



FRONT PAGE
Balochistan Budget 2026-27: Rs1.089 Trillion...
Page No1



EDITORIAL
Forced Marriage in Islam: A Clear Violation of Women's Rights and...
Page No 2



BALUCHISTAN
PDMA Balochistan Conducts Heatwave Awareness...
Page No 3



NATIONAL
£190m corruption case: IHC orders Inrnan, Bushra's meeting with legal...
Page No 4

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QUETTA VOICE

Pakistan Brokers Historic US-Iran Peace Deal as Islamabad MoU Comes Into Force

By Qasem Shah:

Pakistan has secured a landmark diplomatic victory after successfully brokering a historic peace agreement between the United States and Iran, with Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif announcing that the Islamabad Memorandum of Understanding (Islamabad MoU) has officially come into force.

The development places Pakistan at the center of one of the most significant diplomatic breakthroughs in recent years,

with Islamabad playing the role of mediator in the US-Iran peace deal aimed at ending months of military tensions and restoring stability across the Middle East.

Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif said the Islamabad MoU was electronically signed by US President Donald Trump and Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian.

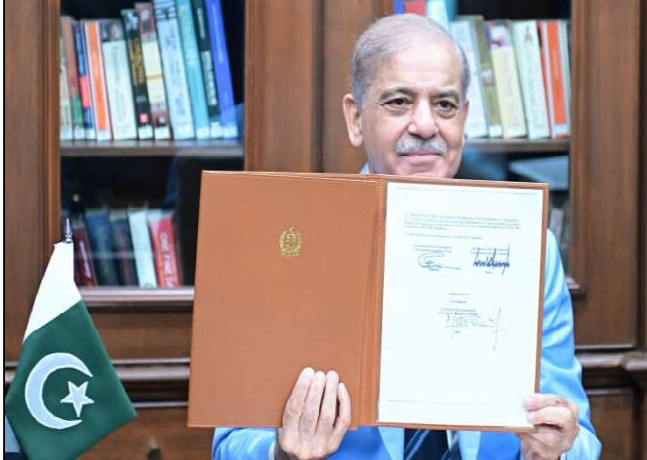
Pakistan also endorsed the agreement as mediator, underscoring its growing diplomatic influence in regional and global affairs.

"The signing of this agreement at the highest level reflects the commitment of both countries to a peaceful and diplomatic resolution," the Prime Minister said.

Under the first phase of the agreement, Iran will immediately reopen the Strait of Hormuz, one of the world's most strategic maritime routes, while the United States will lift its naval blockade against Iran.

The move is expected to ease geopolitical tensions, stabilize oil markets and improve global trade flows.

The Pakistan-mediated US-Iran peace agreement is



Prime Minister of Pakistan, Shehbaz Sharif Signing the Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) Islamabad -- Peace Agreement between Iran and the United States.

being hailed as a major diplomatic achievement for Islamabad.

Analysts say Pakistan's role in facilitating negotiations has strengthened its international standing and demonstrated its ability to mediate complex global conflicts.

Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif praised both Washington and Tehran for choosing diplomacy over confrontation.

He also acknowledged the contributions of Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Türkiye and Egypt in

supporting the peace process.

Highlighting Pakistan's internal efforts, the Prime Minister commended Chief of Defence Staff and Chief of Army Staff Field Marshal Asim Munir for his role in advancing dialogue and helping create conditions conducive to peace and regional stability.

The agreement lays down a roadmap for a final peace settlement to be negotiated within 60 days.

It includes commitments to halt military operations, ease

sanctions on Iran, revive maritime trade and pursue negotiations on Iran's nuclear programme under international oversight.

In addition, the deal provides for broader economic cooperation and reconstruction initiatives, which could unlock billions of dollars in investment and support Iran's economic recovery.

President Asif Ali Zardari welcomed the Islamabad MoU, calling it a historic moment for peace and a testament

to Pakistan's principled and balanced diplomacy.

He said lasting peace can only be achieved through dialogue, mutual respect and cooperation among nations.

The Pakistan-brokered US-Iran peace deal is expected to have far-reaching implications for regional security,

energy markets and international diplomacy, further cementing Pakistan's role as a credible mediator on the global stage.

CMAfridi orders timely completion of ongoing projects

NEWS DESK:

Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Chief Minister Sohail Afridi on Wednesday directed the relevant departments to ensure timely completion of ongoing projects to accelerate economic growth, improve public service delivery, and strengthen governance outcomes across the province. He issued the directives while chairing a meeting to assess the utilisation of development funds and progress on key development initiatives in the province, according to a statement issued here.

The chief minister reiterated that health and education remained among the provincial government's highest development priorities, adding that the upcoming Annual Development Programme would continue to place particular emphasis on these sectors. He underscored that the provision of quality healthcare services was a fundamental responsibility of the government and emphasised that no compromise would be made on improving access to essential health services for citizens. Mr Afridi noted that the growing patient burden on major hospitals in the provincial capital necessitated enhanced attention, strategic planning, and targeted investments in the health sector. He stated that the provincial government was pursuing a comprehensive approach to strengthen healthcare infrastructure and service delivery to meet increasing public demand. Reaffirming the government's development agenda, Mr Afridi stated that projects of significant public importance, particularly those nearing completion, would be prioritised to ensure that development gains were realised and delivered to communities without delay. He emphasised the provincial government's commitment to ensuring the transparent, efficient, and timely utilisation of development resources, saying that all-out efforts would be made to extend the benefits of development investments to every region and segment of society.

Balochistan Budget 2026-27: Rs1.089 Trillion Outlay Approved with 7% Salary and Pension Increase

By Ali Hamza:

The Balochistan government on Thursday presented a Rs1.089 trillion budget for the fiscal year 2026-27, announcing a 7 percent increase in salaries and pensions for provincial government employees despite ongoing fiscal constraints.

Presenting the budget in the provincial assembly, Finance Minister Mir Shohaib Noshirwani said the government had sought to strike a balance between financial discipline and public welfare.

He emphasized that the budget focuses on accelerating development, improving public services, and addressing socio-economic disparities across the province.

According to the budget estimates, Rs79 billion has been allocated for current expenditures, while Rs206 billion has been earmarked for the Provincial Development Programme (PDP).

The development package includes Rs106 billion for new projects and Rs100 billion for schemes already under implementation.

The provincial government has prioritized infrastructure expansion, employment generation, and social sector development to stimulate eco-



File Photo of Mir Shohaib Noshirwani, the Finance Minister of Balochistan.

nomically and improve living standards.

Officials said the budget has been designed to tackle long-standing challenges related to underdevelopment and

unequal access to essential services in different parts of Balochistan.

Significant allocations have also been made for the education and health sectors, with a

focus on enhancing service delivery and expanding access to quality facilities.

The government has additionally pledged to improve the supply of clean drinking

water and strengthen basic civic amenities throughout the province.

The finance minister expressed confidence that the Budget 2026-27 would con-

tribute to sustainable economic progress and ensure balanced development across all districts of Balochistan, paving the way for greater prosperity and improved public welfare.

QUETTA VOICE

Editor: Asim Khan

Fiscal Federalism and the Quest for Equity in Pakistan

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



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

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

“Hidden Deficits” and Contingent Liabilities

Beyond revenue inadequacy, the expenditure side of the fiscal

equation presents an equally formidable challenge.

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

The paper notes

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

strengthen the entire fiscal ecosystem.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

By Musavir Durrani

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

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

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

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

(Qur'an 4:19) This verse was revealed to abolish the *jahliyyah* practice of controlling or forcing women into marriages.

Islam replaced oppression with dignity, choice, and responsibility.

Prophetic Example: Forced Marriages Declared Invalid

A woman once came to the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH)



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

Hadith References: Sahih al-Bukhari, Hadith 5138.

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

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

thers have no right to force their daughters. Parents Can Advise, But They Cannot Force.

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

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

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

These are pure emotional manipulation, and Islam does

not allow it. Emotional or Psychological Pressure is Also Haram. Forced marriage is not only when someone is physically pressured. Even emotional, mental, or family pressure

counts as force. Any *Nikkah* done under fear, pressure, or

threats is invalid (*Batil*) in Islam. This ruling is based on multiple *hadith* in which the Prophet (PBUH) annulled marriages done without consent.

Modern Forced Marriages, A New Way of Burying Women Alive. Before Islam, Arabs used to bury baby girls alive. Today, many scholars say: “We no longer bury women in the ground, we bury their dreams on the day of their *Nikkah*.”

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

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

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

£190m corruption case: IHC orders Imran, Bushra's meeting with legal counsel within 7 days

NEWS DESK: The Islamabad High Court (IHC) on Thursday directed the advocate general Islamabad to arrange a meeting between former prime minister Imran Khan, his spouse Bushra Bibi and their legal counsel within seven days to facilitate the filing and prosecution of appeals against their conviction in the £190 million reference.

A division bench comprising IHC Chief Justice Justice Sarda Muhammad Sarfraz Dogar and Justice Muhammad Asif resumed hearing appeals challenged by the conviction awarded by an accountability court in the high-profile National Accountability Bureau (NAB) reference.

During the proceedings, Imran's counsel Barrister Salman Safdar informed the court that despite repeated efforts he had been unable to meet his client, who remains incarcerated at Rawalpindi's Adiala jail. Consequently, he could neither obtain instructions nor secure a signed vakalatnama (power of attorney) for the appeals.

The counsel submitted that jail authorities had consistently denied him access to the former prime minister. He pointed out that NAB had recently filed an application contending that the petitions seeking suspension of sentence had become infructuous or were no longer maintainable after



the main appeals against the conviction had been fixed.

Safdar argued that without instructions from his client, he was unable to effectively pursue the matter before the court.

Referring to a recent Supreme Court judgment, he maintained that the apex court had granted relief in a similar post-conviction case and that both Imran and Bushra were entitled to seek comparable relief.

The counsel further informed the bench that his last meeting with Bushra had taken place in December last year and that all subsequent access requests had been declined by prison authorities.

CJ Dogar questioned the absence of the advocate general, observing that the law officer was responsible for ensuring that legal counsel were granted access to incarcerated clients whenever re-

quired for court proceedings.

During the hearing, the prosecution had already changed its legal representatives, whereas he remained unable to obtain fresh instructions from his client.

"I have no instructions from Imran. He has the right to change his lawyer if he so desires," the counsel submitted.

The chief justice recalled that the court had previously intervened to facilitate a meeting between the PTI founder and his lawyers, which had subsequently taken place.

Addressing the counsel, CJ Dogar asked whether he possessed a duly signed vakalatnama (power of attorney) authorising him to pursue the appeals.

Safdar replied that he did not have one and clarified that he had been engaged only in connection with the sus-

pension of the sentence petitions.

"The jail authorities have denied me access in a manner that appears aimed at rendering these proceedings time-barred," he contended.

Expressing concern over the situation, CJ Dogar remarked that denial of access to legal counsel was unfortunate and could impede the administration of justice.

The bench subsequently directed the advocate general Islamabad to ensure Imran and Bushra's meetings with their counsel within seven days so that legal formalities, including execution of the vakalatnama (power of attorney) and obtaining instructions, could be completed.

The court deferred further proceedings until after the meetings take place and the necessary authorisation documents are signed.

LHC bars Punjab govt from further action against Ewing Hall after takeover controversy

NEWS DESK: The Lahore High Court on Thursday restrained the Punjab government from taking further action regarding 11.5 kanal Ewing Hall belonging to Forman Christian College University (FCCU).

Earlier this month, activists and alumni raised concerns over the government's alleged repossession of Ewing Hall, arguing that the move could jeopardise an important part of the college's historical legacy.

The Punjab government, however, has maintained that the lease had expired years ago and that substantial dues remained unpaid.

On Thursday, Justice Ahmad Nadeem Arshad issued the order reserving the other day on a petition filed by the FCCU registrar.

A counsel for the petitioner argued that the Punjab government had forcibly taken possession of the land on June 11 and that the Board of Revenue's (BoR) move to cancel the lease was illegal.

The counsel informed the court that the land of Ewing Hall, situated at Neela Gumbad, New Anarkali, had been leased to the college in

1915 and the lease period was extended in 2018 until 2048.

He asked the court to restore possession of the land and restrain the government



to recover lease rent for commercial activities. He asked the court to dismiss the petition.

During the hearing, Justice Arshad observed that if the

government intended to recover lease rent from the college administration, it should have issued a proper notice before initiating any action.

After hearing arguments from both sides, the judge suspended the operation of the BoR decision regarding the cancellation of the lease.

The judge sought a detailed report from the Punjab government and restrained it from proceeding further in the matter till the next hearing.

would be taken over the following day.

The next day the university was allegedly given 24 hours to remove generators, furniture and historical artefacts from the premises.

Days later, the Lahore Heritage Areas Revival Board (LHAR) denied reports that Ewing Hall would be demolished following the government's takeover of the property, saying the structure would be preserved and restored.

Balochistan: Noshki Police Officer Martyred in Targeted Gun Attack, Hunt for Assailants Intensifies

By Web Desk: A police officer was martyred in a targeted gun attack by unidentified armed men in Balochistan's Noshki district on Thursday, prompting authorities to launch a search operation to apprehend the attackers.

According to police officials, the incident took place at Ahmed Wal Chowk, where unknown gunmen opened indiscriminate fire on Mana Afzal Muhammad Hasni, a constable serving in the Crime Detection

Team (CDT). The officer sustained fatal injuries and was martyred on the spot.

The assailants fled the scene immediately after the attack, while police and security personnel rushed to the area and shifted the body to a hospital.

After completing legal and medico-legal procedures, the body was handed over to the family for burial.

A case has been registered against un-

identified attackers, and a comprehensive investigation has been launched.

Security forces have also intensified search operations in and around the area to trace those responsible for the killing.

The latest attack highlights the persistent security challenges in parts of Balochistan, where law enforcement personnel continue to face threats from armed militants and criminal groups.



Pakistan assails 17 Indian water projects, calls them 'tools for hydro-hegemony'

NEWS DESK: Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Ishaq Dar warned on Thursday of "at least 17" projects by India designed to drastically alter the Indus river system and lend it "tools for hydro-hegemony".

The deputy prime minister, in a recorded keynote address at a seminar on trans-boundary water resources, said that responsible states act

"within established legal frameworks" rather than abandoning them — referring to the Indus Waters Treaty (IWT) between Pakistan and India that has been unilaterally suspended by India since May of last year. "The treaty envisages the peaceful resolution of disputes within its own framework," he said, highlighting that it survived "three major conflicts and several other challenges" over the decades.

He also noted that

Pakistan had previously voiced concerns over "certain actions by India" under the treaty.

"Consistent with the treaty's provisions, we sought settlement through international mechanisms and respected decisions that even fell short of our expectations," he said. "At no stage was the outright unilateral abrogation of the treaty considered a viable course of action by the other side."

"It is important to underscore that our concerns are not merely based on Indian statements," the deputy prime minister stressed, stating that India had followed up its belligerent statements with illegal actions.

"These included projects to create reservoirs, expansion of existing structures and, 'most alarmingly,' diversion projects on the Indus, Chenab and Ravi rivers.

"In total, at least 17 such projects that will drastically alter the river system as a whole, giving India the tools for hydro-hegemony that it so desires," he said. "River systems are not merely waterways — they are lifelines. They carry profound historical significance and serve as immediate sources of sustenance and survival."

He said, "Pakistan attached high priority to attracting technology-driven investments and expressed confidence that the BYD-MMC joint venture would contribute to industrial devel-

opment, technology transfer, job creation and export growth".

Lu briefed the minister on BYD's operations and plans in Pakistan, highlighting progress in introducing new energy vehicle technologies to the local market in partnership with the government.

He appreciated the Government of Pakistan's support for

Pakistan reaffirms support for electric vehicle manufacturing, localisation plans

NEWS DESK: Finance Minister Muhammad Aurangzeb on Thursday met a delegation from BYD Group and Mega Motor Company (MMC) and reaffirmed the government's support for electric vehicle manufacturing and localisation in the country.

The ministry said that the delegation was led by Mr. Liu Xueqiang of BYD Group and General Manager, BYD Asia Pacific Auto Sales Division, and Mr. Aly Khan, Chief Executive Officer, Mega Motor Company (Private) Limited.

According to a statement posted by the Ministry of Finance on X, Aurangzeb welcomed the delegation and appreciated BYD's growing footprint in Pakistan, underscoring the importance of strengthening business-to-business collaboration as a key pillar of the evolving Pakistan-China economic partnership.

He said, "Pakistan attached high priority to attracting technology-driven investments and expressed confidence that the BYD-MMC joint venture would contribute to industrial devel-

opment, technology transfer, job creation and export growth".

Lu briefed the minister on BYD's operations and plans in Pakistan, highlighting progress in introducing new energy vehicle technologies to the local market in partnership with the government.

He appreciated the Government of Pakistan's support for

advanced charging technologies and contribute to Pakistan's EV ecosystem through investment in technology transfer and capacity building, the statement added.

The delegation said, "Pakistan had growing potential as a market for new energy content through investment in long-term vision of positioning the country as a regional hub for EV

development and exports".

Aurangzeb said global trends pointed towards an accelerating transition to electric mobility and reiterated the government's commitment to facilitating investments that support technological advancement, sustainable industrialisation and energy efficiency. He said

global expansion plans and reiterated the joint venture's commitment to long-term investment in the country. He also briefed the meeting on progress of the manufacturing project and outlined a phased localisation roadmap aimed at increasing local content through engagement with domestic vendors and suppliers, the ministry added.

The meeting also included discussions on the future role of electric vehicles and plug-in hybrid electric vehicles (PHEVs) in Pakistan.

The BYD delegation shared international experience on the evolution of EV markets and highlighted the complementary role of PHEVs during the transition phase.

He directed relevant authorities to maintain "close coordination" with religious scholars to ensure law and order.

"The code of conduct must be strictly enforced. Azero-tolerance general of police should be adopted against provocative material," the statement quoted him as saying.

Muharram gatherings, processions to be digitally monitored through drones in Islamabad

NEWS DESK: Muharram processions and gatherings will be monitored digitally through drones while geo-tagging of all participants, major roads and procession routes has been completed, according to an interior ministry statement detailing security arrangements for Islamabad.

The statement was issued after Interior Minister Moin Nagvi chaired a meeting to review security arrangements for Muharram in the federal capital.

The statement said a special mobile application, 'Mehfooz Muharram', had also been launched, using which citizens could report any suspicious activity or individual or inadequate security arrangements. It will also have live location sharing and image sharing

features.

It added that a central control room had been established at Safe City as part of security arrangements, and a "four-tier security cordon" would be implemented to ensure the protection of Muharram processions and gatherings.

The statement said Nagvi directed that a four-tier security cordon

be maintained for the protection of Muharram gatherings and processions and a comprehensive traffic plan be implemented.

"Naqvi ordered strict checking at the entry and exit points of all processions and religious gatherings," the statement said, adding that he also instructed all relevant officers to remain in the field.

He directed relevant authorities to maintain "close coordination" with religious scholars to ensure law and order.

"The code of conduct must be strictly enforced. Azero-tolerance general of police should be adopted against provocative material," the statement quoted him as saying.

Moreover, he instructed that arranged

ments for food and drinking water for personnel deployed for security be ensured.

During the meeting, Islamabad's chief commissioner and the Islamabad inspector general of police gave the interior minister a detailed briefing on the security arrangements, the statement said.

They informed that the security audit of all religious gatherings and processions had been completed. Aman and Nisbah committees had been activated, and the Islamabad administration was in contact with religious scholars, as well as the organisers of Muharram gatherings and processions, the statement said.

It added that the meeting was also attended by all deputy inspector-generals of police.

to recover lease rent from the college administration, it should have issued a proper notice before initiating any action.

After hearing arguments from both sides, the judge suspended the operation of the BoR decision regarding the cancellation of the lease.

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