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PTI expresses concern over Imran's health, reiterates demand to shift him to Shifa International Hospital

NEWS DESK:

The PTI on Friday expressed grave concern over the deteriorating health of its founder Imran Khan and reiterated its demand for his immediate transfer to Islamabad's Shifa International Hospital for specialised medical treatment, saying that he was a former prime minister and the most popular leader.

In a press conference, party stalwarts condemned what they described as the government's "criminal negligence" with regard to Imran's health and demanded the immediate transfer of the PTI founder to Shifa International Hospital for specialised medical treatment.

They also called for his personal physicians to be provided immediate access to him and for unhindered meetings with his family members and the party leadership, warning that any further delay could have "serious consequences".

Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Chief Minister Shah Afridi, flanked by senior party leaders, criticised the federal government's conduct on the matter, as well as what he called politically motivated cases against him.

"The PTI founder is not an ordinary citizen; he is the former prime minister of Pakistan and the country's most popular leader, and the government has both a legal and moral responsibility to ensure that he receives proper medical treatment," he said.

"The government's refusal to allow him access to his personal doctors and family members is a blatant violation of basic human rights and legal protocols," CM Afridi stated.

He further condemned the government's handling of the former prime minister's health-related issues,

describing it as "irresponsible and unlawful".

"The party has made every possible effort to secure appropriate medical care for the PTI founder, but the current government has repeatedly rejected these requests," he added.

He warned that the party would not tolerate such behaviour and was fully prepared to launch a "massive movement" for its founder's release.

CM Defends BPSK Chairman's Appointment, Says No One Should Be Criticized for Religion

NEWS DESK:

Balochistan Chief Minister Mir Sarfraz Bugti on Friday defended the appointment of Justice (R) Mehta Kailash Nath Kohli as Chairman of the Balochistan Public Service Commission (BPSK), stating that no individual should

be criticized on the basis of religion as all citizens enjoy equal rights under the Constitution.

Addressing the Provincial Assembly, the chief minister was responding to a question raised by MPA Zamrak Khan Achakzai, who asked whether there was no other person available to be appointed to the position.

The chief minister said that criticism over Kohli's appointment simply because he is a Hindu was inappropriate, adding that merit and professional integrity should remain the guiding principles in such decisions.

He also recalled that around 2013 the image of the BPSK had been badly damaged due to un-

fair appointments and irregularities.

However, he said that when Justice (R) Mehta Kailash Nath Kohli served as chairman, he took steps to remove these irregularities and restore the institution's credibility.

The chief minister further noted that Kohli enjoys a strong

professional reputation and had maintained a good record even during his tenure as a judge.

He added that Kohli's previous performance and integrity were the reasons behind his selection, emphasizing that the government remains committed to merit-based appointments and equal rights for all citizens.

Bolan Mail Train from Quetta to Karachi Cancelled Due to Low Passenger Turnout



NEWS DESK:

The Bolan Mail operating between Quetta and Karachi has been temporarily suspended after railway authorities reported a low number of passengers.

According to officials, the Bolan Mail was scheduled to

depart from Quetta for Karachi today, but the train could not leave as planned due to insufficient passenger bookings. Railway administration stated that the service will remain suspended for now and is expected to resume on March 16, when the train will depart from Quetta for Karachi. The Bolan Mail is one

of the key rail links connecting Balochistan with Sindh, providing an important and affordable travel option for passengers moving between Quetta and Karachi.

Railway officials said the decision to cancel the departure was taken to avoid operational losses caused by the limited number of travelers.

Explosive Drones Intercepted in Islamabad; Airport Operations Continue Normally

NEWS DESK:

Security sources reported that two explosive-laden drones were intercepted in the federal capital on Friday, triggering heightened security measures in different parts of the city.

According to officials, one drone fell near the Faizabad interchange while the second was recovered from Islamabad's I-9 sector.

Preliminary reports suggest that both unmanned aerial devices were carrying explosive material.

Authorities suspect the drones may have been launched from neighboring Afghanistan, although investigations are ongoing to determine their exact origin and purpose.

Following the incident, security personnel cordoned off the affected areas and began a detailed assessment of the devices to prevent any potential threat.

Meanwhile, speculation spread on social media regard-



ing a temporary suspension of flight operations at Islamabad International Airport.

The confusion arose after a brief post on X by the Pakistan Airports Authority mentioned a short operational adjustment before being removed in a later clarification, the authority dismissed reports about the closure of

Islamabad's airspace as unfounded, stating that flight operations at the airport were continuing normally and all scheduled flights were operating without interruption.

Security agencies have increased vigilance in the federal capital while authorities continue to investigate the drone incident.

QUETTA VOICE

Editor: Asim Khan

SBKWU Teacher Recruitment Scandal Raises Alarms for Pakistan's Education System



Editorial: Serious questions have emerged over the secondary teachers recruitment process conducted by Sardar Bahadur Khan Women's University (SBKWU), triggering widespread concern about merit, transparency, and accountability in Balochistan's education system. It is essential to clarify a point that has caused public confusion: the advertised posts were NOT for SBKWU itself. The university was only assigned the responsibility of conducting tests and interviews for Secondary School Teacher recruitment across Balochistan. According to initial findings, hundreds of candidates who had failed were allegedly declared successful during the teacher recruitment process.

Given the scale of the exercise, involving thousands of applicants for secondary teaching positions across the province, such irregularities cannot reasonably be described as clerical mistakes. The magnitude strongly suggests organised manipulation, carried out with the involvement of influential individuals rather than the actions of a single official. This issue strikes at the heart of education governance in Balochistan. Secondary school teachers shape the academic foundation of students, and any compromise on merit directly damages learning outcomes. In Balochistan, where literacy rates remain among the lowest in the country, flawed teacher recruitment further deepens an already critical education

crisis. Reports that deserving candidates were sidelined only intensify public frustration and mistrust. All anti-corruption and accountability institutions must take immediate notice. A transparent, independent, and time-bound investigation is necessary to identify those responsible for manipulating the recruitment process conducted under SBKWU's authority. Accountability must reach every individual involved, regardless of status or influence. This is not merely an administrative controversy; it is a matter of justice and the future of Balochistan's education system. If credibility in teacher recruitment collapses, public trust in institutions will collapse with it. Balochistan cannot afford silence where integrity is at stake.

Balochistan's education sector, implementation of article 25-A



Improving the education sector has always been the hallmark of all successive governments in Balochistan. Every government has allocated substantial funds to improve the education sector and quality of education to enable students to compete on national and international level. Health and education, all successive governments declared their priorities. Former Chief Minister, Dr. Abdul Malik Baloch led nationalist government allocated around 24 percent budget to bring the province at par with other parts of the country. Dr. Baloch's government also declared emergency and announced implementation of article 25-A of the constitution to enroll all out of school children in Balochistan. The number of out of school children in Balochistan is currently over 1 mil-

lion. However, independent sources put the number high as compared to the official data. There are conflicting figures about the exact number of out of school children in Balochistan. To be precise, positive strides were made during Dr. Malik Baloch led government to improve the education sector. For the first time in the history of Balochistan, 5000 teachers were appointed through national testing service (NTS), launching an effective campaign against growing cheating during examinations and introducing the education management and information system to ensure the presence of teachers in schools. Track record shows, teachers were always recruited on political basis with no merit and transpar-

ency in the recruitment process. This has ruined the entire education sector. Dr. Malik Baloch, the then adviser on education Sardar Raza Muhammad Bareech led rallies against cheating to create awareness among the people regarding the curse of cheating in educational institutions. After the removal of Sardar Raza Bareech as an adviser on education and transfers of senior bureaucrats Ghulam Ali Baloch and Saboor Kakar, no effective step was taken to improve the quality of education in Balochistan. Now again the portfolio of education has been awarded to Sardar Yar Muhammad Rind who belongs to Pakistan Tehrik e Insaaf (PTI). Mr. Rind has made announcements to bring what he claimed

revolutionary changes. However, improvement in education sector, enrolling out of school children in schools and improving quality of education needs a multi-pronged strategy. Senior bureaucrat Ghulam Ali Baloch who had already served as secretary education has again been posted. Mr. Baloch is taking a number of initiatives to improve schooling and trace out ghost schools and teaches across the province. However, political speed breakers appear to be major obstacles in his way. Despite being the poorest province of Pakistan, Balochistan spends over 70 billion rupees on primary, middle, secondary and higher education in the province. The province spends thousands of rupees per month on a student. Unfortu-

nately, neither the quality nor the education standard meet national standards what to speak about international standards. Poor quality of education is the result of poor capacity of teachers that needs to be improved to compete on national and international level. The Balochistan government has announced to enroll 70000 kids in government run schools in the province. However, ground realities negate claims of the provincial government. So far, the government has not been able to mobilize the civil society, media, political parties and tribesmen to make sure maximum enrollment of kids in educational institutions of the province. Coordinated efforts and combined strategy by all segments of society can ensure implementation of article 25-A of the Constitution.

Taftan border and Balochistan Govt's response

Quetta Voice Analysis

The sudden arrival of thousands of Zaireen at Pak-Iran border Taftan posed a serious challenge for government of Balochistan to make sure their screening and conduct medical tests in the aftermath of outbreak of COVID-19 in neighboring Iran. The federal government closed the border with Iran at Taftan on February 23rd to halt the spread of deadly corona virus. All of a sudden over 4,000 Zaireen, students, tourists and traders gathered at Taftan, Pakistan's bordering town with Iran. The poorly equipped health officials that too less in number tried to conduct screening and tests of those entered from Iran. However, many managed to flee from the administration and used their own means of communication to reach Quetta on way to their home provinces. The drivers were paid heavy fares by those fleeing the quarantine centers at Taftan. Perhaps, in the beginning, the Balochistan government and Islamabad did not realize the gravity of situation. A wind-blowing tent quarantine center was established to keep the



Zaireen and others to halt the spread of novel corona virus. However, the laboratory to diagnose the deadly disease and conduct tests of novel corona virus could not be arranged at the border soon after the closure of border. The National Institute of Health (NIH) dispatched machinery

and laboratory to conduct the diagnosis 10 days after the closure of the border. Before installation of the laboratory, the health officials used to send tests of suspected patients to Islamabad, Lahore and Karachi for diagnosis. Though, it was imperative to install laboratory soon after

the closure of the border to make sure proper screening and diagnosis of the people. Apart from corona virus, the Balochistan government appeared to be concerned about the security of Zaireen as well. In the past, Zaireen were fre-

quently targeted by terrorists on Quetta-Taftan highway. Since then, the Balochistan government has been providing security and law enforcers escort long convoys of buses from Quetta to Taftan all the time. The Chief Minister Balochistan, Jam Kamal Khan has been closely monitoring the

unfolding situation and all the time directing the concerned quarters to halt the spread of novel corona virus. However, loopholes in the system caused the outbreak of COVID-19 in the country. Although, the Chief Minister issued statements, precautionary measures through print, elec-

tronic and shares videos on social media to sensitize the people about the deadly virus. Nevertheless, the virus penetrated and made its way from Taftan to Sukkur prompting the Chief Minister Sindh Syed Murad Ali Shah to say that Zaireen were not properly screened at Pak-Iran border

Taftan. Opposition political parties in Balochistan in general and the Balochistan National Party ideologue, Sanaulah Baloch have strongly criticized the Jam Kamal led government for what they call its failure and incompetence to contain the corona virus. Political parties, members of civil society and legal fraternity had also objected over the establishment of quarantine center at Mian Ghundi area of Quetta. They feared spread of deadly virus after establishment of center near the city rather they demanded of the government to shift the Zaireen to their home provinces directly from Taftan. To be precise, the virus has already penetrated and now it is time for all political parties from left to right and religious to nationalists to join their hands to contain its spread. The government needs to take all stakeholders including political parties, media, civil society and lawyers to evolve a combined strategy in the province to tackle the situation. It is not alone the job of government rather every individual to play his/her role to contain the virus before it is too late.

Deadly blast rocks Iran as leaders rally in show of defiance

NEWS DESK: Deadly explosions rocked Tehran close to a pro-government rally attended by top officials on Friday, as Israel and Iran unleashed fresh strikes in a war that has ignited the Middle East and threatens to torpedo the world economy.

Since erupting on February 28 with US-Israeli attacks on Iran, the war has cascaded throughout the region, drawn in global powers, and sparked a major oil shock.

AFP journalists in Tehran reported loud blasts over the city skies, as Israel's military said it had hit more than 200 targets in western and central Iran in the past day.

Iran's state media said at least one woman was killed when blasts hit an area near a demonstration, where large crowds had gathered waving flags and brandishing banners reading "Death to America" and "Death to Israel".

"These attacks are out of fear, out of desperation," said Ali Larjani, secretary of the Supreme National Security Council, who attended the rally to mark Quds Day.

"One who is strong

wouldn't bomb demonstrations at all. It's clear that it (the enemy) has failed," said Larjani in a speech broadcast on state TV.

President Masoud Pezeshkian and Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi also attended the rally, while images on Iranian media showed the head of the judiciary being interviewed just as a blast occurred.

Foreign ministry spokesman Esmail Baghai vowed Iran's military would teach the US and Israel "an unforgettable lesson".

Shortly afterwards, state television said Iran had launched a fresh salvo of missiles at Israel.

Black smoke rises following an airstrike, as Iranians take part in the Al-Quds Day rally, a commemoration in support of the Palestinian people on the last Friday of the Islamic holy month of Ramadan, in Tehran on March 13, 2026. —AFP



Iranians speaking to AFP under cover of anonymity have painted a grim picture of life under the bombs, with cities in ruins and cash running short.

"People are desperately trying to withdraw their savings from the banks, as trust in them has vanished," one 30-year-old woman in Kermanshah, western Iran, told AFP.

"Bread is now rationed. The population is extremely tense and outraged."

The United Nations refugee agency has estimated that up to 3.2 million people have been displaced inside Iran since the war started.

Iran's health ministry said on March 9 that more than 1,200 people have been killed.

US Defence Secretary Pete Hegseth said the US and Israel had struck more than 15,000 targets since the war started, warning that Friday would mark the most intensive bombing yet.

"We won't leave Iran launched waves of drone and missile strikes against neighbouring states hosting US military assets throughout the region. Saudi Arabia's defence ministry said on Friday its forces had intercepted dozens of drones, including one targeting its capital's Diplomatic Quarter.

AFP images showed black smoke hanging over the iconic skyline of Dubai after an attack on what was once considered a haven in a chaotic region.

Two people died from drone debris in Oman, according to state media there, while sirens rang out early Friday at Turkey's Incirlik airbase, a key Nato facility housing US troops.

Later on Friday, Turkey's defence ministry said Nato defences had intercepted a ballistic missile from Iran in Turkish airspace, the third such incident in just over a week.

In another sign of the war's spread, French President Emmanuel Macron announced the death of France's first soldier in an attack in the Erbil region of Iraq.

Arnaud Frion, 42, was hit by an Iranian drone as the French military took part in counter-terrorism training, his commanding officer said Friday.

Elsewhere in Iraq, a US refuelling aircraft crashed, killing four crew members, though the military said it was "not due to hostile fire or friendly fire".

In Israel, a strike on the town of Zarzir injured around 60 people, according to police, with AFP images showing burned-out vehicles and craters in the ground.

The conflict has also battered Lebanon, with authorities reporting at least 687 people killed by Israeli attacks.

AFP images from central Beirut showed buildings reduced to husks of rubble and burned-out shells of overturned vehicles as small fires flickered from the aftermath of strikes.

Israeli planes dropping propaganda leaflets over Beirut caused a number of loud booms in the sky, terrifying residents.

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"One who is strong

Indian PM Modi unveils investments in tour of states ahead of polls

NEWS DESK: Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi visited Assam on Friday, announcing multi-billion-dollar investments as part of a tour of states heading into elections, including the key political battleground of West Bengal.

The Hindu nationalist leader is set to launch infrastructure projects in Assam, including land holdings to tea plantation workers, a dam project and a major train and road

corridor, worth over \$5 billion.

The northeastern state of 32 million people is controlled by his right-wing Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP).

On Saturday, Modi will visit neighbouring West Bengal, a state of 105m people led by his political rival Mamata Banerjee, of the All India Trinamool Congress party.

During the visit, he is expected to inaugurate "road infrastructure, railways, port and shipping" projects worth roughly \$2b, which his office says are aimed at "accelerating economic growth".

State elections this year will be held in the southern states of Kerala and Tamil Nadu, both under opposition parties, as well as the smaller coastal territory of Puducherry.

Of these regions, only Assam is currently under full BJP control.

The Election Commission is expected to announce polling dates later this month, with voting widely anticipated to take place in April and May.

Modi visited Tamil Nadu earlier in March, a south-eastern state with some 72m people, where he unveiled investments of more than \$600m, including in a petroleum-related manufacturing project, roads and railways.

He also visited Kerala, with around 33m people, where he unveiled a \$1b worth of projects, as well as Puducherry.

The contest in Kerala is between the main national opposition, Congress party, and the ruling alliance of left-wing parties, led by the Communist Party of India (Marxist).

Past elections in West Bengal and Kerala have seen violent political clashes in the run up to polls.



Partial flight resumption restores some gold flows from key hub Dubai



NEWS DESK: The resumption of some flights from Dubai has allowed gold flows from this major global trading hub to partially resume this week, three sources familiar with the matter told Reuters on Friday.

Deliveries of physical gold to and from Dubai — a major hub supplying Switzerland, Hong Kong and India — have been affected since the start of the US-Israeli war on February 28, which triggered widespread passenger flight cancellations across the Middle East. The traffic remains constrained, but some of the deliveries have restarted, one of the sources said.

He declined to be named because he was not authorised to speak to media.

Easing some of the disruption for India, a key bullion consumer, gold is trading at a discount to London prices, and traders expect India's demand to remain subdued for the next two weeks.

"Only limited flights (from Dubai) have resumed so far, which is helping bring in some bullion, but demand in India is still weak," said a Mumbai-based dealer with a private bank.

Reduced flight traffic is increasing insurance and ground transportation costs for bullion deliveries, another source said.

Gold travels by plane due to security and insurance issues owing to its high value-to-weight ratio. Tracking data on Flight Radar 24 showed Dubai flights at 37% of the usual traffic as of Thursday.

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China passes new ethnic minority law, prioritises Mandarin language

NEWS DESK: China passed a law on a "shared" national identity among the country's 55 ethnic minority populations — including Tibetans, Mongols, Hui, Manchus, and Uyghurs — are concentrated in regions that together cover roughly half of the country's land area much of it rich in natural resources.

The law aims to promote integration across ethnic groups through education, housing, migration, community life, culture, tourism, and development.

It mandates that Mandarin is the basic language of instruction in schools, and for government and official business. In public settings, where Mandarin and minority languages are used together, Mandarin must be given "prominence in placement, order, and similar respects," the draft said.

Sinicization

The state respects and protects the learning and use of minority languages and scripts," it added. Religious groups, religious schools, and religious venues must adhere "to the direction of the Sinicization of religion in China," according to the draft. The law also seeks to ban any interference with marriage choices based on ethnicity, custom or religion, to enable more intermarriage between ethnic groups.

Called "Promoting Ethnic Unity and Progress", the ethnic minority law aims to forge national unity and advance the rejuvenation of the Chinese nation with the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) at its core, a draft copy of the law showed.

It was passed at the closing session of the annual meeting of the National People's Congress, China's legislature, by 2,756 votes, with three opposing votes and three abstentions, according to a witness.

The law will come into force on July 1 this year, state media reported.

Officially, China has 56 officially recognised ethnic groups, dominated by the Han Chinese, who account for more than 91pc of the country's 1.4 billion people.

China's ethnic minority populations — including Tibetans, Mongols, Hui, Manchus, and Uyghurs — are concentrated in regions that together cover roughly half of the country's land area much of it rich in natural resources.

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Sinicization



Turkiye confirms third ballistic missile from Iran shot down

NEWS DESK: Turkey's defence ministry on Friday said a ballistic missile from Iran had been shot down in Turkish airspace by NATO forces in the third such incident of the Middle East war.

"A ballistic munition launched from Iran and entering Turkish airspace was neutralised by NATO air assets in the defence assets deployed in the eastern Mediterranean," a ministry statement said.

Hours earlier, sirens wailed at Turkey's southern Incirlik airbase, a key Nato facility where US troops are stationed, state news agency Anadolu reported.

Local media also reported sirens in Batman (370 kilometres (370 miles) further east).

NATO air defences shot down a first ballistic missile fired from Iran on March 4, with a second intercepted on Monday.



Residents of the southern city of Adana, next to Incirlik, were woken by sirens at 3:25am (0025 GMT) and several posted footage of a fast-moving object that appeared to be on fire, the Ekonomim business news website reported.

Separately, sirens sounded in Batman around 4:00am, with reporters saying the alarm appeared to be coming from a military drone base next to the city's airport.

Monday's incident prompted Washington to close its consulate in Adana and urge all US citizens to leave southeastern Turkey.

Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian denied the missile had been fired from Iran in a phone call to Turkey's Recep Tayyip Erdogan.

Since the US-Israeli war on Iran started on February 28, Tehran has retaliated with strikes across the Middle East.

Incirlik is an important NATO facility used by US troops for decades, but which

also hosts military personnel from Spain and Poland, its website says.

US troops are also stationed at Kurecik, a base in the central Malatya province, where they man an early-warning radar system NATO describes as a "key element" of its missile shield that can detect Iranian missile launches.

Although Ankara has categorically denied radar data has ever been used to help Israel, its presence has rattled Tehran.

Kamran Tessori leaves Governor's House, departs for Umrah in Saudi Arabia

KARACHI (INP): Recently replaced Sindh governor Kamran Khan Tessori departed for Saudi Arabia on Friday morning to perform Umrah shortly after leaving the Governor's House. The former gov-

ernor will stay in Saudi Arabia for a few days and is expected to return to Pakistan on Chaud Raat to celebrate Eid in the country.

Tessori formally vacated the Governor's House and met the staff

before his departure. His personal belongings are scheduled to be shifted from the Governor's House to his private residence today. Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif had decided to replace Tessori with senior Pa-

kistan Muslim League-N leader Nehal Hashmi today. A summary regarding Hashmi's appointment as governor of Sindh has been forwarded to President Asif Ali Zardari for approval. According to a state-

ment issued by the Prime Minister's Office in Islamabad, Sharif met Hashmi at the Prime Minister's House earlier this week and decided to nominate him for the post. Reports about the possible removal of Tessori, who belongs to the Muttahida Qaumi Movement-Pakistan, had been circulating on social media for several days. However, the MQM-P leadership had earlier dismissed such speculation. Nehal

Hashmi previously served as senator from March 2015 to March 2021, according to the Senate's official records. During his last four ceremonies at the Governor's House in Karachi, Kamran Tessori said he had never been a silent governor and had dedicated his life to public service. He expressed hope that public welfare initiatives would continue from the Governor's House even after his departure.



JEDDAH: Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif meets the Crown Prince and Prime Minister of Saudi Arabia H.R.H. Prince Muhammad bin Salman in Jeddah.

Two crude oil ships reach Pakistan from UAE

KARACHI (INP): Two ships carrying between 10,00,000 barrels of oil successfully docked at Karachi from Fujairah, United Arab Emirates (UAE), under the protective escort of the Pakistan Navy.

Officials from the Pakistan National Shipping Corporation (PNSC) confirmed that the safe transfer of the vessels was completed within the Navy's security perimeter.

The escort was deemed necessary following recent attacks on ships in Fujairah, ensuring the safe arrival of the cargo in Pakistani waters.

Earlier, the gas oil carrier MT Torum Damini docked at the Port Qasim, while MT Nave Aropros, carrying 50,000 metric tons of petrol, arrived on March 9.

Pakistan National Shipping Corporation (PNSC) ship Palki is still berthed at the Saudi Arabian Port Ras Tanura.

The ship was stopped due to the closure of the Strait of Hormuz.

A Port Qasim spokesperson confirmed that a vessel from Fujairah has already reached the port, and additional tankers are expected to arrive, ensuring the continuous supply of petrol across the country.

Pakistan's foreign policy must be guided by strategic balance, national self-confidence: Masood Khan

ISLAMABAD (INP): former President of Azad Jammu and Kashmir and former Pakistan Ambassador to the United States Masood Khan has emphasized that Pakistan's foreign policy must be guided by strategic balance, national self-confidence, and institutional diplomacy in navigating complex global alignments.

Masood Khan delivered a comprehensive lecture to participants of the National Institute of Public Administration (NIPA) in Islamabad on the evolution and future trajectory of Pakistan-United States relations and their broader implications for Pakistan's national security and foreign policy.

Tracing the historical context, he recalled that Pakistan emerged in 1947 as a

Chairman Senate felicitates people of Nepal on successful elections

ISLAMABAD (INP): Chairman Senate, Syed Yousaf Raza Gillani on Friday extended his warm felicitations to the people of Nepal and the leadership of the Rastriya Swatantra Party (RSP) following the party's success in the recent parliamentary elections.

through his reform-oriented approach, innovative governance style, and dedication to addressing public issues, particularly through his role in local governance and urban development.

The Chairman of the Senate observed that the rise of young leadership in democratic politics is an encouraging sign for strengthening institutions and ensuring responsive governance.

He expressed hope that under Balendra Shah's leadership, the RSP will contribute positively to Nepal's democratic consolidation, socio-economic progress, and institutional development.

He noted that Balendra Shah, a young leader, has inspired many citizens of the course of two decades, Pakistan provided logistical support and cooperation that facilitated international military operations in Afghanistan. Despite this partnership, he noted that mutual mistrust and policy divergences periodically strained the bilateral relationship.

He underscored that contemporary geopolitics demands a pragmatic and balanced foreign policy approach. While the United States remains an influential global power whose relations shape broader Western engagement, Pakistan must also continue strengthening its strategic partnership with China, including cooperation under the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor and joint defence production initiatives.

Reflecting on the period following the attacks of September 11, 2001, Ambassador Khan said Pakistan once again became a frontline partner in the international campaign against terrorism. Over

Pakistan hits Afghan 313 Corps in Kabul, 4 militant camps in Kandahar and Paktia

RAWALPIND (INP): Pakistan's armed forces have carried out a series of cross-border airstrikes inside Afghanistan under Operation Ghazab-lil-Haq, targeting militant camps and infrastructure associated with the Afghan Taliban and groups described by authorities as Fitna al-Khawarij.

The strikes were conducted during the night between the 12th and 13th of March, when Pakistani forces launched successful aerial operations against five militant hideouts, including military installations.

Petrol price hike pushes weekly inflation up in Pakistan

ISLAMABAD (INP): Following massive hike in petrol prices, weekly inflation in Pakistan recorded a sharp increase of 1.89 per cent, pushing the annual rate to 6.44 per cent.

The weekly inflation report, released in Islamabad, showed that prices of 14 essential items increased during the week, while nine commodities recorded a decline.

Fuel prices saw the most significant surge. Petrol prices rose by 20.60 per cent on a weekly basis, while diesel prices increased by 19.54 per cent.

The price of liquefied petroleum gas (LPG) also climbed by 12.13 per cent during the same period.

Among food items, onion prices went up by 9.63 per cent, while flour became 1.28 per cent more expensive.

Security sources said the airstrikes destroyed the Sherinaw terrorist camp located in Paktia Province, infrastructure belonging to the 313 Corps in Kabul, and the Tarawo militant camps in Kandahar. An oil storage facility at an airfield and nearby logistics infrastructure were also destroyed in the strikes.

Security officials said the operation was part of an ongoing campaign against militant networks and that actions under Operation Ghazab-lil-Haq would continue until the stated objectives were achieved.

Earlier, on March 6, security forces had conducted ground and aerial operations against Afghan Taliban elements and militants described as Fitna al-Khawarij in the Kurram sector along the Pak-Afghan border. Security sources maintained that the military operations were aimed at eliminating militant infrastructure and preventing cross-border attacks.

On March 10, Pakistani forces also launched operations in the Arandu and Kurram sectors, destroying key militant posts and operational centres.

KP moves forward on major air pollution reduction measures

PESHAWAR (INP): A high-level consultative meeting on air quality management and pollution reduction strategies was held under the chairmanship of Junaid Khan, Secretary Climate Change, Forestry, Environment and Wildlife Department, Government of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, here on Thursday.

The meeting was attended by representatives from the World Bank via video link, sector officials from the Environment Protection Agency (EPA) of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, and officers from the KP Forest Department.

The session focused on reviewing key sectoral interventions aimed at reducing air pollution and improving environmental health across the province.

Detailed presentations were delivered covering potential exposure reduction measures in the transport, residential/clean cooking, and industrial sectors.

During the briefing, participants reviewed several high-impact interventions in the transport sector, including effective inspection and maintenance programs for heavy and light-duty vehicles, adoption of Euro-4 emission standards, installation of particle filters for diesel vehicles, promotion of electric two and three-wheelers, and measures to control construction and road dust. These interventions are expected to significantly reduce particulate pollution levels and improve urban air quality.

The meeting also highlighted slight cooking and residential energy initiatives, particularly in rural areas. Proposed measures include the promotion of improved biomass Cookstoves, enhanced access to clean cooking fuels such as gas, electricity and LPG and improved gas supply systems to eliminate outages. These steps are expected to substantially reduce indoor air pollution and associated health risks for households.



ISLAMABAD: Federal Minister for Science and Technology Khalid Hussain Maqsi chairs the 33rd meeting of the PSQCA Board of Directors to approve key reforms and initiatives for modernization.

Pakistan introduces new speed limits on motorways, national highways

ISLAMABAD (INP): Pakistan has introduced new speed limits on motorways and national highways as part of a federal austerity drive aimed at reducing fuel consumption and promoting efficient energy use across the country.

The National Highways and Motorway Police (NHMP) announced the revised limits on Thursday, saying the move follows directives from the federal government to curb fuel usage amid ongoing energy management efforts.

Officials said the changes are intended to encourage more economical driving habits while also supporting broader national strategies to conserve fuel resources.

According to the new directives, the maximum speed limit for motorways and Light Transport Vehicles (LTVs) on motorways has been reduced from 120 kilometres per hour to 100 kilometres per hour. On national highways, the limit for the same category of vehicles has been lowered from 100 kilometres per hour to 80 kilometres per hour.

Authorities said the revised limits will apply across the national road network and will be strictly enforced by the motorway police.

The government has also reduced the speed limit for Passenger Service Vehicles (PSVs) and Heavy Transport Vehicles (HTVs) travelling on motorways. Under the

updated rules, the speed cap for these vehicles has been lowered from 110 kilometres per hour to 90 kilometres per hour.

Officials said the measure is designed not only to reduce fuel consumption but also to improve overall traffic management and road safety.

Lower speeds are expected to decrease fuel usage for large vehicles, which typically consume significantly more fuel at higher speeds.

Similar reductions have been implemented on national highways, where passenger and heavy transport vehicles will now be permitted to travel at a maximum speed of 65 kilometres per hour.

down from the previous limit of 80 kilometres per hour.

Authorities noted that the revised limits aim to standardise traffic flow and promote safer driving practices across the country's intercity road network.

The decision comes in response to directives issued by the Prime Minister of Pakistan, who has called for measures that ensure the efficient use of energy and encourage nationwide fuel savings.

Government officials have emphasised that reducing vehicle speeds can significantly improve fuel efficiency, particularly on long-distance routes where transport vehicles operate continuously.



ISLAMABAD: Secretary Economic Affairs Division, Mr. Muhammad Humair Karim, and Mr. Sebastian Jachek, Country Director of the German Government Bank for Development (KfW), signing a grant agreement.

International Monetary Fund (IMF) delays SLA on discrepancies

NEWS DESK:The International Monetary Fund (IMF) said on Thursday that policy discussions with Pakistan would continue in the coming days to reach a consensus on a staff-level agreement for the \$1 billion tranche amid the global lender's concerns over large fiscal discrepancies in budgets.

In a statement issued after the talks remained inconclusive, IMF Mission Chief Iva Petrova said that while considerable progress was made in the discussions, they would continue in the coming days. Petrova said that the IMF would fully assess the impact of recent global developments on Pakistan's economy and the Extended Fund Facility (EFF)-supported programme.

She further said that considerable progress was made on sustaining fiscal consolidation to strengthen public finances; maintaining a sufficiently tight monetary policy to ensure inflation remains durably within the State Bank of Pakistan (SBP's) target range; and advancing reforms to improve the viability of the

energy sector. Sources said that among the outstanding issues were dividend earnings from the National Bank of Pakistan (NBP), the Pakistan Development Fund (PDF) and the tax target of the Federal Board of Revenue (FBR). The IMF mission had also expressed concerns over huge fiscal discrepancies in the federal and provincial budgets. The IMF wanted to send a technical mission to address the discrepancies, they added.

For the first half of the fiscal year, the finance ministry reported a Rs13 billion fiscal discrepancy, including Rs7 billion in the books of the federal government. The primary reasons for the federal discrepancies were an increase in commercial bank deposits, variations on account of time lag in reporting and book adjustments among the SBP, FBR and Economic Affairs Division (EAD). The IMF had also raised questions about spending on the Daanish schools and their booking by the federal government.

Petrova said that discussions also covered



the impact of the conflict in the Middle East on Pakistan's economic outlook, the balance of payments and external financing needs amid volatile and rising energy prices and tighter global financial conditions. The IMF team and the authorities will continue these discussions with a view to concluding them in the coming days, she added.

The staff-level agreement for the approval of the \$1 billion fourth loan tranche under the EFF and the \$220 million under the Resilience and Sustainability

Facility (RSF) should have been reached by March 11 – the last day of the talks.

The IMF said that the \$7 billion programme implementation under the EFF remained broadly aligned with the authorities' commitment through end-February 2026. Petrova said that 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 dis-

cussions are ongoing.

The government wants to accelerate economic growth to lower rising poverty and unemployment, but the IMF was of the view that Pakistan has not yet reached a stage where it can afford sustainably higher economic growth. The finance ministry told the Senate Standing Committee on Finance on Thursday that the Middle East conflict would not have significant negative implications for the external account.

The implications of the conflict have primarily been witnessed through temporary global oil price hikes, which may pose some downside risks to the external account, said the ministry. However, it added that higher oil prices would transfer windfall gains to our remittances.

Based on the seven months' growth in remittances this year, it is expected that remittances may surpass the annual plan target of \$39.4 billion by the end of the year, which will cushion the external sector and finances the import bill," said the finance ministry.

It further said that despite risks to growth prospects emanating from the conflict, Pakistan's industrial sector, particularly LSM, is performing well and GDP growth is expected to remain on target.

The ministry claimed that Pakistan was steadily moving towards greater self-sufficiency in essential food items. Last year, the country imported \$891 million worth of pulses and \$3.7 billion worth of edible oil. The ministry said that the war has not impacted inflation targets and inflation would still remain within the range. Average inflation during the first eight months of FY2026 stood at 5.5%, well below the target of 7.5% approved by the National Economic Council (NEC), it added.

Under a normal scenario, inflation is expected to remain within the range of 5.5-6.5% in fiscal year 2026. A higher increase in fuel prices due to a prolonged conflict could increase inflationary pressures. However, it is expected to remain below the targeted level of 7.5%, according to the finance ministry.

It further said that despite risks to growth prospects emanating from the conflict, Pakistan's industrial sector, particularly LSM, is performing well and GDP growth is expected to remain on target.

SBP reserves up \$2bn since July 2025

NEWS DESK:The Middle East crisis, which does not look to end in the near future, would surely hit the foreign exchange reserves of countries like Pakistan. However, data issued by the State Bank of Pakistan (SBP) on Thursday showed that its reserves rose by \$41 million to \$16.341 billion during the week ended on March 6. In its latest monetary policy statement, it specifically mentioned that it has been buying dollars from the interbank market to improve its reserves.

Fortunately, the inflow of remittances continues to grow, as noted in February. The remittances in Feb were \$3.3 billion, but were lower than the inflows in January. Some currency market experts believe the inflows should be higher, as they usually grow by 20 per cent during Ramadan. Millions of

Pakistanis are employed in the Middle East, and their total contribution during the first 8 months of FY26 was 53pc of top-of-the-line earnings, the escalating war has threatened many jobs in the Middle East, and new jobs are not available there. The government, which relies heavily on remittances for its foreign exchange earnings, has been encouraging as many Pakistanis as possible to go abroad

for work. The largest employers are the Arab countries and this door has been shut as long as war continues. The SBP's foreign exchange reserves rose by \$2.017bn since July 2025. Similarly, commercial banks' holdings improved by \$59.5 million to \$5.257bn. The country's total reserves reached \$21.598bn, with an addition of \$2.62bn since July 2025. The

State Bank has allowed the import of crude oil, which means it will provide dollars and it affect its reserves.

"In view of the prevailing situation and critical importance of crude oil and petroleum products for the country, it has been decided to allow import of crude oil/petroleum products on CIF basis for 60 days from the date of issuance of this circular letter," said a circular.



Oil heads for weekly gains despite US sanctions waiver on Russian oil

NEWS DESK:Oil prices headed for weekly gains as of Friday, despite the US trying to ease supply concerns by issuing a 30-day license for countries to buy Russian oil and petroleum products stranded at sea.

Brent futures for May rose \$1.02, or 1 per cent, to \$101.48 a barrel at 07:30 GMT, heading for a weekly increase of nearly 10pc. US West Texas Intermediate (WTI) crude for April was up by 94 cents, or 1.0pc, at \$96.67 a barrel, pointed for more than a 6pc uptick for the week. The license was issued in what Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent said was a step to stabilise global energy markets roiled by the US-Israeli war on Iran, but analysts said this has failed to resolve wider supply constraints.

"ICE Brent futures have already breached \$100 per barrel and are still supported today, despite moves to calm the markets with the Russian oil waiver and the unprecedented release of emergency stockpiles," said Emril Jamil, senior analyst at ISEG.

"The market sees this as a short-term solution that does not address the crux of the

supply disruption. The license was issued in what Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent said was a step to stabilise global energy markets roiled by the US-Israeli war on Iran, but analysts said this has failed to resolve wider supply constraints. ICE Brent futures have already breached \$100 per barrel and are still supported today, despite moves to calm the markets with the Russian oil waiver and the unprecedented release of emergency stockpiles," said Emril Jamil, senior analyst at ISEG.

The most important thing is the restoration of navigation in the Strait of Hormuz." The announcement on Russian oil came a day after the US Energy Department said the US would release 172 million barrels of oil from its Strategic Petroleum Reserve to help curb skyrocketing oil prices.

That plan was coordinated with the International Energy Agency, which has agreed to release a record 400 million barrels of oil from strategic stockpiles, including the US contribution. Fleeting relief sparked by the IEA release, however, was shattered by a re-escalation of Middle East risks, IC analyst Tony Sycamore said in a note.

Both benchmark prices surged more than 9pc on Thursday and hit their highest levels since August 2022. Iran's new supreme leader, Ebrahim Raisi, said Iran would fight on and keep the Strait of Hormuz shut as leverage against the US, Israel and the United States and Israel. Two fuel tankers in Iraqi waters were struck by explosive-laden Iranian boats, Iraqi security officials said on Thursday. An Iraqi official told state media that the country's oil ports have completely stopped operations. Meanwhile, US Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent told Sky News in an interview that the US Navy, perhaps with an international coalition, would escort vessels through the Strait of Hormuz when it is militarily possible.

Doha interested in boosting rice imports

NEWS DESK: Federal Minister for Commerce Jam Kamal Khan held a virtual meeting with Minister of State for Foreign Trade Affairs of Qatar Dr. Ahmad bin Mohammed Al-Sayed to further strengthen bilateral cooperation, food security coordination and investment opportunities.

Both sides expressed satisfaction over the positive trajectory of Pakistan-Qatar relations and agreed to further expand economic engagements.

The Qatari minister emphasised the importance of encouraging greater interaction between the business communities of both countries in order to further strengthen economic ties, said a press release issued on Thursday. A key focus of discussion was enhancing Pakistan's exports of rice and other food products to

Qatar. Dr Ahmad bin Mohammed highlighted that rice remains an important component of Qatar's food security programme and national food strategy and expressed interest in increasing imports from Pakistan.

Jam Kamal assured the Qatari minister that Pakistan was taking steps to ensure its exporters remain competitive and responsive to the needs

of the Qatari market, adding that new mechanisms were being introduced to facilitate improved pricing and supply arrangements.

Both sides agreed that relevant departments and officials would coordinate closely to facilitate direct engagement between Pakistani exporters and Qatari importers. In addition to food supply cooperation, the two sides discussed investment opportunities in Pakistan, particularly in infrastructure, logistics and energy. Projects such as Karachi Port expansion and other strategic initiatives were highlighted as potential areas for collaboration. The Qatari side welcomed the proposals shared by Pakistan and indicated that relevant authorities, including the Qatar Investment Authority, would review them.



Fuel price hike pushes weekly inflation up

NEWS DESK:Pakistan's short-term inflation indicator recorded a notable increase, as the Consumer Price Index (CPI) rose 6.44% year-on-year during the week ended March 11, 2026, mainly driven by a sharp rise in energy and essential food prices, according to data released by the Pakistan Bureau of Statistics (PBS).

On a week-on-week basis, the SPI increased by 1.89%, reflecting a significant jump in the cost of key household commodities. The price of onions climbed 9.63%, while bananas rose 1.44% and wheat flour increased by 1.28%. Other items post-

ing smaller increases included chicken (0.66%), pulse mash (0.55%), firewood (0.38%), pulse gram (0.10%), fresh milk (0.08%), and cooked beef (0.02%).

However, some commodities witnessed price declines, partially offsetting the overall rise. The price of tomatoes fell by 3.66%, followed by potatoes, which declined 2.86%. Other items registering decreases included garlic (0.42%), IRRI-69 rice and pulse masoor (0.19% each), mustard oil (0.16%), pulse moong (0.12%), and sugar (0.09%).

Other food items that recorded annual increases included chilly powder (15.20%), beef (12.00%), powdered milk (10.10%), mutton (9.61%), gur (7.10%), broken basmati rice (6.51%), and cooked beef (5.17%). Meanwhile, several food items registered notable annual declines. Potato prices dropped by 31.92%, while chicken fell 25.92% and tomatoes dropped 23.02%. Prices of pulse gram (19.76%), garlic (18.25%), powdered salt (12.52%), and sugar (12.02%) also decreased compared to the same period last year.



Pakistan look to make comeback as Bangladesh eye series

NEWS DESK: A new-look Pakistan face an unusual do-or-die situation on Friday in the second One-day International against Bangladesh who stunned the tourists in the opening match of the three-match series.

Fast bowler Nahid Rana, 23, started with a career-best show of 5-24 as Bangladesh demolished the Shaheen Shah Afridi-led Pakistan in the opening ODI at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium on Wednesday.

Shaheen backed his young team to make a comeback despite the eight-wicket drubbing in the series opener, and will definitely be eyeing to level the series at the same venue today.

Pakistan are featuring in an ODI series in Bangladesh after a long gap of 11 years. The last time when Pakistan played a 50-over rubber in Bangladesh under the captaincy of Azhar Ali, they suffered a 3-0 sweep.



With ample time left before the ICC 2027 World Cup is staged in South Africa, Zimbabwe and Namibia during October-November, Pakistan, which has struggled in ICC events since their 2017 Champions Trophy triumph, will certainly look to develop a side that can face tougher opponents in the ODI showpiece. The current Bangladesh series is only the starting point of that build-up campaign.

Four Pakistan players — Abdul Samad, Maaz Sadaqat, Sahibzada Farhan and Shamiyl Hussain — made their ODI debut on Wednesday after the tourists dropped experienced pros like Babar Azam, Fakhar Zaman and Shadab Khan and aggressive opener Saim Ayub for the series.

Other than Fakhar, the remaining three players flopped in the T20 World Cup held in India and Sri Lanka during February-March.

But the move to include the youngsters did not work at all for Pakistan, at least in the opening game, as they were shot out for a paltry 114 — their lowest-ever ODI total against Bangladesh — with 19.2 overs to spare.

The hosts completed the modest chase without any fuss in just 115.

Though Pakistan hold a clear edge in the head-to-head ODI record against Bangladesh — with 34 wins and six losses — the pumped-up hosts under Mehdi Hasan Miraz will certainly be looking to improve that record when they take the field on Friday before the last game.

While the hosts' bowling showcased their promise in the opener, their batters may well be tested fully today after chasing a modest 115.

Moreover, in the bowling department, Pakistan's pace trio comprising Shaheen, Faheem Ashraf and Mohammad Wasim failed to make any impact as they looked to defend a scanty total.

On the other hand, Bangladesh will be looking to seal the series on Friday before the last game.

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Arbeloa 'confident' Mbappe fit for Man City trip in Champions League

NEWS DESK: Real Madrid coach Alvaro Arbeloa said Friday he was "confident" that Kylian Mbappe will be available to face Manchester City in the second leg of their Champions League last 16 tie.

"He's getting better day by day," Arbeloa said at a press conference. "He won't be there tomorrow (Saturday, in La Liga against Elche), but I'm confident he'll be on the trip to Manchester."

With Mbappe sidelined by a knee injury and several other key players missing, Real thrashed City 3-0 in the first leg at the Bernabeu on Wednesday, thanks to a hat-trick from Federico

Valverde.

City host the second leg next Tuesday and risk being knocked out of Europe by Madrid for the third season in a row.

France forward Mbappe, hampered by a sprain to his left knee since last December, has not played since withdrawing from the squad to face Benfica in the second leg of the Champions League knockout phase play-off round on February 25.

Mbappe has scored 38 goals in 33 appearances for his club this season.

His expected return for Madrid comes ahead of the international break, where France will face Brazil and Colombia in pre-World Cup friendlies in the United States.



Lens eye top spot in Ligue 1

NEWS DESK: Lens are enjoying a remarkable season in France and can seize top spot in Ligue 1 this weekend as they look to take the title fight to a Paris Saint-Germain side whose main focus is the Champions League.

PSG's lead at the top of the table is a single point with nine games remaining, meaning Lens will go top with a win at Lorient on Saturday.

They are aiming to take advantage of the fact that PSG have been given the weekend off, their home fixture against Nantes postponed until April to give Luis Enrique's side a rest in between the two legs of their Champions League last-16 tie against Chelsea.

The fact that Lens are even within touching distance of the Qatar-backed club is entirely unexpected, given that their budget is not even a tenth of that of the reigning European champions.

The club from an old coalmining community in the far north of France, around 400 kilometres from the Belgian border, won their only league title in 1998 but finished as runners-up to PSG as recently as 2023.

They fell away in the last two campaigns, finishing seventh and then eighth, not even qualifying for Europe for this season.

Between 2023 and



the last close season, Lens sold a host of key players, including Brice Samba, Kevin Danso, Seko Fofana, Lois Openda, Facundo Medina, Neil El Aynaoui, Andy 'D'oua' and Abdoukour Khusanov.

Many have gone to leading European clubs such as Manchester City and Inter Milan, often for big fees, but Lens has not been able to re-sign all that money in new signings.

Nevertheless, their decision to appoint former Lyon boss Pierre Sage as coach has been a masterstroke.

The unassuming Sage has built an outstanding side full of over-performing players, in which the biggest star is French international forward Florian Thauvin.

Lens have the best defensive record in the division and have won 12 and lost two of their 15 Ligue 1 games since the start of November.

They are through to the semi-finals of the French Cup, a trophy they have never won and still have a chance of a dream double.

Last weekend, as PSG lost 3-1 to Monaco, Lens beat bottom club Metz 3-0 to cut the gap.

However, the trip to Brittany to play Lorient promises to be an awkward one, as the promoted club are enjoying a fine season.

Sage has in mind the fact that Lens are due to host PSG on the weekend of April 11 and last week compared the

Alcaraz powers into Indian Wells quarters; Draper upsets Djokovic

NEWS DESK: World number one Carlos Alcaraz continued his dominant run at Indian Wells, beating Norway's Casper Ruud 6-1, 7-6(7/2), while Jack Draper upset world number three Novak Djokovic 4-6, 6-4, 7-6(7/5) on Wednesday to reach the quarter-finals in the California desert.

Alcaraz relied on a near-flawless service game to seize control of the match, racing through the opening set in just 37 minutes after breaking Ruud's serve three times.

Thirteenth-seeded Ruud raised his level in the second set and forced a tiebreak, hoping to push the match to a decider, but Alcaraz kept his foot on the gas to seal his 15th consecutive victory of the season to reach the quarter-finals for a fifth straight year.

"The conditions were difficult to be honest. Today the ball was tough to control but we both played great," two-time champion Alcaraz said in his on-court interview. "My first set

was incredible I'm really happy to play that kind of level, really happy to get through and hopefully I'll play this level on the next round." Alcaraz will next face 2021 champion Cameron Norrie, who earlier beat Australia's Rinky Hijikata 6-4, 6-2, with the Spaniard looking to avenge a defeat to the Briton at last year's Paris Masters.

Defending champion Draper claimed one of the biggest wins of his career by beating Djokovic in a deciding set tie-break after two hours and 35 minutes.

Draper, who trailed after dropping the opener 6-4, stormed into the second set by breaking Djokovic early and surviving multiple break points before sealing it with aggressive baseline play.

"Djokovic won a stunning 26-shot rally at 30-all in the opening game of the decider, but Draper surged to leads of 3-1 and 5-3 before the Serb battled back to 5-5 and then broke the Briton as he served for the match.

The 24-year-old kept his composure, forced the tie-break and dominated it to close out a statement victory.

"I still don't feel like I'm playing anywhere near the way I want to play," Draper said. "I came out here tonight and I won that match through determination and trying to problem-solve and do my best and have a great attitude."



Indian-owned Sunrisers face backlash after signing Abrar Ahmed for Hundred

NEWS DESK: Sunrisers Leeds are facing a fierce social media backlash after the Indian-owned Hundred franchise signed spinner Abrar Ahmed this week.

A longstanding political stand-off between India and Pakistan means the two nations only play each other in major global cricket tournaments.

Cricketers from Pakistan have not featured in the Indian Premier League (IPL) since 2009 because of diplomatic tensions between the two nations.

There was speculation that the players from Pakistan involved in this week's inaugural Hundred auction in London would be subject to a "shadow ban", with the IPL-affiliated teams refusing to bid for them.

Four of the franchises — MI London, Manchester Super Giants, Sunrisers Leeds and Southern Brave — are at least partly-owned by companies



that control IPL teams.

But the Leeds-based Sunrisers clinched a deal for leg-spinner Abrar, paying 190,000 (\$252,000) for his services.

Usman Tariq, the only other Pakistani player bought in the auction, was picked up by American-backed Birmingham Phoenix.

The only two Pakistani players in Wednesday's women's auction — Fatima Sana and Sadia Iqbal, went unsold.

The England and Wales Cricket Board last month issued a statement saying all eight of the city-based franchises in the 100-ball-a-side competition were committed to selection based solely on performances.

But Sunrisers have been subjected to fierce criticism from some Indian cricket fans after signing Ahmed.

T h e @SunrisersLeeds account on X was suspended overnight. It was up and running again on Friday with a fresh follower base, but comments focused heavily on Abrar's signing.

The same was true of the club's Instagram feed, while the issue also spilled over onto the accounts of Sunrisers Hyderabad, also owned by the Sun Group media conglomerate.



PML-N stalwart Nehal Hashmi sworn in as Sindh governor

NEWS DESK: PML-N stalwart Nehal Hashmi on Friday was sworn in as the new governor of Sindh, following his surprise appointment a day earlier.

Sindh High Court Chief Justice Zafar Ahmed Rajput administered the oath at a ceremony held in Karachi. Senior leaders were present at the televised ceremony, including PPP leader Saeed Ghani and Sindh Local Government Minister Nasir Hussain Shah.

The newly-appointed governor spoke to the media after the oath-taking ceremony, where he said, "I want to give a message to the people of Sindh. I will move forward with political struggle, faithfulness and honesty."

Hashmi reiterated that his party's message was that of peace, love, and development.

"We have an entire department for laptops for youth, programmes for their training, loan schemes, and other facilities," he said.

"All the federal institutions here will become functional and work for progress

in Sindh," he said. He said the provincial government would "follow in the footsteps of my sister, Punjab Chief Minister Maryam Nawaz, on how to lead a country towards progress."

"We are political people, and we will resolve all the issues through dialogue; we will not pursue the politics of mischief," he said.

Hashmi is a veteran politician who last served as a PML-N senator after his election in March 2015. However, a controversial speech he made in May 2017 landed him in hot water, culminating in his disqualification in February 2018.

On Thursday, President Asif Ali Zardari approved Hashmi's appointment as Sindh governor, hours after it was announced that Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif recommended his appointment to the post previously held by MQM's Kamran Tessori.

A brief statement issued by the PM Office said that PM Shehbaz met Hashmi at the PM House and decided to nominate him as the governor of Sindh.

The surprise move to appoint Hashmi has drawn a strong reaction from ally MQM-P, which complained that it had not been taken on board before the decision to remove its nominee from office, calling it a "grave mistake" by Islamabad and vowing to soon decide its future course of action.

Speaking to the media at the Governor's House on Thursday, the outgoing governor, Tessori, said that if he was punished for raising issues related to Gul Plaza and never been a 'Karachi Bachao Conference', he would continue to speak up for the city.

He remarked that he could reveal who had removed him and on whose instructions, but he chose not to do so.

Tessori congratulated the newly nominated Sindh governor, saying he had seen the news on TV channels and wished him success.

He urged Hashmi to continue the initiatives launched during his tenure.

"No one remains in office forever," he said, adding that he had never been a "mute, deaf or dummy governor" and did not want to be one.

According to a document from the Polio Eradication Programme, available with Dawn, 11 environmental samples out of 126 tested negative across the country in February.

It is worth noting that sewage samples are a key indicator of whether polio vaccination campaigns are being carried out successfully. After samples are detected, polio campaigns are launched in the area

to eradicate the virus. A polio case can be reported in any city due to the frequent movement of people, but the presence of the virus in sewage samples indicates that the vaccination campaign in the area did not meet its target.

The presence of the virus in sewage also indicates that the immunity of local children has declined and that they are at risk of the disease.

Yearly comparison shows that 39 positive environmental samples were reported in the first two months of 2026, compared with 144 in the first two months of 2025 nationwide. Similarly, six

children were paralysed during the first two months of last year. However, only one child has contracted the virus during the first two months of the current year.

The document also shows encouraging numbers: in Balochistan, 11 environmental samples tested positive, compared with 38 in 2025. In Punjab, only one positive sample has been reported, compared with 27 in 2025. Khyber Pakhtunkhwa's data shows that during the first two months of the ongoing year, six positive environmental samples have been reported.

During the same two months of 2025, as many as 26 positive samples were reported. Similarly, in Sindh, 27 positive environmental samples have been reported this year, last year as many as 50 positive environmental samples were reported during the first two months.

A polio expert, who wished to remain anonymous, said that the current data showed that the virus could be completely stopped during the ongoing year.

"However, a major concern is that the virus can bounce back due to the current Pakistan-Afghanistan tensions. In southern KP, almost 120,000 children are being missed due to security reasons and that pocket can provide an opportunity for the virus to bounce back," he said.

Moreover, some areas lack drainage systems, making it impossible to collect environmental samples there. The virus can again start circulating from there," he warned.

The expert said that the high transmission season may begin next month, so the polio programme needed to be on its toes to ensure that the situation did not get out of hand.

The polio virus is less active when the temperature is lower. The high transmission season runs from the last week of April or the start of May through September.

Speaking to Dawn, Pakistan Polio Programme head Anwarul Haq said that Pakistan was finally receiving positive news—that the virus present in the environment had started to decline across the country.

He said that terrorists and their support infrastructure, including logistic bases, and camps, were targeted.

His post also showed the strikes, with the minister saying that Pakistan "recently targeted only those installations which directly/indirectly support terrorism from inside Afghanistan and terrorist camps."

"No civilian population or civilian infrastructure were targeted as falsely propagated by Afghan regime officials and media," he asserted.

The statement by the minister came hours after security sources said that in overnight strikes against terrorists and Afghan Taliban targets, the armed forces destroyed training camps and support infrastructure in Afghanistan.

Pakistan's Armed Forces have carried out successful airstrikes in

side Afghanistan as part of the ongoing Operation Ghazab Lili-Haq, confirmed security sources. According to the minister, the strikes were launched in late February following unprovoked firing by the Afghan Taliban from across the border.

In his X post on Friday, the information minister also provided an update on Afghan losses, saying that 663 Afghan Taliban opera-

7 policemen, including SHO, martyred in attack on police vehicle in KP's Lakki Marwat

NEWS DESK: An attack on a police vehicle martyred seven policemen, including an officer, in the Bettani subdivision of Karachi. The attack occurred on Friday.

The spokesman of the district police officer, Qudratullah, said that a squad of the Shadikhel police station was on routine patrol duty in the area when the terrorist attack occurred. The vehicle was targeted with an improvised explosive device (IED).

The official said that terrorists had planted an IED along the Mastikhel road to target the law enforcement personnel. Six policemen, including a station house officer (SHO) and five constables, lost their lives in the explosion, he said.

The bodies of the martyred and the injured policemen were taken to the hospital.

Fears of Pak-Afghan hostilities causing spike in polio cases as majority of environmental samples test negative

NEWS DESK: Data from Pakistan's Polio Eradication Programme shows that a majority of environmental samples for poliovirus, which causes the crippling disease, collected during the first two months of 2026 have tested negative.

Moreover, a comparison of the first two months of 2025 with the current year shows a more than threefold reduction in positive environmental samples.

Yearly comparison shows that 39 positive environmental samples were reported in the first two months of 2026, compared with 144 in the first two months of 2025 nationwide. Similarly, six

children were paralysed during the first two months of last year. However, only one child has contracted the virus during the first two months of the current year.

The document also shows encouraging numbers: in Balochistan, 11 environmental samples tested positive, compared with 38 in 2025. In Punjab, only one positive sample has been reported, compared with 27 in 2025. Khyber Pakhtunkhwa's data shows that during the first two months of the ongoing year, six positive environmental samples have been reported.

Info minister says Pakistan targeted terrorists, support infrastructure in Afghanistan overnight

NEWS DESK: Information Minister Attaullah Tarar said on Friday that Pakistan successfully targeted terrorist-affiliated locations in Afghanistan overnight.

In a post on X, he said, "It is pertinent to mention that on the night of 12/13 March 2026, Pakistan successfully targeted terrorists' affiliated installations in Afghanistan."

He said that terrorists and their support infrastructure, including logistic bases, and camps, were targeted. His post also showed the strikes, with the minister saying that Pakistan "recently targeted only those installations which directly/indirectly support terrorism from inside Afghanistan and terrorist camps."

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The injured cop later succumbed to his wounds, bringing the total fatalities to seven.

A large police contingent reached the area and launched a search for the perpetrators of the attack.

President Asif Ali Zardari, in a statement issued by the President House, condemned the attack and prayed for the martyrs.

Fears of Pak-Afghan hostilities causing spike in polio cases as majority of environmental samples test negative

NEWS DESK: Data from Pakistan's Polio Eradication Programme shows that a majority of environmental samples for poliovirus, which causes the crippling disease, collected during the first two months of 2026 have tested negative.

Moreover, a comparison of the first two months of 2025 with the current year shows a more than threefold reduction in positive environmental samples.

Yearly comparison shows that 39 positive environmental samples were reported in the first two months of 2026, compared with 144 in the first two months of 2025 nationwide. Similarly, six

children were paralysed during the first two months of last year. However, only one child has contracted the virus during the first two months of the current year.

The document also shows encouraging numbers: in Balochistan, 11 environmental samples tested positive, compared with 38 in 2025. In Punjab, only one positive sample has been reported, compared with 27 in 2025. Khyber Pakhtunkhwa's data shows that during the first two months of the ongoing year, six positive environmental samples have been reported.

Info minister says Pakistan targeted terrorists, support infrastructure in Afghanistan overnight

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President Zardari wished a speedy recovery to the injured. He further stated that the state's resolve towards eliminating terrorism remained "unwavering".

KP has seen a rise in terrorist attacks in the past year. According to the Annual Security Report 2025 from the Centre for Research and Security Studies (CRSS), KP

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

This marked an "absolute increase of 711 deaths, accounting for over 82 per cent of the net national rise and marking almost a 44pc year-on-year surge in violence in the province".

Last month, nine police personnel, in-

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cluding a deputy superintendent of police (DSP),

were martyred in separate terrorist attacks in Punjab's Bhakkar district and KP's Kohat and Wana areas.

Only days prior to that, three Federal Constabulary men were martyred in a terrorist attack in Karak, according to officials.

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Roads blocked in Islamabad, Karachi as processions taken out on Al-Quds Day

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Commuters heading to Tower from Nazimabad have been advised to use Lasbela, turn right onto Nishtar Road, and continue via Rancho Limes and Civil Hospital. Those traveling from Fresco Chowk or Eidgah Chowk to Numaish can go via Tibbi Chowk and turn right to Regal Chowk and Empress Market, or left towards Jubilee, Agha Khan III Road and Soldier Bazaar. Traffic from Daudpota Road or left towards Jubilee, Agha Khan III Road and Soldier Bazaar. Traffic from Daudpota Road or left towards Jubilee, Agha Khan III Road, Coseil Guard, Bahadar Yar Jung Road, Soldier Bazaar, or Uncle Saria Hospital before turning right to Saeed Manzil

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