

Quarterly Round Up

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Internal Situation

The PML Government of Prime Minister Shahid Khaqan Abbasi continues to govern relatively smoothly despite setbacks in terms of the Supreme Court ordered removal of former Prime Minister as head of the party and inability surprisingly to win the controversial elections for the Chairman and Vice Chairman of the Senate. The Government is scheduled to hand over in June to an interim government charged with holding free and fair elections within 90 days. It is difficult to predict the probable outcome of any elections as evidenced most recently in the US Presidential elections.

However the outcome is likely to be a Parliament in which no party will have a clear majority. In that eventuality coalitions will be required. At this stage it cannot be predicted who will head the government. Hopefully the result should lead to a stable coalition rather than a fragile government in power.

Pakistan –India Relations

India continues with its unrealistic and unwise policy of hostility to Pakistan, refusing the Pakistani offer to hold talks. India's use of artillery and other fire along the Kashmir LOC has led to heavy civilian casualties in Azad Jammu & Kashmir. There have been around 1000 violations of the LOC since this latest Indian escalation began. The indigenous opposition to the heavy handed Indian campaign to suppress this latest manifestation of the UN Security Council Resolutions sanctioned Kashmiris right of self-determination has led to unprecedented deaths and also of blinding – an epic case of human rights violations.

Indian harassment of Pakistani officials and their families in New Delhi in these past few months had brought bilateral relations to a low point. At the end of March both sides agreed to end this state of affairs.

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However this is not foreseen as a sign that India will agree to a resumption of talks.

Pakistan-Afghanistan Relations

Relations with Afghanistan remain uneven. There have been a number of high level contacts including at government delegation and military meetings. However with every reversal suffered by the Afghan government at the hands of the Taliban, the government continues its policy of blaming Pakistan behind its failures and lack of effective control. Pakistan continues to assert to both the USA and Afghanistan that a lasting settlement based on peace and reconciliation is the only way forward not to continue the almost 17 years American/NATO led campaign to batter the Taliban into accepting a settlement totally against their will.

Pakistan –USA Relations

The USA, motivated by its inability in Afghanistan to enforce a settlement, has taken a hardline to Pakistan, or rather a harder line, ever since the new Administration of President Trump, but the recent high level visits from here to the US and reciprocal visits and statements by US military and State Department officials reflects a slight softening of the US position reflective of increased activity along the Afghan border. Also reflective in some part to Pakistan's offer to set up multifaceted cooperation mechanism with Afghanistan, Pakistan-Afghanistan Action Plan for Peace and Solidarity (APAPPS) to improve mutual security and to address complaints was reiterated and reinforced by the visit of the Prime Minister to Kabul negotiated in this quarter and which took place in the first week of the next quarter.

Pakistan's Relations with the Muslim World

Pakistan's active diplomacy in the UN and other multilateral forums and regionally and internationally has been traditionally motivated to assure peace, security and development at all levels and for all. However cultivating closer relations with the Muslim World has been a consistent goal which predates the country's independence. Before Partition Muslim League delegations were sent to Muslim countries including

some of those under colonial rule, which was the case for most of them, seeking support for Pakistan's independence with the reciprocal commitment that once independent, Pakistan would support Muslim countries seeking their own independence.

Pakistan was true to its word; championing the Palestine cause in the UN; trying to assert the right of Eritrea not to be handed over to Ethiopia; supporting the freedom struggle of the Maghreb countries including giving sanctuary to some of their resistance leaders in Pakistan and giving them Pakistani diplomatic passports to plead their case in the UN as part of our delegations much to the wonderment of the French; supporting the Indonesian independence movement and later the struggle against colonial rule in Zambia, Rhodesia (Zimbabwe), Namibia and South Africa.

In this quarter under review this important aspect of Pakistan's foreign policy was reflected with a number of high level visits in both directions. The inaugural round of Bilateral Political Consultations (BPC) between Pakistan and Kyrgyz Republic was held in Bishkek on 24 January 2018. Pakistan delegation was headed by the Special Secretary (ME, ECO & CARs), Mr. Aitzaz Ahmed while the Kyrgyz Republic delegation was led by the Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs, Mr. Nurlan Asiyinovich Abdrahmanov. This represents a good bilateral step for institutionalising bilateral relations.

A few days later the President of Indonesia His Excellency Joko Widodo, along with his wife Mrs. Iriana Widodo, paid a State visit to Pakistan on 26-27 January 2018. President Joko Widodo was received at the airport by President Mamnoon Hussain and the First Lady. As a special gesture to the democratically elected leader of the largest Islamic Country, President Widodo was invited to address the Joint Session of the Parliament. The two sides agreed to maintain close high-level exchanges, which would provide guidance to the sustainable development of bilateral relationship and also agreed to further enhance strategic communication and coordination to safeguard their common interests.

The two leaders recognized that the people of Pakistan and Indonesia share deep political, cultural, religious ties and respect for

democratic values. Being the largest countries in the Islamic world, the two stand together for their progress, prosperity, stability, security and territorial integrity. It was agreed to strengthen defence and security cooperation, including through training of defence personnel and cooperation between their respective defence educational institutions and to establish a Joint Committee under the bilateral Agreement on Defence Cooperation. The two leaders noted that bilateral trade has crossed \$ 2 billion mark in last three years. But there is need to improve the trade imbalance which is in Indonesia's favour.

His Majesty King Abdullah II ibn Al Hussein of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan visited Pakistan on 8-9 February 2018. During his visit he met the President Mr. Mamnoon Hussain and the Prime Minister Mr. Shahid Khaqan Abbasi. His delegation included Minister of Foreign and Expatriate Affairs Mr. Ayman Safadi and Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff of the Jordanian Armed Forces Lt. Gen. Mahmoud A. Freihat and senior officials.

In the same month H.E. Mr. Abdulaziz Kamilov, Foreign Minister of the Republic of Uzbekistan, along with a four-member delegation, visited Islamabad on Monday, 12 February 2018. During the visit, the Foreign Minister met with the Foreign Minister of Pakistan, Mr. Khawaja Muhammad Asif. He conveyed a letter from the Uzbek President Mirziyoyev Shavkat Miromonovich, addressed to President Mamnoon Hussain regarding the convening of a conference titled "Peace Process and Cooperation in the field of Security and Regional Cohesion", scheduled to be held in Tashkent on 26-27 March 2018.

On 16-17 February Foreign Minister Khawaja Muhammad Asif paid an official visit to Tunisia to lead Pakistan's delegation to the 9th Session of the Bilateral Joint Commission. He also called on the President of the Republic of Tunisia, Mr. Beji Caid Essebsi. The Foreign Minister thanked President Essebsi for affording the opportunity of meeting and for a very warm welcome to him and his delegation in Tunisia. He underlined the close and cordial ties between the two countries marked by commonality of faith, history and culture. He applauded the leadership role of President Essebsi in preservation and

continuation of democratic values and economic development in Tunisia.

Dr. Javad Zarif, Foreign Minister of Iran visited Pakistan from 11-13 March, 2018, to hold consultations on bilateral relations and regional peace and security with Khawaja Muhammad Asif, Foreign Minister of Pakistan at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

On 27 March Foreign Minister Khwaja Asif led Pakistan delegation to the Tashkent Conference on Afghanistan. He emphasized the need of a regional approach for lasting peace and stability in Afghanistan, and the region. He also appreciated Uzbekistan and its leadership on this regional initiative for peace in Afghanistan cooperation on counter-terrorism and connectivity.

In March the 3rd Round of Pakistan-Turkey Bilateral Consultations on UN-related matters was held on 28th March 2018 in Ankara.

TAPI-Status and its Relevance

The Foreign Minister of Turkmenistan Mr. Rashid Meredov also visited Pakistan in January to hold talks with Foreign Minister Mr. Khawaja Muhammad Asif. The Ministers acknowledged importance of early implementation of the Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan-India (TAPI) Gas Pipeline Project. Minister Meredov later paid courtesy calls on the President and Prime Minister of Pakistan. He conveyed the greetings of leadership of Turkmenistan to the President and the Prime Minister. The Turkmen Foreign Minister also handed over an invitation from the President of Turkmenistan to the President of Pakistan for the link-up ceremony of TAPI being planned in 2018.

On February 22-23 the Prime Minister of Pakistan visited Turkmenistan then Afghanistan to participate in the link up ceremonies at the Turkmen-Afghan border then to Herat to mark the TAPI natural gas pipeline reaching the border of Afghanistan and its next projected advancement to Herat. It is good to see finally progress in this important project for Pakistan's energy security which was negotiated as far back in 1995-1996 but was only revived a few years ago.

The work and jobs its construction would provide in Afghanistan and the transit fee for transporting the natural gas to Pakistan and India would be an important contribution for peace and development.