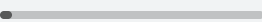




Rawalpindi commissioner says poll results 'manipulated' under his watch; ECP rejects claims

Tahir Naseer | Adnan Sheikh | Published February 17, 2024



Rawalpindi Commissioner Liaquat Ali Chatha addresses a press conference at the Rawalpindi Cricket Stadium on DawnNewsTV

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Rawalpindi Commissioner Liaquat Ali Chatha made explosive claims on Saturday, asserting that the results of the February 8 general elections were “manipulated” under his watch. He also resigned from his position.

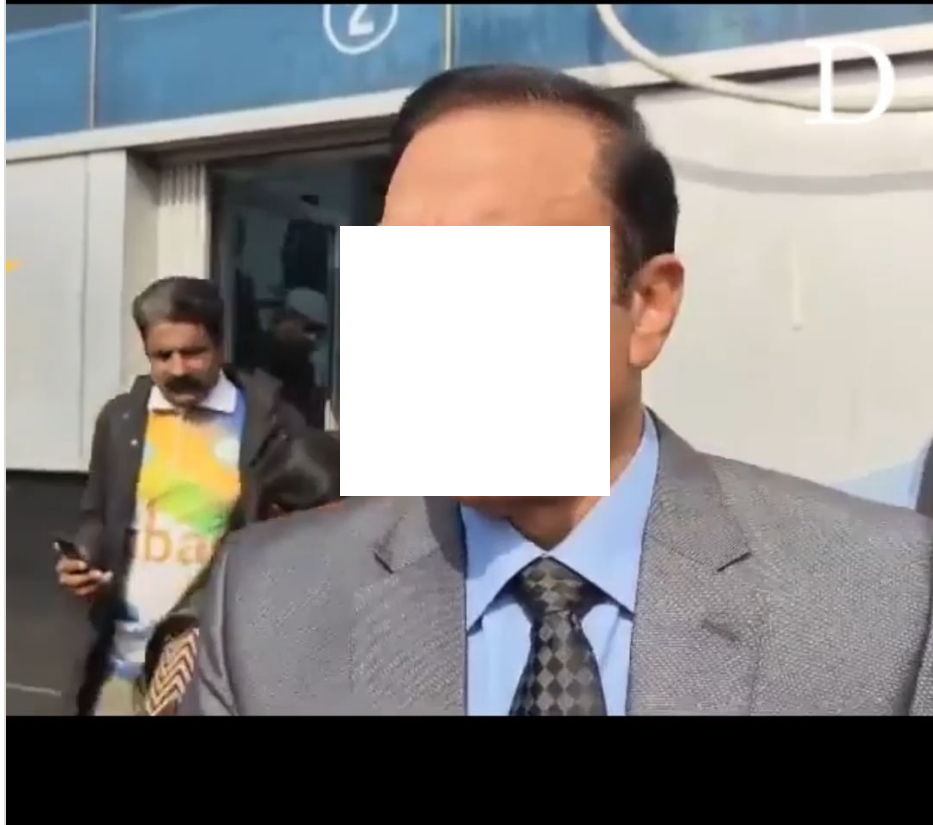
Speaking to reporters outside the Rawalpindi Cricket Stadium, Chatha said, “I am taking responsibility for all this wrongdoing.” He alleged that the chief election commissioner and a top judge of the Supreme Court were “involved in this”.

“We made independent candidates — who had leads of 70,000-80,000 votes — lose by putting on fake stamps,” he added.



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Rawalpindi Commissioner Liaquat Ali Chattha has said that “independent candidates who were winning” the election were made to lose.

When asked by reporters in Rawalpindi if there were “irregularities” in the electoral process and if the local returning officers had delayed the transmission of results, Chattha said that irregularities was a “small term” for it.

“We made to lose the independent candidates who were winning [the election] with a lead of 70,000-80,000 votes by putting on fake stamps,” he added.

“There is no pressure on me,” the commissioner said, adding that he “could not become a part of breaking this country”.

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In a handwritten letter, a copy of which is available with *Dawn.com*, he said he was resigning from his “post and service” as he was “deeply involved in serious crime like mega election rigging 2024”.

The letter was addressed to Punjab Governor Haji Ghulam Ali, interim provincial chief minister Mohsin Naqvi and the provincial chief secretary.


When asked if there were “irregularities” in the electoral process and if the local returning officers had delayed the transmission of results, Chatha said that “‘irregularities’ is a minor word for it”.

The commissioner further said that “stabbing the country in its back” does not let him sleep.

“I should be punished for the injustice I have done and others who were involved in this injustice should also be punished,” he added.


Earlier, addressing a press conference at the Rawalpindi Cricket Stadium, Chatha said there was “pressure” on him to the extent that he contemplated suicide in the morning but then resolved to present matters before the public.




“It is my request to the entire bureaucracy to not do anything wrong for all these political people,” he added.

Murtaza Ali Shah 
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Commissioner Rawalpindi resigns from his position and admits to change the election results before surrendering himself to the police.

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Responding to Chatha's claims, the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) said it "strongly rejected the allegations against the ECP or the chief election commissioner".




In a press release, the electoral watchdog said none of its officials ever issued any instructions to Chatha for a "change in the election results".

Election Commission of Pakistan (OFFICIAL)   

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“Neither is the commissioner of any division ever appointed as a district returning officer, returning office or a presiding officer nor do they ever play a direct role in the conduct of elections,” it asserted.

“However, the election commission will conduct an inquiry into the matter as soon as possible.”

Caretaker Punjab Chief Minister Mohsin Naqvi ordered an “impartial probe” into the allegations levelled by Chatha.

Taking notice of the claims in a statement, he directed that a “high-level committee” be constituted to conduct an inquiry into the matter.

“An independent inquiry of the allegations will be held,” CM Naqvi asserted, adding that the facts will be brought forward.

Meanwhile, Punjab caretaker Information Minister Amir Mir also rejected the claims made by Chatha.

Speaking to *Geo News*, he said that the commissioner had “not shown any proof” of the alleged tampering of election results.

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Noting that Chatha was retiring on March 13, Mir said, “I imagine he’s trying to kick start his political career after he retires.”

The minister further questioned why the official did not come clean about the alleged rigging on February 8 when the polls were held.

Terming Chatha's statements as "irresponsible claims", Mir asked: "If he was forced, why did he not come forward on election day? Why did he come clean after election day?"

"There was some political affiliation of his own or plans and designs that did not happen so he is taking his anger out by blaming the government and elections," the provincial minister alleged.

Mir further said a probe into Chatha's mental health was needed, stating that the commissioner had called for himself to be severely punished.

The PML-N said that the statements made by the Rawalpindi commissioner were a "tactic to gain cheap popularity".

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Following the resignation, in a post on X, the Rawalpindi police refuted [media reports](#) of Chatha's arrest.



Rawalpindi Senior Superintendent of Police (operations) Kamran Asghar also told *Dawn.com* that the commissioner had not been arrested. “How can we arrest someone till a case has been filed against them?” he asked.

On the other hand, PTI’s Khurram Sher Zaman appreciated Chatha’s “courage and bravery”.

“It is hoped that other commissioners in the country would also make public such rigging,” he said in a post on X.

Can a divisional commissioner influence elections?

Advocate Usama Khawar told *Dawn.com* that the Commissioner of a Division does not have an official role in the conduct general elections but can still enjoy an unofficial influence on the conduct of the elections.

“The Election Commission of Pakistan appoints officials from the bureaucracy as election officials for the conduct of elections,” he said.

He said Deputy Commissioners (DCs) of all the six districts of Rawalpindi Division, including Rawalpindi, Attock, Murree, Chakwal, Jhelum, and Talagang, were appointed as the district returning officers (DROs).

Additional deputy commissioner general, additional district deputy commissioner revenue, additional deputy commissioner headquarters, district council chief officer, and the district election commissioners were the returning officers (ROs) of 13 National Assembly constituencies across the division, and all assistant commissioners were the assistant returning officers," Khawar added.

"The Commissioner did not have any official role in this arrangement. However, as the administrative head of the Division, the Commissioner can have an unofficial influence on the conduct of the elections because DCs are subordinate to him on the administrative side.

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