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Fiber Internet for 1,100 Schools, 100,000 OOSC Re-Enrolled: CM Bugti Reviews PSDP

QASEEM SHAH:

The Chief Minister of Balochistan, Mir Sarfraz Bugti, reviewed Public Sector Development Programme (PSDP) projects, including the installation of fibre-optic internet for 1,100 schools, employment opportunities for 60,000 youth, classrooms for 4,000 schools, and enrollment of 100,000 out-of-school children.

CM Balochistan chaired a high-level meeting at the Chief Minister's Secretariat on Thursday to review the progress of development projects being implemented under the Public Sector Development Programme (PSDP).

The meeting was attended by Provincial Ministers Mir Saleem Khan Khosa and Mir Sadiq Umrani, Chief Secretary Balochistan Shakeel Qadir Khan, secretaries of various departments, and other senior officials.

During the briefing, officials informed the meeting that the project to provide fibre-optic internet to 1,100 educational institutions across Balochistan is progressing rapidly and is expected to be completed within the next six months. The initiative aims to promote digital education, online learning, and modern teaching facilities in schools and colleges across the province.

Authorities also informed the meeting that a proposal to extend the fibre-optic network to all educational institutions, hospitals, and government offices, which will help strengthen digital governance and public service delivery in Balochistan.

Education, Youth Employment and Public Services in Focus

The meeting was also briefed on the Enterprises Development Programme, under

which youth are being trained in multiple sectors. Officials stated that the programme aims to connect 60,000 young people with employment and entrepreneurial opportunities, helping boost economic activity and create sustainable livelihoods across the province.

Officials further informed the meeting that a project to construct two additional classrooms in 4,000 single-room schools in Balochistan is underway to improve the learning environment for students.

In another major development, authorities said that 100,000 out-of-school children have been re-enrolled in educational institutions during the past year, marking significant progress in improving access to education in the province.

Chief Minister Bugti expressed displeasure over delays in the release of funds for the Peoples Train Service project and directed the concerned authorities to complete

the project on a priority basis to provide safer and more reliable travel facilities to the public.

Provision of Modern Machinery to 95 Municipal Committees

Officials also informed the meeting that complaint cells are being established from the tehsil to the provincial level to ensure quick resolution of public grievances, enabling citizens to register and track their complaints more effectively.

The meeting reviewed projects related to clean drinking water supply,

the improvement of municipal services, and the provision of modern machinery to 95 municipal committees, which is expected to significantly improve sanitation and civic services across Balochistan.

Participants were also briefed on the ongoing operation against illegal poppy cultivation,

with authorities stating that efforts to destroy illegal crops have been intensified and strict legal action is being taken against those involved.

Timely Completion, Transparency, and Quality are Essential

Chief Minister Bugti directed all departments to ensure that ongoing development projects are completed by June 30 according to the set targets. He warned that departments failing to meet deadlines would have their unused funds withdrawn and reallocated to better-performing departments.

The chief minister emphasized that the timely completion, transparency, and quality of development projects are essential to ensure that the public benefits from these initiatives without delay. He reiterated that public welfare, improved governance, and the provision of basic services remain top priorities of the Government of Balochistan.

Brief pause in fighting between Pak-Afghan forces to identify, retrieve body at Torkham

NEWS DESK:

KHLYBER: Pakistan and Afghanistan border forces on Thursday agreed on a brief pause amid ongoing clashes to identify and collect a dead body lying at Zero Point at Torkham for the last few days.

However, the body identified by Afghan authorities as a national, could not be retrieved from the location due to delayed consultation among the Afghan authorities and the time for the pause in fighting lapsing, sources told Dawn.

They said that local residents had spotted the body and reported it to the security officials, while videos and pictures of the dead body were also shared on social media.

Sources said that soon after, security officials from both countries agreed to constitute delegations of local influential to identify and remove the dead body from the border crossing.

The Pakistan side comprised eight persons, including Malak Tajuddin Shah Khalid, Murad Hussain, Mufti Ejaz, Saeed Khan, Qari Nazeemul, Mulana Aaqib and Qari Jihad Shah.

From the Afghan side, the delegation comprised 11 persons, including Haji Madyar Shinwari, Malak Maula Khan Shinwari, Raees Gul Majeed, Malak Wali Khan, Malak Gul Rehman, Qari Basser, Mautabar Khan, Mufti Asadullah, Darya Khan, Malak Shahzar and Malak Hilmand.



Five delegates from each side met at Zero Point after a pause was instituted at around 2:30pm on Thursday, with both sides holding white flags.

Mufti Ejaz, a senior member of the Pakistani delegation, later told Dawn that although the dead person was identified as an Afghan national, the members of the Afghan side had sought time to discuss the matter with higher-ups.

He added, however, that the matter could not be resolved as the Afghan side could not return till the 5:30pm deadline for the pause.

Shah Khalid, another member of the Pakistani delegation, told Dawn that they also searched for more dead bodies around Zero Point as they had information about more casualties due to the cross-firing between the border forces of both countries. He said that no more dead bodies could be found as the delegates were running short of time.

He said that they had to return to Landi Kotal after the expiry of the deadline, after which cross-firing between border forces resumed.

Ejaz, however, sounded optimistic about there being further development in the matter on Friday. He said that if the Afghan authorities refused to take the dead body on Friday, it would be brought to a local graveyard to be buried in Landi Kotal.

The development comes as Pakistan continues with Operation Ghazab-ill-Haq, which was launched in late February following unprovoked firing by the Afghan Taliban from across the border.

Islamabad has repeatedly accused Kabul of providing space to the banned Tehreek-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) since the Taliban takeover of Afghanistan in 2021. UN monitoring reports over the past two years have noted the TTP's presence in eastern Afghanistan, though the Taliban deny offering support.

118 Climate-Resilient Homes Handed Over to Flood Victims in Hanna-Urak Quetta

ALI HAMZA:

In a major step toward flood recovery in Balochistan, 118 climate-resilient homes have been handed over to families in Hanna-Urak, Quetta, whose houses were destroyed during the devastating 2022 floods in Pakistan.

The keys of the newly constructed houses were formally distributed among beneficiary families during a ceremony attended by local officials and community members.

Mir Murad Baluch, Honorary Consul of Germany in Quetta, handed over the keys to families, marking an important milestone in rebuilding efforts for flood-affected communities.

Officials from the Government of Balochistan, including representatives of the Planning and Development (P&D) Department and the Provincial Disaster Management Authority (PDMA), were also present at the event.

The newly completed houses are part of a larger initiative to build 700 climate-resilient homes in Balochistan for families displaced by floods.



been completed and handed over during the first phase of the programme.

The housing initiative is being implemented with financial assistance from the Government of Germany through KfW Development Bank, in partnership with the Government of Balochistan, to help vulnerable communities rebuild stronger homes capable of withstanding future climate disasters.

The project aims to promote climate-resilient housing in

Balochistan, ensuring safer living conditions for families while strengthening long-term disaster preparedness in flood-prone areas.

QUETTA VOICE

Editor: Asim Khan

Call for Immediate Launch and Expansion of Pink Bus Service in Quetta



Editorial: The Balochistan government's recent approval of the Pink Bus Service in Quetta is a landmark step toward providing women with safe, reliable, and dignified public transportation.

Led by Chief Minister Mir Sarfaraz Bugti and executed by Dr. Faisal Ahmed Khan, Chief of Public-Private Partnership, this initiative marks a first in Balochistan and follows the successful model implemented in Sindh.

Launching this women-only service with three buses is a promising start, but Quetta's growing demand calls for a larger fleet.

To effectively address the transportation challenges women face, the government should expand this service to include at least a dozen pink buses.

A more extensive fleet would significantly enhance women's mobility, providing not only a safe travel option but also empowering access to education, employment, and healthcare facilities. Female commuters often encounter issues like overcrowding, harassment, and long wait times. A larger pink bus fleet would offer them timely, comfortable, and safe transportation, reducing the daily struggles they face on public transport. Such an expansion aligns with the provincial government's agenda for social inclusion and gender-focused urban development, creating

The Genesis of warfare

The history of warfare is as old as the human race. The Book of Genesis states that Cain killed Abel to satiate his vengeance. Ever since vengeance, confrontation and bellicosity have remained pervasive throughout human relations. The perception of life as a zero-sum game breeds selfishness and consequent animosity between in-

dividuals, groups, or states. Instincts of survival and procreation are reflexive, natural for all living organisms including us humans.

War, being one of the forms of human relations, received due attention alongside increased societal complexities. War, being

a supportive environment where women can travel freely. The Pink Bus Service represents more than just transportation; it's an investment in women's empowerment and independence. By increasing the fleet, Balochistan can set a strong precedent for gender-responsive policies that promote equal access to public spaces.

Expanding this service in Quetta can serve as a model for other cities, creating a safer, more inclusive society for women across the province. Let's call on the Balochistan government to enhance this project by committing to a dozen buses, meeting the demand for decent and secure transportation for women in Quetta.

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Malnutrition in Balochistan

Amber Munir in Quetta shared in Wednesday, April 14, 2021 news. The article highlights the role of essential nutrients in human resource development along with a brief introduction of malnutrition, characterization of malnutrition, procedure of taking measurements of SAM and MAM cases, medical complications, community-based management of acute malnutrition (CMAM), infant and young child feeding (IYCF), etc.

Background: Surveys regarding Nutrition National Nutrition Survey (2001-2002): The National Nutrition Survey conducted in 2001-2002 assessed the nutritional levels and health status of mothers and children in Pakistan. Data was collected through a questionnaire consisting of four modules including a household questionnaire, biochemical and clinical questionnaires, and a dietary form. Additional biochemical samples including serum retinol, serum ferritin, and zinc, were collected from mothers and children under-5. Urine samples were collected from mothers and children ages 6-12 years for iodine deficiency. The survey sampled 10,656 households from 700 primary sampling units.

National Nutrition Survey (2011): The NNS 2011 covered all provinces: Gilgit Baltistan (GB), Balochistan, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP), Sindh, Punjab, Azad Jammu and Kashmir (AJK) and the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA). This included 1,500 enumeration blocks (EBs)/villages and 30,000 households, with a 49% urban and 51% rural distribution.

National Nutrition Survey (2018): The 2018 Pakistan National Nutrition Survey (NNS 2018) is the largest national survey carried out in Pakistan. It is designed to provide policymakers, program managers, and academicians a unique set of nutrition-related data including environmental, anthropometric, and biochemical indicators.

National Nutrition Survey (2019): The aim of NNS 2018-19 is to undertake a field survey and generate district-specific nutrition information related to malnutrition (both undernutrition and overnutrition) and micronutrient deficiencies among women and children in Pakistan. Malnutrition status in Balochistan

Balochistan is the most under-developed of Pakistan's provinces, with a high proportion of children under five years of age who are stunted (52%) and 16 percent of who are wasted. Moreover, the prevalence of anemia among children in this age group is 57%

and nearly 49% among women of childbearing age.

Numerous factors are thought to contribute to child undernutrition in Balochistan, including sub-optimal infant and young child feeding (IYCF) practices; frequent child infections (especially diarrhea diseases and measles); maternal nutritional deficiencies and/or illness and death; absence/adequacy of micronutrient supplementation related to malnutrition and household food insecurity and gender inequity. A survey conducted by the National Nutrition Cell revealed that 49% of women in Balochistan were suffering from malnutrition. Moreover, the ratio of maternal anemia was 49%, anemia among children below five years was 57% and iodine deficiency among women was 29%. Balochistan Nutrition Program for Mother and Children (BNPMC)



In response to the challenging nutrition situation in the province, the Department of Health (DoH) launched the Nutrition Program for Mothers and Children (BNPMC) in 2016. They implemented nutrition activities among the rural and urban population of seven selected districts. The total population of these districts is 1,654,613, of which estimated target populations include 132,369 pregnant and lactating women (PLW). Stakeholders include the DoH, Peoples Primary Healthcare Initiative (providing health services at Basic Health Units in the districts), and local NGOs.

The total cost of the above project was 1,492.62 million PKR (US\$14.21 million) of which 80% were provided by the World Bank and 20% by the Government of Balochistan. A major part of the funding

(41%) was allocated to strengthen institutional arrangements which include staffing, technical assistance for capacity building, strengthening coordination mechanisms, addressing malnutrition among children and PLW (37%), and addressing micronutrient malnutrition (13.6%).

Future Plans The foresaid program ended in December 2019 and was limited to seven districts; whereas the malnutrition situation continues to exist in 22 districts of Balochistan. Therefore, the Government of Balochistan has assigned DoH and PPHI to extend nutrition intervention in 22 districts for which project proposals are ready; implementation is expected from July 2021.

The author is a program officer in PPHI

The author is a program officer in PPHI

THE DILEMMA OF ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE (AI) WEAPONS

Masoor ul Hassan The danger associated with autonomous and semi-autonomous weapons systems is unacceptable. There exist a near consensus that such weapons must not be completely AI-controlled.

The design must include appropriate levels of human judgment while resorting to them. This line of thought gains more credence when the present degree of global polarization is taken into view. The international order is tilting towards autocracy and the likelihood of employment of these weapons is becoming a reality. The norms and values of world politics were subjected to heavy Trumpian Strain in the recent past when the competition of naked power showed its ugliness in international relations.

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nuclear. The Perils and Promises of Artificial Intelligence

Harnessing the field of Artificial Intelligence (AI) in warfare brought a paradigm shift in the modus operandi of warfare. It eliminated the requirement of direct human involvement in selecting and engaging targets. Even the smartest of the weapons were hitherto launched and guided by humans.

This development has given rise to the debate of ethics and morality all over again.

António Guterres, the UN Secretary-General joined the skeptics on Twitter where he wrote in March 2019, "Autonomous machines with the power and discretion to select targets and take lives without human involvement are politically unacceptable, morally repugnant and should be prohibited by international law."

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South Korea says it can deter threats from North if US shifts weapons to Middle East

NEWS DESK: South Korea said on Wednesday it could deter threats from the North even if the United States relocated some of its military assets to the Middle East amid the war in Iran.

Washington Post reported this week that the United States was moving parts of its Terminal High Altitude Area Defence (THAAD) system from South Korea to the Middle East, citing unnamed officials.

"Regardless of whether certain USFK assets are deployable overseas, there is no issue whatsoever with our deterrence posture against North Korea, given the level of our military capabilities," the defence ministry said in a statement on Wednesday, referring to the United States Forces Korea command. It declined to confirm the report.

According to Washington Post, US

plans to redeploy parts of a missile defence system.

The THAAD missile defence system is designed to intercept short, medium and intermediate-range ballistic missiles using hit-to-kill technology.

It was installed in South Korea in 2017, a move that sparked strong protests from China. President Lee Jae Myung has said his government is unhappy with the reported asset move but acknowledged there was little it could do about it.

"The government is opposing the USFK's withdrawal of some air defence weapons for its own military needs," he said on Tuesday. "But the stark reality is that we are unable to fully implement our opinions."

A photo taken by Yonhap news agency on Tuesday appeared to show parts of the THAAD battery being dismantled in Seongju County, about 220 kilometres south of Seoul. A presidential official said it was "inappropriate" to comment on questions regarding any military asset rede-



Images released by state media showed Kim overseeing the launch remotely via video footage with his teenage daughter, Ju Ae, who is now widely regarded as his heir apparent.

There, Kim said "important successes" have been made in the practical deployment of strategic and tactical strike means". South Korea's spy agency has said Pyongyang appears to have begun the process of designating Ju Ae as leader Kim's successor, with the North frequently releasing photographs of the young daughter accompanying her father on official duties.

The test came as Washington and Seoul kicked off their spring-time military drills "Freedom Shield" on Monday, to which Pyongyang responded by warning of "unimaginably terrible consequences".

The Choe Hyon is one of two 5,000-ton destroyers in the North's arsenal, both launched last year as Kim seeks to ramp up the navy with short-range tactical missiles capable of carrying nuclear warheads.

leader, state media said on Wednesday, accusing the US and Israel of undermining regional peace. Pyongyang, a longstanding US adversary, has previously condemned the US-Israeli attack on Iran as an "illegal act of aggression". "We respect the rights and choice of the Iranian people to elect their su-

preme leader," Pyongyang's unnamed Foreign Ministry spokesperson was quoted as saying. The official said the United States and Israel are "destroying the regional peace and security foundations and escalating it to a global level worldwide". The spokesperson accused Washington and Israel of vio-

lating Iran's "political system and territorial integrity". Such actions "deserve worldwide rejection as they can never be tolerated," the official added. "Terrible consequences" Pyongyang's state media also said on Wednesday that North Korea's leader oversaw another test-firing of strategic cruise missiles from the naval Choe Hyon destroyer. North Korea carried out a similar missile test from the vessel last week, claiming the country was in the process of "arming the Navy with nuclear weapons". During the test, Kim stressed the importance of expanding a "powerful and reliable nuclear war deterrent," KCNA said.

'Blatant misuse': Iran slams UNSC call to halt attacks on Gulf states

NEWS DESK: The UN Security Council on Wednesday called for Iran to halt its attacks on Gulf states, in a resolution that did not mention US or Israeli strikes on Iran, prompting Tehran's ambassador to decry a "blatant misuse" of the international body.

The resolution, passed by 13 votes with two abstentions, "demands the immediate cessation of all attacks by the Islamic Republic of Iran against Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, and Jordan."

It also "condemns any actions or threats

by the Islamic Republic of Iran aimed at closing, obstructing, or otherwise interfering with international navigation through the Strait of Hormuz."

Iran has repeatedly struck Gulf states in retaliation to US-Israeli attacks that killed Iranian supreme leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei and continue to pummel Iranian sites.

The Islamic Republic has also fired on commercial ships passing through the Strait of Hormuz, a crucial sea passage for the global fuel trade, in a bid to inflict pain on the global economy.

Jamal Alrowaie, the UN ambassador of Bahrain, which introduced the resolution sponsored by 135 countries, said its passing reflected the Gulf's key role in the global economy.

"This is why ensuring the security of this region is not merely a regional matter, it is a common international responsibility that is closely linked to the stability of the global economy and energy security," Alrowaie told the Security Council.

Veto-holders China and Russia both abstained from the Security Council vote, an-

Indian source says Iran to allow India-flagged tankers pass through Strait of Hormuz

NEWS DESK: Iran will allow India-flagged tankers to transit the Strait of Hormuz, through which 40% of India's crude imports pass, an Indian source said on Thursday, though an Iranian source based outside the country denied any such agreement.

India's foreign ministry and the Iranian embassy in New Delhi did not immediately respond to requests for comment.

The Indian source declined to be named, citing a lack of authority to speak to the media, while the Iranian source pointed to the sensitivity of the matter.

A Thai vessel bound for Kandla port in western India was attacked in the Gulf port on Wednesday, prompting strong criticism from New Delhi.

"India deplores the fact that commercial shipping is being made a target of military attacks in the ongoing

conflict in West Asia," the foreign ministry said late on Wednesday.

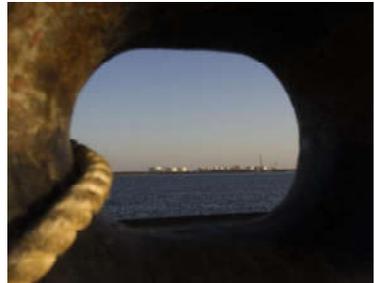
"Precious lives, including those of Indian citizens, have already been lost in multiple such attacks in an earlier phase of the conflict, and the intensity and lethality of the attacks appear to be increasing."

Iran has attacked at least 16 ships in the pas-

sage since Israel and the United States began their war on the country in late February.

Tehran has warned that oil prices could surge to \$200 a barrel, nearly double current levels.

India's foreign minister, S. Jaishankar, held a phone conversation with his Iranian counterpart, Seyyed Abbas



Foreign hacker in 2023 compromised Epstein files held by FBI, source and documents show

NEWS DESK: A foreign hacker compromised files relating to the FBI's investigation of the late sex offender Jeffrey Epstein during a break-in at the bureau's New York Field Office three years ago, according to a source familiar with the matter and recently published Justice Department documents reviewed by Reuters.

The details of who accessed a server at the FBI's New York Field Office, "including the allegation that a foreign hacker was involved, are being reported here for the first time."

In a statement, the FBI said what it described as a "cyber incident" was "an isolated one."

"The FBI restricted access to the malicious actor and rectified the network."

The investigation remains ongoing, so we do not have further comments to provide at this time.

Although the source said the intru-



sion appeared to have been carried out by a cybercriminal rather than a foreign government, "the incident underscores the files' potential intelligence value, one academic said."

The legally mandated publication of US Justice Department documents has exposed the dead financier's ties to prominent people in politics, finance, academia and business, "triggering investigations in numerous countries around the world."

"Who wouldn't be going after the Epstein files if you're the Russians or somebody interested in compromised data?" said Leon Lindsay, who researches the role of emerging technology in global security at the Center for Strategic and International Studies.

"If foreign intelligence agencies are not thinking seriously about the Epstein files as a target cell in 2019, in what was ruled a suicide, after being arrested again on federal charges of sex trafficking of minors."

How many ships have been attacked in the Gulf since start of Iran war?

NEWS DESK: The US-Israeli war on Iran has threatened the Gulf port and disrupted global trade through the Strait of Hormuz, through which roughly a fifth of the world's oil and liquefied natural gas normally passes.

Iran's Revolutionary Guards have warned that any ship passing through the narrow Strait will be targeted.

Below is a list of reported attacks since the war started on February 28.

March 1
A crew member was killed on board Marshall Islands-flagged crude tanker MKD VYOM after it was hit by a projectile as the vessel sailed through the Strait, 50 nautical miles north of the capital Muscat, manager V Ships said.

Gibraltar-flagged oil tanker Heracles Star, which supplies fuel to ships, was struck by a projectile 17 nautical miles northwest of UAE's Mina Sagr in Ras Al Khaimah. A fire caused by the attack was extinguished, UKMTO said.

A Palau-flagged controlled boat laden with explosives was used to target and dam-

age the Bahamas-flagged ship, according to initial assessments from two Iraqi port security sources.

March 6
A tugboat was hit by projectiles in the Strait of Hormuz, six nautical miles north of Oman, while conducting operations with vessel Safeneh Prestige, which was struck on March 4, UKMTO said.

March 7
UKMTO reported - citing a third party it did not name - a possible drone attack 10 nautical miles north of Saudi Arabia's Jubail. It said the majority of the crew was evacuated.

March 11
Thailand-flagged bulk carrier Mayuree Naree was attacked by a projectile in the Strait, 11 nautical miles north of Oman. A fire broke out on board and prompted the vessel's owner Bangkok-headquartered Precious Shipping PSL.BK said in a statement.

Japan-flagged container ship One Majesty sustained minor damage after it was hit by a projectile 25 nautical miles northwest of UAE's Ras Al Khaimah.

March 1
Maltese-flagged container ship Safeneh Prestige was damaged "by a projectile as it sailed towards the top of the Strait, two nautical miles north of Oman. The attack caused a fire in the engine room and prompted "its crew to abandon "ship, according to shipping sources.

March 5
Crude oil tanker Sonangol Nambé was hit by a blast while anchored near Iraq's Khor al Zubair port, US Representative company Sonangol Marine Services said.

An Iranian remote-controlled boat laden with explosives was used to target and dam-



WASA introduces new policy to control petrol expenditures

FAISALABAD (INP): Managing Director (MD) Water And Sanitation Agency (WASA) Saqib Raza has introduced a new policy for controlling petrol expenditures by reducing fuel

limits for field officers across all directorates in accordance to the recent increase in fuel prices. Chaired meeting, he reviewed operational expenses and said that the policy had been formulated in line with the Punjab government's directives to curb fuel spending and ensure efficient utilisation of public resources. He said that the petrol limits allocated to field officers

in all WASA directorates had been revised downward in accordance with the rise in fuel prices and made it clear that no increase in fuel expenditure would be allowed under any circumstances. He also imposed strict restrictions on petrol pump operations supplying fuel to WASA vehicles and directed them not to provide even a single liter beyond the officially al-

located limits for each directorate. If petrol was supplied in excess of the approved quota, the amount would not be deducted directly from the salary of concerned officer, he added. He directed that the monthly fuel allocation should be utilized in a phased manner, with 50 percent of the quota issued during the first fifteen days of the month and the remaining 50 percent during the last fifteen days.



JEDDAH: Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif is being received by His Royal Highness Prince Saud bin Mishan bin Abdulaziz, Deputy Governor of Makkah region, at the royal terminal of Jeddah International airport.

IHC orders formation of medical board for Imran Khan at Shifa Hospital

ISLAMABAD (INP): The Islamabad High Court on Thursday directed the formation of a medical board to assess the health of PTI chairman Imran Khan. The bench, comprising Justice Arbab Muhammad Tahir and Justice Khadim Hussain Soomro, heard the petition filed on behalf of Khan. Sardar Latif Khosa represented the PTI chief, while Advocate General Islamabad Ayaz Shaukat and Additional Attorney General Rashid Hafeez appeared for the government. Sardar Latif Khosa informed the court that Khan had been expending a severe eye condition in his right eye since October. He added that prison doctors initially considered the condition normal, but as Khan's vision worsened, he was transferred

Flight operations resume at Islamabad airport after flypast exercise

ISLAMABAD, March 12 (INP): Flight operations at Islamabad International Airport have resumed after a temporary suspension caused by flypast exercises for Pakistan Day on March 23. The restrictions, which also affected Karachi and Lahore airports, were lifted once the scheduled drills were completed. Airport authorities confirmed that flight operations at Islamabad airport have resumed as usual after the completion of the flypast exercise. The Notice to Airmen (NOTAM) issued earlier for the suspension of commercial flights was also cancelled once the exercise concluded, allowing take-offs and landings to restart. According to airport authorities, flights that were diverted to Shifa Hospital without notifying his family or legal representatives. Khosa to present arguments and instructed the Advocate General to review all medical records and previous decisions regarding the matter. Khosa cited jail regulations and prior rulings, emphasizing that Imran Khan's health and safety require immediate attention. Justice Arbab Muhammad Tahir inquired about the relief previously granted to former Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif, to which Advocate General Ayaz Shaukat responded that it was a writ petition. Tahir added that legal procedures would determine the outcome and asked what recourse is available if the prisoner remains dissatisfied.

Rain and hails bring back chill across Punjab and Islamabad

ISLAMABAD (INP): The first spring rain accompanied by hail turned the weather pleasant in Lahore and several other parts of Punjab, bringing back a chill and making the holy month of Ramadan noticeably cooler. According to the report, heavy rain with strong winds and thunder was reported in several cities, including Lahore, Rawalpindi, Muridke, Pindi Bhattian, Gujranwala, Lala Musa, Kharian, Talagang, Narowal, Shakas were reported in Khanqah Dogran. Lahore also received hail along with intense rainfall, while light drizzle continued during the night. According to the Pakistan Meteorological Department, more rain is expected in the next 24 hours. The minimum temperature in Lahore City was recorded at 21°C, while the maximum reached 30°C. Winds were blowing at around 13 kilometres per hour, and humidity was measured at 70%, while the sky remained partly cloudy. In the federal capital Islamabad, rain in various sectors and surrounding areas caused temperatures to drop, with the morning temperature falling to around 12°C. The Met Office predicted that intermittent drizzle accompanied by strong winds. Thunderstorms were reported in Khanqah Dogran and surrounding areas. In Shakargarh, including Noor Kot and Kartarpur, light rain and cool winds further improved the weather conditions. Rain also made the weather pleasant in Gujranwala, though electricity outages were reported in several parts of the city due to the rainfall. Light showers

with thunder were recorded in Narowal, while Nowshera Virkan and surrounding areas also received rain accompanied by lightning. Meanwhile, in Khyber District, heavy overnight rainfall in the plains of Jamrud and Bara as well as the mountainous areas of the Tirah Valley brought colder conditions once again. The continuous rain also increased water flow in local streams and channels, while clouds still covered the sky in this region. In contrast, the weather in Karachi remained partly cloudy with no immediate chances of rain. According to the Met Office, dry and warm conditions are expected during the day, with temperatures likely to rise to around 37°C under bright sunshine. Humidity levels in the city were recorded at around 85%.



ISLAMABAD: Mr. Farid Ahmad Tarar, newly appointed Member and Chairman of the Competition Commission of Pakistan (CCP), called on the Federal Minister for Finance and Revenue, Senator Muhammad Aurangzeb, at the Finance Division. The Finance Minister congratulated Mr. Tarar on his appointment and wished him success in his new responsibilities.

Pakistan playing role of bridge builder to help de-escalate ME tensions

ISLAMABAD (INP): Foreign Office Spokesperson Tahir Andrabi has said Pakistan is playing the role of a bridge builder to help de-escalate the current tensions in the Middle East (ME). At his weekly news briefing in Islamabad, the Foreign Office Spokesperson Tahir Andrabi said our principled position on issues with respect to sovereignty, international law and the UN Charter and diplomacy is respected in all regional capitals.

He said this allows us to exercise a channel of communication between the relevant capitals. The spokesperson highlighted that throughout the current wave of conflict, Pakistan has consistently urged interlocutors, including the UN Secretary-General, to adhere to three key principles: respect for sovereignty and territorial integrity, a commitment to refrain from using force within each other's territories and upholding international law and the principles enshrined in the UN Charter, alongside the resumption of dialogue and engagement to achieve a peaceful resolution to the crisis. As regards the situation along Pakistan's border, the spokesperson reiterated that Pakistan conducted targeted operations with due diligence with the principles of ensuring that no civilian is hurt. He said we have nothing against Afghan citizens emphasizing they are our brothers and sisters. He said we want no harm to them and we will continue to exercise our due diligence in this regard. Tahir Andrabi said Pakistan has emphatically communicated to Afghan side and to our interlocutors that we need verifiable assurances from Afghan side that their territory would not be used for terrorism against Pakistan. He said since those assurances have not been received, we will continue with our existing policy with respect to that country.

President Zardari felicitates leadership of Mauritius on National Day

ISLAMABAD (INP): President Zardari expressed his confidence that the friendly relations between the two countries would continue to deepen in the years ahead. He conveyed his best wishes for the good health and happiness of President Gokhool and the friendly people of Mauritius on the auspicious occasion of their National Day. The president highlighted that Pakistan attaches great importance to its cordial relations with Mauritius, which are marked by mutual trust and constructive cooperation at both bilateral and multilateral forums. It is encouraging to see the growing engagement between the leadership of both nations and the steady expansion of cooperation in areas of shared interest. There is a considerable potential to further strengthen collaboration through enhanced people-to-people contacts, as well as in the fields of trade, education, culture, and tourism. This visit highlights Pakistan's positive role at the diplomatic front and Pakistan will continue to play this role.

KP govt decides to revive model schools, institutes

PESHAWAR (INP): The Khyber Pakhtunkhwa government has decided to revive the defunct Model Schools and Institutes across the province to restore their past glory and improve the quality of education. The decision was taken during a meeting of the Provincial Education Department chaired by Chief Minister Mohammad Sohail Afridi in Peshawar on Thursday. He stated, adding that the provincial government is undertaking practical measures to elevate the standard of education. The Chief Minister also issued directives for the establishment of new Model Schools and Institutes in Haripur and Khyber districts. He assured that the provincial government would provide all necessary resources on a priority basis to strengthen the educational institutions and ensure the success of the revival project.



ISLAMABAD: MNA delegation visited National Emergency Operation Center for Strategic Briefing on Proactive Disaster Management at NDMA HQs.

Minister signals further increase in petrol prices

ISLAMABAD, March 12 (INP): Federal Minister for Finance and Revenue Senator Muhammad Aurangzeb on Thursday indicated that petroleum prices may increase further in the coming days. His remarks come as consumers are already facing the impact of a sharp rise in fuel prices. The government recently increased petrol and diesel prices by Rs55 per litre, citing rising global oil costs linked to escalating tensions in the Middle East. Under the new rates, petrol now costs Rs321.17 per litre, while diesel has risen from Rs275.70 to Rs335.86 per litre.

Aurangzeb made the remarks while briefing the Senate Standing Committee on Finance and Revenue meeting, held under the chairmanship of Senator Saleem Mandiwala. The finance minister said the government was implementing austerity measures due to the directions of Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif, but warned that petroleum prices could rise further in the coming days due to regional developments and global market pressures. He added that a ministerial committee has been formed by the prime minister to monitor petroleum product prices and supply on a daily basis. "The situation in the region is changing moment by moment, so quick decisions are required regarding the purchase of petroleum products," the minister said. Aurangzeb also informed the committee that Qatar has declared force majeure due to the ongoing war situation, which has disrupted LNG imports. He said an LNG cargo that previously cost around \$25 million is now being purchased for nearly \$100 million. The minister further said the government is considering shutting down six urea fertilizer plants due to surplus supply as the country currently has higher stocks than last year. He noted that fuel rationing is being implemented in countries like Sri Lanka and Bangladesh, where the situation is more severe. Meanwhile, opposition leaders strongly criticised the federal government over the massive increase in petroleum prices, warning that the move would further fuel inflation and poverty. In a statement on X, Jamaat-e-Islami chief Hafiz Naeemur Rehman rejected the increase in petroleum prices and termed the decision unacceptable.

DGPR Balochistan Holds Consultative Meeting with Digital Publishers and Social Media Influencers in Quetta

QUETTA: A consultative meeting was held under the chairmanship of Director General of Directorate General Public Relations Balochistan Aslam Khan with digital publishers and social media influencers to discuss various aspects of the proposed digital media policy.

The meeting was attended by prominent representatives from different newspapers and social media platforms, including Jend Baloch from Daily Itikhab, Zafar Ali from Daily Qudrat, Ali Shah from Daily Quetta Voice, Agha Ubaid from Daily Sada-e-Ulas, Murtaza Jareen from Daily Asia Today, and Ghaffar Langro from Daily Reformer.

Social media personalities including Murtaza Zehri, Nagebullah, Fazal ur Rehman, Abdul



Wakeel, and Sohail Ahmed also attended the meeting along with officials from the DGPR office.

During the session, participants held detailed discussions on various aspects of the proposed digital media policy.

They emphasized that with the rapidly evolving media landscape, promoting and organizing digital media effectively has become a critical need of the time.

Participants shared their views and suggestions, highlighting that digital platforms have become one of the most important channels for information dissemination.

Therefore, the sector should be strengthened through a well-defined policy and effective strategy.

Addressing the meeting, DGPR Aslam Khan said that the Government of Balochistan is taking steps to organize digital media under a formal policy framework.

He stated that, in line with the vision of Mir Sarfraz Bugti, efforts are underway to promote digital media in the province, and consultations with all stakeholders are being carried out to finalize the policy.

He added that the government is also working on a comprehensive strategy to provide facilities for digital publishers and individuals associated with social media, including provisions related to social media allowances.

Aslam Khan further said that merit will be given special importance in the policy, and priority will be given to local individuals from the province so that young people and media professionals from Balochistan can benefit from greater opportunities.

He stressed that the dissemination of digital media, social media influencers through digital media is essential, and cooperation between the government, traditional media, and social media representatives will be strengthened for this purpose.

The DGPR expressed hope that such consultative meetings will continue in the future to further organize and strengthen the digital media sector in Balochistan.

Quetta Road Project from Kohla Phatak to Chaman Phatak Nears Completion, Promises Traffic Relief

QUETTA: Provincial Minister for Communications and Works Mir Saleem Khan Khosa said that the ongoing Kohla Phatak to Chaman Phatak road project in Quetta will significantly reduce traffic congestion in the city and provide citizens with improved commuting convenience.

near Haji Muhammad Anwar, briefed the minister on the progress of the project, noting that construction work is moving swiftly and has entered its final stages, and expressed confidence that the project will be completed soon, bringing direct benefits to the residents of Quetta.

The minister further directed that the pace of all ongoing development projects in the province should be accelerated while maintaining high standards, ensuring timely



The statement came during the minister's visit to inspect the progress of the road construction.

The inspection was attended by Chief Engineer Abdul Rahim Bangalzai, Executive Engineer E&M Works Division Haji Muhammad Anwar, and other relevant officials.

Executive Engineer

Provincial Minister Mir Saleem Khan Khosa expressed satisfaction with the ongoing work, stating that the project will soon reach completion and that the people of Quetta will benefit from its outcomes. He emphasized that the government's top priority is to develop road infrastructure across

tributing to public welfare. SEO Keywords: Quetta Kohla Phatak Chaman Phatak road project, Mir Saleem Khan Khosa road inspection, Quetta traffic improvement, Balochistan road infrastructure projects, Quetta road construction update, provincial government development projects.

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Secretary Communications Reviews Progress of Justice Road Development Project in Quetta

QUETTA: Secretary Communications and Works Babar Khan visited Justice Road in Quetta to review the progress of the ongoing development project.

During the visit, Chief Engineer Quetta Zone Abdul Rahim Bangalzai, Superintending Engineer Quetta City Azhar Jan, Engineer Owais Farvez, and other concerned officials were also present.

Officials provided the Secretary with a detailed briefing on the progress of the project, informing him that construction work is progressing rapidly and that all available resources are being utilized to ensure the



project's completion within the stipulated timeframe.

On the occasion, Babar Khan inspected various sections of the project and reviewed the quality of construction during the project and emphasized that no compromise should be made on construction quality.

The Secretary stated that the timely completion of public welfare projects is among the government's top priorities.

He added that the Communications and Works Department is committed to completing important development projects as soon as possible so that citizens can benefit from them and enjoy improved road infrastructure and better travel facilities.

SEO Keywords: Justice Road Quetta development project, Secretary Communications and Works Babar Khan visit, Quetta road infrastructure project, C&W Department Balochistan, Quetta development projects 2026, Justice Road construction update.

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Price Monitoring Drive Continues in Sohbatpur During Ramadan to Provide Public Relief

SOHBATPUR: On the directives of Balochistan Chief Minister Mir Sarfraz Bugti, the district administration in Sohbatpur has intensified market monitoring during the holy month of Ramadan to ensure the availability of essential food items at official government prices.

As part of the initiative, Naib Tehsildar Habibullah Muhammad Hasni, accompanied by Qanoongo Zahir Ahmed and other staff



members, conducted a detailed inspection of Sohbatpur Bazaar.

During the visit, officials inspected vegetable and fruit shops, grocery stores, and medical stores. The team reviewed the prices of essential commodities, the availability of official price lists, and the expiry dates of medicines.

Shopkeepers were strictly instructed to sell food items according to the government-issued

price list and avoid any form of illegal profiteering or artificial price hikes. The administration emphasized that providing maximum relief to the public during Ramadan remains a top priority for the government.

During the inspection, several shopkeepers were fined a total of Rs. 6,700 for violating

the official price list, while 10 shopkeepers were issued warnings to remain cautious in the future.

Additionally, instructions were issued to improve cleanliness arrangements in the market and ensure better facilities for the public.

The district administration Sohbatpur reiterated that regular monitoring of markets will continue throughout Ramadan to ensure compliance with government price regulations and provide relief to citizens.

SEO Keywords: Sohbatpur price control Ramadan, Mir Sarfraz Bugti directives, Sohbatpur bazaar inspection, Naib Tehsildar Habibullah Hasni market visit, anti-profiteering action Sohbatpur, Ramadan market monitoring Balochistan.

Polio Eradication Meeting Held in Barkhan Ahead of Upcoming Vaccination Campaign

BARKHAN: A meeting of the District Polio Eradication Committee (DPEC) was held under the chairmanship of Deputy Commissioner Abdullah Khoso to review preparations for the upcoming anti-polio campaign in Barkhan.

The meeting was attended by Deputy District Health Officer Dr. Majid Amin Khetrani, District Po-

lician who were missed during the previous campaign. Officials informed the meeting that a target has been set to vaccinate 53,210 children against polio across the district.

The campaign will be carried out in 14 Union Councils, for which 160 polio teams have been formed. To ensure maximum outreach, five transit points will also be es-

tablished to vaccinate children traveling with their families. The meeting was further informed that the polio eradication campaign will be conducted from April 13 to April 16, during which teams will visit households to administer polio drops to children under five years of age.

Addressing the meet-



ing, Deputy Commissioner Abdullah Khoso directed officials to ensure that no negligence is tolerated during the campaign. He emphasized that special attention should be given to children who were missed during the previous drive so that they are vaccinated this time.

He added that all concerned departments must work with full dedication to achieve

the goal of making Barkhan a polio-free district.

SEO Keywords: Barkhan polio campaign 2026, Deputy Commissioner Abdullah Khoso meeting, polio vaccination Barkhan district, polio eradication campaign Balochistan, children vaccination campaign Pakistan, anti-polio drive Pakistan.

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NATIONAL BOOK FOUNDATION Ministry of Federal Education and Professional Training Government of Pakistan

Awards on Best Books for children on Quaid-e-Azam, Allama Muhammad Iqbal and Pakistan Movement 2025

National Book Foundation intends to award cash prizes for the best book written in English on Quaid-e-Azam Muhammad Ali Jinnah, Allama Muhammad Iqbal and Pakistan Movement, published in 2025. Only the books securing first position will be entitled to the award. Each winning author will receive a cash prize of PKR 100,000. Writers and publishers are requested to send 03 copies of books published during the calendar year 2025 on the above topics along with a copy of the author's CNIC and two passport size photographs, latest by April 15, 2026 to the address given below:

Samra Saman Kiyani Incharge Program National Book Foundation 6, Mauve Area, Sector G-8/4, Islamabad Ph: 051-9261184 supplyofbooks@nbf.org.pk

Government Medical Store Depot Health Department Government of Balochistan Quetta. Includes a table with procurement details and contact information.

Ogra notifies massive increase in RLNG price for March

NEWS DESK: Less than a week after the government hiked the prices of petroleum products by a whopping Rs55, the Oil and Gas Regulatory Authority (Ogra) on Thursday notified a massive 19-22 per cent increase in the price of regasified liquefied natural gas (RLNG) for sales at the distribution stage by the two Sui gas companies for the month of March.

The increase was mainly because of increase in terminal charges and lower import molecules and minor increase in import price, the dataset from the authority showed.

The rare increase (19-22pc) in RLNG price for March has come following a minor 0.5pc increase in February and two consecutive monthly reductions in December (6pc) and January (5pc). The prices had cumulatively increased by 4.4pc in October and November.

The Karachi-based Sui Southern Gas Company Limited (SSGCL) serves consumers in Sindh and Balochistan and its system losses at the distribution and stand at 12.55pc, compared to 10.6pc a couple



of months earlier. On the other hand, the Lahore-based Sui Northern Gas Pipelines Limited (SNGPL) provides gas to consumers in Punjab and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. Its system losses at the distribution stage were also reported at almost 9pc compared to 7.47pc in October.

According to Ogra's notification, the RLNG sale price for SNGPL at the transmission stage went up by 19.3pc to \$12.49 per million British thermal units (mmBtu) for March 2026, compared to \$10.41 per mmBtu in January 2026, \$10.92 per mmBtu in December 2025 and \$11.24

per mmBtu in September. The sale price at the distribution stage for SNGPL was, thus, increased by 19.6pc to \$13.55 per mmBtu for March against \$11.335 per mmBtu in February.

It was previously \$11.27 per mmBtu in January, \$11.83 per mmBtu in December and \$12.24 per mmBtu in November.

On the other side, the RLNG sale price for SSGCL has been increased at the transmis-

sion stage by 22pc to \$11.12 per mmBtu for March from \$9.03 per mmBtu in February. It was \$8.98 per mmBtu in January, \$9.47 per mmBtu in December and \$9.86 per mmBtu in September.

The sale price at distribution stage for the company was also increased by 22pc to \$12.54 per mmBtu for March against \$10.27 per mmBtu in February. It was \$10.21 per mmBtu in January, \$10.77 per mmBtu in December and \$11.01 per mmBtu in September.

The regulatory authority said the increase in RLNG price was due to the "increase in the delivered ex-ship (DES) price, import-related cost and terminal charges".

The unaccounted for gas (UFG) for both companies at the distribution stage has gone up since January.

Ironically, the RLNG distribution prices for SSGCL (\$12.54 per mmBtu) and SNGPL (\$13.55 per mmBtu) are almost \$3.3 and \$4.25 per mmBtu higher than the price of DES, respectively.

This is mainly be-

cause of the fact that both LNG importers — Pakistan State Oil (PSO) and Pakistan LNG Ltd (PLL) — and port authorities also charge hefty profit margins on account of retainage and margins at the rate of 3.77pc of the DES price on top of \$9.7pc losses of SNGPL and 12.55pc losses of SSGCL.

The basket RLNG price was based on a total of only two cargoes in March against eight cargoes each in February 2025 and March 2025 due to a force majeure declared by Qatar after its gas facilities came under attack and close of the Strait of Hormuz.

Both cargoes were imported under two LNG contracts between PSO and Qatar Gas at an average of \$7.68 per mmBtu (DES price), compared to \$7.45 per mmBtu last month, but still significantly lower than \$8.9 per mmBtu in March last year.

The DES price was at \$7.52 per mmBtu in January, \$7.87 per mmBtu in December and \$8.15 per mmBtu in November. Of the two, one cargo was procured at \$8.72 and another at \$6.65 per mmBtu.

Six airlines from these countries — Etihad, Air Arabia, Flydubai, Qatar Airways, Emirates and Kuwait Airways — have cancelled about 2,381 flights a day, affecting hundreds of thousands of passengers.

Between March 1 and March 10, only around 50 flights operated, bringing total cancellations during the period to about 23,810, according to statistics reported by The Express Tribune.

IMF mission fails to reach staff-level agreement with Pakistan, talks to continue

NEWS DESK: The International Monetary Fund (IMF) on Thursday confirmed that its mission could not reach a staff-level agreement (SLA) on the third review of the country's \$7 billion Extended Fund Facility (EFF) and the second review of the Resilience and Sustainability Facility (RSF) despite considerable progress, and that negotiations would continue.

In its "End of Mission" statement, the IMF said its team, headed by Iva Petrova, held discussions with Pakistani authorities on the EFF's third review and the second review of the 28-month RSF arrangement in Karachi and Islamabad, as well as virtually from February 25 to March 11 (Wednesday).

"While considerable progress was made in the discussions, these will continue in the coming days, including to more fully assess the impact of recent global developments on Pakistan's economy and

ensure inflation remains durably within the State Bank of Pakistan's target range; and advancing reforms to improve the viability of the energy sector," it said.

"Particular attention was paid to deepening structural reforms, given the authorities' emphasis on accelerating growth, alongside efforts to strengthen social protection and rebuild health and education spending. These discussions are ongoing."

"The IMF statement added that the Pakistani authorities had also made good progress in implementing their reform agenda to strengthen climate resilience, including through the completion of reform measures under the RSF.

"Discussions also covered the impact of the conflict in the Middle East on Pakistan's economic outlook.

hit. Air operations from Pakistan to the Middle East have been severely disrupted by the regional conflict, with more than 500 domestic and international flights cancelled over the past three days, stranding thousands of passengers.

Spot Northwest European jet fuel prices were at \$1,536 per metric ton on Thursday, trading near an all-time high of \$1,633 they reached

intra-day on Monday. Air operations from Pakistan to the Middle East have been severely disrupted by the regional conflict, with more than 500 domestic and international flights cancelled over the past three days, stranding thousands of passengers.

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PIA raises fuel surcharge as Gulf crisis lifts fuel costs 34%

NEWS DESK: Fuel costs of Pakistan International Airlines (PIA) have risen 34% due to the crisis in the Gulf region and the carrier is increasing the fuel "surcharge" on both domestic and international routes, a spokesman said on Thursday.

He added that PIA would raise the fuel surcharge by \$20 on domestic flights and by up to \$100 on overseas flights.

The spokesman further said that 165

flights were cancelled in the past 12 days due to the crisis, which had also significantly hurt international operations.

Higher oil prices due to the Iran war are increasing prices of jet fuel, which accounts for a big portion of airlines' costs. Brent crude oil rose near \$100 per barrel on Thursday on worries about disrupted supply.

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Saudi Arabia activates desert oil pipeline

NEWS DESK: Faced with an unprecedented crisis in shipping its oil to clients overseas, Saudi Arabia is moving rapidly to activate a decades-old contingency plan — pumping millions of gallons of desert to reach tankers on the Red Sea.

With the vital Strait of Hormuz all but closed, the region's petroleum-exporting monarchies are facing a potentially disastrous situation as Iran targets energy installations, storage capacity fills, and production is throttled due to the shipping paralysis caused by the Middle East war.

The Gulf has been battered by Iranian attacks in retaliation for the US-Israeli strikes that sparked the conflict, with Tehran targeting both US assets in the region and civilian infrastructure alike.

To help manage the fiasco, Saudi Arabia is ramping up the use of the Petrolino, its east-west pipeline bisecting the kingdom, Saudi state energy giant Aramco said during an earnings call this week.

Petrolino ramps up activity to bypass Hormuz blockage

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ensure inflation remains durably within the State Bank of Pakistan's target range; and advancing reforms to improve the viability of the energy sector," it said.

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the region, Iran was able to effectively close the Strait of Hormuz and cause widespread disruptions in just a matter of days.

In a line stretching from Kuwait City to Abu Dhabi, Iran has methodically knocked major refineries offline and forced Qatar to shutter LNG installations that provide roughly a fifth of the world's liquefied natural gas. The stranglehold only appears to be deepening, with the US appearing to acknowledge this week that Iran has begun mining the Strait of Hormuz — a chokepoint where around 20 per cent of global energy passes.

the country's farm-to-fork system still revolves around traditional wholesale markets where commission agents dominate trade flows and price formation. Growers' representatives argue that online platforms have so far captured only a marginal share of the overall produce trade. Sindh Abadgar Board (SAB) President Mahmood Nawaz Shah recently said that digital platforms could handle no more than 2-3% of fruit and vegetable volumes, leaving the broader supply chain largely unchanged.

According to Shah, the structure of the market itself limits disruption. Wholesale trading of fruits and vegetables is governed by provincial legislation commonly referred to as the Market Produce Act, which requires buying and selling to take place within officially notified wholesale markets, commonly known as Sabzi Mandis. These markets operate under government-appointed market committees and effectively channel most large-scale trading through designated locations.

As a result, the system continues to rely on commission agents, known locally as arthi, who provide credit to farmers and control access to trading space in wholesale markets. Growers often rely on advances from these intermediaries to finance production, which binds them to sell their harvest through the same dealers at predetermined prices. The structure, farmers say, creates a cycle of dependence that digital platforms have not yet been able to break.

Pakistan's market infrastructure also remains limited relative to population size. Karachi, a city of more than 20 million people, operates essentially a single large wholesale fruit and vegetable market spread over roughly 100 acres, said Nawaz. Growers' bodies argue that such limited infrastructure concentrates trading power and restricts competition.

In contrast, comparable international cities operate multiple wholesale produce markets with extensive storage and logistics facilities, enabling more efficient distribution and price discovery, he added.



Tech fails to break mandi monopoly

NEWS: Technology companies that gave a positive connotation to the word "disruption" for radically transforming traditional markets globally have not been able to make a dent in Pakistan's exploitative fruit and vegetable supply chains, which remain largely controlled by entrenched middlemen and constrained by restrictive government regulations.

Industry observers say that despite the rapid expansion of digital marketplaces and quick-commerce services in urban Pakistan,

the structure of the market itself limits disruption. Wholesale trading of fruits and vegetables is governed by provincial legislation commonly referred to as the Market Produce Act, which requires buying and selling to take place within officially notified wholesale markets, commonly known as Sabzi Mandis. These markets operate under government-appointed market committees and effectively channel most large-scale trading through designated locations.

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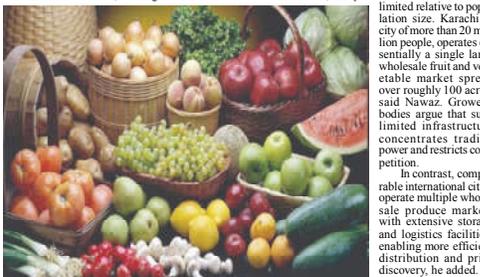
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the structure of the market itself limits disruption. Wholesale trading of fruits and vegetables is governed by provincial legislation commonly referred to as the Market Produce Act, which requires buying and selling to take place within officially notified wholesale markets, commonly known as Sabzi Mandis. These markets operate under government-appointed market committees and effectively channel most large-scale trading through designated locations.

As a result, the system continues to rely on commission agents, known locally as arthi, who provide credit to farmers and control access to trading space in wholesale markets. Growers often rely on advances from these intermediaries to finance production, which binds them to sell their harvest through the same dealers at predetermined prices. The structure, farmers say, creates a cycle of dependence that digital platforms have not yet been able to break.

Pakistan's market infrastructure also remains limited relative to population size. Karachi, a city of more than 20 million people, operates essentially a single large wholesale fruit and vegetable market spread over roughly 100 acres, said Nawaz. Growers' bodies argue that such limited infrastructure concentrates trading power and restricts competition.

In contrast, comparable international cities operate multiple wholesale produce markets with extensive storage and logistics facilities, enabling more efficient distribution and price discovery, he added.



Iran cannot participate in upcoming FIFA World Cup in US, minister says

NEWS DESK: Iran cannot participate in the 2026 FIFA World Cup after the co-host US launched airstrikes alongside Israel, Sports Minister Ahmad Donyamali said on Wednesday.

The attacks assassinated Iran's Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei and triggered a region-wide conflict.

"Considering that this corrupt regime has assassinated our leader, under no circumstances can we participate in the World Cup," the minister told state television.

The 48-team World Cup will be held in the US, Mexico and Canada from June 11 to July 19.

"Our children are not safe and, fundamentally, such conditions for participation do not exist," Donyamali said.

"Given the malicious actions they have carried out against Iran, they have forced two wars on us over eight or nine months and have killed and martyred thousands of our people. Therefore, we certainly cannot have such a presence."

More than 1,300 Iranian civilians have been



Iran are grouped with Belgium, Egypt and New Zealand. All three of their Group G matches are scheduled to take place in the US, two in Los Angeles and one in Seattle.

for World Cup participants held last week in Atlanta.

There was no immediate comment from the Iranian Football Federation or world soccer's governing body, FIFA.

FIFA regulations state that any team that withdraws from the tournament "no later than 30 days before the first match" will be fined at least 250,000 Swiss francs (\$320,800).

"Disciplinary sanctions may include the expulsion of the participating member association concerned from subsequent FIFA competitions and/or the replacement of the participating member association with another member association," FIFA's regulations say.

"The FIFA Council or the relevant committee may decide, in particular, to replace the member association in question with another association."

Iran had selected Tucson's sprawling Kino Sports Complex as the team's base camp and 18 months of preparation hang in the balance with a potential economic hit in Arizona.

New F1 cars more like Mario Kart: Verstappen

NEWS DESK: Four-time world champion Max Verstappen said Thursday he was not having much fun driving the new era of Formula One cars, joking he was practising with Mario Kart because it was more realistic than his simulator.

The Red Bull driver crashed in qualifying in Australia last weekend before having to carve his way from 14th on the grid to finish a creditable sixth.

The new cars require battery management and energy harvesting with a 50-50 split between conventional and electrical power.

They also have features such as straight-line mode, active aero, overtake and boost buttons, which Verstappen reckons are nearer to a video game.

"I swapped the simulator for my Nintendo Switch. I'm practising with Mario Kart, actually. Finding the mushrooms is going

quite well, the blue shells are a bit more difficult."

Verstappen announced this week that he would be driving in the Nurburgring 24-hour race this year.

"I wish I had a bit more fun for sure," he said of Formula One at the moment.

"I mean, I get to race the Nordschleife (Nurburgring) and I hope in the coming years I can do Spa and hopefully Le Mans."

"So I'm combining stuff and I'm also doing other stuff that is a lot of fun."

"It's a bit conflicted because I don't really enjoy to drive the car, but I do enjoy working with all the people in the team and from the engine department as well."

He did express optimism that things would improve as the new rules and regulations were adjusted and said drivers were already in discussions over changes.

"I hope, of course, that it gets better," said the Dutchman.

"I've had discussions with F1 and the FIA and I think we are working towards something that will improve everything."



North Korea vow no more protests in Women's Asian Cup

NEWS DESK: North Korea pledged Thursday there will be no more sideline protests during their Women's Asian Cup quarter-final with Australia after causing a stir against China.

An incensed North Korea refused to play for several minutes in their 2-1 loss to the Chinese during a group game on Monday.

They were left fuming when former Tottenham attacker Wang Shuang scored in first-half stoppage time, demanding the referee look at the pitchside monitor.

The three-time champions refused to resume the game for four minutes as boos rang out. "If that kind of situation happens again in tomorrow's match, we will follow the referees, the match official's decision, and respect it," coach Ri Song Ho told reporters in Perth through an interpreter. Ri was yellow-carded for his part

in the fracas. North Korea are set to face a partisan full house at Perth Rectangular Stadium on Friday against the hosts, who beat them on penalties in the 2010 final after it ended 1-1. Australia's Sam Kerr is the only player left from the match, with North Korea now boasting a young and physical side.

They are looking to build on defending their Women's U17 World Cup title in Morocco last year, which came on the heels of winning the U20 World Cup in Colombia in 2024.

Talented striker Choe Il Son played in both those triumphs before transitioning to the full national side.

"We know Australia are a formidable team, so tomorrow we will give our best to support each other and perform at our highest level," she said.

"We have talent on our side and we've been preparing carefully for the match. We're excited to show what our team can do on the pitch. Not only is a semi-final berth at stake, but also 2027 World Cup qualification with the top six finishers booking their tickets to the Brazil showpiece."



Djokovic ousted by Draper at Indian Wells as Alcaraz marches on

NEWS DESK: Novak Djokovic was dumped out by Jack Draper in a slugfest Wednesday as the defending champion won 4-6, 6-4, 7-6 (7/5) to reach the quarter-finals at Indian Wells.

World number one Carlos Alcaraz sailed into the last eight of the Masters 1000 event for the fifth straight year and there were straight-sets wins for Daniil Medvedev and Cameron Norrie.

But Britain's Draper did it the hard way, wearing down 38-year-old Djokovic in a punishing third set to deny the Serb superstar his first return to the quarter-finals since he won his fifth Indian Wells title in 2016.

"I came out here tonight and I won that match through determination and trying to solve the problem - solve and do my best and have a great attitude," said Draper, who kept the former world number one on the move with multiple drop shots.

The margins were razor-thin over the first two sets. The tide turned on an epic point in the opening game of the third that saw both players chasing down drop shots and scrambling for lob before Djokovic sealed it with



an overhead for a 40-30 lead.

He flopped on the court exhausted and was on his knees again after Draper won the next point. Djokovic would go on to hold serve, but he said it was the difference in the match for him.

"One point," he said.

"It was great winning that point in that game, but I just ran completely out of gas."

Djokovic in his next service game, but couldn't close it out when he served for the match at 5-4.

The reprieve wasn't enough for Djokovic, who led 4-3 in the tiebreaker but couldn't

hang on.

"He played a sloppy game to close it out 5-4, and, you know, I got the crowd, you know, backing me, and I felt the energy," Djokovic said. "It was, like, maybe I'm gonna take this one. It was so, so close."

Draper, playing just his second tournament since missing the better part of six months with an arm injury, was delighted.

"To come out here against Novak, for me the greatest tennis player there is, I'm just incredibly proud of myself," he said.

He won't have long to savor the victory with a quarter-final against

two-time finalist Daniil Medvedev coming up on Thursday.

Medvedev beat American Alex Michelsen 6-2, 6-4.

Alcaraz shines

Alcaraz advanced with a sparkling 6-1, 7-6 (7/2) victory over Casper Ruud, extending his perfect start to 2026.

Alcaraz, who lifted the trophy in the California desert in 2023 and 2024, was untouchable in the first set, conjuring winners from every angle of the court.

"My first set, I think I was unplayable to be honest," Alcaraz said.

"I was really, really happy about playing at that level."

Nahid Rana takes 5 wickets as Bangladesh crush Pakistan in ODI opener

NEWS DESK: Bangladesh pace sensation Nahid Rana claimed his first five-wicket haul in one-day internationals to lead his team to a crushing eight-wicket win over Pakistan in their opening match on Wednesday.

Rana returned figures of 5-24 to skittle out Pakistan for 114, a total Bangladesh overhauled in 15.1 overs of the 50-over contest in Mirpur to take a 1-0 lead in the three-match series.

Opener Tanzid Hasan hammered an unbeaten 67 off 42 balls and put on a second-wicket partnership of 82 with Najmul Hossain Shanto, who made 27, in a statement win.

Saif Hassan fell early for four, while Litton Das remained unbeaten on three with Tanzid.

Earlier, Nahid laid the platform for victory with his outstanding spell in his seven overs to bowl out Pakistan for their lowest



Salman Agha (5) as Pakistan slumped to 69-5.

He was ably supported by captain Mehidy Hasan Miraz, who took 3-29 with his off-spin.

Senior quicks Taskin Ahmed and Mustafizur Rahman took one wicket each.

Number eight Faheem Ashraf offered brief resistance with his 37 before being dismissed by Mustafizur (27), Shamiyul Husain (4), Mazhar Siddiqi (18), and Mohammad Rizwan (10) and

overs. The performance marked a breakthrough in Nahid's young ODI career since his debut in 2024. He had taken only five wickets in his first five matches before producing the five-wicket haul in his sixth appearance.

Nahid is now only the second Bangladeshi bowler to take a five-wicket haul against Pakistan in ODIs after Mustafizur's 5-75 during the 2019 World Cup.



13 terrorists killed in 5 intelligence-driven operations across KP: ISPR

NEWS DESK: Security forces have killed 13 terrorists in five separate operations across Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, the military's media affairs wing said on Sunday.

"On March 6-7, security forces conducted a series of high-tempo intelligence-driven operations, part of relentless counter-terrorism campaign, wherein 13 khawarij belonging to Indian proxy Fina Al Khawarij were killed in five separate engagements in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa," the Inter Services (ISPR) said.

Fina al Khawarij is a term the state uses for terrorists belonging to the banned Tehreek-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP).

According to ISPR, five terrorists were killed in the Bajaur district after an intense fire exchange when troops "effectively engaged the khawarij location" during an intelligence-based operation (IBO).

In two other encounters in Bannu and Dera Ismail Khan districts, three terrorists "belonging to Indian proxy Fina Al Khawarij" were "successfully neutralised", the press release said.

IHC orders medical board on Imran Khan's request for transfer to Shifa Hospital

NEWS DESK: The Islamabad High Court (IHC) on Thursday ordered the formation of a medical board while deciding a petition filed by former prime minister Imran Khan seeking his transfer to Shifa International Hospital for treatment.

The case was heard by Justice Arbab Muhammad Tahir and Justice Khadim Hussain Soomro. PFI founder Khan was represented by lawyer Sardar Latif Khosa, while Islamabad Advocate General Ayaz Shaukat and Additional Attorney General Rashid Hafeez also appeared before the court.

During the hearing, Khosa told the court that Khan had been complaining of deteriorating vision in his right eye since October. He said jail doctors initially treated the matter as routine and that Khan was shifted to the Pakistan Institute of Medical Sciences (PIMS) only after his eyesight had "most been lost."

He added that the family and legal team were not informed during this period. The court asked that Khosa be allowed to complete his arguments and directed the Islamabad advocate general to review medical reports and previous decisions related to the case.

Citing jail rules and past court rulings, Khosa argued that there were serious concerns about Khan's health and life and that immediate specialised care was necessary. The court instructed both sides to continue presenting arguments.

Justice Arbab Muhammad Tahir asked under which case former prime minister Nawaz Sharif had previously received relief. Advocate General Ayaz Shaukat replied that it had been granted through a writ petition.

Justice Tahir remarked that the matter would be decided according to law and questioned what would happen if a prisoner was not satisfied with medical treatment.

The advocate general responded that the satisfaction of the medical officer, not the prisoner, was required under the

enforcement agencies (LEAs) of Pakistan will continue at full pace to wipe out the menace of foreign-sponsored and supported terrorism from the country."

President Asif Ali Zardari commended the security forces for eliminating the terrorists, state-run APP reported, respectively.

The president lauded the professional capabilities of the security forces running the operations in Bajaur, Bannu, DI Khan, Khyber and South Waziristan, the media wing of President's Secretariat said in a press release.

President Zardari underlined that operations against "In dian-backed Fina al Khawarij terrorists were significant for securing peace in the country."

Terror resurgence and intensified operations KP has seen in recent years. According to the Annual Security Report 2025 from the Centre for Research and Security Studies (CRSS).

KP recorded a significant surge in violence last year as "fatalities rose from 1,620 in 2024 to 2,331 in 2025".

The judge observed that treatment was already being provided and suggested that a medical check-up could be conducted at Shifa Hospital, with access granted to Khan's personal doctors.

"Treatment is being carried out and the government acknowledges this. Dr Nadeem Qureshi is an excellent retina specialist," Justice Tahir said.

During the proceedings, Khan's sister Aleema Khan said, "They do not even tell the truth; they keep lying all day." The judge responded that Dr Qureshi could brief Khan's doctors about the ongoing treatment.

A medical report submitted to the Supreme Court on February 15 stated that Khan's vision in his right eye had declined to 15%, prompting renewed calls from Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) for his release on medical grounds. His family has also demanded that he be shifted to Al-Shifa Hospital for treatment by his personal physicians.

Separately, Foreign Office spokesperson Tahir Hussain Andrabi confirmed the visit during the weekly briefing, saying the prime minister had left for a one-day trip to Saudi Arabia.

He said Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Ishaq Dar is accompanying the prime minister on the visit.

The spokesperson added that the trip forms part of ongoing coordination between Pakistan and Saudi Arabia while urging restraint to prevent regional peace and security. He said the visit should also be seen as part of broader diplomatic efforts aimed at paving the way for dialogue and diplomacy in the region.

Amid rising tensions in the Middle East following US-Israeli strikes on Iran, Pakistan has reiterated its strong strategic commitment to Saudi Arabia while urging restraint to prevent a wider regional conflict. Yesterday, Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif discussed the evolving situation during a telephone conversation with Iranian President Masoud Peshkian, stressing that dialogue and diplomatic engagement were essential to ensure peace, stability and development in the region.

At the same time, the prime minister's spokesperson for foreign media, Mosharraf Zaidi, said Pakistan would firmly stand with Saudi Arabia in resolving the crisis, highlighting the depth of ties between the two countries. "The question is not whether Pakistan might come to Saudi Arabia's aid... we will, no matter what, no matter when," he said, while adding that Islamabad was currently focused on preventing further escalation and ensuring key regional partners are not drawn deeper into the conflict.

Iran has responded to the US-Israeli strikes by launching waves of drones and missile attacks not only toward Israel but also at Gulf states, including Saudi Arabia, hosting US military installations, dragging the region deeper into the conflict. The escalation has hit key infrastructure, including airports, ports, hotels, and oil and military facilities across Gulf countries.

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Govt mulling not hiking prices of petroleum products further despite increase in global market

NEWS DESK: The federal government has banned the export of all petroleum products and is considering not hiking prices further despite a continuous increase in the global market and the drawback of about Rs389bn in budget allocations for emergencies to absorb the future price shock as much as possible.

The decision comes after the latest estimates, based on existing tax rates and pricing formula, suggest that the price of high-speed diesel (HSD) going up by Rs56 per litre and that of petrol by Rs41. Petrol and HSD are currently sold on the higher side of Rs322 and Rs337 per litre, respectively, at retail.

Likewise, estimates also showed an increase of Rs7 and Rs53 per litre for the prices of kerosene and light diesel oil, respectively.

The next price review is scheduled for March 15 (Sunday) but ministers indicate these could be reviewed on March 13 (Friday).

Highly placed sources told Dawn that Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif recently told a consultative session attended by federal and provincial representatives — that he and the military leadership had

jointly decided that after the initial increase, there would be no further price hike, at least in the near future, regardless of the prices in the Middle East.

The session, also attended by Field Marshal Asim Munir, was informed that the government would use block allocations for emergencies to absorb further price hikes.

The prime minister told the meeting that no other emergency could be worse than what the whole nation was facing at the moment because of fuel supply disruptions.

PM Shehbaz departs for Saudi Arabia on 'brief' visit

NEWS DESK: Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif on Thursday departed for a brief official visit to Saudi Arabia at the invitation of Crown Prince and Prime Minister Mohammed bin Salman, state broadcaster APP reported.

During the visit, the prime minister is scheduled to hold a meeting with Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, where the two leaders will discuss the prevailing regional situation, ongoing tensions in the region and bilateral relations between the two countries.

According to APP, the discussions will focus on the regional security situation and co-operation between Pakistan and Saudi Arabia on matters of mutual interest.

The visit reflects Pakistan's continued engagement in diplomatic efforts at the international level and its role in promoting dialogue and stability in the region.

Separately, Foreign Office spokesperson Tahir Hussain Andrabi confirmed the visit during the weekly briefing, saying the prime minister had left for a one-day trip to Saudi Arabia.

He said Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Ishaq Dar is accompanying the prime minister on the visit.

The spokesperson added that the trip forms part of ongoing coordination between Pakistan and Saudi Arabia while urging restraint to prevent regional peace and security. He said the visit should also be seen as part of broader diplomatic efforts aimed at paving the way for dialogue and diplomacy in the region.

Amid rising tensions in the Middle East following US-Israeli strikes on Iran, Pakistan has reiterated its strong strategic commitment to Saudi Arabia while urging restraint to prevent a wider regional conflict. Yesterday, Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif discussed the evolving situation during a telephone conversation with Iranian President Masoud Peshkian, stressing that dialogue and diplomatic engagement were essential to ensure peace, stability and development in the region.

At the same time, the prime minister's spokesperson for foreign media, Mosharraf Zaidi, said Pakistan would firmly stand with Saudi Arabia in resolving the crisis, highlighting the depth of ties between the two countries. "The question is not whether Pakistan might come to Saudi Arabia's aid... we will, no matter what, no matter when," he said, while adding that Islamabad was currently focused on preventing further escalation and ensuring key regional partners are not drawn deeper into the conflict.

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However, the sources said the cabinet members were still divided over the prime minister's announcement and technocrats, particularly those directly dealing with the International Monetary Fund (IMF), opposed disturbing the pricing buffers currently in place.

This was reinforced at a meeting of the Senate Standing Committee on Finance, where Petroleum Minister Ali Pervez Malik said attempts were being made to manage the directives of the prime minister and that

a decision would be made after reviewing the global prices on Friday. Minister of State for Finance and Railways Bilal Azhar Kiyani told the meeting that while prices would be directly reviewed on Friday, the government would make all efforts not to further burden the people. He said international prices showed a rising trend. "The prime minister has also directed that burden should not be passed on to the people," he said.

Both the ministers also defended the March 7 decision to increase prices by Rs55 per litre.

At the same time, the prime minister's spokesperson for foreign media, Mosharraf Zaidi, said Pakistan would firmly stand with Saudi Arabia in resolving the crisis, highlighting the depth of ties between the two countries. "The question is not whether Pakistan might come to Saudi Arabia's aid... we will, no matter what, no matter when," he said, while adding that Islamabad was currently focused on preventing further escalation and ensuring key regional partners are not drawn deeper into the conflict.

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saying that otherwise there would have been supply disruptions as seen in Bangladesh and India, where people had also attacked retail stations.

Finance Minister Muhammad Aurangzeb, meanwhile, said international oil prices were still going up.

It may be noted that benchmark Brent prices are generally quoted in the public and social media discourse for comparisons against local retail prices.

The former has no direct linkage and fluctuate mostly based on statements from US President Donald Trump, his aides and like-minded think tanks about the conflict in Iran.

Pakistan's oil imports, more than 95 per cent, originate from the Middle East.

Most of its transportation took place via the troubled Strait of Hormuz, notwithstanding a few alternative routes offshore, and are linked to Dubai-based Middle East pricing, which currently stands at \$135 per barrel against \$105 of Brent.

Petrol and diesel are sold separately and their current Dubai prices stand at \$120 and \$168 per barrel, respectively.

At the same time, the prime minister's spokesperson for foreign media, Mosharraf Zaidi, said Pakistan would firmly stand with Saudi Arabia in resolving the crisis, highlighting the depth of ties between the two countries. "The question is not whether Pakistan might come to Saudi Arabia's aid... we will, no matter what, no matter when," he said, while adding that Islamabad was currently focused on preventing further escalation and ensuring key regional partners are not drawn deeper into the conflict.

Iran has responded to the US-Israeli strikes by launching waves of drones and missile attacks not only toward Israel but also at Gulf states, including Saudi Arabia, hosting US military installations, dragging the region deeper into the conflict. The escalation has hit key infrastructure, including airports, ports, hotels, and oil and military facilities across Gulf countries.

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