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## Pakistan, Iraq Launch Gwadar-Umm Qasr Ferry to Boost Trade

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Pakistan and Iraq have signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) to establish a ferry service between Gwadar Port and Umm Qasr Port, aiming to enhance trade and religious tourism.

Pakistan and Iraq have formalized an agreement to launch a ferry service connecting Gwadar Port in Balochistan with Umm Qasr Port in Iraq, as announced by the Ministry of Maritime Affairs. The Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) was signed following discussions between Federal Minister for Maritime Affairs Muhammad Junaid Anwar

Chaudhry and an Iraqi delegation led by Deputy Head of Mission Abdulqadir Sulyman Alhimiri, according to Associated Press of Pakistan (APP). The initiative aims to strengthen maritime cooperation, boost bilateral trade, and facilitate religious travel, particularly for Pakistani pilgrims visiting Iraq for Arbaeen, with over 88,000 making the journey last year, as reported by The Frontier Post.

Chaudhry described the agreement as a “new chapter” in Pakistan-Iraq relations, emphasizing its potential to enhance economic ties and support religious tourism, per Business Recorder. The ferry service, operated by UK-based Sea Keepers, will use modern vessels equipped with essential amenities for safe and affordable travel, with initial operations starting from Gwadar and Karachi ports. The minister highlighted that Pakistan could supply Iraq’s potassium sulphate needs through a facility in Gwadar’s Free Zone, strengthening trade prospects. He also sought Iraq’s support for Pakistan’s candidacy in the International Maritime Organisation (IMO) elections, receiving assurances from the Iraqi delegation, as noted by Daily Times.

The initiative aligns with Pakistan’s National Maritime Policy to develop its blue economy and position Gwadar as a regional trade hub under the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC). The service is expected to ease pressure on land routes, particularly after Iran’s recent restrictions on border crossings, affecting nearly one million Arbaeen pilgrims, according to Dawn. Public reactions show enthusiasm for the affordable travel option, though some users raised concerns about operational timelines. The ferry service is part of broader plans to connect Gwadar with Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries, enhancing regional connectivity and economic opportunities.