



Islamabad POST

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Bulgarian ambassador celebrates 60 years of bilateral relations

Detailed News On Page-08

Donald Trump tax cut bill disgusting

Detailed News On Page-08



Klaasen announces retirement

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PM orders expansion of rail links with C. Asia

MEHTAB PIRZADA

ISLAMABAD: Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif has directed the formulation of a strategy to expand the railway network in order to enhance trade relations with Central Asian countries. Chairing a meeting regarding Pakistan Railways in Islamabad on Wednesday, he noted that railway system is the backbone of any country's economy. He emphasized the need for a sustainable rebuilding of railway infrastructure across the country for economic and industrial development. He stated that the development of railways on modern lines is a key component of the national policy for regional trade and connectivity. He also instructed to expedite the work of connecting Gwadar to Pakistan Railways network. Minister for Railways Hanif Abbasi briefed the Prime Minister on the ongoing reforms in Pakistan Railways.

Million-plus pilgrims begin Hajj rituals

DNA

MAKKAH: More than a million pilgrims joined Islam's most important rite under a beating sun on Wednesday, as the Hajj kicked off with the Saudi hosts scrambling to avoid last year's 1,000-plus deaths in sweltering heat. With temperatures expected to top 40 degrees Celsius (104 degrees Fahrenheit), robed pilgrims slowly circled the Kaaba at the heart of Makkah's Grand Mosque which is Islam's holiest site. Saudi media reported that others had begun arriving in the sprawling tent city of Mina on Makkah's outskirts where they will stay overnight before the Hajj's high-point Thursday and offer prayers on Mount Arafat, where the Prophet Mohammad is believed to have delivered his final sermon. About 1.4 million pilgrims arrived in Saudi Arabia ahead of the Hajj, one of the five pillars of Islam that must be performed at least once by all Muslims with the means. Authorities have ratcheted up heat protection measures such as extra shade to avoid a repeat of last year, when 1,301 people died as temperatures hit 51.8°C (125.2°F). On Wednesday, pilgrims will perform the tawaf, walking seven times around the Kaaba, which Muslims pray towards each day.

Sana murder suspect Umar sent to jail

Duty Judicial Magistrate Ahmed Shehzad approves IO's request for suspect Umar Hayat's identity parade

ABID RAZA

ISLAMABAD: An Islamabad district and sessions court on Wednesday sent Umar Hayat, the suspected murderer of TikTok Sana Yousaf, to jail on a 14-day judicial remand. The suspect, who was arrested yesterday from Faisalabad, was produced before Duty Judicial Magistrate Ahmed Shehzad after a case was registered against him at Sumbal Police Station under Section 302 of the Pakistan Penal Code. He faces allegations of murdering Yousaf at her residence in Islamabad. The 17-year-old social media influencer – with more than a million followers across various platforms – was shot twice inside her home in Sector G-13/1 on Monday evening.

PM says

Pak desires to strengthen partnership with Belarus

The delegation included Belarusian Ambassador to Pakistan Andrei Metelitsa, Commander of the Belarusian Air Force and Air Defense Major General Andrei Yulianovich Lukyanovich and officials from the Belarusian defense ministry

MAHNOOR ANSAR

ISLAMABAD: Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif on Wednesday said that Pakistan desired to strengthen economic partnership with Belarus and benefit from the country's expertise in agricultural machinery manufacturing. The prime minister, in a meeting with a seven-member delegation led by Belarusian Defense Minister Lieutenant General Victor Khrenin, which called on him here, said that Pakistan and Belarus enjoyed excellent bilateral ties which were strengthening over time. The delegation included Belarusian Ambassador to Pakistan Andrei Metelitsa, Commander of the Belarusian Air Force and Air Defense Major General Andrei Yulianovich Lukyanovich and officials from the Belarusian defense ministry. The prime minister said that cooperation with Belarus in information technology and defense sectors would be further strengthened. He recalled that during his visit to Belarus this year, several memorandums of understanding and agreements were signed, which would contribute to further expand bilateral relations. He also expressed good wishes for Belarusian President Aleksandr Lukashenko. Apprising the delegation of Pakistan's stance regarding the recent

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Crackdown begins

Pakistan sees exodus of 200,000 Afghan nationals Govt pushing strict campaign to remove Afghans with cancelled permits amid growing cross-border insurgency

CENTRELINE REPORT

ISLAMABAD: More than 200,000 Afghans have left Pakistan since the government renewed a deportation drive in April, with Iran also stepping up expulsions of Afghans. Generations of Afghans have fled to neighbouring Pakistan and Iran during decades of successive wars, seeking safety and better economic opportunities. Both governments have grown weary of large migrant populations and ordered millions to leave under the threat of arrest. Pakistan has launched a strict campaign to evict more than 800,000 Afghans who have had their residence permits cancelled, including some who were born in the country

or lived there for decades. According to the interior ministry, more than 135,000 Afghans left Pakistan in April, while around 67,000 departed in May and more than 3,000 were sent back in the first two days of June. The UN's International Organisation for Migration (IOM) on Tuesday voiced concern over a surge in Afghan families being deported from Iran, recording 15,675 crossing in May, a more than two-fold increase from the previous month. Iranian officials have ordered Afghans without documentation to leave by July 6. Nader Yarahmadi, from the Iranian interior ministry, said on state television that it would affect around four million of the more than six million Afghans who Iran says are in the country.



ISLAMABAD: Defence Minister of Belarus Lt. General Victor Khrenin calls on Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif on 4 June 2025. – DNA

CEC appointment

PM Shehbaz invites PTI's Omar Ayub

Five-year term of CEC Sikandar Sultan Raja ended on January 26, along with two other ECP members

DNA

ISLAMABAD: Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif has invited National Assembly Opposition Leader Omar Ayub for a meeting regarding consultations over the appointment of a chief election commissioner (CEC). In a letter addressed to the opposition leader, the PM pointed out that the term of the CEC as well as two other members of the ECP culminated on January 26 but they have been continuing their duties under Article 215 of the Constitution. Under Article 218, proposals for the CEC and members have to be sent to the parliamentary committee, the premier wrote.

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Bilawal urges UN Secy Gen to play role

Secretary-General António Guterres welcomed Pakistan's desire

NEWS DESK

NEW YORK: Head of high-level parliamentary delegation Chairman Pakistan People's Party Bilawal Bhutto Zardari has urged the UN Secretary General to play an active role in reducing tensions between Pakistan and India, promoting dialogue and restoring the Indus Waters Treaty. During a meeting with the UN Secretary General

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Pak-India tensions

Ceasefire holding, but India's political rhetoric persists amid, says Dar

DPM Dar reiterated that Pakistan was open to dialogue – especially on counter-terrorism, but criticized India's rigid stance, particularly Indian Foreign Minister Jaishankar's claim that India would only engage in discussions centered on terrorism

MAHNOOR ANSAR

ISLAMABAD: Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister, Mohammad Ishaq Dar on Wednesday said that while military-to-military understanding between India and Pakistan remains intact and the ceasefire is holding, political rhetoric from the Indian leadership continues to stir tensions, potentially due to domestic considerations, including upcoming elections in Bihar. "Another round of conflict seems remote, but we must remain vigilant," the deputy prime minister said while speaking at a press conference here. He emphasized that the "timeline goalposts" agreed upon between the two sides had been implemented that showed the sincerity of the purpose or seriousness. However, he warned that "political rhetoric was still on," and could have internal reasons, pointing to Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi's and Defence Minister's recent statements, including one referring to recent hostilities as "just a trailer." "I wish sense prevails. We have told the world that we are peace lovers and focused on economic revival," the deputy PM stressed. But he said, "Dignity, sovereignty, and territorial integrity come first – and any conflict can escalate unpredictably." DPM Dar reiterated that Pakistan was open to dialogue – especially on counter-terrorism, but criticized India's rigid stance, particularly Indian Foreign Minister Jaishankar's claim that India would only engage in discussions centered on terrorism. "We have already exposed Indian agencies' involvement in our territory," Dar said, adding that the independent movements within its borders were not under the Pakistan's control. Highlighting his recent diplomatic engagements, particularly the informal bilateral visit to China on May 19, which included discussions around a

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Attaullah Tarar says India has institutionalized terrorism

DNA

ISLAMABAD: Minister for Information and Broadcasting, Attaullah Tarar, has stated that India has institutionalized terrorism as a tool of foreign policy.

Speaking at a news conference in Islamabad on Wednesday, he said India has engaged in state-sponsored terrorism not only in Pakistan but has also targeted minorities, especially Sikhs, across the globe. The Minister further said Indian proxies were responsible for the killing of Sikh leader Hardeep Singh Nijjar in Canada and that India had attempted to target Sikh activists in Australia and the United States. He said India is involved in state-sponsored terrorism and transnational aggression worldwide. The Minister asserted that India has a history of fueling terrorism in Pakistan, referencing its support for the Mukti Bahini in the former East Pakistan in 1971. He said India continues to foment and facilitate terrorism through its proxies, such as Finta al-Hindustan, in Balochistan. He highlighted the arrest of Commander Kulbhushan Jadhav, a serving officer of the Indian Navy, in Balochistan, stating that Jadhav had confessed to carrying out terrorist

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Post-war diplomacy: India, Pakistan seek global support

OPINION

ANSAR M BHATTI

IN the aftermath of a brief but tense military escalation between India and Pakistan, both nations have launched diplomatic offensives aimed at garnering international support. While the dust of confrontation has barely settled, emissaries from New Delhi and Islamabad have been dispatched to various world capitals, each side presenting its narrative and seeking allies in a volatile regional and global climate. India's diplomatic effort is being spearheaded by seasoned diplomat and politician Shashi Tharoor. Tharoor has led delegations to Western and Asian capitals, where the focus appears to be on framing Pakistan as an aggressor and warning of the risks posed by what India perceives as Pakistan's use of proxies and 'cross-border adventurism'. Indian officials have hinted at the possibility of further preemptive action, creating unease in diplomatic circles. In contrast, Pakistan has opted for a multi-pronged diplomatic approach. Several teams have been formed, with the primary group led by former Foreign Minister Bilawal Bhutto Zardari. Pakistan's outreach focuses on explaining the circumstances under which it responded to Indian aggression. Pakistani representatives have emphasized that their military response was reactive, not provocative, and highlighted the potential dangers of unchecked



escalation between two nuclear-armed states. While both sides have been active, international observers suggest that Pakistan may have had more success in presenting its narrative. Islamabad's emphasis on restraint, self-defense, and adherence to international norms has resonated with several countries and international organizations. Pakistan's diplomats have also focused on the human rights situation in Kashmir and the risks posed by India's increasingly unilateral policies in the region. Despite the diplomatic hustle, security officials in Pakistan remain on high alert. Intelligence assessments indicate the possibility of another Indian military strike, though the mode and scale remain uncertain. Speculation is rife that India may explore a naval route, possibly targeting Pakistan's maritime assets or coastal infrastructure. In anticipation of such a scenario, the Pakistan Navy has heightened its readiness levels. Naval units have been deployed to key positions. According to senior defense sources, Pakistan is prepared to meet any aggression with a "full spectrum response," signaling that any attempt to destabilize the region could have grave consequences. Another flashpoint in the India-Pakistan standoff is the future of the Indus Waters Treaty (IWT), signed in 1960 with World Bank mediation. The treaty has survived multiple wars and political upheavals, serving as a rare example of cooperation between the two rivals. However, India has recently indicated that it may withdraw from or unilaterally modify the treaty, an action widely considered illegal under international law. So far, India has not followed through with concrete steps to halt the flow of river waters into Pakistan. However, experts warn that any such move would significantly heighten tensions and possibly trigger a

broader conflict. Water is a critical resource for Pakistan, and any disruption in its availability could endanger agriculture, livelihoods, and economic stability. Pakistan has raised the issue at international forums, warning that tampering with the treaty could set a dangerous precedent. Islamabad views India's threats as part of a broader strategy to exert pressure and escalate tensions without direct confrontation. Both India and Pakistan possess nuclear weapons, a factor that makes any military conflict between them exponentially more dangerous. Pakistan's officials have repeatedly warned that a full-scale war would be catastrophic for both nations and could destabilize the broader South Asian region. Despite these warnings, Indian rhetoric has remained aggressive. Some Indian leaders have hinted that the time has come to "settle scores," reflecting a hardline nationalist sentiment. Such posturing may play well domestically, but it fuels anxiety in diplomatic circles about the potential for miscalculation. What makes the current situation even more tragic is that both India and Pakistan are grappling with profound internal challenges. Poverty, inflation, unemployment, and social unrest plague both nations. Resources that should be directed toward education, healthcare, and economic development are instead being funneled into military preparedness. This shared vulnerability underscores the need for dialogue and de-escalation. While governments may be locked in conflict, the people of both nations face similar struggles. Analysts argue that true security will only come when the two countries prioritize human development over militarization. At the heart of the India-Pakistan conflict lies the Kashmir dispute. The revocation of Article 370 by India in 2019, which granted special status to Jammu and Kashmir, has further strained ties. Pa-

kistan sees the move as an illegal annexation, while India considers it a sovereign matter. Resolving the Kashmir issue is critical to achieving lasting peace. However, meaningful dialogue has been absent for years. Pakistan insists that any talks must include the Kashmiri people and be based on United Nations resolutions, while India maintains that Kashmir is an internal affair. The international community, particularly major powers like the United States and China, has a significant role to play. Both countries enjoy strategic partnerships with India and Pakistan, respectively. They must use their influence to encourage restraint and mediate a peaceful resolution. Instead of taking sides, global actors should act as facilitators of dialogue. The United Nations, too, must move beyond issuing statements and take concrete steps to prevent further escalation. Confidence-building measures, backchannel diplomacy, and third-party mediation could all contribute to reducing tensions. The current post-war scenario offers both danger and opportunity. The danger lies in missteps, miscalculations, or deliberate provocations that could lead to another war – potentially one with nuclear consequences. The opportunity lies in choosing dialogue over destruction. For that to happen, leaders on both sides must rise above populism and nationalism. They must act not just as politicians, but as statesmen – guided by the long-term welfare of their people, not short-term political gain. The world cannot afford a war between two nuclear powers. And India and Pakistan, with their shared history, culture, and aspirations, owe it to their citizens to choose peace over conflict, dialogue over war, and cooperation over confrontation.

KP budget to be presented on June 13

PESHAWAR: The Khyber Pakhtunkhwa government will present its annual budget for the fiscal year 2025-26 in the provincial assembly on Friday, June 13. According to official statement issued on Wednesday, the session will begin at 3 p.m. The budget presentation will be held in accordance with Rule 33(1) of the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Rules of Business, 1985. The upcoming budget is expected to outline the province's financial priorities for the next year, including allocations for development projects, education, health, and infrastructure.—APP

Pre-flood mock exercise held at Indus river

LAYYAH: The district administration, in collaboration with Punjab Emergency Service (Rescue 1122), conducted a pre-flood mock exercise at Indus river near Jhakar Paka. The exercise was aimed to assess and enhance the preparedness of all relevant departments. Rescuers demonstrated practically to tackle flood-like situation and to provide assistance to flood stranded people. Additional Deputy Commissioner (General) Shabbir Ahmad Dogar inspected the arrangements and appreciated the performance of the departments. ADCG Shabbir Dogar said that the mock exercises were essential in strengthening coordination and improving response efficiency. While all departments were fully prepared to tackle any flood situation," he stated District Emergency Officer, Dr. Sajjad Ahmad, affirmed that Punjab Emergency Service Layyah was equipped and ready to handle any emergency or flood-related situation.—APP

Rs 1m given to each families of 6 martyrs

BAHAWALPUR: Financial assistance of Rs 1 million by Chief Minister of Punjab were given to each family of eight individuals who were tragically killed in Iran. The families hail from Ahmedpur East and Samasatta. Federal Parliamentary Secretary for Railways MNA Mian Muhammad Usman Najeeb Awaisi, Provincial Parliamentary Secretary for the Board of Revenue MPA Mian Muhammad Shoaib Awaisi and Deputy Commissioner Bahawalpur Dr. Farhan Farooq attended the distribution ceremony. During the event, the Federal Parliamentary Secretary expressed heartfelt condolences to the bereaved families. He prayed for the forgiveness and elevation of the deceased, as well as patience and strength for the bereaved. He remarked, "May Allah grant the families the fortitude to bear this loss and elevate the ranks of the deceased." Senior officials, including Assistant Commissioner Bahawalpur Saddar Quratul Ain and Assistant Commissioner Ahmedpur East Muhammad Naveed Haider, were also present. The Deputy Commissioner emphasized the district administration's solidarity with the families during this difficult time, reaffirming their support.—APP



ISLAMABAD: Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif in a group photo with Chief Ministers of the four provinces before the start of National Economic Council meeting.

Govt to prioritize youth empowerment in budget

QUETTA: Balochistan Chief Minister Mir Sarfraz Bugti on Wednesday announced that the upcoming provincial budget will prioritize youth empowerment and the creation of maximum employment opportunities, emphasizing the government's commitment to sustainable development and economic stability in the province. Speaking to the media at the inauguration ceremony of the new block and auditorium hall of the Balochistan Assembly in Quetta, the Chief Minister highlighted that

the new infrastructure has been designed to reflect the province's cultural heritage, traditional values, and the evolving needs of future generations. "This new building will not only serve as a functional workspace but will also enhance the efficiency and effectiveness of this prestigious platform for public representation," said CM Bugti. Accompanied by provincial ministers, parliamentary secretaries, and other assembly members, the Chief Minister delivered the speech in the newly constructed auditorium.

He praised the Department of Communication and Works for the swift and quality completion of the project and noted that the older assembly building could no longer meet the province's legislative requirements. CM Bugti further said that the new complex, being developed with the support of the federal government, will be equipped with modern facilities to support the legislative process. He reiterated his administration's dedication to providing all necessary amenities to elected representatives and improving the overall functioning of the assembly. Sarfraz Bugti said that "over 90 percent of the development budget has been utilized within the stipulated time frame, a clear indicator of the government's effective performance," he said. The Chief Minister also revealed that the next provincial budget will be a surplus budget, reflecting strong financial discipline and improved strategic planning. He assured that youth welfare and job creation will remain top priorities.—APP

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Kundi, Andrea discuss coop in various fields with

PESHAWAR: The Austrian Ambassador to Pakistan Andrea Wicke met with Governor Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Faisal Karim Kundi at the Governor House here on Wednesday. During the meeting, both sides discussed matters of mutual interest, bilateral cooperation between Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Austria, the promotion of tourism, and sports-related initiatives. The current and past situation in Afghanistan and issues concerning regional peace and security also came under discussion. Governor Faisal Karim Kundi highlighted the tourism potential of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa's northern districts, saying that the region offers some of the most attractive destinations in the

world. He welcomed international companies to invest in the province's tourism sector. He further emphasized that Khyber Pakhtunkhwa is rich in natural resources and holds a deep-rooted historical and cultural heritage. He reiterated the provincial government's commitment to utilizing local resources for the benefit of its population. Ambassador Wicke commended the sacrifices and determination of Pakistan's security forces and police in the fight against terrorism. She also expressed Austria's keen interest in enhancing collaboration across various sectors, particularly in promoting tourism through joint efforts.—APP

Tessori discusses arrangements for Hajj with Saudi minister

KARACHI: Governor Sindh Kamran Khan Tessori met with Saudi Minister for Hajj and Umrah, Dr. Tawfig Al Rabiah, in Makkah the other day and discussed the arrangements for Hajj, with a special focus on the facilities provided to Pakistani pilgrims. During the meeting, Dr. Al Rabiah presented the sacred Ghilaf-e-Kaaba as a gift to Governor Tessori, a gesture symbolizing deep respect and brotherhood. Governor Tessori expressed heartfelt appreciation for the exceptional hospitality and management extended by the Saudi government to pilgrims from around the world, particularly those from Pakistan. According to Governor House statement, the Governor is currently performing Hajj along with his family on a royal invitation. The Saudi Minister acknowledged and thanked Governor Tessori for his efforts in facilitating Pakistani pilgrims and reaffirmed that serving pilgrims, especially from Pakistan, remains a top priority for the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.—APP

ANF arrest 3 smugglers with over 318 kg

RAWALPINDI: The Anti-Narcotics Force (ANF), conducting three operations across the country, recovered as many as 318.400 kilograms of drugs worth more than Rs 306.8 million and arrested three suspects, said an ANF Headquarters spokesman on Wednesday. He informed that 400 grams of ice were recovered from a parcel sent to Saudi Arabia at a courier office in Lahore. As many as 30 kg of hashish was recovered from a vehicle near Khanazi bazaar, and three suspects were arrested. In another operation, 141 kg of morphine and 147 kg of heroin hidden for smuggling were recovered in the Yakar Mandi area of Qila Saifulah.—APP

Rehabilitation of child victims of abused declared priority

LAHORE: Child Protection and Welfare Bureau (CPWB) Chairperson and MPA Sara Ahmad has said that the Punjab government, under the leadership of Chief Minister Maryam Nawaz, is taking concrete and sustained measures to ensure the safety, rehabilitation, and well-being of children affected by aggression and mistreatment. In her message on International Day of Innocent Children Victims of Aggression, she said the government is committed to protecting vulnerable children from all forms of violence. She said that this day is observed globally to express solidarity with children who have suffered from physical, mental, or emotional abuse. She emphasized that meaningful and sustained measures are being implemented to ensure the safety, protection, and rehabilitation of children affected by aggression and exploitation. "Children are our most precious asset and the foundation of our future. Ensuring their protection is our collective and foremost responsibility," she added. The CPWB Chairperson said that all possible measures are being implemented to shield children from physical and psychological abuse. The Child Protection Bureau remains fully active in its mission to rescue, protect, and rehabilitate children who are victims of violence, exploitation, or neglect. Sara Ahmad urged citizens to remain vigilant and to report any incidents of abuse or exploitation involving children by calling the Child Helpline at 1121. "It is our moral and social duty to protect every child from harm and ensure a safe, nurturing environment for their growth and well-being," she remarked.—DNA

10 fully Moroccan funded scholarships for Pakistani students

ISLAMABAD: The Kingdom of Morocco has offered 10 fully funded scholarships to Pakistani students for admission into Moroccan Public Institutions of Higher, Technical, and Professional Education for the academic year 2025-26, according to an announcement by the Higher Education Commission (HEC) of Pakistan. These scholarships are open to Pakistani and AJK nationals in fields such as Medical Studies, Engineering, Management Sciences, Veterinary Sciences, and Architecture. Students can apply for undergraduate, master's, or PhD programs, subject to eligibility criteria including academic qualifications and age limits. The deadline to register online is Thursday, 12 June 2025 at 4:00 PM Pakistan Standard Time. Applicants must be Pakistani or AJK nationals and should not hold dual nationality. Candidates applying for undergraduate programs must have completed a minimum of 12 years of education (FSc or A-level) and be no older than 23 years. Master's applicants need 16 years of relevant education, while PhD candidates must have completed at least 18 years in a related field. A valid HAT or USAT score is mandatory, depending on the level of study, and nominations will be based on these test scores. Since French is the primary medium of instruction in most Moroccan institutions, especially in scientific and economic disciplines, selected candidates will be required to complete a French language refresher course at centers such as Alliance Française in Pakistan during the 2024-25 academic year. Courses in Arabic Language and Literature and Islamic Studies are taught in Arabic, and applicants for these fields must be proficient in the language. Interested students must apply online through the HEC portal at scholarship.hec.gov.pk under the Moroccan Govt Scholarship Program. At this stage, there is no need to submit hard copies of documents. However, shortlisted candidates will later need to provide academic transcripts, motivation letters, recommendation letters, medical certificates, and other relevant documents including a police clearance certificate and, if employed, a No Objection Certificate from their employer. Applicants pursuing professional degrees like medicine, engineering, or law must confirm the accreditation status of their chosen programs with the relevant professional councils in Pakistan, such as PMDC, PEC, or PBC. Special instructions have been issued by PMDC regarding admissions to foreign medical institutions, and applicants are advised to review these guidelines thoroughly.—DNA

Mango production faces threats in South Punjab

Scientific Officer, Abid Hameed Khan said that abrupt changes in day-night temperatures during 2024 and frost in December, significantly disrupted flowering and early fruit development. "Temperature fluctuations were becoming a growing challenge," he said, encouraging farmers to stay in close contact with the Mango Research Institute for guidance.

MULTAN: Severe weather conditions, including recent dust storms, unpredictable winds and shifting climate patterns, had affected south Punjab, impacting both daily life and agricultural output. Among the worst affected was the region's iconic mango crop, especially in areas like Multan, Rahim Yar Khan, Vehari, Khanewal and Muzaffargarh, where experts now warn of a significant decline in both yield and fruit size compared to previous years. Multan's mangoes, globally acclaimed for their sweetness and unique flavor, may witness a 40% reduction in size this year, said Director

Mango Research Institute Dr Hafiz Asif-Ul-Rehman while talking to APP on Wednesday. He highlighted the dual threats of extreme heat waves and insect infestations, particularly from mango hoppers, as major contributors to the crisis. "While dust storms and erratic weather impact mango orchards, the heatwave and hopper attack were far more dangerous," he noted. "A timely spray of Dinotefuron was essential to protect the fruit and water stress must be avoided at all costs." The figures paint a grim picture as Multan's 31,000 hectares of mango orchards

were expected to yield approximately 426,000 metric tons, falling short of last year's output. Similarly, Rahim Yar Khan may produce 221,000 metric tons, Khanewal 175,000, Muzaffargarh 232,000 and Bahawalpur only 44,000 metric tons. Mango grower Javed Bhutta from Qasim Bela confirmed the fears on the ground. "The fruiting this year was much less than last year, and the remaining crop has suffered from strong winds and pest attacks. A significant amount of unripe fruit has already fallen, he added." To address these challenges, Dr Rehman announced a breakthrough initiative,

the upcoming launch of the Mango Small Tree System under the Government of Punjab's Green Punjab initiative. "This modern orchard management system aims to enhance productivity by introducing shorter mango trees that are easier to maintain and more resilient to climate stresses," he said. Training programmes, workshops and seminars were being organized by the institute to educate mango growers on best practices, pest control and climate adaptation strategies. Dr Rehman also warned against the harmful practice of ripening mangoes with cal-

cium carbide, a chemical banned due to its severe health hazards. "Globally, mangoes were ripened using ethylene, a much safer method. He said that they urge local growers to adopt this technique. Scientific Officer, Abid Hameed Khan said that abrupt changes in day-night temperatures during 2024 and frost in December, significantly disrupted flowering and early fruit development. "Temperature fluctuations were becoming a growing challenge," he said, encouraging farmers to stay in close contact with the Mango Research Institute for guidance.—APP

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National Days and Armed Forces Days

JUNE

June 02/Italy National/ Independence Day

June 04/Finland Armed Forces Day

June 06/Sweden National Day

June 10/Portugal Portugal Day (National Day)

June 10/Jordan Arab Revolution& Army Day

June 11/United kingdom Birthday of Her Majesty The Queen Elizabeth

June 12/Philippines Independence Day

June 12/Russian Federation Day of Sovereignty of the Russian Federation (National Day)

June 13/Zambia Armed Forces day


June 17/Iceland National Day

June 18/Seychells National Day

June 25/Croatia National Day

June 25/Mozambique National Day

June 26/Azerbaijan Army Day



Turkish Airlines.....8494949



Emergency

Rescue (Police).....15

Bomb Disposal.....15

Fire Services Rawalpindi/ Islamabad.....1122 & 16

Emergency Ambulance.1122


& Rescue Services.4451122

Motorway Police.....9266044

Motorway Police.9270601-20

Women Police Stations Islamabad.....9222596

Rawalpindi.....9270601-20



Enquiry

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PIA Flight Info.....114


PIA Cargo.....9280979

Railway Inquiry.....117

Railway Exchange9270831-5

WASA Rawalpindi..5555489

CAA.....9281092



Hospitals

CMH.....5611111

MH.....561116

Cantt Hospital...9270907-11

DHQ.....5556311-4

RGH.....9290301-7

Holy Family.....9290322-7

PIMS.....9261170-79

Polyclinic.....9218300-09

Shifa International 4603666



Departments

CDA.....9221334-43

CDA.....9208301-04

Met Office.....9250360-6

RDA.....5555864

TMA.....5770886

Cantonment Board 9270151-3

Water Tank

Islamabad.....0321-5744480

CDA launches Gandhara Heritage Center to boost cultural activities

The Authority has currently opened Expressions of Interest for investor participation, with project documents available at CDA headquarters. Chairman Randhawa emphasized this launch marks just the beginning of Islamabad’s development journey, urging private sector participation to realize the capital’s full potential. The Gandhara Heritage and Citizen Center will feature cultural exhibition spaces, sustainable architecture, citizen recreation facilities

DNA

ISLAMABAD: The Capital Development Authority (CDA) on Wednesday soft-launched the ambitious Gandhara Heritage and Citizen Center at F-9 Park, marking a new era of public-private collaboration in the federal capital. CDA Chairman Muhammad Ali Randhawa, who also serves as Chief Commissioner Islamabad

and DG Civil Defense, presided over the ceremony attended by key CDA board members, leading hoteliers, investors, and renowned architect Nayyar Ali Dada. The pioneering project will operate under a Public-Private Partnership (PPP) model, with design led by Nayyar Ali Dada & Associates. Officials confirmed the center will be fully operational by next fiscal year, with special emphasis on heritage preservation and maintaining green spaces. Chairman Randhawa called this a “first-of-its-kind initiative for Islamabad,” explaining that revenues generated will be reinvested in city beautification and F-9 Park upgrades. The project aligns with Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif and Interior Minister Mohsin Naqvi’s policy of optimizing government assets. The CDA chief guaranteed strict regulatory compliance and announced a six-month completion deadline. He highlighted the project’s potential to create employment opportunities by activating underutilized assets. Looking ahead, officials revealed plans for new hotel projects in premium locations starting July 2025, with more PPP ventures in the pipeline to support Islamabad’s transformation into a model modern capital. The Authority has currently opened Expressions of Interest for investor participation, with project documents available

Special help desks for public facilitation

ISLAMABAD: Islamabad Capital Territory (ICT) Police have established special Help Desks across the federal capital to ensure timely guidance and immediate assistance during emergencies, while also supporting smooth public movement in cattle markets and commercial centers.

An public relations officer told APP that the initiative was launched under the special directions of Inspector General of Police (IGP) Islamabad, Syed Ali Nasir Rizvi, and implemented by Deputy Inspector General (DIG) Muhammad Jawad Tariq. He said the purpose of these Help Desks is to assist citizens during Eid season, particularly in cattle markets and busy trading areas, by deploying trained young officers and Lady Police Officers to respond effectively to public needs. DIG Tariq said these Help Desks will also play a vital role in taking action against professional beggars operating in commercial zones, ensuring a safer environment for both traders and shoppers. He said citizens can use these desks to obtain information or request prompt police assistance in case of emergencies. DIG said the Islamabad Police is committed to providing a secure environment for public and commercial activity, and the establishment of these Help Desks reflects efforts to protect citizens from harassment, illegal activities, and mobility challenges in high-traffic areas.—APP

PTC for curbing illicit cigarette trade

ISLAMABAD: Director of the Pakistan Tobacco Company (PTC), Asad Shah here on Wednesday expressed grave concern over the surge of illicit cigarette trade. In a pre-budget media briefing, he revealed that illicit cigarettes now comprise 58% share of the market, while the total annual size of the cigarette industry in Pakistan is around 82 billion sticks. Shah said, the sector has the potential to contribute Rs 570 billion annually in tax revenue, but only Rs 292 billion was collected in FY 2023-24, and Rs 223 billion so far in the first 11 months of the current fiscal year. Twelve years ago, the government collected taxes on 67 billion sticks, but currently, only 34 billion sticks are being taxed. The legal sector now holds only a 42% market share but contributes 98% of the revenue, he added. Shah urged for strict enforcement of documentation policies across the entire industry, noting that the government-set minimum price for a cigarette pack is Rs 162.25, whereas 18 billion sticks are being sold at or below Rs 150 per pack, evading taxes. He pointed out that no one has ever been penalized for violating the minimum price law. He recommended raising the minimum pack price to counter the perception of cigarettes being cheap in Pakistan.—APP



ISLAMABAD: Ambassador of Jordan Dr. Maen KHREASAT presenting a souvenir to Chairman CDA Mohammad Ali Randhawa during a recent meeting at the office of the CDA Chairman. Both sides discussed matters of mutual interest. —DNA

Crack down on transport fare hike

ISLAMABAD: As intercity travel increases and a huge rush of travellers was seen ahead of Eid, complaints are surfacing against transporters charging more than the fixed fares at some bus terminals while some passengers claimed they were being asked to pay extra in the name of “Eidi.” Many passengers who were heading to Punjab, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, and other parts of the country expressed concern about fare hikes. A few said that despite the presence of officials, some transporters still attempted to overcharge, especially during evening hours. When contacted the Islamabad district administration, its spokesman said that the authority has taken notice of the issue and launched monitoring operations at all major bus stands. According to officials, several teams led by Assistant Commissioners are visiting terminals, including Faizabad and 26 Number stop, to prevent overcharging. In this regard, Deputy Commissioner Islamabad Irfan Nawaz Memon has directed that all Assistant Commissioners and magistrates remain on duty at bus stands throughout the Eid rush. He stated that any transporter caught demanding more than the approved fare will face immediate action. He also urged citizens not to pay even one rupee above the official fare. “If any driver or operator asks for extra money, report it on the spot,” he said. He added that passengers should cooperate with the administration to stop illegal practices. The administration’s move is aimed at ensuring smooth travel and protecting passengers from fare manipulation during the busy holiday period, the spokesman added. DC Irfan Memon also emphasized the need to ensure that the passengers treated with respect. “Providing a fair and decent journey to all travelers is our responsibility,” he said. Operations at the terminals include random checks, inquiries from passengers about fares, and verification of fare charts displayed at ticket counters. In several instances, transporters were warned or fined for failing to follow the rules. The Deputy Commissioner has appealed to the public to report any violations directly to the Assistant Commissioners present at the terminals. He said such complaints are being addressed immediately, with transporters either being penalized or barred from continuing their services. The administration has also set up helpline numbers and complaint desks at major terminals to facilitate passengers.—DNA

SAPM reviews proposals for rehabilitation of sick, struggling industries

We will present a comprehensive revival plan aligned with the vision of Prime Minister,” said Haroon, adding that the rehabilitation of these industrial units would significantly boost exports

ISLAMABAD: Special Assistant to the Prime Minister (SAPM) on Industries and Production Haroon Akhtar Khan on Wednesday chaired a meeting to review and discuss proposals for the rehabilitation of sick and struggling industrial units across the country. During the meeting, the SAPM stressed that the revival of sick industrial units is a key component of the Prime Minister’s economic vision. He identified high utility costs, elevated interest rates, and limited access to financing for small industrialists as the primary challenges hindering industrial recovery. The meeting was convened on the direction of Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif. The committee recommended that the State Bank of Pakistan (SBP) issue new guidelines to commercial banks to extend financial assistance and support to these struggling units. Additionally, the committee proposed tax incentives, comprehensive business revival strategies, and a borrower categorization system to ensure targeted and effective support. “We will present a comprehensive revival plan aligned with the vision of Prime Minister,” said Haroon, adding that the rehabilitation of these industrial units would significantly boost exports and strengthen the national economy. He directed the committee to finalize the draft revival plan by tomorrow.—DNA

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Briefs

Pakistan's initiatives receiving global backing

ISLAMABAD: A key member of Pakistan's diplomatic delegation to the United Nations, Senator Sherry Rehman Wednesday expressed immense satisfaction over Bilawal's diplomatic efforts, stating that his approach to highlight India's aggression and Kashmir issue is garnering international support and Pakistan is hopeful of achieving favourable outcomes soon. Speaking to a local news channel, Sherry Rehman highlighted Pakistan's diplomatic progress, saying, "Our diplomatic initiatives are receiving global backing, and we're witnessing growing international support for Pakistan's stance on key issues." Pakistan desires peace and stability, focusing on cultural refinement and prosperity, whereas India often resorts to aggressive rhetoric, threatening violence and war, she mentioned. Senator Sherry Rehman added that Pakistan's commitment to peace and stability in the region is commendable and the global community appreciates its efforts to promote harmony. In contrast, India's persistent aggressive narrative and hate-filled rhetoric are concerning, she added. Pakistan's stance on resolving disputes through dialogue and diplomacy is a welcome change, showcasing its dedication to regional peace and prosperity, she further added.—APP

Over 1.320m tons of pulses imported

ISLAMABAD: The imports of leguminous vegetables (pulses) into the country during last 10 months of current financial year grew by 33.47 percent as compared to the imports of the corresponding period of the last year. During the period from July-April, 2024-25, over 1.320 million tons of pulses valued at \$917.890 million were imported as compared to the imports of 1.050 million worth of \$687.738 million of the same period of the last year, according to the data of the Pakistan Bureau of Statistics. Over 143,484 metric tons of pulses valued at \$94.262 million were imported during the month of April, 2025 in order to fulfill the local requirements of leguminous vegetables as compared to the imports of 78,064 metric tons worth of \$50.479 million of the same month of the last year, it added. On year on year basis, the imports of pulses during the month of April, 2025 grew by 88.46 percent as compared to the imports of the same month of the last year, the data revealed. Overall food group exports from the country during the last 10 months of the current financial year decreased by 1.04 per cent, whereas food imports grew by 0.56 per cent as compared to the imports and exports of the corresponding period of the last year.—APP

Portuguese and Danish ambassadors visit AKDN programmes in Chitral

Comprehensive habitat plans for 10 villages have been developed; WASH facilities have been improved in ten schools along with the provision of emergency response materials in 15 schools

DNA

ISLAMABAD: The Ambassador of Portugal to Pakistan, Frederico Silva, and the Ambassador of Denmark to Pakistan Ambassador Jakob Linulf recently visited various programmes of the Aga Khan Development Network in Chitral, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. The Ambassadors, who were accompanied by Mr Akhtar Iqbal, CEO of the Aga Khan Foundation, Pakistan, Ms Nusrat Nasab, CEO of Aga Khan Agency for Habitat (AKAH), Pakistan and Ms Laila Naz Taj, Director AKDN Pakistan Communications saw programmes in Garum Chashma, Chitral town and Kalash Valley including projects related to disaster preparedness and mitigations, climate change action, education, women entrepreneurship, infrastructure development, youth employability and renewable energy projects. His Excellency Frederico Silva and His Excellency Ambassador Jakob Linulf expressed their deep admiration for the comprehensive approach of AKDN towards protecting the environment and mitigating climate change. His Excellency Frederico Silva, the Portuguese Ambassador to Pakistan shared that, "It was greatly rewarding to appreciate the integrated development of AKDN in the Chitral region. The multipronged approach has produced a visible impact on the grassroot communities, elevating its empowerment and local capabilities. I was very happy



to visit the AKRSP established Mogh Microhydel that is now very well managed by the Valley community itself. The Mogh Microhydel provides electricity to 8000 people, 14 schools, a hospital and 165 enterprises. Among many other positive developments, it significantly reduced the workload of the women as well as the environmental degradation. The Aga Khan Higher Secondary School in Chitral city was also a highlight of my visit, showcasing the highly enabling environment it provides for great

minds to flourish and achieve excellence. Students from this school regularly reach very renowned universities in Pakistan and abroad. From natural resource management, education, IT employment and training platforms to climate change resilience, AKDN has been able to bring true community ownership to the far-flung valleys of Chitral." Ambassador Jakob Linulf added that AKDN's multi-input area development has significantly improved the quality of life of the local people. Commu-

nities have been able to adapt to the changing climate and ensure sustainable livelihoods. While speaking about the programme funded by the Embassy of Denmark, 'Increasing Community Resilience to Climate Change (ICRCC)' which is being implemented by the Aga Khan Foundation through the Aga Khan Rural Support Programme and the Aga Khan Agency for Habitat, he noted, "These areas are prone to natural disasters and efforts are needed to escape the worse impacts of the climate change.

The focus of the programme on generating clean energy, nature-based solutions, installation of irrigation infrastructure, harnessing solar power for lift irrigation, empowering communities to establish passive solar greenhouses and training farmers on climate smart agricultural practices can promote environmentally conscious solutions that can reduce the impact of climate-induced disasters." During the last two years, four microhydel have been rehabilitated, six passive solar green houses

have been built, five irrigation channels have been rehabilitated through the programme. Comprehensive habitat plans for 10 villages have been developed; WASH facilities have been improved in ten schools along with the provision of emergency response materials in 15 schools. The programme has established community-based disaster risk response teams, ensuring local communities are equipped with the necessary tools and knowledge to effectively respond to emergencies.

Women's Chamber seeks to increase trade coop with Turkey,US

ISLAMABAD: Samina Fazil, the founding president of the Islamabad Women's Chamber of Commerce, has said that we are striving to promote economic partnerships with friendly countries. One of our goals is to create new opportunities for Pakistani women traders so that they can access the international market and offer their products and services. Samina Fazil said this while signing a MoU with the Turkish American Chamber of Commerce during her visit to the United States. She said that we are deeply interested in promoting women's business skills and advancing economic cooperation at the international level. On this occasion, Dr. Ali Kocak, President of the Turkish American Chamber of Commerce, said that we will fully support women who want to establish a foothold in the American market. Pakistani products can make a place in the American market due to their quality and price. On this occasion, Samina Fazil said that Pakistan and Turkey have deep and long-standing relations, which are based on mutual respect, cultural diversity, and commitment to peace and development. She said that during the recent Pak-India tension, Turkey not only provided moral and diplomatic support but also stood openly with Pakistan at international forums, which further strengthened the spirit of brotherhood. She said that Turkey has stood with Pakistan not only as a friendly country but also as a brother. The economic aspect of APEC-Turkey relations also needs to be strengthened like political and strategic brotherhood. We want to establish a sustainable and comprehensive trade structure that connects Pakistan, Turkey and the United States. We are also active in improving Pakistan's global reputation, promoting investment, and showcasing the capabilities and skills of women to the world. This agreement will pave the way for joint trade exhibitions, delegation exchanges, networking forums, and information exchange programs, which will prove beneficial for Pakistani businesswomen in various sectors including textiles, handicrafts, IT, and services. On this occasion, renowned entrepreneur Farooq Mirza said that together we will set the stage for progress.—DNA

Meeting of Pakistan Society for real estate studies at NUML

MAHNOOR ANSAR

ISLAMABAD: The inaugural meeting of the Pakistan Society for Real Estate Studies (PRES) was held today at the National University of Modern Languages (NUML), Islamabad. This pioneering initiative—the first of its kind in the country, was chaired by Maj Gen Shahid Mahmood Kayani, HI(M) (Retd), Rector NUML, and attended by prominent stakeholders from

the real estate, planning, and development sectors. Distinguished participants included Mr. Jawed Ali Khan, Country Head of UN-Habitat Pakistan, Dr. Nadeem ul Haque, former Country Director IMF, and senior representatives from REITs, construction associations, the Ministry of Housing, Federal Board of Revenue (FBR), and major housing societies such as Capital Smart City, The Garden, and IMARAT. Several international experts have also joined PRES,

bringing global perspectives to local urban challenges. As urbanization accelerates in Pakistan—with projections indicating that over 45% of the population will reside in urban areas by 2030—many cities are grappling with economic disparities, inefficient land use, and environmental degradation. In response, PRES has been established to serve as a think tank and collaborative platform for addressing these challenges through

evidence-based policy input, academic programs, and industry engagement. PRES will undertake a range of initiatives including organizing the International Conference on Real Estate (ICRE), publishing policy papers and briefs, offering short courses and capacity-building programs, and introducing a Sustainability Index to assess and encourage eco-friendly, inclusive development by housing societies and urban developers. During the meeting, participants strongly advocated for enhanced collaboration between academia, industry, government regulators, and development partners to combat illegal housing schemes, improve market transparency, and curb unplanned urban sprawl.

Preparations urged as India may attack on Eid

ISLAMABAD: Shahid Rasheed Butt, a noted business leader and former president of the Islamabad Chamber of Commerce and Industry, stated on Wednesday that following India's defeat and subsequent diplomatic embarrassment, the country has become like a cornered snake, ready to strike. He warned that a restless Modi, fueled by frustration, might seize the opportunity to initiate an attack during the auspicious celebration of Eid. In light of this looming threat, he emphasized the urgent need for Pakistan to bolster its defensive readiness, enhancing its vigilance and preparedness in anticipation of potential hostilities. The business leader also emphasized the need for vigilance against non-traditional warfare methods, including cyber warfare, economic warfare, and propaganda. Talking to the business community, Shahid Rasheed Butt said that a cunning adversary like India should never be underestimated. He said that a cut of one hundred billion rupees in the development budget is insufficient. He said that defense must be the top priority in the upcoming budget as half the national budget is consumed by debt servicing. At the same time, trillions are distributed among provinces and politicians. Most development funds are lost to corruption, nepotism, and flawed planning, resulting in no relief for the public. Dr. Butt proposed redirecting political funds to the armed forces to strengthen national defense. He noted that India's defense budget is ten times greater than Pakistan's, and ignoring this disparity would be suicidal. He said that failing state-owned enterprises cause trillions of rupees in annual losses, and eliminating them could generate significant savings.—DNA

Tailors allegedly fleece customers ahead of Eid

ISLAMABAD: As Eid ul Adha approaches, tailors across the country were facing accusations of overcharging customers for stitching clothes. Many tailors have reportedly stopped taking new orders, citing a surge in demand, while others were charging exorbitant rates for their services. According to reports, some tailors have doubled their stitching charges due to the increased workload and demand for Eid clothes. A customer, who wished to remain anonymous, claimed that tailors have increased stitching charges by up to Rs 200 to 500 for a single suit. Tanzeela, a customer while sharing her experience said "I have visited several tailor shops, but none of them are willing to take my order and it's as if they are selective about who they want to cater to.—APP



RAWALPINDI: June04- Famous Poet Mazhar Shahzad is reciting poetry during poetry Festival for appreciating the role of Pakistan Army for the prosperity of Pakistan, at Fatima Jinnah Women University in City.

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Why Elon Musk distanced himself from the Trump admin

WHEN Elon Musk stepped down from his advisory roles in the Trump administration, it marked a notable moment in the relationship between business and politics. Musk, the maverick CEO of Tesla and SpaceX, had initially joined various advisory councils during Donald Trump's early presidency, reflecting his interest in shaping national policy on climate change, technology, and innovation. However, his exit was swift and sharp—raising questions about the real reasons behind his decision.

At the time, the official reason Musk gave for resigning was the Trump administration's decision to withdraw from the Paris Climate Agreement in 2017. As a staunch advocate for clean energy and sustainable technology, Musk stated that he had "done all [he] could" to convince the administration to remain in the accord. While this reason was principled and credible, there were likely deeper strategic calculations behind Musk's decision—particularly relating to his business ties with China. Tesla's success has been deeply linked to the Chinese market. Not only is China the world's largest EV market, but it is also home to Tesla's massive Shanghai Gigafactory, which was the first foreign-owned car plant in China. The Chinese government provided favorable policies and land for the plant—a clear sign of mutual cooperation. For Musk, China wasn't just another market; it was critical to Tesla's global expansion and profitability.

During Trump's presidency, relations between the United States and China soured dramatically. The trade war, coupled with hostile rhetoric and increased tariffs, created an uncertain climate for businesses operating between the two powers. In contrast to Trump's confrontational approach, Musk maintained a far more cordial tone toward China. He frequently praised Chinese officials, lauded the government's efficiency, and positioned Tesla as a cooperative partner rather than a confrontational actor. This divergence may have created friction between Musk and Trump. The former president valued loyalty and alignment with his headline policies. Musk's refusal to echo Trump's anti-China stance and his continued public admiration for China's policies and support likely irked the administration. In Washington's polarized environment, deviation from the party line—especially on a central issue like China—was often met with criticism, if not outright rejection.

Musk's decision to walk away from the Trump advisory roles can therefore be seen as a pragmatic business move cloaked in environmental idealism. While Musk may have sincerely disagreed with the U.S. withdrawal from the Paris accord, his broader global business interests—particularly in China—made continued association with Trump politically risky and commercially unwise. The episode reflects a deeper truth about modern corporate leadership: in a globalized economy, CEOs of multinational companies cannot afford to be tethered to nationalistic political agendas.

An Islamic City in the Heart of Texas, USA

Qamar Bashir



Despite this storm of resistance, EPIC City is moving forward—calmly, legally, and purposefully. Its leaders maintain that it will not be an enclave of isolation but a model of harmony. And indeed, that vision is essential to preserve. For if Muslims succeed in creating a lawful, vibrant community, other religious or cultural groups may seek to follow suit. That could create friction, yes—but it could also establish a new American model for peaceful coexistence

NATURALLY, as a long-time observer of diaspora dynamics—and having served as Press Attaché in Kuala Lumpur and Press Minister in Paris, while observing the Pakistani community in over 20 countries in both official and private capacities—I've always remained deeply attuned to the evolution of Pakistani and broader Muslim communities abroad. What has consistently amazed me—whether in Malaysia, France, Canada, or now the United States—is the inherent resilience and unity within the Pakistani diaspora. Wherever they go, they organize. They establish cultural centers, host community festivals, open restaurants, support one another's businesses, and transform humble basement gatherings into majestic mosques. Yet, like every community, they carry both virtues and vices. Backbiting, leg-pulling, and even complaints to local authorities against fellow Pakistanis are not uncommon. Still, these shortcomings never overshadow their core strengths. When it comes to culture, faith, patriotism, supporting the destitute, or observing religious and national events and celebrations—they come together, they unite, and they build. That cohesion becomes their identity, their protective shield, and a powerful platform for collective progress. My recent observations in Michigan echo the same story. I've seen how the Muslim community—Pakistani, Bangladeshi, Indian, and others—have coalesced around grand mosques, especially the Islamic Center near Rochester Hills. There, thousands gather for Jummah, Eid, and community events. The complex is not just a religious site; it is a beacon of togetherness, inclusion, and hope. However, what compelled me to write today is something far more unprecedented than a mosque or a cultural center. It is the emergence of an entire Islamic city—not an informal clustering like Hamtramck, Michigan, but a purpose-built, master-planned city in the heart of Texas: EPIC City. Spearheaded by the East Plano Islamic Center, this 400-acre development near Josephine, Texas, aims

to establish a fully integrated community: over 1,000 residential homes, a mosque, a K–12 school, a college, community centers, retail plazas, gardens, and even recreational parks. This isn't a gated religious commune, but an open and inclusive city inspired by Islamic values of peace, education, hospitality, and coexistence. People of all faiths and backgrounds are welcome. And this is what makes the story both inspiring and controversial. The city's approval by local authorities was not an accident. It was earned—through the track record of Muslim communities in Texas, who have demonstrated peaceful coexistence, hardworking ethics, and civic engagement. The project, backed by Community Capital Partners, reflects the growing social, political, and economic clout of Muslims in America. Pakistani, Bangladeshi, Indian, African, Arab—Muslims from all over the world came together in this vision. But not everyone welcomed this initiative. Soon after the city's plans were revealed, an avalanche of toxic reactions flooded traditional and social media. Right-wing activists and even top-level politicians—including Governor Greg Abbott and Attorney General Ken Paxton—began raising alarm bells. They questioned why an "Islamic city" should be allowed in Texas. They compared it to an alleged imposition of "Sharia law," conveniently ignoring the dozens of Christian-based retirement communities and Jewish settlements that exist across the U.S. The hypocrisy is glaring. While Muslims aim to build schools, gardens, homes, and prayer halls, America has for decades exported military bases around the world. This project is not about exclusion—it is about expression. And yet, the backlash has escalated into congressional debates and even calls for federal investigations. Despite this storm of resistance, EPIC City is moving forward—calmly, legally, and purposefully. Its leaders maintain that it will not be an enclave of isolation but a model of harmony. And indeed, that vision is essential to preserve. For if Muslims succeed in creating a

lawful, vibrant community, other religious or cultural groups may seek to follow suit. That could create friction, yes—but it could also establish a new American model for peaceful coexistence. Let us be clear: this is not segregation. It is self-empowerment through unity and identity. As I've seen in Hamtramck, Michigan, similar informal cities already exist. Mosques ring with the Adhan five times a day. Halal stores flourish. Cultural heritage is preserved. The Muslim communities buy homes in proximity, and soon entire neighborhoods organically evolve. And this is not unique to Muslims—Chinatowns, Little Italy, Orthodox Jewish quarters, and Hispanic neighborhoods have long enriched American diversity. But EPIC City is something greater—a formal, organized expression of this natural phenomenon, born not out of fear, but out of faith and aspiration. So what should be the path forward for the Muslim community? Simple. Respect the American Constitution. Respect American values. Respect the law. Remain peaceful. Refrain from criminal activities, extremism, illegal immigration, or anything that stains the reputation of Muslims or immigrants. Honor this country which provides such freedom and opportunity. Contribute to its economy, to its innovation, to its greatness. And never forget the roots. The knowledge, the skills, and the success earned here must also be given back to the homelands—Pakistan, Bangladesh, India, or wherever we come from—so that others too can rise. EPIC City is more than a construction project. It is a symbol—a test of American liberty, and a reflection of Muslim ambition. If built with integrity and inclusiveness, it can become a blueprint for peaceful multicultural cities across the world. And perhaps, only in America, such a vision could not only be dreamed—but also realized.

— Press Secretary to the President (Rtd)
Former Press Minister at the Embassy of Pakistan to France
Former MD, SRBC
Macomb, Michigan, USA

Investing in Balochistan's EPI a necessity for Pakistan's future

Dr. Imran Baloch



The Expanded Program on Immunization (EPI) in Balochistan, has faced significant challenges due to politically motivated appointments, mismanagement and lack of technical expertise—especially when the Deputy District Health Officer (DDHO) role, which oversees EPI, is taken as granted and is filled based on political connections rather than merit. Many appointed DDHOs lack public health or technical experience, leading to poor EPI performance and weak monitoring and supervision of vaccination campaigns

THE Expanded Programme on Immunization (EPI) is a cornerstone of public health, aiming to protect children from life-threatening vaccine-preventable diseases (VPDs) such as polio, measles, diphtheria, tetanus and hepatitis B. Immunization reduces long-term healthcare costs by preventing outbreaks and lowering disease burdens. In Balochistan, Pakistan's largest but most underserved province, the EPI faces unique challenges. Despite efforts by the government and international partners, routine immunization coverage remains low, leading to frequent disease outbreaks. Balochistan lags behind other Pakistani provinces in immunization coverage due to multiple systemic issues. Only 38% of children in Balochistan receive full immunization, compared to the national average of 66% (Pakistan Demographic and Health Survey, 2018). Polio remains endemic in parts of Balochistan due to low vaccination rates. In 2024, out of 74 polio cases 27 cases were from Balochistan, which makes about 36% of total cases of the country. Measles outbreaks are frequent, with over 4,000 cases reported in 2023 alone despite the fact that a significant number of cases are not reported. The underutilization of fixed EPI sites in Balochistan, highlights several systemic and community-level challenges including geographical barriers, low awareness and misinformation, cultural and social norms like restrictions on women's mobility prevent mothers from taking children to fixed sites, economic constraints and weak health infrastructure. Underreporting of unvaccinated and Zero Dose children due to weak surveillance of EPI is another issue. While most of the routine immunization coverage coming from outreach sessions, relying on external funding from organizations like UNICEF and WHO for outreach EPI sessions is not sustainable in the long run. Governments should take ownership and ensure consistent funding to maintain uninterrupted immunization services. Regular outreach sessions are critical for reaching remote and underserved populations, reducing vaccine-preventable diseases. Immunization is a lifesaving public good—government ownership and sustainable financing are non-negotiable for protecting every child. Another critical issue is lack of uniformity in outreach EPI sessions across districts, leading to inefficiencies and missed opportunities for maximizing immunization coverage. Key problems due to non-uniform outreach sessions includes inequitable access and weak monitoring. For example, some districts provide more sessions, while others lag, creating coverage disparities. Disorganized schedules make it harder to track performance and address gaps. Just like Polio National Immunization Days (NIDs) and Supplementary Immunization Activities (SIAs), routine EPI outreach sessions should follow a standardized schedule to ensure equity, accountability and better results. There should be a standardized

Monthly Schedule (Province-Wide), with fixing the number of outreach days (e.g., 12 or 16 days/month) uniformly across all districts and set fixed start and end dates (e.g., 9th to 20th / 9th to 24th of every month or 3 to 4 fixed days of every week) to synchronize activities. With centralized planning & coordination, provincial EPI cell should issue a fixed calendar (like Polio campaigns) rather than leaving it to districts and ensure all districts follow the same microplan with predefined session sites, dates and targets. There should be a strengthened supervision & accountability in term of real-time monitoring dashboards (like Polio dashboards) to track session completion and coverage, and a Third-party validation (independent monitors) to ensure compliance with the uniform schedule. Just like Polio NIDs/SIAs, uniform EPI outreach will maximize efficiency, equity and impact while standardization ensures no child is left behind due to inconsistent scheduling. The Expanded Program on Immunization (EPI) in Balochistan, has faced significant challenges due to politically motivated appointments, mismanagement and lack of technical expertise—especially when the Deputy District Health Officer (DDHO) role, which oversees EPI, is taken as granted and is filled based on political connections rather than merit. Many appointed DDHOs lack public health or technical experience, leading to poor EPI performance and weak monitoring and supervision of vaccination campaigns. These appointees prioritize loyalty over effective service delivery. Weak accountability within the system encourages to corruption and inefficiency in fund utilization. A crucial governance reform needed in Balochistan's health system for merit-based appointments of DDHOs through a transparent, committee-led process headed by the Director General (DG) Health Services, with members, representative from Secretary Health office, Provincial Coordinator (PC) EPI, Divisional Director of concerned division, District Health Officer (DHO) of concerned district and technical expert from WHO/UNICEF (observer role). Selection criteria should be based on Medical degree (MBBS/BDS) + Public Health/Management degree, with relevant field experience preferred (Already serving as permanent government employee in health department). DDHOs should be appointed for 2-3 years (non-transferable without valid reason) with annual performance reviews like EPI coverage, outreach session quality, district health indicators. While removal should only be for underperformance/misconduct (not political reasons). Currently, political interference and favoritism has weakened EPI performance, outreach sessions and overall healthcare delivery. A transparent, merit-based system for DDHOs appointments will strengthen district health leadership, improve immunization coverage and ensure health equity in Balochistan. A critical systemic flaw is that, the Quarterly Review Meetings (QRM) of EPI, designed to assess performance and

drive improvements, have become ceremonial, low-priority gatherings with no real accountability. Instead of being chaired by the Secretary Health (as intended), they are often downgraded to the Deputy Provincial Coordinator EPI, reducing their authority and impact. Key Issues with current QRMs are lack of high-level participation. Secretary Health & DG Health's absence signals low priority, reducing district-level seriousness, poor-performing districts face no penalties or corrective actions, fostering complacency. These meetings focus on routine reporting rather than problem-solving & decision-making. Action points from meetings are rarely tracked or implemented. Restructuring EPI QRMs for accountability & impact in Balochistan is the need of hour, with high-level leadership & mandatory participation. These meetings should be chaired by Secretary Health (Non-Transferable Chairmanship) and co-chaired by DG Health Services with required attendees. Weak reviews correlate with stagnant EPI coverage in Balochistan. Instead of passive reporting, there should be structured reviews as per global best practices like Top 3 Best & Worst Performing Districts (with root-cause analysis), Vaccination Coverage Gaps (zero-dose children, dropouts, gender disparities) Outreach Session Challenges (uniformity, missed areas, supply chain issues), Data Quality & Real-Time Monitoring (NEIR & DHIS2 updates, discrepancies), Action Tracker Dashboard (shared with all stakeholders) monitors commitments and Follow-Up Review after 6 weeks to check progress. There should be performance-based accountability measures like publicly rank districts (Green/Yellow/Red zones based on KPIs). Top-performing districts should get additional resources (vehicles, outreach funds), public recognition (certificates, awards from Secretary Health). Underperforming districts must submit corrective plans (with clear timelines). Persistently Poor Performers (PPP) must face consequences with issuance of warning letters to DHOs/DDHOs and replacement of non-performing officers (if no progress in 2 quarters). If EPI performance matters, then high-level quarterly reviews must be non-negotiable—led by the Secretary Health, with real accountability for results. Balochistan's EPI program faces deep-rooted challenges, but with targeted interventions, community engagement and stronger health systems, immunization coverage can improve. Polio eradication and measles control are achievable, but only if the government, international partners and local communities work together. By addressing these gaps, Balochistan can move closer to achieving universal immunization coverage and protecting its children from preventable diseases.

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Briefs

Pak desires to strengthen partnership...

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tension in South Asia, he said that Pakistan offered India an impartial investigation into the Pehelgam incident, but instead of responding positively, India demonstrated aggression by attacking Pakistan and targeting civilian populations, resulting in the martyrdom of innocent civilians. The prime minister said that on May 10, Pakistan responded befittingly to Indian aggression in self-defense. Conveying President Lukashenko's good wishes to the prime minister, the Belarusian defense minister said that they desired peace and stability in South Asia. He said that the delegation's visit was aimed at further advancing the progress on MoUs and agreements between the two countries. The minister appreciated Prime Minister Shehbaz's personal interest in strengthening bilateral relations and also thanked him for the warm welcome and hospitality. The meeting was attended by Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Ishaq Dar, Defense Minister Khawaja Muhammad Asif, Federal Minister for Defense Production Reza Hayat Haraj, and relevant senior government officials.

Ceasefire holding, but India's political rhetoric...

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trilateral meeting involving Afghanistan. He also noted a broader regional outreach, citing engagements with Türkiye, Iran, Azerbaijan, and Tajikistan. "Our visit to Iran was especially positive," Dar said, adding that both countries agreed to boost bilateral trade to \$10 billion and maintain peace in the region. The Pakistani delegation also met with Iran's Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, who expressed support for Pakistan's regional stability and Kashmir resolution efforts. Dar revealed that Azerbaijan had reiterated its stance on undertaking a \$2 billion investment in Pakistan, while discussions on multilateral cooperation, territorial integrity, and regional connectivity projects, including the Trans-Afghan railway and Peshawar-Kabul highway, are progressing. To a question, the deputy PM criticized India's stance on the Indus Waters Treaty, calling New Delhi's push to renegotiate the agreement a violation of international law. He said Pakistan and India were corresponding for last three years, that this treaty needed review and renegotiation. "We received the last letter from India on April 8, and the reply was due on May 8 which we gave on time despite escalation of tension between the two countries." The treaty cannot be unilaterally suspended, he said adding that any such act would be treated as an act of war. To another question, he said Saudi Arabia and the UAE played "active roles" in de-escalating recent tensions. Dar emphasized that Pakistan's diplomatic efforts had been recognized internationally. "From April 23 to May 11, we explained our position to the world. Our narrative prevailed. Indian claims – including about shooting down of F-16 – were exposed."

He confirmed that Pakistan would assume the presidency of the UN Security Council in July, with "promoting international peace and security through multilateralism and peaceful settlement of disputes" as its central theme. The deputy PM stated that Pakistan had no intention of initiating conflict but would respond robustly if provoked. "We never initiated war, but we gave a befitting response," he said. He also confirmed the downing of six Indian aircraft during recent hostilities, including three to four Rafale, one SU-30, and a UAV.

Reviving sports glory is top priority: DG PSB

"Hosting the South Asian Games is a matter of national prestige, and we are committed to achieving international benchmarks in infrastructure, athlete preparation, and organizational excellence," Pirzada stated.

ANSAR BHATTI

ISLAMABAD: Director General of the Pakistan Sports Board (PSB), Yasir Pirzada, has unveiled an ambitious and comprehensive roadmap aimed at revitalizing the national sports landscape through infrastructure enhancement, advanced athlete training, and long-term strategic planning. The initiative reflects Pakistan's strong resolve to reestablish its prominence in regional and international sports. With Pakistan slated to host the South Asian Games in January 2026, preparations are entering a decisive phase. In a detailed briefing to a delegation of the Rawalpindi-Islamabad Sports Journalists Association (RISJA), led by President Abubakar Bin Tallat, DG Pirzada shared an insightful overview of ongoing developments. He affirmed the government's unwavering support in ensuring that the upcoming Games are not only successful but also leave a lasting legacy.

*Hosting the South Asian



Games is a matter of national prestige, and we are committed to achieving international benchmarks in infrastructure, athlete preparation, and organizational excellence," Pirzada stated. He highlighted the large-scale renovation and development efforts underway at the Pakistan Sports Complex, describing them as transformative. The goal, he said,

is to upgrade the facility to a world-class standard, capable of hosting high-profile international competitions. Under the leadership of Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif, Federal Minister for Inter-Provincial Coordination Rana Sanaullah, and Federal Secretary IPC Mohyuddin Wani, the government is prioritizing the revival and institutional support for sports across Pakistan. DG Pirzada noted that this unified vision is already driving tangible progress. He emphasized the significance of specialized athlete training camps, which now incorporate advanced coaching techniques, nutritional planning, and mental wellness support to better equip national athletes for competitive excellence.

Looking beyond the South Asian Games, Pirzada outlined the PSB's long-term sports development initiatives, which include: Grassroots talent identification programs Revival of school and college-level competitions Strengthened public-private partnerships Capacity building for coaches and officials

He stressed that community engagement and youth development remain central pillars of the PSB's agenda, ensuring that future generations are actively involved in sports from an early age. The session concluded with a candid and constructive exchange of ideas, as journalists offered suggestions for improving media coverage and transparency in sports administration. DG Pirzada reiterated the PSB's commitment to collaboration with the media, recognizing its crucial role in shaping public opinion and supporting national sports development. The RISJA delegation included Abdul Mohi Shah, Shakeel Awan, Zulfiqar Baig, Nasir Naqvi, Shakir Abbasi, Afzal Javed, Shahryar Khan, Arfa Feroze Zaki, Awais Abbasi, and Kiran Khan. This engagement marked a significant step forward in uniting all stakeholders around a common goal: the sustainable revival of sports in Pakistan, with the 2026 South Asian Games serving as both a challenge and an opportunity.

EDGE signs record-breaking AED9 billion naval contract

ABU DHABI: EDGE, one of the world's leading advanced technology and defence groups, has announced the signing of a major AED9 billion (US\$2.45 billion) defence contract with the Kuwait Ministry of Defence for the supply of FALAJ3 62-metre missile boats. This contract marks the largest naval shipbuilding export in the region and ranks among the highest-value naval export deals globally. As the prime contractor, EDGE will lead the programme which includes the design, construction, trials, and delivery of the vessels, in addition to Integrated Logistics Support (ILS) and In-Service Support (ISS). EDGE will also provide the ammunition for the vessels, further demonstrating its end-to-end capability offering. Abu Dhabi Ship Building

(ADSB), EDGE Group's naval arm and the UAE's leading shipbuilder, has been selected as the build subcontractor for the programme. Hamad Al Marar, Managing Director and CEO, EDGE, said, "This agreement with Kuwait is highly significant both in scale and strategic importance. It deepens long-term defence ties between our nations, brings a proven class of advanced vessels into regional service, and reinforces EDGE's position as a trusted international partner. It also reflects the pace of industrial and engineering progress we've achieved in just a few years, and our ability to design, build, and deliver complex naval platforms at scale. As we enter a new phase of export-led growth, this programme marks a clear signal of global confidence in

what EDGE can deliver." The FALAJ 3-class missile boat has also been selected by the UAE Navy, with the first vessel, ALTAF, formally commissioned into service in February 2025. This operational deployment reflects the vessel's proven capability and performance in regional waters. With the latest agreement, these advanced 62-metre vessels are tailored to meet Kuwait's operational requirements, offering high performance, advanced combat systems, and enhanced capabilities for littoral defence operations. This latest contract reinforces EDGE's position as a trusted partner for customers seeking turnkey defence solutions and integrated long-term support, while driving the UAE's strategic objectives for defence exports and industrial collaboration. – Agencies

Cricket Australia confirms tour to Pak next year

MELBOURNE: Cricket Australia (CA) Chief Executive Todd Greenberg has reaffirmed Australia's commitment to strengthening cricketing ties with Pakistan, both through bilateral tours and greater participation of Pakistani players in the Big Bash League (BBL). Speaking to the journalists, Greenberg confirmed that Australia will tour Pakistan next year for a white-ball series and highlighted the importance of this bilateral relationship. "We're touring Pakistan next year for some white-ball cricket, which I think will be great. The 2022 tour showed how warm and welcoming the environment was, and our players loved it," he said. – Agencies

Iga Swiatek and Sabalenka set up French Open semi-final clash

PARIS: Three-time defending champion Iga Swiatek set up a blockbuster French Open semi-final clash with world number one Aryna Sabalenka on Tuesday, as reigning men's holder Carlos Alcaraz powered his way into the last four. Alcaraz blew away American 12th seed Tommy Paul for the loss of just five games in the night session on Court Philippe Chatrier. The Spaniard needed just one hour 34 minutes to dismantle Paul 6-0, 6-1, 6-4 and set up a last-four meeting with Italy's Lorenzo Musetti. "I'm sorry you wanted to watch more tennis, I had to do my work," Alcaraz told the crowd. It was one of those matches where I could close my eyes and everything went in. It was like my feeling today was unbelievable." Earlier, Swiatek, the fifth seed, got past Ukrainian Elina Svitolina 6-1, 7-5, after top women's seed Sabalenka won a tense quarter-final against Olympic champion Zheng Qinwen 7-6 (7/3), 6-3. World number five Swiatek has been struggling for her best form and has not reached a final since winning the French Open title last year. But she gave 13th seed Svitolina little opportunity on her favoured clay surface, breaking in the fourth game to ease through the first set, in windy conditions on Court Philippe Chatrier. The pair exchanged consecutive breaks of serve early in the second set, before Swiatek forced the breakthrough at 5-5 with a powerful forehand down the line. – Agencies

At least 11 killed in stampede at India cricket celebrations

'Hundreds of thousands of people' had flocked onto the streets, says Karnataka deputy CM

BENGALURU: A stampede broke out on Wednesday as a tightly packed crowd celebrated the victory of their home cricket team in the Indian city of Bengaluru, resulting in deaths, a senior government official said. India media reported as many as 11 people had been crushed to death, but Karnataka state's Deputy Chief Minister DK Shivakumar said he was not able to immediately confirm the exact number who had been killed. "The tragedy and death have brought deep pain and shock", Shivakumar said in a statement. "My condolences to the deceased. My condolences to their family." An AFP photographer saw vast crowds as a sea of people crammed the streets and police waved sticks. Shivakumar said "hundreds of thousands of people" had flocked onto the streets. "I have spoken to the police commissioner and everyone, I will also go to the hospital later – I do not want to disturb the doctors who are taking care of the patients", he told reporters. "The exact number cannot be told now. We appeal to the people to remain calm." Broadcasters showed police rushing away from crowds carrying young children in their arms, who had seemingly fainted. One unattended young man was sitting in an ambulance, struggling to breathe. India's NDTV broadcaster said at least 11 people were killed, while The Times of India newspaper reported seven dead. "This is not a controllable crowd," Shivakumar said, speaking to reporters. "The police were finding it very difficult." – Agencies

Attaullah Tarar says India has...

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activities in the province. Attaullah Tarar reiterated that Balochistan is Pakistan's lifeline and assured that the state will safeguard peace, development, and prosperity in the province by defeating Indian-backed proxies. He said Pakistan has defeated India both in conventional warfare and on diplomatic and narrative fronts. The Minister also commended Pakistani media for upholding responsible journalism and successfully countering Indian disinformation campaign. He praised the Pakistani media for effectively challenging false narratives propagated by Indian outlets and presenting the truth to the world.

PM Shehbaz invites PTI's Omar Ayub

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It is pertinent to know that the five-year term of CEC Sikandar Sultan Raja ended on January 26, along with two other members of the Election Commission i.e., Nisar Ahmad Durrani (Sindh) and Shah Muhammad Jatoti (Balochistan). The procedure for appointing the CEC and members of the Election Commission is explained in Article 213 of the Constitution, wherein the PM and the leader of the opposition send three names to the president by consensus.

Bilawal urges UN Secy Gen...

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António Guterres, at UN Headquarters in New York, he particularly emphasized the need for comprehensive negotiations on Jammu and Kashmir issue, which is key to establishing lasting peace in South Asia. The delegation also briefed on the humanitarian implications of holding in abeyance of the Indus Water Treaty, India's unprovoked aggression and violation of UN Charter and International law. Secretary-General António Guterres welcomed Pakistan's desire for peace and reaffirmed the United Nations' strong interest in the preservation of peace, restraint, and diplomacy in the region.

Asia Cup in limbo after Pakistan-India clashes

India scheduled to host Asia Cup, a flagship event of Asian Cricket Council in September

DNA

LAHORE: This year's Asia Cup hangs in the balance following the recent clashes between tournament hosts India and arch-rivals Pakistan. Already-soured relations between the nuclear-armed neighbours further worsened after four days of intense fighting before a ceasefire was announced last month. India are scheduled to host the Asia Cup, a flagship event of the Asian Cricket Council (ACC), in September but uncertainty lingers over the T20 tournament. "To be honest, we have had no discussions within the board about the Asia Cup," a top official of the Indian cricket board (BCCI) told Reuters on Tuesday, refusing to confirm whether the tournament will go ahead as scheduled. "We have been busy with the Indian Premier League and then we have India's tour of England. These are our immediate concerns," he added. The Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) was not forthcoming about its team's participation in the tournament in India either.



RAWALPINDI: Australian High Commissioner Neil Hawkins posing for a picture with the players of Rising Stars Girls Hockey Academy. – DNA

South Africa's Klaasen announces shock retirement

Wicketkeeper-batter says main reason for retirement was to spend more time with family

DNA

LONDON: South Africa wicketkeeper-batter Heinrich Klaasen, who made his debut in 2018, on Monday announced his retirement from international cricket. The 33-year-old cricketer took to social media to share the news, calling it a deeply emotional yet peaceful decision. "It is a sad day for me as I announce that I have decided to step away from international cricket," Klaasen wrote. "It took me a long time to decide what's best for me and my family for the future. It was truly a very difficult decision but also one that I have absolute peace with." Klaasen reflected on his international journey, describing it as the fulfillment of a lifelong dream. "From day one, it was the biggest privilege representing my country. It was everything I had worked for and dreamed about as a young boy," he added. The wicketkeeper-batter, who featured in 122 internationals for the Proteas, felt gratitude towards his coaches during

his cricketing journey. "I have made great friendships and relationships that I will treasure for life. Playing for the Proteas gave me the opportunity to meet incredible people who changed my life. I can't thank them enough. My road to wearing the Proteas shirt was different from most, and there were certain coaches who continued to believe in me – to them,

I'll always be grateful." Klaasen stated that the main reason for his retirement was to spend more time with his family. "I look forward to spending more time with my family, and this decision will allow me to do so. I will always be a big Proteas supporter and would like to thank everyone who supported me and my teammates throughout my career."



Heinrich Klaasen made his international debut in 2018 during an ODI series against India and went on to represent South Africa across all three formats over a seven-year career. ODIs proved to be his most successful format, where he played 60 matches and scored 2,141 runs at an average of 43.69 and an impressive strike rate of 117.05, including four centuries and 11 half-centuries. Among his standout performances was a blistering 174 off just 83 balls against Australia at Centurion in 2023 – the highest individual score by any batter at No 5 in ODI history. In T20Is, Klaasen featured in 58 matches, amassing 1,000 runs at a strike rate of 141.84, with five half-centuries to his name. Klaasen had earlier retired from Tests in January 2024, having featured in four games in the longest format, scoring 104 runs at an average of 13.00. The wicketkeeper batter last played for South Africa in March this year during the ICC Champions Trophy semifinal against New Zealand. He was dismissed for just three runs off seven balls, as the Proteas lost the match by 50 runs.

Briefs

Rupee sheds 11 paisa against US Dollar

ISLAMABAD: The Rupee on Wednesday depreciated by 11 paisa against the US Dollar in the interbank trading and closed at Rs 282.22 against the previous day's closing of Rs 282.11. However, according to the Forex Association of Pakistan (FAP), the buying and selling rates of the dollar in the open market stood at Rs 282.5 and Rs 284.3, respectively. Drones The price of the Euro decreased by 84 paisa to close at Rs 321.28 against the last day's closing of Rs 322.12, according to the State Bank of Pakistan (SBP). The Japanese yen came down by 02 paisa and closed at Rs 1.95, whereas an increase of Rs 0.29 was witnessed in the exchange rate of the British Pound, which was traded at Rs 381.71 as compared to the last day's closing of Rs 381.42. The exchange rates of the Emirates Dirham and the Saudi Riyal increased by 02 and 04 paisa to close at Rs 76.83 and Rs 75.24, respectively.—APP

SECP, FJA conduct specialized training for banking court judges

ISLAMABAD: The Securities and Exchange Commission of Pakistan (SECP), in collaboration with the Federal Judicial Academy (FJA), conducted a first-of-its-kind training program for Banking Court Judges on Pakistan's corporate legal framework. This three-day training, held at FJA from June 2-4, 2025, marked a milestone in judicial capacity building and regulatory-jurisdictional alignment, said a release issued here on Wednesday. The participating judges are officially notified to preside over prosecutions initiated by SECP. This can include cases involving white-collar crime, financial fraud, regulatory violations, and offences under laws such as the Companies Act, 2017 and the Securities Act, 2015. The practical and in-depth training was delivered by SECP Commissioners, Executive Directors, and senior subject-matter experts. Sessions covered a wide spectrum of topics, from company registration, licensing regimes, and financial reporting, to capital market offences, investigative powers, and emerging regulatory challenges. The Federal Judicial Academy has been instrumental in facilitating and curating the training to ensure it meets the judiciary's evolving professional needs. The program culminated with a certificate distribution ceremony, with Honorable Justice Mianqul Hassan Aurangzeb, Judge of the Supreme Court of Pakistan, as Chief Guest. This pioneering initiative underscores SECP's commitment to supporting judicial excellence and effective prosecution. It also sets the stage for a more informed, collaborative, and agile enforcement ecosystem — where regulators and courts work in tandem to uphold the law in an increasingly sophisticated financial environment.—APP

Top Philippine senator to seek dismissal of Duterte impeachment case

MANILA: A top Philippine senator has drafted a resolution seeking to dismiss an impeachment case against Vice President Sara Duterte, his office said on Wednesday, which could boost her chances of political survival after an acrimonious fallout with the president. The lower house in February impeached Duterte, the daughter of former President Ferdinand Marcos Jr., the first lady, and the house speaker. Sara Duterte faces a lifetime ban from office if convicted in a Senate trial. She has repeatedly denied wrongdoing.—APP

Apparel exporters warn against EFS distortion as it's lifeline for SMEs

PHMA, PRGMEA urge PM to block spinners' push for tariffs, restore original scheme

DNA

LAHORE: The value-added textile sector has once again raised a unified voice to safeguard the backbone of Pakistan's export economy—the small and medium enterprises (SMEs) of the apparel industry. In a joint press conference held at PHMA Lahore office on Tuesday, the Pakistan Hosiery Manufacturers and Exporters Association (PHMA) and the Pakistan Ready-made Garments Manufacturers and Exporters Association (PRGMEA) demanded urgent action to restore the Export Facilitation Scheme (EFS) in its original spirit. The leadership jointly called on Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif to intervene and halt policy shifts that threaten to dismantle the EFS. They warned that ongoing bureaucratic distortions—compounded by lobbying from the spinning sector for new tariffs—are pushing the SME-based apparel export industry toward serious crisis. PHMA Zonal Chairman Abdul Hameed and PRGMEA Regional Chairman Dr. Ayyazuddin said the EFS was introduced to allow duty-free import of raw materials for exporters, giving Pakistan's apparel sector a competitive edge. “Instead of simplifying exports, EFS has become bogged down by manual procedures and is now under threat from proposed tariff changes,” said Abdul Hameed. Dr. Ayyazuddin stressed that SMEs, which form the bulk of the value-added industry, cannot survive under such conditions. “We operate on thin margins and short timelines. EFS was a breakthrough for us—but now it's being reshaped to serve upstream interests. These tariffs,

reportedly pushed by the spinners' lobby, protect a narrow segment at the cost of Pakistan's largest job-creating export base.” Leaders expressed concern over reports of potential duties on raw materials like synthetic yarns, man-made fibers, technical fabrics, and accessories—none produced locally. “Any tariff on items under HS Chapters 54, 55, and 96 is unacceptable,” said Abdul Hameed. “These are essential production inputs. Taxing them means taxing exports at the start.” Speaking virtually, PRGMEA former Chairman Ijaz Khokhar—widely regarded for championing exporter causes—said the entire value chain had welcomed EFS as a much-needed correction in policy. “But distortions are creeping in. The original vision of a seamless, transparent system is being hijacked,” he said. Exporters from

Sialkot and Faisalabad criticized the EFS manual verification system, which they said causes delays, miscommunication, and uncertainty. “There's no clear standard on application processing. The 'automated' system still relies on human intervention, creating bottlenecks,” said one Sialkot-based exporter. Former PRGMEA chairmen Sohail A. Sheikh and Sajid Minhas pointed out that Pakistan's export stagnation is tied to its limited product and input range. “Global markets are led by non-cotton apparel, yet we're stuck in cotton because we lack duty-free access to diversified inputs. Imposing tariffs would push us further behind,” said Minhas. They also warned against discouraging the use of stockists, who support the fast-fashion supply model. “SMEs can't afford bulk imports or delays. They depend on

stockists who import in volume and supply on demand. That system must be supported, not penalized,” said Sheikh. Former PHMA Chairman Shehzad Azam added that any disruption in EFS erodes global buyer trust. “When you can't commit delivery or product range, buyers walk away. We've already lost ground to Bangladesh and Vietnam—this policy uncertainty will only accelerate the decline.” Ijaz Khokhar emphasized that the current tariff structure is outdated. “Protective duties on inputs not produced locally hurt value addition and damage exports. We need a progressive, not protectionist, approach.” The leadership also opposed the shift from the simplified fixed tax regime (FTR) to a complex normal tax model. “The fixed tax regime gave predictability and ease of

compliance to SMEs. Moving to normal taxation will only increase harassment, confusion, and cost,” they said, urging the government to maintain the existing framework. PHMA and PRGMEA made it clear that any tariff imposition under EFS would defeat the scheme's core purpose. “This scheme was created to facilitate exporters, not entangle them in red tape or price hikes. Any change influenced by upstream sectors must be withdrawn,” Abdul Hameed stated. As the two associations continue talks with FBR, they underscored the need for political oversight. “We value FBR's engagement, but top-level leadership must take charge. We call on Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif to act now and prevent irreversible damage to Pakistan's apparel export sector,” they concluded.



ISLAMABAD : Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif chairs a meeting on matters related to Pakistan Railways.

Gaza aid sites shut, as Israel issues 'combat zones' warning

GAZA CITY, Palestinian Territories: A US and Israeli-backed group operating aid sites in the Gaza Strip announced the temporary closure of the facilities on Wednesday, with the Israeli army warning that roads leading to distribution centers were “considered combat zones.” The announcement by the Gaza Humanitarian Foundation (GHF) follows a string of deadly incidents near the distribution sites it operates that have sparked condemnation from the United Nations. Israeli bombardment on Wednesday killed at least 16 people in the Gaza Strip, including 12 in a single strike on a tent housing displaced people, the Palestinian territory's civil defense agency said. On Tuesday, 27 people were killed in southern Gaza when Israeli troops opened fire near a GHF aid site, with the military saying the incident was under investigation. UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres condemned the deaths of people seeking food aid as “unacceptable,” and the world body's rights chief condemned attacks on civilians as “a war crime” following a similar incident near the same site on Sunday. Israel recently eased its blockade of Gaza, but the UN says the territory's entire population remains at risk of famine. The GHF said its “distribution centers will be closed for renovation, reorganization and efficiency improvement work” on Wednesday and would resume operations on Thursday. The Israeli army, which confirmed the temporary closure, warned against traveling “on roads leading to the distribution centers, which are considered combat zones.” The GHF, officially a private effort with opaque funding, began operations a week ago but the UN and major aid groups have refused to cooperate with it over concerns it was designed to cater to Israeli military objectives. Israeli authorities and the GHF, which uses contracted US security, have denied allegations that the Israeli army shot at civilians rushing to pick up aid packages. Food shortages in Gaza have propelled fresh international calls for an end to the war, but a ceasefire agreement between Israel and Hamas remains elusive. The UN Security Council will vote Wednesday on a resolution calling for a ceasefire and humanitarian access to Gaza, a measure expected to be vetoed by key Israel backer the United States. At a hospital in southern Gaza, the family of Reem Al-Akhras, who was killed in Tuesday's shooting near GHF's facility, were beside themselves with grief. “She went to bring us some food, and this is what happened to her,” her son Zain Zidan said, his face streaked with tears. Akhras's husband, Mohamed Zidan, said “every day unarmed people” were being killed. “This is not humanitarian aid – it's a trap.” The Israeli military maintains that its forces do not prevent Gazans from collecting aid. Army spokesperson Effie Defrin said the Israeli soldiers had fired toward suspects who “were approaching in a way that endangered” the troops, adding that the “incident is being investigated.” UN human rights chief Volker Turk called attacks against civilians “unconscionable” and said they “constitute a grave breach of international law and a war crime.” The International Committee of the Red Cross meanwhile said “Gazans face an ‘unprecedented scale and frequency of recent mass casualty incidents.’” Scenes of hunger in Gaza have also sparked fresh solidarity with Palestinians, and a boat organized by an international activist coalition was sailing toward Gaza, aiming to deliver aid. The boat from the Freedom Flotilla Coalition departed Sicily Sunday carrying a dozen people, including environmental activist Greta Thunberg, along with fruit juices, milk, tinned food and protein bars. “Together, we can open a people's sea corridor to Gaza,” the coalition said.—DNA

NATO defense buildup must 'outpace Russia': US envoy

BRUSSELS: NATO's push to ramp up defenses must outstrip Russia's rearmament drive as Moscow is already gearing up for its “next move” beyond Ukraine, the US ambassador to the alliance said Wednesday. The warning came ahead of a meeting of NATO defense ministers Thursday that will seek to forge a deal on hiking military spending for a summit later this month. US President Donald Trump has called on Washington's allies to commit to spending five percent of their GDP on defense. NATO chief Mark Rutte looks on track to secure a compromise deal agreement at the upcoming summit in the Hague for 3.5 percent of GDP on core military spending, and 1.5 percent on broader security-related areas such as infrastructure. “The urgency of this moment is undeniable as the Russia-Ukraine conflict grinds on, Moscow is already preparing for its next move,” US ambassador Matthew Whitaker told journalists. “We are already seeing the Kremlin aims to rebuild its military. NATO allies must outpace Russia. We have no other choice. Let me be clear, the time is now.”—APP

Jam vows full support for pharma sector

ISLAMABAD: Federal Minister for Commerce Jam Kamal Khan reaffirmed his commitment to boosting pharmaceutical exports, announcing the establishment of an empowered Pharma Export Promotion Council, PharmEx Pakistan, under the Trade Development Authority of Pakistan. Drones “The pharmaceutical sector has huge export potential, and PharmEx Pakistan is just one or two steps away from becoming operational,” said the minister. He appreciated the industry's rapid progress and assured continued government facilitation to achieve global export targets, said a press release issued here on Wednesday. On trade with Afghanistan, he stated, “With every passing day, our relations are growing stronger and more streamlined — pharmaceutical exports will rise accordingly.” The minister's remarks came during a presentation by Pakistan Pharmaceutical Manufacturers Association (PPMA) Chairman Touqeer ul Haq, who briefed him on the formation of Pharmax Pakistan, a public-private initiative to promote and manage pharmaceutical exports. Chairman Touqeer ul Haq praised the minister's prompt action in addressing critical issues, stating it helped the industry avoid major financial losses. He added that Pharmacy Pakistan has the potential to raise pharmaceutical exports from USD 700 million to \$ 3 billion. The initiative builds on strong sectoral growth, with exports rising from USD 270 million in 2020-21 to USD 355 million in 2024-25, as noted in the latest industry figures. Touqeer ul Haq also called for better facilitation of exports to Afghanistan, a key market, and welcomed the minister's assurance of focused policy coordination. Pharmax Pakistan is expected to serve as a dedicated platform to enhance regulatory compliance, market access, and international outreach for Pakistani pharmaceutical products. Drones The minister assured the association of the Ministry's commitment to resolve the issues faced by the exporters and announced the establishment of a dedicated Exporter Facilitation Desk in the Ministry to help the export industry with critical matters requiring urgent intervention of the Government.—DNA

Indonesia issues warning over COVID-19 surge in Asia

JAKARTA: Indonesia's government has urged health-care facilities to step up COVID-19 surveillance, as a more transmissible omicron subvariant drives a surge in cases across Asia. Parts of Asia have been reporting a new wave of infections since last month, especially Thailand, Hong Kong, Malaysia and Singapore. The new spread of the coronavirus that brought the world to a standstill a few years ago has been linked to JN.1, a highly transmissible variant of the omicron strain of COVID-19. It emerged in late 2023 and spread globally through early 2024, becoming one of the dominant variants in many countries. Indonesian Health Minister Budi Gunadi Sadikin met with President Prabowo Subianto on Tuesday to report on the country's COVID-19 situation. “Cases are indeed increasing, but the rise is caused by variants that are relatively less deadly,” Sadikin told reporters after the meeting. His statement comes after Indonesia's Health Ministry issued a circular last week instructing regional agencies, hospitals, community centers and other medical service facilities across the country to monitor case trends and report unusual conditions. Health quarantine facilities are also instructed to “step up surveillance on people, transportation and items coming from abroad, especially those from countries that are reporting surges in COVID-19 cases,” the circular stated.—APP



شکریہ

وزیر اعلیٰ بلوچستان

میر سر فر از بگٹی

اخباری صنعت کے طویل عرصہ سے زیر التواء واجبات کی ادائیگی کیلئے خصوصی گرانٹ منظور کرنے پر تہہ دل سے شکریہ۔

ہم جناب شاہد ترجمان حکومت بلوچستان، چیف سیکرٹری جناب ٹکلیل قادر خان، سیکرٹری فنانس عمران زرکون، سیکرٹری اطلاعات جناب عمران خان اور ڈی۔ جی۔ پی۔ آر جناب محمود رکھتر ان کی خصوصی کاوشوں اور معاونت کیلئے انتہائی ممنون ہیں۔

ہم امید کرتے ہیں کہ بلوچستان کی اخباری صنعت کی طرف سے بی۔ پی۔ پی۔ ختم کرنے کے دیرینہ مطالبہ پر بھی جلد ہی عملدرآمد کیا جائے گا۔

آل پاکستان نیوز پیپر ڈسوسائٹی

APNS

CCP cracks down on collusion in fertilizer sector

ISLAMABAD: The Competition Commission of Pakistan (CCP) has cracked down on collusion in fertilizer sector, imposed Rs 375 million in fines on leading fertilizer industry associations. Drone The Competition Commission of Pakistan has taken decisive action against anti-competitive conduct in the fertilizer sector, imposing a penalty of Rs 50 million on each of the six major Urea Manufacturers, and also a penalty of Rs 75 million on a leading industry association/FMPAC, totaling Rs 375 million in fines, said a press release issued here on Wednesday. Following a detailed inquiry initiated suo motu, the Commission's Bench comprising Dr. Kabir Ahmed Sidhu and Mr. Salam Amin concluded that six urea manufacturing companies, i.e. M/s Fatima Fertilizer Limited, M/s Fauji Fertilizer Company Limited, M/s Fauji Fertilizer Bin Qasim Limited, M/s Fatima Fertilizer Company Limited, M/s Engro Fertilizer Company Limited and M/s Agritech Limited in coordination with their trade association, FMPAC. Un-

der the guise of conducting an awareness campaign/advertisement, have effectively fixed the price of urea across the country. Such conduct goes beyond the bounds of lawful information dissemination and enters into the realm of anti-competitive behavior in violation of Section 4 of the Competition Act, 2010. Despite claiming price independence, the manufacturers failed to justify their synchronized pricing strategy. The Commission's investigation uncovered that the conduct not only distorted competition, but also harmed farmers across Pakistan, especially during the critical Rabi and Kharif seasons, by artificially influencing fertilizer prices and limiting market choice. The Respondents' attempt to claim protection under the 'state action doctrine' was also rejected. Drones The Bench held that no formal government directive or compulsion existed to justify their collusive behavior. Instead the Respondents took advantage of a Federal Government direction regarding initiating an awareness campaign

encouraging farmers regarding urea price and used it as a tool to fix the price in due coordination among themselves and jointly announced the uniform price for the urea buyers/consumers. The Bench also held that such “actions, under the pretext of complying with government instructions, effectively undermined market forces and distorted competitive pricing mechanisms.” It was also noted with great concern that despite significant variations in input costs, different economies of scales, size of the market, different prices of gas etcetera, all Respondents were charging an identical price for size of urea bag (i.e. Rs. 1768/- per bag). The Bench also noted that “in a market where each undertaking's production capacity and market share are matters of common knowledge, such a coordinated disclosure cannot be viewed as incidental or competitively benign. Rather, the joint announcement constitutes an overt manifestation of concerted conduct.—DNA

Briefs

Russia keen to deepen ties with Pakistan

DNA

MOSCOW: Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov re-affirmed his country's eagerness to strengthen ties with Pakistan within the framework of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO), particularly in the area of counter-terrorism, according to a statement issued by the Foreign Office on Tuesday. He expressed his remarks during a meeting with Special Assistant to the Prime Minister (SAPM) on Foreign Affairs Tariq Fatemi on Tuesday, who is on official visit to Russia, as per the FO.

Trump says 'extremely hard' to do deal with Xi

WASHINGTON: US President Donald Trump said Wednesday it was "extremely hard" to reach a deal with Chinese counterpart Xi Jinping, as he ramped up his global trade war by doubling tariffs on steel and aluminum imports. The comments and higher levies came as OECD ministers gathered to discuss the outlook for the world economy in light of the US hardball approach to trade that has rattled world markets. Trump's sweeping tariffs on allies and adversaries have strained ties with trading partners and sparked a flurry of negotiations to avoid the duties. The White House has suggested the president will speak to Xi this week, raising hopes they can soothe tensions and speed up a trade deal between the world's two biggest economies.

However, in the early hours of Wednesday, Trump appeared to dampen hopes for a quick deal. "I like President Xi of China, always have, and always will, but he is VERY TOUGH, AND EXTREMELY HARD TO MAKE A DEAL WITH!!!" he posted on his Truth Social platform. China was the main target of Trump's April 2 tariff blitz, hit with levies of 145 percent on its goods and triggering tit-for-tat tariffs of 125 percent on US goods. Both sides agreed to temporarily de-escalate in May, after the US president delayed most sweeping measures on other countries until July 9. — APP

PSX extends rally amid positive sentiment, momentum

NAZIR SIYAL

KARACHI: The bourse continued its upward trajectory on Wednesday, extending gains as investors responded to improving sentiment and technical triggers. PSX benchmark KSE-100 Index climbed to an intraday high of 121,851.90, gaining 1,401.03 points, or 1.16%. The session's low was recorded at 120,896.13, reflecting a gain of 445.26 points, or 0.37%. "Payment of the circular debt coupled with rumours of reduction on various taxation and encouraging offtake numbers from cement and fertilisers have led to a broad-based rally," said Ahfaz Mustafa, CEO of Ismail Iqbal Securities. "Also making new highs has triggered an upside on a technical basis," he added. The rally came as Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif declared that talks with IMF over the upcoming federal budget had been successful, hailing it as a step towards a new era of economic development. Speaking in Peshawar on Tuesday, he said the government's focus would now shift from stabilisation to sustainable growth, backed by institutional reforms. Meanwhile, Pakistan's economic team has reportedly persuaded the IMF to drop its demand for an increase in the Federal Excise Duty (FED) on fertiliser from 5% to 10% in the upcoming budget, a move expected to provide relief to the agriculture sector.

Bulgaria-Pakistan diplomatic ties celebrated with cultural exhibition

ANSAR M BHATTI

ISLAMABAD: The Embassy of Bulgaria in Islamabad hosted a vibrant reception titled "The Ancient Treasures of Bulgaria" to mark the Day of the Bulgarian Alphabet and Culture, as well as the 60th anniversary of Bulgaria-Pakistan diplomatic relations. The event brought together diplomats, officials, scholars, and cultural enthusiasts for an evening of celebration and cultural exchange. Ambassador of Bulgaria, H.E. Irena Gancheva, welcomed the guests and highlighted the strong and friendly ties between Bulgaria and Pakistan, forged over six decades of cooperation and mutual respect. She emphasized the importance of cultural diplomacy in deepening people-to-people connections and enhancing bilateral relations.

The chief guest, Additional Foreign Secretary for Europe, Mohammad Ayub, congratulated Bulgaria on its national cultural day and appreciated the embassy's efforts to promote cultural understanding. He noted the historical depth of both nations and expressed hope for continued collaboration in education, culture, and trade.

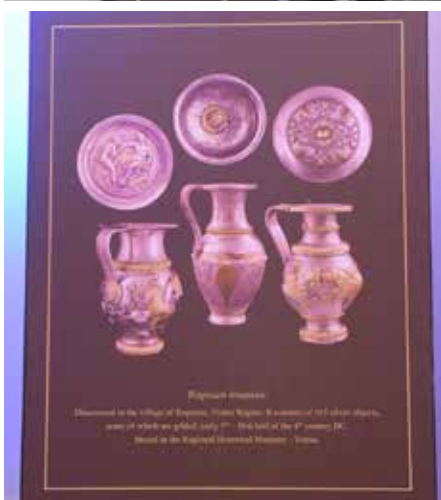
A key highlight of the evening was a special exhibition, "The Ancient Treasures of Bulgaria," showcasing Bulgaria's rich archaeological and cultural heritage. The exhibition was introduced by a visiting Bulgarian assistant professor, who offered insightful commentary on the artifacts and historical narratives. She noted the striking similarities between Bulgarian and Pakistani heritage — particularly in traditional crafts, folk music, and community values.

Ambassador Gancheva proudly emphasized Bulgaria's role as the birthplace of the Cyrillic script, one of the world's most influential writing systems, used by millions across Eastern Europe and Central Asia. "The Cyrillic alphabet is one of our major contributions to the European Union," she noted. "It would not be an exaggeration to say that Bulgaria is perhaps the only country in the world, or among the very few, that celebrates its alphabet and culture in such a dedicated manner."

For Bulgaria, the alphabet is more than just a system of writing—it is a core component of national identity. Ambassador Gancheva explained that the Bulgarian script has been instrumental in preserving the nation's literature, history, and cultural legacy throughout the centuries. "The Bulgarian alphabet is the main factor for the preservation of our identity," she said. "It has protected our cultural spirit and literary tradition across generations."

The occasion was made even more meaningful as it coincided with the 60th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between Bulgaria and Pakistan. Ambassador Gancheva reflected on the strong bonds of traditional friendship and mutual understanding that have developed over the decades. While the diplomatic relationship was officially established 60 years ago, she highlighted that the two countries have been connected for over six decades through shared values and cooperation.

Looking to the future, the ambassador expressed Bulgaria's continued commitment to strengthening bilateral ties with Pakistan. "We remain committed to further developing political dialogue, people-to-people contacts, trade and economic cooperation, as well as fostering partnerships in science, education, and culture," she said. She expressed hope that with joint efforts, both nations will continue to see positive developments in their relations, to the benefit of their peoples. Ambassador underscored the symbolic and practical importance of celebrating these two occasions—a national cultural day and an



anniversary of diplomatic friendship—with a cultural event. Culture, she noted, is a powerful diplomatic tool, capable of bridging gaps and building empathy among people from different backgrounds. "It is not by chance that we decided to celebrate with a cultural event," she explained. "Culture has an important role to play in connecting people, fostering understanding, and conveying messages of unity, especially in today's world."

In an era marked by global crises and complex challenges, the ambassador highlighted that the role of culture in diplomacy is more important than ever. Culture allows people to identify

shared values and challenges, helping to build bridges between continents, countries, and communities. "Culture creates a spirit of togetherness despite our differences," she said. "It speaks the universal language of humanity."

Before concluding her remarks, Ambassador Gancheva expressed heartfelt gratitude to all those who contributed to the success of the event. Though she chose not to name individuals, she acknowledged their hard work and dedication in organizing cultural events not only in Islamabad but also in Lahore. She extended her thanks to the audience for their presence and engagement.

Musk calls Trump's tax-cut and spending bill 'a disgusting abomination'

Musk criticises Trump's tax bill as deficit-increasing; White House dismisses Musk's criticism as Trump stands by bill

NEW YORK: Billionaire Elon Musk plunged on Tuesday into the congressional debate over President Donald Trump's sweeping tax and spending bill, calling it a "disgusting abomination" that will increase the federal deficit. Several fiscally conservative Republicans in the U.S. Senate supported the views Musk expressed in social media posts, which could complicate the bill's path to passage in that chamber.

"I'm sorry, but I just can't stand it anymore," Tesla and SpaceX CEO Musk wrote in a post on his social media platform X. "This massive, outrageous Congressional spending bill is a disgusting abomination."

EDITORIAL ON PAGE 5

He added: "Shame on those who voted for it: you know you did wrong. You know it."

Musk's comments hit a nerve. Republican deficit hawks have expressed concerns about the cost of the bill, which would extend the 2017 tax cuts that were Trump's main legislative accomplishment, while boosting spending on the military and border security. The House of Representatives passed it by one vote last month, after the nonpartisan Congressional Budget Office said the measure would add \$3.8 trillion to the federal government's \$36.2 trillion in debt.

The Senate, also controlled by Trump's Republicans, aims to pass the "One Big Beautiful Bill Act" in the next month, though senators are expected to revise the House version.

Rahul slams Modi for 'surrendering' on Trump's call

"Trump gave just a signal, picked up phone and said, 'Narendra, surrender'," says Rahul Gandhi

NEWS DESK

KARACHI: India's opposition leader Rahul Gandhi launched a scathing attack on Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Tuesday, accusing him of "surrendering" under pressure from US President Donald Trump during India's Operation Sindoor. During the Congress party's organisational revitalisation campaign in Bhopal, Gandhi made these remarks mocking Modi's response to international pressure during the operation, implying that a mere phone call from Trump had led to India backing off.

"Trump gave just a signal, picked up the phone and said, 'Modi ji, what are you doing? Narendra, surrender.' Saying 'Yes, sir', Narendra Modi obeyed Trump's signal", he said, contrasting the current leadership's response with that of former Indian prime minister Indira Gandhi during the 1971 war. "That's character," he said. "Gandhi ji, Nehru, Sardar Patel — they stood up to superpowers. These people just fold."

Gandhi also took aim at dysfunction within his own party, warning against "lame horses" and urging for unity and clarity of purpose. Highlighting the BJP's recent decision to conduct a caste census as an example of bowing to pressure, Gandhi accused the government of lacking conviction and giving in too easily to both internal and external forces. The opposition's offensive has come amid growing criticism of Operation Sindoor, which — shrouded in secrecy and marked by conflicting reports — has become a political flashpoint. In West Bengal, Home Minister Amit Shah escalated tensions further by accusing Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee of opposing the operation for political gain.

US wants strong ties with Pakistan, says Natalie



CENTRELINE REPORT

ISLAMABAD: The U.S. Embassy in Islamabad held a vibrant celebration to mark the 249th anniversary of American independence, with Chargé d'Affaires Natalie Baker delivering a heartfelt address that underscored the enduring friendship and growing partnership between the United States and Pakistan.

The event was graced by the presence of Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif, Deputy Prime Minister Ishaq Dar, federal ministers, members of the diplomatic corps, senior military officials, prominent media personalities, and a wide array of guests from diverse sectors including business, fashion, sports, and civil society.

In her remarks, Natalie Baker warmly welcomed guests in both English and Urdu, emphasizing the strong historical and cultural bonds between the two countries. "The Unit-

ed States and Pakistan have stood together through good times and bad, from development to defense, from health to education," she said.

Reflecting on her second diplomatic posting in Islamabad, Baker praised Pakistan's rich culture, resilience, and the warmth of its people. She noted that the bilateral relationship had grown significantly in scope and depth over the years, and highlighted the shared values of liberty, equality, and opportunity that unite the two nations.

Baker paid tribute to the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) and its long-standing work in Pakistan, praising its life-changing contributions in health, education, food security, and economic empowerment. "The legacy of USAID's work in Pakistan will continue to benefit communities for generations to come," she stated.

On security cooperation, Baker acknowledged the long-standing defense ties between the two countries, particularly lauding the Pakistani security forces for their recent successes in counterterrorism operations. She mentioned Pakistan's pivotal role in the capture and extradition of the ISIS-K terrorist responsible for the Abbey Gate attack in Afghanistan, terming it a major milestone in bilateral counterterrorism efforts.

Economically, she highlighted the recent Pakistan Critical Minerals Investment Forum and growing cooperation in technology, digital markets, and innovation. She also praised Pakistan's leadership in promoting industrial and digital growth.

In a notable diplomatic nod, Baker acknowledged U.S.-Pakistan collaboration in helping de-escalate tensions between Pakistan and India, reinforcing the U.S. commitment to regional peace and stability.

Pakistan persuading IMF to drop fertiliser duty hike

Fertiliser excise duty may stay at 5% if IMF agrees in writing

MONITORING REPORT

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan's budget team is close to persuading the International Monetary Fund (IMF) to withdraw its demand for raising the Federal Excise Duty (FED) on fertiliser from 5% to 10% in the upcoming 2025–26 budget, The News reported. Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif and Finance Minister Muhammad Aurangzeb have led the effort to secure this relief on agricultural

inputs, pressing the IMF to reconsider the proposed hike. If the IMF provides written consent, the FED on fertiliser will remain at the current rate of 5%. Meanwhile, a separate proposal to impose a 5% FED on pesticides is also expected to be shelved following intervention by the Prime Minister's Office. The prime minister also instructed the Federal Board of Revenue (FBR) to evaluate the proposed tariff rationalisation plan at the import stage and come up with accurate calculations that how much it might increase the import bill. The FBR had already expressed its apprehensions that the reduced import tariff might cause mis-declaration of goods to avoid other taxes, such as withholding taxes and GST at the import stage.

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