

15th Edition

Country Analysis Report

APRIL

1st -13th

SUMMARY

In the month of April, the Supreme Court of Pakistan ordered provincial elections to take place by May 14th, 2023, but Parliament rejected the decision. The International Monetary Fund also revised Pakistan's economic growth projection for the current fiscal year down to 0.5%. In response to rising militancy in Pakistan, Islamabad warned Kabul of potential military operations against anti-Pakistan elements in Afghanistan.

Additionally, Pakistan criticized India's decision to host a G20 Tourism Working Group meeting in Srinagar, a city located in the Indian-occupied Jammu and Kashmir territory. Pakistan called the decision "irresponsible" and expressed strong disapproval.

POLITICAL UPDATES

Political Polarization Over Elections:

The opposition party, Pakistan Tehreek-i-Insaf, has **termed** the government's one-year tenure, since the power transition in Islamabad in April 2022, as a "dark period". Meanwhile, the parliament has **rejected** the Supreme Court's order to hold polls; the heightened political polarization has engulfed the country and the state's organs due to a power struggle in Islamabad.

On April 4th, the highest court in the country ordered that provincial polls take place on **May 14**, as stipulated in the constitution, and deemed the delay in elections as "unconstitutional".

The government's political wrangling can be seen not only in their rejection of court orders but also in their recent motion to limit the powers of the chief justice. The highest court in the country had previously ordered the government to **release funds** worth 21 billion rupees to the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP). However, the government has **cited** the current economic situation as a reason for not being able to release the funds needed for provincial elections in Punjab and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.



Picture Source: Reuters

Overall, the **heightened** political polarization in the country has led to a tense and uncertain situation, with the government and opposition at odds on multiple issues. The upcoming provincial elections on May 14 will be a crucial test of the country's democratic institutions and their ability to navigate these challenging times.

Conflicting Views on Holding Unconditional Talks with the Opposition:

The Chairman of the Pakistan People's Party (PPP), Asif Ali Zardari, has **urged** the Prime Minister to hold unconditional talks with the opposition.

Zardari emphasized that unity is crucial during these times of economic and political uncertainty. However, the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) and Jamiat Ulema-i-Fazal (JUI-F) have **rejected** the idea, and conflicting views have also emerged within the PML-N on the matter.

Outrightly **rejecting talks** could be detrimental to the already unpleasant political environment, particularly at a time when opposition leader, Imran Khan has expressed a willingness to hold talks on issues related to national security and the economy.

Finding common ground by surrendering common interests and working towards a shared vision for the country's future should be a priority for all political actors, during the times when it is most needed.

Coalition Government Rejects Supreme Court Bench:

On 13th April, the coalition government in Islamabad, the Pakistan Democratic Movement (PDM), **rejected** the Supreme Court's bench that is set to hear petitions against pending legislation aimed at clipping the Chief Justice's powers. The PDM has called the bench "controversial" due to the like-minded judges on it, and has deemed it "unprecedented" and "unacceptable".

The legislation in question, titled the Supreme Court (Practices and Procedures) Bill 2023, seeks to limit the power of the Chief Justice to take suo moto actions in an individual capacity.

The bill had been **passed** by both houses of parliament, but was later sent back by the President, who stated that the proposed law is "beyond the competence of parliament".



Picture Source: ARY News

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENTS AND INDICATORS

A stampede occurred during the Ramzan rationing in Karachi, Pakistan's biggest city, which resulted in the death of 13 people who had [gathered to collect free Ramadan supplies](#). This tragic incident highlights the struggles of Pakistan, a country that is facing significant economic challenges.

With record-breaking inflation and soaring poverty rates, Pakistan is struggling to make ends meet. The inflation [rate has surged to 35%](#), which comes at a time when the country is hoping to receive an International Monetary Fund (IMF) bailout package to facilitate a much-needed turnaround.



Picture Source: Bakhtar News

International Monetary Fund Revised Economic Projection to Mere 0.5%:

The International Monetary Fund has revised its projections for Pakistan's economic growth rate down to a [mere 0.5% for the current fiscal year](#). The country's inflation has also surged past 27%, and the unemployment

rate has increased to 7%. This represents a clear deterioration of the economic fundamentals over the last six months, as the Fund had previously forecasted a gross domestic product growth rate of 3.5% in October of the previous year and 6% for the year 2022.

US Think Tank Warns of Risk of Default on Pakistan's Debt:

The United States Institute of Peace (USIP), a think tank based in the U.S., has warned that Pakistan may face the risk of defaulting on its debt. The institute [analyzed the situation](#) and noted that the country is facing significant challenges such as high inflation rates, political conflicts, and increasing terrorism.

These challenges have put Pakistan at risk of defaulting on its external debt obligations. The think tank emphasized that this risk of default could escalate the political turmoil that already exists in the country, further exacerbating the issue of surging terrorism in Pakistan.

Pakistan Premier Assures Efforts to Revive Economy:

As Pakistan Premier Shahbaz Sharif completes one year in office, [he assured the citizens](#) that his government is taking significant steps to revive the country's economy. However, the current government's tenure has been marred [by record inflation](#), raising concerns among economists that the economy is spiralling out of control.

The opposition parties in the country have also been critical of the government's performance in addressing the economic challenges faced by the people.

SECURITY AND RULE-OF-LAW SITUATION

Embassy of Sweden Closed in Islamabad Due to Security Concerns:

The Embassy of Sweden in Islamabad had been [closed indefinitely, citing security concerns](#) as the reason. A notice issued by the embassy explained that due to the present security situation in Islamabad, the embassy will not be open to visitors, and the Migration Section will not be processing any requests.

Moreover, it acknowledges that this will be inconvenient but highlights that the safety of its applicants and staff members is its top priority.

Pakistan Warns Afghanistan of Military Action Against Militant Hideouts:

Pakistan's Defense Minister, Khawaja Asif, has recently announced that Islamabad has warned the Afghan government that it will take military action against the hideouts of anti-Pakistan militant elements in Afghanistan if the Afghan Taliban fail to control the militants within their territory.

The minister further emphasized that Pakistan cannot tolerate this situation for an extended period and called for the matter to be resolved as promised by the Afghan Taliban.



Picture Source: The Nation

SOCIAL SECTOR INDICATORS AND DEVELOPMENTS

Concern over the Financial Crisis in Pakistani universities Registered:

The Federation of All Pakistan Universities Academic Staff Association (FAPUASA) has expressed serious concerns over the financial crisis being faced by universities across Pakistan. According to the FAPUASA Central President, Prof. Dr. Kalim Ullah Bareach, many universities are currently struggling with financial issues and are unable to pay the salaries of their faculty and staff members.

This has led to the closure of universities such as the University of Baluchistan, Quetta and the University of Peshawar, with several others expected to close. Moreover, the association has urged the federal government to increase the annual recurring and development budget to at least 500 billion rupees for universities in the federal government budget (2023-2024).

STATUS OF HUMAN RIGHTS

Two Members of Different Religious Groups Gunned Down in Separate Incidents:

In the last week of March, a member of the Sikh community named Dayal Singh was shot dead at his general store in Peshawar. The crime scene yielded 30 pistol shells, and the motive behind the murder is still unknown.

Singh is survived by his son and widow. Similarly, within 24 hours of Singh's murder, a member of the Christian community named Kashif Masih was gunned down by an unknown assailant at his home in Peshawar. Pakistan's Christian community makes up less than 2% of the population.

The persecution of minorities in Pakistan is not a new phenomenon. Although it is not clear if the crimes were committed on religious grounds, still it cannot be argued that Pakistan has a long way to go in ensuring the safety of its minorities.



FOREIGN RELATIONS

Indo-Pak:

India is all set to host the G20 Tourism Working Group meeting in Srinagar, a city in the territory of Indian-occupied Jammu and Kashmir, from May 22 to 24. However, Pakistan has [criticized and condemned](#) the decision, calling it "irresponsible" and expressing strong indignation over the choice of venue.

The disputed region of Kashmir has been a longstanding point of contention between India and Pakistan since their independence in 1947. The situation was further complicated after India's [revocation of Article 370](#) of the Indian Constitution, which had granted the region of Jammu and Kashmir a degree of autonomy, in an illegal move.



Picture Source: Al-Jazeera

Af-Pak:

Pakistan and Afghanistan are facing difficulties in [finding common ground](#) on how to address the issue of Tehreek-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP). Amidst this situation, the acting Foreign Minister of Afghanistan, Amir Khan Muttaqi, is reportedly planning to visit Pakistan. After the fall of Kabul, Pakistan had hoped for an improvement in the security situation in Pakistan. Unfortunately, the situation has only worsened, with the interim government failing to mediate between the banned group and Pakistan.

U.S-Pak:

On April 11th, Congressman Brad Sherman [wrote a letter](#) to Secretary of State Antony Blinken expressing concerns over alleged violations of democracy, human rights, and rule of law in Pakistan. Sherman urged Blinken to guide US policy towards a greater commitment to human rights and to use diplomatic channels to encourage Pakistani authorities to investigate and hold accountable those responsible for any abuses.

Meanwhile, as the agreement between Pakistan and the International Monetary Fund remained at a stalemate, on April 6th, Finance Minister Ishaq Dar [requested assistance from US Ambassador to Pakistan](#) Donald Bloom in facilitating the agreement during a meeting where both parties exchanged thoughts pertaining to matters of mutual interest.

RECOMMENDED READINGS

Pakistan tilts back to the West in a multipolar era, Published by Middle East Institute

Link:<https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/4/12/hrw-slams-pakistan-for-forcibly-evicting-thousands-of-farmers>

Pakistan is making a mistake in ignoring the U.S. for China, Published by AlJazeera

Link:https://www.aljazeera.com/opinions/2023/4/10/pakistan-is-making-a-mistake-in-ignoring-the-us-for-china?traffic_source=KeepReading

For Pakistan to prosper, it must invest in its children, Published by Dawn

Link:<https://www.dawn.com/news/1746219/for-pakistan-to-prosper-it-must-invest-in-its-children>

Ensuring Sovereign Default, Published by Dawn

Link: <https://www.dawn.com/news/1747717>