

DAILY PAKISTAN WATCH

19 August 2026

Security

- ◆ **Suicide Attack Foiled in Bannu** — Security forces in Bannu's Jani Khel Mali Khel area averted a major tragedy when they intercepted a suicide bomber riding a rickshaw who attempted to strike a military MRAP vehicle near Al-Momin School. The attacker was killed before reaching his target, though Sepoy Zeeshan and Sepoy Khairuddin sustained injuries and were moved to CMH Bannu for treatment. The banned Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) sub-group Majlis Askari Karwan claimed responsibility. Security was tightened as investigations began. In a separate incident, police foiled another terror attempt by safely defusing explosives near the University of Science and Technology Township, preventing potential large-scale damage. (*The Express Tribune*, [19 August 2026](#))
- ◆ **Counterterrorism Operations Intensify in Balochistan** — Security forces killed more than nine terrorists in intelligence-based operations (IBOs) across Ziarat, Harnai and Surab districts, part of the ongoing Operation Radd-ul-Fitna-3. According to security sources, eight militants were eliminated in the mountainous region between Ziarat and Harnai, with their hideout destroyed, while another was killed in Surab's Hajika village. Recovered items included ammunition, grenades, a walkie-talkie and a motorcycle. The federal government has designated all Balochistan-based outfits as 'Fitna al-Hindustan', accusing India of backing them. Interior Minister Mohsin Naqvi praised the forces, stating: "We are proud of the brave sons of the security forces who foiled the nefarious designs of the terrorists." (*The Express Tribune*, [19 August 2026](#))
- ◆ **Pakistan's War of Perceptions** — Information Minister Attaullah Tarar stressed that Pakistan's fight against terrorism must extend beyond military operations to countering extremist narratives and misinformation. Speaking at a workshop organised by SSDO, he argued that "perception and narrative war often began before the actual conflict" and warned that policy reversals had undermined years of counter-terrorism gains. Tarar highlighted the success of the National Action Plan, which united federal and provincial governments, armed forces and institutions, but insisted that "policies must have continuity, and political parties should reach consensus on them." He added that Pakistan's soft image abroad must be strengthened through narrative-building, noting that terrorism has no race, colour or religion. (*The Express Tribune*, [19 August 2026](#))
- ◆ **Marka-e-Haq and the Call for Economic Discipline** — Dr Ahsan Abbas reflects on the legacy of Marka-e-Haq, noting that the Pakistan Air Force's professionalism and operational readiness embody Quaid-e-Azam's vision of being "second to none." He highlights how the PAF's role has expanded beyond defence into technological and industrial development, with initiatives like the National Aerospace Science and Technology Park (NASTP) driving indigenisation in aerospace, AI, cyber and space technologies. Yet, he cautions that Pakistan's fragile economy requires the same institutional excellence: "appoint the right person for the right job" and

prioritise indigenous expertise over imported agendas. He argues that effective policy execution, grounded in Pakistan's realities, is essential for resilience. (*The News*, [19 August 2026](#))

- ◆ **India's Narrative on 2025 Conflict Rejected Globally** — More than 15 months after the **India-Pakistan confrontation of May 2025**, New Delhi's attempt to secure narrative dominance through its documentary *Declassified: Operation Sindoor* has been widely dismissed. Independent studies, including **Christopher Clary's Stimson Centre report** and the **British American Security Information Council's 2026 assessment**, confirm Pakistan's **counter-air success on May 7** and highlight that the ceasefire was achieved through **direct military communication and US mediation**, with President **Donald Trump** announcing the agreement. Pakistan's military, via **ISPR**, condemned India's documentary as **"cinematic perjury"**, stressing that **"no amount of cinematic perjury will afford New Delhi any face-saving"** and reiterating that eight Indian aircraft were shot down during *Marka-i-Haq*. Analysts note India's claims of "100 per cent mission success" contradict even its own documentary's acknowledgement of Pakistani missile, drone and air activity. (*Dawn*, [19 August 2026](#))
- ◆ **Beyond Reservoirs: Pakistan's Water Security Challenge** — Pakistan is already living through a **water emergency**, with reserves lasting only 30 days against the 120-day benchmark. As former technocrat **Zahid Maqsood Sheikh** argues, reliance on large dams like Tarbela and Mangla is insufficient. The way forward is not **"dams versus no dams"**; instead, Pakistan must adopt a balanced strategy: efficient irrigation, aquifer recharge, rainwater harvesting, wastewater reuse, flood management, and restoration of mangroves and wetlands. Agriculture reform, better governance, and urban planning are crucial, while lessons from countries like Singapore and Iran highlight both innovation and mismanagement. **Water must be treated as one connected national resource**. (*Pakistan Observer*, [19 August 2026](#))
- ◆ **Balochistan as a Strategic National Asset** — Columnist **Tariq Khan Tareen** argues that Balochistan must be seen not merely through the lens of security but as a **strategic national asset requiring sustained, long-term investment**. Its geography, coastline and mineral wealth can connect South Asia, Central Asia, the Middle East and the Indian Ocean. Gwadar's potential lies in an integrated model of port operations, logistics, fisheries, tourism, energy and manufacturing, with **local communities central to transformation**. Tareen stresses that **"security and development should not be treated as competing priorities; they are mutually reinforcing."** The province's youth, trained for emerging sectors, can drive stability and growth, making Balochistan an engine of Pakistan's economic transformation. (*Pakistan Observer*, [19 August 2026](#))
- ◆ **AJK Unrest: Concessions, Confrontation and Consequences** — Freelance columnist **Abdullah Umar** examines the continuing unrest in 'Azad' Jammu and Kashmir (AJK), noting that the government had already accepted **37 of the JAAC's 38 demands**, including electricity at Rs4 per unit, subsidised wheat and a Rs23 billion relief package. The sole unresolved issue concerned the **12 refugee seats in the AJK Legislative Assembly**, which the Supreme Court ruled enjoy constitutional protection. Umar stresses that **"the central issue, therefore, is not whether the grievances of Kashmiris are genuine. They are."** Yet the movement escalated into violence, with law-enforcement personnel killed, hospitals attacked, and sophisticated weapons recovered. He argues that **"a peaceful protest deserves protection. An armed assault cannot acquire legitimacy"**

merely by being described as a protest.” The unrest, amplified by Indian media, risks undermining Pakistan’s Kashmir narrative unless the distinction between legitimate grievances and violent mobilisation is maintained. (*Daily Times*, [19 August 2026](#))

Economy

- ◆ **Manufacturing Growth Driven by Automobiles** — Pakistan’s large-scale manufacturing (LSM) sector grew **4.98% in FY2025-26**, according to provisional data from the **Pakistan Bureau of Statistics (PBS)**. The **Quantum Index of Manufacturing (QIM)** rose to 120.55 from 114.83 a year earlier, though June 2026 showed a sharp contraction of **6.08% month-on-month**. Automobiles were the standout, with production surging **57.77% annually**, contributing 1.56 percentage points to overall growth. Food, garments, and petroleum products also added positively, while cement expanded **7.36%**. However, **iron and steel (-7.84%)** and **pharmaceuticals (-8.87%)** dragged down performance, with textiles — the largest sector — slipping **0.63%**. The PBS noted growth in diverse industries including beverages, apparel, petroleum, and electronics, while declines persisted in textiles, leather, chemicals, and steel. (*The News*, [19 August 2026](#))
- ◆ **Pakistan Charts Unified Energy Future** — The **Cabinet Committee on Energy (CCoE)**, chaired by Prime Minister **Shehbaz Sharif**, has approved the high-level design of the **National Integrated Energy Plan 2027–2060**, aiming to replace fragmented policymaking with a unified, cross-sectoral framework. Built on four pillars — **Energy, Economics, Equity and Environment** — the plan seeks to ensure a secure, reliable and resilient energy system, promote competitiveness, enable inclusive access, and advance a low-carbon future. Officials say integrated planning will optimise domestic resources, reduce duplication, and align investments with climate resilience. For consumers, the plan promises **more reliable, affordable and accessible energy**, with greater reliance on renewables, indigenous resources and emerging technologies. This marks the first major step toward a long-term roadmap for Pakistan’s energy security. (*The News*, [19 August 2026](#))
- ◆ **Google’s Local Presence Strengthens Pakistan’s Digital Future** — Prime Minister **Shehbaz Sharif** inaugurated **Google’s office in Islamabad**, calling it a “**major milestone**” in Pakistan’s **digital transformation**. He emphasised the government’s vision of *Digital Nation Pakistan*, highlighting initiatives in IT infrastructure, AI training and youth empowerment. Google’s Vice President **Wilson White** said the office would deepen commitment to Pakistan, expand upskilling programmes and support local businesses going global. **Farhan Qureshi**, Cluster Director for Google Pakistan, noted that the office and Chromebook assembly line reinforce Pakistan’s ambition to become a regional technology hub. Since 2022, Google has awarded **350,000 Career Certificate scholarships**, trained over one million people, and supported PKR 3.9 trillion in economic benefits. (*The News*, [19 August 2026](#))
- ◆ **Taxpayers Shoulder PIA Debt Burden** — The government has allocated **Rs73 billion for privatisation contingencies**, including **Rs30 billion to cover interest on Pakistan International Airlines’ Rs268.5 billion debt**, now parked in a holding company. Banks agreed to restructure the debt over ten years at **12% interest**, meaning they will earn **Rs573 billion in interest** — **more than the principal itself**. Officials say the holding company hopes to settle liabilities by selling assets such as hotels. Meanwhile, the government has extended **sales tax exemptions to all airlines for**

15 years from FY2027-28, ending preferential treatment for PIA buyers. Privatisation of three power distribution companies is also planned, with bidding for GEPCO set for December. (*The Express Tribune*, [19 August 2026](#))

- ◆ **Gas-Sector Debt Clearance Plan Unveiled** — The **Petroleum Division** has presented a settlement plan to the Cabinet Committee on Energy (CCOE) to clear **Rs1.49 trillion out of Rs3.6 trillion gas-sector circular debt**. The plan includes **Rs540 billion from dividends of OGDC, PPL and Government Holdings**, **Rs270 billion via a Rs5/litre petroleum levy**, and **Rs590 billion from reduced LNG cargoes and savings from natural gas substitution**. Additional recovery of **Rs80 billion from LNG pricing** and **Rs15 billion from take-or-pay claims** is expected. The debt comprises **Rs1.8 trillion principal and Rs1.7 trillion surcharges**, largely due to tariff differentials and diversion of costly LNG. The CCOE also approved amendments to the **National Electricity Plan 2023-2027** and endorsed the high-level design of the **National Integrated Energy Plan 2027-2060**, built on pillars of **energy, economics, equity and environment**. (*The Express Tribune*, [19 August 2026](#))

Foreign Policy

- ◆ **Syria-Pakistan Relations Enter New Phase** — Syrian Foreign Minister **Asaad Hassan al-Shaibani** begins a two-day visit to Islamabad, the first by a Syrian FM in nearly two decades and since the **ouster of Bashar al-Assad's regime in December 2024**. He will meet Prime Minister **Shehbaz Sharif** and Deputy PM/FM **Ishaq Dar**, with talks expected to focus on rebuilding ties in diplomacy, trade, education and reconstruction. The visit reflects Syria's efforts under President **Ahmed al-Sharaa** to strengthen regional partnerships, supported by **Saudi Arabia and Türkiye**. Pakistan's ties with Syria date back to 1948, with notable defence cooperation including **PAF pilot Sattar Alvi's 1974 aerial victory over an Israeli Mirage**. The visit signals intent to expand beyond defence into broader cooperation. (*The Express Tribune*, [19 August 2026](#))
- ◆ **K-P Seeks US Investment in Tourism and Development** — A high-level meeting between US **Chargé d'Affaires Natalie A. Baker** and **Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa Assembly Speaker Babar Saleem Swati**, joined by parliamentary leaders and provincial ministers, explored cooperation in **tourism, sports, minerals, energy, education and parliamentary capacity building**. Speaker Swati emphasised that **"Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa possesses immense potential in natural resources, minerals, tourism and its young population"**, noting that international investment could generate employment and economic growth. Provincial ministers briefed the US delegation on investment opportunities and ongoing projects, while participants also discussed law and order and public issues. The presence of all parliamentary leaders was highlighted as a sign of unity and commitment to the province's welfare. (*The Express Tribune*, [19 August 2026](#))
- ◆ **Passport Fraud Sparks Crackdown** — Minister of State for Interior **Talal Chaudhry** told the National Assembly that **5,000 Pakistani passports had been seized in Saudi Arabia**, allegedly obtained through Afghan nationals. He revealed that some holders were involved in crimes such as begging. Chaudhry assured lawmakers that details of every seized passport would be provided, noting that reforms had been introduced to improve issuance and strengthen security features. He said the **FIA had arrested over 100 agents in recent operations**, while criminal cases had been

registered against officials who facilitated fraud. He rejected claims of deliberate delays in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and denied identity card discrimination in Balochistan. (*The Express Tribune*, [19 August 2026](#))

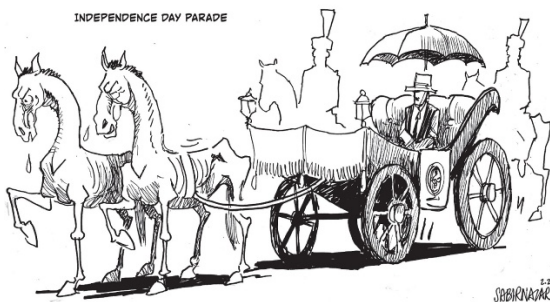
- ◆ **Bangladesh's Assertive Turn in South Asia** — Columnist **Rakhshanda Mehtab**, MS Research Scholar at IIUI, argues that Dhaka's current standoff with India signals a decisive shift. Bangladesh has publicly conditioned Prime Minister Tarique Rahman's visit on India creating a "conducive environment," linking it to grievances over **Sheikh Hasina's public platform in New Delhi** and **unfulfilled extradition requests**. This marks a departure from quiet diplomacy, with Dhaka adopting a "**Bangladesh First**" approach. Mehtab stresses that "**the real story for India here has very little to do with one prime minister's travel schedule**"; it is about whether India can continue relying on size and history to secure deference. Bangladesh's recalibration suggests smaller neighbours may increasingly renegotiate power balances in South Asia. (*Daily Times*, [19 August 2026](#))

Politics, Culture, Etc.

- ◆ **Courtroom Relief and Government Pushback** — **The Supreme Court of Pakistan ordered that Imran Khan be shifted to Shifa International Hospital within two days**, stressing that "**a prisoner does not, by reason of his incarceration, cease to be entitled to humane treatment and necessary medical care.**" The Court directed the formation of a medical board, weekly family meetings, and bi-weekly calls with his sons, while barring disclosure of medical reports for political gain. PTI welcomed the ruling as an affirmation of Khan's **fundamental right to health and dignity**, with Barrister Gohar Ali Khan urging dialogue. However, **Law Minister Azam Nazeer Tarar** said the government will seek modification, arguing treatment should occur in government hospitals under prison law. (*The News*, [19 August 2026](#))
- ◆ **Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa Moves to Outlaw Child Marriage** — The **Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa government** has announced plans to criminalise child marriage through the long-pending **Child Marriage Restraint Bill 2019**, which awaits cabinet approval before being tabled in the provincial assembly. Special Assistant to the Chief Minister for Population Welfare **Tufail Anjum** said legislation would ensure effective implementation, stressing that "**child marriage is an important social issue, and the government is taking effective measures to address it.**" Despite high rates of underage wedlock, K-P and Balochistan remain without provincial laws, unlike Sindh and Punjab, which repealed the outdated **1929 Act**. Reports highlight severe health and psychological traumas among child brides, underscoring the urgency of reform. (*The Express Tribune*, [19 August 2026](#))
- ◆ **Rawalpindi's New Local Government Structure Finalised** — Authorities have issued the final notification for **Rawalpindi's delimitation**, rejecting all objections. The garrison city has been divided into **two municipal towns — Rawal Town and Potohar Town — each with a mayor and two deputy mayors**. Rawal Town will now have 41 union councils, while Potohar Town will have 33, with **Murree Road serving as the dividing line**. The **Rawalpindi District Council has been dissolved**, its areas redistributed among six tehsil councils. Overall, the district will comprise **17 local government bodies**, including two municipal towns, five municipal committees, six tehsil

councils and four cantonment boards. This restructuring paves the way for upcoming local elections. (*The Express Tribune*, [19 August 2026](#))

- ◆ **Committee Formed to Promote Religious Harmony in Karachi** — Commissioner **Syed Hassan Naqvi** chaired a meeting of the **Provincial Paigham-e-Aman Committee**, attended by **Additional IG Karachi Azad Khan**, religious scholars from various schools of thought, and representatives of different faiths. Participants welcomed the initiative, pledging to work collectively for **peace, tolerance and unity**. Naqvi emphasised the committee's role in strengthening dialogue and cooperation among communities, noting the importance of religious leaders in fostering mutual respect. It was agreed that leaders would support each other's religious events, with police and administration ensuring smooth organisation. **Additional Commissioner Muhammad Atif** was appointed as focal coordinator to facilitate communication. (*The News*, [19 August 2026](#))



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