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Ties with Pakistan 'even more important than before': Iran

Says no reason to fear Pakistan-Turkiye-Saudi security pact

TEHRAN, (Monitoring Desk): Iran said on Monday that bilateral ties between Islamabad and Tehran have become "even more important than before" since the war began, with Pakistan serving as the key mediator.
Iran's Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi and Parliament Speaker Mohammad Bagher Ghalibaf were invited by Pakistan to visit Islamabad for talks, Foreign Ministry spokesman Esmaeil Baghaei said. Araghchi and Ghalibaf will visit "at an appropriate time," he said in statements carried by Iran's state-run Press TV. He did not provide further details as to when the visit will take place.
"Reciprocal visits and exchanges are a natural part of the growing ties between the two neighbouring countries. The relationship between Iran and Pakistan is a very important one," he added.
Baghaei further said that he sees no reason to be concerned that a new security pact between Pakistan, Turkiye and Saudi Arabia is "directed against Tehran".
According to Al Jazeera, he stated that the regional military alliance reflected growing awareness that the US cannot guarantee security and is itself a source of insecurity in the Middle East.
He said the "Makkah Joint Defence Agreement" reflected a shift in regional countries' approach to security, with a shift away from reliance on US power.
"Any plan that is based on the geopolitical and historical realities of the region, is comprehensive and inclusive, and correctly identifies the enemy and the threat, has a chance of helping to strengthen security and prevent instability and abuses by the Zionist enemy and its allies," he added, referring to Israel.
He added that Iran would not hold talks with the US as long as Washington continued to "violate the interim deal".Baghaei said Iran has demanded compensation for damage caused by the US-Israel war and that the Strait of Hormuz could reopen if no third party interferes, according to Al Jazeera, and that the US was the cause of major insecurity in the Middle East.
Baghaei also said that negotiations with Oman regarding transit through the Strait of Hormuz are progressing "smoothly and constructively."
"An understanding has been reached about the shipping traffic map and consultations are continuing to finalise some technical points in the joint statement," Baghaei told a weekly news conference, as cited by the semi-official Tasnim news agency.



ISLAMABAD: Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif chairs a review meeting regarding FBR



QUETTA: Opposition Leader Mir Younas Aziz Zehri called on Balochistan Chief Minister Mir Sarfraz Bugti.

Pakistan symbol of identity, freedom, national unity, says CM Sarfraz Bugti

QUETTA, (APP): Independence Day celebrations are reaching their peak across Balochistan, with preparations underway in all divisional and district headquarters. A wide range of cultural, national, and sporting activities are being organized to mark the occasion, while young people are actively participating with patriotic enthusiasm.
Sporting competitions, which began on August 1, have drawn wider participation from athletes and youth across the province. The final round will be held on August 14, where outstanding players and teams will be honored with awards and distinctions. Alongside sports, cultural programs and national activities are being held in various districts, while government buildings, major roads, and public spaces have been decorated with national flags and special Independence Day banners.
Chief Minister Balochistan Mir Sarfraz Bugti welcomed the active involvement of citizens and youth in the celebrations, describing Pakistan as a symbol of identity, freedom, and national unity.
He emphasized that Independence Day is not merely a national holiday but an opportunity to highlight patriotism, solidarity, and love for the country. Sarfraz Bugti noted that the youth of Balochistan are the nation's valuable asset and bright future. He said the government is taking practical steps to provide them with opportunities for positive and healthy activities. Sporting competitions, he added, not only showcase talent but also instill discipline, teamwork, and national spirit among young people.
The Chief Minister stressed that Independence Day is a reminder of the value of freedom, national responsibilities.



ISLAMABAD: Ambassador of Republic of Kazakhstan to Pakistan Yerzhan Kistafin called on Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif

PM Shehbaz welcomes growing confidence of business community in ongoing tax reforms

ISLAMABAD, (APP): Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif on Monday directed the Federal Board of Revenue (FBR) to continue effective enforcement against smuggling, tax evasion, and illegal businesses across the country.
Chairing a review meeting regarding ongoing FBR reforms, the prime minister directed that implementation of the FBR reforms be further accelerated. He welcomed the growing confidence of the business community in the ongoing tax reforms.
The prime minister further instructed that the Chairman FBR and senior officers should stay in Lahore for two days every month, in addition to their monthly stay in Karachi.
"The FBR should accelerate enforcement measures to achieve the prescribed revenue target."
The prime minister appreciated the FBR's actions against illegal cigarette manufacturing factories in Chakwal and Swabi and directed that officers and personnel of good reputation and integrity be appointed to all sensitive posts and departments of the FBR.
He also directed the timely completion of the proposed Faceless System for Inland Revenue. The complete rollout of the Faceless System should be ensured by 2027.
During the meeting, the prime minister was informed that the first phase of the Faceless Inland Revenue System will become operational from October 1, 2026 and the AI- and advanced technology-based Faceless System was an important component of the FBR's recent digitization reforms.
The system will include a National Faceless Audit Wing for the audit of tax returns and a Faceless Assessment Unit for assessments. Under the Faceless System, jurisdiction, over tax cases will be assigned on a random basis, irrespective of geographical boundaries.
The Chairman FBR also briefed the prime minister on his monthly stay in Karachi during the first week of each month, as directed by the Prime Minister, and his meetings with the business community.
The chairman said that he met representatives of seven major trade organizations in Karachi and listened to their concerns.

Governor to represent Balochistan's youth at UN Youth and AI summit in New York

KARACHI, (VoM Report): Governor Balochistan Jaffar Khan Mandokhail will represent the youth of Pakistan and Balochistan at the "Youth and Artificial Intelligence Summit" organized by the United Nations in New York, USA, on August 12. Delegates from more than 186 countries will participate in this global summit. It may be noted that Governor Mandokhail will also address Pakistanis at an event to be held in Dallas, Texas, on August 14, in connection with Pakistan's Independence Day celebrations. At the aforementioned global summit, Governor Jaffar Khan Mandokhail will emphasize enlightening young minds with a modern intellectual worldview, promoting entrepreneurship, developing regional capabilities, and creating real opportunities for the youth of Balochistan to thrive in the rapidly changing technological world. In his address, Governor Jaffar Khan Mandokhail will emphasize the role of artificial intelligence, digital technology, robotics, and online businesses in bridging the gap between the youth of Balochistan and global development. He will also stress equal access to available facilities and opportunities so that no young person is left behind due to geography or circumstances.

Makkah Defence Agreement extension of Pak-Saudi bilateral defence pact: PM

ISLAMABAD, (Monitoring Desk): Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif on Monday said the Makkah Defence Agreement was an extension of the bilateral defence pact signed by Pakistan and Saudi Arabia last year. Last year, Pakistan and Saudi Arabia signed a landmark "Strategic Mutual Defence Agreement", declaring that "any aggression against either country shall be considered an aggression against both". The pact was signed during Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif's visit to Riyadh at the invitation of Saudi Crown Prince and Prime Minister Mohammed bin Salman bin Abdulaziz Al Saud. Addressing a meeting of the federal cabinet, the prime minister recalled that he, Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman and Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan had signed the agreement in Makkah, saying that the agreement was aimed at strengthening defence cooperation among the three countries.
He said the recently signed Makkah Joint Defence Agreement was "entirely for defensive purposes", stressing that it was not intended for aggression.
Pakistan, Saudi Arabia and Turkiye formalised their longstanding strategic relationship through the newly signed "Makkah Joint Defence Agreement", a trilateral security framework that its proponents describe as a defensive arrangement aimed at strengthening collective deterrence.

Govt taking effective measures for development of Balochistan: CM

QUETTA, (VoM Report): Chief Minister Balochistan Mir Sarfraz Bugti held separate meetings here on Monday with provincial ministers, members of the Provincial Assembly, leaders of political parties, and other prominent personalities. Those who met the Chief Minister included Provincial Ministers Mir Zia Langau, Mir Asim Kurd Gilo, and Nawabzada Mir Tariq Magsi; Leader of the Opposition Mir Younis Aziz Zehri; members of the Provincial Assembly Mir Zabid Reki, Rahmat Saleh Baloch, and Dr. Muhammad Nawaz Kibzai; Parliamentary Secretaries Mir Abdul Samad Gorgage and Asghar Tareen; Pakistan Peoples Party Balochistan Provincial President Sardar Umar Gorgage; Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam Balochistan Provincial Emir Maulana Abdul Wasay; Honorary Consul of Germany Mir Murad Baloch; and former District Nazim Sibi Mir Hair Biar Khan Domki.
During the meetings, the overall political and administrative situation in the province, public issues, development matters, and various important affairs were discussed.

Maulana Hidayat vows to provide modern facilities to Gwadar's fishermen

GWADAR, (VoM Report): A meeting was held at the Fisheries Department in Gwadar under the chairmanship of Member of the Provincial Assembly Baloch Maulana Hidayat-ur-Rehman Baloch. The meeting conducted a detailed review of matters related to the welfare of fishermen of Gwadar district, development of the fisheries sector, provision of facilities to deserving fishermen, and the transparent and fair distribution of cheques, green boats, and other necessary equipment.
Director Fisheries Ahmed Nadeem, Assistant Director Shah Fahad, Assistant Director Jiwani Bashir Kakar, Assistant Director Pasni Shah Zeb, and other officers of the Fisheries Department attended the meeting.

Five India-backed terrorists killed during IBO in Balochistan's Panjgur

ISLAMABAD, (Monitoring Desk): Security forces carried out an intelligence-based operation (IBO) in the Sarkini and Chedgi areas of Panjgur district in Balochistan under Operation Rad-ul-Fitna-3 and killed five terrorists, including a key militant commander, security sources said on Monday.
The operation targeted members of Fitna al-Hindustan and resulted in the killing of five terrorists, including the group's commander Wazir, son of Jamal, the sources added.
Security forces also recovered four motorcycles, machine guns, heavy weapons and a cache of ammunition from the possession of the slain terrorists. The killed militants were involved in robbery, extortion, kidnapping and terrorist activities targeting traders and civilians in the area. A clearance operation is underway to eliminate any remaining Fitna al-Hindustan terrorists in the vicinity, the security sources said.
Interior Minister Mohsin Naqvi praised security forces for carrying out a successful IBO in Panjgur, Balochistan, and commended their professionalism after five terrorists were killed during the raid. In a statement, the interior minister said that the security forces had once again demonstrated their resolve in the fight against terrorism.
He added that the country's courageous troops were continuing efforts to eliminate terrorists from Balochistan and restore lasting peace in the province. Naqvi said the entire nation stood united against terrorism and remained firmly alongside the security forces in the fight against militant elements. The minister reiterated the government's commitment to supporting security forces in their efforts to eradicate terrorism from the country.
A day ago, security forces eliminated 15 India-backed terrorists belonging to Fitna al-Khawarij during a series of IBOs conducted under Operation Rad-ul-Fitna-3 across multiple districts of Balochistan.



ISLAMABAD: Federal Minister for Finance and Revenue, Senator Muhammad Aurangzeb, meeting with U.S. Chargé d'Affaires H.E. Ms. Natalie Baker.

Makkah Accord expression of collective commitment to peace through strength, solidarity, mutual respect: DPM Dar

ISLAMABAD, (APP): Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Senator Mohammad Ishaq Dar on Monday reiterated that the Makkah Accord was defensive in nature, and it was not directed against any country.
"Its purpose is to strengthen collective deterrence against external aggression and reinforce our capacity to defend our sovereignty, territorial integrity and peoples," the deputy prime minister said in a statement issued by the Foreign Office.
Extending warm felicitations to the nation on the signing of the "Makkah Joint Defence Agreement" (Makkah Accord) by Pakistan, Saudi Arabia and Türkiye in the blessed city of Makkah Al-Mukarramah, he said this historic accord reflected the depth of our brotherly bonds, shared values and common commitment to peace, security and stability, the deputy prime minister said in his message to the Nation.
He said the signing of the Makkah Accord was a significant milestone in Pakistan's longstanding strategic relationships with the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and the Republic of Türkiye.
"It embodies our shared resolve to strengthen cooperation in addressing the evolving peace and security challenges facing our region." The DPM/FM said the Makkah Accord provided that an armed attack against any one of the three countries shall be regarded as an attack against all, consistent with the inherent right of individual and collective self-defence under Article 51 of the United Nations Charter.
He underscored that Pakistan remained firmly committed to the peaceful resolution of disputes, respect for sovereignty and international law, and the pursuit of regional peace, stability and prosperity.
"The Makkah Accord is not an instrument of confrontation, but an expression of our collective commitment to peace through strength, solidarity and mutual respect."



QUETTA: Former Chief Minister of Balochistan and National Party chief Dr. Abdul Malik Baloch distributing cheques among students at Royal Bolan College of Nursing and Health Sciences through the Pakistan Education Endowment Fund.

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Latest pause in US-Iran confrontation

The latest pause in the United States-Iran confrontation should not be confused with a return to stability. President Donald Trump's decision to hold off on another round of strikes has created diplomatic space, but it has not resolved the dispute that brought the two sides back to the edge of escalation. Washington continues to demand the full reopening of the Strait of Hormuz and enforceable restrictions on Iran's nuclear activities. Tehran, meanwhile, insists that maritime normalization cannot be separated from the cessation of attacks, the removal of the naval blockade and the delivery of promised economic relief.

At first sight, this appears to be a dispute over the implementation of the Islamabad Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) signed in June. In reality, it is more fundamental. The U.S. and Iran entered the MoU with different assumptions about what the agreement was supposed to achieve. Washington viewed it primarily as a mechanism for converting military pressure into Iranian restraint. Tehran regarded it as a reciprocal security bargain intended to exchange Iranian restraint for protection against further attacks and tangible economic relief.

These assumptions shape not only expectations but also the meaning each side assigns to compliance. Washington believes Iran must demonstrate restraint before receiving the full benefits of the agreement. Tehran argues that it cannot surrender its remaining leverage until Washington fulfills its own commitments. The resulting problem is not simply that the parties distrust one another. They disagree about who is taking the greater risk by implementing the agreement first.

The American position begins with the assumption that Iran has been strategically weakened. Months of military attacks, economic pressure and infrastructure losses have reduced Tehran's room for maneuver. From Washington's perspective, Iran accepted the MoU because it needed an exit from an increasingly costly conflict. The agreement is therefore interpreted as the diplomatic extension of military coercion.

This assumption produces a clear expectation. Iran must first restore freedom of navigation, suspend attacks on commercial shipping, and accept meaningful nuclear limitations. Only then should the U.S. provide sanctions relief, release frozen assets or support reconstruction. Any other sequence, Washington fears, would reward escalation and allow Iran to recover economically without addressing the behavior that produced the conflict.

The American approach also treats freedom of navigation as a universal principle rather than a negotiable bilateral issue. Hormuz is not seen as an Iranian bargaining asset but as an international waterway through which a significant share of global energy trade must pass without political conditions. Consequently, Iranian attempts to regulate routes or determine which vessels may transit are interpreted not as legitimate security measures but as coercive interference with an international public good.

The Iranian assumption is almost the opposite. Tehran believes the war has demonstrated the limits of American and Israeli military power. Iran has suffered considerable damage, but it has neither capitulated nor abandoned its principal strategic capabilities. From this perspective, endurance itself constitutes a form of success. The U.S. may dominate the conventional military balance, but it has not been able to transform battlefield superiority into a stable political outcome.

Tehran therefore interprets the MoU not as the document of a defeated party but as evidence that resistance generated diplomatic leverage. It assumes that Washington wants to reduce the economic and regional costs of the conflict without offering Iran reliable protection against renewed attacks. Iranian officials consequently see demands for front-loaded concessions as an attempt to obtain through diplomacy what could not be secured through military operations.

This explains Tehran's emphasis on reciprocity. Iran argues that restrictions on its nuclear program and maritime activities must proceed alongside the suspension of attacks, sanctions relief, restored oil exports and access to frozen assets. Otherwise, Iran would relinquish the instruments that brought Washington to the negotiating table while receiving promises that a future American administration, or even the current one, could reverse.

Iran also assumes that the U.S. does not control the entire escalation environment. Israeli military action, attacks by regional actors and changes in US force posture can undermine Iranian security even if Washington formally observes the MoU. Tehran therefore seeks more than a bilateral American promise. It wants an arrangement that reduces the possibility of renewed attacks across the broader theater.

The consequences are visible. Washington interprets continued Iranian pressure in Hormuz as evidence that Tehran is violating the MoU. Iran interprets American strikes, sanctions measures and delayed economic relief as evidence that Washington violated it first. Each side sees its own actions as defensive enforcement and the other's actions as offensive revision. The MoU has therefore become less a shared roadmap than a contested instrument within the conflict.

Nowhere is this competition more visible than in the Strait of Hormuz. Iran's discourse surrounding the waterway contains four different but complementary narratives

The first narrative historicizes Hormuz. Iranian officials place the strait within a longer story of Persian presence, sovereignty and resistance to external intervention in the Gulf. The insistence on calling the surrounding waters the Persian Gulf is not a minor question of terminology. It embeds contemporary policy in a national historical geography in which Iran is presented as the region's enduring power while the U.S. appears as a distant and temporary intruder.

This historical framing allows Tehran to portray the current dispute as part of an older struggle over who has the legitimate authority to organize Gulf security. The issue is therefore no longer limited to whether ships can transit safely. It becomes a contest between Iranian regional ownership and an externally imposed maritime order protected by American military power.

The second narrative transforms Hormuz into a question of national honor. Iranian leaders increasingly describe control over the waterway alongside nuclear and missile capabilities as a national asset. This rhetorical move is important because it connects maritime policy to sovereignty, sacrifice and collective dignity. Any concession made under military pressure can then be portrayed domestically as surrendering part of the nation's strategic inheritance.

Nationalizing Hormuz helps mobilize domestic support at a time of military and economic pressure. It also strengthens the position of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC), whose naval forces are central to Iran's ability to disrupt shipping and challenge a technologically superior adversary. Yet this narrative also reduces diplomatic flexibility. A bargaining position can be modified; a symbol of national honor is much harder to compromise. The third narrative defines Hormuz as strategic leverage. Iran understands that it cannot match the U.S. platform for platform. Its advantage lies instead in geography, proximity, mines, missiles, drones, fast attack craft and the capacity to increase uncertainty across global energy markets. Tehran does not need to close the strait completely to produce strategic effects. Selective passage, route restrictions, vessel inspections and periodic attacks can raise insurance costs, disrupt supply calculations and compel regional governments to pressure Washington.

New provinces debate and the good governance challenge

DR SYED AKHTAR ALI SHAH

Federal Interior Minister Mohsin Naqvi's recent remarks - that the current political system has collapsed and that politics is increasingly being pursued by a few families and elites - have evoked an intense debate on Pakistan's political and constitutional landscape. Simultaneously, a map proposing new provinces is also circulating, further fueling speculation that the country may be entering another phase of constitutional experimentation and administrative change.

Amid all this, another voice, that of Dr Ishrat Husain, declares that good governance is the basic issue. A prominent economist, academic and civil servant, Dr Hussain opines that institutional effectiveness, economic stability and public trust are the fundamental pillars of national security. From the aforementioned interconnected views and narratives, one reality that emerges is that Pakistan is facing an acute crisis of governance. Undoubtedly, this bitter reality is reflected in the title of the book Governing the Ungovernable, authored by Dr Husain.

These days, the word 'good governance' is being floated as a panacea for all ills. Undoubtedly, good governance is a prerequisite for the well-being of the public. But the fundamental question is not whether governance matters; it is: what do we actually mean by good governance?

During all these discussions, Shehzad Roy's satirical song, Laga Reh, flashed through my mind. Satirically, he narrates Pakistan's political history since independence. He reminds us that successive governments have kept promising change but have often been greasing their own palms and pursuing narrow self-interests instead of really developing institutions and ushering in reforms. The central idea of the song - that everyone tries to serve their own interests while the country's fundamental structural problems remain untouched - points to a bitter truth. This same reality is narrated in the Hindi proverb, dhaak ke teen paat. This proverb portrays a situation that does not change despite repeated efforts. It can be translated into English as 'the same old story'.

Pakistan has passed through parliamentary governments, presidential systems, martial law, caretaker setups, constitutional amendments, accountability drives, and repeated promises of a "new beginning". Yet, having experimented with all models, the country is facing the same problems and is back at square one i.e. dhaak ke teen paat.

It may not be out of context to mention here that I have recently been back from a long visit to the UK and the US. What appealed to me most there was that good governance was reflected not just in how institutions perform, but in people's daily lives too. I realised that the rule of law is the hallmark of good governance. Those countries were administered by elected local governments, but they operated within a clear legal framework and planning principles. Parks, roads, commercial centres, residential areas, playgrounds, recreational facilities, and public services - all have been developed and maintained according to the law, not personal discretion.

More significantly, the enforcement of law is impartial and non-discriminatory. Freedoms are enjoyed within the bounds of the law. The moment a violation occurs, the law is sure to take its course, and the violator is brought to justice. The law is universally applied - ensuring that no one is above the law. This certainty of the enforcement of law is the essence of good governance, which differentiates it from mere political sloganeering.

Adherence to the rule of law ensures that real freedom flourishes. Freedom without law inevitably turns into chaos. This sentiment is echoed in the words 'Thy liberty in law' from the patriotic song, America the Beautiful, penned by the famous American poet Katharine Lee Bates.

The Constitution always remains the supreme law of the land; therefore, respect for it is paramount to good governance. Unfortunately, our constitutional history is filled with accounts of constitutional provisions being mutilated, ignored, or bent to suit political expediency and tailored to favour specific individuals.

This brings us back to the debate on new provinces. Changing administrative boundaries and creating several new provinces may appear sound to many, but it runs the risk of sidelining the real issue of governance itself. Whether Pakistan has four provinces or fourteen, the real question is whether the state can ensure good governance by providing every citizen with quality education, accessible healthcare, employment opportunities, public safety, robust infrastructure and timely justice.

These undertakings require massive funding, something that necessitates a broad-based tax system. But, unfortunately, the majority of the affluent class remains outside an effective tax system. At the same time, regions like Malakand, the ex-Fata region, Gilgit-Baltistan, and Azad Jammu and Kashmir are out of the pale of the federal and provincial tax systems, even though they require heavy public investment for socio-economic development.

Virtually dismantling the existing federal structure or ignoring the constitutional framework of the National Finance Commission would further compound the problem.

The real solution lies in expanding the economy, broadening the tax net, strengthening institutions, ensuring the equitable distribution of resources, and making targeted investments in underdeveloped areas. If governance really is Pakistan's main problem, then we must realise that good governance, in essence, means efficiency, effectiveness, transparency, accountability, and - above all - the rule of law, which includes respect for the Constitution.

Creating new provinces, boundaries or administrative structures would only add to administrative costs, further shrinking the fiscal space for development, and proving counterproductive. For the desired results, the enforcement of law is imperative. Otherwise, once another political cycle is complete, we will find ourselves standing exactly where we are today: new faces, new promises, but the same problems. Once again, Shehzad Roy's satire and the old Hindi proverb, dhaak ke teen paat, will reflect our political reality.

In short, good governance does not lie in new provinces, new slogans or repeated constitutional experiments. Its real essence lies in respect for the Constitution, strong institutions, and - most of all - the effective, fair and impartial enforcement of the law. That is the true and lasting solution to Pakistan's problems.

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Asia in the rapidly changing global order

SHAHID JAVED BURKI

Several years ago, when I was the Director of International Relations Department, I was asked by Tom Claussen, then the President of the World Bank, to write a note on the global order. The note would be used by his speech writer to prepare the draft of a talk he was to give at an event in Tokyo. I wrote a note in which I suggested that after the collapse of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR), the world was no longer bipolar with competition for influence by the USSR and the United States. The world had become multipolar. Claussen liked the note and the speech on which it was used was picked by the Western press. Somebody in the Bank revealed that Claussen's speech was based on a note I had prepared. The Economist chided me for using a word that did not exist in English. There were only two poles, north and south. However, it may have been poor English to describe the world as multipolar, but the word caught on and is now commonly used to describe the emerging global order. I mention this to write about the way the world around the large continent of Asia is evolving.

Three sides of Asia – the west, the north and the east separated by thousands of miles of territory – are now dealing with different country influences. Jennifer Kavanagh wrote in an essay published in the opinion pages of The New York Times on Auguist 1, 2026, under the title "A new order is taking shape in the Pacific" that "since President Trump's return to office, uncertainty over his commitment to the defense of Asia has sparked warnings that Beijing could seize the opportunity to be more assertive, pushing U.S. allies to band together. Those wheels are now turning, bringing new risks: Major changes in global security rarely unfold smoothly. At any rate an overextended United States is less prepared to underwrite Asia's security indefinitely than it once was."

The space vacated by the United States in western Pacific is now being occupied by China. China is extending its reach from the Pacific to its east to the Arabian Sea to its west and also to the north of the Asian continent where it is the only country outside Afghanistan to have reached out to the Taliban who now govern from Kabul. In spite of the effort made by Donald Trump, the American president, China is using its growing economic and political power in its immediate neighborhood. In east, its ambition has provoked its neighbours to take action to check Beining. Japan, although having close economic links with China, has strengthened defence ties with Australia, the Philippines and India. Tokyo is also discussing closer cooperation with South Korea, a close American ally. Japan has abandoned its longstanding restrictions in defence expenditure and defence exports and is moving to link with South Korea as a regional supplier of military equipment. Australia is nervous about what it perceives as the aggressive Chinese moves in the waters its shares with Beijing. It has reached out to small Pacific nations and signed defence agreements with them – a challenge that Washington has as yet not confronted.

There are major changes in the way large countries in East Asia look at their security situation. Fear of American abandonment – if not abandonment than downgrading its presence – is likely to quicken the arms race that is already underway in the eastern part of the Asian continent. China is investing large amounts of resources to build its armed forces and expand its nuclear arsenal. Japan has recently begun deploying longer range missiles. South Korea is thinking of developing its own nuclear arsenal, and Australia is investing in nuclear-powered submarines and missile capabilities. Initially it wanted to take these steps with American involvement but Washington, fearing Chinese reaction, did not get engaged and Australians turned to France for help.

On Asia's western shore, the unprovoked American attack on Iran on February 28, 2026 has ignited a complicated defence situation in the Middle which was not anticipated by Donald Trump, the America president. His declared aim was to weaken Iran's military capacity and provoke a regime change in Tehran. The former aim was partly achieved but the latter one worked in the opposite direction. While the combined American-Israeli bombing killed senior Iranian leaders, they were replaced by people who were more hostile to America's Middle Eastern policies. Iran activated its allies in the area that attacked American forces in several small Middle Eastern nations. Most had American bases. The attacks led to nearly a score American deaths.

The ongoing American war in the Middle East has brought war close to Pakistan's borders. While there has been no military activity in Pakistan, the country's citizens have developed poor impressions of American policies. In addition to the expanding problems in the Middle East, Pakistan has to find a way of dealing with its deteriorating relations with Afghanistan, the neighbour on its northwest. The Taliban who now govern from Kabul have close relations with the extremist group Tehreek Taliban Pakistan, the TTP. In recent months this group has used suicide bombers to attack Pakistan's security forces a s well as people in the restive areas of Pakistan's northwest.

Of the country's four neighbours, Pakistan has troubled relation with three – Iran, Afghanistan and India. Pakistan works well only with China which has economic interests in Afghanistan and the countries of Central Asia. These countries have rich untapped mineral resources that China seeks to tap and transport them through the road network they have built in Pakistan. China constructed CPEC, the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor, that connected its western most Chinese region of Xinjiang with the port of Gwadar on Pakistan's coast. There is now active talk about building CPEC-2 that would take the motorway to Afghanistan. This would provide China with the road that would take minerals extracted from Afghanistan and the countries in the northwest to the processing centres in China.

The writer is a former caretaker finance minister and served as vice-president at the World Bank

When distributed solar meets a centralised power system

ABIS HUSEIN

Pakistan's solar debate often gets reduced to immediate questions: what rate will exported units get? Will net billing hurt payback? And, are solar users shifting costs onto others? These questions matter. But once distributed solar reaches meaningful scale, the deeper issue is no longer just pricing. It is integration.

Pakistan's first solar phase was driven by consumer economics. Grid electricity became expensive, service quality uneven, solar equipment cheaper, and consumers responded rationally. But when many users generate part of their own electricity, solar stops being only a consumer decision and becomes a power-system issue.

This is not because solar is a mistake. It is because Pakistan's electricity system was built around centralised logic: large generation, top-down planning, one-way power flows, and consumers visible mainly through conventional billing. Distributed solar changes that picture. It places generation at the edge of the system, unevenly across households, businesses, industries, locations and feeders.

Solar therefore needs to be discussed in system space, not only tariff space. Tariff space is where most public arguments still sit: export rates, billing treatment, unit savings, and the cost burden on non-solar users. System space asks harder questions. When does solar generation arrive? What happens to feeder-level load patterns? How much visibility does the utility have? What happens to evening demand once daytime self-generation becomes common? How should shared networks recover costs when some users self-supply but still depend on the wires?

These are not anti-solar questions. They are coordination questions.

Distributed solar is exposing the limits of a legacy power system trying to manage a more decentralised reality. The issue should not be framed as a fight between utilities and solar users. DISCOs do need reform, but reform must recognise that their role is changing. In a solarising system, a DISCO cannot remain only a seller of units. It increasingly becomes a network manager, data platform, settlement layer and integration actor.

This is where metering becomes more important than it sounds. A traditional meter is mainly a billing device. A smart meter can become part of a visibility system. That is why the recent official push around smart metering matters. In April 2026, the Power Division announced an IFC-supported advisory arrangement for large-scale smart metering, covering 10 million single-phase connections, along with smart meters for new connections and broader AMI expansion.

Smart meters are not a miracle cure. They will not automatically fix weak feeders, poor policy design or badly aligned incentives. But they do mark movement away from passive billing and toward active visibility. In a distributed solar era, visibility itself becomes system infrastructure.

That matters because a centralised system can survive with coarse visibility, but a distributed one cannot. If generation increasingly sits behind the meter, partial data becomes a strategic weakness. Solar may be politically visible, but operationally blurry. A system that cannot see clearly is likely to govern by reaction rather than intelligence. The Competition Commission study highlights inadequate grid infrastructure, smart-metering gaps and weak data as constraints on solar integration, while pointing toward modernisation, automation, storage and better registration.

The other missing piece is flexibility. Not all demand helps the system equally, and not all solar output helps unless timing is managed well. Storage matters not only as backup for users, but as a bridge between private solar adoption and wider system coordination. So do flexible loads, better demand shaping and time-aware planning.

Pakistan's first solar phase was about escaping cost and unreliability. The next phase of the solar transition will be about making distributed growth compatible with a shared system and about governing distributed energy at scale. The country does not need less solar.

It needs a power system that can see it, integrate it, and work with it.

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Iran parliament to decide fate of Caspian Sea convention: Baqaei

TEHRAN, (Monitoring Desk): Iran's Foreign Ministry spokesperson Esmail Baqaei has stressed that the country independently makes decisions on international agreements based on its national interests, saying the final decision on the Convention on the Legal Status of the Caspian Sea rests with the Iranian Parliament.

Speaking at a weekly press conference in Tehran on Monday, Baqaei said the convention, signed in August 2018, had been under inspection for years by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and other relevant institutions before being submitted to parliament.

Responding to questions about criticism over the timing of the convention's referral, he rejected the claims that the move was linked to the recent war or pressure from another country.

Iran independently makes decisions regarding its national interests, Baqaei said, adding that the country's position on international instruments is determined solely by its interests and considerations.

He noted that the convention has five signatories — the five Caspian Sea littoral states — and cannot enter into force until all five countries have joined it. He said it was natural for the other four countries to favor its early entry into force.

Baqaei emphasized that the Foreign Ministry had fulfilled its responsibilities and would continue explaining the agreement and considering different views, but ultimately, under Iran's Constitution, parliament is responsible for determining its fate.

Regional security

Addressing a question about the emerging defense understanding among Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, and Turkey, Baqaei said recent regional developments reflected a growing realization that security cannot be purchased from outside powers.

He said Iran has consistently advocated regional cooperation, mutual trust and indigenous security arrangements without dependence on external actors. Baqaei argued that developments in recent years, including the Gaza war and the Israeli regime's acts of aggression in Lebanon and elsewhere, had strengthened the perception among regional countries that the regime poses a major threat to regional stability.

He also criticized US support for the Israeli regime, saying Washington had contributed to regional insecurity. Iran, he added, believes security in the region is indivisible and that arrangements based on regional realities and a comprehensive understanding of threats could help prevent instability.

Baqaei also criticized Kuwait over its refusal to provide consular access to four Iranian nationals detained in the country.



ISTANBUL: A special projection highlighting the Mecca Joint Defense Agreement illuminates Istanbul's iconic Galata Tower as part of a communication campaign organized by the Republic of Turkiye Directorate of Communications



BANGKOK: Family members of a teacher killed in a deadly shooting at Debsirin Nonthaburi School, react as they receive the body at Police General Hospital.

Netanyahu rejects Trump plan, ties Gaza exit to disarming Hamas

JERUSALEM, (Monitoring Desk): Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu rejected a Gaza plan backed by Donald Trump, saying Israel would not withdraw its forces until Hamas is "genuinely" disarmed.

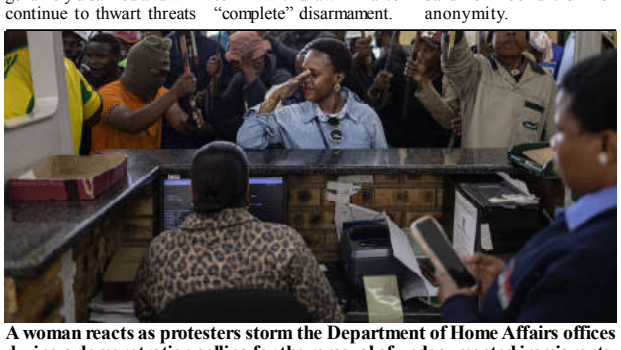
After more than a week of gradually escalating criticism of the plan, Netanyahu explicitly opposed it as he faced pushback from his right-wing base ahead of elections.

"Israel rejects the 15-point document," Netanyahu said, referring to a plan endorsed by Hamas in late July. The Israeli military "will not carry out any withdrawal until Hamas is genuinely disarmed and will continue to thwart threats against our forces and our citizens," Netanyahu said at a Cabinet meeting.

The document, the latest stage in a U.S.-led ceasefire announced in October that has reduced but not ended Israeli operations in Gaza, said Hamas would surrender weapons to a nascent Palestinian governing body. The plan said Israel would begin pulling out forces in tandem with the disarmament, an idea adamantly rejected by Israel, which also wants Hamas to destroy its weapons. After meeting Netanyahu last week, Trump's body implementing the deal, dubbed the Board of Peace, backtracked and said Israel would only need to withdraw after "complete" disarmament.

Earlier Saturday, Hamas said it remained ready to move forward with the U.S.-backed plan, while urging pressure on Israel, which maintains it did not agree to the deal's latest provisions.

"Hamas and other factions have confirmed to mediators their readiness to begin implementing the agreement and move to the second phase, provided it receives Israeli approval and that Israel begins implementing the agreement," a Hamas official told media. "Hamas is urging the U.S. administration to exert pressure on Israel to compel it to abide by the agreement and move to the second phase," the official said on condition of anonymity.



A woman reacts as protesters storm the Department of Home Affairs offices during a demonstration calling for the removal of undocumented immigrants, Alexandra township, South Africa.

Spanish flamenco dancer Christina Aguilera to kick up her heels in Istanbul

For her 'Flamenco on Fire' project, Aguilera will be joined by guitarist Marcos de Silvia and vocalist Miguel 'El Lavi'

ISTANBUL, (Monitoring Desk): Spanish flamenco dancer Christina Aguilera will perform in Istanbul on Aug. 26 as part of her "Flamenco on Fire" project.



The performance, which brings the traditional spirit of flamenco together with a contemporary stage approach, will take place at the amphitheater in Kadikoy's Ozgurluk Park.

Aguilera will be joined by guitarist Marcos de Silvia and vocalist Miguel "El Lavi."

Born in Granada, Aguilera has worked throughout her career with leading flamenco artists including Fuensanta La Moneta, Eva Yerbabuena, Antonio Canales, and Farruquito.

De Silvia, a young guitarist trained at the Cristina Heeren Flamenco Foundation in Seville, and El Lavi, a vocalist from Jerez de la Frontera, a city known for its strong flamenco tradition, will accompany Aguilera during the performance.

Hezbollah urges Lebanon to halt direct talks with Israel over territorial map

BEIRUT, (Monitoring Desk): Hezbollah urged the Lebanese government Monday to halt direct talks with Israel after the Israeli Foreign Ministry published a map depicting large parts of southern Lebanon as Israeli territory.

The group said the map exposed Israeli ambitions over Lebanese land and resources, accusing Tel Aviv of seeking to impose new realities on the ground.

The map, published Friday on the Israeli Foreign Ministry's Arabic-language account on the US social media platform X, showed large areas of southern Lebanon incorporated into Israel.

Hezbollah argued that the map undermined the negotiating track, accusing Israel of using direct talks to buy time while seeking to consolidate its presence on Lebanese territory.

The group called on the government to end direct negotiations and lodge an urgent complaint with the UN Security Council.

It also urged Lebanon's Higher Defense Council to convene an emergency meeting and called for a unified response to defend the country's sovereignty, territory and resources.

Lebanese authorities had not publicly commented on the map as of Monday evening.

Beirut has repeatedly demanded a full Israeli withdrawal from southern Lebanon.

The statement comes after Lebanese and Israeli negotiators concluded a seventh round of US-mediated talks in Rome on Thursday.

The talks focused on implementing a framework agreement reached on June 26.

US-Israel rift deepens over Washington's push to wind down 3 fronts: Report

WASHINGTON, (Monitoring Desk): A rift between Israel and the US is deepening as Washington pushes to wind down fighting in Gaza, Lebanon and Iran, media reported on Monday. Citing unnamed political sources, it said US Central Command (CENTCOM) chief Adm. Brad Cooper conveyed the message during a visit to Israel on Saturday that Washington wants progress toward "closing the three fronts." The push has exposed differences over how far Israel is prepared to scale back its military operations across the region.

Israeli military officials told their US counterparts that Israel intends to preserve its freedom to act against Iran if Tehran continues developing its nuclear program or rebuilding its ballistic missile capabilities, according to the report. In Lebanon, Washington is pushing for further Israeli withdrawals from positions inside the security zone in the south, Channel 13 said. In Gaza, the US is pressing for progress and the deployment of a multinational force that currently includes hundreds of troops from Morocco and Uganda, according to the broadcaster. Israeli security officials have also raised objections with the political leadership in recent days over US demands to halt targeted killings and scale back military operations in Gaza, the report said.

Channel 13 noted that those demands do not explicitly appear in proposals currently under discussion. A senior Israeli military officer cited by the broadcaster said Washington's message to Israel's security establishment was to "move toward closing the three fronts." The report came as US President Donald Trump signaled Sunday that Washington is taking a more restrained approach toward Iran for now. "We are low keying it," Trump told the Axios news site, adding the US is "only semi-negotiating" with Iran while closely watching pressure on its economy.

11 killed in separate shootings in South Africa's Cape Town

CAPE TOWN, South Africa, (Monitoring Desk): At least 11 people were killed in three separate shootings in the Cape Town metropolitan area, South African police said Monday.

The South African Police Service (SAPS) said investigations had been launched into the shootings in Khayelitsha, Langa and Gugulethu townships.

Three men aged 25, 31 and 35 were shot and killed in an attack in the Lingelethu West area of Khayelitsha, police said.

In a second shooting on Winnie Mandela Street in the KwaLanga area of Langa, four men and one woman were killed.

A third attack in the Barcelona informal settlement in Gugulethu left two men and one woman dead and two others injured, according to police.

Additional police teams were deployed to the areas where the shootings occurred as well as other locations considered high risk, SAPS said.

Western Cape Provincial Police Commissioner Lieut. Gen. Sizakhele Dyantyi said the motive for the attacks had not yet been determined and urged anyone with information that could assist the investigation to come forward.

Dyantyi announced a reward of 100,000 South African rand ($6,185) for information leading to the arrest of the perpetrators.

He said gang violence and illegal firearms remained major security challenges in the province.



Intense volcanic activity continues at Mount Etna's Voragine summit crater in Catania, Sicily, Italy

US senator says Trump has 'lost' Iran war

Chris Murphy says continued fighting is weakening US, strengthening Iran and driving up prices

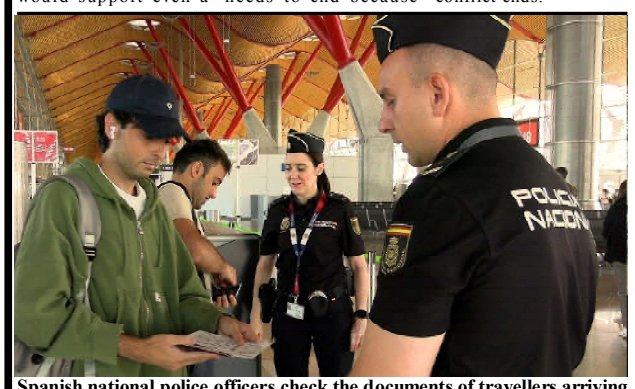
WASHINGTON, (Monitoring Desk): US Democratic Senator Chris Murphy said Sunday that President Donald Trump has "lost this war" with Iran, arguing that continued fighting is weakening the US while strengthening Tehran.

"America is weaker. Iran is stronger," Murphy told NBC, saying he would support even a "bad deal" to end the war and reopen the Strait of Hormuz.

He said the cost of reopening the strategic waterway was rising as negotiations remained stalled.

Iranian officials have demanded reparations, the lifting of sanctions and a halt to US military operations, according to the US media. "The war needs to end because every day that the war continues, America gets weaker, Iran gets stronger, and people here in the United States get screwed as prices go up and up and up," Murphy said.

Murphy said he would oppose funding to continue the war but would support replenishing US munitions after the conflict ends.



Spanish national police officers check the documents of travellers arriving from Italy, after Spain's government said it would establish border controls for flights and ships from Italy, at Madrid-Barajas Airport, Madrid, Spain.

Thousands protest exam 'irregularities' in eastern India as police use water cannons

NEW DELHI, (Monitoring Desk): Thousands of young people demanding reforms to recruitment examinations protested Monday in the eastern Indian state of Jharkhand, as police used water cannons to stop students and job aspirants marching toward the state legislative assembly.

Students in Jharkhand have been protesting for weeks over alleged examination "irregularities," with several currently on hunger strike. On Monday, students and job aspirants began marching toward the legislative assembly complex but were stopped by security personnel, who used water cannons to block their advance. The state government, led by a regional party opposed to Prime Minister Narendra Modi, has held several rounds of talks with student groups, but protesters are demanding an investigation by a federal agency. The government said it had accepted 98% of the protesters' demands. One of the main demands by students and job aspirants is reform of the state's recruitment agencies.

The protest in Jharkhand comes after weeks of nationwide demonstrations last month demanding the removal of India's Education Minister Dharmendra Pradhan over alleged exam paper leaks and irregularities in the country's education system.

The protests were led by the newly formed Cockroach Janta Party.



Mourners gather during a funeral outside Al-Aqsa Martyrs Hospital in Deir al-Balah, central Gaza Strip, Palestine

NOTICE INVITING TENDER

TSE No. 2627081156572 The Directorate General of Fisheries, Government of Balochistan, invites electronic bids from eligible bidders for procurement of the following services under the Balochistan Public Procurement Rules, 2014:

S#	Class of Object / Services	Tender Fee	Bid Security	Procedure
1	Engineering and Research and Technology Based Services (Customized Software Development - 01 Item)	Not Required	2%	Single Stage Two Envelope

Eligibility Requirements At least five (05) assignments of similar nature and complexity. Turnover of at least PKR 25,000,000 during the five preceding years. Active Taxpayer List status, valid Balochistan Revenue Authority (BRA) registration, and Pakistan Software Export Board (PSEB) registration. Audited accounts, certified by a Chartered Accountant, for FY 2020-21, 2021-22, 2022-23, 2023-24 and 2024-25. Local office with field and support staff for service, support and maintenance. Successful completion of five (05) customized software-development assignments in the public sector during the last three (03) years. The bidder must not be blacklisted by any procuring agency in Pakistan and must undertake to complete the contract within the stipulated period after issuance of the work order. **Bid Submission and Opening Bidding documents:** Available electronically at www.bppra.gob.pk. **Bid security:** 2% of the bid value, in the form of a bank guarantee or deposit at call, in the name of the undersigned, issued by a scheduled bank. **Submission deadline:** 25 August 2026 at 12:30 PM through the supplier dashboard on the BPPRA Electronic Public Procurement System (EPPS). **Bid opening:** 25 August 2026 at 1:30 PM on the EPPS system.

IMPORTANT: Only electronic bids shall be submitted; no physical bid is required. Bidders must be registered on the BPPRA EPPS.

DIRECTOR GENERAL FISHERIES
Directorate General of Fisheries, Quetta

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Pakistan set to open new gateway for foreign oil suppliers

ISLAMABAD, (Monitoring Desk): Pakistan is set to open its petroleum storage sector to international oil suppliers through a customs-bonded framework that would permit local sales as well as re-exports.

The move is aimed at positioning Pakistan as a regional petroleum storage and trading hub while enhancing energy security and supply-chain resilience, media reported on Monday. The Policy Guideline on Import on Foreign Suppliers' Account through Customs Bonded Storage Facilities-2026 offers international suppliers a mechanism to maintain inventories in Pakistan without immediately triggering domestic duties and taxes, while giving them greater flexibility to decide whether to supply the domestic market or re-export their stocks.

The Petroleum Division has sent the 168-page policy to ECC (Economic Coordination Committee) for approval. The policy covers a wide range of strategic energy commodities, including crude oil of all grades, motor spirit, high-speed diesel, jet fuel, fuel oil, LPG and LNG. It envisages bonded storage at locations including Port Qasim, KPT/Kemari, Hub, Gwadar, Mahmood Kot and Machike Sheikhupura, subject to the relevant regulatory and safety approvals. The central attraction for foreign suppliers, particularly from the Middle East, such as from Kuwait and the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, is that petroleum cargo can be imported into bonded storage on the supplier's account, rather than requiring an immediate domestic sale or foreign-exchange remittance at the point of entry. Under the proposed structure, a foreign supplier can participate through a registered liaison office or through a locally established branch or incorporated company acting as its consignee. The consignee can develop dedicated storage or use licensed public and private bonded storage facilities.

This effectively positions Pakistan not merely as a destination market but potentially as a strategic storage and trading hub for regional petroleum flows.

For investors, the proposition is straightforward: bring product into Pakistan, keep it under customs bond, wait for a commercially attractive domestic sale or redirect it to an overseas market. The policy could have its biggest strategic impact on energy security. Instead of relying solely on cargoes imported for immediate consumption, Pakistan could see more petroleum stocks physically available inside the country but held under a bonded regime. Such inventories could provide greater flexibility during disruptions in international supply chains.

The policy also provides for movement of bonded petroleum through the national pipeline network from port-based locations to inland approved storage facilities such as Mahmood Kot and Machike Sheikhupura without triggering duty or tax merely because the product moves in bond.



ISLAMABAD: Federal Minister for National Heritage & Culture Aurangzeb Khan Khichi addressing the opening ceremony of the Chinese Language & Chinese Culture Experience Course, "The Language of the Eastern Silk Road," in Islamabad Museum



QUETTA: Provincial president of Pakistan Peoples Party Senator Sardar Umar Khan Gorgage in a meeting with Balochistan Chief Minister Mir Sarfraz Bugti.

Overseas Pakistanis integral part of national economic mainstream: PM

ISLAMABAD, (APP): Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif on Monday expressed satisfaction over the receipt of $3.6 billion in remittances from overseas Pakistanis in July 2026.

"Remittances sent by overseas Pakistanis increased by 13 percent year-on-year in July 2026, which is highly encouraging," the prime minister said in a statement issued by the PM Office.

He said remittances from overseas Pakistanis also increased by 4.5 percent month-on-month in July 2026.

"The consistent and positive contribution of overseas Pakistanis to the stability and growth of the national economy is highly commendable."

The prime minister pointed out that the overseas Pakistanis were a valuable and integral part of the national economic mainstream.

Elimination of terrorists essential for restoration peace in Balochistan: Naqvi

ISLAMABAD, (APP): Interior Minister Mohsin Naqvi has lauded the security forces for successfully conducting an intelligence-based operation in the Panjgur area of Balochistan under Operation Radd-ul-Fitna 3, in which five militants, including their ringleader, were killed.

Paying tribute to the professionalism and operational capabilities of the security forces, Naqvi said the successful action had thwarted the nefarious designs of the militants and dealt a major blow to their activities in the region.

The interior minister praised the bravery and determination of the security personnel who took part in the operation, describing them as a source of pride for the entire nation. He said the courageous sons of the soil were continuing their efforts to eliminate terrorism from Balochistan and were making significant sacrifices to protect the country and its people.

Naqvi said the successful operation demonstrated the security forces' preparedness, professionalism and unwavering commitment to combating terrorism. He stressed that the elimination of terrorist elements was essential for restoring lasting peace and stability in Balochistan and across the country.

"Security forces have successfully thwarted the nefarious designs of the militants," Naqvi said, adding that the nation stood firmly behind the brave personnel engaged in the fight against terrorism.

PPP attempting to portray electoral defeat as result of rigging, says Rana Sana

ISLAMABAD, (APP): Adviser to Prime Minister Rana Sanaullah has said polling in the third phase of the Azad Jammu and Kashmir (AJK) elections is proceeding peacefully in the remaining constituencies of Poonch Division, particularly Haveli and Bagh, with only a few isolated incidents reported.

Speaking to the media, Sanaullah said the elections were being held after the AJK and federal governments agreed to give protesters sufficient time to reconsider their position.

He said those who had sought to prevent the elections should now accept that they had failed to stop the democratic process.

"Those who wanted to stop the elections should now realize that they have failed. The people of Azad Kashmir have exercised their right to vote and given their mandate to their elected representatives," he said.

Sanaullah said the completion of the third phase would pave the way for government formation in AJK. The elected government, he added, would address the legitimate problems and concerns of the people through democratic means.

He urged protesting groups to end their sit-ins and return to the democratic process, saying candidates from constituencies where elections remained pending could join the assembly through by-elections.

At the same time, Sanaullah warned that individuals who had allegedly taken up arms, attempted to mislead the people, undermine the Kashmir freedom movement, damage the state or act in the interests of hostile forces would have to face the law and account for their actions.

According to Sanaullah, polling in Haveli and Bagh began at 8 am and continued peacefully. He said an incident occurred at a police station in Haveli where some individuals allegedly attempted to seize official records. The situation was brought under control after the Quick Response Force, including Rangers and other security personnel, reached the area, allowing polling to resume.

He also said attempts were allegedly made to disrupt polling at three stations in one of the Bagh constituencies. Apart from these incidents, he said, no major violence had been reported.

He alleged that the Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) was attempting to portray its electoral defeat as a result of rigging. "I have mentioned this incident because I do not want the death of this elderly voter to later be presented as the death of a political worker or a victim of electoral violence," he said.

Sanaullah said law-enforcement agencies were fully prepared and that the Quick Response Force was providing additional security throughout the electoral process.

Referring to results announced so far, Sanaullah expressed confidence that the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) would form the next AJK government with a clear majority, which he said could approach a two-thirds majority.

He said that under the leadership of former prime minister Nawaz Sharif, the PML-N would fulfill its election promises and usher in an era of development and prosperity in Azad Kashmir.



LAHORE: MoU Signed at the Federal Ministry of National Health Services to Establish Modern 10-Bed Children's Emergency Unit at Sheikh Zayed Hospital

Bharath for stronger breastfeeding practices, maternal support

ISLAMABAD, (APP): Minister of State for National Health Services, Regulations and Coordination Dr Malik Mukhtar Ahmad Bharath stressed the importance of breastfeeding for ensuring better health and nutrition for infants.

"Together, we must ensure that every child has the healthiest start in life," he said, while talking on the global theme of World Breastfeeding Week.

Dr Bharath said breastfeeding was the foundation of child health and nutrition and played a vital role in building a healthier and more sustainable future for Pakistan. He said significant progress had been made in promoting breastfeeding in the country, but there was still a need to further increase the practice of initiating breastfeeding immediately after birth and exclusive breastfeeding for the first six months. The minister stressed the need for effective community-level support to strengthen the healthcare system and create a supportive environment for mothers and families.

He urged that effective employment protection measures, adequate workplace facilities, and proper implementation of breastfeeding-related laws during maternity were essential to enable mothers to continue breastfeeding.

Dr Bharath reaffirmed that protecting mothers and families from misleading advertising and promotion of breast milk substitutes remained a national priority.

He said the government was committed to promoting breastfeeding across the country.



QUETTA: National flags of Pakistan, Saudi Arabia and Türkiye are displayed along roads and on walls in Quetta to mark the historic joint defense agreement reached between the three countries in Makkah

DPM briefs DRC President, former Guinea-Bissau President on Makkah Joint Defence Agreement

ISLAMABAD, (APP): Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Senator Mohammad Ishaq Dar spoke late Sunday night jointly with President of the Democratic Republic of the Congo Félix-Antoine Tshisekedi Tshilombo and General Umaro Sissoco Embaló, former President of Guinea-Bissau.

The deputy prime minister shared with them the contours of the recently signed Makkah Joint Defence Agreement between Pakistan, Saudi Arabia and Turkiye, and its significance for strengthening strategic cooperation and contributing to regional peace, stability and security, according to a press statement issued by the Foreign Office on Monday.

DPM/FM and President Tshisekedi also exchanged views on Pakistan-DRC relations and agreed on the importance of further strengthening bilateral cooperation, including through high-level exchanges.

The deputy PM/FM conveyed his best wishes to President Tshisekedi and the people of the DRC.



QUETTA: Director General Public Relations Balochistan Askar Khan chairs a meeting regarding key performance indicators (KPIs) of Divisional and District Information Officers.

Question of jurisdiction should be determined at outset of proceedings: Supreme Court

ISLAMABAD, (APP): The Supreme Court has held that the jurisdiction of a consumer court requires a legal relationship between the parties as consumer and service provider, or a legally recognized relationship involving payment for a service, and that merely making a person a party to a complaint does not confer jurisdiction on a consumer court. A two-member bench comprising Justice Muhammad Ali Mazhar and Justice Musarrat Hilali converted into an appeal and allowed a civil petition filed by Muhammad Ishaq, Deputy Director, BISP, Bannu.

The court set aside the July 1, 2025 judgment of the Bannu Consumer Protection Court and the November 6, 2025 judgment of the Peshawar High Court, Bannu Bench, and dismissed the complaint filed before the consumer court.

In its detailed judgment, the Supreme Court observed that the primary purpose of consumer protection laws was to protect consumers against unfair and deceptive business practices. However, a consumer court could entertain only those matters falling within the legal relationship of consumer, goods or services contemplated by law. The court noted that the complainant himself had claimed that he was working as a retailer or agent for franchises under the BISP scheme. However, there was no retailer agreement between him and BISP, nor any documentary evidence on record establishing that BISP had provided him a service or received any consideration from him for such service.

The court further observed that BISP had produced a list of point-of-sale (POS) agents operating in Bannu district, but the complainant's name did not appear on the list.

The Supreme Court held that the very basis of the complaint was defective and, therefore, it was not maintainable before the consumer court. It observed that both the consumer court and the High Court had failed to examine the fundamental question of jurisdiction.

Oil rises as Iran-Oman Hormuz deal nears but reopening remains uncertain

ISLAMABAD, (Monitoring Desk): Oil prices rose on Monday as uncertainty persisted over the reopening of the Strait of Hormuz, with Iran saying an agreement with Oman on new shipping lanes was in its final stages but that the waterway would only reopen once the United States met additional conditions.

Brent crude rose 0.9% to $84.32 a barrel, while US crude gained 0.7% to $78.74. Commercial shipping through the strategically important waterway remained severely disrupted. The latest rise in oil prices comes as markets assess the prospects for a broader Gulf peace deal and its potential impact on global energy supplies. Any sustained disruption to traffic through Hormuz, a key route for global oil shipments, could keep pressure on prices. Asian share markets meanwhile edged higher, following Wall Street's gains after a softer US jobs report reduced expectations of near-term interest rate increases. Japan's Nikkei rose 0.6%, while South Korea's benchmark index gained 0.5%.

3rd phase of AJK elections; polling concludes in Poonch Division's Bagh, Haveli districts

MUZAFFARABAD, (Monitoring Desk): Polls in four constituencies of Poonch Division's Bagh and Haveli districts concluded on Monday as part of the third phase of Azad Jammu and Kashmir (AJK) elections. Polling began at 8am and continued until 5pm. Government officials had anticipated clashes in some areas, while the Election Commission has classified most of the 803 polling stations in the four constituencies as either sensitive or highly sensitive.

"Apart from the regular police of both districts, we have dispatched an additional 10,300 troops to maintain law and order and provide a fear-free atmosphere to voters," Election Commission Secretary Raja Mohammad Shakeel told media earlier.

Railways expands freight, passenger services to boost connectivity in Balochistan

ISLAMABAD, (APP): The Ministry of Railways has undertaken a series of measures to strengthen freight and passenger services in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP) and Balochistan, with a focus on improving connectivity, facilitating trade and providing economical transportation facilities.

"A state-of-the-art dry port has been established at Azakhel in Peshawar Railway Division to cater to the business requirements for bulk transportation of goods between Peshawar and other parts of the country," an official in the Ministry told APP.

He said the brake vans and luggage vans attached to major trains are also facilitating farmers and small traders in transporting vegetables, fruits, dairy products and other small consignments at economical rates.

The official said the regular freight services are operating from Balochistan for transportation of minerals, livestock feed and agricultural products to Karachi and other markets across the country.

He said continuous improvements in digital ticketing, complaint management systems, station facilities and onboard services were providing safer, more comfortable and economical travel options to railway passengers, including those in KP and Balochistan.

At present, he said four Mail/Express trains are operating from Peshawar, connecting the city with different parts of the country.

Similarly, two Mail/Express trains are running from Quetta, linking Balochistan with Peshawar and Karachi.

He said the ministry intends to engage with the provincial governments of KP and Balochistan to introduce additional passenger services, in line with the expansion plans being pursued in other provinces.

The official said the department has set a direction of self-reliance and growth by increasing Pakistan Railways' market share from 8 percent to 30 percent, improving service delivery, ensuring sustainable operations, expanding its network and promoting regional connectivity.



Despite ceasefire and framework agreement, Israeli army carried out artillery attacks on several areas in the Nabatiyeh Governorate in southern Lebanon.

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