

of this intention exist at the military leadership level of both countries. We hope to see these collaborations deepened and taken all the way to practical and operational phases.

Regarding border tensions and problems, is it possible for the two countries to hammer out a solution so that such incidents no longer show up and sour the relations?

I strongly feel that the Zionist regime's evil hand is behind these incidents. Their agents can sneak into even remote areas of Pakistan, manipulating poverty and ignorance among

some misguided elements to set off conspiracies. Problems like these, rooted in Zionist meddling, are not limited to the Iran-Pakistan border but can surface along other borders with neighbors as well. Both countries' officials have now owned up to this reality and acknowledged the issue. Therefore, the relevant agencies in both countries must step up to the plate and put measures in place to nip this malignant tumor in the bud.

I should also flag another point: Pakistan itself has been hit hard by terrorism in 2024, suffering about 1,600 terrorist operations within its own borders,

resulting in over 2,500 deaths. Pakistan is thus a victim of terrorism on its own soil, and its capacity to control self-serving terrorists who operate in its far-flung areas is limited. We must wrap our heads around this fact. Tehran and Islamabad have come to grips with the understanding that terrorism knows no borders. If someone starts a fire in your neighbor's house, the smoke will affect all the neighboring homes. Therefore, Tehran, Islamabad, and Kabul must join forces to combat terrorism and come up with appropriate plans.

Is the goal of reaching \$10

billion in trade exchanges between Iran and Pakistan, mentioned during the president's recent trip, achievable?

If the necessary political and legal will and support are in place and bilateral efforts keep up the momentum, I believe hitting \$10 billion in the next few years is definitely within reach. Let me just point out one thing: Pakistan has a contract for gas supply via pipeline from Iran that remains intact. They can currently receive up to 30 million cubic meters of gas daily from Iran, and just this one commodity alone could push our trade volume close to that \$10 billion target annually. More-

over, expanding other connections such as rail, road links, and maritime exchanges through the two important ports — Chabahar in Iran and Gwadar in Pakistan — could set up massive commercial traffic between the countries. This expansion would benefit bilateral ties as well as the broader region, including China on Pakistan's eastern flank, which would also cash in on these transport and trade developments.

Do you think the Iran-Pakistan gas pipeline will ultimately be put into operation?

Iran's commitment to getting

this pipeline up and running is clear and unwavering. Iran has shown resolve both in execution and in financing the project. The pipeline has already been laid down up to the vicinity of the Pakistani border. However, Pakistan faces two hurdles on its end: First, financing its segment of the pipeline implementation, which I view as manageable since the necessary funds can be sourced from various places, and second, the looming shadow of threats from powers uneasy about this connection. These actors have put the brakes on Islamabad, intimidating them and holding up progress on the pipeline.

Iran deals at risk without sanctions relief

PERSPECTIVE

The focus of Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian's visit to Pakistan, which wrapped up on Sunday, was trade and security, and the challenge before Tehran and Islamabad remains translating the many deals and MoUs signed during the talks into concrete agreements. This is mainly so because of the poor relations between the US and Iran, particularly the former's sanctions that threaten any state wishing to expand ties with Tehran. The visit is significant as it comes after the June Iran-Israel war, in which the US also participated, and at a time when geopolitical alliances are shifting rapidly.

Dr. Pezeshkian and his delegation met the top civilian and military leaders of the country. Among the matters discussed was the bloodbath in Gaza; The Iranian leader also appreciated Pakistan's support during the Israeli aggression.

Dr. Pezeshkian expressed his desire to raise bilateral trade to \$10b, while the need to jointly combat terrorism, especially along the border in Balochistan, was also discussed. The Iranians further sought to join Pakistan and China in expanding regional trade as part of the Silk Road initiative. At least 12 MoUs and deals were signed covering various sectors. Of course, the elephant in the room is US sanctions; Unless both sides



Workers stand around waiting at a section of a gas pipeline linking Iran and Pakistan after the project was launched during a ceremony in the southern Iranian port of Chahbahar on March 11, 2013.

● ATTA KENARE/AFP

address this irritant, it will be difficult to achieve the economic goals both Pakistan and Iran desire.

Perhaps the biggest casualty of foreign sanctions has been the Iran-Pakistan gas pipeline; Tehran has completed the project at its end, while Pakistan is wary of finalising the scheme lest it attract Washington's wrath.

Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif promised an "early resolution"

to the pipeline issue when he was in Iran in May, but the issue did not come up during the Iranian president's visit, at least not publicly. It appears that Pakistan is willing to import petroleum from the US in order to satisfy the Trump administration, and is not willing to import Iranian gas for fear of annoying the US. Unless the pipeline imbroglio is settled amicably, without fear of foreign pressure, Pakistan may

have to fight an ugly arbitration battle, which will harm ties with Iran.

Along with trade, militant groups reportedly active on both sides of the border must be neutralised so that they are unable to damage ties. In 2024, due to the malign activities of armed non-state actors, both capitals traded missile fire; Thankfully, the issue was resolved before things could escalate.

But it serves as a reminder of how militant groups can create highly volatile situations. Pakistan indeed must walk a tightrope between Washington and Tehran. But while we must maintain good ties with the US, it is essential to have cordial relations with a neighbour with whom we share a long border and a long history.

The article first appeared in Dawn.



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Ferry launch eases Iran-Pakistan travel

PERSPECTIVE

The Maritime Affairs Ministry's launch of Pakistan's first-ever ferry service linking the country with Iran and the Persian Gulf states is a long-overdue and highly practical step. It raises the obvious question: Why wasn't this done earlier? Not only does the new sea route bypass the increasingly dangerous land passage through Balochistan — frequently targeted by BLA militants — it also revives a crucial mode of transport for low-income travellers, particularly pilgrims heading to Iraq and Iran, who had been left stranded after land routes were shut down.

The restoration of access for these citizens is significant.

With the sea corridor now open, the government has a vital opportunity to encourage private ferry operators to offer safe, affordable, and comfortable services. If done right, this can transform the ferry sector into a dependable travel alternative for thousands of people, especially those for whom air travel remains out of reach.

The strategic maritime route through the Strait of Hormuz — one of the world's most heavily trafficked waterways — adds another layer of promise. Besides supporting pilgrimages, this link could stimulate trade and strengthen cultural and religious ties with neighbouring nations. Affordable, accessible, and safe travel is a gateway to deeper people-to-people con-

nections — something air travel has historically limited to elites, business travellers, and government functionaries.

While large-scale regional integration remains a distant goal, small but targeted initiatives such as this ferry service offer a clear and achievable path forward. The government must now build on this momentum, offering tax incentives and other support to ensure the sustainability of the service and encourage wider adoption. In a region where movement is often restricted by conflict, class, or cost, this is a welcome and commendable policy shift.

The article first appeared in The Nation.



Pakistan's Minister for Maritime Affairs Junaid Anwar Chaudhry (front-R) and Iran's Minister for Roads and Urban Development Farzaneh Sadeq (front-L) pose for pictures after signing a bilateral agreement in Islamabad, Pakistan, on August 3, 2025.

● GOVERNMENT OF PAKISTAN