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Prime Minister Sharif Orders Launch of Gwadar Safe City Project

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Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif has directed Interior Minister Syed Mohsin Naqvi to expedite the Gwadar Safe City Project, a key security initiative in Balochistan's strategic port city. The project, originally approved in 2016, aims to enhance surveillance and public safety in a region central to the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC). With a revised budget of approximately Rs 4.97 billion, the initiative includes the installation of 640 CCTV cameras across 130 sites, the development of a centralized command-and-control center, and the laying of 180 kilometers of fiber-optic cable. Funding is being provided equally by the federal and provincial governments through the Public Sector Development Programme.

Despite its importance, the project has faced significant delays. As of mid-2025, only about 30 percent of the work has been completed, and full operational status is now targeted for mid-2026. Senate officials have raised concerns over bureaucratic inefficiencies and delayed fund disbursements, which have stalled progress over the past several years. Authorities have stated that key technical and feasibility components have been finalized, but on-the-ground implementation remains slow.

While the initiative is intended to strengthen law enforcement and protect both local residents and foreign workers—particularly Chinese nationals working on CPEC infrastructure—it has also raised human rights concerns. Gwadar, home to a predominantly Baloch population, has long experienced grievances related to political marginalization, limited access to clean water, electricity, and healthcare, as well as military presence. The introduction of mass surveillance, including facial recognition technology, has sparked fears that such systems may be used to monitor dissent rather than ensure public safety.

Local leaders and civil society groups have emphasized the need for transparency and community involvement in the implementation of security measures. Without addressing the socio-economic needs of Gwadar's residents or ensuring protections for privacy and civil liberties, the project risks deepening mistrust between the state and local population. Critics argue that security-driven development, if pursued without adequate public consultation, may fuel further alienation in an already restive region.

The success of the Gwadar Safe City Project will ultimately depend on balancing effective policing with constitutional safeguards and meaningful community engagement. As the government moves forward with securing Gwadar's future as a trade and logistics hub, the inclusion and trust of its people remain critical to long-term stability and progress.