

Pakistan

'Washington seeks new ties'

Shifting alliances as Pakistan manages relationship with US

ISLAMABAD, Feb. 27. (Agencies): As Pakistan navigates its troubled relationship with the United States and scrambles to avoid being blacklisted for doing too little, too late to stop terror funding, regional alliances are shifting and analysts ponder whether a cozier relationship with countries like Russia will complicate efforts to move toward peace in neighboring Afghanistan.



Khan

Russia, analysts say, is motivated by fears of a growing presence of Islamic State militants in neighboring Afghanistan and has warmed up to Pakistan as well as to Taliban insurgents battling the upstart Islamic State group affiliate known as Khorasan Province, the ancient name of an area that once included parts of Afghanistan, Iran and Central Asia.

In the latest move to strengthen ties, Russia last week named an honorary consul to Pakistan's Khyber Pukhtunkhwa Province, which borders Nangarhar province in eastern Afghanistan, where IS has established its headquarters. The IS is also present in northern Afghanistan's border regions with Central Asia, causing further consternation in Moscow.

Russia's honorary consul, **Mohammad Arsalan Khan**, who belongs to a powerful business family in Pakistan's northwest, said economic development is the best weapon against extremism. To that end he said he will promote increased commerce with Pakistan's neighbors, including Russia, which currently accounts for barely \$500 million in trade.

"I think this whole region is a bit of a mess, which I realize is one of the great understatements. Extremists have been taken lightly before and we are where we are because of that," said Khan in an interview in the Pakistani capital, Islamabad. Reflecting on his business-

based strategy, Khan said, "when you can give people a way of earning a living, they will turn away from terrorism, away from extremism."

The appointment reflects a stark turnaround in Pakistan's historical relationship with Russia.

In the 1980s, Pakistan and the US were united against Russia as the Soviet Union sent 150,000 soldiers into Afghanistan to prop up its communist ally in the Afghan capital, Kabul. At the time, Pakistan, with US backing, used Peshawar as a staging arena to arm and deploy Islamic insurgents, referred to as mujahedeen — or as President Ronald Reagan often called them, "freedom fighters" — to wage war on Russia. After 10 years, Russia failed to win the war and on Feb. 15, 1989, left Afghanistan in a negotiated exit.

Meanwhile, a senior aide to US President Donald Trump said during a visit to Pakistan that Washington wants a "new relationship" with Islamabad, the US embassy said on Tuesday, amid worsening ties between the two nations.

Lisa Curtis, deputy assistant to the US president, also voiced US concerns about Pakistan's "deficiencies" in preventing terrorist-financing during her two-day trip to the nuclear-armed South Asian nation.

"Ms. Curtis said that the United States seeks to move toward a new relationship with Pakistan, based on a shared commitment to defeat all terrorist groups that threaten regional stability," the US embassy said in a statement.

Party picks Nawaz brother: Pakistan's ruling party on Tuesday chose Shahbaz Sharif as its president, officials said, replacing his brother and veteran leader Nawaz Sharif following his latest disqualification by the Supreme Court. The Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) party also elected Nawaz as "leader for life", in what will be seen as a provocative move and could anger the judiciary after last week's Supreme Court verdict that removed Sharif as party leader.



This handout photo taken and released on Feb 26, 2018 by the Turkish Presidential Press Service shows Turkey's President Recep Tayyip Erdogan (second right), meeting with Prime Minister of Algeria Ahmed Ouyahia (left), upon his arrival in Algiers. (AFP)

Africa

Erdogan tours Africa: Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan arrived in Algeria on Monday as he embarked on a new tour of Africa in a bid to ramp up Turkey's growing influence throughout the continent.

The Turkish strongman touched down in Algiers, the first leg of the trip that he described as "historic" and that will see him also visit Mauritania, Senegal and Mali. "Algeria is one of our most important trading partners in the region ... We want to strengthen our military, security and cultural relations," Erdogan told a news conference in Istanbul before departing.

Accompanied by several ministers and businessmen, he said he would hold talks with Algerian leaders on relations between the two countries, with a focus on energy as well as regional issues.

On his third visit to Algeria since taking office in 2003, all eyes will be on Erdogan's expected meeting with ailing President Abdelaziz Bouteflika, 80, who rarely appears in public. (AFP)

S. Africa reshuffles cabinet: South African President Cyril Ramaphosa, who took office 11 days ago, announced a sweeping reshuffle Monday that included re-appointing **Nhlanhla Nene**, who was sacked by Jacob Zuma, as finance minister.

Ramaphosa stamped his mark on the presidency with Nene's re-appointment, while David Mabuza, the current premier of Mpumalanga province, was named as the deputy president.

Ramaphosa announced 30 changes

to minister and deputy minister positions after graft-tainted Zuma was forced to resign by the ruling ANC party earlier this month.

"In making these changes, I have been conscious of the need to balance continuity and stability with the need for renewal, economic recovery and accelerated transformation," Ramaphosa said.

Several Zuma allies were demoted or sacked but Zuma's ex-wife Nkosazana Dlamini-Zuma was appointed minister to the presidency, responsible for planning, monitoring and evaluation. (AFP)

Peacekeepers recalled:

Forty-six UN peacekeepers from Ghana have been recalled from their base in northwestern South Sudan following allegations of sexual exploitation of women sheltering at the site, a UN spokesman said Monday.

The 46 police were confined to barracks in Juba on Saturday after a preliminary investigation showed that the Ghanaians were "engaging in sexual activity with women" living at a UN site to protect civilians in Wau, UN spokesman Stephane Dujarric said.

"The information received indicates that some members of the formed police unit allegedly engaged in transactional sex," he added.

The UN peacekeeping mission in



Ramaphosa

Nene

South Sudan has a "zero tolerance, no excuses, and no second changes approach to sexual exploitation and abuse," he said. (AFP)

Burkina generals on trial:

More than 80 people went on trial before a military court in Burkina Faso on Tuesday over a failed 2015 coup in a case seen as a test for justice in the West African country.

Two top generals accused of masterminding the plot, Gilbert Diendere and Djibrill Bassole, were cheered by supporters as they arrived at the court in an upmarket district of the capital Ouagadougou.

Security was high for what is expected to be a lengthy trial, with forces guarding a 200-metre (yard) cordon around a banquet hall which has been transformed into a military tribunal.

Bassole and Diendere — key allies of former president Blaise Compaore who was chased from power in October 2014 — are among a total of 84 people on trial, including 66 military officials and 18 civilians. (AFP)

Congo clashes kill 22: Inter-ethnic clashes in eastern Democratic Republic of Congo have killed at least 22 people, including 15 civilians, over the past two days, a local official said on Monday.

Militiamen from the Hutu-dominated Nyatura militia attacked a Nande-dominated militia called Mai Mai Mazembe in the village of Kalusi on Sunday and Bwalanda on Monday, local administrator Hope Sabini told Reuters.

Eleven civilians were killed in the fighting in Kalusi, while four civilians and seven militiamen were killed in Bwalanda, Sabini said. (RTRS)

Lat/Am

5 Colombian soldiers killed: In presumed ELN rebel attack: Five Colombian soldiers were killed and 10 others injured in an apparent roadside bomb attack by presumed ELN rebels near the border

with Venezuela, the head of the army said Tuesday.

Army General Ricardo Gomez, who gave the toll, told W Radio station that the soldiers were on highway security duty in the department of Norte de Santander, when a blast hit the first vehicle of their group.

Gomez blamed National Liberation Army guerrillas, who are active in the region, for the attack.

Peace talks between the government and the ELN have been suspended since January, although on Monday the rebels announced a temporary March 9-13 ceasefire during the upcoming legislative elections.

The ELN urged the government of President **Juan Manuel Santos** to return to negotiations, which he suspended after attacks blamed on the guerrillas left eight police dead and dozens wounded. (AFP)

2 die falling from plane: Two swallows fell to their death Monday from an airplane as it took off from an airport in Guayaquil, Ecuador on a flight to New York, authorities told local media.

Details of the incident were sketchy with authorities not saying whether a commercial airline was involved.

Officials said the bodies of two men, between 25 and 30 years of age, were found on the southern end of the runway of the Jose Joaquin de Olmedo Airport in Guayaquil.

"Two people got into the landing gear and as the plane took off the system either ejected them or they lost heart" and let go, General Marcelo Tobar was quoted as telling local media. (AFP)

Mexico candidate killed: A state assembly candidate in the southern Mexican state of Guerrero was killed just days after another office-seeker was shot to death in the same city, authorities reported. The ruling Institutional Revolutionary Party said candidate Dulce Rebaja Pedro was killed Sunday.

The Guerrero state prosecutors' office said a state policeman was also killed, and both bodies were found in a truck on a highway outside the city of Chilapa. (AP)



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