PM Shehbaz approves Rs23b for AJK

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Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif recently authorized the allocation of Rs23 billion for Azad Jammu and Kashmir (AJK) amidst escalating protests triggered by a surge in electricity tariffs. Violent clashes between law enforcement and demonstrators resulted in casualties, including one police officer dead and numerous injuries. The unrest prompted a comprehensive shutdown since Friday, halting daily activities across the region.

The decision to disburse funds was made during a special meeting convened in Islamabad, chaired by the Prime Minister and attended by key figures such as AJK Prime Minister Chaudhry Anwarul Haq and representatives from coalition parties.

In response to mounting pressure, PM Haq announced a reduction in electricity tariffs and bread prices. Under the revised tariff structure, household consumers will pay Rs3 per unit for usage ranging from 1 to 100 units, Rs5 per unit for consumption between 101 and 300 units, and Rs6 per unit for usage exceeding 300 units. Similar adjustments were made for commercial consumers.

President Asif Ali Zardari urged all parties involved to exercise restraint and engage in constructive dialogue to address grievances, cautioning against the exploitation of the situation by antagonistic elements. PM Shehbaz Sharif echoed these sentiments, emphasizing the importance of peaceful resolution.

The protests stem from longstanding grievances, with the Joint Awami Action Committee (JAAC) demanding equitable electricity pricing, subsidized flour, and an end to elitist privileges. Despite previous agreements, tensions escalated with the announcement of a planned long march, leading to arrests and further demonstrations. The situation underscores the urgency of addressing socio-economic disparities and fostering inclusive governance in the region.

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