



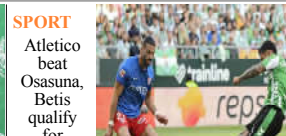
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QUETTA VOICE

When Foreign Aid Cuts Put Our Children's Lives at Risk

SYED ALI SHAH, ANALYSIS:

Every parent in Pakistan — whether in Lahore, Karachi, Peshawar, or a small village in Balochistan — shares one universal dream: to keep their children healthy and safe from preventable diseases. Today, that dream is under threat because of deep cuts in foreign aid.

A recent report by Tabadlab has painted a worrying picture.

Sharp reductions in international funding have badly hit Pakistan's immunisation programmes. Over 60 healthcare facilities have already been forced to close, leaving nearly 1.7 million people without essential services.

Vaccine supplies are shrinking, TB and HIV programmes are struggling, and millions of children now face a higher risk of measles, polio, and other deadly but preventable diseases.

Behind these cold numbers are real stories — a mother in rural Sindh anxiously waiting for her baby's vaccination,

a father in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa worried about his child's next polio drop, and families in Balochistan who have already lost access to basic health facilities.

For years, Pakistan has relied heavily on foreign donors for critical health programmes. With grants dropping by nearly 59% since 2017, the cracks in our healthcare system are now impossible to ignore.

Pakistan currently spends just 0.9% of its GDP on health — one of the lowest rates in



the region.

We cannot continue depending on uncertain foreign aid to protect our future generation.

This national crisis demands urgent action.

The government must prioritize increasing domestic health spending, strengthen local vaccine production, integrate health programmes more efficiently, and develop a sustainable national health financing plan.

At the same time, every political party and institution should treat child immunisation as a shared national responsibility that rises above politics. Our children did not cause

this funding crisis — but they will suffer the most if we fail to act.

The time has come for Pakistan to move from dependency to self-reliance in healthcare.

The health and lives of our sons and daughters are far too precious to be left at the mercy of changing global priorities.

Let us protect Pakistan's children — not just with words, but with decisive action.

University of Gwadar Vice Chancellor, Pro VC Missing Near Mastung Says Babar Yousufzai



NEWS DESK:

QUETTA : The Vice Chancellor of University of Gwadar and the Pro Vice Chancellor reportedly went missing near Mastung while traveling from Gwadar to Quetta, according to Assistant to the Chief Minister for Interior Babar Yousufzai.

Officials stated that both senior university officials lost contact near Mastung, and their mobile phones have remained switched off since the incident.

Security agencies are currently conducting tracing operations and search efforts to locate them.

Babar Yousufzai said that security forces, law enforcement agencies, and the district administration are jointly working on recovery operations and investigating the matter from all possible angles.

The Government of Balochistan has termed the incident highly sensitive and confirmed that all relevant institutions have been activated to ensure the safe recovery of the missing officials.

Umrani Alleges 5 Attacks on Residence Amid Rising Balochistan Security Concerns; Langove Responds

Staff Reporter:

Security situation in Balochistan has once again come into sharp focus after senior PPP leader and provincial minister Mir Sadiq Umrani highlighted serious threats to his life and growing law and order challenges in the province.

Speaking on the floor of the Balochistan Assembly and in public statements, Mir Sadiq Umrani revealed that his residence has been targeted five times.

The minister expressed deep concern over the safety of public representatives, stating that even as a senior minister he does not feel secure.

He also pointed out severe travel restrictions, noting that many roads and highways remain unsafe, forcing lawmakers to take longer, indirect routes — often via Karachi — to reach their constituencies.

Government Response
Balochistan Home Minister Mir Ziaullah Langove promptly responded to the allegations, assuring that the provincial government is fully committed to safeguarding the lives and properties of all citizens, including ministers and elected representatives.

Langove stated that security arrangements have already been strengthened across the



province. Each Member of the Provincial Assembly (MPA) has been provided with six security personnel, while additional guards have been deployed for ministers.

He stressed that there should be "no ambiguity or silence" on such matters and called for collective condemnation of terrorism without any justification or support for violent elements.

Langove further informed that security forces are carrying out intelligence-based operations throughout Balochistan, targeting militant networks, arresting suspects, and neutralizing threats. He reaffirmed that all available resources are being utilized to ensure public safety and restore stability.

Ongoing Challenges
This exchange between the two senior leaders underscores the persistent security concerns in Balochistan,

where political figures continue to raise alarms about threats and unsafe conditions, even as the government maintains that proactive measures and operations are underway to improve the situation.

QUETTA VOICE

Editor: Asim Khan

Fiscal Federalism and the Quest for Equity in Pakistan

AGHASANULLAH: Fiscal federalism forms the bedrock of governance in any federation, determining how financial resources are raised, shared, and spent to foster balanced development and social equity. In Pakistan, this relationship is constitutionally mediated through the National Finance Commission (NFC) Award, a mechanism designed to rectify both vertical imbalances between the federal and provincial governments and horizontal disparities among the provinces themselves.

While the NFC Award represents a vital instrument for devolution and provincial autonomy, a critical examination reveals that its promise of equitable resource distribution is persistently undermined by deeper, systemic flaws in the country's fiscal governance.

The NFC Award has, over successive iterations, progressively increased the provincial share in national revenues, thereby strengthening fiscal decentralization.

This shift has the potential to improve public service delivery by bringing resources closer to the people.

However, the effectiveness of these transfers is contingent upon a healthy national fiscal environment—a condition Pakistan has rarely met.

The nation's fiscal narrative is characterized by structural weaknesses that choke the system at its source.

A chronically narrow tax base, heavy reliance on regressive indirect taxation, and inefficient revenue mobilization by the Federal Board of Revenue (FBR)



mean that the total pool of resources available for distribution is perpetually insufficient.

Consequently, even a well-intentioned NFC Award framework operates within a system of scarcity, limiting its capacity to achieve genuine equity.

“Hidden Deficits” and Contingent Liabilities

Beyond revenue inadequacy, the expenditure side of the fiscal

equation presents an equally formidable challenge.

A significant portion of the federal budget is consumed by non-development expenditures, most notably debt servicing and defense. This leaves limited fiscal space for development spending, which is crucial for long-term economic growth and for addressing regional inequalities.

The paper notes

that the fiscal year 2024-25 saw a nine-year low in the consolidated budget deficit, partly due to provincial surpluses.

However, this superficial stability masks the underlying reality that the cost of servicing past debt continues to crowd out investments in the human and physical infrastructure needed to level the playing field among provinces. A major contribution of the research

is its identification of “hidden deficits” and contingent liabilities as critical yet often overlooked sources of fiscal stress. Beyond the conventional budget deficit, factors such as off-budget expenditures, subsidies to loss-making public sector enterprises, and implicit guarantees for future

Cycle of Short-Term Fixes Rather Than Long-Term Solutions

obligations create a precarious financial reality. This lack of transparency in accounting for risks—from natural calamities to the collapse of state-owned corporations—exposes the federation to unpredictable fiscal shocks.

The failure to consolidate and disclose these contingent liabilities means that the true scale of fiscal vulnerability is rarely debated in parliament or under-

stood by the public, perpetuating a cycle of short-term fixes rather than long-term solutions.

To break this cycle, the paper argues for a fundamental shift from one-dimensional, crisis-driven fiscal management to a multi-dimensional, institutionally anchored approach.

It recommends a suite of reforms that move beyond the NFC Award itself to

strengthen the entire fiscal ecosystem.

Key among these are the establishment of an independent Fiscal Council (FC) to provide unbiased analysis of fiscal policy and budget assumptions, thus reducing political discretion and enhancing evidence-based decision-making.

Furthermore, it calls for strengthening the Medium-Term Budgetary Framework by linking it to Public Service Agreements (PSAs) that tie resource allocation to measurable outcomes, ensuring that provincial transfers under the NFC Award translate into tangible improvements in education, health, and infrastructure.

In conclusion, the National Finance Commission Award is an essential but insufficient instrument for achieving fiscal equity in Pakistan. Its effectiveness is inextricably linked to the overall health of the nation's public finances.

As the research paper demonstrates, persistent issues such as a narrow tax base, unsustainable debt service, and opaque contingent liabilities undermine the very resources that the NFC Award is meant to distribute equitably.

Moving forward, the focus must broaden from negotiating provincial shares to implementing deep-rooted institutional reforms.

By enhancing revenue mobilization, ensuring fiscal transparency, and prudently managing debt and liabilities, Pakistan can create an environment where the NFC Award can fulfill its constitutional promise—fostering a resilient, balanced, and truly equitable federation.

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

By Musavir Durrani

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

core of marriage, while coercion makes a marriage *batil* (invalid).

The Qur'an Clearly Forbids Forced Marriages. Allah states in Surah An-Nisa:

“O you who believe, it is not lawful for you to inherit women against their will.”

(Qur'an 4:19)

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

Islam replaced oppression with dignity, choice, and responsibility.

Prophetic Example: Forced Marriages Declared Invalid

A woman once came to the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH)



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

Hadith References: Sahih al-Bukhari, Hadith 5138.

Sahih Muslim, Hadith 1419. These narrations all confirm that the Prophet (PBUH) allowed the woman to annul her forced marriage.

One narration even states that she chose to remain married but wanted to teach women that fa-

thers have no right to force their daughters.

Parents Can Advise, But They Cannot Force.

Islam highly respects parents, but marriage choice is not their right. They can guide, suggest, and advise,

but they have ab-

solutely no power to force their child into marrying someone. Even if parents think they “know what is best,” they cannot override the choice of their daughter or son. The final decision always

belongs to the person getting married.

Statements such as: “If you don't marry this one, who will marry you?” “You have no choice.” “Do it for family honor.” “You must obey your parents.”

These are pure emotional manipulation, and Islam does

not allow it. Emotional or Psychological

Pressure is Also Haram. Forced marriage is not only when someone is physically

pressured. Even emotional, mental, or family pressure counts as force. Any Nikkah done under fear, pressure, or

threats is invalid (*Batil*) in Islam. This ruling is based on multiple hadith in which the Prophet (PBUH) annulled

marriages done without consent.

Modern Forced Marriages, A New Way of Burying Women Alive. Before Islam, Arabs used to bury baby

girls alive. Today, many scholars say: “We no longer bury women in the ground, we bury their dreams on the day of their Nikkah.”

When a girl is forced into a marriage, pressured emotionally, or told she has no other choice, we destroy her life while she is still alive. This is the new form of burying women alive, and Islam came to end this injustice completely.

Forced marriage has no place in Islam. It is against the Qur'an, against the Sunnah, and against the dignity that Islam gives to every woman and man. Parents must love, support, and guide, but never control or force marriage decisions.

“Allah gave women this right, and no one can take it away.”

Strait of Hormuz 'open to all commercial vessels' provided cooperation with Iran's navy: Araghchi

NEWS DESK: Tehran has called on BRICS members to condemn US and Israeli aggression against Iran, Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi said in a statement upon arriving in New Delhi for a BRICS meeting among foreign ministers.

Araghchi said that the West's "false sense of superiority" must be shattered by the Global South.

While speaking to Press TV at the BRICS summit, he said the main obstacle in the Strait of Hormuz was the US blockade, adding that commercial ships needed to cooperate with the Iranian navy for passage in the Strait, but that it was "open to all commercial vessels."

Israel said it inks \$35 million deal to extend F-35 fighter jet range.

Israel announced on Thursday the signing of a contract worth more than \$34 million to develop "an extended-range" capability for the F-35 Adir fighter jet.

The Defence Ministry said in a statement that its Defence Procurement Directorate signed the deal with Cyclone, a wholly owned subsidiary of Elbit Systems.

The agreement covers "the development of an extended-range capability for the F-35 Adir fighter jet, manufactured by Lockheed Martin," the statement added.

The deal, valued at over \$34 million (over NIS 100 million), covers the development and integration of external fuel tanks based on an existing Cyclone design



originally developed for the F-16," it said.

The new capability is expected to extend the aircraft's operational range, reduce reliance on aerial refuelling, and enhance operational flexibility across long-range missions," the ministry said.

Iran war overshadows Trump's China visit as peace talks stall

US President Donald Trump is expected to ask China to help end the costly and unpopular Iran war in discussions with President Xi Jinping in Beijing on Thursday, with peace talks stalled and the global economic cost of the conflict increasing.

The US-Israeli war on Iran looms large over Trump's visit to China, the first by a US president since his last trip there in 2017, although analysts say he is unlikely to get the support he wants.

More than one month after a tenuous ceasefire took effect, diplomatic efforts have failed to make progress towards resolving a war

that has cost thousands of lives, reshaped alliances in the Middle East and driven up prices of oil and other key commodities around the world.

Washington has called for Tehran to scrap its nuclear programme and lift the 'chokehold' it has placed on the Strait of Hormuz, a key shipping lane through which about 20% of the world's oil and liquefied natural gas travelled before the war began on February 28.

Iran has demanded compensation for war damages, amid the US blockade of Iranian ports and a halt to fighting on all fronts, including in Lebanon, where Israel is battling Iran-backed Hezbollah.

Trump has dismissed Tehran's positions as 'garbage.'

Trump's visit to China, which maintains close ties with Tehran and is a major buyer of Iranian oil, comes as the war fuels inflation at home and raises the risk that voters will blame Trump's Republican

Party in November's midterm elections.

The United States hopes to convince China to play a more active role in getting Iran to walk away from the war they're doing now and trying to do now in the Persian Gulf.

US Secretary of State Marco Rubio told Fox News' 'Hannity' programme in a clip released on Wednesday.

"We've made clear to them that any support for Iran would obviously be detrimental for our relationship. That

is not what we want. We want to see a resolution that is in the best interests of the United States and the world."

A Panama-flagged crude oil tanker managed by Japanese refining group Enoco has passed through the Strait of Hormuz, ship-tracking data from LSEG showed on Thursday, the second instance of such a Japan-linked ship traversing the strait.

Japan relied on the Gulf for about 95% of its oil imports before the war.

Reshaping alliances

Israel said Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu secretly travelled to the UAE in March for "talks with Sheikh Mohammed bin Zayed, which Israel said resulted in a "historic breakthrough" in relations between the two.

They re-established ties in 2020 as part of the Trump-backed Abraham Accords, and the relationship has strengthened since the UAE came under Iranian attack.

But the UAE's foreign ministry denied the trip took place, saying "any claims regarding unannounced visits or undisclosed arrangements are entirely unfounded".

Iran, which has struck the UAE more than its 'other Gulf neighbours in response to the US-Israeli attacks, warned the Emiratis against becoming an enemy.

"Enmity with the Great People of Iran is a foolish gamble. Collusion with Israel in doing 'so unforgivable. Those colluding with Israel to sow division will be held to account," Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi wrote on X.

Separately, Reuters reported that Saudi fighter jets bombed Iranian-backed militia in Iraq, part of a broader pattern of military responses involving Gulf nations during the war that have remained hidden. Retaliatory strikes were also launched from Kuwait into Iraq, sources said.

US Vice President JD Vance said on Wednesday he believed progress was being made in negotiations to end the war.

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Russia establishing 'full partnership' with Afghan Taliban

NEWS DESK: Russia is establishing a "full-fledged partnership" with Afghanistan's ruling Taliban and is encouraging other countries in the region to expand cooperation with Kabul, a senior Russian security official said on Thursday.

Russia last year became the first country to formally recognise the Taliban government that seized power in August 2021 as US-led forces staged a chaotic withdrawal from Afghanistan after 20 years of war.

Interfax news agency quoted Russian official Sergei Shoigu as saying cooperation with Kabul was important for the security and development of the region.

Shoigu, who is secretary of Russia's Security Council, said Moscow was building a "pragmatic dialogue" with the Taliban that included security, trade, culture

and humanitarian support.

He was speaking at a meeting with his counterparts from the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO), a 10-member grouping that includes China, India, Iran, Pakistan and a number of ex-Soviet states.

The SCO should revive its contact group with Afghanistan, Shoigu added.

The Taliban was outlawed by Russia as a terrorist movement in 2003, but the ban was lifted in April 2025.

Russia sees a need to work with Kabul as it faces a major security threat from militant groups based in a string of countries from Afghanistan to the Middle East.

French authorities on Wednesday confirmed more than 1,700 passengers and crew on a British cruise ship after an elderly passenger died and dozens suffered upset stomachs, health officials said.

They insisted there was no connection with the hantavirus outbreak, suspected of killing three passengers on the Dutch MV Hondius cruise ship that set sail from Argentina, which has sparked international alarm.

Dozens suffered from upset stomachs aboard the Ambition — most of whose 1,233 passengers are from Britain — which arrived in the western port of Bordeaux on Tuesday, with 514 crew members also on board.

One 92-year-old British passenger on the Ambition, run by the UK-based Ambassador Cruise Line company, had died of a heart attack, health authorities said.

From Black Death to Covid, ships have long hosted outbreaks

"At this stage, no link has been established with the gastroenteritis episode," they added on Wednesday afternoon. Initial tests ruled out an outbreak of

norovirus, a highly contagious form of gastroenteritis which causes vomiting and diarrhoea, but secondary tests were still underway, they added. Food poisoning had not been excluded.

Seos Guilidhe, a 52-year-old from the Northern Irish capital Belfast, sent a message via Facebook as he was "playing bingo". "We are onboard with extra sanitation guidelines in place. It is not as bad as it was during Covid. People just going about as normal," he wrote in the message, referring to lockdowns during the coronavirus pandemic.

"We are just waiting on test results coming back from the French government to see what the elder gentleman died from," he added.

The cruise line company, which has a fleet of 10 ships, said it was "pleased to have the Ambition back in service" and that it was "committed to providing a safe and enjoyable cruise experience for all our guests."

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Waiting for "clearance is granted"

Passengers on board the Ambition showed peak symptoms on Monday when the ship was docked in Brest, the officials said.

The man in his nineties died before they arrived at the port in France's northwestern Brittany region. The ship, which left the Shetland Islands north of Scotland on May 6, stopped in Belfast and Liverpool in England before reaching Bordeaux, from where it was scheduled to depart for Spain. It was initially supposed to dock back in Liverpool on May 22.

The cruise line company on its Facebook page said its figures showed an increase in cases after embarking guests in Liverpool. No

security measures were in place around the ship as it was docked in Bordeaux on Wednesday, a reporter said. Passengers were taking pictures from the French city of the ship from the deck. Those on board would be allowed to disembark "once clearance is granted" the cruise line said.

A deadly outbreak on a cruise liner is just the latest in a long history of infectious diseases spreading rapidly in the cramped confines of ships, from the Black Death to Covid.

People around the world remain in quarantine or self-isolation after a rare outbreak of hantavirus on a cruise ship left three dead and infected at least seven more.

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allowed occupiers to enter the Al-Aqsa Mosque compound daily, except Fridays and Saturdays, since 2003.

Israeli occupiers stormed the mosque 30 times in April, according to the Palestinian Ministry of Awqaf and Religious Affairs.

Palestinians said Israel had intensified efforts for decades to Judaize East Jerusalem, including Al-Aqsa Mosque, and erase the city's Arab and Islamic identity.

Palestinians seek East Jerusalem as the capital of their future state, citing international resolutions that do not recognise Israel's occupation of the city in 1967 or its annexation in 1980.

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Dozens of Israeli occupiers stormed Al-Aqsa Mosque compound under police protection

NEWS DESK: Dozens of Israeli occupiers stormed the Al-Aqsa Mosque compound in the occupied East Jerusalem on Thursday morning under the protection of Israeli forces, the official news agency Wafa reported.

Local sources said occupiers entered the compound and publicly performed Talmudic rituals in its courtyards under heavy police protection, citing the Jerusalem Governorate.

The Turkish foreign ministry condemned the act in a statement posted on X, saying "Such provocative actions violate the historical and legal status of Al-Aqsa Mosque as a holy site belonging to Muslims, risk further deepening tensions and instability

in the region."

The statement ended with a call to protect the rights of Palestinians and prevent "violations in occupied East Jerusalem and against its holy sites."

Israeli far-right National Security Minister Itamar Ben-Gvir stormed the Al-Aqsa Mosque compound last month in occupied East Jerusalem under heavy police protection. Citing the Jerusalem Governorate,

Wafa said the incursion came amid an ongoing escalation of violations against Islamic and Christian holy sites in East Jerusalem, as well as continued restrictions on worshippers' access to the mosque.

Al-Aqsa Mosque is the world's third-holiest site for Muslims. Jews call the area Temple Mount, claiming it was the site of two Jewish temples in ancient times. Israeli police have

allowed occupiers to enter the Al-Aqsa Mosque compound daily, except Fridays and Saturdays, since 2003.

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Western analysts don't have high hopes for Trump's China visit

NEWS DESK: As US President Donald Trump begins a high-level summit with Chinese President Xi Jinping in Beijing on Wednesday, analysts in Washington said the talks were likely to be defined less by any breakthroughs in trade or technology and more by intensifying geopolitical tensions, with the Iran crisis emerging as a key, if indirect, test of US-China strategic competition.

At an on-the-record briefing on Tuesday hosted by the Washington-based Centre for European Policy Analysis (CEPA), experts argued that the US-China relationship has entered a largely transactional phase, in which both sides pursue narrow gains rather than structural accommodation.

The discussion featured Reinhard Butikofer, senior fellow at CEPA's tech policy programme and former member of the European Parliament; James Lewis, distinguished fellow at CEPA's tech policy programme; Christopher Walker, vice president of CEPA; and William



Eckhson, senior fellow and moderator of the session.

Across their interventions, a consistent theme emerged: Iran is becoming a stress test for US-China diplomacy, even if it is not formally the centrepiece of the summit agenda.

Analysts cautioned against expectations of a substantive reset in US-China relations, describing the summit as narrowly transactional, with limited scope for agreement on core geopolitical disputes.

James Lewis argued that both sides were approaching the talks from a position of self-confidence rather than compromise. "Both sides are

convinced that they are the winning side, and that means limited room for concessions," he said.

He added that between Washington and Beijing would constrain outcomes on the most sensitive issues. "Neither side will make much progress on the two most contentious geopolitical issues — Iran and Taiwan."

According to Mr Lewis, Washington is likely to press Beijing to use its "influence over Tehran to stabilise tensions in the Middle East, particularly around the Strait of Hormuz, a critical global energy chokepoint. However, he doubted China would

comply in any meaningful way.

At the same time, he noted that Beijing was expected to seek concessions from Washington in return, particularly on Taiwan and advanced technology restrictions, reinforcing a cycle of reciprocal but limited bargaining.

Christopher Walker argued that China's alignment with Russia and Iran reflected a deeper structural shift in global politics rather than a temporary alignment of interests. "Russia, as a weaker power, has decided to side with China and other like-minded regimes, including Iran, against the United States and its 'natural' allies," he said.

Punjab to include Marka-e-Haq in school curriculum

LAHORE (INP): The Punjab government has decided to include topics related to patriotism and Marka-e-Haq in the province's educational curriculum as part of efforts to promote national unity and awareness among students.

The decision was taken during a meeting of the Information Steering Committee chaired by Punjab Information Minister Azma Bukhari, which was attended by Secretary Information

Tahir Raza Hamdani and other senior officials. According to officials, the committee agreed to introduce lessons related to patriotism and the Marka-e-Haq narrative in educational

content across the province. The meeting also noted that private educational institutions had not organised programmes related to Marka-e-Haq on the same scale as public in-

stitutions. Authorities have now directed private schools to hold similar awareness and educational activities. Officials further decided that films promoting national unity and Marka-e-Haq would be

produced under the province's film fund initiative. In addition, the Alhama Arts Council will produce a drama based on Shaheed Liaquat. The committee also

approved the launch of a public awareness campaign aimed at strengthening national cohesion. Participants of the meeting requested that visits by the Director General of Inter-Services

Public Relations to educational institutions should continue. During the meeting, officials were also directed to intensify action against hate material ahead of Muharram-ul-Haram.



ISLAMABAD: Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif chairs a meeting on measures to control population of the country.

CM Maryam criticises underperformance of commissioners at Lahore meeting

LAHORE (INP): Punjab Chief Minister Maryam Nawaz on Wednesday made it clear to provincial commissioners that she did not want them to sit in air-conditioned rooms but wanted to see them on the field.

Chairing an important meeting of commissioners in Lahore, she said that while some commissioners' performance was satisfactory, others' performance was not up to the mark. "There is no room for negligence," she said categorically. The chief minister also said that only merit would be followed. "Nepotism will be tolerated."

She informed that from now onwards, development schemes worth billions of rupees would be completed in districts from their own resources. Commissioners of Sahiwal, Sargodha, Faisalabad and Multan

gave a detailed briefing to CM Maryam on available projects. She showed anger over the death of a three-year-old girl, who fell into a manhole in a private housing society in Faisalabad. "If from now on, any person dies after falling into a manhole, the housing society owner will be arrested," she ordered. The chief minister ordered that notices be issued to the owners of all private housing societies in Punjab.

She also ordered that there should be a monitoring of private or government school buildings. "All construction sites should be properly cordoned off in order to prevent any incident," CM Maryam expressed grave concern over the plight of roads in Sahiwal division.

IMF team arrives in Pakistan for 2026-27 budget talks

ISLAMABAD (INP): An International Monetary Fund (IMF) delegation arrived in Pakistan to hold consultations with authorities on the federal budget for the fiscal year 2026-27, the officials said on Wednesday.

The Ministry of Finance said that the formal discussions between the IMF mission and Pakistan's economic team have begun, focusing on upcoming budget targets, tax revenue measures and broader fiscal reforms.

The IMF delegation would remain in Islamabad until May 20 and is scheduled to hold a series of meetings with key institutions, including the Ministry of Finance, the Federal Board of Revenue (FBR) and the State Bank of Pakistan. The talks would review fiscal planning for the next financial year, including tax collection

targets, energy sector reforms, progress on privatisation and measures aimed at strengthening overall financial discipline and governance. The sources said Pakistan is considering setting the tax revenue target for the next fiscal year at over Rs15 trillion, with discussions underway to finalise key macroeconomic indicators and budgetary frameworks.

The IMF has also reportedly expressed concern over suspicious financial transactions and urged authorities to take stronger action against money laundering and improve regulatory enforcement. In addition, the delegation is expected to consult with the Ministry of Energy and other relevant departments on structural reforms in the power sector and state-owned enterprises.

The defence minister mentioned that the Kabul government had become a "proxy" of India and was unwilling to provide Pakistan with concrete assurances regarding cross-border terrorism. "Kabul is not giving us any guarantee to stop terrorism," Asif said, adding that "Afghan authorities only made verbal commitments and were not prepared to provide written assurances."

1000 Hepatitis C screening counters to be established across country

ISLAMABAD (INP): Defense Minister Khawaja Asif has said Kabul government has become an Indian proxy and is not ready to abandon support to terrorist groups perpetrating terrorism inside Pakistan.

He mentioned that three rounds of negotiations were held with Afghanistan with the support of Turkey, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and

India lacks the courage to confront Pakistan directly and is instead using Kabul to wage a proxy war against the country. He said that despite this, Pakistan held detailed negotiations with Afghanistan, regretting that these remain inconclusive.

He mentioned that three rounds of negotiations were held with Afghanistan with the support of Turkey, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and

said Kabul government is unwilling to provide assurances that Afghan territory would not be used for attacks against Pakistan.

He mentioned that our armed forces are rendering sacrifices in the war on terrorism. He said we are on the same page to wipe out terrorism.

Khawaja Asif said Pakistan desires negotiations with Kabul to reach an arrangement against terrorism. He emphatically stated if Kabul is not ready to cooperate, the same response would be given to Kabul as was given to Delhi. Meanwhile, Minister for National Health Services Mustafa Kamal told the house during question hour. He informed the National Assembly that one thousand screening of the electricity gener-

ated during last fiscal year was from the indigenous sources.

He highlighted that a study has been completed for conversion of imported coal based plants to gas coal, emphasizing that this is feasible and viable.

The Minister for Power said the government is not discouraging renewables, emphasizing that its growth is constant.

He said growth of solar net metering consumers continues to rise, emphasizing that new prosumer regulations are attractive enough to attract investment.

He also clarified that the investment of existing promoters has been protected under the new regulations and there is no change in their terms and conditions.

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'One enemy on both borders': Minister sees no difference between Kabul, New Delhi

ISLAMABAD (INP): Defense Minister Khawaja Asif on Tuesday warned Afghanistan's Taliban-led government against continued support for militants, saying Pakistan would respond to Kabul the same way it had responded to India.

There is no difference between Delhi and Kabul," Asif said while addressing the National Assembly in Islamabad, adding that "one enemy" was currently sitting on both Pakistan's eastern and western borders.

The defence minister mentioned that the Kabul government had become a "proxy" of India and was unwilling to provide Pakistan with concrete assurances regarding cross-border terrorism.

"Kabul is not giving us any guarantee to stop terrorism," Asif said, adding that "Afghan authorities only made verbal commitments and were not prepared to provide written assurances."

During his speech, opposition members shouted slogans and interrupted proceedings as Asif praised the sacrifices of Pakistan's armed forces.

"Our armed forces are giving unconditional sacrifices," he said.

"If they do not stop backing terrorists, then there will be war," he warned, saying Pakistan had attempted to resolve the issue through dialogue involving Qatar, Saudi Arabia and Turkey.

"We tried very hard to make them understand with the support of three countries," Asif said, referring to diplomatic efforts involving the Taliban administration.

The minister also said the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa government had not cooperated with the federal government for a long period in dealing with security challenges, though cooperation had now improved.

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Imran Khan lost vision in one eye due to prison torture, claims Salman Akram Raja

ISLAMABAD (INP): PTI Secretary General Salman Akram Raja on Wednesday alleged that PTI founder Imran Khan had lost vision in one eye due to alleged torture during imprisonment and was facing serious health concerns while in custody.

Speaking to reporters outside the Supreme Court in Islamabad, Salman Akram Raja claimed that all avenues of justice appeared closed, alleging that the PTI founder had remained imprisoned for nearly 1,000 days and was being denied basic constitutional and legal rights.

The remarks came days after Imran Khan underwent a fourth intravitreal eye injection at the Pakistan Institute of Medical Sciences (PIMS) on April 28 as part of continued medical treatment.

According to a report submitted to the Supreme Court by Khan's lawyer and the

court-appointed amicus curiae Salman Safdar, the former prime minister had been diagnosed with central retinal vein occlusion (CRVO), a serious eye condition caused by blockage of the main vein draining blood from the retina.

The report stated that the condition is commonly associated with cardiovascular complications including hypertension, diabetes, high cholesterol and heart disease.

During the media interaction, Raja alleged that meetings between Imran Khan and his wife Bushra Bibi were being restricted despite court orders regarding visitation rights.

The PTI leader also alleged that Bushra Bibi was facing politically motivated and false cases, including Toshakhana-related references, which he claimed were based on statements from government witnesses.

Pakistani Ph.D. student in China advances research on early cancer detection

BEIJING (INP): Muhammad Majid, born into a humble family in Fatumand in Gujranwala, found his life calling during his Ph.D. journey at Tianjin University, China.

In a recent breakthrough, his review article titled "Aptamer-based electrochemical biosensors for breast cancer biomarkers: Developments, challenges, and future directions" was published in Analytical Chemistry, one of the world's leading journals in the field.

"Saving a life does not begin in an operating room; it begins in a laboratory, with a sensor small enough to detect what the human eye cannot see," he told China Economic Net in an interview.

He further explained, "My next goal is to pursue postdoctoral

research at the Chinese Academy of Sciences. That environment represents the highest level of scientific rigor and innovation, and I want to refine myself there both technically and intellectually.

After that, I aim to join a research institute in China and establish my own laboratory. But not just any laboratory—a multidisciplinary research lab, where one focus is early cancer detection through advanced sensor technologies, and the other is developing treatment strategies.

While working in China, I also intend to collaborate closely with research institutes in Pakistan. Together, we can build laboratories that prepare young scientific minds for global challenges."

Before coming to China on a Chinese Government Scholarship, he completed his bachelor's degree in chemistry and later ranked among the top five students in his master's program.

He also highlighted the empowering role of academic exchange in China. "Academic conferences are regularly organized where researchers present their latest work. They pushed me to think more critically, observe how others structure their research questions, and understand new methodologies and problem-solving approaches," he said.

"After completing my Ph.D. at Tianjin University, I plan to continue my research in China," he said. "My next goal is to pursue postdoctoral

research at the Chinese Academy of Sciences. That environment represents the highest level of scientific rigor and innovation, and I want to refine myself there both technically and intellectually.

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ISLAMABAD: His Excellency Mr. Yusuf Sharifzoda, Ambassador of Tajikistan to Pakistan, called on the Federal Minister for Climate Change and Environmental Coordination, Dr. Musadik Malik.



ISLAMABAD: Federal Minister for Commerce Jam Kamal Khan chairs a consultative meeting with representatives of Pakistan's leather industry in Islamabad to discuss export competitiveness, taxation reforms, market access challenges, and practical measures to unlock the sector's growth potential through stronger public-private collaboration.

Pahalgalam incident was 'false flag operation': Atta Tarar

ISLAMABAD (INP): Federal Minister for Information and Broadcasting Attaullah Tarar said the Pahalgalam incident was a "false flag operation," alleging that India avoided an impartial investigation, while Pakistan continues to play the role of a frontline state in the global fight against terrorism.

Addressing a seminar on "Marka-e-Haq" at the Institute of Strategic Studies Islamabad, Attaullah Tarar said Pakistan has rendered unmatched sacrifices as a frontline state against

terrorism, while India has been attempting to mislead the international community by blaming Pakistan for its own internal failures and security issues.

He stated that during "Marka-e-Haq," the Pakistani nation, armed forces and state institutions demonstrated complete unity.

According to him, terrorism in India is its internal matter, but New Delhi has repeatedly tried to externalize its crimes and failures by leveling allegations against Pakistan. He said India

imposed unprovoked aggression on Pakistan, but Pakistan responded with responsibility, wisdom and national unity.

Referring to the Pahalgalam incident, the federal minister said Pakistan was immediately blamed without any investigation, despite the Pakistani prime minister offering cooperation for a transparent inquiry. He claimed India avoided any neutral investigation because the Pahalgalam incident was actually a "false flag operation."

He added that Pahalgalam is located far

from the border in an area under strong Indian military control, yet allegations were directed at Pakistan.

According to him, the incident caused damage to India's credibility at the international level.

Attaullah Tarar said complete coordination among state institutions is Pakistan's greatest strength, adding that the country's civil and military leadership is on the same page. He praised the leadership of Field Marshal Syed Asim Munir in dealing with challenges.

Quetta Administration Finalizes Preparations for Anti-Polio Campaign Starting May 18

QUETTA: An important meeting regarding preparations for the anti-polio campaign beginning on May 18 was held under the chairmanship of Mehrullah Badini.

The meeting was attended by the District Education Officer, District Health Officer, Deputy DHO, members of the Aga Khan team, DEOC officials, and EOC representatives.

During the session, Deputy Commissioner Mehrullah Badini formally inaugurated the campaign by administering polio drops to children.

Officials informed the meeting that a target has been set to vaccinate 427,612 children against Polio



during the campaign across Quetta district.

It was further shared that 1,420 security personnel will be deployed to ensure foolproof security arrangements throughout the drive.

The deputy commissioner directed authorities to implement a special strategy to ensure 100 percent coverage of missed children.

He also ordered the establishment of

fixed vaccination sites in schools to maximize outreach and ensure access to a larger number of children.

Mehrullah Badini stated that a strict monitoring plan has been devised for the

success of the campaign and emphasized that all concerned institutions would work in close coordination.

He further instructed officials to strengthen communication with religious scholars, community elders, tribal leaders, and other influential individuals to raise awareness among parents and encourage them to ensure that every child receives polio drops.

The deputy commissioner also assessed that district administration teams would remain present in the field and provide immediate support and assistance to polio teams to ensure the successful implementation of the campaign.

Sibi Commissioner Participates in E-Learning Workshop to Promote Women's Digital Empowerment

SIBI: In line with the vision of Chief Minister Sarfraz Bugti to ensure women's economic and digital empowerment, Asadullah Faiz participated in a one-day e-learning workshop organized in collaboration with the Social Welfare Department and Women Development Department.

The facility will remain available free of cost for women 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

Under the initiative, women will receive free training and guidance in freelancing, web de-

expanded to 30 computers.

The facility will remain available free of cost for women 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

Speaking on the occasion, Commissioner Asadullah Faiz said that women working from home and those requiring financial assistance



The workshop was conducted by IT experts and master trainers from the Commissioner Office Sibi with the cooperation of relevant departments.

Officials stated that Commissioner Asadullah Faiz has established an "Empowered Women Center" at the Divisional Public School Sibi.

The primary objective of the center is to provide a comprehensive support facil-

ity for women working from home so they can market and sell their products through digital platforms, establish business connections, and become economically self-reliant.

Under the initiative, women will receive free training and guidance in freelancing, web de-

veloped by IT experts and master trainers from the Commissioner Office Sibi with the cooperation of relevant departments.

also would be provided with interest-free loans.

He added that the center would serve as an important milestone toward helping women economically independent, while additional facilities would also be introduced in the future to help women in Sibi actively participate in the digital economy and modern technological landscape.

Deputy Commissioner Jaffarabad Chairs Education Group Meeting to Improve Schools and Academic Standards

JAFFARABAD: An important meeting of the District Education Group was held under the chairmanship of Khalid Khan to review the ongoing teaching process, challenges faced by educational institutions, teachers' attendance, improvement in academic standards, and progress on school development projects across the district.

The meeting was attended by Additional Deputy Commissioner Huzoor Bakhsh Bugti, Executive Engineer Irfan Ali Rajput, officials from the Education Department, and other concerned authorities.

During the session, participants discussed in detail the provision of basic facilities in schools, measures to further improve the quality of education, respon-



sibilities of teachers, and the status of ongoing development schemes in educational institutions.

Deputy Commissioner Khalid Khan stated that education is the foundation of progress in any society and that the Government of Balochistan is taking serious steps to improve the education sector.

He directed officials

to adopt practical and effective measures to further strengthen the teaching process across the district so that students can benefit from a better educational environment.

The deputy commissioner made it clear that no compromise would be made on the attendance of teachers and other staff members, warning that strict

action would be taken against absentee employees because negligence in official duties would not be tolerated.

Khalid Khan said that the current provincial government is taking concrete measures to resolve issues faced by educational institutions, while construction, repair, and rehabilitation work on various school buildings is progressing

rapidly under the BSDI program.

He noted that the timely completion of these development projects would not only improve the infrastructure of educational institutions but also help address the difficulties faced by students in acquiring education.

The deputy commissioner further directed relevant officers to pay special attention to the quality and pace of development projects so that improved educational facilities can be provided to the public at the earliest opportunity.

The meeting reaffirmed the commitment to utilize all available resources to strengthen, modernize, and improve the education sector in Jaffarabad district in line with contemporary educational requirements.

Deputy Commissioner Harnai Chairs Key Meetings on Health and Education Performance

HARNAI: Two important high-level meetings were held at the Deputy Commissioner Complex under the chairmanship of Arshad Hussain Jamali to review the overall performance of the health and education sectors across the district.

The meetings focused on staff attendance, delivery of public services, and major issues faced by citizens. Deputy Commissioner Arshad Hussain Jamali made it clear that negligence in public service delivery would not be tolerated under any circumstances.

free and uninterrupted supply of medicines in all hospitals and health centers.

He also ordered strict monitoring of doctors and paramedical staff attendance, warning that disciplinary action would be taken against absent employees.

Special emphasis was placed on improving cleanliness standards in medical centers to provide patients with a respectful and hygienic environment.

Education Sector Review and District Education Group Strategy A separate meeting of the District Education Group was also

accepted.

He directed authorities to take immediate steps for the provision of clean drinking water and other basic facilities in schools.

The deputy commissioner further instructed relevant officials to conduct regular field visits to schools to ensure effective monitoring of educational standards.

A ministerial Committee and Public Service Delivery At the conclusion of the meetings, the deputy commissioner directed all departmental heads to perform their responsibilities with honesty, dedication, and

Balochistan Communications and Works Department Reviews Zero Expenditure on Development Projects

QUETTA: An important review meeting regarding zero expenditure on development projects was held under the chairmanship of Babar Khan.

The meeting was attended by chief engineers from all six zones, senior officers, superintending engineers (SEs), executive engineers, and other relevant officials. Participants held detailed discussions on the progress of ongoing development schemes across various districts.



During the meeting, officials provided a comprehensive briefing on the status of zero expenditure in development projects and highlighted the reasons behind delays in fund utilization.

They also informed the meeting about technical difficulties and administrative obstacles affecting

the implementation of projects.

Addressing the participants, Secretary Communications and Works Babar Khan directed officials to immediately resolve technical and administrative issues in districts where the ratio of zero expenditure on development schemes remains high.

He emphasized that the timely completion of projects is among the government's top priorities and warned that no negligence or unnecessary delays would be tolerated in this regard.

The secretary further instructed concerned officers to accelerate the pace of

work on ongoing projects so that the public can benefit from development initiatives as early as possible.

The meeting also stressed the importance of continuous monitoring of projects and ensuring the effective and transparent utilization of development funds.



Deputy Commissioner Nasirabad Launches Anti-Polio Campaign Ahead of May 18 Drive

NASIRABAD: Captain (Retd.) Zulfiqar Ali Karar officially inaugurated the upcoming anti-polio campaign by administering polio drops to children ahead of the district-wide drive starting on May 18.

The inauguration ceremony was attended by District Health Officer Dr. Ayaz Jamal, Medical Superintendent Dr. Habib Pindran, Dr. Zahir Hussain Umran, and other concerned officials, who also participated in the campaign launch by administering polio drops to children.

Among those present at the event were District Health Officer Dr. Ayaz Jamal, Medical Superintendent Dr. Habib Pindran, Dr. Zahir Hussain Umran, and other concerned officials, who also participated in the campaign launch by administering polio drops to children.

Speaking on the occasion, Deputy Commissioner Zulfiqar Ali Karar stated that all arrangements for the anti-polio campaign beginning on May 18 in Nasirabad district have been finalized. He said the formation and training of all polio teams have been completed, and teams will conduct door-to-door visits to administer polio drops to children under the age of five to ensure that no child is left out of the national



campaign.

He described Polio as a dangerous and crippling disease and emphasized that parents' cooperation is essential to protect children from the virus. He urged all parents to fulfill their responsibility by ensuring that their children receive polio drops and by fully cooperating with district health department teams to help make Nasirabad a polio-free district.

The deputy commissioner also issued strict directives to rel-

evant authorities to ensure effective monitoring of all polio teams during the campaign and to make sure that no area is neglected.

He further ordered extraordinary security arrangements for the safety of vaccination teams, stating that police personnel will be deployed with all polio teams to provide complete protection and ensure the successful implementation of the campaign and the achievement of the national goal of eradicating

polio from Nasirabad district.

TENDER NOTICE: The Provincial Library Balochistan invites bids from eligible bidders for supply of following items: TSS-25021949131. Note: In All Procurements of GOB Whether Through Electronic or Manual Bid Submission, it is Mandatory For All Bidders to Get Registered At Electronic Public Procurement System of BPPRAGOB. Tender Fee: Nil Requested.

TENDER NOTICE: THE DIRECTOR GENERAL, NORTH invites bids from Eligible Bidders for execution of following works for the Year 2026 based on Composite schedule rates 2023 on Percentage Rates Only electronic bid will be submitted. No physical bid is required. Note: In All Procurements of GOB Whether Through Electronic or Manual Bid Submission, it is Mandatory For All Bidders to Get Registered At Electronic Public Procurement System of BPPRAGOB. Tender Fee: 1500 PKR and Bid Security 2% for each work.

Finance ministry terms report on Dar being 'handed' budget-making process 'misleading, incorrect'

NEWS DESK: The Ministry of Finance said on Thursday that a media report claiming Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Ishaq Dar had been handed the budget-making process was "misleading" and "factually incorrect".

The clarification came after a report published by The Express Tribune said the government had "handed over" the responsibility of making the new budget to Dar after it found the initial work below par.

According to the report, Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif had constituted a Dar-led committee to "review, analyse and present tax policy proposals" formulated by the Tax Policy Office working under the Finance Division.

Citing a notification, it added: "With the formation of the committee, the final responsibility to finalise roughly Rs215 billion to Rs230bn in new taxes and to grant any tax relief has been handed over to Dar."

Moreover, the report said, the responsibility for finalising the enforcement measures had been handed over to a committee led by Minister for Economic Affairs Ahad Khan Cheema.

It mentioned that "the prime minister's de-

cision to place Dar at the head of the budget committee and Cheema at the head of the enforcement committee suggests that budget-making responsibility, for all practical purposes, no longer rests in the Q-Block — the seat of the finance minister."

In its clarification on Thursday, the finance ministry said it "strongly rejects the misleading and speculative impression created by The Express Tribune story titled 'PM hands budget-making to Dar'."

"The story incorrectly portrays the constitution of a high-level review committee by the prime minister as a 'handover' of the budget-making process from the Finance Division or as a 'sidelining' of the finance minister. This interpretation is factually incorrect, misleading and does not reflect the actual mandate or functioning of the committee," it said.

The ministry's statement further said that the committee constituted by the PM had been tasked with reviewing and analysing certain tax policy proposals prepared by the Tax Policy Office in the context of the upcoming budget.

"Such consultative and inter-ministerial re-



view mechanisms are neither unusual nor extraordinary, particularly when fiscal measures carry significant economic, political and public implications," it said.

Moreover, as head of the government, the prime minister "is fully within his constitutional and administrative authority to seek broader input from relevant cabinet members before finalisation of tax pro-

posals that may impact businesses, inflation, investment climate and the wider economy," the ministry contended.

It asserted that "at no stage has the budget-making process been shifted away from the Ministry of Finance or the Finance Division."

The preparation of the federal budget, including macroeconomic framework, fiscal strategy, expenditure planning, IMF engagement and overall budget coordination, continues to be undertaken by the Ministry of Finance under the leadership of the finance minister," it added.

The statement also highlighted that Finance Minister Muhammad Aurangzeb himself was a member of the committee constituted by the PM, saying that he "continues to lead Pakistan's

engagement with the International Monetary Fund and other international financial institutions on all budgetary and macroeconomic matters".

"Similarly, the committee relating to enforcement measures has been formed only to refine and strengthen revenue administration and enforcement proposals in consultation with relevant stakeholders. Such coordination

mechanisms are a normal feature of government and fiscal management," it said.

The ministry said the headline and framing of The Express Tribune report "appear designed to create an impression of internal divergence within the government where none exists. The federal budget remains a collective constitutional and cabinet-driven exercise carried out under

the leadership of the prime minister with the Ministry of Finance playing its central and mandated institutional role."

"The ministry expects responsible sections of the media to avoid speculative interpretations and to report institutional processes with accuracy, context and due professional responsibility," its statement said.

Later in the day, DPM Dar chaired a meeting of the newly formed committee to deliberate on "tax policy proposals" for the upcoming budget, as per a statement from his office.

In a post on X, the DPM Office said that during the meeting, the committee "reviewed progress on various proposals".

It further "emphasised the need for balanced, growth-oriented measures aimed at broadening the tax base, enhancing revenue generation, and promoting investment and economic growth".

As per the statement, the meeting also "reiterated the priority for balanced and growth-oriented measures that enhance revenue generation while safeguarding compliant taxpayers from additional tax burden".

FinMin departs for China to attend Pakistan's inaugural Panda Bond issuance ceremony

NEWS DESK: Finance Minister Muhammad Aurangzeb departed for China on Thursday to participate in the issuance ceremony of Pakistan's inaugural Panda Bond in Beijing, the Ministry of Finance said in a post on X. According to the Ministry of Finance, Aurangzeb will attend the official ceremony marking Pakistan's first-ever Panda Bond issuance, a development that gives Paki-

resented a major milestone in Pakistan's financial strategy, aimed at diversifying the country's financing sources, further strengthening investor confidence, and expanding Pakistan's presence in international financial markets. Pakistan was steadily moving towards market-based financing alongside traditional funding avenues. Through the Panda Bond, Pakistan gained access to the

growth, the ministry said.

According to the ministry, Pakistan and China share an enduring friendship built on mutual trust, strategic cooperation, and strong people-to-people ties. China has consistently stood by Pakistan in difficult times, while initiatives, including the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor have opened new avenues for economic collaboration between the two countries. The issuance of the Panda Bond marks another important step towards strengthening this longstanding partnership in the fields of finance and investment. The ceremony in Beijing will be attended by representatives of leading Chinese government and financial institutions, international financial organisations, investors, and banking sector stakeholders. Distinguished participants are expected from the Ministry of Finance of China, the People's Bank of China (PBOC), the Asian Development Bank (ADB), the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB), China International Capital Corporation (CICC), Bank of China, Standard Chartered Bank, Hongta Securities, and other prominent institutions.

This development not only reflects the improving credibility of Pakistan's economy but also demonstrates



stan access to China's domestic capital market for the first time. China's bond market is regarded as one of the largest and deepest capital markets in the world. The ceremony will be held at the Pakistan Embassy in Beijing. In a statement, the ministry said that the issuance of the Panda Bond rep-

resents a major milestone in Pakistan's financial strategy, aimed at diversifying the country's financing sources, further strengthening investor confidence, and expanding Pakistan's presence in international financial markets. Pakistan was steadily moving towards market-based financing alongside traditional funding avenues. Through the Panda Bond, Pakistan gained access to the

confidence of international financial institutions and investors in Pakistan's macroeconomic stability, reform agenda, and economic direction. Positive trends in exports, remittances, and key economic indicators in recent months have provided a stronger foundation for sustainable economic

India bars sugar exports until September

NEWS DESK: India, one of the world's largest sugar producers, has banned exports of the key commodity until the end of September to ensure enough domestic supplies and prevent prices from rising.

The government prohibited exports "with immediate effect", according to an order issued late on Wednesday, other than limited exceptions, including consignments already in the pipeline.

Exports under government deals for food security would also be allowed, the order said.

Chinese capital market for the first time, reflecting the country's economic recovery and the growing confidence of global investors in Pakistan's economy, the statement added. The ministry wrote on X that the overall Panda Bond programme has been set at US\$1 billion,

the confidence of international financial institutions and investors in Pakistan's macroeconomic stability, reform agenda, and economic direction. Positive trends in exports, remittances, and key economic indicators in recent months have provided a stronger foundation for sustainable economic

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China's bond market is regarded as one of the largest and deepest capital markets in the world. The ceremony will be held at the Pakistan Embassy in Beijing. In a statement, the ministry said that the issuance of the Panda Bond rep-

resents a major milestone in Pakistan's financial strategy, aimed at diversifying the country's financing sources, further strengthening investor confidence, and expanding Pakistan's presence in international financial markets. Pakistan was steadily moving towards market-based financing alongside traditional funding avenues. Through the Panda Bond, Pakistan gained access to the

confidence of international financial institutions and investors in Pakistan's macroeconomic stability, reform agenda, and economic direction. Positive trends in exports, remittances, and key economic indicators in recent months have provided a stronger foundation for sustainable economic

Oil edges up as investors focus on Trump-Xi meeting in Beijing

NEWS DESK: Oil prices rose on Thursday, with markets focusing on the high-stakes meeting between US President Donald Trump and Chinese President Xi Jinping to see if it will yield any positive result on the Iran war, which has significantly disrupted global oil supply.

Aside from trade matters, Trump is expected to encourage China to convince Tehran to make a deal with Washington to end the conflict, but analysts doubt that Xi will be willing to push its long-time strategic 'partner too hard.

Brent crude futures were up 26 cents, or 0.25%, to \$105.89 a barrel by 0250 GMT, while US West Texas Intermediate futures rose 32 cents, or 0.32%, to \$101.34.

Both benchmark oil futures contracts fell on Wednesday as investors worried about possible US interest rate hikes as higher fuel prices spur inflationary pressures. Brent crude futures fell more than \$2 a barrel, while WTI futures fell more than \$1.

Trump received a grand welcome at Beijing's Great Hall of

the People on Thursday ahead of talks with China's Xi Jinping set to cover their fragile trade truce, the Iran war and US arms sales to Taiwan.

"Oil prices are in a wait-and-see mode," said ING analysts in a note on Thursday, adding that "the market could be pinning too much hope on the US-China talks yielding some positive results on Iran."

The Strait of Hormuz, a "key energy gateway," has been largely shut since the war broke out at the end of February.

While Trump has

said he did not think he would need China's help to end the war, the president is nonetheless expected to ask Xi for assistance in resolving the costly and unpopular conflict.

"Failure to make meaningful progress on reopening the Strait would leave the US with few options other than renewed military action," IG analyst Tony Scamora said in a note.

Iran, meanwhile, appears to have tightened its control over the Strait, cutting deals with Iraq and Pakistan to ship oil and liquefied natural gas from the region.



Public Sector Development Programme spending remains sluggish

NEWS DESK: At a time when Pakistan's economy is struggling to regain momentum, development spending has remained sluggish, with allocations reaching only 56 per cent and actual utilisation falling short by around 18pc during the first 10 months of the current fiscal year.

The utilisation under the Public Sector Development Programme (PSDP) reached 56pc despite a downward revision in the overall development outlay due to fiscal pressures, according to the Monthly Development Update (May 2026) released on Wednesday.

The actual spending under the PSDP amounted to Rs469.9bn during 10MFY26 against releases of Rs571.2bn, indicating a significant shortfall of 18pc in utilisation during the

period. The government has also scaled down the overall development outlay to Rs837.2bn from the originally projected Rs1,010bn for FY26, reflecting a cut of Rs172.8bn amid fiscal constraints. The ongoing conflict in the Middle East, along with prevailing fiscal pressures, has led to the adoption of several austerity measures, including a reduction in PSDP 2025-26 by Rs172.8bn.

Overall development outlay cut to Rs837.2bn from Rs1,010bn due to fiscal constraints. The utilisation was slightly higher than last year, when it stood at 54pc in the same period last year, when PSDP expenditure amounted to Rs448.6bn against an allocation of Rs519.6bn.

The government accelerated disburse-

ments for parliamentarians' development schemes under the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) Achievement Programme (SAP) after the first five months of the fiscal year.

During the 10-month period, the Planning Commission authorised nearly 70pc, or Rs448bn, of the revised annual allocation of Rs638bn, with nearly the entire amount already spent.

The bulk of these funds was released and utilised within a short span of about five months, making it one of the fastest-executed development programmes. As of April 30, ministries and divisions had sanctioned Rs571.2bn, against which Rs469.9bn (82pc of the actual allocation) had been spent. The annual PSDP allocation for

2025-26 stood at Rs1tr. The planning ministry released only Rs16.8bn for the merged districts, erstwhile Fata, in 10MFY26 against the annual revised allocation of Rs54.3bn. The utilisation of development funds for the tribal areas stood at 31pc.

In contrast to the relatively strong spending on parliamentarians' schemes, disbursements to special regions including Azad Jammu and Kashmir and Gilgit-Baltistan — remained weak. Only Rs60.4bn was spent on development activities in these areas, accounting for 89pc of the annual revised allocation of Rs67.7bn.

Overall utilisation remained much behind the disbursement schedule approved by the government, though slightly higher than last year.

'Don't understand it, but it looks fun': Cricket bowls Japan over

NEWS DESK: Curious spectators clutching rulebooks watch as a batsman smacks a six into the sand and weeds surrounding Japan's brand-new cricket ground, four months before it hosts matches at the Asian Games.

Japanese fans will be familiar with many of the events at the Olympic-like multi-sport competition when it is held in Nagoya from September 19 to October 4, but most are likely to be stumped by cricket.

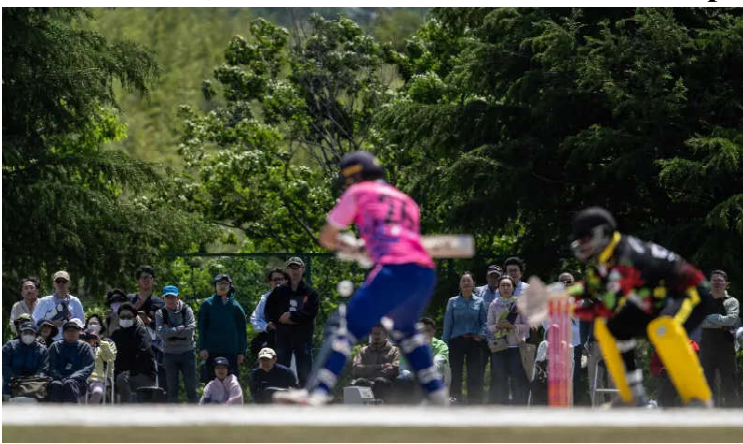
That won't stop them from taking an interest though, and now they have a purpose-built ground to welcome star teams such as India and Pakistan.

Korogi Sports Park, a converted baseball field that still has a pitcher's mound just beyond the boundary, is about a 40-minute train ride from central Nagoya.

It is currently warming up for the Asian Games by hosting its first cricket event, the East Asia-Pacific qualifiers for the 2028 men's T20 World Cup.

The qualifiers feature Japan and fellow cricket minnows Vanuatu, Fiji, Samoa, Indonesia, the Philippines, Papua New Guinea, the Cook Islands and South Korea.

Local resident Yuya Okimasa, who watched



Japan play Vanuatu with his wife and two young children, told AFP that they had only heard of cricket because his daughter watched the Australian cartoon "Bluey". "I'm looking at the rules as I'm watching the game because I don't understand it, but it looks fun," said the 34-year-old, who was attending his first cricket

match. About 300 people turned up to watch Japan's opening game on a windy weekend morning, most sitting on deck chairs within earshot of a commentator guiding them through the basics of the game. Temporary stands will be in place at the Asian Games, taking the capacity up to around

2,000. While the continent's star players may be used to grander surroundings, they are unlikely to be disappointed by the quality of the pitch. That is the responsibility of Asitha Wijayasinghe, who also curates the pitch at the 35,000-capacity Pallekele International Cricket Stadium in Sri Lanka. Adam Birss,

Korogi Sports Park's Asian Games operations manager, says the pitch is likely to be "bouncy". "I would say that it should act like the pitches in Pakistan, which are bouncy but also take spin," he said. "It's got a grippy surface, so if you put

spin on the ball, it will spin off." Korogi Sports Park is part of an ambitious strategy to popularise cricket in baseball-mad Japan, which world governing body the ICC sees as one of its "priority countries". Playing numbers are on the rise, and the Japan Cricket Association (JCA) has had some success in carving out a

tentative foothold for the sport in and around Tokyo. Cricket's inclusion in the Asian Games was only confirmed in April last year, and the JCA argued unsuccessfully that it should be played in Sano, a hotbed for the sport about 100km outside the capital. JCA chief executive officer Naoki Alex Miyaji says Nagoya is "a huge

"vacuum area for cricket" and he worries that there might not be enough time to drum up interest there. "Creating something here with the Asian Games is an ideal situation, but not when you're talking with 15 months' preparation," he said. Miyaji is also concerned about the long-term future of Korogi Sports Park, which will be shared with baseball teams when the Asian Games are over.

The question of who maintains the pitch is another unresolved issue, but Miyaji hopes the venue can be one of the key ingredients of the growth of cricket in Japan.

The local mayor has been an enthusiastic supporter, and there is certainly interest among those who venture along to watch Japan's game against Vanuatu. The Japanese players do their bit, beating their opponents by 30 runs. With only four months to go until the Asian Games begin, Japan's players are hoping the buzz continues.

"The ground looks in incredible condition given that they only started building it a few months ago," said Japan captain Kendel Kadowaki-Fleming. "Excitement is the overwhelming emotion that we're feeling about it."

Atletico beat Osasuna, Betis qualify for Champions League

NEWS DESK: Atletico Madrid consolidated their fourth place in La Liga with a 2-1 victory over Osasuna on Tuesday while Real Betis beat Elche to guarantee themselves a Champions League spot.

Atletico's English forward Ademola Lookman opened the scoring from the penalty spot in the 15th minute after Javi Galan was

carded for handling. Alexander Sorloth made it two with 20 minutes to play, the Norwegian heading in from a close range pass Aitor Fernandez. The only blot on Atletico's copybook up until then was a red

card for Marcos Llorente for two bad fouls. Kike Bajar made the game tighter than it should have been at the end with an injury-time strike to pull a goal back for Osasuna.

But Atletico held on for a result that leaves the Madrid side fourth on 66 points behind newly-crowned champions Barcelona (91pts), Real Madrid (77) and Villarreal (69), all three with a game in hand.

At the other end of the table, Levante climbed out of the bottom three after twice coming back from behind to win 3-2 at Celta Vigo who lost ground in

the race for a Champions League spot. They are one of five clubs on 39 points hovering around the relegation zone, including Elche who were beaten 2-1 at Real Betis, and Espanyol who host Sevilla on Thursday.

Betis' win means that they qualified for next season's Champions League by finishing at least fifth. They currently have 57pts, now seven ahead of sixth-placed Celta Vigo.

It will be Betis' first foray into the elite European competition since the 2005-06 season. Betis manager Manuel Pellegrini said

qualifying for the Champions League after a 20-year absence marked the completion of a goal they set for themselves on the first day of the season. "It's not easy to be in European competitions for six years, much less to have qualified for the Champions League

two matches before the end of the season, Pellegrini, 72, told reporters. "The team's greatest merit was always getting back after losing. I think all those stumbles were more than compensated for today with the great celebration we had in our stadium, with our fans, to whom we owed this joy," the Chilean added.

"We started the first match of the season against Elche, and at the end of the team talk we wrote in green letters, 'Today we begin our journey to the Champions League.'" Betis have been regulars in European competition in recent years, qualifying every season since 2021 and reaching the Conference League final against Chelsea last season. They next face champions Barcelona on Sunday.

Nepali climbers begin Everest season

NEWS DESK: A team of Nepali climbers reached the summit of Mount Everest on Wednesday, opening the route for hundreds of mountaineers expected to attempt the world's highest peak in the coming weeks.

At least 12 members of a rope-fixing team made the ascent, marking the traditional start of the spring climbing window, expedition organisers said.

"The rope-fixing team reached the summit this morning," Chhang Dawa Sherpa of Seven Summits Treks told AFP from the base camp.

"Climbers are already moving ahead," he added. A second team, coordinated by Mingma G Sherpa of Imagine Nepal, assisted in preparing the route.

"Climbers are waiting to summit, so it was important to open the route on time," he said. The work had been briefly disrupted

by a serac -- a block of glacial ice -- above the already treacherous Khumbu icefall, raising fears of delays early in the season.

However, teams established an alternative route to the 8,849-metre (29,032-foot) peak.

Nepal has issued a record 492 Everest permits this season, with a city of tents set up at the foot of Everest for climbers and support staff.

As most mountaineers attempt the ascent with the help of at least one Nepali

guide, about a thousand climbers will be heading for the summit in the next few days.

The high numbers have rekindled concerns about overcrowding on the mountain, especially if poor weather shortens the climbing window.

In 2019, congestion near the summit forced climbers to queue for hours in freezing conditions, with several deaths later blamed on overcrowding.

China has closed the northern approach

from Tibet this season, pushing more expeditions onto Nepal's side.

Chinese climbers account for the largest share of permits this year (109), followed by Americans (76).

Three Nepali climbers involved in Everest preparations have died so far this season, while two foreign climbers died on other Himalayan peaks.

Home to eight of the world's 10 highest peaks, Nepal relies heavily on mountaineering tourism as a key source of revenue.



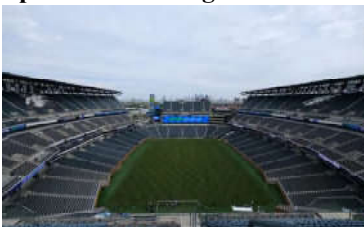
Study warns of dangerous heat at 2026 World Cup as climate risks grow

NEWS DESK: Football's global players' union renewed concerns on Thursday about heat at the 2026 World Cup after scientists warned that the likelihood of dangerous temperatures for players and fans has sharply increased.

An analysis by climate research group World Weather Attribution found that roughly a quarter of the 104 matches at the expanded tournament across the United States, Mexico and Canada are likely to be played in conditions exceeding safety limits recommended by FIFA's medical director, Vincent Goutteborge.

"These estimations justify the need for — and implementation of — a series of mitigation strategies with a view to better protecting players' health and performance when they are exposed to hot conditions."

FIFA's recommended cooling measures when WBGT rises above 26 degrees Celsius and says matches should be postponed if it exceeds 28°C, which is



equivalent to roughly 38°C in dry heat or 30°C in high humidity.

Chris Mullington, consultant anaesthetist at Imperial College London NHS Trust and clinical senior lecturer at Imperial College London, said extreme heat is more likely to influence how games are played than trigger widespread medical emergencies among players.

"It will be more of a performance issue than a health issue," he said. "These players are elite athletes who are acclimatised. You'll see players self-pacing. That behavioural thermoregulation is very difficult to override."

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India, Afghanistan set to feature in Central Asian Volleyball in Lahore

NEWS DESK: India and Afghanistan have confirmed participation in the eight-nation Central Asian Men's Volleyball Championship to be held in Lahore from July 3-10.

Pakistan Volleyball Federation (PVF) chairman Chaudhry Mohammad Yaqoob announced on Wednesday.

Addressing a press conference here, Yaqoob said the PVF had forwarded the confirmations of both countries to the foreign ministries to ensure timely issuance of visas to their squads.

Under the IOC Charter, sports should remain separate from political affairs," Yaqoob said, adding that the national team will travel to the United States for the FIFA World Cup, where they should have no issue for Iran and Afghanistan to compete in Pakistan.

Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Maldives and Nepal have also confirmed participation in the championship. Iran and Uzbekistan are expected to join the event in the

coming days. Describing the championship as a recognised world ranking event, Yaqoob said the tournament would provide valuable ranking points to participating teams besides offering Pakistan an opportunity to showcase its organisational capabilities.

Meanwhile, the PVF also announced a busy international and domestic calendar for 2026, including the inaugural National Volleyball League to be staged in Lahore from July 19 to Aug 5.

"Six franchise teams, each featuring two foreign players, will participate in the league," Yaqoob said. The PVF's recent progress in the sport, he noted that the national team secured a gold medal last year to qualify for the Under-17 World Championship to be held in Doha from Aug 19-29.

A training camp for the side is already underway in Islamabad. Iran and Uzbekistan are expected to join the event in the

PSB had only Rs2 million available despite requiring the same amount monthly for the camp.

"Every year PSB funds lapse, while federations lacking sponsorship and adequate grants struggle to participate in international events and organise domestic competitions," he added.

Yaqoob also regretted the absence of a dedicated volleyball gymnasium under the federation's control, noting that funds allocated by the Punjab Sports Board two years ago for a facility had been diverted to the non-availability of land.

Non-policy concerns — The PVF chairman also criticised delays in the issuance of non-objection certificates (NOCs) by the PSB for participation in international events. "Federations are autonomous bodies under the IOC Charter, but despite that they are required to obtain NOCs from the government without a defined timeframe," he said.

Iran, Italy, Japan, Poland, Türkiye and the United States, will participate in the event.

Pakistan will also compete in the Asian U-18 Volleyball Championship in Bahrain from July 12 to 18, while the senior team is set to feature in the Asian Games in Japan later this year.

The 55th National Men's Volleyball Championship, meanwhile, will be held in Wah Cantonment from May 19-23 with 16 departmental and provincial teams participating.

PSB support criticised — Yaqoob criticised the Pakistan Sports Board (PSB) for failing to support the Under-16 team despite its historic qualification for the world championship. "The PSB refused to hold the training camp, which required around Rs2 million per month, forcing the federation to arrange it from its own resources," he said.

According to Yaqoob, Inter-Provincial Coordination secretary Molyuddin Ahmad Wani informed him that



FO reaffirms commitment to dialogue, rejects 'misleading' int'l media reports on regional tensions

NEWS DESK: Foreign Office Spokesperson Tahir Andrabi on Thursday said Pakistan remains committed to constructive engagement, dialogue and diplomatic solutions for regional peace, while rejecting "misleading international media reports" and addressing recent security concerns.

Speaking at a weekly press briefing, he said Pakistan continues to believe that "constructive partnership and sincere dialogue are essential for advancing peace and shared prosperity for all."

The spokesperson said Pakistan "categorically rejected the CBS News report," describing it as misleading, speculative, and disconnected from factual context.

Andrabi clarified that the aircraft in question arrived "during the ceasefire period" and support diplomatic engagement linked to Islamabad talks, "including movement of diplomatic and administrative personnel. He added that the aircraft "had no connection to



any military contingency whatsoever." He also referred to remarks by US Senator Lindsey Graham, saying

Pakistan's response was issued after a CBS News report published on Monday alleged that Pakistan, despite position-

The statement comes after a CBS News report published on Monday alleged that Pakistan, despite position-

ing itself as a diplomatic conduit between Iran and the United States, "quietly allowed Iranian military aircraft to park

on its airfields, potentially shielding them from American airstrikes." The claims were made citing US of-

ficials who reportedly retained knowledge of the matter, the news agency said.

Andrabi said that Pakistan remains committed to "the principles of diplomacy, dialogue, and sovereign equalities of respect of sovereignty and territorial independence of all states."

Outlining recent diplomatic activity, the spokesperson said Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif held telephone conversations with leaders of Qatar and Azerbaijan over the past week.

Andrabi said the discussions focused on "evolving regional situation and ongoing peace efforts by Pakistan to advance peace and stability through dialogue and diplomacy." The prime minister also extended best wishes to Azerbaijan's leadership for the upcoming World Urban Forum.

The spokesperson said Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Ishaq Dar remained actively engaged in regional diplomacy.

Andrabi noted that UN secretary general's

envoy for the Middle East conflict Jan Arnaud met the DPM this week, and "conveyed the secretary general's deep appreciation for Pakistan's diplomatic efforts aimed at promoting regional peace and stability."

He added that Pakistan had "highlighted its ongoing engagements with all relevant parties to advance dialogue and de-escalation," while expressing gratitude for UN support.

The spokesperson further said Dar held multiple telephone conversations with foreign ministers across the region, including Singapore, Iran, Saudi Arabia, Austria, and China.

He said discussions included Pakistan's efforts on "Iran-US engagement for peace and stability and coordination on maritime security, including the Strait of Hormuz."

Following a call with Saudi Foreign Minister Faisal bin Farhan, both sides agreed on "the importance of safeguarding maritime security, including in the Strait of Hormuz."

IHC reserves verdict on Bushra Bibi's plea for family meetings, medical access

NEWS DESK: The Islamabad High Court (IHC) on Thursday reserved its verdict on a petition seeking family meetings with former prime minister Imran Khan's wife, Bushra Bibi, access to her personal doctor and the provision of essential items.

The case, heard by Justice Arbab Muhammad Fahir, pertained to a petition filed by Bushra Bibi's daughter, Mubashra Maneka. The petition sought permission for regular family meetings, access to a private doctor and provision of essential items.

During the hearing, lawyer Salman Akram Raja argued that meetings with Bushra Bibi had been severely restricted despite her medical condition. "Meetings were arranged on April 17; this was the day her operation was being carried out," Raja told the court. "This was an emergency meeting which lasted only a few minutes."

He said the last regular weekly meeting

took place on February 24, after which no routine meetings were allowed for seven weeks, with only emergency meetings being permitted.

Questioning the restrictions, Raja asked: "What violation of Rule 265 has Bushra Bibi committed?"

He argued that the restrictions were unjustified, adding that it was an admitted fact that Bushra Bibi was unwell and had undergone surgery.

"Their entire case is that there are some tweets by Maryam Watoo due to which meetings are not being allowed. Whenever they feel like it, they stop meetings," he said.

Referring to material presented in court, he stated, "The Twitter account of Maryam Riaz Watoo was mentioned in court. They presented tweets by Maryam Riaz Watoo, but that woman is not even in Pakistan."

"If there is no connection, then there is no need to read her tweets," Justice Fahir observed.

Pakistan successfully test fires Fatah-IV cruise missile: ISPR

NEWS DESK: The Army Rocket Force Command conducted the successful test fire of the indigenous developed Fatah-IV ground-

of the Pakistan Army Rocket Force Command, along with scientists and engineers of the missile's developing agency, were present

tion on the successful training test of the locally developed Fatah-IV ground-launched cruise missile. "The successful

launched cruise missile on Thursday, the military's media affairs wing said. A statement issued by the Inter-Services Public Relations said that the weapon system was "equipped with advanced avionics and state-of-the-art navigational aids" and "capable of engaging long-range targets with high precision."

"The training fire was conducted to enhance operational efficiency of the troops and validate technical parameters of various subsystems incorporated for improved accuracy and enhanced survivability," it added.

According to the statement, senior officers

during the training fire. It said that President Asif Ali Zardari, Chief of Defence Forces and Chief of Army Staff Field Marshal Asim Munir, Chief of Naval Staff Admiral Naveed Ashraf and Chief of Air Staff Air Chief Marshal Zahoor Ahmad Baber Sidhu commended the "successful training fire of Fatah-IV and appreciated the technical prowess, dedication and commitment of all those who contributed towards the successful training fire of the F-series missile."

Later, the interior ministry released a statement, saying that Interior Minister Mohsin Naqvi "congratulates the na-

test is a commendable achievement of the scientists and engineers of the Army Rocket Force Command. [It] is an important advancement in the defence sector," the statement said.

It further quoted Naqvi as saying: "I congratulate the scientists and engineers. I am proud of the scientists and engineers. Pakistan's defence is impregnable."

Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Ishaq Dar said the test firing of the missile marked "another significant milestone in strengthening the country's indigenous defence capabilities and strategic deterrence."

Karachi's Shahrah-i-Bhutto to be fully open to public by end of May: Sharjeel Memon

NEWS DESK: The Sindh government will fully open the Shahrah-i-Bhutto Expressway to the public by the end of May, Sindh Senior Minister Sharjeel Memon said on Thursday.

Shahrah-i-Bhutto Expressway is a 39-kilometre high-speed corridor in Karachi that was noted to be 88.2 per cent complete as of March. Sindh Chief Minister Syed Murad Ali Shah had earlier this year directed the local government department to ensure that the expressway was fully operational by April 2026.

Announcing the upcoming completion of the project at a press conference in Karachi, Memon called the opening of the expressway "very good news" for Karachiites, assuring that they would be saving "at least an hour" coming into the city.

"We believe it will be a game changer in terms of traffic," he said, as well as a big step for people's convenience. After having started to be open in phases, he said, Shahrah-i-Bhutto will now directly connect to the M-9 highway by the end of the month, saving travel time for those heading out of Karachi.

Additionally, the

minister announced that another road was being built to connect Karachi Port with Taj Haider Bridge. He said that the groundbreaking of that road would likely take place around the same time as the completion of Shahrah-i-Bhutto, "give or take one or two days".

"Connectivity will keep getting easier and from this connectivity, people will have a lot more travel convenience," he said, terming the new project a "game changer".

The Sindh government department of PPP has made lots of efforts with these projects to bring people as much convenience as possible," he added. Alongside these two projects, Memon said, work was being carried out on other bridges, underpasses, roads and infrastructure by the Karachi Municipal Corporation (KMC) and lo-

cal government departments. He said that the Sindh government's top priority was to complete these projects as fast as possible.

He addressed the challenges faced during some projects, namely the "hot topic" of the Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) Red Line project on University Road that has stalled for years and recently had its construction contract terminated.

On April 26, CM Murad announced that the deteriorated University Road will be reconstructed within 90 days as the Frontier Works Organisation (FWO) resumed work on it.

"However many efforts we made to complete this project with good intentions and as quickly as possible, there are challenges," Memon said. "With any big city projects, there

are big challenges." Amid the issues faced, however, he said, "We tried with good intentions that government money be spared ... We see how we can save the government's funds, because that is public money."

He added that the government had held conferences, met with the dispute board, raised challenges to their decisions and negotiated, but "the work was not getting done", leading to the cancellation of the contract. "The FWO is working on it day and night," he said, highlighting that the first priority was the completion of the mixed traffic lane.

"On the government's side, or institution's side, there was no ill will." At the time of the contract's cancellation, Memon had told Dawn

that the contract had been terminated due to delays in the project's execution by the contractor. He had said the Asian Development Bank, which funds the project, was unhappy with the pace of work, as were stakeholders concerned about environmental impact.

Alongside the information about the transport projects, the senior minister recalled his visit to China alongside President Asif Zardari last month, where one of the Memoranda of Understanding (MoUs) signed was for a desalination plant in Karachi. Memon highlighted the major issue of clean drinking water for Karachi residents, saying that the project would benefit many. He noted that while desalination plants are expensive, alternative sources are needed for drinking water as the population expands.

He also called attention to MoUs signed in the fields of agriculture and livestock, noting that these were the "only two pathways" for Pakistan's rural population when it came to earning livelihood. He highlighted the longtime friendship between Pakistan and China, describing the visit as a "great success".

Govt orders inquiry into Cambridge exam leaks

NEWS DESK: The interior ministry on Thursday directed the National Cyber Crime Investigation Agency (NCCIA) to investigate, in coordination with Cambridge International Education (CIE), the leaking of the latter's exam papers.

According to a handout issued by the interior ministry, the development came as Interior Secretary Muhammad Khurram Agha chaired a high-level meeting regarding the "alleged leakage of Cambridge examination papers" at the Ministry of Interior and Narcotics Control.

A day earlier, CIE confirmed the leak of an AS-level Mathematics exam paper held on Tuesday and announced the postponement of another Mathematics paper scheduled for Friday (tomorrow). This was the second such incident it had confirmed during the ongoing session.

However, the statement issued by the ministry mentioned the "alleged leakage of Cambridge O-Level Mathematics examination papers". It said that the British deputy high commissioner informed the

participants that "the matter appeared to involve their rather than an actual paper leak", while representatives from CIE reiterated that Cambridge maintains strict standards to ensure transparency and integrity in the conduct of examinations."

It added that the education secretary also raised concerns regarding reports of "another examination paper leak and sought Cambridge's official position on the issue in light of the anxiety being faced by students and parents."

It added that representatives from CIE assured the forum that "an official update in this re-

garding would be shared at the earliest."

It further said that the interior secretary expressed serious concern over the alleged leak of examination papers and underscored the need for coordinated and effective measures for the early resolution of the matter.

"He directed the NCCIA DG to conduct a thorough investigation in coordination with Cambridge."

He further emphasised the strict implementation of decisions taken during the meeting and timely sharing of investigation findings to ensure transparency and maintain pub-

lic confidence." It was also decided that Cambridge would further strengthen its system capacity to address weaknesses and loopholes in the examination process," the statement concluded.

The CIE, part of Cambridge University Press and Assessment, offers internationally recognised exams to schools in over 100 countries. In Pakistan, O Levels (grades 10-11) cover a broad range of subjects, while AS and A Levels (grades 12-13) are more specialised and advanced, providing pathways to higher education in Pakistan and abroad.

Last month, the AS Level Mathematics exam (9709/12), conducted on April 29, was also subject to similar claims. After conducting a thorough investigation into the matter, CIE said it had reason to believe the claims were not unfounded. A replacement examination for the paper has therefore been scheduled for June 9.

In June last year, the question papers of three AS and A Level examinations were partially leaked across Pakistan.

