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QUETTA VOICE

Quetta Train Blast Leaves 14 Dead, Several Injured as Homes, Vehicles Damaged Near Chaman Phatak

Syed Ali Shah, News Desk:
QUETTA: A powerful explosion struck a passenger shuttle train near Chaman Phatak in Quetta on Sunday morning, leaving at least 14 people dead and several others injured, while causing widespread destruction in the surrounding area.
According to officials, the shuttle train was traveling from Quetta Cantonment toward the city railway station when the explosion occurred shortly after 8:00 AM. Authorities confirmed that among those killed were three personnel of the Frontier Corps, while women and children were also reported among the injured.
The blast scene quickly turned chaotic as emergency responders, rescue teams, and local residents rushed to assist victims.
Bodies of the deceased were shifted to hospitals, while injured passengers and civilians were evacuated for urgent medical treatment.
In response to the incident, authorities declared a medical emergency across Quetta hospitals, directing doctors, paramedics, and medical staff to report for immediate duty to handle the growing number of casualties.
The impact of the explosion extended beyond the train, leaving visible destruction across the area. Several train coaches were badly damaged, with reports indicating derailment and overturned compart-



A view of the destruction caused by the deadly bombing in Quetta: Photo Muhammad Ismail

ments. Nearby vehicles caught fire or were severely damaged due to the intensity of the blast.
Residents living close to the site said the explosion shattered windows, damaged walls and roofs, and left several houses partially destroyed. Families in the affected neighborhood described scenes of panic and fear as the sound of the blast echoed across different parts of the city.
Many local residents expressed deep distress over the damage to their homes and personal property, including vehicles destroyed in the incident. Some affected families appealed to the government for immediate support, compensation, and assistance to rebuild their lives after the destruction.
Security forces, police, the Counter-Terrorism Department (CTD), and bomb disposal teams secured the area and began collecting evidence as authorities launched an investigation into the nature of the explosion.
Officials stated that senior provincial leadership was closely monitoring the situation, while rescue and relief efforts continued at the site.

CTD Operation in Quetta: 9 Terrorists Killed, 4 Officials Martyred, Says Shahid Rind

News Desk:
Paying tribute to the fallen personnel, Shahid Rind said the brave officers made the ultimate sacrifice to protect the country and ensure peace in Balochistan.
He added that their contributions and sacrifices will always be remembered.
Injured Personnel Receiving Medical Treatment
Several security personnel were also injured during the operation. The Balochistan government has assured that the wounded officers are receiving the best possible medical care and treatment facilities. Authorities expressed hope for their speedy recovery.

Balochistan Government Reaffirms Zero-Tolerance Policy Against Terrorism
Reterring its unwavering stance against terrorism, the provincial government vowed to continue decisive action against militant groups operating in the region.
"Terrorist elements will not be allowed to disrupt the peace of Balochistan.
The state will utilize all available resources to eliminate terrorism and safeguard the lives of citizens," Shahid Rind said.
Security operations against terrorist networks will continue across the province until lasting peace and stability are achieved, officials added.

Federal Interior Minister, Balochistan CM Co-Chair High-Level Security Moot Following Quetta Blast



ALI HAMZA, QASEEM SHAH:
QUETTA — Federal Interior Minister Mohsin Naqvi and Balochistan Chief Minister Mir Sarfraz Bugti on Sunday co-chaired a high-level security meeting following a tragic explosion near the Quetta-Chaman Phatak (railway crossing).
During the briefing, the Inspector General (IG) of Balochistan Police presented an initial investigation report on the blast to the leadership.
The forum strongly condemned the cowardly attack

on innocent citizens, expressing deep condolences and heartfelt sympathies with the bereaved families of the martyrs.
The Government Stands with Balochistan — Mohsin Naqvi
"Speaking at the meeting, Federal Interior Minister Mohsin Naqvi assured the provincial leadership of Islamabad's unyielding support.
"The federal government stands firmly with the government and people of Balochistan in this hour of grief," Naqvi said.
"The beasts behind this attack have shown the worst form of brutality by targeting innocent civilians.
The supreme sacrifices of our martyrs will never be forgotten."
"Terrorists Will Face Justice" — CM Sarfraz Bugti
"Balochistan Chief Minister Mir Sarfraz Bugti thanked the Interior Minister for his immediate presence and solidarity, noting that Naqvi has consistently stood by the province during testing times.
"We are forever indebted to the blood of our martyrs, and we will not leave their families to stand alone," Chief Minister Bugti vowed.
He directly pointed blame at regional hostile actors, adding, "We will hunt down the terrorists of Fitna-al-Hindustan and bring them to their logical end."
The Chief Minister further stated that he is personally monitoring the medical care being provided to those injured in the blast to ensure they receive the best possible treatment.
The high-profile meeting concluded with strategic directives issued to the IG Balochistan and top officials from law enforcement agencies, who were also in attendance.

11 terrorists killed during IBOs in K-P's North Waziristan: ISPR



File Photo of troops near Pakistan-Afghan border: Quetta Voice

NEWS DESK:
Security forces killed 11 terrorists during a series of intelligence-based operations (IBOs) conducted over the past 48 hours in the Datta Khel area of Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa's North Waziristan district, the military's media wing said on Sunday.
A statement from Inter-Services Public Relations (ISPR) stated that security forces engaged "multiple Khawarji locations" in the area, leading to "intense and fierce exchanges of fire." "11 Khawarji belonging to Indian-sponsored Fitna al-Khawarji were effectively neutralised during the operations," it said.
Fitna al-Khawarji, a term used also by the state for terrorists associated with the banned Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan.
The statement further added that weapons and ammunition were recovered from the terrorists, who had been "actively involved in numerous terrorist activities in the area."
The military said sanitisation operations were continuing to eliminate any remaining terrorists from the area.

QUETTA VOICE

Editor: Asim Khan

Balochistan's Tree Plantation Drive Must Go Beyond Ceremonies



Editorial:

Every spring, usually between February and March, Balochistan witnesses the launch of tree plantation campaigns. Saplings are planted at official ceremonies, photographs circulate on social media, and hopeful statements are issued about a greener future.

While these efforts matter, they fall short of what the province truly needs.

Balochistan is one of the most climate-vulnerable regions in Pakistan and ranks among the hardest-hit areas globally by climate change.

Rising temperatures, recurring droughts, shrinking water resources, and disappearing wildlife are no longer distant threats—they are daily realities for communities across the province.

In such circumstances, tree plantation cannot remain a symbolic activity limited to headlines and hashtags.

What is required is a serious shift toward sustainable plantation. Planting a sapling is only the first step.

Ensuring its survival—through protection, irrigation, monitoring, and community ownership—is what makes a difference. The success of plantation drives should be measured by how many trees survive after one, three, or five years, not by the number of photo sessions held.

The Forest and Wildlife Department must move beyond publicity-driven campaigns and focus on long-term environmental impact.

Native and drought-resistant species should be priori-

tized, while schools, universities, and local communities must be made partners in protecting and nurturing plantations.

At a time when climate change threatens livelihoods, Balochistan does not need unnecessary construction projects or decorative infrastructure.

It needs a large-scale, province-wide plantation initiative—similar to a plantation tsunami—with clear targets aimed at reducing the effects of global warming, improving air quality, and restoring ecological balance.

A genuinely sustainable tree plantation campaign can help secure Balochistan's future. The province's environment cannot wait for another season of symbolic planting; it needs action that takes root and grows.

BUIITEMS Organizes Open Day to Inspire Students Across Balochistan

Syed Dara Shikoh Amir, QUETTA: The Balochistan University of Information Technology, Engineering and Man-

agement Sciences (BUIITEMS) Vice Chancellor Prof. Dr. Khalid Hafeez reaffirmed the university's mission of inclusive education and knowl-

edge sharing. He stated: "BUIITEMS is the university of every student from across the province by hosting a vibrant 'Open Day', showcasing its modern academic facilities, innovative programs, and lively campus culture."

The event attracted an enthusiastic response, with more than 2,000 students from 18+ colleges attending. Visiting students and their teach-

ings provided students with insights into BUIITEMS' wide-ranging degree programs, research projects, and campus life. Many participants

strengthened the bridge between the university and youth across Balochistan. By holding this large-scale Open Day, BUIITEMS has fur-



ther solidified its reputation as a center of excellence in higher education.

Innovation, and student empowerment in Balochistan, encouraging young learners to strive for academic success and contribute to the province's development.

Prof. Dr. Khalid Hafeez applauded the organizing team for successfully conducting the Open Day, adding that such outreach efforts

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South-West Asia and the War Against Narcotics: Where Does Pakistan Stand?

By Dr. B. Sultan: Lady Macbeth once remarked that "a little water clears us of this deed" after the assassination of the King. Yet, with time, she remained haunted, obsessively rubbing her hands in an attempt to cleanse the imagined stains of blood. The persistence of narcotics production and trade in South-West Asia resembles this unending struggle—a dark reality that cannot be easily washed away.

Afghanistan has long been recognized as the world's largest producer of opium, with its roots tracing back to the early 1900s. Over the decades, the repercussions of this industry spilled into neighboring Pakistan and Iran. In the late 2000s, Taliban leader Mullah Omar imposed a strict ban on poppy cultivation through threats, forced eradication, and severe punishments. However, as revealed by the UNODC Opium Survey 2007, the ban primarily targeted cultivation while the trade continued. After the fall of the Taliban, opium again became a major source of funding for logistics, weapons, and militia payments.

In 2022, the Taliban leadership once again announced a ban on poppy cultivation, with Hibatullah Akhundzada officially declaring significant reductions. Some Western reports, supported by satellite imagery, showcased de-



clining poppy fields in southern Afghanistan. However, this raises critical questions: Can Afghanistan realistically abandon such a central economic resource while facing sanctions? And what consequences does this shift have for Pakistan? While certain

international outlets hastily claim that Pakistan has become a new hub for narcotics, such narratives ignore key realities. The issue is not a simple matter of "shifting sands" but a complex regional security challenge. The porous border between Pakistan and Afghani-

stan, coupled with cross-border networks of drug traffickers, means temporary shifts in cultivation are often strategic rather than permanent. Moreover, Afghanistan's pivot towards methamphetamine production—highlighted by satellite

evidence of expanded ephedra processing hubs—reflects adaptive strategies of traffickers rather than genuine eradication. In Pakistan, however, the situation is markedly different. Since 2001, the country has largely maintained its "poppy-free"

status, despite sporadic spillovers from Afghanistan. Following the Taliban's 2022 ban, some illicit cultivations did emerge in border areas, particularly within Balochistan and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. Yet, these were swiftly addressed through

Pakistan's Poppy Elimination Campaign (PEC-2025). This multi-agency effort, led by the Anti-Narcotics Force (ANF) and provincial administrations, successfully destroyed thousands of acres of illegal poppy fields. Over 250 FIRs were registered,

dozens of arrests were made, and awareness campaigns were launched across educational institutions. Importantly, independent surveys after March 2025 confirmed the effectiveness of these eradication drives.

Pakistan's determination to combat narcotics often remains under-reported internationally, overshadowed by outdated or selective portrayals.

The fact remains: Pakistan continues to fight this menace not only for its own stability but also for global security.

What is urgently needed is greater recognition of these efforts by the international community and enhanced cooperation from agencies such as the UNODC.

As South-West Asia remains at the heart of global narcotics trade routes, Pakistan's role is both frontline and decisive. Balochistan, in particular, holds the potential to transform from a vulnerable transit zone into a hub of opportunity, stability, and resilience. Just as Lady Macbeth's imagined guilt could not be washed away with water, the global community cannot absolve itself of responsibility by ignoring Pakistan's sacrifices and achievements in this ongoing struggle. The fight against narcotics requires collective recognition, support, and action—not selective narratives.

Pakistan remains primary interlocutor: Rubio

NEWS DESK: The United States has seen some progress towards a deal with Iran but more work is required, Secretary of State Marco Rubio said on Friday, while Iran's foreign ministry spokesman said the two sides' differences were deep and significant.

He reiterated that Pakistan remained the "primary interlocutor" in Washington's negotiations with Iran aimed at ending the ongoing conflict.

"The primary interlocutor on this has been Pakistan and continues to be and they've done a, you know, I think an admirable job."

And that's what we continue to work through," Rubio told reporters in Sweden after meetings with NATO allies.

"Obviously other countries, you know, have interests because especially Gulf countries that are, you know, in the middle of all this, may have their own situation going on."

We talk to all of them. But I would just say that the primary country we've been working with on all of this is Pakistan, and that remains the case," he said.



While some gaps have been narrowed, there are still sticking points over Iran's enriched uranium and control over the Strait of Hormuz, whose closure since the start of the war has triggered a global energy crisis.

"There's been some progress. I wouldn't exaggerate it. I wouldn't diminish

it," Rubio told reporters after a meeting of NATO ministers in Helsingborg in Sweden.

"There's more work to be done. We're not there yet. I hope we get there."

Rubio reiterated comments made on Thursday that Iran's support for a tolling system for the strait through which a fifth

of the world's oil and liquefied natural gas flows were "unacceptable."

"We're dealing with a very difficult group of people, and if it doesn't change, then the president's been clear he has other options," Rubio said.

He also said the U.S. had not asked the NATO military alliance for help on the

Strait of Hormuz but that there needed to be a Plan B if Iran refuses to reopen the waterway.

Despite the intensifying mediation efforts, Iran's foreign ministry spokesman, Esmail Baghaei,

was quoted by IRNA news agency as saying diplomacy takes time and suggesting that the sides

had not reached a point where an agreement was close.

He said nuclear issues were not being discussed and that a conclusion would not be reached if the U.S. sought to delve into details about highly enriched uranium in Iran.

The US and Israel say their war aims are to curb Iran's support

for regional militias, dismantle its nuclear program,

destroy its missile capabilities and make it easier for Iranians to topple their rulers.

But Iran has so far retained its stockpile of near-weapons-grade enriched uranium, and its ability to threaten neighbours with missiles, drones and proxy militias.

After US-Israeli airstrikes began on February 28, Iran fired at Gulf States that host U.S. military bases and the war reignited conflict between Israel and militant group Hezbollah in Lebanon. Thousands have been killed in Iran and Lebanon.

The war has also created turmoil in the global economy, with the surge in oil prices stoking fears of rampant inflation.

Major stock indexes rose on Friday with the blue-chip Dow hitting a record high, but Treasury yields dipped as investors weighed the likelihood of a near-term deal to end the war.

The US dollar was near its highest level in six weeks on Friday amid the uncertainty over peace talks, while oil prices climbed.

US President Donald Trump said the US would eventually recover Iran's stockpile of highly enriched uranium, which Washington believes is destined for a nuclear weapon, though Tehran says it is intended purely for peaceful purposes.

Two senior Iranian sources told Reuters before Trump's comments that Iranian Supreme Leader Ayatollah Mojtaba Khamenei had issued a directive that the uranium should not be sent abroad.

Trump faces domestic pressure ahead of November midterm elections, with Americans angry over the surge in fuel prices and his approval rating near its lowest level since he returned to the White House last year.

Iran's descriptions suggest it largely rejects terms Trump previously rejected, including demands for control of the Strait of Hormuz, compensation for war damage, lifting of sanctions, release of frozen assets and the withdrawal of US troops.

Rubio meets Modi, renewing ties with India after US-China summit

NEWS DESK: United States Secretary of State Marco Rubio on Saturday invited Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi to Washington, reaffirming the importance of a relationship that has come under growing strain, a week after the United States held a warm summit with Chinese President Xi Jinping.

After joining US President Donald Trump in Beijing a week ago, Rubio — visiting both Asian powers for the first time — flew to New Delhi and saw Modi for more than an hour, inviting the premier

to visit the White House soon. Rubio "underscored the strategic importance of the US-India partnership, rooted in our shared democratic, profound economic and commercial opportunity and the strong personal ties between Modi and Trump," State Department spokesman Tommy Pigott said, glossing over last year's friction between the world's two largest democracies.

Modi, in a post on X, said he was "happy" to receive Rubio. "We discussed sustained progress in the India-US Comprehensive Global Strategic Partnership and issues related to regional and global peace and security," he wrote.

Modi affirmed that India and the US "will continue to work closely for the global good".

Trump has shaken up core assumptions on US foreign policy, including a commitment to building a stronger relationship with India, which was barely mentioned in his administration's national security strategy released last year.

Visiting China, Trump hailed the reception he received from President Xi Jinping, despite limited concrete announcements.

Trump also spoke of the United States and China being a "G2" — a formulation that had fallen out of favour in recent years as US allies fear being shut out of Washington's dealings with a rising China.

Starting with nuns, Rubio, a devout Catholic, began his four-day, four-city tour by touring the headquarters of Mother Teresa's charity in the eastern city of Kolkata and praying over her tomb.

Wearing a yellow garland over his suit, Rubio, joined by his wife Jeanette, smiled before an assembly of nuns, all clad in the late humanitarian's signature white and blue saris. "Rubio spoke about aiding the homeless, terminally ill and those afflicted by leprosy," Sister Marie Juan of Missionaries of Charity told reporters after his hour-and-a-half-long visit.



CDF Munir meets Iranian President Pezeshkian for high-level talks to advance diplomacy

NEWS DESK: Chief of Defence Forces and Chief of the Army Staff Field Marshal Asim Munir met Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian in Tehran on Saturday for high-level talks to advance diplomatic initiatives, according to Press TV.

Reuters reported Iran's top negotiator and Parliament Speaker Mohammad Bagher Ghalibaf told CDF Munir during a meeting that Iran would not compromise on the rights of its nation and country, state TV reported.

He said that Iran's armed forces had rebuilt their capabilities during the ceasefire and that if the US "foolishly restarts the war", the consequences would be "more crushing and bitter".

Earlier, he held talks with Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi in Tehran as Islamabad stepped up diplomatic efforts to help mediate between Iran and the US. Iran's state media reported on Saturday.

Both sides exchanged views on the latest diplomatic initia-

tives aimed at preventing further escalation and ending the Iran war in talks that lasted late into the night, the report said.

He held a second meeting with Araghchi later in the day again. The field marshal had reached Tehran on Friday as part of ongoing mediation efforts. He was received and warmly welcomed by Iranian Interior Minister Ehsanollah Momeni. Interior Minister Mohsin Naqi was also present at the reception.

US betrayals, con-

traditions, excessive demands source of disruption. Iranian FM Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi has attributed difficulties in the Pakistan-mediated negotiations between Iran and the United States to what he described as Washington's repeated failure to uphold its commitments, according to Press TV. During a telephone conversation with António Guterres on Friday, Araghchi cited what he called a history of diplomatic setbacks, including military ac-

tions against Iran, shifting policy positions, and demands that Tehran views as unacceptable. According to the United States and Israel carried out military actions against Iran in June and again on February 28, despite ongoing diplomatic engagement between Washington and Tehran. He also pointed to longstanding disagreements over Iran's nuclear programme and missile capabilities, saying these issues have continued to complicate negotiations.

Congressional report details losses of 42 US aircraft in Iran campaign

NEWS DESK: A recent report by the Congressional Research Service (CRS) says the United States lost or damaged 42 military aircraft during Operation Epic Fury, the 40-day military campaign against Iran that began on February 28, 2026.

The report, released last week and circulated by several US media outlets on Friday, is believed to be the most detailed public accounting so far of US aircraft losses in the conflict. However, the Pentagon has not yet issued its own comprehensive assessment.

In the report, CRS researchers said they compiled the figures from news reports, official Pentagon statements, and announcements by US Central Command (Centcom).

The report notes that the Department of Defence now also using the title "Department of War" under an executive order issued in September 2025 — has not publicly provided a full list of losses from the campaign.

During a congressional hearing on May 12, Acting Pentagon Comptroller Jules W. Hurst III said that the estimated cost of US military operations against Iran had risen to \$29 billion. He said much of the

increase came from "repair or replacement costs for equipment."

The aircraft losses listed in the CRS report include fighter jets, refuelling aircraft, helicopters, surveillance planes, and drones.

Among the most serious incidents were the loss of four F-15E Strike Eagle fighter aircraft. Centcom said three of the aircraft were accidentally shot down by a friendly fire over Kuwait on March 2. All six crew members survived after ejecting safely. A fourth F-15E was reportedly shot down during combat operations over Iran on April 5, although both crew members were later rescued.

The report also cited damage to an F-35A stealth fighter caused by Iranian ground fire during operations over Iran in March. An A-10 Thunderbolt II attack aircraft was lost after being hit by enemy fire on April 3. According to Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Gen Dan C. Coats, the pilot ejected safely before the aircraft crashed.

The CRS report also described significant losses among support aircraft. Two KC-135 aerial refuelling aircraft were involved in an accident over friendly airspace on March 12. One crashed in Iraq, killing all six crew members on board, while the second made an emergency landing. Five additional KC-135 tankers were damaged in an Iranian missile and drone strike on Prince Sultan Air Base in Saudi Arabia. One E-3 Sentry airborne warning and control aircraft

(AWACS) was also damaged during the same attack. Later reports said the aircraft had been parked on an unprotected taxiway.

Special operations forces also suffered losses. Two MC-130J Commando II aircraft supporting a rescue mission for a downed F-15E were reportedly intentionally destroyed on the ground in Iran after they became unable to leave the area. Their crews were evacuated safely.

An HH-60W Ecuclass Green II rescue helicopter was damaged by small-arms fire during rescue operations inside Iran. The largest losses involved unmanned aircraft. According to the report, the US military lost 24 MQ-9 Reaper drones during the campaign.



Pope Leo decries 'dizzying' profits earned by companies that pollute

NEWS DESK: Pope Leo on Saturday called out companies who see "dizzying" profits at the cost of environmental pollution, on a visit to an area in Italy known as a hotbed for illegal dumping of toxic waste.

On a visit to Acerra, about 220 kilometres south of Rome, the first US pope urged the world to "reject temptations of power and enrichment linked to practices that pollute the land, water, air, and social coexistence".

Leo said he wanted to come to the area near Naples known as the "Land of Fires", where the European Court of Human Rights ruled last

year that authorities had failed to protect residents from waste dumping since at least 1988, to "gather the tears" of families who had lost loved ones to related illnesses.

Arriving by popemobile in an outside square on a sunny spring day, Leo was greeted by people waving small yellow and white Vatican flags and wearing yellow hats, some holding up posterboards with pictures of family members who had died.

Leo, who in recent months has been speaking more forcefully and will issue his first major document on Monday, said "unscrupulous people and organisations have

been allowed to act with impunity for too long."

During his four-hour visit to Acerra, he also referred to "the dizzying profits of a few, blind to the needs of people, their work and their future". He also met with victims.

For years, collection, treatment and disposal of garbage in southern Italy was largely in the hands of a small group of private owners, with contracts sometimes tied to the Campania, a mafia group based around Naples.

In January 2025, the European court found that Italian authorities had repeatedly failed to act to stop illegal dumping in a region also known as the "Triangle of

Death" — due to abnormally high rates of cancer for local residents.

The court gave the Italian government two years to establish a comprehensive database of toxic waste sites and communicate the risks to the public.

Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni in February 2025 appointed an Italian general to head a task force aimed at helping victims and pursuing environmental clean-up.

Leo will issue his first encyclical, a major text, to the world's 1.4 billion Catholics, on Monday. It is expected to address the rise of artificial intelligence and how the technology is being used in warfare and challenging workers' rights.

Pakistani students shine in 25th "Chinese Bridge" competition

ISLAMABAD (INP): Eleven Pakistani college students advanced to the national final of the 25th Chinese Proficiency Competition for Foreign College Students, held online,

showcasing their mandarin skills and cultural artistry under the theme "One World, One Family". The Pakistan regional final featured contestants from four

Confucius Institutes across the country — in Islamabad, Faisalabad, Sargodha and Lahore. In the speech segment, participants delivered passionate addresses on global unity and cross-cultural understanding, according to the talent show session included classical poetry recitations, Chinese songs, calligraphy, traditional painting,

Chinese dance and stand-up crosstalk routines. After the final evaluation, the winners of the first, second and third prizes were announced. Pakistani

champion Yun Hai described the victory as a milestone in his life. "This is a huge achievement in my life," he said. "I am deeply grateful to my teachers and friends for their support, en-

couragement and help." The competition, officially known as the "Chinese Bridge", is a major international Chinese proficiency event sponsored by the Center for Language Educa-

tion and Cooperation of China's Ministry of Education. The Pakistan regional final was organized under the auspices of the Chinese Embassy in Pakistan.



JIANGZHOU (China): Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif meets Wang Hao, Party Secretary of the CPC Zhejiang Provincial Committee in Hangzhou.

Punjab CM asks officials to remain in field during Eidul Azha to ensure implementation of arrangements

LAHORE (INP): Punjab Chief Minister Maryam Nawaz Sharif has directed officials to move out of offices and remain in the field during Eidul Azha to ensure effective implementation of arrangements.

Chairing a high-level meeting on Eid preparations, security and sanitation, the chief minister issued detailed guidelines to district commissioners and district police officers across the province.

She said all officers from DCs to DPOs must ensure exemplary arrangements during Eid, warning that no including negligence would be tolerated. The chief minister instructed strict action against those during who also banned the Eid remains in streets, neighbourhoods, drains and canals, imposing a fine of Rs5,000 for vio-

lations. She ordered enforcement of restrictions on the sale of sacrificial animals only in designated cattle markets and directed action against illegal markets. Maryam Nawaz also called for digital monitoring and vigilance operations in cattle markets, along with strong security measures to prevent theft and robbery incidents.

She directed authorities to ensure that banned organisations are not allowed to collect animal hides and ordered strict security arrangements at sensitive locations. She also ordered continued combing operations. The use of loudspeakers at collection camps and in public areas is banned. The chief minister further ordered a ban on aerial firing and display of weapons.

Provincial Disaster Management Authority (PDMA) issues severe heatwave alert during Eid

KARACHI (INP): Provincial Disaster Management Authority (PDMA) Sindh has issued severe heat and heatwave alert during Eidul Azha holidays. According to the Pakistan Meteorological Department, moderate to severe heatwave conditions may occur in different areas from May 25 to 31. DG PDMA Salman Shah said temperatures are likely to reach 47 to 50 degrees Celsius in different districts of Sindh.

There are chances of heat increase in Sukkur, Shikarpur, Qambar, Shahdadkot, Jacobabad, Larkana, Dadu, Shaheed Benazirabad and Tharparkar, Salman Shah said. DG PDMA said many areas including Badin, Sujawal, Thatta, Hyderabad, Mirpurkhas, Jamsoro and Sanghar may also be affected by heat. Salman Shah said due to extremely hot weather in Karachi, the temperature may go up to 35 to 38 degrees Celsius and the intensity of heat is likely to continue even at night. Public should arrange shade and water properly for sacrificial animals. Salman Shah alerted. He directed Deputy Commissioners and related agencies should ensure to implement heatwave SOPs. On the instruction of Rehabilitation Advisor Gianchand Israni, the staff is alert and fully prepared to deal with any emergency. Salman Shah said. On the instructions of PDMA, the district administration and other institutions have set up heatwave relief camps and heatstroke wards in hospitals.

China and Pakistan's open new chapter, as they celebrated 75 anniversary

ISLAMABAD (INP): From Gwadar's China-Pakistan Friendship Hospital which has treated over 350,000 patients since opening, to the screening of Pakistan's highest-grossing film in Chinese cinemas, from Pakistan's first driverless rapid transit train shuttling in Lahore that carries over 300,000 passengers daily in April, to the training of Pakistan's first astronaut for China's space station mission...

As Beijing is to welcome the visit by Pakistan's Prime Minister later this week, one of the most enduring bilateral relationships in modern times and arguable the most important foreign relations for Pakistan is set to renew with refreshed vigor after 75 years of close partnership, says a report carried by Gwadar Pro on Friday.

The year 2026 is one of expanded investment outreach and commemoration designated by both countries.

What began with

highways, ports and power plants is leaving growing imprint on Pakistan's industrial transformation and economic modernisation, and more importantly, seeping into ordinary Pakistani people's life: energy spending saved, difficult illnesses cured, high-paid jobs landed, better products acquired, to name a few.

For 12 consecutive years, China is Pakistan's largest trade partner.

Over 7.4% of Pakistan's goods find its consumers in Chinese market in FY 24-25; in the first quarter this year, Pakistan's exports to China rose 44.79% from a year earlier.

Pakistan's exports to China reached USD 2.38 billion in fiscal year 2024-25. The first phase of the China-Pakistan Free Trade Agreement, launched in 2007, helped

expand bilateral trade by 242 percent over the following decade. Under Phase II, which came into force in 2020, China removed tar-

iffs on 313 priority Pakistani product lines, while both sides agreed to liberalise 75 percent of tariff lines. Source: SDPI. Few transitions in any developing economy in the past decade match the speed of Pakistan's solar uptake. Cumulative solar PV imports from China between 2019 and mid-2025 reached approximately 36 GW, a volume that, on paper, exceeds three-quarters of Pakistan's installed power-generation capacity, as per World Resources Institute.

Lithium battery imports from China rose by approximately 68 percent in the first half of 2025 alone, enabling household and SME storage and effectively democratising electricity access.

While shielding Pakistani consumers from soaring international fuel prices, an increasingly localised value chain is accelerating the country's industrialisation. Researchers at Na-

tional University of Sciences and Technology argue that Pakistan's special economic zones offer the structural foundation for solar localisation under CPEC 2.0.

Their feasibility assessment identifies three sequential opportunities: first, module assembly using imported cells, achievable within 12-24 months at SEZ sites with reliable power supply; second, cell fabrication using imported wafers, requiring 24-48 months and an estimated USD 200-400 million in capital expenditure per production line; and third, full polysilicon-to-panel integration, which could take 48-96 months and demand cumulative investment of roughly USD 1.2-2 billion.

At each stage, greater value is added domestically while dependence on imports steadily declines. The same logic applies to battery energy storage.

Chinese diplomat highlights 75 years of Pak-China Diplomatic Relations

LAHORE (INP): China and Pakistan have stood together through thick and thin over the past 75 years and will continue to face future challenges together, making joint efforts to achieve a China-Pakistan community with a shared future.

These remarks were made by Chinese Ambassador to the People's Republic of China and the first Islamic country to establish diplomatic relations with China, Li Hoeting during the celebration of the 75th anniversary of Pak-China diplomatic relations, organized by Iqbal Academy Pakistan. The event was held at the Iqbal Academy Pakistan on Friday.

Dr. Abdul Rauf Rafiqi, Director of Iqbal Academy Pakistan, hosted the event, which included a flag-hoisting ceremony and a special exhibition of Chinese books on Iqbal.

Mr. Li stated that China and Pakistan will

continue to enhance each other frequently. Our peoples affectionately refer to each other as 'iron brothers,' and have always stood together in times of crisis, whether facing natural disasters or other challenges.

"On May 21, 1951, Pakistan became one of the first countries to recognize the People's Republic of China and the first Islamic country to establish diplomatic relations with China."

Since then, our two countries have always supported each other through various risks and hardships on the basis of the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence.

Mr. Li also noted that as CPEC progresses, cooperation is expanding in key sectors such as industry, agriculture, and mining. "Our partnership in agriculture is increasingly visible, especially in Punjab. The upgraded CPEC will continue to enhance well-

being and development for the peoples of both countries," he explained. In his welcome remarks, Dr. Abdul Rauf Rafiqi highlighted the depth and warmth of 75 years of Pakistan-China diplomatic relations.

He described Pakistan-China friendship as "higher than the Himalayas, deeper than the oceans, and sweeter than honey," emphasizing that this bond is not just between states but between civilizations.

Dr. Rafiqi added that Al-Itama Iqbal, through his poetry, envisioned the awakening of Asia and the rise of China. Today, what is witnessing the realization of that vision, and scholarly work on Iqbal in Chinese strengthens cultural and intellectual exchange between the two nations.

Failure of ongoing mediation efforts can plunge ME into instability, economic turmoil: Masood Khan

ISLAMABAD (INP): Former President of Aard Jambudweep Kashmir Sardar Masood Khan has said that Pakistan is playing a leading diplomatic role to prevent a devastating regional conflict between the United States and Iran.

Sardar Masood Khan speaking during a television interview on the rapidly evolving Iran-US crisis warned that failure of ongoing mediation efforts could plunge the Middle East into prolonged instability and economic turmoil.

He described the current environment as "extremely fluid," noting that contradictory statements from various capitals, have complicated diplomatic efforts despite reports suggesting that a memorandum aimed at ending the conflict may already be under discussion.

Masood Khan stated countries including Egypt, Turkey, Saudi Arabia, and Pakistan, are actively engaged in mediation efforts, adding that Pakistan has assumed a central role in facilitating communication between Tehran and Washington.

He noted that Islamabad's diplomatic outreach and shuttle diplomacy continue at an intense pace, with senior Pakistani leadership remaining deeply involved in efforts to secure de-escalation and dialogue.

Highlighting the complexity of the negotiations, he said one of the most difficult hurdles remains the future status of the Strait of Hormuz.

He observed that Iran has adopted a firm posture regarding control and security arrangements in the strategically vital waterway, further complicating efforts to achieve a comprehensive settlement.

He further stated that inflammatory rhetoric from both sides,

Pakistan Air Chief's Turkiye visit strengthens defence, aerospace partnership

ISLAMABAD (INP): Pakistan Air Force Chief Air Chief Marshal Zabeer Ahmed Baber Sidhu has held a series of high-level engagements during his official visit to Turkiye.

The visit highlighted the close defence relationship between the two nations and underlined their growing collaboration in aerospace innovation, military modernisation and emerging technologies. It also reflected broader efforts by both countries to deepen cooperation in sectors considered vital for future security and technological advancement.

The official engagements brought together senior military leadership, government officials and leading figures from Turkiye's rapidly expanding defence and aerospace sectors. Discussions centred on strengthening institutional ties and exploring new areas of cooperation as both countries continue to expand strat-

egic engagement across multiple domains. During the visit, Air Chief Marshal Sidhu held key meetings with senior Turkiye military and defence officials, including leadership of the Turkiye Air Force.

The discussions focused on enhancing bilateral defence cooperation and reviewing opportunities for expanding military collaboration. The engagements reaffirmed the longstanding relationship shared by Pakistan and Turkiye, often described by officials from both countries as a partnership built on mutual trust, shared interests and close historical ties.

Defence cooperation has remained one of the strongest pillars of that relationship, with both nations frequently engaging in military exchanges, training initiatives and strategic coordination. As part of the visit, the Pakistan Air Force Chief also met with Turkiye Defence Minister Ya'ar Guler.



HYDERABAD : Provincial Minister Sharjeel Memon handing over an e-bike key to a girl during distribution ceremony of free link Scotties.

FCC orders all departments to publish seniority lists every January on websites

ISLAMABAD (INP): The Federal Constitutional Court (FCC) has delivered a landmark ruling on the issue of seniority in public service, declaring that all government departments, autonomous institutions and public corporations must publish their seniority lists every January.

The court held that the seniority of employees recruited through the same advertisement and belonging to the same batch should be determined according to their position on the merit list rather than the date on which they joined service.

Justice Rizvi observed that the principle of "first come, first served" was inconsistent with a fair system of public administration.

The court also ruled that any condition contained in an employment contract that conflicts with the law cannot deprive an employee of legally protected rights.

The judgement emphasised that ac-

cess to information regarding seniority lists is a constitutional and fundamental right of both citizens and public employees.

The court ordered that copies of the decision be sent immediately to the chief secretaries of all four provinces for implementation.

The court expressed serious concern over the failure of the Port Qasim Authority to issue a seniority list for seven years after the confirmation of employees.



JIANGZHOU (China): Special Assistant to Prime Minister on Industries and Production (SAPM) Haroon Akhtar Khan and Federal Minister for National Food Security and Research, Rana Ishaq Hussain, meet Mayor of Changzhou.

Skills Over Degrees: Why Balochistan's Youth Need Opportunities, Not Just Diplomas

By Waqas Mengal
Balochistan is home to one of the youngest populations in Pakistan, with more than 65% of its people falling within the youth category. This should be a source of hope and strength for the province. Instead, for many young people, it has become a source of frustration as they struggle to find meaningful employment after years of education.

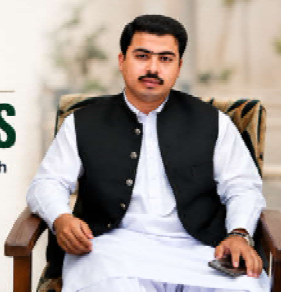
Across Balochistan—from Quetta to the most remote districts—thousands of young graduates are facing an uncertain future. Despite earning degrees, many find themselves unemployed, with limited opportunities to apply their knowledge or build careers. Economic challenges, security concerns, and a lack of private-sector growth have further reduced job prospects, leaving young people feeling discouraged.

The truth is that the government alone cannot provide jobs for every graduate. While education remains important, our system cannot place too much emphasis on degrees and too little on practical skills. Every university produces thousands of graduates, yet many leave campus

SKILLS OVER DEGREES

Why Balochistan's Youth Need Opportunities, Not Just Diplomas

By Waqas Mengal
Youth Activist, Quetta



without the tools needed to compete in today's job market.

The world has changed. Employers are increasingly looking for people who can solve problems, use technology, create businesses, and adapt to new challenges. Skills such as digital marketing, graphic design, software development, freelancing, technical trades, entrepreneurship, and communication are opening doors for young people around the globe. Unfortunately, many students in Balochistan have little access to such opportunities.

There is wisdom in the saying that a skill can feed a person for life. A young person who possesses a valuable skill is not limited by geography or local job shortages. With the right training and internet access, they can work remotely, start a business, or provide services to clients anywhere in the world.

However, skills cannot be developed through theory alone. Young people need hands-on training, mentorship, internships, apprenticeships, and exposure to real-world

challenges. They need institutions that prepare them for life beyond the classroom, not just examinations and certificates.

This is a responsibility that must be shared. The government must invest in vocational and technical education, educational institutions must align their programs with market needs, the private sector must create opportunities for training and employment, and young people themselves must be willing to learn new skills and explore emerging career paths.

Balochistan's youth are not a burden—they are the province's greatest asset. But potential alone is not enough. Without investment in skills, innovation, and opportunity, much of that potential will remain untapped. The future of Balochistan will not be shaped by degrees hanging on walls. It will be shaped by young people who have the skills, confidence, and opportunities to build better lives for themselves and contribute to the development of their communities.

Quetta Administration Finalizes Congo Virus Prevention and Eid-ul-Adha Cleanliness Measures

QUETTA: An important meeting regarding prevention of Crimean-Congo Hemorrhagic Fever, citywide sanitation, and special arrangements for Eid ul-Adha was held under the chairmanship of Mehruallah Badini in Quetta.

The meeting reviewed a comprehensive strategy to prevent the spread of the deadly Congo virus, particularly in cattle markets and other sensitive areas across the city during the Eid season.

The session was attended by Muhammad Amir Hamza, Kabir Hazara, and Ahmad Achakzai.



Muhammad Yousaf Hashmi, along with other concerned officials. During the meeting, Deputy Commissioner Mehruallah Badini directed authorities to ensure daily protective spraying in cattle markets, trader areas, and other high-risk locations to stop the spread of the

virus. He instructed all concerned departments that no negligence would be tolerated in spraying operations, sanitation drives, or public awareness campaigns.

The Deputy Commissioner further stated that special cleanliness arrangements would be

implemented throughout the city during Eid-ul-Adha, while dedicated anti-Congo virus teams were also being formed.

These teams will be deployed in different subdivisions to ensure a clean and safe environment for citizens.

He emphasized that

Sohbatpur Administration Finalizes Eid-ul-Adha Security, Cleanliness and Public Service Plan

SOHBATPUR: An important meeting regarding security, sanitation, public facilities, and safety arrangements for Eid ul-Adha was held in Sohbatpur under the chairpersonship of Fareeha Tareen.

The meeting was attended by police officials, Assistant Commissioners, representatives from the Local Government Department, Municipal Committee, Livestock Department, Health Department, and officers from K-Electric Supply Company along with other concerned departments.

During the session, detailed discussions were held on maintaining law and order during Eid-ul-Adha, ensuring security arrangements, providing facilities in cattle markets, maintain-



ing cleanliness, preventing the spread of Congo virus, and guaranteeing uninterrupted electricity and water supply across the district.

Deputy Commissioner Fareeha Tareen directed police authorities to ensure foolproof security arrangements throughout the district, especially at cattle mar-

kets, bazaars, Eidgahs, and mosques, so citizens can celebrate Eid in a peaceful and secure environment.

She further instructed authorities to maintain smooth traffic flow, strengthen emergency response measures, and ensure the uninterrupted provision of public services during the Eid holidays.

Balochistan Health Secretary Reviews BMCH Revamping Plan and Healthcare Improvements in Quetta

QUETTA: Majeed ur Rehman Panizai chaired an important meeting at Bolan Medical Complex Hospital to review ongoing reforms, healthcare improvements, and the hospital's revamping plan aimed at modernizing medical services for the public.

The meeting focused on enhancing healthcare facilities, improving service delivery for patients, ensuring the availability of modern medical equipment, and reviewing the performance of various hospital departments and administrative systems.

During the session, detailed discussions were also held regarding



the responsibilities, duties, and performance standards of Heads of Departments (HODs) and Heads of Units (HOU)s to ensure the provision of timely, efficient, and quality healthcare services to patients.

Addressing the meeting, Health Secretary Majeed ur Rehman Panizai said that Bolan Medical Complex Hospital is one of the province's largest teaching and treatment insti-

tutions, where thousands of patients seek medical care daily. He stated that the ongoing reform initiatives are aimed not only at improving healthcare services but also at strengthening discipline, accountability, uninterrupted medicine supply, emergency services, staff attendance, and better behavior towards patients by doctors and paramedical staff.

The meeting was attended by Dr. Raz

Balochistan Government Explores Investment Opportunities in Healthcare Sector

A high-level meeting focusing on promoting investment in the healthcare sector and improving medical facilities for the public was held in Quetta under the joint chairmanship of Bilal Khan Kakar and Majeed ur Rehman Panizai.

The meeting was attended by Qaim Lashari, relevant government officials, and local investors.

Participants discussed various proposals aimed at modernizing the healthcare sector in Balochistan, including the establishment of modern hospitals, diagnostic

equipment incentives, and investor-friendly policies designed to attract private sector participation.

Vice Chairman Bilal Khan Kakar stated that the Government of Balochistan is taking serious measures to develop the healthcare sector on a priority basis.

He emphasized that private sector involvement would not only improve access to quality healthcare services but also create new employment opportunities across the province. Secretary Health Majeed ur Rehman Panizai highlighted that

the government is working on a comprehensive strategy to establish modern medical centers in various districts and strengthen the existing healthcare system.

He assured investors that the healthcare sector in Balochistan would become more modern, efficient, and people-friendly, ensuring improved medical services for residents across the province.



Usta Muhammad Administration Finalizes Eid-ul-Adha Arrangements to Ensure Public Relief

USTA MUHAMMAD: An important meeting was held in Usta Muhammad under the chairmanship of Muhammad Ramzan Palal to review arrangements aimed at ensuring better public facilities and effective management of Eid-ul-Adha.

The meeting was attended by DHO Dr. Amir Ali Jamali, MS THQ Dr. Abdul Jabbar Samra, MS DHQ Dr. Ahmed Gopang, representatives of the Municipal Committee, SDO WAPDA Ali Haider Magi, Line Superintendent Hazer Khan Bohar, and SDO PHED Ghulam

comprehensive strategy to address potential issues faced by citizens during the Eid holidays.

Key matters included effective sanitation arrangements, timely and safe disposal of sacrificial animal waste, foolproof security measures, uninterrupted supply of clean drinking water, and the preparation of special emergency duty rosters at government hospitals.

Deputy Commissioner Muhammad Ramzan Palal directed all concerned departments to ensure there is no

negligence in the provision of essential public services during Eid-ul-Adha.

He stressed the importance of coordinated and effective measures related to cleanliness, security, and healthcare services so that citizens can celebrate Eid in a safe and comfortable environment. He further instructed all institutions to maintain close coordination and remain fully alert to handle any emergency situation promptly.

The Deputy Commissioner emphasized that the district administration is committed to providing a clean, secure, and facilitative at-



Muhammad Khokhar. During the meeting, officials discussed a

Barshore District Development Committee Reviews Phase-III Projects and Future Plans

BARSHORE: A meeting of the District Development Committee (BDSI Phase-III) was held in Barshore under the chairmanship of Khalid Shams to review the needs, development plans, and future planning of the newly established district.

The meeting was attended by Asif Yar Khan Kakar, who also serves as Chairman of the Quetta Development Authority, along with SSP Police Abdul Sattar Dashti, Education Officer Faizullah Khan Kakar, Health Officer Muhammad Nasseem Khan, officials from PPHI, and representatives of various government departments.

During the meeting, departmental officials presented briefings on ongoing and proposed development projects in the district. Several development

schemes under BDSI Phase-III were also discussed in detail, with participants reviewing proposals aimed at improving infrastructure and public services.

Deputy Commissioner Khalid Shams stated that the development of Barshore district and the welfare of its residents remain top priorities for the government.

He directed all departments to ensure that ongoing projects are completed on merit and with full transparency, emphasizing that no compromise would be made on construction quality and implementation standards.

Addressing the meeting, Parliament Secretary Asif Yar Khan Kakar said that the provincial government and district administration are jointly working for the district's development.

He assured participants that development funds would be also utilized properly to provide immediate relief and long-term benefits to the local population.

The meeting also included discussions on proposals related to education, healthcare, and water supply, roads, and other essential public facilities.

Deputy Commissioner Khalid Shams instructed concerned departments to finalize and submit their proposals promptly so implementation work can begin without delay. At the conclusion of the meeting, the Deputy Commissioner reaffirmed the administration's commitment to accelerating the pace of development projects to ensure that basic rights and public services are delivered to citizens at their doorstep while addressing local issues and challenges in a timely manner.

Traders want simplified tax system for retailers, real estate, agriculture sectors

NEWS DESK: Traders community on Friday demanded the government to introduce simplified tax system for retailers, real estate sector, agriculture, and industries in the upcoming budget.

President of the Pakistan's Central Organization of Traders Kashif Chaudhry along with other leaderships addressing a press conference here at the National Press Club said that one-page tax return form in Urdu should be introduced for traders and that traders filing tax returns should be awarded an "Honest Taxpayer" shields or certificates.

Mr Chaudhry also demanded that the Federal Board of Revenue should not harass tax filers, the 5.1 percent minimum turnover tax should be abolished, super tax should immediately be withdrawn, and sales tax should be reduced to a single-digit rate. Patron-in-Chief of the Central Organization of Traders Pakistan Khawaja Shahid Razaq Sikka, Chairman Karachi Sindh Tajir Itehad Sheikh Habib, Punjab President and President of Anjuman Tajrae Registered Rawalpindi Sharjeel Mir, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa President Shafiqat Ali Mubarak,



Acting Sindh President Javed Nemon, General Secretary Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Sheikh Saeed and other trade leaders attended the press conference. They urged the FBR to make the simplified tax scheme a success. They said that demanded

separate categories and a simplified taxation system for jewelers.

Kashif Chaudhry called for reductions in interest rates, electricity tariffs, and petroleum prices, along with lower PTA taxes on mobile phones and incentives for the IT sector.

He demanded restrictions on FBR raids, arrests, and unlimited powers, while also calling for an end to lockdowns after Eid and the full restoration of business activities.

He added that a simple tax scheme should be introduced for traders

with an annual turnover up to Rs 200 million, and both new and existing filers should have the option to join the scheme.

Mr Chaudhry said that traders should be exempted from point-of-sale systems and digital invoicing requirements.

He demanded the abolition of withholding tax deduction responsibilities for traders under the scheme and reiterated the removal of the 5.1 percent minimum turnover tax. He proposed that only 0.25 to 0.50 percent tax should be imposed on declared

turnover, while withholding taxes deducted on electricity, telephone bills, and other utilities should be adjustable. He added that traders could even agree to a minimum annual tax payment of Rs. 25,000. He also demanded that traders adopting the simplified

scheme should not face unnecessary questioning regarding their properties or vehicles, and that action against unusual bank transactions should only be taken after consultation with trader representatives. The simplified tax scheme should continue in future years with exemption from audits.

Traders leaders proposed changing the definition and conditions of Tier-1 retailers and demanded that traders accepting digital payments should not be forced to install point-of-sale systems.

They also proposed increasing the annual electricity bill threshold from Rs1.2 million to Rs2 million and limiting point-of-sale implementation in air-conditioned malls to brands and chain stores only.

Kashif Chaudhry regarding the real estate sector, proposed reducing taxes under Sections 236C and 236K to one percent, abolishing Section 7E, and reducing FBR property valuation rates by at least 40 percent. He also demanded special tax relief for overseas Pakistanis purchasing property.

He further called for reductions in sales tax and federal excise duty to improve ease of doing business.

Cotton crisis spurs import surge

NEWS DESK: Pakistan may spend \$1 billion on cotton imports this year as domestic production has plunged to a four-decade low, prompting federal Minister for National Food Security and Research Rana Tanveer Hussain to assure full government support for the revival of the cotton sector during budget consultations with the Pakistan Business Forum (PBF).

A PBF delegation led by Chief Organiser Ahmad Jawad met the minister to discuss budgetary proposals aimed at providing a level playing field for Pakistan's cotton and agriculture sectors.

The minister was quoted as saying that the government considered agriculture and cotton as key pillars

of the national economy and was fully aware of the challenges confronting growers and ginners. He assured the delegation that all practical and farmer-friendly proposals aimed at reviving domestic cotton production and reducing dependence on imports would receive serious consideration.

Mr Tanveer said sustainable agricultural growth remained one of the government's top priorities and pledged continued facilitation for the revival of the cotton sector through PBF's proactive policy measures.

Pakistan faces a \$1.2bn bill as domestic output hits a four-decade low. Mr Jawad said the PBF had strongly recommended the abolition of General Sales Tax (GST) on locally produced cottonseed and oilcake in its budget proposals, describing it as a long-standing demand of growers and ginners.

He said the existing taxation disparity was increasing production costs at the farmer level and discouraging cotton cultivation.

He warned that Pakistan's cotton economy faced an alarming crisis and required urgent policy intervention to restore farmers' confidence and revive cultivation.

PBF Punjab Chairman Malik Talat Suhail said removing GST on cottonseed and oilcake could provide farmers with an additional benefit of at least Rs600 per

maund while also boosting economic activity and enhancing revenue collection for the Federal Board of Revenue.

He said nearly half of cotton ginning factories across the country had already shut down due to declining domestic production.

He added that cotton cultivation had dropped to its lowest level in four decades.

He warned that the country might need to import between 7 and 7.5 million bales of cotton this year as domestic production was expected to remain between 5 and 5.5m bales.

He estimated that the cotton import bill could reach \$1.2bn, putting further pressure on foreign exchange reserves.

He said the country should not be made mandatory for traders who accept at least one mode of digital payment.

He said the point-of-sale should only be enforced on brand stores and chain stores in air-conditioned malls. The traders also sought a significant reduction in withholding taxes on the real estate sector, lowering it to 1% from 4% for filers.

He said the FBR's property valuations should be cut by at least 40%, and overseas Pakistanis should be given special tax relief on property purchases. The government's scheme would not apply to jewelers.

Chaudhry proposed a reduction in duties on raw material imports and more facilities for industries.

Weekly inflation hits 14.47pc

NEWS DESK: Short-term inflation, measured by the Sensitive Price Index (SPI), increased by 14.47 per cent year-on-year for the week ending May 21, mainly due to higher retail prices of perishable food items and wheat flour, according to official data released on Friday by the Pakistan Bureau of Statistics (PBS).

The SPI showed a broad-based rise, indicating continued pressure on the cost of living. The increase was largely driven by sharp gains in key items, including petrol (62.24pc), diesel

(60.90pc), electricity charges (43.30pc), wheat flour (59.45pc), and liquefied petroleum gas (50.73pc). Food inflation remained elevated, with notable increases in the prices of onions, tomatoes, potatoes, mutton, beef and powdered milk. However, some relief was observed in pulses, sugar and eggs, which recorded relatively lower prices.

Energy-related costs continued to weigh on household budgets and push up transport expenses across the economy. The SPI recorded an increase for the 41st

consecutive week. Although the pace of growth has slowed, it reflects sustained pressure on consumers.

Week-on-week, the index declined by 0.33pc, according to the PBS.

The items, whose prices increased the most over the previous week included tomatoes (0.72pc), onions (0.10pc) and pulses (0.10pc). However, on an annual basis, the items whose prices increased the most on (62.24pc), petrol (60.90pc), wheat flour (59.45pc), LPG (0.34pc) and shrimp (0.14pc) and lawn

printed (0.06pc). The items whose prices saw a decline week-on-week included chicken (8.58pc), electricity charges for Q1 (6.08pc), garlic (3.53pc), pulse moong (1.45pc), petrol and diesel (1.21pc) each, LPG (0.87pc), bananas (0.26pc), pulses (0.18pc) and eggs (0.10pc).

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Traders back gov't simplified tax scheme

NEWS DESK: The government on Friday won support from traders for its upcoming tax scheme, which offers a minimum annual tax of Rs25,000 and exempts them from audit and other obligations, raising prospects for the scheme's announcement in the budget.

Kashif Chaudhry, President of the Central Organization of Traders of Pakistan, demanded a simple tax scheme for traders during a press conference.

His demands were in line with the government's planned scheme, which could resolve the decades-old standoff between the trading community and successive governments.

Chaudhry, along with other traders, demanded an easy and simplified tax system for retailers, real estate, agriculture and industries in the upcoming budget. An easy one-page tax return form in Urdu should be introduced for traders, he said. A simple tax scheme should be introduced for traders with annual turnovers up to Rs200 million.

Minister of State for Finance Bilal Azhar Kayani is already working on the simple tax scheme in consultation with traders, including those in Lahore.

The traders demanded that both new and old filers should be allowed to opt into the easy tax scheme. However, the government has made it clear that



existing traders can opt for the new scheme but their tax contributions cannot be less than before.

To keep the Federal Board of Revenue (FBR) at a distance, the government will give a tax plate to be held by traders at the shop. Chaudhry backed this move while demanding that the FBR should not install point-of-sale machines and would not be forced to generate digital invoices of sales. Traders under the easy scheme should be exempted from withholding tax deduction, he added.

Under the scheme, traders would not be subject to audits unless the FBR has incriminating evidence of evasion. The traders sought only 0.25-0.5% of turnover as tax and de-

manded that they be allowed to adjust withholding taxes deducted on electricity, phone and other bills. Kayani has already taken care of these demands.

Chaudhry also backed the minimum annual tax of Rs25,000 by a trader, which would be over and above the adjustable taxes.

The FBR would also not make unnecessary inquiries about the properties and vehicles of those who opt for the easy scheme, he said.

He said action on unusual bank account transactions should be taken only after consultation with traders' representatives. A proposal to introduce a system of gradually imposing fines on non-filers and eventually sealing their shops should be finalised with their consultation.

The current definition and conditions of

Tier-1 retailers should be reviewed and changed, according to the traders.

Point-of-sale should be cut by at least 40%, and overseas Pakistanis should be given special tax relief on property purchases. The government's scheme would not apply to jewelers.

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Govt reduces petrol, high-speed diesel prices by Rs6

NEWS DESK: The government reduced the price of petrol by Rs6 per litre and that of high-speed diesel (HSD) by Rs6.80 on Friday, according to a notification issued by the Petroleum Division.

Following the decrease, the price of petrol stands at Rs403.78 per litre and HSD's at Rs402.78.

The Petroleum Division's press release notifying the decrease said the new prices would be effective from May 23 (Saturday).

This is the second consecutive week in which the government has reduced fuel prices. Last week, the prices of petrol and diesel were reduced by Rs5.

Petrol is mostly used in private transport, small vehicles, rickshaws and two-wheelers and has a direct bearing on the budget of the middle and lower-middle class.

High-speed diesel is mainly used in the heavy transport sector and for large generators.

The government has been revising petroleum prices every week on Friday night following the now-paused US-Israeli war on Iran, which began on February 28.

The war also led to a global fuel crunch caused by the closure of the Strait of Hormuz, through which one-fifth of the world's supply of oil and gas used to pass in peace time.

After the US-Israeli war on Iran began, the government initially hiked petrol and diesel prices by Rs5 per litre on March 6 and announced unpre-

cedented austerity measures on March 9.

In the following weeks, PM Shehbaz said he had rejected recommendations to increase fuel prices despite an increase in the global market on three occasions.

But on April 2, Petroleum Minister Ali Pervaiz Malik and Finance Minister Minister M u h a m m a d Aurangzeb announced an unprecedented increase of 43 per cent and 55pc in the prices of petrol and high-speed diesel, respectively. The ministers had also announced a targeted fuel subsidy programme.

However, just a day later, PM Shehbaz slashed the petroleum levy by Rs80 per litre and brought the price of petrol down to Rs378 per litre.

On April 10, PM Shehbaz further decreased diesel prices and petrol prices by Rs135 and Rs12 per litre, respectively.

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Lens beat Nice to win French Cup for first time

NEWS DESK: Lens won the French Cup for the first time in their history with a 3-1 victory over Nice in the final at the Stade de France on Friday.

Florian Thauvin, a member of the France squad that won the World Cup in 2018, scored one goal and set up another for Ousmane Edouard as Lens found themselves 2-0 ahead late in the first half.

Teenager Djibril Coulibaly pulled one back for Nice with his first senior goal just before the interval and they hit the woodwork twice in the second half.

But Lens made sure of the win through substitute Abdallah Sima, who poked home in the 78th minute to spark joyous celebrations.

The triumph caps a superb campaign for the club from northern France, who under new coach Pierre Sage finished second in Ligue 1 to a dominant Paris Saint-Germain and qualified for next season's Champions League as a result.

Lens had never previously won the French Cup despite reaching the final three times, most recently in 1998 -- that year they won the league title with the only time in their history.

"It is historic, extraordinary," star performer Thauvin told broadcaster France 2.

"It has really been a remarkable season and we were all eager to make history for the club."

The vast majority of the near-capacity crowd inside the 80,000-seat Stade de France were supporting Lens, with many disillusioned Nice fans not attending.

Defeat for Nice adds to their misery in a difficult season which is not yet over -- they finished third from bottom in Ligue 1 and must therefore win a two-legged play-off next week against second-tier Saint-Etienne in order to secure their top-flight status.

The 33-year-old Thauvin narrowly missed out on a place in the France squad for the upcoming World Cup but he seemed determined to put that disappointing behind him as the ex-Newcastle United forward fired in a fine opener on 25 minutes.

The club were due to continue the celebrations long into the night, travelling back to their Stade Bollaert to greet supporters gathered there before an open-top bus tour scheduled for Saturday afternoon.



He then set up the second with a corner that was headed home by former Celtic striker Edouard -- both players end the season with 14 goals.

Coulibaly headed Nice back into the game but Antoine Mendy's effort which hit the bar shortly after the break proved a turning point.

Instead of drawing level, Nice ended up falling further behind when Senegalese forward Sima got on the end of a header back towards his own goal by veteran Brazilian defender Dante, and stabbed in.

Lens are the fifth different winners of the French Cup in the last eight editions, with Rennes, Nantes and Toulouse also lifting the trophy in that time, as well as PSG.

The club were due to continue the celebrations long into the night, travelling back to their Stade Bollaert to greet supporters gathered there before an open-top bus tour scheduled for Saturday afternoon.

Tuchel gambles on chemistry as England squad raises eyebrows

NEWS DESK: Thomas Tuchel admits the squad he will take to next month's World Cup might lack the wow factor of previous England selections but for the German it is all about chemistry.

Since taking charge in January 2025, Tuchel has shown no compulsion to select on the basis of reputations and that was evident when he unveiled his 26 names at Wembley on Friday.

The likes of Manchester City's Foden, who started England's Euro 2024 final, Chelsea's Cole Palmer, who scored the game-defining late goal, defensive stalwart Harry Maguire and Real Madrid's Trent Alexander-Arnold all miss out.

There is still a list-talent in the shape of captain Harry Kane and Madrid's Jude Bellingham and Arsenal's Premier League title winner Declan Rice and Bukayo Saka.

But the inclusion of Al-Ahli striker Toney, Tottenham Hotspur's Djed Spence, Brentford veteran midfielder Jordan Henderson, Arsenal's Noni Madueke and

with players he left out. Maguire, whose form has been instrumental in Manchester United's resurgence, took to social media on Thursday to say he was "shocked and gutted" to miss out on his fourth major tournament.

"I can see the reason behind the disappointment," Tuchel said. "I was a bit surprised (about his omission) because we had a private conversation and he had the chance to express his feelings, which he did."

Asked why he believed he is the man to finally end England's interminable wait, Tuchel referenced a quote from Spanish tennis great Rafael Nadal.

"I arrive with hunger, I arrive with excitement, and I arrive as a competitor and as a challenger. When I see the 26 reactions in the last three days to my phone call then I know the spirit is there. That just shows me that we chose the right group."

England kick off their World Cup campaign against Croatia in Dallas on June 17, before playing Ghana on June 23 and Panama four days later.

But, reprised in June 2023 by the Swiss Fairness Commission (CSL) for misleadingly promoting the "climate neutrality" of the 2022 World Cup, FIFA has refrained from any guarantees on 2026.

Environmental analysts agree that the best way to reduce the impact of mega-competitions is to limit their scale, as the International Olympic Committee has done with its quota of 10,500 athletes for the Summer Games, said Gogishvili.

confidence in his decisions though, insisting it was a squad for all purposes.

"We have specialists for all kinds of different scenarios," he said.

"When we're leading a game, we want to be a strong set-piece team, so we have specialists for that."

We want to be a strong penalty team. We have specialists for that. Last and not least, we have a leadership group that created a culture, they set the tone."

Tuchel's side will be heavily reliant on captain Kane, who has scored an England-record 78 goals in 112 appearances.

Asked why Toney will go as one of his support strikers, Tuchel said he received "fantastic feedback" about the former Brentford player who scored 32 goals in the Saudi Pro League this season.

"We could see he still collects the numbers," Tuchel said. "I think he can be a very valuable addition to Harry Kane."

Tuchel admitted there had been some "painful conversations" with England fans demand the biggest source of CO2 emissions for international events: air travel for teams, officials, media, and especially the "more than five million fans" targeted by FIFA.

Bosnia and Herzegovina, for example, will travel 5,040 kilometres to play group games in Toronto, Los Angeles and finally Seattle. "FIFA's environmental denial" FIFA president Gianni Infantino, who proclaimed his "determination" to combat

Jhonatan Narvaez edges Mas to complete hat-trick of stage wins at Giro

NEWS DESK: Ecuador's Jhonatan Narvaez edged out Spaniard Enric Mas at the end of Wednesday's stage 11 to win his third stage of this year's Giro d'Italia as Alfonso Lualaba retained the leader's pink jersey.

Narvaez (UAE Team Emirates XRG) and Mas (Movistar) battled for the win after leaving the breakaway group on the final climb and Mas made the first move, only for the Ecuadorian to overtake him before the line.

"Mas was the strongest in the climb and I knew I had to play my game. I just tried to defend myself on the uphill," Narvaez said. "I was scared because when he did the sprint he almost closed me on the barriers and I was on the limit, but it was full gas racing all day, because we don't race just in the uphills, we race on the downhills as well."

Italian Diego Ulissi

(XDS Astana) won the race for third place at the end of the 195-km ride from Porcari to Chiavari. There was no change at the top of the general classification, with Portugal's Eulalio maintaining his 27-second lead over race favourite Jonas Vingegaard.

The first half of the stage gave plenty of opportunities for breakaways from the peloton before the riders reached the first of three categorised climbs. Early attacks were reeled in and the group that managed to get away grew in size as others left the bunch to go in chase, before the race settled down on the second climb with a 12-man group over three minutes ahead of the peloton. A crash on the descent brought down three of the leaders, and the breakaway began to split. On the uncategorised climb before the finish, Mas followed and Narvaez attacked and the Spaniard unable to shake off the Ecuadorian before the descent, Narvaez was always going to be the favourite in a sprint finish. Mas, three-times runner-up in the Vuelta a Espana, is out of contention for the overall win and the Spaniard was desperate for a stage victory on his Giro debut, but Narvaez claimed the fifth Giro stage win of his career. The peloton, containing all the GC contenders, trailed in over three minutes behind the winner, and Eulalio (Bahrain Victorious) will wear the pink in Thursday's stage 12, a flat 175-km ride from Imperia to Novi Ligure.



FIFA World Cup to generate unprecedented cash and CO2

NEWS DESK: The biggest and most lucrative ever World Cup this summer will also set a record for the most-polluting sporting event in history, environmental experts say.

"Unlike the case of the Olympic Games, where the carbon footprints have been reducing over the last several editions, this is totally opposite in the case of FIFA men's World Cup," David Gogishvili, a geographer at the University of Lausanne (UNIL), told AFP. The summer's World Cup has been expanded to 48 teams for the first time. It will be played in three countries -- Mexico, Canada and the United States -- also for the first time.

It will generate unprecedented revenue but, UNIL's research shows, "produce the largest carbon footprint in the history of international sport."

UNIL's calculations for CO2-generated emissions range from five to nine million tonnes compared to "around 7.5 million tonnes" for the 2024 Paris Olympics, Gogishvili continued.

That figure far surpasses the estimated

2.17 million tonnes of CO2 generated by Russia in 2018, a far-flung World Cup that involved 40 fewer matches, and the 3.17m tonnes from Qatar in 2022, in a highly compact event criticised for its hastily constructed, oversized and air-conditioned stadiums.

All 16 venues for this summer, from the smothered in Toronto with 45,000 seats, to the largest in Arlington, Texas, which holds 90,000 seats, already existed when the Games were awarded, a point highlighted in 2018 by the "United 2026" bid.

The main issue is the vast span between stadiums. The distance between Miami and Vancouver is more than 4,500 kilometres. That will increase to 5,040 kilometres for the 2026 World Cup, FIFA has refrained from any guarantees on 2026.

Environmental analysts agree that the best way to reduce the impact of mega-competitions is to limit their scale, as the International Olympic Committee has done with its quota of 10,500 athletes for the Summer Games, said Gogishvili.

Indian duo die on Mount Everest

NEWS DESK: Two Indian climbers have died on Mount Everest during a record-breaking period of ascents via Nepal's southern route, as experts warn of overcrowding on the world's highest peak.

They fell ill while descending at high altitude. We are working out how to retrieve the bodies," Nivesh Karki, director at Pioneer Adventures, told AFP.

He named them as Sandeep Are, who he said summited on May 20, and Arun Kumar Tiwari, who reached the peak on May 21.

At least five climbers have died during this Everest season, including the two Indians and three Nepalis. A US and a Czech climber died on Mount Makalu earlier this month.

Nepali climber Kami Rita Sherpa, who scaled Everest for a record 32nd time this month, returned to Kathmandu on Friday, where he expressed concern about the experience of some climbers.

Pictures posted by officials, who gave a preliminary total of 275 pending final confirmation.

The peak can be tackled from both Nepal and the northern face in Tibet, but Chinese authorities have closed the latter route this year.

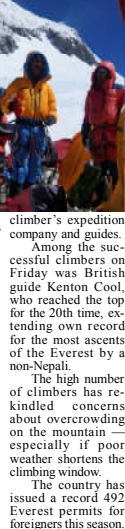
The Guinness Book of World Records lists the highest number to climb Everest in a single day as 354, in May 2019.

Nepali tourism officials said the final number will be tallied after the climbs are verified, which require photographs and statements from the climber's expedition company and guides.

Among the successful climbers on Friday was British guide Kenton Cool, who reached the top for the 20th time, extending own record for the most ascents of the Everest by a non-Nepali.

The high number of climbers has rekindled concerns about overcrowding on the mountain -- especially if poor weather shortens the climbing window.

The country has issued a record 492 Everest permits for foreigners this season.



12 terrorists killed, one person dead in heavy fighting between police, militants in KP's Bannu

NEWS DESK: At least a dozen terrorists were killed while a man was martyred on Saturday as a fierce clash continued between a police peace committee and militants in the Barakzai Akhundkhel area in Miryan tehsil of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa's Bannu district.

District Police Officer (DPO) Yasir Afridi confirmed to Dawn that 12 terrorists had been eliminated, while "one [individual] was martyred" and four policemen were injured during the police action.

Bannu Medical Teaching Institution spokespersons on Mohammad Noman Khattab said the martyr, along with four others injured, was brought to the District Headquarters Hospital. Police also confirmed that during the exchange of fire, a retired Federal Constabulary officer was martyred, adding that

four police personnel and a child were injured.

According to police sources, despite intense firing, the police force displayed bravery and safely reached the police station, while additional personnel were called in to bring the situation fully under control.

Local sources said that a large number of militants were present in the Barkazai area, due to which tensions remain high and intermittent firing continues from both sides.

Contingents from other security forces also reached the site, and search and clearance operations in the area have been intensified further.



President Asif Ali Zardari, in a statement, praised the professionalism and bravery of the KP police and the Counter-Terrorism Department (CTD) in eliminating the terrorists.

"The sacrifices of our police officers are a source of pride for the

nation, and the country will always remember the services of its brave sons," the president said.

In his statement, Interior Minister Mohsin Naqvi also commended the police and CTD for "thwarting the nefarious

plans" of the terrorists. Earlier in the day, Bannu police also averted a major tragedy by defusing a 10-kilogramme remote-controlled bomb planted near Gul Zaman Mosque in Mamash Khel on the Bannu-Miranshar Road.

The bomb disposal squad successfully neutralised the explosive device during a timely operation.

Terrorism resurgence in KP and Balochistan, since the Afghan Taliban returned to power in Kabul in 2021.

Islamabad has repeatedly urged the Taliban administration to dismantle terrorist sanctuaries on Afghan soil, particularly those

linked to the banned Tehreek-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP). Officials say those appeals have gone unheeded.

A day ago, a police official was martyred when unidentified assailants opened fire on him in Khyber district's Bara

tehsil. Earlier this month, Islamabad issued a "strong demarche" to Afghanistan over the May 10 suicide attack at Bannu's Fateh Khel police post, which claimed the lives of 15 police personnel.

On May 12, at least nine people, including two traffic policemen, lost their lives while 33 others were injured in a blast in Lakki Marwat. Earlier this week, a tribal chief was among three killed in a blast in Lower South Waziristan's Wana.

Due to a resurgence of militancy, particularly in KP and Balochistan, where attacks often target security personnel and law enforcement agencies, the state has intensified counter-terrorism operations.

A week ago, police claimed to have eliminated five "high-value targets", including a TTP commander responsible for the deadly Fateh Khel police post attack.

Punjab CTD arrests 13 suspected terrorists in province-wide crackdown

NEWS DESK: The Punjab Counter Terrorism Department (CTD) on Saturday claimed to have foiled a major terror plot by arresting 13 suspected terrorists belonging to various banned organisations during week-long intelligence-based operations (IBOs) conducted across the province.

According to a CTD spokesperson, the department carried out 58 intelligence-based operations in various districts to avert possible terrorist activities. The operations were conducted in Lahore, Jhang, Sahawal, Jhelum, Chiniot, Mandi Bahaudin and Mianwali. During the operations, 58 suspects were interrogated, and 13 alleged terrorists were taken into custody along with arms, explosives, and other prohibited

materials. The spokesperson said the suspects were associated with Fina al Khawarij and other banned organisations.

Fina al Khawarij is a term the state uses for terrorists belonging to the banned Tehreek-i-Taliban Pakistan. Among those arrested, Khawarij Mukhtar Ahmed was apprehended from Lahore along with a large quantity of explosives.

The CTD said it had recovered 2,010 grams of explosives, eight detonators, 15 feet of safety fuse wire, four improvised explosive devices (IEDs), as well as pamphlets and magazines of banned organisations, prima cards, mobile phones and cash from the suspects. According to the spokesperson, the suspected terrorists were allegedly planning to target law enforce-

PM Shehbaz lands in Hangzhou, kicking off 4-day China visit

NEWS DESK: Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif on Saturday landed in Hangzhou, kicking off his four-day official visit to China.

Zhejiang province's Vice Governor Xu Wenguang received PM Shehbaz at Hangzhou Xiaoshan International Airport upon his arrival, the Prime Minister's Office (PMO) said.

China's Ambassador to Pakistan Jiang Zaidong and Islamabad's envoy Khalid Hashmi were also present to welcome him.

According to the PMO, the prime minister will meet Zhejiang Party Secretary Wang Hao during his stay in Hangzhou. Detailing his Hangzhou itinerary, the PMO said PM Shehbaz will attend a business forum aimed at promoting cooperation between Pakistani and Chinese companies under the second phase of China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC 2.0).

He will also participate in a ceremony for the exchange of agreements and Memoranda of Understanding (MoUs).

The PMO further said that the premier will engage with the chief executive officers (CEOs) of leading Chinese companies and visit the headquarters of Alibaba Group to strengthen economic cooperation.

Deputy PM and Foreign Minister Ishaq Dar, Planning Minister Ahsan Iqbal, Information Minister Attaullah Tarar,

IT Minister Shaza Fatima, and PM's adviser Tariq Fatemi were accompanying the premier on the trip.

A day earlier, the Foreign Office (FO) had announced that the premier would undertake an official visit to China from May 23 to 26.

The visit assumes special significance as Pakistan and China commemorate the 75th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations. It will provide an opportunity to reaffirm the abiding strength of the Pakistan-China alli-

weather strategic cooperative partnership and advance the shared vision of building an even closer Pakistan-China community with a shared future," it said.

During the visit, PM Shehbaz will hold meetings with the Chinese leadership, including President Xi Jinping and Premier Li Qiang.

"The two sides will review bilateral cooperation in the political, economic, and strategic domains, with particular focus on the high-quality development of CPEC, trade, investment, industrial cooperation, a g r i e u l t u r a l modernisation, information technology, science and

to-people exchanges," concluded the FO said.

Separately, FO Spokesperson Tahir Andrabi said during his weekly press briefing that the US-Iran war was expected to come up during discussions between PM Shehbaz and the Chinese leadership.

"Pakistan and China have maintained close coordination on the standoff in the Middle East and our peace efforts in this regard," Andrabi said, recalling DPM Dar's visit to China last month.

"We agreed on a five-point principle, which was issued as a joint statement. So, yes, this issue will be discussed during the prime minister's visit," he added.

Fake electricity subsidy links spread online

NEWS DESK: The Ministry of Energy's Power Division on Friday warned electricity consumers against fraudulent schemes involving fake links and QR codes being circulated by criminal elements to steal personal data under the guise of the government's electricity subsidy programme.

In an advisory, the Power Division said consumers were being lured into clicking suspicious links and completing a four-step process requiring them to share personal information before entering a six-digit verification code.

Officials cautioned that such methods were being used to unlawfully obtain sensi-

tive consumer data.

The spokesperson for the Power Division said some elements were also using QR codes to pursue "malicious objectives", stressing that no electricity bill-related information could be submitted on any platform other than the government's official system.

The spokesperson clarified that any such collection of consumer information outside authorised channels was illegal and confirmed that law enforcement agencies had been informed about those involved in the fraudulent activities.

Citizens were advised not to provide any information, digi-

Pakistan tightens airport screening after WHO declares Ebola outbreak global emergency

NEWS DESK: In light of the World Health Organisation's (WHO's) declaration of the Ebola outbreak in Congo and Uganda as a global emergency, Pakistan has intensified screening measures at airports across the country, along with other precautionary steps.

According to the Ministry of National Health Services, Regulations and Coordination on Saturday, Federal Health Minister Mustafa Kamal directed authorities to implement strict precautionary screening protocols at all airports to prevent the possible spread of the virus.

The ministry said the current Ebola outbreak remains confined to the African countries of Congo and Uganda, citing



WHO reports that no cases had been detected outside Africa so far.

Travellers intending to visit African countries have been advised to review relevant travel and health guidelines before departure.

The ministry further stated that no Ebola case had ever been reported in Paki-

stan or neighbouring countries, adding that Pakistan faced a very low risk due to limited travel links with the affected African states.

However, following WHO directives to strengthen precautionary surveillance, health authorities have stepped up monitoring and preparedness measures nationwide,

although no travel restrictions have been recommended.

The health minister said preventive steps were being taken proactively in view of the recent spread of the virus, emphasising that "effective measures are being ensured to protect the public from epidemics."

The health minis-

