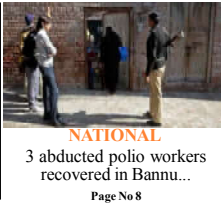




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QUETTA VOICE

Balochistan Digital Media Policy 2026 Approved, AI Recruitment and Climate Strategy Unveiled



WEBDESK:

In a major step toward governance reforms in Pakistan, the Balochistan cabinet, led by Chief Minister Mir Sarfraz Bugti, has approved the Balochistan Digital Media Policy 2026. AI-driven recruitment, and a comprehensive climate change strategy. The high-level cabinet meeting focused on transparency, merit-based governance, economic development, and public

welfare, positioning Balochistan as a reform-driven province in Pakistan. **Digital Media Policy 2026: Boost for Transparency and Media Regulation** The Balochistan Digital Media Policy 2026 aims to eliminate fake or dummy newspapers and ensure fair and transparent distribution of government advertisements. The policy also introduces a

regulated framework for digital and social media, strengthening credible journalism and discouraging misuse of public funds. Officials emphasized that the policy supports authentic media houses and journalists, while promoting accountability and merit in advertisement allocation, an important step for media transparency in Pakistan. **AI-Based Recruitment in Pakistan: Ending Favoritism**

A landmark decision was taken to introduce Artificial Intelligence (AI)-based recruitment in Pakistan for government jobs from Grade 4 to below Grade 16. The system will be implemented in the upcoming fiscal year. This move is expected to ensure merit-based hiring, eliminate political influence and favoritism, improve efficiency in public sector recruitment. Departments have also been directed to clear pending job cases, boosting employment op-

portunities in Balochistan. **Climate Change Fund Policy: Addressing Environmental Risks** The cabinet approved a comprehensive policy for the Balochistan Climate Change Fund, making it one of the first structured provincial climate frameworks in Pakistan. According to adviser Shahid Rind, Balochistan contributes minimally to global emissions but

faces severe impacts from climate change, floods, and natural disasters. The policy introduces a coordinated strategy for climate resilience, disaster management, and sustainable development.

Fisheries and Blue Economy Reforms

The approval of the Balochistan Sustainable Fisheries and Aquaculture Bill marks a key step toward developing Pakistan's blue economy. The policy focuses on: Sustainable fisheries growth Marine resource conservation Adoption of modern fishing technologies Institutional restructuring will further improve efficiency in the fisheries sector.

Wheat Policy and Food Security in Pakistan

To strengthen food security in Pakistan, the cabinet endorsed a strategy to procure wheat through the private sector for strategic reserves. If required, the province will request 100,000 metric tons of wheat from the federal government. This decision aims to stabilize supply and control price volatility in Balochistan.

Rs4 Billion Endowment Fund for Social Welfare

The cabinet approved Rs4 billion for the Balochistan Awami Endowment Fund, including Rs3 billion as seed money. The fund will support education, healthcare, and social welfare programs, contributing to long-term human development. Speaking at the meeting, Chief Minister Mir Sarfraz Bugti reaffirmed the government's commitment to good governance, transparency, job creation, and institutional reforms in Balochistan. He also appreciated Chief Secretary Shakeel Qadir Khan for his role in advancing administrative reforms.

Balochistan Govt Orders Province-Wide Audit of Official Vehicles to Ensure Transparency



NEWSDESK

QUETTA: The Government of Balochistan has announced the formation of a high-level committee to conduct a comprehensive audit of official vehicles across all departments. The move, directed by the Chief Minister, aims to strengthen transparency, accountability, and efficient management of government resources. According to the official notification, the Secretary of Services and General Administration Department (S&GAD) will chair the committee, while the Secretary Finance and Secretary Services, Transport and Administration Department will serve as members. Province-Wide Vehicle Audit The committee has been as-

signed to carry out a detailed audit of government vehicles in Balochistan, covering: Administrative departments Attached institutions Autonomous bodies Subordinate offices The purpose is to ensure that official vehicles are being used strictly in line with government rules and entitlement policies. Focus on Misuse and Unauthorized Allocation/Health News Updates The audit will identify: Excess allocation of official vehicles beyond approved limits Unauthorized use of government cars Cases of misuse, illegal allotment, and unnecessary retention The committee will also recommend actions for the recovery, redistribution, or disposal of surplus vehicles.

Policy Review and Reforms In a significant step toward governance reform, the committee will review the Balochistan Civil Car Rules 1988 and propose amendments to improve. Vehicle allocation systems Monitoring and compliance mechanisms Overall public sector efficiency Timeline and Implementation All departments have been instructed to appoint a Grade-19 focal person within 48 hours to coordinate with the committee and provide required data and records. The committee is expected to submit its final report within 15 days, including actionable recommendations to enhance public sector transparency and resource management.

Balochistan Assembly Drama: Speaker Orders Maulana Hidayat-ur-Rehman Out, Then Brings Him Back

Syed Ali Shah:

QUETTA: Things got heated in the Balochistan Provincial Assembly on Thursday when Speaker Captain (Retd) Abdul Khaliq Achakzai asked senior Jamaat-e-Islami leader and MPA Maulana Hidayat-ur-Rehman to leave the House. The clash started when Maulana Hidayat-ur-Rehman kept speaking despite the Speaker's repeated warnings. The Speaker pointed out that the member was not following parliamentary rules and discipline, especially when questions were being raised about the presence of a proper quorum. Captain Abdul Khaliq Achakzai directed the Sergeant-at-Arms to escort Maulana out, saying the Chair had no choice but to maintain order in the House. Maulana Hidayat-ur-Rehman, known for his strong and passionate style, walked out in protest. Talking to journalists outside the assembly, he called the Speaker's action "unjust" and accused him of behaving in an authoritarian manner, claiming he wasn't ready to listen to



anyone. But the tension didn't last long. Soon after, a group of provincial ministers and opposition members stepped in to calm things down. They spoke with Maulana Hidayat-ur-Rehman and managed to convince him to return to the House. The brief episode once again shows how quickly things can flare up between the

ruling side and the opposition in Balochistan Assembly. Such moments of high drama have become quite common in recent sessions, often leaving observers wondering about the smooth running of legislative work. This time, at least, cooler heads prevailed and the matter was resolved without any major disruption.

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 gate-way 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-

ity 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.

Sri Lanka repatriates 238 crew members of two Iranian warships

NEWS DESK: Over 200 Iranian crew members from two warships who were rescued by Sri Lanka have been sent back to their homeland, a top official said on Wednesday.

Deputy Defence Minister Aruna Jayasekera said 32 sailors rescued from the IRIS Dena — a frigate attacked by US on March 4 just off Sri Lanka — and another 206 from the IRIS Bushehr left the country. Sri Lanka rescued 32 Iranian crew from the warship IRIS Dena on March 4 after it was hit by a torpedo from a US submarine.

The ship was returning from a naval exercise organised by India, amid the US-Israeli war on Iran.



Sri Lanka also rescued 208 crew from a second vessel, IRIS Bushehr on March 5 that had also requested assistance from Colombo after it ran into engine trouble.

"The crew of both ships were flown out about 11pm on a special flight on Tuesday night," Deputy Defence Minister Aruna Jayasekera said.

After its crew was offloaded in Colombo, IRIS Bushehr was towed to waters off Sri Lanka's eastern coast of Trincomalee eventually reaching on Tuesday morning.

"There are about 8-10 Iranian crew remaining aboard to assist operations," Jayasekera added. Sri Lanka granted 30-day entry visas to the crew members and housed them in navy and air force camps before arrangements were made for their return to Iran.

A chartered plane arranged by Iran took back the bodies of 84 crew members from the Dena who were killed in the US attack.

"A few sailors from Lebanon, Israel continued its attacks and targeted paramedic teams on Wednesday in southern part of the country, killing at least three of them."

The Israeli military targeted paramedic teams in the town of Mayfadoun, Nabatiyeh district, three consecutive times, the Lebanese health ministry said in a statement.

"This resulted in the martyrdom of three paramedics and the injury of six others, while one paramedic remains missing," it said.

The Israeli military renewed an order for people to leave a swathe of southern Lebanon as it intensified the attacks on Wednesday, a day after talks with a Lebanese government envoy in Washington, which Hezbollah condemned and termed the Lebanese government move "a national sin" that would widen divisions in a deeply polarised Lebanon.

Iran's ambassador to Sri Lanka Alireza Delkoshi said Tehran was in talks with Colombo to repatriate sailors from the IRIS Bushehr which was given safe harbour in Sri Lanka after the IRIS Dena was sunk.

Sri Lanka President Anura Kumara Dissanayake said the island provided protection to the Bushehr crew on humanitarian grounds in line with the 1907 Hague Convention.

It was not immediately clear on what basis the sailors from the second Iranian vessel were allowed to leave Sri Lanka custody. Sri Lanka has refused permission for US warplanes to use ground facilities in the country in order to maintain Colombo's neutrality. A third Iranian ship — the IRIS Lavan, with 183 crew members — sought shelter in India's Kochi port in early March. More than 100 non-essential crew of the IRIS Lavan have since left India.

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Fuel supply fears after blaze tears through crucial Australian refinery

NEWS DESK: Columns of fire engulfed a crucial Australian oil refinery after a chain of explosions, authorities said on Thursday, as they warned of disruptions to domestic fuel supply.

Flames as high as 60 metres erupted late on Wednesday after a gas leak ignited at the Viva fuel plant in Victoria state, firefighters said, one of only two working oil refineries in Australia. The refinery, about an hour's drive southwest of state capital Melbourne, pumps out about 10 per cent of Australia's fuel, according to energy company Viva.

Fire Rescue Victoria said on Thursday the blaze had been contained, although it could smoulder throughout the day.

"The whole sky was lit up with the bright flame," Geelong resident Wayne Gardiner told AFP.

The refinery is capable of processing up to 120,000 barrels of oil each day, company figures stated.

Analysts said that, together with the Ampol refinery in Brisbane, it produces about 10-20 per cent of Australia's total fuel supply.

"This is not a positive development," Energy Minister Chris Bowen said as the nation's fuel supplies are under pressure due to war in the Middle East.

Bowen said he had spoken to Viva and the firm was "very confident they can replace the petrol with imports".

Prime Minister Anthony Albanese, currently visiting Malaysia, said Australia had secured an additional supply of some 100 million litres of diesel from Brunei and South Korea.

"This is the first of many expected shipments secured, under the government's new strategic reserve powers," he told a news conference.

The fire ripped through a section of the refinery responsible for the production of high-octane petrol, Bowen earlier said.

By triggering isolation valves, other parts of the plant producing jet fuel and diesel had been spared the worst of the blaze.

Geographically isolated and with only two oil refineries, Australia is heavily exposed to disruptions in global fuel supply and imports most of its petrol.

Canberra urged Australians to ignore the impulse to rush out and panic buy more fuel.

"It's important that people buy as much fuel as they need. But no more, no less," Bowen said.

Ferocious Incident controller Mark McGuinness said

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Israel, Lebanon to speak after '34 years', says Trump

NEWS DESK: US President Donald Trump said in a Truth Social post that the leaders of Israel and Lebanon will speak for the first time in 34 years on Thursday, as he claims he is "trying to get a little breathing room between Israel and Lebanon."

The announcement came after Israel's and Lebanon's envoys to the US held rare, direct talks in Washington to discuss an end to Israeli attacks on its neighbour, according to Al Jazeera.

"The prime minister will speak for the first time with the president of Lebanon after so many years of complete breakdown in dialogue between the two countries," Gamiel told the Israeli Army Radio.

"This move will hopefully ultimately lead to prosperity and flourishing for Lebanon as a state."

A Lebanese official source earlier, however, told Reuters news agency that there was no

Donald Trump talking up hopes for a deal that would open the crucial Strait of Hormuz.

US and Iranian officials were weighing a return to Pakistan for further talks as early as the coming week, after negotiations ended on Sunday without a breakthrough. Chief of Defence Forces (CDF) and Chief of Army Staff Field Marshal Asim Munir, a key figure in the mediation in Tehran, said on Wednesday to try to prevent a renewal of the conflict.

"We feel good about the prospects of a deal," White House press secretary Karoline Leavitt said at a news conference on Wednesday, calling conversations mediated by Pakistan "productive and ongoing."

She denied reports that the US had formally requested an extension of a two-week ceasefire agreed by the two sides on April 8.

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Amid Lebanon truce talks, Israel kills 3 paramedics

NEWS DESK: Amid efforts of a ceasefire in Lebanon, Israel continued its attacks and targeted paramedic teams on Wednesday in southern part of the country, killing at least three of them.

The Israeli military targeted paramedic teams in the town of Mayfadoun, Nabatiyeh district, three consecutive times, the Lebanese health ministry said in a statement.

"This resulted in the martyrdom of three paramedics and the injury of six others, while one paramedic remains missing," it said.

The Israeli military renewed an order for people to leave a swathe of southern Lebanon as it intensified the attacks on Wednesday, a day after talks with a Lebanese government envoy in Washington, which Hezbollah condemned and termed the Lebanese government move "a national sin" that would widen divisions in a deeply polarised Lebanon.

Israel's offensive in Lebanon has killed more than 2,000 people and forced 1.2 million from their homes since March 2, according to Lebanese authorities.

Tuesday's meeting between officials of Lebanon government and Israeli government was hosted by US Secretary of State Marco Rubio in Washington.

The Israeli and Lebanese envoys said the talks were positive. Israel has said the aim of the talks is to disarm Hezbollah.

Regional efforts for ceasefire Meanwhile, a Hezbollah lawmaker said Iranian and regional efforts could lead to a Lebanon ceasefire "soon."

Diplomatic efforts by Iran and other regional countries could produce a ceasefire in Lebanon "soon", senior Hezbollah lawmaker Ibrahim-Moussawi on Wednesday said, adding that Tehran had used its blockade of the Strait of Hormuz as leverage.

"The Iranians are exercising high pressure against the Americans and they have put their conditions that the Americans should include Lebanon in the ceasefire. If they don't do it, they are going to continue their blockade of Strait of Hormuz. It's the economic card," Moussawi said.

The Iranians have opened up to several regional and international parties to achieve this goal, he said.

Moussawi declined to comment on whether the group would abide by such a ceasefire.

Complaint to UN In a complaint to the

United Nations, Lebanon's Foreign Ministry said the death toll from the April 8 attacks at Israel stood at 303, including 30 children and 71 women.

Israel claimed it had launched a ground assault against Hezbollah and its Amal allies.

UN experts condemned Israel's bombing in Lebanon earlier this month as "illegal aggression and indiscriminate bombing campaign", the United Nations Human Rights Council said.

"This is not self-defence. It is a blatant violation of the UN Charter, a deliberate destruction of prospects for peace, and an affront to multilateralism and the UN-based international order," the experts were quoted as saying in a statement.

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India plans parliament expansion for women; opposition cries foul

NEWS DESK: India's government was seeking to expand the size of parliament by two-fifths to increase the representation of women in India's Parliament. Opposition parties have cried foul, saying it would benefit the ruling party.

"We're set to take historic steps to empower women," Prime Minister Narendra Modi said, ahead of the special sitting of parliament on Thursday, to debate constitutional amendments to both expand seats for women and the overall size of parliament to over 800.

The bill proposes fast-tracking implementation of a 2023 law in the world's largest democracy of 1.4 billion people, reserving 33 per cent of seats for women.

Increasing the number of women in parliament has, in principle,

broad cross-party support.

"We are all united to give rightful positions to women in India," Parliamentary Affairs Minister Kiren Rijiju said on Thursday.

Women currently account for just 14pc of India's 543 members of the Lok Sabha, the lower house of parliament.

To achieve the expansion, the government said it plans to redraw parliamentary boundaries based on population, a move that would increase the number of seats by nearly 40pc to more than 800.

Modi's Hindu nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) draws much of its support from the densely populated north, and critics say expanding seats in parliament would therefore benefit it the most.

Opposition parties,

which control states in southern India is lower, fear they would lose overall power in parliament.

Opposition leader Rahul Gandhi said that while his Congress party supports increasing the number of women in parliament, it is a statement on the government's approach is aimed at consolidating power.

"The proposal that the government is now bringing has no connection to women's reservation," Gandhi said, in a statement on social media.

"It is merely an attempt to seize power through defilement and gerrymandering."

M.K. Stalin, chief minister of the southern state of Tamil Nadu, and a rival to Modi's BJP, also opposed the plan.

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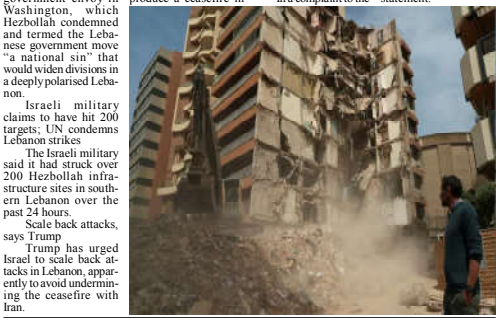
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Child rape accused killed in police encounter in Gujranwala

GUJRANWALA (INP): A suspect accused in a child assault case was killed during an alleged police encounter in Gujranwala, police said.

According to a spokesperson for the

district police, the suspect identified as Arsalan alias Shah was in police custody on physical remand in connection with the abduction and sexual assault of a 13-year-old girl. The

encounter took place within the jurisdiction of the Khiali police station, where the suspect was being taken for investigation. Police said the suspect attempted to escape, while his accomplices opened fire on the police party to help his escape. "In the exchange of fire, the suspect was hit by bullets fired by his own accomplices and died on the spot," the police spokes-

person said. The accused had a prior criminal record and was allegedly involved in serious offenses, including child abduction, sexual violence, and human trafficking. In a separate development, police reported that three encounters took place in different areas of the district, and two others arrested in injured condition. City Police Officer (CPO) Dr. Sardar Ghayas Gul Khan said that a zero-tolerance policy against crimes targeting women and children is being strictly enforced. Elements violating the law deserve no leniency, he added.



Governor Madinah Prince Salman Bin Sultan Bin Abdulaziz Al-Saud received Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif upon his arrival in Madinah Munawwarah.

Power shortfall exceeds 3,500MW as loadshedding challenged in court

LAHORE (INP): The electricity situation has worsened across all power distribution companies (DISCOs) in the country, with a significant rise in loadshedding.

According to sources, the average power shortfall has exceeded 3,500 megawatts, leading to increased unannounced loadshedding in Punjab, including Lahore. In LESCO, the shortfall has crossed 1,000 megawatts, further aggravating the situation for consumers.

Sources from the National Transmission and Dispatch Company (NTDC) said the increased loadshedding is due to shortages of RLNG, hydropower, and oil. They added that the absence of a proper loadshedding schedule is resulting in unannounced outages, with

Alibaba enters Pakistan's financial sector as SECP grants license to Coco Tech

ISLAMABAD (INP): China's tech giant Alibaba Group has formally entered Pakistan's financial services market after the Securities and Exchange Commission of Pakistan (SECP) granted a license to Coco Tech Pakistan (Private) Limited (CTPL), its wholly owned subsidiary.

The move allows Coco Tech Pakistan to operate as a non-banking finance company, introducing "buy now, pay later" (BNPL) services in the country. This model enables consumers to make purchases online and pay in installments, offering an alternative to traditional credit systems, according to a Gwadar Pro's report.

Officials say the development marks a significant milestone for Pakistan's digital economy and reflects

Gwadar "Fishermen Colony" gets over 200 acres land

GWADAR (INP): The Balochistan government has provided over 200 acres of land for the development of modern "Fishermen Colony" for Gwadar fishermen at the cost of Rs2,439.6 million, Gwadar Pro reported on Wednesday.

The land is located at Mouza Ankada South, near the junction of Jiwani and Awaran Avenue, and the Sports Complex Gwadar. The "Fishermen Colony" is a low-cost housing scheme.

A total of 2,970 residential plots, each measuring 120 square yards, will be allocated to fishermen.

A key meeting regarding the Fishermen Colony project in Gwadar was held under the chairmanship

of Director General Gwadar Development Authority (GDA), Mo'in-ur-Rehman Khan.

The meeting was attended by Chief Engineer GDA Haji Sid Muhammad, Director Town Planning Shahid Ali, and Deputy Director Town Planning Abdul Razzaq.

During the meeting, the Director Town Planning provided a detailed briefing, stating that the Fishermen Colony project was announced approximately three years ago by the Prime Minister of Pakistan during his visit to Gwadar, which aims at the welfare of local fishermen. Subsequently, GDA completed initial groundwork.

It was further shared that a request has been submitted to the federal government for the required funding, and the project is awaiting the release of these funds. Once the funds are made available, development work will formally commence. In the next phase, the process of plot allotment to fishermen will also begin.

The Government of Balochistan will provide significant subsidies on land prices and development costs to ensure affordable and quality housing for fishermen. The project will include modern urban facilities such as clean drinking water supply, sewerage system, electricity, schools, mosques, hospitals, and parks.

The Planning and Development (P&D) Department of Balochistan has already approved the PC-II of the project, under which consultancy services, master planning, design, and other technical aspects will be completed.

To ensure transparency, a digital database of allottees will also be established. On this occasion, DG GDA Mo'in-ur-Rehman Khan directed that the project should be advanced on a priority basis so that the real stakeholders of Gwadar — the fishermen — can be provided with modern and dignified housing facilities at the earliest.

PM Shehbaz departs for official visits to Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Türkiye

ISLAMABAD (INP): Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif has departed for official visits to Saudi Arabia, Qatar, and Türkiye from April 15 to 18. The visit aims to strengthen bilateral relations as well as addressing regional peace and security challenges. Officials say the meetings reflect Pakistan's continued focus on deepening strategic partnerships in the Gulf region.

Following his Gulf engagements, the prime minister will travel to Türkiye to attend the Fifth Antalya Diplomacy Forum. The high-level global event brings together world leaders to discuss pressing international issues.

During the forum, Shehbaz Sharif will participate in the Leaders' Panel alongside other global leaders. He is expected to present Pakistan's perspective on key global and regional matters.

DHPP distributes health kits to promote hygiene in Dasu schools

ISLAMABAD (INP): Officials from the Dasu Hydropower Project (DHPP) distributed health and hygiene kits to hundreds of students at two girls' primary schools on Wednesday, part of a broader community wellness initiative.

The initiative is part of a larger campaign launched on March 15 that has already reached the Seo area, where 433 kits were distributed earlier this month. DHPP officials said they plan to extend the program to 11 government high schools across Upper Kohistan to bolster preventive healthcare awareness among both students and teachers. The Dasu Hydropower Project, a major run-of-river scheme on the Indus River, is being developed by the China School Chitraghad Group Company (CGGC). The project has a total planned capacity of 4,320 megawatts (MW). Stage 1, currently under construction, is expected to generate 2,160 MW and produce approximately 12,222 gigawatt-hours (GWh) annually.

Pakistani Scholar bridges Academia and Industry as technical entrepreneur

BEIJING April 15 (INP): For Dr. Sami Iqbal from Pakistan, the journey from a master's student at Southeast University in 2015 to a leading researcher and tech entrepreneur in 2026 is a testament to how academic excellence, when paired with entrepreneurial vision, can create tangible solutions to some of the world's most pressing challenges.

Dr. Sami is now an assistant professor at the university's School of Electronic Engineering and the founder of Enfiniti Innovate, according to a report published by China Economic Net on Wednesday.

The technology startup focuses on smart devices, wearable technologies, AI-assisted preventive healthcare, renewable energy materials, and technology

transfer from China to Pakistan and other Belt and Road countries.

Through these roles, Dr. Sami is positioning himself as a bridge between academia and corporate innovation.

Why would a young researcher devote himself to a field that has not yet been commercialized? The answer lies in a problem that affects billions of people: energy poverty.

Specializing in third-generation solar cells and organic materials like perovskites and multi-walled carbon nanotubes, Dr. Sami has published nearly 30 papers and filed several patents. His work is backed by a global network of collaborations.

Speaking about China's dominance in the solar industry, Dr. Sami noted that more than 80 percent of the world's solar cells and silicon are produced and processed in China.

"Even during my recent four-month sabbatical research visit at McGill University in Montreal, most of the materials we used in those labs were imported from China as R&D raw resources," he said.

He further expressed confidence that third-generation photovoltaic devices will be available for commercial production in less than a decade. "This would highly impact power shortages in Pakistan and every developing country," he added.

"China already has a huge production of intermittent power sources from solar cells connecting to the national grid. The same model can benefit Pakistan."

What inspired Dr.

Saudi Arabia announces \$3bn aid for Pakistan

ISLAMABAD (INP): Pakistan has secured a crucial financial lifeline as Saudi Arabia pledged \$3 billion in additional support to help stabilize the country's economy. The move comes at a critical time as Pakistan faces mounting external payments and pressure on foreign exchange reserves.

Saudi Arabia has agreed to provide a \$3 billion deposit to Pakistan, aimed at supporting its balance of payments and easing immediate financial pressures. The announcement was confirmed in Washington, DC, during his visit, Aurangzeb held detailed discussions with Saudi Finance Minister Mohammed Al-Jadaa, following an earlier meeting in Islamabad.

He noted that Pakistan had deliberately avoided commenting publicly on the support package until formal confirmation was received, despite media speculation.

Aurangzeb expressed gratitude to Saudi leadership, particularly Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman and senior finance officials, for their continued cooperation and timely assistance.

TENDER NOTICE

The Chief Minister Initiative for Dyalpuri Program (Baltichistan) for All DCs involves back to back from the Bidders the supply of following items:

ITEMS TO BE SUPPLIED: Only electronic bid with specifications. No physical bid is required. Note: In All Procurements of 500B Whether Through Electronic or Manual Bid Submission, it is Mandatory For All Bidders to Register As Electronic Public Procurement System of ePPRA GGD.

S. No.	Category of Object	Est. Security
1	1. Household and Educational Lab Equipment	3%
(Total Bidders/Court: 1)		

Procurements shall be made under the Baltichistan Public Procurement Rules - 2014. **Eligibility of Bidders:** 3 Requirements of Similar Nature and Complexity 5,500,000 in Previous 3 Years Turn over of at least 10,000,000 PKR in 2 Subsequent Previous Years Presence in Active Tax Payer List Sales Tax Certificate The bidding firm must not be currently blacklisted by any procuring agency of Pakistan. It is not permissible Submission of the required Bid Security in case Bid Security is not found as required during financial evaluation. The bidding firm shall be declared an ineligible and non-responsive if it/they on stamp paper of Rs. 100/- duly indelible to the effect that it/ he/ Bidder has submitted the current and complete information along with the bid/offer. If any document/ information is found forged/ engineered/ false/ forged at any stage, the bidder may be declared as blacklisted in accordance with law and the performance guarantee and payment, if any, may be forfeited. It Bid Validity Compliance (90 Days) At Delivery Period Compliance (45 Days) In Price Reasonability (1) Compliance of warranty period, its Agreement with all terms & conditions, its Agreement of operation of plant during the warranty period, valid ISO Certification 9001:2015 on relevant category. Registrations with Pakistan Engineering Council (PEC) C-5 and above (100,000,000) in Relevant Category (as per Annexure C to RFP-1) (R&I) (L&I) (S&I) (Solar Energy), L&I (110) (Solar Energy system) (Renewable) (Renewable product compliance / deviation sheet) statement on Bidder's Letterhead duly signed and stamped. Catalogue / Brochure / technical data sheet (having complete technical specifications of the offered goods) Procedure of Procurement: Single Stage Two Envelope bidding Process: e-Bid Security: The bid must accompany Bid Security in the form of Deposit of 3% of specified amount in the name of the tendering authority as a cashed bank. Tender Documents: Bid / Bidding Document can be reviewed electronically from program, https://ppra.gov.pk/ issuance of tender Documents. Complete Bidding Document can be viewed at www.pppra.gov.pk. Last date of submission: bid can only be submitted electronically latest by 04 May, 2026 10:50 AM through supplier dashboard. Tender opening: All tenders will be opened on same day at 11:00 AM on ePPS System Address: Provincial Chief Directorate Procurement, Islamabad-75200. Email: dyalpuri@baltichistan.gov.pk

Provincial Coordinator
Chief Minister Initiative for
Dyalpuri Program Baltichistan
Govt of Sindh

AR No. 4/2026-86/2026
Government of Sindh, Islamabad



ISLAMABAD: Federal Minister for Commerce Jam Kamal Khan in a meeting with Mohammad Harris Agar, discussing formalization to boost exports, tax revenue, and industrial growth.

Japan contributes \$2 million to support communities affected by climate disasters in Pakistan

NEWS DESK: Japan has announced that it will contribute \$2 million to support vulnerable communities affected by disasters across Pakistan, a move which has been welcomed by the United Nations World Food Programme (WFP), according to a press release issued on Thursday.

"This contribution will enable WFP to provide food assistance to more than 45,000 people, impacted by monsoon floods and other shocks. It will also help communities restore assets and stabilise livelihoods for a stronger future," the statement said.

The handout quoted Japan's ambassador to Pakistan, Akamatsu Shuichi, as saying, "Japan values its long-standing partnership with Pakistan and the WFP in supporting vulnerable communities."

"Through this contribution, Japan aims to ensure that families facing hardship have access to essential food while supporting efforts that help communities recover," he stated.

Meanwhile, WFP



Country Director and Representative to Pakistan Coco Ushiyama said, "We appreciate Japan's ongoing support for the people of Pakistan."

"This contribution not only addresses immediate food needs, but also assists families to protect what they have, recover from losses, and strengthen their ability to withstand future shocks. As climate risks intensify, such investments are critical to breaking the cycle of vulnerability and supporting more resilient communities across Pakistan," she said.

The release said that Pakistan faces "major climate risks" including heatwaves, dry spells and glacial lake outburst floods. It said that communities were still recovering from the 2025 monsoon floods that affected 6.9 million people.

"The National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA) warns that the 2026 monsoon season could see 22-26 per cent higher than normal rainfall, raising the risk of severe flooding and highlighting the urgent need for timely support and preparedness," it said.

The release also termed Japan as one of the WFP's "most valued global partners".

"Since the 2022 floods, the government of Japan has contributed more than \$10 million to support WFP's humanitarian operations in Pakistan," it highlighted.

According to figures compiled by the NDMA, the 2025 floods killed at least 1,000 people and affected nearly seven million people. Punjab suffered the most damage, followed by Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and parts of Gilgit-Baltistan, where vast areas of farmland were destroyed, homes were swept away, and many communities were forced to relocate.

Biggest well begins oil, gas production

NEWS DESK: The Oil and Gas Development Company (OGDCL) Ltd (OGDCL) on Wednesday began commercial production from the highest-ever oil and gas discovery from a single well in the country's history.

Baragzai X-01 (Slant) exploratory well in the Nashpa Block, Kohat district of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, is now the highest-producing well and contributes approximately 10pc of OGDCL's total crude oil production.

Petroleum Minister

Ali Pervaiz Malik formally inaugurated the commencement of commercial production in a ceremony that was also attended by Secretary Petroleum Hamed Yaqoob Sheikh, OGDCL Managing Director and CEO Ahmed Hayat Lak and representatives of other exploration and development companies.

After Wednesday's injection of 5,300 barrels of oil per day (bpd), 17 million standard cubic feet per day (mmscfd) of gas, and 15 tonnes per day of liquefied petroleum gas, the cumulative production of the well has reached 15,000 bpd and 45 mmscfd of gas.

Oil and gas production from the well is projected to reach 25,000 bpd and 60 mmscfd in the near future, the state-run energy firm announced.

In a significant operational achievement, an 8-kilometre pipeline was laid in record time, alongside critical modifications for gas processing and crude oil storage, and integration with Mela and Nashpa facilities.

The project is expected to generate substantial economic benefits.

The estimated daily revenue stands at Rs156 million, with monthly revenues projected at Rs4.7 billion and annual revenues at Rs57bn. The development will also result in annual foreign exchange savings of approximately \$329m by reducing reliance on imported fuels, the company said.



Power minister reiterates govt's apology for power cuts arising from 'out of control' situation

NEWS DESK: Power Minister Awais Leghari on Thursday reiterated the government's apology for excessive loadshedding, explaining that the external factor of the fuel supply crisis due to the Middle East war was one of the main reasons.

Addressing a press conference in Islamabad, Leghari reiterated the apology for higher than promised "load management", which the government had blamed on lower water availability for power generation.

"If the public is facing any inconveniences due to us not providing electricity at night and during peak hours, I am directly answerable," he said.

"We apologise too but [...] the circumstances are such that they are not in our control. Even then, we are going to apologise," the minister noted.

He said the country had a total shortfall of 4,000 megawatts (MW) due to two reasons: the shortage of fuel imports due to the ongoing Middle East war and reduced hydropower generation.

Leghari said the required liquefied natural gas (LNG) "stopped coming from abroad af-



ter April 1".

He pointed out that Qatar's state-run energy firm had declared force majeure, which resulted in a "huge gap" in the power requirements fulfilled through gas plants during peak hours.

The minister recalled that the electricity generated from water resources was 3,200MW in April 2025, while the output from LNG plants was 3,000MW.

This year, he said, 3,200MW of hydropower was reduced to 1,671MW due to water not being released from Mangla and Tarbela.

The power minister said that the water from reservoirs was released only if the farmers needed it, and not solely for the purpose of generating electricity.

Leghari observed that the shortfall from LNG plants due to the lack of fuel imports was 2,500MW, whereas the shortfall in hydropower was 1,500MW, adding up to a total shortfall of over 4,000MW.

Speaking on the electricity demand, he said that in the first 15 days of April, the demand was 9,000MW at the minimum and 20,000MW at the maximum. He asserted that there was and would not be loadshedding during off-peak hours, which are during the day, as there was no need for it. "When the demand rises above 16,500MW, the power from gas plants is required. In the absence of gas, the country has no other fuel to fulfil its requirements," the minister said.

He explained, "A shortfall occurs when the demand goes beyond 16,500MW after the consumption of every fuel resource in Pakistan: imported coal, local coal, nuclear, hydropower and solar power. And then in the evening, the loadshedding hours have to be increased as per the requirements."

Leghari stated that one hour of loadshedding across Pakistan was implemented due to a shortfall of 500MW.

Gold, silver prices move up in Pakistan tracking global trends

NEWS DESK: Gold and silver prices rose on Thursday in Pakistan, supported by a weaker dollar and lower US Treasury yields, as investors grew optimistic about a potential end to the Middle East war, which has stoked fears of higher inflation.

Spot gold rose 0.9% to \$4,830.82 per ounce by 0455 GMT. US gold futures for 7 June delivery gained 0.6% to \$4,853.40.

Following international market trends, gold and silver prices in Pakistan recorded further increases, with the price of 24-carat gold per tola rising by Rs1,400 to Rs504,862. Similarly, the price of 10 grams of gold increased by Rs1,200 to Rs432,837.

Meanwhile, the price of silver in the country also increased by Rs110 per tola to Rs8,514, while the price of 10 grams of silver rose by Rs94 to Rs7,299.

The US dollar fell to its lowest level in six weeks, making greenback-denominated commodities, including bullion, more affordable for holders of other currencies.

Benchmark 10-year US Treasury yields eased 0.1%, as hopes of a US-Iran peace deal eased higher-for-longer US interest rate bets.

"The primary driver (for gold) is the optimism about a US-Iran ceasefire that is pushing down longer-term bond yields globally and that kind of created a lower opportunity cost of holding gold and silver," said Kelvin Wong, a senior market analyst at OANDA.

"If we start to see a break above \$4,900, further potential upside

cannot be ruled out towards the next intermediate resistance zone, which is at the psychological level of \$5,000."

Optimism grew that the war may be near an end, with a key Pakistani mediator in Tehran and the President Donald Trump administration talking up hopes for a deal that would open the crucial Strait of Hormuz.

Spot gold prices have fallen more than 8% since the Iran war began in late February amid concerns that elevated energy prices could feed into inflation

and keep global interest rates higher.

While gold is considered a hedge against inflation, higher interest rates weigh on the non-yielding metal's demand.

In the US, traders now see a 29% chance of a 25-basis-point interest rate cut this year. "Before the war, there were expectations of two reductions for this year. Among other metals, spot silver rose 2% to \$80.61 per ounce, platinum gained 1.6% to \$2,143.08, and palladium was up 1.4% at \$1,592.84.



Pakistan receives \$2b from Saudi Arabia: SBP

NEWS DESK: The State Bank of Pakistan (SBP) said on Thursday that the country has received \$2 billion from the Ministry of Finance, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, in a post on X.

The central bank said the funds were received "in the value date of April 15, 2026".

The news comes a day after Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif arrived in Saudi Arabia for the first part of his three-nation tour amid ongoing active negotiation efforts for peace in the Middle East.

The development came on the heels of Saudi Arabia's decision to extend another financial bailout package to Pakistan, aimed at helping the country meet its external financing needs in line with International Monetary Fund (IMF) requirements.

Finance Minister Muhammad Aurangzeb said on Wednesday that Saudi Arabia has committed \$3 billion in additional deposits, with disbursement expected in the coming week. He further stated that the existing \$5 billion Saudi deposit would no longer remain subject to the earlier annual rollover arrangement and would instead be extended for a longer period.

With the fresh loan, Saudi Arabia has become the single largest country that has placed a total of \$8 billion in cash deposits with the central bank. AS\$3 billion hole has surfaced in the gross official foreign exchange reserves after the United Arab Emirates did not roll over its \$3.5 billion debt despite making commitments with the IMF.

Pakistan is expecting a total of \$5 billion in new financial assistance from friendly countries to retain the reserves at their current levels.

Aurangzeb said that the government remained committed to

achieving around \$18 billion in reserves, equivalent to approximately 3.3 months of import cover, by the end of the fiscal year.

Additional IMF loan The government sources told The Express Tribune that it has been decided to seek an additional loan from the IMF under the existing package and there were high chances that the IMF would honour Pakistan's request.

The IMF's managing director has said that her organisation was expecting \$50 billion in financing requests from the member countries to deal with the

ing the Fund management to either augment the existing programme or provide new financing windows. They added that seeking a new financing facility from the IMF may not be possible, but the existing programme can be augmented with additional loans. Pakistan can avail up to 600% of its quota in the IMF, and so far, it has exhausted 350% of the total quota. The sources said that there was a \$2 billion to \$2.5 billion window available, which Pakistan wanted to utilise to handle the effects of the Middle East war.

The sources said



that Pakistan was eligible to avail the additional IMF financing to deal with the war shocks. The sources said that the IMF executive directors were also urging the objective of maintaining reserves in line with its obligations under the IMF, including the objective of Middle East war shocks. The sources said that the IMF executive directors were also urging

Composed Babar guides Zalmi to sixth PSL win against subdued Gladiators

NEWS DESK: The National Bank Stadium remained devoid of spectators on Wednesday night, in keeping with the government's austerities measures that have seen all matches of this HBL Pakistan Super League (PSL) season played behind closed doors.

The silence, now a familiar feature of the ongoing tournament, once again framed the contest — and in that stillness, one sound stood out above all: the crisp, assured echo of Babar Azam's bat striking the ball.

That rhythm accompanied Peshawar Zalmi's march to a comprehensive eight-wicket victory over Quetta Gladiators, as their captain crafted an unbeaten 71 to steer his side to the 156-run target with nine balls to spare.

Zalmi's sixth successive win kept them unbeaten and virtually assured of a place in the playoffs, while Gladiators' campaign continued to falter leaving them fifth on the table with just two wins from six outings.

Earlier, Gladiators were bowled out for 154 on the final ball of the 16-off 13 balls ended in a run-out, leaving Gladiators



themselves despite a handful of promising starts, thanks to another incisive spell by Sufiyan Muqeem.

Ahsan Ali departed early for four, caught by Mohammad Harris off Iftikhar Ahmed, before captain Saud Shakeel's 16 off 13 balls ended in a run-out, leaving Gladiators

at 39-2. Rithee Rossouw briefly countered with a fluent 26 off 18 deliveries, striking four boundaries and briefly shifting momentum. Having taken on Mohammad Basit for three consecutive fours, the South African looked set for more but was undone by left-

arm wrist spinner Sufiyan, dragging a delivery onto his stumps in the eighth over.

At 62-3, Gladiators required consolidation but instead found themselves slipping further. Shamyul Hussain managed 12 before being out to Aaron Hardie, while Khawaja Nafay's

arm wrist spinner Sufiyan, dragging a delivery onto his stumps in the eighth over.

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World Cup security planning delayed

NEWS DESK: The U.S. government has released all funds allocated for security at the soccer World Cup, but the ongoing shutdown of the Department of Homeland Security has affected planning and coordination, a Department official told a Senate hearing on Wednesday.

"A lot of the planning efforts underway for the World Cup have been slowed down, have been delayed due to the DHS Office of Homeland Security's shutdown," Christopher Tomney, director of the DHS Office of Homeland Security, told the Senate Appropriations Committee.

Intelligence briefings reviewed by Reuters last month warned of the possibility of extremists and criminals to target the World Cup, with officials working on preparations for the soccer tournament sounding the alarm on a delay in allocation of approved security funds.

Federal Emergency Management Agency has now distributed the \$625 million earmarked for security. The 48-team tournament, one of the world's biggest sporting events, will be held in the U.S., Canada and Mexico.

"All the funding has been released now. FEMA (GO) is up and operational," he said, referring to the disaster agency's grants management system.

The DHS's shutdown has crossed the two-month mark, with lawmakers in Congress unable to agree on legislation to fund the agency in the wake of President Donald Trump's immigration crackdown. Trump signed an order earlier this month to pay every DHS employee, but the order was blocked by the courts.

"We just can't replace that expertise overnight. It has hindered our coordination with state and locals," he said.

World Cup transportation costs With public transit costs for getting to and from World Cup games repeatedly reaching or exceeding \$100 each way, New Jersey Governor Phil Murphy is asking FIFA to help subsidize the expense.

According to the Athletic, train tickets from New York's Penn Station to MetLife Stadium in East Rutherford, N.J., will top \$100 for World Cup games. The standard fare for that route is \$12-90.

Atletico resist Barca comeback as Dembele fires PSG into CL semis

NEWS DESK: Atletico Madrid sent 10-man Barcelona crashing out of the Champions League and reaching the final four with a 3-2 aggregate victory despite Tuesday's 2-1 quarter-final second leg defeat.

Meanwhile on Tuesday, Ousmane Dembele struck twice to confirm Paris Saint-Germain's place in the semi-finals with a 2-0 victory over Liverpool, sealing a 4-0 aggregate win in their quarter-final tie at a rain-soaked Anfield.

Lamine Yamal and Ferran Torres fired visitors Barca ahead in the 24 minutes but Ademola Lookman's strike gave Atletico the edge in the gripping all-Spanish tie once again after their 2-0 win in the first leg.

Diego Simeone's side returned to the semi-finals for the first time since 2017 by holding on against the Liga Champions in a compelling and bloody battle.

Barcelona defender Eric Garcia was sent off for bringing down Alexander Sorloth as he ran in on goal in the final stages, hampering their chances of finding a third goal to force extra-time.

Atletico have never won the competition and lost the 2014 and 2016 finals against rivals Real Madrid with

end to a four-season wait for any title.

"It's going to be a great match, a tough one, so we'll need to get some rest. Now it's time to start thinking about Saturday. What a great feeling," Griezmann said.

"I hope I can help my team mates to do something beautiful this season, something historical. Our fans deserve it. Barcelona coach Hansi Flick said he believes his eliminated team deserved to progress.

"We played a fantastic first half, (but) we have to score more goals. It was really possible (but) we conceded the goal we didn't expect at this moment," Flick told reporters.

Barcelona forward Raphinha, who was sidelined through injury for both matches, accused referees Clement Turpin, who officiated the second game, and Ivtan Kovacs, from the first, of "robbing" his team.

"I think the refereeing is going really badly, the decisions are terrible and to be fair, I really want to understand why they're so afraid that Barcelona will come and win.

"I really want to understand why they're so afraid that Barcelona will come and win.

Sufiyan Muqeem scripts redemption arc amid Zalmi dominance

NEWS DESK: When Sufiyan Muqeem marks his run-up at the bowling crease, the fall of opposition wickets appears almost inevitable.

Such has been the pattern of the left-arm wrist spinner since he established this HBL Pakistan Super League season for Peshawar Zalmi.

Largely introduced to the attack by captain Babar Azam during the crucial middle overs, Sufiyan has made it a habit of striking regularly. In doing so, the 23-year-old has collected 13 wickets in five PSL outings so far — averaging just under 10 and conceding a miserly 64.9 per over — to sit atop the bowling charts.

Sufiyan's latest masterclass came on Monday night at the National Bank Stadium, where his spell of 3-30 proved decisive in Peshawar Zalmi's 24-run victory over Multan Sultans. Chasing 197, the Sultans looked comfortable at stages.

but Sufiyan's variations and control turned the tide. He removed key players including Josh Philippe and Ashton Turner, applying the brakes as the asking rate soared.

The southpaw's resurgence in the PSL has been nothing short of a redemption arc after he was dropped from the Pakistan side despite a promising start to his international career two years ago — four ODIs yielding eight wickets at the bowling crease, the fall of opposition wickets appearing almost inevitable.

However, selectors moved on, leaving the young spinner to reassess and rebuild.

That setback might have dented confidence. Instead, it triggered a professional response. Back with Zalmi, Sufiyan has displayed the composure and hunger that first caught the selectors' attention.

"Whenever I give him the ball, I am confident that he'll pick up a wicket for me somewhere," Babar said after the Multan match.

"When he goes for the kill, he's not a bowler who gets hit easily. In my opinion, he's a big asset for Pakistan, and to serve Pakistan a lot of the way he's bowling."

Babar added that Sufiyan still needed improvement but was progressing steadily.

"He talks to the coaches. After every match, he asks, 'Where can I do better?'" the Pakistan stalwart noted.

That attitude — humble, inquisitive and relentless — has been evident in Sufiyan's ability to deliver under pressure, mixing flight, dip and sharp turn on unresponsive surfaces.

Zalmi's fielding coach Azhar Ali echoed the skipper's view, highlighting the rarity of left-arm wrist spin in the control Sufiyan has shown.

"Left-arm wrist spin is quite rare and it's hard to bowl accurately. The way he has bowled with control and temperament is impressive because in T20 cricket the best batters come after you and you have to be brave — and he has been brave," Azhar said.

Sufiyan's journey mirrors many Pakistan cricketers — from tape-lab roots in AJK to structured cricket in Rawalpindi, followed by domestic performances that earned him a national call-up.

Early success in T20s promised much, yet the competitive nature of selection meant even brief lapses could cost a place.

For Zalmi, his role goes beyond numbers. In an attack featuring the pace of Nahid Rana and Shoriful Islam, Sufiyan offers control and variety.

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Pakistan ramps up shuttle diplomacy with PM in Saudi Arabia, CDF in Tehran

NEWS DESK: While the White House on Wednesday said the US is discussing a possible second round of peace talks with Iran in Islamabad and is optimistic about reaching a deal, Pakistan's civil and military leadership engaged in feverish diplomacy, with Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif embarking on a four-day tour to Riyadh, Doha and Istanbul and Chief of Defence Forces Field Marshal Asim Munir leading a delegation to Tehran.

Field Marshal Munir's visit comes at a delicate stage in the Iran-US engagement process days ahead of the expiry of the 15-day fragile truce. The visit, moreover, follows backchannel exchanges continuing after last week's direct talks in Islamabad ended without a breakthrough though the diplomatic channel remained open.

A source close to the delegation said PM Munir carried a message from Washington, including updates linked to efforts to secure a ceasefire in Lebanon. Iran was awaiting Israeli announcement on ceasefire before deciding its response. A message relayed through Pakistan, the source added, underlining how developments in Lebanon remain tied to the broader negotiation track. The Iranian side was reportedly also judging whether or not US would stand by the commitments being made in the proposed Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas



Aragchi, who received the delegation at the airport, later in a post on X said he was "delighted to welcome Field Marshal Munir to Iran". He expressed gratitude for Pakistan's hosting of the dialogue, calling it a reflection of "deep and great bilateral relationship" and a shared commitment to regional peace. The Pakistani delegation includes Interior Minister Mohsin Naqvi

and senior officials from the foreign ministry, security institutions and technical bodies. National Security Adviser and Director General ISI Lt Gen Asim Malik travelled separately to join the talks.

Detailed discussion Iranian Foreign Minister Esmail Baghaei, while confirming the visit, said: "Following the talks that took place in Islamabad, and also the

discussions that the Pakistani side has had with US, our views have been conveyed and heard." He said discussions in Tehran would include a detailed exchange of viewpoints about the Islamabad round.

Pakistani officials described the exchanges as part of continued efforts to sustain the fragile two-week ceasefire and prepare ground for another round of talks.

Indirect contacts between Tehran and Washington have persisted since the Islamabad talks, with both sides using Pakistan as the principal channel. The diplomatic push coincided with tentative easing of regional tensions. "War close to over" US President Donald Trump said the war was "close to over" and hinted at another round of talks, while the

White House indicated that Islamabad could again host the next meeting. Separately, Trump signalled reopening of the Strait of Hormuz, a move seen by diplomats as an attempt to stabilise energy flows and reduce immediate pressure. Other parallel developments have added to cautious optimism. Contacts between the United Arab Emirates and Iran have resumed, opening another quiet diplomatic

channel, while reported progress towards a ceasefire in Lebanon has helped ease one of the key flashpoints linked to the negotiations. Diplomats say these moves, taken together, are reinforcing the fragile Iran-US ceasefire that Pakistan helped broker.

At the same time, Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif arrived in Riyadh, where his talks with Saudi leadership are formally centred on economic and defence cooperation but are also expected to support the wider diplomatic effort.

According to Arab media, PM Shehbaz was received by the deputy governor of the Mecca region on arrival. His visit followed Saudi Arabia's decision to provide an additional \$3 billion deposit to support Pakistan's balance of payments, replacing Pakistan's arrangement with the UAE.

The prime minister met Saudi Crown Prince and Prime Minister Mohammad bin Salman and apprised him of the details of the recent Islamabad talks. Deputy Prime Minister Ishaq Dar accompanied PM Shehbaz. On Thursday, the prime minister is set to leave for Qatar from where he would proceed to Turkey. Officials said the prime minister would also brief Saudi leaders on Pakistan's mediation between Iran and the US, including the status of the ceasefire and prospects for renewed dialogue. Riyadh has publicly appreciated Islamabad's role in facilitating the process.

A senior Pakistani diplomat accompanying the delegation said the engagements are aimed at reinforcing a shared objective of regional stability. "Pakistan remains committed to peace and dialogue in the region," the diplomat said. PM Shehbaz is expected to travel onward to Qatar and Turkey, where discussions will cover economic cooperation as well as regional security. In Turkey, he will attend the Antalya Diplomacy Forum and present Pakistan's perspective on ongoing crises in West Asia.

On the sidelines of the forum, PM Shehbaz is "expected to hold bilateral meetings with President Recep Tayyip Erdogan and other key world leaders." Earlier in the day, the White House praised Pakistan's role as the principal intermediary in ongoing diplomatic efforts aimed at ending the Iran conflict. Responding to a question on where the US team would be positioned in the next round of negotiations, White House Press Secretary Karoline Leavitt said, "They would very likely be in the same place as they were the last time," Islamabad. "I would just want to make one point that is important to the president. Pakistanians have been incredible mediators throughout this process and we really appreciate their friendship and their efforts to bring this deal to a close."

IHC expresses displeasure over cutting of trees in Islamabad in violation of previous orders

NEWS DESK: The Islamabad High Court (IHC) on Thursday expressed strong displeasure over the cutting of trees in the federal capital despite previous orders, warning the authorities of contempt proceedings in case of further violations. IHC's Justice Khadim Hussain Soomro, while hearing multiple petitions against tree cutting in various sectors, observed that the court injunction orders issued on January 15 and April 8 had been ignored.

Appearing on behalf of the petitioners, advocates Mudassar Latif Abbasi and Umar Asad argued that the Capital Development Authority (CDA) were continuing to cut trees without lawful justification. During the proceedings, Advocate Abbasi informed the court that more than 30,000 trees had been cut across Islamabad under the

pretext of removing paper mulberry trees, without obtaining mandatory approval from the Pakistan Environmental Protection Agency (Pak-EPA).

He further pointed out that the CDA, in its para-wise comments, had failed to clarify whether any expert opinion or any scientific mechanism to identify the trees being removed.

"It is regrettable that such a beautiful city has been stripped of trees without engaging any experts," he remarked. The judge also noted that no satellite survey or credible methodology had been adopted to verify whether the felled trees were indeed paper mulberry.

Seeking time, the CDA counsel requested the court to allow an opportunity to submit a comprehensive response and assist the bench on the matter.

Expressing surprise, Justice Soomro questioned the CDA's legal team about the absence of expert opinion or any scientific mechanism to identify the trees being removed.

The judge also noted that no satellite survey or credible methodology had been adopted to verify whether the felled trees were indeed paper mulberry.

Seeking time, the CDA counsel requested the court to allow an opportunity to submit a comprehensive response and assist the bench on the matter.

AJK police arrest suspected RAW agent in Rawalakot

NEWS DESK: Azad Jammu and Kashmir (AJK) police claimed on Thursday that they had arrested a suspected agent of India's Research and Analysis Wing (RAW) in Rawalakot, who had been blackmailed into working for the foreign intelligence agency.

According to AJK Inspector General of Police (IGP) Liaqat Ali Malik, one suspect had been arrested who had allegedly been blackmailed into working for RAW.

His handler, whom Malik said used a Facebook account with an address in Lahore, blackmailed him by initially assigning "small tasks" — beginning with compliance activities and later involving geotagging, sharing coordinates, and recording videos of "sensitive" sites, including military installations, schools, bridges and other government buildings in Pakistan.

This time, the AJK police worked

with sensitive institutions to take preemptive action and exposed this whole network.

Malik said, adding that the enemy forces had "trapped" innocent young people while causing damage to life and property.

According to the police, the method of blackmail involves the use of a fake account on social media to lure in targets.

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Security arrangements in Islamabad in overdrive amid possible 2nd round of US-Iran talks

NEWS DESK: Security arrangements in Islamabad were in overdrive on Thursday as speculation continued about the federal capital possibly hosting a second round of talks between the US and Iran.

Speaking to Dawn, senior police officials said a meeting — chaired by the deputy inspector general of logistics — was held last night, during which a shortage of manpower in connection with the security arrangements came to light. Officials have also begun carpeting the Islamabad Expressway to remove bumps and potholes in a bid to ensure a smooth drive from Nur Khan Airbase to the Red Zone, they said.

Meanwhile, police in the federal capital have also sought 7,000 personnel from Punjab police, 3,000 of whom reached Islamabad on Thursday, the senior officials said.

Accommodation for

the additional force has also been placed on high alert, the police officials added, with the Special Branch and Counter-terrorism Department's intelligence wing being asked to mount surveillance and intelligence around slums, wooded areas and nullahs, as well as the city's outskirts, bus terminals, and entry and exit points.

Hotels and guest houses within the capital have also been put under strict surveillance, with the police being directed to check the records of guests and visitors.

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3 abducted polio workers recovered in Bannu after joint efforts of police, jirga

NEWS DESK: Three polio workers abducted by militants on Wednesday have been recovered through coordinated efforts by the police and local jirga elders, police said.

Under the leadership of the Bannu district police officer (DPO), the police initiated immediate action following the incident. A comprehensive strategy was adopted by taking local jirga elders into confidence. Due to the successful mediation by the jirga and the professional competence of the police, the abducted workers were safely recovered.

Bannu DPO Yasir Afridi, while confirming the development, told Dawn that with a lot of efforts, they have been recovered.



The three polio workers were abducted by unidentified militants in an attack on the Jhandu Khel area on Wednesday during the ongoing anti-polio campaign, sparking serious concern in the area.

Earlier this week, a police constable was martyred and four others were injured in an attack on a law enforcement party en route to provide security for polio teams in Khyber

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