



Islamabad POST

Thursday, June 18, 2026

Pakistan's Credible Daily Newspaper

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Magical Lionel Messi equals WC goals record in a thriller

Detailed News On Page-06

US not getting out of NATO, says bloc chief

Detailed News On Page-08



Portugal envoy says keen to boost relations

Detailed News On Page-03



Says UAE an incredible warrior

Behave or be ready for bombs, Trump to Iran

The threat of military action, coupled with disputes over the scope of the MoU, raises questions about whether the two sides can move toward a sustainable agreement

CENTRELINE REPORT

WASHINGTON: US President Donald Trump has issued a stark warning to Iran, threatening to start "dropping bombs" if Tehran does not "behave." The remarks underscore escalating tensions between Washington and Tehran, as both sides continue to spar over regional influence and security concerns. Speaking to reporters, Trump clarified that the recent agreement under discussion with Iran is "not final," describing it instead as a memorandum of understanding (MoU). He firmly denied reports that a \$300 billion reconstruction fund was included in the MoU, dismissing such claims as inaccurate. The President's comments highlight the fragile state of negotiations. While the MoU signals potential avenues for cooperation, Trump's warning suggests that the US is prepared to adopt a hardline stance if Iran fails to comply with expectations. Observers note that this latest exchange could complicate diplomatic efforts aimed at stabilizing the Middle East. The threat of military action, coupled with disputes over the scope of the MoU, raises questions about whether the two sides can move toward a sustainable agreement. At the same time, US President Donald Trump has expressed hope that the agreement with Iran will be part of a larger peace across the region. "This agreement now provides Iran with a historic opportunity. If they follow the path of cooperation we have opened for them, their country will have a chance to survive," he says.

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Iranian tankers exit US blockade zone ahead of peace talks

Three Iranian tankers, carrying combined total of 3.8m barrels of crude oil pass through US blockade

NEWS DESK

TEHRAN: The first tankers carrying Iranian oil exited a US blockade in the Strait of Hormuz, a tracking website said on Wednesday, two days before Washington and Tehran launch talks on an agreed peace deal still scant on details — including Iran's nuclear programme and the lifting of sanctions. The talks on a final settlement are set to begin Friday at Switzerland's Burgenstock mountain resort, as news that the Hormuz Strait will reopen sent world oil prices tumbling. Optimism that the war triggered by the February 28 US-Israeli strikes on Tehran might be coming to an end was dented, however, by fresh Israeli strikes on south Lebanon. The TankerTrackers website, which

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ISLAMABAD: Chairman PPP Bilawal Bhutto Zardari called on Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif and greeted him successful Middle East diplomacy. — DNA

Bilawal meets PM; greets on ME diplomacy

SAIFULLAH ANSAR

ISLAMABAD: Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif held a meeting with Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) Chairman Bilawal Bhutto Zardari in Islamabad. Accompanying the PPP Chairman were Senator Sherry Rehman and Member of the National Assembly Syed Naveed Qamar. During the meeting, Bilawal Bhutto Zardari praised the Prime Minister and Chief of Army Staff Field Marshal Syed Asim Munir for Pakistan's diplomatic efforts in promoting global peace, particularly in the context of the Middle East situation. The two leaders also discussed political and national matters of mutual interest, reviewing the federal government's ongoing development projects in Sindh. Budgetary issues were also part of the conversation, with the Prime Minister emphasizing that effective coordination between the federation and

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Shehbaz terms federal budget 'people-friendly'

PM Shehbaz commended the efforts of the Chief of Defence Forces and Chief of Army Staff, Field Marshal Asim Munir, Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Ishaq Dar and Interior Minister Mohsin Naqvi

FAIZ CHAUDHRY

ISLAMABAD: Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif on Wednesday termed the federal budget for fiscal year 2026-27 "people-friendly" and hoped that it would promote an "export-oriented" economy. He made the remarks in a meeting with women parliamentarians from the PML-N, where he thanked them for their participation in the ongoing budget debate. He expressed hope that people will be able to benefit from the "relief-oriented" budget after the restoration of peace in the region, according to a press statement issued by the Prime Minister's Office (PMO). According to the statement, PM Shehbaz noted that the budget had introduced "measures to empower women in the country as well as increase their inclusion in the mainstream," terming it a "top priority" for the government.

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'9,000 people hold Rs 750 billion deposits'

NEWS DESK

ISLAMABAD: Chairman Federal Board of Revenue (FBR) informed the National Assembly's Standing Committee for Finance about startling disclosures after FBR's access to the databases. FBR Chief Rashid Langarial was testifying on the Pakistan's new tax operating model, before the finance standing committee of the lower house chaired by Syed Naveed Qamar. Rashid Langarial while informing the session about increasing use of the technology in the FBR disclosed that "the 9,000 people in the country hold Rs. 750 billion bank

Continued on Page 06

Briefs

Nawaz Sharif urges AJK protestors to remain calm

ABID RAZA

LAHORE: Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) President Nawaz Sharif on Wednesday called for an end to sit-ins in Azad Jammu and Kashmir (AJK) and urged all stakeholders to engage in meaningful dialogue, as he expressed concern over the region's political situation during a party meeting in Lahore. The former premier made these remarks while chairing a meeting to review the political and administrative situation in AJK. The AJK government on June 5 declared the Jammu Kashmir Joint Awami Action Committee (JAAC) a proscribed organisation under the Anti-Terrorism Act (ATA), saying the group was engaged in terrorism. The ban was imposed days ahead of the banned outfit's planned June 9 protest seeking the abolition of 12 seats in the AJK reserved for refugees from IIOJK who migrated to Pakistan after 1947.

EU chief says Europe, US need to be strong

NEWS DESK

EVIAN: Europe and the United States must work closely together on artificial intelligence, European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen said on Wednesday, after US giant Anthropic blocked AI models over national security concerns. "The US and EU need to be strong partners in AI," she told G7 and tech leaders including Anthropic chief Dario Amodei in the French lakeside resort of Evian. "It is in our mutual interest that our citizens and companies can safely use the best AI models," she added.

Pak renews airspace closure for Indian flights till July 24

All India-owned or India-operated aircraft banned from airspace during notified period, shows PAA Notam

FAISAL SHEIKH

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan has extended airspace restrictions on all India-owned or India-operated aircraft until 4:59am on July 24, according to a Notice to Airmen (Notam) issued by the Pakistan Airports Authority (PAA) on Wednesday. The restrictions apply to all Indian-registered aircraft, including commercial and military planes, the Notam showed. Aircraft leased by Indian airlines will also remain barred from using Pakistani airspace during the period. The extended ban on Indian flights using the airspace took effect at 5:50pm on June 16 and will remain in force until July 24, according to the Notam. Pakistan closed its airspace for Indian airlines in April last year in a tit-for-tat move after New Delhi suspended the critical Indus Water Treaty amid heightened bilateral tensions following the Pahalgam attack in Indian Illegally Occupied Jammu and

Kashmir (IIOJK), which New Delhi blames on Islamabad. Pakistan has rejected the allegations and also called for a transparent inquiry. Following Pakistan's decision, India also shut its airspace to Pakistani airlines on April 30, last year. After the Pahalgam attack, India, on May 6-7, 2025, launched unprovoked attacks on multiple Pakistani cities. In response, Pakistan's armed forces launched a large-scale retaliatory military action, "Operation Bunyanum Marsoos", and targeted several Indian military targets across multiple regions. Pakistan downed eight Indian fighter jets, including three Rafale, and dozens of drones. After at least 87 hours, the war between the two nuclear-armed nations ended on May 10 with a ceasefire agreement brokered by the United States. While India's aviation industry has faced heavy losses, the impact on Pakistani aviation has been minimal.

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Govt hints at reducing petroleum prices

MAHNOOR ANSAR

ISLAMABAD: Federal Minister for Petroleum Ali Pervaiz Malik has said that the government is expected to announce "good news" regarding a possible reduction in petroleum product prices. "We will bring good news regarding a reduction in petroleum prices," the minister said while speaking with Geo News, acknowledging that the public had already faced difficulties due to regional tensions following the US-Iran conflict. The minister's statement comes days after US and Iranian officials agreed on a framework to end their war, which began when US and Israeli forces attacked

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APNS condemns NCCIA notice: calls it an attack on press freedom

The APNS office bearers noted that the action will set a dangerous precedent and create trust deficit, inflict fear, encourage self-censorship and undermine democratic accountability

DNA

KARACHI: The APNS strongly condemns the notice issued to Daily Nai Baat by the National Cyber Crime Investigation Agency (NCCIA) under the PECA law and termed it as an attack on freedom of Press. Senator Sarmad Ali, President and Mr. Muhammad Athar Kazi, Secretary General of All Pakistan Newspapers Society stated that the NCCIA notice to a newspaper and its columnist on complaint of Pakistan Administrative Service Association that the column used the expression "bureau corrupts" to malign civil servants, is a direct assault on press freedom, public discourse, freedom of expression and people's right to know. The PECA was framed as legal frame work for regulating cybercrimes, prosecuting digital offences on social media while promulgating the PECA, media organizations were assured that it would not implicate print media; as its frame work restricted to regulate cybercrime. The action of NCCIA against the newspaper is a blatant transgression of the scope and jurisdiction of the Act and the regulating authority, which is not acceptable to print media. The competent regulatory authority to

deal with any grievances against a newspaper, is the Press Council of Pakistan not the NCCIA.

The APNS office bearers noted that the action under PECA intended to target newspapers for their journalistic work and performing their duty to function as a watchdog of the interest of the people. The action will set a dangerous precedent and create trust deficit, inflict fear, encourage self-censorship and undermine democratic accountability. The APNS strongly believes that a free press cannot function under threat of criminal investigation for reporting, commenting or criticism that serves the public interest. Such notices are not about cybercrime but are intended to silence and strangle the independent journalism.

The APNS demanded that the government must respect Article 19 of the constitution and uphold its commitment to protect independent media. The APNS office bearers stated that the APNS stands in complete solidarity with Daily Nai Baat and all media workers facing harassment for performing their duties. We demand immediate withdrawal of the NCCIA notice issued to the newspaper and complete stoppage of misuse of PECA against newspapers, journalists and media houses.

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Grand wedding ceremony for 15 couples held

PESHAWAR: Al-Khidmat Foundation (AKF) organized grand wedding ceremony for 15 more needy couples from the remote Chitral district of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and also provided them goods of daily necessities worth millions of rupees to the newlyweds. The number of families benefiting from the facility of grand wedding of needy couples under the Asan Nikah project of Al-Khidmat Foundation Khyber Pakhtunkhwa has now increased to 747. In this connection, a grand wedding ceremony was held at Polo Ground Chitral City under the chairmanship of former District Nazim, Haji Maghfir Shah. Former Senior Provincial Minister and Ameer of Jamaat-e-Islami Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (North) Inayatullah Khan was the chief guest on the occasion. The ceremony was attended by well-known social figures Haji Hukmanuddin, President of Al-Khidmat Foundation Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (North), Fazal Mahmood, District Ameer of Jamaat-e-Islami Wajihuddin, District President Abdul Haq and other dignitaries from the city. In this grand wedding ceremony, a lavish wedding reception was also organized for more than 300 guests, including relatives and friends of 15 couples, while each couple was also provided with daily necessities worth Rs. 200,000, including 38 items including beds, washing machine, bedside fan, dressing table, sewing machine, iron, water, tea and dinner set. The entire expenses of this grand wedding ceremony were sponsored by long-time donor of Al-Khidmat Haji Hukmanuddin and other philanthropists.—APP

Immediate release of KP budget details seek

PESHAWAR: Chairman of the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Assembly Standing Committee on Finance, Arbab Muhammad Usman Khan, has expressed serious concern over the provincial Finance Department's failure to provide budget details and supporting documents, and called for immediate release of the required information. In a letter addressed to Provincial Adviser for Finance Muzammil Aslam, Arbab Usman stated that budget-related details and documents concerning the fiscal year 2025-26 had been requested several months ago but had yet to be provided. He said the delay was undermining the oversight role of the provincial assembly and adversely affecting transparency and accountability in financial affairs. Arbab Usman stressed that any delay in approval and implementation of the provincial budget was a matter of concern, as effective governance depended on timely planning, allocation and utilization of public resources. He said the budget was not merely a financial document but a key instrument for delivering public services, executing development projects and fulfilling government responsibilities. The chairman warned that delays in the budget process could negatively impact development schemes, create uncertainty in government departments and hinder delivery of essential public services.—APP

Crime falls sharply as Sindh strengthens policing

KARACHI: Sindh Chief Minister Syed Murad Ali Shah on Wednesday said sustained law enforcement measures, technology-driven policing and institutional reforms had led to a significant improvement in public safety across the province during the outgoing fiscal year. Presenting the Sindh Budget 2026-27 in the Sindh Assembly, the chief minister said Rs7.3 billion had been allocated for development initiatives aimed at strengthening law and order and the policing network across the province. He told the House that effective policing and intelligence-led operations had resulted in a substantial decline in crime, particularly in Karachi, where vehicle theft and snatching cases dropped by 67 per cent and violent street robberies by 54 per cent. The overall crime detection rate improved to 81 per cent. Murad Ali Shah said the government had continued its crackdown on criminal gangs operating in the Katcha areas of Shikarpur, Kashmore and Ghotki. He said Rs872 million was utilised on anti-dacoit operations during FY2025-26, leading to 141 encounters, the killing of 48 dacoits, arrest of 140 suspects and surrender of 475 outlaws under the government's surrender policy. He said law enforcement agencies had also succeeded in clearing nearly 115,000 acres of Katcha land from criminal influence. High-lighting counter-terrorism efforts, the Chief Minister said the Counter Terrorism Department's Fusion Centre had been fully operationalised at a cost of Rs772 million, while work on its

second phase was under way. He said the facility processed 952 pieces of digital evidence and analysed 164 CCTV and video recordings, strengthening intelligence-based investigations and contributing to the neutralisation of 210 terrorists and the arrest of several high-value suspects. "As a result of these efforts, Sindh has remained largely free from major terrorist incidents since late 2024," he said. The Chief Minister said the government had also introduced technology-based traffic management reforms, including an AI-powered faceless e-ticketing system that generated more than 1.07 million e-tickets and collected Rs840.7 million in fines. He said the initiative contributed to a 32 per cent reduction in traffic accidents, a 31 per cent decline in fatalities and a 39 per cent decrease in injuries compared with the previous year. Murad Ali Shah said the Safe City surveillance network had surpassed its installation target, with 1,325 smart cameras equipped with facial recognition and automatic number plate recognition technology now operational. To further strengthen policing capacity, he said, 1,487 Assistant Sub-Inspectors had been recruited, while the government had approved the recruitment of 2,000 investigation officers to enhance investigative capabilities. He added that modernisation work was also under way at 40 model police stations across Sindh as part of broader efforts to build a more efficient, responsive and technologically advanced law enforcement system.—DNA

PMOS to transform govt monitoring

The system enables real-time monitoring of tasks, projects, and milestones, ensuring greater transparency, accountability, and efficiency in government operations, according to press release issued by the ministry

DNA

ISLAMABAD: Federal Minister for Economic Affairs Ahad Cheema on Wednesday reviewed the AI-powered Prime Minister Office System (PMOS), saying the platform would strengthen governance, improve coordination among ministries and support implementation of the National Digital Masterplan through real-time monitoring and enhanced digital integration. The minister was chairing meeting which among others was attended by Minister for IT and Telecommunication Shaza Fatima Khawaja, Secretary IT Zarar Hashim Khan, Chairman Pakistan Digital Authority (PDA) Sohail Munir, along with relevant Additional Secretaries, Joint Secretaries, and senior officers of the Prime Minister's Office. During the meeting, officials from the Pakistan Digital Authority presented a comprehensive demonstration of the PMOS. The participants were briefed on the system's advanced features, highlighting its ability to connect all federal ministries with the Prime Minister's Office through a centralized digital platform. The system enables real-time monitoring of tasks, projects, and milestones, ensuring greater transparency, accountability, and efficiency in government operations, according to press release issued by the ministry. The participants were informed that directives issued by the Prime Minister's Office would be communicated instantly to the relevant ministries and departments through the platform. The system will also facilitate immediate progress tracking and performance monitoring, allowing decision-makers to remain updated on the status of key assignments and initiatives. A key feature of PMOS is its automated alert mechanism, which highlights overdue tasks through pop-up notifications on the accounts of Federal Secretaries and other concerned officials. This feature is expected to significantly improve timely execution and follow-up of government directives. The meeting was also briefed on a sovereign AI-based GPT-powered research system developed by the Pakistan Digital Authority. The tool has been designed to support internal research by utilizing previous directives, decisions, and official orders, enabling faster access to institutional knowledge and informed decision-making. The GPT system will also act as a virtual assistant for government officers, with a proper understanding of official procedures and workflows. It will be capable of assisting in and



completing official tasks assigned by officers through the use of artificial intelligence, thereby enhancing productivity, efficiency, and service delivery across government departments. Minister Ahad Cheema appreciated the efforts of the Pakistan Digital Authority in developing the AI-powered PMOS and acknowledged its potential to modernize public sector governance. He directed the relevant stakeholders to further refine and enhance the system to ensure maximum effectiveness, user-friendliness, and operational efficiency before its wider implementation. Cheema stated that Pakistan is progressing towards an AI-based digital governance system aimed at improving efficiency, transparency, and public service delivery.

He noted that the Prime Minister Office System (PMOS) would serve as a key facilitator in the implementation of the National Digital Masterplan by strengthening inter-ministerial coordination and digital integration. The Minister further said that citizen-focused digital services, already being delivered through platforms such as Asan Khidmat Markaz and other digital forums, would be further enhanced through a connected government-wide digital ecosystem. He emphasized that initiatives such as digital tax enforcement systems and other technology-driven governance solutions would continue to expand in the future, contributing to a more modern, responsive, and accountable public sector.

Joint resolution in KP pledged for effective LG system

PESHAWAR: A multi-stakeholder consultation on 'Constitutional, Administrative, Financial and Political Autonomy of Local Governments in Pakistan' concluded with a consensus to table a joint resolution in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Assembly, demanding an effective, autonomous and sustainable local government system in the province. The participants emphasised the need to strengthen local governments through meaningful devolution of political, administrative, and financial powers, enabling elected representatives to effectively address public issues at the grassroots level and to ensure improved governance and service delivery. Organized by Blue Veins organization in collaboration with Awaz CDS, the consultation was attended by Members Provincial Assembly (MPAs), ex-representatives of LG system, politicians, lawyers and media persons. Those who participated include MPA Aiman Jalil, MPA Shazia Tehmas, MPA Farza

na Shireen, MPA Mehr Sultana, MPA Shahida Waheed Khan Hoti, Ex. Provincial Minister, Kashif Azam Khan, Taimur Kamal, Member Local Council Association and Intizar Khalil, Coordinator Local Council Association. Welcoming the participants, Qamar Naseem, Programme Manager of Blue Veins, said that the demand for a strong and autonomous local government system in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa has evolved into a province-wide campaign due to the systematic erosion of local governments' powers by parallel political structures dominated by provincial and national lawmakers. He emphasized that the continued centralization of authority has weakened grassroots governance, limiting the ability of elected local representatives to effectively address community needs and deliver essential public services. The greatest sufferers due to absence of an effective and empowered local government structure are common people, whose

everyday issues remain unresolved at the grassroots level. Addressing public concerns at the local level is the very essence of local governance in a democratic system, Qamar stressed. Speaking during the discussion, MPA Mehr Sultana said that everyone must play their part in creating awareness about the importance of a strong and autonomous local government system, which is essential for effective governance and the resolution of public issues at the grassroots level. She also held out assurance of taking up the issue on the floor of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa assembly for bringing the issue into the notice of the concerned authorities. Speaking on the occasion, MPA Aiman Jalil said that politicians and parliamentarians should unite on a common platform to restore the true spirit and effectiveness of the local government system in the country, particularly in the province.—APP

Nehal, Ayaz discuss overall political situation

ISLAMABAD: Governor Sindh Nehal Hashmi has called on Speaker National Assembly Sardar Ayaz Sadiq at the Parliament House. During the meeting, matters of national importance, parliamentary affairs and issues pertaining to the welfare and development of the people of Sindh were discussed in detail. Both dignitaries exchanged views on the overall political situation in the country and emphasized the need for strengthening democratic institutions and parliamentary traditions. Ayaz Sadiq has congratulated Nehal Hashmi on assuming the office of Governor Sindh and expressed confidence that his extensive political experience and commitment to public service would contribute significantly to the progress and prosperity of the province. NA Speaker underscored the importance of close coordination between the federation and the provinces to address public concerns effectively and ensure inclusive national development. Nehal Hashmi thanked the Speaker for his good wishes and reaffirmed his commitment to serving the people of Sindh with dedication and sincerity. He appreciated Ayaz Sadiq for administering the proceedings of the House with impartiality. Federal Minister for Interior and Narcotics Control, Syed Mohsin Raza Naqvi, Member National Assembly Aijaz Hussain Jakhriani, and Member National Assembly, Abdul Qadir Patel, State Minister Interior and Narcotics Control Talal Chaudhry were also present during the meeting.—DNA

KP CM reviews uplift funds' utilization

PESHAWAR: Chief Minister Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Muhammad Sohail Afridi chaired an important meeting on Wednesday to review the utilization of development funds and progress on ongoing development initiatives across the province. According to a spokesperson for the CM House, the meeting reviewed fund utilization under the KP Annual Development Programme (ADP), Merged Districts ADP, Accelerated Implementation Programme (AIP), and foreign-funded development portfolio. Officials gave a detailed briefing on the status of fund utilization and implementation of development projects. According to the

briefing, the Accelerated Implementation Programme (AIP) remained at the top with 92 percent utilization of released funds, followed by the Merged Districts ADP with 94 percent and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa ADP with an 88 percent utilization rate. The meeting was informed that progress on development projects across various sectors remained satisfactory and that the target of achieving full utilization of allocated funds would be attained soon. CM Afridi expressed satisfaction over the effective use of development funds and progress on ongoing schemes. Addressing the meeting, he said that health and edu-

cation remained among the top priorities of the provincial government and that the upcoming Annual Development Programme (ADP) would place special focus on these sectors along with other social development areas. He observed that the increasing pressure on hospitals in Peshawar required extraordinary attention and additional measures in the health sector to ensure improved service delivery. The CM reiterated that no compromise would be made on providing quality and timely healthcare facilities to the public and directed authorities to prioritize projects of public importance and those nearing completion.—DNA



MILITARY LANDS & CANTONMENTS DEPT
RAWALPINDI CANTONMENT BOARD
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RAWALPINDI CANTONMENT BOARD

E-AUCTION FOR DISPOSAL OF UNSERVICEABLE STORE ITEMS ON "AS IS WHERE IS" BASIS THROUGH EPADS V2.0 (D10094)

Rawalpindi Cantonment Board (RCB) invites electronic bids through the E-Pak Acquisition & Disposal System (EPADS) Version 2.0 for the disposal of unserviceable store items on "As Is Where Is" basis in accordance with the Public Procurement Regulatory Authority (PPRA) Rules, 2004. The items include old furniture (tables, chairs, etc.), air coolers, electrical accessories, used tyres, scrap material, iron windows, wooden doors and other unserviceable store items. Detailed bidding documents, list of auction items, reserve price, bid security requirements, eligibility criteria, auction schedule and complete terms & conditions are available on EPADS V2.0 and PPRA websites. Only those bidders who are registered with the Federal Board of Revenue (FBR), appearing on the Active Taxpayer List (ATL) and registered on EPADS Version 2.0 shall be eligible to participate in the e-auction process.

Terms & Conditions:

- All interested bidders must be registered on EPADS Version 2.0 prior to participation in the auction. Registration may be completed at: <https://vendors.epads.gov.pk/register>
- Bids shall be submitted electronically through EPADS only. Manual, physical or hard-copy bids shall not be accepted.
- The e-auction shall remain open up to **07 July 2026 at 02:00 PM**. Electronic bids shall be opened online on the same day at **03:30 PM** through EPADS.
- During the auction period, bidders may enhance their bids multiple times until the closing time. Upon expiry of the auction closing time, EPADS shall automatically identify the highest evaluated responsive bidder, subject to approval by the Competent Authority.
- Each bidder shall furnish a **Bid Security of Rs. 400,000/- (Rupees Four Lac Only)** in the form of Pay Order, Bank Draft or Call Deposit Receipt (CDR) issued by a scheduled bank in favour of "Cantonment Executive Officer, Rawalpindi Cantonment Board".
- The original Bid Security instrument must be submitted to the office of Rawalpindi Cantonment Board before the bid submission deadline. Cash payments shall not be accepted.
- Bid securities of unsuccessful bidders shall be returned in accordance with PPRA Rules. The bid security of the successful bidder shall be retained until fulfillment of all contractual obligations.
- The successful bidder shall deposit **33% of the total auction forthwith** at closing of auction proceeding upon acceptance of bid. Failure to do so shall result in cancellation of the award and forfeiture of the bid security.
- After approval by the Competent Authority, the successful bidder shall deposit the remaining auction amount within **seven (07) days** from the date of issuance of the acceptance / approval letter.
- The auctioned material shall be lifted and removed from the designated site by the successful bidder within **fifteen (15) days** after full payment and issuance of the release order.
- The auction shall be conducted strictly on "As Is Where Is" basis. No guarantee regarding quality, quantity, condition, weight, usability or fitness of the auctioned items shall be provided by RCB.
- The successful bidder shall arrange loading, transportation, labour and removal of the auctioned material at his own risk and cost. RCB shall not be responsible for any loss, theft, damage or deterioration of the material after approval of the bid amount.
- No claim for compensation, refund, adjustment or damages shall be entertained on any account after the acceptance of bid.
- Firms, contractors or individuals declared defaulters by Rawalpindi Cantonment Board or any Government/Semi-Government organization shall not be eligible to participate in the auction.
- All applicable taxes, duties and levies imposed by the Federal Government, Provincial Government or any other competent authority shall be borne and paid by the successful bidder as per prevailing laws and regulations.
- In accordance with Rule 48 of PPRA Rules, 2004, a Grievance Redressal Committee (GRC) has been constituted. Details are available on the procuring agency's website and EPADS portal.
- Rawalpindi Cantonment Board reserves the right to reject any or all bids and/or cancel the auction process at any stage prior to acceptance of the highest bid in accordance with applicable provisions of PPRA Rules, 2004.
- This E-Auction Notice is also available on PPRA website: <https://www.ppra.org.pk> and EPADS Portal: <https://eprocure.gov.pk>.

Cantonment Executive Officer
Rawalpindi Cantt

PID(I) 10130 / 25

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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- MH.....5611116
- Cantt Hospital...9270907-11
- DHQ.....5556311-4
- RGH.....9290301-7
- Holy Family.....9290322-7
- PIMS.....9261170-79
- Polyclinic.....9218300-09
- Shifa International 4603666



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- Cantonment Board 9270151-3



Islamabad Metropolitan

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

Water Tank

- Islamabad.....0321-5744480

Portugal marks national day with commitment to friendship with Pakistan

Concluding his remarks, the Ambassador declared: "Portugal and Pakistan may stand at opposite ends of the map, but friendship is not measured in kilometres. It is measured in trust, goodwill, and the courage to build a common future together"

DNA

ISLAMABAD: The Embassy of Portugal hosted a grand reception at Serena Hotel to celebrate the Day of Portugal, Camões and the Portuguese Communities, reaffirming the strong bonds of friendship and cooperation between Portugal and Pakistan. The event was attended by Federal Minister for Overseas Pakistanis and Human Resource Development, Chaudhry Salik Hussain, who served as Chief Guest, alongside other distinguished dignitaries including Federal Minister for Water Resources Mian Mueen Wattoo, Governor of Sindh Syed Nehal Hashmi, Federal Minister for Poverty Alleviation Syed Imran Ahmad Shah, Minister of State for Law and Justice Barrister Aqeel Malik, and former Federal Minister for Maritime Affairs Qaiser Sheikh. Welcoming the guests, the Ambassador of Portugal Paulo Guedes Domingues highlighted the 76th anniversary of diplomatic relations between the two nations, describing the partnership as one built on "Dosti aur Bharosa — friendship and trust." He praised Pakistan's hospitality, noting that he and his family felt deeply at home since arriving in Islamabad earlier this year. The Ambassador underscored Portugal's commitment to strengthening ties in politics, trade, academia, and people-to-people exchanges. He noted that nearly 50,000 Pakistanis now reside in Portugal, contributing positively to Portuguese society and serving as "ambassadors of friendship" between the two countries. He also expressed gratitude to Pakistan for supporting Portugal's successful bid for a seat on the United Nations Security Council (2027-2028), pledging closer cooperation in multilateral diplomacy. Commending Pakistan's constructive role in



promoting peace, he welcomed Islamabad's mediation efforts in Geneva, calling them a "powerful reminder that diplomacy can prevail over conflict." The evening featured Portuguese cuisine, includ-

ing bacalhau, piri-iri chicken, and the famous pastel de nata, offering guests a taste of Portugal's culinary heritage. Concluding his remarks, the Ambassador declared: "Por-

tugal and Pakistan may stand at opposite ends of the map, but friendship is not measured in kilometres. It is measured in trust, goodwill, and the courage to build a common future together."

Pakistani artist honored in China

DNA

ISLAMABAD: A Pakistani scholar and lecturer from the University of Peshawar received an honorary credential at the opening ceremony of the 16th International Exhibition of Traditional Fine Arts in Shanghai, China Economic Net reported on Wednesday. The exhibition, featuring artworks from 38 countries and regions, showcases the preservation and innovation of traditional art in the digital age through diverse forms including painting, ceramics, embroidery, enamel, lacquer art, sculpture and digital art. The recipient, Ms. Hira Ali, who is currently pursuing her PhD in artistic theory at the Shanghai Academy of Fine Arts, Shanghai University, described the experience as "very surreal." "Local and international artists here are growing side by side," she noted. "You can show your talent and abilities on various platforms, creating a welcoming and encouraging environment." Her recent calligraphic series, currently on display at the China Acad-

emy of Arts in Hangzhou, blends the vibrant colors of Shanghai's urban landscape with the flowing script of traditional Pakistani and Urdu calligraphy. The result is a visual dialogue between two distinct cultural traditions, where Chinese aesthetics meet South Asian heritage on a single canvas. "This is how I experiment with techniques and themes, combining Chinese traditions, Chinese culture and contemporary environments with elements of my Pakistani traditional calligraphy," she explained. Another notable work, titled "Chinese Tradition", depicts a traditional Chinese pagoda reimagined through the lens of Mughal miniature painting. The piece captures the architectural grace of its subject while layering it with patterns and motifs drawn from Pakistan's rich artistic history. Her creative range extends beyond calligraphic fusion. She has also produced Chinese flower paintings on Xuan paper, lacquer works on wood and pegboxes, mother-of-pearl inlays on wooden panels, and eggshell lacquer pieces. Her architectural drawings in pencil

colors and acrylic paintings on canvas further demonstrate her versatility across media. Ms. Hira has worked on projects for the U.S. Consulate General in Peshawar, contributing to the initiative centered on colorful truck culture of Pakistan. She also joined a team dedicated to documenting and preserving the heritage of Buddhist Gandhara in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan. One of her pieces titled "My Favorite Scene on Campus" also received recognition. Her artistic practice is deeply rooted in her research on Chinese lacquer art, a craft with thousands of years of history in China but one that is declining in Pakistan. Her research has also taken her to Fuzhou in Fujian province, a city known as the heart of traditional lacquer art. Beyond her own artistic practice, Ms. Hira is working with her supervisor to establish a lacquer art association in Pakistan. Her goal is to integrate her experiences into Pakistan's academic landscape and revive interest in the art form. "I hope that the diversity of arts in China reaches every corner of the world," she added.

Turkish defence delegation pledges disaster aid boost

ISLAMABAD: A high-level Turkish defence delegation led by Lieutenant General Fedai Ünsal, Vice Chief of Staff of the Turkish Armed Forces, visited the National Disaster Management Operation Center (NEOC) at the National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA) headquarters in Islamabad on Wednesday to explore avenues for enhanced cooperation in disaster management, emergency response and climate resilience. During the visit, the delegation was briefed on NDMA's technology driven disaster management architecture, including its multi hazard early warning systems, real time data integration platforms, risk assessment frameworks, Pakistan Disaster Lens (PDL), and national preparedness mechanisms designed to address climate induced and natural disasters. Chairman NDMA Lt Gen Inam Haider Malik welcomed the visiting delegation and outlined the authority's evolving role as Pakistan's lead institution for disaster risk management. Haider highlighted NDMA's transition from a response focused organization to a proactive institution emphasizing disaster risk reduction, preparedness, anticipatory action and community resilience. Officials from both sides discussed institutional mechanisms for disaster preparedness, emergency response and crisis coordination, with a focus on strengthening bilateral cooperation in disaster risk reduction, humanitarian assistance, resilience building and emergency management. The discussions also covered the use of advanced technologies, data analytics and integrated command and control systems to improve disaster response capabilities. The Turkish delegation later toured NDMA's Center of Excellence, Humanitarian Logistics Yard, Logistics Yard and Mobile National Emergencies Operation Center, where they were briefed on Pakistan's specialized capabilities in professional training, humanitarian logistics, deployable command and control systems and emergency response support infrastructure.—DNA

Rs50m trout farming project launched in GB

ISLAMABAD: Gilgit-Baltistan is implementing a Rs50 million trout farming project in District Ghizer as part of efforts to strengthen food security and support economic growth in the region. According to official documents available with Wealth Pakistan, the Government of Gilgit-Baltistan has directed its development resources towards food and nutrition security through fisheries, trout farming, modern agriculture and early childhood development programmes. According to the report, the project titled "Ensuring Food Security and Economic Growth through Extension of Trout Farming in District Ghizer" is under implementation with a total cost of Rs50 million and an allocation of Rs22.8 million during the current year. Gilgit-Baltistan is also implementing the "Targeting Blue Revolution towards Food, Nutrition and Livelihood Security through Conservation of Local Species in Gilgit-Baltistan" project with a total cost of Rs80 million and an allocation of Rs2.97 million. Another project "Improving Rural Livelihood and Food Security through Modern Agricultural Techniques in District Ghizer" is being implemented with a total cost of Rs30 million and an allocation of Rs5.3 million.—APP

Pakistan to establish Green University

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan plans to establish a Green University aimed at developing climate-resilient human capital, promoting green innovation and supporting the country's transition toward a sustainable and low-carbon economy. According to official documents available with Wealth Pakistan, the Ministry of Climate Change and Environmental Coordination (MoCC&EC) is advancing the initiative to equip young professionals with advanced green skills and encourage applied research in climate and environmental fields. The proposed university is expected to play a key role in preparing a workforce capable of addressing climate challenges and supporting emerging sectors linked to environmental sustainability, renewable energy and resource efficiency. As part of broader efforts to promote climate-focused innovation, the ministry is also launching a "Shark Tank"-style National Green Startup Innovation Challenge. The initiative will provide a platform for entrepreneurs and innovators to present climate-smart business ideas to potential investors and development partners. The challenge is designed to facilitate access to funding, mentorship and partnerships, while encouraging youth participation in climate action and supporting the growth of green enterprises. Pakistan is simultaneously strengthening its climate governance framework through the Pakistan Climate Change Authority (PCCA), established under the Pakistan Climate Change Act 2017 alongside the Pakistan Climate Change Council and the Pakistan Climate Change Fund. Mandated to mobilise international climate finance and support implementation of climate policies, the authority has so far developed more than 38 project proposals and secured approval for three projects.—APP

Pakistan's diplomatic efforts bear fruit

ISLAMABAD: Member National Assembly (MNA) Anjum Aqeel Khan from Pakistan Muslim League -Nawaz (PML-N) on Wednesday appreciated Pakistan's diplomatic contribution to the US-Iran peace deal in Geneva, saying the development had weakened anti-Pakistan narratives and highlighted the country's constructive international role. Talking to PTV News, Anjum Aqeel expressed hope that the agreement would strengthen the global economy and bring positive impacts for Pakistan's domestic economy, adding that the global tensions caused by the Iran-America conflict had created economic challenges that also affected Pakistan. He said the expected Geneva agreement be-

tween Iran and the United States was a positive development and credited Pakistan's diplomatic efforts for bringing both sides to the negotiation table. Anjum Aqeel expressed hope that the agreement would bring economic stability globally and that its positive impact would also benefit Pakistan and provide relief to the common people under the vision of Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif. Responding to a query, he criticized India's anti-Pakistan narrative, saying such attempts had failed and Pakistan had emerged stronger. He said the country's success reflected the strength of its defence capabilities and national resilience, which had enhanced Pakistan's position at the international level. He added that PML-N led government was taking steps to further

strengthen the country's foundations by increasing support for key sectors, including defence, exports, tax relief measures and skill development programmes. Anjum Aqeel said these initiatives would help promote economic stability, empower the youth and contribute to building a stronger and self-reliant Pakistan. To another query, Anjum Aqeel Khan said that a seven percent increase was not enough considering the inflationary pressures, but expressed confidence that Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif would provide maximum relief to the people. He said the government was focused on addressing public concerns and improving economic conditions. He expressed hope that the next budget would be more beneficial and bring further relief for citizens.—APP



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Briefs

Mobile app for senators to promote digital governance

ISLAMABAD: As a significant step towards institutional innovation and the promotion of digital governance, the Senate Secretariat, under the leadership of Syed Yousaf Raza Gilani, has decided to introduce a comprehensive mobile application for senators, marking an important milestone in its agenda of leveraging technology for improved efficiency and service delivery. The initiative reflects Chairman Senate's vision of a technologically empowered, efficient, and environmentally responsible parliamentary institution. The mobile application has been developed utilizing indigenous resources and the professional expertise available within the Senate Secretariat, demonstrating the institution's commitment to innovation, self-reliance, and prudent utilization of public resources. The progress on the application was reviewed during a meeting chaired by Chairman Senate Senator Syed Yousaf Raza Gilani at Parliament House Secretary Senate Syed Hasnain Haider briefed the Chairman Senate and committee members on the development of the application, its key functionalities, and the benefits it will bring to parliamentary operations.—APP

Pak's diplomatic role boosts global standing: Ali

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan Peoples Party Parliamentarians (PPPP) MNA Syed Ali Musa Gilani on Wednesday praised the country's political and military leadership for enhancing Pakistan's diplomatic influence and promoting peace in the region. Speaking during the National Assembly's budget debate, Gilani said Pakistan had emerged as a responsible regional player through its diplomatic efforts and contributions to conflict resolution. He said Pakistan had gained greater international recognition under the leadership of President Asif Ali Zardari, Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif and Field Marshal Syed Asim Munir. He congratulated the country's political and military leadership on Pakistan's growing global profile. The PPP lawmaker cited Pakistan's participation in international peace initiatives, defence cooperation with Saudi Arabia and its role in facilitating dialogue among regional and global powers as examples of the country's increasing diplomatic importance. Expressing optimism about the economy, he said greater regional stability and the possible easing of sanctions on Iran could help attract foreign direct investment and improve investor confidence in Pakistan.—APP

AJK elections to conduct according to schedule

ISLAMABAD: Minister of State for Law Barrister Aqeel Malik on Wednesday made it clear that Azad Jammu and Kashmir (AJK) elections would be held on July 27 as per the Constitution and legal framework, saying the announced schedule would remain unchanged and the electoral process would continue according to law. While speaking to a local media outlet, he said all political parties have the right to raise their objections and reservations through democratic forums. He added that Pakistan Muslim League - Nawaz (PML-N) and Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) were allied partners, adding that the government addressed their concerns in Gilgit-Baltistan on priority, adding, the AJK election process has now reached its scheduled stage after the Election Commission of Azad Jammu and Kashmir announced the polling date. He made it clear that the election schedule would not be changed or adjusted according to anyone's preference, as the process would proceed under the constitutional and legal framework. Responding to a query regarding differing views on the AJK elections, he said every political party has the right to present its manifesto and express its position, but all matters must be addressed within the framework of the Constitution, law and established rules.—APP

NUML, CMG mark 75 years of China-Pak diplomatic ties

Cultural Counsellor Chen Peng said that China's development was creating new opportunities for prosperity and growth not only for the Chinese people but also for countries across the region and the world

DNA

ISLAMABAD: The Confucius Institute at the National University of Modern Languages (NUML), in collaboration with China Media Group (CMG) and the China Cultural Center in Pakistan (CCCP), has hosted a knowledge-based quiz program to commemorate the 75th anniversary of diplomatic relations between China and Pakistan. Cultural Counsellor at the Chinese Embassy in Islamabad, Chen Peng, attended the ceremony as the chief guest. Addressing the participants, he said that China's development was creating new opportunities for prosperity and growth not only for the Chinese people but also for countries across the region and the world. He emphasized the importance of further strengthening people-to-people ties and cooperation between China and Pakistan. Speaking on the occasion, NUML Director General Brigadier Muhammad Rafiq Khan said that educational and cultural exchanges between China and Pakistan were bringing the peoples of the two countries closer together and playing a significant role in enhancing bilateral relations. Wang Lei, representative of CGTN Urdu and China Media Group Pakistan, highlighted the enduring friendship between the two nations, describing it as a shining example of mutual trust, brotherhood, and shared development that continues to grow stronger over time. Dean of the Faculty of Languages at the NUML, Dr. Jamil Asghar Jami, noted



that the friendship between China and Pakistan had successfully withstood every challenge and expressed confidence that bilateral ties would continue to expand in the future. During the quiz competition, students answered questions related to the history, culture, and bilateral relations of China and Pakistan, showcasing their

knowledge and skills. Their performances were widely appreciated by the audience. Students from the Confucius Institute also presented colorful cultural performances reflecting the shared cultural heritage, mutual respect, and longstanding friendship between the two countries. At the conclusion of the event, Cultural Counsellor Chen

Peng and NUML Director General Brigadier Muhammad Rafiq Khan distributed prizes among students who demonstrated outstanding performance. A great number of students participated in the competition and demonstrated keen interest in learning more about the longstanding friendship between the two countries.

Tarar urges respect between parliamentary houses

ISLAMABAD: Federal Minister for Law and Justice Azam Nazeer Tarar on Wednesday emphasized the importance of maintaining mutual respect between both houses of Parliament and preserving the dignity of democratic institutions.

Responding to an objection raised by Senator Danesh Kumar regarding remarks made by a member of the National Assembly about senators, Tarar said the comments represented the personal opinion of the concerned lawmaker and did not reflect the collective view of Parliament.

The law minister informed the Senate that he was present in the National Assembly when the remarks were made and had immediately responded to them, reaffirming the need to uphold respect between elected representatives and parliamentary institutions.

Tarar stressed that both houses of Parliament play a vital role in the democratic system and that their prestige and constitutional standing must be safeguarded at all times.

Turning to foreign affairs, the minister highlighted Pakistan's diplomatic success in facilitating the recent Iran-US agreement, saying the country had earned considerable international respect through its constructive role.—APP

Senator Sandhu calls for strong legislation

ISLAMABAD: Member of the Human Rights and Minorities Affairs Special Committee and PML-N Senator Khalil Tahir Sandhu on Wednesday emphasized the importance of collective will, strict implementation of laws and awareness to curb honour killings across all provinces, urging parliamentarians, political stakeholders, institutions to work together for effective solutions with stronger protection of human rights. Speaking exclusively with a local media outlet, PML-N Senator Khalil Tahir Sandhu highlighted the need to strengthen the justice system through protection of judges and witnesses. Senator further explained every adult citizen who has reached the legal age of 18 has the right to make personal decisions, including marriage, but illegal practices and interference by Jirgas continue to create challenges. He said the issue requires collective efforts from all segments of society, stressing that parliamentarians, political representatives.—APP

Summer camp to empower women in AI, digital skills

ISLAMABAD: Fazaia Bilquis College of Education for Women has launched its Summer 2026 Short Courses and Workshops programme, offering training in Artificial Intelligence (AI), data analytics, digital marketing, freelancing, entrepreneurship, Python programming and cyber security to equip women with future-ready skills. College officials told APP that the month-long Summer Camp will run from July 6 to July 31, 2026, featuring more than 21 short courses and workshops designed to enhance professional competencies and prepare participants for emerging opportunities in the digital economy. They said the programme combines practical learning with hands-on training in areas including AI for Productivity, Research with AI, AI Creative Design, AI GameVerse Development, Data Analytics, Graphic Designing, Digital Marketing and Freelancing, Python Language, and Cryptography and Network Security. The officials said the initiative aims to help women explore entrepreneurship, online earning opportunities and career development while strengthening their understanding of modern technological tools and industry trends. Interactive sessions will be conducted by qualified instructors and professionals from relevant fields. They added that the programme also includes courses in professional communication, creative writing, psychology, health and fitness, and teacher development, reflecting a holistic approach to women's education and capacity building. Certificates will be awarded upon successful completion of the courses, while hostel facilities will also be available for female participants. The Summer Camp will be held at Fazaia Bilquis College of Education for Women, PAF Base Nur Khan, Rawalpindi. College students will receive a 50 percent discount on registration fees.—DNA

HEC announces first NSCT result

ISLAMABAD: The Higher Education Commission (HEC) announced the results of Pakistan's first National Skills Competency Test (NSCT) 2026, providing the country's first nationwide benchmark of IT and computer science skills among university students. According to the HEC on Wednesday, more than 40,000 students from 188 universities registered for the test, while over 33,000 IT students were assessed during the examination conducted on April 4-5, 2026. The assessment offers a comprehensive picture of students' performance in critical computer science and information technology domains, identifying both areas of strength and those requiring improvement. The findings

show that students demonstrated the highest proficiency in Web Development Basics (54.1%), followed by Artificial Intelligence and Machine Learning (50.8%), Software Engineering (50.1%), Problem Solving and Analytics (49.1%), and Programming (47.8%). However, the report identified Cyber Security (47.2%) as the area requiring the greatest improvement, followed by Database Systems (42.3%), Data Structures and Algorithms (40.2%), Computer Networks and Cloud Computing (39.6%), and Operating Systems (33.8%). These areas required improvement. Region-wise, Islamabad Capital Territory (ICT) recorded the highest pass rate at 52.9%, followed by Sindh (42.0%), Punjab (39.4%), and Gilgit-Baltistan (32.6%). Lower pass rates were recorded in Azad Jammu and Kashmir (31.0%), Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (30.2%), and Balochistan (29.0%). HEC said the NSCT results will help universities assess academic performance, identify skill gaps, improve curricula, and strengthen Pakistan's IT workforce to meet future industry demands.—APP

Govt to expand fibre-to-home coverage to 10m households

ISLAMABAD: Federal Minister for Information Technology and Telecommunication Shaza Fatima Khawaja on Wednesday said the government's target is to expand fibre-to-the-home coverage to 10 million households in the coming years, which would significantly improve access to reliable internet services. Addressing a community-centred connectivity policy forum titled "The Jhuggiwala Story", she said fibre-to-the-home coverage in Pakistan has increased from around 3 million households to more than 5 million. "The government aims to further expand this to 10 million households in the coming years, which would significantly improve access to reliable internet services," she said. She referred to the government's broader plan to train 1 million people in artificial intelligence and digital technologies, with a focus on reaching non-technical populations, including those in agriculture, industry, and traditional professions. She said digital literacy and AI skills are now essential across all sectors, adding that whether a person is a worker, architect, lawyer or doctor, technological awareness has become necessary for professional growth and productivity. She also highlighted telecom sector reforms, including the elimination of right-of-way charges and related legislative steps aimed at ensuring policy continuity and long-term stability. She said provinces had

supported these measures. According to her, these reforms are essential because digital connectivity directly affects citizens, especially women in rural areas, and limited access risks increasing inequality and the digital divide. She emphasized that in today's rapidly evolving AI-driven world, delays in policy implementation can have significant consequences. The minister further highlighted progress in reducing the gender digital divide, noting improvements in mobile internet usage gaps, although she acknowledged that challenges still remain. She said millions of women have already been trained in digital skills, while further free online training opportunities are being offered to youth and beginners every six months. She also mentioned ongoing collaboration with institutions such as Ignite and international partners to offer advanced digital training courses, adding that Pakistan has already trained hundreds of thousands of young people in digital, soft, and entrepreneurial skills. Referring to digital inclusion in social protection programmes, she said millions of women have been enabled to use digital wallets to receive financial assistance, which has also expanded their ability to carry out transactions such as utility payments, mobile top-ups, and online shopping. She said the transition toward digital payments has helped reduce barriers, improve transparency, and empower women economically.—APP

Al-Shifa Trust starts construction of S Asia's largest eye hospital

DNA

RAWALPINDI: Al-Shifa Trust Eye Hospital has formally started construction of its new Lahore facility, planned as Asia's most modern eye hospital, marking a major expansion of its efforts to provide specialized eye care to millions of people. President Al-Shifa Trust Maj. Gen. (Retd) Rehmat Khan described the project as a significant milestone in the Trust's mission to expand access to quality eye care and reduce preventable blindness across Pakistan. The Trust has awarded the construction contract to a Lahore-based firm, with the agreement requiring completion of the grey structure within 13 months, with provisions to discourage delays. A commencement ceremony was held at the project site, where Al-Shifa Trust officials, engineers, consultants, and construction staff prayed for the successful completion of the hospital. Maj. Gen. (Retd) Rehmat Khan informed that the hospital is being built on 70 kanals of land provided by the Punjab government on the Ring Road, Rawind. The state-of-the-art facility will feature 20 modern operation theatres and will provide advanced treatment for a wide range of eye diseases. Once operational, the hospital is expected to serve around 20 million people and treat more than 600,000 patients annually. Free

treatment will be available for deserving and underprivileged patients, continuing the Trust's policy of ensuring access to quality eye care regardless of a patient's ability to pay. The project comes at a time when vision impairment remains a major public health challenge in Pakistan. More than 26 million people live with blindness or partial vision impairment, placing the country third globally in terms of vision-loss burden. Cataract accounts for more than half of all blindness cases, while the vast majority of cases are considered avoidable, and Central Punjab has the highest prevalence of blindness in the country. Over the past 35 years, Al-Shifa Trust has grown from treating just 25 patients a day to more than 5,000 patients daily. It operates seven eye hospitals in Rawalpindi, Sukkur, Kohat, Muzaffarabad, Chakwal, Gilgit, and Haveli Lakhra. It has also conducted more than 15,000 free screening and surgical camps in remote and underserved areas, bringing eye care to communities with limited access to medical facilities. Between 80 and 90 percent of patients receive treatment free of charge. The Lahore hospital is expected to further strengthen efforts to reduce avoidable blindness and improve access to modern eye care services. The trust also organized a fund-raising event featuring performances by Rahat Fateh Ali Khan and Ustad Noor Buksh, where philanthropists contributed one hundred million rupees to the project.

Zeb seeks enhanced budgetary support for tribal areas' uplift

ISLAMABAD: Special Assistant to the Prime Minister on Tribal Affairs Mubarak Zeb Khan on Wednesday called for a significant increase in development funds for the merged tribal districts to address longstanding socio-economic challenges in the region. Participating in the National Assembly's budget debate, he said the preparation of the federal budget under prevailing economic constraints was a difficult exercise and congratulated the government on its presentation. Speaking on behalf of the tribal districts, he said he was fully aware of the region's pressing issues, including poverty, unemployment, security challenges, and inadequate access to quality education and healthcare. Citing development indicators, he added that Bajaur remained among the poorest districts in the country, while Mohmand was also ranked among the most underdeveloped areas. He added that several districts in the merged tribal region, as well as parts of southern Balochistan, faced similar socio-economic conditions. The SAPM recalled that prior to the 2018 merger of the former Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) with Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, commitments had been made to allocate substantial annual development funds for the uplift of the region. However, he said those pledges had yet to be fully implemented despite the passage of eight years. He pointed out that the merged districts had received far less development funding than promised, which had slowed rehabilitation and development efforts. In this year's budget, he said, Rs27 billion had been allocated for the tribal districts, terming the amount insufficient to meet their needs. Mubarak Zeb Khan urged the government to raise the allocation to Rs100 billion to accelerate development projects and ensure the region received its due share of resources. He said the people of the tribal districts had made immense sacrifices in the fight against terrorism, enduring displacement and significant economic losses. "These are the people who have borne the brunt of terrorism and instability. The question is how much longer they will have to wait for the fulfillment of promises made to them," he added.—DNA



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Why an Iran-US agreement threatens Israel's strategy

HANI HAZAIMEH

AS diplomatic efforts between Washington and Tehran continue to inch forward, one thing has become increasingly clear: Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu views the prospect of a successful US-Iran agreement not as a diplomatic achievement but as a strategic setback. For years, Netanyahu has built much of his regional and international agenda around portraying Iran as an existential threat that can only be contained through pressure, isolation and the constant threat of military force. A breakthrough agreement between the US and Iran would challenge that narrative. It would demonstrate that diplomacy, however imperfect, can achieve what years of confrontation could not: reducing tensions, opening channels of communication and lowering the risk of a wider regional war. That is precisely why Netanyahu is expected to use every political, diplomatic and media tool at his disposal to undermine any agreement that emerges from the ongoing negotiations. His objective is not merely to criticize the deal's provisions. Rather, it is to prevent the agreement from taking root altogether and to drag the parties back to the cycle of mistrust and confrontation that has defined relations for decades. The "Israeli warmonger" has a long history of opposing diplomatic engagement with Tehran. From public speeches and lobbying campaigns to direct appeals to American lawmakers, Netanyahu has consistently argued against negotiations that could normalize relations between Iran and the West. His calculation has remained largely unchanged: a permanent state of confrontation with Iran reinforces Israel's strategic position and keeps international attention focused on Tehran rather than on other pressing regional issues. The first half would be the agreement itself. Any understanding that reduces hostilities between Washington and Tehran weakens the argument that military pressure is the only viable option. It also limits Israel's ability to rally international support for aggressive measures against Iran. It reduces the likelihood of broader regional confrontation, a scenario that some within Israel's political establishment have long viewed as strategically advantageous. The second half of the defeat lies in the reports that Washington's efforts to contain escalation in Lebanon have become part of a broader framework of understandings with Tehran. If the US succeeds in restraining military operations and preventing a wider war on the Lebanese front, it would further di-



minish Israel's ability to shape regional dynamics through military escalation. For Netanyahu, this could be particularly frustrating. The continuation of military pressure in Lebanon has often been presented as necessary to restore deterrence and address security concerns. Yet American intervention aimed at limiting the scope of conflict suggests that Washington increasingly prioritizes regional stability over the expansion of military campaigns. This emerging reality places Netanyahu in a difficult position. He finds himself confronting not only Iran's negotiating team but also an American administration that appears increasingly interested in preventing another prolonged Middle Eastern conflict. While Washington and Tehran remain far from resolving all their differences, both sides appear to recognize the enormous costs of continued escalation. The broader region certainly understands those costs. The Gulf states, along with many other Arab countries, have repeatedly expressed support for diplomatic solutions over military confrontation. Their economies, security interests and development agendas depend on stability rather than perpetual crisis. They have little interest in becoming collateral damage in a struggle between regional and international powers. Diplomacy should not be judged against an impossible standard of perfection. It should be judged against the alternative. This is why efforts to sabotage diplomacy should concern everyone in the region. The Middle East has already paid an extraordinary price for decades of conflict, proxy wars and political brinkmanship. Every missed opportunity for dialogue has ultimately produced more instability, more destruction and more uncertainty. None of this suggests that a US-Iran agreement would be perfect. No agreement ever is. Deep disagreements would remain and implementation would undoubtedly face challenges. Yet diplomacy should not be judged against an impossible standard of perfection. It should be judged against the alternative. And the alternative is clear: renewed confrontation, expanding military operations, greater regional polarization and the ever-present risk of a conflict that could engulf multiple countries. As negotiations continue, Netanyahu may indeed play every card available to derail a deal he considers harmful to Israel's interests. He may attempt to mobilize political allies, amplify fears and create obstacles designed to return the process to square one. The real question, however, is whether the region is willing to allow the opponents of diplomacy to dictate its future once again. The Middle East stands at a crossroads between escalation and engagement. Those invested in perpetual confrontation will continue to resist compromise. But for a region exhausted by conflict, the success of diplomacy – even imperfect diplomacy – offers a far more promising path than another generation of wars. If an agreement ultimately emerges, its greatest achievement may not be what it says on paper. Its greatest achievement may be proving that dialogue can still prevail over those who profit politically from endless crises.

The Nation's Ledger and Parliament's Voice

Muhammad Mohsin Iqbal



The quality of debate has also depended heavily upon parliamentary leadership. Speakers who enforced procedural discipline and finance ministers who remained present to answer questions generally contributed to more focused discussions. Conversely, weak enforcement of rules often resulted in debates becoming excessively political. Another structural limitation has been the lack of technical and analytical support available to many legislators. Modern budget documents contain highly complex economic projections and fiscal assumptions that require specialized expertise for meaningful evaluation

AS June approaches each year, the atmosphere within Pakistan's Parliament begins to change. The federal budget, one of the most significant constitutional and political exercises of the state, is laid before the National Assembly for debate and approval. More than a statement of revenues and expenditures, the budget is a reflection of national priorities, economic realities, and the government's vision for the future. It is the moment when fiscal policy enters the democratic arena and when elected representatives are expected to scrutinize, question, and shape the economic direction of the country. Since the birth of Pakistan in 1947, more than seventy federal budgets have been presented before Parliament. From the modest financial plans of the early years to the highly complex and data-driven budgets of the present era, each budget has served both as a mirror of prevailing economic conditions and as a roadmap for future governance. The journey began on 28 February 1948, when Pakistan's first Finance Minister, Ghulam Muhammad, presented the inaugural budget in Karachi. Since then, successive governments, whether elected, interim, or military-backed, have used the annual budget to articulate their economic priorities and policy choices. Historically, the budget has been presented by the Finance Minister, though on certain occasions the responsibility has fallen upon the Prime Minister or acting finance ministers. Since the restoration of parliamentary democracy in 1985, budget sessions have become increasingly institutionalized and structured. These sessions offer an important opportunity for Parliament to fulfill its constitutional responsibility as the guardian of the public purse. Yet a careful examination of budget debates from 1985 to the present reveals a persistent challenge. Parliamentary rules provide extensive scope for members to examine taxation measures, expenditure priorities, macroeconomic assumptions, and development strategies. However, the actual debates often diverge from these subjects. Members frequently use budget discussions to highlight local grievances, political disputes, administrative shortcomings, or regional concerns rather than engaging directly with fiscal policy. This tendency is not new. During the general discussion on the Budget on 17 June 1975, Deputy Speaker Dr. Ashraf Khatoon Abbasi delivered a landmark ruling, stating that "Any matter may be discussed by members during general discussions on the Budget."

While this interpretation expanded parliamentary freedom, it also opened the door for discussions that often drift away from the budget itself. Research into parliamentary proceedings since 1985 suggests that less than forty percent of the time allocated to budget debates is spent discussing the actual budgetary proposals. The remaining discussions frequently revolve around political rivalries, governance issues, law and order concerns, and constituency-related matters. While these issues undoubtedly deserve parliamentary attention, their dominance during budget sessions diminishes the level of technical scrutiny that a national financial document requires. The pattern becomes more pronounced during periods of political transition. Budget sessions in 1988, 1993, 1999, 2008, and 2018 were significantly influenced by changes in government or broader political uncertainties. By contrast, sessions such as those held in 2002, 2013, and 2021 demonstrated relatively greater engagement with fiscal issues, aided by stronger committee involvement and more substantive participation by opposition members. The quality of debate has also depended heavily upon parliamentary leadership. Speakers who enforced procedural discipline and finance ministers who remained present to answer questions generally contributed to more focused discussions. Conversely, weak enforcement of rules often resulted in debates becoming excessively political. Another structural limitation has been the lack of technical and analytical support available to many legislators. Modern budget documents contain highly complex economic projections and fiscal assumptions that require specialized expertise for meaningful evaluation. The Budget 2026-27 itself presents both encouraging features and legitimate concerns. On the positive side, the government has sought to maintain fiscal discipline, reduce the budget deficit, continue social protection programmes, and achieve macroeconomic stability. The projected primary surplus and the effort to keep inflation under control reflect a commitment to restoring investor confidence and sustaining economic recovery. The continuation of support for lower-income groups through social safety nets and the government's emphasis on economic growth targets are also notable strengths. At the same time, the budget faces criticism

on several fronts. The ambitious tax collection target raises questions about implementation capacity, particularly given past revenue shortfalls. Development expenditure remains constrained compared to the country's vast infrastructure, education, health, and climate-related needs. Businesses and salaried taxpayers continue to express concerns regarding the burden of taxation, while economists argue that a broader tax base remains essential for sustainable fiscal management. The dominance of debt servicing expenditures leaves relatively limited fiscal space for development initiatives and public welfare programmes. Despite these challenges, the budget debate remains one of the most important events on Pakistan's legislative calendar. It provides the opposition with an opportunity to offer alternative economic visions and hold the government accountable. It enables treasury members to defend government policies and explain fiscal choices. Most importantly, it allows Parliament to communicate directly with citizens on issues that affect their daily lives, including taxation, subsidies, public investment, employment, and economic reform. As Pakistan confronts the continuing challenges of public debt, fiscal sustainability, economic competitiveness, and social development, the need for informed and evidence-based budget discussions becomes increasingly urgent. Parliamentarians must be equipped with stronger research support, analytical tools, and institutional resources to engage effectively with budget documents. Budget sessions should evolve from platforms of political theatre into forums of rigorous financial oversight. The history of budget debates since 1985 reveals a Parliament that has steadily evolved, though not without setbacks and diversions. The Federal Budget 2026-27 once again presents an opportunity for the National Assembly to rise above partisan considerations and focus on the economic future of the nation. The rules already provide ample room for meaningful deliberation. The greater challenge lies in the preparedness, commitment, and seriousness of those entrusted to speak on behalf of the people. If Parliament can reclaim the budget session as a forum for informed economic debate, it will not only strengthen democratic accountability but also contribute to the development of a national consensus on the economic direction Pakistan must pursue in the years ahead.

Pakistan should increase trade cooperation with regional countries

Tahir Khan

In this context, substantial potential is seen in cooperation along the lines of the EAEU. This region includes Belarus and Kazakhstan. Recently, Islamabad has already begun to establish trade and economic cooperation with Minsk and Astana. Considering the demand in the countries of the Union, manufacture of agricultural products and textiles in Pakistan can increase in exports of goods to these markets.

TO ensure a steady economic development, Pakistan should increase its Trade cooperation with regional countries and associations is enhanced with a view to find new markets for its products, that will bring additional revenues to the country's budget. On the other hand, it will open the prospects of Pakistan as a logistics hub to connect Asia with Africa and the Persian Gulf state. In this context, substantial potential is seen in cooperation along the lines of the EAEU. This region includes Belarus and Kazakhstan. Recently, Islamabad has already begun to establish trade and economic cooperation with Minsk and Astana. Considering the demand in the countries of the Union, manufacture of agricultural products and textiles in Pakistan can increase in exports of goods to these markets. Moreover, Kazakhstan demonstrates a keen interest in using the territory of Pakistan to provide existence of trade routes with other countries, in-

cluding South-East Asia. There are three ports on the southern coast of Pakistan with access to the Indian Ocean. In this case Pakistan has an advantage over Iran, where the situation remains extremely unstable. Even in turbulent times, the EAEU has proven to be an economically strong union. Pakistan, which has been experiencing some economic difficulties lately can use cooperation with union to stabilize economy. Islamabad could derive certain dividends from its cooperation with EAEU. Moreover, a closer partnership with the EAEU countries could be used in SCO. The members of the associations are the same States. One of the most promising areas of cooperation with the EAEU for Pakistan is to create a common free trade area, which will allow access to products with less prices. At the same time, It is a good option to sell the Pakistani products to the participating countries. One more advantage is energy coopera-

tion. Against the backdrop of the ongoing conflict in the Middle East, Pakistan has faced an energy crisis, which has led to an increase in fuel prices. As a result, the country's economic situation has deteriorated and, consequently, the country's economy has suffered. The partners in this direction from among the countries of the EAEU Russia can assist Islamabad in energy security. It is important to establish reliable transport routes linking Pakistan with the EAEU member countries. One of the options is North-South corridor, to which Islamabad has shown interest for many years. However, due to objective circumstances, Pakistan and Russia haven't managed to send a pilot train from Karachi to St. Petersburg. The second possible option is using China's territory with access to Central Asian countries and then to the Russian Federation. After the end of hostilities on the Pakistan-Afghanistan border, the territory of emirate can be used as well.

Briefs

Behave or
be ready
for bombs,
Trump to Iran

FROM PAGE 01

"As I expressed to the world leaders here this week, it's my hope that the peace agreement will be the beginning of a much larger deal all across the Middle East," Trump adds. Giving story yet another twist, US President Donald Trump said that the United Arab Emirates was "dropping bombs" on Iran last week. "Mohamed at [the] UAE is an incredible warrior. He was dropping bombs last week," Trump adds, referring to Emirati President Mohamed bin Zayed Al-Nahyan.

Iranian
tankers
exit US
blockade...

FROM PAGE 01

monitors oil shipments and storage, marked Iran's "first crude oil exports in two months", citing digital tracking data corroborated by satellite imagery. "At least two National Iranian Tanker Company (NITC) VLCC supertankers named Diona and Hero2 have exited the US Navy blockade perimeter carrying a combined total of 3.8 million barrels of Iranian crude oil between them," TankerTrackers said on X, later adding that a third tanker had exited. Later, a third Iranian crude oil tanker, Suezmax, also exited the blockade line with one million barrels of oil. Negotiations over a final deal are to start immediately after the Swiss signing ceremony and continue during a 60-day window, leading to decisions on the fate of Iran's nuclear programme and a plan for the lifting of international economic sanctions, officials said. The United States will allow Iran to immediately begin selling oil and fuel under the deal to end the war, the Wall Street Journal reported on Tuesday, citing unnamed people familiar with the agreement. A waiver of sanctions on oil sales will take effect immediately after the signing, the Journal added, also covering services such as banking, transportation and insurance. Vessels at the Strait of Hormuz, as seen from Musandam, Oman, June 15, 2026. — Reuters

Some conservatives have expressed concern over the peace deal, with Senate Republicans reportedly requesting the text of the agreement and briefings from the Trump administration. "Let's look at it and see what it actually is," Senate Majority Leader John Thune was quoted as saying in the Journal.

Shehbaz
terms federal
budget...

FROM PAGE 01

He also spoke of Pakistan's peace efforts in the US-Iran war, expressing gratitude to countries who supported Pakistan throughout the peace process. PM Shehbaz commended the efforts of the Chief of Defence Forces and Chief of Army Staff, Field Marshal Asim Munir, Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Ishaq Dar and Interior Minister Mohsin Naqvi for their role in the peace process. "Only with the establishment of lasting peace in the region, the dream of economic prosperity for Pakistan and other countries can be fulfilled," he told the meeting. At this, he recalled the government's efforts to shield the public from a "wave of global inflation" that emerged in the wake of the US-Iran crisis. "With the cooperation of federal and provincial governments, a historic package was given to the economically weaker sections of the society," he remarked, recalling a Rs128bn subsidy and austerity drive launched in March. "In the current situation, the federation and the provinces have fully cooperated to keep country's economy stable, for which the provincial governments are deeply grateful," he stressed. He outlined that for the next year's budget, the government will focus on "national interests, especially increasing water resources, IT, agriculture and minerals, to provide a strong foundation for Pakistani economy".

Pakistan U16 Asian Volleyball
Champions Receive Cash Rewards

The prestigious event will feature ten participating nations: Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Nepal, Turkmenistan, Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan, Maldives, Sri Lanka, India and Pakistan



OUR CORRESPONDENT

ISLAMABAD: The Pakistan Under-16 Boys Volleyball Team, which made history by winning the gold medal at the 2nd Asian U16 Volleyball Championship 2025 in Thailand, was honored with cash rewards under the Federal Government's sports incentive policy during a ceremony held in Islamabad. The young national team achieved a landmark success by securing Pakistan's first-ever Asian title in age-group volleyball. Their historic triumph also earned qualification for the FIVB Boys U17 World Championship 2026, placing Pakistan among the world's emerging volleyball nations.

Federal Secretary for Inter-Provincial Coordi-

national (IPC) Mohyuddin Ahmad Wani attended the ceremony as the chief guest. Also present were Pakistan Volleyball Federation (PVF) Chairman Chaudhary Muhammad Yaqoob, PVF President Sohail Khawar, officials, coaches, players and distinguished guests. Speaking on the occasion, PVF Chairman Chaudhary Muhammad Yaqoob highlighted Pakistan's growing stature in international volleyball and announced that Pakistan will host the CAVA Men's Volleyball Championship 2026 from July 22 to 29 in Islamabad. The prestigious event will feature ten participating nations: Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Nepal, Turkmenistan, Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan, Maldives, Sri Lanka, India and Pakistan. The championship is expected to be one of the largest inter-

national volleyball events ever hosted in the country and will provide valuable exposure to Pakistan's national team while promoting volleyball across the region. Yaqoob further said that the 16th Asian Boys U18 Volleyball Championship will be held in China from July 12 to 18, 2026, while the FIVB Boys U17 World Championship is scheduled to take place in Qatar from August 19 to 29, 2026. Pakistan's U17 team will represent the country on the world stage after qualifying through its historic gold-medal-winning performance at the Asian U16 Championship. As part of preparations for the World Championship, the Pakistan U17 team is expected to undertake an international training tour in France. The tour, being arranged

through international volleyball cooperation, is expected to feature a three-nation series involving Brazil, Iran and Pakistan, providing the young players with high-level competition and valuable international exposure ahead of the global event. The PVF expressed gratitude to the Government of Pakistan, Ministry of IPC, Pakistan Sports Board (PSB), sponsors, coaches, athletes and all stakeholders for their continued support in the development of volleyball in the country. During the ceremony, the Pakistan Sports Board awarded Rs600,000 to each player of the championship-winning team. In recognition of their contribution to the historic achievement, the coaching staff was also granted a collective cash reward of Rs1 million.

Israeli settlers torched
West Bank mosque

JILJILIYA: Palestinian Territories: Israeli settlers set fire to a mosque in a West Bank village on Wednesday, the local mayor said, while AFP journalists at the site saw signs of arson and vandalism. The incident comes amid an increase in attacks against Palestinian communities by settlers in the Israeli-occupied West Bank since the start of the Gaza war in 2023.

Osama Abdullah, head of the village council in Jiljiliya, north of Ramallah, told AFP that "settlers set fire to the ablution room, caused damage to the village's main mosque, and scrawled hostile slogans on the outer walls." Israel's military did not

immediately respond to an AFP request for comment. AFP journalists who visited the mosque on Wednesday reported that the ceiling, walls and floors were blackened by smoke and flames. They said graffiti in Hebrew had been scrawled on the walls, including some reading "vengeance" and "hi from the Hilltop Youth." The Hilltop Youth are a group of Israelis in the West Bank who are regularly accused of violence toward Palestinians they seek to evict from areas they wish to take over.

Mayor Abdullah said settlers arrived to burn down the mosque between 2am and 3am but found its door was locked, so instead set

fire to a room dedicated to ablutions on a lower floor. He said Palestinian civil defense crews, along with young men from the village and neighboring areas, extinguished the blaze. Israel has occupied the West Bank since 1967. More than 500,000 Israeli settlers live in the territory, excluding east Jerusalem, among some three million Palestinians. Settlements, which are illegal under international law, have sprouted all over the West Bank since the right-wing government of Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu took office, which contains many pro-settlement ministers in its ranks. — APP

Haaland
marks first
WC finals
appearance
with brace

ANOTHER potent scorer, Erling Haaland, marked his first World Cup finals appearance with two goals in a 4-1 romp against Iraq in France's Group I. The Manchester City striker pounced from close range on 29 minutes in Foxborough, but Aymen Hussein's header brought Iraq level before Haaland capitalised on an Iraqi defensive error to put Norway ahead again before half-time. He took his international goals tally to 57 in just 51 matches. Substitute Leo Ostigard headed in a third for Norway and they got a fourth deep in stoppage time through a Hussein own goal to secure. — APP

Bernardo Silva
signs two-year deal
with Real Madrid

MADRID: Portugal midfielder Bernardo Silva has signed a two-year deal with Real Madrid, the La Liga giants announced on Wednesday. Silva had left Manchester City after nine trophy-laden years when the 31-year-old's contract expired at the end of last season. "Real Madrid C.F. and Bernardo Silva have reached an agreement for him to become a Real Madrid player for the next two seasons, until June 30, 2028," the club said. Silva, who has 109 Portugal caps, is currently on international duty at his third World Cup. He will be part of the Portuguese squad that kicks off their campaign against DR Congo in Group K action in Houston later on Wednesday. Silva made 459 appearances for Manchester City in total, scoring 76 goals, since joining from Monaco in 2017 — where he won the Ligue 1 title alongside France captain and current Madrid striker Kylian Mbappe. He won 20 major trophies with City, including four successive Premier League titles from 2021-2024 in among six overall. He was part of the Champions League- and treble-winning side in 2023 and the 2019 team that did a domestic treble. It has been a different story recently for Madrid, however. Last season, they finished eighth points behind La Liga champions Barcelona and were knocked out in the quarter-finals of the Champions League. — APP

Turkish opposition
set for showdown
over leadership ballot
forced by court

ISTANBUL: Türkiye's main opposition Republican People's Party (CHP) was set for a tug-of-war after backers of its ousted leader petitioned on Wednesday to hold fresh elections to replace his court-appointed replacement. An Ankara court in May annulled the CHP's 2023 leadership election, citing alleged vote-buying, and reinstated unpopular former party chair Kemal Kilicdaroglu as leader. The decision sparked protests from the CHP, which has been rising in the polls at the expense of Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan, with the party's headquarters stormed by the police in the wake of the decision. Ozgur Ozel, a prominent critic of Erdogan who was ousted as leader by the ruling, has since called for an extraordinary party congress, arguing that the party cannot be governed by what he described as an imposed leadership. More than 800 CHP delegates had by Wednesday submitted petitions calling for that congress to elect a party leader, a party source told AFP. The petitions, delivered to CHP headquarters in Ankara, meet the threshold required under party by-laws to convene an extraordinary congress within 45 days. But political observers say Kilicdaroglu, who had faced criticism for a string of electoral defeats, is all but certain to attempt to stall the congress and any challenge to his leadership. — APP

Magical Messi equals World Cup goals
record as Argentina thump Algeria 3-0

Mbappe scores twice in France's 3-1 victory over Senegal; Haaland's brace helps Norway beat Iraq 4-1

LOS ANGELES: Lionel Messi opened his record-breaking sixth World Cup with a hat-trick to become the tournament's joint all-time top scorer as holders Argentina launched their bid for back-to-back titles with a dazzling 3-0 rout of Algeria. On a magical night at Kansas City's 69,045-capacity Arrowhead Stadium, Messi delivered an electrifying individual display to join Miroslav Klose at the top of the World Cup scorers charts with 16 goals. The 38-year-old had started an unforgettable occasion — his 200th international appearance — by claiming a piece of history, becoming the first man to play in six World Cups as he led Argentina onto the field for what would become a one-sided Group J clash. Argentina's Lionel Messi in action with Algeria's Rayan Ait Nouri, Houssein Aouar, Rami Bensebaini, Aissa Mandi and Nabil during Fifa World Cup 2026 Group J match at Kansas City Stadium, Kansas City, Missouri, US, June 16, 2026. Messi, who first played in the World Cup as a teen-

ager during the 2006 finals in Germany, then emphatically stamped his class over proceedings with a memorable hat-trick — the first of his World Cup career. A 17th minute curling strike took his World Cup goals tally to 14, putting him alongside German legend Gerd Muller and France superstar Kylian Mbappe in the all-time rankings. He then moved one clear of Muller and Mbappe to join Brazilian great Ronaldo on 15 goals in the 60th minute after pouncing on a rebound from an Alexis Mac Allister shot to make it 2-0. Argentina's Lionel Messi celebrates after scoring a goal during the Fifa World Cup 2026 Group J match between Argentina and Algeria at Kansas City Stadium, Kansas City, Missouri, US, June 16, 2026. — Reuters

He joined Germany's Klose on 16 goals in the 76th minute, sweeping in a low finish from the edge of the area before departing to deafening applause and a standing ovation from an adoring crowd four minutes later. Argentina defeated France in an epic 2022 World Cup final in Doha, winning on penalties after a 3-3 draw that saw Les Bleus striker Mbappe score a hat-trick. France — who could meet Argentina in the final again this year if seedings follow the form book — launched their tournament on Tuesday with a 3-1 defeat of Senegal, with Mbappe scoring twice to suggest he is more than ready to deliver another big World Cup. — DNA

Zidane Iqbal becomes first player of Pakistani
heritage to feature in Fifa World Cup

Zidane's father is from Pakistan, while his mother is an Iraqi

NEW YORK: Zidane Iqbal made history at the 2026 Fifa World Cup on Monday, becoming the first player of Pakistani heritage to feature in a men's World Cup. Zidane made history when he stepped onto the pitch in the 59th minute as a substitute for Iraq during their 4-1 defeat to Norway at Boston Stadium in Foxborough. Erling Haaland scored a brace on his World Cup debut as Norway claimed a dominant victory over Iraq in their Group I match. Zidane's father is from Pakistan, while his mother is Iraqi. The former Manchester United midfielder, in an interview with BBC Sport, said he was "surprised" when he learned of the honour and immediately told his dad, whom he hailed as a pivotal figure in shaping his professional career. "To be honest, I didn't even know it myself," Zidane Iqbal told BBC Sport. "I followed the account that posted it [that he was the first player of Pakistani heritage to play at a men's World Cup] and sent it to my dad straight away. I think we were



both surprised. When I tried to qualify for the World Cup with Iraq, I didn't think of anything like this. "My dad is Pakistani. He's my father, the man I respect the most in my life, who helped me so much in my career. "I play for Iraq, grew up in England, but my dad was born in Pakistan. My granddad was a first-generation there, so I have a lot of respect for that side of my family." Iqbal further shared that he takes pride in representing both Pakistan and Iraq and thus will be donning both countries' flags on his boots when he takes to the pitch. The midfielder also explained his decision to showcase his Pakistani heritage through his boots by reiterating the respect for both sides of his family's background. "I wear the Iraqi flag on my left side and the Pakistani flag on my right side," he said. "I think that's because I respect both sides. "When people ask me what I feel more connected to, I can't answer. For me, they're both equal. It's about respect and something I carry with a lot of pride." — APP

Bilawal
meets PM;
greeted
on ME
diplomacy

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provinces is essential for national progress. Both sides agreed that close cooperation between federal and provincial institutions is vital for the successful completion of projects of national importance and for ensuring the provision of better facilities to the people. Bilawal Bhutto Zardari expressed gratitude to the Prime Minister for his support in the formation of government in Gilgit-Baltistan.

'9,000
people hold
Rs 750 bln
deposits'

FROM PAGE 01

deposits and they had paid zero income tax". FBR chairman also said that 98.9 return filers declare lesser income in their tax papers. He said to address this situation a faceless taxation system has been considered to implement. "This system requires no contact between the tax official and the taxpayer," he added.

Pak renews
airspace
closure...

FROM PAGE 01

This is not the first time Pakistan has imposed such restrictions. Airspace closures were previously enacted during the 1999 Kargil conflict and the 2019 Pulwama crisis, both instances in which India faced greater aviation disruptions than Pakistan.

Govt hints
at reducing
petroleum
prices

FROM PAGE 01

Iran on February 28, to halt the US blockade of Iran and reopen the Strait of Hormuz, a key supply route for global oil and gas. Tumbling crude prices on news that Iranian fuel may soon hit global markets promised inflation relief and pushed bond yields lower on Wednesday. Brent crude futures dived below \$80 to the lowest since the opening salvos of the US-Iran conflict in March. On February 27, Brent closed at \$72.48 a barrel and WTI closed at \$67.02. The per-litre price of petrol currently stands at Rs373.78 in Pakistan and high-speed diesel at Rs378.78 per litre. The decision on fuel prices will be made this coming Friday, as the government has been reviewing petroleum prices on a weekly basis since the US-Israeli conflict with Iran on February 28. The petroleum minister told Geo News that the increase in fuel prices during the Iran war had affected household budgets in the past, but the government was committed to providing relief where possible. "There is a promise and the prime minister's direction that we will reduce prices to the extent possible," Malik added. The minister added that the availability of Iranian crude oil in global markets could help ease prices. "On this expectation, oil prices are falling in the international market," he added. The petroleum minister further stated that PM Shehbaz had promised that any reduction in global oil prices would be passed on to the public. "The prime minister had assured that whenever global prices fall, the benefit will be transferred to the people," he said. Earlier this year, the government increased fuel prices after tensions escalated when the United States and Israel launched attacks on Iran in February, prompting Tehran to respond with retaliatory strikes and temporarily disrupt global shipping routes through the Strait of Hormuz. The developments led to a spike in international oil prices. As global rates increased, the government raised domestic fuel prices by more than 50%. Petroleum prices were revised twice in the first week of March. The steepest hike was recorded in April.

Briefs

PSX stays
bullish,
gains over
118 points

ISLAMABAD: The benchmark KSE-100 Index of the Pakistan Stock Exchange (PSX) remained bullish on Wednesday, gaining 118.05 points, a positive change of 0.07 percent, closing at 180,511.02 points against 180,392.98 points on the last trading day. During the session, the ready market recorded a trading volume of 1.230 billion shares with a traded value of Rs 69.216 billion, compared to 1.224 billion shares valuing Rs 70.218 billion in the previous session. The market capitalization increased to Rs 20.125 trillion from Rs 20.053 trillion a day earlier. Out of 495 active companies in the ready market, 206 advanced, 259 declined and 30 remained unchanged. Service Long March topped the volume chart with 189.427 million shares, followed by Kohinoor Spinning with 72.276 million shares and K-Electric Limited with 53.634 million shares. The top gainers included Pakistan Engineering Company Limited, which increased by Rs 64.00 to close at Rs 703.99, and Shifa International Hospitals Limited, which gained Rs 43.10 to settle at Rs 541.06. On the losing side, PIA Holding Company Limited (B) declined by Rs 583.43 to close at Rs 17,454.00, while Siemens (Pakistan) Engineering fell by Rs 28.00 to close at Rs 1,522.19. In the futures market, turnover stood at 193.175 million shares with a traded value of Rs 10.520 billion, compared to 227.845 million shares worth Rs 14.007 billion in the previous session. Out of 313 futures-market companies, 136 recorded gains, 174 declined and three remained unchanged, according to PSX data.—APP

Rupee gains
03 paise
against US
Dollar

ISLAMABAD: The Rupee on Wednesday appreciated by 03 paise against the US Dollar in interbank trading and closed at Rs 278.27 compared to the previous day's closing of Rs 278.30. According to the Forex Association of Pakistan (FAP), the buying and selling rates of the dollar in the open market were recorded at Rs 279.00 and Rs 279.35, respectively. The price of the Euro against the rupee decreased by Rs 0.23 and closed at Rs 322.96 from the previous day's closing of Rs 322.73, according to the State Bank of Pakistan (SBP). The Japanese Yen remained unchanged to close at Rs 1.73, whereas the exchange rate of the British Pound witnessed an increase of Rs 0.02 and closed at Rs 373.37 compared to the previous day's Rs 373.35. The exchange rate of the Emirati Dirham stood stagnant, closing at Rs 75.77, while the Saudi Riyal came down by 01 paise to close at Rs 74.15.—APP

Gold price
ups by
Rs.100 to
Rs.455,236
per tola

ISLAMABAD: The prices of gold witnessed a slight increase in the local market on Wednesday, with 24 karat gold per tola increasing by Rs 100 to settle at Rs 455,236, according to rates issued by the All Pakistan Sarafa Gems and Jewellers Association. Similarly, the price of 10 grams of 24 karat gold went up by Rs 85 to Rs 389,685, whereas 10 grams of 22 karat gold increased by Rs 78 to Rs 357,395. In the international market, the price of gold increased by \$1 to \$4,328 per ounce. Meanwhile, the price of silver per tola decreased by Rs6 to Rs 7,503 while the price of 10 grams of silver declined by Rs 5 to Rs 6,391. The price of silver in the international market also decreased by \$0.06 to \$70.24 per ounce, the association reported.—APP

Minister explores China EV talent to
examine advanced electric mobility

The PMYP chairman interacted with trainers, technical specialists and students to gain firsthand insight into modern vocational education models and the latest technological advancements driving the global transition towards electric mobility



DNA

ISLAMABAD: Chairman Prime Minister's Youth Programme (PMYP) Rana Mashood Ahmad Khan on Wednesday visited the Guangda Electric Vehicle (EV) Training Base in China to examine advanced electric mobility training systems and explore avenues for strengthening technical skills development, vocational education and youth employability in Pakistan's emerging EV sector. During the visit, Mr Khan

highlighted the growing importance of future ready skills, Mr Khan said that hands on technical training and industry aligned education are critical to equipping young people for evolving labour market demands. He noted that electric mobility and green technologies offered significant opportunities for employment generation, entrepreneurship and technological innovation. The visit formed part of broader efforts to deepen Pakistan China cooperation in vocational training, youth development, technology transfer and innovation. Discussions focused on identifying collaborative initiatives that could help enhance Pakistan's technical education ecosystem and

prepare young people for careers in high-growth sectors. Both sides reaffirmed their commitment to expanding partnerships aimed at promoting skills development and knowledge exchange, while supporting the transition towards sustainable and modern transportation solutions. The Prime Minister's Youth Programme continues to pursue international collaborations designed to empower youth through education, innovation and workforce development, ensuring that Pakistan's young population remains competitive in an increasingly technology driven global economy.

PSW wins
trade award

This ensures a uniform, binding legal and operational framework that applies equally across all cross-border regulatory agencies in Pakistan, eliminating bureaucratic silos and ensuring institutional transparency

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan Single Window (PSW) has been declared one of the three winners of the prestigious Asia-Pacific Trade Facilitation Innovation Awards 2026, according to press release issued here Wednesday. The award was presented during Paperless Trade Week 2026 in Bangkok, an elite global forum jointly organized by the Asian Development Bank (ADB) and the United Nations ESCAP under the theme "Next Generation Trade Digitalization - Advancing Digital and Sustainable Trade Facilitation." The award was received by Syed Aftab Haider, Chief Executive Officer of Pakistan Single Window, on behalf of PSW and Pakistan. This recognition highlights PSW's strategic role in advancing Pakistan's digital trade ecosystem, improving regulatory efficiency, and contributing to the country's broader economic modernization. PSW secured global recognition for the successful design, development, and implementation of the Integrated Risk Management System (IRMS). The IRMS represents a transformative shift in how Pakistan manages border clearance. Instead of subjecting all inbound and outbound cargo to slow, manual inspections, the IRMS acts as an intelligent, automated engine, evaluating every trade declaration against predefined regulatory rules, risk-scoring models, and AI-driven analytics. It automatically assigns consignments to the appropriate clearance channels without human intervention. By instantly identifying high-risk consignments requiring strict regulatory assessment, the system allows the vast majority of legitimate, low-risk trade to proceed without unnecessary delays. This ensures that national enforcement resources are focused precisely where vulnerabilities exist, while compliant businesses benefit from faster and more predictable trade processes. Syed Aftab Haider, CEO of Pakistan Single Window, expressed his pride on this collective achievement. "Winning the Asia-Pacific Trade Facilitation Innovation Award is a very proud moment, not just for PSW, but for Pakistan's public and IT sectors, as well," he said. Unlike traditional tools, the IRMS is legally enforced under the Pakistan Single Window Act, 2021, and its comprehensive rules have been officially notified as a Statutory Regulatory Order (SRO). This ensures a uniform, binding legal and operational framework that applies equally across all cross-border regulatory agencies in Pakistan, eliminating bureaucratic silos and ensuring institutional transparency.—DNA

S Korea asks Trump to lead
peaceful diplomacy with N Korea

SEOUL: South Korean President Lee Jae Myung asked US President Donald Trump to take the lead in seeking a peaceful resolution of tensions with North Korea during a brief exchange at the Group of Seven summit on Tuesday, Lee's office said. The two leaders greeted each other during a G7 leaders' group photo, presidential spokesperson Kang Yu-jung said, where Trump asked Lee about the current state of relations with North Korea. Lee asked Trump to lead efforts to resolve the North Korea issue peacefully, as he had done with the war in the Middle East, according to Lee's office. Trump responded that he would work to address the North Korea issue, Kang said. Trump later expressed willingness to play a role in making progress on issues related to the Korean Peninsula in conversation with Lee, Lee's office said according to Yonhap news agency. The two leaders discussed ways to expand mutually beneficial cooperation, including in the shipbuilding sector, and shared the view that cooperation among South Korea, the United States and Japan was important on the basis of the South Korea-US alliance, Yonhap said. The two leaders also discussed efforts to negotiate an end to the Middle East war and freedom of navigation in the Strait of Hormuz, Yonhap said citing Lee's office. In a joint statement issued on Wednesday following the summit, G7 leaders expressed "deep concern" about North Korea's nuclear and ballistic missile programs and reaffirmed their commitment to the "complete denuclearization of North Korea in accordance with UN Security Council resolutions." The leaders also urged North Korea to resolve the issue of Japanese citizens abducted by Pyongyang and reiterated the need to jointly address North Korea's cryptocurrency thefts and cybercrimes. Trump and North Korean leader Kim Jong Un held three meetings during Trump's first term, including a landmark summit in Singapore in 2018, a second summit in Hanoi in 2019 and a meeting later that year at the Demilitarized Zone between the two Koreas, where Trump became the first sitting US president to step into North Korea. The diplomacy collapsed after the Hanoi summit failed to produce an agreement on dismantling North Korea's nuclear program and easing US-led sanctions. Trump has repeatedly signalled interest in reviving direct diplomacy with Kim. He said in August 2025 that he looked forward to seeing the North Korean leader "in the appropriate future," and said in October he would "love" to meet Kim again. Trump last week posted a captionless photo of himself with Kim Jong Un on Truth Social, in an apparent reminder of their past diplomacy. South Korean Unification Minister Chung Dongyoung on Monday said he viewed the post as a "good signal" that Trump would be willing to focus on a meeting with Kim once the conflict with Iran is resolved, local media reported.—DNA

Australia relaxes Gulf
travel advice

SYDNEY/HONG KONG: Australia on Wednesday relaxed its travel advice for several Middle Eastern countries, allowing Australians to transit through and travel to the biggest Gulf air hubs with the security of being covered by insurance. Foreign Minister Penny Wong said the previous "do not travel" advisory had been lowered for the United Arab Emirates, Qatar, Bahrain, Israel and Kuwait after the US and Iran reached an interim deal to end the war. She said the advisory had moved to "reconsider your need to travel" to those countries, as the security situation could still deteriorate rapidly with little warning. The removal of the "do not travel" warning is positive for Gulf airlines. They had carried more than half of all passengers flying from Europe to Australia, New Zealand and Pacific Islands before the war began in late February, according to aviation data firm Cirium. Many Australian travelers concerned about the risk of missiles and drones, schedule disruptions and the lack of travel insurance coverage had preferred flights on carriers like Qantas Airways, Singapore Airlines and Hong Kong's Cathay Pacific Airways that transited in Asia, driving up airfares. Flight Center Travel Group said on Wednesday that travelers with forward bookings to Europe routed via the Middle East had typically amended or canceled plans due in part to the government warning. Emirates said last week it would roll out incentives aimed at winning back travelers worried about the protracted Iran war, focusing on reliability and customer support rather than lower fares because the oil price remained high. Nathan Gee, head of Asia Pacific transportation research at BofA Global Research, said restored travel insurance and more competitive pricing should help Gulf carriers regain share on routes from Australia to Europe and the UK, but the shift was likely to be gradual rather than swift. "In the near term, Asian carriers such as Singapore Airlines are still well positioned, as a portion of travelers continue to favor Asian hubs for greater certainty and smoother transit," Gee said. He added that with long-haul bookings typically made five to six months in advance, the stronger pricing environment should extend into the next few quarters for Singapore Airlines and Cathay Pacific, even as Gulf carriers restore capacity and step up competition. Jet fuel prices more than doubled after the Iran war began, leading many airlines to lift ticket prices, cut capacity and add fuel surcharges. But the price gains have since receded as the prospects of a peace deal improved.—Agencies

Dr. Sidhu to use Fintech to
bring capital market

ISLAMABAD: The Chairman, Securities and Exchange Commission of Pakistan (SECP), Dr. Kabir Ahmed Sidhu Wednesday said that the effective use of financial technology will make capital market investing simpler, safer, and more accessible for all Pakistanis, enabling ordinary citizens to participate in the country's economic growth and wealth creation. He said that digital technology can bring stock market and investment services directly to investors' mobile phones, particularly those of young Pakistanis. This will not only simplify the investment process but also strengthen investor protection and enhance public confidence in Pakistan's capital markets. This is in line with SECP's target of increasing the investor base to 2.5 million, he expressed these views while chairing a meeting of the Board of Directors and senior management of the Central Depository Company of Pakistan Limited (CDCPL) during his visit to Karachi. The meeting reviewed CDCPL's operational performance, technological infrastructure, cybersecurity

framework, digital transformation initiatives, and strategic plans aimed at further strengthening Pakistan's capital market ecosystem. CDCPL management briefed the Chairman on the company's role as the country's central depository and a key pillar of capital market infrastructure. The Board highlighted CDC's robust IT architecture, multiple data centers, strong cybersecurity controls, and round-the-clock business continuity arrangements that have enabled uninterrupted services for nearly three decades. The Board also briefed the Chairman on the upcoming Asaan Connect App, a flagship digital initiative being developed under SECP's guidance. Scheduled for launch in July 2026, the platform aims to simplify investor onboarding, enhance financial inclusion, and attract a new generation of investors through a convenient and user-friendly digital experience. The meeting further discussed CDCPL's strategic restructuring plans, including the separation of core depository functions from non-core businesses such as trustee services.

The initiative is intended to strengthen governance arrangements and facilitate the potential future listing of non-core operations on the Pakistan Stock Exchange while preserving the systemic importance of core depository functions. Dr. Sidhu appreciated CDCPL's contribution to Pakistan's capital market infrastructure and commended its technological capabilities, governance standards, and close collaboration with SECP. He assured SECP's full support for technological innovation, digital transformation, and initiatives aimed at making investing easier, safer, and more accessible for all Pakistanis. Mr. Badiuddin Akber, CEO of CDC, briefed the visiting team on recent technology-driven initiatives designed to improve market accessibility, strengthen investor protection, and simplify investment processes. He reaffirmed CDC's commitment to working closely with SECP to support the development and modernization of Pakistan's capital markets.—DNA

Scorching
heat, other
issues push
Gaza deeper
into crisis

DUBAI: Eight months into a ceasefire that has failed to stop Israeli attacks or fully open Gaza's borders, the 2.1 million Palestinians inside the besieged enclave are entering a summer that aid agencies warn could accelerate an already unfolding public health catastrophe. As summer temperatures soar in Gaza, more than 1.9 million Palestinians displaced by the war, about 90 percent of the population, remain in overcrowded makeshift tents, where access to basic services remains limited. Aid agencies warn that plastic and fabric structures that absorb heat and provide no ventilation or insulation have become incubators for the parasites, rodents and infectious disease now spreading across displacement sites.

"Most internally displaced people in Gaza currently live in uninhabitable tents made of fabric or plastic sheets. The plastic sheets cause several negative health consequences, including skin rashes due to overheating inside the plastic tents," Sally Saleh, head of emergency in Gaza at Medical Aid for Palestinians, told Arab News. "The temperature inside the tents is often much higher than outside and the ventilation is incredibly poor as there are no sufficient windows. This is also the perfect environment for parasites.—APP

Jordan buys
about 60,000
tons feed
barley in
tender

HAMBURG: Jordan's state grain buyer purchased about 60,000 metric tons of animal feed barley in an international tender on Wednesday, European traders said. The barley was bought from trading house Olam at an estimated \$252 a ton cost and freight (c&f) included to be shipped in the first half of September. Traders said these other trading houses participated in Wednesday's tender with their estimated price offers per ton c&f: Bunge \$264 and \$271, CHS \$255.68, Ameropa \$259.95, Cofco \$257.50 and Solaris \$264.14. Shipment in the tender was sought in a series of possible combinations in consignments of 50,000 to 60,000 tons between September 1-15, September 16-30, October 1-15 and October 16-31. Reports reflect assessments from traders and further estimates of prices and volumes are still possible later.—APP

US-Iran deal
can be game
changer:
Canadian PM

EVIAN: Canada's Prime Minister Mark Carney on Wednesday said a US-Iran deal to end the Middle East war could be a "game changer" in the region and beyond. There is "a likelihood that this memorandum of understanding agreement could be a game changer," Carney told reporters on the third day of a G7 leaders' meeting in the French town of Evian. He pointed to encouraging discussions, which included US President Donald Trump, on Ukraine and Lebanon at the summit. The Canadian premier said he noted a US "change in tone with respect to Ukraine" as Kyiv seeks to end more than four years of conflict following Russia's invasion. This included "a more realistic — in our view — expectation of where this war was going to go, and the position against Russia, the tightening of sanctions against Russia, the ability to provide additional defensive support for Ukraine." The leaders of Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, Britain and the United States also held a "very detailed discussion about Lebanon," he added. The talks on a final US-Iran settlement to end the conflict, triggered by the February 28 US-Israeli strikes on Tehran, are set to begin Friday immediately after the signing of the accord in Switzerland and continue over a 60-day window to flesh out its details.—APP

Briefs

GROK was used in strikes against Iran

NEW YORK: Elon Musk's artificial intelligence tool Grok was used in strikes against Iran, the United States government revealed in a legal briefing seen Tuesday by AFP.

The June 15 brief defends the gas turbines used by a giant data centre belonging to the trillionaire's company xAI, which are the target of an environmental lawsuit. In the brief, the US Department of Justice argued that the lawsuit "threatens American national, economic, and energy security by seeking to shut off the power supply for artificial intelligence innovation that supports the Department of War's military operations".

To support the argument, federal prosecutors presented testimony from Pentagon AI chief Cameron Stanley in which he states, under oath, that Grok is already in use within Project Maven, the US military's AI-assisted targeting programme that was initially powered by Anthropic's Claude model.

The project's Maven Smart Systems (MSS) "enabled US forces to deploy over 2,000 munitions to 2,000 distinct targets within 96 hours during Operation Epic Fury," Stanley's statement said. Stanley praised Musk's technology and "the greatly increased operational efficiency made possible by the Grok Gov Model". - APP

PPP secures 11 seats as recount completes

GILGIT: Gilgit-Baltistan Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) Raja Shahbaz Khan on Wednesday announced decisions on three pending election petitions, giving the PPP 11 seats.

The election chief declared PPP candidate Attaullah Khan the winner from GBA-16 Diamer-II, PML-N candidate Malik Kefayat from GBA-17 and PML-N candidate from GBA-13 Astore-I.

The rival candidates had filed petitions with the GB Election Commission, challenging the Form-47 results. After hearing arguments from both sides, CEC Raja Shahbaz Khan had suspended the results and reserved his verdict on the petitions.

With the announcement, the PPP has secured 11 seats, the PML-N has secured six, independent candidates - who joined the Istehkam-e-Pakistan Party (IPP) a day earlier - have won four, PTI-backed candidates have won two and the Majlis Wahdati-Muslimeen has secured one seat. The GB CEC said the notifications for the successful candidates would now be issued.

Info minister terms budget 'positive and relief-oriented'

Relief-oriented budget targets public welfare, says Kiyani

DNA

ISLAMABAD: Minister of State for Finance and Railways Bilal Azhar Kiyani on Wednesday said the federal budget for fiscal year 2026-27 was a relief-oriented budget aimed at supporting the working class, industry, exporters, the construction sector, women, youth and low-income segments, while simultaneously broadening the tax base and sustaining economic growth.

Addressing an online briefing alongside Minister for Information and Broadcasting, Attaullah Tarar, Kiyani said the budget reflected Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif's commitment to providing relief to the public and promoting sustainable economic development. He said the budget contained incentives for industry, exporters and the construction sector, which was closely linked with employment generation and the growth of allied industries. He added that special measures had also been introduced for women, including relief on products related to women's reproductive health through the removal of sales tax under the government's "pink tax" initiative.

The minister said the budget also catered to citizens aspiring to own homes despite limited financial resources and included a comprehensive Prime Minister's Youth Package. He said Rs. 110 billion had been allocated this year under the package for agricultural financing and disbursements to young people. Responding to questions raised by citizens on social media platforms, Kiyani addressed concerns regarding the allocation for the Benazir Income Support Programme (BISP) in comparison with federal spending on education.

He explained that education and health had largely become provincial subjects after devolution, while the federal government primarily played a coordinating role and provided funding for higher education through the Higher Education Commission (HEC). Therefore, he said, a complete assessment of education and health spending should include provincial budget allocations.

The minister said Rs 838 billion had been allocated for BISP during the current fiscal year. He said the programme covered more than 10 million eligible families selected through internationally recognized criteria agreed with the

World Bank, with women being the primary beneficiaries. Answering a question regarding measures for women's health, Kiyani reiterated that the budget had exempted sales tax on products related to women's reproductive health, which would help reduce their cost and improve affordability. Regarding the retail sector's inclusion in the tax net, he acknowledged that a large number of traders remained outside the taxation system despite previous efforts by successive governments. He said approximately 3.5 million shopkeepers were currently outside the tax net.

Kiyani said the government had introduced a new scheme following consultations with traders and expressed confidence that positive results would emerge during the current fiscal year. He added that awareness and implementation efforts would be carried out in major cities and markets to ensure the scheme's success.

The minister said the government had taken into account public feedback received through platforms including Instagram and Facebook and had attempted to address key concerns related to the federal budget.



ISLAMABAD: Ansar Mahmood Bhatti Chief Editor Daily Islamabad POST, CENTRELINE and Diplomatic News Agency (DNA) met with High Commissioner of Mauritius Munsoo Kurrimbaccus. Both sides discussed matters of mutual interest and to explore media cooperation between the two countries. - DNA

Oil slides on Iran supply prospects as traders wait on Warsh

America to waive Iran oil sanctions, boosting global supply outlook, says senior US official

NEWS DESK

LONDON: Tumbling crude prices on news that Iranian fuel may soon hit global markets promised inflation relief and pushed bond yields lower on Wednesday, while stocks and currencies were quieter ahead of Kevin Warsh's debut meeting as Federal Reserve chair. Brent crude futures dived below \$80 to the lowest since the opening salvo of the US-Iran conflict in March.

A senior US official said the US will waive sanctions on Iranian oil under the deal to end the war, raising the prospect of millions of additional barrels of supply.

US bond yields dipped, and rates in Asia followed suit, with 10-year Japanese yields down 1.5 basis points to 2.63% and 10-year Australian rates down almost 5 bps to 4.787%. Few details of the US-Iran agreement, due to be signed on Friday, have been publicly confirmed and a three-month stranglehold on the Strait of Hor-

muz has drained oil inventories, with US reserves at the lowest since 1983. Overnight on Wall Street, investors trimmed crowded bets on tech and semiconductor stocks, pulling the Nasdaq down 1.15%, while rising financial and industrial stocks helped the Dow notch a record high.

Futures were slightly positive in Asia, while chipmaker-heavy markets in Taiwan and South Korea inched lower and MSCI's broadest index of Asia-Pacific shares outside Japan fell about 0.3%. Japan's Nikkei rose 0.4%. Stock markets in Hong Kong and Shanghai were broadly steady. Traders are waiting to see how Warsh walks the line between his dovish president and markets, which expect a hike this year, and the anticipation has broadly held the dollar in stasis. The euro firmed only a little this week, to hover around \$1.16. Tuesday's expected rate hike in Japan failed to lift the yen, though the downside was protected by the risk of official intervention, holding it at 160.3 to the dollar.

Pak, UK agree to deepen security

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan and the United Kingdom have reaffirmed their commitment to strengthening bilateral ties, expanding cooperation in security and law enforcement, and working together on migration-related challenges during a high-level meeting between Interior Minister Mohsin Naqvi and British Deputy Foreign Secretary Hamish Falconer in here on Wednesday. The meeting focused on Pakistan-UK relations and the broader regional situation, with both sides exchanging views on issues of mutual interest, including counter terrorism, illegal migration, institutional cooperation, and police training.

During the talks, Falconer praised Pakistan's constructive and active role in facilitating understanding between the United States and Iran, describing Islamabad's contribution as a significant step toward regional and global peace. He commended Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif and Asim Munir for what he termed a historic role in promoting peace and stability. According to the British minister, efforts that contributed to easing tensions between Washington and Tehran have projected Pakistan as an important advocate of global peace.

Interior Minister, Mohsin Naqvi highlighted the progress achieved through the Upskill Project, noting that the initiative has produced encouraging results and significantly enhanced the capacity of Pakistani institutions. He

said the government remained committed to strengthening professional standards and institutional capabilities through international partnerships.

The two sides agreed to further expand cooperation in a range of sectors, including counter terrorism measures, efforts to curb illegal migration, institutional development, and law-enforcement training programs. Both ministers also agreed to work closely on addressing the issue of fraudulent student visas, which has emerged as a growing concern for authorities in both countries.

Naqvi emphasized that Pakistan was pursuing indiscriminate action against illegal migration networks and human trafficking syndicates, underscoring the government's determination to dismantle criminal groups exploiting vulnerable people. Addressing regional security concerns, the interior minister said several terrorist organizations continue to operate from Afghan territory and stressed that the Afghan government must prevent its soil from being used for activities directed against Pakistan. Reaffirming Islamabad's commitment to stronger relations with London, Naqvi said Pakistan valued its longstanding partnership with the United Kingdom and sought to further deepen cooperation across multiple fields for the benefit of both countries. - DNA

30 Iranian nationals being repatriated: Ishaq Dar

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan is facilitating the repatriation of 30 Iranian nationals, including fishermen rescued at sea and crew members recently interdicted by US authorities. Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Senator Ishaq Dar wrote on X that the group included eight Iranian fishermen who were rescued at sea by the British vessel MMA Valour after their boat ran aground. It also includes 22 Iranian crew members from the vessel Lenore/Davina, which was recently interdicted by US authorities.

Both groups are expected to transit through Karachi in the coming days, he added. Dar said that Pakistan remained in close coordination with the Iranian, US, and UK authorities to ensure the safe transit and early return of the Iranian nationals to their homeland. He reiterated that Pakistan was committed to humanitarian cooperation and to extending every possible assistance to its Iranian brothers. - APP

Sindh cabinet approves budget

NAZIR SIYAL

KARACHI: The Sindh cabinet on Wednesday approved the proposed provincial budget for fiscal year 2026-27, state broadcaster PTV reported. It was approved in a session chaired by Sindh Chief Minister Murad Ali Shah, who said that every class had been catered to in the proposed budget and steps were being taken to eradicate poverty from the province, PTV said.

The report added that the Sindh government also decided on the minimum wage for workers in the budget.

CM Murad, who also holds the portfolio of the finance department, is set to present the province's budget during the Sindh Assembly session later today.

During the meeting, the provincial cabinet appreciated the "record" development initiatives taken during the previous fiscal year, according to the CM House. It added that the cabinet also "reaffirmed its commitment to public service" under the leadership of PPP Chairman Bilawal Bhutto-Zardari. As per the statement, the budget also includes an increase in minimum wage for workers.

Ahead of the provincial budget, CM Murad, in a meeting a day earlier, reviewed the performance of major revenue-generating departments and directed them to strengthen collection mechanisms and improve fiscal efficiency to support the province's development agenda.

US not stepping back from NATO responsibility

DNA

BRUSSELS: NATO chief Mark Rutte said Wednesday that the United States was not stepping back from Europe by announcing cuts to the forces it makes available to the alliance. "In some cases this has been cast as a problem - as the US pulling away from its allies. But that is not the reality," Rutte said on the eve of a meeting of NATO defense ministers. Washington has told allies it is reducing the assets it puts at disposal of NATO commanders as it expects European countries to take "primary responsibility" for their own conventional defense.

"The US has adjusted its pledges to the NATO Force Model," Rutte said. "This is not primarily about where forces and assets are currently, but about who would do what if our defense plans were activated." US and German media reported that the cuts include a third of the 150 US F-16 and F-15 jets designated for NATO, plus refueling and reconnaissance aircraft, bombers and drones. The reports said a submarine that can launch cruise missiles is also being taken out, along with one of two aircraft carrier groups. The US move has sparked fear it could leave Europe vulnerable in the face of an aggressive Russia as questions swirl over US President Donald Trump's commitment to the alliance.

Multiple European diplomats insisted that Europe could step up to replace the capabilities that the US was cutting, if they are given enough time to fill the gaps. "Historically this was overly reliant on the US. Now the US has adjusted its pledged contributions - and other Allies have stepped up to contribute more," Rutte said. The NATO chief said the United States had "made clear that the US nuclear deterrent is solid." "And that it is crucial that Europe and Canada do more on the conventional front, understanding that the US has obligations around the globe that it needs to account for," he said.

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