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Pakistan expels Indian envoy, suspends all bilateral trade

Moves Seen As Bid To Spur US To Intervene

Indrani Bagchi & Omer Farooq Khan

Islamabad/New Delhi: Stung by the Modi government's decision to turn Article 370 into a dead letter, Pakistan expelled India's high commissioner Ajay Bisaria on Wednesday to protest against the decision which strips Jammu & Kashmir of its special status and splits the state into two Union territories.

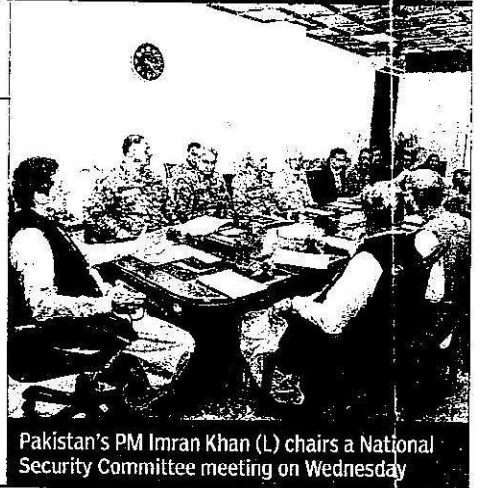
With the Indian move, backed by big margins in both Houses of Parliament, signalling a resolve to bind J&K even more tightly to In-

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► PM likely to address nation on J&K today, P 6

dia, Pakistan sought to hit back and also declared it will suspend all bilateral trade. The actions seem intended to assure domestic audiences, including anti-India terror groups, which have for long been assured of Pakistan's support for the Kashmir cause. Sources feel that Pakistan

IMRAN GOVT GOES ON DIPLOMATIC OFFENSIVE

- Pakistan's National Security Committee led by Imran Khan decides to **suspend trade with India** in a "downgrading of diplomatic ties"
- Will **review bilateral arrangements**
- Will take **Kashmir issue to the UN**
- To observe **Pakistan's Independence Day on August 14** in solidarity with Kashmiris
- A **joint parliamentary session also passed a resolution condemning India's "unilateral move"** on Kashmir. It slams "other regressive measures to change Kashmir's demographic structure as well as recent surge in unprovoked firing and shelling on unarmed civilian population across the LoC"



Pakistan's PM Imran Khan (L) chairs a National Security Committee meeting on Wednesday

Pak starts reimposing airspace restrictions

Pakistan has started re-imposing restrictions in its airspace. While as of now flights between the West and south India, with Delhi at its heart, are not affected, airlines are keeping their fingers crossed. Meanwhile, air travellers

should leave for airports earlier till the month-end due to enhanced security checks. IGI has asked domestic and international flyers to reach at least 3 and 4 hours, respectively, before their departure time. TNN

could also be seeking to create a spectre of an imminent military escalation to scare the Trump administration into nudging India to start negotiations over J&K with US in a mediator's role.

Pakistan also said it will take the Indian decisions on J&K to the United Nations, in-

cluding the Security Council, while its independence day on August 14 will be observed as a protest and solidarity day.

The last time an envoy was expelled was in 2002 after terror attacks in India, including the one on Parliament when New Delhi asked then Pakistan high commis-

sioner Ashraf Jehangir Qazi to withdraw. This, however, did not happen in the immediate wake of the Parliament attack on December 13, 2001. India first recalled its own envoy Vijay Nambiar from Pakistan in early 2002.

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Pak to suspend trade relations with India

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Pakistan did not resort to a tit-for-tat response, allowing its HC to stay put in New Delhi. India expelled Qazi after the attack on the military camp at Kaluchak in May 2002.

The decisions were announced after a marathon meeting of the national security council chaired by Pakistan Prime Minister Imran Khan on Wednesday. Pakistan said it would downgrade diplomatic relations and suspend all trade with India. The NSC headed by PM is Pakistan's top civil-military body.

The meeting also promised to review all bilateral agreements with the NSC mandated to take crucial decisions on security and foreign affairs even as the Pakistan army has a crucial role in these matters. The NSC meeting was called to review the situation inside J&K and along the LoC.

The Indian action is a frontal challenge to Pakistan's efforts to internationalise the J&K dispute and seeks to fundamentally alter the nature of any India-Pakistan discussions in future, talks with the removal of the "special status" tag. It

DOWNGRADE JUST SYM

> The last time ties were downgraded was by India after the Parliament attack in 2001. India saw the it as an act of aggression by Pak

> Unlike then though, as former foreign secretary Kanwal Sibal says, Pak can't see India's reorganisation of J&K as an act of aggression

> Most countries have called it an internal matter of India. China slammed India but its criticism was confined to Ladakh where it shares a disputed border with India

> As Sibal says, downgrading

of ties unlikely to impact. The two absence of any engagement, w representation There's little tra Pakistan in any

> It also does Imran Khan as who kept saying Pakistan' soug in ties with Ind

> Pak will tak UNSC but, Sib may not want its upcoming with India by

is also a snub to expectations that the US need for Pakistani assistance in exiting Afghanistan will lead to increased pressure on India to renew talks on J&K.

Meanwhile, senior US state department official Alice Wells will be in Delhi on Thursday, after spending a couple of days in Islamabad.

Former diplomat Arun Singh, who was in charge of the Pakistan desk, said, "The Imran government clearly feels itself under pressure domestically to be seen as do-

ing something India's action the myth of lated to the K ter the Trump will want to ing a sense of sis will enha al activism. want to proj as a success

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