Sharif’s Story and Pakistan’s Future

What is the issue?

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- Pakistan is currently seeing a major political churn, with the sentencing of former PM Nawaz Sharif for corruption.
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- While the case is believed to have a strongly rooted political angle to it, it nonetheless is threatening to end the political life of Mr. Sharif.
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- At this juncture, it would be appropriate to look into Pakistan’s politics through the lens of Mr. Sharif’s illustrious career.
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How did Mr. Sharif’s present situation evolve?

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- In 2017, Pakistani “Supreme Court” declared the then PM Mr. Nawaz Sharif as dishonest for not disclosing a separate income from his son’s company.
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- Subsequently, the SC disqualified him from his post as PM for the same reason, which was what started a political chaos in Pakistan.
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- Recently, an anti-corruption court convicted ousted PM Nawaz Sharif and sentenced him to 10 years in prison for disproportionate assets.
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- Also, presently, the Pakistani “military, intelligence, and judiciary” seems to be clearly working against Mr. Sharif in a partisan manner.
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- Nonetheless, Mr. Sharif, who was in London when the verdict was read, has stated that he intends to return despite facing imminent arrest.
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- Considering the long prison term and the other pending cases, the situation seems to mark the end of a long and tumultuous political career.
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What are the significant events of Mr. Nawaz Sharif's political career?

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- **Beginning -** Nawaz Sharif was born in a Kashmiri industrialist family, in Lahore (Punjab) and he looked after the family business after studies.
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- Nationalisation of Sharif family's steel business in 1976 by Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto's "PPP government" drove Nawaz to join politics against Bhutto.
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- He joined the "Pakistan Muslim League" (PML), and became the finance minister in the Punjab provincial cabinet in 1981 and Punjab CM in 1985.
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- Subsequently, when his PML party saw a vertical split, he emerged as the leader of one of the breakaway factions which then came to known as PML-N.
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- **As PM -** He was first elected PM in the year 1990, but was removed by the Pakistani president in 1993 and then reinstated again by the Supreme Court.
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- Nonetheless, he had to quit due to external pressure, and his party lost the subsequent election to "PPP" led by Ms. Benazir Bhutto (daughter of Zulfiqar).
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- Mr. Sharif was elected PM for the 2^{nd} time in 1997, and it was during this period that Pakistan successfully tested Nuclear Weapons (in 1998).
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- But in 1999, Mr. Sharif was overthrown in a military coup by Gen. Pervez Musharraf, which was the 4^{th} since Pakistan's independence since 1947.
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- He was subsequently convicted of corruption and given a life sentence for his "hijacking order" - to not allow Mr. Musharraf's plane to land in Islamabad.
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- **Resurrection -** In 2000, Mr. Sharif is said to have reached a deal with the military, which secured him a presidential pardon and allowed him to take refuge in Saudi Arabia.
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- When the political situation became conducive again in 2007, he returned to contest elections that sought to end Mr. Musharraf's military rule.
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- The run up to the elections saw the assassination of Benazir Bhutto, and the subsequent sympathy wave paved the way for her party to win in 2008.

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- The 2013 elections saw Nawaz win a 3rd term as PM as his party, the PML-N secured a strong majority in the Parliament.
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- **Downfall -** Panama Papers leaks in 2016, which indicated the involvement of Sharif family members in financial fraud, generated strong opposition.
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- This massively weakened Mr. Sharif's position and ultimately resulted in his ouster and conviction, and further, is threatening to end his political career.
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How does Pakistan's political future look?

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- No PM in Pakistan has been allowed to finish his five-year term due to the interventions by Pakistan's deep state (extremist vested interests).
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- When a Pakistan PM falls foul of the deep state, the Opposition, senior bureaucrats and the judiciary get together against him/her.
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- **Incumbent -** Nawaz Sharif is the current victim of the deep state's wrath.
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- PML-N is presently facing a leadership crisis as its undisputed leader Nawaz Sharif is going to jail just 3 weeks before the national elections.
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- Significantly, defections are also being orchestrated within the PML-N and his supporters are facing a massive crackdown by state agencies.
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- As the electoral minefield is clearly against Mr. Sharif, he has already flagged the elections as rigged and his party is unlikely to emerge victorious.
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- By deciding to come back to Pakistan, Mr. Sharif is taking a calculated risk, which might influence the political situation significantly.
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- **Churn -** Extreme Islamists and anti-India terrorist forces have been given a free run by the current caretaker government, which is overseeing the polls.
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- More importantly, some of these banned extremist groups (like Hafeez Saeed's LeT) are even participating in elections through frontal organisations.
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- Lethal violence has been unleashed against secularist groups that are refusing to tow the line of the deep state actors and the military.
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- The media has also largely been tamed by harassing journalists, and they are now being forced to lambast Mr. Nawaz Sharif with a vitriolic campaign.
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- Non compliant networks are being throttled in the market by forcefully removing newspapers from shops and taking news channels offline.
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- **The Victor -** Cricketer turned politician Mr. Imran Khan is leading the movement against Sharif and his political stakes are on the upswing.
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- While his party was a fringe player in Pakistan's national politics thus far, the current situation is ripe for him to make a big foray.
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- Notably, the PPP, which was the main opposition thus far, is currently rated rather poorly, with an extremely diminished vote share.
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- Nonetheless, if he happens to rub the wrong side with the deep state actors, it is only a matter of time before he goes down just like Nawaz Sharif.
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Source: The Hindu, Indian Express

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