

ICEP's CSS WEEKLY

CURRENT AFFAIRS DIGEST FOR CSS / PMS ASPIRANTS



ISSUE 10

COVERAGE: JULY 19 – JULY 25, 2026

-  14 IN-DEPTH ARTICLES
-  50-QUESTION MCQ BANK
-  CONSOLIDATED VOCABULARY

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LAHORE, PAKISTAN

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S&P Upgrades Pakistan's Credit Rating to 'B'

A CAUTIOUS VOTE OF CONFIDENCE

S&P Global Ratings raised Pakistan's long-term sovereign rating from 'B-' to 'B' with a stable outlook on July 22, 2026.



KEY DRIVERS OF UPGRADE



Political & Institutional Stability

Stability has enabled the government to implement difficult reforms.



Fiscal Consolidation

Accelerated revenue mobilisation and prudent fiscal management.



Strong External Support

Sustained financing from bilateral partners and IMF programme.

STRONG EXTERNAL & IMF SUPPORT



CHINA



SAUDI ARABIA



KUWAIT

\$16.8 BILLION

DEPOSITS & SWAP SUPPORT PROVIDED BY BILATERAL PARTNERS (FY2026)



\$7 BILLION

IMF EXTENDED FUND FACILITY
Signed in September 2024
Most performance targets met;
timely disbursements unlocked.

KEY NUMBERS



REAL GDP GROWTH (FY2027)

3.5%

Supported by ongoing reforms and IMF programme.



FOREIGN EXCHANGE RESERVES

\$25.3 BILLION

End-June 2026
vs \$6.7 billion in Dec 2022



EXTERNAL PAYMENTS COVER

\$16.4 BILLION

External principal payments covered over next 12 months.



FISCAL DEFICIT (FY2027)

~4% OF GDP

Projected decline in fiscal deficit.



“Improved credibility must support sustainable economic change, not cheaper borrowing to finance consumption. That is the real test.”

— S&P GLOBAL RATINGS, SOVEREIGN RATING STATEMENT (JULY 22, 2026)

IMPLICATIONS FOR PAKISTAN



Lower Borrowing Costs Over the Long Term



Stronger Investor & Market Confidence



Greater Access to International Capital



Foundation for Sustainable Growth

THE ROAD AHEAD

- ✓ Maintain fiscal discipline
- ✓ Boost tax base & revenue collection
- ✓ Ensure energy sector reforms
- ✓ Promote exports & private investment
- ✓ Convert credibility gains into broad-based and inclusive growth



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LAHORE, PAKISTAN



LEARNING PHASES

PHASE 1 (2 MONTHS)

ENGLISH FOUNDATION &
17 CORE FPSC READINGS

PHASE 2 & 3 (8 MONTHS)

FULL CSS SYLLABUS PREP &
MPT (DAILY CLASSES, WRITTEN
TASKS + WEEKLY TESTS)

PHASE 4 (1 MONTH)

STRUCTURED REVISION &
TIME MANAGEMENT

PHASE 5-8 (TILL EXAM)

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S&P Upgrades Pakistan's Credit Rating to 'B': A Cautious Vote of Confidence

A. Executive Summary

On July 22, 2026, S&P Global Ratings raised Pakistan's long-term sovereign credit rating by one notch, from 'B-' to 'B', with a stable outlook, marking the country's first upgrade from this agency in nine years. The decision reflects three converging drivers: improved political and institutional stability that has allowed the government to push through difficult reforms; a strengthening fiscal position built on accelerated revenue mobilisation; and continued external financing support from bilateral partners such as China, Saudi Arabia and Kuwait, whose combined deposits and swap facilities reached \$16.8 billion by the end of fiscal year 2026. S&P projects real GDP growth of 3.5 percent for fiscal year 2027, aided by the ongoing \$7 billion IMF Extended Fund Facility signed in September 2024, under which Pakistan has met most performance targets and unlocked timely disbursements. Foreign exchange reserves, including the central bank's gold holdings, have climbed to \$25.3 billion as of end-June 2026 from a multi-year low of \$6.7 billion in December 2022, comfortably covering the \$16.4 billion in external principal payments due over the next twelve months. For CSS and PMS aspirants, this development is a textbook case study in sovereign credit analysis, IMF programme conditionality and the political economy of fiscal consolidation. The upgrade arrives in the same week Finance Minister Muhammad Aurangzeb approached the United States for a separate \$10 billion currency stabilisation facility, underscoring that Pakistan's economic managers are simultaneously pursuing multiple, mutually reinforcing tracks to entrench macroeconomic stability. Editorial commentary in Dawn and Pakistan Today has cautioned, however, that a rating upgrade is a judgment on debt-servicing capacity and willingness, not a certificate of broad economic health; Pakistan's government debt remains close to 68 percent of GDP, well above the 'B' category median, and interest payments still consume a large share of federal revenue. The durable exam takeaway is that credibility gains must now be converted into sustained, broad-based growth rather than treated as licence for renewed borrowing.

B. Key Arguments

- S&P raised Pakistan's long-term sovereign rating from 'B-' to 'B' with a stable outlook on July 22, 2026, the first upgrade from the agency in nine years.
- The upgrade cites three drivers: political and institutional stability, fiscal consolidation, and sustained bilateral and IMF-linked external financing.
- S&P forecasts real GDP growth of 3.5 percent for FY2027, with inflationary pressure kept marginal despite energy-price effects of the Middle East conflict.
- Foreign exchange reserves rose to \$25.3 billion by end-June 2026 from a low of \$6.7 billion in December 2022.
- Bilateral partners — China, Saudi Arabia and Kuwait — have provided \$16.8 billion in deposits and swap support, critical to meeting external financing needs.
- Tax revenue collection rose by 3.2 percentage points of GDP in the twelve months to June 2025, and momentum continued into FY2026.
- The general government fiscal deficit is projected to fall to about 4 percent of GDP in FY2027, down from near 8 percent during the 2022–23 crisis years.
- Government interest payments are forecast to decline to an average of 38 percent of revenue over the next three years, from a peak above 60 percent in FY2024.
- The upgrade came in the same week Islamabad sought a separate \$10 billion Exchange Stabilisation Support Facility from the US Treasury.
- Editorials in Dawn and Pakistan Today caution the rating is not a certificate of economic health, given debt-to-GDP still near 68 percent of GDP.

C. Critical Analysis

Causes: The upgrade stems directly from Pakistan's continued compliance with the IMF's \$7 billion Extended Fund Facility, under which successive reviews have been cleared on schedule. Political stability since the 2024 transition has allowed the finance ministry to pursue tax reforms — including broadening the retail and agricultural tax base — without the policy reversals that plagued earlier IMF programmes. Sustained inflows from bilateral partners have also removed the immediate threat of default that hung over Pakistan in 2022–23, giving rating agencies room to recognise reduced near-term repayment risk.

Implications: A higher sovereign rating typically lowers the risk premium investors demand on Pakistani Eurobonds and sukuk, potentially reducing future borrowing costs and easing access to international capital markets that have been largely closed to Islamabad since 2022. It may also improve sentiment among portfolio investors in the domestic stock and bond markets and support the rupee's relative stability. For ordinary citizens, the effect is indirect: cheaper sovereign borrowing does not automatically translate into lower inflation or better public services unless fiscal savings are redirected productively.

Challenges: Pakistan remains in speculative-grade territory, meaning any external shock — a renewed spike in oil prices from the Iran conflict, a shortfall in tax collection, or delays in bilateral rollover agreements — could quickly reverse sentiment. Debt-to-GDP at nearly 68 percent of GDP is still well above the 'B'-category median of about 51 percent, and reliance on the continued goodwill of three bilateral creditors is a structural vulnerability rather than a permanent solution.

Opportunities: The upgrade offers a window to re-enter international capital markets on more favourable terms, diversify away from short-term bilateral rollovers toward longer-dated market instruments, and attract foreign direct investment in export-oriented sectors. It also strengthens Pakistan's negotiating position in parallel talks with Washington over the proposed currency stabilisation facility, since a rising rating trajectory signals credible reform commitment to potential partners.

Way Forward: Sustaining the upgrade trajectory requires locking in tax reforms through legislation rather than administrative fiat, protecting the primary surplus even in politically difficult years, and using any market-access gains to lengthen debt maturities instead of financing new current expenditure. Analysts recommend an explicit medium-term fiscal framework, published multi-year revenue targets, and continued transparency with rating agencies to convert this single-notch gain into a durable climb out of the deeply speculative category.

D. Statistics & Facts

B New S&P Rating (from B-)	3.5% Projected FY27 GDP Growth	\$25.3bn FX Reserves, End-June 2026	~68% Debt-to-GDP Ratio
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- S&P upgrade announced Wednesday, July 22, 2026; outlook set as 'stable'.
- Previous S&P rating of 'B-' had stood, with a negative outlook, prior to this move.
- Reserves rose from a multi-year low of \$6.7 billion (December 2022) to \$25.3 billion (end-June 2026).
- External principal payments due over the next 12 months total \$16.4 billion, which reserves comfortably cover.
- Bilateral central bank deposits and swaps from China, Saudi Arabia and Kuwait total \$16.8 billion.
- Tax revenue rose 3.2 percentage points of GDP in the year to June 2025.
- General government deficit projected at about 4% of GDP in FY2027, down from near 8% in FY2022–23.
- Net general government debt-to-GDP is projected to average a 4.2-percentage-point annual change for FY2026–29.
- Government interest payments projected to fall to an average 38% of revenue over three years, from over 60% in FY2024.
- Investment fell 0.1 percentage point of GDP to 14.4%, and savings fell 0.5 points to 13.5% of GDP.
- The IMF's \$7 billion Extended Fund Facility was approved in September 2024.

- Finance Minister Aurangzeb separately requested a \$10 billion Exchange Stabilisation Support Facility from the US Treasury the same week.

E. Quotable Quotes

"Political stability has bolstered the government's capacity to implement reforms."

— S&P Global Ratings, Sovereign Rating Statement (July 22, 2026)

"Improved credibility must support sustainable economic change, not cheaper borrowing to finance consumption. That is the real test."

— Dawn Editorial Board, Newspaper Editorial (July 24, 2026)

F. Examiner's Perspective

Paper	Likely Angle
Essay	Discuss how sovereign credit ratings shape a developing economy's access to international capital, using Pakistan's 2026 upgrade as a case study.
Current Affairs	Evaluate the significance of Pakistan's improved S&P rating for its ongoing IMF programme compliance.
Pakistan Affairs	Trace the fiscal reforms since 2022 that enabled Pakistan's return from near-default to a 'B' sovereign rating.
Interview	How would you explain, in two minutes, why a rating upgrade does not equal economic recovery?

G. Vocabulary Builder

Sovereign	Relating to a national government's authority	National	The sovereign rating reflects the state's ability to repay debt.
Consolidation	Combining or strengthening	Reinforcement	Fiscal consolidation reduced the deficit sharply.
Speculative-grade	Below investment-grade credit quality	Non-investment-grade	Pakistan remains in speculative-grade territory despite the upgrade.
Bilateral	Involving two parties	Two-sided	Bilateral creditors rolled over billions in deposits.
Disbursement	The act of paying out funds	Payout	Timely IMF disbursements followed programme compliance.
Rollover	Renewing a loan instead of repaying it	Renewal	Pakistan depends on the rollover of commercial credit lines.
Premium	An extra amount paid for risk or value	Surcharge	A lower risk premium eases government borrowing costs.
Resilience	Capacity to recover from difficulty	Toughness	Reserve buildup boosted the economy's external resilience.
Mobilisation	Organising resources for use	Assembly	Revenue mobilisation improved through tax reform.
Vulnerability	Susceptibility to harm	Weakness	Heavy reliance on three creditors is a structural vulnerability.

H. CSS/PMS Complete Question Bank

MCQ: S&P Global upgraded Pakistan's long-term sovereign credit rating in July 2026 from 'B-' to which rating?

- A. BB-
- B. B
- C. CCC+
- D. BB+

Correct Answer: B. B

Pakistan Affairs Q1: Examine the role of IMF programme compliance in Pakistan's 2026 sovereign rating upgrade.

Pakistan Affairs Q2: What structural weaknesses continue to constrain Pakistan's creditworthiness despite the S&P upgrade?

Current Affairs Q1: Compare the roles of S&P and Fitch in assessing Pakistan's credit risk during 2026.

Current Affairs Q2: Discuss how bilateral financing from China, Saudi Arabia and Kuwait has shaped Pakistan's external debt profile.

Short Question (20 marks): Write a note (20 marks) on the significance of Pakistan's foreign exchange reserve recovery since 2022.

Analytical Question: Analytically assess whether a one-notch sovereign upgrade can be considered evidence of durable macroeconomic stability.

Essay Topic: Sovereign Debt and Development: Can Credit Rating Upgrades Translate into Inclusive Growth?

Further In-Depth Study

<https://tribune.com.pk/story/2619768/sp-upgrades-credit-rating-to-b-1>

<https://www.dawn.com/news/2017937/improved-rating>

<https://www.nation.com.pk/23-Jul-2026/s-p-upgrades-pakistan-s-long-term-sovereign-credit-rating-b>

<https://pakobserver.net/rating-upgrade/>



Pakistan Hit with 10 Percent US Tariff Under New Forced-Labour Trade Regime

A NEW ERA OF PROTECTIONISM

Effective July 2026, the United States has imposed a 10% tariff on Pakistani exports under its new forced-labour trade regime, reshaping global trade governance.

WHY THIS TARIFF?



Enforced under Section 301 of the Trade Act, 1974.



Targets countries accused of benefiting from forced labour practices.



Aims to protect human rights and ensure fair competition in global trade.



Part of the Trump administration's broader "America First Trade Policy".

PAKISTAN'S EXPORTS TO THE US (FY2025)



TEXTILES & APPAREL
\$5.2 BILLION



LEATHER GOODS
\$0.8 BILLION



SPORTS GOODS
\$0.6 BILLION



SURGICAL INSTRUMENTS
\$0.3 BILLION

TOTAL EXPORTS: \$6.9 BILLION

WHAT DOES THIS MEAN FOR PAKISTAN?



Higher Export Costs
Pakistani goods become more expensive in the US market.



At Risk Sectors
Textiles, apparel, leather goods, sports goods, and surgical instruments most affected.



Reduced Competitiveness
Pakistan may lose market share to competitors like Bangladesh, Vietnam, and India.



Jobs & Growth Impact
Risk to employment, investment and overall economic growth.

PAKISTAN'S POSSIBLE RESPONSE



Diplomatic Engagement
Raise concerns through bilateral and multilateral forums.



Compliance & Reforms
Strengthen labour laws, monitoring and corporate accountability.



Diversify Markets
Expand exports to EU, Middle East, Africa and Central Asia.



Support Affected Industries
Provide incentives, skills upgrading and technology support.

KEY TAKEAWAY



This 10% tariff is a wake-up call for Pakistan to align with global labour standards and future-proof its export economy.

THE BIGGER PICTURE



Global trade is shifting towards values-based protectionism.



Human rights and labour standards are now trade determinants.



Countries must adapt or risk losing access to key markets.



Sustainable growth depends on ethical, competitive and resilient trade practices.



Pakistan Hit with 10 Percent US Tariff Under New Forced-Labour Trade Regime

A. Executive Summary

The United States announced on July 24, 2026 that it would impose new tariffs of 10 to 12.5 percent on imports from 60 trading partners, including Pakistan, citing inadequate enforcement of bans on goods made with forced labour. The new duties, which took effect at 12:01 a.m. EDT on Friday, July 24, replace a temporary global 10 percent tariff that the Trump administration had imposed after the US Supreme Court struck down its earlier 'reciprocal' tariffs of 10 to 50 percent in February 2026 for exceeding presidential authority. Under the new framework, introduced through Section 301 of the Trade Act of 1974 rather than the emergency powers law the Court invalidated, Pakistan is grouped with Bangladesh, India, Canada, Mexico, Indonesia, Jordan, Sri Lanka and the United Kingdom at the lower 10 percent rate, while 38 other economies, including China, face 12.5 percent. Shipments already in transit to the United States were granted a grace period until July 28. The timing is awkward for Islamabad: Pakistani officials had reported progress in bilateral trade talks in Washington as recently as July 11, and the new tariff arrives even as trade negotiators continue discussing a broader reciprocal agreement. It also follows a much steeper 29 percent tariff Trump imposed on Pakistani exports in 2025 under the now-defunct emergency powers framework, later reduced to 19 percent; the current 10 percent duty is a separate, additional layer rather than a replacement for earlier measures. For CSS and PMS aspirants, the episode illustrates how US trade policy has pivoted from constitutionally vulnerable executive orders toward statutory authorities intended to survive judicial review, and how forced-labour enforcement has become a durable pretext for tariff policy. Textile and apparel exporters, who supply the bulk of Pakistan's \$5 billion-plus annual exports to the US market, are the most exposed, adding fresh urgency to Islamabad's parallel pursuit of the \$10 billion currency stabilisation facility and a comprehensive trade deal.

B. Key Arguments

- The US imposed 10 to 12.5 percent tariffs on 60 trading partners effective July 24, 2026, replacing an expiring temporary 10 percent global tariff.
- Pakistan was assigned the lower 10 percent rate, alongside Bangladesh, India, Canada, Mexico, Indonesia, Jordan, Sri Lanka and the UK.
- 38 other economies, including China, face the higher 12.5 percent rate under the same order.
- USTR Jamieson Greer said the tariffs enforce a century-old US forced-labour import ban that trading partners have failed to match.
- The new duties rely on Section 301 of the Trade Act of 1974, designed to be more resilient to legal challenge than earlier IEEPA-based tariffs.
- The US Supreme Court struck down Trump's earlier 10–50 percent 'reciprocal' tariffs in February 2026 for exceeding presidential authority.
- Shipments already in transit to the US were exempted until July 28, 2026.
- The tariff arrives despite recent Pakistan-US trade talks reporting progress toward a reciprocal agreement as of July 11, 2026.
- It is an additional layer atop Pakistan's earlier 29 percent (later reduced to 19 percent) IEEPA tariff imposed in 2025.
- Japan and Australia publicly criticised the move as unjustified and inconsistent with existing trade arrangements.

C. Critical Analysis

Causes: The immediate cause is legal: after the Supreme Court invalidated Trump's broad emergency-powers tariffs, the administration sought a statutory alternative less exposed to judicial challenge. Section 301 forced-labour enforcement offered that vehicle, framed as protecting US workers from unfair competition rather than as a general trade-balancing tool. Pakistan's inclusion reflects USTR's assessment that its supply-chain labour protections, particularly in textiles and agriculture, remain insufficiently verified despite submissions made during the investigation.

Implications: A 10 percent tariff raises costs for Pakistani exporters competing with regional rivals such as Bangladesh and Vietnam in the US apparel market, Pakistan's largest single export destination. Because textiles account for a large share of export earnings and employment, the tariff could pressure margins in an industry already squeezed by high energy costs and financing constraints, complicating the current account gains reflected in the recent S&P upgrade.

Challenges: Pakistan must now negotiate simultaneously on two fronts: seeking exemption or reduction of the new forced-labour tariff while also pursuing a broader reciprocal trade agreement and the proposed \$10 billion currency facility. Overlapping negotiating tracks risk diluting Islamabad's leverage, and the forced-labour framing makes the issue harder to resolve through purely economic concessions, since it also touches labour rights and compliance verification.

Opportunities: Pakistan can use the episode to accelerate supply-chain labour audits and certification, potentially positioning itself to move into the lower-tariff tier alongside countries deemed compliant. Strengthened labour standards could also improve access to European and other Western markets that increasingly tie trade preferences to labour and environmental compliance, turning a defensive response into a longer-term competitiveness gain.

Way Forward: Analysts recommend that Islamabad pursue an expedited bilateral review process with USTR, backed by verifiable labour-compliance documentation from the textile sector, while continuing broader reciprocal trade talks. Diversifying export markets beyond the US, and accelerating value-addition in textiles to reduce price sensitivity, would also cushion the impact of tariff volatility going forward.

D. Statistics & Facts

10% New US Tariff on Pakistan	60 Countries Covered by the Order	12.5% Higher-Tier Rate (38 Countries)	Jul 28 Grace Period Deadline for Transit Goods
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- New tariffs took effect at 12:01 a.m. EDT, Friday, July 24, 2026.
- Tariffs range from 10 percent to 12.5 percent across 60 trading partners.
- Pakistan, India, Bangladesh, Canada, Mexico, Indonesia, Jordan, Sri Lanka and the UK assigned the 10 percent rate.
- China and 37 other economies assigned the 12.5 percent rate.
- The measure follows a months-long USTR investigation under Section 301 of the Trade Act of 1974.
- It replaces a temporary 10 percent global tariff imposed after the Supreme Court's February 2026 ruling.
- That temporary tariff had run for 150 days before expiring on July 24, 2026.
- Pakistan's earlier IEEPA-based tariff, imposed in 2025, started at 29 percent before being reduced to 19 percent.
- Pakistani officials reported trade-talk progress with Washington as recently as July 11, 2026.
- Shipments already in transit to the US were given until July 28, 2026 before the new tariff applied.
- Japan and Australia's governments publicly objected to the tariff decision.
- The tariff order is expected to cover roughly 99.4 percent of US imports, with exemptions for goods like oil, gas and fertiliser.

E. Quotable Quotes

"The United States has had a forced labor import ban for nearly a century, and rigorously enforces it; it's well past time for our trading partners to do the same."

— Jamieson Greer, US Trade Representative (July 23, 2026)

F. Examiner's Perspective

Paper	Likely Angle
Essay	US Trade Policy After the Tariff Ruling: Assess how Section 301 forced-labour tariffs reshape global trade governance.
Current Affairs	Discuss the July 2026 US tariff order on 60 countries and its implications for the global trading system.
Pakistan Affairs	Evaluate the impact of the new 10 percent US tariff on Pakistan's textile export sector.
Interview	How should Pakistan balance simultaneous trade negotiations on tariff relief, a reciprocal deal, and a currency facility with Washington?

G. Vocabulary Builder

Reciprocal	Given or done in return	Mutual	The two sides discussed a reciprocal trade agreement.
Statutory	Required or permitted by law	Legal	The tariffs now rest on statutory rather than emergency authority.
Invalidate	To make legally void	Nullify	The Supreme Court invalidated the earlier tariff order.
Levy	A tax or duty imposed	Duty	The new levy applies to Pakistani textile exports.
Compliance	Acting in accordance with rules	Conformity	Labour compliance audits could help exporters avoid penalties.
Exemption	Freedom from an obligation	Exception	Goods in transit received a temporary exemption.
Verification	Confirming the truth of something	Confirmation	USTR sought verification of Pakistan's labour submissions.
Margin	The difference between cost and selling price	Profit margin	Exporters fear shrinking margins under the new tariff.
Diversify	To vary or expand	Broaden	Exporters are urged to diversify beyond the US market.
Leverage	Power to influence outcomes	Influence	Overlapping talks risk diluting Pakistan's negotiating leverage.

H. CSS/PMS Complete Question Bank

MCQ: Under the July 2026 US tariff order, what rate was applied to Pakistani exports?

- A. 19 percent
- B. 29 percent
- C. 10 percent
- D. 12.5 percent

Correct Answer: C. 10 percent

Pakistan Affairs Q1: Assess the impact of the new US forced-labour tariff on Pakistan's textile and apparel exports.

Pakistan Affairs Q2: Discuss Pakistan's options for tariff relief while simultaneously pursuing a reciprocal trade deal with Washington.

Current Affairs Q1: Explain why the Trump administration shifted from IEEPA emergency powers to Section 301 authority for its 2026 tariffs.

Current Affairs Q2: Compare the trade positions of Pakistan, Bangladesh and India under the new US tariff regime.

Short Question (20 marks): Write a note (20 marks) on the legal basis and scope of the US forced-labour tariff order of July 2026.

Analytical Question: Analytically evaluate whether forced-labour enforcement is a credible justification or a trade-protectionist pretext.

Essay Topic: Trade, Labour and Power: The Politics of Twenty-First Century Tariffs.

Further In-Depth Study

<https://propakistani.pk/2026/07/24/pakistan-hit-with-10-us-tariff-as-trump-targets-60-nations-over-forced-labour-concerns/>

<https://www.dawn.com/news/amp/2017941>

<https://tribune.com.pk/story/2620167/pak-goods-to-face-10-us-tariff>



AJK Elections Revised to a Three-Phase Schedule Amid Security Concerns

ENSURING REPRESENTATION, SAFETY & TRANSPARENCY

The Azad Jammu & Kashmir (AJK) government has announced a three-phase schedule for the upcoming general elections, balancing democratic representation with ground realities.

THREE-PHASE ELECTION SCHEDULE



PHASE 1

15 SEPTEMBER 2026

Muzaffarabad, Bagh, Haveli, Sudhnoti & Kotlian Districts



PHASE 2

22 SEPTEMBER 2026

Poonch, Mirpur & Bhimber Districts



PHASE 3

29 SEPTEMBER 2026

Neelum Valley & Leepa Valley



RESULTS ANNOUNCEMENT

WITHIN 72 HOURS AFTER COMPLETION OF POLLING

WHY THE REVISION?



Prevailing security threats along the LoC and sensitive areas.



Harsh weather and difficult terrain, especially in Neelum & Leepa Valleys.



Better logistics, polling arrangements & staff deployment.



Ensure free, fair and transparent elections across all districts.



“ Our priority is to conduct elections in a peaceful, free and fair manner, so that every eligible voter can exercise their democratic right. ”

– AJK GOVERNMENT SPOKESPERSON

SIGNIFICANCE OF AJK ELECTIONS



Strengthens democratic institutions in AJK.



Enhances people's trust in governance and system.



Promotes stability and development in the region.



Projects AJK's commitment to democratic values.



Cross-LoC tensions & infiltration threats.



Remote terrain & poor connectivity.



Logistical complexities in phased polling.



Ensuring high voter turnout across all phases.

AJK AT A GLANCE



- 3.9 Million+ Population
- 10 Districts
- 45 Assembly Seats
- Special constitutional status under Article 3 of AJK Constitution
- Shares culture, history & bonds with Pakistan



A MESSAGE TO THE VOTERS



Your vote is your voice. Your participation is the foundation of a stronger, prosperous and democratic Azad Jammu & Kashmir.



ICEP's CSS WEEKLY
CURRENT AFFAIRS DIGEST FOR
CSS / PMS ASPIRANTS



ISSUE 10



COVERAGE: JULY 19 – JULY 25, 2026



LAHORE, PAKISTAN

ICEP CSS INSTITUTE

15 YEARS LEGACY OF TOPPERS: 2000+ SERVING BUREAUCRATS



CSS'2027

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AJK Elections Revised to a Three-Phase Schedule Amid Security Concerns

A. Executive Summary

The Election Commission of Azad Jammu and Kashmir (AJKEC) announced a major revision to the 2026 Legislative Assembly election schedule on July 21, 2026, moving from a single-day poll to a phased process spread over three dates. Chief Election Commissioner Justice (retd) Ghulam Mustafa Mughal confirmed that Mirpur Division, comprising Mirpur, Kotli and Bhimber districts with 13 constituencies, will vote as originally planned on July 27. Muzaffarabad Division, covering Muzaffarabad, Neelum and Jhelum Valley districts, along with the 12 constituencies reserved for Jammu and Kashmir refugees residing in Pakistan, will vote on August 2. Poonch Division's 11 constituencies will go to the polls last, on August 10. The Commission said the phased approach, decided after consultation with major political parties, was designed to ensure a satisfactory security and law-and-order environment in each division rather than force a single nationwide polling day amid growing public concern about stability. The election will decide all 45 general seats of the AJK Legislative Assembly, with more than 1,265 candidates having filed nomination papers, including 218 for the 12 refugee seats. The Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf, having again failed to secure an election symbol, announced it would not contest as an organised bloc, framing its absence as opposition to what it called elite-driven electoral politics that ignores Kashmiri voices, while the Pakistan Peoples Party and Pakistan Muslim League-N are contesting actively across all three divisions. Results for each phase are to be announced the same evening polling concludes. For CSS and PMS aspirants, the AJK poll offers a live case study in the constitutional status of Azad Kashmir, its unique institutional arrangement under the Azad Jammu and Kashmir Interim Constitution Act 1974, the mechanics of phased elections under security constraints, and the political salience of the Kashmir dispute in Pakistan's domestic and foreign policy discourse, particularly given continuing debate over the region's representation and its relationship with the federal government in Islamabad.

B. Key Arguments

- AJKEC revised the 2026 election schedule from a single polling day to three phases on July 21, 2026.
- Mirpur Division (13 constituencies) votes July 27 as originally scheduled.
- Muzaffarabad Division and the 12 refugee constituencies vote on August 2, 2026.
- Poonch Division's 11 constituencies vote last, on August 10, 2026.
- The AJK Legislative Assembly election covers all 45 general seats across the three divisions.
- More than 1,265 candidates filed nomination papers, including 218 for refugee constituencies.
- The phased schedule was adopted after consultations with major political parties to address security concerns.
- PTI announced it would not contest as an organised party after again failing to secure an election symbol.
- PPP and PML-N are contesting actively across all three divisions and phases.
- Results for each phase are to be declared the same evening polling concludes, with the full picture emerging by mid-August.

C. Critical Analysis

Causes: The shift to phased polling followed 'the prevailing worsening law and order situation in different parts of the region', according to the Election Commission, reflecting heightened security assessments in specific districts rather than a region-wide threat. Consultation with political parties suggests the Commission sought to balance electoral credibility with practical security deployment capacity, since staggering polling allows security forces to concentrate resources division by division rather than thinly across all 45 constituencies simultaneously.

Implications: A staggered schedule extends the campaign period into mid-August, potentially altering momentum between phases as parties adjust messaging based on Mirpur's results before Muzaffarabad and Poonch vote. It also concentrates national and international attention on AJK politics for several weeks, amplifying the platform for parties

and interest groups to frame the elections around broader Kashmir-related themes, including the region's ties with Islamabad and its role in Pakistan's Kashmir policy.

Challenges: Phased elections raise logistical and fairness concerns: parties campaigning in later-voting divisions can tailor appeals based on earlier results, while security deployments must be sustained over three separate polling days rather than one. PTI's decision not to contest as an organised bloc also raises questions about the competitiveness and representativeness of the exercise, given the party's history of significant support in some AJK constituencies.

Opportunities: A phased approach, if executed transparently, can strengthen public confidence in election administration by demonstrating adaptive, security-conscious governance rather than either forcing an unsafe single-day vote or resorting to postponement. It also offers the Commission a template for future elections in security-sensitive constituencies, and an opportunity to showcase institutional resilience under scrutiny.

Way Forward: Sustained, division-specific security planning through August 10, transparent same-day counting and result announcement for each phase, and even-handed media access for all contesting parties will be essential to preserving the process's credibility. Post-election review of the phased model could also inform whether similar staggered arrangements should become standard practice in future AJK or other security-sensitive polls.

D. Statistics & Facts

45	3	1,265+	Aug 10
Total AJK Assembly Seats	Polling Phases	Candidates Filed Nominations	Final Phase (Poonch Division)

- Mirpur Division: 13 constituencies, polling July 27, 2026.
- Muzaffarabad Division and refugee seats: 21 constituencies combined, polling August 2, 2026.
- Poonch Division: 11 constituencies, polling August 10, 2026.
- Total candidates who filed nomination papers: over 1,265, including 218 for the 12 refugee constituencies.
- 1,047 candidates filed papers for the 33 constituencies within AJK territory.
- Elections will be held under the supervision of Pakistan's armed forces, per the Election Commission.
- The AJK Legislative Assembly comprises 53 total seats, with 27 needed for a majority (including reserved seats).
- The revised schedule was announced on Tuesday, July 21, 2026, in Muzaffarabad.
- Previously, all constituencies were scheduled to vote on a single day, July 27, 2026.
- Voting hours are set from 8am to 5pm on each respective polling day.

E. Quotable Quotes

"Under the revised schedule, polling in Mirpur Division will be held on July 27, while Muzaffarabad Division and the 12 refugee constituencies will go to the polls on August 2."

— Justice (ret'd) Ghulam Mustafa Mughal, Chief Election Commissioner, AJK (July 21, 2026)

F. Examiner's Perspective

Paper	Likely Angle
Essay	Elections Under Duress: Assess how security considerations reshape electoral design, using AJK's 2026 phased polls as a case.
Current Affairs	Discuss the significance of the phased 2026 AJK Legislative Assembly election schedule.
Pakistan Affairs	Explain the constitutional status of Azad Jammu and Kashmir and its electoral relationship with the federation.
Interview	What administrative trade-offs does a phased election schedule involve compared to a single-day poll?

G. Vocabulary Builder

Phased	Carried out in stages	Staggered	The AJK election adopted a phased polling schedule.
Constituency	An electoral district	District	Mirpur Division includes 13 constituencies.
Nomination	Formal proposal of a candidate	Candidacy filing	Over 1,265 nomination papers were submitted.
Deployment	Positioning of resources or forces	Positioning	Security deployment was concentrated division by division.
Credibility	The quality of being trusted	Trustworthiness	Transparent counting preserves electoral credibility.
Salience	Prominence or importance	Prominence	Kashmir retains high political salience in Pakistani discourse.
Staggered	Arranged to occur at different times	Phased	A staggered vote reduces security strain on a single day.
Interim	Provisional or temporary	Provisional	AJK operates under the Interim Constitution Act of 1974.
Bloc	A group acting together for a common purpose	Coalition	PTI opted not to contest as an organised bloc.
Representativeness	The degree to which something reflects a wider group	Inclusiveness	A major party's absence raises questions about representativeness.

H. CSS/PMS Complete Question Bank

MCQ: Which AJK division was scheduled to vote first, on July 27, 2026, under the revised election schedule?

- A. Poonch Division
- B. Muzaffarabad Division
- C. Mirpur Division
- D. Neelum Division

Correct Answer: C. Mirpur Division

Pakistan Affairs Q1: Discuss the constitutional and administrative framework governing elections in Azad Jammu and Kashmir.

Pakistan Affairs Q2: Examine the political significance of a major party contesting AJK elections only as independents.

Current Affairs Q1: Evaluate how security considerations are reshaping electoral administration in South Asia.

Current Affairs Q2: Compare AJK's phased 2026 election model with single-day polling systems elsewhere in the region.

Short Question (20 marks): Write a note (20 marks) on the composition and electoral process of the AJK Legislative Assembly.

Analytical Question: Analytically assess whether phased elections strengthen or undermine electoral fairness.

Essay Topic: Democracy Under Security Constraints: Balancing Free Elections and Public Safety.

Further In-Depth Study

<https://tribune.com.pk/story/2619593/ajk-to-have-polls-in-three-phases-1>

<https://www.geo.tv/latest/674080-ajk-election-commissioner-announces-phase-wise-polls-beginning-july-27>

<https://pakobserver.net/azad-kashmir-elections-2026-revised-schedule-announced-voting-starts-july-27/>

Draft National Data Governance Policy 2026: Regulating AI and Government Data

BUILDING TRUST, PROTECTING RIGHTS, ENABLING INNOVATION

The Pakistani government has unveiled the Draft National Data Governance Policy 2026 to regulate data collection, sharing, storage and use, with a special focus on AI governance and privacy protection.

CORE PRINCIPLES

-  **Privacy by Design**
Privacy must be embedded in all systems and processes.
-  **Lawfulness & Transparency**
Data use must be lawful, transparent and accountable.
-  **Purpose Limitation**
Data should be collected only for defined, legitimate purposes.
-  **Data Minimisation**
Collect only what is necessary and retain for limited time.
-  **Security & Integrity**
Ensure data is accurate, secure and protected from unauthorised access.

KEY OBJECTIVES

-  Establish a comprehensive legal and institutional framework for data governance.
-  Protect individuals' privacy and data protection rights.
-  Provide clear guidelines for the ethical and responsible use of AI and data.
-  Promote secure data sharing and interoperability among government entities.
-  Enable data-driven innovation, economic growth and better public service delivery.

SCOPE OF POLICY

-  All federal, provincial & local government entities
-  Public sector organisations and agencies
-  Government data in digital or physical form
-  AI systems using public or government-related data

KEY PROVISIONS IN THE DRAFT POLICY



Consent Management
Clear mechanisms for informed consent.



Data Governance Institution
Creation of a central Data Governance Authority.



Data Classification & Protection
Categorisation of data by sensitivity levels.



Data Sharing Framework
Standard protocols for secure data exchange.



Independent Oversight
Regular audits and compliance monitoring.



Enforcement & Penalties
Strict penalties for breach of data protection rules.

AI GOVERNANCE FOCUS



- ✓ Risk assessment for AI systems
- ✓ Algorithmic transparency and explainability
- ✓ Bias detection and fairness
- ✓ Human oversight and accountability
- ✓ Prohibition of harmful and manipulative AI use

BENEFITS FOR PAKISTAN



Stronger citizen trust and privacy protection



Better policy making through reliable data



Innovation and AI ecosystem development



Alignment with global data governance standards



Improved public services and economic growth

“

Data is the new national resource. Responsible governance of data and AI is essential for a secure, inclusive and prosperous digital future.

— GOVERNMENT OF PAKISTAN

”

Draft National Data Governance Policy 2026: Regulating AI and Government Data

A. Executive Summary

Pakistan's Ministry of Information Technology and Telecommunication has moved toward finalising the country's first comprehensive National Data Governance Policy after a public consultation period that closed on July 10, 2026, with an ongoing Dawn editorial and analysis cycle through mid-to-late July scrutinising its provisions on artificial intelligence oversight. Prepared by the Pakistan Digital Authority (PDA), established in 2024 under the Digital Nation Pakistan Act 2025, the draft policy declares government data a 'strategic national asset' held in trust for citizens rather than owned by the agencies that collect it. Public bodies are recast as custodians, not proprietors, of the data they hold, and citizens are granted a new right to know who within government accessed their personal data, when, and for what purpose, restrictable only on narrow, legally recorded grounds. The policy's most consequential feature for CSS and PMS aspirants tracking technology governance is its treatment of artificial intelligence: government agencies deploying AI systems that make legally significant decisions affecting citizens will be required to ensure explainability, continuous monitoring, meaningful human oversight, and public transparency, including publication of automated decision-making systems in a public registry maintained by the PDA. The framework also introduces controls on government use of generative AI, guarding against factual inaccuracies, intellectual property violations and data leakage, and establishes the 'once-only principle' under which citizens should not have to resubmit the same data to different government departments. Critics, including a Dawn analysis published in the coverage window, note that while the policy requires AI systems to be audited, it stops short of specifying the technical and legal standards against which such audits should be conducted, leaving Pakistan's National AI Policy 2025 to fill gaps on safeguards for citizen-affecting automated decisions. The policy also references Internet of Things devices, a category broad enough to include the expanding network of CCTV and Safe City cameras across major urban centres, without yet resolving the surveillance and privacy questions those systems raise.

B. Key Arguments

- The draft National Data Governance Policy 2026 was released for public consultation, which closed July 10, 2026.
- It is prepared by the Pakistan Digital Authority (PDA), established in 2024 under the Digital Nation Pakistan Act 2025.
- The policy declares government data a 'strategic national asset' held in trust, not owned by individual agencies.
- Citizens gain a new right to know who accessed their personal data, when, and for what purpose.
- AI systems making legally significant decisions must ensure explainability, monitoring, human oversight and transparency.
- Automated decision-making systems must be listed in a public registry maintained by the PDA.
- The policy introduces safeguards for government use of generative AI against inaccuracies, IP violations and data leakage.
- It establishes a 'once-only principle' so citizens need not resubmit the same data across departments.
- Critics say the policy mandates AI audits without yet specifying clear technical standards for those audits.
- The framework references IoT devices broadly enough to cover expanding Safe City and CCTV surveillance networks.

C. Critical Analysis

Causes: Rapid digitisation of government services, expanding use of AI in public administration, and gaps in Pakistan's fragmented data-handling rules created pressure for a unified framework. The absence of a comprehensive personal data protection law made it necessary for the PDA to draft interim governance rules covering AI, data sharing and citizen rights ahead of, and designed to later align with, formal data protection legislation.

Implications: If notified, the policy would represent Pakistan's first serious attempt to regulate how the state collects, uses and shares citizens' data, with direct implications for privacy, digital public infrastructure expansion, and the government's growing reliance on AI in service delivery, taxation, and law enforcement. Greater transparency requirements could also improve public trust in digital government initiatives that have previously drawn criticism over opacity.

Challenges: Implementation capacity is a major concern: requiring explainability and human oversight for AI-driven decisions demands technical expertise that many public bodies currently lack. The policy also leaves surveillance technologies, particularly CCTV and Safe City systems, governed by vague IoT provisions rather than explicit rules, and its application currently excludes provincial governments unless they voluntarily adopt equivalent frameworks.

Opportunities: A credible data governance framework could position Pakistan more favourably for digital investment and cross-border data partnerships, while a public registry of automated decision systems would set a regional benchmark for AI transparency in the public sector. It also creates space for civil society and academia to engage constructively in shaping the technical standards the policy still needs to define.

Way Forward: Analysts recommend the government pair the policy's principles with detailed technical standards for AI auditing, extend clearer rules to surveillance technologies, and expedite a standalone personal data protection law to give the framework full legal force. Encouraging, rather than merely inviting, provincial adoption would also be necessary to make the 'once-only principle' and citizen data rights meaningful nationwide.

D. Statistics & Facts

Jul 10 Public Consultation Closed	2024 Year PDA Was Established	2025 Digital Nation Pakistan Act	1st Pakistan's First Unified Data Governance Framework
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- Draft policy released for public consultation on June 26, 2026 by the IT Ministry.
- Consultation period ran until July 10, 2026, after which feedback was to be incorporated.
- Requires federal cabinet approval before formally taking effect.
- Applies to federal ministries, departments, regulators, autonomous bodies and public-sector companies.
- Also extends to contractors, processors and grantees handling government data on the federal government's behalf.
- Provincial governments are 'encouraged', not required, to adopt the same or an equivalent framework.
- The PDA was set up in 2024 to oversee Pakistan's digital public infrastructure initiative.
- The policy operates under the framework of the Digital Nation Pakistan Act, 2025.
- Pakistan's National AI Policy 2025 promotes AI adoption but offers limited citizen-safeguard detail, per Dawn analysis.
- The policy explicitly excludes personal data held outside the public sector, primary legislation, judicial proceedings and specific national-security matters.

E. Quotable Quotes

"Public bodies are custodians of government data and not its owners."

— **Draft Data Governance Policy 2026, Ministry of IT and Telecommunication (June 26, 2026)**

"Data protection and usage regulations had become necessary due to rapid digitisation."

— **Shaza Fatima Khawaja, Federal Minister for IT and Telecommunication (June 2026)**

F. Examiner's Perspective

Paper	Likely Angle
Essay	Governing the Algorithm: The Case for AI Regulation in Public Administration.

Paper	Likely Angle
Current Affairs	Discuss the key features of Pakistan's draft National Data Governance Policy 2026.
Pakistan Affairs	Examine the institutional role of the Pakistan Digital Authority in shaping digital governance in Pakistan.
Interview	What risks does government use of generative AI pose to citizens, and how might policy address them?

G. Vocabulary Builder

Custodian	A person or body that holds something in trust	Trustee	Public bodies act as custodians, not owners, of government data.
Explainability	The quality of being understandable in reasoning	Interpretability	AI systems must offer explainability for legally significant decisions.
Registry	An official list or record	Ledger	Automated systems must be listed in a public registry.
Surveillance	Close monitoring of behaviour or activity	Monitoring	Safe City cameras raise ongoing surveillance concerns.
Consultation	The process of seeking input or opinions	Deliberation	The draft policy underwent public consultation until July 10.
Framework	A structured system of rules or ideas	Structure	The policy provides a national data governance framework.
Redress	Remedy for a wrong or grievance	Remedy	Citizens require clear redress mechanisms for data misuse.
Opacity	Lack of transparency	Obscurity	Digital initiatives have drawn criticism over opacity.
Notify	To formally announce as legally effective	Enact	The policy will be notified after cabinet approval.
Safeguard	A measure to protect against harm	Protection	The policy introduces safeguards against AI-generated inaccuracies.

H. CSS/PMS Complete Question Bank

MCQ: Which institution was tasked with preparing Pakistan's draft National Data Governance Policy 2026?

- A. State Bank of Pakistan
- B. Pakistan Digital Authority
- C. FIA Cybercrime Wing
- D. NADRA

Correct Answer: B. Pakistan Digital Authority

Pakistan Affairs Q1: Discuss the significance of the 'once-only principle' for citizen-government data interactions in Pakistan.

Pakistan Affairs Q2: Examine the challenges of implementing AI oversight requirements across Pakistan's federal bureaucracy.

Current Affairs Q1: Compare Pakistan's emerging AI governance approach with global trends in public-sector AI regulation.

Current Affairs Q2: Discuss the relationship between data governance policy and citizens' right to privacy.

Short Question (20 marks): Write a note (20 marks) on the objectives of Pakistan's Digital Nation Pakistan Act, 2025.

Analytical Question: Analytically assess whether Pakistan's draft data governance policy adequately safeguards citizens against AI-driven harm.

Essay Topic: Data as a National Asset: Balancing State Utility and Citizen Privacy in the Digital Age.

Further In-Depth Study

<https://www.dawn.com/news/2016342/governance-protecting-pakistans-personal-data>

<https://www.brecorder.com/news/40427660/pakistan-unveils-national-data-governance-policy-2026-to-transform-digital-governance>

<https://www.arabnews.pk/node/2649083/pakistan>



OPERATION AL-AZM

SECURITY FORCES PRESS COUNTER-TERRORISM DRIVE IN MASTUNG

RESTORING PEACE, SECURING BALOCHISTAN

Security forces have intensified Operation Al-Azm in Mastung, Balochistan, targeting terrorist hideouts, disrupting networks and restoring peace in the region.



**MASTUNG
BALOCHISTAN**



OBJECTIVES OF OPERATION AL-AZM

- Eliminate terrorist elements and their safe havens.
- Disrupt terror networks and logistical support systems.
- Ensure safety of civilians and protect lives and property.
- Establish durable peace and writ of the state in Balochistan.

REPORTED OUTCOMES (SO FAR)



*Figures are indicative; official confirmation awaited.

KEY ACTIONS TAKEN

- Intelligence-based operations conducted in multiple areas of Mastung.
- Terrorist hideouts, weapons caches and ammunition recovered.
- Several terrorists neutralised; others arrested.
- Area sanitisation and search operations continuing.

WHY IT MATTERS

- Mastung has witnessed a spike in terrorist activities targeting security forces and civilians.
- Operation Al-Azm reflects the state's resolve to eliminate terrorism from Balochistan.
- Peace and stability are essential for development and progress of the region.



“Our security forces remain committed to protecting the nation and its citizens. No compromise on peace and security.”

– ISPR STATEMENT

CHALLENGES AHEAD

- Difficult terrain and cross-border sanctuaries.
- External support to terrorist proxies.
- Need for continued intelligence, coordination and public support.

IMPACT OF OPERATION AL-AZM

- Enhances security environment.
- Boosts public confidence.
- Supports socio-economic development.
- Strengthens the writ of the state.

COMPREHENSIVE APPROACH

- Security operations with community engagement.
- Rehabilitation and deradicalisation initiatives.
- Infrastructure and development projects.
- Rule of law and speedy justice.

“The sacrifices of our brave soldiers will not go in vain. Together, we will defeat terrorism and build a peaceful, prosperous Balochistan and Pakistan.”



ICEP's CSS WEEKLY
CURRENT AFFAIRS DIGEST FOR
CSS / PMS ASPIRANTS

ISSUE 10
 COVERAGE: JULY 19 – JULY 25, 2026
 LAHORE, PAKISTAN

Operation Al-Azm: Security Forces Press Counter-Terrorism Drive in Mastung

A. Executive Summary

Pakistani security forces have intensified Operation Al-Azm, an intelligence-based counter-terrorism campaign in the Khad Kocha area of Mastung district, Balochistan, with the confirmed death toll of militants reaching 13 by July 25, 2026, according to security sources cited by Radio Pakistan, Geo News and The Express Tribune. The operation targets fighters the state identifies as belonging to 'Fitna al-Hindustan', the official designation for India-backed elements of the banned Balochistan Liberation Army and allied groups, alongside 'Fitna al-Khwarij', the label used for Pakistani Taliban networks. Over successive days of fighting beginning around July 22, security forces killed militants in stages — four on one day, six more including facilitators and suicide bombers on July 23, and three additional militants confirmed by July 25 — while destroying multiple hideouts and recovering weapons, ammunition and materials used to manufacture improvised explosive devices. Officials also confirmed the arrest of facilitators and both male and female suicide bombers during the operation, and reported that several other militants sustained injuries. The campaign follows a wave of violence in Balochistan, including the killing of a district and sessions judge and his security guard when unidentified gunmen opened fire on their vehicle on the national highway near Mastung, an attack that triggered the launch of Operation Shaban in the same area. Interior Minister Mohsin Naqvi has repeatedly commended the security forces' 'professionalism and operational capabilities' and reaffirmed that operations will continue 'until terrorism is completely eradicated from Balochistan', while stressing that the federal government and the Balochistan provincial government are moving forward in complete unity and coordination to establish peace. For CSS and PMS aspirants, Operation Al-Azm illustrates the continuing internal security dimension of Pakistan's counter-terrorism strategy, the state's framing of Baloch separatist violence as externally sponsored, and the judiciary's growing exposure to targeted attacks in high-threat provinces, all central themes in Pakistan Affairs and Current Affairs papers on internal security and governance.

B. Key Arguments

- Operation Al-Azm has killed at least 13 militants in Mastung's Khad Kocha area as of July 25, 2026.
- The operation targets groups the state labels 'Fitna al-Hindustan' and 'Fitna al-Khwarij', linked respectively to Baloch separatist and TTP networks.
- Security forces destroyed multiple militant hideouts and recovered weapons, ammunition and IED-making materials.
- Both male and female suicide bombers, along with facilitators, were arrested during the operation.
- The operation follows the killing of a district and sessions judge and his guard near Mastung on the national highway.
- That judicial killing triggered a related campaign, Operation Shaban, targeting the Mangi Dam Police Station attackers.
- Interior Minister Mohsin Naqvi commended security forces' professionalism and vowed operations would continue until terrorism is eradicated.
- Officials say the centre and Balochistan's provincial government are coordinating closely on the security response.
- Balochistan's Home Minister has noted that threats against judges by convicted terrorists have contributed to low conviction rates in terrorism cases.
- The operation is part of a broader nationwide counter-terrorism campaign amid rising militant activity since 2021.

C. Critical Analysis

Causes: Operation Al-Azm was launched on intelligence reports of militant presence in Khad Kocha, following a surge in attacks in Balochistan, including the assassination of a sitting judge. Pakistan's security establishment attributes much of this violence to Indian-sponsored support for Baloch separatist networks, a claim consistently denied by India, while separately continuing operations against TTP-affiliated networks it says operate with sanctuary across the Afghan

border.

Implications: Sustained operations in Mastung reflect the Baloch insurgency's persistence despite years of military campaigns, and the growing willingness of militant networks to target symbols of the state, including the judiciary, rather than only security forces. This raises the stakes for governance and rule of law in Balochistan, where low terrorism-conviction rates are already a documented problem partly attributable to witness and judicial intimidation.

Challenges: Balochistan's difficult terrain, porous provincial and international borders, and long-standing grievances over resource distribution and political representation complicate purely kinetic counter-terrorism responses. Judicial intimidation undermines the province's ability to prosecute captured militants even when security operations succeed tactically, creating a gap between military success and durable rule-of-law outcomes.

Opportunities: Coordinated centre-province security cooperation, as emphasised by Naqvi, offers a template for addressing Balochistan's security challenges through joint federal-provincial ownership rather than purely federally-directed operations. Effective prosecution of captured facilitators and financiers, if judicial security can be assured, could also disrupt militant networks more durably than kinetic operations alone.

Way Forward: Analysts recommend pairing continued intelligence-based operations with enhanced protection for judges and prosecutors handling terrorism cases, alongside political engagement to address underlying grievances driving recruitment into separatist networks. Strengthening witness protection and specialised anti-terrorism courts would help convert tactical gains from operations like Al-Azm into lasting judicial accountability.

D. Statistics & Facts

13+ Militants Killed in Operation Al-Azm	Mastung Focal District, Balochistan	2 Suicide Bombers Arrested (Male & Female)	2025 Border Clashes Preceding Escalation
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- Operation Al-Azm death toll reached 13 militants as of Saturday, July 25, 2026.
- Fighting concentrated in the Khad Kocha area of Mastung district, Balochistan.
- Security forces recovered weapons, ammunition and IED-making materials from multiple hideouts.
- Six terrorists were killed in a single ISPR-confirmed operation on July 23, 2026, alongside multiple arrests.
- Both male and female suicide bombers were among those arrested during the operation.
- The judge attacked near Mastung was a district and sessions judge, killed alongside his security guard.
- Operation Shaban was launched in response to an earlier attack on the Mangi Dam Police Station.
- Border clashes with Afghan Taliban-affiliated militants in October 2025 killed over 200 fighters and 23 Pakistani soldiers.
- Pakistan's cross-border response, Operation Ghazab lil-Haq, targeted militant hideouts across the Afghan border.
- Naqvi reaffirmed federal-provincial coordination to establish peace in Balochistan.

E. Quotable Quotes

"The nation stands shoulder to shoulder with security forces for the complete elimination of the menace of Fitna al-Hindustan."

— Mohsin Naqvi, Federal Interior Minister (July 23, 2026)

"Centre and Balochistan government are moving forward in complete unity and coordination to establish peace."

— Mohsin Naqvi, Federal Interior Minister (July 25, 2026)

F. Examiner's Perspective

Paper	Likely Angle
Essay	Internal Security and the State: Evaluating Pakistan's Counter-Insurgency Strategy in Balochistan.
Current Affairs	Discuss the significance of Operation Al-Azm in Pakistan's ongoing counter-terrorism campaign.
Pakistan Affairs	Examine the political and security dimensions of the Baloch insurgency and the state's response.
Interview	How would you assess the balance between kinetic operations and political engagement in resolving Balochistan's security challenges?

G. Vocabulary Builder

Insurgency	An organised rebellion against authority	Uprising	The Baloch insurgency has persisted for decades.
Intimidation	Frightening someone to influence their behaviour	Coercion	Judicial intimidation lowers terrorism conviction rates.
Sanctuary	A place offering protection or refuge	Safe haven	Militants are said to find sanctuary across the border.
Kinetic	Involving direct physical force or combat	Combative	A purely kinetic response cannot resolve political grievances.
Facilitator	One who assists or enables an activity	Enabler	Several facilitators were arrested alongside suicide bombers.
Eradicate	To eliminate completely	Eliminate	The minister vowed to eradicate terrorism from Balochistan.
Separatist	Advocating separation from a larger political unit	Secessionist	Separatist networks remain active in parts of Balochistan.
Coordination	Organised joint action	Cooperation	Federal-provincial coordination is central to the security response.
Prosecution	Legal proceedings against an accused person	Legal action	Weak prosecution undermines counter-terrorism gains.
Porous	Allowing passage through, not fully sealed	Permeable	Porous borders complicate counter-terrorism enforcement.

H. CSS/PMS Complete Question Bank

MCQ: In which Balochistan district is Operation Al-Azm primarily concentrated?

- A. Quetta
- B. Mastung
- C. Gwadar
- D. Khuzdar

Correct Answer: B. Mastung

Pakistan Affairs Q1: Discuss the causes and consequences of the Baloch insurgency for Pakistan's internal security.

Pakistan Affairs Q2: Examine the challenges facing Pakistan's judiciary in prosecuting terrorism cases in Balochistan.

Current Affairs Q1: Assess the role of cross-border militant sanctuaries in sustaining insurgent violence in South Asia.

Current Affairs Q2: Compare kinetic and political approaches to counter-insurgency, with reference to Balochistan.

Short Question (20 marks): Write a note (20 marks) on the objectives and scope of Operation Al-Azm.

Analytical Question: Analytically assess whether military operations alone can resolve Balochistan's security challenges.

Essay Topic: Beyond the Gun: Rethinking Counter-Insurgency Strategy in Pakistan.

Further In-Depth Study

<https://www.geo.tv/latest/674706-13-terrorists-killed-so-far-in-ongoing-operation-al-azm-in-balochistan>

<https://tribune.com.pk/story/2620188/number-of-terrorists-killed-in-balochistans-operation-al-azm-reaches-13>

<https://www.radio.gov.pk/25-07-2026/security-forces-continue-counterterrorism-operation-in-balochistan>



PETROL PUMP OWNERS DEFER NATIONWIDE STRIKE AFTER GOVERNMENT ASSURANCES

— DIALOGUE TODAY, SOLUTION TOMORROW —

Petrol pump owners have deferred their planned nationwide strike after the government assured them of addressing their key demands through dialogue and policy relief measures.

WHAT HAPPENED?



Petrol pump owners announced a nationwide strike over serious grievances.



The government initiated talks with representatives of the petrol dealers.



Assurances were given to address the key issues through dialogue.



The strike has been deferred while negotiations continue.

STRIKE DEFERRED
DIALOGUE CONTINUES

KEY DEMANDS OF PUMP OWNERS



Review and rationalisation of commission structure.



Timely payments from Oil Marketing Companies (OMCs).



Reduction in withholding tax and other regulatory burdens.



Inclusion of dealers in policy making and consultations.



Security and safety measures at fuel stations.

“The government is committed to resolving genuine issues of petrol pump owners through mutual understanding and constructive dialogue.”

— GOVERNMENT SPOKESPERSON

GOVERNMENT ASSURANCES



Formation of a joint committee to address grievances.



Review of taxation and regulatory measures.



Ensuring timely payments from OMCs.



Measures to improve security and business environment.



Continuous engagement and transparent communication.

IMPACT OF DEFERRING THE STRIKE



Avoided disruption in fuel supply across the country.



Prevented economic losses and public inconvenience.



Shows maturity and willingness for dialogue on both sides.



Builds trust between the government and the private sector.



Ensures stability in the energy sector.

THE WAY FORWARD

- ✓ Sustained dialogue and follow-up meetings.
- ✓ Time-bound resolution of key issues.
- ✓ Balanced policies for business and public interest.
- ✓ Stronger, transparent and predictable regulatory framework.

“ Dialogue is the bridge between problems and solutions. Together, we can ensure energy security and economic stability. ”



ICEP's CSS WEEKLY
CURRENT AFFAIRS DIGEST FOR
CSS / PMS ASPIRANTS



ISSUE 10



COVERAGE: JULY 19 – JULY 25, 2026



LAHORE, PAKISTAN

Petrol Pump Owners Defer Nationwide Strike After Government Assurances

A. Executive Summary

The All Pakistan Petroleum Pump Owners Association (APPPOA) and the Pakistan Petroleum Dealers Association called off a planned nationwide strike scheduled to begin the night of July 22-23, 2026, after negotiations with Federal Minister for Petroleum Ali Pervaiz Malik produced government assurances that dealer grievances would be addressed within two weeks. The dispute centred on three demands: an increase in dealers' profit margin from the current 2.6 percent (roughly Rs 8.64 per litre) to as much as 8 percent, or a nearly threefold rise to around Rs 25 per litre; restoration of the previous fortnightly or monthly fuel-price revision mechanism instead of the newly introduced daily pricing system; and abolition of a quota system imposed by oil marketing companies. Malik told dealers the margin demand was 'totally unreasonable' in its full form but agreed the government would consult the Oil and Gas Regulatory Authority (OGRA) and other stakeholders, then submit a summary to the federal cabinet for approval on a revised margin structure. He also confirmed the daily pricing mechanism, introduced as fuel prices climbed amid the wider regional energy shock linked to the Iran-Israel-US conflict, would continue on a two-week trial basis before being reviewed with sector representatives, and that OGRA would begin publishing daily fuel prices and their detailed breakdown, including in Urdu, to improve transparency. The Pakistan Business Forum separately opposed any margin increase and called for scrapping the daily pricing mechanism altogether, warning that supply disruption would damage industry, trade, transport and agriculture nationwide. New prices took effect from July 23, with petrol set at Rs 327.12 and high-speed diesel at Rs 375.04 per litre. For CSS and PMS aspirants, the episode is a useful case study in regulatory bargaining between the state and a powerful retail lobby, and in how global energy shocks propagate into domestic price-administration disputes.

B. Key Arguments

- APPPOA and the Pakistan Petroleum Dealers Association deferred a planned nationwide strike after talks with the government on July 22, 2026.
- Dealers had demanded a profit margin increase from 2.6 percent (about Rs 8.64/litre) to as high as Rs 25/litre.
- A second demand sought restoration of fortnightly or monthly pricing instead of the newly introduced daily fuel-price mechanism.
- A third demand called for abolishing the quota system imposed by oil marketing companies.
- Petroleum Minister Ali Pervaiz Malik called the full margin demand 'totally unreasonable' but pledged a cabinet review within two weeks.
- The daily pricing mechanism will continue on a two-week trial basis before being reassessed with sector stakeholders.
- OGRA will publish daily fuel prices and their breakdown, including an Urdu-language version, to improve transparency.
- The Pakistan Business Forum opposed margin increases and urged scrapping daily pricing altogether.
- New prices from July 23, 2026 set petrol at Rs 327.12 and HSD at Rs 375.04 per litre.
- The government has spent around Rs 100 billion since February 28, 2026 cushioning fuel-price impacts amid the regional energy shock.

C. Critical Analysis

Causes: Rising international oil prices, driven by the Iran-Israel-US conflict and threats to Red Sea and Strait of Hormuz shipping, prompted the government to introduce daily fuel-price revisions to pass through global volatility more precisely. Dealers, however, viewed the shift as increasing their operational risk without a corresponding rise in margins that have remained largely static for years, precipitating the strike threat.

Implications: A nationwide fuel-supply disruption, even briefly, would have had cascading effects across transport, agriculture and industry, given Pakistan's near-total dependence on road transport for goods movement. The government's rapid concession to a two-week review reflects the political sensitivity of fuel access, especially amid already elevated inflation and energy costs linked to regional conflict.

Challenges: Balancing dealer margins against consumer price sensitivity is politically delicate: raising margins risks passing further costs onto consumers already burdened by high fuel prices, while resisting dealer demands risks recurring supply disruptions. The daily pricing mechanism itself remains contested, with business groups arguing it creates uncertainty for downstream industries reliant on predictable input costs.

Opportunities: Increased price transparency through OGRA's planned daily public breakdown could reduce public suspicion of profiteering and provide a stronger evidentiary basis for future pricing negotiations. A successful two-week trial, if paired with a fair margin settlement, could also establish a more durable, rules-based framework for fuel pricing going forward.

Way Forward: Analysts suggest an independently reviewed, formula-based margin adjustment tied to actual dealer operating costs would reduce the recurrence of strike threats, while maintaining daily pricing transparency to keep pass-through aligned with global markets. Broader energy-sector reform, including diversifying import sources and strengthening strategic reserves, would help cushion Pakistan from future regional energy shocks.

D. Statistics & Facts

Rs 327.12 Petrol Price per Litre (from July 23)	Rs 375.04 HSD Price per Litre (from July 23)	Rs 100bn Govt Subsidy Spend Since Feb 28, 2026	2 weeks Trial Period for Daily Pricing Review
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- Strike was to begin midnight, Wednesday, July 22-23, 2026, before being deferred.
- APPPOA claims to represent roughly 15,000 petrol pumps nationwide.
- Dealers sought margin increase from 2.6 percent to as much as 8 percent, or Rs 8.64 to Rs 25 per litre.
- Government committed to submitting a margin-adjustment summary to the federal cabinet.
- Daily fuel pricing mechanism to run on a two-week trial before formal review.
- New petrol price effective July 23, 2026: Rs 327.12 per litre.
- New HSD price effective July 23, 2026: Rs 375.04 per litre.
- Government fuel-subsidy spending since February 28, 2026 totals approximately Rs 100 billion.
- Brent crude futures climbed to \$94.07 per barrel amid regional shipping threats around the same period.
- OGRA to publish daily prices and breakdowns, including in Urdu, for public transparency.

E. Quotable Quotes

"The government would consult with the Oil and Gas Regulatory Authority and other stakeholders on the dealers' margin issue and submit a summary to the federal cabinet for approval."

— Ali Pervaiz Malik, Federal Minister for Petroleum (July 22, 2026)

F. Examiner's Perspective

Paper	Likely Angle
Essay	Energy Pricing and the State: Balancing Market Signals with Public Interest in Pakistan.
Current Affairs	Discuss how regional conflict has affected Pakistan's domestic fuel-pricing policy in 2026.
Pakistan Affairs	Examine the role of interest-group bargaining, such as APPPOA's strike threat, in shaping Pakistan's economic policy.
Interview	How should the government balance dealer margin demands against consumer price protection?

G. Vocabulary Builder

Margin	Difference between cost and selling price	Profit margin	Dealers demanded a higher profit margin per litre.
Quota	A fixed allocation or limit	Allocation	Dealers objected to the quota system imposed by oil companies.
Volatility	Tendency to change rapidly and unpredictably	Instability	Daily pricing better reflects global oil-price volatility.
Pass-through	Transfer of cost changes to consumers	Cost transfer	The mechanism improves pass-through of global price changes.
Subsidy	Financial support from government to reduce cost	Financial aid	The government spent heavily on fuel subsidies.
Downstream	Later stages of a supply or production chain	Later-stage	Downstream industries need predictable fuel costs.
Profiteering	Making excessive profit unfairly	Overcharging	Transparency measures aim to prevent profiteering.
Deadlock	A situation where no agreement can be reached	Impasse	Talks broke the earlier deadlock over pricing.
Formula-based	Determined by a fixed calculation method	Rule-based	A formula-based margin could reduce recurring disputes.
Reroute	To send along a different path	Redirect	Shipping firms had to reroute cargo amid regional threats.

H. CSS/PMS Complete Question Bank

MCQ: What was the primary demand of Pakistan's petroleum dealers that led to the July 2026 strike threat?

- A. Import licence reform
- B. Higher dealer profit margins
- C. Tax exemption
- D. Refinery subsidies

Correct Answer: B. Higher dealer profit margins

Pakistan Affairs Q1: Discuss the impact of global energy-price volatility on Pakistan's domestic fuel-pricing policy.

Pakistan Affairs Q2: Examine the role of regulatory bodies like OGRA in managing energy-sector disputes.

Current Affairs Q1: Assess how the 2026 regional conflict in the Middle East has affected global oil markets.

Current Affairs Q2: Compare daily and periodic fuel-pricing mechanisms in terms of economic efficiency and public acceptability.

Short Question (20 marks): Write a note (20 marks) on the causes of Pakistan's July 2026 petroleum dealers' strike threat.

Analytical Question: Analytically evaluate whether daily fuel pricing serves the public interest better than periodic revisions.

Essay Topic: Pricing Power: The Political Economy of Fuel Regulation in Developing Economies.

Further In-Depth Study

<https://www.dawn.com/news/2017673>

<https://www.geo.tv/latest/674280-petrol-pump-owners-defer-nationwide-strike-after-negotiations-with-govt>

<https://english.aaj.tv/news/330464664/petrol-pump-owners-defer-nationwide-strike-after-talks>

AURANGZEB SEEKS \$10 BILLION US CURRENCY STABILISATION FACILITY

— STRENGTHENING RESERVES, BUILDING CONFIDENCE —

Finance Minister Muhammad Aurangzeb has approached the United States for a \$10 billion Currency Stabilisation Facility to bolster Pakistan's foreign exchange reserves, support the rupee and entrench macroeconomic stability.

WHY THIS STEP?



To stabilise the rupee amid volatility in global markets.



To strengthen foreign exchange reserves.



To deepen economic & financial cooperation with the United States.



To enhance investor confidence and credit worthiness.

KEY OBJECTIVES



Augment foreign exchange reserves for external payment sustainability.



Support rupee stability and manage external shocks.



Bolster macroeconomic stability and market confidence.



Facilitate trade, investment and long-term growth.

\$10 BILLION
CURRENCY STABILISATION FACILITY

WHAT IS A CURRENCY STABILISATION FACILITY?



A Currency Stabilisation Facility (CSF) is a financial arrangement in which a country provides funds (loans, swaps or deposits) to support another country's balance of payments, stabilise its currency and strengthen its reserves.

POTENTIAL BENEFITS FOR PAKISTAN



Higher foreign exchange reserves and liquidity buffer.



Greater rupee stability and reduced market volatility.



Improved investor & lender confidence.



Stronger position in global and regional economic engagements.

KEY DETAILS OF THE PROPOSED FACILITY



AMOUNT SOUGHT
\$10 Billion
from the United States



NATURE
Currency Stabilisation / Financial Support Arrangement



PURPOSE
Support reserves, rupee stability & external payments



REQUESTED BY
Finance Minister Muhammad Aurangzeb



COUNTERPART
United States Government / US Treasury



EXPECTED IMPACT
Macroeconomic stability, confidence & growth support

THE CONTEXT

- Pakistan has been undertaking fiscal consolidation and structural reforms under the IMF programme.
- Reserves have improved but remain vulnerable to external shocks.
- Global uncertainty, commodity prices and geopolitical tensions pose risks.
- Additional support will help build a stronger buffer and anchor market confidence.



CHALLENGES AHEAD



Dependent on terms, conditions and geopolitical considerations.



Need to maintain reform momentum and fiscal discipline.



External risks and global uncertainties may persist.

“

This facility, if finalised, will be a vote of confidence in Pakistan's economic direction and a catalyst for sustainable stability and growth.

”



ICEP's CSS WEEKLY
CURRENT AFFAIRS DIGEST FOR
CSS / PMS ASPIRANTS



ISSUE 10



COVERAGE: JULY 19 – JULY 25, 2026



LAHORE, PAKISTAN

Aurangzeb Seeks \$10 Billion US Currency Stabilisation Facility

A. Executive Summary

Finance Minister Muhammad Aurangzeb formally asked US Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent to establish a \$10 billion Exchange Stabilisation Support Facility for Pakistan during a meeting in Washington on July 21, 2026, according to reporting first carried by Reuters and confirmed by officials at Pakistan's embassy in Washington. An official readout from the embassy said Aurangzeb sought US support for Pakistan's 'road to market', framed around improved access to international capital markets, higher foreign exchange reserves, and enhanced sovereign credit ratings, a request that followed closely on S&P's decision the same week to upgrade Pakistan's rating to 'B'. Neither the Pakistani embassy nor the US Treasury provided further technical details of how the proposed facility would operate, and the Treasury declined to comment publicly on the request. A source familiar with discussions told Reuters that the Trump administration 'has a keen interest in remaining engaged' with Pakistan and has 'more than once pledged' to help strengthen the country's economy, suggesting Washington may be receptive even without an immediate formal announcement. The request mirrors a currency-stabilisation model under which the US Treasury would effectively back Pakistan's foreign exchange reserves, reducing pressure on the rupee and providing a buffer against speculative attacks or sudden capital outflows, a facility structurally different from the IMF's programme-based lending or bilateral central-bank deposits from China, Saudi Arabia and Kuwait. For CSS and PMS aspirants, the episode underscores how Pakistan's economic diplomacy in 2026 operates on multiple simultaneous tracks — IMF compliance, bilateral rollovers, sovereign rating management, and now a bid for direct US Treasury-backed support — reflecting both the scale of the country's continued external financing needs and Washington's stated interest in deepening economic engagement with Islamabad following its role as a ceasefire broker in the 2026 Iran conflict.

B. Key Arguments

- Finance Minister Muhammad Aurangzeb requested a \$10 billion Exchange Stabilisation Support Facility from US Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent on July 21, 2026.
- The request was first reported by Reuters and confirmed by Pakistan's embassy in Washington.
- Aurangzeb framed the request around Pakistan's 'road to market' — improved capital-market access, reserves and credit ratings.
- The request came in the same week S&P upgraded Pakistan's sovereign credit rating to 'B'.
- Neither the Pakistani embassy nor the US Treasury disclosed further technical details of the proposed facility.
- The US Treasury declined to comment publicly when approached by Dawn's Washington correspondent.
- A source said the Trump administration has 'more than once pledged' to help strengthen Pakistan's economy.
- The proposed facility differs structurally from the IMF's Extended Fund Facility and bilateral central-bank deposits from China, Saudi Arabia and Kuwait.
- The request follows Pakistan's stated role as a ceasefire broker in the 2026 Iran war.
- The move reflects Pakistan's parallel pursuit of IMF compliance, bilateral rollovers and now direct US Treasury engagement.

C. Critical Analysis

Causes: Despite the S&P upgrade and reserve recovery, Pakistan's external financing needs remain large relative to its reserve base, and bilateral rollovers from China, Saudi Arabia and Kuwait, while critical, are not a permanent substitute for market access. Seeking direct US Treasury backing reflects an attempt to diversify Pakistan's financing sources and capitalise on improved reform credibility to secure a more durable buffer against currency volatility.

Implications: A US-backed currency stabilisation facility, if agreed, would represent a significant deepening of US-Pakistan economic engagement at a time when bilateral trade relations are simultaneously strained by the new 10 percent tariff on Pakistani exports. It could also reduce Pakistan's reliance on frequent, negotiation-heavy bilateral rollovers, providing more predictable reserve support.

Challenges: The US Treasury's silence and lack of detail suggest the proposal remains preliminary, and past instances of stated US 'interest' in supporting Pakistan's economy have not always translated into concrete financial commitments. Washington's own currency and foreign-assistance priorities, as well as the ongoing tariff dispute, could complicate rapid movement on the request.

Opportunities: If secured, the facility would strengthen Pakistan's currency stability, potentially lowering imported inflation and providing greater certainty for the private sector on the pace of any needed rupee adjustment. It could also serve as a confidence signal to other bilateral and market investors, complementing the momentum from the S&P upgrade.

Way Forward: Analysts suggest Islamabad should pursue the currency facility request alongside, not instead of, continued IMF programme compliance and bilateral creditor engagement, while using the improved rating trajectory to negotiate favourable terms. Linking the request to concrete, verifiable reform milestones would likely improve its chances of translating from stated US 'interest' into a formal commitment.

D. Statistics & Facts

\$10bn Requested Facility Size	Jul 21 Date of Aurangzeb-Bessent Meeting	\$25.3bn Pakistan's FX Reserves (End-June 2026)	\$16.8bn Existing Bilateral Deposits/Swaps
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- Aurangzeb met US Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent in Washington on Tuesday, July 21, 2026.
- The request was for a \$10 billion Exchange Stabilisation Support Facility.
- Reuters first reported the request, later confirmed by Pakistan's Washington embassy.
- Pakistan's FX reserves stood at \$25.3 billion as of end-June 2026.
- Existing bilateral deposits and swaps from China, Saudi Arabia and Kuwait total \$16.8 billion.
- The request followed S&P's upgrade of Pakistan's sovereign rating to 'B' on July 22, 2026.
- US Treasury officials did not provide details or public comment on the request.
- The request comes despite a new US 10 percent tariff on Pakistani exports effective the same week.
- Pakistan's role as a broker in the 2026 Iran war ceasefire was cited as context for deepening US engagement.
- No formal timeline or agreement has yet been announced for the proposed facility.

E. Quotable Quotes

"The Trump administration has a keen interest in remaining engaged with Pakistan and has more than once pledged to help strengthen the country's economy."

— **Unnamed Official Source, Cited by Dawn's Washington Correspondent (July 22, 2026)**

F. Examiner's Perspective

Paper	Likely Angle
Essay	Economic Diplomacy in a Multipolar World: Pakistan's Balancing Act Between the IMF, Bilateral Creditors and the US.
Current Affairs	Discuss the significance of Pakistan's request for a US-backed currency stabilisation facility.
Pakistan Affairs	Examine how Pakistan's 2026 economic diplomacy reflects its broader foreign-policy priorities.
Interview	What risks and benefits would a US Treasury-backed currency facility carry for Pakistan's monetary sovereignty?

G. Vocabulary Builder

Stabilisation	The act of making something steady or secure	Steadying	The proposed facility aims at currency stabilisation.
Buffer	A cushion against shocks or shortfalls	Cushion	Reserves act as a buffer against speculative attacks.
Readout	An official summary of a meeting's outcome	Summary	The embassy issued a readout of the Aurangzeb-Bessent meeting.
Preliminary	Coming before the main matter; introductory	Initial	The facility remains at a preliminary stage.
Diversify	To vary or spread across different sources	Broaden	Pakistan seeks to diversify its external financing sources.
Speculative	Based on conjecture rather than certainty	Conjectural	The rupee remains vulnerable to speculative attacks.
Engagement	Involvement or participation with another party	Involvement	The US signalled continued economic engagement with Pakistan.
Milestone	A significant point of progress	Benchmark	Reform milestones could strengthen Pakistan's negotiating position.
Broker	An intermediary who arranges agreements	Mediator	Pakistan positioned itself as a ceasefire broker in the Iran war.
Momentum	The force gained by continued development	Impetus	The rating upgrade added momentum to Pakistan's financing push.

H. CSS/PMS Complete Question Bank

MCQ: Who did Finance Minister Aurangzeb approach for a \$10 billion currency stabilisation facility?

- A. IMF Managing Director
- B. World Bank President
- C. US Treasury Secretary
- D. Saudi Finance Minister

Correct Answer: C. US Treasury Secretary

Pakistan Affairs Q1: Discuss the significance of Pakistan's multi-track approach to external financing in 2026.

Pakistan Affairs Q2: Examine the relationship between Pakistan's sovereign credit rating and its bilateral financing diplomacy.

Current Affairs Q1: Assess how bilateral currency stabilisation facilities differ from IMF programme lending.

Current Affairs Q2: Discuss the strategic implications of deepening US-Pakistan economic engagement in 2026.

Short Question (20 marks): Write a note (20 marks) on Pakistan's external financing strategy in mid-2026.

Analytical Question: Analytically evaluate the risks and benefits of Pakistan seeking a US Treasury-backed currency facility.

Essay Topic: Between Washington and Beijing: Pakistan's Economic Diplomacy in a Contested World Order.

Further In-Depth Study

<https://www.dawn.com/news/2017402>

HOUTHI-SAUDI ESCALATION: ARAMCO FACILITIES IN JIZAN AND YANBU TARGETED

A DANGEROUS TURN IN REGIONAL INSTABILITY

Houthi forces have claimed drone and missile attacks on Aramco facilities in Jizan and Yanbu, intensifying tensions with Saudi Arabia and threatening energy security in the Red Sea region.



WHAT HAPPENED?



Houthis claimed drone and missile attacks on Aramco facilities in Jizan and Yanbu.



Explosions and fires reported; Aramco confirmed limited damage, no casualties.



Saudi air defenses intercepted several projectiles.



Houthi leader vowed more attacks in response to Saudi-led operations in Yemen.

WHY THESE TARGETS?



JIZAN FACILITY

- Crude oil processing
- Supplies the domestic market
- Strategic for southern energy flows



YANBU FACILITY

- Key Red Sea export terminal
- Handles crude exports to global markets
- Critical to Saudi energy security

REGIONAL & GLOBAL IMPACT



Heightened risk to global oil supplies and energy prices.



Threat to Red Sea maritime routes and global trade.



Escalation could expand the Yemen conflict beyond borders.



Strains regional stability and complicates diplomatic efforts.

SAUDI ARABIA'S RESPONSE



Enhanced air defense and surveillance.



Assured continued operations of critical facilities.



Vowed firm response to protect national security.



Called on international community to condemn Houthi aggression.

THE BIGGER PICTURE



- Houthi attacks are part of a broader campaign against Saudi targets.
- Iran's alleged support continues to fuel the conflict.
- Peace prospects remain dim despite past ceasefire efforts.

KEY TAKEAWAYS



Targeting Aramco facilities is a direct threat to Saudi energy infrastructure.



Red Sea security is crucial for global energy and trade stability.



Escalation risks wider regional conflict with global repercussions.



Diplomatic efforts and de-escalation are more urgent than ever.

Houthi-Saudi Escalation: Aramco Facilities in Jizan and Yanbu Targeted

A. Executive Summary

Yemen's Iran-aligned Houthi movement fired missiles and drones at Saudi Arabia's Red Sea coastal cities of Jizan and Yanbu early on Saturday, July 25, 2026, striking facilities affiliated with Saudi Aramco, in what Houthi military spokesman Brigadier General Yahya Saree described as retaliation for Saudi-led coalition airstrikes on the Yemeni port city of Hodeida the previous night. NASA's FIRMS satellite fire-detection system recorded a significant thermal anomaly at the Aramco Jazan refinery on the same day, corroborating Houthi claims of fires at the site, even as Saudi Arabia's government did not immediately confirm the specific damage. The exchange followed a rapidly escalating sequence: Houthi forces had earlier this week attacked two Saudi oil tankers in the Red Sea, prompting the Saudi-led coalition to strike Hodeida's port and telecommunications infrastructure late Friday, wounding two people according to Houthi-run health officials, while the coalition maintained it had avoided hitting the port itself and struck only 'legitimate military targets' linked to threats against commercial shipping. Saudi civil defence issued and then lifted danger warnings for both Jizan and Yanbu, and air-defence systems, reportedly including Greek-operated batteries, intercepted at least two ballistic missiles aimed at Yanbu's oil refineries. The escalation is unfolding against the backdrop of the wider 2026 Iran war, now in its fifth month, during which the United States has continued near-nightly strikes on Iranian targets, and Iran's foreign minister has called for 'diplomacy and dialogue' to prevent the Yemen theatre from becoming a fresh flashpoint. For CSS and PMS aspirants, the Jizan-Yanbu strikes are a critical case study in how proxy conflicts widen regional wars, the vulnerability of Gulf energy infrastructure to asymmetric attack, and the risk that Red Sea shipping-lane disruptions pose to global oil prices and Pakistan's own energy import bill, given Islamabad's heavy reliance on Gulf crude and its stated interest in regional de-escalation.

B. Key Arguments

- Houthi forces struck Aramco-affiliated facilities in Jizan and Yanbu with missiles and drones early on July 25, 2026.
- The attack was described by Houthi spokesman Yahya Saree as retaliation for Saudi-led strikes on Hodeida the previous night.
- NASA satellite imagery recorded a significant thermal anomaly at the Aramco Jazan refinery, corroborating reported fires.
- The Saudi-led coalition said it struck 'legitimate military targets' in Hodeida province, not the port itself, after Houthi attacks on Saudi tankers.
- Two people were reportedly wounded in the Hodeida strikes, according to Houthi-run health officials.
- Saudi air defences, reportedly aided by Greek-operated systems, intercepted at least two ballistic missiles aimed at Yanbu.
- Saudi civil defence issued, then lifted, danger warnings for both Jizan and Yanbu early Saturday.
- The escalation occurs amid the wider 2026 Iran war, with the US continuing near-nightly strikes on Iranian targets.
- Iran's foreign minister Abbas Araghchi called for diplomacy to prevent further military confrontation over Yemen.
- The clashes threaten renewed disruption to Red Sea shipping lanes and global energy markets.

C. Critical Analysis

Causes: The immediate trigger was a Houthi attack on two Saudi oil tankers in the Red Sea, prompting Saudi retaliation on Hodeida, which in turn drew a wider Houthi missile and drone barrage on Saudi energy infrastructure. Underlying causes include Iran's continued material support for the Houthis amid the broader 2026 Iran war, and the Houthis' strategic use of Red Sea shipping and Gulf energy targets as leverage against both Saudi Arabia and the Western-backed coalition supporting Yemen's internationally recognised government.

Implications: Direct strikes on Aramco facilities raise the risk of a significant supply disruption from one of the world's largest oil producers, with immediate potential to push global crude prices higher, compounding pressure already building from the broader Strait of Hormuz crisis. For energy-importing states like Pakistan, sustained Gulf instability threatens to erode the very macroeconomic stability reflected in the recent S&P rating upgrade, given Pakistan's reliance on Gulf oil and gas imports.

Challenges: The conflict resists easy resolution because it is now entangled with the broader US-Iran war, meaning a ceasefire confined to Saudi Arabia and the Houthis alone may not hold if Tehran continues to view Yemen as a pressure valve against its adversaries. Verifying the actual extent of damage at Aramco facilities is also difficult given the fog of competing claims from Houthi media and Saudi authorities.

Opportunities: Renewed international attention on Red Sea security could accelerate multilateral efforts, including naval escort operations, to protect shipping lanes and reduce the risk of a broader Gulf energy crisis. Diplomatic channels floated for a wider US-Iran ceasefire could, if successful, also create space for parallel de-escalation between Saudi Arabia and the Houthis.

Way Forward: Analysts recommend intensified diplomatic engagement, potentially involving Gulf Cooperation Council states and international mediators, to delink the Yemen theatre from the broader Iran war and secure a localized ceasefire around Red Sea shipping and energy infrastructure. Strengthened multinational naval presence to protect commercial and energy shipping lanes would also reduce the risk of further economic spillover.

D. Statistics & Facts

Jul 25 Date of Jizan/Yanbu Strikes	2 Ballistic Missiles Intercepted at Yanbu	2 Wounded in Hodeida Strikes	5 mo. Duration of Wider 2026 Iran War
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- Houthi missile and drone strikes on Jizan and Yanbu occurred in the early hours of Saturday, July 25, 2026.
- NASA's FIRMS satellite system detected a significant thermal anomaly at the Aramco Jazan refinery the same day.
- Saudi-led coalition strikes on Hodeida occurred late Friday, July 24, 2026.
- Two people were reportedly wounded in Hodeida: a worker and a woman on Kamaran Island.
- Air-defence systems intercepted at least two ballistic missiles aimed at Yanbu's oil refineries.
- The wider 2026 Iran war began after US-Israeli strikes on February 28, 2026, killing Iran's Supreme Leader.
- US forces conducted a 13th consecutive night of strikes on Iran as of late July 2026.
- Brent crude futures climbed to \$94.07 per barrel amid escalating Red Sea shipping threats.
- The Strait of Hormuz, through which roughly 20 percent of global oil passes, has faced repeated closures during the conflict.
- Saudi civil defence issued brief public warnings for Jizan and Yanbu before lifting them minutes later.

E. Quotable Quotes

"A Yemeni missile strike sparked fires in the southern Saudi city of Jizan on the Red Sea."

— Houthi Ansarollah Media, Telegram Statement (July 25, 2026)

"Diplomacy and dialogue are needed to solve the Yemen conflict without military confrontations."

— Abbas Araghchi, Iranian Foreign Minister (July 25, 2026)

F. Examiner's Perspective

Paper	Likely Angle
Essay	Proxy Wars and Energy Security: The Strategic Vulnerability of Gulf Oil Infrastructure.
Current Affairs	Discuss the significance of the Houthi strikes on Aramco facilities for regional and global energy security.

Paper	Likely Angle
Pakistan Affairs	Linked to Pakistan via its heavy reliance on Gulf energy imports and its stated interest in regional de-escalation.
Interview	How should energy-importing states like Pakistan hedge against Gulf supply disruptions caused by regional conflict?

G. Vocabulary Builder

Retaliation	An act of revenge for a prior action	Reprisal	The strikes were framed as retaliation for coalition attacks.
Anomaly	A deviation from what is normal	Irregularity	Satellite data recorded a thermal anomaly at the refinery.
Corroborate	To confirm or support with evidence	Substantiate	Satellite imagery helped corroborate the reported fires.
Intercept	To stop something before it reaches its target	Block	Air defences intercepted two ballistic missiles.
Asymmetric	Involving unequal or unconventional means of conflict	Unbalanced	The Houthis rely on asymmetric missile and drone tactics.
Flashpoint	A point at which conflict may suddenly erupt	Trigger point	Yemen risks becoming a fresh flashpoint in the wider war.
Leverage	The use of influence to achieve an outcome	Influence	The Houthis use shipping threats as strategic leverage.
Delink	To separate or disconnect	Decouple	Diplomats hope to delink the Yemen theatre from the Iran war.
Spillover	The extension of effects beyond an original area	Overflow	Regional conflict risks economic spillover into energy-importing states.
Multinational	Involving several nations	International	A multinational naval presence could protect shipping lanes.

H. CSS/PMS Complete Question Bank

MCQ: Which two Saudi Red Sea cities were targeted by Houthi missile and drone strikes on July 25, 2026?

- A. Jeddah and Mecca
- B. Jizan and Yanbu
- C. Damman and Riyadh
- D. Medina and Taif

Correct Answer: B. Jizan and Yanbu

Pakistan Affairs Q1: Linked to Pakistan via its dependence on Gulf oil imports: assess how Red Sea instability affects Pakistan's energy security.

Pakistan Affairs Q2: Linked to Pakistan via its diplomatic interest in Gulf and Iran-related regional stability.

Current Affairs Q1: Discuss the strategic significance of the Red Sea and Strait of Hormuz in global energy trade.

Current Affairs Q2: Examine the relationship between the Houthi-Saudi conflict and the broader 2026 Iran war.

Short Question (20 marks): Write a note (20 marks) on the causes and consequences of the July 2026 Houthi strikes on Saudi Aramco facilities.

Analytical Question: Analytically assess whether localized ceasefires can hold amid a wider regional war.

Essay Topic: Energy Chokepoints and Global Security in an Age of Proxy Conflict.

Further In-Depth Study

<https://www.turkiyetoday.com/region/aramco-refinery-in-jazan-burns-after-houthi-missile-and-drone-strike-3224596>

<https://www.ksat.com/news/2026/07/25/houthis-fire-missiles-and-drones-at-saudi-arabia-in-response-to-strikes-on-a-yemeni-city/>

<https://thedefensepost.com/2026/07/25/houthis-saudi-strike/>





INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS

THE 2026 IRAN WAR DEEPENS AS US STRIKES CONTINUE

RIISING TENSIONS, EXPANDING CONFLICT, UNCERTAIN OUTCOME

The 2026 Iran war has entered a more dangerous phase as the United States continues precision strikes on Iranian nuclear and military targets, while Iran vows a strong response. The conflict now risks engulfing the wider Middle East.

HOW IT ESCALATED



Early 2026: Nuclear talks stalled amid mutual distrust.



May 2026: US imposed new sanctions targeting Iran's oil and missile programs.



June 2026: Iran attacked US-allied shipping in the Persian Gulf.



July 2026: US launched precision strikes on Iranian nuclear & military sites.

US STRIKES: KEY POINTS



Strikes targeted nuclear facilities in Fordow, Natanz, Isfahan and military command centers.



Used B-2 bombers, Tomahawk missiles and precision-guided munitions.



US claims strikes aimed at "degrading" Iran's nuclear and missile capabilities.



Operation framed as self-defense and protection of regional allies.

IRAN'S RESPONSE



Iran vowed "harsh and decisive" retaliation against US interests.



Missile & drone attacks reported on US bases in Iraq and Syria.



Threats to close the Strait of Hormuz, vital for global oil trade.



Iran mobilizing regional allies and proxies across the region.

REGIONAL IMPACT



Oil prices surged above \$110 a barrel amid supply fears.



Shipping in Persian Gulf and Red Sea facing serious threats.



Heightened risk of wider war involving Hezbollah, Houthis and other groups.



Gulf states on high alert, seeking de-escalation.

KEY ACTORS & THEIR POSITIONS



UNITED STATES

Says strikes are necessary to prevent Iran from acquiring nuclear weapons and to protect regional stability.



IRAN

Calls US strikes an act of aggression; vows to defend sovereignty and retaliate strongly.



ISRAEL

Supports US actions; says Iran's nuclear program is an existential threat.



RUSSIA

Condemns US strikes; calls for immediate ceasefire and diplomacy.



CHINA

Urges restraint; emphasizes dialogue and opposes unilateral military action.

GLOBAL CONSEQUENCES



Risk of prolonged conflict with global economic fallout.



Energy markets volatile; inflationary pressures rising.



UN Security Council remains divided, no resolution yet.



Diplomatic efforts continue but results remain uncertain.

POSSIBLE SCENARIOS



1. DIPLOMATIC BREAKTHROUGH

Backchannel talks lead to ceasefire and return to negotiations.



2. LIMITED WAR

Continued tit-for-tat strikes without full-scale regional escalation.



3. WIDER CONFLICT

Involvement of regional proxies sparks a broader Middle East war.

KEY TAKEAWAYS



The 2026 Iran war reflects the failure of diplomacy and deepening mistrust.



US strikes mark a significant escalation with unpredictable consequences.



Iran's response and regional dynamics could broaden the conflict.



Global stability, energy security and economic recovery are at serious risk.



Urgent diplomatic efforts are needed to prevent a wider regional war.



As strikes continue and threats escalate, the world watches anxiously — hoping diplomacy can still prevent a wider war.



ICEP's CSS WEEKLY
CURRENT AFFAIRS DIGEST FOR
CSS / PMS ASPIRANTS



ISSUE 10



COVERAGE: JULY 19 – JULY 25, 2026



LAHORE, PAKISTAN

The 2026 Iran War Deepens as US Strikes Continue and Hormuz Crisis Persists

A. Executive Summary

The 2026 Iran war, which began with US and Israeli airstrikes on February 28 that killed Iran's Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei and senior officials, remains unresolved nearly five months later, with US forces continuing near-nightly strikes on Iranian targets into late July 2026 even as regional mediators circulate proposals for a renewed ceasefire. Iran shut the Strait of Hormuz, the chokepoint through which roughly a fifth of global oil passes, in the war's early weeks, and though a brief ceasefire brokered by Pakistan on April 8 offered a temporary reprieve, talks in Islamabad subsequently failed, and the United States moved to impose a naval blockade on Iran. Through late July, Iranian authorities said US forces had struck 95 locations across 12 cities over a ten-day period, while drones targeted a northern Iraqi city hosting US forces as fighting continued to spread across the region. CNBC reported that regional mediators had presented Washington and Tehran with a proposal for a ten-day ceasefire around July 21, aimed at reviving an earlier memorandum of understanding, though analysts at ING cautioned 'large divisions remain between the US and Iran' and noted President Trump's warning that 'every time Iran kills an American soldier they will pay for that killing many times over.' The conflict has already produced a significant global fuel crisis, an extended US-led naval blockade and aerial campaign, and a US naval escort operation to protect shipping, alongside a new multinational Persian Gulf Strait Authority established to manage passage through the strait. Oil markets have responded with sustained volatility, with Brent crude briefly topping \$100 a barrel amid the uncertainty. For CSS and PMS aspirants, the persistence of the Iran war despite repeated ceasefire attempts illustrates the difficulty of de-escalating a multi-front regional conflict once it has drawn in Gulf states, Yemen's Houthis, and Iraqi militias, and highlights Pakistan's continuing diplomatic role, and economic exposure, as a mediator and energy-dependent neighbour to the crisis.

B. Key Arguments

- The 2026 Iran war began February 28 with US-Israeli strikes that killed Iran's Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei.
- Iran responded by closing the Strait of Hormuz, disrupting roughly a fifth of global oil shipments.
- A Pakistan-brokered ceasefire on April 8, 2026 offered a temporary reprieve before subsequent Islamabad talks failed.
- The US subsequently imposed a naval blockade on Iran and launched an aerial campaign to reopen Hormuz.
- Iranian authorities said the US struck 95 locations across 12 cities over a recent ten-day period.
- Drone attacks targeted a northern Iraqi city hosting US forces as the conflict widened regionally.
- Regional mediators proposed a ten-day ceasefire around July 21, 2026 to revive an earlier memorandum of understanding.
- Analysts note large divisions remain between Washington and Tehran despite ceasefire proposals.
- A multinational Persian Gulf Strait Authority has been established to help manage shipping through Hormuz.
- Brent crude has briefly topped \$100 per barrel amid sustained market volatility tied to the conflict.

C. Critical Analysis

Causes: The war's roots lie in the February 28 US-Israeli strikes targeting Iran's leadership and military infrastructure, which Iran characterised as an existential threat warranting maximal retaliation, including closing Hormuz and striking US-allied Gulf states. Repeated ceasefire failures reflect deep mutual distrust: Washington has demanded verifiable Iranian de-escalation while Tehran has sought guarantees against further strikes before committing to any durable halt.

Implications: Continued conflict sustains a global fuel-price shock, disrupts shipping and aviation across the Middle East, and forces energy-importing countries, including Pakistan, to absorb higher import costs even as they pursue domestic macroeconomic stabilisation. The widening of hostilities to Iraq and Yemen also raises the risk of a broader multi-state regional war beyond the original US-Iran axis.

Challenges: Mediation efforts face the challenge of coordinating incentives among multiple actors — the US, Iran, Israel, Gulf states, Iraq and Yemen's Houthis — each with distinct objectives, making a comprehensive and durable ceasefire far harder to achieve than a bilateral truce. Verification of compliance, given the war's diffuse, multi-front nature, also remains a persistent obstacle to any negotiated halt.

Opportunities: Pakistan's earlier role as ceasefire broker offers a continuing diplomatic opening, particularly given its relationships with both Gulf states and, historically, with Iran. A successful ten-day ceasefire, if achieved, could create space for a more structured negotiation process addressing Hormuz security and regional de-escalation more comprehensively.

Way Forward: Analysts suggest a phased de-escalation approach, beginning with narrow, verifiable measures such as protection of commercial shipping and humanitarian corridors, before attempting a comprehensive political settlement. Sustained international pressure for a return to diplomacy, alongside continued support for the Persian Gulf Strait Authority's role in managing safe passage, would help contain further economic damage.

D. Statistics & Facts

Feb 28 War's Start Date	~20% Share of Global Oil Passing Through Hormuz	95 Locations Struck by US Over 10 Days	\$100+ Brent Crude Price Peak (per barrel)
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- The 2026 Iran war began on February 28, 2026, with US-Israeli strikes killing Iran's Supreme Leader.
- Iran closed the Strait of Hormuz to foreign shipping in the war's early weeks.
- A Pakistan-brokered ceasefire was agreed April 8, 2026, but subsequent Islamabad talks failed.
- The US then imposed a naval blockade on Iran and continued an aerial campaign to reopen Hormuz.
- Iranian authorities reported US strikes on 95 locations across 12 cities over a recent ten-day window.
- US forces have carried out strikes on Iran for 13 consecutive nights as of late July 2026.
- A regional mediator proposal for a ten-day ceasefire emerged around July 21, 2026.
- Brent crude briefly topped \$100 per barrel amid the conflict's market disruption.
- A multinational Persian Gulf Strait Authority has been formed to help manage shipping through Hormuz.
- Casualties linked to the broader Strait of Hormuz crisis include a sunk tugboat and at least 17 damaged merchant ships.

E. Quotable Quotes

"Every time Iran kills an American soldier they will pay for that killing many times over."

— Donald Trump, President of the United States (July 2026 (Truth Social post))

"Large divisions remain between the US and Iran."

— Warren Patterson and Ewa Manthey, ING Strategists (July 21, 2026)

F. Examiner's Perspective

Paper	Likely Angle
Essay	War Without End: Assessing the Prospects for De-escalation in the 2026 Iran Conflict.
Current Affairs	Discuss the trajectory of the 2026 Iran war and its impact on global energy markets.
Pakistan Affairs	Examine Pakistan's diplomatic role as ceasefire broker in the 2026 Iran war and its economic exposure to the conflict.
Interview	What conditions would be necessary for a durable, verifiable ceasefire in the Iran war?

G. Vocabulary Builder

Blockade	A military blocking of access to a place	Siege	The US imposed a naval blockade on Iran.
Checkpoint	A strategically vital narrow passage	Bottleneck	The Strait of Hormuz is a critical global checkpoint.
Mediator	A neutral party who helps resolve a dispute	Intermediary	Pakistan acted as a mediator in the April ceasefire.
De-escalation	The reduction of conflict intensity	Cooling down	Diplomats are pursuing de-escalation through phased measures.
Multi-front	Involving several separate areas of conflict	Multi-theatre	The war has become a multi-front regional conflict.
Verifiable	Able to be confirmed as true	Confirmable	Washington demanded verifiable Iranian de-escalation.
Truce	A temporary agreement to stop fighting	Ceasefire	A brief truce in April failed to hold.
Diffuse	Spread out over a wide area	Dispersed	The conflict's diffuse nature complicates verification.
Escort	Protective accompaniment	Convoy protection	The US launched a naval escort operation for shipping.
Existential	Relating to survival or existence itself	Survival-related	Iran viewed the initial strikes as an existential threat.

H. CSS/PMS Complete Question Bank

MCQ: When did the 2026 Iran war begin?

- A. January 15, 2026
- B. February 28, 2026
- C. April 8, 2026
- D. July 21, 2026

Correct Answer: B. February 28, 2026

Pakistan Affairs Q1: Discuss Pakistan's diplomatic role in brokering the April 2026 Iran war ceasefire.

Pakistan Affairs Q2: Examine the economic implications for Pakistan of prolonged instability in the Strait of Hormuz.

Current Affairs Q1: Assess the causes and regional consequences of the 2026 Iran war.

Current Affairs Q2: Discuss the challenges of achieving a durable, multi-party ceasefire in a diffuse regional conflict.

Short Question (20 marks): Write a note (20 marks) on the strategic importance of the Strait of Hormuz to global trade.

Analytical Question: Analytically evaluate why repeated ceasefire attempts in the 2026 Iran war have failed to hold.

Essay Topic: Checkpoints and Conflict: The Geopolitics of Strategic Waterways in the Twenty-First Century.

Further In-Depth Study

<https://www.britannica.com/event/2026-Iran-war>

<https://www.cnn.com/2026/07/21/us-iran-war-trump-hormuz-houthi.html>

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2026_Iran_war_ceasefire



INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS



SCO
25 YEARS
OF COOPERATION

SCO COUNCIL OF FOREIGN MINISTERS MEETS IN CHOLPON-ATA ON THE ORGANISATION'S 25TH ANNIVERSARY

REINFORCING REGIONAL UNITY, ENHANCING COOPERATION FOR A SHARED FUTURE

The Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) Council of Foreign Ministers met in Cholpon-Ata, Kyrgyzstan, to mark the 25th anniversary of the Organisation, review progress, and chart the course for deeper cooperation in an evolving global landscape.

CHOLPON-ATA
KYRGYZSTAN



KEY HIGHLIGHTS



SCO Council of Foreign Ministers met in Cholpon-Ata, Kyrgyzstan on the occasion of the 25th anniversary of the Organisation.



Reaffirmed commitment to the SCO Charter, Shanghai Spirit, and multilateralism.



Reviewed cooperation in politics, security, economy, connectivity, and cultural exchanges.



Discussed global and regional challenges, including terrorism, extremism, and economic instability.

FOCUS AREAS



SECURITY COOPERATION

Enhancing joint efforts against terrorism, separatism, and drug trafficking.



ECONOMIC PARTNERSHIP

Promoting trade, investment, digital economy, and sustainable development.



CONNECTIVITY & INFRASTRUCTURE

Advancing regional connectivity through transport, energy, and corridor projects.



PEOPLE-TO-PEOPLE TIES

Strengthening cultural exchanges, tourism, education, and youth engagement.

KEY OUTCOMES



Issued joint statement reaffirming unity and shared vision.



Agreed to enhance cooperation in emerging sectors including technology, environment, and health.



Underscored the need for a fairer and more inclusive global order.



Expressed support for expansion of SCO activities and greater role in global governance.

SCO MEMBER STATES



CHINA



RUSSIA



INDIA



PAKISTAN



KAZAKHSTAN



KYRGYZSTAN



TAJIKISTAN



UZBEKISTAN

IRAN
(Member)BELARUS
(New Member)MONGOLIA
(Observer)TÜRKİYE
(Dialogue Partner)

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE MEETING



Marks a milestone in SCO's journey of 25 years.



Strengthens regional stability, peace, and prosperity.



Enhances SCO's role as a key player in a multipolar world.



Promotes cooperation based on mutual respect and sovereign equality.

LOOKING AHEAD



Deepen practical cooperation in priority areas.



Strengthen SCO's institutional mechanisms.



Promote sustainable and inclusive development.



Work together for a community with a shared future.

THE SHANGHAI SPIRIT



MUTUAL TRUST



MUTUAL BENEFIT



EQUALITY



CONSULTATION

RESPECT FOR DIVERSITY
OF CIVILIZATIONS

“

The SCO remains committed to building a better world through solidarity, cooperation, and a shared future.

”



ICEP's CSS WEEKLY

CURRENT AFFAIRS DIGEST FOR
CSS / PMS ASPIRANTS



ISSUE 10



COVERAGE: JULY 19 – JULY 25, 2026



LAHORE, PAKISTAN

SCO Council of Foreign Ministers Meets in Cholpon-Ata on the Organisation's 25th Anniversary

A. Executive Summary

Foreign ministers of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation's ten member states convened in Cholpon-Ata, Kyrgyzstan, on July 23 and 24, 2026, for the Council of Foreign Ministers (CFM) meeting held under Kyrgyzstan's SCO chairmanship and themed '25 Years of the SCO: Together Towards Sustainable Peace, Development, and Prosperity'. Pakistan's Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Ishaq Dar led the Pakistani delegation, arriving after participating in the ASEAN Regional Forum in Manila and attending an informal ministers' dinner before the formal session, where he held bilateral meetings with counterparts including Iran's foreign minister, with whom he discussed dialogue to ease regional tensions linked to the Iran war. The CFM, the third-highest decision-making forum within the SCO structure after the Heads of State and Heads of Government councils, brought together ministers from Pakistan, China, Russia, India, Iran, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan to coordinate foreign policy positions, discuss regional security challenges, and prepare the agenda for the organisation's upcoming higher-level summits. Iran's foreign minister reportedly used the platform to warn countries assisting any attack on Iran that they would face consequences, reflecting how the SCO's traditionally economic and security cooperation agenda is increasingly shaped by the unresolved Iran war. Dar separately met his Kyrgyz counterpart, with both sides reaffirming commitment to deepen bilateral trade, investment, energy and people-to-people ties and to implement understandings reached during earlier presidential visits. For CSS and PMS aspirants, the Cholpon-Ata meeting illustrates the SCO's evolving role as a platform where Eurasian powers, including India and Pakistan as full members since 2017, coordinate on connectivity and security even amid bilateral tensions between individual members, and demonstrates how regional multilateral forums increasingly find their agendas reshaped by acute crises like the ongoing Iran conflict.

B. Key Arguments

- The SCO Council of Foreign Ministers meeting was held in Cholpon-Ata, Kyrgyzstan, on July 23-24, 2026.
- The meeting was themed '25 Years of the SCO: Together Towards Sustainable Peace, Development, and Prosperity'.
- Pakistan's Deputy PM and Foreign Minister Ishaq Dar led Pakistan's delegation, arriving from the ASEAN Regional Forum in Manila.
- The CFM is the third-highest decision-making forum within the SCO structure.
- Participating states included Pakistan, China, Russia, India, Iran, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan.
- Dar held bilateral talks with Iran's foreign minister, calling for dialogue to ease regional tensions.
- Iran's foreign minister reportedly warned states assisting any attack on Iran of consequences at the SCO platform.
- Dar and his Kyrgyz counterpart reaffirmed commitment to deepen bilateral trade, investment and energy cooperation.
- The meeting finalised preparations following earlier SCO National Coordinators' consultations in Cholpon-Ata.
- Cholpon-Ata was designated the SCO Tourism and Cultural Capital for 2025-2026.

C. Critical Analysis

Causes: The meeting is a scheduled annual milestone within the SCO calendar, but its 2026 agenda was inevitably shaped by the ongoing Iran war, requiring member states, several of which maintain complex relationships with both Iran and the United States, to navigate sensitive diplomatic terrain. Kyrgyzstan's chairmanship used the organisation's 25th anniversary to emphasise cohesion and long-term regional cooperation despite these external pressures.

Implications: The SCO's growing centrality as a platform for Eurasian diplomacy allows Pakistan to engage major powers, including China, Russia and India, in a single multilateral setting, offering opportunities for economic

connectivity discussions alongside security dialogue. Iran's use of the forum to issue warnings over the ongoing war also signals how bilateral crises can shape the tenor of ostensibly cooperative multilateral gatherings.

Challenges: The SCO's consensus-based structure and the presence of both India and Pakistan, along with China and Russia, means the organisation often struggles to move beyond broad statements toward binding action on acute security crises. Divergent member positions on the Iran war and other regional flashpoints limit the CFM's capacity to produce more than coordinated rhetoric on the most pressing issues.

Opportunities: Pakistan's participation offers a venue to advance its stated priorities of regional connectivity, trade corridors linking South and Central Asia, and deeper bilateral ties with individual SCO members such as Kyrgyzstan. The 25th-anniversary framing also gives member states a chance to recommit to longer-term cooperation goals that transcend any single crisis.

Way Forward: Analysts suggest Pakistan should use SCO platforms to advance concrete connectivity and trade initiatives even where security consensus proves elusive, while continuing quiet bilateral diplomacy, as demonstrated by Dar's meeting with Iran's foreign minister, to contribute toward de-escalating regional conflicts that threaten the broader Eurasian cooperation agenda.

D. Statistics & Facts

10 SCO Member States	25 Years Since SCO's Founding	Jul 23-24 CFM Meeting Dates	3rd CFM's Rank in SCO Decision-Making
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- The SCO Council of Foreign Ministers met in Cholpon-Ata, Kyrgyzstan on July 23-24, 2026.
- Ten member states participated: Pakistan, China, Russia, India, Iran, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan.
- The meeting marked the SCO's 25th anniversary under the theme of sustainable peace, development and prosperity.
- Ishaq Dar arrived in Cholpon-Ata after attending the 33rd ASEAN Regional Forum in Manila.
- The CFM is the third-highest SCO decision-making forum, after Heads of State and Heads of Government councils.
- Cholpon-Ata was designated the SCO Tourism and Cultural Capital for 2025-2026.
- Dar attended an informal ministers' dinner ahead of the formal CFM session.
- Pakistan and India have been full SCO members since 2017.
- Dar held bilateral meetings with counterparts including Iran's foreign minister on the sidelines.
- Kyrgyzstan holds the SCO's rotating chairmanship for the 2025-2026 cycle.

E. Quotable Quotes

"25 Years of the SCO: Together Towards Sustainable Peace, Development, and Prosperity."

— SCO Kyrgyz Chairmanship, Official Meeting Theme (July 2026)

F. Examiner's Perspective

Paper	Likely Angle
Essay	Multilateralism in a Fractured World: The SCO's Role in Eurasian Diplomacy.
Current Affairs	Discuss the significance of the 2026 SCO Council of Foreign Ministers meeting for regional cooperation.
Pakistan Affairs	Examine Pakistan's engagement with the SCO as a platform for regional connectivity and diplomacy.
Interview	How can consensus-based organisations like the SCO remain effective when members hold divergent security interests?

G. Vocabulary Builder

Multilateral	Involving several parties or nations	Multi-party	The SCO is a multilateral regional organisation.
Chairmanship	The role of presiding over an organisation	Presidency	Kyrgyzstan holds the SCO's rotating chairmanship.
Consensus	General agreement among a group	Unanimity	SCO decisions typically require member consensus.
Connectivity	Linkage or interconnection, especially of trade routes	Interlinkage	Pakistan promotes regional connectivity through the SCO.
Cohesion	The state of forming a unified whole	Unity	The 25th anniversary theme emphasised organisational cohesion.
Bilateral	Involving two parties directly	Two-sided	Dar held several bilateral meetings on the sidelines.
Flashpoint	A point where conflict may erupt	Trigger point	The Iran war remains a regional flashpoint.
Rhetoric	Persuasive or symbolic language, often without binding action	Language	Critics say SCO statements risk becoming mere rhetoric.
Corridor	A route facilitating trade or transit	Route	Pakistan seeks to develop trade corridors linking Central and South Asia.
Rotating	Changing position in a regular sequence	Alternating	The SCO chairmanship rotates annually among members.

H. CSS/PMS Complete Question Bank

MCQ: Where was the 2026 SCO Council of Foreign Ministers meeting held?

- A. Beijing, China
- B. Cholpon-Ata, Kyrgyzstan
- C. Tashkent, Uzbekistan
- D. Islamabad, Pakistan

Correct Answer: B. Cholpon-Ata, Kyrgyzstan

Pakistan Affairs Q1: Discuss Pakistan's strategic interests in participating in the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation.

Pakistan Affairs Q2: Examine how Pakistan balances its SCO membership alongside its bilateral relationships with China and other members.

Current Affairs Q1: Assess the SCO's effectiveness as a platform for regional security cooperation.

Current Affairs Q2: Discuss the challenges facing consensus-based multilateral organisations amid acute regional crises.

Short Question (20 marks): Write a note (20 marks) on the structure and decision-making forums of the SCO.

Analytical Question: Analytically evaluate whether the SCO can meaningfully influence outcomes in the ongoing Iran war.

Essay Topic: Regionalism in the Twenty-First Century: The Promise and Limits of Multilateral Organisations.

Further In-Depth Study

<https://www.bolnews.com/pakistan/ishaq-dar-joins-sco-foreign-ministers-meeting-in-kyrgyzstan/>
<https://qazinform.com/news/cholpon-ata-to-host-sco-council-of-foreign-ministers-meeting-3c717e>
<https://www.radio.gov.pk/23-07-2026/dar-arrives-in-kyrgyz-republic-for-sco-cfm-meeting>



**AMNESTY
INTERNATIONAL**

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL: KABUL REHAB CENTRE STRIKE A 'POSSIBLE WAR CRIME'

CIVILIAN SUFFERING, ACCOUNTABILITY NEEDED

Amnesty International has said that a strike on a rehabilitation centre in Kabul, which killed and injured dozens including civilians and vulnerable people, may amount to a war crime under international law.



WHAT HAPPENED?

- A strike hit a rehabilitation centre in Kabul, where people with disabilities had sought shelter.
- Dozens were killed and many more injured, including civilians and vulnerable individuals.
- Amnesty International says the attack appears unlawful and may constitute a war crime.

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL'S FINDINGS

- The centre was a known civilian facility, providing rehabilitation services.
- No evidence was found of any military presence or activity at the site.
- The strike failed to distinguish between civilians and military objectives.
- The attack is likely a disproportionate and indiscriminate assault.

INTERNATIONAL LAW PERSPECTIVE

- Attacks must distinguish between civilians and combatants.
- Deliberate or indiscriminate attacks on civilians are war crimes.
- Parties to conflict are bound by International Humanitarian Law (IHL).
- Accountability and investigations are essential to uphold justice.

HUMAN IMPACT

- Loss of lives, including people with disabilities.
- Severe psychological trauma for survivors.
- Further strain on an already fragile humanitarian situation in Afghanistan.

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL'S DEMANDS

- An independent, impartial and transparent investigation into the strike.
- Those responsible must be held accountable.
- Parties to the conflict must respect IHL and protect civilians and civilian infrastructure.
- Greater protection for vulnerable groups, including persons with disabilities.

REGIONAL & GLOBAL CONCERN

- The attack has drawn strong international condemnation.
- Highlights the worsening humanitarian crisis in Afghanistan.
- Reinforces the urgent need for peace, dialogue and respect for human rights.

KEY TAKEAWAYS



Civilian facilities must never be targets.



Protecting the most vulnerable is a legal and moral obligation.



War crimes must be investigated and punished.



Respect for human rights is key to lasting peace.

“Attacks that kill and injure civilians, especially the vulnerable, can never be justified. Accountability is the only path to justice.”
– Amnesty International

Amnesty International: Kabul Rehab Centre Strike a 'Possible War Crime'

A. Executive Summary

Amnesty International published a detailed investigation on July 22, 2026 concluding that a Pakistani airstrike on the Omid Addiction Treatment Centre in Kabul on the night of March 16, 2026, which killed at least 269 civilians and injured 122 more according to the UN Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA), should be investigated as a possible war crime. The London-based rights group said its weapons experts analysed videos and photographs of bomb remnants and concluded that at least one of the munitions used was a Takbir precision-guided bomb, and that satellite imagery of the facility between April 2023 and mid-March 2026, alongside verified footage from inside the centre, showed clearly marked signage identifying it as a rehabilitation and treatment facility, with large groups of patients visible in imagery captured just three days before the strike. Amnesty said it found no evidence supporting Pakistan's claim that the strikes, part of a broader campaign across multiple Afghan provinces after the escalation of cross-border hostilities with the Taliban in October 2025, targeted military or terrorist infrastructure, and argued the attack violated the special protections international humanitarian law affords healthcare facilities as well as the principles of distinction, precaution and proportionality meant to protect civilians. Pakistan rejected the allegation, with official sources telling Pakistan Today that Amnesty's report reflected an advocacy finding rather than a judicial determination, lacked access to Pakistan's operational intelligence and targeting process, and ignored the broader context of sustained cross-border terrorism from Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan networks operating from Afghan soil. Amnesty called on Pakistan to conduct a transparent, independent investigation into the decision-making that led to the strike and to prosecute anyone found criminally responsible, including under the doctrine of command responsibility. For CSS and PMS aspirants, the case is a central reference point for international humanitarian law principles governing the conduct of hostilities, the legal protections owed to medical facilities, and the tension between counter-terrorism justifications and civilian protection obligations under international law.

B. Key Arguments

- Amnesty International's investigation, published July 22, 2026, calls the March 16 Kabul strike a possible war crime.
- UNAMA previously confirmed at least 269 civilians killed and 122 injured in the strike on the Omid Addiction Treatment Centre.
- Amnesty's weapons experts identified at least one munition used as a Takbir precision-guided bomb.
- Satellite imagery and verified video showed the site was clearly marked as a rehabilitation and treatment facility.
- Imagery from three days before the strike showed large groups of patients present at the centre.
- Amnesty found no evidence supporting Pakistan's claim the strike targeted military or terrorist infrastructure.
- The strike is alleged to have violated IHL protections for healthcare facilities and the principles of distinction, precaution and proportionality.
- Pakistan rejected the findings as an advocacy conclusion lacking access to its operational intelligence.
- Pakistan maintains the strikes responded to sustained TTP-linked cross-border terrorism from Afghan territory.
- Amnesty called for a transparent, independent investigation and possible prosecution under command responsibility.

C. Critical Analysis

Causes: The strike occurred amid a broader Pakistani military campaign across multiple Afghan provinces following the escalation of cross-border hostilities with the Afghan Taliban in October 2025, driven by Islamabad's assessment that TTP networks operate with sanctuary inside Afghanistan. Amnesty's investigation attributes the high civilian toll to an alleged failure to adequately verify the target's civilian nature before striking.

Implications: A formal 'possible war crime' designation from a major international human rights body carries significant reputational and diplomatic consequences for Pakistan, potentially affecting its standing in international forums and

complicating cooperation with states and institutions sensitive to international humanitarian law violations. It also intensifies scrutiny of Pakistan's broader cross-border counter-terrorism campaign against Afghanistan.

Challenges: Verifying competing narratives is inherently difficult given restricted independent access to strike sites and classified military intelligence; Pakistan argues Amnesty's methodology cannot capture the full operational picture, while Amnesty argues visible evidence contradicts Pakistan's stated target rationale. The dispute also risks further straining an already fraught Pakistan-Afghanistan relationship amid continuing cross-border militant activity.

Opportunities: A transparent, credible Pakistani investigation, if conducted, could help rebuild international confidence in Pakistan's compliance with humanitarian law even while it continues counter-terrorism operations, and could clarify command-and-control failures, if any, to prevent recurrence. Engagement with independent investigators could also strengthen Pakistan's broader case regarding the scale of TTP threats emanating from Afghan territory.

Way Forward: International law experts recommend an independent, impartial inquiry into the targeting decision-making process, with findings made public, alongside continued diplomatic engagement to address the underlying cross-border terrorism dispute with Kabul through verifiable, mutually monitored security arrangements rather than unilateral strikes with high civilian risk.

D. Statistics & Facts

269+ Civilians Killed (UNAMA Estimate)	122 Civilians Injured	Mar 16 Date of the Strike	Jul 22 Date Amnesty Report Published
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- The strike on the Omid Addiction Treatment Centre occurred on the night of March 16, 2026.
- UNAMA confirmed at least 269 civilians killed and 122 injured in the strike.
- Amnesty's report was published July 22, 2026, four months after the strike.
- Amnesty analysed more than 60 photos and videos from the site, plus satellite imagery and interviews.
- Weapons experts identified at least one munition as a Takbir precision-guided bomb.
- Satellite imagery reviewed spanned April 2023 to March 15, 2026.
- Large groups of patients were visible in imagery from just three days before the strike, on March 13.
- Pakistan's Information Minister Attaullah Tarar denied targeting any hospital or rehabilitation centre the day after the strike.
- UNAMA reported 75 people killed and 193 injured in Afghanistan from cross-border clashes since February 26, 2026, prior to further escalation.
- Cross-border hostilities between Pakistan and the Afghan Taliban escalated from October 2025.

E. Quotable Quotes

"The attack on the Omid Centre constitutes a serious violation of international humanitarian law — possibly amounting to a war crime."

— Isabelle Lassee, Amnesty International Acting Regional Director for South Asia (July 22, 2026)

"No hospital, no drug rehabilitation centre, and no civilian facility was targeted."

— Attaullah Tarar, Pakistan's Information Minister (March 17, 2026)

F. Examiner's Perspective

Paper	Likely Angle
Essay	International Humanitarian Law in an Age of Cross-Border Counter-Terrorism.
Current Affairs	Discuss the implications of Amnesty International's findings on the Kabul rehabilitation centre strike.

Paper	Likely Angle
Pakistan Affairs	Examine Pakistan's counter-terrorism justification for cross-border strikes against Afghanistan-based militant networks.
Interview	How should states balance counter-terrorism imperatives against civilian protection obligations under international law?

G. Vocabulary Builder

Proportionality	A legal principle balancing military necessity against civilian harm	Balance	Proportionality is a core IHL principle in targeting decisions.
Distinction	The IHL requirement to distinguish combatants from civilians	Differentiation	The principle of distinction protects civilians from direct attack.
Precaution	Care taken to prevent unnecessary harm	Caution	Precaution requires verifying targets before striking.
Munition	Military weapons and ammunition	Ordnance	Investigators identified the munition as a precision-guided bomb.
Sanctuary	A place offering safety or protection	Refuge	Militants are alleged to find sanctuary across the border.
Accountability	Being answerable for one's actions	Responsibility	Amnesty called for accountability through prosecution.
Verification	The process of confirming accuracy or truth	Confirmation	Independent verification of the target's nature remains disputed.
Impartial	Not favouring one side over another	Unbiased	An impartial investigation was demanded by rights groups.
Jurisdiction	The authority to interpret and apply the law	Legal authority	Questions remain over which body has jurisdiction to investigate.
Culpability	Responsibility for wrongdoing	Blameworthiness	Command responsibility doctrine addresses culpability up the chain.

H. CSS/PMS Complete Question Bank

MCQ: What facility did Amnesty International say was struck in Kabul on March 16, 2026?

- A. A military barracks
- B. A drug addiction treatment centre
- C. A police station
- D. A refugee camp

Correct Answer: B. A drug addiction treatment centre

Pakistan Affairs Q1: Linked to Pakistan via its cross-border counter-terrorism campaign against Afghanistan-based militant networks.

Pakistan Affairs Q2: Linked to Pakistan via the diplomatic and legal consequences of international war-crime allegations.

Current Affairs Q1: Discuss the international humanitarian law principles of distinction, precaution and proportionality.

Current Affairs Q2: Examine the role of international human rights organisations in investigating alleged war crimes.

Short Question (20 marks): Write a note (20 marks) on the legal protections afforded to healthcare facilities under international humanitarian law.

Analytical Question: Analytically assess the tension between state counter-terrorism justifications and international humanitarian law obligations.

Essay Topic: Justice Beyond Borders: The Role of International Law in Regulating Armed Conflict.

Further In-Depth Study

<https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2026/07/afghanistan-pakistan-deadly-pakistan-air-strikes-on-kabul-drug-rehab-centre-should-be-investigated-as-possible-war-crime-new-investigation/>

https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2026/07/22/afghanistan-pakistan-amnesty-airstrike-drug-treatment-kabul/cc5c6c14-85ce-11f1-9cec-0fb26676f07e_story.html

<https://www.pakistantoday.com.pk/2026/07/22/pakistan-rejects-amnestys-allegation-says-report-ignores-cross-border-terrorism-threat>





INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS

EIGHT ARAB AND ISLAMIC STATES CONDEMN ISRAELI ESCALATION AT AL-AQSA MOSQUE

**JOINT STATEMENT CALLS FOR END TO VIOLATIONS
AND PROTECTION OF HOLY SITES**

Eight Arab and Islamic countries have strongly condemned Israel's continued violations and provocations at the Al-Aqsa Mosque, calling for immediate international action to stop the aggression and uphold the sanctity of Islamic holy sites in occupied Jerusalem.

“The sanctity of Al-Aqsa Mosque is a red line. These repeated violations threaten regional peace and stability.”

THE CONDEMNATION



Eight Arab and Islamic states issued a joint statement condemning Israel's escalation.



They denounced storming of Al-Aqsa Mosque by Israeli forces and settlers.



Called Israel's actions a flagrant violation of international law and UN resolutions.



Warned that such acts fuel tension and could lead to wider conflict.

THE 8 ARAB & ISLAMIC STATES



1. SAUDI ARABIA



2. JORDAN



3. EGYPT



4. QATAR



5. UNITED ARAB
EMIRATES



6. TÜRKİYE



7. PAKISTAN



8. INDONESIA

KEY DEMANDS



Immediate end to Israeli provocations and aggression at Al-Aqsa Mosque.



Protection of Al-Aqsa Mosque and all Islamic holy sites.



The international community must take urgent action to hold Israel accountable.



Support for the Palestinian people's rights and legitimate aspirations.

ISRAELI VIOLATIONS AT AL-AQSA



- Frequent raids by Israeli forces and settlers.
- Restrictions on Palestinian worshippers.
- Use of force, arrests, and humiliating measures.
- Attempts to alter the historical and legal status quo.

WHY AL-AQSA MATTERS



Al-Aqsa Mosque is the third holiest site in Islam.



A symbol of Islamic identity, heritage, and unity.



Attacks on Al-Aqsa are attacks on the faith and sentiments of millions worldwide.

IMPACT ON REGIONAL & GLOBAL PEACE



Escalations risk triggering a broader regional conflict.



Undermines peace efforts and international law.



Inflames anger across the Islamic world and beyond.

INTERNATIONAL LAW & RESOLUTIONS



UN resolutions affirm the historical status quo at Al-Aqsa Mosque.



Israeli actions violate international humanitarian law.



UNSC resolutions 252, 267, 476 and others condemn Israeli measures.



Respect for holy sites is a responsibility of the global community.

KEY TAKEAWAY



The protection of Al-Aqsa Mosque is a collective responsibility. Silence in the face of injustice emboldens aggression; unity and action can restore justice and peace.



Eight Arab-Islamic States Condemn Israeli Escalation at Al-Aqsa Mosque

A. Executive Summary

The foreign ministers of Pakistan, Egypt, Türkiye, Indonesia, Jordan, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates issued a joint statement on July 23-24, 2026 condemning what they described as Israel's escalation at Al-Aqsa Mosque/Al-Haram Al-Sharif in occupied East Jerusalem, after more than 4,200 Israeli settlers and members of far-right groups, according to Al Jazeera, stormed the mosque compound on July 23 in one of the largest such incursions of the year, timed to mark the Jewish holiday of Tisha B'Av. The ministers, in a statement shared by Pakistan's Foreign Office, condemned the mass incursions led by extremist Israeli ministers under the protection of Israeli police, the raising of the Israeli flag inside the compound's courtyards, and the erection of two tents by Israeli police within the site, calling these actions a flagrant violation of international law, relevant United Nations resolutions, and the historical and legal status quo governing the holy sites in occupied East Jerusalem. The statement reaffirmed that the entire 144-dunam Al-Aqsa Mosque/Al-Haram Al-Sharif compound is a place of worship exclusive to Muslims, that the Jerusalem Endowments and Al-Aqsa Mosque Affairs Department under Jordan's Ministry of Awqaf holds exclusive jurisdiction to administer the site, and that Israel possesses no sovereignty over occupied Jerusalem or its Islamic and Christian holy sites. The eight ministers called on Israel, as the occupying power, to immediately lift restrictions on access to Jerusalem's Old City and to refrain from obstructing Muslim worshippers' access to the mosque, warning that continued provocations 'fuel hatred and extremism' and undermine prospects for a just and lasting peace based on the two-state solution. Middle East Eye separately reported that US, Jordanian and Palestinian officials described an emerging plan, championed by figures including Jared Kushner and US Ambassador to Israel Mike Huckabee, under which future management of the site could shift closer to Israeli interests, a development the joint statement's signatories did not directly address. For CSS and PMS aspirants, the episode underscores Pakistan's continued diplomatic alignment with the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation consensus on Jerusalem and the enduring centrality of the Al-Aqsa custodianship question in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

B. Key Arguments

- Eight Arab-Islamic foreign ministers, including Pakistan's, issued a joint statement on July 23-24, 2026 condemning Israeli actions at Al-Aqsa Mosque.
- More than 4,200 Israeli settlers and far-right group members stormed the compound on July 23, one of the largest incursions of the year.
- The incursions coincided with the Jewish holiday of Tisha B'Av.
- The statement condemned the raising of the Israeli flag and the erection of two tents inside the compound by Israeli police.
- Signatories affirmed the 144-dunam compound is a place of worship exclusive to Muslims.
- The statement reaffirmed the Jordanian-backed Islamic Waqf's exclusive jurisdiction over the site's administration.
- The ministers stated Israel has no sovereignty over occupied East Jerusalem or its holy sites.
- Israel was called upon to lift access restrictions to Jerusalem's Old City for Muslim worshippers.
- The statement warned that provocative actions fuel hatred and extremism and obstruct the two-state solution.
- Middle East Eye reported a separate, unaddressed plan to shift Al-Aqsa's management closer to Israeli interests.

C. Critical Analysis

Causes: The escalation stems from a sustained pattern of mass settler incursions into Al-Aqsa led by nationalist Israeli officials, occurring against the backdrop of continuing regional tension linked to the broader Israeli-Palestinian conflict and the wider Middle East crisis. Symbolic actions such as flag-raising and tent installation are widely viewed by Muslim-majority states as deliberate attempts to alter the decades-old status quo governing the site.

Implications: Repeated incursions risk inflaming religious sentiment across the Muslim world, with historical precedent showing that flashpoints at Al-Aqsa can trigger wider unrest in the occupied Palestinian territories. The joint statement signals continued diplomatic coordination among key Muslim-majority states, including Pakistan, even as some signatories simultaneously pursue separate normalisation or engagement tracks with Israel.

Challenges: Diplomatic statements alone have historically had limited effect in halting settler incursions, and reports of US-backed plans to alter the site's management structure suggest growing pressure on the existing status quo arrangement. Coordinating a unified Muslim-world response is also complicated by differing bilateral relationships each signatory maintains with the United States and Israel.

Opportunities: Sustained, coordinated diplomatic pressure from a broad coalition of Muslim-majority states, several with significant leverage in Washington, could help preserve the historic status quo and press for accountability over repeated violations. The statement also reinforces the Jordanian custodianship arrangement as the recognised legal framework, providing a basis for future international advocacy.

Way Forward: Analysts suggest the signatory states should pursue this issue through the UN Security Council and General Assembly, alongside direct diplomatic engagement with Washington to resist any changes to Al-Aqsa's management structure, while supporting Jordan's custodial role and calling for international monitoring of access restrictions imposed on Muslim worshippers.

D. Statistics & Facts

8 Signatory States	4,200+ Settlers in the July 23 Incursion	144 Dunams of the Al-Aqsa Compound	Jul 23-24 Statement Issuance Dates
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- The joint statement was issued by foreign ministers of Pakistan, Egypt, Türkiye, Indonesia, Jordan, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and the UAE.
- More than 4,200 Israeli settlers and far-right group members stormed Al-Aqsa on July 23, 2026.
- The incursion coincided with Tisha B'Av, a Jewish day of mourning and fasting.
- The Al-Aqsa Mosque/Al-Haram Al-Sharif compound covers 144 dunams (roughly 35 acres).
- The Jerusalem Endowments and Al-Aqsa Mosque Affairs Department operates under Jordan's Ministry of Awqaf and Islamic Affairs.
- Israeli police reportedly erected two tents within the compound during the incursions.
- The statement was released as Pakistan's Foreign Office Press Release No. 186/2026.
- Middle East Eye reported an emerging US-backed plan potentially shifting Al-Aqsa management closer to Israeli interests.
- Settler violence remains the leading cause of Palestinian casualties in the occupied West Bank, per the report.
- The statement invoked relevant UN Security Council and General Assembly resolutions on Jerusalem's status.

E. Quotable Quotes

"These provocative actions fuel hatred and extremism, and obstruct efforts to advance a just and lasting peace on the basis of the two-State solution."

— Joint Statement, Eight Arab-Islamic Foreign Ministers (July 23, 2026)

F. Examiner's Perspective

Paper	Likely Angle
Essay	Jerusalem's Holy Sites and the Politics of Custodianship in the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict.
Current Affairs	Discuss the significance of the July 2026 joint Arab-Islamic statement on Al-Aqsa Mosque.

Paper	Likely Angle
Pakistan Affairs	Examine Pakistan's diplomatic position on the status of Jerusalem and the Al-Aqsa Mosque.
Interview	How effective are joint diplomatic statements in altering ground realities at contested religious sites?

G. Vocabulary Builder

Incursion	A sudden invasion or entry into a territory	Intrusion	Settlers carried out a mass incursion into the mosque compound.
Custodianship	The role of guardian or caretaker	Guardianship	Jordan holds custodianship over Jerusalem's Islamic holy sites.
Status quo	The existing state of affairs	Current situation	The statement demanded preservation of the historic status quo.
Sovereignty	Supreme authority over a territory	Dominion	The ministers denied Israeli sovereignty over occupied Jerusalem.
Occupying power	A state exercising control over an occupied territory	Occupier	Israel was addressed as the occupying power in the statement.
Provocation	An action intended to provoke a reaction	Incitement	Settler incursions were described as provocative acts.
Endowment	Property or funds set aside for a religious or charitable purpose	Waqf	The Jerusalem Endowments manage Al-Aqsa's affairs.
Extremist	Holding radical or immoderate views	Radical	Extremist ministers were said to have led the incursions.
Normalisation	The establishment of formal diplomatic relations	Rapprochement	Some states pursue normalisation with Israel separately.
Custodial	Relating to guardianship or protective responsibility	Protective	Jordan's custodial role over the holy sites was reaffirmed.

H. CSS/PMS Complete Question Bank

MCQ: Which Jewish holiday coincided with the large-scale July 23, 2026 incursion into Al-Aqsa Mosque?

- A. Yom Kippur
- B. Tisha B'Av
- C. Passover
- D. Rosh Hashanah

Correct Answer: B. Tisha B'Av

Pakistan Affairs Q1: Linked to Pakistan via its foreign policy alignment with the OIC consensus on Jerusalem's status.

Pakistan Affairs Q2: Linked to Pakistan via its historical diplomatic support for Palestinian rights and the two-state solution.

Current Affairs Q1: Discuss the legal and historical status quo governing Jerusalem's holy sites under international law.

Current Affairs Q2: Examine the role of joint multilateral statements in addressing violations at contested religious sites.

Short Question (20 marks): Write a note (20 marks) on the significance of the Jordanian custodianship of Jerusalem's Islamic holy sites.

Analytical Question: Analytically assess whether diplomatic statements alone can deter repeated incursions at Al-Aqsa Mosque.

Essay Topic: Sacred Geography and Global Politics: The Enduring Dispute Over Jerusalem.

Further In-Depth Study

<https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2026/7/23/arab-and-muslim-countries-condemn-israeli-escalation-at-al-aqsa-mosque>

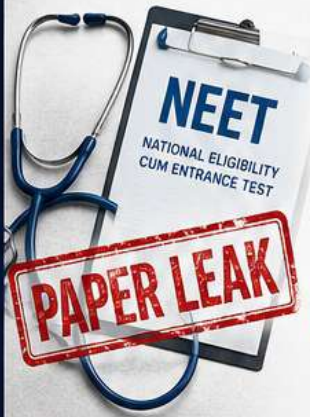
<https://www.middleeasteye.net/news/eight-muslim-countries-condemn-mass-israeli-raids-al-aqsa>

<https://www.pakistantoday.com.pk/2026/07/24/pakistan-seven-arab-islamic-nations-condemn-israeli-actions-at-al-aqsa-urge-end-to-violations>





INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS



INDIA'S NEET PAPER-LEAK PROTESTS ESCALATE INTO OPPOSITION CRACKDOWN STANDOFF

YOUTH OUTRAGE, GOVERNANCE FAILURE, DEMOCRACY AT TEST

India's National Eligibility cum Entrance Test (NEET) paper-leak scandal has triggered massive protests across the country, exposing deep loopholes in the exam system and sparking a political storm, with opposition leaders alleging a cover-up and authoritarian suppression by the government.



WHAT HAPPENED?



Allegations emerged that the NEET-UG 2024 paper was leaked before the exam.



Multiple arrests made in Bihar, Jharkhand, Gujarat and other states.



Students across India hit the streets demanding a re-test and justice.



NTA admitted to "irregularities" in the exam process in some centres.

KEY FACTS



NEET-UG 2024 held on 5 May 2024



Over 24 lakh candidates appeared



Over 1,500 students scored perfect 720, raising suspicions



CBI investigation ordered; several arrests including coaching mafia links



Supreme Court hearing petitions; next date awaited



Students demand outright cancellation & re-exam

STUDENTS' DEMANDS



Cancellation of the NEET-UG 2024 exam.



Re-conduct the exam in a transparent manner.



Ensure accountability and strict action against culprits.



Reform the NTA and exam conduct system.



Protect the future of lakhs of aspiring doctors.

GOVERNMENT'S RESPONSE



- NTA acknowledges "instances of malpractice".
- Compensation announced for some affected students.
- Government claims a fair and transparent probe is underway.

OPPOSITION'S ALLEGATIONS

- Accuses government of shielding the powerful "coaching lobby".
- Claims the issue reveals "systemic corruption".
- Alleges use of ED, CBI and police to intimidate protesting students and opposition leaders.
- Demands resignation of Education Minister.



CRACKDOWN ON PROTESTS

- Police lathi-charge on protesting students in several states.
- Section 144 imposed in some areas.
- Opposition leaders detained during protests.
- Critics say it's an attack on democratic rights and freedom of expression.



WHY IT MATTERS?



NEET is the single gateway for medical admissions in India.



Any malpractice destroys the future of millions of students.



Highlights deep flaws in exam governance and institutional accountability.



Reflects growing youth disillusionment and trust deficit in institutions.



IMPACT ON INDIA



Eroding trust in public institutions.



Political polarization intensifies.



Uncertain future for lakhs of students.



India's democratic image facing global concern.



KEY TAKEAWAY



The NEET paper-leak scandal is not just an exam controversy; it is a test of India's governance, accountability, and democracy. Justice for students and systemic reforms are the need of the hour.



India's NEET Paper-Leak Protests Escalate into Opposition Crackdown Standoff

A. Executive Summary

Opposition protests in New Delhi over the alleged NEET-UG 2026 medical entrance examination paper leak escalated sharply in the week of July 20-21, 2026, when Congress Leader of the Opposition Rahul Gandhi, his sister Priyanka Gandhi Vadra, Samajwadi Party president Akhilesh Yadav and other India bloc parliamentarians staged a sit-in near Prime Minister Narendra Modi's residence demanding accountability over the alleged irregularities and over police use of force against protesting students a day earlier. According to reporting from The Wire and The Tribune, Delhi Police used force, including lathi charges and tear gas, to stop a student-led 'Chalo Sansad' march toward Parliament, prompting Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge to describe the response as 'a crushing of a peaceful democratic protest' and to announce he would not celebrate his birthday in light of it. Rahul Gandhi and other senior leaders, including chief ministers from opposition-governed states, were subsequently detained by police for hours before being released, with visuals showing Gandhi resisting detention circulating widely on Indian media. Union Minister Dharmendra Pradhan accused the opposition of 'shamelessly exploiting students as political tools to manufacture disruption' during Parliament's Monsoon Session, while Gandhi and allied MPs said House Speaker Om Birla had told them he would need government 'permission' before allowing a parliamentary debate on the issue, a claim the ruling party has not directly confirmed. The standoff reflects broader opposition grievances over the conduct of the Monsoon Session, including earlier internet shutdowns and a partial sealing of Parliament during Monday's demonstrations. For CSS and PMS aspirants, the episode is a relevant case study in the functioning of opposition politics, parliamentary accountability mechanisms, and civil liberties enforcement within India's democratic framework, offering comparative material for questions on democratic backsliding and executive-legislature relations in South Asia.

B. Key Arguments

- Opposition protests over the alleged NEET-UG 2026 paper leak intensified in New Delhi during July 20-21, 2026.
- Rahul Gandhi, Priyanka Gandhi Vadra and Akhilesh Yadav staged a sit-in near PM Modi's residence.
- Delhi Police used lathi charges and tear gas to stop a student-led 'Chalo Sansad' march toward Parliament.
- Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge described the police response as 'a crushing of a peaceful democratic protest'.
- Rahul Gandhi and other senior opposition leaders, including two chief ministers, were detained for hours before release.
- Union Minister Dharmendra Pradhan accused the opposition of exploiting students for political disruption.
- Opposition MPs alleged the Lok Sabha Speaker said he needed government permission to allow a parliamentary debate.
- The protests occurred during Parliament's Monsoon Session amid broader opposition grievances over its conduct.
- Reports referenced earlier internet shutdowns and a partial sealing of Parliament during the demonstrations.
- The episode has intensified opposition unity within the India bloc, spanning Congress, Samajwadi Party and allied parties.

C. Critical Analysis

Causes: The protests were triggered by allegations of a paper leak in the NEET-UG 2026 medical entrance examination, a recurring flashpoint in Indian politics given the exam's high stakes for millions of students, compounded by opposition anger at the government's handling of student protests and its perceived reluctance to allow a full parliamentary debate on the issue.

Implications: The standoff highlights ongoing tensions between India's executive and opposition over parliamentary accountability mechanisms, and raises questions about the proportionality of police responses to student-led protests. It

also demonstrates the India bloc's capacity for coordinated cross-party mobilisation, potentially shaping opposition strategy ahead of future electoral contests.

Challenges: Verifying competing claims about the scale of the paper leak, the necessity of police force used against protesters, and the accuracy of claims regarding the Speaker's position on debate permissions is difficult amid highly polarised domestic media coverage. The episode also risks further eroding trust in India's standardised testing and parliamentary accountability institutions if left unaddressed.

Opportunities: A transparent government inquiry into the alleged NEET-UG irregularities, coupled with a substantive parliamentary debate, could help restore public and opposition confidence in both the examination system and India's legislative accountability mechanisms. It also offers regional democracies a comparative reference point on managing student-led protest movements without escalation.

Way Forward: Political analysts suggest that an independent investigation into the alleged paper leak, together with a formal parliamentary debate as demanded by the opposition, would be the most direct route to defusing the standoff. Restraint in policing student protests and clearer communication from parliamentary leadership on debate scheduling would also help lower tensions during future sessions.

D. Statistics & Facts

Jul 20-21 Peak Protest Dates	64 MPs Reportedly Detained (per prior similar protest reports)	200+ Congress Workers Detained	2026 NEET-UG Exam Year in Question
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- Protests intensified in New Delhi during July 20-21, 2026 over the alleged NEET-UG 2026 paper leak.
- Delhi Police used force, including lathi charges and tear gas, against the student-led 'Chalo Sansad' march.
- Rahul Gandhi, Priyanka Gandhi Vadra and Akhilesh Yadav were among leaders present at the PM residence sit-in.
- Rahul Gandhi was detained and taken to Chhatrasal Stadium; Priyanka Gandhi was taken to Mandir Marg police station.
- Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge announced he would forgo his birthday celebration in protest.
- India bloc parties involved included Congress, Samajwadi Party, Shiv Sena (UBT) and Left parties.
- Union Minister Jitendra Singh held over 15 minutes of talks with Rahul Gandhi that did not resolve the standoff.
- Opposition MPs said Speaker Om Birla cited the need for government 'permission' to allow a debate.
- The protest took place during the second day of Parliament's Monsoon Session, 2026.
- Internet shutdowns and a partial parliamentary sealing were reported around the initial Monday demonstrations.

E. Quotable Quotes

"We have witnessed a crushing of a peaceful democratic protest."

— Mallikarjun Kharge, Indian National Congress President (July 21, 2026)

F. Examiner's Perspective

Paper	Likely Angle
Essay	Opposition Politics and Executive Accountability in South Asian Democracies.
Current Affairs	Discuss the significance of India's 2026 NEET-UG protest standoff for democratic accountability.
Pakistan Affairs	Linked to Pakistan via comparative regional debate on civil liberties and opposition rights in South Asia.
Interview	What lessons can South Asian democracies draw from India's 2026 student protest standoff regarding proportionate policing?

G. Vocabulary Builder

Standoff	A situation in which no side is able to gain an advantage	Impasse	The protest developed into a prolonged political standoff.
Accountability	The obligation to answer for one's actions	Answerability	Opposition parties demanded government accountability on the exam leak.
Proportionality	An appropriate balance between response and provocation	Balance	Critics questioned the proportionality of the police response.
Mobilisation	The organisation of people for collective action	Organisation	The protest reflected significant opposition mobilisation.
Detain	To keep someone in official custody temporarily	Hold	Several leaders were detained for hours before release.
Coalition	An alliance of political parties or groups	Alliance	The India bloc coalition coordinated the protest response.
Session	A formal period during which a legislature meets	Sitting	The protest occurred during Parliament's Monsoon Session.
Irregularity	A deviation from standard or expected practice	Anomaly	Allegations of exam irregularity triggered the protests.
Polarised	Divided into sharply contrasting groups or opinions	Divided	Coverage of the episode remained highly polarised.
Erosion	The gradual wearing away or weakening of something	Weakening	Unaddressed grievances risk erosion of institutional trust.

H. CSS/PMS Complete Question Bank

MCQ: What triggered the July 2026 opposition protests near India's Prime Minister's residence?

- A. A fuel price hike
- B. The alleged NEET-UG 2026 paper leak
- C. A border dispute
- D. A currency devaluation

Correct Answer: B. The alleged NEET-UG 2026 paper leak

Pakistan Affairs Q1: Linked to Pakistan via a comparative regional lens on opposition rights and civil liberties in South Asian democracies.

Pakistan Affairs Q2: Linked to Pakistan via parallel debates on parliamentary accountability mechanisms in Islamabad and New Delhi.

Current Affairs Q1: Discuss the role of student movements in shaping political accountability in South Asia.

Current Affairs Q2: Examine the balance between public order enforcement and the right to peaceful protest.

Short Question (20 marks): Write a note (20 marks) on the significance of parliamentary debate rights for opposition accountability.

Analytical Question: Analytically assess whether the 2026 NEET protest standoff reflects broader democratic strain in India.

Essay Topic: Streets and Chambers: The Interplay of Protest and Parliament in Democratic Accountability.

Further In-Depth Study

<https://m.thewire.in/article/politics/rahul-gandhi-leads-congress-protest-outside-pm-modis-residence-demanding-his-resignation/amp>
<https://www.tribuneindia.com/live-blog/delhi/cjp-parliament-march-live-updates-protests-to-continue-says-cjp-after-meeting-with-jp-nadda/>
<https://www.indiatvnews.com/news/india/cjp-protest-in-delhi-live-updates-demonstrators-return-to-jantar-mantar-several-detained-police-personnel-injured-reactions-visuals-2026-07-21-1048882>



INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS

TRUMP'S GLOBAL TARIFF RESET:
60 COUNTRIES FACE NEW DUTIES

A NEW ERA OF PROTECTIONISM AND ECONOMIC REALIGNMENT

Former U.S. President Donald Trump has announced a sweeping tariff reset, imposing new duties on imports from 60 countries, aiming to protect American industries, reduce trade deficits, and reshape global trade dynamics in his potential return to power.

AMERICA FIRST
FAIR TRADE
STRONGER ECONOMY



WHAT IS THE TARIFF RESET?



A new round of import tariffs announced on goods from 60 countries.



Tariffs range from 10% to 50%, depending on trade practices and relations.



Aims to protect U.S. jobs, industries, and national security.



Part of Trump's "America First Trade Policy" to reduce reliance on foreign goods.

KEY HIGHLIGHTS



Tariffs imposed on 60 countries, including major trade partners.



Higher duties on countries with large trade surpluses with the U.S.



Targeting key sectors: steel, aluminum, autos, electronics, pharmaceuticals, and more.



Countries warned of retaliation if unfair trade continues.



Implementation in phases starting August 1, 2026.

EXAMPLES OF NEW TARIFF RATES

COUNTRY / REGION	NEW TARIFF RATE
China	25%
European Union	20%
India	26%
Japan	20%
South Korea	15%
Vietnam	20%
Mexico	20%
Brazil	15%
South Africa	30%
Others (various)	10% – 50%

TRUMP'S JUSTIFICATION



Protect American manufacturing and workers.



Correct unfair trade imbalances and exploitative practices.



Reduce massive trade deficits and boost economic sovereignty.



Strengthen national security by reducing dependence on rivals.

“For too long, other countries have taken advantage of the United States. Those days are over.”

— Donald J. Trump

POTENTIAL IMPACTS



Higher costs for imported goods; may lead to inflation.



Boost for domestic industries and job creation.



Risk of trade wars and retaliatory tariffs.



Consumers may face limited choices and higher prices.

GLOBAL REACTIONS



European Union: "Deeply concerned and evaluating response."



China: "Will take necessary counter measures to protect our interests."

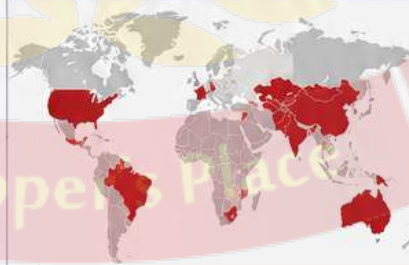


India: "Reviewing the impact; committed to national interest."



WTO: "Tariffs of this magnitude risk undermining global trade stability."

COUNTRIES MOST AFFECTED



Many emerging economies and key manufacturing hubs face the steepest tariffs, raising concerns over growth and exports.

WHAT'S NEXT?



Countries may negotiate to avoid or reduce tariffs.



Businesses to reassess supply chains and strategies.



Global trade landscape poised for major shifts.



U.S. election outcome will determine the policy's long-term future.

THE BIGGER PICTURE



Rising protectionism worldwide



Eroding trust in multilateral trade system



Shift toward bilateral deals and alliances



Economic nationalism on the rise

“This is not just about tariffs. It's about fairness, respect, and putting America first.”

— Donald J. Trump



ICEP's CSS WEEKLY
CURRENT AFFAIRS DIGEST FOR
CSS / PMS ASPIRANTS



ISSUE 10



COVERAGE: JULY 19 – JULY 25, 2026



LAHORE, PAKISTAN

Trump's Global Tariff Reset: 60 Countries Face New Duties Under Forced-Labour Rules

A. Executive Summary

The Trump administration's decision to impose new tariffs of 10 to 12.5 percent on 60 trading partners, effective July 24, 2026, marks the White House's first major step in rebuilding a near-global tariff wall after the US Supreme Court struck down its earlier 'reciprocal' duties of 10 to 50 percent in February 2026 for exceeding presidential authority under emergency-powers law. Unlike the invalidated measures, the new tariffs rely on Section 301 of the Trade Act of 1974 and are framed around forced-labour enforcement, with USTR Jamieson Greer arguing that the United States has enforced forced-labour import bans for nearly a century and that trading partners must now do the same. The order covers roughly 99.4 percent of US imports, with product-specific exemptions for goods such as oil, gas, fertiliser and select food items, and creates a two-tier structure: 17 economies deemed to have implemented or committed to forced-labour import bans, including the European Union, Taiwan, Pakistan, India, Bangladesh, Canada, the United Kingdom and Mexico, face the lower 10 percent rate, while 41 other economies, including China, Japan and South Korea in combination with existing most-favoured-nation tariffs, face the 12.5 percent tier. The move drew swift international criticism: Japan's government said it 'regretted' the decision, Australia's trade minister called the duties 'unjustified' and inconsistent with existing free trade commitments, and the US-based coalition We Pay the Tariffs argued the forced-labour justification was a legally convenient pretext to rebuild tariffs that could not otherwise survive judicial or legislative scrutiny. The measures follow a months-long USTR investigation and are widely viewed by trade lawyers as more resilient to future court challenges than the invalidated emergency-powers tariffs. For CSS and PMS aspirants, the episode illustrates the evolving legal architecture of American trade protectionism, the use of labour and human-rights framing as a durable justification for tariff policy, and the far-reaching implications for global supply chains and the multilateral trading system underpinned by the WTO.

B. Key Arguments

- New US tariffs of 10 to 12.5 percent on 60 trading partners took effect July 24, 2026.
- The measures rely on Section 301 of the Trade Act of 1974, distinct from the emergency-powers tariffs struck down by the Supreme Court in February 2026.
- USTR Jamieson Greer framed the tariffs as enforcing forced-labour import bans across trading partners.
- The order covers roughly 99.4 percent of US imports, with exemptions for select goods like oil, gas and fertiliser.
- Seventeen economies, including the EU, Taiwan, Pakistan, India, Bangladesh, Canada, the UK and Mexico, received the lower 10 percent rate.
- Forty-one other economies, including China, Japan and South Korea, face a combined 12.5 percent tariff tier.
- Japan's government said it regretted the decision; Australia's trade minister called the duties unjustified.
- A US small-business coalition argued the forced-labour justification is a pretext to rebuild legally vulnerable tariffs.
- The measures follow a months-long USTR investigation initially proposed in June 2026.
- Trade lawyers view the new tariffs as more resilient to legal challenge than the invalidated emergency-powers duties.

C. Critical Analysis

Causes: The Supreme Court's February 2026 ruling against Trump's broad emergency-powers tariffs forced the administration to find an alternative legal basis for its protectionist trade agenda. Section 301, paired with forced-labour enforcement, offered a framework grounded in existing statute and a politically resonant human-rights justification less vulnerable to being struck down.

Implications: The tariffs reshape global supply chains by raising costs across a huge share of US trade relationships simultaneously, with export-dependent developing economies facing renewed pressure on competitiveness even as they

navigate other simultaneous negotiations, such as Pakistan's parallel pursuit of a reciprocal trade deal and currency stabilisation facility. It also signals a durable shift in US trade policy toward statutory tools intended to survive future legal and political challenges.

Challenges: Critics argue that using forced-labour enforcement as a blanket justification across 60 diverse economies risks diluting the credibility of genuine labour-rights advocacy, while trading partners face the practical challenge of proving compliance with US labour standards to potentially secure future tariff relief. The scale of the measure also raises the risk of retaliatory trade actions and further strain on the rules-based multilateral trading system.

Opportunities: Countries willing to strengthen supply-chain labour compliance and transparency may find pathways to negotiate reduced tariff tiers, turning a defensive trade challenge into an opportunity to modernise labour standards and potentially improve access to other Western markets with similar requirements. The episode may also accelerate global efforts to establish clearer, internationally recognised forced-labour compliance benchmarks.

Way Forward: Trade analysts recommend affected countries pursue expedited bilateral compliance reviews with USTR backed by verifiable labour audits, while diversifying export markets to reduce dependence on any single trading partner. Longer term, strengthening multilateral trade dispute mechanisms through the WTO could help manage the recurring cycle of unilateral US tariff actions and legal challenges.

D. Statistics & Facts

60 Countries Covered	10-12.5% Tariff Range	99.4% Share of US Imports Covered	Feb 2026 Supreme Court Struck Down Prior Tariffs
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- New tariffs took effect at 12:01 a.m. EDT on Friday, July 24, 2026.
- The order covers 60 trading partners with duties of 10 to 12.5 percent.
- Seventeen economies received the 10 percent rate: Argentina, Bangladesh, Britain, Cambodia, Canada, Ecuador, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, India, Indonesia, Jordan, Malaysia, Mexico, Pakistan, Sri Lanka and Trinidad and Tobago.
- The EU, Taiwan, Japan, South Korea and Switzerland face rates totalling 10-12.5 percent combined with existing MFN tariffs.
- Thirty-eight to forty-one other economies, including China, face the 12.5 percent tier.
- The measure covers approximately 99.4 percent of total US imports.
- Exemptions apply to select goods including oil, gas, fertiliser and certain food items.
- The Supreme Court struck down Trump's earlier 10-50 percent 'reciprocal' tariffs in February 2026.
- A temporary 10 percent global tariff, imposed after that ruling, expired after 150 days on July 24, 2026.
- The new duties are based on Section 301 of the Trade Act of 1974.

E. Quotable Quotes

"The United States has had a forced labor import ban for nearly a century, and rigorously enforces it; it's well past time for our trading partners to do the same."

— Jamieson Greer, US Trade Representative (July 23, 2026)

F. Examiner's Perspective

Paper	Likely Angle
Essay	Protectionism Repackaged: Labour Rights and the New Politics of Global Tariffs.
Current Affairs	Discuss the global economic implications of the July 2026 US tariff order on 60 trading partners.
Pakistan Affairs	Linked to Pakistan via its direct exposure to the new US tariff as a major export destination.

Paper	Likely Angle
Interview	How should developing economies respond strategically to unilateral tariff actions justified on labour-rights grounds?

G. Vocabulary Builder

Protectionism	Economic policy restricting imports to protect domestic industry	Trade barrier policy	Critics see the new tariffs as a form of protectionism.
Statutory	Established or governed by law	Legal	The tariffs now rest on statutory Section 301 authority.
Retaliatory	Done in response to a perceived wrong, in kind	Reciprocal	Trading partners may consider retaliatory trade measures.
Compliance	Conformity with rules or standards	Conformity	Exporters must demonstrate labour compliance to avoid penalties.
Multilateral	Involving multiple countries or parties	Multi-party	The WTO underpins the multilateral trading system.
Benchmark	A standard used for comparison	Standard	Clearer forced-labour benchmarks could guide compliance.
Pretext	A reason given to conceal the true purpose	Excuse	Critics call the labour justification a legal pretext.
Resilient	Able to withstand or recover from difficulty	Durable	The new tariffs are considered more legally resilient.
Exemption	Freedom from an obligation or duty	Exception	Certain goods received tariff exemptions.
Diversify	To vary or broaden across different sources	Broaden	Countries are urged to diversify export markets.

H. CSS/PMS Complete Question Bank

MCQ: Under what US legal authority were the July 2026 tariffs on 60 countries imposed?

- A. IEEPA emergency powers
- B. Section 301 of the Trade Act of 1974
- C. The WTO Safeguards Agreement
- D. Executive Order 12345

Correct Answer: B. Section 301 of the Trade Act of 1974

Pakistan Affairs Q1: Linked to Pakistan via its assignment to the lower 10 percent tariff tier and its ongoing bilateral trade talks with Washington.

Pakistan Affairs Q2: Linked to Pakistan via the implications for its textile and apparel export competitiveness.

Current Affairs Q1: Discuss the evolution of US trade policy from IEEPA emergency tariffs to Section 301 forced-labour tariffs.

Current Affairs Q2: Examine the implications of unilateral tariff actions for the WTO-based multilateral trading system.

Short Question (20 marks): Write a note (20 marks) on the two-tier tariff structure introduced by the US in July 2026.

Analytical Question: Analytically evaluate whether forced-labour justifications for tariffs represent genuine policy or legal convenience.

Essay Topic: Trade Wars and the Erosion of the Rules-Based International Order.

Further In-Depth Study

<https://www.dawn.com/news/amp/2017941>

<https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2026/jul/23/trump-slaps-new-tariffs-60-trading-partners-backfilling-blanket/>

<https://abcnews.com/Business/trump-set-impose-sweeping-tariffs-60-trade-partners/story?id=135020049>



Section 1: National Affairs (25 Questions)

1. S&P Global upgraded Pakistan's long-term sovereign credit rating in July 2026 from 'B-' to which rating?

- A. BB-
- B. B
- C. CCC+
- D. BB+

Answer: B

2. Under the July 2026 US tariff order, what rate was applied to Pakistani exports?

- A. 19 percent
- B. 29 percent
- C. 10 percent
- D. 12.5 percent

Answer: C

3. Which AJK division was scheduled to vote first, on July 27, 2026?

- A. Poonch Division
- B. Muzaffarabad Division
- C. Mirpur Division
- D. Neelum Division

Answer: C

4. Which institution prepared Pakistan's draft National Data Governance Policy 2026?

- A. State Bank of Pakistan
- B. Pakistan Digital Authority
- C. FIA Cybercrime Wing
- D. NADRA

Answer: B

5. In which Balochistan district is Operation Al-Azm primarily concentrated?

- A. Quetta
- B. Mastung
- C. Gwadar
- D. Khuzdar

Answer: B

6. What was the primary demand of Pakistan's petroleum dealers in the July 2026 strike threat?

- A. Import licence reform
- B. Higher dealer profit margins

- C. Tax exemption
- D. Refinery subsidies

Answer: B

7. Who did Finance Minister Aurangzeb approach for a \$10 billion currency stabilisation facility?

- A. IMF Managing Director
- B. World Bank President
- C. US Treasury Secretary
- D. Saudi Finance Minister

Answer: C

8. What was Pakistan's foreign exchange reserve level as of end-June 2026?

- A. \$6.7 billion
- B. \$16.4 billion
- C. \$25.3 billion
- D. \$35 billion

Answer: C

9. What GDP growth rate did S&P project for Pakistan in FY2027?

- A. 2.1 percent
- B. 3.5 percent
- C. 5.0 percent
- D. 1.8 percent

Answer: B

10. Which three bilateral partners provided \$16.8 billion in deposits/swaps supporting Pakistan's reserves?

- A. UAE, Qatar, Kuwait
- B. China, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait
- C. UK, US, China
- D. Saudi Arabia, Iran, China

Answer: B

11. Under Pakistan's IMF programme, what is the size of the Extended Fund Facility approved in September 2024?

- A. \$3 billion
- B. \$7 billion
- C. \$10 billion
- D. \$12 billion

Answer: B

12. How many AJK Legislative Assembly general seats are being contested in the 2026 elections?

- A. 33
- B. 45
- C. 53
- D. 21

Answer: B

13. What is the 'once-only principle' in Pakistan's draft Data Governance Policy?

- A. Citizens vote only once
- B. Citizens need not resubmit the same data across departments
- C. Data is deleted after one use
- D. AI systems may only be audited once

Answer: B

14. What term does the Pakistani state use to describe India-backed elements of the Balochistan Liberation Army?

- A. Fitna al-Khwarij
- B. Fitna al-Hindustan
- C. Ghazab lil-Haq
- D. Al-Azm Brigade

Answer: B

15. What was the revised petrol price per litre in Pakistan effective July 23, 2026?

- A. Rs 300.00
- B. Rs 327.12
- C. Rs 350.50
- D. Rs 375.04

Answer: B

16. Which body will oversee Pakistan's National Data Governance Policy under the Digital Nation Pakistan Act 2025?

- A. PTA
- B. PDA (Pakistan Digital Authority)
- C. SECP
- D. NADRA

Answer: B

17. How many terrorists had been killed in Operation Al-Azm as of July 25, 2026?

- A. 6
- B. 10
- C. 13
- D. 20

Answer: C

18. What was Pakistan's previous S&P rating before the July 2026 upgrade?

- A. CCC+
- B. B-
- C. BB
- D. B+

Answer: B

19. APPPOA represents approximately how many petrol pumps nationwide?

- A. 5,000
- B. 10,000
- C. 15,000
- D. 20,000

Answer: C

20. Government debt-to-GDP in Pakistan stood at approximately what level at the time of the S&P upgrade?

- A. 45 percent
- B. 55 percent
- C. 68 percent
- D. 80 percent

Answer: C

21. Which minister requested the \$10 billion Exchange Stabilisation Support Facility from the US?

- A. Ishaq Dar
- B. Muhammad Aurangzeb
- C. Ali Pervaiz Malik
- D. Shaza Fatima Khawaja

Answer: B

22. How many constituencies does Poonch Division have in the 2026 AJK elections?

- A. 9
- B. 11
- C. 13
- D. 21

Answer: B

23. What deadline was set for Pakistan's Data Governance Policy public consultation?

- A. June 10, 2026
- B. July 10, 2026
- C. August 10, 2026
- D. May 10, 2026

Answer: B

24. Which minister led negotiations with petrol pump owners to defer the July 2026 strike?

- A. Ahsan Iqbal
- B. Ali Pervaiz Malik
- C. Ishaq Dar
- D. Mohsin Naqvi

Answer: B

25. Which minister commended security forces during Operation Al-Azm in Balochistan?

- A. Khawaja Asif
- B. Mohsin Naqvi

- C. Ahsan Iqbal
- D. Ishaq Dar

Answer: B

Section 2: International Affairs (25 Questions)

26. Which two Saudi Red Sea cities were targeted by Houthi missile and drone strikes on July 25, 2026?

- A. Jeddah and Mecca
- B. Jizan and Yanbu
- C. Dammam and Riyadh
- D. Medina and Taif

Answer: B

27. When did the 2026 Iran war begin?

- A. January 15, 2026
- B. February 28, 2026
- C. April 8, 2026
- D. July 21, 2026

Answer: B

28. Where was the 2026 SCO Council of Foreign Ministers meeting held?

- A. Beijing, China
- B. Cholpon-Ata, Kyrgyzstan
- C. Tashkent, Uzbekistan
- D. Islamabad, Pakistan

Answer: B

29. What facility did Amnesty International say was struck in Kabul on March 16, 2026?

- A. A military barracks
- B. A drug addiction treatment centre
- C. A police station
- D. A refugee camp

Answer: B

30. Which Jewish holiday coincided with the July 23, 2026 mass incursion into Al-Aqsa Mosque?

- A. Yom Kippur
- B. Tisha B'Av
- C. Passover
- D. Rosh Hashanah

Answer: B

31. What triggered the July 2026 opposition protests near India's Prime Minister's residence?

- A. A fuel price hike
- B. The alleged NEET-UG 2026 paper leak
- C. A border dispute

D. A currency devaluation

Answer: B

32. Under what US legal authority were the July 2026 tariffs on 60 countries imposed?

A. IEEPA emergency powers

B. Section 301 of the Trade Act of 1974

C. The WTO Safeguards Agreement

D. Executive Order 12345

Answer: B

33. Which Iranian leader was killed in the US-Israeli strikes that began the 2026 Iran war?

A. Hassan Rouhani

B. Ali Khamenei

C. Ebrahim Raisi

D. Abbas Araghchi

Answer: B

34. Approximately what share of global oil passes through the Strait of Hormuz?

A. 5 percent

B. 10 percent

C. 20 percent

D. 35 percent

Answer: C

35. Who brokered the temporary April 8, 2026 ceasefire in the Iran war?

A. Saudi Arabia

B. Pakistan

C. Qatar

D. Turkey

Answer: B

36. According to UNAMA, how many civilians were killed in the March 2026 Kabul strike investigated by Amnesty International?

A. 122

B. 150

C. 269

D. 300

Answer: C

37. Which munition did Amnesty International's weapons experts identify in the Kabul strike?

A. JDAM bomb

B. Takbir precision-guided bomb

C. Hellfire missile

D. Cruise missile

Answer: B

38. How many countries jointly issued the statement condemning Israeli actions at Al-Aqsa Mosque in July 2026?

- A. Five
- B. Six
- C. Eight
- D. Ten

Answer: C

39. What is the total area of the Al-Aqsa Mosque/Al-Haram Al-Sharif compound?

- A. 44 dunams
- B. 144 dunams
- C. 244 dunams
- D. 344 dunams

Answer: B

40. Which body administers Jerusalem's Islamic holy sites under the recognised custodianship arrangement?

- A. Egyptian Ministry of Awqaf
- B. Jordanian Ministry of Awqaf and Islamic Affairs
- C. Saudi Ministry of Hajj
- D. UN Trusteeship Council

Answer: B

41. Who is the US Trade Representative who announced the July 2026 tariff order?

- A. Robert Lighthizer
- B. Katherine Tai
- C. Jamieson Greer
- D. Scott Bessent

Answer: C

42. How many trading partners were covered under the US tariff order effective July 24, 2026?

- A. 40
- B. 50
- C. 60
- D. 70

Answer: C

43. Which two Congress leaders were detained during the July 2026 protests in New Delhi?

- A. Sonia Gandhi and Rahul Gandhi
- B. Rahul Gandhi and Priyanka Gandhi Vadra
- C. Mallikarjun Kharge and Akhilesh Yadav
- D. Rahul Gandhi and Akhilesh Yadav

Answer: B

44. Who is Pakistan's Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister who attended the SCO CFM meeting?

- A. Bilawal Bhutto Zardari

- B. Khawaja Asif
- C. Ishaq Dar
- D. Mohsin Naqvi

Answer: C

45. What theme was adopted for the SCO's 25th anniversary Council of Foreign Ministers meeting?

- A. Unity in Diversity
- B. Together Towards Sustainable Peace, Development, and Prosperity
- C. One Region, One Future
- D. Connectivity and Growth

Answer: B

46. What US naval and security measure was established to protect shipping through the Strait of Hormuz?

- A. Persian Gulf Strait Authority
- B. Hormuz Trade Council
- C. Gulf Cooperation Fleet
- D. Red Sea Task Force

Answer: A

47. What did the Saudi-led coalition strike in Hodeida in response to Houthi attacks on Saudi tankers?

- A. An airport
- B. The port and telecommunications infrastructure
- C. A hospital
- D. A university

Answer: B

48. Which US administration official was cited discussing a plan to alter Al-Aqsa's management structure?

- A. Marco Rubio
- B. Jared Kushner
- C. Scott Bessent
- D. Mike Pompeo

Answer: B

49. What examination is at the centre of India's July 2026 opposition protests?

- A. UPSC Civil Services Exam
- B. NEET-UG medical entrance exam
- C. JEE engineering exam
- D. CAT management exam

Answer: B

50. What organisation published the July 2026 investigation into the Kabul rehabilitation centre strike?

- A. Human Rights Watch
- B. Amnesty International
- C. International Crisis Group

D. UNAMA

Answer: B

REPORTS & INDICES IN THE NEWS

S&P Sovereign Rating Report (Pakistan)	S&P Global Ratings	Upgraded Pakistan to 'B'; benchmark for creditworthiness and IMF programme credibility.
Agricultural Census 2024 (National Report)	Pakistan Bureau of Statistics	First fully digital farm/livestock census; reveals shrinking, fragmenting farms.
National Data Governance Policy 2026 (Draft)	Ministry of IT & Telecommunication / PDA	First unified framework for government data, privacy and AI oversight.
2026 Iran War Ceasefire Documentation	Wikipedia / International Mediators	Tracks Pakistan-brokered ceasefire efforts and their collapse/renewal attempts.
Amnesty International Investigation: Omid Centre Strike	Amnesty International	Details alleged IHL violations in the March 2026 Kabul airstrike.
USTR Section 301 Forced Labour Tariff Determination	Office of the US Trade Representative	Legal basis for the July 2026 tariff order on 60 countries.

ORGANISATIONS IN THE NEWS

Pakistan Digital Authority (PDA): Federal body established in 2024 overseeing digital public infrastructure and the new Data Governance Policy.

Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO): Ten-member Eurasian political, economic and security bloc; held its 25th-anniversary CFM in July 2026.

Amnesty International: London-based human rights organisation; investigated the March 2026 Kabul airstrike as a possible war crime.

All Pakistan Petroleum Pump Owners Association (APPPOA): Represents roughly 15,000 petrol pumps; deferred a nationwide strike in July 2026.

Office of the US Trade Representative (USTR): US agency that designed and announced the July 2026 forced-labour tariff order.

UN Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA): UN body that verified casualty figures from the March 2026 Kabul strike.

Election Commission of Azad Jammu and Kashmir (AJKEC): Body overseeing the phased 2026 AJK Legislative Assembly elections.

PERSONALITIES IN THE NEWS

Muhammad Aurangzeb	Finance Minister, Pakistan	Sought a \$10 billion currency stabilisation facility from the US Treasury.
Ishaq Dar	Deputy PM & Foreign Minister, Pakistan	Led Pakistan's delegation to the SCO Council of Foreign Ministers meeting.
Mohsin Naqvi	Federal Interior Minister, Pakistan	Oversaw and commended Operation Al-Azm in Balochistan.

Jamieson Greer	US Trade Representative	Announced the July 2026 forced-labour tariff order on 60 countries.
Scott Bessent	US Treasury Secretary	Received Pakistan's request for a \$10 billion currency stabilisation facility.
Justice (retd) Ghulam Mustafa Mughal	Chief Election Commissioner, AJK	Announced the revised three-phase AJK election schedule.
Isabelle Lassee	Amnesty International Acting Regional Director, South Asia	Led findings on the Kabul rehabilitation centre strike investigation.
Rahul Gandhi	Leader of the Opposition, Lok Sabha, India	Led opposition protests over the alleged NEET-UG 2026 paper leak.
Ali Pervaiz Malik	Federal Minister for Petroleum, Pakistan	Negotiated the deferral of the July 2026 petroleum dealers' strike.
Shaza Fatima Khawaja	Federal Minister for IT & Telecommunication, Pakistan	Oversaw the draft National Data Governance Policy 2026.

CONSOLIDATED VOCABULARY (140 WORDS)

Sovereign	Relating to a national government's authority	National	N-01
Consolidation	Combining or strengthening	Reinforcement	N-01
Speculative-grade	Below investment-grade credit quality	Non-investment-grade	N-01
Bilateral	Involving two parties	Two-sided	N-01
Disbursement	The act of paying out funds	Payout	N-01
Rollover	Renewing a loan instead of repaying it	Renewal	N-01
Premium	An extra amount paid for risk or value	Surcharge	N-01
Resilience	Capacity to recover from difficulty	Toughness	N-01
Mobilisation	Organising resources for use	Assembly	N-01
Vulnerability	Susceptibility to harm	Weakness	N-01
Reciprocal	Given or done in return	Mutual	N-02
Statutory	Required or permitted by law	Legal	N-02
Invalidate	To make legally void	Nullify	N-02
Levy	A tax or duty imposed	Duty	N-02
Compliance	Acting in accordance with rules	Conformity	N-02
Exemption	Freedom from an obligation	Exception	N-02
Verification	Confirming the truth of something	Confirmation	N-02
Margin	The difference between cost and selling price	Profit margin	N-02
Diversify	To vary or expand	Broaden	N-02
Leverage	Power to influence outcomes	Influence	N-02
Phased	Carried out in stages	Staggered	N-03
Constituency	An electoral district	District	N-03
Nomination	Formal proposal of a candidate	Candidacy filing	N-03
Deployment	Positioning of resources or forces	Positioning	N-03
Credibility	The quality of being trusted	Trustworthiness	N-03
Salience	Prominence or importance	Prominence	N-03
Staggered	Arranged to occur at different times	Phased	N-03
Interim	Provisional or temporary	Provisional	N-03

Bloc	A group acting together for a common purpose	Coalition	N-03
Representativeness	The degree to which something reflects a wider group	Inclusiveness	N-03
Custodian	A person or body that holds something in trust	Trustee	N-04
Explainability	The quality of being understandable in reasoning	Interpretability	N-04
Registry	An official list or record	Ledger	N-04
Surveillance	Close monitoring of behaviour or activity	Monitoring	N-04
Consultation	The process of seeking input or opinions	Deliberation	N-04
Framework	A structured system of rules or ideas	Structure	N-04
Redress	Remedy for a wrong or grievance	Remedy	N-04
Opacity	Lack of transparency	Obscurity	N-04
Notify	To formally announce as legally effective	Enact	N-04
Safeguard	A measure to protect against harm	Protection	N-04
Insurgency	An organised rebellion against authority	Uprising	N-05
Intimidation	Frightening someone to influence their behaviour	Coercion	N-05
Sanctuary	A place offering protection or refuge	Safe haven	N-05
Kinetic	Involving direct physical force or combat	Combative	N-05
Facilitator	One who assists or enables an activity	Enabler	N-05
Eradicate	To eliminate completely	Eliminate	N-05
Separatist	Advocating separation from a larger political unit	Secessionist	N-05
Coordination	Organised joint action	Cooperation	N-05
Prosecution	Legal proceedings against an accused person	Legal action	N-05
Porous	Allowing passage through, not fully sealed	Permeable	N-05
Margin	Difference between cost and selling price	Profit margin	N-06
Quota	A fixed allocation or limit	Allocation	N-06
Volatility	Tendency to change rapidly and unpredictably	Instability	N-06
Pass-through	Transfer of cost changes to consumers	Cost transfer	N-06
Subsidy	Financial support from government to reduce cost	Financial aid	N-06
Downstream	Later stages of a supply or production chain	Later-stage	N-06
Profiteering	Making excessive profit unfairly	Overcharging	N-06
Deadlock	A situation where no agreement can be reached	Impasse	N-06
Formula-based	Determined by a fixed calculation method	Rule-based	N-06
Reroute	To send along a different path	Redirect	N-06
Stabilisation	The act of making something steady or secure	Steadying	N-07
Buffer	A cushion against shocks or shortfalls	Cushion	N-07
Readout	An official summary of a meeting's outcome	Summary	N-07
Preliminary	Coming before the main matter; introductory	Initial	N-07
Diversify	To vary or spread across different sources	Broaden	N-07
Speculative	Based on conjecture rather than certainty	Conjectural	N-07
Engagement	Involvement or participation with another party	Involvement	N-07
Milestone	A significant point of progress	Benchmark	N-07
Broker	An intermediary who arranges agreements	Mediator	N-07
Momentum	The force gained by continued development	Impetus	N-07
Retaliation	An act of revenge for a prior action	Reprisal	I-01
Anomaly	A deviation from what is normal	Irregularity	I-01
Corroborate	To confirm or support with evidence	Substantiate	I-01

Intercept	To stop something before it reaches its target	Block	I-01
Asymmetric	Involving unequal or unconventional means of conflict	Unbalanced	I-01
Flashpoint	A point at which conflict may suddenly erupt	Trigger point	I-01
Leverage	The use of influence to achieve an outcome	Influence	I-01
Delink	To separate or disconnect	Decouple	I-01
Spillover	The extension of effects beyond an original area	Overflow	I-01
Multinational	Involving several nations	International	I-01
Blockade	A military blocking of access to a place	Siege	I-02
Chokepoint	A strategically vital narrow passage	Bottleneck	I-02
Mediator	A neutral party who helps resolve a dispute	Intermediary	I-02
De-escalation	The reduction of conflict intensity	Cooling down	I-02
Multi-front	Involving several separate areas of conflict	Multi-theatre	I-02
Verifiable	Able to be confirmed as true	Confirmable	I-02
Truce	A temporary agreement to stop fighting	Ceasefire	I-02
Diffuse	Spread out over a wide area	Dispersed	I-02
Escort	Protective accompaniment	Convoy protection	I-02
Existential	Relating to survival or existence itself	Survival-related	I-02
Multilateral	Involving several parties or nations	Multi-party	I-03
Chairmanship	The role of presiding over an organisation	Presidency	I-03
Consensus	General agreement among a group	Unanimity	I-03
Connectivity	Linkage or interconnection, especially of trade routes	Interlinkage	I-03
Cohesion	The state of forming a unified whole	Unity	I-03
Bilateral	Involving two parties directly	Two-sided	I-03
Flashpoint	A point where conflict may erupt	Trigger point	I-03
Rhetoric	Persuasive or symbolic language, often without binding action	Language	I-03
Corridor	A route facilitating trade or transit	Route	I-03
Rotating	Changing position in a regular sequence	Alternating	I-03
Proportionality	A legal principle balancing military necessity against civilian harm	Balance	I-04
Distinction	The IHL requirement to distinguish combatants from civilians	Differentiation	I-04
Precaution	Care taken to prevent unnecessary harm	Caution	I-04
Munition	Military weapons and ammunition	Ordnance	I-04
Sanctuary	A place offering safety or protection	Refuge	I-04
Accountability	Being answerable for one's actions	Responsibility	I-04
Verification	The process of confirming accuracy or truth	Confirmation	I-04
Impartial	Not favouring one side over another	Unbiased	I-04
Jurisdiction	The authority to interpret and apply the law	Legal authority	I-04
Culpability	Responsibility for wrongdoing	Blameworthiness	I-04
Incursion	A sudden invasion or entry into a territory	Intrusion	I-05
Custodianship	The role of guardian or caretaker	Guardianship	I-05
Status quo	The existing state of affairs	Current situation	I-05
Sovereignty	Supreme authority over a territory	Dominion	I-05
Occupying power	A state exercising control over an occupied territory	Occupier	I-05
Provocation	An action intended to provoke a reaction	Incitement	I-05

Endowment	Property or funds set aside for a religious or charitable purpose	Waqf	I-05
Extremist	Holding radical or immoderate views	Radical	I-05
Normalisation	The establishment of formal diplomatic relations	Rapprochement	I-05
Custodial	Relating to guardianship or protective responsibility	Protective	I-05
Standoff	A situation in which no side is able to gain an advantage	Impasse	I-06
Accountability	The obligation to answer for one's actions	Answerability	I-06
Proportionality	An appropriate balance between response and provocation	Balance	I-06
Mobilisation	The organisation of people for collective action	Organisation	I-06
Detain	To keep someone in official custody temporarily	Hold	I-06
Coalition	An alliance of political parties or groups	Alliance	I-06
Session	A formal period during which a legislature meets	Sitting	I-06
Irregularity	A deviation from standard or expected practice	Anomaly	I-06
Polarised	Divided into sharply contrasting groups or opinions	Divided	I-06
Erosion	The gradual wearing away or weakening of something	Weakening	I-06
Protectionism	Economic policy restricting imports to protect domestic industry	Trade barrier policy	I-07
Statutory	Established or governed by law	Legal	I-07
Retaliatory	Done in response to a perceived wrong, in kind	Reciprocal	I-07
Compliance	Conformity with rules or standards	Conformity	I-07
Multilateral	Involving multiple countries or parties	Multi-party	I-07
Benchmark	A standard used for comparison	Standard	I-07
Pretext	A reason given to conceal the true purpose	Excuse	I-07
Resilient	Able to withstand or recover from difficulty	Durable	I-07
Exemption	Freedom from an obligation or duty	Exception	I-07
Diversify	To vary or broaden across different sources	Broaden	I-07

20 ESSAY TOPICS FOR PRACTICE

1. Sovereign Debt and Development: Can Credit Rating Upgrades Translate into Inclusive Growth?
2. Trade, Labour and Power: The Politics of Twenty-First Century Tariffs.
3. Democracy Under Security Constraints: Balancing Free Elections and Public Safety.
4. Governing the Algorithm: The Case for AI Regulation in Public Administration.
5. Beyond the Gun: Rethinking Counter-Insurgency Strategy in Pakistan.
6. Pricing Power: The Political Economy of Fuel Regulation in Developing Economies.
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8. Energy Chokepoints and Global Security in an Age of Proxy Conflict.
9. Chokepoints and Conflict: The Geopolitics of Strategic Waterways in the Twenty-First Century.
10. Regionalism in the Twenty-First Century: The Promise and Limits of Multilateral Organisations.
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12. Sacred Geography and Global Politics: The Enduring Dispute Over Jerusalem.

13. Streets and Chambers: The Interplay of Protest and Parliament in Democratic Accountability.
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15. Pakistan's Path to Economic Stability: Reform, Rating and Resilience.
16. The Role of Multilateral Diplomacy in De-escalating Regional Conflicts.
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