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Turkiye backs stability plan as PM seeks global action to stem terror

• Calls for lasting ceasefire, humanitarian access and reconstruction in Gaza • Meets Iranian president; cites mutual support during external aggression • Holds informal interactions with Putin and Erdogan, Tajik and Kyrgyz presidents

By Syed Irfan Raza

ISLAMABAD: Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan has expressed Ankara's readiness to contribute to a mechanism established to maintain stability amid 'extended ceasefire' between Pakistan and Afghanistan, after Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif at an international forum on Friday urged the global community to press the Afghan Taliban to honour their international obligations and curb terrorist groups operating from Afghan soil.

President Erdogan made the offer during a meeting with PM Shehbaz on the sidelines of the international forum held in Turkmenistan, where the premier also held meetings with Russian President Vladimir Putin, Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian, Tajikistan President Emomali Rahmon and Kyrgyzstan President Sadyr Japarov.

Addressing the event dedicated to the International Year of Peace and Trust 2025, the International Day of Neutrality and the anniversary of Turkmenistan's permanent neutrality, PM Shehbaz said

peaceful dispute resolution was "a cornerstone" of Pakistan's foreign policy. In this regard, he also cited Pakistan's support for the Gaza Peace Plan and its subsequent endorsement by the UN Security Council.

Pakistan began the year by taking its seat as a non-permanent member of the UN Security Council, where it was working to uphold global peace and security, he said.

Erdogan pushes Putin on 'limited ceasefire' at ports, energy facilities: Page 11

"While we persevere in this quest for peace, the scourge of terrorism is, however, raising its head yet again, and this time, unfortunately, from Afghan soil," he said, urging the international community to press the Taliban government to fulfil its commitments and rein in terrorist elements operating from its territory.

PM Shehbaz expressed gratitude to Qatar, Turkiye, Saudi Arabia, Iran and the United Arab Emirates for their efforts in

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Gaza force deployment expected in early 2026

• International Stabilisation Force 'won't fight Hamas'; Indonesia says it is preparing to deploy 20,000 troops for health, construction-related tasks • Muslim bloc foreign ministers back UNRWA amid talk of 'terror designation'

WASHINGTON: International troops could be deployed in the Gaza Strip as early as next month to form a UN-authorized stabilisation force, two US officials told Reuters, but it remains unclear how Hamas will be disarmed.

The officials, speaking on condition of anonymity, said the International Stabilisation Force (ISF) would not fight Hamas. They said lots of countries had expressed interest in contributing and US officials are currently working out the size of the ISF, composition, housing, training and rules of engagement.

An American two-star general is being considered to lead the ISF but no decisions have been made, the officials said.

Deployment of the force is a key part of the next phase of US President Donald Trump's Gaza peace plan. Under the first phase, a fragile ceasefire in the two-year war began on October 10 and Hamas has released hostages and Israel has freed detained Palestinians.

"There is a lot of quiet planning

that's going on behind the scenes right now for phase two of the peace deal," White House spokesperson Karoline Leavitt told reporters on Thursday. "We want to ensure an enduring and lasting peace." Indonesia has said it is prepared to deploy up to 20,000 troops to take on health and construction-related tasks in Gaza.

"It is still in the planning and preparation stages," said Rico Sirait, spokesperson of Indonesian Defence Ministry. "We are now preparing the organisational structure of the forces to be deployed."

Demilitarising Gaza

The Security Council authorised the ISF to work alongside newly trained and vetted Palestinian police to stabilise security "by ensuring the process of demilitarising the Gaza Strip, including the destruction and prevention of rebuilding of the military, terror, and offensive infrastructure, as well as the

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PM SHEHBAZ Sharif is pictured during a meeting with Russian President Vladimir Putin, Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan and Turkmen leader Serdar Berdimuhamedov, on the sidelines of a multilateral summit in Ashgabat.—Dawn

Binance, HTX get initial nod to set up local units in Pakistan

MoU signed with Binance to explore 'tokenisation' of up to \$2bn of assets

By Khaleeq Kiani

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan on Friday gave initial clearance for Binance and HTX, two major global cryptocurrency exchanges, to register with regulators to set up local subsidiaries and begin preparations for full exchange licence applications, the Pakistan Virtual Assets Regulatory Authority (PVARA) said.

The PVARA said it had issued early approvals to Binance and HTX after reviewing their governance and compliance controls. The clearances allow them to register on the Anti-Money Laundering system, set up local units and prepare full applications.

PVARA Chairman Bilal bin Saqib said the clearances kick off Pakistan's phased licensing process and signalled that compliance strength will determine which exchanges move ahead.

The initiative comes as Pakistan speeds up a major digital-finance overhaul in just a few months, creating the Pakistan Crypto Council (PCC) and establishing the PVARA, while drafting a formal licensing regime.

Pakistan ranks as the world's third-largest crypto market by retail activity, Mr Saqib said at Binance Blockchain Week Dubai 2025 earlier this week.

A central bank digital currency pilot and a Virtual Assets Act are also planned for 2025.

The PCC signed a letter of intent with US-based World Liberty Financial to explore stablecoin use, tokenisation and other digital-asset infrastructure, the finance

ministry said in April.

MoU with Binance

Also on Friday, the Ministry of Finance signed a memorandum of understanding (MoU) with Binance Investments Co Ltd, a global blockchain and digital asset technology company, to explore the use of emerging financial technologies in Pakistan's capital markets and enhance access for international investors.

The MoU was signed by Federal Minister for Finance and Revenue Muhammad Aurangzeb and Binance co-chief executive Richard Teng, in the presence of Binance CEO Changpeng Zhao, the ministry said in a statement.

According to the statement, the MoU establishes a framework for exploring potential collaboration on the tokenisation and blockchain-based distribution of Pakistan's real-world and sovereign assets, including government bonds, treasury bills, commodity reserves and other federally owned assets.

Subject to applicable laws, policies and regulatory approvals, the initiative may involve assets of up to \$2 billion, with the objective of enhancing liquidity, transparency and access to international markets.

Under the proposed arrangement, Binance and its affiliates may provide technical expertise, advisory support, training and capacity building to help Pakistan assess and adopt modern, compliant blockchain infrastructure.

The collaboration aims to explore secure and transparent digital platforms that could facilitate broader participation by international investors, while fully respecting Pakistan's regulatory framework and sovereign control.

Mr Aurangzeb described the MoU as a strong signal of Pakistan's reform trajectory. "This is a very strong

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Nawaz asks premier to consider NFC share for AJK, GB

Says both regions must have the capacity to utilise funds

By Zulqernain Tahir

LAHORE: PML-N President and former prime minister Nawaz Sharif on Friday urged his younger brother, Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif, to allocate funds for Azad Jammu and Kashmir (AJK) and Gilgit-Baltistan (GB) in line with the National Finance Commission (NFC) award.

The remarks come ahead of elections, which are due to be held in both territories early next year.

The elder Sharif's call for including AJK and GB in the NFC formula is significant, as smaller provinces have previously opposed similar proposals from the Centre. The idea was formally raised when NFC talks began under then prime minister Imran Khan, while current Foreign Minister Ishaq Dar has also supported the proposal in the past to ease the federal government's fiscal burden.

"Funds should be given to Azad Kashmir and Gilgit-Baltistan under the NFC award. My message should be conveyed to the prime minister, and I will also speak to Shehbaz Sharif in this regard," Mr Sharif said while meeting party leaders to discuss preparations for the polls.

"A certain amount must be given every year to both Azad Kashmir and GB. This is very important," he said, adding that the two regions must have the capacity to utilise the funds.

He recalled that AJK and GB had not been able to fully utilise federal funding in the past. "They need to know how to spend that money. The way I wanted such funds utilised did not happen," he said. Mr Sharif also asked party members to submit applications for election tickets in AJK and GB by Dec 31.

"We will decide who will be awarded the tickets on merit in AJK and GB, as we do in other provinces," he said. "We will not tolerate infighting over tickets. Anyone involved will be excluded from the process."

He said that after applications were received, he would visit the two regions and meet candidates before finalising nominations.

Mr Sharif also praised his daughter, Punjab Chief Minister Maryam Nawaz, for launching initiatives aimed at public welfare. He cited projects such as cancer hospitals, model villages and the metro bus system.

During the NFC meeting last week, the federal government proposed mobilising additional consolidated revenues amounting to more than five per cent of GDP over the next three years (about Rs6.5 trillion a year at the current exchange rate).

The proposal was floated during the much-delayed inaugural meeting, which also sought legal opinion on whether federal expenditure priorities could bind the provinces.

Participants told journalists outside the Ministry of Finance that there was no demand to reduce the provincial share in the divisible pool from the existing 57.5 per cent, as had been speculated, and that there was no discussion on altering responsibilities, as these subjects fall under the Council of Common Interests (CCI) and the National Economic Council (NEC).

They said the fiscal requirements of AJK and GB would also be deliberated at the working-group level.

Wet weekend ahead for many parts of country

By Aamir Yasin

RAWALPINDI: A western weather disturbance is set to bring rain-thunderstorms with snowfall over the hills to western and northern parts of the country this weekend and intensifying fog likely to develop over the country's plains, the Pakistan Meteorological Department announced.

As the country faces dry weather, a shallow western disturbance approached the country's western parts on the night of Dec 12, the Met Office said. Under its influence, a weather system is forecast to affect the region through the weekend.

Light to moderate rain-thunderstorms and snowfall over the hills with occasional gaps, are expected in Chitral, Dir, Swat, Shangla, Kohistan, Malakand division, and Buner in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Diamir, Astore, Ghizer, Skardu, Hunza, Gilgit, Ghanche and Shigar in Gilgit-Baltistan; and the Neelum valley, Muzaffarabad, Poonch, Hattian, Bagh and Haveli in Azad Jammu and Kashmir.

On Dec 14 and 15, partly cloudy to cloudy conditions with light rain or snowfall are expected in Bajaur, Mohmand, Khyber, Orakzai, Kurram, Waziristan, Quetta, Ziarat, Zhob, Sherani, Chaman, Pishin, Qilla Abdullah, Qilla Saifullah and Noushki.

There are chances of drizzle in Islamabad, Rawalpindi, Peshawar

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ON OTHER PAGES



Arts students can pursue FSc now

The Inter-Board Coordination Commission (IBCC) on Friday notified a new policy allowing students with an arts background in matric to enroll in pre-medical and pre-engineering groups (FSc) at the intermediate level. The notification, issued by the IBCC stated that arts students could register in these groups starting from the first annual exams of 2026.

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\$940m grant, loan okayed by ADB, WB

The Asian Development Bank and the World Bank approved a total of \$940 million in loan and grant for reforms in the state-owned entities, water sector and safely managed water, sanitation and basic hygiene services in Pakistan. ADB approved two projects to accelerate reforms and enhance disaster resilience, while WB will extend \$400m for Punjab.

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'Caution, not panic': what to know about 'super flu'

• UK variant of mutated influenza bug has also been detected in Pakistan • Doctors say flu shots best way to prevent severe illness, hospitalisation • Fog may speed up transmission; the elderly at risk from younger 'super spreaders'

By Ikram Junaidi and Asif Chaudhry

WHILE several European countries, particularly the United Kingdom, are grappling with a surge in what is being dubbed the 'super flu', Pakistani health experts say the situation "warrants caution, but there is no need to panic", as the condition is caused by an existing virus undergoing some genetic shifts.

According to the World Health Organisation (WHO), the surge is driven primarily by influenza A(H3N2) and an emerging sub-clade known as sub-clade K, a drifted variant of H3N2 with multiple genetic changes from related viruses.



DOCTORS stress that the flu vaccine offers the best chance of preventing severe illness.—AFP/File

The WHO confirms that influenza activity has increased globally in recent months, with an early rise in flu activity being observed in several countries.

It is important to note that the current epidemiological data does not show that sub-clade K is any more severe than previous strains. However, its early spread ahead of the typical season curve is important, and that flu shots remain one of the most effective measures to guard against severe illness and the possibility of hospitalisation.

WHO emphasises that influenza remains common and continues to evolve seasonally through gradual genetic change, requiring ongoing surveillance and vaccine updates. Vaccination is still expected to offer protection against the range

of circulating viruses, including drifted subclades, and is particularly important for high-risk groups.

Pakistan's elderly 'more vulnerable'

While it has led to increased hospitalisations in Europe, specialists note that Pakistan's smaller elderly population and established seasonal patterns mean the local impact is likely to remain less severe, though still significant.

In Islamabad, former Punjab health minister and International Advisor for London's Royal College of Physicians, Dr Javed Akram, told Dawn that the virus

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EXPLAINER