



In this Issue

What challenges exist in reconciling the security imperatives of the state and the democratic aspirations projected by political parties?

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Performance and Prospects of Democracy in Pakistan: Political Scenarios Affecting the Elections 2013

It is for the first time in Pakistan's history that an elected government is completing its term (2008-2013). The Pakistan Peoples Party-led coalition was jolted on several occasions, but it managed to survive.ⁱ While the completion of its term is an achievement, the performance of the democratically-elected government – federal, provincial and local – does not inspire much confidence. Poor governance, persistent adversarial relations between the executive and the judiciary, allegations of corruption and the inability of the political leadership to build consensus to combat terrorism continue to cast aspersions on the democratic process and civilian regime's capability to sustain democracy.ⁱⁱ

The thrust of this paper is conceptual and theoretical rather than empirical. Broadly, it aims to draw attention to three issues. First, what are the challenges in reconciling the security imperatives of the state, and the democratic aspirations projected by the political parties? Second, elections are important *procedural* components of democratic aspirations in a society. In Pakistan, these are severely conscribed by the military-hegemonic system. While holding elections, adequate attention must be paid to strengthening the *substantive* components of democracy – rule of law, respect and tolerance of dissent and minority rights, religious and cultural pluralism and freedom of association.ⁱⁱⁱ These remain missing links in the discourse on electoral process in Pakistan. Third, under the PPP-led coalition government, there has been a qualitative change in civil-military relations. The indications are that nuanced power-sharing mechanisms between the civilian and military sides are evolving. Is this a tactical shift or the emergence of a new partnership that guarantees sustained support for the electoral process and representative government?

Theoretically, elections facilitate the stability of electoral process and the formulation of electoral system. Political parties demand and compete on transparent, fair and just electoral laws. In Pakistan, during 1970-2008, nine national elections were held and preparations are underway for the tenth in May this year. In all these elections, the military was a key player, sometimes explicitly and on other occasions implicitly. What can we learn from the past elections to project future outcomes?

A number of studies have explained and analysed the centrality of the military in Pakistan's politics.^{iv} In a military hegemonic system, the military has "a monopoly of control over strategic policy issues and decision making institutions in the country. It can manipulate and steer the behaviour of political leaders and interest groups in a chosen direction. In the social and cultural sense the public also shows greater trust and confidence in the military as compared to political parties. This lends legitimacy to military's hegemony."^v

This hegemonic power creates a "coalition of the willing", with individuals, groups and political parties whose interests and ideology not only converge with the military but they also voluntarily accept its hegemonic position. The military assumes that the situation is Hobbesian, therefore, all instruments – including coercion, intimidation, patronage, and graft – are used to foster the coalition of the willing (by the Zia and Musharraf regimes).

The military hegemonic system under President General Pervez Musharraf (1999-2008) skilfully reinvented the Pakistan Muslim League (as the PML-Q), the Muttahida Majlis-e- Amal (MMA) alliance of religious parties, and the Muttahida Quami Movement (MQM) as alternatives to mainstream political parties. The 2002 elections gave a boost to the PML-Q, the MMA parties, the MQM and changed the discourse of politics in Pakistan. The narrative tilted towards the right, restricting the liberal-secular social and political space. This right-leaning coalition also demonstrated that the religious parties were equally pragmatic in building coalitions and could continue to perpetuate. This forced the PPP and the PML-N to find ways to collaborate and survive, but they also leaned towards the right.

In 2007, Musharraf's decision to remove the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court had three unanticipated consequences. First, it shook the foundations of the political order that his regime had so assiduously crafted (2002-2007). Second, it galvanised the lawyers' community and prompted a strong, extended series of public protests. This created an opportunity for the PPP and PML-N. They were initially reluctant to join in, but as the protests continued, they mobilised their party workers. Third, confronted with a defiant higher judiciary and rebellious lawyers, Musharraf sought a 'deal' with the major political parties to hold elections in 2007.^{vi} (Elections were delayed by the assassination of Benazir Bhutto and were held in February 2008.)

This redefined the terms of engagement between the military and the political parties, and could be taken as the end of an era of military elections, the Pakistani experience reveals three disturbing trends.

First, despite building and sustaining the longest coalition government at the federal and provincial levels, the political parties and their leadership have not been able to strengthen party system. The present state of the system continues to reinforce the popular perception that the electoral process does not necessarily strengthen political parties, and instead intensifies factionalism.^{vii}

Second, with each election, the ideological centre of political parties has shifted towards the religious right. The liberal and pro-poor factions within each party have considerably weakened.^{viii} Such discourse not only defines the limits and functioning of political parties but also weakens their resolve to respect dissent and pluralism, protect minorities, and pursue just and socio-economic welfare-oriented policies.

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Third, increasingly political parties have become instruments of *biradari*/tribal affiliations and criminal mafias that acquire power, and receive and distribute patronage, but do little to educate and inform citizens. Consequently, political parties start to symbolise centres of power, and are perceived by the public as obstructing good governance and representation.

Recurring Themes

This brief will now identify some of the recurring themes and expectations the electoral process rouses in response to the military-hegemonic system under which it was designed and implemented.

1. Before every election, political parties, analysts and international observers, each in their own way, identify the inadequacies of electoral system in Pakistan. Political parties invariably reveal a lack of trust in the incumbent party and accuse it of oppressing its opponents. However, the current PPP-led coalition is being criticised for corruption and poor governance. In other words, the government-opposition relationship remains adversarial, with a deep lack of trust. This dents confidence in the prospect of fair elections. Therefore, the key concern is building trust between the government and the opposition.

However, in 2013, the situation is somewhat different. Political parties are divided on how to combat corruption, terrorism and improve governance, but are by and large united on two points: perpetuating the current coalitional arrangement of political parties with limited modification, and keeping the military out of politics.

2. Each election rouses the demand to disengage, curb, and – if possible – eliminate the role of the military from politics. However, political parties and leaders find it difficult to build consensus on how to do that. The outcome of each past election has been a strengthening of the military's role in the political system. During 2008-2013, the military continued to be the guarantor for sustaining democracy. The question is: would electoral democracy lead to the supremacy of civilians over the military?
3. Each election has stirred criticism on the role of state (especially the intelligence agencies) in manipulating the process and compromising its fairness. As a result, elections do not create public confidence and this adversely affects voter participation, which shows a worrying trend. It declined from 63 per cent in 1977 to 43.1 per cent in 1988, and then to 41.2 per cent in 2002).^{ix} In the 2008 elections, though, voter participation marginally increased to 43.65 per cent.^x This turnout is expected to double in the upcoming elections. The Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) is projecting an 88 per cent voter turnout in the 2013 elections.^{xi} According to the ECP, 84.4 million votes had been registered as of August 2012 and this number is rising steadily. The Commission expects to have registered 94 million votes by March.^{xii} Despite a segment of the public still fearing manipulation by the intelligence agencies, the 2013 elections seem to be different in the sense that the possibility of rigging by intelligence agencies is at best limited if not impossible, given the focus on the election and the media's self-assumed watchdog role.
4. Although all political parties demand – the party in power also recognises the need for – an autonomous and independent election commission, yet both remain apprehensive on its

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autonomy. Therefore, the critical question has been how to make the Election Commission fair and just, so that voters and parties have confidence in it. The 2013 elections are likely to mark a departure from the previous pattern. The 18th and 20th constitutional amendments have substantially altered the structure of the ECP and turned it into an autonomous body.^{xiii}

The 18th amendment replaced the president's appointment authority with a consultative process to select the Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) and four members of the ECP. These officials are appointed at the recommendation of a parliamentary committee comprising members from both the treasury and the opposition benches. The CEC now also has considerable financial autonomy, with budgetary powers transferred to the Commissioner's office from the ministry of finance. The CEC's tenure has been increased to five years, with the responsibility to prepare a five year strategic management plan.^{xiv}

5. Political parties have contributed little in terms of raising substantive issues to inform and educate citizens about the need for good governance, security and economic development. This begs the question: under the military hegemonic system, how were political parties disabled, de-institutionalised or allowed to fragment? Confronted with disabilities, what strategies did the political parties adopt to disrupt military hegemony and strengthen the party system? Apparently none, as the manifestos of political parties show a lack of focus and resolve on policy issues.
6. Despite widespread citizen apathy and a lack of trust in the electoral process, there is little that any political party is doing to politically engage the ordinary Pakistani. Only recently have Imran Khan's Pakistan Tehrik-e-Insaf (PTI) and Tahir-ul-Qadri's Minhaj-ul-Quran have made some efforts to mobilise the youth. This also pushed the PML-N government in the Punjab province to reach out to the youth.^{xv} Despite these youth mobilisation efforts, there is a growing impression that political parties have become irrelevant to the political process.

Citizen confidence in political parties could be boosted through mass mobilisation and active citizen engagement on political issues. That is possible if the political parties come up with specific programmes and agendas of change and welfare. The challenge for political parties and their leadership is to build faith in the party system as a pre-requisite to democracy and as an alternative to the military. The record of political parties on this count is not very inspiring. Will political parties behave differently in this election? Will they be able to build a coalition that has public confidence and legitimacy, and provides an alternative to military hegemony?

Given these constraints and challenges, here are a few scenarios for the coming elections.

Scenario 1

Could the elimination of an indispensable party leader lead to political chaos?

Personalisation of power has become a dominant reality in Pakistani politics and evokes personality-centric hostility. The history of Pakistan reveals two significant trends in elections. First, each electoral cycle (since 1970) evokes and embodies personification of hostility. Political leaders and parties, at the time of election claim that under the incumbent President or Prime Minister; fair and free elections are not possible. Hostility is personified. The case of President Zardari is no different. This personification of hostility, however legitimate, does undermine the

credibility of the office of the President. In Pakistan's case, the evidence reveals that the person holding the office of President has not been careful in preserving the dignity and neutrality of the particular office. Therefore, in the public perception, the personification of hostility gains credibility and raises concerns about the legitimacy of electoral process.

Second, the personalisation of power sometimes promotes the notion of indispensability of a particular leader. In a political system with questionable and fragile legitimacy, it is legitimate to ask: how indispensable is a political leader and what if s/he is eliminated? The current Pakistani situation is a little more complex, where given the scale of terrorist attacks and unpredictable suicide bombings, elimination of any political party's leader could delay and disrupt the forthcoming elections (as happened after Benazir Bhutto's assassination in December 2007), but the possibility of a rollback of the electoral process seems remote.

Therefore, it is plausible to argue that while the elimination of an indispensable leader cannot be completely ruled out, it is unlikely to produce chaos. The event could be handled relatively smoothly, but would still present formidable challenges and require political acumen and skill in managing the situation.

Scenario 2

Relatively Neutral Military Model and Elections

The second scenario is of fair, free, and transparent elections, along the lines of the 1970, 1988, and 2008 polls, where the military assumed the role of a facilitator and relatively neutral referee. In such a situation, the outcome could be a surprise, which raises the possibility of the two largest political parties, the PPP and PML-N, as the most likely winners.^{xvi} Each of the three elections mentioned above brought the PPP in power and redefined power sharing with the military, but with each electoral victory, the PPP support base also weakened and created more space for other political parties. The liberal/secular social and political space also shrank with each election. Such an arrangement provides political parties with an opportunity to enhance the party system, and it also helps military to pursue power sharing away from the public gaze.

This could lead to a re-arrangement of power sharing in which the military shows some concession to different classes and groups. Such an arrangement could have greater legitimacy and stronger popular support. Domestic and external circumstances seem to convey the convergence of politico-military interests and perpetuation of the existing model.

Scenario 3

The 1997 Electoral Model

The third scenario is based on the 1997 elections. In such a situation, the assumption would be that the political parties (particularly the larger, national ones) find it difficult to build a healthy and stable relationship between the party in power and the opposition political parties. Therefore, the state encourages legal and political conditions through a set of pre-electoral processes that enhance the opportunity and possibility of a 'heavy mandate' for a favoured political party. In such an eventuality, the other larger national political party is disfigured and decimated to the extent that it is not in position to launch a protest movement, while the state, the media and minor political groups are willing to accept the legitimacy of that heavy mandate. This

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promotes the illusion of a two-party system but does not offer legitimacy and political space to the opposition. It does not encourage the politics of accommodation and does not allow for minimal coalition building with smaller and regional parties that are willing to operate under the ‘dominant party’.

The second lesson from the heavy mandate model is that it produces an illusion of autonomy and popular support for the party in power. Driven by the power and legitimacy of the heavy mandate, the party in power neither facilitates the strengthening of party system, nor pursues the politics of accommodation with other parties. The heavy mandate that was expected to promote power sharing between the military and the PML-N instead led to adversarial relations. The outcome of the heavy mandate model was that it discredited and weakened the political parties and the party system. More development of democratic norms and values, halted and reversed Pakistan’s transition to democracy and re-established the military-hegemonic system.

In October 2011, the political mobilisation campaign launched by Imran Khan and his Pakistan Tehrik-e-Insaf (PTI) and subsequently in December 2012 by Allama Tahir ul Qadri and his Tehrik-e Minhaj-ul-Quran initially brought up speculation of military backing.^{xvii} However, these speculations tapered off and the prospects of a repeat of the heavy mandate model remain limited.

Scenario 4 The 2002 Electoral Model

The fourth scenario is based on the 2002 electoral model. This model was preceded by massive changes in the legal, political and administrative structures of Pakistan. The legal, political and administrative framework was transformed through the Local Government Ordinance 2001, the 2002 constitutional amendments and a host of other changes in the electoral laws. The aim was to avoid a re-play of the heavy mandate scenario. What is interesting is that despite massive pre-electoral changes and allegations of state manipulation, the election outcome was still unsatisfactory for the state. The election remained fruitless and necessitated the construction of a post-election party and parliamentary system. The architects of the 2002 model tried to disfigure the outcome and engineered a post-election alliance. The larger national political parties (the PPP with 80 seats and the PML-N with 18) were reduced to irrelevance. Through manipulation, graft and intimidation, a coalition of the willing was constructed. The beneficiaries of the system – the parties in the coalition – tried to present it as a democratic model. Yet, internationally and domestically, it did not gain legitimacy. Despite its longevity, the system remains fragile, vulnerable to manipulation and susceptible to breakdown. Ironically the 2002-2007 parliaments (federal and provincial) also clearly established the hegemony and centrality of the military in Pakistan politics.

The 2002 model could not assure continuity. As we approach the 2013 election, the search for yet another alternative model has intensified. There is hope and despair surrounding the coming election, with many questions – will it lead to democratic consolidation and the strengthening of democratic values in Pakistan or will it be another state-managed event? Will the political parties and their leaders show the vision and commitment to strengthen the party system? These questions demand serious research and further reflection.

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Scenario 5 War on Terror and Emergency?

The on-going war on global terrorism raises the possibility of a fifth scenario. The rising number of suicide bombings in Pakistan and the possibility of a U.S./Israel on Iran, fallout from the withdrawal of U.S.-led forces in Afghanistan, and possible conflict with India, raise another spectre for the elections. On the pretext of rising violence, the party led government may impose emergency rule and delay elections for another year, curbing any and all political activities. This could impact the presidential election, with the current assemblies serving as the electoral college. With the President re-elected for the next term, new elections could be delayed until early 2015.

This scenario seems unlikely, as the political parties have already agreed and the parliament stands dissolved.

Scenario 6 Ethnic and Sectarian incidents and the Prospects of a Disintegrated Vote

Predicting electoral outcomes is a difficult task. In the 2013 elections, at least five new factors could disrupt any calculations about electoral outcome: increase in voters and a higher turnout; the young voter or 'youth bulge'; intensity in ethnic and sectarian strife; the possibility of a Saraiki province carved out of southern Punjab; and unanticipated foreign aggression.

For voter turnout and participation, political parties traditionally employ caste, clan and *biradari* for mobilisation. In the coming elections, the use of social media and a larger voter turnout are new factors that could reflect the socio-political transformations in Pakistan. The ECP is projecting a higher turnout compared with previous elections. According to data released by the ECP, almost half the registered voters, 47.5 per cent of 84.3 million, are under the age of 35.^{xviii} A disproportionately higher youth voter turnout could prove decisive.

An age-wise breakup of the 2012 electoral rolls shows that there are now 16.2 million registered voters between the age of 18 and 25 years. Approximately 1.5 million out of these turned 18 between January and June this year. According to the National Database and Registration Authority (NADRA), an average of 12,000 to 15,000 new computerised identity cards are issued daily, a majority of them to those who have turned 18 recently. The largest chunk of registered voters, 23.8 million, however, lies in the 26 to 35 year age bracket followed by 17 million voters between the age of 36 and 45. Almost 12 million voters lie in the 46 to 55 year age bracket, 8.4 million between the age of 56 and 65, and another 6.7 million are over the age of 65.^{xix}

The impact of the youth vote remains unclear, therefore factors like *biradari*, kinship, clan and caste remain potent factors.

Rallies could be an indicator of the youth vote potential. In 2011 and 2012, Imran Khan organised mass rallies throughout the country and the youth were dominant participants. As Imran Khan was gaining recognition as leader of the youth, on December 23, 2012, Tahir ul Qadri arrived in Lahore from Canada and mobilised his followers to march towards Islamabad. There was significant youth participation in his rally.^{xx} This led some analysts to argue that the two main

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political parties were losing ground and that the youth turnout on Election Day could determine the outcome. There is growing realisation that the young voter could swing the elections and political parties are trying to attract this unpredictable segment of the electorate. The impact of social media in mobilising voters on election day remains unclear.

The demand for a Saraiki province in southern Punjab has gained momentum during the last two years. The PPP has supported the demand.^{xxi} The PML-N has been less enthusiastic about it. The attitude of parties to this demand could have an impact on voters in the region, where the PPP appears to have a slight edge over the others and could benefit because of its position on this matter.

The year 2013 began with a series of unfortunate events. Tensions between Pakistan and India escalated with incidents along the Line of Control in Kashmir. Such was the scale that negotiations between Pakistan and India were put on hold. Anti-Indian sentiment could also influence voters. Second, the mass killing of Shias, especially Hazaras in Balochistan, and parties' response to it, could impact the Shia vote.^{xxii}

The best case scenario for 2013 appears to be the second model with a relatively neutral military. This implies that the incumbent coalition parties could lose some seats. It would be interesting to note how many of those seats will be won by Imran Khan's PTI and others. No single party is likely to secure an overwhelming majority.

The worst case scenario is a combination of the fifth and sixth scenarios, with an escalation in ethnic/sectarian violence that could roll back Pakistan's progress towards democratic consolidation.

Conclusion

It augurs well that the PPP-led coalition government has completed its term and the country is ready for succession of power through the electoral process. However, the governance record of governments at the federal, provincial and local level does not inspire much confidence. Citizen insecurity, escalation in violence against ordinary citizens and minorities, incidence of terrorist activity and ineffective prosecution of culprits continues to cast aspersions on the efficacy of democratic governance in Pakistan. Constructing and sustaining democracy in Pakistan demands recognising the centrality and legitimacy of political parties and investing in strengthening the organisation, support base, funding and capacity of its leadership. The onus of sustaining democracy is on the political leaders and political parties. The media, civil society, judiciary, bureaucracy and the military can only contribute by supporting the democratic process. Reformed and democratised political parties and leaders are the best guarantee for a democratic order's continuity and stability. Unless political parties and their leaders build minimum consensus on the smooth functioning of party system, create space for citizen participation and community development – which demands respect for dissent and legitimising the role of opposition – they will not be able to provide an alternative to the military's hegemony.

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End Notes

- ⁱ The initial coalition of PPP-PML-N and others ended on the question of whether to reinstate the Supreme Court judges Musharraf had sacked. "*Sharif Quits Pakistan Coalition over Musharraf Ouster*". Bloomberg, 12 May 2008. Subsequently JUI-F also withdrew from coalition and the MQM has been threatening to leave and remained part of the ruling coalition, until February 2013.
- ⁱⁱ See for example Afzal Bajwa, "*Yes My Lord*." The Nation, 18 Feb. 2010, on the judiciary-government stand-off on the issue of appointment of Supreme Court and High Court judges. On the matter of the letter written to the Swiss courts to reopen graft cases against President Zardari, "*Swiss Letter: The End*." Express Tribune, 10 Feb. 2013.
- ⁱⁱⁱ Marc F. Plattner, "*Populism, Pluralism, And Liberal Democracy*", Journal of Democracy, No, 1, Volume, 21, January 2010. Pp 81-92.
- ^{iv} See for example, Hasan Askari Rizvi, The Military and Politics in Pakistan (Lahore: 1986 updated and revised edition Sang-e-Meel, 2000) Stephen P. Cohen, Pakistan Army (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984) and Ayesha Jalal, The State of Martial Rule: The origins of Pakistan's Political Economy of Defence (Cambridge: 1990) also Democracy and Authoritarianism in South Asia (Lahore: Sang-e-Meel, 1990)
- ^v Saeed Shafqat, Civil- Military Relations in Pakistan: From Zulifkar Ali Bhutto to Benazir Bhutto (Boulder: Westview Press/Pak Book, 1997). pp 7-8 On a similar theme but with ground breaking fresh evidence and theoretical rigour, see Ayesha Siddiqua's Military Inc., Inside Pakistan's Military Economy (Karachi: Oxford, 2007)
- ^{vi} The National Reconciliation Order promulgated on 5 October 2007 by Musharraf, see Beena Sarwar, "*Daughter of the East Returns - with West's Aid*." Asia Times online, 19 Oct. 2007.
- ^{vii} See for example, Dr. Khalil Ahmad, Siyasi Partian Ya Siyasi Bandobast: Pakistani Siyasat Ke Pech-o-Khum Ka Falsafiyani Muhakma (Urdu), Lahore: Alternate Solutions, 2012.
- ^{viii} Murders of Salman Taseer (4 January 2011) and Shahbaz Bhatti (2 March 2011). Torching Christian settlements in Gojra (1 August 2009) and Badami Bagh (9 March 2013).
- ^{ix} For some insightful, reliable, concise information and data on Pakistani elections, see Election in Pakistan :Background Paper February 2007 (Islamabad:PILDAT,2007) also see
- ^x National Assembly Turnout, Election Commission of Pakistan, 28 May 2009.
- ^{xi} Sikander Shaheen, "*ECP Eyes 100pc Increase in Voters' Turnout*" The Nation, 18 Oct. 2012.
- ^{xii} Election Commission of Pakistan – <http://www.ecp.gov.pk/AboutECP.aspx>
- ^{xiii} The 18th and 20th Constitutional amendments ensure independence of the Election Commission to hold free and fair elections.
- ^{xiv} Election Commission of Pakistan – see <http://www.ecp.gov.pk/AboutECP.aspx>.
- ^{xv} Chief Minister Punjab initiated the launch of youth festivals, sports events, distributed laptops among the youth; Danish schools and Ujala scheme among others.
- ^{xvi} PILDAT (2007) p 20/ "National Assembly- Party Positions including Reserved Seats, see, Election Commission of Pakistan, 18 Dec. 2012. <http://ecp.gov.pk/Misc/PartyPosition/NAPosition.pdf>.
- ^{xvii} PTI has an active youth wing that campaigned vociferously in universities and educational institutes in Lahore prior to its September rally. Similarly Tahirul Qadri mobilised the youth from Minhaj University and

seminaries and institutes under Minhaj ul Quran. Both targeted the youths' angst towards corruption in the government and how that curtails opportunities for them.

xviii "AGE WISE STATISTICS OF FER-2012" Election Commission of Pakistan, 27 Feb. 2013
<http://ecp.gov.pk/VoterStats/AgeWiseVoterStats.asp>.

xix "AGE WISE STATISTICS OF FER-2012" Election Commission of Pakistan, 27 Feb. 2013.
<http://ecp.gov.pk/VoterStats/AgeWiseVoterStats.aspx>

xx Zubaida Mustafa, "Lessons of Long March Comments." Dawn, 30 Jan. 2013. Web.
<<http://dawn.com/2013/01/30/lessons-of-long-march/>>.

xxi "Zardari Meets Gilani in Multan Discusses Seraiki Province Comments." DAWN 16 Nov. 2012
<http://dawn.com/2012/11/16/zardari-meets-gilani-in-multan-discusses-seraiki-province>

xxii Cross border exchange of fire with Indian soldiers on January 8, 2013. Three blasts in Quetta on January 10 claimed 93 lives. Shias were target killed in different areas and the month was said to be the worst in terms of sectarian violence in over a decade.