**Enduring Uncertainties**

**The new wave of terrorism remains a matter of grave concern for the Armed Forces, Intelligence Agencies and the caretaker setup alike.**

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Scene one: PML (N) is already in celebration mode but the enthu­siasm about the PM ship seems to have mellowed down. Its leadership has been successful in wriggling out of all cases as the Courts, the NAB and the ECP have taken a sympathetic view of all past ‘wrongdoings’ to ensure pro­vision of a level-playing-field to the apparently chosen par­ty. Western Ambassadors have held meetings with the PML (N) su­preme leader. All other parties have ac­cepted ‘pre-poll rigging’ albeit not be­fore expressing their indignation. With IK still incarcerated, PML (N) leaders will have no difficulty in running the ‘mandatory’ election campaign. PPPP would be pleased to retain Sindh and would not mind at all to get a few addi­tional seats in Punjab. PTI is working on how to gather their ‘independent’ can­didates under its broken umbrella once they contested elections with signs oth­er than the bat. IPP is all set to become PML (Q) of yesteryears. Parliament is getting ready to witness the largest ba­zar ever of horse trading. The mass­es are wondering why money is being squandered for holding elections if the results thereof are already known.

[Qinwen to meet Sabalenka in 2024 Australian Open women's singles final](https://www.nation.com.pk/26-Jan-2024/qinwen-to-meet-sabalenka-in-2024-australian-open-women-s-singles-final)

Scene two: The internal security situ­ation is getting worse by the day. TTP and its cohorts are keeping the LEAs busy twenty-four-seven. The new wave of terrorism remains a matter of grave concern for the Armed Forces, Intelli­gence Agencies and the caretaker setup alike. Kabul seems reluctant in acceding to Islamabad’s requests. The return of refugees has caused additional frictions between the two countries. Islamabad seems determined to eliminate terror­ism and extremism against all odds.

Scene three: A dismal economic situ­ation continues to portray bleak pros­pects as low tax revenue, large energy sector debt, huge SOEs losses, low ex­ports and super subsidies keep giving sleepless nights to the country’s eco­nomic managers. On the other hand, some measures have shown promis­ing signs as the dollar flight is halt­ed; some smugglers and hoarders are reprimanded; a few electricity and gas thieves have been apprehended; and the stock exchange is showing unprec­edented trends. The Special Investment Facilitation Council (SIFC) established to attract billions of dollars mainly from the GCC countries, has since been intro­duced in the UN General Assembly and the World Economic Forum (WEF).

[Evidence points to India’s role in assassination of two Pakistani citizens](https://www.nation.com.pk/26-Jan-2024/evidence-points-to-india-s-role-in-assassination-of-two-pakistani-citizens)

Scene four: Sino-Pakistan relations are getting strengthened with the com­mencement of the second phase of the China-Pakistan Economic Corri­dor (CPEC) while the US-Pak trajecto­ry still causes concerns for Islamabad. The COAS’s military diplomacy takes routes in Washington but matters re­lating to trade and investment could not be addressed. Islamabad has start­ed looking towards the East with hopes of compensating for the loopholes in the economy. Pakistan remains ‘irrele­vant’ for India as the latter starts pok­ing its nose in AJK’s affairs after getting a nod from its Supreme Court regarding its actions of 5 Aug 2019. With no hope of normalization of relations, Pakistan choses to overlook India and refocus its attention on matters other than Kash­mir. Perhaps, it is time that Islamabad pulled out a copy of its first ever Nation­al Security Policy from the archives and have it updated, particularly its chapter on the country’s foreign policy.

[Bilawal asks PML-N, PTI workers to vote for PPP](https://www.nation.com.pk/26-Jan-2024/bilawal-asks-pml-n-pti-workers-to-vote-for-ppp)

Election Scene: The President, the Su­preme Court, the Election Commis­sion of Pakistan, the caretaker PM and all the major political parties have de­cided rather vowed to hold the polls in the country on 8 February. The Supreme Court has warned all tv channels against airing any views that could put the elec­tion date in doubt. Candidates from vari­ous parties along with the independents have been allotted election symbols. Election campaigns have commenced with all three major parties expressing confidence over their chances of win­ning majority seats. However, the Senate of Pakistan, quoting the alarming securi­ty situation and the extreme cold weath­er, would wish to delay the election date by at least three months. Many believed that since the most popular political party had been denied its election sym­bol during a televised hearing of the Su­preme Court just a few weeks before the elections, the Senate or any other stake­holder might not have any objection on holding elections on the announced date. Nevertheless, the Senate keeps reit­erating its demand of delaying the polls, one resolution after another.

[PML-N will set wheels of national development in motion once again: Shehbaz](https://www.nation.com.pk/26-Jan-2024/pml-n-will-set-wheels-of-national-development-in-motion-once-again-shehbaz)

The twist: Iran and Pakistan have de­cided to address all issues amicably af­ter exchanging drones and missiles. Both countries have also decided to follow the path of negotiation after proving a point or two. Hence, if elections get delayed, the reasons thereof must be outside the prevailing tensions between the two neighborly Muslim countries. It would be interesting to see how the caretakers would justify any delay in elections.

Assessment: Facing serious existen­tial threats, Pakistan is in the grip of a grotesque albatross. The alarming se­curity situation and the deteriorating economic predicament have made the upcoming general elections almost in­consequential. The hopes of having some kind of political certainty even af­ter the general elections, are gradually fading. The already jaded elections even if held on time or delayed, are likely to produce an unevenly hung Parliament whose first and foremost job would be to present the country’s budget. The in­cumbent President needs replacement. The coveted posts of PM, CM Punjab and the Federal Finance and Foreign Minis­ters are likely to be contested fiercely, thereby, creating further chaos with­in the rank and file of the ruling party as well as in Parliament. The mantra of ‘mujhey kiun nikala’ could not be ruled out as the three-time PM has a right to know the reasons of his unceremonious ouster. Hence, the ghosts of the past are likely to first haunt and then mar the political landscape, thereby, bringing the country back to square one.

[Police will act as first-tier responders followed by Armed Forces: ECP](https://www.nation.com.pk/26-Jan-2024/police-will-act-as-first-tier-responders-followed-by-armed-forces-ecp)

The question that might have prompt­ed the Senate to have the general elec­tions delayed perhaps related to the continuation of the policies put in place by the caretaker setup particularly the SIFC and the privatization process. As the new democratically elected PM is not likely to follow the footsteps of a caretaker PM, the needle on the elec­tions’ clock has refused to tick any fur­ther. The choice is between the devil and the deep blue sea. Hence, one thing could be safely deduced. Whether the elections are held in February or May, the outcome will pose more problems for the country than offering solutions.

Clearly, a battle between the democrat­ic process and the process of economic recovery has commenced. Due to several factors, in Pakistan, democracy and eco­nomic prosperity has somehow become mutually exclusive. As miracles don’t happen in this age, the politicians are not likely to gather under one roof and assure the powers-that-be to collectively work for the country’s future. Seemingly, the chosen party is not in a mood to blink and provide requisite assurances. It wants the lion’s share. All said and done, political uncertainty is likely to continue or, God forbid, Pakistan may have to face the unlikely outcome of a political failure in any third world country. Meanwhile, the nation is forced to endure uncertain­ties in almost every sphere of life.

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