

DAILY PAKISTAN WATCH

21 May 2026

Security

- ◆ **Academia Engages with ISPR on Security** — At the **National Security and Strategic Leadership Workshop 2026**, over **200 vice chancellors, deans, registrars, and senior faculty members** joined a special session with **DG ISPR Lt General Ahmed Sharif Chaudhry**. He discussed internal security issues, while participants praised the **Pakistan Army's role in defence and stability**, citing victory in *Marka-e-Haq* and pride among Kashmiris. Academia received guidance on **countering negative propaganda** and enhancing awareness of national security and information warfare, with participants stressing that **linking armed forces and academia is “the need of the hour.”** (*The News*, [21 May 2026](#))
- ◆ **Deadly Turf War Rocks Kurram**— **Nineteen militants, including commander Mumtaz Imti, were killed during a violent clash between rival armed groups in Pakistan's Kurram district.** Police sources said factions led by Kazim and Imti fought over territorial and operational control in Manato Kamran Killay. The Imti group suffered the heaviest losses, while four militants from both sides reportedly went missing. Local tribesmen recovered bodies and arranged burials. **Officials warned that persistent militant activity in central Kurram continues to disrupt normal life despite ongoing security operations.** (*The News*, [21 May 2026](#))
- ◆ **Afghans Deserve Better** — The editorial argues that the **Afghan Taliban regime** continues to pursue policies that destabilise the region while inflicting severe suffering on its own people. Pakistan's **Operation Ghazab Lil Haq** reflects growing frustration over Kabul's refusal to act against the **TTP and BLA**, with diplomacy failing to address cross-border terrorism. Afghanistan faces a **catastrophic humanitarian crisis**, with poverty, food insecurity, and restrictions on women worsening isolation. The editorial stresses that the Taliban must **end militant safe havens and restore basic rights**, or risk ruling over an impoverished, isolated territory. (*The News*, [21 May 2026](#))
- ◆ **Critique of Hindutva's Global Influence and Security Concerns** —In this opinion piece, Syed Qamar Afzal Rizvi argues that India's BJP government and RSS are advancing Hindutva ideology through global networks, diaspora influence and strategic alliances. **He alleges that rising religious intolerance, intimidation of minorities and “transnational repression” have drawn international scrutiny from human rights groups and Western institutions.** Rizvi compares the RSS with fascist movements, citing critics who describe it as inspired by Mussolini and Hitler. He contends that “international scrutiny surrounding the RSS and Hindutva-linked politics is reportedly increasing”. (*Pakistan Observer*, [21 May 2026](#))
- ◆ **Kashmir: Voices Amid Global Rivalries** — Brig (R) **Naseem Akhtar** reflects on Kashmir's history as more than a territorial dispute, but a **human story of memory, identity, and loss.** He recalls family experiences from 1947, noting how narratives hardened and overshadowed lived realities. The piece traces Kashmir's journey from the **Treaty of Amritsar (1846)** to the

Instrument of Accession (1947), UN resolutions, and India's **revocation of Article 370 (2019)**. Akhtar warns that global crises like Gaza and Ukraine risk pushing Kashmir into diplomatic silence, despite its unresolved nature. He urges Pakistan to **deepen diplomatic engagement**, strengthen governance in 'Azad' Kashmir, and move beyond slogans toward a **realistic political framework** that acknowledges the human dimension of the conflict. (*Pakistan Observer*, [May 21, 2026](#))

- ◆ **Indus Waters Arbitration: Pakistan's Triumph in Law** — In his column, lawyer **Asif Mahmood** explains the **Permanent Court of Arbitration's ruling** upholding Pakistan's stance that **India cannot suspend the Indus Waters Treaty unilaterally**, nor treat the rivers as its exclusive property. The court also affirmed that **India must share information** and cannot build dams blocking Pakistan's allocated waters. Mahmood stresses that while the court lacks enforcement powers, the verdict strengthens Pakistan's case internationally. He warns that depriving Pakistan of water would be a **"grave threat... amounting to a war crime."** (*Daily Times*, [21 May 2026](#))
- ◆ **Speculation on New Administrative Units** — A claim by **South Asia Index** has sparked debate over a possible **28th Constitutional Amendment** to redraw Pakistan's provincial boundaries. The report suggested proposals to include **Islamabad, Gilgit-Baltistan, 'Azad' Jammu & Kashmir, Karachi and Gwadar** in federal territories, alongside new divisions such as **West Punjab, South Punjab, Bahawalpur, Potohar, Urban Sindh, Rural Sindh, Mehran, Makran and Gwadar**. For Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, units like **South KPK, Hazara and Kohistan** were mentioned. However, **no official plan has been confirmed**, though **Rana Sanaullah, Advisor to the Prime Minister**, noted demands from AJK and GB for inclusion in the **NFC award**. (*Daily Sangar*, [20 May 2026](#))

Economy

- ◆ **Iranian Oil Smuggling Threatens Pakistan's Economy** — Smuggled petroleum products from Iran have surged amid the **US-Iran war and closure of the Strait of Hormuz**, raising alarm among Pakistan's refineries. They warned the **Oil and Gas Regulatory Authority (OGRA)** that unchecked inflows — estimated at **2.8 billion litres annually, costing Rs227 billion** — are undermining local operations. Smuggled diesel and petrol, sold at roadside outlets, now account for **23% of daily HSD demand**, causing losses of **Rs475 million per day**. Refineries urged enforcement measures, cautioning that reduced production would deter future investment. (*The Express Tribune*, [21 May 2026](#))
- ◆ **Rs70bn SAP Guidelines Revised Ahead of Budget** — The Cabinet Division has issued new instructions for the **Sustainable Development Goals Achievement Programme (SAP)**, with **Rs70 billion allocated** for parliamentarians' development schemes. Critics argue SAP is used to secure political support, with over **Rs300 billion spent in five years**. The revised guidelines require schemes (Rs0.25m–Rs100m) to be identified by at least 10 residents, covering education, health, water, roads, gas, electricity, and community projects. Funds will be released via sanction letters, subject to feasibility, NOCs, and audit procedures. (*The News*, [21 May 2026](#))
- ◆ **Pakistan Secures Historic WCO Policy Commission Seat** — Pakistan Customs has achieved a **landmark victory**, winning election to the **World Customs Organization (WCO) Policy**

Commission for the **2026–2028 term**, its **first-ever representation in nearly 70 years of membership**. The nomination, secured at the **Asia Pacific RHCA Meeting in Hong Kong**, will be formally approved at the WCO Council Session in June. The Policy Commission shapes global customs policies on **modernisation, trade facilitation, digital transformation, and enforcement cooperation**. Pakistan’s success, led by **Syed Asad Raza Rizvi**, was bolstered by its **Pakistan Single Window (PSW) reforms** and regional outreach. (*The Nation*, [21 May 2026](#))

- ◆ **CPEC 2.0: Embedding Climate Resilience** — Climate expert **Ali Tauqeer Sheikh** argues that as Pakistan and China mark 75 years of ties, **CPEC 2.0 must integrate climate-proofing into every project**. Unlike CPEC 1.0’s state-led infrastructure focus, the new phase is **business-to-business**, centred on industrialisation, technology transfer and private investment. Sheikh warns that Pakistan’s vulnerability to floods and glacial risks makes resilience essential, stressing that **“climate resilience standards must be embedded in every CPEC 2.0 project.”** He calls for green financing, renewable energy pipelines, and SEZ carbon standards. (*Dawn*, [21 May 2026](#))
- ◆ **Pakistan’s External Sector Under Strain** — An editorial in *Dawn* highlights how Pakistan’s external sector has once again revealed **structural weaknesses**, with **FDI falling 31pc in FY26’s first 10 months** and the **current account deficit returning in April**. More than half of FDI came from China, yet even these inflows dropped from \$1bn to \$740m. Disinvestment, including Telenor’s exit, signals eroding investor confidence amid **policy uncertainty, taxation issues and currency instability**. Reliance on remittances is unsustainable. Without reforms to boost exports, productivity and investor trust, Pakistan risks recurring balance-of-payments crises. (*Dawn*, [21 May 2026](#))

Foreign Policy

- ◆ **UK Praises Pakistan’s Regional Diplomacy**—United Kingdom’s National Security Adviser Jonathan Powell met Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif, conveying His Majesty’s Government’s appreciation for Pakistan’s **“constructive role in regional diplomacy”** and congratulating the premier on economic reforms. Shehbaz reaffirmed commitment to **“robust and forward-looking engagement”** with the UK, recalling his cordial call with Prime Minister Sir Keir Starmer. Powell expressed Britain’s interest in expanding cooperation in security, trade, investment and development. (*The Express Tribune*, [21 May 2026](#))
- ◆ **Prince Rahim Aga Khan V Welcomed in Islamabad** — President **Asif Ali Zardari**, accompanied by **First Lady Aseefa Bhutto Zardari**, received **Prince Rahim Aga Khan V** at Nur Khan Airbase on his first official visit to Pakistan since becoming the **50th Imam of the Shia Ismaili Muslim community** in February 2025. A **tri-services guard of honour** was presented at Aiwan-e-Sadr, followed by meetings with Zardari, Aseefa, and **Bilawal Bhutto Zardari**. The president praised the **Aga Khan Development Network’s contributions** in healthcare, education, and heritage, while Rahim reaffirmed AKDN’s commitment. (*The News*, [21 May 2026](#))
- ◆ **Pakistan-China Relations Mark 75 Years of Friendship** — Both the **Senate and National Assembly** passed resolutions commemorating the **75th anniversary of diplomatic ties with China**. Moved by **Deputy PM and Foreign Minister Ishaq Dar**, the Senate resolution reaffirmed support for the **China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC)** and the **one-China principle**, stressing

enduring fraternal relations based on trust and mutual benefit. The NA resolution, presented by **Federal Minister Tariq Fazal Chaudhry**, congratulated both nations, with members warmly welcoming a visiting **Chinese parliamentary delegation**. Speaker **Ayaz Sadiq** and **First Lady Aseefa Bhutto Zardari** formally greeted the guests. (*The Nation*, [21 May 2026](#))

- ◆ **Punjab, Azerbaijan to Boost Economic Ties** — Punjab CM **Maryam Nawaz Sharif** met Azerbaijan’s Economy Minister **Mikayil Jabbarov** in Lahore, where both sides agreed to establish a **joint working group for economic cooperation**. **Senior Minister Marriyum Aurangzeb** will head the group for Punjab, tasked with identifying priority sectors, facilitating PPPs, and easing regulatory frameworks. Discussions included prospects of a **Preferential Trade Arrangement (PTA)** to enhance market access. Maryam highlighted Punjab’s **Economic Transformation Plan**, inviting Azerbaijani investment in SEZs, smart cities, agriculture, logistics, and IT infrastructure. (*The Nation*, [21 May 2026](#))
- ◆ **China-Pakistan Ties Enter “New Phase” at 75-Year Milestone**— In this opinion piece, Chinese Ambassador to Pakistan, Jiang Zaidong praised the enduring China-Pakistan partnership on the 75th anniversary of diplomatic relations, describing it as an “ironclad friendship”. **He highlighted the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor’s contribution of over USD 25.9 billion in investment and 260,000 jobs, calling it a model of Belt and Road cooperation**. Zaidong also emphasised growing strategic coordination on global issues and pledged deeper collaboration in trade, infrastructure and diplomacy. He argued that stronger bilateral ties would help counter global uncertainty and advance a shared future. (*The Nation*, [21 May 2026](#))
- ◆ **Pakistan–India Exchange Sharpens at UN Security Council Debate**— During a United Nations Security Council discussion on civilian protection, Pakistan and India traded strong accusations over terrorism and international law. **Pakistan’s representative Saima Saleem accused India of “terrorism, occupation and repression,” alleging involvement in cross-border violence and rights violations in Kashmir**. In response, India’s envoy Harish Parvathaneni criticised Pakistan’s record on militancy and civilian protection. Pakistan also raised concerns over Kashmir and the Indus Waters Treaty, asserting commitment to international law while accusing India of undermining regional peace. (*Dawn*, [21 May 2026](#))

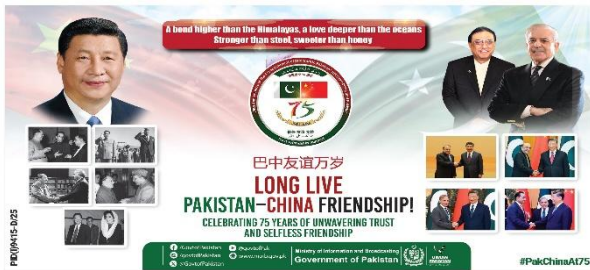
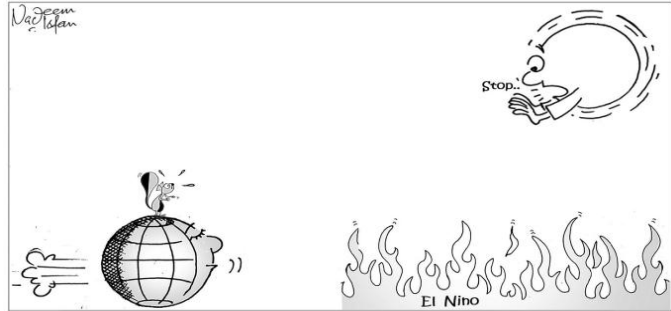
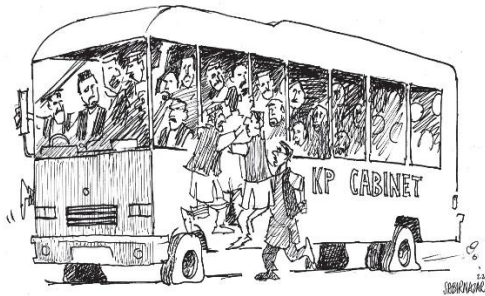
Politics, Culture, Etc.

- ◆ **PTI ready to for talk if Imran released** — Pakistan Tehreek-i-Insaf (PTI) has agreed to dialogue with the government only if its founder, **Imran Khan, is freed from jail**. PTI MNA **Ali Muhammad Khan** urged opposition leader **Mehmood Achakzai** to accept PM Shehbaz Sharif’s invitation, stressing unity for political stability and recalling PTI’s solidarity during the **May 2025 conflict with India**. Opposition members briefly joined NA proceedings to welcome a **Chinese delegation marking 75 years of ties**, before walking out in protest over Imran’s imprisonment. (*Dawn*, [21 May 2026](#))
- ◆ **PML-N Accuses PPP of Evading AJK Polls** — With elections nearing in Azad Jammu and Kashmir, **Leader of the Opposition and PML-N regional president Shah Ghulam Qadir** accused the ruling PPP of **“running away from elections”** by backing postponement calls through the JAAC. At a Rawalakot rally, he alleged the PPP was conspiring against the system, recalling Bhutto’s “Idhar Hum, Udhar Tum” slogan as divisive. He vowed PML-N would contest

independently, claiming a **two-thirds majority**. Other leaders echoed concerns, urging the Election Commission to announce the schedule before May 25. (*Dawn*, [21 May 2026](#))

- ◆ **Pakistan Resumes Offshore Energy Exploration** — After an **18-year pause**, Pakistan has reopened its offshore frontier, signing agreements for **23 deepwater blocks** across the Indus and Makran basins. Federal Petroleum Minister **Ali Pervaiz Malik** hailed the move as a “defining milestone,” securing an immediate **\$82 million investment** for seismic studies, with potential inflows of **\$1 billion** if drilling proceeds. State-run Mari Energies emerged dominant, while OGDCL, PPL, and foreign firms also joined. Officials emphasised reduced fuel import dependence, job creation, and coastal community development. (*The News*, [21 May 2026](#))
- ◆ **KP Chief Minister Sohail Afridi alleged that police fired bullets at PTI workers**— Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Chief Minister Sohail Afridi alleged that police fired bullets at PTI workers and lawmakers during a sit-in near Adiala Jail, injuring several protesters. **Afridi warned of “serious consequences” if jailed PTI founder Imran Khan was not treated at Al-Shifa International Hospital under the supervision of his family and personal doctors.** He accused Islamabad Police of blocking elected representatives and causing massive traffic disruption. Declaring that PTI would intensify nationwide protests, Afridi stated: “At how many people you will fire bullets”. (*The Nation*, [21 May 2026](#))
- ◆ **Democracy Delayed in Balochistan** — The postponement of the **NA-256 Khuzdar by-election** highlights the fragility of governance in Balochistan, where **militancy, tribal disputes and security gaps** prevent citizens from voting safely. The **Election Commission of Pakistan insists on its constitutional duty** to hold polls, noting seats cannot remain vacant indefinitely. Yet repeated delays, including Quetta’s local government elections since 2019, expose weakening state authority. The editorial urges federal and provincial governments to prioritise Balochistan’s borderlands, stressing that **citizens deserve both safety and representation.** (*Dawn*, [21 May 2026](#))
- ◆ **Xi and Putin Deepen “Unyielding” Ties** — In Beijing, **President Xi Jinping** and **President Vladimir Putin** reaffirmed their alliance, extending their treaty of “friendly cooperation” and signing agreements on **trade, media, and energy**. Xi warned of a global slide back to the “**law of the jungle**”, criticising unilateralism. Putin praised relations as at an “**unprecedentedly high level**”, though analysts note Russia’s weakened position after years of war in Ukraine. Talks also covered **Ukraine, Iran, and US relations**, with Xi stressing that a **comprehensive ceasefire is of utmost urgency.** (*The Express Tribune*, [21 May 2026](#))

PTI RIFTS DEEPEN AFTER CABINET EXPANSION



On the occasion of the **75th anniversary of Pakistan-China diplomatic relations**, the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, Government of Pakistan, published this advertisement in major newspapers across the country. [Link](#)

[Disclaimer: We do not subscribe to the views expressed by the Pakistani reporters, leaders and commentators, we are making available for perusal by our experts/analysts/policymakers every day. We put it all together in Daily Pakistan Watch (DPW) with a view to acquainting our readers with the prevalent thought process in Pakistan having its bearing on India, with the hope that such effort will help us in devising appropriate policies to deal with Pakistan in a more effective manner.]