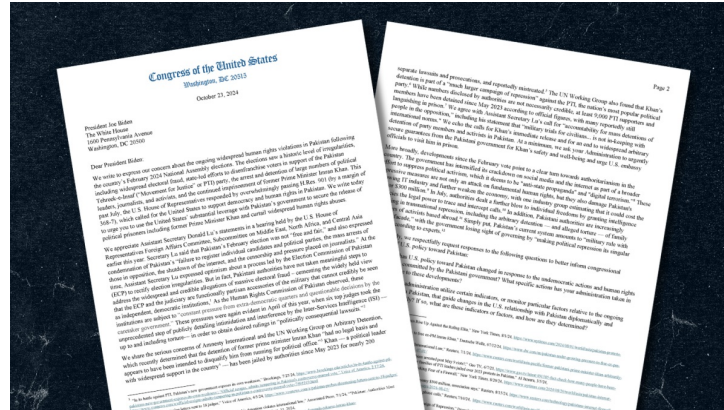


US lawmakers urge President Biden to pressure Pakistan into releasing Imran Khan



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Around 60 Democratic lawmakers from the US House of Representatives have written to President Joe Biden urging him to pressure Pakistan into releasing Imran Khan, the jailed founding chairman of the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI). “We write today to urge you to use the United States’ substantial leverage with Pakistan’s government to secure the release of political prisoners including former Prime Minister Khan and curtail widespread human rights abuses,” the lawmakers wrote in a letter on Wednesday. US Representative Greg Casar, who led the letter, said

it marked the first such collective call from multiple members of the US Congress for the release of Khan, who otherwise has had testy relations with Washington as a long standing critic of US foreign policy. Imran has been in jail since August 2023 and has faced dozens of cases after he was removed from the prime minister's position in April 2022 through a parliamentary vote of no confidence. His party has said that the more than 200 cases are politically motivated. He has been acquitted or granted bails in most of the cases filed against him. The pending cases against him mostly pertain to the May 9 violence. Khan has denied responsibility and has been acquitted or granted bail in many of those cases. He also faced the 190 million pound Al Qadir varsity land corruption case. The case alleges that Imran and Bushra obtained billions of rupees and land worth hundreds of kanals for legalising Rs50 billion – at that time £190 million – that was identified and returned to the country by the UK during the PTI government in 2019. Imran says cases against him, which disqualified him from contesting the February 2024 elections, are politically motivated. A UN human rights working group said in July Imran's detention violated international law. After being ousted Imran blamed the Pakistani military for his removal, accusing it of taking dictation from the US. He singled out top US diplomat Donald Lu, for involvement in Washington's alleged engineering of his ouster from power through a vote of no-confidence. The US and Pakistani military both had denied any involvement in Imran Khan's ouster calling his removal a

democratic process. The political turmoil surrounding Imran escalated following his arrest on May 9, 2023, on corruption charges, which sparked widespread violent protests from his supporters and party leaders, including an assault on the army headquarters in Rawalpindi and the burning of a corps commander's residence in Lahore. Following the unrest, Imran, in a purported audio conversation that surfaced on social media was heard reaching out to US Congresswoman Maxine Moore Waters, imploring her to advocate against the reported human rights abuses in Pakistan. The ex-prime minister expressed concerns over what he said was an escalating crackdown on PTI members that began shortly after violence that followed his arrest. Meanwhile, the Democratic lawmakers also raised concerns about reported irregularities in Pakistan's elections. Pakistan's government denies being unfair in Imran's treatment and its election commission denies the elections were rigged. Although Imran did not run, but candidates he backed secured the highest number of seats. But they still failed to muster the support of allies to meet the required number of parliamentary seats to form a government. His rivals however managed a majority and formed a coalition government. Elections in Pakistan have mostly faced accusations of non-transparency and irregularities. The losing parties usually cry foul as was the case in 2013, 2018 and 2024. Imran Khan's own ascent to power in 2018 was marred by opposition's allegations of pre-poll rigging and being granted favour from the establishment. The

leadership of the country's incumbent major governing parties, the Pakistan Muslim League – Nawaz (PML-N) and the Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) at that time were in the opposition and facing corruption-based crackdown much like Imran's PTI faces now. The PML-N and PPP at that time had claimed that the cases against them were politically motivated and trumped up to weaken their pre-election position to place Imran Khan into power. A survey by the Pakistan Institute of Legislative Development and Transparency (Pildat) found that the 2024 polls had the lowest fairness score among all general elections conducted since 2000. The 2013 elections were given the highest fairness score.