



Iran war costs soar past \$29bn as truce teeters

• Before taking off on long-awaited China trip, Trump vows to 'win peacefully or otherwise' • Tehran expands Hormuz control as EU mulls post-war naval mission • *Wall Street Journal* claims UAE launched strikes on Iranian energy facility last month • Pakistan pushes China, Azerbaijan on ME peace; earns praise from US president for being 'absolutely great' mediator

WASHINGTON: As prospects for peace in the Middle East diminished due to the rigid stances adopted by the US and Iran, the Pentagon on Tuesday said the conflict with Tehran had cost Washington more than \$29 billion since the start of hostilities in February, even as consumer inflation in the US hit a three-year high in April.

Jules Hurst, who is performing the duties of comptroller, told US lawmakers on Tuesday that the bill included updated repair and replacement of equipment and operational costs, *Reuters* reported. "The joint staff team and the comptroller team are constantly looking at that estimate," Mr Hurst said. He was speaking alongside Defence Secretary Pete Hegseth and Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, General Dan Caine.

On April 29, the Pentagon said the war had cost \$25bn at that point.

Unyielding stances: Editorial on Page 6

Trump goes on social media conspiracy posting spree: Page 11

Trump expects 'big, fat hug' from Xi amid tense agenda: Page 12

FO gives CBS reality check on 'parked Iran jets' claim

ISLAMABAD: The Foreign Office on Tuesday rejected as "misleading and sensationalised" a report by an American media outlet claiming that Pakistan had "quietly allowed" Iranian military aircraft to park at its airfields while simultaneously playing the role of mediator in the Middle East conflict.

Citing US officials, *CBS News* had alleged that days after US President Donald Trump announced a ceasefire with Iran in early April, Tehran sent multiple aircraft to Nur Khan Airbase.

"Among the military hardware was an Iranian Air Force RC-130, a reconnaissance and intelligence-gathering variant of the Lockheed C-130 Hercules tactical transport aircraft," the report claimed.

In a statement issued on Tuesday, the Foreign Office

The statement came hours before President Donald Trump took off aboard Air Force One bound for China, the first trip by a US leader to the rival power in nearly a decade. He is set to hold talks on Thursday and Friday with Chinese President Xi Jinping that will focus heavily on trade but also on potential friction points over Taiwan and Iran.

Earlier, the US had rejected an Iranian response

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Fuel levy yields lowest fiscal deficit in nearly three decades

• Gap shrinks to Rs856bn, or 0.7pc of GDP, during July-March • Provincial surpluses, higher PDL collections, lower debt servicing drive improvement • Revenue-to-GDP ratio falls; defence, pension, subsidy expenditures rise

By Khaleeq Kiani

ISLAMABAD: Supported by higher-than-targeted provincial contributions, strong petroleum levy collections and lower interest payments during the first three quarters of the current fiscal year, Pakistan recorded its lowest fiscal deficit in at least 27 years at 0.7 per cent of GDP, despite a decline in revenue ratios and increases in most expenditure heads except debt servicing.

According to official fiscal operations data released by the Ministry of Finance for July-March, the historically low fiscal deficit was achieved after a gradual reversal of the Rs2.1 trillion surplus, equivalent to 1.6pc of GDP, recorded in

the first quarter (July-September) of the current fiscal year.

The budget surplus had narrowed to Rs542 billion (0.4pc of GDP) by the end of the first half and eventually turned into a fiscal deficit of Rs857bn by the end of the third quarter.

The data showed that petroleum levy remained the government's largest revenue source, surging by 45pc to Rs1.205tr despite mounting public suffering caused by higher fuel prices amid the US-Israel war on Iran. The collection appears set to surpass the annual target of Rs1.468tr by a wide margin. During the same period last year, petroleum levy collection stood at less than

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SECURITY personnel inspect debris scattered in front of shops in the Sarai Naurang area of Lakki Marwat after a bomb ripped through a busy marketplace, claiming at least nine lives.—AFP

Two policemen among nine slain in Lakki Marwat blast

At least 33 injured as explosives planted in a rickshaw rip through busy marketplace

By Ghulam Mursalin Marwat

LAKKI MARWAT: At least nine people, including two traffic policemen, lost their lives while 33 others were injured on Tuesday, after a bomb blast tore through a busy market in the Sarai Naurang tehsil of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa's Lakki Marwat district, police said.

Lakki Marwat Deputy Commissioner Hameedullah Khan said that, per initial reports, terrorists had planted explosives in a rickshaw.

Footage of the site of the bombing showed several shops and three-wheelers damaged in the blast, but no group has so far come forward to claim responsibility for the attack.

Shortly after the blast, Rescue 1122 spokesperson Shahdab Khan said ambulances and rescue teams were dispatched to the site. He also requested people to stay away from the scene and cooperate with rescue agencies.

The Lakki Marwat district police officer's spokesperson, Qudratullah Khan, identified the martyred

police officials as Adil Jan and Rahatullah. A statement issued by the KP CM's office confirmed that both were traffic police officials.

DC Hameedullah Khan confirmed that the death toll stood at nine, corroborating an incident report issued by the THQ hospital. According to the report, 33 injured people were brought to the hospital and five of them were referred to Bannu hospital.

The deputy commissioner visited the THQ hospital in Sarai Naurang, where the injured were receiving

Treasury, opposition spar in Senate over terror wave in KP: Page 12

medical attention and directed the administration to provide them with the best available facilities. He added that the critically injured had been referred to the DHQ hospitals in Bannu and Peshawar.

Expressing grief over the incident, Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif reaffirmed the country's resolve towards "eradicating the scourge of terrorism," state-broadcaster *PTV* reported. He said all relevant institutions were working towards eradicating terrorism with "unwavering resolve", and directed an inquiry into the blast.

The premier lauded the "sacrifices made by law

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PM orders uninterrupted supply of fertiliser to safeguard food security

• Asks ministries to explore alternative fertiliser imports from Central Asia • Reiterates Balochistan's development as federal govt's top priority • Says waste-to-energy projects can reduce fuel imports, carbon footprint

By Syed Irfan Raza

ISLAMABAD: Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif on Tuesday directed the authorities concerned to ensure the timely provision of fertiliser to farmers at all costs and ordered continuous monitoring of fertiliser supplies to safeguard the country's food security.

Chairing a meeting on food security and fertiliser reserves in the capital, the prime minister said fulfilling the agricultural sec-

tor's requirements remained the government's top priority to ensure national food security, according to a statement issued by the Prime Minister's Office (PMO).

He directed the relevant ministries and institutions to formulate contingency plans for alternative fertiliser supplies from Central Asian states in view of possible disruptions in supply chains from Gulf countries.

The prime minister also instructed authorities to ensure sufficient fertiliser stocks for both

khari and rabi crop seasons and emphasised accelerating work on projects aimed at increasing local fertiliser production through the installation of new plants.

During the meeting, he directed strict action against artificial shortages and hoarding of fertiliser to protect farmers from exploitation and maintain stable supplies in the market.

The meeting was informed that the uninterrupted supply of

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Med students going abroad advised to register with PMDC

By Ikram Junaidi

ISLAMABAD: The Pakistan Medical and Dental Council (PMDC) on Tuesday announced that students intending to pursue medical or dental education abroad must qualify for the Medical and Dental College Admission Test (MDCAT) and obtain registration before going abroad.

The PMDC said a committee chaired by Deputy Prime Minister Ishaq Dar is currently overseeing the strengthening of the regulatory framework for medical and dental education in Pakistan.

It said that a meeting of the PMDC's sub-committee on accreditation of medical and dental colleges and postgraduate qualifications was held to "review ongoing reforms and regulatory measures to strengthen medical and dental education in Pakistan".

"The sub-committee is focused on enhancing transparency, standardising accreditation mechanisms for medical and dental colleges, and streamlining the recognition

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ON OTHER PAGES



Eid may fall on 27th, says Suparco

While acknowledging that a final decision regarding the sighting of the Zilhajj crescent will be made by the Central Ruet-i-Hilal Committee, Pakistan's Space and Upper Atmosphere Research Commission (Suparco) has forecast the new moon is expected to be sighted on the evening of May 17 when its age would be around 18 hours and 30 minutes, while Eidul Azha is likely to fall on May 27. **Page 3**

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