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Iran Announces Reopening of Strait of Hormuz 2026: Relief for Global Oil and Pakistani Pockets?



Zeshan Ahmed, Syed Ali Shah, News Desk:

In a significant development that could bring down fuel prices across Pakistan, Iran has announced the full reopening

of the Strait of Hormuz – the world’s most critical oil shipping route.

Iran’s Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi declared the narrow waterway “completely open”

for safe passage on Fri-

day, ending weeks of effective blockade that had disrupted global energy supplies and spiked petrol and diesel prices in the region.

The announcement comes as part of a fragile two-week ceasefire between Iran and

the United States, with quiet diplomatic efforts reportedly supported by Pakistan.

Ships are now required to coordinate with Iranian authorities and follow monitored routes. Early reports confirm that the first commercial tank-

ers have already begun moving through the strait after being stuck for weeks.

Why This Matters to Every Pakistani Family

For ordinary Pakistanis, the Strait of Hormuz reopening is not just distant geopol-

tics — it directly touches daily life. The strait handles nearly one-fifth of the world’s oil and gas trade. When it was closed, global oil prices surged, pushing petrol rates higher at pumps from Quetta to Karachi.

Ahmed Khan, a truck driver from Balochistan, shared his relief: “My vehicle was parked for over a month. Every extra rupee on diesel meant less money for my children’s school fees and food. If prices come down even a little, it will be a big help.”

Hundreds of ships carrying thousands of seafarers — many from South Asia — had been trapped.

The blockade also raised fears of inflation, higher transport costs, and power shortages in energy-importing countries like Pakistan.

Cautious Hope Amid Uncertainty

While the move brings immediate hope, Iranian officials have described the reopening as temporary and “subject to technical limitations.”

Analysts warn that long-term stability depends on whether the ceasefire holds and if future negotiations address issues like tolls or joint management of the waterway.

For now, energy markets are watching closely.

A sustained reopening could help stabilise oil prices and ease pressure on Pakistan’s economy, where fuel costs influence everything from rickshaw fares to electricity bills.

As one regional shipping expert noted: “Today the strait breathes again. Tomorrow, millions of families will feel the difference — if peace lasts.”

Quetta Voice will continue to monitor the situation and its impact on Balochistan and Pakistan.

Bushra Bibi undergoes eye surgery, returns to Adiala after overnight hospital stay: jail authorities



NEWS DESK:

Bushra Bibi, wife of incarcerated former premier and Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) founder Imran Khan, underwent eye surgery on the evening of April 16 after complaining of impaired vision in her right eye, jail authorities said.

The jail administration reportedly took immediate notice and arranged an examination by ophthalmologists,

who diagnosed retinal detachment in Bushra Bibi’s right eye. In view of the diagnosis, doctors advised surgery.

She was then shifted to a private hospital in Rawalpindi. Professor Dr Nadeem Qureshi and his panel performed the surgery after necessary tests and medical examinations were conducted and Bushra Bibi’s consent was obtained.

After the surgery and an overnight hospital stay, the former first lady was discharged in satisfactory condition and has been shifted back to Adiala Jail. Post-operative examinations and follow-ups

will be conducted in accordance with doctors’ advice, according to jail authorities. A meeting was also arranged

between Bushra Bibi, her daughters, and her sister, jail authorities said.

The meeting, which was specially arranged, continued for over an hour. During the meeting, the family inquired about

Bushra Bibi’s well-being and health, and expressed satisfaction over her condition, according to the authorities. After the meeting, the family departed from Adiala Jail.

PTI confirmed Bushra Bibi’s surgery in an X post, saying she was “once again taken to a hospital in an emergency and under the cover of darkness.”

Ahsan Iqbal Urges Stronger Climate Resilience and Water Management in Balochistan



Khudai Noor Nasar

ISLAMABAD: Federal Minister for Planning, Development and Special Initiatives, Ahsan Iqbal, has called for urgent and practical steps to strengthen climate resilience in Balochistan, warning that climate change is no longer a distant threat but a daily reality for Pakistan.

Speaking at the IFRAP Technical Workshop on resilience, basin planning, and flood modeling, he told participants that the country must move beyond reacting to disasters and start preparing for them. Referring to the devastating 2022 Pakistan floods, he noted that regions like Sindh and Balochistan suffered the most, further widening existing inequalities.

The minister explained that the federal government secured a \$400 million support package from the World Bank to launch the IFRAP initiative. The program is designed to rebuild damaged infrastructure, restore livelihoods, and, importantly, help communities better withstand future climate shocks.

He also raised serious concerns about Pakistan’s growing water crisis, pointing out that the country is among the most water-stressed in the world. With reservoir capacity shrinking due to silting and no major new dams built in



decades, Pakistan currently stores only about 30 days’ worth of water — far below the global standard. He stressed that better water storage systems are critical, especially since most rainfall comes during the monsoon season.

Throughout his address, Ahsan Iqbal emphasized the importance of smarter planning. He highlighted how tools like flood modeling and basin-level planning can help policymakers make informed, science-based decisions rather than relying on outdated approaches.

He also spoke about reforms in development planning, noting a shift toward outcome-based systems. According to him, success should not be measured by how much money is spent, but by the real impact projects have on people’s lives.

Focusing on Balochistan, the minister reaffirmed the government’s commitment to

the province, mentioning a development allocation exceeding Rs. 200 billion.

However, he warned of a worsening groundwater crisis in Quetta, where water levels are dropping rapidly each year, and called for immediate action to manage water resources more sustainably.

He further highlighted the creation of a National Water Security Task Force, stressing that coordination between federal and provincial governments, along with international partners, will be key to tackling climate challenges effectively.

Wrapping up his speech, Ahsan Iqbal encouraged participants to turn ideas into practical solutions. He expressed hope that with the right investments in water storage, scientific planning, and resilient infrastructure, Pakistan can turn future climate risks into opportunities for long-term sustainability and growth.

QUETTA VOICE

Editor: Asim Khan

Taxpayers' Money Down the Drain: Favoured Outlets Feast While Balochistan's Real Media Starves

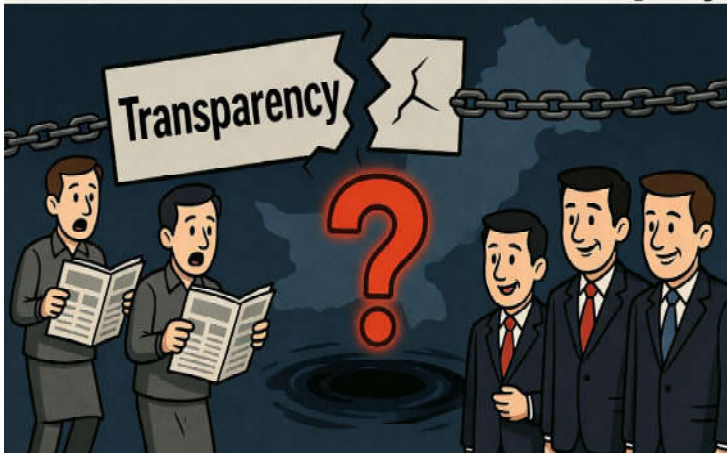
Quetta Voice Investigative Report
QUETTA: Public money meant to inform the people of Balochistan is allegedly disappearing into a "black hole" as the Directorate General Public Relations (DGPR) continues to favour a handful of "well" connected "blue-eyed" media houses in the distribution of government advertisements.

This concern was also echoed during a meeting of the Joint Media Action Committee at Quetta Press Club, which called for the fair and judicious distribution of government advertisements.

Some "blue-eyed" newspapers getting lion's share. Despite tall claims of transparency and meritocracy by the provincial government, credible newspapers with actual circulation and readership are being sidelined, while outlets with little to no visibility continue to receive a lion's share of official ads.

Insiders and media observers say there is still no clear, fixed criteria for allocating advertisements. Powerful and well-connected houses allegedly enjoy preferential treatment.

Hidden Scandal Demands Enquiry



raising serious questions about misuse of taxpayers' money. The anomaly has become more glaring as the national press largely ignores

Performing Well Than Mighty Information Ministry. The anomaly has become more glaring as the national press largely ignores

Balochistan, including important statements of the Chief Minister. Meanwhile, even the Chief Minister's personal social media

counts appear to perform better in public outreach than the entire machinery of the Information Ministry. Journalists and concerned citizens are

now demanding an independent inquiry into the distribution of government advertisements. They insist that those who received

funds without delivering any real service or performance must be held accountable. "The time for cosmetic promises is over," said one senior

journalist on condition of anonymity.

"First fix the rot in advertisement distribution, then talk about any digital media policy."

First Ensure Transparency Then Speak About Digital Policy

The proposed digital policy, currently under discussion, risks losing all credibility if the foundational issue of unfair and opaque ad distribution is not addressed immediately.

Balochistan stands at a critical juncture. The common citizen expects the government to spend public funds responsibly—not to subsidise ghost outlets or reward political favourites while genuine voices struggle for survival.

Transparency is not a favour; it is the basic right of the people.

Merrit must replace patronage. Only then can any talk of digital reform carry weight.

The provincial government must direct chief minister inspection team, anti corruption or the national accountability bureau to conduct a thorough investigation into this scandal.

How AI Is Making Modern Production Smarter and Faster

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

As the need for faster content grows, AI is becoming a key player in modern studios. It helps creators stay up to date with new trends and what audiences want. Studios are using AI to work faster and save money. According to Deloitte's 2024 report, 42% of executives say it boosts efficiency and productivity.

Let's explore how AI is changing production from planning to editing. You'll learn how it saves time, cuts costs, and boosts creativity. By the end, you'll see how it's making modern production smarter and faster.

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

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

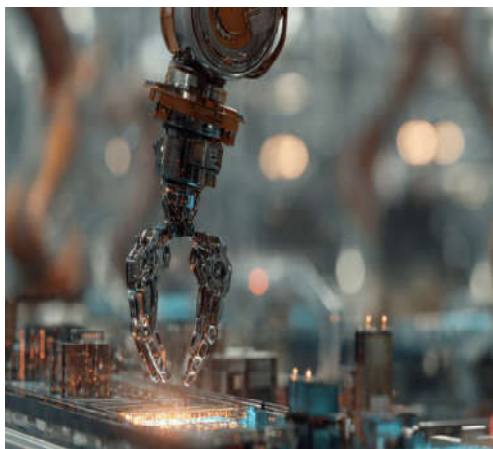
During pre-production, it assists with scriptwriting, budgeting, and virtual set design. In production, it enhances camera tracking, lighting adjustments, and virtual set design. Finally, in post-production, it streamlines editing, color correction, sound design, and even creates advanced visual effects.

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

Why Production Houses Are Turning to AI

Production houses are facing rising costs and tighter schedules. Keeping up with deadlines while staying creative has become a major challenge. To stay efficient, many studios are now using AI to manage time more effectively. In fact, 60% of post-production studios utilize AI-powered editing tools to reduce editing time, reduce expenses. This trend is growing rapidly as the global AI in media and entertainment market is projected to reach \$34.1 billion by 2027.

The demand for quick content is also increasing. Streaming platforms compete to release new shows faster, putting pressure on production teams. At the same time, advertising agencies are already using AI tools for content creation, showing how quickly the industry is adapting to new technology. There is also a shortage of skilled post-production professionals. AI tools step in to



handle repetitive work like cutting scenes or syncing dialogue. These tools help generate dialogue, plot twists, and creative concepts in minutes, saving time while keeping creativity flowing.

Storyboarding and concept visualization have also become easier. Tools like Midjourney, Runway ML, and Pika Labs turn written ideas into visuals, helping directors and producers see how scenes might look before filming begins.

This makes planning smoother and reduces the need for costly revisions later.

AI is also improving casting and budgeting. Some tools analyze data to predict how well an actor will connect with audiences. AI software like Celtx and StudioBinder helps plan budgets and schedules. These tools make it easier for studios to manage costs, track

spending, and stay on time. Production AI is transforming the way films are shot on set. For example, AI-powered cameras can automatically track actors, adjust framing, and optimize lighting in real time. This helps directors capture perfect shots faster and reduces the need for repeated takes. According to MarketsandMarkets, the use of AI cameras in film production is expected to grow by 22% annually by 2027.

Virtual production is becoming more common. Tools like Unreal Engine and NVIDIA Omniverse allow filmmakers to create realistic digital environments before filming begins. These virtual sets save time, cut costs, and give teams more creative freedom, especially for large-scale or fantasy

projects. AI supports crews during editing. Voice recognition systems can follow script lines or adjust camera settings through simple voice commands.

As a result, on-set work becomes smoother, and the crew can focus more on storytelling rather than technical details.

In Post-Production, This phase gets a big boost from AI, especially in editing and sound design. Tools like Runway ML, Adobe Premiere Pro AI, and Descript automate tasks like cutting, syncing, and scene detection. Smart apps can identify key moments and streamline workflows, helping editors focus on storytelling.

AI also improves color grading and sound editing. It can automati-

cally balance colors, refine lighting, remove background noise, and sync soundtracks. Even some free tools can apply complex color grading for a consistent look. These features save time and make the final product polished and professional.

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

The use of AI in video editing has reduced production time by an average of 30%, showing how much it improves efficiency.

AI also helps with versioning and distribution. It can create multiple edits for different platforms like social media, TV, or YouTube Shorts. This allows studios to repurpose content easily and deliver it quickly. Overall, AI makes post-production faster, more precise, and more creative.

Case Studies: How AI is Shaping Modern Production

Case Study 1: Netflix Builds a Cloud-Based VFX Studio

Netflix, one of the biggest entertainment companies in the world, began producing its own content in 2012. To make collaboration easier, the company wanted to create a visual effects (VFX) studio in the clouds. This would let artists work from anywhere, making it easier to collaborate and streamline workflows, helping editors focus on storytelling.

Using NICE DCV and Amazon EC2 G4 instances, Netflix built fast and secure remote workstations. These cloud tools allowed artists to edit, animate, and

render with high-quality visuals while keeping performance smooth. The system helped Netflix move from testing to full production in just one year.

By using AWS, Netflix reduced costs and technical barriers for creators. The company could now attract top VFX and animation talent from anywhere in the world. This innovation showed how cloud and AI tools can transform modern film production.

Case Study 2: Croptify's AI Innovation in Grain Grading

In South Australia, Anna Falkner and Andrew Hannon founded Croptify to make grain testing faster and more accurate. Traditional testing relied on human inspection, which often caused mistakes and disagreements.

The founders wanted a smarter AI-based way to grade crops. Working with the Australian Institute for Machine Learning (AIML), they built AI systems that could analyze grain samples in seconds.

Their system reduced testing time from 24 minutes to just 90 seconds and achieved 98% accuracy. This made the grain supply chain faster and more reliable.

In 2024, Croptify raised \$2 million AUD from investors to expand its technology. Their success proved that AI can bring real value to agriculture by making testing faster, more accurate, and more consistent.

Falkner advises businesses to focus on real problems first and then see if AI is the right solution. Case Study 3: What's Next? Entertainment's Use of AI in Creative Production

Israeli army fire kills Palestinian teenager in West Bank

NEWS DESK: Israeli forces killed a 17-year-old Palestinian in the occupied West Bank on Thursday, according to Palestinian officials.

Mohammed Murad Mahmud Rayan was "killed by the (Israeli) occupation forces on Thursday morning in Beit Duquq", a village just north of Jerusalem, the Ramallah-based Palestinian health ministry said in a statement.

The Israeli army said a "violent disturbance of the peace" broke out during "operational activity" in the Beit Duquq area, and "a terrorist hurled stones at the soldiers, posing a threat to them".

"Soldiers responded with fire towards the terrorist" who was "neutralised", the army added.

According to the Palestinian news agency Wafa, the Israeli army was carrying out a "wide-scale search operation targeting several homes".

Settlers block students path to school with barbed wire.

At least 1,060 Palestinians have been killed by Israeli soldiers or settlers in the West Bank since the Gaza conflict



blocked school path

At least 46 Israelis, both civilians and members of the security forces, have been killed in the same area in Palestinian attacks or during Israeli military operations, official Israeli figures show.

School path

Dozens of children

tried on Monday to get to school in the small village of Umm al-Khair near the city of Hebron. They found their way blocked by barbed wire which villagers said had been placed there by Israeli forces from the nearby Carmel settlement.

Khalil Hathaleen,

head of the Umm al-Khair village council, said the barbed wire prevented children from the outskirts of the village taking their usual safe path through a valley to the school in the village

Otherwise, he said, the children would have

to walk along a road which he described as dangerous, because it passes closer to the settlement.

"We insist on using the main path that our children have always taken," he said, accusing Jewish settlers of trying to take over the land so

that they can expand their settlement.

Israeli human rights group B'Tselem said the barbed wire was part of a coordinated campaign by settlers and the Israeli military to intimidate Palestinians and drive them from their land in the West Bank, which it said

Local Palestinians said they have filed a complaint through an Israeli-Palestinian office about the barbed wire fence, which stands near Israeli flags, but that it had not been removed.

Residents said Israeli soldiers had later fired teargas, causing several children to experience breathing difficulties. Some residents described the children's symptoms as if they were suffocating. In the video, smoke can be seen rising. Classes had been suspended at the start of the Iran war.

Restrictions on Palestinians

The Yesha Council, a body that represents West Bank settlers, said that "a barrier was put in place to protect the residents of Carmel, in coordination with Israeli security authorities" after repeated attempted incursions into Carmel.

It said there were other routes that could be used.

Syria completes takeover of military sites used by US forces

NEWS DESK: Syria said on Thursday the government's takeover of military sites previously used by US troops had been completed, which it said reflected the successful integration of the Kurdish-led SDF group into national structures.

The Syrian government and Kurdish forces declared in January a ceasefire deal that set out a phased integration into the state of Kurdish fighters that had long been allied to the United States.

Washington had stationed troops in Syria for more than a decade helping to combat the militant Islamic State (IS) group.

In recent months, Syria's new Islamist government has expanded its control to

parts of the country's northeast that were previously held by US-allied Kurdish forces, while the government has also formally joined the international anti-IS coalition.

The US intervened in Syria in 2014 to fight IS, which had taken over swathes of Syria and Iraq in a lightning offensive.

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reflecting "a shared assessment that the circumstances which originally necessitated the American military presence in Syria... have fundamentally changed".

The Syrian state is today fully capable of leading counterterrorism efforts from within, in cooperation with the international community, it added.

US Central Command, which is responsible for American troops in the Middle East, said that US forces

"have completed turning over all of our major bases in Syria, as part of a deliberate and conditions-based transition".

"US forces continue to support partner-led counterterrorism efforts, which are essential to ensuring the enduring defeat" of IS, the military command

added. Earlier Thursday, Syria's defence ministry said the army "took over the Qasrak air base... after the withdrawal of international coalition forces".

A defence ministry official said that the base is now "empty of American forces after they fully withdrew", while a correspondent near the northeastern city of Qamishi saw a convoy of US military vehicles heading towards the Iraqi border.

"Sustained efforts" Qasrak was considered a key US base in northeast Syria and served in recent months as a logistics hub for US military convoys and military equipment heading for Iraq.

In February, days before the Middle East war erupted, three sources said that US forces leading the anti-IS coalition would complete their withdrawal from Syria within a month.

Syria's Kurds lost swaths of territory to government forces earlier this year following clashes between the sides, who then agreed a deal to gradually integrate the Kurdish-led Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) and Kurdish civilian institutions into the state.

Alongside the US-led coalition against IS, the SDF spearheaded the battle that led to the jihadist group's territorial defeat in Syria in 2019.

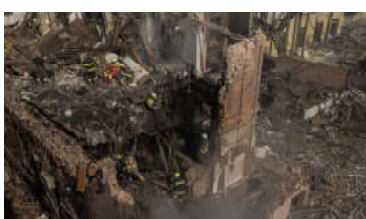


Russian strikes kill 19 across Ukraine

NEWS DESK: A massive Russian drone and missile barrage killed at least 19 people in cities across Ukraine, more than four years into the war with talks on ending the conflict stalled.

Journalists heard loud bangs echoing over the capital during the night and saw huge plumes of black smoke rising over central Kyiv at dawn. More than 100 people were wounded in the attacks that ripped through apartment buildings in the middle of the night.

Ukrainian President Zelensky, on a tour of Europe, called for a minute of silence for those killed, at an event in a church in the Netherlands. "Today, Ukraine is another very hard day, a really hard night, the day after a massive Russian attack," he said. The attack "has proven Russia



does not deserve any easing of global policy or lifting of sanctions,"

he wrote on social media EU council chief Antonio Costa accused Russia of choosing to "deliberately terrorise civilians", decriing the overnight killing as a "horrendous attack against civilian targets".

The Ukrainian air force said Russia had launched 659 drones

and 44 missiles in an attack that started on Wednesday daytime and stretched until dawn on Thursday.

The Russian army said it had "carried out a massive strike" against Ukrainian military and energy targets.

Kyiv has also stepped up its own long-range drone and missile attacks on Russia.

Strikes overnight

killed two people, including a child in southern Russia, officials said. The Russian army said its forces intercepted 207 Ukrainian drones across its western and southern regions.

In the Ukrainian capital of Kyiv, four people were killed, including a 12-year-old boy, and at least 62 wounded, mayor Vitali Klitschko said.

Australian soldier accused of war crimes in Afghanistan granted bail

NEWS DESK: An Australian court granted bail on Friday to former soldier Ben Roberts-Smith, charged with murdering unarmed prisoners captured in Afghanistan following a sweeping war crimes probe.

The towering soldier became a household name across Australia when he was awarded the Victoria Cross in 2011, a medal reserved for only the most courageous wartime exploits.

But a landmark military report in 2020 revealed grave allegations against Australian troops sent to fight Taliban forces, accusing elite units of torture, summary executions and "body count" competitions.

This month Roberts-Smith was charged with five counts of "war crime — murder", with police alleging he was complicit in a string of unlawful killings between 2009 and 2012.

After ten days behind bars he was granted bail, with Judge Greg Grogan telling a Sydney court that the former soldier faced the prospect of "years and years" in jail before his case went to trial.

In court via video link, Roberts-Smith appeared impassive as he was shown on screen in a green prison tracksuit.

His lawyer Slade Howell argued it was unacceptable to keep the soldier behind bars as the case slowly wound through the courts.

"It will take many, many years and will have many twists and turns," he said.

The prosecution, in turn, argued the grave nature of the alleged crimes warranted strict bail conditions.

"The applicant is accused of either killing or directing his subordinates to kill unarmed detainees in the custody of Australian armed forces," prosecution lawyer Simon Buchen reported.

Should Roberts-Smith be found guilty, he faces a maximum sentence of life in prison.

From war hero to defendant

The decorated soldier met Queen Elizabeth II, had his portrait hung at the Australian War Museum, and was even honoured as the nation's "father of the year".

But the war hero's reputation was called into question in 2018, when a series of news reports linked him to the alleged murder of unarmed Afghan prisoners by Australian troops.

The soldier had allegedly kicked an unarmed Afghan civilian off a cliff and ordered subordinates to shoot him, The Age and The Sydney Morning Herald reported.

He was also said to have taken part in the machine-gunning of a man with a prosthetic limb which he later used as a drinking vessel with other soldiers.

Roberts-Smith has staunchly maintained his innocence throughout, launching legal action against the newspapers who aired the allegations.

But his efforts to sue The Age and The Sydney Morning Herald for slander would backfire, with a judge finding in 2023 many of the journalists' claims were "substantially true".

Such civil trials carry a lower burden of proof than the criminal proceedings Roberts-Smith now faces.

Australia deployed 39,000 troops to Afghanistan over two decades as part of US- and Nato-led operations against the Taliban and other militant groups.

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definitive list of actions or behaviours that would constitute a violation of the "honest living" requirement.

The Swedish Refugee Law Centre, an organisation that provides legal assistance to asylum seekers, says the new considerations will make the process for residence permits unpredictable.

"This can also create a sense of insecurity when you don't really know how your actions in different situations might be assessed," Elias Nygren, a lawyer working for the organisation, told AFP.

Some organisations worry that certain types of activism may also be considered a breach of "honest living".

"We organise trainings in civil disobedience, that is, in non-violence and the principles that guide our actions."

"We are finding that this question comes up more and more often," Frida Bengtsson, head of Greenpeace Sweden, told AFP.

Other factors may include going into debt "without any intention or effort to repay", organised begging, committing welfare fraud, or working off the books.

Those found not adhering to the "honest living" standard could face deportation.

The consequences for the very serious "forming" of migrants affected by the reform, John Stauffer, a legal adviser for the human rights organisation Civil Rights Defenders, told AFP.

Even a person's statements — although they in themselves should not be considered as proof of a lack of "honest living" — may indicate links to "violent extremism", Ludvig Aspling, a spokesman for the anti-immigration Sweden Democrats, which props up the minority right-wing government, said when the plans were announced.

"This creates a system where people, depending on their legal status and whether they are citizens or have resi-

denance permits, have different rights in our society, especially when it comes to freedom of expression," Stauffer said.

"If you are a citizen, you have broad and strongly protected freedom of expression. If you are not a citizen, then you will have freedom of expression, but it will not be as strong," he explained.

"Like a guest"

The proposal would make it easier to revoke immigrants' residence permits.

"It is not a human right to stay in Sweden. It's important to remember that," Migration Minister Johan Forsell told AFP.

"If you come to Sweden and you're not a citizen, it's almost like being a guest in someone's home."

Then you should show that you want to become part of the country.

That you make an effort, that you pull your weight, that you work," Forsell said.

The government has not yet published a

definitive list of actions or behaviours that would constitute a violation of the "honest living" requirement.

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The proposal would make it easier to revoke immigrants' residence permits.

"It is not a human right to stay in Sweden. It's important to remember that," Migration Minister Johan Forsell told AFP.

"If you come to Sweden and you're not a citizen, it's almost like being a guest in someone's home."

Then you should show that you want to become part of the country.

That you make an effort, that you pull your weight, that you work," Forsell said.

The government has not yet published a

definitive list of actions or behaviours that would constitute a violation of the "honest living" requirement.

The Swedish Refugee Law Centre, an organisation that provides legal assistance to asylum seekers, says the new considerations will make the process for residence permits unpredictable.

"This can also create a sense of insecurity when you don't really know how your actions in different situations might be assessed," Elias Nygren, a lawyer working for the organisation, told AFP.

Some organisations worry that certain types of activism may also be considered a breach of "honest living".

"We organise trainings in civil disobedience, that is, in non-violence and the principles that guide our actions."

"We are finding that this question comes up more and more often," Frida Bengtsson, head of Greenpeace Sweden, told AFP.

Other factors may include going into debt "without any intention or effort to repay", organised begging, committing welfare fraud, or working off the books.

Those found not adhering to the "honest living" standard could face deportation.

The consequences for the very serious "forming" of migrants affected by the reform, John Stauffer, a legal adviser for the human rights organisation Civil Rights Defenders, told AFP.

Even a person's statements — although they in themselves should not be considered as proof of a lack of "honest living" — may indicate links to "violent extremism", Ludvig Aspling, a spokesman for the anti-immigration Sweden Democrats, which props up the minority right-wing government, said when the plans were announced.

"This creates a system where people, depending on their legal status and whether they are citizens or have resi-

Punjab to introduce electric buses in 10 districts

LAHORE (INP): Amet-ing chaired by Punjab Chief Minister Maryam Nawaz reviewed key developments in the province's transport sector and approved several new initiatives to improve public mobility.

Officials informed the meeting that more than 125,000 passengers have benefited from the free transport service currently operating on 21 routes. Under this program, a total of 3,560 bus trips have been completed so far.

The government has approved the introduction of electric buses in 10 districts: Attock, Bhakkar, Hafizabad, Khaneval, Layyah, Sheikhpura, Gujranwala, Sialkot, Mandi Bahaudin, and Okara.

According to the briefing, 100 electric buses will arrive in Punjab within the current month, followed by 350 more by mid-May and another 264 by the end of June. Authorities also plan to establish a dedicated bus depot in each division to support the electric fleet. The chief minister has directed officials to present a plan for operating 1,500 electric buses at the tehsil level, indicating a major expansion of the initiative.

The meeting also reviewed progress on mass transit system projects in Gujranwala and Faisalabad. A report on Punjab's first e-taxi scheme was presented, stating that 194 e-taxi will be introduced in May and 208 in June.

Maryam Nawaz further instructed that construction and renovation of metro bus stations be completed as soon as possible.



WASHINGTON, D.C.: Federal Minister for Finance and Revenue, Senator Muhammad Aunrazgeer, witnessed the signing of an important financial agreement in Washington, D.C., in the presence of the Ambassador of Pakistan to the United States, on the sidelines of the World Bank-IMF Spring Meetings.

Rs 5.36b spent in current fiscal year on 22 development projects in Gwadar under PSDP 2025-26

ISLAMABAD (INP): The major ongoing schemes include the construction of Gwadar-Ratodero Road, New Gwadar International Airport Project, and multiple initiatives under the Gwadar Development Authority. The New Gwadar International Airport remains the single largest project in the region with an approved cost of Rs 54.98 billion. The total cost of these 22 projects stands at Rs 47.72 billion up to June 2025, leaving a throw-forward of Rs 12.26 billion. An allocation of Rs 4 billion was made for 2025-26, against Rs 3.43 billion was released and Rs 2.34 billion utilized by March 30 this year. The Construction of Gwadar Ratodero Road Project (M-8) has an estimated expenditure of Rs 32.89 billion up to June 2025.

Govt moving towards integrating technical skills, digital education: Anusha Rahman

LAHORE, April 16 (INP): Senior Advisor to the Chief Minister Punjab, Senator Anusha Rahman has said the government is moving towards integrating technical skills, digital education and social protection initiatives to equip youth with market-relevant capabilities and ensure inclusive development.

She stated this while holding a series of meetings on education, health, digital skills, IT development, human rights and minority affairs here on Thursday.

In a meeting with Chairperson Parliamentary Committee on Literacy and Non-Formal Basic Education Maria Tial and Member National Assembly Shumaila Rana, it was discussed to equip children enrolled in basic education programmes with technical and vocational skills.

It was emphasised that, in line with the vision of Chief Minister Punjab Maryam Nawaz Sharif, children should not be limited to basic education alone but also be empowered with modern, market-relevant skills to secure dignified employment. The meeting noted that special budgetary allocations have been made to benefit millions of children, while both sides agreed to further strengthen non-formal and basic education programmes by integrating skill-based training with early education.

Later, the advisor met former MPA Saira Iftikhar and discussed maternal and child health, nutrition and overall well-being. It was agreed that effective measures are being implemented under the Chief Minister's vision.

Pakistan playing key mediating role between US, Iran: FO

ISLAMABAD, April 16 (INP): The Foreign Office (FO) on Thursday stated that Pakistan is playing a significant mediating role between the United States and Iran, adding that the recent round of negotiations remained largely constructive.

During a weekly briefing, Foreign Office spokesperson Tahir Hussain Andrabi said that Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif played an active role in facilitating US-Iran talks held in Islamabad.

He said that a 21-hour negotiation process between the two sides was productive, reflecting Pakistan's strong commitment to promoting peace in the region.

Pakistan's diplomatic efforts between the US and Iran have been widely appreciated in international circles, he added.

The spokesperson further noted that the prime minister is currently on Tri-nation visit to Saudi Arabia, Qatar, and Turkey to discuss the Middle East crisis.

He added that Pakistan's role helped make a ceasefire between Iran and the US possible. The prime minister also received phone calls from leaders of various countries acknowledging Pakistan's efforts.

FO spokespersons also condemned Israeli aggression and attacks in Lebanon, reiterating Pakistan's commitment to a principled, dialogue-driven, and diplomatic approach to resolving complex geopolitical conflicts.

Tahir Andrabi said that Pakistan continues to maintain active engagement with all relevant parties as part of its efforts to reduce tensions and promote peaceful resolutions in the region.

He emphasized that Pakistan, acting as a facilitator and mediator, has kept open channels of communication with concerned stakeholders and constructive state to help de-escalate tensions and create space for dialogue.

According to the spokesperson, Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Ishaq Dar, along with the country's senior military leadership, has been actively involved in diplomatic outreach aimed at ensuring regional peace and stability. Pakistan has consistently maintained that conflicts can only be resolved through dialogue and cooperation.

The Foreign Office further noted that ongoing diplomatic engagements, including visits by Pakistan's senior military leadership to Iran, are part of this broader policy to strengthen consultation and coordination for regional peace.

Pakistan reaffirmed its role as a responsible and constructive state on the global stage, stressing that diplomacy and dialogue remain the only effective means to resolve conflicts.

FO spokesperson stated that Pakistan's foreign policy remains centered on sustained outreach aimed at ensuring regional peace and stability. Pakistan has consistently maintained that conflicts can only be resolved through dialogue and cooperation.



ISLAMABAD: Federal Minister for Railways Muhammad Hanif Abbasi visited the residence of Federal Minister Syed Inam Ahmed Shah and expressed heartfelt condolences on the passing of his mother, praying for her eternal peace and strength for the bereaved family.

PM Shehbaz Sharif arrives in Doha after wrapping up Saudi Arabia visit

ISLAMABAD (INP): Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif reached Doha after concluding his official visit to Saudi Arabia, according to a statement issued from the Prime Minister's Office (PMO) on Thursday.

The PMO stated that the prime minister will hold a bilateral meeting in Doha with Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al Thani to discuss matters of mutual interest.

According to PMO, a meeting between Shehbaz Sharif and Mohammed bin Salman in Jeddah lasted for nearly two hours, during which both leaders held detailed discussions on the evolving regional situation.

The statement said the prime minister reaffirmed Pakistan's solidarity and support for Saudi Arabia in light of rising regional tensions. He also praised the Kingdom's patience and restraint in the current circumstances.

Prime Minister Shehbaz emphasized that the people of Pakistan stand firmly with their Saudi brothers, adding that the Saudi leadership serves as an example for all peace-loving nations. The Saudi crown prince, in turn, appreciated the constructive role played by the prime minister and Pakistan's military leadership in ongoing peace efforts.

The prime minister also acknowledged Saudi Arabia's continued support for Pakistan's economic stability.

Both leaders further reiterated their commitment to strengthening cooperation in defense and security, as well as enhancing their long-standing strategic partnership.

The prime minister would undertake official visits to Saudi Arabia, Qatar, and Turkey from April 15 to 18. The visits to Saudi Arabia and Qatar are focused on strengthening bilateral cooperation and discussing regional peace and security.

In Turkey, the prime minister is expected to attend the Antalya Diplomacy Forum, where he will present Pakistan's stance alongside other global leaders.

The visit comes amid ongoing tensions in the Middle East, where Gulf countries, including Saudi Arabia, have faced attacks linked to the broader conflict involving Iran, the United States, and Israel. Pakistan has been actively working to mediate and promote dialogue to ease tensions in the region.

Upper Kohistan steps up efforts to fast-track hydropower, renewable energy projects

ABBOTTABAD (INP): The district administration of Upper Kohistan has stepped up efforts to fast-track hydropower and renewable energy projects, as a high-level review meeting agreed on decisive measures to remove obstacles hindering progress.

Deputy Commissioner, Azizullah Jan presided over the meeting, where officials from relevant departments reviewed the status of ongoing projects and related concerns. He underscored that timely completion of energy projects remained a top priority.

He said sustained energy initiatives would play a key role in boosting local development while ensuring the supply of affordable and environmentally friendly electricity to the people.

The meeting focused on identifying field-level challenges affecting project implementation. Participants proposed workable solutions, leading to a consensus on immediate actions to resolve issues. Matters pending, including employee appeals, approvals of new medical colleges, and decisions on decisive corruption case related to Bahawalpur Medical College remains unresolved despite clear directions issued by the Islamabad High Court two months ago. The court had instructed the council to hear the affected employees and issue a final decision. However, no significant progress has been made, raising concerns of possible contempt of court.

PMDC inaction delays key decisions, raises contempt concerns

ISLAMABAD, April 16 (INP): The delay of a crucial meeting of the Pakistan Medical and Dental Council (PMDC) has left several important matters pending, including employee appeals, approvals of new medical colleges, and decisions on decisive corruption case related to Bahawalpur Medical College remains unresolved despite clear directions issued by the Islamabad High Court two months ago. The court had instructed the council to hear the affected employees and issue a final decision. However, no significant progress has been made, raising concerns of possible contempt of court.



ISLAMABAD: Federal Minister for Commerce, Jam Kamal Khan in a meeting with Raimundas Karabid, discussing enhanced Pakistan-European Union trade ties, for the upcoming Pakistan-EU Business Forum (April 28-29, Islamabad), and the continued importance of GSP+ for boosting exports and investment cooperation.

Nearly 98pc of medical seats filled, following deliberations, Senate body informed

ISLAMABAD (INP): The Senate Standing Committee on National Health Services, Regulations and Coordination (NHSR&C) was informed here on Thursday that nearly 98 percent of medical seats had been filled.

Following detailed deliberations and consultations with the Ministry, Pakistan Medical and Dental Council (PMDC), and the Committee.

The Standing Committee on National Health Services, Regulations and Coordination (NHSR&C) met under the Chairmanship of Dr. Mahesh Kumar Malani, to deliberate upon key issues concerning medical education, public health challenges and regulatory reforms.

The committee was briefed that the step benefited around 1,000 students out of approximately 1,100 vacant seats

which remained vacant despite extended deadlines. The committee took up the agenda regarding the PMDC and the Ministry's revised policy for conducting future MDCAT examinations. It was apprised that MDCAT examinations would be conducted soon after the conclusion of all FSC Boards and Cambridge examinations across the country, in order to avoid delays.

The Chairman directed the Ministry and PMDC to finalize and announce the schedule well in advance so that students nationwide could prepare accordingly.

The Committee also sought a comprehensive update on vacant seats, seat allocation, and student admissions.

As it was informed that nearly 98 percent of seats had been filled, the efforts of Ministry of Health Services, Regulations and Coordination (NHSR&C) and the PMDC for effectively addressing the issue and ensuring optimal utilization of available seats.

The committee expressed serious concern over reported deaths, including suicide cases, in medical colleges, particularly in Punjab and Mirpur Khas.

The ministry was directed to submit a detailed report on such incidents over the past years and to ensure that thorough inquiries would be conducted and corrective measures implemented to avert any such incident in the future.

The issue of rising HIV cases in Pakistan and Faunsa Tehsil were also highlighted and the committee members were informed that 331 cases had been reported.

The committee termed the situation alarming and directed the committee appreciated that a detailed briefing be presented in the next meeting, including information on global funding allocations and their utilization.

The committee also directed the ministry to strengthen its inspection mechanisms and to take provincial departments on board before finalizing key policies.

The committee also discussed the Pakistan Nursing and Midwifery Council Ordinance, 2025 and recommended that the bill would be passed after necessary amendments by the committee.

The meeting was attended by Members National Assembly Ms. Zahra Wadood Fatemi, Ms. Farah Nuz Akbar, Dr. Shazia Sobia Aslam Soomro, Dr. Shaista Khan, Dr. Nikhat Shakeel Khan, Ms. Aliya Kamran, Dr. Darshan, Ms. Saheen Ghoury, Raja Khurram Shahzad Nawaz and Ch. Muhammad Shahbaz Babar (virtually).

Pakistan-China Investment Seminar 2026 Signals New Era of Economic Growth: Governor Balochistan

QUETTA: Governor Balochistan Jafar Khan Mandokhail stated that the Pakistan-China Investment Seminar 2026 is not merely a formal gathering but the beginning of a new phase of economic growth and transformation for Pakistan and Balochistan. Addressing participants at the seminar held at the Chinese Consulate in Karachi, he said that the initiative reflects a shared vision of building a prosperous future where Pakistan and Balochistan emerge as hubs of innovation and development in the region.



Governor Mandokhail emphasized the need to shift focus from merely exporting raw minerals to establishing processing plants within the province to transform Balochistan into a modern industrial hub. He highlighted vast investment opportunities in sectors such as energy, trade, agriculture, higher education, healthcare, and livestock, inviting global investors to explore these prospects. He assured that the government is fully committed to providing protection and facilitation to investors. "Every investment we welcome and every partnership we build is a step toward a brighter and more prosperous future," he said, adding that investments are not only financial commitments but also contributions to the dreams and futures of the youth.

He stressed the importance of collaboration between universities and industries, and the inclusion of business leaders and industrialists in policy-making processes to ensure sustainable development. The Governor concluded by urging stakeholders to act boldly, embrace innovation, and strengthen unity to build a legacy that future generations can be proud of. At the end of the event, he distributed commemorative shields among organizers and participants.

Pakistan China Investment Seminar 2026, Jafar Khan Mandokhail speech, Balochistan investment opportunities, Karachi seminar news, China Pakistan relations, economic development, Pakistan, industrial growth Balochistan, foreign investment Pakistan.

DC Nasirabad Chairs Peace Committee Meeting, Urges Unity Amid Middle East Tensions

NASIRABAD: Deputy Commissioner Nasirabad Zulfikar Ali Kharral chaired an important meeting of religious scholars, zakireen, and members of the Peace Committee to discuss the current global situation and promote

scenario. He noted that the unity shown by Islamic countries following recent tensions involving Iran reflects a positive step toward collective strength. He highlighted that Pakistan's neutral and

sermons, especially during Friday prayers, and to highlight Pakistan's positive role in maintaining peace. He further remarked that Pakistan remains committed to global peace efforts and safeguarding its integrity,



The meeting was attended by scholars from various schools of thought, religious leaders, and relevant officials. Participants held detailed discussions on the ongoing tensions in the Middle East and Pakistan's role as a mediator in promoting peace. Addressing the meeting, Deputy Commissioner Zulfikar Ali Kharral emphasized that the Muslim Ummah needs unity and solidarity in the current global

peace-oriented stance has been widely acknowledged at the international level, adding that the country has always played a constructive role in promoting regional stability and will continue to do so. The Deputy Commissioner stated that war is not a permanent solution to any issue and stressed the importance of peaceful dialogue and diplomacy. He urged religious scholars to promote awareness, unity, and harmony through their

calling on all segments of society to contribute toward national stability. The meeting concluded with special prayers for unity among the Muslim Ummah, peace in the region, and the success of Pakistan's mediation efforts. Nasirabad peace committee meeting, DC Zulfikar Ali Kharral statement, Middle East tensions Pakistan response, Muslim unity call, Pakistan mediation role, religious scholars meeting Pakistan, peace and stability news

IG Balochistan Highlights Police Sacrifices, Reforms, and Public Safety Initiatives



QUETTA: Inspector General of Police (IGP) Balochistan Muhammad Tahir stated that Balochistan Police is playing a key role in maintaining law and order by utilizing professional capabilities. He said that around 1,139 police personnel have sacrificed their lives in the line of duty to protect the lives and property of citizens, calling their sacrifice a guiding light for the force. He made these remarks while briefing trainee officers from the National Institute of Police Administration (NIPA), Quetta, during a study visit to the Central Police Office (CPO). The session was attended by senior officials including the Director General NIPA Syed

Ali Raza Shah, Additional IG Operations Agha Muhammad Yousaf, Additional IG Administration Javed Ali Mehr, DIG Headquarters Hassan Asad Alvi, DIG Tele Shad Ibr. Masih, and AIG Operations Naveed Alam, among others. Visit to Police Facilities. The trainee officers were also taken to inspect various departments at the CPO, including the Data Command and Communication Center, library, museum, and daycare center. Law and Order Operations and Reforms. The IGP said that after the merger of B-area and A-area systems, reform work has accelerated across the province. During a special campaign last year, po-

lice achieved significant operational success, including: Arrest of 780 claimed offenders. Detention of 1,466 absconders. Arrest of 1,404 criminals. Recovery of 26 kidnapped individuals. He added that lists of arrested proclaimed offenders and wanted criminals are being shared with other provinces to improve coordination. Strengthening Investigation and Public Service. The IGP highlighted the establishment of a Serious Crime Wing to ensure complex cases are investigated effectively and criminals are brought to justice. He further noted that open court sessions (Khuli Kachehri) are

regularly held at range and district levels, which has helped improve public trust in the police. "Complaint cells at the CPO, along with WhatsApp and toll-free helplines of the IG, are actively addressing public grievances. Use of Technology and Welfare Measures. According to the IGP, Safe City surveillance cameras are being used for monitoring traffic and crime, producing positive results. A rescue unit has been established in Ziarat, including small personnel, to assist tourists in emergencies. The briefing concluded with the playing of commemorative shields between IGP Balochistan Muhammad Tahir and DC NIPA Syed Ali Raza Shah.

Accountability and Disaster Response The IGP emphasized a system of self-accountability within the department, where officers are rewarded for good performance and penalized for negligence. He also noted that police, in collaboration with other institutions, have played a vital role in rescue operations during heavy rains, snowfall, and floods. A dedicated welfare wing for families of martyrs is actively working for their support and

Harnai Road Project Launched: 17km Double Road to Boost Connectivity and Economic Growth

HARNAI: A major development initiative has been launched in Harnai under the vision of Provincial Minister for Food Haji Noor Muhammad Durrani, marking a new phase of infrastructure development in the region. Under the Balochistan Socio-Economic Development Project (Phase-II), a 17-kilometer-long and 24-foot-wide double road from Sur Pul Nadi to Spin Tangi has been formally inaugurated. The project, with an esti-

Mandokhail, senior lawyer Abdul Nasir Tareen, District Education Officer Ghulam Haider Tareen, and District Health Officer Dr. Shaob Akram Mengal. Other notable attendees included Haji Baz Muhammad Durrani, Abdul Salam Durrani, Haji Muhammad Raza Tareen, and workers of the Pakistan Muslim League-N (PML-N). Officials described the project as a "lifeline" for the local economy. The road will con-

nect Spin Tangi with the district headquarters, facilitating faster transportation and improved access to markets for agricultural produce. The project route was attended by a large number of administrative officials, tribal elders, and political representatives. The chief guest was Muhammad Saleem Tareen, accompanied by Ameenullah



ated cost of Rs. 740 million, is expected to significantly improve transportation and connectivity in the area. The inauguration ceremony was attended by a large number of administrative officials, tribal elders, and political representatives. The chief guest was Muhammad Saleem Tareen, accompanied by Ameenullah

will create employment opportunities and bring prosperity to the region. Harnai road project, Noor Muhammad Durrani development, Balochistan infrastructure news, Spin Tangi road construction, socio-economic development project Balochistan, road connectivity Pakistan, rural development Harnai

at the local level and give priority to hiring local residents to strengthen the district's economy. He further directed all NGOs to establish their offices within Jafarabad district to ensure direct access for the public and facilitate prompt resolution of community issues. The Deputy Commissioner warned that strict monitoring will continue and any negligence will not be tolerated.

Panjgur Open Katcheri Held to Address Public Issues, Officials Assure Swift Action

PANJGUR: The district administration Panjgur organized an open katcheri at Jirga Hall to address public grievances and improve service delivery across various departments. The session was jointly chaired by Assistant Commissioner Panjgur Itikhar Zahir and DSP City Amer Jan Baloch. The event was attended by representatives from multiple departments including the Pakistan Rifles, Municipal Corporation, Health Department, B&R, PPH, and other relevant agencies. Key officials present included Major Hamza, Chief Officer Municipal Corporation Itzrauliah Baloch, DHO Dr. Abid Reki, MS Teaching Hospital Dr. Abdul Ghaffar Baloch, Deputy Director Agriculture Zahoor Ahmed Baloch, XEN B&R Zarf Baloch, SDO PHE Zarf Baloch, and District Support Manager PPH Ikram

Noor Baloch. During the session, citizens and community representatives highlighted several pressing issues, including prolonged power outages, rising prices of essential commodities, improvement in healthcare facilities, support for farmers, and traffic management challenges. They also stressed the need for better facilities at the Thalassaemia Center in the Teaching Hospital, particularly the availability of blood bags and essential medical supplies. Speaking on the occasion, Assistant Commissioner Itikhar Zahir assured that the district administration is committed to resolving public issues on a priority basis. He said that matters within administrative jurisdiction will be addressed immediately, while other concerns will be forwarded to relevant departments for necessary action. He added that all is-

suues raised during the open katcheri will be reviewed in detail, and efforts will be made to utilize available resources for transparent and impartial public service delivery. Panjgur open katcheri, public complaints Balochistan, AC Itikhar Zahir meeting, civic issues Panjgur, healthcare electricity issues Balochistan, district administration Panjgur news, public service delivery Pakistan

regional needs and public welfare to accelerate sustainable development. He reiterated the government's resolve to expand the scope of development initiatives in remote districts to eliminate deprivation and ensure access to essential services at the doorstep of citizens. He concluded by stating that the government believes in balanced development across all regions of Balochistan and is utilizing all available resources to achieve this goal. Barkan development news, CM Sarfaraz Bugti meeting, Balochistan budget plans, Koh-e-Suleman 50 bed hospital Barkhan, public welfare projects Pakistan, regional development Balochistan, infrastructure projects Barkhan

DC Jafarabad Reviews NGO Performance, Calls for Transparency and Local Employment Opportunities

S Commissioner Jafarabad Khalid Khan chaired an important meeting to review the coordination, performance, and progress of NGOs operating in the district. Representatives of various NGOs attended the meeting and provided detailed briefings on their ongoing welfare projects and development initiatives. The session included a comprehensive review of social and developmental activities

at the local level and give priority to hiring local residents to strengthen the district's economy. He further directed all NGOs to establish their offices within Jafarabad district to ensure direct access for the public and facilitate prompt resolution of community issues. The Deputy Commissioner warned that strict monitoring will continue and any negligence will not be tolerated.

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CM Balochistan Meets Tribal Leader, Discusses Development Plans for Barkan

QUETTA: Chief Minister Balochistan Mir Sarfaraz Bugti held a meeting with tribal leader Mir Abdul Karim Khetran to discuss the political and regional development planning for the upcoming fiscal year budget. It was agreed that future projects would be aligned with public needs to ensure meaningful relief for local communities. On the occasion, Mir Abdul Karim Khetran expressed gratitude to the Chief Minister for approving and advancing key development projects in Barkhan, including a 50-bed hospital. He hoped that on-



going government initiatives would significantly improve the provision of basic facilities in the area. Speaking on the occasion, Chief Minister Mir Sarfaraz Bugti stated that the development of underdeveloped regions, including Barkhan, remains a top priority of the current government. He emphasized that equitable distribution of resources is being ensured across the province. He further remarked that after Dera Bugti, he considers Barkhan as his second home and reaffirmed his commitment to

the welfare of its people. He said practical steps are being taken to improve healthcare, education, and basic infrastructure, which are among the government's top priorities. The Chief Minister also highlighted that the upcoming budget will include projects based on

regional needs and public welfare to accelerate sustainable development. He reiterated the government's resolve to expand the scope of development initiatives in remote districts to eliminate deprivation and ensure access to essential services at the doorstep of citizens. He concluded by stating that the government believes in balanced development across all regions of Balochistan and is utilizing all available resources to achieve this goal. Barkan development news, CM Sarfaraz Bugti meeting, Balochistan budget plans, Koh-e-Suleman 50 bed hospital Barkhan, public welfare projects Pakistan, regional development Balochistan, infrastructure projects Barkhan



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Pakistan, Saudi Arabia sign agreement to extend \$3bn deposit

NEWS DESK: Pakistan and Saudi Arabia on Friday signed an agreement to extend a \$3 billion deposit from the Saudi Fund for Development (SFD).

Saudi Arabia, earlier this week, pledged an additional \$5 billion in deposits for Pakistan and extended its existing \$5bn facility for a further three years.

The agreement, signed between the Saudi Fund for Development (SFD) and the State Bank of Pakistan (SBP), provides for the extension in the maturity of a USD 3 billion deposit placed by SFD with the State Bank of Pakistan, said a post on X by the Ministry of Finance.

The ministry said that the agreement was signed between SBP Governor Jameel Ahmed and Chief Executive Officer of the SFD Sultan bin Abdulrahman Al-Marshad.

Minister for Finance and Muhammad Aurangzeb witnessed the signing of an important financial agreement in Washington, DC, in the presence of Pakistan's ambassador to the United States, Lar.

The development took place on the sidelines of the World Bank



IMF Spring Meetings

The ministry added that the extension of the deposit reflects "strong and longstanding economic partnership between Pakistan and the Kingdom of Saudi

Arabia" and will support the country's external sector stability.

On Thursday, the Saudi Press Agency also reported that Saudi Arabia had extended the \$5bn deposit with the

central bank and announced an "additional \$3bn deposit".

This assistance aims at supporting Pakistan's economy and strengthening its resilience amidst evolving

global economic challenges, and comes in accordance with the leadership's directives to strengthen the bonds of brotherhood between the two countries, affirming the

kingdom's commitment to fostering the economic growth of Pakistan, which is expected to reflect positively on the living conditions of Pakistan citizens," it said.

Pakistan will reportedly return a \$3.5bn loan to the UAE this month, putting pressure on its reserves and risking breaches of its International Monetary Fund (IMF) programme tar-

gets. The development comes at a sensitive time for the country's external account position, which is already under strain from rising global oil prices and economic spillovers linked to tensions in the Middle East.

According to official figures, Pakistan's foreign exchange reserves stood at \$16.4bn as of March 27, sufficient to cover close to three months of imports.

However, the repayment requirement from the UAE has added fresh pressure on the country's external buffers.

In March, Islamabad failed to secure an agreement with the UAE to roll over the \$3.5bn facility,

marking the first such failure in seven years, and raising concerns about near-term financing gaps.

Pakistan's foreign exchange position, though under pressure, remains part of a broader stabilisation effort under IMF-supported reforms.

Analysts say external financing risks remain a key vulnerability, particularly amid volatile energy prices and constrained global capital markets.

Auto financing rises to Rs345bn

NEWS DESK: Geop-oli-tical tensions have not dampened the hopes of new car buyers, as outstanding auto loans surged for the 16th consecutive month to Rs345.34 billion in March, up from Rs336bn in February, thanks to lower interest rates.

However, sales of cars, sports utility vehicles,

pick-ups and vans totalled 15,531 units in March, up 40 per cent

year on year (YoY) but down 9pc month on month (MoM) due to a 23pc MoM drop in sales of

the market leader Pak Suzuki, followed by a nine per cent MoM drop in Hyundai Nishat vehicles in March.

Other assemblers posted MoM growth ranging from 1pc to 29pc.

This took 9MFY26 cumulative sales to 144,029 units, up 43pc YoY.

As the Middle East war got underway from Feb 28, import of completely and semi-knocked down kits by the local assemblers remained upbeat,

rising to \$170m in March from \$157m in February, while its 9MFY26 import bill swelled by 116pc to \$1.471bn YoY, signalling positive sales outlook in the coming months.

Some auto analysts predict positive momentum in auto sales during 2026, supported by lower interest rates,

while rising petroleum prices have also prompted many consumers

to switch to new electric vehicles in March and in the current month.

Ajeet Kumar of BMA Capital Management said the MoM decline in March auto sales was driven by fewer working days due to the Ramadan and Eid Holidays.

The geopolitical climate may have also affected the industry's supply chain, affecting sales during the period.

Expecting a gradual normalisation in auto sales with volumes recovering toward more sustainable levels,

he said near-term momentum may remain subdued due to the economic fallout from the Iran-US conflict, which has heightened inflationary pressures.



Aurangzeb lauds Beijing's support for Pakistan's IMF programme during meeting with Chinese counterpart

NEWS DESK: Finance Minister Muhammad Aurangzeb appreciated China's support in facilitating Pakistan's engagements with the International Monetary Fund (IMF) in a meeting with his Chinese counterpart, the finance minister said on Friday.

Aurangzeb arrived in the United States on Monday to participate in the World Bank Group and International Monetary Fund (IMF) Spring Meetings 2026, taking place from April 13 to 18 in Washington, DC.

The Spring Meetings bring together finance ministers, central bank governors, policymakers and development experts from around the world amid ongoing global economic uncertainty.

While there, the finance minister held an important meeting with China's Finance Minister Lan Foa on the sidelines of the meetings, the ministry said in a statement on X.

During the meeting, he expressed deep appreciation for China's "long-standing and unwavering bilateral support" to Pakistan, as well as the constructive role

played by China's Executive Director at the International Monetary Fund (IMF) in facilitating Pakistan's programme engagements, the statement said. According to the ministry, Aurangzeb briefed his Chinese counterpart on Pakistan's performance under the IMF programme.

He highlighted the successful conclusion of a staff-level agreement for the third review under the Extended Fund Facility (EFF) and the second review under the Resilience and Sustainability Facility (RSF), with approval from the IMF's executive board expected in early May.

Aurangzeb also provided an update on the progress of Pakistan's inaugural Panda bond issuance, as part of efforts to diversify financing sources and deepen engagement with international capital markets.

He further appreciated Minister Lan's acknowledgement of Pakistan's active role in facilitating dialogue and promoting stability in the region.

The finance minister conveyed Pakistan's "full and unconditional support" for the establishment of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) Development Bank,

particularly as Pakistan prepares to assume the SCO presidency in September, the statement added.

He also expressed appreciation for the continued support extended by China's executive directors at both the IMF and the World Bank.

Separately, the finance minister held a meeting with representatives of global rating agency Moody's on the sidelines of the Spring Meetings.

He briefed the representatives on Pakistan's external financing position, noting that the country has successfully met its Eurobond repayment obligations and continues to honour all creditor commitments on schedule.

He highlighted the financial support extended by Saudi Arabia, which is expected to further strengthen Pakistan's external position.

"The finance minister

momentum in auto sales during 2026, supported by lower interest rates,

while rising petroleum prices have also prompted many consumers to switch to new electric vehicles in March and in the current month.

Ajeet Kumar of BMA Capital Management said the MoM decline in March auto sales was driven by fewer working days due to the Ramadan and Eid Holidays.

The geopolitical climate may have also affected the industry's supply chain, affecting sales during the period.

Expecting a gradual normalisation in auto sales with volumes recovering toward more sustainable levels,

he said near-term momentum may remain subdued due to the economic fallout from the Iran-US conflict, which has heightened inflationary pressures.

Textile exports drop 7.06pc

NEWS DESK: Pakistan's textile and clothing exports fell 7.06 per cent in March compared with the same month last year, marking a second consecutive monthly decline and signalling weakening global demand.

The fall follows a brief recovery in January, when the sector posted a modest year-on-year increase of 3.14pc, according to data released by the Pakistan Bureau of Statistics on Thursday.

The contraction highlights the volatility facing one of the country's key export industries, where fragile external demand and high domestic costs continue to limit sustained growth. Export proceeds from the sectors have recorded a negative growth since October.

The exports fell by 8.56pc in December, 2.57pc in November and 0.57pc in October. Data show that textile and clothing exports fell slightly to \$1.328bn in March 2026 from \$1.430bn in March 2025.

The PBS data showed exports of readymade garments

dipped 6.18pc in value and 4.95pc in quantity during March FY26, while knitwear dipped 14.27pc in value and 28.42pc in quantity. Bedwear dipped 6.21pc in value and 2.98pc in quantity.

Towel exports slightly increased by 1.26pc in value and 4.98pc in quantity in March FY26, whereas cotton cloth declined by 1.30pc in value but surged by 3.43pc in quantity.

Yarn exports surged 8.32pc YoY in March FY26.

The exports of made-up articles, excluding towels, decreased by 2.55pc, while tents, canvas, and tarpaulin increased by 41.07pc in March.

Imports of synthetic fibre decreased 26.33pc, and the arrival of synthetic and artificial silk yarn rose by 11.78pc in March.

Import of raw cotton declined by 65.83pc.

However, the import of second-hand

clothes dipped 8.60pc.

Oil imports fell

Pakistan's oil import bill also recorded a 5.85pc decline in the first nine months (July to March) of FY26, falling to \$11.245bn from \$11.945bn in the same period last year.

The slight decrease reflects a slump in demand, particularly for petroleum products.

Data showed a 7.45pc decline in the value of petroleum products, but a 2.45pc rise in quantity during 9MFY26.



Big industry grows 5.89pc in 8MFY26

NEWS DESK: Pakistan's Large-Scale Manufacturing (LSM) sector posted a year-on-year growth of 5.89 per cent in July-February 2025-26.

Industrial production in February grew 6.45pc YoY, according to figures released by the Pakistan Bureau of Statistics on Tuesday.

However, on a month-on-month basis, the LSM recorded a negative growth of 8.97pc in February. Industrial output has rebounded over the past five consecutive months following the previous month's sluggish growth. July 2025 saw robust growth of 8.99pc, which decelerated to 0.54pc in August, then slightly reversed to 2.69pc in September, 8.33pc in October, 10.37pc in December, and 10.5pc in January.

The food group grew 5.26pc in 8MFY26. Wheat and rice milling rose by 2.32pc.

Wheat and rice milling increased substantially during the period under review, owing primarily to improved crop harvests.

However, cooking oil production increased by 2.95pc, while vegetable ghee production fell by 2.48pc.

However, tea blended declined by 9.6pc.

Month-on-month output shrinks 8.97pc in February.

The overall textile sector grew a paltry 1.61pc in 8MFY26. Cotton yarn in figures released by the Pakistan Bureau of Statistics on Tuesday.

Garment exports grew by 7.16pc YoY in 8MFY26.

This rebound in

garments production in the past five months from the previous month's sluggish growth indicates a revival in export orders from the sector.

Coke and petroleum products surged 11.98pc in 8MFY26. Most petroleum products posted positive production growth during the months under review.

Petrol production rose 13.51pc, high-speed diesel by 19.72pc.

The LPG production jumped 12.96pc, kerosene by 10.39pc during 8MFY26.

However, furnace oil output dipped 2.08pc in 8MFY26.

The automobile sector grew 61.66pc in

8MFY26, driven by a 62.29pc surge in jeep and car production, followed by a 88.79pc surge in truck production, and a 37.21pc surge in bus production.

However, LCV production declined by 2.43pc during the first eight months of the current fiscal year compared with a year ago.

The production of pharmaceutical products dipped by 4.94pc, and fertilisers by 0.15pc.

Iron and steel production declined 5.70pc in 8MFY26.

Buildings/ingots, mostly consumed in the construction industry, experienced a 15.03pc decline.



Kings' misery deepens as United climb to second in PSL

NEWS DESK: Karachi Kings suffered their third consecutive defeat in the HBL Pakistan Super League on Thursday night as Islamabad United chased down a modest 151-run target with eight wickets and four overs to spare here at the National Bank Stadium.

The victory propelled United to second place in the PSL standings, while the home side's campaign continued to unravel, leaving their playoff hopes hanging by a thread.

Put in to bat first on a tricky surface that offered grip for spinners, Kings could only post 150.6.

Reeza Hendricks played the anchor's role with an unbeaten 51 off 44 balls (four fours), but regular wickets at the other end prevented any momentum from building.

Saad Baig fell early for six, flicking Richard Gleeson to deep square. Fellow opener Jason Roy provided a brisk start, smashing 39 off 27 balls with three fours and sixes, including a flat sweep off Imad Wasim over backward square and a gorgeous cut past cover.

He timed the ball



sweetly until Shadab Khan deceived him with a quicker leg-break, inducing a straightforward catch at long-off in the ninth over.

Hendricks held the innings together amid the collapse.

Salman Ali Agha

(four) and Azam Khan (34 off 29, three fours and a six) tried to accelerate but found the United bowlers in excellent rhythm.

Azam fell to a superb diving catch by Sameer Minhas off Gleeson, while Khushdil

Shah and Moeen Ali (8) departed in quick succession.

Gleeson was the pick of the attack with 2-22, mixing yorkers and cutters effectively.

Shadab claimed 2-28, intelligently using flight and variations to

push batters out of their comfort zones.

Faheem Ashraf and Mohammad Hasnain also kept things tight with variations.

The surface appeared two-paced at times, and Kings' middle order struggled to find

boundaries consistently.

Their powerplay score of 45-1 looked promising, but the inability to capitalise later proved costly.

In reply, United made light work of the chase.

Devon Conway and

debutant sensation Sameer Minhas forged a blistering 93-run opening stand in just 10 overs that effectively sealed the contest.

Sameer, the rising star, lit up the stadium with a sparkling 36-ball 58 laced with 10 boundaries.

He punished anything short or wide with authority — an attractive square drive off Mir Hamza, back-to-back fours off Salman (including a swivel pull to deep midwicket), and a regal inside-out drive through covers off Khushdil Shah.

He stepped down the track to loft Khushdil over the bowler's head and brought up his fifty with a flicked single.

His aggressive yet composed approach, blending classical drives with innovative shots like the reverse flick off Adam Zampa.

Conway perfectly timed him preceded by a measured yet fluent 53 not out off 36 (six fours and a six).

He opened his account with a square drive and kept the scoreboard ticking with clever placement.

His standout moments included powerful

back-foot punches and a thunderous pull off Khushdil to deep midwicket.

The pair milked singles intelligently while pouncing on loose deliveries, putting Kings' bowlers under immense pressure.

Sameer fell just short of a bigger score, stumped off Moeen Ali for 58, but by then the asking rate was under control.

Shadab then took over. He provided the finishing flourish, smashing an inside-out six over long-off off Zampa and two more maximums off Hasan Ali — one a lofted six over long-on and another backed by a fierce four over third man.

He remained unbeaten on 31 off 16 balls.

Conway brought up his fifty with a whippy pull off Abbas Afridi that raced to the deep square boundary, sealing victory in style.

Kings' bowling lacked penetration. Hamza, Hasan Ali and Zampa went for plenty, while the spinners were unable to stem the flow of boundaries.

The Moeen-led side looked passive, failing to take the game on despite a long batting line-up.

World Anti-Doping Agency targets India's performance-enhancing drugs production

NEWS DESK: A crackdown on India's performance-enhancing drugs (PEDs) production — the biggest globally — is key to tackling the doping menace and protect the athletes, World Anti-Doping Agency (WADA) chief Witold Banka told AFP on Thursday.

Banka and his team have been in New Delhi as part of their push to build stronger ties between national law and order agencies including cyber crime cells to help uphold the credibility of professional sport.

WADA has sought help from India's Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) — federal police — to curtail the initial supply chain of racketeers and agents who peddle drugs.

"We see the problem of production of performance-enhancing drugs (PEDs). India is the biggest producer of those illegal substances," said Banka.

"That's why we collaborate with the CBI, with law enforcement, to

try to destroy this market and to really protect the lives of athletes and the health of society," added the 41-year-old Pole. WADA has been aggressive in curbing the doping crisis with their Global Anti-Doping Intelligence and Investigations Network (GAIN) initiative since 2022.

An INTERPOL-backed "operation upstream" has been a success for WADA with 250 raids around the world, 88 illicit labs dismantled and almost 90 tons of

PEDs seized.

"We are here because India is the biggest population (1.4 billion) and we see how important it is for the Indian authorities, and we see the need to strengthen the system here — it's a common interest," Gunter Younger, head of investigations for WADA, told AFP.

"For now I see the appetite and willingness from the public authority side (in India) to work with us closely to address this issue. We

know it's not only about the doping of the athletes."

Younger, a former head of the Bavarian Police's Cybercrime Division, said to strike a blow against the doping menace the focus should be shifted from athletes to the supplier of the PEDs.

"We always focus on testing, and the whole infrastructure in the last 25 years the anti-doping community was focusing on testing, and it was okay in the beginning.



Bayern's late show sink Real, Arsenal scrape past Sporting to reach CL semis

NEWS DESK: Late strikes from Luis Diaz and Michael Olise sealed a dramatic 4-3 win for Bayern Munich over Real Madrid on Wednesday, clinching a 6-4 aggregate victory and setting up a semi-final with holders Paris Saint-Germain.

In the other last-eight tie on Wednesday, Arsenal edged past Sporting to reach the second successive season with a 6-0 home draw earning them a 1-0 aggregate victory.

At the Allianz Arena, the tie was level at the break in the second leg after a scintillating opening half, with record 15-time European champions Real going ahead three times on the night.

Bayern won 2-1 last week in the Spanish capital, but Arda Guler pounced on a loose Manuel Neuer pass to put the visitors ahead after just 34 seconds at the Allianz Arena.

He scored again from a free-kick after Aleksandar Pavlovic equalised.

Harry Kane put Bayern back ahead in the tie only for Kylian Mbappe to restore parity overall when he put Real 3-2 up before half-time.

Eduardo Camavinga was sent off for a second yellow card with four minutes left.

or an unbelievable pass. "In this case it was two great finishes by Luchito (Diaz) and Michael (Olise), to finish the game for us, and that's what the Champions League is about."

"Sometimes, you can be the dominant team and lose, so it's nice to get through and win this one."

Temperatures boiled over after the final whistle with Guler picking up a straight red for confronting the referee.

"We got off to a bad start, and then conceded again through a free-kick and a counter. The first half was hectic," Joshua Kimmich told DAZN.

"The second half was calmer, we had more control — and then managed to win in the end. It wasn't our best performance, but we'll take the win."

"The two best teams in Europe will face each other. We had many top level games against Paris in recent years. I'm looking forward to it."



Kingsmen extend winning streak in PSL

NEWS DESK: Hyderabad Kingsmen continued their winning run in PSL 2026 with a five-wicket victory over Rawalpindi on Thursday, chasing down a modest target with 21 balls to spare after an outstanding bowling display restricted their opponents to 121.

The win marked Kingsmen's third consecutive triumph and lifted them two places to fourth in the eight-team standings, strengthening their push for a playoff berth. Rawalpindi, meanwhile, remained bottom of the table after suffering their sixth straight defeat, carrying a negative net run rate of 1.821.

On a surface that played slow despite appearing fresh, Kingsmen's bowlers set up the victory with disciplined lines and clever variations.

Rawalpindi struggled throughout the innings and never recovered from early damage, eventually posting a below-par total that prevented insufficient Kingsmen's chase was far from straightforward, however, as they were forced to rebuild after slipping to 69 for five.

Rawalpindi briefly raised hopes of an upset, but an unbroken 54-run stand between Kusal Perera and Irfan Khan steadied the innings and guided the



visitors home.

Perera finished unbeaten on 32 off 24 balls, while Irfan contributed 34 not out from 29 deliveries. The pair came together after the dismissals of Marnus Labuschagne, who made 32 off 21, and Glenn Maxwell, who fell for a golden duck in the space of three deliveries.

Despite the setbacks, Kingsmen were aided by the low required rate, needing just 53 runs from 64 balls when Irfan arrived at the crease.

The duo initially focused on strike rotation, working the ball into gaps and waiting for scoring opportunities as the pitch continued to grip. Once settled, both batters began to accelerate, finding boundaries in the latter stages

to ease the pressure and complete the chase without further alarms.

Rawalpindi had earlier started brightly with the ball. Left-arm spinner Asif Afridi delivered a tight opening spell in the powerplay, conceding only 10 runs in three overs while removing Maaz Sadaqat and Saam Ayub, the latter falling in a wicket maiden. Fast bowler Mohammad Amir added to the pressure by dismissing Usman Khan at midwicket before the end of the powerplay, triggering celebrations among the home supporters and briefly raising hopes of a major upset.

However, Kingsmen's innings unravelled in the middle phase as wickets continued to fall.

Labuschagne anchored briefly before being trapped lbw by Saad Masood off the final ball of the ninth over. Maxwell's dismissal followed immediately, as Ben Sears produced a sharp delivery that shattered the stumps and exposed the middle order.

Earlier, Rawalpindi's own innings never gained momentum under sustained pressure from Kingsmen's bowling attack. Mohammad Rizwan struck a couple of early boundaries off Mohammad Ali, but scoring quickly became difficult as wickets fell at regular intervals.

The introduction of spin from the second over choked the run rate, with Ayub and Hassan Khan maintaining tight control through the middle overs.

Messi new owner of Spanish fifth-tier club Cornella

NEWS DESK: Lionel Messi has bought Catalan club Cornella and become the team's new owner, the Spanish fifth-tier side announced on Thursday.

The eight-time Ballon d'Or winner is still playing in the United States for Inter Miami and is expected to play a key role in Argentina's World Cup title defence this year.

"This move reinforces Messi's close ties to Barcelona and his commitment to the development of sport and local talent in Catalonia," the club said in a statement confirming the former Barcelona star's acquisition.

Several top players have come through the ranks at Cornella, including Arsenal goalkeeper David



Raya and Messi's former Barca teammate Jordi Alba.

Cornella has suffered back-to-back relegations in the past two seasons. Leo Messi's arrival marks

the beginning of a new chapter in the club's history, aimed at driving both sporting and institutional growth, strengthening its foundations, and continuing to invest in talent,

Cornella added.

"The project is guided by a long-term vision and a strategic plan that combines ambition, sustainability, and a strong connection to its local roots."

Govt admits up to seven hours of power outages

NEWS DESK: Power Minister Awais Leghari on Thursday confirmed six to seven hours of load management — almost three times higher than the government's public commitment — citing a sudden surge in demand, non-availability of imported gas and lower water discharges for irrigation.

Speaking at a news conference, the minister said power shortfalls had been caused by disruptions to LNG imports due to the Middle East crisis and by lower provincial irrigation water requirements, both of which he said were beyond the government's control.

However, he insisted that the government was making every possible effort to minimise both outages and potential tariff increases arising from the use of expensive alternative fuels.

In this regard, he said the government had even postponed maintenance of nuclear power plants for a few weeks, with no scheduled shut-downs until July.

He added that all available resources had been mobilised, including diplomatic channels, to secure fuel supplies, through alternative LNG sourcing and diversion of local gas, while ensuring adequate availability for fertiliser production.



The minister said the country had experienced unusual fluctuations in demand this month due to weather conditions, with the lowest demand of 9,000MW on April 9 and a peak of 20,000MW six days later, on April 15. He said the situation would slightly improve a day as discharges from dams had been increased by 15,000 cusecs to 25,000 cusecs, which would help enhance hydropower generation.

On the other side of the equation, hydropower sources provided 3,200MW and 3,000MW from liquefied natural gas imports, leading to minuscule generation from furnace oil because it had a significant fuel-cost impact.

This year, however, all LNG-based plants with a capacity of 6,000MW remain mostly idle due to LNG import disruptions caused by the Middle East war.

While LNG-based plants provide no more than 500MW and that too on local gas, hydropower supply also stood at 1,600MW, because of recent rains that replaced water discharges from dams for irrigation.

This meant, he claimed, that there would have been no power shortfall if LNG-based and hydropower plants had been operating, as the current shortfall was around 3,400MW.

"Every 500-600MW

shortfall translates into one-hour load management and therefore the government was forced to have six to seven hours of average load management without any discrimination between urban and rural areas," he said, adding that the load management schedule was equitable.

He claimed that there was no load management during the daytime, when demand generally remained low and there was sufficient generation capacity available.

He appealed to consumers to conserve power to sail through an international crisis.

He added that despite shortcomings at present, Pakistan's diverse energy sources — like coal, solar, wind, nuclear and others — are also a strength, which provides resilience in times of crisis, otherwise, the situation would have been even worse than at present.

Mr Leghari said the early market closures enforced by the government had also helped shave about 1,200, 1,400MW peak demand, otherwise, the load management would have been higher by another two hours.

The minister did not agree with a questioner that LNG from

Qatar may not be available for the next three years and claimed that some supplies were possible by mid-May.

He said spot purchases were not possible at the moment because of the war's impact and unaffordable prices, as imports of petrol and diesel were already facing foreign exchange constraints due to higher import prices.

He conceded that cheaper and greater generation capacity in the south could not be utilised in the north for some transmission constraints as well as system stability issues arising out of the non-availability of LNG-based generation capacity in the mid-country and that was why there was no load management in Karachi and Hyderabad power supply areas, except some economic load management by K-Electric in high-loss areas.

With these load management efforts, the minister said the positive fuel cost adjustment next month would be around Rs1.3 per unit, compared to Rs1.8 per unit a couple of months ago.

otherwise, fuel costs would have risen significantly with full utilisation of furnace oil and diesel-based plants.

Pakistan sets the stage for next round of talks

NEWS DESK: Chief of Army Staff and Chief of Defence Forces Field Marshal Syed Asim Munir on Thursday held a series of high-level meetings in Tehran with Iran's top political and military leadership, including President Masoud Pezeshkian, as part of Islamabad's efforts to lay the groundwork for the next round of Iran-US talks expected in Islamabad.

During the visit, Field Marshal Munir called on President Pezeshkian and discussed the evolving regional situation, with particular focus on de-escalation efforts and the importance of sustained diplomatic engagement.

Both sides exchanged views on

agrees to enhance cooperation in key sectors including security, defence, and energy, while emphasising the importance of ensuring uninterrupted global energy supplies amid ongoing tensions. Officials said the flurry of diplomatic engagements in Tehran and Doha reflects a coordinated Pakistani effort to build consensus and create conducive conditions for the resumption of meaningful Iran-US negotiations.

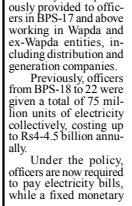
Meanwhile, Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif on Thursday arrived in Turkey on an official visit to attend the 5th Antalya Diplomacy Forum. The Governor of Antalya, Hulusi Sahin, warmly received the prime minister and the Pakistani delegation at

the airport. Pakistan's Ambassador to Turkey, Yusuf Junaid, along with senior diplomatic officials, was also present on the occasion.

The prime minister will attend the 5th Antalya Diplomacy Forum tomorrow. During the forum, the prime minister will participate in the "Leaders Panel" to present Pakistan's perspective.

On this occasion, bilateral meetings of the prime minister are also expected with President Recep Tayyip Erdogan and other key global leaders.

Deputy Prime Minister Senator Ishaq Dar, Minister for Information and Broadcasting Attaulah Tarar, Special Assistant Tariq Fatemi, and the Prime Minister's spokesperson for international media Musharraf Zaidi are accompanying the prime minister as part of the Pakistani delegation.



Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif on Thursday arrived in Turkey on an official visit to attend the 5th Antalya Diplomacy Forum.

while several countries had offered assistance, the United States preferred to continue its outreach through Pakistan, describing Islamabad as an "effective and trusted mediator" that had helped bring both sides closer to a potential agreement.

Meanwhile, on the diplomatic front, Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif arrived in Doha on Thursday and held an extensive meeting with Qatar's Emir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al Thani. The two leaders discussed the evolving situation in the Middle East and agreed on the need to reinforce efforts aimed at de-escalation and regional stability.

The Qatar leadership appreciated Pakistan's constructive role in promoting dialogue, while Prime Minister Shehbaz reaffirmed solidarity with Qatar and condemned recent attacks targeting Gulf states. Both sides also reviewed bilateral ties,



Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif on Thursday arrived in Doha on Thursday and held an extensive meeting with Qatar's Emir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al Thani.

LHC upholds govt's policy abolishing free electricity units for power sector employees

NEWS DESK: The Lahore High Court has upheld the federal government's policy to monetise free electricity units for officers of the Water and Power Development Authority (Wapda) and power distribution companies, it emerged on Friday.

As per the ruling, the benefit was a non-statutory service perk and could be lawfully altered as part of administrative and financial reforms.

Justice Malik Javid Iqbal Wains announced the verdict dismissing a constitutional petition challenging a notification issued by the Ministry of Energy (Power Division) on December 5, 2023.

The impugned notification introduced a policy to monetise free electricity units previously provided to officers in BPS-17 and above working in Wapda and ex-Wapda entities, including distribution and generation companies.

Previously, officers from BPS-18 to 22 were given a total of 75 million units of electricity collectively, costing up to Rs4-4.5 billion annually.

Under the policy, officers are now required to pay electricity bills, while a fixed monthly



amount — based on earlier entitled units — has been incorporated into their pay.

The petitioner — Gujranwala Electric Power Company Engineers & Officers Association — through its chairman, had argued that free electricity units formed part of their service conditions and had been consistently enjoyed since their induction. Senior lawyer Ramzan Chaudhry represented the association during the proceedings and argued that the withdrawal of the facility was illegal, discriminatory and unconstitutional, particularly as lower-grade employees (BPS-1 to 16) continued to receive the benefit.

However, Assistant Attorney General Malik Tanvir Awan defended the federal government's policy, stating that the move was aimed at financial rationalisation of the power sector, which is facing severe challenges, including circular debt and operational losses.

He maintained that the facility had not been withdrawn but merely converted into a non-entitlement component to streamline administrative processes, reduce inefficiencies and address issues such as delayed recoveries and duplication. In his judgment, Justice Wains

framed a key question as whether free electricity units constituted a vested or statutory right enforceable through constitutional jurisdiction. The judge ruled that the facility of free electricity units was a service-linked privilege, not a statutory or vested right.

No legal provision or statutory rule was presented to establish the benefit as an enforceable entitlement, the judge said.

In the judgment, Justice Wains observed that the monetisation policy was a legitimate executive decision, taken as part of broader financial restructuring and did not suffer from illegality or arbitrariness.

Rejecting claims of discrimination, he held that officers in BPS-17 and above constitute a distinct cadre and that differential treatment based on reasonable classification does not violate constitutional guarantees.

Justice Wains concluded that economic and fiscal policy decisions fell within the executive's domain and courts cannot substitute their judgment unless a clear constitutional violation is demonstrated.

The judgment cautioned against judicial overreach, noting, "Interference of this nature would also run contrary to the doctrine of separation of powers."

He also dismissed arguments that the impugned policy violated fundamental rights. "Accordingly, the impugned notification dated Dec 5, 2023, [...] does not warrant any interference by this court and the same is hereby upheld," the judgment concluded.

Meanwhile, Power Minister Awais Leghari welcomed the development in a post on X, stressing that abolishing the benefit was a "very old and longstanding demand of the people".

Railway, Punjab govt agree to run fast train between Lahore, Rawalpindi

NEWS DESK: Pakistan Railways and Punjab government on Thursday joined hands by signing a memorandum of understanding (MoU) to run a fast train between Lahore and Rawalpindi and various other trains on local routes in a bid to transform railway transport across the province.

The MoU was signed by Chief Minister Maryam Nawaz and Federal Minister for Railways Muhammad Hanif Abbasi.

Under this initiative, Pakistan's first fast train service will be introduced between Lahore and Rawalpindi, covering approximately 280 kilometers in just two hours and 15 minutes.

The projects aim to modernise and expand railway operations across Punjab, with fast and regional train services to be operated over approximately 1,415 kilometers across 20 regional and eight key local routes.

Modern diesel multiple unit (DMU) trains will be deployed on regional routes, including Shahdara to Narowal (79km) and onward to Sialkot (62km), Rawand Kasur, Pakpattan to Lodhran (370km), Sheikhupura, Jaranwala to Shorkot (220km), Lalamsa, Malakwal to Sarapidh (147km), Faisalabad via Chak Jhumra to Shaheebabad (68km), and the inter-provincial corridor from Kot Addu to Kashmore via Dera Ghazi Khan (303km).

It will cover approximately 280km in just two hours and 15 minutes. New locomotives and modern passenger coaches will be inducted to enhance operational efficiency and service standards.

Railways Minister



Muhammad Hanif Abbasi termed the agreement a defining moment for Pakistan Railways, stating that approximately 90 million passengers across nine routes were expected to benefit from the project.

He emphasised that the project would significantly upgrade railway services to align with international standards.

under the leadership and supervision of the chief minister.

He said that in parallel with service expansion, Pakistan Railways was undertaking major infrastructure improvements.

Lahore Railway Station was being upgraded with comprehensive beautification and international-standard parking facilities.

Advanced automated (unmanned) safety systems were also being introduced to reduce accidents and enhance operational safety across the network.

He said environmental sustainability was an integral part of the initiative, with over 400,000 trees being planted along railway tracks.

A 40km green corridor from Shahdara to Rawand was also being developed to create a modern, environmentally sustainable railway environment compatible to international benchmarks.