



Daily The Spokesman

A Leading National Daily



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مجھ سے اراکیم بن موسیٰ نے بیان کیا،
انہوں نے کہا تم کو شاہین یوسف نے خبر
دی، انہیں معرے، انہیں ہام بن منیر نے
اور ان سے ابو ہریرہ رضی اللہ عنہ نے بیان کیا
کہ رسول اللہ صلی اللہ علیہ وسلم نے فرمایا اس
ذات کی قسم! جس کے ہاتھ میں میری زبان
ہے اگر تم بھی آخرت کی وہ مطکات جانتے
جو میں جانتا ہوں تو تم زیادہ روئے اور کم پشتے۔
(بخاری ص 637)

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US to permanently close Peshawar consulate, citing cost

The US State Department announced plans to permanently close its consulate in Peshawar, a key diplomatic mission near the Afghan border that served as a primary operations and logistics hub before, during, and after the 2001 invasion of Afghanistan, the AP says in a report. The department notified Congress this week of its decision, citing annual savings of \$7.5 million and stating that the closure would not hinder America's ability to advance its national interests in Pakistan, according to a copy of the notification.



OGRA raises imported LNG prices for Sui Northern and Sui Southern

Pakistan's Oil and Gas Regulatory Authority (OGRA) has raised the prices of imported liquefied natural gas (LNG) for March, the regulator said in a notification on Thursday. OGRA increased the price per million British thermal units (MMBtu) for Sui Northern Gas Pipelines Limited by Rs 622, bringing the new rate to \$13.55 per MMBtu, an increase of \$2.22.

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PM arrives in Jeddah

JEDDAH: Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif is being received by His Royal Highness Prince Saud bin Mashaal bin Abdulaziz, Deputy Governor of Makkah region, at the royal terminal of Jeddah International airport on Thursday.



Photo: PID

Ishaq Dar holds talks with Oman FM on Middle East tensions



City Desk

ISLAMABAD: Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Senator Ishaq Dar held a telephonic conversation with Oman's Foreign Minister Badr bin Hamad Al Busaidi to exchange views on the evolving situation in the Middle East and the wider region.

Ishaq Dar appreciated Oman's constructive and principled role in promoting dialogue and de-escalation amid escalating regional

tensions, reports Radio Pakistan.

He also expressed solidarity with Oman and its people in light of the recent attacks on the country.

Ishaq Dar emphasised Pakistan's call for restraint, immediate de-escalation and a return to diplomacy.

He reaffirmed Pakistan's continued support for all efforts aimed at reducing tensions and promoting peace and stability in the region and beyond.

Govt decides to appoint Nehal Hashmi as Sindh Governor

City Desk

ISLAMABAD: The federal government has decided to appoint senior Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) leader Nehal Hashmi as the Governor of Sindh.

According to a statement issued by the Prime Minister's Office, Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif has sent a summary in this regard to President Asif Ali Zardari for approval.

Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif also met Nehal Hashmi to congratulate him on his appointment.

Other officials present included Deputy Prime Minister Ishaq Dar, Defence Minister Khawaja Asif, and Adviser Rana Sanaullah.

During the meeting, the Prime Minister congratulated Hashmi on his appointment.



Nehal Hashmi, a senior leader of the PML-N, hails from Karachi.

Nehal Hashmi previously served as a member of the Senate from March 2015 to February 2018. He also served as Adviser on Law, Justice, and Human Rights to former prime minister Nawaz Sharif from 1997 to 1999.

On February 1, 2018, the Supreme Court of Pakistan sentenced Hashmi in a contempt of court case, giving him a one-month prison term.

As a result, he was disqualified from holding any public office for five years.

'If provoked, we won't stay silent': Tessori

Bureau Report

KARCHI: Kamran Tessori, the outgoing governor of Sindh, said he will continue speaking out on public issues and warned that he will not remain silent if politically targeted, as the federal government moves to replace him.

Speaking at an event in Karachi, Tessori said he was fully aware of who was behind the decision to remove him from the governor's office.

"If you provoke us, we will not let it go. I know who removed me and on whose instructions," he said.

The governor added that no one remains in office forever but insisted he had never served as a "silent or dummy governor."

"When I assumed the office, I pledged to work for the sake of God and the people," he said.

Tessori said he was ready to face consequences for speaking out on civic issues, particularly his stance on the Gul Plaza



matter in Karachi. He maintained that highlighting public problems was his responsibility and that he would not retreat from that duty.

He also hinted at a new direction in his political career, saying his political journey was "just beginning" and that its future course would become clearer in the coming period.

Tessori added that welfare initiatives and youth-focused programmes launched during his tenure would continue so that more citizens could benefit.

During the event, he congratulated Nehal Hashmi of Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) on his appointment as the Sindh governor and urged him to expand ongoing initiatives.

PM Shehbaz embarks on a daylong Saudi Arabia visit

Spokesman Report

ISLAMABAD: Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif on Thursday departed here for a brief daylong official visit to Saudi Arabia, at the invitation of Saudi Crown Prince and Prime Minister Mohammed bin Salman bin

Abdulaziz Al Saud.

During the visit, the prime minister will meet with Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman bin Abdulaziz Al Saud, according to a PM Office statement.

Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Senator Mohammad Ishaq Dar accom-

panied the prime minister.

In the meeting, both leaders will discuss the ongoing tensions in the region, the regional security situation, and bilateral relations between the two countries.

This visit highlights Pakistan's positive and active role in diplomacy on the international stage,

and the country will continue to play this constructive role.

At his weekly press briefing, Foreign Office spokesperson Tahir Andrabi told the media that the prime minister's visit to Saudi Arabia was part of the coordination between Pakistan and Saudi Arabia on matters of

regional peace and security and ending violence and hostilities.

He said that the visit should also be seen in the broader context of Pakistan's efforts to advocate and facilitate an early cessation of hostilities and violence in the region with the aim of paving the way for dialogue and diplomacy.

Considerable progress made in Pakistan, IMF talks

Reuters

Pakistan and the International Monetary Fund made "considerable progress" in talks on the third review of the country's Extended Fund Facility (EFF) programme.

However, the two sides have yet to reach a staff-level agreement, with discussions continuing as officials assess the impact of the Middle East conflict on the economy, the Fund said on

Wednesday.

"While considerable progress was made in the discussions, these will continue in the coming days," IMF mission chief Iva Petrova said in an end-of-mission statement.

The IMF team and Pakistani authorities will continue discussions in the coming days with a view to concluding the reviews, Petrova said.

Talks assessed risks from the Middle East conflict and

rising energy prices to Pakistan's economy, balance of payments and external financing needs, as the country imports most of its fuel.

Programme implementation under the \$7 billion Extended Fund Facility (EFF) has remained broadly aligned with authorities' commitments through end-February 2026, the IMF said.

Pakistan has also made "good progress" implementing climate resilience reforms under the RSF,



aimed at strengthening resilience to climate shocks.

Talks focused on fiscal consolidation, tight monetary policy and energy sector reforms.

Discussions covered the third review of Pakistan's 37-month EFF and the second review of the 28-month Resilience and Sustainability Facility.

Leghari orders strict action on poor performers, strengthens 118 call center for consumer relief

Commerce Desk

ISLAMABAD: Federal Minister for Power Sardar Awais Ahmed Khan Leghari on Thursday directed all power distribution companies (DISCOs) to make the redressal of electricity consumers' complaints more effective and transparent and ordered strict action against officers showing negligence in service delivery.

Leghari has also directed that Customer Services Directors of all power distribution companies be held accountable regarding the redressal of consumer complaints. Particularly, he took notice of the low registration of complaints by electricity consumers in Peshawar (PESCO),

HAZECO, Sukkur (SEPCO), Hyderabad (HESCO) and Quetta (QESCO) and instructed these five companies to maximally introduce the 118 Smart Call Center to consumers so that every consumer can benefit from this facility.

Among the distribution companies, Lahore Electric Supply Company (LESCO) registered the highest number of complaints at 1,031,685, of which 1,027,538 were resolved, maintaining a resolution rate of 99.60 percent. Multan Electric Power Company (MEPCO) recorded 651,683 complaints and resolved 646,908, achieving a 99.27 percent success rate. Faisalabad Electric Supply Company (FESCO) handled 297,182 complaints and



resolved 296,161, reaching a resolution rate of 99.66 percent, while Gujranwala

Electric Power Company (GEPCO) registered 238,681 complaints and resolved 237,802 with a 99.63 percent success rate. Islamabad Electric Supply Company (IESCO) recorded 177,887 complaints and resolved 176,840, achieving a resolution rate of 99.41 percent.

Other companies including PESCO, HESCO, SEPCO, HAZECO, TESCO and QESCO also maintained resolution rates above 98 percent, reflecting strong coordination and commitment across the distribution network to address consumer concerns. These details reflect excellent coordination among all power distribution companies (DISCOs) and their seriousness towards consumer service.

Supreme Court grants bail to Kashmiri separatist Shabir Ahmed Shah in terror funding case

Spokesman Report.

DEHLI/ISLAMABAD: The Supreme Court today granted bail to Kashmiri Separatist Leader Shabir Ahmed Shah in a terror funding case, noting that the delay ordained in the trial could not be explained. A bench of Justices Vikram Nath and Sandeep Mehta passed the order, after hearing Senior Advocate Colin Gonsalves for Shah and Senior Advocate Siddharth Luthra for NIA. Shah was arrested in June 2019 and arrayed as an accused in the second supplementary chargesheet filed by NIA on October 04, 2019.

The allegations against him are that he played a key role in building a separatist movement in Jammu and Kashmir, paying tribute to the families of slain terrorists, receiving money through



hawala transactions and raising funds through LOC trade used to "fule subversive and militant activities." He had approached the High Court

challenging a July 7, 2023 order passed by the special NIA court rejecting his bail plea, but his plea was dismissed. His plea stated that there he was

not mentioned in the main and first supplementary chargesheet filed by NIA where it has been shown that the offences had allegedly occurred as a result of the conspiracy.

"Therefore, in the absence of any material/material against the appellant, the prolonged period of incarceration, the impossibility of speedy trial with 400 witnesses to be examined by the prosecution, the appellant seeks bail," the appeal stated.

On the other hand, NIA argued that various accused persons (including Shah) conspired for raising and collecting funds for causing disruption in the Kashmir valley and to wage war against the government of India. Case Title: SHABIR AHMED SHAH Versus NATIONAL INVESTIGATION AGENCY, SLP(Cr) No. 13399/2025

Azad Kashmir health workers stage symbolic protest for charter of demand



Bureau Report

MUZAFFARABAD: Health Employees Federation holds 2-hour symbolic protest in favor of Charter of Demand, health employees from all over Azad Kashmir will hold a big protest demonstration in Muzaffarabad on March 16. Yesterday, employees held a protest sit-in at AIMS AIMS Ambor demanding their rights and raising slogans against the government. The atmosphere of AIMS Hospital echoed with the slogans of Sada Haak Athe Rakh Na Ahal Govt. Na L Director General Hey Hey. Addressing the protestors, Health Employees Federation Central Secretary General Syed Sajjad Hussain Naqvi, Paramedical Staff District Muzaffarabad President Raja Sadaqat Khan, Raja Raees Wilayat, Khaliq Ahmed Abbasi, Raja Taslim Khan, Ashfaq Mughal, Chaudhry Alam, Masoom Mughal, Shahzad Ahmed, Muntaz Mughal, Latafat Mughal, Chaudhry Badar, Yasir Qureshi, Syed Waqar Gilani, Raja Zeeshan and others said that one state, two constitutions, is a complete injustice. In our charter of demand, all employees of the health department should be given health allowance as per the running basic. Paramedical staff, supporting staff, health workers, supervisor nurses should be given a service structure under a four-tier formula.

Masood Khan Outlines Three Pillars for Pakistan's Future Foreign Policy

Spokesman Report

ISLAMABAD: Ambassador Masood Khan, former President of Azad Jammu and Kashmir and former Pakistan Ambassador to the United States, China, and the United Nations, has emphasized that Pakistan's foreign policy must be guided by strategic balance, national self-confidence, and institutional diplomacy in navigating complex global alignments.

Speaking to participants of the National Institute of Public Administration (NIPA) in Islamabad, Ambassador Masood Khan delivered a comprehensive lecture on the evolution and future trajectory of Pakistan-United States relations and their broader implications for Pakistan's national security and foreign policy.

He emphasized that Pakistan possesses the experience and diplomatic maturity to maintain equilibrium between major powers while safeguarding its national interests.

"Pakistan is a resilient and capable nation," Ambassador Masood Khan concluded. "Our diplomacy must be confident, balanced, and institutionalized, enabling us to build constructive partnerships while preserving strategic autonomy in an increasingly complex international order."



Strategic briefing

Islamabad: MNA delegation visited National Emergencies Operation Center for Strategic Briefing on Proactive Disaster Management at NDMA HQs, on Thursday.



Photo: PID

PML-N AJK leaders discuss party growth and women's role in politics

Spokesman Report

ISLAMABAD: PML-N Azad Jammu and Kashmir Secretary General Chaudhry Tariq Farooq met with Muslim League-N Azad Jammu and Kashmir Women's Wing Central Vice President and Member of Manifesto Committee Maryam Idrees.

In the meeting, Maryam Idrees thanked Secretary General Chaudhry Tariq Farooq for giving her time for the meeting and said that meeting a senior, stylish and constructively thinking personality like you is very important for me.

Your struggle for the



strength of the party is not hidden from anyone. I got the opportunity to learn. Maryam Idrees added that the field of politics is very important.

I did not come into politics by accident, but came with preparation and a vision.

In the meeting, Maryam Idrees reiterated her resolve that she will continue to play her effective role in further strengthening and mobilizing the party and women's wing in Azad Kashmir so that more and more women can enter politics and play their full role in the development and progress of society and the country through the platform of the PML-N.

Advocate Slams Pakistan Judiciary for Copying Government Work Schedule

Asim Tanveer

MULTAN: Former President of the High Court Bar Association Multan and Advocate of the Supreme Court, Syed Riaz-ul-Hassan Gilani, has written a letter to the Chief Justice of Pakistan criticizing the decision to limit court work to four days a week, calling it an irresponsible move made in imitation of the government and for its appeasement.

In his letter, he stated that Pakistan's Supreme Court already holds the distinction of being among the few courts in the world working only 192 days a year, and introducing a four day working week would further worsen the situation. He questioned what kind of new record was being set through this decision.

Gilani remarked that in Islamic history even during times of war the institution responsible for the dispensation of justice was never suspended even for a moment. However, he lamented that Pakistan appears to be moving in the opposite direction by slowing down the process of justice. He cited the example of Iran, stating that despite being in a state of war, courts there are still functioning normally. He added that Pakistan's judiciary, already burdened with millions of pending cases, must seriously reflect on correcting its course.



PIMS needs urgent reforms, AI-based monitoring: senior official

Zain Khan Malghani

ISLAMABAD: A senior government official has called for urgent systemic reforms in public hospitals, including the introduction of artificial intelligence (AI)-based monitoring, improved sanitation systems and strengthened laboratory facilities, following what he described as serious management shortcomings witnessed during a recent visit to Pakistan Institute of Medical Sciences (PIMS).

In a letter addressed to the Secretary of Ministry of National Health Services, Regulations & Coordination, Dr Ahmed Ali Sirohey, Director General of the Crisis Management Unit and Audit and Inspection at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, highlighted the need for modernising hospital administration through technology and stronger operational oversight.

Dr Sirohey said the concerns emerged during a week-long stay at

PIMS while his daughter was under treatment after suddenly losing consciousness on March 2.

According to the letter, the family rushed the patient to the emergency department of PIMS but encountered serious difficulties upon arrival. "There was no clean stretcher available and no staff member present to assist in shifting the patient," he wrote, adding that attendants had to arrange and push the stretcher themselves.

After the initial examination, the patient was referred to the medical emergency and intensive care unit, but had to wait several hours before being shifted to a critical care room. Even then, she reportedly remained on a stretcher until the next day due to the non-availability of beds.

The official noted that the hospital appeared to be under immense pressure, with numerous critically ill patients waiting for treatment.

Dr Sirohey also raised concerns about hygiene and administrative

management, stating that bedsheets were not changed for days and sanitation conditions were visibly poor. He further alleged that attendants were sometimes asked to make informal payments for basic consumables, including urine bags.

While he acknowledged the dedication of doctors who regularly visited patients, he observed that the presence of supporting staff significantly declined after the doctors left the wards.

The letter emphasised that the problems were not solely due to resource shortages but were also linked to weak monitoring, accountability and operational systems within public hospitals.

To address these challenges, Dr Sirohey proposed several reforms, including the installation of AI-driven hospital management dashboards to monitor patient inflow, bed occupancy, waiting times and staff availability in real time.

He also suggested the introduction



of biometric attendance systems for nurses and support staff, digital sanitation logs to ensure regular cleaning and linen replacement, and sensor-

based hygiene monitoring supported by independent audits.

Among other recommendations, he urged the government to strengthen

in-house laboratory capacity in public hospitals to conduct essential diagnostic tests internally and integrate laboratory systems with electronic patient records to accelerate diagnosis and treatment.

The official further called for transparent digital inventory systems for medicines and medical consumables to prevent shortages and eliminate informal payments, along with automated complaint portals for patients and attendants.

"Public hospitals carry the burden of serving millions of citizens who cannot afford private healthcare," Dr Sirohey wrote, adding that adopting modern technologies could significantly improve patient care without proportionally increasing costs.

He urged the ministry to consider launching a pilot reform programme in major federal hospitals, including PIMS, to modernise hospital management and restore public confidence in the healthcare system.

FROM TRAINING TO EMPLOYMENT: STRATEGY FOR PAKISTANI YOUTH

Skills development is key to Pakistan's economic future



An Exclusive Interview with NAVTTC Chairperson Gulmina Bilal

Amjad Mehmood

Ms. Gulmina Bilal, Chairperson of Pakistan's National Vocational and Technical Training Commission (NAVTTC), is at the forefront of efforts to transform the country's human capital through skills development and vocational training. Known for her dynamic leadership and longstanding commitment to governance reform and social development, she brings decades of experience from the public policy and civil society sectors. At a time when Pakistan's youthful population represents both a challenge and an opportunity, she is championing a national vision to equip millions of young Pakistanis with market-relevant skills, strengthen industry linkages, and position the country's workforce to compete in an increasingly technology-driven global economy. Her leadership at NAVTTC reflects a broader effort to reshape Pakistan's technical and vocational education system into a catalyst for economic growth, employment generation, and inclusive development.

In an exclusive interview with Daily The Spokesman, Ms. Gulmina Bilal outlined the commission's initiatives to strengthen skills development and improve employment opportunities for Pakistani youth.

Introducing NAVTTC, she said the commission serves as the federal regulatory body responsible for promoting technical and vocational education and skills training across the country. Through a wide range of training programs and partnerships with public and private institutions, NAVTTC aims to enhance employability and expand job opportunities for individuals while strengthening Pakistan's skilled workforce. "In many ways, NAVTTC functions as a regulatory authority similar to how institutions such as PTA and PEMRA regulate their respective sectors," she explained. "Our responsibility is to ensure quality by setting standards for training institutions, including curriculum benchmarks, faculty qualifications, and training delivery. This helps maintain a minimum professional threshold for teachers and training providers so that students receive industry-relevant skills." She said that NAVTTC has been performing this regulatory role since its establishment in 2005.

She added that the commission is also mandated to plan and implement the Prime Minister's Youth Skill Development Program, which aims to equip young people with market-relevant skills. NAVTTC manages and disburses resources for these initiatives to ensure training opportunities reach intended beneficiaries across the country. She explained that following Pakistan's 18th Constitutional Amendment, provincial Technical Education and Vocational Training Authorities (TEVTAs) operate independently within their respective provinces. However, NAVTTC continues to serve as the national regulatory authority for skills development, while provincial TEVTAs function primarily as implementing bodies. Under the Prime Minister's Youth Skill Development Program, NAVTTC collaborates with public sector organizations and universities to provide training in various trades. While the commission provides funding support for certain initiatives, provincial authorities also conduct their own programs through provincial budgets.

She emphasized that these programs are equipping young people with market-relevant skills while expanding opportunities for women in traditionally male-dominated trades. "Trades such as plumbing, mobile repair, carpentry, and electrical work, which were once considered male-dominated, are now being offered through women-only training programs," she said. "Launched last year as a pilot under the Prime Minister's directive, the initiative has now become a regular part of NAVTTC's training portfolio." She added that several advanced IT and modern skills programs have also been introduced, drawing inspiration from successful training models in China.



Photos by Sultan Bashir ONLINE

"Our priority is to ensure trainees receive proper hands-on training and acquire the practical skills required in their trades"

Highlighting a shift in approach, she said NAVTTC is now focusing on preparing work-ready youth rather than simply issuing certificates. "In the past, the emphasis was largely on training numbers and certification, with less attention to whether trainees were actually ready for employment," she said. "We have changed that approach. Our priority is to ensure trainees receive proper hands-on training and acquire the practical skills required in their trades. We also actively facilitate their placement in relevant industries, both within Pakistan and abroad."

Since July 2025, NAVTTC has been working to update curricula and introduce internationally recognized certifications in various trades. The commission has also accredited several new training organizations that meet its quality and compliance standards.

Explaining the accreditation process, Bilal said organizations seeking registration must apply through NAVTTC's digital management information system and submit evidence-based documentation. Applications are evaluated for faculty qualifications, infrastructure, and training capacity before on-site inspections are conducted. "Successful applicants are registered upon payment of a fee valid for three years," she said. "Once accredited, they become recognized partners on the NAVTTC portal and can offer authorized training courses."

Addressing allegations in the past regarding fake students and certifications, she said strict monitoring mechanisms have been introduced to ensure transparency. Biometric attendance systems have been imple-

mented for students, and cameras are now mandatory in classrooms and laboratories to verify the authenticity of training activities. Payments are withheld from organizations that fail to comply with these requirements. NAVTTC also conducts regular monitoring and third-party audits to ensure programs are delivered transparently and credibly.

"Transparent, focused, and industry-aligned training programs are integral part of NAVTTC"

She acknowledged that concerns regarding fake certificates had previously been raised, but said the issue has now been addressed through the issuance of certificates on secure security-paper pages with verifiable features designed to prevent forgery.

Discussing the selection of training providers, she said NAVTTC issues trade-specific advertisements inviting applications from registered organizations. Industry experts evaluate the competing institutes, and the most qualified organizations are selected to conduct training programs.

Speaking about the Skill Verification Program run by Takamol Holding of Saudi Arabia, she said the initiative verifies the skills of foreign workers before the issuance of work visas. Under the system, skilled workers must pass practical and theoretical tests in their country of origin to confirm their competence. Testing centers have been established across Pakistan, enabling applicants to appear for examinations at nearby facilities. However, she added that one of the key challenges is that most tests are conducted in English, which creates difficulties for skilled workers who possess strong practical expertise but lack formal education in the language. NAVTTC is currently in discussions with Takamol authorities to introduce testing in national and regional languages to

make the process more accessible.

She added that the entire testing process is now recorded and can be monitored online by Takamol officials, addressing earlier complaints of irregularities and improving transparency. NAVTTC has also launched preparatory training sessions to help Pakistani workers better understand the test format and increase their chances of success. Workers who obtain the Takamol certificate can then apply for employment visas for Saudi Arabia. Pakistan, she added, was the first country to sign the Skill Verification Program agreed mandatory skill verification in July 2021.

On international certification, she said such opportunities were previously limited within NAVTTC programs. The commission has now introduced internationally recognized certifications in trades where standardized global frameworks exist, enabling trainees to obtain credentials accepted in international labor markets. She also highlighted efforts to strengthen industry linkages. "When I assumed office, one of the key gaps at NAVTTC was the lack of strong industry alignment," she said. "Bridging this gap became a priority." On-the-job training with relevant industries has now been made mandatory, and partnerships have been established with sectors including textiles, pharmaceuticals, and manufacturing to ensure students gain practical experience.

Discussing proposed amendments to the Apprenticeship Act, she said NAVTTC presented reform proposals during its January 2026 board meeting. The commission's legal team drafted amendments aimed at making the law more effective and practical. The proposed reforms would require industries above a certain size to allocate mandatory apprenticeship slots, enabling trainees to receive structured on-the-job training aligned with industry needs.

"Commercial attachés at Pakistani embassies can play an important role in promoting Pakistani skilled labor internationally"

She also stressed the need for stronger coordination with Pakistani missions abroad to expand overseas employment opportunities for skilled workers. "Commercial attachés at our embassies can play an important role in promoting Pakistani skilled labor internationally," she said. "Their engagement can help secure more employment visas for workers trained through NAVTTC programs."

Responding to a question on funding and sustainability, she said the key challenge is not the availability of resources but their efficient utilization. Decisions, she said, are increasingly guided by data on district-level needs and labor market demands. NAVTTC has developed an online platform that provides real-time information on training institutions across Pakistan. The system allows officials to review data on training capacity, faculty qualifications, and operational status of institutes across districts, from Sanghar to Dalbandin.

Highlighting major initiatives, she said the Prime Minister's Youth Skills Development Program remains a flagship project providing free vocational training to young people nationwide. The program is implemented through more than 1,000 training institutes and offers over 250 courses, ranging from emerging technologies such as artificial intelligence and robotics to traditional trades like hospitality and welding. She also referred to the National Employment Exchange Tool (NEXT), an online platform designed to connect skilled youth with potential employers and expand employment opportunities. Ms. Gulmina concluded the interview by highlighting NAVTTC's role in implementing the URAAN Pakistan Program, which focuses on equipping diverse groups, including boys, girls, madrasa students, and differently abled individuals with future-oriented skills such as information technology, game development, artificial intelligence, and other high-tech trades. Referring to international cooperation, she said Pakistan continues to benefit from strong support from China. "Pakistan doesn't walk alone," she said. "China has been walking with us like family."

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Iran's War and the End of American Invincibility

History sometimes reaches a point where confidence collapses faster than armies do. The ongoing war involving the United States, Israel, and Iran appears to be one of those moments. What was expected in Washington and Tel Aviv to be a short, punishing campaign has instead become a prolonged regional confrontation with mounting military losses, deepening economic consequences, and a growing challenge to the long-assumed aura of invincibility surrounding both Israel and the United States.

What makes the present war historically important is not merely that it interrupted diplomacy again, but that it exposed how wrong the original assumptions were. If one follows the public statements of American officials from the start of this war, the message was unmistakable: Iran would be broken quickly, its strategic capabilities would be shattered, its people might rise, and the regime would either capitulate or collapse. Instead, the opposite has happened. Iran has not folded. It has absorbed punishment, retaliated across the region, and shown that even under intense assault it can still impose military and economic costs on its adversaries. That alone has altered the psychological landscape of the war.

The human toll illustrates the scale of the confrontation. Country-by-country tally as of March 11, at least 1,270 people have been killed in Iran, while Iranian officials have in some statements put the civilian toll even higher. In Israel, 12 people had been reported killed. For the United States, seven service members

killed and around 150 wounded, with several of the wounded suffering serious injuries. Additional deaths across the Gulf and neighboring states drawn into the conflict, including the UAE, Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Lebanon, Iraq, and Syria, underscoring how far this war has spread beyond its original battlefield.

These casualties are strategically significant because they undermine the image of a clean, one-sided campaign. American bases have been hit. Troops have been killed. Installations have been damaged. Israeli civilian life has been repeatedly disrupted by missile and drone alerts. Iran, of course, has suffered by far the heaviest losses in lives and infrastructure, but the core point remains: the war has not stayed cost-free for those who initiated it. The United States, despite possessing the world's most advanced military machine, has not been able to shield all of its personnel or quickly neutralize Iran's retaliatory capacity. That matters politically as much as militarily.

The financial cost is also becoming harder to ignore. The Trump administration told Congress the first two days of the war consumed about \$5.6 billion in munitions alone. Another report said the administration estimated the first six days had already cost the United States more than \$11 billion. These are enormous sums for less than a week of war, and they do not capture the full future bill if the conflict drags on.

Israel is also paying a steep price. Ira-

el's Finance Ministry estimated damage to the Israeli economy could exceed 9 billion shekels a week, or about \$2.93 billion weekly, under war conditions. That figure reflects not just the direct expense of operations, but disruption to business, reserve mobilization, emergency response, and the continuing burden of missile defense. In other words, even before counting long-term reconstruction or strategic loss, the war is costing Israel billions every week.

Iran's cost is harder to quantify precisely in credible public reporting, but it is clearly immense. The country has suffered extensive strikes on military, energy, industrial, and civilian-linked infrastructure, alongside the highest death toll of any party to the conflict. So while the United States and Israel are paying in cash, mobilization, and casualties, Iran is paying in blood, damaged infrastructure, and wider economic disruption. That asymmetry is real. But Tehran's apparent response has been to widen the cost field so that others pay too.

That is where the Strait of Hormuz becomes central. About one-fifth of the world's oil and gas supply normally passes through this chokepoint and that tanker traffic effectively collapsed after the war began. Iran declared the strait closed and threatened ships trying to pass, while war-risk insurance surged and hundreds of vessels were left backed up in and around the Gulf. Reuters also reported damaged tankers, cancelled war-risk cover, and a near paralysis of

the route. Iran may not be able to match the United States in airpower, but it can make the world pay for a war imposed on it. By choking the route, raising the risk premium, and forcing shipping and energy markets into crisis, Iran can externalize part of the war's cost. Instead of bearing the burden alone, it can push that burden onto energy importers, insurers, freight operators, and ultimately consumers around the world.

That is why the warning from the global shipping sector matters. The head of Maersk warned that the extra cost created by the conflict would be passed through the chain to customers and then to consumers. Shipping rates are rising, freight detours are growing, insurance costs are soaring, and businesses worldwide are already feeling the squeeze from the war's disruption of Gulf trade. The war is rattling businesses globally, squeezing supplies and raising doubts about critical trade routes.

So the war's cost is now operating on three levels at once. First, there is the direct military bill: billions for Washington, billions per week for Israel, and severe destruction for Iran. Second, there is the human bill: thousands dead or wounded across Iran, Israel, the United States, and the wider region. Third, there is the global consumer bill: higher oil prices, more expensive shipping, higher insurance, and rising inflation that ordinary people far from the battlefield will end up paying.

If one carefully examines the public statements issued by the United States leadership—from the early declarations of the administration to the confident

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Analysis

Qamar Bashir

UNSC Condemns Iran Retaliation with Pakistan's Backing; Russian Resolution Fails

With Pakistan supporting, the UN Security Council on Wednesday adopted a Bahrain-sponsored resolution condemning Iran's retaliatory attacks on the territories of several Persian Gulf states amid the rapidly spiraling crisis in the Middle East.

Thirteen members of the 15-nation Council voted in favour of the measure, while Russia and China abstained.

A second resolution calling for a halt to all military action in the Middle East, which was drafted by Russia, failed to pass.

The resolution mustered four votes in favour — Russia, China, Pakistan and Somalia — two against (US and Latvia), with nine members abstaining. Nine votes are required for a resolution to pass.

Both draft resolutions were aimed at addressing the devastating war in the Middle East, which was triggered by the joint US-Israeli strikes on Iran that began on 28 February and Iran's subsequent retaliation across the region.

Russia's UN Ambassador Vasily Nebenzya said he had abstained on the Bahraini resolution because the text was "extremely unbalanced" and that it "does not meet the purpose" of maintaining international peace and security.

Explaining his positive vote for both texts, Pakistan's UN Ambassador Asim Ifukhar Ahmad said, "This is a conflict that should never have happened," adding that it was unfortunate that the Council could not unify behind a comprehensive response to end the conflict.

"That's the sad reality," he lamented.

The conflict and its disastrous fallouts, the Pakistani envoy pointed out, are no more isolated — the regional and global dimensions are obvious.

"When international law is violated, peace is imperiled, not advanced," he said.

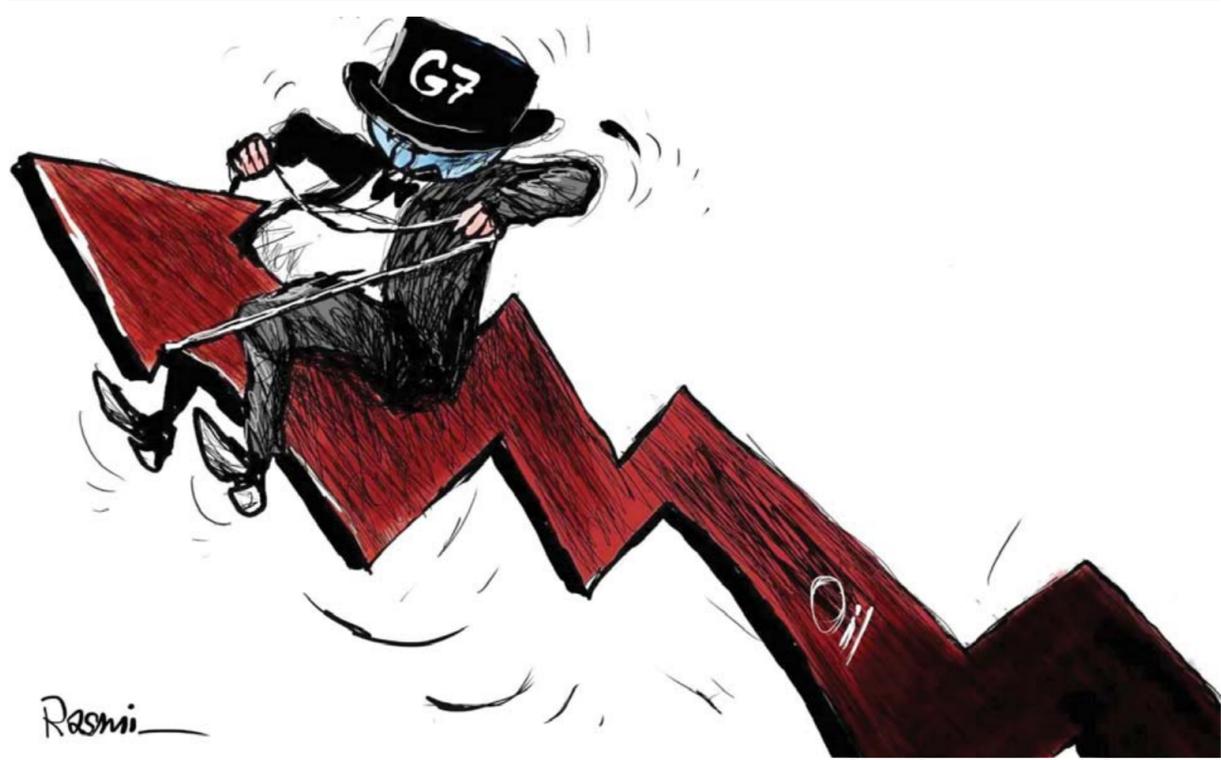
"We call for immediate and complete cessation of hostilities and return to the dialogue table. Only a peaceful settlement will serve everyone's interest," the Pakistani envoy added.

"The deplorable turn of events unfolding in the region — from the initiation of unwarranted attacks on the Islamic Republic of Iran on February 28th, which Pakistan also condemned — have seriously jeopardised international peace and security, given rise to grave consequences, and unnecessarily embroiled the entire region," he said.

"As a brotherly neighbouring country, Pakistan supports the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Iran. We are deeply concerned by the instability in Iran."

Pointing out that these developments also carry profound socio-economic and humanitarian repercussions, as a neighbouring country, Pakistan has not remained immune from these impacts — two of its nationals lost their lives in attacks on the UAE.

"Our fuel supplies have been seriously hampered, obliging the Government to take extraordinary measures for conserving the use of oil, gas and electricity; Several essential aviation links have been severed, while others face disruptions."



Cartoon by Amjad Rasmī. (Courtesy of Asharq Al-Awsat)

US+Israel-Iran War: Pakistan Plays Pacific Role

The recent military operations launched by Israel and the United States against Iran have thrust the Middle East into a perilous and expansive conflict. Coordinated Israeli and American air and missile strikes have deliberately targeted not only Iran's highest military and political leadership but also vital civilian infrastructure, including universities, research institutions, and essential public facilities. The martyrdom of senior Iranian commanders and the bombardment of academic and scientific centers have elevated what began as regional friction into a full-scale war. This escalation represents a profound threat to stability across the Middle East and constitutes a major challenge to international peace and security. Should this conflict remain unchecked, God forbid, it risks spiraling into a third world war whose devastating consequences would linger for centuries, making recovery nearly impossible.

In these exceptionally critical and unprecedented circumstances, the role of Pakistan's political, diplomatic, and military leadership has assumed extraordinary significance.

For decades, the politics of the Middle East has served as a battleground for the competing interests of global powers. The present war has starkly illustrated how the pursuit of dominance and strategic advantage can plunge an entire region into chaos and uncertainty. Following the attacks on Iran, waves of apprehension and alarm have swept through the Gulf states, the broader Arab world, and the entire Muslim ummah. Fears of the conflict spreading further have intensified dramatically. It was precisely

at this pivotal moment that Pakistan, acting as a responsible Islamic state, stepped forward with a carefully balanced yet firmly principled position.

Pakistan's political leadership responded with clarity, resolve, and courage—articulating a stance that not only embodied national policy but also authentically voiced the collective conscience of the Muslim world. Mian Muhammad Nawaz Sharif, leader of the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N), issued a forthright and unambiguous condemnation of the aggression perpetrated by Israel and the United States against Iran. He declared Pakistan's complete solidarity with Tehran and underscored that such unprovoked assaults on a sovereign nation violate fundamental principles of international law while endangering the peace of the entire region.

In a similar vein, President Asif Ali Zardari addressed a joint session of Parliament with remarkable boldness and conviction. He unequivocally denounced the Israeli and American attacks, reaffirmed Pakistan's unwavering solidarity with Iran, and made it clear that no action undermining the sovereignty or territorial integrity of an independent state could ever receive Pakistan's support. His speech stood as a powerful and comprehensive expression of Pakistan's official position.

Prime Minister Mian Shehbaz Sharif played an equally dynamic, responsible, and visionary role throughout the crisis. He personally engaged with global leaders, intensifying diplomatic initiatives aimed at de-escalation. Guided by his directives, Pakistan's foreign service consistently advanced the country's principled viewpoint across international and

regional platforms: that war solves nothing, and only sustained dialogue and genuine diplomacy can pave the way toward durable peace.

A particularly decisive contribution came from Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Senator Ishaq Dar. Through tireless engagement with foreign ministers and heads of state worldwide, he repeatedly called for an immediate end to hostilities against Iran and urged all parties to choose the path of negotiation over further destruction. Pakistan's diplomatic conduct during this period—marked by poise, foresight, and professionalism—earned widespread recognition and respect on the global stage.

Pakistan's military leadership, under Chief of Army Staff and Chief of Defence Forces Field Marshal Syed Asim Munir, demonstrated equal gravity, strategic acumen, and restraint. In response to rapidly shifting regional realities, defensive readiness was thoroughly reviewed while high-level outreach was pursued with key partners. Field Marshal Munir's meetings with the Saudi Minister of Defence and other senior military and political figures highlighted Pakistan's earnest desire to foster regional peace and stability. These interactions aimed to soothe tensions among Arab nations, avert deeper fractures within the Muslim world, and prevent the spread of conflict. In essence, Pakistan's military and diplomatic apparatus worked in concert to serve as a stabilizing bridge amid rising flames.

At home, the crisis elicited an inspiring display of national unity. Nearly every major political party and school of thought rallied in solidarity with Iran and in condemnation of the aggression. Public sentiment strongly affirmed that, when a brotherly Islamic nation faces such hostility, Pakistan is morally and ideologically bound to stand on the side of principle and justice. This collective resolve

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Analysis

Sardar Abdul Khaliq Wasi

The Game of Global Powers and the Future of the Muslim World

The Middle East is currently passing through an extremely sensitive and critical phase. Recent reports and analyses indicate that the rising tensions in the region are not merely a limited conflict between a few states but could be part of a much larger geopolitical contest among global powers. The growing confrontation between Iran, the United States, and Israel has not only threatened regional peace but could also influence the political and economic stability of the entire world. If this tension continues to escalate, it may become a historic turning point capable of reshaping the geopolitical map of the Middle East.

Some Western analysts have also described the situation as unusual and complex. Former U. S. Army Colonel Douglas Macgregor has stated in recent remarks that Iran appears to be performing much stronger than many had expected. According to him, Iran has reportedly benefited from satellite intelligence provided by China and Russia, enabling it to conduct effective actions against American and Israeli targets. Macgregor also suggested that certain American military facilities in the region have suffered damage and that U. S. policies have not achieved their intended outcomes. In his view, some strategies adopted during the administration of former U. S. President Donald Trump contributed to intensifying tensions in the region rather than reducing them.

In this entire scenario, the importance of the Strait of Hormuz becomes even more significant. This narrow waterway is considered one of

the most critical routes for global energy supply, as a substantial portion of the world's oil passes through it. If this passage were to be blocked, the consequences would extend far beyond oil prices, potentially shaking the foundations of the global economy. The economies and daily lives of Gulf countries would also be severely affected.

Another important factor is that many Arab states heavily depend on imports for their basic necessities, particularly food and water. Estimates suggest that Gulf countries import nearly 95 percent of their food, while around 60 percent of their drinking water is obtained through desalination plants. If these facilities were targeted during a war, the consequences could lead to a severe humanitarian crisis. Human beings may survive for some time without oil, but survival without food and water is impossible. Therefore, targeting energy centers, desalination plants, and critical infrastructure essentially means paralyzing entire societies.

Recent reports also suggest that the scope of warfare has expanded beyond purely military targets. Energy facilities, oil refineries, and water plants have increasingly become targets. On one side, there are reports of the United States and Israel striking Iranian energy facilities, while on the other side, Iran is reportedly launching retaliatory actions against Israeli and Gulf targets. Some reports have even mentioned attacks involving oil tankers and energy-related infrastructure in the region.

Amid this tense situation, one noteworthy development is that Saudi Arabia and several

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Analysis

Muhammad Asif

CM Punjab Approves Punjab's First AI Roadmap to Make Province South Asia's Leading AI Hub

Bureau Report

LAHORE: Maryam Nawaz Sharif has approved Punjab's first Artificial Intelligence (AI) Roadmap, setting an ambitious target to transform the province into South Asia's leading AI-driven region by 2029.

Under the initiative, the world's first AI Delivery Unit will be established in Punjab to accelerate the adoption of artificial intelligence across governance and public services. The chief minister will serve as the chairperson of both the AI Delivery Unit and the Special Project Team overseeing the roadmap's implementation.

During a briefing on the AI roadmap, Provincial Adviser on

AI Ali Dar informed the meeting that the initiative is expected to generate more than 100,000 employment opportunities over the next three years. The programme could also increase Punjab's GDP by 5 to 10 percent and potentially raise foreign exchange reserves by \$10 to \$20 billion through technology-led growth.

The roadmap outlines the development of key pillars including AI infrastructure, AI administration, AI citizen services, job skills development, AI-driven economic growth and AI governance. Four cross-functional teams will be established focusing on special projects, data management, strategic operations and strategic communi-

cations.

The chief minister also approved the establishment of an AI Technical Advisory Board, directing that leading experts in the field be included to guide the initiative.

According to the implementation timeline, the Punjab AI Roadmap Manifesto will be launched in March, followed by the international launch of the AI Delivery Unit in June. An AI Governance Policy will be introduced in July, while a Global Tech Partnership and Citizen Portal will be launched in August to coincide with Independence Day celebrations.

Further milestones include the launch of a Health Board App in September, integration



of AI-based systems for smog monitoring and mitigation in October, and the Kissan AI Board also directed that agriculture Kissan AI Bot to support farmers with modern advisory tools.

FGP, Accountability Lab Pakistan Host Public Dialogue on Youth Entrepreneurship

City Desk

ISLAMABAD: Freedom Gate Prosperity (FGP), in collaboration with Accountability Lab Pakistan and Hamdard University Islamabad Campus, hosted a public dialogue on the youth employment crisis and the role of entrepreneurship, bringing together policymakers, academics, development practitioners and young participants to explore practical pathways for empowering youth and creating sustainable economic opportunities in Pakistan.

Chairperson of the National Vocational and Technical Training Commission (NAVTC), Gulmina Bilal Ahmad, delivered the keynote address and emphasized the importance of equipping young people with practical knowledge and skills to navigate the country's challenging economic environment. She noted that strengthening technical and vocational education, along with encouraging entrepreneurship, can open new avenues for youth employment and enable young people to become job creators rather than job seekers.

Rahmat Hindiarta Kusuma, Minister Counsellor for Information, Social and Cultural Affairs at the Indonesian Embassy in Pakistan, shared examples from Indonesia's experience



in promoting youth entrepreneurship through supportive public policies, skills development programmes and innovation-driven collaboration. He highlighted the importance of cross-cultural partnerships, innovation ecosystems and institutional cooperation in enabling young entrepreneurs to transform ideas into viable businesses.

Earlier, Muhammad Anwar, CEO of Freedom Gate Prosperity (FGP), Shahzad Afzal Kayani, Director Quality Enhancement Cell at Hamdard University, Syed Raza Ali, Program Manager at Accountability Lab Pakistan, Providing thematic insights, Dr. Shahbaz Tariq, Head of Research at FGP, Dr. Ansar Abbas, Associate Dean

at the Faculty of Management Sciences, Hamdard University, Waqas Khaleeq, CEO of Smart Solar, Lahore, spoke about the relevance of entrepreneurial thinking for Pakistan's youth and the importance of translating ideas into practical impact through knowledge, mentorship and supportive institutional frameworks.

Traffic Plan Issued in Multan Ahead of the Last Ashra of Ramadan

Zain Khan Malghani

MULTAN: In view of the arrival of the last Ashra of Ramadan, the City Traffic Police Multan has issued a comprehensive traffic management plan to ensure smooth flow of traffic and facilitate citizens. The plan has been formulated under the supervision of Chief Traffic Officer Multan Kainat Azhar Khan.

According to details, special arrangements have been made in response to the expected increase in traffic congestion at grain markets, vegetable markets, shopping centers, and busy bazaars during the last days of Ramadan. Additional traffic police



personnel have been deployed, while officers on duty have been instructed to remain alert and ensure effective traffic management.

To maintain the flow of traffic, barriers have been placed to regulate traffic in Gulgasht at Gardeez Market and Hussain Agahi Bazaar. These measures aim to facilitate citizens visiting markets for shopping during the last days of Ramadan.

The City Traffic Police has appealed to citizens to seek guidance from traffic staff present at duty points, avoid wrong parking and other traffic violations, and cooperate with the police in maintaining traffic discipline.

Brave Soldier Naib Subedar Fizan Martyred Defending Pakistan-Afghanistan Border



Abdul Majid

FAISALABAD: It is with profound sorrow that we announce the martyrdom of Naib Subedar Fizan, a brave soldier of the 148 SP Air Defence, who laid down his life in the line of duty on the Pakistan-Afghanistan border.

Naib Subedar Fizan, hailing from 2 JB Chak Ramdewali, Faisalabad, displayed unwavering courage and dedication to his country. He was wounded in action a few days ago and succumbed to his injuries at CMH this evening.

His ultimate sacrifice is a testament to his unshakable commitment to the nation's security and sovereignty. Our thoughts and prayers are with his family, and we share in their grief.

May Allah grant Naib Subedar Fizan the highest ranks in Jannah and comfort his family in this hour of sorrow.

Mian Fazal Elahi congratulates Mauritius on independence anniversary

Spokesman Report

ISLAMABAD: Editor-in-Chief of Diplomatic Focus Magazine, Mian Fazal Elahi, has extended warm congratulations to the government and people of Mauritius on the occasion of their National Day, celebrated on March 12.

In a message addressed to the High Commissioner of Mauritius to Pakistan, Mansoor Karambaks, Elahi said the day marks a historic milestone for the island nation as it commemorates its independence from colonial rule in 1968.

He said Pakistan values its cordial and longstanding relations with Mauritius, which are built on mutual respect, cooperation and shared values.

"Pakistan takes pride in the strong bilateral relations we share with Mauritius," Elahi said, adding that the two countries continue to work together in the spirit of friendship and understanding.

Highlighting the historical significance of independence for both nations, he remarked that Pakistan, having undergone its own struggle for freedom, deeply appreciates the bond of solidarity and goodwill with Mauritius.

Elahi further said that relations between the two countries have consistently reflected a shared commitment to promoting peace, stability and prosperity in the region.

LUMS Energy Institute Technical Report Charts Pakistan's Path to a Fully Decarbonised Electricity System by 2040

City Desk

ISLAMABAD: A new technical study released by the LUMS Energy Institute (LEI) concludes that Pakistan can transition to a clean and largely fossil-free electricity system by 2040 while maintaining affordability, reliability, and long-term energy security.

Titled 'The Net Zero Transition: A Pathway to Clean and Sustainable Electricity by 2040', the report is based on detailed power system modelling, demand projections, generation optimisation, and transmission analysis, making it one of the most comprehensive system studies undertaken on Pakistan's electricity sector.

The analysis shows that share of fossil fuel generation, which currently accounts for nearly half of electricity generation, could

effectively be reduced to below one percent by 2040 through renewable energy expansion, energy storage deployment, and grid modernisation. The transition pathway is projected to avoid approximately 78 million tons of carbon emissions, positioning the power sector as a central driver of Pakistan's climate objectives.

One of the study's most significant findings highlights how rapid growth in distributed solar generation is reshaping electricity demand profile. Daytime reliance on grid electricity is expected to fall sharply, with minimum system demand projected to decline to nearly 3,000 MW during certain periods despite rising overall consumption. This structural shift will require enhanced grid flexibility, optimal storage capacity, and demand-side management to maintain operational stability of the grid.

A 15-year roadmap outlined in the study provides a structured generation and transmission capacity expansion plan comprising approximately 8,500 MW of solar, 14,000 MW of wind, and 7,000 MW/ 42,000 MWh of battery energy storage, supported by grid reinforcement investments with a total estimated cost of USD 5.5 billion (present value: USD 1.9 billion). The modelling confirms that this transition pathway is technically viable and aligned with maintaining system reliability under high renewable penetration scenarios.

Importantly, the study shows that integrating indigenous renewable energy resources could substantially reduce dependence on imported fossil fuels, thereby enhancing long-term price stability and limiting exposure to global energy market

volatility.

Speaking at the launch, Ms. Shaista Pervaiz Malik, Member of the National Assembly and Convenor of the Parliamentary Task Force on Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), appreciated the technical study undertaken by the LUMS Energy Institute and highlighted the importance of evidence-based policymaking in advancing Pakistan's sustainable development agenda.

Dr. Musadik Malik said, "Pakistan possesses abundant natural endowments, from hydropower and solar potential to vast wind corridors, yet the real pathway to a sustainable future lies in channeling these resources through sound policy and human ingenuity."

Dr. Fiaz Ahmad Chaudhry, Senior Advisor at the LUMS Energy Institute and Chairman



BOD, National Grid Company, underscored the importance of integrated planning in shaping Pakistan's energy future.

The launch was attended by senior policymakers, representatives of regulatory institutions, and industry stakeholders,

reflecting the growing national focus on research-driven planning to support Pakistan's evolving energy transition.

Shahbaz Sharif DHQ Hospital Multan Provides All Medical Best Facilities, says Dr Tanzeel Ur Rehman

Asim Tanveer

Dr. Tanzeel-ur-Rehman the Medical Superintendent of Shahbaz Sharif District Headquarters (DHQ) Hospital Multan, highlighted a remarkable era of clinical excellence and service delivery. Aligning with the visionary directives of Punjab Chief Minister Maryam Nawaz Sharif and the proactive leadership of Secretary Health Primary and Secondary Punjab Madam Nadia Saqib, the hospital has become a beacon of hope for thousands of patients across South Punjab.

One of the most significant achievements discussed was the hospital's performance in eye care. Dr. Tanzeel-ur-Rehman noted that even during the era of the Sehat Card (State Life), Shahbaz Sharif Hospital outperformed every other district hospital in Punjab in terms of eye surgeries. This success created a "trend" where patients from far-flung districts began flocking to Multan for treatment.

When the Sehat Card facility concluded across Punjab in June, many feared a halt in services. However, the hospital transitioned seamlessly. Utilizing the Local Purchase (LP) budget and receiving extra funding from the Health Department as compensation for the Sehat Card's end, the hospital ensured that eye surgeries never stopped. In 2024 and 2025, the hospital performed between 3,000 to 3,500 eye surgeries. Combined, the figure reaches a staggering 6,000 surgeries—a number that exceeds the specific population density of the immediate area, proving that the hospital serves the entire region. The momentum continues into the current year; in January 2026 alone, 30 surgeries have already been performed thanks to sustained extra grants.

"We ensure that every lens implanted is of the highest quality," Dr. Tanzeel emphasized. "While sourcing lenses from Lahore might cause a slight logistical delay, the quality is never compro-



mised."

Dr. Tanzeel-ur-Rehman issued a strong message to the public regarding the reliability of government hospitals. He argued that the Biomedical Equipment, HR expertise, Infection Prevention Control (IPC) measures, and the robust medicine supply chain found at Shahbaz Sharif Hospital are of a scale that the private sector simply cannot afford to replicate.

The Medical Superintendent was high in his praise for Secretary Primary and Secondary Health Punjab Madam Nadia Saqib. He described a two-way communication channel where clinical measures and service quality are closely monitored.

Over the last 11 months, despite managing 70,000 OPD patients and a total of 100,000 patients monthly

(including emergency and indoor cases), the hospital has faced zero medicine shortages or budgetary deficiencies. He said that Madam Secretary provided timely extra grants to bridge the deficit left by the Sehat Card, ensuring no interruption in service delivery.

Under the Annual Development Scheme, significant upgrades are underway:

Complete renovation of all hospital washrooms. Construction of an additional floor to accommodate more patients. Rebuilding structures that were previously deemed unsafe. With the conversion of RHCs and BHUs into Maryam Nawaz Health Clinics, the hospital successfully established a streamlined MLC (Medico-Legal Case) process in collaboration with the DPO

and DSP.

The hospital has also prioritized the "Turn-Around Time" (TAT) for patients. Previously, three small, scattered pharmacies caused congestion and confusion. Following Madam Secretary's direction:

A single, large outdoor pharmacy entity was created between the two campuses. This pharmacy is highly visible and remains open from 8:00 AM to 8:00 PM, mirroring the OPD timings. This centralization has mitigated "micro-leakages" and pilferage, making the supply chain easier to manage.

The hospital maintains a rigorous schedule for maternal care. Gynecologists are available across all three shifts at both the Mother and Child Hospital and the Shahbaz Sharif Emergency



department, ensuring 24/7 coverage for urgent cases.

With the lowest complaint rate among Punjab's hospitals, Shahbaz Sharif DHQ Hospital Multan stands as a testament to what can be achieved when local management is backed by strong provincial leadership. Through

the combined efforts of Chief Minister Punjab Maryam Nawaz Sharif and Secretary Primary and Secondary Health Punjab Madam Nadia Saqib. The hospital continues to prove that quality healthcare is not just a privilege for the few, but a right being delivered to the masses.

Interview of Luqman Khan, CEO, and Director Technical ALTEC ENGINEERS



Tahir Amin Malik



Q. NO.1, When did you start your career in business?

Answer: I am basically a Structure Engineer. Structural Engineers must have qualification of minimum Master Degree in Civil Engineering with specialization in Structural Engineering.

I did a job in Pakistan's largest Engineering Consultancy firm NESPAK from 2005 to 2012 and left with the designation of SENIOR STRUCTURAL ENGINEER.

In 2013 I started my own Engineering Consultancy Firm to serve in the private sector. Then I converted my portfolio from job to Business.

Q. NO.2, What kind of services your company is providing?

Answer: My company has been registered with the Pakistan Engineering Council since 2016. We are providing Engineering Consultancy Services in the construction sector which include Architectural design

services, Structural Design Services, MEP Design Services, Environmental Engineering Services, Fire Fighting Design Services, for residential buildings and commercial buildings from low rise to high rise buildings and Industrial buildings in all types of manufacturing.

Q. NO.3, How many projects have you done and how many are under progress?

Answer: We have done hundreds of projects in residential, commercial and industrial sectors and are still working on a large number of projects in all sectors.

Q. NO. 4, Who are your major clients?

Answer: WE are working with DHA, BAHRIA TOWN, LDA, CDA, Sundar Industrial Estate, Quaid e Azam Business Park, Faisalabad Industrial Estate, Multan Industrial Estate, Raheem Yar Khan Industrial Estate, Bhalwal Industrial Estate, Quaid e Azam



Industrial Estate, RUDA, Alkabeer Town, Ittehad Town, and Lake City, at institutional level and private sector level.

Q. NO.5, What is the role of the Pakistan Engineering Council?

Answer: Pakistan Engineering Council is the regulatory body of Engineering Profession in Paki-



stan.

Council register Engineers, Engineering Consultants and Contractors to serve the Engineering Profession in Pakistan.

Q. NO.6, Tell us the role of your technical management team?

Answer: Role of technical management team in any

construction project is always vital. Team makes sure of the planning of the project and execution of the project as per drawings and Engineering standards.

Q. NO.7, Tell us about your upcoming projects?

Answer: We are having a

number of upcoming projects in sectors described above. We are always passionate about extending our portfolio.

The upcoming projects relate to the residential, commercial and industrial sector of varying volume and costs.

Q. NO.8, Any message for those who want to come into the construction Field?

Answer: Construction field is very dynamic and keeps expanding day by day to overcome new challenges faced by humanity. Construction fields accompany around forty industrial manufacturing sectors and always keep very large opportunities who adopt these fields as careers either in consultancy or construction.

Profile
Altec Engineers is an National Engineering Consulting firm. This Company was founded in 2009 by Eng. Luqman Khan. With over 21 years of experience in Pakistan working a unique and complete design and construction projects of Residential, Commercial and Industrial Sectors such as Textile, Pharmaceutical, Engineering, Food Processing, Auto Parts, Hospitals, Plazas, Multi Story Buildings, Roads, Bridges and Sewerage Water supply systems of modern urban area's. Ceo Luqman Khan

have built a strong portfolio for his Company. His dedication ethical standards and high quality of service have attracted a growing clientage. Altec Engineers works with all major construction Companies, Government Agencies and private Development Firms and this firm has strong portfolio and cooperative working arrangements with manufacturers, specially with general contractors and large A/E Firms. Today Altec Engineers operators working throughout the Sundar Residen-

tial Estate, Dha, LDA, Behria Town and delivery Solution for projects in all over Pakistan. Altec office is located in 39-B-1 Johar Town Lahore Pakistan Altec Engineers is dedicated to building lasting relationship based on trust and mutual respect with its Clients and business Partners. Innovations, Quality design, Flexibility and experience are Altec's sources of strength. Spokesman News did the interview of Luqman Khan Ceo and Director Technical Altec Engineers which is for our Viewers.

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- LDA
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President Zardari felicitates the leadership of Mauritius on National Day

Spokesman Report

ISLAMABAD: President Asif Ali Zardari has extended his warm felicitations to the President of the Republic of Mauritius, Mr. Dharambeer Gokhool, G. C. S. K., the Government and the friendly people of Mauritius on the auspicious occasion of their National Day.

The President highlighted that Pakistan attaches great importance to its cordial relations with Mauritius, which are marked by mutual trust and constructive cooperation at both bilateral and multilateral fora. It is encouraging to see the growing engagement between the leadership of both nations and the



steady expansion of cooperation in areas of shared interest. There is a considerable potential to further strengthen collaboration through enhanced people-to-people contacts, as well as in the fields of trade, education, culture and tourism, said the President.

President Zardari expressed his confidence that the friendly relations between the two countries would continue to deepen in the years ahead, to the mutual benefit of the people of both countries.

The President conveyed his best wishes for the good health and happiness of President Gokhool and for the continued peace, progress and prosperity of the people of Mauritius.

British envoy Jane Marriott meets Maulana Fazlur Rehman News Desk

Islamabad: British High Commissioner in Pakistan Jane Marriott on Thursday visited the residence of Maulana Fazlur Rehman in Islamabad, where the two leaders discussed the political and security situation in Pakistan and the wider region.

During the meeting, both sides exchanged views on issues of mutual interest, including the security situation in Paki-



stan and Afghanistan, as well as developments involving Iran, Israel, the United States and the Gulf states.

The discussion also focused on strengthening bilateral relations between Pakistan and the United Kingdom.

Maulana Fazlur Rehman, who heads Jamaat Ulema-e-Islam (F), called on Britain to play a constructive role in

addressing the evolving security challenges in the region.

Speaking on the occasion, Jane Marriott said the United Kingdom remained engaged with regional countries and was playing its diplomatic role regarding the situation.

Engineer Zia-ur-Rehman and the British High Commissioner's political counsellor were also present during the meeting.

Speakers Highlight Shared Pakistan-China perspectives on Regional Conflicts

Spokesman Report

ISLAMABAD: The Institute of Regional Studies (IRS), Islamabad, hosted a roundtable discussion titled "Pakistan and China: Shared Perspectives on the Contemporary Regional Security Environment." The event brought together prominent speakers Mushahid Hussain Sayed, Moin ul Haque, and IRS President Jauhar Saleem to discuss evolving geopolitical challenges and the convergence of Pakistani and Chinese perspectives on regional security.

The discussion examined the implications of the ongoing confrontation involving the United States, Israel, and Iran, as

well as tensions between Pakistan and Afghanistan amid the resurgence of terrorism in Pakistan.

Ms. Nabila Jaffer, Lead of the China Program at IRS, introduced the speakers and highlighted the far-reaching consequences of the escalating conflict in West Asia.

In his opening remarks, Ambassador Jauhar Saleem stressed that the ongoing conflict in West Asia has already sent shockwaves across the global political and economic landscape, warning that further escalation could trigger a significant economic shock. He delineated Pakistan's principled position on the issue and underlined the need for resolving the widening

conflict through peaceful dialogue. Referring to ongoing tensions between Pakistan and Afghanistan, he noted that the current situation reflects Kabul's failure to respond positively to repeated diplomatic initiatives, through bilateral, regional, and international channels. He also drew attention to India's role in fomenting terrorism in Pakistan and obstructing constructive engagement between Pakistan and Afghanistan.

Ambassador Saleem emphasized that the Pakistan-China partnership has remained an 'important pillar of regional stability' and highlighted the shared stance of Islamabad and Beijing in advocating dialogue

and peaceful means to resolve conflicts.

Speaking on the occasion, Senator Mushahid Hussain Sayed described the current geopolitical situation as an "arc of conflict stretching from Israel to India." Drawing attention to what he termed ideological parallels between Zionism and Hindutva, he remarked that "Modi and Netanyahu, Akhand Bharat and Eretz Israel, are two sides of the same coin," arguing that both states have acted as "flagrant violators of international law, the United Nations Charter, and human rights." He suggested that the recent actions by the United States and Israel against Iran were based on miscalculations,



warning that such actions often prolong conflicts rather than resolve them. He also noted that Iran has demonstrated resilience despite mounting pressure, maintaining its political structure. Describing Iran and China as civilizational states with deep historical roots, he argued that such societies possess the endur-

ance necessary for prolonged geopolitical competition. He also emphasized that developments across the Middle East, South Asia, and Afghanistan should be viewed as interconnected theatres shaping the broader regional security environment and added that Pakistan and China share closely aligned perspectives on

regional peace and consistently advocate diplomatic solutions to conflicts.

Ambassador Moin ul Haque observed that the ongoing conflict carries implications far beyond geopolitics, affecting energy markets, trade routes, economic stability, and the livelihoods of millions of people.

US+Israel-Iran War: Pakistan Plays Pacific Role

Continued from Page 4

mirrored the foundational values of the state—rooted in Islamic brotherhood and solidarity with the ummah.

Pakistan's multifaceted response—political, diplomatic, and military—during this grave crisis stands as genuinely historic and worthy of admiration. The leadership not only upheld moral and legal principles but also conducted itself with responsibility and wisdom on the world stage. Prime Minister Mian Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif's proactive diplomacy, Senator Ishaq Dar's measured professionalism, and Field Marshal Syed Asim Munir's sagacious command together projected Pakistan as a credible, mature, and respected actor in international

affairs.

Yet the war's repercussions reach far beyond the battlefield, severely disrupting the global economy. The ongoing confrontation has triggered acute volatility in energy markets. Given the Gulf's central role in global oil supply and Iran's strategic geographic position, any major disruption or prolonged tension in the region inevitably drives crude oil prices upward at alarming speed.

As a net oil importer, Pakistan feels these shocks acutely. The dramatic surge in international oil prices has translated into steep hikes in domestic petrol and diesel costs. These increases ripple through transport, manufacturing, commerce, and the prices of everyday necessities, compounding

inflationary pressures on an already strained economy. Though not a combatant, Pakistan suffers direct economic harm. Continued escalation could push inflation to even more punishing levels.

In such trying times, those entrusted with governance carry a heavy responsibility to safeguard public welfare through swift and effective measures. Sharp and sustained rises in petroleum prices inflict genuine hardship on ordinary citizens; therefore, urgent financial and administrative interventions are essential to curb further increases and, wherever feasible, restore prices closer to earlier, more affordable levels.

The present global crisis has once again demonstrated an immutable truth: conflict ignited anywhere on

earth inevitably sends shockwaves everywhere. Amid these fragile circumstances, Pakistan's political, diplomatic, and military leadership—most notably Prime Minister Mian Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif, Deputy Prime Minister Senator Ishaq Dar, and Field Marshal Syed Asim Munir—has exhibited profound insight, steadfast responsibility, genuine national cohesion, and far-sighted judgment. Their conduct is not merely praiseworthy; it has significantly enhanced Pakistan's standing in the eyes of the world. Should this same wisdom and unity endure, Pakistan will continue to play a constructive role in international crises while steadfastly protecting the economic well-being of its people and the dignity of the nation.

Continued from Page 4

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Senior officials repeatedly suggested that Iran's military capabilities would be dismantled within days and that overwhelming American power would quickly force Tehran into submission. That assumption has proven profoundly mistaken.

Despite possessing the world's most powerful military machinery, the United States now finds itself engaged in a conflict that has not unfolded according to its expectations. American bases have come under attack, soldiers have been killed, many others wounded, and several installations across the region have been damaged. The broader political objective of encouraging an uprising inside Iran has also failed to materialize;

instead of internal collapse, the conflict appears to have strengthened national unity within the country. In this sense, the war has produced an outcome that few strategists anticipated.

Just as the brief but intense confrontation of June 2025 raised questions about Israel's long-assumed aura of invincibility, the ongoing conflict of 2026 has begun to cast similar doubts about the ability of the United States to impose swift military outcomes against determined adversaries. The lesson emerging from this war is stark: even the most formidable military power may find that modern conflicts are far more complex, costly, and resistant to quick resolution than early confidence suggests.

The writer is Press Secretary to the President (Rtd), Former Press Minister, Embassy of Pakistan to France, Former Press Attaché to Malaysia and Former MD, SRBC. He is living in Macomb, Michigan

Iran's War and the End of American Invincibility

Continued from Page 4

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The Game of Global Powers and the Future of the Muslim World

Continued from Page 4

other Arab states have so far avoided direct involvement in the war against Iran. In the past, Middle Eastern conflicts often drew rapid alignment from regional actors, but this time many Arab countries appear to be pursuing a more cautious and balanced policy. Many observers consider this restraint a wise decision, as direct Arab involvement could transform the conflict into a much broader regional war.

Some analysts believe that a larger political strategy may be operating behind the scenes. At present, the conflict appears to be between Iran and Israel, but there are efforts in certain circles to redirect it toward a confrontation between Iran and the Arab world. If that were to happen, the consequences could be disas-

trous for the entire Muslim world, as it would mean Muslims fighting against one another.

History shows that global powers have often used similar strategies. First, tensions in a region are intensified; then local powers are gradually drawn into confrontation with each other. Once the region becomes unstable and weakened, external powers intervene under the banner of peace-keeping. The experiences of Iraq, Libya, and Afghanistan illustrate how such interventions rarely lead to lasting peace and instead often create deeper crises.

In this context, some analysts are raising questions about whether the present developments could be part of a broader geopolitical plan. According to certain viewpoints, continuous instability in the region may

create conditions that allow particular political objectives to be achieved. If Muslim countries fail to recognize this possibility, they may unintentionally contribute to the success of such strategies.

A painful reality is that at times the emotional or short-sighted decisions of Muslim leadership themselves make the situation more complicated. If Iran were to target cities or installations in Arab countries, it could strengthen the narrative that Israel seeks to promote. Similarly, if Arab states react emotionally and enter into direct confrontation with Iran, they too could fall into the same trap. The likely result would be that Muslim blood would be shed by Muslim hands, making it easier for external actors to achieve their strategic goals.

Recognizing this danger, the President of Türkiye has also warned the Muslim world about the risks of falling into such traps. He has emphasized that certain forces often attempt to pit brother against brother and that the Muslim world must remain cautious and avoid being manipulated into internal conflict. His statement highlights the urgent need for unity, wisdom, and strategic awareness within the Muslim world.

During wartime, various claims and counterclaims are also reported. Some reports indicate that bombing in different parts of Tehran caused damage to civilian areas and resulted in casualties. Iranian sources have stated that residential buildings, educational institutions, and medical facilities were also

affected. On the other hand, Iran's Revolutionary Guard has claimed that American forces suffered significant casualties in certain attacks and that some personnel were captured. However, American officials have rejected these claims and described them as propaganda. These developments remind us that modern warfare is not fought only on battlefields. It also takes place in the arenas of information, media narratives, and psychological influence. Each side highlights its successes while dismissing the claims of the other in order to shape international public opinion.

Amid all these circumstances, the most critical question for the Muslim world is whether Muslims will learn from history or repeat the same mistakes that weakened them in the past. The

Qur'an offers a clear principle to guide believers in such situations:

"And do not dispute with one another lest you lose courage and your strength depart."

If Iran and the Arab world fail to understand this reality, the consequences will not be limited to a single country but will affect the entire Muslim community. Therefore, Muslim nations must act with wisdom rather than emotion, avoid being used against one another, and prioritize unity and cooperation.

The present era is one filled with trials and challenges. In such times, Muslims must seek guidance from the teachings of the Qur'an and the principles of wisdom and justice. They must develop political awareness and carefully analyze global developments. If the Muslim world

chooses the path of unity, wisdom, and foresight, it can emerge from this crisis with dignity and strength. However, if it falls into internal divisions and emotional decision-making, the consequences could be deeply damaging for the region and for the entire Muslim Ummah.

It is our hope and prayer that God protects the Muslim world from this turmoil, grants wisdom and foresight to its leaders, and gives us the awareness needed to recognize and counter the strategies of those who seek to divide us. History shows that nations that remain united and act with wisdom are the ones that ultimately overcome trials and shape their own future.

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Called on

ISLAMABAD: Mr. Farid Ahmad Tarar, newly appointed Member and Chairman of the Competition Commission of Pakistan (CCP), called on the Federal Minister for Finance and Revenue, Senator Muhammad Aurangzeb, at the Finance Division today. The Finance Minister congratulated Mr. Tarar on his appointment and wished him success in his new responsibilities.



Photo: PID

Iran's new supreme leader urges continued closure of Hormuz Strait

Xinhua

TEHRAN: Iran's new Supreme Leader Mojtaba Khamenei on Thursday called for the continued closure of the Strait of Hormuz and pledged to open new fronts in his country's conflict with the United States and Israel.

He made the remarks in his first message published on his website since Sunday's announcement of his appointment as Iran's supreme leader.

"The demand of the masses of people is the continuation of the effective and regret-inducing defense. Also, the lever of blocking the Strait of Hormuz must definitely continue to be used," Khamenei said, addressing the country's people and armed forces.

"Studies have been conducted on the opening of other battlefronts where enemy has little experience and will be extremely vulnerable, and their activation will take place if the war situation continues and based



on considering the interests," he said.

Khamenei extended condolences over the "heartbreaking martyrdom" of his father, former Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei, saying he learned of the Assembly of Experts' decision to select him as Iran's new leader, like other Iranians, through state-run IRIB TV.

Dozens killed and injured as Israeli bombardment continues across Lebanon

Wafa

BEIRUT: Israeli forces continued on Thursday to bombard various areas across Lebanon, resulting in the killing of dozens of people, injuries to others, and the destruction of numerous buildings and infrastructure.

Israeli warplanes carried out an airstrike on the seaside district in the Ramlet al-Baida area of the capital, Beirut, leaving 12 people killed and 28 others injured. Seven more people were reported killed in the town of Arkej.

Israeli forces also shelled a residential building in the Aramoun area in the Aalay district of Mount Lebanon, killing five people and injuring seven others, according to the Emergency Operations Center of the Ministry of Public Health.



Later in the evening, Israeli warplanes carried out airstrikes on a residential building in the Bachoura area of central Beirut after issuing a warning for residents to evacuate. Another warning was

issued for a residential building in the Zoqaq al-Blat area.

Airstrikes and drone attacks also targeted several locations in the Dahiyeh district of Beirut, while the Israeli army renewed evacuation threats

for residents in the areas of Haret Hreik, Ghobeiry, Lailaki, Hadath, Burj al-Barajneh, Tahwat al-Ghadir, and Chiyah.

Israeli warplanes also struck the Faculty of Sciences at the

Lebanese University in the Hadath area, killing the faculty's director Hussein Bazzi and professor Mortada Srour, who were present in the courtyard of the building.

Heavy displacement movements were reported in areas south of the Zahrani River following warnings issued by the Israeli army urging residents to move north.

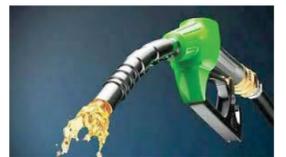
Israeli airstrikes and artillery shelling also targeted the cities of Tyre and Nabatieh, as well as the towns of Frun, Maarakeh, Hanniyeh, Bint Jbeil, Taffahata, Deir Antar, Barish, Haris, Khiam, Qana, Ain Ebel, Burj Qalaouiyeh, Qaqaiyat al-Jisr, Deir Kifa, Adchit, Qeileh, Zibqin, Debbin, Aitaroun, Taybeh, and Kafra in southern Lebanon, and the towns of Qasarnaba, Douris, and Ain Bourday in the Bekaa in eastern Lebanon.

Punjab Assembly moves to reverse Rs 55 petrol hike

Bureau Report

LAHORE: A resolution has been submitted in the Punjab Assembly condemning the government's decision to increase the price of petroleum products by Rs 55 per litre.

The resolution, tabled by Tehreek-e-Insaf MPA Imtiaz Mahmood, states that the Federal Minister and the Ministry of Petroleum had previously said the country maintains a 28-day fuel reserve. Despite this, the Prime Minister of Pakistan decided to impose the emergency increase in petrol prices, according to the reso-



lution.

The resolution warns that the decision will trigger a sharp rise in inflation. It demands that the federal government immediately withdraw the petrol price hike and take urgent measures to provide relief to low-income citizens.

Govt prioritising fibre infrastructure to improve internet quality: Shaza Fatima



Commerce Desk

ISLAMABAD: Federal Minister for Information Technology and Telecommunication Shaza Fatima Khawaja on Thursday said the government was prioritising the expansion of fibre infrastructure to improve the reliability and quality of internet services across Pakistan.

Speaking at the second round of the spectrum auction, she said a major challenge facing the country's digital connectivity was the lack of fibreisation, noting that most people currently rely on wireless broadband and mobile networks for internet access.

"Our second big plan is fiberisation," the minister said, adding that the government was working to implement policies aimed at strengthening the national fibre backbone.

She said the plan also focuses on improving last-mile connectivity through fibre-to-the-home (FTTH) so that households can directly benefit from high-speed and reliable internet services.

Shaza Fatima said effective execution of these policies would significantly expand internet access and enhance service quality across the country.

Shaza Fatima Khawaja said Pakistan has taken a major step toward digital transformation after completing the first round of the latest spectrum auction, which generated \$507 million for the government.

The minister said 480 MHz of spectrum had been acquired by the country's three telecom operators, with Jazz securing the largest share, followed by Ufone and Zong.

Pak-Qatar trade ministers agree to enhance bilateral economic cooperation

Commerce Desk

ISLAMABAD: Federal Minister for Commerce, Jam Kamal Khan held a virtual meeting with Dr. Ahmad bin Mohammed Al-Sayed, Minister of State for Foreign Trade Affairs of the State of Qatar, to discuss ways to further strengthen bilateral cooperation, food security coordination and investment opportunities between the two brotherly countries.

During the meeting, both sides expressed satisfaction over the positive trajectory of Pakistan-Qatar relations and agreed to further expand



economic engagement and cooperation between the two countries.

The Qatari minister emphasized the importance of encouraging greater inter-

action between the business communities of both countries in order to further strengthen economic ties, said a release issued here on Thursday.

A key focus of the discus-

sion was enhancing Pakistan's exports of rice and other food products to Qatar.

Dr. Ahmad bin Mohammed Al-Sayed highlighted that rice remains an important component of Qatar's food security program and national food strategy, and expressed interest in increasing imports from Pakistan.

The Qatari side welcomed the proposals shared by Pakistan and indicated that relevant authorities, including the Qatar Investment Authority (QIA), would review them.

During the discussion, Minister Jam Kamal Khan also expressed Pakistan's concern

over the evolving regional situation and conveyed solidarity with the leadership and people of Qatar.

The Commerce Minister noted that Pakistan supports all diplomatic efforts aimed at de-escalation and regional peace, adding that the Prime Minister has been actively engaging with regional partners and friendly countries to encourage constructive dialogue and stability.

Both ministers also agreed to activate the Pakistan-Qatar Joint Task Force to accelerate progress on economic cooperation and investment initiatives.

Inclusive value chain for pulses key to food security, reduction in imports: Rana Tanveer

Commerce Desk

ISLAMABAD: Federal Minister for National Food Security and Research Rana Tanveer Hussain has said that developing a competitive and inclusive value chain for pulses is critical for ensuring food security, improving nutrition and reducing Pakistan's reliance on imports, thus only a 30 per cent improvement in the sector could significantly cut the country's pulses imports.

He was speaking at a seminar,

titled: "Developing Competitive and Inclusive Value Chains of Pulses in Pakistan", as chief guest, organized by Sustainable Development Policy Institute (SDPI) here on Thursday, said a press release.

Rana Tanveer stressed that promoting public-private partnerships, local seed production and value addition would help in strengthening the pulses sector and support small farmers. Improved market intelligence, crop preservation facilities and

national quality standards are essential to attract investment and build a robust value chain.

Earlier, Dr. Abid Qaiyum Suleri, SDPI Executive Director, said pulses had long been overlooked in policy discussions despite their importance for nutrition and food security.

Australian High Commissioner, Timothy Kane, said agriculture was an important pillar of cooperation between Pakistan and Australia, and the ACIAR had been working in Pakistan

for more than two decades. He said crops such as chickpeas and lentils were not only affordable sources of nutrition but also helped improve soil fertility through nitrogen fixation.

Dr. Munawar Raza Kazmi, the ACIAR Country Director and Dr. Rajendra Adhikari from the University of Queensland also highlighted that pulses play a critical role in sustainable food systems and household food security, particularly for small landholders in South Asia.

