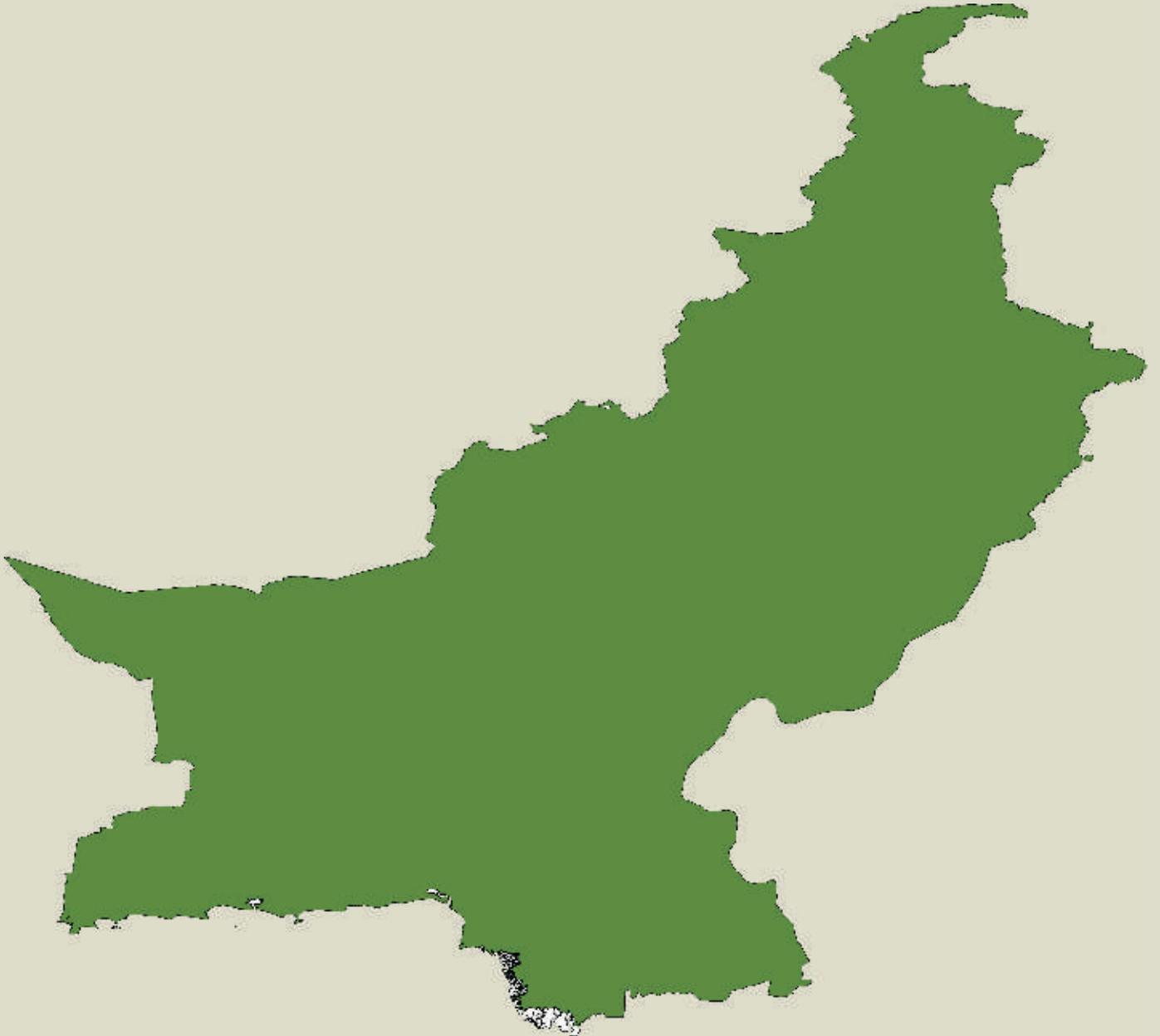


March 2022

PAKISTAN NEWS DIGEST

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



Prepared by

Dr. Zainab Akhter

Dr. Nazir Ahmad Mir

Dr. Mohammad Eisa

Dr. Ashok Behuria



MANOHAR PARRIKAR INSTITUTE FOR
DEFENCE STUDIES AND ANALYSES

मनोहर पर्रिकर रक्षा अध्ययन एवं विश्लेषण संस्थान

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PAKISTAN NEWS DIGEST, March 2022

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POLITICAL DEVELOPMENTS

PM's growing challenge, Editorial, *Dawn*, 08 March¹

PM Imran Khan is under pressure. As political developments unfold at a quickening pace and the opposition appears to be finalising its vote of no-confidence move against Mr. Khan, it is becoming increasingly obvious that the PTI government is faced with its gravest crisis since it assumed power in 2018. If the party was feeling the heat at the federal level, it is now up against a major challenge in Punjab too. On Monday, the disgruntled Jahangir Khan Tareen group scored a major victory when Mr. Khan's close aide and former senior minister of Punjab Abdul Aleem Khan joined it. Speaking to the media after the group's meeting, Aleem Khan made little attempt to hide his disillusionment with the state of affairs under the PTI government. *With the JKT group's numbers swelling, it appears that if they pull back support for the Usman Buzdar government in Punjab, it could be in serious trouble.* The centre and Punjab heating up simultaneously is no coincidence. The opposition wants to pile maximum pressure on the government through the numbers game in the assemblies and via the PPP's long march that is scheduled to reach Rawalpindi and Islamabad today. The undiplomatic attack by the prime minister may create diplomatic problems for Pakistan and it is rather unfortunate that his advisers could not convince him to not take such a harsh position publicly.

A Vote of No-Confidence? Editorial, *The Nation*, 08 March²

It is the time of the month when the inconsistent opposition gears up energy and revitalizes its campaign against the ruling party. Despite toying with the threat many times over the last few years, this time the opposition appears quite serious about attempting a vote of no-confidence. Pakistan People's Party (PPP) senior leader Syed Khurshid Shah has even given a date- on Sunday he said the opposition parties will submit a no-confidence motion against Imran Khan on 8th March. It is true that there have been several reports of divisions in the ruling party's camp, as there have been stories of discontent PTI politicians. No matter how much PTI may deny that these stories of discord are rumours, where there is smoke there is fire, and even the leaders of the ruling party know there is some risk of defectors in the party. *However, for that to happen, the opposition must also be a united block, and that is also clearly not the case. The horse-trading that occurred in the Senate elections damaged some of the opposition parties as much as it did to PTI.* Just last month, the

¹ <https://www.dawn.com/news/1678866/pms-growing-challenge>

² <https://nation.com.pk/2022/03/07/a-vote-of-no-confidence/>

government was successful in disrupting the opposition when PPP Senator Yusuf Raza Gilani resigned from the post of leader of the opposition in the Senate. The opposition has not even demonstrated the ability to stop any of the contentious bills introduced in parliament pulling off a vote of no-confidence, with that resume, would be an achievement indeed.

Rocky road for PM, Editorial, Dawn, 09 March³

The day of reckoning for the PTI government may be at hand with the submission of a no-trust motion against Prime Minister Imran Khan by the combined opposition after weeks of political manoeuvring and deliberations. The question now is: will he survive this move? Even though the onus of proof that Mr. Khan has lost the confidence of the National Assembly is on the opposition, the odds, at least for now, appear stacked against him. Mr. Khan, facing a bigger threat from within his party, has a maximum of 21 days to defeat the motion. The Constitution binds the speaker to summon the Assembly session not more than 14 days after receiving the requisition, which has also been filed, for a vote on the resolution after “the expiration of three days” and no “later than seven days” from the commencement of the sitting. Indeed, a sitting government has enough clout to win back rebellious lawmakers and create divisions in the opposition. But now it is near impossible for the PM to bridge the gulf he has created between himself and his old friends Jehangir Tarin and Aleem Khan. *For now, he isn't in a position to give them what they want Punjab without losing the PML-Q's support. Likewise, opposition benchers will think twice before jumping ship when the government is at its weakest.*

Establishment's role, Editorial, Dawn, 10 March⁴

Ever since the opposition parties announced their plans of ousting Prime Minister Imran Khan through a vote of no-confidence, many have been asking which side the security establishment supports. The answer, they believe, will help them place safe bets on the outcome of the opposition's no-trust motion. Given the military's long-standing sway over Pakistan politics and influence on virtually every political party, including many posturing as anti-establishment outfits, this is not surprising. So far, the PTI leadership has maintained that the ‘security establishment is with Pakistan’, insisting that it stands with the government in these difficult times. However, the combined opposition contends that the establishment is now neutral, implying that it no longer backs the ruling party for which it allegedly paved the way for electoral success in 2018. Indeed, there is no evidence so far to show that the

³ <https://www.dawn.com/news/1679043/rocky-road-for-pm>

⁴ <https://www.dawn.com/news/1679241/establishments-role>

establishment is behind the opposition's move against Imran Khan. Yet many have doubts regarding the security establishment's neutrality in the current crisis. *Unfortunately, the establishment has a long history of meddling in politics. It has directly ruled the country for three decades. Analysts have pointed out that when not ruling directly, it has pulled strings from behind the scenes to oust elected governments, propped up pressure groups, created divisions in parties to split their vote bank, financed opposition parties to destabilise elected set-ups, etc. in order to maintain its grip on political power.* It is widely perceived that politicians have always needed the armed forces' support to come to power. We have seen politicians occasionally stand up to the military's dominance and political interference, but there has never been a dearth of civilian leaders willing to do the establishment's bidding for a share in power.

Ominous, Najam Sethi, *The Friday Times*, 11 March⁵

The numbers game for ascertaining who will be the Leader of the House (prime minister) has finally kicked off. The PTI has 155 votes and its allies have 24, totalling 179 for the government. The combined opposition has 162. If at least 10 switch from the government to the opposition, swelling its ranks to the magic number of 172, Imran Khan will be gone. What are the chances this will come to pass? The Opposition claims that at least 20 PTI MNAs have already committed to crossing the floor on voting day. Some are said to have been "induced" to switch by the prospect of getting a winning berth on the PMLN ticket in central or northern Punjab or PPP ticket in Sindh or southern Punjab. *Some palms may also have been greased. If this claim is even half true, then the dice will roll for the Opposition on D-Day.* For precisely this reason, Imran Khan is fighting back on two fronts. He is swallowing his pride and arrogance and desperately trying to retain his allies by counter inducements. But his focus is on stopping his own herd from flocking to the Opposition. *The idea is to instil confidence in his allies that he isn't going anywhere and they should stick to him. Imran Khan's strategy is to block his MNAs from coming to parliament on voting day.* And if they defy his orders and end up voting with the Opposition against him, to get the Speaker, Asad Qaisar, to disqualify them from remaining members of the PTI and cancelling their votes. Constitutionally, he cannot stop them from voting against him and the disqualification process can take up to four months (one month with the Election Commission of Pakistan and three months in appeals before the Supreme Court) if due process is followed.

⁵ <https://www.thefridaytimes.com/ominous/>

Faulty narrative, Editorial, Dawn, 15 March⁶

As the country braces for another political crisis, it is becoming increasingly clear that the government is doing precious little to calibrate its intensity. In fact, if the statements of the ministers and advisers are anything to go by, the ruling party looks to be increasing the political temperature. At the heart of this turmoil is the upcoming vote of no-confidence and the visible tension in the PTI camp as the numbers game looks more in favour of the opposition. The danger is that the government may take steps that could inject complications into what is a fairly straightforward constitutional process. *Fearing that a significant number of his own MNAs might be ready to vote against Prime Minister Imran Khan, cabinet ministers have been peddling a strange logic according to which the National Assembly speaker can disqualify such members even before they vote, or bar them from voting.* He can do neither. Yet such is the confusion being spread by seemingly responsible people that the ruling party and its supporters have internalized this misplaced logic as narrative. Legal experts have clarified that every MNA's right to vote is protected by the Constitution and he or she cannot be stopped from exercising this right. *The disqualification clause is equally clear. If the member crosses the floor by casting the vote against their party, they are liable to be disqualified. If he or she is fine with taking this risk, that too is a right that can be exercised.*

An explosive interview, Editorial, The News, 17 March⁷

Generally, one would not imagine that a political answer by a politician in an interview would mention babies, nappies or rotten charsi tikkas but nothing is much of a surprise in Pakistan, where political discourse is both plunging new depths and retaining the much-used resort to euphemisms. The interview in question aired on Tuesday night – saw PML-Q leader and Speaker Punjab Assembly Chaudhry Pervaiz Elahi hold little back while criticising the government – a government Elahi's party is in alliance with not just in Punjab but in the centre as well. *It is not the first time the PML-Q leadership has made critical comments about the ruling party and Prime Minister Imran Khan's style of governance.* Although a clarification some could optimistically see it as a pro-government statement was issued yesterday by the PML-Q, that doesn't do much to take the sting away from the original statements by Elahi, which only added to the speculations regarding which way the allies will turn, a decision that will come out in the open soon enough. More importantly, the fact that the MQM and PML-Q have repeatedly criticised the government should warrant an introspection by the government why is it that its allies as well as

⁶ <https://www.dawn.com/news/1680076/faulty-narrative>

⁷ <https://www.thenews.com.pk/print/942163-an-explosive-interview>

groups within the party are openly complaining about the way the ruling party has been going about its business of governance.

A task for OIC, Editorial, *The Express Tribune*, 22 March⁸

Islamabad will be the fulcrum of the Islamic world as it proudly hosts the 48th meeting of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) Council of Foreign Ministers. The moot will take place on March 22-23, and coincides with the 75th celebrations of Pakistan Day. It is, nonetheless, being convened at a very crucial time of realpolitik. The Muslim world is meticulously busy in chartering a prospective and independent line of action while dealing with issues of power politics, and at the same time is faced with the curse of Islamophobia. This is why it is hoped this great amalgamation of dignitaries will provide them with an opportunity to find a way out to come out of this abyss. The agenda too this year is reflective of the OIC's mandate, i.e. to adopt a unanimous stance on the problems faced by the Muslim communities. To count a few prominent issues: provision of humanitarian assistance for Afghanistan, Islamophobia, Palestinian struggle for an independent statehood, and the right to self-determination of Kashmiris under the Indian yoke. *Last but not least, climate change, the aftermath of Covid-19 and the spiraling food and oil prices are also issues that will keep the delegates glued in a huddle of minds.*

The captain's gambit, Editorial, *Dawn*, 28 March⁹

It seems that the last wisps of the political fog that has clouded the federal capital since March 8 finally dissipated yesterday evening at Islamabad's Parade Ground. For the first time this month, Prime Minister Imran Khan sounded like a man certain of the fate that awaits him in the days to come. Between the lines of his long-running speech were the clearest indications yet that he has come to terms with the likely outcome of the impending no-confidence vote and is now moving on to laying the ground for the politics of what comes next. *Brandishing a weathered-looking document allegedly containing "written proof", the prime minister suggested that his government was the target of an international conspiracy.* Though he insisted that he did not want to get 'swept up' in emotions and 'over-speak' on the matter which, he said, "might affect Pakistan's foreign policy" – the prime minister suggested that he faced the same circumstances Zulfikar Ali Bhutto did before his unceremonious removal by military dictator Ziaul Haq. One also wonders just what Mr. Khan believes he has done to defy world powers such that they think it important to remove him from office while war rages in Europe and the global economy strains under unprecedented inflation. All said, this was the

⁸ <https://tribune.com.pk/story/2349012/a-task-for-oic>

⁹ <https://www.dawn.com/news/1682181/the-captains-gambit>

speech of a man with both eyes on the future someone who knows his time is up and wishes to go down as a political martyr.

Grave Challenge? Editorial, *The Daily Times*, 29 March¹⁰

A country that invests so much in building a defence narrative is in no position to wave a foreign threat—especially one holding the sway over the king and all his men—in front of a thumping crowd and forget it ever existed. Swirling talk of money from questionable sources lighting the fire under efforts to topple the ruling government should have been pursued as a matter of life and death. From tilting the balance to a tolerable party all the way to orchestrating a prime minister's execution, foreign hands have notoriously played the system for their own gains. And this is something that should be discussed in the innermost circles with a firm grip on evidence and a hawk's eye on all quarters. Whether our country's walls are impregnable is for the security agencies to deliberate upon but in the meantime, a captain trying to save his neck from arrows raining from all directions has far crippling challenges to look out for. Islamabad rally was historic in the truest sense and the ruling PTI still rules millions of hearts far and wide. Yet, the question is not about its seemingly endless sea of supporters. *The magic number stays perpetually fixed at 172. The head-on collision with the no-confidence motion cannot be avoided for long and the only option available is to pass with flying colours.*

ECONOMIC ISSUES

External loan burden, Editorial, *The Express Tribune*, 02 March¹¹

A new report on the official figures for foreign borrowing by the PTI government has sent the jaws of most analysts crashing down \$47.55 billion so far. The figure has been run up in just 43 months, meaning that the government is borrowing well over a billion dollars a month from abroad. In the process, Prime Minister Imran Khan and the ruling PTI have put more external debt on the shoulders of Pakistanis than any government in history, with little to show in terms of socioeconomic improvements for citizens. While the government may try to blame its predecessors for forcing it to run to international lenders soon after taking charge, the fact that borrowing levels remain high and are actually rising without a corresponding increase in economic growth suggests that the government has not only failed to fix the country's debt problem, but has made it significantly worse. In the first seven

¹⁰ <https://dailytimes.com.pk/909361/grave-challenge/>

¹¹ <https://tribune.com.pk/story/2346001/external-loan-burden>

months of this year alone, the government has borrowed \$12 billion, or 86% of the full-year target of \$14 billion. Incidentally, total foreign borrowing for the previous fiscal year was \$14.3 billion. *A further complication comes from the fact that a significant amount of the new borrowing \$2.6 billion is in the form of commercial loans, which have significantly higher interest rates and collateral conditions, coupled with shorter repayment periods.* Interestingly, the full year target for commercial loans is \$4.87 billion, meaning that the government may add over \$2.2 billion in foreign loans before the year is up.

Economic fallout, Abdul Jalil, The News, 07 March¹²

What ails Pakistan's economy? It won't be an exaggeration to say that this question requires a doctoral-level thesis even to summarise the argument. Economic experts have varying views on it, and they come up with different sets of rationale. The country's economic crisis is multipronged, and if we solve one problem, another pops up. Issues such as a debate on a civil or military government, policy continuity, conflicts between the public and private sectors, development and non-development expenditures, political instability, class conflict, infrastructure, poverty, etc., have a big impact on the economy. But if we delimit this question, we may shortlist a few pivotal causes which branch out to other related issues. *Pakistan's economic output continued to lag behind, and, consequently, we had to rely on foreign debts to make ends meet. The ever-increasing foreign debt and non-development expenditure strangled our economic indicators, and now we seem to have hit the rock bottom.* This shift from a development state to a security state has other repercussions as well. A thriving economy needs scientific and technological development which relies on a modern and progressive education system. Just like many other social and economic sectors, the education sector was also sacrificed at the altar of the country's security. Our education institutions lack the capacity to produce market-oriented skilled individuals who can cope with the ever-shifting socio-economic trends. If we compare ourselves with our neighbouring countries like India and Bangladesh, the difference is quite evident.

No confidence in the economy, Dr. Pervez Tahir, The Express Tribune, 11 March¹³

Prime Minister Imran Khan faces a no-trust motion. If one goes by Bilawal's speech at the D-Chowk the other night, the opposition's no-confidence move against the government is driven by the deteriorating state of the economy. Its most direct impact is on the employment situation. There is, however, no data to look at job losses in the short run. The next best alternative is the rate of inflation that gives an idea of the suffering imposed on lives and livelihoods. So Bilawal mostly talked about prices. So did Imran Khan, in his public

¹² <https://www.thenews.com.pk/print/939320-economic-fallout>

¹³ <https://tribune.com.pk/story/2347316/no-confidence-in-the-economy>

announcements of reduced energy prices, subsidized rations and enhanced Ehsaas dole. In other words, both sides see inflation as the enemy of the people, with the opposition rallying the support of the public and its representatives against the failure of the government to control it and the government protecting its base by taking unconventional measures to alleviate the suffering. Where will the money come from? The State Bank thinks it is deficit-neutral, but for how long? *Despite the recurrence of high fiscal deficits, demand has not pulled inflation. Core inflation reflecting non-food, non-energy prices has been consistently less than the overall rate of inflation. Throughout the PTI rule, inflation has been led by food and energy.* In the arena of our politics, the failure to deal with the rising inflation is the single-most important indicator of economic mismanagement. Small wonder that the opposition's move is anchored in the lack of confidence in the economy. The interesting question here is: does the opposition have an alternative?

Fiscal deficit challenge, Editorial, *The Express Tribune*, 14 March¹⁴

The budget deficit for the ongoing fiscal year is estimated, by the Ministry of Finance, to fall Rs318 billion short of the target, and is going to be in excess of Rs4.3 trillion a new record. And this is despite the fact that the government has cut the development budget by Rs200 billion; slapped Rs360 billion worth of mini-budget; and collected Rs268 billion additional tax (in the first eight months of FY22) on higher imports and higher inflation. *While, under the IMF agreement, the government had to achieve an overall primary budget surplus of Rs25 billion, it has instead shown Rs665 billion deficit by June this year. It goes without saying that this breach of commitment with the international lender signals a tough time ahead both for the rulers and the ruled.* To infuriate the IMF further, the cash-strapped government of Prime Minister Imran Khan has announced a relief package for people across the board, besides promising that there would be no raise in power and gas tariffs and oil prices till the next budget. So how does the government plan to plug the Rs4.3 trillion fiscal gap that is further broadened by the amount of the PM's relief package? Well, the PM will either have to go back on his words and increase the utilities' prices or find some specific areas to impose new taxes. *There are however reports that while fresh loans are being sought both from foreign and domestic sources, further cut in development spending is being mulled.* Whatever way the government goes about darning the huge fiscal hole, it is the masses who will have to bear the brunt eventually.

¹⁴ <https://tribune.com.pk/story/2347796/fiscal-deficit-challenge>

SECURITY SITUATION

Another attack in Quetta, Editorial, *Dawn*, 04 March¹⁵

The continuing spate of deadly attacks in Balochistan lays bare the state's failure to pre-empt subversive forces, which seem to be operating with untampered vigour. *Violence once again visited the provincial capital on Wednesday, with a remote-controlled bomb killing at least three and injuring 25 on Quetta's Fatima Jinnah Road.* It appeared from initial reports that the attack was planned and aimed at inflicting casualties on a police patrol. While a station house officer, whose vehicle appeared to have been targeted, survived, a deputy superintendent was not as fortunate. Civilian lives and property, too, were lost or damaged. They bore the worst of the attack, as they invariably do in incidents such as these. While there has been no claim of responsibility thus far, it bears mentioning that this was the second attack in Quetta within a week targeting the city police force. *The first, a gun attack last Friday on policemen taking a lunch break, was claimed by the banned TTP.* The modus operandi of both incidents suggests that the attackers had knowledge of police movements and response strategies and targeted them when they were at their most vulnerable. *The National Security Policy unveiled just weeks ago promised a more secure Pakistan for all its citizens. Decisive actions must be taken — and seen to be taken for people to keep their faith in that promise.*

FATF unfairness, Editorial, *Dawn*, 07 March¹⁶

It is no surprise that the FATF, the global money laundering and terrorist financing watchdog, has retained Pakistan on its so-called grey list of countries under increased monitoring until June. This is in spite of the significant progress made by Pakistan in completing the required actions and Islamabad's political commitment to implementing a comprehensive action plan as acknowledged by the FATF over the last couple of years. Pakistan was put on the grey list in June 2018 and has since completely or largely addressed 32 out of 34 action points. *The watchdog "encouraged Pakistan to continue to make progress to address the remaining items as soon as possible by continuing to demonstrate that it is enhancing the impact of sanctions by nominating individuals and entities for UN designation and restraining and confiscating proceeds of crime in line with its risk profile".* Energy Minister Hammad Azhar, who is heading Pakistan's efforts to exit the list, said on Saturday that Pakistan's effort to complete the FATF's technical requirements would be acknowledged 'soon'. One, Pakistan's compliance on the technical

¹⁵ <https://www.dawn.com/news/1678194/another-attack-in-quetta>

¹⁶ <https://www.dawn.com/news/1678704/fatf-unfairness>

side may have significantly improved but its effectiveness is still ranked as poor by the FATF as is evident from the consolidated ranking assigned to the country based on the third follow-up report released last month. Two, Islamabad's growing tilt towards China and recently Russia is widening the gulf between the country and the West, including the US, allowing India to influence FATF decisions on Pakistan. *That completing all actions for effectiveness of the AML/CFT regime is a structural benchmark of the IMF deal underlines Pakistan's weakening clout in Western capitals.*

Terror in Balochistan, again, Editorial, Daily Times, 31 March¹⁷

Call it a tweaking by the foreign hands, tightening of the screws by the liberation armies or sheer bad luck, the return of terrorism to Balochistan cannot be denied any longer. The issue is already making rounds in powerful corridors because as many as seven major attacks have been carried out since the beginning of the year that security personnel are overwhelmingly targeted by those who take pleasure in playing with our blood speaks volumes about their disillusionment with anything that resonates even remotely with Pakistan. After a brief spell of normalcy, Balochistan—a province that has endured far more than its fair share of unrest and violence—is treading a security tightrope once again. Back into the frying pan, indeed. Those steering the wheel become satisfied by pinning the tail on the Taliban takeover of Kabul. But even if their fears hold true, the onus primarily lies on the state to bolt its front door, maintain the fences on its boundary walls and stand guard. Simply waving the red flag and waiting for an armoured saviour to enter the scene on a shining horse won't do. *Balochistan is bleeding and won't stop until Islamabad unleashes the newly minted National Security Policy and tends to its wounds. Slapping on a bandaid in the name of public harassment is no worthwhile solution. If history has taught us anything, it is always the people-to-people linkages that matter in such fights.*

URDU MEDIA

Pakistan's neutral stand on Ukraine crisis, Jang, 02 March¹⁸

By taking a neutral stand on the Russia-Ukraine crisis, Pakistan has decided to not participate in the UN general Assembly debate on the conflict. Islamabad said that it supported a peaceful resolution to the conflict by holding talks. *The session of the UNGA on the Russia-Ukraine crisis was supposed to end on*

¹⁷ <https://dailytimes.com.pk/910124/terror-in-balochistan-again/>

¹⁸ <https://e.jang.com.pk/detail/65024%22>

Tuesday evening. It was attended by more than 100 countries of the world. The purpose of the session was to pass the US tabled resolution in which Russia was asked to withdraw its troops from Ukraine. The Ukrainian envoy at the UN warned the assembly that if Ukraine was not to be saved, the UN would be destroyed too. Earlier, a similar resolution was tabled to the UN Security Council which failed because Russia had vetoed it. *The world knows that Pakistan always prefers peaceful solutions to conflicts. The recent example for the same is playing an active role in organizing talks on Afghanistan. It is also a fact that the world needs peace, not a war. If the Russia-Ukraine war continues, it would spread in other areas/countries.* Chances of a third world war cannot be ruled out entirely and if that happens it would be a disaster for the world. Therefore, Pakistan's position seems the right one. Its decision to abstain can't be counted as absence and secondly it can use its relations to find a way for negotiations.

'Grey list' of FATF, Editorial, Jang, 07 March¹⁹

Minister for energy Hammad Azhar has said that Pakistan was trying to meet the demands of FATF. The statement came in the background of the decision taken by FATF to continue Pakistan in its 'grey list' for terror financing charges against Islamabad. The international body has asked Pakistan to meet the rest of the demands. *Out of the 34 demands of FATF, Pakistan lacks behind in implementing only two. In the case of money laundering, six out of seven conditions have been met. In case of the terror financing 26 points have been acted upon and only one remains disputed. According to some higher officials, Pakistan's plan is to fully implement the 2021-action plan against money laundering and terror financing by January 2023.* FATF was created in 1989 to keep a watch and stop terror financing and money laundering in the world. The role of the body increased after 9/11 attacks. The body has been issuing a report from time to time against the countries that it thinks don't meet the points or recommendations of FATF. The PTI led government has taken concrete measures to bring out the country from FATF's 'grey list' and it is hoped to happen soon. *Despite the deleterious efforts of India and anti-Pakistan countries, Pakistan has been able to project itself as a peaceful and as an equal member of the community of the nations. This is a big success of the PTI led government.*

No-confidence motion against the Prime Minister, Editorial, Daily Ausaf, 09 March²⁰

The opposition has moved a no-confidence motion against the Imran Khan led government in the national assembly. The opposition has asked for a session of

¹⁹ <https://e.jang.com.pk/detail/68716%22>

²⁰ https://www.dailyausaf.com/epaper/popup.php?newsrc=issues/2022-03-09/156468/p8_01.gif

the national assembly. The motion is signed by 86 members. *The tussle between the government and opposition has entered its final round. The opposition has entered the field with more than one option. When PPP was reaching Islamabad with its long march, no confidence motion was being submitted at the same time.* PDM has announced its march from 23 March. All these efforts to dislodge the government are made at a time when the international level new blocks are getting formed. Also, in the third week of March a session of OIC is going to be held in Islamabad. Though both the government and opposition claim to have the numbers, it will be clear on the day when voting is held for no-confidence motion. Historically, though speakers and chief ministers have been removed through no-confidence motion in Pakistan, never so far has a prime minister removed. Question is what then after? Who will save the country from political instability, terrorism, and inflation? *While it is true that the people have right to question their representatives about needs if the people, the opposition should also come up with a formula what would it do to give people relief from inflation, unemployment, economic crisis and terrorism. If they after removing Imran Khan put blame on the Khan led government for the crises in the country that will be intolerable.* The state institutions should stay away from politics. At the same time in this political crisis they need to be alert so that enemies don't get a chance to exploit the political situation. It is better that before submitting the no-confidence motion, the opposition should make public its policies on economy, diplomacy, defense and business. If it succeeds in removing the government, it should provide some relief to the public.

Charged political environment and national interest, Editorial, Jang, 14 March²¹

Despite strong protest from Pakistan on 9 March from Sirsa district in Haryana, India has neither started a joint investigation nor has taken any concrete steps so far. Nor has been the government of Pakistan given any update about any investigation in this regard. *The government of Pakistan has taken a serious notice of the 'cold response' from India on this serious matter. Islamabad again summoned the Indian counselor in Pakistan and resorted to strong protest, demanding that an investigation of the incident should be announced.* The missile, fired from India, remained in the Pakistani air space for about 3 minutes and 24 seconds. Pakistan requested an investigation in the case and also offered full support from its side. India in response just offered a conventional apology, which can be considered undiplomatic. *If Pakistan had taken a counter action of the missile firing from India, a war could have started between two countries. Any war between India and Pakistan can lead to a nuclear disaster.* Pakistan acted sensibly and didn't take any action. It asked the government of India to investigate the matter. It is the time that the

²¹ <https://e.jang.com.pk/detail/74202>

government in Pakistan should take the matter to the UN and demand the international body to ask for a reply from India.

Imran refuses to resign, Editorial, *Nawa-i-Waqt*, 25 March²²

As the day for the session holding no-confidence against Prime Minister Imran Khan is inching closer, political tussle between the government and the opposition has also intensified. In this regard, during an interaction with senior journalists in the PM House. Imran Khan refused to resign in any circumstance saying that he will fight till the end with the opposition. *He said that he would give a surprise one day before the voting.* Prime Minister Imran Khan said that the meaning of 'neutral' has been taken wrong. Here the neutral meant not standing with wrong but supporting right. *The army is criticized for wrong things. The premier said that the country needs a strong army. If there was no strong army the county would have broken into three.* Imran Khan said that write it down that the no-confidence motion would fail. He claimed that 60-65 percent of people were with him. Imran said that after the rally/Jalsa on 27 March his support base would rise up to 90 percent. He said that his trump card was that he hadn't used any card so far. On the other side, *the opposition is also trying its best to dislodge the prime minister. In this way the confrontation between the government and the opposition continues, implying that political bitterness would increase in the coming days by keeping all basic civility at bay.* Both sides however should not forget that they exist because of the constitution and democracy. They should keep in mind that they should not escalate the situation and act according to the law of the land.

The political battle in its last phase, Editorial, *Jang*, 27 March²³

Work on the no-confidence motion against Prime Minister Imran Khan has started. With this the political temperature has risen in the country. In his speeches, Imran Khan has increased his attacks. *Prime Minister Khan said in Kamalia recently that because of Nawaz Sharif the judiciary got divided. Nawaz is uniting judges, the Election Commission was with him from the outset. The Next target would be the army. Imran said that even if he loses his life he would not spare the three thieves.* Imran said that if he continues to be in power for some more time, Shahbaz Sharif would be in jail. Imran said that when Allah calls for a Jihad, there is no neutral stand. The premier said every single army chief stood against Nawaz Sharif because they are the first to come to know about his corruption. *Imran said that the Dawn Leaks was a message to India that he wanted friendly ties but he didn't want the army. The whole lecture of Imran Khan was an attack on the opposition and made fun of the*

²² <https://www.nawaiwaqt.com.pk/E-Paper/lahore/2022-03-25/page-10/detail-9>

²³ <https://e.jang.com.pk/detail/85301>

opposition leaders. Imran even tried to make the state institutions biased by saying that the Election Commission was standing with Nawaz Sharif. Imran Khan threatened that if he continued to be in power he would throw the opposition in jail. In this context the allegation and tirade of Prime Minister Khan become weak. The corruption charges against Nawaz Sharif have not been proven. In his speeches the focus of Prime Minister is character assassination of his opponents. He is getting a response in the same language. *Unfortunately during the current regime even for a single day the government and the opposition have not collaborated for running state affairs.* In regard to the no-confidence motion the political battle has entered its last phase. In the national interest whatever may be the result of the motion, both the parties should accept it without creating any crisis.

ELECTRONIC MEDIA

Aiteraz Hai with Adil Abbasi, PM Imran Khan's warning to opposition? ARY News, 06 March²⁴

Prime Minister Imran Khan in his latest address to a public gathering on Sunday 06 March at Mailsi warned the opposition to be prepared for what he would do to them once their planned no-confidence motion against him fails. *It has to be noted that the PDM, an alliance of opposition parties, is currently in the process of finalising the motion against the prime minister, claiming to have the support of enough lawmakers in the parliament to make the ouster a success.* The prime minister then named his main political rivals individually and questioned their credentials and motives. *"First there is criminal number one Nawaz Sharif,"* he said, stating that the PML-N supremo gave a performance worthy of Bollywood when he was handed a prison sentence by the Supreme Court. Both the PM and the opposition are angry, what will be the result? **Guests:** Fawad Chaudhary-PTI; Faisal Javed Khan-PTI & Nasir Hussain Shah-PPP. **Fawad Chaudhary** questioned why the opposition parties are in a hurry to bring no confidence motion, he explained this is because the cases of corruption and other cases against the opposition big wigs are in the last lag. They feel that if the PM Imran Khan continue there will be a decision or outcome of their cases, they are all scared. Maryam Nawaz and Nawaz Sharif cases are proved, Shehbaz Sharif and Asif Zardari cases are still pending. The way Pakistan is treated by US, Europe is questionable, and they are not ready to talk about Pakistan's role in Afghanistan as well on the issue of Kashmir. **Faisal Javed Khan** pointed out that the no confidence motion is just a plot, they are gang of people who have plot outside and allies of west. They have no

²⁴ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Hz7DG6pLK3k>

interest in Pakistan, their main plan is to remove PM Imran Khan. Some media channels are backing the opposition. The opposition does not have the number to bring the no confidence motion. The public support PM, even if his government is brought down. Imran Khan will be more dangerous if he sits in the opposition. They have nothing do after 10 March, thus looking for face saving. *Nasir Hussain* shah pointed out that the PM is frustrated and have mentioned that US President should have at least called. The taxes have increased, what about the cases against the PTI and the PM Imran Khan for foreign funding. There is no one policy of the government that have become successful. The decision will be taken soon and it will not be extended till March. PM's protests in Sindh has failed completely.

Off The Record with Kashif Abbasi, How PM Imran Khan can prevent his party members from being part of the no-confidence motion? ARY News, 09 March²⁵

After the vote of no confidence by the opposition, Imran Khan travels to Karachi on 09 March in a bid to reinforce trust and held meetings with the leadership of Muttahida Qaumi Movement-Pakistan (MQM-P) and Grand Democratic Alliance (GDA), allies of his government in the Centre. *FM Qureshi said the meeting was fruitful and the two parties had finalised a workable strategy for the future, according to a statement carried by Radio Pakistan.* He said the MQM-P leadership expressed their full confidence in the premier and the PTI thanked its ally for its hospitality and support. Later PM arrived at Sindh Governor House, where he held a meeting with GDA leaders and discussed the overall political situation in the country. The PM also blasted the opposition leaders of PPP, PML-N and JUI-F in strong words and underlined that he is determined to put them behind bars and they are trying their best to get rid of their corruption cases. How will these meetings pan the future of politics in Pakistan? How PM Imran Khan can prevent his party members from being part of the no-confidence motion? *Guests:* Arshad Sharif-Analyst; Fahad Hussain –Analyst; Tariq Bashir Cheema-PML-Q & Syed Aminul Haque MQM-P. *Fahad Hussain* pointed out that right now the opposition has circled the PTI government (*taken the first step, submitted vote of no confidence*) and seems to have the upper hand. Now it has to be seen if the government has any plans to diffuse the attack by the joint opposition. The allies of the PTI government are also meeting with the opposition and they might support the move if they get a good deal. *Arshad Sharif* pointed out that the opposition has revealed their cards but it has to be seen if the government has any cards and how it uses them. The allies are seriously considering the offers given by the opposition, post the no confidence motion the timing is important and we have to see

²⁵ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Qb1o4011tr4>

where the allies vote swing. *After the meeting with PM, the MQM has said that they are with the PTI government but it will keep its options open.* The allies of the PTI are right now giving open statements but will be weaponised in the next few days. *Tariq Bashir Cheema* underlined that the PML-Q is still looking at the situation and analyzing it. The PML-Q has already warned the PTI that if the PTI MNA's break away then the allies might as well break away from the government. We have already conveyed the message to the PM Imran Khan about the same. The allies have supported the PTI government on each step in these three and half years, how could have the PTI survive without the support of the allies? *He pointed out that the PTI has never taken its allies on board on important decisions, but still we are supporting them. They need to put their house in order.* The PTI is already out of time. **Syed Aminul Haque** pointed out that MQM is the biggest allies of the PTI government but it is a different party with different thinking. PM came to meet the MQM after three years, and welcomed him. But there was no talk about the vote of no confidence in the meeting with PM Imran Khan. We talked about developing local government with the PM Imran Khan.

Jirga with Saleem Safi, Exclusive Interview of Fazal-ur-Rehman, JUI-F & PDM Chief, Geo News, 13 March²⁶

Q: Why the Vote of no confidence against the PTI government at this point of time? **A:** The basic point is that we have not accepted the PTI government since 2018, as it came into power by rigging elections. All opposition parties at that point agreed that elections were rigged. In these years of PTI government there is no development in any quarter. I want to thank my workers who participated in these protests and travelled from far off areas in the millennium march and protest against the PTI government. We were given assurance by government representatives that there will be new elections. PTI has cheated the youth of the country and not given any employment. **Q: You are dependent on PML-N & PPP for vote of no confidence, do you trust the parties?** **A:** When PDM was formed there was two options, vote of no confidence and resignation of PTI government, at that time JUI-F asked for resignation. Now the PML-N agrees that JUI-F was right and now PPP is not part OF PPP. I want to see the establishment neutral and it should be maintained for future. All organisations should work within their own boundaries. I want to support the unity of the opposition at this point, though we may had differences in the past. Imran Khan is using bad words against the opposition and this shows his real face. **Q: Imran Khan is saying that it is a propaganda of the west and the opposition is supported by US to uproot his government?** **A:** Imran Khan has failed to impress his own masters internally (establishment) and externally (US). We are fighting to free this country from Imran Khan and in this we will take support

²⁶ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=W3bwcAoKoS>

coming from any quarter. At this point of time Imran Khan is sacred and he is giving these kind of statements. The truth is that drone attacks from Pakistan was allowed by PPP and not Imran Khan, he is just giving these statements to show himself as a victim. Now he is saying that because he is anti-drone, US is supporting the opposition in Pakistan that is rubbish. If Imran Khan is so powerful why Kashmir is still an issue? He can't stop the US in anything. US has not asked for any aircraft launching space to Imran Khan, this story was planted in media by using a journalist. **Q: Imran Khan has travelled to China and Russia, your take? A:** These visits does not mean that US will be against Imran Khan. The question is that what the end result of these visits is. These speeches in the UN does not mean anything but an antic of Imran Khan. Yes it was a good speech, but he sold out Kashmir, went begging to the IMF. See the economy of Pakistan it is in a bad state. Until Imran Khan goes away China will not give any money, even the US. Imran Khan cannot bring any *Riyasat –e-Madina*, word does not suits him, see today where the religious ministry is standing today? Imran Khan has nothing to do with religion, it is just a cover.

Breaking Point with Malick, Is the current political turmoil in Pakistan inching towards a showdown? Hum News, 22 March²⁷

The host Mohammad Malick underlined that both sides the government and opposition now seems desperate to prove their worth and are counter attacking each other. The PTI MNA's are flip flopping their position amid all the drama and the allies of the PTI are almost ready to declare their loyalties with the revolting opposition. In this episode the host asked what is the current political situation in Pakistan and if it is moving towards a final show down? **Guests:** Senior Analysts-Fahad Hussain, Arif Hussain Bhatti, & Ahmad Hussain Dahar-rebel PTI MNA. **Ahmad Hussain dahar** pointed out that I use to call Imran Khan the *Ertrugul* of Pakistan and thought that leaving him will be a mistake, **but the day he assimilated PML-N MPA's into PTI my dream was broken. His speeches in the protests and gatherings attracted large public and he showed so many dreams of a developed Pakistan.** He underlined that but none of the promises Imran Khan made has been fulfilled so far. So now how can walk on such lines shown by a leader like Imran Khan who took U-turns at every corner. How can he label that I have been sold and that I have taken money from opposition. My question is how much you paid for the PML-N MPA's. Criminals are used to attack us and our homes. I have tried talking to CM Buzdar but nothing was done. Imran Khan is so confused right now that he complimented the Indian foreign policy, which in reality is anti-Pakistan. I have already given my demands and if the PTI fulfil the demands then I will be with PTI, will wait till last and act accordingly. **Arif Hussain Bhatti** pointed out that Imran Khan has no idea how to use words properly and bombards and

²⁷ https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aN_en1sqPBA

does character assassination. The PM should have listened to the demands of its MNA's and MPA's and fulfilled it on time. These leaders have been isolated by the PTI and it is difficult for them to go back to support the PTI again. There is no respect to these MNA's and allies of the PTI government and therefore they are rebelling now. *Fahad Hussain* pointed out that the allies of the PTI are tilted towards the united opposition and most probably will be with them on vote of no confidence. The joint press conference by MQM and Maulana Fazl Ur Rehman openly is an indication about MQM's stand and support to PDM. On the other hand the government is not making any efforts to reach out the allies like PML-Q and MQM.

BOMBINGS, SHOOTINGS AND DISAPPEARANCES

(Select incidents culled out from the Pakistan media)

Place	Date	Description	Killed	Injured
Balochistan				
Peshawar ²⁸	04/03/2022	At least 30 dead, dozens injured in Peshawar imambargah blast.	30	50
Khyber Pakhtunkhwa				
Peshawar ²⁹	04/03/2022	57 dead, 200 injured in Peshawar's imambargah attack	57	200
North Waziristan ³⁰	29/03/2022	Four terrorists killed in North Waziristan operation	04	00

²⁸ <https://tribune.com.pk/story/2346343/at-least-30-dead-dozens-injured-in-peshawar-imambargah-blast>

²⁹ <https://tribune.com.pk/story/2346343/57-dead-200-injured-in-peshawars-imambargah-attack>

³⁰ <https://tribune.com.pk/story/2350051/four-terrorists-killed-in-north-waziristan-operation>