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Minister supports creation of up to 12 provinces

• Khawaja Asif says new units should be created on administrative grounds, not linguistic, ethnic or political lines • Calls for transfer of powers, resources from provincial capitals to local institutions • MQM-P renews demand for new administrative units; calls for ending 'deprivation' of urban Sindh

By Our Staff Reporter

SIALKOT / KARACHI: As a debate around the possible creation of new administrative units rages in the country, another federal minister on Sunday voiced his support for the proposal, but warned against carving out units on linguistic, ethnic or political lines.

Outspoken Defence Minister Khawaja Asif, who has previously voiced his support for the suggestion — first put forward by his cabinet colleague Mohsin Naqvi — said that the existing concentration of authority in provincial capitals was preventing government services and resources from reaching people at the local level.

Speaking to *Geo News*, Mr Asif said the idea of creating new provinces had been debated for the past two months, stressing that the country could have as many as 12 if the exercise was driven by administrative needs rather than linguistic, ethnic or political considerations.

He argued that Pakistan's growing population called for smaller administrative units capable of delivering public services more effectively, adding that decision-making should not be confined to provincial capitals such as Lahore, Karachi, Quetta and Peshawar.

Stressing the need to bring administrative authority closer to the people, Mr Asif also questioned the existing arrangement for distributing financial resources, insisting that funds provided by the federal government remained largely under the control of provincial administrations, instead of reaching local government institutions.

He maintained that local bodies, which were supposed to benefit from these resources, continued to depend on provincial governments for funds and authority.

The minister also urged political leaders to change their attitude towards the exercise of power, saying that as politicians, there was a temptation to exercise all the power themselves.

Public representatives must remember that their authority was entrusted to them by the people, he said.

Referring to past administrative arrangements, Mr Asif recalled the One Unit scheme, under which the provinces of West Pakistan were merged into a single administrative unit before the arrangement was eventually abolished.

He also pointed to Afghanistan, saying the number of its provinces had increased from around eight or 10 to more than 30.

The defence minister's remarks come amid reports of a plan to divide Pakistan into 12 provinces through a possible 28th Constitutional Amendment, with a nationwide referendum also being contemplated.

Media reports suggested that the proposed restructuring could involve dividing Punjab into four provinces, KP and Balochistan into three each, and Sindh into two.

MQM-P renews demand

Meanwhile, the Muttahida Qaumi Movement-Pakistan (MQM-P) on Sunday vowed to mobilise its entire organisational network and parliamentary

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ANTALYA: Participants from Vanuatu pose for photo at the venue of COP31, the UN climate change conference, which kicks off in Turkiye from today.—Reuters Editorial on Page 6

PM briefs Nawaz on KP after new security plan unveiled

• Elder Sharif backs emergency set-up in province, says intervention should have come much earlier • Faceless anti-terrorism courts planned to shield judges, prosecutors, witnesses; Rs70bn funding boost for police, CTD announced • KP home secretary slams PTI for lack of political ownership of antiterror actions • Kundi says even people like Fazl face 'restrictions on movement'; terms IBOs a necessary step

By Umer Farooq and Amjad Mahmood

PESHAWAR / LAHORE: Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif briefed his brother, PML-N President Nawaz Sharif, on the law and order situation in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP) and recent initiatives for the province's development during a meeting in Lahore.

The country's political situation and other matters of national importance were also discussed in the meeting, held at Jati Umra.

According to state-run *APP*, PM Shehbaz apprised the party president of the government's ongoing economic reforms, the challenges being faced and measures being taken to address them.

The two leaders also discussed ways to further improve the national economy.

The meeting came weeks after the federal government has imposed emergency and governor's rule in KP, citing the provincial government's "deliberate disengagement" from the fight against terrorism.

The PML-N leadership defended the decision, with the PM saying the federal government was "compelled" to take the step because of security concerns, while the party president argued that the intervention should have come much earlier.

Faceless ATCs

To intensify the war against terrorism in KP, the provincial set-up has announced plans to establish 'faceless' anti-terrorism courts.

Explaining the rationale behind the move, KP Home Secretary Amjad Ali Khan said that witnesses in terrorism cases were reluctant to come forward because of security concerns.

"So, we have recently sent the amendment to set up faceless anti-terrorism courts. Through this, not just the protection of witnesses, but that of prosecutors and judges will also be ensured," the home secretary said at a briefing.

Mr Khan accused the now-dysfunctional PTI-backed provincial government of lacking political ownership, saying the armed forces and police had rendered many sacrifices, while the administration failed to own them.

He said foreign policy was the federal government's domain and that it had formulated an Afghan policy in the country's interest, but

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KP, GB agree to settle old boundary disputes

South Air offers to operate flights to northern areas

By Jamil Nagri and Nisar Ahmad Khan



KP Governor Faisal Karim Kundi and GB Chief Minister Amjad Hussain meet in Islamabad.—Dawn

GILGIT/MANSEHRA: In a move towards resolving decades-old territorial issues, Gilgit-Baltistan Chief Minister Amjad Hussain and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Governor Faisal Karim Kundi have agreed to initiate negotiations to settle boundary disputes between the two regions, including those involving Shandur Top, Babusar Top and areas surrounding the Diamer-Bhasha and Dassu dams.

The agreement came during a meeting between the two leaders in Islamabad on Sunday, where they discussed matters of mutual interest, including territorial disputes, improved air connectivity to Gilgit-Baltistan and the training of relevant officials.

According to a statement issued by the GB Chief Minister's Secretariat, both leaders agreed that the boundary disputes would be taken up by the chief secretaries of the two regions, before being referred to their respective political leadership for deliberations.

The initiative aims to resolve disputes involving villages along the KP-GB boundary through mutual understanding and amicable negotiations.

An official attending the meeting told *Dawn* that the two sides had agreed to pursue a peaceful settlement of the long-standing disputes, which have repeatedly triggered tensions and violent clashes between communities living along the disputed territories.

Disputes between KP and GB persist over several strategically important areas, including Shandur Top, Babusar Top and parts of Kohistan.

Shandur Top, home to the world's highest polo ground at around 12,500 feet, is claimed by both provinces, with the matter under consideration by a provincial boundary commission.

Babusar Top, linking Mansehra with Diamer through Kaghan Valley, is another contested area whose ownership and jurisdiction remain unresolved

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Heatwaves in Punjab threaten agriculture, food security: UN

• Report says fruit yields plunge 50pc; heat stress spreads livestock disease, cuts milk output • Shrinking incomes, food spoilage limit rural families' healthy diets • Women bear brunt of crisis due to heavy outdoor labour; preterm birth risk jumps 26pc in severe weather

By Amin Ahmed

ISLAMABAD: Increasingly frequent and severe heatwaves in Punjab's rain-fed rural areas are disrupting agricultural production, reducing household incomes and worsening food insecurity, particularly among women and vulnerable communities, according to a report by United Nations (UN) agencies.

The assessment "Extreme Heat and Agriculture", was published jointly by the UN Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) and the World Meteorological Organization (WMO).

It warns that rising temperatures have emerged as one of the most serious and acute hazards facing global food production, threatening the livelihoods of billions of people while inflicting immediate economic and nutritional damage on vulnerable farming communities.

"The effects of extreme heat on production are stark, as heat waves have led to significant declines in crop yields," the report said.

In the high-rainfall zones of Punjab, fruit productivity has fallen by as much as 50 per cent, the agencies found.

Livestock operations across the region are also severely affected. Large ruminants produce less milk under heat stress, and small ruminants face increased outbreaks of foot-and-mouth disease, the report said.

For rural families dependent on farming, the loss of agricultural output directly translates into reduced household income and diminishes their ability to purchase basic food staples.

The crisis is compounded by the accelerated spoilage of vegetables, dairy products and other perishable goods in extreme temperatures. That widespread spoilage further reduces local food availability and drives up market prices.

As a result, rural families face a double burden. They produce less diverse and nutritious food for their own consumption while simultaneously losing the agricultural income they rely on to purchase food from markets. "This double burden severely limits their access to healthy diets," the report said.

Although entire communities

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Eisenkot warns of crisis as he seeks to replace Netanyahu

• Herzog officially tasks him with new govt formation; says Israel must face 'new political reality' after US election • Ex-military chief seeks support from ultra-Orthodox parties; may initially form a minority govt with outside support from Arab-Israeli parties

JERUSALEM: Israel's former military chief Gadi Eisenkot started the tough task on Sunday of forming a government, reaching out to Benjamin Netanyahu's allies as he warned the veteran prime minister had brought the country to a historic crisis.

Eisenkot, 66, a political novice who has vowed to bridge Israel's deep polarisation under Netanyahu, formally received a mandate from President Isaac Herzog, giving him 28 days to form a government despite his bloc lacking a clear majority.

President Herzog earlier warned that the country faced "uncertainties" after elections in the United States. "Israel must face 'new political reality' after US election," he said.

In the United States, the most vital ally of Israel, Democrats on Tuesday swept elections with calls to rein in Israel after the devastation in Gaza and the unpopular Iran war which Netanyahu launched with President Donald Trump.

Trump describes midterms as 'giant step back' in US history: Page 12

Both Herzog and Eisenkot acknowledged Israel's growing isolation under Netanyahu, who is wanted by the International Criminal Court on genocide charges.

Eisenkot, who had traded his usual all black for a suit and tie, at a ceremony at the presidential office admitted, "We are in a state of emergency, approaching a point of no return for the State of Israel. We must form a national emergency government. This will require creative and unconventional political steps."

Born to a family of working-class Moroccan immigrants, Eisenkot would be the first Sephardic prime minister — a community mostly descended from Middle Eastern or North African Jews — in a country long dominated by an Ashkenazi elite with ties to Europe.

"We are in the midst of a devastating diplomatic crisis. Even our closest friends and strategic allies are saying their relationship with Israel must be reassessed," Eisenkot said.

While inviting Netanyahu's Likud Party along with far-right party of Finance Minister Bezalel Smotrich to join, only with himself as prime minister, Eisenkot said, "My door is open and my hand is extended, wholeheartedly and willingly, to anyone who understands the gravity of this moment."



ISRAEL'S ex-military chief Gadi Eisenkot (left) officially gets mandate from President Herzog to form a new government.— AFP

Wooing the ultra-Orthodox

In consultations with Herzog last week, Eisenkot received recommendations from parties accounting for 67 lawmakers, against 46 for Netanyahu.

But that vote count included Israeli Arabs, whose seat haul surged to a historic high on anger over Netanyahu's government and whom several parties oppose having in government.

Avigdor Liberman, a former Netanyahu aide turned sharp critic who nonetheless shares his hawkish views, has been adamant against any alliance with Arab Israelis, who are descendants of Palestinians

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Aramco building in Riyadh comes under Houthi attack

RIYADH: An Aramco building in Riyadh was targeted in an "attempted attack", the Saudi energy ministry said on Sunday, with eyewitnesses telling *AFP* that the skyscraper sustained damage, after the Saudi-led coalition fighting Yemen's Houthi rebels said it had intercepted missiles launched by the group.

Senate opposition leader urges govt to stay out of Yemen: Page 3

The Houthis claimed responsibility for the attack. Aramco facilities and infrastructure have been repeatedly targeted by the rebels in Yemen in recent months, including tankers, refineries, storage areas and the company's headquarters.

"Aramco tower in KAFD has been targeted, that's the sure thing," an eyewitness told *AFP*, referring to the King Abdullah Financial District. Two other witnesses confirmed seeing damage to the building.

Another eyewitness in the area said they had seen a projectile strike the building but were

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TODAY'S FUEL PRICE

Petrol	Rs346.00
Diesel	Rs378.00

Source: Ogra

ON OTHER PAGES



PML-N set to retain two Punjab seats

The PML-N appeared set to retain both seats in by-polls, with unofficial results showing its victory in Chichawatni constituency of Punjab Assembly and Gujranwala constituency of National Assembly. The by-polls were marked by low turnout, vote boycott in one village and the issuance of notices to five PML-N women lawmakers over alleged violations of the election code. **Page 3**



Hamza ton helps Pakistan U19 sink India

Hamza Zahoor produced a match-winning unbeaten century as Pakistan Under-19 defeated arch-rivals India by three wickets in a thrilling Group A encounter of the ACC Men's Under-19 Asia Cup in Muscat. Pakistan reached the 209-run target in 48.1 overs, finishing at 211 for seven, with Hamza holding his nerve under pressure to steer his side to victory. **Page 18**

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