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CM Bugti vows to reinforce public security; eliminate threat of terrorism

QUETTA, (VoM Report): Balochistan Chief Minister Mir Sarfraz Bugti has reiterated that terrorist attempts to spread fear, disrupt development activities and undermine economic progress in the province will not succeed, saying the government remains committed to protecting citizens and maintaining peace.

The chief minister issued the statement following a security operation in Gwadar in which an attack on an unoccupied construction company camp was foiled and seven suspected militants were reportedly killed. Bugti commended the security forces for their prompt and effective response, praising their professionalism, courage and operational preparedness in preventing the attack. He said militants affiliated with Fitna al-Hindustan were seeking to create instability in Balochistan and interfere with development activities, but their efforts would not be allowed to succeed. "Elements seeking to undermine Balochistan's economic activities and development projects through terrorism will never achieve their objectives," the chief minister said.

Bugti lauded the Pakistan Army and other security agencies for their continued efforts to maintain law and order, describing the courage and sacrifices of personnel engaged in counterterrorism operations as a source of national pride. He said groups attempting to obstruct infrastructure development and economic activity would continue to face sustained action from the security forces.

The chief minister maintained that the sacrifices of security personnel in the fight against terrorism would not go in vain and reaffirmed that operations against militant groups would continue to protect the province and its people.

Bugti said the provincial government would take every necessary measure to safeguard the lives and property of citizens, reinforce public security and eliminate the threat of terrorism. He stressed that a secure environment was essential for attracting investment, advancing infrastructure projects and expanding economic opportunities, adding that the government was determined to ensure that violence did not impede Balochistan's development.



BERLIN: President Asif Ali Zardari in a meeting with German President Dr. Frank-Walter Steinmeier at the Office of the President



PESHAWAR: Field Marshal Syed Asim Munir, NI (M), HJ, Chief of Army Staff and Chief of Defence Forces (COAS & CDF), visited Corps Headquarters

Home Minister vows to eliminate terrorism from Balochistan

QUETTA, (VoM Report): Balochistan Home Minister Mir Ziaullah Langove has reaffirmed the provincial government's resolve to thwart terrorist attempts aimed at disrupting peace, economic activity and development in the province, saying such elements would not be allowed to obstruct Balochistan's progress.

The home minister issued the statement following the foiling of a terrorist attack in Gwadar, in which seven suspected militants were reportedly killed during an operation by security forces.

Langove praised the personnel involved in the operation for their prompt response, professionalism and courage, saying the successful action reflected the security forces' preparedness to counter emerging threats.

He said the operation demonstrated the vigilance and operational effectiveness of law enforcement agencies, which acted swiftly to prevent the militants from carrying out their plans.

The home minister said groups seeking to destabilize Balochistan or damage infrastructure and economic activities through violence would not achieve their objectives. He maintained that security institutions would continue taking effective measures against threats to public safety, development projects and economic progress.

Paying tribute to the security personnel engaged in counterterrorism efforts, Langove said their services and sacrifices remained a matter of national pride and were instrumental in protecting the province and its people.

"The people of Balochistan and security forces will continue to stand united in the fight against terrorism and work towards establishing lasting peace," he said.



QUETTA: Provincial Minister Mir Asim Kurd Gailo and MPA Sardar Abdul Rehman Khetran called on Balochistan Governor Jaffar Khan Mandokhail.

No incorrect or arbitrary detection bill will be charged to any consumer in future: Leghari

ISLAMABAD, (APP): Federal Minister for Energy (Power Division) Sardar Awais Ahmad Khan Leghari has taken strict notice of electricity distribution companies (DISCOs) imposing excessive and unjustified detection bills on consumers, warning DISCOs that no incorrect or arbitrary detection bill will be charged to any consumer in the future.

Addressing an important meeting with the Boards of Directors of DISCOs on Friday, the minister issued formal directives to implement a stringent and comprehensive reform framework, said a press release.

He underlined that while curbing electricity theft remains an unquestionable national priority, arbitrarily burdening innocent citizens will not be tolerated under any circumstances. Under this framework, the discretionary authority of field staff is being strictly regulated to protect consumers while ensuring that no hurdle is created for honest officers performing their duties against power theft.

In light of the Federal Minister's directives, the Power Division is mandating that all DISCOs issue detection bills exclusively through the centralized online portal developed by PITC. A complete ban has been enforced on the issuance of manual and discretionary detection bills by field staff or SDOs. Issuing manual bills will be officially treated as severe misconduct, liable to strict disciplinary proceedings and major penalties against the responsible officials and staff. Under this framework, comprehensive proposed amendments to the Consumer Service Manual (CSM) will be submitted in the coming days to bind every process within clearly defined timelines. Under the new framework, replacing defective or burnt meters immediately or within a maximum of two billing cycles has been made mandatory, while average billing during this period will be restricted strictly to a maximum of two months.

In cases where a meter is established to be running slow or fast, recovery or credit adjustments will be confined strictly to the preceding two billing cycles. Similarly, bringing the duration of detection billing under strict regulation, the chargeable period for illegal abstraction by general consumers is proposed to be fixed at three billing cycles.

Pakistan pays tribute to frontline polio workers

ISLAMABAD, (APP): Pakistan's Polio Eradication Initiative marked World Polio Day 2026 on Friday by honouring frontline workers for their dedication and sacrifices in protecting children against the crippling disease.

The event, held under the theme "Shukriya Polio Frontline Workers – Celebrating the Champions of a Polio-Free Pakistan," was attended by Minister of State for National Health Services, Regulations and Coordination Dr Malik Mukhtar Ahmad Bharath, Prime Minister's Focal Person for Polio Eradication Ayesha Raza Farooq, development partners, donors and more than 100 frontline workers from across the country.

Reaffirming the government's commitment to polio eradication under the leadership of Prime Minister, he stressed the importance of sustained vaccination campaigns, effective disease surveillance and collective action to achieve a polio-free Pakistan. He also reiterated the government's commitment to supporting and safeguarding frontline workers as they continue their efforts to protect children and build a healthier future.

World-class consultants must be engaged for development of livestock, dairy sector : PM

ISLAMABAD, (APP): Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif on Friday approved the restructuring of the Livestock and Dairy Development Board and directed that the selection of its chairman and members be carried out transparently and strictly on merit. The prime minister chairing a review meeting on reforms in the livestock sector, said the board should be made an effective and active institution by inducting capable and experienced professionals from the private sector, a Prime Minister's Office news release said.

The prime minister directed the authorities concerned to present a comprehensive action plan for the complete eradication of foot-and-mouth disease, with clear targets, measurable results and a fixed timeframe.

He announced that the federal government was establishing a plant in Islamabad for the production of modern and effective livestock vaccines, using its own resources.

The prime minister also directed that world-class consultants be engaged for the development of the livestock and dairy sector.

Pakistan seeks trade corridors to Central Asia via China: Aleem

ISLAMABAD, (APP): Federal Minister for Communications Abdul Aleem Khan on Friday said Pakistan was keen to develop trade corridors to Central Asian countries through China to strengthen regional connectivity and expand trade opportunities.

He expressed these views during a meeting with newly appointed Azerbaijani Ambassador to Pakistan Irfan Davudov, who called on him here, said a press release.

Abdul Aleem Khan warmly welcomed Ambassador Irfan Davudov on his appointment to Pakistan, extending his heartiest congratulations and best wishes for a successful diplomatic tenure.

Discussions were held on areas of mutual interest. Enhancement of bilateral relations, trade, and infrastructure cooperation also came under discussion.

A firm commitment was expressed to further strengthen the long-standing friendly relations between Pakistan and Azerbaijan from both sides.

Detailed discussions were held on expanding bilateral trade, economic cooperation and joint ventures, particularly in the communications and infrastructure sectors.

Highlighting strategic trade opportunities, Federal Minister Abdul Aleem Khan emphasized that Pakistan is keen to develop trade corridors reaching Central Asian Republics via China.

He stressed that a robust transportation network and modern infrastructure are essential for enhancing regional connectivity and facilitating smooth trade flows.

No compromise on safety of citizens; stability of Balochistan: Shahid Rind

QUETTA, (VoM Report): Balochistan Chief Minister's Aide on Information and Political Affairs Shahid Rind has reaffirmed the government's resolve to prevent terrorist elements from disrupting peace, development and economic activity in the province, saying violence would not be allowed to obstruct Balochistan's progress.

Rind issued the statement after security forces foiled an attack on a vacant construction company camp in Gwadar, in which seven suspected militants were reportedly killed. He commended the security personnel for their prompt response and professional handling of the operation, saying the successful action reflected the vigilance and preparedness of the security institutions. According to Rind, the personnel who thwarted the alleged militants' plans had demonstrated courage and operational effectiveness and deserved recognition for their role in protecting the province.

Ten terrorists including one female terrorist killed in Gwadar clearance operation: ISPR

RAWALPINDI, (APP): Security Forces foiled an attempt by Indian-sponsored terrorists to carry out terrorist activities in Gwadar District, killing 10 terrorists, including a female during a clearance operation while one civilian embraced martyrdom.

"On 22 October 2026, Indian-sponsored terrorists of Fitna al Hindustan attempted to carry out terrorist activities in District Gwadar, in the general areas of the Gabd Border Crossing and Gwadar city. By targeting these locations, terrorists sought to harm the very people they claim to represent and wanted to obstruct the development and prosperity of Balochistan. To protect residents and clear the area, Security Forces launched clearance operations in and around Gwadar city," said a news release issued by Inter Services Public Relations (ISPR).

"In separate engagements, Security Forces foiled the terrorists' designs and their bid to undermine the writ of the state and spread their misconstrued agenda. In the ensuing exchanges of fire, ten terrorists, including one female terrorist, were sent to hell. During the terrorist attacks one civilian embraced Shahadat and few vehicles were damaged. Operations were concluded without any loss to Security Forces, restoring order and writ of the state," it further said.

The coercion of a Baloch woman into this attack is a crime not only against the state but against the hurmat of Baloch women. It exposes the terrorists' cynical exploitation of Baloch women as an instrument of propaganda, intended to inflame public sentiment and lend false sanctity to their campaign. Such tactics are contrary to Baloch and Islamic traditions, which hold women in the highest honour.



NORTH DERA BUGTI: Balochistan Chief Minister Mir Sarfraz Bugti talking to media

UNAMA highlights restrictions on religious freedom in Afghanistan

ISLAMABAD, (APP): The United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) has highlighted growing restrictions on religious freedom in Afghanistan, reporting the closure of dozens of Ismaili prayer halls in northeastern Badakhshan province and limits placed on Shia religious observances.

According to UNAMA's latest quarterly human rights report, Taliban authorities—led by the Ministry for the Propagation of Virtue and the Prevention of Vice alongside other bodies—have restricted religious practices, including closing at least 33 Ismaili prayer halls, known as Jamatkhanas, across Badakhshan province. The closures affected 17 Jamatkhanas in Zebak district, 14 in Ishkashim, and two in Wakhan.

The report noted that authorities instructed worshippers to stop using the Jamatkhanas and cited the presence of mihrabs to argue that the structures should instead function as mosques.

Further reports also note that a Shia Imambargah in Kabul was seized and converted into a madrasa, with followers barred from entering, while media restrictions continue to limit coverage of these developments.

To manage sectarian unrest, Deputy Minister of Defence Abdul Qayyum Zakir was appointed as a special operations commander. UNAMA further detailed restrictions on Shia religious observances during Ashura, noting that Shia communities in Parwan and Logar provinces were instructed to limit their ceremonies strictly to designated mosques. Additionally, UNAMA confirmed that 45 Shia men were detained in Kabul for displaying Ashura flags.

The UN and international rights groups have repeatedly expressed serious concern over these measures, warning that the closure of worship sites and restrictions on religious ceremonies infringe upon freedom of worship, deepen sectarian divisions, and leave various Muslim communities and sects in Afghanistan vulnerable to exclusion.



ISLAMABAD: Federal Minister for Energy (Power Division) Sardar Awais Ahmad Khan Leghari addressing an important meeting with the Boards of Directors of DISCOs

THE VOICE OF MILLIONS

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Another oil shock

The sharp increase in the domestic price of petrol and diesel is an unavoidable correction amid external price shocks triggered by the US-Israel war on Iran.

That the petrol price was reduced by Rs80 — after increasing it by Rs137 to Rs458 per litre — in less than 24 hours shows political pressure and confusion in officialdom.

Alongside the fuel price adjustments, the government has also ordered early market closures to conserve energy and announced targeted subsidy for motorcycle owners, farmers and transporters.

For weeks, the authorities had resisted passing on the full impact of rising oil prices to consumers, absorbing the surge in the budget.

Following an earlier increase of Rs55 per litre almost a month ago, the authorities were seemingly banking on a swifter resolution to the Gulf crisis, a bet that cost the national exchequer Rs129bn.

That space has now run out.

The move shows that Pakistan simply does not have the capacity to sustain fuel subsidies.

Years of weak tax revenue mobilisation, coupled with rising public sector expenditures, have left the government with little room to absorb such shocks without risking macroeconomic instability.

The pressure is not confined to the fiscal side. The external sector supported by a fragile foreign exchange buffer painstakingly rebuilt over two years is also vulnerable.

Higher global oil prices translate into a heavier import bill, threatening to erode reserves and destabilise the exchange rate. Given the ongoing Middle East crisis, the government had no other choice.

While the decision is fiscally justified, its consequences for the public will be immediate and severe. A fresh wave of inflation is inevitable. In fact, transporters have already raised fares, freight operators have sharply increased charges, and businesses are passing on higher input costs to consumers.

This will cascade through the broader economy, significantly raising the cost of living.

The burden will fall disproportionately on low- and middle-income households, many of whom are already struggling to cope with persistent inflation.

Targeted subsidies may offer some relief but are unlikely to fully offset the broader price shock that is unfolding.

More fundamentally, this crisis underscores a deeper policy failure. For decades, governments have delayed tax reforms and avoided difficult fiscal adjustments. Resultantly, the state remains heavily reliant on indirect taxation.

Today, a large part of fuel prices consist of government taxes and levies. Had revenue and spending reforms, such as broadening the tax base and curbing government expenditure, been undertaken earlier, the burden on consumers could have been significantly lower. Instead, citizens are now facing a double squeeze: soaring global energy prices as well as elevated indirect FBR levies imposed to meet the government's revenue needs.

While the fuel price hike was unavoidable it also serves to remind us of the heavy cost the masses are paying for delayed structural reforms.

Engineered stability

Farooq Arby

Pakistan's external account signals aren't comforting. Export momentum is uneven, imports are rebounding and the current account has been oscillating between deficit and modest surplus. But the rupee has been unusually calm. That combination typically shows up as visible pressure on exchange rates in emerging markets. The missing puzzle piece is policy. The State Bank of Pakistan has been purchasing extensively from the exchange market over the past two years. Is the SBP merely smoothing volatility through interventions or actively shaping the market?

Currency market intervention isn't necessarily controversial, and central banks do routinely step in to dampen disorderly swings, curb speculative overshooting and maintain market functioning. If transparent and proportionate, such action can lower uncertainty, support trade planning and anchor expectations. But there's a difference between episodic smoothing and persistent purchases. When a central bank repeatedly becomes the dominant buyer in the market (a monopsony), it influences price discovery, even if it insists it's not targeting a specific exchange rate. Over time, participants stop focusing only on trade flows, remittances and portfolio sentiment and begin pricing in its likely presence. The bank's presence alone can dictate price formation.

When one player consistently absorbs supply, the exchange rate may stop reflecting underlying demand-supply fundamentals and, instead, begin to reflect administrative intent. As a monopsony, the central bank can dictate the dollar's price. The result can be an exchange rate that appears stable but is actually managed at an artificially low level. The rupee has exhibited a degree of parity stability in the last couple of years. But while reassuring on the surface, it may not fully correspond to macroeconomic realities. If this process keeps the rupee stronger than what fundamentals would imply, the costs keep accumulating quietly before arriving loudly.

First, an artificially strong currency is effectively a subsidy to imports and a tax on exports. Imports become cheaper in rupee terms, while exporters lose pricing power in competitive global markets. For Pakistan, which is still constrained by limited export diversification and a structurally fragile external account, this weakens the one lever that can generate durable foreign exchange, trade competitiveness.

A credible exchange rate must balance three imperatives.

Second, an overvalued rupee distorts investment signals. Exchange rates aren't only a macro indicator but are also economy-wide price signals that guide capital allocation. If firms and investors believe the rupee is policy — rather than fundamentals-driven, incentives shift.

Tradable-sector firms hesitate to scale, import dependence becomes rational and domestic industry faces sustained pricing pressure from cheaper foreign goods. The long-run outcome is slower productivity growth and fewer jobs in sectors that can actually earn foreign exchange.

Third, credibility becomes the hidden balance sheet item. Once markets internalise the fact that the exchange rate is 'guided', expectations become path-dependent and traders ask what the central bank will tolerate rather than what fundamentals imply. Stability becomes brittle. In such a setting, a guided exchange rate ultimately proves costlier and more painful than market-based adjustment, as inevitable corrections arrive abruptly, triggering inflation, eroding real incomes and forcing emergency stabilisation.

To be clear, re--serve accumulation itself is not a policy sin. Ade-quate buffers str-e-n-gthen sovere-i--gn resilience, im--prove credit ratings and provide insu-r-ance agai-nst external shocks. But method and magnitude matter. If reserves rise primarily through sustained market dominance rather than through organic inflows, exports, remittances and FDI, the policy begins to resemble market engineering rather than market management.

A credible exchange rate framework must balance three imperatives: volatility management, price discovery and reserve adequacy. When intervention shifts from stabilisation to structural influence, the exchange rate stops performing its macroeconomic role as a shock absorber and instead becomes a policy variable.

The objective should not be a rupee that is politically comfortable, nor reserves accumulated at any cost. It should be a currency that reflects economic fundamentals while the central bank intervenes only to prevent disorderly conditions. Smoothing volatility is prudent. Sustained dominance is not. The distinction between the two determines whether policy strengthens the exchange market, or muddles it.

If Iran unravels

Moazzam Husain

Pakistan has long viewed the sudden collapse of the Iranian regime as a national security threat. That assessment, which has been held quietly for years, acquired fresh urgency with the outbreak of the Gulf conflict. Pakistan is already confronting heightened militancy and terrorism in its western regions, where groups such as the TTP and BLA operate from sanctuaries in Afghanistan. In our worst-case calculations, a sudden power vacuum in Tehran would risk unleashing a flood of advanced Iranian weapons — particularly kamikaze drones — into these networks.

Field Marshal Asim Munir met President Donald Trump last year in June, during the height of the 12-day war with Iran, and again in September. Iran featured explicitly in their discussions, with Trump publicly noting that Pakistan "knows Iran very well, better than most". These meetings gave Islamabad insight into the Trump administration's thinking on Iran while also conveying Pakistan's concerns to him.

The US-Israel campaign that began on Feb 28, 2026, opened with heavy decapitation strikes and deeper attacks on Iranian military and nuclear sites. Israel saw the moment as a historic opportunity to eliminate what it regards as an existential threat. Reports indicated that certain Arab capitals, while publicly calling for de-escalation, also privately encouraged a more decisive outcome. In Washington, hawkish quarters initially leaned towards regime change, though President Trump has since shifted towards declaring major objectives achieved and exploring a negotiated exit.

What Pakistan fears most is a rapid fracture of central authority in Tehran. The IRGC has already demonstrated its ability to function in a decentralised manner. Even after the early loss of the Supreme Leader and dozens of senior commanders, IRGC units continued launching missiles and drones on local initiatives. In the most plausible scenario, dozens of battle-hardened IRGC battlegroups, each with its own internal command chain, would survive the collapse of central authority. Some would seize control of the vast underground 'missile cities' and weapon caches. Others would take physical possession of dispersed Shahed-136/238 drone production lines.

The region could quickly turn into an arms bazaar.

With no foreign power willing to put boots on the ground, reconfiguration of power would be decided by whoever controls the guns and the factories. A younger generation of IRGC commanders, needing funds to expand their influence, would have strong incentives to turn to the black market.

Advanced munitions, including kamikaze drones, could potentially find their way into the hands of arms dealers, non-state actors and militant groups across the region. Iran shares long borders with several countries, creating multiple pathways for proliferation. The region could quickly turn into an arms bazaar, with deadly weapons finding their way to groups that currently operate with far more rudimentary capabilities.

In consequence, the low-tech drone incidents of today could tomorrow become deadly campaigns using Iranian-origin Shaheds and Mohajer systems. Pakistan has already witnessed in the recent skirmishes with Afghanistan when low-tech drones arrived over Islamabad. The leap from those rudimentary systems to sophisticated, long-range Iranian drones would represent a qualitative escalation — and the danger would not stop at Pakistan's borders. The combination of rogue militias and deadly weapons such as Shahed drones combined with vast ungoverned spaces would create a powder keg stretching from the Kurdish mountains and Iraq to Yemen and across the Red Sea into the Horn of Africa.

Which is why Pak-istan has quietly co--unselled restraint on both sides thro-ug-h-out this crisis. It has urged Iran to avoid targeting Gulf civilian and economic in--frastructure and wo--uld have conveyed to Washington the severe risks of a regime collapse. These efforts reflect Islamabad's understanding that uncontrolled collapse in Tehran would create a security vacuum far more dangerous than the current stalemate.

The silver lining is that beyond the rhetoric, initial drafts have been exchanged, with the US presenting 15 points and Iran responding with five. The positions are far apart, as is normal at the start of serious talks. Yet the process has begun.

For Pakistan, the priority remains clear: to bring these two positions closer. Maintaining open channels of communication with all parties Islamabad remains in daily contact with the Iranian leadership, frequent engagement with GCC capitals, and close coordination with Washington as well as Beijing. As Pakistan mediates the initiative the real question in the days ahead is whether the parties can narrow the gap so that the region does not cross into further dangerous territory.

Economic security buffers

Ishrat Husain

Two recent developments offer compelling reasons for policymakers to prioritise the building of buffers for economic security. First, Pakistan has earned international goodwill by playing a proactive role in encouraging dialogue among parties engaged in the Gulf conflict. Second, the IMF has shown unusual flexibility by reaching a staff-level agreement without imposing additional conditions at this critical juncture. With no end in sight to the conflict, Pakistan must leverage this goodwill and policy space to derive tangible economic benefits. However, this mustn't follow the well-trodden path of a rentier state, where geostrategic positioning is exchanged for short-term financial inflows. Instead, a strategy to build durable buffers against future shocks must be adopted. Four key pillars of economic security merit attention.

Strengthening foreign exchange resilience: This requires boosting non-debt-creating inflows, re-profiling short-term external liabilities and maintaining market-determined exchange and interest rates. The recent relocation of transshipment activities to Pakistani ports is an opportunity to be sustained through improving capacity, governance and operational efficiency of maritime institutions. Temporary waivers of financial instruments for exports to Iran and Central Asian Republics should be institutionalised to facilitate regional trade. Construction of the Iran-Pakistan pipeline should be initiated. Gwadar Port must be made fully operational and completion of the western route linking it to the Karakoram Highway prioritised.

Security for oil and gas, mining and Chinese companies and joint ventures is a sine qua non. Providing electricity and water to Gwadar residents and developing infrastructure in the mining districts of Balochistan and KP is necessary as is the development of districts along the western corridor. Liberal import of goods, fuel and electricity from Iran would benefit Makran coast inhabitants and generate jobs. Third-country mediation efforts for Pak-Afghan rapprochement can be expedited as a reciprocal gesture for Pakistan's constructive regional peace effort.

Trade policy also needs recalibration. The trade agreement with China should be renegotiated for a more balanced arrangement as seen in Asean agreements, while a trade agreement with Asean itself should be expedited. Exporters' long-standing constraints must be addressed through a comprehensive policy framework. Instead of piecemeal interventions, a five-year policy guaranteeing consistency and predictability should be formulated. Effective implementation should ensure that arbitrary actions by tax and regulatory authorities do not undermine confidence. FDI is another avenue to boost external buffers. Agreements with GCC countries should be finalised to attract investments, increase jobs for Pakistanis and convert short-term deposits into longer-term equity investments. We should also revisit tariff arrangements with the US to improve market access. While expanding the Roshan Digital Account to non-resident investors is a positive step, safeguards are necessary to lessen the risk of sudden capital outflows in times of financial stress.

Four key pillars can help strengthen Pakistan's economic security in these troubling times.

Energy security: Increasing behind-the-meter solarisation has raised the share of indigenous energy to around 88 per cent; this must be reinforced by offering attractive incentives to MNCs for exploration and development of domestic resources. Regulatory bottlenecks must be removed to allow producers to sell directly to end users and introduce competition in gas and electricity distribution. Strategic oil reserves by the government in addition to enhanced stock by MNCs should be built up. Infrastructure investment is just as important. Projects such as the rail link between Islamkot and Mirpurkhas and transmission line to evacuate Thar coal should be brought to fruition. New pipelines, expanded use of railways for fuel transport and upgradation of oil refineries to convert furnace oil into higher-value products would boost efficiency and preserve foreign exchange. Addressing the circular debt is essential, as it constrains liquidity and discourages investment in capacity expansion and operational improvements.

In transport, the transition to e-vehicles — particularly two- and three-wheelers — should be accelerated and bottlenecks removed. Expanding e-bus services in urban centres beyond Karachi, Lahore and Islamabad-Rawalpindi would reduce reliance on imported fuel. Energy conservation, including rationalising commercial operating hours, can also contribute. Introducing multi-tariff pricing for industrial consumers to encourage off-peak usage would help optimise capacity utilisation and rationalise energy pricing.

Food and fertiliser security: Reassuringly, locally produced urea and DAP are significantly cheaper than imported alternatives. Continued gas supply from the Mari fields to fertiliser manufacturers is a prudent policy and should be sustained. Given tightening global fertiliser markets and potential supply chain disruptions, ensuring domestic availability is critical for agricultural productivity. Wheat policy, however, needs careful management. The deregulation attempt in the previous crop year created uncertainty and hardship for farmers and consumers. The current target of procuring six million tons for strategic reserves is appropriate, but reverting to a system of compulsory procurement that has historically been marred by corruption, market distortions and fiscal losses must be avoided. Strategic reserves should be released during lean months to stabilise prices. Support for small farmers must also be strengthened. Financing initiatives such as Kissan Cards should be better targeted, while provincial programmes, such as procurement from Hari cardholders in Sindh and direct subsidy payments, can enhance equity in agriculture. Social protection: Rising fuel and transport costs translate into higher prices for food and other essentials, disproportionately affecting low-income households.

Across-the-board fuel subsidies are fiscally unsustainable and poorly targeted. Instead, Pakistan should build on its well-established BISP by expanding coverage to include more vulnerable households and increasing transfer amounts to reflect inflationary pressures. Similarly, the expansion of health insurance through provincial health card schemes should be prioritised, ensuring uniformity in coverage, eligibility and service delivery. Health shocks are a major cause of impoverishment, particularly for daily-wage and informal workers. Effective health protection can be a critical buffer against such vulnerabilities.

While there are many other aspects of economic security in need of structural reforms, the current regional uncertainty and domestic constraints necessitate prioritisation.

The urban cost of war

Dr Noman Ahmed

Since the past several weeks, a war has been raging in the Gulf and Middle East region. While missiles, interceptors and drones are instruments of 21st-century warfare, a trait shared with conflicts in the last century is the grave impact on cities. Whether it is Tehran or Beirut, the brunt of the impact is borne by the urban population. Tens of thousands of residential buildings in Tehran have been partially or completely damaged. Cultural sites, university buildings and military and civilian institutional structures add to this estimate. There is limited information from Tel Aviv but multiple missile attacks by Iran have caused widespread destruction in the city and the wider region. Beirut, sadly home to several earlier conflicts, has reported the forced eviction of over a million residents on account of Israeli attacks. Cities in Kuwait, the UAE, Qatar, Bahrain, Jordan, Saudi Arabia and even Oman and Turkiye have experienced infrastructural damage. With no ceasefire in sight, it is feared that even tougher times lie ahead.

Cities are a natural target of aggression by belligerent countries. The attacking forces intend to cause critical damage to the enemies' decision-making apparatus. In Tehran, Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei and some of his family members, Dr Ali Larijani and some of his family members, and many other high-ranking Iranian officials were martyred. Military command structures, communication channels, financial hubs and other important economic and strategic assets make cities vulnerable to war damage. As cities grow, military and civilian jurisdictions often overlap. In some cases, cities continue to re-zone, generating buffers to keep civilian locations away from military assets. But all too often, the conflict does not spare civilian sites, even those located at a distance. And sometimes passive military sites become a hazard for the urban population. The tragic Ojhri Camp incident in April 1988 is an example. An explosion at this ammunition depot caused rockets and projectiles to fly all over Islamabad and Rawalpindi. Over 90 people died; hundreds were believed to have been wounded, some with permanent injuries.

When at war, there are hardly any principles that belligerents abide by. One observes military planes carrying out air strikes on hospitals, clinics, universities, schools, elderly care facilities and other social infrastructure. Gaza's tragic situation is a case in point. One of the densest settlements, Gaza saw almost all its social facilities targeted by Israel. The Minab school tragedy in Iran shows that small children can also become fodder in a reckless war. Some wars have seen military commanders use human shields and conduct their operations from civilian facilities where they take cover. As a result, innocent people become targets or are caught in the crossfire when belligerents attack each other. Sometimes even urban centres in states that are not engaged in war are affected as the predicament of the GCC countries shows; the flames of war can consume even those places not meant as direct targets. Had it not been for today's superior air defence systems, the scale of damage in the UAE, Bahrain, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Jordan and Turkiye may have been much larger.

Military structures, communication channels and financial hubs make cities vulnerable to war damage.

Wars challenge the principles of city planning and development. Almost all cities are planned and developed for peacetime conditions. Even a momentary interruption, in which war breaks out, questions such an approach. For instance, compact cities with a properly outlined morphology, grid-based and well-laid-out landscapes, streets and public congregation spaces, and solid social and physical infrastructure are desirable in the eyes of planners. But such cities are predictable targets during times of conflict. Convoluted and ambiguous layouts and invisible social and physical infrastructure is what war-zone habitats may require. The present war experience in the Middle East may give city planners and managers cause to consider an alternative approach if they are to ensure the safety of citizens and governance institutions.

Wars also end. Post-war redevelopment is an established area of expertise. Many cities across the world have been destroyed during conflicts. But once these conflicts ended, they bounced back, thanks to a scientifically steered process of redevelopment. During the war in Bosnia-Herzegovina in the 1990s, many cities saw extensive damage. Mostar, an idyllic town on the Neretva river, saw colossal destruction. It was a friendly urban settlement boasting a multicultural society and was a site of immense interest to architects, planners, engineers and other design professionals who focused on its heritage and conservation. Its most iconic landmark was the Stari Most bridge dating from the Ottoman era. The bridge, destroyed in 1993 by shelling, represented a unique architectural example. When the war ended, concerted efforts began to rebuild it. Active citizen participation accelerated the process. The restoration of other cultural artifacts was also prioritised. In 2004, the restored historic quarters of Mostar were inaugurated by a galaxy of international figures, led by then Prince Charles. It is hoped that Tehran will see similarly better times once the war ends.

Trump's anger over Iran thrusts NATO into fresh crisis

Monitoring Desk

WASHINGTON/BRUSSELS/PARIS: The NATO alliance has in recent years survived existential challenges - ranging from the war in Ukraine to multiple bouts of pressure and insults from U.S. President Donald Trump, who has questioned its core mission and threatened to seize Greenland.

But it is the U.S.-Israeli war with Iran, thousands of miles from Europe, that has nearly broken the 76-year-old bloc and threatens to leave it in its weakest state since its creation, say analysts and diplomats.

Trump, enraged that European countries have declined to send their navies to open up the Strait of Hormuz to global shipping following the start of the air war on Feb 28, has declared he is considering withdrawing from the alliance.

"Wouldn't you if you were me?" Trump asked Reuters in a Wednesday interview.

In a speech on Wednesday night, Trump criticized U.S. allies but stopped short of condemning NATO, as many experts thought he might.

But combined with other barbs aimed at Europeans in recent weeks, Trump's comments have provoked unprecedented concern that the U.S. will not come to the aid of European allies should they be attacked, whether or not Washington formally walks away.

The result, say analysts and diplomats, is that the alliance created in the Cold War that has long served as the basic fabric of European security is fraying and the mutual defense agreement at its core is no longer taken as a given.

"This is the worst place (NATO) has been since it was founded," said Max Bergmann, a former State Department official who now leads the Europe, Russia, and Eurasia Program at the Center for Strategic and International Studies in Washington.

"It's really hard to think of anything that even comes close."

That reality is sinking in for Europeans, who have counted on NATO as a bulwark against an increasingly assertive Russia.

As recently as February, NATO Secretary-General Mark Rutte had dismissed the idea of Europe defending itself without the U.S. as a "silly thought." Now, many officials and diplomats consider it the default expectation.



Federal Interior Minister Mohsin Naqvi listens to citizens' complaints during an open court at NCCIA Zonal Headquarters in Lahore



ISTANBUL: Deputy Prime Minister/Foreign Minister Senator Mohammad Ishaq Dar meeting the Foreign Minister of Saudi Arabia, Prince Faisal bin Farhan Al Saud

South Korea, France agree to deepen defence and energy ties amid Middle East conflict

Monitoring Desk

SEOUL: South Korean President Lee Jae Myung and French President Emmanuel Macron said on Friday they planned to boost defence cooperation and work together to address the economic and energy crises triggered by the war in Iran.

Macron arrived in South Korea on Thursday for a two-day state visit after also visiting Japan, and held a summit in Seoul on Friday.

It is the first state visit by a French president since 2015 and French officials have said the trip aims to strengthen France's strategic and economic role in the region at a time of "strong international and regional tensions."

"President Macron and I agreed to share policy-related experiences and strategies in order to jointly address the economic and energy crises triggered by the Middle East war," Lee said after the summit. The leaders also confirmed their commitment to bolstering energy security including by collaborating to secure safe maritime transport routes through the Strait of Hormuz, he said.

Like other Asian economies, South Korea relies heavily on energy imports, including through the Strait of Hormuz. Iran has effectively shut down the waterway in response to U.S.-Israeli attacks that began on February 28, driving up energy prices and stoking fears of a global recession.

Macron said on Thursday that it would be unrealistic to launch a military operation to force open the strait, after U.S. President Donald Trump challenged U.S. allies to work towards reopening it.

Macron said after Friday's summit that the countries, both major arms manufacturers, would strive to boost their defence ties.

"What we want to do is give this cooperation a contemporary dimension," Macron said, citing joint exercises and more cooperation in production and in critical military capabilities.

Trump fires Pam Bondi as attorney general

Monitoring Desk

WASHINGTON: President Donald Trump ousted US Attorney General Pam Bondi on Thursday after mounting frustration with her performance, especially over the release of files on late sex offender Jeffrey Epstein.

Trump also felt Bondi was not moving quickly enough to prosecute critics and adversaries whom he wanted to face criminal charges, according to sources. Deputy Attorney General Todd Blanche, a former personal lawyer to Trump, will lead the Justice Department temporarily, Trump said in a social media post.

In the post, Trump praised Bondi as a "Great American Patriot and a loyal friend" who had overseen a "massive crackdown in Crime".

Bondi will soon move to a job in the private sector, Trump said.

Blanche thanked Trump and praised Bondi in a social media post. "We will continue backing the blue, enforcing the law, and doing everything in our power to keep America safe," he said.

During her tenure as the top US law enforcement official, Bondi was a combative champion of Trumps agenda and dismantled the Justice Departments longstanding tradition of independence from the White House in its investigations.

But it was repeated criticism over the Epstein files, including from Trump allies and some Republican lawmakers, that came to dominate her tenure. Bondi was accused of covering up or mismanaging the release of records on the DOJs sex-trafficking investigations into Epstein, a financier who cultivated ties with wealthy and powerful figures.

Trump informed Bondi at a White House meeting on Wednesday that he was looking to replace her as attorney general, according to a source familiar with the matter.

Trump told Bondi multiple times over the past several months that he was unhappy with her performance, a senior White House official said.

The official said Trump has contemplated replacing her with Lee Zeldin, the administrator of the Environmental Protection Agency, but has also discussed other candidates.

Bondi spent much of Wednesday with Trump, riding with him to the US Supreme Court in the morning, attending an Easter lunch where he spoke and later watching his address to the nation on the Iran war. At the Supreme Court, Trump watched as one of Bondi's top officials, Solicitor General D. John Sauer, was grilled by justices about the administration's attempt to limit birthright citizenship.

Zelenskiy urges lawmakers to act as Ukraine funding hangs in balance

Monitoring Desk

KYIV: President Volodymyr Zelenskiy called on lawmakers to pass key legislation next week to avert a funding crisis, help Ukraine fight the war against Russia, and enact key reforms required for European Union accession.

Due to lagging reforms and slow legislative progress in late 2025 and early 2026, Ukraine missed deadlines to unlock billions from its key lenders, economists said.

With the need for external financing standing at $52 billion this year - equivalent to around a quarter of annual economic output - the budget situation is desperate.

"I have a list of key draft laws that are critical for securing funding," Zelenskiy said in remarks released on Friday.

They range from strengthening the court system to reforming energy sector procedures.

"I believe that members of parliament from all parties must understand the importance of these bills for Ukraine's budget," said Zelenskiy, who has a majority in parliament but relations have soured.

David Arakhamia, head of the ruling Servant of the People faction, said lawmakers planned to meet on Monday to discuss the legislation with the key ministers. Voting is planned for April 7 and 8.

Ukraine depends on Western financial support as it fights a bigger and better-equipped enemy. Since the 2022 invasion, Kyiv has received about $174 billion in economic aid.

But this year, key funding has been stalled after Hungary's Prime Minister Viktor Orban, who maintains close ties with Moscow, blocked a 90 billion euro loan to Ukraine.

By contrast, Russia will benefit from the surge in global oil prices due to the war in Iran. Economists from several Ukrainian think tanks said the country was critically late with meeting obligations under the EU's Ukraine Facility programme, failing deadlines on 14 indicators and risking more than $3.9 billion in financing.

In a March 30 letter to the speaker, seen by Reuters, EU Enlargement Commissioner Marta Kos said progress on the legislation would send a signal about Kyiv's commitment to reforms.

Chinese robotaxis stall in apparent 'malfunction'

Monitoring Desk

BEIJING: A string of self-driving robotaxis owned by Chinese internet giant Baidu stalled in central China, stranding passengers after an apparent "system malfunction", police said on Wednesday.

Local authorities in Wuhan, Hubei province, began receiving calls "one after another" on Tuesday night about "multiple Apollo Go cars stopped in the middle of the road, unable to move", police said in a statement.

Apollo Go is Baidu's driverless taxi service which began charging for rides in Beijing in 2021 and operates in designated areas across several cities. "After investigation, preliminary findings suggest the cause was system malfunction," police added, without specifying how many cars were impacted.

Social media users shared videos of themselves attempting to contact customer service from inside their stalled robotaxis as other vehicles passed by. "Apollo Go, are you paralysed?" one person wrote on social media, alongside a video of unanswered calls to the company dialled from an in-car tablet. The light green Apollo Go logo was visible on the steering wheel.

The social media user said they were "stuck" in the middle of the road for more than 30 minutes.



Ibrahim Mohammed Hamad, who was preparing to get married next month in Gaza, saw his home, which he had built with great effort, destroyed in an Israeli attack. Living in the Nusayrat Refugee Camp in the central Gaza Strip, Hamad searched for traces of his dream of a happy home among the rubble of the destroyed building after the attack.

French-owned CMA CGM container ship passes Strait of Hormuz, data shows

Monitoring Desk

PARIS: A container ship belonging to French shipping group CMA CGM has passed through the Strait of Hormuz, MarineTraffic vessel tracking data shows, in a sign that Iran may not consider France a hostile nation. The Malta-flagged Kribi, owned by CMA CGM, crossed the Strait. It is the first French-owned vessel to make it through the channel since U.S.-Israeli attacks began on Iran at the end of February. Until the war led to the effective closure of the Strait, it was the route for about a fifth of global oil and liquefied natural gas supplies. It was not immediately clear how the vessel, which the data shows is sailing south along the coast of Oman, secured safe passage. CMA CGM did not respond to a request for comment. President Emmanuel Macron's office did not immediately respond to a request for comment on whether his government had brokered the ships' passage.

World food price rise set to continue if Iran war lasts, FAO says

Monitoring Desk

PARIS: World food prices climbed to their highest level since September last year and could rise further if the Middle East conflict that pushed up energy prices continues, the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization said on Friday.

"Price rises since the conflict began have been modest, driven mainly by higher oil prices and cushioned by ample global cereal supplies," FAO Chief Economist Maximo Torero said in a statement.

But if the conflict lasts over 40 days and input costs remain high, farmers may reduce inputs, plant less, or switch crops to less intensive fertiliser crops, he said.

"Those choices will hit future yields and shape our food supply and commodity prices for the rest of this year and all of the next," he added.

The FAO Food Price Index, which measures changes in a basket of globally traded food commodities, rose by 2.4% from its revised February level. It is 1% above its value a year ago, although nearly 20% below its March 2022 peak, reached after the start of the war in Ukraine.

The cereal price index increased by 1.5% from the previous month, led by a 4.3% increase in international wheat prices due to worsening crop prospects in the U.S. and expectations of lower plantings in Australia due to higher fertiliser costs.

Global maize prices edged up as ample global supply offset concerns over fertiliser costs, and indirect support from greater ethanol demand prospects linked to higher energy prices.

Rice prices dropped 3.0% due to harvest timing and weaker import demand.

Vegetable oil prices increased 5.1%, marking the third consecutive monthly rise. Higher quotations for palm, soy, sunflower, and rapeseed oil reflected the impact of rising global energy prices and expectations of stronger biofuel demand. Palm oil prices reached their highest level since mid-2022.

Forget democracy, Burkina Faso military leader Traore says

Monitoring Desk

DAKAR: Burkina Faso's military leader, who seized power in a coup in September 2022, told journalists that "people need to forget about democracy" and that "democracy kills", the latest sign he aims to rule for the long term.

Ibrahim Traore's military government had originally committed to organising an election in 2024. But a year after the coup, he said there would be no elections until the country—which has struggled for more than a decade to contain Islamist insurgencies linked to al Qaeda and Islamic State—was safe enough for everyone to vote.

When asked about elections during a roundtable with journalists aired on state television on Thursday night, Traore said his administration was focused on other challenges.

"People need to forget about the issue of democracy," he said. "We have to tell the truth: democracy isn't for us."

Invoking the example of Libya, where he said outsiders tried to "impose democracy", he added that "democracy kills."

Traore's government dissolved all political parties in January, after earlier suspending political activities. Before the coup, the country had more than 100 registered political parties, with 15 represented in parliament after the 2020 general election. Neighbouring Mali and Niger, also led by military rulers who took power in coups, have similarly dissolved political parties. Islamist insurgencies in all three countries have killed thousands and displaced millions over the past decade.

Earlier on Thursday, Human Rights Watch published a report indicating that Burkina Faso's military and its allies have killed more than twice as many civilians as Islamist militants have since 2023.

U.S. fighter shot down over Iran as Trump threatens to hit more infrastructure

Monitoring Desk

WASHINGTON/CAIRO: Iran shot down a U.S. warplane on Friday, setting off a search by both sides for surviving crew as the war looked set to intensify with President Donald Trump threatening more attacks on civilian infrastructure.

Iran's Revolutionary Guard Corps said it was combing an area near where the plane came down in southwestern Iran. The regional governor promised a commendation for anyone who captured or killed the pilot.

A U.S. military official confirmed that a fighter jet had been shot down and a search was under way.

Iranian news agencies said U.S. helicopters were flying low on apparent search missions and carried videos of residents shooting at them.

There were no confirmed details of the searches or the type of aircraft shot down.



The Princess of Asturias Awards, Spain's most prestigious international awards, were presented at a ceremony held at the Campoamor Theatre in Oviedo, in the Asturias region of northern Spain



ISLAMABAD: Federal Minister for Finance and Revenue, Senator Muhammad Aurangzeb, meeting with Sandeep Mahajan, Regional Practice Director for the MENAAP region, World Bank, alongside Ms. Bolormaa Amgaabazar, Country Director, World Bank, and Simon Andrews, Division Director, IFC, to discuss Pakistan's economic reforms and priorities for investment-led growth

TENDER NOTICE

The Provincial Library Balochistan invites bids from eligible Bidders for supply of following items. **TSE-2627101214441 Only electronic bid will be submitted, No physical bid is required. Note: In All Procurements of GOB Whether Through Electronic or Manual Bid Submission, It is Mandatory For All Bidders to Get Registered At Electronic Public Procurement System of BPPRA GOB. Tender Fee Not required**

S.No	Class of Object	Bid Security
1	ICT Equipment(Network, surveillance devices, storage devices, Office Equipment) **(Total Item(s) Count: 2)**	3 %

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TENDER NOTICE

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S. No	TSE Number	Name of Work's	Last Date and Time of Bid Submission	Tender Opening	Estimated Cost
1	TSE-2627101214463	HOME SOLAR SYSTEM FOR TEHSIL KILLA SAIFULLAH & TEHSIL MUSLIMBAGH DISTRICT KILLA SAIFULLAH PSDP NO Z2026.3964...	10 November,2026 10:00 AM	11:00 AM	15,000,000
2	TSE-2627101214453	HOME SOLAR SYSTEM FOR TEHSIL QAMARDIN ZHOB DISTRICT ZHOB PSDP NO (Z2026.1092)..	11 November,2026 10:00 AM	11:00 AM	10,000,000

Procurements shall be made under the Balochistan Public Procurement Rules – 2014.**Eligibility of Bidders:**Eligibility Criteria for bidders may be seen in the Bidding Documents**Bidding Procedure:**Single Stage Two Envelope Bidding Procedure (TSE-2627101214453, TSE-2627101214463) **Tender Documents:**The Bidding document can be downloaded from www.bppra.gob.pk (free of cost) and the same can also be obtained from the office of the under-signed upon payment of prescribed tender fee. **Address:** URBON PLANNIN& DEVELOPMENT ZHOB **Phone no:** 3138201082 Email: engrnajeeb001@gmail.com

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Governor vows to create greater opportunities for Balochistan's talented, deserving youth

QUETTA, (VoM Report): Balochistan Governor Sheikh Jaffar Khan Mandokhail has underscored the need to connect the province's youth with international educational, professional and economic opportunities, saying greater collaboration with the private sector, universities and overseas Pakistanis can help advance human capital and economic development.

He made these remarks during a meeting with US-based Pakistani businessman and philanthropist Tanveer Ahmed at Governor House, Quetta, where they discussed initiatives aimed at expanding higher education and creating greater opportunities for talented and deserving students. The discussions covered scholarships, the development and modernization of public-sector universities, research and innovation, as well as measures to strengthen professional skills among young people.

The governor and Tanveer Ahmed also exchanged views on ways to help Balochistan's business community access international markets, expand trade links and attract foreign investment to the province. Governor Mandokhail highlighted the potential role of overseas Pakistanis in supporting educational advancement and contributing to investment and economic growth in Balochistan. He said stronger links between universities and the private sector could enable young people to acquire skills aligned with international standards and compete more effectively in the global arena. The governor also appreciated Ahmed's efforts to support Pakistani students pursuing higher education, encourage international investment and build stronger connections among overseas Pakistani communities. He particularly acknowledged initiatives associated with Ahmed to present the aspirations and potential of Pakistani and Balochistan youth at the United Nations headquarters in New York, describing international platforms as important avenues for highlighting their talent, creativity and commitment to peace and development. During the meeting, Tanveer Ahmed assured the governor of his cooperation in strengthening Balochistan's public universities and broadening scholarship opportunities for deserving students. Governor Mandokhail expressed optimism that enhanced engagement with Pakistani entrepreneurs and philanthropists abroad would help open new avenues for educational cooperation, international partnerships and sustainable economic development in the province.



BERLIN: President Asif Ali Zardari inspects the Guard of Honour along with German President Frank-Walter Steinmeier during the Official Welcome Ceremony at Germany



ISTANBUL: Deputy Prime Minister/Foreign Minister Senator Mohammad Ishaq Dar meeting the Foreign Secretary of the United Kingdom, Ed Miliband

Younus Zehri for comprehensive security strategy supported by practical measures

KHUZDAR: Balochistan Assembly Opposition Leader Mir Younus Aziz Zehri has called for stronger and coordinated measures to improve the law and order situation in Khuzdar, stressing that the protection of citizens' lives and property must remain a top priority.

Zehri made the remarks during a meeting with DIG Khuzdar Region Imran Qureshi at his office, where he welcomed the police officer on assuming his new responsibilities and conveyed his best wishes for his tenure.

The meeting included a detailed discussion on the prevailing security situation in the region, public concerns and challenges affecting peace and stability. Zehri emphasized the need for a comprehensive security strategy supported by practical measures to address security challenges and establish lasting peace in the area.

Govt taking effective measures to introduce structural reforms: PM

ISLAMABAD, (APP): Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif on Friday reiterated Pakistan's willingness to open its economy to promising international markets and consult globally recognised economic experts to advance the country's economic growth and prosperity.

The prime minister expressed these views during a meeting with Peter Briggs, Managing Director of North American Operations at international consulting firm Alvarez & Marsal (A&M). Shehbaz Sharif said that after achieving economic and fiscal stability, the government was taking effective measures to introduce deep-rooted structural reforms and promote export-led growth and a productive economy.

He highlighted the government's focus on improving the performance and efficiency of the domestic manufacturing sector while taking measures to attract foreign direct investment (FDI).

The prime minister said the government was pursuing a strategy to assess the economic viability of state-owned enterprises (SOEs) and subsequently move towards privatisation to support the national economy and promote growth. Emphasising the importance of expertise and professional capacity, Shehbaz Sharif said Pakistan recognised the need for qualified professionals and expert teams to strengthen its economic growth engine.

He added that Pakistan was ready to establish productive partnerships with international consulting firms to support economic growth.

Balochistan govt to focus on stronger governance, transparent development: CM Bugti

NORTH DERA BUGTI, (VoM Report): Balochistan Chief Minister Mir Sarfraz Bugti has called for the establishment of smaller administrative divisions and districts to make government services more accessible to citizens and improve the effectiveness of civil administration across the province.

Addressing a press conference in North Dera Bugti, the chief minister said Balochistan's expansive geography and dispersed population made it necessary to develop an administrative structure that could respond more effectively to the needs of people living in remote areas. He said residents should be able to access essential government services without having to undertake lengthy journeys, adding that greater emphasis should be placed on creating smaller divisions and districts alongside the ongoing national discussion about the formation of new provinces.

Bugti announced that all divisional posts for the newly created Koh-e-Suleman Division had been approved and that the appointment of officers and supporting staff would be completed shortly.

He said his government had begun working towards the creation of more manageable administrative units nearly two years ago, well before the issue gained renewed attention at the national level. According to him, the move was driven by Balochistan's distinctive geographical conditions and administrative requirements.

The chief minister said decentralizing authority would make government institutions more accessible and responsive while also improving accountability and service delivery.

Bugti reiterated his resolve to turn Rakhni into a model administrative centre, saying the area deserved divisional status much earlier. He said development work was already in progress and the provincial government was focusing on upgrading infrastructure, reinforcing public institutions and expanding opportunities for residents.

The chief minister also directed that strict measures be adopted to prevent corruption, kickbacks and other irregularities in development schemes in Rakhni. He said clear instructions had been issued to ensure transparency and maintain quality in public-sector infrastructure projects. The Communication and Works Department, he added, was directly executing development schemes to improve construction standards and strengthen supervision.

Bugti stressed that public funds must be utilized responsibly and that development projects should translate into concrete benefits for local communities rather than serve private interests.

Commenting on the security situation, the chief minister praised the security forces for thwarting an attempt to target a construction company's building in Gwadar. He commended the Pakistan Army, Frontier Corps and police for their continued efforts and sacrifices in countering terrorism.



ISLAMABAD: Speaker National Assembly Sardar Ayaz Sadiq in a meeting with President of the Republic of Maldives Dr. Mohamed Muizzu

General allegations, mere oral assertions could not shift initial burden of proof to opposite party: Supreme Court

ISLAMABAD, (APP): The Supreme Court has held that a party alleging fraud, forgery or misrepresentation in a registered sale deed is required to establish the allegation through clear and reliable evidence, and that mere general allegations or denial of a registered document does not shift the initial burden of proof to the other party.

A two-member bench comprising Justice Jamal Khan Mandokhail and Justice Naeem Akhtar Afghan gave the ruling while deciding CPLA No.4211/2023. The court converted the petition into an appeal and allowed it, setting aside the judgments of the Lahore High Court and appellate court and restoring the trial court's decision. The court observed that under Article 117 of the Qanun-e-Shahadat Order, 1984, the burden of proving a fact lies upon the person who asserts its existence for determination of a legal right or liability. It clarified that a party alleging fraud, forgery or misrepresentation must prove the allegation through clear and convincing evidence.

General allegations and mere oral assertions could not shift the initial burden of proof to the opposite party. The court further held that even a mere denial by the signatory of a registered sale deed was insufficient to shift the burden of proof onto the party seeking benefit from the registered document. In the instant case, the plaintiffs failed to produce reliable evidence establishing fraud, forgery or misrepresentation in the preparation of the registered sale deed dated August 21, 2000. In contrast, the petitioner produced both attesting witnesses to the sale deed before the court, whose testimony was found consistent and reliable.



Minister of State for Law and Justice Barrister Aqeel Malik attends the United Nations Day celebration alongside other distinguished guests

China leads Pakistan's Rs8.1 trillion foreign-funded development portfolio

ISLAMABAD, (APP): China accounts for the largest share of Pakistan's Rs8.099 trillion foreign-funded development portfolio, with six China-supported projects carrying a combined estimated cost of Rs2.539 trillion, representing approximately 31.4% of the total value of 98 projects being managed by the country.

According to official donor-wise figures for the fiscal year 2026-27, a copy of which is available with Wealth Pakistan, the Ministry of Planning, Development and Special Initiatives has listed 98 foreign-funded development projects with a combined estimated cost of Rs8.099 trillion.

The figures show that China leads all individual donors in terms of total project cost despite supporting only six of the 98 schemes. Estimated expenditure on these projects stood at Rs57.229 billion as of June 30, 2026, while the recorded throw-forward amounted to Rs2.482 trillion, indicating substantial expenditure remaining on the projects.

For the current fiscal year, the government has allocated Rs31.7 billion for China-supported projects, comprising Rs25.829 billion in rupee cover and Rs5.872 billion in local funding.

The International Development Association (IDA) ranks second in terms of total project cost, with nine schemes valued at Rs2.279 trillion, accounting for approximately 28.1% of the overall portfolio. Estimated expenditure on these projects reached Rs695.401 billion by June 30, 2026, while Rs60.075 billion has been allocated for 2026-27.

The Asian Development Bank (ADB) supports the highest number of projects among all donors, with 31 schemes involving a combined estimated cost of Rs1.131 trillion.

Samarkand Summit adopts declaration to boost investment in children's wellbeing

SAMARKAND, (APP): The World Summit on Investing in Children's Wellbeing concluded in Samarkand with the adoption of the Samarkand Declaration on Investing in Children's Wellbeing, outlining a shared commitment to strengthening child protection, improving access to essential services and increasing investment in children as a foundation for sustainable and equitable development.

The declaration was adopted on last day at the conclusion of the two-day summit held on October 21–22 under the theme "Investing in Children's Wellbeing: A Path Toward Sustainable and Just Development for Future Generations."



Organized by Uzbekistan in collaboration with the Special Representative of the United Nations Secretary-General on Violence Against Children, UNICEF, the World Health Organization (WHO) and the World Bank, the summit brought together First Ladies, ministers responsible for social protection, health, education and finance, representatives of governments and international organizations, civil society, academia, the private sector, as well as children and young people. The declaration reaffirms the participating states' commitment to the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the principle that the best interests of the child must guide decisions affecting children. It recognizes that children constitute around one-third of the world's population and that investment in their wellbeing generates long-term benefits in health, education, productivity, social cohesion and peace. Under the declaration, participating states committed to advancing policies and measures suited to their national circumstances, priorities and capacities, with particular emphasis on social protection, child safety, healthcare, education and opportunities for young people.

The document calls for strengthening social protection systems and expanding benefits for children and families, particularly during crises. It also emphasizes the need to reinforce mechanisms protecting children from violence, abuse and exploitation, including risks arising in the digital environment.

Mental health essential component of overall health: Dr Luo Dapeng

ISLAMABAD, (APP): Pakistan's National Mental Health Policy will provide an opportunity to expand mental health support to more than 32 million people in need of care.

Speakers said this while addressing the closing session of the two-day Global Mental Health Summit on Friday.

WHO Representative in Pakistan Dr Luo Dapeng said the organization would continue to support Pakistan in reaching families with mental health services, stressing that mental health was an essential component of overall health. "Pakistan's National Mental Health Policy is an opportunity to reach over 32 million persons who need mental health support. WHO stands with Pakistan to reach every family, because there is no health without mental health," Dr Luo said. The two-day Global Mental Health Summit, held in Islamabad from October 1-2, brought together mental health experts, policymakers, academics and representatives of national and international organizations to discuss evidence-based approaches to strengthening mental health services.

The summit followed the launch of Pakistan's National Mental Health Policy 2026-2035, which aims to expand access to mental health care through stronger services and greater emphasis on prevention, early identification and community-based support.



Azerbaijan's Ombudsperson Sabina Aliyeva Meets Hon'ble Chief Justice of the Federal Constitutional Court of Pakistan, Mr. Justice Amin-ud-Din Khan; Discussions Held on Human Rights Protection, Institutional Cooperation and Professional Experiences

Pakistan, China vows to further strengthen collaboration in healthcare, medical education sectors

BEIJING, (APP): Two Memorandums of Understanding (MoUs) on medical education cooperation and international youth exchange between China and Pakistan were signed on September 30 at Riphah International University, as the Pakistan Chapter of the China Pakistan Medical Association (CPMA) and the China–Pakistan Youth Volunteer Services Team Center were launched.

The agreements recognize the friendship and all-weather strategic cooperative partnership between China and Pakistan, and commemorate the 77th anniversary of the founding of the People's Republic of China and the 75th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between China and Pakistan. Under the medical cooperation track, Riphah International University and the China Pakistan Medical Association signed an MoU providing for cooperation in medical education, medical research, clinical and professional training, and international exchange, aimed at further strengthening bilateral collaboration in the healthcare and medical education sectors.

In parallel, a second track of cooperation was opened between Riphah International University and the Shandong Tongshan Children Welfare and Development Center, covering culture, arts, education and international youth exchange, a reflection of the growing people-to-people dimension of China–Pakistan relations, in which youth exchange and cultural engagement are seen as important pillars of long-term friendship, CEN reported on Friday.

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