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COUNTRY ANALYSIS

REPORT



accountabilitylab PAKISTAN

SUMMARY

In the year 2023, Pakistan faced significant challenges, including political instability, economic recession, and increase in social and human rights abuses. In addition, the country had complex and sometimes strained relationships with its neighbors and other international actors. This report aims to provide a comprehensive overview of the political, security, economic, social, human rights, and foreign relations situation in Pakistan for the year 2023. It examines the major developments and challenges faced by the country in 2023, as well as the opportunities and threats that lie ahead. Through this analysis, the report hopes to shed light on the state of Pakistan for the year 2023 and its prospects for the future.

POLITICAL UPDATES

In 2023, Pakistan faced political turmoil marked by assembly dissolutions, court interventions over election schedules, and Imran Khan's arrest sparking widespread protests. Legal challenges plagued Khan, while Nawaz Sharif's return and parties' campaign strategies added to the political landscape. PTI witnessed an exodus and alleged victimization, while the Election Commission finalized preparations for the 2024 elections, implementing digital reforms.

Dissolution of Punjab And Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Assembly:

Since being removed as Prime Minister last April, PTI leader Imran Khan had been calling for early elections. According to Pakistan's constitution, new elections must take place within three months of the dissolution of a provincial legislature if the house is unable to establish an interim government. On January 12, the Chief Minister of Punjab, Chaudhry Pervaiz Elahi signed the summary for the dissolution of provincial legislature after he successfully secured the vote of confidence by retaining the magic number of 186.

Following the dissolution of the Punjab government, the process to install a caretaker government in Punjab was set in motion. Mohsin Naqvi was appointed as the caretaker Chief Minister of Punjab. PTI had rejected the appointment of caretaker chief minister and announced protests against the ECP decision in all metropolitan cities.

The Election Saga in Pakistani Politics:

In February 2023, after the dissolution of the provincial assemblies of Punjab and K-P, the top court took notice of the delay in the announcement of elections for these assemblies and took suo motu notice of the matter. In an unexpected turn of events, a panel of five judges from the Supreme Court resumed the hearing of the suo motu proceedings related to the delay in announcing the date, which is typically done by nine bench judges.

Amidst the controversial delay in announcing election dates by the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP), President Arif Alvi warned the ECP and Lahore High Court (LHC) also directed the ECP to immediately announce election dates for the provinces.

In March 2023, the Supreme Court directed the provincial assemblies to hold elections within 90 days. After the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) proposed holding elections in Punjab between April 30th and May 7th, Pakistan's President, Dr. Arif Alvi, directed that the elections in Punjab will be held on April 30th, 2023.

PTI issued a list of its candidates for then announced elections in Punjab and awarded 297 tickets for the much-anticipated elections to be held on May 14th. Meanwhile, the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) did not award any party tickets at all.

On March 28th, the government of Pakistan presented a bill in the national assembly, called the Supreme Court (Practice and Procedure) Act, 2023, aimed at curbing the powers of the Supreme Court, which, according to the then Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif, had created "political instability" in the country. The legislation was introduced after the Supreme Court initiated a suo motu notice of the Election Commission of Pakistan's delay in conducting provincial elections in Punjab. Under the constitution of Pakistan, elections take place naturally within 90 days of the dissolution of the government. Some legal experts welcomed the proposed amendments to limit the Supreme Court's powers, however, the termed the manner in which this new legislation was introduced as "questionable" and "problematic".

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

On April 4th, the highest court in the country ordered the provincial polls to take place on May 14, as stipulated in the constitution, and deemed the delay in elections as "unconstitutional". The government's political wrangling could be seen not only in their rejection of court orders but also in their follow up motion aimed at limiting the powers of the chief justice. The highest court in the country had previously ordered the government to release funds amounting 21 billion rupees to the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP).



However, the government cited the then economic situation as a reason for not being able to comply with the directions for provincial elections in Punjab and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.

On 27th April, after the parties sat together face to face in a bid to cease the stalemate, the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) party suggested dissolving the assemblies in May and conducting elections in July, along with proposing an amendment to excuse any delay in polls exceeding 90 days.

Both sides involved in the discussion agreed not to use the dialogue process as a means of delaying the decision.The political environment in Pakistan witnessed unprecedented turmoil in the first few days of May, fueled by a civil-military-judicial rift, due to which the 14th May polls were eventually canceled.

Former Prime Minister Imran Khan Arrested from Islamabad Court:

On May 9th, 2023, Imran Khan was arrested and was booked in more than 100 cases. Some of the labeled charges included terrorism, blasphemy, and corruption. After continuous failed attempts to arrest him in Lahore, he was arrested in the Al-Qadir Trust corruption case by the National Accountability Bureau (NAB). The allegations against him were that he and his wife, Bushra Bibi, received millions of dollars in bribes from a property tycoon through a charitable trust. The trust runs a university outside Islamabad that is devoted to Islamic teachings. This project was initiated by the former first lady, Bushra Watto.

After his arrest, clashes and riots broke out across the country. Khan's supporters blamed the Pakistan Army for his arrest. In major cities, including Islamabad, Lahore, and Peshawar, his supporters took to the streets. In response, police were deployed, and, at the state's request, the Pakistan Army was also deployed. The Pakistan Tehreek-i-Insaf (PTI) leadership denied involvement in violent clashes and said it believed in achieving its goals by remaining peaceful and adhering to the constitution.

PTI leaders were also arrested, including Khan's then close aides Asad Umar, Shah Mehmood Qureshi, Dr. Shireen Mazari, Maleeka Bokhari, and Fawad Chaudhry, under Section 3 of the Maintenance of Public Order (MPO).

Staunch and vocal supporters of PTI, journalist Imran Riaz Khan and Aftab Iqbal were also arrested. PTI workers across the country had also been arrested through a crackdown by thousands of numbers. In his address to the nation, the then Prime Minister, Shehbaz Sharif, called the PTI workers "terrorists" and affirmed that strict action would be taken against the "state's enemies".

On May 11, the Supreme Court ordered authorities to present Imran Khan before the three-member bench. The Supreme Court declared Imran Khan's arrest "illegal" and ordered him to be "immediately" released and sent to the Police Line Guest House.

Authorities were asked to present Imran Khan before the Islamabad High Court (IHC) on 12th May. PTI, which had been on a rampage and its protests had led to clashes with the police across the country, resulting in the death of several, welcomed the decision, with the government naturally discontent with the development.



Picture Source: Bloomberg

On May 12th, the IHC in its hearing stopped the authorities from arresting Imran Khan and gave him protective bail in any case, including undisclosed ones, filed against him anywhere in the country till May 15. A separate IHC bench granted him interim two-week bail in the Al Qadir Trust case. The government and coalition, Pakistan Democratic Movement (PDM), did not welcome the decision and in response announced a protest against the Supreme Court for "facilitating" Imran Khan.

Imran Khan accused the military of political wrangling and accused the establishment of his arrest. He repeatedly demanded for elections following the dissolution of the Punjab and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP) assemblies, which were to be held on May 14th.

Previously on March 1st, non-bailable arrest warrants were issued against Imran Khan in the Toshakhana case. Later, the Islamabad police, led by Superintendent of Police (SP) City, went to Zaman Park, Khan's residence in Lahore to enforce the warrant. The attempts to arrest Imran Khan turned violent when Khan's supporters resisted their leader's arrest. It was reported that during the clashes, PTI supporters threw stones at the law enforcement agencies while police retaliated with tear gas canisters.

During his absence from his Lahore residence, the police had gathered with heavy machinery and water cannons for a raid. Videos showed police using cranes to break through the main gate of Khan's house and baton-charging the PTI workers who resisted their entrance.

9th May is a Dark Chapter in History of Pakistan: ISPR:

The Inter-Services Public Relations (ISPR) in its press release termed 9th May a "black chapter" in the history of Pakistan further reiterating what unfolded on the day was something Pakistan had never witnessed before: the General Headquarters, Corps Commander Lahore House, and various military installations were attacked by angry PTI supporters. This all came after former Premier Imran Khan was arrested from the Islamabad High Court (IHC) while he was present at the court for a hearing of one of many cases registered against him.

Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) leader and former Prime Minister, Imran Khan, was banned from making speeches and appearing on media platforms following the vandalism of state institutions on May 9th. The Pakistan Electronic Media Regulatory Authority (PEMRA) issued directives to media channels, instructing them not to give airtime to individuals who promote hate speech.

On June 12th, Imran Khan said that he had no evidence against Major General Faisal Naseer or the Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) regarding direct threats made against him, during the Joint Investigation Team (JIT) inquiry investigating his allegations against top military officials. However, he said that it was told to him by someone.

After the 9th May incident, several leaders of the Pakistan Tehreek-i-Insaf (PTI) announced their departure from the party and from politics altogether.Over 130 leaders resigned, which was prompted by the violent events that unfolded on May 9th in the country.



Picture Source: The News International

According to Imran Khan, the exodus was prompted due to "military pressure" and massive crackdown on PTI leaders. Prominent figures such as Shireen Mazari, Fawad Chaudhry, Asad Umar, and Maleeka Bokhari, who held senior positions within the PTI, are among those who bid farewell in response to the May 9th incidents of vandalism.

Imran Khan Jailed and Barred From Public Office:

Imran Khan, the former Prime Minister of Pakistan, had been arrested on August 5th and subsequently handed a three-year prison sentence in connection with a corruption case. The verdict also barred him from holding any political office for next five years.

The accusation against him revolves around the alleged illegal sale of state gifts, amounting to 140 million Pakistani rupees for personal profit. Khan denies any wrongdoing and maintains that the items were lawfully acquired from Toshakhana, a government-owned treasure repository.

His legal team argues that his trial lacked fairness and asserts that his conviction was driven by political motives.

Cipher Saga:

On August 9th, a news outlet based in the United States, known as The Intercept, released what it claims to be the contents of a confidential diplomatic cable, suggesting that the US administration wanted the removal of former Pakistani Prime Minister Imran Khan from power in the previous year.

According to Imran Khan, the contents of this communication indicated that the US collaborated with his political adversaries and the Pakistani military to orchestrate his removal through a vote of no confidence.

The Intercept news website published purported particulars of a discussion that took place between Pakistan's then-ambassador to the US, Asad Majeed, and Donald Lu, who held the position of Assistant Secretary of State for the Bureau of South and Central Asian Affairs, on March 7. 2022. As per the report, this conversation occurred shortly after Khan's visit to Moscow on February 24, which happened to be the same day Russia invaded Ukraine.

Lu is quoted as saying, "I think if a no-confidence vote against the prime minister succeeds, all will be forgiven in Washington because the Russia visit is being looked at as a decision by the prime minister. Otherwise, I think it will be tough going ahead." The details of this conversation were purportedly transmitted by Majeed to Islamabad through the diplomatic "cipher."

In response, the spokesperson for the US State Department, Matthew Miller, remarked that the statements reported by The Intercept do not indicate a definitive US stance on Pakistan's leadership. He added that the US had both publicly and privately expressed apprehensions concerning Khan's visit to Russia.

While the cipher may not substantiate Khan's claim of "regime change," it does shed light on the substantial power imbalance between the United States and Pakistan, as well as the consistent interference by the U.S. in Pakistan's domestic politics.

On September 28th, the Federal Investigation Agency (FIA) officially declared Imran Khan and Shah Mahmood Qureshi guilty in the cipher case. This revelation came as part of the investigation report submitted by the FIA to the Special Official Secrets Act court in Islamabad.

Caretaker Government Setup in Pakistan:

On August 9th, President Arif Alvi dissolved the tumultuous tenure of the Pakistan Democratic Movement (PDM) led government, following the advice of the then Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif. Sharif's government had come into power following a vote of no confidence in April 2022, which led to the removal of Imran Khan from the Prime Minister office.



Picture Source: Arab News

At this critical juncture, Pakistan found itself surrounded by political and economic turmoil. Anwar-ul-Haq Kakar, a former lawmaker, was appointed as Pakistan's eighth caretaker prime minister on August 14th. Kakar assumed the country's leadership during a period of a struggling economy and heightened polarization within the nation.

Pakistan's Democratic Woes:

On August 20th concerning Pakistan's democratic challenges unfolded with President Arif Alvi's announcement on 'X' platform, previously known as Twitter. President Alvi refused to endorse the Official Secrets Amendment Bill 2023 and the Pakistan Army Amen tumdment Bill 2023, stating his disagreement with these laws. Despite the bills having already received approval from both houses of parliament, President Alvi, a member of the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) party, stood against the coalition government that had passed these bills. He also_hinted that his staff might have acted against his directives, which has led to this situation. President Alvi expressed regret for the potential repercussions of his staff's actions.

As per Pakistan's constitution, if the president neither signs a draft bill nor returns it with objections within 10 days following its passage through both houses, the bill automatically becomes law.

President Alvi's disclosure raised suspicions of his signature being forged by one of his staff members. This revelation was seen as a setback for the influential military and had the potential to spark a new constitutional crisis.

The bills referenced in the President's statement criminalized the disclosure of information that could harm Pakistan's security or the interests of its armed forces. These bills also granted intelligence agencies the authority to conduct raids and detain civilians based on suspicions of legal violations. Critics, including the opposition PTI led by imprisoned ex-PM Imran Khan, swiftly opposed the respective laws, fearing they'd curb civil liberties and give more power to the military to stifle dissent in the name of national security.

Nawaz Sharif's Return to Pakistan's Politics:

In October 2023, former Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif returned to Pakistan after spending four years in the United Kingdom. He came back to participate in the upcoming elections to be held on February 8th. One of the primary issues the PML-N has encountered is the erosion of wider political support. This has been exacerbated by factors such as mounting inflation and internal divisions within the party. Additionally, the party's popularity has seen a gradual decline over the years. In the 1997 National Assembly election, it secured 59% of the popular vote in Punjab. This figure dropped to 47% in the 2013 election and further down to 35% in 2018.



Picture Source: Financial Times

In addition to these political challenges, Nawaz Sharif also faces legal issues. He is currently barred from holding public office, and he is involved in various legal cases, including those related to Avenfield, Al-Azizia, and Toshakhana. While he has received protective bail in some of these cases and relief in others, these legal challenges continue to loom over his political ambitions.

Uneven Grounds: PTI's Alleged Victimization and PML-N's and PPP's Election Campaigns:

As the 2024 general elections draw closer, Pakistan People's Party (PPP) Chairman Bilawal Bhutto Zardari unveiled his party's plan to alleviate the burden of inflation and provide relief to the citizens. PPP highlighted their commitment to ensuring employment and healthcare benefits, if PPP secures victory in the elections.

The Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) has intensified its nationwide election preparations, delegating campaign responsibilities to youth and minority communities. In a separate development, the PML-N and MQM-Pakistan jointly announced their participation in the 2024 general elections during a joint press conference. Moreover, during Nawaz Sharif's visit to Quetta before the upcoming general elections on February 8, Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) leader Nawaz Sharif successfully drew over 30 influential political leaders from Baluchistan to join his party.

While the PML-N, among other major parties, initiated its political campaign, Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) leader Imran Khan addressed Chief Justice of Pakistan (CJP) Justice Qazi Faez Isa on November 28th, seeking action against the alleged political victimization of his party, including abductions and disappearances of its workers.

In a detailed seven-page document, Imran emphasized the application of Article 184(3) of the Constitution, safeguarding fundamental rights such as liberty, association, assembly, and free speech related to political affiliation. He criticized the use of power to manipulate the political landscape, urging fair and unbiased media coverage for all political parties.

Imran highlighted instances of alleged maltreatment by authorities in Punjab, Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa, and Islamabad, expressing concern over the targeting and re-arresting of PTI workers through multiple criminal cases, demanding fair trials for them.

In a recent development, the Election Commission rejected nomination papers, including those of prominent figures like Imran Khan and Shah Mehmood Qureshi, totaling 54 PTI members. This followed PTI candidates' contestations of rejection by election tribunals, advancing the election process to its appellate stage.

Concerns about mishandling and alleged state machinery interference, exemplified by incidents like Munawar Gill's detention in Gujranwala before filing nomination papers, have escalated within the PTI.

Constituencies Finalized: ECP's Preparation for 2024 General Elections:

On November 30th, the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) finalized the constituencies for the upcoming 2024 general elections, comprising 266 National Assembly (NA) seats and 593 Provincial Assembly (PA) seats.

These boundaries were determined through the Digital Census conducted earlier in 2023. For the NA, the allocation stands at 266 general seats.

Moreover, amidst robust preparations for the forthcoming 2024 general elections, the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) initiated significant reforms, including the introduction of the Digital Information Lab and a policy for accrediting international observers through a digital information application.

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENTS AND INDICATORS

Pakistan grapples with a persistent economic crisis, struggling to meet external financial obligations and avoid default. High inflation and scant foreign reserves worsen the downturn. Despite incoming capital, mismanagement and corruption have drained reserves and escalated debt. While China and Saudi Arabia offered temporary financial aid, ongoing issues have triggered civil unrest, including fuel shortages and energy constraints. The grounding of of 400 flights by the Pakistan International Airlines' underscores economic struggles. Concerns have grown over Chinese loans, which experts believe have have significantly added to Pakistan's debt, making it a top recipient globally.

International Monetary Fund and Pakistan's Economic Conundrum:

Earlier in 2023, Pakistan's economic situation was fragile and facing the possibility of default, requiring bailout assistance from the International Monetary Fund (IMF). Talks between Pakistan and the IMF had resumed virtually, aiming to secure crucial funding. Despite previous negotiations between January 31st and February 9th, an agreement was not reached. To unlock a $1.1 billion tranche, Pakistan committed to increasing tax revenue by 170 billion rupees and eliminating circular debt as per IMF demands.

In July 2023, Pakistan averted a potential economic crisis with the help of a much-anticipated International Monetary Fund (IMF) bailout package.

The country, which had been facing its worst economic crisis since its inception in 1947, engaged in last-minute talks with the IMF to revise its budget before the existing bailout package expired. The global lender had agreed to provide Pakistan with a conditional loan of $3 billion, known as a Stand-By Arrangement (SBA). The deal was approved on July 12th. While experts believed that the agreement offered some relief to Pakistan's struggling economy, the country still needed to address its structural problems to avoid future default-like situations.



Picture Source: Profit by Pakistan Today

Since its inception, Pakistan has been relying on borrowing from bilateral and multilateral institutions to sustain its economy, and this approach has drawn criticism.

Nobel laureate economist Joseph Stiglitz argued that the conditions imposed on borrowers by the IMF, such as fiscal austerity and high interest rates, have often been counterproductive for developing nations and have had devastating effects on their local populations.

After one week of approving a $3 billion bailout package, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) acknowledged that Pakistan is facing "complex and multifaceted" economic challenges with "exceptionally high" risks due to internal and external shocks. These shocks include devastating floods that caused damages exceeding $30 billion, the ongoing war in Ukraine, and fiscal pressures.

In the first half of 2023, data reveals that approximately 832,000 Pakistani youth, including nearly 400,000 highly qualified individuals, departed the country in search of better financial prospects. This surge in emigration highlights a significant increase in the phenomenon of "brain drain" in Pakistan.

Historic Hike in the Commodity Prices and Taxes:

In the year 2023, Pakistan witnessed prices of common goods such as petrol and gas increased, and the Economic Coordination Committee (ECC) approved a 124% hike in gas tariffs from January to June in compliance with IMF conditions. Food prices had also risen alongside the increase in prices for everyday commodities such as petrol and gas. In February, Pakistan faced severe financial difficulties, with weekly inflation rates exceeding as high as 40 percent.



Picture Source: The Express Tribune

Budget Presented for The Fiscal Year 2023-24:

The budget for the fiscal year 2023-24 was guided by several key principles. It ensured that there would be no increase in duties on imports of essential items.

The budget also focused on trade facilitation and ease of doing business to create a favourable environment for investment. It also encouraged industrialization and investment, providing incentives to promote growth in this sector. The agriculture sector received special attention with incentives aimed at boosting productivity and modernization.



Picture Source: Geo Tv

The budget for the fiscal year had an outlay of approximately 14.5 trillion rupees. The largest allocation, amounting to Rs. 1,804 billion, was earmarked for defence, representing an increase of around 13 per cent compared to the revised allocation in the previous budget. Furthermore, Rs. 135 billion were allocated to the Higher Education Commission, and Rs. 13.10 billion were allocated to the Health Ministry.

The Federal Board of Revenue is estimated to collect Rs. 9,200 billion in revenue, with Rs. 5,276 billion allocated to the provinces, and federal non-tax revenues are expected to reach Rs. 2,963 billion. Additionally, Rs. 7,303 billion were allocated for interest payments.

Caretaker Government Granted Significant Economic Authority Ahead of General Elections:

Ahead of upcoming General Elections in Pakistan in February 2024, a joint session of the Parliament on July 26th approved amendments to the Election Act 2017. The amendment bestowed the caretaker government with unprecedented powers, enabling it to take actions and decisions concerning existing bilateral or multilateral agreements and projects.

Experts suggested that this amendment effectively vested the caretaker government with substantial economic authority.

Senator Ali Zafar emphasized that an interim government should not be granted authority that did not rightfully belong to them.

Their purpose was to maintain the functioning of the state and ensure a smooth electoral process, without overstepping their boundaries and assuming powers reserved for elected representatives.

Many commentators considered this move an effort to empower a caretaker government to exceed the legally mandated two to three months tenure.

Economic Performance of the PDM Coalition Government:

Analyzing the PDM coalition government's economic journey, a mix of challenges and strategies were witnessed. In the last fiscal year, the economy only grew by 0.3%. Inflation was a persistent issue during the PDM's rule.

Despite efforts to control it through import restrictions, inflation rose above 30% in the later part of their tenure, remaining above 20% in the PDM's tenure. Unfortunately, this economic challenge positioned Pakistan as the worst-performing Asian economy in terms of price control.

To tackle high inflation, the government increased interest rates multiple times. By August 2023, the interest rate had reached 22%, a significant increase from 12.25% in April 2022.A major focus for the PDM government was preventing a financial crisis.

In early 2023, the country's reserves dropped below $4 billion, but due to agreement with the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and financial support from Gulf countries, the situation improved, bringing the reserves back to a more stable level.

Summing up, the PDM coalition government faced a challenging path in stabilizing the economy. While striving to manage inflation and maintain financial stability, their strategies involved import restrictions, interest rate adjustments, and cooperative agreements to avoid economic crises.

The budget also focused on trade facilitation and ease of doing business to create a favourable environment for investment. It also encouraged industrialization and investment, providing incentives to promote growth in this sector. The agriculture sector received special attention with incentives aimed at boosting productivity and modernization.

Pakistan's Army Chief's Engagement with Business Leaders Amid Economic Challenges:

Pakistan's Army Chief Asim Munir, vowed to steer Pakistan from its current economic crisis and appeared confident in addressing the prevailing economic challenges.

In September 2023, General Munir convened a meeting with fifty businessmen from various regions of the country. However, critics raised concerns regarding this initiative, arguing that it fell outside the traditional mandate of the military, as the responsibility for economic governance primarily rested with political governments.

Following the meeting, the government launched a sweeping crackdown on individuals and groups involved in dollar smuggling, hoarding, and organized crime cartels, which caused significant economic losses.

As a result of the crackdown on foreign currency smugglers, the Pakistani currency had appreciated remarkably against the US dollar, leading to a notable reduction in gold prices. Tens of millions of dollars flowed back into Pakistan's interbank and open markets since raids on black market operators began.

Ahead of 2024 general elections, In October 2023, the federal caretaker government in Pakistan took a significant step to provide relief to the people amid a challenging economic crisis that persisted since mid-2022.

The federal caretaker government had made a significant reduction in petrol prices, cutting them by up to Rs40 per liter, which provided much-needed relief to the people who had borne the brunt of a challenging economic crisis since mid-2022.

SECURITY AND RULE OF LAW SITUATION

In the first half of 2023, Pakistan witnessed a concerning surge in terrorist incidents, as per a report by the Pakistan Institute for Conflict and Security Studies (PICSS). The data disclosed a significant escalation, with 271 militant attacks resulting in 389 deaths and 656 injuries. This starkly contrasts with the figures from the same period in 2022, which reported 151 attacks causing 293 fatalities and 487 injuries.



Picture Source: Pakistan Politico

This year-on-year increase signifies a remarkable 79% rise in militant attacks.Moreover, the comparison with the latter half of 2022, which registered 228 attacks leading to 246 deaths and 349 injuries, highlights an 18% surge in attacks during the first half of 2023. The increase in fatalities and injuries is particularly alarming, with a 58% rise in deaths and an 88% increase in injuries during this period.

The surge of terrorism in Pakistan has brought the country back to a state it was in a decade ago, undoing previous successes in combating terrorism, such as the defeat of the Tehreek-i-Taliban. In February 2023, Pakistan's former Prime Minister Imran Khan criticized the security forces and intelligence agencies for their perceived negligence leading to an increase in terrorism incidents in the country.

Persistent Threats to Security Apparatus in Pakistan:

In the month of June 2023, in its annual report, the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) highlighted the persistent threat posed by the Tehreek-i-Taliban (TTP) to Pakistan and the region. The 1988 sanctions committee monitoring Taliban highlighted the strong and symbiotic link between the Taliban, Al-Qaeda, and Tehreek-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP). It also mentioned that certain groups enjoy greater freedom of movement with the support of Taliban de facto authorities.

The year 2023 saw a surge in militant attacks, claiming about 500 civilian and 500 security force lives—the highest toll in six years, per a report by the Center for Research and Security Studies. Northwestern Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and southwestern Baluchistan bore the brunt of these attacks.

Pakistani police and military suffered their deadliest year in a decade, losing over 500 personnel to bombings and ambushes. Groups like Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan, Tehreek-e-Jihad Pakistan, Baluch insurgents, and Islamic State affiliates were linked to or claimed responsibility for the violence.

The military reported 265 officers and soldiers killed in nationwide militant attacks and counterinsurgency operations. In a chilling December incident, militants attacked a northwestern army base, resulting in the deaths of at least 23 soldiers—the worst attack in recent history.

In tragic incident, a suicide bomber targeted a political rally in northwestern Pakistan, resulting in the deaths of over 50 people and injuring nearly 200 others, as reported by officials.

These attacks on political rallies are deeply discouraging for democracy, particularly in a country where political processes have been inconsistent. Such violent incidents can further alienate people from political participation.

Pakistan's Counterterrorism Measures:

In 2023, Pakistan's security forces eliminated 566 terrorists in over 18,000 intelligence operations and apprehended 5,161 more.

Later in the year, Pakistan conducted Intelligence-Based Operations (IBOs) to deter security crises originating from Afghanistan. Additionally, to establish political consensus on the security challenges, all parties and stakeholders came together. However, due to the lack of political will, coupled with a volatile political and economic situation, the issues have only exacerbated.

These military actions unfolded against a backdrop of escalating tensions between Pakistan and the Afghan Taliban, with Islamabad accusing Kabul of failing to control the movement of armed groups across the border. The Taliban administration, in response, refuted these allegations, intensifying the strain between Kabul and Islamabad.

As Pakistan gears up for the upcoming general elections in February 2024, the nation's stability and its capacity to effectively address complex economic and security challenges depend on democratic processes. A cohesive and democratic transition, facilitated by collaboration between political and military leadership, is crucial to the country towards stable governance, enabling it to address critical issues on multiple fronts.

STATUS OF HUMAN RIGHTS

In 2023, several cases of human rights abuses surfaced in Pakistan, including: a private jail maintained by a landlord discovered in Baluchistan, churches attacked and damaged over alleged blasphemy charges, state-endorsed military trials of civilians initiated, and incidents of mistreatment of repatriated Afghan refugees.

Human rights organizations denounced arbitrary censorship, ill-treatment of Afghan refugees, and the Supreme Court addressed the military trials issue. Pakistan is rated "Partly Free" in Freedom House's 2023 report on global political rights and civil liberties, indicating a need for significant progress in ensuring civil, human, and political rights.

Human Rights Turmoil in Pakistan: Arbitrary Arrests, Party Dismantlement, and Controversial Military Court Trials:

On May 22nd, the former Prime Minister of Pakistan, Shehbaz Sharif, made a vow to prosecute supporters of Khan who allegedly stormed various military installations across the country in military courts. Military courts are typically reserved for trying military personnel and enemies of the state.

This announcement was met with domestic and international criticism, with calls to reconsider the decision to prosecute civilians under the Pakistan Army Act, which critics argued deprives citizens of their right to a fair trial.

A full-blown crackdown unfolded in Pakistan after the incident on May 9th. According to former Interior Minister Rana Sanaullah, approximately 5,000 of Khan's supporters were arrested, which human rights groups deemed arbitrary. However, the PTI claimed the figure to be between 12,000-15,000. The repeated arrests led to a distancing of many Pakistan Tehreek-i-Insaf (PTI) party members from the party, allegedly under pressure from the government. Iftikhar Durrani, a close aide to Khan, stated that it was a full-blown campaign to dismantle the party.



Picture Source: The Nation

On June 4th, former federal minister Hammad Azhar expressed distress in a tweet, revealing that his 84-year-old father, who had various health issues, had been taken from his home to an unknown location by the police.

Similarly, the previous month, PTI leader Usman Dar's house was raided, and it was alleged that the raiding team entered Dar's home and threatened his sister with the rape of their septuagenarian mother if Dar did not surrender to the police. During this time, PTI female workers also came forward and claimed that they had been threatened, harassed and beaten by the police in contact with the 9th May mayhem.

Furthermore, PTI leaders were arrested in cases related to the 9th May events, even after securing bail in the past. Dr Shireen Mazari, Maleeka Bokhari, and Ali Muhammad Khan were arrested by the Punjab police and Capital police, despite having obtained bails. Several First Information Reports (FIRs) were registered against them and many other leaders of PTI.



Picture Source: Arab News Pakistan

After the vandalism incident on May 9th, 33 suspects were handed over to the military courts in Pakistan for trial. The accused faced charges of attacking sensitive military installations, as well as damaging and stealing important equipment used for data collection.

They are being prosecuted under the Pakistan Army Act (PAA), 1952, and the Official Secrets Act, 1923, which allow for the trial of civilians in military courts in specific circumstances, such as inciting mutiny, espionage, and taking photographs of prohibited areas.

International human rights organizations, including Human Rights Watch, had called on Pakistan to ensure fair trials for these civilians and to adjudicate their cases in the civilian justice system.

In another unfortunate incident, Imran Riaz Khan, a Pakistani journalist and an ardent supporter of Imran Khan, had gone missing for nearly five months after being taken into custody, returned home in September .

Imran Riaz was apprehended by police at Sialkot airport in Punjab on May 11 while attempting to leave the country due to concerns about his potential arrest. Authorities had accused him of inciting violence through his reporting. In a video message released just before his arrest, the journalist explained that he was leaving Pakistan because he felt that the space for free speech was shrinking, and he was being silenced.

Critics have long accused Pakistani security agencies of intimidating and harassing journalists critical of the military's involvement in politics. Pakistan is frequently cited by global press freedom advocacy groups as an unsafe country for journalists. According to the U.S.-based Committee to Protect Journalists, at least 97 media workers and journalists have been killed in Pakistan since 1992, primarily due to their work. Unfortunately, investigations into these cases have failed to result in any convictions.

Churches Ravaged Over Blasphemy Charges:

In a deeply unfortunate incident on August 16th, an enraged mob attacked multiple churches in a Christian neighborhood within the Jaranwala tehsil of Faisalabad.

The mob was incensed over an alleged desecration of the Holy Quran. It is to be noted, Christianity is Pakistan's third largest religion with a total population percentage of over 2%. The constitution of Pakistan enshrines the rights of minorities with the promise of safeguarding their rights in article 36.



Picture Source: Reuters

In response, over 100 individuals involved in the vandalism had been arrested. Videos and messages shared on social media by local residents show that the mob was incited by loudspeaker announcements from mosques, accusing three Christians of desecrating religious scriptures.

Recognizing the gravity of the situation, the interim Punjab government initiated a thorough inquiry into the incident.

Blasphemy remains an extremely sensitive issue in Pakistan, and history has shown that mere accusations can quickly escalate into widespread violence.

The Centre for Social Justice, an independent group advocating for minority rights, compiled data on blasphemy cases in Pakistan. Their data reveals that since 1987, over 2,000 individuals have faced blasphemy accusations, tragically resulting in the deaths of at least 88 people based on these allegations.

Most often, such cases result in mob-driven justice. This is evident in the case of Asia Bibi, who spent 9 years in jail before being acquitted by the Supreme Court of Pakistan, as well as the tragic incident involving a young Christian couple set ablaze by an angry mob.

Another instance occurred in Sialkot, where a Sri Lankan factory manager lost his life due to a mere accusation, further highlighting the dangers of mob violence.

Afghan Refugees Repartition Raises Humanitarian Concerns:

For years, Afghan refugees sought shelter in Pakistan to escape conflict and the Taliban. Around 4.4 million Afghan refugees were in the country, with 1.7 million lacking valid documents. In October 2023, the caretaker Interior Minister, Sarfraz Bugti, stated there would be an implementation of expulsion of undocumented refugees and no extension for refugees to stay would be given.

Bugti assured that unregistered migrants wouldn't face mistreatment upon arrest; they'd receive necessary provisions until deportation. This sparked international concern, with the US and the UN urging reconsideration due to fears of injustices, human rights violations, and family separations.

The situation highlighted the immediate need to address humanitarian concerns, the legal status of displaced people, and the impact of repatriation policies.

SOCIAL SECTOR INDICATORS AND DEVELOPMENTS

Education Budget for the Fiscal Year 2023-24:

The government's allotment of Rs. 97.098 billion for Education Affairs and Services in the fiscal year 2023-24 budget sparked attention and criticism for its marginal increase of approximately 5.5 per cent compared to the revised allocation of the current fiscal year. Pakistan's expenditure on education, accounting for around 1.7 per cent of GDP in the fiscal year 2022-23, placed the country at the bottom of the regional rankings in terms of education funding. Experts and advocates for education have emphasized on the urgent need for more significant investment in the education sector to address the existing challenges and gaps in providing quality education.

A significant portion of the allocated funds, totalling Rs. 76.589 billion, had been specifically allocated for Tertiary Education Affairs and Services, making up approximately 79 per cent of the total allocation.

Furthermore, Rs. 4.468 billion has been designated for pre-primary and primary education affairs and Rs. 10.778 billion has been reserved for Secondary Education Affairs and Services.

Tragic Loss of Life: Pakistani Migrants Face Perilous Journey:

In a quest to reach safer shores, 300 Pakistanis who were illegally migrating to Europe lost their lives off the coast of Greece when the ferry carrying more than 700 people sank.

Every year, thousands of Pakistanis embark on this dangerous journey in search of a better life amid the record-high inflation in Pakistan, which reached upto 40% in 2023.

In 2022-23 alone, the brain drain situation accelerated in Pakistan as more than 800,000 Pakistanis left the country to pursue jobs overseas.



Picture Source: Business Recorder

An account of the events that transpired on the ship before it sank revealed that certain nationalities, particularly Pakistanis, were "condemned to the most dangerous part of the trawler" where they had minimal chances of survival.

"The testimonies suggest that women and children were effectively 'locked up' in the hold, ostensibly to be 'protected' by men on the overcrowded vessel," the Guardian report said. The report added that Pakistani nationals were mistreated "when they appeared in search of freshwater or tried to escape" from the hold.

Smog Crisis Response: Punjab Government's Emergency Measures:

Earlier in November, AirVisual reported a staggering concentration of tiny particulate matter in the air in Lahore, reaching nearly 450—a level 30 times higher than the World Health Organization's recommended maximum average daily exposure.



Picture Source: Al Jazeera

This level is considered hazardous, far exceeding both Pakistan's and the WHO's thresholds for safe air quality. In response to these hazardous smog conditions, the Punjab government declared a health emergency, leading to the closure of educational institutions, markets, and offices across eight districts in Punjab.

ENVIRONMENT AND CLIMATE CHANGE UPDATES

Pakistan, despite being a low-ranking carbon emitter, experiences disproportionate effects of climate change.



Picture Source: The News International

It ranks among the world's top ten most climate-vulnerable countries. Two major floods within a decade caused over $30 billion in damages, exacerbating the nation's climate challenges. Additionally, Pakistan faces significant obstacles in accessing climate financing.

Pakistan's vulnerability to climate change has increased in recent years, leading to more frequent and severe natural disasters such as floods and droughts. These disasters have caused a significant loss of life and property, and have reversed development gains in the country. The South Asia Climate Change Action Plan 2021-25 projects that the quality of life in Pakistan is set to decline by 4% to 5% by 2030.

In 2022-23 alone, the brain drain situation accelerated in Pakistan as more than 800,000 Pakistanis left the country to pursue jobs overseas.

Impact of Monsoon Flooding in Pakistan and International Support:

Earlier in 2023, the Chairman of the National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA) had issued a warning that there was a high probability of devastating floods in Pakistan in the year 2023.

In 2022, monsoons and floods devastated millions in Pakistan. In June 2023, devastation struck Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP) in Pakistan as torrential pre-monsoon rains and floods wreaked havoc. According to authorities from disaster management, in June, at least 25 people lost their lives, and hundreds were injured. Similarly, in Punjab, four deaths were reported due to rain-related incidents. The southern districts of Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa, faced the full force of powerful storms.

In July 2023, the River Indus at Taunsa, River Ravi at Sidhnai, and River Sutlej at Sulemanki experienced low flood levels. According to local officials, approximately 150 houses had been flooded. The flow of water in the River Sutlej measured 72,000 cusecs, which indicated a low-level flood.

Due to the continuous release of water by India, along with heavy rains, the water level at Head Islam was recorded at 52,000 cusecs. The overflowing flood water from Sulaimanki wreaked havoc in areas along the river bed, leading to the submersion of several settlements in low-lying regions, forcing residents to evacuate their homes along with their animals for safety.
The Sutlej River burst its banks on August 21, inundating several hundred villages and thousands of acres of land. Around 100,000 people were evacuated from the affected areas.
The floods caused widespread damage to homes, businesses, and infrastructure. Crops were ruined, and livestock were killed. The government had deployed rescue teams to help the affected people.

Earlier, the NDMA had issued a warning about possible inundation in low-lying areas and villages, flooding of crops along the River Sutlej, and overtopping of roads. Moreover, India also released more water into the river due to persistent rains in the catchment areas that exacerbated the crisis.

The monsoon season that started in June 2023 resulted in extensive flooding and landslides, causing significant human and infrastructural damage across multiple regions of Pakistan. The National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA) reported that heavy monsoon rains persisted from June 25 to August 5, leading to the unfortunate loss of 196 lives, with 283 individuals sustaining injuries.

Additionally, the flooding damaged 3,703 houses, particularly affecting Baluchistan and 2,320 houses, and caused the loss of 1,114 livestock across the country as of August 5.

In response to these challenges, Pakistan received substantial financial assistance. Out of the total pledged amount of $10.953 billion, the country has received $10.33 billion in loans and $550.4 million in grants from various countries, private donors, and international financial institutions. This support was committed during the Geneva donors conference held in January 2023.

However, experts believed that these funds should have been climate grants rather than loans. The effects of severe catastrophic 2022 monsoon flash floods are still haunting the affected population.

Approval of National Adaptation Plan 2023 to Bolster Climate Resilience and Protect Vulnerable Communities:

On July 26th, the federal cabinet of Pakistan gave its approval to the National Adaptation Plan 2023, a crucial initiative aimed at enhancing climate resilience and safeguarding communities vulnerable to the adverse effects of climate change.

The plan was recommended by the Ministry of Climate Change and will encompass the implementation of early warning systems and effective measures to cope with emergency situations.

Pakistan's Leadership in Global Climate Initiatives:

On June 22nd, Former Prime Minister Shahbaz Sharif traveled to Paris to participate in the Summit for a New Global Financial Pact.

The summit focused on presenting Pakistan's perspective and proposals for the reformation of international financial situations, climate finance, green infrastructure, achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), and addressing debt-related challenges.At the summit, the former prime minister expressed his concern over the disparity in resource allocation.

In December, Caretaker Prime Minister Anwaarul Haq Kakar introduced the groundbreaking "Recharge Pakistan" initiative at the COP28 summit in Dubai. This ambitious seven-year, $77.8 million effort aims to leverage nature to bolster Pakistan's climate change adaptation strategies.

Unveiled at Pakistan's pavilion during COP28, the initiative garnered support from various quarters, with $77.8 million in grants. Notably, the funding includes contributions of $66 million from the Global Climate Fund (GFC), $5 million each from USAID and The Coca-Cola Foundation, and $1.8 million from WWF.

Pakistan grapples with significant climate-related hurdles, potentially leading to catastrophic events like the 2022 year floods. The nation confronts dual challenges: limited access to climate finance and insufficient technical capabilities, hindering its pursuit of essential climate adaptation and mitigation objectives.

FOREIGN RELATIONS

Indo-Pak:

On May 3rd, former Foreign Minister Bilawal Bhutto Zardari visited Goa, India, to attend the meeting of the foreign ministers of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO). The SCO is a regional political and security bloc whose members include Russia, China, India, and Pakistan. Zardari's visit was the first by a senior Pakistani official to India in 12 years.



Picture Source: DAWN

According to Islamabad, the visit was not an attempt to mend ties with India, but an opportunity to ensure Pakistan's foreign policy interests with SCO members. In a press conference after the SCO meeting, Indian External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar criticized his Pakistani counterpart, calling him a "promoter, justifier, and spokesperson" of the "terror industry."

Jaishankar also responded to Pakistan's objection to hosting meetings in the Indian-occupied Kashmir, saying that Pakistan has "nothing to do " with Kashmir and that it "was, is, and will always be" part of India. In response, Bilawal Bhutto urged SCO members to refrain from "weaponizing terrorism for diplomatic point scoring" and said that he had made an attempt to dispel the "myth" and "false propaganda" of the Bhartiya Janata Party (BJP) that every Muslim is a terrorist.



Picture Source: Reuters

The diplomatic visit was far from resolving the 76-year-old conflict between India and Pakistan, but it was a step in the right direction.

It is vital for both countries to continue to engage with each other and to work towards a peaceful resolution of the conflict.

On 19th May, under the guise of normalcy in Indian Occupied Kashmir, the Indian government hosted a G-20 working group meeting. In response, Pakistan's former Foreign Minister, Bilawal Bhutto Zardari, launched a protest campaign in Pakistan Administered Kashmir, denouncing the move by calling it a "display of arrogance".

At the virtual Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) conference held on July 4th, Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi, who hosted the event as the President, reiterated India's allegations of cross-border terrorism without explicitly naming Pakistan. Modi called upon SCO members to condemn cross-border terrorism, emphasizing that failure to do so reflects double standards. It is believed that his remarks were directed at Chinese President Xi Jinping.

Additionally, Modi addressed concerns regarding the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), stating the need to respect the sovereignty and regional integrity of member countries when implementing connectivity projects. It is to be noted that India claims that a portion of the CPEC passes through a disputed region.

In August, China advocated for the expansion of the BRICS coalition to incorporate additional developing nations, including Pakistan. However, India swiftly voiced its opposition to this proposal, citing concerns that such an expansion could potentially dilute the core objectives and consensus that have been established among the existing BRICS member countries.

In November, Pakistan formally expressed its desire to become a member of BRICS, the alliance comprising five emerging economies, including rival India, alongside Brazil, Russia, China, and South Africa. Mumtaz Zahra Baloch, spokesperson for Pakistan's foreign ministry, highlighted BRICS as a crucial group of developing nations and disclosed Pakistan's formal request to join.

The move underscored BRICS' growing stature as a leading bloc in the Global South, challenging the dominance of the United States and its Western allies in key policy decisions.

However, historical tensions between Pakistan and India might pose challenges to Pakistan's entry, evidenced by a previous blockage of Pakistan's participation in a significant policy dialogue event at a BRICS summit.

Afghanistan-Pak:

In January 2023, Pakistan's former Defence Minister, Khawaja Asif, alleged that Afghan soil had been used to perpetuate cross border terrorism against Pakistan by the Tehrik-e Taliban Pakistan (TTP).

Kabul termed these allegations as "incorrect" and "regrettable". The remarks came after the National Security Committee (NSC) issued a statement stating that "no country will be allowed to provide sanctuaries to terrorists" and that terrorists "will be dealt with the full force of the state".

In February, in an effort to address security concerns and the closure of borders between Pakistan and Afghanistan, Pakistan's former Defence Minister Khawaja Asif and Spy Chief Lieutenant General Nadeem Anjum traveled to Kabul to engage in talks with the Taliban government. During the meeting, the Pakistani delegation, along with Afghanistan's acting Deputy Prime Minister for Economic Affairs Mullah Abdul Ghani Baradar, discussed economic cooperation, regional connectivity, and security matters that had been affecting Pakistan.



Picture Source: Al Jazeera

Pakistan has witnessed a surge in militant violence since the Taliban regained power in Afghanistan two years ago following the U.S. and NATO withdrawal. Islamabad officials have attributed this surge to fugitive leaders and fighters from the banned Tehreek-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) relocating to Afghanistan.

From there, they have launched increasingly deadly attacks on Pakistani security forces, resulting in numerous casualties, especially in the northwestern Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and southwestern Baluchistan provinces bordering Afghanistan.

The expulsion of Afghan illegal refugees from Pakistan in November 2023 is being seen as a strategic move by experts to gain leverage over the Taliban government in Afghanistan. Experts believe Pakistan aims to pressure Kabul into taking action against the Tehreek-i Taliban Pakistan (TTP) and is using Afghan refugees as a bargaining tool for broader geopolitical objectives.

In the month of November, in a meeting between Afghanistan's acting commerce minister with Pakistan's Caretaker Foreign Minister urged Islamabad to halt the deportation of Afghan citizens.

The discussions also addressed concerns of Afghan citizens returning home, highlighting restrictions on transferring cash and property from Pakistan to Afghanistan. Many Afghans had established businesses and homes in Pakistan over decades, facing obstacles in relocating due to these limitations.

Sino-Pak:

In February 2023, due to Pakistan's ailing economy, China extended a loan of 700 million dollars. It is important to note that Pakistan is already indebted to China and Chinese commercial banks for a sum of $30 billion. In June, Pakistan received another $1 billion loan from China.



Picture Source: The News International



Picture Source: Reuters

In the midst of fierce global competition between the United States and China, Pakistan dismissed speculations regarding its potential participation in the China bloc. In May 2023, Mumtaz Baloch, the spokesperson for Pakistan's Foreign Office, rejected such speculations and emphasized that Pakistan maintains a principled stance of not engaging in bloc politics.

Caretaker Prime Minister Anwaarul Haq Kakar embarked on an official visit to Beijing. During his participation in the 3rd Belt and Road Forum (BRF) for International Cooperation on October 16, discussions between Pakistan and China revolved around the deepening of political, economic, education, science and technology, cultural, and people-to-people relations.

The visit resulted in the signing of several Memorandums of Understanding (MoUs) and agreements for bilateral cooperation across sectors such as commerce, communication, transport, food security, and health, underscoring the commitment to enhancing the partnership between the two nations.

U.S-Pak

In March 2023, Pakistan announced that it will not participate in the U.S.-led Summit for Democracy, which was held in Washington and had invited 120 global leaders. This decision was believed to be an attempt by Pakistan to avoid displeasing its longstanding ally China, which was not invited to the summit.

In the month of August, the Intercept report cited an alleged ‘cipher’ that showed a top US official telling a Pakistani diplomat ‘all will be forgiven’ if Khan is sacked.The United States acknowledged that it privately and publicly expressed concerns over former Pakistani Prime Minister Imran Khan's visit to Russia amidst the Russo-Ukraine war. However, the U.S. has denied any involvement in his subsequent removal from power through a vote of no confidence.



Picture Source: Pak Today

In September, a report published by The Intercept, an American news outlet, revealed that secret arms sales by Pakistan to the United States played a role in facilitating a controversial bailout from the International Monetary Fund (IMF) earlier this year.

These arms sales were intended for the Ukrainian military, implicating Pakistan in a conflict in which it had faced pressure from the United States to take sides.

This news sheds light on the behind-the-scenes dealings between financial and political elites, often hidden from public view, even though the public ultimately bears the consequences. Pakistan encountered resistance due to stringent structural policy reforms required by the IMF as part of its recent bailout package.Pakistan has long been recognized as a production center for essential munitions used in battles.

Reports indicated the presence of Pakistani-produced shells and other munitions in the Ukrainian military's arsenal as Ukraine struggled with shortages of weaponry and hardware. The leak of records detailing these arms transactions came from a Pakistani military source earlier this year. The documents outline munitions sales between the United States and Pakistan that were agreed upon from the summer of 2022 to the spring of 2023, as reported by The Intercept.

RECOMMENDED READINGS

Managing US Relations with Pakistan in Uncertain Times: Opportunities and Obstacles, Published by Middle East Institute
Link: Managing US Relations with Pakistan in Uncertain Times: Opportunities and Obstacles | Middle East Institute (mei.edu)

Pakistan’s economic tightrope in 2023, Published by The News
Link: Pakistan’s economic tightrope in 2023 (thenews.com.pk)

Brics: What is the group and which countries are joining?, Published by BBC
Link: Brics: What is the group and which countries are joining? - BBC News

5 countries to keep an eye on in a year of elections around the globe, Published by Dawn
Link: 5 countries to keep an eye on in a year of elections around the globe - World - DAWN.COM

Pakistan in 2023: Another Year of Economic Turmoil, Political Unrest, and Security Challenges, Published by South Asian Voices
Link: https://southasianvoices.org/pakistan-in-2023/