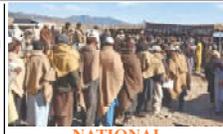




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First Digital, Print Daily of Balochistan

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149 Pakistanis Arrive at Taftan Border from Iran as Regional Tensions Persist

Riaz Hussain Baloch:

CHAGAI: The arrival of Pakistani nationals from Iran at the Taftan border continues amid the ongoing tensions between

Iran and Israel. According to officials, another 149 individuals reached the Taftan border after arriving from Iran. Among them are 53 pilgrims, three tourists, eight

businessmen, and four work visa holders. Officials said that since the escalation of tensions between Israel and Iran, a total of 2,660 people have entered Pakistan through the

Taftan border. Deputy Commissioner Chagai Jahanzeb Noor Shahwani stated that all necessary facilities are being provided to the arriving individuals at Pakistan House

Taftan. He added that the returning Pakistanis are being sent to Quetta in convoys, from where they proceed onward to their respective cities. Geographic Reference

Balochistan Education Department Announces Temporary School Closure in Balochistan

Education Desk

QUETTA : On March 9, 2026, the Government of Balochistan through the Balochistan Education Department (Schools) announced the temporary closure of all public and private educational institutions across the province.

According to the official notification, the decision has been taken in view of the prevailing regional situation and to ensure administrative preparedness for any potential emergency circumstances.

As per the directive, all schools and educational institutions across Balochistan will remain closed from March 9, 2026,

until March 23, 2026 with immediate effect. Authorities stated that the measure has been taken to facilitate the public and to address potential issues related to transportation and mobility.

However, the Education Department clarified that several academic activities will continue as scheduled during

the closure period. These include the ongoing admission campaign, the digital school census, and any ex-

aminations already scheduled. Relevant officials and staff have been instructed to continue these activities effec-

tively in accordance with the guidelines issued by the department. Officials also stated that

the situation is being monitored continuously, and further instructions may be issued if required.



PM Shehbaz Announces Austerity Measures as Global Oil Prices Cross \$100 Amid Middle East Conflict

NEWS DESK:

ISLAMABAD: Shehbaz Sharif on Monday announced a series of austerity measures to manage the economic impact of the ongoing Middle East conflict, which has pushed global oil prices above \$100 per barrel and created new challenges for Pakistan's economy.

In a televised address to the nation, the prime minister said the regional war had increased instability across energy markets, directly affecting oil-importing countries such as Pakistan. He stressed that the government was taking necessary steps to protect the national economy while minimizing the financial burden on the public.

Fuel Conservation Measures Introduced

To reduce fuel consumption, the government decided to cut fuel allowances for official vehicles by 50 percent for the next two months. Additionally, 60 percent of government vehicles will remain off the roads during the same period as part of the austerity strategy.



However, emergency services such as ambulances will remain exempt from these restrictions.

Oil Prices Create Economic Pressure

The prime minister noted that Pakistan relies heavily on oil and gas imports from Gulf countries. Due to the ongoing regional conflict and disruptions in supply routes, the global oil market has become volatile.

He said the government had recently taken "difficult decisions," including adjustments in petroleum prices, to cope with rising international oil costs and maintain economic stability.

Government Assures Public of Economic Stability

Shehbaz Sharif assured citizens that Pakistan's economic indicators have shown improvement in recent months, including lower inflation, a relatively stable rupee, and reduced electricity tariffs.

Despite these improvements, he warned that oil prices may continue rising if tensions escalate in the region. The government, he said, will continue working day and night to protect the economy and reduce the impact on the public.

Regional Security and Diplomatic Efforts

The premier also addressed the broader regional situation, saying Pakistan is closely monitoring developments in the Middle East and pursuing diplomatic efforts to ease tensions.

He added that Pakistan's armed forces remain alert to deal with security challenges along the western borders while ensuring national stability.

EDITORIAL

Editor: Asim Khan

Balochistan's Climate Fund – A Lifeline Against Growing Disasters

Editorial: Balochistan has taken a historic and timely step by establishing its first-ever Climate Fund, a move that signals the province's recognition of the existential threat posed by global warming and climate change. In his recent meeting with British High Commissioner Jane Marriott, Chief Minister Mir Sarfraz Bugti rightly underscored the urgency of mobilizing resources to safeguard communities from natural calamities that are growing in frequency and intensity.

Floods in Bannar: The tragic flash floods in the Bannar area of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa this month, which claimed precious human lives, are a grim reminder of Pakistan's extreme vulnerability. The province stands on a fragile ecological and seismic zone — prone not only to floods but also to recurrent droughts, earthquakes, and the looming threat of desertification. Each disaster further strains the already fragile infrastructure, displaces communi-

ties, and deepens poverty.

Stop Deforestation: The Climate Fund, if implemented transparently and effectively, has the potential to become a lifeline for millions. It can provide the financial base for disaster preparedness, early warning systems, reforestation, water management, and community resilience projects. Equally important, it can build trust between the government and people by showing that saved resources — like the Rs. 14 billion curtailed from the budget — are being invested in protecting lives and livelihoods.

The Battle Cannot Be Fought Alone: However, climate change is not a battle fought in isolation. Partnerships with international allies, such as the United Kingdom, are essential for bringing technical expertise, innovative solutions, and funding support. The Climate Fund must be protected for the people of Balochistan.

By Durdana Najam:

Pakistan at UNGA: climate change must take centre stage

The 80th United Nations General Assembly convenes this month under the theme "Better together: 80 years and more for peace, development and human rights". For Pakistan, the session offers not just another forum for speeches, but a crucial stage to demand justice on behalf of climate-vulnerable nations.

Each word of the UNGA theme — peace, development, human rights — rings hollow for nations fighting against the reality of climate injustice. There can be no peace when communities are repeatedly displaced by floods, no development when infrastructure collapses, and no human rights when people are stripped of homes and livelihoods by a crisis they did not create.

The delegation Pakistan sends to New York must put climate change at the heart of its diplomacy. This is not a matter of prestige but of survival. With less than one per cent contribution to global greenhouse gas emissions, Pakistan has become one of the top ten most climate-vulnerable states (Germanwatch Global Climate Risk Index, 2021). The injustice is clear: those who polluted least are paying the highest price.

Scientists confirm that monsoon patterns in South Asia are being intensified by climate change (IPCC AR6, 2021), a trend that raises the risk of many more disasters in the future. Pakistan's recent ordeal makes this injustice tangible. Since late June 2025, heavier-than-ever monsoon rains and cloudburst floods have claimed over 1,000 lives, inundated farmland and disrupted livelihoods. The catastrophe displaced 33 million people, destroyed 2 million homes, damaged 4.4 million acres of crops and inflicted \$30 billion in economic losses. The scars of earlier floods in 2010 and 2011 are still raw, both in infrastructure and in memory.

The country's experience with previous disasters only strengthens the case. In 2010, unprecedented floods displaced 20 million people and caused losses of more than \$10 billion (World Bank, 2010 Post-Disaster Needs Assessment). The following year, Sindh was hit again, with nine million affected. In 2022, the devastation was catastrophic: a third of the country under water, 33 million people affected, 1,700 dead, and \$30 billion in losses (World Bank, 2022 Damage and Needs Assessment). That single event pushed nine million more Pakistanis below the poverty line.

Pakistan's vulnerability is compounded by geography. Accelerated melting of over 7,000 glaciers — the largest concentration outside the poles — now brings both short-term floods and long-term water scarcity. Record-breaking heatwaves, with temperatures soaring above 50°C, have triggered heatstroke and dehydration among vulnerable communities, with devastating effects on agriculture. The backbone of Pakistan's economy, is at the mercy of a climate crisis it did not create.

This is the message Pakistan's delegation must carry to New York: climate justice is not charity but obligation. If we cannot spend even our revised Nationally Determined Contribution (NDC), pledging an unconditional 15% reduction in emissions by 2030 and a conditional 35% cut if finance and technology were made

An environmental awakening

Under a CommonSky, unlike the cliché associated with the word, common specifically when it comes from diasporic intelligentsia, is a profound example of relational aesthetics or digital relationality.

In simple words, it illustrates what defines art today. Delighted by your thoughtful and comprehensive approach to the project recently showcased at the South Asia Institute in Chicago, I was eager to receive it. I admit that being in a lecture room with this curious, young world is indeed a fulfilling experience. The observation below is based on the lack of experience with art, yet ample understanding of the times and challenges they face. I find satisfaction and hope both in your project and in how it was received by these enthusiasts.

The next step is to ensure that it does not become another underutilized policy initiative. Effective monitoring, independent oversight, and community involvement will be key to making it a success. The time has come when we must take all possible steps to translate the promise of the Climate Fund into tangible protections for the people of Balochistan.

Climate change has been a key consideration for my studies and research in the past few months; the scarcity of water for Rabi crops in December-January, the India-Pak war over water in May, the violent monsoon in July, followed by floods in August and September. They were also aware of earthquakes in Russia and Afghanistan or wildfires in California and Australia.

Environment, ecology, greenhouse gases, drought, volcanic eruptions, shifts in temperatures and weather patterns are some of the topics discussed in every classroom in Sciences, IR, P&D, Demography, Psychology, Law, Business, or any other. Let me say that they have been looking into the nature of the visible and the politics of the invisible in the context of climate change.

The visual depiction of the "invisible" in your work is compelling. Let us focus on a living force that affects our environment, stressing the interconnectedness and fragility of our world.

By Sadia Pasha Kamran:

Qatar... what next?

So, Bibi Netanyahu and his right wing, deeply entrenched in the uncontrolled government — which have no respect and regard for international law or for the image hit that it is only benefactor, the US, gets internationally and domestically for their response to the muddled global climate when the League of Nations had all but lost their credibility. My focus though is on an enforcement of impunity that disorder and a residential compound used by Hamas political leaders in the West Bay Lagoon area of Doha, where Hamas leaders were reportedly discussing a new US-backed ceasefire proposal. The strike, after Hamas's earlier brazen attacks on Lebanon, Iraq, Syria and Iran this year alone, killed six people: five members of Hamas and a Qatar security officer.

Key Hamas leaders, reportedly, remained unscathed. Netanyahu confirmed the "wholly independent Israeli operation" to avenge the October 7 attack. The strike drew widespread international condemnation. Qatar, while condemning the attack, vowed to pursue legal avenues for accountability and continue the mission of efforts. In the joint Arab League (AL) and OIC summit in Dhaka, GCC pledged to "activate a joint defence mechanism", and the possibility of trade limitations against Hamas. UNSC unanimously condemned the strike.

By Inam Ul Haque:

South-West Asia and the War Against Narcotics: Where Does Pakistan Stand?

By Dr. B. Sultan:

Lady Macbeth once remarked that "a little water clears us of this deed" after the assassination of the King. Yet, with time she remained haunted, obsessively rubbing her hands in an attempt to cleanse the imagined stains of blood.

The persistence of narcotics production and trade in South-West Asia resembles this unending struggle — a dark reality that cannot be easily washed away. Afghanistan has long been recognized as the world's largest producer of opium, with its roots tracing back to the early 1900s. Over the decades, the repercussions on this industry spilled into neighboring Pakistan and Iran. In the late 2000s, Taliban leader Mullah Omar imposed a strict ban on poppy cultivation through threats, forced eradication, and severe punishments. However, as revealed by the UNODC Opium Survey 2007, the ban primarily targeted cultivation while the trade continued. After the fall of the Taliban, opium again became a major source of funding for logistics, weapons, and militia payments.

In 2022, the Taliban leadership once again announced a ban on poppy cultivation, with Hainullah Akhundzada officially declaring significant reductions. Some Western reports, supported by satellite imagery, showcased declining poppy fields in northern Afghanistan. However, this raises critical questions: Can Af-



ghanistan realistically abandon such a central economic resource while facing sanctions? And what consequences does this shift have for Pakistan?

While certain international outlets hastily claim that Pakistan has become a new hub for narcotics, such narratives grossly oversimplify the issue. The issue is not a simple matter of "shifting sands" but a complex regional security challenge. The porous border between Pakistan and Afghanistan, coupled with cross-border networks of drug traffickers, means temporary shifts in cultivation are often strategic rather than permanent. Moreover, Afghanistan's pivot to drugs, methamphetamine production, and high-technology trafficking, highlighted by satellite evidence of expanded opiate processing hubs — reflects adaptive strategies of traffickers rather than genuine eradication.

In Pakistan, however, the situation is markedly different. Since

2001, the country has largely maintained its "poppy-free" status, despite sporadic spillovers from Afghanistan. Following the Taliban's 2022 ban, some illicit cultivations did emerge in border areas, particularly within Balochistan and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.

Yet, these were swiftly addressed through Pakistan's Poppy Elimination Campaign (PECC-2025). This multi-agency effort, led by the Anti-Narcotics Force (ANF) and provincial administrations, successfully destroyed thousands of acres of illegal poppy fields. Over 250 FIRs were registered, dozens of arrests were made, and awareness campaigns were launched across educational institutions. Importantly, independent surveys after March 2025 confirmed the effectiveness of these eradication drives. Pakistan's determination to combat narcotics often remains under-reported internationally, overshadowed by out-

dated or selective portrayals. The fact remains: Pakistan continues to fight this menace not only for its own stability but also for global security. What is urgently needed is greater recognition of these efforts by the international community and enhanced cooperation from agencies such as the UNODC.

As South-West Asia remains at the heart of global narcotics trade routes, Pakistan's role is both frontline and decisive. Balochistan, in particular, holds the potential to transform from a vulnerable transit zone into a hub of opportunity, stability, and resilience. Just as Lady Macbeth's imagined guilt could not be washed away with water, the global community cannot absolve itself of responsibility by ignoring Pakistan's sacrifices and achievements in this ongoing struggle. The fight against narcotics requires collective recognition, support, and action — not selective narratives.

The great disorder

It is there is one book that I would recommend to readers in these confusing and tumultuous times in global affairs — a rule-based order has run its course without a new one in place — it is Robert D. Kaplan's *War and Peace*.

Netanyahu attempted to eliminate Hamas' engaged the international leadership in the negotiations. Hamas was there on US invitation and assurance of their safety by the Qataris. If ever there was a betrayal of trust in international politics, this was the last nail in its coffin.

The moment is similar in context to the rise of Hitler and dissolution of the Weimar. He calls it a consequence of the wars we lived in. He links of Netanyahu can cause the dominoes to topple just as Hitler did in the post-WWII order. It is American fear of any conflict-resolution mechanism, or authority, or an arbiter that all but lost their credibility for free for all weapons of the end of WWII, a weapon of ultimate arbitration emerged in the form of America's nuclear bombs which brought the last of the axis powers to its knees. Is the world about to witness a repeat of similar proportions?

It must though all begin with investigating what the US has in mind about its own position in the world as never realiter unfolded. The US is largely driven by the authority and its preeminence because of feared disruptions around emerging technologies and AI. China has made rapid advances in these fields and it has unnerved America. Rather than fight to retain its singularity and control of the world system devised in Bretton Woods, the US is resorting to its ultimate power equivalence through use of military force — if not directly, through its proxies in Europe, Middle East and Asia. More than the world threaten, what Netanyahu and Israel is American fear of being dislodged as its prime arbiter that seems to lead the dissolution of that order.

China and the world at large have found stability, predictability and prosperity under the existing global regime and methods of arbitration.

America has underwritten this stability through its leadership.

But when leadership is unnerved and unsure, and apprehensive, it tends to take extreme measures. That is why no one is sure if the UN and its affiliates have the authority and capacity to arbitrate conflicts. If the UN undermines the authority and control and domination of the international system, Israel, Ukraine and India continue to be bolstered by the US to do as told. Hence, Israel's demonic role in Gaza, and now this, are the result of the chaotic behaviour against Qatar, remains unchecked.

Trump's commercial instincts alone when thousands are being slaughtered in Gaza.

Or is he simply playing second fiddle to Netanyahu and Israel may think it is a strategic end? Is Netanyahu running against time under a threat of continuing whittling of American credibility in the world and its position as the preeminent power when it is seen to be standing with and behind Israel in its adventures?

By Shahzad Chaudhry:

The plight of the Indus delta

Extractive and wasteful water use has created a severe crisis for the Indus River flows into the Arabian Sea. This natural confluence of outflowing freshwater and the sea not only prescribes water conservation, but it has also created an interlinked system of swamps, streams and mangrove forests.

This delta ecosystem provides a unique habitat to a diverse range of species, including migratory birds and one of the world's rarest dolphins, the blind Indus River dolphin, all of which are currently under great stress.

The delta covers an area of over 40,000 sq km, which makes it the world's fifth largest delta system, containing within it the seventh

largest mangrove forest system. The Indus delta is mostly located in the southern Sindh province of Pakistan with a small portion in the Kutch region of India.

The Indus delta has been under stress for quite a while now. The Indus River for irrigating cash crops has not only reduced flows downstream, but it has also done persistent damage to the Indus delta and its wetlands.

At a time when there is increasing need for efficient water use, water conservation and sustainability, the water regime in Pakistan remains wasteful and extractive. Besides excessive water extraction, runoff chemicals and other pollutants are other major threats to the Indus delta. In the US-Pakistan

productive areas became infertile. Following independence, the Pakistan government began to invest in large dam projects with support from entities like the World Bank. The increasing diversion of Indus River for irrigating cash crops has not only reduced flows downstream, but it has also done persistent damage to the Indus delta and its wetlands.

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Centre for Advanced Studies in Water estimated a few years ago that the downstream flow of water into the delta has decreased by 80 per cent since the 1950s. Besides irrigation canals, hydropower dams, climate related impacts on glacial and snow melt have also been identified as major factors for this decrease in outflow, which has, in turn, caused major seawater intrusion. The salinity of the water in coastal areas has increased by alarming levels making it very difficult for local farming communities in the delta to grow crops. Increased salinity is leading to larger brackish water extraction, salinisation and a resulting spike in mortality.

By Syed Muhammad Ali:

Israel faces difficulty stopping Hezbollah drones, officials warn of long war

NEWS DESK: Israeli army officials have said the military is facing difficulties intercepting drones launched from Lebanon and may eventually need to evacuate communities near the border, according to a report by Haaretz.

According to them, the Israeli military had so far decided against ordering evacuations, but officials described its success in intercepting drones from Lebanon as "very partial". Army officials also said no time limit had been set for the current operation against Hezbollah in Lebanon and warned that a "long war" was likely.

Haaretz said Israeli military officials believe Hezbollah is significantly weaker than it was during Israel's previous operation in Lebanon in 2024, describing the group as being in a "difficult situation".

According to Haaretz, officials said Hezbollah's elite Radwan force is now operating only north of the Litani River rather than close to the Is-



raeli border, making it more vulnerable to attack. They said the unit was still rebuilding its command structure after many of its senior officers were killed during Israel's

2024 campaign. The report added that Israeli officials believe joint Israeli-American attacks on Iran have cut Hezbollah off from some of its funding

and weapons supply, leaving the group largely isolated from Tehran and fighting Israel more independently. Hezbollah's intervention on Iran's behalf had created ten-

sion between Iran and Lebanon, according to Israeli military officials. Officials claimed the Israeli military had destroyed hundreds of buildings in Lebanon so far, in-

cluding 50 multi-storey structures. Air strikes on Beirut's Dahiyeh district would continue, they said, because it remained an important Hezbollah operations hub. According to

Haaretz, Israeli military sources said Saturday's strike on a hotel in Beirut targeting Iranian officials marked a shift in approach, with the army previously avoiding at-

tacks on targets in especially sensitive locations.

Haaretz said the military was also operating in the Bekaa Valley, where Hezbollah has allegedly been launching rockets and drones.

The IDF's Northern Command had been preparing for the possibility of Hezbollah entering the war for months before the attack on Iran began. Once Hezbollah launched attacks on Israel, those plans were immediately activated, army sources told Haaretz.

Those preparations included strikes on senior Hezbollah figures and Iranian Quds Force officials in Lebanon, who were said to be involved in both directing the fighting and maintaining links between Iran and Hezbollah.

Israeli officials said their forces were trying to prevent three main threats from Lebanon: a ground incursion into Israel, continued rocket and drone fire, and any effort by Hezbollah to rebuild its strength.

Mojtaba Khamenei's appointment as supreme leader draws measured US response, sharp Israeli warning

NEWS DESK: Tehran has confirmed the selection of Mojtaba Khamenei as Iran's new Supreme Leader, a decision that has drawn contrasting reactions from Washington and Jerusalem, reflecting differing strategies in responding to Iran's evolving leadership.

US response: calculated and cautious. So far, President Donald Trump has avoided direct criticism of Mojtaba Khamenei's succession, instead framing the development in terms of energy markets and US strategic influence.

In a post on Truth

Social, an hour after the announcement, he highlighted that temporary oil price increases were a minor cost compared with global stability and security.

But in an interview with ABC News earlier on Sunday, Trump repeated his suggestion that the US has a role in shaping acceptable leadership outcomes.

While he described Khamenei's expected appointment as problematic, he refrained from threatening direct military action.

This approach un-

derscores the US balancing act: managing domestic political narratives, calming global energy markets, reassuring allies, and containing regional conflict without provoking an open war.

Israel's reaction: direct and aggressive. Israel, by contrast, has taken a markedly confrontational stance. Israeli Defence Minister Israel Katz warned that any new leader linked to Iran's ruling elite would be "an unequivocal target for elimination".

The Israeli military stated that it would hold successors personally accountable, a message highlighting Jerusalem's

readiness to continue targeted operations against Iranian leadership figures it perceives as threats.

Even before Mojtaba Khamenei's formal appointment, Israel had stepped up strikes on Iranian infrastructure and proxy positions in the region, demonstrating its willingness to apply pressure not just on policy but on individuals associated with Tehran's strategic direction.

Implications. The Israeli military, reportedly close to the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC), is seen by analysts as a continuation of Iran's hardline policies rather than a turn toward moderation.

His selection maintains the ideological path established by his late father, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, and signals the persistence of the established power structure.

Experts note that many Iranians had hoped for a shift toward a system led by elected officials rather than a clerical figure.

That aspiration, observers say, appears curtailed by the ongoing pressures of regional conflict and foreign intervention.



Trump, UAE leader discuss security as Iran strikes targets across Gulf

NEWS DESK: The United Arab Emirates President, Mohamed bin Zayed Al Nahyan, held a phone call with Donald Trump on Monday to discuss escalating tensions in the region as the US-Israel and Iran war continues, state media reported.

According to the Emirates News Agency (WAM), the two leaders discussed the latest developments and their implications for regional and international security and stability.

During the call, they also addressed what the UAE described as ongoing Iranian attacks targeting the Emirates and other countries in the region. Emirati officials said such actions constitute violations of national sovereignty and pose a threat to regional stability.

The conversation came as authorities in the UAE reported a missile threat early on Monday, saying air defence



systems were responding as Iran carried out retaliatory strikes on Israel and US bases across the Gulf. Attacks have been reported in Kuwait, the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain, Qatar, and Saudi Arabia.

The war began on February 28, when the United States and Israel launched attacks on Iran. On the same day, the UAE defence ministry reported the death of

a person after debris fell following the interception of missiles targeting sites in Abu Dhabi. Another death of a Pakistani national was reported late Saturday night, also due to missile debris.

Earlier today, in a post on X, the National Emergency Crisis and Disaster Management Authority said air defence systems were actively responding to the

threat. State media also reported that authorities in the Emirate of Fujairah had brought a fire under control after shrapnel fell following successful air defence interceptions.

Emergency response teams contained the blaze, and no injuries were reported. Officials have urged the public to rely only on official sources for information.

Bangladesh shuts universities early to save power amid energy crisis

NEWS DESK: Bangladesh will close all universities from Monday, bringing forward the Eidul Fitr holidays as part of emergency measures to conserve electricity and fuel amid a worsening energy crisis.

Officials said universities campuses consume large amounts of electricity for residential halls, classrooms, laboratories, and air conditioning, and the early closure would help ease pressure on the country's strained power system.

Authorities said the decision applies to all public and private universities across the country, a move that officials said will not

only reduce electricity consumption but also ease traffic congestion, which leads to fuel wastage.

Officials said universities campuses consume large amounts of electricity for residential halls, classrooms, laboratories, and air conditioning, and the early closure would help ease pressure on the country's strained power system.

Government and private schools in

Bangladesh are already closed for 95% of its holy month of Ramadan, meaning most educational institutions across the country will now remain shut during the period.

The move comes as Bangladesh faces mounting uncertainty over fuel and gas supplies following disruptions to global energy markets caused by the ongoing conflict in the Middle East. The country,

which relies on imports for 95% of its energy needs, imposed daily limits on Friday on fuel sales after panic buying and stockpiling.

As part of broader austerity measures, the government has also asked all foreign-curriculum schools and private coaching centres to suspend operations during this period to limit electricity use. Severe gas shortages have already forced Bangladesh to halt operations at four of its five state-run fertiliser factories, redirecting available gas to power plants to avoid widespread outages.

The country has also bought LNG from the spot market at sharply higher prices while seeking additional cargoes to bridge supply gaps.

"We are doing everything we can to reduce consumption and ensure stability in power, fuel, and import supplies," a senior energy ministry official said.



Turkey says it deployed six F-16 fighter jets, air defence systems to northern Cyprus

NEWS DESK: Turkey on Monday deployed six F-16 fighter jets and air defence systems to northern Cyprus to boost the security of the Turkish community there amid the war in Iran, the defence ministry said, adding that Ankara would take additional measures if needed.

European powers have moved to ramp up military deployments to the ethnically-split island in recent days, after an Iranian drone, which security officials believe was fired by Hezbollah, an ally of Iran in Lebanon, hit the British Akrotiri air base in Cyprus last week.

In the context of the latest developments in our region, six F-16 fighter jets and air defence systems have been deployed to the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus as of today, the ministry said in a statement, adding that this was part of the phased planning to strengthen the breakaway state's security.

Last week, NATO defences shot down a ballistic missile fired from Iran into Turkish airspace, in a significant escalation of a U.S.-Is-



raeli war against Iran that has spread to the wider region. NATO member Ankara warned Iran on Saturday against firing more missiles towards it.

Turkey has criticised the European Union member Greek Cypriot administration in the south of the island, and is the only country to recognise the Turkish Cypriot state to the north.

The deployment comes amid worsening regional tensions in the Middle East and wider Gulf region. The United States and Israel continue to attack Iran with strikes as the latter con-

tinues to retaliate with its own strikes on US military bases in the region.

Iran fired missiles at Israel early Monday in the name of the Islamic Republic's new leader, Mojtaba Khamenei, who was selected to succeed his slain father despite threats by the United States and Israel to target him next. Meanwhile, Israel struck five oil facilities in and around Tehran early Sunday, killing at least four people and sparking blazes that left the skies filled with acrid smoke.

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Pakistan 'plans' income tax relief for salaried class

ISLAMABAD (INP): Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif has given in-principle approval to a proposal aimed at providing income tax relief to the salaried class in Paki-

stan. The plan suggests lowering the maximum income tax rate by five percentage points to 30% and removing the super tax imposed on high-income earners as well as the corporate sector. However, the government will first seek approval from the IMF before moving forward with the measures. Sources said the

proposals were discussed during a meeting chaired by the Prime Minister and will be presented to the IMF next week. In addition to reducing the highest tax rate for top-

earning salaried individuals, the plan also proposes increasing the related income tax slabs. The Pakistan government is also expected to recommend eliminating the super tax on wealthy individuals and companies as part of its discussions with the IMF.

Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif has instructed officials to further refine the proposal with input from private sector experts so that they are well-prepared and acceptable for IMF consideration. According to sources, the government is exploring a tax relief package worth approximately PKR 1.5-1.8 trillion, although officials acknowledge that the IMF may be hesitant to approve such a significant fiscal concession.



LAHORE: Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif offers condolence over demise of late Zaem Qadri, Senior Politician and former Provincial Minister.

Pakistan targeting militant hideouts in Afghanistan: Tarar

ISLAMABAD (INP): Minister for Information and Broadcasting Attaullah Tarar has said Pakistan is conducting operations against militant hideouts inside Afghanistan based on accurate intelligence information.

In a statement carried by foreign media outlets, he said Pakistan has not targeted any civilian areas in Afghanistan, emphasizing that Pakistan is targeting only the infrastructure of terrorists and their support networks.

He said the imaginary figures presented by the Afghan Taliban government are not even worth a serious comment. He said claims made by the spokesperson of the Afghan Ministry of Defense regarding victories against Pakistan in the battlefield are incorrect and are merely propaganda.

He said the fact that reports by the Afghan Taliban regime and the UN Mission in Afghanistan about civilian casualties in Afghanistan. Attaullah Tarar said the information provided by the UN agency based in Kabul relies entirely on the Taliban government.

He said the fact that Afghan Taliban and the terrorist group Fatah al-Khawarij are jointly carrying out attacks confirms the existence of a nexus between the Afghan Taliban government and multiple terrorist organizations operating from Afghan territory.

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Pakistan won't allow use of its soil for attack on Iran: Rana Tanveer

ISLAMABAD (INP): Federal Minister for National Food Security and Research Rana Tanveer Hussain on Sunday said that Pakistan will not allow use of its soil for attack on Iran.

Speaking to journalists in his constituency Sharqpur Sharif, Rana Tanveer said that Pakistan has strongly condemned the US and Israel attacks on Iran. Pakistan also condemns attacks on Saudi Arabia and other Gulf countries.

He said that Gulf countries and Saudi Arabia have assured Pakistan that they will not allow their territories to be used for attacks against Iran. He also said that Iran should not carry out attacks on Saudi Arabia or Gulf states.

The federal minister further said that Pakistan has joined efforts to maintain peace in Gaza. Pakistan has always condemned Israel's aggression and brutality against the Palestinians.

He also stated that the government has slightly increased petroleum prices due to Middle East tensions. However, if the war continues, petroleum prices may rise further, adding that fuel prices are increasing worldwide.

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KP CM announces subsidy for all motorcyclists in province

PESHAWAR (INP): Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Chief Minister Sohail Afridi announced a subsidy for all motorcyclists in the province to give them some relief amid the rising fuel prices.

Addressing a press conference alongside Special Assistant on Information Shaif Jan and Finance Adviser Muzammil Aslam, the chief minister criticized the recent increase in petrol prices by the federal government.

He described it as an "economic bomb" dropped on the public. He said that the provincial government rejects the increase in petrol prices and urged the federal government to consult provinces before taking such decisions.

Afridi added that the federal government should reduce its own expenditures rather than placing additional financial burdens on citizens. He also accused the federal government of politicizing various national issues.

He said that when petrol prices were increased during the COVID-19 pandemic, the opposition criticized the move.

He noted that around 1.4 to 1.6 million motorcycles are currently registered in the province, and each registered motorcycle user will receive Rs2,200 to help cover transportation expenses.

Afridi said the Government of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa stands with its people and has also decided not to increase fares for the Peshawar Bus Rapid Transit system, with the government absorbing the additional costs.

He further stated that the provincial government has imposed a ban on the purchase and sale of new vehicles and restricted international trips to cut expenses.

Afridi added that despite the crash of the provincial government's helicopter, the administration has decided not to purchase a new one.

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PM awards Rs1.5m to Pakistan national hockey players

ISLAMABAD (INP): Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif has announced a reward of Rs1.5 million for each member of Pakistan's national hockey team for their exceptional performance in the World Cup Qualifiers.

The announcement celebrates both the team's success and their dedication to the sport.

The prime minister described the prize as a testament to the players' perseverance, highlighting the commitment and hard work of the national hockey players.

He added that this initiative not only rewards the team but also serves to promote hockey across the country.

Pakistan's team created excitement among fans by securing qualification for the Hockey World Cup after an eight-year gap, following outstanding performances in the World Cup Qualifiers held in Egypt.

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CM Maryam forms Punjab Economic Transformation Committee

LAHORE (INP): Punjab Chief Minister Maryam Nawaz has constituted provincial Economic Transformation Committee to drive sector-wise development and boost the province's economy.

The 11-member Economic Transformation Committee will be headed by Senior Minister Maryam Aurangzeb, with the Finance Secretary serving as the committee secretary.

Sources said the committee will identify potential growth areas at the district level through economic mapping and prioritize sectors for establishing industry clusters.

It will also set actionable indicators and develop short- and long-term timelines for economic initiatives. Plans will be created in consultation with private-sector stakeholders to ensure feasibility and impact.

The committee will focus on skill development programmes tailored to industry requirements and take steps to link locally produced value-added products to global value chains.

Additionally, it will work on creating a sustainable ecosystem to support economic growth. Proposals include developing specialized industry hubs across Punjab.

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Pakistan records highest petrol prices in region after major hike

ISLAMABAD (INP): Pakistan has recorded the highest petrol prices in the region following a recent sharp increase in petroleum product rates.

The latest comparison comes after the government recently announced a major increase in petroleum prices, citing rising global oil costs and tensions in the Middle East as key factors behind the hike.

In comparison, petrol in India costs about \$1.03 per litre, while in Sri Lanka the price is around 94 cents per litre.

Similarly, petrol in Bangladesh is priced at nearly 95 cents per litre, highlighting a significant gap with Pakistan's fuel rates.

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QUETTA: Secretary Minorities Affairs Syed Noman Shah in a group photo with participants during iftar part organized by SRD and OM.

Balochistan Announces Temporary Closure of Schools, Colleges and Universities Until March 23

News Desk: QUETTA: The Government of Balochistan has announced the temporary closure of educational institutions across the province as a precautionary step in response to the evolving regional situation and potential transport challenges.

According to an official notification issued by the Balochistan School Education Department, all public and private schools across the province will remain closed from March 9 to March 23, 2026. Authorities said the decision was taken to ensure administrative preparedness and to minimize difficulties related to transportation and movement of students and staff.

The department clarified that several ongoing initiatives will continue despite the closure. The province-wide school admission campaign, the digital census of schools, and examinations that are already scheduled will proceed as planned. Relevant officials and administrative staff have been instructed to ensure these activities continue in accordance with departmental guidelines.

In a separate notification, the Balochistan Colleges, Higher and Technical Education Department also ordered the closure of all government intermediate colleges, degree colleges, technical institutes, and public sector universities in the province. Officials said the decision was taken in view of the ongoing conflict in the Middle East and the possible disruption in fuel supply that could affect transportation and academic operations.

Under the notification, colleges and universities will remain closed from March 10 to March 23, 2026. During this period, all academic, teaching, and administrative activities at these institutions will remain suspended. The provincial government said the measure is aimed at ensuring public convenience and maintaining administrative readiness while monitoring the evolving regional situation.

QUETTA: Governor Balochistan Jaffar Khan Mandokhail said that Balochistan University of Information Technology, Engineering and Management Sciences (BUITEMS) has achieved a historic milestone by securing a Bridge Project worth Rs250 million from the European Union for the first time.

He made these remarks during a meeting with Dr. Khalid Hafeez Shaikh, Vice Chancellor of BUITEMS, at the Governor House Quetta. The governor praised the university administration for significantly improving its performance indicators. He noted that BUITEMS' ranking score has increased from 51 percent to 80 percent compared to last year, calling it a remarkable achievement. Governor Mandokhail commended Vice Chancellor Dr. Khalid Hafeez Shaikh and his team for their dedication and efforts to enhance the university's academic and research standards.

He expressed hope that in the near future, all public sector universities in Balochistan will generate new revenue streams through scientific research and patents, ultimately becoming financially self-sufficient. During the meeting, the governor also highlighted the progress of the BUITEMS Zhob Campus, stating that the campus is moving forward in terms of both quality and academic growth. He added that if the campus continues progressing at the same pace, it may soon be upgraded to the status of a full-fledged university.

Higher Education World University Rankings placed the university among the top 1000 universities globally. Governor Mandokhail further stated that the outstanding performance and achievements of BUITEMS represent important milestones of progress, success, and commitment to serving society. He also expressed satisfaction that BUITEMS has been placed in the global band 1500 of the Times University Rankings.



BUITEMS Secures EU-Funded Bridge Project Worth Rs250 Million: Governor Mandokhail



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Security Bunkers and Concrete Wall Project Reviewed for Quetta Red Zone

QUETTA: A review meeting regarding the construction of security bunkers and a concrete wall in the Red Zone was held under the chairmanship of Babar Khan, Secretary of the Communications and Works Department.

The meeting was attended by several senior officials, including Chief Engineer Quetta Zone Abdul Rahim Bangulzai, SE City Engineer Azhar Jan, SP Red Zone Hanan Achakzai, Technical Advisor of the Communications and Works Department Engineer Ehsan Dautani, and Engineer Owais Parvez, along with other officials.

During the meeting, Engineer Owais Parvez delivered a detailed briefing on the progress, technical aspects, and construction phases of the project. He informed participants that work on different phases of the project is currently underway.

The meeting was also briefed about various challenges faced during construction, including security concerns and administrative issues. Participants discussed several proposals and measures to address these challenges and ensure the smooth completion of the project.

Inquiry Launched into Haleem Plaza Fire Incident in Quetta

QUETTA: A meeting to review the investigation into the fire incident at Haleem Plaza Quetta was held under the chairmanship of Shahzaib Khan Kakar, Commissioner of Quetta Metropolitan Corporation.

The meeting was attended by Deputy Commissioner Mehruallah Badini, Chief Fire Officer of Quetta Metropolitan Corporation Abdul Haq, Assistant Commissioner (Political) representatives of the traders' association, the chief fire officer, and other relevant individuals were also recorded. Commissioner Shahzaib Khan Kakar directed the concerned authorities to conduct a comprehensive and transparent investigation to determine the exact cause of the fire.

He instructed the Chief Fire Officer to submit a detailed report on fire safety arrangements at the plaza, including the availability of a fire-fighting system, emergency exit routes, fire extinguishers, and the response during the rescue operation. The meeting also emphasized the need to examine possible causes of the fire, particularly the absence of fire safety certification, electricity-related issues, and other factors.

QUETTA: Deputy Commissioner Mehruallah Badini officially inaugurated the 'Clean and Green Quetta Initiative 2026' by planting a tree at the Parsi Graveyard site in Shehbaz Town Quetta. The launch marked the beginning of a major tree plantation campaign aimed at making the city greener and cleaner. The event was attended by members of the Rotary Club Quetta, representatives of the city's social activists, and a large number of local residents. Participants expressed their commitment to supporting the district administration in efforts to make Quetta a greener and environmentally friendly city.

Addressing the ceremony, Deputy Commissioner Mehruallah Badini said that the Clean and Green Quetta Initiative 2026 aims to promote environmentally friendly activities and raise public awareness about the importance of tree plantation.

He announced that under this campaign, around 10,000 trees will be planted in different areas of the city with the cooperation of citizens, civil society organizations, and various institutions. Badini emphasized that tree plantation plays a crucial role in reducing environmental pollution, mitigating the impacts of climate change, and improving the urban environment.

He urged all segments of society to actively participate in the campaign to help provide a healthier and better environment for future generations. The Deputy Commissioner further stated that the district administration will continue the tree plantation drive in phases across different parts of the city. Government institutions, educational organizations, social groups, and citizens will be engaged in the campaign to transform Quetta into a clean, green, and environmentally pleasant city.

At the end of the ceremony, participants also planted various saplings as part of the campaign. The Deputy Commissioner expressed his appreciation for the active participation of all stakeholders in making Quetta a greener and more sustainable city.

Deputy Commissioner Launches 'Clean and Green Quetta Initiative 2026' with Tree Plantation Drive

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Executive Engineer Building CW PPRM Department Suffer Quetta

ASSISTANT DIRECTOR Local Govt. Killa Abotkhwa

CHIEF Planning Officer CHED PPRM DEPARTMENT

POSITION VACANT. The Government of Balochistan, Health Department invites applications from dynamic and result oriented individuals for the post of Project Director for Establishment of 500 Bedded Teaching Hospital at Loralai purely on contract basis for a period of two (2) years extendable subject to satisfactory performance and life of the project.

Oil prices soar over 25% as Iran war rattles global markets

NEWS DESK: Oil prices surged more than 25% on Monday to their highest levels since mid-2022 as some major producers cut supplies, and fears of prolonged shipping disruptions gripped the market due to the expanding US-Israeli war with Iran.

Energy markets are particularly nervous because the crisis is unfolding around the Strait of Hormuz, through which roughly one-fifth of the world's oil supply normally passes.

Disruptions in tanker movements and rising security risks have already slowed shipping activity, leaving Asian buyers especially vulnerable given their heavy reliance on Middle Eastern crude.

Brent crude futures LCO1 were up \$2.48 to \$117.65 per barrel at 0451 GMT - on track for the biggest-ever jump in a single day, while US West Texas Intermediate (WTI) crude CLE1 futures were up \$25.72, or 28.3%, to \$116.62.

WTI surged 31.4% to a session high of \$119.48 a barrel on Monday, while Brent rose as much as 29% to



\$119.50 a barrel. Before the surge on Monday, Brent had already climbed 27% and WTI by 35.9% in a week. "Unless oil flows through the Strait of Hormuz resumes soon and regional tensions ease, upward pressure on prices is likely to persist," said Yasu Menon, managing director for investment strategy at OCBC in Singapore.

Iraq and Kuwait have begun cutting oil output, adding to earlier liquefied natural gas reductions from Qatar, as the war blocked shipments from the Middle

East. Analysts expect the United Arab Emirates and Saudi Arabia will have to also cut output soon as they run out of oil storage.

Also boosting prices is the appointment of Mojtaba Khamenei to succeed his father, Ali Khamenei, as Iran's supreme leader, signalling that hardliners remain firmly in charge in Tehran, a week into its conflict with the United States and Israel.

"With the appointment of the late leader's son, Iran's new leader, US President Donald Trump's goal of regime change in Iran has become more difficult," said Daniel Hynes, senior commodity strategist at ANZ.

Weeks or months of high fuel prices. The war could leave consumers and businesses worldwide facing weeks or months of higher fuel prices even if the week-old conflict ends quickly, as suppliers grapple with damaged facilities, disrupted logistics and elevated risks to shipping.

"The next flag will be whether it eventually gets to a point where they have to start shutting in oil wells, which not only impacts output even further, but it also delays a response once the conflict eases as well."

That would potentially sustain those prices for much longer," said Satoru Yoshida, a commodity analyst with Rakuten Securities.

"That view accelerated buying, as Iran is expected to continue its closure of the Strait of Hormuz and attacks on other oil-producing na-

sources said on Sunday. Crude storage has reached maximum capacity, said an official with the state-run Basra Oil Company.

Kuwait Petroleum Corporation began cutting oil output on Saturday and declared force majeure on shipments, though it did not say how much production it would shut.

Iran's attacks on oil infrastructure across the region have continued. Fujairah Media Office said fire broke out in the UAE's Fujairah oil industry zone.

Meanwhile, as oil prices fell, with no injuries reported. Saudi Arabia's Defence Ministry said on X that it intercepted a drone heading to the Shaybah oilfield.

Israel's military has threatened to shut those prices for the deceased Ali Khamenei, while Trump said the war might only end once Iran's military and rulers had been wiped out. Meanswhile, as oil prices surged, US Senate Democratic Leader Chuck Schumer called on Trump to release oil from the Strategic Petroleum Reserve.

CORPORATE WINDOW: Saving up on transportation costs

NEWS DESK: The ongoing Middle East crisis coupled with the Pak-Afghan war and an increase in fuel prices is unlikely to give any major hit to the sales of two-wheelers.

As the twin conflicts wage on, auto makers fear disruptions and shipping delays in the arrival of imported parts, logistic congestion, high freight and war risk charges and increased transportation cost leading to the hike in high-speed diesel rate, now fixed at Rs35.86 per litre, as of last Saturday.

The above crisis may push up prices of imported raw material, thus forcing the assemblers to raise prices of two-wheelers. However, market people maintain that despite rising prices, motorcycles may continue to remain an affordable option for the buyers towards fuel savings compared to moving into four-wheelers and public and private transport. In the last few years, car owners have already started keeping a 70-150cc bike in their houses and lawns, a further rise in petrol price may push

more car owners to keep a new or a slightly older model to save the cost of running on higher engine capacity cars and sports utility vehicles.

As fuel costs rise, market personnel believe two-wheeler demand will remain strong as the only form of affordable transport.

In this situation, the demand for 70cc bikes may further go up. The prices of second hand bikes are already high due to higher prices of new bikes. After fresh petrol price shocks — the demand for used bikes may further crawl up.

Bike sales also depend a lot on rural buying based on better crops like wheat, cotton, rice and sugarcane. A good crop is a boon for the growers to replace an old bike with new one. Bike sector expert, Mohamud Salari Sheikh said that there is no denying the fact that the Afghan-Pakistan and Iran-US-A-Israel wars have shattered the buyers' sentiments as the foothold of buyers in their houses and lawns, a further rise in petrol price may push

However, demand for two wheelers has always remained upbeat in difficult times, especially when car prices go up. Prospects of good bike sales still exist in the upcoming months in view of a massive rise in imports of parts and accessories by bike assemblers despite claims of record high localisation. Import of complete and semi knocked down (CKD) kits by the two-wheeler assemblers has swelled by 74 per cent to \$43m in 7MFY26 from \$25m in the same period last fiscal. Consumers feel that motorcycles are still a better option in reaching their destinations amid deteriorating road infrastructure and death of public and private transport especially in Karachi. However, rising cases of bike snatching and stealing of new and used bikes haunt bike buyers in Karachi.

Atlas Honda Limited (AHL), the manufacturer of Japan's Honda bikes, has continued to break new sales records since September 2025 amid the exit of Japan's Yamaha motorcycle last year. Despite high prices, AHL sold a record

157,059 units in January 2026. The bike giant's total sales in 7MFY26 surged to 945,801 units from 703,226 units in the same period last fiscal year. Sales of other assemblers like Japan's Suzuki and Chinese bike maker, United Motorcycle, stood at 20,282 and 101,703 units as compared to 13,910 and 80,370 in the above period. Sales of some Chinese bike assemblers have improved while others have been struggling for their survival as they failed in providing a quality bike. As per data of large scale manufacturing, the country's overall bike production during July-December FY26 rose by 41 pct to 1.9 million units from 774,461 in the same period last fiscal.

That said, the petrol price hike may not help in reviving electric bike sales in a big way due to their higher prices and other issues. Only per cent of petrol engine buyers have shifted towards e-bikes, while the share of e-bikes being purchased by young girls also stands at 1pc of the total two-wheeler market.

Bloodbath at PSX as KSE-100 slides over 11,000 points

NEWS DESK: Pakistan Stock Exchange said the halt was triggered when the KSE-100 index fell 5pc from the previous day's close. In accordance with PSX regulations, all equity-based markets were suspended. When trading resumed, the index fell further, recording a decline of 13,157.62 points before making a brief recovery ahead of the close.

At close, trading volume stood at 378,012,095 shares, with a total value of Rs33,004,278,586.

The market's heaviest movers were led by K-Electric Limited, which tumbled 7.81pc to Rs7.20 on 127,469,387 shares. First National Equities Limited saw a sharper drop, plunging 12.21pc to Rs15 on 33,608,420 shares, while The Bank of Punjab slumped 10.01pc to Rs25.45 on 33,386,662 shares.

Trading was temporarily halted around 9:20am after the index dropped 9,780.15 points, prompting a market suspension.

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A notice from the

surge in global oil prices, which have weighed heavily on investor sentiment.

The latest slide follows a particularly turbulent week for the market, with heightened volatility reflecting investor concerns over external risks and macroeconomic uncertainty. According to Reuters, oil prices surged around 2.5pc on Monday to their highest since mid-2022.

Brent is on track amid escalating geopolitical tensions and a

as escalating geopolitical tensions are putting particular pressure on world energy supplies.

Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif is expected to unveil an austerity plan on Monday in view of the global fuel crisis.

Last week, the government increased the prices of petrol and high-speed diesel by Rs5 per litre, the highest-ever such hike, as the country felt the first direct economic impacts of the ongoing regional conflict.



SBP holds policy rate at 10.5% amid Gulf war

NEWS DESK: The State Bank of Pakistan (SBP)'s Monetary Policy Committee (MPC) has decided to maintain the policy rate unchanged at 10.5% following its meeting on March 9, 2026. The decision aligns closely with market expectations and recent analyst surveys amid heightened regional geopolitical tensions.

The hold comes as the second MPC meeting of the calendar year 2026, following the January 26 meeting, where the rate was also kept steady at 10.5% despite earlier expectations of easing.

The latest stance reflects caution over potential imported inflation pressures from surging global energy prices, triggered by the US-Iran tensions that have driven Brent crude up sharply to around \$108 per barrel. Following the suit, the Pakistani government also increased petrol prices by Rs5 per litre, bringing the new price to Rs32.117 per litre.

A pre-MPC survey by Topline Securities (released March 6, 2026) captured strong



consensus for status quo: 92% of respondents anticipated no change to the policy rate, a notable shift from the January poll, where many had expected cuts.

Key factors cited included a 25% spike in Brent oil prices and corresponding global diesel price jumps of 37-49%, raising concerns for oil-import-dependent Pakistan.

Market reactions showed caution, with 58-85 bps increases

observed in 6-month T-bill and KIBOR yields leading up to the decision.

Looking ahead, 60% foresaw the policy rate remaining at 10% (or close to current levels) by June 2026, while 58% projected average CPI inflation around 7% and PKR/USD stability in the 280-285 range. However, prolonged conflict could exacerbate currency pressures, fuel inflation, and potentially force future rate adjustments upward if imported cost pressures intensify.

The SBP emphasized in its previous many PMC statements a balanced approach to safeguarding price stability while nurturing sustainable growth recovery.

This cautious pause is seen as support for ongoing macroeconomic stability efforts, building on prior rate reductions (including the 50 bps cut to 10.5% in December 2025), while allowing time to monitor energy price dynamics, domestic inflation trends, and external account resilience.

The SBP emphasized in its previous many PMC statements a balanced approach to safeguarding price stability while nurturing sustainable growth recovery.

Oil soars 25pc, gold drops as Iran war jolts global commodity markets

NEWS DESK: Oil prices surged around 25 per cent on Monday to their highest since mid-2022, with Iran on track for a record one-day gain, while gold fell 2pc as an escalating Iran war squeezed world energy supplies, boosted the dollar and dampened hopes of interest-rate cuts.

Agriculture markets, led by edible oils, rose as they took their cue from oil prices due to the extensive use of vegetable oils in making biofuels. Aluminium firms also supply worries even as other metals faced headwinds from a stronger dollar.

The risk of more "Middle East" damage continues to build by the day." Iran on Monday named Mojtaba Khamenei "to succeed his father, Ali Khamenei as Supreme Leader. Soaring oil lift veg oils, grains. Brent was on track

for its biggest one-day gain ever in both per cent and absolute terms as the expanding US-Israeli war with Iran led some major Middle Eastern oil producers to cut supplies, and "on fears of prolonged disruption to shipping through the Strait of Hormuz chokepoint. Brent crude futures climbed to a high of \$119.50 per barrel and US West Texas Intermediate (WTI) to \$119.48 a barrel.

"The situation appears to be deteriorating further," ING analysts said in a note. "In addition, upstream oil production has started to shut in, with producers facing storage constraints. In Kuwait, and the UAE began reducing oil production."

In agricultural markets, Malaysian palm oil rose 9pc, and Chicago soybean oil climbed to its highest since late 2022, buoyed by "the crude oil rally. Wheat rose to its highest since June 2024, and corn prices hit a 10-month high. "Aluminum jumps on supply disruptions. Aluminum soared to its highest in four years as "supply concerns due to the Middle East war intensified. Benchmark three-month aluminum on the London Metal Exchange hit its highest since March 2022 at \$3,544 per ton. Qatar's smelter Qatium and Aluminum Bahrain have already declared force majeure on shipments amid rising tensions in the Middle East. Other base metals were weighed down by a firmer dollar.

Unstoppable India target Olympic gold after making World Cup history

NEWS DESK: India captain Suryakumar Yadav said gold in 2028 on cricket's return to the Olympics was the country's next big aim after extending their T20 domination with back-to-back World Cup titles. Co-hosts India hammered New Zealand by 96 runs in the final in Ahmedabad on Sunday to be the first team to retain the T20 World crown and first to win it three times.

It was also the first time a team have won the title on home soil, and they did it with a brand of fearless, attacking cricket.

"It has been very special," Suryakumar told reporters at a celebratory midnight press conference, as fans across the country flooded into the streets. "And definitely the next goal is Olympic gold, and also the T20 World Cup that year."

Los Angeles 2028



will see cricket return to the Olympics for the first time since 1900. Led by then-captain Rohit Sharma, India won the T20 World Cup two years ago in Barbados for their first major title since the 2013 Champions Trophy. Rohit and fellow stalwart Virat Kohli retired from the shortest format after the final against South Africa, and Suryakumar took over as captain. "I think that

drought ended in 2024 after a really long time and from there we never looked back," said the 35-year-old. "We played a different brand of cricket in 2024 and from there we understood how this team needs to work (going) forward. "And it's been a wonderful journey since then."

Suryakumar added: "We wanted to do something special in front of the home

crowd. We want to continue doing that... and never stop."

India won the 50-over World Cup in 2011 at home under MS Dhoni, who led the team to a T20 World Cup in the inaugural edition in 2007.

After that was a comparative drought in the biggest events by India's sky-high standards. Two-time World Cup winner Gautam Gambhir, who succeeded Rahul Dravid as coach after the 2024 World Cup win, wants to carve out his own legacy.

"I don't believe in inheriting anything, I believe in creating something," said Gambhir, who has not always been universally popular with fans and pundits as the coach.

"And hopefully we've created something which probably all of you guys could be proud of, the kind of brand of cricket we've played."

Southampton strike late to dump Fulham out of FA Cup

NEWS DESK: Southampton became the first non Premier League club to reach the quarter-finals of this season's FA Cup with a 1-0 victory at Fulham that was sealed by a late penalty on Sunday.

The game looked as though it was heading for extra time when Finn Azaz was brought down in the area by Joachim Andersen and Southampton's Ross Stewart converted from the spot.

It was no more than Championship side Southampton deserved as they made the better

chances, including one for Azaz that was brilliantly saved by Fulham keeper Benjamin Leonote who had earlier done well to deny Tom Fellows. Their players wore a yellow commemorative kit to mark 50 years since they wore the same shirts when Bobby Stokes sealed the second-tier Southampton's shock 1976 FA Cup final win against Manchester United at Wembley.

Southampton join a powerful-looking quartet already through to the last eight with Arsenal, Manchester City, Chelsea and Liverpool in the hat for the quarter-finals. On Saturday, Chelsea battled past 10-man Wrexham and moved into the last eight after a 4-2 win but only after a mid-field scare against the second-tier side, who twice took the lead at the Racecourse Ground.

Hollywood-owned Wrexham, watched by actors Ryan Reynolds and Rob McElhenney, went ahead through Sam Smith but the visitors drew level courtesy of an own goal shortly before



PM announces Rs1.5m reward for each hockey player after World Cup qualification

NEWS DESK: Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif on Monday announced cash rewards of Rs1.5 million for each player of the national hockey team in recognition of their performance in the World Cup Qualifiers, according to a statement released by the Prime Minister's Office.

"The move recognises the players' dedication and hard work and is intended to

support the development of hockey in Pakistan," the statement added.

The statement said the national team's participation in the qualifying tournament on August 14 this year in Belgium and the Netherlands.

Pakistan qualified for the Hockey World Cup 2026 after defeating Japan in the semi-final of the World Cup qualifying tournament on Friday.

The Men in Green continued their unbeaten run in the tournament, securing a 4-3 victory over Japan in Egypt to confirm their place in the global event

and end an eight-year wait for World Cup qualification. They eventually lost to England 4-1 in the final of the qualifiers. The tournament is scheduled to begin on August 14 this year in Belgium and the Netherlands.

Pakistan had failed to qualify for the previous edition of the World Cup and last secured a place in the tournament in 2018.



Russia wins first Paralympic gold

NEWS DESK: Russia won its first Winter Paralympic gold medal under its own flag since 2014 as skier Varvara Voronchikhina was crowned women's super-G standing champion on Monday in Cortina.

Despite Russia's ongoing war with Ukraine, the International Paralympic Committee (IPC) has allowed six Russian athletes and four from their allies Belarus to represent their countries, accompanied by their national flags, rather than competing as neutrals.

"It's so special for me because it's my first Paralympic Games and it's my dream since I was a child," Voronchikhina told reporters after collecting her medal.

"And when I see my flag, it's so special and amazing."

Already a bronze medalist last weekend, when she claimed Russia's first podium appearance at a Winter Games in 12 years, 23-year-old Voronchikhina beat French silver medalist Aurelie Richard by 1.96sec on the Olympia



delle Tofane piste on Monday to claim top spot. Sweden's Ebba Aarsjoe was third.

"Congratulations to Varvara Voronchikhina on Russia's first gold medal in the super-G at the Milan-Cortina Paralympics," Russia's sports minister Mikhail Degtyarev posted on Telegram.

"The Russian anthem is playing," he added of the podium ceremony, which took place at the end of Monday's super-G events.

Voronchikhina received a polite smattering of applause as the gold medal was placed around her neck, before the playing of the national anthem and raising of the Russian flag were permitted to a respectful silence.

During Friday's opening ceremony in Verona, representatives of the Russian team were booed by some spectators as they paraded behind the country's flag.

Russia was banned from the 2018 Games due to a doping scandal, although some athletes were permitted to compete under neutral colours.

Russia and Belarus were then banned from the 2022 Paralympics following the invasion of Ukraine, although they were permitted to compete as neutral athletes in the Paris Summer Paralympics two years later.

Voronchikhina said Saturday, after finishing third in the downhill, that four years ago she was in Beijing ready to compete before Russia was suspended by the IPC. "For me it was really, really sad and I hope in these Games I will be better and it will be," she added.

White House UFC event to be headlined by Topuria-Gaethje

NEWS DESK: An Ultimate Fighting Championship event to be staged on the White House's South Lawn in June will be headlined by Itz Topuria and Justin Gaethje, the UFC announced Saturday.

The lightweight championship clash will top a bill of six fights set to take place on the US Flag Day holiday and the 80th birthday of President Donald Trump, who is an avowed UFC fan.

The June 14 event has been dubbed "UFC Freedom 250," in reference to the United States' 250th anniversary celebrations this summer. Topuria is one of the UFC's top rated fighters and a double-weight champion who has won all 17 of his fights. A former featherweight champion, he earned the lightweight belt last year by knocking out Brazil's Charles Oliveira before temporarily stepping away from the sport for personal reasons.

Born in Germany to Georgian refugee parents, Topuria moved to Spain as a teenager, and has both Georgian and Spanish citizenship.

In Topuria's absence, Arizona native Gaethje won an interim lightweight title, but will



now have a chance to capture the undisputed championship.

The 37-year-old American has a 27-5 record in UFC.

Trump has said a stadium for more than 100,000 people would be constructed in front of the White House for the fight, although organizers have since said the event is expected to host some 3,000 to 4,000 people at the heart of Washington DC.

Large screens to view the event are expected to be raised in other places near the White House for larger crowds to watch the show. The event was originally announced for July 4, which is Independence Day in the US, before being moved to Trump's birthday. The Republican president has also unveiled plans for an IndyCar race on the streets of Washington to mark the 250th anniversary of the country's independence. UFC is the largest and most successful organization in the burgeoning world of MMA, a blend of martial arts disciplines like jujitsu, kickboxing, boxing and wrestling.

Bouts take place in an eight-sided ring -- dubbed "The Octagon" -- bounded by a chainlink fence.

With few exceptions -- such as eye-gouging -- male and female

fighters are allowed to employ almost any technique to attack their opponent.

The sport's popularity with young men -- a key demographic in the 2024 US election -- and Trump's long association with the UFC have made the promotion a regular fixture at some of its more high-profile events, where he is greeted like a rock star.

Its brutal nature and high injury rate mean the sport is controversial, with doctors decrying the potential for brain damage amongst fighters who are repeatedly hit in the head, though it has gained increasing mainstream acceptance in recent years.



Pak Navy launches 'Operation Muhafizul Bahr' against threats to shipping, trade amid Mideast crisis

NEWS DESK: The Pakistan Navy on Monday launched Operation Muhafizul Bahr to counter 'multi-dimensional threats to national shipping and maritime trade' amid the ongoing Middle East crisis, the military's media wing said.

Tensions in the Middle East escalated sharply after US and Israeli air strikes last week assassinated Iran's Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei and several senior officials, triggering a wave of retaliation from Tehran and widening the conflict across the region.

In response to the strikes, Iran launched retaliatory attacks on US military bases in several Gulf countries, significantly expanding the scope of the confrontation.

The conflict has already led to the suspension of around a fifth of global crude

and natural gas supply, as Tehran targets ships in the vital Strait of Hormuz between its shores and Oman, and attacks energy infrastructure across the region.

A press release from the Inter-Services Public Relations (ISPR) issued today said:

"In view of the evolving regional maritime security environment and potential disruptions to critical sea lanes, Pakistan Navy has launched Operation Muhafizul Bahr to counter multidimensional threats to national shipping and maritime trade."

It said the initiative aimed to ensure the uninterrupted flow of national energy supplies and the security of sea lines of communication (SLOCs).

The ISPR further stated that with approximately 90% of Pakistan's trade conducted via sea, the op-

eration aimed to ensure that vital sea routes remained 'safe, secure and uninterrupted'.

"PN escort operations are being conducted in close coordination with the Pakistan National Shipping Corporation."

PN is fully cognizant of the prevailing maritime situation and is actively monitoring and controlling the movement of merchant vessels to ensure their safe and secure transit," it said.

The ISPR said the navy ships were currently escorting two merchant vessels, one of which was scheduled to arrive in Karachi today.

"Pakistan Navy remains fully prepared to respond to emerging maritime security challenges and is committed to ensuring the safety of national shipping and regional maritime security," it added.

Pakistan urges nationals in Iran to register for swift repatriation

NEWS DESK: Pakistan's ambassador to Iran, Muhammad Mudassar Tipu, issued an appeal on Monday for Pakistani nationals in the country to register with the embassy immediately for repatriation, warning that securing transportation has become increasingly difficult amid the ongoing conflict in the region.

In a post on X, the ambassador said the embassy was facing mounting logistical hurdles in arranging departures. "It is getting very hard to find the buses due to ongoing challenges here," he wrote.

Calling on nationals who wish to return, Tipu requested them to register with the embassy immediately so

that their departure may be planned without any further delay.

"I particularly call on our nationals in Qom to cooperate with us in their immediate repatriation," the ambassador wrote. The call comes amid escalating tensions between Iran and the United States and Israel continue their strikes against Iran, with the Islamic Republic attacking US military bases in the region.

Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif chaired a high-level meeting regarding the overall security situation in the country following the attacks.

He subsequently directed the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to take all necessary steps to ensure the safe repatriation

of Pakistanis stranded in Iran.

Many Pakistanis, including students, pilgrims, tourists, and traders, have streamed home from Iran through the Taftan and Gwadar border crossings in Balochistan, while Pakistani missions in Saudi Arabia launched round-the-clock helplines and deployed teams at major airports to assist travellers as the conflict continues to spill into the wider Gulf region.

Iran has continued to fire missiles at Israel early Monday, in the name of the Islamic Republic's new Supreme Leader Mojtaba Khamenei, who was selected to succeed his slain father despite threats by the US and Israel to target him next.

PMD warns winds could carry pollutants from Iran, worsen air quality in western parts of Pakistan

NEWS DESK: The Pakistan Meteorological Department (PMD) on Monday cautioned that the pollution resulting from the recent US-Israeli attacks on Iran's oil sites could worsen air quality in western parts of the country.

"Due to [the] recent situation in Iran, the winds may carry pollutants and deteriorate air quality in the western parts of the country," read a press release issued by the PMD.

Iran, Pakistan's western neighbour, has been embroiled in a war with the United States and Israel since the latter's February 28 strikes that assassinated its supreme leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei.

Major airstrikes on Tehran's refineries and fuel depots on March 7 plunged the Iranian capital into a toxic gloom as black smoke fell on Sunday.

In Tehran, the sun was blotted out by thick black smoke billowing from oil facilities that continued to smoulder.

CNN correspondent Françoise Pletgen described the scene at Tehran's Shahran oil depot as "apocalyptic", adding that "breathing the air feels quite toxic".

The Iranian Red Crescent Society warned civilians of severe health risks, cau-



tioning that the "significant quantities of toxic hydrocarbons, sulfur and nitrogen oxides" released could cause chemical burns and lung damage.

Further strikes by the US and Israel hit five oil facilities in and near Tehran, according to an official with the National Iranian Oil Products Distribution Company.

Showers expected in upper parts of the country, the PMD predicted that rain and thunderstorms were likely in the upper parts of the country under the influence of a

westerly wave that was to approach on Monday evening and persist until March 12.

The PMD said "partly cloudy to cloudy weather conditions with chances of moderate rain-wind-thunderstorm (few heavy falls at times)".

They were expected in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa's Dir, Kohistan, Chitral, Swat, Shangla, Battagram, Buner, Malakand, Munshehra, Abbottabad and Haripur. It predicted the same for Gilgit-Balistan (GB) and Azad Jammu and Kashmir (AJK) from

Monday evening to March 12.

On March 10 and 11, "light rain-wind-thunderstorm" was likely in Khyber, Mohmand, Peshawar, Swabi, Mardan, Charsadda, Nowshera, Bajaur, Bannu, Waziristan, Orakzai, Kurram, Kohat, Hangu and Mianwali.

According to PMD, "rain-wind/thunderstorm" was expected in Islamabad, the Potohar region, Murree, Galliat and surroundings from Monday night to March 11 with occasional gaps. "Hailstorm at isolated places is also likely

in Islamabad and upper parts of the country during the forecast period," the statement added.

Listing the possible impacts, the Met Office said daytime temperatures were expected to decrease by three to four degrees Celsius in the country's upper parts.

It warned that landslides may occur in vulnerable areas of upper KP, GB and AJK during the period.

The PMD advised tourists to avoid unnecessary travelling and urged farmers to manage their crops according to the prevailing weather.

Registration of more displaced persons from Tirah begins today

NEWS DESK: The registration of internally displaced persons of the Akkakhel tribe in Tirah valley will start from today (Monday), the district administration announced on Sunday.

The announcement was made in light of growing concerns among Akkakhel elders about the rapidly deteriorating security in their region, bordering Orakzai district.

The Akkakhel Qaumi Council in their meeting on March 3 had demanded of the security officials and the district administration to either take punitive measures against the militant groups assembled in their area, or arrange for their prompt evacuation as they are threatened due to the presence of armed groups.

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K-P cuts fuel allowance by 25% as cabinet unveils two-month conservation plan amid Mideast crisis

NEWS DESK: The Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa (K-P) government on Monday introduced a two-month fuel conservation plan, slashing fuel allowances for official vehicles by 25% amid the global energy crisis triggered by the US-Israeli conflict involving Iran.

This move came as part of broader national efforts to manage fuel resources prudently amid reports of supply chain strains, rising global crude prices and regional tensions affecting imports through key routes.

Federal authorities maintained that domestic petroleum stocks remain adequate for current needs, while urging measures to prevent hoarding and promote conservation at provincial levels.

According to Special Assistant to the Chief Minister on Information and Public Relations Shafiq Jan, the provincial government approved a "Fuel Conservation and Responsible Government Initiative" aimed at reducing fuel consumption and promoting the efficient use of government resources.

Under the plan, fueling at government offices will be implemented for an initial period of two

provide them the status of IDPs with all the facilities which were earlier provided to other tribes from Tirah.

Akkakhel Qaumi Council seeks protection from militant groups assembled in their area.

The district administration said in a statement issued from Khyber House that a registration centre has been established at the Al-Hajj market near Bara

bazaar where the incoming families of Akkakhel would be registered.

The statement advised families from other tribes not to go to the newly established registration centre as only families from Akkakhel tribe would be registered. The Akkakhel elders had earlier expressed their serious concern over the growing incidents of collateral damage during mel-

l igence-based operations. They said that a number innocent tribesmen had lost their lives while their houses too were damaged in such operations.

They informed the authorities concerned that a sizeable number of the armed terrorists had taken refuge in the bordering areas with Orakzai after thousands of families left their houses in Malakand, Khel,

Shalobar, Zakkhahel and other surrounding localities of Tirah valley in December and January.

With no temporary arrangement for the Tirah IDPs at government level, the authorities concerned that a sizeable number of the armed terrorists had taken refuge in the bordering areas with Orakzai after thousands of families left their houses in Malakand, Khel,

the district administration has, meanwhile, started distributing monetary package of Rs. 250,000 among the earlier arrived families while relying on data compiled from Nadra and polio vaccination campaigns.

However, hundreds of the families from different tribes insisted that they were yet to receive the promised grant as their names could not be matched with either Nadra or the polio vaccination record.



months on the directives of Chief Minister Sohail Afridi," he said.

He added that, as part of the initiative, the cabinet decided that meetings within government departments would be conducted entirely through virtual platforms.

Jan said that with this decision, the overall reduction in fuel allowances would reach 50%, as a 25% cut had already been in place since the COVID-19 period.

However, police, rescue services and other law enforcement agencies will be exempt from the fuel reduction policy.

He said the cabinet

also approved the introduction of a 50% work-from-home policy for government offices in an effort to reduce fuel consumption.

In addition, the government decided to significantly limit the use of vehicles and helicopters under VIP protection, while banning unnecessary official ceremonies and government dinners as part of broader austerity measures.

Jan said the cabinet had also proposed keeping educational institutions closed on Fridays to reduce fuel consumption, with virtual classes prioritised.

He added that petrol pumps would be monitored on a daily basis and strict action would be taken against

hoarding.

The provincial government will also ensure the availability of diesel for farmers and wheat harvesting operations.

"The provincial government will implement fuel-saving and economic protection policies without placing an additional burden on the public," Jan said.

Addressing the provincial cabinet meeting, CM Afridi said authorities must take steps to shield the public from the economic burden created by increasing fuel costs.

He stressed that in difficult economic conditions, rulers and state institutions should be the first to reduce their privileges, adding that reducing official protocol and government ex-

penditures could help provide relief to the public. He criticised the traditional approach of placing the burden of economic sacrifices on ordinary citizens.

"In Pakistan, the public is always targeted when sacrifices are required. This attitude must change," CM Afridi said.

The chief minister also referred to policies during the tenure of former prime minister Imran Khan, saying that relief had been provided to the public and businesses despite the global COVID-19 pandemic.

Afridi said the provincial government would oppose any decision that placed additional financial pressure on citizens.

He also reviewed the Ehsaas Ramadan Dastarkhwan programme, saying district administrations and members of the provincial assembly were running the initiative effectively.

The chief minister added that a large number of deserving people were benefiting from the initiative.

He directed authorities to establish Ehsaas Mazdoor Shelters at divisional headquarters for daily wage labourers.