

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

EDITOR'S NOTE

The campaign for NA-120 by-election and the victory of Kulsoom Nawaz dominated much of the debates and discussions in Pakistan media keeping in view the upcoming national assembly election in Pakistan scheduled early next year. The implications of proscribed groups' participation was also critically analysed in the media. At the foreign policy front, Pakistan and China discussed Free Trade Agreement that the two countries intend to conclude at the earliest. In spite of US concerns over Pakistan's alleged support to terrorism and its role in destabilizing Afghanistan, Pakistan and the US held bilateral discussions on how to forge close defence cooperation keeping their mutual interests in mind.

COMMENTARY

NA 120 By-election: What it means for Pakistan politics

*Smruti S Pattanaik **

The results of the by-election held in the National Assembly 120 seat, which Kulsoom Nawaz, wife of the deposed Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif won, did not come as a surprise to many who are watching the politics of Pakistan keenly. It was a predictable result. But there were three factors that are significant in this by-election and have implications for Pakistan politics.

The emergence of Mariyam Nawaz as an able successor to her father Nawaz Sharif in the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N). The manner in which she campaigned on behalf of her mother, who had, in the

past, played an important role in keeping the party's moral high when Sharif was dismissed from power and later jailed by the military government under Musharraf. Maryam's election speeches, on behalf of her mother, who was undergoing treatment in London for cancer, reflected her maturing political skills in taking on the powerful establishment and shifting the orientation of the political debate from corruption to derailment of democracy. She remained focused on how her father was removed from power— not because of corruption but due to a political conspiracy hatched by judiciary in collaboration with Pakistan Army to derail democracy. The Sharifs portrayed Kulsoom's victory as vindication of their innocence having suffered much ignominy after the panama verdict.

That Maryam's appeal resonated with the voters is borne out by the fact that electorate remained loyal to the family even though the margin of Kulsoom Nawaz's victory was low, which the party needs to ponder over. It needs to work hard to win the next election by showcasing the party's performance in reviving the economy rather than harping much on the challenges posed by invisible forces in cahoots with certain political forces. It is still in good health to take on the opposition on the home turf.

This election also brought out into open the rivalry between the two Sharif brothers. Shahbaz Sharif, the Chief Minister of Punjab, remained away from the election campaign along with his son Hamza who at one point of time was speculated to succeed Shahbaz in Lahore after Nawaz's dismissal.

It is being said that because of the differences within the family, Imran's PTI performed better than in the last election in a constituency regarded as the den of

the Sharifs. This has implications for the coming elections, in which, the party aspires to win comfortably as a viable alternative to the PML-N. The party improved its support base even though its nominee The PTI candidate, Dr Yasmeen Rashid, reduced the margin of her defeat by about 26,000 votes. In 2013 election, she was defeated by margin of 40,000 votes, but in this election she lost by 14,000 votes. In gross terms, she secured more votes than she did in the earlier elections despite the fact that the overall polling was mere 39 per cent this time, compared to over 50 per cent in 2013.

PTI has been trying to replace the PML-N in politics as an alternative political party having similar ideological stance. Like the PMNL-N, it has a centre-right political affinity, and at the moment, it appears to have the blessings of Pakistan's powerful military establishment. The crisis within the PPP and its inability to form a formidable opposition has created the necessary political space for PTI in Punjab and elsewhere, especially in the urban areas. One problem the PTI faces is that its rural base continues to be weak and needs an overhaul in terms of building its grassroots support-base. Though it has some leaders like Shah Mehmood Qureshi in its ranks, these leaders do not have much influence beyond their constituencies. After ousting Nawaz, the party is trying to have a new opposition leader in the Parliament. It is in talks with Altaf Hussain's Muttahida Quami Movement (MQM). However, PTI and MQM remain political archrivals in Karachi. Without forging a broad coalition with regional and sectional parties, which it does not show any sign of doing yet, it is unlikely for PTI to win the next election. But it has a growing support base in urban locales, and rumoured support from the 'umpire' that Imran alluded to during his *dharna* in 2014, which will add to the worries of PML-N in the next elections.

The re-emergence of radical right outfits in this election remains yet another important indicator of Pakistani politics. Candidates from two right wing groups—Tehreek-e-Labaik ya Rasool Allah (LYR), with Bareilvi persuasion and Milli Muslim League, with Ahl-e-Hadith orientation— finished third and fourth, together bagging about 11 per cent votes.

Azhar Husain Rizvi, backed by LYR, a coalition of Bareilvi Islamist groups led by Allama Khadim Hussain Rizvi who had the support of Jamiat ulema-i-Islam

Pakistan (JUIP) and the Sunni Ittehad Council (SIC) secured the third place with more than 7,000 votes. Its campaign defended blasphemy law and Islamic rule. It was the same group which had denounced Nawaz government for the hanging of Mumtaz Qadri— the official bodyguard of Salman Taseer, then governor of Punjab— who had killed Taseer for empathizing with an alleged blasphemer. Yaqoob Sheikh, supported by the Milli Muslim League (MML) – the political front for Jamaat ud Dawa and its sister organization Lashkar e Taiba, finished fourth with 5822 votes. The PPP was relegated to the fifth position with little more than 1400 votes.

The emergence of MML is being seen as army's effort to mainstream the militant groups and bring them into electoral politics after their activities provoked censure from the international community. Retaining and promoting India-focused Islamic militant groups in the political arena may be part of this new strategy. Fazlur Rahman Khalili's outfit Harkat-ul-Mujahideen is also being sought to be mainstreamed as a political outfit called Ansar ul-Umma. Though this party did not contest the by-election, this election only gave a rough idea about their support base. It is interesting that no action was taken against either LYR or MML despite the fact that the two independent candidates backed by these groups openly flaunted their connection to the proscribed groups.

The Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) was criticized for allowing these proscribed parties to contest election. The Commission defended its decision and clarified that it only allowed them as independent candidates and is waiting for the clearance from the Interior Ministry to register them as political parties. In the meanwhile, the Interior Ministry, after consulting the Foreign Ministry and intelligence agencies, has reportedly directed the ECP not to register these parties as political parties as it would have international implications and may affect Pakistan's drive against them as per the National Action Plan (NAP) and expressing the fear that it may lead to violent politics.

The mainstreaming of these forces was one of the sore points between Nawaz Sharif and Pakistan army when it was formally proposed in April 2016. Such mainstreaming would mean that India-Pakistan relations would continue to be controlled by the Pakistan Army

and its proxies. They are likely to infect the electoral campaigns with conservative ideas, which may force mainstream parties to backpedal on their progressive foreign policy and liberal political agenda. It is likely that with the strengthening of PTI and other religious affiliates who share close relationship with the establishment, Pakistan politics would move further right-ward in the coming days.

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THE WEEK AT A GLANCE

ECONOMY

China-Pakistan FTA talks conclude with ‘breakthrough’ in negotiations,

The eighth round of China-Pakistan Free Trade Agreement negotiations finally concluded on a positive note on Friday, as the breakthrough in talks ended a two-and-a-half year stalemate. The second phase of negotiation which began on Sept 14 in Beijing, was attended by co-chairman Mohammad Younus Dagher, Secretary Commerce, Pakistan and Wang Shouwen, Vice Minister for Commerce, China. Pakistan requested for meaningful market access and an end to the preference erosion of Pakistani exports in the meeting. During the rounds, Pakistan shared a list of 70 high-priority items of export interest, seeking immediate market access. The Chinese officials agreed to consider the request favourably. These tariff lines constitute more than 80% of Pakistan’s current exports to China. The Chinese delegation consisted of representatives of seven government ministries and departments. Ambassador of Pakistan to China Masood Khalid was also present during the negotiations.

<https://www.geo.tv/latest/158331-china-pakistan-fta-talks-conclude-with-breakthrough-in-negotiations>

Pakistan, US agree to boost trade ties

Pakistan will soon host Business opportunity Conference in collaboration with the United States to boost sector wise cooperation between business community of the two countries. This was agreed at a meeting between Commerce Minister Mohammad

Pervaiz Malik and United States Ambassador to Pakistan, Mr. David Hale in Islamabad on Tuesday. The Minister said that Pakistan and United States have cordial trade relations at trade between the two countries stand at 6 billion dollars during the last financial year. He said that Pakistan is also looking forward to further improve bilateral trade with Afghanistan and facilitate the transit trade between the two countries. The Minister said Pakistan is looking forward to holding the 7th meeting of Afghanistan-Pakistan Transit Trade Coordination Authority which was scheduled on 10th and 11th of this month but unilaterally postponed by the Afghan side. The Ambassador said that Pakistan is lucrative for investment and that U.S businesses are interested in investing in Pakistan. He further said that GSP is the key and Pakistan is making good use of it. Earlier, the European Union Ambassador to Pakistan Mr. Jean Francois Cautain called on Federal Minister for Commerce, Mohammad Pervaiz Malik. Matters of mutual interest were discussed in the meeting.

<http://www.radio.gov.pk/12-Sep-2017/pakistan-us-agree-to-boost-trade-ties>

POLITICS

Water dispute: Pakistan-India talks commence on Sep 14 under WB,

The delegations of Pakistan and India will meet in the United States to hold talks on the long-standing water dispute between the two countries. The Pakistani delegation, headed by Secretary Water Resources Division Arif Ahmed Khan, has left for the talks, which are to be held on September 14 and 15 under the supervision of the World Bank. According to sources, Pakistan will reiterate its reservations under the Indus Waters Treaty over the design change in the 330 MW Kishanganga Hydroelectric Plant being constructed at River Neelum by India, as well the design of the 850 MW Ratli Hydroelectric Plant being constructed on River Chenab. The Pakistani side will raise the objection that the design of these projects being constructed on Pakistan’s share of the rivers will obstruct water flow in the country’s rivers. India has also begun electricity projects including the 1,000 MW Pakal Dul, 120 MW Miyar and 48 MW Lower Kalnai projects on River Chenab’s tributaries. Pakistan will raise its reservations

over these projects too.

<https://www.geo.tv/latest/157871-water-dispute-pakistan-india-talks-to-commence-on-sep-14-under-wb>

Pakistan ejects int'l NGO from Kurram Agency

Pakistani authorities have asked the Doctors Without Borders (MSF) aid group to close its medical facilities in a militancy-wracked tribal district, the organisation said, as officials tighten controls on foreign NGOs working in the country. MSF said the government has refused to renew the permit required to continue its healthcare projects in Kurram district in the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (Fata) located in the restive northwest along the Afghan border. "MSF is saddened by the decision from the authorities responsible for NGOs working in Kurram Agency," Catherine Moody, the group's country representative, said in a statement released late Wednesday. The tribal districts are among the poorest areas in Pakistan, and are governed under a draconian legal system introduced by British colonial rulers more than a century ago. A senior government official in Kurram confirmed that MSF has been asked to stop working in the district after its permit expired. "They have been asked to stop working until their (permit) is renewed," the official told AFP Thursday, adding that authorities have been paying closer attention to foreign NGOs across the country, especially in tribal areas. The organisation said officials have not explained why their permit was refused in an area where it has been providing healthcare for 14 years. Although violence in Pakistan and its tribal districts has declined in recent years following a series of military offensives against insurgents, Kurram has remained a top target for militant groups.

<http://nation.com.pk/national/14-Sep-2017/pakistan-ejects-int-l-ngo-from-kurram-agency>

US officials visit Pakistan to advance defence cooperation

US Department of Defence's Joint Improvised-Threat Defeat Organisation (JIDO) Director Lieutenant General Michael Shields led a four-member delegation on a three-day visit to Pakistan during this week. This was General Shields' second visit to Pakistan as the JIDO director, said a press release here on Friday. During the

visit, the visiting general and the delegation met with Pakistan's Army's Chief of General Staff, the Director General of Military Operations, and officials from the Interior Ministry. General Shields also met with the chairman of the Pakistan Army's Counter Improvised Explosive Device Organisation (CIEDO) to discuss initiatives, training, and other areas of military cooperation between Pakistan and the US. General Shields also visited the Counter IED, Explosives, and Munitions School (CEMS) at the Military College of Engineering in Risalpur. On his visit to Risalpur, the commandant of the Military College of Engineering briefed the American delegation on their efforts to train soldiers to detect and neutralize IEDs and other emerging battlefield and operational threats. "I greatly appreciated the opportunity to meet Pakistani leaders to discuss our mutual efforts to combat the IED threat," General Shields said. "It is a complex issue that requires all of our collective efforts. I look forward to continuing our collaboration with Pakistan and with CIEDO." JIDO supports a variety of counter-IED bilateral engagements and training and provides support for the Pakistani Army's efforts to improve their counter-IED exploitation capabilities in Risalpur.

<https://www.pakistantoday.com.pk/2017/09/15/us-officials-visit-pakistan-to-advance-defence-cooperation/>

SC dismisses Sharif family, Dar's review petitions against Panama verdict,

The five-member bench of the Supreme Court dismissed all review pleas against the Panama case decision on Friday, after the petitioners' counsels wrapped up their arguments earlier. The review petitions had been filed by the Sharif family and Finance Minister Ishaq Dar against the Supreme Court's judgment in the Panama Papers case which had resulted in then premier Nawaz Sharif's disqualification and filing of monitored and time bound corruption cases against them. Reading out the short-order, Justice Asif Saeed Khosa, who headed the five-member bench, remarked that the court will share reasons for dismissal of the petitions later. Speaking to the media after the verdict, Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf leader Fawad Chaudhry said the court's decision is a victory for the nation. He criticised the government's attempts to have the Supreme Court's monitoring judge removed from overseeing the corruption cases against the Sharif family and Dar.

Similarly, Sheikh Rasheed said that until the Hudabiya Paper Mills case is probed, one cannot get to the London flats issue. The bench was headed by Justice Khosa and comprised Justice Gulzar Ahmed, Justice Ijazul Ahsan, Justice Sheikh Azmat Saeed and Justice Ejaz Afzal Khan — who along with the latter two headed the special implementation bench in the Panama case that oversaw the work of the Joint Investigation Team (JIT).

<https://www.geo.tv/latest/158187-sc-likely-to-conclude-bearing-panama-case-revieu-petitions-today>

Trilateral meeting of Pakistan, China, Afghanistan FMs likely this year

Foreign ministers of China, Pakistan and Afghanistan will hold their first trilateral talks within the year, Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi said Friday. Wang made the remarks during a press conference after a meeting with visiting Pakistani Foreign Minister Khawaja Asif, adding

that Pakistan and Afghanistan are important countries in the region and he hopes the two nations can work together to safeguard stability in the region. While, Pakistan has reiterated support for China's offer to host the first trilateral meeting of Foreign Ministers of Pakistan, China and Afghanistan later this year, focusing on strategic communication, practical cooperation, and security dialogue. Wang said that China attaches great importance to the relations with Pakistan and Afghanistan, and actively helps the two countries narrow differences and enhance mutual trust. It is also exploring opportunities to develop cooperation among the three countries, he added. Addressing a press conference along with his Pakistani counterpart, Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi said Pakistan's people, government and the armed forces rendered unprecedented sacrifices against terrorism.

<https://www.thenews.com.pk/latest/228704-Trilateral-meeting-of-Pakistan-China-Afghanistan-FMs-likely-this-year>

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