



**BALUCHISTAN**  
Jhal Magsi: Three Killed in Exchange of Fire Between...  
Page No 5



**INTERNATIONAL**  
At least 101 people missing after submarine attack on Iranian ship...  
Page No 3



**NATIONAL**  
Bulleh Shah Express from Kasur to Pakpattan resumes...  
Page No 8

**SPORT**  
Atletico hammered but reach Copa del Rey final  
Page No 7



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# QUETTA VOICE

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## No fuel shortage in Pakistan: finance minister

**NEWS DESK:**

Finance Minister Muhammad Aurangzeb on Wednesday cautioned over oil stocks amid global uncertainty due to the US-Israel and Iran war, but said that there was no emergency-like situation in Pakistan.

Briefing the Senate Standing Committee on Finance, the minister suggested conserving fuel as a preventive measure.

"We are not going for rationing of fuel as there is no fuel shortage in the country, but things could become serious if the war drags on," Aurangzeb said in response to the query by Saleem Mandviwala, the chairman of the committee.

The committee was informed that there were petrol and diesel stocks for 28 days, crude oil stocks for 10 days, and liquefied petroleum gas (LPG) and liquefied natural gas (LNG) for 15 days.

"But, some cargoes have been stuck in Qatar and to offset this short supply, the output from local gas fields was being enhanced," he added.

The committee was informed that the finance ministry would hold daily meetings with the relevant departments to monitor the country's fuel position and fuel prices in international markets.

It is worth mentioning that Pakistan on Wednesday formally requested that Saudi Arabia provide an alternative oil supply route through Yanbu to maintain its fuel supply chain in the wake of the closure of the Strait of Hormuz. Meanwhile, State Bank of Pakistan Governor Jamil Ahmad noted that global oil prices could reach \$100 per barrel, which may increase external sector pressures.

It is worth noting that energy imports account for a significant portion of Pakistan's annual import expenditure.

Ahmad added that Pakistan's foreign exchange reserves were at a comfortable level and had reached over \$16 billion.

He said the central bank expected foreign exchange reserves to reach \$18bn by June and around \$20bn by December. At the same time, the SBP governor emphasized that the reserves were not accumulated through additional borrowing.

He said that the central bank had purchased approximately \$2.4bn from the market during the past three years, adding that these purchases helped stabilise the currency and improve external buffers.

## Peace Possible Only If Afghan Taliban Renounce Support for Terrorism," Says Field Marshal Syed Asim Munir

**Zeeshan Ahmed, News Desk:**

**Rawalpindi:** Field Marshal Syed Asim Munir, NI (M), HJ, COAS & CDF, visited Wana in South Waziristan to review the prevailing security situation and operational preparedness along the Western border, the military's media wing said.

Field Marshal laid a floral wreath at the Shuhada Monument to pay homage to the martyrs who rendered su-

preme sacrifices in defence of the motherland.

The Field Marshal offered Fateha and reaffirmed that the sacrifices of Shuhada remain the cornerstone of Pakistan's security and resilience, the Inter-Services Public Relations (ISPR) stated.

During the visit, the Field Marshal was given a comprehensive briefing on the security environment,

ongoing intelligence-based operations and measures in place for border man-

agement.

The Field Marshal was briefed in detail regarding ongoing Operation Ghazab ul Haq and developments along Pakistan-Afghanistan border.

Field Marshal Syed Asim Munir interacted with the officers and troops deployed in forward areas, commending their unwavering professionalism, operational vigilance, and high morale during the ongoing skirmishes.

He lauded their steadfast

commitment to safeguarding Pakistan's sovereignty and ensuring peace and stability in the region.

The Field Marshal emphasised that use of Afghan soil by Fitna al Khawarij and Fitna al Hindustan for acts of terrorism against Pakistan was unacceptable and all necessary measures would be taken to neutralize the threat emanating from across the border.

The Field Marshal reiterated that peace could only pre-

vail between both sides if the Afghan Taliban renounced their support for terrorism and terrorist organisations.

Appreciating the Pakistan Army's operational preparedness,

the Field Marshal expressed full confidence in the combat readiness, synergy, and resilience of the formations deployed along Pakistan-Afghanistan Border.

Upon arrival, the Field Marshal was received by the Corps Commander Peshawar,

## 721000 Afghan Migrants Repatriated from Balochistan: Apex Committee

**NEWS DESK:**

A detailed review of the law and order situation, counterterrorism efforts, and governance reforms was carried out during the 21st meeting of the Provincial Apex Committee held in Quetta under the chairmanship of Chief Minister Mir Sarfraz Bugti.

During the briefing, the committee was informed that 721,000 Afghan migrants have been repatriated from Balochistan, while close to one million individuals have returned to Afghanistan through transit routes across the province.

The committee strongly denounced the use of Afghan territory for activities against Pakistan and commended the Pakistan Army for its effective defensive preparedness and swift response to security threats. The forum reaffirmed its confidence in the national leadership, including the Prime Minister of Pakistan and Field Marshal Asim Munir.

Officials informed the meeting that operations against illegal foreign nationals are ongoing, with a cash reward of Rs50,000 announced for citizens providing verified intelligence. The committee was also briefed on intensified action against poppy cultivation, leading to the inclusion of 330 individuals on the Fourth Schedule.



Disciplinary proceedings have been initiated against nine officers accused of involvement in anti-state activities, while show-cause notices for termination have been issued. The committee viewed the distancing of

families from terrorist elements as a constructive and encouraging trend.

The Federal Investigation Agency presented an update on operations targeting hawaladhi networks and extortion

rackets in Balochistan. Authorities reported 24 arrests and 16 convictions so far, with further investigations underway. The Apex Committee expressed satisfaction over the agency's improved performance and directed

continued vigilance.

On the education front, the meeting was informed that 200,000 out-of-school children were enrolled in schools over the past year. Biometric attendance systems have been implemented

in 10 out of 12 universities across Balochistan, with directives issued to extend the system to colleges and schools in the next phase.

Addressing the session, Chief Minister Mir Sarfraz Bugti stated that the impact of deterrence policies is becoming evident and the writ of the state is steadily strengthening. He underscored the importance of a unified and firm state narrative against terrorism.

He emphasized that education and merit will enable children of laborers to achieve upward mobility, noting with pride that five children of laborers were selected for the Pakistan Air Force this year. He further highlighted that 28,000 youth from Balochistan are currently serving in the Pakistan Army and Frontier Corps, describing it as clear proof of the province's patriotism.

The Chief Minister concluded by stressing that all state institutions are aligned to ensure lasting peace and stability. He warned that strict legal action would be taken against elements involved in spreading anti-state propaganda, adding that sustainable peace is linked to development, education, and employment opportunities.

The meeting was attended by the Quetta Corps Commander, senior civil officials, and members of the military leadership.

## QUETTA VOICE

Editor: Asim Khan

### Pakistan-Saudi Arabia Defense Pact – A Historic Milestone in Bilateral Relations



**Editorial:** For over eight decades, Pakistan and Saudi Arabia have enjoyed close and cordial relations rooted in faith, friendship, and mutual cooperation. The recent visit of Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif to the Kingdom has further strengthened these historic ties, marking a new chapter in the relationship between the two brotherly nations.

#### SMDAA Unprecedented Event

The signing of a Strategic Mutual Defense Agreement between Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif and Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman is unprecedented. For the first time, both states have formally pledged that an attack on one will be considered an attack on both.

This landmark pact is not only a testament to their shared commitment to peace and security but also a reflection

of the growing geopolitical importance of Pakistan in the wider Middle East and South Asia. Over the years, Saudi Arabia has stood firmly by Pakistan, extending support in critical times, whether financial, diplomatic, or strategic. At the same time, Pakistan has successfully managed to maintain positive ties with both Saudi Arabia and Iran, balancing its role in a region often marked by divisions. This ability to uphold cordial relations with diverse regional players demonstrates Islamabad's maturity in diplomacy.

#### This Is Indeed A National Achievement

This historic step deserves to be celebrated as a national achievement. It is a reflection of Pakistan's enduring diplomacy and its ability to transform long-standing friendships into strategic partnerships that ensure stability, prosperity, and peace for generations to come.

the international stage and help consolidate its role as a bridge between the Muslim world and the global community. The defense agreement with Saudi Arabia is, therefore, a matter of immense pride for the Pakistani nation. It not only secures Pakistan's strategic interests but also strengthens the balance of power in the region. Such developments assure the people of Pakistan that their country is not isolated but deeply engaged in shaping the future of regional security and cooperation.

#### China, Turkey And Saudi Arabia Fully Support Pakistan

Equally significant is the fact that Pakistan continues to receive consistent and unconditional support from major global actors such as China, Turkey, and Saudi Arabia. These relationships enhance Pakistan's leverage on

## Balochistan in the Eye of Climate Change Storm: Calls for Resilient Climate Policies Surface

Chandni Kakar:



In the global battle against climate change, Balochistan, Pakistan, serves as a stark reminder of the urgent need for climate resilience. The province is experiencing increasingly severe weather events, a consequence of human-induced climate change. However, many residents mistake regular fluctuations for regular weather occurrences, hindering recognition of the escalating climate crisis.

#### Balochistan becoming unbearably hot

Balochistan is becoming unbearably hot, with rising temperatures transforming heatwaves into a year-round threat. These heatwaves pose severe health risks, including heat stress, dehydration, and even fatalities. In

2017, Turbat recorded a scorching 53.5°C (128.3°F), setting a record for Pakistan. Unfortunately, forecasts suggest that temperatures will continue to rise. However, the climate challenges in Balochistan extend beyond relentless heat waves. The province grapples with devastating droughts and floods, both of which wreak havoc on homes and infrastructure. The floods of 2010 and 2022 left nearly 4 million people displaced, disrupting lives and triggering food shortages and price spikes due to their impact on the agriculture sector.

#### The 2022 flood in Balochistan underscores the looming climate change threat

The 2022 flood underscored the looming threat of climate

change over Balochistan. Driven by intensified and increasingly frequent monsoon rains, the full extent of the damage is yet to be comprehended. However, it exposed the province's vulnerabilities and highlighted the urgent need for effective management strategies. Balochistan's annual rainfall of just 200 mm barely meets the needs of its parched population. This water scarcity adversely affects food production, access to drinking water, and livestock numbers, exacerbated by climate change. The severe droughts of 1997-2003 and 2014-2017 forced migrations to water-rich areas.

#### CC affects economy

Climate change also decimated the region's economy

through the loss of livestock. Between 2010 and 2022, over 1.5 million livestock were lost, costing over \$1 billion and displacing over 100,000 people, particularly in districts like Quetta, Pishin, Turbat, Pajpore, and Khuzdar.

However, Balochistan cannot accept this grim fate. It requires comprehensive strategies tailored to its unique needs of its parched population. This water scarcity adversely affects food production, access to drinking water, and livestock numbers, exacerbated by climate change. The severe droughts of 1997-2003 and 2014-2017 forced migrations to water-rich areas.

#### CC affects economy

Climate change also decimated the region's economy

equally crucial. **Tree plantations could mitigate sweltering temperatures**

In a province where tree planting could mitigate sweltering temperatures and climate change impacts, government initiatives should engage younger generations in green initiatives. Achieving a resilient future necessitates a collaborative effort involving government, local communities, civil society, and the commercial sector. Balochistan's path towards resilience begins with a symphony of collective action.

By addressing these critical issues, Balochistan can better adapt to the challenges posed by climate change, ensuring a more secure and sustainable future for its residents.

## Israel and Iran Conflict and Its Impact on Middle East Stability

Syed Muhammad Wascon:

Israel and Iran are exchanging deadly attacks. Israeli strikes have hit homes, hospitals, and aid workers in Tehran. Iran responded with missile and drone attacks on cities like Tel Aviv and Haifa. Many civilians have been killed or injured on both sides.

The conflict is drawing global attention. President Trump left the G7 early due to the crisis. UK leaders warn against military action without approval. Tensions are rising, and the risk of a wider war is growing. Global powers are urging both sides to de-escalate.

The violence is shaking the region's stability. Political alliances are shifting, economies are under pressure, and millions fear what comes next.

Behind the strikes and statements lies a deeper struggle for military power, especially between Iran and Israel. From the origins of their rivalry to current military actions, regional fallout, and global reactions, this article breaks down what you need to know.

**Historical Background**  
The Iran-Israel conflict history began intensifying after the 1979 Iranian Revolution, which transformed Iran from a close ally of Israel into one of its fiercest opponents.

Iran's support for armed groups like Hezbollah and Hamas, along with Israel's targeted assassinations and airstrikes, deepened the divide.

The October 7 Hamas attack and Israel's retaliation marked a sharp escalation, pushing the conflict into more direct and dangerous territory.

Over the years, the tensions have played out through a timeline of provocative events. Iran's controversial nuclear program has



drawn repeated warnings and attacks from Israel. Both nations have launched cyberattacks against each other, with the Stuxnet virus and strikes on nuclear sites. Proxy wars have continued across Lebanon, Syria, and Gaza, keeping the region in a constant state of unrest.

**External Powers**  
External powers have also shaped the conflict's course. The U.S. strongly supports Israel with military aid and intelligence, while Iran receives political backing from Russia and economic support from China.

These global ties have made the situation more complex, raising the stakes and limiting diplomatic solutions.

**Current State of the Conflict**  
The conflict between Israel and Iran is intensifying, with Israel intercepting 30 drones

and multiple ballistic missiles. From Iran, Israel's airstrikes targeted nuclear sites, while also killing Iranian chief of staff Ali Shamamir.

Iran retaliated with missile strikes on Israel, causing damage in places like Herzliya, though no injuries were reported. The conflict has led to at least 224 Iranian and 24 Israeli casualties, with countries like India and Pakistan evacuating their citizens from Tehran.

Israel's attacks have disrupted Iran's energy infrastructure, including the South Pars gas field. The violence has strengthened support for Iran's hardliners, with global concerns rising over the ongoing conflict.

**Impact on Middle East Stability**  
Political Instability  
The Israel-Iran conflict is deeply affecting nearby nations. Syria is moving closer to the West. Iraq struggles to balance relations with Iran and the U.S.

Egypt and Jordan are working to protect their own security. This conflict is not just about two nations—it's changing the political map of the Middle East.

on, regional alliances are shifting. Syria is moving closer to the West. Iraq struggles to balance relations with Iran and the U.S.

Egypt and Jordan are working to protect their own security. This conflict is not just about two nations—it's changing the political map of the Middle East.

The Israel-Iran conflict has triggered a regional arms race. Countries like Saudi Arabia, UAE, and Egypt are increasing their defense spending.

They want to upgrade weapons, air defenses, and missile systems. This rise in military buildup reflects growing fears of future attacks.

The chances of a wider war are also rising. Iran's support for militias and Israel's direct strikes have already pulled

producers and consumers. Trade routes and airlines are also affected. Several carriers suspended flights to Iran, Iraq, and nearby nations. Jordan, Iraq, and Iran closed their airspace, halting traffic on some of the world's busiest air corridors. These changes hurt tourism and slow cargo movement across continents.

Conflict-hit countries like Iran face added economic pressure. Sanctions, rising inflation, and oil infrastructure damage are worsening Tehran's financial crisis. Iraq and Lebanon may also suffer due to economic ties with Iran and ongoing instability.

Global inflation may rise if this war continues. **Humanitarian and Social Consequences**  
The human toll is rising fast. Over 220 Iranians, including women and children, have been killed.

Israeli casualties are also growing. Missiles and airstrikes are displacing families, destroying homes, and leaving civilians trapped in unsafe areas.

Anger is spreading across the region. Anti-Israel protests have erupted in Iraq, Lebanon, and Egypt. At the same time, anti-Iran sentiment is growing in countries like Jordan and Syria. The conflict is deepening political divides and fueling mistrust among neighboring populations.

This rising hostility is damaging regional unity. People are taking sides based on political or religious beliefs. Online hate speech and propaganda are also increasing.

If the conflict continues, the social fabric of many Middle Eastern countries could unravel even further.

**International Reactions and Mediation Efforts**

The United States strongly backs Israel and warns Iran of tougher retaliation. President Trump stated that future strikes could be even more brutal if Tehran doesn't step back. Meanwhile, the EU and United Nations have urged both sides to show restraint and return to dialogue to avoid a wider war.

Russia and China have taken a different stance. Both nations criticized Israel's actions and called for a peaceful solution.

Russia offered to host peace talks, while China emphasized the need to protect energy routes and maintain regional stability.

Despite rising tension, diplomatic efforts are slowly moving.

The UN is considering emergency talks, and some countries are proposing fresh sanctions on Iran.

Others are pushing for a ceasefire and talks to prevent further bloodshed and protect civilians on both sides.

**Conclusion**  
The Israel-Iran conflict has triggered political instability, military escalation, and economic shockwaves. Neighboring countries like Syria, Lebanon, and Iraq face serious risks, while oil prices and trade routes are under pressure.

Civilian lives have been lost, and public anger is growing. Global powers are taking sides, but some are also pushing for peace.

This conflict is not just about two nations, it affects the whole region and beyond. With rising deaths and economic damage, urgent diplomacy is needed. Only strong regional cooperation and global mediation can stop the violence and bring long-term peace.

# Trump claims 'everything's been knocked out' in Iran

**NEWS DESK:** US President Donald Trump on Tuesday boasted of wide damage on Iran inflicted by the US-Israeli attack, while denying that Israel had forced his hand into launching the war. "Just about everything's been knocked out," Trump said as he met German Chancellor Friedrich Merz, answering his first questions from reporters since the strikes began on Saturday.

Trump's administration has given conflicting reasons for going to war, with Secretary of State Marco Rubio saying Monday that the US did so only after learning that ally Israel was going to strike. But Trump walked that back, saying that he acted to prevent Tehran launching an assault first.

"Based on the way the negotiation was going, I think they (Iran) were going to attack first. And I didn't want that to happen," Trump said in the Oval Office. "So, if anything, I might have forced Israel's hand."

The US president has also faced criticism for the lack of an apparent day-after plan for Iran, and he admitted that he was not sure how the situation would play out after the conflict. "I guess the worst case

would be, we do this, and then somebody takes over who's as bad as the previous person, right?" Trump said, referring to Ayatollah Ali Khamenei.

Iran's supreme leader was killed in air strikes on the first day of the conflict. "I guess the worst case would be, we do this, and then somebody takes over who's as bad as the previous person, right?" said Trump. "That could happen. We don't want that to happen."

Trump also told protesters in Iran to hold off any major moves until the situation had stabilized. He has also used the recent deadly crackdown on protests in Iran as a justification for the war. "We've said, don't do it yet. If you're going to go out and protest, don't do it yet," Trump added.

He said that two waves of US-Israeli attacks on Iran had killed figures he had eyed as potential new leaders, adding that there had been a "substantial" new attack on a meeting to choose the new leadership. "Most of the people we had in mind are dead," he said. "Now we have another group. They may be dead also, based on reports."

Trump further said



the reason there wasn't an evacuation plan for our embassies is that "it happened all very quickly." "As soon as this ends those prices are going to drop, I believe, lower than even before," he said.

Earlier, Trump had said that it was too late for talks with Iran even though Tehran wants them, according to AFP.

"Their air defense, Air Force, Navy, and Leaderships is gone. They want to talk."

"I said 'Too Late!'" Trump wrote in a Truth Social post, two days after saying he had agreed to talks, amid the joint Israeli-US bombardment of Iran.

Trump has renewed his criticism of Britain for initially holding off

on Iran by the United States and Israel because any British military action must have a "viable, thought-through plan" and he did not believe in "regime change from the skies".

But he has since allowed the US to use UK bases to launch what he called limited and defensive strikes to weaken Tehran's capabilities, after Iran hit 7 US allies in the region with drones and missiles.

On Monday, a British base in Cyprus was hit by a drone that Cyprus officials said was likely launched by Iran-backed Lebanese group Hezbollah.

Trump says US will cut all trade with Spain after he refused to let the US military use its bases for missions linked to strikes on Iran.

"Spain has been terrible," Trump stated, adding that he had told Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent to "cut off all dealings" with Spain.

"We're going to cut off all trade with Spain. We don't want anything to do with Spain," he added.

Foreign Minister Jose Manuel Albares said Spain would not allow its military bases, which are jointly oper-

ated by the U.S. and Spain but under Spanish sovereignty, to be used for attacks on Iran, which Spain has condemned.

Fifteen US aircraft have left the Rota and Moron military bases in southern Spain since the attacks on Iran, maps by flight tracking website FlightRadar24 showed on Monday.

Iran says will hit all Mideast economic hubs if US-Israeli attacks persist.

An Islamic Revolutionary Guard general warned Tuesday that continued US-Israeli attacks would see Iran conduct reprisals against "all economic centres" in the Middle East, AFP reported.

"We are saying to the enemy that if it decides to hit our main centres, we will hit all economic centres in the region," said Ebrahim Jabbari.

"We have closed the Strait of Hormuz. Currently, the price of oil is above \$80 and will soon reach \$200," he was quoted as saying by Iranian news agency ISNA, as Brent crude climbed above \$85 for the first time since July 2024.

Israel says hit ballistic missile production sites across Iran.

## X suspends revenue sharing for undisclosed AI war videos

**NEWS DESK:** Social media platform X announced on Tuesday that it would suspend creators from its revenue sharing program for 90 days if they posted AI-generated videos of armed conflicts without disclosing that they were artificially made, the company said.

The policy change, announced by an executive of the Elon Musk-owned platform, targets what the company described as a threat to information authentic-

ity amid the ongoing war pitting the US and Israel against Iran.

"During times of war, it is critical that they have access to authentic information on the ground," X's head of product Nikita Bier said, adding that current AI technologies make it "trivial to create content that can mislead people."

X said on Monday that it would "continue to refine" its policies and product to ensure the platform "can be trusted during these

critical moments".

The new AI disclosure policy represents a notable pivot for a platform whose approach to content moderation has been heavily criticised since Musk completed his \$44 billion acquisition of Twitter — subsequently rebranded as X — in October 2022.

Since Musk's takeover, X has largely sought to remove its policies against misinformation, deeming them censorship.

Under the new rules, repeat offenders face permanent suspension from the Creator Revenue Sharing program, which pays eligible users a share of advertising revenue generated by their posts.

Violations will be flagged through Community Notes — the platform's crowd-sourced fact-checking system — as well as through metadata and other technical signals embedded in AI-generated content.

## At least 101 people missing after submarine attack on Iranian ship off Sri Lanka, sources say

**NEWS DESK:** At least 101 people were missing and 78 were wounded after a "submarine" attack on an Iranian ship off Sri Lanka's coast, sources said on Wednesday.

Earlier, it was reported that the Sri Lankan military rescued at least 30 people on board a sinking Iranian ship near Sri Lanka waters, the country's foreign minister told parliament.

The Sri Lankan navy dispatched a rescue mission after a distress call from the Iranian ship, a defence ministry spokesperson said earlier on Wednesday.

Vijitha Herath said Sri Lankan navy vessels and an aircraft were deployed for the rescue operation, but did not say what caused the Iranian warship to sink.

Herath did not give further details but said Sri Lanka would take ap-

propriate action.

Local media reported that the ship reported distress off the coast of Galle in the southern part of the country, and that the injured had been admitted to a hospital in Galle.

An opposition legislator asked in parliament whether the vessel had been bombed as part of the ongoing US-Israeli attacks against Iran, but there was no immediate response from the government.

Navy spokesman

Buddhika Sampath said their operation was in line with Sri Lanka's maritime obligations.

"We responded to the distress call under our international obligations, as this is within our Search and Rescue Area in the Indian Ocean," Sampath told AFP.

Local officials said the main hospital in Galle, 115 kilometres (70 miles) south of the capital, had been placed on alert to receive the evacuated sailors.



## Pakistan Embassy in UAE halts in-person services 'until further notice'

**NEWS DESK:** The Pakistan Embassy in the United Arab Emirates (UAE) announced the temporary suspension of its in-person consular services "until further notice" on Wednesday in view of the evolving regional situation.

A circular issued by the embassy referred to an advisory by the UAE Ministry of Human Resources and Emiratization recommending remote work for the private sector, discouraging workers from remaining in open areas.

The embassy termed the measure "precautionary," saying it had been taken "in the interest of the safety and well-being of community members and embassy staff alike." It provided emergency contact numbers for commu-

nity members to remain in touch if they needed assistance.

The embassy added that updates regarding resumption of services would be communicated "in due course" through official channels.

It advised Pakistani nationals to follow the instructions of local authorities and stay informed through official announcements.

The US and Israel attacked Iran on Saturday, assassinating Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei and carrying out hundreds of airstrikes.

The conflict has since spread across the Middle East as Iran's retaliatory strikes have thrown Gulf states into chaos.

## US Congress considers moves to curtail Trump's war powers

**NEWS DESK:** The US Congress meets this week to consider a Senate war powers resolution and two competing measures in the House of Representatives aimed at limiting President Donald Trump's authority to expand US military operations against Iran without explicit congressional approval.

The Senate resolution, led by Senator Tim Kaine (Democrat-Virginia), invokes the War Powers Resolution of 1973, which was enacted during the Vietnam War to check presidential war-making authority. If adopted, it would require the termination of the US armed forces' involvement in hostilities against Iran unless Congress authorises their continuation.

"The Constitution says we're not supposed to be at war without a vote of Congress," Kaine said. "The lives of our troops are at risk. We ought to come back to Washington right away and vote on this."

In the House, Rep. Ro Khanna (Democrat-California) and Rep. Thomas Massie (Republican-Kentucky) have introduced a bipartisan resolution directing the president to remove US

forces from hostilities against Iran without congressional approval.

At the same time, a separate and more cautious House approach has been backed by Rep. Josh Gottheimer (Democrat-New Jersey) and other centrists, who have stopped short of demanding an immediate halt but called for compliance with existing law and congressional consultation. Gottheimer said he expects the president to "simply return to the War Powers Act."

The votes follow coordinated US and Israeli strikes on Iranian military and political targets, an escalation that has reportedly resulted in American casualties and raised fears of a broader regional conflict.

Democratic leaders have framed their position around congressional oversight rather than immediate disengagement. Senate Minority Leader Chuck Schumer (Democrat-New York) said he had urged Secretary of State Marco Rubio to "be straight with Congress and the American people about the objectives of these strikes and what comes next," adding that the Senate "should return to session to pass a war powers resolution."

House Minority Leader Hakeem Jeffries (Democrat-New York) also called for classified briefings and a formal vote, saying the administration must "provide an ironclad justification for this act of war, clearly define the national security objective and articulate a plan to avoid another costly, prolonged military quagmire in the Middle East."

Progressive lawmakers have been more direct in opposing the operation. Sen. Bernie Sanders (Independent-Vermont) and Sen. Jeff Merkley (Democrat-Oregon) have publicly declared "no war with Iran."

But divisions are visible within the Democratic Party. Sen. John Fetterman (Democrat-Pennsylvania) said he would oppose the resolution. "It's not necessary. Honestly, though, the entire thing is really an empty gesture," he said.



# Senate body discusses health sector legislation

ISLAMABAD (INP): The Senate Standing Committee on National Health Services, Regulations and Coordination discussed key legislative and policy matters concerning the health sector.

The committee which met under the chairmanship of Senator Amir Waliuddin Chishti undertook a detailed consideration of the Private Member's Bill titled

"The Electronic Nicotine Delivery Systems (Regulation) Bill, 2025".

Members appreciated the intent and efforts behind the proposed legislation and held an in-depth discussion on its various provisions.

The ministry briefed the committee on objections raised by stakeholders and proposed a complete ban on the use of vapes, citing

concerns that such devices may facilitate drug injection and smoking, and that the bill does not adequately address taxation aspects.

After deliberation, the committee resolved to incorporate the ministry's proposed amendments and directed that a comprehensive briefing be presented in the next meeting following the incorporation of these amendments.

The committee also examined and recommended the admission policy for private medical colleges. Expressing concern over the existing 50% weightage assigned to the Medical and Dental College Admission Test (MDCAT), members termed it disproportionate and called for a thorough review of the current admission scheme.

# China-Pakistan cooperation expands into green urban innovation

ISLAMABAD (INP): China-Pakistan technological cooperation is expanding beyond energy and infrastructure into sustainable urban development, as Islamabad authorities initiated discussions with Chinese investors on electric vehicle charging networks and advanced construction technologies aimed at transforming the federal capital into a model green city.

The Capital Development Authority (CDA) hosted a high-level meeting with a Chinese investor delegation to explore collaboration on electric mobility infrastructure, innovative housing solutions, and environmentally sustainable urban technologies.

Pakistan's growing alignment with China's green development expertise, Gwadar Pro reported.

At the center of discussions was the development of a citywide electric vehicle (EV) charging ecosystem designed to support Islamabad's transition toward cleaner transportation.

Officials highlighted newly introduced regulatory frameworks intended to accelerate private investment while ensuring long-term operational viability.

Randhawa said that Islamabad offers significant investment potential in EV infrastructure, noting that the CDA has already established regulatory guidelines and enforcement mechanisms to facilitate deployment.

The initiative aligns with Pakistan's broader climate commitments and reflects increasing adoption of Chinese clean-mobility technologies worldwide.

Dr Khalid Hafiz explained that updated building regulations now require commercial developments to allocate at least three percent of their space for EV charging facilities, integrating electric mobility planning directly into urban design standards.

Additionally, charging infrastructure will become mandatory

across nearly all 138 fuel stations in the capital, with existing stations required to install at least one charging point and new stations obligated to establish two.

According to Gwadar Pro, the Authorities also outlined plans to develop dedicated EV charging hubs at strategic locations throughout Islamabad, aiming to reduce range anxiety and encourage public adoption of electric transport solutions.

The Chinese delegation expressed interest in participating in Pakistan's emerging EV market and presented technological solutions covering charging systems and smart infrastructure integration.

Discussions emphasized potential collaboration models that combine investment with technology transfer and local capacity development.

Beyond mobility, talks expanded into innovative housing technologies, particularly 3D-printed construction methods that promise faster, more cost-efficient, and environmentally sustainable housing delivery.

Chinese representatives briefed officials on global applications of the technology, highlighting reduced construction waste, lower costs, and accelerated project timelines.

Chahira in a Randhawa emphasized that future urban expansion must incorporate modern construction solutions capable of addressing housing demand while minimizing environmental impact.

Technology transfer and local skill development were identified as key objectives of potential cooperation.

The meeting also reviewed proposals to introduce electric bikes and scooters as part of an integrated urban mobility strategy.

Officials discussed complementary environment-friendly initiatives, including progress toward electric train systems designed to reduce congestion and emissions in the rapidly expanding capital.



ISLAMABAD: President Asif Ali Zardari in a meeting with Mr Naveed Kamran Baloch who called on him following the administration of his oath as Wafaqi Mohtasib (Federal Ombudsman) at Awan-e-Sadr.

# MNAs resume debate on escalating situation in region, urging diplomatic intervention and national unity.

ISLAMABAD (INP): Lawmakers in the National Assembly on Wednesday resumed debate on the escalating situation in the region, with members urging diplomatic intervention and national unity.

Speaking on the floor of the House, Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) leader Mirza Khattab Baig urged major regional and global powers to play an active role in defusing rising tensions in the Middle East, warning that continued conflict could further destabilize the Muslim world.

Baig noted that while negotiations with Iran were ongoing, Israel launched an attack on the country, exacerbating regional security concerns. He described the situation as deeply troubling, with Muslim nations divided and confronting both internal and external pressures. Calling for urgent diplomatic efforts, Baig said Pakistan, as an elected member of the United Nations Security Council, should play a proactive role in preventing further escalation.

Usama Hamza highlighted that the attack on Iran had entered its fifth day, alleging that it

was part of a broader pattern of Western interventions in Muslim countries since 2001. He claimed that "arrogant powers" had repeatedly targeted Muslim states over the past two decades, citing Iraq, Libya, and Yemen as examples of military interventions based on allegations that later proved unfounded. He urged the Muslim world to reflect on its collective role and unity amid growing regional tensions. Sheikh Alah Ahmad expressed deep concern over the conflicts, saying the news was "heartbroken" over the situation in the Middle East, particularly the recent attack on Iran. He criticized Israel's actions, alleging that the country had previously devastated Palestinian areas and caused widespread destruction in Muslim-populated regions. Ahmad described the situation as tragic, asserting that certain global powers continue efforts to destabilize and weaken Muslim nations, along with Turkey, Russia, China, and the United Nations Secretary-General.

Muhammad Farooq Sattar termed the regional situation a "critical and historic juncture," noting that both the region and Pakistan were at a sensitive turning point requiring unity and clarity of purpose. He referred to the in-

camera briefing provided by Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif and Deputy Prime Minister Ishaq Dar, suggesting that a joint session of Parliament should also be convened to ensure the participation of elected representatives, including those unable to attend the briefing.

He emphasized that Pakistan cannot afford internal divisions at this stage. "We must not allow any rift between brothers within the country that could be exploited by others," he stressed, urging the need for a clear and unified national stance. He highlighted Pakistan's close ties with neighboring Iran, as well as its longstanding relations with Gulf countries, calling for a diplomatic approach that safeguards all strategic partnerships during this challenging period.

PPP leader Shahida Rehmani described the developments in Iran as a moment of historic significance, recalling the sacrifices of Karbala and the enduring legacy of Imam Hussein (RA) as a defining moment for the Muslim Ummah. She said Iran had faced attacks, sanctions, and diplomatic isolation but continued to demonstrate resilience, uniting its people despite pressure from the United States and its allies.

Mir Shabir Ali Bijani called for greater unity among Muslim nations, emphasizing the need for collective reflection and coordinated action in light of escalating tensions. He highlighted Iran's Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei's decades-long role in the country's political and religious affairs and noted that Pakistan was among the first countries to condemn recent hostilities against Iran. He urged the Muslim Ummah to recognize the gravity of the crisis, citing the possible, though brain-controlled rehabilitation, the patient graduated from the total paraplegia to walking with crutches, reports China Economic Net (CEN) on Wednesday.

One confined to laboratories, BCIs is now entering clinical and commercial pathways.

For countries with aging populations and significant neurological health burdens, BCIs represent a medical technology opportunity grounded in real healthcare de-

mand, core technological challenges, and long industrial cycles.

In China, they have also become a clearly defined future industry, disabed in long-term national planning and backed by an expanding ecosystem of hospitals, startups, manufacturers, and regulators.

Why BCIs? China's interest in Brain-Computer Interfaces (BCIs) is driven by a triad of strategic imperatives, namely, technological sovereignty in key supply chains, large clinical demand from neurological patients, and new economic growth opportunities.

As a field that integrates advanced materi-

# Brain-Computer Interfaces: China's Strategic Bet on a Constrained Frontier

ISLAMABAD (INP): Five years post-spinal surgery, a patient is back on his feet. The NeuCyber Matrix BMI System (Beina-1) made it possible through brain-controlled rehabilitation, the patient graduated from the total paraplegia to walking with crutches, reports China Economic Net (CEN) on Wednesday.

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# Crackdown against adulteration, sale of substandard food items continues

PESHAWAR (INP): The Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Food Safety and Halal Food Authority has continued its province-wide crackdown against adulteration and the sale of substandard food items.

According to the spokesperson, Food Safety teams, in coordination with district administrations, carried out joint operations in Buner, Battagram, Haripur, Lakki Marwat, Mardan, Lower Dir and Charsadda under the provincial government's Ramadan Plan.

During the operations, inspections were conducted at meat shops, milk sellers,

samosa and pakora outlets, bakeries, kebab shops, general stores and other food businesses.

Several outlets were sealed and heavy fines imposed over violations, including the sale of meat from underage animals, use of substandard and rancid cooking oil, poor hygiene conditions and non-compliance with food safety SOPs.

The spokesperson said that in Battagram, the Manshara Food Safety team confiscated and destroyed 200 liters of substandard cooking oil and 50 kilograms of spoiled liver.

Director General

In Haripur, 150 liters of adulterated and substandard milk were discarded on the spot after failing tests conducted through a mobile food testing laboratory.

Similarly, in Mardan, Lower Dir and Charsadda, cooking oil used at kebab and frying units was tested with modern equipment. Substandard oil was destroyed and fines were imposed accordingly. Improvement notices were also issued to several businesses, while expired licenses were renewed and new licenses issued where required.

Director General



ISLAMABAD: Federal Minister for Finance and Revenue, Senator Muhammad Aurangzeb, chairing a meeting of the committee constituted by the Prime Minister to monitor petrol prices and supply dynamics amid regional tensions, at the Finance Division today.

# PSF launches first National Contest for Need-Based Technologies 2026

ISLAMABAD (INP): The Pakistan Science Foundation (PSF) has announced the launch of its First National Contest for Need-Based Technologies 2026, opening doors for young students and researchers across the country to present innovative solutions to real-world problems.

PSF, which has long been committed to promoting science and creativity among school and university students, says the contest is designed to encourage applied science and technology that directly addresses local and national needs.

The foundation is inviting projects and in-

novations from young researchers and students that are original, practically presented, and capable of making a meaningful difference in everyday life.

According to an official source, the interested participants are expected to present their innovative solutions in the form of working models or physical products.

The contest is divided into two categories. The first category is aimed at students from Grade 7 to Grade 12, covering secondary and higher secondary school levels. Students in this category may participate individually or in groups of up to three, with a registration fee of Rs. 2,000 per individual or group.

The second category is open to university students enrolled at the BS or MS level in any public or private government-recognized institution in Pakistan.

Like the first category, participation can be individual or in a group of up to three students, though the registration fee is higher at Rs. 5,000 per individual or group.

The cash prizes are on offer for top performers in both categories. In the school-level category, the first prize stands at Rs. 200,000, the second at Rs. 100,000, and the third at Rs. 50,000. In the university-level category, the first prize is Rs. 500,000, the second at Rs. 250,000, and the third at Rs. 100,000. University-level participants compete for more substantial rewards, with the first prize set at Rs. 500,000, the second at Rs. 300,000, and the third at Rs. 100,000. PSF has made clear that prizes will only be awarded to projects that are original, clearly presented, and practically viable.

All working models and products must be physically delivered to the PSF office located at 1-Constitution Avenue, G-52, Islamabad, before the April 30 deadline.

The decision of the jury will be considered final in all matters.

The last date to submit entries is April 30, 2026, and application forms are available for download on the PSF's official website at psf.gov.pk.



ISLAMABAD: Central President ISO Pakistan Amin Shiraz, Vice Chairman Majlis Wahdat-e-Muslimeen Allama Ahmed Iqbal and other leaders are addressing a press conference at the NPC.



# Govt kicks in energy contingency plan

**NEWS DESK:** The government has decided to roll out a contingency plan to keep cars and stoves running amid disruption of fuel supplies while Pakistan's trade deficit jumped 25% to \$25 billion ahead of any adverse impact of rising crude oil and liquefied natural gas (LNG) prices.

A ministerial committee responsible to ensure smooth supplies of petroleum products on Tuesday presented the contingency plan to Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif after Qatar told Pakistan that it may not be able to provide LNG cargoes due to the ongoing Gulf war.

PM Sharif has empowered the committee to take all the necessary decisions to continue seamless energy supplies. Finance Minister Muhammad Aurangzeb chairs the committee that has representation from all the relevant stakeholders, including the Petroleum Division.

It has been decided that the government will immediately try to bring 350 million cubic feet per day (mmcf) of local gas production online that was earlier curtailed to make room for surplus



LNG

The government has also decided to cut gas supplies to fertiliser plants, minimise gas flow to power plants from 250 to 80 mmcf and, if needed, cut supplies to CNG stations.

Government officials said that despite the curtailment of gas to the fertiliser plants, there would not be any shortage of the commodity due to the availability of over 800,000 metric tons of stocks. To meet power needs during evening, the government may run some of the closed plants on alternative fuels. There would also be gas rationing for households considering the recent developments, the officials said.

Pakistan's crude oil

supplies would be affected in the wake of tensions in the Strait of Hormuz and the Red Sea. The officials said that PM Sharif was expected to ask the Saudi ambassador to provide oil cargoes through the Red Sea as the Strait of Hormuz was closed.

Iran has broadened the scope of the war after it was attacked by the

United States and Israel. Iran is now hitting energy facilities of those Gulf countries that have provided military bases to the US.

Crude oil prices jumped above \$83 per barrel on Tuesday, which would carry huge implications for consumers as well as the current account deficit. Owing to limited supplies, LNG prices are also on the rise, making it difficult for the government to book cargoes from alternative routes.

The Pakistan Bureau of Statistics (PBS) on Tuesday released the July-February trade figures, which again portrayed a sorry state of external trade. The gap between imports and exports reached \$2.7 billion during the eight-month period. The deficit was \$5 billion, or 23%, higher than the same period of last fiscal year.

The trade summary showed that exports fell in all the three monitored benchmarks - month-on-month, year-on-year and for eight months.

Exports fell to \$22.7 billion during the first eight months of the current fiscal year, down 7.3%.

## Agritech shuts urea plant due to disrupted LNG supply

**NEWS DESK:** Agritech Limited (AGL) has announced the suspension of operations at its urea plant following a disruption in Re-gasified Liquefied Natural Gas (RLNG) supply, according to a notice submitted to the Pakistan Stock Exchange (PSX) on Wednesday.

The company

stated that Sui Northern Gas Pipelines Limited (SNGPL) had formally communicated a "potential event of force majeure" declared by the Liquefied Natural Gas (LNG) supplier.

According to the notice, the development stems from "the ongoing regional conflict in the Middle East," which has disrupted LNG production facilities and, in turn, impacted LNG supply to Pakistan.

As a result of this, SNGPL informed Agritech that RLNG supply to its fertilizer plant would be suspended from 12am on Wednesday until further notice. Therefore, Agritech confirmed

## Experts stress solar policy clarity

**NEWS DESK:** Experts have urged policymakers to introduce policy clarity in a bid to attract Chinese solar manufacturing under the Green CPEC Alliance.

The Pakistan-China Institute hosted a regional conference titled "Asean-to-Pakistan Pathways: Attracting Chinese Investment for Solar PV Value-Chain Manufacturing", aimed at drawing lessons from Southeast Asian solar boom to Pakistan, and adding to anchor manufacturing in Pakistan.

Griffith Asia Institute Director Dr Christoph Nedopil called for focusing on the conditions that made Asean a preferred destination for Chinese solar manufacturing.

He emphasised the role of credible investment facilitation, execution readiness and the broader logic of China's overseas "cleantech push, while guiding discussion on what Pakistan must prioritise first to compete for the next wave of manufacturing investment, including closing gaps related to policy stability, Special Economic Zones (SEZ) execution, logistics and investor risk protection.

Pakistan-China In-

stitute Chairman Senator Mushahid Hussain Sayed, in his address, underscored that Pakistan's solar growth was increasingly tied to China's industrial power, citing imports of around 17 gigawatts (GW) of solar panels in 2024 and about 17.9 GW in FY25, taking total imports beyond 50 GW by September 2025, while Pakistan's share in China's solar exports rose to about 12% in 2025 from 2% in 2022.

He highlighted solar's impact on energy security, noting solar provided about 25.3% of Pakistan's utility electricity between January and April 2025.

He pointed to a one-time strategic window at a time when global solar installations reached around 597 GW in 2024 and module prices fell to \$0.07 to \$0.09 per watt in 2024 and early 2025, taking total imports beyond 50 GW by September 2025, while Pakistan's share in China's solar exports rose to about 12% in 2025 from 2% in 2022.

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## Pakistan requests alternative oil supply route from Saudi Arabia after closure of Hormuz Strait

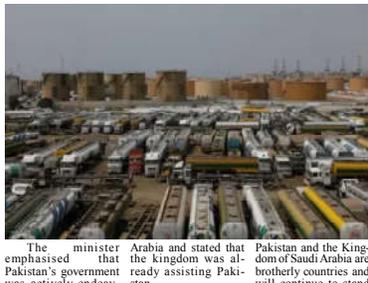
**NEWS DESK:** Pakistan on Wednesday formally requested that Saudi Arabia provide an alternative oil supply route through Yanbu to maintain its fuel supply chain in the wake of the closure of the Strait of Hormuz following the United States-Israeli attack on Iran.

The request was made by Federal Minister for Petroleum Ali Pervaiz Malik to the Saudi ambassador to Pakistan, Nawaf bin Abdul-Malki during a meeting. The Saudi ambassador assured full support in this regard, according to a statement by the petroleum division.

During the meeting, both sides discussed matters of mutual interest and bilateral cooperation.

The minister apprised the ambassador about the current situation and the implications of the closure of the Strait of Hormuz on global energy markets.

He stated that Pakistan is closely monitoring the evolving situation on a daily basis, as the majority of Pakistan's energy supplies transit through the Strait.



The minister emphasised that Pakistan's government was actively endeavouring to ensure continuity of the energy supply chain for its people.

He noted that the support of brotherly countries like Saudi Arabia meant a lot to Pakistan during challenging times.

Malik further highlighted that Saudi Arabian sources had assured security of supplies through the port of Yanbu on the Red Sea, which could help meet energy requirements.

He also expressed gratitude for the continued support of Saudi Arabia and stated that the kingdom was already assisting Pakistan.

He added that one vessel had been assured dispatch from Pakistan to the port of Yanbu to lift crude oil for Pakistan.

The minister further expressed hope that supplies of oil from Yanbu would be prioritised for Pakistan.

The ambassador stated that the kingdom was fully aware of the evolving situation and reaffirmed that Saudi Arabia will stand firmly with Pakistan to meet any emergency requirements.

He emphasised that

## Exports contract 8.76pc in February

**NEWS DESK:** Pakistan's merchandise exports slipped back into negative territory in February, reversing a brief recovery seen a month earlier and raising fresh concerns over port performance, particularly for overseas shipments amid escalating tensions in the Middle East.

The setback follows five consecutive months of contraction, with exports showing a modest rise in January, offering cautious optimism that a recovery might be taking shape.

That momentum, however, proved short-lived as February data signalled renewed pressure on the external sector.

Trade analysts warn that the unfolding crisis in the Middle East could weigh further on export performance, particularly by disrupting trade routes, dampening demand in key regional markets, and adding uncertainty to global supply chains.

With geopolitical risks mounting, exporters now face heightened volatility in the months ahead.

In absolute terms, export proceeds fell 18.76pc to \$2.27 billion in February from \$2.49bn a year ago, the Pakistan Bureau of Statistics (PBS) said on Tuesday.

Trade gap widens by one-fourth to \$25.04bn in MY26.

On a month-on-

month basis, export proceeds dipped by 25.63pc in February from the previous month. Last month, the government announced several measures, including a reduction in energy rates, to minimise pressure on the country's trade performance.

Currently, the exporters are grappling with subdued global markets and the high cost of doing business in the country.

The textile exporters have already complained about contractions owing to the high cost of doing business.

In FY25, export proceeds rose 4.67pc to \$52.106bn against \$50.675bn in the preceding year.

Trade deficit narrowed 1.68pc to \$5.25bn in February from \$5.34bn over the corresponding period last year. Last month-on-month, imports decreased 9.51pc.

In the first eight months of 2025-26, the import bill grew by 8.06pc to \$45.51bn, up from \$42.11bn in the corresponding period last year.

The import rose 6.57pc to \$58.38bn in July-January FY25 from \$54.78bn over the previous year.

The trade deficit narrowed 4.63pc to \$2.98bn in February from \$2.85bn over the corresponding month of last year. The trade deficit swelled 24.98pc to \$25.04bn in July-February 2025-26, up from \$20.04bn over the corresponding period last year.

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# England 'not fearing anything' against India, says Curran

**NEWS DESK:** England will go into their T20 World Cup semi-final against India with no fear, said all-rounder Sam Curran on Tuesday, adding that their first job would be to silence a raucous home crowd.

England will take on the favourites and hosts in front of 35,000 fiercely partisan fans in Mumbai on Thursday, with a place in the final against South Africa or New Zealand at stake.

The noise will be deafening at times in the cauldron-like confines of the Wankhede Stadium.

But Curran said that because he and many of his England teammates — such as Will Jacks at the Mumbai Indians — play in the Indian Premier League (IPL), they will not be fazed.

"It's an experience as a young cricketer you dream of — playing India in the semi-final of the World Cup," left-arm seamer Curran told reporters.

Curran was in the international wilderness a year ago but forced his



way back into the England squad with eye-catching performances in T20 franchise leagues, including the IPL. "India are a quality side but we've played a lot of cricket here. We know how to play on these grounds and we know what to expect," he said. "The IPL, no question, has helped a lot.

Having played in the first match of the tournament when they beat Nepal in a final-ball thriller. He then repeated the feat against Italy and has contributed

by the challenge," Curran said, adding England could judge how well they were playing by the volume of the fans.

"If the crowd are silent, England are probably going to be doing well. That's our positive way of looking at it," said Curran.

It is the third T20 World Cup in a row that England will have played India in the semi-finals and each time the winners have gone on to lift the trophy.

In 2022, England crushed India by 10 wickets in Adelaide and went on to beat Pakistan in the Melbourne final.

Two years ago, India won in Guyana by a similarly dominant 68 runs before downing South Africa in Barbados.

South Africa face New Zealand in the first semi-final on Wednesday. The final will take place on Sunday in Ahmedabad.

"I guess this is what the last four or five weeks have been building for," said Curran.

## Sabalenka backs 'best-of-five' Slam proposal

**NEWS DESK:** World number one Aryna Sabalenka on Tuesday voiced her support for a proposal to make women's matches best-of-five sets during the later stages of Grand Slam tournaments.

Speaking ahead of this week's ATP-WTA tournament in Indian Wells, the hard-hitting Sabalenka said she believed switching to five sets would benefit her game.

"Yeah, let's do that," the four-time Grand Slam singles champion said when asked about the idea, which was floated by incoming US Tennis Association chief Craig Tiley at the Australian Open earlier this year.

"I feel like I would have probably more Grand Slams," Sabalenka added.

"Physically I'm really strong, and I'm pretty confident that my body can handle that. So let's do it," Tiley, the former head of the Australian Open who last week was named as the new USTA chief, told the New York Times in an interview last month that switching to five sets from the quarter-finals onwards at Grand Slams should



be discussed. "All the research shows interest grows as the match goes on," Tiley said. "As a sport, we need to evolve." But while Sabalenka backed the move, other women players were more circumspect. "I mean, it probably would favor me, because I'm physically up there with the best, but I mean, I probably wouldn't want to see that happen," reigning French Open champion Coco Gauff told reporters. "And if it were to happen, I would prefer it to be the whole tournament, not just the

## Atletico hammered but reach Copa del Rey final

**NEWS DESK:** Atletico Madrid struggled through a 3-0 Copa del Rey semi-final second leg defeat at Barcelona on Tuesday but scraped into the final 4-3 on aggregate.

The Spanish champions almost produced a comeback for the ages after their 4-0 first leg defeat in early February, but fell just short at Camp Nou.

Youngster Marc Bernat netted twice for the record 32-time winners and Raphinha scored a penalty as Barcelona tried in vain to claw back Diego Simeone's side's lead.

Atletico, who clung on desperately in the first 32 minutes, returned to the final for the first time since 2013.

They will face Real Sociedad or Athletic Bilbao, who meet on Wednesday in the second semi-final second leg.

"We are disappointed but we can be very proud about the performance we showed today," Barca coach Hansi Flick told reporters.

"It was an amazing game from us and we created a lot of chances to score even more goals. In the end it didn't happen and we have to

accept it." Simeone insisted his team deserved to progress over the two legs.

"We were close to getting back to the final (in recent years), and in this two-legged game we were better than Barcelona," said Simeone.

Barcelona came out flying and Ferrn Lopez's long-range effort just over the bar set the tone, as Hansi Flick's team threw everything they had at a potential comeback.

They were dealt an early setback when Jules Kounde went off injured in the opening stages.

Antoine Griezmann

came close against his former side as Atletico threatened on the counter-attack. Ferran Torres fired wide and had a shot saved low at the near post by Atletico goalkeeper Juan Musso before Barcelona took the lead. Teenage star Lamine Yamal drilled across the face of goal for Bernat to finish from close range, with one 18-year-old setting up another.

Ademola Lookman headed narrowly off-target for Atletico and came to rue the miss as Barca doubled their advantage before the interval. Spain midfielder Pedri was tripped in the

box by Marc Puyill and Raphinha sent Musso the wrong way from the spot. Atletico held out.

Joao Cancelo almost grabbed the third but his shot was beaten away by Musso at full stretch, with Simeone's team on the ropes.

Bernat set up a frantic finale when he volleyed home Cancelo's swirling cross to take Barca within one goal of the crumbling Rojiblancos.

Flick put centre-back Ronald Araujo up front for the final stages, in search of a fourth goal to "make the impossible possible", as he called on his team to do before the game.



## Will Iran take part in 2026 FIFA World Cup?

**NEWS DESK:** The war in the Middle East triggered by US and Israeli strikes on Iran has raised the question of whether the Iranian national team will take part in the World Cup later this year, during which it is due to play group games in the United States.

The possibility of a boycott of the World Cup has been raised in Iran.

Within hours of the joint US-Israeli strikes beginning on Saturday, Iranian Football Federation president Mehdi Taj told Iranian television: "What is certain at the present time is that with this attack and this cruelty, we cannot look forward to the World Cup with hope." Taj also announced that the Iranian domestic league had been suspended.

"Team Melli", as the Iranian national team are known, secured qualification in March last year for a seventh World Cup, and a fourth in a row. Iran have been drawn in Group 'G' with Belgium, Egypt and New Zealand and are due to play two games in Los Angeles and one in Seattle.

A large Iranian diaspora lives in Los Angeles since the Islamic



Revolution of 1979. A large part of that diaspora backed the Pahlavi dynasty which was overthrown in the revolution.

World football's governing body is re-examining cautious regarding the possibility of Iran pulling out of the World Cup. "We had a meeting... and it is premature to comment in detail, but we will monitor developments around all issues associated with the world," FIFA secretary general Mattias Graström said on Saturday.

A source close to FIFA said no discussions had yet taken

place with the Iranian Football Federation regarding a possible withdrawal of the team from the tournament.

Tuesday marks exactly 100 days to the tournament's opening game and the situation in Iran could become acutely uncomfortable for FIFA, president Gianni Infantino, who has been keen to show that he has a close relationship with US President Donald Trump.

All the more so as other countries in the Gulf who are due to take part in the World Cup have been drawn into the war, with Saudi Arabia, Qatar and Jordan

all being targeted by retaliatory Iranian strikes.

FIFA's regulations do not provide for the possibility of a boycott of the World Cup by a qualified team. A source close to world football's governing body said "specific decisions" would have to be taken to replace Iran with another team if necessary.

Article 6 of the regulations for the 2026 World Cup says that "if a participating member association withdraws, as a result of force majeure, FIFA shall decide on the matter at its sole discretion and take whatever action is deemed necessary."

## Markram eyes 'fresh start' for unbeaten South Africa in semi-final battle against New Zealand

**NEWS DESK:** South African captain Aiden Markram on Tuesday said his team's win over New Zealand in the group phase will count for nothing in the T20 World Cup semi-final, which will be a "completely fresh start". The two teams clash at Kolkata's Eden Gardens in the first semi-final on Wednesday, with both having never lifted a cricket World Cup.

South Africa are the only unbeaten side in the last four and trying to rid themselves of a reputation for choking in the final stages at World Cups. They have been the team to be beaten in this edition and got the better of New Zealand by seven wickets in a group game in Ahmedabad on Feb 15.

"We had a good run against them (New Zealand) in the group stages, but both teams have played a lot of cricket since then," Markram told reporters.

"It's a completely fresh start tomorrow and it being a semi-final which is exciting as well. I don't think it's as straightforward as just being able to repeat that."

"We'll try to bring



our best game to the front again." South Africa suffered a heartbreaking defeat in the 2024 T20 World Cup final against India in Barbados, when they needed 30 off 30 balls with six wickets and lost by seven runs after a clatter of wickets.

South Africa beat India and the West Indies in the Super Eight to have many marking them down as the favourites to lift the trophy.

"With regards to being favourites or not, that's all different people's opinions," said Markram. "Was a team really

just try to focus on putting good games of cricket together and playing that exciting brand that we've been trying to play for the last 18 months or so."

Markram has led South Africa from the front with 268 runs including three half-centuries and a top score of 86 not out in seven matches.

He holds an impressive captaincy record of 15 wins in 16 T20 World Cup matches with the only defeat in the 2024 final.

"The senior guys in the team, we lean on them a lot. They help guide you and lead you

when you have a few doubts," said Markram. "I think because of that and a really strong group of players over the years, we've developed that. Fortunately, it reflects well, but it's definitely a reflection on the group as a whole."

"NZ Back themselves in one-off games" New Zealand captain Mitchell Santner said underdogs New Zealand back themselves against anyone in "one-off games".

Santner admitted that unbeaten South Africa, who comfortably beat New Zealand in the group stage, were "very good".



## 578 flights cancelled in 5 days amidst Middle East tensions

**NEWS DESK:** Pakistan's international airports are experiencing widespread flight cancellations for the fifth consecutive day due to ongoing regional tensions in the Gulf.

With a total of 578 flights to Gulf countries, including the UAE, Bahrain, Kuwait, and Qatar, being cancelled since March 28, with 162 flights cancelled on Wednesday alone.

Affected carriers include Emirates, Etihad, Air Arabia, PIA, Air Blue, Fly Dubai, and Qatar Airways.

Sources report that 578 flights to Middle Eastern countries have been cancelled from Pakistan's airports over the past five days.

At Karachi Airport, 40 flights to Dubai, Abu Dhabi, Qatar, Sharjah, Kuwait, and Bahrain were cancelled.

## PTI 'opts out' of today's in-camera huddle on security

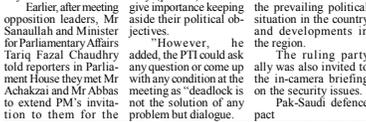
**NEWS DESK:** In a significant political development, the government on Tuesday invited the main opposition Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) to sit together and shun their differences specifically for the sake of external and internal security threats to Pakistan and fragile security situation in the region.

The ruling PML-N extended the olive branch to the PTI when Special Assistant to PM on Political Affairs Raja Sanaulah met Mehmoed Achakzai and Raja Nasir Abbas, leaders of the opposition in the National Assembly and the Senate, respectively, inviting them to attend an important in-camera briefing, convened by Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif at his office at 11:00am today.

However, the PTI has decided not to attend any meeting unless a meeting with its founder Inran Khan is arranged. Govt had invited all parties to the briefing, convened by PM Shehbaz.

The decision was made during the meeting of the party's political committee, held on Tuesday.

Earlier after meeting opposition leaders, Mr Sanaulah and Minister for Parliamentary Affairs Tariq Fazal Chaudhry told reporters in Parliament House they met Mr Achakzai and Mr Abbas to extend PM's invitation to them for the



Senator Muhammad participated as a Special Invitee, while Senator Hidayatullah Khan attended as the mover of the point of public importance.

The chairman highlighted complaints regarding overcharging of admission fees beyond the prescribed capped limit of Rs1.8 million and directed PMDC to take strict action against any violations.

The panel further

Qatar Airways has also issued an update, confirming that its flight operations will remain suspended until March 6 due to the continued closure of Qatari airspace. Passengers will receive further updates on March 6 at 9:00am.

The airline added that operations will resume once the airspace is safely reopened and advised passengers to check their website for the latest updates.

Meanwhile, SriLankan Airlines has resumed limited flight operations between Colombo and Dubai from Wednesday, following a suspension that began on February 28.

Flight UL231 will depart from Colombo to Dubai, while the return flight UL232 will carry passengers back to Colombo, the airline confirmed.

No benefit will go to PTI if it refuses the dialogue process."

In the past, the PTI had refused to sit with the government on many other important issues except for a condition that the government had to release PTI founder Inran Khan from jail.

Replying a question, he said Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif and Chief of Defence Forces (CDF) Field Marshal Syed Asim Munir were using their personal relations and influence for de-escalation in the war US-Israel war on Iran. "We are quite hopeful for success in this," he added.

Mr Chaudhry said the prevailing fragile situation required that all parties to think above their political affiliations and interests and attend the huddle.

Earlier, PM Shehbaz along with Deputy Prime Minister Ishaq Dar, federal ministers Ahsan Iqbal and Azam Nazeer Tarar, besides Mr Sanaulah met a PPP delegation comprising Senator Sherry Rehman, Raja Pervez Aslam Syed Naveed Qamar, and Ajaz Jakhani and discussed the prevailing political situation in the country and developments in the region.

The ruling party ally was also invited to the in-camera briefing on the security issues.

Pak-Saudi defence pact

## In-camera briefing on regional situation concludes at PM House

**NEWS DESK:** The leaders of parliamentary parties, led by Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif, were on Wednesday given an in-camera briefing on the regional situation.

PM Shehbaz had invited parliamentary leaders and party heads to "sit down and develop a course of action so we can move forward". Law Minister Azam Nazeer Tarar said on Tuesday while addressing the National Assembly.

The briefing began shortly after 11:30am and concluded after more than two hours. It mainly discussed the ongoing "Operation Ghazab Hil-Haq" against terrorist hideouts and the Middle East conflict.

"The meeting was given an in-camera briefing regarding the Pakistan-Afghanistan situation, the hostilities in Iran, Middle East and the Gulf, and Pakistan's diplomatic efforts," read a statement from the PM Office (PMO). It added that the parliamentary leaders of the participating political parties "freely expressed their views" and the participants underscored the need for national unity,



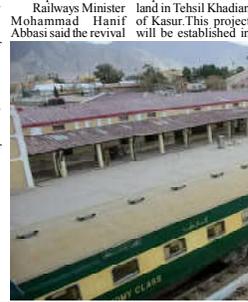
consensus and unanimity in the current circumstances," the PMO statement said. It noted that the attendees hailed Pakistan's diplomatic efforts, read a statement from the PM Office (PMO). It added that the parliamentary leaders of the participating political parties "freely expressed their views" and the participants underscored the need for national unity,

## Bulleh Shah Express from Kasur to Pakpattan resumes from May 28

**NEWS DESK:** Federal Minister for Railways Hanif Abbasi on Tuesday announced that Bulleh Shah Express (Kasur to Pakpattan) would be resumed.

The route of Bulleh Shah Express passes through Kasur, Usmatwala, Kanganpur, Mandi Ahmedabad, Basirpur, Haveli Wasavewala to Pakpattan.

Railways Minister Mohammad Hanif Abbasi said the revival of the train would provide affordable, safe and reliable travel facilities to the local population and would promote regional economic activities. In addition, as a major initiative for the people of Kasur, approval was given for the establishment of a public park on 25 acres of land in Tehsil Khudyan of Kasur. This project will be established in the constituency of the prime minister, speaker Punjab Assembly and Minister of State Malik Rashid Ahmed Khan, which will provide opportunities for recreational and healthy activities to the local citizens. The minister also announced the beautification and upgradation of Kasur Railway Station to provide modern facilities to the



## Senators voice concern over fee hikes by private medical, dental colleges

**NEWS DESK:** The Senate Standing Committee on Health Services on Tuesday expressed grave concerns regarding the overcharging of fees by private medical and dental colleges.

The meeting was chaired by Senator Amir Waliuddin Chishti and attended by Senators Nadeem Ahmed Bhutto, Syed Masroor Ahmad, Rubina Khalid, Anusha Rahman Ahmad Khan, Rahat Jamali, Sarmad Ali, Dilawar Khan and Agha Shahzaib Durrani.

He urged the ministry to explore measures for increasing the overall number of medical seats in the country. The body examined the centralised admission policy for private medical colleges.

Expressing concern over the existing 50 per cent weightage assigned to the Medical and Dental College Admission Test (MDCAT), members termed it disproportionate and called for a thorough review of the current admission scheme.

The committee urged the Pakistan Medical and Dental Council (PMDC) to reassess the structure and rationale of MDCAT and align it with international best practices.

Senator Chishti also directed PMDC to consider reducing the MDCAT weightage to 33 per cent, assigning 10pc to interview and 57pc to present a detailed, evi-

dence-based briefing on the matter in the next meeting.

The issue of licensing for foreign-qualified doctors was also discussed.

The chairman of the committee directed PMDC to facilitate qualified doctors who have successfully cleared the National Registration Examination (NRE) in accordance with the prescribed requirements for the grant of medical licenses.

Additionally, the committee took up the matter concerning the alleged arbitrary selection by the universities of Health Sciences (UHS) of students from Balochistan under the Prime Minister's Special Scholarship Program, instead of those selected through the prescribed process by HEC and PMDC.

The Chairman directed PMDC to examine the matter and ensure its prompt resolution throughly.

Q's Chaudhry Salik Hussain.

Senators part of the briefing included PPP's Sherry Rehman, BAP's Manzoor Ahmed Kakar, PML-N's Pervaiz Rasheed, MQM-P's Faisal Subzwari, National Party's (NP) Jan Muhammad, Anwarul Haq Kakar and Hafiz Abdul Kareem.

MNAs participating in the meeting included PPP's Naveed Qamar, MQM-P's Farooq Sattar and Aminul Haque, as well as NP's Pullain Baloch Senate Chairman Sousef Raza Gilani, NA Speaker Sardar Ayaz Sadiq, Senate Deputy Chairman Syedal Khan Kasur and NA Deputy Speaker Ghulam Mustafa Shah were also present in the meeting.

Cabinet members who attended it included Deputy PM and Foreign Minister Ishaq Dar, Information Minister Attallah Tarar, Law Minister Azam Nazeer Tarar, Planning Minister Ahsan Iqbal, Parliamentary Affairs Minister Tariq Fazal Chaudhry, Health Minister Mustafa Kanar, and Public Affairs Minister Rana Mubshir Iqbal.