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Founded By:
(Late) Rehmat Khan

ABC CERTIFIED

Email: editor.peakpoint@gmail.com
Website: www.peakpoint.pk

Executive Group Editor
Arif Mehmood Khan



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PM orders strict implementation of austerity, energy-saving measures; Friday declared weekly additional holiday

PEAK POINT

ISLAMABAD: Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif on Tuesday directed all federal ministries and divisions to strictly implement the government's austerity and energy conservation measures, emphasizing that Pakistan must ensure economic stability despite the prevailing regional and global challenges.

Chairing a review meeting at the Prime Minister's House on the implementation of the government's announced austerity and energy-saving initiatives, the prime minister approved making Friday the weekly additional holiday as part of the broader strategy to conserve energy and reduce government expenditures.

Addressing the meeting, the prime minister

said the government was making every possible effort to keep the national economy stable despite difficult international circumstances. He stressed that effective implementation of austerity and energy conservation measures was essential to achieving this goal.

The prime minister informed participants that a special committee headed by Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Ishaq Dar had been formed to oversee the implementation of these measures. The committee will review progress on a daily basis and submit reports to the government.

PM Shehbaz Sharif also directed that the austerity measures taken by government departments should undergo a third-party audit to assess their impact and ensure transparency and effectiveness.



ISLAMABAD: Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif Chairing a review meeting at the Prime Minister's House on the implementation of the government's announced austerity and energy-saving initiatives.

In phone call with Bahrain's FM, Dar reiterates Pakistan's call for de-escalation in Iran war

PEAK POINT



ISLAMABAD: Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Ishaq Dar, on Tuesday, in a phone call with his Bahraini counterpart, reiterated Pakistan's call for de-escalation and

dialogue for stability in the Middle East amid escalating tensions in the region.

Iran, Pakistan's western neighbour, has been embroiled in a war with the United States and Israel since the latter's February 28 strikes that assassinated its supreme leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei. In retaliation for the strikes, Iran resorted to targeting neighbouring countries, which house US bases, including Bahrain.

According to a statement by the Foreign Office (FO), Dar spoke with Bahrain's Foreign Minister Dr Abdullah Bin Rashid Al Zayani last night, and the two "exchanged views on the developments in the Middle East and the wider region, conveying grave concern over recent attacks, including in Bahrain".

FO added that during the call, Dar "reaffirmed Pakistan's solidarity with Bahrain and its people". He also underscored the need for "de-escalation.

Pakistan, India exchange sharp words at UN Security Council over Afghanistan

PEAK POINT

WASHINGTON: During a heated debate on Afghanistan at the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) on Monday, Pakistan lambasted India's criticism of cross-border strikes, accusing Delhi of complicity in the terror threat at the western border. Pakistan's Permanent Representative Asim Iftikhar Ahmad exchanged strong words with his Indian and Afghan counterparts after the former accused Islamabad of "flagrant violations of international law" during the Pak-Afghan conflict.

During the session, India's Permanent Representative Parvathaneni Harish said his country "reiterates UNSG's deep concern at

civilian casualties caused by cross-border violence representatives, said he was compelled to take the



and strongly condemns airstrikes which are flagrant violations of international law, UN Charter and state sovereignty". India also expressed "grave concern on 'trade and transit terrorism'" and said "these vulnerabilities of Land-Locked Developing Countries should not be weaponised". Ambassador Ahmad, following the remarks from the Indian and Afghan

at length about the security situation in Afghanistan, mentioning civilian casualties and border clashes, there was no acknowledgement of the "terrorist threat emanating from Afghanistan" because of India's own complicity in the situation. He added that Pakistan had provided "irrefutable evidence of India's collusion with terrorist groups that are engaged in orchestrating violent attacks against Pakistan".

"One can sense India's pain in seeing its heavy investment in the Afghan terrorist franchise going to waste as a result of Pakistan's precise and effective action against terrorist camps and support bases inside Afghanistan," Ambassador Ahmad remarked.

UN condemns attack on girls' school in Iran, calls for independent investigation

PEAK POINT

NEW YORK: The United Nations has expressed serious concern over the recent attack on a girls' school in Iran.

At a press briefing, UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres's spokesperson Stephane Dujarric described reports of students being killed in the attack as deeply regrettable and emphasized that an independent investigation into the school attack is necessary. He stated that attacks on civilians in the Middle East.

Pak Army destroys Afghan Taliban posts in Arandu, Khurram sectors

PEAK POINT

PESHAWAR: The Pakistan Army has successfully destroyed key posts and centres in the Arandu and Kurram sectors during the ongoing operation Ghazab Lil-Haq, in response to the Afghan Taliban regime's unprovoked aggression. Security sources said the Afghan Taliban were forced to flee their posts due to effective attacks and retaliatory actions by the Pakistan Army. The armed forces were targeting only Afghan Taliban and Fitna al Khwarji hideouts as well as military installations, they added.

Donald Trump vows Iran war will 'end very soon'

PEAK POINT

WASHINGTON: President Donald Trump on Monday said that US military operations in Iran would be ending soon, reassuring markets that have been thrust into chaos by a war still reverberating across the Middle East.

The war had sent stock markets slumping and oil prices soaring on Monday as Tehran, under new leader Mojtaba Khamenei, fired a fresh barrage of missiles at its Gulf neighbours and signalled that the strategic Strait of Hormuz would likely remain closed.

But Wall Street climbed into positive territory on Trump's signals of a short war, with Tokyo and Seoul also opening Tuesday strongly, despite

the president's continued threats to expand the harder," Trump told a news conference in



campaign if Iran did not fall in line.

Oil prices also reversed course, falling as much as 5% a day after benchmark crude rocketed past \$100 a barrel — its highest level since Russia's invasion of Ukraine in 2022.

"It's going to be ended soon, and if it starts up again they'll be hit even

with Iranian forces launching a fresh wave of missile and drone attacks on Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, Qatar, the UAE and Israel.

Another missile was also fired at Nato member Türkiye, the second such incident in five days, with the alliance's air defences intercepting it before it could reach its target.

Diplomatic efforts focused Monday on the highly strategic Strait of Hormuz, which has been blocked to nearly all oil tankers — sending shockwaves across the global economy. French President Emmanuel Macron said his country and its allies were working on a "purely defensive" mission to reopen the strait, through which nearly 20% of the world's crude oil.

Florida, after telling lawmakers that the campaign would be a "short-term excursion."

Iran's Revolutionary Guards replied Tuesday that they, not the Americans, would "determine the end of the war". Trump's remarks came on the first day in power for the 56-year-old son of late leader Ali Khamenei,

Foreign ministry says mass evacuation from Middle East not required

PEAK POINT



ISLAMABAD: Senior officials of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MoFA) on Tuesday assured the National Assembly Standing Committee on Overseas Pakistanis that there was no situation requiring a mass evacuation of Pakistani nationals from the Middle East. The head of the MoFA's Crisis Management Cell gave a detailed briefing to the NA committee about the number of Pakistanis stranded in various Middle Eastern countries due to the ongoing conflict and about the efforts being made to repatriate them.

In the meeting, presided over by PPP MNA Syed Agha Rafiqullah, the committee members expressed their serious concerns.



SPORTS



PSL 11 schedule revealed as Pakistan's premier T20 league expands to eight teams



PEAK POINT
LAHORE: The Pakistan Cricket Board has unveiled the schedule for the 11th edition of the HBL Pakistan Super League, marking a major expansion of the country's flagship T20 competition. The tournament will run from 26 March to 3 May, featuring 44 matches across six cities in a 39-day cricketing spectacle. For the first time since the league's inception in 2016, eight teams will compete in the tournament. Two new franchises, Hyderabad Kingsmen and Rawalpindi Pindiz, have joined United, Karachi Kings, Lahore Qalandars, Multan Sultans,

est PSL auction. The Kingsmen were acquired for Rs175 crore, while the Pindiz secured their place in the league with a bid worth Rs245 crore. Matches will be staged in Faisalabad, Karachi, Lahore, Multan, Peshawar and Rawalpindi. The upcoming edition will also mark the first time that Faisalabad and Peshawar host PSL fixtures, widening the league's footprint across Pakistan. The participating teams in the expanded league include Hyderabad Kingsmen, Islamabad United, Karachi Kings, Lahore Qalandars, Multan Sultans,

Peshawar Zalmi, Quetta Gladiators and Rawalpindi Pindiz. Under the tournament structure, each team will play 10 matches during the league stage. The top four teams will advance to the knockout phase consisting of Qualifier 1, Eliminator, Qualifier 2 and the Final. The playoffs are scheduled to take place from 28 April to 3 May, with the final set to be held at Gaddafi Stadium in Lahore. A reserve day for the final has also been scheduled for 4 May in case of weather interruptions. The tournament calendar includes 12 double-header match-days, offering fans multiple fixtures on the same day. Gaddafi Stadium will host three of those double-headers. Gaddafi Stadium will serve as the primary venue of the tournament, staging a total of 15 matches including the opening fixture on 26 March between Lahore Qalandars and Hyderabad Kingsmen. The Lahore venue holds a special place in PSL history. It hosted the first PSL match played on Pakistani soil in 2017 when the final was staged there, and has since held the championship matches in 2022, 2023 and 2025.

India's Arshdeep fined for throwing ball at NZ's Mitchell in T20 World Cup final



PEAK POINT
DUBAI: India fast bowler Arshdeep Singh was fined by the International Cricket Council (ICC) on Tuesday after an incident during the Twenty20 World Cup final when he hurled the ball at New Zealand batsman Daryl Mitchell.

In the 11th over of New Zealand's chase on Sunday, Mitchell played the ball to Arshdeep and the bowler threw it straight back at him, hitting the New Zealand batter on the pads. Mitchell was livid and advanced on Arshdeep, who turned around and walked back without apologising, forcing the umpire to step in. India captain Suryakumar Yadav then came over and apologised. The ICC said Arshdeep breached the ICC Code of Conduct for "throwing a ball (or any other item of cricket equipment) at or near a player in an inappropriate and/or dangerous manner", handing him a fine of 15% of his match fee. Arshdeep, who apologised to Mitchell at the end of the over and again after the match, accepted the sanction. India beat New Zealand by 96 runs to become the first side to lift the men's T20 World Cup for a third time.

Pakistan's squash future bright with talented young players: Qamar Zaman



PEAK POINT
ISLAMABAD: Former World Squash Champion and Executive Member of Pakistan Squash Federation (PSF) Qamar Zaman, has expressed optimism about Pakistan's squash future, citing the presence of talented young players who can excel on the international stage. In an interview

with APP, he said that several training camps have been established in different cities to bring forward new talent. He added that renowned players must further improve their fitness, talent and morale so that they can achieve success and raise Pakistan's profile in international squash. Zaman, who is also the Chairman of the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Squash Association said that training camps are currently underway in Peshawar and Lahore to nurture emerging talent. He is personally supervising the training camp in Peshawar, where 110 boys and girls from Under-7, Under-8, Under-9, Under-10 and Under-11 categories are receiving coaching during the holy month of Ramadan. He said the players are being trained by chief coaches under modern and high-standard training methods. He added that a tournament for these young players will also be organized this month to provide them with match practice. Similarly, the Pakistan Squash Federation has also established a training camp in Lahore where junior players are undergoing training. Zaman noted that Pakistan currently has two promising players — Noor Zaman, who recently won the World Under-23 Championship in Karachi, and Hamza Khan, the winner of a World Junior Squash event — have the potential to achieve success for Pakistan in international mega events.

Raptors win Pak-China Exhibition Basketball match



Pakistan National Women Lacrosse team wins silver medal at Asian Lacrosse Games 2026

PEAK POINT
RIYADH, SAUDI ARABIA: The Pakistan National Women Lacrosse Team created history by winning the Silver Medal at the Asian Lacrosse Games 2026, held in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia. This remarkable achievement marks Pakistan's first-ever international representation in the sport of lacrosse, making the victory even more historic and inspiring. Pakistan's women's team delivered outstanding performances throughout the tournament, competing against experienced Asian teams and securing second place despite having limited resources and no substitute players, a testament to their resilience, discipline, and fighting spirit. Miss Fiza Zahir emerged as the star of the tournament, scoring an impressive 24 goals, the highest by any player in the competition, and playing a crucial role in Pakistan's journey to the final. The medal awarding ceremony was honored by the pres-

ence of Mr. Fahad, President of the Saudi Lacrosse Federation, who personally awarded the medals to the Pakistan team, recognizing their exceptional performance. The team's success was strongly supported by Mr. Irfan Khan, Team Coach, and at the international level. Mr. Mansoor Ahmad Khan, President of the Pakistan Lacrosse Federation, praised the players, officials, and management for their tireless efforts and termed the silver medal a "huge milestone for women's sports



Mr. Syed Muhammad Ilyas Shah, Team Manager, whose extraordinary services, dedication, and strategic management played a vital role in securing this historic medal. The Pakistan National Women Lacrosse Team was led by Chef De Mission Engr. Taifoor Zarin, whose leadership and commitment ensured Pakistan's dignified participation and lacrosse development in Pakistan. "This historic achievement not only reflects the determination of Pakistan's women athletes but also opens a new chapter for the growth of lacrosse in Pakistan, inspiring young girls across the country to dream big and represent Pakistan on the global stage."

Pakistan hockey team earns Rs 30m reward after World Cup qualification

PEAK POINT
ISLAMABAD: President of the Pakistan Hockey Federation (PHF) Mohyuddin Ahmad Wani on Monday congratulated the national hockey team for qualifying for the FIH Hockey World Cup 2026 after an eight-year gap and announced a cash reward of Rs 30 million for the players on behalf of Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif. The announcement came during a



meeting between the PHF president and the national team management and players led by head coach Khawaja Junaid, said a news release issued by the PHF Media Cell. During the meeting, Wani congratulated the team on their outstanding performance in the World Cup Qualifier round and said qualifying for the World Cup after

eight years was a positive sign for the future of Pakistan hockey. He said the Rs 30 million cash prize had been announced by Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif, who is the chief patron of the PHF, in recognition of the team's remarkable achievement. Wani said the entire nation needed to encourage and support the players so that these heroes could continue to perform at a higher level and bring more laurels to the country.

5G spectrum auction historic step for Pakistan's digital future: Shaza Fatima



PEAK POINT

ISLAMABAD: Federal Minister for Information Technology and Telecommunication Shaza Fatima Khawaja on Tuesday said the spectrum auction was a historic step that would improve digital connectivity and strengthen Pakistan's digital economy.

Speaking at the opening ceremony of the Spectrum Auction for Next Generation Mobile Services (NGMS)/5G, she said Pakistan had seen several technological revolu-

tions in the past, but the current phase of digital transformation was especially important for the country.

The ceremony was attended by Information Minister Attaullah Tarar, Finance Minister Muhammad Aurangzeb, Pakistan Telecommunication Authority Chairman Hafeez Ur Rehman and several parliamentarians. The minister said different institutions worked together to make the spectrum available for the auction. She added that the development was an encouraging moment for Pakistan as it would help

the country move towards the next generation of technology.

She said Pakistan entered the 3G and 4G era during the government of former Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif between 2014 and 2016. Since then, no major spectrum auction has been held, which has caused problems with internet quality and user experience.

Shaza Fatima said the auction would not only introduce 5G services but also improve the quality and capacity of existing 4G networks.

She said fast, reliable and affordable internet had become a basic need for citizens, adding that digital connectivity now played an important role in sectors such as the economy, agriculture, industry and national security. The minister said the government had also removed right-of-way charges for telecom infrastructure to speed up the expansion of fiber networks across the country.

She added that a national fiberization plan would soon be launched to help telecom companies expand their infrastructure after acquiring spec-

Atta Tarar cautions against undue online debates on foreign policy

PEAK POINT

ISLAMABAD: Federal Minister for Information and Broadcasting Attaullah Tarar on Tuesday urged all stakeholders to refrain from unnecessary social media debates regarding the country's foreign policy.

Talal Chaudhry, he called on citizens to prioritize national interest over digital engagement and monetization.

The minister emphasized that Pakistan maintains close, fraternal relations with regional and Islamic countries, including Iran and multiple Arab nations.

He highlighted a concerning trend where vloggers and social media users post sensational interpretations of international relations to derive 'views' and financial gain.

He warned that such speculative content is dangerous, as



foreign entities often misinterpret private media commentary as official state policy.

Tarar clarified that the Ministry of Foreign Affairs remains the central authority for communicating Pakistan's official stance, supported by regular briefings from the Prime Minister's Office and the Deputy Prime Minister's Office.

He noted that while domestic politics allows for a high degree of criticism, foreign policy must be handled with extreme sensitivity.

Law minister stresses need for caution when discussing Pakistan's foreign policy amid tensions in Middle East

PEAK POINT

ISLAMABAD: Law Minister Azam Nazeer Tarar on Tuesday called on the media to exercise caution when discussing matters related to Pakistan's foreign policy amid escalating tensions in the Middle East, citing "unease" voiced by "friendly countries".

He made the remarks while addressing a press conference alongside Information Minister Attaullah Tarar and Minister of State for Interior Talal Chaudhry.

The press conference came against the backdrop of conflict in Iran, which has been embroiled in a war with the United States and Israel since the latter's February 28 strikes, prompting retaliatory strikes from Iran on neighbouring countries, which house US bases.

Taking note of the recent escalation in the Middle East following US-Israeli attacks on Iran, the minister stressed the need for caution in the "narrative on these matters on social media, electronic media, and print media".

"As a nation, we must keep in mind that when expressing our views, we have to keep the constitution and Pakistan's foreign policy under consideration," he said.

He added that the analyses coming out of Pakistan had caused "unease on diplomatic fronts from at least a friendly country or some other corner".

"We have been asked if this was Pakistan's stance or an individual one," he added. At the outset of the press conference, the minister reiterated Pakistan's stance on the tensions in the Middle East, stating that the country had been pushing for efforts to "find a diplomatic solution" to the conflict. In light of the prevailing situation, the minister urged the need to be careful in the "narratives coming from media as well as social media".

"Pakistan is a responsible state and a nuclear state. Pakistan has an essential role in the region; it has its own identity and its own stance in terms of its defence and foreign policy," the minister said. He noted that Article 19.

Mohsin Naqvi meets prominent Shia scholars from across Pakistan

PEAK POINT

ISLAMABAD: Interior Minister Mohsin Naqvi met with prominent Shia scholars from across Pakistan. During the meeting, in view of the prevailing situation, it was agreed that all processions across Pakistan on 21st Ramadan, the martyrdom day of Imam Ali (AS), will conclude by the time of Maghrib prayers.

It was also decided during the meeting to reduce the duration of other processions. Detailed discussions were held regarding the security arrangements and a fool-proof security plan for processions and religious gatherings on the occasion of the martyrdom day of Imam Ali (AS) on 21st Ramadan.

Speaking on the occasion, Interior Minister Mohsin Naqvi said that every possible measure will be taken to ensure the safety and facilitation of mourners.

He stated that religious scholars have always stood firmly with Pakistan during difficult times, and today, once again, Pakistan seeks their unity and solidarity. Mohsin Naqvi emphasized that in the current

CM Maryam announces CCD as Punjab's premier investigation agency

PEAK POINT

LAHORE: Chief Minister Maryam Nawaz Sharif has decided to elevate the Crime Control Department (CCD) into Punjab's premier investigation agency, aiming to strengthen crime control and public trust.

The CM said the CCD's scope will be expanded and modelled on five of the world's leading crime control agencies, incorporating advanced forensic techniques, investigative skills, modern technology, AI-based software, and state-of-the-art intelligence surveillance.

Specialised machinery and equipment will be provided to track and monitor criminals, while the department's headquarters will be upgraded with cutting-edge facilities.

Maryam Nawaz Sharif also announced that CCD offices, police stations, and residential units will be established in every division, district, and tehsil of Punjab. Following Eid-ul-Fitr, a campaign against illegal firearms will be launched across the province. The CCD's initiatives have already yielded results: homicide and crimes against women have dropped significantly, robberies have decreased by 77 percent.



Sindh schools to close from March 16-31, Friday to be WFH for govt offices as part of austerity measures

PEAK POINT

KARACHI: The Sindh government on Tuesday announced its own set of austerity measures to curtail the economic impact of the ongoing regional tensions, stating that schools will observe a spring vacation and government offices will work from home on Fridays.

Addressing a press conference, Sindh Senior Minister Sharjeel Inam Memon said schools across the province will have a "spring vacation from March 16 to 31, while colleges and universities will switch to online classes".

However, he noted, no ongoing exams will be postponed. The minister also clarified



that, contrary to some media reports, government functioning will not stop on Fridays. Instead, government officials will work from home (WFH).

"Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday — you have to work. On Friday, you have to work from home," he said. The Sindh minister affirmed that the province endorsed all the decisions announced.



ISLAMABAD: Federal Minister for Law and Justice Senator Azam Nazeer Tarar, Federal Minister for Information and Broadcasting Attaullah Tarar & Federal Minister for State for Interior Talal Chaudhry's news conference.

NGMS/5G spectrum auction a historic milestone for digital transformation: Aurangzeb

PEAK POINT

ISLAMABAD: Federal Minister for Finance and Revenue Senator Muhammad Aurangzeb on Tuesday described the NGMS/5G Spectrum Auction conducted by the Pakistan Telecommunication Authority (PTA) as a historic milestone that will accelerate Pakistan's digital transformation and strengthen the country's digital economy.

Addressing participants at the spectrum auction ceremony, he said it was a pleasure to witness the culmina-

tion of extensive efforts undertaken over the past year and a half to finalize the framework for the auction.

He noted that the Spectrum Committee, which he chaired, carried out detailed deliberations to develop a balanced framework aimed at optimizing revenue while simultaneously fostering an enabling ecosystem to advance Pakistan's digital journey.

Senator Aurangzeb acknowledged that the process for the spectrum auction had been initiated earlier under the leadership of the Minister for Information

Technology during her previous tenure in 2021.

He commended the continuity of policy across successive administrations, noting that while governments may change, sustained policy direction ensures progress. He termed the auction an important moment for all stakeholders who had contributed to bringing the initiative to completion.

Aurangzeb emphasized that digital development was not an end in itself but a means to achieve broader economic and social progress. He said improved digital connectivity would

deliver faster, cheaper and better services, unlocking numerous opportunities across various sectors of the economy. Highlighting the importance of the IT and IT-enabled services sector, he said enhanced digital infrastructure would strengthen one of Pakistan's most promising areas of growth, particularly in boosting exports and creating employment opportunities.

He stressed that the government's role is to provide the enabling ecosystem that allows the private sector to lead economic growth. In this regard, he referred to several ongoing initiatives

aimed at advancing the digital agenda, including support for freelancers, the Prime Minister's Digital Pakistan vision, expansion of digital infrastructure, development of payment systems and the digitization of government payments. He added that greater spectrum availability and the rollout of 5G services would also facilitate emerging technologies such as artificial intelligence, blockchain and Web 3.0, helping Pakistan transition towards a modern digital economy. The minister further noted that improved connectivity and digital infrastructure are

particularly critical during times of crisis. Referring to the Prime Minister's announcement a day earlier, he said enhanced digital capacity would enable seamless transitions to online education, remote working and other digital services when required. The minister thanked the members of the spectrum committee and all stakeholders for their contributions in reaching this milestone. He expressed confidence that the spectrum auction would pave the way for improved connectivity, innovation and economic opportunities across Pakistan.