

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 demonstration and sit-in carried out by the *Labbaik Ya Rasool Allah* (TLY) and the government's response to it, dominated the media landscape in Pakistan. The government's decision to accept all the demands of TLY, which includes the resignation of Zahid Hamid was criticized by many. The role played by the armed forces which many see as siding with TLY also reflected the military-mullah nexus and how the army is shaping the political order in Pakistan. Six major religious parties in the country announced the revival of Muttahia Majlis-e-Amal (MMA). During this week, Pakistan's trade deficit in the first four months of the current fiscal year widened to \$12.22 billion, that will have an impact on the overall performance of the economy.

COMMENTARY

Politics of Religion in Pakistan: The Emergence of *Labbaik Ya Rasool Allah* (TLY)

*Dr Zainab Akbter**

The recent unrest in Pakistan which ended with the resignation of the federal law minister has once again brought forth the debate on how the religious conservative groups have manipulated the religious sentiments and have brought the government to the knees. The Islamabad protests or Faizabad sit-ins demonstrated a fragile government succumbed to their demands even after unsuccessfully trying to use force to disperse the crowd which resulted in the killing of one protestor while 140 were injured. This article deals

with the emergence of Tehrik Labbaik Ya Rasool Allah (TLY), its support base and what does its rise mean for Pakistan politics.

Two things about Pakistan that cannot be denied or done away with: first, its creation on the basis of religion and second, the dominance of Army which runs the shows - sometimes directly and sometimes behind the curtains through its protégé. These two factors clearly played a role this time around. Khadim Hussain Rizvi, the leader of TLY who is also a prayer leader and (defender of Mumtaz Qadri, assassinator of ex Punjab Governor late Salman Taseer) criticised the Election bill 2017, accusing the government of making changes in the Khatm-e-Nabuwat (finality of Prophet hood clause) from 'solemnly swear' to 'declare', decided to march to Islamabad demanding the resignation of Law Minister, Zahid Hamid. After protests from religious groups over the changes in the election bill, the government came out with clarification that there have been minute changes in the language here and there but the provision regarding Khatm-e-Nabuwat has not been changed at all. However, in spite of government's clarification, Maulana Rizvi saw this as an opportunity to establish himself as a religious leader and decided to continue with the sit-in. What helped the group is Army's reluctance to crack down against the group that has obstructed the main artery road connecting Lahore with Islamabad. The government was also extremely reluctant to use force for initial twenty days fearing a religious backlash. The Sunni Tehreek (ST) head Sarwat Ijaz Qadri also joined Rizvi in the demonstration against the government.

Identifying with the Barelvi traditions the group has surged in a major way and has been able to lure followers

based on the religious sermons and Rizvi has declared himself as guardian of religious faith and the Prophet. His relevance has increased ever since the entry of the group into the political sphere with the formation of Tehrik-e-Labbaik Pakistan (TLP), its political wing. TLP declared its arrival in politics in the NA-120 by elections in Lahore this year with its candidate finishing third by cutting into the votes of the mainstream political parties. It has to be underlined here that Rizvi launched his political career and politics in the name of Mumtaz Qadri and attracted growing numbers of followers. Qadri was the former police bodyguard who had shot dead Salmaan Taseer in 2011 over his stand in the case of Aasia Bibi, a Christian accused of blasphemy. Qadri was hanged in 2016. The protests accompanied with violence demonstrate that TLY can also resort to violence and extremism in order to pursue their religio-political agenda.

Political groups in the Barelvi traditions are generally critical of Taliban-type militancy and support army's action against such groups in the tribal areas. This explains the army's inaction in the Islamabad protests especially after the civil government called for its help to remove the protestors. The army refused to take any actions citing reasons that it cannot use force against its own people. Rather it asked both the sides - the government and the protestors - to resolve the matter peacefully "avoiding violence from both sides as it is not in national interest & cohesion." What is intriguing is the fact that the government did not take any steps to stop these people marching to Islamabad. Rather than taking strong action against the group initially, it engaged other religious leaders to break the impasse. This also shows the lack of imagination and strategy of the government to deal with this group.

The disturbing images of army distributing money to those protesting after the government decided to accept all the demand reinforces the fact that Army has selectively used various groups against the government to weaken them politically. In the tug between the two, these religious groups in Pakistan are gaining political favour and support by the army as and when they are needed.

The increasing influence of these extremist groups like Jammat-ut-Dawa (JuD) and TLY in politics with the

launch of their political wings as a part of Army's blue print of mainstreaming the religious groups is a worrying trend which will have severe implications for politics in Pakistan. The resignation of the Law Minister under the pressure of the protesting TLY shows how elected government can be pressurized in the name of religion. This also demolishes the myth that Barelvi groups are anti-thesis of the Wahabbis and Salafists. Rather, the Barelvi group, with political patronage of the establishment as well as the government, has emerged as a new challenge. With the parliamentary election round the corner and with the PML-N being at the weakest point of its political history, the religious political groups are going to shape the political narrative.

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THE WEEK AT A GLANCE

POLITICS

Upper House unanimously passes bill to boost Khatm-e-Nabuwat clauses

Legislators in the Upper House of parliament passed the Elections (Amendment) Bill 2017 with a majority after the National Assembly unanimously approved revival of 7B and 7C clauses of the bill, relating to Khatm-e-Nabuwat. Speaking on the occasion, Law Minister Zahid Hamid said that after mutual consensus, sections 7B and 7C of the Conduct of General Elections Order, 2002, had been restored to their original form via the bill. The bill seeks to incorporate and reaffirm the provisions of articles 7B and 7C of the Conduct of General Elections Order, 2002, through addition of a new Section 48A in the Elections Act, 2017. Section 7B states that the status of Ahmadis remains as stated in the constitution, whereas Section 7C says that if enrolled voters' belief in the finality of Prophethood of Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) is contended, they shall have to sign a declaration reaffirming their belief, failing which their "name shall be deleted from the joint electoral rolls and added to a supplementary list of voters in the same electoral area as non-Muslim."

<https://dailytimes.com.pk/142304/upper-house-unanimously-passes-bill-boost-khatm-e-nabuwat-clauses/>

‘Showdown’ in Islamabad

The government geared up for a possible showdown with religious hardliners camped out on the federal capital’s busy Faizabad Interchange after the Islamabad High Court (IHC) ordered the district administration to take all necessary steps to clear the area. There were fears that a crackdown would have serious repercussions, with the government hinting that some of the protesters were armed and would not shy from resorting to violence. Interior Minister Ahsan Iqbal requested the protesters to call off their protest peacefully as parliament had already restored clauses related to Khatm-e-Nabuwwat to their original form. “We know that there are armed men and we know that there are people with them [the protesters] who are waiting to provoke chaos,” the minister said in a press conference on the matter late Friday evening. “It is incumbent on the leaders of this protest to make sure nothing untoward happens.” He said that whoever “challenges the writ of the government will be dealt with”. “We have the capability, but we would rather avoid violence.”

<https://dailytimes.com.pk/142320/showdown-in-islamabad/>

Revival of MMA

Six major religious parties in the country announced the revival of Muttahia Majlis-e-Amal (MMA). One of the aims behind the revival is to protect the Islamic identity of the country, as the parties claim that this step is the only way to ensure democratic stability in the country. Two major parties responsible for this revival are Jamaat-i-Islami (JI) and Jamiat Ulema-i-Islam Fazal (JUI-F). It appears that the revival of the MMA is not being given much consideration by the mainstream parties and it is only being taken as a desperate attempt to get some votes. Despite their rhetoric, history shows that religious parties have not fared well in elections. The people of Pakistan have traditionally preferred to bring mainstream forces into power when given the chance. It would also be interesting to see what implications aggressive entities such as Tehreek-e-Labaik (TYL) and Milli Muslim League (MML) may have on the MMA. Perhaps they could join in the fun. Or better yet, attempt to replace the older faces of religious politics.

<http://nation.com.pk/14-Nov-2017/revival-of-mma>

ECONOMY

Trade deficit swells to \$12bn in four months

Pakistan’s trade deficit in first four months of current fiscal widened to \$12.22 billion from the \$9.34 billion reported in corresponding period of last fiscal, official data showed. The overall trade deficit widened by 31 percent in July-October 2017 period of Fiscal Year 2017-18 (FY18) as against the same period in FY17, reported the Pakistan Bureau of Statistics (PBS). The International Monetary Fund (IMF) said that the increase in growth to 5.3 percent was underpinned by rising investment related to the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor infrastructure project and strengthening credit growth. On monthly basis, exports swelled by 12.72 percent from \$1.7 billion in September 2017 to \$1.9 billion in the October 2017. Similarly, imports in the country increased by 10.19 percent to \$4.9 billion during the fourth month of new fiscal year, as compared to \$4.4 billion by the end of September 2017. Trade deficit grew by 8.68 percent to \$3.1 billion in October 2017 as compared to \$2.7 billion in September 2017.

<https://dailytimes.com.pk/139330/trade-deficit-swells-12bn-four-months/>

PM unveils 10-year uplift package for Balochistan

Prime Minister Shahid Khaqan Abbasi has announced a 10-year development package for Balochistan to bring cities and towns of the province on a par with other developed areas of the country. Mr Abbasi said the meeting on development schemes reviewed the Sui Southern Gas Company’s Rs20bn project regarding mixing of LPG in the gas supply system and other projects worth Rs80bn, including those being carried out under the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC). These projects would be reviewed on a monthly basis, he added. Chairing the meeting on law and order, PM Abbasi said the sacrifices rendered by law enforcement personnel for bringing peace to Balochistan were unmatched. He reiterated that the federal government would provide full support to the Balochistan government in improving the law and order situation.

<https://www.dawn.com/news/1370584/pm-unveils-10-year-uplift-package-for-balochistan>

‘CPEC boosts foreign direct investment by 74%’

Foreign direct investment (FDI) inflows into Pakistan have registered an extraordinary increase of 74 per cent during first four months of the current fiscal year, chiefly due to CPEC, according to Pakistan Board of Investment (BOI). A BOI statement issued on Thursday revealed that Pakistan received FDI of \$939.7 million so far in July-Oct 2017-18 that represents a 74.4 per cent increase when compared to the inflows recorded during the same period of the preceding year. According to BOI, China was the leading investor country with \$631.7 million, up 224.6% from the same period in the financial 2016-17. Chinese firms invested large portion of their funds in energy and infrastructure projects under China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC). The net inflow of FDI from Malaysia stood at \$107 million in July-Oct FY18, against \$9.4 million during the same period last year. French investors accounted for \$38.0 million in FDI during the period under review. The inflow of direct investment in the power sector was increased by 125.4% to \$422.4 million in the four months of FY18. The construction sector fetched \$177.0 million in FDI, compared to \$31.4 million a year earlier.

<https://dailytimes.com.pk/141586/cpec-boosts-foreign-direct-investment-74/>

SECURITY

US bill delinks LeT from Haqqani network

While the United States considers LeT a terrorist organisation, it also realizes that the group’s main focus is Kashmir, not Afghanistan. Linking LeT to the Haqqani network, however, creates an impression that the US not only wants Pakistan to help it win the war

against the Taliban but also wants it to change Islamabad’s position on Kashmir. Since it already considers LeT a terrorist organisation, Washington will continue to ask Islamabad to stop the group from carrying out attacks inside India. But by delinking it from the Haqqani network, US policymakers are sending a message to Islamabad, that fighting the Haqqani network is their first priority. This distinction is clearly underlined in a congressional document, the ‘conference’ version of the National Defence Act 2018. The new version has confined this requirement to the Haqqani network only, indicating a desire in Washington to focus entirely on Afghanistan as long as it takes to subdue the Taliban insurgency there.

<https://www.dawn.com/news/1370332/us-bill-delinks-le-t-from-haqqani-network>

Pakistan, US trade blame over cross-border terrorism

The two-day visit of United States Central Command Gen Joseph Votel, in which he held a series of meetings with senior Pakistani military commanders, including Army Chief Gen Qamar Bajwa, reinforced the perception that Pakistan and the US had not been able to narrow their trust deficit despite a series of high-level meetings. Gen Votel, while meeting military and intelligence leaders, emphasised the importance of improved Pak-Afghan relations, and the need for strengthened border security, including measures to coordinate military operations along both sides of the border. In contrast to Pakistan’s view about the high-level engagements as an effort for finding common ground for progress in ties, the US says the meetings were for “advancing the Trump administration’s South Asia policy goals”.

<https://www.dawn.com/news/1371015/pakistan-us-trade-blame-over-cross-border-terrorism>

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