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Pakistan hopes to 'refresh' US ties with PM Khan's visit



Donald Trump (file)



Imran Khan (file)

Islamabad, Pakistan

Pakistan expressed hopes yesterday that Prime Minister Imran Khan's maiden trip to the White House later this month would help repair its acrimonious relationship with Washington as the US seeks its help in ending the war in Afghanistan.

Observers believe that the nearly 18-year conflict will be the major focus of talks between Khan and President Donald Trump when they meet on July 22, as Washington presses for Pakistani assistance in securing a peace deal.

"Pakistan has been facilitating the US-Taliban talks in good faith, underscoring that

it remains a shared responsibility," Foreign Minister Shah Mehmood Qureshi said during a seminar in Islamabad.

"It will therefore be appropriate to work for broader engagement from Afghanistan to bilateral issues, economic and trade cooperation, to peace and stability in South Asia," he added.

On Tuesday, Qureshi said that Trump's invitation to Khan reflected the "importance of the relationship for both sides".

Last year, Trump suspended \$300 million in military aid to Islamabad, saying Pakistan has given Washington "nothing but lies & deceit, thinking of our leaders as fools".

Indonesia seizes notorious vessel wanted by Interpol



Representative picture

Jakarta, Indonesia

A notorious Panama-flagged vessel wanted by Interpol for illegal fishing has been seized by Indonesia, authorities said yesterday.

The MV NIKA -- a vessel with an extensive maritime rap sheet -- was intercepted by the navy Friday in the Strait of Malacca, the fisheries ministry said on Twitter.

The 750-tonne vessel had 18 Russians and 10 Indonesians aboard, the Jakarta Post reported. The crew have been detained and are now being questioned.

The ship is suspected of falsifying registration documents

and claiming it was a bulk carrier instead of a fishing boat in order to avoid detection, said fisheries minister Susi Pudjiastuti said.

"This ship has been wanted by Interpol in many countries for a long time," she told broadcaster TVOne.

"The ship kept changing flag. The last one it used was Panama's... which is typical of ships used in illegal, unreported, and unregulated fishing."

Boats involved in illegal fishing often obscure their origins by using foreign flags, a system that complicates monitoring and oversight by allowing ships to register outside of the vessel owner's country.

Malaysian MPs back lowering voting age to 18

Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia

Malaysia's parliament yesterday backed lowering the voting age from 21 to 18, a change that would add millions of people to the electoral roll and was pushed by the country's reformist government.

The Southeast Asian nation is one of a handful of countries around the world that

limits voting to those aged over 21, and the change still has to be debated and passed in the country's senate before it can become law.

The overhaul was championed by the government of Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad -- who at 94 is the world's oldest leader -- about a year after it came to power by defeating a long-ruling, corruption-plagued coalition.

Fuel leak halted blastoff for Indian rocket: reports

India | Sriharikota

A fuel leak in the rocket engine forced India to abort the launch of its landmark Moon mission less than one hour before liftoff, media reports said yesterday.

A committee of experts was looking into the causes of the problem that put back the bid to become just the fourth nation -- after Russia, the United States and China -- to land a spacecraft on the Moon.

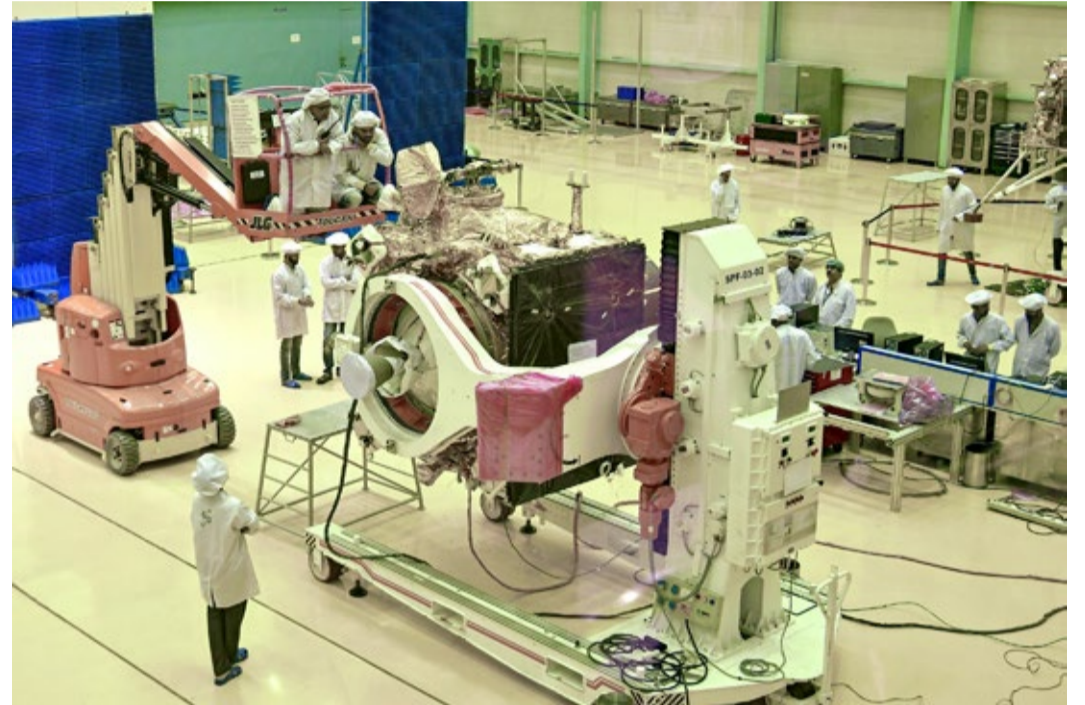
Having halted the countdown 56 minutes and 24 seconds before the scheduled launch of Chandrayaan-2 -- or Moon Chariot 2 -- the Indian Space Research Organisation gave no explanation for what it called a "technical snag" in the rocket nor a date for a new attempt.

"As a measure of abundant precaution Chandrayaan-2 launch has been called off," ISRO said.

However, the *Times of India* quoted a senior mission scientist as saying there had been a leak in the GSLV-MkIII rocket's helium fuel component.

"After filling helium, we found the pressure was dropping, indicating there was a leak," the unnamed scientist said adding that it was possible there were "multiple leaks".

"We were lucky that the mission did not enter the automatic launch sequence else all would have been lost," the *Hindustan Times* quoted a senior ISRO official as saying.



Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) scientists work on the orbiter vehicle of 'Chandrayaan-2', India's first moon lander and rover mission planned and developed by the ISRO, in Bangalore

The report added that scientists were "racing to plug the leak" in time for a new launch window at the end of July.

Experts said Indian mission chiefs would be cautious about trying a new liftoff.

"If the launch does not happen in the next 48 hours, it could be postponed for a few months until we get an opportune launch window," said Ravi Gupta, a scientist formerly with the state-run Defence Research and Development Organisation.

Low-cost missions

India has spent about \$140 million on Chandrayaan-2, with most of it home-made. It is one of the cheapest in the crowded space race.

The launch would have been the third to the moon this year.

China put its Chang'e 4 mission on the lunar surface in January, while Israel's \$100 million Beresheet crash-landed when it sought to become the first privately funded mission in April. A soft landing on the Moon

would be a huge leap forward in India's space programme.

National pride is at stake as Prime Minister Narendra Modi has vowed to launch a crewed space mission by 2022.

It follows another high-profile but low-cost Indian mission -- Mangalyaan -- which put a spacecraft in orbit around Mars in 2014 at a fraction of the cost of comparable projects by established space powers like the United States, which often cost billions of dollars.

\$800,000 spent in one day on Malaysia ex-Prime Minister's cards, court hears

Kuala Lumpur

Credit cards belonging to Malaysia's disgraced ex-leader Najib Razak were used to spend over \$800,000 in one day at a luxury jeweller in Italy, a court has heard.

The 2014 spending spree is the latest evidence of what critics say is the lavish lifestyle enjoyed by Najib after he and his cronies allegedly plundered state coffers.

The former prime minister, his family members and inner circle are accused of stealing billions of dollars from Malaysian sovereign wealth fund IMDB in a fraud that stretched around the world.

The claims played a major part in Najib's government losing power at elections last year. He was arrested after being ejected from office, and went on trial over the scandal in April.

At a hearing in the case Monday, a bank official said two credit cards belonging to the ex-leader were used to spend 3.3 million ringgit (\$803,000)



The current trial is the first of several that Malaysia's disgraced ex-leader Najib Razak is expected to face over sovereign wealth fund IMDB

at a branch of Swiss jeweller De Grisogono in Italy, state news agency Bernama reported.

The money was spent on August 8, 2014, said Yeoh Eng

Leong, a senior official from Malaysian lender AmBank, although he did not disclose what was bought, Bernama reported.

The cards were also used

to pay over 460,000 ringgit at a Chanel boutique in Hawaii and over 120,000 ringgit at a Shangri-La Hotel in Bangkok, he told the Kuala Lumpur court.

Najib defended the Italian spending spree.

"This expenditure is for a gift to a senior member of the royalty of a government and their entourage that has good relations with our country," he said in a Facebook post.

"It is normal to give gifts to leaders of other governments".

The current trial is the first of several that Najib is expected to face over IMDB, and centres on claims 42 million ringgit was stolen from SRC International, a former unit of the fund.

During his years in office, Najib and his luxury-loving wife Rosmah Mansor -- who has also been charged over the fraud -- came to symbolise the rot in Malaysia's elite.

Following the election, police discovered valuables, including cash, jewellery and luxury handbags, worth up to \$273 million in properties linked to the couple.