

PM Shehbaz warns renewed Middle East tensions could impact Pakistan's economy

PEAK POINT

ISLAMABAD: Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif said on Thursday that escalating tensions in the Middle East could adversely affect the country's economic outlook, reiterating the need for vigilance and readiness across all relevant institutions.

Chairing a high-level meeting to review the impact of regional tensions on the national economy, the prime minister said that by the grace of Allah, the national economy remained stable at present, but stressed the need to formulate a comprehensive strategy to enable timely action.

Iran and the US exchanged intensified fire on Thursday in a week-long escalation that has all but torn up last month's truce.

For the first time since an Islamabad Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) paused fighting last month, the United States launched two big waves of air strikes in a single day on Wednesday, mostly on targets near the coast in southern Iran.

Iran responded with missiles and drones fired at US military bases in neighbouring countries, including a major barrage at a recently expanded air base in Jordan.

The re-escalation has once again largely halted traffic through Hormuz, the world's most important shipping route for oil and gas, pushing up global energy prices.

The US and Iran signed the Islamabad Memorandum of Understanding on June 17, largely mediated by Pakistan.



ISLAMABAD: Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif chairs a meeting to review austerity measures in the evolving economic situation.

Security forces foil suicide attack on military post in South Waziristan's Wana, kill 4 terrorists: sources

PEAK POINT

LOWER SOUTH WAZIRISTAN: Security forces have foiled an attempted suicide attack targeting a military post in the Kori Kot area of Lower South Waziristan's Wana, killing four terrorists, sources said on Thursday.

According to security sources, the terrorists tried to attack the security forces' post using an explosives-laden vehicle late at night. But the attempt was foiled as the threat was detected, and the suicide attacker was killed, they said.

The sources said that three other terrorists were also killed in the action taken by security forces.

They said the targeted post was being used to protect the local population and to prevent the movement of Fitna-al-Khawarij — a term that the state uses for the banned Tehreek-i-Taliban — towards Wana Bazar.

The sources said that the terrorists wanted to destroy the post after their persistent failure in achieving their objectives. A search and clearance operation was launched in the area after their unsuccessful attempt to attack the post, they added.



US strikes Iran's coastal defences in fresh salvo; Tehran again targets American assets in Gulf states

PEAK POINT

NEW YORK: The US, early on Thursday, launched a second wave of attacks on Iran's coastal defences and missile sites within a span of 24 hours after reimposing a naval blockade of Iranian ports, and Tehran responded by again targeting US military sites in neighbouring Gulf countries. The latest escalation comes days after a fragile truce collapsed, raising the specter of a return to full-scale war, with Iran once again threatening to shut off more regional energy exports after blocking the vital Strait of Hormuz.

Hostilities have intensified since Iran said late on Saturday it had closed the Strait of Hormuz. Military operations are also keeping ships from transiting the vital artery, which carried about a fifth of global oil and gas shipments before the US-Israeli war on Iran. Brent crude oil, the international benchmark, closed at a one-month high of \$84.95 a barrel on Wednesday. US Central Command said the military had attacked coastal defence systems and cruise missile storage and launch sites on Iran's Greater Tunb Island starting around 6am EDT, then launched a second wave of strikes against multiple cities nine hours later.

"US forces struck Iranian command centres, air defence sites, missile and drone capabilities, and coastal surveillance facilities," it said in a statement, adding it also hit targets in Bandar Abbas, home to Iran's largest port and key navy and Iran's Revolutionary Guards facilities on the Strait of Hormuz.



Dar arrives in Shanghai to sign Pakistan's founding membership of China-led AI body

PEAK POINT

CHINA: Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Ishaq Dar reached China's Shanghai on two-day visit on Thursday to sign an agreement for Pakistan to join the World Artificial Intelligence Cooperation Organisation (WAICO) as a founding member, the Foreign Office (FO) said.

China proposed the creation of WAICO last year for AI governance. Upon his arrival in China, Dar was received by Shanghai Vice Mayor Wu Wei, Pakistan's Charge d'Affaires to China Aizaz Khan and Consul General of Pakistan in Shanghai Shahzad Ahmad Khan, the FO said on X.

It added that apart from attending the signing ceremony of WAICO, Dar will also participate in the World Artificial Intelligence Conference (WAIC) 2026 during the visit and engage with other leaders to advance international AI cooperation and promote inclusive, equitable AI governance. An earlier statement by the FO said that Dar would also hold a bilateral meeting with his Chinese counterpart.



US 'appreciates' Iran's release of American citizen: Trump

PEAK POINT

WASHINGTON: US President Donald Trump said on Wednesday that the United States "appreciates" Iran's release of an American citizen who he said was "wrongfully detained" in 2024.

"Iran has allowed an American Citizen, who was wrongfully detained in December of 2024 under the 'presidency' of Sleepy Joe Biden, to leave the Country," Trump wrote on his Truth Social platform. "She is now safely out of Iran, and in good condition."

The United States of America appreciates this gesture.

Pakistan urges US, Iran to 'end violence', resume technical-level talks

PEAK POINT

ISLAMABAD: (FO) The Foreign Office (FO) on Thursday urged the United States and Iran to "end violence" and resume technical-level talks, while noting that the Pakistan-mediated interim peace deal was "facing challenges".

Addressing a weekly press briefing, FO spokesperson Tahir Andrabi noted that the implementation of the Islamabad Memorandum of Understanding signed between the US and Iran last month was "facing challenges".

He affirmed that "Pakistan will continue to encourage all sides to end violence and resume technical-level talks in accordance" with the MoU and the joint statement issued by mediators Pakistan and Qatar on June 20 following the direct talks in tries. "As hostilities have Switzerland."

WEEKLY BRIEFING OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS

"We hope all parties will remain committed to the path of dialogue and diplomacy in resolving their outstanding issues," Andrabi added.

The remarks come as the warring parties continued to trade attacks on Thursday, with the US hitting Iran's coastal defences and missile sites and Iran retaliating by targeting American military sites in neighbouring Gulf coun-

progress," he affirmed.

The FO spokesperson stressed that ultimately, "all conflicts and disputes are resolved through dialogue at the negotiation table". He highlighted that the Islamabad MoU remained an "enduring framework for promoting peace, mutual respect and shared prosperity".

The FO spokesperson also underscored the "importance of ensuring the continued safety, security and freedom of maritime navigation" in the Strait of Hormuz. "Many countries, particularly those in the Global South, are being adversely affected by the situation in the Strait of Hormuz," he noted. "Pakistan recognises the urgent need to address the impact of the current situation on global energy supplies and other economic commodities."

continued over the past week, Pakistan reiterates its call on all parties to exercise maximum restraint and refrain from any actions that would further undermine peace and stability," Andrabi said.

"Pakistan firmly believes that there is no alternative to sustained engagement, dialogue and diplomacy in pursuit of the shared objectives of lasting peace, stability and



Russia, China vow deeper ties with Pakistan in focus

PEAK POINT

ISLAMABAD: Russia and China have reaffirmed their commitment to deepening strategic coordination and expanding cooperation across political, economic and regional domains, as they marked the 25th anniversary of the Treaty of Good-Neighbourliness and Friendly Cooperation. In a joint article, Russia's Ambassador to Pakistan Albert P Khorev and China's Ambassador Jiang Zaidong described the 2001 treaty as a "landmark document" that laid the foundation for a comprehensive strategic partnership, calling it a "vital constant" amid sweeping global changes. The envoys said the agreement formalised longstanding ties based on equality, mutual respect and win-win cooperation, and has since evolved into a model of major-country relations in a transforming global order. They also highlighted the significance of the 1996 Joint Declaration, which set the course for "equal and trusting partnership aimed at strategic cooperation in the 21st century," noting that both documents continue to guide bilateral ties.

SPORTS

PHF okays merit-based selection criteria for Hockey World Cup camp

FIH invitation a great honour for Pakistan: Shahbaz Senior

PEAK POINT

ISLAMABAD: Former Pakistan hockey captain Shahbaz Ahmad Senior has termed the invitation extended to him by the International Hockey Federation (FIH) for the 2026 Hockey World Cup as a great honour not only for himself but also for Pakistan, saying the recognition reflects the country's glorious legacy in world hockey. The FIH recently invited Shahbaz Ahmad Senior to attend the 2026 Hockey World Cup, to be held from August 15 to 30 in Belgium and the Netherlands, in recognition of his outstanding services to the game and his status as one of the sport's most celebrated figures. Shahbaz said he was delighted to receive the invitation and thanked the FIH for honouring him as one of the game's legends. "It is a great honour for me and for Pakistan. I am grateful to the FIH for inviting me to attend the Hockey World Cup 2026 as an FIH Legend. I will proudly attend the event," he said. Widely regarded as one of the greatest players in hockey history, Shahbaz earned worldwide acclaim for his dazzling dribbling skills, explosive acceleration and unmatched ball control, earning him the nicknames "The Man with Electric Heels" and the "Maradona of Hockey." He captained Pakistan to its last Hockey World Cup triumph in Sydney in 1994. "I always played hockey with complete dedication for Pakistan and had the privilege of leading the team to the World Cup title in 1994. Those memories will always remain close to my heart," he said.



PEAK POINT

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan Hockey Federation (PHF) has finalised a proposed merit-based selection criteria for the Pakistan Senior Men's National Team World Cup Camp, aimed at ensuring a transparent, objective and performance-driven selection process.

According to a PHF press release, players will be evaluated in five key areas: tactical under-

standing, technical ability, physical performance, mental strength and attitude.

Each player will be assessed on a scale of one to five in every category by the coaching staff during trials and training sessions.

Under the proposed criteria, a player must secure a score of three or above in at least three of the five evaluation areas to qualify for selection in the National Team

World Cup Camp.

The evaluation framework has been developed by the international coaches working with the PHF, based on global best practices, player monitoring and technical observation.

To ensure greater transparency and accountability, the assessment process will be supported by digital evidence, including GPS tracking data and video analytics.

The proposed selection criteria and recommendations will now be submitted to the PHF Selection Committee and the President of the federation for final approval.

The PHF said the initiative reflected its commitment to select the country's best talent through a fair, transparent and data-driven process as preparations continue for the upcoming Hockey World Cup.

National Chess Championships concludes at PSC



PEAK POINT

ISLAMABAD: The 34th National Men's Chess Championship and the 10th National Women's Chess Championship concluded at the Pakistan Sports Complex, with Zaman Sohail and Farha Siddiqi emerging as the national champions after impressive performances.

The championships, organized by the Chess Federation of Pakistan, featured around 250 male and female players from across the country competing in various categories.

Federal Minister for Parliamentary Affairs Dr. Tariq Fazal Chaudhry attended the closing ceremony as chief guest and distributed medals, certificates and cash prizes among the winners.

Speaking on the occasion, the minister said Pakistan's international standing was steadily improving and its diplomatic stature had strengthened globally. He highlighted the government's commitment to promoting after sports, identifying trophies, young talent and pro-

viding greater opportunities for athletes.

Dr. Tariq Fazal Chaudhry also praised Chess Federation of Pakistan President Syed Zeeshan Ali Naqvi for his contributions to sports, expressing confidence that the federation would continue to promote chess and enhance Pakistan's presence in international competitions. In the men's championship, Higher Education (HEC) player Zaman Sohail secured the national title with five points.

Punjab's M. Zarwaiz Shakhhaiz finished second with 4.5 points, while HEC's A.R. Akhtar claimed third place on the basis of a tie-break after also scoring 4.5 points.

Furqan shines as HEC claim National Weightlifting glory



Messi inspires Argentina into second straight World Cup final

PEAK POINT

ATLANTA: Lionel Messi inspired a stunning late comeback as Argentina overturned a one-goal deficit to beat England 2-1 on Wednesday, booking a place in the World Cup final with two goals in the final seven minutes.

Just when England appeared set for victory after Anthony Gordon's second-half goal, Argentina mounted a relentless late siege and got their reward as Fernandez levelled before Martinez completed the turnaround in the 92nd minute with Messi providing the pass for the equaliser and the cross for the winner.

The result added another unforgettable chapter to one of football's fiercest rivalries, a contest rich in history, emotion and tension from the opening whistle.

For England, dreams of a first World Cup final since

1966, when they enjoyed their only triumph at the global tournament, were dashed in the closing stages, while Argentina celebrated a comeback that kept alive their quest for another world title. With England inexpli-

minute substitute, struck the winner early in added time when Alexis Mac Allister drove a short off the post that Messi recovered. The 39-year-old talisman drove down the right to send in a brilliant ball for Martinez to



cably parked in their own end, an Argentina equaliser felt inevitable and, after waves of late pressure, Fernandez finally broke through in the 85th minute when Messi found him in space on the edge of the box to fire home from 20 metres past Jordan Pickford into the corner. Martinez, an 81st-

minute substitute, struck the winner early in added time when Alexis Mac Allister drove a short off the post that Messi recovered. The 39-year-old talisman drove down the right to send in a brilliant ball for Martinez to

head home. The victory carried particular significance for 39-year-old Messi, who was making what is widely expected to be the final World Cup appearance of his glittering career.

For England, the defeat was a devastating blow after matching Argentina for much of the contest.

Spain one step away from World Cup glory after dominant win over France



Ignite, Ministry of IT to host Indus RAS Expo 2026

PEAK POINT

As robotics and

ISLAMABAD: The National Technology Fund (Ignite), operating under the Ministry of Information Technology and Telecommunication (MoITT), will host the Indus RAS (Robotics and Autonomous Systems) Expo 2026 on July 22-23 at the Pak-China Friendship Centre in Islamabad.

The two-day national technology event will bring together policymakers, defence organizations, industry leaders, researchers, academia, startups, investors, students and technology professionals to strengthen Pakistan's robotics ecosystem and accelerate the adoption of autonomous technologies across strategic sectors.

autonomous systems continue to reshape economies worldwide, they are driving transformation across manufacturing, defence, agriculture, healthcare, logistics, transportation and public services. The Indus RAS Expo 2026 aims to position Pakistan at the forefront of this technological shift by providing a collaborative platform where innovators, researchers and industry representatives can showcase indigenous solutions, exchange knowledge and forge partnerships to translate research into real-world applications.

The expo will feature innovations in defence robotics, drone technologies, industrial automation, mar-



itime autonomous systems, agritech, Physical AI, human-machine collaboration, AI-powered decision support systems and emerging startup solutions.

Leading universities, research institutions, technology companies, startups and public-sector organizations will showcase locally developed products, advanced proto-

types, applied research and live technology demonstrations, highlighting Pakistan's growing capabilities in advanced engineering and intelligent systems. Among the flagship attractions will be the RAS Innovation Challenge and the RoboWars Competition, where students, engineers and startups will present original robotics,

drone and autonomous systems solutions before a panel of industry experts. The event will also feature high-level plenary sessions and an Immersive Experience Dome, combining interactive storytelling with 360-degree digital experiences to inspire the next generation of innovators and demonstrate the transformative potential of emerging technologies.

Federal Minister for Information Technology and Telecommunication Shaza Fatima Khawaja said, "Robotics and autonomous systems are becoming fundamental drivers of economic competitiveness, industrial modernization and national resilience. Indus RAS Expo 2026 reflects the govern-

ment's and Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif's commitment to investing in innovation, empowering local talent and creating opportunities for our researchers and entrepreneurs to develop technologies that can compete on the global stage." Ignite Chief Executive Officer Muhammad Bilal Abbasi said, "At Ignite, we believe innovation flourishes when academia, industry and government work together with a shared purpose. Indus RAS Expo 2026 is designed to strengthen these connections, accelerate the commercialization of indigenous technologies and provide innovators with a national platform to demonstrate solutions that can shape Pakistan's technological future."

OGRA Puts Gas Leakage Burden on Consumers as Senate Demands Protection

NADEEM TANOLI

ISLAMABAD: Gas consumers may be held responsible for leakage occurring after gas passes through their meters, OGRA told a Senate committee, as lawmakers raised concerns over the removal of meters and unnecessary hardship faced by the public. The Senate Standing Committee on Cabinet Secretariat said consumers must be protected from unfair treatment and should not lose their gas connections due to weak checking systems or administrative mistakes. The issue was discussed during a committee

meeting chaired by Senator Rana Mahmood Ul Hassan at Parliament House. The Oil and Gas Regulatory Authority informed the committee that it had addressed an earlier complaint involving the removal of gas meters over suspected leakage. OGRA clarified that consumers were responsible for gas leakage after it passed through the meter. However, committee members said simply placing responsibility on consumers was insufficient. They stressed that gas companies must properly identify the location and cause of a leak before taking action against a household.

The committee directed OGRA to introduce stronger consumer-protection measures so that people would not be punished without clear evidence. The Senate panel directed OGRA to promote modern technology, including smart gas meters. Smart meters can provide more accurate information about gas use and may help identify unusual consumption or possible leakage. The committee said better technology could reduce disputes between consumers and gas companies. It could also help prevent the sudden removal of meters based on unclear or disputed claims. Members

said ordinary families should not be forced to make repeated visits to government offices to restore a connection or challenge a decision. The committee asked OGRA to develop a system that is clear, quick and fair for consumers. Committee Chairman Senator Rana Mahmood Ul Hassan also directed OGRA to address administrative shortcomings within Sui Northern Gas Pipelines Limited. The committee did not detail every shortcoming, but its direction showed concern over how consumer cases were being handled. Lawmakers said gas

companies must improve their complaint systems and ensure that staff follow proper rules before removing meters or taking other actions. They stressed that officials responsible for delays or unfair treatment must be held accountable. The committee also reviewed payments owed to oil marketing companies. OGRA informed members that it had held meetings with the companies after earlier directions from the committee. Document requirements relating to the settlement of price differences had also been relaxed. The committee appreciated

the step but said reducing paperwork would have little benefit if companies still did not receive their payments on time. It directed OGRA to ensure timely settlement of payments to oil marketing companies. Members said delayed payments could damage the companies' financial position and affect the country's fuel-supply system. The committee directed OGRA to protect consumers, improve gas company performance, and ensure that legitimate payments to oil marketing firms are not unnecessarily delayed.

Opinion & Editorial

Arif Mehmood Khan
Group Editor: 0333-5366814
Samra Athar Kakakhel
Resident Editor
Nadim Tanoli
Joint Editor: Mob-0301-7777874
Email: editor.peakpoint@gmail.com
www.peakpoint.pk

Taxing retailers

The government's endeavour to bring in retailers with a favourable tax slab is appreciated. The intention is not only to ease complex accounting processes - as around three million retailers countrywide are currently untaxed - but also to bolster the exchequer with a decent turnover. The recent proposal introduces a voluntary income tax regime for small shopkeepers, offering them exemptions from audits, withholding taxes, and mandatory digital invoicing. Traders should take this as a bonanza offer to become part of the formal economy. Individual retailers with an annual turnover of up to Rs200 million will have the option to pay an income tax equal to 1% of their gross turnover, or a minimum fixed tax of Rs25,000, even if taxes already deducted at source exceed their liability. This proposal offers a clear path forward; the FBR must ensure robust enforcement, and shopkeepers who evade compliance must be taken to task. All previous efforts to bring wholesalers and retailers into the tax net were politically jaundiced. This has taken a toll on the economy, as major revenue earners were coddled at the expense of national development. It is ironic that the salaried class pays a staggering income tax of over Rs630 billion, whereas corporate entities, real estate, and traders thrive on the premise of their nuisance value.

Pakistan's Ground Zero

Ali Taseer Sheikh
ILGIT-BALTISTAN

Pakistan's climate ground zero. For decades, the country's climate emergency was narrated from its floodplains: Sindh's submerged villages, Punjab's swollen tributaries, the 2010 and 2022 disasters. These were the consequences of a deeper story. The origin has abruptly moved upstream. GB is no longer the water tower that occasionally leaks. It is where the Indus system's first disasters now begin, not where they arrive.

Heatwaves once confined to Sindh's cities and Punjab's plains now reach the Upper Indus Basin (UIB). In June 2026 alone, the Met Office issued its second GLOF (glacial lake outburst flood) alert of the month, warning that sustained high temperatures across GB and KP were accelerating glacier and snowfield melt to the point that existing lakes were expanding and new ones forming in real time.

This follows a pattern of near-annual escalation: in August 2025, a GLOF from the Shishper glacier tore through Hassanabad Nullah in Hunza, severing the Karakoram Highway, in the highest-volume event since 2018. Each year now sets its own benchmark. Underneath the visible flooding sits a less visible mechanism. Central Karakoram's glaciers are not simply shrinking the way the Himalayan glaciers to their east are; some have been sta-

ble or even advancing since 1990 — a documented anomaly.

But stability at the surface has no meant stability underneath. Meltwater cuts channels through the ice itself, moving downward by gravity, forming englacial tunnels that destabilise glaciers from within even where their outward mass looks intact.

That is why river discharge from central Karakoram basins rose through 1985-2010 even as the glaciers appeared, by satellite, to hold steady. The lakes are the visible symptom; the tunnels are the mechanism; community displacement is the result. Pakistan currently counts 3,044 glacial lakes, with some 36 formally classified as hazardous and likely to affect over 7.1 million people. Precipitation is changing structurally, in step with temperatures. Snow consolidates into firm, and firm into ice, a process called firnification, but now there's less time for the process: more runs off as meltwater first, so the basin drains down its snowpack faster than it replenishes. High-altitude western UIB stations like Shendure, Yasin, Ziarat, Rattu, Chilas and Shigar, show a statistically significant rise in monsoon precipitation at elevation.

Climate models project the monsoon extending north and northwest into the UIB, with a rising share of the basin's precipitation falling as rain rather than snow. The monsoon, once a lowland

event arriving after the high-altitude melt season had run its course, is beginning to overlap it. Rain on an already melting snowpack accelerates run-off.

We have a flood regime that no longer respects Pakistan's disaster-response calendar. The consequence is a flood regime that no longer respects Pakistan's disaster-response calendar or its fourth national flood protection plan (2018-2028). GLOFs and monsoon floods, once sequential risks with distinct seasons and targets, are becoming concurrent and compounding, a different planning problem entirely.

Debris and mudslides change the underlying ecology in ways ordinary flooding does not: a riverine flood leaves silt, while a flow carrying boulders and glacial till causes irreversible loss and damage to the ecosystem. Buner and Lower Dir showed this in August 2025, when flash floods carried boulders flattening neighbourhoods and leaving survivors standing on rubble that used to be farmland. There is 'non-economic loss and damage', the central pillar of the global loss and damage discourse. It shows up in the erosion of proud local heritage of grafting glaciers. GB is home to more than 50 languages and dialects, including Domaaki and Wakhi, classified by Unesco as critically endangered, and Burushaski, a language spoken nowhere else on earth.

Courtesy Dawn

The grief of Karbala

Syed Jalal Hussain

When the last light of Ashura fades, the world is drawn back to a desert where the sky burned red and a small caravan stood before the machinery of an empire. Karbala was a battlefield, but it was also the place where grief learned to speak. A grief so old that centuries have passed over it, yet alive enough to still enter homes and unsettle the soul.

Karbala is remembered as a story of courage. But after the swords had fallen silent and the dust had settled, another story began: the story of those who survived.

The story of Karbala continued through grief.

That grief became a force of its own, carried in sermons and testimonies through generations. Yazid could command armies, but he could not command memory. He could silence bodies, but not what those bodies came to represent. This is the enduring miracle of Karbala: its grief transformed into living testimony.

In the aftermath of Ashura, grief was carried by those with every reason to collapse beneath its weight. The women and children of Karbala were made to walk through humiliation and captivity, expected to be evidence of defeat. Instead, they became custodians of truth. In that journey from Karbala to Kufa and Damascus, grief acquired a language, becoming testimony against power and cruelty. No figure represents this more powerfully than Zainab bint Ali. If Hussain's stand revealed the courage of sacrifice, Zainab's voice revealed the courage of survival. Her grief rose with dignity, unbroken and unafraid. In the court of Yazid, with the horrors of Karbala still fresh in her heart, she spoke as though the battlefield itself had entered the room. Her sermon turned a spectacle of triumph into a reckoning. She showed that grief, when joined with truth, becomes more dangerous than any army.

Courtesy Tribune

Aleem visits Jalalpur Pirwala section of Motorway, directs speedy completion of projects



PEAK POINT

ISLAMABAD: Federal Minister for Communications, Abdul Aleem Khan on Thursday paid a comprehensive visit to the Jalalpur Pirwala section of the M-5 Motorway to inspect the progress of various ongoing development projects.

During the visit, the minister issued strict directives to expedite the pace of work. He said all ongoing development projects on the

motorway must be completed at the earliest without any further delay and ensure the provision of world-class facilities to commuters, said to a press release.

Aleem visits Jalalpur Pirwala section of Motorway, directs speedy completion of projects

Secretary Communications and Chairman National Highway Authority (NHA), accompanied the minister during the visit.

Inspecting different project sites, Abdul Aleem Khan instructed the officials to accelerate the pace of work and ensure that all ongoing development projects were completed without delay.

As part of the visit, he also inspected the motorway's service and rest areas, where he reviewed the newly constructed restrooms, kitchens and overall cleanliness standards.

Expressing his resolve to uplift commuter services, the Minister stated that passengers travelling on the motorway deserve the highest quality of service. He said the rest areas must provide passengers with top-tier, world-class amenities.

He also took notice of the under-construction mosque at a service area and instructed the authorities to complete the project on a priority basis. Stressing that public health and convenience remained the government's top priority.

Sharjeel Memon urges Fazlur Rehman to withdraw remarks on armed forces, martyrs

PEAK POINT

KARACHI: Senior Sindh Minister Sharjeel Inam Memon on Thursday urged Jamiat Ulema-Islam Fazl (JUI-F) chief Maulana Fazlur Rehman to withdraw his recent remarks regarding Pakistan's armed forces and martyrs, saying the statement had caused pain to the families of fallen soldiers and sent the wrong message at a time when the country should remain united.

The remarks were made by the JUI-F chief during a recent public gathering, where his comments about the armed forces and the country's martyrs drew strong criticism from political leaders and other quarters.

Speaking at a press conference in Karachi, Memon said he respected the veteran politician but believed he should reconsider his comments. "My request to



Maulana Fazlur Rehman is that he should take his statement back," he said, adding, "Withdrawing your words does not diminish your stature; rather, it enhances it. We are all human and can make mistakes."

He said the rank of martyrs remained unchanged regardless of political statements but argued that such remarks could discourage the families of those who had sacrificed their lives for the country. Memon said Indian media had amplified the remarks and questioned who stood to benefit from such statements.

Ahsan seeks strategic partnerships with US institutions to advance Pakistan's knowledge economy

PEAK POINT

BOSTON (USA): Federal Minister for Planning, Development and Special Initiatives Professor Ahsan Iqbal has sought strategic partnerships with leading American universities, research centres and innovation institutions to strengthen Pakistan's higher education, research, climate resilience and innovation ecosystem, saying the country was committed to building a knowledge-based economy through global collaboration.

During a series of high-level engagements in Boston, the minister met academic leaders, researchers and innovation experts at Boston University, the Harvard Kennedy School's Growth Lab, J-PAL and the Cambridge Innovation Center (CIC) to explore cooperation in higher education, public policy, economic transformation, climate resilience and technology commercialization.

At Boston University, Ahsan met Prof. Adil Najam and Vice President for Research Dr. Ken Lutchien to discuss expanding academic coop-

eration and strengthening Pakistan's human capital through advanced research partnerships.

He briefed the participants on the government's flagship US-Pakistan Knowledge Corridor initiative, launched to enable 10,000 Pakistani scholars to pursue PhD studies at the world's leading universities. He proposed a collaborative framework under which Pakistani doctoral researchers could undertake research at top American universities on Pakistan's priority development challenges, with the institutions facilitating tuition support while Pakistan bears logistical expenses. The proposal was welcomed, with both sides expressing interest in exploring the partnership further. "The strength of the United States lies in the strength of its universities. Pakistan is committed to building a knowledge-based economy by investing in quality education, research and innovation through partnerships with world-class institutions," the minister said. He also highlighted Pakistan's efforts to expand higher education enrolment.

IT minister arrives in China to attend World AI conference

PEAK POINT

ISLAMABAD: Federal Minister for Information Technology and Telecommunication Shaza Fatima Khawaja arrived in Shanghai, China, on Thursday to participate in the World Artificial Intelligence Conference (WAIC) 2026.

According to a news release issued by the Ministry of Information Technology and Telecommunication, the minister is playing an active and key role during her visit to Shanghai and is participating in high-level technical negotiations on the establishment of the World Artificial Intelligence Cooperation Organization (WAICO).

Shaza Fatima Khawaja will represent Pakistan at the World Artificial Intelligence Conference 2026 being held in Shanghai.

During her visit, the minister is also scheduled to hold important bilateral meetings with global technology leaders and foreign ministers to promote cooperation in artificial intelligence.

Pakistan showcases youth led, inclusive AI vision at UN forum

PEAK POINT

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan called for inclusive, human-centered, and equitable artificial intelligence governance at a high-level discussion held at the United Nations Headquarters on Thursday, jointly organised by the Permanent Missions of Pakistan and Tajikistan and the Prime Minister's Youth Programme. The event brought together diplomats, UN officials, technology experts, academics, and youth representatives to explore how AI can advance sustainable development through innovation, inclusion, and resilience while ensuring that no country or community is left behind. Speakers warned that unequal access to digital infras-



structure, financing, technology, and skilled human resources could widen existing global inequalities, particularly for developing countries.

They stressed that AI must become a tool for shared progress by expanding access to technology, investing in capacity building, and placing young people at the centre of sustainable development efforts.

Chairman Prime Minister's Youth Programme Rana Mashhood Ahmad Khan.

Five M.Phil scholars successfully defend Biotechnology research at Women University Mardan

PEAK POINT

ISLAMABAD: The Department of Biotechnology, Women University Mardan, successfully conducted the M.Phil Viva Voice Examinations of five research scholars in the Committee Room of the University on 16 July 2026. The successful defenses reflected the Department's commitment to advancing innovative research addressing environmental sustainability, human health, and industrial challenges. The Department expressed its sincere gratitude to the Vice Chancellor, Prof. Dr. Razia Sultana, for her continued support in strengthening research activities and promoting academic excellence at



Women University Mardan. The viva voice examinations were attended by Dr. Hina Jabeen, Head of the Department of Biotechnology, along with faculty members, supervisors Dr. Nadia Sharif and Dr. Neelam Zeb, representatives from the Directorate of Academics, and the distinguished External Examiners, Prof. Dr. Sadaf Niaz and Prof. Dr. Tahir Usman from Abdul Wali Khan.



BOSTON: Federal Minister for Planning, Development & Special Initiatives, Ahsan Iqbal, meets senior academic leaders at Boston University during his visit to the United States to promote collaboration in higher education, research, innovation and public policy.

Sufficient petroleum stocks available to meet demand: NCMC

PEAK POINT

ISLAMABAD: The National Coordination and Management Council (NCMC) on Thursday noted that sufficient petroleum product stocks were available in the country to meet the prevailing demand.

The meeting was convened to comprehensively review the availability of petroleum products across the country. Representatives of the Oil Companies Advisory Council (OCAC), the Federal Board of Revenue (FBR) Customs Wing, the Oil and Gas Regulatory Authority (OGRA), and other relevant stakeholders attended the



meeting, according to a news release. During the meeting, the supply-side challenges high-

lighted by OCAC representatives were discussed and addressed.

The committee observed

that the concerns raised by the OCAC primarily stemmed from an abnormal increase in petroleum prod-

uct sales during the first 15 days of July. Analysis presented by OGRA also indicated the

possibility of hoarding in anticipation of a potential price increase.

The NCMC emphasized that OGRA's enforcement mechanism should play a more proactive role and urged provincial governments to ensure there is no hoarding and that petroleum products remain readily available to the public without inconvenience.

The committee reaffirmed that petroleum product stocks in the country are sufficient and directed all relevant stakeholders to ensure an uninterrupted supply across the country.