



BALUCHISTAN
Historic Pakistan Day Rally Held in Duki with Strong...
Page No 5



INTERNATIONAL
Afghanistan announces release of detained US citizen
Page No 3



NATIONAL
Sindh govt on high alert as PMD forecasts another rain...
Page No 8

SPORT
ICC names Sahibzada Farhan player of the month for Feb after 'stellar'...
Page No 7



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Editor: Asim Khan.

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Email address: dquettavoices@gmail.com
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Trump Pauses Iran Strikes Following Pakistan's Strategic Intervention

NEWS DESK:

Pakistan is emerging as a key diplomatic player in efforts to de-escalate tensions in the ongoing US-Israel conflict with Iran, according to a report by the Financial Times. The development highlights Pakistan's growing role in regional peace-building and

back-channel diplomacy. World News Service Sources cited by Reuters revealed that Field Marshal And Chief of Army Staff Syed Asim Mumin held discussions with US President Donald Trump, focusing on conflict de-escalation strategies involving Iran.

Senior Pakistani officials have reportedly facilitated in-

direct communication between Tehran and key US figures, including Steve Witkoff and Jared Kushner.

In a significant development, President Trump announced a five-day delay in planned military strikes on Iranian infrastructure, a move widely interpreted as a result of Pakistan's diplomatic intervention.

The pause comes at a critical moment, as the conflict enters its fourth week, raising concerns over regional stability and global security.

Over the past 48 hours, Pakistan, in coordination with Turkey and Egypt, has intensified back-channel diplomacy efforts.

These initiatives aim to prevent further escalation be-

tween the US and Iran, reinforcing Pakistan's role as a mediator in international conflict resolution.

The diplomatic push reflects the leadership of Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif and the strategic engagement of military leadership, underscoring Pakistan's commitment to peace, dialogue, and regional stability.

President of PTI's Islamabad chapter says Imran's release not possible without coordinated strategy

NEWS DESK:

Amid efforts underway by the PTI for the release of ex-premier Imran Khan, the party's Islamabad chapter on Tuesday proposed a roadmap, saying that it would not be possible without a comprehensive and well-coordinated strategy.

It should be mentioned that the party had announced that registrations for a movement to release Imran, who has been imprisoned since May 2023 would begin after Eid.

"A detailed and actionable plan has been submitted to Secretary General Salman Akram Raja, outlining a path toward achieving democratic stability and securing the release of Imran and other detainees," PTI Islamabad Chapter President Aamir Mughal told Dawn.

Mughal added that it would be difficult to overcome the current political challenges unless the party leadership presented a practical roadmap in line with the prevailing ground realities.

"The first and foremost point is accountability within the party. Without holding office-bearers and ticket holders accountable for their performance since Imran's arrest, the movement cannot progress effectively. A transparent review process and the inclusion of energetic leadership can help restore confidence among supporters," he said.

Mughal suggested a six-point narrative, which included the release of all detainees, including Imran, supremacy of the Constitution and rule of law, reduction in inflation, elimination of corruption and poor governance, job creation, and improvement in law and order.

He suggested communicating a unified message consistently at all levels of the party.

"There is a need for organised public engagement. Peaceful and lawful public gatherings can be held on a rotational basis across districts to ensure consistent participation and visibility.

Similar coordinated activities can also be arranged in other provinces and regions," Mughal said.

He also suggested mobilising the youth as a "major focus" which was the main force for change.

"Young people must be encouraged to participate constructively in democratic processes beyond social media," he added.

Mughal claimed that an effective media and communication strategy was essential.

"Social media influencers and responsible journalists should be engaged to promote the agenda and ensure accurate information reaches the public.

Grassroots workers who actively contribute on the ground should be recognised," he added.

He also suggested that the overseas community should be mobilised to amplify the message globally and provide organisational and financial support within legal frameworks.

The PTI leader also stated that the party's lawyers' wing must be activated to strengthen legal advocacy and uphold constitutional principles through peaceful and lawful means.

Balochistan Rain Alert: PMD Warns of Heavy Rain and Flash Floods

Syed Ali Shah, News Desk:

QUETTA: A powerful western weather system is set to bring widespread rain, thunderstorms, strong winds, and possible hail to nearly 27 districts of Balochistan over the next few days, the Pakistan Meteorological Department (PMD) warned on Tuesday.

The Met Office has issued an alert for two main spells: March 24-25 and March 27-29, with occasional breaks. Heavy downpours are likely between March 25 and 28, raising the risk of flash flooding in local streams, nullahs, and hilly areas.

Affected Districts

Coastal & Southern Areas (heavy rain with sea breezes possible):

Gwadar, Pasni, Omara, Kech (Turbat), Panjur, Awaran, Lashela, Kharan, and Khuzdar.

Central & Northern Areas (moderate to heavy rain with thunder):

Quetta, Ziarat, Chaman, Pishin, Chagai, Dabhoi, Noshki, Loralai, Qila Abdullah, Qila Saifullah, Sibi, Kohlu, Barkhan, and Nasserabad.

Other Districts (rain with strong winds and thunder):



Harnai, Zhob, Kalat, and Mastung

Today (March 24), skies will be partly cloudy across most of the province, with rain likely starting in the afternoon or evening in several areas. Some places may see intense

showers and hail. Temperatures will drop in Quetta and northern regions, accompanied by gusty winds.

Safety Warnings and Precautionary Measures

The PMD has directed PDMA, Rescue 1122, local administrations, and the Highways Department to stay on high alert and take preventive action.

Residents living near nullahs, streams, or dams are

strongly advised to move to safer places. Keep children indoors during heavy rain and hail. Stay away from electricity poles and wires, as strong winds may cause trees or poles to fall.

Travelers and tourists should avoid non-essential journeys, especially on mountainous and coastal roads where visibility can drop suddenly. Always check the latest weather update before travelling.

Much-Needed Rain with Risks

This rain spell is expected to bring relief to Balochistan's dry lands and support agriculture. However, authorities stress the need for caution to prevent loss of life and property from flash floods.

The situation is being closely monitored, and the PMD will issue further updates as required.

Public Appeal:

- Do not go near nullahs, dams, or streams during or after heavy rain.
- Keep children at home.
- Stay away from power lines.
- Exercise caution when collecting rainwater.
- Stay safe and keep checking official weather updates.

QUET VOICE

Editor: Asim Khan

Balochistan High Court Opens the Doors of Justice Wider Than Ever Before



Editorial:

The Balochistan High Court's latest initiative — introducing a dedicated WhatsApp number and email address for public complaints — marks a meaningful shift toward openness, accessibility, and public empowerment within the judicial system.

This is not just a procedural reform; it is an invitation for citizens to engage directly with the justice system in ways that were previously difficult, time-consuming, and often intimidating.

For decades, obtaining certified copies of court judgments or dealing for clients and even for experienced lawyers.

Long queues, procedural delays, and administrative hurdles made the process difficult, especially for people from remote districts of the province.

With digital communication now formally integrated, citizens, litigants, and counsel will be able to request and access judgment copies far more easily. This single step reduces barriers that have existed for years and ensures that justice is not only done — but also seen to be done.

Equally important is the ability for citizens directly to file complaints against the judiciary or court staff if they face

misconduct, delays, or unfair treatment. Many people lacked the courage, resources, or channels to raise such concerns.

This mechanism now provides them a safe and accessible option, reinforcing the idea that justice is a right, not a privilege.

The Balochistan High Court deserves recognition for taking a forward-looking approach to judicial transparency.

By embracing technology, the court has empowered the public, strengthened accountability, and made justice more approachable for millions. This is a good step — one that brings the judiciary closer to the people it serves.

Forced Marriage in Islam: A Clear Violation of Women's Rights and Human Dignity

By Musavir Durrani:

Forced marriage remains one of the most damaging cultural practices in parts of the Muslim world today. Despite being justified in the name of honor, tradition, or family unity, Islam itself strictly forbids forcing any woman, or man, into a marriage they do not want. Islamic teachings make consent the core of marriage, while coercion makes a marriage *batal* (invalid).

The Qur'an Clearly Forbids Forced Marriages. Allah states in Surah An-Nisa: "O you who believe, it is not lawful for you to inherit women against their will." (Qur'an 4:19)

This verse was revealed to abolish the jahiliyyah practice of controlling or forcing women into marriages.

Islam replaced oppression with dignity, choice, and responsibility.

Prophetic Example: Forced Marriages Declared Invalid.

A woman once came to the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) complaining that her father had married her without her permission. The Prophet (PBUH) gave her the full right to reject or accept the marriage, proving that consent is mandatory.

Hadith References: Sahih al-Bukhari, Hadith 5138; Sahih Muslim, Hadith 1419.



These narrations all confirm that the Prophet (PBUH) allowed the woman to annul her forced marriage.

One narration even states that she chose to remain married but wanted to teach women that fathers have no right to force their daughters.

Parents Can Advise, But They Cannot Force. Islam highly respects parents, but marriage choice is not their right. They can guide, suggest, and

advise, but they have absolutely no power to force their child into marrying someone. Even if parents think they "know what is best," they cannot override the choice of their daughter or son.

The final decision always belongs to the person getting married.

Statements such as: "If you don't marry this one, who will marry you?" "You have no choice." "Do it for family honor."

"You must obey your parents." These are pure emotional manipulation, and Islam does not allow it. Emotional or Psychological Pressure is Also Haram. Forced marriage is not only when someone is physically pressured. Even emotional, mental, or family pressure counts as force.

Modern Forced Marriages: A New Way of Burying Women Alive. Before Islam, Arabs used to bury baby girls alive. Today, many scholars say: "We no longer bury women in the ground, we bury their

dreams on the day of their Nikkah. "When a girl is forced into a marriage, pressured emotionally, or told she has no other choice, we destroy her life while she is still alive.

This is the new form of burying women alive, and Islam came to end this injustice completely. Forced marriage has no place in Islam. It is against the Qur'an, against the Sunnah, and against the dignity that Islam gives to every woman and man. Parents must love, support, and guide, but never control or force marriage decisions. "Allah gave women this right, and no one can take it away."

How AI Is Making Modern Production Smarter and Faster

Syed Muhammad Waseem:

AI is changing the way we create and collaborate, with 41% of brands already using AI for video production. Production teams now have to create more content faster than ever. Staying on track while keeping ideas fresh is a daily challenge. AI is changing how production teams plan, shoot, and edit. It's making the process faster, smarter, and more creative.

As the need for faster content grows, AI is becoming a key tool for shaping the future of modern media production.

Why Production Houses Are Turning to AI. Production houses are facing rising costs and tighter schedules. Keeping up with deadlines while staying creative has become a major challenge. To stay efficient, many studios are now using AI to manage time and 60% of post-production studios utilize AI-powered editing tools to reduce editing time, reduce expenses, and speed up production.

The Evolution of AI in Media Production. AI in media production has evolved rapidly over the years. Initially, it served as a basic tool for handling repetitive tasks such as video editing, adding visual effects, and creating computer graphics. Over time, it has transformed into a powerful creative partner that now supports teams at every stage of production.

In the beginning, AI was mainly used for video automation, and voice synthesis. These tools helped save time but still required significant human input. Today, AI plays an active role across pre-production, production, and post-production, making the entire process more efficient and consistent.

During pre-production, it assists with scriptwriting, budgeting, and storyboard creation. In production, it en-

hances camera tracking, lighting adjustments, and virtual set design. Finally, in post-production, it streamlines editing, color correction, sound design, and even creates advanced visual effects.

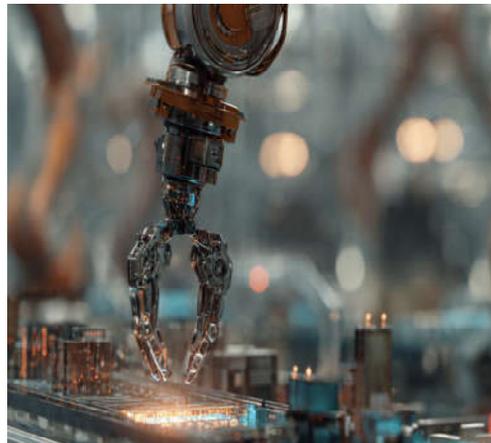
Major studios such as Netflix and Warner Bros. are now using AI-driven tools to analyze audience preferences, optimize workflows, and enhance storytelling. As a result, AI has shifted from being a simple technical assistant to becoming an essential force in shaping the future of modern media production.

AI is changing how production houses work from start to finish. It supports every stage of filmmaking, from planning and shooting to editing and final delivery. In Pre-Production, AI is making the pre-production stage faster and more creative. Writers now use tools like ChatGPT, Jasper, and Sudowrite to draft scripts or explore story ideas. In fact, 60% of film studios are exploring AI-driven tools to speed up brainstorming and script development. These tools help generate dialogue, plot twists, and creative concepts in minutes, saving time while keeping creativity flowing.

Storyboarding and concept visualization have also become easier. Tools like Midjourney, Runway ML, and Pika Labs turn written ideas into visuals, helping directors and producers

see how scenes might look before filming begins. This makes planning smoother and reduces the need for costly revisions later. AI is also improving casting and budgeting. Some tools analyze data to predict how well an actor will connect with audiences. AI software like Celyx and StudioBinder helps plan budgets and schedules. These tools make it easier for studios to manage costs, track spending, and stay on time. In Production, AI supports crews during filming. Voice recognition systems can follow script lines or adjust camera settings through simple voice commands. As a result, on-set work becomes smoother, and the crew can focus more on storytelling rather than technical details.

In Post-Production, this phase gets a big boost from AI, especially in editing and sound design. Tools like Runway ML, Adobe Premiere Pro AI, and Descript automate tasks



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In Post-Production, this phase gets a big boost from AI, especially in editing and sound design. Tools like Runway ML, Adobe Premiere Pro AI, and Descript automate tasks

like cutting, syncing, and scene detection. Smart apps can identify key moments and streamline workflows, helping editors focus on storytelling.

AI also improves color grading and sound editing. It can automatically balance colors, refine lighting, remove background noise, and sync soundtracks. Even some free tools can apply complex color grading and polish and professional look. These features save time and make the final product polished and professional.

In addition, AI enhances VFX, CGI, and localization. It removes green screens, fills missing frames, and generates realistic effects quickly. Voice tools like Resemble AI and ElevenLabs speed up dubbing and translations for multiple languages.

The use of AI in video editing has reduced production time by an average of 30%, showing how much it improves efficiency. AI also helps with versioning and distribution. It can create multiple edits for different platforms like social media, TV, or YouTube Shorts. This allows studios to repurpose content easily and deliver it quickly. Overall, AI makes post-production faster, more precise, and more creative.

Case Studies: How AI Is Shaping Modern Production. Case Study 1: Netflix Builds a Cloud-Based VFX Studio. Netflix, one of the biggest entertainment companies in the world, began producing its own content in 2012. To manage the largest VFX studio in the world, they needed a way to bring real value to agriculture by making testing fairer, faster, and more consistent. Falkner advises businesses to focus on real problems first and then see if AI is the right solution.

Case Study 2: What's Next Entertainment's Use of AI in Creative Production. What's Next Entertainment is redefining how film production teams approach creativity and pre-production. To make their workflow smoother and boost creative output, the company uses AI tools like Midjourney and ChatGPT in its daily processes.

During the early stages of filmmaking, the team uses Midjourney for storyboarding and visual exploration. It helps them create detailed visual references, test color palettes, and shape the overall look and feel of each scene before production begins. This saves time and improves collaboration among directors, designers, and cinematographers.

Case Study 3: Croptify's AI Innovation in Grain Grading. In South Australia, Anna Falkner and Andrew Hannon founded Croptify to make grain testing faster and more accurate. Traditional testing relied on human inspection, which often caused mistakes and disagreements.

The founders wanted a smarter AI-based way to grade crops.

Working with the Australian Institute for Machine Learning (AIML), they built AI software that could analyze grain samples in seconds. Their system reduced testing time from 24 minutes to just 90 seconds and achieved 98% accuracy. This made the grain supply chain faster and more reliable.

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Afghanistan announces release of detained US citizen

NEWS DESK: The Afghan Taliban announced on Tuesday that it was freeing a US national who had been detained for more than a year.

The foreign ministry said the family of linguist and researcher Dennis Coyle had written to the supreme leader of Afghanistan, requesting his release for Eid.

"The Supreme Court of the Islamic Emirate deemed his period of detention sufficient and decided on his release," a statement read.

The announcement came after a meeting of Foreign Minister Amir Khan Muttaqi, US former special envoy to Afghanistan Zalmay Khalilzad, United Arab Emirates' (UAE) ambassador to Kabul, Saif Mohammed Al-Kebbi, and a member of Coyle's family.

The UAE facilitated the release, the ministry said, adding that Coyle had been reunited with his family in Kabul on Tuesday.



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Coyle, 64, was arrested by the Afghan authorities in January 2025, according to the Foley Foundation, which advocates for the release of Americans taken hostage or arbitrarily detained abroad.

A website set up by his family, freedenniscoyle.com, said he was "legally working to support Afghan communities as an academic researcher" when he was detained.

They said he had been held in "near-solitary conditions, requiring permission even to use the bathroom, and without access to adequate medical care".

Coyle first travelled to Afghanistan in the early 2000s "to survey Afghanistan's rich linguistic diversity and help Afghan communities develop resources in their own languages", they added.

"Throughout his years of service, Dennis maintained a home

in Kabul and built deep, meaningful relationships with the Afghan people," the website read.

"Those who know him speak with profound appreciation for both the man and his work. Dennis has always embraced Afghan culture with genuine warmth — sharing cups of traditional green tea, enjoying dried fruit snacks, and engaging in the kind of heartfelt conversations that bridge cultures," it said.

"His love for the Afghan people isn't just professional; it's personal and deeply felt."

Earlier this month, US Secretary of State Marco Rubio said the country had formally placed Afghanistan on its list of countries engaged in "wrongful detentions".

The Afghan authorities called it "regrettable" and "poignant" to talks between the two sides and previous releases with mediators from Qatar.

North Korea's Kim vows 'irreversible' nuclear status, warns Seoul of 'merciless' response

NEWS DESK: North Korea will never give up nuclear weapons, leader Kim Jong Un said, indicating that it will soon designate South Korea the "most hostile state".

Kim also told the country's legislature in a policy address on Monday that the United States was committing "state terrorism", in an apparent reference to its military attacks on Vietnam.

"We will continue to firmly consolidate our status as a nuclear-armed state as an irreversible course, while aggressively stepping up our struggle against hostile forces," Kim said at the Supreme People's Assembly.

"We will, in line with the mission en-

trusted by the Constitution of the Republic... further expand and advance our self-defensive nuclear deterrent," Kim said, according to the official Korean Central News Agency (KCNA).

While the United States and Israel have insisted that their attacks on Iran are to stop the Islamic republic from developing nuclear weapons — an aim Tehran denies — Pyongyang is thought to be light years ahead by comparison.

Despite years of sanctions and diplomatic isolation, the Chinese ally is estimated to have dozens of nuclear warheads and the fissile material for many more.

It has also unveiled increasingly sophis-

ticated delivery systems, including new solid-fuel intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBMs) that can launch with little warning.

Kim, a day after his reappearance as head of the authoritarian nation's highest policymaking body, the State Affairs Commission, also did not mince words about his southern neighbour.

"We will designate South Korea as the most hostile state and deal with it by thoroughly rejecting and disregarding it," Kim said.

The announcement came despite repeated overtures by President Lee Jae Myung, a dovish leader who took office in June, for dialogue without preconditions. Pyongyang has

ignored these gestures, which advocates for the release of Americans taken hostage or arbitrarily detained abroad.

Pyongyang will "make it pay mercilessly — without the slightest consideration or hesitation — for any act that infringes upon our Republic", Kim added.

Nuclear guarantee Hong Min, a senior analyst at the Korea Institute for National Unification, said that Kim's comments on consolidating its nuclear status showed "Pyongyang sees US actions in Iran and Venezuela with 'deep concern and seriousness'".

Andrej Lankov, a professor at Kookmin University in Seoul, said that "Iran's experience once again confirmed what the North Koreans have always known, [that] in the modern world, the only security guarantee is, well, nuclear weapons."

Donald Trump met Kim in his first term and there has been speculation of a re-run when the US president makes his delayed visit to China next month.

Kim, who was greeted with cheering crowds and received a standing ovation in the assembly, said on Monday that the US is "carrying out acts of state terrorism and aggression across the world".



Australia, European Union agree sweeping new trade pact 8 years in the works

NEWS DESK: The European Union (EU) and Australia struck a long-awaited free-trade deal on Tuesday, while also agreeing to boost defence cooperation and access to crucial rare-earth minerals in the face of global uncertainty over trade.

EU chief Ursula von der Leyen's visit to Australia comes as the 27-nation bloc and the import-reliant nation navigate renewed economic vulnerability sparked by the US-Israel war on Iran.

The accord is the latest agreed by Brussels in a push to diversify trade as Europe faces challenges from the United States and China.

Key sticking points on Australian use of European geographical names as well as how much beef can be exported to the continent were overcome to reach the deal after eight years of negotiations.

Another compromise will see Australian winemakers allowed to use the term "prosecco" domestically, but they must stop using it for exports after 10 years.



Australia will also be allowed to keep using some geographical names, such as feta and gruyere, in cases where producers have used the name for at least five years. And European carmakers will benefit from Australia raising the threshold for a luxury car tax on electric vehicles — three-quarters will now be exempt.

The two sides also agreed to step up defence cooperation as well as critical raw materials.

Addressing the Australian parliament on Tuesday, von der Leyen described a world that was "brutal, harsh and

unforgiving". "We cannot be over-dependent on any supplier for such crucial ingredients, and that is precisely why we need each other," she said.

"Our security is your security, and with our new security and defence partnership, we have each other's back."

Beijing's foreign ministry urged the EU on Tuesday to abandon its "zero-sum thinking".

"We hope the European side will... refrain from adopting protectionist measures, and view China's development in a rational and objective light," spokesman Lin Jian said when asked at a regular news briefing about von der Leyen's comments.

Von der Leyen told Australian lawmakers that Tuesday's agreement on trade was a "fair deal, and one that delivers for your businesses and one that delivers for our businesses".

Under the deal, the EU said it expected exports to Australia to grow by a third over a decade.

Eight die, 71 'rescued' as plane with 125 on board crashes in Colombia

NEWS DESK: Eight people were killed after a Colombian air force plane carrying 125 passengers crashed just after takeoff deep in the country's southern Amazon region on Monday. Military sources said 71 people on board had been rescued.

Colombian air force Commander Fernando Silva said in a video posted on social media that the plane was carrying 114 passengers and 11 crew members, and that authorities were still investigating the cause of the crash.

Defence Minister Pedro Sanchez said earlier on X the accident happened as the Lockheed Martin-built Hercules C-130 was taking off from Puerto Leguizamo on the border with Peru, as it transported troops.

The exact number of victims and the causes of the crash have not yet been determined," he said.

Footage from the scene published by local outlet BluRadio showed thick plumes of smoke rising from the wreckage. One video showed the plane heading towards the ground just seconds after takeoff. BluRadio said the crash took place just 3 km (2 miles) from an urban center. Two military sources said 71 people had been rescued from the wreckage. Silva put the figure at 48 in the earlier video message.

US defence company Lockheed Martin did not immediately respond to a request for comment. "I hope there are no fatalities in this horrific accident that should never have happened," President Gustavo Petro said in a post on X, in which he criticised bureaucratic obstacles for delaying his plans to modernise the military. "I will grant no further delays; it is the lives of our young people that are at stake,"

he said. "If civilian or military administrative officials are not up to this challenge, they must be removed."

Hercules C-130 planes were first launched in the 1950s and Colombia acquired its first models in the late 1960s. It has more recently modernized some older C-130s with newer models sent from the US under a law that allows for the transfer of used or surplus military equipment. Additional details of the plane involved in the accident were not immediately available. Several candidates in Colombia's upcoming May 31 presidential election expressed condolences to the families of the injured soldiers on social media and called for an investigation.

The crash is the second by a C-130 Hercules aircraft in South America in under a

parenity". At the end of February, another Hercules C-130 belonging to the Bolivian Air Force crashed in the populous city of El Alto, barely 100 metres from the city, prompting clashes between residents and security forces.

The troubled border area has been the scene of heavy military activity in recent weeks, as the Colombian and Ecuadoran militaries try to tackle drug-running cartels and militias.

Images from the scene showed civilians clambering around the broken tail of the aircraft, marked FAC 1016, as smoke and flames billowed above the trees.



FO urges media to refrain from speculation amid reports of Islamabad hosting US-Iran talks

NEWS DESK: The Foreign Office (FO) on Tuesday urged the media to refrain from speculation and await official announcements when asked about reports of Islamabad being a possible venue for talks between the US and Iranian representatives amid the ongoing Middle East conflict.

"Pakistan, consistent with its longstanding policy, remains committed to the resolution of the ongoing conflict in the Middle East/Persian Gulf through diplomatic means and engagements," FO spokesperson Tahir Andrabi said.

"Diplomacy and negotiations often require that certain matters be advanced with discretion. The media is therefore encouraged to re-



frain from speculation and to await official announcements regarding decisions and outcomes," he said.

The FO spokesperson's statement came after several international media outlets, including Reuters and Axios, suggested that Islamabad could serve as a venue for po-

tential direct talks between US and Iranian representatives in the coming days.

The claim gained traction because of US President Donald Trump's hint on Monday at discussions with Iran in the next few days.

However, there has been no official confirmation from Pakistan, the US or

Iran regarding any such arrangement.

Earlier, Andrabi said in reply to a query by Dawn, "If the parties desire, Islamabad is always willing to host talks."

He recalled that Pakistan had consistently advocated for dialogue and diplomacy to promote peace and stability in the region.

Pakistan vows continued action against terror threats

ISLAMABAD (INP): Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Mohammad Ishaq Dar on Monday reaffirmed that Pakistan remains firmly committed to eradicating the menace of terrorism, stating that the country's actions inside Afghanistan are aimed at achieving this objective.

Deputy Prime Minister/Foreign Minister Mohammad Ishaq Dar, Monday, expressed the hope that amid the austerity measures adopted by the Government in view of the recent ongoing regional conflict, the nation while sticking to the values of unity, faith and discipline would be

steadfast and together they would successfully navigate this challenge as well.

He said they were extending warm greetings to the nation, Dar said, "Today we honour the Pakistan Resolution adopted on

March 23, 1940, under which the Muslims of the Subcontinent demanded a separate homeland where they could live according to the principles of Islam." Dar said the brave nation rendered countless sac-

rifices to achieve the homeland envisaged in this resolution.

Dar further said Pakistan remained firmly committed to eradicating the menace of terrorism. Pakistan's actions inside Afghanistan against the menace of Fitna-al-Hindustan and Fitna-ul-Khawarij/TTP were directed towards this goal, he added.

Dar said "Our brave sons of the soil are sacrificing their lives in its pursuit.



LAHORE: President Asif Ali Zardari in a meeting with the Interior, Finance and Petroleum Ministers to review security, economic, and energy challenges at Bhutto House.

LHC rejects plea against PM Shehbaz, Hamza's acquittal in money laundering case

LAHORE (INP): The Lahore High Court has dismissed a petition filed against the acquittal of Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif and Hamza Shehbaz in a money laundering case, upholding the registrar office's objection and declaring the plea inadmissible.

Chief Justice Aalia Neelum heard the case related to the Rs16 billion money laundering allegations against Shehbaz Sharif and Hamza Shehbaz.

The petition was filed by Advocate Vishal Ahmed Shakir through senior lawyer Amir Saeed Raan. During the hearing, the petitioner's counsel argued that Shehbaz Sharif secured a favorable decision within 15 days of becoming Prime Minister.

He stated that both Shehbaz Sharif and Hamza Shehbaz had filed acquittal pleas before indictment, which were accepted by the Special

Dams in Kishwar displace 1,000 families, intensify water war fears

JAMMU (INP): In a development exposing the dual agenda of demographic disruption and strategic resource manipulation by the India's Modi regime, over one thousand families have been displaced by hydro-power projects in Indian illegally occupied Jammu and Kashmir, intensifying fears of a calculated plan to control water flows towards Pakistan.

According to Kashmiri analysts and water policy experts, the disclosure made in the Indian Parliament confirms that at least 1,004 families in Kishwar district have been affected by major hydroelectric projects, including Dulhasti, Pakal Dul, Kiru and Kwar.

Analysts say such large-scale displacement, coupled with inadequate rehabilitation measures, reflects a systematic pattern of marginalizing local populations while consolidating India's grip over key water resources originating from the region.

Nation celebrates Pakistan Day amid austerity due to Gulf war

LAHORE (INP): The nation is set to celebrate Pakistan Day on Monday with a renewed pledge to transform the country into a true Islamic and welfare state in line with the vision of Quaid-e-Azam Muhammad Ali Jinnah.

The day is observed to commemorate the historic Lahore Resolution passed on 23rd March in 1940, under which Muslims of the Subcontinent set the agenda of a separate homeland for themselves. The day dawned with thirty-one-gun salute in the federal capital and twenty-one-gun salute in provincial capitals.

Special prayers were offered in mosques after Fajr prayers for progress and prosperity of the country.

Sindh Governor Nihal Hashmi and Chief Minister Murad Ali Shah paid their respects at Mazar-e-Quaid. Members of the Sindh cabinet were also present with the Chief Minister. They laid flowers at the grave of Quaid-e-Azam Muhammad Ali Jinnah and offered Fataha. Later, they recorded their wishes in the visitors' book.

A change of guard ceremony was held at the Pakistan Air Force presented an impressive march-past.

The Pakistan Air Force took over the security responsibilities of Mazar-e-Iqbal, which were previously handled by the Sufley Rangers.

Air Vice Marshal Shahid Afzal, Air Officer Commanding of PAF Airman Academy Korangi Creek, was the chief guest on the occasion. He laid a floral wreath, and offered Fataha at the grave.

Meanwhile, ISPR has released a special national song 'Meri Mitt Meri Jaan', Pakistanis in Zindabad' in connection with Pakistan Day. The national song carries a strong message of patriotism and national unity in relation to Pakistan Day.

It may be recalled that President Asif Ali Zardari cancelled parade by the armed forces in view of the Gulf oil crisis and austerity measures, on PM's advice.

A post on the President's X account said: "President Asif Ali Zardari approves summary to cancel Pakistan Day parade and related events on March 23, 2026, in view of the Gulf oil crisis and austerity measures, on PM's advice. Investment ceremony has been rescheduled to 28 April."

A statement issued from the Prime Minister's Office (PMO) on March 17 stated that in the backdrop of the ongoing Gulf oil crisis and the consequent austerity measures announced by the government, it was decided that the Pakistan Day parade and associated ceremonial events shall not be held on March 23.

US-Israel-Iran war : FT central diplomatic player to mediate

ISLAMABAD, March 24 (INP): As the war involving the United States, Israel, and Iran enters its fourth week, Pakistan has emerged as a central diplomatic player, attempting to broker a ceasefire and prevent further regional destabilization. According to a report by the Financial Times, Islamabad is positioning itself as the primary venue for potential peace talks between the Trump administration and Tehran. The diplomatic push involves Pakistan's top leadership. Field Marshal Asim Munir reportedly held a phone call with U.S. President Donald Trump on Sunday to discuss de-escalation strategies. Simultaneously, Pakistani Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif has maintained a direct line of communication with Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian.

Sources familiar with the matter told the Financial Times that senior Pakistani officials are facilitating "back-channel" messages between Tehran and key U.S. figures, including Jared Kushner and Steve Witkoff. The goal is to establish Islamabad as a neutral ground where both sides can meet to resolve the ongoing Iran war concerns and broader Middle Eastern hostilities.

PMD forecasts sporadic rainfall in Karachi from tomorrow

KARACHI, March 24 (INP): The Pakistan Meteorological Department (PMD) has forecast sporadic rainfall in Karachi from tomorrow (Wednesday).

The weather will remain partly cloudy to cloudy in the city today, and maximum temperature could soar to 33 Celsius with 88 per cent humidity.

The metropolis is expected to receive showers on March 25 to 29, coupled with strong winds and thunderstorm weather department said.

Hyderabad, Sukkur, Dadu, Kashmore, Jambhad, Larkana and Kashmir districts of Sindh also expected to receive rainfall during the forecast period.

The PMD on Monday said that a western weather system is expected to enter parts of Balochistan on March 24 and intensify by the night of March 27.

Under its influence, wet spells are likely in Balochistan's Pongor, Turbat, Kech, Awaran, Gwadar, Pasni, Marwar, and other districts including Lasbela, Khuzdar, Chagai, Dalbandin, Kalat, Sibi, Kohlu, Quetta, Barikhan, Naseerabad, Loralai, Ziarat, Chaman, Pishin, Qila Abdullah, Qila Saifullah, Nuski, Harnai, Zhab, Qalat, and Mastung.

Imran Khan undergoes third eye procedure at PIMS Hospital

ISLAMABAD (INP): Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) founder Imran Khan has undergone a third eye procedure at the Pakistan Institute of Medical Sciences (PIMS), where doctors declared his vision "satisfactory" following a detailed examination.

Hospital authorities said that the former premier was brought to the hospital with his consent, where he was administered a third anti-VEGF injection as part of his ongoing treatment.

The procedure was carried out in an operation theatre under strict medical protocols and precautionary measures, it noted.

A medical board assessed his condition after the procedure and expressed satisfaction with his eyesight, the hospital said.

Officials stressed that the PTI leader remained stable throughout and was discharged shortly after the treatment.

Monday's procedure marks the latest phase in his eye care. He was earlier shifted to the hospital from Adiala jail on February 24, when he received the second dose following a comprehensive examination.

At the time, cardiologists, including echocardiography and an electrocardiogram, had shown normal results, and he was declared medically stable.

On March 18, his medical check-up was completed by a newly formed board comprising five doctors and staffers at Adiala jail following instructions from the Islamabad High Court (IHC).

Earlier this month, the IHC directed the capital city's chief commissioner to constitute a medical board to assess his health condition, while rejecting a petition seeking his transfer to a private hospital.

The jailed PTI founder was diagnosed with central retinal vein occlusion (CRVO), a serious eye condition, according to a report submitted to the Supreme Court by his lawyer and the court's amicus curiae, Salman Safdar.

The condition occurs when the main vein draining blood from the retina becomes blocked and is often associated with cardiovascular risk factors such as high blood pressure, high cholesterol, diabetes, and heart disease.



ABU DHABI: Ambassador Shafiq Ali Khan hoisting the national flag during the National Day of Pakistan's ceremony held at the Embassy of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan in Abu Dhabi.



SINGAPORE: High Commissioner Rabia Shafiq with members of the Pakistani community and officials at Pakistan House, Singapore, during the commemoration of the 86th National Day of Pakistan.

National heroes remembered as Pakistan Day celebrated

ISLAMABAD, March 23 (INP): The nation celebrated Pakistan Day today with a renewed pledge to transform the country into a true Islamic and welfare state in line with the vision of Quaid-e-Azam Muhammad Ali Jinnah.

The day is celebrated to commemorate the historic Lahore Resolution passed on 23rd March, 1940, which set the agenda of a separate homeland for Muslims of the Subcontinent. The day dawned with 31-gun salute in the federal capital and 21-gun salute in provincial capitals.

Special prayers were offered in mosques after Fajr prayers for progress and prosperity of the country. Change of guard ceremonies were held at Mazar-e-Quaid in Karachi and Allama Iqbal's mausoleum in Lahore.

Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif hoisted the National Flag in Lahore to mark the celebrations of Pakistan Day.

Last week, the government announced that it would not hold the usual Pakistan Day parade and other ceremonial events on March 23, in light of the ongoing Gulf oil crisis and the resulting austerity measures unveiled by the government.

President Asif Ali Zardari and Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif have paid tribute to the national heroes and to

the martyrs and ghazis who sacrificed for the creation and stability of Pakistan. In their messages on Pakistan Day, they said undoubtedly, with the blessing of freedom, Pakistan stands as a testament to the wisdom, determination, perseverance, and sacrifices of our ancestors.

The President and Prime Minister said the entire nation stands resolute in upholding its proud traditions and remains ever ready to face any challenge.

The President in his message said that despite early challenges after independence, Pakistan made significant progress through determination and cooperation, including building strong institutions, enhancing defense capabilities, and combating terrorism. Reaffirming Pakistan's resolve against security threats, he stressed that no group will be allowed to use foreign soil to act against the country.

The Prime Minister in his message said the government has steered Pakistan's economy towards sustained growth despite numerous challenges. He said sustainable peace in South Asia is linked to the just resolution of the Jammu and Kashmir issue and Pakistan will continue to extend moral, political, and diplomatic support to our brothers and sisters in Indian Illegally Occupied Jammu and Kashmir.

Historic Pakistan Day Rally Held in Duki with Strong Public Participation

DUKI: Like the rest of the country, Pakistan Day (March 23) was celebrated in District Duki with great enthusiasm, where a historic rally was organized on the special directives of Parliamentary Secretary Sardar Masood Khan Luni and Sardar Khushdil Khan Luni.

The rally witnessed massive participation from tribal elders, political and social figures, youth, and citizens from all walks of life. It began from Luni House, with participants carrying national flags and chanting slogans such as "Pakistan Zindabad" to express their patriotism.

The rally passed through major roads of the area and concluded at Masjid Road, where proper security arrangements were ensured to maintain a peaceful environment.



Addressing the youth, speakers urged them to contribute to the country's progress through education, unity, and hard work, and to adopt Quaid-e-Azam's guiding principles of "Faith, Unity, Discipline" in their daily lives.

The event concluded with special prayers for the country's security, stability, and prosperity, along with a renewed pledge to remain united for the protection and development of Pakistan.

Keywords: Duki Pakistan Day rally, March 23 celebration Duki, Sardar Masood Khan Luni, Khushdil Khan Luni, Quaid-e-Azam message, youth role Pakistan development

Keywords: Panjgur Muhammad Hussain Baloch, Director of Colleges & Higher Education, Panjgur, Government Girls Inter College Tasp, Panjgur to review its academic and environmental and institutional performance.

While inspecting the college, the Director identified certain gaps in essential facilities and assured the college administration that these needs would be addressed on a priority basis to further enhance institutional effectiveness.

He also appreciated the efforts of the college management for efficiently running the institution despite limited resources.

Keywords: Panjgur Girls College inspection, Muhammad Hussain Baloch visit, Government Girls Inter College Tasp, Balochistan education updates, academic performance review, college development initiatives

Keywords: Panjgur administrative operations. During the visit, he conducted a detailed inspection of all major departments, including classrooms, laboratories, and administrative offices, and assessed the overall educational



SHERANI: A grand and dignified ceremony was held in Sherani Town to mark Pakistan Day (March 23), with active participation from people belonging to all walks of life.

The ceremony was attended by government officials, tribal elders, teachers, students, and members of civil society in large numbers. The stage proceedings were conducted by Abdul Wahab Sherani, who efficiently managed the event.

Students from various educational institutions delivered passionate speeches highlighting the historical, national, and ideological importance of March 23. They paid tribute to the sacrifices of the founding generation and emphasized the principles of unity, faith, and discipline for the country's stability and progress.

Outstanding students were also awarded prizes for their performances. Addressing the gathering, Deputy Commissioner Hazrat Wali Kakar attended the event as the chief guest.

Prior to the ceremony, a large rally was led by him, showcasing the patriotic spirit and deep attachment to the significance of Pakistan Day. Following the national flag hoisting, the Commissioner hoisted the national flag, while a smartly turned-out police contingent presented a guard of honor.

The ceremony was attended by government officials, tribal elders, teachers, students, and members of civil society in large numbers. The stage proceedings were conducted by Abdul Wahab Sherani, who efficiently managed the event.

Pakistan Day Celebrated with Simplicity and Dignity in Harnai



HARNAI: Pakistan Day (March 23) was observed in District Harnai with traditional simplicity and dignity, marked by a series of meaningful events.

The main ceremony was held at Government Boys Model High School Harnai, where Deputy Commissioner Arshad Hussain Jamali hoisted the national flag.

A smartly turned-out police contingent presented a guard of honor, while senior district officials attended the event.

The ceremony was graced by Deputy Commissioner Arshad Hussain Jamali as the chief guest, accompanied by Additional Deputy Commissioner Muhammad Saleem Tareen.

The event began with the recitation of the Holy Quran, followed by the flag-hoisting ceremony and inspection of the police salute.

Among those present were District Education Officer Ghulam Haider Tareen, SP Police Abdul Hafeez Jakhrani, DDO Mushtaq Ahmed, Principal Shamsuddin, along with members of civil society and teachers. Speakers paid tribute to the historic significance of March 23, 1940, and the vision of the founding father to lead Pakistan toward development and success.

The simple yet impactful event inspired a renewed sense of patriotism among the younger generation, encouraging them to play an active role in the country's growth and future.

Keywords: Harnai Pakistan Day celebration, Arshad Hussain Jamali, March 23 event Balochistan, Government Boys Model School Harnai, unity faith discipline Pakistan, youth patriotism

Health Department Deputy Secretary Visits Loralai Teaching Hospital, Reviews Facilities and Services

LORALAI: Deputy Secretary Health Hameedullah Nasir paid a brief visit to the Teaching Hospital Loralai to review healthcare facilities and ongoing arrangements.

During the visit, Deputy DHO Dr. Shah Zaman Hamza Zai, Operation Theater Incharge Dr. Jaffar Khan Ghilzai, and Supervisor Ishaq Khan Nasir briefed him on various hospital departments.

They highlighted key issues faced by the hospital and provided details about measures taken during Ramadan and the upcoming Eid period.

The Deputy Secretary inspected different sections of the hospital and reviewed the duty roster to assess staff availability and service delivery.

Speaking on the occasion, Hameedullah Nasir emphasized that the health sector is of critical importance, as it is directly linked to serving humanity.



He stated that no negligence will be tolerated in providing healthcare services, while good performance will be encouraged and appreciated.

Keywords: Loralai Teaching Hospital visit, Hameedullah Nasir, health department Balochistan, hospital inspection Pakistan, Ramadan healthcare arrangements, public health services

The event was attended by SSP Loralai Dr. Fakad Ahmed, SDPO Kareem Mandokhail, Afzal Umankhail (son of MPA Haji Toor), along with police officers, personnel, and other distinguished guests in large numbers.

The ceremony began with the recitation of the Holy Quran, followed by the national anthem. A well-disciplined police contingent presented a guard of honor, and the national flag was hoisted amid chants of "Pakistan Zindabad."

In his address, DIG Junaid Ahmed Sheikh highlighted the historical importance of March 23, 1940, stating that it marked a decisive moment for Muslims of the subcontinent, ultimately leading to the creation of Pakistan.

He emphasized that the day is an opportunity to renew commitment to Quaid-e-Azam's guiding principles of unity, faith, and discipline.

He urged police officers and personnel to prioritize public service, uphold the rule of law, and ensure the protection of citizens' lives and property.

He stressed that maintaining law and order and delivering justice with honesty, dedication, and professionalism are the fundamental responsibilities of the police.

The DIG further noted that in the current circumstances, the role of police has become even more crucial, and every officer must perform duties diligently to maintain public trust.

The ceremony concluded with special prayers for the country's peace, stability, and progress, along with tribute to the martyrs of Pakistan. Participants reaffirmed their commitment to serving the nation and maintaining peace.

Pakistan Forest Day: MRDL Leads Green Initiative with Large-Scale Tree Plantation Drive

Riaz Hussain Baloch: In a renewed push for environmental sustainability, MCC Resources Development Limited (MRDL) marked Pakistan Forest Day with a tree plantation campaign at its project site, highlighting its long-term commitment to eco-friendly development.

As part of the initiative, over a hundred saplings were planted to support efforts aimed at restoring and improving the surrounding environment.

The activity reflects the company's ongoing dedication to green practices, as such plantation drives have become a regular feature of its annual calendar.

The event brought together Chinese and Pakistani leadership along with employees, who actively participated in the plantation effort. The joint activity not only promoted environmental awareness but also fostered collaboration and stronger professional bonds between the two sides.



MRDL emphasized that it will continue to prioritize sustainable practices and community engagement, aiming to create a healthier environment while contributing to the region's long-term ecological balance.

The ceremony was presided over by Principal Muhammad Younas Malazai and attended by teachers, local elders, and a large number of students, marking the nation of the founding generation.

He noted that the youth of Shahrag possess immense talent, and such events help connect them with the true objectives behind the creation of Pakistan.

Speakers highlighted the significance of March 23, stating that it reminds the nation of the sacrifices of the founding generation, which led to the creation of an independent homeland.

Pakistan Day Celebrated with Enthusiasm at Shahrag School in Harnai

SHAHRAHAG HARNAI: A dignified and vibrant ceremony was held at Government Boys Higher Secondary School Shahrag to commemorate the historic Pakistan Resolution of March 23, 1940.

The event was presided over by Principal Muhammad Younas Malazai and attended by teachers, local elders, and a large number of students, marking the nation of the founding generation.

Naat, followed by the flag-hoisting ceremony in the school premises. Students presented colorful tableaux on national songs and created a lively atmosphere by singing popular patriotic songs like "Di De Pakistan."

Speakers highlighted the significance of March 23, stating that it reminds the nation of the sacrifices of the founding generation, which led to the creation of an independent homeland.

He noted that the youth of Shahrag possess immense talent, and such events help connect them with the true objectives behind the creation of Pakistan.

Speakers also stressed that the country's progress depends on the principles of unity, organization, and strong faith.

In his presidential address, Principal Muhammad Younas Malazai urged students to equip themselves with education and play their role in safeguarding the ideological frontiers of the country.

Fertiliser sector on edge amid Gulf crisis

NEWS DESK: Escalating geopolitical tensions in the Middle East, combined with the disruptions to Qatari gas exports and the closure of the Strait of Hormuz, have caused a significant shock across global fertiliser markets.

The Gulf region, which accounts for nearly one-third of the world's urea exports, has experienced a sharp decline in production and logistics capacity, resulting in severe supply shortages and unprecedented price increases.

International urea prices have increased to \$740-750 per tonne, reflecting the combined effects of feedstock shortages, shipping disruptions, and rising market uncertainty. For economies reliant on imports, particularly in South Asia, the crisis has caused delayed shipments, decreased availability,

and significantly higher procurement costs," worries a senior executive of the Fertiliser Manufacturers of Pakistan Advisory Council — a collective forum of all major fertiliser producers in Pakistan, in an interview with Dawn.

For Pakistan, where urea is a vital input for staple crops like wheat and rice, the implications are considerable. Current estimates suggest the landed cost of imported urea is between Rs13,700 and Rs14,700 per bag, compared to the domestic price of approximately Rs4,400 per bag.

This margin, more than three times higher, underscores the extent of exposure managed through domestic production.

DAP imports vulnerable to supply disruptions. At the core of this



resilience is Pakistan's local fertiliser industry. By utilising domestic gas resources and established production infrastructure, local producers have maintained a continuous supply, protecting farmers from global price fluctuations. Currently, the industry holds approximately 0.9 million tonnes of urea in stocks, sufficient to meet demand for the upcoming Kharif season, provided plant operations persist throughout the

year. The stabilising function of domestic production goes beyond affordability. In farming systems, fertiliser use is closely linked to yield outcomes. Rising input costs often lead to re-

duced application, which in turn hampers crop productivity and fuels food inflation. By maintaining a stable price, the domestic fertiliser industry has effectively broken this inflationary cycle, protecting both farm eco-

nomics and broader food security.

However, the situation presents a different challenge for Di-Ammonium Phosphate (DAP). Domestic DAP production remains structurally limited, estimated at around 0.7 million tonnes annually, mainly from a single manufacturing plant. Pakistan's total DAP requirement ranges from 1.3 million to 2.3 million tonnes annually, making the country heavily reliant on imports.

This structural deficit renders Pakistan particularly vulnerable to extended disruptions in the Middle East. Any ongoing restrictions on global DAP supplies could cause sharp rises in international prices, potentially exceeding the volatility observed in urea markets. In this context, maintaining a continu-

ous gas supply to the country's only DAP production plant is crucial to reducing reliance on external sources.

The ongoing crisis, therefore, emphasises a key policy priority: domestic fertiliser production must be seen as a strategic asset rather than just a commercial activity.

The capacity to produce and supply vital agricultural inputs locally has proven its value as a buffer against external shocks, helping to safeguard economic stability and food security.

"As global supply chains continue to face uncertainty, the lesson is clear. In times of international disruption, it is domestic industrial capacity that maintains agricultural continuity — keeping fields productive, markets stable, and food systems secure," he says.

PSX rallies 1,200 points after Eid break

NEWS DESK: The Pakistan Stock Exchange's benchmark KSE-100 index on Tuesday gained over 1,200 points.

The index gained 1,225.99 points, or 0.80 per cent, to close at 153,966.36 points, up from the previous close of 152,740.37 points.

The KSE-100 rose to an intraday high of 157,442.68 points at around 9:30am, then declined to an intraday low of 153,382.90 points at 2:36pm, before settling at 153,966.36.

Topline Securities, in a statement, noted that the day began on a "hopeful note, as the local bourse took cues from the buoyant international markets".

"Easing geopolitical tensions and a dip in global oil prices set the stage for optimism, inviting bulls to charge early into the session," it said. It said that the momentum picked up quickly and drove the index to a "strong intraday high of +4,702 points, reflecting renewed confidence across the board". However, as the day unfolded, the enthusiasm began to fade, it said.

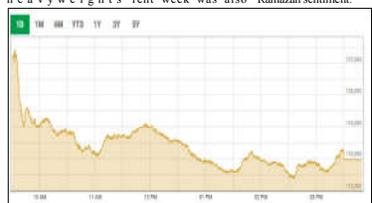
Topline Securities said that the trading activity was "slim — a silent warning that the rally

lacked strong hands behind it" despite a "promising start".

"With volumes failing to support the surge, the market gradually gave up a significant portion of its gains," it added. It said that despite the index settling with a gain of 1,225 points, it remained "well off its peak".

"Market activity remained subdued, with total volumes clocking in at 375 million shares, while turnover stood at Rs22.97 billion," the statement said. K-Electric Limited (KEL) dominated the volumes chart, with trading surpassing 35m shares. Topline Securities said it should be mentioned that K-Electric appointed a new CEO earlier in the day.

"On the index front, a heavy weight is



PTA gives go-ahead for Telenor, Ufone merger

NEWS DESK: The Pakistan Telecommunications Authority (PTA) has granted technical approval for the merger of Telenor Pakistan and Ufone, and the Pakistan Stock Exchange (PSX) will be informed of the development on Tuesday.

Since the Pakistan Telecommunication Company Ltd (PTCL) is a listed company and Ufone is its key subsidiary, the company secretary will inform the PSX that Ufone was technically a part of PTCL.

Meanwhile, a senior PTCL official, responding to Dawn's query, stated that no further approvals from the board were needed, as the required permissions for the takeover and merger of Telenor

Pakistan had already been granted.

"Legal approvals are the next steps, and for that, an application for amalgamation will be filed in the Islamabad High Court soon," the official added.

The amalgamation takes up to four weeks to complete, and matters related to court cases are cleared during the process.

Amalgamation process to take 4 weeks

"This is a legal requirement to check if the parties concerned do not have any litigation related to individuals, bank loans, tax authorities, consumers or other telecos in this case," said a senior PTCL executive, adding that during the process the input is obtained from the State

ENGROH, Fauji Fertiliser Company, Lucky Cement Limited, Systems Limited, and the Hub Power Company Limited led the charge, collectively contributing +1,184 points. Topline Securities said:

"Conversely, MCB Bank, National Bank of Pakistan, Sazgar Engineering Works Limited, Kohat Cement Company Limited, and Nestle acted as key laggards, dragging the index down by 237 points," it added.

Last week, PSX extended its decline for an eighth consecutive week, with KSE-100 closing lower in a holiday-shortened trading period ahead of Eid-ul-Fitr.

The market operated for four sessions during the final week of Ramadan, while the current week was also

shortened due to the Pakistan Day holiday on March 23. Topline Securities Ltd said on Monday that the KSE-100 index declined 0.73pc week-on-week to close at 152,740 points, a 1,126 points. The decrease was mainly due to rising geopolitical tensions in the Middle East, particularly the US-Israel conflict with Iran, which drove volatility in global energy prices and eroded investor confidence. Analysts at Arif Habib Ltd had observed increased volatility throughout last week, driven by ongoing geopolitical uncertainty and selling pressure. They had expected market direction to remain tied to geopolitical developments and post-Ramadan sentiment.

ing Jazz and Zong.

The PTA has also imposed another restriction: any franchisee must be given at least six months' notice before their contract is terminated. The existing Telenor SIM number will continue on the Ufone network.

Currently, there are around 202m mobile phone subscribers, including 74.19 million for Jazz and 53.90m for Zong. The total number of mobile subscribers for the merged company will be around 72.45m. However, it is expected that the number will drop by 10pc as many subscribers have SIMs from both Ufone and Telenor, and after the merger, these subscribers will shift to Jazz or Zong networks.

While the newly merged company can shut down such towers, the PTA has set conditions for towers shared by other telcos, includ-

JJ chief flays govt for 'burdening' common citizen with high petroleum prices

NEWS DESK: Jamaat-islami chief Hafiz Naeemur Rehman on Tuesday once again criticised the government for its major hikes in petroleum prices — following the closure of Hormuz Strait — and termed them a burden on the common citizen.

Earlier this month, the government hiked the prices of petrol and high-speed diesel by Rs55 per litre to manage the impact of the US-Israel war on Iran, which has triggered a global oil crisis affecting many countries, including Pakistan.

Although Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif last week said he had twice rejected recommendations for further increasing petrol and HSD prices, they effec-

tively remain unchanged at Rs321.17 and Rs335.86 per litre, respectively.

Addressing a press conference in Lahore today, the JJ chief said the 20 per cent increase in the petroleum development levy (PDL) had pushed prices to Rs20-125 per litre, affecting

journalists, students, workers, and riders.

"The government can reduce petrol prices by cutting the levy," he suggested, adding that the final power unit sale price should also see immediate reductions.

Rehman linked rising prices to broader government mismanagement and called for investigations into agreements with Independent Power Producers (IPPs), claiming the economy is

under strain in what he described as a "war-like situation".

He claimed: "Even if we remove the levy, the IMF (International Monetary Fund) argues that targets will not be met, but no Pakistani company has the capacity to challenge the government in an international court under the current system."

In the government's latest move aimed at absorbing the impact of the global oil crisis, PM Shehbaz on Sunday announced a Rs200 per litre increase in the levy on high-octane fuel, a premium-grade petroleum product used mainly in luxury vehicles.

"This decision will reduce the burden on the economy, the richest

class in the country will bear the burden," a statement by the PM's office said.

He claimed: "Even if we remove the levy, the IMF (International Monetary Fund) argues that targets will not be met, but no Pakistani company has the capacity to challenge the government in an international court under the current system."

Rehman also criticised the ongoing hostilities in the Middle East, stating: "The war should stop, and it has become clear that the US and Israel have suffered a defeat. They attacked and claimed they would change regimes."

"They even celebrated the assassination of Ayatollah Khomeini," the JJ chief added, referring to Iran's slain supreme leader.

Commenting on US President Donald Trump, Naeem said, "Trump keeps claiming success in the first hour, but they were defeated. If once again proves that he does not understand history, he operates on a business agenda and aims to control the world through power."

Naeem linked domestic challenges to international threats, insisting that the US and Israel remain hostile to Pakistan.

He praised the Palestinians and Iranians for resisting oppression and stressed the need for Pakistan to recognise its "real enemies" to protect its defence, nuclear programme and ideology.



OGDCL commences oil production from development well in Hyderabad

NEWS DESK: The Oil and Gas Development Company Limited (OGDCL) on Tuesday announced the successful commencement of oil production from its development well Pasakhi-13 in Hyderabad, marking Pakistan's first successful horizontal well in a classic reservoir.

According to a statement by the company, Pasakhi-13 is currently producing 460 barrels of oil per day (BPD). The well

was drilled to a measured depth of 2,966 metres, including a 546-meter horizontal section, the company said in a statement.

Advanced geosteering technology enabled precise navigation within a narrow 3 metre drilling window, ensuring optimal placement within the reservoir's sweet spot, it added.

It stated that the well was completed and tested using a 460 barrels of oil per day (BPD). The well

(ESP), specifically optimised for horizontal well configurations.

Despite challenging reservoir conditions, the horizontal drilling approach has significantly enhanced reservoir exposure, resulting in nearly three times higher production compared to offset wells under similar conditions, it said.

Pasakhi-13 is part of the Pasakhi and Pasakhi North Development and Produc-

tion Lease, where OGDCL holds 100 per cent working interest.

This achievement reinforces OGDCL's commitment to innovation, technical excellence, and the deployment of advanced technologies aligned with global standards, the company said,

adding it reinforced its role in boosting indigenous hydrocarbon production and contributing to Pakistan's long-term energy security.

OGDCL (HSD) 100 per cent working interest. This achievement reinforces OGDCL's commitment to innovation, technical excellence, and the deployment of advanced technologies aligned with global standards, the company said, adding it reinforced its role in boosting indigenous hydrocarbon production and contributing to Pakistan's long-term energy security.



PSL to go ahead sans spectators, matches limited to Lahore and Karachi under austerity drive

NEWS DESK: Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) Chairman Mohsin Naqvi said on Sunday that the 11th edition of the Pakistan Super League (PSL) would go ahead sans spectators while matches would be held only in Karachi and Lahore in line with the government's austerity drive.

The tournament, which is set to begin on March 26, will feature eight teams and 44 matches. It was initially scheduled to be held across six venues — Lahore, Karachi, Rawalpindi, Multan, Peshawar, and Faisalabad.

However, addressing a press conference in Lahore on Sunday, the PCB chairman said the board, after holding consultations with the government and security agencies, had decided that the tournament "will go ahead as scheduled [..] but a few difficult decisions had to be taken."

Noting the government's austerity drive, which was launched in the wake of the global fuel crisis triggered by the US-led war on Iran and aimed at fuel saving measures, the PCB chairman said, "On one hand, 25 per cent of 30,000 people will be

gathering at stadiums and on the other hand, we are telling people to restrict their movement.

"So until this crisis ends [..] we will not allow crowds in the stadiums," Naqvi said, adding that it was a "difficult decision" which had to be taken.

He further announced the cancellation of the PSL's opening ceremony in line with the government's efforts to minimise expenses.

He said that the "gate money" loss the franchises would face due to the absence of spectators would be accommodated by the PCB.

Naqvi also announced that matches would only be held in two cities — Lahore and Karachi. He said the decision was taken to "limit movement".

He also took the opportunity to apologise to the fans in Peshawar, where matches were scheduled to be held. "I had made a promise but unfortunately because of the situation, we could not go ahead," he said.

He added that those who had already bought tickets for the matches will be given refunds within 72 hours.



players would begin arriving "today and tomorrow."

"We cannot postpone because we did not have any window to hold it later in the year," the PCB chairman said, adding that "we must not go forward with a limited mindset."

"Technically, it was up to the PCB to decide,

but we have taken all the franchises into confidence," Naqvi added.

In a later press release, the board said, "In consultation with the government of Pakistan, and in line with the officially announced national austerity and resource conservation measures, the PSL has introduced a revised op-

erational plan for the 2026 edition of the tournament."

It said that to support the efficient use of energy and public resources in light of the prevailing regional geopolitical situation, the number of host venues had been streamlined from six to two.

"Additionally, un-

der the revised government standard operating procedures, matches will initially be held without spectators. This operational adjustment has been made purely in support of the broader national conservation effort and to ensure that the tournament is conducted in the most efficient and responsible

manner," it said.

"The league remains confident that the passion of its audience, combined with innovation in coverage, will make this edition one of the most widely watched in its history," it said.

According to the new schedule, 44 matches will be taking

place in a space of 39 days with Lahore and Karachi hosting 22 matches each.

"The opening match between Hyderabad Kingsmen and Lahore Qalandars remains intact, while Lahore will also see Eliminator 1, 2 and the final. Qualifier will be played in Karachi," the PCB said.

Two weeks ago, the government announced unprecedented austerity measures to cope with the fuel crisis triggered by the US-led war on Iran after hiking petroleum products' prices earlier this month.

The measures included a 50 per cent cut in fuel allowance for official vehicles and a four-day work week. It was also decided that 50pc of staff in the public sector would work from home; however, those providing essential services are exempt. On Thursday, the government had appealed to the public to adopt fuel-conservation measures to "avert the risk of petroleum products' supply getting affected in the coming days". A day later, Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif said that he had rejected recommendations for further increasing the prices of petroleum products.

Foreign players start arriving as PSL 11 nears

NEWS DESK: The HBL Pakistan Super League (PSL) 11 is set to commence on March 26 amid unprecedented circumstances, with several overseas players having arrived in Lahore to join their franchises for the tournament.

The 11th edition, running until May 3, features eight teams competing in 44 matches, but the event has undergone significant revisions due to a severe fuel crisis triggered by the ongoing conflict in West Asia involving Iran, the United States and Israel. American all-rounder Sikandar Raza, a key retention for Lahore Qalandars, Australian batter Marcus Labuschagne (direct signing for debutants Hyderabad Kingsmen), fast bowler Riley Meredith, Sri Lankan wicket-keeper-batter Kusal Perera, and New Zealanders Devon Conway and Mark Chapman have reached Lahore.

Bangladeshi contingent including Mustafizur Rahman, Nahid Rana and Parvez

Hossain Emon are expected late tonight, with PCB officials anticipating the arrival of nearly all foreign players by Tuesday night.

The tournament's format has been re-shaped following government directives on energy conservation. Initially scheduled across six venues—including debuts for Faisalabad and Peshawar—the PCB scaled operations to two cities (Gaddafi Stadium and Karachi), each hosting 22 matches. All games will be played in closed doors until the regional

conflict concludes, with the opening ceremony cancelled as part of austerity measures. The fuel shortage stems from disruptions in global oil supplies, particularly through the Strait of Hormuz, prompting nationwide restrictions on movement, school closures, work-from-home policies and extended holidays. The opening fixture pits defending champions Lahore Qalandars against new entrants Hyderabad Kingsmen at Gaddafi Stadium, owned by businessman Fawad

Sarwar (who also owns Chicago Kingsmen in the US minor league), mark one of two fresh franchises this season, adding intrigue to the league's expansion.

The PCB has assembled a high-calibre panel of match officials, with Sir Richie Richardson, from the ICC Elite Panel of Match Referees and a former West Indies captain, will make his PSL debut. He has prior experience in Pakistan, having officiated four Tests and three T20s between 2017 and 2024, including the Pakistan vs. West Indies T20 series at Gaddafi Stadium.

South Africa clinch 19-run win over New Zealand in fourth T20

NEWS DESK: South Africa's spinners played a decisive role as the tourists won the fourth Twenty20 international against New Zealand by 19 runs on Sunday to secure the five-match series 2-2.

New Zealand were well placed to clinch the series midway through their chase in Wellington after the Proteas tested 164-5.

However, from 88-3 after 10 overs, they lost wickets in rapid succession to be all out for 145 off 18.5 overs.

It ends the series, played between weakened sides from both countries, to a decider in Christchurch on Wednesday.

The match swung in favour of South Africa when spinners Keshav Maharaaj and Preenal Subrayen turned the screws through the middle stages of the chase.

Captain Maharaj is comfortably the most experienced member of an experimental tour squad and proved hard to score from as he took

2-22 off four overs. Subrayen, playing his first T20 international, bowled Dane Cleveler for 26 to spark New Zealand's middle order crumble and finished with 2-13 off three overs. Maharaj said his side played with more energy than in defeats in Hamilton and Auckland.

"It was a perfect response to two disappointing losses in a row," he said.

"Coming into this game, you could see there was a little more energy and hunger.

"We are a young team, finding our way in international cricket so it takes a little bit of time."

Opener Tim Robinson top-scored with 32 for New Zealand while Proteas paceman Gerald Coetzee took 3-31. South Africa's innings were dominated by 57 off 36 balls from wicketkeeper Connor Esterhuizen.

He was dismissed by a spectacular off-spin catch from Katene Clarke, on his international debut, off Ben Sears' bowling.



Hockey: Back on the Ture Again

NEWS DESK: Pakistan Hockey has burst into the limelight, both on and off the field.

Although not much was right over the last 15 years, the recent events and their consequences were largely unforeseen. It started immediately after Pakistan's participation in the second leg of the Pro League in Australia. The results weren't unexpected. Against Germany and Australia, ranked third and fifth respectively, the then 14th-ranked Pakistan lost all four matches.

The issue of non-payment of players' salaries had become the norm. But this time, as soon as the players returned to Pakistan, they complained of poor treatment. Captain Ahmad Shakeel Butt blamed the team management and the Pakistan Hockey Federation (PHF), stating that there were no hotel bookings for them on their arrival in Australia. The players were roaming the streets for hours. Later, they were lodged in substandard accommodations, where the rooms had to be shared between four or five players.

"We had to prepare our own food, and clean rooms, utensils and toilets. In all previous tournaments, meals were arranged through official hotel bookings. This is the first time in history that we were told to man-



age our own food within the daily allowance," the team captain said.

He simply declared that the players wouldn't work with the team management; head coach Tahir Zaman, assistant coaches Usman Shehik and Zeeshan Ashraf and video analyst Nadeem Lodhi. It set alarm bells ringing. Pakistan had to depart for Ismailia, Egypt, in less than a week for the all-important World Cup qualifiers.

Unable to feature in the PHF World Cup's previous two editions, the Pakistan hockey team have finally qualified for the next one, to be played in Belgium and the Netherlands in August. It's been a rocky road but it's a first step.

Enough is enough. Finally, the powers that be, who should have acted much earlier, took decisive steps. On the

directive of the prime minister—the ex-officio patron-in-chief of the PHF—the federation's president Fariq Bugti and the secretary-general Rana Mujahid tendered their resignations.

An ad hoc setup, with the federal secretary of the Inter-Provincial Coordination (IPC) ministry, Molyuddin Ahmad Wani, as its president, was announced. In a quiescent Fariq Bugti act, the outgoing president had slapped a two-year ban on Captain Ahmad Butt, his last act in office. The ad hoc president lifted the ban as his first act.

The entire team management was changed. The new coach, World Cup-winning Khawaja Ahmad has had numerous coaching assignments with the national senior and junior teams, without achieving anything no-

table. His assistant, Azfar Yaqoob, is a newcomer. The experienced Sultan Ashraf took on the duties of video analyst.

In a wonderful gesture, Mohsin Naqvi, the president of the Pakistan Cricket Board (the only self-financed sports body in Pakistan), met the members of the hockey team. He lamented the mistreatment of the players during the Australian tour. The players received cheques of one million rupees each, which Naqvi had previously announced as a reward for their second position at the Nations Hockey Cup World Cup Qualifiers. The 2026 World Cup will feature 16 teams. Nine teams had already qualified: the two co-hosts, five continental champions, and the winners of the past two Pro Hockey League events.

ICC names Sahibzada Farhan player of the month for Feb after 'stellar' performance with bat at T20 World Cup

NEWS DESK: The International Cricket Council (ICC) on Monday declared Pakistan opener Sahibzada Farhan as ICC Men's Player of the Month for February after his "stellar display with the bat" at the recent T20 World Cup.

In a press release, the global cricket body said, "Pakistan opener Sahibzada Farhan has grabbed the ICC Men's Player of the Month for February 2026 owing to a stunning ICC Men's T20 World Cup 2026 campaign in Sri Lanka."

"The highest run-getter of the marquee event finished with 383 runs in seven matches (six innings) at an average of 76.60, which included two hundreds and as many half tons.

"The hard-hitting right-hander had a superb run at the stroke rate of 160.25 while breaking a longstanding Virat Kohli's record of most runs at the T20 World Cup in a single edition," the ICC said.

Farhan has become the first male Pakistani player to achieve this title since parv Harris Rauf in November 2024. He was also the



only Pakistani player included in the 12-member Team of the Tournament for the 2026 season of ICC T20 World Cup, the ICC press release stated.

It quoted Farhan as saying, "It's an incredible feeling to win this ICC award, especially for performances on the World Cup stage, where fans from all over the world are watching every moment. That makes it even more special."

"It was truly a tournament I'll always cherish, and I'm determined to carry this momentum forward in the series and competitions ahead. I'm deeply grateful to my teammates for their constant support and belief

in me — this wouldn't have been possible without them."

The press release further mentioned that the opener also became the first batter to score two centuries in a single global event — against Namibia and Sri Lanka — of the shortest format.

"Farhan attained a new career-high rating on the latest Men's T20 Batting rankings as he moved to second spot post an outstanding ton against Sri Lanka in Pallekele," it said.

Moreover, "he was also involved in a record partnership of 176 runs, the highest for any wicket in T20is, with Fakhar Zaman. Despite



the efforts and the five-run victory against the co-hosts, Pakistan couldn't qualify to the semi-final stage due to a lesser net run rate."

Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) Chairman Mohsin Naqvi congratulated Farhan on winning the ICC Player of the Month award.

A statement issued by the PCB quoted Naqvi as saying that Farhan's feat was a source of pride for Pakistan cricket and a reflection of his "hard work and professional approach". "I hope that he will maintain consistency in his performances," Naqvi was quoted as saying.



LHC sustains objection on plea against acquittal of PM Shehbaz, his sons in money laundering case

NEWS DESK: The Lahore High Court (LHC) on Tuesday sustained an objection on the maintainability of a petition filed against the acquittal of Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif and his sons in a Rs16bn money laundering case.

LHC Chief Justice Aalia Neelum heard the plea filed by a young lawyer as an "objection case". The office of the LHC's registrar had objected to the maintainability of the petition, questioning the locus standi (the right to bring a legal action to a court) to agitate the matter.

During the hearing, the chief justice asked the petitioner's counsel, Amir Saeed Rawn, how his client was an aggrieved party in the matter. The LHC chief justice noted that the Federal Investigation Agency (FIA), the prosecuting agency, had not filed any ap-

peal against the acquittal judgment of the trial court. To the court's query, the counsel said the decision was issued in December 2022 despite the availability of substantial evidence in the case. He alleged that the FIA had colluded with the accused to secure the acquittal from the trial court.

The counsel further contended that courts could be approached even with a delay in matters of public interest. However, Chief Justice Neelum upheld the objection raised by the registrar's office.

Legal experts say that an appeal against acquittal or conviction in criminal cases can only be filed by the prosecution or the defence. The FIA had booked PM Shehbaz and his sons — Hamza and Sulaiman Shehbaz — in November 2020 under Sections 419, 420, 468, 471, 34 and 109 of the Prevention of Corruption Act, read with Section 3/4 of the Anti-Money Laundering Act 2010.

In October 2022, a special court had acquitted PM Shehbaz and his son Hamza in the money laundering case, saying there was no probability of conviction even if the prosecution's evidence collected during the investigation was recorded. In July 2023, the trial court also acquitted Sulaiman.

The trial court had also ordered the Establishment Division secretary to initiate action against former adviser to the prime minister on accountability, Mirza Shahzad Akbar, and officials of the FIA for launching a frivolous and baseless prosecution against PM Shehbaz and other suspects in the case.

CERT warns 'hostile actors' could exploit supply chains to target national infrastructure

NEWS DESK: The National Computer Emergency Response Team (National CERT) on Tuesday issued a cybersecurity advisory warning that hostile actors may exploit supply chains to target critical national infrastructure, including power, banking, and defence systems. The advisory highlights that even minor lapses during the delivery of hardware and software could trigger large-scale system failures.

CERT cautioned that all hardware deliveries should be treated as potential security risks and subjected to strict inspection protocols. It further warned that unverified software updates could introduce hidden backdoors into the national digital infrastructure, posing long-term security threats.

The alert comes amid growing global concern over supply chain vulnerabilities, where state-sponsored cyber espionage has increasingly extended into logistics and manufacturing stages.

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The advisory also emphasised that securing supply chain security could lead to the complete paralysis of the country.

flagged vendors with unknown ownership structures as a significant risk factor, urging institutions to ensure transparency and due diligence in procurement processes. It noted that reliance on a single supplier could create systemic vulnerabilities, where a breach in one entity might disrupt entire sectors such as the national power grid or banking network.

Institutions have been directed to adopt tamper-proof mechanisms and tracking systems for transporting sensitive equipment. Additionally, organisations are required to promptly report suspicious network traffic and unusual software behaviour to relevant authorities.

National CERT has further instructed institutions to implement a zero-trust security model, ensuring that all devices are authenticated before being connected to networks. The advisory emphasised that neglecting supply chain security could lead to the complete paralysis

of critical national installations. The warning underscores the urgent need for strengthened cybersecurity frameworks as Pakistan's digital infrastructure continues to expand and integrate across sectors.

Earlier this month, multiple Pakistani television channels, websites and mobile applications came under coordinated cyberattacks. The main attack happened at the state-owned sat-

Pakistan stands 'ready, honoured' to host US-Iran talks, says PM Shehbaz

NEWS DESK: Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif said on Tuesday that Pakistan stood "ready and honoured" to host "meaningful and conclusive talks" between the US and Iran.

Pakistan welcomes and fully supports ongoing efforts to pursue dialogue to end the war in the Middle East, in the interest of peace and stability in the region and beyond," he said in a post on the social media platform X.

Subject to concurrence by the US and Iran, Pakistan stands ready and honoured to be the host to facilitate meaningful and conclusive talks for a comprehensive settlement of the ongoing conflict," he said.

PM Shehbaz's statement came shortly after the Foreign Office (FO) urged the media to refrain from speculation and await official announcements when asked about reports of Islamabad being a possible venue for talks between the US and Iranian representatives amid the ongoing Middle East conflict.

"Pakistan is always willing to host talks," he recalled that Pakistan had consistently advocated for dialogue and diplomacy to promote



peace and stability in the region. The developments came as several international media outlets, including Reuters and Axios, suggested that Islamabad could serve as a venue for potential direct talks between US and Iranian representatives in the coming days.

The ongoing conflict in the Middle East, which has entered its fourth week, began with the US and Israel launching attacks on Iran on February 28. The strikes also resulted in the assassination of then-supreme leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei.

On Monday, Pakistan took centre stage in a coordinated diplomatic push alongside Turkey and Egypt for de-escalation, as the trio appeared instrumental in securing a five-day pause of US plans to strike Iranian energy and power infrastructure, officials said, describing the effort as going beyond routine crisis management.

US President Donald Trump publicly announced the pause on strikes on Monday, claiming Washington had held "very good and productive conversations" with Tehran over the previous couple of days that could lead to a "complete and total resolution" of hostilities. The pause, however, remains conditional and limited to strikes on Iranian power plants and major energy assets, with fighting continuing across mul-

ti-ple fronts. Reporting by the Financial Times and Axios suggested that senior officials from the three countries separately engaged with US Special Envoy Steve Witkoff and Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi, relaying positions between the two sides.

The exchanges were indirect, with no direct contact reported between Washington and Tehran.

The scope of the backchannel discussions went beyond an immediate pause. Officials said the exchanges focused on de-escalation, reopening of the Strait of Hormuz, and the parameters of a broader end to the war.

On Monday, Iranian Foreign Ministry Spokesman Esmail Baghaei, while confirming that messages had been conveyed in recent days through several "friendly countries," said the Iranian response was centred on its "principled positions."

Iran also denied any direct or indirect negotiation with the Trump administration or Witkoff, framing the US announcement as an attempt to influence markets.

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'Two-strikes' rule for promotion deemed unlawful: Islamabad High Court

NEWS DESK: The Islamabad High Court has invalidated a statutory regulatory order (SRO) barring senior bureaucrats from promotion to BS-22 after two deferrals or rejections, reshaping promotion criteria for Pakistan's senior civil service.

Justice Raja Inaam Ameen Minhas, presiding over a cluster of writ petitions, declared the "Reconsideration Amendment" (SRO 253(1)/2025) as unconstitutional and "ultra vires" the parent statute, effectively reversing the recommendations of the 29th High Powered Selection Board (HPSB).

The legal battle centred on the amendment, notified on March 5, 2025, which stipulated that any officer considered and not recommended for promotion to the top-tier BS-22 grade on two occasions would be permanently ineligible for future consideration. The court found the provision "irrational" and "arbitrary" and "impermissible."

Justice Minhas noted that a deferral could occur for reasons unrelated to an officer's merit, such as an incomplete service record, being on training, or a temporary lack of vacancies.

By treating such procedural delays as equivalent to a finding of unsuitability, the rule imposed a "major penalty" without the due process guaranteed by the Constitution, the judgment said.

The ruling addressed seven petitions filed by senior BS-21 officers who were passed over for promotion. The case of M. Amir Zulfikar Khan, a veteran of the Police Service of Pakistan, was highlighted by the court as a "stark illustration of ir-

public service spirit. A major factor in the court's decision was the violation of natural justice, observing that officers were superseded without being informed of the specific reasons.

The judgement emphasised that while bureaucrats do not have an absolute right to promotion, they have an "indefeasible right to be fairly and lawfully considered."

The court also rejected the government's plea of "confidentiality" as the selection board's minutes, ruling that such secrecy cannot be used to shield decisions from judicial review.



Sindh govt on high alert as PMD forecasts another rain spell starting tomorrow

NEWS DESK: Sindh's Chief Secretary Asif Hyder Shah on Tuesday ordered all district administrations to remain on "high alert" in view of further expected rains in the province this week.

The Pakistan Meteorological Department (PMD) has predicted showers in parts of Sindh between March 25 and March 29, with occasional gaps.

Charing a meeting, the chief secretary directed the Sindh Provincial Disaster Management Authority (PDMA) to issue an immediate advisory on the situation.

All commissioners, deputy commissioners (DCs) and assistant commissioners participated in the meeting, which was attended virtually by most, and were directed to present in the field for the next seven days.

Noting the PMD's prediction of rainfall, Shah directed the PDMA to issue an advisory to the public about the situation and directed all relevant institutions to take preliminary measures to ensure full readiness for the upcoming spell of rain.

PDMA issues advisory

In Monday's statement, the PMD predicted rainfall and thunderstorms across the country from March 24 to March 30 with "occasional gaps".

Subsequently, the Sindh PDMA on Tuesday issued a province-wide alert warning of rain and strong winds across the coming days, urging authorities and the public to take precautionary measures.

PDMA Director General Salman Shah said several districts, in-

cluding Karachi, Thatta, Badin, Hyderabad, Sukkur, Dadu, Kashmore, Jacobabad and Larkana, could be affected by the weather system.

The PDMA directed its staff to remain on alert with necessary machinery in place to respond to any emergency situation. Authorities warned that strong winds and possible hailstorms could damage weak structures and solar panels.

Officials also cautioned that standing crops in various areas may suffer losses due to adverse weather conditions, while a drop in temperature is expected during the period.

Citizens were advised to avoid unnecessary travel, while tourists and commuters were urged to exercise caution. Farmers were also asked to take preventive measures to protect their crops.

The PDMA said all DCs and relevant departments have been instructed to remain on high alert and "advance arrangements" have been ensured to effectively deal with any emergency situation.

While voiding the "two-strikes" rule, the court upheld the "Chairman Amendment" (SRO 243(1)/2025). It ruled that Muhammad Asif Dur could lawfully chair the HPSB as he held the post of Federal Minister for Forestry, fulfilling the requirement for a "Federal Minister authorised by the Prime Minister".

The inclusion of parliamentarians Bilawal Bhutto Zardari and Karwanja Mubashir Asif for consultation was also declared valid.

The court issued several directives, ordering that the petitioners' cases be reconsidered by the HPSB based on "discernible criteria" and documentary evidence. Any adverse findings must be communicated to the officers within 14 days.

The government was also directed to assign M Amir Zulfikar Khan a posting appropriate to his rank within 30 days. As part of the relief, the court directed that Sohail Ali Khan, an officer of the Information Group, be considered for a "proforma promotion".

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