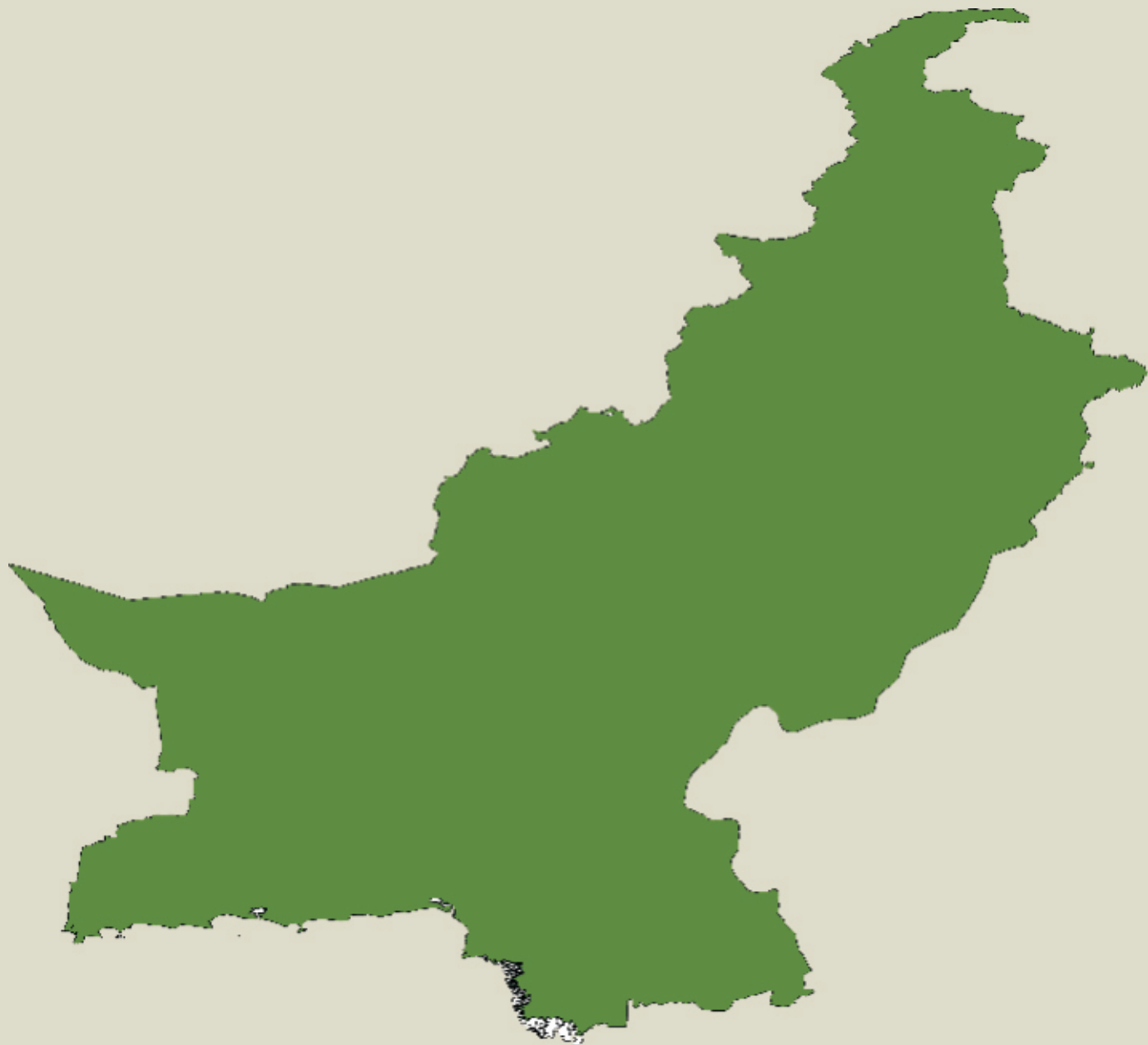


March 2025

PAKISTAN NEWS DIGEST

*A Selected Summary of News, Views and Trends
from Pakistani Media*



Prepared by

Dr. Zainab Akhter

Dr. Nazir Ahmad Mir

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POLITICAL DEVELOPMENTS

Trump's praise, Editorial, *The Express Tribune*, 06 March¹

The appreciation from US President Donald Trump on Pakistan's role in counter-terrorism hints at greater cooperation in times to come. Speaking before the joint session of Congress, Trump lauded Islamabad's unfettered support in helping net a key terrorist involved in the 2021 Kabul Airport bombing. *The sentiment was reciprocated by PM Shehbaz Sharif as he reaffirmed Pakistan's determination to combat terrorism. Trump's acknowledgment is the way to go as any anti-terror protocol would be incomplete in the region without Pakistan. This calls for renewed coordination in defence and intelligence spheres, and the largesse that the US has exhibited by approving \$397 million for Pakistan's F-16 fighter jet fleet maintenance is a sign of farsightedness.* While Islamabad is an allied-ally of Washington, and the relationship has survived crests and troughs, the menace of terrorism calls for chalking out a new roadmap for the region and beyond. Working together in ushering normalcy in Afghanistan and taking out terror sanctuaries are indispensable steps. Washington's realisation testifies that Pakistan is not isolated anymore, and there are enough common denominators to act upon. The consolatory words from Washington came hours after a daredevil attack on Bannu Cantonment, which claimed the lives of five army personnel as they valiantly resisted an ambush. The terrorists had tried to enter the fortified compound with the help of suicide bombers, resulting in a heavy exchange of fire. According to ISPR, all the 16 terrorists were gunned down and the attack was successfully repulsed

Address to joint session, Editorial, *The Express Tribune*, 11 March²

The President's ceremonial address to the joint session of the parliament this year too was a contentious affair. *There were no serious takers from the treasury, and the opposition performed its sacrosanct duty of obstructing the speech as has been the convention for decades. President Asif Ali Zardari felt it incumbent upon himself to praise the coalition government, of*

¹ <https://tribune.com.pk/story/2532536/trumps-praise>

² <https://tribune.com.pk/story/2533499/address-to-joint-session>

which his PPP is also a part, on its one-year performance that mainly features pulling the economy out of the woods. But the points that the President underscored, such as working for promoting good governance and political stability, sounded utopian, as the current dispensation sits at the pinnacle of restlessness and polarisation. The ruling coalition's disregard for the rule of law as well as a plethora of legislations in contravention of the spirit of Constitution, such as the 26th amendment, made a mockery of egalitarian principles that the President spelt out before the august house. *Zardari was on the mark as he told the legislators to work harder to strengthen the democratic system, restore public confidence in the rule of law, and to put Pakistan on the road to prosperity.* The discord within the ruling coalition was evident as the President expressed his disapproval of the federal government's plan to construct six canals on River Indus. That, to many, was tantamount to playing the Sindh Card.

Khan or Pakistan? Editorial, *The Nation*, 19 March³

The in-camera meeting of the Parliamentary Committee on National Security, held under heightened security measures, reflected both the consensus and resolve needed to tackle the crisis while also exposing the severity of the situation. While no new recommendations emerged, the meeting reinforced the urgency of fully implementing the National Action Plan devised in 2014. This includes nationwide military operations, engagement with religious scholars to counter extremist narratives, and stricter monitoring of digital platforms to curb the spread of radical ideologies. However, despite this apparent unity, one glaring absence remained the opposition party, Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI). Even as hundreds of Pakistanis have been rescued from captivity through the courageous efforts of the armed forces, PTI seems fixated on a single individual: Imran Khan. The party's decision to boycott such a crucial gathering over the exclusion of its leader underscores the extent to which it functions less as a political entity and more as a personality cult. PTI has even suggested it would oppose a military operation in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa without public

³ <https://www.nation.com.pk/19-Mar-2025/khan-or-pakistan>

consensus an alarming stance when national security is at stake. Such obstinance risks deepening divisions at a time when unity is paramount.

Fundamental Shift, Editorial, *The Nation*, 20 March⁴

In the aftermath of the Jaffer Express hijacking, the government appears to be treating the incident with the gravity it deserves, recognizing that the nation's sense of loss and insecurity must be transformed into resolute action. *In this regard, President Asif Ali Zardari's visit to Quetta is a significant step, and his remarks there offer a vision for the future. As the country's figurehead, his role in uniting the people and bolstering morale in Balochistan is crucial. His commitment to the people of Balochistan and the nation's resolve to ensure their security is a welcome stance one that should be echoed by others in the government.* However, more important than rhetoric are the concrete promises made and the solutions outlined by the President. While the primary response remains a military one focused on eliminating terrorist hideouts, dismantling networks, and pushing militants back into Afghanistan and parts of Iran such kinetic measures alone will not suffice. As President Zardari rightly pointed out, a long-term solution must extend beyond military action. Insurgency, particularly when deeply embedded in a region, cannot be eradicated solely through force. This requires a fundamental shift in priorities, with resources diverted from federal and provincial projects in wealthier regions like Punjab toward Balochistan.

Moving Forward, Editorial, *The Nation*, 21 March⁵

Pakistan and Saudi Arabia reaffirmed their commitment on Thursday to strengthening defence and security cooperation, recognising the importance of joint efforts in addressing regional security challenges. *This came as Prime Minister Shahbaz Sharif arrived in Jeddah on Wednesday for a four-day official visit, accompanied by a high-powered delegation that included the foreign minister, the chief of army staff, the Punjab chief minister, as well as other federal ministers and senior officials.* The frequent high-level engagements with the UAE

⁴ <https://www.nation.com.pk/20-Mar-2025/fundamental-shift>

⁵ <https://www.nation.com.pk/21-Mar-2025/moving-forward>

and Saudi Arabia over investment in Pakistan appear to be gaining momentum, ensuring that avenues for investment particularly in the country's mineral and hydrocarbon resources remain open. The inclusion of the chief of army staff in this visit underscores the significance of the security dimension in these discussions. Pakistan has a longstanding history of providing security assistance to Saudi Arabia, and with its well-equipped military and extensive experience, both nations have the potential to enhance their cooperation and establish a more structured and mutually beneficial security arrangement. Meanwhile, side-by-side meetings between Saudi Arabia's minister for investment and Pakistani business groups and representatives continue at full pace.

The Balochistan conundrum, Editorial, *The News*, 24 March⁶

Balochistan is one of Pakistan's most pressing challenges, marked by a complex mix of political unrest, terrorism and a deep-seated sense of alienation among its people. As Pakistan observed its national day on Sunday, President Asif Ali Zardari reaffirmed the state's resolve to combat terrorism and support the armed forces. *His statement reminded one of the grim reality of escalating violence, particularly in Balochistan, where unrest and terrorism continue to destabilize the province – the latest being the violent clashes in Quetta during a protest rally by the Baloch Yakjehti Committee (BYC).* The brutal killing of four Punjabi labourers in Kalat, the murder of four police officers in Noshki, and the deadly suicide bombing on a paramilitary convoy are part of a troubling pattern. The hijacking of the Jaffar Express by the Baloch Liberation Army (BLA) was a particularly alarming incident, resulting in the tragic loss of 26 innocent lives. *The BLA's violent agenda is for all to see; the terrorist organisation not only targets security forces but also deliberately inflames ethnic tensions by attacking non-Baloch workers. A kinetic operation against the BLA is a necessity to curb its militant activities.* However, military operations alone cannot bring lasting peace to Balochistan. A purely force-driven approach has historically failed to resolve insurgencies and instead risks pushing younger Baloch into the ranks of militant groups.

⁶ <https://www.thenews.com.pk/print/1294615-the-balochistan-conundrum>

Need to find a political solution, Editorial, *The Express Tribune*, 27 March⁷

Balochistan has a situation to handle and it is being mismanaged. The protesters as well as the authorities are unfortunately found to be on the wrong side of the solution, and are making it more complicated by digging in their heels. All that is needed is to talk it out, and that is where they are at a fail. *It goes without saying that Balochistan is infected with terrorism, which has both internal and external contours. Also, the daredevil hijacking of Jaffar Express, the holding up of its inmates and subsequent attacks across the province are condemnable acts of terrorism. At the same time, it's also a fact that the revulsion-laden districts of the restive province are poorly governed and lack a political solution to the grievances that have their genesis in socio-economic realms.* Thus, by providing due political space to the constituents, and by ensuring that rule of law and constitutionalism come to safeguard their rights, the rot can be stemmed and a viable solution ushered in. The protests and sit-in that have been in vogue since the train hijacking is pushing the province over the brink. The detention of BYC activists, including Mahrang Baloch, is getting global traction and is unnecessarily complicating the situation. While the tendency to resort to violence by BYC and likes is condemnable, the authorities too have desisted from addressing the root cause of the problem and have made it a purely civil-strife issue.

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENTS

IMF dilemma, Editorial, *The News*, 18 March⁸

Pakistan's first biannual review under the EFF concluded last Friday without a staff-level agreement, despite both the government and the IMF delegation claiming that significant progress had been made towards reaching a broader agreement. When exactly this will happen remains unclear. The IMF has termed Pakistan's implementation of the programme as

⁷ <https://tribune.com.pk/story/2536589/need-to-find-a-political-solution>

⁸ <https://www.thenews.com.pk/print/1292808-imf-dilemma>

‘strong’ but frequent changes by policymakers could be a reason there hasn't been a consensus and the SLA is not yet finalized. At one point, when consensus seemed achievable, it was claimed that the political leadership might not accept the harsh conditions. Major stumbling blocks also include the inability of the government to achieve a primary surplus of Rs2.4 trillion for the current fiscal year, persistent losses in the power sector, unresolved issues related to state-owned enterprises (SOEs), and delays in privatisation deadlines, and challenges in curtailing expenditures. Some of the things that have been agreed upon, however, are an increase in the number of point-of-sale (POS) machines by several thousand within the current fiscal year, video surveillance of manufactured goods and the scrapping of the Tajir Dost Scheme. *The whole IMF process so far has been quite brutal for ordinary Pakistanis, who have seen their taxes and tariffs rise, their salaries remain stagnant and market prices that remain far too expensive even if they are no longer rising as fast. Politicians are right to be wary of any further measures that exacerbate this dynamic given the backlash they might cause.*

Sugar profiteering, Editorial, *The Express Tribune*, 21 March⁹

The government's decision to fix the retail price of sugar at Rs164 per kilogram, 13% higher than its earlier cap, is yet another chapter in the longstanding cycle of hoarding and price manipulation. *This cycle plays out the same way every time: sugar exports are allowed under the promise that local prices will remain stable, supply is deliberately restricted, and prices inevitably rise. Sugar millers, repeatedly accused of cartelisation, have once again managed to push prices upward while the government has rubber-stamped the increase. This cycle repeats itself year after year.* Each time, the government assures the public that prices will remain under control. Each time, the opposite happens. The state actively facilitates these price hikes under the guise of official pricing mechanisms, ensuring that consumers are left at the mercy of a handful of powerful millers. The only way to break this cycle is through strict enforcement of anti-hoarding laws. *The government must actively monitor sugar stocks and impose severe penalties on millers and traders found guilty of hoarding. Surprise inspections and real-time tracking of sugar production and distribution must become*

⁹ <https://tribune.com.pk/story/2535496/sugar-profiteering>

standard practice. Independent regulatory oversight is equally essential. The Competition Commission of Pakistan must be empowered to take action against hoarders for cartelisation. No single industry should have the power to dictate national pricing policies.

The IMF lifeline, Editorial, *The News*, 28 March¹⁰

Pakistan's continued progression under the IMF programme has been secured, with IMF staff and Pakistani authorities reaching a staff-level agreement on the first review under the country's 37-month Extended Fund Facility (EFF) on Wednesday. *The SLA also included a new 28-month arrangement under the Resilience and Sustainable Facility (RSF). Now, the IMF's Executive Board will consider the approval of approximately \$2.3 billion in loans, with expectations that Islamabad will be able to secure the money in the first week of May 2025, ahead of the upcoming budget for FY2025-26.* This is also when an IMF mission is expected to visit Pakistan to help finalize the next budget, with a particular focus on taxation measures and curtailing unbridled expenditures. This is certainly good news, especially when it comes to the RSF part, which aims to support Pakistan's climate change resilience, mitigation and adaptation and natural disaster management efforts. The RSF will also reportedly help support water management and align energy sector reforms with climate change mitigation targets. Most importantly, Pakistan's economy remains afloat for another six months or so. If even this target had not been achieved, then all the economic austerity and tariff pains that people have endured over the past 18 months would have been for naught. *The country's long-awaited transition to a more competitive and export-led model of growth still remains elusive. In fact, even with what little growth Pakistan has had since signing the EFF back in September 2024, the country was back in a current account deficit of \$420 million by January and remained in the red in February too.*

¹⁰ <https://www.thenews.com.pk/print/1295925-the-imf-lifeline>

SECURITY SITUATION

Haqqania Attack, Editorial, *The Nation*, 03 March¹¹

The death of Maulana Hamidul Haq Haqqani, Vice-Chancellor of the renowned Jamia Darul Uloom Haqqania seminary, in a suicide blast that claimed several other lives, is a stark reminder of Pakistan's ongoing struggle for peace. *It highlights the deep rifts and factional divisions that continue to undermine the country's stability. Maulana Hamid was the son of the influential cleric Maulana Samiul Haq Haqqani, often referred to as the "Father of the Taliban", whose religious teachings influenced many militants resisting foreign occupation in Afghanistan. His assassination is a serious setback to the fragile negotiations between Pakistan and Afghanistan aimed at resolving their longstanding disputes through diplomacy.* On the same day, an explosion in Quetta injured 10 people, including Frontier Corps soldiers on patrol. Elsewhere, security forces killed six terrorists in an intelligence-based operation in North Waziristan, according to the Inter-Services Public Relations (ISPR). Pakistan remains caught in the middle of a relentless conflict facing attacks on its security forces, launching counter-offensives against militant hideouts, and now, suffering strikes against those working to broker peace. This is a brutal and complex battle, and days like these serve as grim reminders of the dangers ahead.

Border crisis, Editorial, *The News*, 05 March¹²

The continued closure of the Pak-Afghan Torkham border could be seen as a manifestation of just how complicated our border with Afghanistan is -- marked by history, family, tradition, ethnicity and also violence. *The border, a crucial trade and transit route but also an important route for many families, has been rendered inactive due to hostilities, leaving thousands stranded and disrupting the lives of countless traders, transporters and civilians. This closure, triggered by the construction of a bunker by Afghan forces near Zero Point, has led to casualties and financial loss the most recent cross-border*

¹¹ <https://www.nation.com.pk/01-Mar-2025/haqqania-attack>

¹² <https://www.thenews.com.pk/print/1288747-border-crisis>

firing left several of our security personnel injured. Torkham is one of the busiest trade routes between Pakistan, Afghanistan and Central Asia, facilitating over \$3 million in daily trade. With over 5,000 trucks laden with perishable goods stranded on both sides, traders are suffering heavy financial losses. The plight of daily wage workers, transporters and local businesses that depend on cross-border trade only compounds the urgency of the crisis. *There is also the humanitarian matter of medical travel for Afghan patients, many of whom rely on Peshawar's hospitals for critical treatment. All of this has to be seen in the larger geopolitical context: Pakistan has consistently urged Afghanistan to take stronger action against the TTP, which continues to operate from Afghan soil.* The Afghan Taliban regime, however, has failed to curb the activities of these groups. Islamabad's concerns have been validated by reports presented to the United Nations Security Council, which confirm the TTP's operational capabilities in Afghanistan.

Tackling terrorism, Editorial, *The News*, 10 March¹³

The surge in terrorism in Pakistan is linked to the rise of the Afghan Taliban and the withdrawal of US troops from Afghanistan. Pakistan's shaky relationship with this neighbour has further exacerbated the situation as Afghanistan has not cooperated with us in ensuring that Afghan soil is not used as a safe haven by terrorists. *The sour relations between the two countries have strengthened the TTP which continues to carry out attacks with more impunity. Just last week, an affiliate of the TTP claimed the attack in Bannu that targeted security forces around five soldiers and 13 civilians embraced martyrdom.* While the security forces were able to eliminate all the 16 terrorists involved in the attack, the episode once again reminds us of the challenges we have to endure. It would not be a stretch to say that instability in Pakistan is also in the interest of India, which often adds fuel to the fire, quite discreetly. *Then, the economic instability also allows extremist groups to make more recruits. Years of instability in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Balochistan and the lack of empathy shown by successive governments have created sharp divisions among people who are then easily lured by extremists to join their ranks.* The widespread use of social media platforms by extremist groups has also allowed them to reach out to more

¹³ <https://www.thenews.com.pk/print/1290267-tackling-terrorism>

disgruntled people. These groups manipulate narratives, exploiting public frustration and alienation to serve their radical agendas.

Terror's long night, Editorial, *The News*, 13 March¹⁴

The attack on the Jaffar Express by the Balochistan Liberation Army (BLA) was an act of terrorism. There is no other word to describe what happened. *While the BLA has attacked the railways before, especially the Jaffar Express, the scale at which they have done it this time is new. On Tuesday, militants blew up a railway track, opened fire and seized control of the Jaffar Express; the train was carrying more than 400 passengers. By Wednesday night, the operation to free the hostages was completed with the ISPR saying that all the attackers present at the site were killed and all the hostages freed.* However, before the operation, the terrorists had managed to kill 21 hostages. This brazen attack is alarming on multiple levels. Train hijackings are rare, requiring sophisticated planning and resources and the BLA's ability to execute such a complex operation suggests that it has been growing in strength and capability. *But more than that, it seems to have grown in the kind of support it is getting. The BLA's recruitment strategies target disenfranchised Baloch youth, who, feeling abandoned by the state, fall prey to the rhetoric employed.* Balochistan, along with Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, has been the primary victim of terrorism in recent years. However, the challenges in the province are unique, stemming from political alienation, economic exploitation and human rights violations.

The terror challenge, Editorial, *The News*, 17 March¹⁵

Pakistan's war against terrorism remains an unrelenting struggle, with extremist violence continuing to claim lives and spread fear across the country. *The recent suicide blast at the Jamia Darul Uloom Haqqania madrassa in Nowshera, which killed cleric Maulana Hamidul Haq, came as an unwelcome reminder of the persistent threat posed by militant elements. Just last week, another attack targeted a mosque in South Waziristan during Friday prayers,*

¹⁴ <https://www.thenews.com.pk/print/1291234-terror-s-long-night>

¹⁵ <https://www.thenews.com.pk/print/1292448-the-terror-challenge>

injuring Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam (JUI-F) district Chief Abdullah Nadeem and three others. These attacks are not isolated incidents but part of a larger, ongoing pattern of violence. Within this context, especially, JUI-F Chief Maulana Fazlur Rehman's condemnation earlier this month of the Haqqania madrassa attack was a significant and necessary step. The Maulana categorically stated that attacking scholars is not 'jihad' a term that extremist elements often misuse to justify their actions. Militant groups not only exploit religious narratives to justify their violence but also manipulate people's religious sentiments to recruit new members. *It is imperative that all stakeholders' religious scholars, political leaders and civil society firmly reject such interpretations and work together to counter extremist propaganda. Beyond religious extremism, Pakistan is also facing new forms of militant violence, the recent hijacking of the Jaffar Express showing how terrorist threats are not limited to one ideology or group.* While the perpetrators of this incident may not have invoked religious justifications, the act itself reflects the same lawlessness and disregard for human life that terrorism breeds. Political and military leaders must recognize that extremism in any form is a threat to national stability.

Editorial, *The News*, 20 March¹⁶

Pakistan's terror problem is increasing at a terrifying level. Whether the TTP or the BLA, we seem to be surrounded by bad-faith actors trying to create chaos. This is why Tuesday's in-camera session of the Parliamentary Committee on National Security was a much-needed attempt to forge a collective response to the growing threat, particularly in Balochistan and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. *The meeting, attended by the country's civil and military leadership, looked at the necessity of confronting terrorism with an iron hand. Ideally, this should have been an all-of-stakeholder approach but true to form key opposition figures, particularly from the PTI, remained absent -- exposing the deep political fissures that continue to hinder a united front against this existential threat.* While the PTI cited concerns over being side-lined in security decision-making, their refusal to participate in a crucial discussion on national security inevitably raises questions about their commitment to actually addressing what is now an existential crisis for Pakistan. The Global Terrorism

¹⁶ <https://www.thenews.com.pk/print/1293402-security-huddle>

Index 2025 paints a grim picture for Pakistan. With a staggering 45 per cent increase in terrorism-related deaths and a record-breaking 1,099 attacks in 2024 alone, the urgency of the situation cannot be overstated. Yet, despite this growing crisis, the PTI's decision to boycott the national security session citing political grievances was a disheartening display of misplaced priorities.

Fragile ties, Editorial, *The News*, 25 March¹⁷

Pakistan and Afghanistan have once again pledged to strengthen diplomatic engagement, hoping to unlock their full potential for mutual benefit. *The visit of Pakistan's Special Representative for Afghanistan Ambassador Muhammad Sadiq Khan to Kabul is a sign of another attempt at repairing fractured ties. His visit follows a US delegation's departure and coincides with the reopening of the Torkham border, a critical crossing that had been closed for nearly a month.* While regional experts are seeing these developments as positive and they are the lingering distrust and unresolved security issues between the two countries will no doubt continue to cast a long shadow over bilateral relations. The main source of all the tension is the persistent issue of terrorism, particularly the presence of the Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) on Afghan soil. Pakistan has repeatedly urged the Afghan Taliban regime to sever ties with the TTP and prevent them from launching cross-border attacks. The December 2024 drone strike by Pakistan against TTP camps inside Afghanistan had been a manifestation of Pakistan's growing frustration. *More recently, Pakistan has accused Afghanistan of sheltering the Balochistan Liberation Army (BLA), with security agencies presenting evidence linking BLA militants to handlers across the Pak-Afghan border.* All this came to a head with the Jaffar Express hijacking and the subsequent military revelations.

¹⁷ <https://www.thenews.com.pk/print/1294942-fragile-ties>

The return of Pervez Khattak, what is going to happen? Report, Ummat, 03 March¹⁸

Finally Pervez Khattak was inducted in the federal government. Ummat had reported sometime back that making Khattak an advisor in the federal government was being considered. Although made an advisor to Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif, Khattak has not been given any portfolio so far. For some time it has been said that Khattak may be made an advisor to the interior minister to counter the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) in Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa (KP). However, it will be clear only after he is given a portfolio whether the same plan is being implemented. A source said that adjusting Khattak was guaranteed. The question now is what portfolio is given to Khattak to benefit from the adjustment. If he is put in the interior ministry that means that he has the task to counter PTI's protests and rallies in KP and across the country. Given the affairs of present Interior Minister Mohsin Naqvi it is possible that Khattak may become interior minister. Some say that Mohsin may be limited to Chairman of PCB. As the PTI has said that the party would carry out protests after Eid, appointing Khattak as advisor in the interior ministry appears apt. No one knows the situation in KP particularly better than Khattak. Also, once an advisor in the interior ministry, both Chief Secretary and IG KP will be under his command. Khattak will be able to decide who should go where. *Since 8 February 2024 KP has been used as a camp by the PTI to assert itself against the federal government. Although the party did not succeed in its agenda but many in PTI think that the reason for that is either Ali Amin Gandapur has been compromised and he is someone else's man.* That was the reason that Imran Khan replaced Gandapur as the party president with Junaid Akbar as the new President of PTI in KP. Although Junaid had made big claims, his close aides say that he is not that powerful. Some say Junaid had refused to become the party president in KP.

¹⁸ <https://ummat.net/epaper/news.php?date=2025/03/03/&p=story2.gif>

Displacement near Torkham due to border tension, Mohd Qasim, *Ummat*, 05 March¹⁹

The situation at the Torkham Border Crossing between Pakistan and Afghanistan is serious at the moment. The issues that started due to construction have deteriorated. There are reports that 3 Frontier Corps (FC) personnel and one citizen were injured. Due to the worsening of the 10-day long crisis the local population has started moving from the area. Mohd Sajid from Nawahi area of Peshawar said that he owns two dry fruit shops in the Landi Kotal Bazar. Talking to Ummat Sajid said that "the situation is bad. Earlier he could easily get fruits from Afghanistan via Torkham. Both he and the people across the border who used to get him fruits used to benefit from this trade. But for the last few days the situation has been serious. The border is closed and the business is low as well." The situation in the Peshawar mandis is also not good. The prices of fruits along with dry fruits have reached new heights. The markets of Peshawar are dependent on Afghanistan mostly. At the same time poultry, vegetables, meat and other stuff used to go to Afghanistan from Peshawar. Since the situation has been bad, both sides are paying the price. Since the trade is stopped, the Landi Kotal Bazar is deserted. Traders of both sides are losing millions of rupees and if the situation continues like this the losses may be even higher. According to the latest reports, the local population has started moving from the area to safe locations. Many have taken refuge in their relatives' homes in Peshawar and in the adjacent areas. Similarly, traders from the Landi Kotal Bazar have started moving towards Charsadda, Mardan and Naushera. One trader from the Landi Kotal Bazar Mohd Ashiq said that he does fruit business. However, due to the existing situation he has moved to Peshawar. He said that the traders are waiting for the opening of the border. Demands are made on Pakistan and Afghanistan to resolve the border issue through talks.

A new twist in Pak-US relations, Editorial, *Roznama Jang*, 07 March²⁰

Recent expressions of "gratitude" from Washington and Islamabad towards each other can be seen as a new turning point in the long-cold Pakistan-US relationship. On Tuesday night, during his first address to the joint session of the US Congress, President Donald Trump

¹⁹ <https://ummat.net/epaper/news.php?date=2025/03/05/&p=story6.gif>

²⁰ <https://e.jang.com.pk/karachi/07-03-2025/page6>

thanked Pakistan for playing a role in the capture of Muhammad Sharifullah, a member of ISIS responsible for the bombing at Kabul airport in 2021 that killed 13 American soldiers. In response, Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif thanked President Donald Trump on social media for appreciating Pakistan's role in counterterrorism efforts in Afghanistan and in capturing ISIS's operational commander, a resident of Afghanistan, during a successful operation along the Pakistan-Afghanistan border. The bombing at Kabul airport in 2021 killed 13 American soldiers and 170 Afghan civilians. *After taking office, President Donald Trump had prioritised economic recovery and the elimination of inflation in his address to the joint session of Congress, stating "America First." During his speech, he specifically thanked the Pakistani government for its help in the capture of the terrorist. Following this expression of gratitude towards Pakistan from the American president, US National Security Advisor Michael Waltz also called Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Senator Ishaq Dar to convey President Trump's appreciation for Pakistan's counterterrorism efforts.* In his message on social media, Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif thanked President Trump and stated that Islamabad has always played a key role in counterterrorism efforts to deprive terrorists and extremist groups of safe havens and to stop their operations against any country. Pakistan has made immense sacrifices in this effort, including the loss of over 80,000 brave soldiers and civilians. The resolve of Pakistan's leadership and people remains unwavering, and efforts to eradicate terrorism from the country will continue.

Possible détente in Pak-US relations, Faisal Mesud, Roznama92, 09 march²¹

Historian Dr. Ayesha Jalal thinks that while the combined pressure of internal, regional and international factors forced Pakistan to join the American camp, America had its own interests in the region. Everyone is aware of the fact that in international relations, there are neither friends nor enemies, only interests. *During the Cold War, after the power in Pakistan fell into the hands of the civil and military bureaucracy, it became easier for the Americans to deal with the country through the well-known colonial weapon of "aid for security cooperation." ... In the face of any Soviet advance from the north-western passes, Pakistan's status was nothing more than a transactional ally. Therefore, soon there was a sense of*

²¹<https://roznama92news.com>

change in Americans' thinking about India and a need to reassess relations with Pakistan. When the Indo-Pakistan War of 1965 ended, the coldness in relations between the Cold War allies became clear. *The Bhutto government was formed after the fall of Dhaka at a time when, according to Ayesha Jalal, "global Islamization" was taking root in the region as a result of factors such as the Arab-Israeli war, the Arab embargo on oil supplies, and the American patronage of jihadist organizations.* Thus, while the populist Prime Minister Zulfikar Ali Bhutto was ostensibly fighting against American colonialism, under the joint underground patronage of his government and the CIA, young men like Gulbuddin Hekmatyar and Ahmad Shah Massoud were busy organizing armed groups against the communists within Kabul University. *The "Islamic extremism", that is being used to ban Muslims from entering America, was founded under American patronage decades ago. When the Soviet Union attacked Afghanistan in 1979, America created Mujahidin and compared them with the founders of America. After the dissolution of the Soviet Union and 9/11, the same Mujahidin were called terrorists.* By this time, General Musharraf was looking for legitimacy and used America. Pakistanis were told that this was not America's war, but ours.

International community should focus on resettlement of Afghan refugees. Editorial, *Ummat*, 11 March²²

Following the policy to ask foreign citizens to leave the country, Afghan Citizen card holders have been given time till 31 March 2025 to leave Pakistan. According to sources from the interior ministry, from 1 April the process of expelling foreign citizens will begin without any further extension on the date. The program of sending back foreign citizens, IFPR, was started on 1 November 2023 and foreigners have been given till 31 March to voluntarily leave Pakistan. The Afghan citizens have been given enough time to leave respectfully. Interior minister said that in no way these refugees will be mistreated; they will be provided food and their health will be taken care of. The statement read that Pakistan is a responsible state and abides by all international laws and norms. However, foreigners living in Pakistan will have to meet the legal requirements. *On the other hand, security sources say that the government institutions have already started measures to identify and return the illegal*

²² <https://ummat.net/epaper/news.php?date=2025/03/11/&p=idr1.gif>

foreigners in the country. After 31 March a full operation will be launched. The world acknowledges that Pakistan has hosted thousands of Afghan refugees for the last four decades. It makes Pakistan one of those countries that have hosted and taken care of a maximum number of Afghan refugees. However, in the last few years it has come to light that some Afghan citizens have been involved in illegal activities. According to government data, four lakh illegal Afghan refugees reside in Karachi. Out of them 225 Afghan citizens have been found involved in various crimes, including some involved killings. During this time there has been a rise in terror attacks in the country. In the terror activities of the banned Tehreek-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) more than 2500 were killed in 2024, highest in the last nine years. Due to the increased terror attacks, Pakistan has faced issues in bringing foreign investment. Infrastructure is also suffering due to these attacks. It is in this context that the interior ministry has asked all foreigners and Afghan citizen card holders to leave the country by 31 March 2025. After that, from 1 April an operation to expel foreigners will start.

National Unity against Terrorism, Editorial, Roznama Jang, 21 March²³

The rising new wave of terrorism, especially in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Balochistan, has raised concerns about law and order and national security, and this sense of urgency has grown stronger, highlighting the need for the nation to unite and adopt a strategy to confront this brutal threat. Serious efforts are being made by both government and opposition political parties to find a solution to this issue by convening an All-Party Conference. After the in-camera session of the Parliamentary Committee on National Security, President Asif Ali Zardari met with members of Balochistan's parliamentary parties in Quetta and, during a speech at a meeting on law and order, he made it clear that the state must prevail. The war against terrorism must be won. Terrorist elements will be defeated at any cost. The President stated that the Counter-Terrorism Wing will be provided with modern weapons. The terrorists' attempt to divide the nation is indeed strengthening our eternal enemy. This is a national issue, and all political parties should put aside their political biases and differences. If Pakistan exists, we all exist; our politics exists. Chairman of the PPP, Bilawal Bhutto, specially participated

²³ <https://e.jang.com.pk/karachi/21-03-2025/page6>

in the meeting. Parliamentary leaders raised concerns about the issues facing the province and the grievances of the Baloch people, assuring that steps would be taken to address them. President Zardari stated that Balochistan is close to his heart, and he wishes to see every child in the province in school, along with the development and sustainable peace in the province. He also promised to set up camps in Balochistan after Eid. Unfortunately, the highest illiteracy rate is in Balochistan, and a large portion of the population is deprived of basic necessities, which banned organizations and foreign terrorists are exploiting.

Infiltration from Afghanistan, Editorial, Jang, 25 March²⁴

The continuous influx of terrorists from Afghanistan into Pakistan is the main problem that has affected bilateral relations. It was expected that the relations between the two countries would improve after the withdrawal of American forces and the establishment of the Taliban government. The worrying thing is that despite repeated diplomatic efforts to stop the use of Afghan soil for terrorism in Pakistan, not much has been achieved on that front. According to the ISPR statement, the latest proof of this was in the form of an attempt by a group of banned Tehreek-i-Taliban (TTP) terrorists from Ghulam Kalay district of North Waziristan, for whom the term Khawarij is used at the state level, to enter Pakistani territory on the intervening night of 22-23 March. However, the brave soldiers of the Pakistan Army foiled this nefarious attempt by killing at least 16 terrorists. The statement clarified that Pakistan has been continuously asking the interim Afghan government to ensure effective border management. *The timing of the latest infiltration is particularly noteworthy. The night before the armed terrorists attempted to enter North Waziristan, a decision to improve bilateral relations had been made in a meeting between Pakistan's Special Representative for Afghanistan and the Acting Afghan Foreign Minister. A day earlier, the Torkham trade crossing, which had been closed for four weeks, had been reopened and traffic between the two sides had resumed. Therefore, it is not unreasonable to assume that this infiltration was a conspiracy by the agents of those powers who do not want to see Pak-Afghan relations restored.* Therefore, the authorities of both countries should resolve the issues

²⁴ <https://e.jang.com.pk/detail/869040>

wisely and move forward with mutual cooperation for peace and stability in the region and the development and prosperity of the people.

ELECTRONIC MEDIA

Nowshera Explosion: Top Haqqania Madrassa Figure among 7 Dead, Sethi Se Sawal, Samaa TV, 02 March²⁵

The host informed that at least six people, including JUI-S leader Maulana Hamidul Haq Haqqani, were killed and 15 injured when a suicide blast ripped through the Darul Uloom Haqqania seminary in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa's Nowshera district. *Adviser to KP Chief Minister on Information Barrister Mohammad Ali Saif confirmed in a statement that Maulana Hamidul Haq was among the dead. "He was a great religious scholar whose immense services to Islam are unforgettable," he said. "Maulana Hamidul Haq's martyrdom is an irreparable loss."*

The blast tore through the main prayer hall of the madrassah as worshippers gathered for Friday prayers. It was a suicide blast. Three policemen were also injured in the attack. Najam Sethi pointed out that there is a divide in the Taliban on the basis of ideology. Haqqani network is also divided and there members are also targeted. Siraj Haqqani has ties with Pakistani intelligence and was the entry point to Taliban for Pakistan. While on the other hand Haibatullah Akhundzada who is the ideological head of Taliban in Kandahar. Mulla Umar son of Mullah Umar is defence Minister, there is tensions in the Taliban because Haibatullah Akhundzada is conservative and he believes in orthodox Islam and wants people to follow that without any relaxation. He does not want women education and foreign relations. There is division between these groups in Afghanistan. The section of Taliban in Doha who helped in the talks also want international contacts and is against Akhundzada. These differences were not coming out in the open but the division was getting wider in the Taliban. Even Haqqani had international contacts and this target killing is the result of internal tensions within the Taliban regime. Mulla Yaqoob

²⁵ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YS0dXO5R1BU>

who is the UAE left Afghanistan as Akhundzada noticed that he has sided with the other group. Haqqani network was also the founder of JUI-F, therefore Sami Ul Haq was also eliminated. Maulana Hamidul Haq Haqqani was eliminated this time because it is believed that he is close to establishment and intelligence agencies and this is a message for Pakistan. He was going to be part of the delegation from Pakistan that was supposed to meet Taliban in Afghanistan. This killing has put a full stop on the possible delegation from Pakistan that was supposed to visit Afghanistan. Sethi pointed out that there will be more targeted assassinations in the future and it has already reached Pakistan. This time it is not by the TTP but the killings are due to the internal rifts amid the Taliban. For strategic direction there is a need for strategic person with full authority, NECTA does not have any power and is not doing its job. There is no implementation mechanism for NECTA. There is a need to spate religion from politics, there is intolerance in the country. Talking about the Haqqani network he pointed out that there are lots of attack on the network.

Trump's arrival & Pakistan-US relations? Jirga with Saleem Safi, Geo News, 10 March²⁶

In this episode Saleem Safi discusses the arrival of Trump as President, his team and how it will impact the World, especially its impact on Pakistan. The guest is Dean of Boston University who is sitting in US and the host tries to understand his point of view on these issues. *Guest:* Dr. Adil Anjum-Dean Boston University. *Adil Anjum underlined that the return of Trump in itself is a big change and we have to understand how the World will move from here. Trump is always on alive TV showing announcing his decisions and this will remain for a long time, the change is permanent.* Talking about Trump's team he underlined that public in US is scared of this team, they are dangerous and not reliable and most important they are extremist. The Defence secretary is questionable, actually Trump came with a vengeance policy and he has come back to take the revenge with such a cabinet. All of them are loyalist of Donald Trump and they will do anything he directs them to do. About Elon Mask plays an important role and he played a great role in bringing him back to power, second he is head of twitter and Elon controls the narrative. The ideology of Elon

²⁶ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=durhPbzqWxQ&t=347s>

Mask is also important and he is also very extremist. This government has come with an anti-intellectual streak, and against globalism and this ideology is important and to be noted. Trump wants his team to be loyal to him, and show allegiance to Trump, this is an imperial presidency. There is a power play and he wants to bring all centre of powers to be his loyalist. The main issues in US at this point of time is foreign policy and it is impacted by the national policy. Trumps second term is labeled as second civil war although without any bullets. The mandate to Trump represents a divided society and the number of votes he got this time is less then when he was defeated last time. It is not only about US aid that is banned but a whole university system is disbanded in the US. For example Trump has said that the Department of Education will be scrapped and dismantled. The internal issue in US is there and the society is divided and this will impact the larger international policy. Make America great again, this slogan means that US is not great right now and we need to make it great just like it was in the past. Trump has locked horn with US allies like Canada and Europe. Canada has always been loyal to US in the past, but still Trump has talked about tariff wars. Trump and Putin has long story and Trump thinks that Putin stood by him. Trump admires power, and he thinks Putin is power and therefore he is a fan of Putin. When Volodymyr Zelensky tried talking negative about Putin, things went downhill for him on the live show. Instead of Europe's support to Ukraine, the truth is that machinery for war for Ukraine mainly came from US and now US has also said that it will stop sharing intelligence. Europe will try to be self-reliant and they have realized that they cannot depend on the west.

National Security Committee Meeting: "Operation or WAR?" Capital Talk with Hamid Mir, *Geo News*, 19 March²⁷

After the increase in the terror incidents across Balochistan and KPK, the parliamentary committee on national security finally met. *Hamid Mir underlined that a need was felt to use parliament as a forum to discuss on alternatives to fight this new wave of terrorism. The NSC met in an in camera briefing but the point to note is that the opposition party PTI decided not to be a part of this briefing, the government on its side has criticised the PTI for not attending the*

²⁷ https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=o_VKXd_93XY

NSC meeting which is above politics and concerns the national security of the country. Shehbaz Sharif pointed out after the meeting that elements in Pakistan that do propaganda with enemy will not be spared. *The PTI has said that military operation is not the solution and a committee sitting in a small room can't decide the future of the country.* Salman Akram Ranjha of the PTI during the conference also demanded that Imran Khan should be out on parole and should be included in the talks. He also added that the solution of this issue is in a *bigger national dialogue*. Hamid Mir asked how this issue will be resolved. **Guests:** Senator Musadik Masood Malik-PML-N & Barrister Ali Zafar-PTI. **Senator Musadik Masood Malik** informed that the PTI was invited for the briefing and since the terror incident the government has been reaching to them for dialogue. Imran Khan's jail term and the terror incidents are two different things. The government also allowed the PTI team to meet Imran Khan and we were hoping he will direct the committee to take part in the briefing but unfortunately the opposite happened and Imran Khan directed not to attend the NSC meeting. We are now in a war situation and the PTI saying there is no need for operation against terrorism indicates that they do not care about the national security of the country which is shocking, why this narrative? The PTI is circling the whole discussion on Imran Khan and there is no talk about terrorism. We are saying that the government will root out the militants but the PTI is saying operation is not the solution. The PTI should decide if they want to finish terrorism out of the country or not. **Barrister Ali Zafar** pointed out that the PTI cares about Pakistan and national issue, there was a discussion in the PTI and there was two opinions, one felt that there is a need to take part in the NSC and the other group said that Imran Khan should be involved in a national dialogue and then come out with a strategy. All these options were discussed, advantages and disadvantages and finally we decided to meet Imran Khan and take his view in which the final decision of not taking part in the NSC was laid out. Talking about the legal option to bring out Imran Khan he underlined that there is a crisis situation and Imran Khan can be given a parole to come out and take part in the national dialogue. He added that only operation is not the way but it is part of the solution, for complete solution dialogue is important and we need to talk to the people and listen to their grievances. There is no representative government in Balochistan and they do not represent the public. The people think that the government is taking its resources but not giving anything back to the people

like there is no development. Dialogue is important but if we minus one important leader of the opposition from this, then how will the country find a complete solution.

BOMBINGS, SHOOTINGS AND DISAPPEARANCES

(Select incidents culled out from the Pakistan media)

Place	Date	Description	Killed	Injured
Balochistan				
Quetta ²⁸	03/03/2025	Female suicide bomber kills 1 person and injures 3 in southwest Pakistan.	01	03
Noshki ²⁹	16/03/2025	Pakistan army hit by another BLA attack, 5 killed, including 3 soldiers	08	00
Khyber Pakhtunkhwa				
Bannu ³⁰	03/03/2025	Pakistanis mourn 18 killed in a suicide bombing at an army base.	18	00
Peshawar ³¹	15/03/2025	Prominent Religious Scholar Mufti Munir Shakir Killed in Peshawar Blast.	01	00

²⁸ <https://apnews.com/article/pakistan-balochistan-female-suicide-bomber-attack-149d02f23e6889b62607416be4a2ac3c>

²⁹ <https://www.aninews.in/news/world/asia/pakistan-army-hit-by-another-bla-attack-5-killed-including-3-soldiers20250316171249/>

³⁰ <https://apnews.com/article/pakistan-bannu-funeral-suicide-bombing-aea1ee6c90a7054cf737147ef73541ce>

³¹ <https://arynews.tv/religious-scholar-mufti-munir-shakir-killed-in-peshawar-bomb-blast/>