

CHINA'S XI CALLS FOR STRAIT OF HORMUZ TO REMAIN OPEN IN CALL WITH SAUDI CROWN PRINCE

BEIJING
REUTERS

Chinese President Xi Jinping called on Saudi Arabia to remain open to normal passage, as this serves the common interests of regional countries and the international community, he told the Saudi leader.



China is concerned over renewed instability around the strategic waterway, as a US-Iran cease-fire came under fresh strain after the US seized an Iranian cargo ship and Tehran signalled it would not join new-peace talks for now.

China is the main buyer of Iranian crude. Iran has largely closed the strait to ships other than its own since the US and Israel launched the war in February, while Washington has imposed a blockade of Iranian ships since last week.

China advocates an immediate and comprehensive cease-fire, and insists on resolving conflicts in the Middle East through political and diplomatic channels, state news agency Xinhua cited Xi as saying. "The Strait of Hormuz should

remain open to normal passage, as this serves the common interests of regional countries and the international community," he told the Saudi leader.

Worries have mounted over the survival of the cease-fire between Washington and Tehran after the US seizure of the Iranian vessel. Trump had credited Beijing with helping to get Iran to the previous negotiations with the US in Pakistan.

The Chinese-foreign-ministry on Monday expressed concerns over the

"forced interception" by the US of the Iranian ship, while urging relevant sides to abide-by-the-cessation-agreement.

Xi's call-with-the-Saudi-crown-prince followed a meeting in Beijing last week with the crown prince of Abu Dhabi, when Xi urged adherence to international law.

He also told the Saudi crown prince that China supports countries in the Middle East in "taking their future and destiny into their own hands, and promoting

long-term regional stability and peace".

Macron decries blocking Strait of Hormuz as 'mistake on both sides' — French President Emmanuel Macron has denounced the blockade of the Strait of Hormuz as "a mistake on both sides", AFP reports. "It is likely that, following the American decision to maintain a targeted blockade on Hormuz ... the Iranian authorities changed their initial position ... this is a mistake on both sides," Macron tells journalists in Gdansk, Poland.

French President Emmanuel Macron has called for the United States and Iran to de-escalate amid increased tensions over the weekend over the Strait of Hormuz, Al Jazeera reports.

"Our position remains the same. We need to settle things through diplomacy. Everyone must calm down", Macron has said during a joint press conference with Polish-Prime-Minister-Donald-Tusk.

Macron adds that France was "not specifically targeted in the Strait after Iran fired shots on ships on Saturday, including a container ship belonging to French-shipping-giant CMA-CGM, which described the volleys as "warning shots" and said at the time that the crew was safe.

India and South Korea target \$50b trade by 2030 with fresh economic initiatives

NEW DELHI
AGENCIES

India and South Korea said on Monday that they would boost their economic ties by expanding cooperation in energy, critical minerals, shipbuilding, semiconductors and steel as they seek to double their trade to \$50 billion by 2030.

New Delhi and Seoul also agreed to resume and step up negotiations to give new energy to their 2010 trade agreement as India wanted their trade to be more balanced and South Korea wanted greater market access to the world's fastest-growing major economy.

South Korean President Lee Jae Myung is in India for a three-day visit, the first South Korean presidential state visit to the country in eight years.

"We decided to upgrade the framework of economic cooperation between the two countries to create a new engine for shared growth," Lee told reporters after talks with Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

The two countries created a ministerial-level economic cooperation committee for the first time, Lee said, adding that they would strengthen cooperation in areas such as nuclear power plants, clean energy as well as trade and investment.

With the US-Israel war on Iran squeezing global energy supplies, India and South Korea would also continue to cooperate to ensure the stable supply of energy resources and key raw materials such as naphtha, Lee added.

Modi said Lee's visit was extremely significant and that the two countries had taken important decisions to boost two-way trade to \$50 billion by 2030 from around \$27 billion at present.

"Today, we are laying the foundation for the success story of the next decade," Modi said, as he recalled strong civilisational ties between the two countries that go back several centuries.

Big investment in India's steel sector Indian Trade Minister Piyush Goyal said he held talks with his South Korean counterpart, Yoo Han-woo, and discussed ways to resume and revamp the trade pact and explored opportunities to deepen cooperation in the areas of industry, green energy and digital trade.

Lee will attend a joint business forum conference later on Monday where some 250 South Korean participants are expected, including leaders of household names in India such as Samsung Electronics, Hyundai Motor and LG Group, South Korea's Yonhap news agency said.

The two sides also plan to sign a total of 20 private-sector memoranda of understanding on the sidelines of the forum, covering areas including shipbuilding, digital technology and energy, Yonhap said.

Separately, South Korea's POSCO Holdings said in a regulatory filing on Monday that its steelmaking unit plans to build a joint venture integrated steel plant with India's JSW in Odisha state.

POSCO's investment until end-2031 is expected to be about \$1.09 billion, the filing said.

The joint venture deal to set up a 6-million-ton-per-annum steel plant in Odisha was announced last week. In a policy seminar at South Korea's parliament last week, Maeng Hyun-chul, a research fellow at Seoul National University's Asia Centre, noted India's longstanding complaint of a widening trade deficit with South Korea and said that political ties had not kept pace with commercial ties.

South Korea had a \$12.8 billion trade surplus last year, with exports worth \$19.2bn and imports of \$6.4bn, according to Korea International Trade Association data. Lee will be visiting Vietnam after India.

Lebanon reopens key southern routes as Israeli demolitions continue

BEIRUT
AGENCIES

Lebanon's military announced on Sunday it had reopened a key road and bridge destroyed by Israeli strikes in the country's south, a crucial step for civilians even as a fragile 10-day truce is undermined by continued Israeli occupation and demolitions.

The conflict, which escalated on March 2, prompted an Israeli offensive that killed more than 2,100 people, including 177 children, and forced over 1.2 million to flee, Lebanese authorities say. Including all casualties, nearly 2,300 people have been killed.

Lebanon's military said it "fully reopened" a road linking Nabatieh with the Khardali area and "partially reopened the Buj Rahal-Tyre bridge."

"Work is also underway to rehabilitate the Tayr Falsay-Tyre bridge ... following damage caused by the Israeli aggression," the army added.

Israeli strikes on bridges crossing Lebanon's Litani River, which flows about 30km north of Israel, largely cut off the area south of the waterway.

The vital Qasimiyeh bridge reopened, allowing displaced residents to check on property. However, many remained hesitant to venture back with the truce's longevity uncertain.

An AFP correspondent in the southern city of Sidon saw heavy traffic heading to Beirut as displaced southerners returned to temporary homes and shelters in the capital after briefly visiting southern areas.

As civilians navigate the destruction, the Israeli military, published a map on Sunday of its new-deployment-line inside Lebanon, bringing dozens of mostly abandoned Lebanese villages under its control.

Israel condemns soldier's desecration of crucifix in south Lebanon

JERUSALEM
AGENCIES

Israel's Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, the foreign minister and the military on Monday condemned the desecration of a crucifix after it was smashed by an Israeli soldier in a Christian village in southern Lebanon.

A photo that emerged online over the weekend shows a soldier taking the blunt side of an axe to a fallen sculpture of Jesus on the cross. It was posted by Younis Trawi, who describes himself as a Palestinian reporter and has also posted images of Israeli soldiers' misconduct in Gaza.

Reuters verified the location of the image as Dobei, one of the few villages in southern Lebanon where residents remained through an Israeli military campaign against Hezbollah that began on March 2.

The cross was part of a small shrine in the garden of a family living on the edge of the village, said Fadi Falfel, a priest in Dobei. "One of the Israeli soldiers broke the cross and did this horrible thing, this desecration of our holy symbols," he said.

Netanyahu said that the soldier's actions went against Jewish values of tolerance.

Unicef decries water suppliers' killing in Gaza

JERUSALEM
AGENCIES

Two civilian contractors delivering water for the UN children's fund were shot dead by Israeli troops in northern Gaza, Unicef said on Saturday, expressing fury over the deaths the previous day.

"Unicef is outraged by the killing of two drivers of trucks contracted by Unicef to provide clean water to families in the Gaza Strip," it said in a statement.

When contacted by AFP, the Israeli military claimed that the troops saw "two armed terrorists in the area of the Yellow Line" approaching, so they "opened fire".

The army said the incident was "under review".

Unicef said the incident took place at the Mansoura water filling point in northern Gaza, which is "the only operational truck filling point for the Mekorot water supply-line serving Gaza City".

"The incident, in which two other people were injured, occurred during routine water trucking operations, with no changes in movement or procedures," it said, adding that the point was used



multiple times a day" by Unicef and its humanitarian partners.

Following the incident, all activities at the filling point had been suspended, it said, urging the Israeli authorities to "immediately investigate" the incident and ensure those responsible be held accountable.

"Humanitarian workers, essential service providers and civilian infrastructure, including critical water facilities, must never be targeted."

"The protection of civilians and those delivering life-saving assistance is an obligation under international humanitarian law," Unicef said.

Earlier on Saturday, Gaza's health ministry, which operates under Hamas authority, reported an overall death toll of 72,549 since October 2023. That number includes 773 Palestinians killed since the Gaza cease-fire came into effect on Oct 10, 2025.

Israeli army claims — On Saturday, the Israeli army said troops had opened fire in two incidents in the Gaza Strip's north and south, eliminating "two infiltrators who crossed the Yellow Line and approached the forces posing an immediate threat".

FBI Director Kash Patel files defamation suit against The Atlantic

WASHINGTON
AGENCIES

FBI Director Kash Patel has filed a defamation lawsuit against The Atlantic and reporter Sarah Fitzpatrick over an article that alleged he had a drinking problem and was frequently absent from work, claims Patel has denied.

According to Reuters, the lawsuit was filed after The Atlantic published a report on Friday that said Patel's alleged conduct could pose a national security risk. The article was initially published under the headline "Kash Patel's Erratic Behavior Could Cost Him His Job and Cited more than two dozen anonymous sources who voiced concern over what it described as Patel's visible intoxication and unexplained absences, which it said had worried officials at the FBI and the Department of Justice."

The online version of the article was later retitled "The FBI Director Is MIA. Reuters said it could not independently verify the claims made in The Atlantic's report or determine why the headline was changed."

The article alleged that early meetings at the FBI had to be rescheduled because of Patel's late-night drinking and that he was often away or unreachable, slowing decisions needed to move investigations forward. Reuters reported that the White House, the Department of Justice and Patel all denied the allegations in The Atlantic's story.

The report also carried a statement from the FBI attributed to Patel, which said: "Print it, all right, I'll see you in court, bring your checkbook."

Patel repeated his denial in an interview with Reuters, saying: "The Atlantic's story is a lie. They were given the truth before they published, and they chose to print falsehoods anyway. After Patel threatened legal action during an appearance on Fox News on Sunday, The Atlantic Editor-in-Chief Jeffrey Goldberg told CNBC:

"We stand by our reporting on Kash Patel. Lawsuit seeks \$250 million."

The complaint, filed in the US District Court for the District of Columbia, seeks \$250 million in damages. It argues that while The Atlantic was entitled to criticise the FBI's leadership, it crossed a legal boundary by publishing an article replete with false and obviously fabricated allegations designed to destroy Director Patel's reputation and drive him from office.

The lawsuit further alleges that The Atlantic ignored denials issued by the FBI — and did not respond to a Friday letter from Patel's lawyer, Jesse Binnall, sent to senior editors and the magazine's legal department. According to the complaint, the letter requested more time to rebut 19 allegations that the reporter had told the FBI press office she intended to publish. Reuters said it could not establish how, or whether, The Atlantic responded to that request.

Japan issues tsunami warning after 7.4-magnitude quake, records 80cm wave

TOKYO
AGENCIES

Japan recorded an 80-centimetre tsunami wave at a port in the country's north on Monday after a powerful 7.4-magnitude earthquake struck off the region, according to the Japan Meteorological Agency (JMA). The JMA said the wave was observed at 5:34pm local time at a port in Kuji, in Iwate prefecture. It had earlier reported that a 70-centimetre wave reached the same area at 5:32pm.

Earlier in the day, the agency said a magnitude-7.4 earthquake hit at 4:53pm in Pacific waters off northern Iwate prefecture. The tremor was strong enough to shake large buildings in Tokyo, which is located hundreds of kilometres from the epicentre.

Following the quake, the JMA issued a tsunami warning for waves of up to three metres and urged residents in affected areas to move to safety. In its warning, the agency said, "Evacuate immediately from coastal regions and riverside areas to a safer place such as high ground or an evacuation building," adding that damage from tsunami waves was expected.

The agency also cautioned that, "Tsunami waves are expected to hit repeatedly. Do not leave safe ground until the warning is lifted."

Footage aired by national broadcaster NHK did not show any immediate visible damage around several ports in Iwate.

Four candidates enter public race to succeed Guterres as next UN chief

NEW YORK
AGENCIES

Four contenders are squaring up to succeed Antonio Guterres as leader of the United Nations, which faces unprecedented global instability, war and its own crushing budget crisis.

Chile's Michelle Bachelet, Argentina's Rafael Grossi, Costa Rica's Rebecca Grynspan, and Senegal's Macky Sall will each face grillings by 193 member states and NGOs for three hours on Tuesday and Wednesday.

It is only the second time the UN has held a public Q&A, a format created in 2016 to boost transparency.

Ultimately the five permanent members of the UN's top body, the Security Council, hold the power, wielding vetoes over who leads the global organisation as its secretary-general.

US President Donald Trump's envoy to the Manhattan-based UN, Mike Waltz, has warned the next chief must align with "American values and interests" and that Washington would back

the best candidate — not necessarily a Latin American woman, as some countries are demanding.

All four candidates to take over the embattled UN when Guterres departs on

December 31, 2026 pledge to grow trust in the bitterly divided organisation that faces financial Armageddon because of Washington's refusal to pay its bills.

Here is a look at the contenders: Michelle Bachelet

A Chilean socialist brutally tortured by the regime of Augusto Pinochet, Bachelet became her country's first woman president in 2006.

She went on to be the UN rights chief, a sensitive role in which she alienated some countries, especially China, which mused her for reporting on alleged abuses of the Uyghur people.

Bachelet, 74, has said that she is "gratified" she has the experience "to confront a moment" marked by unprecedented crises and conflicts. She is backed by Mexico and Brazil — but Chile withdrew its backing after far-right President Jose Antonio Kast took office.



CRESCENT COTTON MILLS LIMITED
NOTICE OF EXTRA-ORDINARY GENERAL MEETING

NOTICE IS HEREBY GIVEN THAT an Extra-Ordinary General Meeting of the shareholders of CRESCENT COTTON MILLS LIMITED will be held at the Registered Office of the Company on Friday the 15th May, 2026 at 09:30 a.m. to transact the following business:

- To elect seven Directors of the Company, as fixed by the Board for a period of three years commencing from May 18, 2026 in accordance with the provisions of the Companies Act, 2017 in place of retiring Directors namely:

1. Mr. Abid Mahmood	2. Mr. Adnan Amjad
3. Mr. Naveed Gulzar	4. Mr. Salman Rafi
5. Ms. Nazish Arshad	6. Mrs. Shameen Afsar
7. Mr. Taimur Amjad	
- To transact any other business with the permission of the chair.

REGISTERED OFFICE: On Behalf Of The Board
Crescent Cotton Mills Limited (Sami Ullah)
Nishatabad, Faisalabad Company Secretary
Dated: April 17, 2026

TRUMP TOUTS 'BETTER THAN OBAMA' IRAN DEAL AS ISLAMABAD TALKS FACE UNCERTAINTY

■ 'IT WILL BE SOMETHING THAT THE ENTIRE WORLD WILL BE PROUD OF,' US PRESIDENT SAYS

■ IRANIAN FOREIGN MINISTRY SPOKESPERSON SAYS THERE IS CURRENTLY 'NO PLAN' FOR A SECOND ROUND OF NEGOTIATIONS WITH US

WASHINGTON/TEHRAN/ISLAMABAD
STAFF REPORT / AGENCIES

UNITED States President Donald Trump said on Monday that the new deal in the pipeline with Iran would be "far better" than the nuclear deal realised by former president Barack Obama and would "guarantee peace, security and safety" for everyone, adding that it was coming "relatively quickly".

Trump made the assertion in a post on Truth Social.

In another post, he said: "I read the fake news saying that I am under 'pressure' to make a deal. This is not true! I am under no pressure whatsoever, although, it will all happen, relatively quickly!"

He further said that the US Navy's blockade of the Strait of Hormuz would not be lifted until the deal was secured.

Meanwhile, Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian expressed deep mistrust towards the US, saying honouring commitments was essential for meaningful dialogue amid growing uncertainty over new peace talks.

In a post on X, Pezeshkian said, "Honouring commitments is the basis of meaningful dialogue. Deep historical mistrust in Iran toward the US government conduct remains, while unconstructive & contradic-



tory signals from American officials carry a bitter message; they seek Iran's surrender. Iranians do not submit to force."

Earlier, Pezeshkian said Iran would seek to end the war imposed on the country by the US and the Israeli regime while preserving national honour.

Emphasising the importance of managing wartime conditions intelligently, the president said, "Today, we are endeavouring to manage these difficult circumstances through prudence, wisdom, and the preservation of national honour, so that we may subsequently focus on reconstruction and problem-solving through precise planning."

Pezeshkian made the remarks during a visit to a fire station, where he expressed gratitude for the efforts of firefighters and emergency personnel, particularly during the 40-day war.

During the visit, the president received a briefing on the services provided by firefighting units to the public throughout the war.

Referring to the economic and social consequences of the conflict, Pezeshkian said, "It is natural that after the conclusion of hostilities, the country will face challenges in reconstruction, securing financial resources, and market control."

» CONTINUED ON PAGE 03

Islamabad locked down, offices, schools move online as Red Zone sealed ahead of US-Iran talks

ISLAMABAD
STAFF REPORT

Islamabad police on Monday rolled out an updated traffic and security plan ahead of the expected arrival of foreign delegations in the federal capital, as authorities sealed off the Red Zone and shifted government operations within the area to remote working arrangements ahead of the anticipated second round of US-Iran talks.

According to an official notification, all ministries, divisions, and federal government offices located within the Red Zone will operate from home on Monday, April 20. However, officers and secretariat staff have been directed to remain on standby and report to office at short notice if required. The Cabinet Secretariat issued the directive late Sunday night.

Separately, the Islamabad Capital Territory District Magistrate Irfan Nawaz Memon announced that entry into the Red Zone will remain suspended on April 20, ordering all public and private offices and schools within the area to adopt work-from-home arrangements to avoid inconvenience.

» CONTINUED ON PAGE 03

Pakistan intensifies diplomacy as Dar urges continued Iran-US engagement

ISLAMABAD
STAFF REPORT

Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Ishaq Dar on Monday stressed the importance of sustained engagement and dialogue during a telephone conversation with his Iranian counterpart Abbas Araghchi, as uncertainty continues to surround a potential second round of US-Iran talks in Islamabad, the Foreign Office said.

In a post on X, the Foreign Office confirmed that FM Dar held a telephonic conversation with the Iranian foreign minister.

During the call, Dar emphasised the need for continued dialogue and early engagement to resolve outstanding issues and promote regional peace and stability. Both sides agreed to remain closely engaged moving forward. The Iranian side, in its own statement, said the two ministers discussed regional developments and ceasefire-related matters, exchanging views on ongoing coordination. Pakistan's diplomatic outreach gains traction Earlier, Australian Foreign Minister Penny Wong appreciated Pakistan's "constructive role" in facilitating dialogue and its continued commitment to diplomatic engagement during a telephone call with Ishaq Dar.

» CONTINUED ON PAGE 03

Two police martyred, including woman constable, in Khuzdar shootout

QUETTA
STAFF REPORT

At least two police personnel, including a woman constable, were martyred and three others sustained injuries in a fierce exchange of fire with terrorists in Balochistan's Khuzdar district on Monday, a senior police official said. According to Khuzdar Additional Superintendent of Police (ASP) Abdul Qudus, the incident occurred in Bajoi, a remote mountainous town located about 35 kilometres from Khuzdar city, when police came under attack during a search operation following a robbery complaint. He said police were conducting house-to-house searches in the area when armed terrorists, believed to be holed up nearby, opened fire on the team. The martyrs were identified as woman police constable Malik Naz and Head Constable Sami Ullah, both residents of Khuzdar district. The ASP said the woman constable was part of the search team due to the nature of the operation involving house searches. "This is the first incident of its kind in which a woman constable was targeted during a search operation," ASP Qudus said. No group has so far claimed responsibility for the attack. The ASP added that the area is extremely remote, and police along with other law enforcement agencies have launched a search operation to track down and arrest the attackers.

Government condemns attack, vows action Provincial Home Minister Ziaullah Langove lauded the bravery and sacrifice of the martyred personnel, pledging that the attackers would be brought to justice. "The sacrifices of police personnel in the fight against terrorism are a matter of pride for the nation," he said in a statement, adding that terrorists targeting law enforcement agencies would not be spared under any circumstances.

PM pays tribute to martyred woman constable Meanwhile, Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif paid rich tribute to Balochistan Police woman constable Malik Naz Baloch, who embraced martyrdom while performing her duty during the operation in Khuzdar.

Naqvi meets Iran, US envoys to discuss preparations as 'uncertainty clouds 2nd round of Islamabad Talks'

ISLAMABAD
STAFF REPORT

Pakistan on Monday intensified efforts to facilitate a second round of "Islamabad Talks" between the United States and Iran, as Interior Minister Mohsin Naqvi held separate meetings with the two countries' envoys amid "lingering uncertainty over whether the negotiations will proceed."

Uncertainty persisted over the planned second round, with mixed signals emerging from Tehran even as Islamabad continued preparations to host the talks.

Naqvi's stepped-up diplomatic engagement comes as Pakistan positions itself to host what officials describe as a "possible second round" of negotiations, following an inconclusive first round.

According to separate statements issued by the Interior Min-



istry, Naqvi met US Charge d'Affaires Natalie Baker and Iran's Ambassador to Pakistan Reza Amiri Moghadam to review arrangements and regional developments.

In his meeting with the Iranian envoy, Naqvi said Pakistan had completed preparations for the talks and ensured "foolproof" security arrangements for all foreign

delegations. However, Tehran said earlier on Monday that it had yet to decide whether to send a delegation, and no formal confirmation of the talks has been issued.

Both sides underscored the need for a sustainable diplomatic solution to ease tensions, the ministry said.

» CONTINUED ON PAGE 03

KP Assembly backs Islamabad Talks, urges diplomacy for regional peace

PESHAWAR
SALEEM JADOON

The Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Assembly on Monday unanimously passed a resolution in support of the "Islamabad Talks," reiterating its backing for peace and diplomacy and terming the US-Iran negotiations in Islamabad an

important opportunity for "regional peace and stability."

The resolution, jointly presented by both opposition and government members, called for the promotion of peace, stability and regional cooperation, and paid tribute to the foreign policy vision of former prime minister Imran Khan.

According to the text of the resolution, Pakistan's role in the Doha Process under the Imran Khan government was acknowledged, while the Kartarpur Corridor was described as a landmark initiative. The House further stated that peace talks in Islamabad represent the only viable path to lasting peace.

Four terrorists neutralized, police officer martyred in two KP IBOs

RAWALPINDI
STAFF REPORT

Four terrorists, including two highly wanted commanders, were neutralized and one police officer was martyred in two separate intelligence-based operations in Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa, officials confirmed on Monday.

In a statement, the Inter-Services Public Relations (ISPR), the military's media wing, said, "On 19 April 2026, an intelligence based operation was conducted by Security Forces in Bannu District on reported presence of khwarij."

"During conduct of the operation, after intense exchange of fire, two khwarij, belonging to Indian sponsored Fitna al-Khwarij, including Kharji Ringleader Waheedullah alias Mukhtar along with a suicide bomber were sent to hell," the ISPR said, adding that a suicide jacket, weapons and ammunition were also recovered from killed khwarij.

The state uses the term Fitna al-Khwarij for the terrorists belonging to the banned Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP). The ISPR said that the terrorist ring leader Waheedullah was "amongst the most wanted terrorists" due to his involvement in multiple terrorist activities, including attacks that led to the "martyrdom of security forces personnel and innocent civilians". According to the statement, he was also the main handler of a suicide bomber in Bannu District on February 21, an attack in which Lieutenant Colonel Gul Faraz was martyred.

The ISPR further said the operation had "indeed avenged the heinous act and brought the main perpetrator to justice", adding that the "timely action of security forces also averted a major catastrophe". It added that a sanitisation operation is being conducted in the area to eliminate any remaining terrorists. It added that Pakistan's "relentless counter-terrorism campaign under the vision Azm-e-Istehkam", approved by the Federal Apex Committee on the National Action Plan, will continue at full pace.

EU backs Pakistan's peace push as world awaits US-Iran talks in Islamabad

ISLAMABAD
SALEEM JADOON

European Council President Antonio Costa on Monday voiced optimism about a potential breakthrough in US-Iran negotiations, telling Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif that the "world is anticipating with great expectation" the next round of the "Islamabad Talks."

According to a statement issued by the Prime Minister's Office (PMO), the two leaders spoke over the phone and exchanged views on the evolving situation in the Middle East, with PM Shehbaz briefing the European Union leadership on its ongoing diplomatic outreach and peace efforts.

Costa praised Pakistan's "constructive role" in facilitating dialogue between Washington and Tehran, and said the European Union was ready to support the process "in every possible manner," the statement said.

Both leaders underscored the need to sustain dialogue and diplomacy to ensure lasting regional and global security, agreeing

to remain in close contact as efforts for a second round of talks gather momentum.

Later, in a post on X, Costa said it was a "pleasure" speaking with the Pakistani premier, expressing "sincere gratitude" for Islamabad's "tireless efforts" to promote peace and stability.

He added that the world was "watching with great expectation" the next meeting between the United States and Iran, which he said should take place in Islamabad at the earliest opportunity.

"We hope that an agreement will be reached to bring an end to the conflict and lead to the full reopening of the Strait of Hormuz. The European Union supports all ongoing efforts towards peace in the Middle East," Costa said.

Prime Minister Shehbaz welcomed the EU's appreciation of Pakistan's diplomatic role and its readiness to back continued engagement, reaffirming Islamabad's commitment to dialogue as the only viable path to regional peace and stability.

Last month, Costa had similarly reiterated the EU's support for Pakistan's peace efforts, emphasising that only sustained diplomacy could help de-escalate tensions in the region.

Talks amid fragile momentum The diplomatic outreach comes after 40 days of airstrikes, following which US and Iranian negotiators opened talks in Islamabad earlier this month, focusing once again on the core trade-off between nuclear restrictions and economic relief.

During their most recent engagement, the United States proposed a 20-year suspension of Iran's nuclear activities, while Tehran countered with a shorter halt of three to five years, according to officials familiar with the discussions.

Although formal negotiations are yet to fully commence, US President Donald Trump said earlier that Vice President JD Vance and an American delegation were expected in Pakistan for talks, expressing confidence that a deal could be reached swiftly

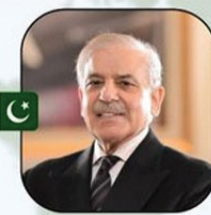
and indicating willingness to meet Iranian leaders if progress is made.

However, Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian struck a more cautious tone, voicing deep mistrust toward Washington and stressing that honouring commitments would

be essential for any meaningful agreement.

Diplomats say a preliminary framework may be achievable, potentially built around a nuclear package and an economic package, though the nuclear component remains the most contentious.

Telephone Conversation



Prime Minister of Pakistan
MUHAMMAD SHEHBAZ SHARIF



President of the European Council
H.E. ANTONIO COSTA



PAKISTAN IN ADVANCED TALKS WITH QATAR FOR FOUR LNG CARGOES AMID POWER SHORTFALL

■ AT LEAST THREE LNG CARGOES BOUND FOR PAKISTAN ARE CURRENTLY STRANDED IN PERSIAN GULF AS CLOSURE OF STRAIT OF HORMUZ CONTINUES TO DISRUPT SUPPLY

PROFIT
MONITORING DESK

PAKISTAN is in advanced discussions with Qatar to secure at least four liquefied natural gas (LNG) cargoes, with potential shipments expected to pass through the Strait of Hormuz within days, according to officials, Dawn reported.

The move comes as the power division has requested around 400 million cubic feet

per day of LNG to meet electricity demand, amid rising load-shedding concerns ahead of summer.

According to Bloomberg's vessel-tracking data, at least three LNG cargoes bound for Pakistan are currently stranded in the Persian Gulf as the closure of the Strait of Hormuz continues to disrupt supply.

LNG imports had been disrupted last month after the closure of the Strait of Hormuz following US-Israel strikes on Iran, which led to regional tensions and Qatar de-

claring force majeure on its LNG contracts, including those with Pakistan.

Officials said Pakistan has approached Qatar at a high level to secure cargoes, with technical teams from both sides working on arrangements. Several LNG shipments are believed to be stranded near the Hormuz chokepoint.

QatarEnergy had declared force majeure on March 4 following an attack on an LNG facility, disrupting supply arrangements with Pakistan.

Despite the shortfall, load shedding has eased in recent days due to higher hydropower generation, supported by increased water releases from Tarbela Dam of up to 30,000 cusecs.

Officials said LNG import schedules are expected to normalise once QatarEnergy lifts force majeure conditions and shipping routes stabilise.

The power division warned that without adequate RLNG supply, reliance on alternative fuels such as high-speed diesel could in-

crease generation costs and extend load management hours.

Pakistan's LNG-based power plants, with a combined capacity of around 6,000MW, are considered essential for meeting peak demand and maintaining grid stability.

Officials noted that electricity demand is expected to rise further with the onset of summer, making RLNG availability critical for uninterrupted and cost-effective power generation.

Transparency seeks cancellation of SNGPL tender, alleges 'mis-procurement' and rule violations

■ WATCHDOG URGES PPRA TO DECLARE MIS-PROCUREMENT, CITES EXCLUSION OF LOCAL BIDDERS AND RULE BREACHES

PROFIT
MONITORING DESK

Transparency International Pakistan (TIP) has raised concerns over alleged violations of procurement rules by Sui Northern Gas Pipelines Limited (SNGPL) in a recent tender, calling for the process to be declared "mis-procurement" and the contract to be cancelled, according to a news report.

In a letter to the Public Procurement Regulatory Authority (PPRA), TIP highlighted irregularities in Tender No. SNC-1930/25 related to the procurement of air intake filter elements and pre-filter stocks.

The tender, which closed on October 28, 2025, saw one bidder, M/s Qaim, declared non-responsive due to discrepancies in documentation and alleged non-compliance with specified requirements.

The firm challenged the decision before the Grievance Redressal Committee and later approached PPRA, which observed that the procurement appeared to be structured for foreign bidders.

TIP said this raises legal concerns, noting that limiting participation to foreign suppliers may violate the Public Procurement Rules 2004 and undermine policies supporting local industry.

The organisation stated that such actions fall under Rule 50 of the PPRA Rules, which defines unauthorised breaches of procurement procedures as mis-procurement.

It added that Rule 24 requires fair competition and encourages preference for domestic suppliers, while relevant policies mandate value addition or price preference for local manufacturers.

TIP also criticised PPRA for not formally declaring the case as mis-procurement despite identifying irregularities.

The watchdog recommended that the tender be cancelled and re-issued in line

with procurement laws, and called for enforcement of Integrity Pact provisions in case violations are confirmed.

It further urged action against officials responsible for the alleged irregularities under applicable laws.

The letter has been shared with multiple authorities, including the Prime Minister's Office, Petroleum Division, National Accountability Bureau, and Federal Investigation Agency.

TIP said it acted as a whistleblower organisation in the matter, emphasising the need for transparency and compliance with procurement rules.

Pakistan's shipping activity remains uninterrupted despite Hormuz tensions

PNSC vessels *Sargodha*, *Shalimar*, *Lahore* handle crude as port processes 80,000 tonnes cargo

PROFIT
NEWS DESK

Shipping activity in Pakistan has remained uninterrupted despite tensions in the Strait of Hormuz, with oil tankers continuing to arrive and discharge fuel supplies at Karachi port.

As per reports, the Pakistan National Shipping Company's tanker MT Sargodha has already unloaded crude oil from Fujairah, while two more vessels, MT Shalimar and MT Lahore, are expected to berth to discharge additional shipments.

Another vessel, MT Martini, is scheduled to dock to load surplus fuel oil produced locally. Port operations also included other tankers such as MT Hafnia Henriette and MT Wan HE, which berthed to load naphtha and ethanol, while MT Eva Gold departed after loading ethanol cargo.

Karachi port handled over 60,554 tonnes of containerised cargo, including 58,366 tonnes of imports and 2,188 tonnes of exports. Two ships also offloaded 1,388 tonnes of imported soybean meal. Export activity included shipments of 611 tonnes of rice by three vessels, bringing total cargo handling across liquid, dry and bulk segments to around 80,000 tonnes on Sunday. Authorities said 19 cargo ships are expected to berth at the port on Monday, indicating continued shipping activity despite regional disruptions.

Jazz International launches public offer for 6.67% stake in TPL Insurance at Rs30 per share

Offer follows 53.81% acquisition deal, total takeover to exceed 60% stake

PROFIT
NEWS DESK

Jazz International Holding Limited has announced a public offer to acquire up to 6.67% additional shares of TPL Insurance Limited at a price of Rs30 per share, following its agreement to acquire a majority stake in the company. According to a stock filing by Arif Habib Limited, Manager to the Offer, on Monday, the offer covers 13.24 million ordinary shares and is being made under Pakistan's takeover regulations, with Jazzworld Pakistan Limited acting as a person acting in concert.

The development follows a share purchase agreement signed on March 5, 2026, under which Jazz International is acquiring 53.81% stake in TPL Insurance from TPL Corporation, representing 106.89 million shares at the same offer price. Additional stakes held by FinnFund and DEG, amounting to 32.85% combined, are being acquired separately through private arrangements and are not part of the public offer. Under regulatory requirements, the acquirer is obligated to offer minority shareholders an opportunity to sell shares, resulting in the current public offer for 6.67% of the company. The transaction structure indicates that Jazz International's total holding in TPL Insurance could exceed 60% following completion of the acquisition and public offer. Arif Habib Limited is acting as manager to the offer and has submitted due diligence certification to the Securities and Exchange Commission of Pakistan. The public announcement extends an earlier intention disclosed in September 2025, with a subsequent addendum in December and a timeline extension pushing the offer date to June 5, 2026. Jazz International, incorporated in the UAE in 2025, currently does not hold any shares in the target company prior to this transaction. The move marks a significant ownership transition in TPL Insurance and reflects ongoing activity in Pakistan's capital markets under takeover regulations.

SECP disburses Rs1.19b in salaries, benefits with retrospective effect over 16 months

■ RS579 MILLION PAID AS ARREARS, RS612 MILLION ALLOCATED TO PENSION, GRATUITY FUNDS UNDER BOARD APPROVAL

PROFIT
MONITORING DESK

The Securities and Exchange Commission of Pakistan (SECP) disbursed Rs1.191 billion to its chairman, commissioners, senior officials and staff over a 16-month period, with payments made retrospectively following approval by its policy board, The News reported.

The payments, covering the period from July 1, 2023 to October 31, 2024, included salaries, perks, privileges and other benefits, along with allocations to gratuity, pension and trust funds. According to official data, Rs579.139 million was paid as salary arrears, while Rs612.054 million was transferred to gratuity and pension-related funds.

Breakdown of payments shows that the chairman and three members received Rs65.559 million, nine execu-

tive directors Rs68.787 million, and 16 directors Rs87.046 million.

In addition, 33 directors received Rs135.123 million, 32 joint directors Rs56.391 million, 58 additional joint directors Rs68.541 million, 42 deputy directors Rs25.142 million, and 55 assistant directors Rs18.296 million.

Other disbursements included Rs398,481 to three management executives and Rs53.839 million to 140 staff members. The development came to light following concerns raised in the Senate regarding financial practices of public entities.

In response, the SECP spokesperson said the payments were made after a salary benchmarking exercise conducted by KPMG to align compensation with market standards.

The regulator stated that the proposal was approved by its policy board,

which is the competent authority under the SECP Act, 1997, to approve budgetary and financial decisions.

The SECP said Rs579 million was disbursed as arrears for the 16-month period, while Rs612 million was allocated to trust funds maintained for employee retirement benefits.

It added that approvals from external authorities were not required, as the policy board holds statutory authority over such matters.

The regulator also said information was shared with oversight bodies, including parliamentary committees, as required under relevant procedures. On audit status, the SECP said the matter has not yet been taken up at the Departmental Accounts Committee level, adding that audit observations are addressed through established mechanisms with the Auditor General of Pakistan.

Record 165 GW of wind power capacity added in 2025, led by China, report says

■ ASIA INSTALLS 131 GW, 80% OF GLOBAL TOTAL, CHINA ADDS RECORD 120.5 GW, EUROPE COMMISSIONS 19 GW

LONDON
REUTERS

The global wind industry installed a record 165 gigawatts of new capacity last year, up 40% from 2024 and mostly driven by China, a report by the Global Wind Energy Council said, adding this still lagged the pace needed to hit a key climate goal.

Renewable power made up almost half the world's total electricity capacity last year. This year, oil and gas prices have soared due to conflict in the Middle East and countries are looking for alternatives to meet rising energy demand. The rise in wind capacity installation was driven by strong demand

for new onshore wind, which rose by 42% to 155.3 GW, the GWEC said, while new offshore wind rose by 18% to 9 GW.

Asia, led by China and India, commissioned 131 GW of new capacity, which was 80% of the global total. China made up the bulk of that, adding a record 120.5 GW of new wind capacity. Europe was the second-highest region for installations, commissioning 19 GW of new capacity.

The U.S., despite the anti-wind rhetoric of the current administration, added nearly 7 GW of onshore wind last year. As a result of the new additions, cumulative global wind capacity increased to nearly 1.3 terawatts last year.

To meet a global goal to triple renewable energy capacity by the end of the decade, the International Renewable Energy Agency has said 320 GW of new wind capacity needs to be installed every year.

Therefore, new wind capacity needs to be doubled annually from the current level, the GWEC said.

But under current policies, the GWEC estimates a total of 969 GW of new capacity is expected to be added worldwide by 2030, averaging 194 GW per year. "Under all the scenarios that stay close to the 1.5 C global warming target, wind energy volumes need to undergo a dramatic and global expansion in the next few years," it added.

Cotton sector questions FCA target of 9.64m bales for 2026-27

PROFIT
MONITORING DESK

Pakistan's cotton sector has raised concerns over the Federal Committee on Agriculture's production target of 9.64 million bales for 2026-27, calling it inconsistent with recent output trends. Industry representatives said the target-setting process lacks alignment with ground realities, noting that crop estimates are fixed without comprehensive data or stakeholder consultation, leading to gaps between projections and actual production. According to data from the Pakistan Cotton Ginners' Association, the 2025-26 target of 10.2 million bales resulted in production of around 5.6 million bales, while previous seasons also recorded significant shortfalls. Stakeholders said the continued gap between targets and output has created uncertainty, particularly for importers who rely on accurate estimates to plan procurement strategies. They added that the absence of a clear revival strategy and weak enforcement of crop zoning policies remain key challenges for the sector. Industry representatives also pointed to the expansion of sugarcane cultivation, especially in south Punjab, which has reduced land available for cotton. They said unrealistic targets without policy measures could increase reliance on imports of cotton and edible oil, adding pressure on the external account. Stakeholders called for realistic production estimates, stronger enforcement of zoning laws and policy support to improve domestic output.

PSX plunges over 1,700 points as US-Iran tensions shatter ceasefire optimism

■ KSE-100 DROPS 1%, BROAD-BASED SELLING HITS ALL SECTORS AS GLOBAL MARKETS REACT TO RENEWED ESCALATION

PROFIT
NEWS DESK

Bears dominated a volatile session on Monday, with the benchmark KSE-100 Index of the Pakistan Stock Exchange (PSX) plunging over 1,700 points during intraday trading, as investor concerns grew that the ceasefire between the United States and Iran may not hold after Washington said it had seized an Iranian cargo ship attempting to breach its blockade, igniting Tehran to vow retaliation.

According to PSX data, the market opened on a negative note, with the KSE-100 Index falling to 170,625.96, down

more than 3,300 points in early trading. The index later recovered some losses and gained over 300 points, but overall it remained under pressure.

Around midday, selling pressure intensified again, pushing the KSE-100 down to 169,226.56, a decline of 4,712.45 points by around 1:10 pm.

Selling was observed across major sectors, including automobile assemblers, automobile parts and accessories, cable and electrical goods, cement, commercial banks, fertilizer, oil and gas exploration companies, oil and gas marketing companies, power generation and distribution, and refineries.

At close, the KSE-100 settled at

172,196.70, down by 1,742.31 or 1% from the previous close.

Last week, the KSE-100 Index witnessed a strong turnaround and posted a gain of 6,748 points, or 4.0% week-on-week, to close at 173,939, supported by optimism around US-Iran ceasefire developments and easing regional tensions. However, brokerage firms warned that the KSE-100 Index is expected to remain driven by developments in US-Iran talks.

Today's downturn comes after the reports that the U.S. military fired on an Iranian-flagged cargo ship headed towards Iran's Bandar Abbas port on Sunday after a six-hour standoff, disabling its engines.

U.S. Marines then rappelled from helicopters onto the vessel, U.S. Central Command said. "We have full custody of their ship, and are seeing what's on board!" President Trump wrote on social media.

Iran's military said the ship had been travelling from China. "We warn that the armed forces of the Islamic Republic of Iran will soon respond and retaliate against this armed piracy by the U.S. military," a military spokesperson said, according to state media. Iran also rejected new peace talks with the U.S., its state news agency reported on Sunday, hours after U.S. President Donald Trump said he was sending envoys for talks in Pakistan and would launch new

strikes on Iran unless it accepts his terms.

The ceasefire in the Iran war is due to run until Tuesday.

The renewed tensions between the US and Iran impacted the global markets, and S&P 500 futures fell around 0.7%, a modest move considering the index notched a record closing high on Friday.

Asia-Pacific markets were mixed, with Australia's S&P/ASX 200 down 0.5% and Japan's benchmark Nikkei up 0.7%.

Bond markets, which rallied on Friday, retreated. Brent crude futures rose about 6% to \$95.36 a barrel. S&P 500 futures fell around 0.6%, and European futures fell 1.2%. But equity benchmarks in Seoul, Taipei and Tokyo shrugged off risks to advance, with Taiwan's shares touching a record high and the other two not far behind.

ISLAMABAD
AHMAD AHMADANI

PAKISTAN SIGNS IFC DEAL FOR NATIONWIDE SMART METER ROLLOUT

TRANSACTION ADVISORY SERVICES AGREEMENT TO ENABLE DEPLOYMENT OF ADVANCED SMART METERING INFRASTRUCTURE (AMI), CUT COSTS, REDUCE LOSSES, DIGITISE POWER DISTRIBUTION SYSTEM

In a significant development, the Ministry of Energy has signed a Transaction Advisory Services Agreement (TASA) with the International Finance Corporation (IFC), under which the global financial institution will serve as transaction advisor for the large-scale deployment of Advanced Smart Metering Infrastructure (AMI).

Under the agreement, the IFC will carry out a comprehensive techno-commercial assessment to structure a service-provider model or a public-private partnership framework for the initiative. The objective is to mobilize both local and international investors for the installation, operation, and maintenance of smart metering infrastructure across the country.

The Power Division, in a statement, said the move is part of a broader push led by Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif to digitize Pakistan's power distribution system and re-

place outdated infrastructure with modern, technology-driven solutions. The reform drive is aimed at improving operational efficiency, ensuring financial sustainability, and enhancing service delivery.

Advanced Smart Metering Infrastructure is being positioned as a cornerstone of this transformation. Smart meters are expected to provide real-time monitoring of electricity consumption, significantly reduce power theft through anomaly detection, im-

prove billing accuracy and recovery, and minimize human intervention to eliminate manual errors, said the Power Division.

The Power Division also said that the government has already achieved a major breakthrough by reducing the procurement cost of both single-phase and three-phase smart meters by 40 percent through an international competitive bidding process, resulting in substantial savings for the national exchequer and ultimately benefit-

ing consumers.

As part of implementation measures, all power distribution companies have been directed to install smart meters for every new electricity connection, effectively phasing out traditional meters for new applicants. Additionally, all existing three-phase meters—primarily used by commercial and industrial consumers—are to be converted into smart meters within a stipulated timeframe to ensure their inte-

gration into the digital grid.

To tackle the persistent issue of defective and faulty meters, the Ministry has worked closely with the National Electric Power Regulatory Authority. In its recent determinations on distribution companies' investment plans, NEPRA has allowed DISCOs to replace faulty meters with smart meters, accelerating the transition toward a fully digitalized power network, said the Power Division.

Pakistan intensifies diplomacy as Dar urges continued Iran-US engagement

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 01

According to the Foreign Office, Wong expressed appreciation for Dar's efforts in promoting dialogue between Tehran and Washington and commended Pakistan's sustained diplomatic role in encouraging engagement. "She commended Pakistan's continued commitment to promoting diplomatic engagement in this regard," the statement said. The Foreign Office added that Dar briefed the Australian foreign minister on the "Islamabad Talks" held on April 11-12 and reiterated Pakistan's resolve to continue encouraging dialogue and constructive engagement. Both sides expressed concern over broader implications for the global economy, particularly for developing countries, and stressed the importance of peaceful resolution of conflicts. Pakistan at centre of mediation efforts The Foreign Office noted that FM Dar has received growing international recognition for his diplomatic outreach, as Pakistan has positioned itself at the centre of high-level mediation efforts during the evolving Iran-US-Israel tensions. Over the past week, senior officials and influential voices from more than ten countries — including Saudi Arabia, Iran, the United States, China, Turkey, Azerbaijan, Bahrain, Uzbekistan, and Egypt — have acknowledged Pakistan's facilitation efforts in encouraging ceasefire-related dialogue. Meanwhile, Islamabad is preparing to host a second round of Iran-US talks after Washington confirmed that a high-level US delegation led by Vice President JD Vance is expected to arrive in Pakistan. Pakistan has emerged as a key facilitator in the sensitive diplomatic track, positioning itself as an "honest broker" amid sharply divided positions between Washington and Tehran.

Naqvi meets Iran, US envoys to discuss preparations as 'uncertainty clouds 2nd round of Islamabad Talks'

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 01

"Pakistan-Iran relations span decades, and we hold these brotherly ties in high esteem," Naqvi said, reiterating Islamabad's support for resolving the US-Iran conflict through dialogue. "A lasting solution is essential for regional peace and stability," he added. Senior Islamabad officials, including Chief Commissioner Sohail Ashraf, Inspector General of Police Ali Nasir Rizvi, and Deputy Commissioner Irfan Memon, attended the meeting. Earlier, Naqvi met Baker at the US Embassy in Islamabad's Diplomatic Enclave, where they discussed the regional situation and ways to strengthen Pakistan-US ties. He briefed the US envoy on security arrangements, stating that "special measures" had been put in place for visiting delegations. US President Donald Trump said on Sunday that American representatives would arrive in Islamabad for talks with Iran, raising expectations despite the uncertainty.

FBR suspends six customs officers in silver swap probe

PROFIT
NEWS DESK

The Federal Board of Revenue (FBR) has suspended six customs officers, including senior officials, after further investigation into the silver swap case revealed evidence of involvement, negligence and inefficiency. According to a statement issued on Sunday, those suspended include a Collector of Customs in BS-20, a deputy collector in BS-18, an assistant collector in BS-17 and three officials in BS-16. The FBR said a criminal investigation is in progress and individuals found directly involved will be charged under FIR No 01 dated April 13, 2026. It added that other beneficiaries identified in the case will also face legal action. To ensure an independent inquiry, three new officers have been posted to the Collectorate of Customs Enforcement in Quetta, replacing the previous team. A new Collector and Additional Collector have already taken charge. The FBR said it maintains a policy of zero tolerance for corruption and that disciplinary action will be taken against any official found involved, regardless of rank.

Trump touts 'better than Obama' Iran deal as Islamabad talks face uncertainty

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 01

These are realities that require meticulous management and public cooperation." He emphasised that overcoming these hardships would not be possible without public participation and solidarity.

VANCE-LED US TEAM EN ROUTE TO ISLAMABAD FOR IRAN TALKS: TRUMP: Trump said that Vice President JD Vance and a US delegation were set to land in Pakistan within hours for talks on Iran and asserted that a deal would be signed "today", adding that he would be willing to meet with Iranian leaders himself if progress was made.

Anadolu and Al Jazeera reported that Trump told Fox News that the Iran deal would be signed "today" in Pakistan. It was not immediately clear what timeframe he was referring to. Trump warned that if no deal was signed, he would "blow up every single power plant and bridge in Iran". Iran has neither confirmed the claim nor announced a decision to send a delegation to Islamabad. However, Pakistani sources told the New York Post that Tehran was "willing for a second round" but that "no decision has been taken about" it.

In an interview with the New York Post, Trump said that he would be willing to meet with Iranian leaders himself if progress was made. Trump said negotiations with Iran were expected to proceed, expressing confidence that talks would not collapse despite lingering uncertainty.

"We're supposed to have the talks," Trump said in a brief interview, brushing aside doubts about whether negotiations would fall apart. "So I would assume at this point nobody's playing games."

He confirmed that a high-level US delegation — including JD Vance, special envoy Steve Witkoff and adviser Jared Kushner — was already en route to Islamabad for the next round of negotiations.

"They're heading over now," Trump said shortly after 9 am EST. "They'll be there tonight, [Islamabad] time."

However, according to a source familiar with the matter, Vance is in the US and has not departed for Pakistan. It was not clear when he might travel, or whether other members of a US delegation were en route or already in Islamabad for talks.

Trump also signalled openness to a potential face-to-face meeting with the Iranian leadership if an opportunity arose.

"I have no problem meeting them," he said. "If they want to meet, and we have some very capable people, but I have no problem meeting them."

At the centre of the negotiations, Trump said, was a firm US demand that Iran abandon any pursuit of nuclear weapons. "Get rid of their nuclear weapons. That's all very simple," he said. "There will be no nuclear weapon."

He added that Iran could prosper if it complies with this condition.

"Otherwise, a wonderful country — it truly could be," Trump said.

However, Trump declined to outline potential consequences if Tehran refused to comply or if talks collapsed, particularly as the ceasefire deadline approached.

"Well, I don't want to get into that with you," he said when asked whether the US would escalate measures, such as seizing additional ships tied to Iran. "You can imagine. It wouldn't be pretty." Asked whether Washington was confident about its counterparts in Tehran, Trump said: "We have pretty good ideas, and we think we're dealing with the right people."

Later, in a post on Truth Social, Trump said Israel had not persuaded him to go to war with Iran, stating that "the results of October 7, added to my lifelong opinion that Iran can never have a nuclear weapon", were responsible for his decision. "I watch and read the fake news pundits and polls in total disbelief. Ninety per cent of what they say is lies and made-up stories, and the polls are rigged, much as the 2020 presidential election was rigged," he wrote. "Just like the results in Venezuela, which the media doesn't like talking about, the results in Iran will be amazing - and if Iran's new leaders (Regime Change!) are smart, Iran can have a great and prosperous future," he added.

IRAN WILL NOT ACCEPT ANYTHING BEYOND INTERNATIONAL LAW: DEPUTY FOREIGN MINISTER: Iran's Deputy Foreign Minister Saeed Khatibzadeh said Tehran would not accept any terms beyond international law in its dealings with the US.

Speaking in an interview with state broadcaster IRIB, Khatibzadeh said: "Time should not place Iran under pressure."

He added that Iranian officials, including Parliament Speaker Mohammad Bagher Ghaalibaf and Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi, have already presented what he described as "fair and practical

proposals" within the framework of Iran's legal rights. Khatibzadeh also said many statements by US officials were aimed at domestic audiences and influencing markets, rather than reflecting a consistent policy approach. He stressed that Iran's strategy was not shaped by US rhetoric, whether positive or negative, and reiterated that Tehran "would not accept anything beyond international law." The deputy minister also emphasised that diplomacy remained the only viable path to resolving crises, calling on the United States to abandon what he described as a "maximalist approach" and engage with Iran on the basis of mutual respect.

'POSITIVE DEVELOPMENT SOON': Pakistan is expecting "positive development soon" regarding the Strait of Hormuz following a call from the Chief of Army Staff and Chief of Defence Force, Field Marshal Asim Munir, to Trump, Pakistani government sources told Anadolu on Monday with the request of anonymity.

The intense diplomatic efforts by Islamabad come to smooth the way for the second round of talks between the US and Iran, expected any time soon in the Pakistani capital. "We expect positive development soon," sources said, referring to a phone call by Field Marshal Munir with Trump during which they discussed the Pakistani mediation process and the US blockade of the Strait of Hormuz.

PRESIDENT PEZESHKIAN STRESSES IMPORTANCE OF DIPLOMACY WHILE NOTING DISTRUST OF US: Earlier, Pezeshkian said that every rational and diplomatic path should be used to reduce tensions with the US, but added that vigilance and distrust in interactions with Washington were an "undeniable necessity", according to the state news agency IRNA.

A two-week ceasefire between Iran and the US is set to expire on Wednesday, with US representatives set to reach Islamabad for Iran negotiations on Monday while Tehran has yet to announce whether it will send a delegation to Pakistan.

Iranian state TV quoted an unnamed informed source as saying there were no plans for a second round of negotiations due to the US' "excessive and irrational" demands as well as its changing stances.

The adversaries are at loggerheads over the Strait of Hormuz, where Iran tight-

ened control over maritime transit as the US continues to blockade Iranian ports and on Sunday took custody of a vessel trying to get past the American blockade.

Both Iran and the US have accused each other of violating the ceasefire. Pezeshkian said the US blockade showed that Washington was moving toward "repeating previous patterns and betraying diplomacy", according to state TV.

IRAN RULES OUT SECOND ROUND OF US TALKS 'FOR NOW': Iranian Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Esmail Baghaei has said on Monday there is currently "no plan" for a second round of negotiations with the US as the US is "not serious" about pursuing the diplomatic process, committed "violent acts" and violated ceasefire provisions.

He said during a news conference that US proposals have been "unserious" and its demands "unrealistic", adding that Tehran has clearly stated their demands and won't change them. "We do not believe in deadlines or ultimatums when it comes to safeguarding Iran's national interests."

On the topic of nuclear stockpiles, Baghaei said that removing the stockpile was "never an option in negotiations" as "Tehran's definitive position is to preserve nuclear achievements within its territory."

Baghaei stated that the US has violated talks and negotiations twice, attacked Iran, killed Iranian people and attacked infrastructure, according to Al Jazeera. Differences over Iran's nuclear programme still remain, a senior Iranian source told Reuters on Monday, as Iran and the United States try to reach a lasting peace with the two-week ceasefire ending soon.

The senior Iranian source said that Tehran's "defensive capabilities", including its missile programme, are not open to negotiation with the United States.

"Continuation of the US blockade on the Strait of Hormuz undermines the peace talks," the source said. Regarding the targeting of an Indian vessel, Baghaei stated that the Iranian institutions are investigating whether it was targeted by Iran's forces.

China voices concern over US seizure of Iranian cargo ship, urges further talks China has expressed concern over the "forced interception" by the US of an Iranian-flagged cargo ship, a Chinese foreign ministry spokesperson said on Monday, urging relevant parties to abide by the ceasefire agreement in a responsible manner.

Islamabad locked down, offices, schools move online as Red Zone sealed ahead of US-Iran talks

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 01

An Islamabad Police spokesperson said licensing services will continue only at Police Facilitation Centres in F-6, Gulberg Greens, and the Diplomatic Enclave, while other centres, including the Faizabad Traffic Headquarters, will remain closed until further notice.

Citizens have been advised to follow official advisories and stay updated through Islamabad Traffic Police WhatsApp channels, social media platforms, and ITP FM 92.4.

TRANSPORT DISRUPTED ACROSS TWIN CITIES: On Sunday, authorities suspended heavy and public transport across Islamabad, with Rawalpindi Deputy Commissioner Hassan Waqar Cheema also confirming a similar ban on all private, public, and goods transport services as a precautionary measure.

The sweeping restrictions severely disrupted daily life in Islamabad and Rawalpindi, where passengers were left stranded at bus terminals. Many travellers turned to railway stations as an alternative.

Railway services came under pressure due to increased demand, with heavy crowds reported at stations. The Karachi-to-Peshawar Khyber Mail was delayed by three hours, although passengers continued to arrive in large numbers. The Metro Bus Authority also announced the complete suspension of the Red Metro Bus Service from Saddar Station in Rawalpindi to Pak Secretariat Station in Islamabad until further notice.

SECURITY TIGHTENED FOR HIGH-LEVEL DIPLOMACY: Authorities said the measures are part of comprehensive security arrangements for the expected diplomatic engagement, aimed at ensuring safety and maintaining order

during high-level talks.

Security has been significantly tightened across the capital, with Islamabad Police personnel barred from using mobile phones while on duty and instructed to wear anti-riot gear. Islamabad Police, Pakistan Rangers, and the Frontier Corps will jointly man checkpoints. Around 18,000 personnel, including reinforcements from Punjab, have been deployed, with elite commandos, snipers, and rapid response units placed on high alert. Rawalpindi Police have also been placed on high alert, deploying over 10,000 personnel and establishing more than 600 special pickets. Senior officers, including SSP Operations Malik Tariq Mehboob, are supervising field operations.

MOVEMENT RESTRICTIONS AND CLOSURES: Authorities have ordered the complete closure of hostels, hotels, and guest houses in sensitive areas, with legal action warned for violations. Closure of seminars near high-security zones is also under consideration.

The Red Zone and Extended Red Zone remain fully closed to all traffic. The Islamabad Expressway between Koral and Zero Point has also been shut, while Srinagar Highway may be closed intermittently.

Heavy traffic entry into Islamabad from all directions has been prohibited. Alternative traffic routes have been designated for residents of G-5, G-6, G-7, F-6, and F-7 via Ninth Avenue and Margalla Road, while multiple diversions have been issued for commuters between Islamabad and Rawalpindi, including routes via Korang Road, Bani Gala, Murree Road, and Rawal Road.

Heavy traffic between GT Road and Peshawar or Lahore will be diverted via Taxila Motorway, Chakri Interchange, Chak Beli Road, and Rawat GT Road. Citizens have been

advised to strictly follow diversion plans and stay updated through official police channels.

MOTORWAYS PARTIALLY CLOSED: Several motorways leading to Islamabad, including M1, M2, and M3, have been closed for public transport, though they remain open for private vehicles.

A spokesperson for the Lahore administration confirmed that the M2 Lahore-Islamabad motorway has been restricted for public transport only, following federal government instructions for "foolproof security arrangements." Officials said similar restrictions apply to M1 and M3 motorways.

DIPLOMATIC BACKDROP: Security arrangements have intensified ahead of the anticipated second round of US-Iran talks in Islamabad.

Pakistan previously hosted the first round of direct US-Iran negotiations on April 11-12, which ended without agreement but without collapse, while the two-week ceasefire brokered earlier remains in place and set to expire on April 22. US President Donald Trump earlier signalled optimism over ongoing diplomatic efforts, though tensions persist over key issues including maritime security and the Strait of Hormuz. Iran has meanwhile maintained its position on regional maritime access and sanctions-related disputes.

POWER SUPPLY ASSURED: Meanwhile, the Islamabad Electric Supply Company (IESCO) has assured uninterrupted electricity supply during the diplomatic engagements. IESCO Chief Executive Officer Engineer Chaudhry Khalid Mahmood said grid stations and feeders are being monitored round the clock and staff have been fully mobilised.

CPD/2026/T-049

BOP THE BANK OF PUNJAB

Procurement of Branch / Office Network Switches

Technical and financial bids on the "Single Stage-Two Envelope Bidding Process" are invited from well reputed organizations/companies for the "Procurement of Branch / Office Network Switches" as per the following details: -

- Bid documents are immediately available at E-Pads portal (<https://punjab.eprocure.gov.pk/>) and the PPRA website after this publication and may be obtained/downloaded free of cost.
- Bids will be Uploaded/Submitted on E-Pads Portal till **07-May-2026 (11:00 am)**. Technical Bids will be opened by a Committee on the same day i.e. **07-May-2026 at 11:30 am**, in the presence of bidders or their authorized representatives who wish to attend the bid opening process.
- Financial Bids of only technically qualified bidders shall be opened on a date/time to be announced subsequently.
- Bids shall be Uploaded/Submitted through E-Pads Portal only.
- The bid security minimum 2% of the estimated cost must be submitted to Head CPD before submission time in the form of Call Deposit Receipt (CDR)UC in favor of The Bank of Punjab. While copy is to be uploaded on E-Pads as a part of Technical Bids.
- Prices must be quoted inclusive of all applicable taxes and delivery charges.
- Valid NTN and GST Registration Certificates are required with the bids.
- This Tender Notice is uploaded on website of PPRA (www.ppra.punjab.gov.pk), BOP (www.bop.com.pk) and E-Pads portal (<https://punjab.eprocure.gov.pk/>).
- The Bank will not be responsible for any cost incurred in the submission of documents.

Customers can file complaints via SBP's 'Sunwai' service at <https://sunwai.sbp.org.pk>.

Head Centralized Procurement
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Peace, not posturing

PAKISTAN is doing something few states can do at this moment. It is speaking to Washington, maintaining working credibility in Tehran, and retaining enough trust in Beijing to matter in a crisis that has already damaged diplomacy, trade and regional stability. Islamabad's role in bringing the United States and Iran into direct contact has been real and significant. The first round of talks in Islamabad on April 11 and 12 did not produce an agreement, but they did establish a channel at a moment when the alternative was a wider war.

That is why the most dangerous obstacle now is not a lack of mediation. It is the return of public brinkmanship. The latest signals have been contradictory and corrosive. Iran says it has not decided whether to attend the next round. President Donald Trump said an American delegation was heading to Islamabad, while a Reuters source said Vice President JD Vance had not yet left the United States. At the same time, both sides have continued to trade accusations over ceasefire violations, naval actions and the blockade on Iranian ports. Diplomacy cannot move forward if every opening is followed by a threat, a denial or a public test of resolve.

This is where Pakistan's diplomacy matters most. Its value lies not only in hosting talks, but in reducing mistrust long enough for talks to become serious. Pakistan has lines into all the capitals that matter. It has a security relationship with the United States, a strategic partnership with China and a border, history and sustained channel with Iran. Few countries can combine those relationships without appearing captive to one side. That gives Islamabad leverage, but it also imposes discipline. The task now is to keep the process alive, lower the temperature and push all parties back toward a table that none of them can afford to abandon.

The strategic logic is plain. War has exhausted everyone. Iran is under pressure. The United States is managing escalation without a clear political end state. The region is absorbing the economic shock, and the world is already feeling the consequences through energy insecurity and shipping risk around the Strait of Hormuz. There is no serious constituency left that benefits from an indefinite crisis, except those who confuse escalation with strength.

Pakistan should therefore resist the temptation to treat mediation as a one-off event. It should keep using its ties with Washington, Tehran and Beijing to widen diplomatic space, not merely preserve appearances. That means steady engagement, quiet persuasion and refusal to let rhetoric dictate policy. The war has run long enough. The next phase must not be about posturing for domestic audiences or testing each other's pain thresholds. It must be about ending a conflict that has already taken too much and proved too little.

PAKISTAN TODAY

Dedicated to the legacy of late Hameed Nizami

Arif Nizami (Late)
Founding Editor

M. A. Niazi | Babar Nizami
Editor Pakistan Today | Editor Profit



DR MUHAMMAD AKRAM ZAHEER

PUNJAB'S education landscape has long stood at the intersection of ambition and constraint. Successive governments have promised reform, yet the gap between policy and classroom reality has often remained wide. In this evolving context, the educational vision of Maryam Nawaz Sharif, particularly in relation to the Public Schools Reorganisation Programme (PSRP) and the Punjab Education Foundation (PEF), is being closely watched by educators, parents, and policy observers alike.

Her approach appears to build upon an existing framework rather than discarding it altogether. The PSRP, which places underperforming public schools under the management of private partners, has been both praised and criticised over the years. Supporters argue that it injects efficiency and accountability into a system weighed down by bureaucratic inertia. Critics, however, caution that it risks diluting the public character of education and may prioritise numbers over substance. Within this debate, Maryam Nawaz Sharif's stated emphasis on improving access and standards suggests a pragmatic rather than ideological stance. Her public addresses have repeatedly highlighted the need to ensure that no child is left out of school due to poverty or geography. In a province where millions of children remain out of school, such a focus resonates with ground realities.

The role of PEF in this vision is central. Established as a vehicle to promote public-private partnerships in education, the foundation has expanded its reach over the years, particularly in low-income communities. Through programmes that subsidise tuition for students in private schools, it has sought to bridge the affordability gap. Under the current administration, there are indications that this model may be further strengthened, with an emphasis on expanding coverage and tightening oversight. Observers note that one of the more significant aspects of this approach is its reliance on measurable outcomes. Schools operating under PEF-supported schemes are required to meet certain performance benchmarks, often assessed through standardised testing. This has introduced a culture of evaluation that is not always present in traditional public schools. For policymakers, such data offers a way to track progress and identify gaps. For teachers and students, however, it can sometimes translate into pressure to perform within narrow parameters.

Maryam Nawaz Sharif's challenge lies in balancing these competing considerations. On one hand, there is a clear need to raise standards and ensure accountability. On the other, education cannot be reduced to test scores alone. Issues such as teacher training, curriculum relevance, and student well-being require

Punjab's changing education system

equal attention. In her recent statements, there has been some recognition of this broader picture, with references to improving school infrastructure, investing in teacher capacity, and incorporating modern teaching methods. Another dimension of her educational vision is its social context. In many parts of Punjab, particularly in rural and underserved urban areas, schools are not just centres of learning but also spaces of social mobility. For families struggling with economic hardship, the availability of a functional school nearby can make a tangible difference. By expanding programmes under PEF and refining initiatives like PSRP, the government appears to be aiming for a model that combines reach with a degree of flexibility.

Yet, questions remain about sustainability. Public-private partnerships can deliver results in the short to medium term, but they also require consistent funding and effective regulation. Ensuring that partner schools adhere to agreed standards, while also maintaining affordability for families, is no small task. Past experiences have shown that without robust monitoring, disparities can emerge between different regions and providers. There is also the issue of perception. For many, public education carries an expectation of state responsibility. The increasing role of private actors, even within a regulated framework, can raise concerns about equity and long-term direction. Maryam Nawaz Sharif's government will need to address these concerns not only through policy but also through communication, making it clear how these initiatives serve the broader public interest.

At the same time, it would be unfair to overlook the potential benefits of the current approach. In areas where government schools have struggled with absenteeism, poor infrastructure, or low enrolment, alternative management models have sometimes produced visible improvements. Classrooms that were once empty have seen students return, and basic facilities have been restored.

While such gains may not be uniform, they offer a glimpse of what targeted intervention can achieve. The emphasis on girls' education is another noteworthy element. Punjab has made progress in narrowing the gen-

der gap in schooling, but challenges persist, particularly at higher levels of education. Any strategy that seeks to expand access must take into account the specific barriers faced by girls, including cultural norms and safety concerns. Programmes under PEF have, in some instances, contributed to increasing female enrolment, and there are expectations that this focus will continue.

In assessing Maryam Nawaz Sharif's educational vision, it is also important to consider the broader governance context. Education reform does not operate in isolation. It intersects with issues such as fiscal management, administrative capacity, and political continuity. The success of initiatives like PSRP and PEF will depend not only on design but also on execution across multiple layers of government. For now, the direction appears to be one of cautious expansion combined with incremental reform. Rather than sweeping changes, there is an effort to refine existing mechanisms and extend their reach. Whether this approach will yield the desired results remains to be seen. Much will depend on how effectively challenges are addressed and how responsive the system remains to feedback from the ground.

Education policy is judged not by announcements but by outcomes in classrooms by whether children can read, write, and think with confidence. It is here, far from policy documents and press briefings, that the true impact of any vision becomes visible. Maryam Nawaz Sharif's tenure offers an opportunity to build on past efforts while addressing their shortcomings. If managed carefully, the combination of PSRP and the Punjab Education Foundation could contribute to a more inclusive and responsive education system. If not, it risks becoming another chapter in a long history of partial reforms. For the people of Punjab, the stakes are clear. Education remains one of the most powerful tools for social and economic advancement. The hope is that current efforts will move beyond rhetoric and deliver lasting change where it matters most—in the lives of students and the future of the province.

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Iqbal in his early poetry

Today is Allama Iqbal's 88th death anniversary

DR MUHAMMAD AFZAAL MALERKOTLAVI

THERE are a very few number of the dynamic poets of the world, among whom is Allama Sir Muhammad Iqbal (9 November 1877, Sialkot- 21 April 1938, Lahore, buried at the footstep of the Badshahi Mosque), a titanic figure in both poetry and philosophy. During the Pakistan Movement, Quaid-e-Azam Muhammad Ali Jinnah 25 December 1876, Karachi-11 September 1948) stated that if the Muslims of India were successful in getting a separate state, and if he was offered the choice of becoming the head of this state and of the writings of Allama Iqbal, he would choose the latter.

Allama Iqbal is the only universal reformer among all those who got the highest modern education along with ancient learning. As far as Allama Iqbal's highest place in both the Islamic and non-Islamic worlds is concerned, it is based on his later poetry, not his earlier. That leads us to understand that his earlier poetry deals with and reflects his non-philosophical and traditional aspect, though reflecting some new trends, and of a non-Islamic, secular type. In this early poetry, Allama Iqbal stands for the things others do.

Allama Iqbal's early poetry and its thoughts belong to the period before he went abroad, from his very beginning to 1905. This is the period to which belongs the first part of his first poetic collection, Bang-i Dara.

In his early poetry, Iqbal follows different traditional Western-cum-Eastern thoughts. At that time we find, when Iqbal was born and grew up, even at the time of his early poetry, Europe had two thoughts at their extreme, rationalism and nationalism.

Rationalism is totally based on nonreligious wisdom, even being anti-religion, nationalism is also anti-religious, being based on patriotism or secularism. Patriotism, or we can say area-wide nationalism was being implemented everywhere globally. A country was not only a country, but a nation, like India was a country, and home to a nation and Indian nationalism. In this thought, the country-nation is above the country's religions, castes, creeds and colours. 'Jai Hind' means the victory of the Indian motherland, or country-based nationalism, over all other creeds.

When Iqbal's early poetry is studied on the issue of nationalism, he is to be found a thinker similar to his contemporaries. We can see it evidenced in many verses of Bang-i Dara. For example he wrote:

Miti ki mooraton main samjha hai Khuda hai/Khak-i watan ka mujh ko ka har zarra devta hai (You think God is in earthen idols/For me every atom of the Motherland is an angel)

It can easily be seen that patriotism, the country-based nationalism, highly influenced Iqbal's early poetry. In these lines one can see

that though Iqbal condemned idol worship, he gave preference to nationalism over religion. When we further study these lines, we find that in his early poetic age, he had agreed that God could be traced only in nationalistic patriotism, even as compared to religion.

Poems like Tarana-i Hind and Mera Watan Wahi Hai in Bang-i Dara, out of the early poetry, can be brought further as further proof. Here one line, Saray jehan se achha Hindustan hamara (Our Inia is better than the whole world) can sketch a further picture of the contemporary and Western patriotism in the mind of Iqbal's early mind and early poetry.

That traditional and Western patriotic theory was removed from Iqbal's mind and poetry when he came back from England after the completion of his Western higher studies in 1908, the year his early thought, as well as his early thought and early philosophy had changed.

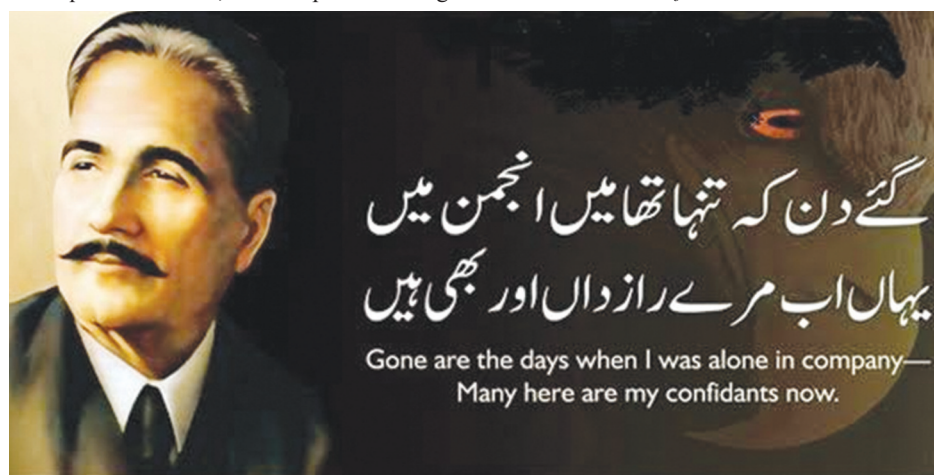
One must agree with Dr Iftikhar Ahmad Siddiqui's statement, "In the previous stage

of his poetry, Iqbal had been a supporter of the ideology of patriotism and the creator of the Tarana-I-Hindustan.

However, this ideology had planted in the hearts of the people of the West the reason for prejudice. After witnessing this, Iqbal's eyes were opened, so he expressed his abhorrence and condemnation thus: 'I am strongly opposed to nationalism not just because, when this ideology became common in India it would cause greater harm to the Muslims, but the reason for my opposition is that I see germs of an atheistic materialism in it, which I believe to be the greatest danger of mankind. Love of country is no doubt a good thing, and there is a place for it in Man's moral lives.

Even though what is more important is a person's beliefs, his culture and civilization, his historical traditions, and for them a person makes the greatest of sacrifices, rather than the piece of land from which he hails, and to which the human spirits has a temporary attachment,"

The writer is a freelance columnist



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EDITOR'S MAIL

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Grain gains matter

WHEAT is a cornerstone of national food security as well as rural livelihood, serving as the staple diet for over 200 million people and providing essential by-products for livestock feed and agro-based industries. Despite its importance, national wheat productivity remains well below potential.

During 2023-24, wheat was cultivated on 9.73 million hectares and produced 31.8 million tonnes, but the average yield (3,268kg/ha) remained far lower than the potential yield of 5,000 to 8,000 kg/ha. This persistent gap is driven by multiple constraints, such as inefficient irrigation, imbalanced fertiliser use, delayed sowing, poor crop rotation, low seed quality, and limited adoption of climate-smart technologies.

Post-harvest losses and weak extension services further exacerbate the problem. Addressing these challenges requires integrated, research-based interventions supported by strong institutional frame-works. Proper land preparation is crucial for achieving the productive potential of wheat, influencing all growth stages from germination to grain formation. Optimised tillage practices, such as a sequence of mould-board ploughing, disc harrowing, rotavation and planking, can increase yields by 13-30 per cent.

Laser land-levelling is also important, enhancing irrigation uniformity, reducing runoff, and improving water-use efficiency. Research shows that laser levelling needs to be repeated every three years, which significantly increases net income and reduces water use by more than half compared to the traditional methods. These improvements can really lay the foundation for better plant establishment and more sustainable wheat production.

The sowing method plays a very decisive role in wheat productivity. Conventional methods that are commonly used lead to poor germination and high water consumption. In contrast, modern sowing techniques, such as ridge planting, raised-bed planting, and drill sowing, can increase yields by 9-22pc while significantly improving water-use efficiency. Each method requires specific tillage sequences and irrigation practices to maximise performance.

Equally important is the alignment of suitable wheat varieties with appropriate row spacing and timely sowing. Delayed sowing can reduce yields by 8-64pc, while early sowing enables various varieties to escape heat stress and disease, resulting in higher productivity.

Poor weed control and disease management practices result in 17-25pc losses in the wheat yield, which is also threatened by fungal diseases, including rust, loose smut, and root rot, that can reduce the yields by up to 50pc. Early planting combined with balanced fertilisation can help mitigate rust infestation across various wheat varieties. Balanced fertiliser use and efficient irrigation scheduling represent additional pillars of sustainable wheat production. Excessive irrigation in conventional systems leads to nutrient leaching, shallow water tables, waterlogging, and ground-water deterioration. Proper irrigation timing and depth ensure that nutrients remain within the root zone, and that water resources are conserved.

Pakistan's wheat productivity challenge is deeply rooted in agronomic, institutional and environmental factors. Bridging the yield gap requires a holistic, climate-smart approach that integrates precision land preparation, advanced sowing techniques, balanced nutrient management, scientific irrigation scheduling, and proactive weed and disease control.

Strengthening the extension services, improving access to quality inputs, and aligning agricultural policies with research-based recommendations are critical for sustainable improvement.

By adopting modern technologies and evidence-based practices, Pakistan can significantly enhance wheat productivity, ensuring national food security, economic resilience, and a more sustainable future for millions who depend on this vital crop.

DR NAZAR GUL
HAFIZ ABDUL SALAM



DR IMRAN KHALID

New data shows the vitality of China and its foreign trade

AS the International Monetary Fund and World Bank convene for their Spring Meetings in Washington this week, the atmosphere is heavy with a familiar sense of foreboding. The prevailing narrative among the gathered technocrats is one of a world pulling apart. We are told that “de-risking” is the new mandate, that global value chains are fraying, and that the era of seamless integration is over. The outbreak of war in the Middle East earlier this year has only deepened this pessimism, with the IMF recently downgrading its 2026 global growth forecast to 3.1 percent amid fears of a prolonged energy crisis and a potential slide into recession.

Yet, if one looks at the latest data from Beijing, a strikingly different reality emerges. In the first quarter of 2026, China’s foreign trade surged by 15 percent, reaching 11.84 trillion yuan. This is not merely a statistical rebound or a case of “front-loading” to beat anticipated tariffs. It represents the fastest growth rate in five years and the first time first-quarter trade has ever breached the 11 trillion yuan threshold.

To understand why this matters, one must look beyond the headline figures at the underlying composition of this growth. For decades, the world viewed China through the lens of an export-led juggernaut fueled by low-cost manufacturing. That model is being replaced by a more complex, resilient, and balanced economic engine. In this latest quarter, while exports grew by a healthy 11.9 percent, imports climbed by a staggering 19.6 percent to nearly 5 trillion yuan.

This surge in imports suggests that the “world’s factory” is successfully transitioning into the “world’s market.” A 20 percent jump in imports during a period of global monetary tightening and geopolitical volatility indicates robust domestic industrial demand and a stabilizing consumer base. It signals that China’s pivot toward high-quality development is generating a massive pull factor for global goods, providing a necessary floor for an otherwise precarious international economy.

The drivers of this performance are equally revealing. Private enterprises, often the most sensitive barometers of economic vitality, now account for over 57 percent of China’s total trade. Their trade volume grew

by 16.2 percent in the first quarter. This is a critical metric because it counters the frequent Western narrative that China’s economy is becoming a stagnant monolith of state-led activity. Instead, the dynamism is coming from the bottom up, with private firms leading the charge in innovation and market adaptation. Furthermore, foreign-invested enterprises recorded their eighth consecutive quarter of growth, a clear sign that international capital remains deeply tethered to Chinese supply chains despite the political rhetoric of decoupling heard in Western capitals.

Geopolitically, we are witnessing a profound diversification of trade routes. The era of over-reliance on a few Western markets is giving way to a more multipolar trade map. In the first quarter, trade with Belt and Road partner countries rose over 14 percent, now making up more than half of China’s total trade. Connectivity with ASEAN and Latin America grew by 15.4 percent, while trade with Africa jumped by nearly 24 percent.

This shift is not accidental; it is a calculated response to the rise of protectionism elsewhere. By deepening ties with the Global South, China is building a trade architecture that is increasingly insulated from the policy shifts of Washington or Brussels. This does not mean China is turning its back on the West - trade with the European Union and the United Kingdom actually rose by double digits this quarter - but it does mean that the leverage held by Western trade policy is diminishing.

This resilience is being tested by the volatility in the Middle East. The blockade of the Strait of Hormuz in late February and the subsequent spike in energy prices have sent ripples through global markets. However, the direct impact on China’s trade momentum appears managed. This is partly due to China’s aggressive pursuit of energy se-



curity through green technology. As the world’s leader in electric vehicles, renewable energy, and battery storage, China has created a domestic buffer against traditional energy price shocks. When oil prices rise, the structural advantage of a “green” industrial base becomes a competitive edge rather than a liability. In the first quarter alone, exports of 3D printers and electric vehicles surged by 119 percent and 77 percent respectively, illustrating how Beijing is successfully moving up the value chain.

The implications for the global economy are significant. At a time when growth is slowing in many advanced economies - with

the United States projected at 2 percent and the European Union at a meager 1.3 percent for 2026 - China is on track to hit its 5 percent growth target. While this is lower than the double-digit era, the sheer scale of the Chinese economy means this growth adds more to global GDP than the rapid expansions of the past.

Moreover, the nature of this growth is more sustainable. By moving away from a property-heavy model and toward advanced manufacturing and digital technologies, Beijing is addressing long-standing structural risks. The fact that foreign direct investment reached over 160 billion yuan in the first two

months of the year underscores a fundamental truth: the global supply chain is too integrated to be easily dismantled. The “China Plus One” strategy pursued by some firms has often resulted in “China Plus One More Step,” where components are still sourced from Chinese factories before final assembly elsewhere.

As we look toward the remainder of 2026, the challenge for the international community is to move past the zero-sum logic of trade wars. China’s Q1 data demonstrates that its economy remains an essential anchor of stability. A country that can grow its trade by 15 percent amidst global fragmentation and a regional war is not an economy in decline, but one in transformation.

In an age of volatility, economic stability is a global public good. The paradox of 2026 is that while the rhetoric of the Spring Meetings focuses on the dangers of a fragmented world, the actual flow of goods and capital suggests a world that is finding new ways to stay connected.

China is at the center of this new connectivity. By continuing to open its markets and integrate with a broader array of global partners, it is providing a rare sense of certainty. The world can ill afford to ignore that stability, regardless of the political winds blowing through Washington.

The writer is a freelance columnist

“Private enterprises, often the most sensitive barometers of economic vitality, now account for over 57 percent of China’s total trade. Their trade volume grew by 16.2 percent in the first quarter. This is a critical metric because it counters the frequent Western narrative that China’s economy is becoming a stagnant monolith of state-led activity. Instead, the dynamism is coming from the bottom up, with private firms leading the charge in innovation and market adaptation.”

Qalibaf answers ten key questions on Iran-US talks in Islamabad

TEHRAN TIMES

IN a televised interview, Iranian Parliament Speaker Mohammad Bagher Qalibaf, who headed Iran’s negotiating delegation in Islamabad, addressed ten key questions regarding the talks with the United States and other topics. Here’s a concise summary of the interview in a question-and-answer format.

1. Why do you believe Iran is victorious in this war?

Trump did not achieve his goals. He faced a worse disaster in Isfahan than in Tabas [the ill-fated Operation Eagle Claw in 1980]. We are undoubtedly victorious.

The recent conflict is the third imposed war, which started with America’s cunning in the middle of negotiations. In the 12-day war [in June 2025], there was a 14-hour delay in our reaction. But in the third imposed war, despite the martyrdom of the commander-in-chief [of the armed forces, Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei], the IRGC commander-in-chief, and the chief of general staff of the armed forces, our reaction was carried out in the shortest possible time and with precision.

The F-35 incident was not an accident. It was the result of a laborious and operational effort. With the missile that exploded near the aircraft, the enemy understood our capabilities.

Iran has become more formidable in its offensive capabilities and [military] design than in the past. The adversaries could not believe it until they saw it proven in the field. For nearly 50 nights, [the Iranian] people have remained on the streets. Iran hit about 180 [enemy] drones — a capability it did not have in the previous war.

2. Do you say that Iran is stronger than the US militarily?

The Americans possess more wealth, equipment, and military facilities, and the Zionist regime also holds great power. We did not destroy them. [Nevertheless,] we are the winners in this war. We fought an asymmetric war and repelled the enemy with our own design and preparation. The enemy had money and facilities, but did not act correctly.

3. Why has Trump called for a ceasefire?

The US government claims “America First,” but in practice, it demonstrates that “Israel First” matters more. We hold the advantage in the field, and that is why Trump is calling for a ceasefire. The enemy’s goal was to force Iran to surrender in a war lasting only two or three days, but we fought for 40 days, and the enemy was forced to accept a ceasefire. They could not make us surrender.

The idea that we destroyed the enemy’s military is not true. Even though we did not destroy them, we are still the winners; that is a different matter.

Whether in the field, in the streets, or in diplomacy, it is we who command the position of strength. The enemy cannot impose its will on us.

Negotiation is simply another form of struggle. There will be no compromise in diplomacy. If the enemy makes a mistake at any moment, we are ready. We have no trust in the enemy. The armed forces are fully prepared.

On approximately the 36th or 37th day of the conflict, a 15-point proposal was conveyed to Iran through Pakistani intermediaries, specifically the Prime Minister and the Chief of Army Staff. [This is after] Trump had threatened to hit [our] infrastructure.

After review, Iran formulated ten points that outlined the nation’s demands. We informed Pakistan that we did not accept the original fifteen points, but that our ten points were acceptable. We stated that if the US had input on these ten points, they were negotiable. The Americans later proposed nine points, but Iran insisted on its original ten. Eventually, the US requested a temporary ceasefire to begin the negotiations.

4. What role did you expect Trump to play in announcing the ceasefire?

We informed Pakistan: if the US wants a ceasefire, Trump must announce the request on his [Truth Social] account. This ensures everyone knows the request originated with them. This is the diplomacy of authority.

Hezbollah launched its recent operations to support Iran; the Resistance Front came to our aid. Therefore, the ceasefire had to include them. A primary condition from Iran was a region-wide ceasefire, including both Iran and the Resistance Front.

5. Who currently controls the Strait of Hormuz?

The Iranian Armed Forces control the Strait of Hormuz. Our intent is for those who did not align with the enemy to pass through without difficulty. We have no desire to increase insecurity; not now, and never.

After the talks in Islamabad started, the US attempted to send a minesweeper after discovering a mine [in the Strait of Hormuz], but we did not back down. We warned that it would be a violation of the ceasefire and that we would strike. We moved to the brink of conflict, and they retreated.

6. What exactly did you tell the American delegation about their minesweeper?

In Islamabad, I warned the American delegation: “If your minesweeper advances even a small distance, we will shoot.” They requested 15 minutes to issue a command to turn back. They gave the order, and it returned.

7. What is your response to the US blockade of Iran?

The Americans have been trying to impose a blockade for days. This supposed siege means that while others pass freely, Iran is blocked! It is a decision rooted in clumsiness and ignorance.

8. What will happen if the US does not lift the blockade?

If the U.S. refuses to lift its blockade, the Strait of Hormuz will be restricted. If we are prevented from passing, then we will ensure no one [connected to the adversaries] passes.

I have no trust in the enemy. Building trust is their first task. Trump posted [on Truth Social] that the negotiators were alive to negotiate, but if no decision is made within 24 hours, it is unknown if they will stay alive. This is your behavior. We will stand until the end.

9. When did negotiations with the US actually begin?

We did not hold any negotiations until 48 hours before the ceasefire. Trump is a master of lying and psychological warfare. Yesterday [on April 17], he posted eight tweets, seven of which were false.

The negotiations began when Trump posted a request for a ceasefire. We summarized our position in 10 points, and the Leader of the Islamic Revolution [Ayatollah Seyyed Mojtaba Khamenei] accepted the underlying basis and the specific conditions [to start the negotiations].

We were in Pakistan for thirty hours, arriving at midnight on Saturday. There were no prior negotiations with the U.S. before this; there were only exchanges of messages [through mediators].

We view negotiation as a method of struggle, a way to complete the work of the field and assert the rights of our people on the streets. Rest assured, we are pursuing these issues one step at a time.

10. How would you describe your personal readiness for what lies ahead?

Whether it is a matter of negotiation papers or war plans, my resolve remains the same. I am prepared to sacrifice my life and my honor. We move as one under the Leader of the Islamic Revolution, following his guidance exactly: neither overstepping nor falling behind.

All the enemy’s efforts are aimed at destroying the unity and solidarity of the people. Nearly 30 million [Iranian] people have already registered for the JANFADA [those who are ready to sacrifice their lives] campaign.

When the threat was made to bomb our infrastructure, families—including parents with their children—arrived to form human chains to protect those sites.

Our strength lies with the people, and we owe them our deepest gratitude. To ensure that no harm comes to our nation today, it is essential that we all stand behind the Leader.

Ireland in crisis: A warning to Europe

CENTER FOR EUROPEAN POLICY ANALYSIS

EANNA MACKEY

IRELAND’S crisis came as a bolt from the blue. On April 7, a protest by farmers and haulers over rising fuel prices quickly escalated into nationwide blockades. Discussion naturally enough focused on soaring fuel prices and the government’s response.

There was already disgruntlement with the administration, but the event that tipped the scales was the Iran War, which has throttled global supplies and jolted fuel prices upwards. This may be more than a political crisis at the west of the European continent. It may be a distress signal soon to be repeated elsewhere. The early protests emerged from a grassroots movement something like the British truck driver protests of 2000, which in turn were inspired by French demonstrations. The effect in Ireland was devastating, affecting transport routes, distribution hubs, and critical infrastructure, with fury directed at a government deemed out of touch, inept, and sleepwalking into a national disaster.

In response, the defense forces were deployed alongside Garda Síochána public order units to assist in clearing key sites and restoring access to essential supply chains. The administration initially ruled out negotiations with protest leaders, although with oil supplies dwindling as a result of port blockades, it subsequently backed down by flooding the zone with cash. An initial €250m (\$295m) for fuel tax cuts was bolstered with another €505m of sweeteners including tax cuts on April 13. On April 14, the government, a coalition of Fianna Fáil, Fine Gael, and eight independents, survived a motion of confidence by 92 votes to 78.

The government climbdown resulted from enormous pressure; by April 10, three days into the protest, more than 500 petrol (gas) forecourts had reportedly been emptied of fuel, while deliveries from ports, depots, and Ireland’s only oil refinery in Whitegate, County Cork, were significantly disrupted. Sector-specific protests led by farmers, agricultural contractors, and road hauliers soon broadened into a wider confrontation between demonstrators and the state over a myriad of converging crises, including the cost of living, lack of housing, immigration, and the economic viability of fuel-dependent industries.

The protests emerged against a backdrop of sharply rising fuel costs, placing significant pressure on transport-reliant sectors already deeply affected by inflation and global supply chain volatility. Diesel prices have increased exponentially in recent weeks amid broader geopolitical tensions in energy markets.

In Ireland, fuel is heavily taxed, with excise duties, VAT, and environmental

levies accounting for almost 60% of the retail price, including the carbon tax, which was scheduled to increase in May but has since been deferred until October as a result of the protests. For many participants, the blockades were framed as a last-resort response to mounting financial pressure rather than a political campaign. However, the scale of disruption led to a rapid escalation in tensions, with the government attributing elements of the unrest to outside agitators and far-right involvement, despite a lack of such evidence.

Although there had been earlier indications on state broadcaster RTE that the government would engage in dialogue, officials later refused to meet protest representatives at Leinster House in a bid to end the blockades, with Tánaiste Simon Harris stating they would not engage with what they described as an unselected body.

Additionally, on the back of the protests, Minister for Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport, and Media Patrick O’Donovan called on the media regulator, Coimisiún na Meán, to review coverage of the fuel protests. He described aspects of reporting as “lopsided” and “skewed,” comments that caused a backlash from journalists and their employers.

The government’s response has taken place against the backdrop of wider fiscal commitments, including close to €1bn in foreign aid since January, as well as an estimated €6bn annually directed towards a network of government-adjacent non-governmental organizations. State broadcaster RTE has also received significant state financial support in recent years, including a bailout package worth over €750m.

During the confidence vote, Kerry Teachtaí Dála (MP) Michael Healy-Rae resigned as Minister of State, stating that the government no longer represented the interests of Irish people. The decision to deploy the armed forces and public order units to disperse the protests may prove a defining moment for the sitting government, with some observers suggesting it will damage its political authority.

Ireland is due to assume the EU presidency in the coming months. While the immediate disruption has eased, the political and social tensions exposed during the crisis are likely to remain a point of contention. While major blockades have since eased, underlying tensions remain. It’s possible the protests will flare again.

For the UK and Ireland’s fellow EU members, the upsurge of popular direct action will cause concern that similar trouble may soon spread. The combination of fast-rising costs and already fragile public trust can be explosive.

Eanna Mackey is a reporter based in Ireland with a background in geopolitics and economics.

CHINA'S XI CALLS FOR STRAIT OF HORMUZ TO REMAIN OPEN IN CALL WITH SAUDI CROWN PRINCE

BEIJING
REUTERS

CHINESE President Xi Jinping called for normal passage of ships through the Strait of Hormuz to be maintained, in a phone call on Monday with Saudi Arabia's Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman held as Beijing steps up efforts to help end US-Israel war against Iran.

China is concerned over renewed instability around the strategic waterway, as a US-Iran ceasefire came under fresh strain after the US seized an Iranian cargo ship and Tehran signalled it would not join new peace talks for now.

China is the main buyer of Iranian crude. Iran has largely closed the strait to ships other than its own since the US and Israel launched the war in February, while Washington has imposed a blockade of Iranian ships since last week.

China advocates an immediate and comprehensive ceasefire, and insists on resolving conflicts in the Middle East through political and diplomatic channels, state news agency Xinhua cited Xi as saying. "The Strait of Hormuz should



remain open to normal passage, as this serves the common interests of regional countries and the international community," he told the Saudi leader.

Worries have mounted over the survival of the ceasefire between Washington and Tehran after the US seizure of the Iranian vessel. Trump had credited Beijing with helping to get Iran to the previous negotiations with the US in Pakistan.

The Chinese foreign ministry on Monday expressed concerns over the

"forced interception" by the US of the Iranian ship, while urging relevant sides to abide by the ceasefire agreement.

Xi's call with the Saudi crown prince followed a meeting in Beijing last week with the crown prince of Abu Dhabi, when Xi urged adherence to international law.

He also told the Saudi crown prince that China supports countries in the Middle East in "taking their future and destiny into their own hands, and promoting

long-term regional stability and peace". **Macron decries blocking Strait of Hormuz as 'mistake on both sides'**

French President Emmanuel Macron has denounced the blockade of the Strait of Hormuz as "a mistake on both sides", AFP reports. "It is likely that, following the American decision to maintain a targeted blockade on Hormuz ... the Iranian authorities changed their initial position ... this is a mistake on both sides," Macron tells journalists in Gdansk, Poland.

French President Emmanuel Macron has called for the United States and Iran to de-escalate amid increased tensions over the weekend over the Strait of Hormuz, Al Jazeera reports.

"Our position remains the same. We need to settle things through diplomacy. Everyone must calm down", Macron has said during a joint press conference with Polish Prime Minister Donald Tusk.

Macron adds that France was not specifically targeted in the Strait after Iran fired shots on ships on Saturday, including a container ship belonging to French shipping giant CMA CGM, which described the volleys as "warning shots" and said at the time that the crew was safe.

NEW DELHI
AGENCIES

India and South Korea target \$50b trade by 2030 with fresh economic initiatives

India and South Korea said on Monday that they would boost their economic ties by expanding cooperation in energy, critical minerals, shipbuilding, semiconductors and steel as they seek to double their trade to \$50 billion by 2030.

New Delhi and Seoul also agreed to resume and step up negotiations to give new energy to their 2010 trade agreement as India wanted their trade to be more balanced and South Korea wanted greater market access to the world's fastest-growing major economy.

South Korean President Lee Jae Myung is in India for a three-day visit, the first South Korean presidential state visit to the country in eight years.

"We decided to upgrade the framework of economic cooperation between the two countries to create a new engine for shared growth," Lee told reporters after talks with Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

The two countries created a ministerial-level economic cooperation committee for the first time, Lee said, adding that they would strengthen cooperation in areas such as nuclear power plants, clean energy as well as trade and investment.

With the US-Israel war on Iran squeezing global energy supplies, India and South Korea would also continue to cooperate to ensure the stable supply of energy resources and key raw materials such as naphtha, Lee added. Modi said Lee's visit was extremely significant and that the two countries had taken important decisions to boost two-way trade to \$50 billion by 2030 from around \$27 billion at present.

"Today, we are laying the foundation for the success story of the next decade," Modi said, as he recalled strong civilisational ties between the two countries that go back several centuries.

Big investment in India's steel sector
Indian Trade Minister Piyush Goyal said he held talks with his South Korean counterpart, Yeo Han-koo, and discussed ways to resume and revamp the trade pact and explored opportunities to deepen cooperation in the areas of industry, green energy and digital trade.

Lee will attend a joint business forum conference later on Monday where some 250 South Korea participants are expected, including leaders of household names in India such as Samsung Electronics, Hyundai Motor and LG Group, South Korea's Yonhap news agency said.

The two sides also plan to sign a total of 20 private-sector memoranda of understanding on the sidelines of the forum, covering areas including shipbuilding, digital technology and energy, Yonhap said.

Separately, South Korea's POSCO Holdings said in a regulatory filing on Monday that its steelmaking unit plans to build a joint venture integrated steel plant with India's JSW in Odisha state.

POSCO's investment until end-2031 is expected to be about \$1.09 billion, the filing said.

The joint venture deal to set up a 6-million-ton-per-annum steel plant in Odisha was announced last week. In a policy seminar at South Korea's parliament last week, Maeng Hyun-chul, a research fellow at Seoul National University's Asia Centre, noted India's longstanding complaint of a widening trade deficit with South Korea and said that political ties had not kept pace with commercial ties.

South Korea had a \$12.8 billion trade surplus last year, with exports worth \$19.2bn and imports of \$6.4bn, according to Korea International Trade Association data. Lee will be visiting Vietnam after India.

Lebanon reopens key southern routes as Israeli demolitions continue

BEIRUT
AGENCIES

Lebanon's military announced on Sunday it had reopened a key road and bridge destroyed by Israeli strikes in the country's south, a crucial step for civilians even as a fragile 10-day truce is undermined by continued Israeli occupation and demolitions.

The conflict, which escalated on March 2, prompted an Israeli offensive that killed more than 2,100 people, including 177 children, and forced over 1.2 million to flee, Lebanese authorities say. Including all casualties, nearly 2,300 people have been killed.

Lebanon's military said it "fully reopened" a road linking Nabatieh with the Khardali area and "partially reopened the Burj Rahal-Tyre bridge."

"Work is also underway to rehabilitate the Tayr Falsayr-Tyre bridge ... following damage caused by the Israeli aggression," the army added.

Israeli strikes on bridges crossing Lebanon's Litani River, which flows about 30km north of Israel, largely cut off the area south of the waterway.

The vital Qasmiyeh bridge reopened, allowing displaced residents to check on property. However, many remained hesitant to venture back with the truce's longevity uncertain.

An AFP correspondent in the southern city of Sidon saw heavy traffic heading to Beirut as displaced southerners returned to temporary homes and shelters in the capital after briefly visiting southern areas.

As civilians navigate the destruction, the Israeli military published a map on Sunday of its new deployment line inside Lebanon, bringing dozens of mostly abandoned Lebanese villages under its control.

Israel condemns soldier's desecration of crucifix in south Lebanon

JERUSALEM
AGENCIES

Israel's Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, the foreign minister and the military on Monday condemned the desecration of a crucifix after it was smashed by an Israeli soldier in a Christian village in southern Lebanon.

A photo that emerged online over the weekend shows a soldier taking the blunt side of an axe to a fallen sculpture of Jesus on the cross. It was posted by Younis Tirawi, who describes himself as a Palestinian reporter and has also posted images of Israeli soldiers' misconduct in Gaza.

Reuters verified the location of the image as Debel, one of the few villages in southern Lebanon where residents remained through an Israeli military campaign against Hezbollah that began on March 2.

The cross was part of a small shrine in the garden of a family living on the edge of the village, said Fadi Falfel, a priest in Debel. "One of the Israeli soldiers broke the cross and did this horrible thing, this desecration of our holy symbols," he said.

Netanyahu said that the soldier's actions went against Jewish values of tolerance.

Unicef decries water suppliers' killing in Gaza

JERUSALEM
AGENCIES

Two civilian contractors delivering water for the UN children's fund were shot dead by Israeli troops in northern Gaza, Unicef said on Saturday, expressing fury over the deaths the previous day.

"Unicef is outraged by the killing of two drivers of trucks contracted by Unicef to provide clean water to families in the Gaza Strip," it said in a statement.

When contacted by AFP, the Israeli military claimed that the troops saw "two armed terrorists in the area of the Yellow Line" approaching, so they "opened fire".

The army said the incident was "under review".

Unicef said the incident took place at the Mansoura water filling point in northern Gaza, which is "the only operational truck filling point for the Mekorot water supply line serving Gaza City".

"The incident, in which two other people were injured, occurred during routine water trucking operations, with no changes in movement or procedures," it said, adding that the point was used



"multiple times a day" by Unicef and its humanitarian partners.

Following the incident, all activities at the filling point had been suspended, it said, urging the Israeli authorities to "immediately investigate" the incident and ensure those responsible be held accountable.

"Humanitarian workers, essential service providers and civilian infrastructure, including critical water facilities, must never be targeted.

The protection of civilians and those delivering life-saving assistance is an obligation under international humanitarian law,"

Unicef said. Earlier on Saturday, Gaza's health ministry, which operates under Hamas authority, reported an overall death toll of 72,549 since October 2023. That number includes 773 Palestinians killed since the Gaza ceasefire came into effect on Oct 10, 2025.

Israeli army claims
On Saturday, the Israeli army said troops had opened fire in two incidents in the Gaza Strip's north and south, eliminating "two infiltrators who crossed the Yellow Line and approached the forces posing an immediate threat".

FBI Director Kash Patel files defamation suit against The Atlantic

WASHINGTON
AGENCIES

FBI Director Kash Patel has filed a defamation lawsuit against The Atlantic and reporter Sarah Fitzpatrick over an article that alleged he had a drinking problem and was frequently absent from work, claims Patel has denied. According to Reuters, the lawsuit was filed after The Atlantic published a report on Friday that said Patel's alleged conduct could pose a national security risk. The article was initially published under the headline

Kash Patel's Erratic Behavior Could Cost Him His Job and cited more than two dozen anonymous sources who voiced concern over what it described as Patel's visible intoxication and unexplained absences, which it said had worried officials at the FBI and the Department of Justice.

The online version of the article was later retitled
The FBI Director Is MIA. Reuters said it could not independ-

ently verify the claims made in The Atlantic's report or determine why the headline was changed.

The article alleged that early meetings at the FBI had to be rescheduled because of Patel's late-night drinking and that he was often away or unreachable, slowing decisions needed to move investigations forward. Reuters reported that the White House, the Department of Justice and Patel all denied the allegations in The Atlantic's story.

The report also carried a statement from the FBI attributed to Patel, which said:

Print it, all false, I'll see you in court, bring your checkbook.

Patel repeated his denial in an interview with Reuters, saying:

The Atlantic's story is a lie. They were given the truth before they published, and they chose to print falsehoods anyway.

After Patel threatened legal action during an appearance on Fox News on Sunday, The Atlantic Editor-in-Chief Jeffrey Goldberg told CNBC:

We stand by our reporting on Kash Patel.

Lawsuit seeks \$250 million

The complaint, filed in the US District Court for the District of Columbia, seeks \$250 million in damages. It argues that while The Atlantic was entitled to criticise the FBI's leadership, it crossed a legal boundary by publishing an article replete with false and obviously fabricated allegations designed to destroy Director Patel's reputation and drive him from office. The lawsuit further alleges that The Atlantic ignored denials issued by the FBI.

and did not respond to a Friday letter from Patel's lawyer, Jesse Binnall, sent to senior editors and the magazine's legal department. According to the complaint, the letter requested more time to rebut 19 allegations that the reporter had told the FBI press office she intended to publish. Reuters said it could not establish how, or whether, The Atlantic responded to that request.

TOKYO
AGENCIES

Japan issues tsunami warning after 7.4-magnitude quake, records 80cm wave

Japan recorded an 80-centimetre tsunami wave at a port in the country's north on Monday after a powerful 7.4-magnitude earthquake struck off the region, according to the Japan Meteorological Agency (JMA). The JMA said the wave was observed at 5:34pm local time at a port in Kuji, in Iwate prefecture. It had earlier reported that a 70-centimetre wave reached the same area at 5:32pm. Earlier in the day, the agency said a magnitude-7.4 earthquake hit at 4:53pm in Pacific waters off northern Iwate prefecture. The tremor was strong enough to shake large buildings in Tokyo, which is located hundreds of kilometres from the epicentre.

Following the quake, the JMA issued a tsunami warning for waves of up to three metres and urged residents in affected areas to move to safety. In its warning, the agency said, "Evacuate immediately from coastal regions and riverside areas to a safer place such as high ground or an evacuation building," adding that damage from tsunami waves was expected.

The agency also cautioned that, "Tsunami waves are expected to hit repeatedly. Do not leave safe ground until the warning is lifted."

Footage aired by national broadcaster NHK did not show any immediate visible damage around several ports in Iwate.

Four candidates enter public race to succeed Guterres as next UN chief

NEW YORK
AGENCIES

Four contenders are squaring up to succeed Antonio Guterres as leader of the United Nations, which faces unprecedented global instability, wars and its own crushing budget crisis.

Chile's Michelle Bachelet, Argentina's Rafael Grossi, Costa Rican Rebecca Grynspan, and Senegal's Macky Sall will each face grillings by 193 member states and NGOs for three hours on Tuesday and Wednesday.

It is only the second time the UN has held a public Q&A, a format created in 2016 to boost transparency.

Ultimately the five permanent members of the UN's top body, the Security Council, hold the power, wielding vetoes over who leads the global organisation as its secretary-general.

US President Donald Trump's envoy to the Manhattan-based UN, Mike Waltz, has warned the next chief must align with "American values and interests" and that Washington would back

the best candidate — not necessarily a Latin American woman, as some countries are demanding.

All four candidates to take over the embattled UN when Guterres departs on

December 31, 2026 pledge to grow trust in the bitterly divided organisation that faces financial Armageddon because of Washington's refusal to pay its bills.

Here is a look at the contenders:

Michelle Bachelet
A Chilean socialist brutally tortured by the regime of Augusto Pinochet, Bachelet became her country's first woman president in 2006.

She went on to be the UN rights chief, a sensitive role in which she alienated some countries, especially China, which mauled her for reporting on alleged abuses of the Uyghur people.

Bachelet, 74, has said that she is "convinced" she has the experience "to confront a moment" marked by unprecedented crises and conflicts. She is backed by Mexico and Brazil — but Chile withdrew its backing after far-right President Jose Antonio Kast took office.



CRESCENT COTTON MILLS LIMITED
NOTICE OF EXTRA-ORDINARY GENERAL MEETING

NOTICE IS HEREBY GIVEN THAT an Extra-Ordinary General Meeting of the shareholders of **CRESCENT COTTON MILLS LIMITED** will be held at the Registered Office of the Company on Friday the May 15, 2026 at 09:30 a.m. to transact the following business:-

- To elect seven Directors of the Company, as fixed by the Board for a period of three years commencing from May 18, 2026 in accordance with the provisions of the Companies Act, 2017 in place of retiring Directors namely:

1. Mr. Abid Mahmood	2. Mr. Adnan Amjad
3. Mr. Naveed Gulzar	4. Mr. Salman Rafi
5. Ms. Nazish Arshad	6. Mrs. Shameen Azfar
7. Mr. Taimur Amjad	
- To transact any other business with the permission of the chair.

REGISTERED OFFICE: On Behalf Of The Board
Crescent Cotton Mills Limited (Sami Ullah)
Nishatabad, Faisalabad Company Secretary
Dated: April 17, 2026

CORPORATE CORNER

CDA chief reviews pace of work on under construction projects

ISLAMABAD
STAFF REPORT

Chief Commissioner Islamabad and Chairman Capital Development Authority (CDA), Sohail Ashraf, visited the under-construction National Police Academy building, Elite Police School, and expansion of Islamabad Safe City Project on Monday. Inspector General (IG) Islamabad Police, Syed Ali Nasir Rizvi along with other relevant officers, accompanied him.

Chairman CDA reviewed the progress made on the construction work of the National Police Academy project. Relevant officers briefed him about the progress on the National Police Academy project, said that construction work is progressing rapidly on all parts of the National Police Academy project simultaneously and under construction building consists of approximately 9 floors. During the briefing, it was informed that the construction work on all floors of the building has entered its final stage. Chairman CDA was apprised that along with the construction works, the finishing work of the project is also progressing rapidly. During the briefing, it was further said that the academy will also include modern training facilities for the trainees. Chairman CDA Sohail Ashraf directed the expeditious completion of the remaining construction work on the project and said that the provision of all high-quality training facilities within the academy should be ensured. He said that high standards should be ensured for all construction and finishing works included in the project.

Later, the CDA Chairman visited the expansion of Islamabad Safe City Project and the Elite Police School. During a briefing, Chairman CDA was informed that the Islamabad Safe City project is being expanded on modern lines. He was also told during the briefing that rappelling towers and obstacles are being constructed for training at the Elite Police School.

Solar Pakistan 2026 concludes successfully

LAHORE
STAFF REPORT

The three-day Solar Pakistan 2026 exhibition successfully concluded today at the Expo Centre Lahore, marking a significant milestone in accelerating Pakistan's transition to alternative energy. Organized by Fakt Exhibitions (Pvt) Ltd, the event attracted more than 400 companies from 10 countries, energy experts, policymakers, and received an overwhelming response. The closing ceremony was graced by Faheem Ur Rehman Saigol (President of the Lahore Chamber of Commerce & Industry) (LCCI) he said, "Solar Pakistan is an essential initiative in unlocking the alternative energy potential of regions like Punjab. With abundant sunlight and growing awareness, this region is well-positioned to lead in sustainable energy solutions.

Speaking on the success of the exhibition, Saleem Khan Tanoli, CEO of Fakt Exhibitions, stated: "We are pleased to see the enthusiastic participation and engagement from both national and international stakeholders. Solar Pakistan continues to serve as a catalyst for innovation and collaboration, shaping the future of Pakistan's energy landscape."

The exhibition provided a vibrant platform for business networking, strategic partnerships, and on-ground solutions aimed at addressing Pakistan's energy challenges. From smart solar panels and hybrid storage systems to off-grid solutions tailored for rural areas, the showcase offered a practical roadmap for advancing alternative energy adoption across the country. In light of the growing energy demand and rising climate concerns, Solar Pakistan 2026 has reinforced the urgency of transitioning to cleaner energy sources. The successful execution of the event positions Lahore as a rising hub for energy innovation and highlights the pivotal role regional cities can play in driving national energy resilience and sustainability.

ATIR GRANTS TAX RELIEF TO IT EXPORTER, REMANDS RS51.2 MILLION CASE

■ TRIBUNAL RULES EXPORT REMITTANCES MAY QUALIFY FOR EXEMPTION, SENDS CASE BACK TO TAX OFFICER

PROFIT
MONITORING DESK

THE Appellate Tribunal Inland Revenue (ATIR) has granted relief to a software exporter by remanding a case involving Rs51.2 million in foreign remittances back to the assessing officer, ruling that the income may qualify for tax exemption under existing law, Business Recorder reported.

The case involved Majaz Elahi, who had declared Rs51,195,457 as export proceeds from IT services and software in his tax return, claiming exemption under Clause 133 of Part 1 of the Second Schedule to the Income Tax Ordinance, 2001.

The return was initially accepted, but tax authorities later reopened the case under Section 122(8) following information regarding a property transaction.



After the taxpayer denied owning any such property, the focus shifted to the source of the declared exempt income.

The assessing officer subsequently treated the amount as unexplained in-

come under Section 111 and added it to taxable income, a decision that was upheld at earlier appellate stages.

The taxpayer challenged the ruling, arguing that the amount represented for-

ign remittances from IT exports, supported by bank statements, remittance certificates, and documentation issued by the Pakistan Software Export Board.

The tribunal noted that the earlier order contained a factual error regarding an alleged property sale and accepted that the available record prima facie supported the taxpayer's claim.

Based on this assessment, ATIR set aside the earlier finding and directed the assessing officer to re-examine the case in light of the evidence.

The tribunal observed that export proceeds from IT services and software are eligible for exemption under the law and should not be treated as unexplained income without proper evaluation.

The decision highlights the need for tax authorities to assess foreign remittances linked to IT exports on the basis of evidence and applicable legal provisions.

Rs48b mega package announced to transform Sheikhupura: Azma Bokhari

LAHORE
STAFF REPORT

Provincial Minister for Information and Culture, Azma Bokhari has said that under the vision of Chief Minister Maryam Nawaz, Punjab has embarked on the largest and most transparent development journey in its history. The objective is to uplift the public from conditions of neglect and underdevelopment and provide a clean, modern living environment.

She expressed these views while speaking to the media after receiving a detailed briefing on development projects and the law and order situation at the Deputy Commissioner's Office in Sheikhupura.

Azma Bokhari revealed that Chief Minister Maryam Nawaz has announced a historic development package worth Rs 48 billion for Sheikhupura. Under this package, extensive work is underway across the district, including the construction of new roads, modern sewerage systems, water tanks, and city beautification projects.

She emphasized that, unlike in the past, development is no longer limited to selected areas but is now reaching every town and village across Punjab. An amount exceeding Rs 12.5 billion has been allocated specifically for WASA-related projects.

Sharing a major development for the city, she announced that eco-friendly electric green buses will



begin operating between Lahore and Sheikhupura within the next 10 days. This service will particularly benefit female students, working women, and elderly citizens by providing safe and dignified transportation. She directed the administration to complete the construction of modern depots and charging stations on an emergency basis.

Speaking about sanitation and rural uplift, Azma Bokhari said that the flagship programs "Suthra Punjab" and "Model Village" are transforming rural areas. Under these initiatives, projects worth Rs 809 million are being implemented to provide sewerage systems and basic facilities. She added that, for the first time in 74 years, a structured waste management system has been established, which is being closely monitored.

On administrative discipline, she made it clear that Chief Minister Maryam Nawaz has issued strict instructions that no delays in development projects or compromises on safety measures will be tolerated. She directed the Deputy Commissioner to display project details and visuals at excavation sites so that the public remains informed about the benefits following temporary inconvenience.

Highlighting improvements in law and order, she appreciated the performance of the Punjab Police, stating that, in line with the Chief Minister's vision, significant progress has been achieved, including up to a 40% reduction in rape cases. She reaffirmed the government's commitment to intensifying crackdowns against drug trafficking and child abuse.

CTO Islamabad visits city duty points with SSP Operations

ISLAMABAD
STAFF REPORT

Following the special directives of the Inspector General of Police (IGP) Syed Ali Nasir Rizvi, Islamabad Police has taken effective measures to ensure foolproof security and efficient traffic management in the federal capital.

In this regard, Chief Traffic Officer (CTO) Islamabad Muhammad

Sarfraz Virk, accompanied by SSP Operations Islamabad Qazi Ali Raza, visited various duty points in the city. They met with police officers and officials present on duty.

On this occasion, while reviewing the checking process, they directed the concerned officers to further strengthen and make checkpoints more effective to ensure the protection of citizens' lives and property. All officers were directed to re-

main alert at all times, ensure thorough checking of suspicious individuals and vehicles, and immediately report any suspicious activity to the relevant authorities.

The CTO Islamabad also issued directions to ensure effective traffic arrangements on highways and to maintain the smooth flow of traffic throughout the city. Further necessary traffic-related guidelines were also issued to ensure that citizens do not face any difficulties and that traffic flow remains uninterrupted.

Citizens are requested to follow the advisory issued by the traffic police. Islamabad Traffic Police remains present on the roads at all times to guide and facilitate the public.

He further stated that all officers and officials should treat citizens with courtesy and respect to strengthen the bond of trust between the police and the public. The protection of citizens' lives and property is the top priority of Islamabad Police, and all security measures are being taken with this objective.

PM&DC holds preliminary hearings on student suicide and harassment cases

ISLAMABAD
STAFF REPORT

The Pakistan Medical and Dental Council convened a preliminary hearing to review the tragic case of a medical student's suicide, reportedly linked to harassment. PM&DC President Prof Dr Rizwan Taj, along with Registrar Dr Rehan Naqvi, expressed sorrow over the incidents and emphasized a zero-tolerance policy towards harassment and any negligence in medical and dental institutions. Three preliminary hearings were convened today to ensure a fair and informed assessment of the matters at hand before any formal disciplinary proceedings were initiated. Relevant stakeholders, including representatives of the concerned institution, were called to present their accounts so that the factual matrix could be clearly established. The President of PM&DC carefully reviewed the initial findings and sought clarifications from the concerned representatives to verify key facts and to assess the sufficiency of evidence. This process was undertaken to determine whether the cases were ready for referral to the Disciplinary Committee for further adjudication.

The first hearing was of the doctors with "OT video leak scandal". All 05 doctors, including Dr. Tayaba Fatima, Dr. Zainab Tahir, Dr. Muhammad Essa, Dr. Ayesha Afzal and Dr. Maham Amin attended. The incident involved the circulation of an inappropriate video on social media by the PG trainees of Lady Wellington Hospital, Lahore, showing a race amongst doctors performing surgeries on two tables and making callous comments.

Second hearing was on the sad incident of suicide by a final year MBBS student Ms. Fareeha at Fatima Jinnah Medical College, Lahore. The principal of the College appeared and explained the facts.

The third hearing was on the sad incident of suicide by Ms. Fehmida Leghari 3rd year MBBS of student of Muhammad Medical College, Mirpurkhas. The principal of the college appeared and explained the facts.

After the preliminary hearings, President PM&DC forwarded the cases to the PM&DC Disciplinary Committee for final determination/decisions. The Disciplinary committee is scheduled to be held next week.

Uninterrupted power supply to be ensured in view of arrival of international delegations: IESCO CEO

ISLAMABAD
STAFF REPORT

Chief Executive IESCO Engineer Chaudhry Khalid Mahmood has said that all arrangements have been finalized to ensure uninterrupted power supply in view of the arrival of international delegations in Islamabad. In this regard, he chaired a high-level meeting at IESCO Head Office in which Chief Engineer Operation Muhammad Kashif Shah and Chief Engineer O&M Zahid Saleem Usmani, officers of the concerned operation circles participated. The Chief Executive IESCO said that the officers and staff of the concerned areas are fully mobilized. Grid stations and feeders are being monitored 24 hours a day and Insha Allah, IESCO will ensure continuous power supply during this big event.

CAT upholds CCP order against Kingdom Valley, maintains Rs35m penalty for deceptive marketing

ISLAMABAD
STAFF REPORT

The Competition Appellate Tribunal (CAT) has upheld the Competition Commission of Pakistan (CCP)'s order dated 27 May 2025 against Kingdom Valley (Pvt.) Limited, directing the real estate developer to deposit a penalty of Rs35 million for misleading consumers about the location and approval status of its housing project.

During the proceedings, the Commission observed that Kingdom Valley had

engaged in deliberate deceptive marketing by portraying its project, actually located in Mouza Choor, Rawalpindi, as in Islamabad through billboards, social media, and other advertisements, thereby misleading consumers to command higher value. It is further added that the project was being widely promoted as "NOC approved" even before formal approvals were obtained, indicating a calculated strategy to deceive.

In its detailed judgment, the Tribunal endorsed the Commission's findings, holding that the company had clearly mis-

represented the project by advertising it as "Kingdom Valley Islamabad" despite its actual location in Rawalpindi. It noted that advertisements had been launched prior to obtaining approvals, reinforcing the element of deception. Rejecting the Kingdom Valley's defence that similar practices were prevalent in the sector, the Tribunal observed that "the deception angle becomes insurmountable when violation occurs in broad daylight," adding that "two wrongs never make one right."

While upholding the violation under Section 10(2)(b) of the Act, relating to dis-

semination of false or misleading information to consumers, the Tribunal maintained the penalty of Rs35 million, terming the misstatement of the project's location a "grave default." It emphasised that such practices are particularly harmful in the real estate sector, where consumers are frequently misled by exaggerated claims, often resulting in significant financial losses. The Tribunal further directed that failure to deposit the penalty within 20 days would result in restoration of the Commission's original order in its entirety, exposing the company to higher financial liability.

GOVT WORKING TO STABILISE FUEL PRICES AMID GLOBAL TENSIONS, SAYS PETROLEUM MINISTER

■ ALI PERVAIZ MALIK SAYS PAKISTAN'S ECONOMIC POSITION REMAINS RELATIVELY STABLE COMPARED TO SEVERAL REGIONAL ECONOMIES THAT HAVE FACED SIGNIFICANT STRESS IN RECENT YEARS

PROFIT
MONITORING DESK

FEDERAL Minister for Petroleum Ali Pervaiz Malik said on Sunday that the government is working to stabilise fuel prices and manage volatility in the petroleum sector, while prioritising relief for consumers amid global economic pressures. Speaking to a local media channel, he said efforts are underway to maintain balance in fuel pricing despite external shocks linked to ongoing regional conflicts, adding that policy decisions are being shaped to protect the public from rising costs.

The minister said the government is focused on easing the burden on consumers while ensuring supply stability, noting that continued reforms are aimed



at managing price pressures without disrupting the energy market.

He said Pakistan's economic position

remains relatively stable compared to several regional economies that have faced significant stress in recent years, in-

cluding India, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka. The minister also highlighted the role of civil and military leadership in strengthening Pakistan's diplomatic standing, referring to engagement led by Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif and Deputy Prime Minister Ishaq Dar.

He said Pakistan's role in facilitating dialogue in the Middle East crisis has been recognised internationally, adding that recent flexibility shown by the United States and Iran is a positive signal for de-escalation. However, he noted that both sides still need to move towards a comprehensive and lasting agreement to ensure long-term stability in the region.

The minister expressed confidence that ongoing policy measures, combined with diplomatic engagement, would help sustain economic stability and provide further relief to consumers.

Karachi police arrest four over alleged matric and inter exam paper leak network

KARACHI
STAFF REPORT

Karachi police said on Monday they had arrested four members of what they described as an organised network accused of leaking Matric and Intermediate Board examination papers and taking millions of rupees from students in return.

According to police, the Karachi police chief had tasked the Special Investigation Unit (SIU) with tracing the network. Investigators said the operation uncovered 10 groups that were allegedly sharing examination papers with students through WhatsApp on the night before exams. SIU Senior Superintendent of Police Samiullah Soomro said complaints related to online fraud had been coming in for some time. He said the papers being circulated were found to be 70% to 90% accurate.

Soomro said the four arrested suspects had first set up eight WhatsApp groups, adding more than 1,300 students to them. He said students were told a night before an examination that the paper had been leaked and was available with the group administrator. Those interested were then asked to contact the admin through direct message to get the paper.

The officer said investigators later found two more WhatsApp groups during the probe, bringing the total to 10. He added that police had so far arrested the ringleaders of four of those groups.

Probe widens to possible board links

Soomro said police suspected that some people linked to the Matric and Intermediate Boards might also have been involved, saying the papers may have reached the suspects through them.

He also said that during questioning, one of the suspects stated that he had generated the papers himself using artificial intelligence. According to Soomro, the suspect said he used past papers and guess papers to create new papers with AI, which was why the leaked material was not fully accurate. Police said the suspect then sold those papers to students through WhatsApp groups.

The leaked papers were 70% to 90% accurate.

The SSP said the suspects received money from students through online payment methods and added that police had obtained records of those transactions as part of the investigation.

Arrests made from multiple areas

Police said the main number used to run the WhatsApp groups was registered in the United Kingdom, and efforts were under way to obtain its details.

Soomro said police recovered cash, mobile phones, hard drives and transaction records from the arrested men. He said the suspects were taken into custody in Malir, Surjani Town, Gulshan-e-Iqbal and New Karachi.

According to the SIU officer, the suspects are to be produced before a court on Tuesday for physical remand as the investigation continues.

Pakistan, Egypt conclude two-week Thunder-II counterterrorism exercise at Cherat

ISLAMABAD
STAFF REPORT

Pakistan and Egypt have wrapped up a two-week joint military exercise centred on counterterrorism operations at Cherat in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, according to the Inter-Services Public Relations (ISPR). In a statement issued on Monday, the military's media wing said the Pakistan-Egypt Joint Exercise Thunder-II was held at the Special Operations School in Cherat, described as the military's premier Special Operations School. The ISPR said the exercise was designed to improve interoperability between the two sides by refining drills, procedures and techniques related to counterterrorism operations through joint training. According to the statement, combat teams from the Pakistan Army's Special Services Group (SSG) and the Egyptian Special Forces took part in the exercise. The ISPR said the participating troops displayed exceptional professionalism and operational skill during the training period.

The closing ceremony was attended by the General Officer Commanding SSG, Commander of Egyptian Paratroopers Major General Mohamed Saad Abdel Razik and Egypt's defence attaché were also present at the event, the ISPR said. The military's media wing said the exercise also contributed to deepening defence ties between the two countries. "The exercise also served to further strengthen the longstanding and historic military-to-military relations between the two friendly nations," it stated. Pakistan and Egypt maintain long-standing bilateral relations.

According to the reports, the joint exercise had commenced on April 6 at the Special Operations School in Cherat. Last year, Chief of Army Staff Field Marshal Asim Munir, during a meeting with Egyptian defence officials in October, reaffirmed Pakistan's commitment to enhanced defence and military cooperation with Egypt.

PTI warns of looming food crisis, slams govt over 'anti-farmer' policies

ISLAMABAD
STAFF REPORT

Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) Central Information Secretary Sheikh Waqas Akram on Monday launched a scathing attack on the government, accusing it of pursuing "flawed, short-sighted and agenda-driven policies" that have crippled key sectors of the economy, which he claimed had performed significantly better under the leadership of Imran Khan. In a strongly worded statement, the PTI leader said the government's "anti-people and anti-farmer policies" had brought economic activity to a near standstill, pushing Pakistan's agricultural backbone into deep distress and paralysing the broader economy. He warned that without immediate, comprehensive and practical policy corrections, the country risks not only a decline in wheat production but also a looming food security crisis.

Sh Waqas said the ruling elite appeared detached from the ground realities faced by ordinary citizens and farmers, adding that growers across the country were once again approaching a breaking point. Highlighting the deepening wheat crisis, he said farmers were grappling with uncertainty over pricing, flawed procurement arrangements, non-availability of gunny bags and the increasing dominance of middlemen in markets — factors that have severely eroded their financial viability. "Despite the announcement of a support price of Rs3,500 per maund, the rate does not reflect actual production costs," he said, adding that per-acre cultivation expenses — driven by sharp increases in fertilisers, seeds, pesticides, water charges, diesel, harvesting and threshing — have surged to nearly Rs210,000.

Govt says Middle East war will slow growth this year and next

ISLAMABAD
STAFF REPORT

The government said on Monday that Pakistan's economic growth would come under pressure in the current and next fiscal years because of a sharp reduction in development spending, fuel subsidies and inflationary effects linked to supply chain disruptions caused by the war in the Middle East.

Planning Minister Ahsan Iqbal told a news conference that the cut in development allocations would weigh on economic activity. He said, "This (cut in development budget) will have a negative impact and, coupled with international oil prices and inflation, will result in economic slowdown and affect our growth target of 4.2pc" for the current year.

His remarks marked the first official acknowledgement that growth may fall short of the target, although international lenders had already projected Pakistan's

growth rate in the range of 3.2pc to 3.5pc.

Development spending reduced
Responding to a question, the minister said the Public Sector Development Programme (PSDP) for the current fiscal year had been cut by Rs173 billion, bringing it down to Rs837bn from the budgeted Rs1.01 trillion.

He said the reduction was made to help finance the Prime Minister's Austerity Fund, which was set up to subsidise fuel prices, especially diesel, during the harvesting season.

Iqbal said Pakistan's gross domestic product grew by 3.8pc in the first two quarters, from July to December, compared to 1.9pc in the same period last year, before what he described as an external shock from the Middle East crisis affected Pakistan and other economies. He said the impact on the growth outlook would be smaller in the current fiscal year because the crisis emerged after

three quarters had already passed, but warned that the effect would be more pronounced in the first six months of the next fiscal year even if the war ended immediately. He added that global supply chains and markets usually required six to nine months to return to normal.

Oil prices, inflation and subsidies

The planning minister said oil prices and uninterrupted supply were critical for the global economy and that higher prices had raised export costs internationally. He said Pakistan had avoided disruptions in oil supplies through proactive decisions, but added that consumption had to be controlled through price adjustments to prevent domestic and external deficits from widening. Under that approach, he said, the government first raised diesel and petrol prices by Rs55 per litre and then kept them unchanged for the next two weeks by providing a Rs129bn subsidy through a Rs100bn reduction in development spending.

CM Maryam pushes Blue Economy drive to turn barren land into shrimp export hub

LAHORE
SALIEEM JADOON

Punjab Chief Minister Maryam Nawaz on Monday reaffirmed her commitment to transforming barren lands across the province into productive economic zones under the Blue Economy Programme, saying the promotion of aquaculture and shrimp farming on international standards would generate employment, rehabilitate unused land and boost exports, according to a DGPR handout.

"Significant progress has been achieved in developing infrastructure for shrimp farming projects in Sargodha Estate, Ali Wala and Shah Garh," the chief minister said, commending the team for ex-



pediting work, according to a statement issued by the Chief Minister's Office (CMO).

At the Sargodha shrimp farming project, excavation of 118 ponds has been completed, alongside the boring of 116 tube wells and 100 percent land clearing and

survey over 365 acres. Construction of the warehouse is 90 percent complete, while work on the administration block and feed store is progressing rapidly. The project spans a total area of 500 acres.

In the Ali Wala shrimp estate, 90 percent of the allocated 1,267 acres has been cleared. Excavation of 642 out of 737 ponds has been completed, while 91 percent work on the drainage system and 100 percent excavation of MDC drains have been finalised. Survey and clearing of a 9,000-metre road network have been completed, along with 80 percent of earth-filling work. Foundations for the administration office, hostel, warehouse and labour residences have also been laid.

Four road workers abducted by armed men in Tirah valley

KHYBER
NEWS DESK

Four workers engaged in road construction were abducted by armed men in the Peer Mela area of Tirah valley in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa on Monday, according to local sources.

The abducted men included two excavator operators and two labourers who were busy levelling land for the construction of a link

road when gunmen took them away at gunpoint, the sources said. They added that the workers were shifted to an undisclosed location after the abduction. According to the same sources, three of the four kidnapped workers are residents of Balochistan.

Security forces launched a search operation in the area and adjoining localities following the incident, local sources said.

After the abduction, local eld-

ers called for effective security arrangements for people working on development schemes in the area. They warned that incidents of this nature could affect ongoing development work in Tirah valley.

Security concerns raised in Bara

Separately, a peace council of the Akkakhel tribe was held in Bara tehsil of Khyber district, where participants voiced concern over the worsening security situation in the area.

Members of the council told Dawn that the meeting expressed deep concern over the deteriorating law and order situation and demanded immediate steps to address it.

Loss of energy output in MidEast will take about two years to recover, IEA says

PROFIT
REUTERS

It will take about two years to recover the energy output lost in the Middle East from the conflict there, Fatih Birol, the head of the International Energy Agency, was quoted as saying in an interview with the Neue Zuercher Zeitung newspaper.

"That will vary from country to country. In Iraq, for example, it will take much longer than in Saudi Arabia. However, we

estimate it will take approximately two years overall to reach pre-war levels again," Birol told the Swiss newspaper.

Birol added that the market was underestimating the consequences of a prolonged closure of the Strait of Hormuz.

Shipments of oil and gas that were already en route to their destinations before the war in Iran began have now arrived, mitigating the impact of shortages, he said.

"But no new tankers were loaded in March. There were no new deliveries of oil,

gas or fuels to Asian markets. This gap is now becoming apparent. If the Strait of Hormuz is not reopened, we must prepare for significantly higher energy prices."

Asked whether the IEA could carry out another release of emergency oil reserves after its March move, Birol said the agency was ready to act immediately and decisively.

"We're not there yet, but it's definitely under consideration," Birol said.



TRUMP TOUTS 'BETTER THAN OBAMA' IRAN DEAL AS ISLAMABAD TALKS FACE UNCERTAINTY

■ 'IT WILL BE SOMETHING THAT THE ENTIRE WORLD WILL BE PROUD OF,' US PRESIDENT SAYS

■ IRANIAN FOREIGN MINISTRY SPOKESPERSON SAYS THERE IS CURRENTLY 'NO PLAN' FOR A SECOND ROUND OF NEGOTIATIONS WITH US

WASHINGTON/TEHRAN/ISLAMABAD
STAFF REPORT / AGENCIES

UNITED States President Donald Trump said on Monday that the new deal in the pipeline with Iran would be "far better" than the nuclear deal realised by former president Barack Obama and would "guarantee peace, security and safety" for everyone, adding that it was coming "relatively quickly".

Trump made the assertion in a post on Truth Social.

In another post, he said: "I read the fake news saying that I am under 'pressure' to make a deal. This is not true! I am under no pressure whatsoever, although, it will all happen, relatively quickly!"

He further said that the US Navy's blockade of the Strait of Hormuz would not be lifted until the deal was secured.

Meanwhile, Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian expressed deep mistrust towards the US, saying honouring commitments was essential for meaningful dialogue amid growing uncertainty over new peace talks.

In a post on X, Pezeshkian said, "Honouring commitments is the basis of meaningful dialogue. Deep historical mistrust in Iran toward the US government conduct remains, while unconstructive & contradic-



tory signals from American officials carry a bitter message; they seek Iran's surrender. Iranians do not submit to force."

Earlier, Pezeshkian said Iran would seek to end the war imposed on the country by the US and the Israeli regime while preserving national honour.

Emphasising the importance of managing wartime conditions intelligently, the president said, "Today, we are endeavouring to manage these difficult circumstances through prudence, wisdom, and the preservation of national honour, so that we may subsequently focus on reconstruction and problem-solving through precise planning."

Pezeshkian made the remarks during a visit to a fire station, where he expressed gratitude for the efforts of firefighters and emergency personnel, particularly during the 40-day war.

During the visit, the president received a briefing on the services provided by firefighting units to the public throughout the war.

Referring to the economic and social consequences of the conflict, Pezeshkian said, "It is natural that after the conclusion of hostilities, the country will face challenges in reconstruction, securing financial resources, and market control."

» CONTINUED ON PAGE 03

Islamabad locked down, offices, schools move online as Red Zone sealed ahead of US-Iran talks

ISLAMABAD
STAFF REPORT

Islamabad police on Monday rolled out an updated traffic and security plan ahead of the expected arrival of foreign delegations in the federal capital, as authorities sealed off the Red Zone and shifted government operations within the area to remote working arrangements ahead of the anticipated second round of US-Iran talks.

According to an official notification, all ministries, divisions, and federal government offices located within the Red Zone will operate from home on Monday, April 20. However, officers and secretariat staff have been directed to remain on standby and report to office at short notice if required. The Cabinet Secretariat issued the directive late Sunday night.

Separately, the Islamabad Capital Territory District Magistrate Irfan Nawaz Memon announced that entry into the Red Zone will remain suspended on April 20, ordering all public and private offices and schools within the area to adopt work-from-home arrangements to avoid inconvenience.

» CONTINUED ON PAGE 03

Pakistan intensifies diplomacy as Dar urges continued Iran-US engagement

ISLAMABAD
STAFF REPORT

Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Ishaq Dar on Monday stressed the importance of sustained engagement and dialogue during a telephone conversation with his Iranian counterpart Abbas Araghchi, as uncertainty continues to surround a potential second round of US-Iran talks in Islamabad, the Foreign Office said.

In a post on X, the Foreign Office confirmed that FM Dar held a telephonic conversation with the Iranian foreign minister.

During the call, Dar emphasised the need for continued dialogue and early engagement to resolve outstanding issues and promote regional peace and stability. Both sides agreed to remain closely engaged moving forward. The Iranian side, in its own statement, said the two ministers discussed regional developments and ceasefire-related matters, exchanging views on ongoing coordination. Pakistan's diplomatic outreach gains traction Earlier, Australian Foreign Minister Penny Wong appreciated Pakistan's "constructive role" in facilitating dialogue and its continued commitment to diplomatic engagement during a telephone call with Ishaq Dar.

» CONTINUED ON PAGE 03

Two police martyred, including woman constable, in Khuzdar shootout

QUETTA
STAFF REPORT

At least two police personnel, including a woman constable, were martyred and three others sustained injuries in a fierce exchange of fire with terrorists in Balochistan's Khuzdar district on Monday, a senior police official said. According to Khuzdar Additional Superintendent of Police (ASP) Abdul Qudus, the incident occurred in Bajoi, a remote mountainous town located about 35 kilometres from Khuzdar city, when police came under attack during a search operation following a robbery complaint. He said police were conducting house-to-house searches in the area when armed terrorists, believed to be holed up nearby, opened fire on the team. The martyrs were identified as woman police constable Malik Naz and Head Constable Sami Ullah, both residents of Khuzdar district. The ASP said the woman constable was part of the search team due to the nature of the operation involving house searches. "This is the first incident of its kind in which a woman constable was targeted during a search operation," ASP Qudus said. No group has so far claimed responsibility for the attack. The ASP added that the area is extremely remote, and police along with other law enforcement agencies have launched a search operation to track down and arrest the attackers.

Government condemns attack, vows action Provincial Home Minister Ziaullah Langove lauded the bravery and sacrifice of the martyred personnel, pledging that the attackers would be brought to justice. "The sacrifices of police personnel in the fight against terrorism are a matter of pride for the nation," he said in a statement, adding that terrorists targeting law enforcement agencies would not be spared under any circumstances.

PM pays tribute to martyred woman constable Meanwhile, Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif paid rich tribute to Balochistan Police woman constable Malik Naz Baloch, who embraced martyrdom while performing her duty during the operation in Khuzdar.

Naqvi meets Iran, US envoys to discuss preparations as 'uncertainty clouds 2nd round of Islamabad Talks'

ISLAMABAD
STAFF REPORT

Pakistan on Monday intensified efforts to facilitate a second round of "Islamabad Talks" between the United States and Iran, as Interior Minister Mohsin Naqvi held separate meetings with the two countries' envoys amid "lingering uncertainty over whether the negotiations will proceed."

Uncertainty persisted over the planned second round, with mixed signals emerging from Tehran even as Islamabad continued preparations to host the talks.

Naqvi's stepped-up diplomatic engagement comes as Pakistan positions itself to host what officials describe as a "possible second round" of negotiations, following an inconclusive first round.

According to separate statements issued by the Interior Min-



istry, Naqvi met US Charge d'Affaires Natalie Baker and Iran's Ambassador to Pakistan Reza Amiri Moghadam to review arrangements and regional developments.

In his meeting with the Iranian envoy, Naqvi said Pakistan had completed preparations for the talks and ensured "foolproof" security arrangements for all foreign

delegations. However, Tehran said earlier on Monday that it had yet to decide whether to send a delegation, and no formal confirmation of the talks has been issued.

Both sides underscored the need for a sustainable diplomatic solution to ease tensions, the ministry said.

» CONTINUED ON PAGE 03

KP Assembly backs Islamabad Talks, urges diplomacy for regional peace

PESHAWAR
SALEEM JADOON

The Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Assembly on Monday unanimously passed a resolution in support of the "Islamabad Talks," reiterating its backing for peace and diplomacy and terming the US-Iran negotiations in Islamabad an

important opportunity for "regional peace and stability."

The resolution, jointly presented by both opposition and government members, called for the promotion of peace, stability and regional cooperation, and paid tribute to the foreign policy vision of former prime minister Imran Khan.

According to the text of the resolution, Pakistan's role in the Doha Process under the Imran Khan government was acknowledged, while the Kartarpur Corridor was described as a landmark initiative. The House further stated that peace talks in Islamabad represent the only viable path to lasting peace.

Four terrorists neutralized, police officer martyred in two KP IBOs

RAWALPINDI
STAFF REPORT

Four terrorists, including two highly wanted commanders, were neutralized and one police officer was martyred in two separate intelligence-based operations in Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa, officials confirmed on Monday.

In a statement, the Inter-Services Public Relations (ISPR), the military's media wing, said, "On 19 April 2026, an intelligence based operation was conducted by Security Forces in Bannu District on reported presence of khwarij."

"During conduct of the operation, after intense exchange of fire, two khwarij, belonging to Indian sponsored Fitna al-Khwarij, including Kharji Ringleader Waheedullah alias Mukhtar along with a suicide bomber were sent to hell," the ISPR said, adding that a suicide jacket, weapons and ammunition were also recovered from killed khwarij.

The state uses the term Fitna al-Khwarij for the terrorists belonging to the banned Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP). The ISPR said that the terrorist ring leader Waheedullah was "amongst the most wanted terrorists" due to his involvement in multiple terrorist activities, including attacks that led to the "martyrdom of security forces personnel and innocent civilians". According to the statement, he was also the main handler of a suicide bomber in Bannu District on February 21, an attack in which Lieutenant Colonel Gul Faraz was martyred.

The ISPR further said the operation had "indeed avenged the heinous act and brought the main perpetrator to justice", adding that the "timely action of security forces also averted a major catastrophe". It added that a sanitisation operation is being conducted in the area to eliminate any remaining terrorists. It added that Pakistan's "relentless counter-terrorism campaign under the vision Azm-e-Istehkam", approved by the Federal Apex Committee on the National Action Plan, will continue at full pace.

EU backs Pakistan's peace push as world awaits US-Iran talks in Islamabad

ISLAMABAD
SALEEM JADOON

European Council President Antonio Costa on Monday voiced optimism about a potential breakthrough in US-Iran negotiations, telling Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif that the "world is anticipating with great expectation" the next round of the "Islamabad Talks."

According to a statement issued by the Prime Minister's Office (PMO), the two leaders spoke over the phone and exchanged views on the evolving situation in the Middle East, with PM Shehbaz briefing the European Union leadership on its ongoing diplomatic outreach and peace efforts.

Costa praised Pakistan's "constructive role" in facilitating dialogue between Washington and Tehran, and said the European Union was ready to support the process "in every possible manner," the statement said.

Both leaders underscored the need to sustain dialogue and diplomacy to ensure lasting regional and global security, agreeing

to remain in close contact as efforts for a second round of talks gather momentum.

Later, in a post on X, Costa said it was a "pleasure" speaking with the Pakistani premier, expressing "sincere gratitude" for Islamabad's "tireless efforts" to promote peace and stability.

He added that the world was "watching with great expectation" the next meeting between the United States and Iran, which he said should take place in Islamabad at the earliest opportunity.

"We hope that an agreement will be reached to bring an end to the conflict and lead to the full reopening of the Strait of Hormuz. The European Union supports all ongoing efforts towards peace in the Middle East," Costa said.

Prime Minister Shehbaz welcomed the EU's appreciation of Pakistan's diplomatic role and its readiness to back continued engagement, reaffirming Islamabad's commitment to dialogue as the only viable path to regional peace and stability.

Last month, Costa had similarly reiterated the EU's support for Pakistan's peace efforts, emphasising that only sustained diplomacy could help de-escalate tensions in the region.

Talks amid fragile momentum The diplomatic outreach comes after 40 days of airstrikes, following which US and Iranian negotiators opened talks in Islamabad earlier this month, focusing once again on the core trade-off between nuclear restrictions and economic relief.

During their most recent engagement, the United States proposed a 20-year suspension of Iran's nuclear activities, while Tehran countered with a shorter halt of three to five years, according to officials familiar with the discussions.

Although formal negotiations are yet to fully commence, US President Donald Trump said earlier that Vice President JD Vance and an American delegation were expected in Pakistan for talks, expressing confidence that a deal could be reached swiftly

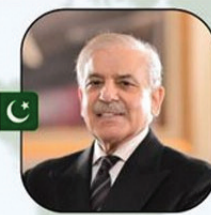
and indicating willingness to meet Iranian leaders if progress is made.

However, Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian struck a more cautious tone, voicing deep mistrust toward Washington and stressing that honouring commitments would

be essential for any meaningful agreement.

Diplomats say a preliminary framework may be achievable, potentially built around a nuclear package and an economic package, though the nuclear component remains the most contentious.

Telephone Conversation



Prime Minister of Pakistan
MUHAMMAD SHEHBAZ SHARIF



President of the European Council
H.E. ANTONIO COSTA



PAKISTAN IN ADVANCED TALKS WITH QATAR FOR FOUR LNG CARGOES AMID POWER SHORTFALL

■ AT LEAST THREE LNG CARGOES BOUND FOR PAKISTAN ARE CURRENTLY STRANDED IN PERSIAN GULF AS CLOSURE OF STRAIT OF HORMUZ CONTINUES TO DISRUPT SUPPLY

PROFIT
MONITORING DESK

PAKISTAN is in advanced discussions with Qatar to secure at least four liquefied natural gas (LNG) cargoes, with potential shipments expected to pass through the Strait of Hormuz within days, according to officials, Dawn reported.

The move comes as the power division has requested around 400 million cubic feet

per day of LNG to meet electricity demand, amid rising load-shedding concerns ahead of summer.

According to Bloomberg's vessel-tracking data, at least three LNG cargoes bound for Pakistan are currently stranded in the Persian Gulf as the closure of the Strait of Hormuz continues to disrupt supply.

LNG imports had been disrupted last month after the closure of the Strait of Hormuz following US-Israel strikes on Iran, which led to regional tensions and Qatar de-

claring force majeure on its LNG contracts, including those with Pakistan.

Officials said Pakistan has approached Qatar at a high level to secure cargoes, with technical teams from both sides working on arrangements. Several LNG shipments are believed to be stranded near the Hormuz chokepoint.

QatarEnergy had declared force majeure on March 4 following an attack on an LNG facility, disrupting supply arrangements with Pakistan.

Despite the shortfall, load shedding has eased in recent days due to higher hydropower generation, supported by increased water releases from Tarbela Dam of up to 30,000 cusecs.

Officials said LNG import schedules are expected to normalise once QatarEnergy lifts force majeure conditions and shipping routes stabilise.

The power division warned that without adequate RLNG supply, reliance on alternative fuels such as high-speed diesel could in-

crease generation costs and extend load management hours.

Pakistan's LNG-based power plants, with a combined capacity of around 6,000MW, are considered essential for meeting peak demand and maintaining grid stability.

Officials noted that electricity demand is expected to rise further with the onset of summer, making RLNG availability critical for uninterrupted and cost-effective power generation.

Transparency seeks cancellation of SNGPL tender, alleges 'mis-procurement' and rule violations

■ WATCHDOG URGES PPRA TO DECLARE MIS-PROCUREMENT, CITES EXCLUSION OF LOCAL BIDDERS AND RULE BREACHES

PROFIT
MONITORING DESK

Transparency International Pakistan (TIP) has raised concerns over alleged violations of procurement rules by Sui Northern Gas Pipelines Limited (SNGPL) in a recent tender, calling for the process to be declared "mis-procurement" and the contract to be cancelled, according to a news report.

In a letter to the Public Procurement Regulatory Authority (PPRA), TIP highlighted irregularities in Tender No. SNC-1930/25 related to the procurement of air intake filter elements and pre-filter stocks.

The tender, which closed on October 28, 2025, saw one bidder, M/s Qaim, declared non-responsive due to discrepancies in documentation and alleged non-compliance with specified requirements.

The firm challenged the decision before the Grievance Redressal Committee and later approached PPRA, which observed that the procurement appeared to be structured for foreign bidders.

TIP said this raises legal concerns, noting that limiting participation to foreign suppliers may violate the Public Procurement Rules 2004 and undermine policies supporting local industry.

The organisation stated that such actions fall under Rule 50 of the PPRA Rules, which defines unauthorised breaches of procurement procedures as mis-procurement.

It added that Rule 24 requires fair competition and encourages preference for domestic suppliers, while relevant policies mandate value addition or price preference for local manufacturers.

TIP also criticised PPRA for not formally declaring the case as mis-procurement despite identifying irregularities.

The watchdog recommended that the tender be cancelled and re-issued in line

with procurement laws, and called for enforcement of Integrity Pact provisions in case violations are confirmed.

It further urged action against officials responsible for the alleged irregularities under applicable laws.

The letter has been shared with multiple authorities, including the Prime Minister's Office, Petroleum Division, National Accountability Bureau, and Federal Investigation Agency.

TIP said it acted as a whistleblower organisation in the matter, emphasising the need for transparency and compliance with procurement rules.

Pakistan's shipping activity remains uninterrupted despite Hormuz tensions

PNSC vessels *Sargodha*, *Shalimar*, *Lahore* handle crude as port processes 80,000 tonnes cargo

PROFIT
NEWS DESK

Shipping activity in Pakistan has remained uninterrupted despite tensions in the Strait of Hormuz, with oil tankers continuing to arrive and discharge fuel supplies at Karachi port.

As per reports, the Pakistan National Shipping Company's tanker MT Sargodha has already unloaded crude oil from Fujairah, while two more vessels, MT Shalimar and MT Lahore, are expected to berth to discharge additional shipments.

Another vessel, MT Martini, is scheduled to dock to load surplus fuel oil produced locally. Port operations also included other tankers such as MT Hafnia Henriette and MT Wan HE, which berthed to load naphtha and ethanol, while MT Eva Gold departed after loading ethanol cargo. Karachi port handled over 60,554 tonnes of containerised cargo, including 58,366 tonnes of imports and 2,188 tonnes of exports. Two ships also offloaded 1,388 tonnes of imported soybean meal. Export activity included shipments of 611 tonnes of rice by three vessels, bringing total cargo handling across liquid, dry and bulk segments to around 80,000 tonnes on Sunday. Authorities said 19 cargo ships are expected to berth at the port on Monday, indicating continued shipping activity despite regional disruptions.

Jazz International launches public offer for 6.67% stake in TPL Insurance at Rs30 per share

Offer follows 53.81% acquisition deal, total takeover to exceed 60% stake

PROFIT
NEWS DESK

Jazz International Holding Limited has announced a public offer to acquire up to 6.67% additional shares of TPL Insurance Limited at a price of Rs30 per share, following its agreement to acquire a majority stake in the company. According to a stock filing by Arif Habib Limited, Manager to the Offer, on Monday, the offer covers 13.24 million ordinary shares and is being made under Pakistan's takeover regulations, with Jazzworld Pakistan Limited acting as a person acting in concert. The development follows a share purchase agreement signed on March 5, 2026, under which Jazz International is acquiring 53.81% stake in TPL Insurance from TPL Corporation, representing 106.89 million shares at the same offer price. Additional stakes held by FinnFund and DEG, amounting to 32.85% combined, are being acquired separately through private arrangements and are not part of the public offer. Under regulatory requirements, the acquirer is obligated to offer minority shareholders an opportunity to sell shares, resulting in the current public offer for 6.67% of the company. The transaction structure indicates that Jazz International's total holding in TPL Insurance could exceed 60% following completion of the acquisition and public offer. Arif Habib Limited is acting as manager to the offer and has submitted due diligence certification to the Securities and Exchange Commission of Pakistan. The public announcement extends an earlier intention disclosed in September 2025, with a subsequent addendum in December and a timeline extension pushing the offer date to June 5, 2026. Jazz International, incorporated in the UAE in 2025, currently does not hold any shares in the target company prior to this transaction. The move marks a significant ownership transition in TPL Insurance and reflects ongoing activity in Pakistan's capital markets under takeover regulations.

SECP disburses Rs1.19b in salaries, benefits with retrospective effect over 16 months

■ RS579 MILLION PAID AS ARREARS, RS612 MILLION ALLOCATED TO PENSION, GRATUITY FUNDS UNDER BOARD APPROVAL

PROFIT
MONITORING DESK

The Securities and Exchange Commission of Pakistan (SECP) disbursed Rs1.191 billion to its chairman, commissioners, senior officials and staff over a 16-month period, with payments made retrospectively following approval by its policy board, The News reported.

The payments, covering the period from July 1, 2023 to October 31, 2024, included salaries, perks, privileges and other benefits, along with allocations to gratuity, pension and trust funds. According to official data, Rs579.139 million was paid as salary arrears, while Rs612.054 million was transferred to gratuity and pension-related funds.

Breakdown of payments shows that the chairman and three members received Rs65.559 million, nine execu-

tive directors Rs68.787 million, and 16 directors Rs87.046 million.

In addition, 33 directors received Rs135.123 million, 32 joint directors Rs56.391 million, 58 additional joint directors Rs68.541 million, 42 deputy directors Rs25.142 million, and 55 assistant directors Rs18.296 million.

Other disbursements included Rs398,481 to three management executives and Rs53.839 million to 140 staff members. The development came to light following concerns raised in the Senate regarding financial practices of public entities.

In response, the SECP spokesperson said the payments were made after a salary benchmarking exercise conducted by KPMG to align compensation with market standards.

The regulator stated that the proposal was approved by its policy board,

which is the competent authority under the SECP Act, 1997, to approve budgetary and financial decisions.

The SECP said Rs579 million was disbursed as arrears for the 16-month period, while Rs612 million was allocated to trust funds maintained for employee retirement benefits.

It added that approvals from external authorities were not required, as the policy board holds statutory authority over such matters.

The regulator also said information was shared with oversight bodies, including parliamentary committees, as required under relevant procedures. On audit status, the SECP said the matter has not yet been taken up at the Departmental Accounts Committee level, adding that audit observations are addressed through established mechanisms with the Auditor General of Pakistan.

Record 165 GW of wind power capacity added in 2025, led by China, report says

■ ASIA INSTALLS 131 GW, 80% OF GLOBAL TOTAL, CHINA ADDS RECORD 120.5 GW, EUROPE COMMISSIONS 19 GW

LONDON
REUTERS

The global wind industry installed a record 165 gigawatts of new capacity last year, up 40% from 2024 and mostly driven by China, a report by the Global Wind Energy Council said, adding this still lagged the pace needed to hit a key climate goal.

Renewable power made up almost half the world's total electricity capacity last year. This year, oil and gas prices have soared due to conflict in the Middle East and countries are looking for alternatives to meet rising energy demand. The rise in wind capacity installation was driven by strong demand

for new onshore wind, which rose by 42% to 155.3 GW, the GWEC said, while new offshore wind rose by 18% to 9 GW.

Asia, led by China and India, commissioned 131 GW of new capacity, which was 80% of the global total. China made up the bulk of that, adding a record 120.5 GW of new wind capacity. Europe was the second-highest region for installations, commissioning 19 GW of new capacity.

The U.S., despite the anti-wind rhetoric of the current administration, added nearly 7 GW of onshore wind last year. As a result of the new additions, cumulative global wind capacity increased to nearly 1.3 terawatts last year.

To meet a global goal to triple renewable energy capacity by the end of the decade, the International Renewable Energy Agency has said 320 GW of new wind capacity needs to be installed every year.

Therefore, new wind capacity needs to be doubled annually from the current level, the GWEC said.

But under current policies, the GWEC estimates a total of 969 GW of new capacity is expected to be added worldwide by 2030, averaging 194 GW per year. "Under all the scenarios that stay close to the 1.5 C global warming target, wind energy volumes need to undergo a dramatic and global expansion in the next few years," it added.

Cotton sector questions FCA target of 9.64m bales for 2026-27

PROFIT
MONITORING DESK

Pakistan's cotton sector has raised concerns over the Federal Committee on Agriculture's production target of 9.64 million bales for 2026-27, calling it inconsistent with recent output trends. Industry representatives said the target-setting process lacks alignment with ground realities, noting that crop estimates are fixed without comprehensive data or stakeholder consultation, leading to gaps between projections and actual production. According to data from the Pakistan Cotton Ginners' Association, the 2025-26 target of 10.2 million bales resulted in production of around 5.6 million bales, while previous seasons also recorded significant shortfalls. Stakeholders said the continued gap between targets and output has created uncertainty, particularly for importers who rely on accurate estimates to plan procurement strategies. They added that the absence of a clear revival strategy and weak enforcement of crop zoning policies remain key challenges for the sector. Industry representatives also pointed to the expansion of sugarcane cultivation, especially in south Punjab, which has reduced land available for cotton. They said unrealistic targets without policy measures could increase reliance on imports of cotton and edible oil, adding pressure on the external account. Stakeholders called for realistic production estimates, stronger enforcement of zoning laws and policy support to improve domestic output.

PSX plunges over 1,700 points as US-Iran tensions shatter ceasefire optimism

■ KSE-100 DROPS 1%, BROAD-BASED SELLING HITS ALL SECTORS AS GLOBAL MARKETS REACT TO RENEWED ESCALATION

PROFIT
NEWS DESK

Bears dominated a volatile session on Monday, with the benchmark KSE-100 Index of the Pakistan Stock Exchange (PSX) plunging over 1,700 points during intraday trading, as investor concerns grew that the ceasefire between the United States and Iran may not hold after Washington said it had seized an Iranian cargo ship attempting to breach its blockade, igniting Tehran to vow retaliation.

According to PSX data, the market opened on a negative note, with the KSE-100 Index falling to 170,625.96, down

more than 3,300 points in early trading. The index later recovered some losses and gained over 300 points, but overall it remained under pressure.

Around midday, selling pressure intensified again, pushing the KSE-100 down to 169,226.56, a decline of 4,712.45 points by around 1:10 pm.

Selling was observed across major sectors, including automobile assemblers, automobile parts and accessories, cable and electrical goods, cement, commercial banks, fertilizer, oil and gas exploration companies, oil and gas marketing companies, power generation and distribution, and refineries.

At close, the KSE-100 settled at

172,196.70, down by 1,742.31 or 1% from the previous close.

Last week, the KSE-100 Index witnessed a strong turnaround and posted a gain of 6,748 points, or 4.0% week-on-week, to close at 173,939, supported by optimism around US-Iran ceasefire developments and easing regional tensions. However, brokerage firms warned that the KSE-100 Index is expected to remain driven by developments in US-Iran talks.

Today's downturn comes after the reports that the U.S. military fired on an Iranian-flagged cargo ship headed towards Iran's Bandar Abbas port on Sunday after a six-hour standoff, disabling its engines.

U.S. Marines then rappelled from helicopters onto the vessel, U.S. Central Command said. "We have full custody of their ship, and are seeing what's on board!" President Trump wrote on social media.

Iran's military said the ship had been travelling from China. "We warn that the armed forces of the Islamic Republic of Iran will soon respond and retaliate against this armed piracy by the U.S. military," a military spokesperson said, according to state media. Iran also rejected new peace talks with the U.S., its state news agency reported on Sunday, hours after U.S. President Donald Trump said he was sending envoys for talks in Pakistan and would launch new

strikes on Iran unless it accepts his terms.

The ceasefire in the Iran war is due to run until Tuesday.

The renewed tensions between the US and Iran impacted the global markets, and S&P 500 futures fell around 0.7%, a modest move considering the index notched a record closing high on Friday.

Asia-Pacific markets were mixed, with Australia's S&P/ASX 200 down 0.5% and Japan's benchmark Nikkei up 0.7%.

Bond markets, which rallied on Friday, retreated. Brent crude futures rose about 6% to \$95.36 a barrel. S&P 500 futures fell around 0.6%, and European futures fell 1.2%. But equity benchmarks in Seoul, Taipei and Tokyo shrugged off risks to advance, with Taiwan's shares touching a record high and the other two not far behind.

ISLAMABAD
AHMAD AHMADANI

PAKISTAN SIGNS IFC DEAL FOR NATIONWIDE SMART METER ROLLOUT

TRANSACTION ADVISORY SERVICES AGREEMENT TO ENABLE DEPLOYMENT OF ADVANCED SMART METERING INFRASTRUCTURE (AMI), CUT COSTS, REDUCE LOSSES, DIGITISE POWER DISTRIBUTION SYSTEM

In a significant development, the Ministry of Energy has signed a Transaction Advisory Services Agreement (TASA) with the International Finance Corporation (IFC), under which the global financial institution will serve as transaction advisor for the large-scale deployment of Advanced Smart Metering Infrastructure (AMI).

Under the agreement, the IFC will carry out a comprehensive techno-commercial assessment to structure a service-provider model or a public-private partnership framework for the initiative. The objective is to mobilize both local and international investors for the installation, operation, and maintenance of smart metering infrastructure across the country.

The Power Division, in a statement, said the move is part of a broader push led by Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif to digitize Pakistan's power distribution system and re-

place outdated infrastructure with modern, technology-driven solutions. The reform drive is aimed at improving operational efficiency, ensuring financial sustainability, and enhancing service delivery.

Advanced Smart Metering Infrastructure is being positioned as a cornerstone of this transformation. Smart meters are expected to provide real-time monitoring of electricity consumption, significantly reduce power theft through anomaly detection, im-

prove billing accuracy and recovery, and minimize human intervention to eliminate manual errors, said the Power Division.

The Power Division also said that the government has already achieved a major breakthrough by reducing the procurement cost of both single-phase and three-phase smart meters by 40 percent through an international competitive bidding process, resulting in substantial savings for the national exchequer and ultimately benefit-

ing consumers.

As part of implementation measures, all power distribution companies have been directed to install smart meters for every new electricity connection, effectively phasing out traditional meters for new applicants. Additionally, all existing three-phase meters—primarily used by commercial and industrial consumers—are to be converted into smart meters within a stipulated timeframe to ensure their inte-

gration into the digital grid.

To tackle the persistent issue of defective and faulty meters, the Ministry has worked closely with the National Electric Power Regulatory Authority. In its recent determinations on distribution companies' investment plans, NEPRA has allowed DISCOs to replace faulty meters with smart meters, accelerating the transition toward a fully digitalized power network, said the Power Division.

Pakistan intensifies diplomacy as Dar urges continued Iran-US engagement

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 01

According to the Foreign Office, Wong expressed appreciation for Dar's efforts in promoting dialogue between Tehran and Washington and commended Pakistan's sustained diplomatic role in encouraging engagement. "She commended Pakistan's continued commitment to promoting diplomatic engagement in this regard," the statement said. The Foreign Office added that Dar briefed the Australian foreign minister on the "Islamabad Talks" held on April 11-12 and reiterated Pakistan's resolve to continue encouraging dialogue and constructive engagement. Both sides expressed concern over broader implications for the global economy, particularly for developing countries, and stressed the importance of peaceful resolution of conflicts. Pakistan at centre of mediation efforts The Foreign Office noted that FM Dar has received growing international recognition for his diplomatic outreach, as Pakistan has positioned itself at the centre of high-level mediation efforts during the evolving Iran-US-Israel tensions. Over the past week, senior officials and influential voices from more than ten countries — including Saudi Arabia, Iran, the United States, China, Turkey, Azerbaijan, Bahrain, Uzbekistan, and Egypt — have acknowledged Pakistan's facilitation efforts in encouraging ceasefire-related dialogue. Meanwhile, Islamabad is preparing to host a second round of Iran-US talks after Washington confirmed that a high-level US delegation led by Vice President JD Vance is expected to arrive in Pakistan. Pakistan has emerged as a key facilitator in the sensitive diplomatic track, positioning itself as an "honest broker" amid sharply divided positions between Washington and Tehran.

Naqvi meets Iran, US envoys to discuss preparations as 'uncertainty clouds 2nd round of Islamabad Talks'

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 01

"Pakistan-Iran relations span decades, and we hold these brotherly ties in high esteem," Naqvi said, reiterating Islamabad's support for resolving the US-Iran conflict through dialogue. "A lasting solution is essential for regional peace and stability," he added. Senior Islamabad officials, including Chief Commissioner Sohail Ashraf, Inspector General of Police Ali Nasir Rizvi, and Deputy Commissioner Irfan Memon, attended the meeting. Earlier, Naqvi met Baker at the US Embassy in Islamabad's Diplomatic Enclave, where they discussed the regional situation and ways to strengthen Pakistan-US ties. He briefed the US envoy on security arrangements, stating that "special measures" had been put in place for visiting delegations. US President Donald Trump said on Sunday that American representatives would arrive in Islamabad for talks with Iran, raising expectations despite the uncertainty.

FBR suspends six customs officers in silver swap probe

PROFIT
NEWS DESK

The Federal Board of Revenue (FBR) has suspended six customs officers, including senior officials, after further investigation into the silver swap case revealed evidence of involvement, negligence and inefficiency. According to a statement issued on Sunday, those suspended include a Collector of Customs in BS-20, a deputy collector in BS-18, an assistant collector in BS-17 and three officials in BS-16. The FBR said a criminal investigation is in progress and individuals found directly involved will be charged under FIR No 01 dated April 13, 2026. It added that other beneficiaries identified in the case will also face legal action. To ensure an independent inquiry, three new officers have been posted to the Collectorate of Customs Enforcement in Quetta, replacing the previous team. A new Collector and Additional Collector have already taken charge. The FBR said it maintains a policy of zero tolerance for corruption and that disciplinary action will be taken against any official found involved, regardless of rank.

Trump touts 'better than Obama' Iran deal as Islamabad talks face uncertainty

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 01

These are realities that require meticulous management and public cooperation." He emphasised that overcoming these hardships would not be possible without public participation and solidarity.

VANCE-LED US TEAM EN ROUTE TO ISLAMABAD FOR IRAN TALKS: TRUMP: Trump said that Vice President JD Vance and a US delegation were set to land in Pakistan within hours for talks on Iran and asserted that a deal would be signed "today", adding that he would be willing to meet with Iranian leaders himself if progress was made.

Anadolu and Al Jazeera reported that Trump told Fox News that the Iran deal would be signed "today" in Pakistan. It was not immediately clear what timeframe he was referring to. Trump warned that if no deal was signed, he would "blow up every single power plant and bridge in Iran". Iran has neither confirmed the claim nor announced a decision to send a delegation to Islamabad. However, Pakistani sources told the New York Post that Tehran was "willing for a second round" but that "no decision has been taken about" it.

In an interview with the New York Post, Trump said that he would be willing to meet with Iranian leaders himself if progress was made. Trump said negotiations with Iran were expected to proceed, expressing confidence that talks would not collapse despite lingering uncertainty.

"We're supposed to have the talks," Trump said in a brief interview, brushing aside doubts about whether negotiations would fall apart. "So I would assume at this point nobody's playing games."

He confirmed that a high-level US delegation — including JD Vance, special envoy Steve Witkoff and adviser Jared Kushner — was already en route to Islamabad for the next round of negotiations.

"They're heading over now," Trump said shortly after 9 am EST. "They'll be there tonight, [Islamabad] time."

However, according to a source familiar with the matter, Vance is in the US and has not departed for Pakistan. It was not clear when he might travel, or whether other members of a US delegation were en route or already in Islamabad for talks.

Trump also signalled openness to a potential face-to-face meeting with the Iranian leadership if an opportunity arose.

"I have no problem meeting them," he said. "If they want to meet, and we have some very capable people, but I have no problem meeting them."

At the centre of the negotiations, Trump said, was a firm US demand that Iran abandon any pursuit of nuclear weapons. "Get rid of their nuclear weapons. That's all very simple," he said. "There will be no nuclear weapon."

He added that Iran could prosper if it complies with this condition.

"Otherwise, a wonderful country — it truly could be," Trump said.

However, Trump declined to outline potential consequences if Tehran refused to comply or if talks collapsed, particularly as the ceasefire deadline approached.

"Well, I don't want to get into that with you," he said when asked whether the US would escalate measures, such as seizing additional ships tied to Iran. "You can imagine. It wouldn't be pretty." Asked whether Washington was confident about its counterparts in Tehran, Trump said: "We have pretty good ideas, and we think we're dealing with the right people."

Later, in a post on Truth Social, Trump said Israel had not persuaded him to go to war with Iran, stating that "the results of October 7, added to my lifelong opinion that Iran can never have a nuclear weapon", were responsible for his decision. "I watch and read the fake news pundits and polls in total disbelief. Ninety per cent of what they say is lies and made-up stories, and the polls are rigged, much as the 2020 presidential election was rigged," he wrote. "Just like the results in Venezuela, which the media doesn't like talking about, the results in Iran will be amazing - and if Iran's new leaders (Regime Change!) are smart, Iran can have a great and prosperous future," he added.

IRAN WILL NOT ACCEPT ANYTHING BEYOND INTERNATIONAL LAW: DEPUTY FOREIGN MINISTER: Iran's Deputy Foreign Minister Saeed Khatibzadeh said Tehran would not accept any terms beyond international law in its dealings with the US.

Speaking in an interview with state broadcaster IRIB, Khatibzadeh said: "Time should not place Iran under pressure."

He added that Iranian officials, including Parliament Speaker Mohammad Bagher Ghaalibaf and Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi, have already presented what he described as "fair and practical

proposals" within the framework of Iran's legal rights. Khatibzadeh also said many statements by US officials were aimed at domestic audiences and influencing markets, rather than reflecting a consistent policy approach. He stressed that Iran's strategy was not shaped by US rhetoric, whether positive or negative, and reiterated that Tehran "would not accept anything beyond international law." The deputy minister also emphasised that diplomacy remained the only viable path to resolving crises, calling on the United States to abandon what he described as a "maximalist approach" and engage with Iran on the basis of mutual respect.

'POSITIVE DEVELOPMENT SOON': Pakistan is expecting "positive development soon" regarding the Strait of Hormuz following a call from the Chief of Army Staff and Chief of Defence Force, Field Marshal Asim Munir, to Trump, Pakistani government sources told Anadolu on Monday with the request of anonymity.

The intense diplomatic efforts by Islamabad come to smooth the way for the second round of talks between the US and Iran, expected any time soon in the Pakistani capital. "We expect positive development soon," sources said, referring to a phone call by Field Marshal Munir with Trump during which they discussed the Pakistani mediation process and the US blockade of the Strait of Hormuz.

PRESIDENT PEZESHKIAN STRESSES IMPORTANCE OF DIPLOMACY WHILE NOTING DISTRUST OF US: Earlier, Pezeshkian said that every rational and diplomatic path should be used to reduce tensions with the US, but added that vigilance and distrust in interactions with Washington were an "undeniable necessity", according to the state news agency IRNA.

A two-week ceasefire between Iran and the US is set to expire on Wednesday, with US representatives set to reach Islamabad for Iran negotiations on Monday while Tehran has yet to announce whether it will send a delegation to Pakistan.

Iranian state TV quoted an unnamed informed source as saying there were no plans for a second round of negotiations due to the US' "excessive and irrational" demands as well as its changing stances.

The adversaries are at loggerheads over the Strait of Hormuz, where Iran tight-

ened control over maritime transit as the US continues to blockade Iranian ports and on Sunday took custody of a vessel trying to get past the American blockade.

Both Iran and the US have accused each other of violating the ceasefire. Pezeshkian said the US blockade showed that Washington was moving toward "repeating previous patterns and betraying diplomacy", according to state TV.

IRAN RULES OUT SECOND ROUND OF US TALKS 'FOR NOW': Iranian Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Esmaeil Baghaei has said on Monday there is currently "no plan" for a second round of negotiations with the US as the US is "not serious" about pursuing the diplomatic process, committed "violent acts" and violated ceasefire provisions.

He said during a news conference that US proposals have been "unserious" and its demands "unrealistic", adding that Tehran has clearly stated their demands and won't change them. "We do not believe in deadlines or ultimatums when it comes to safeguarding Iran's national interests."

On the topic of nuclear stockpiles, Baghaei said that removing the stockpile was "never an option in negotiations" as "Tehran's definitive position is to preserve nuclear achievements within its territory."

Baghaei stated that the US has violated talks and negotiations twice, attacked Iran, killed Iranian people and attacked infrastructure, according to Al Jazeera. Differences over Iran's nuclear programme still remain, a senior Iranian source told Reuters on Monday, as Iran and the United States try to reach a lasting peace with the two-week ceasefire ending soon.

The senior Iranian source said that Tehran's "defensive capabilities", including its missile programme, are not open to negotiation with the United States.

"Continuation of the US blockade on the Strait of Hormuz undermines the peace talks," the source said. Regarding the targeting of an Indian vessel, Baghaei stated that the Iranian institutions are investigating whether it was targeted by Iran's forces.

China voices concern over US seizure of Iranian cargo ship, urges further talks China has expressed concern over the "forced interception" by the US of an Iranian-flagged cargo ship, a Chinese foreign ministry spokesperson said on Monday, urging relevant parties to abide by the ceasefire agreement in a responsible manner.

Islamabad locked down, offices, schools move online as Red Zone sealed ahead of US-Iran talks

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 01

An Islamabad Police spokesperson said licensing services will continue only at Police Facilitation Centres in F-6, Gulberg Greens, and the Diplomatic Enclave, while other centres, including the Faizabad Traffic Headquarters, will remain closed until further notice.

Citizens have been advised to follow official advisories and stay updated through Islamabad Traffic Police WhatsApp channels, social media platforms, and ITP FM 92.4.

TRANSPORT DISRUPTED ACROSS TWIN CITIES: On Sunday, authorities suspended heavy and public transport across Islamabad, with Rawalpindi Deputy Commissioner Hassan Waqar Cheema also confirming a similar ban on all private, public, and goods transport services as a precautionary measure.

The sweeping restrictions severely disrupted daily life in Islamabad and Rawalpindi, where passengers were left stranded at bus terminals. Many travellers turned to railway stations as an alternative.

Railway services came under pressure due to increased demand, with heavy crowds reported at stations. The Karachi-to-Peshawar Khyber Mail was delayed by three hours, although passengers continued to arrive in large numbers. The Metro Bus Authority also announced the complete suspension of the Red Metro Bus Service from Saddar Station in Rawalpindi to Pak Secretariat Station in Islamabad until further notice.

SECURITY TIGHTENED FOR HIGH-LEVEL DIPLOMACY: Authorities said the measures are part of comprehensive security arrangements for the expected diplomatic engagement, aimed at ensuring safety and maintaining order

during high-level talks.

Security has been significantly tightened across the capital, with Islamabad Police personnel barred from using mobile phones while on duty and instructed to wear anti-riot gear. Islamabad Police, Pakistan Rangers, and the Frontier Corps will jointly man checkpoints. Around 18,000 personnel, including reinforcements from Punjab, have been deployed, with elite commandos, snipers, and rapid response units placed on high alert. Rawalpindi Police have also been placed on high alert, deploying over 10,000 personnel and establishing more than 600 special pickets. Senior officers, including SSP Operations Malik Tariq Mehboob, are supervising field operations.

MOVEMENT RESTRICTIONS AND CLOSURES: Authorities have ordered the complete closure of hostels, hotels, and guest houses in sensitive areas, with legal action warned for violations. Closure of seminars near high-security zones is also under consideration.

The Red Zone and Extended Red Zone remain fully closed to all traffic. The Islamabad Expressway between Koral and Zero Point has also been shut, while Srinagar Highway may be closed intermittently.

Heavy traffic entry into Islamabad from all directions has been prohibited. Alternative traffic routes have been designated for residents of G-5, G-6, G-7, F-6, and F-7 via Ninth Avenue and Margalla Road, while multiple diversions have been issued for commuters between Islamabad and Rawalpindi, including routes via Korang Road, Bani Gala, Murree Road, and Rawal Road.

Heavy traffic between GT Road and Peshawar or Lahore will be diverted via Taxila Motorway, Chakri Interchange, Chak Beli Road, and Rawat GT Road. Citizens have been

advised to strictly follow diversion plans and stay updated through official police channels.

MOTORWAYS PARTIALLY CLOSED: Several motorways leading to Islamabad, including M1, M2, and M3, have been closed for public transport, though they remain open for private vehicles.

A spokesperson for the Lahore administration confirmed that the M2 Lahore-Islamabad motorway has been restricted for public transport only, following federal government instructions for "foolproof security arrangements." Officials said similar restrictions apply to M1 and M3 motorways.

DIPLOMATIC BACKDROP: Security arrangements have intensified ahead of the anticipated second round of US-Iran talks in Islamabad.

Pakistan previously hosted the first round of direct US-Iran negotiations on April 11-12, which ended without agreement but without collapse, while the two-week ceasefire brokered earlier remains in place and set to expire on April 22. US President Donald Trump earlier signalled optimism over ongoing diplomatic efforts, though tensions persist over key issues including maritime security and the Strait of Hormuz. Iran has meanwhile maintained its position on regional maritime access and sanctions-related disputes.

POWER SUPPLY ASSURED: Meanwhile, the Islamabad Electric Supply Company (IESCO) has assured uninterrupted electricity supply during the diplomatic engagements. IESCO Chief Executive Officer Engineer Chaudhry Khalid Mahmood said grid stations and feeders are being monitored round the clock and staff have been fully mobilised.

CPD/2026/T-049

BOP THE BANK OF PUNJAB

Procurement of Branch / Office Network Switches

Technical and financial bids on the "Single Stage-Two Envelope Bidding Process" are invited from well reputed organizations/companies for the "Procurement of Branch / Office Network Switches" as per the following details: -

- Bid documents are immediately available at E-Pads portal (<https://punjab.eprocure.gov.pk/>) and the PPRA website after this publication and may be obtained/downloaded free of cost.
- Bids will be Uploaded/Submitted on E-Pads Portal till **07-May-2026 (11:00 am)**. Technical Bids will be opened by a Committee on the same day i.e. **07-May-2026 at 11:30 am**, in the presence of bidders or their authorized representatives who wish to attend the bid opening process.
- Financial Bids of only technically qualified bidders shall be opened on a date/time to be announced subsequently.
- Bids shall be Uploaded/Submitted through E-Pads Portal only.
- The bid security minimum 2% of the estimated cost must be submitted to Head CPD before submission time in the form of Call Deposit Receipt (CDR)UC in favor of The Bank of Punjab. While copy is to be uploaded on E-Pads as a part of Technical Bids.
- Prices must be quoted inclusive of all applicable taxes and delivery charges.
- Valid NTN and GST Registration Certificates are required with the bids.
- This Tender Notice is uploaded on website of PPRA (www.ppra.punjab.gov.pk), BOP (www.bop.com.pk) and E-Pads portal (<https://punjab.eprocure.gov.pk/>).
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Customers can file complaints via SBP's 'Sunwai' service at <https://sunwai.sbp.org.pk>.

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Peace, not posturing

PAKISTAN is doing something few states can do at this moment. It is speaking to Washington, maintaining working credibility in Tehran, and retaining enough trust in Beijing to matter in a crisis that has already damaged diplomacy, trade and regional stability. Islamabad's role in bringing the United States and Iran into direct contact has been real and significant. The first round of talks in Islamabad on April 11 and 12 did not produce an agreement, but they did establish a channel at a moment when the alternative was a wider war.

That is why the most dangerous obstacle now is not a lack of mediation. It is the return of public brinkmanship. The latest signals have been contradictory and corrosive. Iran says it has not decided whether to attend the next round. President Donald Trump said an American delegation was heading to Islamabad, while a Reuters source said Vice President JD Vance had not yet left the United States. At the same time, both sides have continued to trade accusations over ceasefire violations, naval actions and the blockade on Iranian ports. Diplomacy cannot move forward if every opening is followed by a threat, a denial or a public test of resolve.

This is where Pakistan's diplomacy matters most. Its value lies not only in hosting talks, but in reducing mistrust long enough for talks to become serious. Pakistan has lines into all the capitals that matter. It has a security relationship with the United States, a strategic partnership with China and a border, history and sustained channel with Iran. Few countries can combine those relationships without appearing captive to one side. That gives Islamabad leverage, but it also imposes discipline. The task now is to keep the process alive, lower the temperature and push all parties back toward a table that none of them can afford to abandon.

The strategic logic is plain. War has exhausted everyone. Iran is under pressure. The United States is managing escalation without a clear political end state. The region is absorbing the economic shock, and the world is already feeling the consequences through energy insecurity and shipping risk around the Strait of Hormuz. There is no serious constituency left that benefits from an indefinite crisis, except those who confuse escalation with strength.

Pakistan should therefore resist the temptation to treat mediation as a one-off event. It should keep using its ties with Washington, Tehran and Beijing to widen diplomatic space, not merely preserve appearances. That means steady engagement, quiet persuasion and refusal to let rhetoric dictate policy. The war has run long enough. The next phase must not be about posturing for domestic audiences or testing each other's pain thresholds. It must be about ending a conflict that has already taken too much and proved too little.

PAKISTAN TODAY

Dedicated to the legacy of late Hameed Nizami

Arif Nizami (Late)
Founding Editor

M. A. Niazi | Babar Nizami
Editor Pakistan Today | Editor Profit



DR MUHAMMAD AKRAM ZAHEER

PUNJAB'S education landscape has long stood at the intersection of ambition and constraint. Successive governments have promised reform, yet the gap between policy and classroom reality has often remained wide. In this evolving context, the educational vision of Maryam Nawaz Sharif, particularly in relation to the Public Schools Reorganisation Programme (PSRP) and the Punjab Education Foundation (PEF), is being closely watched by educators, parents, and policy observers alike.

Her approach appears to build upon an existing framework rather than discarding it altogether. The PSRP, which places underperforming public schools under the management of private partners, has been both praised and criticised over the years. Supporters argue that it injects efficiency and accountability into a system weighed down by bureaucratic inertia. Critics, however, caution that it risks diluting the public character of education and may prioritise numbers over substance. Within this debate, Maryam Nawaz Sharif's stated emphasis on improving access and standards suggests a pragmatic rather than ideological stance. Her public addresses have repeatedly highlighted the need to ensure that no child is left out of school due to poverty or geography. In a province where millions of children remain out of school, such a focus resonates with ground realities.

The role of PEF in this vision is central. Established as a vehicle to promote public-private partnerships in education, the foundation has expanded its reach over the years, particularly in low-income communities. Through programmes that subsidise tuition for students in private schools, it has sought to bridge the affordability gap. Under the current administration, there are indications that this model may be further strengthened, with an emphasis on expanding coverage and tightening oversight. Observers note that one of the more significant aspects of this approach is its reliance on measurable outcomes. Schools operating under PEF-supported schemes are required to meet certain performance benchmarks, often assessed through standardised testing. This has introduced a culture of evaluation that is not always present in traditional public schools. For policymakers, such data offers a way to track progress and identify gaps. For teachers and students, however, it can sometimes translate into pressure to perform within narrow parameters.

Maryam Nawaz Sharif's challenge lies in balancing these competing considerations. On one hand, there is a clear need to raise standards and ensure accountability. On the other, education cannot be reduced to test scores alone. Issues such as teacher training, curriculum relevance, and student well-being require

Punjab's changing education system

equal attention. In her recent statements, there has been some recognition of this broader picture, with references to improving school infrastructure, investing in teacher capacity, and incorporating modern teaching methods. Another dimension of her educational vision is its social context. In many parts of Punjab, particularly in rural and underserved urban areas, schools are not just centres of learning but also spaces of social mobility. For families struggling with economic hardship, the availability of a functional school nearby can make a tangible difference. By expanding programmes under PEF and refining initiatives like PSRP, the government appears to be aiming for a model that combines reach with a degree of flexibility.

Yet, questions remain about sustainability. Public-private partnerships can deliver results in the short to medium term, but they also require consistent funding and effective regulation. Ensuring that partner schools adhere to agreed standards, while also maintaining affordability for families, is no small task. Past experiences have shown that without robust monitoring, disparities can emerge between different regions and providers. There is also the issue of perception. For many, public education carries an expectation of state responsibility. The increasing role of private actors, even within a regulated framework, can raise concerns about equity and long-term direction. Maryam Nawaz Sharif's government will need to address these concerns not only through policy but also through communication, making it clear how these initiatives serve the broader public interest.

At the same time, it would be unfair to overlook the potential benefits of the current approach. In areas where government schools have struggled with absenteeism, poor infrastructure, or low enrolment, alternative management models have sometimes produced visible improvements. Classrooms that were once empty have seen students return, and basic facilities have been restored.

While such gains may not be uniform, they offer a glimpse of what targeted intervention can achieve. The emphasis on girls' education is another noteworthy element. Punjab has made progress in narrowing the gen-

der gap in schooling, but challenges persist, particularly at higher levels of education. Any strategy that seeks to expand access must take into account the specific barriers faced by girls, including cultural norms and safety concerns. Programmes under PEF have, in some instances, contributed to increasing female enrolment, and there are expectations that this focus will continue.

In assessing Maryam Nawaz Sharif's educational vision, it is also important to consider the broader governance context. Education reform does not operate in isolation. It intersects with issues such as fiscal management, administrative capacity, and political continuity. The success of initiatives like PSRP and PEF will depend not only on design but also on execution across multiple layers of government. For now, the direction appears to be one of cautious expansion combined with incremental reform. Rather than sweeping changes, there is an effort to refine existing mechanisms and extend their reach. Whether this approach will yield the desired results remains to be seen. Much will depend on how effectively challenges are addressed and how responsive the system remains to feedback from the ground.

Education policy is judged not by announcements but by outcomes in classrooms by whether children can read, write, and think with confidence. It is here, far from policy documents and press briefings, that the true impact of any vision becomes visible. Maryam Nawaz Sharif's tenure offers an opportunity to build on past efforts while addressing their shortcomings. If managed carefully, the combination of PSRP and the Punjab Education Foundation could contribute to a more inclusive and responsive education system. If not, it risks becoming another chapter in a long history of partial reforms. For the people of Punjab, the stakes are clear. Education remains one of the most powerful tools for social and economic advancement. The hope is that current efforts will move beyond rhetoric and deliver lasting change where it matters most—in the lives of students and the future of the province.

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Iqbal in his early poetry

Today is Allama Iqbal's 88th death anniversary

DR MUHAMMAD AFZAAL MALERKOTLAVI

THERE are a very few number of the dynamic poets of the world, among whom is Allama Sir Muhammad Iqbal (9 November 1877, Sialkot- 21 April 1938, Lahore, buried at the footstep of the Badshahi Mosque), a titanic figure in both poetry and philosophy. During the Pakistan Movement, Quaid-e-Azam Muhammad Ali Jinnah 25 December 1876, Karachi-11 September 1948) stated that if the Muslims of India were successful in getting a separate state, and if he was offered the choice of becoming the head of this state and of the writings of Allama Iqbal, he would choose the latter.

Allama Iqbal is the only universal reformer among all those who got the highest modern education along with ancient learning. As far as Allama Iqbal's highest place in both the Islamic and non-Islamic worlds is concerned, it is based on his later poetry, not his earlier. That leads us to understand that his earlier poetry deals with and reflects his non-philosophical and traditional aspect, though reflecting some new trends, and of a non-Islamic, secular type. In this early poetry, Allama Iqbal stands for the things others do.

Allama Iqbal's early poetry and its thoughts belong to the period before he went abroad, from his very beginning to 1905. This is the period to which belongs the first part of his first poetic collection, Bang-i Dara.

In his early poetry, Iqbal follows different traditional Western-cum-Eastern thoughts. At that time we find, when Iqbal was born and grew up, even at the time of his early poetry, Europe had two thoughts at their extreme, rationalism and nationalism.

Rationalism is totally based on nonreligious wisdom, even being anti-religion, nationalism is also anti-religious, being based on patriotism or secularism. Patriotism, or we can say area-wide nationalism was being implemented everywhere globally. A country was not only a country, but a nation, like India was a country, and home to a nation and Indian nationalism. In this thought, the country-nation is above the country's religions, castes, creeds and colours. 'Jai Hind' means the victory of the Indian motherland, or country-based nationalism, over all other creeds.

When Iqbal's early poetry is studied on the issue of nationalism, he is to be found a thinker similar to his contemporaries. We can see it evidenced in many verses of Bang-i Dara. For example he wrote:

Miti ki mooraton main samjha hai Khuda hai/Khak-i watan ka mujh ko ka har zarra devta hai (You think God is in earthen idols/For me every atom of the Motherland is an angel)

It can easily be seen that patriotism, the country-based nationalism, highly influenced Iqbal's early poetry. In these lines one can see

that though Iqbal condemned idol worship, he gave preference to nationalism over religion. When we further study these lines, we find that in his early poetic age, he had agreed that God could be traced only in nationalistic patriotism, even as compared to religion.

Poems like Tarana-i Hind and Mera Watan Wahi Hai in Bang-i Dara, out of the early poetry, can be brought further as further proof. Here one line, Saray jehan se achha Hindustan hamara (Our Inia is better than the whole world) can sketch a further picture of the contemporary and Western patriotism in the mind of Iqbal's early mind and early poetry.

That traditional and Western patriotic theory was removed from Iqbal's mind and poetry when he came back from England after the completion of his Western higher studies in 1908, the year his early thought, as well as his early thought and early philosophy had changed.

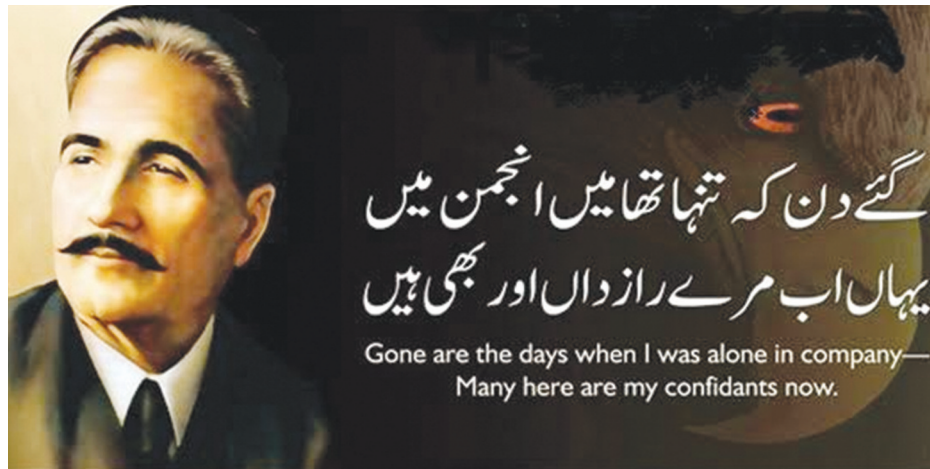
One must agree with Dr Iftikhar Ahmad Siddiqui's statement, "In the previous stage

of his poetry, Iqbal had been a supporter of the ideology of patriotism and the creator of the Tarana-I-Hindustan.

However, this ideology had planted in the hearts of the people of the West the reason for prejudice. After witnessing this, Iqbal's eyes were opened, so he expressed his abhorrence and condemnation thus: 'I am strongly opposed to nationalism not just because, when this ideology became common in India it would cause greater harm to the Muslims, but the reason for my opposition is that I see germs of an atheistic materialism in it, which I believe to be the greatest danger of mankind. Love of country is no doubt a good thing, and there is a place for it in Man's moral lives.

Even though what is more important is a person's beliefs, his culture and civilization, his historical traditions, and for them a person makes the greatest of sacrifices, rather than the piece of land from which he hails, and to which the human spirits has a temporary attachment,"

The writer is a freelance columnist



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EDITOR'S MAIL

Send your letters to: Letters to Editor, Pakistan Today, 4-Shaarey Fatima Jinnah, Lahore, Pakistan.

E-mail: letters@pakistanoday.com.pk

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Grain gains matter

WHEAT is a cornerstone of national food security as well as rural livelihood, serving as the staple diet for over 200 million people and providing essential by-products for livestock feed and agro-based industries. Despite its importance, national wheat productivity remains well below potential.

During 2023-24, wheat was cultivated on 9.73 million hectares and produced 31.8 million tonnes, but the average yield (3,268kg/ha) remained far lower than the potential yield of 5,000 to 8,000 kg/ha. This persistent gap is driven by multiple constraints, such as inefficient irrigation, imbalanced fertiliser use, delayed sowing, poor crop rotation, low seed quality, and limited adoption of climate-smart technologies.

Post-harvest losses and weak extension services further exacerbate the problem. Addressing these challenges requires integrated, research-based interventions supported by strong institutional frame-works. Proper land preparation is crucial for achieving the productive potential of wheat, influencing all growth stages from germination to grain formation. Optimised tillage practices, such as a sequence of mould-board ploughing, disc harrowing, rotavation and planking, can increase yields by 13-30 per cent.

Laser land-levelling is also important, enhancing irrigation uniformity, reducing runoff, and improving water-use efficiency. Research shows that laser levelling needs to be repeated every three years, which significantly increases net income and reduces water use by more than half compared to the traditional methods. These improvements can really lay the foundation for better plant establishment and more sustainable wheat production.

The sowing method plays a very decisive role in wheat productivity. Conventional methods that are commonly used lead to poor germination and high water consumption. In contrast, modern sowing techniques, such as ridge planting, raised-bed planting, and drill sowing, can increase yields by 9-22pc while significantly improving water-use efficiency. Each method requires specific tillage sequences and irrigation practices to maximise performance.

Equally important is the alignment of suitable wheat varieties with appropriate row spacing and timely sowing. Delayed sowing can reduce yields by 8-64pc, while early sowing enables various varieties to escape heat stress and disease, resulting in higher productivity.

Poor weed control and disease management practices result in 17-25pc losses in the wheat yield, which is also threatened by fungal diseases, including rust, loose smut, and root rot, that can reduce the yields by up to 50pc. Early planting combined with balanced fertilisation can help mitigate rust infestation across various wheat varieties. Balanced fertiliser use and efficient irrigation scheduling represent additional pillars of sustainable wheat production. Excessive irrigation in conventional systems leads to nutrient leaching, shallow water tables, waterlogging, and ground-water deterioration. Proper irrigation timing and depth ensure that nutrients remain within the root zone, and that water resources are conserved.

Pakistan's wheat productivity challenge is deeply rooted in agronomic, institutional and environmental factors. Bridging the yield gap requires a holistic, climate-smart approach that integrates precision land preparation, advanced sowing techniques, balanced nutrient management, scientific irrigation scheduling, and proactive weed and disease control.

Strengthening the extension services, improving access to quality inputs, and aligning agricultural policies with research-based recommendations are critical for sustainable improvement.

By adopting modern technologies and evidence-based practices, Pakistan can significantly enhance wheat productivity, ensuring national food security, economic resilience, and a more sustainable future for millions who depend on this vital crop.

DR NAZAR GUL
HAFIZ ABDUL SALAM



DR IMRAN KHALID

New data shows the vitality of China and its foreign trade

AS the International Monetary Fund and World Bank convene for their Spring Meetings in Washington this week, the atmosphere is heavy with a familiar sense of foreboding. The prevailing narrative among the gathered technocrats is one of a world pulling apart. We are told that “de-risking” is the new mandate, that global value chains are fraying, and that the era of seamless integration is over. The outbreak of war in the Middle East earlier this year has only deepened this pessimism, with the IMF recently downgrading its 2026 global growth forecast to 3.1 percent amid fears of a prolonged energy crisis and a potential slide into recession.

Yet, if one looks at the latest data from Beijing, a strikingly different reality emerges. In the first quarter of 2026, China’s foreign trade surged by 15 percent, reaching 11.84 trillion yuan. This is not merely a statistical rebound or a case of “front-loading” to beat anticipated tariffs. It represents the fastest growth rate in five years and the first time first-quarter trade has ever breached the 11 trillion yuan threshold.

To understand why this matters, one must look beyond the headline figures at the underlying composition of this growth. For decades, the world viewed China through the lens of an export-led juggernaut fueled by low-cost manufacturing. That model is being replaced by a more complex, resilient, and balanced economic engine. In this latest quarter, while exports grew by a healthy 11.9 percent, imports climbed by a staggering 19.6 percent to nearly 5 trillion yuan.

This surge in imports suggests that the “world’s factory” is successfully transitioning into the “world’s market.” A 20 percent jump in imports during a period of global monetary tightening and geopolitical volatility indicates robust domestic industrial demand and a stabilizing consumer base. It signals that China’s pivot toward high-quality development is generating a massive pull factor for global goods, providing a necessary floor for an otherwise precarious international economy.

The drivers of this performance are equally revealing. Private enterprises, often the most sensitive barometers of economic vitality, now account for over 57 percent of China’s total trade. Their trade volume grew

by 16.2 percent in the first quarter. This is a critical metric because it counters the frequent Western narrative that China’s economy is becoming a stagnant monolith of state-led activity. Instead, the dynamism is coming from the bottom up, with private firms leading the charge in innovation and market adaptation. Furthermore, foreign-invested enterprises recorded their eighth consecutive quarter of growth, a clear sign that international capital remains deeply tethered to Chinese supply chains despite the political rhetoric of decoupling heard in Western capitals.

Geopolitically, we are witnessing a profound diversification of trade routes. The era of over-reliance on a few Western markets is giving way to a more multipolar trade map. In the first quarter, trade with Belt and Road partner countries rose over 14 percent, now making up more than half of China’s total trade. Connectivity with ASEAN and Latin America grew by 15.4 percent, while trade with Africa jumped by nearly 24 percent.

This shift is not accidental; it is a calculated response to the rise of protectionism elsewhere. By deepening ties with the Global South, China is building a trade architecture that is increasingly insulated from the policy shifts of Washington or Brussels. This does not mean China is turning its back on the West - trade with the European Union and the United Kingdom actually rose by double digits this quarter - but it does mean that the leverage held by Western trade policy is diminishing.

This resilience is being tested by the volatility in the Middle East. The blockade of the Strait of Hormuz in late February and the subsequent spike in energy prices have sent ripples through global markets. However, the direct impact on China’s trade momentum appears managed. This is partly due to China’s aggressive pursuit of energy se-



curity through green technology. As the world’s leader in electric vehicles, renewable energy, and battery storage, China has created a domestic buffer against traditional energy price shocks. When oil prices rise, the structural advantage of a “green” industrial base becomes a competitive edge rather than a liability. In the first quarter alone, exports of 3D printers and electric vehicles surged by 119 percent and 77 percent respectively, illustrating how Beijing is successfully moving up the value chain.

The implications for the global economy are significant. At a time when growth is slowing in many advanced economies - with

the United States projected at 2 percent and the European Union at a meager 1.3 percent for 2026 - China is on track to hit its 5 percent growth target. While this is lower than the double-digit era, the sheer scale of the Chinese economy means this growth adds more to global GDP than the rapid expansions of the past.

Moreover, the nature of this growth is more sustainable. By moving away from a property-heavy model and toward advanced manufacturing and digital technologies, Beijing is addressing long-standing structural risks. The fact that foreign direct investment reached over 160 billion yuan in the first two

months of the year underscores a fundamental truth: the global supply chain is too integrated to be easily dismantled. The “China Plus One” strategy pursued by some firms has often resulted in “China Plus One More Step,” where components are still sourced from Chinese factories before final assembly elsewhere.

As we look toward the remainder of 2026, the challenge for the international community is to move past the zero-sum logic of trade wars. China’s Q1 data demonstrates that its economy remains an essential anchor of stability. A country that can grow its trade by 15 percent amidst global fragmentation and a regional war is not an economy in decline, but one in transformation.

In an age of volatility, economic stability is a global public good. The paradox of 2026 is that while the rhetoric of the Spring Meetings focuses on the dangers of a fragmented world, the actual flow of goods and capital suggests a world that is finding new ways to stay connected.

China is at the center of this new connectivity. By continuing to open its markets and integrate with a broader array of global partners, it is providing a rare sense of certainty. The world can ill afford to ignore that stability, regardless of the political winds blowing through Washington.

The writer is a freelance columnist

Private enterprises, often the most sensitive barometers of economic vitality, now account for over 57 percent of China’s total trade. Their trade volume grew by 16.2 percent in the first quarter. This is a critical metric because it counters the frequent Western narrative that China’s economy is becoming a stagnant monolith of state-led activity. Instead, the dynamism is coming from the bottom up, with private firms leading the charge in innovation and market adaptation.

Qalibaf answers ten key questions on Iran-US talks in Islamabad

TEHRAN TIMES

IN a televised interview, Iranian Parliament Speaker Mohammad Bagher Qalibaf, who headed Iran’s negotiating delegation in Islamabad, addressed ten key questions regarding the talks with the United States and other topics. Here’s a concise summary of the interview in a question-and-answer format.

1. Why do you believe Iran is victorious in this war?

Trump did not achieve his goals. He faced a worse disaster in Isfahan than in Tabas [the ill-fated Operation Eagle Claw in 1980]. We are undoubtedly victorious.

The recent conflict is the third imposed war, which started with America’s cunning in the middle of negotiations. In the 12-day war [in June 2025], there was a 14-hour delay in our reaction. But in the third imposed war, despite the martyrdom of the commander-in-chief [of the armed forces, Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei], the IRGC commander-in-chief, and the chief of general staff of the armed forces, our reaction was carried out in the shortest possible time and with precision.

The F-35 incident was not an accident. It was the result of a laborious and operational effort. With the missile that exploded near the aircraft, the enemy understood our capabilities.

Iran has become more formidable in its offensive capabilities and [military] design than in the past. The adversaries could not believe it until they saw it proven in the field. For nearly 50 nights, [the Iranian] people have remained on the streets. Iran hit about 180 [enemy] drones — a capability it did not have in the previous war.

2. Do you say that Iran is stronger than the US militarily?

The Americans possess more wealth, equipment, and military facilities, and the Zionist regime also holds great power. We did not destroy them. [Nevertheless,] we are the winners in this war. We fought an asymmetric war and repelled the enemy with our own design and preparation. The enemy had money and facilities, but did not act correctly.

3. Why has Trump called for a ceasefire?

The US government claims “America First,” but in practice, it demonstrates that “Israel First” matters more. We hold the advantage in the field, and that is why Trump is calling for a ceasefire. The enemy’s goal was to force Iran to surrender in a war lasting only two or three days, but we fought for 40 days, and the enemy was forced to accept a ceasefire. They could not make us surrender.

The idea that we destroyed the enemy’s military is not true. Even though we did not destroy them, we are still the winners; that is a different matter.

Whether in the field, in the streets, or in diplomacy, it is we who command the position of strength. The enemy cannot impose its will on us.

Negotiation is simply another form of struggle. There will be no compromise in diplomacy. If the enemy makes a mistake at any moment, we are ready. We have no trust in the enemy. The armed forces are fully prepared.

On approximately the 36th or 37th day of the conflict, a 15-point proposal was conveyed to Iran through Pakistani intermediaries, specifically the Prime Minister and the Chief of Army Staff. [This is after] Trump had threatened to hit [our] infrastructure.

After review, Iran formulated ten points that outlined the nation’s demands. We informed Pakistan that we did not accept the original fifteen points, but that our ten points were acceptable. We stated that if the US had input on these ten points, they were negotiable. The Americans later proposed nine points, but Iran insisted on its original ten. Eventually, the US requested a temporary ceasefire to begin the negotiations.

4. What role did you expect Trump to play in announcing the ceasefire?

We informed Pakistan: if the US wants a ceasefire, Trump must announce the request on his [Truth Social] account. This ensures everyone knows the request originated with them. This is the diplomacy of authority.

Hezbollah launched its recent operations to support Iran; the Resistance Front came to our aid. Therefore, the ceasefire had to include them. A primary condition from Iran was a region-wide ceasefire, including both Iran and the Resistance Front.

5. Who currently controls the Strait of Hormuz?

The Iranian Armed Forces control the Strait of Hormuz. Our intent is for those who did not align with the enemy to pass through without difficulty. We have no desire to increase insecurity; not now, and never.

After the talks in Islamabad started, the US attempted to send a minesweeper after discovering a mine [in the Strait of Hormuz], but we did not back down. We warned that it would be a violation of the ceasefire and that we would strike. We moved to the brink of conflict, and they retreated.

6. What exactly did you tell the American delegation about their minesweeper?

In Islamabad, I warned the American delegation: “If your minesweeper advances even a small distance, we will shoot.” They requested 15 minutes to issue a command to turn back. They gave the order, and it returned.

7. What is your response to the US blockade of Iran?

The Americans have been trying to impose a blockade for days. This supposed siege means that while others pass freely, Iran is blocked! It is a decision rooted in clumsiness and ignorance.

8. What will happen if the US does not lift the blockade?

If the U.S. refuses to lift its blockade, the Strait of Hormuz will be restricted. If we are prevented from passing, then we will ensure no one [connected to the adversaries] passes.

I have no trust in the enemy. Building trust is their first task. Trump posted [on Truth Social] that the negotiators were alive to negotiate, but if no decision is made within 24 hours, it is unknown if they will stay alive. This is your behavior. We will stand until the end.

9. When did negotiations with the US actually begin?

We did not hold any negotiations until 48 hours before the ceasefire. Trump is a master of lying and psychological warfare. Yesterday [on April 17], he posted eight tweets, seven of which were false.

The negotiations began when Trump posted a request for a ceasefire. We summarized our position in 10 points, and the Leader of the Islamic Revolution [Ayatollah Seyyed Mojtaba Khamenei] accepted the underlying basis and the specific conditions [to start the negotiations].

We were in Pakistan for thirty hours, arriving at midnight on Saturday. There were no prior negotiations with the U.S. before this; there were only exchanges of messages [through mediators].

We view negotiation as a method of struggle, a way to complete the work of the field and assert the rights of our people on the streets. Rest assured, we are pursuing these issues one step at a time.

10. How would you describe your personal readiness for what lies ahead?

Whether it is a matter of negotiation papers or war plans, my resolve remains the same. I am prepared to sacrifice my life and my honor. We move as one under the Leader of the Islamic Revolution, following his guidance exactly: neither overstepping nor falling behind.

All the enemy’s efforts are aimed at destroying the unity and solidarity of the people. Nearly 30 million [Iranian] people have already registered for the JANFADA [those who are ready to sacrifice their lives] campaign.

When the threat was made to bomb our infrastructure, families—including parents with their children—arrived to form human chains to protect those sites.

Our strength lies with the people, and we owe them our deepest gratitude. To ensure that no harm comes to our nation today, it is essential that we all stand behind the Leader.

Ireland in crisis: A warning to Europe

CENTER FOR EUROPEAN POLICY ANALYSIS

EANNA MACKEY

IRELAND’S crisis came as a bolt from the blue. On April 7, a protest by farmers and haulers over rising fuel prices quickly escalated into nationwide blockades. Discussion naturally enough focused on soaring fuel prices and the government’s response.

There was already disgruntlement with the administration, but the event that tipped the scales was the Iran War, which has throttled global supplies and jolted fuel prices upwards. This may be more than a political crisis at the west of the European continent. It may be a distress signal soon to be repeated elsewhere. The early protests emerged from a grassroots movement something like the British truck driver protests of 2000, which in turn were inspired by French demonstrations. The effect in Ireland was devastating, affecting transport routes, distribution hubs, and critical infrastructure, with fury directed at a government deemed out of touch, inept, and sleepwalking into a national disaster.

In response, the defense forces were deployed alongside Garda Síochána public order units to assist in clearing key sites and restoring access to essential supply chains. The administration initially ruled out negotiations with protest leaders, although with oil supplies dwindling as a result of port blockades, it subsequently backed down by flooding the zone with cash. An initial €250m (\$295m) for fuel tax cuts was bolstered with another €505m of sweeteners including tax cuts on April 13. On April 14, the government, a coalition of Fianna Fáil, Fine Gael, and eight independents, survived a motion of confidence by 92 votes to 78.

The government climbdown resulted from enormous pressure; by April 10, three days into the protest, more than 500 petrol (gas) forecourts had reportedly been emptied of fuel, while deliveries from ports, depots, and Ireland’s only oil refinery in Whitegate, County Cork, were significantly disrupted. Sector-specific protests led by farmers, agricultural contractors, and road hauliers soon broadened into a wider confrontation between demonstrators and the state over a myriad of converging crises, including the cost of living, lack of housing, immigration, and the economic viability of fuel-dependent industries.

The protests emerged against a backdrop of sharply rising fuel costs, placing significant pressure on transport-reliant sectors already deeply affected by inflation and global supply chain volatility. Diesel prices have increased exponentially in recent weeks amid broader geopolitical tensions in energy markets.

In Ireland, fuel is heavily taxed, with excise duties, VAT, and environmental

levies accounting for almost 60% of the retail price, including the carbon tax, which was scheduled to increase in May but has since been deferred until October as a result of the protests. For many participants, the blockades were framed as a last-resort response to mounting financial pressure rather than a political campaign. However, the scale of disruption led to a rapid escalation in tensions, with the government attributing elements of the unrest to outside agitators and far-right involvement, despite a lack of such evidence.

Although there had been earlier indications on state broadcaster RTE that the government would engage in dialogue, officials later refused to meet protest representatives at Leinster House in a bid to end the blockades, with Tánaiste Simon Harris stating they would not engage with what they described as an unelected body.

Additionally, on the back of the protests, Minister for Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport, and Media Patrick O’Donovan called on the media regulator, Coimisiún na Meán, to review coverage of the fuel protests. He described aspects of reporting as “lopsided” and “skewed,” comments that caused a backlash from journalists and their employers.

The government’s response has taken place against the backdrop of wider fiscal commitments, including close to €1bn in foreign aid since January, as well as an estimated €6bn annually directed towards a network of government-adjacent non-governmental organizations. State broadcaster RTE has also received significant state financial support in recent years, including a bailout package worth over €750m.

During the confidence vote, Kerry Teachtaí Dála (MP) Michael Healy-Rae resigned as Minister of State, stating that the government no longer represented the interests of Irish people. The decision to deploy the armed forces and public order units to disperse the protests may prove a defining moment for the sitting government, with some observers suggesting it will damage its political authority.

Ireland is due to assume the EU presidency in the coming months. While the immediate disruption has eased, the political and social tensions exposed during the crisis are likely to remain a point of contention. While major blockades have since eased, underlying tensions remain. It’s possible the protests will flare again.

For the UK and Ireland’s fellow EU members, the upsurge of popular direct action will cause concern that similar trouble may soon spread. The combination of fast-rising costs and already fragile public trust can be explosive.

Eanna Mackey is a reporter based in Ireland with a background in geopolitics and economics.

CHINA'S XI CALLS FOR STRAIT OF HORMUZ TO REMAIN OPEN IN CALL WITH SAUDI CROWN PRINCE

BEIJING
REUTERS

CHINESE President Xi Jinping called for normal passage of ships through the Strait of Hormuz to be maintained, in a phone call on Monday with Saudi Arabia's Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman held as Beijing steps up efforts to help end US-Israel war against Iran.

China is concerned over renewed instability around the strategic waterway, as a US-Iran ceasefire came under fresh strain after the US seized an Iranian cargo ship and Tehran signalled it would not join new peace talks for now.

China is the main buyer of Iranian crude. Iran has largely closed the strait to ships other than its own since the US and Israel launched the war in February, while Washington has imposed a blockade of Iranian ships since last week.

China advocates an immediate and comprehensive ceasefire, and insists on resolving conflicts in the Middle East through political and diplomatic channels, state news agency Xinhua cited Xi as saying. "The Strait of Hormuz should



remain open to normal passage, as this serves the common interests of regional countries and the international community," he told the Saudi leader.

Worries have mounted over the survival of the ceasefire between Washington and Tehran after the US seizure of the Iranian vessel. Trump had credited Beijing with helping to get Iran to the previous negotiations with the US in Pakistan.

The Chinese foreign ministry on Monday expressed concerns over the

"forced interception" by the US of the Iranian ship, while urging relevant sides to abide by the ceasefire agreement.

Xi's call with the Saudi crown prince followed a meeting in Beijing last week with the crown prince of Abu Dhabi, when Xi urged adherence to international law.

He also told the Saudi crown prince that China supports countries in the Middle East in "taking their future and destiny into their own hands, and promoting

long-term regional stability and peace". **Macron decries blocking Strait of Hormuz as 'mistake on both sides'**

French President Emmanuel Macron has denounced the blockade of the Strait of Hormuz as "a mistake on both sides", AFP reports. "It is likely that, following the American decision to maintain a targeted blockade on Hormuz ... the Iranian authorities changed their initial position ... this is a mistake on both sides," Macron tells journalists in Gdansk, Poland.

French President Emmanuel Macron has called for the United States and Iran to de-escalate amid increased tensions over the weekend over the Strait of Hormuz, Al Jazeera reports.

"Our position remains the same. We need to settle things through diplomacy. Everyone must calm down", Macron has said during a joint press conference with Polish Prime Minister Donald Tusk.

Macron adds that France was not specifically targeted in the Strait after Iran fired shots on ships on Saturday, including a container ship belonging to French shipping giant CMA CGM, which described the volleys as "warning shots" and said at the time that the crew was safe.

NEW DELHI
AGENCIES

India and South Korea target \$50b trade by 2030 with fresh economic initiatives

India and South Korea said on Monday that they would boost their economic ties by expanding cooperation in energy, critical minerals, shipbuilding, semiconductors and steel as they seek to double their trade to \$50 billion by 2030.

New Delhi and Seoul also agreed to resume and step up negotiations to give new energy to their 2010 trade agreement as India wanted their trade to be more balanced and South Korea wanted greater market access to the world's fastest-growing major economy.

South Korean President Lee Jae Myung is in India for a three-day visit, the first South Korean presidential state visit to the country in eight years.

"We decided to upgrade the framework of economic cooperation between the two countries to create a new engine for shared growth," Lee told reporters after talks with Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

The two countries created a ministerial-level economic cooperation committee for the first time, Lee said, adding that they would strengthen cooperation in areas such as nuclear power plants, clean energy as well as trade and investment.

With the US-Israel war on Iran squeezing global energy supplies, India and South Korea would also continue to cooperate to ensure the stable supply of energy resources and key raw materials such as naphtha, Lee added. Modi said Lee's visit was extremely significant and that the two countries had taken important decisions to boost two-way trade to \$50 billion by 2030 from around \$27 billion at present.

"Today, we are laying the foundation for the success story of the next decade," Modi said, as he recalled strong civilisational ties between the two countries that go back several centuries.

Big investment in India's steel sector
Indian Trade Minister Piyush Goyal said he held talks with his South Korean counterpart, Yeo Han-koo, and discussed ways to resume and revamp the trade pact and explored opportunities to deepen cooperation in the areas of industry, green energy and digital trade.

Lee will attend a joint business forum conference later on Monday where some 250 South Korean participants are expected, including leaders of household names in India such as Samsung Electronics, Hyundai Motor and LG Group, South Korea's Yonhap news agency said.

The two sides also plan to sign a total of 20 private-sector memoranda of understanding on the sidelines of the forum, covering areas including shipbuilding, digital technology and energy, Yonhap said.

Separately, South Korea's POSCO Holdings said in a regulatory filing on Monday that its steelmaking unit plans to build a joint venture integrated steel plant with India's JSW in Odisha state.

POSCO's investment until end-2031 is expected to be about \$1.09 billion, the filing said. The joint venture deal to set up a 6-million-ton-per-annum steel plant in Odisha was announced last week.

In a policy seminar at South Korea's parliament last week, Maeng Hyun-chul, a research fellow at Seoul National University's Asia Centre, noted India's longstanding complaint of a widening trade deficit with South Korea and said that political ties had not kept pace with commercial ties.

South Korea had a \$12.8 billion trade surplus last year, with exports worth \$19.2bn and imports of \$6.4bn, according to Korea International Trade Association data. Lee will be visiting Vietnam after India.

Lebanon reopens key southern routes as Israeli demolitions continue

BEIRUT
AGENCIES

Lebanon's military announced on Sunday it had reopened a key road and bridge destroyed by Israeli strikes in the country's south, a crucial step for civilians even as a fragile 10-day truce is undermined by continued Israeli occupation and demolitions.

The conflict, which escalated on March 2, prompted an Israeli offensive that killed more than 2,100 people, including 177 children, and forced over 1.2 million to flee, Lebanese authorities say. Including all casualties, nearly 2,300 people have been killed.

Lebanon's military said it "fully reopened" a road linking Nabatieh with the Khardali area and "partially reopened the Burj Rahal-Tyre bridge."

"Work is also underway to rehabilitate the Tayr Falsayr-Tyre bridge ... following damage caused by the Israeli aggression," the army added.

Israeli strikes on bridges crossing Lebanon's Litani River, which flows about 30km north of Israel, largely cut off the area south of the waterway.

The vital Qasmiyah bridge reopened, allowing displaced residents to check on property. However, many remained hesitant to venture back with the truce's longevity uncertain. An AFP correspondent in the southern city of Sidon saw heavy traffic heading to Beirut as displaced southerners returned to temporary homes and shelters in the capital after briefly visiting southern areas. As civilians navigate the destruction, the Israeli military published a map on Sunday of its new deployment line inside Lebanon, bringing dozens of mostly abandoned Lebanese villages under its control.

Israel condemns soldier's desecration of crucifix in south Lebanon

JERUSALEM
AGENCIES

Israel's Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, the foreign minister and the military on Monday condemned the desecration of a crucifix after it was smashed by an Israeli soldier in a Christian village in southern Lebanon. A photo that emerged online over the weekend shows a soldier taking the blunt side of an axe to a fallen sculpture of Jesus on the cross. It was posted by Younis Tirawi, who describes himself as a Palestinian reporter and has also posted images of Israeli soldiers' misconduct in Gaza.

Unicef decries water suppliers' killing in Gaza

JERUSALEM
AGENCIES

Two civilian contractors delivering water for the UN children's fund were shot dead by Israeli troops in northern Gaza, Unicef said on Saturday, expressing fury over the deaths the previous day.

"Unicef is outraged by the killing of two drivers of trucks contracted by Unicef to provide clean water to families in the Gaza Strip," it said in a statement.

When contacted by AFP, the Israeli military claimed that the troops saw "two armed terrorists in the area of the Yellow Line" approaching, so they "opened fire".

The army said the incident was "under review".

Unicef said the incident took place at the Mansoura water filling point in northern Gaza, which is "the only operational truck filling point for the Mekorot water supply line serving Gaza City".

"The incident, in which two other people were injured, occurred during routine water trucking operations, with no changes in movement or procedures," it said, adding that the point was used



"multiple times a day" by Unicef and its humanitarian partners.

Following the incident, all activities at the filling point had been suspended, it said, urging the Israeli authorities to "immediately investigate" the incident and ensure those responsible be held accountable. "Humanitarian workers, essential service providers and civilian infrastructure, including critical water facilities, must never be targeted.

The protection of civilians and those delivering life-saving assistance is an obligation under international humanitarian law,"

Unicef said. Earlier on Saturday, Gaza's health ministry, which operates under Hamas authority, reported an overall death toll of 72,549 since October 2023. That number includes 773 Palestinians killed since the Gaza ceasefire came into effect on Oct 10, 2025.

Israeli army claims
On Saturday, the Israeli army said troops had opened fire in two incidents in the Gaza Strip's north and south, eliminating "two infiltrators who crossed the Yellow Line and approached the forces posing an immediate threat".

FBI Director Kash Patel files defamation suit against The Atlantic

WASHINGTON
AGENCIES

FBI Director Kash Patel has filed a defamation lawsuit against The Atlantic and reporter Sarah Fitzpatrick over an article that alleged he had a drinking problem and was frequently absent from work, claims Patel has denied. According to Reuters, the lawsuit was filed after The Atlantic published a report on Friday that said Patel's alleged conduct could pose a national security risk. The article was initially published under the headline

Kash Patel's Erratic Behavior Could Cost Him His Job and cited more than two dozen anonymous sources who voiced concern over what it described as Patel's visible intoxication and unexplained absences, which it said had worried officials at the FBI and the Department of Justice.

The online version of the article was later retitled **The FBI Director Is MIA**. Reuters said it could not independently verify the claims made in The Atlantic's report or determine why the headline was changed.

The article alleged that early meetings at the FBI had to be rescheduled because of Patel's late-night drinking and that he was often away or unreachable, slowing decisions needed to move investigations forward. Reuters reported that the White House, the Department of Justice and Patel all denied the allegations in The Atlantic's story. **The report also carried a statement from the FBI attributed to Patel, which said:**

Print it, all false, I'll see you in court, bring your checkbook. Patel repeated his denial in an interview with Reuters, saying: The Atlantic's story is a lie. They were given the truth before they published, and they chose to print falsehoods anyway. **After Patel threatened legal action during an appearance on Fox News on Sunday, The Atlantic Editor-in-Chief Jeffrey Goldberg told CNBC:**

We stand by our reporting on Kash Patel. **Lawsuit seeks \$250 million**

The complaint, filed in the US District Court for the District of Columbia, seeks \$250 million in damages. It argues that while The Atlantic was entitled to criticise the FBI's leadership, it crossed a legal boundary by publishing an article replete with false and obviously fabricated allegations designed to destroy Director Patel's reputation and drive him from office. The lawsuit further alleges that The Atlantic ignored denials issued by the FBI.

and did not respond to a Friday letter from Patel's lawyer, Jesse Binnall, sent to senior editors and the magazine's legal department. According to the complaint, the letter requested more time to rebut 19 allegations that the reporter had told the FBI press office she intended to publish. Reuters said it could not establish how, or whether, The Atlantic responded to that request.

and did not respond to a Friday letter from Patel's lawyer, Jesse Binnall, sent to senior editors and the magazine's legal department. According to the complaint, the letter requested more time to rebut 19 allegations that the reporter had told the FBI press office she intended to publish. Reuters said it could not establish how, or whether, The Atlantic responded to that request.

TOKYO
AGENCIES

Japan issues tsunami warning after 7.4-magnitude quake, records 80cm wave

Japan recorded an 80-centimetre tsunami wave at a port in the country's north on Monday after a powerful 7.4-magnitude earthquake struck off the region, according to the Japan Meteorological Agency (JMA). The JMA said the wave was observed at 5:34pm local time at a port in Kuji, in Iwate prefecture. It had earlier reported that a 70-centimetre wave reached the same area at 5:32pm.

PUBLIC NOTICE LEGAL HEIRS TRANSFER

Sr #	PLOT#	SECTOR	PHASE	MEASURING	Shareholder
1	6	D	9P	2 Kanal	Shareholder
2	75	CE1	9P	8 Marlas	Shareholder

Beware that Muhammad Asif CNIC # 35202-2695535-7 S/O Basharat Ahmad died on 23 Aug 2025. We are the Legal Heirs of His above Mentioned Properties Defence Housing Authority, Lahore Cantt.

1. Basharat Ahmad (Father) 2. Azra Khatoon (Mother)
3. Faiza Asif (Widow) 4. Mahnoor (Daughter)
5. Muhammad Azan Asif (Son) 6. Irha Asif (Daughter)

Anyone having objections may contact Secretary Defence Housing Authority, Main Office Complex Phase 6 Lahore Cantt within 15 days of the publication of this notice.

CRESCENT COTTON MILLS LIMITED
NOTICE OF EXTRA-ORDINARY GENERAL MEETING

NOTICE IS HEREBY GIVEN THAT an Extra-Ordinary General Meeting of the shareholders of **CRESCENT COTTON MILLS LIMITED** will be held at the Registered Office of the Company on Friday the May 15, 2026 at 09:30 a.m. to transact the following business:-

- To elect seven Directors of the Company, as fixed by the Board for a period of three years commencing from May 18, 2026 in accordance with the provisions of the Companies Act, 2017 in place of retiring Directors namely:
 - Mr. Abid Mahmood
 - Mr. Adnan Amjad
 - Mr. Naveed Gulzar
 - Mr. Salman Rafi
 - Ms. Nazish Arshad
 - Mrs. Shameen Azfar
 - Mr. Taimur Amjad
- To transact any other business with the permission of the chair.

REGISTERED OFFICE: Crescent Cotton Mills Limited Nishatabad, Faisalabad
On Behalf Of The Board (Sami Ullah) Company Secretary
Dated: April 17, 2026

Four candidates enter public race to succeed Guterres as next UN chief

NEW YORK
AGENCIES

Four contenders are squaring up to succeed Antonio Guterres as leader of the United Nations, which faces unprecedented global instability, wars and its own crushing budget crisis.

Chile's Michelle Bachelet, Argentina's Rafael Grossi, Costa Rican Rebeca Grynspan, and Senegal's Macky Sall will each face grillings by 193 member states and NGOs for three hours on Tuesday and Wednesday. It is only the second time the UN has held a public Q&A, a format created in 2016 to boost transparency.

Ultimately the five permanent members of the UN's top body, the Security Council, hold the power, wielding vetoes over who leads the global organisation as its secretary-general.

US President Donald Trump's envoy to the Manhattan-based UN, Mike Waltz, has warned the next chief must align with "American values and interests" and that Washington would back the best candidate — not necessarily a Latin American woman, as some countries are demanding.

All four candidates to take over the embattled UN when Guterres departs on December 31, 2026 pledge to grow trust in the bitterly divided organisation that faces financial Armageddon because of Washington's refusal to pay its bills. Here is a look at the contenders:

Michelle Bachelet
A Chilean socialist brutally tortured by the regime of Augusto Pinochet, Bachelet became her country's first woman president in 2006.

She went on to be the UN rights chief, a sensitive role in which she alienated some countries, especially China, which mauled her for reporting on alleged abuses of the Uyghur people. Bachelet, 74, has said that she is "convinced" she has the experience "to confront a moment" marked by unprecedented crises and conflicts.

PUBLIC NOTICE LEGAL HEIRS TRANSFER

Beware that Abdul Rauf CNIC # 35202-0973203-3 S/O Muhammad Sharif died on 25 January-2026. We are the Legal Heirs of His plot # 170 Sector D Phase 12 Measuring 1 Kanal (4250 Sqft) Defence Housing Authority, Lahore Cantt.

1. Naseem Akhtar (Widow) 2. Muhammad Waseem Rauf (Son)
3. Naveed Rauf (Son) 4. Ghulam Fatima (Mother)

Anyone having objections may contact Secretary Defence Housing Authority, Main Office Complex Phase 6 Lahore Cantt within 15 days of the publication of this notice.

PUBLIC NOTICE LEGAL HEIRS TRANSFER

Beware that Rukhsana Ajmal Malik CNIC # 35201-7324088-2 W/O Ajmal Anwar Malik died on 11-January-2026. We are the Legal heirs of Her plot # 932 Sector U Phase 7 Measuring 1 Kanal Defence Housing Authority, Lahore Cantt.

1. Ajmal Anwar Malik (Husband) 2. Anika Haris Siddiqui (Daughter)
3. Hassan Ajmal (Son) 4. Ahsan Malik (Son)
5. Rida Ajmal (Daughter)

Anyone having objections may contact Secretary Defence Housing Authority, Main Office Complex Phase 6 Lahore Cantt within 15 days of the publication of this notice.

PUBLIC NOTICE LEGAL HEIRS TRANSFER

Beware that Inayat Khurshid CNIC # 35202-1313335-0 W/O Khurshid Muhammad Chaudry died on 22-05-2019. I am the legal of Her plot # 1810 Sector D Phase 9 Measuring 5 marlas 87 Sqft Defence Housing Authority, Lahore Cantt.

1. Tahir Mohammed Khurshid (son)

Anyone having objections may contact Secretary Defence Housing Authority, Main Office Complex Phase 6 Lahore Cantt within 15 days of the publication of this notice.

CORPORATE CORNER

CDA chief reviews pace of work on under construction projects

ISLAMABAD
STAFF REPORT

Chief Commissioner Islamabad and Chairman Capital Development Authority (CDA), Sohail Ashraf, visited the under-construction National Police Academy building, Elite Police School, and expansion of Islamabad Safe City Project on Monday. Inspector General (IG) Islamabad Police, Syed Ali Nasir Rizvi along with other relevant officers, accompanied him.

Chairman CDA reviewed the progress made on the construction work of the National Police Academy project. Relevant officers briefed him about the progress on the National Police Academy project, said that construction work is progressing rapidly on all parts of the National Police Academy project simultaneously and under construction building consists of approximately 9 floors. During the briefing, it was informed that the construction work on all floors of the building has entered its final stage. Chairman CDA was apprised that along with the construction works, the finishing work of the project is also progressing rapidly. During the briefing, it was further said that the academy will also include modern training facilities for the trainees. Chairman CDA Sohail Ashraf directed the expeditious completion of the remaining construction work on the project and said that the provision of all high-quality training facilities within the academy should be ensured. He said that high standards should be ensured for all construction and finishing works included in the project.

Later, the CDA Chairman visited the expansion of Islamabad Safe City Project and the Elite Police School. During a briefing, Chairman CDA was informed that the Islamabad Safe City project is being expanded on modern lines. He was also told during the briefing that rappelling towers and obstacles are being constructed for training at the Elite Police School.

Solar Pakistan 2026 concludes successfully

LAHORE
STAFF REPORT

The three-day Solar Pakistan 2026 exhibition successfully concluded today at the Expo Centre Lahore, marking a significant milestone in accelerating Pakistan's transition to alternative energy. Organized by Fakt Exhibitions (Pvt) Ltd, the event attracted more than 400 companies from 10 countries, energy experts, policymakers, and received an overwhelming response. The closing ceremony was graced by Faheem Ur Rehman Saigol (President of the Lahore Chamber of Commerce & Industry) (LCCI) he said, "Solar Pakistan is an essential initiative in unlocking the alternative energy potential of regions like Punjab. With abundant sunlight and growing awareness, this region is well-positioned to lead in sustainable energy solutions.

Speaking on the success of the exhibition, Saleem Khan Tanoli, CEO of Fakt Exhibitions, stated: "We are pleased to see the enthusiastic participation and engagement from both national and international stakeholders. Solar Pakistan continues to serve as a catalyst for innovation and collaboration, shaping the future of Pakistan's energy landscape."

The exhibition provided a vibrant platform for business networking, strategic partnerships, and on-ground solutions aimed at addressing Pakistan's energy challenges. From smart solar panels and hybrid storage systems to off-grid solutions tailored for rural areas, the showcase offered a practical roadmap for advancing alternative energy adoption across the country. In light of the growing energy demand and rising climate concerns, Solar Pakistan 2026 has reinforced the urgency of transitioning to cleaner energy sources. The successful execution of the event positions Lahore as a rising hub for energy innovation and highlights the pivotal role regional cities can play in driving national energy resilience and sustainability.

ATIR GRANTS TAX RELIEF TO IT EXPORTER, REMANDS RS51.2 MILLION CASE

■ TRIBUNAL RULES EXPORT REMITTANCES MAY QUALIFY FOR EXEMPTION, SENDS CASE BACK TO TAX OFFICER

PROFIT
MONITORING DESK

THE Appellate Tribunal Inland Revenue (ATIR) has granted relief to a software exporter by remanding a case involving Rs51.2 million in foreign remittances back to the assessing officer, ruling that the income may qualify for tax exemption under existing law, Business Recorder reported.

The case involved Majaz Elahi, who had declared Rs51,195,457 as export proceeds from IT services and software in his tax return, claiming exemption under Clause 133 of Part 1 of the Second Schedule to the Income Tax Ordinance, 2001.

The return was initially accepted, but tax authorities later reopened the case under Section 122(8) following information regarding a property transaction.



After the taxpayer denied owning any such property, the focus shifted to the source of the declared exempt income.

The assessing officer subsequently treated the amount as unexplained in-

come under Section 111 and added it to taxable income, a decision that was upheld at earlier appellate stages.

The taxpayer challenged the ruling, arguing that the amount represented for-

ign remittances from IT exports, supported by bank statements, remittance certificates, and documentation issued by the Pakistan Software Export Board.

The tribunal noted that the earlier order contained a factual error regarding an alleged property sale and accepted that the available record prima facie supported the taxpayer's claim.

Based on this assessment, ATIR set aside the earlier finding and directed the assessing officer to re-examine the case in light of the evidence.

The tribunal observed that export proceeds from IT services and software are eligible for exemption under the law and should not be treated as unexplained income without proper evaluation.

The decision highlights the need for tax authorities to assess foreign remittances linked to IT exports on the basis of evidence and applicable legal provisions.

Rs48b mega package announced to transform Sheikhupura: Azma Bokhari

LAHORE
STAFF REPORT

Provincial Minister for Information and Culture, Azma Bokhari has said that under the vision of Chief Minister Maryam Nawaz, Punjab has embarked on the largest and most transparent development journey in its history. The objective is to uplift the public from conditions of neglect and underdevelopment and provide a clean, modern living environment.

She expressed these views while speaking to the media after receiving a detailed briefing on development projects and the law and order situation at the Deputy Commissioner's Office in Sheikhupura.

Azma Bokhari revealed that Chief Minister Maryam Nawaz has announced a historic development package worth Rs 48 billion for Sheikhupura. Under this package, extensive work is underway across the district, including the construction of new roads, modern sewerage systems, water tanks, and city beautification projects.

She emphasized that, unlike in the past, development is no longer limited to selected areas but is now reaching every town and village across Punjab. An amount exceeding Rs 12.5 billion has been allocated specifically for WASA-related projects.

Sharing a major development for the city, she announced that eco-friendly electric green buses will



begin operating between Lahore and Sheikhupura within the next 10 days. This service will particularly benefit female students, working women, and elderly citizens by providing safe and dignified transportation. She directed the administration to complete the construction of modern depots and charging stations on an emergency basis.

Speaking about sanitation and rural uplift, Azma Bokhari said that the flagship programs "Suthra Punjab" and "Model Village" are transforming rural areas. Under these initiatives, projects worth Rs 809 million are being implemented to provide sewerage systems and basic facilities. She added that, for the first time in 74 years, a structured waste management system has been established, which is being closely monitored.

On administrative discipline, she made it clear that Chief Minister Maryam Nawaz has issued strict instructions that no delays in development projects or compromises on safety measures will be tolerated. She directed the Deputy Commissioner to display project details and visuals at excavation sites so that the public remains informed about the benefits following temporary inconvenience.

Highlighting improvements in law and order, she appreciated the performance of the Punjab Police, stating that, in line with the Chief Minister's vision, significant progress has been achieved, including up to a 40% reduction in rape cases. She reaffirmed the government's commitment to intensifying crackdowns against drug trafficking and child abuse.

CTO Islamabad visits city duty points with SSP Operations

ISLAMABAD
STAFF REPORT

Following the special directives of the Inspector General of Police (IGP) Syed Ali Nasir Rizvi, Islamabad Police has taken effective measures to ensure foolproof security and efficient traffic management in the federal capital.

In this regard, Chief Traffic Officer (CTO) Islamabad Muhammad

Sarfraz Virk, accompanied by SSP Operations Islamabad Qazi Ali Raza, visited various duty points in the city. They met with police officers and officials present on duty.

On this occasion, while reviewing the checking process, they directed the concerned officers to further strengthen and make checkpoints more effective to ensure the protection of citizens' lives and property. All officers were directed to re-

main alert at all times, ensure thorough checking of suspicious individuals and vehicles, and immediately report any suspicious activity to the relevant authorities.

The CTO Islamabad also issued directions to ensure effective traffic arrangements on highways and to maintain the smooth flow of traffic throughout the city. Further necessary traffic-related guidelines were also issued to ensure that citizens do not face any difficulties and that traffic flow remains uninterrupted.

Citizens are requested to follow the advisory issued by the traffic police. Islamabad Traffic Police remains present on the roads at all times to guide and facilitate the public.

He further stated that all officers and officials should treat citizens with courtesy and respect to strengthen the bond of trust between the police and the public. The protection of citizens' lives and property is the top priority of Islamabad Police, and all security measures are being taken with this objective.

PM&DC holds preliminary hearings on student suicide and harassment cases

ISLAMABAD
STAFF REPORT

The Pakistan Medical and Dental Council convened a preliminary hearing to review the tragic case of a medical student's suicide, reportedly linked to harassment. PM&DC President Prof Dr Rizwan Taj, along with Registrar Dr Rehan Naqvi, expressed sorrow over the incidents and emphasized a zero-tolerance policy towards harassment and any negligence in medical and dental institutions. Three preliminary hearings were convened today to ensure a fair and informed assessment of the matters at hand before any formal disciplinary proceedings were initiated. Relevant stakeholders, including representatives of the concerned institution, were called to present their accounts so that the factual matrix could be clearly established. The President of PM&DC carefully reviewed the initial findings and sought clarifications from the concerned representatives to verify key facts and to assess the sufficiency of evidence. This process was undertaken to determine whether the cases were ready for referral to the Disciplinary Committee for further adjudication.

The first hearing was of the doctors with "OT video leak scandal". All 05 doctors, including Dr. Tayaba Fatima, Dr. Zainab Tahir, Dr. Muhammad Essa, Dr. Ayesha Afzal and Dr. Maham Amin attended. The incident involved the circulation of an inappropriate video on social media by the PG trainees of Lady Wellington Hospital, Lahore, showing a race amongst doctors performing surgeries on two tables and making callous comments.

Second hearing was on the sad incident of suicide by a final year MBBS student Ms. Fareeha at Fatima Jinnah Medical College, Lahore. The principal of the College appeared and explained the facts.

The third hearing was on the sad incident of suicide by Ms. Fehmida Leghari 3rd year MBBS of student of Muhammad Medical College, Mirpurkhas. The principal of the college appeared and explained the facts.

After the preliminary hearings, President PM&DC forwarded the cases to the PM&DC Disciplinary Committee for final determination/decisions. The Disciplinary committee is scheduled to be held next week.

Uninterrupted power supply to be ensured in view of arrival of international delegations: IESCO CEO

ISLAMABAD
STAFF REPORT

Chief Executive IESCO Engineer Chaudhry Khalid Mahmood has said that all arrangements have been finalized to ensure uninterrupted power supply in view of the arrival of international delegations in Islamabad. In this regard, he chaired a high-level meeting at IESCO Head Office in which Chief Engineer Operation Muhammad Kashif Shah and Chief Engineer O&M Zahid Saleem Usmani, officers of the concerned operation circles participated. The Chief Executive IESCO said that the officers and staff of the concerned areas are fully mobilized. Grid stations and feeders are being monitored 24 hours a day and Insha Allah, IESCO will ensure continuous power supply during this big event.

CAT upholds CCP order against Kingdom Valley, maintains Rs35m penalty for deceptive marketing

ISLAMABAD
STAFF REPORT

The Competition Appellate Tribunal (CAT) has upheld the Competition Commission of Pakistan (CCP)'s order dated 27 May 2025 against Kingdom Valley (Pvt.) Limited, directing the real estate developer to deposit a penalty of Rs35 million for misleading consumers about the location and approval status of its housing project.

During the proceedings, the Commission observed that Kingdom Valley had

engaged in deliberate deceptive marketing by portraying its project, actually located in Mouza Choor, Rawalpindi, as in Islamabad through billboards, social media, and other advertisements, thereby misleading consumers to command higher value. It is further added that the project was being widely promoted as "NOC approved" even before formal approvals were obtained, indicating a calculated strategy to deceive.

In its detailed judgment, the Tribunal endorsed the Commission's findings, holding that the company had clearly mis-

represented the project by advertising it as "Kingdom Valley Islamabad" despite its actual location in Rawalpindi. It noted that advertisements had been launched prior to obtaining approvals, reinforcing the element of deception. Rejecting the Kingdom Valley's defence that similar practices were prevalent in the sector, the Tribunal observed that "the deception angle becomes insurmountable when violation occurs in broad daylight," adding that "two wrongs never make one right."

While upholding the violation under Section 10(2)(b) of the Act, relating to dis-

semination of false or misleading information to consumers, the Tribunal maintained the penalty of Rs35 million, terming the misstatement of the project's location a "grave default." It emphasised that such practices are particularly harmful in the real estate sector, where consumers are frequently misled by exaggerated claims, often resulting in significant financial losses. The Tribunal further directed that failure to deposit the penalty within 20 days would result in restoration of the Commission's original order in its entirety, exposing the company to higher financial liability.

GOVT WORKING TO STABILISE FUEL PRICES AMID GLOBAL TENSIONS, SAYS PETROLEUM MINISTER

■ ALI PERVAIZ MALIK SAYS PAKISTAN'S ECONOMIC POSITION REMAINS RELATIVELY STABLE COMPARED TO SEVERAL REGIONAL ECONOMIES THAT HAVE FACED SIGNIFICANT STRESS IN RECENT YEARS

PROFIT
MONITORING DESK

FEDERAL Minister for Petroleum Ali Pervaiz Malik said on Sunday that the government is working to stabilise fuel prices and manage volatility in the petroleum sector, while prioritising relief for consumers amid global economic pressures. Speaking to a local media channel, he said efforts are underway to maintain balance in fuel pricing despite external shocks linked to ongoing regional conflicts, adding that policy decisions are being shaped to protect the public from rising costs.

The minister said the government is focused on easing the burden on consumers while ensuring supply stability, noting that continued reforms are aimed



at managing price pressures without disrupting the energy market.

He said Pakistan's economic position

remains relatively stable compared to several regional economies that have faced significant stress in recent years, in-

cluding India, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka. The minister also highlighted the role of civil and military leadership in strengthening Pakistan's diplomatic standing, referring to engagement led by Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif and Deputy Prime Minister Ishaq Dar.

He said Pakistan's role in facilitating dialogue in the Middle East crisis has been recognised internationally, adding that recent flexibility shown by the United States and Iran is a positive signal for de-escalation. However, he noted that both sides still need to move towards a comprehensive and lasting agreement to ensure long-term stability in the region.

The minister expressed confidence that ongoing policy measures, combined with diplomatic engagement, would help sustain economic stability and provide further relief to consumers.

IN TODAY'S ISSUE



ATTENTION

Some readers have complained that they are not getting the magazine with their newspaper copy. Please call or WhatsApp us at the following number to register a complaint.

Contact: 0307-7338168
irfan.farooq@pakistanoday.com.pk

Karachi police arrest four over alleged matric and inter exam paper leak network

KARACHI
STAFF REPORT

Karachi police said on Monday they had arrested four members of what they described as an organised network accused of leaking Matric and Intermediate Board examination papers and taking millions of rupees from students in return.

According to police, the Karachi police chief had tasked the Special Investigation Unit (SIU) with tracing the network. Investigators said the operation uncovered 10 groups that were allegedly sharing examination papers with students through WhatsApp on the night before exams. SIU Senior Superintendent of Police Samiullah Soomro said complaints related to online fraud had been coming in for some time. He said the papers being circulated were found to be 70% to 90% accurate.

Soomro said the four arrested suspects had first set up eight WhatsApp groups, adding more than 1,300 students to them. He said students were told a night before an examination that the paper had been leaked and was available with the group administrator. Those interested were then asked to contact the admin through direct message to get the paper.

The officer said investigators later found two more WhatsApp groups during the probe, bringing the total to 10. He added that police had so far arrested the ringleaders of four of those groups.

Probe widens to possible board links
Soomro said police suspected that some people linked to the Matric and Intermediate Boards might also have been involved, saying the papers may have reached the suspects through them.

He also said that during questioning, one of the suspects stated that he had generated the papers himself using artificial intelligence. According to Soomro, the suspect said he used past papers and guess papers to create new papers with AI, which was why the leaked material was not fully accurate. Police said the suspect then sold those papers to students through WhatsApp groups.

Pakistan, Egypt conclude two-week Thunder-II counterterrorism exercise at Cherat

ISLAMABAD
STAFF REPORT

Pakistan and Egypt have wrapped up a two-week joint military exercise centred on counterterrorism operations at Cherat in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, according to the Inter-Services Public Relations (ISPR). In a statement issued on Monday, the military's media wing said the Pakistan-Egypt Joint Exercise Thunder-II was held at the Special Operations School in Cherat, described as the military's premier Special Operations School. The ISPR said the exercise was designed to improve interoperability between the two sides by refining drills, procedures and techniques related to counterterrorism operations through joint training. According to the statement, combat teams from the Pakistan Army's Special Services Group (SSG) and the Egyptian Special Forces took part in the exercise. The ISPR said the participating troops displayed exceptional professionalism and operational skill during the training period.

The closing ceremony was attended by the General Officer Commanding SSG, Commander of Egyptian Paratroopers Major General Mohamed Saad Abdel Razik and Egypt's defence attaché were also present at the event, the ISPR said. The military's media wing said the exercise also contributed to deepening defence ties between the two countries. "The exercise also served to further strengthen the longstanding and historic military-to-military relations between the two friendly nations," it stated. Pakistan and Egypt maintain long-standing bilateral relations.

According to the reports, the joint exercise had commenced on April 6 at the Special Operations School in Cherat. Last year, Chief of Army Staff Field Marshal Asim Munir, during a meeting with Egyptian defence officials in October, reaffirmed Pakistan's commitment to enhanced defence and military cooperation with Egypt.

PTI warns of looming food crisis, slams govt over 'anti-farmer' policies

ISLAMABAD
STAFF REPORT

Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) Central Information Secretary Sheikh Waqas Akram on Monday launched a scathing attack on the government, accusing it of pursuing "flawed, short-sighted and agenda-driven policies" that have crippled key sectors of the economy, which he claimed had performed significantly better under the leadership of Imran Khan. In a strongly worded statement, the PTI leader said the government's "anti-people and anti-farmer policies" had brought economic activity to a near standstill, pushing Pakistan's agricultural backbone into deep distress and paralysing the broader economy. He warned that without immediate, comprehensive and practical policy corrections, the country risks not only a decline in wheat production but also a looming food security crisis.

Sh Waqas said the ruling elite appeared detached from the ground realities faced by ordinary citizens and farmers, adding that growers across the country were once again approaching a breaking point. Highlighting the deepening wheat crisis, he said farmers were grappling with uncertainty over pricing, flawed procurement arrangements, non-availability of gunny bags and the increasing dominance of middlemen in markets — factors that have severely eroded their financial viability. "Despite the announcement of a support price of Rs3,500 per maund, the rate does not reflect actual production costs," he said, adding that per-acre cultivation expenses — driven by sharp increases in fertilisers, seeds, pesticides, water charges, diesel, harvesting and threshing — have surged to nearly Rs210,000.

Govt says Middle East war will slow growth this year and next

ISLAMABAD
STAFF REPORT

The government said on Monday that Pakistan's economic growth would come under pressure in the current and next fiscal years because of a sharp reduction in development spending, fuel subsidies and inflationary effects linked to supply chain disruptions caused by the war in the Middle East.

Planning Minister Ahsan Iqbal told a news conference that the cut in development allocations would weigh on economic activity. He said,

"This (cut in development budget) will have a negative impact and, coupled with international oil prices and inflation, will result in economic slowdown and affect our growth target of 4.2pc" for the current year.

His remarks marked the first official acknowledgement that growth may fall short of the target, although international lenders had already projected Pakistan's

growth rate in the range of 3.2pc to 3.5pc.

Development spending reduced
Responding to a question, the minister said the Public Sector Development Programme (PSDP) for the current fiscal year had been cut by Rs173 billion, bringing it down to Rs837bn from the budgeted Rs1.01 trillion.

He said the reduction was made to help finance the Prime Minister's Austerity Fund, which was set up to subsidise fuel prices, especially diesel, during the harvesting season.

Iqbal said Pakistan's gross domestic product grew by 3.8pc in the first two quarters, from July to December, compared to 1.9pc in the same period last year, before what he described as an external shock from the Middle East crisis affected Pakistan and other economies. He said the impact on the growth outlook would be smaller in the current fiscal year because the crisis emerged after

three quarters had already passed, but warned that the effect would be more pronounced in the first six months of the next fiscal year even if the war ended immediately. He added that global supply chains and markets usually required six to nine months to return to normal.

Oil prices, inflation and subsidies
The planning minister said oil prices and uninterrupted supply were critical for the global economy and that higher prices had raised export costs internationally.

He said Pakistan had avoided disruptions in oil supplies through proactive decisions, but added that consumption had to be controlled through price adjustments to prevent domestic and external deficits from widening. Under that approach, he said, the government first raised diesel and petrol prices by Rs55 per litre and then kept them unchanged for the next two weeks by providing a Rs129bn subsidy through a Rs100bn reduction in development spending.

CM Maryam pushes Blue Economy drive to turn barren land into shrimp export hub

LAHORE
SALHEEM JADOON

Punjab Chief Minister Maryam Nawaz on Monday reaffirmed her commitment to transforming barren lands across the province into productive economic zones under the Blue Economy Programme, saying the promotion of aquaculture and shrimp farming on international standards would generate employment, rehabilitate unused land and boost exports, according to a DGPR handout.

"Significant progress has been achieved in developing infrastructure for shrimp farming projects in Sargodha Estate, Ali Wala and Shah Garh," the chief minister said, commending the team for ex-



pediting work, according to a statement issued by the Chief Minister's Office (CMO).

At the Sargodha shrimp farming project, excavation of 118 ponds has been completed, alongside the boring of 116 tube wells and 100 percent land clearing and

survey over 365 acres. Construction of the warehouse is 90 percent complete, while work on the administration block and feed store is progressing rapidly. The project spans a total area of 500 acres.

In the Ali Wala shrimp estate, 90 percent of the allocated 1,267 acres has been cleared. Excavation of 642 out of 737 ponds has been completed, while 91 percent work on the drainage system and 100 percent excavation of MDC drains have been finalised. Survey and clearing of a 9,000-metre road network have been completed, along with 80 percent of earth-filling work. Foundations for the administration office, hostel, warehouse and labour residences have also been laid.

Four road workers abducted by armed men in Tirah valley

KHYBER
NEWS DESK

Four workers engaged in road construction were abducted by armed men in the Peer Mela area of Tirah valley in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa on Monday, according to local sources.

The abducted men included two excavator operators and two labourers who were busy levelling land for the construction of a link

road when gunmen took them away at gunpoint, the sources said. They added that the workers were shifted to an undisclosed location after the abduction. According to the same sources, three of the four kidnapped workers are residents of Balochistan.

Security forces launched a search operation in the area and adjoining localities following the incident, local sources said.

After the abduction, local eld-

ers called for effective security arrangements for people working on development schemes in the area. They warned that incidents of this nature could affect ongoing development work in Tirah valley.

Security concerns raised in Bara
Separately, a peace council of the Akkakhel tribe was held in Bara tehsil of Khyber district, where participants voiced concern over the worsening security situation in the area.

Members of the council told Dawn that the meeting expressed deep concern over the deteriorating law and order situation and demanded immediate steps to address it.

Loss of energy output in MidEast will take about two years to recover, IEA says

PROFIT
REUTERS

It will take about two years to recover the energy output lost in the Middle East from the conflict there, Fatih Birol, the head of the International Energy Agency, was quoted as saying in an interview with the Neue Zuercher Zeitung newspaper.

"That will vary from country to country. In Iraq, for example, it will take much longer than in Saudi Arabia. However, we

estimate it will take approximately two years overall to reach pre-war levels again," Birol told the Swiss newspaper.

Birol added that the market was underestimating the consequences of a prolonged closure of the Strait of Hormuz.

Shipments of oil and gas that were already en route to their destinations before the war in Iran began have now arrived, mitigating the impact of shortages, he said.

"But no new tankers were loaded in March. There were no new deliveries of oil,

gas or fuels to Asian markets. This gap is now becoming apparent. If the Strait of Hormuz is not reopened, we must prepare for significantly higher energy prices."

Asked whether the IEA could carry out another release of emergency oil reserves after its March move, Birol said the agency was ready to act immediately and decisively.

"We're not there yet, but it's definitely under consideration," Birol said.

