

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

EDITOR'S NOTE

The Faizabad sit-in had interesting nuggets from the Urdu press that was fulsome in its praise for the Army and its ways of handling the sit-in without violence. However, the role of the Army and intelligence agency in reaching an agreement and distributing money among the supporters of TLR was questioned by the judiciary. The Pakistan-US spat has led a significant section of the elite to argue for a closer relationship that Pakistan needs to forge with China and Russia. Interestingly, China, which is seen as a security guarantor for Pakistan warned its citizens of a series of imminent “terrorist attacks” on Chinese targets there. Road projects worth Rs1 trillion of the National Highway Authority (NHA) under the CPEC are on hold as Beijing wants to issue ‘new guidelines’.

COMMENTARY

Faizabad Sit-in and Reactions from Pakistan Media

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The reactions of the Pakistan media, both English and vernacular, to the Faizabad Sit-in, which lasted for about three weeks (December 5-26, 2017) deserve critical analysis. This commentary seeks to analyse select editorials, opinion pieces and news items that were published during this period.

These protests were given wide coverage by the Pakistani media, particularly the print media. However, while covering these protests one could easily isolate the ideological differences within the print media of

Pakistan. The differences in the ideological leanings of both English and vernacular media were clearly visible in the manner in which both the media covered the protest. This also indicates the deep polarization within the Pakistani society and the increasing sway of conservatives in the country. Even the most powerful institution within the state, the army, was seen to be pandering to the demands by religious zealots. It was either willingly caving into their pressures apprehending popular backlash, or quietly exhorting the conservatives to embarrass the government, many would argue. However, it is useful to analyse how the sit-in panned out and what kind of comments it elicited from the media, which would indicate the direction that the media is taking over the issue.

The Sit-in

The Faizabad sit-in was spearheaded by a Bareilvi preacher, Khadim Hussain Rizvi, belonging to a relatively less known outfit named Tehreek-i-Labaik Ya Rasool Allah Pakistan (TLYRA), and created a county-wide stir, forcing the civilian government to concede the demands of the protestors, which included amendment of ‘declaration’¹ by the candidate in the Election Act 2017 which allegedly diluted the previously mentioned ‘oath’ pertaining to the finality of Prophet Mohammad and resignation of the federal law minister Zahid Hamid, who was held guilty for drafting the bill. The government had agreed to suitably amend the section dealing with the ‘declaration’ even before the sit-ins began. The sit-in paralysed the daily routine activities in the twin cities of Islamabad and Rawalpindi.

The judiciary took suo motu notice of the disruptive effect of the sit-in. The Islamabad High Court (IHC) issued a directive to the Islamabad Capital Territory

(ICT) administration to get Faizabad interchange vacated by November 18. Finding the sit-in continuing beyond this date, it asked the government on November 20, 2017, to explain as to why it had failed to clear the Faizabad Interchange of the protesters. On November 25, the IHC termed the sit-in as an “anti-state activity” and “an act of terrorism” and issued another show-cause notice to the interior minister for not implementing the court’s orders to clear Faizabad.

On November 21, 2017, the Supreme Court issued notices to IG Islamabad, IG Punjab, Attorney General and sought detailed reports from Interior and Defence secretaries and asked the authorities to explain what measures had been taken to protect the basic rights of people. Upon being told by the premier intelligence agency of Pakistan, Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI), that the protesters were politically motivated, the apex court expressed its disappointment with quality of the report furnished by the top intelligence agency, asked the agencies to submit fresh reports, and went on to censure the authorities indirectly by saying “We cannot be unmindful when the protesters attempt to denigrate the glory of Islam by their willful disregard of the injunctions stipulate in the Holy Quran. Sadly, even the avoidable death of a child has failed to soften the hearts of the protesters, let alone to atone for it”.

On November 25, local Islamabad police, with the help of Frontier Constabulary (FC) personnel and other law enforcement agencies, launched an operation against protesters. About 8,500 elite police and paramilitary troops in riot gear were engaged in the day-long operation to clear out the Faizabad interchange. As per media reports, six people were killed and hundreds injured, as law enforcement agencies finally acted under court orders to disperse the protesters. Unable to succeed in clearing up the Interchange, by evening the Ministry of Interior issued a notification authorizing deployment of the Pakistan Army to assist civil authorities under Article 245 of the Constitution. However, the army appeared quite hesitant. Report suggested meetings between the prime minister and the army chief wherein the latter refused to use force against the crowd and instead expressed his readiness to protect government facilities in the vicinity. In a written response the army also sought clarification from the government about whether it could apply force with the use of firearms, even as around 1000 Rangers personnel were

deployed along with the police and FC personnel and given charge to control the chaotic situation.

Finally, a six-point agreement was signed on the early hours of November 26, between the government and the religious leadership with Maj Gen Faiz Hameed of the ISI signing the agreement as ‘guarantor’. The agreement began with the sentence that TLYRA “is a peaceful party and does not believe in violence and unrest.” The terms of the agreement included resignation of the law minister against whom TYLRA would not issue any *fatwa* for his act, which was regarded as ‘blasphemous’ and a commitment by the government to take action against those responsible for the controversial amendment as per findings of the Raja Zafarul Haq committee, which was already looking into the case, to be made public within 30 days.

Interestingly, the agreement concluded with thanksgiving to the army chief: “*Yeh tamam muahida chief of army staff General Qamar Javed Bajwa sahib aur unki numayindah team ki khasoosi kawajon ke zariye tay paya gaya, jiske liya hum unke mashkoor hain ke unhon ne quam ko ek bahut bade sanihya se bachaya.*” (The whole agreement was made possible by the Honourable Army Chief Qamar Javed Bajwa and the special team chosen by him. We are grateful to him for saving the country from a big catastrophe).

As soon as the agreement was signed, the Director General Pakistan Rangers (Punjab) Major General Azhar Naveed descended on the scene and was soon caught in camera by the media distributing envelopes containing 1000 rupee notes to each of the protesters, arguably as bus-fare to enable them to get back to their homes as soon as possible.

As the protesters started dispersing from the morning of November 26, the Islamabad High Court questioned the policy of the government as well as the army for assigning the role of the mediator to the military in the agreement to end the sit-in. Expressing “serious reservations on the terms of the agreement and mannerism in which it arrived”, the court order said “the federal government has to satisfy the court about the constitutional role of Armed forces and an acknowledgement by the federal government/Executive of the country regarding role of armed forces as an arbitrator”. A helpless Justice Shaukat Aziz Siddiqui was heard asking “Where is their Radd-ul-Fasaad now? Did they not see any Fasaad (anarchy) in this protest?”

Media on the Protests

The English language media was visibly critical of TLYRA, Pakistan, and its leader Khadim Hussain Rizvi, for organizing the sit-in and causing public inconvenience by blocking the main road and the government's failure to disperse them.

The Urdu media reacted to the sit-ins in a different way. Although, initially, it criticized the protesters for creating troubles and disrupting the day-to-day lives of the common people, their overall tone and tenor remained soft towards TLYRA. Compared to this, their criticism of the government was severe.

A comprehensive look at some of the major Urdu newspapers can give the readers an insight into the coverage pertaining to this sit-in. A well-known columnist, Naved Masood Hashmi, writing in the *Daily Ausaf*, hinted at a conspiracy hatched by the European Union against the finality of prophethood. He alleged that Nawaz Sharif's government was weakening religious movements and institutions in the country.

Ex-army chief Mirza Aslam Baig in his column in *Daily Ummat*, praised *Tebreek-e-Labaik for achieving its goals in just three weeks, which the Tahree-k-Insaaf could not achieve through its protests over the last three years*. He said that Islamabad High court judge Justice Shaukat Aziz Siddiqui and Gen. (R) Pervez Musharraf were surprised as to who was supporting the protests and who worked out the conditions of the final agreement. In his comment, in the same paper, Justice Qazi Amin Ahmed of Lahore High Court held that it was the army who pulled the country out of a big crisis. He argued that the Army had to intervene because it respected the civilian government.

He questioned the wisdom of Justice Shaukat Aziz Siddiqui for having asked the government and army to use force to disperse the protestors when they wanted to hold negotiations. He held that *majority of the personnel among the rangers and the constabulary belonged to Khadim Hussain Rizvi's Barehvi sect, and both the army as well as the interior ministry apprehended disobedience*. TLYRA's strategy showed, he believed, that *religious groups were getting ready to enter politics, unlike in the past when they were happy working for various mainstream parties*. ... *The decision by TLYRA and other religious groups was regarded as important and it was argued that such action would bring about a change in the political*

circles. The protests have come as a solid rebuttal to the attempts aimed at changing the ideological basis of Pakistan.

On the contrary, the English language media, for instance, the *Daily Dawn* wrote editorially on the issue and termed the sit-in as the 'politics of siege'. It further said that "the democratic right to protest has been hijacked and the federal capital and country's fourth most populous city, Rawalpindi, have virtually been held hostage."

Zahid Hussain in his column in *Dawn* argued against "giving in to the irrational demands of a political-religious group", which "would further weaken the authority of the government and the state". He considered the "new phenomenon spearheaded by clerics like Khadim Hussain Rizvi more dangerous as it evokes wider emotional appeal among the less-educated populace".

Another English language newspaper *Daily Pakistan's* columnist Ahmed Quraishi saw it as a "Mullah Mutiny", and asked "Is a coup in slow motion playing out in Pakistan?"

On Army's Role

The vernacular and English language media discussed the role of army in diffusing the Faizabad dharna differently. The Urdu media hailed the Pakistan army's role in reaching out to the protesters and saving the country from further political instability. An editorial in *Daily Ausaf* succinctly put it as "wise efforts of army chief" which led to the end of the Sit-in. It thanked the army for having made the government understand that the army could not fight with its own people. It also appreciated General Bajwa's wisdom for his stance that those responsible for the change in law relating to the finality of prophethood must be punished".

In contrast, English media was very critical of the army's role as a mediator between TLYRA and the government. Many editorials and commentaries in English dailies interpreted the army's role as a pre-planned conspiracy against the ruling government. They suspected that the whole episode was orchestrated by the Army.

An editorial in *The Nation* terming the whole episode as a sad state of affair, observed that there was no need to

congratulate either the army or the government, for “what has resulted in badly-handled circumstances for both institutions”. It criticized the army for “taking a half-hearted stance” and by advising the government to take the moral high ground, the army was undermining the authorities, at a time when the need for unity on all fronts was most needed.

Another editorial of *The Nation*, calling it a democratic failure, noted that there were voices in the polity pointing fingers at both, the government and the army, for mishandling the protest in the capital. Quoting State Minister for Interior, Talal Chaudhry, it said that the recent protest was not over Khatam-e-Nabuwat but on Khatam-e-Hakumat. He also pointed out that the army should not have been a part of the solution because it creates doubts about the impartiality of the institution. While his concern may be valid, it must also be noted that the government itself decided to bring the army on board. If the government had thought it best to resolve the matter on its own, it should have stuck to its original plan.

On the contrary, the Urdu media blamed it all on the civilian government. An editorial in *Daily Ummat* criticized the government for having *tried to use the army shyly to turn the direction of popular hatred away from the Sharif family towards the army and judiciary and show the Army as anti-Islam*. It alleged that the names involved in the tampering of the Prophet-hood Declaration Clause, were kept secret. It hailed *Pakistan Army and its chief for not being amateurish (Pakistani fauj aur is ke army chief ne kachi goolyaan nabi keheli hain)* and praised the army chief *for his love of Islam, and Pakistan. Gen. Bajwa's rejection of the government's request for using the army to disperse the protestors was highlighted by the Urdu media as an indication of his tacit recognition that Tehreek-e-Labaik represented the wishes of the people. ... The PML N government was advised by commentators to stop its efforts to save the Sharif family and secure Islam and Pakistan's interests.*

Conclusion

A cursory look at these select editorials and op-ed pieces in Urdu and English print media would convince the reader that they treated the issue at hand differently. Widely circulated Urdu newspaper like *Daily Ummat*, *Daily Nawa-e-Waqt*, *Daily Ausaf* and *Daily Jasart* were reluctant to openly criticize the sit-in or dharna and the

hesitation of the army to disperse the protestors by using force. Even if the commentators had their reservations about the methods of the protest, they were seen to be supporting the cause advocated by the protestors, which was perhaps the reason why they were so soft on the TLYRA. The editorials and comments in the English language media, in contrast, were very critical of sit-in episode, without exception. Similarly, as regards the role of the Army, the Urdu media hailed the role of the Army in diffusing the crisis, while the English language media was critical of the Army's role and the manner in which it dealt with the crisis. It was quite clear from the way *Nawa-i-Waqt* and *The Nation* differed in their approach over the issue, even if both these newspapers come out of the same media house. The reason for such differences could be the nature of readership they have and therefore they were perhaps catering to the sensibilities of their respective readers. The Urdu media appeared quite conservative in its outlook towards issues concerning religion, and was particularly seen pandering to the military establishment.

¹ The section on 'Declarations by the candidate', contained a clause (iii) which simply mentioned "I believe in the absolute and unqualified finality of the Prophet-hood of Muhammad (Peace Be Upon Him), the last of the Prophets.....", while previously, the candidate had to 'declare 'on oath' that he/she believed in Khatm-e-Nabuwat. The amendment later retitled the section as "Declaration and Oath by the Person Nominated" and the clause was changed to 2(i) which read: "I, the above mentioned candidate, solemnly swear that, I believe in the absolute and unqualified finality of the Prophethood of Muhammad".

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THE WEEK AT A GLANCE

POLITICS

Khawaja Asif hints at foreign policy shift from US towards China, Russia

Foreign Minister Khawaja Asif on Tuesday said Pakistan's foreign policy has for long remained US-centric; however, the time had come to review the policy

and shift its focus towards Russia and China. The foreign minister highlighted the possibility of a policy shift and said revisiting the Islamabad's policy was the need of the hour. The minister hinted at an inclination towards the left block of the world, saying "China lives next to us and we have a common wall. Russia can also be our good friend." We can't have an independent foreign policy until we are economically strong," the minister maintained. Asif said the US has been Pakistan's biggest trade partner. "We have to convert our diplomatic outpost to trade outpost," he said, adding that Islamabad must improve and correct its relationships.

<https://www.dawn.com/news/1374715/khawaja-asif-hints-at-foreign-policy-shift-from-us-towards-china-russia>

Mattis urges Pakistan to help US, 'others'

The United States urged Pakistan to cooperate with it and "others" as it renewed its call for intensification of Pakistani operation in fight against terrorist groups allegedly operating from Pakistan. Reminding his interlocutors of the potential benefits of cooperating with "US and others", Mr. Mattis said Pakistan could then contribute to peace and stability in Afghanistan and security of the region. The US acknowledges the counterterrorism effort undertaken by Pakistani security forces, but say that it is focused against groups operating within the country, whereas those carrying out attacks outside the country's borders have remained unaffected.

<https://www.dawn.com/news/1374617/mattis-urges-pakistan-to-help-us-others>

ECONOMY

Three CPEC projects hit snags as China mulls new financing rules

China has temporarily stopped funding of some projects particularly those related to the road network under the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) till further decision regarding 'new guidelines' to be issued from Beijing, a senior government official told Dawn on Monday. The decision could affect over Rs1 trillion road projects of the National Highway Authority (NHA). It was not clear how wide the impact of the delay will be, but initial reports confirm that at least three road projects are going to experience a delay. The projects to be

affected include the 210-km Dera Ismail Khan-Zhob Road, at an estimated cost of Rs81 billion. Of this, Rs66bn will be spent on construction of road and Rs15bn on land acquisition. Also the Rs19.76bn 110-km Khuzdar-Basima Road has also been affected. The Rs8.5bn 136-km remaining portion of Karakoram Highway (KKH) from Raikot to Thakot is also impacted.

<https://www.dawn.com/news/1374532/three-cpec-projects-hit-snags-as-china-mulls-new-financing-rules>

Iran opens \$1bn project to expand Chabahar port

Iran inaugurated a long-awaited \$1 billion project to expand its southeastern Chabahar port which Tehran hopes would help the country become a key transit route to Afghanistan and Central Asia, competing with Gwadar port. President Hassan Rouhani inaugurated the expansion, carried out with an investment of \$1 billion, including \$235 million from India. The project has more than tripled the port's capacity to 8.5 million tons a year. India has committed \$500m to the Gulf of Oman port, which is Iran's closest to the Indian Ocean and would allow it to bypass Pakistan. But New Delhi has proceeded cautiously at a time when Washington has taken an aggressive approach towards Tehran.

<https://www.dawn.com/news/1374416/iran-opens-1bn-project-to-expand-chabahar-port>

SECURITY

China warns nationals of terror attacks in Pakistan

China its nationals in Pakistan of plans for a series of imminent "terrorist attacks" on Chinese targets there, an unusual alert as it pours funds into infrastructure projects in the country. The embassy warned all "Chinese-invested organizations and Chinese citizens to increase security awareness, strengthen internal precautions, reduce trips outside as much as possible, and avoid crowded public spaces". China has long worried about disaffected members of its Uighur Muslim minority in its far western region of Xinjiang linking up with militants in Pakistan and Afghanistan.

<https://www.dawn.com/news/1375452/china-warns-nationals-of-terror-attacks-in-pakistan>

Army chief calls for widening scope of madressah education

Army Chief Gen Qamar Javed Bajwa has called for widening the scope of education at madressahs (religious seminaries) to enable the students to play a more positive and productive role in society. The army chief said more religious seminaries were established in Balochistan compared to modern and quality schools for local students during the past four decades. “Only religious education is being imparted to the students at all these seminaries and thus the students are left behind in the race for development.” Gen Bajwa said he was recently

told that 2.5 million students were being taught in madressahs. “So what will they become: will they become Maulvis (clerics) or they will become terrorists?” he asked, saying it was impossible to build enough mosques to employ the huge number of madressah students. The army chief said poor education was holding back the nation of 207 million people, and especially in madressahs.

<https://www.dawn.com/news/1375246/army-chief-calls-for-widening-scope-of-madressah-education> ■

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