

This E-Bulletin focuses on major developments in Pakistan on a weekly basis and brings them to the notice of strategic analysts and policy makers in India.

EDITOR'S NOTE

The political landscape of Barelvi politics is undergoing a change in Pakistan. In the future it may lead to more violence among different groups within the Sunni sect. The mainstream political parties are facing a crisis. Though the PML-N - which defeated a resolution in the National Assembly against Nawaz Sharif for being elected as the party president - is also facing internal crisis as many of the top leaders are accused of corruption. The Pakistan People's Party is also not showing any signs of political revival after its embarrassing election defeat in 2013. The PTI may not be in a position to pull in an election victory on its own in the next election. Therefore, the emergence of smaller radical religious political parties like the Milli Muslim League and Tehreek-e-Labaik Ya Rasool Allah are significant.

COMMENTARY

Rise of Barelvi Politics in Pakistan: from Street to Mainstream Politics

*Yaqoob ul Hassan**

Barelvi Islam, a creed of a Chishtiyya school of Sufi order was established by Ahmad Raza Khan from Bareilly (1856-1921). Ahmad Raza laid the foundation of the Ahl-e-Sunnat movement in the sub-continent. Ahmad Raza Khan repudiated the Deobandis and Ahle Hadiths for their stances on shrines. He also compiled a book of fatwas (decrees) titled as *Hussam ul Haramain* against Deobandi and Ahle Hadiths, terming them infidels and Wahabis. Ahl-e-Sunnat or Barelvi often

used interchangeably supported Pakistan movement whereas Deobandi and Jamaat-e-Islami opposed the creation of Pakistan. Since then Barelvi's have almost remained apolitical in Pakistan. Most of the time in the history they supported state narratives. But things have changed abruptly over the years and Barelvi groups are now being active in politics. They found themselves under the onslaught from other sects of the Sunni Islam particularly from the militant Islamic groups that propagate Salafist ideology and consider shrines as *shriks*. Since the rise of Pakistani Taliban and its affiliates, Barelvi's and their shrines have come under attack. The other challenge Barelvi school of thought is facing is the emergence of the text centred approach. The young and educated generation get swayed by text based interpretation of the religion rather than an old shrine based practices which Barelvis' adhere and preach. The other problem Barelvi's face is the disunity within its ranks. They haven't succeeded in getting all the Barelvi groups under a united platform. Roughly there are more than 50 Barelvi organisations in Pakistan. There were times when they tried to come together particularly after the Nishtar Park episode in which more than 50 Barelvi scholars were killed after suicide bombers allegedly from LeJ ripped through a congregation of the 12th Rabiul Awwal at the Nishtar Park in April 2006. Although they again failed, but Barelvis as a community realised that they need a political formation to overcome the weaknesses and challenges.

However, 2015 was a turning point in the history of Barelvis in Pakistan whereby they felt it necessary to rely on the violent extremist rhetoric. The hanging of Mumtaz Qadri provide Barelvi's an opportunity to get united. The emergence of Tehreek -e-Labaik Ya Rasool Allah (TLYR) can be seen in that perspective also. TLYR

emerged after exploiting the popular sentiments that arose after the hanging of Mumtaz Qadri. A Barelvi follower, Mumtaz Qadri killed Salman Taseer, the former governor of Punjab over his suggestion to ‘modify’ the blasphemy law and his support for Asya Bibi who has been given a death sentence for committing blasphemy under section 295 C of penal code. TLYR was founded on August 2015 at Nishtar Park, Karachi, the same place where in 2006 the Barelvi leaders, who were addressing the congregation of the 12th Rabiul Awwal, were killed in a bomb blast allegedly masterminded by Lashkar-e-Jhangvi. Spearheaded by Khadim Hussain Rizvi, a handicapped cleric interestingly who is convicted under the 4th schedule of anti-terrorist law for his hate speeches and anti-state activities. The TLYR came from the Sunni Tehreek that too emerged from the Dawat-e-Islami which was established to counter the infamous Sipah-e-Sahaba in Karachi. The Sunni Tehreek was also propped by many western actors particularly from the US and UK in Pakistan to counterbalance the Deobandis and Taliban influence in Karachi. But Sunni Tehreek couldn’t succeed rather it failed to stop the attacks on shrines. The two recent developments vindicated that TLYR has emerged as a major political force in Pakistani polity.

A first sign of its political emergence was the NA-120 (Lahore) and NA-4 (Peshawar) by-elections held on September and October 2017 respectively. Although the ruling party PMLN reclaimed the NA-120 seat and the PTI’s margin of vote did increase as compared to 2013 general elections but it was the performance of two religious parties that brought them to limelight. In the by-elections, there were two independent candidates who were dependent on two known religious outfits and they collectively bagged 10.4 percent (12,952) of the votes. One of these two religious parties’ candidates, Azhar Hussain Rizvi, stood at third position with 7,130 votes. He is supported by the Labbaik Ya Rasulallah outfit that campaigned against the PML-N for ‘hanging Mumtaz Qadri.’ The other independent candidate was supported by the Milli Muslim League; founded and supported by the Jamaat ul Dawa of Hafiz Saeed. The takeaways from this elections were that TLYR backed candidate got support from the Barelvi dominated mosques which are 100 plus in that constituency. The other factor that played an equally important role was the TLYR’s leader Khadim Hussain Rizvi’s campaign against his opponents particularly against Nawaz Sharif for hanging Mumtaz Qadri. In comparison PMLN, PTI

and Milli Muslim League, TLYR did tremendously well in spite of lack of resources to mobilise people compared to others and most importantly, unlike others, it did not have the women workforce to coax female voters to vote for it. Otherwise its tally might have improved further.

The TLYR’s Muhammad Shafiq Amini grabbed 9934 votes in NA-4 seat. The TLYR backed candidate fared better than the JI and its vote margin was almost close to that of the PPP candidate. The outcome of the results did give a moral boost to the TLYR. They realised the importance of the political rhetoric’s embedded with religious idioms, hate speeches and threats to those who against their religious belief.

The second phenomena was the Faizabad Chowk sit-in that forced the government to capitulate humiliatingly before an enraged TLYR led mob who were protesting against what they call alleged attempt by PMLN government to change the law pertaining the finality of Prophet. In a face saving attempt the government reached an understanding and accepted all their demands that includes the resignation of the law minister, Zahid Hamid. Most importantly, the government agreed to the removal of Rizvi’s name from the 4th schedule.

Be this capitulation of the civilian government or orchestration from the military establishment, Rizvi will reap the political benefits for his successful *dharna*. What Pakistan Tehreek Insaaf (PTI) and Pakistan Awami Tehreek (PAT) couldn’t achieve in their long sit-in, Rizvi succeeded in just 20 days. He returned as a hero and gave a hope to his Barelvi community that their dream of political power can be realised. After successfully capitalising on Qadri’s execution and it has now emerged as the protector of Prophet’s honour and dignity (Namoos-e-Risalat). Rizvi is likely to create a dent on the vote banks of the mainstream parties. Only time will say, whether Rizvi led TLYR can translate this success into a political victory in the next general elections but nevertheless it has shown its ability to influence the core policies of the state. The rise of TLYR has intensified the already existing religio-political landscape in Pakistan. Thus TLYR would be a force to reckon with in the coming elections which is likely to be held in August 2018.

* Yaqoob ul Hassan is a Researcher at the South Asia Centre of the IDSA and member Pakistan Project.

THE WEEK AT A GLANCE

POLITICS

Pressure to evict protestors mounting: Ahsan

In a last-ditch effort to avoid a showdown, Interior Minister Ahsan Iqbal on Sunday made a passionate appeal to the protestors to end their sit-in as the deadline given by the court to clear the Faizabad Interchange has already passed. However, he made it clear that pressure to resolve the crisis is mounting. The minister warned that an operation could be launched against Tehreek Labbaik Ya Rasool Allah and Sunni Tehreek anytime as four rounds of talks with them had failed. Ahsan accused the two religious parties of launching negative propaganda on the social media and instigating the people. He warned that the government has showed patience until now and 'the well goes only this deep'.

<http://nation.com.pk/20-Nov-2017/pressure-to-evict-protesters-mounting-ahsan>

PML N defeats Nawaz-specific amendment to election law

The Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) on Tuesday put all speculations about a possible split within the party to rest when it defeated a Nawaz Sharif-specific opposition bill - seeking to restore the bar on a disqualified person from holding party office - in the National Assembly. NA Speaker Ayaz Sadiq announced the result of the 163-98 vote in a charged assembly hall, amid heavy sloganeering from both sides of the aisle. The only minor embarrassment for the ruling party was the defiance of former prime minister and government ally Zafarullah Khan Jamali, who openly voted with the opposition benches when the speaker ordered a headcount. The Muttahida Qaumi Movement (MQM) also voted with the opposition.

<https://www.dawn.com/news/1372077>

SC flays government's failure to end sit in

The Supreme Court lashed out at the government for its inability to end the Faizabad sit-in for over two weeks while rubbishing reports submitted by intelligence and security agencies. The court sought a complete report from all stakeholders by November 30. In its order, the bench, while praising the government's efforts to avoid

loss of life, also suggested that use of non-lethal force could be employed to clear the protestors. "Morally, we have imperceptibly crept to the lowest level of our understanding of Islam," said Justice Faez Isa, who along with Justice Mushir Alam was hearing the matter after they took notice earlier this week when a lawyer requested that he be excused from a case due to difficulty commuting between Rawalpindi and Islamabad.

<https://tribune.com.pk/story/1566101/1-faizabad-sit-sc-blames-government-not-taking-timely-action/>

Abbasi hopeful of PPP's help on delimitation bill

Prime Minister Shahid Khaqan Abbasi Thursday said that the government would try to pass the bill on delimitation of constituencies before the general elections in the Senate with the possible help of the Pakistan People's Party. Chairing a meeting of the federal cabinet here, Abbasi - quoted by a participant of the meeting - said the government was in contact with the other parties on the proposed bill. The participant of the meeting, a federal minister, told The Nation that the cabinet members supported Abbasi's bid to hold meeting with Pakistan People's Party leadership. PM Abbasi has asked opposition leader in the National Assembly Khurshid Shah to arrange his meeting with Asif Ali Zardari or Bilawal Bhutto Zardari to seek PPP's support for the bill on the delimitations in the Senate.

<http://nation.com.pk/24-Nov-2017/abbasi-hopeful-of-ppp-s-help-on-delimitations-bill>

Army called in after botched operation

The army was called in on Saturday to deal with the aftermath of a botched operation against protestors from religious parties that had all but paralysed the twin cities of Islamabad and Rawalpindi for over a fortnight. As many as six people were killed and hundreds wounded as law enforcement agencies finally acted under court orders to disperse protestors who had amassed at Faizabad Interchange. But the ill-planned action only added fuel to the demonstrators' fire and not only failed to dislodge them, but also fanned smaller protests in other parts of the country. Six killed, hundreds injured in clashes across Islamabad, Pindi o Protesters maintain hold on Faizabad o Action sparks countrywide protests, law minister's home attacked in Pasrur.

<https://www.dawn.com/news/1372930>

ECONOMY

PM sees gas surplus in Pakistan with start of second LNG terminal

Prime Minister Shahid Khaqan Abbasi inaugurated on Monday the second liquefied natural gas (LNG) terminal at Port Qasim, which was built by Pakistan GasPort Limited with an investment of \$500 million to pump gas into three LNG-based power plants in energy-starved Punjab. Addressing the inaugural ceremony, the prime minister declared that Pakistan would have surplus gas after the second terminal started processing gas on November 24. However, he said the surplus would be short-lived as gas demand from industries and other sectors was rising.

<https://tribune.com.pk/story/1563655/1-pm-says-first-lng-cargo-new-import-terminal-due-nov-24/>

Top cooperation body Okays CPEC long-term plan

The Joint Cooperation Committee (JCC) of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) approved on Tuesday the Long-Term Plan (LTP 2017-30) envisaging broad parameters for future cooperation, but could not conclude agreements on development projects and special economic/industrial zones. Informed sources said the Chinese delegation complained about the political instability in Pakistan that would negatively impact on the pace of CPEC progress. The two sides took almost four hours longer than the scheduled time to conclude the 7th JCC meeting as they struggled over acceptable phrases and language to sign off minutes of the meeting.

<https://www.dawn.com/news/1372079>

Pakistan borrows another \$500m from China

Pakistan has obtained yet another foreign commercial loan of \$500 million from the Industrial and Commercial Bank of China (ICBC), a move aimed at stopping official foreign currency reserves from slipping to dangerous levels. With the fresh foreign loan that Islamabad contracted on October 11, total foreign commercial borrowings in the first four months of this fiscal year have crossed \$1 billion, said sources in the Ministry of

Finance. The finance ministry had informed parliament in June this year that it would obtain \$1 billion as commercial loans during 2017-18 that will end in June next year. However, it has already breached the limit with eight months remaining.

<https://tribune.com.pk/story/1565845/2-pakistan-borrows-another-500m-china/>

Govt yet to revise failed trade policy

The government has yet to revise its Strategic Trade Policy Framework (STPF) that failed to enhance tumbling exports of the country. The government in June this year had decided to revise the STPF, which is failing to yield results. The three-year STPF was approved by the government last year. The framework aimed to expand exports to \$35 billion by 2018, improve export competitiveness, shift the economy from factor-driven to innovation-driven and increase the share in the regional trade. However, exports had continued to fall. The commerce ministry's officials said that they had completed the consultation process with the export associations.

<http://nation.com.pk/25-Nov-2017/govt-yet-to-revise-failed-trade-policy>

SECURITY

Fazl claims army defeated militants with JUI-F support

JUI-F chief Maulana Fazlur Rehman has said that army might not have won the war against terrorism easily without the support of his party. Speaking at Ulema Conference here on Monday, he said that elimination of the gun culture was essential for protection of the country. "Our security forces have won the war against terrorism but it might not have been easy without the support of JUI-F," he said, adding that like army, a large number of ulema, students and political workers also laid down their lives in that war. Federal Minister for Housing Akram Khan Durrani and other leaders of JUI-F also attended the conference.

<https://www.dawn.com/news/1371826>

Army Officer martyred in Dera Ismail Khan operation

An army major was martyred in an exchange of fire with militants affiliated with the banned Tehreek-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) during a search operation in the early hours of Wednesday morning. According to a police official, the army conducted a search operation along with the police on Mosazai Street of Kulachi tehsil on intelligence about the presence of terrorists in the area. A wanted militant, identified as Zahir Shah, was also reportedly present there. The encounter took place near Zahir Shah's house, he said. Terrorists opened fire and lobbed a hand-grenade at the security personnel which resulted in the martyrdom of Maj Ishaq, the official said, adding that the militants ran away after firing.

<https://www.dawn.com/news/1372341>

Terror bid foiled: five TTP militants arrested with explosive in Shabqadar

Police claimed on Thursday to have arrested five alleged militants of banned Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) from Shabqadar, Charsadda district of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (K-P), with heavy cache of explosive and ammunition. "The arrests have thwarted a major terror

bid," SHO Shabqadar Police Station Muhammad Arif told the media. Arif said the militants were planning an attack on vaccination teams during the on-going anti-polio drive in the area. Police displayed the recovered 40kg of explosive, seven mortar shells, three speaker magnets, two IEDs, 10 hand grenades, 13 detonators, and five remote control receivers with a 20-metre of cord from the spot.

<https://tribune.com.pk/story/1566760/1-terror-bid-foiled-five-ttp-militants-arrested-explosives-shabqadar/>

Senior K-P cop martyred in suicide attack

Additional Inspector General (AIG) of K-P Police Ashraf Noor and his guard Habibullah were martyred in a suicide bomb attack on his convoy in Hayatabad area of Peshawar on Friday morning. According to Rescue 1122 service, six other policemen suffered injuries in the explosion near Zarghooni Mosque. Peshawar police chief Tahir Khan told reporters that the suicide bomber rammed his motorcycle into the AIG's vehicle in the police convoy at the junction of Hayatabad Phase I and II.

<https://tribune.com.pk/story/1566938/1-aig-ashraf-noor-martyred-in-peshawar-suicide-blast/>

Editor: Dr Smruti S Pattanaik, Research Fellow & Coordinator, Pakistan Project

News compiled by: Nazir Ahmad Mir, Researcher & Member, Pakistan Project