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Pakistan launches indigenous satellite, boosts space capabilities

The Pakistan Space and Upper Atmosphere Research Commission (Suparco) on Saturday 25 April successfully launched Pakistan's indigenous Electro-Optical Satellite (EO-3) from China's Taiyuan Satellite Launch Centre.

“Today's launch of EO-3 Satellite is yet another significant milestone; a step forward in Pakistan's journey towards self-reliance and technological excellence,” Suparco said in a statement.

Equipped with advanced imaging capabilities, the EO-3 satellite is expected to play a vital role in transforming urban planning, disaster management, food security and environmental protection across the country.

It said the EO-3 satellite would lay the foundation for a comprehensive Earth Observation System aimed at supporting national priorities across multiple sectors and contributing to sustainable socio-economic development.

The Foreign Office said in a statement that the satellite also carries advanced experimental payloads designed to validate next-generation space technologies.

“These include a multi-geometry imaging module for enhanced imaging accuracy, an advanced energy storage system and an onboard AI-powered data processing unit to enable

real-time analysis and intelligent decision support,” it said. The Foreign Office said that the addition of EO-3 to Pakistan's Earth observation satellite fleet would significantly enhance national capabilities in remote sensing by improving data continuity, imaging reliability and analytical precision.

The military's media affairs wing, Inter-Services Public Relations (ISPR), said the satellite would provide imaging data to “revolutionise urban planning, disaster management, food security and environmental protection”.

China's Xinhua news agency said that the satellite was launched at 8:15pm (Beijing time) aboard a Long March-6 carrier rocket and “successfully entered its planned orbit”.

EO-3 is the latest addition to Pakistan's growing satellite programme. The first indigenous electro-optical satellite, EO-1, was launched from China's Jiuquan Satellite Launch Centre



THE satellite is launched from China's Taiyuan Launch Centre.

in January 2025, followed by EO-2 earlier this year from Yangjiang Seashore Launch Centre.

President, PM laud scientists

President Asif Ali Zardari termed the launch a “historic milestone”, describing it as a clear manifestation of Pakistan's self-reliance, scientific expertise and growing capability in space technology.

He praised the efforts of Suparco's scientists and engineers and noted that their work was helping align Pakistan with modern technological requirements.

The president also appreciated China's “consistent and trustworthy cooperation” in the space sector.

Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif lauded the dedication and professional excellence of Suparco's engineers and scientists on the achievement.

He also acknowledged China's continued support in advancing cooperation in the space domain and reaffirmed the government's commitment to strengthening Pakistan's space programme.

Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Ishaq Dar congratulated Suparco and praised its technical excellence and dedication.

He said the successful launch reflected Pakistan's growing scientific capabilities and reiterated the government's resolve to further strengthen the country's presence in the space sector.

Interior Minister Mohsin Naqvi also congratulated the nation and described the launch as a “big achievement”, adding that Pakistan-China cooperation was reaching new heights in the space domain.

He said the satellite would support multiple sectors and further enhance Earth observation capabilities.

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PIA's Hajj operation begins on April 19

Pakistan International Airlines (PIA) has announced that its Hajj operation will formally commence on Sunday April 19, during which more than 55,000 pilgrims will be transported to the Holy Land through 191 flights from across the country.

A PIA spokesperson said that under the government scheme, 49,000 pilgrims will travel, while over 6,000 pilgrims through private Haj group operators will also be facilitated via PIA flights.

He also noted that the first flight of the Haj operation, PK-747, will depart from Sialkot for Madinah on April 19 at 1:55am, carrying over 390 pilgrims.

Under the Haj operation, PIA will transport over 15,400 pilgrims from Islamabad to Saudi Arabia through 46 flights.

From Karachi, over 15,000 pilgrims will be flown through 55 flights; from Lahore, 12,377 pilgrims through 34 flights; from Faisalabad, 3,680 pilgrims through 23 flights; from Multan, 5,383 pilgrims through 13 flights; from Sialkot, 2,075 pilgrims through five flights; and from Quetta, 4,487 pilgrims through 15 Haj flights.

The first Haj flight from Quetta will depart on April 21 at 5:45am with over 300 pilgrims.



Inaugural Hajj flight by AirSial departs from Karachi on 18 April 2026



Karachi: The inaugural Hajj flight of the 2026 Hajj operations departed from Jinnah International Airport, Karachi, carrying 160 pilgrims to the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. The ceremony was attended by the Honorable Governor of Sindh Nehal Hashmi, the State Minister for Auqaf, and the Provincial Minister for Religious Affairs. Senior airport officials, including the Airport Manager, Deputy Airport Manager, and representatives of Airport Security Force (ASF), were also present on the occasion. The dignitaries extended their best wishes to the pilgrims for a safe and spiritually fulfilling journey. During their visit, the honorable guests also reviewed the facilities provided under the Route to Makkah initiative, including the Saudi immigration counters established at the airport. They expressed satisfaction over the arrangements and appreciated the facilities extended to the hujjaj. The flight, operated by AirSial as PF-7700, departed at 02:05 hours, marking the commencement of Hajj flight operations from Karachi.



Inaugural Hajj flight under Route to Makkah initiative departs Lahore's Allama Iqbal Int'l Airport



The inaugural Hajj flight under the Route to Makkah Initiative, SV-5735, successfully departed Lahore's Allama Iqbal Int'l Airport at 10:54 AM.

A dignified ceremony was held at the airport to mark the occasion. The event was attended by Molana Tahir Ashrafi and the Ambassador of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia to Pakistan, H.E. Nawaf bin Saeed.

Other distinguished participants included Engr. Jafn bin Khalaf Ali Shammar, Mr. Abrar Ahmad Mirza (Federal Secretary, Religious Affairs), Maj. Gen. Dr. Saleh bin Saad Almiraba, Mr. Khawaja Salman Rafique (Provincial Minister for Specialised Healthcare), and Mr. Sardar Muhammad Yousaf (Federal Minister for Religious Affairs). Senior officials of the airport were also present, including Airport Manager (APM), Deputy APM, Station Manager, Terminal Managers Departures and Arrivals, Manager Airside (MAS), OI/C PFS, Chief Security Officer ASF, and Deputy Director FIA Immigration. All airport operations remained smooth and normal throughout the movement of the flight.



Inaugural ceremony of pre-Hajj operations 2026 at Islamabad and Multan International Airports



The first inaugural Hajj flight for the year 2026 was successfully conducted from Islamabad International Airport (IIAP) under the Route to Makkah initiative, marking the commencement of Hajj operations from the federal capital.

Approximately 38,000 to 39,000 Hujjaj are expected to travel through Islamabad International Airport during the Hajj operation this year - the highest number of pilgrims.

The inaugural flight, SV-5723, departed from Islamabad to Madinah with a total of 270 pilgrims on board, along with 10 crew members. The flight took off at 11:00 AM from Gate A-2. The ceremony was graced by the presence of the Federal Minister for Religious Affairs, Mr. Sardar Muhammad Yousaf, along with the Deputy Ambassador of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. Senior officials from the Ministry of Religious Affairs, including the Joint Secretary and Director Hajj, as well as representatives from the Saudi Embassy, were also in attendance.

The inaugural ceremony of Pre-Hajj Operations 2026 was held at Multan International Airport, where Airblue Flight PA-876 bound for Madinah departed carrying 151 Hajj pilgrims. The ceremony was graced by the presence of Honorable Chairman Senate Syed Yousaf Raza Gillani as Chief Guest. Distinguished attendees included Mian Muhammad Kazim Pirzada, Minister for Irrigation Punjab; Rana Abdul Manan Sajid, MPA; and Begum Maqsooda Ansari, MPA.



AirSial launches flight to Sukkur



Islamabad International Airport continues to strengthen domestic connectivity with the commencement of AirSial's inaugural Airbus A320 service on the Islamabad-Sukkur route. The inaugural flight (SIF152) arrived at Sukkur at 12:10 PM carrying 37 passengers, while the return flight (SIF153) departed at 1:12 PM with 39 passengers on board.

Initially, one weekly flight will operate on this route, providing a direct and efficient air link between Islamabad and Sukkur.

AirSial starts flight to Skardu



AirSial has expanded its domestic network with the launch of a new weekly service as it continues to grow operations and added capacity on key routes. On 24 April :AirSial's first flight was landed at Skardu International Airport. Congratulations on this big milestone and a great boost for GB tourism.



Picturesque view of Skardu International Airport.

Centrum Air launches flight from Tashkent to Lahore



Marking a significant milestone in regional aviation, Centrum Air successfully operated its inaugural flight from Tashkent to Lahore on April 21, 2026, arriving at Allama Iqbal International Airport. This landmark event underscores the growing connectivity and strengthened bilateral ties between Pakistan and Uzbekistan.

The ceremony was attended by key dignitaries and aviation stakeholders, including H.E. Ambassador of Uzbekistan Mr. Alisher Tukhtaev, Honorary Consul General of Uzbekistan Mr. Najeeb Mushtaq Vohra, and Mr. Adilmirzaev Khulmirzaev, Head of Agents Division at Centrum Air. Representing the airline division of Gerry's Group, Ms. Seemab Zaman, General Manager North & Central, attended the ceremony along with her team.

Hosted by Gerry's Dnata, the event featured a traditional water cannon salute upon the aircraft's arrival, followed by a ceremonial cake-cutting attended by distinguished guests, cockpit crew, and operational teams. A highlight of the ceremony was the presentation of the Gerry's Group commemorative shield to the Ambassador of Uzbekistan, symbolizing the importance of this new partnership.

Gerry's Group played a central role in ensuring the success of the inaugural operation, with dedicated teams actively managing check-in counters and passenger facilitation to ensure a smooth and efficient experience.

As the official General Sales Agent (GSA), Gerry's Group reaffirmed its commitment to supporting airline partnerships, enhancing operational excellence, and contributing to the advancement of Pakistan's aviation sector. The launch of Centrum Air's new route is expected to boost tourism, trade, and people-to-people exchanges between the two countries.



Chief Coordinator Aviation (MoD) Conducts Inspection Visit at Faisalabad International Airport

Col. Irfan Hassan, Chief Coordinator Aviation, Ministry of Defence, recently visited Faisalabad International Airport (FIAP) as part of ongoing inspections of airports managed by Pakistan Airports Authority (PAA).

During the visit, a meeting was held with relevant government stakeholders and PAA sectional heads to review airport operations, flight handling, and operational challenges.

The Airport Manager FIAP briefed the Coordinator on ongoing development projects, future plans, and existing

constraints. A presentation, including a one-year performance overview, was also shared.

A comprehensive inspection of Service Level Agreements (SLAs), commercial operations, airside areas, ATC tower, lounges, and passenger facilitation services was conducted.

The Coordinator expressed satisfaction over cleanliness standards and passenger facilitation arrangements. He appreciated the efforts of PAA in ensuring efficient service delivery.

He also interacted with staff at facilitation desks and reviewed inter-agency coordination matters.





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Fits Air starts flight from Colombo to Lahore

Officially commenced its operations at Lahore Airport with the arrival of its inaugural flight from Colombo.

The flight was warmly welcomed upon arrival, where passengers were greeted with roses. To mark this significant milestone, a cake-cutting ceremony was organized, attended by senior airport management, SAPS representatives, and airline officials.

Following the ceremony, the inaugural outbound flight departed for Colomb, carrying 66 passengers, reflecting a successful start to Fits Air's operations in Pakistan.

British Deputy Head of Mission in Karachi calls on DG PAA

A two-member delegation from the British High Commission Karachi, led by Deputy Head of Mission Mr. Tom Burge, called on Director General Pakistan Airports Authority (PAA), Air Vice Marshal Zeshan Saeed.

During the meeting, both sides held a detailed and fruitful discussion on matters pertaining to cooperation and collaboration in aviation-related development projects. Areas of mutual interest were also discussed, with a focus on enhancing bilateral engagement in the aviation sector.

Deputy Director General (Works & Development), Mr. Sumair Saeed, also attended the meeting.

The Director General PAA highlighted the Authority's ongoing initiatives aimed at modernizing airport infrastructure and improving operational efficiency across the country. He reaffirmed PAA's commitment to fostering international partnerships for sustainable growth and development of Pakistan's aviation industry.

The visiting delegation appreciated the efforts of Pakistan Airports Authority and expressed interest in strengthening cooperation in areas of mutual benefit.

The meeting concluded with a shared resolve to further enhance collaboration between Pakistan and the United Kingdom in the field of aviation.



Heathrow airport traffic surges as war diverts global flights

Heathrow Airport in London saw a 10 per cent surge in transit passengers in March as a US-Iran war forced the closure of major Middle Eastern airspace, redirecting global air traffic through Europe, the airport announced on Monday 13 April.

Total passenger numbers at Europe's busiest airport climbed 6.9pc to 6.65 million last month compared with a year earlier.

The spike in traffic came as airlines rerouted long-haul journeys away from the Persian Gulf following the outbreak of war on Feb 28, when Iran fired retaliatory missiles at US allies in the region after US-Israel launched war on Iran.

The conflict has severely disrupted the business model of Gulf carriers like Emirates, Etihad Airways and Qatar Airways, which rely on connecting passengers through their hubs in Dubai, Abu Dhabi and Doha.

While Iraq and Bahrain recently reopened their airspace amid a ceasefire, many restrictions remain in the United Arab Emirates and Qatar.

"While Heathrow's long-haul network absorbed demand in March, the outlook for the next few months remains uncertain," Heathrow CEO Thomas Woldbye said in a statement.

Despite the passenger boom, Heathrow said its growth lagged European competitors because its two runways are already at full capacity.

The airport warned in February that Istanbul, with five runways, will likely overtake it as Europe's busiest hub.

The shift in global travel patterns was stark: Heathrow said routes to the Middle East plunged 51.1pc in March, while traffic to the Asia-Pacific region and Africa rose 31.1pc and 23.3pc, respectively.

The rerouting through London is part of a massive, ongoing disruption to global aviation. The closure of key Middle Eastern hubs has forced carriers worldwide to suspend flights, alter schedules and cancel routes for months to come.

Latvia's airBaltic and Finland's Finnair have canceled Dubai flights until October. Air Canada has suspended services to Tel Aviv and Dubai until September, while Lufthansa Group has

halted most of its flights to the region until at least late May, with some suspensions running through October.

In response, airlines are shifting capacity to meet demand on newly popular routes. IAG-owned British Airways said it would cut flights to the Middle East when services resume and add capacity to India and Africa.

Hong Kong's Cathay Pacific is operating extra flights to London and Paris, and Australia's Qantas is adding flights to Rome to meet an upswing in demand for European travel.

Beyond flight disruptions, the war has upended airline finances by causing jet fuel prices to soar from around \$90 per barrel to as high as \$200 in recent weeks. With fuel accounting for up to a quarter of an airline's operating expenses, the spike is forcing carriers to pass costs onto consumers.

Airlines have responded with a wave of fare hikes, new surcharges and increased fees for optional services. Air France-KLM plans to increase long-haul

ticket prices by 50 euros per round trip, while Cathay Pacific hiked its fuel surcharge by 34pc.

In India, major carriers like IndiGo and Akasa Air have introduced fuel surcharges on domestic and international flights.

In the United States, major carriers have focused on raising fees for checked baggage. American Airlines, Delta Air Lines and United Airlines all announced they would increase checked bag fees by \$10 or more.

The financial pressure is also leading to capacity reductions. United is cutting unprofitable flights in preparation for oil prices remaining elevated until the end of 2027, while Scandinavian airline SAS said it would cancel 1,000 flights in April.

Other measures include South Korean carrier T'way Air planning to furlough cabin crew.

Some airlines, including Air New Zealand, have suspended their full-year earnings forecasts, citing the market's volatility.

For now, Heathrow said the conflict's "knock-on impacts to global supply chains, including fuel, have not affected airport operations", but the uncertainty for the entire aviation sector remains high.

Strengthening global partnerships and unlocking new opportunities

Mr. Hanif Zakaria, COO of Gerry's International Pvt. Ltd. visited the Uzbekistan Trade Centre for a productive meeting with Chairman Sohail Moten and the team. The discussion centered on enhancing bilateral trade, exploring new avenues of cooperation, and fostering

long-term collaboration between Pakistan and Uzbekistan.

This engagement reflects Gerry's International's continued commitment to building strong international relationships, facilitating cross-border trade, and contributing to sustainable economic growth in the region.



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Qantas launches new 737 flights to last place in the World



Qantas' Network Expansion

Qantas confirmed that the new Apia flights are an extension of its existing daily Sydney–Auckland operations. This approach allows the airline to leverage its established trans-Tasman capacity while opening a

new market from New Zealand.

According to company representatives, the addition of this route improves accessibility to Samoa for passengers based in New Zealand. It also enhances travel flexibility by offering multiple weekly options without requiring transit through Australia.

The move aligns with broader airline strategies to tap into underserved regional markets. By connecting Auckland directly with Apia, Qantas positions itself to capture growing demand in the Pacific travel segment.

The introduction of this service is expected to significantly reduce travel time and complexity for passengers traveling between New Zealand and Samoa. Previously, many itineraries required indirect routing, often via Australia.

The airline emphasized that the route will support tourism growth while also strengthening cultural and economic ties between the two regions. Increased seat capacity and frequency are likely to benefit both inbound and outbound travel markets.

Qantas also stated that it does not anticipate fuel supply constraints affecting the reliability of the new service. This assurance comes amid ongoing concerns about fuel logistics at smaller Pacific destinations.

Overall, the Auckland–Apia launch reflects a targeted expansion strategy focused on improving regional connectivity. With steady demand and efficient scheduling, the route is expected to become a key link in the airline's Pacific network.

Qantas (QF) is expanding its trans-Tasman network with the launch of a new year-round international service linking Auckland Airport (AKL) and Apia (APW), marking a notable step in strengthening connectivity between New Zealand and Samoa.

The new route will begin operations on June 16 and represents the airline's first direct international service from New Zealand to a Pacific Island destination. The flights will be operated using the Boeing 737, targeting both leisure travelers and those visiting friends and relatives.

Qantas New Auckland to Apia Flight

The Auckland–Apia service will operate three times weekly, offering consistent connectivity across the week. Flights from Auckland will depart in the early evening, allowing passengers to arrive in Samoa the same night.

The outbound service, designated QF145, will run on Tuesdays, Thursdays, and Sundays with a departure time of 5:55 PM. It is scheduled to land in Apia at 10:45 PM local time, making it convenient for same-day travel.

Return flights, operating as QF144, will depart Apia on Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays at 6:40 AM. These services are timed to arrive in Auckland by 9:55 AM, enabling onward connections, particularly to Sydney, Island Business flagged.



PAA extends airspace ban on Indian aircraft until May 24

The Pakistan Airport Authority (PAA) on Tuesday 21 April extended its airspace ban for Indian aircraft for another month until May 24, marking a year of flight restrictions on India's airlines.

“Pakistani airspace will remain closed to Indian-registered aircraft, or Indian airlines/operators (including military flights),” a PAA Notice to Airmen (Notam) said.

“This ban will now be effective till May 24, 2026, at 4:59am.”

Pakistan's airspace is divided into two flight information regions (FIRs), Karachi and Lahore, according to a Pakistan Civil Aviation Authority (PCAA) document from 2022. The Notam applies to both the Karachi (OPKR) and Lahore (OPLR) FIRs.

The Notam issued by Pakistan bars Indian flights in its airspace till May 24.

The previous extension was set to expire on April 24.

India and Pakistan have closed their airspaces to each other's airlines since late April 2025, when tensions between them escalated in the wake of a deadly attack in Indian-occupied Kashmir's Pahalgam district.

On April 24, Pakistan's top brass had announced a series of measures, including the closure of its airspace to all India-owned or Indian-operated airlines with immediate effect, as it retaliated against New Delhi's slew of aggressive measures against the country.

New Delhi, without evidence, had alleged that Islamabad backed the attack; however, Pakistan had strongly denied any involvement and offered a neutral probe. The nuclear powers had the fiercest air battle in May, in which Pakistan said it downed seven Indian fighter jets.

Delta Airlines lands with one more passenger than it had on departure

A Delta Air Lines flight from Hartsfield - Jackson Atlanta International Airport (ATL) to Portland International Airport (PDX) landed with one more passenger than it had on departure after a woman gave birth onboard just 30 minutes before arrival. The baby girl was delivered on Flight D1478 on Friday, April 24, turning a routine transcontinental service into a rare midair medical emergency.

The incident is the second reported onboard birth in April on a commercial aircraft bound for a US airport, following the arrival of another baby on a Caribbean Airlines flight from Kingston, Jamaica, to New York JFK airport (JFK) earlier this month. The episode also highlights a little-known reality of air travel: while airlines have medical procedures and emergency kits onboard, the rules around flying while pregnant are mostly set by individual carriers, not by one universal federal cutoff.

One More Passenger Lands In Portland



Credit: Delta Air Lines

The moment appears to have unfolded quickly onboard Flight 1478 from Atlanta to Portland. A flight attendant asked over the intercom whether any medical personnel were onboard, and two emergency medical technicians, Tina Fritz and Caarin Powell, responded. Fritz later said the crew told them there was “a lady up front who thinks she's going into labor,” with contractions already coming about three minutes apart. The passenger, identified as Ashley, gave birth roughly 30 minutes before the flight landed in Portland.

With no hospital delivery room and limited supplies, the improvised midair delivery relied on quick thinking from the EMTs, flight attendants, and passengers. Fritz said she asked for a medical kit, and then had to make do with what was available, including blankets borrowed from passengers and a flight attendant's

shoelace, which was cut and used as a tourniquet to help start an IV. The baby then arrived fast. “Within three really good pushes, the baby was out and doing perfect,” Fritz said. “Mom was a rock star.”

The aircraft was already close to landing by the time the baby girl was delivered. Fritz said she cut the cord, wrapped the baby, and then braced for touchdown before giving the newborn back to her mother as the aircraft taxied in. The cabin reported cheered for the mother after the delivery, while emergency medical services met the aircraft on arrival in Portland. Both mother and baby were later reported to be in stable condition.

Delta later released a statement:

“We extend our sincere thanks to the crew and medical volunteers on board who stepped in to provide care to a customer onboard prior to landing in Portland. The health and safety of our customers is always our top priority, and we wish the new family all the best.”

No Federal Cutoff, Different Airline Rules



Credit: Shutter stock

There is no broad US federal rule that sets a single pregnancy cutoff for airline passengers. The FAA's pregnancy guidance is primarily aimed at aviation medical certification and says pregnancy under normal circumstances is not disqualifying, while the CDC and ACOG both direct pregnant travelers to check individual airline policies.

Delta is among the more permissive US carriers. Its website states that it does not impose restrictions on flying while pregnant and does not require a medical certificate, although it says passengers traveling after their eighth month should check with a doctor to ensure travel is not restricted.

Airline	Pregnancy policy summary
Delta Air Lines	No restrictions and no medical certificate required; advises a doctor to check after the eighth month.
American Airlines	A doctor's certificate is required if the due date is within four weeks; restrictions apply within seven days before or after delivery on domestic flights under five hours.
United Airlines	Medical clearance may be needed at 36 weeks or for a high-risk pregnancy.
Southwest Airlines	Recommends against air travel beginning at the 38th week.
JetBlue	Passengers expecting delivery within seven days need doctor documentation dated no more than 72 hours before departure.
Frontier Airlines	Allows pregnant passengers to fly, but says those in the ninth month should check with a doctor.
Spirit Airlines	Passengers in the eighth month are urged to obtain physician clearance before travel.
Allegiant Air	Recommends pregnant passengers consult a physician before flying.
Breeze Airways	Requires a physician statement for domestic flights in the ninth month, dated within 72 hours, confirming fitness to fly and that delivery is expected after the final flight.

The broad norm is that uncomplicated pregnancies are usually treated as safe for occasional air travel until late pregnancy, with 36 weeks often used as the common benchmark. However, US airline policies are far from uniform. Delta has no hard cutoff; Southwest Airlines discourages travel from week 38; American Airlines uses the due-date window; United Airlines uses 36 weeks or high-risk pregnancy as a trigger; and Breeze Airways has one of the clearest ninth-month documentation requirements.



An air taxi takes off from John F. Kennedy airport. The flight completed the first point-to-point demonstration from JFK Airport to Manhattan heliports (downtown and midtown). It took less than 10 minutes—a trip that typically takes 60-120 minutes by car.

Gerry's Group highlights strategic engagement at Centrum Air session, hosted by Lahore Chamber of Commerce & Industry

Gerry's Group participated in a high-level industry engagement hosted by the Lahore Chamber of Commerce & Industry (LCCI), in collaboration with Centrum Air, bringing together key stakeholders from across Pakistan's aviation, travel, and trade sectors.

The session was attended by Ms. Seemab Zaman, General Manager North & Central at the airline division of Gerry's Group, alongside LCCI Vice President Mr. Khurram Lodhi, esteemed chamber members, government representatives, media professionals, and prominent figures from the travel and trade industry. The event provided a valuable platform for dialogue, collaboration, and alignment on emerging opportunities within the aviation sector.

Centrum Air's comprehensive product showcase was presented by Ms. Seemab Zaman, highlighting the airline's competitive fare structure, expanding route network, and strong commercial potential in the Pakistani market. Particular emphasis was placed on enhanced connectivity to major international destinations, including Frankfurt, Guangzhou, Istanbul, Moscow, St. Petersburg, Bangkok, Baku, and Bishkek.

The session also spotlighted Uzbekistan as a promising and increasingly attractive destination for both business and leisure travel, reflecting growing regional connectivity and tourism potential.

As the official General Sales Agent (GSA) for Centrum Air in Pakistan, Gerry's Group reaffirmed its commitment to driving commercial growth, strengthening strategic partnerships, and unlocking new market opportunities. Gerry's Group continues to play a pivotal role in supporting the advancement of Pakistan's aviation and travel ecosystem through collaborative initiatives and industry engagement.



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PPP labour bureau leader rejects PIA privatisation

Pakistan Peoples Party's in-charge of Labour Bureau, Chaudhary Manzoor Ahmed, on Wednesday April 29 rejected the ongoing privatisation of Pakistan International Airlines (PIA), calling the process "unconstitutional and non-transparent".

Speaking at a press conference in Islamabad, Chaudhary Ahmed alleged that the government has violated legal requirements by proceeding with the sale without approval of the Council of Common Interests (CCI) or the parliament.

"The PIA was established under the Acts of 1956, 2016, and 2023. Under the law, neither the CCI nor Parliament was taken into confidence before this privatisation," he said.

"This makes the entire process of the Pakistan International Airlines privatisation illegal," he said.

He said while the national flag carrier was valued at Rs135 billion, the government received only Rs10bn from the sale, with Rs6bn separately paid to consultants.

The PPP leader demanded immediate formation of an independent judicial commission to investigate the privatisation of the national flag carrier and to identify those responsible for "selling the national airline for pennies".



Ethiopian Airlines Plans Direct Flights To Lahore To Boost Trade And Connectivity

Ethiopian Airlines is reportedly considering launching direct flights to Lahore following discussions between Pakistani and Ethiopian officials in Islamabad. The talks focused on improving trade relations, business connectivity, and cultural exchange between the two countries. The initiative is described as part of broader efforts to enhance regional connectivity and cooperation.

S. Korean fighter pilot fined for mid-air photos that caused crash

A South Korean fighter pilot has been ordered to pay 88 million won (\$59,200) in damages over a 2021 mid-air collision he caused by trying to get photos and videos of himself flying, an official report said recently.

The pilot, whose identity was withheld, wanted to capture footage of his last sortie before reassignment, according to the report by the Board of Audit and Inspection.

While travelling at 578 kilometres per hour (359 mph), he had the pilot of a second plane and another colleague take snaps of him on their phones.

In search of the perfect shot, he flipped his jet and flew close to the other aircraft, resulting in a misjudgement that caused his left stabilator — a horizontal stabiliser on a plane's tail — to collide with its wing.

There were no casualties, but the unsanctioned move caused 878 million

won in damages. The pilot's manoeuvre, which had not been coordinated with others in his formation, caused the aircraft to "invert up to 137 degrees so that its upper side could be captured on video", the report said.

The defence ministry initially ordered him to pay the full amount but he appealed to the board, which reduced his liability to 10 percent of the total repair costs. The board took into account that other pilots had previously conducted in-flight filming, and that he had still safely commanded the flight and returned to base without causing further damage.

"Since commissioning in 2010, the individual has served for an extended period as a fighter pilot, managing aircraft safely," the report said. While the report did not specify what type of aircraft was involved, the Yonhap news agency said it was an F-15K.

Mayor of Karachi visits PAA Headquarters

Barrister Murtaza Wahab Siddiqui, Mayor of Karachi, met Air Vice Marshal (AVM) Zeeshan Saeed SI(M), Director General Pakistan Airports Authority (PAA), at PAA Headquarters. The meeting focused on collaboration between Karachi Metropolitan Corporation (KMC) and PAA to beautify the surroundings of Jinnah International Airport, including certain roads and areas in its vicinity, to enhance the overall environment and passengers' ease.

DG PAA assured Mayor Siddiqui of his full assistance in the efforts to beautify Karachi and Jinnah International Airport.



Both parties expressed commitment to strengthening institutional coordination to improve airport facilities, passenger services, and aviation-related initiatives benefiting the citizens of Karachi and Pakistan.





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Airports moving towards one-window clearance

In a push to modernise border control and cut wait times for travellers, the country is moving towards a “one-window” airport clearance system using e-gates and smart scanners, with a joint strategy by the ministries of defence and interior coming under detailed discussion on Wednesday 22 April.

The plan comes amid growing international passenger traffic and repeated complaints of congestion at major airports. The country handled 25.4 million domestic and international passengers in 2025, up 12 per cent year-on-year, according to Civil Aviation Authority data.

Interior Minister Mohsin Raza Naqvi chaired a meeting to address the dual challenge of facilitating outbound passengers while strengthening checks against human smuggling.

Minister of State for Interior Tallal Chaudhry, Interior Secretary Muhammad Khurram Agha, Defence Secretary retired Lt Gen Muhammad Ali, Additional Interior Secretary Maj Gen Noor Wali Khan, Additional Defence Secretary Maj Gen Qaiser Suleman, Anti-Narcotics Force Director General Maj Gen Abdul Mueed, and Federal Investigation Agency (FIA) Director General Dr Usman Anwar attended the meeting.

Officials agreed to ensure close coordination among all agencies at airports and to replace fragmented checks with a unified system. “Joint checking on a single scanner by all institutions will save time and facilitate passengers,” Mr Naqvi said, adding that reducing congestion and waiting times through interagency coordination is a government commitment.

It was decided that joint counters and a unified checking system will be introduced so passengers face one stop instead of multiple agency desks.

Technology upgrade

Modern baggage and document scanners will be installed to speed up verification and improve detection.

E-gates that use biometric passport scanners and facial recognition are set to be rolled out, cutting average immigration clearance from 3–5 minutes to under 45 seconds per passenger. An official said the phased rollout of modernisation was

likely to start from Islamabad International Airport. Progress on e-gate installation was reviewed in the meeting. The interior minister stressed that faster clearance must not weaken enforcement.

The FIA data shows over 1,200 human smuggling attempts were intercepted at airports in 2025. Officials said e-gates will be linked with FIA's exit control list, passenger name records, and Interpol databases to flag high-risk travellers in real time.

Separately, the defence secretary said modern equipment is being imported to reduce bird-strike risks at airfields. Acoustic bird deterrent systems and upgraded radar will be deployed at major airports to prevent aircraft damage and flight delays.

Frequent fliers have long flagged bottlenecks. “Immigration and ANF checks separately can take 40 minutes at peak hours. A single window would be a huge relief,” said a travel operator.

Airlines also expect faster turnarounds once automated gates are in place.

PIA fleet expansion on the cards



For the longer-term, the new owners have outlined a plan to double the national flag carrier's fleet to 60 aircraft.

Arif Habib, chairman of the Arif Habib Consortium, which owns Pakistan International Airlines (PIA), has said that the national flag carrier currently has 30 aircraft, of which 18 are operational, and five to six require repair and maintenance.

Speaking to industrialists at the Korangi Association of Trade and Industry (KATI) on Thursday 9 April, he said the airline is working to make these aircraft operational, and adding them back to the fleet will bring the total to 26. The long-term target is to expand the fleet to 60 aircraft.

EU carriers face Jet fuel shortage

As of late April 2026, major aviation headlines are dominated by geopolitical impacts, including resumed flights at Tehran's airport following a ceasefire, while Al Jazeera reports that Iran conflict-related jet fuel shortages threaten European routes. Other top stories include, according to Aviation 24.be, the Trump administration exploring wartime laws to support Spirit Airlines, and Hawaiian Airlines joining the oneworld alliance.

This video discusses how the Iran conflict has impacted the aviation industry::54

Key Aviation Headlines (April 2026):
Geopolitics & Operations: Flights

resume at Tehran's Imam Khomeini Airport. However, EU carriers face potential, significant jet fuel shortages.

Al Jazeera

Airlines & Routes:

Hawaiian Airlines joins the oneworld alliance, expanding network connectivity.

Freebird Airlines Europe expands operations at Cologne/Bonn with new summer routes.

easyJet adds nine new routes from the UK, and Air Canada takes delivery of its first A321XLR.

Ryanair plans to shut its Berlin base due to high costs.

Industry & Technology:

Air France Industries KLM Engineering & Maintenance subsidiary Barfield renews a component partnership with AerFin.

Joramco partners with AeroParts-AI for AI-supported smart sourcing.

Iberia Maintenance Madrid becomes a LEAP Premier MRO shop.

AviTrader Aviation News

Incidents & Safety: A Belgian A400M aircraft came under fire in Haiti but landed safely.

Infrastructure & Security: Long lines occurred at US airports as the House debated pay for federal workers. .



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Chief Minister, Balochistan visits SIAL

Chairman Sialkot International Airport, Mr. Hassan Ali Bhatti, extended a gracious welcome to the Honorable Chief Minister of Balochistan, Mir Sarfaraz Bugti, upon his arrival at Sialkot International Airport. The Honorable Chief Minister held a one-on-one meeting with the worthy Chairman SIAL, where matters of mutual interest were discussed in a cordial and constructive manner, reflecting a shared commitment towards strengthening institutional collaboration and exploring avenues of cooperation.



The ADB delegation meets with the Chairman of SIAL

To advance infrastructure development, Chairman Sialkot International Airport, Mr. Hassan Ali Bhatti, met with a delegation from the Asian Development Bank (ADB) to discuss strategic collaboration and sustainable growth. ADB support has been secured in the form of funding (not a loan) for upgrading the runway to Category III standards.

The Chairman also sought ADB's strategic support for a dedicated motorway exit and Section 4 approval for runway land acquisition. ADB has, in principle, agreed to play a supportive role in these initiatives.



SIAL meeting with Collector Customs

Chairman Sialkot International Airport Limited, Mr. Hassan Ali Bhatti, held a productive meeting with the Collector Customs Ms Saima Ayyaz, and SCCI members to deliberate on matters concerning import operations and courier services companies. During the meeting, both sides engaged in constructive discussions aimed at enhancing coordination and streamlining existing procedures. Emphasis was placed on ensuring greater efficiency, transparency, and facilitation for stakeholders, ultimately paving the way for a more seamless and effective operational framework.



SIAL participates in the PTM held in Karachi

Sialkot International Airport (SIAL) marked a robust and strategic presence at Pakistan Travel Mart 2026. The participation was led by worthy Vice Chairman SIAL, Mr. Waqas Afzal, resonating the airport's assurance to expand its global aviation footprint. During the event, SIAL effectively showcased its evolving capabilities and its unprecedented role within the National Aviation landscape. During the event, the Vice Chairman and CEO SIAL engaged in a series of high-level B2B engagements with key international stakeholders, including the country manager of Sri Lankan Airlines, the head representatives of AirAsia, Riyadh Air, and Ethiopian Airlines. These interactions were complemented by a constructive meeting with the Malaysian High Commissioner to Pakistan, Mohammad Azhar Mazlan, and the Consul General of Malaysia in Karachi, Pakistan, Mr. Herman Hardynata Ahmad, further strengthening avenues for bilateral cooperation and aviation partnerships. The platform provided an opportunity to highlight SIAL's progressive outlook, operational excellence, and its vision for enhanced international connectivity.



Air Vice Marshall (R) Tanweer Ashraf Bhatti (2nd -L) CEO of SIAL and Mr. Waqas Afzal (3rd-L), Vice Chairman of SIAL with other participants on the occasion.

Pakistan Cargo Services participates in Surgical Exhibition

PCS had the opportunity to attend the Technology & Innovation Summit – 4th Edition (22 April 2026), organized by the Surgical Association Sialkot.

An insightful event showcasing advancements in technology and innovation within the industry.

It was great networking and learning experience for the participants'.



Mr. Fazal Jilani, CEO of M/s Surgicon (Pvt) Ltd. and Chairman, of AirSial, Photographed with the PCS staff.



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How Gwadar Port is benefiting from the Strait of Hormuz crisis

Business at the port has increased amid ongoing tension. But business should not have to depend on disruptions and wars.

MV Riva Glory with 14,629 MT transshipment cargo arrives at Gwadar Port in Pakistan, April 5, 2026.

On April 16, two cargo vessels arrived at Gwadar Port, carrying 368.7 tons of machinery and general cargo goods, as well as 5,000 metric tons of fertilizer. Earlier in the month, another cargo ship brought over 14,000 metric tons of transshipment cargo goods. So far in April, Gwadar has handled around 11,000 standard shipping containers. For a port that handled around 8,300 containers in all of 2025 and historically has not seen more than 20 ships dock in an entire year, the current activity is unprecedented.

Some analysts have interpreted this surge as signaling a potential long-term opportunity for Gwadar, one that could improve its visibility in regional shipping networks, build operational credibility and perhaps, attract sustained commercial interest.

Gwadar's location near the Strait of Hormuz, the narrow chokepoint through which almost 20 percent of global oil and liquified natural gas (LNG) flows, accords it strategic importance. This and the deep waters of Gwadar's eastern bay, which give it the capacity to handle large cargo ships, attracted Chinese investment. But despite these advantages, the port has remained underutilized for much of the past two decades.

The recent surge in cargo traffic is driven by regional dynamics and geopolitical tensions, especially connected to the Strait of Hormuz. In recent months, Hormuz has dominated world media headlines to an extent that has rarely been seen before. This is largely because of the Israel-U.S. war on Iran and the repeated closure, reopening, and blockade of the Strait of Hormuz. Being such an important global energy route, these disruptions have sent shockwaves through global markets, causing supply shortages and surging oil prices.

Additionally, vessels operating in the strait face security risks. This has increased insurance premiums, delays, and uncertainty in safe passage. In response, most shipping operators have

avoided entering the Strait of Hormuz altogether. But cargo already in transit and which has to pass through Hormuz cannot be easily rerouted, forcing vessels to seek temporary anchorage in relatively safe and less congested locations along the Arabian Sea, including Gwadar Port.

The scope for rerouting is very limited. Only Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates have operational pipelines, Saudi Arabia's East-West pipelines run from its oil field to the Red Sea port, and the UAE's pipeline connects Dubai's field to Fujairah on the Gulf of Oman, outside the Strait of Hormuz. But these only partially bypass Hormuz and can handle a



very limited share of exports. Most of the trade still requires dependence on maritime transit through the strait.

Additionally, goods destined for markets in West Asia, especially shipments from China that rely on Hormuz, can hardly reroute. Vessels cannot remain at sea indefinitely. They are seeking alternate places to dock or short-term storage options at nearby ports.

Pakistan's Gwadar Port, given its proximity to the Strait of Hormuz, but relative distance from the immediate conflict zone, has emerged as one such logistical node. Thus, it is currently functioning not only as a transshipment point but as a port for safe anchorage, as vessels await clarity in regional conditions.

This perception of relative safety, in an otherwise unpredictable region, is also a result of Pakistan's emergence as an unexpected mediator between Iran and the United States. On the one hand, this diplomatic role may be related to Pakistan's own economic and geopolitical vulnerabilities. But it has also contributed to Pakistan's image as a reliable actor on the global stage.

Islamabad also heavily relies on energy imports that transit through the Strait of Hormuz, disruption of which has already affected the economy with rising costs and supply pressures. At the same time, mediation has brought some short-

term financial and political benefits, including \$2 billion from Saudi Arabia as of April 15, with an additional \$3 billion of financial support pledged. This may also provide temporary relief to Pakistan's strained foreign exchange reserves.

Pakistan shares a roughly 900-kilometer-long border with Iran, making it vulnerable to instability in Iran spilling over into its own territory. It has suffered from the effects of the war in Afghanistan for decades. The impact of the war in Iran could be more severe as it relies on it for energy, food and other essential goods. Disruptions could also affect the informal cross-border trade that sustains thousands of livelihoods in the restive border province of Balochistan, with implications for the larger Pakistani economy.

However, for Gwadar, the current conditions and the increased activity at the port mean that cargo arriving at the port is meant not for local markets but is temporarily handled and stored before being sent onward to other destinations. Cargo is offloaded, stored for short durations, facilitated in part by the port's provision of free storage up to a month, and then reloaded onto other vessels for onward shipment. Thus, this pattern suggests that Gwadar is currently functioning less as a trade hub and more as a temporary logistical buffer amid the ongoing uncertainty.

This activity may, no doubt, contribute to port utilization in the short-term and bring in more economic activity, but whether it contributes to any sustained commercial growth post-war or long-term economic viability remains to be seen. At present, Gwadar port is designed to handle around 16,000 standard shipping containers and offers over 90,000 square meters of storage capacity for general cargo.

The current demand of the port appears to be more of a temporary logistical need than a consistent, destination-based trade. As a result, the increased cargo traffic in Gwadar cannot yet be treated as the long-awaited transformation,

This raises the question again: how long will Gwadar continue to wait for its long-anticipated potential to materialize? A port's growth or business, after all, should not depend on disruptions and wars, but on stability.

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Pakistan notifies six land routes for sending goods to Iran

Pakistan has notified six routes for the transportation of goods to Iran against an encashable bank guarantee, amid reports that thousands of containers destined for the neighbouring country are awaiting clearance at local ports.

To bring this into force, the commerce ministry has issued a statutory regulatory order, 'Transit of Goods through Territory of Pakistan Order 2026'.

The routes designated for the transit of goods are: (1) Gwadar-Gabd; (2) Karachi/Port Qasim-Lyari-Ormara-Pasni-Gabd; (3) Karachi/Port Qasim-Khuzdar-Dalbandin-Taftan; (4) Gwadar-Turbat-Hoshab-Panjgur-Nagg-Besima-Khuzdar-Quetta/Lakpass-Dalbandin-Nokundi-Taftan; (5) Gwadar-Lyari-Khuzdar-Quetta/Lakpass-Dalbandin-Nokundi-Taftan; and (6) Karachi/Port Qasim-Gwadar-Gabd.

Some reports suggest that over 3,000 containers destined for Iran have been stuck at the Karachi ports for the past few days. The development comes as the blockade of the Strait of Hormuz, which was the route for one-fifth of the world's oil and gas supply in peacetime, and that of the Iranian ports continues amid the ongoing US-Iran conflict.

The commerce ministry said in its order that cargo transportation under the notification shall be regulated in accordance with the provisions of the Customs Act, 1969, the rules made thereunder, and the procedures prescribed by the Federal Board of Revenue. The order has come into force with effect from April 25.

It has been issued in pursuance of Article 2 of the agreement between the Pakistani and Iranian governments on International Transport of Passengers and Goods by Road, executed in June 2008, and in exercise of the powers conferred by sub-section (1) of Section 3 of the Imports and Exports (Control) Act, 1950.

The order states that unless otherwise prohibited, goods transportation has been explicitly described as "cross-stuffing", which means the transfer of goods from one container to another container or any other mode of transportation, which shall be allowed in a mode and manner as provided in the relevant customs laws and regulations.

It further defines customs security as an encashable financial guarantee, submitted by traders or through their

authorised brokers on transit goods, for an amount equivalent to the import levies of Pakistan, as provided in the relevant Customs laws, rules and regulations.

A shipper under the order means any natural or legal person by whom or in whose name a contract of carriage of goods has been concluded with a carrier, or any person by whom or in whose name the goods are actually delivered to the carrier in relation to the contract of carriage of goods.

The order "shall apply to the transportation of transit goods in transport units, consigned from the territory of a third country and destined for a place in the territory of Iran through the territory of Pakistan".

Under the order, transit has been defined as the movement of goods across the territory of Pakistan when the passage across such territory is only a portion of a complete journey, which begins and ends beyond the borders of Pakistan. Moreover, a transit transport corridor has been explained as a route for use by a carrier for the transit of goods.

Gwadar Port

Notably, the order grants Gwadar Port formal status as a designated route for transit trade with Iran.

It identifies Gwadar as a future major transit and logistics hub, a development being described by experts as a "game changer" for regional trade.

Gwadar Port Authority (GPA) spokesman Jameel Qasim said the order gave central importance to the Gwadar-Gabd corridor due to its shorter distance and reduced travel time.

GPA Chairman Noorul Haq Baloch said Gwadar's distance to Gabd was only around 89 kilometres, allowing goods to reach the border in just two to three hours. In contrast, the Karachi to Gabd route covers nearly 700 kilometres and takes 16 to 18 hours, resulting in an estimated 87 per cent reduction in transit time through Gwadar.

The GPA chairman said the shorter route was also expected to reduce transport costs by 45pc to 55pc, making Gwadar a more competitive option for traders and shipping companies.

Officials said Gwadar's modern port infrastructure, including cranes, large storage yards, faster customs clearance and lower congestion, provided it with an edge over Karachi and Port Qasim, where delays and extra charges were common.

Economic analysts estimate the project could generate \$24 to \$32 million annually, while Gwadar may capture at least 25pc of Iran's transit market in the initial stage. The initiative is also expected to attract investment in logistics parks, cold storage facilities and warehousing, creating thousands of jobs for local youth.

Behram Baloch in Gwadar also contributed to this report

Punjab to export livestock, meat; signs MoU

Punjab will export livestock and meat as the provincial government on Saturday 25 April signed a memorandum of understanding (MoU) with seven institutions, including a Chinese company, for the purpose.

A video link meeting in this regard was presided over by Chief Minister Maryam Nawaz Sharif on Saturday 25 April. Under the agreement one million livestock would be exported.

The meeting was informed that China's Global Meat Company would install a boiler unit in collaboration with the government owned Punjab Agriculture and Meat Company (PAMCO) in the province.

The boiler unit will prepare boiled meat on a large scale for export. Meat companies will import the meat of 300,000 animals ready for export. A target is set for fattening 300,000 buffaloes and cows, and 300,000 sheep and goats. Some 100,000 goats and sheep will be raised for export.

The state-of-the-art veterinary hospitals will be established in every tehsil of the province. Four mobile veterinary dispensaries will operate in each tehsil to provide door-to-door animal treatment.

The CM doubled the quota of free livestock for rural women.

Mechanization of the livestock farming sector would be introduced in Punjab for the first time. The government will provide up to 60 per cent subsidy on livestock machinery. Milk chillers, mixing machines, milk can coolers, weighing scales, feed mixers, pilot machines, and other equipment will be provided. Some 9,255 animals will be distributed free of cost to widowed and divorced women in 12 districts of South Punjab. Two million animals will be tagged to meet export targets.

Pakistan opens land route to Kyrgyzstan

Pakistan Customs has launched the first export from the Karachi Export Processing Zone to Kyrgyzstan via the land route under the TIR regime, opening a new corridor to Central Asia via Sost Dry Port, China.

The consignment, valued at \$59,314 and weighing 23.9 tonnes, contained assorted oil, tea, henna, herbs, cream, and soap from Hemani Group. It was cleared electronically through the Pakistan Single Window (PSW) system after activating EPZ as a TIR [Transports Internationaux Routiers] station.

An official announcement of the Federal Board of Revenue said the directorate general of Transit Trade, Karachi, led the upgrade of customs systems in coordination with PSW, TIR operators, PNCC-ICC, and the IRU. All formalities, including electronic pre-declarations, were completed for smooth transit.

This move enhances regional connectivity and gives EPZ exporters direct access to Central Asian markets, boosting Pakistan's trade outreach.

The government has recently notified six transit routes through Iran, expanding options for regional trade. Pakistani exporters are already using this corridor to ship goods such as rice, kinno and potatoes to Central Asian states as an alternative route.

Pakistan had traditionally relied on the Chaman and Torkham border crossings for overland access to Central Asia via Afghanistan. However, these routes have remained closed since October 2025 due to rising security concerns and cross border militancy.

As a result, border stations with Afghanistan have been shut for all categories of trade, including transit to Central Asian markets. With these disruptions, exporters have been left with limited choices and are increasingly routing shipments through Iran to access Central Asia, as well as markets in Azerbaijan, Russia, via China the Sost border Kyrgyzstan corridor.

Commerce Minister Jam Kamal Khan met with the Tajikistan Ambassador, Sharifzoda Yusuf Toir, to discuss measures to enhance bilateral trade, strengthen transit connectivity, and deepen institutional cooperation between Pakistan and Tajikistan.

Two cargo ships anchor at Gwadar Port

Two cargo ships have anchored at Gwadar Port, boosting commercial operations at the port. One of the ships, MV HOM Leader; has arrived with 368.7 tons of machinery and general cargo.

The other ship, MV Do/phin 103, anchored at the port with 5,000 metric tons of MOP fertiliser. Port workers are carrying out offloading operations with full arrangements in place to ensure timely clearance.

According to officials, the arrival of cargo ships at Gwadar Port is contributing

to increased economic activity. The Chairman of Gwadar Port, Noor-ul-Haq Baloch, said the rise in the port's operational capacity is a positive development.

Gwadar Port Authority spokesperson Jameel Qasim said that MV HOM Leader has brought transshipment cargo, including various machinery and general goods. This reflects Gwadar's growing importance as a regional logistics and machinery handling hub.

Meanwhile, MV Do/phin 103 delivered 5,000 metric tons of MOP fertiliser.

Exports to major European markets slow down despite GSP+ status

Pakistan's exports to major western and northern European markets have recorded negative growth in the first nine months of the current fiscal year compared with a year ago, despite the continuation of the Generalised Scheme of Preferences (GSP+) status, raising concerns about weakening demand for the country's goods.

The development comes against the backdrop of a shifting global trade environment, as the US-Iran conflict sends shockwaves through the Middle East, impacting global goods transport and accelerating the fall in exports to European markets. Additionally, earlier this year, European Union preferential market access was offered to India, one of Pakistan's key competitors in textiles.

For Pakistani exporters, the evolving situation presents a dual challenge: maintaining compliance with EU conditions while facing increasing competition from countries gaining preferential or expanded market access.

Official data compiled by the State Bank showed that Pakistan's exports to European countries recorded a paltry year-on-year growth of 0.94 per cent to \$6.86 billion in the nine months (July to March) of fiscal year 2025-26 (9MFY26), against \$6.79bn over the last year.

In FY25, exports to the EU rose 7.44pc to \$8.86bn, up from \$8.24bn in the previous fiscal year. In comparison, in FY24, Pakistan's exports to the EU had dipped 3.12pc to \$8.24bn despite its GSP+ status. Exports to northern Europe slightly dipped by 0.85pc to \$557.31m in 9MFY26, from \$562.13m in the corresponding months last year.

Exports to western Europe slightly

fell by 3.14pc to \$3.30bn in 9MFY26, from \$3.41bn in FY25.

The country's exports to Germany declined by 2.97pc to \$1.24bn. Exports to Netherlands slipped by 1.78pc to \$1.1bn. Exports to France decreased by 2.62pc to \$411.89m, while the same to Belgium fell by 4.73pc to \$402.86m.

However, exports to southern Europe grew by 6.47pc to \$2.43bn in 9MFY26, from \$2.28bn in the corresponding period last year, while exports to eastern Europe grew 5.06pc to \$566.92m in 9MFY26, from \$539.63m in the corresponding period last year.

Exports went up 7.44pc to \$1.18bn in Spain, rose by 4.26pc to \$880.13m in Italy, but fell by 8.44pc to \$98.16m in Greece.

Before Brexit, Pakistan's major export destination was the UK. In the post-Brexit period, Pakistan's exports to the UK decreased slightly to \$1.62bn in 9MFY26, from \$1.62bn in the corresponding period last year, a decline of 0.23pc.

In FY25, Pakistan's exports to the UK increased by 7.19pc to \$2.16bn from \$2.02bn in the preceding year.



Huge storage charge waivers at KPT terminals announced

Federal Minister for Maritime Affairs Muhammad Junaid Anwar Chaudhry on Sunday 26 April announced storage charge waivers ranging from 25 to 50 per cent at Karachi Port Trust (KPT) terminals to facilitate exporters affected by recent disruptions in Gulf-bound shipments.

Following consultations with terminal operators to address exporters' concerns, retired Rear Admiral Shahid Ahmed, the chairman of KPT, led the initiative on the minister's direction. The effort secured waivers of 50 per cent at KGTL from March 1 to 20, 2026; 50 per cent at KICT from March 1 to 10, 2026; and 25 per cent at SAPT from March 11 to 31, 2026.

The minister said these measures apply to export containers stranded at terminal yards that could not be loaded due to operational issues. 'The waivers aim to reduce financial pressure on importers and exporters, clear pending consignments, and improve cargo clearance efficiency,' he added.

In a statement, Mr Chaudhry said the move marks a positive step to support the export sector, ensure trade continuity, and ease logistical bottlenecks.

Maritime institutions are being encouraged to adopt a more facilitative and trade-friendly approach so that operational delays do not result in avoidable costs for stakeholders,' he said.

The minister emphasised the need for improved coordination among ports and terminal operators to ensure smoother logistics and better service delivery.

He described such relief measures as part of a broader strategy to make the maritime sector more responsive and competitive, and better aligned with national trade priorities. He added that efficient port operations are vital for economic stability, export growth, and investor confidence.

Excitement around Karachi Port

The world appears to be rediscovering Pakistan as it plays a mediating role in easing regional tensions and helping avert global recession. Disruptions to key sea routes and rising risks at established regional shipping hubs have begun to divert attention and some traffic towards the country's underutilised ports. Fiscal incentives announced in March have further supported a modest uptick in activity at local ports.

According to port operators and private sector sources tracking recent trends, tariff cuts of up to 60 per cent and the introduction of volume-linked rebates have incentivized shipping lines, boosting through put at Pakistani ports by stimulating trade flows and improving the maritime sector.

While hard data is not yet available, a anecdotal evidence points to a noticeable increase in vessel calls, with a rising number of ships at anchorage and growing demand for ancillary services such as bunkering.

The government announced a comprehensive package of fiscal incentives, effective March 18, 2026, to enhance the regional competitiveness of its ports. Measures include tariff and cargo discounts, notably up to a 60pc reduction in port tariffs for vessels carrying at least 50pc transshipment cargo, and a 50pc discount on wet cargo charges for large container ships at Karachi and Port Qasim.

'To fully leverage Pakistan's coastline, we need deeper drafts, expanded berthing and storage capacity, and sustainable use of marine resources, alongside greater digital integration'

The minimum transshipment threshold has been lowered to 7.5pc, while the base discount has been raised to 20pc, with additional tiered incentives. Further measures include a 5pc discount for green shipping, a 60pc concession on dry bulk exports, a 50pc reduction in transshipment charges at Port Qasim, and approval of a new ferry service connecting Pakistan with Iran and Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries.

Experts believe that timely measures, meaningful reforms and enhanced port capacity could finally allow Pakistan to harness the natural advantage of its geography.

This is not the first time Pakistan has abruptly come into global focus. Following the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979 and again after 9/11

in 2001, the country swiftly moved into the West's strategic orbit. In both instances, inflows of dollars fueled short-term growth spurts, but these proved unsustainable amid weak policies and fragile political and economic structures.

This time may be different. The goodwill appears to stem from Pakistan's own diplomatic positioning rather than from external shocks, and the country is not under direct military rule as it was in earlier phases. Still, outcomes will hinge on the leadership's ability to convert this moment into durable gains.

"From being labelled as a dangerous, near-failing state, Pakistan has, for now, earned recognition as a responsible nation committed to peace. It has also, at least temporarily, addressed a long-standing concern of the private sector, which viewed the country's image as a key deterrent to investment," an analyst said, requesting anonymity.

"With sustained effort and reform, undertaken in close consultation with the private sector, Pakistan could shift towards a more durable growth trajectory," he added.

Retired Rear Admiral Moazzam Ilyas, Chairman of Port Qasim Authority (PQA), said the fiscal incentives announced by the government have already led to an increase in vessel calls and transshipment activity, with both Port Qasim and Karachi Port recording higher throughput. "To fully leverage Pakistan's coastline, we need deeper drafts, expanded berthing and storage capacity, and sustainable use of marine resources, alongside greater digital integration. Under the leadership of Minister for Maritime Affairs Junaid Anwar Chaudhry, port authorities have also facilitated transshipment cargo on GCC-bound routes," he noted.

He added that while Pakistani ports have demonstrated resilience during recent Gulf disruptions, handling sustained surges will require further infrastructure upgrades. "The influence of competing hubs and shipping lines' preference for established transshipment routes in South Asia has constrained Pakistan's potential so far. That said, improvements in bunkering, digitisation and fiscal incentives are gradually positioning our ports for a stronger regional role," he added.

M H Lodhi, Managing Director of Monsoon Winds Maritime Services, echoed the PQA chairman's view that the March incentive package has already delivered measurable gains.



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He noted that Karachi Port recorded a sharp surge in transshipment volumes in March, handling about 11,000 twenty-foot equivalent units (TEUs), far exceeding the 8,300 TEUs handled in all of 2025. Global lines, such as Hapag-Lloyd and OOCL, have added or planned calls, indicating early traction. Port Qasim has also seen steady growth, supported by available capacity of over 8,000 TEUs and additional yard space.

However, Mr Lodhi cautioned that much of the spike reflects temporary diversion due to Gulf disruptions rather than structural demand. Sustained

volumes would strain the existing systems because of limited yard space, infrastructure gaps, congestion risks, high turnaround times and a lack of off-dock integration.

He termed the moment a strategic opportunity to convert short-term gains into durable growth by addressing bottlenecks, to compete with established hubs like Dubai and Salalah. "The incentives worked tactically, but becoming a regional hub requires deeper structural and policy reforms," he concluded.

Muhammad Rajper, Managing

Director of General Shipping Agencies, said that while firm data is unavailable, each additional vessel brings in roughly \$50,000 to \$75,000 in port dues. "Unconfirmed reports suggest around 10 vessels called at Pakistan's three ports recently," he noted.

He stressed the need to actively market Pakistani ports to international shipping lines. "Capacity is not the constraint. The issue has been rigid custom procedures, though these are now easing, and the heavy subsidies offered by Gulf ports, which have made competition difficult," he added.

Govt advised against ratifying Unesco maritime heritage pact

The National Institute of Oceanography (NIO) has advised against ratifying a Unesco convention aimed at protecting underwater cultural heritage in Pakistan's maritime zones, citing national security and institutional concerns.

In a letter to the Department of Archaeology and Museums (DOAM), the institute said that while the objectives of the Unesco 2001 Convention on the Protection of Underwater Cultural Heritage were acknowledged, "several strategic, institutional, economic and legal considerations suggest that Pakistan may prudently defer ratification at this stage."

The letter, seen by media, noted that Pakistan's underwater zones include sensitive naval corridors, submarine cable routes and offshore installations.

"Ratification of the Convention could require reporting and international cooperation, potentially exposing sensitive geospatial and hydrographic data, which may have national security implications," it warned.

The NIO maintained that Pakistan currently had limited institutional and technical capacity to implement the convention, including a lack of trained marine archaeologists, underwater survey infrastructure and conservation laboratories.

It cautioned that ratification under these conditions would create binding international obligations without realistic capacity for compliance, potentially exposing the country to criticism or external pressure.

Written in response to Unesco's request, which maintained that Pakistan would be the first country in the region to ratify such a convention, the NIO further said, "Economic and developmental

priorities, such as port development at Gwadar, offshore hydrocarbon exploration, fisheries management and other blue economy initiatives, could be impacted by the convention's 'in situ preservation' principle, which may necessitate archaeological clearances or restrictions on seabed exploration."

From a legal standpoint, the NIO said that Pakistan already exercises jurisdiction over its territorial waters and Exclusive Economic Zone under the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS). Strengthening domestic legislation and policies would allow effective protection of underwater heritage without ratifying additional multilateral obligations, it insisted.

The institute said that ratification could also lead to increased foreign involvement in archaeological projects, limiting national control over discoveries and their interpretation. "At present, Pakistan's underwater heritage is largely unmaped and underexplored, and the immediate national benefit of ratification is minimal," it added.

"It is respectfully submitted that Pakistan may defer ratification of the Unesco 2001 Convention. It is recommended that priority be given to strengthening domestic legal and regulatory frameworks for underwater cultural heritage, building technical and human resource capacity in marine archaeology, conducting national surveys and research under Pakistani supervision and reconsidering ratification once adequate institutional readiness is achieved," the NIO said.

According to an official in the National Heritage and Culture Division, signing such an agreement "raises security

concerns with the government. No other country in South Asia has ratified the convention".

However, in August last year, the government announced that Pakistan was set to become the first South Asian nation to ratify the 2001 Unesco Convention on the Protection of Underwater Cultural Heritage. It dubbed the move a significant step towards safeguarding its submerged maritime legacy.

The announcement was made by Federal Minister for Maritime Affairs Muhammad Junaid Anwar Chaudhry during a meeting with Unesco representative Dr Cristina Menegazzi. The two sides had discussed collaborative efforts to document, preserve and promote Pakistan's rich underwater archaeological resources.

In recent years, underwater cultural heritage has attracted increasing attention from both the scientific community and the general public. For scientists, it represented an invaluable source of information on ancient civilisations, maritime practices, human use of land and marine environments, and climate change, according to Unesco.

Maritime archaeology, a specialised discipline that explores the relationship between humans and bodies of water through historical artefacts, is gaining prominence in coastal nations with rich maritime histories, according to a previously issued statement by the Press Information Department (PID).

In Pakistan's case, this included shipwrecks, submerged landscapes, ancient maritime infrastructure such as piers and lighthouses, and historic trade routes along the Arabian Sea.

Kalash valleys, three Sindh forts added to Unesco 'tentative list'

THE historic fort at Kot Diji (left) and the Kalash community in Chitral (right) have become the latest Pakistani heritage to be listed on Unesco's tentative list, taking the total number of listed Pakistani sites to 29.—Dawn / Kohi Marri / file

Total number of Pakistani heritage sites on the list rises from 25 to 29. Move marks first time an entire living community, its culture have been included

PESHAWAR/ISLAMABAD: The Kalash valleys in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa are among four heritage sites in Pakistan added to the Unesco World Heritage Tentative List, marking a milestone in heritage conservation, it emerged on Tuesday. The other three sites are the Kot Diji, Naukot and Umerkot forts in Sindh.

With these additions, the number of heritage sites in Pakistan on the Tentative List has increased from 25 to 29.

According to Unesco's website, a country must prepare an inventory of important natural and cultural heritage sites within its boundaries, known as the Tentative List. "It is an important step since the World Heritage Committee cannot consider a nomination for inscription on the World Heritage List unless the property has already been included on the State Party's Tentative List," it says.

Kalash — an enclave of three remote and inaccessible valleys of Bumburet, Birir and Rumbur — is located in KP's Chitral district and is inhabited by over 4,000 indigenous people who profess a polytheistic religion and maintain unique cultural practices.

KP Director General of Archaeology and Museums Dr Abdul Samad told Dawn that the development was a significant achievement towards the preservation of Kalash culture. "It is the first time an entire community and its cultural practices have been included on the Unesco Tentative List," he said.

He said his department had been working for more than a decade to have the Kalash cultural landscape placed on the UN agency's heritage list. He said the enlistment would contribute to the preservation of both the tangible and intangible aspects of Kalash culture.

Dr Samad explained that the first step involved acceptance of a submission by the World Heritage Centre on the Tentative List, followed by formal notification by the UN body. However, he added that after tentative enlistment, a dossier must be submitted to the UN body, incorporating bylaws and other necessary requirements.



He said inclusion on the Tentative List had placed Kalash culture on the national and international cultural map, facilitating bylaws, community development, and preservation of tangible and intangible heritage; therefore, it was a major achievement.

KP Governor Faisal Karim Kundi, in a post on X, welcomed the development, terming it a "major milestone". He noted that KP was "home to some of the world's most breathtaking landscapes and unique cultural traditions, and this recognition is long overdue". "A well-deserved moment that brings global attention to the beauty and heritage of our region," he added.

According to Unesco's website, "The Kalasha Valley cultural landscape possesses outstanding universal value (OUV) as an extremely rare and exceptionally well-preserved example of a living indigenous cultural system."

It said this system has continued without interruption for centuries within its original geographic and cultural setting. Despite historical changes, outside influences, and social pressures, the Kalasha community has successfully maintained its distinct identity.

"These features are not abstract ideas or symbolic references to the past, as they are actively practised and clearly connected to the physical landscape, where specific places serve as designated locations for particular ceremonies and ritual activities. The landscape itself is directly involved in sustaining and expressing cultural life."

It said the tangible heritage includes more than 140 recorded ceremonial structures, ritual platforms, ancestral graveyards featuring distinctive wooden

carvings, and traditional villages. Each of these places has its own name, purpose and meaning within the memory and identity of the community.

A vital step

Dr Tahir Saeed, former director at the Department of Archaeology and Museums, said the inclusion of four sites was a vital step towards future nominations to the prestigious World Heritage List.

Dr Saeed, who was engaged by the archaeology departments of Sindh and KP to prepare and submit proposals to Unesco, told Dawn that the inclusion strengthens Pakistan's position in global heritage conservation.

According to him, an evaluation team from the World Heritage Centre is expected in August/September this year to inspect the Port of Bhambhor, following Pakistan's request to include the site — dating from the first century BC to the 13th century AD — in the World Heritage List.

"If approved by the evaluation team, the Port of Bhambhor could be added to the list by 2027," he said, adding that he had prepared the nomination dossier.

The last time a property of archaeological significance from Pakistan was declared a World Heritage Site was nearly three decades ago. "Rohtas Fort was included in the World Heritage List in 1997," he said.

Pakistan currently has six sites on the World Heritage List: Lahore Fort and Shalimar Gardens, Taxila, the remains of Makli Necropolis, Takht-i-Bahi, Mohenjo Daro, and Rohtas Fort.

The last time Unesco accepted Pakistan's request to include properties on the Tentative List was a decade ago, in 2016.



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Hinglaj Mata festival draws nearly 300,000 Hindu pilgrims



INDU devotees perform rituals at the holy site in Balochistan.

The three-day annual festival of the historic Hinglaj Mata temple concluded successfully on Sunday 19 April, with the hope that peace and religious harmony will prevail across the country, and that minorities will work jointly for the development and prosperity of the country.

The religious festival, which began on April 17 in the rugged mountains of Balochistan, has emerged as a powerful symbol of religious harmony and tolerance. Considered the third-largest Hindu religious gathering after festivals in India and Nepal, the event attracted around 300,000 pilgrims this month, with nearly a million devotees visiting the shrine in a year. The large gathering this year was seen by officials as a message of unity.

Several thousand devotees travelled to the Hinglaj Mata Temple on foot from various areas of Sindh, including Tharparkar, Umerkot, and Sanghar.

The journey, which for many took 20 days, demonstrated a strong religious devotion and served as an example of interfaith harmony.

The Balochistan government, the Provincial Disaster Management Authority, and the district

administration made extensive arrangements to ensure the festival ran smoothly.

The PDMA distributed ration bags and other essential items to pilgrims, while Deputy Commissioner Lasbela Humaira Baloch and Senior Superintendent of Police Najeebullah Pandrani remained on site to oversee administrative and security matters.

To ensure pilgrims' safety, a large-scale security operation was put in place. Contingents of the Pakistan Army, Frontier Corps, Police and Levies were deployed to provide foolproof security for the massive event.

As part of humanitarian efforts, the Pakistan Coast Guards, PPHI, and the Lasbela Health Department established free medical camps. At these camps, specialist doctors and female doctors examined hundreds of pilgrims and provided free medicines.

The Shri Hinglaj Mata Welfare Mandli also arranged a 24-hour "bhandara" (langar), ensuring an uninterrupted provision of food, cold water, sherbet and tea for all attendees.

Mandli officials, including President Mukhi Vinod Kumar Lasi, General Secretary Veersi Mal Kediwani and spokesperson Parkash Kumar Lasi, worked alongside hundreds of volunteers to serve pilgrims around the clock.

Several political and social figures visited the temple to participate in rituals. Attendees included Jamiat Ulema-i-Islam leader and former Balochistan Member of Provincial Assembly Mukhi Sham Lal Lasi, Sindh Governor's Coordinator Vishal Palyani and MPA Sanjay Kumar.

Railways minister inaugurates revamped Safari train service

Minister for Railways Hanif Abbasi on Sunday 12 April inaugurated an upgraded Safari train in Rawalpindi, highlighting major reforms and tourism-focused rail services.

Addressing the inaugural ceremony at the Rawalpindi Railway Station, the minister said comprehensive measures were being taken to modernise the railways with positive outcomes already becoming visible.

He said the Safari train had been upgraded with modern facilities, including air-conditioned coaches, newly-designed comfortable seating and an improved, family-friendly environment. The train has been transformed into a tourism-based recreational model, featuring short stopovers at various stations along with planned activities, while extended stays and lunch facilities are being offered at scenic locations such as Attock Khurd.

The minister noted a significant increase in the train's occupancy, reflecting growing public confidence in railway services.

He added that efforts were underway to enhance operational performance by mobilising railway officers in the field. He also acknowledged the dedication of railway workers who continue to serve under challenging conditions and play a key role in system restoration.

Appreciating the operational continuity on the Karachi-Rohri track despite its deteriorated condition, the

Senator Daanesh Kumar, who also attended, described the temple as one of the most sacred sites in Hinduism.

"The arrival of three times more pilgrims than last year is proof of interfaith harmony and Pakistan being a safe country," Kumar said while talking to the media. He noted that pilgrims could perform their religious rituals in the harsh, mountainous region without fear.

Kumar added that the festival counters negative propaganda regarding minority rights in the country.

"The Hinglaj Mata Mandir festival sends a clear message to the world that Pakistan respects and protects the rights of minorities and promotes interfaith harmony," he said.

He also appreciated the efforts of the local administration, volunteers, and the Hinglaj Mata Mandir Committee in ensuring smooth, well-organised arrangements for the pilgrims.

minister stated that comprehensive reforms were being introduced in mechanical, braking and locomotive systems. He said a new maintenance regime was being introduced to address longstanding issues related to delayed locomotive upkeep.

Mr Abbasi stated that the railway upgradation programme was targeted for completion by December 2026, while major infrastructure initiatives were expected to commence in the first week of September.

He said progress was underway on a railway infrastructure project worth approximately \$2 billion, and work was being accelerated to reduce travel time between Lahore and Karachi by five hours.

He added that track upgradation in the Lahore Division was progressing at an estimated cost of Rs250 billion. Additionally, a plan to introduce DMU trains on nine routes is being advanced in collaboration with the Punjab government. Partnerships with provincial governments through joint venture models are also being expanded to strengthen railway development.

The minister appreciated Punjab Chief Minister Maryam Nawaz in accelerating railway projects, and announced that, in collaboration with the Sindh government, the upgradation of Rohri junction will begin soon, aiming to modernise the historic facility. He said special measures were being taken to revive the freight and cargo sector.

Pakistan launches medical tourism initiative under SIFC

The Pakistan National Medical Tourism Initiative, under the Special Investment Facilitation Council (SIFC), has been formally launched.

The development was announced during the 30th Annual International Conference of the Pakistan Association of Plastic Surgeons (Paps), marking a significant milestone for the country's surgical landscape.

Organised under the leadership of Conference Secretary Prof Dr Abdul Khaliq Malik, head of Plastic and Burn Surgery at Pims, the event drew over 400 delegates and 12 international faculty members despite regional challenges.

The conference served as a premier scientific forum, featuring a robust lineup of research-based presentations, state-of-the-art lectures, and live surgical workshops. A dedicated track focused on non-invasive aesthetic procedures, such as Botox, fillers and fat grafting, provided residents and specialists with hands-on exposure to global trends.

The event hosted an eminent lineup of global experts, including Prof Dr Eva Maria (Germany), president of Icoplast, Prof Nick Wilson John (UK), chair of the Bapras Education Committee and leading specialists from China, Egypt, Türkiye, Argentina and Saudi Arabia.

The ceremony, attended by Health Secretary Aslam Ghauri and senior military officials, including DG SIFC Maj Gen Asadur Rehman Cheema, aimed to position Pakistan as a regional destination for affordable, high-quality reconstructive and aesthetic surgery.

The conference received significant academic support from the vice chancellors of Nums and SZABMU, alongside the administrative patronage of Prof Dr Rana Imran Sikandar, executive director of Pims.

During the proceedings, the new leadership of Paps was sworn in, with Prof Dr Mazhar Nizam assuming office as president.

Prof Dr Abdul Khaliq Malik expressed gratitude to the organising committee, particularly acknowledging the contributions of Dr Safdar Ali and Prof Dr Farrukh Aslam. The long-standing services of pioneers such as Prof Mamoon Rasheed and Prof Moazzam Nazir Tarar were also recognised for inspiring the next generation of surgeons.

The three-day event concluded with a resolve to strengthen global academic collaborations and cement Pakistan's role as an emerging leader in plastic surgery

innovation.

Meanwhile, Federal Minister for Health Mustafa Kamal held a meeting with the Sehat Kahani team, led by CEO Dr Sara Saeed Khurram.

During the meeting, the CEO presented a briefing on the three-month performance of Sehat Kahani's telemedicine integration across basic health units (BHUs) in Islamabad and dispensaries in Karachi. She said the project has been implemented across eight facilities, serving thousands of patients

through both general and specialist consultations.

The briefing highlighted that key specialties included gynaecology, paediatrics and dermatology, with the highest patient volumes recorded in the 0–9 and 20–49 age groups. Notably, 65 per cent of the beneficiaries were women, reflecting improved access to healthcare services.

From a financial perspective, the initiative resulted in an estimated cost saving of approximately Rs8 million by reducing patient travel, avoiding expensive private consultations and ensuring timely access to medicines and treatment.

Sea of colours, faith marks Baisakhi at Panja Sahib



Sikh pilgrims Wear traditional costumes and holding Khalsa flags.

A sea of vibrant colours, spiritual devotion and historic reverence marked the Baisakhi festival and the 327th birth anniversary of the Khalsa at Gurdwara Panja Sahib, where thousands of Sikh pilgrims, including more than 2,200 yatrees from India, gathered to perform sacred rituals and reaffirm their deep-rooted connection with the land of their Gurus.

From the early hours of the morning, the holy premises echoed with the recitation of Gurbani, as devotees clad in traditional attire — men wearing turbans of bright hues and women in colourful

dupattas — queued patiently to pay obeisance at one of Sikhism's most revered shrines. The occasion commemorates the founding of the Khalsa by Guru Gobind Singh in 1699, a defining moment in Sikh history that symbolises courage, equality and spiritual discipline.

The courtyard of the gurdwara presented a striking visual spectacle. Pilgrims bowed their heads in humility, offered ardas (prayers), and took part in the sacred langar, embodying the Sikh principles of selfless service and communal harmony. Many devotees were visibly moved, with tears in their eyes as they touched the sacred rock bearing the

handprint associated with Guru Nanak Dev, after whom the shrine is named.

“Punjab has long served as a spiritual home to Sufis, saints and Gurus. It is a land where the very earth seems to carry the essence of love, harmony, and deep reverence for humanity, and Gurdwara at Hassan Abdal is a living example of it”, said Punjab Minister for Minority Affairs, Sardar Ramesh Singh Arora.

“This is more than a journey—it feels like returning home in a spiritual sense,” said Sardar Hardeep Singh, a devotee, his voice filled with emotion. He said that he was just five years old when he along with his parents moved from a village near Gujranwala. He said that still today he is in contact with his childhood friends who show him his ancient place through video calls.

“Setting foot on this sacred land brings us deep peace. Pakistan holds profound significance for us as the land of our Gurus, and visiting Panja Sahib allows us to reconnect with our heritage,” said another Indian pilgrim, Harpreet Kaur. “Every corner here tells a story of our faith,” she added. “We feel a deep sense of belonging. The love we receive from the people here is unforgettable.”

The Baisakhi festival, celebrated annually on April 13 or 14, holds dual significance — marking the harvest season in Punjab and commemorating the establishment of the Khalsa Panth. For Sikhs worldwide, it is a day of renewal, reflection and reaffirmation of their spiritual commitments. The Baisakhi celebrations at Gurdwara Panja Sahib once again underscored the enduring spiritual ties that connect Sikh communities worldwide to their sacred heritage in Pakistan. The convergence of thousands of pilgrims, including those from across the border, served as a powerful testament to faith's ability to transcend boundaries and bring people together in shared reverence.

Throughout the day, scenes of devotion unfolded across the sprawling complex. Elderly pilgrims were seen leaning on walking sticks yet determined to complete their rituals, while young volunteers assisted in distributing food and water. As the sun set behind the Jablat Hills, the gurdwara complex glowed with lights, and the recitation of evening prayers created a serene and contemplative ambience. Devotees continued to pour in, each carrying personal hopes, prayers and gratitude.

As the final prayers concluded and the holy verses faded into silence, a sense of serenity descended upon Gurdwara Panja Sahib — not as an ending, but as a timeless continuation of faith, echoing in every heart that had gathered in the courtyard of the Guru.

Ancient glass beads unearthed at Taxila's Bhir Mound



Workers carry out excavation at Bhir Mound. (Right) Glass beads discovered during recent excavations

As many as 18 glass beads dating back to the early 2nd century BC to the 1st century AD have been discovered during recent excavations at the historic Bhir Mound, also regarded as the first city of the Taxila valley civilisation, which was abandoned between the 1st century BC and the 2nd century AD by the Bactrian Greeks, the last known inhabitants of the site.

“This appears to be part of a necklace, as the thread has rusted away while the beads survived. They were discovered in trench H-3 at a depth of 14 inches from the surface, a few yards from the Taxila Museum,” said Deputy Director of the Punjab Department of Archaeology Aasim Dogar, who heads the five-member excavation team.

The official noted that scientific research, systematic documentation and conservation efforts are helping preserve the region's cultural heritage.

“The preliminary study suggests these newly discovered beads belong to the late Maurya period and the earliest Greek era in Taxila. Extensive archaeological research on such figurines confirms that these artefacts are characteristically local and indicate the artistic influences Taxila absorbed under the Mauryan rule,” Mr Dogar said. “Similar glass beads were earlier discovered by Sir John Marshall during excavations at Sirkap, the first metropolitan city of Taxila, between 1913 and 1934,” he added.

He said the discovery demonstrates that even in the BC era, the inhabitants of ancient Gandhara excelled in metalworking and had already invented glass. The presence of glass beads, he said, shows that Taxila was not only a cultural and educational hub but also an important industrial and commercial centre in

ancient South Asia when the region played a major role in trade and craftsmanship. Taxila's beads, he added, were widely traded across Central Asia and the Indian subcontinent.

“Preliminary dating places the artefacts between the early 2nd century BC and the 1st century AD, though specialists caution that further laboratory testing and contextual analysis are required before drawing definitive conclusions,” he said. Responding to a question, the senior archaeologist said that the utilisation of the latest Japanese and Chinese software and hardware, especially GPS technology, drone surveys, 3D scanning and digital mapping, has produced highly positive results.

He said key tools and equipment for excavation and quarrying were provided by the Japanese government through the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) under the project titled Improvement of Equipment for Exhibition and Conservation of the Taxila Museum. The project was implemented with Japanese grant assistance amounting to 48.8 million yen in February this year.

The Bhir Mound holds immense archaeological significance. According to experts, its remains represent one stage of the historic city of Taxila. The earliest town in Taxila was situated at the Hathial mound in the southwest corner of the Sirkap site. It lasted from the late second millennium BC until the Achaemenid period, with remains from the latter phase still present in the mound. Bhir Mound represents the second city of Taxila, beginning in the pre-Achaemenid period and lasting until the early Hellenistic period.

Historical accounts testify that Panini, the author of the renowned Sanskrit grammar text, lived in Taxila; Caraka, a famous master of medicine, also had a house on Bhir Mound; and Kautilya — the Brahman adviser to Chandragupta Maurya and author of the classic treatise on statecraft, the Arthashastra — was a resident of the ancient city as well.

Bhir Mound, along with nearby excavations, forms part of the Ruins of Taxila, which were inscribed as a Unesco World Heritage Site in 1980.



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Marka-i-Haq Monument under construction at Kutchery Chowk Rawalpindi



Marka-i-Haq Monument at Kutchery Chowk is scheduled to be completed by the first week of May.

A monument is being constructed in Baggi (horse carriage) Park at Kutchery Chowk Rawalpindi in front of Fatima Jinnah Women University, and is expected to complete in the first week of May.

The Frontier Works Organisation (FWO) has been assigned the task to establish the Marka-i-Haq Monument on The Mall.

“It is a replica of the monument in H-8 Islamabad. However, Marka-i-Haq Monument is unique as it is being constructed in an established park and additional land will not be acquired for it,” said a senior official of the district administration while talking to media.

He said the project was likely to complete before May 10, the first anniversary of the Maraka-i-Haq. He said the monument was being constructed on the direction of the provincial government which provided funding for the project.

“The main purpose of this project is to commemorate victims and honour the sacrifices of martyrs and ghazis of the operation Bunyanum Marsoos,” he said. The official said the theme symbolises the nation's collective unwavering resolve and unity, highlighting the spirit of remaining united in the face of all kinds of threats.

He said PHA was given the task to improve the condition of the park adjacent to the monument. He said PHA had started work on land development in the park.

On the other hand, Rawalpindi Municipal Corporation has suggested the name of the Kutchery Chowk flyover and underpass as Marka-i-Haq Flyover and Underpass and sought objections from the public, if any.

A senior official of RMC told media under the law, the civic body had to take objections from the public for renaming main squares and roads.

He said the public hearing would be held after which a committee would finalise the name of the flyover and

underpass.

Meanwhile, more than 80 per cent work on the Kutchery Chowk remodelling project has been completed and the divisional administration has directed to complete the work by May 31.

Work on the Kutchery intersection is 76 per cent complete, development work on Iftikhar Janjua Road 74 per cent

Railway, Punjab govt agree to run fast train between Lahore, Rawalpindi

Pakistan Railways and Punjab government on Thursday 16 April joined hands by signing a memorandum of understanding (MoU) to run a fast train between Lahore and Rawalpindi and various other trains on local routes in a bid to transform railway transport across the province.

The MoU was signed by Chief Minister Maryam Nawaz and Federal Minister for Railways Muhammad Hanif Abbasi.

Under this initiative, Pakistan's first fast train service will be introduced between Lahore and Rawalpindi, covering approximately 280 kilometers in just two hours and 15 minutes. The project aims to modernise and expand railway operations across Punjab, with fast and regional train services to be operated over approximately 1,415 kilometers across 20 regions and eight key local routes.

Modern diesel multiple unit (DMU) trains will be deployed on regional routes, including Shahdara to Narowal (79km) and onward to Sialkot (62km), Raiwind, Kasur, Pakpattan to Lodhran (370km), Sheikhupura, Jaranwala to Shorkot (220km), Lalamusa, Malakwal to Sargodha (147km), Faisalabad via Chak Jhumra to Shaheenabad (68km), and the inter-provincial corridor from Kot Addu to Kashmore via Dera Ghazi Khan (303km).

New locomotives and modern passenger coaches will be inducted to enhance operational efficiency and service standards.

Railways Minister Muhammad Hanif Abbasi termed the agreement a defining moment for Pakistan Railways, stating that approximately 90 million passengers across nine routes were expected to benefit from the project. He emphasised

complete and construction on Jinnah Park Chowk is 75 per cent complete. Besides, utility ducts' work is 83 per cent and construction of a pedestrian bridge is 55 per cent complete.

The divisional commissioner said the project was progressing at a record pace in double shifts as the target was to complete it in 18 months while it will be completed in a record period of six months.

“A deadline of May 2026 has been set for the completion of the project,” he said and directed further increase in the pace of work.

that the project would significantly upgrade railway services to align with international standards under the leadership and supervision of the chief minister.

He said that in parallel with service expansion, Pakistan Railways was undertaking major infrastructure improvements.

Lahore Railway Station was being upgraded with comprehensive beautification and international-standard parking facilities. Advanced automated (unmanned) safety systems were also being introduced to reduce accidents and enhance operational safety across the network.

He said environmental sustainability measures form an integral part of the initiative, with over 400,000 trees being planted along railway tracks. A 40km green corridor from Shahdara to Raiwind was also being developed to create a modern, environmentally sustainable railway environment comparable to international benchmarks.

The minister acknowledged the efforts of Senior Minister Maryam Aurangzeb in supporting the execution of this initiative over the past year.

Talking to media, minister Abbasi said the Punjab CM had pledged to provide Rs45 billion funds to the railways for upgrading nine local routes and running trains in a bid to reduce traffic rush on highways and control smog.

“Besides this, the government will also support the railways financially for launching fast trains on the Lahore-Rawalpindi route. On this particular project, Rs350 billion will be spent since it entails laying of new track,” he explained.

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