[**Zille Shah was special indeed**](https://www.dawn.com/news/1741752/zille-shah-was-special-indeed)

[Abbas Nasir](https://www.dawn.com/authors/112/abbas-nasir) Published March 12, 2023

The writer is a former editor of Dawn.

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YET another tragedy of our times. Political worker Ali Bilal, aka Zille Shah, a diehard Imran Khan supporter, has been [killed](https://www.dawn.com/news/1741190), his broken, tormented body abandoned at the Services Hospital in Lahore. The [preliminary post-mortem report](https://www.dawn.com/news/1741381) shows more ‘blunt force trauma’ injuries than one can count, and even then his family has no hope of getting justice.

He was picked up by police from Zaman Park, along with other PTI activists, during the party’s abortive attempt to launch an election campaign, and was last videoed alive as he was being driven away in a police van.

His injuries seemed consistent with a severe beating, some medical experts say after reading the preliminary post-mortem report, and the Lahore police registered a murder FIR against the PTI leader, but the very same police later claimed that he and other detained PTI workers had been freed.

The police also claimed that after his release, Ali became the unfortunate victim of a [road accident](https://www.dawn.com/news/1741608/pti-workers-death-i-will-not-bow-to-pressure-and-false-allegations-says-punjab-cm-naqvi). He was supposedly hit by a black Vigo whose driver and passenger brought his body to the hospital and, on being told he was dead, they escaped.

It is only a matter of time before he is forgotten. Workers are cannon fodder, leaders are sacrosanct.

After they drove away, they were traced via the ‘safe city’ CCTV network. The police also released the arrested men’s statements to corroborate their version. There are calls for a judicial inquiry into the tragic killing of a political worker. Whether one is ordered or not isn’t clear at this point.

But given the experience of how such inquiries seldom point the finger of blame at the guilty party, it can be safe to assume that the family of the political worker will mourn him, and will hope forlornly that they get justice — while Zille Shah remains a ping-pong game across the political divide.

It is only a matter of time before he is forgotten. Heartbreaking that may be. But that is how it is. Workers are cannon fodder, leaders are sacrosanct.

Talking of leaders, it appears from Imran Khan’s remarks during a [*BBC* interview](https://www.dawn.com/news/1741255) that his hopes of a patch-up with the military leadership are now fading. It was also evident that despite that setback, he isn’t prepared to talk to the politicians currently in government because he says they have ‘looted and plundered’ public funds.

In a country where success even in electoral politics is difficult without one power centre or the other aligned with you, his only allies now, according to government sympathisers, seem to be some elements in the judiciary. His political fate may hinge on how reliable this perceived source of support is.

With a mere seven weeks to go before the [Supreme Court-mandated elections to the Punjab and KP assemblies](https://www.dawn.com/news/1739739), it is likely that the political temperature will rise further. For now, Imran Khan and PTI will mostly try and take centre stage via getting wall-to-wall coverage on social media platforms they have excelled in building and propagating their narrative on.

On the other hand, their main rival in the crucial battleground of Punjab, PML-N’s chief organiser Maryam Nawaz Sharif, has already embarked on a mass contact drive, travelling to different districts and trying to get a sense of the pulse of their workers/supporters and the electorate at large.

In a *DawnNews* interview with Adil Shahzad, Ms Nawaz was evasive when asked if she or party president Shabaz Sharif will be the PML-N candidate for the Prime Minister’s Office in case her party wins the next election. This was quite an interesting development.

Sources in the PML-N, who requested anonymity, have said that Maryam Nawaz has already taken charge of the party structure and decision-making in Punjab, and the party ‘organiser’ of yesteryear, Hamza Shabaz, had been completely sidelined.

Since this is Ms Nawaz’s first foray into running the party in its erstwhile powerbase of Punjab, where it is now facing a very serious challenge by Imran Khan and his party, who knows whether she will succeed in reviving the PML-N’s somewhat imperilled fortunes or her lack of experience will let her down.

How the PML-N keeps ‘fine-tuning’ its line of attack regarding who is to blame for the current economic crisis including runaway inflation, which can potentially wreck the electoral prospect of any incumbent, has also raised some questions about its strategy.

One of the most significant is how the former army chief has now slipped under the radar and the former ISI chief and two former chief justices are in the PML-N crosshairs. One insider explained that the former army chief has now retreated into the shadows for a reason.

The insider said that ever since Gen Bajwa decided to turn ‘apolitical’ and then openly admitted to his institution’s political engineering before his retirement, he became ‘inactive’ (I took this to mean against the PML-N) but the same couldn’t be said of the former ISI chief.

Retired Lt-Gen Faiz Hameed, in spite of losing in the race to become the army chief and seeking premature retirement, apparently did not give up on undermining the PML-N and continued being hostile courtesy a number of loyalists he had placed in the intelligence services and elsewhere in key departments, according to the insider.

This enabled him to gather information, provide advice to PML-N opponents and feed a steady stream of ‘disinformation’ against the government and the Sharif-led party. This, the source said, is why the party decided to up the attacks on the former intel chief.

There could be some truth to these claims, as multiple sources have reported a clean-up, a purge of sorts, at the heart of the ISI, where many retired officers had been rehired by Faiz Hameed on contract and remained loyal to him.

No matter how much one is forced to discuss the macro issues, I can’t seem to get Zille Shah’s innocent face out of my mind. A motivated political worker to me is beautiful. Simply because he/she represents hope. He was a special person indeed. May his family somehow find solace.

*The writer is a former editor of Dawn.*

[**abbas.nasir@hotmail.com**](http://mailto:abbas.nasir@hotmail.com)

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