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QUETTA VOICE



CM Mir Sarfraz Bugti: Absenteeism in Balochistan Schools & Hospitals Falls Below 1%

Staff Reporter:

Quetta Chief Minister Mir Sarfraz Bugti has expressed satisfaction over the visible progress in Balochistan, saying that ongoing institutional reforms and better governance are finally delivering real improvements in public services.

Speaking on Thursday, the Chief Minister revealed that complaints about teachers not showing up at schools and doctors missing from hospitals have dropped sharply to less than one percent over the past three months.

"This is clear proof that our monitoring system and effective governance measures are working," he said in a post on X.

Mr Bugti called this development a "real and practical example of good governance."

He noted that, for the first time in the province's history, the longstanding and frustrating issue of staff absenteeism in education and health sectors is being addressed meaningfully.

The resulting improvement in education and health services has started restoring people's confidence in the government, he added.

He recalled that absenteeism

was once one of the top complaints raised by citizens during open courts (Dhullt kacheris). Thanks to a well-planned strategy, strict oversight, and swift administrative action, the situation has now largely been brought under control.

"Attendance in schools and hospitals has improved significantly, which is leading to better service delivery for the people," the Chief Minister said.

According to official figures shared by Mr Bugti, 412 open courts were held across Balochistan's 36 districts in the last nine months, receiving a total of 3,675 complaints. A large

number of these were related to closed facilities and staff absenteeism.

However, in March alone, out of 871 complaints, only four were about absenteeism — a strong indicator of how effective the government's reforms have been. The Chief Minister said this sharp decline shows that the administration is now responding to public grievances quickly and efficiently. With the absenteeism issue mostly resolved, citizens have begun raising other important service delivery matters, which the government is tackling proactively.

Mr Bugti specially appreci-

ated Chief Secretary Shakeel Qadir Khan and the entire administrative team for their dedication in implementing these reforms.

He highlighted that regular review meetings at the secretariat, divisional, and district levels have played a key role in achieving these results.

Reaffirming his government's commitment, the Chief Minister said the focus remains on making every school and hospital fully functional with staff present at their posts.

"Ensuring transparency and accountability in governance will continue to be our top priority," he added.

Islamabad airport becomes Pakistan's first to launch 5G services

NEWS DESK:

The Pakistan Airports Authority (PAA) announced on Thursday that 5G services had been launched at Islamabad International Airport, making it the first airport in Pakistan to offer such services. In a statement issued by the PAA, the launch of 5G connectivity at the airport was facilitated in collaboration with a private telecom company, providing passengers with ultra-fast internet and modern digital facilities. "The newly launched 5G services will enhance passengers' travel experience with high-speed connectivity and advanced digital amenities," said the PAA statement.



Pakistan recently sold 5G spectrum worth \$507 million in an auction aimed at boosting internet speeds. After the launch, telecom operators said they would initially launch 5G services in Islamabad and the provincial capitals, with plans to extend them to other areas of the country later. In total, the government had sold 480 MHz of spectrum, although it had originally targeted 597 MHz. Three telecom operators — Jazz, Zong, and Ufone — secured frequencies to roll out next-generation mobile services.

According to the Pakistan Telecommunication Authority (PTA), the auction resulted in the sale of two lots in the 700 MHz band, all five lots in the 2300 MHz band, all 19 lots in the 2600 MHz band, and 22 out of 28 lots in the 3500 MHz band, bringing the total spectrum sold to 480 MHz.

A day earlier, Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif said that the government was providing "all possible facilitation" to investors in the digital and telecom sectors, citing the recent 5G spectrum auction, during a meeting with VEON Group CEO Kuan Kerzoglio.

Terzoglio also appreciated the government's efforts to enhance transparency and improve the investment climate, saying Pakistan had moved "swiftly" towards achieving a digital economy and rolling out 5G services.

Flash Floods Hit Over 30 Districts in Balochistan as Heavy Rains Continue

NEWS DESK:

Torrential rains combined with strong winds, thunder, and hail have created emergency-like conditions in more than 30 districts of Balochistan during the last 24 hours. The sudden downpour has led to flash flooding, damaged roads and homes, and caused major disruptions in communication and transportation.

Heavy rainfall lashed several areas including Quetta, Khuzdar, Kalat, Lasbela, Hub, Gwadar, Qila Abdullah, Zhob, Hamai, Loralai, Kohlu, Mastung, Sherani, and Ziarat on Wednesday, turning low-lying zones into waterlogged patches and triggering fast-moving floods in seasonal streams.

Young Girl Loses Life to Lightning

Tragedy struck in Dhadhar town when a 12-year-old girl was fatally struck by lightning. The bolt also damaged a local electricity transformer, adding to the power-related problems in the area. In many places, mobile networks and internet services went down, cutting off communication between remote regions and the rest of the province.

In Kachhi district, surging waters from the Nari River and



Tasleem Akhtar's house swept away by flash floods in Quetta Nawan Killi. Photo Quetta Voice

nearby hills tormented flooded Ghazi village. Eight houses were completely washed away while ten others suffered serious damage. Local crops were also ruined, forcing families to seek higher ground independently.

Timely Rescues Save Lives

Rescue teams remained ac-

tive across the province. In Qila Abdullah district, authorities successfully pulled 15 passengers, including women and children, from a stranded mini-coach trapped in rising floodwaters. Two more vehicles were rescued from the Machka stream. Thankfully, no one was injured in these incidents.

A supply truck was also swept away near Gulistan, but all occupants remained safe.

Roads Closed, Travel Restrictions Enforced

Major routes, including the Quetta-Chaman highway, have been badly affected by high water levels. Several roads linking Hamai to Quetta, Sibi, and Punjab are now impassable. Passenger vehicles have been left stranded in seasonal rivers in Pishin and Toba Achakzai.

Local administrations have banned all vehicle movement near nullahs and streams. Section 144 already in effect in vulnerable districts, and police have been instructed to stay on high alert.

Weather Alert Extended

The Pakistan Meteorological Department has issued a fresh warning, stating that heavy rainfall, windstorms, and hail may continue across Balochistan until April 3, 2026. Northeastern and

central districts, including Zhob, Sherani, Sibi, Kohlu, Qila Abdullah, Mastung, Kalat, Khuzdar, and Lasbela, face the highest risk of further flash flooding in hill torrents.

Officials have also cautioned that gusty winds and lightning could damage weak infrastructure such as electricity poles, billboards, and solar panels.

Government on High Alert

In response to the situation, Deputy Commissioner of Kachhi district chaired an emergency meeting with all concerned departments. A detailed contingency plan was prepared focusing on evacuation of low-lying areas, constant monitoring of embankments, and keeping rescue teams and equipment ready around the clock.

The Provincial Disaster Management Authority (PDMA) has strongly advised residents to stay away from rivers, streams, and low-lying zones and to avoid all non-essential travel until the weather improves.

Authorities continue to monitor water levels in dams and streams while appealing to the public to remain cautious and follow official instructions to prevent further loss of life and property.

QUETTA VOICE

Editor: Asim Khan

Urgent Need for a Modern Examination Hall at BPSC



Editorial

The recent high-level meeting at Governor House between Balochistan Governor Sheikh Jaffar Khan Mandokhail and Balochistan Public Service Commission (BPSC) Chairman Justice (R) Mehta Kalash Nath Kohli has once again exposed a long-standing injustice faced by thousands of young aspirants in the province: the absence of a modern, spacious examination hall.

Governor Mandokhail described this infrastructural shortfall as a "major gap" that directly hampers the commission's ability to conduct competitive written examinations and interviews with the dignity, efficiency, and fairness they deserve. In a province where youth unemployment is already a crisis, forcing candidates into cramped, outdated, or makeshift venues during high-stakes tests is simply unacceptable. It undermines exam

integrity, creates unnecessary stress, disadvantages those traveling from remote districts, and sends a discouraging message about how seriously the state values merit-based opportunity.

The BPSC is not just another department—it is the gateway through which competent, honest, and capable officers enter public service. These officers shape governance, deliver development projects, maintain security, and implement policies that affect every citizen of Balochistan. When the very institution responsible for selecting them is starved of basic facilities, the entire chain of public administration suffers.

Successive governments have allowed this neglect to persist for years, prioritizing other expenditures while leaving the BPSC to struggle with financial constraints and outdated infrastructure. This is not merely an admin-

istrative oversight; it is a betrayal of the province's talented youth who pin their hopes on transparent, merit-driven recruitment.

The Governor's emphasis on urgent financial support, modern infrastructure, and institutional reforms must now move beyond words. The provincial government should immediately prioritize and fund the construction of a state-of-the-art examination and interview complex at BPSC.

For the first time in the history of Balochistan, 5000 teachers were appointed through national testing service (NTS), launching an effective campaign against growing cheating during examinations and introducing the education management and information system to ensure the presence of teachers in schools.

Track record shows, teachers were always recruited on political basis with no merit and transpar-

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



Improving the education sector has always been the hallmark of all successive governments in Balochistan. Every government has allocated substantial funds to improve the education sector and quality of education to enable students to compete on national and international level. Health and education, all successive governments declared their priorities.

Former Chief Minister, Dr. Abdul Malik Baloch led nationalist government allocated around 24 percent budget to bring the province at par with other parts of the country. Dr. Baloch's government also declared emergency and announced implementation of article 25-A of the constitution to enroll all out of school children in Balochistan. The number of out of school children in Balochistan is currently over 1 mil-

lion. However, independent sources put the number high as compared to the official data. There are conflicting figures about the exact number of out of school children in Balochistan.

To be precise, positive strides were made during Dr. Malik Baloch led government to improve the education sector.

For the first time in the history of Balochistan, 5000 teachers were appointed through national testing service (NTS), launching an effective campaign against growing cheating during examinations and introducing the education management and information system to ensure the presence of teachers in schools.

Track record shows, teachers were always recruited on political basis with no merit and transpar-

ency in the recruitment process. This has ruined the entire educational sector. Dr. Malik Baloch, the then adviser on education Sardar Raza Muhammad Bareech led rallies against cheating to create awareness among the people regarding the course of cheating in educational institutions.

After the removal of Sardar Raza Bareech as an adviser on education and transfers of senior bureaucrats Ghulam Ali Baloch and Saboor Kakar, no effective step was taken to improve the quality of education in Balochistan.

Now again the portfolio of education has been awarded to Sardar Yar Muhammad Rind who belongs to Pakistan Tehrik e Insaaf (PTI). Mr. Rind has made announcements to bring what he claimed

revolutionary changes. However, improvement in education sector, enrolling out of school children in schools and improving quality of education needs a multi-pronged strategy. Senior bureaucrat Ghulam Ali Baloch who had already served as secretary education has again been posted.

Mr. Baloch is taking a number of initiatives to improve schooling and trace out ghost schools and teaches across the province.

However, political speed breakers appear to be major obstacles in his way.

Despite being the poorest province of Pakistan, Balochistan spends over 70 billion rupees on primary, middle, secondary and higher education in the province.

The province spends thousands of rupees per month on a student. Unfortu-

nately, neither the quality nor the education standard meet national standards what to speak about international standards. Poor quality of education is the result of poor capacity of teachers that needs to be improved to compete on national and international level.

The Balochistan government has announced to enroll 70000 kids in government run schools in the province. However, ground realities negate claims of the provincial government. So far, the government has not been able to mobilize the civil society, media, political parties and tribesmen to make sure maximum enrollment of kids in educational institutions of the province. Coordinated efforts and combined strategy by all segments of society can ensure implementation of article 25-A of the Constitution.

Taftan border and Balochistan Govt's response

Quetta Voice

Analysis

The sudden arrival of thousands of Zaireen at Pak-Iran border Taftan posed a serious challenge for government of Balochistan to make sure their screening and conduct medical tests in the aftermath of outbreak of COVID-19 in neighboring Iran. The federal government closed the border with Iran at Taftan on February 23rd to halt the spread of deadly corona virus.

All of a sudden over 4,000 Zaireen, students, tourists and traders gathered at Taftan, Pakistan's bordering town with Iran. The poorly equipped health officials that too less in number tried to conduct screening and tests of those entered from Iran. However, many managed to flee from the administration and used their own means of communication to reach Quetta on way to their home provinces. The drivers were paid heavy fares by those fleeing the quarantine centers at Taftan.

Perhaps, in the beginning, the Balochistan government and Islamabad did not realize the gravity of situation. A wind-blown tent quarantine center was established to keep the



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

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

Though, it was imperative to install laboratory soon after

the closure of the border to make sure proper screening and diagnosis of the people.

Apart from corona virus, the Balochistan government appeared to be concerned about the security of Zaireen as well.

In the past, Zaireen were fre-

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

The Chief Minister Balochistan, Jam Kamal Khan has been closely monitoring the

unfolding situation and all the time directing the concerned quarters to halt the spread of novel corona virus.

However, loopholes in the system caused the outbreak of COVID-19 in the country.

Although, the Chief Minister issued statements, precautionary measures through print, elec-

tronic and shares videos on social media to sensitize the people about the deadly virus.

Nevertheless, the virus penetrated and made its way from Taftan to Sukkur prompting the Chief Minister Sindh Syed Murad Ali Shah to say that Zaireen were not properly screened at Pak-Iran border

Taftan.

Opposition political parties in Balochistan in general and the Balochistan National Party ideological, Sanaulah Baloch have strongly criticized the Jam Kamal led government for what they call its failure and incompetence to contain the corona virus.

Political parties, members of civil society and legal fraternity had also objected over the establishment of quarantine center at Mian Ghundi area of Quetta. They feared spread of deadly virus after establishment of center near the city rather they demanded of the government to shift the Zaireen to their home provinces directly from Taftan.

To be precise, the virus has already penetrated and now it is time for all political parties from left to right and religious to nationalists to join their hands to contain its spread.

The government needs to take all stakeholders including political parties, media, civil society and lawyers to evolve a combined strategy in the province to tackle the situation. It is not alone the job of government rather every individual to play his/her role to contain the virus before it is too late.

Nasa launches 4 astronauts on world's first crewed lunar mission in half a century

NEWS DESK:Four astronauts blasted off from Florida on Wednesday on Nasa's Artemis II mission, a high-stakes voyage around the moon that marks the United States' boldest step yet toward returning humans to the lunar surface later this decade in a race with China.

Nasa's Space Launch System (SLS) rocket, topped with its Orion crew capsule, roared to life just before sunset at the agency's Kennedy Space Centre in Cape Canaveral, Florida, carrying its debut crew — three US astronauts and a Canadian astronaut — into Earth orbit.

The 32-story-tall space vehicle thundered into clear skies, trailing a towering column of thick, white vapour.

Nasa Administrator Jared Isaacman said the launch was an opening act for subsequent missions that would include construction of a moon base to support the enduring presence we're trying to create on the surface.

If the mission proceeds as planned, the



Nasa's Artemis II Space Launch System rocket carrying the Orion spacecraft lifts off from Launch Complex 39B at Kennedy Space Centre on April 1, 2026 in Cape Canaveral, Florida. — AFP/US

crew consisting of Nasa astronauts Reid Wiseman, Victor Glover and Christina Koch, plus Canadian Space Agency astronaut Jeremy Hansen, will fly around the moon and back in their nearly 10-day expedition, putting the spacecraft through its paces while venturing deeper into space than humans have ever gone.

The mission is the debut crewed test flight in the Artemis programme, successor to Nasa's Cold War-era Apollo project, and the world's first to send astronauts in the vicinity of the moon, out of Earth's orbit, in 53 years.

Nasa's Artemis II Space Launch System rocket carrying the Orion spacecraft lifts off from Launch Complex 39B at Kennedy Space Centre on April 1, 2026 in Cape Canaveral, Florida. — AFP/US

on April 1, 2026 in Cape Canaveral, Florida. — AFP/US

this decade, after one more crewed mission around the moon. Nasa is targeting 2028 for Artemis IV, a first-ever landing of astronauts on the moon's South Pole, seeking to beat China's planned crewed mission to the same lunar region as early as 2030.

The last time astronauts walked on the moon — a feat so far achieved only by the United States — was the final Apollo mission in 1972.

"For all humanity" After nearly three years of training, the crew is the first to fly in Nasa's Artemis programme, a multi-billion-dollar venture established in 2017 to build up a long-term US presence on the moon over the next decade and beyond, serving as a stepping stone to eventual missions to Mars.

Minutes before liftoff, Canadian astronaut Hansen, strapped inside the gumdrop-shaped Orion capsule, told mission control in Houston: "This is Jeremy, we are going for all humanity."

19 migrants found dead by Italian agency

NEWS DESK:The bodies of 19 migrants were recovered from an inflatable boat south of the island of Lampedusa on Wednesday by the Italian coastguard, a spokesman said.

Fifty-eight other people, including five children, were found alive during the rescue in the early hours of Wednesday and transported to Lampedusa, according to coastguard spokesman Roberto D'Arrigo.

Lampedusa mayor Filippo Mannino said seven people, including two children, were being treated in hospital for hypothermia and hydro-toxication from hydro-

carbon fumes". The coastguard rescue was staged some 135 kilometres off the Italian island inside Libyan search-and-rescue waters.

The boat was spotted drifting by an Italian reconnaissance plane on Tuesday but there were no Libyan coastguard or civilian ships in the area to assist, D'Arrigo said. A decision was taken to send an Italian coastguard vessel from Lampedusa. D'Arrigo said some of the migrants may have died while being transported back to Lampedusa in particularly rough weather conditions with waves up to seven metres high.

"We are deeply saddened by yet another tragic incident in the Mediterranean," the UN refugee agency said on X, adding that its representatives were "providing immediate support to the survivors".

English Channel. Two migrants died on Wednesday while trying to cross the Channel to Britain, French maritime authorities said. Rescue services responded to eight people in distress following an attempt to board a vessel on the northern French coast, according to the maritime prefecture for the Channel and the North Sea. The two dead were a Sudanese man and an Afghan man, according to a police source. Authorities also took a woman to hospital, though her condition is not life-threatening. Five survivors were taken into custody, the police source added.

The eight were among around 30 people waiting to board the boat, spotted by French authorities on Wednesday morning.

Croatian river border emergency crews on Wednesday rescued around 30 migrants stranded in marshland near a river while crossing the country's border with Bosnia, officials said.

Amid fears some may have died during the crossing, searches continued through the area, but no bodies were immediately found.



UK to host talks with 35 countries on reopening Strait of Hormuz

NEWS DESK:Britain will host talks on Thursday aimed at forming a coalition of countries to explore ways to reopen the Strait of Hormuz after US President Donald Trump said securing the vital waterway was a problem for other nations to resolve.

British foreign minister Yvette Cooper will chair the virtual meeting of about 35 countries, including France, Germany, Italy, Canada and the United Arab Emirates around midday in London to explore ways to restore freedom of navigation in the area.

The United States is not due to attend. The meeting takes place after Trump said in an address to his nation on Wednesday evening that the Strait could open "naturally", "and it was the responsibility of countries that rely on the waterway to ensure it was open.

Focus on mines, protecting tankers. Iran has effectively shut down the Strait, which carries about a fifth of the world's total oil consumption, in retaliation for US-Israeli strikes, which began in late February. Reopening the waterway has become a priority for governments "around the world as energy prices soar.

But concerns about the impact of the rising cost of energy on the global economy have prompted them to try to form a coalition to explore ways to reopen the waterway "once a ceasefire is agreed, according to European officials. The talks on Thursday will be the first formal meeting of the group before more detailed discussions involving military planners in the coming weeks, the officials said. One European official said it was expected that any first phase of "any plan "for reopening the Strait would be

on ensuring the waterway was free of mines followed by a second phase to protect tankers crossing the area. Starmer said reopening the waterway would "not be easy" and would require "a united front" of military strength and diplomatic activity" alongside working with the "shipping industry.

Trump said on Wednesday that other countries that the Strait of Hormuz should "build up some delayed course" and "just grab it". "Just make it, protect it, use it for yourselves," he said.

Iran army chief warns 'no enemy troops should survive' any US ground invasion

NEWS DESK:Iran's army chief warned on Thursday that "no enemy troops should survive" if the US attempts a ground invasion. "In the event the enemy attempts a ground operation, no one should survive," Amir Hatami said in comments carried by state broadcaster IRIB.

Hatami said the military leadership has instructed operational commands to closely monitor movements by the US forces and respond with utmost precision. "It is necessary to monitor the enemy's movements and actions with utmost precision and extreme caution, moment by moment, and to implement plans to counter its attack methods at the appropriate time," he said.

The spectre of war must be removed from our country, and security must prevail for all, as it is unacceptable for places to be safe while our people are in danger," he added.

Earlier, Iranian Foreign Ministry spokesman Esmail Baghai said Iran will take "necessary actions" to prevent the Strait of Hormuz from being exploited for "military aggression" against the country, according to Tasnim News Agency.

Baqaei also said Thursday that a US missile landed on a sports hall in Lamerd, Fars, killed 21 civilians on Feb. 28, including teen-

agers, denouncing the attack as a "despicable war crime." "The American new #PrSM missile ... struck a crowded sports hall filled with innocent teenagers," he said in a statement on X.

Baqaei accused the US of deliberately targeting civilians and described the attack as a "despicable war crime." According to visual evidence examined by the New York Times and weapons experts, a newly developed US missile struck civilian sites in southern Iran, targeting a sports hall and an adjacent elementary school near a military compound in the city of Lamerd.

An analysis of videos and photos from the scene suggested the weapon used was a Precision Strike Missile, a short-range ballistic missile developed by the US Army.

Iran's military response after Trump's address, Trump said in a televised speech on Wednesday night that the US military had "successfully accomplished its goals in Iran, but offered no clear timeline for ending the monthlong war and vowed to bomb the country back into the Stone Ages." But he declined to lay out a concrete plan to wind down the war, now in its fifth week, beyond saying that the US would finish the job "very fast." "We have all the cards," Trump said from the White House in his first prime-time address since the US and Israel

launched the war on February 28. "They have none." He glossed over some major unresolved issues, such as the status of Iran's enriched uranium and access through the Strait of Hormuz, a conduit for global oil supplies which Iran has effectively closed. The Strait, he said, would open "naturally" "once the war ended." Trump said he expects the war to continue for another two to three weeks but believes the conflict is approaching an end.

In response, a spokesperson for Iran's Khatam-al-Anbeya Central Headquarters, cited by the Fars news agency, said US and Israeli assessments of Iran's military strength are flawed.

Pakistan, seven Muslim nations condemn Israel's death penalty law for Palestinians

NEWS DESK:Pakistan, along with seven other Muslim countries, strongly condemned on Thursday Israel's enactment of a law imposing the death penalty in the occupied West Bank, describing it as part of "increasingly discriminatory, escalating Israeli practices" against Palestinians.

A joint statement issued by the foreign ministers of Pakistan, Egypt, Jordan, the United Arab Emirates, Indonesia, Turkey, Saudi Arabia, and Qatar said the countries "strongly condemn the Israeli occupying power's enactment of a law in its parliament (Knesset), that allows the imposition of the death penalty in the occupied West Bank and its de facto application against Palestinians," read the statement shared by the Foreign Office on X.

Israel's parliament passed the law on Monday, making the death penalty a default "sen-

tence for Palestinians convicted in military courts applying to Palestinians in the Israeli-occupied West Bank would also be able to impose the death penalty, with the defence minister having the right to submit an opinion to the judicial panel.

The measure includes provisions requiring sentencing within 90 days with no right to clemency. Under the bill, the death penalty can be imposed without a request from the prosecution, unanimity will not be required for a death sentence, and the decision will be made by a simple majority.

course that denies the inalienable rights and the very existence of the Palestinian people in the Occupied Palestinian Territory." They described the legislation as "a dangerous escalation, particularly given its discriminatory application against Palestinian prisoners," adding that "such measures risk further exacerbating tensions and undermining regional stability."



Iran's army chief Amir Hatami speaking at a press conference in Tehran, Iran, on Thursday. — AFP/US



Soldiers in military gear standing in a line, possibly during a training exercise or a security operation. — AFP/US

Abbasi pays tribute for successful operation against terrorist in KP

ISLAMABAD (INP): Federal Minister for Railways Muhammad Hanif Abbasi paid rich tribute to the security forces for their successful operations against terrorists in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. In a statement, the minister lauded the elimination of 13 militants during operations conducted in Bannu and Bara, calling it a clear reflection of the

professionalism and operational capability of the security forces. He said that the unwavering resolve of the armed forces in the fight against terrorism is a matter of pride for the entire nation. "The whole nation stands behind its security forces and takes pride in their courage and sacrifices," he added. Hanif Abbasi reaffirmed that anti-terror

elements would be confronted with full force on every front, emphasizing that Pakistan remains determined to root out terrorism in all its forms. He said that the bravery and sacrifices rendered by the security personnel are unforgettable and will always be remembered with honor. The minister underscored that the nation remains united and resolute in its commitment to eliminate terrorism completely.

He also assured that the sacrifices made for the peace and stability of the country would not go in vain. Highlighting national unity, Abbasi said that all state institutions are on the same page in the ongoing fight against terrorism and together they will ensure lasting peace in the country.



ISLAMABAD: Chairman Senate, Syed Yousuf Raza Gillani in a meeting with Lt.Gen. (R) Nazir Ahmed, Chairman N.A.B at Parliament House.

Senate Deputy Chairman reaffirmed his commitment to Balochistan development, welfare

ISLAMABAD (INP): Deputy Chairman of the Senate Syed Ali Khan Nasar Wednesday, reaffirmed his commitment to the development and welfare of Balochistan, saying that the province's progress and the well-being of its people remain his top priorities.

Speaking at a ceremony in Quetta, Sardar Akhtar Khan, Chairman of the Balochistan Tribal Union, presented an honorary shield to Syed Ali Khan Nasar in recognition of his public service and efforts for the province's development.

The event was attended by legal professionals, social figures, and youth representatives who praised his contributions to Balochistan.

Expressing gratitude, the Deputy Chairman said the honour rests on the trust of Balochistan's people. He vowed to continue working for the province's development, youth empowerment, and promotion of national unity.

He also noted that the government and state institutions are committed to advancing Balochistan, using all available resources and thanked the organisers for their support.

During his visit, he met with Chairman Quetta Development Foundation Bismillah Nasar, senior advocate Sohail Ahmed Rajput, Afhan Ahmed Kakar, and other social leaders. They discussed development, public welfare, and the province's key challenges, while appreciating his ongoing efforts to address Balochistan's challenges. Youth members of the Quetta Development Foundation presented him with a bouquet, expressing confidence in his leadership.

PMDC changes admission policy for medical colleges

ISLAMABAD (INP): In a major reform, the Pakistan Medical and Dental Council (PM&DC) has decided to overhaul the MDCAT examination schedule to reduce dependence on coaching academies. The new policy will be implemented from the next academic cycle.

The PM&DC has announced a significant change in the medical college admission policy, with MDCAT exams to be conducted shortly after intermediate exams. Under the new decision, MDCAT tests across the country will begin just six days after the FSC examinations.

Federal Health Minister Mustafa Kamal said the move was taken on the special instructions of the prime minister. He added that the primary objective is to eliminate

Cop martyred, two bandits killed in Lahore CCD encounter

LAHORE (INP): A Crime Control Department (CCD) constable embroiled in a shootout with two suspected robbers was killed in an exchange of fire in Lahore.

According to details, a CCD team, after receiving credible information, CCD team raided a house to arrest hiding outlaws in the Kahna area of Lahore. To see the raiding team, the accused opened fire indiscriminately from inside the house. Police engaged them effectively and killed two outlaws.

In the operation, a policeman was martyred, and three others sustained injuries, who have been admitted to the hospital. The martyred constable was identified as Abdul Razaq Dogar and the two dacoits were identified as Fahad Bilal and Usman. Police further revealed that the wife of Fahad Bilal, Rabia was also a proclaimed offender. The husband and wife are involved in dozens of criminal activities in Rawalpindi, Lahore and Islamabad. The main accused, Fahad Bilal, was wanted by the police in more than seven cases. Three other policemen were also injured in the shootouts, whereas accomplices of the dead bandits escaped during the encounter. According to police, a CCD team on information about the hiding of dacoits in a house contacted a raid in the area. The dead robbers were wanted in multiple cases of heinous crimes, including robbery. Police have launched a manhunt for the fleeing suspects.

Chinese Language Hub opens in Islamabad to mark 75 Years of China-Pak ties

ISLAMABAD (INP): As China and Pakistan celebrate 75 years of diplomatic relations, a step forward in educational cooperation was taken with the launch of the Islamabad-based Zhuyuan Academy, an institution dedicated to advancing Chinese language education and HSK proficiency training across the country.

The event, titled "Celebrating the 75th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between China and Pakistan, in a new era of HSK Chinese language learning" was jointly organized by the Pakistan Chinese Education Association, Jiangxi University of Science and Technology, and the local Smart School, China Economic Net reported on Wednesday.

The ceremony, held in a hybrid format, brought together education leaders, heads of institutions and frontline educators from both countries and marked a milestone in institutionalizing Chinese language learning in Pakistan.

At the core of the newly established Zhuyuan Academy is a commitment to systematize HSK Chinese proficiency test preparation. The institution aims to provide professional, comprehensive and efficient Chinese language training for Pakistani students to master the language, ensuring that learners are well-equipped to meet international standards.

By focusing on structured training modules aligned with HSK requirements, the academy also seeks to address the growing demand for certified Chinese language skills in trade, industry and academic exchanges.

Beyond test preparation, the initiative is designed to build a localized Chinese education system tailored to the unique characteristics of Pakistani students.

CM Maryam takes notice of electricity suspension at Lahore hospital

LAHORE (INP): Punjab Chief Minister Maryam Nawaz on Wednesday took notice of the suspension of electricity during surgery as the doctors have to perform the operation through phone's light at Services Hospital in Lahore.

The Chief Minister sought a complete and comprehensive report about the incident from the health department. Earlier, Chief Minister Maryam Nawaz has ordered action under the Punjab Employees Efficiency, Discipline and Accountability (Peeda) Act against those medical staff involved in the video incident at Lady Willingdon Hospital, Lahore.

Show-cause notices have been issued to responsible senior administrative officials, while a formal letter has also been sent to the Secretary Health Azmat Mahmood has sought written explanations within seven days while Secretary Law Asif Bilal Lodhi and Secretary Local Government Mian Shaukel Ahmed have been appointed as hearing officers.

According to a

handout, the health department has decided to take action against Dr. Tayyaba, Dr. Maham, Dr. Zainab, Dr. Ayesha, and Dr. Essa for recording a patient's video during surgery.

Additionally, proceedings under the Peeda Act have been initiated against former MS Dr. Farah, HOD Dr. Uzma, Senior Consultant Anaesthesia Dr. Muneer, Senior Registrar Dr. Rutaba, Dr. Munazza, and Senior Woman Medical Officer Dr. Dur-o-Aram on the CM's directive.

The medical superintendent, head of the department and other senior doctors have been charged with negligence, administrative lapses, and failure of oversight, it said. Secretary Health Azmat Mahmood has sought written explanations within seven days while Secretary Law Asif Bilal Lodhi and Secretary Local Government Mian Shaukel Ahmed have been appointed as hearing officers.

Pakistan's agricultural exports to China gain momentum as cotton and sesame seed demand on rise

BEIJING (INP): Pakistan's agricultural exports to China recorded steady growth in the first two months of 2026, with cotton yarn and sesame seeds emerging as key contributors.

China Economic Net reported quoting the latest data from the General Administration of Customs of China (GACC). During January-February 2026, Pakistan's cotton-related exports to China reached \$74.63 million, marking a 3 percent increase compared to \$71.63 million in the same period of 2025.

The growth reflects sustained demand from China's textile sector. In January-February of 2026, exports of uncombed cotton yarn (with cotton content above 85 percent) exceeded \$18.16 to Fujian Province, followed by Zhejiang Province with \$9.78 million as per data from GACC. Additional consignments to Guangdong and Anhui added several million dollars more, underscoring strong and geographically diverse demand from major textile-producing regions.

Sesame seed exports also demonstrated solid performance, with total shipments surpassing \$14.07 million during the two months. A major consignment to Anhui Province was valued at approximately \$4.59 million, followed by exports of approximately \$4 million to Beijing and \$2.48 million to Fujian, along with additional volumes to Shandong and

Beijing, China's Customs data showed. These figures highlight China's increasing reliance on Pakistan as a supplier of oilseeds for food processing and edible oil production.

M u h a m m a d Imran, Trade and Investment Counsellor at Pakistan's Consulate in Guangzhou, told China Economic Net that Southern China has seen continued growth in tropical fruit processing, juice production, and ready-to-drink beverage manufacturing, fuelling demand for products like Guoqing, Guangxi, and Fujian are home to major processing hubs for bananas, pineapples, lychees, and other tropical fruits.

These facilities require stable supplies of complementary ingredients, including Pakistani rice, sesame seeds, and spices used in flavor formulations and packaged food products.

Industry reports indicate that processed fruit and beverage production in these provinces increased by approximately 8-10 percent year-on-year in early 2026, supporting demand for agricultural imports.

Industry analysts note that the continued rise in cotton yarn exports aligns with the needs of China's large-scale textile manufacturing industry.

At the same time, growing sesame seed imports are supported by rising demand in China's food sector, particularly in edible oils and processed products, reinforcing the role of agriculture in strengthening bilateral trade ties.



ISLAMABAD: Federal Minister for Education and Professional Training Dr. Khalid Maqbool Siddiqui attended Convocation Ceremony at Islamabad Model College for Girls (PG).

Rape survivors struggle to access justice despite legal reforms, new report finds

KARACHI (INP): Reforms to expand Pakistan's sexual violence laws, increase penalties, and improve procedures have not translated into better justice or protection for survivors, finds a new report by Equality Now.

Legal Response to Sexual Violence in Pakistan: Challenges in Enforcement and Access to Justice reveals how poor implementation, long delays in investigations and trials, and a legal out-of-court "compromises" are just some of the factors contributing to a distastefully low 0.5% rape conviction rate. Cases are undermined by flawed evidence collection and a shortage of public prosecutors. Victim-blaming is common, with police, prosecutors and courts frequently applying out-

dated and narrow interpretations of rape and consent. Survivors also struggle to access legal aid, psychosocial care, and safe spaces. Ineffective victim and witness protection. Women and girls from marginalized communities, including Christian and Hindu groups, face higher risks of sexual harassment, abduction and forced religious conversion, including through child marriage. Women with disabilities are reported to be up to three times more likely to experience sexual violence, with their agreement, physical evidence of violence is not needed to prove rape, and survivor testimony alone can be sufficient to secure a conviction. Despite this, authorities commonly rely on evidence of injury or resistance, and there re-

welcome changes, it needs now to build on those with effective enforcement. The priority now is consistent legal implementation enabled by better resourcing, training and accountability. Gaps in laws that leave women and girls unprotected must be closed and state support services improved so that all survivors can receive the justice they are entitled to.

Rape in Pakistani law is based on the widespread consensus that sexual violence investigations are weak, insufficient resources undermine the collection, preservation and analysis of evidence. Police rely heavily on medical verification, such as DNA, and overlook other important forensic and non-forensic evidence.

Balochistan Officials Discuss Flood Situation in Duki, Immediate Relief Measures Ordered

QUETTA: Parliamentary Secretary for Forests Sardar Masood Luni met with Principal Secretary to the Chief Minister Imran Zarkoon to discuss the recent flood situation in Duki and surrounding areas.



During the meeting, both officials reviewed the overall situation, damages caused by heavy rains and flooding, and the immediate challenges faced by affected communities.

Sardar Masood Luni highlighted the hardships faced by residents, emphasizing the urgent need for government intervention and relief efforts. Taking serious notice of the situation, Imran Zarkoon directed the Director General of PDMA

Governor Mandokhail Praises BRSP Expansion, Emphasizes Women Empowerment and Sustainable Development

QUETTA: Governor Jaffar Khan Mandokhail has lauded the Balochistan Rural Support Program (BRSP) for expanding its operations to 36 districts across Balochistan, calling it a historic milestone and a testament to the organization's commitment to uplifting remote and underdeveloped areas.

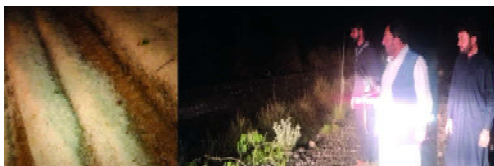


He expressed these views while addressing a briefing on the performance of BRSP, attended by Member of Provincial Assembly Haji Barkat Rind, Principal Secretary to the Governor Abdul Nasir Dautani, BRSP Chief Executive Officer Dr Tahir Rasheed, Senior Manager Naimatullah Miri, and Manager Ibrahim Alvi.

Jaffar Khan Mandokhail emphasized the importance of women's participation in all development initiatives, stating that inclusive growth is essential for sustainable progress. He also highlighted the launch of a Center of Excellence in Renewable Energy at BUITEMS, terming it a major step toward long-term energy solutions. He further noted that expanding the livestock sector to the union council level could prove to be a

Heavy Rains and Hailstorm Disrupt Life in Harnai, Authorities Launch Relief and Restoration Efforts

HARNAI: Torrential rains and severe hailstorms have brought life to a standstill in Harnai and surrounding areas, triggering flash floods that have cut off road links with Quetta and caused significant financial losses to local farmers.



Amid the crisis, the provincial government and district administration have mobilized relief efforts under the supervision of Deputy Commissioner Arshad Hussain Jamali, with restoration work currently underway. In response to the emergency situation, Additional Deputy Commissioner Muhammad Saleem Tareen and SDO Irrigation Syed Asif Shah Bukhari conducted a detailed inspection of

Watt Bund. Officials reported that although a low-level flood flow is passing through the area, unprecedented hailstorms have severely damaged orchards and standing crops, leading to heavy losses for local farmers. The provincial government has assured that it will not leave the people of Harnai alone during this difficult time. On the special directives of the Chief Minister, authorities are actively working to provide financial assistance and compensate for damages. Arshad Hussain Jamali is personally overseeing relief operations, with efforts focused on reopening blocked roads through heavy machinery and delivering timely assistance to affected farmers. Despite the widespread disruption caused by the natural disaster, swift action by the government and district administration has provided a ray of hope to the affected communities to ensure a quick recovery in the district.

DC Kech Urges Banks to Strengthen CSR Role for Public Welfare and District Development

TURBAT: Deputy Commissioner Kech Yasir Iqbal Dashti chaired an important meeting of bank managers at the DC Office in Turbat to discuss enhancing the role of financial institutions in public welfare initiatives across

more effective and impactful for the people of Kech District. Addressing the participants, Yasir Iqbal Dashti urged bank managers to actively utilize Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) initiatives be directed toward key sectors such as education, healthcare, clean drinking water, and other essential services to ensure direct relief for the public. The Deputy Commissioner further assured that the district administration will

within their jurisdiction to contribute to district development and address public issues. He emphasized that CSR funds should

tend full cooperation to banks in implementing welfare projects in a transparent and efficient manner. The meeting con-



cluded with a shared commitment from all participants to work collaboratively for the overall development and prosperity of Kech District, ensuring improved living standards for the local population.

Table with 7 columns: S.No, Description of Works, and ECOST. It lists various development projects and their estimated costs.

Quetta Commissioner Launches Large-Scale Tree Plantation Drive to Boost Environment and Combat Climate Change

QUETTA: Commissioner Quetta Division Shahzaib Khan Kakar chaired a meeting to promote tree plantation across the mountains and ridges surrounding Quetta, aiming to enhance environmental sustainability.

trees and plants planted in various locations. The meeting was also informed that Phase III and Phase IV of the plantation campaign will begin in the coming months, focusing on eastern mountainous areas.



The meeting was attended by representatives from the Forest, Agriculture, and Environment departments, along with Divisional Director Development Zahoor Ahmed and Assistant Commissioner (Political) Kaleemullah. During the session, the commissioner was briefed in phases about the ongoing plantation campaign. Officials shared that the first phase has already been successfully completed, with

Initially, 31,000 saplings will be planted in this phase, with an overall target of approximately 85,000 plants. Shahzaib Khan Kakar directed all departments to select plant species that are suitable for the local climate and ensure proper care, growth, and sustainability to achieve long-term results. He emphasized that tree plantation is essential not only for environmental im-

Quetta Administration Accelerates School Enrollment Drive, Announces Improved Facilities for Students

QUETTA: Deputy Commissioner Mehruallah Badini chaired an important meeting on the school enrollment campaign in Quetta, focusing on increasing admissions and improving educational facilities.

atting admissions in Grade 1. Officials were directed to take practical steps to ensure that children who are currently deprived of education are brought into the school system. The meeting was attended by the District Education Officer, Additional Deputy Commission-



ment schools has been completed, and newly enrolled students will receive free books. Key decisions were also made to improve school infrastructure. These include the construction of washrooms in various

schools, building new classrooms where shortages exist, and installing solar panels in multiple schools across Quetta. Additionally, to ensure access to clean drinking water, water tankers and other facilities will be provided to schools. The Deputy Commissioner directed all concerned officials to

Training Session Held in Duki to Ensure Success of April 2026 Anti-Polio Campaign

DUKI: A key training session for UC Medical Officers (UCMOs) and area-in-charges was held at the Deputy Commissioner Office in Duki in preparation for the National

Immunization Days (NID) Polio Campaign, April 2026. The session was attended by District Health Officer Dr Bahadur Khan Luni, N-Stop Of-

icer Dr Abdul Hameed, DSO Dr Abdullah Khan, CCO Saeed Ahmed Nasir, ISD Coordinator Saddam Hussain, along with all UCMOs and area in-charges.

NOTICE INVITING TENDER. The Executive Engineer Building, COPPAH Department District, Lashela invites sealed tender based on composite schedule of rates, 2025 (CSRs) for the work listed below: EARNEST MONEY 2%, Tender Fee 1500 and Time limit 63 Months Under (SSDI) Balochistan Special Development Initiative Program.

PM Shehbaz says Centre, provinces need to make collective efforts to provide relief amid global oil crisis

NEWS DESK: Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif on Thursday said the Centre and provinces need to set their priorities and make collective efforts to provide relief to the needy amid the global oil crisis triggered by the US-Israeli war on Iran.

He made the remarks while addressing a high-level meeting, attended by Chief of Defence Forces Field Marshal Asim Munir, the chief ministers from all four provinces and federal ministers.

The premier said that the Centre and provinces should utilise their resources sagaciously and curtail their development projects as much as possible while also utilising their resources on agricultural-related initiatives.

"We have to spend this money on public goods and transport. Now we have to set our priorities jointly," he added.

He also highlighted the government's initiatives to protect the economy and the com-



Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif (center) leads a high-level meeting with provincial chief ministers and federal ministers to discuss the global oil crisis.

mon man from the global oil crisis. In his remarks, PM Shehbaz also said that

like other countries across the world, Pakistan was "being severely affected by this war".

He added that after achieving macroeconomic stability, the "time for prosperity and development had arrived but

unfortunately, as a result of this war, we are facing unlimited economic difficulties".

He said two Pakistani vessels that were "waiting to pass through the Strait of Hormuz" were able to do so thanks to the efforts

made by Deputy Prime Minister Ishrat Dar and CDF Munir.

He also recalled that his teams held separate meetings with the chief ministers soon after the conflict sparked, after which it was decided to "pass on" hikes of Rs55 in petroleum prices.

The PM also highlighted the various austerity measures undertaken by the government, especially thanking PPP Chairman Bilawal Bhutto-Zardari for "showing great interest" and calling upon him, as well as President Asif Ali Zardari for holding meetings.

"We gave a blanket cover in these three weeks, and regarding this, the Centre contributed Rs129bn. We made a Rs100bn cut in the Public Sector Development Programme and we added the savings into the account, from which the Centre bore the expenses," he said.

Second Waziristan block discovery lifts gas production

NEWS DESK: Production has commenced from the Spinwam-1 exploratory well in the Waziristan Block, adding 40 million cubic feet per day (MMCFD) of gas and around 200 barrels per day of condensate to the national supply, according to a statement issued on Wednesday.

The well is part of the Waziristan Joint Venture (JV), operated by Mari Energies Limited (Mari Energies), with partners Oil and Gas Development Company Limited (OGDCL) and Orient Petroleum Inc.

The JV holds participating interests of 55%, 35% and 10%, respectively.

With the addition from Spinwam-1, total gas supply from the Waziristan Block has reached approximately 100 MMCFD, along with around 800 barrels per day of condensate, which is be-

ing fed into the national gas network. The development follows the earlier Shewa-1 discovery, making Spinwam-1 the second successful exploratory well in the block.

An inauguration ceremony was held at the Mari Energies head office and attended by Federal Minister for Petroleum Ali Perwaiz Malik.

He said discoveries such as Spinwam-1 contributed to

strengthening Pakistan's energy security, reducing reliance on imports and supporting economic stability.

The minister also acknowledged the role of law enforcement agencies (LEAs), exploration and production (E&P) companies and Sui Northern Gas Pipelines Limited (SNGPL) teams, stating that their efforts and sacrifices had enabled continued op-

erations in challenging conditions. Malik said local E&P companies had stepped up to address supply disruptions linked to the closure of the Strait of Hormuz, adding that Pakistan had managed the situation better than several countries in the region.

He also said fertilizer supply had been maintained and prices remained lower compared to regional levels.



Sugar policy ends price controls

NEWS DESK: The government has finalised a new national sugar policy to largely end political control over prices, production and sales — in a move that this time may also benefit poor farmers and open a highly controlled sector to competition.

The draft National De-Regulation Policy of the sugar sector has also set a benchmark set by the International Monetary Fund (IMF) for "the cessation of formal and informal price controls at all stages along the value chain".

The draft suggests that the new policy could promote market efficiency, enhance competition, safeguard consumer welfare, and unlock the true economic potential of the sector, farmers and millers.

The policy also talks about ending the zoning policy, which aimed to keep tight control over pricing, production and licensing, and served as a major tool for exploitation of farmers while limiting the business of setting up sugar mills to a few families.

At the processing stage, limitations with respect to determination of sugarcane crop zoning and approvals for installation of new mills or enhancement of their capacity will be removed with the consensus of provincial governments, according to govern-



ment officials. Under the new policy, farmers will have freedom and competitive market pricing, as the government will remove all restrictions on where farmers sell and what they grow. This will empower growers to get better market returns and encourage efficient price discovery.

According to IMF documents, the new national policy on sugar will be a crucial test for Pakistan's resolve to overcome reform resistance. The draft suggests that the government will remove zoning and varietal rules, price fixation in some jurisdictions, licensing requirements for mill entry and federal

trade restrictions have together produced inefficient allocation of raw material and processing capacity, according to the draft policy.

The government has decided that all regulations related to the growing of sugarcane and its processing will be removed, subject to the consent of the provinces that have main control over the agriculture sector.

Millers will also benefit as they will be permitted to choose their raw materials, as the production of sugarcane is less than the installed capacity. This would improve product diversification, raise profitability and reduce distortions from price controls, officials said.

Energy costs push March inflation to 7.3pc

NEWS DESK: Consumer inflation rose to 7.3 per cent in March from 7pc in February, maintaining an upward trend largely driven by higher energy prices amid the fallout of the Middle East war.

The continued increase in monthly inflation, measured by the Consumer Price Index (CPI), has pushed it beyond the earlier comfort range as domestic energy tariffs registered a sharp rise during March.

With the conflict persisting in the Middle East, energy prices are expected to increase further in April as the government passes on higher costs to consumers.

The surge in fuel prices is also likely to raise transport costs, feeding into higher prices of essential food items, particularly perishables.

The finance ministry also reported that inflation would remain in the range of 7.5pc to 8.5pc in March, citing high energy costs due to the West Asia war.

The State Bank kept its policy rate unchanged at 10.50pc in response to rising inflation, warning that inflation could remain above its 5.7pc medium-term target range for a few months, even as economic activity gathers pace and rising imports

widen the trade deficit. On a month-on-month basis, inflation increased by 1.2pc compared to the previous month, according to data released by the Pakistan Bureau of Statistics (PBS) on Wednesday.

Inflation between July and March was recorded at 5.67pc in 2025-26, slightly higher than 5.25pc over the corresponding period last year, despite a high base effect.

The average annual inflation for FY25 dropped sharply to 4.49pc from 23.41pc in the previous year, aided by a high base effect, declining food prices, and lower transport costs.

The government has projected an inflation target of 7pc for the current fiscal year.

Economists describe the current trend as disinflation — a slowdown in the pace of price increases, not a general decrease as in deflation — though the cost of living remains high for many households.

Food inflation in March increased by 2.9pc in urban areas and 4.5pc in rural areas. On a month-on-month basis, food inflation rose by 0.1pc in urban areas but declined by 0.6pc in rural areas.

Non-food inflation reached 10.3pc in urban areas and 9.7pc in rural regions, indicating that non-food inflation remains high and has been steadily rising in recent

months. In March, core inflation — excluding volatile food and energy components — stood at 7.4pc in urban areas and 8.4pc in rural areas.

Urban food items that saw notable month-on-month price increases included chicken (13pc), fresh fruits (11.25pc), fresh vegetables (5.01pc), pulse masoor (2.78pc), meat (1.53pc), sweetmeat (1.49pc), bakery and confectionery (0.72pc), dry fruits (0.66pc), wheat products (0.57pc), ready-made food (0.53pc), mustard oil (0.50pc), cigarettes (0.22pc), pulse moong (0.15pc), milk powder (0.10pc), fresh milk (0.06pc) and rice (0.06pc).



Gold prices slump as Trump threatens more attacks on Iran

NEWS DESK: Gold fell sharply from two-week highs on Thursday after US President Donald Trump said that Washington would continue its military campaign in Iran in the coming weeks, driving oil prices higher and dampening hopes of interest rate cuts.

Spot gold declined over 2.8% at \$4,622.59 per ounce, as of 0719 GMT, after falling over 4% earlier and snapping a four-day winning streak. US gold futures slid 3.4% to \$4,649.

Following international market trends, gold and silver prices in Pakistan witnessed a decline. The price of gold dropped by Rs7,100 per tola, bringing it down to Rs486,962, while the rate for 10 grams of gold decreased by Rs6,087 to Rs417,491.

Silver prices also fell, with the price per tola decreasing by Rs50 to Rs7,634, while the rate for 10 grams dropped by Rs300 to Rs6,546. While the pullback followed bullion's climb to

its highest level since March 19 before Trump's remarks.

In a prime-time address, Trump said the US would carry out aggressive strikes on Iran "and was nearing 'completion of its main strategic objectives' in the conflict. It disappointed investors who had hoped for clearer signals of an end to hostilities.

"It's (gold's slide) a clear reaction to (Trump's) address and the risk of escalation potentially over the weekend, that's pushed oil prices higher, and naturally that's pushed the gold price quite meaningfully lower," said Kyle Rodda, a senior financial market analyst at Capital.com.

The 10-year US Treasury yield and the dollar index both advanced, pressuring dollar-denominated gold. Meanwhile, Brent crude surged more than 6% after Trump indicated targeting of Iran's energy infrastructure, raising supply con-

cerns.

Gold had dropped 11% in March, its worst monthly performance since 2008, following the outbreak of the Iran conflict on February 28. The surge in oil prices has fuelled inflation concerns, complicating the Federal Reserve's monetary policy outlook.

Expectations for US rate cuts remain low through most of 2026. Bets for a December rate cut have fallen to just 12%, down from around 25% before Trump's latest comments.

While gold typically benefits during periods of inflationary

pressure and geopolitical tension, higher interest rates reduce its appeal by increasing the opportunity cost of holding the non-yielding asset.

Gold traded at a premium in India this week for the first time in two months, as softer prices boosted demand for the metal, while premiums in China ticked down slightly as buyers awaited a deeper correction. In other metals, spot silver fell 5.4% to \$71.07, having earlier dropped over 7%. Platinum fell 3.1% to \$1,902.65 and palladium shed 1.8% to \$1,446.53.



Farhan stars in Pakistan Super League (PSL) as Sultans chase 226

NEWS DESK: Sahibzada Farhan struck a superb unbeaten century on Wednesday to lead Multan Sultans to a commanding six-wicket win over Hyderabad Kingsmen, chasing down a daunting 226-run target with eight balls to spare in the Pakistan Super League.

Farhan smashed 106 not out off 57 balls, hitting eight sixes and seven fours, as Sultans completed one of the most impressive chases of the season and maintained their unbeaten start.

The winning hit came in fitting fashion, a towering six that sealed victory and capped a dominant innings.

The right-hander's knock overshadowed aggressive half-centuries from Kingsmen's Maaz Sadatqat and Sharjeel Khan, who earlier powered their side to a formidable total.

Sadatqat provided a blistering start, racing to 62 off just 26 balls, including five sixes and five fours, while Sharjeel marked his return to the league after three years with an unbeaten 51 off 26 deliveries.

Their efforts helped Kingsmen post a chal-



lenging 225, but it ultimately proved insufficient.

Sultans' chase began at a rapid pace, with Farhan and Steven Smith taking control early.

After a steady first over, Smith launched the counterattack, striking boundaries off Riley Meredith and Saim Ayub to shift momentum quickly.

Farhan soon took

charge, dismantling both pace and spin with a series of clean strikes.

The pair added a century stand in quick time, bringing up 100 runs in just 7.1 overs — the third such partnership of the season and effectively setting back but failed to capitalise.

Their opening burst ensured the required rate remained under con-

trol, with Sultans consistently ahead of the asking rate.

Even after Smith's departure, Farhan maintained the tempo finding boundaries at regular intervals.

Kingsmen had opportunities to pull things back but failed to capitalise.

Farhan, shortly after reaching his half-century off 25 balls, was

dropped at long-on by Irfan Khan Niazi, a lapse that proved costly.

Another missed chance followed in the 14th over when wicketkeeper Usman Khan failed to complete a straightforward stumping to dismiss Shan Masood.

Masood capitalised on the reprieve, scoring quickly before eventually falling, further easing

the pressure on Sultans.

Any hopes of a comeback were effectively ended when Farhan attacked Marcus Labuschagne in the middle overs, collecting 21 runs in a single over with two sixes and a boundary to bring the target well within reach.

Farhan then guided the chase calmly, ensuring there were no late

setbacks as Sultans cruised home with more than an over to spare.

Earlier, Kingsmen had made a strong statement with the bat despite entering the match without a win.

Openers Saim Ayub and Sadatqat gave them a flying start, putting pressure on the Sultans bowlers from the outset.

Usman Khan contributed a brisk 25, in-

cluding three sixes in a single over, while Sharjeel's late flourish added crucial runs in the final overs.

His 30-run assault in the 18th over, featuring three sixes and two fours, lifted Kingsmen to a total that appeared competitive.

However, their bowlers struggled to contain Sultans' aggressive batting, and lapses in the field further compounded their difficulties.

The result lifts Sultans to the top of the table with two wins from two matches, underlining their strong early form in the tournament.

Kingsmen, meanwhile, remain at the bottom after three defeats in as many games, with questions over their ability to defend big totals.

Farhan later dedicated his match-winning performance to his parents.

"I asked my parents to pray for me before the match, and this performance is for them — their prayers mean everything to me," he said.

The victory reinforces Sultans' credentials as title contenders, while Kingsmen face an uphill task to revive their campaign in the matches ahead.

'Iran will be at World Cup': Infantino

NEWS DESK: FIFA president Gianni Infantino told AFP that Iran will be at the World Cup and will play their group matches in the United States as scheduled, despite the Middle East war.

"Iran will be at the World Cup," Infantino said at a half-time as Iran beat Costa Rica 5-0 in a friendly in southern Turkey. "That's why we're here. We're delighted because they're a very, very strong team. I'm very happy."

"I've seen the team. I've spoken to the players and the coach, so everything is fine," added Infantino, whose attendance at Tuesday's game was unannounced.

Infantino went on to stress that Iran's "matches will be played where they are supposed to be, according to the draw."

The World Cup, being hosted by the United States, Mexico and

Canada, starts on June 11. Iran are set to play their first Group G game against New Zealand in Los Angeles on June 15. They are then scheduled to play Belgium in Los Angeles on June 21 and Egypt in Seattle on June 26. Iran's participation had been thrown into doubt by the war with the US and Israel that broke out on February 28.

"For us, what matters most are FIFA's rules and regulations. We will comply with whatever FIFA decides. Every host country has made commitments to FIFA and must honour them," Mehdi Mohammadi said.

Mohammadi, the vice president of the Iranian Football Federation (IFFIR), told AFP at the match.

The IFFIR had said earlier this month it was "negotiating" with FIFA to relocate the country's World Cup matches from the United States to Mexico.

Mexico Mexican Presi-

dent Claudia Sheinbaum also said that her country is prepared to host Iran's first-round matches at the tournament if needed.

"Fruitful discussions" with FIFA officials said that US President Donald Trump had given assurances that the Iranian team would still be welcome.

But Trump then stated that Iran's team should not travel to the tournament "for their own life and safety."

Iran hit back at whatever FIFA decides. Trump's comments, saying that "no one can exclude Iran's national team from the World Cup."

On Tuesday, Mohammad Nabi said Infantino had been en route from Mexico to Qatar.

"Having learnt that we were organising friendly matches here, he came to see us in person, and we had a fruitful discussion," Mohammadi said.

"Given our history in this competition, it is only natural that FIFA should support the Iranian team. Mr Infantino is providing the necessary support to our national team and has given our players a great boost."

Asked before the game if Iran would be at the World Cup, back-up striker Dennis Eckert Ayensu told AFP: "Inshallah" (God willing). Iran, who also played a friendly against Nigeria in the Turkish town of Belek last Friday, crushed Costa Rica, who have not qualified for the World Cup, 5-0 on Tuesday.

Skipper Mehdi Taremi, with two penalties, Ali Ghobadipour and Mohammad Mottahbi put Iran four goals up by the break. Half-time substitute Mehdi Ghayebi added a fifth in the 51st minute by which time coach Amir Ghalenqi had started to empty his bench.

Gravina has been in charge of the FIGC since late 2018, when he was elected to be the permanent replacement for Carlo Tavecchio.

A FIGC source confirmed to AFP that Gravina would hold a meeting on Thursday afternoon with the heads of Italy's three professional divisions, and both the players and referees' associations.

Some fans made their feelings known about Gravina and the FIGC by chucking eggs at the governing body's headquarters in Rome.

It is an unacceptable disgrace. Italian football needs a complete overhaul, starting with the resignation of Gabriele Gravina, the League Party, a member of Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni's coalition, wrote on Instagram.

It's clear that Italian football needs to be rebuilt from the ground up and that starts with changes at the top of the FIGC," Abodi said in a statement.

National outrage across the country as Italy's Sport Minister Andrea Abodi said on Wednesday that Gravina should step down.

"It's clear that Italian football needs to be rebuilt from the ground up and that starts with changes at the top of the FIGC," Abodi said in a statement.



Arsenal into Women's Champions League semi-finals

NEWS DESK: Reigning champions Arsenal booked their spot in the Women's Champions League semi-finals with a 3-2 aggregate victory over Chelsea, despite a 1-0 defeat at Stamford Bridge on Wednesday's quarter-final second leg.

Knowing they had to chase the game, Chelsea had manager Sonia Bompastor "sent off late on, started at a furious pace. Yet Arsenal soon knocked them out of their rhythm, and the home side didn't manage a single shot on target in the first half as the visitors took their time over every dead ball."

Arsenal grew into the game in the second half, but all the drama happened late on as Chelsea threw everything forward in an effort to get back in the tie. Arsenal substitute Stina Blackstenius headed home from a cross from her Swedish compatriot Emma Holmberg in the 80th minute, but the goal was chalked off after a VAR review found that the striker had been just outside the build-up.

Chelsea went back on the attack and defender Verle Burman struck the post with a late shot and midfielder Spoke Nuesken was denied by a brilliant save from Arsenal keeper Daphne van Domselaar, who tipped her header onto the inside of the far post before the ball bounced away to safety.

Arsenal's Beth Mead then smacked a stoppage-time shot off the far post before Nuesken finally netted, stealing in ahead of defender Lotte Wubbens. Moy to sweep home a first-time shot in the 94th minute and set up a nerve-jangling finale.

United made it 3-3 on aggregate when Melvine Malard scored in the 11th minute and the game looked to be heading for extra time until Gladis Veggisdottir headed Bayern back in front in the 81st minute, and Linda Dallmann sealed the win by firing home three minutes later.

Arsenal will face either Olympique Lyonnais or VfL Wolfsburg in the semi-finals, with Bayern Munich set to take on Barcelona or Real Madrid, with Barca leading 6-2 on aggregate and Wolfsburg holding a slim 1-0 advantage heading into Thursday's second leg.

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'The World Cup curse': Italy sheds tears after missing out again

NEWS DESK: Italy woke up angry and disillusioned on Wednesday after the national team missed out on the World Cup for the third time in a row by losing a play-off to Bosnia, prolonging a sporting nightmare for the football-mad country.

"The World Cup curse," said the front page of Italy's main daily Corriere della Sera, calling for rebuilding in a country that has produced some of the game's greatest players but has won only one match at the finals since lifting the trophy for the fourth time in 2006.

Headlines in La Gazzetta dello Sport and Corriere dello Sport, the country's two main sports newspapers, both said "We're all staying at home" in reference to another summer without a World Cup.

Italy suffered a 4-1 defeat in the shoot-out in Zenica after their play-off final finished 1-1, while Turkey, the Czech Republic and Sweden all secured their places at the finals.

"I don't think the boys deserved to suffer such a blow," said Italy coach Giancarlo Gattuso. "It's difficult to digest."

Gattuso knew he had a tough job on his hands when he was appointed in June, asked to replace Luciano Spalletti and take Italy to the World Cup with automatic qualification looking near-impossible after

a 3-0 hammering at the hands of Norway.

One of the heroes of Italy's 2006 World Cup triumph, Gattuso remained vague on his future as coach even as Gabriele Gravina, the head of Italy's football federation (FIGC), asked him to stay beyond the end of his current contract which expires this summer.

Bosnia won at the end of extra time, with Sandro Tonali the only Italy player to score from the spot as Francesco Pio Esposito blazed their first penalty over and Bryan Cristante smashed his kick against the crossbar.

Moise Kean had given Gattuso's Italy the lead on 15 minutes, but they were reduced to 10 men when Alessandro Bastoni was shown a straight red card late in the match.

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Pakistan's Ali sisters reach squash quarters

NEWS DESK: Pakistan's rising squash trio Mahwish, Seehra and Mehwish Ali advanced to the quarter-finals of the SRAFTL International Junior Open Squash Championship in Kuala Lumpur with dominant performances on Thursday.

The three sisters outclassed their respective opponents in straight games, underlining their growing stature on the international junior circuit and keeping Pakistan's hopes alive in the tournament.

Mahnoor Ali produced a composed and aggressive display in the third round of the Asian Junior Super Series, defeating China's Du Shaoyu 3-0. In a closely contested match, Mahnoor held her nerve at crucial moments to secure a 3-0 win, securing her place in the last eight.

In the Under-15 category, Seehra Ali registered an emphatic victory over Malaysia's Kugan Karasah. After edging a tight opening game 14-12, she dominated the remainder of the match, winning the next two games 11-4 and 11-6 to complete a con-



vincing straight-games triumph.

Mehwish Ali continued the winning momentum with a clinical performance against Singapore's Wong Anne. Demonstrating excellent court control and precision, she secured a 3-0 win with scores of 11-8, 11-4 and 11-6 to move into the quarter-finals.

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Pakistan in talks with Afghanistan but Kabul must demonstrate 'visible and verifiable actions': FO

NEWS DESK: Pakistan is holding talks with Afghanistan to end the current conflict between the two countries, but Kabul must "demonstrate visible and verifiable actions", said Foreign Office Spokesperson Tahir Andrabi on Thursday.

Since Pakistan launched Operation Ghazab il-Haq against terrorist hideouts in Afghanistan on February 26, diplomatic contact between the two sides had largely ceased.

The talks in the northwestern Chinese city of Urumqi were being held between senior officials of the two countries, the spokesperson said in his weekly press briefing.

The meeting was focused on sharing perspectives on the latest escalation. No major outcomes were expected, though it was believed that China was pushing for confidence-building measures, such as reopening trade routes.

The spokesperson recounted the visit of Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister



Ishaq Dar to Beijing earlier this week at the invitation of Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi, saying that it "provided an opportunity for both sides to hold in-depth discussions on regional issues as well as bilateral matters of global and mutual concerns".

PM Shehbaz says Centre, provinces need to make collective efforts to provide relief amid global oil crisis

NEWS DESK: Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif on Thursday said the Centre and provinces need to set their priorities and make collective efforts to provide relief to the needy amid the global oil crisis triggered by the US-Israeli war on Iran.

He made the remarks while addressing a high-level meeting, attended by Chief of Defence Forces Field Marshal Asim Munir, the chief ministers from all four provinces and federal ministers.

The premier said that the Centre and provinces should utilise their resources sagaciously and curtail their development projects as much as possible while also utilising their resources on agricultural-related initiatives.

"We have to spend this money on public goods and transport. Now we have to set our priorities jointly," he added.

He also highlighted

that came up for discussion between the two foreign ministers. Pressed later for details, he confirmed that Pakistan had sent a delegation to Urumqi for talks.

The spokesperson added that Pakistan had sent the delegation "in line with its consistent position and longstanding practice of supporting a credible process that can lead to

pass through the strait), which will see further progress in the coming days," he highlighted.

He also recalled that his teams held separate meetings with the chief ministers soon after the conflict sparked, after which it was decided to "pass on" hikes of Rs55 in petroleum prices.

The PM also highlighted the various austerity measures undertaken by the government, especially thanking PPP Chairman Bilawal Bhutto-Zardari for "showing great interest" and calling upon him, as well as President Asif Ali Zardari for holding meetings.

"We gave a blanket cover in these three weeks, and regarding this, the Centre contributed Rs129bn. We made a Rs100bn cut in the Public Sector Development Programme and we added the savings into the account, from which the Centre bore the expenses," he said.

At least 4 killed as heavy rain lashes Karachi; city administration declares emergency

NEWS DESK: At least four people were killed on Thursday as heavy rain lashed Karachi, according to police and rescue officials.

The deaths occurred in separate incidents; three people died due to electrocution while a fourth was killed due to a crumbling building.

Site Superhighway Industrial Area Police Station House Officer (SHO) Mubammad Nawaz told Dawn that Shahabuddin, 40, was trying to fix an electrical issue in Aksanabad when he suffered an electric shock and died. He said the deceased

was killed when she suffered an electric shock inside her home in Sector 7-A. Meanwhile, a spokesperson for the Edhi Foundation said in a statement that a 23-year-old man, Sarfaraz, 23, was electrocuted inside his home in Hasan Brohi Goth near Bashir Chowk.

Separately, Rescue 1122 spokesperson Hasaanullah Haseeb Khan told Dawn that heavy rains adversely affected the structure of a three-storey building near Bismillah Hotel in Pak Colony.

The wall of the second floor collapsed, trapping a passerby under the debris. The rescue team retrieved the man from the rubble and took him to Abbasi Shahed Hospital, where doctors pronounced him



was believed to be an employee of K-Electric. Suriani Police SHO Sohail Khaskheer told Dawn that 7-year-old girl, Dua Batool Sarfaraz

der the debris. The rescue team retrieved the man from the rubble and took him to Abbasi Shahed Hospital, where doctors pronounced him

The KE official advised citizens to maintain a safe distance from TV internet cables, broken wires and electricity installations.

the deputy prime minister's visit to Beijing, despite medical advice to rest after suffering a hairline fracture during the quadrilateral talks in Islamabad, and starting peace talks as soon as possible.

Security forces kill 8 terrorists along Pak-Afghan border in North Waziristan: ISPR

NEWS DESK: Security forces have killed eight terrorists while responding to their movement along the Pak-Afghan border in North Waziristan district, the military's media affairs wing said on Thursday.

In a press release, the Inter-Services Public Relations (ISPR) said the engagement took place on Wednesday after the "movement of a group of kharaj" was picked up by the security forces.

As a result of precise and skillful engagement, eight kharaj belonging to Indian proxy Fina al Kharaj were sent to hell," the ISPR said, adding that weapons and ammunition were also recovered from them.

Fina al Kharaj is the name the state uses for terrorists belonging to the banned Tehreek-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP). Sanitisation operations are ongoing to eliminate any other Indian-sponsored kharaj in the area," the military said.

The engagement once again substantiates our repeated stance regarding object favouring the

effort towards cessation of hostility and it is an effort towards paving the way for a sustainable pathway towards finding the lasting settlement of the ongoing hostilities," he said.

SC halts anti-terrorism court from framing charges against journalist Matuallah Jan

NEWS DESK: The Supreme Court (SC) on Thursday restrained the anti-terrorism court (ATC) from framing charges against veteran journalist Matuallah Jan, and directed the Islamabad High Court (IHC) to expeditiously decide on the challenge to the terrorism charges invoked against him.

Headed by Justice Muhammad Ali Mazhar, a three-judge SC bench took up a plea by the journalist seeking to set aside the IHC's Feb 23, 2024, order denying interim relief to stay his criminal trial.

During the hearing, the prosecution did not object to the issuance of directions to the high court, while the court observed that it would not go into the merits of the case at this stage so as not to prejudice it in favour of either party. Barrister Qadeer Janjua represented Jan in the case, in which the

subject matter of the journalist, and the risk of irreparable loss. It is a settled trinity of law governing the grant of interim injunctions; stays, it said. The petition said the journalist has an overwhelmingly strong prima facie case, adding that the trial court itself, while granting bail, observed that the prosecution's case was "full of doubts". Furthermore, the forensic report of the Punjab Forensic

Science Agency (PFSA) refuted the primary narcotics allegation by the prosecution. It found that the recovered substance was not "ice," added the petition. The law on what constitutes "terrorism" is no longer res integra and was definitively

Operation Ghazab il-Haq was launched on the night of February 26, following unprovoked firing by the Afghan Taliban from across the border.

From March 18 to 23, Pakistan observed a five-day temporary pause in the operation on the occasion of Eidul Fitr, with the FO later saying it would continue "until its objectives are achieved".

De-escalation requests were made by Saudi Arabia, Qatar and Turkey were part of the reasons behind the pauses announced by both sides, according to their respective statements.

engagement comes as Pakistan presses on with Operation Ghazab il-Haq, targeting terrorist hideouts in Afghanistan. A day ago, officials from Pakistan, Afghanistan and China met in the Chinese city of Urumqi amidst a trilateral mechanism.

While a foreign ministry official said the meeting was not a "mediation effort per se," it was believed that China was pushing for confidence-building measures, such as reopening trade routes.

There has been a resurgence in terrorism in Pakistan since the Afghan Taliban returned to power in Kabul in 2021. Islamabad has repeatedly urged the Taliban administration to dismantle terrorist sanctuaries on Afghan soil, particularly those linked to the banned TTP. Officials say those appeals have gone unheeded.

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