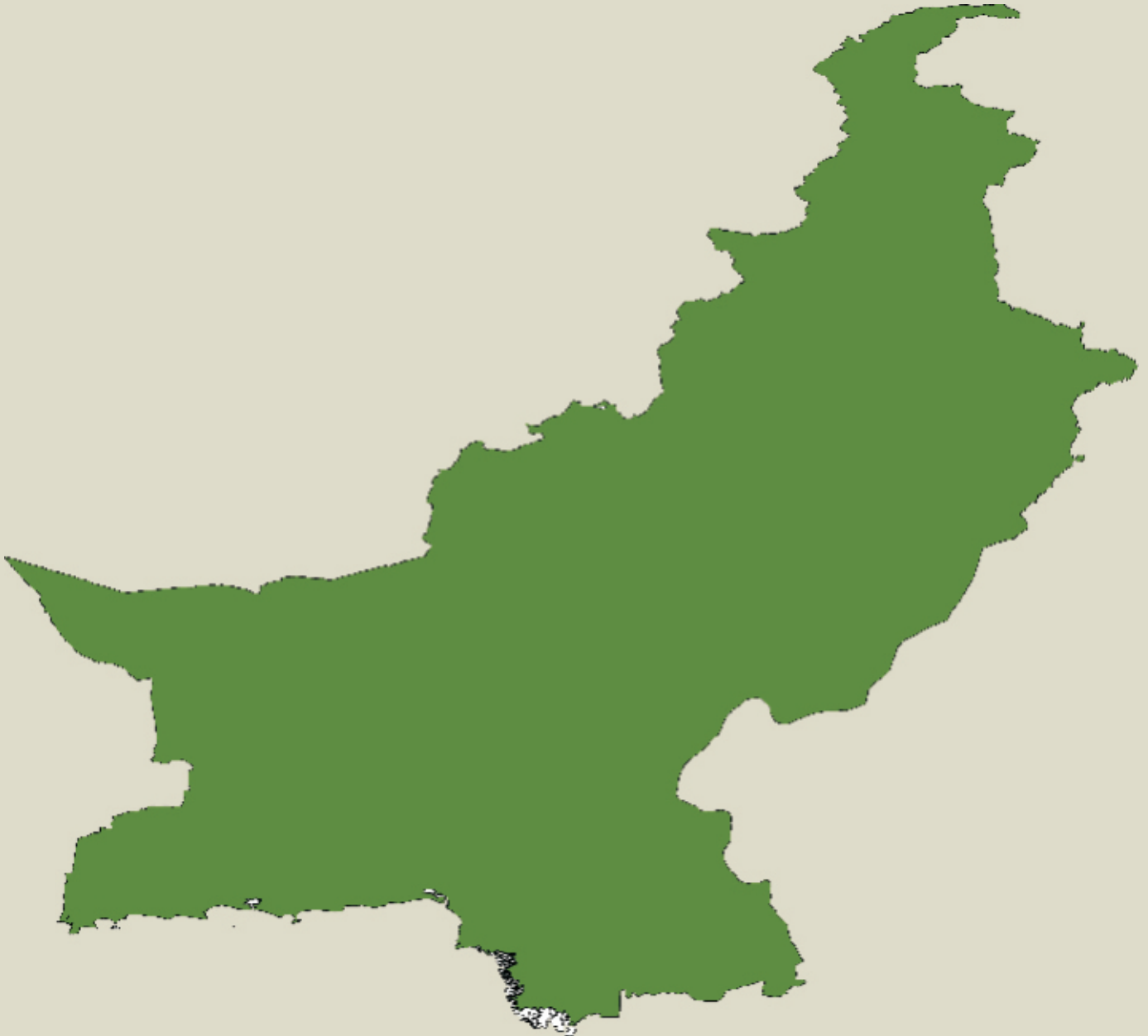


April 2023

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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DEFENCE STUDIES AND ANALYSES
मनोहर परिकर रक्षा अध्ययन एवं विश्लेषण संस्थान

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POLITICAL DEVELOPMENTS

Politicising the judiciary, Editorial, *Dawn*, 03 April¹

The flames from the PML-N and PTI's political war are now consuming all branches of the state, pushing the country towards unprecedented chaos. The judiciary has become the latest battleground between the two factions, with senior justices, whether they realise it or not, now being seen as pieces on a chessboard, to be moved or removed as the players see fit. More salvos have been fired from London and Lahore, with PML-N supremo Nawaz Sharif blaming the apex court for all of the country's troubles post-2017, and the PTI chief accusing his rival party of "threatening" the Supreme Court along the lines of what it did in 1997 to silence former chief justice Sajjad Ali Shah. Both sides have exhorted their supporters to 'come out' and 'take a stand' in their favour, increasing fears of clashes on the streets. The incumbent government and its sympathizers are spinning their sudden interest in the Supreme Court's affairs as a long overdue effort to reform its 'practices and procedures'. It is increasingly looking like a very thin façade. There has been a parallel, ongoing effort to paint certain judges as being 'sympathetic' to Imran Khan and the PTI, which has been countered dutifully by the latter's supporters with attacks against judges being seen as 'sympathetic' to the PML-N.

More crises? Editorial, *The News*, 05 April²

While most legal experts believe that the election question was always a moot point in that elections under the constitution are required to be held within 90 days, there are those who feel there is little to stop the government from withholding funds. *That may not be as easy though, with the PTI talking about contempt proceedings against Prime Minister Shehbaz if he does not carry out the court's orders. As for elections in Punjab, the caretaker government has said that it will implement the court's orders but political observers say that if the government delays in releasing funds, it would not be in the ECP or the caretakers' hands.* What the SC does in this case will lead to another executive versus judiciary faceoff. Coming at a time when political players say this road may end up spelling doom for, such talk should not be taken lightly. This is especially because, if the country's interior minister is musing that an emergency can be imposed, we have a lot to worry about. It would be better if all political parties sat together and resolved this issue instead of taking it to an end where all of democracy wraps up. Might one also hope that the

¹ <https://www.dawn.com/news/1745593/politicising-the-judiciary>

² <https://www.thenews.com.pk/print/1057384-more-crises>

superior judiciary too realizes that things are headed south very fast and that at the end of the day, justice is as important as the means taken to arrive at it? Controversy and justice were never natural allies.

Fractured state, Editorial, Dawn, 06 April³

*The list of disappointments runs long while turmoil rips through the highest echelons of power. When it comes to the mess the country faces, no one is above blame – neither the government, nor the opposition; neither the executive, nor the ‘establishment’; and, lastly, not the judiciary or the two factions it has divided itself into. We have a verdict – the right one though rendered controversial because of the debatable composition of the bench – from the highest court, yet, nobody truly believes it will be implemented. The legislature and executive have made it clear they will not listen to the judiciary, and the judiciary has made it clear it is not interested in listening to anyone at all. Within the judiciary, a smoldering civil war threatens to turn into a blazing inferno, with both factions one-upping each other with tit-for-tat power moves. Watching their struggle unfold is like witnessing one’s elder’s fight horrifying and pitiable. Is this the end of the Pakistan we have known? Is this the Götzen-Dämmerung the twilight of our false idols? The wise and powerful have fallen off their high pedestals. Those once considered ‘national leaders’ appear bereft of ideas and helpless against the vortices sucking the country towards a dark void. **The judges must work out their differences and agree to disagree while remaining within the bounds of reason and respectability. The PDM government, especially the PML-N, must put a stop to its confrontation with the judiciary.***

A year of chaos, Editorial, The News, 10 April⁴

It has now been exactly one year since former Prime Minister Imran Khan was removed from office – and his government lost power – by the constitutional provision of a vote of no-confidence. It has also been one year of political chaos, with the PTI pretty much in protest the past 365 days. The starkest amphitheater of this chaos has been Punjab, which has not seen even a week go by without some new twist in the political tale. For a province that has been used to being not just the centre of power but also of relative calm in the country, this has been an unexpected reality check. Even one year on, though, things are far away from settling down. As it stands, Pakistan is in the middle of a judicial crisis, an economic crisis, and a political power crisis – not to mention the ever-looming security crisis. The judiciary needs to set its house in order lest justice lose the loftier status it must

³ <https://www.dawn.com/news/1746175/fractured-state>

⁴ <https://www.thenews.com.pk/print/1059018-a-year-of-chaos>

always maintain. Our economic planners need to figure out which way we are headed. And our security planners need to make sure they act on the decisions they have taken at the NSC meet. This has been one year too many for such tumult. A dash of 'normal' will be welcomed by all. *The economic crisis and the security crisis are challenges the government should be looking at but can't – or won't – because of the myriad battles being fought on tiny little hills by all political (and apolitical) stakeholders in the country.* The Punjab election is still nowhere on the horizon, despite the SC ruling. In question is not just the funding – which has not yet been provided to the ECP – but also the three-member ruling by the SC regarding election in Punjab.

Celebrating the constitution, Editorial, *The Dawn*, 11 April⁵

The constitution of Pakistan is an imperfect document as most constitutions are and as a constitution is a living document and transforms via new amendments, interpretations and an evolving society, one would think consensus and democratic law-making would take care of all these issues. *Given the political chaos that we are witnessing today, talking about the constitution may sound pedantic but it is really the most hopeful conversation to be had at this moment in our history.* Since both sides of the political aisle are laying claim to both democracy and constitutionalism, may we dare hope for a future where political stakeholders realize that at the end of the day, what really saves them is the constitution. From Imran Khan's PTI abrogating the constitution through Qasim Suri's ruling last year to the judicial reinterpretation of Article 63A to the current government's refusal to hold elections in Punjab and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, the way that the constitution has been made redundant has been a grotesque reflection of years decades, early of this document being used merely as a weapon of choice by whoever has been in power, and a handy slogan by whoever has been out of power. *For example, the PDM and its allies were the only alliance that was successful in sending an elected prime minister home through the constitutionally mandated vote of no-confidence without using any unconstitutional means.*

Court vs Parliament, Editorial, *The Express Tribune*, 28 April⁶

As the proceedings of the day were abruptly adjourned and a detailed order was awaited, it sent shivers down the spine. *The coalition government, which is adamant that it will not be holding the polls on May 14 for reasons of political exigency, seems to have reacted*

⁵ <https://www.thenews.com.pk/print/1059381-celebrating-the-constitution>

⁶ <https://tribune.com.pk/story/2414004/court-vs-parliament>

by opting for a vote of confidence for Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif, and this obviously hints at crossing swords with the judiciary. The ruckus is leading the nation nowhere. The stance on the part of the government is mired in political reasoning, and is openly in defiance of the dictates of the Constitution. Moreover, as observed by the honourable bench, the government is opting for time-buying tactics by delaying meaningful talks with the opposition, and the order to hold polls on May 14 is being flouted. Last but not least, the fact that the judiciary's keen interest in regulating political affairs is now being openly questioned and contested by the elected representatives, as is evident from the tit-for-tat trust vote on Monday, makes the working equation sour to the core. *A decent exit strategy is a must, and both the organs of the state must lean back to look at the wider picture with the common denominator of holding the Constitution in high esteem. This is how the polarised mosaic can be cleansed for a fair relationship as per law.*

Newfound neutrality, Editorial, Dawn, 27 April⁷

The elephant in the room was the army's role in politics, and the response was predictable. Neutral is the way it is going to be, so it is claimed. Before that came up, however, newly appointed DG ISPR Maj Gen Ahmed Sharif Chaudhry in his maiden presser talked at length about security-related issues. Among these, he listed the military's successes in anti-terror operations, saying that the army and LEAs had carried out 8,269 intelligence-based operations during 2022 in which 1,378 suspected terrorists were taken into custody and 157 were killed. Significantly, given the public uproar over what had been a plan to 'mainstream' TTP militants in KP's tribal districts, he distanced his institution from the previous government's initiative of holding talks with the banned group. Gen Chaudhry also spoke about the evolving militant landscape following the US exit from Afghanistan and said that TTP and Baloch insurgents were working together to sabotage peace in Balochistan and KP. The question-and-answer session provided the opening for the DG ISPR to say that relations between a sitting government and the army were apolitical but constitutional in nature and that the army did not support the ideology of any party and respected all parties. *What was said should be a statement of the obvious in any democracy. But when former army chief Gen Qamar Bajwa admitted that the army has been meddling in politics for almost the entirety of Pakistan's existence, he was articulating what everyone had known for a long time: the military had either been ruling directly or pulling the strings from behind the scenes, making and breaking governments, manipulating poll results, engineering alliances, etc.*

⁷ <https://www.dawn.com/news/1749546/newfound-neutrality>

ECONOMIC ISSUES

Charter of economy, Editorial, *The News*, 03 April⁸

The PTI had rejected his call for a charter of economy when Imran Khan was the prime minister. The party also rejected his call for a dialogue post-vote of no-confidence and said that the government only wanted to deflect attention from its economic failures. Now that we are facing a systematic collapse of every institution's credibility and a constitutional crisis is staring at us, it would be prudent on the part of all political stakeholders to sit together and come up with a new social contract, and more importantly a charter of economy because elections without conflict resolution will not solve any problems. *Pakistan needs proper economic reforms, and a guarantee that all political parties will stick to them regardless of who comes to power. It is important that everyone agrees on issues like tax reforms such as increasing property taxes, imposing agriculture taxes, taxing retailers and other sectors. If there is a consensus on privatizing some government assets, the government should go ahead and do it.* If there are commitments made to the IMF, no party can undo them. The oil and gas sector needs to be reformed. This is just the tip of the iceberg and a proper charter of economy would no doubt also look at deep-rooted structural flaws within our economy. For this, all stakeholders need to set aside their petty political differences and for once focus on the people who are dying just to place food on their tables.

Inflationary peril, Editorial, *The Express Tribune*, 06 April⁹

The widespread belief is that the increase was toned down in order to avoid killing investment while also complying with the IMF's stability conditions. Unfortunately, there remains a high likelihood that neither of these goals will be accomplished without more efforts on the fiscal policy front. The World Bank has now slashed Pakistan's growth estimate from an already-paltry 2% to just 0.4% for the current fiscal year, and even that figure assumes a deal with the IMF will be reached soon. While the country's leadership may cite another World Bank report that said the entire region is seeing a decline in its growth rate, we should note that Sri Lanka and Pakistan are almost entirely responsible for that decline. While India, Bangladesh and smaller countries have all taken hits, they have managed their resources and responded to external events, such as the war in Ukraine, much better than us. *In fact, despite hitting rock bottom, Sri Lanka has managed*

⁸ <https://www.thenews.com.pk/print/1056705-charter-of-economy>

⁹ <https://tribune.com.pk/story/2410096/inflationary-peril>

to avoid the harrowing reports of deaths and injuries on bread lines that we are now regularly reading, and there are some positive moves in the right direction. This is because once Sri Lanka acknowledged that it was holding a begging bowl, it began complying with the IMF rather than acting like Finance Minister Ishaq Dar or Imran Khan and his cavalcade of finance ministers who's chest-thumping for political optics has repeatedly endangered the loan programme.

The Saudi largesse, Editorial, *The Express Tribune*, 10 April¹⁰

Riyadh's generosity to come up with a soft loan of \$240 million to fund a water reservoir project is a welcome gesture. The fact that the tranche has been released at a time when economic uncertainty is at its apex in the country simply hints at the confidence of the Kingdom in Pakistan's development. The multipurpose Mohmand Dam Project is part of initiatives to promote sustainable development goals, and will go a long way in buoying agriculture and energy requirements of vast rural areas in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, apart from stemming to a great extent the threat of flash floods. *Saudi Arabia's role in Pakistan's developmental mosaic is no secret. It has expressed its keen interest in investing in petroleum products, and installing an oil refinery in Gwadar as well. But what makes the Royal benevolence part and parcel of Pakistan's socio-economic dispensation is its largesse to stand fast in times of crisis and exigencies.* This is why the cash rollover tranches that come Islamabad's way off and on continue to act as a lifeline, and the last of such a courtesy is the \$3 billion package that is holding the anchor of the economy in pestering adversity. Last but not least is the referral letter from the Saudi leadership to the IMF, endorsing release of funds to the country to the tune of \$1.1 billion. The Saudi inventiveness for the big-ticket project has luckily coincided with the Finance Minister's assertion that a deal with the IMF has been ironed out, and Pakistan will escape the threat of bankruptcy. The country's foreign exchange reserves have slumped to less than \$4 billion, sending fears of an imminent default.

The IMF's puzzle, Editorial, *The Express Tribune*, 17 April¹¹

Apart from the financing gap that Pakistan currently experiences, there is a communication gap too with the IMF. Even after months of hectic negotiations, both Islamabad and the global lender are not on the same wavelength, and differ in their theories while playing to the gallery. The crisscross with the IMF, and its inorganic prescriptions, have led to

¹⁰ <https://tribune.com.pk/story/2410928/the-saudi-largesse>

¹¹ <https://tribune.com.pk/story/2412276/the-imfs-puzzle>

unprecedented toiling for 220 million people of the country. *Within a span of the last nine months, inflation has skyrocketed to around 45%, and the rupee has lost its value to the core against the greenback. With widening budget deficit and exports slumping to a record low, there is apparently no way out for the sluggish economy.* The IMF itself has identified a hole of \$6 billion in Pakistan's external financing needs, which are unlikely to be overcome if the pace of deterioration continues. Last but not least, commercial banks too are jittery as they are made to read the despicable credit rating which has hit rock-bottom. If academic abstracts are any benchmark, the economy has technically defaulted, and the piecemeal measures to keep it afloat are merely meant for face-saving. The question remains constant: what's next? Will the next loan tranche of around \$1.1 billion bridge the gap, and get going? *The simple assessment is 'no'. Completing the 9th review programme is one thing, and making inroads for a smooth sailing is another. The puzzle is how to get out of this quagmire, and when!*

Still no funds, Editorial, Dawn, 18 April¹²

Initially, the IMF's reluctance to complete the performance review and its insistence on the implementation of harsh prior actions were seen as the outcome of the deepening trust gap between the Fund and Pakistan due to the repeated breach of programme targets by both previous dispensations and the present government. But the IMF kept delaying matters despite the PDM government executing practically all prior actions to qualify for the Fund's dollars. But while there is every reason to be puzzled by the IMF's stance regarding the delay in the restoration of the programme, Pakistan's politicians and policymakers need to learn some hard lessons from the way multilateral and bilateral lenders have acted this time. They must realise that the world has changed a great deal in the last two decades. The world is no longer ready to help those who don't help themselves. The Saudis have repeatedly said of late that they want Pakistan to work within IMF discipline and tax its people if it wants the kingdom's money to fix its external account. *Others have told us the same thing. The Americans said as much after the catastrophic 2010 floods. We did not listen to them then, and continue to ignore such warnings. But for how long? True, this time too we may get help sooner or later.* But unless our politicians and policymakers take and act on hard decisions, the world will no longer step in to rescue us from a mess of our own making.

¹² <https://www.dawn.com/news/1748282/still-no-funds>

Terrorism in Balochistan, Editorial, Jang, 03 April¹³

There is no doubt that Pakistan is once again facing terrorism. Sometimes these terrorists come from their safe havens in Afghanistan and sometimes they operate from Iran. The other day, terrorists present across the Iranian border attacked Pakistani security forces who were on routine patrolling at the Pakistan-Iran border in Jalgai sector of Kech district of Balochistan. Four soldiers of the Pakistan Army were martyred in the attack. DG ISPR said in its statement that effective actions were being taken against these terrorists on the Iranian border. It also read that necessary contact is being made with Iran to prevent such incidents in the future. It is to be noted that this was not the first time that terrorists from the Iranian side have carried out operations within the borders of Pakistan. Terrorist attacks on the security forces in Balochistan are continuing. A similar incident this year took place in January when four Pakistan Army personnel were martyred by terrorists, firing from the Iranian border in Panjgur district of Balochistan. Due to recent attacks, it is being said that terrorists are once again targeting the security forces in Balochistan. Defeating these terrorists is of great importance for a peaceful and developed Balochistan. The Pakistan military will surely defeat enemies and would foil the ill-intentions of the enemy who are supporting terrorism in Balochistan to weaken Pakistan. Pakistan's Foreign Office also needs to play a proactive role in these circumstances to prevent the use of foreign land for the purpose of terrorism in the beloved motherland.

The reality of Pak-Israel trade, Editorial, Jang, 04 April¹⁴

The news about Pakistan's sale of food products in the markets of Israel has been circulating in the media for several days. Pakistan does not have any diplomatic or trade relations with Israel due its illegal occupation of the land of the Palestinians. That is why surprise and indignation were being expressed on the news. It is welcome development in this regard that after the Ministry of Foreign Affairs' brief explanation, the spokesman of the Ministry of Commerce has issued a detailed explanatory statement the other day in this regard. According to this statement, Pakistan does not recognize Israel; Pakistan neither has trade nor banking relations with it. It was said in the statement that Pakistan Customs has confirmed that no shipment was exported to Israel, nor was any payment made to any Pakistani bank. If Pakistani goods or commodities have been exported from a third country, then it is not called Pakistani exports to Israel. The Prime Minister's

¹³ <https://e.jang.com.pk/detail/410947>

¹⁴ <https://e.jang.com.pk/detail/411784>

Special Representative for Interfaith Harmony and the Middle East, Tahir Ashrafi, has also stated that it is impossible to establish any kind of relations with Israel until the Palestinian issue is resolved. After this explanation, it would be unjustified to call this issue Pak-Israel trade and make it a propaganda tool against the government. If some do so it would be considered a clear proof of malice on the part of them.

Consistent decrease in exports, Editorial, *Daily Dunya*, 06 April¹⁵

According to the data of the federal government, the total exports in March were \$36 billion, which means that annual exports of the country decreased by 15 percent. The export of services also recorded an over 5 percent decrease. The continuous decline in exports for the last seven months is not allowing strengthening of the foreign reserves and has created a possibility of laying off the employees working in export business. Textile is a big export sector. It amounts to over 60 percent of the country's total exports. But because of the flawed policies of the government the sector is weakening. Now because of the closing of hundreds of textile units, almost 7 million people are unemployed. Other export sectors have also been impacted. It is obvious that only by increasing exports foreign reserves of the country can be increased and the value of rupee controlled. But the government instead of focusing on the sector ended the subsidy on gas and electricity for the sector. Because of this the condition of the exporters have worsened. It is necessary that the government resolves the issues of the export sector on a priority basis. It should in fact introduce a comprehensive plan to increase exports.

Avoid making national interests an issue of ego, Editorial, *Ummat*, 10 April¹⁶

The controversy over holding elections in Punjab and Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa (KP) is intensifying with every passing day. Differences even among judges have cropped up on the matter. This has led the political parties to play their political games. The Shehbaz cabinet is delaying releasing funds for the elections, despite clear court orders. The stubbornness shown by the government is scary as it might lead to disqualification of anyone or all as not releasing the funds would be considered as the contempt of the court. Shehbaz Sharif has taken refuge in the parliament and the cabinet. However, this may intensify the crisis. Therefore, the "Powerful masters' should act sensibly on this matter. The cabinet is also fearing making a decision on the matter and Shehbaz is sticking to his confrontational position. That is why no decision was taken in yesterday's cabinet meeting. It remains what unfolds in today's meeting. The signs from the government to

¹⁵https://e.dunya.com.pk/detail.php?date=2023-04-06&edition=LHR&id=6682258_52268473

¹⁶ <https://ummat.net/epaper/news.php?date=2023/04/10/&p=idr1.gif>

confront the judiciary is in no one's interests. If the governments hold elections at once across the county then he can dissolve the assembly before its due date and keep everyone happy. The same suggestion came from Siraj ul Haq, the emir of Jamaat-e-Islami. Siraj was right in saying that an emergency, martial law or presidential system is not a solution to the problem. Even if elections were held in Punjab the results would be surely controversial. The impression from the government that it wants to confront the judiciary implies that the politicians are sticking to their old anti-judiciary traditions. The court judgments are challenged in the parliament. Certainly, the parliament is supreme. But if the politicians in the pretext of the supremacy of parliament try to pursue their vested interests that can sow new issues. *Is not all this making the country and the nation a laughing stock that on the behest of the government anti-judiciary legislation is being done? The government is running away from conducting elections constitutionally* If elections are not held the PTI has threatened that it would take the roads. That would all likely increase political tension in the country. Prior to this, President Arif Alvi had sent back the Practice and Procedure Bill regarding the legislation about the judiciary to the parliament. On the action of the President Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif had said that sadly Arif Alvi was working like a PTI worker instead of the President of the country.

Constitutional crisis: new development, Editorial, Jang, 11 April¹⁷

To end the ongoing constitutional and judicial crisis in Pakistan, the government, PDM and the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court have taken some steps. This has led to a new situation and nothing can be predicted ahead of time whether or not it would be fruitful. It is expected, however, that it can help to overcome the current state of confrontation between the legislature and the judiciary. *According to the sources, an important development is that efforts have been started by top justice of the Supreme Court to end the division among the judges of the Supreme Court.* In this regard, he has held separate meetings with fellow judges. In order to eliminate the impression of differences among the judges and to create a consensus among them, the Chief Justice formed 9 benches for the judicial week starting from 10 April. The judges who wrote the dissenting notes in the suo motu case of Punjab election have been added to the bench headed by Chief Justice. ... *According to legal experts, the proposal to appoint the highest judges through a parliamentary committee is to invite a new confrontation between the legislature and the judiciary. They say that the government does not have the required majority for the constitutional amendment.* However, if there is a consensus on this issue between the government and the opposition, it can be approved. But agreement between the

¹⁷ <https://e.jang.com.pk/detail/417314%22>

government and the opposition seems impossible in the current situation. *The series of steps taken by the Supreme Court Chief Justice to resolve the differences among the judges is definitely a positive step. The steps taken by the government and the ruling political coalition are defensive in nature. The need of the hour is that the opposition should change its attitude in this matter and create an atmosphere of understanding through which the country can come out of crises.* Pakistan is facing a serious economic crisis. If political, constitutional and judicial crises also occur, the problems of the people would increase further. The government would suffer more problems. Therefore, political leaders and institutions would have to play their role to overcome this difficult situation.

Positive progress on the Pak-Iran gas pipeline project, Editorial, Roznama92 News, 18 April¹⁸

Positive signals have started coming in Pakistan regarding China's mediation and the restoration of Saudi Arabia-Iran relations. In this context, dynamic and aggressive diplomacy has been started on the Pak-Iran gas pipeline project. The gas pipeline project between Iran and Pakistan was signed in 2010. Under the agreement, the 781-km-long gas pipeline was to be completed by Pakistan in 2014. The condition was that if Pakistan did not lay its share of the pipeline by the end of 2014, it would have to pay a daily compensation of one million dollars by the end of 2014. In 2011, Iran announced that it had completed its share of the pipeline. During a meeting of the Public Accounts Committee, the Petroleum Secretary informed the committee that if Pakistan did not fulfil the commitments made regarding the IP deal, Iran could potentially impose a fine of \$ 18 billion on Pakistan and contact the relevant international agencies for this. Therefore, Pakistan should complete this project by taking advantage of the favorable environment to avoid penalties and meet its energy needs. At this time Saudi Arabia will not be angry nor there any other problems, so it should complete the important project.

China to invest energy sector, Editorial, Jang, 28 April¹⁹

For China Pakistan is an important strategic partner in the region. One example of that is China's billion-dollar project China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), which is an important milestone in promoting Pakistan's economic development. Projects under the CPEC include upgrading the Gwadar port, energy, communication systems and industrial zones and work on these projects is going on fast. The construction of energy projects has

¹⁸https://www.roznama92news.com/efrontend/web/index.php/?station_id=2&page_id=7&is_common=Y&xdate=2023-04-18

¹⁹ <https://e.jang.com.pk/detail/428696%22>

accelerated since the launch of CPEC in Pakistan. Under the CPEC, China has invested \$21 billion in Pakistan in various sectors like energy, which includes the electricity of a power house in Gwadar which runs on coal. According to the available data, Pakistan's annual energy import bill is \$27 billion and it urgently needs to develop alternative domestic sources of energy including solar, wind, hydel and nuclear to overcome the alarming current account deficit. *The government is thinking to gradually shift the country's coal-fired power plants to Thar coal, so that to end dependence on expensive imported coal. Chinese investment in the energy sector under CPEC can be termed as a gift for Pakistan.* China is also playing its role to solve Pakistan's financial crisis. In these times of serious economic and financial crisis, China's contribution to Pakistan, which is almost equal to the IMF installment, is proof of China's selfless friendship with Islamabad.

ELECTRONIC MEDIA

Chairman PTI Imran Khan's Exclusive Interview, News Edge, GNN, 02 April²⁰

The host informed that it has been one year since Imran Khan was removed from power through a non-confidence movement by the opposition/PDM. Since then she underlined that Pakistan is in a continuous political and economic turmoil and that street support for the PTI chief has increased manifold. The Supreme Court (SC) of Pakistan she underlined is also divided on many issue for the moment. She questioned why is the SC which is the supreme power divided, will it solve the issues? Will there be elections in ninety days? **Guest:** Imran Khan, Former Prime Minister & PTI Chairman. **Q:** *It's been one year of the political and economic turmoil in the country and now there is a new one and the government is trying to remove the chief Justice of Pakistan. In this scenario will there be elections?* **A:** The Government is making hundred mistakes to cover one. Our government was brought down according to a propaganda. In our power there was industrial growth and economic growth, wealth was created. Now from our reverse engineering technique it is clear that General Qamar Bajwa was making plans to bring down our government from a long time and how Hussain Haqqani was brought and made a part of that plan before nine months. This was done all because Bajwa wanted to extend his term and with Shehbaz Sharif there was an understanding that he will get an extension. But they forgot that the public will stand with the PTI and beat them at their own game. **Q:** *Was it only about extension and if so what was the role of US in all these?* **A:** First of all it is a lie that I offered lifetime extension to General Bajwa. Bajwa wanted to weaken the PTI. The truth

²⁰ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jb2y-Kxd6Pg>

is there were two meetings with Bajwa after I lost power and the only thing which I told him is that there should be elections and that there is no other. We also informed that if they destabilize the country there will be an economic crisis. Even now they are behind our social media which we are using as a platform, rest we are banned from all other media. Our social media handlers are kidnapped. **Q: Do you see elections happening in KP and Punjab and general elections?** **A:** Imran Khan asked elections why there will be no elections). He underlined that according to the constitution of Pakistan there should be elections in ninety days after the dissolution of provincial assemblies. How can they extend ninety days, they cannot go beyond ninety days. There was a survey in Punjab which clearly show that PTI is winning and they know that PTI cannot be beaten at the game of elections that is why they are scared. What is PDM, it is association for their individual benefits. I have 15 cases per day and this is not even stamped on hardened criminals. There are terrorism charges too but this is just conspiracy. But the point is that they all have old cases proved under *Panama*. *If we want to save Pakistan there should be rule of law. Bajwa thinks that Shehbaz Sharif was a genius and therefore he removed me.*

SC declaring ECP decision to hold elections on 8 October null & void give, On the Front with Kamran Shahid, *Dunya News*, 04 April²¹

In what has been billed as a verdict that buried the so-called doctrine of necessity, the Supreme Court declared the decision of the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) to delay the vote in Punjab until October 8 as never to have existed and against the Constitution by reviving the election schedule, Restoring the election schedule issued by the tribunal on March 8 with some modifications, the unanimous verdict by a three-judge bench — headed by Chief Justice Umar Ata Bandial and consisting of justices Ijaz ul-Ahsan and Munib Akhtar — then set May 14 as the new date for the election in Pakistan's most populous province-Punjab. The host underlined that both the opposition and PDM has made the SC controversial. He also added that the chances of elections in Punjab is fifty-fifty on the fresh dates announced by the SC. In this episode Kumaran Shahid asked, how much of it is possible on the ground. What about the KP elections? **Guests:** Justice (R) Shahid Usmani; Musadik Malik-PML-N & Sadaqat Ali Abbasi-PTI. **Shahid Usmani** pointed out that once the court gives any decisions it becomes public property, whether you accept it or not. If the directions are not followed the court can use contempt of court. *There is a conditional order with the decision that the ECP should also provide security for the elections and if the government do not provide they can come back to the court.* The defence ministry should look into the security for the elections and the defence has the

²¹ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1qJnEvkdd1g>

right to deny or accept the offer. The Ministry of defence can say that their resources are involved and over stretched on the borders, in this case they cannot send the ministry of defence to jail. The government cannot deny that they do not have the money to conduct elections, they really has to prove that they do not have money in actual sense. It is normally not the work of the SC to pass order for elections in any province. **Musadiq Malik** pointed out that we have rejected the new dates of elections in Punjab announced by the SC. This whole case will now come in the Parliament and now they will decide on the issue. The court can't make laws, it is the job of the Parliament to debate and then come on any decision. After the decision, a six member bench was formed that announced the decision of Justice Faiz Isa null and void. There will be discussions in Parliament and national assemblies. **Sadaqat Ali Abbasi** pointed out that it is a great decision by the SC and the court should be given all the respect for this decision. He added that it is as a rule that the elections should be conducted within ninety days and the court has proved this fact and gave decision in sync with the constitution. The security is a neutral and will aid in conducting the elections.

Jirga with Saleem Safi, Exclusive Interview: Siraj Ul Haq (Chief of Jamaat-e-Islami), Geo News, 09 April²²

The host pointed out that one party that has managed to keep away from the politics of the country, keeping a safe distance from both the government and opposition is Jamaat-e-Islami. In this episode Safi interviews the chief of Jamaat-e-Islami, Siraj Ul Haq about his views on the current politics of the country and what he thinks of the government and opposition at this point of time. *Some important Q & A's are as follows: Q: You are not taking any sides, government neither opposition so what is your view on the current political crisis? A: The issue of the common public is the price of wheat that is 160 rupees in Peshawar and the price of all essential commodities are increasing every day. Today the issues that are discussed are more suitable to TV screen but it is not the issue of the public on the streets. People have lost the power to buy essential commodities, and people are dying chasing trucks delivering wheat. Adalat and parliament issues are of the powerful and VIPs. Q: What is your service to these needy people? In 2018 was it election or Selection? A: We are trying to serve the poor through our trust Al Kidmat in these three years. But we are not in power and if they cannot serve the country they should hand over the control to us. Imran Khan use to visit ISI office daily to get power but now that the army and agency is not supporting him, he is all guns blazing against the army. In 2018 it was not election but selection. Now the army is regretting its decision to bring Imran Khan*

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

in power and the public is suffering due to the *hybrid regime*. **Q: What you think about the external hand in Pakistani Politics (e.g. US)?** A: There is no difference between the PDM and PTI if you talk about the policies of both parties. When Imran Khan was out of power, he brought the issue of the external forces. The truth is that Imran Khan and US are same on all the agenda's (IMF, Transgender etc.) and there is no scope of any difference. No one should interfere in the business of Pakistan be it Zalmay Khalilzad or any other personality. Jamaat-e-Islami has never took part officially in any government, in KP people showed trust in us. **Q: What about Mutahida Majilis Amal (MMA)?** A: If Maulana Fazl wanted to be part of the association, we made it clear that he should not be part of any government like PDM and PML-N because he was the head of MMA. Currently Maulana Fazl is the Imam of PML-N and PPP and head of PDM. This time he underlined that *Jamaat-e-Islami* will fight the elections with its own symbol and alone.

Off the Record with Kashif Abbasi, Dialogue between parties is the only way to break the political deadlock? ARY News, 17 April²³

The State Bank of Pakistan has allocated Rs. 21 billion for elections to Punjab and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa assemblies on Supreme Court's order and sought finance ministry's nod to release the amount. An approval of government is required to release the amount from the Federal Consolidated Fund (FCF) while the government has to get National Assembly's approval for its release. However the PDM government/Parliament has stopped the transaction and transfer of money. It has to be noted that the Supreme Court (SC) has also fixed 14 May for elections in Punjab. The host if the government does not obey the orders of the SC what will be the result? Will the efforts by Jamaat-e-Islami to break talks between the opposition and government work? **Guests:** Siraj-ul-Haq (Chief of Jamaat-e-Islami), Faisal Karim Kundi-PPP & Usman Dar-PTI. Siraj-ul-Haq pointed out that when there is crisis in the country it is our duty to mediate and bring the warring parties together. That is why our party Jamaat-e-Islami has intervened and trying to break talks between the opposition and government. He underlined that his party want a peaceful election in the country and bring the crisis to an end. He added all parties should take two steps back and come to the table for dialogues. He underlined that both Imran Khan and Shehbaz Sharif want to resolve the issue and find a middle path. **Faisal Karim Kundi** pointed out that there is a need for political forces to have dialogue. Our core committee and leadership sat and decided that there is no alternative but talks and we will bring our partners like PML-N and Maulana Fazl Ur Rehman's party on table for talks. Political parties should sit together, and go to elections as soon as possible to break the deadlock). The PPP has formed

²³ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WTl6DkYIn-k>

a three bench committee in order to talk with all parties and request all parties to come on the dialogue table. Imran Khan should not be arrested on the basis of political motivation or there should not be politically motivated arrest. *Usman Dar* pointed out that it looks like PTI has to come on the roads to demand elections. The Supreme Court of Pakistan should try to restore the rule of law and make sure that ECP conduct elections on time. He also pointed out that even if PTI want to come back to Parliament, the PDM will not allow it. It is such a shame that in Pakistan the Parliament is running away from elections and on top of it stopping the transfer of money from State Bank for elections in Punjab and KP.

Off the Record with Kashif Abbasi, Parliament will have the final say regarding the initiation of talks with the PTI, ARY News, 26 April²⁴

Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif reiterated that simultaneous elections will take place in October or November after the current National Assembly completes its term on August 13, whereas parliament will have the final say regarding the initiation of talks with the PTI. Bilawal Bhutto also gave a powerful speech criticizing the PTI and stated that there cannot be elections in ninety days. The host added if someone in PPP disagrees with his state, the person will be kicked out of the party. There will be no talks, no elections and they will not implement the orders of the Supreme Court (SC). What is the future? Will there be elections on time? *Guests:* Shah Mehmood Qureshi PTI & Irfan Qadir (SA PM on Legal Reforms). *Shah Mehmood Qureshi* informed that I am surprised on the speeches made in the parliament especially Bilawal Bhutto. The government has once again attacked the institute of Supreme Court through the Parliament sitting and it is a shame that he labelled SC as part of PTI's Tiger Force. They have taken a new step towards undermining the constitution and democracy. The view of sound minded leaders within PPP are sidelined. There is no attempt to talk with PTI, I am the representative from PTI and no approached us for talks and the PDM does not want to either go for elections. If the PPP does not agree with the judges, it has to be made clear that PTI will stand with the constitution. The judges are attacked and they are reminded that they can be de-notified any time from the government. If there is no elections then what about the caretaker governments in Punjab and KP, there term is over. *Irfan Qadir* informed that he only will clarify on the legal position of the government and there can be disqualification of judges including the chief Justice with reference to executive order. There is a need to re visit the orders and correct it.

²⁴ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=22q0OZa3gek>

BOMBINGS, SHOOTINGS AND DISAPPEARANCES

(Select incidents culled out from the Pakistan media)

| Place | Date | Description | Killed | Injured |
|---------------------------|------------|---|--------|---------|
| Khyber Pakhtunkhwa | | | | |
| Kohat ²⁵ | 03/04/2023 | Two police officials martyred in Kohat | 02 | 00 |
| Peshawar ²⁶ | 04/04/2023 | Killed 4 Pakistani security men last night: TTP | 04 | 00 |
| Swabi ²⁷ | 08/04/2023 | ASI martyred in Swabi grenade attack | 01 | 02 |
| Bara ²⁸ | 08/04/2023 | Two soldiers martyred in Khyber IED blast | 02 | 00 |
| Balochistan | | | | |
| Kech ²⁹ | 01/04/2023 | 4 soldiers martyred in terrorist attack along Pak-Iran border in Balochistan's Kech: ISPR | 04 | 00 |
| Quetta ³⁰ | 10/04/2023 | Deadly blasts target police officials in Pakistan's Quetta | 04 | 22 |

²⁵https://www.app.com.pk/domestic/two-police-officials-martyred-in-kohat/?__cf_chl_tk=XGDsMG.HIHdgQ1UEhXrLT6Z_G86XbAzDmri2WbZNiss-1682937378-0-gaNycGzNC-U

²⁶ <https://newsvibesofindia.com/killed-4-pakistani-security-men-last-night-ttp/>

²⁷ <https://tribune.com.pk/story/2410485/asi-martyred-in-swabi-grenade-attack>

²⁸ <https://tribune.com.pk/story/2410709/two-soldiers-martyred-in-khyber-ied-blast>

²⁹ <https://www.dawn.com/news/1745363>

³⁰ <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/4/10/deadly-blast-hits-police-vehicle-in-pakistans-quetta-official>