met the prime minister and the army chief. The high-level visit indicates that despite the irritants, bilateral ties are on track.* It seemed the visit was designed to normalize ties, while the rapidly changing situation in Afghanistan may also have come under discussion. Therefore, both Pakistan and Saudi Arabia are likely keeping an eye on the Afghan theatre in order to evolve a common

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<sup>3</sup> <https://www.dawn.com/news/1634998/criminalising-torture>

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.dawn.com/news/1637513/saudi-fms-visit>

strategy. The fact is that both sides, as well as other Muslim states, should develop consensus on key issues affecting the Muslim world, especially Palestine and Kashmir. *In fact, it was Foreign Minister Shah Mahmood Qureshi's outburst last year criticizing the Saudi-led OIC over its inaction on Kashmir that caused ties to nosedive.*

#### **PTI's Sialkot win, Editorial, Dawn, 30 July<sup>5</sup>**

There are numerous reasons why the opposition parties find **themselves struggling against the government but one key reason is the lack of cohesion in their anti-government narrative. The PML-N's internal duality is a particularly acute factor that is dragging down the party in electoral contests.** While the PTI has now started focusing on its projects and schemes, the PML-N is still running around in circles trying to figure out whether it wants to pursue an aggressive policy or a more prudent one. It is this confusion, or ambiguity, that has forced the PML-N to explain every defeat as a product of rigging without producing any convincing evidence to substantiate its claims. This narrative gets diluted when confronted by inconvenient contradictions. *When the PML-N wins a by-election, there is no mention of malpractice but when it loses, it cries foul. It may want to recognize that the PTI is slowly consolidating its political strength and setting itself up strongly for the general elections.*

#### **Refugee Dilemma, Editorial, the Nation, 07 July<sup>6</sup>**

With the deteriorating situation in Afghanistan now in freefall, *Pakistan will be forced to make some difficult decisions going forward if it is to insulate itself from the fallout. One of those decisions is with regards to the refugee influx which seems inevitable based on current trends.* ... The refugee crisis is real and poses a serious burden not only in terms of hosting refugees, but also managing their constant cross-border movement. This dual burden will intensify significantly as the violence increases in Afghanistan. An influx of refugees will also place a significant strain on our economy because a younger educated generation of Afghans will flee towards Pakistan in search of stability and livelihood. This will result in a highly competitive environment when Pakistan is already struggling to deal with its youth cohort. *All these factors illustrate that the humanitarian aspect cannot be viewed in isolation. There is no easy decision here that can please everyone.*

#### **Taliban advance, Editorial, Dawn, 16 July<sup>7</sup>**

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<sup>5</sup> <https://www.dawn.com/news/1637733/ptis-sialkot-win>

<sup>6</sup> <https://nation.com.pk/07-Jul-2021/refugee-dilemma>

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.dawn.com/news/1635342/taliban-advance?preview>

This situation means that the 'Islamic emirate of Afghanistan' may very soon become a reality, bringing with it associated challenges for Afghanistan's neighbours particularly Pakistan as well as the larger international community. In fact, the battle between Kabul and the Taliban is practically being waged at Pakistan's doorstep. On Wednesday, the Afghan Taliban captured the town of Wesh opposite Chaman, removed Afghanistan's national flag and raised their own standard. *This ritual is being repeated across Afghanistan as the Taliban have captured several other border crossings.* In this grim scenario, the options for Pakistan are limited. Clearly, this country wants to dispel the impression that it wants a Taliban government in Kabul. In fact, efforts are afoot to organize a conference on Afghanistan in Pakistan over the next few days and a number of Afghan politicians have reportedly confirmed their attendance, though it is unlikely that President Ashraf Ghani will attend. *The fact is that it is in Pakistan's best interest not to play favorites in Afghanistan. If Pakistan is seen as favoring a Taliban dispensation in Kabul, it will isolate this country globally. Moreover, a Taliban 'victory' in Afghanistan will embolden their ideological comrades in Pakistan, including the banned TTP, and will create a logistical and training hub for anti-Pakistan militants across the border.*

**Asian or Afghan Solution?** Najam Sethi, *The Friday Times*, 16 July<sup>8</sup>

*The Miltablishment has separately briefed the leaders of the government, opposition and media about the difficult situation and hard decisions in store, and sought a "responsible" reaction from them which means not taking sides in the conflict between the various stakeholders, in particular not glamourizing the Afghan Taliban by playing to the anti-American gallery in the country, nor reporting on any resurgence of Taliban terrorism in Balochistan or erstwhile FATA.* Islamabad's stated position is that a power-sharing arrangement in Kabul is a necessary condition for peace in the country and stability in the region. A full-fledged Taliban takeover, it is argued, will prolong and deepen the civil war by provoking neighbours and the international community to react in an aggressive manner by stoking their respective proxies, bringing Afghanistan back full circle to 2001. Pakistan, in particular, is forecast to bear the brunt of the blowback from such a situation as happened earlier, both in terms of having to cope with a mass influx of refugees as well as a resurgence of violent Taliban terrorism in our borderland provinces. *The Miltablishment has belatedly acknowledged that there are no good (Afghan) vs bad (Pakistan) Taliban and a Taliban seizure of power in Kabul is likely to entrench and embolden the Pakistani Taliban, Al-Qaeda and Islamic State terrorists in safe havens in Afghanistan to launch ever more fierce attacks in Pakistan.*

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<sup>8</sup> <https://www.thefridaytimes.com/asian-or-afghan-solution/>

**Taliban vs Mujahideen, Imran Jan, *The Express Tribune*, 15 July<sup>9</sup>**

The Mujahideen undoubtedly fought against a mighty Soviet Red Army. However, they were made up of both local Afghan fighters and global volunteers that willingly enlisted to fight the Jihad against the infidel godless communists. *Most importantly, this global Jihad was supported by the richest and strongest nations around the world. The Americans, Saudis, and many others provided cash, weapons, training and propaganda support to the Mujahideen. While the Mujahideen's defeat of the Soviets was quite a momentous task, it dwarfs in comparison to what the Taliban just did.* The Taliban fought this war alone. They did not have the backing of some superpower providing arms and money. It did not have the moral support of the western media which had portrayed Osama bin Laden as a freedom fighter during the 1980s. *The Taliban have always been labeled as terrorists and extremists. The Mujahideen killing the Soviets was hailed as the noble work of jihad while the Taliban killings are labeled as terrorism.* The Taliban were not welcomed and hosted inside the White House by the incumbent president and equated with the founding fathers of the US. *Most importantly, the Taliban defeated the mightiest army in the history of mankind plus the coalition of allied countries that had occupied their land, plus the local government in Kabul. At the risk of sounding and being labeled as a Taliban sympathizer, the most unavoidable truth is that what the Taliban did is what nobody before has been able to do in Afghan history.*

**Pakistan's Afghan policy, Rafiullah Kakar, *International The News*, 24 July<sup>10</sup>**

The unconditional withdrawal of foreign troops from Afghanistan and the looming threat of a civil war has generated an intriguing debate on the policy choices confronting Pakistan. Islamabad's stated Afghan policy seeks "political settlement, stability, economic development and the denial of any haven for terrorists". Islamabad also ostensibly opposes the military takeover of Afghanistan by Taliban and claims to have no favorites in Afghanistan. Notwithstanding Pakistan's stated policy, many in the US, Afghanistan and Pakistan remain skeptical of Islamabad's commitment to political stability in the war-torn country. This situation of mistrust has been compounded by the pro-Taliban commentary and coverage of the Afghan conflict in Pakistani media. Afghan Taliban are alleged to have used Pakistani territory to launch cross-border attacks, raise funds, recruit young people as foot soldiers and treat

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<sup>9</sup> <https://tribune.com.pk/story/2310543/taliban-vs-mujahideen>

<sup>10</sup> <https://www.thenews.com.pk/print/867484-pakistan-s-afghan-policy>



wounded fighters. *So, regardless of the official claims, we are effectively supporting the Taliban in the conflict against the popularly-elected Afghan government, a trend that has been going on for the past 20 years.* It is true that Pakistan doesn't have complete influence over the Taliban but, unlike other regional actors, *Pakistan does have tremendous leverage. The real test of Islamabad's commitment to supporting intra-Afghan peace process is its willingness to use the leverage it holds over the Taliban.* Preventing the Taliban from using Pakistani soil in their fight against the Afghan government and people is the least Pakistan should do to gain the trust of the war-ravaged people living across both sides of the Durand Line.

## ECONOMIC ISSUES

### **Easy budget victory, Editorial, Dawn, 01 July<sup>11</sup>**

*The odds were always stacked against the opposition. Its claims to not let the PTI get its budget apart, it was always known that the government had enough numbers to smoothly manage the National Assembly's approval for its spending and tax revenue collection plans for the next fiscal year.* Hence, the passage of the budget on Tuesday was not unexpected. What surprised people was the lack of effort on the part of the opposition, specifically the PML-N, the largest opposition group in the Assembly, to resist its passage. *More surprising was the sudden disappearance of a large number of PML-N lawmakers from the House just when it was time to vote for or against the budget. Opposition leader Shehbaz Sharif, who had pledged to ensure that the budget would not be passed, did not turn up either. Former Prime Minister Shahid Khaqan Abbasi stayed away on the pretext of a hearing of a case against him.* It seems from their statements justifying their absence that PML-N leaders had already conceded defeat.

### **Remittance diversity and economic stability, Dr Mazhar Mughal & Dr Junaid Ahmed, the Express Tribune, 21 July<sup>12</sup>**

*The just-ended financial year (FY21) witnessed a record increase in home remittances, which crossed \$29 billion for the first time in the country's history. The 27% year-on-year growth is the highest the country has seen since FY04.* Since the 1970s oil boom, when a significant number of Pakistanis began

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<sup>11</sup> <https://www.dawn.com/news/1632485/easy-budget-victory>

<sup>12</sup> <https://tribune.com.pk/story/2311625/remittance-diversity-and-economic-stability>

working in the Gulf, remittances from overseas Pakistanis have regularly covered a major portion of Pakistan's trade gap, as the country's exports have rarely exceeded half of the amount of goods and services imported. The country heavily relies on these inflows to manage its chronic balance of payment difficulties. Remittances have withstood the test of time, be it the Global Financial Crisis of 2008-09, the slump in oil prices during the middle of the previous decade which hit Gulf economies, or Pakistan's domestic economic challenges during the 2018-19 balance of payment crisis and the Covid-19 pandemic. In fact, money transfers by the nearly nine million-strong Pakistani overseas community played a crucial role in mitigating the nation's economic hardships during the first three Covid-19 waves. Such is the stability of remittances that we take them for granted in Pakistan. *Key to their stability lies in the remarkable geographical diversity of Pakistan's remittance portfolio. In FY21, inflows from no less than 19 countries located in four continents exceeded \$100 million.* Some of these countries, particularly Gulf States, Australia and Canada, are major exporters of natural resources while the economies of the others are mainly based on services and manufacturing. The business cycles of these two groups differ sharply.

## SECURITY SITUATION

**Negative NAB impact, Editorial, Dawn, 07 June<sup>13</sup>**

*NAB has become a major drag on the economy, paralyzing decision-making across all tiers of government.* So when the petroleum secretary told a Senate panel that the dreaded anti-corruption watchdog had 'dispossessed government officials of the initiative to take decisions' and that NAB's "brutal act" was imposing heavy costs on the economy, he was giving voice to popular sentiment. *If NAB has earned anything in its more than two decades of existence, it is the widespread mistrust of people from all segments of society.* Though the agency has been mired in controversy since its early years, the uncalled for interventions by the watchdog in more recent times under its present chairman, in several spheres of life, have robbed it of whatever integrity or credibility it had if any. Unfortunately, many now see NAB as a key obstruction in the way of the nation's progress. *It is lamentable that NAB has achieved few results in over 20 years and its attempts to stop corruption and financial wrongdoings have been largely unsuccessful. Rather, in recent years it has been turned into a tool for political persecution of opponents of sitting governments.*

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<sup>13</sup> <https://www.dawn.com/news/1632685/negative-nab-impact>

**PM security protocol, Editorial, *The Express Tribune*, 08 July<sup>14</sup>**

*Prime Minister Imran Khan recently announced that he would stop using protocol and security when attending private events as an austerity measure and to avoid inconveniencing the public. His supporters have lauded the move, while his detractors have called it showmanship, noting that the savings are nominal in the greater scheme of things.* While it is true that actual savings are pennies to the dollar or paisas to the rupee compared to the bloated non-development portion of the budget, the move, under normal circumstances, would still be a positive symbolic gesture. The terrorist threat in Pakistan is very real. *Moving about without protocol is inviting an attack. If Imran does not value his own safety, perhaps he should respect the office of prime minister. It's not as if it hasn't happened before. And even if PM Imran does not believe his life is at risk, several other political leaders legitimately need security.* Would he force them to sacrifice it as well? That is not to say that protocol is not abused, but addressing that means taking action against the abusers, rather than collective punishment. We also need clarity on what the PM means by 'private functions', since these could be anything from dinner at a restaurant or a visit to a friend's house to weddings and even political rallies. *If he doesn't want to inconvenience the public, he could just avoid going and offer his regrets to the host. Surely they would understand.*

**Talking to insurgents, Editorial, *Dawn*, 07 July<sup>15</sup>**

Notwithstanding CPEC-related development in Balochistan, insurgent groups remain active in the province. Over the years, security forces have largely contained the violence, but it is nevertheless an issue of concern in a challenging regional environment. *Speaking at an event in Gwadar on Monday, Prime Minister Imran Khan voiced an intention to hold talks with "disgruntled extremists who are offering resistance in Balochistan". ... Any serious attempt at reaching out to the insurgents needs to have the consensus of the civilian government as well as the security establishment, and it must be based on a willingness to make concessions.* The state must loosen its control over Baluchistan's resources, profits from which must be ploughed back into the province to an extent and in a manner that meets the requirements of justice. *Given the trust deficit, it would make sense to involve nationalist leaders such as Dr Malik and BNP-M's Akhtar Mengal who may still have the ear of the 'angry Baloch', in the effort to 'woo' them.*

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<sup>14</sup> <https://tribune.com.pk/story/2309317/pm-security-protocol>

<sup>15</sup> <https://www.dawn.com/news/1633608/talking-to-insurgents?preview>

### **Renewed threat of militancy, Editorial, Dawn, 28 July<sup>16</sup>**

*As the security situation in Afghanistan continues to deteriorate, the prospect of foreign militants relocating there from conflict zones elsewhere is becoming more likely.* That development is certain to have a dangerous spillover effect in the region, particularly in Pakistan where signs of an uptick in militancy are already being felt. According to the 28th report of the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team, prepared for the UN Security Council, so far there has been “only limited relocation” but it could increase “should the environment there become more hospitable to ISIL or groups aligned with Al Qaeda”. The report also says that Al Qaeda is present in at least 15 Afghan provinces, and that in Kandahar, Helmand and Nimruz provinces, its Indian Subcontinent chapter, or AQIS, “operates under Taliban protection” and consists mainly of Afghans and Pakistanis. If this is indeed the case, then the Afghan Taliban’s assurances to the US that they will not allow transnational Islamist outfits to operate from its soil cannot be taken at face value. *It is also well known that the banned TTP has sanctuaries inside Afghanistan’s border areas, which neither the Afghan government for strategic reasons nor the Afghan insurgents for ideological reasons have tried to disturb.*

## **PROVINCES & REGIONS**

### **Balochistan**

#### **Reconciliation with Baloch’s a non-starter? Najam Sethi, The Friday Times, 09 July<sup>17</sup>**

*The federal government’s attempt to “reach out” to diffuse “angry” Baloch dissidents waging war against Pakistan from safe border havens in Afghanistan and Iran is backed by the Militabishment which is deeply worried about the deadly frequency of insurgent attacks.* This issue has acquired a degree of urgency in the wake of the American departure from Afghanistan and India’s bid to consolidate its foothold and assets in the post-American dispensation. *Therefore Islamabad has upped its public diplomacy about the “foreign hand” behind terrorist attacks in Pakistan as for example the recent attempt to bomb the Lahore house of Hafiz Saeed, the anti-India jihadi leader and alleged mastermind of the Mumbai attack on 26/11, 2008, by pointing the finger squarely at India.* It is also credibly alleged that the Baloch separatists are funded and trained by India. **Certainly, Imran Khan has not helped the**

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<sup>16</sup> <https://www.dawn.com/news/1637323/renewed-threat-of-militancy>

<sup>17</sup> <https://www.thefridaytimes.com/reconciliation/>

cause of reconciliation by closing the door on those Baloch insurgents who are “linked to India”. But all the insurgent groups are linked to either Indian or Afghan intelligence agencies for training, sustenance, arms and ammunition. In our own neighborhood, Pakistan has provided such support to the resistance in occupied Jammu & Kashmir for nearly thirty years and to the Afghan Taliban for nearly two decades. So this caveat effectively makes such an offer of reconciliation a non-starter. Why then has it been made?

**AJK**

**AJK’s ugly elections, Editorial, Dawn, 27 July<sup>18</sup>**

As widely expected, the PTI has won a comfortable majority of seats in the Azad Kashmir elections brushing aside the challenge from both the PPP and PML-N. Prime Minister Imran Khan will now nominate a prime minister for AJK from among two hopefuls whose names have been doing the rounds in party circles. By winning the election, the PTI has upheld the tradition of the ruling party in Islamabad forming the government in Muzaffarabad. *It has enough reason to be satisfied with its performance and Prime Minister Imran Khan is justified in giving his team a pat on the back. Yet, there are problems. As election campaigns go, this was one of the ugliest in recent times.* The tone and tenor of speeches, the intensity of partisan attacks and the level of personal mudslinging was, to say the least, abominable. *All party leaders focused on insulting their rivals instead of talking about issues concerning the AJK electorate. These leaders brought their animosity and mutual loathing into the AJK arena and polluted the air with their toxic brand of politics.* They had no qualms about relegating the issues of Kashmir into the background and highlighting instead what they considered the most damaging aspects of their rivals’ politics.

**URDU MEDIA**

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<sup>18</sup> <https://www.dawn.com/news/1637120/ajks-ugly-elections>

**The Islamic State of Pakistan and the Chinese State, Khursheed Nadeem, *Daily Dunya*, 08 July<sup>19</sup>**

Whether they are flag bearers of the state of Medina or heralds of Islamic revolution, everyone in Pakistan praises the Chinese Communist Party (CCP). The case of Maulana Fazl-ur Rehman is understandable given the history. *The Deobandi School wanted to create some reconciliation between politics and communism. Many in the 1970s were saying that "Bhutto's socialism is better than Mawdudi's Islamism"*. But what is common between the State of Medina and the Chinese State? Or is there some commonalities between Islam and Communism? Pakistan has been a battleground for Communism and Islam. It was on those days that Maulana Mawdudi had said that Pakistan was not a country for the followers of Marx and Mao but for the Ummah of the prophet Mohammad. In modern times, communist and socialist countries have adopted liberal economies. Liberal economy comes with the idea of liberal democracy. But China has been opposing it. How far can it do so? Prime Minister Imran Khan has been saying that the Chinese political model is better than the West's democratic model. According to him, if China could bring out a large chunk of its population out of poverty that was because of its political model. Imran Khan's understanding of political systems is confusing. He keeps praising Malaysia, Europe, and China and then also appreciates the state of Medina concept. *One thing is clear: Imran wants a party or an individual to get complete rights and that too for unspecified timer.*

**"Strange" supporters and opponents of the Taliban in Pak, Saleem Safi, *Jang*, 14 July<sup>20</sup>**

Both groups, the pro-Taliban supporters and pro-Pakhtun supporters of Ashraf Ghani are lying/bluffing as of now. *The supporters of Ghani criticize the Pakistani establishment but sit silent on the US that cheated the Ghani administration and the Afghan people.* America released many Taliban leaders from Guantanamo Bay and got Mullah Baradar freed from a jail in Pakistan. It removed sanctions from the Taliban and talked to them, sidelining Ashraf Ghani and signing an agreement. It forced the Ghani administration to take measures that it would be hesitant otherwise, like the releasing of the Taliban prisoners. *In return it could not take guarantee for announcing a ceasefire from the Taliban.* Still, the Pakhtun nationalists do not criticize America but target the Pakistani media. The other day I interviewed the Taliban spokesperson Suhail Shaheen. I was criticized for doing the same. However, before my interview Suhail Shaheen had given interviews to various Afghan channels. I did not interview Suhail when the Taliban were banned by the US. In fact I

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<sup>19</sup> [https://e.dunya.com.pk/detail.php?date=2021-07-08&edition=LHR&id=5690150\\_62192350](https://e.dunya.com.pk/detail.php?date=2021-07-08&edition=LHR&id=5690150_62192350)

<sup>20</sup> [https://jang.com.pk/news/956222?\\_ga=2.161860543.2008849841.1626071865-835994399.1598849708](https://jang.com.pk/news/956222?_ga=2.161860543.2008849841.1626071865-835994399.1598849708)

interviewed Hamid Karzai, Ashraf Ghani and Abdullah Abdullah many times. *The supporters of the Taliban, including Shah Mehmood Qureshi, Sheikh Rasheed or Pakistan's defence experts celebrate Taliban's victory in Afghanistan. And then when Pakistan is blamed for meddling (in Afghanistan) or for taking a biased approach, they get angry. The reality is that as people like these exist in Pakistan, the Taliban and Pakistan don't need an enemy. The strangest are some religious leaders, some tv-anchors and some defence experts in Pakistan who want democracy in Pakistani but support the Taliban system in Afghanistan. They display complete hypocrisy, an un-Islamic character. But the day does not seem too far when these people will realize because the Taliban are not hypocrites, like the Pakistanis. The system they like for themselves, they would want the same for their Pakistani brothers.*

**Pakistan a facilitator in the Afghan peace process, Editorial, Jang, 12 July<sup>21</sup>**

Without having a political system in place, America's withdrawal from Afghanistan is worrying many well-wishers who want a stable region. Given the geographical links, nature of population, shared culture and language, the issue is much more serious for Pakistan. *DG ISPR Babar Iftekhhar said that the other day when the gun could not resolve the Afghan conflict in the last two decades, how can it now?* He said that the Afghans should resolve their issues between them. Pakistan can only facilitate such talks. *The DG said that Pakistan was not a custodian of the peace in Afghanistan but a facilitator and neutral vis-a-vis all Afghan factions.* The whole knows that Pakistan has made sincere efforts to restore peace and stability in Afghanistan. It is India that is investing in Afghanistan for nothing but to do propaganda against Pakistan. Babar said that Afghan security forces could control the current situation as America has invested billions of dollars on their training and weapons. *But if still they are unable to do the same, that would be because of internal issues, reality on the ground and other complications.* He said that no third party can dictate terms to the Afghans. They would think about what is good for their country. Intra Afghan talks is the only option through which the Afghans can find solutions to their problems. *The Taliban could not have fought their guerrilla war without the support of the people. The Taliban said two days ago in Moscow that they want to take every group and party along in the development of Afghanistan. It is better for the Taliban and the government in Kabul to talk to each other and stop the ongoing bloodshed.* Pakistan's role will be only to facilitate such talks. Islamabad has made it clear that in case of a civil war, it would not open its border for more refugees. The situation demands

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<sup>21</sup>[https://jang.com.pk/news/955211?\\_ga=2.194389678.2008849841.1626071865-835994399.1598849708](https://jang.com.pk/news/955211?_ga=2.194389678.2008849841.1626071865-835994399.1598849708)

that the Taliban and President Ashraf Ghani act carefully and don't let the situation go out of control.

## ELECTRONIC MEDIA

**Off The Record with Kashif Abbasi, National Security Committee briefing by Military high command on Afghanistan? ARYNews, 1 July<sup>22</sup>**

*In the meeting of the parliament's national security committee, the military high command briefed the political leaders on the situation in Afghanistan and other strategic matters. This briefing is significant in addressing two issues and thereafter the policy of Pakistan, first towards Afghanistan after US withdrawal and second the Kashmir issue, which is back in news after the Gupkar gang met Indian PM Narendra Modi. Kashif Abbasi pointed out that the way US force is leaving Afghanistan (in a state of civil war with Taliban gaining control), might led to a crisis and the problems will be dumped on Pakistan in the form of Refugee crisis. Secondly, Pakistan has made it clear that there will be no talk on Kashmir till 370 is restored but at the same time there are talks of Track II diplomacy behind closed doors. He asked about the security briefing, especially on Afghanistan and Kashmir. Why was PM not present in the briefing? Guests: Mohammad Zubair-PML-N; Arshad Sharif-Analyst. Arshad Sharif informed that as far as giving air base to the US, Pakistan and US are still bound to the 2001 Agreement according to which US can use Pakistani air space as well as land route to enter Afghanistan. But providing air base to US in Pakistan after exit from Afghanistan is bit problematic, question is if in twenty years the US could not do anything in Afghanistan how providing a base will solve the issue. In this security briefing the role of India in Afghanistan might have been discussed although Pakistan do not recognize Indian role in Afghanistan. The US is demanding that Pakistan should support and patronize the groups they support in Afghanistan, and Pakistan has categorically rejected the offer and also have started to fence the border to avoid any crisis. There is a propaganda to plant *desh* (ISIS) and TTP in the tribal areas of Pakistan, mainly in KPK and Balochistan in the guise of the refugee influx through the border. Mohammad Zubair pointed out that the statement of the PM on not giving base to the US is a popular position but the question is who will handle the chaos in Afghanistan if not US? Today for the PM it is not so difficult to take position on Afghanistan post US withdrawal as compared to the situation after soviet withdrawal or post 9/11. In the 1979 soviet occupation in Afghanistan, the mujahedeen who took arms were not terrorists, but they were up against an occupation. Post 9/11 is all terrorism. US came to*

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<sup>22</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=opormUq3FQ8>



remove Alqeda and Osama Bin Laden, after that there stay in Afghanistan is not justified. Pakistan cannot afford dis-engagement with US AS economy is linked.

### **Breaking Point with Malick, What is PTI government's plan for Balochistan?**

*Hum News, 08 July<sup>23</sup>*

*Recently the PTI government is showing lots of interest in Balochistan and making efforts to reach out to the people of Balochistan. PM Imran Khan and COAS both visited Balochistan and the federal government (PM) appointed MNA Shahzain Bugti as his special assistant (SAPM) on reconciliation and harmony in the province. The host underlined that Balochistan is not only issue of Quetta but it has a deep impact on Karachi and Lahore. There is a confusion among the government on the issue of Balochistan, they are saying that only people who are politically isolated will be reached out but those who are connected to India and involved in terrorism will be handled in different ways. He asked he in this episode why Bugti was appointed as SAPM and not Akhtar Mengal? Does the PTI has a plan for Balochistan? Guests: Amir Mateen-Senior Analyst; Senator Amanullah Kakar-Balochistan Awami Party (BAP) & Sana Ullah Baloch-BNP-Mengal. Senator Amanullah Kakar pointed out that Balochistan is a complex issue and a house divided as there are many political parties who have different views and it will not be easy to negotiate with them all on one platform. The choice of Shahzain Bugti as SAPM on reconciliation is PM's call but yes, there could have been better choices than him. He underlined that there is a genuine thinking among the government to reach out to the people of Balochistan, we have talked with the government on this many times to find ways to resolve the issue. The counter terrorism department in the province is planning to recruit more people and there will be more focus on the border management. The provincial counter terrorism department of police will recruit 3-4 thousand specialist officers who will be provided with special training, equipment and cultural capacity building. Police will be morphed to fight terrorism and the FC will focus more on the border regions. Sana Ullah Baloch underlined that the word reconciliation attached to the newly appointed SAPM Bugti is problematic as it is not the work of one individual that can undertake reconciliation, it should be the state who need to reach out, not an individual. First the complex challenges within the province needs to be resolved, the issues of Balochistan is socio-psychological and can't be resolved by one person, it would not be solved overnight. It is not a serious sensible move by the government. The issue is due to the over hyped terrorism there is too much militarization even in the government and the control of the establishment is deep in all spheres. The money invested in the province does not reach to the grassroots like in education. Missing persons issue is another*

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<sup>23</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0P1Z1YS5Nk4>

big topic that is the outcome of conflict. **Amir Mateen** pointed out that although the step taken by the government is good for optics but is not the solution of the issue of Balochistan.

**Jirga with Saleem Safi, Interview of Taliban Spokesperson in Doha Suhail Shaheen, Geo News, 11 July<sup>24</sup>**

The Taliban is taking over the districts of Afghanistan in a rapid manner and the US is silent on this take over. It has managed to take over the districts on the Tajikistan and Iran and the Afghan military is surrendering to the Taliban in huge numbers. *The host informed that Turkey is taking special interest in Afghanistan and has under taken the security of the Kabul airport. This special interest out of the blue is also questionable? Guest: Suhail Shaheen-Taliban Spokesperson (Doha).* **Q: The manner in which the Taliban is taking up the districts in Afghanistan by force under its rule, does this indicate that political talks have failed?** **A:** There is no change in our policy of talks and negotiations but the districts and the Afghan army they are coming up to the Taliban voluntarily or through negotiations and talks. After the US departure the Afghan force feel free to join us as they are no longer scrutinized by the US army for supporting us and our just cause. The new developments in Afghanistan is due to the reason that people does not have faith in the Kabul administration & they want to join our ranks by choice. 90% of them have joined us through negotiations. In six we have taken over 170 districts so far. **Q: The surrender is coming more from the Tajik, Uzbek and Hazara rebels and most of the arms and ammunition are coming from them? Is this voluntary or due to some force by external players?** **A:** There are more Mujahedeen and followers of Taliban in these areas and in the 20 years we have a loyal base, the leaders of all ethnicity and governors are members of the Islamic emirates leadership council. These are propaganda that it's based on one nationality Pashtun and therefore they are surrendering, this is not true. May be before 20 years things were different but it's totally different in the current scenario. **Q: What about the difference between Taliban and Kabul government? Do you think that the Taliban will take over Kabul anyways and therefore no talks?** **A:** The truth is that the Kabul government headed by Ashraf Ghani does not show any flexibility and we will not settle to anything less than an Islamic Emirate. *For example in the Doha agreement it was listed that the Kabul government will release the political prisoners of Taliban three months after the Doha agreement* but sadly it did not happen and not helped in blacklisting. The government in Kabul have never been able to bring peace and therefore we want a negotiated peace. We want no role of external elements and hope to

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<sup>24</sup> [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=g\\_oFsrdoG-g](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=g_oFsrdoG-g)

build an afghan inclusive government. **Q: Is there a chance that Taliban will consider a democratic set up through elections in Afghanistan?** **A:** We are ready to talk with the Kabul government on their demands, they should bring their demands on the negotiation table. **But the bottom line is that there will be Islamic Nizam in Afghanistan.** Since from the time of fighting to kick out Soviet Union, we have given many sacrifices to make Afghanistan an Islamic emirate. We have an agenda and Nizam and have shared with the other party and talks are going on discussing this aspect. Our jihad for twenty years will not go for west but we are in the process of negotiations. **Q: Has Taliban and India have any contact or talks? What is there concern?** **A:** there has be no contact with India so far and the reports of meeting are not true. India should stand neutral and impartial and should stand with the people of Afghanistan and not an imposed government. **Our main agenda/policy is that we will not let other countries to use Afghanistan soil against any other country.** We are not against technology/media but content will be made Islamic and according to the culture of our country. Media outlets will be kept operative and functional, we will not interfere but again contents will be according to our value. Music is a religious question and it will be discussed by the grand muftis, if to allow or not.

**Program Breaking Point with Malick, Talk with Zabiullah Mujahid: Official Spokesperson of Taliban Afghanistan, Hum News, 12 July<sup>25</sup>**

The host Mohd. Malick underlined that there are lots of development in Afghanistan related to Taliban, and also due to these development in the neighbouring country, there is a kind of crisis in Pakistan. Pakistan government has decided to maintain a *“meaningful policy of silence”* for the next ten days or so over the developments in Afghanistan. The exit of the US and NATO in the dark hours of night has left a vacuum and has impacted the Afghan government and army’s morale. Although Taliban has said they will go for a negotiated settlement, but the stage is set for more mess and fights in the country and this will have an impact on Pakistan. In this episode Malick invites **Zabiullah Mujahid**, official spokesperson of the Taliban Afghanistan (for the first time on TV in Pakistan) and asked *will the Taliban this time come with a different policy? Wil they support the TTP? What about women’s right?* **Zabiullah Mujahid** pointed out that the Taliban has emphasized on a negotiated settlement and want to take over Kabul and other cities with negotiation and peace but if the other party (*Afghan government*) does not cooperate and use delay tactics, then the Taliban will be forced to use arms and ammunitions against any resistance. **Our team in Doha are ready for talks with**

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<sup>25</sup> [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ygQOp-Z\\_byI](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ygQOp-Z_byI)

*the delegation from the Afghan government side but they do not have a delegation for talks in Doha, members of the peace delegation are scattered in different countries, so it's a delay from their side. TTP is not the issue of Afghanistan, it is an internal issue of Pakistan and as far as our policy is concerned we will not let any terror organizations like TTP to use the Afghan soil to attack Pakistan or any other neighbouring countries. Women rights and education will be safe under Taliban under Islamic rights. We do not have relations with ISI but yes Pakistan is a Muslim country and we have similar culture and we wish for good relations with Pakistan. India is a country and we will want good relations but we will not let them use our soil for any terror activities.* We have no relations with the ISIS and they are our enemies. Although there is no ideological change in the thought process of Taliban but since 20 years we have more experience and will try to protect the rights of people if our government comes in Kabul. Although we are ready for war but we want to solve the issue through talks and peace. **Sami Yusuf Zai: Journalist & Analyst-** pointed out that Zabiullah said in this episode that there will be no change in the ideology of Taliban and this is something to worry for all of us. Pakistan want Taliban to condemn TTP but he has not said anything about it and this is a fact that TTP is present in Afghanistan and the Taliban has not taken any step against the TTP. The takeover of the Taliban will be a moral boost for other terror groups around the World. In the north many Tajik and others are joining Taliban, in taking up Kabul there can be a war between Pashtun and non-Pashtun tribes. The Taliban are in a frame of mind to go for military takeover of Afghanistan and implement Islamic *sharia*. **Pakistan thinks that Taliban government will be good for CPEC but the Taliban has no experience in governance and there can be sanctions on them if they come in power.**

**Khobar se Aagay, Why Nawaz Sharif met with NSA Afghanistan, Naya Daur, 28 July<sup>26</sup>**

The meeting of Nawaz Sharif with Afghanistan's National Security Advisor (NSA) Hamdullah Mohib in London has stirred a political debate in Pakistan with the PTI government and its leaders criticizing the meeting. **In this episode Raza Rumi asked Najam Sethi to comment on this meeting and why the Pakistan government is making noise about the same.** Najam Sethi pointed out that the media in Pakistan was busy comparing the performance of the PML-N in the recently concluded AJK to the meeting of Nawaz Sharif and the Afghan NSA and pointed out that the failure of the PML-N is because of the meeting. Najam Seth underlined that in reality there is no connection of the Afghan issue

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<sup>26</sup> [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=K20\\_24SfJo0](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=K20_24SfJo0)

with the elections in AJK. NSA of Afghanistan is an official channel and the army chief of Pakistan and NSA Moeed Yusuf also meets him. Nawaz Sharif has been PM for three terms and he has the right to meet any official representative of Afghanistan. He also informed that the meeting between NSA Afghanistan and Nawaz Sharif was facilitated by an important Middle Eastern country (Saudi Arab) in an effort to find a solution to the Afghan problem. The point is that Nawaz Sharif still has relevance in Pakistani politics and therefore the PTI government is doing propaganda about PML-N losing in AJK and connecting it to this meeting. The bottom line is that US, India and UAE are trying their best to include India in the whole game. This is an indirect message/signaling to Islamabad and Rawalpindi to support Ghani government in Afghanistan and to accommodate India. *The US will fully support the Afghan air force against the Taliban. Nawaz Sharif want normalization and does not want the Pakistan government and establishment to support the Taliban to the extent they are doing now.*

## BOMBINGS, SHOOTINGS AND DISAPPEARANCES

(Select incidents culled out from the Pakistan media)

Place	Date	Description	Killed	Injured
<b>Khyber Pakhtunkhwa</b>				
Dasu <sup>27</sup>	14/07/2021	8 killed near Dasu hydropower plant	08	05
Multan <sup>28</sup>	14/07/2021	Blasphemy suspect injured in firing en-route to court in Multan	00	01
Mansehra <sup>29</sup>	15/07/2021	9 Chinese, 4 Pakistanis killed in Dasu bus tragedy	13	28
Peshawar <sup>30</sup>	30/07/2021		01	01

<sup>27</sup> <https://www.dawn.com/news/1635023/8-killed-near-dasu-hydropower-plant>

<sup>28</sup> <https://www.dawn.com/news/1634983/blasphemy-suspect-injured-in-firing-en-route-to-court-in-multan>

<sup>29</sup> <https://www.dawn.com/news/1635150>

<sup>30</sup> <https://www.dawn.com/news/1637770>

		Policeman martyred in blast in Peshawar's Karkhano Market		
<b>Punjab</b>				
Khurram <sup>31</sup>	14/07/2021	Two security men martyred in Khurram operation	02	03
<b>Balochistan</b>				
Pasni <sup>32</sup>	15/07/2021	Army officer, soldier martyred in Pasni terrorist attack	02	00

<sup>31</sup> <https://www.dawn.com/news/1634888/two-security-men-martyred-in-kurram-operation>

<sup>32</sup> <https://tribune.com.pk/story/2310686/army-officer-soldier-martyred-in-pasni-terrorist-attack>