



Islamabad POST

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Budget is people friendly, says finance minister

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Aleem Khan for cashless Tolling on roads

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Tax of property sale, purchase slashed

Rs 18.8tr budget; GDP growth targeted at 4pc

- Income tax cut for those earning above Rs183,000 per month
- Withholding tax on foreign debit/credit card transactions slashed from 5pc to 0.5pc
- Taxes on sanitary pads, contraceptives completely withdrawn
- Final Tax Regime for IT, freelance exporters extended for three years until FY30
- 7pc raise in salaries and pensions of govt employees; 10pc increase in minimum wage proposed
- BISP budget raised 17pc to Rs838bn; coverage to expand to 12m families
- Rs71bn allocated for PM's Apna Ghar housing scheme with 5pc mortgage facility

ANSAR M BHATTI

ISLAMABAD: Finance Minister Muhammad Aurangzeb presented the FY2026-27 budget in the National Assembly (NA) on Friday, during a session that began two hours late and was marred by loud protests from the opposition. Aurangzeb prefaced the numbers with a note of thanks to leaders of the coalition parties supporting the federal government, as well as a rumination on Pakistan's improved standing in the world, which he described as a culmination of events that started from last year's Operation Bunyan-um-Marsoos and which peaked with Pakistan brokering a ceasefire between Iran and the US amidst a dangerous regional escalation. The finance minister said the government was also focused on increasing revenues through tax enforcement and compliance rather than increasing the tax burden on the people. "For this purpose, we are making changes to the compliance and enforcement mechanism and carrying out reforms in the FBR," he said.

Given the uncertainty in the region and to ensure the country's defence, "a significant increase has been made in the defence budget", he said. **Details of the budget:** The budget presented for fiscal year 2026-27 has an outlay of Rs18.8 trillion, of which Rs8,045bn will be set aside for markup payments, Aurangzeb explained as he introduced the proposals. The finance minister said the economy was expected to grow 4 per cent in FY2026-27, and average inflation was expected to be recorded at 8.2pc. He added that the fiscal deficit would be contained at 3.6pc of GDP, while a primary surplus of 2pc would be targeted by the government. Tax revenue has been estimated at Rs15,264bn for FY-2026-27, which is 17.6pc more than the outgoing year's Rs12,983bn, of which Rs8,848bn would go to the provinces. Aurangzeb said that the federal and provincial governments had agreed on a mechanism to meet "some national demands". "The country will experience the positive impact of this mechanism," he said, adding that the mechanism was agreed on the basis of

"federal cooperativism" and without affecting the constitutional rights of provinces. Under this mechanism, he continued, provinces' share in the federal divisible pool would remain in accordance with the 7th National Finance Commission award. Reiterating that tax revenue for the coming fiscal year was estimated at Rs15,264bn, he said Rs13,250 would be set aside for "distribution between the federal and provincial governments". "The amount of Rs15,264bn to Rs13,250 will be available to the provinces as grants under Article 164 of the Constitution to meet national strategic demands," he explained. This mechanism would remain in place for FY2026-27, and would be "renewed along similar lines with provinces' consultation for FY28 and FY29", he added. The minister then thanked the provincial governments for "stepping up for the national cause". He added that the federal non-tax revenue was budgeted at Rs5,336bn and net federal revenue was budgeted at Rs11,751bn.

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Briefs

MQM demands share in for Karachi uplift

NAZIR SIYAL

KARACHI: A delegation of the Muttahida Qami Movement-Pakistan (MQM-P) called on Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif in Islamabad on Friday and discussed the budget for FY2026-27 and development projects for Sindh were discussed, according to the Prime Minister's Office (PMO). A statement issued by the PMO said that the delegation was led by Dr. Khalid Maqbool Siddiqui, convener of the MQM and federal minister for education and professional training. It also included Health Minister Syed Mustafa Kamal and Members of the National Assembly Farooq Sattar, Amin ul Haq, and Javed Hanif.

Former Senator dies in road accident

FIAZ CH

ISLAMABAD: Former senator Taj Muhammad Afridi passed away on Friday after his vehicle was involved in a fatal accident near Colonel Sher Khan Interchange on the M-1 motorway, police said in a statement. According to a statement by the Motorway Police, the former senator was travelling from Islamabad to Peshawar. "Former senator Afridi died in the accident, while his driver sustained minor injuries," the statement said. It further said that upon receiving reports of the accident, the Motorway Police immediately reached the scene, adding that a technical fault in the vehicle reportedly caused the crash.

US-Iran stand-off

Shehbaz says final text of US-Iran peace deal reached

In a post on X, the prime minister said that the government was "fully aware of incessant misinformation campaign" being waged by those "who want to sabotage the peace deal"

MAHNOOR ANSAR

ISLAMABAD: Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif on Friday said that a final text of the US-Iran peace deal has been reached, with Pakistan working closing with both sides to finalise the next steps. In a post on X, the prime minister said that the government was "fully aware of incessant misinformation campaign" being waged by those "who want to sabotage the peace deal". "Peace has never been this close as it is now," he said. Meanwhile, Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Senator Mohammad Ishaq Dar has spoken with Swiss Foreign Minister Ignazio Cassis, where the two top diplomats

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Iran agrees to dismantle nukes: US

DNA

WASHINGTON: Iran has agreed to dismantle key parts of its nuclear programme under a landmark understanding with the United States, according to White House officials. The announcement marks what could be a historic breakthrough in decades of strained relations between the two nations. Deputy Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi confirmed that a memorandum of

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Bilawal Bhutto attends budget session

FIAZ CHAUDHRY

ISLAMABAD: Moments before the budget session was to begin, the PPP, which is the main ally of the ruling PML-N, said its chairperson Bilawal would not attend the sitting, but it also clarified that the party was not boycotting the session. This was after some television channels aired reports that the party had decided to boycott the session.

"Some members will attend the session. The PPP will be a part of the budget process in the national interest," the party posted on X. The post, however, was later deleted. In a subsequent post, the party said Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Ishaq Dar and Law Minister Azam Nazeer Tarar had held a meeting

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US deal sees release of \$24 billion frozen assets: Iran

Iran-US peace memorandum could be signed on Sunday in Geneva

NEWS DESK

WASHINGTON/TEHRAN: Iran's Mehr news agency on Friday published a draft deal with the United States which would, if adopted, secure the release of \$24 billion in frozen assets within a 60-day period. The agency, citing a source close to Iran's negotiating team, said an accord would allow for the "release of \$24 billion of Iran's blocked funds during the 60-day final negotiation period." It added that half of that sum would be "made available to Iran before the start of negotiations." Mehr said the memorandum of understanding would include a "permanent and immediate cessation of hostilities on all fronts, including in Lebanon." Iranian state media reported the nuclear program would be included in 60-day talks with US. State media also reported that Tehran would not cede control of Hormuz under the draft deal. "Iran makes no commitment in this text to cede the management of the strait or the restoration of conditions that existed prior to the American and Israeli military aggression," according to the official IRNA news agency, which referred to "the broad outlines of the current text" being finalized. Tehran earlier said Friday it had not reached a final decision on a deal to end the Middle

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Taking Kharg Island would pose risks for US troops

DNA

WASHINGTON: President Donald Trump has intensified his rhetoric regarding a potential seizure of Iran's Kharg Island, vowing to take the major oil terminal in the "not too distant future" to "assume total control of their Oil and Gas Markets." While the president has used social media to escalate threats against the island, he has also acknowledged the complications of a ground invasion. In recent comments to Fox News, Trump stated his "preference" would be to take the island to make a "fortune" for the US, but he questioned if the American people had "the stomach for it," adding that he "does not want to have to put boots on the ground." A critical energy lifeline: Kharg Island is a small rocky outcrop located approximately 15 to 16

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AFRICA DAY CELEBRATIONS



ISLAMABAD: Federal Information Minister Attaullah Tarar and Ambassadors of the African countries cutting cake to celebrate the African Day. - DNA

Atta Tarar highlights African continent's economic potential

He stressed that Pakistan's outreach is not limited to economic cooperation but also extends to fostering people-to-people connections and mutual understanding

SAIFULLAH ANSAR / DNA

ISLAMABAD: Federal Information Minister Attaullah Tarar, speaking at a ceremony marking Africa Day, underscored Pakistan's commitment to strengthening ties with African nations. He emphasized that Pakistan attaches great value to its relations with Africa, describing the continent as an emerging economic powerhouse with immense potential for growth and collaboration. Tarar noted that Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif had issued special instructions to intensify focus on Africa, a directive that has already led to the introduction of Pakistan's "Look Africa Policy," which he said is progressing successfully. Highlighting the strategic importance of Africa, the minister pointed out that the continent's vast resources, youthful population, and expanding markets make it a vital partner for Pakistan in trade, investment, and cultural exchange. He stressed that Pakistan's outreach is not

limited to economic cooperation but also extends to fostering people-to-people connections and mutual understanding. On the occasion, the Ambassador of Zimbabwe also addressed the gathering, commending the Pakistani government's efforts to cultivate closer links with African countries. He expressed appreciation for Islamabad's proactive approach in engaging with Africa and welcomed the initiatives aimed at building stronger diplomatic and economic bridges. Following the speeches, Minister Tarar toured various stalls set up by participating African nations. Each stall showcased traditional delicacies, offering guests a taste of authentic African cuisine. The vibrant atmosphere reflected the diversity and richness of African culture, with visitors enjoying dishes that highlighted the continent's culinary heritage. The event not only celebrated Africa Day but also symbolized the growing partnership between Pakistan and African countries, reinforcing the shared vision of prosperity and cooperation.

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Punjab to replace fuel buses with carbon-free electric

LAHORE: Punjab Mass Transit Authority has decided to replace fuel-powered buses with electric buses, taking an important step to promote environment-friendly transport system. According to officials, under this project, the bus system managed by the Mass Transit Authority will be shifted to a modern electric system, with the aim of reducing carbon emissions and providing citizens with clean, safe and modern travel facilities. In this regard, applications have been invited from the concerned companies and firms, while the pre-qualification process will be started from July 16. According to the conditions, only those companies will be eligible who have experience in supplying 12 meter long fully electric buses, besides, experience in supply of 100 per cent genuine parts, repair and maintenance of electric buses has also been made mandatory. Under the project, the responsibility of installation and commissioning of charging stations will also be entrusted to the respective companies, while the training of drivers and operational arrangements of the buses will also be entrusted to them. Officials say that this initiative is being taken under the Punjab Mass Transit Authority and its aim is to promote a carbon-free and environment-friendly public transport system as per the vision of Chief Minister Punjab Maryam Nawaz Sharif.—APP

Free travel by Orange Line train, Metro bus ends on June 13

LAHORE: The facility of free travel in public transport including Orange Line Train, Metro Bus, and Speedo bus services in Lahore and other cities has been abolished. According to the Punjab Mass Transit Authority (PMA) sources, the Punjab government has decided to withdraw the free travel relief from June 13 (tomorrow). The government had provided free travel facility to provide relief to citizens due to the increase in the prices of petroleum products. According to the authorities, this facility was given on a temporary basis, after which public transport will be operated as per the normal fares.—APP

Nehal, Murad vow to ending child labour

KARACHI: Sindh Governor Muhammad Nehal Hashmi and Sindh Chief Minister Syed Murad Ali Shah have reaffirmed their unwavering commitment to ending child labour and protecting every child's right to education, safety and a brighter future. In their separate messages on the World Day Against Child Labour, they said that children belong in schools, playgrounds, and homes not workplaces. It is time to work together to ensure every child enjoys a safe and dignified childhood. The Sindh CM said that the Government of Sindh is strengthening access to quality education, enforcing child protection laws, expanding social welfare programs and creating opportunities to address the root causes of child labour including poverty and inequality.—APP

Canada, UNODC equip FIA to boost anti-human trafficking efforts

Under the initiative, UNODC has provided FIA with specialized training, technical assistance, victim protection programmes, awareness campaigns, infrastructure improvements and operational equipment to support anti-trafficking efforts

DNA

ISLAMABAD: United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), with financial support from the Government of Canada, handed over specialized equipment to the Federal Investigation Agency (FIA) to strengthen Pakistan's efforts against human trafficking and migrant smuggling. An official told state run news agency on Friday that the handover ceremony was attended by High Commissioner of Canada to Pakistan Tarik Ali Khan, Director General FIA Dr. Usman Anwar and UNODC Representative in Pakistan Troels Vester. The official said the equipment package included portable forensic document examination kits, analytical workstations, laptops, data storage solutions, networking equipment and office infrastructure support. According to the official, the equipment would enhance FIA's investigative, analytical and operational capabilities in dealing with increasingly complex cases of trafficking in persons (TIP) and smuggling of migrants (SOM). The official said the support was provided under a Canada-funded programme being implemented by UNODC since 2021 to strengthen Pakistan's response to human trafficking and migrant smuggling. Under the initiative, UNODC has provided FIA with specialized training, technical assistance, victim protection programmes, awareness campaigns, infrastructure improvements and operational equipment to support anti-trafficking efforts. Representatives of Canada, UNODC and FIA reaffirmed their shared commitment to strengthening Pakistan's capacity to prevent and combat human trafficking and migrant smuggling while protecting vulnerable individuals from exploitation. They emphasized the importance of enhancing institutional capacity and supporting a stronger criminal justice response through international cooperation and modern law-enforcement tools. The official said the partnership reflected a joint commitment to addressing transnational crime and strengthening FIA's operational capabilities to effectively tackle trafficking and migrant smuggling networks.



Call for quality education promotion

QUETTA: Balochistan Governor Jaffar Khan Mandokhel said that the government has been focusing on quality education and the development of women in the province since the beginning to empower them. "I have laid special emphasis on the education and training of my daughters in my family so that they go ahead and respect not only other women but also set an exemplary example for the new generation. Today, all of us, including the provincial ministers, have come together to encourage and honor the Dukhtar Balochistan Lady Doctors", he said. He expressed these views while addressing the participants of the Dukhtar Balochistan Award Program organized by Balochistan Women Promote Talent at the Iranian

Cultural Center. On this occasion, provincial ministers including Mir Saleem Khosa, Mir Asim Kurd Gelu, Haji Muhammad Khan Lehri, Haji Barkat Rind, Director General Iranian Cultural Center Abu Al-Hasan, Additional Secretary Raja Attar Abbas, Dr. Faris Rind and Syed Shahzeb Raza, along with a large number of senior lady doctors and women, were present. The Governor said that economic independence is the foundation that enables any woman to secure her own and others' rights and privileges. "I am proud to be a part of this award program organized by Balochistan Women Promote Talent, which highlights the services, capabilities and sacrifices of women in our society", he said. Jaffar Khan Mandokhel said that he upheld

the glorious national values and traditions, we respect all women, whether they are mothers, daughters, sisters or wives saying that our women doctors are true messiahs, serving patients day and night, from operation theatres to research laboratories, from community clinics to rural health centres, they are rendering excellent services under the vision of a healthy and prosperous Balochistan. Mandokhel said that the women of Balochistan are second to none in talent and determination, the need is to provide them with equal opportunities and facilities to move forward. He said that today, we not only pay tribute to their professional services, but we also express our hope and expect that they would continue to serve with the same dedication in the future. The Governor of Balochistan congratulated you on the success of this program and appreciated the performance of these extraordinary women. = Finally, Governor Balochistan Jaffar Khan Mandokhel presented awards to the Dukhtar Balochistan Lady Doctors and women from other fields of life, while commemorative shields were distributed among the guest.—DNA

Impersonator held during recruitment drive in Kohat

KOHAT: The Federal Investigation Agency (FIA) arrested an impersonator on Friday for attempting to appear in a physical recruitment test in place of another candidate at the Sports Complex, Kohat. According to Assistant Director FIA, Amjad Ali, the suspect, identified as Younis Khan was caught during the scrutiny process. The suspect was in possession of a roll number slip and the original National Identity Card (NIC) belonging to the actual candidate, Naveed Khan. During the verification process, FIA officials noted a discrepancy between the suspect's appearance and the photograph on the official documents. Upon further questioning, the accused confessed to appearing as a proxy candidate for his friend, Naveed Khan. Subsequent biometric verification conducted through NADRA further confirmed the identity fraud. Following the incident, the accused was handed over to the Jungle Khel Police Station for further legal proceedings.

In a separate development, the Kohat district police launched a targeted "Search and Strike" operation against criminal elements and proclaimed offenders, acting on the special directives of District Police Officer (DPO) Shahbaz Alahi. Led by SHO City Police Station, Saifulah Khan, the operation resulted in the arrest of six individuals identified as Shamimullah, Usman, Basit, Gul Mohammad, Zakir, and Shah Mahmood. Police recovered one Kalashnikov and four pistols from the possession of the suspects. Among those arrested, Shah Mahmood was a wanted proclaimed offender in a narcotics case. All suspects have been shifted to the City Police Station for further investigation.—APP

Aleem directs cashless tolling on highways

ISLAMABAD: Federal Minister for Communications, Abdul Aleem Khan on Friday directed the authorities concerned to expedite the implementation of Intelligent Transportation Systems (ITS) and introduce cashless electronic toll collection on major highways and motorways across the country to enhance efficiency, security and public convenience. Chairing a high-level review meeting during his visit to the National Highways and Motorway Police Headquarters, the minister ordered the immediate inclusion of the M2 Motorway in the ITS Program, emphasizing that cameras, security infrastructure and communication networks should be completely unified and integrated under this modern technological framework, said a press release. To modernize the infrastructure and ensure uninterrupted and smooth travel for passengers, the minister directed the immediate introduction of a cashless and free-flow electronic toll collection system on all major routes. He clearly directed that this state-of-the-art electronic tolling network be directly linked to the security framework of Safe City and highlighted that these interconnected technological measures would not only help in improving traffic management but would also greatly assist law enforcement agencies in preventing crimes. Emphasizing public safety and passenger convenience, Abdul Aleem Khan instructed the authorities to ensure

the presence of Motorway Police personnel at all motorway service areas and provide uniform facilities to commuters across the network. He also made it mandatory to deploy Rescue 1122 staff, fire brigades and fully equipped ambulances at service areas along motorways and national highways. The minister directed the Motorway Police to further strengthen emergency response mechanisms and ensure the early provision of air ambulance services. The minister also ordered the Motorway Police authorities to bring the safety standards on Murree Expressway and other major national highways in line with the prescribed legal norms. Referring to the connecting roads of the northern areas, Abdul Aleem Khan directed to take special safety measures for the mountain passes, especially the immediate installation of safety guard rails on the Jaglot-Skardu Road and Mansehra-Kaghan-Naran Road. He directed that the temporary IBEX rest rooms established in these beautiful tourist regions should be converted into permanent and fully equipped Rest Areas to ensure better travel facilities for tourists and transporters. During the meeting, Secretary Communications, Chairman National Highway Authority (NHA) and Inspector General of National Highways and Motorway Police briefed the minister on operational and administrative matters. The meeting concluded with the approval of key recommendations and strategic decisions.—DNA

Minister distributes Rs 7.56m cheques among talented minority students

FAISALABAD Provincial Minister for Minority Affairs Sardar Ramesh Singh Arora distributed cheques worth Rs 7.56 million among 126 talented students belonging to the minority community at DMC hall here on Friday. Member Provincial Assembly Mian Tahir Jamil, Additional Deputy Commissioner Finance and Planning Mudassar Mumtaz, Vice President Minority Advisory Council Punjab Kamran Bhatti, Bishop David Emmanuel, Principal DMC Mirza Yasin and representatives of the minority community were also present. The minister termed that brilliant and intelligent students are the precious asset of the country. The PML-N government was always striving for the educational and social development of minorities; he said adding that the number of scholarships as well as funds has been doubled for minorities on the instructions of Punjab CM Maryam Nawaz Sharif. He said that from new fiscal year, 2000 deserving students from minorities will be given scholarships. He said that first time in province history, 100,000 minority cards have been given to poor families in the dynamic leadership of CM Maryam Nawaz Sharif. The minister said that measures are being taken for the development and prosperity of the minorities from the Punjab Assembly floor. He said that the talented youth belonging to minorities were also being provided opportunities for preparation of CSS examination with the coordination of Civil Services Academy. He hoped that that new avenues of development will open in the next three years.—APP

NICVD-HSMH partner to establish cardiac care services

KARACHI: Sindh Chief Minister Syed Murad Ali Shah presided over the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between the National Institute of Cardiovascular Diseases (NICVD) and Hassan Suleman Memorial Hospital (HSMH), Malir, aimed at establishing comprehensive cardiac care services for residents of Malir and surrounding areas. The partnership will enable Hassan Suleman Memorial Hospital to provide emergency cardiac assessment, stabilisation, and follow-up care, while patients requiring advanced interventions such as angiography, angioplasty and cardiac surgery will be referred to NICVD through a dedicated referral mechanism. The collaboration also includes tele-cardiology support, specialist consultations and capacity-building of medical and paramedical staff. The signing ceremony was held at the Chief Minister House and attended by Health Minister Dr Azra Fazal Pechuho, Secretary to CM Asif Jameel, Secretary Health Tahir Sangi, Acting Executive Director NICVD Asad Bilal Awan, Head of Cyber Knife Centre Prof Dr Tariq Mahmood, Chairman HEC Prof Dr M Tariq Rafi, President Hassan Suleman Foundation Dr Javed Suleman,

Dr Shahab Ullah, Dr Zahid Jamal, Dr Anwar Ali Khan and other senior officials. Speaking on the occasion, Chief Minister Murad Ali Shah said the Sindh government was committed to expanding access to quality healthcare services and ensuring that life-saving cardiac treatment reaches people closer to their homes. "NICVD has become a symbol of hope for millions by providing world-class cardiac treatment free of cost. Through this collaboration, we are extending that model to Malir, where patients will be able to receive timely cardiac assessment and emergency care before being connected to NICVD's advanced treatment network," the Chief Minister said. Shah added that cardiovascular diseases remain among the leading causes of death and emphasised the importance of rapid diagnosis and treatment. "In cardiac emergencies, every minute is precious. This partnership will strengthen emergency response systems, improve patient outcomes and ensure that residents of Malir and nearby localities have quicker access to specialist cardiac care," he said. The Chief Minister directed the Health Department and NICVD management to ensure effective im-

plementation of the agreement and develop a robust referral and transfer mechanism to guarantee uninterrupted treatment for patients requiring advanced cardiac interventions. Health Minister Dr Azra Fazal Pechuho described the agreement as an important milestone in strengthening healthcare services in Sindh through institutional collaboration. "NICVD has revolutionised cardiac healthcare by creating a network that delivers free and high-quality treatment across the province. The partnership with Hassan Suleman Memorial Hospital will further expand access to early diagnosis, emergency cardiac management, and specialist care for the people of Malir and adjoining areas," she said. Dr Pechuho said the government would continue to support innovative partnerships that improve healthcare accessibility, reduce treatment delays and enhance patient care. President Hassan Suleman Foundation, Dr Javed Suleman, thanked the Chief Minister and the NICVD leadership for their support and vision. "We are honoured to partner with NICVD, one of the most respected cardiac institutions in the region.—DNA

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Head Office
3rd Floor, Yasin Plaza, 74-West, Blue Area, Islamabad.
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Branch Offices

Karachi
Plot No. 18, 8/15, 3rd Floor, Khatkhata Mall, Main Ring Road, 172-Block-2, P.E.C.H.S.
Karachi. Tel: (+92 21) 3433063, 34319479
Fax: (+92 21) 3431762
E-mail: karachi@freelinemovers.com

Lahore
P-4, Gulberg Centre, Main Boulevard, Lahore.
Tel: (+92 42) 3575081, 3571986
Fax: (+92 42) 3571428
E-mail: lahore@freelinemovers.com

Peshawar
Office No. C-6, 3rd Floor, Zohrab Plaza, Left Road, Ring Road, Peshawar.
Tel: (+92 91) 292778
Fax: (+92 91) 292888
E-mail: peshawar@freelinemovers.com

Kabul
House #4, Street #4, Charah Anar Road, Shahr-e-Naw, Kabul - Afghanistan.
Tel: (+92 902) 173, 93 77938 838, 93 77948 318
E-mail: kabul@freelinemovers.com

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

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- DHQ.....5556311-4
- RGH.....9290301-7
- Holy Family.....9290322-7
- PIMS.....9261170-79
- Polyclinic.....9218300-09
- Shifa International 4603666



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- TMA.....5770886
- Cantonment Board 9270151-3



Islamabad Metropolitan

- Corporation.....9209224
- Potohar Town.....9209224
- Rawal Town.....5773343

Water Tank

- Islamabad.....0321-5744480

UNHCR, QAU sign agreement to advance refugee research

UNHCR continues to work with partners to support refugees, returnees, and host communities. On World Refugee Day, it calls for continued solidarity so that people forced to flee can access protection, assistance, and opportunities to rebuild their lives - until everyone is safe

SAIFULLAH ANASR

ISLAMABAD: Ahead of World Refugee Day, observed globally under the theme "Until Everyone is Safe," UNHCR, the UN Refugee Agency, and Quaid-i-Azam University (QAU) reaffirmed their commitment to advancing opportunities through partnership, education, and academic cooperation. An event held at Quaid-i-Azam University brought together students, academics, and partners to reflect on the importance of safeguarding the right to seek safety and on the collective responsibility to support people forced to flee conflict, persecution, and violence. Marking the occasion, UNHCR and Quaid-i-Azam University signed a Cooperation Framework Agreement (CFA) to strengthen collaboration in support of education, research, and knowledge-sharing initiatives on refugee protection, statelessness, migration, and forced displacement. The agreement will support academic research, curriculum development, capacity-building initiatives, and the work of the Pakistan Academic Consortium on Refugee Law and Migration (PACRAM), helping to promote dialogue and evidence-based approaches to displacement in Pakistan. Speaking on the occasion, Mr. Oscar Sanchez, Deputy Representative of UNHCR in Pakistan, said the theme "Until Everyone is Safe" reminds us that protection begins with the right of every person to seek safety and live with dignity. He also acknowledged Pakistan's long-standing support for Afghan refugees over more than 45 years. "Through our partnership with Quaid-i-Azam University, we are investing in knowledge, research, and future generations who can contribute to stronger protection frameworks and sustainable solutions for refugees and other vulnerable people," he added. Prof. Dr. Zafar Nawaz



Jaspal, Vice Chancellor of Quaid-i-Azam University, stated that universities play a vital role in advancing understanding and developing solutions to global challenges. He said that this partnership with UNHCR reflects the spirit of 'Until Everyone is Safe' by strengthening education, research, and legal scholarship on refugee protection and forced displacement. Chief Commissioner for Afghan Refugees, Asmatullah Shah, noted Pakistan's long tradition of hosting refugees and working with partners to address displacement challenges. H.E. Ambassador of Switzerland, Mr. Georg Steiner, congratulated UNHCR and QAU

on the milestone, saying that the partnership will help develop future legal professionals, policymakers, researchers, and advocates. Steiner underscored that effective refugee protection goes beyond humanitarian assistance. "It is also about strengthening the institutions, knowledge, and legal frameworks that enable communities to respond to displacement in a principled and sustainable manner," he said. Earlier, Director of the School of Law, Dr. Aziz ur Rehman, provided an overview of the Cooperation Framework Agreement. A DAFI scholarship recipient and pharmacy student spoke about the challenges refugees

face in accessing education and shared her concerns about the future of Afghans, particularly women. "I have wonderful Pakistani friends and professors here at the university, who have never treated me differently," she said. "Through them, I learned that kindness has no nationality, and friendship knows no borders." UNHCR continues to work with partners to support refugees, returnees, and host communities. On World Refugee Day, it calls for continued solidarity so that people forced to flee can access protection, assistance, and opportunities to rebuild their lives - until everyone is safe.

People's welfare remains centre of budget: Sultan

ISLAMABAD: PML-N leader Mian Sultan Ali Ranjha on Friday expressed hope that allied partners will jointly back the upcoming federal budget, saying it is designed to deliver maximum relief to the salaried class and strengthen public welfare measures. Mian Sultan Ali Ranjha, while speaking to PTV News, said that the federal budget has been prepared with a clear focus on public welfare, adding that it prioritizes maximum relief for the salaried class through tax concessions and other supportive measures. He said that the government, along with its allied partners has placed greater emphasis on people-centric policies rather than allocating excess

weight to development spending. He added that the main objective of the budget is to ease the burden on common citizens, particularly the underprivileged segments of society. Ranjha stated that, in the prevailing economic conditions, the government has made sincere efforts to present a balanced and practical budget. He expressed hope that all coalition partners, including the Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP), would extend their support for its successful passage. He further said that with the collective cooperation of allied parties, the budget would be successfully implemented and would help provide meaningful relief to the salaried class while pro-

moting broader public welfare.

He also highlighted the efforts of the PML-N leadership in launching development works and expanding a network of welfare-oriented projects across the country. He added that whenever the party comes into power, it faces challenging economic conditions, including an unstable economy, which requires a strong focus on growth and stabilization. He further said that with the collective cooperation of allied parties, the budget would be successfully implemented and would help provide meaningful relief to the salaried class while promoting broader public welfare.—DNA

Climate change making each year hotter than last

He concluded that there is now a need for serious attention and urgent action on climate change, stressing that delays will only increase risks and strengthen the impact of extreme weather events in the coming years

ISLAMABAD: The National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA) expert Syed Muhammad Tayyab Shah Friday called for stronger joint efforts and greater awareness on climate change, warning that rising temperatures could make 2027 one of the hottest years on record and stressed the need for coordination among government departments, emergency services, and partners. While speaking to a local media outlet, NDMA expert Tayyab Shah highlighted that the global warming trend continues, warning that each year is becoming hotter than the previous one and urging stronger

cooperation among all stakeholders to address the growing climate crisis. He stated that due to climate change, rising temperatures are expected to persist in 2026, with intense heat conditions likely to continue across the country, increasing environmental stress and public safety risks. He further warned that 2027 could become one of the hottest years on record, bringing serious risks such as increased pressure on rivers, accelerated glacier melt, changing weather patterns, and a rise in mountainous hazards. He also noted that greenhouse gas emissions are contributing significantly to these changes, making Pakistan one of the most vulnerable countries, particu-

larly facing threats like landslides, flash floods, and sudden heavy rainfall events. He added that NDMA is actively strengthening preparedness through early warning systems, digital monitoring, and improved alert mechanisms, but stressed that effective disaster management requires stronger coordination between federal and provincial institutions, emergency services and humanitarian partners. He concluded that there is now a need for serious attention and urgent action on climate change, stressing that delays will only increase risks and strengthen the impact of extreme weather events in the coming years.—DNA

ITP takes action against 300,000 violators

ISLAMABAD: Islamabad Traffic Police (ITP) processed more than 160,000 driving licence applications and took legal action against over 300,000 traffic violators during the last six months as part of efforts to improve road safety, enforce traffic laws and ensure smooth traffic flow in the federal capital. An ITP official told APP on Friday that Islamabad Traffic Police undertook extensive measures during the period to facilitate citizens, promote road safety awareness and strengthen enforcement of traffic regulations across the city. The official said more than 160,000 citizens were provided driving licence-related services, including issuance of over 66,000 learner permits and renewal of more than 38,000 driving licences. According to the official, over 3,500 duplicate licences and more than

50,000 fresh driving licences were issued, while over 5,000 licences were converted or endorsed during the six-month period. The official said Islamabad Traffic Police also launched extensive awareness campaigns and educated more than 500,000 citizens on road safety and traffic regulations. Under the road education programme, over 200,000 citizens received awareness, while more than 54,000 people were reached through activities conducted in various markets. Similarly, over 74,000 citizens were educated under the Good Citizen Campaign, while more than 97,000 people received awareness through the Friends of Police Programme. The official said road safety seminars organized at educational institutions, public and private organizations and other public places helped educate thou-

sands of citizens about safe driving practices and traffic laws. Meanwhile, Islamabad Traffic Police took legal action against more than 300,000 traffic violators during the reporting period. The official said over 25,000 motorists were penalized for lane violations, while legal action was taken against more than 47,000 citizens for illegal parking. Similarly, action was taken against over 32,000 vehicles displaying fancy number plates and more than 16,000 motorcyclists for riding without helmets. More than 18,000 motorists were penalized for wrong-way driving, while legal action was initiated against over 21,000 vehicles for overloading. The official said Islamabad Traffic Police remained committed to utilizing modern technology, improving citizen facilitation services and providing a safer travelling environment for road users.—APP

Rs 2,000m sets aside for Police Hospital

ISLAMABAD: The federal government has earmarked Rs2,000 million under the Public Sector Development Programme (PSDP) 2026-27 for the ongoing National Police Hospital project in Islamabad aimed at strengthening healthcare facilities for police personnel and their families. According to Budgetary documents released on Friday, the project was approved by the Central Development Working Party (CDWP) on March 2, 2023 and is being implemented in Islamabad as a major healthcare initiative for the law enforcement community. The total cost of the project stands at Rs6,479.879 million, of which Rs2,217.977 million had been spent up to June 30, 2026. The remaining throw-forward liability has been estimated at Rs4,261.902 million as of July 1, 2026. The government has allocated Rs2,000 million for the project during fiscal year 2026-27 to accelerate construction work and facilitate its timely completion. The National Police Hospital is expected to provide modern medical, diagnostic and emergency healthcare facilities for serving and retired police personnel as well as their families, reducing reliance on external healthcare institutions. The project is among the major ongoing initiatives aimed at improving welfare and healthcare services for law enforcement personnel in the federal capital.—APP

Safe City Islamabad gets Rs 2,69m

ISLAMABAD: The federal government has earmarked Rs2,699.339 million under the Public Sector Development Programme (PSDP) 2026-27 for the ongoing Expansion of Safe City Islamabad project aimed at strengthening surveillance, public safety and smart policing capabilities in the federal capital. According to Budgetary documents released on Friday, the project was approved by the Central Development Working Party (CDWP) on May 16, 2025, and is being implemented under the Islamabad Capital Territory (ICT) Police. The total cost of the project stands at Rs7,499.339 million, of which Rs4,800 million had been spent up to June 30, 2026.—APP

Shahrah-e-Dastoor closed for traffic due to protest

ISLAMABAD: Islamabad Traffic Police (ITP) on Friday issued a traffic advisory, informing citizens that Shahrah-e-Dastoor had been closed for traffic due to a protest. An ITP official told APP on Friday that commuters were advised to use alternate routes to avoid inconvenience and traffic congestion in and around the Red Zone. The official said citizens travelling to and from Margalla Road could use the route via Bari Imam as an alternative. According to the official, motorists were requested to avoid unnecessary travel towards the Red Zone and plan their journeys accordingly. The official further advised road users to utilize alternate routes to help maintain smooth traffic flow and avoid delays caused by diversions in the area. Citizens were urged to follow traffic instructions and remain updated through Islamabad Police social media platforms and ITP FM 92.4 for the latest traffic situation and travel guidance.—APP

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Briefs

Pakistan ranks second globally in pilgrim count

ISLAMABAD: Federal Minister for Religious Affairs and Interfaith Harmony, Sardar Muhammad Yousaf, announced on Friday that Pakistan's Hajj operation achieved resounding success, earning the Excellence Award from the Saudi Ministry of Hajj and Umrah for the second consecutive year. Speaking at a reception ceremony at the Islamabad International Airport, the Minister stated that under the Prime Minister's direct patronage, the Hajj Mission successfully utilized all available resources to provide exemplary services. He highlighted that Pakistan ranked as the second-largest country globally in terms of pilgrim volume, yet managed to maintain flawless logistics, with 80 percent of the pilgrims benefiting seamlessly from the "Road to Makkah" project and the private Hajj sector securing three individual awards. Expressing deep gratitude to the Saudi leadership, including the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques and Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, the Minister praised the exceptional cooperation between the two nations.

Regarding future plans, Sardar Yousaf disclosed that the Saudi Ministry has already issued its deadlines, prompting the Pakistani government to present the upcoming Hajj policy to the Federal Cabinet within the current month, which will feature an application process structured strictly on a "First Come, First Served" basis. The Minister further underscored the high standard of welfare provided during the season, noting that 100 percent of Pakistani pilgrims in Madinah were accommodated within the prized "Markazia" (central area). He lauded the commendable performance of the Hajj Medical Mission, the Saudi German Hospital, and local volunteers, particularly highlighting that the mission dedicatedly assisted 146 critically ill and elderly pilgrims to ensure they completed essential rituals like Waqoof-e-Arafat and Ta'waf-e-Ziyarat. The Minister emphasized that the overall complaint rate remained under one percent due to immediate on-site resolutions, vowing that arrangements for the next cycle in Makkah, Madinah, and Mashair would be finalized well ahead of schedule, the Minister emphasized that the overall complaint rate remained under one percent due to immediate on-site resolutions, vowing that arrangements for the next cycle in Makkah, Madinah. —APP

Gwadar emerges as a future regional hub

The Economic Survey presented the developments as part of broader efforts to improve connectivity, infrastructure, energy security and commercial activity in Gwadar as Pakistan seeks to strengthen the port's role in regional trade networks.

DNA

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan's Economic Survey 2025-26, unveiled, highlighted Gwadar's growing importance in the country's economic and connectivity plans, describing the port city as a future regional hub for trade, logistics and transshipment. The survey said the Eastbay Expressway has "significantly improved connectivity to Gwadar Port by providing a dedicated, signal-free corridor linking the port, Free Zones, and the Makran Coastal Highway, resulting in reduced congestion, lower transport costs, and more reliable cargo movement." The government also reported progress on plans to connect the New Gwadar International Airport with Gwadar Port and the Free Zones through a second

phase of infrastructure development that would enable "integrated sea-air logistics," Gwadar Pro reported. The survey described Gwadar Port as occupying "a strategically significant position at the mouth of the Persian Gulf, just outside the Strait of Hormuz and along one of the world's busiest maritime trade corridors." It added that development under the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) has "enhanced Gwadar's importance as a future hub for trade, logistics, and transshipment activities, with the potential to strengthen regional connectivity and attract foreign investment." According to the survey, "Gwadar Port is steadily emerging as a strategic pillar of Pakistan's maritime economy and regional trade architecture". The report said development activities continued dur-

ing the fiscal year to "enhance its commercial viability and operational capacity." It noted that China Overseas Port Holding Company completed master planning and feasibility studies for the main Free Zone spanning 2,281 acres, while construction work on several industrial units has begun. The survey said port operations were also gaining momentum, with international shipping companies including COSCO and Sino-Trans maintaining regular services. "These developments are expected to further support Gwadar Port's emergence as a regional trade, logistics, and transshipment hub," it said. On energy, the survey disclosed that the Prime Minister of Pakistan has "granted in-principle approval for the processing of a 40 MW power project in the Gwadar

region". To tackle chronic utility shortages, the report said the Power Division and the Private Power and Infrastructure Board carried out a preliminary assessment focused on "solarizing 24 pumping stations and one water desalination plant." The proposed solution includes "9.7 MW of solar PV systems coupled with 18.26 MWh of BESS" and is expected to generate annual savings of Rs987 million. The survey said, "This configuration is expected to generate annual savings of Rs 987 million, with an estimated payback period of 2.7 years." The Economic Survey presented the developments as part of broader efforts to improve connectivity, infrastructure, energy security and commercial activity in Gwadar as Pakistan seeks to strengthen the port's role in regional trade networks.

BISP chairperson for ending child labour

ISLAMABAD: Chairperson of the Benazir Income Support Programme (BISP), Rubina Khalid, has emphasized that the elimination of child labour is essential for building a just, developed, and prosperous society. In her message on World Day Against Child Labour, Senator Rubina Khalid said that the Constitution of Pakistan guarantees the protection of children from exploitation and forced labour. She noted that Article 11 prohibits forced labour and child exploitation, while Article 25-A ensures every child's right to free and compulsory education.

"Children should hold books in their hands, not tools," she stated, stressing the need to address the social and economic factors that force children into labour.

The BISP chairperson said that providing education, healthcare, and protection to every child is a shared responsibility of the state and society. She highlighted that the Employment of Children Act, 1991, along with other relevant laws, provides safeguards against hazardous child labour and called for effective implementation of these laws.

Senator Rubina Khalid said that BISP is playing a vital role in supporting vulnerable families, promoting children's education, and helping secure a brighter future for the country's youth. She emphasized that investing in children's education is, in fact, an investment in Pakistan's future. —APP

Freelance boom powers Pakistan's digital economy

ISLAMABAD: Chairman Prime Minister's Youth Programme (PMYP) Rana Mashood Ahmad Khan on Friday hailed the sharp increase in Pakistani freelancers' earnings, as highlighted in the Economic Survey 2025-26, saying the growth reflects the talent, innovation and global competitiveness of the country's youth. Commenting on the survey findings released by the federal government, Mr Khan said freelance earnings surged from \$642 million to \$959 million annually, marking a significant contribution to Pakistan's digital economy and foreign exchange reserves. The Pakistan Economic Survey 2025-26 notes that the remarkable rise in freelance income has been driven by expanding digital opportunities, improved access to technology and the growing participation of young Pakistanis in international online marketplaces. —APP



ISLAMABAD: Australian High Commissioner Tim Kane along with officials of ANF after signing MoU. DNA

Climate resilience, green growth get Rs 2.48b boost

ISLAMABAD: The federal government has allocated Rs2.478 billion for four ongoing projects of the Climate Change and Environmental Coordination Division under the Public Sector Development Programme (PSDP) 2026-27 aimed at strengthening climate resilience, green entrepreneurship, institutional capacity and sustainable urban planning. According to the PSDP 2026-27 released on Friday, the largest allocation of Rs2.336 billion has been earmarked for the Up-scaling of Green Pakistan Programme (Revised) against the total approved cost of Rs122.147 billion. The project, approved by the Executive Committee of the National Economic Council (ECNEC) on August 7, 2025, has an estimated expenditure of Rs34.964 billion up to June 30, 2026, while its throw-forward liability stands at Rs41.358 billion. The government has also allocated Rs40.661 million for the Strengthening Technical Capacities of Ministry of Climate Change and Environmental Coordination (STC-MoCC&E) (Revised) project. The project, approved by the Departmental Development Working Party (DDWP) on June 13, 2025, carries a total cost of Rs916.028 million. An estimated Rs58.605 million is expected to be spent by June 30, 2026, leaving a throw-forward of Rs857.423 million. Similarly, Rs51.600 million has been allocated for the project titled "Green Skills for Sustainable Development: Promoting Green Entrepreneurship and Innovation in Pakistan." The DDWP-approved initiative has a total cost of Rs450 million. The project has no expenditure up to June 30, 2026, while its entire cost remains as throw-forward liability. Meanwhile, the government has earmarked Rs50 million for the Formulation of National Urban Strategy and Guidelines to Reduce Impacts of Urban Flooding, Droughts, Climate Disasters, and National Guidelines for Spatial Planning Considering Climate Change and Disaster Risks in Pakistan. The project, approved by the Central Development Working Party (CDWP) in April 2025, has a total approved cost of Rs106.401 million. An estimated expenditure of Rs106.401 million is expected by June 30, 2026. Overall, the Climate Change and Environmental Coordination Division's ongoing development portfolio carries a total approved cost of Rs123.619 billion. The estimated expenditure up to June 30, 2026 stands at Rs35.023 billion, while the throw-forward liability amounts to Rs42.771 billion. Under PSDP 2026-27, a total allocation of Rs2.478 billion has been provided for the four ongoing schemes. —DNA

IOM, Pak-China youth community hold mental health training program

ISLAMABAD: The International Organization for Migration (IOM), in collaboration with the China-Pakistan Youth Exchange Community (CPYEC), conducted a specialized mental health training session on self-empowerment and stress management for 21 volunteers involved in promoting bilateral youth exchanges. Held here this week, the program was aimed to strengthen volunteers' psychological well-being while enhancing the resilience and effectiveness of service teams engaged in cross-cultural exchange initiatives. The training program, titled "Self-Help Plus & Stress Management," featured scientifically structured and interactive content designed to be professional, practical and engaging. Gwadar Pro reported on Friday. Activities included a lecture on the Circle of Control model, psychological healing exercises, thematic discussion sessions and a hand-painting interactive experience. The curriculum was tailored to address the psychological needs of long-term volunteers. CPYEC is a volunteer organization started spontaneously in 2013 by Chinese and Pakistani youth. Ma Bin, head of the organization, highlighted that Chinese and Pakistani volunteers serve as vital bridges for people-to-people exchanges between the two countries, playing an indispensable role in cultural understanding, charitable assistance and youth outreach. —APP

Sherry calls for urgent action to end child labour

ISLAMABAD: On World Day Against Child Labour, Senator Sherry ehan expressed grave concern over the continued prevalence of child labour that threatens the future of millions of children and undermines the country's development goals. "Every child deserves a childhood, an education, and the opportunity to realize their full potential. Yet millions of Pakistani children continue to be trapped in cycles of poverty, exploitation, and hazardous work," Senator Rehman said. She noted "According to ILO, approximately 8.6 million children in Pakistan are engaged in child labour. Of these, nearly 2.7 million children are involved in the worst and most hazardous forms of labour, including work in agriculture, brick kilns, domestic servitude, workshops, and other dangerous sectors." Senator Rehman underscored "Child labour remains deeply intertwined with poverty, inequality and lack of access to education. Many families struggling to meet basic needs are compelled to send their children into the workforce instead of classrooms." Senator Rehman emphasised the gendered

dimensions of child labour, noting that while boys are statistically more likely to be engaged in economic labour, girls often shoulder invisible and unrecognized burdens. Many young girls spend more than 21 hours per week performing unpaid household work, limiting their educational opportunities and exposing them to multiple forms of vulnerability. "Child labour is not merely a labour issue; it is a human rights issue, a development issue, and a social justice issue. It perpetuates intergenerational poverty, deprives children of education, and weakens our collective future," she said. Senator Rehman noted that Pakistan possesses a robust constitutional and legal framework prohibiting child labour and protecting children's rights. She said "Article 11(3) of the Constitution of Pakistan strictly prohibits the employment of children below the age of 14 years in factories, mines, and other hazardous occupations. Article 25-A guarantees free and compulsory education for all children between the ages of 5 and 16 years, while Article 37(e) obligates the state to ensure humane working conditions and prevent children from being employed in occupations unsuited to their age." She added "At the federal level, the Employment of Children Act, 1991 remains a cornerstone of Pakistan's legal framework, prohibiting the employment of children under the age of 14 in hazardous occupations and regulating the working conditions of adolescents under 18 years of age. Following the 18th Constitutional Amendment, provinces have also enacted specific child labour laws and protections, reinforcing commitments to children's rights and welfare. However, Senator Rehman stressed that legislation alone is insufficient without effective implementation and enforcement. She called for a comprehensive national strategy that combines poverty alleviation, expanded social protection, universal access to quality education, stronger labour inspections, and targeted interventions for vulnerable communities. —DNA

Tarar reaffirms Pakistan's commitment to end child labour

DNA

ISLAMABAD: Federal Minister for Human Rights Azam Nazeer Tarar on Friday reaffirmed Pakistan's commitment to eliminating child labour, saying every child has the right to education, protection, dignity and the opportunity to achieve their full potential. In a message issued on the occasion of World Day Against Child Labour, the minister said child labour deprives children of their fundamental rights and undermines their prospects for a secure future. He stressed that protecting children from exploitation and hazardous

work is essential for building a just, inclusive and prosperous society.

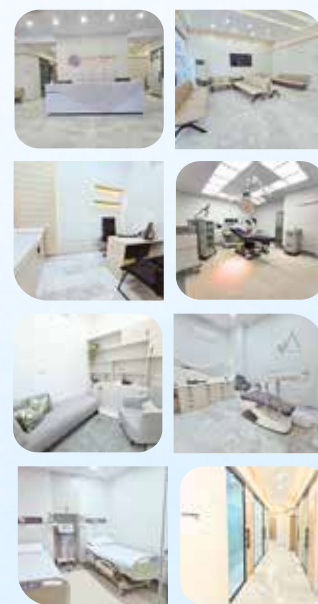
Tarar noted that despite ongoing efforts, many children remain vulnerable to exploitation and are denied opportunities to learn, develop and realize their potential. He said the government is committed to strengthening child protection systems, expanding access to education and supporting vulnerable families through social protection initiatives. Highlighting constitutional safeguards, the minister said Article 11 of the Constitution prohibits the employment of children in hazardous occupations, while Article 25-A guarantees free and compulsory

education. He added that Pakistan has further strengthened its commitment through the ratification of International Labour Organization Conventions No. 138 and No. 182 on child labour. The minister emphasized that eliminating child labour requires collective efforts from government institutions, communities, employers, civil society, parents and educators. "Let us renew our commitment to building a Pakistan where every child is safe, educated and empowered to contribute meaningfully to society," Tarar said, adding that protecting children from exploitation is both a legal responsibility and a moral obligation.



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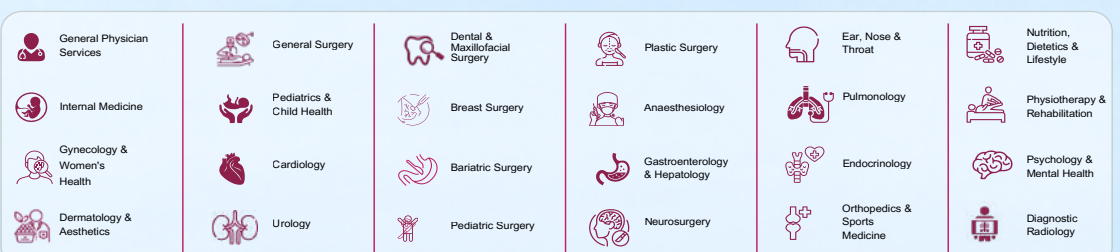
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US Strategic Recalibration in the Indo-Pacific

DR. MUHAMMAD AKRAM ZAHEER



IN the evolving geopolitical landscape of the Indo-Pacific, the proposition of a collective defense pact akin to NATO has become increasingly pertinent for the United States and its regional allies. Historically, the absence of such a multilateral security architecture in Asia was attributed to both strategic calculations and geopolitical limitations. However, the growing assertiveness of China, particularly under the leadership of Xi Jinping, has catalyzed a fundamental

shift in the region's threat perceptions and defense strategies. In this context, the article under analysis argues for the necessity and viability of a "Pacific Defense Pact," encompassing the United States, Australia, Japan and the Philippines, as a strategic bulwark against Chinese expansionism.

At the heart of this renewed strategic discourse lies China's unabated pursuit of regional hegemony, framed under the ideological rubric of "the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation." Beijing's intentions, as evidenced through its assertive actions in the Taiwan Strait, South China Sea and broader Indo-Pacific, reflect a desire to dismantle the existing U.S.-led security architecture and replace it with a China-centric order. If successful, such a reordering would drastically undermine the United States' ability to secure its economic, strategic and technological interests in one of the world's most dynamic regions. China's expanding military capabilities lend credibility to these ambitions. As CIA Director William Burns disclosed in 2023, President Xi has mandated that the People's Liberation Army (PLA) be prepared to invade Taiwan by 2027. While Beijing may still harbor doubts regarding its capacity to execute such a military campaign, sustaining and amplifying these doubts is crucial to U.S. deterrence strategy. This entails convincing China that any aggression would incur prohibitive costs, thereby necessitating not only American military preparedness but also a more cohesive regional security posture.

Over the past decade, the United States has moved from a primarily bilateral alliance structure in the Indo-Pacific to a more "networked" approach. This reconfiguration has involved upgrading security partnerships, repositioning mobile and lethal military assets and encouraging interoperability among allies. Unlike previous arrangements focused on exclusive bilateral commitments, the current strategy fosters intra-alliance cooperation, thereby multiplying deterrence capabilities and geopolitical cohesion. Nevertheless, these informal and ad hoc meas-

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Deputy Editor: Abid Raza

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Phone: 051-8488394 / 051-2261960

Off: Awan Plaza, Block 18-A, G-8 Markaz Islamabad



ures lack the structural robustness of a formal collective defense pact. To ensure long-term regional stability and a credible deterrence posture, a treaty-based alliance—tentatively termed the "Pacific Defense Pact"—is posited as an essential evolution. Initially comprising Australia, Japan, the Philippines and the United States, this coalition could expand as strategic and political conditions mature. The notion of a multilateral security framework in Asia is not novel. In the aftermath of World War II, the United States established a network of bilateral alliances designed to contain Soviet influence, secure its military presence in East Asia and mitigate intra-regional tensions. These included security pacts with Japan, South Korea, Taiwan, the Philippines, Australia and Thailand. Unlike NATO, however, these arrangements never coalesced into a formal collective defense organization. This divergence was a result of several factors: the diverse geopolitical interests of regional actors, residual animosities stemming from historical conflicts and concerns about entrapment in a potential U.S.-Soviet confrontation. SEATO (the Southeast Asia Treaty Organization), the only multilateral attempt during the Cold War, ultimately failed due to its lack of cohesion and mutual strategic purpose. It disbanded in 1977, serving as a cautionary example of the challenges associated with creating unified security structures in Asia.

Contemporary developments, however, suggest that the barriers to multilateralism in Asia are eroding. Regional powers increasingly share a common threat perception centered on China's revisionist behavior. Japanese Prime Minister Shigeru Ishiba has acknowledged the absence of a NATO-style alliance as a potential catalyst for regional conflict, emphasizing the urgency of institutionalizing collective defense mechanisms. Three primary trends underscore the feasibility of such a pact: first, the emergence of a shared strategic alignment in response to China's rising military assertiveness; second, the intensification of security cooperation among U.S. allies; and third, a new emphasis on reciprocal responsibility-sharing, whereby U.S. partners play a more proactive role in maintaining regional security. Japan has undergone a profound strategic transformation. Despite deep economic interdependence with China, bilateral relations have been marred by unresolved historical grievances and ongoing territorial disputes, particularly over the Senkaku / Diaoyu Islands. China's increasingly aggressive maritime behavior, including the 2021 law permitting its coast guard to use force in contested waters, has heightened Tokyo's threat perceptions. In response, Japan has loosened constitutional constraints on its military, committed to doubling defense expenditures to 2% of GDP and acquired offensive capabilities such as Tomahawk missiles. These developments signify Japan's transition from a defensive posture to an active security contributor, as highlighted by political scientist Michael Green, who characterized Japan as "the most important net exporter of security in the Indo-Pacific."

The Philippines has also recalibrated its defense orientation in light of Chinese encroachments in the South China Sea. After years of accommodating Beijing, Manila has responded to persistent harassment and territorial violations with a sweeping modernization of its armed forces. Under Presidents Rodrigo Duterte and Ferdinand Marcos Jr., the Philippines adopted a new defense strategy in 2024, emphasizing territorial defense, cyber capabilities and enhanced surveillance. The shift reflects growing alarm over China's aggressive tactics, such as denying access to fishing grounds and disrupting resupply missions in contested waters.

Trump's Peace and Steal Deal Paradox

Qamar Bashir



These conflicting narratives raise important questions.

Is Trump announcing a political understanding that still awaits formal approval? Is he attempting to create momentum by publicly declaring success before negotiations are complete? Or are the parties engaged in a carefully coordinated diplomatic choreography in which public positions differ from private negotiations? Whatever the answer, the contradictions reveal how fragile and complex modern diplomacy has become. The uncertainty surrounding the agreement is particularly significant because it...

Whatever the answer, the contradictions reveal how fragile and complex modern diplomacy has become. The uncertainty surrounding the agreement is particularly significant because it follows months of military confrontation. The conflict created severe economic consequences

IN one of the most remarkable diplomatic developments of the year, President Donald Trump announced that the United States and Iran had reached what he described as a "great settlement" and suggested that a formal signing ceremony would take place in Europe within days. According to Trump, the agreement had been approved by all relevant parties and would mark the successful conclusion of a conflict that had shaken global markets, disrupted energy supplies, and threatened to engulf the region in a wider war. Financial markets immediately responded with optimism. Investors interpreted Trump's declaration as evidence that diplomacy had finally triumphed over military confrontation. Oil prices stabilized, stock markets gained strength, and hopes emerged that one of the most dangerous geopolitical crises in recent memory was approaching a peaceful resolution.

Yet within hours of Trump's announcement, a remarkable contradiction emerged. Iran's Foreign Ministry publicly rejected the notion that a final agreement had been reached. Foreign Ministry spokesman Esmail Baghaei stated that no definitive settlement had yet been approved and that the matter remained under review by the country's decision-making institutions. According to Tehran, discussions were continuing, and reports regarding an imminent signing ceremony were premature. Soon afterward, a second challenge to Trump's narrative emerged from Israel. According to a senior Israeli official quoted by Israeli media, Jerusalem had not been informed of any finalized U.S.-Iran agreement. The statement appeared to directly contradict Trump's assertion that all concerned parties had approved the arrangement. The result is an extraordinary diplomatic puzzle. The United States president says a deal exists and will soon be signed. Iran says no final agreement has been reached. Israel says it has no knowledge of such an agreement. Rarely has the international community witnessed such dramatically different descriptions of the same diplomatic process.

These conflicting narratives raise important questions. Is Trump announcing a political understanding that still awaits formal approval? Is he attempting to create momentum by publicly declaring success before negotiations are complete? Or are the parties engaged in a carefully coordinated diplomatic choreography in which public positions differ from private negotiations? Whatever the answer, the contradictions reveal how fragile and complex modern diplomacy has become. The uncertainty surrounding the agreement is particularly significant because it follows months of military confrontation. The conflict created severe economic consequences

throughout the world. Energy markets became volatile. Inflationary pressures intensified. Businesses postponed investments. Consumers paid higher prices for fuel and essential goods.

At the same time that he announced the agreement, President Trump made another revelation that generated worldwide attention. He claimed that the United States had been secretly moving millions of barrels of oil associated with Venezuela and Iran through strategic waterways. According to Trump, American military capabilities had enabled these operations while preventing adversaries from interfering. During his remarks, President Trump made statements that critics interpreted as an admission that Iranian oil had been secretly intercepted and diverted during the period of confrontation. According to his account, large quantities of oil allegedly reached international markets despite Iranian efforts to protect their exports. The President portrayed this as evidence of American operational superiority and an economic success for the United States.

He also referred to arrangements involving Venezuelan oil supplies, describing how American energy infrastructure had benefited from increased access to foreign crude. His comments suggested that U.S. refineries were operating at high capacity and generating substantial economic returns. This goes far beyond merely moving oil through contested waterways, but amounts to the appropriation of resources that belong to sovereign nations and, ultimately, to the people of those countries. These valuable national assets associated with Iran and Venezuela were taken and utilized for the economic benefit of the United States while the populations of those countries continue to endure severe economic hardship. What has troubled many observers is not only the claim itself but also the apparent pride with which it was presented. During the President's remarks, those surrounding him appeared to applaud the operation as a strategic success. Their reaction conveyed a troubling message: that the acquisition of resources belonging to weaker nations is considered acceptable when carried out by a powerful state. Such actions would contribute to making wealthy countries wealthier while depriving already struggling populations of resources that could otherwise support economic development, public services, and improved living standards.

From this perspective, the issue extends beyond geopolitics and energy security. It becomes a question of ethics, sovereignty, and international justice. If the resources of one nation can be used for the benefit of another without the clear consent of its people and

government, the principles of equality among nations and respect for sovereign rights are placed at risk. The international community must apply the same standards to powerful countries that it expects from smaller states, ensuring that natural resources remain the property of the nations and peoples to whom they belong. The timing of the peace initiative is equally significant. Many observers believe that economic realities played a major role in bringing all sides back to the negotiating table. Rising energy prices were creating inflationary pressures. Transportation costs increased. Food prices rose. Businesses faced uncertainty. Ordinary citizens felt the impact directly at gas stations and grocery stores.

For millions of Americans already struggling with the rising cost of living, the burden was particularly painful. Every increase in oil prices affected household budgets. Inflation reduced purchasing power. Businesses delayed investment decisions. Financial markets reflected growing anxiety over the possibility of a prolonged military confrontation. Regardless of interpretation, Trump's statements transformed what might have been a straightforward peace announcement into a much broader discussion about power, resources, and international legitimacy. Yet perhaps the most overlooked aspect of the story is the role of diplomacy behind the scenes. During his remarks, President Trump specifically acknowledged the efforts of Pakistani Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif and Field Marshal Syed Asim Munir. According to Trump, both leaders played an active role in facilitating communication between the parties and encouraging a diplomatic path forward.

Yet diplomacy and agreement are not the same thing. An agreement exists only when all principal parties publicly acknowledge and formally approve it. At present, that threshold has not yet been crossed. Trump's confidence, Iran's caution, and Israel's apparent surprise illustrate that the final chapter of this diplomatic drama has not yet been written. For now, the peace deal announced by Washington remains a promise rather than a confirmed reality. Whether it ultimately succeeds will depend not on declarations made before cameras, but on decisions made behind closed doors in Washington, Tehran, Jerusalem, and the diplomatic capitals of Europe. The destination may be peace, but the journey is clearly not over.

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

A Parliament Transformed: The Vision and Leadership of Ayaz Sadiq

Muhammad Mohsin Iqbal



The culmination of this vision was witnessed with the launch of Pakistan's first AI-enabled parliamentary system. This historic initiative represents a milestone not only for the National Assembly but for parliamentary institutions throughout the developing world. By integrating advanced digital tools and artificial intelligence into legislative processes...

THE progress of nations is seldom measured merely by the laws they enact or the institutions they build. Rather, it is reflected in the character of those entrusted with leadership and in their ability to adapt institutions to the demands of changing times. History bears witness to the fact that true leadership is not confined to authority; it is manifested through tolerance, magnanimity, foresight, and an unwavering commitment to the public good. Such qualities are neither acquired overnight nor sustained without perseverance. They require patience in the face of criticism, resilience amid challenges, and the courage to pursue reform even when the path is difficult. In contemporary Pakistan, few public figures embody these attributes more distinctly than thrice-elected Speaker National Assembly Sardar Ayaz Sadiq. The hallmark of great leadership lies in bringing people together while steering institutions towards excellence. Throughout his parliamentary career, Sardar Ayaz Sadiq has demonstrated a rare ability to combine humility with determination, fostering consensus while pursuing meaningful change. His tenure has not merely been about presiding over parliamentary proceedings; it has been marked by a sustained effort to transform the National Assembly into a modern, efficient, and accountable institution capable of meeting the governance challenges of the twenty-first century.

One of the most remarkable achievements under his stewardship has been the implementation of a comprehensive programme of right-sizing, fiscal discipline, and institutional modernization within the National Assembly Secretariat. At a time when public resources are under immense pressure and governments across the world are seeking greater efficiency, the Secretariat has emerged as a model of prudent financial management. Through carefully planned austerity measures and administrative reforms, it is projected to save approximately Rs. 4.5 billion during the financial year 2025-26, amounting to more than a quarter of its total budgeted expenditure. What makes this accomplishment particularly noteworthy is that it has been achieved without sacrificing institutional effectiveness or employee welfare. The Secretariat undertook a substantial reduction in sanctioned posts, decreasing its workforce structure from 1,725 positions to 1,344. Yet not a single employee was dismissed or compelled to

resign. This reflects a sophisticated approach to human resource management in which efficiency was enhanced through strategic restructuring rather than punitive measures. Equally significant has been the reduction in non-employee expenditure through stronger financial oversight, rational procurement practices, energy conservation initiatives, and tighter operational controls. These measures have not only generated considerable savings but have also cultivated a culture of accountability and responsible governance. In an era where public trust in institutions often depends upon transparency and fiscal prudence, such reforms set an example worthy of emulation.

Perhaps the most transformative dimension of this reform agenda has been the Speaker's vision of a paperless Parliament. For generations, parliamentary work relied heavily upon mountains of documents, reports, agendas, notices, and legislative papers. The extensive digitization of parliamentary business has revolutionized this process. Electronic circulation of official documents has significantly reduced paper consumption, printing expenses, and administrative delays while contributing positively to environmental sustainability. This shift reflects a recognition that technological innovation is not merely a convenience but an essential instrument of modern governance.

The culmination of this vision was witnessed with the launch of Pakistan's first AI-enabled parliamentary system. This historic initiative represents a milestone not only for the National Assembly but for parliamentary institutions throughout the developing world. By integrating advanced digital tools and artificial intelligence into legislative processes, the Assembly has entered a new era of institutional capability. Legislative research, document management, information retrieval, and administrative coordination are now being strengthened through technology-driven solutions designed specifically for parliamentary requirements.

What distinguishes this initiative is its emphasis on national ownership and data sovereignty. The AI platform has been developed as a highly secure, fully on-premises system, ensuring that all parliamentary data remains within Pakistan and under the exclusive control of the National Assembly. At a time when concerns about cybersecurity and data protection are becoming

increasingly significant, this approach demonstrates both foresight and responsibility. The digital transformation has also extended to the Speaker's Office and parliamentary administration. Members of the National Assembly have been provided with digital devices enabling immediate access to legislative documents and parliamentary records. Training programmes for technical staff have been introduced to ensure that the institution possesses the capacity required to sustain and expand these innovations. The establishment of a modern data centre further underscores the Assembly's commitment to building a technologically empowered parliamentary ecosystem.

These achievements gain even greater significance when viewed against the backdrop of Sardar Ayaz Sadiq's parliamentary legacy. By March 2026, he had become the longest-serving Speaker in Pakistan's parliamentary history, surpassing the record previously held by Maulvi Tamizuddin Khan. Having been elected Speaker on three separate occasions, he occupies a unique place in the democratic evolution of the country. Yet longevity alone does not define greatness. What distinguishes his tenure is the manner in which experience has been translated into institutional reform and enduring progress.

The National Assembly's journey toward efficiency, transparency, and technological modernization illustrates how visionary leadership can transform public institutions without compromising democratic values. In a world where governance increasingly depends upon innovation and adaptability, Pakistan's Parliament has demonstrated that tradition and technology need not stand in opposition. Instead, they can work together to strengthen democratic institutions and improve public service.

The reforms introduced under the leadership of Sardar Ayaz Sadiq offer an important lesson: genuine progress is achieved not through rhetoric but through sustained effort, careful planning, and a willingness to embrace change. By combining fiscal responsibility with digital innovation and institutional modernization, the National Assembly has set a precedent for other public institutions. It is a reminder that when leadership is guided by wisdom, tolerance, and a commitment to the national interest, even the oldest institutions can be renewed and prepared for the challenges of the future.

Briefs

US deal sees release of \$24 billion frozen...

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East war, despite US President Donald Trump claiming an agreement could be signed in days and canceling threatened strikes on Iran. Claiming that talks with Iran had been "brought to the highest level of Iranian leadership and approved," Trump said he had "canceled the scheduled strikes and bombings against Iran this evening." "Time and place of the signing to be announced shortly," he added. Trump said the finer points of the arrangement had been approved by the United States and its allies in the region, including Israel, with which Washington jointly launched the war in February. However, Iran's foreign ministry spokesman Esmail Baqaei said Tehran "had not reached a final conclusion on the agreement." He added that "most of the text of the agreement was finalized, but the problem began when the US side made new demands and changed its positions." The Tasnim news agency noted that Trump had announced a deal was imminent 38 times in the previous two months. "Until Iran announces the matter of a potential understanding, any news from Trump on this subject should be regarded the same as his previous messaging," it noted. Later Trump doubled down, telling reporters "I understand the answer is yes," when asked if Iranian supreme leader Ayatollah Mojtaba Khamenei had approved the deal. Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's office said in a statement after the Israeli leader and Trump spoke that Israel was not a party to the memorandum of understanding with Iran. Netanyahu expressed his appreciation for Trump's commitment to securing a deal that includes removing enriched material, dismantling enrichment infrastructure, limiting missile output and ending support for regional proxies, the summary showed. "Approved by all parties! The war — which began February 28 with a wave of US-Israeli strikes on Iran that killed supreme leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei — paused under an April truce. But efforts to hammer out a permanent end to the fighting appeared stalled. Tehran's mayor said Thursday the former supreme leader's funeral would be delayed to the end of June or start of July.

Taking Kharg Island...

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nautical miles off the Iranian coast. It serves as a vital economic hub, processing 90 percent of Iran's crude oil for export via deep-water jetties that can accommodate very large tankers. The BBC reports that "Ninety percent of Iran's crude oil comes through a terminal on the island," which provides a major source of revenue for the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC). However, Reuters notes that a seizure might not have an "immediate impact" on the Iranian economy, as the country's oil exports have already been severely curtailed by the war that began Feb. 28. Military strikes and spared infrastructure The US military has already conducted significant operations against the site. On March 13, the US launched what Trump described as "one of the most powerful bombing raids in the history of the Middle East," claiming to have "totally obliterated" every military target on the island. US Central Command (Centcom) confirmed that while more than 90 military targets were struck—including naval mine storage and missile bunkers—the oil infrastructure was intentionally preserved "for reasons of decency" and to avoid long-term economic damage. Trump noted that while he has held off on destroying the pipelines, he could do so on "five minutes' notice." According to the BBC, Iranian state media reported that the March attacks targeted air defenses, a naval base, an airport control tower, and a helicopter hangar, but failed to stop oil exports.

GRITFIT GYM CELEBRATES ANNIVERSARY



ISLAMABAD: The members and management of the Grifit Gold G-11 Gym G 11 cutting cake to celebrate the anniversary. — DNA

Mexico get World Cup party started with 2-0 win over South Africa

Julian Quinones scores early goal as Mexico dominate opener; Raul Jimenez adds second with header

DNA

NEW YORK: Mexico got the World Cup party started as the co-hosts swept away South Africa 2-0 on Thursday in an encounter with three red cards as the pyrotechnic smoke of the opening ceremony gave way to a cloud of red mist at a thrumming Azteca stadium. The match fired the starting gun for the quadrennial football extravaganza, yet the scrappy encounter will likely be remembered not for its thrilling football but for its flurry of dismissals. Julian Quinones's early strike set the tone for a dominant Mexican display in the Group A encounter with Raul Jimenez's header midway through the second half removing any lingering tension for the home crowd. Yet South Africa were reduced to 10 men when Sphephelo Sithole was sent off early in the second half, with his teammate Themba Zwane following him off the pitch before Mexico's Cesar Montes was dismissed in the dying moments. The ill-tempered encounter spoiled an otherwise party atmosphere, yet the home crowd got to celebrate an opening victory that will set them up nicely to make it out of a group that also includes South Korea and the Czech Republic. "It's a moment I'll carry with me for the rest of my life," said Mexico midfielder Erik Lira. "The only thing I felt was that everything it took to get here had been worth it." It was a day of firsts for the World Cup, as the first 48-team edition, and the first to be held in three countries, got underway in the first stadium to host three World Cup openers. South Africa players look dejected after their 2-0 defeat to Mexico in the Fifa World Cup 2026 Group A match at Estadio Azteca, Mexico City on June 11, 2026. — Reuters

It was fitting therefore that the first of a record 104 matches had Mexico clinch a first win in the tournament's opening match after seven previous failures and of course, it was the first World Cup opener to feature three red cards. The fixture was a repeat of the 2010 tournament opener, when South Africa held Mexico to a 1-1 draw



in Johannesburg, yet this encounter was played out in a stadium with World Cup history stamped all over it. The Azteca has witnessed some of the tournament's most iconic moments, from Maradona's 'Hand of God'

and 1986 heroics to Pele's all-conquering Brazil side of 1970. While there was none of that era-defining quality on show on Thursday, it mattered little to the hordes of green-clad supporters, who had already been revved into frenzied excitement before a ball was kicked. With the match played against a backdrop of protests that had threatened to bring Mexico City to a standstill, supporters were taking no chances, with many already hovering around the stadium nearly seven hours before kickoff. An opening ceremony that featured Shakira and Burna Boy performing the World Cup anthem had pumped up the crowd still further before Mexico swiftly got down to business. A drone view shows fans watching the match between Mexico and South Africa during the 2026 FIFA World Cup at a public screening in Plaza Garibaldi in Mexico City, Mexico, June 11, 2026. The game was barely minutes old when Jimenez stung the fingertips of South Africa goalkeeper Ronwen Williams with a volley from 12 yards, but the tournament's opening goal was not long in coming. Sithole was robbed on the edge of his own box by Lira, preferred in the heart of midfield to captain Edson Alvarez, and he quickly fed Quinones who danced inside before drilling a low finish beneath Williams. South Africa were clinging on for dear life as the first half came to a close and the second began in a similar vein. Brian Gutierrez drew the first red card when his marauding run towards the box was stopped in its tracks by Sithole, whose clumsy tackle from behind earned him his marching orders to complete a miserable afternoon's work for the midfielder. The crowd had begun to get a little restless at Mexico's failure to turn their numerical advantage into another goal but that frustration was relieved when Jimenez bagged his first World Cup goal, with a powerful downward header past Williams from a devilish cross by Roberto Alvarado. The game's finale was dominated by the dismissals with Zwane sent off after a VAR check for a supposed arm to the face while Montes was sent off for Mexico for denying a goalscoring opportunity. — APP

Iran agrees to dismantle nukes: US

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understanding (MoU) between Tehran and Washington is "closer than ever," but urged media outlets to avoid speculating about the precise contents of the deal until details are formally released. The White House described the agreement as a step toward ensuring global security, emphasizing that Iran's compliance would be monitored through international mechanisms. While specifics remain undisclosed, officials suggested the deal includes dismantling enrichment facilities and limiting uranium stockpiles. Araghchi stressed that transparency and patience are essential, noting that premature reporting could undermine delicate negotiations. If finalized, the accord could reshape Middle Eastern geopolitics, ease sanctions on Iran, and open new avenues for diplomatic cooperation. Analysts caution, however, that implementation will be complex and dependent on sustained trust between both sides. For now, both Washington and Tehran appear committed to advancing dialogue rather than confrontation, signaling a rare moment of cautious optimism in international diplomacy.

Bilawal Bhutto attends...

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with Bilawal at Parliament. A third post by the party said that Bilawal was chairing a joint parliamentary meeting of the PPP, where the budget, Gilgit-Baltistan elections and the situation in Azad Kashmir were discussed. The PPP and PML-N had held multiple rounds of talks ahead of the budget before they settled their issues on matters pertaining to the budget. In the NA today, PPP members, including Shazia Marri, staged a protest before the budget presentation, demanding that the government provide Sindh its due share of water. "Sindh is facing 48 per cent water shortage," said a placard held by Marri. PPP members also surrounded the speaker's dais for some time before returning to their seats. They raised the slogan "Give us water to drink and live". The PPP, which is in the government in Sindh, has been complaining of "unjust reduction" in the province's water share by the Indus River Systems Authority.

Pakistan Army clinches 1st position at Int'l Pacesetter Competition 2026

RAWALPINDI: In a remarkable display of excellence, Pakistan Army team, represented by Pakistan Military Academy (PMA), has clinched 1st Position at the prestigious International Pacesetter Competition 2026 held at the Royal Military Academy (RMA) Sandhurst, United Kingdom. The PMA team made a clean sweep at the competition, securing all major honors, that is 1st Overall Team Trophy, Best Pace Sticker and Best Driver award, said a news release issued by Inter Services Public Relations (ISPR). The 9-member Pakistani contingent, led by Major Haider Gulzar (Adjutant, PMA), arrived in UK on June 5, 2026. — APP

Rs18.8tr budget; GDP growth targeted at 4pc

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Moreover, Rs1,000bn had been set aside for the federal Public Sector Development Programme (PSDP). After the inclusion of funds set aside for state-owned enterprises and public-private partnership, this amount increases to Rs.1451bn. He said that Rs2,224bn was set aside for provincial development schemes and Rs451bn for investment by state-owned enterprises. "This distribution reflects the division of responsibilities under the 18th Amendment, under which provinces are largely responsible for the social sector and the federal government focuses on strategic projects," he added. The finance minister said Rs3,000bn has been allocated for defence and Rs1,071bn for civil administration expenditures. Sharing these figures, Aurangzeb said defence was the government's topmost priority. The finance minister announced that Rs2,800bn was set aside for the Benazir Income Support Programme, Azad Jammu and Kashmir, Gilgit-Baltistan and merged districts of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. He also announced that a reduction in the income tax had been proposed for four slabs. It was recommended that income tax be reduced from 23pc to 20pc for those earning Rs2.2m to Rs3.2m annually; from 30pc to 25pc for those earning Rs3.2m to Rs4.1m; from 35pc to 29pc for those earning Rs4.1m to Rs5.6m; and from 35pc to 32pc for those earning Rs5.6m to Rs7m.

He added that it had been decided to end the surcharge on the salaried class, adding that the super tax would be abolished for businesses earning between Rs150m and Rs500m annually. And it would be reduced from 10pc to 8pc for businesses whose income exceeded Rs500m. Abolishing the tax on sanitary pads and contraceptives had also been proposed under the new budget, he added. He also said that government employees' salaries were being raised by 7pc, and a 7pc increase had also been recommended in the pensions of retired employees. It had also been proposed to increase the minimum wage by 10pc, he added. "Defence capability has reshaped strategic partnership" Aurangzeb began by thanking the allies of the ruling coalition, including PPP Chairperson Bilawal-Bhutto Zardari, whose participation earlier remained doubtful after his party expressed some reservations. "This defence capability has reshaped our strategic partnerships not just in the region but in the world," he said, mentioning a defence pact signed between Pakistan and Saudi Arabia last year. He said that, however, local prices in Pakistan did not fully reflect this rise in prices. "Had the government passed on the entire burden to the people, the local prices would have been much higher," he said, saying that the government had given people relief through subsidies of Rs128 billion. The minister said that the current dispensation, led by PM Shehbaz, would be presenting its third budget.

Before further elaborating on the budget for the upcoming fiscal year, he gave a roundup of the past two years. He said the GDP growth in the outgoing fiscal year was recorded at 3.7 per cent, growth in large scale manufacturing was recorded at 6.1pc and 4.1pc growth was witnessed in the services sector. "The growth in LSM and services sectors is the highest in four years," he added. The minister said the size of the country's economy had increased to \$452bn, terming it a "new milestone". Moreover, per capita income had increased to \$1,901 from last year's \$1,751 and the policy rate had seen a "historic decline" over the past two years, he added. Aurangzeb further said the country's foreign exchange reserves had increased to \$17bn from \$4bn three years ago. "This gives us an import cover for three months." He said the average inflation was expected to remain around 7pc in the outgoing year, adding that it would reduce with de-escalation between the US and Iran. Aurangzeb further said the Pakistan Stock Exchange saw a record increase of 173,000 new investors over the past year. The minister further said that reforms were underway in the Federal Bureau of Revenue, adding that FBR's annual tax revenue was Rs7,200bn in FY2022-23. This had doubled in three years and was expected to reach Rs13,000bn by the end of this fiscal year, he added. Moreover, he said the government had introduced loan schemes for small farmers and businesses.

South Korea fight back to beat Czech Republic in World Cup opener

South Korea next face Mexico on June 18 and Czechs travel to Atlanta to meet South Africa

MEXICO: South Korea rallied from a goal down to defeat the Czech Republic 2-1 and make a winning start to their World Cup Group A campaign, much to the delight of their fans and the sizeable local Mexican support they enjoyed in a festive Guadalajara on Thursday. The Koreans joined Mexico on three points at the top of the pool after the co-hosts defeated nine-man South Africa 2-0 in the tournament opener in Mexico City. Ladislav Krejci put the Czechs ahead with a

fine header as the European side dominated in the air, but Hwang In-beom equalised shortly afterwards and turned provider for substitute Oh Hyeon-gyu's winner. Oh had come on for the misfiring Son Heung-min, who had five chances in the first half alone but endured an off-day in front of goal and is still two goals shy of the all-time scoring record for the side, failing to add to his 56 strikes. South Korea next face Mexico on June 18 and the Czechs travel to Atlanta to meet

South Africa on the same day. There were noticeable areas of empty seats in the stadium, but the vast majority of the 44,985 in attendance were firmly behind the Koreans. It was a game of contrasting styles, the technical quality and passing range of the Koreans versus the brute strength and direct style of the Czechs. The first half was goalless but the game sprang to life in the second period and it was the Czechs who took the lead after 59 minutes when Krejci rose highest to head

home from a long throw by Vladimir Coufal. South Korea were level eight minutes later and it was a fine goal too. Lee Kang-in's excellent through ball created the shooting opportunity for Hwang In-beom and he cut inside before curling a right-footed shot low into the far corner. Korea were undone by a set-piece again when Thomas Soucek headed in a free kick, but the flag was raised for offside as the Czechs' first game at the World Cup in 20 years ended in defeat. — APP

Shehbaz says final text of US-Iran...

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exchanged views on the regional situation and welcomed the "encouraging progress" toward an agreement between the United States and Iran. "The Swiss Foreign Minister appreciated Pakistan's leading mediating role in supporting diplomatic engagement and its efforts in helping advance progress towards peace and stability in the region and beyond," the Foreign Office says on X, adding that both sides have agreed to remain closely engaged.

Briefs

Gold prices surge by Rs 7,250 per tola

ISLAMABAD: The prices of gold registered a significant increase in the local market on Friday, with 24 karat gold per tola rising by Rs 7,250 to settle at Rs 439,966 compared to Rs 432,716 on the previous trading day, according to rates issued by the All Pakistan Sarafa Gems and Jewellers Association. Similarly, the price of 10 grams of 24 karat gold increased by Rs 6,525 to Rs 375,947 from Rs 369,422 whereas 10 grams of 22 karat gold went up by Rs 5,925 to Rs 344,923 against Rs 338,998. In the international market, the price of gold increased by \$72.50 to \$4,175.30 per ounce from \$4,102.80. Meanwhile, the price of silver per tola rose by Rs 190 to Rs 7,079 from Rs 6,889, while the price of 10 grams of silver increased by Rs 171 to Rs 6,028 from Rs 5,857. The price of silver in the international market also increased by \$1.90 to \$66.00 per ounce from \$64.10. — APP

Ukraine to request \$20b to keep momentum against Russia

KYIV: Ukraine is seeking an additional \$20 billion in military funding from its allies to cement what it sees as its current battlefield advantage over Russia, a Ukrainian defense source said on Friday. The request will be made next Thursday at a meeting of the Ukraine Defense Contact Group, an alliance of more than 50 countries also known as the Ramstein group that provide financial and military aid for Kyiv. Russia's advances have slowed this year — effectively grinding to a halt last month — as Ukrainian mid-range drone strikes have harmed its supplies and logistics for the front line. Long-range drone strikes are meanwhile inflicting pain on Russia's energy sector. In recent weeks, Ukrainian military commanders have said the dynamics on the battlefield have given them a window this year to bring Russia to the negotiating table on more favorable terms. Robert Brodvi, the commander of Ukraine's drone forces, told Reuters that his strategic aim was to force Russia to pull its troops back from the front-line by destroying their supply lines and logistics with escalating drone attacks. — APP

32 Pakistani mango processor companies registered with China

To address logistics challenges, PHDEC is also working with the National Logistics Corporation (NLC) on an alternative transport corridor that would move mango consignments through Sust, Tashkurgan and Kashgar before distribution to China's interior markets

DNA

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan has expanded its China-compliant mango export infrastructure after the number of mango processing and Hot Water Treatment (HWT) facilities registered with China's General Administration of Customs (GACC) increased from 25 to 32. Talking to Wealth Pakistan, Pakistan Horticulture Development & Export Company (PHDEC) Manager Agri Products Khawar Nadeem said China had approved seven additional Pakistani facilities, enabling them to process, pack and export mangoes to the Chinese market.

"The newly approved units are now eligible to pack and export mangoes to China," he said, adding that the expansion would strengthen Pakistan's export infrastructure and improve compliance with Chinese import requirements. As part of its export promotion strategy, PHDEC has also launched business-to-business (B2B)

engagements in China to connect Pakistani exporters with potential buyers. Khawar said the first B2B session was held on June 9, bringing together 12 to 14 prospective Chinese buyers and Pakistani exporters to facilitate trade partnerships. "We invited potential buyers of Pakistani mangoes and facilitated direct matchmaking with exporters so that commercial exports can begin more effectively," he said. To address logistics challenges, PHDEC is also working with the National Logistics Corporation (NLC) on an alternative transport corridor that would move mango consignments through Sust, Tashkurgan and Kashgar before distribution to China's interior markets. According to Khawar, export diversification has become increasingly important following the closure of the Afghanistan border and rising transportation costs linked to regional tensions affecting traditional trade routes. "To compensate for expected export losses this season, we are actively moving towards alternative

markets," he said. Pakistan has already secured approval for four to five additional mango varieties for export to Japan and is pursuing market access for Vietnam and Cambodia. At the same time, PHDEC is conducting awareness campaigns for exporters on import regulations, Goods Declaration (GD) procedures and export requirements for Middle Eastern markets and Iran to ensure smooth shipments during the current season. Exports have started from Sindh, while shipments from southern Punjab are expected shortly, followed by larger volumes from central Punjab later this month. Khawar said adverse climatic conditions have significantly affected production, forcing PHDEC to revise crop estimates downward by 20% to 30% compared with last year. As a result, mango exports are projected to decline to around 80,000 tonnes this season, down from nearly 110,000 tonnes last

year. Despite lower production, international demand for Pakistani mangoes remains strong. Premium varieties such as Sindhri, Chaunsa, Anwar Ratol and White Chaunsa continue to enjoy robust demand across the Gulf region, China, Europe and North America. Pakistan typically exports around 110,000 tonnes of mangoes annually to nearly 50 countries, generating between \$75 million and \$80 million in foreign exchange earnings. Khawar noted that the industry's performance this year will largely depend on how effectively exporters manage higher transportation costs while maintaining competitiveness in overseas markets. He stressed that while demand for Pakistani mangoes remains strong, exporters face a challenging season marked by higher freight costs, logistical disruptions and a smaller crop. "The demand is there, but maintaining competitiveness in traditional export markets will be the key challenge this season," he said.

Philippines-China tensions rise

MANILA: The Philippine military said on Friday that China's sanctions against Defense Secretary Gilberto Teodoro Jr. are aimed at silencing critics of Beijing's activities in the contested South China Sea, marking a new turn in the long-simmering diplomatic dispute between the two nations. Teodoro, who took up the defense chief post in June 2023, has been one of the most vocal critics of Beijing's actions in the South China Sea and against Taiwan. As the two countries have overlapping claims in the strategic waterway through which billions of dollars of goods pass each year, the area has been a source of tension between the Philippines and China, with flare-ups becoming more frequent in recent years. On Thursday, the Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs announced that Teodoro and his family have been banned from entering China, including Hong Kong and Macao, over what it described as "irresponsible remarks" that undermines Chinese interests. The Armed Forces of the Philippines described China's sanctions against Teodoro as "ungrounded," as it vows to defend the country's sovereignty and rights in the South China Sea.

"These sanctions are a transparent attempt at political intimidation, meant to silence those who expose coercive and illegal actions in our exclusive economic zone," retired Rear Adm. Roy Vincent Trinidad, AFP spokesperson for the South China Sea, said in a statement on Friday. "The AFP maintains that no amount of foreign pressure, legal maneuvering, or personal targeting of our leadership will deter the men and women of the military from performing our constitutional duty. Beijing has maintained its expansive claims of the disputed waters, despite a 2016 international tribunal ruling that China's historical assertion to it had no basis. Last month, at an international security conference in Singapore, Teodoro criticized Beijing's activities in the area and its continued 'disregard' of the 2016 ruling. In a statement early on Friday, Teodoro said the Chinese sanctions came to "those who speak the truth against their deception." He added: "I will just keep doing my duty and uphold our nation in the face of the wickedness they are committing here and even in our seas." The sanctions against Teodoro are likely to complicate Philippines-China ties, officials and experts said. While the imposition of sanctions is China's sovereign prerogative, the Philippines views it as an unfriendly act that further complicates the bilateral relations," the Philippine Department of Foreign Affairs said. — APP



ISLAMABAD: A delegation of MQM met Prime Minister of Pakistan Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif.

Iran war poses ME's biggest economic shock in 5 decades

RIYADH: The Iran war has delivered the broadest economic shock to the Middle East and North Africa in at least half a century of regional upheaval, according to an analysis produced by Asharq Business with Bloomberg. Its report, based on analyzing International Monetary Fund data dating back to 1980, compared the conflict with the onset of major geopolitical crises, including the Iran-Iraq war, Iraq's invasion of Kuwait, the 2003 US-led invasion of Iraq, the 2011 Arab protests and the aftermath of the Oct. 7, 2023, attacks. The current crisis is hitting a much larger economic bloc than previous shocks in the sample. The combined nominal gross domestic product of the 10 directly affected economies — including Iran, the Gulf states, Iraq, Lebanon, and Israel — is about \$4 trillion, equal to roughly 70 percent of the Middle East and North Africa economy and around 3 percent of global output, according to the analysis. It underscores how the conflict may prove to be the region's biggest turning point since the 1973 Arab oil embargo, a crisis that disrupted the global economy and led to what economists later called "stagflation." The difference is that the 1970s oil shock helped launch a Gulf boom, while the Iran war threatens to leave the region facing higher costs from disrupted trade and damaged investor confidence. The conflict also came at a time when the Middle East was gearing up for a massive multi-year reconstruction effort in several postwar countries, including Syria, Lebanon, and Sudan, where Gulf states had been expected to play a major role alongside international institutions. For the first time since the 1940s, a military conflict in the Middle East directly affected 10 countries: Iran, the UAE, Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, Kuwait, Qatar, Oman, Iraq, Lebanon, and Israel. The war disrupted oil and gas production and exports across most Gulf countries, as well as Iraq and Iran. It also pushed OPEC production in May to its lowest level since 1985, according to Bloomberg estimates. Combined GDP of the countries directly affected by the war is close to \$4 trillion, equal to about 3 percent of the global economy and roughly 70 percent of the Middle East and North Africa's nominal GDP — a share unmatched by any other crisis in the historical sample. In growth terms, the aftermath of the 1979 Iranian revolution and the start of the Iran-Iraq war caused the region's economy to contract by more than 1 percent in 1980, driven by a 21.6 percent collapse in Iran's economy. This year, the IMF's baseline scenario expects Iran's economy to shrink by about 6 percent. By contrast, higher oil prices helped the region's GDP grow by about 7 percent in 1990 and 1991, despite Iraq's invasion of Kuwait and the subsequent war to liberate the country. Oil prices also helped the region grow by about 5.8 percent in 2003 despite the US-led invasion of Iraq, while Iraq's own economy contracted by more than 36 percent. In 2011, the data show the region's GDP grew by about 4 percent despite the impact of the anti-government protests on Egypt, Tunisia and Libya, as Gulf economies — led by Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and Kuwait — posted strong growth supported by oil prices. — DNA

Saudi Arabia, Indonesia in talks to deepen tourism coop

"We are now working closely with our Indonesian partners to enrich that connection, expand tourism exchange, enhance the visitor journey, and create opportunities for our destinations, businesses and communities

JAKARTA: Saudi Arabia and Indonesia are looking to further their tourism cooperation following a ministerial meeting, with Jakarta preparing to attract more tourists from the Kingdom. Saudi Arabia is one of the main markets for Indonesia's tourism sector, with more than 156,000 Saudi travelers visiting the archipelagic nation last year — the highest number of any Middle Eastern country. Saudi Tourism Minister Ahmed AlKhateeb and his Indonesian counterpart Widiyanti Putri Wardhana discussed ways to strengthen tourism partnership during a meeting on the sidelines of a UN meeting in Toledo, Spain, on Thursday, their offices said in a joint statement. "Saudi Arabia is one of Indonesia's key partners in the Middle East, and Indonesia stands ready to further deepen this partnership, particularly in tourism, in a spirit of mutual respect and shared benefit," Wardhana said. Saudi tourists are considered big-spenders among foreign travelers visiting Indonesia, who tend to stay for longer periods and travel with families, with the popular holiday spots of Bali and Puncak cited as their destinations of choice. Indonesia is hoping to attract at least 16 million foreign tourists this year, and has been participating in international tourism trade shows such as the Arabian Travel Market and the Riyadh Travel Fair to promote its top travel destinations, such as Bali. Indonesian officials are also planning to improve the training of its hospitality workers to accommodate more travelers from the Arab world as part of efforts to "welcome more Saudi tourists," the tourism ministry said. As tourism is also a key sector in the Kingdom's Vision 2030, the two countries have held various discussions on how to boost ties in this field, including in efforts to upskill their tourism workers. "Saudi Arabia and Indonesia share a uniquely strong tourism connection through faith and culture," AlKhateeb said. — APP

An overview of gender policy in Uzbekistan

In recent years, wide-ranging reforms have been implemented in our country aimed at creating equal rights and opportunities for women and men, ensuring the full participation of women in social and public life, supporting them socially, economically, and legally, as well as protecting them from harassment and violence. Thanks to the high political will and initiatives of the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan, Shavkat Mirziyoyev, the issues of ensuring gender equality, protecting the interests of women, and ensuring the strength of families have been designated as priorities of state policy. The programs and strategies adopted in this regard are recognized not only at the national but also at the international level. The participation of women in the socio-political, economic, and spiritual life of our country is increasing day by day. Today, they actively participate in state administration bodies, parliament, local councils, entrepreneurship, and scientific fields. Systematic measures are being implemented to create new jobs for women, develop their knowledge and potential, and widely involve them in entrepreneurial activities. Within a short period, a national legislative base corresponding to international standards in this field was created. In particular, more than 100 normative-legal acts have been adopted over the past eight years. Among them, such important regulatory documents as the Law "On Guarantees of Equal Rights and Opportunities for Women and Men" and the Law "On Protection of Women from Harassment and Violence" are of particular importance. Today, Uzbekistan consistently continues to cooperate with international organizations such as the UN, OSCE, and UNESCO in implementing its gender policy. This cooperation is creating new opportunities for protecting the interests of women and allowing them to fully manifest their potential in our country. In order to properly establish the gender equality policy and ensure its full implementation, the "Strategy for Achieving Gender Equality until 2030" was adopted. Work on its introduction to all spheres and sectors is being carried out rapidly. The "Uzbekistan - 2030 Strategy" defines important goals and tasks for strengthening the system of supporting women, ensuring their rights and legal interests, increasing their social, economic, and political activity, and ensuring gender equality. First, to continue the policy of ensuring gender equality and increasing the share of women in leadership positions by boosting their socio-political activity; Second, to create an environment of intolerance toward harassment and violence against women in society, and to ensure the rights and legal interests of women; Third, to establish a transparent mechanism for targeted work with the "Women's Notebook" ("Ayollar dafitari") and establish public control over these efforts. Concepts such as gender analysis of regulatory legal acts, adopting a gender-responsive national budget, and gender auditing are being introduced into legislation and put into practice. The Commission on Increasing the Role of Women in Society, Gender Equality, and Family Issues has been established. It coordinates efforts to create equal opportunities in all aspects of rights and freedoms, protect the interests of women in achieving the UN Sustainable Development Goals, and develop and

implement relevant measures to eliminate existing problems. Furthermore, regional commissions on increasing the role of women in society, gender equality, and family issues are operating under local Councils of People's Deputies. To effectively implement state policy on ensuring the rights and interests of women and comprehensively strengthening the family institution, a vertical system has been created that reaches down to the lowest level — the neighborhood ("mahalla") and household. In order to elevate state policy regarding families and women in the Republic to a new level, find systematic solutions to their problems, and effectively organize and coordinate the activities of authorized bodies, the "Committee for Family and Women" was established along with its divisions in the Republic of Karakalpakstan, regions, Tashkent city, and districts (cities). The Committee has been effectively implementing tasks such as continuing the policy of ensuring gender equality, increasing the socio-political activity of women, and carrying out reforms to support them. The "Family and Gender" Research Institute under the Committee has created the "uzgender.uz" electronic platform for studying and monitoring gender issues in Uzbekistan. It contains data such as gender indices, an electronic corpus, interactive services, a gender analytical newsletter, and a gender library. In addition, online platforms such as "gender.stat.uz" by the National Statistics Committee and "gendermadad.uz" by the NGO "Madad" under the Ministry of Justice have been launched to provide our people with consultations and information on relevant topics. To ensure the implementation of tasks set out in the Law "On Guarantees of Equal Rights and Opportunities for Women and Men," advisory councils on ensuring gender equality have been established under state bodies, economic management structures, the private sector, and civil society institutions.

Today, the number of these Gender Advisory Councils has reached 4,000 nationwide. These councils serve as an important platform for ensuring equal rights and opportunities for men and women, maintaining gender balance in workplaces and all spheres of social life, protecting the interests of women, and effectively implementing decisions related to gender policy. Attention is paid to increasing women's activity in political life: the Electoral Code legally stipulates that at least 40% of candidates nominated for deputy positions by political parties (or 2 out of every 5 candidates) must be women. A norm was also introduced in the Family Code establishing the marriage age for both men and women as 18 years. The list of occupations with unfavorable working conditions where the use of women's labor was fully or partially prohibited has been abolished. In the political arena of our country, women are emerging not just as participants, but as leaders. Currently, they make up: 35% of leadership positions; 45% of entrepreneurship; 49% of political parties; 53% of higher education. Many leading women are working in several key positions in our country — including the Chairperson of the Senate, Head of the Presidential Administration, Deputy Prime Minister, Ombudspersons, ministers, and heads of agencies and committees. This is a high evaluation of the intellectual potential, spiritual maturity, and management skills

of modern Uzbek women. While the share of women in ministerial and equivalent positions was only 2.9% in 2018, by 2025 this figure reached 7.7%. It should be noted that preparing women for leadership positions at various levels is a complex and systematic process that requires thorough preparation. To this end, 244 women have been trained so far under the newly created "School of Women Leaders" curriculum, and about 60 of them have been appointed to various leadership positions. In particular, 15 women who received the highest Key Performance Indicators (KPI) at the "School of Preparation for Khokim (Governor/Mayor) Positions" were selected and involved in special training programs, indicating a future increase in the number of women among regional, district, and city-level leaders. Based on Decree No. PF-95 of the President of our State dated June 19, 2025, strategic directions were set to elevate the civil service to a completely new level of quality. Within the framework of these reforms, the issue of increasing the role and activity of women in state governance is designated as a special priority. Specific target indicators have been set for the active recruitment of women into public service for the period up to 2030. In particular, the goal is to increase the share of women in the civil service as well as in the "National Personnel Reserve" to 40%. By relevant decision of the Government, it has been established that, as a rule, at least 30% of the total number of candidates recommended for admission to the master's program of the Academy of State Policy and Governance under the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan must be women. In addition, comprehensive measures are being taken to improve the system of preparing women for high-level positions and to develop their leadership potential. Through this, women will have the opportunity to actively participate not only in the state administration system but also at the level of strategic decision-making. The number of quotas for women who have 5 years of work experience but do not have higher education was increased 5-fold, reaching 2,500. Under this privilege, more than 2,000 women entered higher education institutions between 2022 and 2025. Since 2022, contract fees for all women studying in master's programs at State Higher Education Institutions have been covered by the state budget. In this regard, funds amounting to 333.8 billion soums were covered by the state budget between 2022 and 2025. A system of interest-free educational loans for up to 7 years has been established for female students studying in higher education institutions, technical schools, and colleges. In this regard, educational loans worth 4.6 trillion soums were allocated to nearly 415,000 female students in 2022-2025. Allocating grants up to 50 million soums to 1,000 "mentor" female entrepreneurs who supported women in implementing "green projects" and IT projects, as well as helping at least 5 women start their businesses; Allocating collateral-free loans up to 100 million soums to women with a positive credit history; Forming entrepreneurship skills in women who want to start their own businesses through the launch of the "Partner Entrepreneur" ("Hamkor tadbirkor") program, helping women start businesses on a cooperative basis, and assisting women in plac-

ing and selling their products on local and international electronic platforms. Also, targeted work is being carried out with female entrepreneurs through a 4-stage system: "First Step to Business", "Starting a Business", "Expanding a Business", and "Elevating a Business" to form a wide layer of "champion entrepreneurs" in cooperation with partner organizations. As a result, in 9 months of this year, assistance was provided to secure lucrative employment for 2 million 48 thousand women across the Republic: 527.6 thousand women were employed in vacant positions in enterprises and organizations. 296.8 thousand women were trained in vocations and entrepreneurship. In particular, 160.8 thousand women were trained in vocations, 136 thousand women in entrepreneurship, and 63.9 thousand were attached to artisans. 99 thousand women were involved in training by Women's Entrepreneurship Centers. Commercial banks allocated credit funds amounting to 15.7 trillion soums to 203 thousand women to support entrepreneurship projects. Of this, 1.7 trillion soums of credit funds were allocated to 105 thousand women within the framework of family entrepreneurship development programs. The Central Bank approved the Strategy for Providing Financial Services in the Field of Supporting Women's Entrepreneurship. In order to systematically organize employment and health-strengthening efforts for women by training them in professional and entrepreneurial skills at the lowest level — the neighborhoods ("mahallas"), the activities of centers for ensuring employment and strengthening the health of women were launched in 2,876 mahallas. To award active women, the "Mo'tabar Ayol" (Venerable Woman) badge was established, and 2,090 women have been awarded to date. 480 talented girls were awarded the Zulfiya State Prize, established to increase the socio-political activity of young women and create conditions for them to realize their abilities and potential in various fields, as well as to encourage them. A mechanism for taking women victims of harassment and violence under state protection and issuing protection orders has been created. In order to prevent gender-based violence, separate articles on domestic (household) violence, harassment, and disclosing information that humiliates a person's honor and dignity or reflects confidential aspects of human life were included in the legislation. Centers for Rehabilitation and Adaptation of Women operate to provide socio-legal and psychological assistance to women who have suffered from harassment and violence or fell into difficult social situations, and to provide them with targeted support. The Committee for Family and Women and its territorial divisions: Are exempted from paying state fees for lawsuits filed in courts to protect the rights and legal interests of women; Can submit mandatory representations to heads of state bodies and organizations to eliminate violations of legislative acts, as well as the causes and conditions giving rise to them, in the field of ensuring the rights and legal interests of women and strengthening families; Benefit from a newly created system to release women from punishment ahead of schedule on bail (surety).

Briefs

JAAC protesters in AJK's Poonch district disperse

NEWS DESK

MUZAFFARABAD: All three gatherings of the activists and supporters of the proscribed Joint Awami Action Committee (JAAC) at the fringes of Rawalakot dispersed and their participants returned to their respective areas shortly after midnight, officials said on Friday.

The development reportedly came after indications that authorities had planned a major operation to uproot the protesters, who had converged from various districts on the eastern outskirts of Rawalakot in Poonch district.

The regional administration and the JAAC have been at odds over various issues, most notably the committee's demand to abolish the 12 seats in the region's Legislative Assembly that are reserved for refugees from Indian-occupied Jammu and Kashmir who settled in mainland Pakistan after 1947.

"There is not a single participant at any of the three sit-in sites on the outskirts of Rawalakot. All have unconditionally surrendered before the state and have returned, rather fled, back to their respective areas," Poonch Divisional Commissioner Sardar Waheed Khan told Dawn in the early hours of Friday.

India summons US diplomat for second time

DNA

NEW DELHI: India summoned a senior US diplomat on Friday for a second time in two days, after American strikes on three largely Indian-crewed merchant vessels off Oman killed three Indians.

The foreign ministry said it had summoned US Deputy Chief of Mission Jason Meeks to lodge "a strong protest ... regarding the continuing attacks by US naval forces on commercial vessels carrying Indian mariners." The attacks "have already resulted in the tragic and avoidable loss of three Indian lives," the ministry said.

Meeks was first summoned to the foreign ministry on Wednesday, after a US strike on the Palau-flagged MT Settebello off the coast of Oman, which killed three Indian sailors.

PSX gains on US-Iran deal hopes, lower oil prices

KSE-100 Index touches intraday high of 171,692.23, gaining 1,988.63 points, or 1.17%

DNA

KARACHI: The equity market traded higher on Friday as hopes of a possible US-Iran deal and lower oil prices lifted sentiment, while investors awaited the federal budget for cues on the market's longer-term direction. During the session, the Pakistan Stock Exchange's benchmark KSE-100 Index touched an intraday high of 171,692.23, gaining 1,988.63 points, or 1.17%, and a low of 170,946.54, reflecting an increase of 1,242.94 points, or 0.73%, from the previous close of 169,703.60. "Trump's statement that strikes are being delayed as the deal is near drives the sentiment positive. Lower oil prices increase the stock market on a daily basis. Purely sentiment play," said AAH Soomro, an independent investment and economic analyst.

"Today's budget is very important for the long-term direction," said AAH Soomro, an independent investment and economic analyst. Asian stocks gained and oil prices dipped on Friday after US President Donald Trump withdrew his threat of further strikes on Iran and said a deal could be signed in the coming days. Iran's position remained unclear, however, with Foreign Ministry spokesperson Esmail Baqaei saying Tehran "had not reached a final conclusion on the agreement". Trump's comments fuelled a global stock market rally and pushed oil prices lower, reviving hopes that a resolution may be nearing in the war triggered by US-Israeli strikes in February.

Trump said talks with Iran had been "brought to the highest level of Iranian leadership and approved", adding that he had "cancelled the scheduled strikes and bombings against Iran this evening". "Time and place of the signing to be announced shortly," he added. However, Baqaei said "most of the text of the agreement was finalised, but the problem began when the US side made new demands and changed its positions". Oil prices slipped to two-month lows on expectations of a possible agreement, with Brent crude futures dropping 1.8% to \$88.76 per barrel after falling nearly 3% overnight. Regional markets also rallied, with MSCI's broadest index of Asia-Pacific shares outside Japan jumping 3.7%, South Korea's KOSPI surging 7.8% and Japan's Nikkei rising 3.6%. Investors were also watching the federal budget, which is set to be presented in the National Assembly on Friday with an estimated outlay of around Rs17.5 trillion.

PHILIPPINE INDEPENDENCE DAY

DNA



ISLAMABAD: Federal Minister Rana Tanvir Hussian, Presidential spokesperson Murtaza Solangi, Ambassadors of the ASEAN member countries posing for a picture in traditional ASEAN style on the occasion of the Independence Day of the Philippines. - DNA

Pakistan's poverty rises, education spending drops

The literacy rate stands at 63%, with female literacy at 54%, while nearly one in three children remains out of school despite a decline from 38% to 28%

NEWS DESK

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan's education spending fell sharply to just 0.8% of GDP in FY2025, down from 1.5% in FY2023, while the national poverty rate surged to 28.9% in FY2024-25, reversing years of progress and pushing millions more people below the poverty line, according to the Pakistan Economic Survey 2025-26. "The latest estimates, however, indicate a reversal in this declining trend," the survey stated. "The national poverty headcount increased to 28.9% in 2024-25, compared to 21.9% in 2018-19." The poverty line itself told a story of soaring inflation. It increased from Rs 3,757.85 per adult equivalent per month in 2018-19 to Rs8,484 in 2024-25, "reflecting substantial inflation over the period."

Rural areas, where the majority of Pakistan's poor live, bore the brunt of the reversal. Rural poverty jumped from 28.2% to 36.2% over the same period, while urban poverty rose from 11.0% to 17.4%. "Poverty remained significantly higher in rural areas," the survey said. At the provincial level, every major province saw poverty worsen. Balochistan remained the poorest, with 47.0% of its population living below the poverty line, up from 41.8% in 2018-19. Khyber Pakhtunkhwa followed at 35.3% (up from 28.7%), Sindh at 32.6% (up from 24.5%), and Punjab at 23.3% (up from 16.5%).

The survey also documented a sharp rise in income inequality. The national Gini coefficient, a measure of inequality where higher numbers indicate greater disparity, increased from 28.4 in 2018-19 to 32.7 in 2024-25. "This suggests that the recent rise in poverty was accompanied by wider disparities in income distribution," the survey said. Urban inequality rose from 31.0 to 34.4, while rural inequality climbed from 23.4 to 29.2. Sindh recorded the highest inequality among provinces at 35.9. "The shock is strongly regressive. It hurts the poor first and the poor most," the survey said, citing a UNDP assessment that 8.8 million people across the region could be pushed into poverty under even a short disruption scenario. The survey warned that the Middle East conflict could worsen poverty further. "Another external shock can therefore quickly weaken purchasing power, raise food insecurity and strain remittance-receiving families," it said. "Around 55% of Pakistan's remittances originate from the Middle East."

Separately, the survey showed that education expenditure stood at Rs962.0 billion during FY2025, compared with Rs1,251.06 billion in the previous reported year," the survey said, reflecting a 23% decline in nominal spending and a near-halving of education's share in the national economy. The reduction was driven by cuts at both federal and provincial levels, with provinces accounting for the steepest declines. Punjab's education budget fell dramatically from Rs492.7 billion in FY2023 to Rs178 billion in FY2025, a 64% reduction, underscoring uneven fiscal prioritisation across regions. Similarly, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa spending reduced by 62.6% to Rs94.78 billion, while Sindh's expenditures increased by 40% to Rs369.1 billion and Balochistan spending up by 49% to 136.9 billion. Despite government rhetoric on human capital development, the data points to persistent structural weaknesses. "The quality of education is strongly linked to the quality of school facilities," the survey noted.

San Cristobal: Pope Leo XIV renewed his support for migrants on Friday in the Canary Islands, saying "all of us are migrants" and urged newcomers to do their part to integrate, on the final day of a week-long visit to Spain focused on migration issues. Calling integration a "reciprocal journey," the pope urged migrants learn the language of their host country, "to respect its laws, to get to know its customs, to participate in communal life," during a meeting in Tenerife with organizations that work with migrants. Leo also warned that migrants face a "silent shipwreck" after arrival, "left alone in a city, without a voice, without ties, work or a sense of security, and exposed to those who take advantage of vulnerability."

Bangladesh and India to coordinate petrol on border

NEWS DESK

DHAKA: Bangladesh and India have agreed to deepen cooperation along their shared border with improved intelligence sharing and co-ordinated patrols, according to a joint statement released on Friday, amid strained relations over alleged undocumented migration.

Dhaka has accused Indian authorities of attempting to force migrants across the border without due process, complicating efforts to stabilise ties following the 2024 ousting of Sheikh Hasina and India's broader effort to identify and deport undocumented migrants. Border Guard Bangladesh (BGB) and India's Border Security Force (BSF) described the discussions as "cordial, positive and forward-looking", according to the statement released at the end of a four-day meeting of top border officials in New Delhi.

Pope urges migrants to integrate

DNA

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Interior Minister visits Injured Security Personnel at CMH Peshawar, Hails Their Bravery

DNA

ISLAMABAD: Interior Minister Mohsin Naqvi visited the Combined Military Hospital (CMH) in Peshawar on Friday to inquire about the well-being of injured personnel from the Pakistan Army and the Federal Constabulary, commending their courage and dedication in the line of duty. During the visit, Naqvi

met each injured officer and soldier individually, expressing concern for their recovery and offering words of encouragement. He praised the wounded personnel for their unwavering commitment and professionalism, saying their sacrifices reflected the highest traditions of service to the nation. The interior minister also received detailed briefings from doctors regarding the treatment and medical condition of the injured personnel.

Crackdown on women by Afghan police slammed

NEW YORK: A group of UN experts on Friday denounced a crackdown on women in Afghanistan's western city of Herat, saying at least two people had been killed during a protest against the restrictions. Herat's morality police started arresting dozens of women on Saturday for not wearing the body-cloaking chador or burqa. A protest against the measures on Tuesday was broken up by force and a boy was shot dead, the UN said, while witnesses told AFP that security forces opened fire.

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