

Nepal's PM Karki speaks with PM Modi on phone

■ By Shirish B Pradhan
KATHMANDU, Sept 18 (PTI)

NEPAL'S newly-appointed Prime Minister Sushila Karki on Thursday held a telephone conversation with Prime Minister Narendra Modi, who expressed his support for the interim Government in fulfilling its priorities.

It was the first telephone conversation by PM Karki with any foreign head of state.

Karki, 73, became Nepal's first woman Prime Minister on Friday, ending days of political uncertainty after the ouster of Prime Minister K P Sharma Oli following youth-led 'Gen Z' protests



against his Government over corruption and a ban on social media.

Prime Minister Modi congratulated Karki on her historic appointment as the first female Prime Minister of Nepal, the Foreign Ministry said in a statement here.



During the conversation, Prime Minister Karki said that "elections will remain the topmost priority of the

interim Government, with strong determination for accountable, responsive and corruption-free governance, reflecting the aspiration of the youth," it said.

Pak, Saudi Arabia ink strategic defence pact

■ By Sajad Hussain
ISLAMABAD, Sept 18 (PTI)

PAKISTAN and Saudi Arabia have signed a "strategic mutual defence" agreement, which declares that any attack on either country will be considered "an aggression against both".

The agreement was signed by Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif and Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman on Wednesday during the Pakistani leader's day-long visit to the Gulf Kingdom, according to a joint statement. The deal comes days after an Israeli attack on the Hamas leadership in Qatar, a key US ally in the Gulf region.

The Strategic Mutual Defence Agreement states that "any aggression against either country shall be considered an aggression against both," according to the joint statement.

"This agreement, which reflects the shared commitment of both nations to enhance their security and to achieving security and peace in the region and the world, aims to develop aspects of defence cooperation between the two countries and strengthen joint deterrence against any aggression," it added.

India on Thursday said it will study implications of the move for its national security as well as for regional and global stabil-

ity. **Will study implications, says MEA spokesperson Randhir Jaiswal**

development, External Affairs Ministry spokesperson Randhir Jaiswal in New Delhi on Thursday said India will study the implications of the move for its national security as well as for regional and global stability. In a carefully crafted response to a media query on the issue, Jaiswal said New Delhi remains committed to protecting India's national interests and ensuring "comprehensive national security in all domains".

The sealing of the pact came over four months after a four-day



Randhir Jaiswal

According to the Pakistan-Saudi joint statement, the pact

builds on the historic partnership extending for nearly eight decades between Saudi Arabia and Pakistan, and is based on the bonds of brotherhood and Islamic solidarity, as well as shared strategic interests and close defence cooperation between the two countries.

The two sides also reviewed the historic and strategic relations between both countries and several topics of common interest.

In a post on social media, Sharif on Thursday said their talks "covered a wide range of issues,

reviewing regional challenges and enhancing bilateral cooperation".

Sharif also said that he greatly values the Saudi Crown Prince's "consistent support and his keen interest in expanding Saudi investments, trade and business ties between our two countries".

Ahead of the PM's visit to the oil-rich kingdom, the Foreign Office had said that Pakistan and Saudi Arabia enjoy a historic relationship, rooted in shared faith, values and mutual trust, and the visit will provide an important opportunity to the two leaders to consolidate this unique partnership, while exploring new avenues of collaboration, for the

benefit of the peoples of the two countries.

This was Sharif's third visit to the Gulf region within a week. He earlier visited Qatar twice, on Thursday and Monday, to express solidarity with Doha following Israel's attack in the Gulf country and to attend an emergency meeting of Arab-Islamic nations on the issue.

Sharif was accompanied by Army Chief Asim Munir, Foreign Minister Ishaq Dar, Defence Minister Khawaja Asif, Finance Minister Muhammad Aurangzeb, Information Minister Attaullah Tarar, Environment Minister Musadik Malik and Special Assistant Tariq Juteh. ■

Global community must ensure LeT, JeM, no longer exploit Afghan territory: India

■ By Yosita Singh

UNITED NATIONS, Sept 18 (PTI)

INDIA has called on the international community to ensure UN-designated terror entities, including Pakistan-based Lashkar-e-Taiba and Jaish-e-Mohammed, as well as their facilitators, no longer exploit Afghan territory for terrorist activities. "India is closely monitoring the security situation in Afghanistan," India's Permanent Representative to the UN Ambassador Parvathaneni Harish said on Wednesday.

"The international community must coordinate efforts towards ensuring that entities and individuals designated by the UN Security Council, ISIL and Al Qaeda and their affiliates, including Lashkar-e-Taiba and Jaish-e-Mohammed, along with those who facilitate their operations, no longer exploit the Afghan territory for terrorist activities," he said, in an apparent reference to Pakistan.

Harish, delivering a statement at the UN Security Council meeting on Afghanistan, said that India and Afghanistan share a civilisational relationship and Delhi has a "paramount interest" in ensuring peace and stability in the war-torn country.

"We believe in the utmost importance of international and regional consensus and cooperation on key issues concerning Afghanistan and actively engage with all relevant parties to promote peace, stability and development in the country. Our participation in UN meetings in Doha and other regional forums reflects our efforts," he said.

Army chief visits Arunachal

Highlights Army's focus on operationalising drone capabilities



Chief of the Army Staff (COAS) General Upendra Dwivedi during his visit to the Likabali Military Station to review the combat readiness of the formation, in Arunachal Pradesh. (PTI)

KOLKATA, Sept 18 (PTI)

CHIEF of Army Staff General Upendra Dwivedi on Thursday visited a drone centre at Likabali in Arunachal Pradesh, underscoring the Army's focus on operationalising drone capabilities, an official said.

The Army is rapidly scaling up the induction of drones and counter-drone systems, he said in a statement.

"The Chief of Army Staff visited one such facility at Likabali in Arunachal Pradesh, underscoring the Indian Army's focus on operationalising drone capabilities," the official said.

The CoAS had, during his speech at the 26th Kargil Vijay Diwas at Dras on July 26, announced that every infantry battalion will have a drone platoon, artillery regiments will be equipped with counter-drone systems and loiter munitions, and composite 'Divyastra' batteries will be created to enhance precision and survivability.

"Our striking power will increase manifold in the coming days," General Dwivedi had declared, asserting that the Army is moving rapidly towards becoming a modern and future-ready force. The statement said that many units were already operationalised and "drone centres established at premier training academies" such as the

Indian Military Academy in Dehradun, Infantry School in Mhow and Officers Training Academy in Chennai.

The move is aimed at embedding drone operations as a standard capability for soldiers across all arms of the Army, the official said.

He said the Army's approach is captured in the concept of 'Eagle in the Arm' - the idea that every soldier should be capable of operating a drone, just as he carries his weapon.

Depending on the task of the unit or soldier, drones will be employed for combat, surveillance, logistics, or even medical evacuation, the statement said.

"Counter-drone measures are also being inducted in parallel, creating a layered system to both exploit and neutralise unmanned platforms," it said.

This dual thrust, arming soldiers with drones while strengthening counter-drone defences, reflects the army's recognition that unmanned systems are no longer niche but "essential elements of the battlefield", it said.

By institutionalising training, operationalising units, and aligning force structures, the Army is ensuring that the "soldier of tomorrow" will not only carry a weapon but also an eagle - a drone that extends his vision, reach and power on the battlefield, the official said.

Individuals operating Chabahar Port will face sanctions, threatens US

■ By Yoshita Singh
NEW YORK, Sept 18 (PTI)

THE Trump administration has said that individuals operating the Iranian port of Chabahar will face sanctions beginning later this month, a decision that will have implications for India, which is involved in developing a terminal at the strategic port.

Located in Sistan-Balochistan province on the energy-rich country's southern coast, Chabahar port is being developed by India and Iran to boost connectivity and trade ties.

The move to revoke the 2018 sanctions waiver is consistent with President Donald Trump's maximum pressure policy to isolate the Iranian regime, State Department principal deputy spokesperson Thomas Pigott said in a statement earlier this week.

"The Secretary of State has revoked the sanctions exception issued in 2018 under the Iran Freedom and Counter-Proliferation Act (IFCA) for

Decision will have implications for India, which is involved in developing a terminal at the strategic port.



Afghanistan reconstruction assistance and economic development, effective September 29, 2025. Once the revocation is effective, persons who operate the Chabahar Port or engage in other activities described in IFCA may expose themselves to sanctions under IFCA," Pigott said.

India would be affected by this decision, as it is involved in developing a terminal at the Chabahar port on the Gulf of Oman. On May 13, 2024, India signed a 10-year contract to operate the port that will help it expand trade with

Central Asia.

This was the first time India would take over the management of an overseas port. New Delhi had proposed to develop Chabahar port way back in 2003 to provide Indian goods a gateway to reach landlocked Afghanistan and Central Asia using a road and rail project called International North-South Transport Corridor (INSTC), bypassing Pakistan.

The INSTC is a 7,200-km-long multi-mode transport project for moving freight among India, Iran,

Afghanistan, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Russia, Central Asia and Europe.

US sanctions on Iran over its nuclear programme had slowed the development of the port.

The long-term agreement was signed by Indian Ports Global Limited (IPGL) and the Port & Maritime Organisation of Iran. It replaces an initial 2016 pact, which covered India's operations at Shahid Beheshti terminal in Chabahar port and had been renewed on an annual basis.

In 2023, Chabahar port was used by India to send 20,000 tonnes of wheat aid to Afghanistan. In 2021, the same was used to supply environmentally friendly pesticides to Iran. The US had exempted the Chabahar port project from sanctions in 2018, saying "the secretary has provided for an exception from certain sanctions under Iran Freedom and Counter-Proliferation Act of 2012 with respect to the development of Chabahar Port".

On UK trip, Trump highlights his 'good relationship' with PM Modi



US President Donald Trump takes his seat next to Britain's Prime Minister Keir Starmer for a business roundtable at Chequers near Aylesbury, England on Thursday. (AP/PTI)

WASHINGTON, Sept 18 (IANS)

US PRESIDENT Donald Trump on Thursday spoke about India-US ties and his recent phone call with Prime Minister Narendra Modi, saying he's "very close to India" and has a "very good relationship" with the Indian PM.

While addressing a press conference with British Prime Minister Keir Starmer before concluding his UK visit on Thursday, Trump recalled his discussions with PM Modi.

"I'm very close to India. I'm very close to the Prime Minister of India. The other day, wished him a happy birthday. We have a very good relationship. He put out a beautiful statement too," Trump said.

In their first phone conversation in months, Trump had called Prime Minister Modi on Tuesday to wish him on his 75th birthday.

Prime Minister Modi, in a post on X, termed Trump as his "friend" and thanked him for the wishes.

"Thank you, my friend, President Trump, for your phone call and warm greetings on my 75th birthday. Like you, I am also fully committed to taking the India-US Comprehensive and Global Partnership to new heights. We support your initiatives towards

a peaceful resolution of the Ukraine conflict," PM Modi wrote.

President Trump also posted on Truth Social, calling the phone call "wonderful" and thanked him for his support in attempting to end the conflict in Ukraine.

The phone call happened on the day US Assistant Trade Representative for South and Central Asia Brendan Lynch held trade talks with India's chief trade negotiator Rajesh Agrawal in Delhi.

Both sides termed the discussions as "positive."

Trump, during the press conference, also said he's willing to take action against Russia, only if other European countries join in.