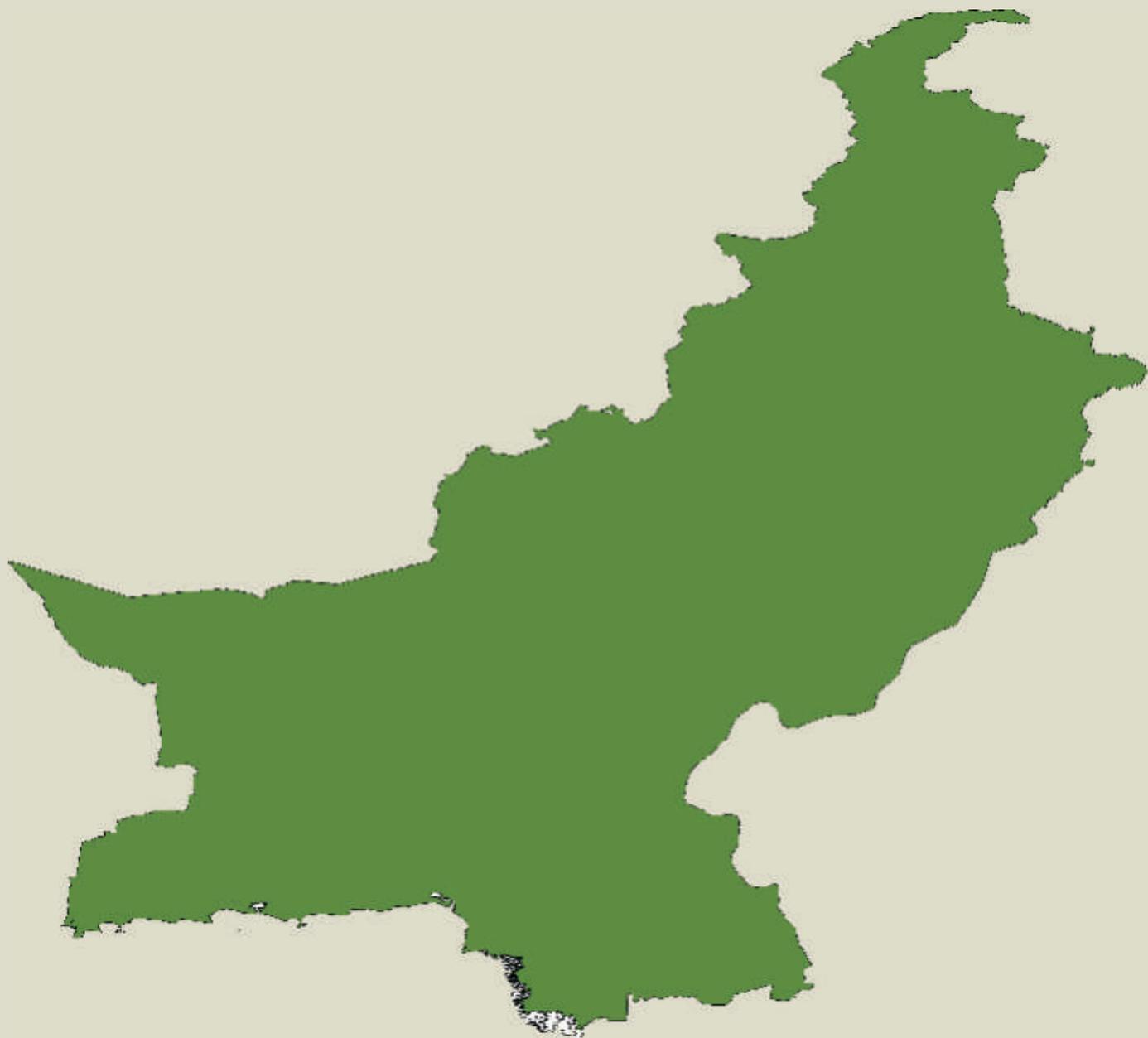


October 2020

PAKISTAN NEWS DIGEST

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



Prepared by
Dr. Zainab Akhter
Dr. Nazir Ahmad Mir
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POLITICAL DEVELOPMENTS

Abdullah in Islamabad, Editorial, *The Express Tribune*, 01 October¹

It is indeed a welcome moment. Chairman of the High Council for National Reconciliation of Afghanistan Dr Abdullah Abdullah visited Pakistan and leaders from both countries reiterated their commitment to improving the bilateral ties and to the Afghan peace process. Relations between the two countries have been see-sawing over the past few years, partly due to a history of mistrust going back decades and partly due to foreign influence and interference in bilateral issues. In the past, Abdullah has been among the Afghan politicians throwing all sorts of accusations at Pakistan. *That made Abdullah's conciliatory tone at a recent event in Islamabad stands out. He went as far as committing that his country would not allow its territory to be used against any other country.* While the weakness of the Afghan security forces may stand in the way of that promise working out in practice, we are optimistic that at least they will make an effort to try to eliminate terrorist's safe havens from border areas. While this relationship does remain strong, trying to prop up the Taliban and a disinclination to work with the Afghan government in the past had harmed Pakistan's interests. Willingness to work with all parties will eventually benefit all stakeholders in the long run.

Die is cast, Najam Sethi, *The Friday Times*, 05 October²

Nawaz Sharif has crossed the Rubicon and proclaimed the loudest whispers in the land. He says the ISI is "a state above the state", the NAB Chairman is victimizing the opposition, the Election Commission of Pakistan rigged the 2018 elections, judges high and low have succumbed to threats and blackmail; FIA, SECP, and other government agencies are abusing their powers. Some people say this is a suicidal move. Others contend it's a do or die situation because Mr. Sharif was unfairly ousted from office and dragged to prison, leaving him with no option but to stand up and fight for his life. *Many believe that, whether he succeeds or not in winning back some political space for his party and himself personally, this is a historic moment in the political evolution of Pakistan because the elephant in the room has finally been identified for being part of the problem rather than its solution.* But with Nawaz Sharif constantly thundering on the media from the safety of London

¹ <https://tribune.com.pk/story/2266391/abdullah-in-islamabad>

² <https://www.thefridaytimes.com/die-is-cast/>

and Maulana Fazl Ur Rahman flexing his million-man muscle, the stage is set for political instability and uncertainty. *With the economy in the dumps, the IMF packing its bags, Narendra Modi breathing fire and venom on our eastern border and the Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan increasingly foraying into FATA, this doesn't augur well for Pakistan. In the coming months, the Militabishment can either open up political space or close it further.* In the past, when it has opted for closure through direct intervention, it has been propped up by dollops of American economic and military support, backed by Saudi Arabia. *That is not going to happen now. To hope China can fill the vacuum is wishful thinking. The die is cast.*

Anti-state mantra, Zahid Hussain, Dawn, 07 October³

Sharif's scathing criticism of the role of the security establishment in the country's politics seems to have been the main reason for action against the former prime minister. There has been little in Sharif's speech that other political leaders have not said before. It has been criticism of the unlawful and unconstitutional indulgence of a state apparatus acting outside its mandate. How can it be described as an act of sedition and anti-state activity? Virtually all elected civilian governments have had the bitter experience of what is commonly described as a 'state within a state'. Their own failings notwithstanding, elected governments have never been fully autonomous in taking decisions on key national issues. It's also no secret how the intelligence apparatus was used to destabilise the civilian leadership and prop up pliant politicians. *What makes establishment elements more controversial is the perception of their involvement in extra-constitutional activities and partisan role. From the opposition parties' perspective, the establishment leadership has become a part of the current political dispensation which affects its professional responsibilities. A number of recent scandals have worsened the Khan government's predicament making it more vulnerable to the opposition's attack.* The latest sensational revelation by a former FIA chief that he was asked by the 'highest authority' to file cases under anti-terrorism and treason laws against some senior PML-N leaders raises serious questions. Labelling the opposition 'anti-state' may not help the government to confront the most serious challenge yet to its rule.

Tigers unleashed, Editorial, Dawn, 14 October⁴

The Corona Relief Tiger Force (CRTF) has steadily had the scope of its 'responsibilities' widened to well beyond what its name suggests it was set up for, which was in itself a controversial move. *On Sunday, Prime Minister*

³ <https://www.dawn.com/news/1583711/anti-state-mantra>

⁴ <https://www.dawn.com/news/1584954/tigers-unleashed>

Imran Khan tasked the million-member force of volunteers with checking the prices of food items and posting them on its portal, adding that he would discuss the matter further in a forthcoming meeting. Escalating food prices is an extremely serious issue and must be tackled in a responsible and credible manner. As the government itself apprehends, the opposition is likely to exploit it for political gain during its campaign to dislodge the current dispensation. *To employ the services of a volunteer force operating without any legal cover is an oddly casual and inappropriate approach by the prime minister.* Even in the provinces where CRTF is operating, there are district administrations, which include price control magistrates, mandated to carry out the latest task assigned to the volunteer force. *Opposition politicians from the outset have criticised the CRTF as a political gimmick; increasingly it is being seen as a private political force that answers to the prime minister.*

Political Economy Woes, Najam Sethi, *The Friday Times*, 16 October⁵

The Economic Coordination Committee of the federal cabinet has deferred a decision to increase the support price of wheat for the next crop because it will definitely fuel food inflation at a time when curbing inflation is possibly the biggest item on its agenda. *It's so worrying that Imran Khan is desperately exhorting his rag tag Tiger Force to lend a hand in monitoring and controlling prices.* One manifestation of this is the occupation of D Chowk in Islamabad by thousands of lower grade government employees agitating for salary increases and by health workers protesting price hikes of essential commodities. It's only a matter of time when other sectors and groups erupt on the streets across the country. *Unfortunately, however, the problem is going to get worse in the coming months. The IMF has not given a penny this year to the government because its conditions for a third tranche of the three year \$6b structural adjustment program remain unfulfilled.* Come January 2021, if the government hasn't significantly raised gas, petrol and electricity prices, if it hasn't significantly increased tax collection, if it hasn't managed significantly to reduce the circular debt, it may simply walk out of Pakistan, as it has done on all except one occasion in the last twenty years. *But if the IMF exits, the World Bank, the Asian Development Bank and other international finance institutions will follow suit. As if the internal situation wasn't bad enough, we have unprecedented external pressures.* NSA Moeed Yusuf has revealed a dastardly Indian hand behind increasing acts of TTP terrorism, Baloch insurgency, Sunni-Shia sectarian conflict, hybrid warfare and border clashes in which Pakistani soldiers are martyred every day.

⁵ <https://www.thefridaytimes.com/political-economy-woes/>

Gulbuddin Hekmatyar's visit, Editorial, *The Daily Times*, 22 October⁶

Pakistan is finally getting the attention it deserves when it comes to ending the war in Afghanistan. For the longest time it was blamed for all that was going wrong for the allies because of its alleged contacts with the Taliban, even though Islamabad always maintained that it lost any meaningful leverage it once had over the insurgents when Washington went ahead with its so-called war against terrorism. *And now, after turning to Pakistan to help get the Taliban to the negotiating table and thanking it for its efforts, all varieties of Afghan leaders are coming to Pakistan to talk about their own country's road to reconstruction. The latest guest to come to Islamabad was Gulbuddin Hekmatyar, a former insurgent commander who has now embraced the great ideal of peace.* And he took back the same things from Pakistan that others have, which is that now that an Afghan-owned and Afghan-led peace process has begun, everybody must do everything possible to make it succeed. The intra-Afghan dialogue currently underway in Doha, which Pakistan had called for all along, will have its share of ups and downs but its participants need to be mindful of the immense burden they are carrying as representatives of people who have seen nothing but war for at least the last four decades.

Moment of reckoning, Najam Sethi, *The Friday Times*, 23 October⁷

The People's Democratic Movement (PDM) has kicked off with a bang. What next? The PDM now moves to Quetta. One may reasonably expect Nawaz Sharif and Maulana Fazal to join hands there with provincial opposition sub-nationalist leaders *to focus on the historical political and economic discrimination of the region and a denial of constitutional provincial rights by the centralizing, "one-unit" endorsing, Miltabishment.* The consequences of this focus on the Miltabishment can be good or bad for the power-players, depending on how it and the PTI government react singly or jointly. Until now, the PTI government has been blithely shrugging away its abysmal mis-governance and corruption by relying on the unqualified support of the Miltabishment. *Unfortunately, the Miltabishment hasn't helped its own cause by publicly subscribing to the "same-page" policy prescriptions. Overnight, however, the Miltabishment rather than the PTI government is in the eye of the gathering storm.* If it continues to play political partisanship, it will have to sanction renewed repression against the opposition. But this will further discredit it and make it lose the respect of Pakistanis which is the glue

⁶ <https://dailytimes.com.pk/680385/gulbuddin-hekmatyars-visit/>

⁷ <https://www.thefridaytimes.com/moment-of-reckoning-2/>

that binds state and society. If it doesn't, *it will have to seek accommodation with the PDM which means nothing less than cutting the root cause of its troubles, Imran Khan, adrift. This moment of crisis for the Miltabishment is a moment of reckoning for Pakistan.*

No talks with opposition, then? *Daily Times*, 26 October⁸

Just when it seemed, even if for the briefest moment, that the government was beginning to see the futility of a head-on confrontation with the opposition as the latter's protests gather momentum and there might be a possibility of negotiations to diffuse the situation, the prime minister himself has ruled out such a possibility very strongly. *Raising the stakes at this point in time hardly seems the wisest thing to do. And as for the PM personally going to Great Britain and talking to Prime Minister Boris Johnson to get Nawaz Sharif back, it is difficult to understand how that could be possible without a formal extradition treaty.* Or maybe that is precisely what the Pakistani and UK governments have been discussing lately. Either way, the government does not seem to be doing itself any favours by fighting fire with fire. Already it is in trouble with the people because of high prices and the fact that everybody now believes the government is simply helpless to do anything about all the mafias and cartels it holds responsible for it. Surely this is one of those moments when discretion is the better part of valour.

Crossing red lines in Quetta, Editorial, *Dawn*, 28 October⁹

In Quetta, the Pakistan Democratic Movement ventured into forbidden territory. At its Gujranwala and Karachi rallies, the PDM leaders highlighted the people's economic hardships and the misery caused by skyrocketing prices of essential food items and medicines, and rightly so. But it was at the mammoth gathering in Balochistan's capital last Sunday that the speakers also addressed the issue of enforced disappearances, and gave voice to the grief of the families of the missing. *In political terms, bringing up the issue of enforced disappearances in such a no-holds-barred way is a gesture of defiance to the powers that be, indicating the opposition alliance's willingness to cross what were hitherto considered 'red lines'. It is nevertheless significant that the problem of enforced disappearances is being raised from the national stage by a section of the top political leadership.* The Commission of Inquiry on Enforced Disappearances has only succeeded to some extent in tracing the whereabouts of the cases that have come before it. It has failed spectacularly in the other, equally important, aspect of its mandate; that is, "to fix responsibility on individuals or organisations

⁸ <https://dailytimes.com.pk/681536/no-talks-with-opposition-then/>

⁹ <https://www.dawn.com/news/1587423/crossing-red-lines-in-quetta>

responsible". *While no part of the country is now immune to this despicable practice, highlighting the issue in Balochistan is particularly fitting because enforced disappearances have further deepened the sense of alienation among its people.* Despite the vast resources that lie underneath its soil, the majority of Baloch live in poverty, the many promises made to them of a better future still unfulfilled.

ECONOMIC ISSUES

The return of inflation, Daily Times, 13 October¹⁰

It seems the next few months are not going to be too pleasant for the average Pakistani, especially that big bulk of the population that struggles to make ends meet every day of the week. On top of all the news that really puts people from this particular section off quite badly, like the opposition gearing up to unseat the government and the government using all its resources to crack down on the opposition, etc, now they must also contend with the prospect of higher inflation all over again. And since the fact that they are poor implies that they cannot easily afford most necessities of life, it shouldn't really take too much imagination to figure out just how they feel about governments that are unable to keep a lid on prices, especially when it comes to items of everyday use. *Alas, it was not so and now not only is inflation making a rather discomforting comeback but it is doing so at a time when growth is barely above zero percent. That, of course, means that we are quite literally flirting with stagflation, when low growth and high unemployment coincide with high prices and make everybody's lives miserable.* And going by how this particular phenomenon has ravaged economies in the past, one like Pakistan's can easily take a pretty steep fall and take about a decade just to get back to previous growth levels.

Govt borrows to repay debt: report, Shahbaz Rana, The Express Tribune, 22 October¹¹

Pakistan has slipped into a debt trap due to the government's failure to bring reforms and weak fiscal management, which has also raised national security concerns, says a report of a think tank being run by a ruling party leader. "We are in a debt trap that is entirely of our own making. It is a risk to our national security," said a brief report of the Institute of Policy Reforms (IPR). The IPR paper titled "Pakistan's debt and debt servicing is cause for concern", underlined that the government was borrowing to repay the maturing debt.

¹⁰ <https://dailytimes.com.pk/677093/the-return-of-inflation/>

¹¹ <https://tribune.com.pk/story/2269212/govt-borrows-to-repay-debt-report>

This adds to criticism against the growing public debt, which now seems to be a concern for all political parties, businessmen and experts. *The report underlined that in last fiscal year 2019-20 alone, Pakistan added a total of Rs4.3 trillion to its debt and liabilities. It was equal to 10.4% of the country's gross domestic product (GDP). "In two years, total debt and liabilities have grown by a massive Rs14.7 trillion.* In the last fiscal year ended June 2020, Pakistan's total debt and liabilities stood at 107% of GDP or Rs44.5 trillion while gross public debt was equal to 87% of GDP. The IPR stated that while the government often attributed the increase in debt to exchange value changes, the picture was more complex. Domestic debt has grown at an equal pace and external debt has also grown in US dollars.

Will IMF learn? Rashid Amjad, *Dawn*, 26 October¹²

The current situation dictates that the government may need to take further steps to protect real incomes of the poor as the current direct income support to the poor through Ehsaas and other programmes may not be enough. These may include raising direct subsidies on essential items especially wheat to tide over the current situation. But these short-term measures need to be backed by a convincing medium-term plan that show how these will be financed without jeopardizing the hard-earned macroeconomic stability achieved at considerable cost and hardship. *Critically economic management needs considerable improvement and better coordination to avoid in future similar food inflation crisis.* The IMF must in turn move away from its stubborn insistence on pre-Covid 19 benchmarks and derail a programme that is being reasonably well implemented in very difficult circumstances. *Indeed, it should reconsider its overall approach in Pakistan which has failed miserably over the last 30 years to spark sustained growth and is currently pushing it into a low-growth high inflation equilibrium triggered in part by its insistence on a market-driven exchange rate.*

SECURITY SITUATION

More censorship, Editorial, *Dawn*, 05 October¹³

Each day it seems there is a fresh assault on the fundamental right to freedom of speech. The arguments about 'upholding the rule of law' that are used to bolster such restrictions are specious and misleading. They cannot disguise the actual objective behind this campaign, and it is no less than a sustained

¹² <https://www.dawn.com/news/1587047/will-imf-learn>

¹³ <https://www.dawn.com/news/1583314/more-censorship>

campaign, which is to erase every vestige of dissent and discomfiting opinion from the public domain. *On Thursday, Pemra issued an order in response, so it claimed, to a complaint that some TV channels had aired the speeches of a proclaimed offender clearly meaning Nawaz Sharif and banned satellite news channels from airing any speeches, interviews and public addresses by proclaimed offenders or absconders.* In its statement, Pemra repeatedly referred to its code of conduct, and to the Supreme Court's emphasis on broadcast media's compliance with it. In fact, censorship by the authorities is becoming a troubling pattern. On Friday came yet another prohibition order, in which Pemra directed TV channels to stop broadcasting news about the motorway gang rape, although this time it was on orders of the ATC in which the crime is being tried. *If the court has any reservations, it can order the media to refrain from showing pictures of the accused so as not to compromise the identification parade. A blanket order such as this one serves no purpose.*

Resurging terrorism, Syed Akhtar Ali Shah, *The Express Tribune*, 07 October¹⁴

The current incidents of terrorism are the offshoots of militancy of two different dimensions; one propelled by ethno-nationalism and the other by religious militancy. The focus of this discourse is more on the religiously motivated militancy. This breed of militancy is of transnational character, drawing inspiration not only from local leaders but also across borders. Therefore, the developments within our region and the Middle East cannot be delinked. *The stronger the Taliban get in Afghanistan, the greater will be the impact on militant organisations within Pakistan, as such organisations have been drawing their inspirational support from Mullah Umar and Tehreek-i-Taliban Afghanistan. In this backdrop, the recent organizational restructuring of the Tehreek-i-Taliban Pakistan under the leadership of Noor Wali Mehsud who has political exposure and is considered a religious scholar, ideologue and author of a book is quite alarming.* Reportedly, rather than being carried away by short-lived tactical dividends, he adopted a long-term plan, using all his energies on a strategic reorientation of the group. The major focus of Wali has remained on re-articulating TTP's ideological orientation. *He has simultaneously issued a code of conduct to infuse organizational discipline within the terror group. Ever since, the organisation is regularly circulating a propaganda magazine, Mujallah Taliban, to highlight the group's position on different issues.* The TTP also got published two issues of *Sunnat-e-Khauila*, a magazine focusing on female recruitment and radicalisation in Pakistan.

¹⁴ <https://tribune.com.pk/story/2267232/resurging-terrorism>

NAB versus human rights, A. Rehman, Dawn, 15 October¹⁵

That the National Accountability Bureau has little respect for human rights is widely known. The extent to which human rights are violated by NAB can only be established by documentation, a process in which this institution is obviously not interested. *Surprisingly, NAB victims too have not attempted a record-based assessment of this important institution's performance.* In this situation a fact sheet prepared by former senator Sehar Kamran can only be welcomed. The first shocking fact presented in this report is that NAB is allegedly responsible for causing 12 deaths. NAB has been able to get away with blue murder on the strength of the myth that all means adopted to fight corruption are fair and that the ends justify the means. *These myths are used by vindictive minds to justify torture to obtain evidence and secure convictions. While cases of successful prosecution are publicised nothing is said about the sharks that are left untouched. If such practices are continued for long, the corruption of the anti-corruption brigade will dwarf the corruption of the people chosen through a highly selective process.*

Digital surveillance, Editorial, Dawn, 16 October¹⁶

The stage is steadily being set for increased internet surveillance in the country. The government has a clear target for which it is silently laying the groundwork, but the preparations are all taking place without the input of key stakeholders from the tech industry. A report published in this paper yesterday revealed that this lack of transparency has set off alarm bells for the big technology companies who will be the direct targets of this regulation and surveillance. It was also revealed that the government wants to further restrict and control what is published on social media, with a demand to block and regulate content. The rules, under which these sweeping powers would be legalized, have so far been kept secret, with the coalition even stating that, despite multiple requests, no draft of the revised rules has been shared with industry stakeholders for input or feedback. *That the government is diligently laying the foundation for the large-scale digital surveillance of citizens is deeply unsettling.* What is more disturbing is the secrecy with which all of this is being done, with even the tech companies complaining that they have been left in the dark. Such a hawkish approach to digital companies makes a mockery of both the prime minister's dream of a 'digital Pakistan' and his claim of "I am democracy". *The dogged tracking of citizens, the eagerness to*

¹⁵ <https://www.dawn.com/news/1585155/nab-versus-human-rights>

¹⁶ <https://www.dawn.com/news/1585329/digital-surveillance>

access their data and the desire to proactively block certain kinds of content reeks of paranoia and is shameful behaviour in a democracy.

No right to censor, Editorial, Dawn, 20 October¹⁷

Protestations against rising media censorship and growing curbs on the constitutionally mandated freedom of expression have been rising since the PTI government took power more than two years ago. Today, it is no secret that the media is under constant pressure to desist from saying, writing and showing anything that does not gel with the official version of events. Speaking truth to power, apparently, is considered quaint and unfashionable. The fact is, nothing could be further from the truth. This unfortunate reality was visible in vivid colours during the PDM rally in Karachi on Sunday. TV channels would dip into speeches by various leaders and then cut back to studios on apparent whim. However, there was clearly more than what met the eye. It was not long before it became obvious that speakers who are known critics of the establishment's political role got little or no time on air. Censorship of the kind we are witnessing today reflects the fear and insecurities embedded within the state structure. Such insecurities have fueled alienation among those who need to be enveloped in a national embrace. We continue to endure the adverse consequences of pursuing such myopic policies.

A police force undermined, Editorial, Dawn, 22 October¹⁸

The Sindh police is angry, and understandably so. Earlier, perhaps given the 'sensitivities' involved, there was not much clarity from official quarters as to what had actually transpired in the hours before retired Capt. Mohammed Safdar's arrest in Karachi. *The action reinforces the growing crescendo of voices echoing the claim, most recently made by Nawaz Sharif, that there is 'a state within the state' of Pakistan. Indeed, the Sindh Rangers, which technically report to the interior ministry, often operate as though the laws of the land do not apply to them.* They have in many instances violated the right to due process by disappearing people, several of whom have endured torture in custody. It is that sense of impunity both on the part of those giving the order to compel the IG's compliance, and those who carried it out which created a situation precipitating an imminent institutional clash. *Hubris can often lead to unintended consequences. For a major civil law-enforcement agency*

¹⁷ <https://www.dawn.com/news/1586034/no-right-to-censor?preview>

¹⁸ <https://www.dawn.com/news/1586410/a-police-force-undermined>

to be undermined, that too in such a brazen manner, is entirely unacceptable and deserves to be roundly condemned.

Another blast, Editorial, *The Express Tribune*, 28 October¹⁹

Despite the National Counter-Terrorism Authority (Nacta) warning based on 'credible information' about possibility of terrorists striking the city, why the security agencies failed to foil the bomb attacks in Peshawar on Tuesday and in Quetta on Sunday? The terrorists chose a religious school where mostly adult students studied for better impact. They acted with self-assurance and succeeded. But those who are to counter their sinister designs came a cropper in puncturing their self-assurance. The situation demanded utmost alert considering that lately such terror attacks had happened inside Afghanistan and terrorists might also target various places in Pakistan with a view to derailing the ongoing talks aimed at restoring peace in Afghanistan. The PM had expressed apprehensions that India might use Afghan soil to destabilise Pakistan. Despite prior warnings, terrorists have succeeded. We all should realize that we are in a cauldron of enmity; there is no room for complacency. Awkward and tragic moments ought to be avoided.

PROVINCES & REGIONS

Gilgit Baltistan (GB)

Giving Gilgit-Baltistan provincial status could be a political masterstroke: Part 2, Riaz Akbar & Yawar Abbas, *The Express Tribune*, 07 October²⁰

Giving G-B provincial status will remove these roadblocks and help spur economic growth in the region, especially attracting private sector investment which has been highlighted by the G-B government to the national government and other international development partners like the World Bank as one of the major development issues of G-B. Issues of economic integration, regional linkages and trade that have kept G-B as, arguably, the least industrially developed part of Pakistan. Legalizing Pakistan's control over G-B also raises the prospects of an important suggestion floated by the Chinese ambassador to Pakistan: joint

¹⁹ <https://tribune.com.pk/story/2270146/another-blast>

²⁰ <https://tribune.com.pk/article/97190/giving-gilgit-baltistan-provincial-status-could-be-a-political-masterstroke-part-2>

development of the GB-Xinjiang region as sister provinces, and to turn them into a single economic and strategic theatre at the BRI's point of origin. Such a venture will not just give an international flair to BRI's starting point, but will also bring innumerable economic, strategic, and cultural benefits to Pakistan via Central Asia, West Asia and Eastern Europe. The Pakistani government, media organisations, and the people of G-B need to highlight and push for this joint venture as it will plug Pakistan into an economic, infrastructure, strategic and cultural matrix that will further the country's interests.

GB politics, Editorial, Dawn, 09 October²¹

With elections due in Gilgit-Baltistan next month, this would be an opportune time for those who make decisions in Pakistan to study the northern region's political situation, particularly the legitimate demands of its people. *While the region opted for Pakistan soon after the partition of the subcontinent, successive governments in Islamabad have been very slow to grant full political rights to GB.* Even today, while progress has been made, GB remains outside the political mainstream, with a hybrid system in place where the area's elected representatives compete with powerful, unelected bureaucrats sitting in the federal capital to decide its fate. *Moreover, when movements for rights gather steam, these are quickly subdued with often harsh penalties imposed on political leaders. Take the case of Baba Jan.* The Hunza-based activist was handed down a 71-year sentence by an antiterrorism court for raising a voice for victims of the Attabad Lake incident. Hundreds of people held a protest in Aliabad, Hunza, on Monday demanding justice for Baba Jan and 13 others who have been in jail since 2011. *The protesters slammed the application of terrorism charges against the activists, and called for the release of all political prisoners. Instead of clamping down on all those who demand their rights and terming them 'anti-state', the rulers need to deal with the issues that confront GB in a democratic manner.* Using heavy-handed tactics will only add to the discontent that is bubbling in the region. *Moreover, the centre must give serious thought, though keeping possible drawbacks in mind, to the plan to give the region provisional provincial status, and thus representation in the National Assembly and Senate; waiting endlessly for the resolution of the Kashmir dispute to which GB is historically linked is unfair in the eyes of GB residents.*

GB protests, Editorial, Dawn, 14 October²²

²¹ <https://www.dawn.com/news/1583893/gb-politics>

²² <https://www.dawn.com/news/1584953/gb-protests>

With an election in the region due next month, the authorities need to handle the situation with care. Demonstrations have up till now been peaceful, but discontent is brewing, mainly due to the harsh penalties imposed on people exercising their democratic right to organise. *But beyond the Aliabad incident, the leaders in Islamabad must ensure that an atmosphere of political freedom and a democratic culture are allowed to flourish in GB.* Muzzling the people's opinions simply because they differ from the official line will have counterproductive results, and will add to discontent in a geopolitically sensitive region. *We have seen the failure of this approach before particularly in Balochistan. In that province, due to the mistakes of the establishment, alienation from the national mainstream grew; this was exploited by forces internal and external.* The same mistake must not be made in GB. The educated, politically aware populace must be allowed to make informed decisions at the ballot box, while more needs to be done to give the region the same rights the rest of Pakistan enjoys. Heavy-handed tactics must be abandoned in favour of a democratic, inclusive approach.

Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KPK)

Funding for tribal districts, Editorial, Dawn, 06 October²³

The much-touted 10-year development plan for the seven merged districts of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa has failed to take off in its very first year doesn't show the PTI government in a good light. A report in this newspaper says the federal government had released only Rs37bn in the last fiscal out of the Rs72bn it had pledged under the Tribal Decade Strategy 2030 to fast-track development in the underdeveloped areas. The performance of the provincial government is even worse as it released just Rs1bn out of the Rs11bn it had promised for the uplift of the ex-Fata districts. The actual utilization of the funds on the ground is believed to be very little compared to the amount released to the departments. Other factors may also have contributed to the extremely slow start of the 10-year development strategy, but non-availability of funds is the major reason for the project's failure to take off. *In the last two decades or more, the economy of the former Fata districts has taken a serious hit because of the long years of the war against militancy in the region. The merger of the tribal districts with the settled areas of the province had brought a ray of hope for the people.* It is the responsibility of the government to keep their hopes alive by according top priority to the development of this region by removing financial and administrative snags in the way.

²³ <https://www.dawn.com/news/1583506/funding-for-tribal-districts>

PDM's T-20 after PNA's inning, Gen (R) Mirza Aslam Beg, *Ummat*, 01 October²⁴

PDM is a simple democratic movement. There is no foreign power behind it. The movement wants a change in Pakistan, a reaction to Imran Khan's "New Pakistan" which is based on three main agendas: "first, making Pakistan social and economically state better modeling on the State of Medina; second, freeing the country from corruption; and third bringing back the looted wealth to help the poor of the country." For the last two and half years, a lot of noise has been created and the image of the opposition damaged. NAB and other agencies are taking action against the corrupt. However, no relief has been given to the public. Media is being suppressed, causing a moral defeat of the country. The opposition was feeling suffocated. Bilawal Bhutto succeeded in bringing the opposition together. Indeed, PDM can be a strong movement. Imran Khan has two options. First, before the situation worsens, hold the elections before they are due. Second, let the opposition play its politics; stay indifferent and act against the opposition by using the state power. Imran Khan does not like to meet the opposition. That is why the Army Chief had to talk to the opposition leaders. It seems that Imran Khan would let the game begin. The opposition has made its strategy clear. With Maulana Fazlur Rehman reading out the APC's declaration means that his leadership has been accepted by the opposition. On the other hand, the government has decided to suppress the movement. Shahbaz Sharif has been already arrested and others' may follow. There are some corrupt leaders in the opposition. But there are some honest leaders as well who believe in the chastity of the constitution. These people can lead the movement and make the transition possible. The people of the country have decided that democracy is important for the country. But the government has already started suppression.

New phase in Afghan-Pak relations, Editorial, *Jang*, 01 October²⁵

²⁴ <http://ummat.net/2020/10/01/news.php?p=idr2.gif>

²⁵ <https://jang.com.pk/news/82651>

The visit of the chairman of the Afghan High Peace Council (AHPC) Abdullah Abdullah to Pakistan at a moment when the intra-Afghan talks are going on in Doha signals that the situation in the war torn country has started to improve. *This has opened a phase of better Pak-Afghan relations. It would also help in regional security and development and in returning the lakhs of Afghan refugees from Pakistan.* Abdullah's views in his meetings with Prime Minister Imran Khan, foreign minister Shah Mehmmod Qureshi and the speaker of National Assembly also signaled that Afghanistan recognises the role of Pakistan in resolving the conflict in Afghanistan. *Abdullah said at the Institute of Strategic Studies of Pakistan (ISSP) that Islamabad played an important role in the Doha agreement. He said we want to move beyond the past and learn lessons from it.* Prime Minister Imran Khan said that the Afghan conflict can be resolved only by talks. He said that the Afghan leadership should not let the opportunity be wasted. Pakistan would support any decision taken by the Afghan leadership, Imran added. *The need of the hour is that Afghanistan should act on what it says. It should not let the internal or external forces that do not want better ties between the two countries, intervene in the matters. Pakistan wants that to make the Doha talks successful, a ceasefire should be announced. Decrease in the violence would help in implementing the Doha agreement.* It is hoped that the Afghan leadership would support Pakistan's efforts in this regard.

The return of "gadaar card", Nasir Chaudhry, Daily Pakistan, 05 October²⁶

I feel sad that the "gadaar card" has returned to Pakistan. *On this occasion, Prime Minister Imran Khan has used it against the top opposition leader Nawaz Sharif. It seems that the corruption card has not succeeded. Nawaz Sharif's return to politics has made Imran worried. Also, because of the PTI led government's bad performance, people are openly saying that the earlier government's performance was better. They say the country was moving ahead in the right. In such circumstances, Nawaz Sharif's return to politics causing trouble for the government was natural.* It seems that Imran has no option left but to play his last card against the leader of the main opposition and the biggest province of the country. It is to be seen whether it works. *Because the allegation has been put by the Prime Minister himself, he needs to prove it, may be by setting a judicial inquiry. Otherwise he should vacate his post. The Prime Minister should not act like a social media user. His response to the opposition's attack should be a responsible one. Imran Khan seems overly trying to please the army. He should follow the law and*

²⁶ <https://dailypakistan.com.pk/E-Paper/lahore/2020-10-05/page-9/detail-5>

the constitution rather. Bringing back the “gadaar card” would be suicidal for the country. It was the reason that divided the county in 1971. Now if it is brought and used against the leader of the largest province of the country, it could have severe implications.

Where does the each party stand in PDM? Saleem Safi, Jang, 14 October²⁷

Every group/party is unhappy. But everyone’s response is different. *PML-N patron Nawaz Sharif thinks that he was removed as the Prime Minister. PML-N was weakened and fragmented. He along with his daughter was sent to jail. Still he tried to reach out through Shahbaz Sharif but even he was not spared and sent to jail.* Despite all this, he and Maryam kept silent. But the promises made to them were never kept. Asif Zardari thinks that he went the extra mile. *He cooperated in the Senate elections and the Senate Chairman election by sacrificing his party candidate. But instead of rewarding him, he was told to pack his bag from Sindh before the elections. He protested. He was told that Sindh would be given back to him. Expectedly, he cooperated again.* After the elections he was forced to sit in the opposition and later was arrested and cases against him were pursued. *Maulana Fazlur Rehman thinks that he was not rewarding for standing against the TTP in KP and for surviving three suicide attacks. He was betrayed in 2013 and KP and Balochistan were taken away from him. His approach has been aggressive from the beginning thus.* The Maulana also thinks that the media has been stopped to give coverage to his activities and efforts were made to discredit him. The Maulana also has a suspicious view about Imran Khan from the 1990s itself. He is also angry that the promises made to him for cancelling his ‘dharna’ were not kept. ANP, PkMAP and the Baloch nationalist parties also see themselves being betrayed. *The question is how serious is each party in PDM and to what extent can they go? I think PML-N, JUI-F, and Baloch nationalist parties, PkMAP are serious and can go to any extent. However, the position of ANP and PPP is a little different.* Zardari does not want elections because he thinks that PPP would lose Sindh as well. But he is aware about the fact that despite cooperation, he was not spared. *Furthermore, PPP is still in contact. One meeting with Bilawal Bhutto happened before the APC and one after that. In the same way, ANP is in touch. For ANP, PTM is also an issue.*

The system under threat? Editorial, Daily Pakistan, 20 October²⁸

²⁷https://jang.com.pk/news/831462?_ga=2.36202528.1627074690.1602478388-835994399.1598849708

²⁸ <https://dailypakistan.com.pk/E-Paper/lahore/2020-10-20/page-9/detail-0>

Foreign Minister Shah Mehmood Qureshi said that the game being played by the opposition threatens the system of the country. Targeting the Pakistan Democratic Movement (PDM), Mr Qureshi said that the opposition would get nothing at the end. Mr Qureshi said that Bilawal Bhutto should not become part of an agenda that had support of Narendra Modi. *The opposition has done only two public meetings so far and the Foreign Minister fears that the system was under threat. At the same time, the government has been decrying the opposition movement by saying that nothing is going to be achieved by the opposition parties.* Mr Qureshi himself said that the people of the county were not going to listen to the opposition's rhetoric. Sheikh Rashid said that by February there would be a radical change and 15-20 PML-N members would leave the party. In that case, what specific inputs Qureshi has that made him issue the statement! Are the foundations of Pakistan's system so weak that two public meetings of the opposition would bring it down? It seems that the Foreign Minister made the statement in haste. *Imran Khan, apparently ignorant about the threats to the system, is saying the opposition does not threaten his government. He is saying that he would bring Nawaz Sharif back and put him in jail. Unaware about the threats that Qureshi could see, the Foreign Minister should inform the Prime Minister about them. The government and the opposition should support the current parliamentary system. It is in the interest of both. Sometime back, the people Imran Khan was criticizing opposition leaders saying that he would not keep them even as his peons. The same people now have become the most confidante and competent ones for Imran Khan.*

Pakistan still in the FATF grey list, Mirza Ikhtiar Beg, Jang, 26 October²⁹

FATF in its virtual meeting from 18 to 23 October analysed the report presented by Pakistan on the implementations on the 27 points set by the FATF. *The president of FATF Dr Marcus Pleyer said that though Pakistan has acted upon the 21 points and also started working on the next six points, it would continue to remain in the grey list. The decision on whether its name should be removed from the grey list would be taken in the next meeting, February 2021.* Pakistan has taken many steps to meet the conditions set by FATF. Islamabad passed UN Security Council amendment bill and terrorism amendment bill, despite the strong opposition from the opposition parties. According to the new laws, punishment for money laundering has been increased from 5 to 10 years imprisonment while property of the guilty would also be confiscated. *However, Pakistan needs to implement the other six points to come out of the grey list. It needs to act on terror finance and take action against 1373 persons and groups that are involved in terror*

²⁹https://jang.com.pk/news/836505?_ga=2.232697247.1264832580.1603692066-1172285561.1585539487

financing. After the recent laws passed in the National Assembly, only 50 lakh rupees can be sent to foreign countries without permission. Earlier there was no such restriction. According to new law, it is not allowed to put money in an account in foreign currency after the exchange. Also, carrying more than 10,000 dollars as cash is banned. It is a welcome step that despite the Coronavirus pandemic, Pakistan could implement 27 points of FATF. *By doing so, it avoided the possibility of being put in the blacklist. Despite taking the steps, Pakistan was continued to be put in the grey list, though the President said there was discrimination against Pakistan. However, India and its allies tried hard to keep pressure on Pakistan through FATF.*

Maryam focus of international media, Arif Anjum, Ummat, 26 October³⁰

As expected, the Pakistan Democratic Movement (PDM) has attracted attention of international media. *In all this, Maryam Nawaz is being given special attention. Also, apparently UAE media has grown disenchanted with Imran and a supporter of PDM.* American analysts are also following the developments of PDM. Generally American and British media follow Pakistan's mainstream politics. This time is unexpected that more interest is being shown in the opposition politics. Newspapers of UAE are given front space to PDM: Both Gulf News and Khaleej Times are reporting PDM with special interest. *Khaleej Times carried a special full-page interview of Maryam Nawaz on Saturday. Maryam expressed her views freely in the interview. Few days back, Gulf News had carried a rather condescending cartoon of Imran Khan. It needs to be mentioned that in general newspapers in UAE are not allowed to criticize the politics of neighbouring countries. But the cartoon was not published but went viral on the internet.* Few days ago, there was an article in the editorial page praising Maryam Nawaz. The coverage of Maryam Nawaz is not limited in the Gulf. In Germany, DW called her "face" of the opposition movement. Similarly, the Quetta rally was also given enough coverage by the foreign media and commentators.

Government under pressure to reach out the opposition after Quetta, Ummat, 28 October³¹

Because of the increasing pressure from PDM (and its successful rallies), Prime Minister Imran Khan is under pressure to resolve issues with the opposition through talks. *On the other hand, the head of PDM Maulana Fazlur Rehman has said that he was ready for talks. But the talks would not be held with Imran Khan but with his "supporters" (read the establishment). According to the sources, Nawaz Sharif is not ready to talk to the*

³⁰ <http://ummat.net/2020/10/26/news.php?p=story5.gif>

³¹ <https://ummat.net/2020/10/28/news.php?p=story5.gif>

Government either. But he has not closed all doors for the “powerful forces”. According to the sources, the reasons behind these offers for talks are the three successful rallies of PDM. The Quetta rally has had a deep impact on the thinking of the government. The people turned out in masses, despite the warnings of the provincial governments about possible terror attacks. *After the rally, the Prime Minister was given clear advice for reaching out the opposition for talks, according to the source. This situation is difficult for the Prime Minister: not only because he has been denying talking to the opposition and preferred NAB cases but also any effort to reach out might be seen as a sign of weakness from his side.* That can damage Imran personally. However, after receiving the advice, Imran has delegated the responsibility to some of his ministers. *According to the sources, PTI is trying to create rifts in PDM. By so, it would also get a chance to say that it tried to reach out.* From the PDM side, Shahid Khaqan Abbasi said that PML-N would not talk to **Imran Khan on any issue. We would talk to those who are the real authorities.** He said that PML-N would raise every issue related to common people in the National Assembly. *According to the source, PTI is trying to bypass PML-N and try to reach out to PPP and JUI-F. The government is ready to give some concessions as well. But Bilawal Bhutto and the Maulana are being careful.* Also, it is a reality that PML-N is influential in the opposition camp. According to the source, PML-N is in no mood to talk but it may revisit its policy in a new setup.

ELECTRONIC MEDIA

Program Breaking Point with Malick, Maulana Fazl Ur Rehman will lead the anti-government Protests? Hum News, 03 October³²

The presidency of Pakistan Democratic Movement (PDM) has been given to Maulana Fazl Ur Rehman and is now leading from the front after he terminated his radical antiestablishment protests early this year. In a scenario where both the government and opposition are not ready for any kind of negotiations attacking each other left right and center especially after Nawaz Sharif’s anti-army speech from London, *the host asks where is Pakistan’s politics going from this point?*

Guests: Faisal Vawda, Federal Minister for water & Resources (PTI), Senator Musadiq Malik (PML-N), Chaudhary Manzoor Hussain (PPP) & Murtaza Ali Shah, Senior Analyst (London).

³² https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LP_ibMChW3A

Murtaza Ali Shah noted that the options for the officials representing the high commission of Pakistan in London are very limited when it comes to serving the notice to Nawaz Sharif. Five attempts so far have been made to serve the notice but so far no success. The street where Nawaz Sharif has his home is tightly gated and if the officials try to go in by force, case of trespassing/property damage can be stamped on them. The arrests warrants have been sent through royal mail and technically unless someone from the Sharif family receive it; it does not serve any purpose. He informed that the British government has underlined that this is an internal matter of Pakistan and that they cannot take any step against Nawaz Sharif because he has not broken any law within United Kingdom. **Faisal Vawda** pointed out that our government has to bear the brunt of the wrong decision they took to send Nawaz Sharif out of the country and now a very healthy Nawaz Sharif is even not sparing the army/courts and is blasting them from London. He stressed that this is the same narrative (antiestablishment) used by India before and now and the India media is celebrating it. He added that all the fraternity that was involved in sending him to London, including government leader they are responsible to bring him back. He noted that the PDM has appointed Maulana due to the street power he has because of the madrassa students. When asked why Nawaz Sharif is not receiving the letter, does it mean that they have no faith in the Pakistani legal system; **Senator Musadiq Malik** replied that if they use a proper way to serve the notice, by calling them and taking an appointment and not just standing outside, it will serve a better result. But if the government wants to do it just for optics and local consummation without any legal bidding then there is no point. He pointed out that by sloganeering in front of Nawaz Sharif house with masked face will not yield any results. **Chaudhary Manzoor Hussain** underlined that this is the wish of the government that PPP should not support the movement or leave the PDM in between but the point is that PPP as a party was the one who tried its best to bring the opposition together then why will we do such a thing, leaving the PDM? He added there is threat to democracy and parliamentary form as **Faisal Vawda** was talking about possibility of Presidential form of government.

Capital Talk with Hamid Mir, FIR against PML-N leaders for sedation & conspiracy against Pakistan, Geo News, 05 October³³

FIR is registered by Punjab police in Lahore against Nawaz Sharif and other PML-N leaders for sedation and conspiring against Pakistan and State institutions. For the first time the name of an elected PM of Pakistan, Raja

³³ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dB5OotHwzfs>

Rafiq Haider of Pakistan occupied Kashmir (PoK) has been added in the list of sedation against Pakistan. The FIR alleges that in the speeches made on September 20 and October 1, *the former premier supported the policies of neighbouring India, so that Pakistan would continue to remain on the Financial Action Task Force's (FATF) 'grey list'.* The FIR also names ten women parliamentarians (including Maryam Nawaz, Maryam Aurangzeb) and three retired Lt. Generals. The host underlines that now the leaders of PTI are making veiled attacks on women parliamentarians of the opposition. In this episode the host discuss the FIR with women guests from the opposition and government.

Guests: Marriyum Aurangzeb, PML-N; Shandana Gulzar Khan, PTI & Naz Baloch, PPP.

Shandana Gulzar Khan pointed out that the people named in the FIR had all attended Nawaz Sharif's speech in which he had fired antiestablishment and anti-intuitions attacks. She underlined that in our constitution it is clearly underlined that no one can talk against the institutions, especially for personal gains. *By talking about military interference in politics of Pakistan Nawaz Sharif has literally defamed the whole institution. He talked against the army who is responsible for our security.* When asked about Sheikh Rashid's verbal attack on Maryam Nawaz and his warning she replied that yes sheikh Rashid should have restricted his wording but women parliamentarians should also not use bad words against them. She pointed out that *Tariq Fateh one of known anti Pakistan journalist, Indian origin Canadian based, he has pointed out in his article that Nawaz Sharif's speech is rousing speeches against the army and state of Pakistan.* **Marriyum Aurangzeb** blamed that the government representatives have not given a good ear to the speeches of Nawaz Sharif and are misinterpreting it in a wrong way labelling it as antiestablishment speech. *She argued that he has been three times ex PM of Pakistan who transferred the country into a nuclear state, the main stress of his speech was to preserve democratic values of the country.* Talking about the Sheikh Rashid issue she pointed out how can a senior leader say that he will do postmortem of a women leader? **Naz Baloch** argued the most shameful was including the name of PM Azad Kashmir Rafiq Haider in the list for sedation against the country, this has given a negative message internationally. By doing this the PTI government once again displayed immaturity and irresponsibility on its part. *One thing this government has been successful in doing is labelling the opposition leaders as corrupt even they do not leave a chance to speak against them in international forums.*

Sethi Sey Sawal, Managed Media, Najam Sethi Official, 21 October³⁴

³⁴ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oiEu0GJW3nU>

Najam Sethi in this episode talked about the state of media that is controlled by the government. The media houses have been directed to blackout any antigovernment, antiestablishment speeches during the People's Democratic Movement (PDM) protests organised by the united opposition in different parts of the country. *The main points are first*, the PTI government has efficiently and cunningly managed the media and most of the media houses both electronic and print has given into the government's narrative. *The speech of most of the regional leaders like Mohsin Dawar of the PTM, Akhtar Mengal (Balochistan), Mahmood Khan Achakzai of Pakhtunkhwa Milli Awami Party etc. where blurred or blackout from the Karachi Jalsa because of the fear of antigovernment and antiestablishment attacks by them. Second*, Najam Sethi underlined that telephone calls were made to the cable operators to follow the direction and not to show anything that is against the government. During the Karachi protests few opposition leaders' speeches were broadcasted like of Bilawal and Maryam as this time they did not attack the government and Nawaz Sharif was not given a screen time. *Third*, Sethi answered why the media is giving up to the governments wishes. He underlined that there was a time when journalists use to run the media but now the media is controlled by capitalists and feudalists that have business interests and cannot afford to go against the government. The government have ways to tighten their screw. In return these feudalists control the media houses and journalists and if they do not obey are kicked out of jobs. *Sethi pointed out that there are two types of journalists in Pakistan today, one that are rational but suppress their rationality to save their jobs and second who openly support the government's narratives. Fourth*, Due to the same reason the reporting has now shifted to social media and people are turning to this media to know the truth. The speed with which news is coming on social media, it will make the mainstream media irrelevant in Pakistan. But the government is also trying to control the social media by imposing bans, irrespective of this new platforms will keep emerging on the social media. *The full speeches of regional leaders muted by mainstream media was made available on social media handles.*

BOMBINGS, SHOOTINGS AND DISAPPEARANCES

(Select incidents culled out from the Pakistan media)

Place	Date	Description	Killed	Injured
Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP)				
Bajaur ³⁵	14/10/2020	Army soldier martyred, another injured in Pak-Afghan border post attack	01	01
Peshawar ³⁶	06/10/2020	Professor belonging to Ahmadi community shot dead in Peshawar allegedly after religious argument	01	00
Peshawar ³⁷	27/10/2020	At least 7 killed, 70 injured in blast at madressah in Peshawar's Dir Colony	07	70
Balochistan				
Razmak ³⁸	16/10/2020	20 security personnel martyred in Ormara, Razmak attacks	20	00
Sindh				

³⁵<https://tribune.com.pk/story/2268304/army-soldier-martyred-another-injured-in-pak-afghan-border-post-attack>

³⁶<https://www.dawn.com/news/1583413/professor-belonging-to-ahmadi-community-shot-dead-in-peshawar-allegedly-after-religious-argument>

³⁷ <https://www.dawn.com/news/1587278/at-least-7-killed-70-injured-in-blast-at-madressah-in-peshawars-dir-colony>

³⁸<https://tribune.com.pk/story/2268503/20-security-personnel-martyred-in-ormara-razmak-attacks>

Karachi ³⁹	11/10/2020	Jamia Farooqia head Maulana Adil, driver shot dead in Karachi	02	00
Karachi ⁴⁰	21/10/2020	At least 5 dead, 20 injured in an explosion in Gulshan-i-Iqbal building in Karachi	05	20

³⁹ <https://www.dawn.com/news/1584316/jamia-farooqia-head-maulana-adil-driver-shot-dead-in-karachi>

⁴⁰<https://www.dawn.com/news/1586243/at-least-5-dead-20-injured-in-an-explosion-in-gulshan-i-iqbal-building-in-karachi>