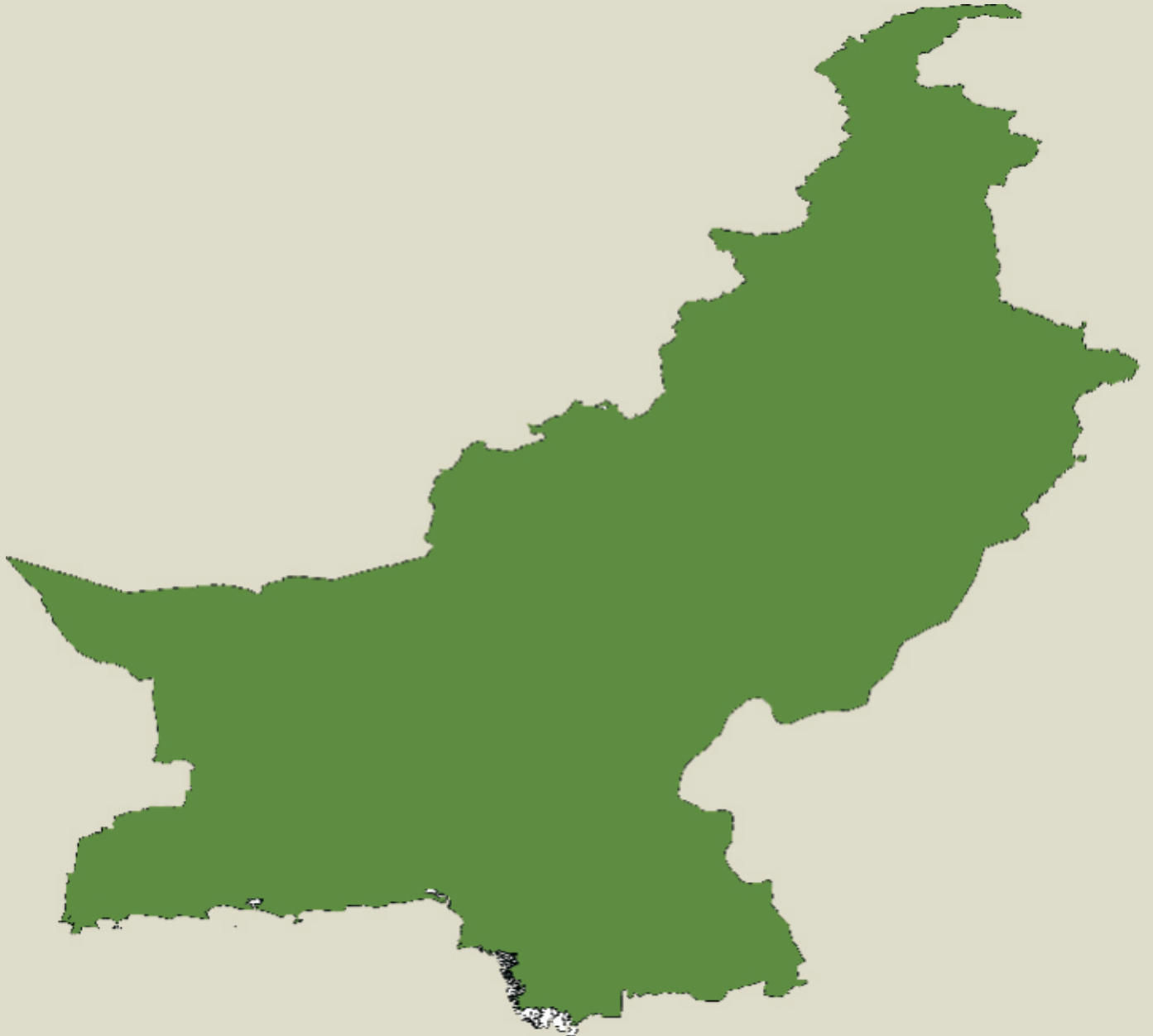


March 2023

PAKISTAN NEWS DIGEST

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



Prepared by
Dr. Zainab Akhter
Dr. Nazir Ahmad Mir
Mr Afroz Khan
Dr. Ashok Behuria

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PAKISTAN NEWS DIGEST, March 2023

CONTENTS

POLITICAL DEVELOPMENTS	04
ECONOMIC ISSUES	06
SECURITY SITUATION	07
URDU & ELECTRONIC MEDIA	
Urdu.....	12
Electronic.....	17
STATISTICS	
BOMBINGS, SHOOTINGS AND DISAPPEARANCES.....	18

POLITICAL DEVELOPMENTS

Much ado about nothing, Editorial, *The News*, 06 March¹

Despite the bravado regarding not being afraid of being arrested, one thing is now quite clear: Imran Khan does not want to go to jail. From his party members allegedly misrepresenting facts to law enforcement, to his party members rushing to court for bails at the drop of a hat, the PTI chair is adamant to stay away from incarceration. That is not difficult to understand: though people have varying explanations for his reluctance. Some say he is afraid for his life and feels there is a threat he may be in danger if he gets arrested. *The skeptical though say that this is far more about the fear of losing the limelight – something Imran Khan is now very used to and something he gets far more even now when out of power than those that are in power.* While political observers say that perhaps Sunday's Zaman Park fiasco was the government testing the waters for an eventual arrest, it is difficult to see what exactly the government will have achieved by that. For the less astute observer, Sunday seemed to be another day of victory for Imran and his PTI and another day of the government and its departments looking indecisive and weak. *This is not to say that an arrest would add to the government's credentials but that the optics of one police force outside Imran's home while the interior minister making it seem like the government didn't even want to arrest him makes it all seem so last-minute and haphazard. What is the government banking on as it prepares for election?*

A day of casualty in Punjab, Editorial, *The Express Tribune*, 10 March²

There is some serious thinking business needed by the political parties, and the caretakers in the province, to resolve whether the constitutional mandatory elections in the province will be held under what scenario. The retreat of the Punjab government by taking back Section 144, which was earlier imposed for seven days, and the relief that the PTI chairman got from the court of law, wherein he was excused from personally appearing in a case, have scaled down the tension. This is a much-desired relief, and the need of the hour is to ensure that law and order is maintained, and due political space is provided to all political parties in the run for electioneering. *This is, in fact, the primary duty of the interim setup under Chief Minister Mohsin Naqvi, and he and his cabinet are liable to the dictates of the constitution. The question now is what's ahead?* The PTI's recourse to talk it out with the Election Commission, and knock at the superior judiciary's door, to realise its fundamental

¹ <https://www.thenews.com.pk/print/1046910-much-ado-about-nothing>

² <https://tribune.com.pk/story/2405249/a-day-of-casualty>

right of going to the polls is most welcome. It has to also ensure that its support does not turn into a clash of interests, and this is where the acumen of leadership counts. Let there be no repeat of May 25 and March 8 fissures on the streets of Punjab.

Showdown at Zaman Park, Editorial, *The Express Tribune*, 15 March³

While there is no stepping down the ladder by either side, the evolving equation does not bode well for upcoming elections in the province on April 30 and, thus, necessitates extreme acumen and political wisdom. The bid to arrest Khan was not the first one. *Islamabad and Punjab police had been after the PTI supremo for long, as he shielded behind bails and interventions from the court. Though none are clear as to which case is simmering so high to torpedo the uneasy peace mosaic of the country, the situation warrants a brush of leadership to scale down tensions.* But unfortunately that is not the case as the PTI is busy playing to the gallery on the premise of its popularity, and the PDM alliance is out to buy time in the wake of delaying elections in two provinces under one pretext or the other. Had Khan thought it appropriate to face the court of law on whatever charges came his way, irrespective of reservations against them, he would have attained high moral ground. His skeptical political call to evade appearance before courts has apparently pushed him to a dead-end. At the same time, it goes without saying that the caretaker set-up in Punjab is going over the brink in its pursuit of Khan something that would sooner than later be challenged under the law.

ECONOMIC ISSUES

Stricter conditions by IMF, Editorial, *Dawn*, 02 March⁴

Nearly three months after Finance Minister Ishaq Dar refused to be dictated to by the IMF, these countries also seem to be siding with the lender, providing Pakistan only enough to keep it going until the bailout loan is finalised. With a large credibility gap and trust deficit exacerbated by the ongoing political drama in the country, it is foolish to expect them to step up to help us in a big way without the IMF on board. The Fund may be showing further strictness on issues such as the exchange rate, interest rate, external financing gap and the permanent debt-servicing surcharge on electricity, but has the government been keeping its promises? Can it deny that the exchange rate is again being

³ <https://tribune.com.pk/story/2406079/showdown-at-zaman-park>

⁴ <https://www.dawn.com/news/1739911>

tinkered with? That said, it must be pointed out that some of the new IMF conditions, such as linking interest rates with headline inflation and the imposition of permanent debt surcharge on electricity, seem quite unreasonable. The Fund must show some elasticity on these conditions to prevent the country's economic crisis from getting out of hand. *It is all a bit confusing. Is it its familiarity with Pakistan's poor track record or some sinister international 'plot' that is keeping the IMF from finalising the staff-level agreement with Islamabad for the revival of the stalled loan, despite the government's implementation of several politically tough 'prior actions'?*

Crippling loan programme, Editorial, *The Express Tribune*, 03 March⁵

Islamabad's struggle to get the IMF bailout programme restored continues, as the global lender is coming up with one condition after the other so much so that the official authorities have started complaining of 'maltreatment' and believing that foreign capitals are working for Pakistan's 'meltdown'. Such a belief has stemmed from the fact that despite implementation on many a tough decision, carrying huge political cost, the global lender has kept moving the goalposts. *The IMF loan programme is already costing the masses dear, as the rate of inflation, at 31.6%, has risen to an almost 50-year high; and compliance with the new demands is sure to push it up further.* Where the harsh conditions are intolerable for the common man as well as the business community in the country, they are not either working to meet their target of increasing the implementation capacity of the IMF-suggested reform measures themselves. The Fund must realise that the economic reforms programme, being imposed on the Pakistan government, needs to be workable so as to enable the country to increase its debt repayment capacity.

Plan B on economy? Editorial, *The Express Tribune*, 27 March⁶

Quite understandably, the government's initiatives, especially the petrol subsidy plan, have drawn concerns from the IMF whose resident representative in Pakistan says that the government had not consulted the Fund over the fuel pricing scheme, and that it needs to be agreed before a deal is finalised. *The Fund is also insisting on written guarantees from Pakistan's friendly countries to bridge the external financing gap — of around \$6 billion — for the loan deal to culminate.* And while assurances from friendly countries were still awaited, the government rather violated the IMF conditions through the aforementioned initiatives — thereby putting a potential bailout deal in peril. With the central bank holding just around \$4.6 billion worth of forex reserves and the government needing \$3 billion in

⁵ <https://tribune.com.pk/story/2404095/crippling-loan-programme>

⁶ <https://tribune.com.pk/story/2408325/plan-b-on-economy>

the next three months to settle foreign obligations, one wonders whether the government has a plan B to avert a financial default. Well, if Miftah Ismail, the discarded foreign minister, is to be believed, there can be none “as the IMF is the lender of last resort: when nothing works, IMF is the only go-to option”. Worryingly though, even this last remaining option is not working as a financial default stares us right in the face.

Economy in Doldrums, Editorial, *The Express Tribune*, 31 March⁷

With fiscal and humanitarian crises bringing us closer to the brink, we are teetering on the edge of collapse yet again, and this time, China appears to be the answer to all our prayers. In the midst of negotiating a bailout from the IMF, something we have done 20 times before, our foreign reserves have plummeted to record lows, leaving us with no money to finance our colossal balance of payments deficit. *What we really need is a hard reset, but that simply isn't possible without even more foreign assistance which is what created this mess in the first place. Our dependence on imports and a low inflow of dollars has triggered a repeated balance of payments crises, resulting in piles of debt and no foreign exchange.* But without foreign intervention, the country risks debt default. Right now, the priority is to secure yet another loan from China as part of its \$2bn commitment to the country. The funds will provide much-needed relief for a nation that needs to service about \$7 billion worth of repayments in the next few months, which is also incidentally crucial to unlocking its \$6.5 billion loan from the IMF. Currently, around 30 per cent of Pakistan's foreign debt is owed to China, a situation that has likely been exacerbated by our recent requests for a loan, Meanwhile, China is busy fighting a battle against debt restructuring, a crucial mechanism for helping low-income countries that have spiraled into crisis owing to higher US interest rates and a stronger dollar. But *China, the world's largest sovereign creditor, has historically been reluctant to restructure loans, instead preferring to extend new credit. With each successive loan Pakistan accepts, it pulls itself further into a vicious cycle of dependence that can only be remedied through self-sufficiency.*

SECURITY SITUATION

Lurking militancy, Editorial, *Dawn*, 23 March⁸

With the din of politics drowning out everything else in Pakistan, the troubling reality that is emerging is that the country is facing an ever-present terrorist threat, primarily in the

⁷ <https://dailytimes.com.pk/1078972/economy-in-doldrums/>

⁸ <https://www.dawn.com/news/1743707>

shape of the TTP. Though mercifully the violence perpetrated by the group has not reached the bloody levels of a decade ago, the situation is far from normal. Take the twin attacks in KP on Tuesday, in which at least five security personnel, including a senior ISI officer, lost their lives. *In one incident, Brig Mustafa Kamal Barki, who was attached to the intelligence agency, was martyred along with his driver in South Waziristan, close to the Afghan border, when he was ambushed by terrorists. In the other episode, at least three troops were martyred in an encounter in Dera Ismail Khan.* While no group has yet claimed responsibility for either attack, the TTP is active in both areas; splinter groups may also have been responsible. The fact that militants can hit cities — as they have done in Peshawar and Karachi over the past few months — as well as target troops in the field in remote areas, indicates their reach and operational capabilities. It is these capabilities that need to be neutralised by the security forces before the TTP, or similar malign actors, gain the confidence to stage even more brazen attacks. Sustained diplomatic efforts must also continue in order to convince the Afghan Taliban to not let their soil be used to host anti-Pakistan terrorists. *The Afghan rulers tend to be evasive about TTP activities in their country, but the message from Pakistan needs to be unambiguous: there can be no safe havens in Afghanistan for terrorists. Internally, political dissonance is not helping the counterterrorism effort.*

Judicial review! Editorial, *The Express Tribune*, 31 March⁹

A lot of political engineering went into play as the parliament passed the bill to clip the CJP's privileges to constitute benches, and take Suo motu action under Article 184(3). The new legislation has literally scrapped it down, perhaps bringing to an end judicial activism for all times to come. This was an unwarranted development at a time of acute political instability, and when institutions are at loggerheads over exercising their constitutional duties. The point is that the apex court's right and discretion to interpret the constitution, in case of a legal tangle, has been undermined by the new legislation. As things stand, elections to Punjab and K-P legislatures hang in the balance, and the provisions of the Constitution are in limbo. *The need of the hour is to scale down the volatility of political activism, and see reason in the spirit of the constitution. This is perhaps what the CJP meant as he sought input from the Interior and Defence ministers over their contribution to holding the polls, and went on to grill the ECP over the stalemate and inordinate delay.* Let the top court come up with its judicial review, and the organs of the state bow before it.

⁹ <https://tribune.com.pk/story/2409023/judicial-review>

Attacking Baloch students in reckless, BSF, Daily Sangar, 28 February¹⁰

*In a statement the spokesperson of the Baloch Students Front (BSF) said that the attack at the hands of Pashtun students and shopkeepers at the Baloch students in Quaid-i-Azam University Islamabad is reckless and a foolish act. To make two helpless communities fight against each other is a well thought-out conspiracy. Serious sections in the Pashtun community need to understand this plan. He said that it is not the time for fighting between two helpless communities but to struggle together against the powers that try to eliminate our history and culture. The Baloch and Pashtun apart from being neighbors also share history as well. He said that the Baloch students are not orphans and that whoever wants to target them they can do that with ease. Baloch youth know how to answer force with force. **If this conspiracy is not foiled then it would cost both the Baloch nation and the Pashtun nation, he added.** The Pashtun students should introspect. Otherwise if Baloch students are attacked again then they would give back a befitting reply to their attackers.*

Let political tussle go and focus on elections, Editorial, Nawa-i-Waqt, 03 March¹¹

*The Supreme Court has ordered elections in Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa (KP) and Punjab within 90 days. Chief Justice Umar Ata Bandial announced the judgment which was supported by a majority of three against two judges in the Supreme Court. **As soon as the judgment came out, former prime minister and head of Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaaf Pakistan (PTI) Imran Khan said that he welcomed the judgement of the top court. After the Supreme Court's judgment, there is a possibility that the dark clouds of lawlessness in the country might disperse. Imran said that the Pakistan Democratic Movement (PDM) under the supervision of the Prime Minister tried to suppress the court through a shameful campaign against the honorable judges.** Imran also announced to stop his Jail Bharo Movement and said that his party would work on election campaigns in KP and Punjab. **It is a welcome development that the matters are moving forward. The ruling coalition also should abandon political confrontation and pave the way for the elections by respecting the Supreme Court's judgment so that there is relief from the confusion in the country.** No political party benefits from the ongoing politics; nor is helping the people. It is better to leave the political tussle now and better to focus on the elections.*

¹⁰ <https://dailysangar.online/?p=33859>

¹¹ <https://www.nawaiwaqt.com.pk/E-Paper/Gawadar/2023-03-03/page-4/detail-9>

Pak-China relations, Editorial, Jang, 04 March¹²

Pakistan is China's most important strategic partner in the region. China's billion-dollar project, CPEC, is a mark of Pakistan's significance for China. The two countries have a long history of bilateral relations, in which Pakistan and China generally cooperate on global issues. *The Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs expressed openly Beijing's views about the bilateral relations the other day saying that China would ask all factions to play a constructive role by making collective efforts for Pakistan's economic and social stability.* According to global rating agencies Moody's and Fitch, Pakistan's outstanding debt as of June is seven billion dollars, including loans from China. In view of the long-standing relations between the two countries, it is asked whether China would give some relief in its outstanding debts to Pakistan. *China's position on this issue is clear: only the top Chinese officials would be able to give a definitive answer. But China and Pakistan are not only strategic partners but also "iron brothers". The spokesperson of the Chinese Foreign Ministry said that the two countries have always stood together in each other's difficult times.* The statement of the Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs that China is asking all parties to make joint efforts to play a constructive role in Pakistan's economic and social stability efforts implies that China is determined to bring Pakistan out of the ongoing crisis. Beijing would surely succeed in that.

Scared of Imran Khan? Mazhar Abbas, Jang, 15 March¹³

There is a fear of the captain, he said. But the captain will happen. He said there is fear of election, he said. But there will be an election. *The condition of the ruling coalition seems to be such that it looks for an excuse for not holding elections. Not only the government now but it seems some sections also want the same on seeing the intelligence reports of the Election Commission (EC) for delaying the elections. To say that there is a threat of terrorism and many leaders including Imran Khan, Bilawal Bhutto, Maryam Nawaz can be targeted by terrorists is not new in Pakistan: such dangers always exist in Pakistan.* Still it may have been understandable. But then Maryam Nawaz's demand that "first justice then election" reminded of the slogan of the Zia era that "first accountability then election". Then Ahsan Iqbal is talking about "first census", then constituencies", then election" and the finance ministry is saying that money is not available for elections. *The popularity of Imran Khan and the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaaf (PTI) is less because of Imran Khan and more because of the Pakistan Democratic Movement (PDM) parties, PPP, ANP (two*

¹² <https://e.jang.com.pk/detail/385542>

¹³ <https://e.jang.com.pk/detail/395519>

parties not part of PDM) and JUI. The 11-month rule of the PDM has helped to improve the PTI's declining graph. The seats that were thrown in PTI's "basket" from Karachi and other cities in the 2018 elections, now the party is in a position to win them easily. Whether former president Asif Ali Zardari sees Imran Khan a politician or not, at this time politics seems to be revolving around Imran only. Same thing was said about Nawaz Sharif in the 1980s. ... *Imran Khan has support of three types of voters. One, is the so-called Imran's "Fan Club or Burger Class"; second is the voters who has shown perseverance by being on the streets, taking part in sit-ins, long marches and going to jails in the last 11 months; and the third is the one that still considers Imran a better alternative than Sharif's and Zardari. The majority of new voters are seen with PTI.*

US to launch energy projects in Pakistan, Editorial, Roznama92 News, 17 March¹⁴

The United States has announced the introduction of new renewable energy projects in flood-affected areas of Pakistan. Pakistan is going through the worst economic and energy crisis in its history. Despite the low demand for electricity in winter, load shedding is being done for 4 to 6 hours in rural areas and 3 hours in urban areas, on the other hand, on the demand of IMF, the government has increased electricity prices 6 times in its 10-month rule, due to which it is not possible for the poor to pay the electricity bill. To deal with it *Pakistan is spending \$ 29 billion annually on the import of petroleum products*, which is further exacerbating the economic crisis. According to economists, Pakistan can come out of the economic crisis by reducing the energy import bill. In such a situation, the announcement of the United States to start renewable energy projects in flood-affected areas is a welcoming step. It can relieve the poor from electricity bills. It would be better if the government obliges commercial banks across the country to provide cheap loans for the home solar system so that the citizens can get rid of heavy electricity bills by installing a solar system in easy instalments and Pakistan can also get rid of expensive electricity made from imported fuel.

Why is Imran Khan scared of his arrest? Syed Mujtaba Rizwan, Nawa-i-Waqt, 20 March¹⁵

Purpose of the rule of law is justice. Law should be the same for the powerful and the weak. People in Pakistan do not understand the supremacy of law: supremacy of law means bringing the powerful under the law. Pakistan Muslim League-N leader Maryam Nawaz reacting to Imran Khan's non-appearance in the court, said that despite the court

¹⁴https://www.roznama92news.com/efrontend/web/index.php/index2?station_id=2&page_id=7&is_common=Y&n=1000&xdate=2023-3-17

¹⁵ <https://www.nawaiwaqt.com.pk/E-Paper/Gawadar/2023-03-20/page-5/detail-16>

orders, Imran's non-appearance in front of the law was a slap on the face of the justice system of the country. Another leader of the PML-N Javed Latif said that the government should tell the people what are the obstacles in the arrest of Imran Khan? He said that what was hidden in the last 8 months should be disclosed in the interest of the country. If Imran Khan was still being shown leniency then the present government should speak the truth. In 6 hours pro-Imran decisions are given, then why are not Nawaz Sharif's cases being heard for 6 years? *During the hearing on the security bail application of Imran Khan in the Lahore High Court (LHC), the court again gave Imran more time to appear. ... It should be remembered that the state of Madinah was founded on two basic principles: one, law is equal for all and second the state would be a welfare state. Earlier nations were destroyed because there was a separate law for the rich and the poor.* The LHC has said that the order issued yesterday to stop the operation in Zaman Park to arrest Imran Khan in the Toshakhana case would remain in force till tomorrow. However, *the PTI had survived the first phase of the operation by offering voluntary arrest. As it appeared later, this was a delaying tactic as the party's supporters swelled as time passed. Soon clashes between officials of various agencies and the PTI workers started and continued on the second day.* The Punjab government said that 58 police personnel were injured in the action.

IMF and Pakistan, Editorial, Jang, 26 March¹⁶

The staff level agreement for the release of the instalment of \$1.20 billion from the International Monetary Fund (IMF) for the recovery of the Pakistani economy is not happening. Meanwhile, the economic problems of the country are increasing. In the first week of February, the team of the IMF arrived in Islamabad for the ninth assessment. After ten days of negotiations, it was expected that an agreement would be reached soon and the specified amount would be received. *In the latest development the commissioner of the IMF said that only after assurances from the both sides an agreement would be signed with Pakistan. He clarified that only after assurances from the World Bank (WB), Asian Development Bank (ADB), Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) and other bilateral partners, especially China, Saudi Arabia and UAE, would the next step with regard to Pakistan be taken.* He said that Pakistan has sufficient funds for the most urgent expenses. The staff level agreement would be reached only when certain important points are settled. However, the bright prospects for a staff level agreement, which were looking very bright until a few days ago, were reduced due to the recent fuel subsidy scheme of the government of Pakistan, under which the price of petrol per litre for motorcycle and

¹⁶ <https://e.jang.com.pk/detail/404460>

rickshaw drivers is kept Rs 100 low. Although Minister of Petroleum and Natural Resources Dr. Musadiq Malik has claimed that the IMF has no objection to the scheme, IMF representative in Pakistan Esther Perez Ruiz has stated that agreement on the fuel subsidy scheme is necessary before the agreement is signed. On the other hand, *senior government sources have confirmed that the lack of confidence on the part of the IMF, the lack of capacity to implement the reformed program of the IMF and the delaying tactics of the IMF are the reason that the staff level agreement is getting delayed (. Because of which both sides are unable to agree on mutually acceptable Memorandum of Economic and Financial Policies.*

ELECTRONIC MEDIA

Who will decide the date of elections in KP & Punjab? On The Front with Kamran Shahid, Dunya News, 01 March¹⁷

There is so much confusion in Pakistan right now and the political parties and judiciary are unable to decide who will announce elections in KP and Punjab after the dissolution of the assemblies. Now they have knocked the door of Supreme Court on the matter. The anchor underlined that there is so much drama in deciding the issue that the main issues of the people are sidelined. *There is a clear political divide on the issue of elections and therefore it is left to the Supreme Court to decide. Also he informed that in the Toshakhana case Imran Khan gets relief as Islamabad High Court (IHC) approves interim bail plea till March 09 2023. Guests: Muhammad Zubair-PMLN; Usman Dar-PTI and Murtaza Solangi Muhammad Zubair* we will not break any rules but if the Supreme Court asks governor of Punjab and KP to conduct elections within ninety days, we will look for mechanisms to challenge it. The Supreme Court will have to take note of all the issues like population counting, financial issues and decide on the elections. On one hand Imran Khan talks about Islamic government on the other hand there is immunity and he is miss using the support of his followers by directing them to get arrested and protest in court *Usman Dar* informed that PTI is hoping for good and prepared for worst but we have faith in the Supreme Court that it will direct ECP to conduct elections within ninety days. Governors of KP and Punjab first had to announce caretaker setup and then elections have to be announced within ninety days. *But when the governor had to decide the dates of elections they left it on the*

¹⁷ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uJ7-MqD2HZE>

Supreme Court to decide. The PML-N plus caretaker setup in Punjab and KP are in the hope that they will go on like this till one year. **Murtaza Solangi** pointed out that the decision of the Supreme Court will be contested by one or the other political parties. The Supreme Court will have to decide according to the constitution and it has to be irrespective of the desire of any political party. The elections cannot take place out of the blue, there will have to be preparations. *If Imran Khan has personal health issue he should have used helicopter and reported to court but the way he brought his supporters in large number to court, it looked like it was a pressure tactic to pressurize the court.*

Will IMF finalize the deal? What are the conditions? Capital Talk with Hamid Mir, *Geo News*, 02 March¹⁸

There is still confusion over where matters stand between the government and the International Monetary Fund (IMF). After the first round of technical talks between the IMF team and the government concluded in first week of February 2023 Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif observed that the lender was imposing conditions that were 'beyond our wildest dreams'. Hamid Mir underlined Pakistan is still begging to the IMF and asked will Pakistan agree to the terms of the IMF and cut a deal soon? *Guests:* Miftah Ismail-Former Minister of Finance, Pakistan. *Miftah Ismail*, when asked about the sudden jump in dollar value, he pointed out that for some time the State Bank of Pakistan tried to control the control the dollar. The IMF has said that the actual value of dollar is in the market and not what is projected in the interbank system. State bank had to remove its control from the dollar and therefore its value has gone high suddenly. The increase in the reserve is due to the 70 crore dollar loan given by China, we have not earned the dollar. *The reality of the day is that we have to return the money back to China and adding to the issue there is no agreement with IMF yet.* He underlined that Pakistan need to negotiate with IMF and curve a deal with them soon. When asked if the current Minister of Finance Ishaq Dar resign after his failure to control dollar and the economic crisis, he said that that should be decided by the people of Pakistan. He underlined that when we increase the cost of essentials it badly impact the poor and common people of Pakistan. It has to be noted that: *first*, Pakistan-IMF virtual talks underway. *Second*, IMF has set new conditions for staff-level agreement and *third*, fund has suggested a new prescription on exchange rate.

¹⁸ https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=F5Je_yZInaM

Zaman Park Standoff: An attempt to arrest Imran Khan? Off The Record with Kashif Abbasi, ARY News, 14 March¹⁹

*The political temperature is soaring high amid the government's attempt to arrest chairman PTI Imran Khan from his Zaman Park residence is still underway. A tense situation prevailed in Lahore more contingents were called to Zaman Park where a stand-off between party supporters and law enforcers has been going on for more than 14 hours for the former prime minister's arrest. Amid calls from the party to yet again gather at Zaman Park, Imran addressed his supporters and said more attempts to arrest him were underway. Speaking in a video message, Imran likened the day's events to the situation in Illegally Indian Occupied Jammu and Kashmir. "The way police attacked our people, there is no example of this. What is the reason for attacking a small number of people like this?" Kashif Abbasi informs that this is a fact that the government has a warrant to arrest Imran Khan, even if it is politically motivated. He added that Imran Khan should give his arrest and follow rule of law. **He asked** what does the constitution and law says in this case?. He also added that it looks like that even the current government seems to have not learned from the past who use to talk about political engineering. PDM is doing the same things, they use to talk against the PTI rule. **Guests:** Syed Ali Zaidi-PTI; Arif Hameed Bhatti (Analyst) & Ather Kazmi (Analyst). **Syed Ali Zaidi** who is currently stationed with Imran Khan at Zaman Park argues that there is no law, it is a jungle raj and even if Imran Khan gives his arrest the current government will miss use its power. There are almost eighty cases against Imran Khan just based on the ego of the PDM government. He asked if there was rule of law, why late journalist Arshad Sharif did not give his arrest and got out of Pakistan and even then he got killed on a foreign land. He informed that the workers at Zaman Park were sitting peacefully but the police and contingent came and tried to arrest Imran Khan at Zaman Park. **Arif Hameed Bhatti** pointed out that the government is scared of the elections and the thought of losing to Imran Khan. This is unbelievable that they are using force and shelling at a residence of an ex-Prime Minister. Zaman Park looks like Srinagar as it is surrounded by containers and all the roads to it are blocked. He pointed out that Maryam Nawaz has said that she will not let elections happen, and this is directed from London. The policemen are bound to the orders and they are just following the directions of the high powers. Imran Khan is so popular and the people are supporting him, his popularity is evident from the support he is getting on the streets. **Ather Kazmi** pointed out that on one side Maryam Nawaz was addressing a convention and on the other hand Zaman Park was attacked by contingent, so there is no level playing field. If Imran Khan*

¹⁹ https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lp_vUMP47_g

will be arrested he will be sent to a isolated place, the point is why this is happening this now? The way things are happening now in Pakistan, it cannot be transmitted or discussed on a talk show. The way system is misused, public will lose faith in democracy.

Militant element in Zaman Park supported by PTI? Capital Talk with Hamid Mir, Geo News, 17 March²⁰

In the latest episode of Capital Talk Hamid Mir underlined the fact that militant elements are present in the protest of Zaman Park and is supported by the PTI and Imran Khan He added this is not only claimed by politicians but also by many media outlets. He also added that petrol is now 5 rupees more costly but this development is over shadowed by the protest at Zaman Park. He asked in this show is there a militant element supported by Imran Khan present in their Zaman Park protests? Will Imran Khan give his arrest or he will be forcefully arrested by the government and Punjab police? **Guests:** Aqil Yousafzai-writer/analyst; Senator Musadiq Malik- Minister of State for Petroleum, Saira Bano-GDA, Azhar Siddique-Lawyer Imran Khan. **Hamid Mir** informed that Iqbal Khan, a former member of the TTP Swat's Sufi Mohammad faction is now a part of the Imran Khan-led standoff in Zaman Park. He also tweeted, "This is Maulana Iqbal Khan, who was earlier associated with the Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan and was in jail following his arrest,". He was freed by Lt Gen (retd) Faiz Hameed under the garb of peace talks and was made a part of the PTI by then KP CM Mahmood Khan, the journalist added. "He is in Zaman Park, Lahore these days." **Aqeel Yousafzai** confirmed that *there are militants in Zaman Park* and said Iqbal Khan was a member of Tehreek-e-Nafaz-e-Shariat-e-Mohammadi (TNSM) since 2009 and hails from Swat's Fatehpur village. He is also stationed with many of his people at the Zaman Park. **Musadiq Malik** informed that Pakistan cannot decide as standalone decision on the price of petrol, it is impacted by the international rates of petrol and is dictated by international market. The price of petrol comes in dollar and we have to first buy dollar with rupee and therefore the value of rupee with dollar set the price of petrol every fifteen days. Petrol is a very costly import of Pakistan and if we give subsidy on petrol we will lose all the fund. **Saira Bano** asked why the government in a hurry to arrest Imran Khan is. Is there a terrorist stationed at Zaman Park? In that way Rana Sanaullah should also be arrested and his home attacked as is happening in Zaman Park. The situation in Pakistan is such that anything can happen, if the government is talking about rule of law then the court has also ordered elections in Punjab and KP, why the government is not following it. It is an irony that they are expecting Imran Khan to follow the rule and laws. **Azhar Siddique** informed that the warrant against Imran Khan is *non bailable for procurement of attendance in the court*. This is not a warrant for arrest, this is

²⁰ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AmBNoq2I2Hw>

not a terrorism case. There was a murder attempt on him, Imran Khan is not running from hearing of court. Whenever he went for hearing, the government has slapped other cases on him and now there are uncountable cases on him. Till 18th March Imran Khan cannot be arrested as he has stay order but the government tried to arrest on 14th March.

Punjab elections Postponed? 11th Hour with Waseem Badami, ARY News, 22 March²¹

The Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) postponed the Punjab elections, through an order originally scheduled for April 30, till October 8 (*30 April ko Punjab ke elections hone thay*). The elections are delayed by five months. Will there be elections on said date or will be postponed for real asked Waseem Badami in this episode. This amounts to the subversion of the constitution said *Aitezaz Hassan*, legal expert. Although caretaker setup does not have too many rights to run the government, it is just a seat warmer for the upcoming chief minister after elections. This order can be challenged in the Supreme Court and can penalize the ECP. *Mohammad Malick* senior analyst on this show underlined that he has been saying this for a long time that the Punjab elections will be postponed but no body believed my proposition. There is huge vacuum and lots of questions are been raised, if elections are postponed then what about the interim setup in Punjab. There is a very serious divide in the political groups and institution in Pakistan, he added that there will be no chance of provincial elections in October. *Arshad Bhatti* underlined that the government does not look to be in a mood to announce any elections. ECP is not bound to look towards Supreme Court but if elections are not conducted in ninety days, it can be conducted any time in the future.

Jirga with Saleem Safi, Geo News, 26 March²²

In the latest episode the host argued that the media in Pakistan currently is not discussing on important issues and focusing on petty politics. He underlined that the breakthrough between Saudi Arab and Iran mediated by China was completely side-lined by the Pakistani media, both electronic and Print. In this episode he asked the guests questions related to the Saudi-Iran development and what impact this will have on Pakistan in the future? Will the Saudi Iran political development will lead to some friendship of sort in between the two countries in future? **Guests:** Kamran Bukhari-senior analyst, Allama Arif Hussain Wahidi- Naib Saddar Shia Ulema Council & Allama Tahir Ashrafi-head Pakistan Ulema Council. **Kamran Bukhari** pointed out that we still have to see if the relationship between Saudi and Iran will presume because Saudi has said that we still need to check if

²¹ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uOgD5aWbFO0>

²² <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eb1BOehq4aI>

Iran bring some change in behaviour. Saudi has said that they will only believe when they verify. He underlined *that Saudi-Iran conflict has been going on for a long time and it is a geo-sectarian conflict and the latest deal between the two countries can only termed as a temporary truce.* This is a small ceasefire and we have to wait and see. Opening embassies in both countries does not mean it will restore friendship. It is unclear what it means by security arrangement in the deal. Iran is itself facing so many internal challenges like sanctions by US and also Saudi is facing so many dilemmas. The Chinese just want to send the message that they are playing the part that US use to play and in a way China is ready to replace the role of US in the future. *Allama Arif Hussain Wahidi* pointed out that Iran wants to come close to the Muslim countries including Saudi-Arabia. Peace is the only thing that is need of the hour of the Muslim contraries and this deal will have a great impact on the future of the Arab countries. The Arab wants to invest in Iran and Iran also has a huge market in Saudi, this will set an example for other Arab Countries that want to restore good relations with other countries. Saudi and Iran are friend countries to Pakistan and both are important for us and this friendship will bring peace in the region as well as in Pakistan. US's main motto is divide and rule and if China is replacing US it is good news for Pakistan as well as the region. *Allama Tahir Ashrafi* pointed out that Mohammad Bin Salman (MBS) has a vision and he want to make this part of the World a new Europe. This will open markets for both countries in each other's countries. Relations are getting better this Ramadan and both countries are trying to bury the past and working for a better future. This will also close the shop of the terror factories and reduce terrorism in the region. If big Muslim Countries like Iran and Saudi are coming together, small countries in this region will come together automatically.

BOMBINGS, SHOOTINGS AND DISAPPEARANCES

(Select incidents culled out from the Pakistan media)

Place	Date	Description	Killed	Injured
Khyber Pakhtunkhwa				
Abbottabad ²³	21/03/2023	Tehsil chairman, 10 others killed in Abbottabad attack	11	00
S. Waziristan ²⁴	21/03/2023	ISI brigadier martyred in South Waziristan shootout	01	07
Peshawar ²⁵	30/03/2023	DSP among four martyred in Lakki Marwat IED blast	04	00
Balochistan				
Bolan ²⁶	06/03/2023	9 policemen martyred, 13 wounded in bomb attack on Balochistan Constabulary van in Bolan: police	09	13

²³ <https://www.thenews.com.pk/amp/1052202-tehsil-chairman-10-others-killed-in-abbottabad-attack>

²⁴

²⁵

²⁶ <https://www.dawn.com/news/1740715/9-policemen-martyred-13-wounded-in-bomb-attack-on-balochistan-constabulary-van-in-bolan-police>

